

Landscaping

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CAST

George, sixteen year old Hispanic teenager wearing a suit and tie of the uniform of the prep school he attends.

Grayson, sixteen years old, white, who is in George's class at an exclusive prep school.

Stuart Adams, Grayson's father, around 45.

John, George's father, around 45, and is wearing work clothes

Kenny, around sixteen years old, from the neighborhood, dressed casually.

ACT I, SCENE I

The kitchen of George's apartment. It is morning and JOHN and his son are scrambling to get out the door. The son, GEORGE, is a sophomore in high school at an exclusive prep school. He wears a suit and tie, the uniform of the school. George is sitting on a chair, tying his work boots, but then goes into a coughing fit. George enters and looks on with concern over his father's coughing.

GEORGE

You OK?

JOHN

I'm fine.

GEORGE

You've been coughing a lot lately.

JOHN

I'm fine.

A beat.

You working with me today?

George pours some cereal and sits down to eat it.

GEORGE

Well, I'm suppose to go over to this classmate's house to work on a project, but I'd rather work with you. I need the money, and I want to learn the business.

JOHN

Let me make this clear: you will not work for, or take over my company after you graduate college.

GEORGE
We can't afford college.

JOHN
Let me worry about that.
You're too smart not to go to
college.

GEORGE
But I enjoy being outside, working
with my hands, being your own boss.

JOHN
You can do so much better.

GEORGE
What's wrong with what you do?

JOHN
You don't wanna be some old
landscaper like your father, doing
physical labor into your fifties.

GEORGE
It's a life. You employ all these
people. What's wrong with that?

JOHN
Because you can do so much better.
I'm proud of the fact I have thirty-
five people working for me, that I
came to this country not knowing
the language, not knowing anything,
but son, you can do so much more.

*George's cell phone rings. You hear George respond to the
call. You don't hear the other voice.*

GEORGE
Hey, let me call you back.

A beat as George puts his phone down.

JOHN
Who was that?

GEORGE
Kenny.

JOHN
I wish you wouldn't hang out with
him.

GEORGE

He's my best friend, known him since kindergarten.

JOHN

He's not your friend. And he's gonna end up working at the factory, like most of your friends, or hanging out on the corner planning their next petty crime.

GEORGE

My friends' fathers work at the factory and they support their families. What's wrong with the that?

JOHN

It pays horrible wages and that's why all your friends' fathers work two or three extra jobs just to make ends meet.

Listen, Go and do your project with your new friend. I got enough workers.

GEORGE

He's not my friend.

John starts coughing again.

That's not a good cough. You think it has anything to do with the factory next door?

JOHN

The report from the city said the sir quality is fine, meets all state and federal regulations.

GEORGE

I don't know if I believe that. You ever notice how many kids have asthma in our neighborhood?

JOHN

No, but why do you say that?

GEORGE

I read.

A beat.

Can I ask you something?

JOHN

Sure son.

GEORGE

You own a company; you could afford to buy a house in the suburbs. Why haven't we moved?

JOHN

I already invested my profits.

GEORGE

In what?

A beat.

JOHN

Hey, hurry up. You don't wanna be late.

GEORGE

Don't get me wrong: I appreciate the opportunity, but I like the people in our neighborhood. I liked the local high school I was in. At least they didn't look down on me.

JOHN

You weren't challenged in that school. You need to be challenged.

George's cell phone rings. George takes it and stands off to the side.

GEORGE

They don't know?...I appreciate that...Bye.

George comes back. A beat.

JOHN

Kenny again?

GEORGE

Yes.

A beat.

JOHN

Something going on?

GEORGE

No.

JOHN
Nothing you wanna tell me?

GEORGE
No Dad. Nothing's going on.

A beat as John scrutinizes his son.

JOHN
OK. Now, when you're with your new friend, and they ask you what your father does for a living, tell them I'm a landscape architect. You wanna make a good impression.

GEORGE
They're not my friends. And what's wrong with what you do?.

JOHN
You'll understand one day. But I want you to be with your friend. That's why we sent you to that school, to meet the right people.

GEORGE
My friends are the right people.

I like our neighborhood. Our neighborhood is a community. People look out for each other. All the mothers are either sitting on their stoops or hanging out their windows. It's the safest neighborhood in the entire city.

JOHN
Son, it's dirty and the fumes from that factory makes it unhealthy.

GEORGE
But I rarely see fumes.

JOHN
That's because it's a chemical factory, so a lot of the fumes are invisible. People here are too poor to move, or too poor to fight it.

A beat.

GEORGE
So why haven't we moved?

JOHN

I told you. I invested the money already.

A beat.

GEORGE

They look down on me in that school.

JOHN

What do they say?

GEORGE

It's not something they say. You just feel it, that somehow I'm an intruder. The other day some kid asked me where he should put the trash, like I was some janitor.

JOHN

I'm sure they're not all like that. It might take some time, but you'll meet the right people. That's how you get ahead; that's how you climb out of this neighborhood. I never had that opportunity.

GEORGE

My friends are the right people, and I don't want to climb out of this neighborhood. This neighborhood is my home.

JOHN

The people at your school are the ones you should be hanging out with. They're the ones with connections, and that's your ticket. It's who you know. I don't think you realize what an opportunity this is.

GEORGE

You should send my sister there. She's smarter than me.

JOHN

No, you're the oldest male in the family. That's the tradition..

GEORGE

My sister deserves it more than me.

JOHN

We can't pay for both. And your friends: I bet they don't approve of you going to the prep school.

GEORGE

They just don't understand it. They got my back.

JOHN

If they had your back, they would embrace your good fortune.

GEORGE

It's not like that. It's complicated.

JOHN

No it's not. You been given this gift here.

GEORGE

I never asked for it.

JOHN

You didn't, but I pray you embrace it. This gift you have been given: it comes with responsibility.

GEORGE

I don't want the responsibility. I just wanna be a normal kid.

JOHN

But you're not a normal kid, and there's a responsibility that goes with that.

A beat.

GEORGE

OK. Dad I want to show you something. You ever hear of Fredrick Law Olmsted?

JOHN

No.

George goes over and brings a book to show John. He opens the book.

GEORGE

Olmsted was the father of modern landscape architecture.

(MORE)

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Look at this. The beauty. He designed Central Park, the Capital, Boston Common. You know what his philosophy was? Here, it says right here: "When Frederick Law Olmsted and Calvert Vaux were chosen to plan the new park, they set out to resolve this tear in the social fabric and create a space designed to bring all people together regardless of their backgrounds."

You should study him Dad. Maybe incorporate some of his designs into your jobs.

JOHN

Son, I don't understand what you just read. I'm just a small landscaping company and I'm proud of the job we do, but I could never do something like what you just showed me. I didn't know you were interested in things like that.

GEORGE

I'm interested in all architecture. I think architecture can change the world, both for good and for bad. There is this public housing project in Chicago named Cabrini Green, which was build just like a prison, as if they are preparing kids for their future incarceration. The design of that project was institutional, and it depressed the environment of that community. I want to build architecture that breathes life into a community, that has impact. I wanna design something different, that uplifts a community, not depress it.

A beat.

JOHN

Where do you get all those books?

GEORGE

Library.

JOHN

Listen, I'm working in Brentwood today. When you make it big, that's where you'll live.

GEORGE

Brentwood keeps people like us out.

JOHN

There's always a first.

GEORGE

It won't be me.

JOHN

Son, do you talk about these ideas with your friends.

GEORGE

No.

JOHN

How 'bout at school?

GEORGE

This one teacher will let me borrow his architectural books. And we talk about architectural. Why you ask?

JOHN

Just wondering.

A beat. George's cell phones rings. George takes the call off to the side.

GEORGE

...thank you. I owe you...OK.

A beat.

JOHN

Son, what's happening. What did you do?

GEORGE

Dad, it's nothing. I'm fine.

JOHN

OK. I just have a bad feeling about Kenny.

GEORGE

Kenny has some rough edges but he always has my back.

JOHN

Then why do you owe him?

GEORGE

We're friends. We're friends cause we owe each other.

JOHN

That makes no sense. He's not your friend if he can blackmail you.

GEORGE

He would never do that.

JOHN

Sure he would if it saves his ass. What are you gonna do if he calls in his chip?

GEORGE

Dad, we're friends. We've been friends our whole lives.

JOHN

Let me tell you something: Kenny is on a downward spiral and someone like that always takes the people around him down. Don't let your loyalty to a friend ruin your future.

GEORGE

He wants what is best for me.

A beat.

JOHN

OK son. I'll see you tonight.

GEORGE

Love you Dad.

JOHN

Speaking of the devil, Kenny just drove up.

John starts coughing again. George stops, watches his father. Kenny enters just as John stops his cough.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Hello Kenny.

KENNY

Nice to see you Mr. Flores. I'm giving your son a ride to school.

JOHN

Thank you Kenny.

KENNY

Have a good day sir.

John leaves, but then hides behind a door so he can overhear his son's conversation with Kenny.

KENNY (CONT'D)

Hey, you coming?

GEORGE

No, I don't think so. I got school.

KENNY

So do I.

GEORGE

No, really. I'm meeting this classmate after school to work on a project together.

KENNY

Fuck that. You too good to hang out with your friends?

GEORGE

No, I just need to be at school today.

KENNY

You think you're better than us now don't you?

GEORGE

No.

KENNY

Then come with us.

GEORGE

I told you. I just can't ditch school like I use to.

A beat.

KENNY

You've changed George. You walk around like your shit don't stink. That's what happens when you try to assimilate.

GEORGE

You don't know what you're talking about.

KENNY

Sure I do. You think you're too good for us, with all your new rich friends. Well, you grew up right here, same as us. You can't hide who you are.

GEORGE

Not trying to.

KENNY

Then come with us, earn some money.

GEORGE

I don't think so.

KENNY

Hey, you think you can just walk away, wipe your hands clean. If I'm ever pulled in for that job we did, I ain't going down alone. I'll be naming names, and you're a goddamn accessory.

GEORGE

You never told me you were gonna do the job. I just sat in the back seat. I never got out.

KENNY

You were in the getaway car.

A beat.

GEORGE

Get the fuck out.

KENNY

Good luck with your new friends.

John quietly leaves. Kenny exits. George remains, lost in thought.

ACT I SCENE II

The scene is GRAYSON'S state of the art kitchen, part of an opulent home. Grayson is George's classmate and he has invited George over to work on a school project. Grayson is standing as George enters.

GRAYSON

Hey.

GEORGE

Hey.

GRAYSON

You have any trouble finding this?

GEORGE

No, bus stops right up the street.

GRAYSON

Jesus, I haven't rode a bus
in...maybe forever.

George looking around, admiring the house. A beat.

GEORGE

This is quite the house.

GRAYSON

Nothing special.

GEORGE

I appreciate the architecture.

GRAYSON

It's just a house. You hungry?

GEORGE

I'm fine.

Grayson opens the refrigerator door.

GRAYSON

How 'bout some steak? I can have
the maid make us a sandwich.

GEORGE

I'm fine.

GRAYSON

Come on. I know you're hungry.

GEORGE

No really. I'm good.

GRAYSON

Well, I'm gonna eat something.

At this moment a leaf blower can be heard. It is loud.

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Jesus. You would think the wetbacks could of worked on our yard earlier, when everyone was gone.

I'd hate to earn my living cutting grass. I mean, as a sixteen year old, I get it. But as a grown man...That guy out there must be at least 50 years old. That's gotta suck.

Grayson looks out the window.

GEORGE

Landscapers do more than just cut grass.

GRAYSON

Any idiot could to it. I will say this: they're all illegals that work the lawns in Brentwood.

GEORGE

What makes you say that?

GRAYSON

(Not listening)

It's a fuckin' invasion. My father calls it an infestation.

A beat.

GEORGE

What makes you think they're all illegals?

GRAYSON

They don't speak the fuckin' language. I mean, you're in Americans now. Learn the fuckin' language.

A beat.

You know I'm right. My Dad broke it down for me.

GEORGE
Broke what down?

GRAYSON
You sure you don't want something
to eat?

GEORGE
I'm fine.

GRAYSON
How 'bout something to drink?

GEORGE
Water's fine.

GRAYSON
What kind?

GEORGE
Whataya mean?

GRAYSON
(Opening the
refrigerator.)
You want Poland Spring, Desanti,
Hint.?

GEORGE
Tap is fine.

GRAYSON
That shit will kill you. I hope you
don't drink tap water at home.

GEORGE
Why wouldn't I? .

GRAYSON
Ever hear of Flint, Michigan? Those
people are fucked. Poor people have
the worse luck.

GEORGE
I don't think it's luck. I think
it's intentional.

GRAYSON
I don't know what that means. Here,
take a Poland Spring.

GEORGE
Thanks.

GRAYSON

So how do you like the school? It's your first year, right?

GEORGE

Wasn't expecting all the homework, but you get used to it.

GRAYSON

How'd you get in?

GEORGE

Whataya mean?

GRAYSON

You some kinda diversity student?

A beat.

GEORGE

I applied and they accepted me.

GRAYSON

Well, the school is a fuckin' zoo. It used to be a good school but all they talk about now is diversity, and that LGBT bullshit. It feels like we're the minorities now. There's no fuckin' standards. You agree, don't you?

GEORGE

Agree about what?

GRAYSON

The infestation. You know what I'm talking about.

GEORGE

No, I don't. (passive, aggressive). Why don't you explain it to me?

GRAYSON

I know you agree.

GEORGE

As a matter of fact I don't agree.

A beat, as Grayson stares down George.

...so what do you think we should do our project on?

GEORGE (CONT'D)

Our teacher assigned us reparations.

GRAYSON

We're not doing that shit.

GEORGE

That's what she assigned.

GRAYSON

I don't know why she assigned that to us, or why she paired us. I think she likes to bust my balls, having me read all this Communist bullshit, like that Baldwin book. Something about fire. I was the only one that has to read it.

GEORGE

You mean the Fire Next Time by James Baldwin?

GRAYSON

Yeah, that's the one. I mean, why would she assign that to me? She knows how I feel about shit.

GEORGE

Maybe that's why she assigned it.

GRAYSON

Whataya mean by that?

GEORGE

Nothing.

GRAYSON

Reparations. That's not happening. What's there to write about? Reparations are just one big giveaway for welfare queens or people who don't want to work. That's our report right there-- one sentence.

GEORGE

Well, we did have slavery in this country and a lot of land was stolen from black people.

GRAYSON

And this is my problem? My Dad built a company from scratch.

(MORE)

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Why should he give his money away
for something that happened over
200 years ago that he had
absolutely nothing to do with.
That's socialism.

The leaf blower makes a loud sound. Grayson walks over to the window and looks out.

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Jesus. God damn illegals. Who do
your parents use for landscaping?
They use illegals?

GEORGE

We live in an apartment.

GRAYSON

That sucks. What's your father do
for living?

The leaf blower goes off again.

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Goddamn it.

Grayson goes to the door and calls out.

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Hey...HEY JOSE!...Can I talk to you
for a second?

The landscaper comes into the kitchen,. It is George's father John. George and his father are shocked, look back and forth at each other, but remain silent. George walks away, looking away from his father, although he steals glances at his father's and Grayson's interaction.

GRAYSON (CONT'D)

Listen, would you mind coming back
in the morning? We are trying to
work here and that leaf blower is
way too loud.

JOHN

Yes sir, we can do that. I'm sorry
about that.

GRAYSON

I don't understand why you wouldn't
know that.

JOHN

Yes sir. We'll be back in the morning.

John slithers out, embarrassed. George remains silent.

GRAYSON

Hey, I was just playing with you earlier, see how far I could bust your balls. I didn't mean anything by it.

GEORGE

No, you did mean something by it. You know I'm Hispanic.

GRAYSON

Don't be so sensitive. I was just busting your balls. I was talking about illegals, not people like you.

GEORGE

Those are my people.

A beat.

GRAYSON

Lets be real for a second. The only reason you're in in that school is because of affirmative action.

GEORGE

I'm in the school because my test scores were out the roof. How'd you get in?

GRAYSON

Don't be so sensitive. You can't say anything anymore without being called a racist.

GEORGE

Answer the question.

A beat.

GRAYSON

Well, if you must know.

GEORGE

I could care less.

GRAYSON

Well, my brother went there. My father went there. My grandfather went there.

GEORGE

I see.

GRAYSON

Hey, we're good, right?

GEORGE

No, we're not good .

Grayson's father, STUART ADAMS, enters.

GRAYSON

Hey Dad.

STUART ADAMS

(Angry and patronizing)

You were supposed to call the electrician today to fix the outdoor lights. Did you forget?

A beat.

GRAYSON

Oh...I'm sorry.

STUART ADAMS

Son, I asked you to do this simple thing. Are you just plain stupid? I got a lot going on at work and when I tell you to do something, I expect it to be done.

Silence as everyone gets uncomfortable.

GRAYSON

(Cowering away)

Yes sir.

STUART ADAMS

(To George)

My son's an idiot.

GRAYSON

(In propitiation)

Dad, I told the wetbacks to go home and work in the morning, since we come home in the afternoon.

A lawn blower is heard.

STUART ADAMS

Well, you certainly got your message across.

A beat.

GRAYSON

This is George. We're working on a school project together.

STUART ADAMS

I hope you're ready to carry my son on this project. I'm not sure he would even be in that school if it wasn't for my donations. He's certainly isn't following in the footsteps of his older brother.

GRAYSON

Why do you always have to bring up Tommy?

STUART ADAMS

Cause he has made something of himself.

George stands silent, not sure what to say. Grayson looks away, embarrassed.

You're gonna have to get your own dinner. You can handle that, right?

GRAYSON

What about Mom?

STUART ADAMS

Her plane got canceled. She'll be home tomorrow. I'll be in my office.

Grayson looks down, then looks towards George, trying to hide his embarrassment, but trying to gauge George's judgment, and his own shame. There is a knock on the door and Grayson goes over to answer it. It is John.

JOHN

Can I speak to your Dad for a moment?

GRAYSON

Dad, Jose here wants to talk to you.

JOHN

It's John.

Stuart Adams comes over.

JOHN (CONT'D)

Excuse me Mr. Adams, but can I talk to you for a moment--in private?

STUART ADAMS

Just say what you need to say. I'm very busy.

JOHN

Well, this is somewhat sensitive sir.

STUART ADAMS

You're wasting my time: now what is it?

JOHN

Well, the last two checks you gave me bounced. I tried to call you after the first one but...

Grayson looks away in embarrassment.

STUART ADAMS

(Interrupting)

Just redeposit them. They're fine. I shouldn't have to tell you that.

JOHN

I did but one still didn't go through. In the future I need to be paid in cash. I have people working for me and they can't afford a missed paycheck.

STUART ADAMS

OK. Are we finished here Jose?

A beat, George walks over to his father and Stuart.

GEORGE

This is my father and his name is John Torres. You need to call him by his name.

Grayson is shocked.

STUART ADAMS

OK son.

GEORGE

You should know this sir: my father has been running a very successful landscaping business for the past thirty years. He employs over thirty-five people and pays them a livable wage. i'm proud to call him my father.

A beat.

STUART ADAMS

Anything else son?

GEORGE

No.

STUART ADAMS

I'll have cash for you next time. Are we good Jose?

GEORGE

Excuse me: you need to call my father by his name, John Torres.

Ignoring the last statement. A beat.

STUART ADAMS

I'll be upstairs in my office son. My secretary is coming over. Send her up when she arrives.

JOHN

I'm gonna need that cash now. This is my final day here.

STUART ADAMS

You're quitting? You can't afford to quit.

JOHN

Not something you need to worry about. You need to pay me now.

A beat.

STUART ADAMS

I don't have the cash on me. Come by tomorrow.

JOHN

What time?

STUART ADAMS

After three.

JOHN

There's one more thing: WHAT'S MY
NAME?

Long pause.

STUART ADAMS

What'd you say?

JOHN

WHAT'S MY NAME?

A beat, shaken.

STUART ADAMS

John Torres. I'll have your cash
tomorrow.

*Stuart slowing walks away but then stops, deep in thought. He
turns to John.*

STUART ADAMS (CONT'D)

John, I'm sorry. I won't have your
money tomorrow, or any time in the
near future. Tomorrow morning my
company will be filing for
bankruptcy protection. My access to
cash has been shut off.

JOHN

Well that's gonna be a problem. You
owe me for two months.

STUART ADAMS

I know. And I'm sorry.

JOHN

You being sorry doesn't help me
make payroll.

STUART ADAMS

I know that John, but I have to be
honest, and you will get paid. I'll
make sure of that.

A beat, deep in thought.

You got a nice clean company. I
envy you. I see how your employees
look at you with respect.

(MORE)

STUART ADAMS (CONT'D)

My whole life is clicks: I click on my computer. Make another click and move money from one account to another. I don't produce anything John. You produce a product, a service. There is an honesty to your business. I envy that.

A beat, as Stuart looks around, trying to articulate something.

I've worked for twenty-five years and at the end, I have nothing, nothing to look back on and say, I did that.

I never wanted to go into business but my life was mapped out the day I was born. And as I got older, I saw the trap. I wanted to be a writer but my father smothered that dream. The money. That's the hardest part--walking away from the money...I envy you John. I can see your son has character, and I'm sorry Grayson, I wasn't there for you growing up; I wasn't a very good father. I am sorry John. You're an honest businessman who doesn't deserve this-but you will get paid. I'll make sure of that.

JOHN

I believe you.

A beat.

STUART ADAMS

I laid off two hundred people today, all good people who worked hard for me. It's the worse day of my life. It was horrible, dumping all those people out on the street knowing there is no Plan B. Wall Street is hemorrhaging jobs right now and I don't know when they will come back. Wall Street is one big casino and the house always wins.

Long pause.

GRAYSON

Does Mom know?

STUART ADAMS

Yes.

GRAYSON

What is she gonna do?

STUART ADAMS

Lets take it one day at a time.

JOHN

Stuart, I'm sorry this is happening to you. Don't worry about the money. I'll be fine. I know you'll come out on the other side of this.

A beat. Stuart starts to get emotional.

STUART ADAMS

Thank you John. That's one of the nicest things anyone has ever said to me.

There is an awkward silence between George and Grayson.

GEORGE

Dad, I'll ride home with you.

JOHN

OK son. We're finishing up now.

STUART ADAMS

John, thank you for your understanding. You're a good man and I will make this right.

JOHN

I know you will.

George walks John to the door.

GEORGE

Dad, you never answered the question.

JOHN

What question?

GEORGE

Where did you invest all that money?

A beat.

JOHN
I invested it in you son.

A beat.

GEORGE
You sure?

JOHN
Never been more certain of anything
in my life.

GEORGE
Dad, I gonna make sure I'm worthy
of that investment.

JOHN
Nothing could make me happier...OK.
I'll meet you outside.

John leaves, as does Stuart.

GRAYSON
I'm sorry about all this.

GEORGE
I understand.

A beat.

I should be going. We'll do this
another day.

GRAYSON
Sure...George, I wish you wouldn't
say anything about this at school.

GEORGE
Don't worry. Nobody talks to me in
that school.

George starts to leave. Grayson is shaken.

GRAYSON
George.

GEORGE
Yes.

A beat.

GRAYSON
Since it's so loud around here, I
was wondering if we could meet at
your apartment next time?

GEORGE
Yeah. We can do that.

GRAYSON
Thank you George.

GEORGE
It's gonna be OK Grayson.

GRAYSON
Thanks George.

George nods.

END OF PLAY