

The Talk
A Stage Play

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SCENE ONE

The living room of Hakeem Rush's house in New York City (2012). Hakeem is watching the morning news. His 15 y/o son Rashad walks down the stairs, and overhears Hakeem talking to himself.

Hakeem: Unbelievable! Just, fucking, unbelievable. You can't make this shit up.

Rashad: Hey Dad ...good morning. How are you doing?

Hakeem: Hey son. Come over here for a second. Lemme talk to you.

(Rashad sits next to his father on the couch)

Rashad: What's up?

Hakeem: Now son, I know we have had this talk before, but we are going to have this talk again.

Rashad: A talk about what?

Hakeem: Listen to me the reason why we must have this talk is because you are a black child in America.

Rashad: I know.

Hakeem: Yeah, I know you know. But you don't know.

Rashad: What's that supposed to mean?

Hakeem: Look yesterday a young boy down in Florida lost his life to a neighborhood watchman.

(Rashad takes a deep breath, then exhales. He knows this is going to be a long conversation)

Hakeem: I want you to understand that I'm not going to be there for you all the time. I need you to listen closely because this could mean the difference between me seeing you again, and me not seeing you.

Rashad: Uh huh.

Hakeem: I know it's hard for you to imagine yourself in this situation because you're young, and a bit arrogant if I may add. But young kids get in trouble all the time.

Rashad: Look the police don't scare me, nor does a neighborhood watch person. Stop worrying Dad!

Hakeem: Actually, it's sad to say that even though you might listen to every word that comes out of my mouth, being compliant may not even work. You might even follow all of the commands a police officer gives you. Look I know these talks take away for what you have planned today.

Rashad: So why are we having this conversation?

Hakeem: Because you are my son!

Rashad: Whatever Dad!

Hakeem: I love you with all of my heart son.

(Hakeem puts both hands on Rashad's shoulders)

Hakeem: Look at me. I need this to get through to you. Many black parents are having these talks with their children. And even though we are having these talks with our children, we still run the risk of never seeing our children again.

Rashad: *(sighs)* I feel like you only care now, because it's on tv.

Hakeem: A teenage kid down in Florida was gunned down, and all you can say to me is "I only care now, because it's on tv.

Rashad: YEAH! ...I mean what happened?

Hakeem: I don't know. They got in some sort of altercation, and next thing you know ...Pow!

Rashad: What!

Hakeem: (sigh) Yeah son! He shot the kid from point blank range. I don't know what this world is coming to. What kind of world do we live in, where a neighborhood watchman feels the need to shoot a child that is walking home? Then claim self-defense.

(Rashad looks back at his dad and sees the fear in his eyes. Then he gets worried himself)

Hakeem: Look I don't mean to scare you. You are not a bad person. It's not your fault.

Rashad: Are you scared?

Hakeem: Yeah, I'm scared. Rashad, I don't know what I would do if I lost you. Look I know me and your mother are not together anymore. But if there is one thing that we can agree on, it's that we both need to have this talk with you.

Rashad: Don't worry Dad. I like having these talks with you.

Hakeem: I won't lie to you; you're going to see some things that might break you down. We live in a society where some people might not want to see you succeed, because of the color of your skin. It is constructed so that people like you and me fail.

Rashad: I know. I see it all the time. It happens at school, the mall, even at block parties.

Hakeem: Listen if you are ever approached by the police or even a neighborhood watchman, don't fight back. Don't give them a reason to feel threatened by you. Stay calm. You must do what they say, and even with that it MIGHT NOT work.

Rashad: I won't fight back.

Hakeem: I believe in you. Hold on to your light and protect it with all your heart. Don't ever let someone define who you are. You are intelligent, beautiful, and you have a right to live life with happiness. Just like everyone else.

Rashad: Thank you Dad. That means a lot to me. It means a lot to hear it coming from you.

Hakeem: I know how hard it is to see yourself in a situation where you are confronted by the police. And trust me some of these confrontations that I talk with you about can escalate quickly.

Rashad: I hate the way they fucking talk to us though.

Hakeem: Watch your mouth son!

Rashad: My bad! Sometimes I feel like they are trying to provoke us ...you know. Sometimes I see other kids chillin, and next thing you know, they have them face down on the pavement, or the hood of some squad car.

Hakeem: At hindsight it seems unfair at times. But you must know how to behave in these situations. Keep in mind, those officers have families to go home to also. They have people that love and care for them, the same way I love and care for you.

Rashad: I never thought about it like that.

Hakeem: You have to tune out some of the negative thoughts you might have during these encounters. Try to keep a level head. But you're pretty levelheaded.

Rashad: Thank you Dad.

Hakeem: You kept a level head when your mom and I were going through what we went through. But this time it's different.

Rashad: I hear what you're saying.

Hakeem: What am I saying smarty pants?

Rashad: You're saying, "keep doing what I'm doing."

(Hakeem mocks Rashad)

Hakeem: "Keep doing what you're doing." You think that's all huh?

Rashad: No ...I'm just saying. It's going to take some work for me to understand how to conduct myself when approached by the police. But for the most part, I have been listening to you Dad. You might think I'm not listening ...but I listen.

Hakeem: You listen?

Rashad: Yup!

Hakeem: Go on.

Rashad: *(hint of sarcasm)* What ...I listen to you. I listen to Mom. I listen to my coach. I listen to the teacher. I listen to my guidance counselor.

Hakeem: And that's the thing that sickens me about this situation. We have all of these people talking to our kids, and yet nothing has changed. So, I need you to always be prepared. I need you to always be cognizant of your surroundings. Above all else ...you're my son. And I love you.

Rashad: Gosh Dad ...how many times you're gonna tell me that you love me?

Hakeem: I gonna tell you as much as possible. Cause you need to hear it. And you need to know it. Some of these children are running around here with no parents to tell them that they are loved. They don't have a mother, or father to tell them that they love them.

Rashad: That's sad.

Hakeem: I know. What's even more sad is that some of these kids don't even have a coach, or teachers to look after them when the parents are not around. They just fall through the cracks in the system.

Rashad: Wow! I never thought about it like that.

Hakeem: Yeah, it's deep son. That's why I get so upset when I hear that another child died from the hands of the police, because deep down inside, I know that child didn't have a chance.

Rashad: I'm glad to have you and Mom there for me, you know, having these talks. These talks can be difficult sometimes, because sometimes I'm so preoccupied. I neglect to think about other people's circumstances, and how those circumstances can affect my life if I don't make the right decisions.

Hakeem: Now you sound like my son.

Rashad: Sound like your son. What? Dude I'm a better version of you.

Hakeem: Oh, you're a better version of me huh?

Rashad: Yeah, but don't let Mom find out that I said that. If she hears me talking like that. She would lose her mind.

Hakeem: How do you figure?

Rashad: Because I remind her of you.

(Hakeem smirks at the thought of his son reminding him of himself)

Hakeem: That's the beauty of having you as my son. You're like a smaller version of me. That's why the thought of ever losing you is so DIFFICULT.

Rashad: I don't want to lose you either Dad.

Hakeem: I know son. We must communicate with one another. You have to let me know what's going on with me you.

Rashad: Everything is fine Dad.

Hakeem: Good! You hungry?

(Hakeem walk over to the kitchen to have breakfast together)

Rashad" Yeah, I'm starving.

Hakeem: What do you want to eat?

End Scene

