

ACT I, SCENE 6: THURSDAY AFTERNOON, APRIL 15

(At the end of Scene 5, when George Skatzes learned of the murder of hostage guard Robert Vallandingham, he convened an impromptu prayer meeting with hostages Clark and Ratcliff at stage L. Skatzes knew that a fateful line had been crossed, saying to the blindfolded guards, "Boys, I don't know if we are ever going to make it out of here.")

Prisoner George Mays remembers encountering Skatzes after the body had been taken out to the yard. He asked, "What the hell is going on?" George answered, sarcastically: "It takes a hell of a man to stab someone through the heart when he's tied up." At the time George did not know how Vallandingham had been killed. Eye witness statements indicate that Vallandingham was strangled with an extension cord.

Scene 6 begins with Skatzes coming back to the telephone at center stage. Other prisoners sit and stand around him. Officer Vallandingham's death is obviously on Skatzes' mind and on the mind of the prison negotiator, Dirk Price.

Unless otherwise indicated, the following dialogue is transcribed verbatim from Negotiation Tape #8.)

PRICE: What are you going to do, George, throw us another body tomorrow?

SKATZES: No sir. . .

PRICE: Last night, you . . .

SKATZES: . . . not if I can help it.

PRICE: . . . told us you wasn't going to do it.

SKATZES: Listen, I didn't want that to go down this morning. I, I, dearly hate that, and I voiced my opinion about that in here. I'm not shy about that.

PRICE: What happened, George? Did you lose control or what?

SKATZES: Never had control. I'm just a negotiator. Just one man.

(Noises are heard from beneath the floor. The prisoners surrounding Skatzes speak to him. Their voices cannot be heard but their manner is agitated.)

SKATZES: I don't know if you're setting explosives. I don't know what you're doing . . . but get the people out of the

tunnel.

PRICE: I am not setting explosions. . . . You're not seeing them drilling and setting. If we have people down there, it is only to maintain the security of that tunnel . . . nothing else is going on.

SKATZES: I know what's happening. I know that there's something going to happen this evening before dark. I know you're blowing it. . . . I know this in my heart. . . . If nothing happens on this yard before dark I know the ultimatum. I know that you're blowing the fucking floor down there or whatever. You're setting up down there. . . . There's no question in my mind about that.¹

(Skatzes told Price he had been instructed to say that unless the authorities removed their people from the tunnels, there would be no further negotiations until the next morning. At the same time, George repeated his conviction that unless there was some movement before dark the authorities would attack. The following segments of the transcript suggest the tension under which both men were working.)

SKATZES: I know in my heart that tonight's the night. I know that. I know that if we don't go out there and do something, as you got it set up, that you're blowing and you're coming in here. I guess that's just the way it's going to have to be, man.

PRICE: It doesn't have to be that way, George.

SKATZES: I know it doesn't have to be that way, but they sent the word down and there's nothing till the AM and there's nothing I can do about it.

PRICE: Hey George, do you feel like you're in danger?

¹In fact the authorities apparently were drilling in the tunnels. The official transcript of the negotiations recorded conversation among police officers away from the telephone, as well as conversation by the negotiator of the moment over the telephone. The following was said away from the telephone:

SERGEANT HUDSON [later the lead prosecution witness against Skatzes]: I heard the F.B.I. was bringing in some of those . . .

FEMALE VOICE: I seen them.

SERGEANT HUDSON: . . . low speed, quiet drills. I don't know if they're here or not.

FEMALE VOICE: I saw them. (Transcript, Negotiation Tape # 8, p. 6.)

SKATZES: I've been in danger ever since this thing started.

PRICE: George, we're not going to harm you. We're keeping you safe.

SKATZES: You're talking to a dead man. I know it. You know it. . . . That matters to me not.

(As dusk was about to fall, it was agreed that 1) George Skatzes would go out on the yard with a hostage and release that hostage in exchange for making a radio address, and 2) the next morning, a prisoner would go out with a second hostage and release him in exchange for speaking on TV.

The idea that if there was a talk on radio, George Skatzes would make it, came up quite suddenly in the telephone negotiations between Skatzes and Dirk Price.)

PRICE: The cable and the microphone are coming out right now. You got to bring one hostage with you, George.

SKATZES: They won't go for it.

PRICE: You go for it, George.

SKATZES: If it were up to me, if I was the decision maker, sure, I'd go for that. But they won't go for it.

PRICE: George, the tables are being moved as we speak into the yard. I want you and them to give me somebody now to talk to me face to face on live radio. You owe me that much.

SKATZES: Can I come out there and talk to you on live radio?

PRICE: Yes, George . . .

SKATZES: Me?

PRICE: . . . you can come out there and talk to me on live radio.²

(The arrangement was for Skatzes to take hostage Darrold Clark with him to the yard. A prisoner wrote out some grievances on a piece of paper. Other prisoners told Skatzes that he was not to discuss Officer Vallandingham's death. Officer Ratcliff, held hostage with Officer Clark in the same cell, wrote a note for his family but prisoners took it away from him. Ratcliff

²The following material within parentheses is drawn from testimony of George Skatzes and Darrold Clark, Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 2357, 2410-2411, 5385-5387.

thereupon asked Skatzes "to deliver a message to his people."

Skatzes walks to stage L, is briefly lost to view, and then reappears with hostage Darrold Clark, blindfolded. Skatzes and Clark go "out on the yard": that is, they descend into the L hand aisle of the theater. Skatzes takes Clark's blindfold off. Clark later recalled: "I think he had some paper or something with him, set it down. He undressed, showed them that there were no weapons on his body." There is reason to believe that the wind may have blown away the note on which the prisoners' demands were written, although George testified at trial that he "couldn't even read the writing." Skatzes and Clark approach a table with two chairs on either side of the table and sit down. Negotiator Dirk Price and Officer Hudson are seated at the other side of the table. There is a microphone on the table.)

PRICE: There's your cup of coffee I told you I'd have ready.

SKATZES: Darrold wants one. Got a cup for Darrold?³
(Speaking into the microphone.) All right this is inmate negotiator George. I'm out here at the negotiating table, my brothers.

If you can hear me on that radio, please holler at me.
[Sound of yelling in the background.]⁴

Okay, I'm out here. I know there's a lot riding on my shoulders right now. I'm gonna do the best job I can. Everything's kind of tense. Everybody's a little nervous, but before I come out here everybody in the world had something they wanted [me] to say.

Okay. All right, here we go. I can't possibly remember all of [the] demands but I'll touch on some and what I feel [are] the most important. But first off, I'd like everybody to understand that to the best of my knowledge tomorrow morning, at 8:00 a.m. I believe, we are going to have live coverage of this on Channel Ten news. To the best of my knowledge one more hostage is to be released in the same process that we have just went through. That is upon negotiation approval here. You still hear me up there, brothers? [More yelling in the background.]

~~Okay. From the offset of this we have tried desperately,~~
desperately to get in contact with the news media. We have been stopped by this administration. They think they can confine this incident within the walls of this prison, like no other part of the world can hear this. They think they can hide everything

³Radio address of George Skatzes, Skatzes trial exhibit.

⁴A tape made inside L block while Skatzes was delivering his address reveals that the listening prisoners repeatedly responded to his words with thunderous applause. (Tunnel tape L-4-80.) Prisoners in other facilities at least as far away as Columbus and Mansfield were also listening.

like they've been doing here for years and years.

This is not the case. We are oppressed people, we have come together as one. We are brothers. We are very oppressed and we're very sick of it. We're not going to take this any more. [Applause in background.]

We are a unit here. They try to make this a racial issue [but] it is not a racial issue. Black and white alike have joined hands at SOCF and have become one strong unit.

We have endured pure hell in there that they have put us through. We are still standing strong and we will remain strong until we either negotiate this to our likings, or they will kill us. We are prepared to die, if need to be.

And we hope it doesn't come to that. We hope there is no more violence, we hope there are no more unnecessary murders. We as a convict body send our condolences to Bobby's family. I can't pronounce his last name so I'll have to use his first. But that is something that had to happen. A lot of us didn't want it but that's, I'm sorry, that's all I can say.

Now. First off we want to continue to have news media coverage. We want to work and negotiate. We want all of our moves babysitted by you people out there on the other side of this fence. People other than the people attached to this administration or sympathizers of this administration.

We preferably would like to have an FBI negotiator. We want to get away from this administration. They are oppressing us. They act like this is a joke. I have worked very closely with the hostages. We are in agreement. They have seen right beside me, eye to eye, first hand, as to how this administration has acted like this is a joke. It is not a joke. Lives are involved here.

Now, we are releasing one: Darrold Clark, Junior here. I guarantee you, folks, he is not gonna be coerced, pressured or otherwise when he goes on the other side of this fence, and he is going to tell you what it's like in here.

He's going to tell you, I guarantee you he has seen it side by side beside myself, Jeff Ratcliff, and a few others, as to how this administration has acted, and acts like this isn't nothing. This is something.

List of demands. Excuse me if I seem to rattle on: I've got so much on my mind, and I can't possibly keep it in order. There's a lot of pressure, you know?

One of [the] things that we want to get rid of in this oppressed condition is our father oppressor, King Arthur Tate. He has got to go. Talk to me! It's nepotism. I hear a lot of complaints about this in the inmate population. They have got to stop that. What's the sense of dealing with one person when one person over here cracks your head and they turn around and look over here and their uncle cracks your head, too. What's the difference? They all see eye to eye. We're not gonna take no more oppression. [Applause in background.]

There's another thing that I personally have in my heart. It's about this TB thing in here. Now, they give us those tests,

and there's some rumor, maybe, I don't know, but there's something like 33 percent of the people in this inmate population (not talking about the guards) that have tested positive, but approximately 33 percent of the inmate population, if that's true, that's tested positive. Am I still on the radio up there, brothers? [Sound of yelling in background]

Okay, I'm very limited in time. I'm sorry. . . . The list of demands and all like that is by no means short. I could rattle on forever.

I do have one more thing. A man asked me to do him a personal favor. He asked me to bring a note out here to his people. I wasn't permitted to bring a note. That's fine. I will say Jeff Ratcliff sent his love to his momma and his papa and his people and he said that he is in there hanging in there strong. He was with [Darrold] Clark all the time, he is doing good and I hope we will have him out of here soon, too.⁵

(Second person speaking inaudibly)

And Jeff, if you can hear me, Donald Ray said he loves you, brother. I don't know, there's so much running through my head and I know there's a lot of pressure on me out here. I'm a strong individual. I can handle it. I know perhaps I haven't pleased everybody because I haven't touched on everything. I've tried. Like again I say, I'm limited on time. There's a lot running through my head.

But one thing I would like to say, in the past in my time here at SOCF, I have said that there are a lot of passive motherfuckers in this population. Because of everything they seem[ed] to be so passive about taking.

I'm a man enough to stand up and say I'm wrong. These people here, these my fellow convict brothers, have done nothing (inaudible) at this time, and you are standing strong and a lot of you feel like me that you are ready to die, and I'll tell you what, brothers, every damn one of you, I'm proud of you and I take my hat off to you.

And there is one more thing that I would like to say to you people out there on the other side of this fence that can hear me. Please try to help us get some type of electricity and water in here. [Applause in background.] 'Cause we are not going to bow down, we are not going to give up, we are going to remain no matter what they put on us; if we die, we die. But we would like to have some lights in there, and some water.

(Officer trying to cut off address.)

If we're still alive I hope that we can continue to

⁵Ratcliff testified at Skatzes' trial that his parents were across the highway in a school, and that "every time you turned around [my mother] was collapsing." When George transmitted Ratcliff's message, "a buddy of mine . . . ran over to the school and said, as long as he's with inmate George, you might as well believe he's going to be okay. And that gave them hope and faith." (Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 5998-A - 5999-A.)

negotiate and I hope that this is not a trick, I hope we have the live TV coverage in the morning.

OFFICER: Thank you, sir. I understand your hand of fellowship.

SKATZES: Fine with me, that's fine with me.

OFFICER: But George, you've been an honest man and we appreciate it. . . . Okay, George. Thank you for dealing with us in good faith. . . . Thank you for working with us, George.

SKATZES: Yessir.⁶

(Clark exits with the other officers.

Skatzes turns around, and returns to the occupied cell block, mounting the stairs onto stage L. It is by now quite dark. Skatzes' path from L to R across the stage is lit by candles held by other prisoners. There is a lot of yelling and screaming "hoorah."⁷ However, as Skatzes reaches stage R he is confronted by his friend and fellow member of the Aryan Brotherhood, Jason Robb. They are alone on this portion of the stage.)

ROBB: Brother. Some of the guys are saying that you paid more attention to Vallandingham and Ratcliff than to our demands. They are upset about that. A lot of people are not happy.

The Muslims feel that you are putting the blame on blacks. The prison people are making you look too pro-guard. Paranoia is setting in. A rift is beginning between black and white.

You are good hearted, George. You are being played by them. They are playing you with a "good old boy, country boy, help us"

⁶Radio address of George Skatzes, Skatzes' trial exhibit.

⁷George Skatzes was asked at his trial how the other prisoners responded to his radio talk. He answered:

It was kind of strange because I am not a person with an inflated ego or anything like that, but like when I come back in, it was all about like hoorah, or whatever, then holding up candles whenever I walked down the hallway, but . . . I am just me, you know. (Testimony of George Skatzes, Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 5387-5388.)

A witness at Skatzes' trial, Brian Michael Young, was asked to describe the general reaction to George's performance. He answered: "Well, there was, especially at the end, there was a lot of yelling and screaming, this and that. I guess, you know, overall, people liked it." (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 5097.)

line. They are inside your head.

You are on overdrive. You need sleep.

You may have to step aside. They want me to take your place as a negotiator.⁸

END OF SCENE 6. END OF ACT I.

GEORGE SKATZES SUPPORTERS
P.O. Box 1591, Marion, OH 44301-1591

⁸Robb's words are drawn from Skatzes' own testimony at his trial (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 5389) and from a conversation between the Lynds and Jason Robb at the Ohio State Penitentiary in Youngstown, July 2, 1998. The thrust of Jason's words is corroborated by the following.

Black Gangster Disciple leader Anthony Lavelle testified at Skatzes' trial that "Cecil Allen, Were, Roper . . . I guess you would say, the whole Muslim faction was dissatisfied with the way he [Skatzes] had been handling the telephone" (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 3961.) Some of the Muslims "felt that George was working too closely with the State instead of trying to get what we wanted, and some of them was questioning whether he was really trying to help us or help himself out of trouble." (Transcript, p. 3968.)

Correctional Officer Ratcliff, one of the hostages, testified that after the radio broadcast, he didn't see George for a while. The men guarding Ratcliff told him that George had been fired from his position as negotiator, and that Robb had taken his place. (Skatzes trial transcript, p. 5235.)

Roger Snodgrass testified that when Skatzes went out to make his radio talk, the list of demands he was supposed to read blew away in the wind. Some prisoners were so angry that they wanted to kill George, some were just disappointed, and some were still behind him all the way.

Q. What happened to Skatzes' position in the riots after the radio broadcast?

A. Basically George faded out. He come back, went straight to a meeting in L-7. I was present at that meeting. . . . It was decided that George would remain off the negotiations team, that he would just be George. I mean, he wouldn't be in the meetings and stuff. (Skatzes trial transcript, pp. 4439-4440.)

George Skatzes' own summary, written on the transcript of Inmate Tape XIII, back of p. 15, is as follows: "The inmates felt that the State people were playing a head game with me The inmates didn't want that. Now this is when Jason gets involved."