

THE UNKNOWABLE KILLING OF LITTLE BOY BLUE

by David Boles

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ACT ONEScene 1

(The scene is a ravine in Chester, Nebraska on Christmas eve, 1985. A buckshot riddled deer crossing sign slaps against its post in the breeze. A rear axle with a barren tire rim is hacked into the ground. Hollow cattail husks poke from muddy slopes like cleats. Snow falls and dusts the land like lace. A tiny, but brilliant, shock of blue is revealed frozen to the ground by a brilliant and piercing white light from above. The wind yawns. Ditch debris dances.)

HUNTER

She's right here, Sheriff!

(HE appears at the top of the gulch cradling a double barreled shotgun. HE slaps the cold from his arms. HE is dressed in Red Wing workboots, a green plaid cap with earflaps, overalls and a heavy parka. HE slides down the gully on his rump)

Steven? You there?

(HE pulls himself to his feet and stares dumbly at the shock of blue and caresses it like a gemstone)

KELTON (OFF)

(A Flash Of Red appears at the top of the ravine: it is SHERIFF KELTON dressed in a luminous Santa Claus costume. His badge is pinned to the faux white fur cuffing his neck. His duty belt

shines with a fresh spit polish
 and serves as the lash for a giant
 stomach pillow under his outfit)
 On my way, Rollie! Don't forget we gotta get back
 right quick to take these Christmas gifts to the
 orphans.

HUNTER

It's right here like I said. I was lookin' for the
 pheasant I shot and my eye was pinched by this shank
 'o blue. Nothin' Mother Nature made could be that
 color blue.

KELTON

Hmmm. Well. To me. It looks like a doll.

HUNTER

But there are tiny hair buds on the back of the hand.

KELTON

Hmmm. Well. If it ain't a doll. Then it sure ain't
 alive.

HUNTER

It's fresh-frozen.

KELTON

Never seen a dead body so small before.

HUNTER

It isn't a dead body, Steven! It's a dead... little
 boy!

KELTON

(Kneels on the ground and uses his
 service knife to chip away the icy
 cocoon encapsulating the blue
 bundle)

Hmmm. Well. The ice ain't so terrible thick.

HUNTER

Maybe we shouldn't touch him?

KELTON

We ain't touchin' it. I'm touchin' it.

HUNTER

I just thought maybe you might want to wait for the authorities, first, that's all.

KELTON

Uh-huh. Well. Why don't you go find a phone, call my wife, have her ask me to come on down to the crime scene. I'll meet you there. I'll meet you there. I'll be the fat, tall guy wearing red.

HUNTER

Look, Steven. You're hilarious, alright? I meant should I go get Doc Lauder to come down and take a looksee.

KELTON

(HE pries the body from the frozen earth)

Aw. That old coon-dog couldn't handle an investigation if it was stuck in his hands with hot solder and tar paper! He drinks, ya know. Lookit here. I already started the investigation: nose, lips, left ear -- all ripped from the face with a knife. Hair is clean, neatly parted. Left hand is placed over the heart. Cuticles pushed back. Nails clipped. Right hand tucked under the body. Port wine birthmarks ring the neck and stain the forehead. Eyelids are half-mast over egg-white eyes. Ground undisturbed. No burial attempt. Reckon' the kid's... oh say... fifty pound if that.

(He sticks the tiny body in his Santa Claus hat and trudges up the ravine)

That's it. Investigation closed. Let's get over to the orphanage. Okay?

HUNTER

This child was meant to be found.

KELTON

Naw... he run away and lost his way home. Happens a lot.

HUNTER

To cattle, maybe.

KELTON

Oh. Come on. This kid got disoriented in the cold and fell down here to die. If it's murder, Rollie, they hide the body. Let's go. Say there -- if it means that much to you, we'll drop him off at Doc Lauder's. Tonight, for you, the orphans will wait.

HUNTER

Whuddya mean?

(KELTON pauses and looks back down
the ravine at HUNTER)

Tonight, the orphans are already in your arms.

(The LIGHTS change to...)

ACT ONEScene 2

(A frozen pond reflects a twisting rope of clouds pulling across a cyan moon. Leigh hunter, wrapped in a quilted blanket and overcoat, sits shivering on a hollow log. In the distance, a turkey call is heard. She answers by rapping her mittened hands rapidly against the log. Deputy sheriff roger KELTON ENTERS. He pulls the skin against his Adam's Apple, wiggles it, and calls out like a wild turkey. LEIGH answers him as before.)

ROGER

Sweet-knees, that ain't the proper response to a wild turkey in heat!

LEIGH

I know, Roger. But turkey season closed a month back. Winter Grouse...

(SHE raps her hands on the log again)

...is a more accurate bird call for this time of year.

ROGER

Uh. Well. It might be more accurate, Leigh -- but a Winter Grouse cannot compare with the passion of a wild turkey's mating dance.

(HE flaps his arms and wiggles his legs as he imitates the dance.

LEIGH laughs)

Now don't laugh too hard, my little Winter Grouse, or yer Paps bird might swoop down and peck off my passion.

LEIGH

(Opens her blanket and welcomes
him)

I can handle Daddy and I can peck off your passion
myself.

ROGER

Better you than me!

(HE swoops into the blanket with
her and eats her neck)

Gobble, gobble, gobble!

LEIGH

Another raging success for the wild turkey dance!

(SHE pulls him from her neck, and
bring his lips to hers. THEY
kiss)

ROGER

Ouch! Your beak is chapped!

LEIGH

I'm windburnt from the waiting. Where you been?

ROGER

Oh. Well. Paps radioed me with news of somethin'
blue found in the ditch off a Highway 81. But, I had
to stop here first to wish you a Merry Christmas,
Leigh.

LEIGH

Well, I guess you better go, then. Merry Christmas to
you too, Roger.

ROGER

(Stands to leave)

Merry Christmas, Leigh.

(HE shakes her hand and holds onto
it)

LEIGH

What is this?

ROGER

What do you mean?

LEIGH

There's something in my hand. I mean -- in-between our hands.

ROGER

That so? Well, I guess you better leggo of my hand and find out what it is, then.

LEIGH

(SHE tries to let go of his hand,
but he won't let her hand. HE
giggles, and releases her hand)

Ahhh? It looks like an engagement ring box?

ROGER

Really? What if it's that special kinda box you open up and all the bad things in the world come spinnin' out and everyone is miserable for the rest of their short, unworthy lives?

LEIGH

That's what I said: "It looks like an engagement ring box."

ROGER

Well then I guess I better toss it into the woods, wherest no beast nor Wild Winter Grouse can open it and unleash the end of the world upon us common, but innocent love Turkeys.

(HE takes the box from her and
pretends to throw it away. LEIGH
grabs his cocked throwing arm)

LEIGH

Lemme take a little peek first.

ROGER

Welp, okay. It's your dare.

(HE presents her with the box)

The fate of the world is between your fingers.

LEIGH

Oooo. It looks like an ice cube.

ROGER

Yeah, but this one won't melt in your mouth.

LEIGH

(Pushes the ring on her finger)
Heavy. I like heavy.

ROGER

Oh, I been savin' fer that since were first put a happy eye to each other in kindergarten.

POLSKOVIC

That was an Age ago.

ROGER

I'm a slow saver.

LEIGH

It's a beauty, all right. But we coulda used the money to pay --

ROGER

(Upcuts her and hugs her tight)
That little grouse we got bastin' gots to have a first class life. And goin' number one starts with the Mams.

(HE takes off his glove and places a bare hand against her abdomen)
Only the best for you both. That is my promise. You have my word.

(Using his open fingers, HE combs the hair out of her eyes and discovers tears in her eye)
I will give you an honorable, upright, moral life.

LEIGH

Lord, this little box has unleashed quite a punch.

ROGER

Merry Christmas.

LEIGH

It really has loosed the end of the world.

ROGER

Yes, darlin' it has. This is the end of the world as we know it. From now on -- we get to build ourselves a better one. Now let's go straight off and tell your Paps that I'm not askin' fer your hand on account I already took it.

LEIGH

No!

(HE is stopped by her sharp tone.
SHE immediately smiles and softens
her tone)

I mean, "No, not yet, Sweetfeet." I'm not a piece of merchandise to be marked down and bartered. It is my decision to marry you, and I will tell him -- with you at my side -- tonight at church. Agreed?

(HE thinks for a slow moment, then
does his Wild Turkey mating call
again. THEY embrace in laughter.
LEIGH removes the ring from her
finger and replaces it in the box)

To be safe -- to stay in control of the telling -- I'll put the ring back on after Daddy knows, okay? But in our hearts, we'll know I never took it off my finger. Okay? You understand, right Roger?

(HE pulls away from her, but SHE
firmly pulls him back into her
embrace)

Just... say... you understand, Roger.

ROGER

(The tension in his shoulders
becomes stronger as HE forces a
smile for her)

Sure, Leigh. I understand.

(As LEIGH hugs him, we see his
expressionless face fade into the
moonlight. BLACKOUT.)

ACT ONEScene 3

(The scene is DOC LAUDER'S examination room. A technician's lamp burns white over a stainless steel table. DOC CUD LAUDER, dressed in overalls and a dirty lab coat, stands over a small orange heat lamp focused on the corpse. HUNTER and KELTON stand behind him and hunker for a look over LAUDER'S shoulder.)

LAUDER

He should be done about now.

(HE flicks off the heat lamp and stretches out the body)

Warmed him up above forty degrees. Yes. Flesh is soft to the pinch now. He was well-fed. We can begin.

(KELTON, still in his Santa outfit, has his face positioned directly over Lauder's shoulder. LAUDER gives him a look.)

Red's your color by the way.

(KELTON backs off. LAUDER begins his examination by starting a cassette recorder)

Thayer County Coroner's Report on: Baby Boy Blue. December Twenty-Four, 1985. 11:30pm. Nine year old male. Blond hair -- cut and styled before death. Freckles on both cheeks.

KELTON

Say somethin' I ain't already told you!

HUNTER

He's doin' the job, Steve. Give him a chance.

LAUDER

Soap residue in the armpits. Circular cigarette burn on right forearm and a small birthmark is visible on the inner right calf. Nose, ear, lips chewed off by field mice.

KELTON

Mice? That kid was cut with a serrated kitchen knife!

LAUDER

The teeth marks puncturing the flesh is from an animal, Sheriff. Say, why don't you two boys wait outside while I do a little jigsawin' into the lad? There's Egg Nog in the lobby.

(The Lights Fade on LAUDER as electric circular saw is heard dissecting flesh and bone. HUNTER and KELTON cross downstage into the harsh florescent lights of the lobby. THEY pour the Nog from a silver serving urn)

HUNTER

Who did this, Steven? Who could misplace a son?

KELTON

Well. See. I dunno. You got ten thousand daily possibilities. We're but a smack fifty mile from the very center of the United States here in Chester. Highway 81 runs straight through us here in Nebraska - - and 81 runs sixteen hundred miles from Canada to Mexico.

HUNTER

Well, if it's murder, the body dumping could've taken as little as five minutes! Two from 81 to the ditch, one to drop the body, and another two back to 81!

KELTON

It ain't murder. The boy has a home. He's lost. But he's missed. We just gotta get the word out. If he don't hail from these parts, then we got a sixteen hunnert mile of ribbon to check including every exit ramp and cloverleaf branching out along the way.

HUNTER

Well, it's a hopeless case, then.

LAUDER

(Enters the lobby. His bloody
palmprints shine wetly from his
lab coat)

Mebbe not hopeless. It no one around here steps up to
claim the murdered boy, then the F.B.I.'ll step in and
track 'em down.

HUNTER

Murder! I knew it!

KELTON

Murder! Ha! Prove it.

LAUDER

Here's what I found. The lungs are congested. The
stomach is empty but I found fecal matter in the
bowel, so the boy ate an hour before death. There are
no dental fillings, so positive identification is
impossible, I'm afraid. The white plastic feet of the
sleeper are unmarked under magnification. No cuts or
stains on those plastic feet either. The boy never
walked in the sleeper. He had to be placed on the
ground. The anus was dilated...

HUNTER

(Upcut)

You mean the kid was raped first?!

LAUDER

No. No. That's a sign of instant freezing. The boy
had no remarkable marks.

KELTON

Huh? You blind, drunken old bull! The kid was
covered with port wine birthmarks!

LAUDER

Ha! It's been 35 year since I examined a suspicious
death, but Sheriff? I do know the difference between
a birthmark... and freezer burn! Those marks you saw
were caused by exposure to sub-zero temperatures.
Without a cushion of fat between skin and bones, warm
flesh discolors quickly in that kind of cold.

HUNTER

Warm flesh? That means the child was put on the ground while he was still living?

LAUDER

Could be. Or that he was put down the instant after he died.

HUNTER

Why, the most a child could survive wearing only a sleeper like that is what? Twenty minutes tops?

LAUDER

Tops. What other evidence from the crime scene do you have for me?

KELTON

There's nothing else. What you have is all we got.

LAUDER

Nothing else? Any photos of the body in position?

KELTON

You know we had an ice storm last night. Everything was heavy and coated with ice. Just dream about it and draw yourself a picture.

LAUDER

Uh-huh. And the ground beneath the body? That was covered in ice, too?

KELTON

The kid was covered in ice! The ground was frozen. Look, I'm not on trial here. You two detectives are trying to stick a murder on a game of pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey.

LAUDER

Well. If you didn't check the ground, you didn't check.

HUNTER

I checked. There were indentations in the ground where the body had lain.

LAUDER

I'd call that significant.

KELTON

What? What're you doin' tampering with my crime scene?

HUNTER

Crime scene? You told me the investigation was closed. I simply covered the ground where he slept to give him a proper, if ceremonial burial, on Christmas Eve. It was then that I noticed the ground had melted and conformed to his body.

KELTON

Well, beat me with a brick! My best friend's a lawyer, and he's messin' up my life by fiddling with State's evidence!

HUNTER

I practice Wills and Deeds, not murders!

KELTON

Would you stop calling this a murder?! Someone's gonna hear you!

ROGER

(Enters the lobby)

Hi Paps! Hey Doc? Your coat's bleeding! Red's your color, ya know. Hey now, what's all this gossip I'm hearin' about a murder?

LAUDER

Hello, Roger. I'm gonna wrap up some mouth and rectal swabs, blood, hair and stool samples along with fingernail scrapings and the blue sleeper for quick delivery, okay?

ROGER

I sure hope those aren't the orphan's Christmas gifts!

LAUDER

I want you to deliver the package to the State Patrol in North Platte. Can you handle that?

ROGER

Can do, sure.

KELTON

There's no need to bring in the State Patrol! Lemme investigate this quietly on my own tomorrow.

ROGER

Oh, I'd say tomorrow's too late, Paps. The time for quiet has gone away screaming into the night. The whole town's running spooked right now searching for someone to blame -- seems they all saw you bring the dead child here while they were waitin' outside the church for Santa Claus.

KELTON

Ho, ho, ho.

ROGER

The congregation ran, Paps. They all shouted that there was a murderer among us. The orphans ran back to the convent. Each parent has gone home to pray with their children for strength from God to kill their neighbor.

KELTON

Are you trying to make me feel better, son?

HUNTER

This has gone beyond you. Beyond us. This is the outside comin' in.

ROGER

And to stay safe and small and close-knit, we better prepare ourselves to turn the outside inside out with a double barrel shotgun if they show up here again.

KELTON

Ho, ho.

LAUDER

I'll draw up an imagined face based on the boy's skull structure. We'll pass out copies of Boy Blue all along Highway 81. Don't knit the brow boys. Something always stands up on tippy toes and waves at you saying, "I did it." Sometimes it's a body. Sometimes it's a conscience. You just gotta know where to look for the wave.

KELTON

Ho. Well. This is no murder. That isn't done here. Not while I'm Sheriff. We don't kill our children here like animals. We grow 'em high like cottonwoods. We harvest 'em like wheat. We celebrate them like rain! We are Nebraskans for Chrissakes.

ROGER

Then why do all the best serial killers come outta the mid-west?

KELTON

Someone's gonna report a missing child, we'll show 'em the body, they'll have a good cry and use a Kleenex; the town'll do a funeral and by tomorrow noon tops, this will be put to bed behind us.

HUNTER

There'll be no report. Because the person who is responsible for him -- is the same person who put him there.

(Crossfade to:)

ACT ONEScene 4

(a stained glass window of Christ's crucifixion glows in candlelight. Good REVEREND ROSLYN POLSKOVIC stands in front of the stained glass giving a midnight sermon from behind an altar carved out of a tree trunk.)

POLSKOVIC

(Lighting votive candles as SHE speaks)

This is the season for renewal, love and passion. God, let your love overwhelm the fear of those who left their hearts by the roadside with the child you delivered unto us. Should those responsible for this babe come out of the cold and into the warmth of your understanding, let it be known that we shall offer them the most beloved of Your gifts: Forgiveness. We shall soothe them with the kind of love that has soothed our hatred, our scorn and our fear. We will offer them what you have selflessly bestowed upon us: The Peace of Christ. Amen.

(KELTON, LAUDER, HUNTER, LEIGH and ROGER are revealed in the church and echo her "Amen")

For those who didn't run for their guns -- for those strong enough to stay here in the safety of your Blessings, Lord, I ask you to make them stronger with your passion for life. And for those who ran from You -- give them the cool peace of mind to remain calm in their trembling uncertainty.

POLSKOVIC

(SHE breaks bread and passes around a brass goblet filled with

red wine. As each person drinks
and eats, SHE says:)

Bliss of Christ: Blood and Body.

(SHE now extinguishes all the
candles except the one lighting
the stained glass window)

Let us form an unbreakable circle of hands that will
chain us together with Blind Faith in the solidarity
of Hope.

(POLSKOVIC leads them all in
singing "What Child Is This?" as
THEY form a circle. As THEIR
voices rail against the dark:
BLACKOUT)

ACT ONEScene 5

(HUNTER and LEIGH walk up a dirt path to the front porch of their home.)

HUNTER

Thanks for walking home with me.

LEIGH

I don't mind. I'm a Pro at doing time in the cold.

(THEY sit on a porch swing and sway in the night)

HUNTER

It took more than the cold to murder that little boy.

LEIGH

He belonged to somebody. Maybe it was an accident?

HUNTER

No matter the cause, we know he trembled to death.

LEIGH

He's better off with the Lord, then.

(The chains on the porch swing groan as THEY share a comfortable silence)

HUNTER

That's just what mother would've said. She and I would sit here every Christmas Eve and pick out stars while we inventoried our Blessings. You are every blessing we wished for.

LEIGH

(Snuggling into the cradle of his arm)

You tell me every day.

HUNTER

You are loved. Every moment of every instant. And that's why this Christmas is so especially hard.

LEIGH

Every Christmas is hard, Daddy. We'll always miss Mamma, but we're good company for each other.

HUNTER

Not any more, Leigh. Tonight, you are no longer my baby. Tonight, you are a woman with a future that doesn't include her old man. Tonight, I say good-bye.

LEIGH

Not tonight, Daddy, please! We always save getting maudlin for Memorial Day when we take a picnic to Mamma's grave. Tonight? Let's just be quiet together. Tonight, let's be content.

HUNTER

Congratulations, Leigh. I'm proud of you.

(HE hands her an envelope)

Now get out.

(LEIGH opens the envelope without expression)

LEIGH

Why did you buy me a one-way ticket to Chicago?

HUNTER

(Laughing, LEIGH pulls away from him)

Why am I sending you to Chicago? Because I love you. Because you graduated law school with honors. Because you passed the Bar exam with the highest score in the region. Because Chicago wants you for \$87,000 a year plus benefits and a low interest loan for a home of your own. Because you are going to pock the façade of the world with the Hunter name in a way your old man never could. Because you are better than this a-here this gumball down.

LEIGH

But here is home. Here is where I want to be!

HUNTER

You like it here because it is safe and familiar. You can always come back here to live in your retirement.

In between the now and age 65, you'll visit me twice a year -- on Christmas and Memorial Day -- and you'll write postcards weekly. I'll call you on the phone every other Wednesday after 11 PM when the rates go down. It'll be as if you never left! Now have a good life and see you later!

LEIGH

But I never said I wanted to go. I never accepted the job!

HUNTER

Leigh. You're smarter than this town. I didn't have the brightness to get out. Practicing Wills and Deeds still haven't paid off my college debt. The future for you here is darkness, loss and cruelty. Your death won't be cold and quick like that little boy's in the ditch. Your death would be like mine: Lukewarm, dry and public. You're too sharp to me maimed by your fear of success.

LEIGH

(Upcut)

No!

HUNTER

Leigh? You're getting upset? Didn't I teach you emotion is unworthy of a lawyer? Didn't I teach you that an attorney should only use cool logic?

LEIGH

Here's the cold case: I don't want to move to Chicago. I like it here. I want to join your business. I want to open up a Kid and Pop Shop: "Hunter and Hunter, Attorneys at Law specializing in Wills, Deeds and..."

HUNTER

(Upcut)

...And Despair." If your mother were resurrected, you'd have already killed her again with this talk of sinkin' down roots in this rotted town.

LEIGH

You leave Mamma outta this! You can't use her memory as a cudgel against me any more! I have my own free will to follow.

HUNTER

The judge has rendered his verdict: You are Gone!

LEIGH

I won't go.

HUNTER

You have no right of appeal in this home. You're going.

LEIGH

Should I find Justice in a home of my own, then?

HUNTER

With whom?

(Sniggering)

Roger?

(In the distance, ROGER's Wild Turkey Mating Call is heard.

HUNTER goes to the porch rail and cocks an ear to the wind)

I thought turkey season ended a month ago?

LEIGH

(SHE takes his face in her hands)

Look at me. Like you and Mamma, me and Roger want to count our Blessings right here under the stars. He's asked me to marry him. I said yes.

HUNTER

(HE incredulously peels her hands from his face)

Roger Kelton didn't finish high school. But he will surely finish you if you marry him. He'll drown you with children. He'll chain you to a stove with a dishrag. You'll be gasping for air from the Lysol fumes. No. I didn't raise up a daughter alone just so she can become another man's mother.

LEIGH

But I love him.

HUNTER

Really? And does he love you back? He certainly can't love you more than I already do. Why isn't that enough?

LEIGH

Roger loves me dearly and he loves me in a way you cannot.

HUNTER

You do not love Roger. You love the idea of being protected. If Roger loves you as much as I do, he'll see you off to Chicago tomorrow and stay out of your life forever. He'll feel what's best for you, because I'm going to knock it into his head with my fist!

(LEIGH searches the dark horizon
for a sign of ROGER on the dirt
road)

Love yourself first! Then, if there's any love leftover -- we'll buy you a dog.

LEIGH

Roger's coming.

HUNTER

Happiness has no foundation if there's no achievement of your promise.

ROGER

(Slowly plodding up the porch
steps, HE walks into an icy
silence)

'Evenin' Mr. Hunter. You okay, Leigh?

HUNTER

She's fine, Roger. We're sharing a family moment. We're thinking about mother.

LEIGH

I'm leaving.

HUNTER

Yes, you are.

(LEIGH sprints past ROGER and runs
away into the night. ROGER
watches her vanish. HUNTER looks
up at the stars)

ROGER

What happened here?

HUNTER

We were counting our Blessings, Roger.

ROGER

That so?

HUNTER

Ever done that, Roger?

ROGER

Can't say I have.

HUNTER

Because you don't have any? Or because you can't count that high?

(ROGER takes a step toward him.

HUNTER stands and crushes his fists white with anger)

Give me the pleasure.

(Silence)

ROGER

I love her Mr. Hunter.

HUNTER

If I find even half of your greasy palmprint on her, you'll be certain to feel the undying clench of a father's love.

ROGER

Good evening Mr. Hunter.

(HE tips his Deputy's hat to HUNTER and steps down the porch stairs backwards. HE turns and walks down the path and calls back over his shoulder)

And a Merry Christmas to you.

HUNTER

(HE stiffly goes to the porch rail and grabs the painted wood. HE glares out at ROGER's disappearing outline. HE speaks softly)

Yes, Roger.

(HE sits down hard on the swing and rocks himself.)

It's going to be a very Happy New Year without you.

(BLACKOUT)

ACT ONEScene 6

(KELTON is pulling down the christmas lights and snow decorations from the exterior of the church. DOC LAUDER ENTERS.)

LAUDER

Sheriff! I got the State Patrol Crime Lab report back!

KELTON

Hell. Well? Read it!

LAUDER

(Scanning a long computer print out)

"Blue sleeper was manufactured by Regal under the brand-name *ToddleCare*. Sales tags were still attached. It was purchased at K-Mart -- shipped July 1985 -- arrived on the sales floor in August. The sleeper can't be traced to a single store, only a distribution center and there are two national shipping hubs for K-Mart. Each serves half the nation."

KELTON

Ugh. Well. They can't even give us a pot to pee in.

LAUDER

(Continuing to read)

"Fresh Urine stains on the sleeper's foot and neck indicate that the boy'd been able to stand and urinate during the day of his death."

KELTON

Kid must've piddled on the sleeper while he was pulling it back up?

LAUDER

Maybe so.

(He adjusts his glasses to read
the last part of the report)
Lessee. "No semen or spit stains. Blue paint flecks
from a ten-year-old car interior were picked out of
the fibers on the sleeper's neck." End of file.

KELTON

Even the leads are stillborn.

LAUDER

Uh, Steve. You should know -- that the State boys
sent this case to the Federal lads for further
investigation.

KELTON

What? No. Embarrassing! The whole town's laughing
at me, Cud!

HUNTER

(Enters walking)

If your boy spent more time tracking down leads and
less time chasin' my daughter, you might have yourself
a murderer in custody by now.

LAUDER

This is where I get off. See you later, men. I owe
the F.B.I. a written report.

(HE exits quickly)

KELTON

You raised up a good daughter. Now let her be her own
woman.

HUNTER

They're out of control. If kids can't see the truth
of the matter, then it falls on the parents to peel
back their eyelids and make 'em look into the light.
They crave discipline and guidance. If they can't see
the misery coddling their future together -- then we
need to speak our callused, but experienced, tongues
and save them from each other.

KELTON

Aw. I never seen two kids so sweet on each other.
Been inseparable since they were babies. That counts.

HUNTER

(Shouting)
 Call off your boy! He's got her by the neck and he's squeezing! She's already missed one flight to Chicago and she can't miss another!

KELTON
 What is it that scares you so much, Rollie?

HUNTER
 Leave me out of it.

KELTON
 How can I? You just come in and stepped right through it.

HUNTER
 (Shouting)
 This has nothing to do with me! That's like saying Roger'd be a poor father to my grandchildren because his father can't solve a simple case of murder!

KELTON
 (Staring silent daggers. A moment, then --)
 Roger! Let's go home.
 (ROGER slowly Enters from inside the Church with Christmas wreaths hanging his arms like bracelets)

HUNTER
 (Startled)
 Roger? I... I... didn't know you were there... listening.

ROGER
 It's okay, Mr. Hunter. I suppose it's good to know you talk the same way about me behind my back as you do to my face.

HUNTER
 We'll discuss this later, Roger. We'll settle this alone. I have to go drop Leigh off at the airport right now.

(HE Exits)

KELTON
 (HE picks up his box of ornaments)

Let's go home, son.

ROGER

(A candle is lighted in the Church window)

I just want to sit here a while, Paps. Go on home to Mams and eat my share of supper. I'm not so hungry. I'll catch up later.

KELTON

Alright, Rog. Don't let him get to ya. And stop crying!

ROGER

(Discreetly wiping tears from his eyes)

No one's crying here, Paps.

KELTON

Shape up! Be a man and pull yourself together before someone sees you.

(HE chucks ROGER on the back and Exits)

ROGER

I'll pull myself, together Paps! I'm no Mams' boy, no sir!

(HE weeps softly to himself.
REVEREND POLSKOVIC Enters from the Church carrying a box full of Valentine's Day decorations.)

POLSKOVIC

Roger? Is that you? I heard weeping.

ROGER

(Spins to face her and wipes his nose on his sleeve)

No ma'am. No tears shed here! They'd freeze yer face with tiny icicles if you tried that in this weather.

(HE takes the box from her)

Hey! Lemme help you with that.

POLSKOVIC

Can I get you something warm? Are you thirsty? Would you like to sit down?

ROGER

Uh. Well. Nothing to drink, thank you. I'm here to speak with you on official police business. But, I will take you up on the offer to sit.

(HE plunks himself down on the church steps)

POLSKOVIC

How are you?

(SHE sits next to him and holds his hand)

ROGER

Aw, this whole investigation's got me and Paps stuck! Been a month now with no clues. Been on the road doin' interviews for three weeks now. No one stepped forward to claim the kid. Got twenty-five thousand fliers with an official police drawing of the boy flutterin' around seven states. Not one call. F.B.I.'s never had a boy this young and well-preserved go unidentified for so long. A'course that don't make Paps feel any better... the longer it takes... the more fingers point to murder. Paps feels the folks laughing at him. It's become more than an unsolved case of a missing child or a murder. To him? It's become a trial for winning back his respectful place in the community.

POLSKOVIC

No one's laughing at your father. We all feel the same desperation of at least trying to put a name to the boy.

ROGER

(HE begins to decorate the Church lawn with giant Valentines from the box)

Oh, sure, we know all that. But Paps? Well, he's more stubborn than prideful. And me bein' his only Deputy an' all -- not to mention bein' his only child -- we'll there's a certain pressure to live up to a... high water mark. To help keep Pap's head above water by risin' to the occasion and puttin' the finish to this case. If I were any kinda son... any kind of man... at all -- I'd've solved this one for him by now. I let down my only Paps.

POLSKOVIC

Being a good son has nothing to do with the case. You didn't come to me to hear that.

ROGER

You're right about that, Reverend. That ain't why I come. I'm here to ask for your assistance in my ongoing investigation into the death of Little Boy Blue.

POLSKOVIC

What can I do?

ROGER

In your station between the Lord and the rest of us -- I'd like to know if you overheard anything along the way that could give my investigation a shove in a direction that can't yet be sensed?

POLSKOVIC

I don't understand what you need from me, Deputy.

ROGER

I am asking you -- for the good of the town, now -- to name the guilty party responsible for the death of the child.

POLSKOVIC

Is that all?

ROGER

That's about it from top to toe.

POLSKOVIC

Roger? I couldn't tell you anything even if I heard something.

ROGER

Why not?

POLSKOVIC

Because I'm trusted to keep my mouth shut and my heart open.

ROGER

You're trusted to keep secrets.

POLSKOVIC

I'm trusted to keep quiet. Betrayal is born in increments. I am my vow, Roger. If I overhear a conversation with God -- it is my responsibility to leave it in His hands. I am not the one to judge. I am not the one who delivers Forgiveness.

ROGER

I understand.

POLSKOVIC

And Roger? I can tell you with a clean conscience that I don't know any more than you do.

ROGER

Really?

POLSKOVIC

Does that make you feel any better?

ROGER

Can't say as it does. Just one more thing, Reverend.

POLSKOVIC

Yes, what is it?

ROGER

Pray for me?

POLSKOVIC

I already have.

ROGER

I've asked Leigh to marry me.

POLSKOVIC

Congratulations.

ROGER

Thank you. So you'll marry us?

POLSKOVIC

You two stop by and we'll have a sit down to discuss the unbreakable bond of Holy Matrimony: We'll make certain you both understand that only death can cleave you. You cannot be split by argument, festering child, civic disgrace... or even an admission of murder. Death is your only sever. Do you understand me, Roger?

ROGER

I do, Ma'am.

POLSKOVIC

Anything else?

ROGER

Only one thing. You promise this is between us? You swear not to tell anyone, right?

POLSKOVIC

(Smiling)

I promise.

ROGER

It's hard for me to bring up, you understand? I don't know how to say it without just lettin' it go.

POLSKOVIC

Take your time.

ROGER

(HE wipes a bead of sweat from the tip of his nose and stammers quickly -- leading himself to the verge of sobbing again)

Reverend Polskovic? Do you... I mean I know my grammar ain't from the Webster's... and I do happen to admit... that I ain't got brains seepin' outta my ears... but never-the-less -- do you -- do you think I'm dumb?

POLSKOVIC

You're bright and insightful, Roger.

ROGER

Really? So you think I could be a good husband, then? You think I could provide not only food for my family, but good conversation as well?

POLSKOVIC

I do.

ROGER

And if someday me and Leigh had say... a baby of our own? You strongly believe that I could raise it up with the right morals and give the baby a knack for understanding the world?

POLSKOVIC

I believe it deeply.

ROGER

Well, thank you, Reverend Polskovic. You have ministered to me and my investigation beyond your earthly call of duty. You're very kind.

(HE pulls a pink rose from his vest pocket)

Happy Valentine's Day, Reverend.

POLSKOVIC

Thank you, Roger. The color is beautiful. What happened to the stem?

ROGER

I plucked off the thorns. Didn't want you to bloody a finger.

POLSKOVIC

If God molded the thorns between his hands -- then a little blood must be the price of the beauty.

ROGER

You didn't already get one, did you?

POLSKOVIC

What do you mean?

ROGER

Well. I didn't know if Jesus already delivered one.

POLSKOVIC

He delivers in a different way everyday, Roger. But until today? He's never delivered a thornless rose. Thank you.

(SHE Exits into the Church and extinguishes the candle in the window)

HUNTER

(HE Enters wearing bright yellow boxing gloves)

Hello, Roger.

ROGER

(HE spins to face him)

Mr. Hunter? Why are you wearing boxing gloves?

HUNTER

My hands are cold.

(HE punches the gloves together and takes deliberate steps toward ROGER)

Where is she? What have you done with Leigh?

ROGER

I've been right here communing with the Reverend. Go inside and ask her if you don't believe me.

HUNTER

You owe me \$87,000 a year, Roger -- plus benefits. Plus a low interest loan. Plus two one-way plane tickets to Chicago. You owe me the rewards of being a fruitful father.

ROGER

I don't know what you're talking about.

HUNTER

I think you do know, Roger. I think your playing dumb is a ruse. I want my daughter back so I can kick her outta this ditch of town. Where are you hiding her?

(HE stands directly in front of him)

ROGER

Wherever Leigh is, she's there on her own. I had nothin' to do with it. Are... uh... you gonna hit me?

HUNTER

If I hit you, Roger, you'll arrest me for battering an officer of the law.

ROGER

(HE pulls off his badge and tosses it to the ground)

I'm off duty. Take your best shot.

HUNTER

Oh. Well. If it's what you want Roger...

ROGER

(Upcut)

If you gotta do it -- do it like a man. Take the gloves off.

HUNTER

(HE slowly unties the glove laces with his teeth lets them drop to the earth from his hands. HE cocks a fist and punches ROGER in the stomach)

Is that man enough for you?

ROGER

(Whispering while doubled over in pain)

I love her.

HUNTER

(HE punches him hard on the ear)

Is that man enough for you?

ROGER

(Falls to his knees)

You won't make me cry. I won't.

HUNTER

(HE punches Roger on the chin)

You stay down there with the boys where you belong!

ROGER

(ROGER reels back and lands on the ground. HE picks himself slowly up, wipes the blood from his lip, stands up, and towers over HUNTER)

It's time for you to go home now. I'm starting to get mad.

(HUNTER stares him down. ROGER, never breaking eye contact, picks up the boxing gloves and hands them to HUNTER)

Here. You're a tired and petty boy. Run along home now, son.

(HUNTER takes the gloves and Exits walking backwards -- never breaking his stare. The Lights Fade as ROGER remains tall and motionless alone on stage as HE continues to stare down HUNTER in the distance)

ACT ONEScene 7

(LEIGH sits alone again by the frozen pond on a cold hollow log. The night is starless and moonless. The lights of interstate 80 burn along the horizon. LEIGH raps her bare hands against the log -- calling out to ROGER as a wild grouse calls her mate. LEIGH's call is met by the far off howl of a stray dog. LEIGH places her hand over her abdomen and feels the kick of her baby inside. She smiles and pulls her engagement ring from its velvet box. She places the ring on her finger with a romantic flourish. Finally, a figure appears.)

LEIGH

Roger? Are you there? Dear God, I've been calling you for an hour! I thought you became murder victim number two! I was ready to call yer Paps and have him search the frozen ditch for your cold, hard, corpse! Who wants to elope with a dead body?

NAN

The dead body comes right after your marry them Leigh, believe me.

LEIGH

Who's there? Come out of the darkness.

NAN

(SHE Enters and lights a kerosene lantern)

It's me, Leigh.

LEIGH
Mrs. Kelton?

NAN
Yes.

LEIGH
What are you doing here?

NAN
I came to see you.

LEIGH
Where's Roger?

NAN
Roger won't be coming, Leigh.

LEIGH
Oh? Why?

NAN
He's working.

LEIGH
Got a hot lead on a suspect, does he?

NAN
No. He doesn't.

LEIGH
Oh. So he just had to work, then?

NAN
Yes. Roger just had to work.

LEIGH
And why are you here?

NAN
To inform you. That Roger will not be here.

LEIGH
I'm going to find Roger.

NAN

Sit down. And listen. There are times when a woman don't fit between a Paps and his boy. This I know. There are times when men need to stand together -- to prove their dedication to each other. There are times when the right thing for a woman to do -- is to stand back apart. Do you understand this, Leigh?

LEIGH

What's between me and Roger is really between him and his Paps? Is that it? Did I get that right.

NAN

Yes.

LEIGH

Uh-huh.

NAN

So there's no longer a need for you to wait for Roger -- for he is no longer here for you. Don't waste your life pinin' for my boy here on a hollow log. Move along. Do something else.

LEIGH

Like, say, move to Chicago?

NAN

If that's what you like. Yes. Go. To Chicago. Without Roger.

LEIGH

What did my father say to you?

NAN

Nothing. This is between Roger and his Paps.

LEIGH

I thought this was between me and Roger!

NAN

Can't be no more.

LEIGH

But, Mrs. Kelton --

NAN

Leigh! I'm an old woman. And I'm cold. Just tell me you understand, Leigh! I can't say it no other way than that. I gotta get back.

LEIGH

Okay, then. "I understand, Mrs. Kelton."

NAN

Thank you, Leigh. We women stick together better than men -- 'cause we're tougher to tear apart. And we'll take care of you and the little chicken, don't fret it. You just let me know how much you need and it's all yours.

LEIGH

Oh that. Forget it.

NAN

What? Was there a problem?

LEIGH

Yes. There was a problem. But Doc Lauder patched me up.

NAN

Doc Lauder? Why'd you go to that old smoot of a coat-hanger-butcher?

LEIGH

It was between me and me.

NAN

Well, you done it up fine this time! No mistakin' you're from your father's flesh: you're both inbred stubborn and cruel by a mile!

LEIGH

Just "Tell me you understand" Mrs. Kelton.
(SHE pulls the ring from her
finger)

NAN

Ungrateful child!

LEIGH

(She longingly places the ring
back in its velvet box)

You know? Even if you ask nice, all the troubles of the world won't fit back in the box. Sometimes? You just gotta try pushin' 'em back in yourself while praying for Salvation from joy.

(SHE casts the ring box at NAN and Exits walking)

NAN picks up the ring as a Wild Turkey Mating Call is barely heard)

ROGER

(Entering and trying to do the Turkey Call)

I'm hurt, Leigh. Are you there? I need help.

(HE enters staggering from the blows HUNTER delivered)

Everything's top dog from here on out -- you got yourself a real man for a husband, now!

(HE sees NAN on the log)

Mams?

NAN

Hello, boy. Looks like someone run you through a mill backwards.

ROGER

I tripped and fell.

NAN

Aren't you hungry? Dinner's gettin' cold waiting for you.

ROGER

Mams, where's... where's Leigh?

NAN

She's gone, boy. She left you.

ROGER

I don't believe it. We had a plan.

NAN

She's in Chicago now, boy.

ROGER

Lies! She wouldn't! What did you do to her?

NAN

A boy callin' his Mams a liar is pretty stiff. I'll turn you over my knee and run you through the mill a second time sideways if you keep up that smart mouth.

ROGER

She wouldn't leave without me.

NAN

What do you want? Proof?

(SHE tosses the ring box at him.

HE fumbles to open it)

Wear it and weep, boy.

ROGER

No.

(HE opens the box and places the ring on his pinky finger)

She couldn't.

(HE begins to sob deeply)

Why? Why?

NAN

Come, boy.

(SHE motions for him to join her on the log)

Come home to the bosom of your good Mams' arms.

(ROGER slithers over to her. SHE strokes his golden hair)

That's my boy. That's my boy.

(SHE turns out the kerosene lamp.

BLACKOUT.)

ACT ONEScene 8

(Good REVEREND POLSKOVIC stands behind her altar in a pinpoint spotlight. The stained glass mosaic of the crucifixion throbs with color behind her. She faces us and addresses us as if we are her congregation.)

POLSKOVIC

Well, I'm glad to see you all made it back to the chapel in one piece and came to celebrate Easter together. I offer you all congratulations: The orphans finally got their Christmas presents and I understand your gifts have served nicely as their muses of joy. Now onto Little Boy Blue, whom we have named "Matthew" and claimed in our hearts as our own. Matthew came to us hungry and unclothed. I asked the Lord: "Why?" His answer was revealed to me in a dream: "This small stranger has been in your lives in other forms. And you have not heard him or seen him because you were too busy trying to prove your virtue." My friends -- those who left Matthew were probably just like the child they abandoned -- they too were little children, scared and hungry and falling through the gaps of faith untouched by Christ's message. God does not ask us to accept the action of their hearts, but he does ask us if we are brave enough to know our own? Can it be gambler's luck that Matthew's death and burial connect the two most important days in our Christian calendar? Yesterday buried a child. Today raises our Savior. Christ peered out at us from the eyes of a dying child. Christ whispered our names in the wind from the lips of a small boy's corpse left by a country road in rural Nebraska.

(SHE sings one a capella verse of "Amazing Grace." Directly behind her, MATTHEW'S fresh grave and engraved tombstone become visible

in the ditch as a Light from above
 pierces down from the sky)
 Come with me and visit Matthew's grave. His coffin
 was donated by a Missouri company. A mother from
 Kansas provided the size 8 suit. The widow Roberts
 donated the burial vault. Even the grave digger
 refused payment. Perhaps now he can finally rest for
 eternity in the dark, moist, fertile Nebraska soil.
 The gravestone, donated by a South Dakota company
 reads: "Little Boy Abandoned / Found Near Chester,
 Nebraska. / December 24, 1985 / Whom we have called
 'Matthew.' / Which means 'Gift of God.'" Two lines
 have been left empty at the bottom of the tombstone.
 Let us now bow our heads and pray together that
 Matthew's birthday and given name will someday be
 chiseled there.

STUTZEL

(As POLSKOVIC closes her eyes and
 bows her head to pray, ELLIOT
 STUTZEL Enters from the back of
 the church and limps down the
 middle aisle of the audience. HE
 never takes his eyes from her.)

The Light shining down on
 MATTHEW'S grave instantly BLACKS
 OUT.

POLSKOVIC, feeling STUTZEL'S
 presence, lifts her
 head from prayer and opens her
 eyes. SHE catches his wild stare
 and THEY silently lock eyes.)

STUTZEL -- dressed in a torn tank-
 top and blue jeans -- shuffles
 along with filthy-bare feet. His
 long hair flows past his rounded
 shoulders. STUTZEL'S twisted,
 wiry beard and moustache hide his
 snaggleteeth.

After passing through the midst of
 the audience, STUTZEL stops at the
 foot of the altar, does a slow
 turn and faces us. HE squints in

the harsh light. His voice is
thin and feeble.)
My name is Elliot Stutzel. I'm looking for my son,
Danny.

(BLACKOUT.)

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWOScene 1

(ELLIOT STUTZEL, head bowed as if in deep prayer, sits behind a small interrogation desk in the Sheriff's office. His wrists are handcuffed, his ankles are chained in leg irons. ROGER, eating a jelly donut, stands behind STUTZEL. KELTON rips a teletype report from the machine and paces the room. HUNTER sits at the table with STUTZEL.)

KELTON

Err. Well. Now Elliot, it seems you're famous for tragedy.

STUTZEL

It flows behind me like a cloak.

KELTON

Were do we start? With your two Social Security numbers with different middle initials? Or with your two driver's licenses from Ohio and Indiana that are in different names? I got it! Let's start where every story is born: Does your Paps know where you are?

STUTZEL

If you mean my father -- he thinks we're dead.

ROGER

One of you is.

KELTON

(Reading from the teletype report)

"Your father, One-Eyed Elliot, is Deacon of the Swarzentruuber Order of the Amish in Ohio?"

STUTZEL

Yes.

KELTON

Why did he excommunicate you and Danny?

STUTZEL

He placed us under the Bann for violating the Asbund's Ordnung -- The Scriptural Rule of Order. We were to be considered dead by the other Amish for living on the outside. It was our curse for living with you Englischers.

HUNTER

What did your wife have to say about that?

STUTZEL

Danny's mother is serving God. Who are you?

HUNTER

Rollie Hunter. I'm an attorney investigating for the Prosecution.

KELTON

(Reading again from the report)

"Pregnant with your second child in 1977, your wife burned to death in a suspicious barn fire." Why would you send an eight month pregnant woman out to do a man's work milking cows and haying horses?

STUTZEL

Irene enjoyed working with her hands. Living with the Amish, you learn to search for joy in every crevice of a textureless life. I did not wish her to work, but how could I deny her the joy with mingling hands with God's greatest creations? With Irene gone, there was no earthly reason for me and Danny to stay with the Amish.

KELTON

Or maybe with Irene outta the way, you was finally free to move in with your good buddy Gary Pitcher in Texas? How is Gary?

STUTZEL

Mr. Pitcher is also serving God.

KELTON

Uh-huh. Coaxed into serving the Lord with a bullet in the right temple?

STUTZEL

Tragedy flows behind me like a cloak.

KELTON

Time to hang up the cloak, Elliot. It's time for the truth to flow from you now. Gary Pitcher was found murdered two months ago. The body was dumped in a drainage ditch in rural Texas. Mr. Pitcher's left hand was placed over his heart. He'd been given a haircut hours before his death. Sound familiar?

STUTZEL

Why should it sound familiar?

HUNTER

How did Danny die?

STUTZEL

I cannot be certain. He complained of a severe sore throat. I gave him medication, but the soreness grew.

KELTON

Did you take him to a doctor?

STUTZEL

No. He told me he would get better. He told me not to worry. He decided to sleep in the back of the car -- on some luggage -- wrapped in a blanket. I pulled the car over often to check on him -- and when I checked him the last time -- his eyes shone white. I panicked. I did not know what to do.

HUNTER

Was Danny alive at that point?

STUTZEL

I cannot say with God's certainty. I have often wondered if he was.

ROGER

If you weren't sure he was dead or living -- then you must've intended to kill Danny by dumping him in that frozen ditch.

STUTZEL

(HE pounds the desk with his
cuffed hands)

I said, "I did not know what to do!"

KELTON

Why did you kill you son?

STUTZEL

The boy was sick!

KELTON

Did you smother him with the blanket first?

STUTZEL

I left Danny where God could find him! I pulled off the road, placed him in a slash in the land and covered him with snow. I would've buried him, but I didn't have anything to dig with.

KELTON

Was Danny alive when you dropped him in that ditch or not?

STUTZEL

I did not "drop" him! I laid him there gently!

HUNTER

Was he breathing?

STUTZEL

We cannot know! That is a question God alone can answer!

KELTON

Why did you lie about your son's death? Why did you tell your dead wife's parents that Danny died in a car crash?

STUTZEL

I did not want them to worry. I admit I have caused pain and suffering and I am sorry and I will not deny

that I have handled this situation with Danny's death the wrong way. I beg your forgiveness. God knows I'm guilty of lies, but I did not abuse or kill my son!

ROGER

Why did you come back here?

STUTZEL

I wanted to see if Danny was still there. He wasn't, so I figured God had taken him home.

KELTON

Why didn't you report the death?

STUTZEL

Death is a time for mourning with family. I don't have a family. So I decided to be alone with God and pray

KELTON

Sounds to me it's Satan who's got you by the neck, Elliot, not God!

LEIGH

(SHE Enters dressed sharply as a
big city lawyer)

Excuse me, Sheriff... Deputy. What are you doing here?

HUNTER

What am I doing here? What're you doing here? You're supposed to be in Chicago!

LEIGH

Are you Mr. Stutzel's attorney?

HUNTER

Of course not! You think I'm a fool to take on Elliot? He'll be frying in the Chair before the Fourth of July.

LEIGH

If you don't represent Mr. Stutzel, what are you doing here?

HUNTER

I'm setting the groundwork for the prosecution.

LEIGH

On who's authority?

HUNTER

What's wrong with you? I'm helpin' out here! It's a small town!

LEIGH

Most unfortunate.

KELTON

Uh, Leigh? Good to see you, darlin' -- but we're conducting an official police interrogation.

LEIGH

Mr. Stutzel? Do you know your rights as the Accused?

STUTZEL

What am I accused of?

LEIGH

Mr. Stutzel, I counsel you to say nothing more. Sheriff, has this man been read his Rights?

KELTON

A'course he has! It's the first thing Roger done straight off!

(ROGER nods)

LEIGH

Good. Mr. Stutzel. My name is Leigh Hunter and I'd like to serve as your defense attorney.

HUNTER

Oh, dear God! Where's the money in that?!

LEIGH

This isn't about money, Mr. Hunter. This is about Justice. The law firm I work for in Chicago believes that there's a Wild West sense of justice running this town; and they sent me down as Mr. Stutzel's pro bono hired gun to preserve his Constitutional Rights. If you have an objection, take it up with the Founding Fathers.

HUNTER

Dear, dear God! What have you done?!

LEIGH

You're awfully emotional for a lawyer, Mr. Hunter. I would think you'd been taught better than that?

ROGER

Leigh! Please cut the kidding!

LEIGH

Oh, I assure you this is no joke, Deputy.

KELTON

He's a murderer, Leigh!

STUTZEL

(Quietly offended HE gives KELTON
a look)

I am still in the room.

LEIGH

Mr. Stutzel, do you accept my services or not?

STUTZEL

It is God who pulled you to me, counsellor. I cannot deny His desire.

KELTON

Bullshit!

LEIGH

If you have anything else to say, Sheriff, I suggest we take this outside so my client can be spared the color and contour of your anger.

KELTON

(HE leads her outside)

Let's go. Lock him up, Roger!

LEIGH

(Turning back to HUNTER)

You too. You're not staying.

(HUNTER follows them out.)

ROGER

(HE closes the door behind them as STUTZEL bows his head again. ROGER pulls out his wallet and picks out a small, dog-eared and yellowed card. As HE reads aloud with difficulty, the Lights begin to Fade...)

Mr. Stutzel?

(HE clears his throat and stammers)

Uh. Well. "You... have.. the Right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law..."

(As STUTZEL's head snaps up, HE smiles as the lights touch to BLACKOUT)

ACT TWOScene 2

(Memorial day. Good REVEREND POLSKOVIC is at DANNY's graveside planting new sod in the fresh dirt covering the grave. Two tiny American flags stick out of the gravestone's flower urns.

POLSKOVIC

On this great day of Memorial when we lovingly remember those beloved who have passed, Lord, we give good thanks for the great love that grew in this child from within us all and a greater beauty blossomed back. This is a beauty that brings us to an understanding so exceptional that it can only be a gift from God. We have learned through your heart, the foolishness of passing judgment upon others. You allowed this wandering soul to test our belief in each other.

(She plants Naked Ladies in the earth and strings violets on the gravestone)

You gave him unto us, not to spur us on to Damnation of others, but to help us mend and heal the tear in the brilliant fabric of our lives. Thank you, Lord. Thank you for saving us from ourselves.

ACT TWOScene 3

(LEIGH walks along the pond with DOC LAUDER. Her briefcase is full of papers.)

LEIGH

Thanks for walking with me, Cud. Can I ask you a few more questions?

LAUDER

Anything for you, Leigh. You got more guts than a butcher.

LEIGH

I'll take that as a compliment.

(SHE smiles)

What was the cause of Danny Stutzel's death?

LAUDER

Well, I'd say it was Elliot Stutzel puttin' the boy outside to freeze to death.

LEIGH

Let me try that one again. What did you write down as the cause of death on Danny Stutzel's death certificate?

LAUDER

Rapid Freezing.

LEIGH

Good. Did you send your findings to the pathology department at the St. Louis Medical Center in Missouri like I asked?

LAUDER

Anything for you, Leigh.

LEIGH

And you sent in...?

LAUDER

The usual. Photos. X-rays. Crime scene descriptions. Microscopic tissue slides.

LEIGH

And how many autopsies do they perform a year down there in St. Louis?

LAUDER

Oh. A thousand maybe. This is a lot of questions, Leigh.

LEIGH

Only a few more if you can.

LAUDER

Okay. But, I'm stopping when I get to my place. I'm tired.

LEIGH

Let's... walk slower.

(SHE stops walking)

How many autopsies do you perform a year here in Thayer County?

LAUDER

Including animals?

LEIGH

(SHE laughs gently)

No, silly! Don't count livestock or chickens or dogs that got run over.

LAUDER

Oh. Alright. Well. Lessee. Can't say.

LEIGH

Let me make it easier for you to count it down, then, Cud. How long have you been our Coroner?

LAUDER

Fifty year.

LEIGH

And how many suspicious death autopsies have you performed -- on humans, now -- and don't count the one you did on Danny.

LAUDER

The answer'd be: One.

LEIGH

How long ago was that one?

LAUDER

Thirty-five year.

(HE looks at his feet)

I think we stopped. I'm still tired. Walk me home.

(HE begins to shuffle along and
SHE follows him)

LEIGH

I really appreciate this, Cud.

LAUDER

Anything for you, Leigh.

LEIGH

Did you read Dr. Michelle Gimpson's report from St. Louis?

LAUDER

Yeah. I read it.

LEIGH

Did her report state that trace elements of carbon monoxide were found in Danny's lungs?

LAUDER

It did.

LEIGH

What might cause a finding like that?

LAUDER

Tobacco smoke.

LEIGH

Car exhaust?

LAUDER

Sure.

LEIGH

Any barbiturates or alcohol found in the level two trace-drug blood screen?

LAUDER

Nope.

LEIGH

Why not?

LAUDER

Because there weren't no level-two blood screen.

LEIGH

Why not?

LAUDER

Because I didn't order one.

LEIGH

Why not? Isn't that standard practice?

LAUDER

Mebbe in St. Louis. But not around here. There's no standard to practice when you only get one of these ornery cases every thirty-five year.

LEIGH

Could you run a level-two blood screen right now if I asked you to?

LAUDER

Anything for you, Leigh. But not that.

LEIGH

Why not?

LAUDER

Got to be done at the time of the initial autopsy.

LEIGH

Golly, Cud. That's too bad isn't it? Since that test didn't get run -- we really can't rule out that Danny could've been killed by -- say -- a drug overdose?

LAUDER

Or not killed by a drug overdose.

LEIGH

Right. Danny could've died from an epileptic seizure. Or an allergic reaction to cough medicine or by breathing in car fumes while he slept --

LAUDER

(Upcut)

Or by holdin' his breath 'til he turned blue and died.

LEIGH

Right! Why are there so many possibilities, Cud?

LAUDER

Because Danny had no medical records.

LEIGH

And why is that important?

LAUDER

It's important, because we can't be sure of the boy's habit of interaction with drugs, plants, dust...

LEIGH

Or anything in the physical world for that matter. Do I have that right?

LAUDER

That's about right.

LEIGH

Tell me how Dr. Gimpson in Missouri ended her report concerning the cause of death for Daniel Stutzel.

LAUDER

She ended it with a question mark.

LEIGH

And what one word sentence did that question mark punctuate regarding Danny's cause of death.

LAUDER

"Unknowable."

LEIGH

I believe this here's your fork-in-the-road.

LAUDER

So it is. I'm home. You're gonna cut me up for the dogs to chew when I take the witness stand, aren't you?

LEIGH

It's just a job, Cud.

LAUDER

Yeah. Just don't forget it's possible Danny Stutzel was still alive when Elliot placed him on the ground in sub-zero weather. You can't not prove that.

LEIGH

It'll never get that far, Cud. You take care, now?

LAUDER

Anything for you, Leigh.

(HE pecks her on the cheek and
Exits up his dirt road and calls
back over his shoulder)

'Night now.

LEIGH

'Night.

(SHE continues walking along the
pond on her way to the County
Jail. KELTON emerges from the
woods to face her down)

Who's there?

KELTON

Ah. Well. Sure are jumpy tonight, Leigh. Guilty conscience got you up nights?

LEIGH

Sheriff, I make it clear that if you had any questions or comments to place them in writing and submit them to my office for a reply.

KELTON

Cut the lawyer shit, Leigh. We're off the record now.

LEIGH

Okay. We're off the record.

KELTON

I know you since you was a pup. I know your background. I know your upbringing.

LEIGH

You don't know anything about me.

KELTON

Oh, I know you plenty. I seen you through the rough and the soft. You grew up with my boy without a sliver of malice touching either of you.

LEIGH

Get to the point.

KELTON

Stand aside. Let one of them smartass, liberal, cry-babies from Omaha drive up here and empty Stutzel's bedpan.

LEIGH

Tell me what you're scared of, Steven.

KELTON

I'm scared of you, Leigh. How can you show more compassion for a stranger than for the blood of your town? You got a fancy life in Chicago. You got Roger bawlin' himself to sleep nightly. You got me here on my knees praying that the roots you sank in this town run all the way up and over to Illinois. What's left to prove? What's left to win?

LEIGH

Justice for an accused man.

KELTON

You're not in this for Justice. You're in this for you.

LEIGH

This has nothing to do with you and me. This has only to do with justice.

KELTON

Really? Why does your Justice sting the heart?

LEIGH

Justice serves the mind. It never touches the heart.

KELTON

So that's it?

LEIGH

That's always been it.

KELTON

The law's made you cold, girl. Cold like Elliot. He's aged you. I been doing this for over 20 years and I thought Elliot was the hardest I ever took on -- but I was wrong. Tonight, you're tougher than Elliot Stutzel. How is it possible you can be tougher than cold?

LEIGH

I have a client waiting.

(SHE pushes past him)

KELTON

May God forgive you Leigh, because no one here ever will.

LEIGH

Good evening, Sheriff.

(As LEIGH Enters the Jail, the scene shifts to...)

ACT TWOScene 4

LEIGH ENTERS THE JAIL AND
FINDS ROGER AND HUNTER
PLAYING CARDS.
ROGER'S BACK IS TO THE DOOR.

ELLIOT PRAYS SILENTLY ON HIS
KNEES IN HIS CELL.

ROGER

I'd call that Gin.

HUNTER

I'd call you a damn good card player, son!

(When HE sees LEIGH, HE quickly
laughs hard slaps ROGER on the
shoulder)

You're quite a card, Roger.

ROGER

(Startled by HUNTER's intimacy, HE
politely laughs along)

Playin' cards I'm good at. It's readin' off 'em that
gives me the frets.

HUNTER

You're Aces.

ROGER

Jack 'O Hearts or none a'tall!

LEIGH

Hate to break this up, gentlemen, but I'm here to
conference privately with my client.

ROGER

(HE leaps to his feet at the sound
of her voice)

I'll wait outside.

(HE cannot meet her eye and Exits)

HUNTER

This was supposed to be my big break, you know. Pock the town. Make my mark. All that. "Rollie Hunter For The Prosecution."

LEIGH

Sorry to bring you up to reality.

HUNTER

Uh-huh. They're bringing in a Prosecutor from Norfolk to hand you your head on a platter.

LEIGH

You may leave now.

HUNTER

Oh, I'm leaving.

(Strolling to the door)

You'll never set him free, you know. No jury in Nebraska will let loose the killer of Little Boy Blue.

LEIGH

Not that it's any of your business, but we're not having a trial by jury. Judge Gretchen Benson is flying up from Lincoln to hear the case.

HUNTER

What? Your bringing in a Judge? A liberal woman judge from Lincoln?

LEIGH

This case will be tried on facts, not emotion.

HUNTER

But we got the rifle from Texas that killed Gary Pitcher. Elliot's fingerprints are all over it!

LEIGH

What does that have to do with the death of Danny Stutzel?

HUNTER

He confessed! Elliot admitted he did it!

LEIGH

If there was a confession, it was twisted and coerced without appropriate representation, so that's out.

HUNTER

Oh, if I could only take you on in court, I'd spank you with scales of Justice!

LEIGH

(Laughing lightly)

You'll have your cut at me when I call you to the witness stand.

HUNTER

Who? Me? What'd I do?

LEIGH

You tampered with the crime scene. So anything you found and touched in the ditch is out, too.

HUNTER

You know he did it and you still want to cut him loose? Dead or alive, no one leaves a baby outside for the animals to chew!

LEIGH

Mr. Hunter? Cough it off. Mr. Stutzel's barnyard confession is out. Everything my client said that night cannot and will not be used against him in a court of law because Deputy Roger Kelton did not read my client his Miranda Rights.

HUNTER

You leave Roger outta this!

LEIGH

Excuse me?

HUNTER

Oh, he's alright! He's slow, but he's got a good heart. What does he know about murder investigations? His job is to pick up drunk high school kids, sober 'em up, and send 'em safe home to their Mams.

LEIGH

Congratulations. That was quite a spirited defense of Roger Kelton's incompetence with this investigation. We'll see if he holds up in court. Good night and good-bye.

HUNTER

Don't bother saying "Good riddance."
(HE Exits slamming the door)

LEIGH

Mr. Stutzel? Are you ready?
(SHE explodes her of data on the
card table and pulls it next to
the jail cell)

STUTZEL

(HE opens his eyes and stands to
face her. HE pushes his face
through the bars of his cell)

I am ready.

LEIGH

Elliot. Do you know what the initials C-P-R stand
for?

STUTZEL

C-P-R stands for: Cardiopulmonary resuscitation.

LEIGH

How do you know that?

STUTZEL

I worked as an orderly in a hospital for three years.
It was part of our monthly basic training to learn and
to practice all life saving techniques.

LEIGH

Ever had an emergency at the hospital where you used
C.P.R.?

STUTZEL

Once an old woman passed out in the waiting room and I
gave her C.P.R.

LEIGH

Did she live?

STUTZEL

She lived so much she sent me fifty dollars worth of
flowers as a thank you.

LEIGH

Did you ever come in contact with a dead body at the hospital?

STUTZEL

Many. It was I who washed the dead bodies and placed them in zippered dead-man bags for transportation to the funeral homes.

LEIGH

So you've been trained to recognize a dead body from a living one?

STUTZEL

Yes.

LEIGH

What happened on the day your son died?

STUTZEL

He was asleep in the back seat of the car. I stopped the car for a breath of fresh air. When Danny didn't get out of the car, I went in the car and turned him over. He was blue. And cold. And wasn't breathing. I gave him mouth-to-mouth. I massaged his heart. I administered C.P.R.

LEIGH

And then what happened?

STUTZEL

As per my training, I checked for signs of life: He still had no pulse and wasn't breathing on his own. I then repeated my actions: C.P.R. a second time.

LEIGH

In your expert medical opinion, was your son dead when you found him in the car?

STUTZEL

Yes.

LEIGH

Do you know the cause of death?

STUTZEL

No.

LEIGH

At the time of Danny's death, what type of car were you driving?

STUTZEL

I drove a used 1975 Gremlin.

LEIGH

And where did Danny sit when you drove together?

STUTZEL

He sat mostly in the front passenger seat.

LEIGH

And where was Danny sitting on the day of his death?

STUTZEL

He wasn't sitting. He was laid flat in the back seat taking a nap. He had a headache.

LEIGH

Were you aware on the day of Danny's death that there had been a factory recall of your used 1975 AMC Gremlin?

STUTZEL

No.

LEIGH

It was recalled for a faulty car exhaust. Did you smell anything unusual on the day of Danny's death?

STUTZEL

No, I didn't smell anything unusual. But, of course, my expert medical training reminds me that carbon monoxide from a car exhaust has no color or smell.

LEIGH

Could those colorless, odorless fumes have seeped into the back seat of your car and accidentally poisoned your son?

STUTZEL

They won't let you ask me that, you understand. I can be my own expert witness when it comes to medical training, but I'm not an expert on mechanics or poisonous fumes.

LEIGH

Right. Let's start again.

(The Lights begin to Fade as SHE
reshuffles her notes and starts
with a quicker pace)

Elliot. Do you know what the initials C-P-R stand
for?

STUTZEL

C-P-R stands for: Cardiopulmonary resuscitation.
(The Lights continue to fade)

LEIGH

How do you know that?

STUTZEL

I worked as an orderly in a hospital for three years.
It was part of our monthly basic training to learn and
to practice all life saving techniques....

(Light are now at BLACKOUT)

ACT TWOScene 5

NAN PACES IN HER KITCHEN AS
REVEREND POLSKOVIC KNOCKS ON
THE SCREEN DOOR.

POLSKOVIC

Nan? Is that you in there?

NAN

Yes, Reverend. Thank you for coming to me so quickly.
Would you like some coffee?

POLSKOVIC

Half a cup.

NAN

I've been burdened, Reverend.

(SHE pours POLSKOVIC a mug of
coffee. As SHE passes the mug to
her, it slips from NAN's hand and
cracks on the floor. SHE uses her
apron to wipe up the mess)

It seems I spend half my life crawlin' on my knees.

POLSKOVIC

Me too.

(POLSKOVIC smiles and helps her
wipe up the mess. NAN kneels,
POLSKOVIC sits on the floor)

I fear that my actions have brought misery to the
town.

POLSKOVIC

Misery? In what form?

NAN

In the form of Danny Stutzel.

POLSKOVIC

Go on.

NAN

I realize now that Danny Stutzel was a messenger sent by God.

POLSKOVIC

And what was his message?

NAN

Mind your business. Do not meddle in affairs that are not your own. The result is heartbreak, death and revenge. Keep quiet and the Devil will pass you by.

POLSKOVIC

And how do you know this?

NAN

It came to me in a Vision: I am standing alone on a concrete road. And I am there -- to spend all of Eternity alone on this road to no place -- because I am guilty of opening something that didn't belong to me.

POLSKOVIC

Who did it belong to?

NAN

Leigh Hunter. And my torment is her spiteful, rabid return as she frees and unleashes the Angel of Death unto us all.

POLSKOVIC

Was it your intent to cause this harm?

NAN

No. I was only trying to relieve them of pain.

POLSKOVIC

And you were maimed in the process.

NAN

Yes. I was maimed because it wasn't my place to judge. I'm being punished. I deserve it and I'm sorry.

POLSKOVIC

You can set it right. Ask God for Forgiveness.

NAN

It's too late. Elliot Stutzel won't hang -- and it's all my fault.

POLSKOVIC

This isn't about you and Elliot. This is about you and Leigh. Set it right between the both of you, and let God worry about the rest.

NAN

No. I can't face her. It's too hard. I'm too ashamed.

POLSKOVIC

(Stands)

If Elliot Stutzel walks, don't let your conscience trample you, too.

(SHE offers her hand to NAN)

Go to her and be done with it. Stand with me.

NAN

(SHE takes POLSKOVIC's hand and stands)

Thank you, Reverend. Maybe it's not too late after all.

(The Lights Fade as NAN grabs her coat and Exits with POLSKOVIC)

ACT TWOScene 6

ELLIOT STANDS IN A HOLDING
PEN IN THE THAYER COUNTY
COURTHOUSE. HE IS DRESSED IN
NEON ORANGE PRISONER
OVERALLS. LEIGH PACES
AROUND HIM.

LEIGH

Elliot. They offered you a plea bargain. Pled down
from Murder in the First Degree to court costs and two
misdemeanors for abandoning a body and failing to
report a death.

STUTZEL

How much is that?

LEIGH

Less than a year with Good Time.

STUTZEL

I meant the court costs.

LEIGH

Oh. Twenty-one dollars.

STUTZEL

What do you think?

LEIGH

Well, you did abandon a body and you did fail to
report the death.

STUTZEL

No. I mean -- do you think I did it?

LEIGH

It doesn't matter if you did it or not, you have a
plea bargain.

STUTZEL

If it did matter -- do you think I did it?

LEIGH

Do you think you did it?

STUTZEL

I guess it's pretty "unknowable."

ROGER

(Opens the door)

Uh, 'scuse me. The District Attorney's looking for you, counsellor.

LEIGH

Thanks, Roger. Uh -- Deputy.

(ROGER smiles at her as HE closes the door)

I'll be straight back.

(As LEIGH Exits the Holding Pen, NAN approaches her)

NAN

Leigh! A moment, please.

LEIGH

Hi, Mrs. Kelton. I'm busy right now --

NAN

Can we talk later?

LEIGH

Uh -- sure.

NAN

Good.

LEIGH

I do have something to show you.

NAN

Yes.

(NAN hugs her hard as the scene shifts to...)

ACT TWOScene 7

THE DITCH HAS BEEN CLEARED OF ITS PREVIOUS PERSONALITY: THE JUNK HAS VANISHED LIKE GHOSTS.

ROGER, DRESSED IN HIS FATHER'S SANTA CLAUS OUTFIT, SITS ON THE FROZEN GROUND THAT IS DANNY STUTZEL'S GRAVE.

HE STRADDLES THE TOMBSTONE AND POUNDS A CHISEL INTO THE STONE WITH A MALLET.

THE MUSICAL PALPITATIONS OF METAL CHIPPING AWAY MARBLE ECHOES LIKE A CHILD CRYING FOR HELP.

LEIGH, CARRYING A BUNDLE OF SWADDLING AND A RED ROSE, APPEARS AT THE TOP OF THE RAVINE.

WHEN SHE SEES ROGER, SHE STOPS, AND THEN TURNS TO LEAVE. ROGER LOOKS UP FROM HIS HANDIWORK AND CRIES OUT.

ROGER

That you, Leigh?

LEIGH

Oh. Uh. Yes, Deputy. It's me. Your Mams told me I could find you here, but I mistook you for your Paps in that getup.

ROGER

I'm on my way to feed the orphans. Hey. You mind coming down here a sec? I could use your help.

LEIGH

I, uh, will if you help me down there first.

ROGER

Sure.

(HE puts down his tools and slowly
turns to her and sees the bundle
in her arms for the first time)

LEIGH

Roger Kelton, this is your daughter -- Ann.

ROGER

What is this?

(HE rips off his white beard and
hat and clambers up the slope)

LEIGH

A daughter should have a chance to know her Paps no
matter what.

ROGER

My daughter? How old is she?

LEIGH

Six months.

ROGER

Golly. You even named her after my GrandMams! But...
my Mams said... I thought that you... I'd been told
that we...

LEIGH

(SHE smiles and hands ANN to him)

None of that can matter now, Roger. What matters is
that we are here. The three of us. Together again.

ROGER

Hi, Ann. You have my hair.

(HE pets ANN's hair gently)

You coulda told me?

LEIGH

I was told you didn't care.

ROGER

Oh. Yeah. I did care. Always will.

LEIGH

(SHE follows his hand as HE pets
ANN's hair)

Is that my ring?

ROGER

Sure is. I been wearin' it since the day we broke up.

LEIGH

Say, now. I guess we never really broke up, did we?

ROGER

No. I guess we never did.

LEIGH

Well?

(SHE smiles. SHE waits)

ROGER

(HE smiles back. HE waits)

Well?

LEIGH

I'm waiting!

(SHE presents her hand)

ROGER

Oh! Sure!

(HE twists the ring from his pinky
finger and pushes it on her
finger)

I do.

LEIGH

Me too. I guess our families are the next stop?

ROGER

Together.

LEIGH

Yes.

(THEY kiss softly)

ROGER

Come down here and take a look up close before we go.
(THEY slide down the slope and
admire the gravestone)
Mornin' sun shines her up real pretty.

LEIGH

(Reading aloud)
"Daniel Elliot Stutzel / September 7, 1976"

ROGER

How she look?

LEIGH

You did a good job.

ROGER

Yep. It's finally over.

LEIGH

Oh, It'll never be over. Every Christmas we'll
remember what happened. We wish it could be over, but
it never will be.

ROGER

Mebbe so. How's Elliot?

LEIGH

Good. Just finished an Algebra course. Ready to take
his G-E-D next week.

ROGER

When's he gettin' out?

LEIGH

He'll be free by New Year's.

ROGER

Right. Congratulations.

LEIGH

Not really. Texas has already lined up an extradition
hearing for the murder of Gary Pitcher.

ROGER

Welp, at least The Lone Star State has a murder weapon
with Elliot's prints on it.

LEIGH

Not any more. The rifle was destroyed in a routine cleaning of the evidence warehouse.

ROGER

Stutzel must'a been born under a four-leaf clover. You gonna head on down an' defend him in Texas, too?

LEIGH

Nope. Elliot and I are through. And he'll need more than me and a lucky clover down in Texas: Frontier Justice was birthed there. One look at old Elliot Stutzel and he's up the river for 80 years.

ROGER

I wonder. Guess the only real winner here then, is you, then?

LEIGH

I only tried to do the upright... the moral... the Christian thing. I felt a Calling to help anchor another wandering soul and I answered it as best I could. And it all turned to ash between my fingers. I saved a man but lost my town.

ROGER

You didn't lose me. I can't offer you 87 thou or a low interest loan, but you still have a home here... with me... if you want it.

LEIGH

I do.

ROGER

Then it's done. Ready to go?

LEIGH

One more thing.

(SHE places the single red rose on
top of the gravestone)

Do you think he cried? Did he die cold?

ROGER

It's forever between him and God. Yesterday -- like tomorrow -- like this moment -- is unknowable.

(THEY Exit the ravine and the
Lights Fade.

Snow begins to fall.

A Brilliant Shaft of Light pierces
the dark from above and lands on
Danny Stutzel's glowing tombstone.

The rose begins to vibrate.

The rose blushes redder.

The rose explodes into a thousand
frozen shards of falling red
petals)

CURTAIN.