

SCRIMAGE

by

PRINCE GOMOLVILAS

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Prince Gomolvilas
prince@princegomolvilas.com
www.princegomolvilas.com

THE CHARACTERS

BENNY: 17, male, Asian American

HAN: 16, male, Asian American, wears glasses

FEMALE: multiple ages, any race

THE SETTING

United States of America.

THE TIME

Now and Then.

An instrumental hip-hop beat slowly fades up. FEMALE appears. The beat reaches a crescendo and then cuts out. FEMALE speaks to the audience.

FEMALE

This story, like many stories, begins with a rap battle.

Our first opponent is Benny, a high school senior...

BENNY appears.

FEMALE

...who has a chip on his shoulder the size of a football.

BENNY

If you got the juice, you got the juice.

FEMALE

He's up against his younger brother Han, who skipped a grade and is also a senior...

HAN appears.

FEMALE

...and has no idea what he's doing on the schoolyard.

HAN

Do I have to be here?

FEMALE

Two rounds! No mercy! Let's battle!

FEMALE observes and vocalizes what she's feeling, accompanied by the sound of other students doing the same. Although BENNY is an amateur, he shows promise.

BENNY

UH

NERDS AND GEEKS RESPECTED NOWADAYS
ON THE STREET BY GUYS AND BY THE LADIES
BUT YO, MY YOUNGER BROTHER HAN HERE
LOOK LIKE A STER'OTYPE FROM THE EIGHTIES

COKE-BOTTLE GLASSES SAME COLOR AS
HIS WHACK HAIR THAT'S GREASY AS A BIG MAC
SHOES LIKE HE AT A JOB INTERVIEW
AND CLOTHES BE FROM THE MARSHALLS CLEARANCE RACK

The crowd reacts positively to BENNY. HAN may be clever, but he's not the best rapper.

HAN

YOU MAY CALL ME OUT FOR HOW I LOOK
AND FOR JUST THE FIRST ROUND THAT'S A GOOD START
BUT TEASING ME IS LIKE TEASING YOU
BECAUSE MOST PEOPLE CAN'T TELL US APART

YOU THINK YOU'RE ACTING TOUGH WHEN YOU CLENCH
YOUR FISTS AND MAKE A FACE LIKE YOU'RE ALL SMUG
BUT THIS AGGRESSION IS DEPRESSING
'CAUSE YOU'RE NOTHING BUT AN INSECURE THUG

The crowd is surprised, and reacts positively to HAN. BENNY is a bit fazed by HAN's minor success.

BENNY

YO
GIRLS OLD AND YOUNG BE WANTIN' A GUY
WHO TAKES CHARGE AND CAN CONQUER AND DESTROY
BUT HAN HERE CANNOT PLEASE A WOMAN
BECAUSE HE'S JUST A LITTLE ASIAN BOY

(Miming a small "body part":) WHEN I SAY LITTLE I MEAN LITTLE
(Looking close at Han's crotch:) BECAUSE IF YOU TRY TO FIND IT YOU'LL FAIL
SOMETIMES I WONDER IF MY BROTHER
YO, CAN EVEN BE CONSIDERED A MALE

The crowd goes wild for BENNY.

HAN

BENNY THINKS HE KNOWS WHAT WOMEN WANT
AND TRIES HARD TO TEACH HIS YOUNGER BROTHER
BUT THE ONLY WOMAN IN THE WORLD
THAT HE KNOWS HOW TO PLEASE IS OUR MOTHER

GIRLS TAKE JUST ONE LOOK AT THIS DANG FOOL
AND THEIR GOOD DAY TURNS INTO A BUMMER
HE THINKS HE'S THE KING OF THE WHOLE WORLD
BUT ALL HE IS, RIGHT, IS DUMB AND DUMBER

The crowd goes really wild for HAN, who looks pleased with himself. BENNY looks upset by the upset. FEMALE holds up HAN's arm, declaring him the winner. The crowd reaction reaches a crescendo and fades. An instrumental

hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space, as FEMALE exits. BENNY and HAN are now mid-conversation, elsewhere.

BENNY

Why you tryna embarrass me?

HAN

I thought that's the whole point of a rap battle.

BENNY

(Mockingly, pushing up imaginary glasses with his finger:) "I thought that's the whole point of a rap battle." There's no way you and me brothers. You gotta be adopted.

HAN

That's entirely false because our birth records indicate that we are indeed—

BENNY

Why you gotta do that?

HAN

Do what?

BENNY

Use ten words when you can use one.

HAN

I don't know what you mean.

BENNY

When I say, "You gotta be adopted," just say back, "No." That's it. Not "our birth records indicate this and that."

HAN

The English language is a very complex form of—

BENNY

You definitely adopted. Mom and dad probably found you on the ground in some Chinese village.

HAN

You're just mad because I did so well.

BENNY

'Cause they feel sorry for you.

HAN

Since I'm so inexperienced, perhaps they were judging on a curve, but nonetheless I emerged triumphant.

BENNY

You sound like a robot. Maybe that's it. You not adopted. You half-human, half-machine.

HAN

Well, technically, a being with both biological *and* artificial parts is not a "robot." It's actually called a "cyborg."

BENNY

Oh, my God, we definitely not blood. And, fine, I'll give you this rap battle, but in everything else *I'm* a winner and *you're* a loser.

HAN

Even if that were true—which it isn't—winning is overrated.

BENNY

Being a loser gets you beat up at school.

HAN

I've reported all of my tormentors to the proper authorities.

BENNY

Stand up for yourself every once in a while.

HAN

I don't need to. There are school policies and procedures in place for a reason.

BENNY

You keep talkin' like that, you gonna die alone. Girls like a guy who's smart, but you's...*extra*. That's another thing makes us different. All the girls love me, and you still kissin' on your pillow every night.

HAN

"All the girls." Maybe you should just focus on your girlfriend.

BENNY

I can't help it if all the dimes on campus thirsty.

HAN

It doesn't seem very respectful to Rebecca, if you ask me.

BENNY

Nobody asked you. You should be coming to *me* for advice. I can teach you how to not be so awkward around girls.

HAN

I am focused on my schoolwork. I'm perfectly happy being unattached.

BENNY

Then why you always cryin'?

HAN

I'm not always crying.

BENNY

Every year you asking girls to the school dances, and every year you fumble. And I hear you crying in your room like... (*Fake-crying in a very exaggerated manner.*) ...Why?! WHY?! WHYYYYY?! I JUST WANNA BE LOVED! IS THAT SO WRONG?!

HAN

Humans feel things.

BENNY

Girls feel things. Be a man.

HAN

You sound like Dad.

BENNY

I need to give you guidance since Dad ain't around much.

HAN

I'm just being me.

BENNY

Well...*stop*.

HAN

You're not better than me.

BENNY

How can you even say that?! I'm a hundred times better than you! Real talk. Imma make something of myself.

HAN

I plan on doing the same.

BENNY

Yeah, yeah, you gonna be a doctor. There are a million Asian doctors. So what? But not a lot of us in football. Imma be a trailblazer.

HAN

Don't be dismissive of what I'm doing. You don't know what I do. You don't me at all.

BENNY

You don't know *me*.

HAN

I know enough. You're stupid.

BENNY

You weak.

BENNY puts HAN in a headlock. HAN struggles to break free. FEMALE appears. The sound of a bell, causing BENNY and HAN to freeze.

FEMALE

Benny and Han weren't always at each other's throats. When they were younger, they were a united front.

BENNY and HAN un-freeze. In this sequence, their movements are choreographed. They smoothly move out of the headlock position to stand side by side, facing the audience, hands behind their back.

BENNY & HAN

(An exclamation of solidarity:) Huh!

FEMALE

A united front against people who stared at them with suspicious eyes.

BENNY and HAN block the "stares" with an arm.

BENNY & HAN

Huh!

FEMALE

Against the name-calling and racial slurs hurled at them on the daily.

BENNY and HAN block the "slurs" with the other arm.

Huh! BENNY & HAN

Against the shoves... FEMALE

BENNY and HAN puff their chests, pushing back against the “shoves.”

Huh! BENNY & HAN

Against the punches... FEMALE

BENNY and HAN block their faces with their hands.

Huh! BENNY & HAN

Against the kicks... FEMALE

BENNY and HAN sweep a leg to the side.

Huh! BENNY & HAN

Against anyone or anything that would threaten this brotherhood. FEMALE

BENNY and HAN grip each other’s hand in the air, a show of solidarity.

Huh! BENNY & HAN

But things are different now. FEMALE

Without releasing HAN’s hand, BENNY makes a fluid motion that gets HAN back into the original headlock.

Let go of me! HAN

Say I'm better than you!

BENNY

I'd rather die!

HAN

Then you gonna die!

BENNY

BENNY and HAN struggle. FEMALE wraps a scarf around her neck to become BENNY and HAN's mother.

Boys!

FEMALE (MOTHER)

BENNY and HAN stop.

How many times do I have to tell you? Don't kill each other!

FEMALE (MOTHER)

BENNY lets go of HAN and points an accusatory finger.

He started it!

BENNY

No! He did!

HAN

What would your father say if he saw you two like this?

FEMALE (MOTHER)

Dad's not here.

HAN

So it don't matter.

BENNY

I change my mind. Go right ahead and kill each other!

FEMALE (MOTHER)

FEMALE exits.

I bet you wouldn't last a day in my shoes. You don't have enough brain power.

HAN

BENNY

What? You read some medical books and memorize some long words. Any idiot with a memory can do that. It don't mean you're smart. It just means you're good at Simon Says.

HAN

You're vastly underappreciating my abilities.

BENNY

You wouldn't last one second being me.

HAN

What? You run around and tackle other guys. It doesn't make you an athlete. It just means you're dumb enough to do it.

BENNY

I'll tell you what. You come to football practice with me and see if you can survive one week.

HAN

Your coach won't let me do that.

BENNY

You let me worry about the coach. If I can get permission, will you do it?

HAN

Well then you have to help my group with our science fair project. And whatever boring research we need done, whatever grunt work that's necessary, you have to do it. I bet you're not smart enough to do your share and last a week.

BENNY

I'll take that bet.

HAN

What are we betting?

BENNY

Whoever lasts longest wins. *I* win—that means you have to do all of my homework, every class, for the rest of the semester.

HAN

I win—and I get your PS4 for the rest of the semester.

BENNY

No way!

HAN

So you think you're going to lose.

BENNY

No!

HAN

Then take the bet. *(Extending his hand for a shake.)* Take the bet!

BENNY shakes HAN's hand—but then makes a fluid motion that gets HAN in a headlock again. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space, as HAN exits. BENNY addresses the audience.

BENNY

When I was younger, middle school, sixth/seventh grade, my friends were into comic books, spending afternoons arguing about Marvel versus DC. Or they be on their PS4's, pretending to be *GTA* thugs or shooting down the enemy in *Call of Duty* number whatever.

But me? I didn't look up to superheroes, and I didn't care about holding a virtual gun.

I was all about the NFL. That's the National Football League for those of you who don't know sports from a hole in the ground.

BENNY

The NFL. 'Cause there's nothing more American than competition and conquest.

HAN and FEMALE, both in football helmets, appear on either side of BENNY, facing the audience.

BENNY

To win, you gotta be strong.

BENNY mimes tackling an unseen player in front of him, but only using the upper half of his body—i.e., his feet remain in place. Simultaneously, HAN mimes getting hit and stumbles backward. They both grunt when appropriate. A sound of impact accompanies the movement.

BENNY

To win, you gotta be tough.

BENNY mimes tackling an unseen player again. Simultaneously, FEMALE mimes getting hit and stumbles backward. They both grunt when appropriate. A sound of

impact accompanies the movement. HAN and FEMALE get back in their starting position.

BENNY

To win, you gotta be a man.

BENNY mimes tackling an unseen player again. Simultaneously, HAN mimes getting hit and stumbles backward. They both grunt when appropriate. A sound of impact accompanies the movement.

BENNY

Be a man.

BENNY mimes tackling an unseen player again. Simultaneously, FEMALE mimes getting hit and stumbles backward. They both grunt when appropriate. A sound of impact accompanies the movement. HAN and FEMALE exit.

BENNY

That's right. This ain't baseball, where you politely tag a dude out. Or soccer, where you just trying to maneuver around another guy. This is football, fam—things are done by force. A collective effort of ankle taps, chop blocks, and gang tackles.

And just like any other kid who loved football growing up, I of course admired the players who dominated back in the day: your Peyton Mannings, your Calvin Johnsons, and your LaDainian Tomlinsons.

But the guys I *really* looked up to back then weren't black or white or any race you normally find on a football field. My heroes in the NFL were all Asian-American, just like me—well, maybe a little more jacked than me, but you know what I'm talking about.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE appears, wearing a football helmet and a Patriots jersey. (Jerseys may be substituted with team flags.)

BENNY

Guys like Eugene Chung, who first played for the Patriots.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE tears away her jersey, revealing a Bengals jersey underneath.

BENNY

Kevin Kaesviharn, the Bengals.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE tears away her jersey, revealing a Chargers jersey underneath.

BENNY

Junior Seau, the Chargers.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE tears away her jersey, revealing a Steelers jersey underneath.

BENNY

Troy Polamalu, the Steelers.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE tears away her jersey, revealing a Cowboys jersey underneath.

BENNY

Dat Nguyen, the Cowboys.

The sound of DJ scratching. FEMALE exits.

BENNY

Now the list isn't very long, but there are more, which tells guys like me that what I want out of life—a career in the NFL—is possible.

The football player I looked up to the most, though—and I still do—the guy who paved the way for all who came after him, was the very first Asian-American to ever play in the NFL, almost one hundred years ago, all the way back in 1927.

HAN appears, as Walter Achiu, wearing a 1920s-style leather football helmet. He stands tall with his hands behind his back.

BENNY

His name was Walter Achiu, but everybody called him “Sneeze” ’cause “Achiu” sounded like:

HAN

(Sneezing:) Ah-choo!

BENNY

Get it? Yeah. Anyway. When he was going to the University of Dayton, in Ohio, he was a star athlete, a triple threat in...

The sound of DJ scratching. HAN strikes a pose, as if he's a batter at home plate.

...baseball...

BENNY

The sound of DJ scratching. HAN smoothly transitions into another pose, as if he's a sprinter in starting position.

...track...

BENNY

The sound of DJ scratching. HAN smoothly transitions into another pose, as if he's a quarterback ready for a snap exchange.

...and football.

BENNY

The sound of DJ scratching.

BENNY

After college, he played for an NFL team called the Dayton Triangles, as both a running back and a defensive back, for two years. Trying hard to feel included during a time in America when something called the Chinese Exclusion Act was in effect.

FEMALE appears, fist in the air, wearing a red baseball cap backwards.

(Chanting:) No, no, no!
The Chinese must go!

FEMALE

FEMALE exits.

BENNY

Walter Achiu, born on the island of Oahu in Hawaii, to a Chinese father and a Hawaiian mother. Walter Achiu, pioneer.

HAN takes off his leather helmet and throws it to BENNY, who catches. HAN addresses the audience.

HAN

I find the practice of hero worship to be rather off-putting.

BENNY throws the helmet at HAN's head. HAN is hit, but he ignores it.

HAN

I don't put my faith in people. I put my faith in ideas. And not just any ideas. Ideas that mean something.

BENNY

(Pretending to cough:) Nerd!

HAN

Studies show that as we grow older our ability to remember new things, to take in new information, declines. This is because the brain is unable to remove old memories, and doesn't have room for new ideas.

BENNY

(Pretending to cough:) Weak!

HAN

So, at my young age, I have to be careful of what I allow into my brain. I don't want to waste all that space on things that do not matter.

An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. FEMALE (as a Male Coach) appears, wearing a blue baseball cap and holding a modern-day football helmet. She blows a whistle and addresses unseen players.

FEMALE (MALE COACH)

Each and every one of you is a sorry excuse for a man! You can't even be considered men! You can't even be considered boys! I'm gonna call you "ladies" from now on because that's all I see! When I ask for laps, I want laps! When I ask for drills, I want drills! When I ask for more, I want more!

FEMALE (as a Male Coach) blows the whistle. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. BENNY and HAN enter. FEMALE throws the helmet to BENNY, who catches.

BENNY

Coach, you remember my brother Han, right?

FEMALE (MALE COACH)

How could I forget? Freshman year, I made the students do ten pushups, and he passed out, and I had to call an ambulance.

HAN

Heat stroke is a real thing.

FEMALE (MALE COACH)

It was the middle of winter.

BENNY

Well, Han wants to join us for practice this week. See if he likes it.

FEMALE (MALE COACH)

I don't think there's enough insurance in the world that will cover the injuries he's sure to have. *(Blows whistle at unseen players:)* Who told you you could rest?!

FEMALE exits.

HAN

I guess that's that then.

BENNY

Nah. I got an idea. Raymond Dominguez is home all week 'cause of the flu. So you'll just put on his uniform and helmet, and Coach won't be able to tell the difference. 'Cept for the fact that Raymond is a decent defensive tackle and you'll definitely suck.

HAN

All right then. How do we start?

BENNY

First thing we gotta do is build up your strength and stamina.

HAN

And how do you suggest we go about that?

BENNY

We gonna run.

HAN

I don't like running.

BENNY charges at HAN.

BENNY

Run, run, run!

HAN runs, with BENNY following. They exit. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. HAN and BENNY appear again, still running, but this time BENNY is moving alongside HAN, who's moving a bit slower than before. They exit. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. HAN and BENNY

appear again, still running, but this time BENNY is ahead of HAN, who's moving slower still and gasping for air. HAN stops, bends, and puts his hands on his knees.

HAN
I can't breathe.

BENNY
I didn't tell you to stop.

HAN
I need to catch my breath.

BENNY
Are you giving up then?

HAN
No!

BENNY
I win the bet?

HAN
No!

BENNY
You a girl?

HAN
No!

BENNY
When I ask for laps, I want laps!

HAN starts running again, with BENNY following. They exit. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. FEMALE (as a Science Teacher) appears, wearing glasses, playing with a Hoberman sphere. HAN enters, followed by BENNY.

HAN
Mrs. Lee, do you remember my brother Benny?

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)
Oh, I remember. Sophomore year, he believed that an acceptable experiment was setting his farts on fire.

BENNY

For real though, that was dope.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

If by “dope,” you mean “disgusting,” then, yes, it was “dope.”

HAN

Well, Benny’s much more mature now, and he wants to help with my science fair project this week.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

Why would you want to *decrease* your chances of winning?

BENNY

Ow. Teach. That’s harsh.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

(*To HAN:*) As you wish.

FEMALE exits.

BENNY

So what’s this stupid project all about?

HAN

Let’s not get ahead of ourselves here. First, we need to train your brain to think in a certain way that will be conducive to what we’re working on.

BENNY

Huh?

HAN

We have to get you thinking like a scientist. We have to improve your brain’s processing speed.

BENNY

How we do that?

HAN

Well, one way is for you to learn a completely new skill that’s outside of your comfort zone.

BENNY

Nothing’s outside my comfort zone.

HAN produces knitting needles and yarn.

HAN
You're going to knit a scarf.

BENNY
I take that back.

HAN
Here.

BENNY
Hell nah. That's gay.

HAN
Don't say that. It's so inappropriate.

BENNY
What you want me to do is inappropriate.

HAN
I bet this would have direct correlation in improving your football skills too. I mean, manual dexterity is important, right?

BENNY
Playin' around with a ball of yarn like I'm freaking pussycat? Nah. Nah. Nah!

HAN
You have to do it.

BENNY
I don't have to anything.

HAN
So you're quitting?

BENNY
I didn't say that.

HAN
So I win the bet?

BENNY
You win nothing.

HAN
Then what's it gonna be?

BENNY

Fine.

BENNY yanks the needles and yarn from HAN. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. As HAN exits, FEMALE (as REBECCA) enters, holding pom-poms. She performs a cheer, while BENNY watches.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

WE'RE THE BEST
WE CAN'T BE BEAT
WE WILL NEVER
ACCEPT DEFEAT

WILDCATS
WILDCATS
GOOOOO
WILDCATS

An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. BENNY and FEMALE (as REBECCA) are in the middle of a mostly playful conversation.

BENNY

My brother wanted me to sit down like an old grandma and do like arts and crafts.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

What's wrong with knitting? It might help you with hand/eye coordination.

BENNY

I'm a guy. I like being a guy. You're dating me because I'm of the male persuasion.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Oh, my God, you're so ridiculous sometimes.

BENNY

Men should do men things. Women should do women things. When you cross the streams, that's how the whole world gets outta whack. That's how civilizations fall.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

You want to know how civilizations fall, go look in a mirror.

BENNY

That's cold.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

When did you turn into such a caveman?

BENNY

Don't you want a protector?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Sure, yeah, but there's always room for a little sensitivity.

BENNY

Sensitivity? Like you want me to watch the Hallmark Channel with you and cry?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

That would be sweet. But it has to be tomorrow. I'm supposed to hang out with Jessica tonight.

BENNY

Where you going?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Just at her house.

BENNY

You should go somewhere with her. I don't like you being at her house.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Well I guess that's not for you to decide.

BENNY

She's got those two shifty-eyed brothers, and I don't like the way they look at you.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Frank and Jacamo? They're harmless. You're so paranoid.

BENNY

You're my girl though.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

And you're my boy. And if you were secure enough in your masculinity, you'd knit me a scarf.

BENNY

I'm secure.

BENNY starts knitting. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. HAN enters, holding a

football helmet which is a prototype of his science fair project. While he speaks to FEMALE (as REBECCA), BENNY remains in his own world in the background.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

You can't kick Benny off our science fair team.

HAN

He's refusing to do the work.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Actually, he's doing what you asked him to do.

HAN

Shut. Up.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Seriously. He's knitting.

HAN

He is?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I mean, it resembles a bullwhip more than a scarf, but at least he's trying.

HAN

(Referring to the helmet in his hands:) Why's it so important to you anyway that he help out with our science project?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I think you're a good influence on him.

HAN

I think you're a good influence on him.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Aw, that's nice.

HAN

I love you!

FEMALE (REBECCA)

What?

HAN

Um. What? Huh? No. I mean. I love how you care about my brother. Yeah. That's it. That's what I love. I love *that*. Not *you*. *That*.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

O...kay.

FEMALE exits. HAN slaps his own forehead. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. BENNY enters, holding a football.

BENNY

Drop to the ground, and give me fifty! When I ask for pushups, I want pushups!

HAN

Look, we've done pushups, we've done laps, if I actually have to be here with you, then you might as well teach me some football.

BENNY

You do pushups like a girl, you run like a girl, you might as well be a girl, I don't even know where to start with someone like you.

HAN

Enough of this strength and stamina training. Let's get down to the game.

BENNY

If you don't got strength, if don't got stamina, you gonna get slaughtered.

HAN

I'm more resilient than you think. Hey, if you don't want to actually teach me anything about football, then I'll push myself to do these lame training exercises and survive the week and win this bet and get your PS4 and play Minecraft all year.

BENNY

What are you—ten?

HAN

What would Walter Achiu do?

HAN puts on his helmet.

BENNY

“What would Walter Achiu do?” All right, all right, I can work with that. (*Putting on his helmet.*) Well, Walter Achiu started out as a running back. So why don't you carry the ball and— (*To an unseen character.*) Hey, Kevin! My brother's doin' drills! Help us out!

He's gonna run the ball! You block him! *(To HAN:)* You run the ball as far as you can, and Kevin's gonna try and tackle your sorry self.

HAN runs forward with the ball, but is almost immediately tackled to the ground by the unseen character.

Again! BENNY

HAN gets up, runs, and gets tackled.

Again! BENNY

HAN gets up, runs, and gets tackled.

Again! BENNY

Again? HAN

BENNY
You gotta learn how to take a hit. Be a man, man.

HAN gets up, runs, and gets tackled.

Let's go! BENNY

That's enough. HAN

We just got started. BENNY

It hurts. HAN

Where? BENNY

Everywhere. HAN

HAN takes off his helmet.

Are you crying?
BENNY

I'm in pain.
HAN

Stop crying.
BENNY

It's really bad.
HAN

Dude, you're embarrassing me.
BENNY

I feel my feelings.
HAN

Feel your feelings on the inside, bruh.
BENNY

*HAN violently throws the helmet at BENNY, who catches.
An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and
space. FEMALE (as SCIENCE TEACHER) enters.*

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)
(To BENNY:) What's your question?

This is the science project?
BENNY

This is the science project.
HAN

This is a football helmet.
BENNY

HAN
The football helmets that NFL players wear have been pretty much the same for the past four decades.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)
No significant changes, even as evidence of CTE has continued to accumulate year after year.

HAN

CTE: Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy.

BENNY

I know what it is.

HAN

A degenerative brain disease caused by multiple concussions over time.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

The number of former NFL players who suffer from some form of CTE?

HAN

Ninety-nine percent.

BENNY

What? You're trying to get football banned from our school?

HAN

No. The enemy is not football. I'm trying to, as they say, build a better mousetrap. But in this case, the mousetrap is a football helmet. You hold in your hands the future. A football helmet that handles impact in a way that hasn't been handled since the inception of the game.

BENNY puts on the football helmet. FEMALE produces a football helmet and puts it on. They face the audience.

HAN

The shell of a standard-issue football helmet is rigid.

FEMALE steps forward.

HAN

So when you take a hit....

FEMALE bends forward and mimes ramming the top of her helmet into another player. The sound of impact.

HAN

...the full force of the impact goes directly into the helmet and slams directly into the head. The padding on the inside absorbs some of the shock, but not enough to reduce the potential of CTE.

FEMALE exits.

HAN

The shell of our prototype football helmet is flexible.

BENNY steps forward.

HAN

So when you take a hit...

BENNY bends forward and mimes ramming the top of his helmet into another player. The sound of impact—but a bit muted.

HAN

...the helmet morphs its shape, allowing it to absorb much more of the impact.

BENNY take off the helmet and throws it to HAN, who catches. BENNY exits.

HAN

The difficulty is in finding the exact ratio of rigid material to flexible material. It needs to be flexible enough to absorb the force of a hit, but rigid enough to push back against it too.

HAN studies the helmet. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. FEMALE (as REBECCA) enters. She performs a cheer, while HAN continues to study the helmet.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

FIRE IT UP

(Clap-clap.)

FEMALE (REBECCA)

TAKE CONTROL

(Clap-clap.)

FEMALE (REBECCA)

DOMINATION

(Clap-clap.)

FEMALE (REBECCA)

THAT'S OUR GOAL

(Clap-clap.)

WILDCATS
WILDCATS
GOOOOO
WILDCATS

FEMALE (REBECCA)

An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. HAN and FEMALE (as REBECCA) are mid-conversation.

HAN

You're right. Our project is riddled with problems.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I think the main issue is that we can't test out our different designs on real people.

HAN

Yeah, I wish I could line up our entire football team with different helmet designs and bash them all over the head with a hammer, but I guess that wouldn't be ethical. We're basically going to lose the science fair.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Not necessarily. Last year, for my science fair project, I was working on a cell phone case that could take a beating. So I designed a small impact sensor that would allow me to test out my cases.

HAN

What does that have to do with this?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I think with some modifications my impact sensor may be able to test our different helmet designs and see how much force they can withstand.

HAN

Really? Cool.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I thought so.

HAN

I'm glad you're on our team.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Me too. I like this team. You're awesome.

HAN
You're awesome. I like you.

FEMALE (REBECCA)
I like you too.

HAN
I *really* like you.

FEMALE (REBECCA)
What?

HAN goes in for a kiss. FEMALE moves her head away in time—but in a smooth manner, not an aggressive one. BENNY enters, just in time to see HAN and FEMALE's lips so close to one another.

BENNY
The hell's goin' on here?!

HAN and FEMALE pull away from each other.

BENNY
Huh?! Answer me!

BENNY grabs HAN by the shirt.

HAN
Hey!

FEMALE (REBECCA)
Benny!

BENNY
What the hell do you think you're doing, bro?!

HAN
I'm in love with Rebecca.

BENNY
What?!

FEMALE (REBECCA)
What?! No!

BENNY shoves HAN.

BENNY

(*To FEMALE:*) I knew you were up to something!

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I'm not up to anything.

BENNY

Oh, yeah? I been blowin' up your phone. You didn't answer me once.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Well I've been too busy to respond.

BENNY

Too busy gettin' with my brother?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

It's not like that.

HAN

Calm down, Benny.

BENNY

(*To FEMALE:*) I text you, you need to text me back right away. That's the way it's gonna be from now on.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Benny.

BENNY

I wanna know where you are at all times.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Are you kidding me?

BENNY

What you have to hide?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Nothing. There's nothing going on between me and Han. He's like a brother to me.

HAN exits.

BENNY

You not allowed to talk to my brother alone any more.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

We were just working on the science project. Because you haven't been of any help all week.

BENNY

You don't see him unless I'm around. That's that.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

You don't control what I do or don't do.

BENNY

I do though.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

No.

BENNY

I do.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

I'm leaving.

BENNY

You're not goin' anywhere.

BENNY grabs FEMALE's arm.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Hey!

BENNY

You're stayin' here until I tell you you can leave.

FEMALE yanks her arm away.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

No!

BENNY raises his hand in the air, ready to strike. FEMALE stares him down.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Don't. You. Dare.

BENNY lowers his hand.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

We are done here. I'm done with you. Done. You understand?

FEMALE exits. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. HAN enters, wearing his prototype football helmet and holding a football. He throws the football to BENNY, who catches. BENNY is seething. He is now mid-conversation with HAN.

HAN

(To BENNY:) Hope you're ready to give up your PS4 because the week's almost through. I can take a hell of a lot more than you thought I could, huh?

BENNY

Walter Achiu was also a defensive back. He had to do everything he could to stop running plays.

HAN

Is that what we're doing today?

BENNY

That's what you're doing today. Now I've got the ball. And you either tackle or be tackled.

BENNY produces a football helmet and puts it on. BENNY and HAN face the audience.

BENNY

Can you stop me, Han? Can you be a man?

The sound of a whistle. BENNY makes a forward motion. HAN gets knocked back.

BENNY

Again!

The sound of a whistle. BENNY makes a forward motion, more aggressively this time. HAN gets knocked back.

BENNY

Again!

The sound of a whistle. BENNY makes a forward motion. HAN gets knocked back.

Again! BENNY

No more. HAN

When I ask for more, I want more! BENNY

I need to take a break. HAN

Breaks are for losers. BENNY

Benny. HAN

Again! BENNY

The sound of a whistle. BENNY makes a forward motion and HAN gets knocked back four more times successively. Then, BENNY makes a final forward motion, and HAN falls onto his back. HAN is motionless.

Get up. Let's go. One more time. BENNY

No answer.

Han! C'mon! BENNY

No answer.

Han? BENNY

FEMALE (as Science Teacher) enters. She addresses the audience.

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)
"Concussion." Noun. From the Latin word "cuncussio."

BENNY kneels by HAN's side.

BENNY

Han!

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

A concussion is a mild traumatic brain injury. It is caused by a bump, blow, or jolt to either the head or the body, which causes the brain to move rapidly inside the skull.

BENNY

Han!

FEMALE (SCIENCE TEACHER)

The effects of a concussion range from minor symptoms, like confusion, headaches, or nausea, or, in some cases, major conditions, like a coma.

An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in space and time. FEMALE takes off her glasses and puts on a scarf to become the mother. FEMALE (as MOTHER) kneels next to HAN, opposite of BENNY.

FEMALE (MOTHER)

You: Number One Son. Number One Son protects his younger siblings, not hurt them.

BENNY

You raised him to be weak. And dad's gone all the time. Han don't know how to take a hit.

FEMALE (MOTHER)

You think taking a hit makes you a man?

BENNY

It makes me something.

FEMALE (MOTHER)

Okay. You believe what you want to believe. But all your beliefs: they have no power. They have no control. They don't make Han stay in a coma; they don't make him wake up. Your beliefs: they don't do anything except lie in your heart. So to your father, to me, to your brother: your beliefs? They mean absolutely nothing.

FEMALE exits. HAN gets up and takes off his helmet. He puts on the leather football helmet and assumes the role of Walter Achiu. He addresses the audience. While doing so, BENNY exits.

HAN (WALTER ACHIU)

When I, Walter Achiu, also known as "Sneeze," was being described earlier in this play, I was called a "pioneer" for my participation in the NFL. But if you look at my career stats,

which span two years, it would be difficult to be impressed. During that time, I was only able to run the ball for a total of 27 yards, caught the ball twice for an additional 17 yards, missed a field goal kick once, and made one incomplete pass. That's it. Compared to my peers, who came years later, my impact on the game itself, on the Dayton Triangles, was small.

But I didn't join the NFL to be better than everyone else. I didn't choose football as a way to satisfy a need to win. I played for the love of the game.

HAN takes off his leather helmet. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in time and space. FEMALE (as REBECCA) enters. HAN throws the helmet to FEMALE, who catches. HAN exits.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

(To the herself, re: the helmet:) Imagine being Walter Achiu and getting tackled and wearing nothing but this. His head could've split open like a watermelon smashing against the pavement.

BENNY enters, holding the prototype football helmet.

BENNY

(To FEMALE, re: his helmet:) We've come a long way.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

What're you doing here?

BENNY

I came to apologize.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

To make me feel better, or to make you feel better?

BENNY

Both?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Go ahead then.

BENNY

I'm sorry. For everything. We don't have talk. We don't have to hang out. But I really want to help out on the science fair project. For my brother.

FEMALE contemplates this. She throws the leather helmet to BENNY, who catches.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Well then get to work.

BENNY freezes. FEMALE addresses the audience.

FEMALE

This is the moment Benny started to cry. We're not going to show it here because he's still coming to terms with the fact that he has emotions. Ha.

He cried, yes, for his brother, who suffered a brain injury that put him in a coma. But, interestingly enough, he was also crying for himself, for reasons he didn't totally understand.

FEMALE freezes. BENNY addresses the audience.

BENNY

As this semester transitioned into next semester, Han remained in his coma. Nobody has any idea if he'll ever come out of it.

I continued to play football, but with a different attitude. I stopped looking at it as a blood sport, and I instead starting thinking about the idea of sportsmanship. I also continued to work with Rebecca on my brother's science fair project.

FEMALE un-freezes

FEMALE (REBECCA)

(Re: the prototype helmet:) That helmet. This prototype. I think we're close.

BENNY

Close to what?

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Close to finding a balance.

BENNY

Between function and form.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Yes.

BENNY

Between rigid material and flexible material.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

Yes.

BENNY studies the prototype.

FEMALE (REBECCA)

You keep working on this project. You must really want to win.

BENNY

No. I don't care if we win. I just want to figure it out.

FEMALE exits. An instrumental hip-hop beat, indicating a shift in space and time. HAN enters and stands, facing the audience, with his eyes closed. BENNY looks at HAN

BENNY

UH

ASIAN-AMERICAN MEN ARE TAUGHT
THEY'RE NOT AS MANLY AS OTHER RACES
SO YOU EITHER BE AS PEOPLE SAY
OR TOUGHEN UP AND PUT ON BRAVE FACES

BUT MAYBE MODERATION IS KEY
FINDING BALANCE 'TWEEN THE STRONG AND SOFT TOO
AND I WILL DO ME LIKE I DO ME
AND I WILL LET YOU DO NOTHING BUT YOU

BENNY throws the leather helmet to HAN, who catches as he opens his eyes. BENNY puts on the prototype helmet. HAN puts on the leather helmet, becoming Walter Achiu.

HAN (WALTER ACHIU)

I told you I played football for the love of the game. But I didn't tell you what I love about it so much. The number one thing, the thing that I love the most about it is this:

After each down, whether you progressed a few yards or experienced a setback, whether you caught the ball or fumbled it, whether you tackled another player or got tackled yourself, whether you did good or whether you made a mistake, whether you were playing offense or playing defense: well, after each down, you go back to the line of scrimmage, you meet your opponent at the neutral zone, and you, no matter what your position is, no matter who you are, you: you begin again.

BENNY and HAN turn to each other and face off in a three-point stance at the imaginary line of scrimmage.

END OF PLAY