Acting Edition

Moreno

by Pravin Wilkins

SAMUEL FRENCH

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MORENO was first produced by Ceri Lothian and Theatre503 (Lisa Spirling, Artistic Director; Andrew Shepherd, Executive Director) in London on 1 March 2022. The production was directed by Nancy Medina, with design by Aldo Vazquez, lighting design by Laura Howard, sound design by Duramaney Kamara, and movement direction by Ingrid Mackinnon. The production manager was Tabitha Piggott, and the stage manager was Rhea Jacques. The cast was as follows:

LUIS MORENO ..... Sebastián Capitán Viveros
EZEKIEL WILLIAMS ..... Joseph Black
CRE'VON GARCON ..... Hayden McLean
DANNY LOMBARDO ..... Matt Whitchurch

CHARACTERS

LUIS MORENO – Twenty-six-year-old Chicano NFL running back. Short, lean, cut. Cocky and materialistic in a "new money" sort of way. Media darling. Has a good heart, buried under more than a few layers of self-absorption.

EZEKIEL WILLIAMS – Thirty-three-year-old Black NFL linebacker. Tall and muscular – he's a big dude. No-nonsense. Self-educated and politically knowledgeable.

CRE'VON GARCON – Twenty-three-year-old Haitian-American cornerback. A lanky motherfucker. Street smart; quick-witted. The kind of guy who would get in a fight, lose, and still walk away talking shit. Extremely empathetic beneath this exterior.

DANNY LOMBARDO – Thirty-two-year-old white quarterback. Very tall; handsome by white beauty standards. Football is life: nothing before 1892 has meaning. The stadium is a temple.

SETTING

An NFL locker room, sideline, and field.

TIME

The 2016–2017 football season.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

A slash [/] indicates a point of interruption, where one character begins speaking over another.

Parentheses [( )] indicate something thought but not uttered.

ANNOUNCERS/REPORTERS #1 & #2 are not intended to be cast. They are disembodied voices.

With deep and enduring gratitude for Colin Kaepernick and the hundreds of NFL players who knelt to acknowledge a moment of national injury, who held each other up as brothers in the face of injustice, and who persevered through hate to make a movement.

Pravin Wilkins

ACT I

Scene One

(Offseason: Mid-March.)

(Lights up on a pro football locker room. There are four lockers, three of which have gear in them: helmets sitting; jerseys hanging. There's a "Williams" jersey in one locker, a "Garcon" jersey in a second locker, a "Lombardo" jersey in a third, and a conspicuous lack of a jersey in the last one.)

(Enter **LUIS MORENO**, *swaggering in. He carries a large athletic bag and a speaker, which plays a hip-hop song about making a ton of money, something like "I Get Money" by 50 Cent.*[*]*)*

*(***LUIS** *is getting into the music as he begins to remove football gear [i.e. shoulder pads, helmet, cleats, etc. – everything but his jersey] from his bag and place it in his locker. Eventually, he breaks out into dance and starts to make it rain, showering the stage with cash.)*

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(Enter **EZEKIEL WILLIAMS** *and* **CRE'VON GARCON**.*)*

CRE'VON. Awww shiiiiiiit what's this? Is this THE mothafuckin Luis Moreno in my locker room right now? Is this for real?

LUIS. Ay what up you that kid outta Tulane, yeah? I've seen some film of you up there with them 6-foot-5 Julio Joneses, batting that shit down. What's your secret?

*(***LUIS** *daps up* **CRE'VON**; **EZEKIEL** *regards the mess.)*

CRE'VON. My secret ain't no secret – every corner from the dawn of time knows this: it's ALL about getting in they heads! Just gotta heckle em 'til you see what really gets under their skin, then keep shootin that their way. Eventually they snap. Lose focus. Make mistakes.

LUIS. Huh. That's some savage shit ese.

CRE'VON. And you know I seen you out there breakin ankles! Ain't you had the fastest forty of all time or some crazy shit?

LUIS. Well, I don' like to brag but... shit wait, yes I do and yes I did!

CRE'VON. Dayum Zeke we finna lock down the league wit this nigga!

*(***EZEKIEL** *turns off the music.)*

EZEKIEL. So this is how you wanna make an entrance? This is how you wanna introduce yourself to your new team?

CRE'VON. Shit it don't gotta be all like that /

EZEKIEL. Hey. Cre'von. I got a C and four gold stars on my jersey that say right now's a good time for you to shut the fuck up.

(A beat.)

LUIS. Damn bro, I'm just over here tryna celebrate. I didn't mean nobody no offense.

EZEKIEL. Look we're a serious team, alright? And if I'm being real with you I had some reservations about bringing you on in the / first place.

LUIS. Reservations about bringing me on? Over there acting like you cut the checks? Man who the fuck you sposed to be anyways?

EZEKIEL. I'm a twelve-year veteran of this league. Let's say my word goes far around here.

LUIS. Well, it don't quite seem like your word went far enough this time.

(A beat.)

Tell me, what "reservations" you talkin about?

CRE'VON. Gentlemen come on, we don't gotta do this right now.

EZEKIEL. My reservations are that you're a hotshot who's not bringing the right mentality to this team. Pick that shit up.

LUIS. Excuse me?

EZEKIEL. Whatever *this* is, we don't do it in this locker room.

LUIS. You didn't think I was just gonna leave all that lying around forever...

EZEKIEL. I wanna see you pick it up.

(A beat. **LUIS** *begins to collect the money from the floor. After a couple seconds,* **EZEKIEL** *exits.)*

LUIS. There, aight? You hap– wait, where'd that mothafucka go?

CRE'VON. He ain't usually like that, I think he's just a lil bitter is all.

LUIS. Fuck he got to be bitter about?

CRE'VON. Well…it's basically an open secret round here. Him and some of the other older guys, Big man approached em. Asked em to take a cut so we could bring you on.

LUIS. Oh I see now; so he's pissed this money's in my hands and not his.

CRE'VON. Yeah maybe somethin like that. He's also… dealin with some other shit…but anyways I don't think we got the chance for a proper introduction. My name's Cre'von, but my niggas call me Creole.

LUIS. So that mean Black people call you Creole, or everybody?

CRE'VON. Hah! Everybody.

LUIS. And why they call you that?

CRE'VON. Cuz I'm Creole, nigga.

(A beat.)

What, you ain't never heard of no Creoles?

LUIS. It's like…an ethnicity?

CRE'VON. Ethnicity, race, fuck if I know. We just Haitians from Louisiana. But I grew up in St. Louis with my dad, not as many of us out there. You could say ya boi stood out a lil bit.

LUIS. Huh. Then ain't it a lil weird to just call you Creole? That'd be like if people called me "Chicano."

CRE'VON. You're overthinkin it dawg. I ain't about that PC college campus shit. That's what my niggas back in The Lou call me and it ain't never felt weird.

(A beat.)

And what's that word you said?

LUIS. What word?

CRE'VON. Chickano?

LUIS. Oh, *Chicano*. It means you're Mexican but you grew up in America.

CRE'VON. Well look at that, brotha, we teachin each other shit already. Anyway, I'm boutta dip outta here. I got me a fine ass lil date.

LUIS. Ay keep an eye out for 49ers though.

CRE'VON. 49ers? You mean 69ers? Cuz they the freaky hoes I'm lookin for!

LUIS. Nah nah, 49ers. Cuz it's the gold rush and we California baby.

*(***CRE'VON** *laughs.)*

CRE'VON. You're funny, man. We gon' get along just fine. Just fine.

*(***CRE'VON** *exits.* **LUIS** *puts his money in a clip.)*

LUIS. *(Mockingly.)* "Pick this shit up."

(A beat.)

*(***LUIS** *stands and shuffles his feet as in a football drill: he does some jukes, spin moves. He's in some pain: he sits and rubs his right knee. He crosses himself and puts a finger to God.)*

LUIS. You gon' look after me this time, right? You gon' have me running just like before?

(Enter **DANNY LOMBARDO**, *looking like he just got back from vacation.)*

DANNY. Marino! They told me you were moving your gear in today and I just *had* to drop in.

LUIS. Danny, it's a pleasure.

DANNY. Marino Marino Ma-Louis fucking Marino. God damn. Welcome aboard.

*(***DANNY** *extends his hand: they shake.)*

So, I'm excited that you're here, but I'm also a business-oriented man.

LUIS. Oh you know I am too. I got big business.

DANNY. Do you now?

LUIS. I got business that go beyond football. I mean, I know you watched that Super Bowl, a few years back. I was on the field so of course at the time I didn't know it happened like this, but my mama was watching at home and she told me later, "Mijo, after you got the first touchdown they cut to the Nike commercial and it was you again!"

*(***LUIS** *laughs.)*

So yeah. I be all business all day, 25/8 mothafucka.

DANNY. Well, I didn't exactly mean that. I meant *business.*

*(***DANNY** *gestures toward the locker room.)*

And so, I've got a question I'd like to ask you.

LUIS. Yeah what's that, Danny?

DANNY. Well. I've seen you on the field. I've seen you do your little Cuba-Gooding-"show-me-the-money" dance when you get in the endzone. I've seen you dressed up like Deion Sanders in those post-game interviews. And yes, I saw your Nike ad during that Super Bowl. So I've got a certain picture of who you are. But I want to ask you myself. What is it that makes you tick?

LUIS. That makes me tick?

DANNY. Yeah, what makes you tick, what keeps you going, what gets you outta bed in the morning?

LUIS. That's hard to say, Danny. What'd you say if I asked you the same question?

DANNY. Hey don't play coy with me. I asked first.

LUIS. I dunno man, it's kind of a big question.

DANNY. Okay let's try something smaller. Why football?

LUIS. Why football?

DANNY. Yeah, of all the sports out there.

LUIS. I didn't wanna be cliché and be that Mexican kid who plays soccer.

*(***DANNY** *laughs.)*

DANNY. Well this isn't going anywhere. How about I just tell you what makes *me* tick. Then you can think about it and get back to me.

LUIS. Okay.

DANNY. One word and one word only. Winning. W-I-N-N-I-N-G. And I spell it out because…the tense is important.

LUIS. Well I can dig that ese.

(A beat.)

DANNY. You know how many QBs had a better passer rating than me in the last five years? Zero. You know how many QBs get paid more than me? Nine. And God knows it ain't because I'm not worth it. Nope. It's 'cause for me – I can't speak for you, but for *me* – money comes second to Super Bowls. I can't say that being in an ad in a game I lost would make me feel too great. Because money comes second to the Hall of Fame. To greatness.

LUIS. Well that's admirable, Danny. That's real admirable.

DANNY. And…how best to say this. I mean, I guess what I'm saying is if a guy were to come onto this team asking for a lot of money, a LOT of money, I wouldn't necessarily question his motives, but I would expect that person to help us win games.

LUIS. Well, any guy a front office pays top dollar for should be doing that.

DANNY. I'd also expect him to have the kind of hustler mentality to be able to…get over an injury.

(A beat.)

ANYWAYS, nice talk Marino. Looking forward to getting out there for camp.

LUIS. Yeah, yeah. Lookin forward to it…

*(***DANNY** *goes to exit; before he does,* **LUIS** *speaks up.)*

Hey. You know what, I'm not playing that "new-guy-keeps-his-head-down" shit. I get paid a lotta money cuz I earn a lotta money. And while we're talking bout that, let's talk about how you still got the highest salary of anyone on the team. So I don't need no lectures about putting the team, putting wins above money. The two come hand in hand with me, aight? I get paid; we win games. Mathe-fuckin-matics.

(A beat.)

And don't you be questioning whether I still got it. My knee is fuckin stronger than before, if anything. I spent a whole god damn year getting this shit right again. It ain't no question whether I still got it, it's a question if anybody else can claim they even in the conversation bout who's the best running back in the league.

DANNY. Marino, I think you're taking all of this a bit personally /

LUIS. It's Moreno.

DANNY. Mareno. Sorry.

LUIS. Mo. Reno.

*(***DANNY** *doesn't try again.)*

Say it.

DANNY. Look, I didn't mean to offend you. Just know, expectations are high.

LUIS. I'm a diamond baby. I come into form under pressure.

DANNY. Hah! Alright then Diamonds. I'll catch you on the field. But don't be getting side-tracked. There's a lot of distractions in this world that can keep you from what's important.

(They shake hands. **DANNY** *exits.)*

(A beat. **LUIS** *finally removes his jersey from his gym bag. He hangs it up in the locker.)*

(Lights out. Sounds of a football practice play over the speakers: The quarterback calls an audible, the ball is hiked, feet hit the ground rapidly, players on the sideline shout "BALL BALL BALL!" to indicate to defenders the ball is in the air, players make contact, sounds of celebration, etc.)

Scene Two

(Training Camp: Mid-July.)

(Lights up: We are on the field for a practice. **LUIS**, **EZEKIEL**, **CRE'VON**, *and* **DANNY** *are all onstage. They each run drills according to their position. Maybe this is realistic; maybe abstract.)*

*(***LUIS** *does a drill with* **EZEKIEL** *where he tries to evade him, maybe an angle drill. This is where two players face one another, standing about ten yards apart. To one player's right – and the other's left – are cones set up at about three-yard intervals. The cones should be equidistant from each player. On some signal, the ball-carrier – i.e.* **LUIS** *– jogs down the line of cones, then cuts and starts a sprint as he decides which cones to run between. The defender – i.e.* **EZEKIEL** *– tracks the ball carrier and wraps them up if they catch them.* **EZEKIEL** *is successful in catching* **LUIS** *more often than not.)*

*(***CRE'VON** *does a defensive-back drill with* **DANNY** *acting as quarterback. This could be a back-pedaling drill where* **DANNY** *holds a football and stands still. As* **CRE'VON** *back-pedals,* **DANNY** *moves the ball to one side or the other:* **CRE'VON** *responds by shifting out of the back-pedal and jogging in the same direction indicated by* **DANNY**. *It's a three-step drill:* **CRE'VON** *starts back-pedaling,* **DANNY** *puts the ball to one side of his body and* **CRE'VON** *reacts, then* **DANNY** *brings the ball to the other side and* **CRE'VON** *reacts again by snapping his head around to the*

other side and tracking the ball as **DANNY** *throws it.* **CRE'VON** *doesn't catch it every time, but he does get his hands on the ball every time.)*

(During/between the drills, the **PLAYERS** *heckle one another.)*

EZEKIEL. Come on now, Moreno. You think you're quick but you givin it away with them big eyes.

LUIS. Ay you keep talking that good shit I'mma have you on your big ass.

EZEKIEL. You had a month and I haven't seen you do nothin like that yet.

LUIS. Yeah that's just cuz it's easier to run right around your clomping ass legs.

(A beat.)

CRE'VON. I smell blood Danny! I'm a fuckin shark and I smell blood! It's time to get out the water you surfer-lookin mothafucka!

DANNY. If you're a shark you got no teeth yet, rookie! More like Kevin Hart in a baby shark costume!

CRE'VON. Ay this my second year homie I'm a veteran!

DANNY. "Ay ThIs My SeCoNd YeAr HoMiE i'M a VeTeRaN!"

(A beat. **ALL** *continue running their drills. Then: a whistle.)*

*(***LUIS**, **EZEKIEL**, **CRE'VON**, *and* **DANNY** *take a water break, conglomerating around a table with athletic water bottles. They're out of breath, except for* **DANNY**.*)*

We aren't fucking ready.

CRE'VON. Nigga what? I been ready since summer began, for real. Get my ass out on that field with a crowd to see it.

LUIS. Yeah Danny, why you say we ain't ready? I'm ready as fuck to step out there and BOP! Give some mothafuckas the stiff arm on my way to anotha check.

*(***DANNY** *reaches out to shove* **LUIS**, *but* **LUIS** *evades him.)*

WOOP! Spin move bitch I'm over here now.

DANNY. Everybody's out here acting like wins are going to be wrapped and ready for us like fucking iPhones on Christmas.

CRE'VON. Okay maybe where you from, y'all got iPhones for Christmas / but…

EZEKIEL. Danny's right. Just cuz we won the division last year doesn't mean it'll fall in our laps.

CRE'VON. But this time around, we got this speedy lil Mexican nigga! Wait, wait. This speedy lil *Chicano* nigga. My bad.

LUIS. I mean Mexican's fine too…

DANNY. Yeah yeah. Diamonds is fast, when he decides he's not gonna jog.

LUIS. Fool what? I don't wanna hear none of that shit from you. All you gotta do is stand like a statue in the backfield while we sprinting.

DANNY. I just do *my* job. My job doesn't literally have "running" in the fucking name.

LUIS. Man fuck you Danny!

EZEKIEL. Hey! What the fuck is this, the *Real Housewives of Atlanta*? We don't point fingers on this team. We take responsibility for ourselves and we push each other to be better.

LUIS. Thank you.

EZEKIEL. That being said, Moreno: you might be used to getting some kind of special treatment cuz you're in Nike ads and shit. But that asshole is a team captain and if he says you're slacking then you gotta pick it up. And I'm not saying anything, but you didn't get past me more than once today.

LUIS. Oh I see how it is, finger-pointing is reserved for the mothafuckas with badges. How American.

*(***LUIS** *flicks* **EZEKIEL***'s captain patch.)*

EZEKIEL. Don't call it a fucking badge.

LUIS. You the one actin like a cop. Whatchu want me to say, huh? "Yes suh, yes suh. Sorry for defending myself, suh."

*(***EZEKIEL** *moves towards* **LUIS** *but* **CRE'VON** *steps between them.)*

CRE'VON. Hey now big man. Let's take a walk. Come on.

EZEKIEL. Don't fuckin push me, Moreno.

LUIS. If the truth hurts, say ouch.

(A beat. **CRE'VON** *sneaks a look to* **LUIS** *as he exits with* **EZEKIEL***.)*

DANNY. Damn. Not sure I've ever seen him so mad.

LUIS. I'm not sure I ever seen his ass not mad.

DANNY. You do realize "cop" is possibly the worst thing you could call him.

LUIS. I don't need a white guy from Santa Barbara to tell me cops ain't popular.

DANNY. Nah, you don't get it Diamonds. His parents were Black Panthers.

LUIS. So fuckin what?

DANNY. Look, I don't even know why I'm telling you this. None of this shit is my problem.

LUIS. Naw, naw. Go on. What's it to me who his parents are?

DANNY. Were.

LUIS. Whatever. Were.

DANNY. I REALLY don't think you're picking up what I'm putting down. They're dead. And his mom passed a couple days ago.

LUIS. Oh…shit. I didn't know that… So you're saying I should feel sorry for him.

DANNY. Well…that's not really my business.

(A beat.)

But what you do on the field? That is my business. And I see you grabbing that knee when we're on the sidelines. I see past this façade you've got up. I see that you're struggling. And all I'm saying is, you better not be spoiled goods.

LUIS. I should kick the shit out of you right here.

DANNY. Better use your good leg.

LUIS. You a fuckin asshole you know that?

DANNY. Hey, you think I'm the asshole? What about you? What about the game you're playing? Sign the biggest single-year contract ever at your position, then go get yourself "re-injured"? I see right through you, Diamonds. You don't care about this game. You care about your bank account. And as you love to mention, you've already got enough celebrity: why should you care about finishing the season?

LUIS. You know what Danny, you're right about exactly one thing in all that bullshit that just came out your mouth. My fuckin bank is number one. I ain't got no shame in that!

Mothafuckas like you always actin like chasin money is so bad. That's cuz you ain't never hurted for it! Money's the seed for literally EVERYTHING you possibly could want. Want some food and some clothes for yo family? MONEY. Wanna travel the world, see beautiful new places, witness different cultures or what-the-fuck-ever? MONEY. Wanna get the politicians you like in office? DINERO. The whole human world's made of money – if you ain't got it, you ain't shit. And when I say you ain't shit, I mean you lower than shit. Least shit's got some place to go.

(A beat.)

So you better fuckin believe I care about my bank. But those commas attached to this jersey. You could say I care bout this game by extension. So yeah, maybe it's always been about somethin else for me, but so the fuck what if I don't look at that field as some holy place? So the fuck what if it's a different thing for me? That don't mean I'mma pull some stupid shit like injure my own fuckin knee. Maybe you over there witchyo thirty-somethin ass thinkin bout retirement, but I got *years* left.

DANNY. Oh yeah? But explain the one-year contract then. If you aren't just going for the payout, what the hell are you doing?

LUIS. This the year I prove still ain't nobody got shit on me, then I get signed four years at sixty mil and I'm a happy fuckin man.

(A beat.)

DANNY. Hold on, are you serious right now? So you're not tanking…you're betting your career? On this season? Coming off an ACL / and a…

LUIS. Yeah, that's exactly what I'm fuckin doin. So maybe you can change your attitude bout me and gimme some god damn respect.

DANNY. Yes. Yes. Absolutely. I'm a piece of shit. I take back everything I said. But…wow. You really are a gambler, aren't you? Twenty-six ain't young for a running back. You have, what. Five, six years left, tops. You should've taken the first four-year offer you got.

LUIS. None of them was enough. I ain't playin four years for less than I'm worth. I ain't you, Danny.

*(***LUIS** *exits toward the locker room;* **DANNY** *follows.)*

*(***EZEKIEL** *and* **CRE'VON** *enter the locker room.)*

EZEKIEL. I don't get why you're always taking that man's side. His attitude is fuckin toxic.

CRE'VON. I mean yeah he always be frontin, but / like…

EZEKIEL. The man is incapable of taking criticism. He acts like a (child)… Look. I'm not gonna rant to you about this. That's not how I handle my shit. That's mine and his business. But part of it has to do / with you…

CRE'VON. Hold up…

EZEKIEL. And that part is that you're emulating him / and shit…

CRE'VON. ZEKE! Hold. The fuck. Up. For just a second my nigga.

(A beat.)

First of all: what the fuck you say? Emulating? I ain't fuckin understand you, man. SECOND OF ALL: you tryna be too many things for too many people right now. You gotta be you for YOU real quick!

EZEKIEL. What the fuck are you talkin about?

CRE'VON. I'm just sayin like, you tryna be a leader for everybody right now and you gotta take a minute to just…process stuff for yourself…

EZEKIEL. Are you saying cuz my momma died that I can't act as the fuckin captain on this team? You sayin I don't got what it takes to do my fuckin job?

CRE'VON. Nigga I'm sayin that I see through yo lil façade and I see that you hurtin, and I see that you needa take a god damn minute to come to grips with whateva you goin through. Which I god-fuckin-damn imagine is a lot, and I sympathize, and I emulate witchyou.

(A beat.)

EZEKIEL. You mean empathize?

CRE'VON. Yeah. The fuck I say? Emulate? See that's you fuckin me up.

EZEKIEL. So you've lost a parent?

CRE'VON. Well... My moms wasn't around when I was growin up, but that ain't really the same. You can't lose somethin you never had, you know? But I lost people. So I can empathize, like. With that pain.

EZEKIEL. Can you empathize with the struggle of lettin down your pa(rents) – your pops?

CRE'VON. Nah nigga, he had low ass expectations.

EZEKIEL. Then you wouldn't understand what I'm goin through right now.

CRE'VON. Maybe if you use yo words, you can help me understand.

(A beat.)

What?? I ain't tryna be a asshole right now, I'm tryna be here for you cuz you be the stoic type who lets shit boil deep down and you just needa let that shit boil over for a / second.

EZEKIEL. Her last words to me were "you can still do somethin great in this life."

CRE'VON. Wha – that don't make no sense! I mean you / you…

EZEKIEL. I ain't shit.

CRE'VON. Nigga you came from nothin and now you gettin paid to ball… You a fuckin inspiration. How it is you ain't shit?

EZEKIEL. I ain't shit compared to her. I get paid to run around and smash the shit out of people. What is that really?

CRE'VON. Whatchu mean "what is that really?" Nigga you can make any job sound dumb if you say it like that. Politicians get paid to stand and talk in front some big ass flag. Niggas in construction get paid to fuck up concrete or pour it. Writers get paid to hit keys with they scrawny-ass / fingers…

EZEKIEL. Alright I take your point, but what I do still ain't shit to a woman who helped break Assata outta prison.

CRE'VON. Assata? Who's Assata?

EZEKIEL. How you never heard of Assata Shakur? Mothafucka this is why you gotta educate yourself: you know white America ain't gonna teach you bout any Black revolutionaries who they didn't kill in the end. It ain't a good look for them so they just leave it out.

CRE'VON. Hold up, she related to Tupac?

EZEKIEL. Okay, I already know I'm not gonna get you to read a whole ass book, but at least listen to "A Song for Assata." Common? *Like Water for Chocolate*? Shit man, you can give six minutes for the culture. Long story short, Ms. Shakur fought for our rights and got put in prison for it and my momma helped break her out. Needless to say, that don't leave this room… then again, I guess it doesn't matter now.

CRE'VON. Damn nigga yo mom gangsta as fuck.

EZEKIEL. Yes…that's definitely one way to put it. Another would be to say she devoted her life to our struggle. And I always thought, you know, if I made it, if I ended up somewhere besides the corner or the cage, that'd be a testament to her. To her work as a mother, as an activist. To the work she did to move us forward.

CRE'VON. So you free now cuz she fought then. Ain't that a win?

EZEKIEL. She didn't see things like that. Naw…after I got drafted, you know what she said to me? "Zeke, don't do it. Don't you sign yourself away to the plantation. They're just gonna use you up and spit you out, broken. Broken of mind and body." I didn't say nothin. I knew I wasn't gonna change her mind. She always saw sports as one of the tracks the white man offers us to keep us happy, but where we ain't really gonna change shit. So I already knew how she felt. But she kept goin anyways. "They auction you off," she said, "then they buy you, sell you, trade you. They even got you out on a field. Cuz to them, you're field niggas. Ain't nothing changed but the money."

CRE'VON. That's crazy bruh, we ain't field niggas. We just niggas who happen to be on a field. Them owners don't control us.

EZEKIEL. But don't they?

CRE'VON. No fuckin way. They own some of our time, yeah. But that ain't no different than any job. We gotta give em some hours and we gotta answer to em when it's about business. Everything outside that, that's yours.

EZEKIEL. But maybe they own us in a different way. Maybe they own our minds. Maybe when the money keeps coming in and the cameras keep flashing and the whistles keep blowing, when the reporters keep asking you the same questions again and again and again

and you give your scripted non-answers, when you keep donating that lil something to a charity cuz it's a good look for the league and it makes you feel a bit saintly, just saintly enough…maybe it's like hypnosis. They drag you along by your ego and convince you that you're steering.

CRE'VON. I really wish I could help you figure that but my mind ain't wrappin around what you puttin down.

EZEKIEL. Give it another five years. At that point…either you'll know what I'm talking about or you'll be lost in the whirlwind.

CRE'VON. Nigga you on some Langston Hughes shit right now.

EZEKIEL. Well, least you know who he is.

CRE'VON. Yeah I'd love to meet the nigga.

*(***EZEKIEL** *facepalms.)*

CRE'VON. I'm just fuckin witchyou! Why so serious, nigga? Come on. We gotta get you a drink or somethin.

EZEKIEL. Nah. No blue pill for me tonight. I got shit I needa think about.

CRE'VON. Shit, well alright then Morpheus.

Yeah I know, finally you drop a line I get. Anyways I hear you – if that's what you gotta do that's what you gotta do. Just keep your head on you.

*(***CRE'VON** *exits.* **EZEKIEL** *is alone onstage.)*

(A beat. Lights out.)

Scene Three

(Pre-season Week One: Early August.)

(Lights up on the locker room: triumphant hip-hop music [something like "All I Do is Win" by DJ Khaled] plays over speakers as* **LUIS** *and* **CRE'VON** *get down to it.* **DANNY** *is primping himself up, presumably for a post-game interview.)*

DANNY. Guys, come on. It's the fucking pre-season.

CRE'VON. But nigga we mopped the floor with those mothafuckas! That shit was a slaughter!

LUIS. Man, maybe two or three of them fools got two or three fingers on me all day!

*(***EZEKIEL** *enters and starts changing from athletic attire into street clothes.)*

EZEKIEL. Hey can somebody turn that off real quick?

DANNY. Jesus, gladly.

*(***DANNY** *turns off the music.)*

CRE'VON. Ay come on man!

EZEKIEL. So who's heard about Kaep?

LUIS. Colin Kaepernick? QB on the Niners? What about him?

EZEKIEL. He's been sitting down during the national anthem for the last couple games. They're speculating if it's a political statement.

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