

American Son

by Christopher
Demos-Brown

SAMUEL FRENCH

Samuel French Acting Edition

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The world premiere of *AMERICAN SON* was presented at Barrington Stage Company (Julianne Boyd, Artistic Director; Tristan Wilson, Managing Director) on June 17, 2016 in Pittsfield, Massachusetts. The production was directed by Julianne Boyd, with scenic design by Brian Prather, costume design by Sara Jean Tosetti, and lighting design by Scott Pinkney. The production stage manager was Renee Lutz. The cast was as follows:

KENDRA ELLIS-CONNOR Tamara Tunie
SCOTT CONNOR.....Michael Hayden
OFFICER PAUL LARKIN Luke Smith
LIEUTENANT JOHN STOKESAndre Ware

AMERICAN SON premiered on Broadway (produced by Jeffrey Richards; Simpson Street; Rebecca Gold; Will Trice; Stephen C. Byrd; Alia Jones-Harvey; Nnamdi Asomugha; Domnick LaRuffa, Jr. & Co.; Greenleaf Productions; Van Kaplan; Willette & Manuel Klausner; Jada Pinkett Smith; The Miami Group; Lu-Shawn M. Thompson; Act 4 Entertainment; Gabrielle Palitz; Carl & Robin Washington; Bruce Robert Harris and Jack W. Batman; Shonda Rhimes; Bellanca Smigel Rutter; Salmira & Son; Jayne Baron Sherman; Steve Stoute for United Masters; Steven Toll; Dwyane Wade; Gabrielle Union-Wade; and the Shubert Organization) on November 4, 2019 at the Booth Theatre. The production was directed by Kenny Leon, with scenic design by Derek McLane, costume design by Dede Ayite, lighting design by Peter Kaczorowski, and sound design by Peter Fitzgerald. The production stage manager was Jane Grey. The cast was as follows:

KENDRA ELLIS-CONNOR Kerry Washington
SCOTT CONNOR..... Steven Pasquale
OFFICER PAUL LARKIN Jeremy Jordan
LIEUTENANT JOHN STOKES Eugene Lee

CHARACTERS

KENDRA ELLIS-CONNOR – African-American, female, forties to early fifties. A professor of psychology and the mother of a teenage son. Recently separated from her White husband. Emotionally raw but trying to keep it together behind a professional façade. Exceptionally intelligent and self-possessed.

SCOTT CONNOR – White, male, late forties to fifties. Kendra's estranged husband. An FBI agent of predominantly Irish ancestry. Takes pride in his family's long tradition of military service. Though rigid in his views he has a warm, sensitive side and is a deeply loving and devoted father.

OFFICER PAUL LARKIN – White, male, mid-twenties to thirty. An intelligent, congenial young police officer with bold career ambitions who lacks actual life experience.

LIEUTENANT JOHN STOKES – African-American, male, fifty to mid-sixties. A tough, no-nonsense career police officer who is used to having people listen when he talks. He has paid his dues. He knows the rules and has no hesitation enforcing them.

SETTING

The waiting room of a police station in Miami-Dade County, Florida.

TIME

A morning early this coming June, shortly after 4:00 a.m.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A backslash (/) is a cue for the next line to begin and overlap the previous line.

(Words in parentheses) that are not stage directions are meant to be said in passing, or under the character's breath. It's not important that the audience hear them clearly.

[Words in brackets] are not to be spoken. They're in the script to indicate what the character is thinking.

For Kate and Jilly.

Race is the child of racism, not the father.

- Ta-Nehisi Coates

(KENDRA ELLIS-CONNOR is in a police station waiting room.)

(She waits alone for a beat or two longer than it seems like the audience can possibly stand. Then she grabs her cell phone and sends a text. [We hear a sound from her phone to indicate this.]

(Another beat as she waits for a response. None comes. She then dials her cell phone.)

KENDRA. Jamal – goddammit, where are you. I’ve sent you four texts now...five...you can’t text me back? Call me.

(She hangs up. Several beats. She calls again.)

Me again. Honey, I’m sorry I... I didn’t mean to get angry. Call me please.

(She hangs up. She searches on her phone for a number then dials again.)

Hi this is – (Shit).

(A beat as she listens to Jeffrey’s voicemail greeting.)

Jeffrey – this is Jamal’s mother. It’s uhh...Tuesday – no, Wednesday night...morning. I’m looking for Jamal. He hasn’t come home and I thought he might be with you. Sorry to bother you – or...y’know...call so early. If you get this message and he’s with you, please have him call me.

(OFFICER PAUL LARKIN enters.)

My number’s three zero five – well, it’s on your – OK... just in case, it’s three zero five, four five zero, five nine, five eight.

(She puts the phone down.)

LARKIN. OK...

KENDRA. Sorry.

LARKIN. So...I checked...like you asked, and the car does show up.

KENDRA. Yeah...?

LARKIN. It shows up in the system. That's all we really know right now.

KENDRA. Shows up. Shows up how?

LARKIN. Just shows up as...you know...

KENDRA. I mean what's the – how does it end up coming to the attention of...you know...

LARKIN. It just – was logged in somehow. From...an incident. Coulda been ticketed...coulda been towed... I mean...

KENDRA. But Jamal – my son – he was driving it.

LARKIN. OK – I thought you told me you weren't really sure / whether or not...

KENDRA. OK – yeah. Yes. I didn't see him drive away in it. I did not actually see him get in the car. Correct. But the car's not in our driveway. And he's been gone since eight o'clock last night. Going on eight, nine hours. He's usually home by midnight.

LARKIN. Right...

KENDRA. He never came home. And when I called the police, they said something happened to the car and... and –

LARKIN. OK – I thought you told me they said that –

KENDRA. Hold on – I wrote it down.

(Checking a scrap of paper in her purse.)

“...Identified in an incident.” That's what she said
“identified in an incident.”

LARKIN. I understand, but...

(Beat.)

Listen, I'm really sorry... I'm sure he's gonna turn up. And you've already said you're not the registered owner of the vehicle, so... I mean... I told you I'd verify the vehicle information anyway? And I did that. OK?

(Beat. He turns to go.)

KENDRA. He has work.

LARKIN. Sorry?

KENDRA. Well – an internship. Jamal has a very prestigious –
He's got someplace to be this morning.

LARKIN. Sure.

KENDRA. I'm sayin' – this isn't like him.

LARKIN. Ma'am...

KENDRA. Look, can't you just... Can't you do a missing
persons report...something?

LARKIN. Not for forty-eight hours, no. Or if there's evidence
of, y'know...

KENDRA. Foul play?

LARKIN. We don't really use that term. That's the movies.

KENDRA. "Something bad." Whatever.

LARKIN. Right.

KENDRA. He hasn't come home. He's a responsible kid. His
car coulda been stolen.

LARKIN. We don't know that.

KENDRA. He's missing.

LARKIN. OK –

KENDRA. Isn't that enough?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Look...he's sixteen? Seventeen?

KENDRA. Just turned eighteen.

LARKIN. So he's just about to graduate from high school?

KENDRA. Yeah...

LARKIN. So...

KENDRA. So what?

LARKIN. He's probably out on South Beach. Or (and I know
you probably don't wanna hear it) but hooking up with
some girl... Doing what teenage boys do...

KENDRA. Yeah?

LARKIN. I mean, that's what I was doing at that age.

KENDRA. *(Skeptical.)* Mmm-hmmm.

(OFFICER LARKIN *turns to go.*)

KENDRA. Look, I'd still appreciate if y'all'd just -

LARKIN. Ma'am - we will.

KENDRA. But...you said that before, and you're leaving, and I'd really like to know what's going on.

LARKIN. Look - I told you: As soon as the a.m. liaison officer gets here...

KENDRA. No - I mean now.

LARKIN. Sorry?

KENDRA. Now. I wanna know now.

LARKIN. I'll be happy to walk you back out to reception and you can / check again to see whether -

KENDRA. I was just at reception.

LARKIN. Well...y'know / there's not much more -

KENDRA. For half an hour.

LARKIN. I know...

KENDRA. The lady there...

LARKIN. ...I understand...

KENDRA. ...I mean she was no help at all. She sent me to you.

LARKIN. Look - I'm very sorry, but -

KENDRA. This can't be that hard. Either he's in the system, or he isn't.

LARKIN. Ma'am - no disrespect, but we have a protocol.

KENDRA. I may seem paranoid. But he's not home. His car is...showing up on your radar. Humor me?

LARKIN. Ma'am, as soon as the a.m. liaison officer gets here, / I'm sure he'll -

KENDRA. Officer, please?

LARKIN. Look, I don't even know what you expect me to do.

KENDRA. Don't y'all have computers...or a database with (I don't know) names? DOBs?

LARKIN. Yeah. But I'm not authorized to just run down a rabbit hole whenever someone / walks in and -

KENDRA. Please?

(Beat.)

Please?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Fine.

KENDRA. Thank you.

LARKIN. But I'm gonna need some additional information.

KENDRA. Sure.

LARKIN. (*Getting something to write with.*) (Lemme just get something to...) First name again.

KENDRA. Jamal. J-A-M-A-L.

LARKIN. Last name "Conner"?

KENDRA. Yes.

LARKIN. E-R?

KENDRA. No, O-R. C-O-N-N-O-R.

LARKIN. DOB?

KENDRA. Five, one, ninety-eight.*

LARKIN. Any priors?

KENDRA. Sorry...?

LARKIN. Priors. Has he ever been arrested before?

KENDRA. Oh - No.

LARKIN. You sure?

KENDRA. Yes.

LARKIN. Even juvy?

KENDRA. Juvy?

LARKIN. Does he have a juvenile record?

KENDRA. No.

LARKIN. Nothing.

KENDRA. Nothing.

*The DOB should be May 1, seventeen years before the year of your production. For example, if the production is in 2018, Kendra should say: "Five, one, two thousand one."

LARKIN. Not even a trespassing...resisting without / petit theft?

KENDRA. He's never so much as torn the tag off a new mattress, OK?

LARKIN. Excuse me?

KENDRA. Nothing. No. No arrest record. At all.

LARKIN. Does he go by any other names?

KENDRA. Like...a nickname? I mean, his father calls him "J" but...

LARKIN. No - AKAs.

KENDRA. I'm sorry...?

LARKIN. AKAs. You know..."also known as." Like...street names.

KENDRA. Street names.

LARKIN. If he was taken into custody under a different alias... Gave a different...you know...different from some other time...is all I'm sayin'...

(Beat.)

KENDRA. I just told you, he's never been arrested.

LARKIN. Right - but just in case he might have been printed for...(I don't know...whatever.) Or had a warning issued, or...

KENDRA. A "street name"?

LARKIN. Right.

KENDRA. *(Sarcastically.)* Like "Peanut" or "Black"...?

LARKIN. Exactly.

KENDRA. ...Or "Pookie"?

LARKIN. Yes ma'am.

KENDRA. Well...there's "June Bug."

LARKIN. *(Writing.)* "June Bug"?

KENDRA. Yup.

LARKIN. That's his street name?

KENDRA. (Jesus Christ.)

LARKIN. Is it?

KENDRA. No. It's not an "alias." It's not a "street name."

LARKIN. You sure?

KENDRA. It's what I used to call him when he was little.

It's what I call him now when I want to knock the cool out of him in front of his friends. He doesn't have a "street name." Can you please just run all this through your computer / and find out what's going on -

LARKIN. Ma'am, I'm going to. But I need to make sure I have all the correct information so we're not just spinning our wheels here.

KENDRA. Fine.

LARKIN. Height?

KENDRA. Six two. Maybe a little taller since last time we measured him.

LARKIN. Uh-huh.

KENDRA. He really shot up this year.

LARKIN. Weight?

KENDRA. One eighty. One eighty-five, thereabouts. Glasses. Cornrows. Light green eyes.

LARKIN. (*Writing.*) OK. Excellent. Do you remember what he was wearing when he left last night?

KENDRA. (I don't know)...probably jeans and a t-shirt.

LARKIN. Alright. Does he have any distinguishing...you know...

KENDRA. Like a birthmark?

LARKIN. Yeah. Scars, tattoos, gold teeth. That kinda stuff.

(*Beat.*)

KENDRA. No. No tattoos. No golds. His only scar's on his stomach right here.

LARKIN. OK. Good. (*Writing.*) It's visible?

KENDRA. Is the scar visible?

LARKIN. Yes ma'am.

KENDRA. On his stomach?

LARKIN. Yes.

KENDRA. Not if his shirt's on.

LARKIN. No I mean can it be seen? Does he get those...
(whatchacallit)...big, thick...

KENDRA. Keloids?

LARKIN. Keloids. Right.

(Beat.)

KENDRA. No.

LARKIN. Great. Great.

(Beat.)

And that's from...?

KENDRA. The scar?

LARKIN. Yeah. Where did he get it?

KENDRA. You mean *how* did he get it?

LARKIN. Well both, I guess. Yeah.

KENDRA. Does this matter?

LARKIN. Ma'am...

KENDRA. It's not from a gang fight.

LARKIN. OK, lady - listen -

KENDRA. Officer...respectfully... Are there that many six foot two inch Black boys involved in "incidents" tonight you gotta know if they might just have scars on their tummies?

LARKIN. Not unless you wanna find him, I mean...

(While the following describes Jamal, it is said sarcastically:)

KENDRA. Jamal's sign is Taurus. With Virgo rising. He's bashful and looks away when he smiles. He plays the guitar - especially likes blues and rock.

LARKIN. Really, / I'm just looking for -

KENDRA. Old seventies and eighties bands.

LARKIN. Ma'am -

KENDRA. I tried to turn him on to Funkadelic and Debarge,
/ but...

LARKIN. Ma'am -

KENDRA. ...He's strictly mainstream classic stuff. Clapton.
Van Halen.

LARKIN. OK.

KENDRA. He throws "a mean breaking ball" (whatever that means).

LARKIN. Alright, listen -

KENDRA. Vegetarian - hates fried chicken. And he's afraid of clowns.

LARKIN. Ma'am -

KENDRA. Walks like a jock, but he can recite almost any Emily Dickinson poem.

LARKIN. OK -

KENDRA. And he still gets a tear in his eye whenever he hears "Puff the Magic Dragon."

LARKIN. -

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Sorry.

(Beat.)

Pyloric stenosis.

LARKIN. -

KENDRA. You asked how he got the scar on his stomach. It's from surgery. When he was a baby. For pyloric stenosis. He inherited it from his father.

LARKIN. Thank you.

(Beat. A peace offering:)

I love Emily Dickinson.

(Beat.)

"It is a far, far better thing I do than I've ever done. It is a far / far better rest I go to..."

KENDRA. That's Charles Dickens.

LARKIN. Mmmm. I don't think so. Anyway. Lemme see what I can find out, OK?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Hey – was he angry or...upset about anything last night?

KENDRA. Why?

LARKIN. Just in case he had a reason to...y'know...just run off and chill for a while.

(Beat.)

KENDRA. No.

LARKIN. OK. Cool.

(Indicating a box of donuts sitting on a table.)

Help yourself to a donut.

KENDRA. Really?

LARKIN. I know. What can I say? We really do like 'em.

(OFFICER LARKIN exits.)

(KENDRA paces a bit. She looks at the box of donuts. Maybe she picks one up, then tosses it back in the box.)

KENDRA. Unbelievable.

(Her cell phone rings. She looks to see who's calling hoping it's Jamal then realizes it's not.)

(Dammit). Hey. You on your way down here, I hope?
Oh, OK.

(Beat.)

Not yet.

(Beat.)

I don't know.

(Beat.)

Scott – I said I don't know. I've been trying to find out.

(Beat.)

Well...'cause they're being very evasive.

(Beat.)

I have no idea "why" - well...that's not true. I have *some* idea.

(Beat.)

I am keeping my cool, but it's not helping. That's why it'd be nice if you were here.

(Beat.)

Well I called you almost an hour ago.

(Beat.)

I am keenly aware of what time it is.

(Beat.)

Yeah? Well you know what? Maybe if you were home in your own bed instead of sleeping in someone else's we wouldn't be having this discuss-

(Long beat.)

I'm not startin'...I said I'm not - Hey! I'm "dropping it," OK?

(Beat.)

In a waiting room somewhere in the back. When you come through the entrance, turn left and park in the main lot in front. Go to the info desk. Ask for Officer Larkin. Larkin.

(Beat.)

I don't know. Some low-level newbie who ain't all that bright.

(Beat.)

OK. Bye.

(She hangs up the phone.)

(Shit, shit, shit... Girl...)

(She fixes her hair and clothes and takes out a compact to check her makeup.)

(A few beats, then she tries to call Jamal again.)

KENDRA. It's Mama again. Baby, I know you're still very upset, and we both said a lotta things we shouldn't have last night, but I'm worried about you. Please call me.

(Beat. OFFICER LARKIN enters.)

So...?

LARKIN. OK, there was an incident. / The car was -

KENDRA. An "incident"?

LARKIN. If you'll allow me please... There was an incident. We don't know what. The car was stopped and there is a pending investigation.

KENDRA. What's that mean?

LARKIN. That's all I can tell you.

(Checks his notepad.)

Lieutenant Stokes...he doesn't normally get in till about eight, and I've been instructed that all further information needs to go through him.

KENDRA. I'm sorry - who?

LARKIN. Lieutenant Stokes. He's the a.m. public affairs liaison officer. Look I'm pretty new here, so I don't know him personally. They told me he's been paged to come down immediately, but...

KENDRA. But he might not get here for another few hours.

LARKIN. He's been paged.

KENDRA. But that's when he normally gets in.

LARKIN. Apparently.

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Not acceptable.

LARKIN. Excuse me?

KENDRA. That's not acceptable.

LARKIN. Ma'am, it is what it is.

KENDRA. I call the police at three o'clock in the morning and I'm told my car's been "involved in an incident" -

LARKIN. Not *your* car.

KENDRA. My son's car. And my son's missing. Now you're telling me he's in custody.

LARKIN. No.

KENDRA. He might be.

LARKIN. We don't know that yet.

KENDRA. Well, we really don't know anything yet, do we?

LARKIN. We don't know much, no. That's my point.

KENDRA. Is my son in custody or not?

LARKIN. I told you, you're gonna have to be patient and wait for the / a.m. liaison officer to get here.

KENDRA. I sat out in that lobby almost half an hour before I even got to speak to you.

LARKIN. I completely understand your concern.

KENDRA. Respectfully, officer - I don't think you do.

LARKIN. Ma'am - I have kids too, OK?

KENDRA. Do you?

LARKIN. I do.

KENDRA. How old are they?

LARKIN. Well... / they're -

KENDRA. Any of 'em Black?

LARKIN. Excuse me?

KENDRA. Do you have any Black sons this big who might just be sitting in "police custody" at four o'clock in the morning?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Look... Ms. Connor.

KENDRA. Ellis-Connor.

LARKIN. Ms. Ellis-Connor... I'm doing the best I can to / help figure out where

KENDRA. Do you have a Black son?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Wow... We're really gonna go there?

KENDRA. Oh we been there for a while.

(Beat.)

LARKIN. No, ma'am. I have two young daughters. White daughters.

KENDRA. Then let's skip the "empathy" tactic, OK? 'Cause believe me - you got no idea.

LARKIN. Fine. Whatever.

(Long beat.)

(Finally, OFFICER LARKIN gives her a smile of genuine, deep compassion. As soon as he does:)

Y'know, I thought we'd developed a...kind of a...

KENDRA. Why you still here?

LARKIN. Sorry?

KENDRA. Go.

LARKIN. Excuse me?

KENDRA. Please. Go. Find Jamal. / Find my son.

LARKIN. Ma'am - I told you, Lieutenant Stokes will be here any minute / and all information is supposed -

KENDRA. I don't care who's on his way down here - you got a badge too.

LARKIN. Ma'am...

KENDRA. You people got computers and cell phones and police radios - you mean to tell me you can't walk out that door in five minutes and find out where my son's at?

LARKIN. Look, I -

KENDRA. Where is he?

LARKIN. Ma'am...I understand that you're tense. I understand that this must be very upsetting for you.

KENDRA. Stop telling me you understand.

LARKIN. Ma'am, listen -

KENDRA. And stop calling me "Ma'am."

LARKIN. OK. OK.

(Beat.)

Listen. As soon as Lieutenant Stokes gets here, I'm gonna see that you talk to him immediately, we're gonna find out where Jerome is, / and you'll be outta here in plenty of time for him to -

KENDRA. Jamal. Jamal. / His name is Jamal.

LARKIN. Sorry. I'm sorry, (Jesus).

KENDRA. (*Furious.*) Goddammit.

LARKIN. (*Matching her fury.*) Stop screaming at me.

(*Beat.*)

KENDRA. OK. OK. Whewwww...alright...lemme just...

(*Beat.*)

Lemme start again. I'm so sorry if I implied or suggested any...bad faith...on your part.

LARKIN. I completely understand your concerns.

KENDRA. -

LARKIN. What?

KENDRA. You keep saying that. "I understand." "I share your concerns." Is that from some...HR training video or something?

LARKIN. No.

KENDRA. "When dealing with a (*Maybe she does air quotes.*) 'problem personality' diffuse the situation."

LARKIN. What?

KENDRA. "Put the person at ease..."

LARKIN.

KENDRA.

I don't know what you're - "Echo their feelings."

LARKIN. No.

KENDRA. Look - I have a Ph.D. in psychology. I'm a professor at the university, OK? So I know when I'm being (*Maybe more air quotes.*) "managed."

LARKIN. Ma'am...

KENDRA. Ah-ah!

LARKIN. Ms. Connor.

KENDRA. Ellis-Connor.

LARKIN. I'm not (*Maybe also air quotes.*) "managing" you.
(Jesus) I'm just trying to be nice.

KENDRA. Sure.

(*Beat.*)

LARKIN. Look. We have a protocol. I'm supposed to follow it. But lemme see if I can...(y'know) pull a few strings before Lieutenant Stokes gets here. Get a little more info, OK?

KENDRA. I'd really appreciate that.

LARKIN. Just give me a few minutes?

(*He turns to leave.*)

Do you need anything?

KENDRA. -

LARKIN. I swear, I'm just being nice.

(*Beat.*)

KENDRA. (*Lightening up a little.*) Water?

LARKIN. (*As helpful as he can be.*) There's a water fountain down the hall.

KENDRA. Great.

LARKIN. Out the door, around the corner to your left.

KENDRA. Thanks.

LARKIN. Two, actually. Right next to each other.

KENDRA. Two doors?

LARKIN. No (sorry).

(*His mouth is moving way faster than his thoughts.*)

Two water fountains. You can't miss 'em. They're right next to each other. 'Cause the building's really old and when it was built it was...

(*A nice long beat.*)

KENDRA. Segregated?

LARKIN. Yeah.

KENDRA. -

LARKIN. *(Trying to fill the dead air.)* And there's a... Above the water fountains. There's a...there's a...

KENDRA. -

LARKIN. ...Like a...a commemorative plaque dedicated to like...“The Big Five,” or something.

KENDRA. The Big Six.

LARKIN. The Big Six. Right. Abernathy and...I can't remember 'em all but... It's...it's fascinating the...the... you know...history...and all they did for...people.

(Beat. KENDRA exits.)

Sonofa-BITCH.

(OFFICER LARKIN takes out his cell phone and sends a text. As he's finishing his text, SCOTT CONNOR enters. He's wearing a suit and tie and has a badge on.)

SCOTT. Excuse me / are you uhhhh...

LARKIN. I was just texting Amy to get your ETA. Jesus Christ, what took you so long? I'm... I'm very sorry, sir - It's just this lady's been really, really difficult and -

SCOTT. I'm here about Jamal Connor.

LARKIN. Yeah - she's gonna be right back so... OK - So far... all I know...the car is pulled over. Uhhh... Three black males in a Lexus - like a...late model Lexus, I think.

SCOTT. Hold on...

LARKIN. So...expired tag...or the driver's texting, uhhh... Not clear on the reason for the stop - Exigent circumstances.

SCOTT. OK.

LARKIN. I guess. Look, there's not much in the system yet. It's logged with the General Investigations Unit -

SCOTT. GIU?

LARKIN. - So probably no big deal, right? I got someone in GIU to give me a little info but...

SCOTT. Listen - slow down -

LARKIN. I know – I know – that’s against protocol, but I was just trying to keep the natives at bay until the cavalry arrived you know? Man, am I glad you’re here.

SCOTT. I’m sorry... Officer Larkin, right?

LARKIN. Yeah.

SCOTT. OK, let’s just back up / and make sure I understand what you’re telling me –

LARKIN. I mean, wait’ll you see this lady. (Whoa). Totally outta control. I mean... I got kids too, but she went from zero to ghetto in like...nothing flat, you know?

SCOTT. –

(SCOTT starts to put together what’s happening just as KENDRA re-enters.)

LARKIN.

Ma’am. This is
Lieutenant...

KENDRA.

Hey.

SCOTT. Hey.

KENDRA. Jesus Christ, Scott.

SCOTT. It’s OK. It’s gonna be fine.

(Beat.)

(To LARKIN.) Where’s our son?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. (Shit.) Lieutenant Stokes is on his way. I’m really sorry for the delay.

KENDRA. They haven’t told me anything, Scott. Not a thing. They don’t even know if Jamal’s been arrested / or if he’s in custody, or –

SCOTT. *(To KENDRA.)* OK. OK. Just calm down, alright?

(To LARKIN.) I wanna speak with the GIU detective interrogating my son.

LARKIN. Look, as I’ve been telling your – her, I’m not at liberty to give / you any more information –

SCOTT. Now.

(Beat.)

LARKIN. I'm sorry. Who exactly are you?

SCOTT. Scott Connor. I'm Jamal's father. / And I want to speak to -

LARKIN. No, no, no. I'm talking about... (*Indicating SCOTT's badge.*)

SCOTT. I'm an FBI agent.

LARKIN. Ah.

SCOTT. Sorry if that...confused you.

LARKIN. Yeah.

SCOTT. My son's a minor. We have a right to talk to him before you interrogate him.

KENDRA.

LARKIN.

Scott...

I'm sorry, sir, / but I'm not authorized -

SCOTT. I don't want you to be sorry. OK?

KENDRA. Scott...

SCOTT. I want you to take me to whoever is interrogating my son.

KENDRA. Scott.

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. His birthday was last month. Remember? He's eighteen.

(*Beat.*)

SCOTT. Shit.

KENDRA. It's OK.

SCOTT. I knew that.

KENDRA. Of course.

SCOTT. Goddammit. I got him the car. / You know I knew that.

KENDRA. No - hey. I said it's OK.

SCOTT. It's four a.m., I haven't even had a friggin' cup of coffee yet.

KENDRA. I understand.

(*Beat.*)

SCOTT. (*To LARKIN.*) Look –

LARKIN. Lieutenant Stokes should be here very soon.

SCOTT. Listen – I wanna know what's going on with my son. You've been in contact with the GIU detective. / I'd just like to have a word with him –

LARKIN. No, sir.

SCOTT. Excuse me?

LARKIN. I have not been in contact with the GIU detective.

SCOTT. Two seconds ago you told me you had...

LARKIN. No, sir. That is not correct. I got someone in GIU to read me a bit of information second-hand from the daily log sheet. That's all.

SCOTT. Uh-huh.

LARKIN. I have not been able to speak with anyone about the case yet. There is a protocol we have to follow and it involves the a.m. liaison officer.

SCOTT. Lieutenant Stokes.

LARKIN. Exactly.

SCOTT. And you don't know when he'll be here.

LARKIN. Very soon, I hope.

(Beat.)

If you'd rather not wait here, that's fine. You can leave your cell number. I'll be happy to call you when he arrives. There's a Denny's on the corner. It's a very short walk from here –

KENDRA. Thank you. We'll wait.

LARKIN. Sure.

(Beat.)

Can I get you anything? Water? Coffee?

KENDRA. I'm fine.

SCOTT. Coffee'd be great.

LARKIN. Cream? Sugar?

SCOTT. No – I like it black.

KENDRA. Well...

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Listen. I'm sure this is no big deal. I just started working here, but they tell me this happens every night. We got a skeleton crew in admin on the late shift and it can take forever for information to filter down, so...

(Beat.)

SCOTT. I apologize if I was...y'know...

LARKIN. Not at all.

(Beat.)

And I'm really sorry about when you came in and I...

SCOTT. Yeah...

KENDRA. Sorry about what?

SCOTT. Nothing.

(Beat.)

LARKIN. FBI, huh?

SCOTT. Yeah.

LARKIN. Awesome.

SCOTT. Thanks.

LARKIN. That's like...my dream job.

SCOTT. Is it?

LARKIN. Uh-huh. Behavioral analysis.

SCOTT. Really?

LARKIN. I applied, but they told me I needed investigative experience...which is why I joined the force, so...

SCOTT. Well I hope you kicked ass in...y'know...differential equations or whatever...

LARKIN. B.S. in Forensics at Jacksonville State. "Go Gamecocks!"

SCOTT. Well good. 'Cause those guys on the Ted Bundy Brigade are all smart as hell.

LARKIN. "Ted Bundy Brigade"...that's awesome.

SCOTT. They don't really like to be called that.

LARKIN. Oh.

SCOTT. It's what the rest of us call 'em when we want to piss 'em off.

LARKIN. Right.

SCOTT. I'll be happy to put in a good word for you when the time comes.

LARKIN. Really?

(SCOTT hands OFFICER LARKIN a business card.)

SCOTT. Sure. Just gimme a call.

LARKIN. That'd be so awesome. Thank you.

SCOTT. You bet. The Lexus, by the way, is registered to me.

LARKIN. The...?

SCOTT. The car. My son's car. It's registered to me - Scott Alan Connor. It was a birthday gift.

LARKIN. Oh. Nice.

SCOTT. Yeah, well...pre-owned, you know. Still kind of indulgent, I guess...

LARKIN. Oh. Yeah. Whatever.

KENDRA. He worked very hard.

SCOTT. It was a real reach for us / but -

KENDRA. We thought he'd earned it.

SCOTT. Anyway - we kept it in my name for the insurance. But I can tell all of this to the GIU guy myself when you bring me down to talk to him.

LARKIN. Right.

(Beat.)

So. Coffee bl- no cream or sugar. I'm on it.

(He exits. A beat.)

SCOTT. What? What?

KENDRA. Nothing.

SCOTT. No, not "nothing." What?

KENDRA. Why don't you just offer to cut and blow out his hair...give him a hand massage for God's sake?

SCOTT. Kendra.

KENDRA. I mean...

SCOTT. I'm just trying to be civil.

KENDRA. Whatever.

SCOTT. Well acting all crazy isn't gonna help the situation.

KENDRA. Who's acting crazy?

(Beat.)

They have our son. We want to know where he is. They can tell us. This ain't complicated.

SCOTT. This is a bureaucracy, OK? I think you're assuming the worst when - y'know - truth be told, the current situation is probably a whole 'nother thing. Just a bunch of functionaries looking at one frame of the film at a time.

KENDRA. I don't know...

SCOTT. Listen - I work in a bureaucracy. You're not gonna get anywhere chewing out some low-level "yes man."

KENDRA. I've been here for almost an hour.

SCOTT. Look, alls I'm sayin' - when you're dealing with a bureaucracy -

KENDRA. "All."

(Beat.)

SCOTT. All?

KENDRA. "All you're sayin'." "All" is not plural. It's not a possessive. There's no such word as "alls." Just "all."

SCOTT. Seriously?

KENDRA. Jamal doesn't "aks a question." He doesn't speak Ebonics, you don't get to speak White Trash.

SCOTT. (Oh Christ.)

KENDRA. That's right. "Alls I'm sayin'." "A whole 'nother." Just purge that shit.

SCOTT. "A whole 'nother"?

KENDRA. Yeah. "The current situation is probably a whole 'nother thing."

SCOTT. (Sweet Sweating Jesus...)

KENDRA. The word is "another." One word.

SCOTT. Ohhh kayyy...

KENDRA. Don't go shoving the word "whole" in the middle of it.

SCOTT. Can we just not go off in the weeds on some... / You know...

KENDRA. This isn't "off in the weeds"... You know how I killed myself to make sure Jamal speaks proper English.

SCOTT. Believe me, I know -

KENDRA. OK?

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. Good.

SCOTT. You just said "ain't" two seconds ago, but I "ain't" allowed to. Makes perfect sense.

KENDRA. I said "ain't" for emphasis. You just speak bad English.

SCOTT. (Jesus.) It's like every little thing with you lately.

KENDRA. No. This isn't "every little thing." As hard as I worked to make him..."fit in," it's a slap in my face when you cavalierly lapse into "Okee from Muskogee."

SCOTT. Can we just - Let's see if we can get our arms around the here and now...figure out where J's at and not...y'know...rehash the last five years of our marriage? Would that be OK?

KENDRA. Sure.

SCOTT. Good.

(Beat.)

And I never forced you to "make him fit in."

KENDRA. Whatever.

SCOTT. Hey...I let you name him "Jamal" didn't I?

KENDRA. "Let me"? Here we go...

SCOTT. Right?

KENDRA. Baby, I'm sorry, I love your Irish people and all, but I simply was not gonna go through life with a son

named... What was it you were putting on the table at the time?

SCOTT. Seamus.

KENDRA. Helllll no...

SCOTT. I'da gone with something else. Liam... Aidan...

KENDRA. (Jesus.) And I needed to commemorate my brother - I thought you understood that.

SCOTT. I did.

KENDRA. You may not remember, but in Arabic, / Jamal means beauty.

SCOTT. "It means beauty." How could I forget.

KENDRA. It's a great name.

SCOTT. Sure. What's not to like? "Hey, Beauty - wanna toss the football?" Can't wait till he's twenty-one so me and the guys can head to the tavern and hoist a glass of whiskey with ol'... "Beauty."

KENDRA. My, / oh my.

SCOTT. Maybe he'll bring his friends "Chastity" and "Mother's Milk" along as designated drivers.

KENDRA. Is your sense of masculinity really that delicate?

SCOTT. Of course not, Kenny. It's just a helluva fun button to push. His name's fine.

KENDRA. You can't even say it half the time. It's always "J" this. "J" that.

SCOTT. Aww, c'mon. I got a nickname for my son. That's just a...a male bonding thing.

KENDRA. Just man up and say it. You've always hated his name because it's "too Black."

SCOTT. Hey - you're the one who just said Seamus was "too Irish."

KENDRA. You think his name's a handicap.

SCOTT. Well you know what? On a scale from "Eric Holder" to...y'know "Darnell Jackson"... "Jamal" is brushing right up against "Darnell"...

KENDRA. Must be terrible feeling so...alienated from your own flesh and blood.

(This really touches a nerve with SCOTT.)

SCOTT. Hey - I'd challenge hell's furies for that kid. You know that. He's my only son.

(Long beat.)

Should we try calling him again?

KENDRA. I've already tried about fifteen times. I keep getting his voicemail.

SCOTT. Me too. "This is Jamal. Have a blessed day." When did that bullshit start?

KENDRA. He's been going with me and Mama to church.

(Beat.)

Thank you...by the way.

SCOTT. For what?

KENDRA. For taking her to her dialysis.

SCOTT. Oh...please...

KENDRA. No, it's a huge help.

SCOTT. Bobby's like my own mother, you know that.

KENDRA. I know.

SCOTT. She's a tough old broad.

KENDRA. Well she thinks the sun rises and sets on you. She blames me for all this.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. You look good.

KENDRA. Oh... Jesus -

SCOTT. Well you do.

KENDRA. Please don't go there.

SCOTT. Well we haven't really seen each other since...you know...

KENDRA. Oh, I know -

SCOTT. Can't I just notice?

KENDRA. What'd you expect, Scott? Four months without you and I'd completely fall apart? That what you were hoping?

SCOTT. (Oh, Christ.) Just forget I said anything, OK?

KENDRA. Yeah. Just forget it. Let's just find our son, and go back to our respective corners, OK.

SCOTT. Fine...

(SCOTT receives another text message.)

KENDRA. Is it Jamal?

SCOTT. No.

(Beat.)

Where was he last night? I assume he went out?

KENDRA. Yeah...

SCOTT. With who?

KENDRA. I don't know.

SCOTT. You don't know?

KENDRA. Why should I know?

SCOTT. (Jesus Christ.) Kendra?

KENDRA. I don't grill him every time he leaves the house. He's a grown man. I trust his judgment.

SCOTT. Listen. You insisted J live with you. Which I was totally OK with. But you took on an obligation / to be responsible for -

KENDRA. I thought we weren't going to rehash our whole relationship.

SCOTT. OK. OK, fine.

KENDRA. Fine.

SCOTT. It's just... I mean I hate to keep harping on this, but the kid is going to West Point in like a month. / It's just not acceptable that he -

KENDRA. (Oh here we go.)

SCOTT. It's not - Kenny. The last few times he's stayed at my place, he's looked like a goddamned gangster.

KENDRA. A "gangster"?

SCOTT. Yes. A "gangsta." I said it. OK?

KENDRA. Why? 'Cause he's not wearing Brooks Brothers?

SCOTT. The baggy pants, the cornrows. That stupid, loping, surly walk he's suddenly developed.

KENDRA. He's a teenage boy, OK?

SCOTT. A second ago he was a "grown man."

KENDRA. He's just trying to figure out who he is.

SCOTT. "Figure out who he is"?

KENDRA. Explore his own identity.

SCOTT. Oh, Christ almighty. Today it's cornrows, tomorrow he'll be out helping OJ find the "real killer."

KENDRA. See? That right there. Comments like that. You just don't get it. His world is not *your* world, Scott.

SCOTT. Oh yes it is. It most certainly is. Look - I completely appreciate how you had to grow up. OK? The hard streets of Liberty City. Interstate cutting through. Red-lining. All o' that. I admire it. I always have. It's one of the many reasons I... [Love you? Fell in love with you? Admire you?]

(*Long beat.*)

KENDRA. You what?

(*Beat.*)

You what?

SCOTT. His world is not *that* world. But his world is definitely *my* world. You and I both worked hard to make it my world. We spent almost a quarter of a million dollars putting that kid through the best private schools in the city. He grew up in Coral Gables, for Chrissake. He's had every possible advantage. I simply will not accept him regressing into...

KENDRA. Into what?

(*Beat.*)

Just say it, Scott.

SCOTT. That young man has no excuse for getting himself into this situation.

KENDRA. What situation? We don't even know what happened yet.

SCOTT. Obviously something happened. And I can take a pretty good guess what.

KENDRA. Why are you automatically gonna blame him before you even know anything?

SCOTT. He was driving around with two Black kids.

KENDRA. Oh, God forbid.

SCOTT. Don't give me that. Please - don't.

KENDRA. Are you kidding me?

SCOTT. Look - it's just you and me in here, so stop with the performance art.

KENDRA. Seriously?

SCOTT. Kenny, c'mon.

KENDRA. No really. He was with two other Black kids? That's the issue here? I mean what's the big -

(Long beat.)

How do you know who he was with?

SCOTT. *(Referring to Officer Larkin.)* This guy told me.

KENDRA. This cop?

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. When?

SCOTT. When I walked in.

KENDRA. Whoa, whoa, whoa, hold up. So the whole hour I'm here he didn't know a thing. The minute you walk in the door he's fulla answers.

SCOTT. I wouldn't necessarily say "full of answers," but...

KENDRA. But he told *you* Jamal was in a car with two other kids?

SCOTT. They were stopped, yeah.

KENDRA. Two other Black kids.

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. Well he never told *me* any of that. Wonder why that might be?

SCOTT. Right now, I don't really care. I just wanna know who they are.

KENDRA. Didn't your new buddy there tell you?

SCOTT. No.

(Beat.)

Well I think you'll agree – this demonstrates some very questionable judgment.

KENDRA. No. Not necessarily.

SCOTT. Really?

KENDRA. He's got a right to be in a car with his friends without getting dragged downtown at three a.m.

SCOTT. Nobody's saying he / doesn't have the –

KENDRA. Even if he's in a car with his *Black* friends.

SCOTT. What Black friends?

KENDRA. What do you –? Scott, c'mon. Can't you see what you're saying?

SCOTT. This is exactly what I'm saying. What Black friends? Listen – Was he with Jeffrey? Was he out with Nate or Manny? Kids we know and trust? 'Cause that'd be one thing...

KENDRA. I... I told you, I don't know...

SCOTT. No. And he certainly wasn't with Al.

KENDRA. Al's in Europe with his family on vacation.

SCOTT. Right. And Al's the only Black kid he hangs out with. Which is exactly my point.

KENDRA. Funny. That's exactly *my* point.

SCOTT. OK, look...

KENDRA. You think our bougie son has no right to associate with other Black kids without stamping a presumption of guilt all over himself.

SCOTT. No – I think our half-White, half-Black, who-gives-a-shit-what-race-he-is son – the one who got a fourteen seventy on his SAT and aced AP Physics – knows better'n to commit unforced errors in life by taking stupid risks. Especially when he's on the cusp of doing great things. I think he understands that – like it or not – the way you present yourself in life has consequences. Wear your pants halfway down your ass and ghetto hair...

KENDRA. ...Then you got no right to complain when you walk by and a White lady clutches her purse.

SCOTT. You got no right to complain when you walk by and *any* lady clutches her purse.

KENDRA. No, no, no. That's not - You're saying that associating with other Black kids is "taking a stupid risk."

SCOTT. Aww c'mon, Kenny. You know that's not what I'm saying.

KENDRA. Lemme ask you something...

(*Re: Officer Larkin.*) If this little asshole had told you Jamal was out in a car with two *White* boys he barely knew, would you be blaming him then? Would that be an "unforced error"?

SCOTT. If I didn't know 'em. If I hadn't met 'em. Black, White - you're damn right it would be.

KENDRA. Scott - no matter how many privileges he's got, the world still looks at him like it looks at me...not *you*.

SCOTT. Boy, I'll tell ya... I can see exactly what's been happening. I'm outta the house a few months, and - no doubt - you've been pumping his mind full of victimhood psychobabble.

KENDRA. Oh... You know...

SCOTT. "Pity me! Pity me!"

KENDRA. I've done nothing of the sort.

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. Instead of pointing the finger at me, maybe you oughta be looking in the mirror.

SCOTT. Oh, this is my fault now?

KENDRA. You're the one who disappeared at the pivotal moment in his life.

SCOTT. Excuse me?

KENDRA. You know exactly what I'm saying.

SCOTT. I coached his baseball team for ten years. I went to every one of his concerts. Have I ever missed a banquet or game / or event or meet -

KENDRA. That's not... That's not what I'm talking about.

SCOTT. Then what are you talking about?

KENDRA. You walked out on him.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. I did not.

KENDRA. Yes you did.

SCOTT. Bullshit.

KENDRA. You did.

SCOTT. No I didn't.

KENDRA. I'm sorry, but that's exactly / what you -

SCOTT. You know...

KENDRA. You did.

SCOTT. Kendra -

KENDRA. You up and walked out on him.

SCOTT. I didn't walk out on *him*. I walked out on *you*.

(Long beat.)

KENDRA. Oh.

SCOTT. I didn't mean for that to [come out like that].

(Beat.)

It's just... I get so sick and tired of having the same freakin' argument with you over and over and over again - *that's* what I walked away from. Not...y'know...

(Shit) Kendra - I'm... I'm sorry... / It's not that I don't have a -

KENDRA. Stop. Just put the shovel down and stop digging, alright?

SCOTT. Look...can we just - J's on his way to being a commissioned officer at one of the most elite institutions on earth. My job is done. He's a man now.

(Beat.)

A man I'm...so proud of...

KENDRA. I know.

SCOTT. I cannot...cannot have you telling me I didn't do my job as a father.

KENDRA. OK.

SCOTT. I am not *your* father, Kendra.

KENDRA. OK.

SCOTT. That's what walking out looks like.

KENDRA. Alright.

SCOTT. So don't...don't...

KENDRA. Scott -

SCOTT. Please.

KENDRA. I said I get it.

(A long beat. KENDRA is agitated. Maybe she paces, or bites her nails...something...)

SCOTT. Hey - Everything's gonna be fine. Just try to relax.

KENDRA. This time of night I always get agitated. You have no idea. I'm usually awake about this time. I don't know I've had a sleep-filled night since that boy was born. Most nights...my eyes fire wide open out of a sound sleep. Heart beating so hard I feel it throbbing in my ears. Always right about this time... Too late to go back to sleep, too early to get on with the day. You just snoring away. Usually, I go stand in the door to his room and listen to him breathe. Sometimes I go in and touch the muscle on his neck or shoulder. Stand there and bullshit myself: "Don't worry Kendra - he's big and powerful. This world can't hurt him." Till that nagging feeling comes back and I dwell on how fragile he is. Whatever nightmare it is just woke me up: Someone texting in an SUV...an errant punch in a bar fight...a ruptured appendix in some third-world country. Most mothers can sit there in the dark and get rational...go back to sleep. But sometimes...in my nightmares...I see nooses and crosses and White men with Brylcreem crew-cuts. Last summer when Jamal wanted to drive with Jeff to Bonnaroo... I was... I just...

SCOTT. Look - J and I just thought you were being a little over-the-top with the mother hen thing, is all...thinking he was too young, / but we disagreed, and moved on -

KENDRA. "Too young"? "Too young" had nothing to do with it. (Shit), my granddaddy was fighting in Okinawa when he was seventeen. ("Too young.") It wasn't that. It was the prospect of him driving through the Deep South... my son alone with a White boy driving Sherman's March to the Sea in reverse. Maybe he and Jeff stop at a gas station in some little town... 'Cause he doesn't know any better. 'Cause we raised him to believe the world's full of goodness. And he starts batting his doe eyes at some cute li'l White girl. Maybe the two of 'em walk into a burger joint happens to be an "alt-right" hangout. Maybe some guy with a swastika tattooed on his bicep's had a little too much to drink...doesn't like the look of this boy who's poisoning the country's racial purity.

(Beat.)

But the worst one...the one that always comes back... is I see him getting stopped by a cop for doing nothing in particular. I see ankle-high boots and badges and nightsticks. And I think back on that night when I was five years old and watched my stoic mother doubled over sobbing in the kitchen 'cause Arthur McDuffie'd been beaten to death by the cops...and they'd acquitted those cops.

(Beat.)

And you were a li'l boy asleep on the other side of town dreaming of becoming one.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Don't be scared.

KENDRA. Yeah?

SCOTT. This is just some frivolous nonsense. He probably had his music cranked up too loud.

KENDRA. You think?

SCOTT. Yeah, you know how he likes to do. Or his buddies had a couple bottles of beer in the back seat... Something stupid... Kids sowing wild oats.

(Beat.)

But let's not piss these people off, OK? Just...keep cool, half an hour – the three of us'll be at Denny's having a "teachable moment."

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Have you talked to him recently?

SCOTT. I talk to him pretty much every day. Well, mostly texting but...

KENDRA. No. Have you... Have you talked to him about...

SCOTT. About what?

KENDRA. West Point?

SCOTT. What about it?

KENDRA. I don't wanna get in the / middle of this again.

SCOTT. What about it?

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Well, he's...

SCOTT. He's what?

KENDRA. He's rethinking it.

SCOTT. Rethinking what?

KENDRA. You should talk to him.

SCOTT. About what, Kendra?

KENDRA. He's thinking of taking the farm team contract. Or maybe seeing where the guitar thing might go.

SCOTT.

KENDRA.

Jesus Christ. Again?

Listen... It'd probably just be a deferment.

We're doing this again?

KENDRA. He's afraid to tell you.

SCOTT. He should be.

(Beat.)

I hope this wasn't your idea.

KENDRA. OK...look...

SCOTT. You're encouraging this nonsense?

KENDRA. -

SCOTT. I'm... I'm speechless.

KENDRA. Scott, listen to me -

SCOTT. He doesn't even have the arm speed to make it out of double-A ball. He doesn't have the talent, OK? (A brutal reckoning that I - his father, not you - was forced to make with him, thank you.)

(Beat.)

And guitar? He's gonna play guitar? For a living?

KENDRA. Just 'cause you were too scared to pursue your dreams don't take it out on him.

SCOTT. Oh please.

KENDRA. Let him try while he's young. At worst, he spends some time finding himself.

SCOTT. Sure. You kick around trying to "find yourself," before you know it you're a forty-year-old dude with a 150 IQ and no college degree. You're making what... four-fifty a week playing in a goddamned wedding cover band... Being hired by a guy who can afford to drop a hundred K on a wedding because he didn't waste ten years of his life "pursuing his dream" of... of...(y'know) being on the Olympic curling team, or... writing the great American novel.

KENDRA.

That is not what I'm...

SCOTT.

The men in my family have served this country in every generation since they got here.

(OFFICER LARKIN enters with coffee.)

KENDRA. Scott.

SCOTT. He's not entitled to break that tradition.

KENDRA. Scott -

SCOTT. Not an option. End of discussion.

LARKIN. Sorry to interrupt.

(To SCOTT, trying to be playful.) Coffee. No cream, no sugar.

SCOTT. Thanks.

LARKIN. So. I got some more information for you. Not a lot. I checked the computer intake log again. Your son was identified as a vehicle occupant in a traffic stop. In your Lexus. I also confirmed that there were two other Black males in the vehicle when it was stopped.

SCOTT. Why were they stopped?

LARKIN. The log's not that specific. The general "infraction" category was checked off.

KENDRA. What does that mean?

LARKIN. It's whatever the patrol officer logged in from the laptop in his patrol car. He like...checks off a box.

KENDRA. So this tells us nothing.

LARKIN. Well, it's not showing up as pursuit following felony. Stolen car. BOLO. Y'know, the really bad stuff you can check off.

KENDRA. OK...

SCOTT. (To LARKIN.) Who were the other boys?

LARKIN. I'm not really allowed to...

(Beat.)

OK, badge to badge? This stays between us. DeShawn Rolle and Jarvis Bell.

SCOTT. (To KENDRA.) You know 'em?

(KENDRA indicates "No.")

LARKIN. Bell's a twenty-year-old with misdemeanor convictions. He had an open warrant.

SCOTT. For what?

LARKIN. That I can't tell you.

SCOTT. (To KENDRA.) You see? You see what I'm tellin' ya?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. One other thing. I gave your son's social media accounts a quick look over...

KENDRA. Really? That's what you been doing while we're standing around in here?

LARKIN. Social media's like...the first stop in missing persons cases.

KENDRA. Oh, please.

LARKIN. Fact. And that, I *did* learn in a training video.

(Beat.)

He posted a photo. A bumper sticker on the back of your Lexus. "Shoot Cops with your phone whenever they make a bust."

SCOTT. Excuse me?

LARKIN. Yeah. That's what it says.

SCOTT. "Shoot cops"?

LARKIN. And those words are in like...*huge* letters, OK?

SCOTT. I think you're mistaken.

LARKIN. The rest in little-bitty font so's all anyone wasn't two feet away from the bumper could see was a Lexus that said "Shoot Cops."

SCOTT. No. Not my son.

(OFFICER LARKIN shows SCOTT a photo he's printed out.)

LARKIN. 'Fraid so.

SCOTT. *(Looking at the photo.)* "Shoot Cops."

LARKIN. Shoot people trying to do their jobs.

SCOTT. That's all you can see.

LARKIN. Yup.

SCOTT. Jesus Christ.

LARKIN. Shoot people with wives and kids.

SCOTT. Son of a bitch.

LARKIN. Shoot 'em 'cause - you know - you're part of the revolution or whatever, I guess.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Kendra?

KENDRA. What?

SCOTT. That car is registered in my name.

KENDRA. This isn't about us, remember? Our son is in police custody.

SCOTT. Our son has a sticker on his car that says "Shoot Cops." My son.

KENDRA. Scott, look –

SCOTT. I'm a cop. I'm "the cops," goddammit.

KENDRA. It's about camera phones not guns, Jesus. And right now I couldn't care less about you and him (*Re: LARKIN.*) and your...goddamned Thin Blue Line. I care about finding our son.

SCOTT. Did you know? Had you seen it?

KENDRA. –

SCOTT. Aww, Ken...honey...please tell me you didn't know about this. Please tell me...

KENDRA. There are three Black kids in his school. Three. Out of four hundred something. And the other two are dating each other.

SCOTT. Right. No...no, I totally get it. Being one of the only Black kids at the most expensive prep school in the city instead of...you know...being a Black kid at MLK Senior where you gotta go through a metal detector every day – THAT entitles you to put a bumper sticker on your Lexus that says "shoot the stupid dumbass who got me this car."

LARKIN. Should I like, [leave]...

KENDRA. He is depressed. He is confused. He is grappling with a lot right now.

SCOTT. Bullshit.

(*To LARKIN.*) I'm sorry to be...venting in front of you like this...

LARKIN. No, listen – I – I totally hear you.

(*Beat.*)

KENDRA. Where is Jamal now?

LARKIN. What I just told you...that's all that was in the computer. And I wasn't even supposed to tell you that. I'm really supposed to wait for this Lieutenant Stokes guy to get here.

(Beat.)

Tell you what... I'll go check the computer again...see if someone mighta logged something in in the last few minutes.

KENDRA. You know what? I sat around here almost a half hour, you couldn't tell me a damned thing (except maybe how to go on a self-guided, Jim Crow tour of the building) -

SCOTT. Ken -

KENDRA. But as soon as my husband walks in - my *White* husband - all the sudden you're as helpful as can be.

SCOTT. Kendra...

KENDRA. Why is that?

(Beat.)

LARKIN. Do you *not* want me to go look at the computer again?

SCOTT. If you wouldn't mind too much, uhhh... (I'm sorry, I never got your first name...)

LARKIN. Paul.

SCOTT. Paul. If you wouldn't mind, we'd really appreciate it.

LARKIN. Sure thing.

(Re: SCOTT's coffee.) Refill?

SCOTT. That'd be great.

(OFFICER LARKIN exits.)

(Throughout the following, SCOTT will check his phone/texts a few times.)

KENDRA. "That'd be great." Know what else'd be great? If you'd take my side at some point.

SCOTT. Dammit, Kendra.

KENDRA. You're so goddamned nice to him, it's making me sick.

SCOTT. Well, I mean...“Shoot Cops”? For Christ’s sake.

KENDRA. That’s why you’re kissing this man’s ass?

SCOTT. I’m ready to put my fist through the wall.

KENDRA. Put yourself in Jamal’s place.

SCOTT. Oh, give me a break.

KENDRA. No, no, no. For just one minute. Put yourself in your son’s place. He’s the only Black person most of those li’l White kids at his school know. Most of ’em... only Black people they’ve ever exchanged two words with are the Jamaican hospice nurse who wipes Bubbie’s ass, and the people at some Habitat for Humanity house they helped build so they had something to put on their application to Princeton.

SCOTT. Listen, / I get that –

KENDRA. You have to understand, Scott. Jamal is going through a...a... [I don’t know how to explain it] – an *awakening*.

SCOTT. An awakening?

KENDRA. Yeah.

SCOTT. To what?

KENDRA. To this. (*She rubs her finger on the back of her hand.*)

SCOTT. OK...and...?

KENDRA. And Philando Castile. AND Eric Garner. AND Tamir Rice. Every time it happens, he... He feels the world close in on him a little, OK? And it comes at him from both sides ’cause all his White friends think he represents the entire race. It’s not like if he were at a school with other Black kids he could lean on. He’s the one all the White kids look to. There’s immense pressure on him to be – well I’ll tell you what he calls it: “The Face of the Race.” That’s what he says: “I feel like I’m the Face of the Race.”

SCOTT. He’s told you this?

KENDRA. Many times.

SCOTT. He’s never said anything like that to me.

KENDRA. Baby...look at you...and look at me...and reckon why that might be?

(Beat.)

When these men get shot down, he...he... *(Struggling for it.)* he can feel their ghosts.

(Beat.)

That bumper sticker was...

SCOTT. Was what? No, really - I want to understand.

(Long beat.)

KENDRA. Can't you see that Jamal is also right here? Filming cops is all these kids have. It's their last line of defense. Shit - God forbid I'm stopped - it's mine too. That's the world we live in. Whether you get it or not.

SCOTT. No. I do. I get it.

(Beat.)

He still shoulda known where this kinda thing can lead.

KENDRA. Where? Here? Tonight?

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. Because of a bumper sticker?

SCOTT. Yes.

KENDRA. You really think that's what this is about?

SCOTT. It sure didn't help.

KENDRA. A bumper sticker?

SCOTT. Look - if I'm a cop rolling down the street at two a.m. and it's a close call on probable cause...

KENDRA. The bumper sticker would push you over the edge?

SCOTT. You bet. Especially if after I make a warning stop I get some uppity asshole lecturing me on his rights.

KENDRA. Son of a bitch.

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. "Uppity"?

SCOTT. Oh, come on, Kendra.

KENDRA. Is that what you just said?

SCOTT. Jesus Christ.

KENDRA. Unbelievable.

SCOTT. Please don't.

KENDRA. From you?

SCOTT. Kendra...

KENDRA. I... I... I don't know what to say.

SCOTT. Goddammit, don't make this about how I tripped on some coded word fossil.

KENDRA. -

SCOTT. I can't have J lapsing into a life where he makes excuses for himself all the time. I won't.

KENDRA. And I won't have him walk around apologizing for who he is.

SCOTT. No one's asking him to do that.

KENDRA. Oh yes they are. "Keep your hands on the wheel, boy. Look straight ahead and don't make any sudden moves. Wouldn't wanna make the man with the bulletproof vest nervous when he walks up to your window with a Glock pointed at your head." Your father ever tell you that?

SCOTT. He never had to.

KENDRA. Your goddamned right he didn't.

SCOTT. Look - I'm as eager to sort this out as you are. He's my son too. I just don't think that...you know...lecturing these people about Black Lives Matter is gonna help. Let's just try catching flies with honey, OK?

KENDRA. Maybe they need a little lecture. They sure finna get one when I sue they asses.

SCOTT. Alls I'm saying - ALL...

(Beat.)

All I'm sayin' - let's give 'em the benefit of the doubt and not act like we're in some back-asswards Klan county in South Carolina. This is Miami, for God's sake.

KENDRA. Where my Black, Ph.D.-havin' ass still has to drive down something called "South Dixie Highway" to get to work every day.

SCOTT. Kenny - I see your point. I do. But throwing all that up in White people's faces makes 'em feel like shit. And when you make people feel like shit they tend not to want to help you.

KENDRA. Yassa, Massa Scott.

SCOTT. Oh God...

KENDRA. Auntie Kendra don won hoit nobody feelins. Sorry, Massa Scott.

(Beat.)

What's so funny?

SCOTT. You being ridiculous.

(Beat.)

KENDRA. My husband laughs when I pretend to be a house slave, and I wonder why we're separated.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. (Jesus, I'll tell ya...) Did you and I ever agree on anything?

KENDRA. Oh, come on.

SCOTT. No, did we?

KENDRA. Seriously?

(Beat.)

Seriously?

(Beat.)

The importance of hard work. Frugality. Respect for our elders. Uhhh...bourbon Manhattans at dusk out on the patio.

SCOTT. OK.

KENDRA. Thelonious Monk. Right?

SCOTT. We always agreed on Thelonious Monk.

KENDRA. Yes we did.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Thai food.

KENDRA. Right.

SCOTT. The U.

KENDRA. Yup.

SCOTT. Cormac McCarthy, uhhh...the Cayman Islands...

KENDRA. Sex.

(Long beat.)

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. The morning J was born was the best day of our lives.

SCOTT. We definitely agree on that.

KENDRA. Right?

(Beat. SCOTT picks up the photo of the "Shoot Cops" bumper sticker. Referring to it:)

SCOTT. I still can't... I just can't... (Jesus Christ).

KENDRA. When I was at that conference in Atlanta a couple months ago. I saw another bumper sticker: "Don't Blame Me, I Voted for Jefferson Davis." Nobody was pulling him over.

SCOTT. That's just some bigoted asshole, Kenny.

KENDRA. But in Atlanta. In the capital of Black America. White people get to glue their anger all over *their* cars.

SCOTT. I can't answer for every racist White person.

KENDRA. No? You're not the "Face of the Race"?

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Well I'm sure glad to see that this is the standard we're holding our son to these days.

KENDRA. What standard is that?

SCOTT. Looking for a bigot behind every tree. 'Cause that's what this leads to. "Shoot Cops" bumper stickers and... and...all this "micro-aggression" bullshit on college campuses.

KENDRA. Can we drop it?

SCOTT. I mean seriously, Kenny – what were you thinking?

KENDRA. Look, he just put it on the car today – or yesterday.
(I'm losing track of time, here.)

SCOTT. So you did know it was there.

KENDRA. Scott – yes. I saw it. I didn't like it either. But Jamal's been so on edge about everything lately. You weren't around and it was up to me to do triage. I decided the bumper sticker was a battle that could wait until morning. I told him not to get in that car until he got rid of it.

SCOTT. Fine. But once this is all done, you and I need to have a little talk about the quality of your judgment on this.

KENDRA. Wow. OK – know what? I'm not running cover for you anymore – He put the bumper sticker on the car to get back at you.

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. Yeah. He's furious with you.

SCOTT. For what?

KENDRA. What do you think, Scott? For leaving him. Sorry –
“leaving *me*.”

(Beat.)

SCOTT. He told you this?

KENDRA. Told me? I had to watch my six-foot-tall son cry his eyes dry about three nights running. Calling you names they haven't invented yet. That poor child was curled up in my arms like a li'l baby.

(Beat.)

SCOTT. I... I...

KENDRA. “I... I...” Yeah.

(Beat.)

That's what all this is about. The bumper sticker. The cornrows. It's a rebellion. Against you.

SCOTT. Bullshit.

KENDRA. No, honey. It's not bullshit. It's called the science of human psychology. This is what young men do when the person they model their whole identity and moral code after...ummmm, (damn - what's the clinical term) ..."fucks over his family."

SCOTT. Kenny -

KENDRA. He hates you right now. And for the first time in his life, he hates being half White. I told you - I'm not happy about the goddamned bumper sticker or the cornrows or the baggy pants. But it's just a phase he'll get over. Hopefully a short one. I'm just trying to help him reassemble a very fragile identity. An identity you busted into pieces when you walked out the door. So get off my back about this 'cause you don't get to claim the high road here!

(SCOTT gets a text and checks it.)

SCOTT. It's not J.

KENDRA. Dammit.

(Re: SCOTT texting.) You really need to be texting her now?

SCOTT. It's my brother.

KENDRA. So?

SCOTT. He sent a link and said it's urgent.

KENDRA. What? Dwyane Wade dunking? You two can't bond over your "man crush" some other time?

(SCOTT clicks on the link. The sound of muffled voices from his phone...then:)

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Awwww, man. Awww, man.

SCOTT.

Jesus...

VOICE 2. *(Voice-over.)*

Don't do it, man. Don't do it, man.

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Nigger, stay down. / Stay down, nigger!

SCOTT. Jesus.

(More footsteps. Then three gunshots in rapid succession.)

KENDRA. What? What? Scott, what is it?

SCOTT. It's uhh...

KENDRA. Scott?

(She takes his phone and fumbles to see what he's just watched.)

SCOTT. No.

(He goes to take his phone back.)

Kendra, please don't.

(She moves away and starts watching the video.)

Honey...

KENDRA. Hush.

(She replays the video. Muffled voices, then:)

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Awwww, man. Awwww, man.

VOICE 2. *(Voice-over.)* Don't do it, man. Don't do it, man.

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Nigger, stay down. Stay down, nigger!

(More footsteps. Then three gunshots in rapid succession.)

KENDRA. *(Startled by the first gunshot.)* Ahhh!

(A very long beat. Then very quickly:)

What...what's it mean?

SCOTT. I don't know?

KENDRA. Is that Jamal?

SCOTT. Shit.

KENDRA. Scott, is that him?

SCOTT. I don't know.

KENDRA. Is that him?

SCOTT. I don't know, Ken, I don't know.

KENDRA. Oh God.

SCOTT. Just gimme one second to...

KENDRA. What's the text say?

SCOTT. I didn't really pay attention...

(Taking back the phone and reading the text.)

"Look ASAP. AM stringer posted on CBS4 site. Is this J?"

KENDRA. Lemme see. Lemme see it.

(She watches it again.)

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Awwww, man. Awwww, man.

VOICE 2. *(Voice-over.)* Don't do it, man. Don't do it, man.

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Nigger, stay down. Stay down, nigger!

KENDRA. *(Overlapping the video.)* Oh God, Scott, I think one of them's Jamal. Is that Jamal? Is that him?

SCOTT. OK, listen...

KENDRA. The one running? Is that him? In the blue shirt. / I think that's his shirt...

SCOTT. Kendra... Kendra. Let's take this a step at a time, OK?

KENDRA. OK.

SCOTT. I'm gonna call John at the TV station.

(SCOTT dials the phone.)

KENDRA. I wanna see it again. / I wanna make sure –

SCOTT. Just wait a second lemme – just lemme try to get hold of my brother and see if he knows anything about –
(Into the phone.) John? Hey, it's me. So is that J in the –

(Beat.)

Uh-huh.

(Beat.)

But did he say whether or not –

(Beat.)

SCOTT.

OK...

(Beat.)

OK...

KENDRA.

What'd he say.

SCOTT. Can you text me his number so I can call him?

SCOTT.

Oh you don't... OK.

SCOTT. Yeah. K, thanks.

(He hangs up.)

KENDRA. What'd he say?

SCOTT. The station monitors the police scanner. They heard reports of a warrant stop – Some guy...a bystander... witness...something – he doesn't really know. Happens to be there, sends in this video.

KENDRA. Was it Jamal? Is he hurt?

SCOTT. He doesn't know. John doesn't... Just – he just – the scanner chatter came back with my car so he texted me the video link, and... He doesn't...

KENDRA. But it *could* be Jamal. Scott... He could be hurt. Jamal could be hurt –

SCOTT. I don't know, Kendra. I don't know. I saw what you saw. I don't know. I mean I –

(OFFICER LARKIN enters with coffee.)

LARKIN. *(To SCOTT.)* I got your refill.

SCOTT. *(Grabbing the phone.)* Have you seen this?

LARKIN. What?

SCOTT. Have you seen this?

LARKIN. No. No. Seen what.

(SCOTT hands him the phone and plays the video.)

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Awwww, man. Awww, man.

VOICE 2. *(Voice-over.)* Don't do it, man. Don't do it, man.

VOICE 1. *(Voice-over.)* Nigger, stay down. Stay down, nigger!

SCOTT. *(Overlapping the video.)* I wanna know what's happening with my son now.

(The sound of three shots is heard on the video.)

LARKIN. I don't know what this is.

SCOTT. A video. Apparently from a traffic stop.

LARKIN. What (sorry) - What video / from what stop.

SCOTT. The stop where - I - I don't know, that's why I'm asking.

KENDRA. Our son and...and...other kids, we think.

LARKIN. Where'd you get it.

SCOTT. Forget about where I got it, OK?

LARKIN. I'm just trying to understand why you think it has something to do with your son.

KENDRA. Because someone - his brother sent it and thinks it / could be Jamal -

SCOTT. Forget all that - Where's our son?

KENDRA. We just wanna know if he's OK.

LARKIN. I told you, Lieutenant Stokes is on his way down and he'll be able to tell you.

SCOTT. Listen. Listen to me. I've been - We've been waiting - We've been very patient. But our son is in custody. Your custody. You have him. And we want to know where he is. We wanna talk to him.

LARKIN. Sir, / I understand, but -

SCOTT. Now. We wanna talk to him now.

LARKIN. Look - I am doing everything I / can to sort this all out for you, but -

SCOTT. No, no no - shhh, shh, sh - This is easy. I'm gonna make it really easy, OK? I want to talk to him. Now. Where is he?

LARKIN. OK. As I have explained...I am not authorized to tell you that. Listen. I think if we just calm down for a minute and stop jumping to conclusions / we'll get this all sorted out -

(OFFICER LARKIN hands SCOTT the coffee and SCOTT swats it out of his hand, sending coffee flying all over the wall.)

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Where is our son?

(Beat.)

Where is our son?

(LIEUTENANT STOKES enters, unobserved by anyone.)

LARKIN. Sir – you just committed a battery on a law enforcement officer. That's a second-degree felony, OK?

SCOTT. Listen ya little shit – you don't tell me where our son is – right now – I'm gonna commit a capital felony.

KENDRA. *(Noticing STOKES.)* Scott.

SCOTT. We're done being strung along.

KENDRA. Scott.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES approaches SCOTT.)

STOKES. Sir, I'm gonna ask you to please take a seat and calm down.

SCOTT. Who are you?

(LIEUTENANT STOKES grabs SCOTT by the arm.)

STOKES. Sir...please...

(SCOTT pushes LIEUTENANT STOKES' hand away.)

SCOTT. Get your hands off me.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES attempts to grab SCOTT's arm again, but SCOTT pushes it away and shoves him.)

STOKES. I'm gonna ask you nicely one more time.

SCOTT. *(To LARKIN.)* Who the fuck is this?

STOKES. *(To LARKIN.)* Officer, gimme a hand.

(To SCOTT.) You have the right to remain silent.

(To LARKIN.) Your cuffs please.

(To SCOTT.) Anything you say or do may be used against you in a court of law.

SCOTT. Are you kidding me?

STOKES. You have the right to consult an attorney before speaking to the police...

SCOTT. You're kidding me?

STOKES.

I'm afraid not.

KENDRA.

Scott?

SCOTT. What am I being arrested for?

STOKES.

You have the right to have an attorney present during questioning now or in the future.

KENDRA.

Scott? Scott what's happening?

SCOTT. Are you kidding me? / You're kidding me?

(During the following, LIEUTENANT STOKES attempts to cuff SCOTT.)

STOKES. If you cannot afford an attorney, one will be appointed for you free of charge before any questioning, if you wish. If you decide to answer any -

(As the officers attempt to cuff SCOTT he resists and they scuffle.)

Stop, Stop. Hey. / Listen - listen to me.

KENDRA. This is ridiculous.

SCOTT. Let go of me. Let go of me, goddammit. Sonofabitch, / let go of me.

(The scuffle briefly abates.)

STOKES. Listen. You wanna keep on racking up charges, or you wanna calm down and get this over with?

(LIEUTENANT STOKES tries to cuff SCOTT again, but SCOTT slaps his hands away again.)

(To LARKIN.) Officer...

(Throughout the following, LIEUTENANT STOKES and OFFICER LARKIN tackle SCOTT to the ground, cuff him, and throw him on a sofa.)

Get his feet. / Get his feet. I got his... Hold him. Hold him.

LARKIN. I got him. I got him.

(To SCOTT.) Hold still. Stop it - / Hold still. Hold still.

SCOTT. Let go of me. Goddammit. / Stop - Let go of me.
Let go of me. Let go of me.

STOKES.

LARKIN.

(To SCOTT.) Hold still. I got him. I got him.
/ Hold still now.

KENDRA. Stop. Both of you. Stop. Stop it. / He's got a heart
murmur. He's got a heart murmur.

STOKES. OK. OK. Good. Settle down now. / Settle down.

SCOTT.

KENDRA.

Sonofabitch.

What is wrong with you
people?

STOKES. OK. That's enough.

SCOTT. You sons of bitches.

KENDRA. (To STOKES.) What is wrong with you?

STOKES. I said that's enough.

(To SCOTT.) You injured?

(Beat.)

Are you injured?

KENDRA. He certainly could have been.

STOKES. Sir?

(Beat. No answer. Then to OFFICER LARKIN:)

Get photos of him. His face and hands. Yours and mine
too.

(Throughout the following, OFFICER LARKIN
takes photos, as instructed, with his iPhone.)

KENDRA. Was that at all necessary?

STOKES. Unfortunately, it was.

(Beat.)

Now we all calm? We all settled down?

(Beat.)

Good. My name is Lieutenant John Stokes. I'm the a.m. shift liaison officer. I understand / there was an incident.

SCOTT. We want to know where our son is.

STOKES. Quiet please.

SCOTT. We want to know now. Right now.

(Beat.)

STOKES. OK... Imma try this one more time. I don't want to take you into custody. I definitely don't wanna charge you. 'Cause if I do, Imma have to spend the rest of the morning doing paperwork. The case would have to be processed by the state attorney's office. They'll call us all in for a sworn statement. And this young officer and I aren't gonna lie about what just happened right here.

SCOTT. What just happened was you two lost your minds.

STOKES. No sir. What happened was you committed a felony battery on a law enforcement officer, followed by resisting arrest with violence.

SCOTT. Bullshit.

STOKES. Is it? You're a law enforcement officer, you tell me.

(Beat, then to KENDRA:)

Ma'am, did your husband knowingly strike a law enforcement officer, or am I making that up?

SCOTT & KENDRA. *(Realizing STOKES is right.)* -

STOKES. Alright then. Let's not make me charge you. I'd hate to see you lose the badge and pension I'm sure you've worked very hard for.

SCOTT. *(Rising from his seat.)* I have a right to know where my son is.

KENDRA. Scott -

STOKES. You are mistaken. You have no such right, sir. Your son is an adult who is the subject of an investigation. Right now, you have the right to sit down and shut up.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES pushes him back onto the couch.)

STOKES. Do you understand?

KENDRA. He understands.

STOKES. I'm talking to him.

(To SCOTT.) Do you understand?

SCOTT. (To STOKES.) Fuck you.

KENDRA. Scott, please...

(Beat.)

STOKES. (To LARKIN.) Take him over to intake and book him. Two counts battery on a law enforcement officer, two counts resisting with violence. Every time he so much as flinches or looks at you cross-eyed between now and getting fingerprinted, you add a charge for resisting without. Got it?

LARKIN. Ye- Yessir. Do I take him into custody?

STOKES. If he can calm himself, give him a "promise to appear" and cut him loose.

SCOTT. You people are animals.

STOKES. Do I need to call in a taser and backup or are you gonna find a way to hold it together?

(Beat.)

SCOTT. I'm fine.

STOKES. Alright then.

SCOTT. But you'll be hearing from my lawyer.

STOKES. And you'll be hearing from mine. My lawyer's name is "The State Attorney." What's your lawyer's name?

(To LARKIN.) Get him outta here.

(OFFICER LARKIN leads SCOTT out. Beat.)

Now... Again... My name is Lieutenant John Stokes.

KENDRA. I would very much like to know if / my son is OK.

STOKES. If you will be still, I will tell you everything I currently know. But I will not be lectured. And this will not devolve into a shouting match.

KENDRA. When did I ever shout at you -

STOKES. Ma'am...

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Fine.

(Beat.)

STOKES. I will tell you what I know. You will quietly, and politely listen, or I will simply walk out that door and you can find out what you wanna know in due course. Understood?

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Who is your supervisor?

(He turns to leave.)

I'm sorry. Understood.

(He stops and comes back.)

STOKES. Excuse me?

KENDRA. I said: "understood."

(Beat.)

STOKES. Good. This is what I know: At approximately oh two fifteen this morning a late model, silver Lexus was pulled over by a patrol officer. That Lexus is registered to a Scott Alan Connor.

KENDRA. That's my husband.

STOKES. Three African-American males have been taken into police custody in connection with the incident. We don't know much more about the stop / except that -

KENDRA. The cop shot at someone. / I saw the video where someone -

STOKES. I will not compete with your outrage and speculation.

KENDRA. I saw a video. There were shots fired.

STOKES. I don't have confirmation of that.

KENDRA. But I saw it. I heard it.

STOKES. You heard noises on a grainy video. I am trying to get facts.

KENDRA. He called one of the kids a nigger. He -

STOKES. If you'll be kind enough to let me finish -

KENDRA. He called him a nigger. I heard it.

STOKES. No, ma'am.

KENDRA. You saw it.

STOKES. Incorrect. One of the people taken into custody was a bystander - a Black bystander - who shot that footage on his cell phone. It's his voice you hear in the video. Not the voice of a law enforcement officer.

KENDRA. Why was Jamal stopped? He doesn't drink. We just bought the car. The brake lights were working.

STOKES. Ma'am -

KENDRA. He had his registration and insurance card, I made sure of that.

STOKES. Ma'am -

KENDRA. He wouldn't have given anyone any reason to stop him.

STOKES. Nobody said your son was stopped. There were at least three individuals involved in the incident. I don't know who was driving the vehicle when it was pulled over. Neither do you. You'll cause yourself a lot less heartache if you stop jumping to conclusions. At the moment, I don't know why the car was stopped. OK?

KENDRA. OK.

STOKES. Right now, what I've told you is all I know.

KENDRA. Alright.

STOKES. When I find out anything else, I will immediately inform you of it. Alright?

KENDRA. Fine.

(Beat.)

STOKES. I will tell you this... The car had a bumper sticker on it that raises some concerns.

KENDRA. I'm aware of that.

STOKES. Kinda makes your close scrutiny of your son's registration and insurance card moot, now doesn't it?

KENDRA. I don't see how.

STOKES. C'mon my sistah, I know you know better than that.

KENDRA. I am not your "sistah."

STOKES. A Black boy in a car with a bumper sticker like that...? He's asking for trouble.

KENDRA. And what does that tell you?

STOKES. It tells me the world is not the same for people who look like you and me.

KENDRA. Jesus Christ.

STOKES. Yeah. That's what it tells me. It also tells me that the people who patrol the streets with legal authority to use deadly force are not robots. They help their kids brush their teeth at night. Read 'em Dr. Seuss and pray they'll get to do it the next night. They do it for the pride and not for the money. It tells me that when they see some nihilistic, agitatin' young thug, their pride may get the best of 'em.

KENDRA. Who the hell do you think you are? Calling my son a thug. Running cover for some cracker-ass cop.

STOKES. The cop is Black. The one who made the stop? He's Black as you and me.

(Beat.)

Lemme tell you something lady. I parachuted outta planes. I fought door-to-door in combat. The most scared I've ever been in my life...ever...is when I made my first traffic stop on a ghetto street. And you know why? Because there are hip-hop songs and bumper stickers and mobs shutting down the interstate saying the cops are the enemy so it's OK to question 'em. It's OK to challenge 'em. If they pull you over, it's OK to bust out with an attitude. Act like gangsters and have... "swagger." You step up to a cop, that makes you hard. Well all that bullshit gets cops killed.

KENDRA. I don't know who you're talking about, but that's not Jamal. My son was taught to be respectful and assert his rights.

STOKES. When I pull you over, you got no grounds to “assert your rights.” Know what you have the right to do? Shut up and do what I say.

KENDRA. I – I – I can’t believe what I’m hearing. You serve us. Not the other way around.

STOKES. What if your car matches one from an Amber alert? What if you fit the BOLO for someone who’s just shot up a school? When you get stopped you got no idea what it might be. Some hard-acting fool just gets in the way.

KENDRA. Maybe if you’d grown up in the Pork ‘n Beans like me, you’d understand that Black boys don’t act gangster to be hard, they do it to hide their fear.

STOKES. I come up in Overtown lady, so ain’t nobody gotta tell me why they do like they do. Oh, but hold up – Y’all’s family’s living the American Dream, ain’t ya? Your son got no reason to be afraid, right?

KENDRA. Oh – is that what I should be doing? Teaching him to be scared? Be a good boy and keep his mouth shut?

STOKES. Damn right. Make sure he understands that for us? There ain’t no “American Dream.”

KENDRA. Well... I guess I just wasn’t raised to be a bitter Uncle Tom like you.

STOKES. Lady, you got a nerve...

KENDRA. You damned right I do.

STOKES. Mmmm, I’ll tell ya – two minutes with you, I know your whole adult life.

KENDRA. Aww bullshit.

STOKES. Oh, but I do. I know you got a husband carries around a picture of you on his phone. Every time he say some fool ass racist thing, he pull up that picture and go: *(Pretending to hold up a picture on a phone.)* “Oh no. Not me. ‘Cause looky here at my Black wife.”

(Beat.)

I know how you could never explain to him that pain in your heart... That pain that claws out your contentment

'cause every public service announcement for hepatitis C and every malt liquor billboard got someone who looks like your baby boy in it. Or why your son was the tallest, smartest kid in the third grade but the teacher never seemed to call on him no matter how high he raised his li'l brown hand. 'Cause that's a pain your man could never quite understand. So you tried to kill that pain by making your son "proud" and telling him to live the "American Dream." Teaching him to "assert his rights" instead of how to survive as a Black man in this country.

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Fuck you.

STOKES. One thing I know for sure about this incident already. Just like almost every other one of 'em: If the young brothers woulda just shut their mouths and done what they were told, none of us would be here tonight. That's what I suggest you do - sit tight and shut up.

(He turns to go.)

Oh. And sistah... Next time you call a Black man a Tom? It'd play a whole lot better if that Black man didn't just drag your *White* husband out the room in handcuffs.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES exits.)

(A good full minute passes, during which lightning strikes and a heavy rain begins to fall.)

(SCOTT enters.)

(Another beat.)

SCOTT. They booked me. Gave me a "promise to appear."

(He holds up a paper, tears it into pieces, and throws it on the floor.)

Stupid. Just stupid. I don't understand. I just don't... /
I don't...

KENDRA. Why did you walk up to me?

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Why did I...?

KENDRA. At Carl and Joy's party...

SCOTT. Oh...

KENDRA. The first time we ever met. Why did you walk up to me?

(This should be played with an intensity aimed at masking their fear.)

SCOTT. Kenny...

KENDRA. Tell me.

SCOTT. Now?

KENDRA. Tell me again.

SCOTT. Babe -

KENDRA. Please...

(Beat.)

SCOTT. Because...

(Beat.)

KENDRA. Because I was staring at you...

SCOTT. I was staring at *you*... I couldn't help it...

KENDRA. What else?

SCOTT. I uhh...

KENDRA. What else?

SCOTT. You don't think Jamal's gotten himself / into some kinda situation where -

KENDRA. *(Urging him.)* Shhhhh. We were standing on Carl and Joy's patio looking at each other...

(They've told this story a thousand times. It's now coalesced into the comforting mythology of how they fell in love.)

SCOTT. ...We were looking at each other...couldn't take our eyes off of each other...

KENDRA. ...And...

SCOTT. ...And I walked over...

KENDRA. (*Urging him.*) ...You walked over to me...

SCOTT. ...My heart was pounding so hard I couldn't talk...

KENDRA. ...And all these other girls walking back and forth to the bar. And you never looked at a one of 'em. You just kept walking...and staring at me...

SCOTT. Yeah.

KENDRA. And you looked up...

SCOTT. ...And I looked up...

KENDRA. ...Right past me...and I thought "maybe not."

SCOTT. But I...

KENDRA. ...But...you...you...

SCOTT. ...I put my hand on your shoulder...

KENDRA. ...And you pointed out a bird in a tree. This gorgeous little red bird.

SCOTT. And it flew away. / And I said -

KENDRA. And you told me it was tired of being just the / second most beautiful creature at the party.

SCOTT. "The second most beautiful creature there."

KENDRA. That's what you said.

SCOTT. Yeah.

(*Beat.*)

Hey...

KENDRA. It's coming apart. Everything's coming apart.

SCOTT. Oh, Kenny.

KENDRA. I know you're not coming back. It hurts Scott. It hurts. The fact she's White makes it almost unbearable.

SCOTT. I don't love her.

KENDRA. Then...why?

SCOTT. I don't...

(*Long beat.*)

KENDRA. We made a magnificent person, didn't we?

SCOTT. We did.

(*Beat.*)

KENDRA. I was thinking...before you came back...about that time when you and I were fighting. (I don't even remember what it was about.) When Jamal was a baby. And I was upset. And he thought I was crying 'cause of the thunder and lightning. And he said...

SCOTT. Oh yeah...

KENDRA. ...He said: "Don't cry Mama...it's just God takin' pictures of the rain."

SCOTT. We wrote it down in his "baby book."

KENDRA. And he grabbed my tears with his li'l bitty hands... and tried to put 'em back in my eyes.

(Beat.)

Last night I... I told him...

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. We were both furious...and he was yelling at me and I... I...

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. I said things to him...

SCOTT. What?

KENDRA. Oh God – Horrible...ugly... Things a mother should never say to a child. / We were both so angry and – I just wanna – I wanna hold him and look him in the eyes – I wanna pull every word I said out of his head and bury it in the ground.

SCOTT. Hey. Hey, it's OK.

KENDRA. Goddammit!

SCOTT. It's OK.

KENDRA. "Shoot cops." I should've gone out with a razor and peeled that goddamned thing off his car. / I shoulda gone out there as soon as I saw it.

SCOTT. No, no, no – You were right. That shouldn't have made any difference. It shouldn't matter. It's not your fault. It's not his fault.

KENDRA. I'll never say a cross word to him again. I just need to know he's OK.

SCOTT. He's OK.

KENDRA. Please, Jesus, let him be OK.

SCOTT. He's OK. He's OK.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES enters. He recites the following in a very precise, deliberate fashion.)

STOKES. I have news. Your son, Jamal Connor, was a rear seat passenger in a vehicle with a Jarvis Bell and a DeShawn Rolle. Bell was wanted on a misdemeanor warrant for marijuana possession. The car was tailed by a Metro cruiser near the Scott Projects in Liberty City where the driver was observed purchasing a nickel bag of marijuana.

SCOTT. *(Concerned.)* Goddammit.

STOKES. Following the purchase, while driving westbound on Seventy-ninth Street, the car was approached by a marked patrol car. Officer Rodney Banks, who had witnessed the purchase, pulled the car over. The camera on the patrol car shows Officer Banks approaching the driver's side of the vehicle - Mr. Bell was driving the car. The officer returns to his vehicle with the occupants' identification and, apparently, begins checking them on his laptop. After approximately thirty seconds, Mr. Bell exits the vehicle and attempts to approach the officer. The officer pulls his gun / and gets Mr. Bell to the ground.

KENDRA. Oh God.

STOKES. As the officer calls for backup, DeShawn Rolle exits from the rear of the vehicle. The officer trains his gun on Rolle. At that moment, Jamal Connor exits the vehicle in an apparent effort to place his hands / on the hood of the car...

SCOTT. *(Scared.)* Oh no.

STOKES. ...It's wet, he may have slipped. As Jarvis Bell simultaneously begins to stand up and take flight. The officer, now confronted with all three vehicle occupants - one of whom has a warrant - and not having searched the vehicle for a possible weapon...

KENDRA. Oh God, no...

STOKES. Fires three shots at the fleeing suspect.

KENDRA. Please God, no...

STOKES. Either a stray shot or a ricochet...we don't know which yet...CSI is at the scene now...strikes Jamal Connor in the head killing him instantly.

KENDRA. No, no, no, no, / no, no, no, no... (*Continuing intermittently through lights out.*)

STOKES. I am...terribly sorry for your loss. There will be a full inquiry. I'll give you a moment.

(LIEUTENANT STOKES *exits.*)

SCOTT. I can't breathe. I... I...can't breathe. I can't breathe -
(*Rapid lights out.*)

End of Play