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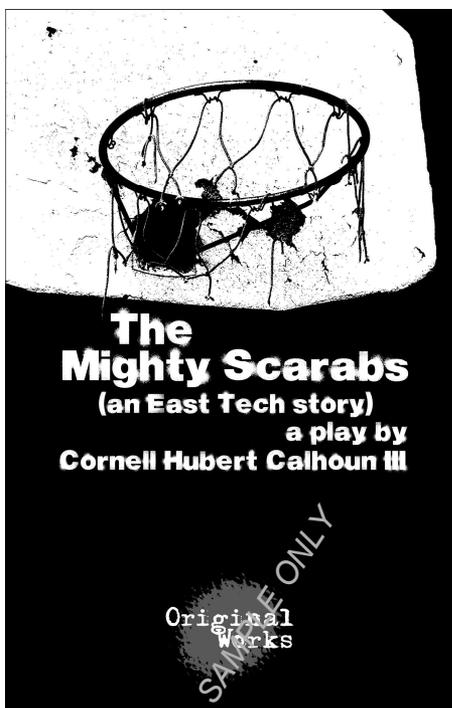
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**The Mighty Scarabs**

**by Cornell Hubert Calhoun III**

**Synopsis:** The ball stops bouncing for everyone... eventually. When the heroes of Cleveland's East Technical High School basketball team won the state championship in '55 the world was theirs for the taking. Thirteen years later, the ball has stopped bouncing and reality has set in. A funny, lyrical and mournful exploration of what happens to inner-city hardwood stars when the glory days are a distant memory.

**Cast Size:** 5 Males, 4 Females

# **BROKEN FENCES**

**by Steven Simoncic**

SAMPLE ONLY

*Broken Fences* premiered May 3, 2013 in New York City, produced by Ballybeg Theatre. The production was directed by Alex Levy.

The cast and crew was as follows:

|         |                  |
|---------|------------------|
| Hoody:  | Clinton Lowe     |
| D:      | Erika Rose       |
| Marz:   | Emilio Aquino    |
| Czar:   | Brian Carter     |
| April:  | Krissy Shields   |
| Barb:   | Lori Funk        |
| Spence: | Scott Aiello     |
| Esto:   | Benjamin Foronda |

Costume Designer: Valérie Thérèse Bart

Sound Designer: Howard Fredrics

Lighting Designer: Adam H. Greene,

Set Designer: Kathryn Kawecki

Stage Manager: Allyson Namishia

## Synopsis:

In a neighborhood on Chicago's deep West Side, the momentum of gentrification has taken hold and things have begun to change forever. As property taxes rise and demographics shift, Hoody and D struggle to keep the only home they have ever known. But when April and Czar -- a white couple intent on starting a family -- buy their first home and move in next door, the very definition of home is called into question. With unflinching honesty and unapologetic humor, *Broken Fences* attempts to examine identity and invisibility, community and security, hope and hostility in a modern American urban village that is at once foreign, and the place that these people call home.

## Character Breakdown

Hoody: African American male. Early thirties. Engaged to D.

D: African-American female. Late twenties.

Czar: Mid-thirties, Caucasian male. Married to April.

April: Mid-thirties, Caucasian female.

Spence: Late thirties, Caucasian male. Married to Barb.

Barb: Late thirties/early forties, Caucasian female.

Marz: Mid-twenties, African-American male.

Esto: Mid-twenties, Caucasian male who grew up in an African-American neighborhood.

BROKEN FENCES

ACT I / SCENE 1: WELCOME TO THE HOOD

*(Lights up on two small urban yards separated by a chain-link fence. The yard stage left is lived-in but well maintained with a small grill, a few lawn chairs, and a weathered picnic table. In the yard stage right, we see April and Czar surrounded by moving boxes. Czar is at the back door of the house. He pulls out a set of keys, opens the door, and sort of presents the house to April. They share a moment of "here we go." She picks up a small box and walks toward the door to enter the house.)*

CZAR: Wait. Hold on.

APRIL: What. *(April pauses. There is a beat.)* You're not serious. Czar, this is --

CZAR: Ridiculous, yes I know. But I still think we need to do it.

APRIL: We've been married five years.

CZAR: We've never owned a home.

APRIL: We just sold a condo.

CZAR: Condos don't count. This is a home. We have a house! So, c'mon -- hike it up here.

APRIL: I'm not hiking anything.

CZAR: C'mon, I'm supposed to carry you over the -- it's like a thing you do.

APRIL: If you're a Viking.

CZAR: It symbolizes good fortune.

APRIL: It symbolizes taking the wife's virginity, against her will, the night of her wedding.

CZAR: Really? How do you know that?

APRIL: How do you not know that?

CZAR: Because I'm not a Viking.

APRIL: And I'm not a virgin, so...

*(Czar's cell phone rings.)*

CZAR: *(Answering the phone)* Hey man.

APRIL: Who is it?

CZAR: *(Into the phone)* Yeah -- no, we're good -- so far we've established that I'm not a Viking and April's not a Virgin but we haven't unpacked a thing. What, Seriously?

APRIL: Spence?

CZAR: That's great, but you guys don't have to --

APRIL: Tell him no.

CZAR: Well, yeah, sure -- no that's fine --

APRIL: It's not fine --

CZAR: *(To April)* They're our best friends.

APRIL: He's your best friend.

CZAR: *(Back to the phone)* Okay, but are you sure 'cause -- really?

APRIL: They do this all the time --

CZAR: No that's great -- if you're already -- yep -- we're out back. Yeah, just park on the street. No, it'll be fine. I know, but -- *(To April)* It'll be fine right? Parking on the -- *(off April's reaction he goes back to the phone)* It'll be fine. Okay, see you in a few. *(He hangs up.)*

APRIL: They're coming over.

CZAR: They have Thai food.

APRIL: But they don't have an invite.

CZAR: Maybe they were just in the neighborhood.

APRIL: That's not funny.

CZAR: We could use some food -- the book says you're supposed to eat like every three hours --

APRIL: He's worried about his car isn't he?

CZAR: No, he just wasn't sure if he should park on the street.

APRIL: Which is code for --

CZAR: He's worried about his car.

APRIL: Why?

CZAR: I don't know -- 'cause he watches the news.

APRIL: What's that supposed to mean.

CZAR: It means we're probably gonna get a lot of this.

APRIL: A lot of what.

CZAR: Code. Our friends are gonna be polite and...confused... and concerned about their cars.

APRIL: That's ridiculous.

CZAR: It's also true. Wait 'til your folks visit, they're gonna be speaking Klingon.

APRIL: I don't care -- they're gonna have to get used to the fact that we live in East Garfield Park --

CZAR: And they will. Eventually. But in the mean time, we're gonna have to get used to the fact that when people say things like this place is really neat... it means they think we're fucking crazy.

APRIL: And when they call us adventurous?

CZAR: It means they think we're fucking crazy.

*(Spence and Barb enter the yard carrying bags of Thai take out.)*

SPENCE: Hey guys -- I think we found it --

CZAR: Spence! C'mon back.

APRIL: Hey guys!

SPENCE: This place is huge, man.

BARB: Wow congratulations -- it's really pretty April.

APRIL: Someday we'll actually figure out where half our stuff is.

BARB: Oh my god we are still missing stuff and we moved like five years ago.

SPENCE: And the car will be --

CZAR: Fine. It'll be fine.

BARB: *(To April)* How are you feeling by the way?

APRIL: Oh you know... Gassy... bloated... have to pee every ten minutes.

SPENCE: You just described my life. I think I'm pregnant.

BARB: *(To April)* Just don't lift anything heavy.

SPENCE: That's what Czar's for.

CZAR: Thought that's why you're here.

SPENCE: I'm here to snoop. Mock you. Eat Pad Thai and drink a really good bottle of white.

BARB: *(To April)* Are you okay with Thai -- we can get something else --

APRIL: No that's fine --

BARB: When I was pregnant my taste totally changed.

APRIL: So far I'm just constantly hungry --

CZAR: I actually think I know where some dishes are.

*(Czar opens a box. He and April begin to pull out a few plates. Spence and Barb open the take-out bag.)*

SPENCE: So... how's it going?

APRIL/CZAR: Good./ *(Overlapping April)* Good so far.

CZAR (CONT'D): I think we're still getting used to the fact that we actually have a house and new neighborhood and all... it's good.

SPENCE: Can I ask you something?

CZAR: Probably not.

SPENCE: Was this pure economics or are you like doing a thing here.

CZAR/APRIL: (*Simultaneously*) We're doing a thing./Pure Economics.

CZAR: In addition to the pure economics, I think we thought it'd be good to actually try and find a real, diverse community in Chicago -- with the kid coming we wanted him to grow up in a place where people didn't all look --

BARB: It's a boy?

CZAR: What? No, I just said him because -- I dunno why -- is that dickish?

SPENCE: It's kinda dickish.

CZAR: I don't think it's dickish.

SPENCE: That's probably what makes it dickish. What you meant to say is that you're excited to meet your baby, and boy or girl, you just hope it will be half as beautiful as your wife.

CZAR: (*To Barb*) Does that work?

BARB: It did 'til now.

CZAR: Okay -- we just didn't want our sexless, almost-as-beautiful-as-my-wife child to grow up in a place where everyone looks exactly the same.

SPENCE: Yeah, we didn't have that problem.

CZAR: We looked at all the fashionably gentrifying neighborhoods --

SPENCE: Pricey right?

CZAR: Couldn't touch a house in Logan Square or Ukrainian Village.

APRIL: It was this or going out to the suburbs.

BARB: Well I have to say, this place is really neat.

APRIL: Barb -- when you say this place is neat, does that mean you think we're fucking crazy?

BARB: No... I think it means I think it's neat.

APRIL: See Czar.

CZAR: Spence?

SPENCE: I think you're fucking crazy. But in the best possible way. This is brilliant -- this neighborhood's gonna blow up by the time you flip this.

CZAR: We're not flippers -- we don't flip.

SPENCE: C'mon man. Did you see all the developer signs out there?

CZAR: April wouldn't even let me carry her over the threshold because it's culturally insensitive to Vikings. You think she's gonna let us flip a house?

SPENCE: You remember Creepy Geoffrey?

CZAR: Copywriter?

SPENCE: With the hair plugs... smelled like yoga.

CZAR: He was a hack.

SPENCE: That's why he's in real estate now. He's all over this neighborhood.

CZAR: Well good for Geoffrey but we still need to --

SPENCE: Nail the Tic Tac thing. Yeah, I already did that.

CZAR: Really.

SPENCE: You were out. Wanna know what it is?

CZAR: Not the dirty mint thing.

SPENCE: Fresh mints for dirty mouths. Think of all the dirty things people do with their mouths -- you need a mint.

CZAR: No it's --

SPENCE: Kent loved it.

CZAR: Kent's an idiot.

SPENCE: He's also your boss.

BARB: Are dirty mints a good thing?

SPENCE: It's dirty mouths -- you're not in the target audience Barb. We're going after young people.

CZAR: He means younger people.

SPENCE: Millennials, club kids... Tic-Tacs are gonna be cool again.

APRIL: Were they cool before?

SPENCE: Number one mint in the sixties.

CZAR: They were the only mint in the sixties.

SPENCE: Wrong. Mentos. 1948. Read the fuckin' brief.  
(*Hands Czar a file and a product sample.*)

CZAR: What's this?

SPENCE: Gift from Kent. It's your worst nightmare.

CZAR: We're not working on this.

SPENCE: I don't think we have a choice.

APRIL: What's a Cheese Chunker?

SPENCE: It's... cheese.

CZAR: Product. It's cheese prod - they can't legally call it cheese.

SPENCE: Yeah, well either way, it's the next six weeks of our lives. (*Off Czar's reaction...*) Look, we don't hop on this - they'll give it to two kids straight out of art school that make half as much as we do.

CZAR: Great -- let 'em go nuts.

SPENCE: Yeah but no. See I have a McMansion with a McMortgage and a monthly bill from Waldorf so my child can learn to play with yarn instead of read -- so I'm Cheese Chunking. That make any sense to you?

CZAR: Sort of.

SPENCE: Well now that you're sort of locked into a sort of huge-ass mortgage yourself, you'll sort of realize your nuts are sort of in a vice for the next 30 years, and you'll sort of become a fan of Cheese Chunkers. No offense April, it's a beautiful home.

(*Spence gets up and walks to the fence.*)

CZAR: Why is he limping? Why are you limping?

SPENCE/BARB: I pulled a muscle./He got snipped.

SPENCE: I pulled a muscle after I got snipped.

CZAR: I didn't know you got snipped.

SPENCE: No one does unless they talk to Barb for thirty seconds. In case you're wondering, I don't feel like any less of a man.

CZAR: That's not what I'm wondering.

BARB: A bunch of the dad's all went together.

SPENCE: Jesus Barb, enough.

APRIL: You all went together? Like a little club or something?

SPENCE: It's not a club. It's a loose organization of like-minded individuals.

APRIL: Like a club.

SPENCE: It's not like we're all laying spread eagle on the same table or anything.

CZAR: Did that come up?

SPENCE: Getting snipped is what guys in Schaumburg do. They make a whole thing out of it. You grill some steaks, make a pitcher of Manhattans, then you go --

CZAR: Get sterilized with your neighbors.

SPENCE: See this is why I don't tell you things. You'll see man -- your head changes when you have kids.

CZAR: I'm just saying I think it's neat.

*(Esto enters the yard next door. We hear tinny/compressed music coming from a blaring pair of headphones on his ears. He doesn't even notice his new neighbors. He is carrying a box that looks exactly like the boxes April and Czar are unpacking. He sets the box on the picnic table, cracks it open, and pulls out some dishes, oblivious to the stare of the people across the fence.)*

SPENCE: What's he doing?

CZAR: I think he's stealing our dishes.

*(Esto begins to unpack more dishes from the box.)*

CZAR: Hey. Excuse me.

*(No response. Esto bobs to the music in his headphones.)*

SPENCE: Hey buddy, we're talking to you!

BARB: Spence!

SPENCE: What!

BARB: You're not supposed to confront him like that.

SPENCE: What are you supposed to do?

CZAR: Call the cops.

SPENCE: For dishes. In this neighborhood.

CZAR: Yes. For dishes in this neighborhood.

BARB: He looks like he lives there.

SPENCE: You don't wanna be that guy man. The cops get to go home - you're already there. So's he.

APRIL: Okay, everybody. Just relax. Excuse me - Hello! I know you can hear me.

CZAR: If you don't turn around we're gonna call the police.

*(This gets Esto's attention. He pauses as if he just heard something, pulls off his headphones, turns around and sees Czar, Spence, April and Barb standing against the fence. )*

ESTO: Sup.

APRIL: Hi. Um... this is really... I think those might be ours.

ESTO: Huh?

CZAR: The dishes. They - look like ours.

ESTO: They do look like yours.

CZAR: Yes. They do, so...

ESTO: What. You think I stole 'em?

CZAR: No. I dunno. I mean it looks like - you sort of have our dishes.

APRIL: Listen, we don't want to make a big thing out of this.

ESTO: Then don't.

CZAR: Excuse me?

*(Hoody and D enter their yard from the back of Hoody's house. They are carrying bags of groceries. )*

HOODY: *(On Phone)* Yo, man. You see Yummy, you tell him he owe me \$200. I'm callin' everything in. *(To Esto.)* Thought you was out looking for a job.

*(Esto nods his head toward the other yard. Hoody and D look across the fence and see Czar, Spence, April and Barb. There is a beat as they look at each other for the first time.)*

HOODY (CONT'D): Sup y'all.

*(April, Czar, Spence, and Barb wave/nod and say "Hi." There is another beat.)*

HOODY (CONT'D): Y'all... Need directions or something?

APRIL: Actually, we live here. As of today anyway.

D: Y'all the ones moving in here?

CZAR: Yeah, that's us.

D: Huh.

APRIL: Well, we are. I'm April and this is my husband, Czar. These are our friends, Spence and Barb. *(Spence and Barb say hi/smile/wave.)*

HOODY: All right then -- welcome to the neighborhood. I'm Courtney. This my fiancé D, see y'all already met Esto.

SPENCE: Sort of.

D: Hold on y'all -- I gotta do something --

HOODY: You serious?

D: Talk Hoody. I'll be right back.

*(D runs into her house. There is an awkward beat of silence over the fence.)*

HOODY: So y'all... unpacking and shit.

*(A beat as they all smile and nod.)*

CZAR: Yeah. Dishes mostly.

HOODY: Dishes is good.

CZAR: Yeah -- we love our dishes.

SPENCE: Everybody does.

*(D enters carrying a small square of fabric.)*

D: Here we go y'all -- this for you. *(She hands April the small piece of cloth.)*

APRIL: Thanks. This is great.

CZAR: Wow. That's -- *(Looking at the fabric)* yeah. Thank you.

HOODY: Y'all have no idea what the hell that is do you? *(Off their reaction...)* It's a swatch.

BARB: Like from a quilt.

D: This a little Garfield Park tradition.

HOODY: Started when everyone on this block was related.

D: Whenever somebody from the hood start a new adventure -- good or bad -- they get a swatch.

HOODY: Make a baby -- get a swatch. Somebody dies -- get a swatch. *(Glancing at Esto)* Get out the joint - get a swatch. It's some crazy-ass old school Mississippi shit, but all the aunties still do it anyway.

D: It ain't crazy -- it's for real Hoody. Swatch tells you you ain't alone in the world. Tells you you got some work to do. And then one day when you got a quilt all made --

HOODY: You give a swatch to somebody else who needs it.

D: That's right. You can't stop the swatch -- it just keeps goin' so --

APRIL: Are you sure, 'cause... I don't want to --

D: This ain't me baby, this tradition.

APRIL: Well thank you. Really. Now I'm gonna have to learn how to knit. You don't knit a quilt, do you? Sew. I'll learn how to sew.

D: Good -- you can teach me -- Hoody's momma ain't never forgive me for my sloppy stitches.

CZAR: So this is your place?

(*Hoody nods.*)

APRIL: It's great. How long have you lived here?

HOODY: Whole life. This was my grandma's house, then my mom's and then she left it to me.

ESTO: And Marz.

D: His whole family used to live up in here.

HOODY: Cousins, half brothers, half sisters. Somebody get out the joint, they come here. (*Looking at Esto*) Get kicked out they house - they come here. Half of 'em ain't even related to me.

APRIL: Our family's all over the place.

D: (*To April*) So, it's just the two of y'all in all that house?

APRIL: Actually, we have one on the way.

D: I knew it. I could tell.

APRIL: Really?

D: See how shiny your hair is? When it gets thick like that, that's a sign you making a baby. I knew as soon as I saw you.

APRIL: It just came in -- I never had hair like this before.

D: Every white girl look like Mary J. Blige for 'bout two months when she pregnant.

HOODY: D cuts hair. She a stylist.

D: Training to be a stylist.

HOODY: She good too.

APRIL: That is so cool. Now how about you guys, any babies running around?

D: We gonna start a family soon as I finish school, right Baby?

HOODY: We already got kids (*gesturing to Esto*), you lookin' at one of them.

BARB: We have Tyler. He's 3. (*Showing a photo on her phone.*)

D: So y'all gotta be getting ready for number two.

BARB: Actually Spence just got --

SPENCE: We're good -- we like having one child.

D: (*To April*) Well if y'all need a crib or anything - his momma kept everything.

APRIL: That'd be great -- our family doesn't really do the hand  
-me-down thing.

D: For real?

HOODY: See my momma's side alone we got 24 cousins.  
Can't open a drawer around here without a couple cousins  
flying out. Same pair of pants hits five, six asses before it  
gets retired.

CZAR: Yeah, we pretty much just have the stuff we brought.  
Just the stuff in these brown cardboard boxes... these brown  
cardboard boxes here in our yard.

*(Czar is looking straight at the brown cardboard box Esto has  
on the picnic table in Hoody's yard... Hoody notices the box...  
followed by D. They both look at Esto.)*

HOODY: What -- you helping out Lover Boy?

ESTO: Yeah, man. I was just telling them how I found some  
of their stuff that was stole.

HOODY: For real.

ESTO: Straight up.

HOODY: See that's good that you found it, 'cause these seem  
like nice people.

ESTO: Yeah, they seem real nice.

HOODY: And ain't nothin' worse than getting your shit stole  
the day you move in.

D: That's right. And she pregnant too - she don't need that  
kind of stress.

HOODY: Personally, I'd like to see the dude that did it get  
nailed. Specially if he had some priors and what not from  
back in the day - shit could get weird real fast.

ESTO: Yeah, see they left their truck wide open.

APRIL: That's true, we did.

ESTO: Couple shorties been lifting 'em all day. I figured since you're Hoody's new neighbors, I'd hook you up and get your stuff back.

HOODY: So you like Neighborhood Watch.

ESTO: Just my way of giving back.

HOODY: Another way to give back would be to... just *(gesturing to the box)* give it back.

ESTO: Yeah, right - I was just going through it to make sure it was all there. *(Esto hands the box back over the fence to Czar.)* So, here you go, now we got it all straight and everything's cool. It's cool right?

HOODY: Up to y'all. You may still wanna file a report just to be safe.

*(Hoody holds out his cell phone across the fence.)*

APRIL: No. It's cool.

CZAR: It's cool?

APRIL: Uh huh.

CZAR: *(To Hoody/Esto)* It's cool.

*(Lights hard cut to black. A spotlight fades up on Hoody who is now wearing a black hooded sweatshirt pulled up over his head. As he delivers his monologue, D enters his light and slowly takes the hooded sweatshirt off his back and changes him into a button down Jiffy Lube work shirt. By the end of the monologue, she completes the transformation by handing him a junior college economics text book. )*

ACT I / SCENE 2: INVISIBLE

HOODY: I am invisible. Been invisible all my life. When I was a kid I could go days, weeks without being seen. Throw my hood up over my head, eyes pushed way back deep inside, and poof just disappear. Blend into the street another shadow another shade of black and grey on the stairs by the train. Ain't nobody know my real name and that was fine with me 'cause I didn't need one. And I got used to it too, being invisible. I could flow like air, life blowing through me like a breeze. Like I wasn't there. And it was tight too 'cause when you young and you angry and you invisible, you can fuck with people and they don't even know what hit 'em. Can't catch what you can't see. And for a long time ain't nobody see me... 'til one day this light skinned boy from Pilsen pulls out his nine mil acting all gangsta and shit and - POP! POP! Busts two caps just like that. I musta been real invisible that day 'cause that boy from Pilsen never even saw me. Bullet passed through me like a pit bull, clawing and scratching and biting its way out. Woke up in Cook County Hospital with a red Bulls jersey that used to be white packed into my chest. Don't even know how it got there. That was the day I became a little more in focus.

*(The lights come up a bit so we get a better look at his face.)*

HOODY (CONT'D): After a while I realized the scars weren't just on me, they were me. And every year, I got more. Earned every cut, every burn, every bruise, and every tattoo the more marked up I got, the more I could be seen. At least here in Garfield Park you ain't had to look hard to see me -- I was everywhere, man -- just connect my dots (*Pointing to scars on his arm*) and you got me. Least the old me. The fuck you me. The used-to-be me. Now my shit's retired like Jordan. Ham sandwiches and double shifts, that's all I'm pulling these days. Shit I go to Costco. And I like it. Scars are fading... dots are disappearing... trade your bruise and tattoo for some comfortable shoes... and you're left with a whole lot less to connect.

*(The lights fade to black.)*

ACT I / SCENE 3: YUMMY IS A PIMP

*(A light fades up on Hoody's yard. D is pacing with a book bag, a dented mannequin head and a full head of steam. Hoody enters.)*

HOODY: 'Sup baby.

D: *(Gesturing with the dented hair styling mannequin.)* Somebody sat on my head.

HOODY: Who?

D: Some guy nodded out on the Red Line. I gotta dye and style test tomorrow - I got to practice tonight.

HOODY: So get another head.

D: Where am I gonna get another head at seven thirty?

HOODY: You got skills baby, you don't need no practice -

D: Aw, hell no. Don't even start, Hoody. This is Mario Tracocci. They weeding students out every week. They looking for a reason. *(A beat.)*

HOODY: What.

D: Let me use your head.

HOODY: My head? No, no, no.

D: Hoody.

HOODY: Hell no.

D: You gonna be sitting here anyway -- you ain't even gonna notice - *(He gestures. She stops.)*

HOODY: I have spoken on this topic. And... you just gonna have to get another head 'cause...

D: Sit down.

HOODY: Damn, D -

D: Sit.

*(There is a brief standoff then Hoody sits. D puts a flowery smock around his neck and begins to lay out her scissors, razor, and hair dye.)*

D: So, how was your day, sir?

HOODY: The hell you mean how was my day?

D: We supposed to develop a rapport with our clients. They grade us on it. So how was your day?

HOODY: Good until now.

*(Just as D gets ready to apply the color, Esto enters carrying a stack of mail and a massive coffee drink with whip cream from Starbucks.)*

ESTO: Aw, hell no.

HOODY: Don't even.

ESTO: So D, we just blowing him out or we getting real with this shit?

D: We getting real with this shit. Highlights. We gonna be a while.

HOODY: How long's a while?

D: Don't turn your head.

*(D straightens Hoody's head. She begins to do her prep work. Esto watches, taking a big sip of his coffee drink.)*

HOODY: The hell is that.

ESTO: This here is a venti, extra foamy, triple shot skinny soy machiatto with whip.

HOODY: That good?

ESTO: Fuckin' delicious man. Y'all should go up there.

D: Where.

ESTO: New Starbucks up on Kostner.

HOODY: The fuck they put a Starbucks on Kostner?

ESTO: Old Currency Exchange. Got a fuckin' Panda Express going up next door too.

HOODY: How you buying five dollar coffee, man?

ESTO: They givin' 'em out free. It's the grand opening. Your brother's working up there.

HOODY: Marz working at Starbucks.

ESTO: You oughta call him, Hoody. He told me to tell y'all they hiring. I been chillin' up there all day. They got these big ass couches. Footrests and shit.

HOODY: How many of them you drink?

ESTO: Six.

*(They all bust up/react.)*

ESTO (CONT'D): I'm freaking out man.

*(Esto polishes off his coffee drink and tosses the cup in the trash.)*

ESTO (CONT'D): Yo, I grabbed your mail. Y'all got a bunch more of them letters from the Assessor's Office.

*(Esto tosses a stack of letters on Hoody's lap.)*

D: We got more letters?

*(Esto makes his way upstage to the fridge.)*

ESTO: *(To Hoody)* Yo, Beyonce - you want a beer?

D: What are all these letters for?

HOODY: They ain't for nothin'.

ESTO: *(To Hoody from the fridge.)* Yo, Rhianna you thirsty?

D: *(Still looking at the letters.)* If they ain't nothing then let me see.

HOODY: D -

*(D grabs a letter out of Hoody's hand. He tries to grab it back but it's too late.)*

D: You said you were gonna take care of this.

HOODY: I got some bullshit letters a while ago, but they ain't nobody down there you can talk to so I -

D: Stopped opening the mail. Damn, Hoody, I told you --

HOODY: What's it say?

D: Says we owe \$5,278. That's like double last year's. They can't just up and do that.

HOODY: They did it. Currency Exchange becomes a Starbucks, condos going up in the park... We livin' in the lap of luxury now so we got to pay.

ESTO: So don't pay it.

HOODY: Don't pay it, they take your house.

D: Oh hell no, they ain't taking this house! This your momma's house. This your grandmama's house.

HOODY: They ain't takin' my house. I'll figure somethin' out.

D: Well you doin' a great job so far.

ESTO: (*Looking over D's shoulder at the letter.*) 60 days. Fuck, man.

HOODY: Where it say that --

D: Can we get an extension?

HOODY: Not another one.

D: You already got an extension? (*A beat.*) When were you gonna tell me?

HOODY: When I figured out how to pay it.

(*Marz enters with a tray of three large Starbucks drinks.*)

MARZ: Sup y'all.

HOODY: You just lettin' yourself in now? This ain't your house.

MARZ: Technically it's half mine -- she was my momma too. I brought these for y'all. This here's Green Tea Frappuccino, shit's like nine dollars a glass so drink it slow 'cause this ain't no Shamrock Shake and shit.

ESTO: I still can't believe you working at Starbucks, man.

MARZ: This just part of my gig Lover Boy -- I got multiple revenue streams. Economic tide lifting all boats in this 'hood -- better get your dingy in the water man.

ESTO: Okay I have no idea what that means.

HOODY: Means he has two damn jobs.

MARZ: That's right I'm teaching too.

ESTO: The hell you gonna teach?

MARZ: Boot camp.

ESTO: Boot camp class.

*(Marz smiles.)*

ESTO (CONT'D): You mean people pay you money to beat on they ass like they was in the Army?

MARZ: Every goddamn Saturday.

ESTO: Who the fuck would do that?

MARZ: White people. Sixteen of the motherfuckers. Looking for a challenge and shit.

ESTO: How the hell you get hooked up with that?

MARZ: LuLu Lemon.

ESTO: Who's she.

MARZ: Bitch makes yoga pants for people to wear in Starbucks.

ESTO: Why the fuck they wanna wear yoga pants in Starbucks?

MARZ: 'cause they telling everybody they going to yoga next.

ESTO: Who the fuck cares?

MARZ: The other people wearing yoga pants. I'm pulling coffee and all I hear is these ladies in they yoga pants talking 'bout they Boot Camp class. I'm like -- I was in the Navy -- I'll put a boot in they ass for half what these mutherfuckers chargin' 'em. Hung a flier -- now I'm a Boot Camp instructor for 'bout sixteen pairs of yoga pants.

ESTO: That's awesome man.

HOODY: That's bullshit that's what that is.

*(Marz notices the letters on the table.)*

MARZ: Looks like y'all got a little mail. *(Looks at the letter.)* How bad? *(No one answers.)* That bad. Whole hood gettin' hit. Some bills almost triple last year. Only going up from here. Big ass article about it in the Trib - not that any y'all gonna read it. Y'all remember Dookie?

ESTO: Joliet.

MARZ : Five to eight with good behavior.

HOODY: 'Cause he was stupid.

MARZ: 'Cause he was broke. Wasn't his fault.

HOODY: Here we go, who you gonna blame now?

ESTO: White people.

MARZ: Dookie was living here since we was kids and he ain't never jacked no cars. But then all the people from Lakeview start movin' in because they feelin' adventurous and shit. And guess what - a lot of them was white -- and Dookie was down with that for a while. It was all good. He was even hitting that white girl for a while.

ESTO: Sheila.

MARZ: Right and she was fine, too. But then, after a while, rent goes up and he can't afford to live in his own neighborhood, 'cause it ain't his neighborhood no more. It's theirs and he don't belong. So they evict his ass. Next thing you know his little white girlfriend is gone. She ain't about to be dating no homeless, pissed off brother, and before you know it he's sleeping under the Edens talking to pigeons like they was his kids. Then one day some other white girl come driving down the street in her brand new Beamer. She stops at the light and when he looks into her eyes, he sees everything he's lost. So instead of washing her windshield, Dookie decides he's gonna take somethin' back. Next thing you know, he's in lock up at County. Simple economics. *(To Hoody)* Maybe if you actually read some of your textbooks, you'd know this shit.

D: Dookie jacked a car. That ain't economics. That's a felony.

MARZ: That's reality. Y'all ain't never gonna learn are ya? I told you the shit's changin'. Y'all like dinosaurs, and it's gettin' cold out there. Time to wake your black Jurassic asses up. Look next door.

ESTO: Whatever man, that's one building.

MARZ: That's three families they kicked out that apartment so they could build one house. How you like your new neighbors? I hope a lot 'cause they dropped \$350,000 to live here. That's why your tax bill's all jacked up.

HOODY: Ain't nobody gonna pay three fifty to live here.

MARZ: That's the point. They dropped three fifty 'cause they bettin' here ain't gonna be here for long.

ESTO: How you know they paid three fifty?

MARZ: Yummy. He hung dry wall over there for six months.

ESTO: I thought Yummy was a pimp.

MARZ: Yummy is a pimp.

ESTO: What kind a pimp hangs dry wall?

MARZ: The kind that set up shop in the middle of a recession. Had all his bitches spackling the bathrooms too. Yummy and his girls had to get creative to make their dollars. That's what I'm doing.

ESTO: Hear that Hoody?

HOODY: Just get y'self a job Lover Boy.

*(Esto exits.)*

D: Marz - we ain't going anywhere.

MARZ: Alright, say you find a way to make your bill this year. Ain't no way you gonna, but say you do. What you gonna do next year, and the year after that when you get reassessed again? This ain't no one time shot. People want return on their investment, so they bringin' everything with them - Baby Gap, Montessori fuckin' Whole Foods.

D: Good. Bout time. They selling Slims and Vodka on every corner but try and find a grape that ain't soda round here.

MARZ: That Whole Foods comes, folks like you and me is asked to leave.

*(Marz takes the letter out of Hoody's hands and presents it to D. D grabs it out of his hands.)*

D: You remember my momma Marz? Her last year, when she got really bad, she had to keep scoring to stop shaking. So we moved. Constantly. You remember Hoody.

HOODY: I remember hunting all over the damn hood to find you.

D: Twenty-eight. Slept in twenty-eight different beds that year - shelters, church basement, the park. I know because for my twelfth birthday I got a pack of real colored pencils from Pastor Hatch at the toy drive and I decided I was gonna be an artist. So I drew every bus stop and every boyfriend's couch. I still have 'em. Twenty-eight shaky sketches of places we had to call home every night. Then one morning momma stopped moving all together. And so did I. Came here. Hoody's momma - *(gesturing toward Marz)* your momma -- gave me number twenty-nine for a night. And I never left. Haven't spent a night outside this house ever since. First day you have a home is the last day you homeless. And I have a home. *(Looking to Hoody)* We have a home. *(Moving around the room collecting the phone, a pad of paper, a pen, etc.)* I'm gonna call down there. This ain't happening. Baby, look at me. Look at me. This ain't happening.

*(D Kisses his cheek and exits.)*

MARZ: *(In a husky female voice, imitating D)* Baby, look at me. Look at me. No wonder your ass so tired all the time.

HOODY: She'd kick your ass.

MARZ: You don't think I know that?

*(A beat. Hoody cracks a slight smile.)*

HOODY: Thought you hated Starbucks.

MARZ: I do. That's why I work there.

HOODY: Selling five-dollar coffee to people on food stamps.

MARZ: Everybody else making money off this hood, I can too. This some Robin Hood shit goin' on right here.

HOODY: Who your boss?

MARZ: Andy.

HOODY: White boy?

MARZ: Ever known a brother named Andy? And he ain't my boss, he my bitch.

HOODY: Naw man, you the bitch and you don't even know it. You ain't no Robin Hood. You just a ho with dental.

MARZ: That's all right, we all hos. Least I'm a well paid ho with benefits, a bonus and a uniform that ain't got my name on it. Another six months I'll have enough cash saved to get somewhere the fuck out of here.

*(Hoody reacts -- smirks and shakes his head.)*

MARZ (CONT'D): That's all right Jiffy Lube, we all got to make the bank any way we can. It's cool. I'll let you change my oil some time. Tip your ass real good, too.

HOODY: Remember where your black ass is from, Junior.

MARZ: I know where I'm from. And I know when it's time to leave.

*(Marz gets up to go.)*

HOODY: Yeah you was always good at leaving. Ever since we was kids all you ever did was run --

(Marz stops.)

MARZ: And all you ever did was get in the way.

HOODY: And you damn lucky too. I got in the way of a light skinned boy from Pilsen once -- right between you and his nine mil -- you remember that, junior?

MARZ: I remember you was the fucking magical negro -- gets shot -- rises from the dead -- you were a neighborhood savior man. Thug hero. Everybody on your jock after that. I remember you lovin' that shit.

HOODY: And I remember you disappearing.

MARZ: Don't make no difference -- ain't nobody in this hood ever see me anyway.

HOODY: I come out the hospital. You disappear. Mamma dies - you disappear. Bills come in - you disappear. Old man comes back around looking for cash - you disappear. Look at you man - you still running away.

MARZ: 'Cause I went to school I was runnin'? 'cause I got out the house? I was walking man - forward. You were standing so still it just looked like I was running. What you gonna do Hoody? (A *beat*.) What you should do is get the fuck out. They buying lots -- vacant lots -- for 250 a pop. There are real estate agents all over my Starbucks man. That's where they work -- I got three of them want to do a damn deal right now. We can sell, split the cash and move on. This our ticket out man.

HOODY: Wait, We? Now there's a we? Where was we when the basement flooded? Where the hell is we when the goddamn furnace blows out twice a winter. Ain't been no we for a long time. Only been you and me.

MARZ: Momma's gone, Hoody. So's the hood. We should be too.

HOODY: This my home. That may not mean much to you - not that any motherfuckin' thing does --

MARZ : Thug hero days is over man... you still trying to be the neighborhood savior and they ain't no neighborhood left to save.

HOODY: Yeah well least that's better than only trying to save your own ass all the time.

MARZ: That's all anyone can save, man.

HOODY: Yeah? And how's that working out for you player?

MARZ: I ain't dead yet.

HOODY: Yeah, well me neither.

*(Lights fade to black.)*

SAMPLE ONLY

ACT I / SCENE 4: BATMAN

*(Lights up on Hoody and D at the picnic table in their yard huddled over an economics text book. She is helping him with his homework.)*

D: Naw, see -- what'd we say -- this a liability right? Liabilities is the shit you owe, not what somebody owes you. Now what side of the balance sheet that go on?

*(Hoody gestures to an area of his worksheet.)*

D (CONT'D): Right side -- boom -- there you go. Now where does Property, Plant and Equipment go?

HOODY: I have no goddamn idea.

D: Okay let's start with something easier. Where does cash go?

HOODY: The hell out my pocket.

D: C'mon Hoody, I got to get to my own class.

HOODY: I pulled a double today --

D: And you trying to pull bullshit now --

HOODY: I don't need no damn worksheet --

D: Just do your homework.

HOODY: I don't have the head for this shit D -- you know that -- school ain't never been my...

D: Stop right there Hoody. This is your thing. All right? You ain't stupid. You stubborn. Occasionally you a act a fool -- but you ain't stupid. You feel me baby? I don't do stupid. You a brilliant black man. Say it.

HOODY: I'm a brilliant black man.

D: Like you mean it.

HOODY: I'm a brilliant black man.

D: That's right. You are. You marrying me. *(She gets up, kisses him.)* I gotta get to my class -- I'm gonna make you some flash cards tonight. You finish this while I'm gone. *(Off his reaction.)* Hoody.

HOODY: I'll finish it.

*(D gathers her stuff and exits. Hoody takes a beat, makes sure she is gone, then reaches into his book bag and pulls out a comic book and a joint. He flips open the comic book, and lights up. A light fades up on Czar's yard. Czar enters his yard. He is wearing a yoga tank top and yoga pants, and is carrying a yoga mat. He lays the yoga mat down and proceeds to get into the downward dog position. Hoody picks his head up out of the comic, looks into the next yard and sees czar in a full downward facing dog. Czar notices he's being watched and looks over at Hoody... for a beat, their eyes lock - Czar in his yoga pose - Hoody in his chair with a smoke and comic book.)*

CZAR: Howdy neighbor.

HOODY: The fuck you doin' man?

CZAR: Yoga. Vinyasa yoga. April got me started on it to relieve stress.

HOODY: Shit work?

CZAR: No, not really.

*(Hoody walks over to the fence and holds out the joint, offering it to Czar.)*

HOODY: This does.

CZAR: I don't smoke weed. *(A beat.)* In front of April.

*(Czar takes a bigger hit than expected.)*

HOODY: That's what I figured.

*(Czar hands the joint back to Hoody.)*

CZAR: What's that. Superman?

HOODY: Batman.

CZAR: Reissue?

HOODY: Vintage. Only take it out the plastic -

CZAR: When you need to relax.

HOODY: Used to be the Avengers, then I had my Fantastic Four phase.

CZAR: Who doesn't.

HOODY: But Batman is cool, he just a normal dude, you know? He ain't got no super powers from outer space like Superman. He's got to work it. Survivor and shit.

CZAR: Exactly. I never got Superman.

HOODY: He a tight ass.

CZAR: But Batman always seemed like a cool dude.

HOODY: Plus he got a pimped out ride -

CZAR: And Cat Woman's like porn hot.

*(Hoody nods. Takes a hit.)*

CZAR (CONT'D): I uh, got rid of all my comic books to make room for the baby.

HOODY: Sold 'em?

CZAR: Pitched 'em. I just felt this need to purge. I've been clinically insane since April got pregnant.

HOODY: Baby's a blessing man. Been raising babies all my life. Soon as I got outta my diapers I started changing Marz'. Raised cousins, D's cousins, nephews, nieces. You ain't really done anything till you raised a kid. Save your life man.

CZAR: I realize I haven't really done anything. I'm just not sure a kid's going to fix that.

HOODY: Y'all wanted kids though, right?

CZAR: It was time. April's clock's been ticking for a while, and she was like, we're doing this.

HOODY: Aw shit --

CZAR: Exactly.

HOODY: Momma says you gonna make a baby -- you gonna make a baby.

CZAR: Which was awesome. Like random mid-day ovulation sex -- and I'm thinking this could go on for a while 'cause we usually aren't good at the things we try -- but then boom -- it happened. We got pregnant and suddenly April's ecstatic and I'm ecstatic 'cause I've never seen her so happy, but inside, I'm either feeling complete terror or nothing at all.

HOODY: Yeah, well it ain't really about you anymore is it?

CZAR: No. No, it's not. I guess I forget that sometimes.

HOODY: That baby comes along, he ain't gonna let you forget it.

CZAR: Save my life, right?

HOODY: Least save you from yourself. Kids have a way of simplifying things. You get up every day and do it. You don't have to think about it.

CZAR: You got wisdom, Courtney.

HOODY: We grow up fast in Garfield Park.

CZAR: Yeah, I been meaning to do that myself one day.

HOODY: Then do it. Get your head out your ass and go have your baby. He on his way man.

CZAR: Sounds way less dickish when you say it.

HOODY: Say what.

CZAR: Calling him him -- I do that too -- but assuming male gender without actually knowing the baby's sex can come off as misogynistic and offensive to the fetus -- which is fine -- but... what do you think?

HOODY: I think y'all think too damn much. The word him should not set you off like that. That shit ain't healthy.

CZAR: See that's what -- I think we need to spend more time together. April says we need to make friends here and you're making sense to me man.

HOODY: Must be the yoga.

CZAR: Think it's the weed.

HOODY: How'd ya'll hook up?

CZAR: Me and April? Hyperhidrosis.

HOODY: Hyper who?

CZAR: Excessive sweating. Me not her. In big meetings I had this sweating thing like I was moist for a year... so I went to get checked out and she worked in the doctor's office... and...

HOODY: Damn man, you pulled ass at the sweat doctor? You got game player.

CZAR: Yes -- I did pull ass at the sweat doctor - how about you and D?

HOODY: High school. Her momma was in bad shape.

CZAR: Sick?

HOODY: Yeah. Addict. Bad scene, so my momma sort of took D in. We hooked up for a while, then took some time off - and - then I figured it out.

CZAR: What?

HOODY: Shit don't work without her. Rest is history.

CZAR: You got the girl, the yard, Batman - you're set man.

HOODY: That's what I used to think, too. House was damn near paid off, now our taxes like another mortgage.

CZAR: Yeah I saw that article in the Trib. (*Beat.*) I'm sorry, man.

HOODY: What you sorry for? Don't be sorry for me. You doing what you supposed to be doin' - you takin' care of your family.

CZAR: But I'm fucking with yours --

HOODY: See, that's your problem right there. That's a white boy thing. Y'all can't even enjoy the fact that you stepped up and bought a house.

CZAR: Well, it's kinda hard when you see the repercussions.

HOODY: Fuck repercussions. See brothers know how to handle success. You think Jay Z feelin' guilty 'bout his mansion in the Hamptons? Hell, no. There's a reason they ain't no black Kurt Cobains.

CZAR: It's called having a conscience.

HOODY: Yeah well conscience is expensive. This about survival, using what you got - taking care of your own - Batman versus Superman.

CZAR: If that's the case, then it's simple -- sell it. Easy. Done. Make a pile of cash, grab D, go start again somewhere else.

HOODY: Can't do that.

CZAR: Why not?

HOODY: I don't know.

CZAR: Yes you do. Your conscience won't let you do it. Maybe you're a little whiter than you think.

*(A beat.)*

HOODY: Yeah, well I still ain't doin' no yoga.

CZAR: Yeah - well, that's what I said too.

*(Hoody walks away from the fence, sits back down, lights a cigarette and resumes reading his comic book. Czar resumes his yoga pose. Lights fade to black.)*

ACT I / SCENE 5: BOOT CAMP

*(Lights up on Marz. Standing at attention are Spence and Barb in matching sweat suits. Spence is wearing protective sport goggles.)*

MARZ: Good morning, ladies. Welcome to Boot Camp Class. I am here to ruin y'all's day before you go to brunch at fuckin' Nookies. You feel me? Next three hours y'all's asses is mine. Anybody think they can't handle this shit, best get the fuck out now.

*(Spence begins to take off his sport goggles.)*

BARB: Spence.

*(Spence begins to put the sport goggles back on.)*

MARZ: What's your name Milky Way?

SPENCE: *(Smirking)* Spence.

MARZ: Something funny, Spencer?

SPENCE: No. I mean yes but... no.

MARZ: Wait up - hold on now. You address me as sir. You got that snowflake?

SPENCE: *(Motions for Marz to come closer, then quietly continues)* Look man, I get it, I'm in advertising, I understand this is all part of your brand identity and all that -- that's why we're here - it's great - but you might want to y'know -- just tone it down a bit, all right?

MARZ: So I should tone it down?

SPENCE: Yeah -- I mean.... we're in a park -- there are like toddlers learning how to swim over there. I mean I like what you're doing -- just maybe a bit less that's all.

MARZ: (*Quietly and right in Spence's face*) I'm gonna tell you a little secret Spencer, okay? This shit's for real man. Y'all picked the wrong motherfuckin' class. This ain't no Disney-fied, cardio-funk bullshit. I'm a militant mutherfucker and I enjoy this shit. You feel me player?

SPENCE: I feel you.

MARZ: Sir.

SPENCE: I feel you. Sir.

MARZ: Good. So why you here today Spencer?

SPENCE: We had a Groupon for another class that expired so—

MARZ: Naw man -- you tell me why you really here, Spencer!

SPENCE: We saw your ad in Starbucks and...

MARZ: And?!

SPENCE: My wife told me to come! Sir.

MARZ: You do everything your wife tells you to do?

(*Spence looks to Barb. She shakes her head "No."*)

SPENCE: No sir.

MARZ: You a warrior, Nilla?

SPENCE: No sir. Art Director sir.

MARZ: The hell you art direct?

SPENCE: Cheese Chunkers sir.

MARZ: (*Suddenly changing his energy.*) I fuckin' love Cheese Chunkers, man.

SPENCE: Really? 'Cause we have some focus groups coming up. Seventy five bucks and all the cheese product you can eat.

MARZ: No shit.

SPENCE: Yeah it's only like an hour.

MARZ: What I gotta do.

SPENCE: Eat Cheese Chunkers and tell me if you like them.

MARZ: I can do that.

SPENCE: Then do it.

MARZ: Done.

SPENCE: And bring some friends too.

MARZ: Seventy-five dollars each?

SPENCE: Per person.

MARZ: All right Spencer, we'll talk after class, I'll hit you with my celly and shit.

BARB: Excuse me. I'm sorry, I don't mean to -- I never complain -- but we sort of paid for this and want the full... thing... so...

MARZ: The hell she talking about?

SPENCE: She's wants more bat shit crazy.

MARZ: *(Back into character)* That's good 'cause I'm 'bout to go off on this motherfucker *(To Spence)* You hear me Tube Sock?

SPENCE: Yeah -- that's -- just like that.

*(Marz moves to Barb.)*

MARZ: *(Right up in her face)* How 'bout you -- you got a name two percent?

BARB: It's Barbara Sir!

MARZ: *(To Spence)* I think she can kick your lily white ass Spencer.

*(Then back to Barb.)*

MARZ (CONT'D): You do all your homework today Cracker Barrel? You run all three miles before class?

BARB: Yes sir.

MARZ: Didn't walk any of 'em.

BARB: No sir.

MARZ: 'Cause if you lyin', the rest of the platoon gonna pay.

*(Spence looks around. Realizes he is the rest of the platoon. )*

MARZ: You hear that, Spencer? If she lyin', I'm gonna take it out your ass. Hope you brought lots of water.

SPENCE: She walked, Sir.

BARB: Spence!

SPENCE: She totally walked!

BARB: Really!?

SPENCE: Hey I'm not the one who didn't run her three miles!

BARB: Will you please grow some balls Spence!

SPENCE: Oh I've got balls, Barb!

BARB: That's like the opposite of balls --

SPENCE: Look I am not gonna be sacrificed to Full Metal Jacket over here because your thighs were chafing!

BARB: You said you wanted to take this class!

SPENCE: I say lots of things I don't mean! It's called being married!

*(Marz blows his whistle.)*

MARZ: Ho - ho - hold on a second -- we gonna have to hug this shit out right here. Now I don't care whose thighs was rubbin' or whose balls is shrinkin'. Y'all got to feel the love, all right? Y'all lucky - look at you -- y'all got your family, little matching sweat suits and shit. Hug your man baby doll. That's right. Show your warrior some ba-dunk-a-dunk. There you go Spencer, grab that ass man - there you go - see y'all feel better? All right - now go get your mouth guards -- it's gonna get a little rough.

*(Lights fade to black.)*