



BETWEEN THE LINES

By Greg Harries

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Character Breakdown:

Ryan: Plays goalie on the soccer team, a good friend and listener. Megan is his best and oldest friend.

Megan: Tough girl who also plays soccer. Ryan is her best friend.

Natalie: Smart, academically focused girl who is Ryan's new friend.

Props Breakdown:

Natalie:

- Marker

Megan:

- Black eyeliner
- Makeup wipes
- Hat

All:

- Phones

RESPECT BACKGROUND BEFORE SHOW STARTS

CLASSROOM VB

RYAN

Hey, guys. My name's Ryan Blake. I'm a fairly typical student. I love playing goalie when we play soccer. I got second in the school spelling bee last year, and most of all, I'm a really good listener. And as it turns out, that can make you pretty popular. Basically, I just really love to help my friends out with their problems.

But honestly, these days, that's not so easy. Because I'm part of the problem. And things are really out of control. I had to come to school early this morning to clean the desks, because I got in trouble. And it's not just me. See, I've got these two friends who have to help me, too. This is Megan.

(MEGAN enters)

MEGAN

Hey, Ryan!

RYAN

Megan and I have been friends forever. Megan's one of the strongest, bravest, and funniest people I know. We grew up next door to each other, and we even play on the same soccer team.

MEGAN

Sure, if you call what you do in the goal playing. As long as I'm defending, there's not much for you to do.

RYAN

(RYAN laughs)

Yeah, I know. Except for when you foul and I have to stop penalty kicks.

MEGAN

Those refs are blind, and you know it!

(NATALIE enters)

NATALIE

What are you guys talking about?

MEGAN

Soccer, not that you'd know much about it.

NATALIE

Oh, that again?

RYAN
(Turning)

And this is Natalie.

NATALIE

Hi, everybody!

RYAN

Natalie is a newer friend of mine. We actually became friends after the school spelling bee last spring.

NATALIE

And what happened at the spelling bee, Ryan? Go ahead, tell 'em.

(MEGAN rolls her eyes)

RYAN

She was the one who beat me.

NATALIE

That's right. And don't you forget it.

RYAN

Natalie has been really great to me. My parents split up over the summer, and my mom and I moved to an apartment near Nat's place. We walk to school together when it's nice enough, and talk about books we both read.

MEGAN

Yeah, that sounds thrilling.

NATALIE

It's better than some boring soccer game.

MEGAN

Yeah, I'd hate for you to risk breaking a nail.

NATALIE

At least I grow them. I can't hear myself think in class over the sound of you biting yours.

MEGAN

Natalie, how do you spell ANNOYING?

NATALIE

(Facing front)

Annoying. M-E-G-A--

RYAN

Guys, can you stop it?! For just one second? For the millionth time, you're really being unkind to one another and THAT's annoying. Can you go start cleaning, I'll be there in a minute.

(They exit)

See, this is what I'm talking about. Ever since I moved, Megan has been really jealous of Natalie, and Natalie has been really mean to Megan. It's making me really upset, and I just don't know what to do about it. Looking back, it started on the first day of school last year. Natalie and I were just getting to school when we ran into Megan.

NEIGHBORHOOD VB

(Natalie enters)

NATALIE

And that, Ryan Blake, is why you can't even talk about this book until you read chapter 17! You don't even know how the monsters in this story work yet.

RYAN

Oh c'mon, I think I can handle it.

NATALIE

No way. Spoilers are sacred.

MEGAN
(Entering)

Hey, what are you guys talking about?

RYAN
Oh, just this book we both started this summer. It's called The Hunters.

MEGAN
Woof, no thanks. Not my style.

NATALIE
That's cool. It's a really tough read.

MEGAN
Well I could read it if I wanted, I just don't, that's all.

NATALIE
No, Megan, I didn't mean--

MEGAN
(Cutting NATALIE off and crossing to Ryan)

Ryan, your mom's on snack duty for the game tomorrow. Is she making those awesome extra-butter peanut butter bars?

RYAN
Probably. She'd bring orange slices, but...

MEGAN
...she hasn't found a way to put chocolate chips in them, yet.
(They laugh)

NATALIE
Oh, you should see if she can make a batch for the party.

RYAN
Good idea!

MEGAN

What party?

NATALIE

Oh, Ryan and I are going to start a book club, I'm having people over tomorrow night.

RYAN

Yeah, I guess a lot of Natalie's friends are into The Hunters books.

MEGAN

So we're not going to have our usual post-game ice cream pig-out?

RYAN

I guess not this week, sorry.

MEGAN

Whatever. More for me, I guess. See ya later, nerds!

(She exits)

NATALIE

(Looking at Ryan)

Nerds?!

(She exits)

RYAN

Megan didn't mean anything by that, she was just teasing. But it turns out Natalie has been picked on for being smart for years and she's pretty sensitive about it.

SOCCER FIELD VB

She came to the game the next afternoon with her friends. Her mom was just going to drive us all to her house after the game. But at the game, it was weird. They'd cheer for me when I made a save, but...

MEGAN

(Bursting in)

Every time I touched the ball they started whispering, pointing, and laughing!!

RYAN

I don't know, I think they were just talking.

MEGAN

Trust me Ryan, they were not just talking. You couldn't even see it because you were in your goal the whole time. They were making fun of me, Ryan. It didn't happen when I was on the bench, which was a lot of the second half because I was so distracted. This is why all my friends are guys. I hate this stuff!

RYAN

Well just play it cool, okay? Natalie's coming over here.

NATALIE

(Enters)

Hey guys, great game! Well, for Ryan anyway. Great half-game, Megan.

MEGAN

Real funny, bookworm. Why are you even here? Shouldn't you be studying in the library?

RYAN

C'mon, the game's over. Cool it. Don't make me dump a water cooler on you two.

NATALIE

Well if the MVP says so, I guess I'll ease up. You ready to go?

RYAN

Yeah, about that---my mom's not crazy about me coming over. She doesn't really know your parents yet, and all the other kids are new to her, too. She said she'd feel better if there was at least someone she knew at the party.

NATALIE

What? But the trailer for the first Haunters movie came out today! We were all gonna watch it together.

RYAN

Well...I don't know. Hey, what if Megan came along?

NATALIE & MEGAN

What?!

RYAN

My mom would be fine if she were there, and maybe you two have more in common than you think.

MEGAN

I doubt it. I tried reading that book, I fell asleep by page 9.

NATALIE

Did you get sleepy from sounding out all those big words?

(MEGAN gives an offended look)

RYAN

Stop, you two. I want you to get along, okay?

MEGAN

Fine. If it'll help you out with your mom, I'll go.

(Sarcastically)

I'm sure it'll be fun.

RYAN

Cool. I'll go tell our moms and grab the peanut butter bars. I'll be right back.

(RYAN exits)

MEGAN

Natalie, listen, I don't know what your deal is, but Ryan has been my best friend forever. That's not changing, so please stop messing with me.

NATALIE

I'm not trying to, you just don't get my jokes.

MEGAN

I get them, they're just not funny. And I heard what you and your dork friends were saying about me.

NATALIE

Oh, you heard them? Listen, I'm sorry about that. They didn't want to come to the game.

MEGAN
(Skeptical)

Oh, so you didn't have anything to do with that?

NATALIE

No, not at all, I swear! They just don't like sports. But they're cool, actually. Hey, in fact, some of the girls are staying over for a sleepover after the party tonight. You should ask your mom if you can, too! We'll stay away from the book talk, we can play games, maybe we can even do something about your nails.

MEGAN

My nails? Ah, I don't care, they're fine, I think.

(She catches herself from biting at them)

But...sure. I'll go talk to my mom. I'd better get out of here. I don't want the team thinking I've joined the Chess Club. Kidding. Thanks for inviting me.

(She slugs NATALIE's arm)

See you in a bit.

(MEGAN exits)

NATALIE
(A bit defeated and sarcastic)

Chess Club. Great.

(NATALIE exits. RYAN re-enters)

SOLID COLOR WALL FOR HOUSE VB

RYAN

So the party, for the most part, went pretty well. The new Haunters movie trailer was awesome! We must have watched it like 50 times! Everyone had a great time, my mom's peanut butter bars were a hit, as usual. Later, Natalie and her friends were talking about the latest Haunters books, so Megan and I played video games and joked around. Eventually, the boys had to go home, and the girls stayed for the slumber party. I wish Megan had left at the same time, though. Maybe what happened next wouldn't have happened.

(RYAN exits)

(Megan and Natalie enter, they sit down)

NATALIE

Ok, Megan, truth or dare.

MEGAN

What? I don't think I want to do either.

NATALIE

Sorry, not an option. Truth or dare, no chickening out.

MEGAN

Fine, truth.

NATALIE

Have you ever thought about kissing Ryan Blake?

MEGAN

What?! No!

NATALIE
(Laughing)

Wow, you were pretty quick to answer that one.

MEGAN

Yeah, because it's disgusting. Ryan's like a brother to me.

NATALIE

So...you wanna kiss your brother?

(Laughing)

Megan, this is only getting worse for you.

MEGAN

Ugh, forget this. I'm tired, and I'm tired of you and your dork friends. You guys have fun talking about whichever ghost's the prettiest or whatever, I'm going to bed.

NATALIE

Megan, I was just kidding! Learn to take a joke.

(MEGAN exits)

NATALIE

(Looking around to her friends)

We'll give her a little time to fall asleep. Then, girls,

(She takes out a permanent marker)

It's makeover time.

(NATALIE exits. RYAN enters)

HALLWAY VB

RYAN

The way things had been going, I was worried when I left Megan alone at Natalie's. She didn't get in touch at all on Sunday, so that made me worry even more. Megan's got a short temper. Sometimes I get picked on by other kids at school. But Megan doesn't hesitate to jump in when I need help. Even when they're twice her size. And as fired up as she gets, most people think twice about messing with her. But with Natalie and her friends, it was different. Megan just doesn't know how to play their games. I didn't talk to her again until Monday morning. She wasn't even in classes, I just ran into her when I was in the hallway to use the bathroom.

(MEGAN enters. She's wearing a hat. She sees Ryan and tries to dodge around him to exit.)

RYAN

Whoa there, Megan, where's the fire?

MEGAN

Get out of my way, Ryan.

RYAN

Hey, I just want to say hi.

MEGAN

I don't have time. I need to talk to Ms. Hobbes.

RYAN

Well just tell me how the rest of the night went at Natalie's. Did you stay up all night? Did you guys tell ghost stories?

MEGAN

It went like this, Ryan!

(She removes her hat, revealing the word "LOSER" written across her forehead in black letters.)

RYAN

Whoa. Does that say "LOSER"? Who did that to you?!

MEGAN

Who do you think?! I went to sleep because I didn't want to play their stupid girly games anymore, and I woke up the next morning like this. I went to ask her mom for a ride home, but I felt so sick to my stomach that I couldn't do it. I got sick in their bathroom and walked home.

RYAN

Megan, her place is miles away from yours! You should have called me. My mom and I could have picked you up.

MEGAN

Oh please! I never even see you anymore, because you're always with Natalie and her precious little nerd herd!

RYAN

I just can't believe that she did this.

MEGAN

Well believe it. I guess the years of people picking on her for being such a brainiac have made her a complete jerk, Ryan.

RYAN

Megan, stop. It's obviously not okay that she did this, but you haven't exactly been too nice to her, either.

MEGAN

I can't believe this. This is permanent marker, Ryan! Are you actually taking her side?

RYAN

No, I'm not! I'm going to talk to her about this. Lunch is coming right up.

MEGAN

Fine. Whatever.

(She shoves her hat back on)

I need to get out of here before it gets busy. Just tell your new best friend to watch her back.

RYAN

Megan, don't be like that. Getting even with her isn't going to help anyone. Don't you remember what happened to me last year?

MEGAN

What, that thing with Trent? That was nothing like this.

RYAN

Yeah it was.

(He sits)

You don't know the whole story.

MEGAN

What do you mean? (She sits) You beat him up and he left you alone.

RYAN

Yeah, maybe for the three days that I was stuck at home, suspended. But then I missed two soccer games, right?

MEGAN

Yeah, so what?

RYAN

I missed those games because Trent jumped me on my way home from school and I was so beat up I could hardly walk, much less play soccer. He got suspended after that, but it didn't help. Luckily, he moved away this spring, or I don't know what would have stopped our fighting.

MEGAN

Well I guess I'll just have to teach Natalie her lesson a little bit more forcefully.

RYAN

Megan, wait!

(She exits)

CAFETERIA VB

RYAN

So as soon as I saw Natalie head toward the lunch line, I grabbed her.

(Natalie enters)

RYAN

Natalie, have a minute?

NATALIE

Yeah, sure thing. What's up?

RYAN

I saw what you did to Megan.

NATALIE

Oh, yeah. Listen, I didn't realize it was a permanent marker.

RYAN

What difference does that make? Why would you write that? "Loser"? That's really mean, Natalie.

NATALIE

Yeah well, she was being mean to my friends all night! She wasn't exactly a very courteous guest. Plus, her snoring was keeping everyone—

RYAN

Stop it. Listen, I want to be your friend, but I want to be Megan's friend, too. And if you can't be more kind to her, I don't see how that can happen.

NATALIE

Kind to HER? Ryan, she's been nothing but a jerk to me! She's always calling me names, or picking on me for my grades, it doesn't stop. I was just trying to get her to lay off.

(MEGAN enters, unseen by others)

RYAN

That doesn't make what you did okay, not at all.

NATALIE

Ryan, she's an idiot. Trust me, we're better off without her.

RYAN

Hey! I know she has a hard time in class, but she tries--

(At this, MEGAN shoves NATALIE from behind. She nearly falls over.)

NATALIE

Whoa, Megan, what are you doing?

MEGAN

I'm teaching you to keep your big mouth shut.

(MEGAN shoves NATALIE again.)

NATALIE

You've lost it!

(NATALIE shoves MEGAN.)

RYAN

(Getting in between them)

Hey, stop it! Natalie, you don't want to mess with her. Megan is—

NATALIE

What, you think I'm some nerd that can't defend herself?!

RYAN

No, it's just that Megan's really tough, okay? Megan—

MEGAN

Oh I heard you talking about me, too. You just wait.

(MEGAN pushes RYAN away. Then MEGAN grabs NATALIE by the back of her hair. NATALIE grabs MEGAN'S hat, taunting her. MEGAN jumps trying to get the hat back but NATALIE pushes her, which causes her to stumble into RYAN. RYAN holds onto MEGAN'S shoulders, trying to keep her back. MEGAN elbows RYAN in the stomach to break free. MEGAN lunges at NATALIE with a closed fist. She's prepared to throw a punch. RYAN grabs MEGAN'S arm to hold her back. NATALIE blocks her face. RYAN gets in between them.)

RYAN

GUYS, STOP IT!

(The action freezes briefly, RYAN looks out to the audience.)

RYAN

And that's how the teachers found us.

(They pull apart. NATALIE and MEGAN exit to their sides.)

Megan had scratch marks on her neck, some of Natalie's hair got pulled out, I even got a bruise on my stomach from Megan's elbow. [Beat] And then came the punishment. We all got four weeks of detention. Even me. Even though I was just trying to break it up! And it didn't stop there. Ever since that day, they've been terrible to each other at school, but they haven't left it there. This is from Megan's Instagram.

BRICK VB

(MEGAN enters in front of SL banner)

MEGAN

“Like” this if you think Natalie’s too weak to lift her backpack. Share if you think she’s too weak to lift a pencil.

RYAN

And this is from Natalie’s Instagram posted with a picture of a sloth.

(NATALIE enters in front of SR banner)

NATALIE

Here we have a rare photo of Megan’s brain working a math problem at actual speed.

RYAN

And Megan’s TikTok...

MEGAN

Hey everybody, I found a quiz to find out which lame Haunters character you might be. I hear Natalie got so mad at her result she cried for hours.

RYAN

And a Snap from Natalie...

NATALIE

(Slowly, mockingly)

I’ve heard that the teachers are going to start talking t-h-i-s s-l-o-w so Megan can keep up.

CLASSROOM VB

RYAN

And that’s where we are now. It’s our last day of detention, and even so, it feels like it’s never going to end.

NATALIE

Maybe we’d all get along if Megan would just admit she can’t keep up with us.

MEGAN

Or maybe you need to apologize before I teach you another lesson.

RYAN
(Fed up)

GUYS, why can't you be in the same room for more than ten seconds without attacking each other?

NATALIE
I don't know, ask her, she's the one who can't keep her big mouth shut.

MEGAN
Oh, you should talk. I saw what you wrote online.

NATALIE
What? You can read? I had no idea!

MEGAN
(To Ryan)

See what I mean?! She's such a jerk!

NATALIE
Come on, Ryan, you even admitted she can't keep up with us.

RYAN
What?

MEGAN
Yeah, I heard that. You were talking about me that day before the fight.

RYAN
I was just trying to get through to her! I didn't mean anything by it!

NATALIE
See, she thinks the only way to solve things is by fighting.

MEGAN
That's the only way to get you to shut your mouth.

NATALIE

Why don't you shut your mouth?!

MEGAN/NATALIE

I hate you, Natalie! I hate you, you jerk, etc.

RYAN

ENOUGH!!

Sorry, I -- I shouldn't have yelled. Sometimes I just don't know what to do about you two. I want you both to be my friends, but this has been terrible for me. And don't think I haven't seen these.

(RYAN pulls out his phone.)

NATALIE

What are you talking about?

RYAN

Screen shots. All the mean pictures you've posted on your Instagram account. "Megan Brandt runs like a rabid squirrel."

MEGAN

You took screen shots!? That's awesome, she's going to get in such big trouble!

(RYAN shows MEGAN his phone)

RYAN

And these are yours. "Maybe Natalie should just die so she can be with her dumb ghostie friends forever."

(MEGAN laughs)

I wonder if the Principal would think that's so funny.

NATALIE

Spoke too soon, huh?

MEGAN

Shut up, Natalie!

RYAN

See, this is what I can't handle! You can't say a word to each other without it being mean, somehow. I'm just exhausted. It's at the point where I don't want to be friends with either of you.

MEGAN/NATALIE

Ryan, don't say that./Ryan, come on--

RYAN

Listen, you're both my friends, okay? But I can't take this anymore! Natalie, my grades are tanking because you keep distracting me in class with your endless nasty notes about Megan. And Megan, I've been skipping soccer practice because I'm so tired of you bad-mouthing Natalie every chance you get. I'll be lucky if I don't get cut from the team! So if it will stop me from feeling like this, I'll just find other friends.

MEGAN

Wow. Okay.

RYAN

Yeah. So here's what I'm thinking. Either I can send these (gesturing to the phone) to the principal and she can give you guys a couple more weeks of detention to sort this out--

MEGAN

They can't do anything, we did it at home.

RYAN

Wrong. You can still get in trouble, even if you didn't post it at school. Or, I can delete them, and you can find a way to at least be kind to each other. Maybe not best friends, I know that would be a lot to ask, but at least be decent to each other. Because I can't keep getting pulled between you. You both keep telling me I'm too fun or too smart for the other one. If you really think that, you should treat me better. I deserve friends who respect me. I want you to be those friends. But that's out of my hands.

So, am I sending these to the principal, or deleting them?

(Gesturing to his phone)

(NATALIE and MEGAN share a look. They look down at the floor.)

MEGAN

We'll take care of it.

NATALIE

We promise.

RYAN

You'd better. I'm going to spend the rest of detention cleaning the whiteboards.

(He starts to exit)

MEGAN

Okay. Ryan, I'm sorry.

NATALIE

That makes two of us. Thanks for telling us how you feel.

RYAN

Sure. Just don't make me regret it. I'd hate to have to find another soccer team AND another book club.

(RYAN exits. There is an awkward silence)

MEGAN

So...what are we going to do?

NATALIE

Look, Megan--ever since I won my first spelling bee, everyone's called me nerd or freak or dork. Every single day since then. People try to cheat off of me in class, I get mean notes on my desk when I leave it, people even steal my homework.

MEGAN

I didn't know that.

NATALIE

How could you? You're too busy laughing it up with all the guys in school, being Miss Popularity...

MEGAN

I'm not---the guys can be jerks sometimes, too.

NATALIE

And you're always the first girl picked in gym and recess, while I'm just trying to blend into the walls.

MEGAN

Yeah, I guess so. But that's not as good as it sounds. I get bored talking about sports all the time. And don't tell anyone, but I really do like reading. I started that first *Haunters* book.

NATALIE

What? Really?!

MEGAN

Natalie, you were right, Chapter 17 is INSANE!!

NATALIE

I know! Wait till you find out about---

MEGAN

Hello?! Spoilers!

NATALIE

Oops, sorry! Anyway, that's not really important right now.

MEGAN

Ryan's right, though. Aside from that, we don't have a lot in common. But we do have Ryan in common, and I don't know about you, but I don't want to lose that. He's been my best friend since kindergarten.

NATALIE

And he's the only guy friend I have in this school, besides being one of the smartest and nicest people I know.

MEGAN

But we're not making it easy on him, as much as we fight. We're really hurting him. I didn't even think about how bad he'd feel this whole time.

NATALIE

Yeah. I had no idea. Talk about feeling sick to your stomach.

MEGAN

(Stands, takes out her phone)

You know what? I'm gonna delete everything I posted about you on Instagram and TikTok.

NATALIE

(Stands, takes out her phone)

Me too.....and I'll get my friends to delete their posts, too.

MEGAN

I had a feeling those might be out there, on one of your Haunters pages.

NATALIE

Haunters fans, we stick together.

(They link pinkies for a pinky swear)

MEGAN

Really, don't tell anyone I read your sappy ghost romance book.

NATALIE

“May the doors of Black Manor fall from their hinges before I speak—“

MEGAN

Okay. I get it. Man, you're such a dork. But, so am I, I guess.

NATALIE

Thanks. I guess you're not too bad either.

(RYAN enters from the other side.)

MEGAN

Don't you forget it.

(She slugs NATALIE in the shoulder)

NATALIE

Ow, that hurt!

MEGAN

Really? I'm sorry.

NATALIE
(Laughing)

I'm kidding.

RYAN

Well. They may not exactly be best friends, but it's a start. And listen, if your friends are being less than friendly to each other, don't be afraid to do something about it—

MEGAN

Or just say something about it.

NATALIE

Yeah, there are lots of ways you can do that.

RYAN
(Testing them)

Oh yeah? Like what?

MEGAN

Well, I've worked with the coach to cut back on all the negativity on our soccer team. Now, everyone's a lot more positive on the field, and win or lose, we all leave feeling good.

NATALIE

Yeah, and I brought a new book to my book club about friends being kinder to each other. See, a lot of my friends also jumped on board when I started picking on Megan, and I didn't like that. So we all read a book that would help us learn how to be better friends to each other.

MEGAN

And your friends, Natalie, have been way nicer to me since then.

NATALIE

The soccer team's been really cool, too! They even picked me early in gym the other day.

RYAN

Sounds like you two patching things up has made the whole school better. That's pretty cool. And it's all thanks to me. Thank you, thank you, no applause, just throw money---

NATALIE/MEGAN

Oh boy! Come on, Big Shot, etc.

(They all exit)

RESPECT BACKDROP FOR TALKBACK