

QUINN: I wish I could disappear too. But I'm stuck in this life. I need to eat. I get sum cash in my hand and it's just stuck to my fist.

(pause)

Am thinkin' of dropping school too...

HAMLIN: Quinn—

QUINN: Am not a smart ass like you but am the one wearing new clothes.

(pause)

I need it, fam... Even though I have dreams that someone slashes me, like my spirit comes out my body—

HAMLIN: U sure the guy weren't me? Not like I'm tryna kill my friend but...

(pause)

Who to say I won't catch a body one day if I need to.

QUINN: Ham stop scarin' me, bro.

HAMLIN: I'm not scarin' shit. Look at you. You juss disappear. Dun even know you anymore.

(beat)

Ya know Nic didn't shed a tear at Alex's funeral?

(beat)

QUINN: Are you pissed cause I hang out with Nic?

HAMLIN: What?!

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(beat)

You and Nic are delusional.

QUINN: No, you are!

HAMLIN: Whatever Q.

QUINN: Oh, F you Ham. I'm a yout still, but at least I got the nuts to mek bread for my family. What bout you?!

QUINN *puts on his hoodie and exits.*

HAMLIN *stands there, provoked.*

SCENE 8

Some days later. Early evening. HAMLIN is in his house standing near the drying sage leaves. He breathes in and out, almost wanting to steal their energy.

QUINN and NIC *are in front of HAMLIN's house with beers, fancy clothes and shiny new phones. NIC rolls a blunt while QUINN dances to the beats, with his cap on backwards, speaking into his phone.*

QUINN: Get your bag up fellaz. This year it's all about chasin' the bag. Be leader. *(framing NIC)*

Look at my bad ass friend.

NIC *kicks QUINN away.*

QUINN: Oook. Well peeps, be a—

HAMLIN: *(from the house)* Quinn, shut up.

QUINN: ...a man, a present to your girl and—

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Annoyed, HAMLIN storms out in his cheap clothes, leaving the door open behind him.

HAMLIN: Quinn, I said shut up man!

HAMLIN *grabs QUINN's phone and flicks the hat off QUINN's head.*

QUINN: *(grabbing phone back)* Bro...

NIC *chuckles.*

HAMLIN: *(to NIC)* What you lot doing here? Am tryna study, so go sell your crap somewhere else.

While backing away HAMLIN bumps into NIC making his cigarette fall on the floor. He then accidentally steps on it.

NIC *gets up, confrontational.*

HAMLIN *shrinks.*

HAMLIN: Oh s-shit, I'm so sorry I-I...

QUINN *quickly places himself in the middle.*

QUINN: Ok, Ok. Juss chill man.

HAMLIN: It's cool Q, I don't need your help.

QUINN: What? *(to NIC)* Nic, my man, my bro. Calm it.

HAMLIN *takes the "bro" in.*

HAMLIN: *(to QUINN)* I said, I don't need your help Q!

Startled, QUINN places his hat on HAMLIN's head to break the ice.

QUINN: Wait, uhm... King Hamlin... ha! Get it?

HAMLIN *struggles to smile.*

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NIC *goes to roll another blunt.*

HAMLIN: I ain't no King. I fucked up. No job.

HAMLIN *throws the hat on the floor.*

QUINN: Ooookay.

(annoyed) Ham, you never show up. I told ya. Today's money problems could be solved. Tell him, Nic. *(whispers to HAMLIN)* Ham, I can top up ur phone, bro.

NIC: U ain't got no phone credit Ham? *(laughs)* Naw man. You wouldn't last a day in my shoes. *(looking down on QUINN)* You both, actually... I tell you dat no one gonna step to me no more now dat I am like a boss man. No more problems for Nic big man. Been thru more shit than you weak lot! Remember my dad even kickin' me out da house when I finally hit him back? I became a transformer that day.

NIC *flexes his muscles.*

QUINN: Yeah, you tell him, Nic. You juss have to be more like Nic. *(chuckles)* Then am sure you could help ur mum.

HAMLIN: *(sarcastic)* Be like Nic, yeh? Man-like-Nic.

NIC: Dat's right. Crackheads even got more hustle than you. Stop being a top dickhead and come to Guildford. Follow your big bro.

NIC *accidentally knocks a pot of sage on the floor.*

HAMLIN *rushes to put it back in place.*

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HAMLIN: Nic! Careful man! That's my mum's sage! It takes ages to grow. They supposed to bring this house luck.

NIC: Sorry

(beat)

Is it working though? Maybe I should put one in my pocket and then I'll be ok. Or maybe I juss...

NIC *stubs out some ash in the sage pot. Then he violently snips some leaves off and rolls another blunt with them.*

NIC: There, I feel safe already.

NIC *pretends to breath in and out his smoke on HAMLIN's face.*

QUINN *instinctively laughs out loud. This hurts and gets on HAMLIN's nerves.*

HAMLIN: You... You both with your... your fancy garms... and your fucking phones... and—

HAMLIN *suddenly grabs QUINN's phone again and this time throws it on the floor. It cracks. He gasps. He can't believe he just did that.*

QUINN: Bro what's wrong wiv you?! That was new!

The boys look at each other in a moment of cold silence.

The sound of the electricity alarm key starts to beep very loudly.

NIC: So, what's it gonna be lil dickhead? You gonna roll with us now?

HAMLIN *surrenders.*

Lights out.

SCENE 9

Evening.

HAMLIN *is alone in the living room. He looks at his reflection in the mirror, topless. With no electricity, there is just a little flashlight on the table.*

HAMLIN: I ain't no dickhead, you know! *(screaming to self)* Now stop bein' a dickhead!? Why you let peoples treat you like that? What, you ain't a man? What, Q ain't your bro anymore? Huh? Nic better huh? *(his voice raises)* Why you let people go walking all over you? Why you take dat—it's funny? You wanna stand there and laugh at me? Why you laughin' at me! You wanna slap me in my face? Which one of you lot wants it! What?! W-what?!...Hold me back! Hold me back. Don't make me fight! The streetz are callin', the bills are callin'. Gonna be like Nic. Naw, you know what?! Better than him.

HAMLIN *is out of breath, staring in the mirror.*

HAMLIN: Nic.

(*pause*)

HAMLIN: Why you whistling so loudly, bro? Anywayz, Nic, I'm coming dis time. You better be right.

HAMLIN *quickly looks for his hat. He poses in front of the mirror and tries to pump his chest.*

Lights out.

INTERVAL

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SCENE 10

Night.

HAMLIN and QUINN are in a derelict area waiting for NIC.

QUINN is fiddling with sage leaves in his pocket.

They stand there in silence, distant from each other.

QUINN: Remember me and you playin' in the sandpit?

(*pause*)

You'd be walkin' and I'd be behind puttin' my feet in your footprints.

HAMLIN *doesn't reply.*

Even back then I thought: I wanna be like him.

HAMLIN *gives him a stare. QUINN attempts to connect once more.*

QUINN: If I had your head—

HAMLIN: You don't tho.

QUINN: Right.

(*pause*)

You're way ahead.

HAMLIN *doesn't reply.*

QUINN: Come on Ham... So what now. I'm dumb and don't deserve my shit?

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HAMLIN: Yes.

QUINN: Why? You're here too now.

(beat)

Lettin' my new drip come tween us?

HAMLIN: I read dat slaves from the master's plantation used to fight amongst each other over which slave master was wealthier or had the nicest stuff.

(pause)

I guess nothing's changed.

The sound of NIC whistling 'Baa baa black sheep' is heard, but he is nowhere to be seen.

Then, a light from a lamppost shines on NIC as he approaches the boys, amusing himself for his grand entrance.

NIC: My boyz.

As if jealous, NIC walks in between the boys to separate them and to attract more attention for himself.

NIC: I woulda sworn I was in Guildford 10 min ago. I take a walk and I'm here. Funny dat.

QUINN: Hey—

HAMLIN and QUINN notice something odd on NIC's face. He has a fresh scar on a cheek.

NIC: See, Hamlin has finally grown some balls. Welcome, my little pet.

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NIC pats HAMLIN on the head. HAMLIN says nothing.

NIC: (standing on a bench) Now, are you manz ready to ride out? Are you lot ready for war?!

QUINN pats his chest repeatedly.

QUINN: Yeah! Yes, I am.

NIC: (to QUINN) Now Q!

Distracted, QUINN is turned the other way.

QUINN: Huh? Huh what?

NIC: Q! Over here.

QUINN: Yo! What?

NIC: Q, I hope your bitch was right about this place. (to HAMLIN) Hamlin, come here for a minute. Something serious.

(beat)

You forgot to put on your leash.

NIC laughs as he jokingly shoves HAMLIN away.

NIC: Now, I will show them who the new king is with dis.

NIC takes a knife out of his pocket, dangling it with pride.

QUINN is visibly uncomfortable.

HAMLIN gives him a stare.

The boys start to overlap each other when talking.

HAMLIN: (to QUINN) What the fuck man!

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HAMLIN *starts leaving*.

NIC: (to HAMLIN) Don't you dare chicken out on me now!

QUINN: (to both) I thought we... I thought we were just gonna sell sum stashes. (pause)

I... I don't know bout dis Nic.

HAMLIN: (to QUINN) I'm done with you.

NIC's nerves are hit. He points the machete at QUINN.

NIC: Stop being a pathetic loser, you little bitch. You are the worst business partner ever.

QUINN is hurt.

NIC points the knife at QUINN and HAMLIN.

HAMLIN: Nic, Put that ting down.

NIC points the knife now at HAMLIN.

QUINN: What's wrong with you?!

NIC: Relax guys. Juss playn' innit. (puts knife down)

You know, dem people on the corner tonight are just a bunch of kids lookin' for about six points.

HAMLIN: Points?

NIC: We gonna get em to back off from our corners. Cause I decided they are now ours. Someone stole our deliveries yesterday cause Q is too dumb to even remember to

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collect dem. Those fuck heads had all da time to snatch our stuff.

QUINN: I thought you said the delivery was tomorrow!

HAMLIN: Dis is not what you s-said over the phone. I don't—

NIC: (flicks HAMLIN's hat off)

Look at my face yeh? Am I a wimp? Gotta give dis (points to scar) some meaning.

HAMLIN grabs his hat back.

NIC looks excited.

NIC: Dis is an new adventure guys! What u lot so serious for? Ha? I see a funeral. I see da flowers. And then I see a family. Dey gotta cry them tears! Too much fun.

HAMLIN: You proper losing it?

NIC: OMG, I'm playin'.

HAMLIN: What if someone sees us! What-what about the police?

NIC: They fightin' the same villains we fighting, but they think we're the villains. Hamlin, they don't care about us.

NIC laughs and hands QUINN the knife.

NIC: TAKE the knife!

QUINN grabs the knife, hesitantly and nervously.

NIC: Hero of the day.

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QUINN *stares at the knife and looks at HAMLIN for an approval which he does not get.*

NIC: Wipe that milk off your mouth, Quinn. Show me you are a man.

QUINN: We da only ones who ever follow you and your fake army. How we not know you ain't all BS?

QUINN *puts the knife down.*

NIC: U ain't no warrior.

HAMLIN *sees something from afar.*

HAMLIN: Guys? Ain't dat Bladez's mandem by dat bus stop?

NIC: Yas! *(excited)* We gonna come to that pathway. When I say "go", we gonna cut and round em up.
(pause)

Go go go go! They are leaving!

NIC *puts his hoodie on and runs towards the bus stop. A faint police siren is heard in the background.* HAMLIN and QUINN *halt.*

NIC: Hamlin, come on! Q, move your ass!

The sound of the bus moving away is heard. Terrified, HAMLIN and QUINN start leaving, chickening out.

NIC: Oh man, you pieces of shit! Why you slown' me down?!

QUINN: What's dis tryna be a big man, ha? Whatever red U got flowin' through you, I ain't got it. Game over. I'm going home.

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NIC: *(pointing the knife)* No backbone. Dis mess is your fault and you can't even be a real man about it. Bladez knows our every move because of you and your big mouth snitch bitch. You ruin my war.

HAMLIN: *(scared)* Nic, put that ting down. Please... please!

NIC: You lot ain't for da streetz. *(to QUINN)* Betcha that Leah of yours has her dayz counted. The young Romeo my ass—

QUINN *charges at NIC. They struggle.*

HAMLIN *steps forwards trying to separate the two boys which leads to NIC accidentally stabbing QUINN.*

QUINN *fatally falls to the ground.*

There is a moment of petrified realization of what just happened.

HAMLIN: *(rushing to QUINN)* Quinn!

NIC *stays there frozen unable to accept what he just did. He drops the knife.*

Another police siren is heard in the background.

NIC *impulsively picks the knife. He grabs*

HAMLIN's arm to pull him away.

HAMLIN *looks at QUINN one last time and reluctantly exits.*

Lights out.

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SCENE 11

The morning after. NIC has a movie on his phone in HAMLIN's living room while he looks for food on the kitchen shelves.

HAMLIN sits on the sofa, frozen. He clutches a sage branch and at a pillow.

NIC: I swear the only thing I can make in dis house is a sardine sandwich. No thanks.

NIC looks at HAMLIN, has a moment, then continues as if it were nothing.

NIC: Anyhow... ordered sum Chinese for us.

HAMLIN does not reply.

NIC: You think I'm not gonna hook up my soldier and keep him fed?

(pause)

Yeh coz that's what a boss does.

(pause)

Yeh man.

NIC sits and pulls out some money.

NIC: Anything you need, bills made. I got you, man. You're my friend.

HAMLIN does not reply.

NIC starts watching the film.

NIC: That's right Michael B. Jordan! You tell em!

NIC peaks HAMLIN's way but gets no reaction.

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NIC: Look, am only tryna be helpful. Don't cook well like your mum. Don't worry, Ham. I got some extra for Mum for when she's home.
(beat)

That's my man Michael! The dude chose not to go with his slave masters. Instead, he drops in the ocean to be with his ancestors, 'coz he said death is better than bondage. Now that's deep.

NIC pretends to play fist fight. He hits HAMLIN's on the head jokingly.

HAMLIN does not react.

NIC: Oh com on, Ham.

(pause)

Q was still seeing dat chick 'coz Bladez wasn't lookin' too happy des days. Snitch. Totally unreliable. He fucked up real bad.

HAMLIN clings onto more sage leaves. NIC is lost for more words and looks the other way.

NIC: His boyz are everywhere, stealin' all our stuff. They are leavin' nothing for us. Now they're even selling stashes in Guildford.

(long pause)

Quinn's stinky mouth even snitched something about our goldmine. (unsure) Am, am sure he did... He did yes...

HAMLIN brings the leaves to his nose and starts breathing them in.

NIC takes the sage out of HAMLIN's hands.

NIC: That shit don't work.

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HAMLIN *violently grabs the sage back and pushes NIC out of the way.*

NIC *looks surprised, yet satisfied.*

NIC: Q had it in his pocket, um um... yeh, yeh, that's right, Q asked for it by havin' it in his pocket and look where he is now. In some street corner, if they ain't found him already.

HAMLIN: We could have saved him. I could have—

NIC: Toughen up, Ham—

HAMLIN: Are you mad, fam?

NIC: He was never gonna make it. It's his fault. Yes, yes...

(*pause*)

I only helped him leave sooner before someone else got him.

(*beat*)

In fact, in a way, Bladez street boys are to blame.

HAMLIN *turns to stare at NIC.*

HAMLIN: What?

NIC: Yes, yes, they are to blame! They should pay for what they did.

HAMLIN *is in disbelief.*

NIC: Fuck them!

(*beat*)

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Time to step up now, Hamlin. You a soldier now. Be like ME.

HAMLIN: No thank you.

NIC: (*offended*) Yaw know, I've seen the white meat. I've seen cuts all the way to the bones. The scars stay for the rest of your life. I ain't afraid of them. No sir. Alex, I was there when dey fighting. He became a beast after he got cut and went out lookin' to stab the next madem. A real man.

(*pause*)

You gotta fight back dese days. No time for cryin'.

HAMLIN *turns the other way. This*

motivates NIC to speak more convincingly. He lifts his jumper. Three old knife wound scars are visible on his chest.

NIC: A real man, yes...

(*pause*)

U know when a man's skin is open and that shit is the perfect line, a perfect scar. The first time, Doctor told me dey got me an inch away from my heart.

(*pause*)

It happened fast. The second time I got cut, in seconds I went from hyper-dude to stabbed. Went into a foetal position on the floor gaspin' for air. Survival kicked in—so I'm thinkin' 'I wanna rip your head off, I wanna need kill you.'

HAMLIN *just stares.*

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NIC: I'ma let them know my name is my name. That's how you pump your chest like a man. If you can't box, you gotta slice a man. (*unsure*) You gotta... If you don't, you're just as good as dead.

(*pause*)

Dead like Quinn...

NIC is affected by his words but fumbles his way out to hide it. He continues on his self-preach.

NIC: What's the difference between sum posh twat sayin' "Give me liberty or give me death" or me walkin' around sayin' "I don't give a fuck?"

HAMLIN: He was my bro... (*holds tears back*) I'll tell everybody what you did.

NIC: I did?

(*pause*)

I did nothin'. (*grins*) Or maybe you did? Who do you think they're gonna believe? A white boy or a black boy?

(*pause*)

Don't you dare. This is between you and me only!

NIC points an intimidating finger at HAMLIN.

HAMLIN suddenly looks concerned and scared.

NIC: I'm sick of people fucking with me! I am da new boss! Won't let anyone say I no good

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for the hood. You and your pissy mattress. Hell, you think you can juss be out when you want? You are in dis as much as I am. You were there. Savages can smell the fear and they devour. They leave you smellin', rotting, like Quinn's body YOU left behind. (*pause*)

I say it's hunting season!

HAMLIN looks at NIC.

NIC: What?! What are you lookin' at? Do you think I deserved to die instead of Q? Do I look like a monster? Am I a monster?

NIC is fully energized and out of his mind.

HAMLIN looks at him not entirely sure if he is joking or not.

NIC: I said, will you fuck society with me or not?! Will you take from Bladez what he took from Quinn? Do you wanna take down those dicks who killed your dad?

(*pause*)

I'm the new Bladez! This is good dirt standin' right here. Nic is good dirt, good seed standin' right here dis second! So, you with me or not? I'm society's child! I'm society's fucking child! This is how they made me!

(*pause*)

I gotta World War Three comin'! There will be a new king! Believe! (*beats his chest*) Hamlin, you roll with me now.

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NIC places his hand on HAMLIN's shoulder. HAMLIN stands there frozen and scared, reluctantly brainwashed.

SCENE 12

The same day. Afternoon.

HAMLIN walks down a street coming back from school. He is on duty selling stashes looking around as if waiting for someone to come buy a stash. For a moment, he thinks he sees QUINN.

HAMLIN: Quinn?! (unsure) Yo Quinn, wait for me. I'm sorry—I'm—

The boy turns around to reveal he is not QUINN. He moves closer in an intimidating manner.

Suddenly a punch out of nowhere is swung in HAMLIN's stomach.

HAMLIN: What the—

HAMLIN is strong enough to block the person and they struggle for a while. His school bag and stashes are ripped off him.

HAMLIN: No!

HAMLIN places his hands in his pockets and realizes that there is nothing in there anymore.

HAMLIN: No, no no...NO-NO. Fuck!!! I thought I saw your face. I'm sick of all this man! What did I tell you?! I told you not to do

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thissss! Stupid Q. U didn't listen. I ain't goin' down like you. Not in the ground.

Transition lights. Evening.

HAMLIN walks home and goes to his room, ignoring MAMA H. He comes back in wearing a hoodie, feeling different and walking with an attitude.

MAMA H: Hamlin?

MAMA H. stares at him for a moment, swiftly removes his hoodie. She then goes to her sage plants, disappointed. Trying to breathe in and out and stay calm.

Feeling uncomfortable, HAMLIN picks up a bin bag, sees the transformer toy on the table, has a moment, but then bins it. He starts making his way outside.

MAMA H: If I'ma leave this Earth one day, I wanna trust you can take care of yourself coz the system won't. Juss like they ain't helping me, us.

HAMLIN: We both know I'm likely to be gone first.

(pause)

I'll tell Dad that you said hi...

MAMA H: Stop it. Don't do this to me Hamlin. Your mum ain't stupid.

HAMLIN: Yeh. I know u ain't.

MAMA H: Why u breathin' heavy at night?

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HAMLIN: Whys I keep breathin' ...

MAMA H: I hear u.

HAMLIN: I... I keep having these dreams.

MAMA H: What dreams?

HAMLIN: Dreamin' I'm... laying in my bed and I keep hearing these footsteps and they keep coming closer and closer and closer and... I don't know whether I'm dreamin' or whether it's real... every night they just keep comin' closer.

(pause)

MAMA H: U keep listenin' closer for them footsteps. That's Dad watching over you.

HAMLIN: He used to say if anything happened to him, he'd fight for me in Heaven so that I could live.

MAMA H: And he is. He fought for u.

HAMLIN: All I see around me is hate. When I walk down the streets the next thing I know, I'm in another hood and I feel I'm huntin'. Fight breaks out in no time.

(pause)

My first thinkin' is, I wanna attack to defend myself.

(pause)

It meks me scared of what I wanna do... I feel this new energy, like, like I'm another person. Like I want to learn to be a hero.

MAMA H. *looks concerned.*

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HAMLIN: Everyone in the world hates boys that look like me, Mum. Brown boys.

(long beat)

MAMA H: You mean like Quinn?

HAMLIN: Huh??

MAMA H: Where is he?

HAMLIN: He uh...

MAMA H: Hamlin?

HAMLIN: What?

MAMA H: My baby Quinn sage plant is all dry... not cause of me, dis time. Hamlin? Is he okay? His mother called me as he never went home. Hope he ain't gettin' involved in sum street stuff. Don't lie.

(long beat)

HAMLIN: He's cool. Maybe he went to his girl.

MAMA H: *(suspicious)* I need u boyz lookin' out for each other. Stay out of trouble.

(beat)

Promise me you are gonna walk tall like your father, like the Hamlin King you are.

HAMLIN: *(hesitant)* I promise.

(beat)

MAMA H: Let me show u somethin'.

MAMA H. *takes HAMLIN outside to show him a skinny bloomed sage.*

HAMLIN *places the bin bag down.*

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MAMA H: Look at her. Not a bad look for such a rocky root. I needed you to see the seed grow in the dirty soil. I wanted you to be proud. Nan would be proud...

(pause)

Ain't she beautiful? My beautiful Hamlin.

(pause)

I love you.

MAMA H. *looks at HAMLIN concerned, then enters the house.*

Pensive, HAMLIN puts his hoodie back on and then goes back inside.

Transition lights.

NIC *enters. He turns around to check nobody is looking and puts a coin into the electric meter. The garden lights come on. He then takes a new fully-grown sage plant out of his bag and places it near the front door. A tag on it reads "Nic".*

SCENE 13

The next day.

NIC *is in a park waiting for HAMLIN.*

HAMLIN *enters wearing his baggy old trousers, his new hoodie, and a cap placed backwards.*

NIC *laughs.*

HAMLIN: What's so funny?

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NIC: (*fixes HAMLIN's hat*) You. You look dressed like a cartoon version of Quinn... only you're no snake. Am I right, huh? You've been a good boy for three days... now don't go being stupid.

NIC *places his fingers on HAMLIN's lips as if to shush him, then points a finger at him.*

HAMLIN *suddenly feels uncomfortable.*

NIC: Now. Ham. Hello?

HAMLIN *looks away.*

NIC: Come on. Snap out of it, Ham! Right, lesson number one. Let's play the scoreboard.

HAMLIN: The what?

NIC: It takes a real man to throw a few swings. Show me what you've got.

NIC *squares off in a boxing position.*

HAMLIN *tries to follow, but he just can't snap out of his depression.*

NIC: Okay so Ham, put ur fist up yeh... right... Now Hamlin yeh. You could be walkin' down the South endz and sum dude comes up to you yeh—he's not gonna stop you and say, "sorry bro, are you part of the dis crew?" If he don't know you, he's just gonna stab you... Where u think he's aiming?

HAMLIN: The heart.

NIC Naw. It's da head first. It's 50 points for the head. Da highest score. The heart is only 30 points.

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NIC *jabs for HAMLIN's head*. HAMLIN *tries to block this but is unsuccessful*.

Man-up Hamlin!

HAMLIN: What?!

NIC: Block me!

(*beat*)

Look bro, I'm tryin' to look after you, yeh, I am tryin' to protect you, us. So, wek up, yeah?

HAMLIN: (*reluctantly*) Well, if he tries to steal from me—

NIC: He ain't gonna be stealin' from u, just gonna stab you!!

HAMLIN: Yeh, I know—

NIC: He's gonna shank you. Right here.

NIC *pretends to aim for HAMLIN's heart* but HAMLIN *manages to block him this time*. *He looks revived and very pleased by this*.

NIC: Dat's could have been 30 points. Yeh? Ok, well done.

(*beat*)

Now, let's just say you get lucky and you about to do a runner, yeh?

NIC *and* HAMLIN *continue to square up*.

NIC: Now if I'm a little yout and I'm new and I gotta lil knife... I'm aimin' for your legs. Das a quick 10 points and a quick way to rise up the ranks.

HAMLIN: I ain't tryna be in no gang.

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NIC: Remember what I said. You ain't got no choice. In dis hood, you're involved no matter what. Don't you be stupid.

HAMLIN *struggles to accept this*.

NIC: Now, you see dat knife slashing meat in the kebab shops over there yeh. Why you think they get stolen?

HAMLIN *turns around and, while distracted, NIC pretends to point to HAMLIN's heart, holding the pose*.

NIC: Aaand my 30 points! If I get up the ranks, I become a leader—controlling 15-20 kids, tellin' them what to do.

HAMLIN: What is this point shit?

NIC *pretends to strike for HAMLIN's head*.

HAMLIN *block him again and the feeling is great*.

NIC: This point shit popped up on my phone the other day. TikTok stuff. You would know if ya had a phone. So, do you wanna become a big man, a hunter?

HAMLIN: Ah man, ok ok!

NIC *sneaks another hit*.

NIC: Bam! Got you in the head! 50 points for me. Now I'm the leader.

HAMLIN *looks annoyed yet is finally convinced and smiles*. *The boys fistbump*.

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SCENE 14

Later that day. Evening.

HAMLIN enters.

MAMA H. *stands outside her the door as if she has seen a ghost.*

HAMLIN *is startled and goes to her.*

HAMLIN: Mum! Mum what is it?

MAMA H. *can barely speak.*

MAMA H: My plant Hamlin... my plant has died.

HAMLIN: What... Mum?

MAMA H: Q's plant. I knew it... I knew it. His mum called.

HAMLIN *is suddenly silent.*

MAMA H: His mum said the last she saw him, he was fixing his school bag and then he was gone for many hours. He never went back home. Was two days ago.

HAMLIN: What?!

HAMLIN *turns away, unable to look MAMA H. in the eyes.*

(beat)

MAMA H: They found his body this morning. They have no clue who did it.

(pause)

The police be lookin' and they called here.

(pause)

MAMA H: Hamlin?

HAMLIN *looks stone dead.*

MAMA H: They want you to go in to chat to them?

(pause)

Don't be scared baby. You're not like des boys. They are juss hungry! Ain't no one paving the way. Their mothers raised them in abuse, and they want to ride around with the pain!

(pause)

And I can't help them no more.

(pause)

Hamlin?

MAMA H *reaches out for her son, but*

HAMLIN *rejects her and impulsively exits.*

MAMA H: Hamlin!

MAMA H. *painfully enters the house.*

SCENE 15

Weeks later, evening.

HAMLIN *enters in the dark, the electricity key beeps. HAMLIN puts in a coin.*

HAMLIN *is dressed in all black fashionable designer clothes. With baggy trousers and his hoodie, he now looks more confident and in*

control—a bad boy with a shiny new watch on his wrist and a new phone.

MAMA H. enters.

HAMLIN: (on the phone) That was mad, fam, had mad love for dat still. Sorted it out, bro.

Yo, Mum, what you sayin'?

silence

MAMA. H: Yo M-u-m what you s-a-y-i-n'?

HAMLIN: Why u all dolled up for?

MAMA. H: Dolled up? For who? I'm tryna change job. The money is not enough. Am thinkin' Teacher Assistant or somethin'.

HAMLIN is distracted.

Hello?

HAMLIN: (disinterested) Oh yeh, congrats.

HAMLIN messages on his phone.

MAMA H: Hello?

HAMLIN: Ha? Oh sorry. Sum gyal posted something dumb on Insta. Gotta go soon.

MAMA H: Been few weeks now and every time I wake up you goin' out. Hamlin, you need to speak to someone maybe... I know you're hurtin... but keeping busy and talkin' like that isn't—

HAMLIN: Am busy mekin' sure you eat.

HAMLIN makes his way.

MAMA H. looks at him displeased.

MAMA H: They will never hire you lookin' like that!

HAMLIN takes the comment in.

MAMA H: What did your father tell you about dressin' like that? You look like a suspect.

HAMLIN: And now you mekin' me wanna leave when u say his name.

(beat)

Dis is my new drip. It's me now, innit. Don't need no interviews. Dey don't need me.

(beat)

Should I tek my clothes off and give em to you?

(pause)

I mean got no coins left but I got a few notes dat I could give u—

MAMA H: Hamlin?

HAMLIN: What, you want me naked?

MAMA H: I want you to act right and remember your father's layin' in the cemetery protectin' you.

HAMLIN: But he ain't here is he, huh? Stop checkin' on me. I don't need you.

This hurts

MAMA H: I know you're hurting. I know Q—

HAMLIN: No.

HAMLIN *accidentally knocks a sage pot on the floor. He looks at the mess, horrified, but then—*

HAMLIN: It ain't workin' anyways. It's shit. It's a stupid old Nan shit.

Long cold silence, MAMA H. is in shock.

NIC's 'Baabaa black sheep' whistles are heard from outside.

HAMLIN's phone buzzes. He gets money out his pocket, counts the notes and puts them on the table.

HAMLIN: Rent.

(pause)

It's done. Make my own luck. I'm da man of this house now.

Speechless. MAMA H. sits on the sofa.

HAMLIN exits.

Lights up outside.

NIC waits for HAMLIN near the usual hang out wall.

NIC: Big props to u lil man, proud of u.

HAMLIN: Yo, fam, why the urgent call?

NIC: It's us or dem. They tryna do us. Manz tried to show me a machete and are selling all over Guilford. Now we gotta let those kids know who's ruling. Gonna score dem points.

HAMLIN: I thought this was a quick job ting. Dis sounds like sum other beef. You never say everything.

NIC: I need someone I can rely on. You can't be slippin' now.

HAMLIN: Nic man. I'm tired.

NIC: What?

HAMLIN: Been workin' my ass off for you. So, am FUCKIN' tired!

NIC *looks almost impressed by the attitude, but then hovers over HAMLIN.*

NIC: As I said, you too involved now. Dey know where you live and where we hang out. *(challenging)* Besides, I think dey the ones were involved when your father got shanked.

HAMLIN: *(takes a breath)* What?!

NIC: So, when u gonna get ur P's and get the respect u deserve if ur always bottom of the pile?

NIC and HAMLIN *put their hoodies on and exit.*

SCENE 16

Later that evening. A dim light peers through the living room window of HAMLIN's house.

A man, dressed in a black hoodie, approaches. He starts vandalizing the front porch. He spreads all the bin bag rubbish and knocks the sage pots.

Lights rise on MAMA H. as she stands in the middle of it all, speechless and about to break down.

MAMA H. *kneels to pick up her broken pots.*

MAMA H: Naw, naw my babies. Not my babies...

(beat)

Nan, I'm sorry ... fucked up... I fucked up...
A moment and MAMA H. gets up decisively.

MAMA H: We ain't doing this today, not in my house... not with my children. You youngens, all you see is demons!

MAMA H. *storms back in the house with her broken pots.*

Transition lights.

The boys are in an alleyway. There is a BOY there with knife in hand, scared to use it.

HAMLIN: Noooo! Noooooo!

The BOY reaches for HAMLIN's leg, hitting it. HAMLIN gives a piercing scream. NIC stands to the side, scared.

81

NIC: Ham! Ham! Come on!

NIC slide his knife to HAMLIN. It's too far from his reach.

HAMLIN: I can't do it Nic, I can't do it!

NIC: Even Q laying in a pool of blood has not manned you up now! It's you or him.

THE BOY reaches for HAMLIN again and hits him hard. HAMLIN falls on the floor.

HAMLIN: Fuck you, dickhead!

NIC: Hamlin, watch out!

The BOY swings a punch in HAMLIN's stomach. Nearly there to deliver the final death sentence.

Taken suddenly by a wave of anger, HAMLIN flips the boy over, punching him endlessly.

HAMLIN: You fuckin' piece of shit. YOU Fuckin' ...

The rage is so overwhelming, even NIC cannot believe what he is seeing.

(very long beat)

HAMLIN leans on top of the boy's body, panicked and in disbelief.

NIC slowly picks up the knife and places it back in his pocket.

NIC: Thanks for havin' my back, bro.

HAMLIN: Oh, Shut up man! I never wanted this. Not this far.

82

NIC: Deep shit now for you, lil man. (*points at body on floor*) Ham, I've been stabbed, what? Three times now. Been crucified by the police. Pissed on from the hood. I'm walkin' around with the thorns on.

(*beat*)

And you? You were fresh meat out there. One of da real manz see you comin', you's finished. So, be proud today.

HAMLIN: I said shut up man! I ain't your bro no more. Look at what you made me do. (*breathing heavily*) What did I—

NIC: What I made you do?

(*pause*)

Don't go blamin' me for what you do. Cause of your fuck ups, people been pointin' at me. But now, I ain't protectin' you no more.

HAMLIN: Protect me! How?! You got me and Q into this shit!

NIC: I juss helped Q take the pain away.

HAMLIN: You're crazy!

HAMLIN *stands up aggressively keeping his hand on his aching leg.*

NIC *suddenly feels threatened.*

NIC: Don't look at me like I'm a loser.

(*beat*)

Yes, I am crazy, but you know what else? I don't give a shit.

(*pause*)

83

I don't give a shit about Q, I give a shit about you. I don't even give a shit about myself.

(*beat*)

Too bad what you did to Quinn and to that boy.

HAMLIN: What?!

NIC: Check out the halo on my head. (*beats chest*) 'King Nic.'

NIC *violently pushes HAMLIN, but HAMLIN pushes him back, squaring off to him.*

HAMLIN: What! Come on. Let's go then! Runnin' up your mouth, let's see!

NIC *swings a punch, but HAMLIN ducks quickly.*

HAMLIN: Is dis the best war you got?

NIC: (*scared*) Y-you're juss like your dead dad. (*pause*)

You're juss like him.

NIC *swings another punch, but HAMLIN fends it off, then grabs NIC by the shirt.*

HAMLIN: Get out of here, before I fuck you up!

NIC: (*unsure*) You don't really have the balls.

NIC *desperately attempts to push HAMLIN again but HAMLIN blocks him.*

HAMLIN: You ain't no King... (*flips NIC's hat off*)

You ain't shit.

NIC *is hurt and backs away scared.*

84

NIC: Am gonna let everyone know what YOU did!

You're a coward.

NIC *exits pointing the knife at HAMLIN.*

NIC: (*scared*) You juss like Q yeah, juss like Q...

NIC *dries his sudden tears.*

...you fuck me over man... it is over for you... (*desperate*) "slash"!

NIC *exits.*

HAMLIN *stands there confused between the new powerful energy he just found and the fear of death.*

HAMLIN: I'm tired of this shiiit!

HAMLIN *swings in the air.*

HAMLIN: I'm so fucking tired of this shit...

HAMLIN *swings again.*

Fuck this shit! Fuck you, motherfucker! Fuck you with this death shit! Come on den get me, come and get, I'm standing right here. I'll kill you. Come on death! Come on death! Bring my dad while you're at it as well.

(*beat*)

Where were you, where were you for my birthday, New Year, Christmas, when Mum was cryin' huh? Where were you? How am I gonna tell my kids dey got no granddad ha? (*pause*)

85

Why u have to die like dat, tryna be da hero and that? But you ain't nothin' but a bitch. I'm the one tryna be a man now.

(*pause*)

I can't do this.

(*pause*)

Come and get me, Mr. Death. Yo, boss man. Mr. Death bring your crew, bring your gang and face me like a man. Juss tek my last breath and let me rest... please.

Sound of sirens. HAMLIN leaves in a hurry with his aching leg.

He drags himself home, stops just before the front door realizing what has been done to his house.

(*beat*)

HAMLIN *suddenly barges in the house going straight for the table. His walk is troubled.*

MAMA H. *notices and rushes towards him.*

(*long beat*)

MAMA H: Hamlin?

(*beat*)

Hamlin!

HAMLIN: I ain't got no time.

MAMA H: No. It's been weeks you acting weird.

HAMLIN *'s phone buzzes. MAMA H. grabs his phone and slams it on the table.*

86

MAMA H: Not this streets shit. Have you seen my front porch?

HAMLIN: Let me go!

MAMA H: NO. Listen to me.

(beat)

Sometimes I'm hurtin' thinkin' that your Dad's not alive. I'm sorry. And now Q. God, I'm sorry.

HAMLIN: Mama—

MAMA H: Sorry that... I didn't teach you how to fight. U have all these dreams. I mean this area has the Devil's children. A happy child won't have the heart to walk up to someone and cut them to pieces—

HAMLIN: Ma, let me go. None of your fu—

(pause)

It's not your business.

MAMA H: Lord knows you could be thinking about being sum lawyer, or a software engineer... but not with that mouth. I mean, I'm not perfect, but I don't wanna see my imperfect baby laying in his father's pool of blood.

(this hits)

When a mother hears her boy's been stabbed, she feels him kicking in her heart. And—it—hurts. Hamlin, it hurts me.

(beat)

I never asked you where the smart meter payments came from, all your new clothes,

87

your phone... because I didn't want to hear you lie to me.

HAMLIN *doesn't reply.*

MAMA H: Never lie to me!

HAMLIN: Mum, I said none of your fucking business!

MAMA H. *slaps HAMLIN who stands there petrified.*

MAMA H: Don't you do that! Did I make things so bad? I'm supposed to die first. I'll leave you first!

HAMLIN *pulls himself together and starts looking through the mess of objects on the table.*

MAMA H: God dammit Hamlin! Hamlin?!

HAMLIN *finds gardening scissors. MAMA H gasps. It is not clear yet what Hamlin intends doing with it until he goes for the door. MAMA H. desperately follows him.*

MAMA H: Oh, so you tough and you wanna go out and hurt somebody? Go on, stab me then.

HAMLIN *does not turn around.*

MAMA H: What? You wanna end up like Alex in the cemetery... or Quinn on the side of a street?

HAMLIN *freezes.*

MAMA H: Don't you think I know.?

(pause)

88

MAMA H: What is a mother to think...

HAMLIN *doesn't reply.*

MAMA H: Give me the bloody scissors, Hamlin!

HAMLIN *finally exits.*

MAMMA H. *follows.*

HAMLIN: NIC! NIC! I know you're here hidin'. Dis ain't your home anymore! Come face me like a man! Come get ur fuckin' points!

HAMLIN *desperately swings the knife in air.*

NIC *is hiding in a corner crying, clinging on the sage plant with his name on it.*

QUINN *'s ghost sits on the garden low wall, watching him.*

HAMLIN: Where are you, you piece of shit!

Hiding like a baby? Admit it bro, the only reason why you still standin' above ground is coz ur too much of a coward to take your own life.

(pause)

Look at me now. Do I look like monster yet? Do I?!

HAMLIN *lifts his hoodie to expose his clean chest.*

HAMLIN: This is good dirt standin' right here.

(beats chest)

Hamlin is good dirt. I'm society's child. I'm society's FUCKING CHILD! This is how YOU made me.

(beat)

89

HAMLIN: Check out the halo on MY head.

(pause)

King fuckin' Hamlin.

HAMLIN *beats his chest repeatedly.*

HAMLIN: He was my bro. How could you! How could I... I left you layin' there...

HAMLIN *drops the knife, finally breaking down in full tears.*

He furiously takes his hoodie off and throws it far away from him.

HAMLIN: I'm tryn' mum. I'm tryn'.

(pause)

HAMLIN: I'm so sorry.

MAMA H. *stand behind him heartbroken.*

HAMLIN *continues to undress slowly, taking off his new shoes and his watch.*

(long beat)

MAMA H. *helps a fragile HAMLIN back up and starts bringing him in the house, looking back, hoping to see NIC. She spots the transformer toy on the floor. She places it on the garden wall.*

Transition lights.

90

HAMLIN is sitting near the table. His phone on it and on speaker mode. MAMA H. is right behind him.

METROPOLITAN POLICE: Metropolitan Police, how can I help?

Lights out.

REQUIEM

A couple of days later. Early morning.

HAMLIN is in a Secure Training Centre. Sitting in the middle of a bare room, waiting. In the background, sound of young boys chattering.

MAMA H. comes in holding a leafy and healthy sage pot with the "Hamlin" label on it. She places it in front of HAMLIN, who does not react. There is an embarrassing silence in the air.

MAMA H starts singing "Eyes on the Sparrow", off key, to break the ice.

MAMA H:

I sing because I'm happy.

I sing because I'm free...

HAMLIN surrenders and chuckles.

MAMA H: He's one of the last sages standin'. Look how full and leafy this baby is. Almost

like a fresh salad. It has grown real nice u know, outside in de sun, well, some sun.
(pause)

Maybe am not so bad at dis after all.

(pause)

Nan would always say "We all need healing from the outside to come in."

(pause)

It's funny the way plants are born kinda tender, but den get brittle and dry, just like men. Yep, you came outta my womb soft and supple and—

HAMLIN: I love you too, Mum...

(pause)

Even though I dun miss your singing, your sneezing and all de leaves flying in de house.

HAMLIN and MAMA H. giggle.

A sad silence lingers for a bit.

MAMA H: You okay? You know I got the Teacher Assisting job at the end?

(beat)

You doing well here? Keeping out of trouble?

HAMLIN: Yeah....

(long silent beat)

MAMA H: Oh, almost forgot—

MAMA H *collects a crumpled paper from her bag.*

MAMA H: Found this near the other pots when I was cleaning up. Thought you might want to keep it.

MAMA H. *hands the paper to HAMLIN.*

HAMLIN *unfolds it. It's QUINN's sketch of himself. HAMLIN smiles and turns the paper around to make out the drawing.*

HAMLIN: Maybe he did look a bit like Idris... *(painfully laughs)* He deserved a proper send off.

MAMA H: There's no such thing as a proper send off. The spirit lives on. We eventually become bones and dirt—

HAMLIN: He wasn't... He wasn't dirt. He's clean now.

MAMA H: U gotta trust that he's resting in a better place. You said it best, "He now an Angel. Restin' somewhere quiet."

(beat)

You know Nic, he, well nobody knows where he is...

HAMLIN: Yeh...

From off stage an adult voice is heard.

YOUTH PRISON GUARD: Time's up.

MAMA H. *starts to leave, reluctantly.*

HAMLIN: Mum?

MAMA H: Yeh?

HAMLIN: I finally had a dream. A good one. I can finally say that.

(pause)

I was playin' in the ocean and heard some footsteps coming closer and closer. Quinn popped up right as I turned around.

(pause)

I called his name...

(pause)

...and he said: "What's-up?...what's up, Hamlin King."

A buzzing sound is heard in the background.

CURTAIN