

## CHARACTERS

**FAYE** – Black woman, mid-to-late fifties. Working-class woman. Tough and a lifetime of dirt beneath her nails. Somewhere, deep compassion.

**DEZ** – Black man, mid-to-late twenties. Working-class young man. Young hustler, playful, street-savy, and flirtatious. Somewhere, deeply sensitive.

**SHANITA** – Black woman, mid-to-late twenties. Working-class young woman. Pretty but not ruled by it. Hard-working. By-the-books. Believes in the work she does. Also, pregnant. Somewhere, a beautiful dreamer.

**REGGIE** – Black man, late thirties. White-collar man. Studious. Dedicated. Compassionate. The Foreman. Somewhere, a fire brims.

## SETTING

Detroit, Michigan. Stamping Plant. Winter.

## TIME

Somewhere around year 2008.

## AUTHOR'S NOTES

# ACT ONE

## Scene One

*(In darkness, smoke comes out of a stack. The sound of auto plant machinery hums and rattles. Hip-hop drum beats [J Dilla-inspired] blend into the rhythm – a cacophony of working class hustle. Echos of sighs. Machinery hums hums hums. J Dilla beats rock rock rock. They blend together until we are almost bopping our heads to it...a factory line hymn...)*

*(In silhouette – the drone of workers on the line. Actions of operating stamping machinery. No clear people. Just shadowed workers misted by the smoke.)*

*(The background sounds fade out.)*

*(Lights rise on the breakroom at a stamping plant. Harsh fluorescent lights bleach the room. Posters on the wall of various cars and SUVs. Pictures of various auto parts – shocks, sparking engines, etc.)*

*(A table and some chairs sit in the middle of the room. A raggedy couch. Some crates that hold random kitchen supplies – plasticware, ketchup packets, etc.)*

*(Somewhere, a microwave and refrigerator.)*

*(Most important in the room: the bulletin board. Covered in notices and papers. But larger than them all are two signs, posted on top and in bigger paper.)*

*(One, handwritten, says “Unit Meeting THURSDAY. Don’t Miss It Again Ya’ll.”)*

*(The other, also handwritten, says "NO SMOKING FAYE.")*

*(FAYE, heavy walk and weathered from the day, walks into the breakroom. Over to her locker. Takes off a sweatshirt, leaving her in a white t-shirt and hard yellow boots. Dirty and worn. She moves past the "No Smoking" sign. Looks at it blankly.)*

*(Pulls out a cigarette from her bosom. Lights it and puffs.)*

*(DEZ enters, wearing gloves and a vest.)*

DEZ. Colder than a bitch today, ain't it?

FAYE. *(Puffing.)* Shiiitt.

DEZ. Told them fools something ain't right with the heat in here. Upstairs could give a damn less.

FAYE. Reggie bringing in a heater today, supposed to.

DEZ. Reggie supposed to been brought in a heater – days ago. Head somewhere else.

FAYE. He got a lot on his mind lately.

DEZ. He ain't the only one.

*(DEZ opens the fridge. Pulls out a lunch. Dilapidated sandwich. Looks at it pitifully. Bites into it anyway. Looks at FAYE squarely.)*

You ain't cold?

FAYE. I got a heat you don't know shit about. Leave me 'lone.

DEZ. *(Laughing.)* Awww hell Faye. You on that over-fifty pause?

FAYE. You better leave me 'lone – talking 'bout over-fifty.

DEZ. You hittin' my mama status. It's 'bout to get serious.

FAYE. I told you don't mess with me boy.

DEZ. I know how ya'll do. Be in the dead of winter, and she talkin' 'bout – "Dez, roll the car window down." I'm like – hell naw, Ma! Why I gotta freeze in the middle of January just cuz you in yo' own personal July?

FAYE. I hope yo' mama slapped you good. Ain't 'spose to bother a woman battlin' her own heat.

DEZ. You know you ain't supposed to be smokin'. You ain't see Reggie's sign?

FAYE. This what I think of Reggie's sign.

*(She blows a circle of smoke.)*

DEZ. You know he gon' trip. Can write you up.

FAYE. Bet' not.

DEZ. You think you a O-G, don't you?

FAYE. I'm is, fool. Been on the line longer than you been born.

DEZ. You swear.

FAYE. 'Fore you knocked up yo' first girlfriend in the back of somebody's Ford.

DEZ. You know I ain't never knocked up nobody in no nothin'.

FAYE. Been puttin' in my time 'fore you even knew what a stamping plant was, fool. I'm yo' elder up in here. Bow down and lick the dust off my Tims.

DEZ. You better go'on somewhere with that.

*(The door to the breakroom opens. SHANITA, a young woman wearing goggles, enters. She is visibly pregnant. She heads straight for the fridge.)*

*(DEZ smiles at her.)*

Hey baby.

SHANITA. Shut up Dez.

FAYE. She gone' file a sexual harassment report on yo' tail. And I'ma throw the book at you.

DEZ. Pshhhh...

SHANITA. Who had some of my salad dressing?

DEZ. Wasn't me.

FAYE. Me neither.

SHANITA. I put my name on it. Big letters – S-H-A-N-I-T-A. Who the hell can't read?

*(She sits down in a huff and tends to her salad.)*

FAYE. Ya'll and these damn signs.

DEZ. What you eatin' salad for? I like my women with meat on their bones.

SHANITA. Boy you swear to somebody's god that I want you.  
*(Shift.)* Faye, you smokin' in here?

FAYE. For five seconds.

SHANITA. Ahem!

*(SHANITA indicates her pregnant belly.)*

FAYE. I'm sorry I'm sorry.

*(FAYE puts out the cig.)*

Shit. Ya'll the ones invadin' my lil' hideaway. Ain't nobody stopping you from eatin' in yo' cars with the rest of them fools. *(Mumbling.)* Worryin' 'bout me 'steada all that dust out there swimming in yo' lungs.

SHANITA. I wear my mask. And I'm not stepping off the line until I absolutely have to. Get the most of my benefits.  
*(Shift.)* Thought you quit, anyway.

FAYE. That patch is a damn lie. All these programs are. You quit when you're ready to quit. 'Til then, you just a nicotine tease. Flirt with her 'til you kiss her right down to the ash.

SHANITA. You better quit, Faye. Don't know nobody that invincible they can battle breast cancer and still be smokin' like it ain't no thang.

DEZ. Faye like flirtin' with death.

FAYE. Been this way over fifty years, don't see why I gotta change now.

SHANITA. What's your son got to say about that?

FAYE. Not a damn thing.

SHANITA. Stubborn.

DEZ. As a mule.

FAYE. Ya mamas. *(Shift.)* How's production comin' on the three-line?

SHANITA. Slow. Since we done lost half the crew, I don't know how Reggie expect us to meet deadline. I'm already workin' overtime four days this week. My feet swellin' as it is.

DEZ. Want me to rub 'em?

SHANITA. Want me to kick you?

FAYE. I'll take yo' overtime. And Dez too, if you want.

DEZ. Not me, naw. You know I'm saving up.

FAYE. You still talkin' 'bout starting that repair shop?

DEZ. Found me a garage over on six mile. All I gotta do is save me enough to buy it outright. Few more months of overtime, I'm in there.

FAYE. And then what? You quit?

DEZ. You mean if we ain't next to get dropped? It's dead flies all around this plant, Faye. I ain't waitin' 'round 'til I get swat.

FAYE. Anywhere else you go you get swat there too, shit. Ain't nothin' new.

SHANITA. You got to make yourself irreplaceable. That's what I'm doing.

FAYE. How you figure you irreplaceable? I been from stamping doors to installing shocks to them seven years I spent sewing interiors. It ain't nobody in this plant more irreplaceable than Faye Davison.

SHANITA. I'm talking work efficiency and ethic. I don't complain. Got the least write-ups. Do a lotta overtime.

DEZ. And you finer than a mug (*as in "muthafucker."*). That make you irreplaceable as hell to me.

SHANITA. And that's sexual harassment number 5,062.

DEZ. I notice you keepin' count.

SHANITA. And anyway, I'm in good standing with the union.

FAYE. Everybody in good standin' with the union, except for Dez.

DEZ. Dues too damn much.

FAYE. You youngin's don't have no respect for the blood been spilled so yo' ass have some benefits.

DEZ. What benefits? I don't hardly see no benefits.

FAYE. Was a time when you wasn't even allowed in the union, dummy. Wasn't nothin' but the mule of the industry doin' the shittiest labor you could think of. And now here you are, *choosing yo' trade and thinkin' you got that shit all by yo'self.*

DEZ. Faye don't start all that with me. You bastards pull money outta my paycheck every month, for what? Only thing the UAW do for me is force me to strike when I don't even want to. Rather stack my paper and build my own enterprise. I done paid enough dues in my life already, I ain't tryin' to pay to nobody else. Them union suckers might get my money, but I ain't got to smile and grin while I sign the shit over. I feel like grittin' my teeth, I'm grittin' my teeth.

FAYE. You ain't seen no UAW strikes 'til you done lost a few teeth to assholes trying to break yo' line and fight you down into the gutter. I can always demonstrate upside yo' head if you need to know how it went.

SHANITA. Knock him out real good, Faye.

DEZ. Awww baby, you ain't got to knock me out. You can just have your way with me.

SHANITA. Boy please.

*(The door to the breakroom opens. REGGIE, Black man with neat haircut, neat pants, and a white-collar button-down shirt, enters. He rolls in a heater.)*

REGGIE. Faye, there you are. I was looking for you.

FAYE. For what? I still got a half hour left to my break. Tell them fools on sixteen-line to take a chill pill and let me rest my dogs.

REGGIE. Wanted to chat with you for a sec.

SHANITA. Finally, a heater!

REGGIE. Smell like smoke in here.

SHANITA. You know who that was.

REGGIE. How big I got to make the sign?

FAYE. Bigger.

DEZ. You got more overtime for me?

REGGIE. I might be able to find something. But Charlie and Bo put in before you.

DEZ. Charlie and Bo been gettin' overtime all week. What about me?

REGGIE. What about you? You want me to throw them to the side cuz you took too long to ask?

DEZ. Don't mean you gotta let them have all the overtime. Ain't 'spose to be no monopolies on overtime.

REGGIE. Don't start fussing with me Dez. I don't need your insubordination today.

DEZ. Insubordination?

SHANITA. Dez can have my overtime. I was gonna tell you anyway. Had to take a doctor's appointment this afternoon. Only time I could get in.

FAYE. Gonna find out the gender?

SHANITA. Not sure yet. Think I wanna be surprised.

REGGIE. Fine. Dez, you're on. I'm done with it. (*Shift.*) I'm gonna plug this up, but then you ain't gonna be able to use the microwave. Can't use too much wattage in this outlet. Gonna have to pick and choose.

DEZ. If that ain't hood-rigging, I don't know what is.

REGGIE. Gotta take what we can get.

FAYE. That's a company heater? Or you brought that from home?

REGGIE. Just take the heater.

FAYE. Foremen ain't responsible for bringing in personal heaters to keep the breakroom warm.

REGGIE. Just take the heater.

DEZ. Ay Reggie, I heard they closed down Kemp.

REGGIE. Where'd you hear that?

DEZ. Bony J.

REGGIE. News from Bony J always comes crooked and on the diagonal. You know not to listen to rumors like that.



DEZ. Nah nah, he showed it to me in Plant Closing News.

SHANITA. It's in the newsletter?

DEZ. Think I'm lyin'?

REGGIE. I guess they went on ahead with it then. Thought they got revived when that new Chrysler came out. Kemp was the number one company for exporting their shocks.

DEZ. They doin' 'em within now.

SHANITA. That make us the last small factory standing now, ain't it?

FAYE. 'Shoul do.

REGGIE. That sixteen-line is gonna be a massive undertaking. They gonna have to bring in rigging crews from all over. If you start hittin' the gym more Dez, you can go'on down there and find you some pickup work.

DEZ. Psshhhh – too bad I could give a damn less watching another plant turn into a ghost-town. I'm straight on that.

FAYE. You 'fraid of ghosts?

DEZ. Them assembly line ghosts? Hell yeah.

SHANITA. Shut up, Dez.

DEZ. Say them empty plants a breeding ground for 'em. You can hear the echoes of machines just runnin' and runnin' in the hollow space. Them fools that be goin' down there playin' in the ruins; dumb-ass White boys come over from Windsor and Ohio to stand in front of those empty plants and take pictures like it's some kinda cabaret step and repeat? Heard that be the last picture they ever take. Some of them jokers never make it back out. The old gas vapors swallow them whole. Disappear.

SHANITA. That's stupid.

REGGIE. Even more stupid is the press operator that goes around spreading that mess.

DEZ. You ain't got to believe me. I know what I know.

FAYE. And that ain't much.

**DEZ.** *(Checking his watch.)* Shit, my break almost over and I ain't even get to make good on my promise to Bony J. 'Sposed to catch him for a game of bones and take his money right quick.

**REGGIE.** You know you're not supposed to gamble on work grounds. I could write you up.

**DEZ.** You got to catch me in action first.

*(DEZ heads to the door.)*

See ya'll at quittin' time. Shanita, I'll meet you out front to walk you to your car. Ain't safe out there after dark.

**SHANITA.** You hit on me and I'm gonna pepper spray your ass.

**DEZ.** Not 'til our first date, baby.

*(SHANITA throws something nearby at DEZ. Maybe a styrofoam cup. He disappears behind the door.)*

**SHANITA.** I'ma go back too. Still got ten minutes, but I'm walkin' slow these days. Swollen feet ain't quick feet, you know? *(Shift.)* Hey Faye, I'm bringing in a book of names tomorrow. You gonna help me pick somethin'?

**FAYE.** Thought you said you didn't wanna know the gender.

**SHANITA.** Somethin' unisex.

*(SHANITA leaves. FAYE watches REGGIE as he straightens things up. A moment of awkwardness.)*

**REGGIE.** Was um...lookin' for you cuz I needed to talk...if you had a sec.

*(FAYE eyes REGGIE intensely.)*

**FAYE.** *(Not a question.)* They shuttin' us down, ain't they.

**REGGIE.** How you –

**FAYE.** I know you Reggie. Can read your face. Been lookin' stressed for a week and then some. *(Beat.)* When you find out?

**REGGIE.** Last week. Harris pulled me into his office.

**FAYE.** Fuck.

*(Pause.)*

When they letting everybody know?

REGGIE. HR is sending out the notice as soon details are final.

FAYE. How soon this happenin'?

REGGIE. Within the year, Faye.

FAYE. (*Sobering.*) FUCK.

(*Another pause.*)

I hit thirty years at the end of the year. In October. We gonna be around that long?

REGGIE. Ain't sure.

FAYE. (*Almost to herself.*) Retirement package be real different for twenty-nine years versus thirty.

REGGIE. I know. I'm thinking on it. Was coming to talk to you. Get the scoop on folks. See what I might be able to figure out for everybody before the news hits. Cuz once it does...

FAYE. What you gonna do? What about Cheryl and the kids?

REGGIE. I've been trying to figure that out. I only got fifteen years on me.

FAYE. But you in a supervisory position. They gonna find you another job. Place you somewhere else.

REGGIE. Dalina just started high school. Got to save up for her college. And we just bought that house over in Sherwood. Couldn't hardly believe we could afford it. But we got it, Faye. It's ours.

FAYE. I know it.

REGGIE. I own something that can't nobody take from me. That mean somethin'.

FAYE. It does. Means a lot.

REGGIE. Now you can't say nothin' about this. I'll lose my job. You know that right?

FAYE. I know you don't expect me to sit on this. That's not what you was coming to ask me.

**REGGIE.** I was coming for your help. To work with you and figure out what we can do to soften this blow. But you can't go taking this to the union yet. I need you to wait and let the company do this right.

**FAYE.** Do this right? Only right way is straight up. I'm still the rep. It's my job to protect these folks.

**REGGIE.** Faye, I'm confiding in you. I'm putting myself on the line for you cuz I'm on your side. But I need you on mine. I need your guidance. Help me figure this out without sounding the alarm.

**FAYE.** Reggie –

**REGGIE.** Please Faye.

*(FAYE says nothing.)*

I wouldn't be in this industry if it wasn't for you. My mama never stopped reminding me that, you know. You always been her most trusted soul sister. Recommended me to get a good job in the factory when wasn't nobody hiring a high school dropout. And now look. I'm wearing a tie to work and buying a house for my family. *(Beat.)* I always appreciate that, Faye. You know that, right?

**FAYE.** *(Softly.)* I know it. She'd be real proud of you.

**REGGIE.** I'm gonna work hard to get us outta here with somethin' we can exhale into. Just please...until I can figure this out...

**FAYE.** Alright, Reggie. Fine. We'll do it your way.

*(REGGIE stares at FAYE for a moment. Releases a smile.)*

**REGGIE.** Thanks Faye. You tough as bricks, you know that? Ain't nothin' can knock you down.

**FAYE.** See you in the mornin'.

**REGGIE.** Alright then.

*(REGGIE heads to the door.)*

And leave those cigarettes alone Faye. If not for the plant rules, at least for your health. Jalen would kill

me if he knew I let his mama smoke herself out of remission.

**FAYE.** My son ain't givin' two shits 'bout that. *(Shift.)* Get outta here. I'll see you in the morning.

**REGGIE.** See you then.

*(REGGIE exits. FAYE stands still after him for a moment.)*

*(Then she reaches into her bosom. Pulls out another cigarette. Lights it.)*

*(And puffs...)*