

K.O.

a play by

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Cast of Characters

_____ BUDDY::
_____ 60's-70's, African American; an older man and the owner of the Bronze Bull Boxing Gym. He was once a fighter himself, a good one too, before being injured in a fight back when he was in his prime.

_____ TYLER::
_____ 16, African American; a smart kid but one who is tired of the bullying he faces at school. He works two jobs to help his mother with the bills and to take care of his siblings. Overall he is the best kind of kid, but he is not one that is confident in himself.

_____ WHEN::
_____ Now.

_____ WHERE::
_____ Anywhere, USA.

We are in the Bronze Bull Boxing Gym, a small ring towards the back and a single chair sitting center towards the front of the stage.

BUDDY COLLINS enters in a grey sweatshirt and sweatpants, a line of silver white hair rounds his head but other than that he is completely bald. He walks over to the chair, holding his back, his body permanently bent over. He sits in the chair, producing a relieving exhale.

BUDDY:

I don't fear nobody but God. I trust nobody but Joe Lewis and the stinging bee Muhammad Ali, or Cassius Clay depending on where ya come from.

I've seen all the great fights, listened to 'em too. From Foreman to Tyson, I know 'em all like the very back of my hand. Yeah, them and the G.O.D. I'm not talkin' about God anymore. G.O.D. as in "good ol' days". Back then all I had to do was come to this here gym, work on my moves and be free of the streets. That's what counted. Those days pass by and sure enough I ended up running the place. The G.O.D.'s become nothing more than distant memories. I'm afraid that I'm beginning to forget some of those times.

TYLER PETERSON enters. He has a black eye and pushes his bicycle, one of the wheels is nearly flat.

BUDDY:

We're closed, little man. And no bikes allowed.

TYLER:

Don't call me little.

BUDDY:

Little or not, we're closed. Get goin'.

TYLER:

My name is Tyler Peterson and I want your help.

BUDDY:

Nice to meet you Tyler. Time for you to leave Tyler.

TYLER:

I want lessons.

BUDDY:

Come back when we're open.

TYLER:

I don't have time for that.

BUDDY:

What else do you have to do?

TYLER:

Stuff.

BUDDY:

Well unfortunately for you my hours of operation don't revolve around your "stuff". Come back when we're open and we can talk about working together. No if's, and's or but's. Now get outta here.

Buddy stands up, attempting to stand in a pose of authority. Tyler grabs his bike, seemingly about to leave.

TYLER:

I don't have a choice.

BUDDY:

What are you talking about?

TYLER:

You tell me that I can only come during certain hours.

BUDDY:

Yeah the hours that we are open.

TYLER:

I can't do that.

BUDDY:

'Cause of "stuff".

TYLER:

Real stuff.

BUDDY:

It's a business at the end of the day. We have rules.

TYLER:

Rules that I can't follow.

BUDDY:

Rules that you have no choice but to abide by.

TYLER:

If you would hear me out you might get it.

BUDDY:

I'm listening.

TYLER:

I can't come during your normal hours.

BUDDY:

You said that. I'mma need a little more than that.

TYLER:

You're gonna judge me.

BUDDY:

This ain't a courtroom.

TYLER:

I don't tell people my life like that, especially people who I don't know.

BUDDY:

Then you can get on out.

TYLER:

Give me time.

BUDDY:

I give you hours. From nine in the morning to nine at night. That's twelve.

TYLER:

Don't you see it? I know you do.

BUDDY:

See what?

Tyler steps closer and points to his black eye.

TYLER:

This.

BUDDY:

Looks like you had a rough day.

TYLER:

Surprisingly not the worst.
A beat.

BUDDY:

What's goin' on, man?

TYLER:

I can't come here during your normal hours 'cause in the morning I got school and that doesn't end until the afternoon. Then as soon as school lets out I have to go to work and by the time I finally get home from that I have to finish the homework I didn't have enough time to do after school and before work, which means that by the time I finish my assignments it's so late that I need to try to get at least an hour of sleep. I'm not always able to. Most of the time I just wait until it's time to get up and ride to school. Do I need to go on?

BUDDY:

What about weekends?

TYLER:

I gotta go to work.

BUDDY:

Ah...

TYLER:

Then to my second job.

BUDDY:

And how old are you?

TYLER:

Sixteen. This is the only time I got right now. I'm not gonna beg. If you want me out I'll be out.

BUDDY:

Hold on a second, son. Answer me this one question.

TYLER:

Yeah?

BUDDY:

Why do you wanna fight?

TYLER:

Why do you think?

BUDDY:

There has to be more reasons than just to protect yourself. You'll be fightin' everyday if that's your only goal.

TYLER:

What's my goal supposed to be?

BUDDY:

Fighting isn't supposed to be fun. Think back to the Roman days, the days of gladiators and huge arenas. That wasn't a game. That was life or death.

TYLER:

I'm not tryin' to kill nobody.

BUDDY:

Boy, listen. That's not what I'm telling you. See, boxing is all about achieving one thing. You know what that is?

TYLER:

A hit.

BUDDY:

A landing.

TYLER:

A landing?

BUDDY:

The K.O.

TYLER:

What's that?

BUDDY:

We got a long way to go if you don't even know what that means. The K.O. - - the knockout. That's how you make sure that they stop messin' with you. Show 'em that you're not there to fight, you're there to win, to teach them a lesson. Now you want that, not a T.K.O.

TYLER:

Meaning...

BUDDY:

Technical knock out. Pity's game. Boxing slang. You'll pick it up.

TYLER:

I don't know to do that. Any of that.

BUDDY:

I'll teach you.

TYLER:

Really?

BUDDY:

Sure. I think my days are numbered here anyway so I might as well try one more time to find a great one.

TYLER:

I'm nothin' great.

BUDDY:

Maybe not. But that's what we all dream of, having the gym that trains the next heavyweight champion.

TYLER:

Did you box?

BUDDY:

Did I box?! Look at the some of the posters on the wall when you get the chance, kid, I did more than box. I won. My name meant something around these parts.

TYLER:

What happened?

BUDDY:

A few things. For one, M.M.A and U.F.C and all those things started getting big. Boxing became more of a game than a sport, something for pay-per-view, not for the world to see. People would rather see men in cages and I'm sorry but I feel like putting one of my guys from this block in a cage would be disrespectful to the ancestors.

Secondly, well, I couldn't go on much longer. Not fighting at least. Training and coaching, sure. That's an easy role to undertake. No one's being rough with ya, but I couldn't step back in that ring unless I wanted to die.

TYLER:

Lemme guess. You got K.O.'d yourself.

BUDDY:

Nah. I could handle that. This was worse. The worst maybe.

TYLER:

What could be worse than getting knocked out in front of a whole crowd?

Buddy balls his shaking hand into an arthritic fist. He gently places it right on the side of Tyler's head.

BUDDY:

The worst thing that can happen to a man in this sport is to get hit on the part that all but controls the rest of his body.

That's why they tell you to keep your gloves up, block yourself, stay on guard. But you can't save every part of yourself. It ain't possible. His name was Ruby Alvarez, big guy. We were fighting in California. I didn't even see it comin'.

TYLER:

What'd you do after that?

BUDDY:

What kinda question is that? I came back home. It was either that or go out there and die, which in my opinion is much worse than being knocked out in front of a crowd of people, don't you?

I came back to the only place I knew, not just the city but this gym. The guy who owned it - the man who built it - was like a father to me. He took me in and gave me a job. I was relatively well known back then so you had young guys comin' off the street just to train where I train. It was quite a time to believe alive.

TYLER:

That's not right. You tell the story like it's a fairy tale, like - - like you came out with the happy ending.

BUDDY:

I came out alive. How much happier could it have gotten?

TYLER:

Barely! What about the guy - - the Alvarez guy? He didn't face any punishments or penalties or whatever for messing you up like that?

BUDDY:

Yeah! He could've. And sure, yeah, maybe he could've gotten D.Q.'d. You got that right but you know something? And maybe I should tell it like this so that you fully understand where I'm comin' from. I would rather almost get killed by him in the ring where I get a paycheck win or lose than live another

day on this block where boys are getting killed for no reason. Pick a team, son. There's only one reasonable choice.

TYLER:

Well I'm sorry but I think it's too late for to become your great one. I'm just tryin' to survive these streets like you were, until I can get out. But I don't have boxing or anything really to help the train move any quicker. All I got is patience. But I can't be knocked down anymore. I don't wanna end up like you.

BUDDY:

Yeah well I don't blame you. I think you oughta be finding your way home now. It's much after the safe time to be out, whenever that is.

TYLER:

What about my lesson? You told me you'd help me.

BUDDY:

Another day. I'm tired.

TYLER:

Yo, I need your help. I gotta face those dudes again in the morning. What am I supposed to do, pretend? Run? Yeah that'll make it a lot better.

Buddy lowers himself back into the chair. He pops his knuckles.

BUDDY:

I can't teach you how to be a man in an hour, young man. Not even in a week. You wanna come in here, see if you can punch hard enough to prove something then leave. That's how "training" works. It takes more than it. It takes dedication, will power.

Buddy stands back up and lifts his fist into a fighting position.

BUDDY:

...this looks cool, right? Go ahead and say it.

TYLER:

I guess.

BUDDY:

It shows you ain't no punk. You're not about to take nothin' from nobody, yeah?

TYLER:

Yeah.

BUDDY:

Go into a job interview with it and they're gonna look at you like you're a fool. But you, you take initiative. I could tell that from the moment you walked in. Use that.

TYLER:

I don't wanna use that.

BUDDY:

But you're gonna have to.

TYLER:

It's not gonna help me in these streets.

BUDDY:

No it's gonna help you get out of them. Now which do you prefer? You ever hear of the three A's?

TYLER:

Nah.

BUDDY:

A.A.A. You always gotta be Alive, Alert and Aggressive. You probably take that as you gotta be tough. Not it. Tough guys don't stay A: Alive long enough to be A: Alert and they live they're whole life tryin' to appear to be A: Aggressive that they don't even bother to include the most important A of them all. Ambitious.

Buddy taps Tyler's head.

BUDDY:

You can use it or you can lose it. Take it from me,
it's so much better when you can use it. Goodnight.

Buddy sits back down.

TYLER:

I'll see you around?

BUDDY:

Probably. I got nowhere to be.

Tyler pushes his bike away.

BUDDY:

Hey Tyler.

TYLER:

Yeah?

BUDDY:

We can start this weekend. Saturday night. Only with
your mother's permission.

TYLER:

That's a bet.

BUDDY:

Hey, hey now, not so you can go around tryin' to
start trouble with nobody, but because I don't want
you out there. We need more boys like you, ones that
can think. You're one of the good ones. You might
even be one of the greats.

TYLER:

Yes sir. See you this weekend.

BUDDY:

This weekend I'll see you.

*Tyler exits with his bike. Buddy sits back and
closes his eyes. We suddenly hear what is going
through his head - - it's an old boxing match.
We hear the announcer calling a next round, his
play-by-play.*

*Eventually the sound fades, as does the lights
and we are in complete darkness.*

THE END.