

Cigarettes, Love, and Rent

By Xora Odelle

SCENE 1

Spotlight up on a young black man. He holds a whiskey bottle wrapped in a brown paper bag. He is on the streets of San Francisco, outside of the Civic Center BART station. His clothes are simple and worn, but he wears them in the way that only black men can that make them seem chic and fashionable. He looks comfortable in his own skin and his moves are confident, but a bit stumbled due to the whiskey.

SAGE

To be or not to be? That's the motherfuckin'
Question - To die without a fight like fawns
Y'all are stuck on depending on luck and
A prayer. Y'all hate me cus I'm a con

I done more for this city than all y'all
Bitches man. Ain't doing shit but lying down
It's your own fault for your own damn downfall
Y'all sleeping. I'm out here getting the crown

City in ruins, bunch of posts - that's it
Just prayers and I'm for surely done
We need to be on the frontlines shootin',
but that message won't make it to you none

I'm tired of it man - shit's not worth it
All the destruction - aye, but I'm still lit

(Lights up on the rest of the stage to reveal SHILOH standing next to SAGE and a group
of young people passing a joint around.)

SHILOH

Man, you a crazy bitch.

SAGE

I'm just speaking truth.

SHILOH

Shit's fucked up, but we don't need to be out here shootin'.

SAGE

It's a metaphor - stupid dumb headass.

SHILOH

Alright, alright. Metaphor, yeah, that's it bruh.

(SHILOH takes whiskey bottle away from SAGE)

Don't let me catch you out here shootin' up in no kinda way, man.

(Pause.)

I'm serious!

SAGE

Don't worry about me, man. I've been weaned.
Use to fly so high, I felt free. You dig?
But yo, I don't wanna be no dope fiend
Cus I'm gonna make it, I'm gonna make it big.

(They both laugh.)

I'll stay off it, man. We're dying like lambs ouchea.

(KENDRIA enters obviously irritated.)

KENDRIA

Hell of a day in the city today
Forgot my clipper. Had to hop the train.

SAGE

You work too hard. You need a getaway.
But we broke so just smoke this mary jane.

(He laughs.)

C'mon smile a 'lil. Relax!

SHILOH

Leave her alone, don't you know it's wrong to police a woman's emotions. That's what they're saying these days. Can't tell 'em to smile.

KENDRIA

In a shitty mood cus my rent got raised
Can't keep up as it is. This city's dying.

SAGE

I know! That's what I'm talkin' 'bout. Shit's Crazy!
Ellis Act this. Ellis Act That. Been crying.

SHILOH

That's what they're saying. No more smiling.

KENDRIA

Not evicted yet, but who knows how long?

It's gonna happen sooner or later.

SAGE

Everyone's singing that same bitch ass song
Just concede to the eradicator.

Well, I'll tell you what, I'm tired of kneeling down at their feet like a BITCH!

SHILOH

Don't mind him, he's on one today.

SAGE

Don't talk 'bout me man, gotta do what's right.
Isn't okay what they're doing to this town
You and this city 'bout to get me tight
Need to go somewhere with that and lay down

SHILOH

Man, don't tell me what to do.

SAGE

And don't tell me what to do.

SHILOH

Just trying to look out for you man 'cus I love you.

SAGE

You gay as fuck right now.

SHILOH

You can't say that shit either, no mo'.

SAGE

Man, can't say nothing no mo'.

KENDRIA

That's not true. Y'all are just what's that word? Problematic.

SAGE

Problematic?

KENDRIA

Mhm.

SAGE

Girl, you better take your ass somewhere with that. Problematic. Shit. Ain't everything problematic?

KENDRIA

That doesn't mean we shouldn't try to be better.

SHILOH

She's right. I be trying to better myself. Now, 3 years ago if I seen a fine ass woman I might say something to her. I might say, "Hey, just wanted to let you know you lookin' *extra* fine today." But, now I don't do that shit. 'Cus it can make 'em uncomfortable, you feel? And that really ain't the point. Not supposed to be going out your day to make someone uncomfortable.

SAGE

Yo, whatever. Y'all be on that mess.

KENDRIA

Nah, you be on that mess, Sage. And then wonder why we ain't ever...

SAGE

Why we ain't ever what?

KENDRIA

You know what.

SHILOH

Why you ain't never got that puss-ay.

SAGE

That's not why. I know the real reason.

KENDRIA

What's that?

SAGE

Cus you afraid of what a real nigga would do for you?

KENDRIA

And what would you do for me?

SAGE

Everything, Kendria. I'd do everything for you.

SHILOH

Now, nigga, that's some gay shit.

SAGE

Thought you said you can't say that shit.

SHILOH

You can't.

KENDRIA

Well, I need somebody to pay my rent. Can you do that?

SHILOH

Yeah, Sage, can you do that?

SAGE

It's not about all that.

KENDRIA

In this city it is.

SAGE

Nah, that's what y'all don't understand. This city is about love. Where is the love?

SHILOH

It moved to Richmond!

SAGE

Where did the love go? What happened? People won't even bum their cigarettes with you no more. I was right here, outside Civic the other day and I seen this man in a nice shirt and some tailored pants smoking a pack of American Spirits, the light blue kind. Now I walked up to him all nice and said "Hey man, can you spare one?" I could see he had a new pack, and you want to know what this man said to me? You wanna know what he had the audacity to say? He said, and

I couldn't believe it, he said, "You got a quarter?" I stood there in disbelief and said "Nah man, I ain't go no quarter," and he said, "Sorry" and went on his way. Can you believe that? That wouldn't have happened three, four years ago. Somebody ask for a cigarette and you got one, you give it to 'em. Simple as that. I should've smacked him right then and there. Who smokes light blue American Spirits anyways? The bitch!

SHILOH

You ain't had no quarter, broke boy?

SAGE

I had a quarter, but I wasn't gonna give my quarter to him. What he need a quarter for? It's about principle.

KENDRIA

No one is under any obligation to give you anything, Sage. That's what you don't understand. Nothing's changed. It's always been this way.

SAGE

Nah, three, four years ago. People'll give you a cigarette no problem.

KENDRIA

Well, I don't smoke.

SAGE

This city, man.

SHILOH

It's not about cigarettes, or love, or rent. It's about human nature man. It's about Locke and shit. All that stuff we learned about in school, y'all remember?

KENDRIA

Ms. Willis would be proud.

SHILOH

Nah, stop playin'. People show you exactly who they are. They do all the time. Humans we're a certain way and shit. We can't change it. It's a survival of the fittest. And I hate to break it to y'all, but maybe we're just not that fit. So we do what we can. That's all we can do. Just what we can.

KENDRIA

I don't know about you, Shiloh, but I work too goddamn hard to not make it. I'm never going to be satisfied with living paycheck to paycheck so I'm working to change that. I'm out here saving, generating wealth to pass down, so my brother can have it different. I speak it into existence and so it shall be.

SAGE

You didn't have \$10 to take BART today.

KENDRIA

Shut up. I get paid tomorrow.

SAGE

I'm just saying. It's not about whether or not Kendria makes it. Whether or not Kendria can pay her rent, ok? It's about the community. It's about whether or not we get to make claim to our own damn neighborhoods.

KENDRIA

You keep worrying about everybody else. I'm going to be here minding my business and raking in the bag.

SAGE

I hope you do Kendria. I hope it for all of us.

KENDRIA

I gotta go to work.

SHILOH

Aye, take my clipper card. It's got a couple bucks on it. Those BART officers have been cracking down, lately. Gotta be safe.

KENDRIA

Thank you.

(KENDRIA exits.)

SHILOH

This world, man.

(SAGE shakes his head and take out a cigarette.)

SAGE

(to the group of friends smoking weed)

Y'all got a light?

Xora Odelle Original