

Even Flowers Bloom in Hell, Sometimes

(a mixtape)

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/The Lark's 25th Annual Playwrights' Week

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/The Ojai Playwrights Conference Foundry Project

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by

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Dedicated to S____, A____, and W_____

Cast of Characters

PRISONER	Male. Mid 20s to late 40s as time passes
INMATE #1	Male. Late 20s to early 50s as time passes
INMATE #2	Male. Late 20s to early 50s as time passes
CELLMATE	Male. Mid 40s to late 60s as time passes
LITTLE MAN (L.M.)	Male. Age 14 – 21.
SISTER	Female. 18-20 progressing to mid-40s.
CORRECTIONAL OFFICER (C.O.)	Male. Early 30s to mid-50s as time passes.
MOTHER	Female. Late-40s to 60s as time passes.
ATTORNEY	Female (to be played by same actor as MOTHER,)

Time:
1991 – 2014

Place:
Federal Correctional Institution. Low or Medium security.

Scene Locations:

- Commons Area/Visiting Area: Three chairs and a table.
- Cell 127: Prisoner/Cellmate's cell: Bunk beds. Books scattered around. Adjacent to Cell 128.
- Cell 128: Inmate 1/Inmate 2's cell: Adjacent to Cell 127. Bunk beds. Various knick-knacks and a few books.
- Solitary Confinement Unit: Single bed.

Final Notes:

The characters do not use racial slurs or epithets. The casting should be either African American, Afro-Latinx, or Latin-American. Like two sides of a coin the prison system is overly-represented demographically by Black and Brown bodies. In this spirit, if the PRISONER'S story and family feature a Latin-American family, it is asked that the INMATE story use African-American or Afro-Latinx performers, and vice-versa. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER and ATTORNEY should share the same ethnic/racial background as the PRISONER.

Optional Pre-Show

Budget permitting, all ushers should be dressed as correctional officers. When patrons go to the box office, all patrons must sign a check-in ledger, pay, and instead of a ticket be given a visitor sticker with their name on it. The stickers should read:

[Theatrical Company Name] Correctional Facility
[Patron Name]
<u>VISITOR PASS</u>
[Date]

Patrons without visitor stickers are to be denied admission.

While waiting for the show to begin an inmate should break out through the house doors. Several pursuing correctional officers (known as C.O.s) follow and catch the inmate. When they catch the inmate, they subdue the inmate and drag him back inside through the house doors while the inmate screams. A moment after this incident the Head Usher/Commanding Officer will address the audience something along the lines of:

*OFFICER Welcome to **[Theatrical Company Name]** Correctional Facility. We apologize for the sudden outburst by one of our...residents. We value your safety, and as such dealt with the matter as swiftly as possible. With that in mind, we have some facility guidelines. No electronics, outside food, cigarettes or drinks are allowed in the visitor facility. We will provide, for a nominal fee, refreshments and snack food about midway through your visit. Visiting hours will last for **[Runtime]** minutes. We are a Zero Tolerance facility. The safety of our residents, visitors, and staff are of the utmost importance. Thus, if you are found using electronics, or smuggling contraband into the visitor facility we will escort you out for the remainder of today's visitation and subsequently revoke all future visitation privileges.*

We will now be taking you to the visitor's facility. Please line up in a single file line and present your Visitor Stickers.

We hope you enjoy your visit.

Bare stage. At opening LITTLE MAN stands frozen in what appears to be mid-speech. The PRISONER enters. LITTLE MAN turns to the audience.

L.M. Track 1: Da Intro/Checking for Monsters. May 6th 1991. Month Number One. Prison.

LITTLE MAN freezes again. The PRISONER stares at LITTLE MAN for a moment more before--

PRISONER I remember the last time we tried to visit my old man. We waited for an hour until we got called to see him. Me. Moms. Baby sister. We stood up with the other people that got called and got in a line to get searched. We take off our shoes and put it through one of those scanners. We pass through a metal detector, and a C.O. pats us down. My old lady tried to make it sound nice. The nice people had to check for monsters trying to sneak in so they don't hurt your dad. Monsters are invisible, so they have to check every time we visit to make sure. That's what moms would tell me.

Silence.

I think parents forget that their kids figure shit out. It didn't take long to understand. My old man was an inmate in the system and I was visiting him. Every second and fourth Saturday of each month.

Silence.

Now, my moms...man...my moms...she wasn't nothing to fuck with. If you push her, she pushing back, no matter who you are. The C.O. was patting me down and he was joking around with me. "Who you gonna see?"

"Well fuck, look at that. Whatchu gonna do when you grow up? You gonna come live here one day? Gonna come over and stay with your dad for a little bit? You a future resident?"

What the fuck was that for, right? And so, I was laughing and shit, and then my moms just blows up on the homie. She starts yelling at the C.O.

Then my sister starts crying and shit's looking ill, man. And the C.O. is right there like,

"The fuck you say to me? I'm just talking to the little hood rat, what the fuck problem you got, ah? I'm gonna let you calm the fuck down, but if you take that tone with me again, you'll lose your visitation privileges."

Silence.

We went home three minutes later.

That was the last time we tried to visit my old man.

That night he called. They got into a fight. I...uh...I went into the other room. She was in the kitchen on the house phone, right? So, I went into the other room and I picked up the other line.

Real quietly. They was yelling some foul shit at each other. My pops was saying,
“It's a fucking joke. You shouldn't have fucking yelled at the C.O. because of a fucking joke.”

And my moms was like,

“You think calling your son a hoodrat is a joke? You think that's the kind of shit a twelve year old should get used to hearing? He doesn't need to be around that shit. Fuck that. Fuck that.”

He hung up on her.

I never saw my old man again.

They ruled it a suicide.

Long silence.

Now don't get this shit twisted. I ain't gonna blame my moms or pops. I ain't gonna blame the broken family or the fucking projects. My moms tried hard and believe it or fucking not, I finished high school. My pops tried to tell me to keep my shit in my studies. My pops warned me.

But let me be real for a second.

If you had to make a choice. Seriously, make a fucking choice and tell me how much would you prefer to make in four hours. Would you like to make minimum wage? What's that in 1991...like... like four bucks an hour? Or...or would you like to be making a stack in that same amount of time? How about a C-Note in 20 minutes?

It's fucking economics.

Fuck it, right? If I was gonna end up here anyway, why not live the good life for a fucking minute, right?

Future resident, right? That's all I was gonna be, right? So, what the fuck? What the fuck else should I'a done?

Silence.

My appeal got rejected.

I'm serving 300 months. That's 25 years. The year is 1991.

This is the story of my redemption.

He laughs.

Nah, fam. I'm just fucking with you.

*Cell 127. The CELLMATE is seated reading the **The Amen Corner** by James Baldwin.*

CELLMATE Track 2: Educate Yourself featuring C.O. and CELLMATE. May 7th, 1991.
The next day. Cell 127.

The PRISONER is guided into his cell by the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER (C.O.). As they walk in the CELLMATE stands up, still reading his book.

C.O. Book down.

CELLMATE Always at the good part...

The CELLMATE drops the book.

C.O. Got you a new friend.

CELLMATE Skip-to-my-fucking-lou.

C.O. What was that, Two Dub?

CELLMATE Thank you for the company, sir. Yet another fucking oppressed minority to add to the swelling population in this already overcrowded trash heap...sir.

C.O. Keep talking.

CELLMATE That's all, for now, sir.

C.O. Watch your tone.

CELLMATE Yes, sir.

C.O. This little shit here steps out of line, you both pay for it.

PRISONER Who the fuck you callin—

The CELLMATE immediately punches the PRISONER in his abdomen. The PRISONER falls over gasping.

C.O. Looks like you got someone looking out for you, new shit.
(to the CELLMATE)
That's going to cost you calling privileges for a week.

CELLMATE Be still my fucking heart.

C.O. Two weeks.

The C.O. exits. The CELLMATE goes to the PRISONER.

CELLMATE You gonna wanna get up now.

The PRISONER sits up. The CELLMATE sits next to him.

CELLMATE Don't fuck with the C.O.s. First mistake every single one of you young cats makes is thinking you can fuck with them. Don't try. It ain't worth it.

PRISONER I coulda fucking taken him.

CELLMATE Yeah? What about when all of them swarm in and start beating your brains in?
(silence)

They gonna try to provoke you. Don't let them. They looking for a reason. You can pay me back later for saving your ass.

PRISONER They do a lot of shit to you?

CELLMATE
(he chuckles.)

Shit, man. I didn't even know. I wasn't ready. Nobody's ready for what they can do to you.

PRISONER What's your name?

CELLMATE Two Double Oh Six Four Nine Eight Zero.

PRISONER What's your real name?

CELLMATE You call me Two-Dub for short. Who are you?

Silence.

PRISONER Three Triple Six Four Oh Five Three.

CELLMATE Fucked up name.

PRISONER Why's that?

CELLMATE Triple six. Mark of the beast, isn't it?

PRISONER Fuck if I care. Just numbers.

CELLMATE You're right. I'ma call you Three-Trip.

PRISONER My name—

CELLMATE Your name in here is Three-Trip.

Silence.

PRISONER Aight.

CELLMATE Whatcha believe in?

PRISONER Nothin', man.

CELLMATE Gotta believe in something. You go crazy in here if you don't.

PRISONER I got three sixes in my number, should tell you everything.

CELLMATE The devil, eh?

PRISONER In the fucking flesh.

CELLMATE Devil look like a punk ass.

They laugh. Beat.

PRISONER Whatchu believe in, old man?

CELLMATE Two-Dub.

PRISONER Ain't answering my question.

The CELLMATE stands up.

CELLMATE You got a mouth on you.

The PRISONER gets ready to defend himself. The CELLMATE laughs. The PRISONER lowers his guard.

PRISONER You a Christian?

CELLMATE Why? You a Bible thumper?

PRISONER What if I am?

CELLMATE You got a shitty Bible if you followed it and ended up here.

PRISONER You one of them Muslims?

CELLMATE If I was?

PRISONER Be asking where your carpet was.

CELLMATE And my Quran.

PRISONER And those hats they wear.

CELLMATE Jews wear them too.

PRISONER Yeah but Muslims got it different.

CELLMATE True indeed.

Silence.

CELLMATE What if I was a Blood or a Crip, young homie?

PRISONER Be asking you what set you representin'...

The CELLMATE laughs. Beat.

PRISONER I asked you if you was Christian because of what you were reading.

CELLMATE It's a play.

PRISONER Says "*Amen Corner*" on it.

CELLMATE Yeah it does.

PRISONER So, you a Christian?

Silence.

CELLMATE Nah, I don't got no religion.

Silence.

CELLMATE

(muttering)

Doesn't mean I ain't looking though...

PRISONER So why you reading a religious book?

CELLMATE You ever heard the phrase, don't judge a book by its cover?

PRISONER Yeah.

CELLMATE Don't judge a story by the title. Here. Read it.

The CELLMATE gets the play and hands it to the PRISONER.

CELLMATE The book's about religion. But not how you think, Three Trip.

PRISONER I'm cool.

CELLMATE Give it a shot. Educate yourself.

PRISONER You some kinda teacher?

The CELLMATE laughs.

CELLMATE Middle school dropout.

PRISONER So, why you hyping so much on education? You dropped out.

CELLMATE 'Cause I know how important it is now that I gave it up.

PRISONER You feel that way about religion?

CELLMATE You're a quick learner. Why don't you believe?

PRISONER Why do you?

CELLMATE Don't know...maybe because I know that God ain't there.

PRISONER Fuck you mean?

CELLMATE Don't worry about it.

PRISONER Come on, old man. You said I should educate myself. So, educate me.

CELLMATE Tell me something...

PRISONER You don't want to answer questions?

CELLMATE Why you asking so many questions?

PRISONER What?

CELLMATE You a snitch?

PRISONER No. Nah, man. You got it twisted.

CELLMATE You got some kind of plea deal? Get shit on me and you go free?

PRISONER Two-Dub, don't—

CELLMATE Get the fuck over here.

The CELLMATE forces the PRISONER up on his feet.

CELLMATE Stand up. Fucking now. Stand up.

PRISONER Look—

CELLMATE You ask questions, you get fucked up. You got me?

PRISONER Alright—alright—I'm sorry.

The CELLMATE lets the PRISONER go. The CELLMATE resumes reading. Silence.

PRISONER So, you like reading plays?

CELLMATE Man, you just keep asking...

PRISONER I like talking. Why you like plays?

The CELLMATE sighs.

CELLMATE I don't know. Just always did...

PRISONER You an actor?

CELLMATE Nah...just...

PRISONER What?

CELLMATE I worked for a theatre a long time ago. Janitor. Cleaning shit back in the 60s. Fell in love with it.

PRISONER Word? Where at?

CELLMATE This place called St. Mark's. I saw this play by a French guy. Nothing but black people in the cast. All the audience was given white masks. It had a queen watching a trial about a white woman getting murdered. And some other...I don't really know how to describe it...

PRISONER What play was that?

CELLMATE I don't even know. I been looking for it everywhere.

PRISONER And you liked theatre ever since?

CELLMATE Yeah. Year or two later I got locked up...

PRISONER For what?

CELLMATE Do you remember what we talked about?

PRISONER Gotcha.

CELLMATE Good. You're learning. Don't mention it again, Three-Trip. Or you're gonna see.

The PRISONER nods, understanding.

C.O.

(offstage)

LIGHTS OUT!!!

An alarm rings. All lights go out except for the ones illuminating the pathway for the C.O. who enters.

C.O. Interlude 1: Some Kinda Metaphor featuring INMATE 1 and INMATE 2. June 8th, 1992.
Month Number Two. Cell 128.

The C.O. exits. A dim light pulls up on Cell 128, adjacent to Cell 127. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2 sit in their beds each holding a copy of Kafka's The Metamorphosis.

INMATE 1 So, the man turns into a roach?

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 Why?

INMATE 2 Supposed to be some kinda like metaphor for what modern human ends up becoming.

INMATE 1 So, we're all turning into roaches?

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 Why do we turn into roaches?

INMATE 2 Because it's like supposed to show what kind of value people end up getting in our day and age.

INMATE 1 Why don't you just say that? Why you gotta talk about roaches?

INMATE 2 Because then it wouldn't be a metaphor.

INMATE 1 What's a metaphor?

INMATE 2 It's like when you compare something but it's not connected necessarily.

INMATE 1 What's that mean?

INMATE 2 So, like, him being a roach doesn't mean he's a roach. It means that his self-worth is like a roaches'. Eventually his own family sees him like that and they talk about how they gotta get rid of him.

INMATE 1 So that's why he dies in the end? Because he got no self-worth?

INMATE 2 Exactly.

INMATE 1 It's kinda like us then, right?

INMATE 2 What do you mean?

INMATE 1 Like, us. How we are. In here.

INMATE 2 I'm not catching what you mean.

INMATE 1 Well, just like in that story, the sister takes care of the roach, right?

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 But the sister's like, "Nah, I can't do this anymore. We gotta get rid of him or he'll ruin us all."

INMATE 2 Right.

INMATE 1 Kinda like how our family visits. They visit and they try to see us when we first get in, but after a while they stop coming. It's too much of a hassle to come see us, so they see us less, till they stop.

Silence.

INMATE 2 So, what you're trying to say is that we're roaches?

INMATE 1 Not literally. Just, like, we're metaphor roaches.

INMATE 2 Come on, man. You don't believe that.

INMATE 1 Isn't that what the story's about, though? It's the modern human. Well right now is the modern time, and ain't we human?

INMATE 2 Come on. I think you're over-thinking this stuff.

INMATE 1 Yeah...

Pause. INMATE 1 looks toward an offstage window and laughs. INMATE 2 looks at INMATE 1 like he's crazy.

INMATE 2 What's wrong with you?

INMATE 1 Look at the window.

INMATE 2 looks at the window, squints, and smiles.

INMATE 2 Well look at that...

INMATE 1 That roach keeps climbing then falls.

INMATE 2 I can see that.

INMATE 1 Ain't that funny?

INMATE 2 Kinda like us, in a way...

INMATE 1 Wait, is that roach a metaphor, too?

INMATE 2 Yeah, I mean, it's like the roach is trying to get out. Freedom's right past this thin wall, but the roach can't climb out. There's no way out, but the roach is trying. Like us. We want out, but we can't seem to make it.

INMATE 1 So, wait. Are all roaches metaphors?

INMATE 2 No, numbskull. But this roach is a metaphor.

INMATE 1 So, are we a metaphor?

INMATE 2 What?

INMATE 1 Like us. Are we like a metaphor?

INMATE 2 What do you mean?

INMATE 1 We're in here, talking about roaches and how they're like us. But like, are we like something to other people who look at us?

INMATE 2 Like who?

INMATE 1 I dunno. God? The angels watching us?

INMATE 2 What kind of metaphor do you think we are when the angels are watching us?

INMATE 1 I dunno...maybe...maybe we're like supposed to be like what happens when an angel does bad. Ends up in here. With roaches talking about stupid things like metaphors. Maybe we're characters in some story that God made up to teach people that when you do wrong it's...never mind. It's nothing.

INMATE 2 We ain't metaphors.

INMATE 1 No?

INMATE 2 Nah. We're people. Metaphors are for stories. Humans...humans have a bigger meaning than that. We...we're heroes in our own stories. And heroes don't always have good times, right?

INMATE 1 Right.

INMATE 2 But eventually the hero gets out and times get better, right?

INMATE 1 Yeah. You got a point.

INMATE 2 We're all heroes. Not no metaphor. We're heroes going through bad times and eventually it's gonna get better. But we gotta keep going on our journey. Things get better.

INMATE 1 Makes sense.

INMATE 2 Yeah...

Long silence. INMATE 1 realizes something.

INMATE 1 But...ain't that a meatphor?

INMATE 2 Nah, that's an analogy.

INMATE 1 Wait...what's an analogy?

Beat. They look at each other. Silence.

Visiting Area. The SISTER is seated. The PRISONER enters led by the C.O. The SISTER and PRISONER embrace before sitting. The C.O. gives them a look that tells them to stop.

C.O. Track 3: Jesus Casting Stones featuring SISTER and C.O. September 9th, 1992. Month Number Sixteen. Visiting Area.

The C.O. exits.

PRISONER Oh my God, look at you!!

SISTER How are you?

PRISONER No. No. We're not talking about me. How's my baby sister? Come on. Tell me.

SISTER Shut up. I'm here to talk about you.

PRISONER Ah...well, you know...

SISTER How they treating you?

PRISONER Long as you keep your mouth shut, they alright.

SISTER How's the food?

PRISONER It's aight.

SISTER Did you get the money for the commissary?

PRISONER Yeah, no, thank you so much for that. I been meaning—

SISTER It's fine. Don't mention it.

PRISONER Yeah, but...I mean...look how you affording to send me that kind of—?

SISTER If I didn't have it, I wouldn't send it.

PRISONER How you getting that kind of money? Mom working?

SISTER You know she's not.

PRISONER So, how you getting the money?

SISTER You been praying?

PRISONER I don't think God wanna listen to me.

SISTER You know God's always willing to listen.

PRISONER Yeah, no, don't change the subject. How you been getting that money?

SISTER Look—

PRISONER Are you—?

SISTER No.

PRISONER No, what?

SISTER No, nothing. I have the money right now, okay?

PRISONER You turning tricks?

SISTER Fuck you.

PRISONER You're not slinging?

SISTER No!

PRISONER Tell me.

SISTER Look, you don't want to—

PRISONER I swear to God, if you're—

SISTER I'm using the student loan money, okay?

Silence.

PRISONER Why you doing that?

SISTER Look—

PRISONER You need that money for school.

SISTER I dropped out.

Silence.

PRISONER Wait, why'd you—?

SISTER Don't worry about it.

PRISONER You're using loan money.

SISTER Yes.

PRISONER You gotta pay that back.

SISTER I'm aware.

PRISONER You gotta go back to school.

SISTER I can't.

PRISONER Fuck you can't. You're going back.

SISTER How we gonna pay rent if I'm in school?

PRISONER The money I got saved up.

SISTER It's gone.

Silence.

PRISONER Gone?

SISTER Attorney fees.

PRISONER How much was the fucking attorney?

SISTER After your appeal got rejected...just the costs and then...

PRISONER What?

SISTER We kept the firm on retainer, right?

PRISONER Why?

SISTER Keep researching. Maybe find a way to get you out somehow.

PRISONER What research?

SISTER Okay, so I been looking up cases, right?

PRISONER Cases?

SISTER Yeah. I found a few cases that are like yours.

PRISONER Why you been looking at cases?

SISTER I'm trying to find cases where the defendants get off, right?

PRISONER Appeal's already been denied.

SISTER Yeah, but if we can find a case that is similar where the guy got off, maybe we can find something. Like a technicality. Re-open the case.

PRISONER Maybe...

SISTER Yeah, like there's one case, right? They didn't read this guy his rights, so he got off because he wasn't informed of what he could be accountable for.

PRISONER They read me my rights.

SISTER Well, there's a lot of others. I been sending a lot of the cases to the paralegal. She said she was gonna give them to the attorney.

PRISONER Why you doing all that work?

SISTER What?

PRISONER Isn't that what the paralegal and attorney are supposed to do?

SISTER Well, yeah, but—

PRISONER Then what the fuck are you paying them for?

SISTER Look—

PRISONER You can't do their work for them. You pay them. They do the research.

SISTER I know that but—

PRISONER You can't be letting people take advantage of you like that.

SISTER I'm just trying to help.

PRISONER So, you help by giving them free money?

SISTER WHAT THE FUCK ELSE DO YOU WANT ME TODO?

(pause)

I'm pregnant.

Silence.

PRISONER How far along are you?

SISTER A few weeks now.

PRISONER Do you know who the father is?

SISTER Fuck you.

PRISONER What?

SISTER What the fuck do you think I—

PRISONER Well you ain't no Virgin Mary.

SISTER And what Jesus are you to be casting out stones?

PRISONER You're right. Aight. My bad.
(beat)
Get an abortion.

SISTER No.

PRISONER Fuck you mean, “no?”

SISTER No. End of story.

PRISONER You don't want a kid.

SISTER Who said I didn't want a child?

PRISONER How you supposed to go to school?

SISTER I dropped out already.

PRISONER You can't do that.

SISTER Why not?

PRISONER You're smarter than me. You...

SISTER I, what?

PRISONER It's not worth throwing away your future.

SISTER That baby might be the future.

PRISONER Come on, don't talk that bullshit about the children being the future.

SISTER He might be.

PRISONER And he might end up in here.

SISTER He might. You're right.

PRISONER So, why the fuck take the risk?

SISTER Because what if he changes everything?

PRISONER This a religion thing? Because Jesus says you shouldn't get an abortion?

SISTER This isn't some pro-life thing. I... could you imagine what would happen if we stopped having kids just because life would be harder for us?

PRISONER Listen—

SISTER No, think about it. We'd all die out, wouldn't we? There'd be no hope. We'd give up. I'd stop looking for cases to get you out of here. We'd give up like dad did. We'd...lose. Things can't change unless we have a future. This baby's that future. Children are the key to changing things. They're what makes the world move forward. They make progress. Do you...? Do you see what I mean?

Silence. The PRISONER starts laughing.

PRISONER That is some of the stupidest shit I've ever heard. Fuck you hear that, Mr. Rogers?

SISTER Fuck you!

They laugh.

PRISONER Does moms know?

SISTER No.

PRISONER Ah, shit.

SISTER Yeah...

PRISONER How is she?

SISTER You know how she is.

PRISONER Think she'll ever visit me?

Silence.

SISTER She's gonna get over it.

PRISONER One day, right?

SISTER She's just...

PRISONER Fuck it. Never mind.

SISTER Yeah.

PRISONER Promise me you won't do the attorney's work again.

SISTER I promise.

PRISONER Or the paralegal's.

SISTER Fine.

PRISONER If you can go back to school—

SISTER I will.

PRISONER Are you sure you want this child?

SISTER I do.

PRISONER Alright. I approve.

SISTER I wasn't asking for your approval.

PRISONER Well you got it anyway.

SISTER Thank you.

Silence. They embrace. The C.O. enters and grabs the PRISONER and pulls him up.

C.O. Get the fuck up.

PRISONER Fuck's happening?

C.O. Fucking checking you.

PRISONER What'd I do?

The SISTER stands up.

SISTER Sir, sir, what's wrong?

C.O. Miss, I'm gonna ask you to sit down right now.

The SISTER sits. The C.O. starts searching the PRISONER.

C.O. Think you're gonna sneak shit in?

PRISONER Hey, I'm not trying—

C.O. I did not ask you to speak.

PRISONER But, I didn't do nothing.

C.O. Fuck outta here, you didn't do anything. All you animals try to do is sneak shit in from the outside.

SISTER Sir, that's uncalled for—

C.O. Miss, if you don't quiet down, I will have you escorted out.

PRISONER You searching me cuz I hugged my sister? Is that it?

C.O. I told you to fucking be quiet.

The C.O.'s hand passes the PRISONER's crotch. The PRISONER jumps involuntarily. The C.O. shoves the PRISONER down. The PRISONER tries to get back up.

PRISONER Yo, what the fuck?

The C.O. gets his baton and beats the PRISONER.

SISTER What are you doing? No! He didn't do—stop! Stop it. Please, stop it!

The C.O. does not stop.

Visiting Room. The PRISONER gets up from the ground and takes a seat while his ATTORNEY enters. The C.O. leads SISTER out. SISTER stops and looks back at her brother before--

SISTER Track 4: Legal Jargon featuring ATTORNEY November 10th, 1992. Month Number Eighteen. Visiting Room.

ATTORNEY No.

PRISONER There's gotta be something.

ATTORNEY I understand that you're trying to find a way out of this, and believe me, I am too, but—

PRISONER What about all those cases my sister been sending you?

ATTORNEY A lot of those cases are—

PRISONER A lot of those cases are similar to my situation.

ATTORNEY Similar doesn't mean the same.

PRISONER You researched all of them, though?

ATTORNEY Yes. I already told you, none of those cases apply to you.

PRISONER Why not?

ATTORNEY Because the law is more complex than—

PRISONER You don't want me to get out.

ATTORNEY It's my job to help you—

PRISONER Then why the hell don't these cases apply to me?

ATTORNEY They aren't the same circumstances.

PRISONER Find a way to make it work.

ATTORNEY The law doesn't have a get out of jail free card.

PRISONER I'm not asking for a fucking get out of jail free card. I'm asking for a way to make this work. I been paying you good money—

ATTORNEY You can't throw money at something and expect it to work out.

PRISONER Unless you're white, then your money's good right?

ATTORNEY This goes beyond race. You know that.

PRISONER Fuck you mean? White guy from a rich family caught with more shit than I've ever sold and he gets off, no problem. But me? How the fuck is this beyond race?

ATTORNEY Be that as it may--

PRISONER Fuck is this, "Be that as it may--" shit? What does that shit do for me? How come white people get the benefit of the doubt?

ATTORNEY Look, your racial animus—

PRISONER Do you understand what the fuck they do to people in here?

ATTORNEY I'm aware.

PRISONER You got family on the inside?

ATTORNEY That's none of your business.

PRISONER Hey, there. You and me, we're both just trying to get by in life. You understand the law. I need legal help. We look out for each other, you know? We *have* to look out for each other, especially in this rigged system.

ATTORNEY I'm sorry, what are you implying?

PRISONER I'm just saying we're in this shit together.

ATTORNEY Are you comparing your criminal activity to my law degree?

PRISONER *Alleged* criminal activity.

ATTORNEY Fuck you.

(silence)

I'm going to give you a piece of advice. No legal jargon. Nothing. Just advice.

(beat)

From the beginning, you've wanted me to find you this magical way to get out of doing your time. You been talking about how we gotta look out for each other. Because why? Our skin color's similar? We both came from difficult backgrounds? You think I'm like you somehow. But you don't see. We had choices. You made yours. I made mine and this is where we ended up. And just because I'm here does not mean it's my responsibility to be helping gangsters and hustlers like you cheat the system.

PRISONER You need to watch how you talk—

ATTORNEY You hired me to give you legal counsel. I'm giving it to you. You keep talking about white people getting it easier. But racism doesn't change the fact that the case against you was airtight. Is there a bias? Yeah. There is. I won't lie to you, there is. But you knew the risks making the choices you did. And don't try to say you didn't. You did. You made your choice, you played game that's rigged against you. What the hell were you expecting? You think you're an exception or something? What, you think your special? Well now you know. You're not. And trying to nitpick and find a loophole...it's a waste of money.

PRISONER What are you saying?

ATTORNEY I'm saying that your appeal has already been denied. This case isn't getting re-opened on a technicality.

PRISONER So, this is how it goes?

ATTORNEY I won't represent you anymore. So, yes. That's it.

PRISONER My money not good enough for you anymore? Is that it?

ATTORNEY It's your sister's money.

PRISONER Fuck you. It's money.

ATTORNEY Okay.

PRISONER The only thing I wanted was a fair fucking trial and to get the same outcome that other people get. I hired you because I thought you'd fight for that result.

ATTORNEY And I did.

PRISONER Then why am I still in here when white people—

ATTORNEY *But you're not white.* The system's fucked, man. It's racist as all hell, but you got caught up in this shit. Blaming white people ain't gonna change that. Own it. Live with it.*(beat)*

Look. You care about your sister. I know you do. We did all we could. Retaining my services is going to cost money your sister shouldn't be spending. Not with a child on the way. You want me looking out for you? Here's me looking out. Stop wasting your time. It's over.

Long silence.

PRISONER Okay. Yeah.

ATTORNEY Good. I'll... I'll drop the bill for the last two months. Don't you or your sister worry about it.

The ATTORNEY begins gathering her things.

PRISONER Before you go.

ATTORNEY What's up?

PRISONER Tell me the truth. Did you ever think I was innocent?

ATTORNEY No.

PRISONER Would you have defended me differently if you thought I was innocent?

ATTORNEY No.

PRISONER Last question. Same situation. Same circumstances. If I was white—

ATTORNEY You would have gotten a lighter sentence.

Silence.

PRISONER Thank you. For your honesty.

Silence. The ATTORNEY begins to exit. The ATTORNEY stops and turns around.

ATTORNEY For what it's worth, I do think you're a good person.

PRISONER sits alone as the ATTORNEY starts to exit. The SISTER enters holding a baby.

ATTORNEY Track 5: His Uncle's Name feat. SISTER. July 20th, 1993. Month Number twenty-six. Visiting area.

The ATTORNEY exits. The SISTER sits. PRISONER watches her, almost afraid.

PRISONER Is that...?

SISTER No. I found him in a dumpster and brought him here.

PRISONER
(*sarcastically*)
Ha ha. Funny.
(*beat.*)
He's beautiful.

SISTER He is.

PRISONER Look, look he's opening his eyes.

SISTER Do you want to hold him?

PRISONER No. No. I can't.

SISTER Come on. Take him.

PRISONER No. You don't understand. I can't....

SISTER
(*realizing he isn't allowed to hold the baby, then looking fearfully at the offstage C.O.*)
Oh...well...just talk to him. You can do that, right?

Silence. The PRISONER nods and leans forward slightly

PRISONER Heeeeey! Little man! How you doing? You know me? I'm your uncle. Wow.Look at you. You're so big! You—
(*he gets choked up*)
What's...what's his name?

SISTER He got his uncle's name.

PRISONER What uncle—?

The PRISONER realizes what she means. Silence.

SISTER Whatcha thinking about?

The PRISONER shakes his head and tries to shrug. He begins to cry. The CELLMATE enters holding two bowler hats. As INMATE 1 and INMATE 2 enter SISTER and PRISONER exit.

CELLMATE Interlude 2: God-Ought feat. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2. October 2nd, 1994. Month Number Forty. The commons area.

INMATE 1 and INMATE 2 are given bowler hats by CELLMATE who then exits. They rehearse *Waiting for Godot*.

INMATE 1 I don't get it.

INMATE 2 What?

INMATE 1 The play. Why we doing this play?

INMATE 2 It's a classic.

INMATE 1 I can't even pronounce it.

INMATE 2 It's pronounced God—

INMATE 1 It doesn't matter. Why we putting this play on?

INMATE 2 It's supposed to be about two men waiting for a guy who is gonna give them something to...

INMATE 1 To what? Like what are they waiting for?

INMATE 2 I mean, the script doesn't really say.

INMATE 1 So, what the heck are they waiting for?

INMATE 2 It's philosophical.

INMATE 1 What's that mean?

Silence.

INMATE 2 It means you can interpret it different ways.

INMATE 1 Why would someone wanna do that?

INMATE 2 Lets you put your own experiences into it and see the thing from your perspective.

INMATE 1 Why do I wanna see it from my perspective?

INMATE 2 You learn something about yourself.

INMATE 1 Do I get something outta that?

INMATE 2 Yes.

INMATE 1 Is it cash?

INMATE 2 No, numbskull. You get closer to understanding things.

INMATE 1 What things?

INMATE 2 Life.

INMATE 1 What do I gotta understand? I'm in here. I work. I eat. I sleep. Sometimes, I do a stupid play.

INMATE 2 Why you doing that?

INMATE 1 Waiting for the day I get out.

INMATE 2 Why you waiting?

INMATE 1 What do you mean?

INMATE 2 Why are you waiting?

INMATE 1 I'm waiting because when it's time, I get out.

INMATE 2 And then what?

INMATE 1 What?

INMATE 2 You get out, and then what? It's all better?

INMATE 1 I mean, yeah, I guess...

INMATE 2 But you don't know for sure. Being real, you don't even know if you're getting out of here alive.

INMATE 1 What the hell am I supposed to do, then?

INMATE 2 We could always kill ourselves.

INMATE 1 What's the point of that?

INMATE 2 I don't know.

INMATE 1 We can't do that.

INMATE 2 So, we wait.

INMATE 1 Yeah.

INMATE 2 You hungry?

INMATE 1 Yeah.

INMATE 2 *gets a carrot out of his pocket.*

INMATE 1 When'd you swipe this?

INMATE 2 It's a prop. So, we can get the characters right.

INMATE 1 I can eat it, though, right?

INMATE 2 Of course.

INMATE 1 *starts eating the carrot.*

INMATE 1 So, what you're saying is—is this God-ought character or whatever, he's like getting outside. We want it to come, but we don't even know about what's gonna happen when...when that guy gets here. Or, like when we get outside.

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 Another one of those metaphors.

INMATE 2 Is it?

INMATE 1 It feels like that to me.

INMATE 2 I wonder how it would feel to someone who's never been in the pen.

INMATE 1 Might be different.

INMATE 2 Kinda philosophical when you think about, right?

INMATE 1 Yeah...

(silence)

Hey...um...

INMATE 2 What's up?

INMATE 1 I don't think I can keep doing this.

INMATE 2 The play?

Silence. INMATE 2 realizes what INMATE 1 means.

INMATE 2 You can keep doing this. We're almost out, you and me. And when we get out it's gonna be like...I don't know...

INMATE 1 Like a prayer answered?

INMATE 2 Or a wish granted.

INMATE 1 Or like a bad chapter finishing in a story.

INMATE 2 That's why we're waiting. Next chapter is gonna get here soon.

INMATE 1 How soon?

INMATE 2 I don't know.

INMATE 1 It feels like forever.

INMATE 2 Maybe it is.

INMATE 1 What's the point of it all if this is forever?

INMATE 2 I don't know...

INMATE 1 Then maybe we should kill ourselves. Like what these guys talk about in the play.

INMATE 2 Maybe. How you wanna do it?

INMATE 1 We could tie up some of the sheets and...

Silence.

INMATE 2 Tomorrow. We'll do that tomorrow.

INMATE 1 No, we won't.

INMATE 2 No?

INMATE 1 No. We'll keep waiting. Like these two guys here in this play they're having us do.

INMATE 2 And then?

INMATE 1 Well, like, for now, we're waiting for C.O. to come get us when our rehearsal is supposed to be done, right?

INMATE 2 And after that?

INMATE 1 Then maybe we'll get out. And maybe there's gonna be a dream come true waiting for us outside.

INMATE 2 Yeah. Maybe.

INMATE 1 I still don't get it though....

INMATE 2 What?

INMATE 1 Why we doing this play?

INMATE 2 Truth?

INMATE 1 Yeah.

INMATE 2 Two-Dub likes these weird plays.

Silence.

INMATE 1 That's it?

INMATE 2 Yep.

INMATE 1 Yeah, but why?

INMATE 2 Why what?

INMATE 1 Why we doing what Two-Dub wants?

INMATE 2 Two-Dub's the director. He chooses the play and we act in it.

INMATE 1 Yeah, but there's other weird plays we could do.

INMATE 2 *sighs.*

INMATE 2 Okay, fine. Truth is, it's cheap and there are no women in it.

Silence. INMATE 1 realizes it and laughs. Soon INMATE 2 joins in laughter.

INMATE 1 Oh...OH!!! I get it now! Now this stupid play makes sense.

INMATE 2 Can't do nothing about it, eh?

INMATE 1 Nothing to be done.

Silence.

INMATE 2 Speaking of nothing to be done...

INMATE 1 Track 6: Meaning of Time feat. CELLMATE *January 23, 1995. Month Number Forty-Four. Cell 127.*

The PRISONER and CELLMATE laying in their beds. The PRISONER is examining a photo. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2 go into Cell 128 and lay down.

CELLMATE Three Trip...

PRISONER What's up?

CELLMATE You up?

PRISONER Fuck kind of question is that?

CELLMATE Man, fuck you.

PRISONER Whatcha want, man?

CELLMATE Whatcha been looking at?

PRISONER Nah, nothin'. Some pictures...

CELLMATE Pictures of what?

PRISONER My sister sent me these pictures of her kid.

CELLMATE Yeah?

PRISONER Yeah, man.

CELLMATE Let me see 'im.

The PRISONER hands him the photograph.

CELLMATE Shit...he's beautiful.

PRISONER Yeah. He's...

CELLMATE He's perfect. Nah, he's special.

PRISONER You think so?

CELLMATE I know it. He got life in 'im.

PRISONER Yeah, man. There's no other way to put that shit. He got life in him.

CELLMATE Kids...man...shit...kids are important.

PRISONER How you figure?

CELLMATE They let you know that...life's still out there, man. When you get locked up you sometimes forget that. The world ain't dead, even when it feels that way in here.

PRISONER How long you been in again?

CELLMATE Long ass time.

PRISONER Yeah, but how long?

The CELLMATE remains quiet.

PRISONER Two-Dub? You aight?

CELLMATE I heard some shit this one time. Stupidest shit I think ever heard. Some dumbass told me that Time ain't real. You believe that?

PRISONER What the fuck you mean, Time ain't real?

CELLMATE That it's some...some like, idea that *they* came up with to control people.

PRISONER Who're *they*?

CELLMATE Right? I don't even know, man. Anyway. So, dumbass told me a that long time ago whoever *they* are create this shit called Time. Then *they* tell you how much you got and what you can do with it. *They* make you work for them and get jobs, they count how much you get paid based on what Time you give them. Form of control.

PRISONER Makes sense, though.

CELLMATE You think so?

PRISONER Fuck, *they* control everything else. Why not Time?

CELLMATE Yeah, but who are *they*? Senators? Business people? Fucking warden? C.O.s? Who are *they*?

PRISONER All of 'em, man.

CELLMATE So, why do *they* follow the same rules?

PRISONER Whatcha mean?

CELLMATE If *they* controlled it, why do it apply to *them*? *They* could get so much more done if Time wasn't an issue.

PRISONER Well, fuck, but look at it like this, if *they* didn't follow the same rules the people would get pissed the fuck off. *They* gotta follow the rules of Time so that *they* can keep controlling people, right? *They* gotta keep up the charade to control us.

Beat. The CELLMATE decides to indulge this theory.

CELLMATE So, you're telling me *they'll* keep us locked up by locking *themselves* up?

PRISONER Ain't that C.O.s though? If you really think about it...

CELLMATE Who the fuck gonna lock themselves up to lock up other people?

PRISONER You alright locking yourself up if you got the key.

CELLMATE What key?

PRISONER Cheddar.

CELLMATE You think the key is cash?

PRISONER Gotta be. Cash lets you do whatever. You break the rules, *they* don't care. Long as you got paper. You can do it.

CELLMATE But you had money, didn't you? Why'd you still end up in here?

PRISONER Allegedly.

(incredulous silence)

Fuck. Fine. Cash got levels. Cash I had been making don't open doors.

CELLMATE So...

PRISONER I was about to get to a point where I was gonna go legit and get my key and get out.

CELLMATE So, *they* grabbed you before you got there.

PRISONER Yeah, man. Whatcha thinking? The *people* that got money now, got *their* money first, then created laws, right? Stops other people from doing the same thing. Keeps the cash flow tight. Keys only distributed to a few.

CELLMATE But cash still flows. People still getting paid no matter how poor or rich.

PRISONER Sure. Fuck yeah, cash is flowing. But not the amounts that the rich already got, right? Just enough to make people think that they can get their chance, if they follow the rules and play the game. But that's where it's fucked up. Ain't nobody got their fucking key following the rules and playing the game. *They* got *their* cash when there were no rules and then made *their* methods illegal afterward.

CELLMATE Nah. There's always been rules. *They* just change the rules to fit what *they* want.

PRISONER How you think they can do that? Because they had cash.

CELLMATE Cash ain't been around that long. What'd they have have before cash? God. Divine right of kings. That kind of shit. But that went away, too. What'd they have for power after that? Colonies. The conquered and the conqueror. After that? Well then they made it about eugenics, right? What people you come from, what skin you got. Rules always been there, but they reset the game and change the rules to fit what they want when people start rebelling.

PRISONER But the system right now is cash. And people don't want this system to go. People want the system to work for them because this system allows exceptions. Those exceptions are people like some bum ass fucker that hits the lotto. Get a record deal. Play some hoops better than anyone else. Whatever the fuck. Let them through. Let them get a taste. Make people hope that maybe they can join that elite class, too. That's why people don't get rid of it. What's fucked up is that's what *they're* playing us on. *They* make us hope. When we hoping, we ain't changing the world. *They* finally figured out how to keep us stuck under *them*.

CELLMATE But what's this got to do with Time existing or not?

PRISONER Time's a tool that *they* created to keep us in line and following orders, no matter what the system is. Otherwise Time ain't real. That's what I been saying.

CELLMATE Nah, man, you know that shit's a weak argument. God and skin color. The conqueror and the conquered never changed. Things just got added on top of the oppression to make people forget they're oppressed. Now they're making up stupid shit about Time not being real. I don't buy that. Time exists.

PRISONER Whatever, dawg.

CELLMATE I can prove it.

PRISONER Aight. I'm going to bed, though.

CELLMATE Hear me out. If f Time ain't real, then why are we even locked up?

PRISONER Fuck you mean?

CELLMATE I got your attention?

PRISONER I'm listening.

CELLMATE If Time ain't real, and people got that figured out, why is being in here punishment?

PRISONER Well because *they're* wasting our...

CELLMATE Time.

PRISONER Nah homie. Our strength. Our youth.

CELLMATE With age you lose those. But what has to pass to lose strength and youth?

PRISONER Ah, fuck it, man, let's go to sleep. It's late—

CELLMATE See, here's what pisses me the fuck off about that theory. Every—every fucking person that says that Time ain't real never had to deal with it passing. You ever see that? Fucking philosophers, professors, academics, and shit. They don't gotta live this, man. All they got is theories. But for me...for you...for anyone in here with a jumpsuit and a number...it ain't no theory. It's a fact. Time is real, because that's what *they're* taking from us.

(silence)

But I ain't even mad. You know why?

PRISONER Why?

CELLMATE Because Time ain't evil. People forgetting that Time gotta pass before the bad turns good. Fire burns a forest, so that new, stronger seeds can grow. But fires and tragedy don't make Time bad and it don't make Time fake. Because if Time were bad, then that little boy is bad. And I refuse to fucking believe that, even for a moment. That boy...the way you look at that picture, you see the good things that come when Time passes by. You see it, right? One day...he'll talk to you. One day he'll want to run before he can even walk. One day he'll start figuring things out. One day he'll get a family. One day he'll hold you up when you can't hold yourself up no more. But those sweet things only come with Time passing.

(silence)

Time exists, man. It does. I been inside long enough to know it's painfully real.

(silence)

The punishment is that *they're* taking away Time from us. *They* don't let us go out and watch Time pass by. We get to understand that, yeah, Time is real. Very real. And we don't get to be a part of it. I mean this with all respect to you, Three-trip. Whether you think Time exists or not doesn't matter at the end of everything. You're still in here, and mental games don't change that. But what changes everything, what sees you through the passage of Time, is that photo and that love you feel in your heart for that little baby.

(silence)

I'ma go to sleep.

The CELLMATE goes to sleep. The PRISONER examines the picture of his nephew.

Bare stage. At center, a payphone where the PRISONER is making a call. Lights pull up on SISTER carrying a corded house phone. She answers. We span the years 1996 - 2004.

SISTER Track 7: Collect Calls A Freestyle Verse 1: June 4th, 1996. Month Number Sixty. Payphone.

As lights go down on SISTER as lights pull up on PRISONER standing at a single payphone.

PRISONER Hello? Hey, sis. How you been?
 Word? Yeah? What's he like?
 He treat you good? Oh shit, he got a bike?
 He took you to Manhattan?
 Oh, it was a musical? How was it? What was it like?
 AIDS? Damn, shit sounds depressing.
 What's it called? *Rent*? It was nice?
 Yeah, but nobody's gonna see the show, then it'll be closing.
 Because the title's shit.
 Me? Nothing, really. Saw the Mike Tyson fight.
 Over after three rounds. Tyson can fucking hit.
 Frank Bruno didn't see it, looking like he fell down a flight.
 How's little man?
 Yeah? Goddamn.
 Yeah. Let me talk to little fam.
 Heeey, little man! You know who I am?
 It's your uncle, that's right.
 How you doing? Yeah? That's tight.
 How old are you? That's insane.
 You're gonna be a big guy soon, mane.
 I'll talk to you later. See you later alligator.
 Put your mom on the line.
 Yeah. Hey. He's really smart.
 You did the right thing, keeping him, following your heart.
 Can you hear me? You did the right thing, keeping him, following your heart.
 Little homie's so freakin' smart.
 I get it now. What? Why'd I call? You forgot? Ah, man that hurts me.
 Today I turn thirty, sis. Thirty. Dirty thirty, sis. You really don't remember?
 No, don't worry. Seriously. Don't worry. Don't start.
 Just make it up to me in December.
 Yeah. We'll see.

He hangs up the phone. That hurt bad. He is grayer now. Long silence. Beat. He picks up the receiver and dials out. Lights rise again on SISTER holding a cordless house phone.

SISTER Verse 2: January 28th, 1998. Month Number Eighty. Payphone.

PRISONER Hello...? Heeey! Wassup, wassup, wassup, sis? Did you see that speech President did a couple days ago? Nah, bullshit. He totally fucked that woman. Hell no, I don't believe what he's saying. That's a trick. He's denying and delaying. Nah. Bored, mostly. You run out of shit to do really fast. But it's like, if you don't have shit to do They'll find shit for you to do, you know? So, you gotta find some shit to do. Even when there's no shit to do. Yeah. Maybe it's getting to me, so... No. I haven't been reading the Bible. Okay yeah, I'll look it up, what's the title? Ecclesiastes? Sounds like Egg nasties. What? No. I don't need you to send me nothing. No. I don't just call you to send me dough. Well all you ever do is tell me read the Bible. I wanted something more than stories, though. Sometimes you wanna hear something familiar, alright? Like I need a reminder that I got people that care. Like your voice and Little Man's is my light. I won't be calling as much anymore. Look, forget it. I'll get outta your hair. Hold up. Before you go, you ever hear this one? Ecclesiastes Number One. ***Everything is meaningless.*** Yeah. I read it before for fun. Jesus loves you. God bless. Fuck it. Whatever. I'm done.

He hangs up. He picks up the phone and calls again. Lights rise on SISTER with her house phone. She answers.

SISTER Verse 3: September 11th, 2001. Month Number One-Hundred and Twenty-Four. Payphone.

PRISONER Wassup? You alright?
 Nothing happened anywhere else, right?
 I don't know. We been on lockdown.
 Been that way morning till sundown.
 They just...they fell like nothing...
 Like they were never here.
 And you know it's weird
 I feel like I relate in a way.
 It's like I was never there, not even back in the day.
 I was just taken away.
 I read this poem, the other day.
 It's called *You Get So Alone at Times That it Just Makes Sense*.
 Fuck no. I hated what it had to say.
 That whole poem sucked.
 I don't get why white people like that Bukowski shit so much.
 Fucking bullshit. You know what he did? He got drunk and fucked.
 I didn't know that was a fucking career.
 What the fuck was I doing out here?
 Coulda drank and wrote poems and did recitals.
 But if I did that, they wouldn't have called me a poet, it'd'a been thug.
 But I'll give it to that old man with his ugly ass mug.
 Homie knew how to make titles.
 That title, man..it was like fuuuuuuuck...
 And it does make sense
 Like on another level,
 That poem is like who I am.
 Mostly shit, but at least the title's good, right?
 Problem is, I don't know what my good is or how to write.
 Plus I ain't old, drunk, and white.
 So, I guess I'm fucked.
 It's a joke. C'mon. It's a joke, fam.
 How's little man?
 No! Don't wake him up. I don't think I can talk to him today.
 I'm good. I'm good. I'll call back another day.
 I love you. Yeah. Okay.
 I know. I'm not like that poem. I'm "special." Cool, whatever.
 I'll talk to you later. Bye. Yes. I'll pray.
 I'll do better.

The PRISONER hangs up. He sighs. He is older. Wearier. Beat. He picks up the receiver and dials out. Lights rise on SISTER with a cellphone now.

SISTER Verse 4: September 28th, 2004. Month Number One-Hundred and Sixty. Payphone.

PRISONER Hey. How you been?
 Yeah, I know. I saw Florida got hit again.
 How many hurricanes is that, like four?
 Shit I don't know if Florida can take anymore.
 It's like when it rains it pours.
 Shit goes bad and it just gets so...
(The Prisoner stops himself, overcome with emotion, but tries to stifle it)
 ...yo, is mom home?
 Could you put her on the phone?
 Yo sis, please let me talk to her.
 I need to talk to my mother.
 Aight then put me on speaker
 I don't need you to understand, I just need...
 Don't make me beg *(he falters again)* and plead.
 Because it's raining here and I'm alone.
 And it's raining so much it's pouring in me.
 No. No. Nothing's wrong.
(Silence. He puts his hand over the mouthpiece to let the dam break for a moment before recovering.)
 Never mind you don't gotta put her on.
 Is she okay, still sick?
 What pills do them doctors got her on?
 Fuck you mean she thinks the doctor's a dick?
 That's not an excuse. You gotta tell her to--
 Yo, that sound like screaming, what's that?
 Why you fighting with little man?
 He's acting out? Where at?
 Aight, let me talk to him. I'll do what I can.
 Hello? Yo, little man, what's up?
 You can't be he acting out in school.
 Man you can't be acting like some kinda fucking fool.
 Yo, wait, wait, wait backup.
 Who the fuck told you that?
 I...yeah...yeah, it's true. I'm locked up.
 But that don't mean you have a reason--
 Because I didn't want you to know...
 No, it doesn't mean I'm a bad guy.
 Little man, please don't go--
 Let me explain--okay...okay...bye.
(Pause)
 Why'd mom do that, Sis? Why would she do that to me? Why did mom tell him I'm locked up? I told you all I didn't want him to know. Put her on. I don't give a fuck. Put. Her. On. I want to talk to my mother. I said put her on. Put her on!

Silence. The PRISONER looks at the receiver. She's hung up the phone. The PRISONER hangs up and tries to redial. No answer. He hangs up. He tries to redial. No answer. He slams the receiver back in place. The PRISONER turns and sees his MOTHER who has entered. She stares back at him then, directly to the PRISONER--

MOTHER Track 8: Time's Passed feat. MOTHER. December 10th, 2004. Month Number One
Hundred and Sixty-Three. Visiting area.

The PRISONER goes to her and sits down. The PRISONER avoids eye contact. Silence.

MOTHER It's good to see you.

PRISONER Yeah. It's good to see you too.

MOTHER Are they feeding you?

PRISONER Yeah.

MOTHER Are they feeding you enough?

PRISONER Why? You gonna do something about it?

MOTHER You look different than when you first went in.

PRISONER It's been 13 years, moms. People look different.

MOTHER Do I look different?

PRISONER No. You look the same.

MOTHER Liar.

PRISONER Never tell a woman she looks older. You taught me that.

MOTHER That's a good lesson.

PRISONER That lesson don't do shit in here.

MOTHER I guess it wouldn't.

PRISONER Yeah.

Silence.

MOTHER Do you know why I never visited you?

PRISONER I dunno.

MOTHER You must have thought about it.

PRISONER Nah. Not really.

Silence.

MOTHER You were always a terrible liar.

PRISONER You look like you aged 30 years.

MOTHER So, you have thought about it.

PRISONER About what?

MOTHER Why I never visited you.

Silence.

PRISONER Yeah. I did.

MOTHER Do you want an answer?

PRISONER Maybe a few years back. Not now.

MOTHER I'll tell you.

PRISONER I already said. I don't care anymore.

Silence.

MOTHER Why not?

PRISONER It's not a question that should get answered.

MOTHER Why not?

PRISONER Because I got all the answers I needed from your silence.

MOTHER And there was a reason for—

PRISONER A reason I don't care about knowing, moms. So, drop it.

Silence.

MOTHER Do they let you watch TV in here?

PRISONER Sometimes, yeah.

MOTHER You know both *Friends* and *Fraiser* ended a few months ago?

PRISONER I don't even know what those shows are, moms.

MOTHER They're good shows. Came on after you got locked up.

PRISONER Oh. Word?

MOTHER Now they ended. Gotta find new things to do now that the good shows are ending.

PRISONER So, that's why you're visiting. Your two favorite shows finished up and you had some free time on your hands.

MOTHER I'm trying to make conversation.

PRISONER Alright. Sorry.

Silence.

MOTHER I don't know if it matters, but—

PRISONER It doesn't matter.

MOTHER A decade hasn't changed that fresh mouth.

PRISONER Thirteen years. Get it right. And, getting old hasn't changed you either.

MOTHER Thirteen years and you're still the same disrespectful boy that don't know how to act around his mother.

PRISONER Thirteen years not seeing your mother, you might forget how to act around her.

MOTHER Always the last word.

PRISONER That honor's reserved for you, moms.

Silence.

PRISONER Why you visiting, moms?

MOTHER I can't come see my son?

PRISONER That's not a reason.

MOTHER Yes, it is.

PRISONER Not if you wait thirteen-fucking years to come see me.

MOTHER Well then, I don't care to tell you.

PRISONER Of course, of fucking course.

Silence.

MOTHER I'm dying.

PRISONER Oh, yeah?

MOTHER I'm not kidding.

PRISONER I believe you...how long you have left?

MOTHER A year. Maybe.

PRISONER I told you to visit a doctor.

MOTHER Wouldn't have mattered. Can't afford the treatment. I wanted to see you one last time.

Silence. The PRISONER laughs.

PRISONER So, what? This that part of the show where you and I have a beautiful moment or some shit? We make up for everything we did to each other and uhh...hug?

MOTHER Nah, that's reserved for people with a future.

PRISONER And we don't got any future, that what you're saying?

MOTHER I'm saying that beautiful things and happy endings are for people who try to do good by the world.

PRISONER Oof, then we sure as shit ain't getting a happy ending.

MOTHER You're talking about yourself.

PRISONER Oh, you did good by the world? You a *good* person?

MOTHER More than you ever could be.

PRISONER Because abandoning your son while he's locked up shows how much you're a good fucking person.

MOTHER You made your choice. I can't control what you—

PRISONER You said that beautiful moments is for people with a future, so what the fuck future you got? You're dying.

MOTHER What, you gonna call your last thirteen years living?

Silence.

PRISONER And you call whatever it is you do living?

MOTHER And what the fuck do you know about what I do?

PRISONER You're really gonna tell me that sitting around watching the same stupid ass re-runs is living a good life?

MOTHER Your sister runs her mouth too much. It's my choice what I do. What choice you got in this dump?

PRISONER Like you got a fucking choice. You can't afford to do anything.

MOTHER I'm not caged like an animal. I got my own home.

PRISONER Damn, look at you talking like that shithole apartment is the Ritz.

MOTHER I'm not a number in a system.

PRISONER Nah, you're just dying.

MOTHER And you're already dead.

PRISONER Then why you wanna come talk to the dead? Misery love company or some shit?

MOTHER No. I'm here to try to fix my biggest mistake.

PRISONER Shoulda gotten an abortion.

MOTHER Sometimes, I think you're not wrong.

PRISONER You're a real piece of shit, you know that?

MOTHER Apple didn't fall far from the tree.

PRISONER Is that what this is gonna be, moms? One last kick in the fucking nuts before you peace out?

MOTHER I came to see you to tell you something important. For once. Listen to me.

PRISONER I'm listening.

MOTHER You need to make right with the world. Before you pass. You need to try to do the right thing for once, for someone else.

Silence. The PRISONER starts laughing again.

PRISONER Oh. Oh, shit. I see.

MOTHER What?

PRISONER You ain't here to see me. You're just here to guilt me.

MOTHER What? No. What the hell are you talking about?

PRISONER Fuck if I know. But I ain't doing this with you.

MOTHER Don't you swear at me.

PRISONER Or what? Or fucking what, moms?

MOTHER I am your mother.

PRISONER Oh, word? You're my mother? That's why I gotta fucking—

MOTHER You show me respect when you're—

PRISONER Respect? For what? For who? Who the fuck are you? I don't know who you are. You look like someone that's supposed to be a mom. Nah, but a mom woulda been there for her son. You ain't been shit to me for over a fucking decade.

MOTHER Do you think—

PRISONER I don't think shit. I been a dead man for thirteen years to you. The dead don't think. All the dead do is rot away waiting for their mothers to come see them just once.

MOTHER And when your mother comes to see you, this is what you do?

PRISONER Does a mother say she wish she got an abortion? Does a mother come just to tell her son that he ain't done shit for nobody else? You weren't fucking complaining when I got your rent or bought you clothes. Who the fuck was that for? Me?

MOTHER You're twisting things around.

PRISONER Does a mother call her son a fucking mistake?

MOTHER We both—

PRISONER No. We both nothing. You're not here. You're already dead. You got Death hanging over you and you're trying to get your salvation checklist done before you get taken. Making yourself alright with God before he judges you. I know that game. You ain't here to see me. You just wanna look like some fucking victim forgiving her son for the shit he did. Well, here's some breaking news, moms; I don't want your forgiveness. And I ain't apologizing.

(beat)

I been dead to you for a long ass time. Let the dead be dead. Our time's passed. Merry Christmas, moms. Thanks for the fucking visit.

The PRISONER exits. The MOTHER watches off. The visiting room door opens and shuts. She faces the audience.

MOTHER I wish I could tell you he came back and we made up. And I wish I could say that it was some misunderstanding that we cleared up. And I want to say I recovered and visited more often. But a few months later I passed a way.

I never understood the men I loved. My husband and son both got called by something so powerful that they had to follow it, and both were taken away from me. They thought they were acrobats walking the tightrope, ready to pull off the impossible.

But they never understood that they were never acrobats, and the tightrope was never there. Just the drop.

And no matter what I did, nothing could keep them from leaving home. A mother's love couldn't keep her boy from following his dad's footsteps. A woman's touch couldn't keep her man from the arranged marriage between him and the system.

I think to myself sometimes...maybe if we weren't struggling. Maybe if I didn't complain so much about the things we didn't have. Maybe if I never stopped to look at clothes I knew we couldn't afford. Maybe if I took a double or a triple shift...

Because I swear. God as my witness...I'd give back the clothes and the rent in a heartbeat. I'd go homeless. I'd work four, five jobs if it meant having my boys with me again.

But it doesn't play out that way. The system don't let you get a do-over.

And if I'm being honest with you all, in my heart I knew my son and I would end up here. Just like this.

And I'd get so angry with myself, I'd lash out at him whenever he tried to talk to me...

I'm a failure as a mother.

And I was too ashamed of my failure to visit my son.

I wish I could say he found out the truth. I wish I could say I wrote a letter explaining everything to him. I wish I could say he found out that I loved him all along. I wish I could say so many things to my baby boy. But it's like my son said...

Our time's passed.

End of A-Side. Flip the tape. Intermission.

Sound of a click like a cassette player stopping. Blackout.

SISTER and LITTLE MAN (L.M.) sit. PRISONER enters escorted by the C.O.

C.O. B- Side. Track 9: Church feat. SISTER and LITTLE MAN. December 6th, 2008. Month Number Two-Hundred and Eleven. Visiting area.

The C.O. exits.

PRISONER Heeeeey, there's my fam!

Silence. The PRISONER walks over. He sits down between LITTLE MAN and his SISTER. He looks between them.

PRISONER What's up?

SISTER I need you to talk to your nephew.

PRISONER Why?

SISTER Because he listens to you.

PRISONER About what?

L.M. It's stupid. We don't gotta—

SISTER It's not stupid.

PRISONER I'm not understanding.

SISTER He doesn't want to go to church.

PRISONER What kid wants to go to church?

SISTER He hates the church.

PRISONER You hated church when we were kids.

SISTER But I never said God wasn't real.

PRISONER He don't believe in God?

SISTER No. He says that religion's just some con job white people made up to keep people enslaved.

PRISONER Yeah? You said that Little Man?

L.M. But its true though.

SISTER You're an ingrate. You don't appreciate the blessings God has given you.

L.M. Blessings? What the fuck kind of blessings did God give to me?

The PRISONER lightly slaps LITTLE MAN on the back of the head.

PRISONER You show respect to your mother.

L.M. Sorry. I just don't see what blessings I been getting from God.

SISTER Your life, your good health.

L.M. What's been so blessed about this life we living, moms? You're working two jobs. You're looking for a third job.

SISTER Those are trials that we have to get through—

L.M. For the rest of our lives. Nah, fuck that.

The PRISONER slaps LITTLE MAN on the back of the head again.

PRISONER The fuck did I just tell you?

L.M. How come you get to swear?

PRISONER Because I don't got a good vocabulary.

L.M. Neither do I.

PRISONER Yeah, but you're young. You can learn more than me.

L.M. Nah, though, but seriously, what kind of blessing is this life? I got my life so I can see it fall apart. That's what you call a blessing?

SISTER You don't understand God's plan...

L.M. What, and you do?

SISTER I know that He always has something good waiting for me.

L.M. When's the last time a good thing happened for us, mom?

SISTER A lot of good things have happened—

L.M. You mean like when we find out there was a party somewhere and we get lots of cans to help pay rent?

PRISONER You guys are collecting cans—?

L.M. Or are the good things when you finish the paper route early and you can get an hour of sleep extra before going to work at McDicks?

SISTER You're not understanding—

PRISONER Wait, what the fuck paper route are you doing—?

L.M. Maybe the good things in life are when you find some loose change at the front window of McDicks.

SISTER When you focus on just the material things, it seems bad, but the wealth we'll have when God—

L.M. It's always later. It's always “be patient.” That's how come things never change. We too busy waiting for God when we should be doing something about the shit that's going down.

The PRISONER slaps LITTLE MAN on the back of the head.

SISTER Alright, Mr. Revolution. What do you want to do? What's your solution? You got more answers than God, then fix our problems.

L.M. I don't know.

SISTER He doesn't know! Of course he doesn't know!

L.M. Least I'm not waiting for some dead dude to come back and take me somewhere that ain't real.

SISTER He. Is. Risen. He died and returned to life for our sins.

L.M. So, he's a zombie.

SISTER Do not disrespect the Lord—

L.M. I'm not disrespecting anything 'cuz the “Lord” ain't real—

PRISONER Okay, both of you gotta stop.

SISTER Talk to him.

L.M. There's nothing to talk about.

PRISONER Nah, come on...I don't wanna get into this argument.

SISTER *Please.*

Silence. The PRISONER sighs.

PRISONER Why can't you go to church?

L.M. What do you mean?

PRISONER Look, it doesn't matter if you believe in God or not. Make your mother happy. Once a week. What is it, like two hours? Come on.

L.M. Ah, man...

PRISONER "Ah, man," nothing. I did that for my mother. You do that for your mother. No complaining. Got me?

L.M. Yeah.

PRISONER That's that. Can we talk about something else?

L.M. Do you believe in God?

PRISONER What'd you say Little Man?

L.M. Do you go to church?

PRISONER No.

L.M. Do they have churches in there?

PRISONER Yeah. All kinds.

L.M. Why don't you go?

(silence)

You don't believe in God, do you?

SISTER Of course he does—

PRISONER No. I don't.

Silence. The SISTER takes out some money and hands it to LITTLE MAN.

SISTER Take this and get some snacks and drinks.

L.M. But mom—

SISTER
(sotto voice)
 Go.

LITTLE MAN *exits*. SISTER *stares at the* PRISONER.

PRISONER I told you I didn't want to talk to him about it.

SISTER You couldn't lie to him?

PRISONER What's the fucking point of lying?

SISTER So, that he can have a better upbringing. So, he can get morals.

PRISONER You don't need religion to have morals.

SISTER Yeah, because you're a great example of that fact.

PRISONER The shit I done in my life doesn't mean anything. Bunch of religious people in here doing ill shit. You don't need religion to have morals.

SISTER That's *your* truth. It's not *the* truth.

PRISONER I ain't getting into this argument with you.

SISTER When?

PRISONER What?

SISTER When did you stop believing?

PRISONER Don't bring that shit up. It's not important.

SISTER It's important to me.

(pause)

Was it when dad died?

(pause)

A relationship with God shouldn't be defined by the life and (death of our loved ones)—

PRISONER We ain't talking about this anymore.

SISTER I want to understand—

PRISONER You don't wanna understand shit.

SISTER Please—

PRISONER I'm not talking about this.

SISTER Your soul—

PRISONER What about my soul? What?

SISTER I'm only—

PRISONER You ain't “only” doing anything except talking bullshit.

SISTER Why are you—?

PRISONER Because for nearly two fucking decades you been telling me “Read your Bible” and “Go pray,” like that shit helps in here.

SISTER Okay. Okay, I get it. We don't have to talk about—

PRISONER No, no, you wanna talk about this shit. We're talking now.

LITTLE MAN *enters with snacks and stands off listening.*

PRISONER Every single fucking day in here, I listen to people praying and talking about how God or Allah or whatever is gonna get them out. But nobody leaves. All that's there is idiots playing around with beads, singing bullshit ass songs, and putting their faces on fucking carpets. But does God come? Does God give a shit about the people crying out to Him?

SISTER God delivers—

PRISONER God don't deliver shit. It's a fucking lie told to us over and over again so we can take the shit they wipe on our face every fucking day.

SISTER Please stop—

PRISONER All God does is cosign His name to those TV pastors who tell you to give money to them and you'll get it all back in heaven when you die. Fucking damn, right? What the fuck did I sell rocks for when I coulda been selling Jesus? God delivers, right? God delivers good people all the wealth of the world, tax free. Meanwhile, you and me? You and me, we just don't pray hard enough. We don't believe enough. We gotta pay for the shit our parents did, we gotta blame ourselves for the shit we did. And there you are trying to teach your boy that it's okay if the system fucks him over because some book tells him to turn the other—

SISTER SHUT UP!

Silence.

SISTER You will not disrespect my beliefs. You. Will. Not.

PRISONER Then don't ask me about this kind of shit—

SISTER You have no idea when you talk about how God turns away from people. God doesn't turn His back on anyone. It's you who can't see how God's been there for you throughout your time in jail—

PRISONER Oh, Jesus Christ, are you really gonna do that count your blessings bull—

SISTER Do not take the Lord's Name in vain.

(silence)

I understand why you don't believe in God. And sometimes I think the same thoughts you do. But, I have to hold onto something. I have to think that there's some kind of reward for all the shit life put me through. I gotta hope and pray that each time I'm trying to pay the bills and get my son new clothes that it's gonna work out. I gotta hold onto the Lord's promise when I come visit you because that woman up front always decides she's gonna search me. I gotta hold onto Christ on the Cross for my salvation when she gropes me asking what I'd be willing to do to see you. Because honestly without God...I don't think I love you enough to keep coming back.

Silence. She sees LITTLE MAN and realizes he's heard everything. She stands up and exits quickly. LITTLE MAN sits down by the PRISONER and lays out the snacks. LITTLE MAN opens a bag of chips and eats some before slyly reaching into his pocket and sneaking out a cigarette which he drops into the bag. He hands it to the PRISONER who sneaks out the cigarette and slips it into his pocket after looking to see if the officers were watching.

PRISONER I heard the economy got bad.

L.M. Yeah. Still is.

PRISONER What happened?

L.M. A lot of people lost their houses. Lot of the projects shut down too.

PRISONER Yeah?

L.M. Not ours, though. But the rents got jacked up again.

PRISONER Because of the economy?

L.M. Shit got real, man.

PRISONER What do you mean?

L.M. Like, Washington Mutual shut down back in September, right? Then that bigass bank Lehman Brothers went under too.

PRISONER Wait, this all happened three months ago?

L.M. Yeah, fam. I don't know how, but moms said that everything was all connected up. Banks shut down because people was losing their houses and buildings. Like a domino effect.

PRISONER So, rent went up to cover the cost of places where rent isn't getting paid?

L.M. Fuck if I know. They always try to find an excuse to raise the rents anyway, right?

PRISONER True, indeed. So, it was like dominoes.

L.M. Yeah.

PRISONER When one part falls, it pushes everything down with it.

L.M. Yeah.

PRISONER We ain't gonna get far in life if your momma falls. Knocks us over too, doing that.

L.M. I know...

PRISONER You're gonna go to church every Sunday.

L.M. I will.

PRISONER Your mother's been through some shit. Do it for her.

L.M. You're right.

The SISTER enters and sits down. Silence.

PRISONER Get your mother something to drink.

L.M. Okay.

LITTLE MAN stands up and leaves. The PRISONER and SISTER stare at each other.

PRISONER You're not gonna visit me anymore.

SISTER Come on, don't say that—

PRISONER I already said it.

SISTER I was overreacting.

PRISONER No, you weren't.

SISTER How do you know?

Silence.

PRISONER You're not gonna suffer for the shit I did. I'm telling you, don't come back to visit.

SISTER You can't stop me.

Silence.

PRISONER That woman up in the front when you check in. She asked you what you would do to see me, right?

SISTER Yeah.

PRISONER And she uses that to do whatever she wants to you.

SISTER It's just groping when she searches—

PRISONER
(furious)
It's not “just” groping.

SISTER Well, what can we do?

PRISONER Stop. Visiting. Me.

SISTER No. You can't tell me that you don't want me to—

PRISONER If you need somebody else's love to give you the strength to see me, then I don't want to see you. How's that?

SISTER How could you say that to me?

PRISONER I'll repeat it. If you need God's love to give you strength to see me, then I don't want to see you. And if you come anyway, I won't come out.

SISTER Is this it? You acting like some kind of hero for saving me from what's been happening for a long time now? You can't tell me what I can and can't endure in this life.

PRISONER I understand the shit you're going through—

SISTER Bull. How the hell could you understand?

PRISONER Because I understand.

SISTER You need to explain yourself a little better.

PRISONER ...

SISTER Wait...did someone...?

She falls silent and realizes how her brother understands.

PRISONER It's not just groping...

Silence. They stare at each other a long while before--

C.O. LIGHTS OUT!

INMATE 1 *and* INMATE 2 *are sitting in their cell. PRISONER is escorted back into his cell while CELLMATE is listening to the conversation between the INMATES.*

CELLMATE Interlude 3: If I'm Still Here... feat. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2. Month Number Two-Hundred and Fourteen. Cell 128.

INMATE 1 Can I ask you something?

INMATE 2 What?

INMATE 1 Do you ever think about what happens when we die?

INMATE 2 No.

INMATE 1 Why not?

INMATE 2 Why you asking?

INMATE 1 I been thinking a lot, you know? About my mom and...and...stuff.

INMATE 2 Is she okay?

INMATE 1 Yeah...just...she don't have much time left, ya know?

INMATE 2 I'm sorry.

INMATE 1 It's left me thinking, ya know?

INMATE 2 Whatcha been thinking?

INMATE 1 I been thinking about...you know how this life seems really screwed up?

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 And it's like, it doesn't get better, right?

INMATE 2 Feels like it doesn't most times...

INMATE 1 So, then, I mean...I dunno, is dying much worse than living?

INMATE 2 What are you trying to say?

INMATE 1 You remember when we did that play, right?

INMATE 2 I do.

INMATE 1 And like, it was funny and all that, but like, I...I get it, man.

INMATE 2 What do you get?

INMATE 1 We're waiting for something that ain't coming. We always think that things are gonna get better, but they never do. One day we get out of here, but we got no money. There's no jobs waiting. No family, no mom. Wouldn't it be better to just...die?

INMATE 2 No, numbskull. No, it isn't.

INMATE 1 Why not?

INMATE 2 Because there's always a better tomorrow. You gotta understand that.

INMATE 1 What I understand is that I seen almost two decades of tomorrows and shit's not changing.

INMATE 2 So, wait a decade more.

INMATE 1 And I'll keep waiting until I die, is that it?

INMATE 2 Yeah. That's it.

INMATE 1 Fuck that.

INMATE 2 Fuck that? *Fuck that?* Fuck you!

INMATE 1 No, fuck you!

They start wrestling each other. Eventually INMATE 2 gets the upper hand and wrings INMATE 1 by the shirt collar.

INMATE 2 Do you know what you're saying when you say that stuff? Eh? Do you?

INMATE 1 I don't know. I don't know nothing. I'm the dumb one. I'm the stupid fucking dumb one who doesn't wanna live anymore because it's just hard. It's hard living like this and never knowing things. It's hard being a—a retard.

INMATE 2 *shakes* INMATE 1 *again*.

INMATE 2 You're not a re—don't you ever—don't you *ever* say—

INMATE 1 But, I am.

INMATE 2 Who told you that?

INMATE 1 You do. When you call me numbskull.

Silence. INMATE 2 *lets go of* INMATE 1.

INMATE 2

(ashamed)

You're not dumb. Don't you ever think that. No matter what anyone says. Even if I say it. Don't believe it for a second.

INMATE 1 Then what am I?

INMATE 2 The only guy in the world willing to ask the questions everyone else is too scared to ask.

INMATE 1 Why's everyone else scared?

INMATE 2 Because...because some people are too afraid to ask about why they're alive, man. Some people don't wanna talk about death until they're about to die. But you? You, you go there. You start exploring things that people would never dream of even thinking about.

INMATE 1 So, what's that mean?

INMATE 2 It means you're not dumb. You're learning.

INMATE 1 So, I'm the smart one?

INMATE 2 You're an intellectual giant. So, I don't ever want to hear that word come out of your mouth.

INMATE 1 Re—?

INMATE 2 I told you don't say it.

INMATE 1 Okay.

(pause)

What am I saying when I say I wanna die?

INMATE 2 You're saying that this life's horrible...that there ain't nothing good about it.

INMATE 1 Isn't it true though?

INMATE 2 It means I make you miserable. And that...I hate to think that...that I wasn't good to you.

They make eye contact.

INMATE 2 Look, I don't know if life's worth living. Anybody that knows never came back from the other side. So, maybe...yeah, this life's just shit. But I don't think...

INMATE 1 What?

INMATE 2 Nothing, man.

INMATE 1 Tell me.

INMATE 2 I don't think it's worth it to leave so soon.

INMATE 1 Why not?

INMATE 2 Because there are people here that we stay for, that...that despite all the horrible stuff, life's still...

INMATE 1 What?

INMATE 2 Life still might be worth living.

INMATE 1 Even if you're trapped in Hell?

INMATE 2 Well, I mean...even flowers bloom in Hell, sometimes, right?

INMATE 1 I don't understand.

INMATE 2 I'm saying, what the hell would I do if you were gone? How could I look at your momma in the face?

INMATE 1 You never met her.

INMATE 2 If she's anything like you described, she'd find me and then give me the ass-whooping of my life.

INMATE 1 *laughs.*

INMATE 1 Yeah, she would.

INMATE 2 So, you can't leave man...I'm...I can't make it without you.

INMATE 1 What are you saying?

INMATE 2 That when you say you wanna give up on life...it's like you've given up on us being happy.

INMATE 1 Are you—?

INMATE 2 Truth?

INMATE 1 That's all I want.

Silence.

INMATE 2 To me...you're the only flower that's ever bloomed in this hell.

Silence.

INMATE 1 What?

INMATE 2 Nothing. Nothing. I'm going to bed.

INMATE 2 climbs onto the top bunk and gets under the covers. INMATE 1 looks up. Silence.

INMATE 1 You're the only flower that's ever bloomed in this hell for me too.

Silence. INMATE 2 gets down from his bunk and sits next to INMATE 1. They stare into each other's eyes. A smile from both.

Shift to Cell 127 with both PRISONER and CELLMATE inside. The CELLMATE chuckles to himself while reading a book.

CELLMATE Track 10: Dearly Beloved featuring CELLMATE, INMATE 1, and INMATE 2. Moments later. Cell 127. *(beat)* Even flowers bloom in Hell, sometimes...ain't that a trip?

PRISONER What?

CELLMATE Nah, nothing. Our neighbors just figured life out.

PRISONER The two guys you got doing those weird ass plays and reading those books about roaches?

CELLMATE Yep.

PRISONER So, what's the point of life?

CELLMATE I dunno. I just watch people figure it out. Don't got a good answer for ya.

PRISONER Fuck you mean?

CELLMATE I'ma need to get the Bible out soon.

The CELLMATE starts looking around for the Bible.

PRISONER Why?

CELLMATE You'll see.

PRISONER You three always been weird as fuck, man.

CELLMATE Yeah. You're right. Fuck, it. They probably won't want me to use it anyway.

*The CELLMATE goes back to reading **No Man's Land** by Harold Pinter.*

PRISONER What are you reading?

CELLMATE A play.

PRISONER All you read is plays.

CELLMATE Always wanted to write one.

PRISONER Why's that?

CELLMATE I dunno. Plays...like with plays it's a novel that you get to bring to life. Like, it's possible to make them happen.

PRISONER You can do that with movies.

CELLMATE Nah man, movies are frozen.

PRISONER Fuck you talking about? Movies are literally moving pictures.

CELLMATE Yeah, but there ain't no changing a movie.

PRISONER And you can do that with plays?

CELLMATE Hell yeah. Plays...plays was meant to be done different ways. They're living. They breathe differently depending on who's reading them. They speak different languages to different people, even if you speak the same English.

PRISONER Man, you always speaking in riddles.

CELLMATE Get all the things I said together and make a book.

PRISONER Call it the Prison Quran.

CELLMATE The Prisoner's Bible! The Inmate's Torah. Revealed to Prisoner Two-Dub and his cellmate Three-Trip.

PRISONER It'll be a new religion.

CELLMATE On the seventh day, while God rested, the Devil came into the garden and built a prison. He threw the Black Adeem and Brown Adan into the prison and told the White Adam to keep them locked there for eternity, or the garden would be poisoned by the Brown and Black men. In his fear White Adam rushed to the prison and became the first guard. Black Adeem and Brown Adan, the first prisoners.

And so, White Adam guarded the prison through the seventh day and through all time. Thus, the Devil created fear and saw that this was good.

PRISONER What about Black and Brown Eve?

CELLMATE They were too busy working three jobs to keep their babies fed and a roof over their head to do anything about it. Now nobody remained in the garden.

PRISONER And on the eighth day?

CELLMATE On the eighth day, God woke up saw the prison and patted the Devil on the back and said, "Good looking out, homie. I was gonna do that later today."

They laugh.

CELLMATE It ain't all of them. Most white people got it shitty, too. They just got them thinking that they got it better.

PRISONER Whatcha mean?

CELLMATE Racism is a trick to make poor people hate each other so much that they don't see what the rich is doing.

PRISONER What are they doing?

CELLMATE Sneaking into the garden and building prisons on top of it.

PRISONER Why they building prisons?

CELLMATE Why would you build a prison?

PRISONER I don't know.

CELLMATE A poor white man, a poor brown man, a poor black man make the same amount. Poor white man looks at the poor brown man and poor black man and says, "I'm poor, but thank God I'm not black or brown." Why's that?

PRISONER Fuck if I know.

CELLMATE Make a prison. You got prisoners. If you got prisoners you'll need guards. Look at it like this. White people are guards. Black and Latins are prisoners. You make the guards think they're above the prisoners. They got more privileges. Yeah. But you gotta fucking think about it. They gotta stay at the fucking prison too. Now all the people trapped in here and the rich take the rest.

Silence.

PRISONER Shit.

CELLMATE They keep us against each other. We all stay inside. The Devil gets the garden. They be saying, "Thank God I ain't an inmate." But where the fuck the guards at?

PRISONER So, what? We should all be friends?

CELLMATE I dunno if we can be. Prison's so old now that people think it was there when the garden first started.

PRISONER So, what the fuck we do?

CELLMATE I dunno.

PRISONER You always got an answer.

CELLMATE Not this time brother...

Silence.

PRISONER You alright?

CELLMATE I'm getting out in a week.

Silence.

PRISONER Hey, why didn't you tell me, man? Congratulations!

CELLMATE Haven't really thought about it too much. Don't seem real.

PRISONER Like a dream come true.

CELLMATE It's just one cage to another.

PRISONER Nah, man. You're getting out. Eat whatever you want. Go wherever you want. Sleep whenever. Dawg, it's gonna be fucking amazing.

CELLMATE Can't eat nowhere without cash.

Silence.

CELLMATE You got family?

PRISONER Yeah, man. I mean—

CELLMATE I don't got family.

Silence.

PRISONER Nobody?

CELLMATE I been in here since 1966. Anyone that knew me is dead or don't wanna see me.

(beat)

When we get out, we're supposed to adjust back in. Get a job. Work hard for some company. Die working. Be a good member of society. All that shit. Show that the system works.

(pause)

But the system ain't one size fits all. It's not meant to be. It's a cycle. That's what it's designed for. You're born, you're thrown inside. You get out for a bit, then go back inside. It's a fucking circle. What's waiting on the outside? The hood? The projects? Look at how they designed that shit. The rooms in the projects ain't no different than the cells in here. They were teaching us to get used to it, man. They were getting us ready to go in before we even knew our own names.

PRISONER The outside ain't prison, man.

CELLMATE Whose gonna give me a job? Whose gonna want my old ass working?

PRISONER Yo...look...

CELLMATE No, you look. It's a fucking set up. You get out there. Managers find you went in the pen, they ain't gonna give you a job. You can't build up. You can't do shit. You gotta turn back to doing what you did before, then the fucking feds pick you the fuck up and throw your ass back in here. Nah, man. No. I can't. That's not life. That's not...

(silence)

Promise me something.

PRISONER What?

CELLMATE Whatever you do...when they let you out, you get the fuck out. Do you understand me?

PRISONER Alright, man. Alright. I promise.

Silence.

PRISONER Hey, Two-Dub?

CELLMATE What's up?

PRISONER I never understood something.

CELLMATE You don't understand a lot of things.

PRISONER Why you always been looking out for me?

CELLMATE You never learned your lesson did you?

PRISONER About what?

CELLMATE Asking questions.

PRISONER Aight. Don't answer.

Silence.

CELLMATE It's gonna work out.

PRISONER Yeah.

They embrace.

INMATE 2
(from Cell 128)
 Two-Dub? Two-Dub?

The light rises on INMATE 1 and INMATE 2's cell.

CELLMATE What's up, young scholar?

INMATE 2 You think gay people can get married yet?

CELLMATE Legally? Not everywhere.

INMATE 2 How about in here?

CELLMATE Far as I'm concerned you could marry ya damn toilet and I'd say it's legal.

INMATE 2 Could you do us a solid?

CELLMATE Need a new book?

INMATE 2 C'mon man.

INMATE 1 He's trying to ask you to get us married.

The CELLMATE laughs.

CELLMATE Fine. Fuck it. I'll do it. Three-Trip you got the Bible?

INMATE 1 Let's just get it done now.

CELLMATE Alright. Three-Trip, you gotta be the witness. Come here. Another chapter to the holy book. This chapter will be called, ***Marriage in the Pen.***

The CELLMATE laughs again. The PRISONER walks over shaking his head.

PRISONER The fucking things you guys get into...

CELLMATE Shut up. You two. Face the wall and hold hands.

INMATE 1 *and* INMATE 2 *do so*.

INMATE 1 Okay.

CELLMATE Alright, listen close. Dearly beloved, we are gathered here to join—

The lights fade on the cells.

Single spotlight on a bare stage. The PRISONER and the INMATES step out of the darkness into the spotlight..

INMATE 1 Track 11:

INMATE 2 Two Dub's Play.

The INMATES drift back into the darkness leaving PRISONER alone in the spotlight.

PRISONER In the library they got here, I found this play. It had a bunch of pictures of the show in the book. Bunch of black people with white masks talking holding a trial over a dead white woman. It was called ***The Blacks*** written by a guy named Jean Genet. The first performance happened in 1964 at a theatre called St. Marks. I remember running to my cell with the book to show Two-Dub...but he wasn't there...

Silence.

Two Double Oh Six Four Nine Eight Zero never believed that you could be truly free if you were a part of society. He also didn't believe that you could ever re-integrate once you've been inside. The old man spent the best years of his life in here and when they got all they could out of Two-Dub, they let him out. Word is he killed himself a few weeks after he was released, but I know Two-Dub didn't do that. That's just shit the C.O.s spread to keep us down.

I'll tell you what's happening and what's gonna happen.

Right now, Two-Dub is at some library learning all about the world so that he can find his way out. The librarian notices he comes in every day. She notices that he likes reading plays. She tells him about how she's involved in her local theatre.

They welcome him home. They let him direct a show. He'll do ***Amen Corner*** or, ***The Blacks***, no. He'll do both. The janitor turned inmate turned theatre director. And he wins a bunch of director awards. They tell him to write a play. He writes about us. He writes about how we grew together. He'll talk about how we cracked the world open and saw the truth for what it was. It gets picked up. It smashes the box office on Broadway. Black people coming out to see it. Brown people come to see it. Anyone with any fucking value comes out to see Two-Dub's play.

He and the librarian get married.

Two-Dub is gonna be happy.

And then, only then, he's gonna pass on. And in his will, he'll specify that his body face the direction of the prison.

They'll honor his wish.

That's how Two-Dub gets out.

On his terms.

I know he will.

LITTLE MAN *sits on a chair. He is a man now, or so he believes. He opens a bag of chips and eats, looking around before--*

LITTLE MAN Track 12: Three Triple Six Four Oh Five Three feat. LITTLE MAN. Month Number Two-Hundred and Twenty-Two. Visiting Area.

A metal door opens and closes. The PRISONER enters.

PRISONER What's up, man?

L.M. Hey! How you been?

PRISONER Look at you! What the fuck, man? You can't visit me more often? You grew up!

L.M. I know, I know. I been busy. I'm sorry.

PRISONER So busy you forget about your own blood? C'mon.

L.M. Alright, alright. My bad. I'll visit more.

PRISONER So, what's this? You got these?

L.M. Yeah. So we can eat.

PRISONER You pay a lot?

L.M. Don't worry about it.

PRISONER You didn't have to get all this.

L.M. It's all good, man, eat.

The PRISONER sits down and begins to eat some chips.

PRISONER So, what's up? How things been?

L.M. Been alright. Usual shit. Different day, ya know? Yo, did you see the Yankees won the World Series?

PRISONER About fucking time, right?

L.M. Think the Cubs will ever win?

PRISONER Nah, man. Some curses are never gonna get broken.

L.M. Yeah?

PRISONER Yeah, man. How's your mother?

L.M. She's alright. Breaking her back working.

PRISONER She still got, what, like two or three jobs?

L.M. Yeah. She's got three now. She's been doing this psychic network thing recently when she gets home. Like a hotline.

PRISONER So, she does that tarot card thing?

L.M. Yeah. I think so.

PRISONER Does it pay good?

L.M. If it did I don't think she'd have the other two jobs.

PRISONER Yeah. You're right.

L.M. How you been?

PRISONER I don't know, bored. Fucking tired all the time.

The PRISONER sits down. He looks around and nods to the LITTLE MAN. The LITTLE MAN drops his chips and bends over to pick them up. He pulls out three cigarettes from his shoe and slips them into the bag of chips. He offers the chips to the PRISONER. The PRISONER takes the bag. Throughout the scene the PRISONER fishes a cigarette out of the bag and slips them in different places; into his shoe, down his pants, down his shirt, etc...

L.M. I can't stay long today.

PRISONER Ah, yeah?

L.M. Yeah. Got something that's come up.

PRISONER Okay...when you leaving?

L.M. Half an hour or so.

PRISONER Okay...

(beat)

How's the neighborhood?

L.M. Changing. Shit's sad.

PRISONER Yeah?

L.M. Lot of college kids moving in, you know? Wanna get the “urban experience” or some shit.

PRISONER Fuck they want that for?

L.M. Nah, now police come out all the time at night. We don't even get to stand around the fucking stoop because we're “intimidating the other tenants.”

PRISONER Cops saying that?

L.M. Since the college kids started moving in. Yeah.

PRISONER Cops actually going out there?

L.M. Cops get there in like five minutes now.

PRISONER Shit, I remember they wouldn't even show up.

L.M. Things changed.

PRISONER Right kind of people moved in.

LM They been trying to get us evicted. Saying we make too much noise. They started a petition.

PRISONER A petition? What the fuck's that gonna do?

L.M. I dunno...

PRISONER You think it might work?

L.M. I dunno, man. They got rid of a shit ton of us.

PRISONER Us?

L.M. The Puerto Ricans that lived upstairs, you know them?

PRISONER Yeah.

L.M. Got evicted. Robertsons too.

PRISONER Jesus...

Silence.

L.M. I'm gonna drop out.

PRISONER Then what you gonna do?

L.M. I been thinking about going into the business.

PRISONER Why you thinking about it?

L.M. I dunno. Times is rough. Rent's going up.

PRISONER So why not get a job?

L.M. You didn't get a job.

PRISONER And look where I am.

L.M. You're a fucking legend, man.

PRISONER For what?

L.M. People still talk about you. They respect the shit out of you.

PRISONER What they saying?

L.M. That you were A-1. That shit's changed since you got locked up. We're losing the neighborhood to those fucking hipster—

A loud whistle.

C.O.

(offstage)

HEAD COUNT! STAND UP!

The PRISONER stands up quickly.

PRISONER Three triple six four oh five three, sir!

C.O.

(offstage)

I DID NOT CALL OUT TO YOU!

L.M. Hey, man, don't take that shit from that fucking guard.

PRISONER Shut up.

L.M. You're better than that.

PRISONER I said shut the fuck up.

C.O.

(offstage)

WHAT THE FUCK DID YOU JUST SAY TO ME?

PRISONER I was talking to my—

C.O.

(offstage)

DID I TELL YOU TO SPEAK?

Silence.

C.O.

(Offstage)

SPEAK!

PRISONER I was talking to my visitor, sir.

C.O.

(offstage)

IDENTIFY YOURSELF!

PRISONER Three triple six four oh five three, sir.

C.O.

(offstage)

“OH” IS NOT A NUMBER!

PRISONER Zero, sir.

C.O.

(offstage)

IDENTIFY YOURSELF PROPERLY!

PRISONER Three six, six, six, four, zero, five, three, sir.

C.O.

(offstage)

There you go. See? Proof. You can civilize a savage with enough training. Sit down. Have a good day.

The PRISONER sits down. His hands are balled into fists, literally biting his tongue.

L.M. That fucking prison guard shouldn't be talking to you like that. I'm gonna fucking...hey. Hey. Hey, you hear me? You alright?

The PRISONER heaves deeply several times.

L.M. Hey, come on, man. Don't—

PRISONER You're going to finish school.

L.M. What?

PRISONER You're gonna get a good education. You're gonna work shitty jobs, and do better than everyone in your classes.

L.M. Look—

PRISONER Shut up.

L.M. Hey, you wanna talk like that to me then—

LITTLE MAN falls silent at the PRISONER'S look. The PRISONER begins taking cigarettes out of their hiding places. He crushes each one and throws them away in the bag of chips.

PRISONER You're not gonna bring me these fucking sticks no more.

L.M. What are you doing?

PRISONER You're not gonna be sneaking shit in, you understand me?

L.M. But you need it.

PRISONER I need you to listen to me.

L.M. Nah, man, why'd you fucking do that?

PRISONER You say everyone respects me?

L.M. Yeah, man.

PRISONER Then shut up and show me the fucking respect you say I earned.

(beat)

Do you know what my street name was?

L.M. Flood.

PRISONER Do you know why?

L.M. You flooded the streets with your product.

PRISONER No. I'd spend so much wherever I'd go, it was like a flood of money. I'd walk into places and buy everyone's food. Where I went, I spent. Everyone loved me. I was hood famous.

(pause)

I thought that was respect.

(pause)

That's not respect.

L.M. People still talking about you—

PRISONER They talk. That's all that shit is. It's talk. How many of them gonna put me up somewhere after I get out? How many of them gonna give me a job? How many of them gonna pay my bills like I paid theirs back in the day? You gotta get educated, man. You think I don't know that you can make more in two hours selling rock than you can a whole week of flipping burgers? But that's the trick, man. If it looks too good to be true, it's not true. They're gonna catch you, guaranteed. Then, they take you away. They take your money, even anything made legit'ly because those fucking RICO laws let them do it. It's a deal with the fucking devil. It's a fucking conspiracy.

L.M. You're talking crazy, man.

PRISONER Promise me.

L.M. Promise what?

PRISONER Finish school. Get a career. Do arts if you fucking want. Just don't fall into that trap. Don't break your mother's heart. Don't end up scared of a damn C.O. taking privileges from you. You're gonna lose the neighborhood to them. That's already gonna happen. But work. Get the money the right way. Then one day, come back. Buy the buildings back with the money you worked hard for. Give it back to the Robertsons or the Puerto Ricans upstairs. Take it back with their own rules.

L.M. Who's gonna hire me?

PRISONER You gotta fight real hard. But you need to. It's the only way out man. You're gonna wanna give up. But I swear to you, it's worth so much more than this prison being the end of your road.

L.M. Nah, man. That's...that's too late for me now.

PRISONER Don't fucking say that.

L.M. It's true, man. I got no skills. I'm a fuck up. That was a beautiful speech and shit, but that's not reality, man. Nobody's gonna give me a chance like that. I'm never gonna make money like that legally. It's not me.

(pause)

You know it's the truth. How many of us actually get out? The fucking game's rigged. Yeah it's a fucking conspiracy but what other choice is there? Watch while my mom gets kicked out of her home? Get forced to move somewhere where we don't know the people? Start over? That puts us back. It don't help. Then they'll push us out of there, too. Then we're fucked over again. There ain't no winning. So, play the game. Fucking make the system work for you. You know?

(pause)

Look man...I gotta go...it was good seeing you.

Silence. LITTLE MAN and the PRISONER stand up. They hug.

L.M. I'll...I'll try, man. I'll try to finish school.

PRISONER Alright.

L.M. I... uh...I love you, man.

PRISONER I love you, too. Take care of your moms for me. Tell her I said hi.

L.M. Yeah, man.

PRISONER Be good. You can get out of this. But you gotta wanna get out.

L.M. Whatever, man.

They stare at each other for a moment.

PRISONER If you're gonna come visit me. Visit me longer next time.

L.M. Alright.

PRISONER Bye.

LITTLE MAN exits. The PRISONER stands alone.

C.O.

(offstage)

Three triple six four oh five three your visit's over. Back inside!

The PRISONER notices the guard using the word "oh" but decides not to give any sass. He exits slowly. Snacks still on the table, left behind.

C.O. (calling out) Interlude 4: Alien Rights feat. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2. January 8th, 2013. Month Number Two-Hundred and Sixty. Cell 128. LIGHTS OUT!

INMATE 2 is reading a book of American political documents while INMATE 1 fumes. Only lights that are illuminated are the walkway lights outside the cells.

INMATE 1 I volunteered to do extra work.

INMATE 2 I know.

INMATE 1 I folded clothes. I handled trash. I served food. I worked late everyday and early every morning.

INMATE 2 You did.

INMATE 1 I begged the warden. I was on my knees begging him. Please let me go to my mama's funeral. Please let me see her face one more time. Please.

INMATE 2 B...

INMATE 1 He said...he said...he'd try.

INMATE 2 Maybe he did.

INMATE 1 He laughed...he fucking...he fucking laughed at me.

INMATE 2 Ah...God...

INMATE 1 I did everything he asked.

INMATE 2 Why'd he say no?

INMATE 1 Security reasons.

INMATE 2 Fuck's that even mean?

INMATE 1 I don't know! I don't even know, B. I...

INMATE 2 It's not right.

INMATE 1 I know I done wrong. But...don't a son—don't a son got a right to see his momma one last time? Don't I get the chance to look her in the eyes and tell her I'm sorry? Don't I get a chance to tell her I got someone in my life, so she don't got to worry no more? Don't I get a chance to make things right?

Silence.

INMATE 2 It's not gonna help. I know it won't. But you didn't have to make nothing right with your mom. She already forgave you.

Silence.

INMATE 1 What were you reading?

INMATE 2 Founding Principles. It's a book with all those old papers like the Constitution and Declaration of Independence, you know?

INMATE 1 Like the stuff George Washington and them made?

INMATE 2 The Patriots, yeah.

INMATE 1 So, what's the book talk about?

INMATE 2 Things like people's rights.

INMATE 1 What's it say about prisoners?

INMATE 2 begins flipping through the pages.

INMATE 2 Let me see. I don't know, really. Okay, here's one. Yeah. Okay. "Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, except as a punishment for crime whereof the party shall have been duly convicted, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction."

INMATE 1 Where'd that get written?

INMATE 2 Constitution. Says...13th Amendment.

INMATE 1 What's servitude mean?

INMATE 2 It means like being forced to work.

INMATE 1 scornfully laughs.

INMATE 2 Why you laughing?

INMATE 1 You don't find that funny?

INMATE 2 What's funny?

INMATE 1 It's saying, you can't be a slave or forced to work unless you been convicted and you're doing time.

INMATE 2 Nah, I...I don't think it's meant that way.

INMATE 1 Yeah? Whatchu think it means, B?

Silence.

INMATE 2 Look. End of everything. We're equal. We were created equal and got these things called unalienable rights.

INMATE 1 What's that?

INMATE 2 What's what?

INMATE 1 That word with "alien" in it.

INMATE 2 Unalienable

INMATE 1 Yeah. What's that?

INMATE 2 It means that it can't be taken away from you.

INMATE 1 Who made that word up?

INMATE 2 That's what Two-Dub called them before he got out.

INMATE 1 What are they?

INMATE 2 What is what?

INMATE 1 Those right things you're talking about. The alien rights.

INMATE 2 Life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.

INMATE 1 Yeah?

INMATE 2 Yeah.

INMATE 1 So, what you're saying is that these are things that everyone gets to have.

INMATE 2 Yes.

INMATE 1 Where'd you read that?

INMATE 2 In this book.

INMATE 1 If these are things that we can't be separated from, then why are we separated from it?

INMATE 2 Because we're prisoners.

INMATE 1 Then that means that our rights can be taken from us, right, B?

INMATE 2 Not if you're free and haven't done anything wrong.

INMATE 1 Then how can they be unalien? If you make a mistake, you lose your rights?

INMATE 2 Well, look. When they first wrote it—

INMATE 1 You don't gotta explain it to me. I get it. We're all created equal until we're prisoners. Then we're not equal no more. Prisoners don't get to have unalienable nothing because that 13th Amendment takes being human away from us. We just... we just...

Awkward silence. INMATE 2 opens his book and begins reading.

INMATE 2 We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit—

INMATE 1 *snatches the book and begins tearing at it.*

INMATE 1 Bullshit. Bullshit. Bullshit! BULLSHIT!!

INMATE 2 *watches. Lights fade on Cell 128 as--.*

*Lights rise on the PRISONER reading August Wilson's **King Hedley II** or José Rivera's **Marisol** in Cell 127. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER enters with a set of inmate's clothes and a towel. The PRISONER puts down his book and stands up at attention. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER lays out the clothes and towel.*

CO. You're getting a new roommate. Track 13: Better Than Me feat. C.O. and LITTLE MAN. March 15th, 2014. Month Number Two-Hundred and Seventy-Four. Cell 127

PRISONER Well, shit. Here I liked being alone.

C.O. He's got a mouth on him.

PRISONER Gonna get along fine, then.

C.O. Yeah.

PRISONER He got a name?

C.O. Fuck's it matter?

PRISONER Nah, you right. Just another number.

C.O. Are you back-talking?

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. He'll be in soon. Fucking...just don't fucking run your mouth, man. We don't always gotta make it so hard for ourselves.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER exits. The PRISONER sits down again. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER returns with LITTLE MAN. LITTLE MAN sees the PRISONER and begins to try to resist going into the cell. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER shoves LITTLE MAN into the cell. The PRISONER stands up again still reading, not paying attention. After a moment, he closes his book and looks up. The PRISONER drops the book.

L.M. No.

Silence. The PRISONER stares at LITTLE MAN as if in a trance. LITTLE MAN turns to the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER.

L.M. Change my cell. Please anywhere else...

C.O. What the fuck are you—?

The PRISONER tackles LITTLE MAN and begins beating him.

PRISONER Why the fuck are you...? You're not supposed to—what the fuck? Why? Why? Fuck you. You're loved. You're better than this. You're not—you *can't*. *Your mother. Your fucking mother. She gave you everything.* She loves you. Everyone loves you. You piece of shit. How could you? Finish school. I told you finish school. *You're better than me. You're better than me. You're better than me...*

L.M. I'm so sorry. Please. Please. I can't—

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER tries to separate them. The other inmates begin hollering. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER hits the Prisoner with his nightstick until the PRISONER lets go of LITTLE MAN. The prison grows silent. LITTLE MAN is unconscious. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER goes over to LITTLE MAN to check on him before turning to the PRISONER.

C.O. You know him.

Silence.

C.O. Stand up.
(*as the PRISONER rises*)
You'll go to solitary.

PRISONER Yes. Sir.

C.O. I have to fill out a lot of paperwork because of you.

PRISONER Yes, sir.

C.O. Fucking savages can't show a little restraint.

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. Do that kind of shit again, I make his life worse here. Do you understand me? Look at me. I said look at me.
(*beat*)

You have a few minutes till I get my papers. Do you understand?

PRISONER Yes, sir.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER exits. As he exits the other inmates begin hurling insults and yelling. The PRISONER walks over to LITTLE MAN and cradles his head. LITTLE MAN stirs.

L.M. I'ma visit more often...I promise, fam...I promise...

The yelling grows louder and louder as sirens and alarms explode into the air.

Smoke and yelling. Inmates run in and out. INMATE 2 stumbles and collapses to his knees. He is bloodied and panting.

INMATE 2 Interlude 5: Ain't that Funny? (*he looks down at an open wound and thinks, "Oh shit, I been shanked"*) feat. INMATE 1 and INMATE 2. March 20th, 2014. Month Number Two-Hundred and Seventy-Four. Commons area.

INMATE 2 *collapses. INMATE 1 enters and runs to INMATE 2.*

INMATE 1 No, no, no. Get up. Get up. Who did this? Who?

INMATE 2 What's going on?

INMATE 1 It's a riot. Come on, we gotta move you outta here.

INMATE 1 *tries to pick up INMATE 2 and fails.*

INMATE 2 Looks like I'm not going anywhere.

INMATE 1 Don't talk like that.

INMATE 2 Are you hurt?

INMATE 1 No, man. Come on. You gotta try. Get up.

INMATE 2 I'm glad you're okay. Makes it easier...

INMATE 1 What're you saying? Making what easier?

INMATE 2 When I first got in... I felt like...I knew...you see...I knew...I was gonna die here.

INMATE 1 You don't say that, you...you numbskull. You're better than that. You remember, I know you remember. The story. This ain't the end of our story. Hero wins in the end. We're the heroes here. We can't let it end like this.

INMATE 2 I guess I'm no hero, then.

INMATE 1 Stop. Stop talking like that.

Inmate 1 gets up and calls out.

INMATE 1 Help! Help! Get the fuck over here! Help me! Don't anyone see? He's hurt! He's hurt!

INMATE 1 *goes back to INMATE 2.*

INMATE 1 I'm not leaving you. Through sickness and health. Good and bad. I'm staying with you. We're getting out of this together.

INMATE 2 It's funny...

INMATE 1 What?

INMATE 2 I found the most beautiful thing in the world in the freakin' pen. Isn't that funny?

INMATE 2 laughs into a coughing fit.

INMATE 1 Stop talking, you're hurting yourself.

INMATE 2 You're the only one who stuck with me...ain't that funny?

INMATE 2 laughs again and closes his eyes. INMATE 1 looks around, afraid.

INMATE 1 We're almost out of here. I ain't leaving you. We got too far for me to leave you. Goh-dot or whatever's gonna show up soon and we're gonna make it somewhere. I don't know where we're going but we ain't stopping here. If I gotta drag you out, I'm dragging you. It don't end here. We ain't metaphors. We ain't roaches. We're human beings waiting for the day we get our unalienable rights back. There's always tomorrow and the next day. But we gotta keep going. Get up. Get up. Till death do us part. That's what the hell I swore and I'm keeping that promise. I'll get you out and we'll be happy—

INMATE 2 doesn't wake up. INMATE 1 stands up and begins dragging INMATE 2. INMATE 1 falls over, unable to drag INMATE 2 any further. INMATE 1 looks around in despair before shutting his eyes and holding his breath as if trying to make it all disappear. Gunshots ring out, the chaos stops. A moment of total stillness. INMATE 1 exhales. With this release, a warm light emanates from him like an aura. He looks around, confused.

INMATE 1 What? What's...?

The light grows stronger, so strong it covers the two INMATES in its warm glow. Flowers begin to bloom around them. Another warm light rises offstage, calling to INMATE 1. He understands.

INMATE 1 Look, B. It's the next chapter. Just like you said. It's finally here. We made it. We really are heroes. We really...

INMATE 1 never finishes his sentence. The light grows brighter and brighter until it overtakes the two men and fills the stage in overwhelming brilliance. They vanish into the world of light leaving nothing behind, not even a single flower petal. The warm light fades. Bare stage. The chaos resumes.

Solitary. PRISONER *stares at the audience. Blank. The cassette warps.*

PRISONER Track 14: Riot feat. C.O. Same Month. Same Day Solitary Cell.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER enters, sweating, breathing heavy, blood trickling from his nose, and shuts the door behind him.

C.O. Inspection.

The PRISONER stands up at attention and stares off. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER looks around. He chuckles. The PRISONER immediately clocks the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER'S appearance.

C.O. Like there's shit in here.

PRISONER That's right, sir.

C.O. You don't have to be so uptight.

PRISONER I understand, sir.

Silence.

C.O. You don't like me.

PRISONER I like you just fine, sir.

C.O. Don't bullshit me. I'm everything you hate.

PRISONER From your mouth to God's ears, sir.

C.O. And from your thoughts to the devil's temptations.

PRISONER You see me as a sinner, sir?

C.O. I do.

PRISONER Because of the jumpsuit, sir?

C.O. What, you think sinners are dressed like me?

PRISONER I never said that, sir.

C.O. But you're sure as hell thinking it.

PRISONER Whatever you say, sir.

C.O. *That's why you're a sinner.*

PRISONER How's that, sir?

C.O. Because you're dishonest. C'mon. If there's a Hell, it's got my ass welcoming you.

PRISONER There's worse shit waiting for me in Hell, sir.

C.O. Drop that "sir" shit.

PRISONER Habit, sir. Taught to respect authority.

C.O. You do a fine job of that.

PRISONER Thank you, sir.

C.O. That was sarcasm, you fucking idiot.

PRISONER Yes, sir.

C.O. I make you mad?

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. I'll never get you to say an honest word, will I?

PRISONER *stops engaging.* PRISONER and CORRECTIONAL OFFICER. *stare at each other. A standoff.*

C.O. Certainly nothin' coming from your mouth's going to God's ears, eh? *Beat. A siren blares and cuts off abruptly.*

PRISONER What was that, sir?

C.O. Probably some fucker trying to break out.

PRISONER I thought I was the dishonest one. Ah. You're bleeding, sir.

C.O. What?

PRISONER Your nose. You're bleeding. Sir.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER looks down and sees his nose is dripping blood. He reaches a hand up gently to his nose to wipe it.

C.O. I am.

PRISONER What's happening out there, sir?

They stand in silence. The sounds of yelling and fighting grows.

PRISONER It's a riot, isn't it, sir?

C.O. Yes.

PRISONER You're hiding here, aren't you, sir?

C.O. Yeah.

PRISONER The whole prison, sir?

C.O. The whole prison what?

PRISONER Has this riot taken over the whole prison, sir?

C.O. I don't want you asking anymore questions.

PRISONER Yes, sir.

C.O. I told you to cut that sir, shit.

PRISONER Alright, sir.

C.O. What the fuck's wrong with you?

PRISONER You're scared, sir.

C.O. Fuck you.

PRISONER No, fuck *you*, sir.

Silence. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER grows uneasy.

PRISONER How did the riot start, sir?

C.O. I'm gonna let what you just said to me go. But if--

PRISONER Why'd the alarm cut, sir?

C.O. Why you asking so many questions?

PRISONER You're gonna answer me, sir.

C.O. You need to watch your tone.

PRISONER Or what, sir?

C.O. Don't make me call backup.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER raises his nightstick threateningly.

PRISONER There's no backup.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER waves the nightstick.

PRISONER Call them.

C.O. Don't tempt me.

PRISONER Swing that stick. See if you can hit me. Hit me. (*beat*) Hit me. (*beat*) Fucking hit me.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER lowers his nightstick. The Prisoner stands in complete stillness, coiled, ready to pounce.

C.O. I don't wanna to hit you. I came here to talk.

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. Listen—

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. What you got left? A year? Two?

PRISONER No, sir.

C.O. Hear me out. We can make an arrangement.

PRISONER Is that so, sir?

C.O. Till you get released. You'll have it easy. You hear me?

PRISONER Don't make promises.

C.O. You have my word.

PRISONER Your word don't mean shit. (*Silence*) This the plan? Stay here till the riot ends?

C.O. And if you keep quiet, you come out of this with the next two years taken care of.

PRISONER Don't bullshit me.

C.O. I'm not bullshitting you, man.

PRISONER They're coming aren't they, sir?

C.O. What?

PRISONER It's the other way around now. You need *my* protection. That right, sir?

C.O. No...

PRISONER Then walk out of here. If you don't need me. Leave.

C.O. What do you need from me? I'll do it.

PRISONER I don't need shit from you. *You* came here. So, why are you here?

C.O. You were the first cell I saw.

PRISONER Don't be a fucking sinner. Answer the question, sir.

C.O. That boy you beat up.

The PRISONER pounces and shoves the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER.

PRISONER Gonna fucking blackmail me?

C.O. No!

PRISONER You don't talk about him.

The PRISONER keeps advancing while the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER backs up.

C.O. I know he's family to you. I could protect him. You know how these riots go. Once it's over it goes back to the way it was. He'll need me.

Beat.

PRISONER He made his choices. Not my job to save him.

The noise outside grows louder.

C.O. You're just gonna dump your family off like that? What the fuck is wrong with you savages? You can't even be bothered to protect your own flesh and blood?

The PRISONER shoves the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER to the floor and advances on him.

PRISONER You wanna see how savages do? (*summoning the Riot*) HE'S HERE! HE'S HERE!!!!

C.O. Shut up! Shut up! I'm sorry! I didn't mean to say—

PRISONER You standing there fucking calling me a coward. Look at you. You don't got your fucking clique riding in to save you, and now you're saying sorry.

C.O. You gotta understand—

PRISONER Gonna give me the, "I'm a good man" sob story? Gonna tell me you got a fucking wife and kids?

The PRISONER has backed CORRECTIONAL OFFICER into a corner. The noises outside grow louder.

PRISONER Savages don't know shit about what that means.

C.O. We're the same, man! We're the fucking same! We're just trying to survive.

PRISONER Nah, it's *you* trying to survive. Me? I'mma fuck me up a C.O.

C.O. Hear me out.

PRISONER You ain't said shit to me for twenty-three fucking years.

C.O. We can talk about this.

PRISONER What is there to talk about, *sir*? You been fronting like you were big shit, *sir*. Now back it the fuck up without your crew, *sir*.

The PRISONER towers over the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER realizes there is no way out. An understanding dawns on him.

C.O. You're right. Let's get it done.

PRISONER Look at you putting on that brave ass face.

C.O. Not brave.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER stands. PRISONER talks a half-step back.

PRISONER Fuck's wrong with you?

C.O. You know when I say we're the same. I did mean it.

PRISONER Fuck you saying?

C.O. I grew up watching all the men in my neighborhood get taken into the system. Whenever they came back. They got changed. They were fucked up. It scared me. Because I knew. It was only a matter of time before it was my turn to go in. Even if I followed all the rules and obeyed the law. When they want you, they want you. That's the cost of being born with this skin. You're expected to do your time. So what? I'm gonna end up in here anyway, right? So, I go in on my terms. Mine. Where I'm not the one getting fucked up. Where I'm not the one fearing for my life. So, I made my choice, just like you made yours. Just like we all make our choice.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER laughs as he slides his nightstick to the bewildered PRISONER.

C.O. But they don't tell you when you put on this uniform. You gotta be harder on the residents. You can't be looking like you're protecting your own, or else you don't belong here. Maybe you belong with the other residents. When you wear this uniform you got the residents who hate you, and the other C.O.s who barely tolerate your ass and want a reason to get rid of you. It's a balancing act. I did what I had to do to make sure I don't fall. Because I wasn't gonna go in, man. Not like everyone else. But that don't excuse my shit. I see you as a sinner, yes. But if you're a sinner then I'm the damned. There's consequences for the choices we make. You did your shit and ended up in here and me...oh fuck...shit...it's funny.

PRISONER What?

C.O. I spent my whole life trying to make sure I don't end in a cell with a motherfucker like you, but here I am. It didn't matter what choices we made in life. We still ended up here. It's all rigged, man. There was never a way out of this shit. We were fucked from the start.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER laughs again.

PRISONER Stop laughing.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER continues to laugh.

PRISONER Stop laughing.

The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER continues to laugh.

PRISONER STOP LAUGHING!

C.O. Then do something. Fucking coward. You talk like I did horrible things to you. Well, you got my admission. I'm owning up to it. Get your payback. Make this shit right. Now.

PRISONER Fuck you.

C.O. DO IT!

The PRISONER picks up the nightstick and looks hard at the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER. A long, tense moment passes between them before the PRISONER slides the nightstick back to the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER.

C.O. Why?

PRISONER I ain't gonna have your blood on me. I'm not your judge and I ain't some easy way for you to pay for the shit you done.

C.O. But you could—

PRISONER No. I really couldn't.

C.O. So, what are we gonna do?

Silence.

PRISONER Gimme your keys.

C.O. Why?

PRISONER That shit ain't your business.

Silence.

C.O. We're stuck. It's an automatic lock that can be opened with a key on the outside, not from the inside. Unless your friends out there get to the control room...

Sound of a lock clicking. Sounds of people rushing out of their cells.

PRISONER Well, would you look at that shit. I think they got to the control room.

The PRISONER opens his cell door and yells out.

PRISONER Good looking out, fam!

The PRISONER turns back to the CORRECTIONAL OFFICER.

PRISONER Gimme your keys. I'll lock you in. Help keep everyone out.

C.O. Why you doing this?

PRISONER Because fuck you, that's why.

Beat. The CORRECTIONAL OFFICER tosses the PRISONER his keys. The PRISONER goes out the door. Sound of a Rewind button being clicked. The tape begins rewinding.

Bare Stage. LITTLE MAN *delivering a speech, The PRISONER enters and watches* LITTLE MAN.

PRISONER Track 15: Outro (*the cassette warps*) Even Flowers Bloom in Hell, Sometimes featuring (*the cassette warps*) my nephew and me. (*the cassette warps*) Last Day. Prison (*the cassette warps*). Prison (*the cassette warps*). Prison (*the cassette warps*). Parole day.

Beat.

L.M. We're not gonna sit around while they abuse us! We are still human beings. We have rights. We demand fair pay for the work we do! We wanna get visited more than two times a month! We've had our trial already. But the shit they do to us is like making us pay twice for the crimes we already got sentenced for. It's double jeopardy. Let us pay for our crimes! Give us a chance to get out and be part of society again! We want a chance to start a new life not get destroyed every day we stay here. We want a shot! Give us the opportunity! We demand dignity. We demand fairness. We demand—

Gunshots. The PRISONER raises a hand and LITTLE MAN freezes. The gunshots stop. Silence. The PRISONER crosses to center.

PRISONER There's this thing that judges do before they sentence felons. They accept character references. In those references, all your family and friends who give a shit about you write to the judge to try to give you the lowest sentence possible. You can even have people come up and speak before the judge sometimes.

My sister was the only one who wrote a letter for me. Nobody came to speak.

I guess that was alright because I felt like people writing letters for me might convince the judge to give me a harsher sentence.

I remember when I had to write one for my dad. I wrote, "Please let my dad out soon so that he can come home and teach me to be like him."

(he laughs)

That fucked up any chances of my dad getting out early. He got the maximum sentence. Moms was pissed. I fucked up.

It's the thing I'm best at. Fucking up.

Silence.

PRISONER One time I called my sister and she told me about this article she read in some prison magazine about how in Florida, inmates that got less visitations were more likely to go back inside once they got out.

I believe it.

Let's play a game. See if you think I'll go back in once I'm out.

Based on my projected release date, I'll have served 300 months and 25 days. In 300 months and 25 days, I got me 17 visitations. Each visit lasted 30 minutes. That means total, in those 300 months and 25 days, I saw my loved ones for eight and a half hours.

So, I fucked around with the numbers. 300 months and 25 days equals out to 10,982 days, which equals 263,568 hours. Now divide eight and a half by 263,568 hours. That makes; Zero. Point. Zero. Zero. Zero. Zero. Three. Two. Percent. You pronounce that 32 millionths. So, 32 millionths of my time in prison was spent getting visited.

Whatcha think my chances are, eh? Think I'd go back in?

Silence.

PRISONER My moms used to tell me that there are only two times in life when you know who's really in your corner. When you're terminal and when you're in prison. When she was right...man, she was right. It's not solitary that gets you. It's not the cells. It's not the shitty food. It's not the C.O.s It's not even the time that gets to you. It's figuring out that you're alone. Absolutely alone in this world. Little Man died when they retook the prison. I'm fucking cold.

Silence.

PRISONER I got out June 4th, 2016. Bodegas and Chinese places became craft beer and cafes. The neighborhood was gone. Cellphones could get you everything you wanted. Everyone had a cellphone. Kids had cellphones. People weren't watching TVs no more. No more calling on the house phone. It was texting and emails now. Checks weren't good in most places. But the important shit stayed the same. Poor people were still poor. Jobs never came, didn't matter who was president. And the street kids still weren't getting ahead in life. Even with all the information of the world at their fingertips. So, of course, the game was still there offering a chance to make some cash to get some clothes and feed your families when minimum wage don't cover the bills.

Silence.

PRISONER Now I want to tell you that I got religion. I want to tell you that I inspired kids all over the country with my story. I want to tell you a story that ends happy. I get enough money to get me and my sister out. Little Man didn't die and gets out early for good behavior. We finally got our American Dream. But this shit's real life. And I'm not gonna lie to you when I tell you that my sister did lose the apartment and eventually we all lost the neighborhood. I'm not gonna lie to you when I tell you that my sister stopped going to church after Little Man passed. I'm not gonna lie to you when I tell you it took me two years to find steady pay. And I won't lie to you when I tell you that for a bit, I sold some la-la until I finally got a job. Small-scale. Smaller than small scale. Didn't blow up like before. I wasn't gonna go back. I'm a lot of the statistics. But I ain't gonna be some recidivist shit stat.

Silence.

PRISONER I dunno, man. I dunno why most of you is still here.

(pause)

Something happy, right? It can't end like this. Yeah. Something happy for all your troubles...

Aight.

The PRISONER unbuttons his uniform shirt revealing a plain white tee. He presses his hand against his stomach and a burst of light creates the pattern of a flower on his abdomen. He presses his hand on his leg where a flower blossoms in a brilliant flash of light. He bursts another on his chest and from his heart flowers flood out blooming across the floor, the cells, across all existence. The light of the flowers pierce through the darkness and smoke vanquishing the prison. The PRISONER stands now in a universe of flowers growing out of the void. He laughs.

PRISONER Like Two-Dub and his friends said, right? Even flowers bloom in hell, sometimes.

(motivating himself)

Own up, man. Come on. One good thing...

(he looks at LITTLE MAN)

My bad. I been trying to delay this moment. I'm scared. We gonna dip out soon. I promise.

I gotta change the story a little bit. I got out March 20th, 2014.

My nephew survives and gets out on good behavior. He gets a degree. He starts a business and invests in a play about inmates written by an old man dating a librarian. He makes enough money on the profits to buyout the apartment building. He gives his momma the keys. He never goes back to the pen.

My sister finishes school with her son and runs the apartment. She prays for my soul every night.

I'm gonna need it.

On my marker, they put up:

***Three Triple Six Four Oh Five Three Rests Here
He Did One Good Thing.
He Died.***

All the rest...this life, all my fuckups...it was all worth it.

That's something like redemption, right?

(hollow laughter)

Redemption.

Silence. The paradise of flowers disappears. Only the PRISONER and LITTLE MAN remain.

PRISONER Whatever. End of B Side.

The PRISONER hugs LITTLE MAN before shoving him to the floor. Gunfire and alarms resume. Just before the bullets hit the PRISONER--

Blackout. Sirens and alarms still ringing for a few seconds after blackout. The cassette clicks Stop. End of Play.