

DRUM



MASSACHUSETTS
CORRECTIONAL
INSTITUTION
NORFOLK
GATEHOUSE
ENTRANCE

NO TRAILERS
TRUCKS--BUSES
TO ENTER
HERE

BLACK LITERARY EXPERIENCE
UNIVERSITY
OF
MASSACHUSETTS

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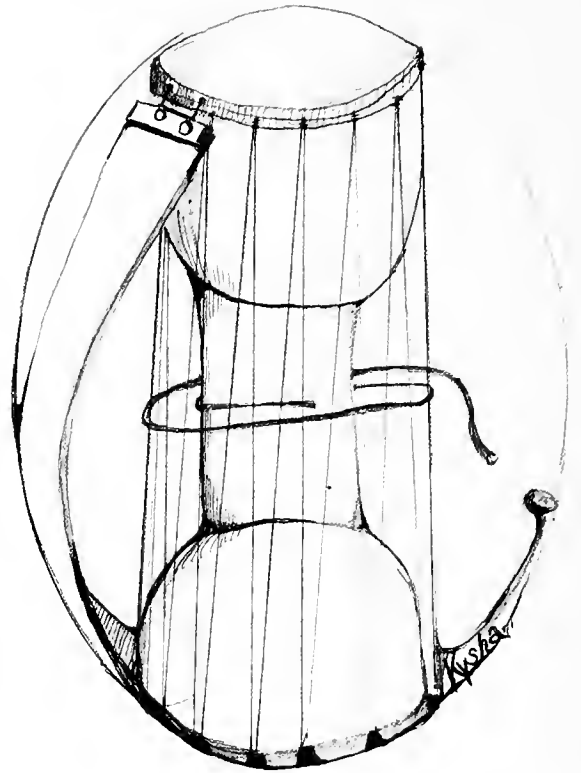
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*This issue of Drum
is dedicated to the Brothers
at Norfolk Prison.*

*Where their life styles revolve
constantly around twenty-four
hours of confinement, in an
institution that does not
ask when, how, and why
they are there, but how
long their undisputed
solutions of reform
will take.*



Universal Prisoner

Most people go around thinking they're free;
believing it's an easy way to be.
How many times are we told what to do
cause it's right, child, or wrong for you?
In your youth did you grow and achieve or did
you throw away the things you couldn't believe?
Do you run in guilt and in fear from all the
things you truly hold dear?
The Universal prisoner makes his own laws
The Universal prisoner has no need for stars.
He can't climb
He can't grow
and worst of all he doesn't know.
Do you share yourself in love.
What's inside
Or do you run to the phony world where most
people hide?
Are you honest like the lilies of the field
you see?
Hey, so ask yourself, are you truly free?
The universal prisoner makes his own laws
The universal prisoner has no need for stars.
Oh, no He can't climb
He can't grow
And worst of all he doesn't know.
No No No No No
No No No No No No No
The Universal Prisoner.
Whatcha you going to tell him?
The Universal prisoner
somebody's gotta talk to him
It's gonna be rough.
The universal prisoner
You gotta straighten him out.
You gotta get him outa his cell
no need to
can't stand it
Gotta find a better way to live
Tired of this jiving
No need
No No No
Whatcha you gonna do?

These lyrics were taken from Eddie Harris & Les McCann Second Movement Album.

In this issue you'll read things by brothers who may have been the guy next door or around the corner. Their writings will try to get a message across to you without having you subject yourself to a confinement such as the one they are going through. This is not to say that all Black people outside of prison are free, but as Malcolm once said "Black people in the United States today are all in prison, the ones in the joint are just in solitary confinement." (By the way Malcolm did time in Norfolk also.)

**And the children
grow up
and
become men.**

**Some go to
foreign soil,
shed blood
and
die for
some unknown cause.**

**Many are thrown
in jails
to die
slow and torturous
deaths,
while mothers wait
in
empty homes
and
dream beautiful
dreams
that
will
never
be
realized**

Shahid



Streets lined with trash cans
Pregnant women hanging out of windows yelling
Yelling to their children who are playing
In a playground that will never be
Each day coming home with a new cut
From a different broken wine bottle

The police circle endlessly to make sure
That no one leaves
While inside the rats eat the cat
Because they already ate the roaches
And the streets are still lined with trash cans

The men are only seen at night
Because at night things don't look so bad
And it's easier to slip from bar to bar
With their favorite night worker

All act as though they don't mind
And deep inside only pray
While watching from the apartment windows
The streets lined with trash cans

Kamau Madu
(carl w. griffin)
1972



The torture chamber:

Welcome to the chamber of horrors where we/the victims of madness enact our respective roles.

Down the street, round the corner, through the alleyway, we stumble upon young brothers drinkin wine talkin trash, smoking reefer caught dead -up in a noddddd jimmm

highhhhh

Moving along, we come across beautiful black women/who are to be the future mothers of our children, selling their warm and fertile bodies to some diseased faggot for pleasure and the exchange of a few dollars.

Down the way, preacher jones got the church jumpin for joy sayin "hallelujah, thank you jesus, lawd ha mercy"

from across the burned-out and vacant lots reminding us strangely of war scenes, comes the sickening smell of fried pig wit eggs on the side. they call that "soul-food" the same ole shit they was feeding our mothers and fathers back on the slave plantation.

On sidewalks, in empty school-yards we see groups of children laughing and playing, seemingly unaware of the approaching danger of the genocide machine that threatens to kill them in their youth.



On we go in our journey through the nightmare of illusion. I see a dead cat lying in the gutter/eyes gone/mouth hanging open/body stiff./

The clouds shift, the winds blow, the seasons change, and birds sing harmonious melodies.

The sky is blue but changing gray for the ghetto is where we die from massive overdoses of oppression.

Take (2) giant steps from the ghetto/ pass the hospital where they shoot you up with strange drugs, and find yourself in the grave/ the next giant step from beyond the ghetto

2 a.m.
11/5/73: Shahid

The coming of THEY:

The People of
THEY
came from far
away on
strange ships,
bringing
the strange
death
and pestilence
with them.

Before
The coming
of They,
THIS rich and fertile land
from which
sprang
my people/the children
of
the
SUN,
knew no air pollution
or
birth control pills.

The air swarmed with
an
abundance
of
free/
winged
spirits.

The hills
and plains were thick
with
herds
of buffalo
before
the coming
The coming
of THEY.



These strange people
that
came
from
beyond
the
rising
SUN,
They brought
their
strange
ways
and
foreign
tongue.

THEY brought
the werewolf/wolfman/
frankenstein/
and
the
curse
of
Death
with them to the
Land of
Sunshine
and
Plenty.

We welcomed them
with
food
and
open
arms
But they spit
in our
faces/
called
us
savages/
raped
our
women/
slaughtered
our
children/
and
threw
our
men
in
jails/
to die
cold and bitter
deaths.

The wars came and for
thousands
of
years
The air
EXPLODED
with
the
scream
of
death
and
hot winds
scorched
the
warm,
fertile
earth
turning her
dry
and
barren
from
lack
of
LOVE.

Who are **THEY?**
these strange
people
who
have
erected concrete
and
steel
monuments
of
DEATH.

Who are **THEY?**
these strange people
whose
words
speak
peace
and
whose
actions
breed
DEATH
and
DESTRUCTION.

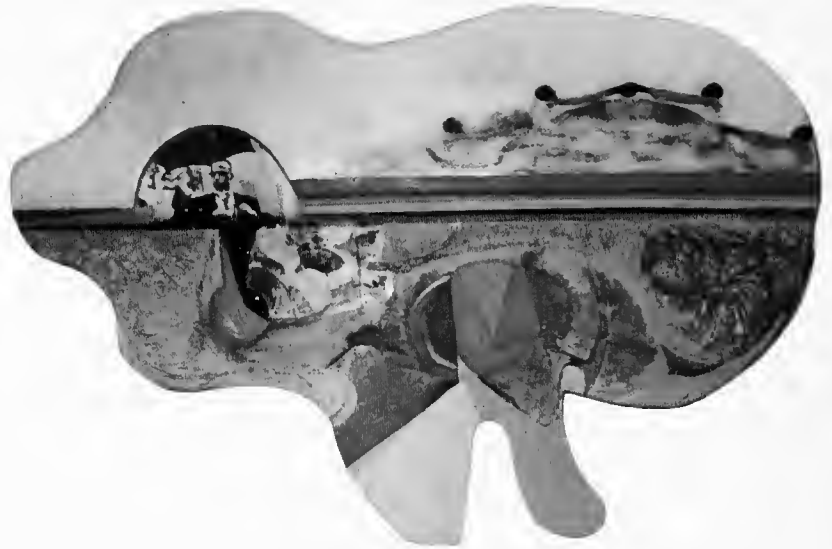
Until we/
the children
of
the
SUN
can
reclaim
our
TRUE
place
in
the
UNIVERSE
and
subdue
the
strange
ones
who

learned
to
walk
on
their
hind
legs/
The earth can never know
PEACE/
and
our
children
will
always
know
slavery
as
our
fathers
and
mothers
have
who
walked
before
us . . .

11: p.m.
10/7/73: Shahid

Message to the People:

In today's world, we find it's lifestream threatening to be exterminated by it's inhabitants. There would appear to be a thickening cloud of gloom over the earth as nations are frantically preparing for war. Look anywhere and you will see chaos and confusion and a growing discontent amongst the people. The call is given, "destroy the system! Change the system!



Revolution!" For what good is it to destroy a system that oppresses when one cannot change or destroy the ugliness within ones own self? After the smoke has cleared and the system is no more, what is to prevent this existing state of madness that we live in from erupting again? When all the bombs have been exploded, and all the bullets have been fired, will there be peace again on this planet? Will there be a lasting solution to the *human* needs of the people? Will the starving children of Vietnam know the peace and freedom denied them? Will the children of the ghettos of America know what happiness and security is after the bombs have exploded?

There can be *no* peace on this planet until *all* the people submit to Allah (creator & Sustainer of *all* life forms)? and obey the laws of creation. All of nature is in a state of complete harmony and order, man is the only part of creation that exists in a state of chaos. In conclusion, man's lasting state of peace and harmony does not depend on his physical environment alone.

As-salaamu-Alaikum-wa-Rahmatullah!

Shawwal 29, 1393 A.H.
(Nov. 25, 1973 A.D.)
Hassan Shahid

Let Freedom Ring:

By Shahid

(The scene opens revealing an open court room. Seated in the court room are the participants of this drama; the district attorney, the defense council, and a young white male dressed like a "hippy" wearing old dungarees, sandals etc. His lawyer walks over to him and says)

"How do you feel?"

White Male—"How the hell do you think I'm supposed to feel, I've been coming to this damned court for the past two weeks, trying to see the judge so I can plead guilty for those five masked armed robberies."

Lawyer—"Well, just be cool, you know that you can get a life sentence for just one masked armed robbery, so sit tight."

(At this moment, Judge Peckerwood makes his entrance.)

Court Clerk—"All rise. Court is in session, all persons having criminal business to attend to in this district court, draw near and give your attention."

Lawyer-Judge—"Your honor, my client wishes to plead guilty and throw himself completely on the mercy of the court."

(Judge is reading some papers that could be the defendants criminal record.)

Judge—"I see that he has quite a bad criminal record; fourteen escapes, three kidnappings, and five assaults on correctional officers."

Judge-D.A.—"Do you have any recommendations?"

D.A.—"Well, your honor, if he will clean himself up, I would recommend a sentence of not more than seven years and no less than five years."

Judge-hippy—"It is my duty to inform you that you are sentenced to serve not more than seven years and no less than five years, provided that you will clean yourself."

Hippy—"Yes sir, thank you, your honor, sir."

Clerk—"All rise, court is dismissed."

(Curtain closes for scene one)

(Scene two opens in the same manner as the preceding scenes. Two men dressed in very conservative business suits are seated at the lawyers table conversing with each other.)

(Judge Peckerwood enters)

Clerk—"All rise, Court is in session, all persons having criminal business to attend to in this district court, draw near and give your attention."

Judge-D.A.—"Do you have any evidence to produce to the court?"

D.A.—"Yes your honor, I have here copies of the records of the defendants insurance company that will show that for a period of ten years, while Thomas J. Watergate III, esq. was president of the insurance company, he misappropriated the sum of three million dollars."

Judge—"Is he here in the court-room?"

(The two men seated at the lawyers table stand and say)

"No, your honor, Mr. Watergate is on vacation in Bermuda with his family, and we are representing him. He informed us that all of the arrangements had been taken care of, and he sent us here to take care of the legal aspects of

this trial. Your honor, may we approach the bench?"

Judge—"Yes."

(They are now huddled together talking for awhile. The huddle breaks and everyone goes back to his place)

One of the lawyers says—

"Your honor, our client wishes to plead guilty and throw himself upon the mercy of the court."

Judge—"So you know that a fine will have to be paid."

Lawyers—"Yes, your honor and we are prepared to pay it."

Judge—"I regret to say that I fine Mr. Watergate for the sum of \$1,000 dollars and sentence him to six months, suspended sentence."

Lawyers—"Thank you sir, your honor sir."

(The curtain closes for scene two, with the lawyers shaking the D.A.'S hand.)

(Scene three opens in the same manner as the preceding scenes. Seated in the courtroom are the defense council, the district attorney, and a young Black male of approximately seventeen years old. He is talking with an elderly Black woman who is his mother. His lawyer whispers something to the D.A. then walks over to the young man and says)

"Are you sure you don't want to plead guilty, I can still get you a deal?"

Yng Blk—"But why should I, I didn't rob that store, I was helping my mother, She'll swear to that."

Lawyer—"You know I believe you, but it's just a question of whether the judge will believe your word over that of the arresting police officer."

Yng Blk—"Well, I still want to go through with it."

Lawyer—"All right, if that's the way you want it, I'm with you all the way."

(Judge Peckerwood makes his entrance)

Clerk—"All rise, Court is in session, all persons having criminal business to attend to in this district court, draw near and give your attention."

Lawyer stands and says—

"Your honor, I would like to have a continuance."

Judge—"Denied."

Lawyer—"May I approach the bench?"

(Now we have them all huddled in a corner, all busily talking about something that nobody but themselves know about.)

Yng Blk—"What is all of this?" slight pause, "Maybe I might get a break after all, but I sure would like to know what they're talking about."

(The huddle breaks and everyone goes back to their respective places.)

Judge-D.A.—"Are you ready to proceed with the prosecution?"

D.A.—"Your honor, two of my witnesses are on vacation in Europe, and are not available at this time."

Judge—"Do you need more time?"

D.A.—"No, your honor, we have the arresting police officer here, and I'm sure that his word will be good enough."

(Lawyer leaps to his feet.)

—“Your honor, I object.”
Judge—“Sit down. Motion denied.”
Judge-D.A.—“Are you ready to proceed?”
D.A.—(Grinning all over himself)
—“Yes, your honor. I would like to bring
Patrolman Lebowskiwitz to the stand.”
Clerk—“Raise your right hand. Do you solemnly
swear to tell the whole truth and nothing but
the truth?”
Police—“I do.”
Clerk—“You may be seated.”
Judge-Police—“One last question, Patrolman Le-
bowskiwitz. Do you have any biased or
prejudicial feelings towards Black people
that might interfere with your reasoning at this
moment, due to the fact that the accused is a
Black male, and the crime was perpetrated
against loyal White citizens of this country.”
(Lawyer leaps up again)
—“Your honor, I object.”
Judge—“You will please hold your tongue, young
man while these proceedings are going on, I’m
in control here. One more outburst like that and
I’ll have you removed from this court.”
Judge-Police—“Please excuse this interruption. Do
you have any biased or prejudicial feelings
toward Black people that might interfere with
your reasoning at this moment, due to the fact
that the accused is a Black male, and the crime
was perpetrated against loyal White citizens of
this country?”
Police—“No, your honor.”
Judge-D.A.—“You may proceed.”
D.A.—“Thank you, your honor.”
D.A.-Police—“For the records sir, will you please
give the court your full name and occupation?”
Police—“My name is Peter Lebowskiwitz, I am as-
signed to Station 109, I work on the p.m. shift.”
D.A.—“Will you please tell the court what you were
doing on the night of August 12th?”
Police—“At approximately 9 p.m. I was driving
along the inner city boulevard I noticed that the
lights were off in Weisberg’s drugstore, and
this seemed strange because Weisberg usually
stays open until midnight on the weekends.
Moving very carefully, I approached the front
of the drugstore and looked in. I saw a Black
male taking money out of the cash register, I
then told him to halt, and that he was under
arrest.”
D.A.—“Did you get a good look at him?”
Police—“Yes.”
D.A.—“Do you see him in the court room?”
Police—“Yes, he is the defendant (points to young
Black male.)
D.A.—“You may continue.”
Police—“He then fired a shot at me, and disappeared
to the back of the drugstore, the door was open,
so I followed in pursuit of him. The back door
was also open, and I came out hoping to see
him, but he had completely disappeared.”
D.A.—“What else happened?”
Police—“As I was walking back to my car, two
women called out to me from the apartment
building across the street, they told me that they
had seen a Black male come running out of the
back of the drugstore and they gave me a descrip-
tion?”
Police (reading from paper)

—“Black male, approximately 5 feet, 8 inches,
smooth-shaved, and wearing a black jacket.” “I
then reported to the police station and proceed-
ed to the neighborhood pool hall.”
D.A.—“What was your intention for going to this
place?”
Police—“Well, I have some informers who are usual-
ly in this area, and I had hoped to get some in-
formation, but upon approaching the pool hall,
I saw the defendant standing in the doorway.”
D.A.—“Is he the same person that you saw in the
drugstore earlier that evening?”
Police—“Yes sir.”
D.A.—“You may continue.”
Police—“I then put him under arrest on suspicion
of armed robbery.”
D.A.—“No further questions.”
Defendant’s Lawyer-Police
—“Sir if I recall correctly, you testified earlier
that you saw the defendant in the drugstore on
the night that the crime in question was com-
mitted.”
Police—“Yes, I did.”
Lawyer—“You also testified that the lights were off
in the drugstore, is that correct?”
Police—“Yes I did.”
D.A.—“Your honor, I object.”
Judge—“Denied.”
Judge-Lawyer—“You may continue.”
Lawyer-Police—
“If it was dark in the drugstore as you testified
earlier, then how could you possibly have been
able to make out the features of the defendant
under such poor lighting conditions?”
(D.A. leaps to his feet, knocking chairs and books
over.)
—“Your honor, I object to this type of ques-
tioning.”
Judge—“Motion sustained.”
D.A.—“Thank you your honor. May I approach the
bench?”
(Another huddle, the defendant’s lawyer is going
through a lot of changes.)
Yng Blk—“Man, this don’t look too cool at all.”
(The huddle breaks and they all go back to their
places.)
Defendant’s lawyer—“No further questions.”
Judge replies—“We will have a short recess.”
Clerk—“All rise, court is in recess.” (Judge leaves.)
(Lawyer is now talking with defendant and de-
fendants mother)
Clerk—“All rise, court is in session, all persons
having criminal business to attend to in this
district court, draw near and give your atten-
tion.”
Judge—“In view of the overwhelming evidence
given by Patrolman Lebowskiwitz, I have no al-
ternative but to find the defendant guilty of
armed robbery, and because of the violent na-
ture of the crime, I sentence you to not more
than 40 years and no less than 20 years.”
Woman begins crying—
“But judge, I need him at home, I’m all alone,
and I have no one to help me.”
Judge (very stern)—“I’m sorry ma’m, but he has
committed a crime for which he must pay.”
(Woman begins crying louder as the curtains close
for the end.)



Man come talking to me about Nation Time
Man talking to me
With a gun in his hand
A needle in his arm
And a bottle of wine in his pocket
Talking about Nation Time
Nation Time
He can't see his son standing on the corner
Crying for his mother
Who's down the block
Giving out V.D. pamphlets
To all her victims
Talking about free the land

Man come talking to me about Nation Time
His forefathers were Africans
But somehow he's a Negro
Don't even know how
Needle in his arm
Wine in his pocket
Gun in his hand
Talking about Nation Time
Don't know why
Little boy still standing on the corner crying
Got no where to go
Never did
His mother had to go get more pamphlets
Talking about free the land

*Kamau Madu
(carl w. griffin)*

"The Mediumly Secured Luv Story"

Ronnie looked up from the letter he was reading and out through the bar cluttered window. He couldn't seem to keep his thoughts from wandering. He couldn't get his emotions under control. This had been opening with more frequency, each time he received a letter from Beth. Love letters, revealing a need impossible for him to fulfill.

"Damn!," he thought, "Why couldn't I be there?"

The answer was there, all around him, outside his window, on his back, he was in prison. He had been there now, for more than four years—one third of a twelve to fifteen year sentence. On top of that, he had received another ten to fifteen years, to be served after the first was finished—the result of an appeal made to the higher courts.

Things were becoming increasingly worse for him, and now, the one thing that ever really meant anything to him was becoming his worst enemy.

He returned to the letter, finding it slipping from his knee to the floor. His right hand shot out, managing to snare the corner of one page as the other continued its journey to the floor. Ronnie pushed himself off the bed and picked up the other page. A large cockroach, obviously female and pregnant, made a dash toward his locker. He allowed it to nearly reach its shelter before bringing his foot down and filling the Saturday afternoon silence of his room with the squish sound. Setting himself back upon the bed, he re-read the last paragraph of the letter, stopping to allow the last of it to reverberate in his mind.

"You are so strong. To cope with that vicious place and those sick minds takes strength. Nothing they have done has broken or destroyed your spirit. And I consider you a prize, cause there are none out here like you. The girls and I need you. We need you home with us."

Ronnie didn't quite agree with her about his strength, at least not anymore. In the two years he had known Beth, a change had taken place. She had recreated him anew.

He never thought any woman possessed the power to change him to the degree Beth had. The effect she had on him was as unexpected as the day she entered his life. Sitting there staring at her letter through unseeing eyes, Ronnie thought back to that Tuesday afternoon.

It had been an exceptionally hot day, and he had been on his way to the basketball court, to hopefully get in a fast game before the work whistle blew. He had worn his sweatshirt and was paying the price in a constant barrage of sweat, burning his eyes and salting his mouth. It was torture, a torture that was self-inflicted. He could have worn a T-shirt, like everyone else. But he never passed up a chance to display some sign of revolt. He wasn't into any militant or revolutionary bag. But he remembered one day, while sitting at a sewing machine in the clothing shop, how subtle and petty the oppression was in this particular prison. The institution regulations demanded all men wear a *blue* uniform, with their names written on the back in *red* thread. It all hit home one day he attempted to sew the seam of a shirt with *black* thread—regulations called for *white* thread. He was charged with "Refusing to follow orders," and thrown in the hole for five days, with a one-meal-a-day penalty. That began his clothing revolt. But it was days like these when Ronnie had second thoughts about his undeclared revolt. Now he walked the quadrangle, continuously swabbing his caramel brown face.

The prison was supposed to be a "medium security institution," but it was kind of difficult to believe. It was structured like a small college campus inside, with eighteen dormitories—nine on the east side and nine on the west. Further back beyond the dormitories on either side were two large fields, each capable of allowing two simultaneous baseball games. To the north of the compound was the school building and O.I.C. (officer in charge), behind it were the shops, where men were paid twenty-five cents a day to make birdbaths, road signs and prison clothing. To the south were

the auditorium, the visiting room, the warden's office, and the door that lead to the invisible prison of society. In the center of all this was a small grassed area, much like a midget football field, set dead center was a short evergreen tree, growing unobstructed. The institution was surrounded by a chain link fence with three lines of barbed wire running across its top, and this was surrounded by a twenty-foot concrete wall, topped by three lines of electric wire. Strategically placed in each corner, atop the wall, were guard towers that housed bullet proof glass, one guard and a loaded machine gun. This was their idea of "medium security."

Also in the east field area was the basketball court. As Ronnie was about to make the turn between two dormitories, the loud-speaker blared out his name.

"Ronald Barns, return to your unit, you have a visitor. Ronald Barns. . ."

Before they repeated the call, he had changed directions and was headed back to his unit. He hadn't received a visit in almost a year now, and wondered who it could be. His heart drummed against his chest and a river of sweat ran as if from a burst dam. His nose itched and his legs were wobbly. His mind began scanning a list of names, searching for the could-be visitor. He knew it wasn't his mother, because she worked during the week and could only come on weekends. His sister was out of town. He entertained the possibility of it being one of his old friends, finally curious enough to find out if he was still alive. He continued his game of mental charades until he reached the door of his unit.

Rushing up the stairs to the third floor, he removed his sweatshirt as he went. Disappearing into his room, he quickly emerged with a washcloth and a bar of soap and went into the community bathroom, he would have a poor man's shower. Looking into the mirror he decided the morning's shave was still usable. Rushing out of the bathroom and back into his room he glanced over the socks in his locker

and picked a pair of over-the-calves black banlons. He dressed like an entertainer between sets, then made his way down the stairs and out the door, snatching up his pass as he went.

The work whistle had blown and the other men were on their way back to the shops. He dodged and weaved between the men, making his way for the visiting room. Sweat trickled down the back of his neck like little bullets as he went to his back pocket for a handkerchief, but discovered that in his haste he had left it behind. He debated a return to the unit but settled for his hand, which wasn't much help.

Coming into view of the visiting room windows, he slowed his pace and tried, with little success, to regain some of his lost composure. In front of the windowed visiting room door, he adjusted the self-made hi-boy collar on his prison shirt and made sure his creased dungarees were all right. He entered the short corridor unbuttoning his sweater to undergo a search. These searches always irritated him. He wondered what they had inside important enough to smuggle out to a visitor.

Considering a little good natured needling, Ronnie decided against it. He was more interested in this mysterious visitor, and didn't particularly want to be detained by some fool guard, looking to add another lock-up to his record. Not right now anyways.

"Damn!," he thought, "who can it be?"

The guard finished his search and Ronnie proceeded on to the visiting room. Dropping his pass on the desk, he searched the cramped room for a familiar face. There were none. Walking further into the room, he looked over to his left. There were two Black women seated at ninety degree angles from each other. One looked as though she could've been one of those Black movie actresses. She wore a yellow miniskirt and halter, displaying smooth walnut skin. The other wore loose fitting grey slacks and a black sweater jersey. She was very appealing in that way only a Black woman can be. She wore a headwrap and sat as regally and dignified as a queen. But, Ronnie knew neither.

Walking in their direction, he wished one would give some sort of sign that would ease the unpleasant confusion filling his mind, but neither did. This meant he'd have to make the appropriate move himself.

His palms were sweating and he felt irritable. The small fans did nothing to cool him. He found himself wishing he were back in the shops.

"Excuse me sisters," he started, "are either of you here to visit Ronald Barns?"

The woman in slacks looked up at him with an ice-melting smile and eyes that looked like dark wells.

"Yes," she said, "I am," nervousness evident in her voice.

Ronnie was glad it was her. He had developed an aversion toward the movie star type—though they were well endowed with good looks—they had been proven to have too much ego. But this woman seated before him just possessed a magnetism, an inner beauty, that seemed to pull at him deep inside, as if he were being exercised. He sat down across from her on one of the backless benches. Not knowing what to say, he produced a lame "Hi."

Her smile split in half, displaying teeth usually seen only in toothpaste commercials. She broke the awkward silence and eased Ronnie's growing discomfort.

"My name is Beth," she began, "Beth Sumner. Jamil sent me up to visit you. He said you don't receive any visits."

That was an understatement. He saw members of his family maybe once or twice a year. His friends seemed to have cut him loose from the very beginning. In reality, he didn't receive any visits *at all*.

He looked at her smooth brown skin, the full lips and nose. Her forehead was creased in question.

"Jamil definitely told you, right?" Ronnie replied. "How is he doing?"

"Fine," she answered, "he had trouble getting himself adjusted at first. But now he's working, finding jobs for other brothers and sisters getting out on paroles."

Ronnie nodded his head. Jamil was one of the brothers he got along with well. He had kept a room full of the latest Black books, and was a student in the prison college pro-

gram. His intentions were to go to college upon his release, but it cost money, so he got a job. Ronnie could never figure out what it was about Jamil he liked, but he listened to him as though he were some great philosopher on life.

It was Jamil, out of all the others who had made promises, who followed through on his. But there would come a time when Ronnie would wish Jamil had done as the others.

When he left the visiting room that day, it was as if everything had taken on new life and meaning. His head was held noticeably higher and a feeling of goodness and pride shown in his smiling face. He rushed back to his room, immediately wrote Jamil a thank-you letter, and then laid back to savor the events of the afternoon.

Ronnie had had the same effect on Beth. Every Tuesday he could look forward to a visit from her, and maybe four to five letters a week. He found she was 23, unmarried, and had two daughters, Hasani, 5 and Tamu, 6. After her second daughter was born, she had begun attending various community meetings, and it was at one of these meetings she had met Jamil.

She and Jamil's woman knew each other, and Jamil, after seeing her several times at meetings and noticing the absence of any male companion, asked if she'd like to visit a brother in prison. She had at first been hesitant, but later said she would give it a try.

Pulled back to the present by someone calling, Ronnie listened closely. The voice called for someone else. It was a drag being on the third floor in his unit. It was very difficult hearing when you were being called. He folded the letter lying in his lap and placed it back in its envelope. Looking out the window he saw two uniformed guards escorting a white inmate down the quad, heading in the direction of the separate confinement building.

He thought back on how wild he used to be, before he met Beth. Very few days went by without some sort of disciplinary action. They all centered around incidents like the red, white and blue shirts, or just turning the tables and harassing the guards as they did everyone else.

Sometimes he would just walk tall and proud, the guards hated it, and would, more often than not, lock him up for "silent insolence." It never really bothered Ronnie, whether he did his time in solitary or in population. Besides, it was a means of breaking the monotony of his humdrum existence.

But things began to change when Beth came into his life. A trip to solitary meant he might miss one of Beth's visits, or there'd be letters he would never see. His relationship with her had become the most important thing in his life at this point, besides trying to get his case overturned in court.

Leaning over from the bed, he pulled a cigarette from the pack on his desk, lit it and threw the match into the open commode. The room was an eight by four coffin, in which he slept, studied, entertained, and made his calls to nature; living-room, bedroom, and bathroom, all in one. He slid off the bed and paced back and forth in the cramped space.

"This god-damn prison!!! This god-damn prison!!!," he repeated to himself.

Ronnie laid down on his bed, made to prison specifications, and thought back to when the relationship between he and Beth had taken its turn from a friendship to the deeply involved, and equally frustrating relationship it was now. It was really inevitable. After the exhaustion of ideological discussions, they just moved on to things emotionally closer.

Beth had been visiting well over a year then, and had begun bringing her daughters. That particular day she wore a banana-yellow pants suit and her hair blown-out into a large crown of an afro. Hasani and Tamu, dressed in small replica suits of their mother's, had gone off to explore the still incomprehensible environment. Their laughter rose and fell in little melodic rhapsodies through the sunlit room. Ronnie wondered if there would still be prisons, as he knew them, when they grew into womanhood. Would they suffer the same agony and despair he was sure plagued Beth? Would their men leave them and their children for greater mobility? Would their sons fall prey to the self-undoing effects of drugs, or

the fratricidal life of the streets? Would they end up forced to view their pasts from prison cells like himself? He recalled an article he had read of a Black woman, who, in this day and age, took the lives of her young son and daughter. When asked why, she replied, "I refuse to subject my children to an existence that predestines them to sorrow and despair." His thoughts were broken as he realized the girls had ceased their play and were now staring up into his face. A wave of embarrassment engulfed him, as though they had heard his thoughts.

Hasani leaned on his leg and smiled up at him.

"Mommy said you're gonna come home and be our daddy. Are you?"

"Are you gonna come live with us?" Tamu added.

Ronnie's thoughts had ventured in that area already, but he hadn't been sure about Beth. How would she respond to having a man who could only love her from afar? Looking into her dark liquid eyes, he knew he would have to speak now or never.

"My case will be heard in court soon," he started, "and there is a possibility . . . I mean, it is time we started seriously considering what we want and where we can go with this relationship." He noticed a flash of alarm cross her smooth face.

"Ronnie, I knew we would eventually get to this point. But it's not just that easy. It will be hard on both of us." She paused and continued, "But I want to share all of you, as much as the circumstances will allow. I really love you and I wonder if we're doing the right thing by getting deeply involved."

Maybe it was that deep rooted need for female companionship, or the lack of communication with his family, or just the drab smothering atmosphere of prison life. All he knew was he had very little resistance to Beth's charm and womanliness. It made no difference to him then because he was happy in a way he hadn't been in a long time.

But it wasn't until now that the real significance of what Beth said hit home. The constant states of depression after reading her letters never left him. There was an unrelenting agony of watching her leave each visiting period, and wanting so

badly to accompany her. And then there was the paranoia, wondering if her nights were spent alone. The very things he had once cherished so strongly were now turning into his antagonists.

Ronnie was again made conscious of his physical surroundings by a knock at his door.

"Barns," he provided as he watched the guard check it off his count sheet. He watched the door close, leaving him again to his frustrations.

Getting up from the bed, he placed Beth's letter in his desk drawer and then went to the sink and filled his cup with water. His sentence had been upheld in court and it was just about certain he'd have to serve his time.

He tried to remember something Jamil had said in one of his essays. He went through his desk drawer and found the copy Jamil had sent him.

". . . and lack of communication with the outside world leads to the creeping despondency that attaches itself to your soul and fosters fatalistic attitudes. . . ."

"Fuck Jamil!" he thought. "If it hadn't been for him I wouldn't be going through these damn changes now."

Sitting down on the open commode, he leaned against the sink and stared at the opposite wall. It was filled with pictures cut from various Black magazines; Black men and women together, with love in their eyes. He had put them there as his feelings for Beth had grown. But they no longer made him feel good inside anymore. They were only reminders of his severance from the community and the woman who was inadvertently causing him so much emotional distress.

Standing, he placed his cup on the desk and opened his locker. After searching a few minutes, he produced a large manila envelope and poured its contents out onto the bed. They were pictures of nude white women in various obscene poses. He placed a towel over the window of the door and pushed a chair against it, and then spread the pictures on his bed and unzipped his fly. It was a temporary method of dealing with frustration.

When finished he placed the pic-

tures back in the envelope and returned it to his locker. He then laid down on the bed to think some more. He thought of the restraint he had to use each time Beth came. Many times they had sat in the visiting room and happened to see another inmate either with his hand in his woman's blouse or under her dress. There were times when he had thought of engaging in the same type of action, but he hadn't wanted to disrespect Beth that way so he would return to his room after a particularly frustrating visit and pull out his skin flicks.

"Damn!" Ronnie thought. "I was in better shape when I wasn't getting any visits at all. . . ." Everything seemed to stand still as though they were placed suddenly into suspended animation. "That's what I have to do," he affirmed to himself. Sitting up, he reached over to his desk drawer and pulled out a pad and pen and began to write.

"... and please don't bring the girls, it's best that you come alone."

He finished the letter and put it in an envelope and placed a stamp on it. Snatching up a shirt, he took it downstairs to the mailbox and went outside to make a couple of laps around the quadrangle before the supper whistle. He felt as though he had been shot through with new life.

"It's bad enough doing time without anyone," he thought, "but if I'm gonna have a woman to help me out, I have to have total and complete access to her. It would be too frustrating any other way."

By the time Tuesday rolled around, he had memorized what he

was going to say and how he would say it. Getting dressed, he went over it one last time.

"Beth, honey, you've got to understand that this is in the best interest for both of us. My sentence was upheld in Supreme Court and it looks very probably that I'll end up doing another five years at the least. That's too long for the both of us to continue on as we are. I can't even function and you're not doing much better. The girls need all the attention you can give them and I can't do anything but hinder you. And baby I'll never make it through this bit, as long as those walls are between us. It's unnatural. . . ."

He switched on the radio and looked at his watch. "Damn!" he thought. "She should've been here by now."

Lighting a cigarette, he laid back on the bed to wait.

"Man, I'm gonna miss her. Miss the girls too. But it's for the best all around. I hope she doesn't make a scene."

The radio announcer gave the time. Ronnie checked his watch.

"Damn! 2:45?" He leaped from the bed. Visits began at 1:00 and he generally was one of the first called.

"Maybe they called and I didn't hear them," he thought. "Let me go check."

Rushing down the stairs, he found the guard in his office reading a copy of *PT 109*. Ronnie hurried in looking across the desk for a possible pass-slip. Sitting up, the guard leaned over the top of the book.

"What do you want, Barns?"

Not wanting to get this guy started, Ronnie got right to the point.

"Have you called me for a visit yet, Mr. Pierce?"

Seeing an opportunity to harass Ronnie, Pierce slammed the book down and stared him in the eyes.

"Barns, it's my job to call you and let you know when you got a visit. When they call me, I call you. And I didn't call!"

Ronnie started to retort but thought better.

"I can't blow this one," he thought, "but where can she be? She's never been later."

As he left the office, Pierce sent a cynical leer at his back, then returned to his book feeling much better.

Ronnie returned to his room and laid back on his bed. He was tired and exhausted from the strain too much mind work can produce. Soon he fell off to sleep and didn't wake until the supper whistle blew.

The next few weeks his mind was in a state of confusion. He had written Beth asking what had happened, but he received no replies. There were no more visits and by the fourth week he was back into his old groove; five days in solitary confinement for refusing to work, and four days for contraband—a steak, etc.

Even though things were back to the old routine, there was always the question of how things would have fared under different circumstances. And on many mornings Ronnie awoke to find his pillow wet and old memories unbearable.

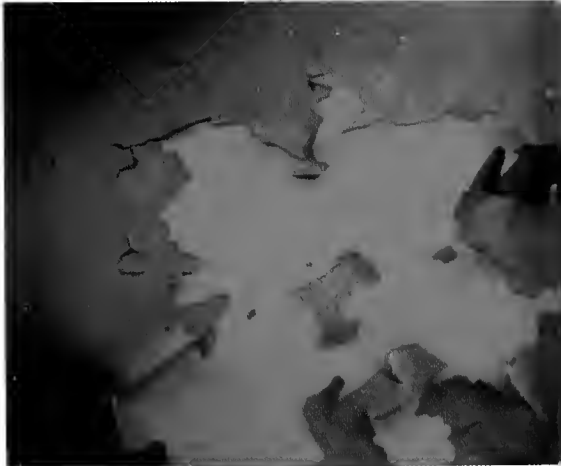
Insan Sauti
(Robert S. Preston)



Insan Sauti (Robert S. Preston)

Insan Sauti was born in Lowell, Massachusetts on March 8, 1949. He is presently serving a "life" sentence in Norfolk Prison where he is Co-Director of the Elma Lewis Technical Theatre Training Program, a drummer for the institution band "Astro-Infinity Plus One," and is a student of U-Mass, Amherst U.W.W. (University Without Walls) Program working toward a B.A. in Theatre Arts. His first play, "The Installment Plan," was the recipient of the 1972 *Barbedwire Theatre Literary Award*, and was first published in the *Drama and Theatre Magazine*. Co-Author of the prison anthology "Who Took the Weight?"—short stories, plays, poetry and essays, his poetry has since appeared in *Zahir*, *The Onyx*, *Write On*, *BAD*, *Hey Out There*, and *RALSA*. He has done several public readings around the Massachusetts area and has recently completed his first book of poetry, "Makungu"—still in manuscript.

THE UNITS, OR



WERE THEY DORMS?



WHEN THE WALLS BECOME TOO COLD, AND THE
CLOSENESS OF MY CELL SHOUTS AT ME AND TELLS
ME THAT I DON'T EXIST . . . I TELL MYSELF THAT
"I AM", AND IN BEING WHAT I MAY, IN ORDER TO
KNOW MYSELF, I MUST BECOME CLOSER TO MY OWN
INNER MOTIVATIONS, BRINGING THE NEARNESS OF THE
WALLS INTO AN AREA OF CONTROLLED AND UTILIZED
KNOWLEDGE WITH WHICH I UNIFY MY MIND.

KEETIE . . .





*Yesterday, when the fragrance of
my peoples' brow became their first river
of independence we sang songs of freedom
as we worked in your fields.*

*And when you thought that you had raped
my great race to the lowest point of intimidation,
we stood up and spoke with what you could only
term as "sass."*

*And when you wanted us to think that you "might" be
getting ready to start considering us as "Nee-grows,"
we tore up your cities and told you our names.*

*So now you say that in this opportune land of your free,
you have a plan that will show us how sincere
you are in helping my people to become
as equal as you.*

*Only this will never do,
because the taste of salt is still in our mouths
and the blisters on our feet
ain't even started to get ready to consider
thinking about healing*



I LOVE YOU BECAUSE

You are the one Woman who has lifted my spirit.
You have instilled in me the will to Live on.
I seek my solitude in the Comfort of your Arms.
You are my Beginning and my End.
You are my Eternity, Infinity, and Utopia.
Without you, there is no me, no Today's, no Tomorrow's,
or Yesterdays.
In you I see Our Lives renewed a Billion times.
When I am beaten and down hearted, you give me
Hope to strive on.
After all of this
I have YOU BECAUSE YOU ARE MY BLACK WOMAN.

Frank (Hakim) Meranda



HAPPY REMEMBRANCES/PROBLEM FRIENDS

Yesterday, I was alone
But I found some friends today
I started recalling people I knew
A long time ago
They filled me with remembrances
Of lovely moments long ago
Which today brought me, great affection
I was alone yesterday, But I found
Some friends today.

Though they do not consider me
The friend I consider them
And if their hearts do not thrill for me
The way mine thrills for them
They will always be my friends!

Their love for me
May be just a dimly-lit affection
I'll try to make my love for them
Keep glowing on forever.
Though I cannot go near them—just now
May not I still Love them.

Charles Bracy

The Installment Plan

by
INSAN SAUTI

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Dedicated to the many Black Men
who have been forced into living
their lives on *installments*. And
to

John (Dinky) Elliott, who closed
out his account permanently—while
on one of his many visits to minimum
security. (May Allah put a thousand
curses on his antagonists.)

CHARACTERS

Kitu (writer)
Alton
Kappie (drummer)
New Man (no name)
Cardplayer 1
Cardplayer 2
Cardplayer 3
Cardplayer 4
Guard
Gerald (Alton's brother-in-law)
Choker (pusher)
3 Junkies
White Cop
2 Bro. Selling Papers
Dee (pimp)
Holly and Susanne (prostitutes)
Jomo
Sundiata
Bobby Lee
Hasani
Xiomara and Omawale (dancers)
Jessica (Alton's wife)
Isis (Jomo's wife)

TIME ORDER

Scene 1: 1st month through 4th
Scene 2: 2nd month through 3rd
Scene 3: 5th month
Scene 4: 6th month

Scene I

(The curtains open revealing a prison tier with seven cells, each numbered in bold black paint above each entrance. There is a railing extending the length of the tier. On the tier are seven Black men in blue dungarees and blue shirts. Four are engaged in a card game; they are seated on buckets and have a large cardboard resting on their knees. Another man is reading a book on the Black experience; he is seated in front of cell number seven. And another, seated in front of cell four, is busy writing—has papers scattered all about him. The last man sits in front of cell

two; he is beating on an empty box with drumsticks. A uniformed guard enters from stage left and proceeds down the tier, stepping on the writer's papers and kicking the drummer's box as he goes. Both men look in his direction as he proceeds off stage right then return to what they had been doing.)

CARDPLAYER 2: Boy, that's a sick mutha fucka there . . . I bet he came all over his self . . . perverted mutha fucka.

C.P. 4: *(Shuffling the cards.)* Yeah, he's the type that would get him a whore and beat her with a stick, then have her piss in his face.

C.P. 1: Reminds me of when I had my two ladies out on the block . . .

C.P. 4: Aw sucka, quit lying . . . you ain't qualified to turn out a *dog!* . . . That's why you jumped out a tree on that bitch and got yourself this bid.

C.P. 1: Fuck-you sucka . . . I didn't jump that stinking bitch . . .

C.P. 4: What happened then, she jump you?

C.P. 1: She gave it up . . . and later on when her whitey friends saw us together, she hollered *rape* . . . to save her *reputation!*

C.P. 4: Then you still a sucka . . . *sucka!!!!!!!*

C.P. 1: Well, how bout you, *chump?* They say you was doing so bad, you tried to take off a grocery store . . . say they found you in the freezer, eating on² of them pre-cooked *hams*. *(Everybody breaks out in laughter.)* They said . . . when the pigs asked . . . *(Is laughing as he speaks.)* . . . asked you what you was doing there . . . you told them that you was the *security guard!!!!* . . . ha ha ha ha! Now if that ain't a *sucka* then chicken ain't poultry. *(C.P. 1 and C.P. 2 slap each other five.)*

C.P. 3: Com'on ya'll, play cards . . . ya'll can signify later on. *(C.P. 4 begins to deal the cards, C.P. 2 is looking into C.P. 1's hand.)*

C.P. 1: Hey sucka, get your damn nose out my hand.

C.P. 2: Shit nigger, the way you be holding that mutha fucka, Ray Charles could see it.

C.P. 3: Com'on man, what cha'll gonna do, run your jibs or play cards? My back is sore . . . I think I'm gonna quit after this game anyways.

C.P. 4: Well you ain't got long to wait, cuz ya'll gonna be leaving damn soon, ha! *(Slams card down on board.)*

C.P. 2: *(In a whining tone.)* Damn man, why you do that? You saw I was out of *clubs*.

C.P. 3: Say man, no talking over the gaddam board. . . . That's what I hate about you niggers . . . *(Is cut off by the Loud Speaker.)*

L.S.: Alton Shannon, report to the H.M.I.C. Alton Shannon, report to the H.M.I.C. *(Man in front of cell seven stands and goes off stage left. Everyone glances in his direction, then returns to what he was doing.)*

C.P. 2: Now where *he* going?

C.P. 3: Might be going to pick up his walking papers.

C.P. 4: Walking papers?! Shit, he ain't going no damn place. That Lame got a record as long as fifty tapeworms, plus he done got hooked up in that Black Bullshit. The parole board'll hurry up and turn him down. They don't want to hear no shit like that.

C.P. 3: If he goes anyplace, you can bet it won't be for long. (*He stretches his arms and yawns.*) If "they" let him go, it'll be cuz he shows promise of coming back . . . Got to stay in business, y'know?

C.P. 2: Say, I heard that Jimmie James is on his way back . . .

C.P. 3: Yeah . . . (*Yawn.*) . . . Bring his two brothers with him . . . Say they was stretching out to the suburbs with their smack trade . . .

C.P. 2: Yeah, them ole rich whiteys didn't dig that shit at all . . . When the man came down on 'em, they had \$250,000 worth of pure dynamite action, plus a few shot-guns and 38's. Boy, them lames wasn't jiving. (*All nod their heads in agreement, WRITER begins to put his papers away.*)

WRITER: That ought to tell you something.

C.P. 4: Here goes that stiff again. Go on, rigor mortis, what you got to say?

WRITER: You keep up that bullshit, you won't be around to hear it.

C.P. 4: Aw man, can't nobody jive with you?

WRITER: (*Ignoring C.P. 4.*) That ought to tell you where they're really at. They don't give a damn, as long as we're messing over ourselves, but the minute we think about giving them a taste of their own medicine, they jump on us with both feet.

C.P. 4: Say man, what you saying, it's alright to push that shit? (*Everyone sits up attentively.*)

WRITER: (*Looking at C.P. 4 with disgust.*) Man, why are you so dumb? I'm saying, Black folk ain't got no money, and you're always talking bout how qualified you are to get some . . . Then, how come you're fooling around where there ain't nothing but pennies? . . . like a . . . like a parasite. Why ain't you out where the *real* money is? "Our own money!," stolen from *us, our mamas and our wives*, every time we pay taxes, buy furniture, pay rent for them *rat-traps*, or pay twice as much for something that has half the quality they say it has . . . I ain't saying dealing *death* is right, but, if you're gonna do it *anyways*, why put it on *yourself*? Put it back on the same beast that put it on you.

C.P. 4: Aw man, I think you losing your mind. This *time* must be getting to you.

WRITER: Man, why don't you wake up. Them whiteys be coming down on the Black Community like some kind of blood thirsty *vultures* . . . They be drinking us dry . . . y'know what we're like? We're like an *apple tree* . . . everytime we come up with something . . . some new apples . . . they run in and rip them off. (*They start laughing, WRITER looks at them angrily.*) Man, I'm serious. Name me anything somebody Black came up with, and I'll show you where whitey co-opted it . . . The vice-president is talking bout "getting down to the nitty gritty". . . (*They break out with a wave of laughter.*) . . . I don't dig Jimmie James' intentions, but, I support the act. . . It's about time we started getting out in them suburbs

getting some of our apples back. . .

C.P. 4: Shit man, with the time them lames is gonna get, they can keep them fucking apples. (*The others laugh and nod their heads in agreement.*)

WRITER: And you ain't doing big time *now*, fool? You ain't doing nothing but *life*, on the "installment Plan."

C.P. 4: Shit, it's better than doing it straight across the board like you . . . You ain't never gonna leave this place . . . You ain't got no hope.

WRITER: All I got to do is make a deal with the *devil* and I'll be as good as *out*! Now ain't that a *bitch*, here it is the twentieth century, and we're still selling our souls to the *devil*! (*GUARD walks back on from stage right.*)

GUARD: All right, let's keep the noise down.

C.P. 3: Com'on, let's finish the game. (*WRITER goes into cell four. GUARD proceeds off stage left. He bumps into ALTON, who is returning to the tier.*)

GUARD: You got a pass, Shannon? (*ALTON shows him his pass and is ready to leave.*) And watch where you're going next time.

ALTON: Man, fuck you! (*ALTON walks on. GUARD writes something on a piece of paper, then disappears.*)

C.P. 2: Say, homeboy, where you been?

ALTON: I been to the mountain, and saw me some streets . . . I'm leaving this rat-hole . . . Not next week, tomorrow, or today, but yesterday. (*Everybody becomes alive with excitement.*) Yeah man, my lease done expired, and I'm overdue by a day. My case was overturned in court and I'm a free man . . . I got to get my things together. (*ALTON hurries into cell seven, comes out with a box of miscellaneous items and a radio. He walks down the tier to the drummer, who has stopped beating on the box, and gives him the radio.*) It has a hard time getting A.M. when it's raining, but otherwise it's in pretty good shape.

DRUMMER: Solid man, be cool. You almost didn't make it this time.

ALTON: Yeah, Kappie, I know, but I ain't worried. I still have some cash left over from my last score. It ain't much, but it'll help me get over the hump. It's them first few months. If I can make 'em, I'll be okay.

KAPPIE: You gonna say good-bye to Kitu?

ALTON: Naw man, Kitu said that he's doing too much time to be saying any good-byes . . .

KAPPIE: I can dig it.

ALTON: Tell him, I'll send him in some writing material and try to stay in touch with him . . . You take care of yourself. (*Turns to CARDPLAYERS, who have resumed their game.*) I'm gonna miss ya'll, y'know that?

C.P. 4: Yeah, home, we gonna miss you too.

C.P. 1: Say man, if you see my brother out there, you tell him that the state don't pay but every three months, and ask him what he's gonna do. (*C.P. 2 and C.P. 4 are discussing something; they end their short conversation with a handshake.*)

ALTON: I don't plan to be on any of them sets, but if I see him, I'll run it. (*He shakes hands with everyone, then exits stage left. GUARD returns, shouting.*)

GUARD: All right, let's get this show on the road . . . Com'on, let's go. (*He stands and watches as each man enters his cell, comes out with a box, and moves down*

one cell, all except for KITU in cell four. When the others have moved, they return to the tier and to what they were doing. A NEW MAN enters from stage left and moves into cell one.)

(Light recedes into blackness, then rises again. NEW MAN comes out of his cell, walks over to the card game. KAPPIE nods his head to the MAN as he passes by. It is three months later.)

C.P. 4: Say, my man, what you bring with you?

NEW MAN: 10 to 15, armed robbery.

C.P. 2: You a veteran, or is this your first?

N.M.: Naw, I got some time in down south A couple of small ones on the coast, and on the island.

C.P. 4: Damn man, then you should feel right at home. (C.P. 2 is looking into C.P. 1's hand again.)

C.P. 1: Hey sucker! There you go again, looking in my muthafucking hand.

C.P. 2: Shit, as bad as you play, what I got to look in your hand for? You just waiting to give up the game anyways. Youse a freak for losing. (KITU comes out of his cell, walks over to where NEW MAN is standing.)

C.P. 3: (Noticing KITU'S arrival.) Com'on man, play cards.

KITU: All you stiffs are freaks for losing. Somehow, we been faked out to think we' winning. . . .

C.P. 4: (Ignoring him.) Say man, I heard they caught Baby Love, backing out a bank with two of his whores. Say they wasn't bring in no cash pounding the bricks, and Baby Love couldn't support his habit. (KITU and NEW MAN go into conversation between themselves.)

C.P. 2: I don't believe that shit. Junkies don't be robbing no banks They be too busy nodding, plus they ain't got the heart.

C.P. 4: Well that's what the wires say.

C.P. 3: Probably one of the bitches talked him up on it.

C.P. 2: Yeah, he was probably half in a nod and thought they was taking him to the pusher. Ha ha ha ha.

C.P. 4: Hope the muthafucker got some pussy before he did it, cause it's gonna be a long time 'fore he cop some more. (Everybody breaks out into laughter, which is cut off by a loud scream coming from one of the other tiers.)

VOICE: A-A-A-A-G-G-G-H-H-H-, lemme out the fucking place, oh god, God, God, fuck you too, you don't care either. Don't nobody care. Don't nobody care Git away from here Git away from me (Sounds of a struggle.) Help!! A-A-A-A-G-G-G-G-H-H-H Don't nobody give a damn Don't nobody give a damn!!!! (Voice fades out, everyone has stopped what they were doing; they are looking at each other; KAPPIE begins drumming on box again.)

C.P. 4: Hey sucker, why don't you give it a break, huh? (KAPPIE ignores him, continues to play louder. C.P. 4 starts for KAPPIE, but 3 and 2 grab him.)

C.P. 2: Be cool man 'fore they be taking you out of here too. (The three go into cell six.)

NEW MAN: (Looks at C.P. 1.) What do you think they gonna do with him? (Pointing in the direction of voice.)

C.P. 1: He's going to the funny farm It ain't nothing, dudes be going off their tree all the time.

Like, you gonna learn, that there ain't but three ways out of this joint . . . either you is dragged out like him (Points in direction of voice.) or you can walk out, like Im'ma do, or you is carried out like Ole Jake.

KITU: (Had been writing, now puts down pen and papers, then walks over to where the others are standing.) Yeah, Ole Jake had been down all his life . . . from the time he was nine years old That's when the State sentenced him to life on "The Installment Plan" He never stayed out more than six months at a time. Finally he caught one big one and died here . . . he was 65 then. All his folks were dead, so they buried him outside the wall in a little plot of land, kept just for that purpose. Didn't nobody care, just another nigger the State didn't have to support, anymore.

KAPPIE: (Stops his drumming and joins the group.) Yeah man, don't nobody care. You can rot in here. Only thing people there in society care about is, they ain't got to deal with you anymore. They don't care about what happens once you in here. Sometimes I be wishing everyone of their women was raped, everyone of their men was offed, and everyone of their children got a heroin habit

C.P. 1: (Chuckles to himself.) Man, wouldn't that be a bitch?

KAPPIE: Sometimes I'm really bitter, like now, but the reality of the situation makes you that way. . . . Do you know why I'm here? Huh? They snatched me up for playing my drums. (NEW MAN looks at him incredulously.) Yeah, they P.V.ed me cause it looked like I was gonna make it.

NEW MAN: You mean all you did was play drums, and they pulled your papers?

KAPPIE: Damn right. Said I was violating my parole by being in an unconducive atmosphere. I tried to tell them suckas, that I been playing drums all my life. . . . since I was four. . . . Man, that's all I know.

KITU: The parole system is full of shit! It's like letting a horse out to exercise. . . when you think he's been out long enough, you put him back under lock and key. . . irregardless of whether the horse wants to be locked back up again. . . . You are the master!!!! Naw, they don't give a damn about a man at all. I know, I've been down twelve years and I've seen a lot. . . .

NEW MAN: Twelve years????!!!! Who'd you kill, the president's cousin??

KITU: Naw man, it happened when I believed in amerikkkan justice, and the righteousness of the beast. I got high one night. . . I was going with this ole white girl at the time, we got to beefing and I knocked her in the jaw. . . she pressed charges and I ended up with assault with intent to rape, assault with intent to murder, intent to rob, and assault and battery. . . .

NEW MAN: Boy, my daddy always said, "Son, a white woman ain't shit, she's out for pleasure, and when it is over, so ain't you." But I can understand the bullshit charges they put you through. . . but most of the time. . . you end up doing only part of the time. . . . How come you been down so long??

KAPPIE: (Cutting off what KITU was about to say.) Cuz the brother got a lot to go with, and them pigs don't dig that at all. They say he ain't leaving til he break—like everyone else, and he ain't breaking!!!!

C.P. 1: And he's dangerous to be around, they'll be thinking that you are like him. Com'on, let's check out what them guys is up to. (C.P. 1 and NEW MAN leave, KAPPIE and KITU watch them go.)

KAPPIE: Well, there goes another one.

KITU: I don't know, he listened, and that's the first step. I remember when you first came in. That was the first thing that set you away from the others. . . .

KAPPIE: Yeah, well you have more faith than I do.

KITU: Or maybe I'm just a little better at disguising my despair. (KAPPIE nods his head in agreement.)

KAPPIE: Yeah, maybe you are. (They fall into silence.) You heard anything new on Alton?

KITU: Naw, last I heard, he was having a pretty hard time.

KAPPIE: That's what I heard too. (Pause.) Do you think he'll make it?

KITU: I don't know, he's been out about four months now. . . . If he can make it past the six month point, he's got a good chance. But that's the hardest point. (Uniformed GUARD enters from stage left with brown paper bag. He enters cell six, when he comes back out his hands are empty. He proceeds off stage right, sneering at KITU and KAPPIE as he goes. They shake their heads in frustration.) Say, did you hear anything 'bout one of those Black Centers being raided by the pigs?

KAPPIE: Yeah, they say it was full of women and children when it happened.

KITU: When are we gonna wake up? I mean to the point where we will do something. . . . (C.P. 4 comes out of cell six scratching.)

C.P. 4: Say man, ya'll ought to cop. . . . Oh, that's right, ya'll don't be messing with no stuff. (Sits down on one of the buckets.) Y'know, this bid wouldn't be all that bad if we could stay high all the time. . . . Yeah. . . (Goes off into a nod.)

KITU: Look at him! We's freaks for losing. (Kicks at the air.) Man, if we would only open our eyes and just look. . . . (Shakes his head in despair.) I'm tired brother. . . I been down too long and I got battle scars all over my soul. . . . I be just watching as these brothers be popping in and out. It's like watching the same old movie over and over, 'cept the cast is always changing. . . . (Shakes his head as if to clear it.) I feel strange, like something deep inside of me is saying I'm not gonna make it.

KAPPIE: Aw man, don't worry 'bout it. If anybody's gonna make it, you will. . . . (Voice blares out over the loud speaker.)

VOICE: Ronald Seller! Ronald Seller! report to the H.M.I.C., Ronald Seller! Ronald Seller! report to the H.M.I.C. (C.P. 3 comes out of cell and goes off stage left.)

KITU: (Shaking his head in despair, his hands are beginning to tremble.) The same ole same ole time and time again. . . . Man. . . . Man. . . .

KAPPIE: Com'on, Kitu, get yourself together man. . . . Don't let them get you too. (KAPPIE puts his arm around KITU'S shoulder.)

KITU: (Seemingly oblivious.) If I could just be out there one more time. . . . Man, do you know what I would do for a home-cooked meal. . . . My mother died after I was down seven. . . . (He begins shaking uncontrollably.)

KAPPIE: I think you better lay down awhile. . . . You need some rest. (KAPPIE takes KITU into cell four, then comes out and goes into cell three. A long scream is heard from cell four. KAPPIE rushes back. The screams continue. KAPPIE'S voice can be heard between screams.)

KAPPIE: Com'on man, you'll be all right. . . . You strong. . . . the baddest brother in the joint. . . . com'on Kitu, they can't break you. . . . com'on now. . . . (One exceptionally long and loud scream is heard. Lights fade to darkness.)

Curtain

Scene 2

(Curtains open. Lights come up on street scene. There are four buildings standing next to each other, between the first two is an alleyway. The first building is a run-down, three story tenement with a large rat on the second floor window sill. There is a pusher standing in front. The second building is a modern high-rise building; there are two neatly dressed brothers with papers under their arms; they are in conversation with each other. The third building is a night club with a large sign over the entrance that reads "Shilte Lounge". There is a man, extravagantly dressed, with two tall and very beautiful black women, one is wearing a mini and the other hot pants. The woman in hot pants hugs the man as he receives money from the other mini-skirted woman; she puts a lump of bills in his hand, he looks at them, slaps her in the face and puts his hand back out again; she digs down along the waist of her skirt and produces more; they all walk into the lounge. The last building is a store front with a large sign that reads "Uhuru House". A Black woman enters from stage left; she is adorned in African dress. She enters the building. Lights fade out into darkness and rise on the three story tenement. A junkie has come out of the alleyway; he is shabbily dressed. He walks over to the pusher and is copping, when a uniformed Pig walks by, purposefully looking in the other direction. The junkie cops, then goes off through the alleyway. ALTON is seen entering from stage right wearing work clothes and carrying a lunch pail. A young Black man comes out behind him, calling his name. It is GERALD, ALTON'S brother-in-law.)

GERALD: Al, hey, Al. (ALTON stops, looks back and waits for him to catch up.) Say man, when d'you get out?

ALTON: Been out 'bout two months now, beat them on a tech.

GERALD: (Enthusiasm evident in his voice.) Shit man, you home free then, no strings attached. What you planning on doing? (Continues on before ALTON can answer.) I see your man around a lot. He's doing gooder than a muthafucka. . . got him a few whores y'know, and they taking good care of him.

ALTON: (Showing surprise and disbelief.) Who you talking 'bout, Dee???

GERALD: Hell yeah! He's killing them. Got money coming in all kinds of ways. (ALTON shakes his head in disgust.) Dig it, Al, I know you don't dig no woman making your money for you, and I was thinking, since

your main man done went and changed up on you. . . y'know. . . if you need a partner, I got some joints lined up; maybe me and you can get down together, y'know?

ALTON: Naw, Gerry, Im'ma try to straighten up, y'know. . . (He lifts lunch pail, GERALD looks at it disdainfully.) Besides your sister would never get off my case, if I brought you out. . . (Pause.) Ain't you suppose to be in school? (GERALD looks down at the ground.)

GERALD: I quit school. They don't wanna teach nothing anyways. They use to pay me to take the day off and go to the movies. Now I done out-grown movies and school. (He looks back up at ALTON, life returns to his voice.) Anyway, damn it, you ain't got to let Jessi know. Com'on, Al, these is big money money joints. (They begin walking, PUSHER steps over in front of them; he has jewelry all over and is in all pink.)

GERALD: Say, Choker, what's going down?

CHOKER: (Flashing money.) It's coming in good, baby. Wanna cop?

GERALD: What'cha got?

CHOKER: Smoke, bombers, coke, hashish, and the big one, and I don't mean Bud. . . (Both break out in laughter.)

ALTON: He don't want nothing, so keep stepping. (ALTON goes to walk on, but CHOKER steps into his path.)

CHOKER: Say, don't I know you from somewhere? (Pause.) Yeah, you did some for the State, right? . . . right, I remember you. . . was real evil, didn't fuck with nobody and didn't let no-one fuck with you.

ALTON: I see you ain't learned nothing from your stay. . . .

CHOKER: (Looking ALTON over.) Course I learned something; I come out knowing how to get to the money twice as fast. . . . (Looking at ALTON'S attire.) You the one look like you ain't learned nothing.

ALTON: I learned to respect myself and my people. . . . And I supporting nobody's death trip. . . . youse a parasite, living off your own people's misery. . . . A foul, low-lifed bloodsucka!!!!!!!

CHOKER: Watch your mouth, sucka. . . . (Smiles.) Besides, if I wasn't doing it someone else would. Shit, it ain't like I'm forcing them fools to shoot that shit, they wanna do it, and I wanna live right. You can say we have sort of an agreement. I take care of their jones and they take care of mine. Here comes one of my business associates now. . . . (Another JUNKIE has come on stage from the alleyway. There is a short rap; then CHOKER is on the JUNKIE, shaking him. ALTON drops his lunch pail and grabs CHOKER, pushes him away, and goes to help JUNKIE up. GERALD looks on incredulously. CHOKER is on ALTON, he turns, hits CHOKER in stomach, CHOKER falls and curls up. JUNKIE looks down at CHOKER then up to ALTON, says in a whining tone:)

JUNKIE: Damn man, why you wanna do that? The dude would have straightened me out when it was all over, shit, now I might not cop. (ALTON puts his hand on JUNKIE'S shoulder, is about to speak. JUNKIE pulls away.) Git your hands off me, muthafucka, you done made me blow! (ALTON goes into CHOKER'S pockets and comes out with a handful of small

packets; he gives them to JUNKIE who rushes off through the alleyway.)

GERALD: Ga'damn! Al, what they done did to you in that place? You know that's bad business. Why you come down on that dude like that? Everybody got to make a living, you can't knock a man for that. Wait till you out here a little longer, you'll see. . . .

ALTON: Listen, Gerry, I said I'm going straight! Now if you got any sense you'd get your ass back in school and try to get out of this rat trap!!!

GERALD: Fuck school and fuck you too. . . . Stiff. . . I use to look up to you, thought you was really something big. Know what I think? I think you lost your heart. . . I think you left it back there behind them walls. (GERALD turns and goes off the way he came on. ALTON looks after him, then he picks up his pail and proceeds on. Lights dim on tenement and rise on the modern high-rise. ALTON is confronted by two BROTHERS selling papers.)

1ST BRO: Excuse me, brother, buy a copy of our latest edition? (ALTON stops, looks down at papers, then up at the BROTHERS, goes into his pocket and comes out with some change.)

ALTON: How much is it?

1ST BRO.: Twenty-five cents, sir. (ALTON looks up at the BROTHER strangely, sorts out the right change and gives it to him. He is about to move on, when the BROTHER interrupts his departure.)

1ST BRO.: Excuse me, brother, would you be interested in attending one of our meetings?

ALTON: When are they?

2ND BRO.: Monday and Tuesday evenings, brother.

ALTON: Hmmm, I don't know. . . don't get much free time these days. (Uniformed COP returns, walks over to where ALTON and the BROTHERS are standing.)

COP: All right, keep it moving, no loitering.

ALTON: (To the BROTHERS as he is moving on.) Listen, if I'm in the area I may check it out. (ALTON moves on. Lights slowly dim on high-rise and come up on lounge.)

2ND BRO.: You didn't get the address. (ALTON has moved on to the next set; he is looking behind him and bumps into a tall Black WOMAN in mini.)

ALTON: Oh, excuse me. (He looks her up and down. She is a nice looking woman, youngish looking. She looks ALTON up and down, smiling. She is a prostitute. There is music coming out of the lounge behind them.)

WOMAN: Think nothing of it, honey. My name is Holly.

ALTON: Yeah, nice to meet you. (He goes to walk around her but she steps into his path.)

HOLLY: Where you rushing to? Don't you want to talk to me? (MAN comes out of the lounge wearing a green wide-brim hat, white and green knit slacks, white shoes, and has rings on all his fingers; he is wearing dark shades.)

MAN: Better move on, Baby, ain't nothing there. My man has a strong dislike for whores. (He makes a motion with his head for her to leave. She walks down to alleyway and disappears. . . . MAN looks at ALTON, looks him up and down, shakes his head.) Damn, man, what happened to you? How long you been out?

ALTON: I should be asking you that. What hap-

pened to the big money you was gonna send me when you split? (*Cuts him off before he answers.*) Never mind, I don't even wanna hear it. Youse a jive M. F., you know that, don't you?

DEE: Aw, Al. I was gonna send it. I was.

ALTON: (*Ignoring his remark.*) I heard you done started pimping. Was she yours? (*Points in direction HOLLY went.*)

DEE: (*Pushing out his chest.*) Yep! Had her five months now. (*A tall and very beautiful Black WOMAN comes out of the lounge. She has a large Afro, is wearing a white short-sleeved sweater-blouse, red and blue hot pants, and high tie-up white sandals. She walks over to DEE, reaches into her purse and gives him a handful of crumpled bills, is about to leave but DEE grabs her arm.*) Stick around, bitch! I want you to meet my Main Man. (*Looks at ALTON.*) This is Susanne, been with me 'bout a year now. Biggest money-maker in town.

ALTON: Man, you done really sunk low. . . .

DEE: (*Look of amazement on his face.*) Say man, didn't you hear me? I said they's the baddest bitches in town. . . on the whole coast. . . Can't nothing with a hole bring in as much as they can. . . . What you talking 'bout I sunk. . . .

ALTON: I'm talking 'bout your respect, fool! She's a woman, not a horse or some slab of beef, sold to the highest bidder. . . . You didn't do the time I did. . . . But let me tell you something. While I was in the joint, I had a chance to find out what a woman can really mean. . . . Man, like, she becomes gold. (*ALTON is in a trance-like stare, engrossed in his own words and thoughts. Meanwhile DEE has sent SUSANNE back into the lounge for cigarettes; he looks back at ALTON who is still rapping.*) If you ain't got a friend in the joint, it don't make no difference, as long as you got a good woman. . . . Everytime she write, telling you how much she love you, it makes you feel like you can take on every screw in the joint. You ain't got to come out no funny bag on her, you can be yourself. . . . (*SUSANNE returns with cigarettes. She opens the pack, places one in DEE'S mouth, then lights it, and puts the pack into his coat pocket. DEE is considering ALTON who is now finishing up his rap.*) . . . and when she comes up to visit, and she has the kids with her, you be feeling like there ain't nobody out in that visiting room as happy as you. (*He smiles to himself.*)

DEE: Al, I know Jessi, and she's a dynamite bit. . . woman. But, most these bitches ain't like that. Like, take Susanne for example, if I was to pull some time, she'd be in another nigger's bed, before the State had a chance to re-outfit me. . . .

SUSANNE: (*Wrapping her arm around his waist.*) Daddy, I wouldn't do that.

DEE: Shut-up bitch! But, anyways, that's the way things go out here. . . cop and blow. . . Today you got it, maybe tomorrow you don't, but if you got anything on the ball, you can always cop again.

ALTON: Yeah man, but if you treat a woman like a dog, she gonna start acting like one.

DEE: Man, you can't let up on them for a minute, or you is liable to blow. . . . You have to keep the pressure on. Hey man, how else am I gonna survive out here, I need money, and I ain't gonna pull no slave time for whitey in some sweat shop. How I'm gonna keep by

Rado, or my wardrobe? (*He looks at ALTON'S clothes and shakes his head from side to side, then looks down at his own and smiles.*) All this takes money to keep up. . . you know that, man.

ALTON: Dee, you know that ain't the only way to get next to some cash, plus half the shit you be spending it on ain't even worth it. . . . (*Looks DEE in the eye.*) You ever think of saving some of it?

DEE: (*Incredulously.*) For what?! What I want, I need now, not tomorrow, next year or ten years from now. I wants my money quick, fast and in a hurry-up, and I got me two of the baddest bitches in town to get it for me. (*Puts his arm around SUSANNE.*)

ALTON: That's another thing. . . . I remember when we was running up in them joints, how we swore never to depend on no milk-toaters for our money, cause that was a faggot's way of getting it.

DEE: Yeah, well I did some deep thinking and found out what a fool I was.

ALTON: How much of a fool you was????

DEE: Yeah, man, the thing is, to get to the money. Damn how you do it. Just get it.

ALTON: (*Shakes his head in frustration.*) Damn, man, brothers is changing up all cross country. . . .

DEE: Wait a minute, Al, I don't wanna hear none of that Black bullshit, cause them niggers ain't doing nothing. Got them young ladies down there freefucking!!

ALTON: Is that suppose to justify what you're doing? You hiding behind something as flaky as that?? Man, you're really down to rock bottom.

DEE: Say man, in this life you do what you got to do. (*HOLLY returns, gives DEE some money. He looks at it, counts it and looks back at her, slaps her across the face, then puts his hand back out. HOLLY reaches into her blouse and comes out with a few more dollars. DEE counts it, nods his head in satisfaction. Uniformed COP walks by, noticing nothing. Both WOMEN walk into the lounge. DEE turns back to ALTON who is looking on in disgust. He shrugs his shoulders and begins to rap again.*) Did you know that Slow Willy is back on the bricks? (*ALTON shakes his head no and mumbles something under his breath.*)

DEE: What?

ALTON: Nothing. I locked on the same tier with him. All he did was play cards all day. What's he doing?

DEE: Little bit of everything. Got a after hour joint over on Suffolk St., does some dealing for the gangsters and has a couple of whores on the side. Got a light jones too.

ALTON: He'll be going back. (*Silence for a few seconds; ALTON looks at his watch.*) Listen man, I got to split else I'm gonna get fired. I'll catch you around. . . and think about what I said.

DEE: And here's something for you to think about. . . . There's plenty of bitches out here, just waiting to cock their legs and bring daddy some scratch, and they ain't no dog bitches either, they's sho'nuff foxes. Now when that eight hour grind gets to grinding at your ass, you think about that, cause the money is big and easy and I know you qualified to make the most of it. (*He turns and begins to walk towards the lounge, hollering back over his shoulder.*) Like the "Tempts" say: "Think about it, Think about it, Think about it."

(ALTON watches him till he disappears into the lounge. Lights begin to fade out slowly on lounge and come up on store front. There is a group of Black people coming out of the store front all dressed in African garb. ALTON turns and looks in their direction. He begins walking towards them. They are chanting, "Uhuru Sasa au vita", over and over. One tall man, wearing a multicolored fez and a full length African robe walks up to ALTON, gives Black handshake. He is JOMO.)

JOMO: Jambo ndugu, my name is Jomo, Jomo Mau. (He points to the others. There are three women and two men, one who is wearing black leather jacket, black shirt and pants. He is leaning against the building, watching, as the sisters practice an African dance step.) That's Sundiata Chaka, (Points at the other brother, dressed in a dashiki and slacks. He has a bald head.) and the sisters are Omawale, Hasani, and Xionara. We run this place here. (Points at building and notices brother standing there.) Oh! that's our Antagonist Non-Solutionist, Bobby Lee Johnson. (BOBBY LEE hollers over.)

BOBBY LEE: If you got any sense man, you'll keep stepping, 'fore they launch you off to dream land, along with them.

JOMO: (Smiles.) Bobby's a demolition expert. He could level this country in no time, but he can't think of anything to put in its place once he's through. Personally, I think he feels something for us and what we're about, cause he is here every day. I think deep inside he knows the necessity of educating our people first.

SUNDIATA: And that's what we're about, "Putting something in our peoples' heads so, they may build as well as destroy. Build for self!"

JOMO: That's why we have this place here. This is our Freedom House, our freedom school, where Black children and adults may come and get their heads together; it's a community center, where Black folk can "be" together. The whole emphasis is placed on "Pamoja" which is togetherness. (One of the sisters leaves the group dancing, and comes over to where the men are speaking.)

HASANI: Jambo wadugu!

JOMO AND SUNDIATA: (Together.) Jambo, Dada yangu!

ALTON: Hi!

HASANI: (Looking at ALTON, smiling warmly.) Do you have children, Ndugu?

ALTON: Yes, two sons.

JOMO: Ahhhh, two warriors. . . Simba . . . That's where our futures lie. In them, is our future liberation. . . the liberation of the nation, our nation. We must prepare the way by providing them with the proper education and skills. Sister Hasani, here, has charge of our nursery section. Children are very important in our struggle. Even Choker, down the street, doesn't want his son to push drugs for a living.

ALTON: Hupph! He doesn't present too good of an example.

BOBBY LEE: (Who has walked over to where they are standing.) Somebody ought to make him an example. . . Like blow his head off. . . We been plagued with dumb niggers long enough. . . You can't be nodding on the battlefield, in a time of war. We been

sleep long enough. . . that nigger is useless.

SUNDIATA: Well, maybe he's right, this time, but, we got enough with whitey killing us off. . . ain't no need to give them no help.

JOMO: Listen, brother, why don't you bring your simbas down here, and maybe stop in yourself. We don't claim that what we have is the thing, but it is an alternative to the other mess that isn't getting anybody anywhere.

ALTON: I might, it sounds pretty good; but I doubt if I could make it too often, like, I'm a working man now. (Holds up pail.)

JOMO: Yeah, I been digging.

ALTON: Just got out the joint, a couple months ago, been trying to make it out here legit, y'know? (SUNDIATA, BOBBY LEE and HASANI have returned to the other group. BOBBY and SUNDIATA watch on as HASANI is shown the new dance.)

JOMO: It ain't easy, brother; I've seen a lot of brothers come out, and not make it. They find that without any skills or education, they get the dregs of employment. And if they have a family to support, it's really hell.

ALTON: Yeah, I'm so hip.

JOMO: Listen, brother, if you ever need any assistance, just drop on by. That's what we're here for.

ALTON: Solid, I'll remember that. . . uh. . .

JOMO: Jomo, Jomo Mau.

ALTON: Jomo. (He smiles, waves good-bye to the others, and is moving on, when uniformed COP returns. ALTON goes off stage left. COP stops at the group, says something and gets into a big argument. All the BROTHERS and SISTERS have surrounded him. Lights dim, then fade to blackness.)

Curtain

Scene 3

(Curtains open. Lights come up on living room scene. There is a modern living room set—a couch, one reclining chair, and another—there is a stereo hi-fi, a dining table, and two pole lamps. There is a window directly center up stage. Beneath the window is the couch, on either side, the pole lamps. At stage right there are two doors, in between the doors is a chair, beside it is a small night table with a telephone. At stage left there is one door; beside it, coming down stage is the recliner, then the stereo hi-fi. At center stage sits the dining table and four straight-backed chairs. Over the couch, on either side of the window is a large picture of Malcolm and one of Garvey. Over the hi-fi is a large African shield crossed by two spears. The lights lower. There is jazz on the stereo. A knock at the door, stage left. A medium-height Black WOMAN with natural hair, rushes from door directly across from it. ALTON enters wearing work clothes and carrying lunch pail, has newspaper under his arm. He grabs the WOMAN and gives her a long kiss; then falls down into recliner.)

JESSICA: What was all that about?

ALTON: Because, the colder it gets out there, the more I enjoy coming home to you.

JESSI: Yeah, well I wish you would remove your home-loving behind out of my recliner till you put on

some decent clothes.

ALTON: Queen Mother of Black Gold, your slightest wish I humbly obey. *(He bows low with a sweeping arm gesture.)*

JESSI: No, my lord and master, it is I who submit totally to your strength and wisdom. O King of Kings. Warrior of the Universe. Unconquerable Black Man. *(ALTON stands and stretches his arms out to her.)*

ALTON: Ours is a love of shared rewards. . . . My queen!

JESSI: My king! *(They embrace and ALTON kisses her in a pecking manner; they separate laughing.)*

ALTON: *(Picking up pail from the floor.)* Where are the kids?

JESSI: Out in the yard, playing. Oh! That man, Jomo Mau, was by here again today. *(ALTON goes through door leading to the bedroom. JESSICA goes back to the kitchen.)*

ALTON: *(From the bedroom.)* Yeah, what'd he want? You'd think he'd be ashamed to show his face around here again, after what he did.

JESSI: All he said was, he had to speak to you, and he would be back later.

ALTON: Well, I got some things I want to say to him anyways. Any mail today?

JESSI: I was hoping you would ask. . . . Just some heavy bills. Seems like no sooner do you pay them, then they asking for more. *(ALTON enters the living room again, has changed work clothes for inexpensive shirt and slacks. Crosses over to the recliner and picks up bills and begins reading them. He shows signs of becoming more depressed with each one he reads. The telephone rings. ALTON gets up to answer it.)*

ALTON: Hello? *(Looks around the room apprehensively.)* What'd I tell you bout calling me here, what if Jessi had answered? I don't care what you got, I got problems too. . . .

JESSI: *(From the other room.)* Who's that, Honey?

ALTON: *(Reflexively hiding the phone.)* Nobody, Baby, just some wise guy. *(Back into the phone.)* . . . Dig it man, I'll see you tomorrow. . . . tomorrow! Damn it!! *(Slams phone down, and just stands. Children can be heard playing. There is a knock at the door. ALTON walks over and opens it to JOMO and a tall Black WOMAN in full-length African dress. She has her hair wrapped. JOMO is wearing Dashiki and slacks.)*

JOMO: Jambo ndugu! *(ALTON, anger evident on his face, doesn't reply.)* Well, aren't you going to let us in? *(ALTON steps aside and they both enter.)*

ALTON: *(Closing the door behind them.)* You know, I ought to knock you in that fool head of yours.

WOMAN: Excuse me, ndugu, is your wife home?

ALTON: *(Pointing to the kitchen door.)* Right through that door there. *(ALTON watches as she goes.)*

JOMO: *(Who is taking a seat at the table.)* She's my priestess, Isis. Named after one of the Egyptian Goddesses. . . . There are very few more dedicated than she is. . . . Dedicated to me, our children and our people. . . .

ALTON: Was she there when the place was raided. . . were your kids there. . . were you there?

JOMO: Come here, brother, sit down and let me

explain something to you. *(ALTON comes over, seats himself, and JOMO continues.)* Now first off, no, my young ones were not there, nor was my wife. I was! . . . Okay now, I can understand your anger, you thought your young warriors would be safe, which they were. . . *(ALTON tries to say something.)* Wait a minute, wait a minute. . . I just want to get this straight. . . .

ALTON: Straight my ass, what about that damn arsenal you people. . . .

JOMO: Brother, you can't be believing all that junk them white folks be running 'bout us. They didn't find nothing but a .22 rifle and some .38 bullets. Man, you know they don't want to see Black folks making any kind of positive steps. They down on us cuz, we for real!

ALTON: *(Jumping up and walking over to the window.)* But man, don't you know I lost my job behind that shit??

JOMO: How am I suppose to know? You haven't been around since it happened. I been by here twice, and your woman hasn't said anything about it.

ALTON: That's because she doesn't know, yet.

JOMO: How are you making it? *(Looking inquisitively.)*

ALTON: I'm making it.

JOMO: *(Rising out of his chair.)* Listen, if there is anything I can do. . . .

ALTON: *(Wheeling around.)* I said I'm making it! . . . Now I don't need any of your help, the welfare's help, or. . . .

JOMO: Brother, I'm not talking about pity, apparently you think I am. I'm talking 'bout communalism. . . . brotherhood!

ALTON: It's all the same. Besides, it was your, so-called, brotherhood that got me in the jam I'm in now. *(Sits in recliner looking at the ceiling.)*

JOMO: Brother, you got an attitude, and you're not thinking. *(Walks over and stands over ALTON.)* We about blackness and getting all our people in a position where they can do for themselves. Only way we can succeed, is by helping each other. Now if you need some assistance. . . .

ALTON: *(Jumping up out of the recliner.)* Man, get out. . . get out my damn house! *(JESSICA and ISIS rush in from the kitchen.)*

JESSI: Honey, what's the matter? *(Stops in-between the two men looking from one to the other. ISIS goes to JOMO'S side.)* What is going on here?

ALTON: Nothing, Baby, my man here is just getting ready to leave. *(He opens the door and stands there. JOMO sends ISIS through first and stops in front of ALTON.)*

JOMO: Brother, I can't figure you out. You're not the same man I met three months ago. *(He shakes his head.)* This is a vicious world, and the man that tries to make it on his own, is doomed to fall, somewhere along the line. *(Heads out the door.)* I wish you all the luck in the world, brother. *(ALTON slams the door behind him.)*

JESSI: Honey, what's the matter? I've never seen you blow up like that before. What did he say?

ALTON: It wasn't nothing.

JESSI: *Nothing!?* Your hollering and screaming all over the place, you throw them out of our house, and say nothing is wrong. Al, you've been acting strange

ever since that thing happened. Is there something else, that you haven't told me about?

ALTON: Listen, Jessi. . . . *(Phone rings; ALTON rushes to pick it up.)* It's your mother. *(JESSICA takes the phone and ALTON goes into the bedroom.)*

JESSI: Hello, Ma. . . fine, fine. No, I didn't, what about Gerald? . . . armed robbery? . . . when, who? . . . Alton? Are you sure, Ma? I mean, he's doing so well on his job, there isn't any need to. . . . *fired? Oh no!*. Yes, Ma, I'll call you back. O.K., bye now. *(JESSICA stands there for a few seconds, turns to go into the bedroom, then stops; ALTON is in the doorway; they stand looking at each other, neither speaking. JESSICA walks over to the table and sits. She puts her head in her hands and begins to weep.)* Why, Al? You were doing so good. . . *(ALTON walks over and puts his arm on her shoulder.)*

ALTON: I tried, Jessi, I really did. But they make it so hard on you. Com'on, Baby, don't cry. *(Tries to wipe tears away with his hanky, but JESSI pulls away; he puts hanky back in his pocket and sits across from her.)* Listen, Baby, just hear me out, O.K.? You got to do that for me. *(She nods her head, wiping tears away with her hand.)*

JESSI: All right, Al, I'll listen.

ALTON: First of all, Baby, I love you, more than a junkie love his stuff, and I wouldn't hurt you or the kids for nothing in the world. Now if you can't understand and believe that, then there ain't no sense in me going on.

JESSI: I believe you, Al.

ALTON: All right. . . . Now you remember when the last of that money ran out, right? *(Nods her head yes.)* Well, I told you then, that we had to get more money than I was making on my job, if we was gonna survive. Well, I was gonna try to get a raise from the boss, but, before I got around to asking him, that incident jumped off down at the Center.

JESSI: But what did that have to do with your job?

ALTON: Wait a minute. . . . Now, you know the kids were in there. So, what happened was, them pigs called my job, talking 'bout they wanna see me. They ran the whole thing down to my Boss. He didn't know that I was an exconvict, plus he don't dig Black folk, too tuff. So when he found out about it, he fired me.

JESSI: When was that? Why didn't you tell me?

ALTON: Cause, Baby, that ain't the kind of thing I want to come back and run to you, especially with your mother constantly on your back, saying I ain't no good, and I'm doomed to failure. *(Bangs hand on the table and walks over to the window, looks out and begins pacing the floor.)* Anyways, I tried a lot of other places and didn't come up with anything, so I got down with your brother. . . . But I tried, Baby, I really did. I didn't want to go back to the joint. . . . All I wanted to do, was be with you and the kids. Even *that* ain't easy to do in this society.

JESSI: But if you had told me, I could have gotten you a job in one of those agencies. . . .

ALTON: As what? A janitor? I ain't got no half decent education. Anyways, just the thought of my woman getting me a gig messes with me inside.

JESSI: Listen, Al, I'm not going to run out and tell the world about it. It's not too late. *(She gets up from the table, runs over to him, grabbing his arm. . . he*

looks down at her sadly.)

ALTON: It is too late, Baby. *(Pulls away and rushes into the bedroom, returns with an old M-1 rifle, stops, looks at JESSI. CHILDREN are heard crying.)*

CHILD 1: Mommy! Mommy! The devil is here. . . .

CHILD 2: They's not the devil, they's the pigs. *(There is a heavy fall of feet in the hallway. . . loud banging at the door. . . a voice is heard.)*

VOICE: Okay, Shannon, open the door, it's the police. . . Com'on, we know you're in there. . . *(Continuous banging.)*

ALTON: *(Looking at JESSICA.)* Go get the boys. *(She hesitates.)* Go on, damn it! *(She rushes out through the kitchen. The hall door is beginning to shake on its hinges. ALTON checks the chamber of the rifle. Lights begin to dim and fade out. A single shot is heard, followed by a heavy barrage. A long scream from a woman. . . then silence.)*

Curtain

Scene 4

(Curtains open. Lights come up on prison tier, showing a man leaving. There is a guard shouting at the others, "Let's get this show on the road". Each of the men enters his cell and returns with boxes. They all move down one cell. No one moves from cell four. After they are finished, they return to the tier, all lean on railing and rap. A new MAN enters cell one.)

BRO. 1: I think somebody was in my cell while we was out exercising. I'm missing some socks.

BRO. 2: What! Some socks? Who the hell wants some damn *state* socks. I been noticing that about you. . . you always accusing someone of beating you out of something. . . . And the thing that gets me is, you *ain't* got *nothing!*

BRO. 1: Fuck you, Sucka. . . .

BRO. 3: Why don't ya'll freeze that shit. *(Looks at BRO. 2.)* You beginning to sound like Clifford.

BRO. 2: Wait a minute, don't be comparing me with that crazy fool. I'm trying to get out this muthafucka. . . *(All break out in laughter except the two men in front of cell one.)*

BRO. 4: It ain't funny. Sometimes I get to believing that shit he was running. . . . Shit, I'd like to do a little fucking up in this country my damn self, but I know I ain't in no position to be talking 'bout, *not here*. And I don't dig the idea of the dude doing all that time. Hell! I liked the man. But evidently he didn't like himself. All he had to do was quit running his jibs so much, and shit, he'd have been out this place in no time. . . . Shit, naturally if I got you locked up and you talking 'bout offing me, I'mma make sure you rot there. . . and the dude wasn't supid or anything. That Black bullshit couldn't get him nowhere, and never gonna get *nobody* nowhere. . . . *(Everyone drops into silence, each engulfed in his own thoughts.)*

BRO. 1: Say, remember that dude that use to be reading all the time? What was his name now? Gaddamn! . . . It's right on the tip of my tongue. . . . *(Everyone is looking at him.)* He went out about six months ago. . . beat them on a tech. . . .

BRO. 4: Oh! You talking 'bout Alton, Alton Shannon. . . Was in for armed robbery. . . .

BRO. 1: Yeah, yeah. . . . I saw him today. He's back in with a new one. Shot it out with some pigs at his crib. . . . say he downed three and wounded four.

BROS.: (All together.) Gaddamn!!!

BRO. 4: Boy, ole homeboy wasn't jiving. Um, um, um. (The two men standing at the end of the tier hurry over to where the others are standing. One is KAPPIE and the other is the new MAN.)

KAPPIE: What was that about Alton? What happened?

BRO. 1: Say he downed some pigs at his crib. He got kind of shot up himself. . . . plus they put a hellfired ass kicking on him at the station.

KAPPIE: What brought the pigs down on them in the first palce?

BRO. 1: Remember all them banks that was getting ripped off awhile back? (KAPPIE nods his head.) Well, that was Alton and his brother-in-law. . . . Alton got to doing bad, and went back to what he knew best.

BRO. 4: Yeah man, and he sho'nuff did it up right. I know he was getting big scratch. . . .

BRO. 3: How'd he get flagged?

BRO. 1: Oh, round the time he first got out, him and Choker got into a beef. . . .

KAPPIE: Who you talking 'bout, the pusher?

BRO. 1: Yeah. Alton wasn't one for pushing that shit or pimping to tuff, so anyways, he got into this thing with Choker and made a fool out him. Choker got plenty salty behind it. Kept hollering 'bout payback. . . .

BRO. 3: Yeah, that sounds just like him too.

BRO. 1: So he was squatting in Jackie's After-Hours and Gerald. . . .

KAPPIE: Who's Gerald???

BRO. 1: That's his wife's brother. A young dude, use to deal for Choker. So Choker's squatting, and Gerald comes in flashing, y'know?. . . . They must've just finished taking the place off, cause Gerald was loaded down. He got to drinking and smoking and running his jibs. Choker got an earful and run to the man on them. Well, they got Gerald with no problem, he was fuck-up. . . . But Alton was at his crib, and when they came to get him, he got his wife and kids out the back door and commenced to set fire to their ass.

BRO. 2: Yeah, well it's gonna be a long, long time 'fore he get out this muthafucka again. . . . (Looks around at BRO. 4.) Which reminds me, gimme my money, sucka.

BRO. 4: Get the fuck out of here.

BRO. 2: Say man, come on now, get up my damn scratch. You made the bet and lose. . . . (BRO. 4 looks around at the others, they are all looking at him, he looks down. BRO. 2 looks around at the others who are looking at him, also.)

BRO. 2: Man, muthafuck you lames. I'd have put odds on ya'll too.

BRO. 3: That's not putting odds, muthafucka, that's a fucking jinx!!! Man, youse a low-lifed dog muthafucka.

BRO. 2: Man, don't be running that bullshit to me.

Take it out and fertilize somebody's field. . . . Can't none of you stiffs stay out a hot second and now you gonna pretend you concerned. . . . Ya'll be offing each other, beating each other, ratting on each and now you gonna say something to me? Shhhhiittt, tell it to that sucka that got ya'll bobbing in and out this muthafucka like a gaddamn yo-yo. . . . (Turns to BRO. 4.) Get my money, nigger, six cartons. You know what brand I smoke. (Goes into cell five. BRO. 4 goes into cell seven, comes out with several cartons of cigarettes, enters cell five. BROTHERS on the tier watch; then 1 and 3 turn and lean on railing.)

BRO. 1: They say Little Dash got raped over on nine tier. . . . I told him to stay away from so-called heavies. . . . but! That dued is hard-headed.

BRO. 3: We all are at times. . . . wonder what his brothers gonna do when they hear bout it.

BRO. 1: What can they do bout it?

BRO. 3: Yeah, guess you're right. (KAPPIE and new man head down the tier.)

NEW MAN: Boy, niggers is foul.

KAPPIE: It ain't the niggers, man, all they doing is what they know best. It's this system, this society, and them whiteys. They the ones that be forcing us into a position where we got to be living like parasites. . . . Look at that brother Alton. All he wanted to do was be with his wife and kids. He didn't really care nothing 'bout how Black he was, or how many whiteys he could get to say nice things about him. All he wanted to do was to be left alone to raise a family and be comfortable. He had changed up or wanted to, but they won't even let a man do that. Kitu use to say, "If we can't help ourselves, then we in bad shape, cause ain't nobody gonna help us." He really wanted to see us get it together. He use to rap about taking brothers as they came through and turning them around and sending them back out there with something on their minds. . . .

But dudes had to live too, and that's where the whole thing fell through. . . . Everything is against us, courts, police, employers, storeowners, landlords, city officials, and the majority of them is white. . . . And little whitey is worse than them on top, cause he's struggling too, and he's gonna block us at every turn. To keep us from getting what he ain't got. . . . So you hit the streets and from there, you begin your down payments on the Installment Plan. . . . (There is a loud crash from off stage left. ALTON enters limping, and carrying a change of clothes and other small items. Everyone looks at him sorrowfully as he walks over to cell four, hesitates, then enters. A muffled scream can be heard from cell five. BRO. 4 rushes out with a blooded knife. Seconds after the scream the loud speaker can be heard, "All inmates return to your rooms for the count," repeats over and over. From off stage someone hollers, "Please don't, com'on, man, don't do that." Some continual laughter. As lights begin to fade, so does all sound. Everything is black and silent, then one exceptionally long scream is heard.)

Curtain

“DID WE REALLY LOVE?”

I read your poem . . . while doing my bit
And I'm sorry to hear you're having a fit
So consider my reality as I run it down
To acquaint you neighbor . . . with my part of the town

A home, a family, and you for a wife
I aspired a job to make secure your life
But deep down inside morals you lack
Always praising some brothers' cadillac

Your momma taught you to play on your man
Rob him daughter of everything you can
But my daddy was cool; he weren't no lame
So I copped him a spoon and he taught me the game

Don't lie to your self; you could have been my wife
But you preferred the glamour . . . of an evil, fast-life

Wherever we would go your eyes would flash
Digging hogs . . . and brothers spending cash
I had no wardrobe—this, you made others to know
By knocking me one weekend, after snorting a heavy blow

I loved you baby and didn't want to blow
So I had to get down and make you my ho
It took some effort . . . to tighten-up my new game
But after wining -and -dining . . . you had your street -name

My cadillac car and diamond rings
Never meant to me anything!
It was you who had contracted an impatients-flu
To play and lean . . . in a blue on blue
And the money that I taught you . . . how to make
Is stashed and invested in my future's stake

Because of you, I lost respect and my pride
Now you want to be home, at someone's side
Both of us are to blame . . . for playing the game
Our children suffer no guidance and name
So I toss them a ten, every now and then
To alleviate the guilt . . . of sharing your sin

Miss lady, miss lady, now that you know
I'll call you a cab . . . so that you can go
Miss lady, miss lady, I must, however, say
Both of us deserve . . . a brighter and better day

By Larry C. Thomas

(To continue, Part 2: “Let's Love Baby”)



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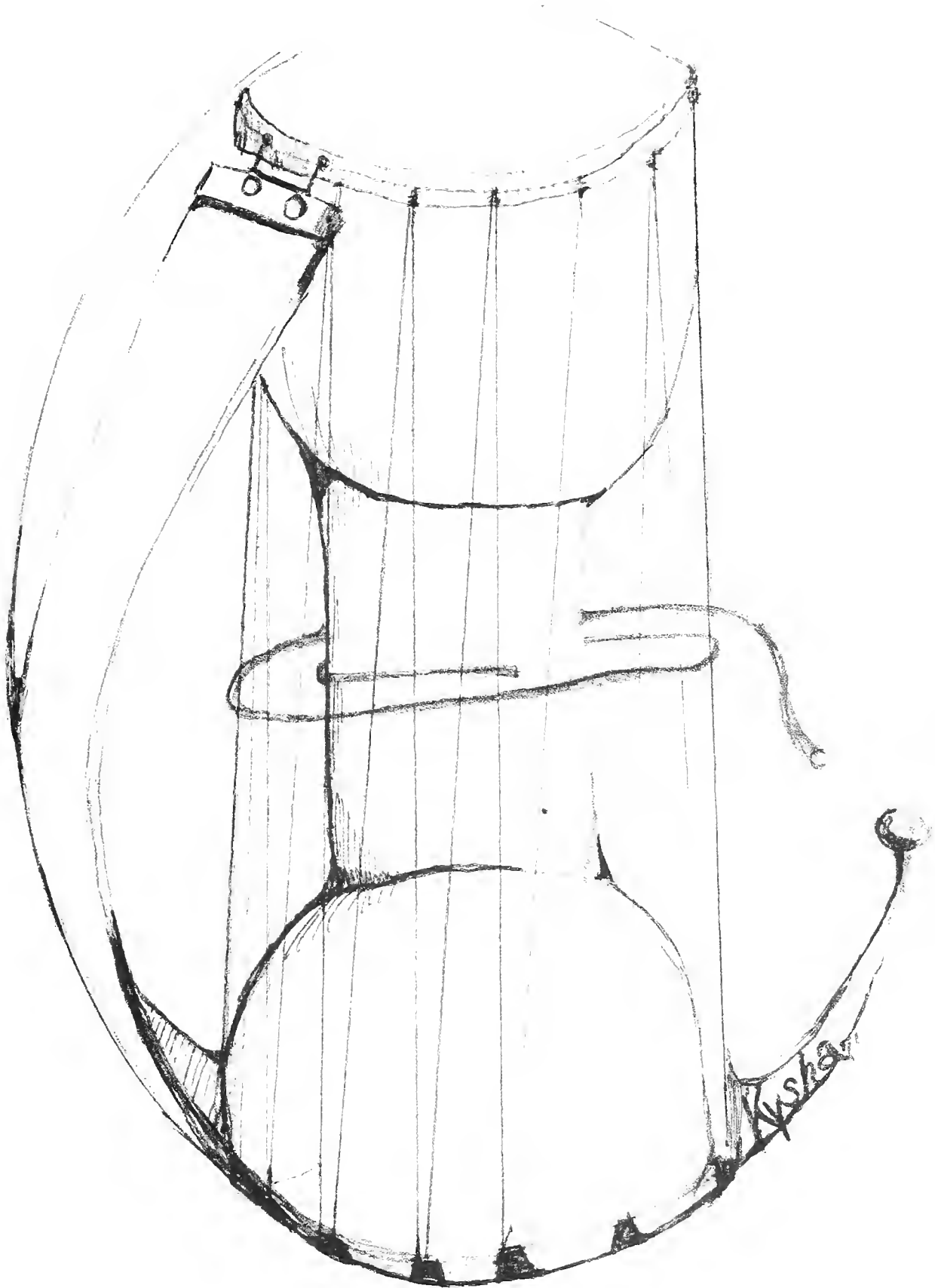
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5/10/07



MASSACHUSETTS
CORRECTIONAL
INSTITUTION
NORFOLK
GATEHOUSE
ENTRANCE

VEHICLE TRAP
NEXT LEFT