

MISTAKEN

An original southern musical
by John Bankhead

REV 12-16-18

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

<u>Cecil:</u>	Colorful Cajun narrator.
<u>Mama Lulu:</u>	Haitian voodoo woman.
<u>Reverend Bobby Swift:</u>	Dynamic gospel preacher.
<u>Thelonious "Thelo" Pitt:</u>	Stalwart sugar cane worker.
<u>Johnny Chavez:</u>	Handsome, two-bit con.
<u>Alex Shaw:</u>	Young, mistaken teenager.
<u>Warden Smelling:</u>	Off-beat prison head.
<u>Officer Heller:</u>	Stoic, sinister foreman.
<u>Crystal:</u>	Johnny's "go-go" girlfriend.
<u>Angel:</u>	Thelo's endearing wife.
<u>Joy:</u>	Alex's demure fiance.
<u>Tooty and Shirly:</u>	Voluptuous strippers.
<u>Rougon:</u>	Unscrupulous bookie.
<u>Bubba:</u>	Johnny's bayou cousin.
<u>Bruly and Alphonse:</u>	Cajun grifters.
<u>Raymundo:</u>	Flamboyant stylist.
<u>Silo:</u>	Hefty country simpleton.
<u>Broussard:</u>	Johnny's workcamp sidekick.
<u>Mr. Jennings:</u>	Alex's attorney.

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ACT ISCENE 1

It's 1969.

THE PROLOGUE BEGINS as the curtain rises to A FULL SCRIM FLIGHT PROJECTION soaring over landscapes and recognizable landmarks of LOUISIANA. Starting at sunrise, each location progresses quickly throughout a day. As the sun sets, we approach an ominous bank of clouds, entering deep into a VIOLENT THUNDERSTORM. The view of the audience turns, diving straight down into the French Quarter.

THE PROLOGUE SWELLS TO A CLIMAX as the SCRIM reveals action on stage - it's JACKSON SQUARE, seen through flashes of lighting, heavy rain and thunder on a darkened stage. Two silhouetted characters struggle. A gun fires. One character falls. The other slowly moves away into the shadows. Another enters, moving quickly to the fallen character.

MALE VOICE

Oh my God.

A final character enters, standing over the two.

FEMALE VOICE

Alex? What have you done?

MALE VOICE

No.. No.

Before ALEX can speak another word, A POLICE OFFICER enters wielding a flashlight. He shines the light on the fallen character, then up to Alex's face. He draws his sidearm slowly.

POLICE OFFICER

Don't frickin' move.

STAGE GOES DARK.

SCENE 2

The lights rise on a PRISON CAMP REC YARD. CECIL, the NARRATOR, enters. INMATES mingle in their state-issued blues.

CECIL

Bayou folks say prison's like one big gumbo. You got all them boys thrown in here from all walks of life. Like a gumbo, you got to watch it just right to make sure nothin' boils over.

REVEREND BOBBY

Jesus, like many of you, was an outcast. Misunderstood. Shunned by his own people, and, eventually and unfortunately put to death so others might live to praise his holy name. Can I get an amen!

SILO AND RAYMUNDO

AMEN!

REVEREND BOBBY

Now that's what I'm talking about!

THELONIOUS (THELO) PITT sits on a wooden chair reading a newspaper. He looks up to watch BOBBY preach, grins, shakes his head, and returns to reading.

A BASEBALL rolls to a stop beneath his feet.

BRULY and ALPHONSE approach wearing baseball gloves to recover the ball, Thelo dips his paper, looking at both men.

They back away slowly and leave the area.

THELO

Hey Reverend, think fast!

Thelo throws the ball to the Reverend and walks off stage.

REVEREND BOBBY

Gentlemen, this baseball is not just leather and string, but a symbol of our constant need to remember what awaits on the outside as we pay for our indiscretions inside these wired walls. Salvation shines light on all God's children through the deeds of righteous and repentful men.

SILO AND RAYMUNDO

Amen!

WARDEN SMELLING enters the yard.

WARDEN SMELLING

Inspirational words, Reverend... and may I say, a nice visual aid for the players.

REVEREND BOBBY tosses the ball to the Warden.

REVEREND BOBBY

Add it to your collection, Warden. A good reminder from the man upstairs.

WARDEN SMELLING

Why thank you, Bobby. This will set nicely next to The Mantle.

OFFICER HELLER enters the yard.

WARDEN SMELLING

Coach Heller. Please be kind enough to bring this to my office. I have some business concerning a new player that needs attending. Bobby. Boys.

The Warden tosses the ball to HELLER.

HELLER

Yes, sir.

The Warden exits. Heller sets the ball on a nearby table, leaning down to TIE HIS SHOE LACE.

JOHNNY CHAVEZ enters, followed by BROUSSARD. He walks directly past Heller, undetected, picks up the ball, and cross to the other side of the yard.

Heller lifts his head to see the ball is gone.

Heller notices BRULY AND ALPHONSE playing catch with another ball. He walks directly between them, snagging the ball in mid flight...

...without breaking stride, Heller moves in the direction of the Warden's exit.

Bruly lights a cigarette.

BRULY

Dick.

Heller stops, turns, and walks directly at Bruly. Bruly backs up.

HELLER

What did you say, Bruly, you stupid coonass?

BRULY

Nothing. Sir. I said nothing.

HELLER

I'll take those smokes.

BRULY

But my wife just gave...

HELLER

Now! You're lucky that's not all I'm taking. You got anything to say, Alphonse?

ALPHONSE

No, sir.

HELLER

That's what I thought.

Heller pulls a cigarette from Bruly's pack, lights it, and blows smoke in his face. He drops the pack to the stage and crushes it with his foot. Heller turns and walks off.

ALPHONSE (UNDER HIS BREATH)

Asshole.

JOHNNY CHAVEZ and BROUSSARD move downstage.

JOHNNY

Gris-Gris. Hoodoo. Tarot Cards - all that crap.
Me and Crystal headed to the Quarter for some
food.. and a few wallets. There she was.

BROUSSARD

Who you talking 'bout, bro?

JOHNNY

Mama Lulu.

A FRENCH QUARTER scene forms as a
BUSTLING, BOISTEROUS CROWD OF
TOURISTS enter stage. STREET
VENDORS enter and set up shop.

CRYSTAL, Johnny's girlfriend,
joins Johnny - they "cruise" the
tourists, lifting wallets as their
targets are distracted by the
local scene.

MAMA LULU sets up a make shift
tarot table.

Street Scene Dance Number

Song: "Everything Comes in Threes"

A DAY IN UPTOWN, I'M STUCK IN THE STREET
MY GROWLING INSIDES NEEDED SOMETHING TO EAT
I SAID TO CRY, LET'S HEAD ON DOWN TO THE QUARTER AND MAYBE
WE CAN PICK UP ONE THEM TAKIE OUTIE ORDERS
CRY SAID TO ME, JOHNNY, HERE COMES OUR RIDE
WE HOPPED ABOARD THE TROLLEY, HANGING TO THE OTHER SIDE
THAT'S HOW IT STARTED, AND THEN THE LESSON BEGAN

DOWN IN NEW ORLEANS THE PEOPLE THEY SEEM KINDA GRITTY
DRIFTING FROM UPTOWN TO DOWNTOWN, THE BASE OF THE CITY
PASSING BY JAX, ON THE WAY TO THE SQUARE
NEXT TO THE MARKET WITH FLOWING BLACK HAIR
SAT A LARGE LADY WITH CARDS IN HER HAND, SHE WAS SINGING

GOT TO BELIEVE IN THE WORDS THAT THE BIG SISTER TELLS YOU
TURNING THREE CARDS, SHE POINTS THEM MY WAY
SHOWS ME THE HAND SHE WANTS ME TO PLAY

CHORUS

VOODOO AIN'T LULU AND WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE FOOLING
WISE CRACKER, DOPE SMACKER, CHILD WHACKER, WORLD BELOW IS
CHURNING
HAVE YOU EVOLVED FROM YOUR PLACE IN THE SEA
CLING TO THE ROPE AS YOU FALL OUT THE TREE
DON'T YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU KNOW, EVERYTHING COMES IN THREES

I THOUGHT IT FUNNY, SHE WANTED NO MONEY TO TELL ME
SECRETS OF LIFE WHEN SHE HARDLY GOT FOOD FOR HER BELLY

CRYS SAID TO ME, MAN, THAT SEEMS PRETTY COOL, BUT, I THINK
WE'D BE BETTER OFF INSIDE MY POOL
I SAID, HOLD ON DUDE, I WANT TO TALK TO THIS WOMAN SOME MORE
GOT TO BELIEVE IN THE WORDS THAT THE BIG SISTER TOLD ME
TURNING THREE CARDS, SHE POINTS THEM MY WAY
SHOWS ME THE CARDS, SHE WANTS ME TO PLAY

(CHORUS)

AS I WAS WALKING, I KNEW SHE WAS RIGHT
INSIDE MY STOMACH, IT BALLED UP REAL TIGHT
THE FEELING THAT WENT FROM MY NECK TO MY HEAD
THE WORDS THAT SHE TOLD ME HAD STARTED TO SPREAD
HAVE YOU EVOLVED FROM YOUR PLACE IN THE SEA
CLING TO THE ROPE AS YOU FALL OUT THE TREE
DON'T YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU KNOW, EVERYTHING COMES IN THREES

YES, IT WAS SPARKED, A GREAT LESSON THAT DAY
THAT PEOPLE ARE PEOPLE, EVEN THE STRAYS
SOMETIMES THE KNOWLEDGE THAT WAITS FROM WITHIN
NEEDS A SMALL TUG TO COME BACK AGAIN
HAVE YOU EVOLVED FROM YOUR PLACE IN THE SEA
CLING TO THE ROPE AS YOU FALL OUT THE TREE
DON'T YOU KNOW, DON'T YOU KNOW, EVERYTHING COMES IN THREES.

SCENE 3

By the end of the number, all male actors have exited one-by-one and clear the stage - except for Johnny - leaving the female characters and Johnny to end the song. TRANSITION back to the prison with all female characters exiting in conversation. Inmates now enter stage, pushing BED BUNKS and CHAIRS into place to create the BUNKHOUSE AREA. RAYMUNDO, SILO, BRULY, and ALPHONSE congregate around a card table to begin their daily game of poker.

Thelo enters and goes to his bunk area.

Cecil crosses, pushing a large broom downstage from the action.

CECIL

We got us a new one today. Barely nineteen and put away for the rest of his so called life with no chance of parole. He just got transferred from New Orleans.

Alex and Warden Smelling cross to the bunkhouse area.

WARDEN SMELLING

Alex, I always like to walk the new boys to their bunk. Team meetings, 6am, every morning... I'm sure Thelo will be more than happy to break you in on our regulations regarding league protocol.

Thelo sits next to his bunk.

WARDEN SMELLING (TO THELO)

We acquired our new ace reliever here from the single A program in New Orleans. It was tough going, but we were finally able to secure a no out contract with Alex... By the way, your requisition for the new playbook came through. I'll send Coach Heller over later to deliver it. Goodbye, gentlemen.

Without looking up, Thelo says..

THELO

Not there. Top bunk.

It's an uncomfortable, silent moment for Alex in his new surroundings. He awkwardly climbs onto the top bunk.

ALEX (QUIETLY WITH HEAD DOWN)

I didn't do it.

Thelo slowly looks up, directly at Alex. Alex looks back. Thelo says nothing with a calm stare.

ALEX

But.. I really didn't. Seriously. I don't like guns. I won't even hunt with my dad.

Theo, still silent.

ALEX

I've never held a gun before. Well, at least until that night. Wait, that didn't sound right. It was on the ground and I picked it up! Shit. This is not going well at all. I should probably stop talking.

THELO

That would be wise.

Thelo stands and moves to Alex.

THELO

Everybody's got a cross to bear, boy. It's just some folks want a set a wheels to roll it around on. Know what I'm saying?

ALEX

No.

THELO

There's a whole lotta bad going down outside these days - 'specially for folks like me - but in this place, we all the same. You might not of killed someone with a gun, or a knife, or even by your own hand.

Thelo pauses - staring at his large, callused hands.

THELO

We're all guilty of something, Alex.

ALEX

Yeah, but not this.

SCENE 4

ALEX and JOY hold hands as they speak across a VISITATION TABLE. Other prisoners visit with their loved ones.

JOY

Your mom's been asking about you. I told her you're O.K., considering the circumstance.

ALEX

All I think about is what I'm missing out there. I'm scared, Joy.

JOY

It's not your fault, baby. The attorney says he's on to something. I know its been months, but you have to hang in there.

ALEX

If only we'd stayed on the street and out of Jackson Square, all of this wouldn't have happened... Let me see the ring.

Joy lifts her delicate hand, showing her engagement ring to Alex. He leans forward and kisses her hand, holding it against his face.

ALEX

It's as bright as your smile the night I gave it to you. Remember what I said?

JOY

We would never be without one another, no matter what.

ALEX

No matter what.

Joy stands and turns - REVEALING SHE IS PREGNANT.

NOTE: Other characters on stage sing background vocals during the choruses. Throughout the song, prisoners and loved ones slowly exit until Joy and Alex are left alone at the end.

Duet with Joy and Alex.

Song: "Inside"

I KNOW WE'LL FIND A WAY
A WAY TO SEE THIS THROUGH
EACH AND EVERY BREATH I TAKE
THE MORE I THINK OF YOU
A BABY NEEDS IT'S MOM AND DAD
A FAMILY YET TO BE
A BABY NEEDS A LOVING PLACE
CRADLED TENDERLY

CHORUS

YOU ARE ME
(AND) I AM YOU
TWO ARE WE
TO SEE IT THROUGH

IT'S ALL TOGETHER TRUE
ON THE INSIDE
IT'S DARK INSIDE
THERE I KNOW
IN A PLACE WHERE WE CAN GROW.

INSIDE, ON THE INSIDE, ON THE INSIDE.

A FAMILY FOR THE HOLIDAYS
A HOME THAT'S SAFE AND WARM
A ROOF ABOVE AND FLOORS BELOW
SHELTERED FROM THE STORM
TO HEAR HIM CRY WHEN HE WAKES UP
IS MUSIC TO MY EARS
TO HOLD HIM IN MY ARMS EACH DAY
AND WIPE AWAY HIS TEARS

(CHORUS - "INSIDE" LINE REPEAT)

BREAK CHORUS

Heller enters.

Joy notices Heller. Alex does not.

SUDDENLY, Alex feels the
uncomfortably strong grip of
Heller squeezing his shoulder.

HELLER

All right, time's up, Shaw. Let's go, boy.

ALEX

I swear to God I'll find a way to be there for
the baby.

JOY

You're gonna be a great daddy, Alex. I love
you... We love you.

HELLER

A daddy. Too bad the kid will grow up without a
father.

Before he can say goodbye, Heller
grabs Alex by the shirt and lifts
him to his feet. They exit. Joy is
left alone on stage with a single
table and the two chairs across
from one another.

JOY

You are a great daddy, Alex.

SCENE 5

Thelo and Alex sit on wooden BLEACHERS amidst a crowd of INMATES conducting mid-day exercise. Warden Smelling crosses with book in hand.

WARDEN SMELLING

Thought I'd deliver the new playbook myself.

Handing the book to Thelo -

WARDEN SMELLING

Alex, how's that arm of yours holding up? You're in "the show" now, my boy. Have to go. Big coaches meeting in five minutes. Must prepare. Later, boys.

ALEX

New playbook? Coaches meeting?

Start STAGE PROJECTION of
Documentary-Style Footage

THELO

Few years back, the warden had him a little accident whilst up in Boston. He's sitting in centerfield at Fenway for a Bosox/Yankees game, when Mickey Mantle tags a long line drive over his head and hits the scoreboard. Apparently, he was bending over to get his hotdog and listening to the game with one a them little ear plugs. The ball came down and hit him square on the head, knocking the Warden out cold. When he came to, Mickey himself was there to sign the ball.

End Documentary-Style Footage

THELO

Ever since, he's been talking like he's a baseball coach in the majors.

ALEX

What's that?

THELO

Shakespeare. Plenty of time for reading in here. Out there, weren't no time for anything else but cutting cane. Never went to school. My Angel taught me to read.

ALEX

Your Angel?

THELO

My wife. Her real name's Angela, but Angel fits her just right. Pretty as a star-filled sky.

Reverend Bobby enters with Silo - loaded head to toe - carrying cleaning buckets, brushes and mops. The Reverend carries nothing.

REVEREND BOBBY

Gentlemen, there is no job more gratifying than outhouse detail. Maybe next they'll allow me to peel some potatoes, or do ya'll call 'em spuds here in the land of snakes and gators?

THELO

Alex - the Reverend Bobby Swift from Sheveport, Louisiana. Bobby here's a new member of the team, just like you. I forget what his position is.

REVEREND BOBBY

Shit stop. God and our great State decided to give me a blue denim vacation down south - all expenses paid. I was under the impression that my church and certain benefits were exempt from the scrutiny of taxation. Apparently, the government thought otherwise and dumped me head first into this chain-linked cesspool. Now I look at overweight, tattooed slobs, swamp land, and barbed wire ... Good Lord, look where I've come.

Inmates gather together to hear Bobby speak.

GOSPEL B3 ORGAN MUSIC begins.

REVEREND BOBBY

My good people. Today I am here not to praise the accomplishments of our Almighty, but, to testify to the sins of a misguided soul.

Inmates give an AMEN! (B3 HIT as if in gospel church)

REVEREND BOBBY

A soul lost in a sea of wanton desire. Desire for the good life. Desire for the superficial and tangible. A soul who asks forgiveness, not pity... For is it so bad to want such good things? To drive an expensive car.

To wear fine clothes. To live in a big,
beautiful house. Aren't we taught from an early
age to seek the American Dream? The dream of
wealth and power - I stand now before you to
tell that true power comes from the inside -
not the out.

Inmates give an AMEN! (B3 HIT)

REVEREND BOBBY

True wealth is not measured in possessions, but
in friendship and forgiveness... Now, some of
you are saying, "Yes, reverend, that's all
good, but aren't you a day late and a dollar
short." That's true. I lost all those fine
possessions. My church. My freedom. But I got
my soul back, and that's a good trade! Can I
get an amen!

INMATES

Amen!

Stage transforms from prison yard
to church setting, complete with
female background singers.

Gospel dance number.

Song: "Good Lord, How Did I Get So
Bad?"

BROTHERS AND SISTERS
YOU ARE GATHERED HERE
NOT TO PRAISE THE LORD
BUT TO RAISE THE FEAR
OF A MISGUIDED DRIVER
ON THE ROAD TO HELL
IF YOUR HOLDING STOCK IN ME
THAN PERHAPS YOU'D BETTER SELL
CAN I GET AN AMEN FROM THE LADIES IN THE CHOIR OVER THERE?

CHORUS

GOOD LORD, HOW DID I GET SO BAD
GOOD LORD, HOW DID I GET SO BAD
'BOUT THOSE TEN COMMANDMENTS
YES I KNOW THEM WELL
PUT YOUR HANDS TOGETHER
AND WE'LL BREAK THE SPELL
THAT IS CAST UPON ME
LEADING ME TO STRAY
NOW MY SOUL'S WITH JESUS

HELP ME FIND MY WAY
BACK TO THE PLACE AND THE SPACE WHERE THIS WHOLE THING BEGAN

(CHORUS X 4)

MUSIC BREAK

CAN I GET AN AMEN FROM THE PEOPLE IN THE CHOIR OUT THERE?

(CHORUS, VAMP OUT)

Stage clears of all characters and returns to prison yard scene. One inmate, Silo, stands alone, circling his fist in the air with whoops of excitement.

STAGE GOES DARK.

SCENE 6

Cecil enters stage, tossing a baseball up and down

CECIL

A baseball done got these stitches on the outside, cher. It's what binds the leather and keeps the ball from fallin' apart. If one of them seams starts to unravel, who knows if it'll hold. Like most things, it's only as strong as it's weakest spot.

Cecil exits.

Thelo and Reverend Bobby eat lunch in the PRISON CAFETERIA, along with a room full of sunburned inmates.

Johnny Chavez walks to their table carrying a tray and takes a seat next to the Reverend.

JOHNNY

Another day in heaven, huh Reverend?

REVEREND BOBBY

Not yet, Mr. Chavez, and I doubt you'll be heading up that way when your turn arrives.

JOHNNY (TO THELO)

As long as you're around to keep me company. ... Hey, what ya got there?

REVEREND BOBBY

I'm afraid it's all words, lacking the proper amount of naked lady pictures usually contained in your sticky-paged literature.

THELO

The Collective Works of William Shakespeare,
Volume One. He was a great playwright from
England hundreds of years ago.

JOHNNY

Groovy. We gotta talk.

THELO

Rougon.

REVEREND BOBBY

Who is Rougon?

JOHNNY

Get lost, Reverend.

The Reverend hesitates.

JOHNNY

Now!

Bobby slowly rises from the table,
holding his half-eaten tray. He
looks directly at Johnny.

REVEREND BOBBY

As the bible says, "The Lord Giveth, and The
Lord taketh away." I wonder what he'll take
from you.

Reverend Bobby turns quickly and
crosses - locating a spot at an
open table.

JOHNNY

Goddamn preachers.

THELO

What's up, boy?

JOHNNY

He found out about Jackson Square.

THELO

How?

JOHNNY

Rougon set up some half-ass lawyer out of
Chalmette - just in case the police found
something that pointed to me. After I told the
lawyer, Rougon paid him more to find out for
himself.

THELO

Your bookie still helps you, after all that money you owe him?

JOHNNY

Frickin' Saints can't win for shit... His insurance in case I got pinched. Rougon's gonna roll on me if I don't get him the money soon. Can't make it happen inside, bro. I have to find a way out. Gotta get back to a life outside this dump. Back to my girl. Back to my life.

THELO

I hear ya, brother. Since I been caged up in this pen, I miss the simplest things... coming in from the fields at the end of a long hard day, knowing my Angel was there waiting for me. Hot rags to wrap around these callused hands and a warm smile to welcome me home.

Song: "The Long Ride Home"

THE LONG RIDE HOME
 YOU'RE DEEP IN MY HEART
 THE SUN'S GOING DOWN
 WE'RE NOT FAR APART
 THE LONG RIDE HOME
 I'M NOT FAR AWAY
 THE WARMTH OF YOUR SMILE
 THE END OF THE DAY

THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THE LONG RIDE HOME
 YOU'RE NOT FAR AWAY

THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THEY'RE DIMMING THE SKY
 THE STILL OF THE FIELDS
 AWAY BY AND BY

THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THE LONG RIDE HOME
 AWAY BY AND BY

THE LONG RIDE HOME
 THE PASSING OF DAY
 AGAIN GREET'S THE NIGHT
 YOU'RE NOT FAR AWAY

SCENE 7

Inside the WARDEN'S OFFICE, Major league pennants and clippings from various baseball publications "wallpaper" the Warden's panel-lined office. A shelf with various baseballs, including THE MANTLE, is prominently placed.

Alex - fidgeting in a hard metal chair - sits across the desk from the Warden.

"Coach Heller" watches on, leaning against a dented metal filing cabinet.

WARDEN SMELLING

Coach Heller here tells me you'd like to be sent back to our minor team. Says you miss your girl. You know Alex, when I left for the life we call baseball, I missed a lot of girls. You get use to it. You're married to the game now, son.

ALEX

She's not some girl, coach - I mean - Warden. She's my fiancée... And she's pregnant. We're having a boy.

WARDEN SMELLING

Alex, didn't you see the film we ran on personal protection. All you had to do was find one of the trainers and....

ALEX

Warden, she's gonna be my wife - not the game. I love her. Joy's got no one to take care of her. I have to be there for the baby being born.

WARDEN SMELLING

I see. Coach Heller, could you find me Mr. Shaw's contract. I believe it's in the top drawer of that filing cabinet.

HELLER

Yes, sir.

Officer Heller pulls a large drawer open. He thumbs through numerous files and pulls one from the drawer, handing it to the Warden.

WARDEN SMELLING

It says here that our farm league headquarters signed you over on a non-determined contract with no limit on your stay... I guess it's up to me to make the call.

ALEX

You won't regret it, sir.

WARDEN SMELLING

I know I won't... Coach Heller, please escort Alex back to the bunkhouse. I believe my mind is made up on this one.

ALEX

Warden.

WARDEN SMELLING

Please, call me Coach.

ALEX

All right, Coach. Coach, isn't there anything I can do? I'm innocent. All I did was try to help a man, and I wind up in prison for the rest of my life.

WARDEN SMELLING

Alex, I get the feeling you and I are going to be real pals. Now, I've got to finish looking at the films with Coach Heller.

(to Heller)

I think Alex here can find his own way back, don't you Coach?

HELLER

Sure.

WARDEN SMELLING

Practice hard, son. Remember, there's no I in the word team.

ALEX

But...

WARDEN SMELLING

Time to go, son.

HELLER

Looks like you struck out, Shaw. Now get out of here.

Dazed by the reality of the situation, Alex stumbles back to his BED in the BUNKHOUSE.

Thelo leans against their bunk. He holds the book on Shakespeare.

THELO
Practice hard?

ALEX
Yep... Playbook?

THELO
Yep... He always says "practice hard" when he wants you out his office.

ALEX
I'm going crazy thinking about the baby. I can't sleep. My stomach hurts too much to eat half the time.

THELO
Considering the quality of the food, that might be a good thing. Take care of yourself, Daddy. Things will work out. They always do, one way or another. Off to the library.

Thelo exits.

Alex scans the environment until his eyes fall upon a single photograph taped to the support above his bed.

Joy, in a flowing cotton dress, holds her stomach - and their child within.

He removes the photo, staring into it deeply.

His entire life in one picture.

ALEX
I miss you so much, Sweetheart... Daddy. I'm gonna be a daddy.

Song: "Father and Son"

FATHER AND SON
WATCHING A YOUNG BOY GROW
SO MANY QUESTIONS FOR ALL THE THINGS I SHOULD KNOW
FATHER AND SON
BOUNCING HIM ON MY KNEE
DADDY GIVE ME A LIFT TO THE BRANCH OF THAT BIG OAK TREE

(BRIDGE/CHORUS)

THERE'S MEN OUT THERE
THEY JUST NEVER
FIND THE TIME
TO SPEND THE TIME
IF I WAS THEM
I WOULD TELL THEM PLEASE, FIND THE TIME
FOR FATHER AND SON FATHER AND SON,
FATHER AND SON
FATHER AND SON

FATHER AND SON
TUMBLING IN THE GRASS
A SCRAPE ON HIS KNEE AS HE'S TRYING TO RUN TO FAST
FATHER AND SON
WATCHING HIS FIRST BALL GAME
HE SMILES TO THE CROWD AS I'M YELLING OUT HIS NAME

(BRIDGE/CHORUS)

SCENE 8

With the LIBRARY AREA to himself,
Thelo contentedly lounges -
reading in his favorite herculon
chair. Reverend Bobby enters the
library.

REVEREND BOBBY

Hello, Mr. Pitt. You seem to spend
quite a bit of time among the creations of our
literary genius.

THELO

Did you know that in the time of Shakespeare
all the roles were performed by men?

REVEREND BOBBY

I'm sure a few of the boys in here would have
enjoyed participation in that mano y mano
environment.

THELO

There's a play where the characters use masks
to hide their identities.

REVEREND BOBBY

How double-o-seven.

THELO

What if we were to stage a play for the
prisoners? A play that uses men to act out all
the roles.

REVEREND BOBBY

It certainly wouldn't hurt to add a little culture to these overalled Neanderthals... No offense, but what do you know about putting on a Shakespearean play; or any play for that matter?

THELO

This ain't about the play. It's about getting out.

REVEREND BOBBY

Are you saying what I think you're saying?

THELO

I direct and cast the roles. I could stage the mask scene so certain characters moved off stage at the same time?

REVEREND BOBBY

With everyone in masks, no one could tell who was who.

THELO

We pick a play that's so confusing.

THELO AND BOBBY (SIMULTANEOUSLY)

Shakespeare.

THELO

Combined with the fact that no one knows who's who, and we got ourselves a chance.

REVEREND BOBBY

Even if you get the chance, how do you make your final exit?

THELO

The guards have to be involved. Smelling will have a roll, too. The scene creates a diversion and gives us our break to the outer fence.

REVEREND BOBBY

Once you're at the fence, you've got alligators, six feet of muddy blackwater and poisonous snakes surrounding the prison, except for the town - and you'll never get past the check point. The only way is through the swamp. It can't be done on foot.

THELO

Got an idea for that, too. I'll tell you about it later... I miss my Angel something bad.

REVEREND BOBBY

We all need angels, Thelonious.

THELO

Mine's in my heart and mind from the time I
wake up, 'til the time I go to bed. Angel's my
wife.

REVEREND BOBBY

She sounds like a very lovely woman.

THELO

She is love, Reverend. Almost every Saturday
night, we'd head downtown to the dance hall.

Bobby exits.

Thelo places the book on the chair
and grabs a broom. He begins to
sweepi, moving downstage.

Stage transforms to the ABBEVILLE
PUBLIC DANCE HALL

THELO

It wasn't nothing but an ole mill. Had these
big wooden floors that they waxed down just
right. I'd usually be the one to sweep 'em
before the dance.

Thelo begins to sing. He goes from
sweeping to "dancing" with the
broom.

At one point in the song, Angel
enters stage, takes the broom and
places to the side. They begin
dancing together.

Other characters join the dance.

Song: "My Wife"

I HAVE SEEN THE RESTORATION
OF A SOUL I FOUND ALONE
I HAVE SEEN THE DESTINATION
ON MY JOURNEYS FAR FROM HOME

CHORUS

I NEED YOU WHEN I AM LONELY
I NEED YOU WHEN I FEEL I JUST CAN'T GO ON
I NEED YOU FROM DAY TO NIGHT TO BRING ME BACK AGAIN
I NEED YOU MY FRIEND, MY LIFE, MY WIFE

I CAN FEEL THE LIGHT APPROACHING
AND THE LOVE THAT HOLDS OUR HEARTS
IN THE SIMPLE WORDS THAT BIND US
'TIL DEATH DO US PART

(CHORUS, SOLO, CHORUS)

All characters leave stage, with Angel being the last to exit. Thelo picks up the broom and sweeps.

STAGE GOES DARK.

SCENE 9

CECIL

Thelo came home and found this traveling salesman attacking his Angel. They say he hit that man so hard it drove his nose through the back of his head. Sometimes good men gotta do bad things to set it right.

Raymundo, Alphonse, Bruly, Silo, and Broussard work the fields, collecting crops to be sold at the PRISON MARKETPLACE.

Shirt soaked in sweat, Cecil carries a bucket of water in one hand and a ladle in the other. He walks from INMATE TO INMATE, pouring water from the ladle over their blistered, dry lips.

Cecil reaches Thelo and Alex working side by side. He gives them each water and continues down the line.

Johnny enters stage with a BURLAP PICKING SACK slung around his shoulder on a strap. A half smoked cigarette hangs from his lips.

His shirt is off, showing a LARGE TATTOO OF A SOARING HAWK WITH A RABBIT IN ITS MOUTH across his muscular, suntanned back.

Words - tattooed across the bottom portion of the artwork - are covered by the sack.

THELO

Hey, boy. You know Johnny?

ALEX

Kind of. I'm Alex. Alex Shaw.

JOHNNY

Johnny Chavez.

Across the stage, Broussard and Alphonse begin to argue. Broussard grabs a full burlap sack and takes a swing at Alphonse. Raymundo jumps on Broussard's back and covers his eyes as he swings blindly spinning in a circle. Silo tries to pull Raymundo off Broussard's back, but gets knocked to the ground as Raymundo's feet come around. He stands up and is knocked back to the ground by the sack. The scene resembles a Three Stooges routine.

THELO

Hate to pick and run, but I gotta go break that up before the boss sees what's happening and they get us all in trouble.

Thelo drops his bag and runs off.

ALEX

Warden Smelling thought he'd be a good influence.

JOHNNY

You mean Coach Smelling. That ball on his desk has Mickey's signature. Mickey Frickin' Mantle. Guess it was a present for knocking out Smelling.

Johnny leans over, pulling green leaves and placing them into the sack.

JOHNNY

I saw you at visitation. That your girlfriend?

ALEX

Fiancee. Her name's Joy

Across the stage, we see Thelo pulling Raymundo off Broussard. Silo lies on the ground, knocked out.

JOHNNY

Where you from?

ALEX

Baton Rouge.

JOHNNY

From Miami, myself. Moved to New Orleans when I was about your age. Heard how big a party town it was. They sure were right. Ever spend anytime in the Quarter?

ALEX

Joy and I got engaged on the river next to Jax Brewery.

JOHNNY

Been there many times. Right where the riverboat docks.

ALEX

Yeah, right across the street from...

Both hesitate, then say...

JOHNNY AND ALEX (SIMULTANEOUSLY)

Jackson Square.

Alex and Johnny turn to each other, a bit confused by what just occurred.

Johnny removes the sack from his shoulder and slaps a huge Mosquito on his lower back. He wipes it off, showing it to Alex.

JOHNNY

Could it get any hotter in this hell hole?

Johnny drops the sacks. Alex notices the remainder of Johnny's tattoo below the rabbit - a line that reads "NEVER SAW IT COMIN'."

ALEX

Never saw it comin'.

JOHNNY

Nice ink, huh. Got it in the Quarter. You can get pretty much anything you want down there.

ALEX

And some things you don't.

JOHNNY

Ain't that the truth.

SCENE 10

INMATES LINE TABLES with friends and family. Cecil enters holding hands with MAMA LULU.

CECIL

How ya'll are!?!... Ole Cecil done got himself a girl on the outside. We met through one of them penpal services.

Mama Lulu sits down at a table while Cecil walks downstage to talk to the audience.

CECIL

Once in while, the warden is kind enough to let the boys see their girls. Thelo got his Angel, Alex got his lil' girl Joy, even Johnny's girl done shown up. Crystal's an exotic dancer on Bourbon at the Bottoms Down Club. She got herself a stage name, too - Crys. P. Chicken. Says her golden legs are finger licking good.

Johnny is at a table with Crystal in conversation.

JOHNNY

My God, see who's sitting with Cecil. That's Mama Lulu. She's that crazy voodoo woman who reads cards in the Quarter.

CRYSTAL

Yeah, I know. She sets up outside the club sometimes. Look, she's waving to you, sweetie.

CRYSTAL

(to Mama Lulu)

Hey, how ya doin'!

Crystal waves to Mama Lulu.

QUICKLY, Johnny grabs her arm and pulls it down.

JOHNNY

Put your arm down. Dammit, now she sees me.

CRYSTAL

Of course she does, silly. That's why she's waving.

JOHNNY

Listen. You seen Rougon lately?

CRYSTAL

Well, I did see him in the club the other night. He's always good to the girls with the tips and all.

JOHNNY

He talk to you about our business?

CRYSTAL

No, Johnny. What are you talking about?

JOHNNY

It's not important.

Alex walks Joy to the table where Johnny and Crystal are seated.

THE BABY IS REALLY SHOWING

ALEX

Johnny, this is my fiancée, Joy.

JOHNNY

Heard a lot about you.

Crystal kicks Johnny under the table.

JOHNNY

Ow, Shit - This here's my girl, Crystal.

CRYSTAL

So, honey, how far you along?

JOY

Six months.

ALEX

I can't imagine not being with Joy for the delivery.

JOY

Not exactly the way we pictured it.

CRYSTAL

That's all right, sweetie. Things have a way of working themselves out. You two got a beautiful baby on the way. That's a hell of a lot more than Johnny and me got together.

(to Johnny)

Ain't that right, Johnny.

Johnny is distracted.

JOHNNY

Huh?

Crystal reaches across the table,
whacking Johnny across the back of
the head.

CRYSTAL

See what I'm talking about.

Warden Smelling enters. He climbs
atop a table to address the
prisoners.

WARDEN SMELLING

Gentlemen, Hope ya'll have enjoyed today's
scrimmage. I have an announcement to make on
behalf of our team captain, Thelonious. Thelo
has proposed a little morale booster that will
involve not only the players, but the coaching
staff as well. It seems his new playbook
features the teamwork philosophy of Mr. William
Shakespeare. Thelo has kindly offered his
services in the direction of this exercise, so
I expect all our players and coaches to get
involved. We're going to field one hell of a
team this season, right boys?!

Different characters begin to
shout out...

PRISONER #1

The sound of the crowd.

PRISONER #2

The crack of the bat.

PRISONER #3

The pitch to the plate.

PRISONER #4

The tip of the cap.

ALL

Baseball!

Dixieland dance number

Song: "Baseball"

WELL BASEBALL'S BEEN AROUND A WHILE
SINCE DOUBLEDAY, HE CRACKED A SMILE
AND LAID OUT FOUR WHITE BASES ON A FIELD
TAKE NINE MEN AND SPREAD ABOUT
CALL THREE STRIKES TO THROW 'EM OUT
SINCE THAT TIME THE GREAT U.S.

APPEAL

UNCLE SAM, DORIS DAY
 MARILYN AND JFK
 JACKIE, BABE, LOU AND MICKEY TOO
 ALL ACROSS OUR SACRED LAND
 PEOPLE CHEERING PACK THE STANDS
 HERE'S TO HOTDOGS, PEANUTS AND COLD BREW

CHORUS

BASEBALL, APPLE PIE AND CHEVROLET,
 KISS YOUR MOM AND HEAD OUT FOR THE GAME
 BASEBALL, WHAT'S A GUY SUPPOSE TO DO,
 AMERICA KEEPS CALLING OUT YOUR NAME

TRIPLE PLAYS, KNUCKLEBALLS
 SLIDERS, BUNTS, BIG GREEN WALLS
 SEND THE BALL TO HOME BEFORE HE SCORES
 I'M OUT SITTING IN THE STANDS
 RADIO CLUTCHED IN MY HAND
 PRAY TO GOD IT DOESN'T START TO POUR

THE SUN COMES OUT, THE STAGE IS SET
 ANOTHER INNING SOON PROJECTS
 A DEEP FLY BALL THAT SAILS ABOVE MY HEAD
 IT HITS THE BOARD AND RATTLES HARD
 A BULB FALLS OUT AND TURNED THE CARD
 THAT CHANGED MY LIFE FOREVER, YOU CAN BET

(*CHORUS X 2*)

SCENE 11

The nightly snore symphony fills
 the bunkhouse.

Johnny sleeps in the top bunk. He
 rolls over, kicking his blanket
 off the bed.

Like a ghost from the shadows,
 MAMA LULU APPEARS with the blanket
 draped over her head. She removes
 the blanket, dropping it to the
 ground.

She first checks out his butt,
 then, shakes him by the ankle and
 says -

MAMA LULU
 Hey boy, wake up!

Johnny, groggy and confused, pulls his leg back.

JOHNNY

What in the hell are you doing here?!

MAMA LULU

I'm in yo head, Johnny. Ain't nobody else gonna hear us. Here, let ole Mama Lulu help ya down.

Mama Lulu pulls with all her weight, ejecting Johnny from his bed.

She grabs his ear and drags him into a pool of light outside the bunk area.

His fellow prisoners sleep soundly.

JOHNNY

Ow, shit! Cut that out!

MAMA LULU

Boy, what the hell's wrong with you? Did you hear nothin' I said to you that day down by the square.

JOHNNY

What?

MAMA LULU

What? Listen and listen close, I got something important to tell you.

JOHNNY

What do you want? Like it makes a difference. This is nothing but a bad dream - Mama Lulu - like that's your real name.

Lulu, without warning, slaps Johnny in the back of the head.

MAMA LULU

Dream, my ass. Didn't I just tell you to listen... You done stirred up a big problem, Johnny Chavez.

JOHNNY

Problem?

She raises her hand to pop him again.

Catching him off guard, Lulu kicks Johnny hard in the shin.

JOHNNY

Dammit, if you don't stop that shit...

MAMA LULU

You done that boy Alex wrong.

JOHNNY

Can I talk now?

Lulu nods.

JOHNNY

I never even met that kid before a he got in here.

MAMA LULU

The boy was there.

JOHNNY

There. There where?

MAMA LULU

In the square.

JOHNNY

There where in the square?

MAMA LULU

The square.

JOHNNY

Where where? What square?

MAMA LULU

Jackson Square, you idiot.

JOHNNY

Oh, no.

MAMA LULU

Oh, yeah. He and his girl, Joy. They were walking through Jackson Square that night and heard a gunshot. Alex ran to see what happened and came upon a man lying in a pool of blood. Being the boy he is, he leaned down, picked up the gun, and held the dying man - not knowing the consequences of his actions. You ran away. Alex arrived.. So did a police man who heard the shot. There was the boy, gun in hand and a dead man in his arms - with his hand on the weapon, the circumstance was all to real.

JOHNNY

My gun.

MAMA LULU

Your gun. And being the good crook you are -

JOHNNY

Untraceable.

MAMA LULU

You're gonna have to take care of this kid until you can find a way to get him outta here.

JOHNNY

Lulu, you know...

MAMA LULU

I know it was an accident, Johnny.

JOHNNY

All I needed was a little cash for smokes. We got in a tumble and my gun went off by mistake... I'm in here a few years for knocking off convenience stores and the kid gets life for murder. I thought I got away with it, since nothing ever came up.

MAMA LULU

Look to Thelo for the answer. See ya later, Johnny.

Mama Lulu backs out of the light and disappears.

Johnny, stunned from the revelation, stands quietly.

He turns to enter his cell - the door is locked shut.

STAGE GOES DARK.

SCENE 12

The sun rises.

Johnny awakes in his top bunk. He feels the back of his head. It hurts.

Heller and the prisoners go through the MORNING COUNT.

BROUSSARD

Get down before Heller sees you!.

JOHNNY

I gotta talk to Thelo.

Johnny finds Thelo in the group of prisoners after the count.

JOHNNY

Thelo, bro. We gotta talk.

THELO

I got something to discuss with you, too. Might have us an answer to your little problem on the outside.

JOHNNY

You don't know the half of it.

THELO

What?

JOHNNY

Mama Lulu.

THELO

Mama who-lu?

JOHNNY

Lulu. Cecil's pen pal that reads cards in the Quarter - she gave me a visit last night.

THELO

What in the hell are you talking about?

JOHNNY

She showed up in my cell last night. At first I thought I was dreaming, but... She told me who took the rap for my accident in Jackson Square - check it out, she even popped my head with her big ass ring. Feel this bump.

THELO

In a dream?

JOHNNY

It was Alex.

THELO

Alex? Damn. Been telling the truth the whole time... That boy is doin' life for your mess and his girl's gonna be havin' a baby.

JOHNNY

I know, I know. I can't tell him. No one else knows besides you and Rougon. Crystal don't even know.

Reverend Bobby enters carrying the Shakespeare "Playbook".

THELO

Listen. The Reverend and I got a plan that's gonna get us outta here - including the boy.

Reverend Bobby hands the book to Thelo.

THELO

Remember when you asked me about this book? I told you that Shakespeare was a great playwright hundreds of years ago.

JOHNNY

Yeah.

THELO

The teamwork exercise Coach Smelling was talking about is inside here. In the old days, all roles in a play were performed by men - even the lady roles.

REVEREND BOBBY

Mr. Shakespeare also loved hidden identity - the face behind the mask.

THELO

We stage this play as a diversion. At some point, all the characters are in masks - including the four of us.

JOHNNY

Hidden identity.

REVEREND BOBBY

Bingo.

Johnny and Thelo both give Bobby the "I can't believe you just used that reference" look.

REVEREND BOBBY

It's a church thing.

JOHNNY

But how do we make it outside the fence? And the swamp?

REVEREND BOBBY

Your cousin Bubba's airboat charter service.

THELO

We also get Bubba to cut the outer chain-link.
When we exit backstage, we exit all the way.

REVEREND BOBBY

What about young Alex?

JOHNNY

I'll take care of Alex, Rev. When the time
comes, he'll be ready.

Johnny quickly exits. Thelo and
Bobby join the rest of the
prisoners.

SCENE 13

Cecil crosses with A PUSH CART
FULL OF BOOKS. He pauses at center
stage.

CECIL

Ya'll ever hear about this guy name
Nostradomus? He said a man can control his own
destiny. If that be the truth, what destiny
would that man pick with so many to choose
from?

Cecil exits.

At a visitation table, Johnny sits
waiting. Heller enters with a
visitor.

A burly, unshaven man wearing a
worn leather biker's jacket stands
in the doorway.

He smirks at Johnny. ROUGON
DUCETTE - Johnny's bookie.

HELLER

Here's your visitor, Chavez.

JOHNNY

Rougon?

ROUGON

Johnny Chavez, my bro. You look good in blue.

Rougon walks to the table, turns the rusting metal chair backwards - straddles it - and sits down.

JOHNNY

What you here for, bro?

ROUGON

Just checking on my investment.

JOHNNY

I got something cookin'. I'll be squarin' with you real soon.

ROUGON

Now how you gonna do that?

JOHNNY

Crystal's working on something for me. I swear, I'm good for it.

ROUGON

We both know Crystal can't help you. Good for it? Hell, Johnny, the only thing you're good for is nothin'. You can't even keep your own ass out of jail, *and*, you go and put an innocent boy in here with you.

JOHNNY

I didn't know about the boy.

ROUGON

Yeah. Well, times up, bro. I just came to tell you I got a lil' present for you on the inside.

JOHNNY

What the hell you talkin' about, Rougon?

ROUGON

You'll find out... I believe our business is concluded. By the way, your stripper girlfriend's out there waiting to see you. Maybe I'll give her a little present of my own. I do spend quite a bit of time at the club. Too bad you can't come hang out with us.

JOHNNY

You son-of-a-bitch!

Rougon stands, whips the chair around, and exits.

Crystal enters wearing what looks to be a catholic school girl uniform. Her shirt is tied in the front - exposing her assets.

CRYSTAL

Hey, baby. I saw Rougon out there. He said you two had a good talk.

JOHNNY

Crys, I need you to get in touch with Bubba for me.

CRYSTAL

What for, Johnny?

JOHNNY

I'll tell you when the time comes, baby. Just do it for me, O.K.?

CRYSTAL

O.K... So.. Johnny, what do you think about Joy having a baby and all? I mean, do you think we'll ever settle down and have some kids. I mean, you still got a chance for early parole, with good behavior

JOHNNY

It's not my behavior I'm worried about. I knew you'd been around the block when I met you, I just didn't realize you were driving the bus.

CRYSTAL

You know I've changed, baby.

JOHNNY

I know. Don't worry about us. I got a feeling we'll be hooking up sooner than you think - you can bet on it

CRYSTAL

Your track record ain't been too good when it comes to betting.

JOHNNY

This one's a sure thing.

Johnny smiles to Crystal and motions to Heller.

JOHNNY

Permission to give her a hug.

HELLER

Yeah, sure. Make it quick.

JOHNNY (IN HER EAR)

After all this, we'll be good.

Johnny hugs Crystal and begins to exit with Heller.

As Johnny leaves, he stops and turns to Crystal...

JOHNNY

Oh, and when you see Mama Lulu, tell her I'm taking care of it.

CRYSTAL

What?

JOHNNY

She'll understand.

Johnny exits with Heller. Crystal is left alone on stage.

CRYSTAL (TO HERSELF)

Sure thing, my ass. Being good is not one of his strong points either. (beat) Hello, I'm Mrs. Chavez. So nice to meet you... Mrs. Crystal Chavez.

Mama Lulu enters with Heller.

CRYSTAL

Hey, Lulu.

MAMA LULU

Hey, baby.

CRYSTAL

Here to see Cecil? He seems like a good man.

MAMA LULU

Sure is. Don't know if I can say the same about yours.

CRYSTAL

I know. Johnny's a little rough around the edges. Oh, he just told me to let you know he's "taking care of it", whatever that means.

MAMA LULU

Good. Just curious - what do you see in that boy anyway?

CRYSTAL

It's hard to say.

Song: "Tell Him or Hard to Say"
(Working Title)

SCENE 14

Prisoners sleep in their bunks.

A boisterous female laugh bursts through the darkened room.

Dragged by the ear once again, Mama Lulu pulls Johnny into the light away from the bunks.

JOHNNY

Let go of me. I told you to cut it out the last time you popped into my head.

MAMA LULU

Speaking of popping..

Once again, without warning, Lulu's oversized ring connects with the back of Johnny's head.

JOHNNY

That's it!

MAMA LULU

How you doing, Johnny? Rougon been to see you lately?

JOHNNY

Screw Rougon. Thelo's got a plan that's gonna get me outta here soon.

MAMA LULU

Forget about your inside obligation?

JOHNNY

I'm planning to make good on that, too.

MAMA LULU

You believe in destiny, Johnny? Ya know, what comes around goes around.

JOHNNY

Never really thought about it.

MAMA LULU

That's right. People like you never think about consequences and how it affects the balance.

JOHNNY

The balance?

MAMA LULU

The balance - Action causes reaction. Your accident has thrown off the balance.

A balance only you can fix. Just like falling dominoes, you push one down and it starts a chain reaction.

JOHNNY

Alex - He's in here because of me and his girl Joy is pregnant.

MAMA LULU

One becomes three... Before you go back to sleep, beware of this. Not everything is as it seems. Careful, for you and only you can make it right... or wrong. (beat) Oh, and that girl Crystal of yours really loves you. Why, I'll never know.

Lulu walks Johnny into his cell.
He climbs up into his bunk.

Mama Lulu pulls a blanket over him, tucking Johnny in.

Johnny, eyes closed and almost asleep, says as if he is speaking to his own mother -

JOHNNY

Goodnight, Mama.

MAMA LULU (SOFTLY)

Goodnight, baby.

MAMA LULU (TO HERSELF)

So many lost souls.

Mama Lulu walks the row of bunk beds.

She stops near another bunk bed.

Alex lies sound asleep - a dull green blanket pulled up to his eyes.

MAMA LULU

Look at him. So much to see and do in his life. Joy and the baby. Breaks ole Mama Lulu's heart. I can only do so much to protect you, sweet child.

Song: "Mama Lulu"

MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR MIND TONIGHT
 TO CHASE AWAY YOUR FEAR
 MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR DREAMS TONIGHT
 DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE
 DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE
 MAMA LULU FEELS THE LOVE YOU HOLD INSIDE
 A LOVE TO TEST YOUR SOUL
 MAMA LULU SEES THE THINGS YOU CANNOT SEE
 THE ONE YOU WILL NOT HOLD
 THE ONE YOU WILL NOT HOLD

CHORUS

MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR DREAMS
 MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR DREAMS, YOUR DREAMS

MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR SPACE AND TIME
 TO LIFT YOUR HEAVY HEART
 MAMA LULU SEES THE FEAR YOU HOLD INSIDE
 THE END IS SOON TO START
 MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR DREAMS TONIGHT
 TO CHASE AWAY YOUR FEAR
 MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR DREAMS TONIGHT
 DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE
 DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE

(*CHORUS X 3*)

SCENE 15

Unknown to the other prisoners,
 Reverend Bobby meets with Warden
 Smelling and Officer Heller in the
 Warden's office.

WARDEN SMELLING

Bobby, Coach Heller and I know you're a natural
 born leader. Why, you even coached your own
 team before you joined our program - I'll cut
 to the chase. We'd like to make you an offer.

REVEREND BOBBY

What might that be, pray tell?

WARDEN SMELLING

Let's just say we know you're not happy with
 your contract, and it would bring you great
 pleasure to be released from it. Maybe go back
 to coaching again - on your own.

REVEREND BOBBY

The thought has crossed my mind.

WARDEN SMELLING

We'd like to test the waters to see if your ready to move back into a leadership position with another franchise.

REVEREND BOBBY

Warden, could you possibly speak in terms I might understand?

WARDEN SMELLING

I'll cut to the quick. Coach Heller and I would like you to act as a liaison between the coaches and the players. Sort of a team captain or manager.

REVEREND BOBBY

I thought Thelonious was your team captain.

WARDEN SMELLING

He is, he is, but he's so busy these days. We thought it might help to have someone else watching over the players for us. Making sure they're doing their drills properly, obeying curfew, that sort of thing.

REVEREND BOBBY

I'd like to discuss this with Thelo first, if it's all right by you.

WARDEN SMELLING

We understand your team loyalty and commend it. Although, there are certain things only a team manager can do; say like, getting out of contract here with our program.

REVEREND BOBBY

I'll think about it.

WARDEN SMELLING

You do that.

Reverend Bobby stands and makes his way to the door.

Heller, standing at the doorway - doesn't move.

Reverend Bobby looks up to Heller's stoic face, as the Warden speaks behind him.

WARDEN SMELLING

Oh, Bobby, it is a shame about that big, beautiful house you own in Shreveport. I hear the state's about to auction it off. Pity you can't be there to save it.

HELLER

Looks like you have something to say to the Warden.

REVEREND BOBBY

Not at the moment. May I pass.

HELLER

Why don't you move me, Reverend.

Bobby stares up to Heller's face.

WARDEN SMELLING

That will be enough, Coach Heller. You're dismissed, Mr. Swift.

Reverend Bobby, holding back a comment, waits for Heller to move. Heller grins and steps to the side. The Reverend exits the Warden's office. The Warden and Heller stand in the door as the Reverend walks downstage. He stops.

Song: "Mistaken, Part I"

HOW DID I GET HERE
 A JOURNEY
 MISTAKEN FROM THE START
 LIFE IS A PASSAGE
 A SHORT PATH
 END, BUT DON'T BEGIN
 PULL YOU FROM A RACE YOU'LL NEVER WIN
 NOW I'M HERE
 WORSE OFF THAT I EVER WAS BEFORE
 CAN'T UNDERSTAND
 WHY DID GOD DECIDE TO CLOSE THE DOOR

MISTAKEN, MISTAKEN
 MISTAKEN, MISTAKEN

The music swells. Reverend Bobby turns hesitantly, looking toward Heller and the Warden. He slowly looks back to the audience.

FADE TO DARK

END ACT I

ACT IISCENE 1

REHEARSALS for Shakespeare's "Much Ado About Nothing" are in process.

PRISONERS put finishing touches on the set while Thelonious works with the actors.

THELO

Alright. Next. Broussard, the line is - "the revelers are entering, brother: make good room."

BROUSSARD

Man, this Shakespeare cat sure did talked funny.

THELO

That's 'cause he didn't grow up driving a bondoed El Camino and drinking shine out a jug. Just say the line, brother.

Reverend Bobby enters in a partially finished costume.

REVEREND BOBBY

What detainees of this rotting wood, chain, and cinder block cathedral hath thou chosen, Sir Thelonious?

THELO

Don't ask.

REVEREND BOBBY

"Much ado about nothing". Never has a production been so appropriately named.

THELO

Let's take a break. You boys go over there and get your costumes fitted.

PRISONERS cross stage to be fitted for colorful period costumes.

THELO

This ain't gonna be easy, but we'll make it work. Secret be told, my big dream was to be a singer and perform in New York City one day. (beat) I know. Folks like me don't get that chance.

REVEREND BOBBY

A man's got to have dreams. That's the one thing they can't take away from you in this place.

RAYMUNDO in seamstress style apparel approaches Bobby.

RAYMUNDO

Reverend, we're ready for you. Just finished with Officer Heller. What an asshole. He ripped one of the sleeves off his costume for fun.

REVEREND BOBBY

Yes, Heller is a barrel of laughs, isn't he?

RAYMUNDO

More like a barrel of dicks.

REVEREND BOBBY

Catch you later, Thelonious.

THELO

Right. Later, Reverend. Raymundo.

Bobby and Raymundo exit.

THELO (TO HIMSELF)

My dream.

Thelo moves downstage center.

All lighting fades to dark, except for a single spotlight on Thelo.

Song: "A Prayer To Myself"

ALL MY LIFE IT SEEMS THAT I'VE BEEN DIFFERENT
 LOOKING OUT THE WINDOW ON THE SIDE
 GET A JOB AND MAYBE RAISE A FAMILY
 IS IT SO BAD TO KEEP THE DREAM ALIVE
 MAMA, POP, AND ANGEL ALWAYS TOLD ME
 PRAY UNTIL THEY HEAR YA 'CROSS THE WORLD
 INTO THE LIGHT I BOW MY HEAD
 SUBMERGING IN THE WORDS I READ
 AND WROTE THE DAY BEFORE I SAID
 THIS PRAYER TO MYSELF

CHORUS

I WILL BE WITH YOU
 FOR A LIFETIME
 AND I PRAY TO GOD YOU NEVER GO AWAY
 CAUGHT IN THE BRIGHT BEAM
 EVER AFTER
 BLIND ME IN THE LIGHT
 LEAD ME HOME AND NEVER GO AWAY

DIFFERENCE IS A STATE WITHIN OUR NATURE
A CHILD BENEATH ITS SKIN REMAINS A CHILD
AN ARTIST'S HOPE FOR SUBTLE RECOGNITION
THE SPIRIT LEFT ALONE AND RUNNING WILD
WHATEVER PATH IN LIFE YOU CHOOSE TO FOLLOW
CHOOSE THE PATH WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND SOUL
IN PRAYER TO YOURSELF BE TRUE
BREAK THE CHAINS REJECTING YOU
BOW YOUR HEAD AND SAY THIS LITTLE PRAYER TO YOURSELF

(CHORUS, OUT)

The single spotlight fades to dark.

SCENE 2

Thelonious stands under a LARGE OAK TREE in the PRISON REC YARD with Reverend Bobby.

Razor wire circles the enormous trunk, just below the first set of high leveled branches.

REVEREND BOBBY

Have you talked to Chavez about his cousin?

THELO

Yea. He says Bubba's working on getting everything set up outside. When we're ready, he'll be ready.

REVEREND BOBBY

What about the boy?

THELO

Johnny's bringing him in at the last minute. No need to let Alex know until the time is right.

REVEREND BOBBY

I'd say that's a good idea.

Alex - with script pages in hand - enters.

ALEX

How's the play coming, Mr. Director?

THELO

Just fine, kid. You been learning your lines?

ALEX

Yeah. Thanks for casting me. Helps take my mind off this whole thing with Joy and the baby.

REVEREND BOBBY

How is your lovely fiancée?

ALEX

OK, I guess. The baby's been kicking a lot. Joy said my attorney stopped by the other day. Thinks he might've found something good for the appeal.

Johnny enters wearing jeans with no shirt or shoes. He smokes a cigarette.

JOHNNY

Don't count on it, lil' bro. The appeal process in this state's kinda like a peep show in the Quarter. It teases you 'til your ready to blow, then the door drops and you're left sitting there with your boys hanging out and no where to take 'em.

REVEREND BOBBY

That's quite the visual you've painted. Much like your exorbitant tattoo - graphic and to the point.

Taking a drag, Johnny smiles and nods his head.

ALEX

I swore to God I'd be there when the baby's born. What am I gonna do, Johnny?

JOHNNY

We'll find a way, kid. We'll find a way.

Cecil enters with Broussard and Silo carrying a large pot. Other inmates are setting tables end to end and spreading newspaper down the length of the tables.

CECIL (TO ALEX, BOBBY, THELO, JOHNNY)

Y'all comin' to the boil?

ALEX

I love crawfish.

JOHNNY

Damn that smells good.

THELO

Be there in a second, Cecil!

CECIL (TO AUDIENCE)

I remember the days when I'd visit my cousin Boudreaux down in Mamou. We'd boil us a couple hundred pounds a crawfish. You pinch the tail, you eat that tail - then you suck the head to get all the juice. The warden thinks it's good for team morale if me and Broussard put on a boil for the boys once in while.

CECIL

Johnny, Alex, Thelo, Bobby - it's hot and ready. Come and get yourself some.

A POT OF BRIGHT RED CRAWFISH is poured out and spread across the tables.

Inmates "belly up" to eat.

Song: "Pinch The Tail, Suck The Head"

CECIL DA COONASS
 DONE GO DOWN TO MAMOU
 PASS A GOOD TIME ON A SATURDAY NIGHT
 ALONG THAT OLE BAYOU
 BIG OLE POT A CRAWFISH
 AND AN ICE COLD DIXIE BEER
 LISTEN REAL CLOSE AND I'LL SHOW YA DA WAY
 WE EAT DA CRAWFISH HERE

CHORUS

YOU GOT TO PINCH DA TAIL AND SUCK DA HEAD
 MAKE SURE YOU BOIL THEM BEFORE THEY ARE DEAD
 PULL 'EM OUT STEAMING ALL CAYENNE READ
 YOU GOTTA PINCH DA TAIL AND SUCK DA HEAD

NOW DA HEAD IT GOT DEM JUICES
 AND ALL DAT TASTY STUFF
 DA TAIL GOT MEAT
 ALL YOU CAN EAT

SOMETIME IT A LIL' TOUGH
 BUT THIS HERE IS A GOOD BATCH
 IT COME RIGHT OUT OF THE POT
 IT YOU FIRST TIME, SO I SHOW YOU AGAIN
 IN CASE YA'LL DONE FORGOT

(CHORUS)

WE GOT US OUR COONASS MUSIC
 WE GOT US OUR ICE COLD BEER

COME PASS A GOOD TIME, WE INVITE YOU ALONG
 ONE DAY WHEN YA'LL DOWN HERE
 BELLY UP TO DAT TABLE
 PICK YOUSELF A GOOD OL' PLACE
 THEN POUR OUT THEM FRESH MUDBUGS
 'CAUSE IT TIME TO STUFF YO FACE

(CHORUS, MUSIC BREAK, CHORUS)

SCENE 3

SHIRLEY and TOOTY - two voluptuous
 strippers - hang outside the
 BOTTOMS DOWN CLUB.

VARIOUS DANCERS AND PATRONS file
 in and out of the front door.

A LARGE NEON SIGN above reads
 BOTTOMS DOWN CLUB - "WE AIM TO
 TEASE"

Mama Lulu reads cards outside the
 entrance.

TOOTY

Shirley, your ass is so big, when you wear a
 yellow dress on the street, people yell "Taxi"!

SHIRLEY

Tooty, your ass is so big, you gotta keep a can
 a Crisco next to the tub to grease the sides
 when you want to flip over.

TOOTY

You hungry, girl?

SHIRLEY

Hell yeah!

TOOTY

Let's go get us a couple Lucky Dogs down on the
 corner.

Crystal exits the Bottoms Down
 Club.

SHIRLEY

Lead the way, girlfriend. See ya later, Lulu.
 Crystal.

Lulu acknowledges Shirley as she
 reads to a wide-eyed female
 tourist.

CRYSTAL

Ladies.

Tooty and Shirley exit.

The tourist seems giddy from the news delivered by Mama Lulu's prediction.

With a large grin, the tourist shakes Lulu's hand then stumbles off down the street - intoxicated with a "Hurricane" drink in hand.

CRYSTAL

Hi, Lulu.

MAMA LULU

Hey, honey. How's that boy Johnny of yours.

CRYSTAL

Ya know. Johnny's heart's in the right place, even when his hand's in somebody else's pocket - I mean, considering what he's been through.

MAMA LULU

Sometimes with the bad ones you gotta cut a lil' rotten off the outside and find a nice core next to their heart.

CRYSTAL

You did say core, right?

Tooty and Shirley return with hotdogs, their mouths stuffed and covered with mustard and relish.

Song: "Turn That Man All Inside Out"

FROM THE DAY THEY'RE LIL' BOYS
ALWAYS PLAYING WITH THEIR TOYS
NEVER GROWING UP TO FACE THE FACTS

NEVER THINKING WHAT THEY SAY
'TIL THE TIME THERE COMES A DAY
LIL' SALLY TAKES THEM OUT THE BACK

IT'S THE JOB OF EVERY GIRL
ROUND OUR FINGERS WE WILL TWIRL
EACH AND EVERY MAN TO CROSS OUR PATH

ADAM MIGHT OF HAD THE RIB
WE'RE THE ONES WHO ROCK THE CRIB
AND PACIFY THE BAD ONES, YOU CAN BET

CHORUS

TURN THAT MAN ALL INSIDE OUT
 GRAB THE BULL BY THE RING, LEAD HIM ALL ABOUT
 FROM THE START WE ALL DELIVER
 MIGHTY POWERS COME THE GIVER
 TWIST AND SHOUT, TURN THAT MAN ALL INSIDE OUT

DIAMONDS, PEARLS, EXPENSIVE THINGS
 ANYTHING HE TRIES TO BRING
 FLOWERS, CANDY GIRL, I'VE SEEN IT ALL

REMEMBERING THEIR GLORY DAYS
 ALWAYS MADE THE WINNING PLAYS
 WE'LL BE THERE TO CATCH 'EM WHEN THEY FALL

(CHORUS, MUSIC BREAK, CHORUS, VAMP OUT)

SCENE 4

STAGE RIGHT - INMATES go through
 DRESS REHEARSAL.

Raymundo, flamboyant and resident
 fashion expert, works on finishing
 touches for the costumes.

VARIOUS PRISONERS sit in rows of
 wooden folding chairs watching the
 rehearsal.

Raymundo speaks with a slight
 Spanish accent.

RAYMUNDO

No, no, no, no! This won't do at all. Look at
 the length of this gown.

Raymundo pins the gown. Thelo
 enters.

RAYMUNDO

There... What do you think, Thelonious? Is this
 OK?

THELO

Wonderful Raymundo. Thank you very much.

RAYMUNDO

I don't know if I'll be finished in time, So
 much to do with so little time to do it.

THELO

Don't worry, it'll all come together just fine.

Reverend Bobby enters in costume.
An elaborate mask hides his face.

He removes the mask upon
approaching Theo.

THELO

Where ya been? I need you on stage in a few
minutes.

REVEREND BOBBY

Patience is a virtue. Haven't you heard good
things come to those who wait?

THELO

Speaking of good things, what's the word on
Bubba's airboat?

REVEREND BOBBY

On schedule. Johnny says his cousin will be
there. What about the boy?

THELO

It's being handled as we speak.

SCENE 5

Prison Rec Yard - Johnny and Alex
stand in the shade of the giant
oak. A GUITAR leans against the
tree.

THUNDER CLOUDS BUILD IN THE
DISTANCE. The muted rumbling of an
approaching storm is heard.

JOHNNY

That's a big one comin' in.

ALEX

Johnny, you ever sit and watch the birds up on
that fence? Everyday I wish I was one of them
birds. Free to come and go... Free as a bird. I
never really thought much about that saying
'til I was trapped in this cage without my
family... What about your family?

JOHNNY

Never really knew my pop. He died when I was
little. The cancer took my momma when I was 17.
All I got left is this picture of her.

From his shirt pocket - inside the pack of smokes - Johnny removes a dog-eared PICTURE OF HIS MOTHER and hands it to Alex.

ALEX

She was beautiful.

JOHNNY

Family's important, kid. You don't have family, you turn out like me. Your baby's gonna know his daddy, Alex... I got us a chance, lil' bro.

ALEX

What?

JOHNNY

Me, Thelo and Bobby are planning on breaking out of this joint.

ALEX

How?

JOHNNY

That play Thelo's putting on - it's nothing but a diversion... Most of the guards are in the play. You know the party scene where we're all wearing masks? Thelo, Bobby, you and me are all off stage at the same time - right? My cousin Bubba's got an airboat. He'll cut the outer fence and wait for us. No one will know we slipped out 'til well into the next scene.

ALEX

What about my appeal? Joy says there might be something that could help me.

JOHNNY

Listen kid. They ain't caught the real murderer and they ain't gonna. Know why? They don't care. It's a hell of a lot easier to let you rot in this joint than do more work. Case closed. You just one more poor lil' white boy sittin' inside their prison they ain't got to worry about killin' somebody else... This is your chance - Joy. The baby. Your life, Alex. It's all on the other side of that fence...I got something for you.

Johnny hands Alex a baseball.

ALEX

Your baseball.

JOHNNY

It's your's now, Alex. You gotta promise me
you'll use it to play ball with your boy
someday.

ALEX

But...

JOHNNY

Promise.

ALEX

What about you and Crystal? Maybe you'll have a
son. Someone to play ball with.

JOHNNY

Crystal's a great woman, but I don't think it's
in our cards. Promise me, kid.

ALEX

I will.

JOHNNY

Good. Now get outta here. Go work on your lines
for the play... and don't tell anyone else
about this.

ALEX

Of course.

Alex exits. Johnny picks up the
guitar and strums a few chords.

JOHNNY (TO HIMSELF)

Crystal. She always stood by me no matter what.
Still does. Told Lulu she loves me. Crystal
sure must know somethin' I don't.

Song: "She Knows Me"

A PAINTING ON A CANVAS OF LIGHT
AN OPEN DOORWAY ON THE EDGE OF THE NIGHT
SHE NEVER TELLS ME WHEN SHE KNOWS I'M NOT RIGHT
SHE HAS FAITH IN ME

SHE HAS A BEAUTY THAT I CANNOT EXPLAIN
AN OPEN SHELTER IN A DOWNPOUR OF RAIN
SOMETIMES I THINK SHE IS HALFWAY INSANE
'CAUSE SHE STAYS WITH ME

CHORUS

SHE KNOWS ME
LIKE THE BACK OF HER HAND
SHE KNOWS ME
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND

BUT I KNOW IT'S RIGHT
EVERY SINGLE NIGHT
SHE KNOWS ME

I'VE BEEN A DREAMER MOST ALL OF MY LIFE
A MARCHING SOLDIER ON THE EDGE OF THE KNIFE
A STRING OF FAILURES BUT SHE SAYS IT'S ALRIGHT
SHE BELIEVES IN ME

SHE KNOWS ME
LIKE THE BACK OF HER HAND
SHE KNOWS ME
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND
BUT I KNOW IT'S RIGHT
EVERY SINGLE NIGHT
SHE KNOWS ME
LIKE THE BACK OF HER HAND
SHE KNOWS ME
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND
BUT I KNOW IT'S RIGHT
EVERY SINGLE NIGHT
SHE KNOWS ME, SHE KNOWS ME, SHE KNOWS ME

STAGE GOES DARK.

TRANSITION TO SCENE 6

Cecil enters in Shakespearean
costume, followed by a dramatic
spotlight on a darkened stage.

CECIL

Alex got himself some serious thinking to do...
Ole Cecil's kids are all grown up now. My wife
done left me when I got thrown in here. Never
saw them kids again... That's how prison hurts
a man the most. It takes away your family, your
freedom, and all the things you care about,
cher.

Cecil exits the stage as the
spotlight fades to black.

SCENE 6

Outside Joy's apartment, RAIN
FALLS in typical Louisiana fashion
- sheets of it.

Joy TALKS ON THE PHONE.

JOY

Yes sir, Mr. Jennings...well, I was going to
see my momma and...oh, well, I'll wait until
you get here. Yes, sir. Bye now.

Joy looks down at her stomach. She
is VERY PREGNANT.

JOY (TO THE BABY)

Did you hear that, honey? Mr. Jennings wants to
talk to us right away about your daddy.

OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE STAGE -

Alex - sitting next to his bunk -
puts on his costume for the play.
The rain continues to fall.

He is alone in the bunk area.

Duet with Alex and Joy - Alex in
the bunk area and Joy in her
apartment.

Song: "It Takes Time"

THE SUN COMES UP
THE SUN GOES DOWN
IT'S BACK AGAIN
YOU'RE NOT AROUND

WHAT AM I TO DO
WITH THIS LOVE INSIDE
GROWING EVERYDAY

THE SUN COMES UP
THE RAIN FALLS DOWN
I LIE IN BED
YOU'RE NOT AROUND

WHAT AM I TO DO
WITH YOUR LOVE INSIDE
GROWING EVERYDAY

CHORUS
IT TAKES TIME

FOR THE WOUNDS TO HEAL

FOR THE LOVE INSIDE
FOR THE TRUTH REVEALED
FOR THE PAIN TO PASS
TO REGAIN MY SOUL
AS THE DAYS GO BY, I KNOW
IT TAKES TIME

THE SUN COMES UP
IT'S DARK INSIDE
I CLOSE MY EYES
AND TRY TO HIDE

WHAT AM I TO DO
WITH YOUR LOVE INSIDE
GROWING EVERYDAY

(CHORUS)

THE SUN COMES UP THE SUN GOES DOWN

MR. JENNINGS - Alex's attorney -
has a jacket pulled over his head
to shield the rain. He knocks at
Joy's door. Joy answers.

MR. JENNINGS
I forgot my damn umbrella at the house.

JOY
Come in. Can I get you a towel or anything?

MR. JENNINGS
Yes. Thank you. That would be great.

Joy leaves the room, returning
with a towel. She hands it to Mr.
Jennings.

JOY
Mr. Jennings. What is it? Have you found
something to help Alex? I'm sorry, can I offer
you some sweet tea or a cold drink?

MR. JENNINGS
That's O.K., Joy. I'll just stay here so I
don't get your floor wet.

JOY
Why are you here?

MR. JENNINGS
Some new evidence has surfaced... What time is
it?

JOY

7:39.

MR. JENNINGS

Too late to contact the judge. I should at least get word to the prison.

JOY

You can't. I mean, they're doing the play tonight. The whole prison's involved. You can't reach anyone in there.

MR. JENNINGS

That's fine. We'll call in the morning.

JOY

Mr. Jennings, what new evidence?

MR. JENNINGS

On key piece - a janitor for the city who worked late that evening has come forward. Apparently, he was cleaning a public restroom close to the scene of the crime - after the time of the murder. In the rest room, he remembered blood in the sink and emptied a garbage bag containing a t-shirt soaked in blood. In the same waste can, he saw a torn bloody piece of another shirt matching the shirt worn by the victim. That, combined with the fact that the officer never actually saw Alex fire the shot, should be enough for a retrial to exonerate Alex of the crime.

Joy - taken by the moment - sits down on a chair near the door.

JOY

Mr. Jennings, I don't know how to thank you. This is amazing news... We're going to be a family again.

SCENE 7

Audience viewpoint - BACKSTAGE OF THE PRISONER'S PLAY now in performance.

INMATES AND GUARDS work together, pushing sleds and various set pieces around.

A curtain hangs behind the characters on stage. The audience sees a partial view of the play in progress through the center break in the curtain.

It's the "party scene" from MUCH ADO ABOUT NOTHING.

Johnny and Alex stand backstage in FULL COSTUME, facing the house, each holding a MASK.

Thelo enters the stage through the curtains - as if exiting from the performance - in full costume. He removes his mask.

THELO

Johnny, where's the Reverend? He's supposed to be back here with us.

ALEX

I saw him a few minutes ago talking to Heller.

Thelo and Johnny look at one another.

THELO

We ain't got time to wait for him. I'm gonna go check the hall. Be right back.

Thelo exits.

JOHNNY

This is it, lil' bro. You sure you're ready?

ALEX

Ready as I'll ever be.

Thelonious returns, now wearing his mask.

THELO

Ready.

ALEX

Yeah.

JOHNNY

Yeah.

THELO

Cool. Get those masks on, in case we get spotted... I almost forgot, break a leg.

He turns and exits swiftly
offstage.

ALEX

I wish he wouldn't of said that.

JOHNNY

Come on, lil' bro.

Johnny and Alex place their masks
and take off after Thelo.

SCENE 8

On the opposite side...

HELLER

This is the last time I'm gonna ask nice.
There's something going on here and I want to
know what it is.

REVEREND BOBBY

Simply a morale booster being performed between
fellow teammates. I really need to get to my
scene.

HELLER

Yeah... You have a new scene now.

Heller grabs Bobby by the costume
and pushes him into the darkness.
We hear a brutal beating take
place.

SCENE 9

The "Much Ado About Nothing" party scene is heard in the distant background.

Johnny, Alex, and Thelo enter through the house.

They deliver their dialog while moving quickly toward the stage.

The sound changes from the party scene in "Much Ado" to a thunder storm engulfing the prison rec yard, now illuminated on stage through intermittent lightning flashes.

The large oak tree looms over the empty yard.

THELO

Come on, we got to get to the meeting point.

JOHNNY

Let's go, Alex. Bubba won't wait for us if we're late!

ALEX

Go! I'm With you!

They return to stage...

In the flashes, we notice the blue gleam of a pistol barrel emerging.

SLOWLY, with sadistic pleasure, Officer Heller moves from the shadows.

Thelo, Johnny and Alex stand dead silent.

As the dialog begins, the actors raise their voices above the sound of the thunder.

HELLER

Surprise, Johnny. Your gift has arrived.

Johnny's pauses, then realizes -

JOHNNY

Heller. You're Rougon's boy.

HELLER

Damn, son, you couldn't have made this much easier for me. I gotta thank you. I was waiting for the right time. Now, you die, I collect my money and save the day - all at once.

THELO

Bobby. That son-of-a-bitch.

Thelo takes an aggressive step toward Heller. Without flinching, Heller raises his weapon and points it straight at Thelo's heart.

HELLER

Hold it right there, Thelo. I gotta do all three of you now. Your boy Bobby didn't want to give up your little secret. Beat him pretty bad. I'm afraid he won't be joining y'all.

Alex is shaking, too scared to speak. Thelo places his large, callused hand on Alex's shoulder to comfort him.

JOHNNY

I frickin' hate that number three!

HELLER

Chavez... I think you'll go first. Sorry about this boys, but a man's gotta do...

THELO

...what a man's gotta do.

Thelo LUNGES for Heller, grabbing his arm holding the gun. They slam against the large oak tree, disappearing in and out of the light.

Lighting blasts show glimpses of the crazed struggle.

Thelo grabs Heller in a choke hold from behind, dropping both of them to their knees. Heller still grips his weapon tightly.

Stunned from the situation, Johnny and Alex are motionless. Thelo yells to Johnny -

THELO

Get the kid outta here!

Johnny moves to help Thelo.

HELLER

I'm gonna kill all of you!

THELO

Now!

Unsure, Johnny wavers.

JOHNNY

Thelo!

THELO

Now, Goddammit!

Johnny turns to Alex, grabbing him by the arm.

JOHNNY

Let's go! Come on!

ALEX

But, but, Thelo?

THELO

RUN KID!

The rain begins to fall relentlessly, a brilliant bolt of lightning STRIKES THE LARGE OAK inside the prison rec yard.

A huge flash of electricity and fire engulfs the upper branches.

A large, fiery limb breaks free, falling toward Thelo and Heller on the stage below.

Thelo and Heller struggle for control of the weapon.

Alex grabs Johnny and pulls him away. Johnny won't budge, ripping his arm from Alex grasp.

Alex runs off stage.

JOHNNY

Thelo!

THELO

Get the hell out of here! Now boy, NOW!

Johnny turns and runs after Alex.

Heller - rolling over the top of Thelo - pushes Thelo's hand into a burning piece of branch on the floor.

His hand searing in pain, Thelo let's go for an instant - just long enough for Heller to FIRE THREE SHOTS in the same direction.

SCENE 10

Alex runs at full speed, slamming into the FENCE LINE bordering the black swamp beyond. His costume clings to him, heavy and wet.

The light of the thunder storm gives him short moments to find the cut wire as he yanks the mask from his face.

ALEX

Bubba, you out there? Bubba! Bubba!

BUBBA (OFF STAGE)

Here kid! Where the hell are the other two?

Alex follows Bubba's voice to the hole in the fence.

ALEX

Hold on, Johnny and Thelo are behind me.

BUBBA (OFF STAGE)

Find 'em and get your asses out here quick, or I'm gone.

Sound of the swamp airboat firing up it's engine.

ALEX

What's goin' on?

Soaked from the downpour, Johnny stumbles to the meeting point - still in mask and full costume. He stops and falls toward the fence, catching himself in the chain-link.

ALEX

Johnny, where's Thelo?

JOHNNY

Alex...Thelo and Heller.. fighting for the gun...

BUBBA (OFF STAGE)

Let's go, boys!

Johnny falls backwards into Alex's arms.

Alex slowly drops both he and Johnny to the ground.

Johnny lies in his lap. Alex removes one hand from beneath Johnny's upper torso.

Falling rain thins the blood, running milky from Alex's hand. He looks down to see a bright red puddle between his legs.

Alex rolls Johnny over and lifts his costume.

Johnny's been shot in the back, THROUGH THE TATTOOED HAWK.

Covered in blood, we see fragments of the words "Never saw it comin'."

ALEX

Oh my God, Johnny, look at you.

BUBBA (OFF STAGE)

Time's up!

Coughing and wheezing, Johnny barely speaks. He tries desperately to pick himself up, but falls back into Alex's lap.

JOHNNY

Shit. Bubba...Bubba.

The airboat is heard racing off in the distance.

ALEX

Oh, no. That's it. We're done.

JOHNNY

"Never saw it comin'". No shit, he shot me in the frickin' back - asshole... Knock, Knock.

ALEX

What?

JOHNNY

Knock, Knock.

ALEX

Who's there?

JOHNNY

Noah.

ALEX

Noah who?

JOHNNY

Noah way we're getting out of this one.

ALEX

I think that's the first time I ever heard a joke outta you.

JOHNNY

I got a better.

A flash of lighting REVEALS WARDEN SMELLING AND REVEREND BOBBY standing side by side. Bobby is visibly beaten, barely able to stand.

They watch quietly to the side in costume, undetected by Johnny and Alex.

Johnny pulls Alex closer -

JOHNNY

It was me, kid.

ALEX

What did you say?

JOHNNY

I killed the man in Jackson Square. The dying man you held in your arms. Just like now... It was an accident. You gotta believe me, lil' bro.

ALEX

I, I believe you, Johnny. Why? Why didn't you tell me before?

JOHNNY

I never made good with anybody. Rougon hired Heller to kill me because of it.

Warden Smelling has heard what he needs to hear. Without speaking, and still undetected, he TURNS AND EXITS with Reverend Bobby.

ALEX

You tried to make good by getting me outta this place.

JOHNNY

Always the wrong way, kid.

Alex reaches beneath Johnny's costume and into his front t-shirt pocket. He removes the PICTURE OF JOHNNY'S MOTHER from the pack of PalMals.

ALEX

Here. Take this.

JOHNNY

Your gonna be a good daddy, kid. It ain't so bad. For the first time in my life, I feel free.

ALEX

Free as a bird.

The downpour of rain turns to a slight drizzle, then stops all together - along with the thunder and lightning.

It's strangely quiet.

Alex removes Johnny's mask.

Johnny, hiding his painful conclusion, reaches to touch Alex's face and smiles.

For his last moments, he sees the life he always wanted in the eyes of an innocent boy.

ALEX

Johnny? Johnny....no. No.

Mama Lulu appears across the fence line, standing on the bayou's edge - unseen by Alex - for this duet.

Song: "Mistaken, Part II"

HOW DID
I GET HERE
A JOURNEY
MISTAKEN FROM THE START
HE DID
THE RIGHT THING
THE FIRST TIME

GAVE FOR ANOTHER
BROTHER TO BROTHER
HE BELIEVED

NOW HE'S GONE
TIME FOR BOTH OF US TO CARRY ON
FATE FILLS MY HANDS
WHY AM I THE ONE TO HOLD THIS MAN

MISTAKEN, MISTAKEN

LIFE IS A PASSAGE
A SHORT PATH
END, BUT DON'T BEGIN
DEATH IS
THE SURE THING
YOU COUNT ON

TO TAKE YOU FROM THIS PLACE

PULL YOU FROM A RACE YOU'LL NEVER WIN
NOW I'M HERE
WORSE OFF THAN I EVER WAS BEFORE

CAN'T UNDERSTAND
WHY DID GOD DECIDE TO CLOSE THE DOOR

MISTAKEN, MISTAKEN

(MAMA LULU)
MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR MIND TONIGHT
TO CHASE AWAY YOUR FEARS
MAMA LULU COMES INTO YOUR MIND TONIGHT
DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE
DON'T WORRY CHILD I'M HERE

(ALEX)
HOW DID I GET HERE

(MAMA LULU)
MISTAKEN

(ALEX AND MAMA LULU)
MY LIFE IS MISTAKEN

Mama Lulu vanishes into the darkness.

Heller and Thelo enter. Thelo is in front - hands cuffed behind his back.

HELLER

There you are, kid - Well, what do we have here? Looks like I got Chavez anyway.

Heller removes the handcuffs and pushes Thelo to the ground.

Heller points the gun at the boy.

HELLER

Like I said before, you boys are gonna die together. Now stand up and turn around. It's gotta at least look like you were running from me.

Thelo stands slowly as Alex - frozen in the moment - holds Johnny's lifeless body in his arms.

HELLER

I said get up, boy!

THELO

Leave the boy be, Heller. You got no business with him.

HELLER

Both of you are my business now, Pitt.

Heller raises the weapon and points it at Thelo.

Alex continues to look at Johnny.

Silent and dazed, he raises his eyes to Heller.

HELLER

Have it your way, Shaw.

Heller steps forward, swinging the pistol down to Alex - aiming directly between the frightened boy's eyes.

Heller's face forms a devilish grin. His finger twitches, ready and willing to take the life.

SUDDENLY, Thelo jumps in front of Alex, blocking the gun with his chest.

Thelo opens his mouth to speak. He says NO!

We hear -

WARDEN SMELLING

NO!

Warden Smelling - still in costume
- enters with THREE ARMED GUARDS.

WARDEN SMELLING

Put the weapon down, Heller. You're in enough trouble now. Don't make it worse.

One guard grabs Heller and handcuffs him. They exit.

The two remaining guards lift Johnny from Alex's lap and exit.

Thelonious kneels next to Alex, making sure he isn't hurt.

ALEX

Warden?

WARDEN SMELLING

I know about Johnny, son.

Warden Smelling extends his hand. With the warden's help, Alex slowly stands.

He again extends his hand - this time to Thelo.

ALEX

Thank you, sir.

The Warden seems strangely out of character.

WARDEN SMELLING

Thelonious, please go to my office and wait for me there - better yet, go to the infirmary and get that arm taken care of. I'll see you in my office afterwards. We have to figure out the consequences for your actions.

THELO

Yes sir, Warden.

Thelo exits.

WARDEN SMELLING

That was a stupid thing you did tonight.

ALEX

I know, sir.

WARDEN SMELLING

You're going to get your chance, Alex. Make it right, son.

Warden Smelling looks to the ground. He sees Johnny's water soaked mask, picks it up, and hands it to Alex.

WARDEN SMELLING

Finally made good.

Warden Smelling turns and walks away, leaving Alex alone.

A large hole in the chain-link can now be seen clearly.

Alex steps to the fence - stops - then throws the mask through the hole, into the bayou.

ALEX

Free as a bird, Johnny. Free as a bird.

STAGE GOES DARK.

SCENE 11

CECIL

Well, six months done past and a lots been happing 'round the prison. You could say things have changed for the better. But ain't that what change it suppose to do? Make people better.

A one room church sits on the grounds of the prison. A small but tasteful sign reads "GIVE IT BACK COMMUNITY CHURCH. ALL ARE WELCOME."

Cypress pews are lined with TOWN'S PEOPLE.

The back portion of the church holds pews filled with prisoners.

CECIL

The Reverend got himself back in church. This time, he's making good by preaching for a new crop a God's children.

Reverend Bobby stands at a podium - a makeshift alter for his inspirational delivery.

Reverend Bobby opens "the good book".

At a table across the stage, Thelo sits in conversation with Angel and Alex's attorney - Mr. Jennings.

CECIL

Thelo got himself a new attorney. Mr. Jennings done found out something about Thelo's case, too. This time around, Thelo gonna get what he couldn't afford the first time. That Jenning's not just a good lawyer - he a good man, cher.

Rougon and Heller enter covered in muck. Soiled T-shirts cling to their bodies as sweat-soaked bandanas cover their heads, each carrying a burlap sack. They cross and exit.

CECIL

Rougon and Heller got what they deserve.

Crystal enters with her recently acquired "LUCKY DOG" HOTDOG VENDING CART, stopping outside her old place of business - The Bottoms Down Club.

Waving to passing tourists - she wears a skimpy, revealing outfit of her own "lucky dog" design.

CECIL

... and Crystal done found herself a new line a work.

CRYSTAL

Hot and spicy, baby! Come and get 'em! My dogs are barking! Come and get 'em!

Excited, Mama Lulu runs on stage and grabs Cecil - almost knocking him over with a big bear hug.

CECIL

I served my time and found me a place to start again. Lulu, well, she went and done got herself married.... Oh yeah. She done married me.

MAMA LULU

Laissez les bons temps rouler, ya'll!

CECIL

That's my girl.

Crystal pushes her "Lucky Dog" hotdog cart past Cecil and Mama Lulu. Tooty and Shirley follow closely behind.

MAMA LULU

Hold on there, Crystal! I'll be back, baby.

Mama Lulu takes off after the cart.

CECIL

I know, I know. Ya'll waiting to hear what happen to our boy, Alex... Well, he done got his wish and made it to the baby's birth after all.

Cecil exits, along with the rest of the cast. CONTINUOUS TRANSITION TO SCENE 12

SCENE 12

Hospital Room.

Alex stares in amazement at his NEWBORN SON.

He kneels next to the bed, kissing both Joy and the baby. Joy hands the baby to Alex. He stands up slowly, cradling the child in his arms.

He picks up the BASEBALL given to him by Johnny and shows it to the baby.

ALEX (TO THE BABY)

I have something for you. A good man gave it to me. A man I wish you could have met. This is yours now.

NURSE

Do you have a name for your boy?

JOY

Yes. John Thelonious Shaw

The nurse places a piece of white tape on the side of a temporary hospital baby crib and writes the name.

Alex sits in a chair, rocking his son as the golden rays of sunset break through the window of the delivery room.

ALEX

Welcome to the free world.

A projected silhouette of a LONE HAWK, circling in the setting sun, is shown as the remaining cast slowly fills the stage for the Finale - Full cast number.

Song: "Path of Time"

IF YOU'RE TIRED
YOU CAN REST YOUR HEAD ON ME
I GET TIRED TOO
JUST LIKE YOU
AND WHEN YOU CRY
I'LL COMFORT YOU
WE ALL GOTTA CRY SOMETIME
MORE THAN WE'D LIKE TO

(CHORUS)

TAKE MY HAND
WALK THE PATH OF TIME
THROUGH THE DOORS OF LIFE

WE BOTH WILL PASS
HOLD ON TIGHT
THE JOURNEY'S LONG AND FAR
TO FIND OUT WHO WE ARE
AND IF WE'LL LAST

(REPEAT CHORUS X 2)

THE END.