

# The Prisoners' Dilemma

By William L. Lederer

© 2008 William L. Lederer

*The prison shower room. Nozzles on the Upstage Wall. A low wall -42 inches high- stretches down the distance of the line of nozzles. Thus, the actors are seen naked from mid-stomach up. Plexi-glass shield or scrim contains steam. Five figures are vaguely seen.*

BENNY

[sings] [vaguely seen behind plexi-glass] Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.  
Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.

*Lawrence staggers out of the steam and around the plexi-glass shield. He picks up a towel from a bench on the low wall.*

BENNY

[continued] [sings] Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.

LAWRENCE

[drying himself] [mildly perturbed] Jesus, come down.

BENNY

[sings] Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.

*Alf steps out of the steam and joins Lawrence at the low wall. He picks up a towel from the bench and starts drying himself.*

LAWRENCE

How's it goin'?

ALF

Three cots and a hot.

LAWRENCE

Ain't that the truth.

BENNY

[sings] Spirit of the Living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the Living God, fall fresh on me.

LAWRENCE

He's still flyin'

*Lawrence and Alf start putting on their prison blues.*

ALF

Listen to that. My celly's gone ding. Let's hope he crashes.

LAWRENCE

Nice and soft.

ALF

Otherwise he's under.

BENNY

[sings] Spirit of the living God, fall afresh on me.

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.

ALF

Repetitious, huh?

LAWRENCE

Yeah, like my time.

BENNY

[sings] Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.

Spirit of the living God, fall fresh on me.

*Jason steps out of the steam and joins Alf and Lawrence.*

JASON

What's comin' off?

ALF

Benny was saved over the week-end.

JASON

After all them fish he un-saved?

LAWRENCE

Amazing grace.

ALF

Let's hope he don't sing that one.

*Peak, in Prison blues and carrying a towel, enters. The group throws him a gang sign i.e., flicking the right cheek with the thumb. He responds with the sign, then proceeds to undress.*

BENNY

[singing] Break me, melt me, mould me, fill me.

ALF

Peak, Benny's got religion.

PEAK

I heard.

BENNY

[sings] Spirits of the living God fall fresh on me.

LAWRENCE

You know how things go.

PEAK

They will. As usual.

*Pause.*

JASON

You look good, Peak. How's the cold?

PEAK

Gone... That lady friend send you a snap yet?

JASON

Sure has.

PEAK

Let's see.

*Jason reaches into his prison blues and gives Peak a snapshot.*

PEAK

[looking at picture] Quite an attraction.

JASON

Not the best. I'll introduce you to better bitches once I'm sprung.

PEAK

Looking forward to it.

*Izzy enters in his Prison Blues. He's jumpy.*

IZZY

Where's Benny!

ALF

In the steam.

BENNY

[sings] Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

I can feel His mighty power and His grace.

IZZY

That shit-hook!

*Izzy charges into the steam with his clothes on.*

PEAK

[aside] [to Alf and Lawrence] Izzy never even noticed me.

**Note: Nearer to the plexi-glass, the audience vaguely sees Izzy and Benny jawing through the steam.**

IZZY

[shouts] Where's my paper?

BENNY

[shouts] I'm out, Izzy. Praise the Lord!

IZZY

"Out" Shit!

BENNY

For good, Iz

IZZY

You can't do that!

BENNY

[puts hand on Izzy's shoulder] [sings in his face] I can hear the brush of angel's wings

I see glory on each face.

*Izzy and Benny tussle.*

BENNY

[sings while tussling] Surely the presence of the Lord is in this place.

*Benny tosses Izzy out of the steam. Izzy's soaked.*

IZZY

Peak, I need a fix!

PEAK

Keep on Benny.

IZZY

I have!

PEAK

I'll see what I can do.

*Izzy exits.*

JASON

Want me to talk to Benny?

PEAK

No. He knows.

*Pause.*

BENNY

[sings] Will the circle be unbroken.

By and by, by and by

There's a better home awaitin'

In the sky, in the sky

JASON

He's diss'n us, Peak.

*Benny steps out of the steam.*

BENNY

Peace, brothers.

*Peak throws the thumb flick gesture. Benny just smiles at him.*

LAWRENCE

[cautious] Woa-

ALF

[under breath] [to Lawrence] I told you: flyin'.

*A long pause.*

JASON

[breaking the ice] How's the chucks!

BENNY

I can pet them now.

PEAK

Watch it. They can bite.

LAWRENCE

Yeah, and give you rabies.

JASON

Come on, Benny. Let's you and me take a walk!

*Benny gives Jason a hug and pats his back. Peak gestures for Lawrence and Alf to leave. They "sign" and exit. Jason lingers.*

PEAK

Jason, go.

JASON

Can't I wait for Benny?

PEAK

No.

JASON

[to Benny] See you...[gang sign to Peak]

*Jason exits. Peak undresses and Benny dresses in clothes he left on the bench.*

PEAK

How was the week-end, Benny?

BENNY

I'm a new man.

PEAK

Lots of singin'?

BENNY

Yeah.

PEAK

And preachin'?

BENNY

More thinkin' and prayin' than either.

PEAK

You prayin' for me?

BENNY

Big time.

PEAK

I appreciate that.

*Pause.*

BENNY

Peak, I want out.

*Pause.*

PEAK

Lots of people depend on you. Inside and out. Nothin' in here to do except feel good once in a while.

BENNY  
No more, Peak.

*Peak stands.*

PEAK  
Let's think about that.

*Peak flicks his cheek. Benny holds back, but then flicks. Peak exits. Benny blesses himself with the sign of the cross.*

**Lights fade.**

## SCENE II

*Alf and Benny's cell: double decker bunks, Sink and toilet at one end of the bunker with a hand plunger-on-stick by its side. Since such cells in this prison are only 9 feet by 6 feet, the audience's POV is of its longest length. Both men are in t-shirts and shorts. Benny is sitting on the top bunk with a bible in his lap. Alf is sitting on the toilet and straining to defecate.*

ALF  
Uh...Uhh...Ugggh!...It's all them starches and getting' Sewer Trout three times a week. Might as well fill us up with wood...Ugggh!...What does that book of yours have to say about constipation?

BENNY  
"Not that which goes into the mouth makes a man unclean, but that which comes out of the mouth."

ALF  
It don't apply here unless swallowin' that whole bible could push it out-... Ugg-

BENNY  
I told Peak I want out.

ALF  
Holy Shit!...Do you know what you're getting in to?

BENNY  
He's thinking about it.

ALF  
Yeah, you've tipped your mit. He'll think about it forever.

BENNY  
Don't care.

ALF  
You say that now.

BENNY  
I'll say it again.

*Pause.*

ALF  
Benny, I ain't one for givin' advice. But you got a long time in here.

BENNY

Forever.

ALF

Peak'll find ways to get around that, too.

BENNY

With God's grace he won't.

ALF

Peak ain't got no grace. He can't afford it!...Uggh!

BENNY

Alf, I'm the lowest of lows. But I'm forgiven...Nothing can touch me now.

ALF

Does that include me?

BENNY

Yeah.

ALF

Aw, shit...It's comin!...Wow!...What a relief!...Ahhh...[looks up] Thanks, up there, for small favors.

BENNY

No small favors. Just one big one.

*Alf wipes his butt, then examines his fingers.*

ALF

Sheet! The cheap bastards...[pulls up his shorts] The shit paper's getting thinner and thinner. Politicians tryin' to save a nickel.

BENNY

Just breathin' is a good thing...and thinkin about God...and my wife...and my twins.

*Alf washes his hands in the sink and wipes off his hands on his t-shirt, sits on the edge of the lower bunk. He flushes the toilet with the plunger.*

ALF

This is the worse slam ever. And you're makin' it worser...[lies down] Just a little comfort, that's all I ask[raises his foot to the bottom of the top bunk and bounces Benny up]...That one big favor—

*Alf slips his hand into his briefs. Styrofoam box in hand, Benny reaches down to the bottom bunk.*

BENNY

Help yourself. They're cookies from our retreat.

ALF

Nah, I'd rather choke the chicken.

*Alf slips his hand into his shorts.*

**Lights fade out.**

### SCENE III

*The Prison Yard. The Stage Right area is composed of weight-lifting equipment. The Stage Left area has the curve of a “cinder” track and some weights. A whistle blows. Officer Daniels, with the whistle hanging from his neck, ushers in Tier 3 A which is composed of 5 White Peakers [Jason, Lawrence, Alf and Benny]] and Seven African-American Devils. The two groups make some friendly small talk [improvised]. Benny lingers with the 7 Devils and they laugh and shadow box with him. The two gangs split: the Whites [Peakers] for the cinder path arc, the African Americans [7 Devils] for the weights area. A dilapidated water cooler is Upstage. The African-Americans take off their prison blues and proceed to lift weights in briefs. Their bodies are covered with tattoos. They have a variety of hair styles: dreads, mohawks, bald, etc...Peakers hit the path. Jason hits the cinder path and runs off-stage. Lawrence jogs next and exits running. Izzy stands around scratching his arm. [Jason and Lawrence’s entrances and exits establish that they’re doing laps] Izzy enters Stage Left. He’s fidgeting, scratching more than ever. He crosses half of the upstage and turns. Lawrence enters. He’s at the end of his run and exhausted. He slaps Izzy on the back.*

IZZY

[jumps] Jesus!...Don’t do that!

LAWRENCE

Izzy, you gotta get more exercise.

IZZY

I’m in good enough shape for the shivs.

LAWRENCE

Yeah, skin and bones, just turn sideways!...Come on. You need a distraction for your distraction.

IZZY

[scratches] You don’t know what you’re talkin’ about.

LAWRENCE

Speed, my friend. Don’t take it, do it! Hit the cinders.

*Jason enters panting. He joins Lawrence and Izzy.*

JASON

[aside] Notice Benny?...He didn’t sign when we was in the shower.

LAWRENCE

Maybe he forgot.

JASON

In front of Peak?

IZZY

Benny better keep signin’.

*Izzy starts scratching his arm.*

LAWRENCE

I’m getting’ tired of all this bullshit. The screws keep catchin’ our signs so we gotta change em’.

JASON

Yeah, next thing you know we'll be put in the hole for scratchin' our assholes.

*Izzy stops scratching. Pause.*

IZZY

What's gonna happen to Benny?!

LAWRENCE

He's gonna go to heaven.

IZZY

He can't!

JASON

How come?

IZZY

He's needed here!

*Peak, in sunglasses, enters and joins Officer Daniels.*

OFFICER DANIELS

[aside] We gotta prepare you for the streets... Tell the Foot Croaker your arches fell.

PEAK

Will do... Gotta break before the lags think I'm a leg hanger.

*Peak joins Jason, Izzy and Lawrence. Jason, Izzy and Lawrence start to sign. Peak gestures "cut!" They "cut" signing.*

PEAK

[looks skyward] No signs here. We're in the open!

*Peak sits on a bench.*

PEAK

[continued] Continue, dogs.

*All but Peak and Izzy continue exercising. They start falling into a combined rhythm doing push ups, sit ups and jumping jacks. Peak watches their coordination effect for a while.*

PEAK

Lawrence.

*Lawrence stops exercising. Peak gestures with his head for him to come over.*

LAWRENCE

Yeah, Peak?

PEAK

Talk to Benjamin.

LAWRENCE

About what?

PEAK

You saw. Remind him of the rules.

LAWRENCE

I'll do my best.

*Benny enters running and exits on the cinder path.*

PEAK

That's expected.

*Lawrence exits after him.*

PEAK

Jason!

*Jason stops exercising and joins Peak.*

PEAK

(continued)[stands] Feel Benny out.

JASON

[hesitant] About what?

PEAK

His singin' wierdly..Now go.

*Jason hits the cinders and exits running. Izzy sidles over to Peak.*

IZZY

[scratching arm] Want me?

*Peak slaps Izzy on the back.*

PEAK

You're always wanted.

*Peak and Izzy start exiting.*

IZZY

Peak, I'm getting sicker.

PEAK

Then get Benny to cooperate.

*Devil #1 lifts a heavy barbell. The rest of the Devils clap.*

IZZY

[about Devils] Them Prunes. Every time I look at them I wanna shit.

PEAK

Don't be a Peckerwood. We need them for the traffic.

**Fade out.**

#### SCENE IV

*The Wall i.e., Upstage Wall. A Woodchuck is at the base of the wall i.e., a hand-puppet partially in view. Benny is on his knees coaxing the Woodchuck with a piece of bread. He's imitating Woodchuck squeals. Lawrence enters panting and advances slowly. The Woodchuck snatches the bread and disappears into the "hole". Benny squeals. The Woodchuck appears and squeals back. Benny pets the Chuck. Lawrence hesitates, advances, and the Woodchuck ducks into its hole.*

LAWRENCE

I wouldn't believe if I didn't see for myself.

BENNY

Feed 'em, then pet 'em. That's all. [extends a cookie to Lawrence] Here. Get started.

LAWRENCE

Nah. One of them things might bite accidentally or on purpose.

*Benny laughs and rises.*

BENNY

Something on your mind?

LAWRENCE

Yours, too, I hope.

BENNY

Larry, I know what's gonna happen. Peak'll test me for a month. Then when he sees he's gettin' nowhere he'll leave me alone.

LAWRENCE

Peak ain't a Chuckie. He'll bite you for the hell of it.

BENNY

Yeah, I guess.

LAWRNECE

Then what are you gonna do?

BENNY

Nothin'.

LAWRENCE

Jesus Christ, cooperate!

*Pause.*

BENNY

Please don't blaspheme.

LAWRENCE

Oh, fuck. You know what I mean.

BENNY

But do you?

LAWRENCE

I do... You're a link. A weak link.

BENNY

No link at all.

LAWRENCE

You was a gangbanger, you was a pusher. That's a fact!

BENNY

No more.

LAWRENCE

God damnit!

BENNY

Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord in vain.

LAWRENCE

I ain't vain. I'm as religious as you!... You're just high from fatigue!

BENNY

Fatigue? I haven't slept for two nights... But I'm fresh, brother. From a tsunami of the soul.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Maybe it'll help you understand if I tell you a little story.

BENNY

You already have. You were the kingpin of coke in Southern Ohio.

LAWRENCE

That's just the surface. But there's a story behind that story. One I'm gonna tell that explains what I'm doing now. So listen!... You know I'm a vet. Came back from the war where I got hooked on everything under the sun. Then got relatively clean and dealt. Then got caught when me and the operation got too big... So the day before the trial I decided to go huntin'. It was one of them days when everything was perfect: the temperature, the wind, no other hunters. Just me and Goldie. And I'm thinkin what's this all about? I'm gonna plead guilty and get the seven year minimum. Why not end it all on a high note? So I sit down, put the shotgun in my mouth and pull the trigger. Next thing I know I'm flat on my back and a flock of geese in v-formation are flyin over. Then Goldie comes lickin' my face. Believe me, I thought I was in heaven!... From that day on, no matter which slammer they send me to, my mission is to talk down anybody who says he's gonna "off" himself... And that's what you're doin' now!

BENNY

You're not gonna tell me to hang in there and when I get out you'll fix it for me in Ohio?

LAWRENCE

Nah, that line's only for the three-time losers.

BENNY

What'd be the line for me?

LAWRENCE

You'll shame the livin' shit out of your family!

BENNY

But I'm not gonna kill myself.

LAWRENCE  
They'll make it look like you did.

BENNY  
You can tell my wife the truth.

LAWRENCE  
After I been offed for that, who's gonna tell my wife the truth?

*A long pause.*

LAWRENCE  
[continued] Think about it.

BENNY  
I heard that before. But thanks anyway.

LAWRENCE  
Anyway... Yeah.

*A woodchuck appears out of another hole down the Upstage wall. It squeals. Lawrence sneaks up on it.*

LAWRENCE  
Scat!

*The Woodchuck ducks into the hole.*

LAWRENCE  
[pointing at Benny] You remember what I told you. Anyway-

*Lawrence exits.*

**Lights dim out.**

## **SCENE V**

*In the dark. The sound of a handball bouncing off the wall and the grunts of players hitting and whacking the ball. Finally—*

JASON  
[off-stage](grunt) Uh!...

PEAK  
[off-stage] Game!

*Lights up on the back wall of a "3-walled handball court." A bench is across the upstage wall i.e. the only prop added to the previous scene. Jason and Peak enter in shorts and wearing handball gloves. They're panting. Jason, more deliberately, to make Peak feel superior. Officer Daniels is standing by.*

JASON  
[panting] I...almost...had...you.  
PEAK  
[panting] Almost is a ghost.

*Jason gives his handball and his and Peak's gloves to Officer Daniels.*

JASON  
You got my number, that's all.  
PEAK  
No control on your left side.  
OFFICER DANIELS  
How did you do, Jason?  
JASON  
[loud] Peak beat me two out-a three. The bastard!

*Officer Daniels exits.*

JASON  
[to Peak] Sorry.  
PEAK  
Don't let on you're a poor loser.  
JASON  
Yeah, it's a fault of mine.  
PEAK  
Correct it.  
JASON  
You bet.

*Pause. Peak looks yonder.*

PEAK  
Look-it that fat skunk...Who's feedin' him?  
JASON  
Probably Benny.  
PEAK  
Bad smell in our cells when it lets loose.  
JASON  
Unbearable.  
PEAK  
Lingers for a week.  
JASON  
They oughta be poisoned.  
*Pause.*  
PEAK  
You know I'm up for a parole hearing in two months.

JASON  
I wish you luck.  
PEAK  
Don't worry about me.  
JASON  
You got a pol in your pocket?  
PEAK  
[winks] You never can tell.  
JASON  
I won't.  
*Pause.*  
PEAK  
I been thinkin' about Benny.  
JASON  
Me, too.  
PEAK  
I been trainin' him to lead the dogs once I'm gone. But now... What d'yuh think?  
JASON  
Religion's a terrible drawback. It makes you unpredictable.  
PEAK  
Maybe not. He understands the two basic rules.  
JASON  
Maybe so. But that Ding could be leadin' up to a slowdown.  
PEAK  
The slam won't tolerate that.  
JASON  
I agree with you one-hundred.  
PEAK  
That's why I been thinkin—  
JASON  
[eagerly] Yeah-?  
PEAK  
Have you ever thought of barkin at the dogs?  
JASON  
No. But I could.  
PEAK  
On a continuous basis?  
JASON  
I'm not just a pretty face.  
*Pause.*  
PEAK  
What would you do if the Ding don't straighten out?  
JASON  
I'd report back to you.  
PEAK  
Jason, I won't be here.

JASON

[catching himself] Uh, after I put a dent in his top.

*Pause.*

PEAK

What if Benny gets another mule to take his place?

JASON

Then I'll personally get two hunting licenses.

PEAK

Still, he's been a loyal lag up until now.

JASON

Maybe you didn't see it, but he was shootin' rocks at you.

PEAK

When?

JASON

When he said "Peace, Brother." His eyes was so deep they was runnin' lava.

PEAK

Never trust words or gestures. Just acts.

JASON

Have you ever doubted me?

PEAK

If I did it wouldn't be for long.

JASON

Your confidence is all I ask.

PEAK

[stands] Good...Come up with a plan and get back to me.

*Peak exits. Jason sits and thinks hard. Izzy enters making loud, nose-blowing honks into his dirty handkerchief.*

JASON

Don't distract me!

*Izzy looks into his handkerchief.*

IZZY

I'm dyin!

JASON

Grow up, kid!

IZZY

For what?

I'm headed for the bone yard already.

*Izzy honks his nose again and sits on the bench.*

JASON

Don't sit near me. I'm plannin'!

IZZY

Planning what?

JASON

A responsibility.

IZZY

You don't have to be responsible. You look gorgeous.

JASON

Aw, wear a hole in your Fifi.

IZZY

I resent that. I'm a better fifi than any Fifi!

JASON

Yeah, Fifi can't hold up to your wear and tear.

*Izzy blows his nose again.*

JASON

Yer gonna honk yer brains out!

IZZY

If I don't catch a germ first.

*Pause.*

JASON

What do you think about Benny?

IZZY

Benny?

JASON

Yeah.

IZZY

All that singin'. Benny makes me feel funny.

*Izzy wipes his eye with his mucous-laden handkerchief, then sits. Jason jumps up from the bench.*

IZZY

[continued] I've had it. I'm a war-torn asshole...Do me a favor. Cut off my head.

JASON

Aw, you're just depressed.

IZZY

I lost my mule!

*Pause. Suddenly coming up with a "plan," Jason snaps his fingers.*

JASON

It's all Benny's fault!

IZZY

How come?

JASON

Stands to reason. Benny vamoosed your mule!

IZZY  
Why? I never hurt noboby except myself.  
JASON  
That's what "Holy Shits" can do to you.  
IZZY  
[holds head] I-I'm in a maze. Everywhere I turn I get shouted at.  
JASON  
Benny's worse than a bull, Izzy.  
IZZY  
A bull in a chop shop.  
JASON  
Jeez-...What are you on now?  
IZZY  
Life [slight pause] after death. I'm burnin up!  
JASON  
Izzy, listen carefully. Your nerves have gone hay-wire. But there's a light...at the end of the  
tunnel!  
IZZY  
A maze.  
JASON  
Tunnel! The one leading to the Shower!  
IZZY  
Shower?  
JASON  
The one you got all wet in!  
IZZY  
I didn't like that. Benny, he-  
JASON  
Then get even!  
IZZY  
How?  
JASON  
I'll toss you a wrench.  
IZZY  
For the nozzle that don't work?  
JASON  
To whack Benny!  
IZZY  
Oh I couldn't do that.  
JASON  
He stole your mule!  
IZZY  
Really?  
JASON  
It's no coincidence we got a new screw.

*Pause.*

IZZY

I-I don't quite get the picture.

JASON

You're a plumber, remember?

IZZY

Occasionally.

JASON

And so am I!

IZZY

.Occasionally-

JASON

On one of those occasions, you're gonna whack Benny.

IZZY

Why?

JASON

He stole your mule!

*Pause. Izzy thinks slowly.*

IZZY

Do you think the screws will trust me with a monkey wrench?

JASON

What a thing to ask.

IZZY

Ok, I won't ask.

*Pause.*

JASON

You'll say you were reaching up to fix a nozzle when Benny tried to fuck you.

IZZY

I'll say nothing of the kind.

JASON

Then you might never see a mule again.

IZZY

In the shower?

JASON

Anywhere!...And don't tell nobody. We're gonna be pro-active and impress.

*Pause.*

IZZY

Will you review your plan...a little slower.

JASON

No!

*Izzy peers out toward Stage Left.*

IZZY  
What's that out there?

JASON  
[looks] A skunk!

*Izzy advances curiously and exits.*

JASON  
[continued] [shouts] The tail's up!

*Izzy honks his nose off-stage. Skunk fluid sprays in from Stage Left. Jason cowers and exits Stage Rights, running.*

## SCENE VI

*Benny and Alf's cell. Benny is sitting on the top bunk, Alf is lying on bottom bunk and will grow agitated as the song progresses.*

BENNY  
[sings] Make me a channel of your peace  
Where there is hatred let me bring your love  
Where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,  
And where there's doubt, have faith in You  
[Alf pulls a pillow over his head]  
Make me a channel of Your peace  
Where there's despair in life, let me bring hope  
Where there is darkness only light  
And where there's sadness ever joy  
Oh master that I may never seek.

ALF  
[aside] Master, master. We got enough masters.

BENNY  
[sings] So much to be consoled as to console.

ALF  
Sing your head off. We got social issues around here.

BENNY  
[sings] To be understood as to understand.

ALF  
Understand this. We been in lock-down for 2 years!

*Alf stands.*

BENNY  
[sings] To be loved as to love, with all my soul.

*Alf sticks his head up on the upper bunk.*

ALF

Two years, Benny! And when we get out in the yard it's only one tier at a time!

BENNY

[sings] Make me a channel of your peace.

ALF

And we only get two hours in the yard every two weeks: with the same faces.

BENNY

[sings] It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.

ALF

Pardon me while I take a whiz.

*Alf heads for the toilet.*

BENNY

[sings] In giving of ourselves that we receive.

*Alf flips up toilet seat.*

BENNY

[sings] And in dying that we're born to eternal life.

ALF

[letting loose] Ahhhh—

*Pause as Alf shakes and zips up.*

BENNY

[sings] Will the circle be unbroken  
By and by, Lord, by and by.

ALF

[irritated] Bye bye, bye-bye!

BENNY

There's a better home-a-waitin' in the sky, Lord, in the sky.

ALF

[interrupts] [sings] In the sky, in the sky  
Pie in the sky  
There's a better day a comin'  
Pie in the sky  
Oh me oh me  
Oh me oh my.

*Pause.*

ALF

[continued] Now will you pipe down?

BENNY

You're wrong, you know.

ALF  
No, I don't know. When I first got here we could use the yard every day.

BENNY  
The gangs ran in battalions flashing their signs.

ALF  
Yeah, well we had more freedom.

BENNY  
And more murders and more rapes.

ALF  
And more lags like Iz: fuckin drug stores on bo-bos.

BENNY  
Our retreats will change all that.

ALF  
What are yuh gonna do? Look up assholes for diamonds.

BENNY  
Attend one retreat and it'll be a new life for you.

ALF  
I don't convert.

BENNY  
Just four days.

ALF  
Three hundred and sixty-five days of brainwashin', I'll still be the same!

BENNY  
You can resist the one day. But last three days and suddenly the Second Coming will be upon  
you: [sings] Be not afraid/ I go before you always/Come follow—

ALF  
Stop it! Talk normal!

BENNY  
[normally] Be not afraid.

ALF  
Not that normal!

BENNY  
What do you want?

ALF  
Peace and quiet.

BENNY  
Death? Do you want death? I do.

ALF  
Yeah-yeah. Well, it looks like you're headin' that way.

BENNY  
Ain't we all?

*Pause.*

ALF  
You know what bothers me? You're so fuckin sure. Give me the old gangbanger who would  
protect my ass with muscle.

BENNY

He is no more.

ALF

Jesus, even your voice has changed. Bark a command at me!

BENNY

I am not a dog. Neither are you.

ALF

[low voice] Keep it to yourself.

BENNY

No more signs to explain my existence.

ALF

You “sign” if you know what’s good for you.

BENNY

Me? I don’t know any more. The Holy Spirit guides me.

ALF

Happy Halloween, my friend. I want nothing to do with you.

BENNY

That won’t happen.

*Pause. Alf starts sniffing the air.*

ALF

Aw, fuck. The skunk!

BENNY

Someone must’ve provoked Beautiful.

**Fade out.**

## SCENE VII

*The Recreation/Library Room. Peak and Lawrence are sitting at a card table playing chess. Benny enters, passes by and exits without Peak or Lawrence seeing him. Peak and Lawrence keep staring at the chess pieces.*

LAWRENCE

[aside] One of these days I’m gonna beat him.

PEAK

[aside] One of these days he’s gonna beat me. Then I’ll know the game’s over.

LAWRENCE

[aside] It’ll be good for him to lose.

PEAK

[aside] I can do anything now and get away with it.

LAWRENCE

[aside] But if I win what will he do to others?

*Pause.*

PEAK

[aside] Here goes the stupidest move in the world.

*Peak moves a chess piece.*

LAWRENCE

[aside] That was the stupidest move in the world!

*Lawrence moves a piece.*

PEAK

[aside] That's even stupider!...[aloud] Hmm...[aside] Make him think I'm thinkin'.

*Peak moves a piece after long deliberation.*

LAWRENCE

[aside] He can't be that stupid. He's on to me...But I can't take the chance.

*Lawrence moves a piece.*

PEAK

[aside] Another dumb move...This is gonna be a real battle.

*Peak moves a piece*

LAWRENCE

You're a master strategist, Peak.

PEAK

You don't do so bad yourself.

*Lawrence moves a piece. A long pause. Peak moves a piece.*

PEAK

Checkmate.

LAWRENCE

Hmm...marvelous. Didn't see it coming.

*A long pause.*

PEAK

What's on your mind.

LAWRENCE

Nothin'. I'm glad things are back to normal.

PEAK

How's that?

LAWRENCE

This slammer's gettin' a new mule

PEAK  
He could be a plant.  
LAWRENCE  
You'd know about things like that better than me.  
PEAK  
That's not good enough.  
LAWRENCE  
How come?  
PEAK  
There's variables sometimes.  
LAWRENCE  
You gotta trust somebody.  
PEAK  
Why?  
LAWRENCE  
You got a point there... What do you propose?  
PEAK  
Nothing for the time being.  
LAWRENCE  
That's a good idea.  
PEAK  
I wouldn't say that.  
LAWRENCE  
No, you wouldn't.  
*Pause.*  
PEAK  
Are you being sarcastic?  
LAWRENCE  
What makes you think that?  
  
PEAK  
The tone of your voice.  
LAWRENCE  
I've got a cold: brutal.  
PEAK  
Brutal?  
LAWRENCE  
Wrong word. I meant raspy.  
PEAK  
You don't sound raspy.  
LAWRENCE  
Then what would you call it?  
PEAK  
Weak. Not to mention your gestures.

LAWRENCE

What about my gestures?

PEAK

They remind me of a flower?

LAWRENCE

What flower?

PEAK

A pansy.

LAWRENCE

A pansy? I could look like one but I'm not.

PEAK

It remains to be seen.

LAWRENCE

I hope not.

PEAK

You spend enough time in the slammer and you can become anything.

LAWRENCE

For a time I was. Not any more.

PEAK

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

I'm not a stooly.

PEAK

I commend you.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Peak, what are you up to?

PEAK

Up to? Don't know yet.

LAWRENCE

Shouldn't have asked.

*Pause. Peak starts sniffing air.*

PEAK

Are you nervous?

LAWRENCE

Not peculiarly.

PEAK

You mean particularly.

*Peak sniffs the air again.*

PEAK

[continuing] The smell's getting worse.

LAWRENCE  
It's from outside.

PEAK  
Yeah, it's not you. An animal.

LAWRENCE  
Yeah.

PEAK  
A skunk!

*Lawrence sniffs the air.*

LAWRENCE  
Could be.

PEAK  
But why? What irritated him?

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE  
Could be sex...or marking off territories.

*Pause.*

PEAK  
Who's makin instruments?

LAWRENCE  
Instruments?

PEAK  
I got ears. You do, too.

LAWRENCE  
Yeah.

PEAK  
You heard that song down the tier.

LAWRENCE  
Yeah.

PEAK  
Who's pluggin' "peace" around here?

LAWRENCE  
Don't know.

PEAK  
Benny Green is... Lawrence, you're bein' evasive!

LAWRENCE  
Why would I wanna do a thing like that?

PEAK  
You're friends!

LAWRENCE  
Acquaintances maybe.

PEAK  
Nobody in here is acquaintances. We're too tightly packed!

LAWRENCE

I can't see what you're drivin' at.

PEAK

Benny has been diddlin' with a skunk.

LAWRENCE

Woodchucks, yes. But a skunk?

PEAK

You know exactly what I mean. Benny's jeopardizin' the community.

LAWRENCE

He's a good man.

PEAK

You're a good man, too. But you can be trusted.

LAWRENCE

I'm not a good man.

PEAK

You are. You're the slam's one-man suicide prevention department for all those greenies. You haven't gone unnoticed.

LAWRENCE

I wish I was.

PEAK

You can be trusted. But loud-mouth singers: emotions in excess!... You remind Benny of the two basic rules.

LAWRENCE

I already have.

PEAK

Then re-remind him. He can sing and preach from the hilltops, but he ain't to come down and interfere.

LAWRENCE

Ok.

PEAK

I'd "off" Benny myself at the first opportunity. Not that I believe in God, but if you "off" a good man you might be hexed.

LAWRENCE

I feel that way, too.

PEAK

But if somebody else does it... You know I'm leavin' the slam in two months and somebody's gonna have to take my place. Somebody who's got sense and a rep for bein' fair but orderly.

LAWRENCE

You got plenty of tiers to choose from.

PEAK

You're in the lead, Lawrence.

LAWRENCE

Yeah, but—

PEAK

No buts. Accept your responsibility or the street will hear about it.

*Peak opens his arms. They embrace, then separate. Lawrence begins his exit looking perplexed.*

PEAK

By the way. Iz is flyin' apart. Take him under your wing.

LAWRENCE

I will.

*Lawrence exits.*

PEAK

[sings] Will the story be unspoken?

Bye the bye, Lord, bye the bye...

*Lights dim out on Peak looking quizzical over what he just sang unconsciously. He holds heart and winces.*

### SCENE VIII

*The wall. Benny is feeding Beautiful, the Skunk, by biting off a piece of an apple and placing it in Beautiful's paws. Lawrence enters. He peers at Benny.*

LAWRENCE

[to himself] Well I'll be. Peak must be psychic!

BENNY

[to the skunk] Sister Beautiful, you're one of God's heavenly creatures. I love you. I love your smell. It's like incense. But the rest of the lags don't appreciate it. Especially during hot days like yesterday. Next time, if you can, please go back down your tunnel and relieve yourself in the open fields?

*Benny takes another bite out of his apple and gives the piece to Beautiful who nibbles away. Lawrence creeps closer to the two.*

BENNY

[continued] [to the skunk] Is that a deal?

*On the ground and almost nose to nose with the critter, Benny wiggles his index finger. Beautiful lays a paw on it.*

LAWRENCE

Oh my God-!

*"Beautiful" turns her back and raises the white under-side of her tail. Benny looks over his shoulder, sees Lawrence, places a "shushing" finger to his lips, then turns back to the skunk and pets her tail down. The skunk disappears into the hole at the base of the wall.*

BENNY

[mouth to hole] Begone, Sister Beautiful. Watch out for the traffic!

*Benny stands and turns to Lawrence.*

BENNY

[continued] What is it, Lawrence, you look worried?

LAWRENCE

I'm gonna hang myself.

BENNY

Don't joke about that. You're doing a fine job.

LAWRENCE

You're doing a fine job, but—

BENNY

But?

LAWRENCE

The basics. Don't interfere with sex or drugs in this hole!

BENNY

If my singing or my example does any good—

LAWRENCE

Good. Keep it that way.

BENNY

Slowly but surely, more and more will come around. Praise the Lord!

LAWRENCE

[half-hearted] Praise the Lord... Benny, how's the family?

BENNY

My wife got married again.

LAWRENCE

I'm sorry.

BENNY

No, it's understandable. I'm never getting' out... But Jasmine and Cynthia are my daughters forever. Praise the Lord.

LAWRENCE

You wanna stay happy and healthy for them?

BENNY

I'm clean and not mean. That'll do.

LAWRENCE

That won't do. Benny, you're a challenge.

BENNY

Me?

LAWRENCE

Just bein here.

BENNY

I know. We got too much idle time.

LAWRENCE

Watch out for Peak.

BENNY

I pray for his soul.

LAWRENCE

His soul makes us all cowards.

*Pause.*

BENNY

I'm startin' a prayer group. Wanna join us?

LAWRENCE

Us? Who's us?

BENNY

Come and see.

LAWRENCE

Can't see it. Sorry.

**Dim out.**

### SCENE IX

*Maintenance Office. A sideways view of a Chair behind a desk. Another chair in front of the desk and another behind the upstage end of the desk. Superintendent of Maintenance, Janice Williams, is sitting behind the desk, Izzy in front and Jason on the upstage side. A metal cabinet with a push-button lock is nearby. Izzy is nodding off.*

JASON

Maybe you never heard this, but prior to 1936 almost all of the penitentiaries were self-sufficient. The inmates were butchers and bakers and farmers...and those who was "nothin' learned a trade inside.

SUPER WILLIAMS

So you're proposing that Isador Duncan be a plumber.

*Izzy wakes with a startle.*

JASON

That's what I'm proposing.

SUPER WILLIAMS

Isador, what do you have to say about that?

IZZY

I agree!

JASON

I got five years to teach him and when he gets out he'll have a profession.

*Izzy nods off again.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Where would he obtain the tools?

JASON

From the Plumbers Union. An act of charity.

SUPER WILLIAMS

An act of charity that'll put the Union out of business.

JASON

Nah, we'll only do the small jobs. No threat to their livelihood.

SUPER WILLIAMS

For instance.

JASON

For instance half the toilets in the cells don't work. You gotta use plungers. And shower nozzles drip. They gotta be fixed for the ecology...And as it stands now the water-main could break and we'd be under water before a plumber would get here.

SUPER WILLIAMS

It's the same on the outside as in.

JASON

I gotta believe that.

SUPER WILLIAMS

What do you have to say about this? [almost shouts] Isador!?

IZZY

[startled] Uh-!?

JASON

Isador feels great about it.

IZZY

Thank...you...for...the...opportunity...for a second chance.

*Pause.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[weakening] Y-yes.

*Super Williams goes to the metal cabinet and shields the lock as she punches in the numbers. She opens the cabinet doors revealing 5 tool boxes per shelf, on three shelves.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[points to a toolbox] This one..."Out" by one PM, "In" when we page you.

*Jason stands. Izzy stands in imitation establishing that he's still not completely with it because he's on some drug. Jason takes the designated toolbox down from the top shelf. He sets it on the floor. Izzy stares at the toolbox and sneezes. He takes out his handkerchief and bats dust off the box.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Let me see inside before you check out.

IZZY

Yes, mam.

*Izzy lifts the "heavy" toolbox and sets it on the desk. Super Williams finds the labeled key on her large key chain, opens the box, does a cursory check of its contents and closes it. Izzy starts toting the toolbox away.*

JASON  
Thank you, Super Williams.  
SUPER WILLIAMS  
This is a test, Jason.

JASON  
Yeah, and if it works, we'll save the institution lots of money...and be humanitarians on top of it.

*Izzy and Jason exit to another area.*

JASON  
[aside] Too bad Old Hug-a-Thug was demoted from Warden to Superintendent after those three lags got the wind taken out of them.

**Lights out.**

### SCENE X

*A small lavatory: two toilets and a sink. The place is filthy. Jason and Izzy enter. Note: Water-spill can be absorbed by a "cracked" spongy checkerboard mat that looks like deteriorating latrine linoleum. This will allow for removal without leaving a swampy mess onstage.*

IZZY  
[awakening] This place is filthy!  
JASON

No worse than our cells.

IZZY  
[looking in toilets] That shit's ingrained. It looks like tar!

JASON  
You don't have to clean. Only fix.

*Izzy opens the toolbox and alternates staring at the tools up close and afar( He's on something and can't focus.) Jason jiggles the flushing handle and it doesn't work. He removes the lid of the septic tank and starts toying around.*

JASON  
Plumbing jobs was my entrée to mansions. Then I'd come back some night, load up my pockets with jewels, then take a dump in the middle of their living rooms before leavin'. That's why they caught me: the notorious cat burglar known to all as "The Dumper."

IZZY  
[lifting a labeled awl] What's this?

JASON  
That's an awl. Rarely used in toiletry.

*Jason starts tinkering around in the septic tank with his hand.*

IZZY  
[reaches back into toolbox] [holds up labeled tongs] How about this?

JASON

Forceps. Never used.

IZZY

[holds up a labeled screwdriver] All these tools have numbers on them.

JASON

One missin' and the screws will know.

IZZY

You don't have to educate me on that one.

JASON

Then why did you ask?

IZZY

I wasn't askin', I was protestin'.

*Jason lifts a valve. Water squirts up. He suppresses the jet stream by holding something inside the septic tank while groping for the water supply pipe faucet. Finally he finds it.*

JASON

That water cock's frozen. Bring me a wrench!

IZZY

We got a whole bunch of funny lookin' ones here.

JASON

The biggest one you got, Hoppy!

*Izzy approaches Jason with a large monkey wrench.*

JASON

[continued] Come on. Give it!

IZZY

You dissed me.

JASON

What the fuck. I'm bein deluged!

IZZY

You called me Hoppy!

JASON

Happy, not Hoppy!

IZZY

If I'm gonna work for you, I ain't a hophead.

JASON

Ok-ok. Open up the jaws.

*Izzy opens up his mouth.*

JASON  
The jaws of the wrench, Huh-appy!

*Izzy opens the wrench jaws.*

JASON  
[continued] [gestures with his head] Now clamp those jaws around that and turn counterclockwise.

IZZY  
Which way is that?

*Because Jason is holding back a gusher in the septic tank with both hands, he gestures one way with his head. Izzy turns the water supply faucet one way which increases the water flow.*

JASON  
No-no!

*Jason head-gestures the opposite way. Izzy does so with the wrench and the jet flow ceases. Jason and Izzy sit on the linoleum floor weary from their ordeal.*

IZZY  
What'll we do now?

JASON  
Report that this shit-can is beyond repair.

IZZY  
Are you gonna teach me somethin' about plumbin'?

JASON  
Of course I will. Along the way.

IZZY  
Along what way?

JASON  
The way to the shower. A nozzle ain't workin', remember?

IZZY  
[about monkey wrench in his hand] I remember I'm supposed to use this.

JASON  
On Benny's bean! Keep that very strongly in mind.

IZZY  
Benny's bean... Why?

JASON  
Why? Cuz it's a mean to the end.

IZZY  
Pretty mean.

JASON  
Sometimes you gotta break a few heads to make omlets.

IZZY

I don't like omlets.

JASON

Then get used to them!...Iz, you can't back out now. We gotta impress Peak.

*Pause.*

IZZY

Jason, will you level with me? How many heads is in this omlet?

JASON

Frankly, that's like askin' how many pins are stuck in one angel.

IZZY

How many?

JASON

Countless numbers. As the bible says we're all in this together. But like cream, the bloodiest ones will rise to the top.

IZZY

All I want is a steady supply of chemicals.

JASON

You got it.

IZZY

And a plumber job with the Union once I get out.

JASON

That, too.

IZZY

And a detox program I can live with.

JASON

I'll see to it.

IZZZY

And a family that'll adopt me...that'll be proud of me...that I'll be able to give what I never got...that I'll someday meet God and not argue! And—

*Jason takes both of Izzy's hands that are now holding the wrench.*

IZZY

[continued] And—

JASON

[shakes Izzy's wrench-bearing hands for him to realize what's at hand] Concentrate!

*Izzy resists. Jason releases his grip. In the momentum of the release, Izzy hits his own forehead with the wrench and falls backwards.*

**Light out.**

## SCENE XI

*Benny and Alf's cell. Benny is sitting on the toilet, Alf is sleeping in the lower bunk.*

BENNY

[sings] Amazing grace! How sweet the sound  
[Alf awakens; and raises his head from pillow]

[sings] That saved a wretch like me!

[Alf rolls over on his side and pulls the pillow over his head]

[sings] I once was lost but now am found

[sings] Was blind but now I see.

[Benny gathers some toilet paper. Alf removes the pillow from his head and rolls over on his back] [sings] 'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear...

ALF

Oh shit!

BENNY

[continued][sings] And grace my fears relieved  
How precious did that grace appear  
The hour I first believed.

*Benny wipes his rump and stands. He goes to the sink.*

BENNY

[sings] Through many dangers, toils and snares.

ALF

Be considerate. I'm sleepin'!

*Benny takes his bible off the top bunk, sits on the floor and starts reading.*

ALF

[continued] What comes after the toils and snares?

BENNY

[to himself to help recall; doesn't sing]

Through many dangers, toils and snares

[remembers and sings]

I have already come

'Tis grace has brought me safe thus far

And grace will lead me home.

*Pause.*

ALF

Any more verses?

BENNY

Yes.

ALF

Sing them, too.

BENNY

[sings] The Lord has promised good to me  
His word my hope secures  
He will my shield and portion be  
As long as life endures

ALF

I wish I could believe that stuff.

BENNY

Why can't you?

ALF

Look at us!

*Pause.*

BENNY

[sings] When we've been there then thousand years  
Bright shining as the sun  
We've no less days to sing God's praise  
Then when we first begun

*Pause.*

ALF

Ten thousand years. That's how long my sentence is.

BENNY

[sings to the same melody] Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God  
Praise God, praise God, praise God  
Praise God, praise God, praise God, praise God  
Praise God, praise God, praise God

*A long pause.*

BENNY

[continued][sings] We're standing on holy ground.  
We're standing on holy ground.

ALF

Ok, end of church.

BENNY

We are "church!"

ALF

No no no no! I ain't joinin!

*A long pause. Benny stands.*

ALF

Sorry I yelled at you.

BENNY

Oh that's alright. You just don't understand.

ALF

Maybe I do understand. You're on a dope-free high.

Benny

More than that: a new reality.

ALF

There's only one reality I know: Here.

BENNY

“Here” can be beautiful.

ALF

Ok, there’s where you’re on shaky ground. Ever since the lock-down—

BENNY

We’re safer now.

ALF

Yeah, at what expense? No freedom but the yard every two weeks.

BENNY

The gangs don’t run this place any more.

ALF

Are you out of your mind?

BENNY

They don’t run most everybody in their heads, but only in their bodies.

ALF

Are you a no-body?

BENNY

One’s gott-a think outside of the brain.

ALF

Benny, as sure as I’m standin’ here, you’re gonna end up in a dirt bed.

BENNY

If I do, it’ll shorten my sentence.

ALF

Ah, now I know where you’re comin’ from!

*A whistle blows. Officer Daniels appears.*

ALF

[continued] Our tier’s Yard time... You go your way, I’ll go mine.

*Alf exits. Lights out.*

## SCENE XII

*The Yard. Peak is standing in front of a bench at the far-end of the stage. He’s wearing shiny black shoes. Alf enters and wanders over to him. Benny heads for the wall and sits facing it [waiting for a woodchuck] The way in which Alf and Benny split their entrances establishes that Alf wants nothing to do with Benny “publicly.” Peakers Jason, Peak and Lawrence and the 7 Devils exchange small talk [improvised] then split into opposite halves of the yard. The Peakers hang around the arc of the track, the 7 Devils around the weights.*

JASON

[about Peak’s shoes] Hey! Great Ones and Twos.

PEAK

I’m breakin’ my feet in for the street.

JASON

Yeah, my Bobos are worse than sandpaper.

*One of the Devils pounds his chest, then pumps his fist in the air. Benny returns the gesture.*

JASON

[on QT] Did you see that? Benny's coppin' the Prunes' voodoo.

PEAK

Don't act prejudice. They could be readin' your lips.

JASON

Yeah, but I got you for protection.

PEAK

We don't wanna start a race war here or in the streets. Besides, let the screws in the watchtowers catch them makin' signs.

*Peak walks away from Jason leaving him standing alone.*

*Alf greets Peak with the "cheek flick" sign.*

PEAK

Careful.

ALF

[looks skyward at "watchtower"] Sorry.

*Pause.*

PEAK

You're lookin good.

ALF

You, too.

PEAK

Must be the singin'.

ALF

I never indulge.

*Pause.*

How's your cellie progressin'?

ALF

He's regressin'. But he's harmless.

PEAK

Not so. He's irritatin' everybody on our tier.

ALF

I'll have him turn it down.

PEAK

To a whisper.

*Devil #1 grunts lifting weights.*

ALF  
I'll try. But he gets awfully emotional.  
PEAK  
Singin' prayers is twice as loud.  
ALF  
At least.

*Devil #2 grunts lifting weights.*

PEAK  
Let's get to the grit. Remember Colie after his retreat? He stooled on a mule.  
ALF  
Benny has shown no signs of wantin' to reform the world.  
PEAK  
Singers could turn Stingers.  
ALF  
Not Benny!  
PEAK  
Would you put your life on it?  
*Pause.*  
*Devil #3 grunts lifting weights.*

ALF  
Nice Fall weather we're having. Ain't yuh glad we don't have to rake leaves?  
PEAK  
Don't skip the subject. There's the possibility of a titanic.  
ALF  
Possible but not probable. I've heard Benny's rap sheet is so long he'll never stool.  
  
*On all fours, Benny squeals like a woodchuck into a hole near the wall.*

ALF  
[continued] The worst he'd do is squeal to a chuckie.  
PEAK  
[about Benny] Look at that. He's a loner. That rap sheet says it. [pensively] And yet he's a family man.  
ALF  
A family loner.

*The Devils laugh among themselves.*

ALF  
[continued] Family loners can get so lonely there's a flare-up.  
  
*Suddenly Peak feels his chest and sits on the bench.*

ALF  
What's wrong?  
PEAK  
Nothin'...

*Izzy enters toting his tool box. He spots Peak's shiny black shoes.*

IZZY  
Hey, look at them shiny Ones and Twos... What's your scam? Fallen arches? I pulled that one  
and only got inserts.

PEAK  
Want 'em?

IZZY  
For my bo-bos, my canvas clappers?

PEAK  
Kiss 'em and they're yours.

IZZY  
[to himself] Why not?

*Izzy sets his tool box down, kneels, pets Peak's shiny black shoes, goes to kiss one, and gets  
kicked in the mouth. Alf steps in front of Izzy to block the watchtower's view of the incident. Izzy  
picks up his tool box and heads for the water cooler. Jason joins him.*

*Alf laughs nervously.*

PEAK  
[to Alf] This is no laughin' matter.

*Izzy and Jason start to work on the water cooler.*

*Devil #7 lifts a barbell successfully and the other Devils clap. Benny initiates the Devils' "sign"  
of thumping the chest, then raising the fist with his head bowed. The seven Devils return the sign.*

PEAK  
[continued] Look. Jason and Izzy... Wonder what's their scam?

*In an overly-instructive way, Jason presses the button of the dilapidated cooler. No water comes  
up.*

PEAK  
[continued] That cooler's been out of order since the beginnin' of my stretch.

*Jason "plays" Izzy's teacher to Officer Daniels as he points to the toolbox formally. Izzy  
responds hyper-formally to Jason but falls over when kneeling down.*

PEAK

[continued] What's Izzy on today? [chuckles]

*Izzy fumbles to open the toolbox. He turns it upside down to open it. Gently but firmly Jason pushes Izzy aside, arights the toolbox, opens the latch and raises the lid. Izzy starts throwing tools [plastic] out of the toolbox until he comes up with the monkey wrench and heads for Benny, but Jason grabs Izzy and re-directs him to the water cooler.*

PEAK

[continued] If Izzy knows something about that cooler, maybe he once stashed his hash there.

*Izzy starts working on the Water Cooler with the monkey wrench by pressing the water dispenser button and putting the wrench to the spigot.*

*Then Izzy starts hammering the sides of the Water Cooler to "jump-start" it. Superintendent Williams appears. Everybody waits for Izzy's next move.*

*Jason takes Izzy's wrench and hands him a screw driver.*

*Izzy stabs the back of the cooler and pries. A metal panel falls. He reaches into the cooler and withdraws the entwined skeleton and dusty pelt of a two-foot-long animal. He tosses it drowsily, then presses the cooler's button. An arc of water flows.*

*Everybody claps. The seven Devils line up and pound fists into Izzy's fist in congratulations.. Devil #3 toys with the cooler's button and Devil #4 plays with squirting arcs.*

*Benny stands over the deteriorated carcass.*

BENNY

[singing]

You shall cross the barren desert,  
But you shall not die of thirst  
You shall wander far in safety,  
Though you do not know the way  
You shall speak your words in foreign lands,  
And all will understand  
You shall see the face of God and live  
Be not afraid. I go before you always  
Come follow me and I will give you rest.

*Benny looks about.*

BENNY

[continued] This is a bad place [slight pause] A holy place.

*The Seven Devils make their chest-pounding, fist to the sky with bent heads, “sign.” Benny then returns their sign.*

PEAK

[on QT] That’s it. [slips a white envelope to Alf] Give this to Benny without him knowin’ where it came from.

**ACT II**  
**SCENE 1**

*Benny and Alf’s cell. Benny is sleeping in the upper bunk. Alf is standing with the envelope in his hand.*

ALF

[to himself] [looking at envelope] It came from nowhere. Just fluttered in... [drops envelope]... [looking at it on the ground] Flip-flop...

*Alf lies down on the lower bunk.*

ALF

[continued] [sings loud to wake Benny up] Michael, row the boat ashore, alleluia,  
Michael row the boat ashore, alleluia.

*A long pause.*

ALF

[continued] [sings loud] Sister trim the sails, alleluia,  
Sister trim the sails, alleluia.

*A long pause.*

ALF

[continued] [sings louder] Michael row the boat ashore, alleluia,  
Michael row the boat ashore, alleluia.

*Benny awakens, sits up.*

ALF

[continued] [sings loudly] Sister, trim the sails, alleluia,  
Sister, trim the sails, alleluia.

*Benny looks over his bunk and down below to Alf’s bunk.*

BENNY  
What’s wrong?

ALF  
Just seein' how you like it.

BENNY

I do!

ALF

So do I.

BENNY

Keep singin'.

ALF

I-I can't remember any more verses.

BENNY

That don't matter.

*Pause.*

ALF

[sings loudly] Michael, row the boat ashore, alleluia.

Adjoined Cellie #1

[off—stage] Michael, you “mother,” shut the fuck up!

ALF

[shouts] Why can't I sing?!

Adjoining Cellie #1

Cuz yuh can't sing good!

Adjoining Cellie #2

And we're eatin' breakfast!

ALF

Aw, shit. Just as I was working up to it –

BENNY

Working up to what, Alf?

ALF

Uh, like what you got.

BENNY

I hope so. You'll never be the same. Everything you see, every moment of the day -!...

ALF

[points to envelope] What's that?

*Pause.*

BENNY

That's unusual. It's too early for the mail.

ALF

Will you get it? I slept wrong. Got a kink in my back.

*Benny smiles, shakes his head and cheerfully gets the envelope. He sits on the edge of Alf's bunk and opens it. He stares at two photos, one in each hand.*

ALF  
[continued] [putting arm over Benny's shoulder] Look at that. Jasmine and Cynthia certainly have grown.

*Pause.*

BENNY  
I knew it.

ALF  
Knew what?

BENNY  
You know.

*Pause.*

ALF

Yeah.

*Pause.*

ALF  
[continued] Don't do anything except one thing.

BENNY  
I'm doin' one thing you never dreamt of.

*Dim out.*

## SCENE 2

*Recreation/Library Room. Alf is sitting at the card table. He shakes his head negatively, bites his lip, runs fingers through his hair, i.e., registers consternation and fear. Then he looks into the beyond, spots someone, stands and turns intentionally tough.*

*Lawrence enters. Alf paces.*

ALF

[muttering] That Mother Fucker...shit-brain...cunt eatin' maggots! [sticks his head out the door to make sure nobody's around to hear him feign toughness].

*Lawrence looks on, curiously, at first, then takes a book from the shelf, sits at the table and reads, thus feigning not being nosy.*

*Alf kicks a chair and sends it flying.*

ALF

[continued] There must be a God cuz there's a real devil.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE  
Gonna watch the World Series?

ALF

[slams feet on table] I ain't watchin' nothin' til I settle with Evil!

*Alf looks long and hard at Lawrence who goes on reading blithely.*

ALF

[continued] A kite flew into our cell last night...with two pairs of eyes and two mouths: one smilin' and one frownin' beautiful and nasty.

*Lawrence looks up.*

ALF

[continued] Benny's God-damned twins!

LAWRENCE

Peak's testin' the limit.

*Pause.*

ALF

What're we gonna do about it?

LAWRENCE

Nothin'.

ALF

Nothin'! You mean nothin'? Nothin' can't be done!

LAWRENCE

It better be or worse'll be spread.

ALF

How can anything be worse than nothin'?!

LAWRENCE

Peace, brother.

ALF

I'll do it. Peak won't know the day nor the hour nor the place.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

You'll get it back: inside or out.

ALF

Who cares? I'm a lifer!

LAWRENCE

Like Benny. They'll reach your relatives.

ALF

Don't have none.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

God help you.

ALF

Gotta have more than that. I need an instrument.

LAWRENCE

Everything around here is cardboard.

ALF

We know that. But they trust you with the vacuum...Cut me two feet out of the cord and I'll give Peak a necktie [gestures throat strangling].

LAWRENCE

It's been done already. A slammer down state. We gotta be more original.

*Pause.*

*Alf looks about, spots the chair that went flying, goes to it, and picks it up.*

ALF

Yeah, that's it. When you and Peak are playin' chess I'll go ding...[laughs] He'll get the chair all right. One that walks up behind him.

LAWRENCE

Don't include me.

*Pause.*

ALF

Mister Suicide Prevention Department, this is how serious it is. Benny's eyes: he shot rocks at me and swore he'd off Peak and his self...Are you with me?...We could do the world a big favor.

LAWRENCE

Let me talk to Peak.

ALF

Are you insane?

*Blackout.*

**SCENE #3**

*Library/Recreation Room. Peak is sitting at the table with a thick book opened in front of him. He's flipping through the pages, finds one and reads with his finger. Benny is half inside the iron door.*

BENNY

[sings] I danced in the morning when the world was begun,  
And I danced in the moon and the stars and the sun  
And I came down from heaven and I danced on the earth  
At Bethlehem I had my birth.

*Officer Daniels enters having passed around Benny.*

PEAK

[to Daniels] Tell that lag to move on.

*Officer Daniels escorts Benny out of sight and returns. He shuts the door and sits down with Peak. They exchange laughs. The door opens but Benny doesn't appear.*

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] Dance then wherever you may be.  
"I am the Lord of the Dance,"said He.

OFFICER DANIELS

[shouts] Get back in your cell!

*Peak turns a page and Officer Daniels sits opposite him.*

OFFICER DANIELS

[continued] Appeal yet?

PEAK

I don't need to appeal.

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] I danced for the scribe and the Pharisee

But they would not dance and they wouldn't follow me.

PEAK

[to Daniels] Do your duty.

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] I danced for the fishermen, for James and for John.

*Officer Daniels exits.*

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] They came with me and the dance went on.

Dance then wherever-

OFFICER DANIELS

[off-stage] Didn't I tell you - ?

*Officer Daniels re-enters and sits at the table.*

OFFICER DANIELS

How's your Ones and Twos?

PEAK

They'll do till I hit the streets.

*Pause.*

PEAK

(continued)How do you like it here?

OFFICER DANIELS

It's getting tougher.

PEAK

How much tougher?

OFFICER DANIELS

About twice as much...But then I brought twice as much up with me from down state...the wife  
and two kids...

PEAK

I come from a big family.

OFFICER DANIELS

Then you understand.

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] I danced on the Sabbath and I cured the lame

The holy people they said it was a shame.

*Officer Daniels stands.*

BENNY

[continued] [off-stage] [sings] They whipped and they stripped and they hung me high  
And they left me there on a cross to die.

*Officer Daniels goes to exit.*

BENNY

[continued] [off-stage] [sings] Dance then –

PEAK

Wait...Let him finish.

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] wherever you may be

“I am the Lord of the Dance,” said he

I’ll lead you all wherever you may be

“I will lead you all in the dance,” said he.

PEAK

Good voice.

*Pause.*

OFFICER DANIELS

[not interested] Brought my sister-in-law, too.

PEAK

Bangin’ her?

OFFICER DANIELS

With a double-barrel.

*Peak laughs.*

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] I danced on Friday when the sky turned black

It’s hard to dance with the devil on your back.

PEAK

Lock him up.

*Officer Daniels exits in a hurry.*

BENNY

[off-stage] [sings] They buried my body and they thought I’d gone

But I am the dance and I still go on.

OFFICER DANIELS

[off-stage] [sighs] Go on!

*Officer Daniels returns and sits.*

OFFICER DANIELS

Our trailer. Every other weekend. Two-hundred miles and back. They miss their grandma.

PEAK

The grandma, too?

OFFICER DANIELS

Yeah, harems are expensive.

*A long pause.*

PEAK

O.K., you got it. Double what you're getting' now...But I'll be out in six weeks. So you'll be mulin' with my successor.

OFFICER DANIELS

Who's that?

PEAK

You'll know before I leave...Just remember, I'll be backin' you from the streets. My family and your family will have to help each other out.

OFFICER DANIELS

That's a given.

*Peak and Officer Daniels stand and do a prolonged handshake at which time Daniels slips Peak a "sugar packet."*

OFFICER DANIELS

Towards a new friendship. Test it.

PEAK

Don't have to...if you know what I mean.

*Officer Daniels exits.*

*Peak stashes the "sugar packet" in his crotch, sits at the table, and reads.*

*10 BEATS as Peak turns pages. Suddenly a crazed Izzy storms in with a monkey wrench. Jason enters too, closes the door, and follows Izzy. Izzy hammers the table with the wrench.*

IZZY

Peak, I wanna be a Peaker!

PEAK

Hold it, kid.

IZZY

[hammers table] I ain't never really been included!

PEAK

Speak to him, Jason.

IZZY

[hammers] [to Peak] You speak!

JASON

Izzy, let's go.

*Izzy swings the wrench at Jason.*

IZZY

Go where?...[swings again] You go!...[swings] Go!...[returns to the table and hammers it] [to Peak] I won't go!

PEAK

Then stay

IZZY

[hammers] No!...[hammers] No! [hammers] No! [hammers].

PEAK

What do you want?

IZZY

I said it! [hammers away] Said it! [hammers] Said it! [hammers] Said it!...I wanna be a Peaker and you're playin' me hard!

PEAK

Isadore, nobody's playin' you hard. You're playin' hard on yourself.

IZZY

[hammers table] Stop!

*Jason opens the door.*

IZZY

[continued] You're playin' again! No more. Hear? No –

*Izzy whips around and sees the iron door open. He darts to the iron door and slams it. Jason backs off.*

IZZY

[continued] [points wrench at Jason] One more...one more time!

*Izzy struts to the table feeling his power.*

IZZY

[continued] [imagining being called a punk] Punk? Who called me a punk?! [stares at Peak]

*Peak remains calm.*

*Pause.*

IZZY

[continued] I thought so...[shouts in Peak's face] Say it! Say Izzy is a punk!

PEAK

Izzy is a punk.

IZZY

Oh, thank you Father, for I have sinned...

PEAK

[calm] Sit down, Isadore.

IZZY  
[haughty] I – I think I will.

*Izzy sits.*

PEAK  
Two things to become a Peaker: open up and shut up.

IZZY  
[sarcastic] You don't say?!

PEAK  
Open up with the worst thing that ever happened to you. And shut somebody else up. Take his wind if necessary.

IZZY  
Hmm...I'm ready!!...The worst thing: I kissed the girls and made them cry...

*No response.*

IZZY  
[continued] I kissed the boys and made them laugh?

*No response.*

IZZY  
[continued] Not good enough?

*No response.*

IZZY  
[continued] Not bad enough!

*Pause.*

*Izzy whips around and sees Jason petrified. He walks toward Jason. Jason bolts for the door. Izzy cuts him down with a chop to the back of his knee. Jason hobbles back into the room as he runs and is chopped down again. Izzy points to a spot furthest from the door and upstage behind Peak. He gestures for Jason to stand there.*

IZZY  
[continued] [points with wrench] Stay there where I can see you!  
*Izzy returns to Peak.*

IZZY  
[continued] [to Peak] Big on signs, Father? [puts thumbnail to his own cheek] How's this?! [and gouges blood]...[female voice] Oh, he was such a sweet little boy [seizes Peak's wrist] until we took him to the potty! [rubs the back of Peak's hand against his own gouged and bloody cheek].

*Izzy sits to the side of Peak simulating a confessional booth.*

IZZY  
[continued] My mother and father. That's what they did: got drunk and made me watch them go at it...Then they flushed my face in the toilet.

*Pause.*  
IZZY  
[continued] Good enough?

*Peak nods yes.*

*Pause.*  
IZZY  
[continued] And the last thing I have to do?...Remind me, please.

PEAK  
[softly] Shut...up –  
IZZY  
Louder!  
PEAK  
[loud] Shut up!  
IZZY  
Shut up who? Benny with my wrench?

*Izzy hands Peak the wrench then places his head on Peak's knee..*

IZZY  
[continued]Let me have it.

*Peak touches Izzy's head with the wrench, then raises the wrench to strike. Izzy whimpers. Peak sets the wrench down on the table and stands.*

PEAK  
Come here, Isadore.

*Izzy walks over on his knees a bit, then falters trying to get up. He tries to rise again but Peak places a hand on his shoulder.*

PEAK  
[continued] Isadore, Isadore. All you've gone through. [pulls out the "sugar packet" from his crotch] Just sprinkle the tail and have a lark.

*Izzy opens the packet, sprinkles Peak's "lark's tail," then presses his face into Peak's crotch..*

IZZY  
Mmmm.  
PEAK  
Mmmm.

*More muted sounds as Peak extends his arms wide, makes fists and strains. Izzy flaps his arms like a graceful lark.*

*Officer Daniels sticks his head in the door.*

OFFICER DANIELS  
What's all the noise about?

*Jason pushes Daniels out gently and closes the door.*

*Dim out.*

#### SCENE #4

*Benny and Alf's cell. Grunting and growling in the semi-dark. Slowly lights come up on Benny in the top bunk with the edge of a sheet in his mouth. He starts tearing the sheet with his teeth into a long strip. Alf, in the lower bunk, rolls over half-asleep. He sees a strip dangling. He grabs it and pulls a bit. Benny pulls back. Alf gives a yank and ends up with a whole strip. Benny quickly turns on his side and faces the upstage wall. Alf examines the strip.*

ALF  
[to himself] Shit.

*Alf stands and dangles the strip above the side of Benny's head.*

ALF  
[continued] [tickling Benny with the end of the strip] Look what I found.

*Benny grabs the strip and won't let go. So Alf yanks the remaining larger part of the sheet, then bites the sheet and starts shaking it and growling like a bulldog. Benny rolls over and looks down at Alf from the upper bunk.*

BENNY  
What are you doing?

ALF  
[takes sheet out of his mouth] Joinin' you.

*Alf starts tearing off another strip from the sheet.*

BENNY  
You can't do that.

ALF  
Why not? I got nothin' to lose.

*Alf snatches Benny's strip and ties the end of his strip to it.*

ALF

We'll pick the right time and place. [tightens the knot] And over we go...Or did you have something else in mind?

BENNY

No.

ALF

Yeah, but it's gonna take tearin' up about a half-dozen sheets...We know Lawrence in "laundry." Maybe he can hike a sheet-a-week.

BENNY

That's too long.

ALF

Then three sheets. We can jump halfway down.

BENNY

No.

ALF

"No" what? Don't you wanna save your kids?

BENNY

If I'm gone –

ALF

Gone where? Government Protection?...That's a thought.

BENNY

Peak'll get to them before me.

ALF

Can't argue with you, can we?...How we stayed cellies so long I'll never know.

BENNY

Thanks, Alf.

ALF

Don't thank me. Thank your kids. If it wasn't for them I'd cut your throat a long time ago. You snore from the mountaintops!

*Alf finishes tying a third strip to the end of the second one.*

ALF

[continued] Now go back to sleep and dream about playin' with your kids on some sunny island.

*Alf throws the eighteen-foot strip on his mattress, lies down and pulls the cover over his body.*

ALF

[continued] [grumbling] Silly son-of-a-bitch.

*Alf rolls over, gets his feet entangled in the eighteen-foot strip and kicks off the blanket trying to kick free. He lies exhausted.*

*Blackout.*

**SCENE #5**

*The shower room. Lawrence and Jason, wrapped in towels to the waist, are sitting on a bench, their backs against the lower wall. Jason has a large black and blue bruise down the side of his knee.*

JASON

[raises towel] [points to the bruise] See? I look like a hooker who didn't do her job.

LAWRENCE

How did it happen?

JASON

All of a sudden...It must've been one of Izzy's chemical reactions.

LAWRENCE

What was he on?

JASON

You never know with Iz. He's a very private freak.

LAWRENCE

Never know which way he's gonna go.

JASON

Yeah,that Keister Bunny is unpredictable.But he sure got what he wanted.

LAWRENCE

What did he want?

JASON

Peak. Now he's a Peaker like you and me.

LAWRENCE

That's a ridiculous word.

JASON

Better'n bein' called a punk.

*Pause.*

JASON

[continued] I don't wanna mention this, but Peak seems to be goin' soft.

LAWRENCE

Yeah? How?

JASON

Talkin' about larks in the middle of sex.

LAWRENCE

[sarcastic] Maybe he's in love.

JASON

With a punk? I have no respect for that.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Maybe something good'll come out of it.

JASON

Yeah, cock-of-the-walk becomes lame duck, or visa versa.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

What do you propose?

JASON

Wait and see at this point.

LAWRENCE

And afterwards?

JASON

If Peak falls we gotta come up with a funnel.

LAWRENCE

A funnel? For what?

JASON

To push that old lag down.

LAWRENCE

Yeah.

JASON

So he goes down like a whirl pool in a tub. With no trace... That's how I did it on the outside.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

You're slippin' me a wolf ticket.

JASON

You'll see who's Peter and the Wolf come Judgment Day.

*Bandage on his cheek, Izzy enters naked. He's covering up his crotch with a monkey wrench. He wields it like a censor.*

IZZY

[singing like the Lord's prayer] Our Peaker who art in Earth

Hollow be my birth

Thy Humpty Dumb

Thy can't be done

In Slam as there ain't no Heaven.

Give us this day our squeeze or snort

And forgive them their markers

As they fuck the Larkers

For thine is the Peaker, the piker,

the Peaker-picked-a-peck of pickled pikers

Forever and ever.

Ah – [natural voice] Where am I?

JASON

Work

IZZY

Work? I don't have t'work. I just wanna make love to a mule all day.

*Izzy, on the upstage side of the low wall, bobs his head up on each "hee-haw"*

IZZY

[bobs up] “Hee-haw”...[bobs up] Hee haw!...[bobs up] Hee haw!

JASON

[to Lawrence] Can you imagine him bein’ a Peaker?

*Izzy stands from behind the low wall.*

IZZY

[slaps wrench against the front of the wall] I overheard that!...What you don’t understand, Jason, me boy, is Love overpowers, work, play, the Law, and about everything else you can think of...except AIDS.

JASON

AIDS?

IZZY

Did I say that?

LAWRENCE

Yeah

IZZY

Well, I got it.

LAWRENCE

When did you learn about it?

IZZY

This mornin’. From the Croaker... Can I have the day off, Jason?

*A long pause.*

IZZY

[continued] [shouts] Jason!

JASON

Yeah, of course. You’re off.

IZZY

What’s wrong with me? Nothin’ never goes right...I’m supposed to tell everybody.

LAWRENCE

The Docs will.

IZZY

[hammers wall] I’ll get killed!

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Maybe not. They could med-line you downstate on a Ghost Train.

IZZY

That slam’s full of dings!...Nah, I wanna stay here. I’m a Peaker!

*Pause.*

JASON

Izzy, get your fuckin’ ass in the shower. You got three frozen nozzles in there!

*Izzy gives Jason a long stare, then, suddenly exits into the shower section which is against the upstage wall.*

JASON

[to Lawrence] That'll keep his memory preoccupied...[stands] Keep an eye on him before he gets hurt. I'm goin' back to my crib for a couple a winks.

*Jason starts his limping exit.*

JASON

[continued] Remember what I said about the funnel: Don't get sucked into the drain for lack of attention.

*Jason continues on to the exit. He meets Alf who is fully dressed in his prison blues. Jason gives him a contemptuous look and exits. Alf sits next to Lawrence.*

ALF

I got a problem.

LAWRENCE

So's everybody.

ALF

But mine's gotta be solved right now... You gotta tell that Duck Story again.

LAWRENCE

They were geese.

ALF

Tell it to Benny.

LAWRENCE

He already heard it.

ALF

Then tell him another.

LAWRENCE

I don't have any other.

ALF

Then make up one.

LAWRENCE

None are as real.

ALF

Why not?

LAWRENCE

Cuz they didn't happen to me.

ALF

Haven't you heard any "one" anywhere just as good or better?

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

What's on your mind, Alf?

ALF

Nothin. My mind is shot.

LAWRENCE

Shot?...Why?

ALF

My jaws ache. I been tearing up sheets with my teeth telling Benny I'll escape with him when I don't know how or what I'm talkin' about!

LAWRENCE

Why do you want to escape?

ALF

Not me. Him! And maybe not him!

LAWRENCE

When?

ALF

Whenever we can get six sheets.

LAWRENCE

I'll get 'em now.

ALF

No. Take your time. Take forever!

LAWRENCE

So what's the problem?

ALF

I got caught talkin' Benny into a Rumpelstiltskin instead of him taken an air dance!

LAWRENCE

Air Dance?

ALF

I'm gonna air dance from that god damn wall! I-I can't climb a lick. I'm a weak sister!: The flu last week. Dehydration and malnutrition!

LAWRENCE

What do you want me to do?

ALF

Not hike six sheets!..We gotta get back to our original plan. I lose it in the library.

*A long pause.*

ALF

Think!

LAWRENCE

I'm thinking.

*Pause.*

ALF

Those twins in pinafores and pigtails...Six year olds who have never known a man!

LAWRENCE

Maybe I'll save four lives.

ALF

Minus one.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Three PM in the Library. Peak's always there at that time...Let's move!

ALF  
Bring the vacuum.

**Dim out.**

**SCENE V**

*Rec. Room/ Library. Peak is reading the Big Book very hard with his finger. Alf opens the door and enters quietly. He's carrying a Styrofoam box, preciously petting it.*

PEAK  
[without looking up] Close the door.

*Alf almost tiptoes back to the door and closes it. He approaches Peak quietly again, sets the Styrofoam box on the table and sits.*

ALF  
How's the law comin'?

PEAK  
Don't need it.

ALF  
What do you need?

PEAK  
Art. And the rest will follow.

*Pause.*

ALF

Rest?

PEAK  
I'm tryin' to. But this passage is difficult.

ALF  
It doesn't have to be.

PEAK  
Or not to be.

*Pause.*

ALF

Well—

PEAK  
Well what?

ALF  
Your last moments in here, what will you be thinkin' about?

PEAK  
William Shakespeare. [pushes the book to Alf] There. Read. Any passage. He said it all!  
Sometimes straight forward, sometimes in codes. Just like my kites.

*Alf looks at the page and concentrates.*

PEAK

[continued] Read!

ALF

[reads mumbling] Mum um um mum.

PEAK

Distinctly!

ALF

[reading with difficulty] The seven...fold...shield..of Aja-ex.

PEAK

Ajax!

ALF

Ajax...cannot keep the bat-er-ee from my heart—

PEAK

Stop!...[takes back the book and reads]The seven fold shield of Ajax “Cannot keep the battery from my heart.”...[looks up] Amazin’. That guy lived hundreds of years ago and knew all about my pacemaker.

*Alf stares at Peak. Peak stares back, then looks at the box suspiciously.*

PEAK

What’s in the box?

*Alf answers with a smile. Peak opens the box cautiously and peaks inside.*

ALF

[finally answers] Cookies.

*Peak closes the box quickly.*

PEAK

Can’t have ‘em.Dietin’ before I get out.

*Pause.*

ALF

They’re awful good...Home-made.

PEAK

Home-made...Who’s home?

ALF

The wives of the guys who run the retreat.

*Pause. Peak takes another peak into the box.*

PEAK

Pretty fancy.

ALF

Scrumptious.

PEAK  
Maybe one bite.  
ALF  
Can't hurt.

*Peak breaks off a piece of one cookie and nibbles on it.*

ALF  
Benny got the kite.  
PEAK  
Too bad. They won't let him fly it in the Yard.  
ALF  
Why?!  
PEAK  
Why? Cuz a kite is a symbol of freedom.  
ALF  
A kite with snaps!  
PEAK  
Snaps?

ALF  
Snaps of twins!  
PEAK  
On the inside or outside of the kite?

*Alf stands and starts pacing madly. Peak takes out a cookie without its head.*

PEAK  
[continued] Look at that. The Gingerbread Man has lost his head. [breaks off an arm and eats it]  
ALF  
You're diddlin' me, Peak!  
PEAK  
[half-earnest] [holds heart] Oh my heart.

ALF  
I ain't putting up with no more of your nonsense! Neither is the outside world!

*Alf picks up the chair by its back.*

PEAK  
That's a tall order. Sit down!

*Alf sits in the chair he was about to use on Peak.*

ALF  
I can understand me, but why Benny?

PEAK

Cuz you're not a threat.

ALF

I'm gonna off you!

PEAK

Benny's got religion. He's gotta be tested.

*Pause.*

PEAK

(continued)I could bring up Benny's past [takes another cookie] Unlike most lags he can't brag about it.

ALF

You're a snake, Peak. A big fat boa constrictor who swallows lambs.

PEAK

Coincidentally, that's what Benny is.

ALF

Liar!

PEAK

(continued)Benny was a welder who lost his temper. Blow torched his own mother right in the kisser cuz he was high and she was mighty and wouldn't give him one more dime to support his habit.

ALF

What does that have to do with twins?

PEAK

[takes a cookie] Association with guilt: and then havin' the nerve to sing it in our faces?

*Peak chomps at a cookie furiously, then attempts to lose himself in reading Shakespeare. The iron door flies open. A hand plugs in a chord. A great noise erupts. Lawrence and a huge industrial vacuum cleaner enter. Lawrence heads straight for Peak. He vacuums around Peak. Amid the loud vacuuming, Lawrence gestures Alf to crown Peak with a chair.*

ALF

[shouts above vacuum noise] No!...No!...I've changed my mind!

*Lawrence persists with his vacuuming. Peak slams the Complete Works of Shakespeare shut and tucks it under his arm. He half-walks, half-runs out of the Library with a vacuum nipping at his heels.*

*Lawrence stands triumphantly next to the vacuum. Alf marches over to the socket and unplugs.*

ALF

We're in big trouble.

*Pause.*

LAWRENCE

Let's go take a shower. I feel filthy.

## SCENE VI

*Shower room. Through the steam and opaque glass Izzy is seen swinging his dopey head.*

IZZY

Good-bye Fifi, hello Peak  
Up with the strong, down with the weak  
In the end I'll get you all  
Meantime dream time, have a ball.

*Izzy pushes his face against the shower room glass, thus distorting it. Lawrence and Alf enter wrapped in towels from the waist down.*

IZZY

[continued] The pigpen poet: not bad, not good...Come and get me!

LAWRENCE

[shouts] Get back to work, kid!

*Izzy pounds half-heartedly on the opaque plexi-glass with his wrench a couple of times; then he sinks out of sight. Lawrence and Alf sit on the bench.*

ALF

You ain't mad that I didn't deliver?

LAWRENCE

No. Just disappointed.

ALF

If you knew what I know.

LAWRENCE

Then I'd be a different person

ALF

Yeah...Anyway, I don't wanna' ruin' anybody's image.

LAWRENCE

Everybody's got faults.

*Pause.*

ALF

He's worse than a Mother fucker! He permanently disfigured his: That's a livin' death. A real hell!

LAWRENCE

Who?

ALF

Nobody.

*Izzy starts bawling.*

ALF  
[shouts] Knock it off, sissy!

*Izzy stops bawling.*

LAWRENCE  
Where do we go from here?

ALF  
Realize our limitations.

LAWRENCE  
Let nature take its course?

ALF  
Let the goose migrate.

*The Seven Devils strut in with Benny in their middle of their line. They're wrapped in towels to the waist. Each of the Devils, including Benny, throw their towels downstage and strut into the shower area. The Devils have tattoos all over. Each Devil and Benny give Alf and Lawrence pitiful looks before going into the shower. Still sitting on the shower floor, Izzy greets the 7 devils and Benny with a variety of "wells" in commenting on their "bodies"*

IZZY  
Well...well...well well...welllll...Weh-ll...wwwell...[surprised] Benny!

*Through the glass, a Devil is seen bending down.*

IZZY  
[continued] Don't touch, I'm pregnant!

*Izzy is lifted up by two Devils.*

IZZY  
[continued] You'll be sorry!

*Benny places his hands on Izzy's head.*

IZZY  
[continued] [like Caesar] You, too, Benny?

*Izzy sinks slowly. Then, suddenly, Izzy is thrown high and horizontally by eight men who shout on each cast:*

BENNY AND 7 DEVILS  
[cast] Kum...[cast] Buy...[cast] Ah!

ALF  
Good to see one thing. Benny's lined himself up with the Seven Devils.

LAWRENCE  
Won't Peak be surprised.

**SCENE VII**

*The Yard. Pitch black. A whistle blows.*

OFFICER DANIELS  
Line up, men...Sound off.

LAWRENCE

One.

ALF

Two.

BENNY

Three.

PEAK

Four.

JASON

Where's Izzy?

*The slam of the prison's heavy metal doors.  
The sound of a bouncing handball.  
The sound of a man grunting from lifting a heavy weight.*

OFFICER DANIELS  
Walk to the right of the line, Jason!

*The sound of a woodchuck squealing.*

THE SEVEN DEVILS AND BENNY  
[chanting] We, the Eight... We the Eight... We, the—

*The whistle blows. Suddenly lights come up on the Yard in full-activity. Officer Daniels, still with a whistle in his mouth, is gesturing for the group of Devils and Benny to break up. And they do break up, looking skyward in a non-committal gesture. Benny totes an empty gallon milk container by the handle. Peak goes to the Water Cooler. Devil #1 places a finger on its button and invites Peak to take a drink. Peak bends down, Devil #1 presses the button and Peak gets a squirt in the face. Devil #1 laughs and gives Peak a slap on the back while the rest of the Devils and Benny join in their laughs. Peak smiles and joins Jason.*

JASON  
We ought-a "off" one of them devils as a reminder.

PEAK

Nah, "off" one and seven more'll rush in. I'll just send 'em all picture postcards in a month

*Jason and Peak move to one end of the Yard, Benny and the Seven Devils to the other; Alf and Lawrence move Downstage center. Izzy and Superintendent Williams enter and mount a dais. Williams is the first one to step up to the Standing Microphone.*

LAWRENCE

[to Alf] Look: Izzy!

JASON

What's my suck-ass assistant doin' up there?

PEAK

Shh... This ought-a be a lark.

SUPER WILLIAMS

[into the mike] Good afternoon, gentlemen.

SEVEN DEVILS

[harmoniously] Good afternoon, Super Williams.

*The Seven Devils and Benny laugh. Woodchuck #1 pops out of its hole.*

PEAK

[about Devils] [On QT] I see it comin'. We're bein' challenged.

JASON

Yeah, by them Prunes from the end of our tier.

*Pause.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Only two weeks ago, two rather enthusiastic young men came into my office and declared they had a proposition. [slight pause] I must admit in own mind it seemed rather far-fetched. But I

listened—

JASON

[on QT] [to Peak] She's got the hots for me.

SUPER WILLIAMS

Listened to someone who had plumbing experience not so very long ago.

JASON

[shouts] Baskins and Robinson!

ALF

[shouts] The ice-cream people!

*Everybody laughs. Woodchuck #2 pops out of its hole.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[smiles] Not the ice-cream people.

*The Seven Devils high-five and slap thighs.*

JASON

[aside] [to Peak] Alf dissed me.

SUPER WILLIAMS

Jason Macdonald, will you give us a wave.

*Jason gives clockwise waves to everybody.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Yes-

*Jason doesn't stop waving. He now waves counter-clockwise.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[slightly impatient] Yes, Jason, your assistant has repaired [reads from a sheet] twelve toilets...[everybody claps] 4 sinks...[everybody claps]... 3 shower nozzles...[everybody claps]

IZZY

[moves to the mike] And the drain in the Warden's tub.

*Nobody claps. Woodchuck #3 pops out of its hole.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Isadore Duncan, I don't know how you do it!

JASON

[aside] [to Peak] Speed.

*Izzy sticks his head into the mike. Benny starts filling his gallon plastic milk container at the water cooler.*

IZZY

I wanna thank Jason for jump-startin me—

JASON

[aside] It's about time.

IZZY

and then he was off to his crib.

*Everybody laughs except Jason and Peak. Woodchuck #4 pops its head out of a hole.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

Gentlemen, not only has Isadore been a benefit to this institution, and to himself, of course, by inspiring others who have talents, to come forth and teach others, and—

*Super Williams breaks down a bit and dabs tears with her fist.*

JASON

[aside] I should be up there.

SUPER WILLIAMS

So without much ado about everything a person can possibly do after a trial period of just two weeks, you, Isadore, should be given more than a token!

*Choked up, Super Williams shoves a plaque into Izzy's stomach.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[on the shove] Here!

*A skunk pops out of its hole.*

*Izzy steps up to the standing microphone. Everybody except Jason, Peak and Officer Daniels, clap and cheer. Isadore quiets everyone down with a gesture...but, in the process, sees from the back wall's juncture [stage-hands operating hand puppets] 4 Woodchucks and a Skunk listening attentively. Izzy is momentarily shocked but snaps to and proceeds to deliver his "acceptance-of-the-plaque" speech.*

IZZY

Thank you..thank you...thanks a bunch...[looks at plaque] Wow! I'm loved! You don't know how much this means to me. [looks at prison audience, then plaque, then animals] Wow!

JASON

"Wow" what?

PEAK

A lark. Listen!

ALF AND LAWRENCE

[to Jason and Peak] Shh!

PEAK

[Points indignantly to himself] Me?!

IZZY

I-I never was much: trailer trash...Sent to Juvenile Correction and got worse.

*The Woodchucks squeal.*

IZZY

Took my first snort at fourteen...Was free basin six months later...when other greenies in Disneyland was goin' to Sunday Services.

DEVIL #5

[power salutes with his raised fist] Right on!

IZZY

Flip flopped in the street, in the stir, in the sky, with the chucks if I could, till my circumference ripped and the pain became endless.

*The Skunk squeaks.*

IZZY

[continued] Still I survived though my center is out of control.

*The Skunk raises its tail and everybody backs off a tad.*

IZZY

So, Super Williams and Gentlemen, as you all are so dear to me, I gotta confess. I am Peckerwood. I thought all you Devils was stinkin pole cats without stripes. But I'm the pole cat. I got AIDS. [pounds chest] Forgive [points fist at the Seven Devils...[pound chest] Forgive...[points fist at Peakers]...[pounds chest] Forgive...[points fist to the sky] Cuz if you can't then you're lower than low [bows his head while keeping his fist aloft]

*Izzy sits down on the floor of the Dais slowly. He cradles the plaque in his lap.*

PEAK

[on QT] Iz has to be mysteriously offed.

JASON

[on QT] When you're gone, I'll take care of it.

*Officer Daniels blows his whistle a bit. But Super Williams grabs his arm.*

BENNY

[shouts across the yard] Peak, are you with me!?

PEAK

[shouts] Go fly a kite!

BENNY

[shouts] I didn't hear that!

*Benny passes the full carton of water on to a Devil who will proceed to take a swig and pass it on to the other Devils.*

PEAK

[shouts] Then hear this!...You have been actin' mighty peculiar lately!

*Benny advances toward Peak...and the Seven Devils begin to gather behind Benny.*

BENNY

[shouts] Big man!

*Devil #1 takes a swig.*

PEAK

[shouts] Twins in pinafores with long pigtales!

*Peak advances, Devil #2 takes a swig.*

BENNY

[shouts] Big, Peak. But not big enough!

*Benny advances with the line of Devils behind him. Devil #3 takes a swig.*

JASON

[on QT] [about the advancing horde] Shouldn't we consider the numbers?

PEAK

[on QT] Get behind me, Jason!

*Jason gets behind Peak.*

PEAK

[continued] [shouts] A pinafore in flames. We'll see how you handle it!

*Peak advances. Devil #4 takes a swig.*

BENNY

[shouts] I'll handle it and keep coming.

*Benny advances. Peak holds his heart...then musters courage.*

PEAK

[shouts] Those pigtails. How sweet to see Clarissa swingin' from them.

*Peak advances.*

BENNY

You better not.

*Peak stops near Benny: Devil #5 takes a swig.*

PEAK

Touch me and Cynthia goes too.

BENNY

Cynthia?... You even know both of their names.

*Pause.*

PEAK

Think.

BENNY

I have. They go and then you go.

*Devil #6 takes a swig. Peak holds his heart, then musters courage again and advances to a "nose-to-nose" confrontation.*

PEAK

So what!?

BENNY

[calmly] Without God, nothing is possible.

PEAK

Nothing is possible.

*Benny places a hand on Peak's shoulder. Peak knocks it off. Devil #7 takes a swig.*

BENNY

[sings] Blest are they, the poor in spirit,  
Theirs is the kingdom of God  
Blest are they full of sorrow,  
They shall be consoled.

*Peak staggers a bit. Benny takes the jug from Devil #7. Peak drops back. Jason steps aside.*

SEVEN DEVILS

[sing] Rejoice and be glad!  
Blessed are you, holy are you!  
Rejoice and be glad  
Yours is the kingdom of God

*Benny advances on Peak.*

BENNY

[sings] Blest are they, the lowly ones,  
They shall inherit the earth  
Blest are they who hunger and thirst,  
They shall have their fill.

*Peak charges Benny, but the Devilish choir of Seven fall on one knee before him.*

SEVEN DEVILS

[sings] Rejoice and be glad!  
Blessed are you, holy are you!  
Rejoice and be glad  
Yours is the kingdom of God.

*Benny, behind his "line," continues:*

BENNY

[sings] Blest are they who show mercy,  
Mercy shall be theirs.  
Blest are they, the pure of heart,  
They shall see God.

*Peak charges the "line" to get at Benny, but is successfully blocked out of the play.*

SEVEN DEVILS

[sings] Rejoice and be glad!  
Blessed are you, holy are you!  
Rejoice and be glad  
Yours is the kingdom of God.

*Peak backs off, Benny advances. Jason is now in Benny's "backfield"*

PEAK

Jason, grab him!

JASON

No thanks. I ain't got the numbers.

*Peak pounds his pacemaker chest. The "linemen" stand and face Quarterback Benny.*

BENNY

[instructing his "line" with his finger] [sings]

Blest are they who seek peace,  
They are the children of God  
Blest are they who suffer in faith,  
The glory of God is theirs

PEAK

You-you Mother Deformer!

*The Seven Devils turn around and face Peak.*

PEAK

[continued] [to Benny] Y-you Kid Killer...of your own!

*The Seven Devils gather and kneel tight together on two knees to protect their quarterback as if it were the last play of the game. Benny takes a swig.*

PEAK

[to officials on the ground and in the watchtowers] Hey, can't you see? We're havin' a riot.

BENNY

[gestures with his jug-free hand for Peak to come toward him] Come on...Come on. Show us how big you really are!

The Seven Devils throw their signs at Peak.

PEAK

[to Watchtower, officer Daniels and Williams] Wakeup, screws. Signs are signs. Sound those sirens!

BENNY

Bigger! Bigger!!

*Peak scrapes his feet for traction, then charges. He dives over the line but lands on his back in front of Benny. Everybody cheers but the Mule, Officer Daniels. Benny slaps his hand into Peak's shirt to feel for a heartbeat.*

BENNY  
[continued] He's alive.

*Nobody claps except Officer Daniels. But even his clap dwindles because of the eyes of others. Benny stands and, from on high, pours the rest of the water from the container onto Peak's face. Peak awakens. The skunks squeals. Sociability returns to all. Peak staggers all over the Yard. But as soon as he approaches others, they either shun or ignore him...except for Benny who dogs him but from whom Peak tries to escape. The Seven Devils stand about like pillars. Peak staggers over to Alf and Lawrence.*

PEAK  
Peakers!

*Lawrence turns away and looks skyward. Geese start honking.*

LAWRENCE  
[looking skyward] Look at that angle swell and shrink.

ALF  
[looking skyward] Like...a slow...whiplash.

LAWRENCE  
[looking up] The lead is changin'

*Peak grabs on to Lawrence.*

PEAK  
Look, I was testin'

*Lawrence shakes Peak off. Peak falls then stumbles to his feet and grabs Alf.*

PEAK  
[continued] Nothin' happened. They can't prove a thing!

*Alf flings Peak who lands near Jason. Peak starts crawling the rest of the way to Jason's canvas shoes. He grabs on.*

JASON  
[feet dancing free of Peak's hug] Off of my bo-bo's! [gym shoes]

*Peak spots Benny over his shoulder. He stumbles to his feet and scrambles away from him and into the arms of Devil #1 who grabs both of his biceps and shakes him. Three devils form a ring around Peak.*

DEVIL #1  
Are you gonna come?  
PEAK  
To what?  
DEVIL #1  
The next retreat.  
PEAK  
I could..for the cookies.

*Devil #1 pushes Peak into Devil #2 who holds him in place.*

BENNY  
[sings] Blest are you who suffer hate  
All because of me  
Blest are you pleased in love  
Shine for all to see.

*Devil #2 pushes Peak across the ring and he is bounced back and forth like a pinball among the 3 Devils during the refrain below.*

THE SEVEN DEVILS AND BENNY  
[sings] Rejoice and be glad!  
Blessed are you, holy are you!  
Rejoice and be glad  
Yours is the kingdom of God.

*Peak spins out of the circle and falls. Officer Daniels blows his whistle. Everybody freezes. Peak breaks his freeze. He walks up to a frozen Officer Daniels.*

PEAK  
[on QT] No matter what,I'm getting' out.And when I do-

*Officer Daniels remains rigid. Peak walks up to Super Williams and gives her a hug. She remains frozen. The woodchucks squeal. Peak dashes for the wall, kicks at one and they all duck into their holes. Peak goes to kick the skunk. It raises its tail. Peak backs off. He turns to face everybody in the yard.*

PEAK  
[points to himself] I could: [points a sweeping finger at everybody else] You could..Anything's possible!

*Peak's sweeping "point" finds Benny and freezes.*

BENNY  
(opening both arms to the sky)  
*Be bigger than big!*

*Peak hesitates, then exits abruptly. Izzy runs to the exit.*

IZZY

Come back, Peak. Please!

Benny

He'll be out and then we'll see.

*Izzy turns and shrugs, hand open, to everyone. Officer Daniels blows his whistle once. Everyone remains frozen. He blows the whistles a second time and breaks the freeze. Everyone passes Izzy in their exit as:*

- 1) *Four of the Devils thump their chests and point fists upward while Izzy returns the gesture... Three Devils exchange pounding fists with him. Benny hugs him.*
- 2) *Jason side-steps Izzy being afraid of disease.*
- 3) *Alf and Lawrence embrace him at the same time.*

SUPER WILLIAMS

[handing Izzy the plaque] You forgot your award.

IZZY

Nah, add other names to it when they learn how to do somethin'.

*Super Williams hugs Izzy. She leaves with the plaque. Officer Daniels approaches. Izzy fakes rapid punches, to his stomach. Officer Daniels calmly smacks him in the forehead with his open palm and staggers him back a bit.*

OFFICER DANIELS

Come down.

*Izzy exits, then Officer Daniels. The Chucks squeal, the Skunk flags its tail, the geese honk overhead and the ground animals quiet down. Izzy enters and looks up. He raises both fists high and bows his head.*

IZZY

On to more tiers.

*Officer Daniels enters, grabs Izzy by the collar and throws him out the exit. Another squadron of geese honk. Officer Daniels looks up for a moment, then exits. The honking dies out, then the lights fade out.*

**The End.**