

**WRONG PLACE, WRONG TIME**

*a 10-minute family drama*

by

**Monique Franz**

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Characters

PUBLIC DEFENDER: A White attorney in a business suit in his forties or fifties.

DAVEON: A nineteen-year-old African American kid, wearing a white T-shirt, low-hanging jeans, and cornrows

CLASSMATE 1: A Black/Latin adolescent with street-tinged name-brand clothes and shoes.

CLASSMATE 2: Another Black adolescent in name-brand athletic wear.

E-MONEY: A drug dealer with name-brand athletic gear and shoes, wearing gold jewelry.

Scene

Scene takes place in a conference room at a courthouse in Hemet, California.

Time

The present.

SETTING: Scene takes place in a private OFFICE, a conference room, at a courthouse. There is a square table and two chairs on either side.

AT RISE: DAVEON sits on one end, slouched in his chair, while the PUBLIC DEFENDER stands authoritatively with a file in his hand.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Listen, you'll go home on probation if you just plead guilty. Take the plea bargain.

DAVEON: I'm not guilty though.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: If your case goes to trial, then they'll lock you up until then, which might be a month or so... (beat) unless you can make the \$1000 bail.

DAVEON: (scoffs) My mom's got no money for bail.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Well, if you take the plea bargain, you'll get to go home.

DAVEON: If I take the plea bargain, then it's a felony on my record.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: If it goes to trial, and they find you guilty, then it's a felony on your record and you'll do jail time. Listen, it's your first offense, take the plea bargain, and go home.

DAVEON: I should get to go home because I didn't set fire to no car. Somebody else did that shit.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Then what were you doing there, Daveon?

DAVEON: Hanging with my boys, that's it. I wasn't even in the vicinity of the car.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: So, who set fire to the car? One of your boys?

DAVEON: It wasn't me. When the cops came, I was just in the wrong place at the wrong time.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Daveon, that's all it takes sometimes.

DAVEON: That doesn't sound right. Whatever happened to being innocent until proven guilty?

PUBLIC DEFENDER: (wearily) People don't look at young men like you and see innocence. You look like trouble and you're running around with the wrong crowd. You become guilty by association. That's enough to cost you your future.

DAVEON: I ain't read the constitution or nothing, but I'm pretty sure it doesn't say "don't run with the wrong crowd."

PUBLIC DEFENDER: No. That's just good common sense. Let me ask you a question, how does a young man like you wind up in the wrong place at the wrong time?

DAVEON: Dudes like me are born in the wrong place at the wrong time. There's never a right place and right time for us to be anywhere.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: (perplexed) Oh yeah? Enlighten me.

DAVEON: I'm one of five of my mother's mistakes, and my dad wasn't the type to own up to any of his. So, I came into this world wrong place, wrong time.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: So, you were handed a bad hand, but how you play that hand is a choice.

DAVEON: You think I have a choice? Right now, I have the choice to plead innocent and go directly to jail or plead guilty and walk away with a felony. A felony is gon' follow me to every job or rent application I fill out.

I'm nineteen years old. My life ain't started yet. With a felony, I'm denied constitutional rights, no rights to bear arms, my pursuit of happiness will be limited, and I won't even be eligible to vote for anybody who cares about my situation. I can't get no government job or work in a school. See, I know that shit, because my moms got a felony, and no matter how hard she works to be a law-abiding citizen, that word *felony* follows her everywhere.

But you're right, Mister. I got choices, but my choices ain't like your choices. My choices aren't whether to have the steak or shrimp. My choices weren't whether to go to Princeton or Harvard. I didn't get to choose to run track or join the swim team. My mom didn't have the money, the time, or the energy to enroll me into activities that would harness a young man's energy or appetite; the need for comradery and sportsmanship; acceptance and accomplishment. She was working, so I had to get those things from the streets.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: So, you do admit to being a man of the streets?

DAVEON: I'll go further than that. I'm no angel. I've taken things. I've had a little weed business, but I ain't burned nobody's car.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: Well, tell me, Daveon, how does a young man like you get to the point that you're taking things, pushing drugs, and running with the wrong crowds?

DAVEON: New shoes.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: What? New shoes?

DAVEON: My mom was doing the best she could with what she had. She couldn't afford to buy me name-brand shoes. So, she bought me some Walmart kicks from where she worked. The dudes at my school clowned me.

(Lights dim in OFFICE.)

(Lights emerge in a flashback scene in a school yard. CLASSMATE 1 and CLASSMATE 2 approach DAVEON. CLASSMATE 1 scans him over, paying particular attention to his sneakers.)

CLASSMATE 1: Man, look at this dude's steppers. Fuck Nikes, he's wearing Sykees and shit.

DAVEON: (embarrassed, but trying to smile it off) Forget you man.

CLASSMATE 2: (laughing, pointing) Them steppers are made of pleather and superglue.

CLASSMATE 1: (also laughing) ...Elmer's glue and shit.

DAVEON: Don't trip. My mom's got them for....

CLASSMATE 1: Man, you might as well come to school with shoeboxes on your feet and wrote the word Nike on them.

CLASSMATE 2: (holds a marker up) I got a marker, I can draw the swoosh.

DAVEON: (less tolerating) Very funny. Man, get out my face.

CLASSMATE 2: Dude, I don't even know how you show your face with them punk ass kicks on.

DAVEON: (angrily, stepping closer to CLASSMATE 2) At least, I know how to read, Bitch.

CLASSMATE 2: Whatever, man. You're a joke.

CLASSMATE 1: Straight up, Dawg. You can't get no respect or play in them kicks.

(Lights out in the school yard. Lights return to the present conference room)

DAVEON: He was right. It seems like a simple thing, but you get no respect if you have no shoe game. Your shoe game is your worth. None of us came from fancy homes or parents with vacation pads in the Poconos. What you have is on your back. If you have a bomb jacket, folks respect you. If you have some gold on your neck, females want to get with you. It isn't enough that you have your own name. You had to add Jordans, Gucci, or Louis Vuitton to your name to be anybody.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: You couldn't see how that didn't make any sense?

DAVEON: Hell naw. I was a punk ass kid. I took the bus over to the strip mall, tried on some red Jordans, and ran out the store. Sad to say, my street cred went up that day. The girls wanted to get at me and e'everything.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: So, it started with a pair of shoes?

DAVEON: (schooling him) It started with poverty. 'Cause moms couldn't afford nothing but plastic shoes. We were six people in a two-bedroom hellhole. Top Ramen was a square meal. Dad wasn't around to help her with the bills and shit. We had nothing. And anybody in my neighborhood with something had either a dad or a hustle.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: So, you chose to hustle?

DAVEON: I chose to take care of myself, because nobody else could. There's only one way a fifteen-year old boy can do that, and have new shoes, a fresh haircut, maybe a little change in his pocket so he can take a girl to Mickey Dee's.

PUBLIC DEFENDER: From what you describe, it sounds like you were trying to gain a sense of control over your existence, over your life.

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