

Scene Two

(In darkness, the humming of machinery creates a midwest hip-hop score. It is an extension of the factory line soundtrack that opened the play.)

(Silhouetted workers are seen in action – their factory line dance.)

(Suddenly, a chink in the machinery. The workers repeat movements as if they are stuck between two motions – unable to complete their task. Short circuiting – caught in dysfunction.)

(Lights crossfade onto the breakroom.)

(It is early morning. Sunlight spills into the windows. Clothes are lain around on the floor and the dilapidated couch. A locker is partially open. The heater is on.)

(DEZ enters the breakroom wearing a coat and backpack. Walks over to a boombox resting on a crate. Unplugs the heater and plugs in the boombox. Puts on a CD. Slum Village, “GET DIS MONEY.”)

(Notices the clothes that are lain about. The open locker. Registers it questionably.)

(Takes out his hard boots. Changes out of his nice gym shoes. Puts gym shoes in locker. Takes off backpack. Looks around himself. Pulls a gun from his hip. Places it in his backpack and seals it good.)

(Pulls out lunch, takes it over to fridge. Opens fridge and sticks head in, looking for something to drink. Shakes OJ cartons, smells milk, etc.)

(SHANITA enters, yawning. Walks right over to the boombox and turns it off.)

(SHANITA goes to her locker and takes off her coat. Stores her belongings. Puts some new salad dressing in the fridge.)

DEZ. (*Rapidly.*) Whoa whoa whoa what up doe? Why you turnin' off my music?

SHANITA. It's too early for this.

DEZ. Morning ritual. I'm sayin'. You messin' up my mojo. Slum Village is my muse. Make me feel like gettin' my hustle on.

SHANITA. I'm being selective about what I listen to while I'm pregnant. Only positive sounds for my baby to hear.

DEZ. What's more positive than makin' that paper?

SHANITA. Seriously, Dez. Mother-to-be. I get priority.

DEZ. Aiight, what you wanna hear? I got other stuff.

SHANITA. Silence. The sound of the refrigerator humming. The sound of the machines running. That's it.

DEZ. That ain't music.

SHANITA. To you, maybe not. To me, it is. Sound like harmony. Like life happening. Production. Good sound.

DEZ. I'm still pissed they busted me for playin' music on the floor. My mind goes numb listening to that stamping sound all day long. A dude could forget how to socialize with the outside world. Forget how to lay that pimp game down on a woman. Got nobody to practice with.

SHANITA. Don't think you 'bout to practice with me.

DEZ. Who else I'm 'sposed to practice with? Faye? That's like hittin' on my Aunt Debra. You the finest woman up in this plant.

SHANITA. What am I – your default hottie? No thank you.

DEZ. You know you more than that to me.

SHANITA. Whatever.

(*Beat.*)

DEZ. Yo' baby daddy brought you here this mornin'?

SHANITA. Do not ask me about my child's father. Not up for discussion Dez.

DEZ. My bad –

SHANITA. You like pissin' me off early in the morning?

DEZ. You look cute when you pissed off. Got that pregnancy glow.

(She fumes at him. He backs off.)

Aight. Too early for compliments I guess.

SHANITA. You don't know what a compliment is, I guess.

(DEZ makes himself busy in the makeshift kitchen.)

DEZ. You want some coffee?

SHANITA. One cup. Milk –

DEZ. And two sugars. I know. I got you.

(SHANITA folds the clothes.)

SHANITA. Who came in here earlier than us? That's Faye stuff?

DEZ. Yeah.

SHANITA. You heard them rumors down on nine-line yesterday?

DEZ. I heard 'em.

SHANITA. Think it's true?

DEZ. Bet not be. I still got about six months left 'fore I have enough for my garage.

SHANITA. But what if they are?

DEZ. Can't stress over that. Rumors 'bout shuttin' down been circulating every year. Then it go away. That's just how it is. Can't worry 'bout it. Cuz if it don't happen, you done worried for nothin'. And if it do happen, you done worried twice. Better to wait to the last possible moment to start worryin', I say. 'Til then, just sit back and go with the flow.

SHANITA. Yo philosophies be...

DEZ. Stupid?

SHANITA. Halfway comforting...

(Beat. DEZ hands SHANITA a cup of coffee. They sip in silence. The sound of the refrigerator runs. SHANITA closes her eyes.)

DEZ. I wasn't sayin' nothin' about yo' baby's daddy. Just wanted to know –

SHANITA. Shhhhh... Listen to the music.

(DEZ watches her...kinda smiles...)

(Beat.)

(FAYE walks in – startled at the sight of them.)

FAYE. Oh – hey...ya'll ain't usually here this early.

DEZ. You in a lil' early yourself, ain't you?

(FAYE averts DEZ' eyes. Goes to grab her clothes.)

FAYE. Forgive my mess...

(FAYE puts the clothes away. Shuts her locker.)

SHANITA. You made the coffee?

FAYE. Yeah.

SHANITA. Taste a lil' different.

DEZ. Better than this slop we usually drink.

FAYE. Brought some of my own beans in. Gourmet coffee beans or some shit. Christmas gift from my son. Ain't got no coffee maker, but he don't know that. So figured I might as well share 'fore they go to waste or whatever.

SHANITA. That's cool Faye, thanks.

FAYE. Whatever. Better than wasting 'em. *(Shift.)* Who workin' overtime tonight?

SHANITA. I'm gonna. Put in my request yesterday.

DEZ. Not me. I got a date.

SHANITA. A date?

DEZ. Yeah. Why – you jealous?

SHANITA. *(A little.)* Pssshhhhh...

FAYE. What you gonna take her out in? Not that hooptie you got out there.

DEZ. Hooptie?

FAYE. So much rust on that car – look like it got a disease. Lesions everywhere.

DEZ. You talk shit now, but I'm 'bout to be working on her. She gonna look real pretty in a couple of months. Ain't gonna hardly be able to recognize her.

FAYE. Ya'll youngins don't know nothin' 'bout how to fix up no car. Treat 'em 'bout as dumb as you treat women. Put a bunch of pretty jewelry on her – gold rims – trick out her exterior and on the inside, she ain't got nothin' to run on. No care. No substance. Just put all your attention on the shit that don't matter. That ain't how to make her purr like you really want.

DEZ. Like you know somethin' –

FAYE. I know how to get a girl in the back of my car faster than you. Tell you that much.

SHANITA. Faye be mackin' the ladies.

FAYE. I ain't said I be mackin' 'em. I just said I know how. If it's one thing I always known, it's cars and women. I keep all of it in tact better than Dez keep his. Bet you that.

DEZ. I keep my cars and my women tight. Don't worry 'bout that.

FAYE. That ol' Betsie you drive ain't got nothin' to run on. Engine sound like it's gonna die on you any day now. Like a ol' dirty woman with a emphysema cough. Hear that girl hacking for her life everytime you drive in the lot. Mile away.

DEZ. You gon' be that ol' dirty woman you keep smokin' –

FAYE. Hush that.

DEZ. Anyway, I'm fixin' to get a new engine. Got the hook up.

SHANITA. Where – at one of them auctions? Heard they for big ol' press machines. Cranes and lifts and whatever. Where you gettin' a new engine?

DEZ. My boy work over at the Briggs Plant. Said he gonna hold one off to the side for me.

FAYE. That sound like some sideways and upside down shit to me. You better be careful dealin' with yo' boy. Police

already arrested two fools last week for stealing plant materials.

Happenin' a whole bunch right now. Some of those ol' dusty ghost towns you talk about are getting ransacked. Poppy Johnson – the nightwatchman over at Kemps – got himself shot in the shoulder one night while he was patrolling the grounds. Didn't even get no disability.

SHANITA. Plants ain't safe no more.

FAYE. Nowhere safe no more. Everybody packin' somethin' these days. Can't go to the corner store without worryin' whether the person you blocked in is gonna come gunnin' at you cuz they got someplace to be in a hurry. Use to be able to offend somebody without losin' your life as the cost...

DEZ. How the hell else they 'spose to go around? Unarmed? You can't coast this city that way 'less you suicidal.

SHANITA. Why can't you? I do. I don't need my baby to come into this world armed and dangerous.

FAYE. Everybody handle tension differently. Some folks see shit fallin' apart and got to join in the destruction. Hands with no use find activity in useless shit. But some folks think on a different plane. Rather be part of the restoration. And some folks just...

SHANITA. What?

FAYE. Smoke a goddamn cigarette. (*Shift.*) Where my pack?

(*DEZ holds up an empty pack.*)

DEZ. You out.

FAYE. Hell, I got to go and get me some. Or you can get me a pack on your lunch break.

DEZ. I'll think about it. Don't know if I wanna be part of your destruction.

FAYE. Boy, I'll slap you.

SHANITA. Faye, you heard them rumors flying 'round the plant lately?

FAYE. What rumors?

SHANITA. Say we next on the choppin' block?

FAYE. Told you don't be listening to rumors. You inhale every rumor you clog up your lungs. Die of asphyxiation of other people's bullshit.

DEZ. I'm gonna get to the bottom of all that hearsay.

FAYE. How you figure that?

DEZ. Gonna ask Reggie straight out. He know somethin' and he ain't tellin' us? That's bitch-made to me.

FAYE. You back offa Reggie. Got himself a lot to deal with already. Counselin' all kinda folks losing they jobs. Ain't easy.

SHANITA. But he gotta tell us, right? I need to keep my benefits.

FAYE. (*Changing the subject.*) Shanita, I almost forgot – I got somethin' for you.

(FAYE goes to her locker. Pulls out a stack of paper. Hands it to SHANITA.)

SHANITA. What's this?

FAYE. List of names. Unisex.

SHANITA. For real?

FAYE. Printed 'em at the computer in Bea's old office. Go on look at 'em.

SHANITA. (*Reading aloud.*) African baby names.

DEZ. Awww hell – African names? That kid ain't gonna be able to get no job.

SHANITA. Shut up Dez!

FAYE. You a special kinda stupid.

SHANITA. (*Reading.*) Akia.

FAYE. Yeah, I like that one. Means "first born."

DEZ. What kinda significance is that? That's like naming a kid – Born On Wednesday.

SHANITA. (*Reading.*) That's Akua.

FAYE. Got significance, fool. Days of week mean things to some people.

SHANITA. Wednesday mean something to me. Means a longer workday. Means being just like my daddy. Mean a lot.

DEZ. (*Regretfully.*) I ain't sayin' it don't mean nothin'.

(*Beat. SHANITA checks her watch.*)

SHANITA. It's almost nine o'clock. Gotta get on the floor.

(*She raises to her feet. FAYE grabs a nearby deck of cards.*)

FAYE. Who got time for a game of Spades before the bell? Dez, lemme take your money right quick.

DEZ. Not me, nah. I already lost a bill yesterday. I'm off gambling today.

FAYE. Come back on break. Maybe you have a change of heart. Need me somewhere to play...keep my mind off shit.

DEZ. Off what?

FAYE. Just shit.

(*SHANITA heads to the door.*)

SHANITA. I'll be back at break Faye. I'll play you. (*Shift.*) And don't let nobody take my salad dressing.

(*SHANITA exits.*)

(*DEZ clears the table.*)

FAYE. I got that.

DEZ. Nah, I do. Let me.

(*DEZ throws coffee cups away. Stops. Looks at FAYE for a moment.*)

FAYE. (*Not a question.*) What.

DEZ. You...alright?

FAYE. I'm fine. What's your deal?

DEZ. The clothes –

FAYE. I'm fine. What's your deal?

DEZ. Nothing. I guess.

(*Pause. Silence.*)

I ain't gonna say nothin', but –

FAYE. Then don't.

DEZ. But the shit is concerning.

FAYE. Let it go, Dez.

DEZ. If Reggie find out –

FAYE. If Reggie find out what? Reggie ain't finding out nothin'. Reggie ain't finding out about my clothes lain around or me being here when ya'll arrived this morning. Reggie ain't finding out about me gambling on the premises. And Reggie ain't findin' out about that gun you keep in your locker. Right? Reggie ain't findin' nothin' out.

DEZ. How you –

FAYE. I know everything about this place, Dez. The walls talk to me. The dust on the floors write me messages. I'm in the vents. I'm in the bulletin boards. I'm in the chipped paint. Ain't nobody can slip through the cracks past me up in here. I can see through lockers. I know what you got in that bag you bring in here everyday. But I don't expose it. Cuz everybody got they bag of shit. You got yours. And I got mine. Leave me to my own stink and don't go tryin' to air me out.

DEZ. What if we just worried about you?

FAYE. Worry 'bout that car need fixin'. Worry 'bout that darkness out there that make you afraid to coast without that metal. But don't worry 'bout me. I'm just fine.

(Beat.)

DEZ. Alright.

(DEZ grabs a pair of goggles and heads to the door.)

I'll come back with your poison at break.

FAYE. I'll come back here lookin' for it...

(DEZ exits.)

(FAYE stands alone for a moment.)

(Looks around the room. Sighs. And exits.)

Scene Three

(Lights rise on REGGIE in the breakroom. He is putting up signs on the bulletin board.)

(First sign reads: "No Gambling On Premises. Dez This Means YOU.")

(DEZ enters the breakroom. Sees REGGIE. Sees sign. Rolls his eyes and goes over to his locker.)

DEZ. *(Under his breath.)* Here we go.

REGGIE. Don't start with me Dez.

DEZ. It's like 100 less trees in the world cuz of all the paper you use to cover this board. Can't you just spare us all and say what you got to say?

REGGIE. I say it and you don't listen. But you better start listening real soon. Things are changing around here.

DEZ. Oh yeah? How so?

REGGIE. Plant was hit last night.

DEZ. Say word?

REGGIE. Took us for a good eighth of sheet metal off the thirteen-line.

DEZ. No kiddin'?

REGGIE. That's right. Upstairs is cracking down on all improper conduct on the floor. That means playing dominoes with Bony J. That means everything Dez.

DEZ. What does me playin' bones have to do with the plant gettin' robbed?

REGGIE. They're losing patience. Zero tolerance policy for any criminal activity on the premises.

DEZ. They got a zero tolerance policy for the criminal activity happening upstairs? Or does that street only run one way.

REGGIE. Cool it with the backtalk, Dez. I told you don't start with me today. I say cut out the gambling, that's what I mean. And whatever else you like to do in opposition to company protocol.

DEZ. I ain't got to move in opposition of nothin'. I understand the rules real clear, Boss.

REGGIE. Good.

(Beat. REGGIE sighs. Continues to post signs on the board. "Unit Meeting Thursday." "Keep The Breakroom Clean." "No Personal Items Left In The Breakroom After Hours.")

DEZ. Speaking of protocol...

REGGIE. What of it?

DEZ. Folks startin' to talk on the shop floor.

REGGIE. Folks always talk on the shop floor. What of it?

DEZ. Sayin' this plant might be the next one to turn into a ghost town. Sound like HR is about to have a whole bunch of shit on they hands. Ain't that right?

REGGIE. I'm not speaking on hearsay.

DEZ. What you mean you not speakin' on it? Either it's happening or it's not.

REGGIE. What are you getting so concerned about HR for? You can barely focus on the line you're working on – why you worrying about HR?

DEZ. Cuz I wanna hear you say it. Tell us the plant is closing down and what we gotta do to make sure we get covered right.

REGGIE. You want me to tell you something that I can't.

DEZ. You can't, hunh?

REGGIE. What do you want from me, Dez? Didn't I just say I don't have nothin' to tell you? The company hasn't folded yet. You just focus on your job and keep your stat sheet clean, and stop worrying about things nobody can control right now.

DEZ. Can't control? Or don't wanna deal with?

REGGIE. You got something you wanna say to me directly? Or you gonna keep grabbing at stuff in the air without landing on nothing. Because I already told you what to do if you wanna make sure you're covered. Do your

job. Lay off the disorderly conduct. And stay out of the shop room gossip. It doesn't suit you well.

DEZ. It doesn't suit me well?

REGGIE. No.

DEZ. What is it with you lately, man?

REGGIE. There's nothing with me.

DEZ. Act like you ain't come up in here the same way the rest of us did. The color of that collar don't change yo' origins. You forget that?

REGGIE. (*Getting heated.*) Don't question my collar, Dez.

DEZ. Ain't questioning the collar. Questioning the man wearin' it.

REGGIE. You question me again and I'll show you exactly what my origins are. I'm done being pushed this way and that, while you completely disrespect my position.

DEZ. Faye got you that position.

REGGIE. Who cares who got me the position?! I'm in it. And I'm your supervisor. And I'm telling you this as clear as I can think to say it...if I catch you doing one thing out of line anywhere on these premises, I will carry out the orders I've been given. And that's not just a write-up this time. It's not even suspension. It's the law. They're pressing charges to anyone stepping over the line. You understand that? That's charges Dez. And you can push back at me and say whatever slick comment that comes out of your mouth, but it's not going to change a damn thing. You break the law, you're done.

(*FAYE enters the breakroom.*)

FAYE. What's all this heat about in here? The radiator broken? Ya'll trying to create yo' own?

(*DEZ fumes. REGGIE turns away and grabs his materials.*)

Hey Reggie, you alright there? Need to talk for a minute?

REGGIE. Need to get back upstairs.

FAYE. You wanna come talk later?

REGGIE. Can't. Dalina got basketball practice. Got to take her to it. Cheryl's working a double tonight. Got to be home with the kids. Can't.

(REGGIE leaves – disgruntled. FAYE watches after him with concern. Turns and looks at DEZ.)

FAYE. You gon' get enough of sickin' at his heels.

DEZ. Lucky I ain't bite.

FAYE. Need to back off of him. Like to push people too far. He been a good supervisor to us. You know that.

DEZ. He holdin' somethin' back and I think you know it too.

FAYE. What's it matter whether or not he tells you what you wanna hear? Until word comes from HR, we ain't got much to stand on.

DEZ. You the rep. You supposed to be on our side. Fighting for us. What happened to all that union talk you got every other day? That only apply to everybody but Reggie?

FAYE. Oh I see, you in a fightin' mood today. Now you wanna throw punches with me? Hunh? You take yo' best shot.

DEZ. Ain't nobody tryin' to fight you.

FAYE. Naw. You feelin' froggy? Go'on and leap!

DEZ. Fine then. He ain't yo' son. That's what I got to say.

FAYE. Oh, now you just talkin' stupid.

DEZ. Am I? Then you tell me you don't got your blinders on when it come to him.

FAYE. I ain't got no blinders for nobody.

DEZ. Tell me why you ain't called no meetings down at the Local or demand this company let us know our fate. Tell me why we ain't talkin' health coverage or severance deals? Ain't even gonna prep us for the blow that might be comin'?

FAYE. You talkin' premature. Got to let the man do his job first. Let him rise to the occasion. If somethin's goin'

down, he can help fight for our jobs. Can't define what a man is until he got to take an action. You judge him befo' we even see what the action gonna be. And me – what I know 'bout that man...what I knew 'bout his mama and what he's made of...when it come to where his heart lie, he gonna rise to the occasion.

DEZ. And if he don't?

FAYE. If it was a fifth, we'd all be drunk.

DEZ. You trust him so much...why you ain't tell him you livin' here?

FAYE. And we are now done with this conversation.

DEZ. So you can get in my ass but I can't in yours?

FAYE. You ain't got enough leverage to get in my ass. Besides, you talkin' 'bout somethin' you ain't got no proof about. You speculating and that's for lawyers and investigators, that ain't for you.

DEZ. Zero tolerance policy. That's what Reggie say. For all disorderly conduct. How disorderly you think it is to be livin' at the job?

FAYE. I don't abide by no rules but necessity. I do what I do 'til I figure out another thing and do that. And that's all I got to say about it.

DEZ. Fine.

FAYE. Now sit down and let me take yo' money.

DEZ. I ain't supposed to be gamblin' no mo –

(DEZ reluctantly sits. FAYE pulls out a deck of cards. Shuffles them.)

FAYE. Cut it.

(DEZ cuts. FAYE deals.)

This ain't a democracy. You in my personal breakroom and in the noble effort of thankin' me for not kickin' yo' ass out, you grant me the simple pleasures of playin' a game of cards so that I can graciously and repetitiously take yo' money. *(Shift.)* Crazy eights. Twenty-five to start.

(She puts cash on the table. DEZ matches her.)

DEZ. (*Dropping his first card.*) Hearts.

FAYE. You know, you ain't the only one in tough shit. When I first come up in this plant, I was pregnant with my first and only. Kinda like Shanita. My son's father ran off and I was assed out. Had dropped outta school to be with him so I ain't have no family to fall back on. My mama didn't play them kinda games – your move.

(*She throws a card on the table. DEZ plays.*)

She come from the real ol' school. Once you shame your mama and turn up with a fast tail, you got to be put out and ain't no lookin' back. I was scared shitless but somethin' in me knew I was gonna survive. Not cuz nothin' was promised to me or cuz I could see the light at the end of the tunnel or no shit like that. But somethin' in me knew what I was made of. I was gonna survive cuz I had to.

DEZ. On you.

(*FAYE's turn.*)

FAYE. So I walked up, hidin' my pregnant belly so I could get me a job, and I got it. Same day. Been workin' the line ever since. Survivin' ever since – take two.

DEZ. Awwwww...

(*DEZ takes two cards.*)

FAYE. And it ain't been no easy work all the time. Even got the battle scars to prove that stamping doors ain't for sissies.

(*FAYE holds up her arm for DEZ to see. A scar skates along her forearm.*)

This beauty right here...from a press machine on twelve-line. Years ago. Got backed up and tried to pull the sheet metal that was stuck in the gears. Press came right down by my hand, sparks burned the shit outta me. Coulda been a lot worse if I ain't move my hand quick. That's fast thinkin' like you ain't never seen. But I still got all my limbs. Everything in tact. Twenty-nine years – knock.

DEZ. So that's the lesson? Faye's a survivor so shut the fuck up and leave her alone? Spades.

(FAYE's turn. She pulls cards.)

FAYE. You know, you really stupid. I'm tellin' you about being pregnant and alone. I'm telling you about having a son and bein' clueless. I'm telling you about not having the answers. Ain't never had 'em and probably never will. But whatever I'm doin', it's keepin' me here. And that's how I can be patient when the plane is headed toward a tree, cuz even if it crash... I don't think I'd die. I think I'd get scarred maybe. But I wouldn't die. Take the train next time. Keep movin' – Hearts.

DEZ. Well I'm tellin' you somethin' right now Faye.

FAYE. What you tellin' me?

DEZ. If the plane is crashing, I ain't gonna sit and watch it go into a tree. I'm goin' in that cockpit and I'm takin' the pilot's life jacket. I'm takin' the pilot's parachute. And I'm jumping from that motherfucker long before it goes up in flames. You can tell that to Reggie or whoever the hell needs to know. I'm gettin' what's mine...

(FAYE glares at DEZ.)

(FAYE pulls a card. And several more. Throws one.)

FAYE. It's gonna come with a price. Just like that scar you got behind your ear.

(DEZ stops playing for a moment. Touches his scar. Strangely self-conscious. Then he releases. Goes back to the cards.)

(DEZ gains speed. Down to only a few cards. FAYE has a full hand.)

You can pretend you and me ain't affected by the same things, except we both got battle scars. But your way is impatient. May work for you in the short-term. But in the long-term, it kills.

DEZ. It's what I am Faye.

FAYE. A hot head?

DEZ. A warrior. See?

(He drops his last card.)

Game.

FAYE. Fuck!

(FAYE slams her hands down on the table. DEZ scoops the cash.)

One more.

DEZ. Naw naw...can't. If Reggie catch me, he's gonna throw me to the wolves. That was my last game on the premises.

FAYE. He's just scaring you cuz you piss him off.

DEZ. Whatever. I ain't takin' that chance. Need me a good severance deal...if...shit goes down.

FAYE. If it was a splif, we'd all be high.

(DEZ rises from the table. Goes to his locker and grabs his goggles, puts on his sweatshirt, etc.)

(SHANITA enters. Tears in her eyes. Visibly upset.)

Shanita, come let me take yo' money.

(FAYE stops when she sees SHANITA – who ignores both FAYE and DEZ. Goes to her locker.)

DEZ. What's the matter with you?

FAYE. You alright?

(SHANITA doesn't answer. Her head in her locker. She bites back a wail. Beat.)

(She grabs her goggles. Closes locker.)

(Then she moves past FAYE, and exits.)

(They both look after her with concern.)

DEZ. See that? Some people head right into that tree, crash, and don't survive. You gotta think about them, too...

(DEZ grabs his goggles and exits.)

*(FAYE alone – shuffles cards. And shuffles cards.
And shuffles cards.)*