

Seven Black Men

by Phillip W. Weiss

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Characters

Will Bosby – actor and academic

L. K. Sampson – former football star

Mujabbah Kalih – former boxing champion

Nighk Byson – former boxing champion

Kim E. Broun – former football star

Milt Haimberlain – former basketball star

Dyger Woots – golf star

This is a one-act play consisting of three scenes.

Disclaimer

Although this play is inspired by actual persons and events, it is a work of fiction and should be construed as such. Any similarity to any persons living or dead is unintended and entirely coincidental. The dialog contained herein is the product of the author's imagination.

Synopsis: Seven famous American black men discuss the role of race in defining their identities.

This play is dedicated to the life of Paul Robeson: actor, athlete, activist, scholar and champion for justice.

Scene 1

Time: the present

Place: a room

Setting: Seven black men are sitting at a table. Each one is famous and successful. Although they have known of one another, this is the first time they have personally met.

WILL

My name is Will Bosby. I'm an actor and a scholar. I have a Ph. D. in education. I produced and starred in one of the most popular television sitcoms in history and became a role model for all aspiring African-Americans. I'm also a veteran of the US Navy and something of a lady's man.

SAMPSON

I'm L. K. Sampson. I'm an ex-football player. I was the first player to rush for over two thousand yards in a season. After I quit playing football I became an actor. On the negative side, I've had some brushes with the law involving some minor misunderstandings.

KALIH

If you are a boxing fan you probably already heard of me. I was born Charlie Kay but later on became a Black Muslim and changed my name to Mujabbah Kalih. I was three-time heavyweight champion of the world. I was stripped of my title after I refused to be drafted into the army.

NIGHK

I'm Nighk Byson. I'm just a regular guy from Brooklyn, street smart and tough. I was the youngest and most intimidating heavyweight champion in history. Later on I served time in the pen. But that's in the past.

KIM E.

My name is Kim E. Broun. I was one of the first black super stars in professional football. I led the league in rushing eight times and won a championship. I quit football while at the top of my game and became an actor. I'm an old man now, but still have things to say.

MILT

I'm Milt Haimberlain. Some consider me the greatest professional basketball player in the history of the game. I'm the first and so far only player ever to score four thousand points in one season and one hundred points in one game. I'm also a prolific lover.

DYGER

My name is Dyger Woots. I have won eighty major golf events and fourteen major championships, and during my career have made over a billion dollars in winnings and endorsements. But I've also had some domestic issues which have set me back. Hopefully I'll be able to get back on the winning track soon.

NIGHK

What are we doing here?

SAMPSON

Somebody sent me an invitation to attend a special event. Is this the event?

KALIH

I got the same invitation. So, here I am.

WILL

I have a feeling that we all received the same invitation.

SAMPSON

Says on the invitation, quote, you are cordially invited to attend a special event. This event will discuss the relationship of the successful black man in a white dominated society, closed quote. It sounded interesting to me, so I said to myself, Why not? What else am I doing? My life's already a disaster.

DYGER

That's your fault.

SAMPSON

I didn't say it wasn't, but I will tell you right now: I never murdered my wife.

MILT

You've been saying that ever since you beat the rap. You know you got off only because the jury was all black and the judge was a joke.

NIGHK

Hey, I got some experience with the legal system too, and let me tell you, it is stacked against the black man. I know, I spent three years in jail for something I didn't do.

KIM E.

But the bro here beat the rap, and he's black, so how come you went to jail and he didn't?

NIGHK

He had the best lawyers money could buy. I had some court appointed putz.

KALIH

You guys repulse me. Real lowlifes, that's what you are, carousing around with white women ...

NIGHK

In my case, the lady was black.

DYGER

Black, white. What's the difference?

WILL

All the difference in the world. I've had fifty women accuse me of raping them, and all of them are white.

KALIH

That's what happens when you mess around with white ladies. They come back to bite you, badly. That's why I stayed away from them.

DYGER

I wish I did that.

KALIH

Look at you. You're half black, half Chinese ...

DYGER

Half Thai ...

KALIH

Whatever, my point being that you don't even know what you are.

WILL

Hey, Kalih, all of us are black, including Dyger. Look at the color of our skin. That says it all.

KIM E.

Big deal. Skin color don't mean squat. Blackness is a question of culture.

SAMPSON

Don't mean anything to me either. I became a star because of my talent, not because of my skin color.

MILT

But that don't matter. People still see the color of your skin – which is black – and that puts you immediately behind the eight ball.

KIM E.

Can that pool talk. Talk plainly. What are you trying to say?

MILT

I am talking plainly. I used a metaphor to try to make my point.

KIM E.

Which is?

MILT

That we are stigmatized.

KALIH

You believe that crap? That's what the white people want you to believe. That we're no good. Me? I was up front about where I was coming from. I even changed my name.

MILT

You did that just to make a lot of noise.

KALIH

I did not. I did it out of conviction. Personal beliefs.

DYGER

Don't make me laugh, brother. You made the noise you did to avoid military service. Be honest. Admit it.

KALIH

I did no such thing.

WILL

Yes, you did. I served four years in the Navy, state side. You could have done the same thing too.

KALIH

Your situation was different.

WILL

No, it wasn't. I could have said up yours, I'm not serving this racist country.

MILT

But at the time you weren't a star. They would have thrown your ass in prison.

WILL

But I didn't give them cause to do that. Instead I served. I didn't grandstand like my friend over here did.

KALIH

You wanted to play the Uncle Tom? Fine. I'm not you.

NIGHK

Who are you calling Uncle Tom? I wanted to make money, and made a ton of it.

WILL

What good was it? Now you're a bum.

NIGHK

I'm no bum. I worked my way up from the street to become champ. But it's easy for you to talk. You're an actor. Me? I went into the ring and put it on the line.

WILL

Acting can be a tough way to make a living too.

KALIH

Acting? Tough? Don't make me laugh. Have you ever been in the ring?

WILL

Yeah. I boxed when I was in the Navy.

KALIH

Big deal. You fought amateurs. I went up against the best in the world.

MILT

I did some boxing too. I liked it.

DYGER

All that brute force stuff turns me off. Me, I like the finesse that goes along with playing golf.

NIGHK

Golf is a pussy sport.

DYGER

Not when you're on the eighteenth hole and ten million dollars is riding on one shot, it isn't. And please stop getting on my case.

NIGHK

Hey, we're just talking, Okay? No need to cop an attitude.

DYGER

Just because I don't get my head bashed in does not mean I'm not a man.

MILT

There's more to being a man than being tough.

KIM E.

I'm not cool with that macho garbage either. Too phony.

KALIH

But that's how people see us, and it scares them.

KIM E.

You mean white people.

KALIH

I mean all people. Look, I'm a Muslim and I believe in peace. That's why I refused to be drafted.

WILL

And you paid the price.

KALIH

I did, but you think I would have been treated that way if I was white?

MILT

But you weren't white and you broke the law.

NIGHK

We've all broken the law. Isn't that right, Sampson?

SAMPSON

Why are you asking me? I was found not guilty.

NIGHK

In LA you were, not in Vegas.

SAMPSON

That was different. There the judge had it in for me.

MILT

That's right, blame it on the judge. Why can't you take responsibility for what you did?

SAMPSON

I didn't do anything.

DYGER

So, you got convicted for nothing?

SAMPSON

That's right. For nothing. All political. Anybody else would have gotten a slap on the wrist. Instead the judge threw the book at me. It sucks. And that is racist.

KIM E.

I was a major football star too, and I managed to stay out of jail.

MILT

You had your run-ins too. What about all those women who complained about you assaulting them.

KIM E.

Bunch of shake down artists, that's all, trying to capitalize on my fame.

NIGHK

That's what I said too.

KIM E.

You see, you understand what I'm talking about. That shows that you're cool.

WILL

I'll tell you, being famous can be rough. You really have to watch yourself.

KIM E.

But being famous can be very lucrative too. So would you rather be poor and unknown, or rich and famous?

MILT

Isn't becoming rich and famous the American dream?

SAMPSON

It sure was for me. I wasn't playing football for nothing.

MILT

You mean you didn't play for the love of the sport?

SAMPSON

Are you joking? No way.

MILT

No. I'm not joking. Why would you think that I'm joking?

SAMPSON

Hey, cool it, man. It's just a saying.

KIM E.

No need to get so touchy. We're just talking here.

DYGER

About what?

NIGHK

I was never much for talking. I let my fists do the talking for me.

DYGER

Man of action, right?

NIGHK

You got it. That's what I've believe. Don't say it, do it.

WILL

I think all of us have been guided by that principle.

SAMPSON

I did too, and look where it got me. Nowhere.

KIM E.

You were a great player, almost as good as me.

SAMPSON

Thanks, bro, but I think I was a little bit better than you.

KIM E.

I won a championship, you didn't.

SAMPSON

But I ran for 2,000 yards in one season, playing for a mediocre team.

KIM E.

That's the problem – you think you're such hot stuff. That's why you never won a championship.

KALIH

That's right. You had it all and you blew it, badly. You had the money, the fame, the notoriety, and you flushed it down the toilet.

SAMPSON

That isn't true.

WILL

It is true. In fact, it's true for all of us.

MILT

Speak for yourself, buddy. I'm happy with my life.

NIGHK

That you bonked twenty thousand women? How did that help improve the image of black men?

MILT

Showed that we can compile impressive stats. I also scored four thousand points in one season.

WILL

You see? Black men are supermen. We can do anything we want.

DYGER

I never thought race was a factor in my career.

KIM E.

A half black half Asian man playing a game dominated by white men and you never thought that race was a factor. Whatever you say.

DYGER

No need to get so condescending with me.

KIM E.

It just sounds so ... stupid. You think that people weren't judging you by a different standard?

KALIH

I know that in my case race was a huge factor in my career.

MILT

That's because you made it a factor. If you had kept your mouth shut the issue wouldn't have come up.

KALIH

Don't be naive. If I hadn't brought it up, I'd be just another Uncle Tom nigger doing the bidding of the white man, and I wasn't going to have any of that, you hear?

MILT

Get this straight: I'm no Uncle Tom and I don't do anyone's bidding. I was well paid for what I did, and so were you. So you have no cause to complain. And please, don't use the n-word again. It offends me.

KALIH

Between bros the n-word is not a derogatory term. That you find its use offensive just shows how white you've become. And you honestly believe that people are color blind?

MILT

Let me tell you something, bro. You have no idea what you're talking about. You think using the n-word is cool but it's not. White people love it when we call each other that word. It confirms and legitimizes every negative stereotype they have of us. Even at the height of Jim Crow the use of that word brought shame, even to the most hardcore racists. Now you hear and see that word everywhere: in movies, television, online, and now from you, a man who changed his name in an attempt to refute what that horrible word signifies. And you accuse me of being white. Why? Because I was paid money from white people to entertain the public? That makes me an Uncle Tom? No, that makes me a worker.

DYGER

Look: people are not colorblind. Okay? But as long as you're producing, then they're not going to throw race in your face.

KALIH

So, what you're saying is that if you hush up and put on that water melon smile and do your job, everything will be cool.

DYGER

That's right, as long as you're making money for them.

SAMPSON

Until something goes wrong, then they'll turn on you faster than a bolt of lightning, and shove that watermelon down your throat.

NIGHK

Is that why your wife was chasing you down the road with a golf club in her hand?

DYGER

That was all hyped up by the news.

NIGHK

I don't think so. Maybe somebody put in the word to her, tipped her off, and all of a sudden you were no longer the fair haired boy. You became the evil, deceitful monster who's a phony and a cheat.

DYGER

I never claimed to be perfect.

WILL

But you were marketing yourself as being perfect, and the public doesn't like to be lied to.

KIM E.

That's right, and that goes double when you happen to be black.

KALIH

Double-standard, man. If you're white you're a bum, but if you're black you're a criminal and a threat. It's political.

WILL

Politics of race. I heard that before, but to tell you the truth I'm not sure what it means.

SAMPSON

But you're the guy with the Ph. D. So you should be explaining what it means to us.

KIM E.

Just another slogan.

MILT

Meanwhile we were given opportunities that blacks in the past never had. So things can't be all that bad.

NIGHK

Given opportunity? Nobody gave me anything. I made my own opportunities. I came up from nothing. No advantages.

WILL

None of us had advantages.

DYGER

That's right.

WILL

Except for you, Dyger. You were born with a silver spoon in your mouth.

DYGER

No I wasn't. My father was a sergeant in the Army.

KIM E.

Who was able to get you on TV when you were three.

DYGER

I really miss my father. He was a great man.

NIGHK

At least your father was around. I never knew mine.

MILT

That's tough going through life not knowing your father.

KALIH

Well, I knew who my father was. But we didn't get along too well. He didn't like my attitude.

SAMPSON

Even when you won that Olympic medal?

KALIH

Even then. He didn't approve of anything I did.

WILL

It sounds that he was a proud man.

KALIH

Proud and angry. Always put down, always kept in his place. Never given the opportunity to really better himself. Real injustice.

DYGER

That's sad. But my dad was there for me.

KIM E.

You were lucky. A lot of black men can't say that.

WILL

I don't know about that. My father was a there for me. He was a professional man, certainly responsible. So, I can't totally endorse this stereotyping of all black men as being a bunch of irresponsible thugs.

SAMPSON

But this is the image of black men that is fed to the public. All black women are on welfare, all black men are pimps. All crap.

NIGHK

Some of it is the truth. Where I grew up in Brooklyn, almost no one knew their fathers.

KALIH

But that was where you grew up. It didn't make it true everywhere.

MILT

Look, I'm from Philly and ...

WILL

I'm from Philly too.

MILT

Too bad we never crossed tracks when we were kids. We could have been friends.

WILL

Didn't work out like that. You went to college, became a basketball star. I took a different road.

SAMPSON

That took you to the same place. Here with us. Losers' Lane.

WILL

Speak for yourself. We're not losers. We're winners. We've all made a ton of money. How's that being a loser?

SAMPSON

Because we are stigmatized, marginalized, and de-humanized, no matter what we do and no matter how much money we make. In fact, the more money we make the more we are hated and despised. Our displays of wealth are perceived as showboating and our money as ill-begotten. No one takes us seriously, except when we act out, and then out comes the race card to de-legitimize us and put us back in our place.

WILL

I still feel like I'm a winner.

SAMPSON

Delude yourself all you want.

NIGHK

Being black comes with a ton of problems.

WILL

Everyone has problems.

NIGHK

Ours are bigger.

SAMPSON

When I was playing football, I thought the party would never stop. Man, I thought I was on top of the world.

MILT

Me too. I was making money, being hailed as the greatest basketball player in the world, yet it wasn't enough. I still was under pressure to prove myself.

KALIH

That's because while you were scoring points other guys were winning championships.

MILT

That's true but they had better supporting casts. There was nothing I could do about that. I was still the best player. And that's what kept bothering me. The press kept on comparing me to them when in fact there was no basis for comparison.

SAMPSON

Same thing happened to me. People would ask: Where's your championship ring? I'd tell them to get lost.

DYGER

You would say that to reporters?

SAMPSON

Well, I didn't exactly use those words, but still I was annoyed.

KALIH

Notice how the press would play black men off against each other?

NIGHK

That was more than coincidental. You know, divide and conquer.

WILL

Look how dominating the black athlete has become in sports. Maybe the system isn't as rigged as it used to be for the black man.

KIM E.

I have to disagree with you there, bro. The black athlete is open to more exploitation now than in the past. There is much more pressure on him to excel. If he fails, he is lambasted mercilessly, labeled as a failure, his "work ethic" is called into question and his motives impugned. Let me tell you a little story. This was when I was still playing football. I was in this bar having a drink, minding my own business. Then this scruffy looking white dude, who I had seen hanging around the locker room at the stadium after the game, comes over to me and asks, "What's it like to be black?" Normally, I would have told the dude to get out of here. After all, who was he to be asking me a question like that? What are we? Freaks? Mutations? I'm a human being too. Why pose a question that separates me from others and calls attention to my skin color? I thought about decking him, but I wasn't about to let him provoke me. I couldn't afford that. Being a big star and being a black man, I had too much to lose by acting out, especially in public, which is what this guy was trying to get me to do. But since he asked me a direct question, I figured I'd give him a direct answer, so I told him, "Being black in this racist society sucks." So the guy says to me, "Hey, man, I can dig it." Coming from a white man, I found that comment to be patronizing. What white person could ever possibly understand what it must feel like to be black? It took all my willpower to restrain myself from hauling off on the guy. Instead, I stayed calm, and with all the dignity I could muster, I replied, "But you're not black, so you can't possibly understand. And why would you want to tell a black man such an idiotic thing like that anyway?" Then one of his buddies comes over and says something like, "We're big fans of yours and we were just trying to make conversation." I said, "Yeah, right," and then, while still maintaining my cool, told them, in graphic language that even you guys would have found shocking, where they could stuff their conversation. That ended the discussion. Both of them gave me dirty looks, quickly finished their drinks and slinked away. No damage was done, that is, none that was visible. Two white men trying to use me to provoke a racial incident, for reasons that would have benefitted them but would have been disastrous for me. That's what happens when you're famous and black. That's why you always have to be on your guard. They're always looking to pull you down, put you on the defensive and use you to confirm their own racist attitudes. It's just the way it is.

NIGHK

So we're targets for every bigot with an axe to grind. Big deal. The paychecks are big and are even getting bigger, so somebody out there must like us.

KIM E.

We're the hired help, nothing more, and we are expendable. Remember: people are fickle. Look what happened to that mealy-mouthed right wing know-it-all on that cable news channel who was the number one rated news commentator in the country. After reports went public about his sexual improprieties at the network, they fired his butt, fast, while he was on vacation. Being one of the biggest draws on television didn't stop the network from summarily kicking him out. And he was a white guy. Meanwhile, the attacks are getting more vicious, the insinuations more vitriolic and the rhetoric more vulgar.

MILT

I think you're right. When the white man dominated in sports, you never heard about drug testing. Now, that's all you hear about.

SAMPSON

But white athletes are affected by that too.

MILT

But not as disproportionately as it affects black athletes. Let me tell you, if I was putting up the numbers today that I put up when I was playing, they would have accused me of being on drugs.

WILL

Well, were you on drugs?

MILT

No way, man. I was as clean as a whistle. When I was playing that stuff didn't even exist.

SAMPSON

There's always been drugs. Uppers, downers, pain-killers, they've always been around, and used.

MILT

The only drug I took was booze. That was my drug of choice.

KIM E.

Mine too, and cigarettes. At that time, smoking was cool. Not like today. Maybe it would be better if they brought back nicotine. Might lead to less abuse of performance enhancing drugs.

DYGER

Bad idea. I can't stand tobacco. I never smoked and I never will.

NIGHK

You must be the only black man on this planet who never smoked. I don't know what I would have done without my cigarettes, especially while I was fighting. I finally quit when a doc told me that it was clogging up my lungs.

DYGER

Good for you. You did the right thing.

NIGHK

Yeah. Then the next thing I was arrested for rape. Maybe I shouldn't have listened to that doc. I would have done better if I had stuck with cigarettes and not fooled with that woman. At least cigarettes don't complain after being used.

DYGER

Are you really that callous?

NIGHK

No, man. I was just joking. I did what I did. It had nothing to do with me cutting out smokes. She was a foxy-looking lady; I liked her and I thought she liked me.

WILL

The mind can play tricks on you.

NIGHK

And on your dick too. It had nothing to do with tobacco.

KALIH

Drugs have always been a problem, in sports and in society. When I became a Muslim, I renounced the use of drugs, alcohol and all other substances not prescribed by a medical doctor.

WILL

There's no need to bring religion into this.

KALIH

I'm not bringing religion into this. I'm just telling you what I did to fend off the kind of attacks that we're talking about now.

WILL

When you publicly changed your name and announced that you were a Muslim, you made religion part of the equation.

KALIH

What equation? I'm not talking about math.

WILL

It's an expression. You know exactly what I'm talking about.

KALIH

I had to go public. It was matter of survival.

NIGHK

I'm not sure I follow you, my man. I'm Muslim too, but I never made it into big deal.

KALIH

That's because you didn't have to. I did that for you.

NIGHK

You didn't do anything for me, okay? And let me tell you something else: I have no doubt that I would have demolished you in the ring.

KIM E.

Two Muslims fighting each other. Now that would have been a huge draw.

WILL

Playing up the religion angle is dangerous. It should be kept private.

SAMPSON

When you're famous, nothing's private. I know.

KALIH

That's only if you don't care about protecting your privacy. Maybe you still craved the attention after you retired from football.

SAMPSON

No, that's not it. Still wanting to make a living doesn't mean having to become an open book to every reporter looking for a story.

DYGER

But that's the price you pay. To the media you're a story, a paycheck. Either you deal with it or drop out.

SAMPSON

You should have followed your own advice. The press hasn't treated you too well.

DYGER

Nor you either. Don't compare what happened to you with what happened to me.

SAMPSON

Why not? We're both black, both successful, both married to white women, both ...

MILT

You two chumps, marrying white women. You were asking for trouble, and you got it, both of you.

SAMPSON

You were never married so who are you to talk?

MILT

That's exactly why can talk. You think I didn't have white women hitting on me? You think I wasn't tempted to go your route? Well, if you think that, you're wrong. That's why I stayed single.

NIGHK

Maybe you're a man-grabber who was fronting as a lady's man to protect your image.

MILT

You know, my man, you're lucky I'm a gentleman or I might take offense at what you said.

NIGHK

You want to do something about it? Try me. All talk, that's all you are. You know, bro, if you're so great then how come you won only two championships while the other guy you played against won eleven?

MILT

Very simple, my good man. Now he was a great player, and also a good friend of mine, but he had a better supporting cast. You see, while he was part of a team I WAS the team. Big difference. I had to carry all the weight. He didn't. If I had played on his team, I would have won fifteen championships.

NIGHK

That's nothing but talk. Just like you and all those women you claimed to have banged.

MILT

Back off. Okay? If you do not stop, I may have to take you up on your offer.

WILL

You two guys, cool it. We can't have black men fighting each other.

NIGHK

What are you talking about? Fighting is part of our culture. It's about manhood. That's why white people are so afraid of us.

WILL

No, it's not. That's what the white man wants you to think. You got to stop thinking like that. If you act like a brute, then you'll be treated like a brute.

NIGHK

What? If a black man sticks up for himself, he's a brute?

WILL

I didn't say that. All I'm saying is that when black men get violent, that's just reinforcing the negative stereotype that white people have of blacks

NIGHK

Who cares about stereotypes? If I'm upset, I'm gonna let people know it. I'm not a slave who has to suck up to the white master.

KIM E

Let me tell you something. I should have done what the brothers are doing today when they take the knee.

WILL

But for what reason?

KIM E

To protest racial injustice.

WILL

What injustice? You were a star. The people loved you. What more did you want?

KIM E

To be acknowledged that I was a man, not just a "black" man.

MILT

I can dig that. People paid to watch me play but I think what they saw in me was some kind of big, gawky black freak.

WILL

How do you know that?

MILT

Because I'm black, that's how I know. Okay? You think white people didn't notice my race?

WILL

But you were admired.

KIM E.

The same way people admire a race horse.

NIGHK

It put bread on your plate.

KIM E.

And always made me choke. I couldn't be myself.

WILL

Are you serious?

KIM E.

Yes, I'm serious. I didn't have the guts to be honest, to tell people how I really felt.

KALIH

Well, I did.

SAMPSON

And what did it get you? Grief.

KALIH

It also got me respect.

SAMPSON

You already had respect. How much more respect did you need?

KALIH

I'm talking about self-respect. That I could finally look at myself in the mirror without feeling ashamed.

WILL

You could have fooled me. I don't remember you acting like you were ashamed of anything.

KALIH

Don't you play me that way, okay? You all know what I'm talking about. Hypocrisy. Being a sell-out to my people and to my race. I was being complete phony and I couldn't take it anymore.

WILL

Who isn't a sell-out? We're all trying to make a living. Even white people have to deal with that.

KALIH

It's not the same. When whites suck up it's for personal reasons; when blacks suck up, they are re-confirming their historical subservience based squarely and exclusively on race. No white person has to deal with that. One morning I woke up and that little birdy inside my head told me, you know what you have to do, now do it.

SAMPSON

For which you paid a price, one that I wouldn't have been able to afford. Besides, I wasn't looking to make any political statements.

KALIH

I hear what you're saying, bro, and but I had to do what I had to do.

NIGHK

You didn't have to do anything. You were just showboating, spouting off, trying to whip up interest in your career, fighting a bunch of chumps.

KALIH

I didn't duck anybody.

NIGHK

That's because there was no one out there worth ducking.

KALIH

Man, you are ignorant of history.

NIGHK

But what you're talking about isn't history. That fight in Manila was a joke. I would have decked that clown in one round. And that fight in Africa? A complete farce. You pull that rope a dope garbage on me and they would have had to carry you out of the ring, maybe in a coffin. You sure those fights weren't fixed?

KALIH

That shows how little you really know about boxing and about who I fought.

NIGHK

All I know is that I would have demolished those guys.

KALIH

Now who's full of talk? You lost the title to a club fighter and when you made that so-called come back you became a laughing stock. No wonder you started hitting on women, to make up for your failures in the ring.

NIGHK

That's a low blow, and you know it.

SAMPSON

You know, Mujabbah, it's easy to fix a match.

KALIH

The same thing can be said for a trial. For instance, yours.

SAMPSON

I was found not guilty fair and square. Nobody was bought off.

KALIH

You're telling me that the trail of blood from the crime scene to your truck was some kind of hoax?

SAMPSON

It was planted.

KALIH

By you.

SAMPSON

You are so wrong!

WILL

You were found not guilty. So why are you becoming so defensive?

SAMPSON

Because I've been hearing that same trash for the last thirty years.

DYGER

And you'll keep on hearing it. Questions were raised about the legitimacy of the trial and the jury's findings.

SAMPSON

My not guilty verdict was a victory for justice, okay?

WILL

Justice for whom?

SAMPSON

For me. And who are you to talk anyway? Doping up women and then fingering them.

WILL

Those are allegations.

KIM E.

Serious allegations. Man, if you wanted women so badly, why didn't you just hire some hookers?

WILL

These women voluntarily came over to my place.

KIM E.

You lured them and you know it. You just won't admit it.

WILL

I am very proud of the way I have lived my life.

KIM E.

As a phony. You and your middle class image. What a sham!

WILL

It was not.

NIGHK

It was too. You tried to pass yourself off as Mister Family Man and Mister Intellectual, just to get over on whitey.

WILL

I refuse to accept that. Unlike you, I did not rape anybody.

NIGHK

At least I owned up to what I did and served my time. You don't have the guts to do the same.

WILL

I don't need to because I did nothing wrong. I am innocent.

KIM E.

That's what they all say.

WILL

Well, it's true.

KIM E.

That that's what they all say?

WILL

No. That I'm innocent. These women were trying to take advantage of me, get over on me, to capitalize on my fame.

DYGER

So, what you're saying is that you were nothing to them; they just wanted to use you.

WILL

That's right.

DYGER

So, did you ever ...

WILL

I'd rather not discuss it.

NIGHK

You are one sorry excuse for a black man. Man, let me tell you, I had so many ladies that I had lost count.

SAMPSON

Including white ladies?

NIGHK

Them too. In fact, they wanted it the most. It was unbelievable.

SAMPSON

Meanwhile you got yours too, by that black lady who complained about you to the police.

NIGHK

She wanted it, so I gave it to her. I couldn't say no.

DYGER

Women kept coming on to me too. After a while it was overwhelming. When I first started out, getting laid was a struggle, but once the money started rolling in, I had to hire an entire staff just to keep the women, and some men too, away.

SAMPSON

Men too? Are you gay?

DYGER

I'm not gay. I received all kinds of letters and emails and gifts from guys saying how much they wanted to meet me and do all kinds of stuff.

SAMPSON

Like what?

WILL

Stuff. Do I have to draw you a picture?

SAMPSON

We live a depraved world.

MILT

Nothing wrong with meeting ladies. Isn't that what life is about? Having a good time?

SAMPSON

So, for you, that's what life is about: screwing women?

MILT

I guess so. Don't tell me you're one of those touchy-feely guys. Big strong guy like you?

SAMPSON

No, man. No way. I've had my share of babes, but after I met my wife, that all changed.

WILL

And it seems not for the better.

SAMPSON

I loved my wife. She was everything to me. I still miss her.

KALIH

Then why did you kill her?

SAMPSON

Because ... Hey! Screw you!

KALIH

You were about to say something, then you stopped.

SAMPSON

I didn't kill anybody! Is that clear?

KALIH

Whatever you say. You were found not guilty, and aren't juries always right?

NIGHK

A jury found me guilty too. Just like they found you guilty, in Las Vegas.

SAMPSON

That was pure politics. All I wanted was my stuff.

DYGER

I remember a few years ago I was guest at a show and I saw someone actually trying to sell one of my old golf clubs. That gave me a weird feeling.

SAMPSON

How much was he charging?

DYGER

Fifteen thousand dollars for a piece of junk.

SAMPSON

I don't think it's fair for anyone to be capitalizing on us like that.

WILL

A lot of stuff in this life isn't fair. Things happens.

SAMPSON

I don't know how you can dismiss that stuff so easily. It outrages me.

KIM E.

There's other more important stuff to be outraged about. Black men being targeted by the police, rotting in prisons, abusing drugs, chronic unemployment.

NIGHK

Now you're sounding like a social worker.

KIM E.

Because I'm telling the truth?

NIGHK

No, because you're sounding completely phony. If you really cared, then you'd be doing something about it.

KIM E.

I'm not a politician.

NIGHK

Then stop sounding like one. Let me tell you something. I know we have issues. We've made money and been successful, but still we've had problems. Is it us or the system or what?

DYGER

I've asked myself the same question, and I still haven't come up with an answer.

MILT

Problems? Speak for yourself. I've had no problems.

DYGER

You bragged about all the women you "dated." What was that about?

MILT

It was part of my autobiography. I was trying to sell a book.

DYGER

So maybe what you were saying was an exaggeration?

MILT

Everything I wrote in the book was the truth.

KIM E.

Yeah. Right.

WILL

That's what we're known for – servicing ladies. Doesn't matter what else we do. To others, all black men are just a bunch of studs.

KALIH

That's racist.

WILL

Yeah, I guess so. But that's the way things are, and it's not going to change.

KALIH

But do we want it to change? When I was in the ring I didn't worry about about that crap. I was too busy making money.

DYGER

Me too. It's only now that I'm thinking about things.

KIM E.

When I was a kid the only thing I thought about was playing football. That was my joy, my passion, and I was good at it. I got involved with the ladies only later, after I stopped playing.

MILT

If it weren't for sports I would have been a nobody. Who do you think would want to have anything to do with a seven-foot tall black man?

NIGHK

But there's more to life than brawn. We have brains too.

SAMPSON

But the public's not interested in our minds. We're the modern-day gladiators.

KIM E.

I'm no gladiator. I played for the love of it, then it became all business, and so I quit.

NIGHK

And you went into movies. I watched a couple of your movies. Boy did they stink.

KIM E.

Come-on. They weren't that bad. They did good at the box office.

NIGHK

Not because of you.

KIM E.

Precisely because of me. I was box office. My name sold.

NIGHK

But nobody really knows who you are as a person.

SAMPSON

Who cares? We all were out there making money. That's what it was about. There's nothing else.

DYGER

There were the fringe benefits.

NIGHK

Which became headaches and landed me in jail. I should have never invited that Hollywood babe to my room.

KIM E.

From what I read and heard, she really asked for it.

NIGHK

I thought so too. And when she complained to the police, boy, was I surprised. In fact, I was shocked. I thought this was nothing but a shakedown, and was willing to pay.

DYGER

How do you think I felt when I saw my wife coming at me with a golf club?

KALIH

But you should have seen that coming. You were playing around with other women and finally got caught. You're lucky she didn't shoot you.

SAMPSON

It's amazing how these women go bonkers. They're so sweet and charming and sexy when we meet them, and then after we marry them, they go crazy. I know, I lived through it.

WILL

Maybe you made her crazy. There she was, this dainty white lady living with this big burly black man with an attitude.

SAMPSON

I did not have an attitude.

WILL

Don't make me laugh. What black man becomes a success without an attitude?

MILT

I made it to the pros because of my talents, not my attitude. Nobody ever complained about me as a person.

WILL

They didn't have to because you were playing the game.

MILT

Exactly, I played the game and I played it well.

DYGER

I played my game well too, and look at me today. I haven't won a tournament in years. And my personal life is in shambles.

WILL

Do you think that people really care about you? If you can't make money for them, then forget it, you will be gone immediately, and if you mess up, it's on you, not them.

NIGHK

So?

WILL

So, just remember who you are: black men living in a white society, populated by people who despise your blackness.

SAMPSON

Why are we so hung up on race?

KALIH

That's what the white man taught us, to keep us down.

NIGHK

I don't think so, bro. Maybe the white man started this jive, but the fact is that black people and white people don't look the same. We are different.

DYGER

But should that really matter anymore? Haven't we gotten beyond the point where race should really matter?

WILL

Apparently not because we're talking about it now, with no white people here to prompt us. So maybe this is something that is now so ingrained in our brains that we can't get rid of it.

SAMPSON

When I was playing, nobody ever treated me differently because I was black.

KIM E.

How do you know that? You think they would let you know what they were up to?

SAMPSON

Maybe when you were playing it was different, but I was treated fairly.

KIM E.

Only as long as you were able to play and produce and make money for them.

SAMPSON

I don't know about that. To tell you the truth, once I started playing football, I never really had much to do with black people.

KALIH

That's when your problems began. You didn't know what you were. In fact, do you know what you are now?

SAMPSON

Of course I do. I'm a black man.

NIGHK

Black on the outside but white on the inside. Are you ashamed of your blackness?

SAMPSON

No, I am not ashamed of my blackness, as you put it.

DYGER

But you're not proud of it either.

MILT

I bet that deep down you'd love to be white.

DYGER

You know I sometimes wonder how my life would have been if I was born white.

MILT

You're already white, in every way except skin color. Let me explain. I knew this white guy. He worked for the welfare department in Philadelphia. He was the only white person in the office. He worked there for years. He was around black people all the time. He even lived in a black neighborhood. All his friends were black. He even had a black girlfriend. One day he asked me, with absolute seriousness, if he was a black man. By being around blacks all the time, he was losing his sense of identity. He didn't know what he was.

KALIH

So what did you tell him?

MILT

I told him he was a white black man, and the same applies to you too, just in reverse. That's why people were so shocked when they found out about your running around and cheating on your wife. That's a black man thing, so your behavior was out of character.

DYGER

Don't white men do that stuff too?

MILT

Yeah, they do, but with them it's different. It's considered an aberration, but with us it's considered normal. Deplorable, but normal. It's called a double standard. That's why when I wrote that I was intimate with twenty-thousand women, no one came right out and said that's impossible, but if a white man had made the same claim, he'd be laughed right out of the room, and maybe even sent to a mental hospital for observation.

KALIH

I think Milt is on to something. You know, when I changed my name and religion, the press went wild. They tried to bury me in mud. They called me every name under the sun. They were using every means at their disposal to destroy me, but if I had been white, they would have left me alone. They would have wrote me off as merely a silly white man who is just acting out, but because I was black, I became a threat.

KIM E.

I toyed with the idea of repudiating Christianity and becoming a Muslim, but the time wasn't right.

KALIH

The time is always right to be true to yourself. You just didn't believe.

KIM E.

No, you're wrong. I did believe, but I also needed the money, so I kept my mouth shut and did my job.

NIGHK

Which was to entertain white people, who loved to watch you do something that they could not do, at least not as well as you could.

KIM E.

I had the opportunity to play. That's something I never took for granted.

WILL

That's exactly the point. If you're white, you don't need to feel grateful, but if you're black you're expected to feel as if somebody is doing you a favor, even if it's really the other way around.

MILT

People say that I revolutionized the way basketball is played. They say I was the dominant player. They say that after I played, the game was never the same. But they're judging me as a player, not as a person. As a person, they thought I was nothing but a talented freak.

DYGER

Nobody ever said that to your face. Right?

MILT

No, they didn't.

DYGER

So, what you're saying is all speculation. Do you read minds?

MILT

No, I do not and I'm glad I don't. What's goes on inside someone's head is totally private.

NIGHK

Until they open up their mouths and start flapping their tongues.

SAMPSON

That sounds sexual. You thinking dirty thoughts?

NIGHK

No, man. That's just an expression. You're too hung up on sex. That's what got you into trouble. You let your wife get the best of you.

SAMPSON

I straightened her out from time to time.

KIM E.

By beating up on her? We heard the tapes that were played at the trial.

SAMPSON

It wasn't as bad it sounded.

DYGER

It was probably a lot worse. She wouldn't have called the police if things were not bad. The problem is that what you did made all black men look bad.

SAMPSON

I didn't do anything.

WILL

Back to that again. Look, we're not here to judge you. We're here to talk about us and who and what we represent.

SAMPSON

I don't represent anybody, man. I'm no politician and I'm not running for political office.

WILL

But you are a public figure, and as such your actions are scrutinized all the time.

NIGHK

I represent myself, period.

WILL

Man, you are so wrong it's not even funny. And you say you're from the street?

NIGHK

I never said that.

WILL

That's your image you project, and in this society image counts for everything.

KIM E.

Like being black.

MILT

We can't help that. We are what we are.

KALIH

But other people don't like what we are.

SAMPSON

So that brings us back to our original issue, race.

NIGHK

This circular talk is beginning to get me dizzy.

DYGER

I've made a huge amount of money being the man who I am. Until now, I never saw myself as being a black man in a white man's sport.

NIGHK

Golf is a sport? To me, it's nothing but a game. Boxing is a sport.

DYGER

Boxing is barbaric.

KALIH

Listen, Dyger, when you say that you're crossing that line. Some of the greatest athletes in history were boxers.

DYGER

I don't mean any disrespect, but ...

KALIH

You did mean disrespect, otherwise you wouldn't have said what you said. You don't see me going on making fun of golf, which, to me, is a sissy game.

DYGER

Hold on now! Now you're crossing my line. Golf is no sissy game, okay. Try playing it and then come back and we'll talk.

KALIH

I'm not saying that golf doesn't require skill. But let's see you play golf while somebody's giving a right upper cut to the jaw.

MILT

You're comparing apples and oranges.

KALIH

What about pears and lemons?

SAMPSON

You guys don't know what rough is until you've been tackled by eleven guys who want to clobber you.

MILT

At least you football guys wear padding. In the world of basketball, we play with no padding at all.

KALIH

Isn't basketball supposed to be a noncontact sport?

MILT

Supposed to be, but it's not. Every time you drive to the basket you get hit, hard.

KIM E.

But in football, hitting is the point of the game; in basketball it's a foul.

MILT

Those fouls still hurt. I can tell you that from personal experience. But I have to agree with you guys about golf.

WILL

You see, this is what I'm talking about. Blacks have this reputation for having brute strength, which is why for us, golf is not a legitimate sport. For blacks, it's a question of machismo.

KIM E.

Machismo is a Spanish thing, and there are no Spanish at this table.

WILL

No, it's not a Spanish thing. It's a black thing. Blacks historically have felt the need to prove themselves on the field of battle, so to speak. A black man playing golf just seems so out of place. No offense, Dyger.

DYGER

None taken.

WILL

Even though I just called you a phony?

DYGER

You asked me a question, so I answered. What did you want me to say?

WILL

No self-respecting black man likes having words put in his mouth.

NIGHK

Be cool. The bro is just trying to provoke you.

KIM E.

He is being cool.

WILL

There is a time to be cool and there's a time not to be cool. When we're around white people, that's when we have to be cool, but amongst ourselves there is no need to keep up pretentions. There's nobody here to impress. We're all in the same bag.

MILT

That's just his personality.

WILL

No, it's not. It's conditioning, pure and simple. Otherwise he wouldn't have lasted a second out on the golf course.

DYGER

Why are you talking about me like I'm not even here?

WILL

Because you're acting like a phony.

SAMPSON

Stop playing with the guy's head. You're just a cheap entertainer who got lucky. So shut up. You're as phony as they come, trying to sound so authoritative and superior. All you're doing is posturing.

KALIH

Isn't that part of being black?

MILT

You mean like when we do trash talk?

KALIH

Yeah, trash talking, like I did all the time.

WILL

That's right, posturing. That's how we assert dominance. White people find that both terrifying and intriguing. I love when they try to copy us, but they never can quite get it right. For them it's not natural. As long as we do it to ourselves, they're okay with it, but try it with a white man, and it becomes a threat.

DYGER

I think there's more to being black than that.

WILL

You think so?

DYGER

Yes, that's why I just said what I said, or were you not listening to me.

KIM E.

When I was making movies, I had to suck in my attitude to keep my job. That's just the way it is.

KALIH

I didn't suck up to anybody.

NIGHK

And it cost you.

KALIH

But I kept my dignity and self-respect.

WILL

You really think you earned the respect of other people? You were behaving like an uppity black man with a huge chip on his shoulder. That's exactly what white people expected from you, and you did not disappoint. They got off on it. They found you both scary and fascinating, certainly not boring. You made for great entertainment.

MILT

Wait a minute. Kalih was scoring political points for our people.

WILL

No, he wasn't. He just made matters worse. His acting-out behavior just confirmed the stereotypical image of the black man as being a conceited scowling malcontent.

KALIH

I resent that statement.

WILL

It's the truth. If you can't handle it, that's your problem, not mine.

KALIH

You keep on flapping your mouth like that I'll make it your problem.

WILL

You see! That's what the world loves to see: black men beating up on each other.

MILT

You're wrong. We're civilized and we don't need to act out.

WILL

I know that, bro, but that does not fit with society's image of us. In fact, it seems almost unnatural. Indeed, in our racist, sick, perverted, and violence-loving society, watching black men getting clobbered is as normal as apple pie.

SAMPSON

I never liked apple pie.

WILL

Okay, then blueberry pie. Is that better?

SAMPSON

I'm cool with that.

WILL

But all this brings up another question; what kind of example does that provide for all the young black men growing up today?

NIGHK

What are you talking about?

WILL

I'm talking about being a role model. Not all black youth are cut out to be sports stars.

MILT

They're not? That's news to me.

WILL

What about blacks who become schoolteachers, doctors, lawyers, even politicians? One even became Secretary of State and another a four-star general, and another President of the United States.

KIM E.

Big deal. Bigger the job, bigger the sell-out. All the talk of integration was about getting the black man to think and act like a white man, which doesn't do it for me. I'm a black man, not a white man. Look what it did to Dyger.

DYGER

Hold on there, bro. Nobody didn't do anything to me. I was always true to myself and to my heritage.

KIM E.

Which was?

DYGER

Being black. That's why I'm here.

KIM E.

Flashing that big smile of yours, always being seen with white people, getting married to a white woman, running around with white girl friends, and you're saying that you are black? Blackness is more than just skin color. It is an attitude, a way of looking at things, and a way of life.

DYGER

Listen, big shot, when you organize a golf tournament, call me and I'll be whatever you want me to be, okay. Those white people were paying me big money to play their game, and I played it well.

NIGHK

Nobody's knocking your skills, brother. You revolutionized the golf game. Because of you golf is now more popular than ever.

MILT

Which shows that a black man can make a difference.

SAMPSON

But at the price of forfeiting your identity, and even much more than that.

KALIH

What are you driving at?

SAMPSON

I'm talking about life itself. The anxieties and tensions that we black men are under have a lethal effect on our health. Plus, and let me be frank ...

NIGHK

You're not frank ...

SAMPSON

Very funny, bro, but I'm trying to make a serious point, which is that when a black man speaks out, he's risking his very life.

KIM E.

That was true in the past when you had Jim Crow and white men were bullying and intimidating us with impunity, but we're finished with that.

SAMPSON

You're deluding yourself. I spent years in jail for some petty stuff that if I were a white man, I would have been charged with disorderly conduct and sent on my way. It's political. That's why so many black man are languishing in prison today.

WILL

They are in prison because they committed crimes.

SAMPSON

No. They are in prison because they are treated in a disproportionately harsher manner. You got millions of people coming into this country and they are displacing blacks in the work force, and as a result blacks and especially black men, are becoming expendable.

WILL

I'm a professional entertainer and I'm not expendable.

NIGHK

We all are. I'll tell you: I had little formal education. Everything I learned I learned the hard way, and I made it big, and then I made some mistakes, and what do I have to show for it? Nothing! My fame, my money, my power, my glory gone, like it never happened.

WILL

That's a sad story.

NIGHK

But true, and for a black man, it's a bitter pill to swallow. We are the product of centuries of racism. My blackness is a label I can't shake off. I hate it!

WILL

But you're stuck with, man. It won't come off.

MILT

We're all in that same boat. I want to be judged as a man, not as a "black" man.

SAMPSON

We all do, but it doesn't work that way. But aren't we guilty of the same thing? The way we judge ourselves and others based solely on race?

KALIH

No! We are the victims! We are the ones who were kidnapped, raped, put down, enslaved, mocked, berated, and de-cultured. Then Mister Lincoln said that we were free! Free to do what? It's amazing that blacks even survive, much less succeed.

KIM E.

Success. I've tasted it, we have all tasted it, and isn't it sweet! There was a movie, The Sweet Smell of Success. They must have been thinking of us when they made that movie.

MILT

I bet you never even saw the movie because if you did, you'd know that the movie wasn't about success. You just got that from the title.

KIM E.

Since when do you know so much about movies?

MILT

You surprised that a tall, gangling black man knows something about movies? That's your racism.

KIM E.

Hey, man, I'm no racist.

KALIH

You're so brainwashed you don't know what to think. Listen, you're a black man brought up in a white world where we are at best tolerated. If white people could, they'd get rid of us, but they can't. There are simply too many of us and we have no place to go. They're stuck with us, and us with them. So the way they deal with us is by brainwashing us into thinking that we're stupid and incapable of intellectual thought and that the black man is dependent on the white man for everything. That's how they control us.

SAMPSON

Nobody's brainwashing me.

NIGHK

That's right, bro. Black or white, I was the champ and I was a huge success. You're telling me that all the cheering and the money wasn't real? To me, it was real. It was my way of proving that I am somebody, and not just a black face in the crowd.

WILL

Don't get all puffed up now, okay. That smell of success that you got high on has different aromas, some of which stink. Man, I was an internationally famous television star, the epitome of middle class values, millions of people practically swearing by me, and now look at me. My life is a disaster.

SAMPSON

Yet, we are alive and we are surviving, and in this world, that is no small accomplishment.

NIGHK

But I don't want just to survive. I want to excel, get to the top, have it all, and for a while I was up there. I was champ!

KALIH

Then you became a chump. You started getting sloppy, lost your focus, got all cocky ...

NIGHK

Like you weren't cocky?

KALIH

But I could back it up, you couldn't. So you went from cool to fool, and if I remember, you went down fast. To tell you the truth I got so worried about you that I actually thought about visiting you.

NIGHK

While I was in prison?

KALIH

No. That wouldn't have been cool. I mean afterwards, when you were still trying to find yourself.

SAMPSON

I could have used a little of that buddy care too, buddy.

KALIH

You! Don't make me laugh. Your arrogance was too much for anyone to bear.

SAMPSON

Me? Arrogant? You must be mistaking me for someone else.

KALIH

No mistake, bro. You were so smug, even at your trial. Hiding behind your lawyers like you were some kind of white banker or politician who could buy his way out of anything.

SAMPSON

I didn't buy my way out of anything. I didn't do it. Don't you believe me?

MILT

I was too busy enjoying life to follow your case.

DYGER

I was out on the golf course with my father practicing my golf.

WILL

At that time, I still had a career to attend to.

NIGHK

I don't know what I was doing at the time, but the last thing I would have wanted to do was watch you squirming on television.

SAMPSON

I can't believe it. Is that how little you guys care about me?

WILL

It's not that we didn't care. It's that ... maybe you got it right. Maybe we didn't care.

SAMPSON

Whatever happened to black solidarity?

WILL

That's nothing but a myth created by white politicians to scare white people into voting for them. The fact is that all of us are wrapped up in our own problems.

MILT

You can leave me out of that. I've enjoyed my life.

WILL

Yeah, humping women and then bragging about it. How empty is that?

MILT

Maybe to you. To me, I call it having fun. I paid my dues, so I have the right to enjoy the fruits of my labor.

WILL

To become a laughing stock?

MILT

Nobody's ever laughed at me. You're just jealous.

DYGER

Excuse me, Milt, but any of us can get women if we want. Why did you have to write a book about it?

MILT

For the money.

DYGER

You set practically every record in the history of basketball and you still needed money? What happened to all the money you earned?

MILT

Women! That's what happened.

WILL

Is this obsession with women a problem only for black men?

MILT

That's a loaded question. If we say no, then we can be accused of being queer and if we say yes, then we'll be accused of being shallow. I think all men are obsessed with women. I like the company of women. What's wrong with that?

DYGER

I don't see women as being a problem. Rather, it's the way we relate to them.

MILT

I relate to them just fine. You never heard of any women complaining about me, have you? So, I must be doing something right.

NIGHK

Being obsessed with women has nothing to do with being black. But you know what, smart guy, maybe you asked the wrong question. Maybe the women are the problem. Whores, prostitutes, call girls, dancers, escorts, actresses, call them what you want: they flaunt what they have, and we notice it. At least I do. I'm a man. I can't help it.

DYGER

Are we going to start demonizing women now? Remember, guys, we all have mothers.

KALIH

You leave my mother out of it. Okay?

KIM E.

Nobody's insulting your mother. We're talking generalities, not specifics. You think I want you calling my sister a whore? Of course not. But to some guy maybe she is, or at least he thinks she is. It's all relative.

DYGER

What does Einstein have to do with this?

MILT

Einstein? Who mentioned Einstein?

DYGER

He's talking about relativity.

KIM E.

Listen, Mister Golfer, we're not talking nuclear physics, okay. So keep Einstein out of this.

NIGHK

I loved my mother. She was poor, but she tried her best.

KALIH

To raise the likes of you, she had to be special.

NIGHK

She was. But my other mother was boxing. She taught me about all about life.

KIM E.

While you were being punched in the face?

NIGHK

And dishing it out too.

WILL

Why are blacks so pre-occupied with violence?

MILT

Is there anything that black men do that's right with you? Are we all just a bunch of maladjusted fools?

WILL

Hey, I didn't say that.

MILT

But you implied it.

WILL

Listen, bro, don't put words in my mouth. Okay? Whether you like it or not, the vast majority of inmates in prison today are black. That's a fact.

NIGHK

In a racist society. That's a fact too.

SAMPSON

Not all blacks are failures. What about all the black entertainers and doctors and lawyer and teachers?

NIGHK

Bunch of phonies. Sucking up to the white boss.

WILL

Can't you be middle class without being a sell out?

MILT

Sure you can. I did it.

NIGHK

You're just a tall black freak. Congratulations.

SAMPSON

I did it too.

NIGHK

You were charged with a double homicide, spent years in prison, and you're telling me that you're middle class. I don't think so.

SAMPSON

Stop judging me, man. That's not right. I'm a black man who became middle class.

NIGHK

Oh, stop your bragging. You're ashamed of what you are, still a street nigger.

MILT

I asked that we not use that word!

NIGHK

It's part of the language.

WILL

I agree with Milt. That word is just too harsh and too offensive.

KIM E.

Such a bunch of prima donnas. You act like you never heard that word before.

DYGER

We've all heard it, too often. I don't need to hear it again.

NIGHK

All I was trying to say was that the bro is refusing to be honest with himself.

SAMPSON

You're wrong, bro! I never forgot my roots.

NIGHK

In fact, all of you are phonies, acting like you're so prim and proper, as if you're white.

WILL

If by roots, you mean where we're from, that's something no one ever forgets.

MILT

What's the point of going down memory lane? We all moved on. I was born and raised in Phillie. So what?

WILL

Our roots are more than geographical. They are cultural too.

SAMPSON

Whenever I hear that word culture I grit my teeth. It's such a loaded word.

WILL

It can be, depending on how it's used.

SAMPSON

I came from a good family.

KIM E.

That produced you.

SAMPSON

What do you mean by that remark?

KIM E.

You think you're someone a parent could be proud of?

SAMPSON

Yes, I am. I made something of myself. I excelled in my chosen profession and became a rather popular actor and entertainer.

KIM E.

But then you messed up.

SAMPSON

If I did, it's not because of my roots.

KIM E.

I guess I can say the same about myself. My life has been good. I've played ball, got married, had kids, caroused around a bit, worked in movies, it's been a good ride.

DYGER

You know, I couldn't have had a better set of parents. My father was a career army man and my mother a very loving woman. I was brought up well. I owe all my success to my father. He believed in me.

WILL

So, if we came from such good families, then why are our lives such disasters?

KALIH

Get off your high horse already, before I knock you off. What the hell do you know about my life? Until today, we've never met. So how can you talk about me?

WILL

There were rumors.

KALIH

All sewer-talk from the press. I've been a good father, a wonderful provider. My kids never had to worry for anything.

DYGER

Mine too.

NIGHK

I've taken good care of my kids.

WILL

So you're current with the alimony payments?

NIGHK

Of course.

WILL

For some reason I find that hard to believe.

NIGHK

Don't believe me. What do I care?

WILL

Alright, then we're all good, responsible parents, except for Milt who played it smart. *(All laugh)* We're all decent, law abiding guys. But we're rebels, too. That's what gotten us into trouble.

MILT

Not rebels: entertainers, performers.

KIM E.

That's right. Showmen, but symbols, too, of the gifted black man who could run faster and jump higher than anyone else.

DYGER

And hit a golf ball further and straighter too.

KIM E.

That too. You showed them, Dyger.

DYGER

I guess I did, but now I'm on the sidelines, and I don't know what to do with myself.

KIM E.

That's the problem. None of us know what to do with ourselves. We were jocks, and what's a jock supposed to do when their time is up?

SAMPSON

Me and you became actors.

KIM E.

Yeah, but it wasn't the same, at least not for me it wasn't. On the field I was practically a god; in the movies I was just another actor, and not a very good one at that.

SAMPSON

I watched a couple of your movies. Like that war movie set in World War Two. You were good. And that western, you almost got the girl.

KIM E.

That's the problem. Almost. Got upstaged by that white actor who couldn't even ride a horse. He needed a stunt double, who, by the way, happened to be a bro.

MILT

You don't say.

KIM E.

I do say. But it was a pay check and I needed the money, for alimony.

NIGHK

So you manned up. Me, I got hauled into court.

KIM E.

Why didn't you just do the right thing and pay?

NIGHK

Pay those bitches? No way. They were trying to take me for everything I had.

KIM E.

But you had kids, man.

NIGHK

So what? I still had to survive. These women didn't love me, they didn't care about me, and they didn't give a flying leap about me. They put out because I had money, and they wanted to cash in. But they were sneaky. They acted like they loved me and I fell for that. I have feelings too.

KALIH

You do?

NIGHK

Yeah, I do.

KALIH

You shameless fool. Why can't you be honest? You're embarrassed only because a judge had to publicly order you to pay.

NIGHK

And lost my home in the process. Believe me, I felt more than just embarrassment.

KALIH

You should have been thinking with your head, not your schlong. Banging women, getting them pregnant. You thought you could get away with that? Not have to deal with the consequences?

NIGHK

Aw, can that talk. I'm a man. Stop preaching at me.

KALIH

Are you really a Muslim?

NIGHK

I am.

KALIH

You should have answered the call earlier.

NIGHK

I answered it when I did, and it helped me. It was a personal thing. At least I didn't make a big deal about it like you did.

KALIH

I didn't make a big deal about it. It was the press that made it into a big deal, and then afterwards vilified me and made me out like I was a traitor.

MILT

Because you refused to be drafted. You were breaking the law.

KALIH

Wrong! By forcing me to go into the army the government was violating my freedom of religion.

KIM E.

So, you becoming a Muslim had nothing to do with trying to avoid the draft?

KALIH

That's right. It was a profoundly spiritual event.

DYGER

My hat's off to you. You pulled it off, and you won your case.

KALIH

Thanks, bro.

SAMPSON

Does being a Muslim provide a peace of mind?

KALIH

Yes, and I'll tell why. Because it's the one true faith that allows me to be who I really am instead of playing a role imposed on me by the white man through Christianity.

SAMPSON

My father was an ordained minister. If he were still alive, he'd be distressed by what you just said. Christianity is the religion of love, while Islam is the one of hate.

KALIH

I take offense at that remark. First, I didn't mean any disrespect regarding your father, but you asked me a straight question and I gave you a straight answer, and in turn you attack my religion, a subject that you really know nothing about.

SAMPSON

Maybe I was a little off base with that remark about Islam, but for me, religion did not figure into my life. There was no way I was going to become a minister. I was too busy playing football. I only mentioned my father because the subject of religion came up.

WILL

So, you repudiated the teachings of your father.

NIGHK

What are you talking about, man? Nobody repudiated anybody. All of us were exposed to religion. So what?

KALIH

But for me, Christianity, with all its talk of salvation and what not, offered no answer to the question of how a black man can make his way through life and keep his identity and sanity and survive in a white dominated racist society.

SAMPSON

I don't think so.

MILT

Me neither. But I remember when I was growing up, the minister of my church was one of the leaders of the community.

KIM E.

That's the way it used to be.

WILL

It still is. It was the church that held neighborhoods together, and still does today.

KIM E.

Have we lost our ways?

SAMPSON

Don't get sappy on me now. Save that junk for the movies.

WILL

I'm serious, bro. The church gave the black communities cohesion and hope.

KALIH

No way. The black churches were a sham. They were clones of the white churches, that's all. Look, my parents were church going people and what did it do for them?

WILL

They were able to raise you, and they did a great job.

KALIH

My parents were hardworking people who never had the opportunities to go even further because they were brainwashed into believing that they needed to know their place. I hated it. Just thinking about it now makes me feel outrage.

WILL

So, converting to Islam made the memories less painful?

KALIH

No. It didn't. But it gave me an outlet through which I could demonstrate my anger without doing something really awful.

KIM E.

No wonder you became a boxer.

KALIH

I never liked boxing. But I was good at it and so I went in that direction. I am not by nature a violent man.

NIGHK

You're not a violent man? Fine. I am. I hit people for a living and loved it.

KALIH

That's where we differ.

NIGHK

No. You only think we differ. We're the same.

KALIH

I never raped anyone or spent time in prison.

NIGHK

You had your brushes with the law too, so don't come off as being so high and mighty.

DYGER

I think we've all had brushes with the law.

WILL

Typical story for the American black man.

MILT

I never got into trouble.

WILL

There's always the exception.

SAMPSON

How did you manage that?

MILT

I guess I wasn't the wash out you guys are.

SAMPSON

Now who's acting so superior? Maybe you just didn't have the balls to assert yourself.

MILT

I did that on the basketball court. That was enough for me.

SAMPSON

But there's more to life than just playing sports.

MILT

There is?

SAMPSON

Yes. Except I didn't realize that until much later.

MILT

Well, for me, playing sports was everything.

WILL

And women too.

MILT

Yeah, women too.

WILL

What a sad, empty life you have led.

MILT

Who are you to judge me? Look at you, scores of women coming out of the wood work complaining about you.

WILL

All sensationalist lies.

MILT

You mean over forty women are lying about you? They're all liars?

WILL

That's right. They came by, I gave them drinks and then we got to know each other. No big deal.

NIGHK

While you were married?

KIM E.

But what about that squeaky-clean image you were selling to the public?

WILL

Am I the only one who's ever socialized with ladies?

KIM E.

But your image was based on a lie!

WILL

That's your opinion, and please don't judge me.

DYGER

We can't help but judge you.

WILL

None of you are in a position to judge me. We've all done our share of partying.

MILT

So it's okay that I humped twenty thousand women?

KALIH

You guys are really beginning to disgust me

WILL

Get off your high horse. You turned your back on your own country.

KALIH

The country that stripped me of my title, due strictly to politics. And I'm supposed to love this country?

WILL

Keep in mind that we're public figures and once you go public, you're fair game for every shill, con-man and reporter looking to make a quick buck at our expense.

KALIH

Can't disagree with you there. I remember that one TV reporter. He built his entire career on hyping me. I knew he wasn't doing it because he loved me.

NIGHK

Maybe he did love you. Weren't you always telling people how pretty you were? Maybe he wanted to take you up on that?

KALIH

All that stuff was part of my hype.

NIGHK

Still, you're not a bad looking guy.

KALIH

I wish I could say the same for you, but if I did I'd be lying, and I'm not a liar. It goes against my religion.

WILL

By that you mean Islam?

KALIH

What other religion would I be talking about?

DYGER

The more you guys talk about religion the more you're losing me.

KALIH

So get lost. Who needs you? Go back to your golf course and go wrap a club around your head.

NIGHK

I take my religion seriously.

SAMPSON

Good for you. But who cares?

NIGHK

There's only one true god and that is Allah, and Mohammed was his prophet.

MILT

That's good to hear. Now can it. Last thing I need is to have anyone preaching at me, be he Jew, Muslim, Christian or whatever.

WILL

That's not the way it used to be. Blacks had a much more respectful attitude toward the church.

MILT

The church is important when things are going bad for blacks. Right now, I have no need for it.

SAMPSON

I don't mind preachers preaching at us, just as long as they keep the sermons short. There's nothing worse than a preacher going on and on about how much we need the Lord.

KALIH

All sweet talk meant to keep blacks down.

DYGER

I am so grateful that I'm alive now and not, let's say, seventy-five years ago. Back then, forget it. I would have been a Nobody. No way would they have let a black man on to the golf course.

SAMPSON

Did any black men ever try?

DYGER

You know, I really don't know.

SAMPSON

For all we know back then there might have been a black man with golf clubs, just like Dyger, who was begging just for a chance to play but never got the chance. That's sad.

KIM E.

The same can be said for any sport. If I had been alive after World War One, I seriously doubt that I would have been given a chance to play.

WILL

But who lost out the most? Us or the country?

KIM E.

Us. We were denied opportunity.

WILL

But the country was denied the opportunity to see the best players in the world, which made the sports that people were paying to watch a sham.

KIM E.

So what about the country? We, as black people, were put down and kept down, period.

KALIH

Until I came along.

NIGHK

Some savior. As soon as you changed your name the country wanted to hang you.

KALIH

But I stood fast and today I'm considered a hero.

WILL

Maybe things aren't as bad for blacks as we think.

MILT

I wouldn't go that far, but things did improve enough for us to make a buck.

SAMPSON

Making the buck. That's what it's all about. I once heard this pro wrestler say, "You live by the buck and you die by the buck." To me, those were profound words of wisdom.

KIM E.

It just shows that anyone can be a philosopher.

MILT

Hear that, Dyger? Inside of you is a philosopher.

DYGER

Well, you know I did go to college.

MILT

I did too, but it sure wasn't to study philosophy. I was there to make money for the university.

WILL

And for that you were well rewarded.

MILT

Later. Not while I was playing for the school.

WILL

They gave you a scholarship, right?

MILT

Right. But I was no scholar.

KIM E.

For some reason, I cannot visualize you hitting the books and writing term papers.

MILT

What are you saying? That my going to college was a fraud?

KIM E.

That's right, and you just said it.

MILT

I was asking a question.

KIM E.

Hey, I attended a major university on a football scholarship. I was there to play football, not learn nuclear physics. They had other programs for that.

MILT

That doesn't mean we didn't learn anything.

KIM E.

We did. The value of our bodies as a tool to make money.

NIGHK

For some reason that doesn't sound so good.

WILL

I think what the bro is trying to say is ...

KIM E.

I don't need you to translate for me, okay? I'm talking plainly and if you don't understand what I'm saying, that's your problem.

KALIH

I thought going to college was supposed to improve your mind. I only heard that because I never went to college.

NIGHK

I didn't either.

KALIH

I guess that's why me and you are two smartest ones here.

SAMPSON

Don't be such a wise guy. I went to college, and even graduated. Without my football scholarship, I would have never made out of the neighborhood.

KALIH

Maybe I should have gone to college.

SAMPSON

On what? A boxing scholarship? I never heard of a school offering a boxing scholarship.

KALIH

How come schools are willing to dish out money for football and basketball but not for boxing? That's not fair.

WILL

Boxing has a negative image. Two people pounding on each other.

KALIH

Oh, and twenty-two people pounding on each other is okay?

KIM E.

That's different. It's a team sport and the goal is to score, not to destroy your opponent.

NIGHK

Then how come in every game someone has to be carried off the field?

KIM E.

It's a contact sport, so that's bound to happen.

KALIH

Boxing is contact sport too. They're both contact sports.

DYGER

Thank goodness I got into golf.

NIGHK

Did anyone ever tell you that you're nothing but a pansy? You sure you're not really white?

DYGER

No, not one drop of white blood.

SAMPSON

Blood is red.

DYGER

It's an expression.

SAMPSON

Here's another expression: Up yours!

DYGER

What brought that on?

SAMPSON

Everything you say. In fact, your very presence here deeply annoys me. I wish you would leave.

KALIH

Hold on there, bro. No need to cop an attitude.

SAMPSON

I don't even know why he's here. You got black skin but there's just nothing about you that's black. All of us here came from the neighborhood. You came from ... somewhere else.

DYGER

I too am black. I'm as black as anyone here.

NIGHK

No you're not. You're half Chinese.

You mean Thai.

DYGER

What's the difference?

NIGHK

A lot.

DYGER

Wait a minute. I've met Chinese and Thais and to me they all look the same. So what are you saying?

NIGHK

I already told Kalih said that I'm half Thai, not half Chinese.

DYGER

Stop your damn nitpicking. Thai. Chinese. Who cares? You're half-Asian, right? No wonder the bro lost his cool.

NIGHK

I didn't lose my cool.

SAMPSON

You got hot under the collar.

NIGHK

Stop playing with me. I'm real, the dude there isn't. Why don't you just go back to your white friends?

SAMPSON

Like all your friends aren't white?

DYGER

I know white people but they're not my friends.

SAMPSON

DYGER

Did that include your wife?

SAMPSON

You mean my late wife and you keep her out of this. How I do miss her. She was so sweet.

DYGER

I think you better do a reality check on your memory.

KALIH

You know, there's a lot more important stuff to talk about.

DYGER

Like what?

KALIH

Like our health. People take us for granted, treat us like we're indestructible machines, and we're not. I'm in constant pain. And no one cares.

SAMPSON

Man, sometimes I can barely walk. The pain got so bad that I had to quit football.

NIGHK

I used to believe that nothing could hurt me.

MILT

That's how you think when you're young.

WILL

It's how you got to think to get you going.

SAMPSON

But it's crazy. We get hit, we get injured, it's reported on the news and all people care about is when is he going to return?

KIM E.

And also if he's faking it. Then he's accused of malingering or having a bad attitude or being selfish or not being a team player or being a head case.

MILT

You notice how many black men are accused of that garbage? That wasn't the case when I was playing.

KIM E.

In those day the black athlete knew his place. If he acted out, especially in the public, he was gone.

SAMPSON

I did some griping when I was playing, but it was about wanting more play time.

WILL

The coach must have loved you.

SAMPSON

We had a good relationship.

KIM E.

While you were able to produce.

MILT

That was the bottom line. Could we produce? That's all they were interested in.

KIM E.

For which we were well paid.

MILT

Of course we were well paid, but was the money worth it if it destroyed our health in the process?

SAMPSON

What was the alternative? Not to play? Not take the money? Go out to the real world and actually get a normal job? Would any of us been happy with that? I wouldn't have.

DYGER

It's amazing what money will get you to do.

SAMPSON

But you were playing a sissy game.

DYGER

That required walking several miles every day and playing under all kinds of weather conditions. Remember, golf is played outdoors, not in an arena.

KALIH

I tried playing some golf, and I have to admit, it's a lot harder than it looks. It's especially hard on your knees and lower back.

DYGER

That's why most golf players sooner or later ruin their knees and back and have to have surgery.

SAMPSON

Still that's not the same as taking a hit on the head or being tackled, hard, by a two hundred fifty-pound guy charging at you helmet first.

DYGER

What can I say? People paid huge amounts of money to watch me play. If you don't like it, so what?

NIGHK

Who do you think you are to be sounding so high and mighty? Your career went down like the sinking of the Titanic. You must have lost at least a billion dollars' worth of endorsements. At one point you were being touted as the greatest golfer in the history of that so-called sport, but you blew it! You and your golf. You had it all and now you have nothing.

KIM E.

I think you're being unduly harsh on the brother. He made some mistakes, but in this society, if you're black the mistakes are greatly magnified and the retribution much greater and the society much more critical and unforgiving.

DYGER

What happened to me had nothing to do with race or with golf.

KALIH

I'm surprised at you. After all that has happened to you, you still think that race isn't a factor. You think that your entire history of denying your essential blackness, and your decision to earn a living in what was, and still is, a white-dominated sport was merely just coincidental? Do you not understand that your preoccupation with white women and hobnobbing with white people, and your phony smile and pretentious humility, was nothing but a pathetic masquerade?

SAMPSON

With golf being part of that phoniness?

WILL

You shouldn't knock how someone makes a living. Besides, you've had your own identity issues too.

SAMPSON

First, I'm not knocking how he makes a living. Then again, I wouldn't knock how a whore makes a living either.

WILL

You'd be a fool to do that. Besides, that comment was uncalled for.

SAMPSON

Can't I speak my mind? Isn't that what we're doing here?

WILL

Of course. But let's not start demeaning each other.

SAMPSON

Nobody's demeaning anybody. As for my so-called identity issues, I never sought to hide who I am. I was always true to myself. I never tried to come off like I was "white."

DYGER

Meanwhile you married a white woman, just I like did, and lived in a mansion in a fancy neighborhood, made movies and was laughing all the way to the bank. You were no different than me.

MILT

Enough of this foolish bickering. You both made lots of money and both ran with white people. So what? You're still black. That is something you can never deny, that we could never deny, no matter how much we may try. So what's the problem?

SAMPSON

No problem. I just don't like someone trying to compare golf to football where people actually sustain real and serious physical damage. Don't forget that being exposed to danger is something that is uniquely part of the black experience in this country. Historically, blacks have worked the most dangerous jobs and have done hardest physical labor, and as a result have shorter life spans.

DYGER

That could also be due to lifestyle choices.

NIGHK

Here we go again, blacks being their own worst enemies.

DYGER

I didn't say that.

MILT

You did say that, in so many words. Because of what I did for a living, my knees are shot, I have arthritis and I'm on pain meds. But that doesn't make me my own worst enemy.

SAMPSON

That goes for all of us, except maybe for Will, being an actor.

WILL

I have my own medical issues too.

MILT

That's not what I'm talking about.

WILL

You know, sometimes acting can be rough.

MILT

I've been in a couple of movies. Nothing to it. If you forget your lines, they use cue cards.

WILL

I remember in one scene I was in a fight with another actor. He was playing a burglar who had broken in to my home.

SAMPSON

Of course, the thief was black.

WILL

Actually, he wasn't.

SAMPSON

Then they were being politically correct. Or maybe you're not remembering the story right. Maybe you were playing the burglar.

WILL

Not likely. I was the star of the show. Anyway, in the fight scene I took a bad fall.

SAMPSON

Why no stunt double?

WILL

I don't know. Probably wanted to save money.

SAMPSON

That figures. If you were white they would have used a stunt double.

WILL

That's hard to say.

KIM E.

He just said it.

WILL

I heard him. Maybe being black has its challenges, but it was being black that helped you beat that double murder rap.

SAMPSON

Like I said before, I didn't murder anybody.

NIGHK

But you were really upset that she was seeing other men.

SAMPSON

I didn't like it, but that doesn't mean I would kill her.

NIGHK

I don't know what I'd do if I saw my wife, or even my ex-wife, screwing around with another man. I might freak out too.

SAMPSON

I never freaked out.

DYGER

But didn't you stalk her?

SAMPSON

No!

MILT

You mean peeping through the window watching your wife ...

SAMPSON

You mean my ex-wife.

MILT

... with another man didn't make your blood boil?

SAMPSON

How would you feel if you saw me with your wife?

MILT

I'm not married.

SAMPSON

Okay, then girlfriend.

MILT

If I'm done with her, then good, she's yours.

DYGER

Do you hear yourself? You're talking about women like their objects to be used and then discarded.

MILT

Aren't they?

DYGER

Are you playing with me?

MILT

No, man, I'm not playing with you.

DYGER

Women are human beings, just like men.

NIGHK

We know they're human. But do they think we're human? Women are taught to hate men, especially black women. That's why we gravitate to the white ladies. They're more appreciative of us.

SAMPSON

My wife was white.

DYGER

So was mine.

WILL

My wife was black and we've been married for decades.

KIM E.

While you were trying to dope up and molest every white woman on the planet. What does that say about your so-called successful marriage?

WILL

I never called it successful, just long.

KIM E.

Well, that it's lasted so long is a tribute to something.

WILL T

Thank you ... I think.

KIM E.

Don't mention it, bro.

WILL

Ever since my son was murdered I've contemplated committing suicide.

KIM E.

When I heard about that I was shocked, and also saddened.

NIGHK

Violence. We live in such a violent society.

WILL

And we're part of it. Immersed in it.

SAMPSON

All of us have known violence. Look what happened to my wife.

NIGHK

And that lady who I raped. She was victim too. It just took me a while to admit that I was the perpetrator.

WILL

So, black men are the problem?

MILT

I never assaulted anybody. But I was mugged once.

KIM E.

Who would be crazy enough to mug a big guy like you?

MILT

When a little guy is holding a gun to you head, he suddenly become very big. You got to remember that we're all targets.

KIM E.

Was the guy black?

MILT

Yes, he was.

KIM E.

Black on black crime. We're our own worst enemies.

DYGER

I hate that term black on black crime. Crime is crime, period. It's not black, white, yellow, brown or any other color, except maybe red, for blood. And that's the one color that's the same for every human being on this planet. And when we get cut and bleed, it's as if the whole human race has been cut.

WILL

Well said, my man. Inside of you is the poet.

DYGER

I'll take that as a complement.

WILL

It was meant as one.

KALIH

Professor, whatever you say. I'm tired and it's time for me to go home.

KIM E.

Looks like this get together is breaking up. I'm going to the bar down the street for a drink. Anyone care to join me? I'm buying the first round.

WILL

Since you're buying, I'm in.

NIGHK

Include me in, too.

DYGER

And me.

SAMPSON

I can use a drink.

MILT

I say, never turn down a free drink. How about you, Kalih? You still want to go home?

KALIH

I'll join you guys, too. One drink won't hurt.

KIM E.

Great! Looks like the party's just getting started.

End of scene 1.

Scene 2

Time: 2:30 AM

Place: a bar.

The seven men have been drinking for hours. They are having an animated discussion. They are now speaking in rhyme.

NIGHK

We can do
anything we want
because we're black
and because we're smart.
While being slaves
things sure were rough,
it taught us how
to act real tough.

SAMPSON

That's right, I say,
we'll set the rules,
and if whites are miffed,
then screw those fools.

WILL

But wait, my bros,
about the whites,
why should we have
to cause them frights?

KALIH

To integrate is a fantasy,
sheer lunacy and hypocrisy.
Jim Crow was bad
we all agree,
but acting white
is just not me.

DYGER

But a bro
became the president,
and he was cool
like Mister Kent.

KIM E.

Big deal, I say,
that made things worse.
Scared lots of whites
who went reverse.

WILL

That's why we gotta
act real nice,
and bring down walls
and break the ice,
'cause if we don't
the whites will say,
"Do mark my words,
we'll make you pay."

SAMPSON

But dig it, bro,
we're all strung out,
we're marginalized
and have no clout.
And furthermore,
I think you'll agree,
the whites want us
to leave them be.
We don't like them,
they don't like us,
we play their game
but still they fuss.

DYGER

But that's because
they won't engage
with blacks who
they believe have rage.

NIGHK

Too bad for them,
I must now say,
they made their bed
and now must pay.

Pay you, you say?
That's your reply?
That's just jive talk,
You must be high.

WILL

So what do you
want us to do?
Play Uncle Tom
and be the fool?

MILT

No, dear bro,
you twist my thought.
We must reach out
yet not be bought.

WILL

Can their rules
and reaching out,
that's prissy stuff
which brings no clout.

SAMPSON

But if we don't
play by the rules,
then whites will
treat us just like fools.

DYGER

You talk as if
We're down and beat,
no need to fret,
we own the street.

NIGHK

The street is good
but not so cool,
when only blacks
are in that pool.

DYGER

Perhaps you don't
like being black,
if that's the case
why don't you pack?

MILT

I did not mean
to act the pest.
I love you guys,
you're all the best.

DYGER

I love you too,
my dear good bro,
fraternal joy
which makes me glow.

NIGHK

Screw you, I say,
and can that crap.
You're drunk, you fool,
so shut your trap.

SAMPSON

Oh shut yours too,
you piece of ice,
The bro was being
Kind and nice.

WILL

SAMPSON

And once again
 I have to say
 Screw you to all
 that white man hay.
 We have to take it
 to the street,
 where we are kings
 and call the beat.

NIGHK

The bro is right,
 and listen to this:
 by keeping the street
 we'll attain real bliss.
 For the street is more
 than just a place,
 it's a state of mind
 which defines our race.

KIM E.

Have you gone nuts,
 Or even worse?
 The street is just
 an empty purse.
 It's just a place
 To live and die,
 Where people work
 And groan and sigh.

SAMPSON

No, dear bro,
 you're way off base,
 the people live
 in a real fine place,
 that needs a little
 sprucing up
 to make it shine
 like a fine gold cup.

KALIH

Now listen here,
you silly fool,
you make it sound
like the street's so cool,
that all we need
are piles of cash
to make street life
a first-class bash.

MILT

What you just said
is really true,
if we can't beat them,
we'll join their crew.
We'll play their game,
Outside and in,
The goal of which
Will be to win.

NIGHK

Okay, my bro,
Your strategy
Is cool as long
As whites do see
that they must deal
with black folk too,
as human beings
with rights to sue.

WILL

But we gotta tone
our rhetoric down.
Stop acting hard
Which makes whites frown.
It makes them
Feel they have the need
to call the cops
and make us bleed.

NIGHK

The modern black
 is not a crook,
 that's racist junk
 in any book.
 For me, I wouldn't
 hurt a fly,
 for we're the prey
 and that's no lie.
 We're tased,
 we're shot and
 even slain,
 when we're unarmed
 and caused no pain.
 There's a war out there
 against us blacks,
 to push us down
 onto our backs.
 But we'll stand tall
 and persevere,
 and never ever
 live in fear.

DYGER

Your message is really
 way off base,
 you see a war
 which is based on race,
 but you are wrong,
 and I'll tell you why: it's
 the marketplace where
 the problems lie.

MILT

You're wrong, my bro,
 it's race real clear,
 the marketplace is
 just a gear
 to buy us off
 and make us feel
 that being black
 is no big deal.

SAMPSON

We had eight years
to make things right,
and go from dark
unto the light,
but things occurred
that made our dream
a murky mix
of mud and steam.

WILL

I say to you,
my learned bro,
that now you sound
like a foolish schmo.
The system that
you now revile
is the exact same one
that made you smile,
it made you rich
beyond all need,
you played a game
that gave you feed.

SAMPSON

And yet today
just look at me,
The system kicked me
on my knee.
It kicked me hard
Till I was down
Then treated me
like a silly clown.

KIM E.

Hey, you screwed up.
You were not cool,
You were treated
Just like a fool,
And this despite
Your big success

Which should have
Made you feel largesse
but instead made you
get all wound up
and act like a
malicious pup.

SAMPSON

What do you want
for me to say?
I made mistakes,
and had to pay.
But with you guys,
All things are cool,
I can be myself,
Both champ and fool.

WILL

I second that,
my good fine bro,
we are black men
and here can crow.
The party is
about to end,
and we will part
each one a friend.
And to the throng
who watched us talk
and seemed to care,
and did not balk,
you all are urged
to come again
to our place
where men are men.
And share with us
a jug of gin,
and shoot some dice
and maybe win,
that would be nice,
you would agree,
so come on by
and let's par-ty.

End of scene 2.

Scene 3

The stage is empty. Will enters and speaks to the audience.

WILL

I bet you're wondering what became of us. Well, maybe I ought to let them tell you themselves. (*The other six men enter the stage.*)

DYGER

I'm making something of a comeback on the golf circuit. I almost won a major tournament. It feels good to be back. Also, I have a really fine lady in my life. No, she's not my ex-wife and yes, she's white. If that's a problem for you, then so be it. Right now, I think I'm back on the right track. If I'm careful and don't repeat certain mistakes, then things should work out for me just fine. Maybe I'll win another major.

MILT

Nothing special to report. Just hanging in there, taking things day to day. People, mostly old guys who knew of me when I was playing, still stop me on the street and say hello. It's nice to be remembered. Sometimes I think about becoming a coach, but I'm a doer not a teacher. What I know about basketball I can't teach. As for my life in general, I've done enough talking. If you're interested in learning more about me, go buy my book.

SAMPSON

I had some legal issues that landed me in jail. All I wanted to do was recover some personal stuff that some guy stole from me and then wanted to sell. Instead, the judge threw the book at me. All politics. The system is still out to get me. Think what you want about me. All I know is that I'm no murderer, and if anyone says otherwise, just don't say it to my face. I don't need the aggravation, and if you see me in the street, just keep walking. I have nothing to say to you or to anyone who thinks I'm a liar. Just leave me alone.

KIM E.

I'm glad just to be alive. Sometimes I watch old movies of myself when I was playing. Wow. It's hard to believe that the guy in those movies is me. I had great moves, but more importantly I played on a great team. If I was playing today, I'd be making millions. The players today don't know how good they have it, especially the black players who want to rock the boat. Let them do what they want. I'm too old to argue with them. They'll have to learn the truth the hard way.

KALIH

Recently I've been having problems with my memory and speech. That's what happens when you make a living in the ring. The doctors think that my symptoms are caused by some kind of disease of the brain, but I know the truth. When your head is used as a punching bag, your brain gets rattled. Still, I have no regrets. I was a black man who refused to knuckle under. The country that once reviled me now lavishes me with honors. That's vindication enough.

NIGHK

Kalih is right. Boxing can be hard on your brain. Luckily, I still got all my marbles upstairs. At least I think I do. I guess I was born with an exceptionally hard head. However, that did not keep me out of prison. After I served my time, I had to do something with all my pent-up rage. I did not want to become just another black man consumed by anger, so I hired a public relations guy who happened to be white. He helped me reinvent myself. Today, I'm considered a personality. Can you believe that? Me? A personality? A guy who made a living by beating people with his fists? I still feel twinges of rage but now I show it with a smile. I've even appeared in a few movies. In this country, anything is possible, even for an angry black man, as long as he maintains self-control and projects a friendly image.

WILL

(To the other men.)

Thank you, gentlemen *(To the audience.)* As for me, I was convicted of sexually assaulting a lady who I had invited to my home. For me, a quiet evening of socializing turned into a legal nightmare. No surprise there. I'm not the first black man who ever suffered a miscarriage of justice. Just because I popped her a couple of pills and she happened to be white doesn't mean I was up to no good. I have nothing but the utmost respect for women, black or white. I have instructed my attorneys to file an appeal. Hopefully my conviction will be reversed and my liberty restored. If not, I may die in prison. Whatever the outcome, my reputation is ruined and that causes me immense sadness because as a public figure who became a role model for aspiring blacks, I feel I let a lot of people down. *(Pause.)* There you have it. Seven black men. Rich. Famous. By opening ourselves up to you we brought you into our lives. In his book *Democracy in America*, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote, quote, "The hope of liberty had always been allowed to the slave to cheer the hardships of his condition. But the Americans of the South are well aware that emancipation cannot but be dangerous, when the freed man can never be assimilated to his former master," close quote. I wonder if Mister de Tocqueville ever spoke to any slaves or ex-slaves to get their side of the story. How does he know what they hoped for or how they coped with their so-called condition, one that was imposed on them by force? Such presumptuousness. How did the French cheer the hardships of their condition while the Germans were raping France? How did the Russians cheer the hardships of their condition while the Bolsheviks were oppressing Russia? Dumb question. Oppression is nothing to cheer about. At least the French got back their country and the Russians recovered their

property rights. What compensation did the ex-slaves get? Nothing. We became sharecroppers. The Jews got compensation. The Japanese got compensation. So, the blacks should get compensation too. I know what you're thinking. I'm just another conniving black man playing the race card to try to get a hand out. Well, you're wrong. As slaves, we were considered valuable property, so much so that our masters fought a war, even declared themselves an independent country, to keep us enslaved. They knew a good thing when they had it and they weren't about to give it up without a fight. Then, while the war was going on, we were so degraded, the mentality of the slave so deeply and firmly embedded in our minds, our sense of self-worth so corroded by centuries of negative conditioning, that while our masters and overseers were getting their butts whupped by the North we couldn't even free ourselves without help. We had to wait for Mister Lincoln to do it for us. Then our ex-masters left us destitute. We made them rich and in return they reduced us to serfs and landless refugees. I say unfair. I know. White people had it rough too. Who could not but feel compassion for the tens of thousands of families, including President Lincoln's family and indeed even our ex-masters' families, who lost a loved one during that awful conflagration, but slaves had it rougher because we were shunned. The divisive effects of our slave past still haunts us today. On September 5, 2018, United States Senator Cory Booker stated, quote, "Children in this country still encounter a different experience of America based upon the color of their skin and not the content of their character," closed quote. However, I digress. Please forgive me. Maybe Mister de Tocqueville's comments were a reflection of his own biases. Maybe deep down he wanted the United States to fail. Now, my purpose is not to take issue with Mister de Tocqueville or his book or incite one race against the other or make a case for reparations. That's for politicians to do, and I'm not running for office. I have enough issues to deal with. Instead, I leave it up to you to decide whether de Tocqueville was right: that America is doomed to be forever divided into two groups, one black and one white, or that America, in the inimitable words of the pledge of allegiance of the United States, is in fact one nation, under God, indivisible with liberty and justice for all.

KALIH

Liberty and justice for all? For the sake of the country, I hope so. Let history be the judge.

MILT

Good question. I await the answer.

DYGER

Your comments provide me food-for-thought.

KIM E.

Powerful words. I wish I had said them.

SAMPSON

You should have been my lawyer.

NIGHK

Right on, bro. You should have been the judge at my trial.

WILL

(To the other men)

Okay guys. Our business here is finished. Time to pack up and leave. *(To the audience)* I hope you found our discussion entertaining and worthy of your time and attention. Take care and have a good day. Oh. Before I forget, one other thing. Don't believe everything you read, watch or hear in the mass media, especially about me. I'm vilified, demonized, and publicly maligned, but don't forget, I also made people laugh, not at me but with me. For a black man that's no small accomplishment. Thus, in my own humble way I bridged the racial gap and made this country a better place. In fact, all of us here did. Knowing that makes me feel good.

The end.

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