

Please Leave the Light On By Jonathan Libman

In the dark we hear the sound of Muslim Prayer.
As the Lights come up we see MUSLIM PRISONERS on the periphery,
kneeling on their own individual mats, praying to Allah. It is
a soothing prayer not an angry one.
Soft lights come up on Joshua and Kareem sleeping in their cell.
Kareem's black feet poke out of the covers.
One of the few times that Gun Hill is actually serene.
Spot on CECILIA, elsewhere, she is older, still delicately
beautiful, collegiately dressed with a high school yearbook.

CECILIA

You know people still say things like "you brought it on yourself" or "you just want attention - you weren't really raped..." - When the truth of the matter is they weren't there... and why would anyone want that kind of attention? Honestly, I don't think a lot of people think before they speak. They just say phrases that sound good. Listen to people a little closer you'll see what I mean... I'm in my third year of college, Barnard - Psychology Major with a minor in Woman's Studies - I didn't really want to minor in women's studies - I want to act - but everyone else here seemed to be such an expert on "being a woman". Sometimes I'd rather be just a girl. To stay a girl. It's something I feel comfortable with. Is that immature?

(Spot on Joshua's MOM, elsewhere, prepping to
visit her son through plexi-glass)

MOM

My secretary asked me the other day - "Do you think it'd be worse if your child was retarded?"...Believe me, it was hard not to fire her, but I have to admit, it was different than the usual "We'll pray for him's and "Whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger"...

(Joshua wakes up. He quietly goes to take a leak)

I've been eating more lately. I put this gurgling humidifier, that I got from Secret Santa, in his room and stumbled on to some personal things he stashed in the bottom drawer of his dresser. A 1984 Playboy with Madonna on the cover, a lipstick covered Virginia Slim, maybe his first condom wrapper...

(Joshua drifts off, staring at something longingly...
An old feeling comes over him, his body, his skin.
Looks to see that Kareem is still asleep)

CECILIA

I really want to be intimate with someone..really intimate. It's just...I mean desire is a thing in it of itself -Shit- I just used one of those phrases that don't mean anything..

MOM

His father left me when Joshua was 9 to go to California and pursue a career in Television. He was one of the writers on that show Herman's Head if you ever?...Didn't think so. When the planets are aligned I get child support.

(Joshua stops touching himself. Something is wrong...
A blend of shame and self-hatred come over him.
He begins a burst of push-ups)

CECILIA

I don't particularly like the Columbia Boys - they're all so "intelligent" or at least convinced that they're predestined for intelligence. They lack.... "Maleness" do any of you find that? - And when they make an attempt it's just..embarrassing..

(Joshua stops, fatigued)

MOM

...Men...He's either dead now or lives in Mexico for whatever it's worth. That's enough about his father...

(Joshua looks out towards something perhaps his mother perhaps Cecilia. Now that no one can see him, Joshua starts to cry)

CECILIA

..I think about Joshua more than I'd like to admit..I wonder how he's doing..what kind of guy he may have turned into if....I even had a dream that I conjugally visited him which was bizarre - I've yet to share this with my analyst.

(Joshua looks longingly at something, perhaps Cecilia)

...I thought about writing him a letter but I didn't want to add insult to injury. How do so many women fall in love with convicts? ...We love what we can't have...?

(KAREEM awakens notices Joshua is up)

KAREEM

Hey.

JOSHUA

Hey.

KAREEM
How you doin'?

JOSHUA
Couldn't sleep.

KAREEM
Me neitha.

JOSHUA
Did I wake you up?

KAREEM
..No..

JOSHUA
I was just..

KAREEM
S'okay - I din see nothin'.
(....**Comfortable silence**....)
I c'give you some privacy -least turn around- I'd do that for ya

JOSHUA
No that's..

KAREEM
Thass all right. Jus part of bein' incarcerated... Lack of
privacy. I like sayin' incarcerated 'stead of locked up, though
they ain't no real difference.

JOSHUA
So then what does it matter?

KAREEM
Incarcerated sounds like we in here cause somethin's not workin'
properly, like under the hood of a car - somethin' that can be
fixed.. eventually..
(**He notices something wrong with Joshua**)
Hey...

JOSHUA
..I'm not doing too good..

KAREEM
..Somethin' happen?..

JOSHUA

.....

KAREEM

I'm not gonna go all Mrs. Vincegueros on you, if you wanna talk about it?..

JOSHUA

My appeal was denied.

KAREEM

Oh man - that suck - I'm sorry.
I'm really sorry. But ain't nobody really ever get outta here on their first try. Least in my experience..

JOSHUA

My Mom liquidated her whole savings-

KAREEM

(Doesn't understand)

So she angry at you?

JOSHUA

No. She's just...
She's not..
I never meant for this..

KAREEM

Hey.. Hey.. Be easy my, man.

(Kareem moves to comfort Joshua who is not receptive)

Keep yo' head up. I'm just gonna come a little nearer to you - okay - no homo - There you are. There you go.
Know what you should do?

JOSHUA

Hmmm?

KAREEM

Write her a letter - let her know you okay. Thass what she wanna hear. Whatchoo think?

JOSHUA

Right now?

KAREEM

I guarantee it make you feel better.

JOSHUA

I need to.. wipe my nose Kareem.

KAREEM

Okay.

(He doesn't let go - Joshua feels better)

You good?

JOSHUA

..I think..

KAREEM

Good - even if you not - it's okay to lie sometime.

(They both go back to their separate beds)

(Long warm pause as they each try to go to sleep)

JOSHUA

..Yo, Kareem, how come your family never came to visit you?
If you don't mind talkin' about it?

KAREEM

Nah, I don't mind. Half my family in jail, down south mostly,
South Carolina, Florida. My ass got caught in New York so I'm
stuck up here. Ain't nobody wanna spend a bus ticket on me.
They got they own crosses ta bear.

JOSHUA

What about your mom?

KAREEM

My Momma is 'bout 300 pounds of tough love. To her I'm just
anotha po' dunk nigga. Have seven kids ain't all of them gonna
work out... Lemme tell ya, them church goin' Mommas ain't nice
'cept on Sunday - durin' the daytime. ...You got a nice Mom -
she be sendin' you all kinds a things - she least gives a fuck.

JOSHUA

Thank you.

KAREEM

For what?

JOSHUA

What you said about my Mom. That was nice.

KAREEM

Ain't so bad bein' nice - somma the time...

JOSHUA

When I first met you I thought you were gonna be...

KAREEM

I know - you was real uncomf'table an shit. It's natural though. I make people...uncomf'table bein' a big ol' nigger. People always testin' me. They's no way around it, really.

JOSHUA

Well, people are afraid...I'm sure once they got to know you-

KAREEM

Sometimes I think all I needed was some positive re-encouragement. People always lookin' at me expectin' me to be bad - so I be bad. Didn't have a true..talent for it. My cousin Elroy - bank robber, my man, Corey High, drug dealer, Angry James, career criminal, nigga had to support 5 kids though, Freakin' basketball coach in my hood went away for some shit that don't even bear repeatin'. Shit first time I heard 'bout role model I thought they was talkin' about dice.

(Slight pause)

Expectations can fuck a nigga up...You feel me?

JOSHUA

Sure do, sure do.

KAREEM

..So hey..

JOSHUA

Huh?

KAREEM

You wanna try this thing?

JOSHUA

Role play?

KAREEM

Yeah - we could like sit on the floor and pretend we're at the beach - like in a Corona commercial.

JOSHUA
Too cold for the beach.

KAREEM
At night, then.

JOSHUA
...okay...

KAREEM
South Carolina's got dope beaches. Pretty waves, drunk
seagulls, fine Southern corn fed bitches...

JOSHUA
That sounds nice.

KAREEM
Myrtle Beach, baby. We on Myrtle Beach. Listen to dem waves.
Shhh... Shhh...

JOSHUA
Shhh... Shhh...

KAREEM
You like them corn fed bitches?

JOSHUA
Oh yeah.

KAREEM
Ever been wid a sistah?

JOSHUA
..Not all the way..

KAREEM
Wha happened? You din like it?

JOSHUA
She had her period.

KAREEM
Oh lord, that suck.

JOSHUA
Don't take this the wrong way but she smelled kind of funny.

KAREEM

Like what you mean?

JOSHUA

Just..I don't know..totally...

KAREEM

We different than ya'll crackers.

JOSHUA

Like chili mixed with cocoa butter.

KAREEM

Damn - you sure she wasn't Puerto Rican?

JOSHUA

No.

KAREEM

Dominican, maybe - they got some black ass bitches.

(Pause)

Hey Joshua, you wanna try this thing?

(Pause)

(They look at each other. Will They...?)

-Lights Fade quickly-