

COUNT

Stories from America's Death Row

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"We are all broken by something."

--Bryan Stevenson

"Death Row ain't no place for nobody. It's pain, loneliness, and heartache. But what I never thought would exist is, there was brothers on Death Row that was good peoples who wanted to help us.

So I been loved by a family here, too."

--Henry McCollum (Interviewed the night before his exoneration)

SYNOPSIS

During a single day on death row, six men unpack their personal inheritances of violence, racism, mental illness, poverty, and surprising love. Based on years of conversation and writing with men sentenced to death or sentenced as children to life without parole, COUNT invites us into a stark florescent otherworld where the condemned struggle to revision what it means to live fully in the face of scheduled death. As we join their lively, difficult, and ultimately affirming search for a life well-lived, we begin to wonder who is disposable, who counts, and what justice means when the blindfold is our own.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

Brownsville: mid-40s. African American. Not religious. Home: Grew up in Brownsville area of NYC. Brownsville is fit, edgy, smart, intense. Spends his free time playing and studying chess.

Kansas City: 26. Biracial, Latino/Black. Catholic-Baptist upbringing. Home: Grew up in the projects in Kansas City, MO. Kansas City is small, artistic. Spends his free time sketching.

Long Beach: Late 50s-60s. African American. Buddhist. Home: Military, moved often, landed in California. Long Beach is trim, neat, self-educated, introvert. Spends his free time listening to NPR and reading, but his eyesight is failing.

Maine: Mid-late 30s. White. Lapsed Catholic. Home: Small town. Working class neighborhood in Maine. Maine struggles with multiple mental illnesses and has been incarcerated since early teens. Spends his free time working out and studying legal documents.

Richmond: 40. Biracial, Black/White. Muslim. Home: Grew up in the projects in Richmond, VA. A big man, Richmond spends his free time writing poetry, freestyling, and practicing basketball, moving and dunking as punctuation to his speech.

Whitehouse: Early 30s. Tri-racial Black, White, American Indian. Home: Grew up in rural and small-town trailer parks in the South. Loves country music and rap, spends his free time studying his Native heritage and creating dream catchers, mainly for gifts.

ADDITIONAL CHARACTERS

Brownsville:

P. 8 Charles
P. 10 Young Black Boy
P. 12 Maine's father
P. 31 Second baseman
P. 32 Cop at baseball game
P. 42 Female Asst. Principal
P. 44 Long Beach's Grandpops
P. 50 Youth Detention Center Guard
P. 53 Johnny
P. 51 Correctional Officer 2
P. 55 Prisoner
P. 77 Maine's mother

Kansas City

p. 39 Lady

Long Beach:

P. 31 Catcher
P. 52 Judge
P. 73 Female Correctional Officer

Maine

P. 9 Richmond's Grandmama
P. 15 Bobby Cain
P. 26 Whitehouse's Grandpa
P. 29 Cop at stadium
P. 31 Third baseman
P. 36 Narcotics Officer
P. 39 Bus Driver
P. 41 Principal
P. 57 Big Bo
P. 63 Parole Board Member

Richmond

P. 6 Brownsville's Moms
P. 8 Miss Essie
P. 11 Brownsville's Grandmoms
P. 15 Kansas City's Papi
P. 18 Cop at Maine's house
P. 26 Kansas City's mom
P. 38 Big Shelley
P. 53 Woman Juror
P. 54 D-Rod
P. 70 Hoss

Whitehouse

P. 9 Richmond's Mama
P. 11 Bob
P. 18 Maine's brother
P. 29 White Woman
P. 30 Friend's Mom
P. 31 First Baseman
P. 35 Long Beach's Pops
P. 50 Kid 11
P. 51 Correctional Officer 1
P. 54 Mitchell
p. 78 Chowhound

SETTING

Lighting defines the cells. Within each rectangle of light, six evenly-spaced open cubes designate beds. Under each cube/bed, loose papers, pens, photos, toilet paper, towels, washcloths, combs, are scattered, stacked, or neatly stored.

A metal table with fixed stools serves as common room, chow hall, etc.

PRODUCTION NOTES

The character and setting descriptions and background information are offered for those who may not have great familiarity with men living on death row or with close custody settings.

The characters are composites, thus fictional. All the stories they tell are true.

Actual, real-time prison sounds, such as announcements, pneumatic doors, work noises, are recorded. The intercom announcements are jarring interruptions of the scene in progress. These announcements mark the progression of a day inside prison.

All story / memory sound effects ("Sound of . . . ") are made by the men on stage.

Properties, other than the few those allowed in their rooms, are mimed.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A cell in this facility is actually 6 feet by 9 feet. Each cell contains a steel toilet, with a sink built in the top. There is a steel bed, with an extremely thin mattress, and a small shelf hanging off the wall. Up high, a Plexiglas and wire window about 6 inches wide by 4 feet long allows the prisoner a slice of the outside world. The window in the cell door is the same material.

In the common area, the table and benches or seats are metal and bolted securely so nothing can be moved.

The prison is illuminated by harsh fluorescent light. From 11 pm--5am, the light dims but the facility is never dark.

This particular group of men has created as safe a space as possible in an inherently dangerous setting. When not participating in a memory scene, the men never forget they are in a prison. They do not touch one another, other than daps, as that could be perceived as threatening by a guard. In prison "real time" the men do not raise their voices at one another, for the same reason. An officer's response to any perceived infraction might be the "hole" aka solitary confinement. This threat of solitary segregation is very real and the time in segregation might easily last three months or more. Should emotion threaten to overtake one of the men, he will clamp down. The other men are respectful of this need to maintain control. A man might very rarely tear up or have a catch in his voice, but the men do not cry.

Most states in the US have a death row. In some prisons, the men are in segregation twenty-three hours a day, sometimes for decades. In other prisons, the men eat, take classes, and spend time in the day room together. COUNT is set in this second type of facility. Due to this access and the very stable population of a death row, these men have developed a certain ease with each other. If a prisoner doesn't care for someone, he avoids him. Men are careful not to rock the boat, because they value their small freedoms.

In prison, a good story is currency and a good storyteller is respected. After years of living together, the men know most of each other's stories by heart.

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As one man wrote about his contribution, "WE MUST ASPIRE TO INSPIRE BEFORE WE EXPIRE."

SCENE

Death Row.

TIME

Morning.

AT RISE: The men wear T-shirts and undershorts. LONG BEACH's lips and prayer beads move slowly. The other MEN are asleep.

LONG BEACH

(Opens eyes)

What shall I say of today?

INTERCOM

5 am! COUNT TIME! COUNT!

Sound of batons rapping on doors.

RICHMOND

Richmond. I come from the rusty tunnel that the creek flowed through, creamy grits thick with cheese, and Grandmama's bright orange fly swatter. Whap!

I belong to saggin' basketball rims, the motel drawer where my mama left me, "Stop crying 'fore I give you something to cry about" and "Black people are lazy."

One thing I know: The decisions you make today gone determine your tomorrow.

And I am a stone: solid, grounded, but covered by dirt.

RICHMOND freezes.

BROWNSVILLE

Brownsville. I come from my grandpop's clippers, New York pizza, and Pine Sol's lemony fresh scent.

I belong to dreadlocks and grills, my mom's heavy hands, "You're gonna be just like your father" and "Black men die young."

One thing I know: Words carry LIFE.

And I am a chess game, complicated, strategic, not for the faint of heart.

BROWNSVILLE freezes.

MAINE

Maine. I come from wicked good lemon cake, my father's wide leather belt, and a web of family secrets.

I belong to the sharp smell of pines, railroad tracks to nowhere, and "Only the paranoid survive, son!"

One thing I know: Success requires perseverance, dedication, and the will to win.

And I am a No. 2 pencil, worn, cracked, but still able to write.

MAINE freezes.

WHITEHOUSE

Whitehouse. I come from a slow-flowing river, croaker fried in a washpot, and the thick smoke of a woodstove.

I belong to busted out windows, hip hop and country, "What damn color are you, anyhow?" and "The only good Injun is a dead one."

One thing I know: What you put out, comes back.

And I am a tree; struck by lightnin' but still alive.

WHITEHOUSE freezes.

LONG BEACH

Long Beach. I come from the cliffs over Sunset Beach, Downey fabric softener and warm quiche Lorraine.

I belong to long distance running, suffocating sheets, "Stay in the closet" and "All black people are ignorant."

One thing I know: Love is the greatest power on earth.

And I am my prayer beads: worn, used, tried and tested.

LONG BEACH freezes.

KANSAS CITY

Kansas City. I come from the playground littered with crack pipes and bullet shells, credit at the corner store, and spicy tamales.

I belong to my baby sister's mocha skin, seeing the colors in shadows, "Quieres una pela pa que esa mierda se pare?" and "Go back to Mexico where you belong!"

One thing I know: Everybody wants heaven but don't nobody wanna die.

And I am a blank sheet of paper with infinite potential for the future.

KANSAS CITY freezes, sketching.

CHOW--BREAKFAST

INTERCOM

CHOW TIME! BREAKFAST! CHOW!

MEN begin to move. KANSAS CITY sketches.

RICHMOND

(Overlaps)

Chow! I'm starving!

MEN splash face, pull on jumpsuits.

KANSAS CITY

(To himself, as he draws)

Starving?! Dude, no. Starving is when you're three years old and haven't had breakfast and you're outta drawing paper, meaning unopened bills, tugging your mom's arm, begging--

(To mom)

WAKE UP! I'm starving! And she's just

(Snores loudly)

Guess I'm on my own.

(Opens cabinet, lifts cereal box)

Cereal? Check. Spoon? Check. Bowl . . . Nope.

KANSAS CITY shrugs, pours cereal on floor. BROWNSVILLE pauses by door.

BROWNSVILLE

Yo, what the hell's you doing, Kansas?!

RICHMOND joins. KANSAS CITY scrambles up, pulls on jumpsuit.

KANSAS CITY

Oh, Brownsville, dude, nothing. Just remembering kid stuff. Eating cereal.

RICHMOND

(Amused)

Off the floor?!

KANSAS CITY

Hey, I was little!

RICHMOND

Some things don't change.

BROWNSVILLE

(Gestures to floor)

What kinda cereal?

WHITEHOUSE joins.

KANSAS CITY

(Considers floor)

Looks like Trix: lemon yellow, orange orange.

WHITEHOUSE

Trix?! High dollar, bro.

KANSAS CITY

Dude, it was knock-off Trix. Called Pranks.

BROWNSVILLE

Word. In our crib, it was Frosted Flakes. "Of corn."

MAINE joins. MEN enter CHOW. Once they receive trays, they eat quickly.

RICHMOND

That's what the box actually said: FROSTED FLAKES and then this tiny "of corn." Shoot, I knew something won't right about that.

BROWNSVILLE

Had an animal on the box. Kangaroo or --

RICHMOND

I think it was a hippo. Or a bear. It was white, anyhow.

WHITEHOUSE

Figures.

BROWNSVILLE

Ghetto cereal.

RICHMOND

(Shoots imaginary ball)

I loved me some Fruit Hoops. How about you, Maine? What kind of cereal Yankees eat?

MAINE

Um, oatmeal?

RICHMOND

Seriously?

MAINE

It was friggin' cold.

KANSAS CITY

I thought oatmeal was hot.

BROWNSVILLE

No, Maine is cold.

KANSAS CITY

Dude, get your long johns.

BROWNSVILLE

The place.

MAINE

(Overlaps)

I'm not [cold]--listen, up north the frosted flakes were outside on the ground.

(To KANSAS CITY)

Ya know, you may be new here, but you sure catch on slow.

KANSAS CITY

(Grins)

Thanks.

BROWNSVILLE

Man, the best was when we woke up and Moms was still out clubbing. I'd pour me and my baby brother a bowlful and I mean full! Then I'd drag the TV to the closet and we'd climb inside with our cereal. Know what we called that little game? "Playing. Solitary."

LONG BEACH

(To himself, as he passes with
tray)

Time in a closet is not my idea of recreation.

RICHMOND

What's that, Beach?

LONG BEACH

Not a thing. "Words, my friends, are the small change of thought."

RICHMOND

Damn, that's profound.

(Writes in notebook)

Who said that?

LONG BEACH

I can't recall who said it first, but I know who said it last.

KANSAS CITY

(Clueless)

Huh?

MAINE

(To KANSAS CITY)

Really?!

LONG BEACH

I leave you gentlemen to it.

LONG BEACH exits Chow Hall.

BROWNSVILLE

Yeah, my first time in prison, I was three months old. Moms took me to visit my father.

KANSAS CITY

(Shakes head)

No manches.

BROWNSVILLE

Oh, manches most def. Not only that, first time Moms comes visit me in prison, she just stands there, looking around, like "Ain't nothin change."

RICHMOND plays BROWNSVILLE'S MOMS.

RICHMOND

(Overlaps)

Ain't nothin change.

BROWNSVILLE

Word. Same prison as my pops. Wasn't just my pops, neither. Grandmoms, aunts, uncles--they all did time. Yo, prison was a family reunion.

RICHMOND

Brownsville, tell City 'bout your cousin.

BROWNSVILLE

Man, hadn't seen him since I got locked up at nineteen. I'm sittin' here in Chow one day when this cat comes over, says, "Yo! I think we're cousins."

RICHMOND, WHITEHOUSE, MAINE

(Overlaps)

"Cousins!"

KANSAS CITY

And botha you on here death row? That's wack, dude.

BROWNSVILLE

Yeah, our lives was an accident waiting to happen.

LICENSES.

INTERCOM

TAG SHOP! LICENSES! TAG SHOP!

LONG BEACH returns to cell. MEN head to shop. One guides the roller machine, one carries plates to embosser, one embosses, one catches and boxes plates after their clear-coat bath.

KANSAS CITY

(Yells over machine noise)
Any you ever actually own a car?

MEN laugh, shake heads.

RICHMOND

No, but I stole a few.

BROWNSVILLE

(To KANSAS CITY)
You kidding, right? In New York City?

MAINE

I was locked up before I could drive. Legally.

KANSAS CITY

How about you, Whitehouse? First ride?

WHITEHOUSE

First ride?

Turns, makes sound of screeching tires and crash. MEN laugh.

KANSAS CITY

No manches.

WHITEHOUSE

First ride I remember, anyhow. My Uncle Buck's blue Camaro. I was maybe four. Middle of June, sun shinin', the entire trailer park outside. Kimberly was over at my Aunt Jeanie's.

KANSAS CITY

Who's Kimberly?

RICHMOND

His mom.

KANSAS CITY

(To WHITEHOUSE)

You call your mom Kimberly? Whitehouse, dude.

RICHMOND

I keep tellin' him it ain't right.

WHITEHOUSE

It's what everybody called her--she won't but a kid. Anyway, Kimberly and her sister Jeanie sold stuff to make ends meet-- liquor, weed, whatever. Uncle Buck was at work, which meant Aunt Jeanie's friend Charles might be visitin'. I liked Charles. He'd lift me over his head, like--

BROWNSVILLE plays Charles.

BROWNSVILLE

Little man be flyin'!

WHITEHOUSE

But first I had some important business: stopping at Ms. Essie's for my sugar fix.

(RICHMOND plays MS. ESSIE)

Ms. Essie was 'bout 147 years old and wore this Shirley Temple wig that was always just a little crooked.

MS. ESSIE

(Bends to dispense treats)

Two sugar cookies and two Hershey kisses.

(Straightens wig)

Damn wig.

(Smiles)

That'll be 25 cent.

WHITEHOUSE

Then outta nowhere:

Sound of gunshot, loud.

MS. ESSIE

Ain't nothin' but a backfire, baby.

WHITEHOUSE

But then--

(Sound of four quick gunshots)

I took off runnin'. Suddenly Uncle Buck's blue Chevy flew by, kickin' up gravel and sidsewipin' a parked car.

(Sound of tires screeching and crash)

I tore around the corner to Jeanie and Buck's trailer. The door was still cracked.

(Pushes door further, leans in)

Charles was lyin' on the floor, shades twisted over his head, Aunt Jeanie sprawled over him like a blanket. The middle of her forehead was oozin' red. I kept sayin: "Get up Auntie, get up, get up."

MAINE

(Overlaps, shakes head)

Get up.

WHITEHOUSE

Sheeit, any innocence I had fuckin' died that day. Along with my love affair for Hershey kisses.

RICHMOND

I feel ya. You need help with them Hershey kisses, just holla.

MEN laugh.

BROWNSVILLE

We got your back.

RICHMOND

Shoot, guns and kisses? Sounds like my grandmama!

MAINE plays RICHMOND'S GRANDMAMA.
Sound of kisses.

RICHMOND'S GRANDMAMA

Richmond, baby, come give me some sugar!

RICHMOND

Sweetest woman in the whole world. Anytime Mama said--

WHITEHOUSE plays RICHMOND'S MAMA.

RICHMOND'S MAMA

Absolutely not!

RICHMOND

Grandmama always said--

RICHMOND'S GRANDMAMA

Of course you can, baby.

RICHMOND

So one night I hear this--

(Sound of banging as RICHMOND
peeps out bedroom door)

Grandmama's in the hallway, cussin' at Mama's door. And she ain't holding no orange fly swatter--she's holding a pistol! I was too little to understand she'd been drinking. All I knew was Grandmama had a gun!

RICHMOND'S GRANDMAMA

I'm gone shoot that goddamn nigga.

RICHMOND

I'd never heard her say such awful words.

RICHMOND'S MAMA

(Opens bedroom door)

You're not shooting anybody. Not unless you shoot me first.

RICHMOND

I was so afraid she was gonna shoot Mama I didn't know what to do. Then--

RICHMOND'S GRANDMAMA

(Mutters)

Nigger-lover.

RICHMOND

Tears just spilled down my cheeks. I didn't understand Grandmama was talking about my white mother and some man. I thought she meant Mama was wrong for loving me.

(Pause)

I sat there on my bed, wonderin' why black people were called niggers and how come we wasn't supposed to be . . . [loved].

RICHMOND clears throat.

KANSAS CITY

Dude, I remember the first time I had a gun pulled on me. I was walking home with my kid brother and he goes, "How come it's so dark?" I'm like--

(To little brother)

Power's out. Happens every summer.

(To MEN)

I'm trying to act all cholo, cause in our hood if you was sensitive, you was something to eat. I was only ten but I already knew plenty. I knew all that bullshit you saw on TV wasn't real. Nobody in their right mind chases anyone with a gun. And if somebody shoots at you, you run the other way. I mean, when a gun's drawn, there ain't no witty dialogue happenin'!

(MEN laugh. Yeah.)

So when this kid rolls up on a hooptie bike, goin "Y'all got--

BROWNSVILLE plays YOUNG BLACK BOY.

YOUNG BLACK BOY

Any money?

(KANSAS CITY looks at brother,
then shakes his head.)

Nigga, please. I know you got somethin'.

KANSAS CITY

The chacho was maybe 12.

(Raises hands)

I mean, we're two little boys in torn sneakers. On our best day we maybe had a dollar between us.

(Glances at arm)

But I had a watch, a Timex. From my mom. I was so proud she trusted me with something valuable.

(Hands over watch)

That's when I understood. My life could be taken for any reason. Or no reason whatsoever. My life: didn't matter. Dude, I never watched TV again. Our drama was live.

RICHMOND

And won't no way to change the channel.

RICHMOND dunks imaginary basketball.

BROWNSVILLE

(Belts out opening notes of
Star Trek theme. Some MEN
join.)

To boldly go where no man--yo, son, my very first memory at
all, ever, is a gun.

WHITEHOUSE plays BOB.

BOB

Gotdammit!!!

BROWNSVILLE

I'm sitting in my grandmoms' apartment playing with my
Starship Enterprise. She's arguing with her boyfriend Bob
and he hauls back and

(Sound of loud slap)

Grandmoms reaches in her bathrobe pocket, Bob grabs her hand,
they start tussling, and then there's this loud--

Sound of gunshot.

BOB

Gotdammit, Daisy, you fuckin' shot my foot!

MEN laugh.

KANSAS CITY

What'd she do, just shoot through the pocket?!

BROWNSVILLE

(Laughs)

Guess so. My six-year-old cousin comes running in, so
Grandmoms gives her the gun.

RICHMOND plays BROWNSVILLE'S GRANDMOMS.

BROWNSVILLE'S GRANDMOMS

Here, hide this in the basement. And take the baby witcha.

BROWNSVILLE

Talk about excited! Not only had Grandmoms just shot Bob, we
were going somewhere I'd never gone before: the basement!

KANSAS CITY

Dude, hood life is basically boot camp for prison.

MAINE

Fuck, childhood is boot camp for prison.

(Sound of shrill whistle.

Imitates father)

Life is what, men?!

(To father)

War, sir, war!

(As father)

Right! And my job is?

(To father)

Make us men, sir!

BROWNSVILLE plays MAINE'S FATHER.

MAINE'S FATHER

Right! And am I doing this outta love for you boys?

MAINE

No, Dad, no!

MAINE'S FATHER

Right! Always assume they are trying to kill you! Who's it gonna be, them or you?!

MAINE

Them, Dad, them!

BROWNSVILLE

Yeah, if you ain't lived it, you got no idea what it's like always being on edge.

KANSAS CITY

When random violence is the soundtrack of your life.

MAINE

(Imitates father, extends hand)

Kneel, son, kneel! Now choke yourself!

RICHMOND

And the enemy is . . . everybody.

KANSAS CITY

Dude, it's a perfect storm.

RICHMOND

If you like crazy.

MEDICATION CART MORNING

INTERCOM

MEDICATION CART! MORNING MEDS! MEDICATION!

RICHMOND, WHITEHOUSE, LONG BEACH, and
MAINE join med line. BROWNSVILLE plays
chess. KANSAS CITY sketches.
WHITEHOUSE unravels remaining sock.

RICHMOND

(To nurse)

Depression. PTSD.

RICHMOND receives paper pill cup.

WHITEHOUSE

Anxiety. PTSD.

WHITEHOUSE receives paper pill cup.

LONG BEACH

Bipolar disorder. PTSD.

LONG BEACH receives paper pill cup.

MAINE

Batshit crazy.

MAINE offers cupped hands for meds.

WHITEHOUSE

(To MAINE)

You gotta focus on the good times, bro. Swimmin' in the
creek, fishin'--man, I'd fish in a mud puddle! You need to
lock that other crap where it belongs. In the past. Cause
growing up in my house? Sheeit. We was poor as sawmill
rats. Windows busted out, no hot water less we heated it on
the woodstove.

RICHMOND

If we ain't had hot water it's cause they cut off our power.

BROWNSVILLE

(Imitating woman)

Baby, did you not pay the light bill man again?

MEN laugh. Sound of slap. Laughter stops.

WHITEHOUSE

I hated that shit. My stepdad beat Kimberly all the time. This one night when my baby brother was about a month old, my stepdad knocked Kimberly around, then told her to get the hell out of the house and take us with her. One in the morning, where we gonna go? Plus, it was rainin'. So, we huddled under this big oak tree. Kimberly tryin' to cover me 'n the baby with her jacket. Soon as it was daylight--

(MAINE makes sound of birdsong.
RICHMOND adds frogs. KANSAS
CITY adds loud, threatening
growl.)

What the hell was that?

KANSAS CITY

I dunno, a bear?

WHITEHOUSE

It's the country, not a damn zoo.

MEN laugh.

RICHMOND

Finish the story. I ain't never heard this.

WHITEHOUSE

I ain't never told it. I swear, unraveling these socks is messing with my head. Kimberly gives me the baby while she goes to check if my stepdad's passed out yet. I tried to keep the baby warm, but . . . by suppertime, he was sick. A few nights later, he died.

LONG BEACH

Ah, guilt, the gift that keeps on giving.

RICHMOND

Damn, that's depressing.

LONG BEACH

(To WHITEHOUSE)

We may be guilty of the good we failed to do, my friend, but not of the good we failed while doing.

RICHMOND

Who said that?

LONG BEACH

Voltaire . . . more or less. Meaning, you can't always protect the people you love.

WHITEHOUSE

Know what's really messed up? Nobody ever talked about what happened. I used to sneak over and put flowers by his little headstone. Tattooed his initials on my arm. So he'd know I ain't forgot.

WHITEHOUSE quickly pulls out dream catcher and starts working.

KANSAS CITY

Carajo, dude, my parents divorced when I was 5 and I knew exactly why. Cause my papi was crazy! I told you 'bout how my auntie's husband, Bobby Cain, was white? Yeah, so, they had a house and everything! Well, a doublewide trailer but we thought she was mad rich.

(MEN laugh)

She and my Papi was celebratin' a visit from this brother they hadn't seen in like ten years. Dude, the place was littered with potato chips, cake, toy soldiers, and six kids sloppy with ketchup and blue icing. It was dope.

Sound of lovemaking in bedroom.

RICHMOND plays KANSAS CITY'S PAPI.

KANSAS CITY'S PAPI

Yeah, baby.

KANSAS CITY

My dad was, um, "borrowing" my auntie's bedroom for him and some lady friend while my auntie and their brother smoked their special cigarette. Suddenly the front door opened and in walked my auntie's husband, Bobby Cain.

MAINE plays BOBBY CAIN.

BOBBY CAIN

(Zeroes in on lovemaking noises)

What the fuck--

KANSAS CITY

Dude, he nearly tore the bedroom door off it's hinges. Then he snatched a sawed-off shotgun from the hall closet

(PAPI appears, zipping pants)

And started walking forward, gun pointed at my dad's belly. Papi's brother pulls out this huge knife and goes, "You know if you kill mi hermano, I'm gonna kill you."

BOBBY CAIN

(To uncle)

I got two barrels. You're welcome to one.

KANSAS CITY'S PAPI

(Looks at KANSAS CITY)

Don't kill me in front of my kids.

Pause. BOBBY CAIN motions PAPI outside.

KANSAS CITY

My aunt tried to hold us back but we ducked past.

(BOBBY CAIN and PAPI face off.)

They just stood there, the sky behind them red and blistered.

(Pause)

Then Bobby Cain pulled the trigger.

Sound of clicking trigger. Everyone jumps. Sound of a second click. KANSAS CITY'S PAPI springs forward.

KANSAS CITY'S PAPI

Chingad[era]--

KANSAS CITY

(Overlaps)

Papi slammed Bobby Cain onto the ground and started pounding

(Sound of punches)

left, right, left, right. His brother grabbed him, "Stop! You're gonna kill him. Basta!"

PAPI freezes, fight drains away.

KANSAS CITY

My dad's bare chest was soaked with Cain's blood.

(Shakes head)

After that, dude, you better believe I kept my mouth shut when Papi beat us. I had seen . . .

LONG BEACH

What a father is capable of.

KANSAS CITY and BROWNSVILLE turn, curious.

BROWNSVILLE

You got somethin' to share, LB?

LONG BEACH

Indeed I do . . . not.

(Stands)

I trust you're perfectly capable of discussing me in my absence.

(Turns)

I should ponder my New Year's resolution.

WHITEHOUSE

Ponder, nothing. I got mine already.

KANSAS CITY

Dope. What is it?

WHITEHOUSE

Not to make no resolutions. One day at a time, bro. And leave the past right there.

KANSAS CITY

Yeah, I feel ya. The past está jodido.

RICHMOND

What's jodido?

KANSAS CITY

Fucked, dude, totally fucked.

RICHMOND

(Writes in notebook)

Jodido--I love me some Español cuss words.

(Reads)

Pendejo, culero--

KANSAS CITY

Just be careful where you say those.

MAINE

Yeah, you liable to piss of some Beaner.

KANSAS CITY

Beaner? Really?

MAINE

Yeah, fuck Español. Gimme plain ol' English. Fuck: The most versatile word in the entire English language.

WHITEHOUSE

Maine, you don't speak English. You speak Maineglish. Cause you mangle the mother tongue.

(Imitates MAINE)

Fathers is some hard bastards, bro.

MAINE

First off, I don't say "bro." And I don't say "Fathers is some hard bastards." I say, "Fathers is some hard bastards."

(MEN exchange looks--sounds exactly the same)

What?!

RICHMOND

In mi casa it won't my father with the heavy hands. It was Mama! And I ain't never cried when she beat me. Too proud. But now? Shoot, I can't even watch Extreme Home Makeover without tearin' up. It's embarrassin'.

BROWNSVILLE

So, that's why Richmond stands in the back when the soaps are on.

MEN laugh.

MAINE

I called the police on my father once.

KANSAS CITY

And lived to tell?

MAINE

We were standing in the garage. Well, he was. I was dangling in the air with his hands around my throat. My big brother busted in--

WHITEHOUSE plays MAINE'S BROTHER.

MAINE'S BROTHER

Let him go, Dad!!! Or I will friggin' kill you!

MAINE

He charged my dad, I hit the floor, and--

MAINE'S BROTHER

Run!!!

MAINE

A friend's mom called the cops. Jesus, I couldn't believe it--the years of abuse would finally be over. Cop put me in the cruiser, rolled up to my house, and confronted my dad with a list of charges.

MAINE'S FATHER

(Blows a smoke ring)

Fuck, yeah, I did it.

MAINE

My dad dropped the cigarette and ground it out with his bare foot. The cop looked from him to me to him.

RICHMOND plays COP.

COP

(Pushes MAINE forward)

Sorry, kid, but you musta deserved it.

KANSAS CITY

The sooner you learn ain't nobody comin' to save you, the better.

MAINE

Yeah, same with the military. Their attitude toward his crazy was: "It's all in your head." Kinda confusing how something in his head could break so many of our bones.

KANSAS CITY
Chiflado, dude. Nuts.

MAINE
Totally.

CANTEEN CALL.

INTERCOM
CANTEEN! LAST CALL FOR CANTEEN!

KANSAS CITY, RICHMOND, MAINE, and
WHITEHOUSE head for canteen.

KANSAS CITY

(To Canteen)
Peanut M&Ms. Three packs.

WHITEHOUSE
What I wouldn't give for one of Ms. Essie's sugar cookies.

RICHMOND
You know you ain't got no money in your J-Pay account, ever.

(To KANSAS CITY)
And you better watch that sugar.

KANSAS CITY
Dude, I don't eat the M&MS. I use the color for paint.

RICHMOND
So, uh, what happens to the peanuts?

MAINE

(To RICHMOND)
You do know that is disgusting?

RICHMOND

(To Canteen)
Pack o' Nabs, please.

(Sighs)
Shoot, when I was a kid, I swore when I got grown, I won't
eatin' nothin' but Whoppers and Cow Tales.

MAINE

Cow tails?! Jesus, Southerners. Are you serious?

RICHMOND

As a diabetic coma. Only time I ever got candy was if I stole it. Or, it was Halloween. Dang, I loved Halloween. The Superbowl of Sugar.

MAINE

At your house, maybe.

MAINE'S FATHER

That's what's wrong with this fucking country, kids think they can just hold out their hands and get candy!

MAINE

We weren't his kids. We were his friggin' troops! Our mission: break windows, slice tires, sling crap on whoever he was feudin' with--

MAINE'S FATHER

(Pleased)

That's how you earn your candy.

WHITEHOUSE

Them military guys need treatment, bro.

RICHMOND

(Shakes head)

Like Yard Dog.

KANSAS CITY

Who's Yard Dog?

WHITEHOUSE

He should not be in this place.

RICHMOND

Dog mostly stays in his room. Says bein' around folks is too embarrassin'.

WHITEHOUSE

Hears voices and shit.

BROWNSVILLE

Yeah, cats all chillin' and outta nowhere, BOOM, he goes kinetic, yellin' and swingin'.

WHITEHOUSE

Ain't right. Military oughta get Yard Dog 'n them some help.

BROWNSVILLE

That's how come his attorneys keep filin' clemency petitions.
Every four years

(Hits table)

On the governor's desk. Probably got one there now--it's New Years Eve. Which means they'll be hoping to hear somethin' before midnight.

KANSAS CITY

What're they petitioning for?

BROWNSVILLE

L-WOP.

MAINE

(Shakes head)

Life without the possibility of parole.

KANSAS CITY

What grounds?

BROWNSVILLE

(Laughs)

Pretty sure it's mental health.

MAINE

Could be multiple grounds. Judicial process, misconduct--lotta exonerations cause of lab error.

BROWNSVILLE

Ain't no "error" when the prosecutor tells the lab what results to manufacture. No wonder Justice wears a blindfold.

KANSAS CITY

(Shakes head)

Dude. You give me a choice between life without parole and death with the possibility of another trial, I'd have to put 12 jurors back in the box.

WHITEHOUSE

Sheeit, you outta your mind. Jury system's a lottery. Ain't no predictin' that outcome.

KANSAS CITY

You telling me? Nobody thought I'd get death. The freakin' prosecutor was shocked. Naw, give me twelve in the box. I gotta believe another jury'd vote different.

MAINE

Yep, you accept life, that's the end of your legal representation.

BROWNSVILLE

Yo, son, a dead man can't do nothing. With life, I still got hope, feel me? **I can** campaign, write letters, put myself in the governor's hands.

RICHMOND

How's that working for Yard Dog? Purple Heart, Bronze Star, shoot, if they ain't grantin' him L-WOP, who they givin' it to?

WHITEHOUSE

Know who else got a petition up? Chewbacca.

KANSAS CITY

No manches! What grounds?

MAINE

Insanity. Not his, the court's.

WHITEHOUSE

Chewie got his death sentenced reversed on account of jury bias.