

AND In This Corner... [A] Cassius

START

In darkness' we hear a repetitive "thiwk thiwk" sound
Lights take their time to reveal, Narrator-Cassius, jumping
rope

After a few moments he stops, looks at us, breathing

NARRATOR - CASSIUS

The world of sports is wide
you got heroes and villains
All sorts of colorful folks
That bring joy to the millions

They run, they jump
They punch, they duck
They swing they hit
They make us stand up

And the one thing in common
Between every and all
No matter how big they got
They started out small

They started out kids
Like to play and laugh
Like to get all dirty
And never take baths

And I was no different
the oldest brother
Rudy the younger
A father, a mother

Grew up in Parkland
Right by Chickasaw park
We played all day until it got dark

Wasn't too different than your life now

We joked and shoved
Sometimes a lot, sometimes little
Only thing different bout then
It was split down the middle

Ding!

Ring Card reads: *Downtown Louisville, 1953*

STOP

AND IN THIS CORNER... [B]

Odessa
Cassius
Rudy

START

ODESSA

Cassius! Rudy! You boys get back here this instant.

Cassius, about 11 years old, comes running from offstage being chased by his brother Rudy, 10.

ODESSA

You stop that runnin'. You know you're not supposed to play in your church clothes.

Cassius and Rudy obey their mother, huffing and puffing.

ODESSA

I got one more store to go into then we can go home and you boys can play for the rest of the afternoon but right now I need you to behave.

CASSIUS

yes mama.

RUDY

yes mama.

A brief moment and then--

CASSIUS

Mama, we thirsty.

RUDY

Yeah, mama we thirsty.

ODESSA

You should've thought of that before you went running around downtown Louisville in July.

CASSIUS

I didn't want to. Rudy was trying to throw rocks at me.

RUDY

No I didn't.

CASSIUS

It's okay. He cant ever hit me. I'm too fast.

ODESSA

Rudy, how many times I got to tell you don't throw rocks at your brother.

RUDY

But he asked me to.

CASSIUS

You don't have to worry. He cant never hit me.

*Odessa is ignoring them now.
The boys are sweating.*

CASSIUS

Can we take off these jackets?

RUDY

Yeah mama we hot.

ODESSA

Just one more store.

CASSIUS

But mama. Here's a place. Couldn't we just go in here for a drink of water?
I see people in there eating and drinking water. We could just ask them for
some water?

Finally Odessa stops, looks in the diner.

ODESSA

I don't think so boys.

RUDY

Why not?

CASSIUS

There some boys in there, same age as Rudy and me. They're drinking water.

ODESSA

Now boys you gon have to wait until we get home and that's the end of it.

They start up with all the "but why?"

ODESSA

That's enough!

the boys get quiet.

ODESSA

They wont give you any water in there.

*the boys look through the diner window
notice that while it is true that there are
boys their age drinking water, they are
not the same color.*

Narrator Cassius addresses us further

N. CASSIUS: I looked in there.

Took a second to see
Them boys drinkin' water aint look like me
And on we walked
Thirsty as ever
But we didn't make a peep
Shoot, we knew better

See this was the south
And during that time
Black and white
Could not intertwine

Now you might think me unlucky
A black boy born in Kentucky

And Jim crow was no treat
Had designated parks and streets

But still we was happy
My home life was good
Everybody helped each other
A strong neighborhood

STOP

Ding!

Ring Card reads: *The Louisville Home Show, 1954*

*We are at the black expo. Booths, people milling
about. In the midst of it all, Cassius 12, Rudy 11 and
another boy Eddie, 12---goof off, snack on popcorn and
candy*

AND IN This Corner., (C) Cassius
Joe Martin

My bike. CASSIUS

Miss. EDDIE
Sir.

It was mine. CASSIUS

Have you seen somebody on a red bike? EDDIE

START

*Joe Martin dressed in his policeman uniform
appears*

Officer. Officer. CASSIUS

Calm down there son. JOE MARTIN

My bike! Somebody stole it from me. CASSIUS

You sure you didn't put it somewhere you forgot? JOE MARTIN

No Sir. I left it right there on the bench next to theirs'. CASSIUS

But they just took yours? JOE MARTIN

It was a brand new red Schwinn. The new one. I only had it just a little while.
It was the fastest bike in the world and somebody stole it. They just come
and took it! CASSIUS

Calm down. JOE MARTIN

CASSIUS

I can't be calm. My daddy bought me that bike. It was so fast. I took good care of it too. Washed it every day. Oiled the chain every week and some no good thief just walks up and takes it!

JOE MARTIN

It's alright.

CASSIUS

No its not! You have to find this thief and when you do I'm gonna whup him. I'm gonna whup him so bad he'll never steal anything again.

JOE MARTIN

Is that right?

CASSIUS

I'm gonna whup him so bad you probably have to arrest me and put me in jail next to him and once we get behind bars I'm gon whup him again.

Joe is tickled by this.

JOE MARTIN

How old are you?

CASSIUS

I'm 12 sir.

JOE MARTIN

You even know how to fight?

CASSIUS

I see that no good thief, I'll be the best fighter you ever seen.

JOE MARTIN

So no?

Cassius shrugs.

JOE MARTIN

You gonna whup anybody---you better learn how.

CASSIUS

What do you mean?

JOE MARTIN

Come by the Columbia Gym, ask for Joe. That's me.

CASSIUS

Am I under arrest?

Joe chuckles

JOE MARTIN

No. Why? you got something to confess?

CASSIUS

No sir. No.

JOE MARTIN

I'm gonna go look for that bike. Come on by the gym. I'll show you how to really fight.

Cassius nods and rejoins Eddie and Rudy.

CASSIUS

STOP You two go head and ride your bikes, I can walk.

RUDY

No, we'll just walk em.

CASSIUS

It's okay. You know go on. I'm gonna run.

EDDIE

What?

CASSIUS

Matter of fact, I bet I can run and get back to Parkland faster than you on a bike.

EDDIE

Stop all that Cassius.

CASSIUS

Ready.

EDDIE

Quit playin.

AND IN THIS CORNER... (D)

Odessa
Rudy
Cash
Cassius

Not next week. Tomorrow. CORKY

Tomorrow? (a tad surprised) CASSIUS

Is that a problem? CORKY
(smirking, sensing the bit of hesitance)

No problem. Tomorrow is perfect. CASSIUS

See you then – chump! CORKY

exit Corky

Ding

START

Ring card reads: *Clay Home*

Clay and Rudy return home to find their parents reading the same Till article.

Odessa gets up, walks to them swiftly and hugs them both tightly.

ODESSA
I'm not gon let nuthin happen to you boys.

RUDY
Why they do that to him mama. He was just a kid. Like us.

CASH
Mississippi is a hard place for Negroes.

ODESSA
But anywhere you go in this country, people don't like when Negros step out they place

CASSIUS
Why is it like this?

ODESSA

Just how it's always been. But don't you be afraid. There is nothing we can do but be who God needs us to be.

CASSIUS

Whens it gonna change?

ODESSA

I pray on it.

CASSIUS

I will too

ODESSA

You boys go on and clean up for dinner.

Rudy exits, Cassius stays

CASSIUS

I challenged Corky Baker to a fight today.

ODESSA

Is that Ruth's boy?

CASSIUS SR

Yeah, that big ole water-head boy, always starting trouble, trying to sneak beers and cigarette butts down at the pool hall.

CASSIUS

He always bullyin' everybody and I'm sick of it.

ODESSA

So you challenged him to fight?
You're not some street thug.

RUDY

(returning, wiping his wet hands on his pants)

It's in the ring! Corky don't know nuthin about a fair fight. Cassius gonna whup him.

CASSIUS

It doesn't matter how many people I beat on Tomorrow's Champions. On the streets, Corky is the champ.

CASH

He's right Dessa. Bullies never stop until you show em you aint scared.

ODESSA

Well, if it's in the ring I suppose

Cassius Sr pats his son on the shoulder

ODESSA

Come yall and sit down for dinner.

They head to sit around the table.

CASSIUS

Can I?

Cassius Sr. nods.

CASSIUS

Dear Lord. Thank you for this food. Thank you for my mama who made it and makes dinner for us every night. Thank you for my dad and Rudy.

(a pause)

I know you're with that boy Emmett. Tell him I said---we wont forget bout him and that his mama is being real strong for him.

(a pause)

and if you can, please help me out with Corky Baker. Amen.

Transition

STOP

Ring Card reads: Clay vs Baker, 1955

Corky Baker, dressed in shorts and a tank top, with boxing gloves, stomps into the ring.

The ensemble surrounds the ring--a bunch of neighborhood folks—likely former victims of Corky's reign of terror---looking on with anticipation.

Finally Clay emerges and steps into the ring.

Corky wears a smirk.

AND IN THIS CORNER



Eddie
Cassius

~~JOE MARTIN~~

~~You're not done talking to me. We're going to pick up right where we left off.~~

~~Joe moves but remains within earshot~~

START

EDDIE

Hey Cassius, listen, so me and some of the guys are going down to Archie's diner to do a sit in.

CASSIUS

Archie's diner. That's white only.

EDDIE

I know. It wouldn't be a sit in if we picked a Negro diner.

CASSIUS

You gon sit in, huh?

EDDIE

Yeah, and we aint gon move till we dragged out.

CASSIUS

Well good luck.

EDDIE

Come with us.

CASSIUS

No thank you.

EDDIE

Why not, you came last time, when we sat in Sullivan's.

CASSIUS

I know and I got covered in milk and orange juice. That don't even go together. They shoving me and callin' me Nigger. For what?

EDDIE

What do you mean---for what?

CASSIUS

Just didn't like it is all.

EDDIE

This aint about what you like? You think our grandparents liked the treatment they got? Our parents? Emmett Till? This is about what's right!

CASSIUS

Just don't think sittin' in is what God has planned for me.

EDDIE

You think you some kind of people's champ, but you just fighting for yourself.

CASSIUS

Eddie, now wait a---

EDDIE

Oh wait. I'm wrong, you fight for that white man over there but not for your brothers and sisters.

CASSIUS

Now wait a---

EDDIE

There are two types of fighters.

The first kind, most kind, they fight for themselves. That's somebody like Corky Baker. He was bigger and meaner and he used it for himself. and the second kind, they use their strength and power to fight for people who cant. The guy who fought Corky Baker back when we was little he was the second kind.

CASSIUS

Eddie.

Eddie stomps off.

Cassius takes a breath and swallows this moment.

Joe returns

JOE

After all I've done you're going tell me you're having second thought!

CASSIUS

You remember when we went to the Olympic Trials, out there in California?

JOE

Yeah.

CASSIUS

We took a plane there. Usually we just drove to all our fights but---

STOP