

ACT II, SCENE 3: AUG. 1993-SEPT. 1994

(Scene 2 portrayed how, in May 1994, a leader of the Black Gangster Disciples at Lucasville named Anthony Lavelle turned state's evidence in return for a plea bargain.

Scene 3 shows the domino effect of Lavelle's decision. It centers on a young member of the Aryan Brotherhood (AB) at Lucasville named Rodger [sic] Snodgrass. Before and during the April 1993 rebellion, Snodgrass looked to George Skatzes--a more experienced convict who was more than twice his age--as a mentor. His letters to Skatzes in 1993 and 1994 express devotion to Skatzes and undying solidarity with the older man.

On May 19, 1994 Snodgrass was indicted for the murder of prisoner Earl Elder on April 11, 1993. A new note began to creep into Snodgrass' letters to Skatzes. In his letters, Snodgrass mentioned, first, Lavelle's decision to plea bargain, and then a similar decision by Robert Brookover, who had been indicted for the murder of prisoner David Sommers on April 21, 1993. Snodgrass told Skatzes that he had been offered a deal but he did not tell Skatzes when, in August 1994, Snodgrass wrote to Prosecutor Piepmeier suggesting a meeting. We sense that the prosecution is playing on Snodgrass' fear that Brookover will testify truthfully about Snodgrass' participation in the murder of Sommers.

In September 1994, shortly before he would have gone to trial, Snodgrass entered into a plea bargain with the authorities. Scene 3 ends with a portion of the videotaped statement that Snodgrass made to the prosecution on September 9, 1994. Snodgrass' testimony was to be the most damaging prosecution testimony against George Skatzes, because it came from a person who might have been expected to support Skatzes, not to betray him.

Throughout the scene Skatzes should be seated alone in his cell at Stage Left. Snodgrass is in a similar cell at Stage Right. Anyone staging this scene should consider ways to enhance the drama: by dimming the lights after each document that Snodgrass reads, by shifting the spotlight (if there is one) from one portion of the stage to another, by having Skatzes turn over pages in silence as Snodgrass reads the same pages from his side of the stage, by causing Snodgrass to call or shout certain portions of his letters rather than simply read them. The center stage area between the cells is empty until the interventions of prosecutors Piepmeier and Gibson.)

SNODGRASS (reading over a letter he has just finished to Skatzes):

August 5, 1993.

Big George,

Greetings Brother. Man, I have been worried sick about you. This will make my third letter to you and no reply We heard that they took all of your personal things. Do they not allow you to go to the commissary?

. . . My Dad is in jail right now. I think my half-sister turned my Dad in. . . .

Well teddy bear, I hope that you get this letter and answer soon. . . . Take good care of yourself and hang tuff, as I know you will. With all my love and respect,

Your Brother, Rodger.

January 3, 1994.

Hello Brother,

I am in receipt of your most welcomed letter and I hope that mine will find you in the best of health. . . .

Brother, I have, in my short time, saw a lot of corruptness in the justice system. As a matter of fact, I feel that the [kidnapping] charges filed against me and the four others are part of a fabrication on the prosecution's part, to pressure us into giving information on other, more serious crimes

Brother, I'm not worried in the least little bit about these bogus, fabricated charges. I don't know how any of the other four have reacted to them, but I am prepared to make this Prosecutor play his hand or fold. . . . I ain't going to let them use me to railroad another man. . . . I don't even know these guys, but if they need me to testify for them in Court I will be more than happy to do so and I would appreciate the same. I can only see one bit of evidence, an inmate who is trying to save his own ass by putting shit on the guys who the prosecutor has already told ain't telling or lying on other folks.

I am on my job and I am not going to let these people railroad me like they did [before]. I was 17 years old then and I thought I was doing myself a favor by taking a 5 to 25 for a plea of Guilty. I also thought I was helping others by not going to trial and by taking the case on my shoulders, only to find out that my co-defendants had already wrote a book on me for the State. They have to pursue this one, Bro. I can accept nothing less than that and a find[ing] of Not Guilty!

I am here for you for anything and you know I won't turn my back on my Brother for nothing! If you ever feel you need to drop a load on someone, be sure it is me. . . .

God Bless you, Brother. As always, my Love, Loyalty and Respect. Your Brother always, Rodger.

[February 1994]

Big Brother,

I certainly hope my letter finds you well and in the Lord's Grace. . . .

I really don't know what to think of my attorney at all. . . . The problem is, he hasn't informed me of anything he has done, has only come to visit me one time, and only had 30 minutes because he showed up after visiting hours and they didn't even want to let him in. . . . He said he would be to see me within 10 days or so but it's been fifteen days and no word yet. I know that there was a hearing to determine whether or not the five lying inmates' identities would be kept secret but I don't know what the ruling was. I only know about the hearing because I read it in the papers, like everything else I know about my case. I go to Court in two days, and still no visit or info from the guy. I haven't received anything at all. . . .

Did I tell you about my Dad? He went back on the run again. I feel kind of responsible because he was doing good at the Halfway House but when he heard about my getting indicted he went to drinking and they caught him sauced coming in and told him to have a seat while they called his Parole Officer. He broke camp on them. . . .

You take good care of yourself and write me real soon. I love to hear from you, My Good Brother. All the writing in the world can't tell you how much I love and respect you.

Now and always, your Brother until death, Brother "Snod"

March 28, 1994

Big Brother,

Hello George, I write in hopes that my letter will find you OK and in the Lord's Grace.

Brother, this will be the hardest letter I have had to write. I have some very disturbing news, and if you don't already know by now, then I hate like hell to be the first to bear the bad news. It must be done and you should be the first.

Brother, I was informed at breakfast this morning that our Brother, Charles Parker, committed suicide in his cell at around

5:30 a.m. I know how close you Brothers were, and all I can say is I'm sorry this happened. They say he hung himself. . . .

P.S. All the Brothers send their love. It's kind of gloom around here, you know?

April 1st, 1994

Big Brother,

Greetings with love. I love you too, My Brother. . . .

Brother, I want to thank you for replying so fast to my letter, and for the understanding you have provided me, and although I have been there at times, it's still very hard for me to accept it. Sometimes you love someone so much that you don't want to believe anything or let go. I have decided that I don't ever have to let go of the love I felt for that Brother, I have a very special place in my heart where that love will always remain, as I do for you and a select few other Brothers. I believe the Brother is with the Good Lord and as you said, "May his honorable soul rest with peace!" . . .

Brother, you said here in your letter that it's "time to reunite." Well, as far as I'm concerned, we haven't never been apart. Maybe physically, yes, but not in our hearts! A Brother is a Brother no matter where he journies to. . . .

Ain't it crazy how we put our life on the line for the goodness of humanity, trying to do what any MFer with a heart would do, and then we get treated as the villain, get punished for doing right? Yeah, it's crazy, but I feel better on the inside, no matter what they do to me! We will endure whatever comes our way, and it just makes us stronger. Just don't let it do otherwise, Brother.

I just heard on the news that a Muslim guy got found guilty of kidnapping, they gave him 15 to 25. And you won't ever guess what the Prosecutor said afterward. He said that this "sets the pace for further Lucasville riot prosecutions." I reckon I'm supposed to pee in my pants now, huh? They really underestimate my strength and intelligence, even if I was guilty, which I am not. I would fight them until I drop. They tricked the kid once with the plea bargain, never again Bro. . . .

Now and always, in the blood, your Brother, Brother Rodger.

[A note by Geoege Skatzes indicates that he received the following letter about April 10, 1994, just after the events described in Scene 2. The notation goes on to say that Skatzes responded immediately with a 20-page letter, enclosing "the note Hasan wrote," that is, the note by Muslim imam Siddique Abdullah

Hasan f.k.a. Carlos Sanders, who celled next to Skatzes at Chillicothe and in the note says that, in his opinion, George did not turn state's evidence.]

Big Brother,

Greetings with my utmost Loyalties, Love, Honor and Respect, as well as that of all the Brothers here. . . .

I hear you had a little visit from the powers that be, and that a very serious threat was pushed at you. . . .

The Powers That Be, being the maggots they are, . . . want to sit in the boat and throw their lines into the water, with hopes of catching a fish.

If they really had even half of the bait they tell guys, they wouldn't ever go fishing at all. Their fish stories are sometimes close to the real catch, but they got a snag and are waiting for the fish to pull it out for them. . . . Our enemies are very cunning, Brother. I surely hope none of the Brothers fall for the fabricated bullshit they are making up. They only know what someone breaks down and tells them, and usually that's a bunch of lies to try to get their own ass out of the fire zone. With the utmost of Love, Nothing but Respect, and Loyalties abundant,

Your Brother, Bro "Snod"

April 24, 1994

Big Brother,

One of these Muslims came back from court and had everything all twisted up He ran the story down to me and Bro Tramp about the "dickheads" coming to see you and you getting moved away and, as he ran it all down, it was as if he has trying to put doubt in our minds about your honor, and he did it out in the rec cage so all his buddies could hear it. . . . After I received your reply I took the little note from Hasan and gently smeared it in his face! . . . It took the kid a minute to accept everything, but I observed him make an effort to inform his tribe about the divide and conquer tactics also. . . .

Rumor has it that the Powers That Wannabe are presenting evidence to the Grand Jury on three murder beefs and that you are the center of attention on two of them. I can neither confirm this or tell you how valid this info is, but judging from what you wrote, I can add it on my fingers and it makes sense. . . . You will have 100% backing from me. All you have to do is have your attorney come see me and I will handle the rest. . . .

Death Before Dishonor, Brother "Snod"

(A white man in a business suit walks to center stage. It is Prosecutor Piepmeier. He reads from a piece of paper.)

"May 19, 1994

The Jurors of the Grand Jury of the State of Ohio . . . do find and present that on or about April 11, 1993, at Scioto County, Ohio, ROGER SNODGRASS, purposely and with prior calculation and design, caused the death of Earl Elder")

SNODGRASS:

[A note by George Skatzes indicates that the following letter was mailed to him on June 7, 1994.]

Big Brother,

. . . Of course, by now you know that I have been indicted for the aggravated murder of an inmate named Elder. . . . My murder trial isn't until late September. . . .

The prosecutors have approached me, through my attorney, with a "deal" as they like to call it. Its script goes like this. I plead guilty to Voluntary Manslaughter, they will drop the two Kidnappings and get me five to twenty-five years, and will talk on my behalf at the Parole Board when my minimum is up. But, I would also have to give information regarding other homicides, unrelated to the AB. In other words, I don't have to tell on my Brothers, just the Blacks. . . .

Ihr Bruder immer, Bro "Rodger"

June 15, 1994

Big Brother,

. . . I read about the deal with Lavelle in the papers. Remember the deal they offered me? I would bet they wanted the same kind of deal with him. . . .

My Dad caught another break. They gave him 18 months to run with the 18 months he already had and then suspended 6 months on the both and gave him his county and halfway house time. So he has 4 weeks left and will be on the streets. . . .

Hey Bro. I just finished listening to the news and there was a clip in there that B.B. [Robert Brookover] copped out to 5 to 25 on some inmate's murder. A guy by the name of David Sommers, it said???

. . . Ihr Bruder Immer. Liebe, Bro "Snod"

July 4th, 1994

Brother George,

Greetings, my Great Brother.

I just received your most welcomed letter and as always, it was a pleasure to hear from you.

I read about the unfortunate news of your getting indicted for being humanitarian to the sorry sonofabitch I just want you to know this, Brother. I am here for you until death if that's what it takes. . . .

Of course you heard about the deal that Brookover made, didn't you? For his full cooperation with the authorities, he has received 5 to 25 years, to run concurrent with the time he is doing. He will be held [in protective custody] at Oakwood for the remainder of his sentence, not to ever have contact with any members of the AB. He will be recommended for parole when eligible [in exchange] for his plea of guilty to voluntary manslaughter and cooperation. In the deal, which I have read, it states: "Due to the extenuating circumstances of his felonious assault on inmate Sommers"

Whatever could that mean? Sounds like dude has really told those gullible sons of bitches some tall tales. Guys that know him well say he is a very expert bullshitter so there's no telling what type of lies he has went and fabricated to save his own ass.

Brother, I have read and reread your most recent letter and all I can gather from it (besides you love me) is that you have a brainstorm going. I ask that you do nothing that will compromise yourself on my behalf, for I am a big enough man to stand on my own two feet, and I don't know anything except fight till they drop.

All the Brothers here send their love and respect and a few said to tell you to answer your mail. . . .

Well My Brother, you take care and drop me a line when you get time. I told my Mom what you said

Death before Dishonor,

Love always,

Bro "Rodger."

(Prosecutor Piepmeier walks back onto center stage, and reads aloud the next communication.)

[Postmarked August 10, 1994]

Mr. Mark C. Piepmeier

914 Main Street

Mr. Piepmeier,

I am writing to encourage a private meeting between you and I, and at this time I do not request nor require the presence of

my attorney.

I must insist that the following measures be undertaken to insure my own safety, and should you be unable to meet these few requirements I recommend, then just abandon the effort altogether for I will not meet with you under any others!

#1. That the meeting be held with you and I only, at least initially. I will only meet with you!

#2. This meeting be held outside of this institution, preferably at a county detention facility and under the guise of "round trip for pre-trial court hearing."

#3. That you do not attempt to contact me here at Mansfield correctional facility by visiting, mail or any other means. . . .

#4. That the only necessary administrative and security personnel be made aware of this meeting. No correctional officers other than the transportation officers.

These four (4) conditions pose no threat to the security of this institution and should be no problem to arrange.

A hot cup of coffee wouldn't hurt either.

Thank you for your time and understanding this matter. Should our meeting prove a success I am sure you will be pleased.

Respectfully, Samuel Rodger Snodgrass.

SNODGRASS (once again reading a letter he has just finished to George Skatzes):

August 25

Bro. George,

Greetings my true white brother. I hope that all is well with you and yours.

. . . It was a hard pain to my heart to hear that they indicted you for the death of [Officer] Bobby [Vallandingham] and the others. Brother, God knows and we all know that you did nothing more than save lives in that madness, and if the truth be known, they know that, too. It is all politics and pressure tactics. . . .

What I would really like to know is: How many times did this Earl Elder dude get killed? You are the third person who has been indicted for that. I would imagine that that's the least of your worries, because of the Guard indictment. . . .

I do have a touch of good news. My Dad got out of the joint two weeks ago and is doing pretty good. He has his own apartment and is the proud owner of a Lazy-boy Recliner. He should be up to visit me next Tuesday the 30th, which will be

the first time I have seen him since before the riot. About a year and a half. I will close on that note My utmost Loyalty goes out to you. Take care and walk strongly.

Your little Brother, "Rodger"

(Accompanied by Snodgrass, a white man in a business suit walks to center stage. It is not Piepmeier, but assistant prosecutor Gibson. He reads the following statement. A third man should also be on center stage, with a video camera to record the questions and answers that follow Gibson's statement.)

RICK GIBSON: The date is September 9, 1994. The time is approximately 12:40 PM. My name is Rick Gibson. I am one of the special prosecutors of Lucasville prison riot cases. We are at the State Highway Patrol headquarters here in Columbus to talk with Roger Snodgrass regarding the events that began on or about April 11, 1993.

We have reached a plea agreement with Roger Snodgrass that he is going to be entering a guilty plea later today in the Franklin County Court of Common Pleas. In exchange for this guilty plea, he has agreed to give us a statement on video tape about some incidents occurring during the Lucasville prison riot.

Roger, the first thing I'd like to talk to you about is the homicide of inmate Earl Elder. You have some knowledge about that, don't you.

SNODGRASS: Yes, I do.

GIBSON: Could you tell us what happened?

SNODGRASS: Well, as I told you a black inmate who I did not know at the time came to the L side gym and inmate Skatzes talked to him for several minutes and then come over and told me that he had something that he wanted me to take care of.

GIBSON: Where did you go from there?

SNODGRASS: We went to L6.

GIBSON: What happened?

SNODGRASS: George told me, "We want you to take this guy

out. You know what you got to do." He was telling me that by the AB bylaws I had agreed to, I had to do this.

GIBSON: What happened next?

SNODGRASS: We went all the way to the end to cell L6-60. The black guy opened the door and George told me, "Do what you have to do, son," and I knew he meant by that, I had to go stab this guy with intentions of killing him. . . .

(The voices continue in question and answer, but the sound gradually fades and the stage slowly darkens.)

End of Scene 3