

Felo-de-se

Characters:

Ulysses Washington--a Black male, educated, multiple murderer.

Leroy Jones--a Black male, illiterate, robber.

Scene:

A four-by-ten foot cell in a maximum security prison. It is occupied by two men dressed in prison clothes. Leroy Jones is lying on the bottom bunk reading a *Players* magazine. Ulysses Washington, dressed only in his underwear, is standing in the back of the cell tying a noose around a ceiling light fixture. The noose is made of torn, braided bed sheets.

ULYSSES (Yanking on the noose) That'll work.

LEROY You're really going to go through with it?

ULYSSES Just as soon as they run yard, I'm history. Gone. Felo-de-se.

LEROY (Puts down magazine) You ain't bullshitting, are you? You're really going to take yourself out?

ULYSSES Does shit stink? Yes I'm going to take myself out. Just as soon as you go to the yard, I'm out of here.

LEROY (Stands, faces Ulysses) You're crazy. You know that? Of all the assholes in this joint, you've got to be the craziest motherfucker in here. You know why?

ULYSSES We've been over this a hundred times already. There's nothing you can say to change my mind.

LEROY I'll tell you why you're crazy, man. You ain't using the good sense you were born with. Of all the low-lifers in this pig sty, you of all people should be the last one to want to kill yourself.

ULYSSES You're wasting your breath, Leroy.

LEROY It don't make no sense. You got so much going for you. Most of these assholes can barely write their names. But you're smart, man. You got college degrees. It don't make no sense to kill yourself.

ULYSSES (sighing) Look at me, Leroy. Do I look happy to you? Do I?

LEROY Happy? Nobody's happy in here.

ULYSSES Exactly. There's no way I can ever be happy in here. No way.

LEROY That's a bunch of bullshit and you know it. You got it going on, Ulysses. A lot of cons wish they were in your shoes. You're educated, articulate, and you've got degrees up the ass. You even got a master's degree, correspondence courses, wasn't they? You got all that going for yourself and you gonna' fuck it off cause you're not happy. What kind of shit is that? You got to be crazy.

ULYSSES (Shaking his head) It's not about degrees, Leroy, or how well I speak. It's about the quality of life. It's about how well one lives, and life in prison is not living well at all. It's just surviving. For life to have meaning for me I have to live well, Leroy. You, me, we are not living well. We're surviving. Only surviving.

LEROY Hell, ain't that enough? This is prison, not a hotel. What do you expect? We got to make the best of a bad situation. You know that.

ULYSSES Prison is not a bad situation, it's much worse than that. Prison is living hell, a graveyard for the walking dead. There's no life here, only death, a long, excruciatingly slow death. Prison kills all our tender feelings, robs our humanity, destroys our sensitivity. There's no love here, only death. Death of our compassionate selves.

LEROY What do you expect? This ain't Disneyland. We got to make due with what we got and what we got is enough to keep us going. We got three meals a day, we got yard, we got TV and radio. We got it going on in here, man. Shit, we got get-high, we got pruno, drugs, and we got sex too. If you're into big-butt boys, we can get our dicks wet just like we was on the streets.

ULYSSES We got nothing, Leroy, nothing. Chocolate coated shit is still shit. Don't you see it? It ain't nothing but window dressing. It ain't real. Just illusions and phony panaceas making you think that you're living so you can divert your attention from the real problems.

LEROY Problems, what fucking problems? We're supposed to be doing time, not sun bathing on the beach.

ULYSSES Does the word rehabilitation mean anything to you, Leroy?

LEROY Rehabilitation my ass. Prison ain't about rehabilitation, it's about punishment.

ULYSSES Right. Prison is about punishment, but it's not supposed to be. Theoretically it's supposed to be about rehabilitation, about restoring us to good health and reestablishing and fostering good standards of morals and values. Do you feel rehabilitated?

LEROY Hell no. The system don't give a damn about us. All they care about is security.

ULYSSES Right. So, you have a bunch of guys coming to a cesspool of steel and concrete and barbed wire. A bunch of poor, uneducated guys without the benefit of being encouraged to change their predacious attitudes, without the advantages of reprogramming their corrupt, malevolent consciences to states of benevolent and ethical considerations, without the benefit of learning marketable skills, serve their time and released back to the streets with the same insensitive and rapacious thought processes that steered them to prison in the first place. Prison doesn't rehabilitate, it perpetuates those undesirable characteristics it claims to abhor. Don't you understand, Leroy? We're no better than animals in a zoo. We're given just enough food to keep us alive, enough space to sleep in, and just enough to keep us ambulatory. We're not living, we're zooing.

LEROY Yeah, well I don't know about all them big words you using, but I do know this. Any man who kills his self is a weak person. It takes a weak mind to give up. Shit, anybody can give up when the going gets tough, but a real man hangs tough.

ULYSSES Really? Suicide isn't easy, it takes tremendous courage to kill one's self. And it also takes great love, great self-love to kill one's self.

LEROY Love? How in the hell can a man love his self by killing his self?

ULYSSES To understand why a man desires to kill himself, you have to fathom the depths of pain, you have to penetrate the dimensions of suffering. If your bones get fractured, you see an orthopedist. If you're emotionally scarred, you see a therapist to heal yourself. But if your pain is so deep, your suffering so unbearable that it robs you of your dignity, your will power, reducing your very soul to a pathetic, cringing, lifeless thing, then it's time to end that pain forever. You find your life here, Leroy. Somehow your diversions of games, football

pools and erotic magazines sustain you. But it does nothing for me. All it does is remind me of how I once lived.

LEROY They're not going to keep you in here forever. You'll see the streets again, Ulysses. Have heart, man. Hang in there. They got to let you out sometime.

ULYSSES I've got to be realistic, Leroy. I killed two people, one of them was an Anglo and one of them was a cop. I've got a better chance of standing in front of a starving lion with a pork chop drawers on than getting out of prison. Besides, the pain is too deep. I miss too much. I miss my woman. I miss not having choices. I can't choose what movie to see or which restaurant to dine in, nor which museum to visit. It's killing me, Leroy. Bit by bit and inch by inch I'm dying inside. I'm forced to live around convicts so heartless, so cruel, so barbaric they wouldn't bat an eye killing their mama on her birthday if it would get them a gram of crack. Around men so hostile, so uncultured, so intolerant of people's needs that they wouldn't know what class or integrity or dignity was if they tripped over it on the way to the dope house. It's killing me, Leroy. Each time i hear some con raping some kid or see gang members pressuring a kid out of his store or hear racial slurs, another part of me dies. I can't stand it anymore. Goddamn it, Leroy, I want to be free. I want to be free to experience life as it was meant to be experienced. Free to see the sunset, free to feel sand between my toes, free to see stars shine at night. I want to smell flowers, hear children playing, see lovers holding hands, I want to hear the sound of waves crashing against the shore, i want to hear live concerts--drums beating, singers crooning, saxophones wailing, keyboards playing--I want to hear the sound of people laughing. I want to drink fine wines and eat char broiled steaks. And, by the blood that flows in my veins, I want to touch somebody. I want to feel my woman's arms around me. I want to feel her body pressed to mine. I want to taste her lips, but I can't. I can't and it's killing me. Millimeter by agonizing millimeter I'm dying inside. And if I have to spend the rest of my life in a hostile, fruitless, stale, loveless environment, then I'd rather be dead. I'd rather be stripped asshole naked, hung on a cross upside down and impaled with iron spikes than spend another day in prison. I can't take it anymore. It's torture, cruel and unusual punishment. Each day another part of me dies. I refuse to continue to suffer like this. I'm going to end it all, and end it now.

LEROY There ain't nothing I can say to make you change your mind?

ULYSSES Nothing.

LEROY I'm sorry to hear that. I'm gonna' miss you, Ulysses. You're good people. What should I do with your property?

ULYSSES Whatever you want. Keep it or sell it. I won't be needing it where I'm going.

VOICE Attention all inmates. Attention all inmates. Prepare for yard release. Main yard release in five minutes.

Scene:
Lights fade to black as Ulysses ties the noose around the ceiling light fixture.

THE END