

THE SHOW ENDS WHEN THE STOOP BREAKS

A one-act drama by
Cris Eli Blak

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

NICO, Black/Latino, any gender.

KEENAN, Black/Latino male.

MOLLY, white female.

All characters are high school-aged.

If you would like to expand the cast, please feel free to create an ensemble of your own to be used as audience members of Nico's dance shows, creators of sounds and settings, protestors, passersby on the street, etc.—you are more than welcome to have fun with this however you see fit so that inclusion is never an issue.

SETTING

In front of a stoop, on a block near you.

Whenever the music is too loud to ignore and the poetry is too true to tune out. In a time not too far back and a time not too far away.

PRODUCTION NOTES

This show doesn't have any strict set requirements or production needs. There should be something signifying the stoop. It could be done through the use of boxes, cardboard, tables, anything. Other than that, let the bodies onstage tell the story. As long as we have their voices, we're gonna be alright.

TRACK 1

(At rise...we are in front of a New York City stoop. For the moments that we are peeking in on, this is home. This is our base. A rap song or beat – something old, something classic, something good – can be heard as NICO enters, laying a cardboard box down on the ground. They hold their phone [plugged into a speaker, playing the song or beat] and put it down on the ground as well. They spread their arms out wide, calling attention to anyone and everyone around them.)

NICO: Alright, alright! Ladies and gentlemen, I am your resident street-surfer, your homie from the block, the best and the focus of your fan clubs. *(Winking:)* Hold your applause—hold your applause, just for a second. Yeah, it's me, Nico Smooth. That's what everyone calls me. I don't need to tell you why. I'd rather just show you. It's 'cause I'm good at what I do and I do what I'm good at, you feel me? Anyone from around here can tell you that. And they wouldn't be lyin' neither. When I was six years old, my Uncle Marvin picked me up and told me that since I was always puttin' on a show, I might as well do it for the green. Money. Yours. So, if you enjoy the show—and I know you will—don't wait or hesitate to compensate and exchange some change. Just throw it down right here on my stage. *(Signaling to the box:)* I know you look at me and see nothing but another kid from the block. I know you think I blend in with the rest of the bodega boys. But I'll tell you this. The city is hot with that good noise. You wish you grew up here. You wish that these were your stomping grounds. The best part about it is that you've never seen it all. There's always an alley caved into a corner that leads to a neighborhood that you've never noticed on the subway map. Every corner has a different color, a new shade of brown under an always blue sky. You have reached a new kind of nirvana, ladies and gentlemen. And you can trust that because I was raised to never lie, not

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even twist the truth a little to my benefit. Nuh-uh. I am someone who will look you in the eyes and tell it to you straight. I spit nothin' but the facts, and that...that's a fact. So what do you say? Penny? Nickel? Dime? Quarter? Dollar? I wouldn't complain if you threw in a Lincoln. I'll watch your kids for a Harriet Tubman. I'd pro'ly marry ya if you threw down a Benjamin Franklin. Hey, I'm just tryna get by the best way I know how. One day at a time. Same as you. Some of you. I can tell by the way some of you are dressed that you've never had to think of an original idea in your life. Your brain was handed to you already full of the rest of your life. But this is what I gotta do. It's a choice—and a motive. It's a hustle—and a hike. I don't ever lie and I don't ask for much, nothing except for you to watch my feet and listen to my story.

(They turn up the music and start dancing. It's nothing mind-blowing—it would never win a major competition—but every move has heart and they know it. They feel it. And since they feel it, we do too.)

TRACK 2

(Later. Nico sits on the stoop, eating from a pack of candy, counting a little bit of change—the payment for their entertainment. KEENAN enters, holding a grease-stained pizza box, beads of sweat swimming down his forehead. He uses his free arm to wipe it off, but as soon as he does, more starts to stream. He sits down beside Nico.)

KEENAN: Yo.

NICO: Yo.

KEENAN: It's too hot outside.

NICO: I personally blame the sun.

KEENAN: I've always liked the moon better.

NICO: That's racist to the sun, bro. People like you make the sun all mad and it gets offended and starts affecting climate change and stuff. If Alaska disappears, it's on you.

(Keenan looks at Nico, waiting for an indication that they were joking. Waits. Waits. Nico just eats the candy. Finally, Nico looks over at Keenan, trying to fight laughter, then they break. They both do.)

KEENAN: Payday?

NICO: Nickels and dimes, baby, nickels and dimes.

KEENAN: Almost to the big time.

NICO: One step closer.

KEENAN: How much do you have now?

NICO: In total?

KEENAN: Yeah.

NICO: 'Bout one fifty.

KEENAN: Not bad.

NICO: For a year? I'd say.

KEENAN: You're about a hundred thousand away from your own stoop.

NICO: I'll work for it.

KEENAN: I know you will.

NICO: What are you doin' over here anyway?

KEENAN: I got a delivery.

NICO: They got you on foot doin' that?

KEENAN: It pays.

NICO: How much?

KEENAN: More than you make spinning around on the sidewalk.

NICO: Ah, you joke now.

KEENAN: Just being honest.

NICO: Keep it up. Just you wait. One day you'll be delivering an extra cheese with mushrooms to my mansion.

KEENAN: Is that what you think?

NICO: That's what I know. And I know what I know. They opened up a new dance studio down the street.

KEENAN: That's a yoga studio.

NICO: But they have dance classes on the weekend, so listen, here's what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna go in there and learn how to do every kind of dance. Not just hip hop, but salsa, ballroom, hey, maybe even line dancing. See me up there with a big belt buckle and a cowboy hat. Whatever it takes. Then I'm applying to Juilliard and cementing my name in the history books.

KEENAN: Juilliard is expensive.

NICO: Scholarships.

KEENAN: Juilliard is hard.

NICO: I've never been afraid of work.

KEENAN: You've never had a real job.

NICO: But I got passion all day. Full time.

KEENAN: Juilliard only lets in certain kinds of people, and I'm sorry, but you ain't that kind of people.

NICO: Why do you do that? Huh, man? Why do you step on my dreams like I'm some gum on the sidewalk? It ain't right.

KEENAN: Nobody's stepping on your dreams.

NICO: Except you.

KEENAN: No. I'm just—

NICO: Stepping.

KEENAN: Being honest with you.

NICO: I don't need your honesty. I need your support.

KEENAN: Fine. Alright. You got my support. You know you do. You always have my support, from day one to day none, cradle to the grave.

NICO: When they see my moves—when they see what Nico can do—nothing else is gonna matter. Not money, not college, not dreams, not anything. Just me, there, doin' my thing. You can bet on that.

KEENAN: Sure. I don't have time for your riddles. I make a real living. I'll tell you what I'm gonna do since we out here manifesting. I'm gonna get enough dough for a car, the one Mr. Hubert's selling, and I'm gonna take that fine piece Molly Pippins on a date.

NICO: That girl doesn't want you!

KEENAN: Shut up—

NICO: I'm just being honest! That's how it is, right? Honesty comes before support.

KEENAN: Ha ha. You're real funny. Hilarious. Quit dancing and become a comedian. Ever since I first laid eyes on that girl, I knew she was supposed to be mine, that she was gonna be. I knew from that first day I saw her at the food court that she was it. She's "the one." When you know, you know. When you know a girl's supposed to be yours. When you know nobody's gonna make you feel the way she makes you feel. And she—she makes me feel like Superman!

NICO: Okay...

KEENAN: And she's Lois Lane!

NICO: Bit of a stretch.

KEENAN: And once I get my funds right, I'mma fly her to wherever she wants to go. Italy? I'll make the meatballs. Paris? I'll slide her my baguette, you know what I mean? I'll take her to Africa and join a bongo band if it'll make her smile. This city is small compared to my dreams. You can stay here if you want, earning your nickels and dimes, swingin' enough to buy a burger. But me? I'm gonna go from flippin' pizza dough to makin' pieces of dough. Cash money, honey. You don't know nothin' about that.

NICO: Maybe not. Maybe not yet! But one of these days. That's what the work's for.

(Beat.)

KEENAN: On my way down here, I passed by Sam's store, and they had this sign up. I couldn't tell what it said from a distance, but when I got closer, I could really read it.

NICO: What'd it say? Are they having a sale?

KEENAN: They're closing. Got bought out.

NICO: What? Nah. Not Sam's. I figured everyone else was gonna get bought out—I mean, that much is pretty clear. Anyone with half an eyeball can see that they're about to tear this place down and flip it. But Sam's—they can't take that away from us. And what about the mural?

(No response.)

Yo, Keenan, what about the mural? Are they taking down the mural or not?

KEENAN: I don't know.

NICO: They better not.

KEENAN: They probably will.

NICO: I thought you said you didn't know.

KEENAN: I don't know. Not for sure. But if they're changing everything else about it, I don't know why they'd leave the mural up. They don't care about Ramy.

NICO: But we do!

KEENAN: And who are we compared to them?! Nobody. We ain't in control of what they do to the place, Nico. We are nobody.

NICO: Dang.

(Nico stands up in frustration and anger. They kick a rock.)

KEENAN: Chill out.

NICO: Chill out?

KEENAN: Yeah. Chill. Out. For real. Somebody sees you acting a fool out here, they'll call the cops, and what's that gonna solve? Who's that gonna help? Not you. Not me. Not Sam's. Definitely not Ramy.

NICO: We gotta do something about it.

KEENAN: Like?

NICO: You're the one with the big ideas.

KEENAN: I'm kinda sweating out all my big ideas right now standing here talking to you.

NICO: Okay. We can, like...protest. Make signs. Call news stations. Yeah, that'll be good. Get the media's attention—get their eyes on us. We can...tie ourselves to the building, like how white kids tie themselves to trees so they don't get cut down. We gotta do stupid stuff like that. Stupid white kid stuff gets

things done. Whatever we gotta do to show that we mean business.

KEENAN: Fool, we come with protests, they'll show us their permits.

NICO: They can't take it down.

(Keenan stands. They are now at equal height.)

KEENAN: You don't think I know that? You know I know that, but I'm not gonna make an idiot of myself in the process. I'm definitely not gonna get in trouble for it.

NICO: Is that all you care about—yourself?

KEENAN: That's not all I care about, but of course I gotta think of myself first.

NICO: You're scared.

KEENAN: I'm smart.

NICO: Go deliver your pizza.

KEENAN: Yeah. I'll do that. 'Cause it's my job. Don't get mad at me. I'm not the one tearing the joint down.

NICO: I'm not mad.

KEENAN: You sure sound mad.

NICO: I'm not mad.

KEENAN: You're acting mad.

NICO: I'm not! *(After a breath:)* What can we do, man? We need to do something. We need to try.

KEENAN: Respectfully, I'm not getting in trouble for you. You're my friend. I don't wanna be your cellmate.

NICO: Then don't do anything bad. Post something. Make a flyer. I don't know. Small stuff.

KEENAN: No matter what we do –

NICO: Don't say it.

KEENAN: No matter what we do, it's not gonna stop them from taking down the mural.

NICO: You're hopeless.

KEENAN: Realistic.

NICO: Scared. What do you even care, really? Your only goal is to come and report to me about ex-girlfriends then get up outta here, you and your little uptown girl.

KEENAN: I got goals. Nothing wrong with that.

NICO: It is if you turn your back on your friend.

KEENAN: And we're still going with you not being mad at me.

NICO: I'm not mad.

KEENAN: Okay.

NICO: ...I'm just disappointed.

KEENAN: Woooooow. You my daddy now?

NICO: I'm a friend. A good friend. A real friend. A good, real friend who's telling you like it is. The really real. You're desperate. You're desperate to be someone you're not. Always wanting to run away.

KEENAN: No one's running.

NICO: Then stand here, for something. For your friends.

KEENAN: A mural isn't a person, Nico. A mural isn't life.

NICO: I know that.

(Nico sits.)

KEENAN: Ramy is gone. Painting on a wall doesn't mean a thing if he doesn't have a heart that beats. I hate to say it. I really

do, but it is what it is. We gotta be honest with ourselves. We have to be real. You have memories. That's even stronger. At least I think so. Do you?

NICO: No. No, I don't. Memories can fade so fast. In a snap. And then they're gone. They get replaced with newer ones, and next thing you know, what was once memory becomes dust, a file you can't retrieve. But with the mural—that was always gonna be there. Even if we went away somewhere, to Italy or France or wherever, we could always come back to his face. To that memorial. That means something to me.

KEENAN: We were all friends.

NICO: And now?

KEENAN: And now it looks like things are about to change—

NICO: Just like that.

KEENAN: In a snap.

NICO: Cool.

KEENAN: Listen—

NICO: You talk like it's so easy for you.

(Keenan picks up the pizza box.)

KEENAN: I won't get a tip if the pizza isn't on time.

NICO: You can't run away from who you are, from where you come from.

KEENAN: I'll hit you up later. Stay safe.

(Keenan exits.)

NICO: Hey!

(But no one's there. Nico is by herself. They take the pack of candy and keep eating.)

You're gonna listen to me one day. Everybody's gonna listen to me one day. No more laughin' at Nico. No, no, no. No more laughin' at Nico and Nico's dreams and Nico's voice and Nico's outfits. I'm gonna be somebody. I gotta be somebody.

(It is clear that the person they want to believe this the most is themselves. The sound of a passing subway train.)

TRACK 3

(Keenan sits on the stoop, rubbing his foot, sore from a long day of work. MOLLY enters. Lost. Confused. A bottle of pepper spray intertwined between her fingers. She looks more out of place than a rainstorm in a desert. Keenan notices her, gets nervous, then gains enough confidence to stand.)

KEENAN: Hey, you're —

MOLLY: Get away from me!

(She holds up the pepper spray, causing Keenan to duck and back away. He puts his hands up.)

KEENAN: Okay, chill, chill. It's me.

MOLLY: Who are you?

(He stands up straight.)

KEENAN: It's Keenan.

MOLLY: Do I know you, Keenan?

KEENAN: I mean, yeah. I mean, well, not really. No. No, not really. Not necessarily. Like not for real. Nah. We're not best friends or anything like that. But we know each other — what I mean is that we know each other's faces.

MOLLY: Excuse me?

KEENAN: No—what I mean is, like, we've seen each other around. I know you. I know your face. I've seen you around places, like the food court, at places. You're Molly.

MOLLY: And now he's saying my name. He knows my name. He said my name out loud. Can this interaction get any creepier?

KEENAN: I'm telling you.

MOLLY: I have a pretty good memory.

KEENAN: Hey, so do I, that's cool. We already have so much in common.

MOLLY: I don't know you. I don't remember you.

KEENAN: Oh...

MOLLY: Are you a threat to me, Keegan?

KEENAN: Okay, so, a couple things. One: it's Keenan. You know Kee-nan. Like a key that you put in the door to unlock it...but with an extra syllable at the end. Kee-nan.

MOLLY: You're neglecting my question.

KEENAN: What was the—oh, right. Secondly: No. I'm not a threat. Not to you, not to anyone. I promise. You can pat me down if you want. I know the procedure. I can't hurt you. I wouldn't. I wouldn't hurt anyone.

MOLLY: That sounds like something someone who's a threat would say to not come off like a threat.

KEENAN: What would a nonthreatening person say then?

MOLLY: Probably the same thing. And this is why I don't trust people from this side of town.

KEENAN: "This side of town"? I'm from this side of town, though.

MOLLY: News flash. I don't trust you.

KEENAN: But why?

MOLLY: Because I don't know you.

KEENAN: Easily resolvable! We could get to know each other. Now. Here.

MOLLY: It's late. I have things to do.

KEENAN: I'll take you wherever you need to be.

MOLLY: Do you have a car?

KEENAN: Not yet.

MOLLY: Then I don't see how you're taking me anywhere.

KEENAN: I have a friend who has a friend who has a car. If you give me like two seconds, I can call the guy so he can call the guy.

MOLLY: That sounds like a lot of trouble, and I don't have the time.

(She starts to walk past him.)

(Last minute save...)

KEENAN: I'm about to have one. A car. I'm buying one. Been working real hard for it too.

(She stops, crossing her arms. She doesn't know where she's going anyway.)

MOLLY: Good for you. What do you do?

KEENAN: I work.

MOLLY: Okay, but—

KEENAN: I work hard. Hardest working man in the city.

MOLLY: That's great, but where do you work?

KEENAN: At a job. Duh.

MOLLY: I see this is going nowhere.

KEENAN: I deliver pizzas.

MOLLY: For what pizza place?

KEENAN: Vito's. It's up the street.

MOLLY: Never heard of it.

KEENAN: I'm sure I've never heard of the place you got your outfit from either.

MOLLY: What –

KEENAN: Family owned. Vito's is. Goes back to the seventies. Best pizza you're gonna find. Everybody says all it takes is one slice and bam, you're addicted. Got people coming into the shop, scratching at their neck, talkin' about, "Please, man, just a slice. I'll do anything for a slice."

MOLLY: I'd agree to disagree.

KEENAN: See, and now we can have a conversation. You're not about to come and disrespect Vito's like that, not without explanation and good reason.

MOLLY: Why does every store or shop on this side of town –

KEENAN: Here she goes with this "side of town" nonsense.

MOLLY: They're always somebody's name.

KEENAN: It's a sign of respect. Open up your own joint, name it after yourself and guess what? You live forever.

MOLLY: Sure. You could also name it something classy?

KEENAN: Classy.

MOLLY: Yes.

KEENAN: Like...Nordstrom?

MOLLY: Like Domino's.

(Keenan grabs his chest and pretends that he is having a heart attack. He really sells it too.)

KEENAN: I can't believe you. You're killing me.

MOLLY: This is a bit, isn't it?

KEENAN: Domino's?!

MOLLY: They have good pizza!

KEENAN: They do not have good pizza! Repent! Now that is how you get hurt around here.

MOLLY: Even I know you're exaggerating about that.

KEENAN: Domino's is fake pizza. Manufactured, corporate pizza. It's so fake I wouldn't be surprised if Domino's Pizza came with a SIM card shoved into it and an outlet cord.

MOLLY: Are you done?

KEENAN: Yes. I am. Sorry. I had a moment. I'm passionate about my work. I'm a hard worker. You know you can sit with me. If you want.

MOLLY: I have places to be, Keenan.

KEENAN: Now you know it.

MOLLY: Now I know you. Sort of.

KEENAN: I can take you.

MOLLY: Without a car.

KEENAN: Feet can take you farther.

MOLLY: That's not even somewhat true. What am I supposed to do, get on your back?

KEENAN: We could arrange that. (*Off her look:*) It's clear you don't know where you're going. It's a little obvious. Actually, a lot. It's a lot obvious.

MOLLY: And here I thought I was a good actress.

KEENAN: I'll tell you who's a good actress.

MOLLY: Meryl Streep –

KEENAN: My Auntie Linda! She falls asleep at work every day, but she figured out how to do it with her eyes open and everything so nobody suspects a thing. Smart woman. It's in the genes. Well, I mean, she's a corrections officer, so she should probably have her eyes on things, but a skill is a skill.

MOLLY: You're funny.

KEENAN: For real? Even for someone who's just from "this side of town"?

MOLLY: Yes.

KEENAN: I appreciate that.

MOLLY: Do you really know this area well?

KEENAN: Probably too well.

MOLLY: I need to be at my dad's new store. It should be close by.

KEENAN: Hmm. Okay. What's it called? I know all the places.

MOLLY: It's going to be named one thing, but right now it's something else – I think something like Sam's.

(Keenan freezes.)

KEENAN: Your dad is the one buying Sam's?

MOLLY: You know it?

KEENAN: Everybody around here does.

MOLLY: Perfect, then you can lead the way.

KEENAN: I don't know if I can.

MOLLY: I'm sorry?

(He sits down. Defeated.)

KEENAN: Not Sam's.

MOLLY: I don't think I understand what the problem is.

KEENAN: Have you been to the store before?

MOLLY: I've seen pictures.

KEENAN: And in those pictures, did you see the store from all angles?

MOLLY: Yes. I think so.

KEENAN: Did you see a mural in any of those pictures?

MOLLY: Yes. Actually, I remember seeing a mural. Nicely done.

KEENAN: Is your dad gonna take it down, the mural?

MOLLY: I'm not sure.

KEENAN: But if you had to guess.

MOLLY: If I had to guess, I'd say he's taking down everything, changing it into something completely different. New and different, that's kind of his brand. What's so important about a mural?

KEENAN: The mural on your dad's new store is important to some people.

MOLLY: Is it important to you?

KEENAN: Why would you ask me that?

MOLLY: It was a question.

KEENAN: But why?

MOLLY: I want an answer?

KEENAN: I don't know. I don't know how I feel about it. Sometimes I get why someone would think it was important, and other times it's not that big of a deal.

MOLLY: What kind of day is today?

KEENAN: A confusing one. Most of the time I just feel like there's death, and there's nothing after it anyway, so we just gotta move on and live our lives before we end up on a mural too.

MOLLY: What does death have to do with it?

KEENAN: Because—the kid on the mural, who the mural is of—he was a friend. He died.

MOLLY: My condolences.

KEENAN: I don't need sympathy. I don't want it.

MOLLY: I'm not—

KEENAN: And you know what bothers me? I mean, what bothers me the most, out of all the things that bother me? I didn't do anything about it. I never did. I never have. I probably never will. I don't talk about it. I try not to think about it. Any of it. And now that mural is being torn down, and I don't wanna do anything about that either. Or maybe I should, and I'm scared. Or maybe I've become numb, or maybe this whole place makes me feel dead anyway, so why not paint a mural for me too?

MOLLY: How did your friend die, Keenan?

KEENAN: (*Hesitantly:*) It was an accident. A bad accident. And accidents happen. You can't stop them or control them or hop

in a time machine and go back in time to fix what happened. It's done. Over and done with.

MOLLY: Do you believe that?

KEENAN: Do you care?

MOLLY: I'm trying to.

KEENAN: And then what's gonna happen, huh? If I— if I pour out every piece of myself to you in this moment, then what? I'll tell you. Nothing. Nada. Zilch. Nothing is going to change. Nothing ever changes, not here, not nowhere, because ya see, change is always nice to talk about, always good to promote and push and act like you're fighting for, but it's nothing but muted noise. Are you now gonna run to Daddy, tell him to scrap all his plans with the store?

MOLLY: I can't do that.

KEENAN: You could, though. But I don't expect you to. This block is changing. Every block is changing. Becoming unfamiliar. Foreign land. And your dad—your dad is Columbus, or Neil Armstrong, planting the flag down on something that doesn't belong to him. I wouldn't be surprised if your family owns everything in a year's time.

MOLLY: Is that a joke?

KEENAN: No. It's how things go. Things are cleared out and reconstructed. Taken over. Occupied. In six months, the pizza joint I work at is gonna be a Starbucks. Pepperoni replaced by oat milk. The bodega right there is gonna be a Dunkin' Donuts, and a bunch of blonde undergrads are gonna take this place over like Godzilla, taking pictures on our stoops like they weren't once someone's home.

(Beat.)

MOLLY: I should really get going.

KEENAN: Yeah.

(Molly begins to exit but stops.)

MOLLY: I still don't know where I'm going.

KEENAN: None of us know where we're going.

MOLLY: Deep. But I meant that I didn't know my way to the store.

KEENAN: Yeah. I figured.

MOLLY: *(After a breath:)* Where do you want to go, Keenan, if you could go anywhere?

KEENAN: Somewhere with sand.

MOLLY: You can go to a beach anytime.

KEENAN: No, I mean somewhere that's nothing but sand. And water. And sky. We know that word, "paradise." I don't want a word. I don't want a painting in my head or an idea that I can't follow through on. I want to feel love between my toes and protection over my head. I want to be in the middle of it. I don't know where it is. I don't know how I'm gonna get there. But I'm gonna swing those pizzas and walk holes in my shoes 'til I'm on a plane skating down the runway.

MOLLY: I believe you'll get there.

KEENAN: Two minutes ago you didn't even care to know me.

MOLLY: I'm known for making mistakes.

KEENAN: Would you ever go out with someone like me?

MOLLY: Talk about a tonal shift.

KEENAN: I mean it. Would you take me to one of those uptown parties, or would I just be a boy in the hood?

MOLLY: I don't see where this is coming from.

KEENAN: How do you feel knowing that you're more likely to reach my paradise, simply by being who you are? Forget that. I know the answer.

MOLLY: You don't.

KEENAN: Molly, right now I think I know everything but myself.

MOLLY: I guess I'll find my way then.

KEENAN: I'll walk you.

MOLLY: Really. I'll be fine.

KEENAN: I need to walk. I don't know what I want, okay? I don't know what I stand for, if I stand for anything. I don't know if I'm a good person for wanting to get up outta here or if I'm a bad one for not appreciating the people I'd be leaving behind. I don't know if I'm running from here or running from myself. I don't know if I care or if I tell myself I care so that I don't feel like a jerk. I don't know any of these things. I don't know anything. I don't know why the world works the way it does and why it chooses to take away good people who haven't done anything to anybody. I don't know! It's messed up and messy and tricky and I have no idea what to do about it anymore. And I'm telling you because it doesn't matter. You see "this side of town," and any care you had is flushed down the drain. You see me, and you think I'm a threat. Are you wrong, or am I wrong? Are you right, or am I right? You can see why I might need to walk to try to either forget or understand what's going on. It's all good.

MOLLY: Okay.

KEENAN: Okay.

MOLLY: Lead the way, captain.

(He forces a smile, conflicted on how he wishes he felt about the situation versus how he really feels. They walk away.)

TRACK 4

(The next morning. Nico enters, dragging their cardboard box platform behind them. Completely absent is any of the enthusiasm that they embodied at the beginning. They look worn out, drained. They stop in front of the stoop and hold the cardboard piece out in front of them.)

NICO: You know, I could make this cardboard into a picket sign, or a billboard, or a bed, or a blanket. I've danced on this street for a few years. I've been the eyes and ears of this here sidewalk, and people watch and they clap along and they say, "Wow, that kid is something else. Real talented," and things like that, and sometimes they even drop money down, and it's always appreciated. Then they leave and I leave and the record continues the next day and the day after that, and I'm starting to realize that all they're doing is watching me speak, they're watching me move, but they're not hearing any of it. See, with every step I take, there's a meaning, a message, a verse. Listen.

(Nico does a move.)

Do you hear it?

(They do another.)

What about now? Sometimes I'm talking about joy. Sometimes I'm talking about pain. Do you feel it? I do. When my feet hit the ground like this, it takes me back to easier times when me, Keenan and Ramy used to make beats on the fire escapes. We'd quite literally escape in our own minds, close our eyes and imagine that we were playing to a sold-out, packed crowd in a giant arena. They all came to hear us beat. Then while they were making sounds, I would walk to the front of the stage, and the crowd would go wild. I mean big cheers, crazy noise, chanting

my name. Wild stuff. I'd lift one foot, and they'd get even louder. Then my mom would call me to come in for lunch or homework, and I'd be right back on the fire escape. No biggie though, 'cause I knew that every night I had permission to dream. And I did. But now – I haven't been able to sleep for the past couple of nights, and I don't know what to do without any dreams to lean on. I don't know who to be. I don't know what to say.

(They let the cardboard fall to the ground and then step on it. They stand there. Silent.)

(Keenan enters.)

KEENAN: Yo.

NICO: ...Yo.

KEENAN: I thought I'd find you here.

NICO: Same place – where else would I be?

KEENAN: No crowd?

NICO: Nah.

KEENAN: What's wrong?

NICO: What do you think?

KEENAN: Everything.

NICO: That's one way to think about it.

KEENAN: Sorry to hear that.

NICO: Sure you are.

KEENAN: I saw your livestream.

NICO: You watched?

KEENAN: Some of it.

NICO: And?

KEENAN: And...

NICO: You brought it up.

KEENAN: I was just sayin'.

NICO: You were just sayin' what?

KEENAN: You were alone.

NICO: So?

KEENAN: I just noticed. You were out there alone. You were by yourself.

NICO: You saw that.

KEENAN: Yeah.

NICO: But you didn't come out there.

KEENAN: Don't be like that.

NICO: No, you saw me out there alone, right? Like I was some lost puppy dog?

KEENAN: I didn't say that.

NICO: Like you're feeling sorry for me.

KEENAN: No.

NICO: But you didn't come out so that I wouldn't still be by myself, did you?

KEENAN: Come on—

NICO: Did you?

KEENAN: You know my mama doesn't let me out after a certain time.

NICO: That's what I thought.

KEENAN: I saw where you had posted about wanting to gather outside of Sam's.

NICO: Yeah.

KEENAN: But no one showed up. Why?

NICO: Because I only have fifty followers on there, I don't know. I reached out to some people to see if they could spread the word, but no flow.

KEENAN: Not one of your friends was willing to share it?

NICO: What friends? I only had two friends. One of them is dead and one of them is...whoever you are.

KEENAN: I'm me.

NICO: You didn't come out.

KEENAN: I already told you —

NICO: I've seen you sneak out for lesser things.

KEENAN: Just because someone doesn't do what you want them to do doesn't mean they're the enemy.

NICO: I looked like an idiot out there.

KEENAN: You could've gone home.

NICO: No. I couldn't have. What don't you get? Yeah, I looked like a fool, but I made a promise to my friend that I wouldn't let him disappear, and I stick to what I say, no matter what. Just because you switch sides doesn't mean I am.

KEENAN: "Switch sides"? You're childish.

NICO: I'm committed.

KEENAN: To what?

NICO: My art.

KEENAN: Your art? Do you know how many artists there are out here?

NICO: I'm different.

KEENAN: How?

NICO: I just am.

KEENAN: But how?

NICO: How are you different from any other pizza boy with a dream?

KEENAN: I'm not! And that's what I'm trying to tell you.

NICO: Like I said, I have my art. I have potential.

KEENAN: Potential isn't enough! Life is not a movie where everything magically works out for everyone at the end. That's not the way it goes. You gotta work. And you gotta fail. Or know that failing is an option.

NICO: So you could fail too.

KEENAN: I probably will! And that's why—that's why sometimes I hate myself.

NICO: What?

KEENAN: Sometimes I hate myself. What do I have, where do I come from? Nothing. So, in the eyes of the greater universe, I too am nothing. And I want to be more. I try to be more. But it's hard when you're trying to build from nothing. The dirt. The ground. The mud. We are dirt and forgettable. No one thinks of us. Who would want to? We're charity cases. We're nothing. Which is why I can't stay here. I can't stand this for much longer, most definitely not the rest of my life. You think I don't hurt, but I hurt. I hurt, and I smile until it hurts. And I hope until it hurts. It's still hurt though, no matter how you try to twist it.

NICO: I'm committed to Ramy's memory. He doesn't have a future, not even the prospect of one. He had that chance taken away from him.

KEENAN: Are you Ramy?

NICO: Of course I'm not Ramy.

KEENAN: Right. You're not Ramy. So you don't know what Ramy would or wouldn't want you to do.

NICO: He wouldn't want us to forget.

KEENAN: He wouldn't want us to waste our time on impossible missions either. They're not gonna keep the mural. I'm sorry, but they're not.

NICO: I'm not gonna give up until my options are exhausted.

KEENAN: They're not going to do it.

NICO: You talk like you know it's a fact.

KEENAN: I do.

NICO: You do?

KEENAN: One hundred percent.

NICO: How could you know that?

KEENAN: I hear things.

NICO: From who?

KEENAN: People.

NICO: What people?

KEENAN: People who know people who know people who know things like the things I'm telling you.

NICO: Thanks for clearing that up.

KEENAN: It's Molly.

NICO: Who?

KEENAN: The girl I'm always talking about.

NICO: White Girl Molly.

KEENAN: Sure.

NICO: Since when do you talk to White Girl Molly? I thought you just stalked her from a distance.

KEENAN: I never stalked her.

NICO: Should I look up the definition of stalking?

KEENAN: Healthy admiration.

NICO: Whatever helps you sleep at night.

KEENAN: Yesterday. We talked last night.

NICO: And you didn't tell me.

KEENAN: I didn't think we were on good terms. I'm still not sure.

NICO: Doesn't matter. You've been wanting to talk to that girl for forever.

KEENAN: Yeah, well, I'm not sure I swept her off her feet or anything.

NICO: But she said something about Ramy's mural?

KEENAN: Yeah, but you can't get all heated when I tell you.

NICO: I'm cool.

KEENAN: Promise me.

NICO: I said I'm cool.

KEENAN: Alright. Molly's dad is who bought the building.

NICO: White Girl Molly's dad is who bought the building?! And you kept talking to her?

KEENAN: You're not being cool right now.

(Nico rolls their eyes and lowers their defenses. A sense of familiarity and civility starts to return.)

NICO: Fine.

KEENAN: I walked with her and met her dad.

NICO: Was this before or after you saw that I was gonna be out there later in the night?

KEENAN: I had already seen it.

NICO: And you didn't think to tell me, "Yo Nico, might not wanna go out there—the dude said he didn't care about our dead friend. He just wants to sell overpriced canned goods."

KEENAN: What if I had? Would you have stayed home? Honestly.

NICO: Probably not.

KEENAN: Okay then.

NICO: Definitely not.

KEENAN: I know.

NICO: The invitation is still open to you.

KEENAN: Maybe next time.

NICO: What's stopping you? And don't try to blame your mama again.

(Keenan thinks.)

KEENAN: Me. I'm stopping myself.

NICO: Why?

KEENAN: I really don't know.

NICO: Just come out. Just tonight. One night. One hour.

KEENAN: You know what I think it is? I think it's that no matter how many places they change, the people are gonna stay the same. They can spend billions of dollars on redesigning every square inch or every block, but it doesn't make me or you any better. They're not redesigning us. They can make a

metropolis for the rich, and it wouldn't make the poor people richer. It would just drive them out into another slum. It's never gonna change for us. People like us. We aren't ever going to be anything greater unless we get out and do it ourselves. They'll hand us handouts but not new lives. And I don't wanna be left behind with everyone else.

NICO: Including me.

KEENAN: Not if we both get out! I don't hate this place—I just hate thinking that I could become someone who died never knowing what the sky looks like somewhere else.

(They both look to the sky, thinking thoughts we don't know.)

I gotta get to work.

NICO: Double shift?

KEENAN: No, just a few hours. Not too bad. Want me to cop you a double cheese?

NICO: I'm good.

KEENAN: Sure?

NICO: Positive.

KEENAN: Alright then. I should get going.

NICO: Bet.

(But no one moves.)

KEENAN: I do miss him.

NICO: Yeah, me too.

KEENAN: Catch you later?

NICO: Catch you later.

KEENAN: Cool.

NICO: Hey Keenan, man.

KEENAN: What's up?

NICO: Maybe just a slice.

KEENAN: (*Smiling.*) I can make that work.

(Keenan exits. Nico steps onto their cardboard stage, moves their feet a little and looks at the audience.)

NICO: Do you hear it?

(The sound of a passing subway.)

TRACK 5

(Another nighttime. Keenan sits on the stoop. He looks around.)

KEENAN: We're taught not to feel. So we don't. We're taught to be a man. And we never grow up. I am a young man made out of missing parts. Destroyed pieces. As I vomit these words on an already trashed street, I push myself to try. I am learning to hear music again. When I deliver a pizza, I feel like I'm doing something, for myself and for someone else. If I get it to them hot and on time, they're happy, I'm happy. I might even get a tip. And it makes me think—I matter. Somebody saw me today. And when someone sees you—there's no feeling like that. Because you remember that you exist. You're not invisible. You're a person. You're alive. And someone knows that. Because someone sees you.

(After a beat, Molly enters.)

MOLLY: Hey.

(Keenan stands.)

KEENAN: Oh hey, what's up?

MOLLY: You tell me. You called me to come down here.

KEENAN: Right. Yes. Did I wake you up?

MOLLY: It's ten o'clock.

KEENAN: I didn't know if I caught you past curfew.

MOLLY: Do you still have a curfew?

KEENAN: No.

MOLLY: Okay.

KEENAN: Yes.

MOLLY: Okay.

KEENAN: I wanted to see you.

MOLLY: That's sweet I guess, but this couldn't have waited 'til morning or afternoon or any time when I wasn't in this neighborhood at this time of night?

KEENAN: You're afraid.

MOLLY: Aren't you?

KEENAN: I'd personally be more afraid if I were in your neighborhood. I thought that maybe I would have changed your mind.

MOLLY: About my safety?

KENNAN: About your perspective. What would I be afraid of out here?

MOLLY: You don't know, and that's the point. You never know what or who is out there waiting for you. I have my pepper spray just in case.

KEENAN: Ignorance is certainly bliss.

MOLLY: I have every right to be suspicious.

KEENAN: Is it a matter of where you are, or is it a matter of the people who live where you are?

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