

# 2/CAUGHT

Sandra Perlman

## CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

HOWARD CURTISS,..... Biology Teacher, 70

KEITH JOHNSON....., African American police officer , 20s

ABBEY WINTER.....reporter/editor , 38

## PLACE

Porter, New Jersey & the Township

## TIME

Winter, 2010

## SYNOPSIS

One small crime, one snowy night and two strangers find themselves trying to save a man from a world where mistakes live forever.



ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

\*

Living room/dining room of ABBEY  
WINTER's house.

The furnishings were stylish in the  
1980's. The room is cluttered with  
stacks of books, magazines and old  
newspapers. A laundry basket of clothes  
sits full. Barbells and other fitness  
"gadgets" stand around, often with hats  
or sweaters hanging from them.

Desert collectibles dominate the room.  
There are little ceramic, plastic and  
other types of cactus, Indian fetish  
animals stand on top of a bright light  
for Seasonal Affective Disorder which  
sits on a large wooden desk next to a  
big screen computer. There are many  
faded photos of a child and a woman at  
different stages of life.

A mini- refrigerator sits in the dining  
area with a assortment of coffee  
condiments, mugs, etc on top. An  
electric teapot is plugged in next to  
it. The house is in need of a good  
cleaning.

ABBEY is thirty-eight. She is wearing  
baggy exercise clothes and ear phones  
and black sleep shades on her head as  
she walks on her exercise machine.  
She is awkwardly humming along out loud  
to some type of Disco dance music.

ABBEY

Owww...Owww...Owww...Owww.

Suddenly she stops, jumps off the  
treadmill and bursts out in song.

ABBEY

Staying ALIVEEEEEEE.

(ABBEY collapses in a heap,  
shouts)

I hate fat thighs, thin eyebrows and....

(Doorbell rings.)

....inter-fucking-ruptions!

(ABBEY puts on her headphones  
and picks up her barbells in  
defiance.)

NO!

(Doorbell rings again. ABBEY  
continues ignoring the bell.)

Read the schedule, AN-DREW. If I'm not answering I'm either  
on vacation or dead!

(Doorbell rings again. ABBEY  
puts down the barbells and  
opens the front door cursing)

Damn you Andrew read the...

(Surprised by the dark figure  
of HOWARD CURTISS standing  
there awkwardly, a man of  
almost seventy.)

Mr. Curtiss?

HOWARD

Please call me Howard, Abbey.

(HOWARD is tall, thin, white  
hair and impeccably dressed  
including a hat, scarf and  
overcoat.)

ABBEY

(stammering)

Good evening....Mister....Howard.....

(Lightning lights up the sky.  
ABBEY grabs HOWARD and pulls  
him into the living room,  
plastering her body against  
the closing door.)

Jesus.....just get inside before we're hit by lightning.

HOWARD

I know it's late.

ABBEY

Not that late.

HOWARD

You seem a little out of breath.

ABBEY

I thought you were Andrew.

HOWARD

I didn't mean to interrupt anything?

ABBEY

I'm alone. I was exercising.

HOWARD

Andrew?

ABBEY

He's a journalism intern at the paper. He lives to work.

HOWARD

You have a lot of exercise equipment.

ABBEY

Saves on closet space.

(Trying to clear a chair.)

Watch your step. Most of my exercise is picking up the equipment and moving it around the room.

HOWARD

My doctor tells me to exercise but I never find the time.

ABBEY

Remember my nickname in high school?

HOWARD

Lois Lane?

ABBEY

"Chubby cheeks".

HOWARD

Young people can be so cruel. You have a beautiful face.

ABBEY

Trust me. It wasn't about my face.

(HOWARD is standing awkwardly.)

HOWARD

You're not working tonight?

ABBEY

Technically I'm off tonight, but with Stan out for the next three months after by-pass I'm on call for anything.

HOWARD

Yes, of course. You're in charge now. Congratulations!

(Taking her hand and pumping a  
shake with both of hands. )

Miss Editor of the Burlington County Star. I meant to send a note but it just got away. I'm so proud of you.

ABBEY

It's just temporary.

HOWARD

You earned it.

ABBEY

It won't last.

HOWARD

But this was your dream.

ABBEY

You remember that?

HOWARD

You wanted to be a newspaper editor. And now you are one.  
"To be the editor is to guide the ship of public opinion."

ABBEY

You remember my graduation speech?

HOWARD

Of course. You were special. A real star. Your mother would be so proud.

ABBEY

My mother would kill me for letting you stand in her living room. Here, let me have your coat...

(ABBEY goes to pull his coat.)

... this is soaking wet.

HOWARD

It's been a pretty nasty night out there.

ABBEY

Weather channel says it's only going to get worse. What a mistake, huh?

(ABBEY hangs up his coat on a wall hook and tries to straighten up the chair.)

Sit here.

HOWARD

What mistake?

ABBEY

Calling it global warming. First coldd ay and the crazies call our anonymous hot line. QUOTE - It's cold so stop writing anymore about that Global Warming crap" -- only they don't say crap. (Pause) You always liked that chair.

HOWARD

People are very passionate about weather.

ABBEY

Anonymous makes people into pigs, trust me. Now, take off your shoes. You know the rule.

HOWARD

I really can't stay very long.

ABBEY

Mom's first rule. No one wears shoes in the house.

(Thunder.)

And I can't let you leave with that storm passing right over us so relax. This was practically your second home, right? Coffee?

HOWARD

Please. Abbey, don't go to any trouble for me.

(ABBEY goes to the "coffee nook" and fixes coffee.)

ABBEY

Coffee is not trouble. Coffee is life. Black with no sugar, right?

HOWARD

Exactly. You have an incredible memory.

ABBEY

I have a lot of useless facts clogging up my hard drive. Sit.

(HOWARD sits down. ABBEY hands him his coffee and he settles into the chair. ABBEY goes to the coffee area to get her own.)

HOWARD

This chair was always so comfortable.

ABBEY

Fit you like a glove were your very words. Mom knew it was your favorite.

HOWARD

I'd forgotten how good it felt to be here.

ABBEY

Shoes off? Good. Relaxed. Great. How good it feels to be here? Priceless.

HOWARD

(HOWARD almost seems in another world. )

You may be right about the Global warming. Words have power with people. Especially in your newspaper.

ABBEY

(ABBEY slips some brandy into  
her coffee.)

You read the Star?

HOWARD

Every morning with my coffee. It is the voice of Burlington  
County.

ABBEY

A toast to the Star!

HOWARD

A real gift to our community.

ABBEY

Why don't you write an op ed piece for us on climate change?

HOWARD

Me?

ABBEY

You're a respected man.

HOWARD

You were the writer.

ABBEY

Half the town had you in school as a biology teacher or their  
principal. They'll listen to you. They know you don't lie.

HOWARD

The other half call in to your hot line.

ABBEY

You write it, I'll publish it. How's that for a deal. I can  
see the headline: "Dr. Biology sets the record straight."

HOWARD

I never finished my dissertation.

ABBEY

Really? I'm surprised.

HOWARD

I'm disappointed.

ABBEY

Mom was always typing up one of your papers. I just figured  
you were Dr. Curtiss by now.

HOWARD

Forty years at the high school. Family. Time just slips away.  
You'll see.

ABBEY

No one will ever work anywhere forty years again.

HOWARD

(HOWARD gets up and loosens his tie.)

Do you mind?

ABBEY

No one wears ties at the newspaper. Sometimes they barely look like they've showered. So, what's up next for Howard Curtiss now that we've got a new "honorary Mayor".

HOWARD

Is it very warm in here?

ABBEY

Oh, God. Sorry, I am so stupid. I turn the thermostat way up when I exercise, then I pretend I'm in the desert talking to God and praying the weight will just drop off my hips.

HOWARD

You're still having those little talks with God.  
(HOWARD picks up a picture of a woman and child.)

ABBEY

I swear I never told anyone else about those talks except you.

HOWARD

Your mother would have been fine with it.

ABBEY

My mother was southern....

HOWARD

...but not Baptist.

ABBEY

Brilliant and ....

HOWARD

Beautiful.

ABBEY

They said I looked like my Dad. You and mom were thin. I hated both of you.

HOWARD

The place looks great.

ABBEY

As you can see, I haven't moved a thing in twenty years.

HOWARD

(Standing up and holding out  
his arms.)

Can you forgive me for being such a stranger all these years.

ABBEY

There's really nothing to forgive, Mr.....Howard. You're a busy man.

HOWARD

You're a success. That's what's important now.

ABBEY

Only in Porter, New Jersey would being named acting editor of a county newspaper in the age of Huffington be considered a success.

HOWARD

I read you. Not Huffington. The Star. Not the internet.

ABBEY

Hey, I'm the one who should feel guilty. Your picture is in my newspaper at least once a month cutting a ribbon somewhere. Reporters eat it up. And you photograph so well. More coffee?

HOWARD

Yes, it's very good. Just like your mother's.

ABBEY

Mom told me her secret before she died.

HOWARD

(HOWARD seems frozen)

Her secret?

ABBEY

(Pause) Chicory.

HOWARD

Chicory?

ABBEY

In the coffee? Definitely, she said chicory makes the best coffee better. Slightly southern and never too bold. Just like Mom.

HOWARD

She told you that?

ABBEY

How about a drink? I've still got your favorite brandy in t his cabinet - probably the rest of the bottle.

HOWARD

No thank you.

ABBEY

Or some gin, vodka...

HOWARD

Coffee is fine.

ABBEY

Remember that crazy drink you and Mom used to drink with tequilla?

HOWARD

You remember that?

ABBEY

It was amazing. You'd mix up all those different liquors up like a magician and the colors would float in that glass like....a sunrise! That was it. Tequilla sunrise. Want to try again? Storm's crazy out there. We could sober up before the cops come.

HOWARD

I stopped drinking after your Mother died.

ABBEY

Funny, I was just old enough to start. But I'm pretty chicken shit about losing control, if you know what I mean.

HOWARD

When did she tell you that secret about her coffee?

(HOWARD has his eyes closed and his hands clasped as if in prayer. ABBEY pours a little more brandy into her coffee cup.)

ABBEY

The week before the accident.

(In a very southern accent, now picking up coffee.)

"Abigail, honey, I've got to tell you this one secret before I die." Then she whispered, "a pinch of chicory in the coffee"....and we both laughed. There I was eighteen and thinking I was about to get a really good story from my Mother about sex or sin and it turns out to be how to make the perfect cup of coffee. But I'll bet you already knew?

HOWARD

No, she never told me what made it so good.

ABBEY

One week later she was dead. Freaked me out for years.

HOWARD

She was a special woman.

ABBEY

A toast to Charleston, South Carolina, birthplace of Kaye Marshall Winter.

(There is an awkward silence.)

When did you last eat?

HOWARD

I don't remember. I was on my way out of the Red Cardinal-

ABBEY

I've got a frig here held hostage with three kinds of cheese, crackers, celery, salsa, olives and here's my stash of chips.

HOWARD

(interrupting)

I was arrested tonight.

ABBEY

Really? You're kidding.

HOWARD

I think - "cited" is the legal term he used.

ABBEY

Who arrested you?

HOWARD

An officer named Johnson. Keith Johnson was his name.

ABBEY

You're not kidding.

HOWARD

Outside the Red Cardinal.

ABBEY

County cop. Not local. Not good. When did this happen?  
(ABBEY pulls out her cell)

HOWARD

A few hours ago.

ABBEY

What time exactly?

HOWARD

I think it was seven fifteen.

ABBEY

It's after ten.

HOWARD

I'm sure it was seven seventeen.

ABBEY

Where the hell have you been for the last three hours?

HOWARD

You sound like a reporter.

ABBEY

I am a reporter, Howard. We get police reports. We write them up in the paper. But you knew that before you came here.

HOWARD

That's not why I'm here, Abbey. Don't get the wrong idea.

ABBEY

It's been years. That's the truth.

HOWARD

I apologize.

ABBEY

Decades.

HOWARD

I regret not coming to visit you. I should have. I wanted to. I just couldn't.

ABBEY

You've been busy at the high school where you spent how long?

HOWARD

Forty years.

ABBEY

... which is right there, across the street. I can throw a stone and hit your window.

HOWARD

I retired and then this thing came along with the city after Lloyd died. You know. Cutting ribbons. It's nothing, really. Just window dressing.

ABBEY

You practically lived here when my mother was your secretary.

HOWARD

Administrative assistant.

ABBEY

Whatever you called her didn't change what she did.

HOWARD

I have no excuses.

ABBEY

You were my biology teacher, my principal....

HOWARD

You were a wonderful student.

ABBEY

You were like family to me.

HOWARD

I was so proud of you.

ABBEY

Then Mom died and you disappeared. Just like her. What was I supposed to think?

HOWARD

I wanted to see you. Honestly. I wanted to come by.

ABBEY

And now you suddenly you turn up at 10 o'clock at night on a Saturday night to tell me you were arrested in our county and I just happen to be the new acting Editor of the newspaper and you think I'm not wondering what the hell is happening?

HOWARD

I can go. Right now. I had no right to come here.

(HOWARD goes for his coat and  
ABBEY blocks him.)

ABBEY

I have to consider that my position at the paper is part of the reason you are suddenly here? You must understand that.

HOWARD

The truth.

ABBEY

The truth.

HOWARD

I had no where else to go.

ABBEY

You have a wife named Carole. A very nice home and a son.

HOWARD

You're angry at me and you have ever right to feel this way.

ABBEY

I'm confused.

HOWARD

I've let you down. I understand that.

ABBEY

Then help me understand why you're here?

HOWARD

After the officer let me go, I just kept driving, probably in circles. I can't remember. I just kept driving listening to old music and praying I would wake up and this would all be a bad dream. You must understand that? Finally, I had to fill up the gas tank and then the roads started to glaze. Suddenly, I found myself sitting in front of the old high school and when I looked across the street, your lights were on and that big tree was still standing in the yard. How many times it was hit by lightning.... Abbey, I am so sorry. You were like a daughter to me. This house was the only place I ever really felt at home. And then your Mother died in that awful crash and you almost died and where was Howard? Why wasn't he here for me? I see that was how you felt and I would understand if you didn't want me to stay.

ABBEY

Sit, down, Howard. Please. Just sit.

HOWARD

Thank yo.

ABBEY

Look, I have plenty of food in the kitchen. It's not that late. You'll tell jokes, we'll laugh and everything will be fine. I promise. It will be just like it was before.

(ABBEY starts for the door.)

HOWARD

Abbey. You are just like your mother in all the best ways.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWO

HOWARD AND ABBEY are both laughing as the lights come back up. Plates of unfinished food are all around. ABBEY looks relaxed and happy and at home with HOWARD.

HOWARD

You tell wonderful jokes.

ABBEY

You told the wonderful jokes. I just laughed.

HOWARD

Biology jokes are not wonderful.

ABBEY

The whole class laughed. That is a fact.

HOWARD

They didn't laugh because they were funny. I am not a funny man. That is a fact.

ABBEY

(Assuming the demeanor of a  
British man)

Okay, so the Dalai Lama walks into a pizza parlor....

HOWARD

Seriously?

ABBEY

No, it's a joke on the internet. It's been viral for weeks. So this British newscaster says in his very newscaster voice, "the Dalai Lama walks into a pizza parlor".

HOWARD

He actually met the Dalai Lama in a pizza shop.

ABBEY

No, he was interviewing the Dalai Lama on British television and he told him this joke. " The Dalai Lama walks into a pizza parlor and asks 'Can you make me ONE with everything."

(ABBEY has her arms wide open  
like a bird in flight. HOWARD  
seems stiff. )

Get it? One - with everything?

HOWARD

(stiffly) That's very good.

ABBEY

You didn't get it.

HOWARD

He's a Buddhist.

ABBEY

You didn't get it.

HOWARD

It is possible that the Dalai Lama believed it was possible. To be one with everything.

ABBEY

(laughing) I think you have to see him do it on the video.

HOWARD

It's possible.

ABBEY

Let me find it online. It's here somewhere. Nothing dies on the internet.

HOWARD

No, it doesn't.

ABBEY

Just a minute. I think I've got it. You Tube loading. Come over here. Come here.

HOWARD

No.

ABBEY

Really, it's funny. He's very British. Very stuffy.

HOWARD

I'm not interested Abbey.

ABBEY

I can get more food. More of everything. Don't move.

HOWARD

Why haven't you asked me why I was arrested?

ABBEY

You said he wrote a citation. A misdemeanor. Right?

HOWARD

Don't you want to know what I did?

ABBEY

Everyone makes mistakes. I'll bet the Dalai Lama even did something embarrassing sometime.

HOWARD

I was caught shoplifting a bottle of red wine and a box of crackers at the Red Cardinal.

ABBEY

Jesus.

(ABBEY goes to the liquor cabinet and swallows the drink like medicine.)

HOWARD

Eighteen dollars and fifty-seven cents. There was no sales slip. He wrote me up right there in the parking lot. I was humiliated.

ABBEY

It was a DUI, people make mistakes.

HOWARD

I haven't had a drop in twenty years.

ABBEY

The Red Cardinal's in the county, not in Porter, the cop didn't know who you were, right?

HOWARD

He was young.

ABBEY

You must have a lawyer.

HOWARD

Carole and I have wills and a trust for Todd when we're gone.

ABBEY

A criminal lawyer, Howard.

HOWARD

I have never been arrested before. I didn't know what to do.

ABBEY

But you did call Carole?

HOWARD

No one knows about this but you and me.

ABBEY

And the officer, whatever his name was.

HOWARD

Johnson. His name was Keith Johnson.

ABBEY

Did anyone else see you?

HOWARD

I don't think so. I don't know.

ABBEY

(ABBY hands him the phone.)  
She's your wife. Tell her.

HOWARD

No.

ABBEY

You have to.

HOWARD

I can't. That's why I'm here.

ABBEY

Okay, let's just take this one step at a time. What time did you say it happened? Maybe he was just going on shift.

HOWARD

I was going to a retirement party. You remember Karen Paulson? A wonderful teacher. She would never have retired if her husband hadn't just had a terrible stroke.

ABBEY

You took a bottle of red wine and crackers?

HOWARD

I swear, it was for Karen's party.

ABBEY

It's okay, Howard.

HOWARD

All I can see is my name in your paper.

ABBEY

We'll work this out. It's not the end of the world.

HOWARD

My life will be ruined.

ABBEY

You don't see the big picture, yet, do you?

HOWARD

What big picture?

ABBEY

You are Howard Curtiss. Number One do-gooder. Beloved teacher, principal and lately even our once-in-a-lifetime honorary mayor who cuts ribbons at everything with a smile. Who the hell will believe it was anything but a mistake.

HOWARD

I think it might have been the manager who called.

ABBEY

He probably got kicked out of your biology class. Eye witnesses are notoriously unreliable.

HOWARD

I need you to understand.

ABBEY

I understand no one will believe you stole something for nothing.

HOWARD

I need to explain this to you, Abbey.

ABBEY

NO! You need to call a lawyer, now. You have to call your wife, now. But you don't need to explain anything more to me.

HOWARD

I felt closer to you than my own son.

ABBEY

Your lawyer is bound by his legal profession. I am a reporter and we are whores. Do you get that part? Whores for headlines. We are in trouble and we need stories.

HOWARD

You're none of those things. I know you.

ABBEY

I'm thirty-eight, not eighteen. It's been twenty years. You don't know me anymore.

HOWARD

I can't ever make this up to you?

ABBEY

I did not expect you to keep visiting your secretary's daughter once she was dead.

HOWARD

I feel terrible.

ABBEY

You were my mother's boss.

HOWARD

I was lost without her.

ABBEY

You don't have to feel guilty and I don't have to feel anything about you anymore.

HOWARD

I understand.

ABBEY

No, you don't. I felt deserted. Alone. You were like family one week and then you were gone. You just disappeared like she did.

I saw you at school and we talked politely about my scholarship and how I was going to live here while I went to school and then - bam. You gave me my diploma and that was it. Nothing. For years. You were my teacher, my principal, my protector, you were here and then you were gone. Did you think I could forget what you did for me? What you meant to me? What you meant to her?

(Cell Phone rings. HOWARD  
freezes. Phone rings again.)

ABBEY

(Phone rings again and ABBEY  
finally picks it up.)

Okay, Andrew, talk to me. Yes, I'm home. Where did you think I was? Sorry no murders, rapes or fires? Yes, that's a little newspaper humor. It's my night off. Yes, this is me on my night off. Call me if anything interesting comes up for the front page, okay? You've still got a little more time.

(ABBEY hangs up goes back to  
the bar and opens a cupboard  
full of junk food. )

Sometimes getting what you think you wanted is not always what you think. Right? Looks like the cop has not filed anything yet or young eager beaver Andrew would be foaming at the mouth for his brand new front page. You're sure you don't want a drink?

HOWARD

You don't need to do this.

ABBEY

Actually I do. That's why reporters are in general are not to be trusted and me, in particular. Do you have your wallet?

HOWARD

My wallet, why?

ABBEY

If you forgot your wallet you might have been too embarrassed to go thru the checkout and so -Voila - you walked out without paying. Works for me.

HOWARD

I have my wallet.

ABBEY

Maybe you didn't have your wallet then.

HOWARD

It never left me at any time tonight.

ABBEY

You could have left it in your car, Howard.

(Lightning strikes.)

Why is there lightning in the middle of the god damn winter!

HOWARD

It's not as uncommon as people think.

ABBEY

People think shit. Trust me, I have seen what people think and we aren't going to get anywhere in this world going on what's in their heads.

HOWARD

Your mother would have given her life a dozen times over for you.

ABBEY

Once was enough.

HOWARD

You were the center of her universe.

ABBEY

I know she loved me. That was never the question in my mind.

HOWARD

You so strong after she died. So strong. I saw those pictures, Abbey, no one should have survived that automobile accident. No one.

ABBEY

I was lucky.

HOWARD

God saved you for a reason.

ABBEY

I was wearing a seat belt, taking a nap, the pillow cushioned my head enough. There was no magic. No God.

HOWARD

It took the jaws of life fifty-two minutes to get you out of that car.

ABBEY

My first front page. "Eighteen year old survives fiery crash" - Wow. People love tragedy. I was a regular Dickens orphan.

HOWARD

You told the police you heard her die.

ABBEY

How did you know that?

HOWARD

I read the report.

ABBEY

It wasn't in the report.

HOWARD

The chief told me. He was worried about you.

ABBEY

It was twenty years ago. I was unconscious part of the time. My arm was broken and my pelvis fractured. Who can remember details.

HOWARD

You don't just forget something like that.

ABBEY

Believe me, you can forget anything if you try hard enough. You should try it sometime. Just push DELETE.

HOWARD

Some would have gone the other way after something as terrible as that.

ABBEY

I went every way possible, Howard, and you protected me.

HOWARD

You were in shock.

ABBEY

I was an eighteen year old orphan who spent six weeks in a hospital and six more weeks fucking up in every way possible and you still made that journalism scholarship happen for me. I don't know what you did or how you did it, but I hope you're not disappointed now.

HOWARD

I was wondering if you were thinking the same thing about me.

ABBEY

Did you stick a gun in someone's face and rob them?

HOWARD

No.

ABBEY

Did you rape a woman tonight?

HOWARD

God, no.

ABBEY

Did you blow up a village?

HOWARD

You know I couldn't do any of those things.

ABBEY

Exactly my point.

(Raising her glass.)

A toast to Porter, high school's greatest biology teacher.  
You made a fucking mistake.

(In a voice meant to mimic

HOWARD's lecture style)

"Who doesn't want to learn more about life, its origins, its  
mysteries, its changing possibilities? Who doesn't want to  
crawl inside that mysterious egg? Or chicken? And find out  
which came first. "

HOWARD

My lecture.

ABBEY

You're a good man.

HOWARD

God spared you for a reason.

ABBEY

Let's leave God out of this.

HOWARD

There has to be some grand design to all of this.

ABBEY

Do yourself a favor, Howard. Call a lawyer, tonight, not  
Darwin. God is not my problem.

HOWARD

Loving my faith and science at the same time has never been a  
problem.

ABBEY

I was once your problem.

HOWARD

And now you think I am yours?

ABBEY

Listen to me. He hasn't filed a report yet. Once he does that  
report is public record. Anyone can see it.

HOWARD

Even if you are innocent?

ABBEY

Anyone.

HOWARD

I didn't know it was quite like that.

ABBEY

That's the way we do it in America. You're arrested. You're on the blotter. Newspapers have crime beats. Crime beats report the blotter. The bigger the crime, the bigger the type.

HOWARD

What size type will you give to my crime.

ABBEY

It was a misdemeanor.

HOWARD

Would my arrest have to be reported at all?

ABBEY

Look, this guy hasn't even filed. Maybe he'll fix it. You said he was young. Maybe he felt sorry for you.

HOWARD

The old man.

ABBEY

You said he didn't know you?

HOWARD

He wasn't from Porter.

ABBEY

That might work in your favor.

HOWARD

This young man, what was his name - the intern?

ABBEY

Andrew.

HOWARD

Andrew. Maybe he won't see the report.

ABBEY

Andrew's very excited about being a reporter. He's always on something electronic. These barely speak to each other. They text, smile, communicate in some unseen world that makes me feel a stranger. You know they don't own a watch and read all their books on tablets. They think God invented the internet on the eighth day.

But the worst thing is they really believe someone's going to save the the whole damn thing when I'm not nearly so sure.

HOWARD

You could find a way.

ABBEY

I don't know what people want except bitching in print and reading obituaries.

HOWARD

You could save them.

ABBEY

Guttenberg, Zuckerberg. Who the hell knows anything anymore? We try something new every week and nothing changes.

HOWARD

You were our star, Abbey.

ABBEY

No, Howard. You were the star. You lit up that school and the rest of us just rode in on your light. Everyone loved you. Everyone knew you Howard Porter.

HOWARD

(Wrapping his hands around  
Abbey's tightly so she can  
barely move.)

If you run my arrest on the front page one my life is over.  
(Lightning flashes again.)

BLACK OUT

SCENE THREE

LGHTS UP.

(HOWARD is laying on the floor.  
ABBEY is holding his hand  
trying to take a pulse.)

ABBEY

I'm useless.

HOWARD

I feel better.

ABBEY

I don't know what your pulse is supposed to feel like. If I did I'd get out of newspapers and do something to save people.

HOWARD

It's okay. Really I'm going to be fine.  
(HOWARD is getting off the  
floor slowly.)

ABBEY

You should have let me call 9-1-1.

HOWARD

No. Really. I'm much better. Just let me sit here in this  
magical chair and I will be my old self again.

ABBEY

Has this happened to you before?

HOWARD

I've never been arrested before.

ABBEY

I meant have you felt weak like this before? A little dizzy?

HOWARD

I did feel sick in the parking lot.

ABBEY

I really don't think we should take any chances.  
(Pulls out her cellphone.  
HOWARD blocks her.)

HOWARD

I've troubled you enough tonight.

ABBEY

You aren't trouble. Really. I'm happy you're here.

HOWARD

You really didn't mind me coming?

ABBEY

I like having you here again. But I don't want you sick so  
tell me the truth.

HOWARD

When the officer stopped me I thought I was going to be sick.  
Then I just started sweating and I thought maybe it was from  
the flu shot I got yesterday. Can I have some water? My  
throat is really dry.

ABBEY

That's it!

HOWARD

What?

ABBEY

The mystery is solved.

(ABBEY grabs a bottle of water  
from the frig and hands it to  
HOWARD who is combing his hair  
and straightening his tie.)

You're probably dehydrated.

HOWARD

Really?

ABBEY

Flu shot. Sweats. The coffee didn't help. It's the end of the year. Stress. It makes perfect sense.

HOWARD

I just stand up, cut ribbons and smile.

ABBEY

Miles of ribbons to cut.

HOWARD

When Lloyd died I said I'd fill in but it's nothing.

ABBEY

Chicken dinners at Rotary. Retirement parties.

HOWARD

Honestly, I felt fine all day.

ABBEY

Listen to me, Howard, you were coming down with some side effects of the flu shot.

HOWARD

You want me to be sick?

ABBEY

Not sick, exactly, but definitely not yourself. That's what you should say.

HOWARD

You want me to say I was sick?

ABBEY

You said it yourself, you had a flu shot. Everyone will assume you didn't feel well and you were confused. You're turning seventy, right?

HOWARD

You want me to think about being sick and old and confused in the Red Cardinal.

ABBEY

Just not yourself.

HOWARD

Mr. Curtiss was not himself.

ABBEY

Exactly.

HOWARD

Howard's not the man he used to be.

ABBEY

I think it makes sense.

HOWARD

What sense?

ABBEY

You're the man who used to lecture us about the meaning of life. I'm trying to give this a little meaning.

HOWARD

Not that way.

ABBEY

What way?

HOWARD

I don't know. I just don't want to be that man you just described.

ABBEY

Look at me. Temporary Editor. I'm here. I'd rather be in the desert, but I'm here. Working. Living. That accident didn't break me. I'm still alive. I'm still Abbey. So let's just agree that this will make some sense so you can now go home and get some sleep and I will do my job and find out what's coming off the police log.

HOWARD

You would do that for me?

ABBEY

I'll call you if the report gets filed tonight.

HOWARD

No.

ABBEY

Howard. It's not like you were having sex behind Mickey D's with a fourteen year old.

HOWARD

Do not call my home!

ABBEY

Okay. You call me.

HOWARD

You said you said you wanted to write great headlines.

ABBEY

I was eighteen when I wrote that.

HOWARD

People remember headlines, you told me.

ABBEY

You've been in our paper enough for two lifetimes.

HOWARD

A good headline is irresistible, you said. Irresistible.  
(Gets his hat and coat)

ABBEY

You were the one who told me to do my job well. I believed you.

HOWARD

I prayed you would be spared in that accident.

ABBEY

You were just like a father to me.

HOWARD

God answered my prayers.

ABBEY

God wasn't driving the car that night, Howard. My mother was. She was the one crying when I got home from school and she vowed never to cry again after my father left her a widow with a seven year old. I never knew any other real father until you came into our lives to encourage me and make her laugh. That Friday night she was waiting with her car keys dangling in her hand, her face all red with tears. "Come on, Abbey," she said, "don't even take your coat off, honey. We got to have a dozen eggs and some milk right now," and I followed after her even when I knew it was wrong because she was my mother. She shouldn't have been driving that night. But I couldn't say no. The smell of you and liquor were all over her but I went anyway. I lived. She died. And I could spend the rest of my life dealing with those big ethical questions of right and wrong, yes or no, life or death. It's true I might not know why I lived but I know I should never have been in that car and she should never have been driving. You're the only one who knows why she was crying.

HOWARD

Am I your ethical problem?

ABBEY

I was trained to believe newspaper shouldn't do harm if they can help it. I don't want to hurt you. But if he files a report I can't help it being in the paper.

HOWARD

(The phone rings.)

Are you going to answer that?

ABBEY

(Picks it up quickly.)

Andrew? Good. I'm bored. Talk to me. What's hot and juicy in Porter tonight.

(She listens. HOWARD is nervously pacing.)

So it's the ice fishing story? Good. It's that dead tonight? I wasn't asking for a murder, but a good fire is always nice in color on the front page. Yes, that was a joke. So call if you get lonely. Not that kind of lonely, Devon. I don't have a Facebook page because I have no friends.

(Flips the phone back)

You're safe. Sunday's edition goes to press with three frost bitten ice fisherman and their sunken Dodge charger.

HOWARD

We were celebrating that day. We had just received a very good rating for the high school. She had written up the final report and the news would come out on Monday. We left school early and came here. We were alone. You'd called and said you wouldn't be home until seven so we made love. Then we celebrated with a tequilla sunrise. Perfect and strong the way she liked them. Maybe a few more than one. We thought there'd be plenty of time before you came home and then she looked at me. She was standing right where you are now. She turned her head in that way that made the whole world disappear. "Howard," she asked. Will you ever leave your wife?" It still breaks my heart to remember. "Will we be together in this life?" she asked looking straight into my eyes. I was so sick of lying. So tired of being a coward. I wanted to be the man she thought I was so I told her the truth. That I probably would never leave Carole. Even though I wanted to be with her, have a real life, I just wasn't that man. I told her and she asked me to leave. I told her the truth and I never saw her alive again.

ABBEY

Go home and wake up your wife. Tell her what happened, then forget about this. All of it.

HOWARD

Is there anything else I can do.

ABBEY

Pray for a fiery auto crash. That's always good for Page One.

BLACK OUT

SCENE FOUR

Lights blinking from his police cruiser, KEITH JOHNSON is writing up a couple of unseen drunks. KEITH is in his late twenties, African American with a controlled attitude.

KEITH

No, this is not cop TV and that is not connected to the internet. I don't care if those are real or not Miss so please do not do flash them at me again. I am a married man. A father. Yes, cops work out but no, I have no interest - please, no! I read your friend her rights, honey, but believe me, I'm not strip searching her. Yes, this is a real gun and no, do not get closer to me because you smell real bad. Oh yeah, I can see she's drunk. I don't need a test to prove that but we do it anyway, you know CSI and all that. Do I think you are sober? No. I believe that it is possible but not your friend ...Whoa....step back. Oh, oh. Too late. Yeah, let her get it all out. It's disgusting let her blow....yes, Lord I am glad you are not my kids. NO! she is not driving anywhere and I can see you are underage so call the Lord himself because that car is not moving if all you got is a Learners. I hope it will come out of my shoes, thank you for your concern. Yes, I will wait until someone comes. Good. I appreciate your good nature, no hugs please. No, I do not believe it was the first time but I sure hope it will be the last when I'm on shift.

BLACK OUT

SCENE FIVE

(Standing under a flood light  
yelling to someone.)

KEITH

I said the lightning is white. Not you. Don't turn away. I'm the voice of Burlington County protection tonight so next time you decide to pull your damn pants down in the middle of the parking lot on a Saturday night - don't! Yeah, you heard me. The black cop said DAMN PANTS. Don't complain. You lost your privileges when you showed your cherry red sixteen year old cheeks next to the Ladies of Perpetual Tears Catholic Church on it-certainly-is-legal bingo night.

So, get back into your friend's old beater and warm those cheeks before I change my cop brain 360 degrees and take you to thaw out at the County Jail - which is definitely not a place you want to see with your pants down. And don't bother reporting me because you don't you got no credibility with your underwear around your ankles, Mister bad ass.

(Thunder rolls.)

Damn, I hate Saturday night.

BLACK OUT

(SIRENS going. KEITH stands under a light with his back to the audience. He is talking on his cell. HOWARD in silhouette unseen)

SCENE SIX

KEITH

Yes, baby it's a good thing when she sings herself to sleep, It means she's growing up, baby, and that's good. You remember when A. J. was that young. Yeah, see, you do remember. Don't to cry so hard, please. It hurts to hear you home alone. Your Mama's coming over? Good. That makes me feel a whole lot better. She's a good woman. Yeah, I said it. (Pause) I got to hon. The usual night. Drunken kids with too much money, too much time and no place to go. (Pause) No, honey, I promise I did not eat anything from Taco Tony's Pizza. I ate what you sent me out with, that's right. We're saving our money for those babies education. (Pause) Please don't cry. We'll get through this post baby blues, you and me together, just like it's always been. Your Mama's already there? Good. You sleep, baby. I promise. I got a plan. The Johnson's going to be just fine.

(KEITH goes to throw away the TACO TONY PIZZA box. HOWARD emerges from the darkness.)

HOWARD

I hate to bother you officer.

KEITH

Hey, man, it's late.

HOWARD

I'm Howard Curtiss.

KEITH

You lost or something?

HOWARD

Howard Curtiss from the Red Cardinal?

KEITH

Gotcha'. That was hours ago. I'm off shift now.

HOWARD

Could we talk.

KEITH

No.

HOWARD

I just wanted to talk about my police report.

KEITH

Double no. Go home.

HOWARD

I've been waiting for you.

KEITH

Do not tell me that. I'm still a rookie to the old guys and I don't want any trouble tonight. Already ruined one pair of shoes tonight.

HOWARD

Please.

KEITH

I'm not listening.

HOWARD

I need to talk.

KEITH

I can raise the volume of my voice real loud if that's what it takes to get you to leave here.

HOWARD

I know you were just doing your job but I thought --

KEITH

Stop right there. You're a smart guy. I remember. A teacher. So Mister Teacher. You imagine a chalk line right between us....Okay? That line divides this space I'm in from that space you're in. Like North and South. Right and Wrong. Cops from the rest of the world. That's the way it works. I can't talk to you.

HOWARD

You have family.

KEITH

You're not listening to me.

HOWARD

I know you've had a long night.

KEITH

Lightning in the middle of winter. Crazies up to no good.

HOWARD

I saw you with the kids in the church parking lot. The girls drunk, the man with his pants....

KEITH

You were out there stalking a cop!

HOWARD

I wanted to watch you work.

KEITH

DO NOT CROSS THIS LINE!!!

HOWARD

I'm sorry.

(HOWARD jumps back.)

KEITH

Better.

HOWARD

You seem like a terribly decent guy.

KEITH

I'm a "terribly decent guy" cop born and raised in Camden, New Jersey. I went to Wilson, not Porter.

HOWARD

I just meant... you didn't seem to enjoy arresting me.

KEITH

You know that just by looking at my Saturday night cop face?

HOWARD

I know faces. I was a teacher.

KEITH

I remember. A principal....the Freaking mayor, I got it all up here. I'm also a smart cop. Don't say anything you will regret.

HOWARD

You didn't seem to take any pleasure in hurting me.

KEITH

I never touched you, Mister High School. Don't you say anything else to your lawyer either or we will be in court.

HOWARD

I know what I did was wrong.

KEITH

Tell that to the judge. Now let me clock out and go home.

HOWARD

You were uncomfortable patting me down. You helped me when I felt sick.

KEITH

I didn't disrespect you.

HOWARD

You treated me with respect. Maybe even a little sadness?

KEITH

You know what makes me sad? Thinking about my new shoes covered with some teenaged girl's alcoholic chips and dips.

HOWARD

I know all the police in Porter. You are different.

KEITH

Real different. Next time steal something there.

HOWARD

There won't be a next time.

KEITH

(whispering)

Don't do this. Go back to all those important thing you got to do to keep Porter safe.

HOWARD

After forty-two years I have no reason to be anywhere.

KEITH

You done?

HOWARD

Completely.

KEITH

You liked your job>

HOWARD

I loved teaching biology.

KEITH

Biology. I cut up some frogs in my day. Been going to night school and I will get my degree.

HOWARD

I'm sure you will.

KEITH

Sensitive cop with a brain.

HOWARD

Teachers see things. I could tell you were smart.

KEITH

Smart enough not to get caught taking a bottle of wine on a Saturday night.

HOWARD

I'm not a criminal.

KEITH

The law has to be the same for everyone.

KEITH

It will never happen again. I swear.

KEITH

Everyone finds God when they're caught. Lord, I swear I'll never lie, cheat, steal, murder, rape or drive drunk again. Bless your name. Most do.

HOWARD

It was less than twenty dollars.

KEITH

You think if you were some 16 year old black jammer from Camden with a bottle of red in his pants worth less than twenty dollars it would be nothing?

HOWARD

I'm an old man.

KEITH

It would be something.

HOWARD

I've tried to live a good life. I do swear it won't happen again. What can I do to prove that to you?

KEITH

(Pause) Okay, it gave me no pleasure writing you up, you seem like a good guy and I don't believe you'll be doing it again real soon - and that's the truth.

HOWARD

Thank you.

(HOWARD moves in closer to  
KEITH who back away.)

KEITH

But we are not buddies, understand? Even if tonight I know you better than your Mama. We are not buddies.

HOWARD

People have expectations.

KEITH

About what?

HOWARD

Tomorrow people will feel differently about me.

KEITH

Tomorrow the manager will call about somebody else. You can't live scared.

HOWARD

If nobody knew this ever happened I wouldn't feel so scared.

KEITH

Now just how do you think that would happen when I wrote it up?

HOWARD

I just meant....

KEITH

...I hope you weren't thinking....

HOWARD

...that you seemed...

KEITH

....I would consider....

HOWARD

...a man who.....

KEITH

Is this going funky, 'cause this man don't take money.

HOWARD

I would never offer you money.

KEITH

It's the law.

HOWARD

But sometime you must have done something....

KEITH

--don't turn this on me. You were the perp. I was the cop. I am doing my job. You were doing something wrong.

HOWARD

I am deeply ashamed of what happened tonight.

KEITH

Shames' good.

HOWARD

I have let everyone down who believed in Howard Curtiss, the man.

KEITH

You think that manager should be thinking about your name before he calls the police.

HOWARD

No. He should do his job.

KEITH

The judge will like that. Your lawyer will like that.

HOWARD

What about you?

KEITH

You got money, pay a good lawyer so you won't need to talk because you should not be talking to me before I file your report.

HOWARD

You haven't reported it yet?

KEITH

You see me leave my job?

HOWARD

I wasn't here the whole time.

KEITH

You should be talking to your lawyer not spying on Keith Johnson. What is your plan?

HOWARD

I didn't think of it as a plan.

KEITH

But you have been thinking about how to get out of this.

HOWARD

If you report this and it comes out in the paper my life is over.

KEITH

Over? Ain't much of a life then, is it?

HOWARD

People have respected me.

KEITH

People are stupid. You messed up. You pay a fine, not prison. I told you I didn't think I'd see....

HOWARD

Oh, no.

(HOWARD clutches his chest and sputters.)

KEITH

What's wrong?

HOWARD

I feel sick.

KEITH

In your chest?

HOWARD

It hurts.

KEITH

Hurts like a knife or a million butterflies? Jeezus you're sweating.

(HOWARD collapses and the cop holds him.)

Jeezuz, don't you go and die on me. Just breathe, damn it. Keep on breathing.

BLACK OUT

SCENE SEVEN

HOWARD is sitting on the front seat of with his feet out the door. KEITH is looking at HOWARD. He holds his cellphone out in front of him.

KEITH

You got two hundred pound weights on your chest or not?

HOWARD

It's better.

KEITH

Let me see your face?

HOWARD

I wouldn't lie.

KEITH

It stopped snowing and you're still sweating. And yes, you would lie.

HOWARD

It's passed over now.

KEITH

I should have done my job and called 9-1-1.

HOWARD

It wasn't like a heart attack?

KEITH

But it wasn't butterflies?

HOWARD

I think it was from the flu shot I had yesterday. I'm almost seventy.

KEITH

Not so old if you take care of yourself. That's what they tell me. Take care of yourself Keith and you'll live to be an old man. First one in the family if I make it.

HOWARD

(Takes the bottle and sits.)

I am thirsty.

KEITH

I got water here. You drink it. People forget it cramps them all up inside. But you would know that being in biology. I'll bet you were a real hard ass teacher.

HOWARD

I tried to get them to love biology.

KEITH

Stay still. I got more. Don't want Mr. Howard Curtiss thirsty on my watch.

HOWARD

Have you ever shot someone?

KEITH

Whoa, where's that from?

HOWARD

I've never been in a police car before.

KEITH

Those boys from Porter didn't ask you out in one of their new fancy cruisers? They are pretty. And fast. You own a gun?

HOWARD

No.

KEITH

Good.

HOWARD

I am a man of science and faith.

KEITH

People got faith in a gun. Specially when their life goes all funky.

HOWARD

I couldn't do that to my family.

KEITH

Family's a good reason to do things.

HOWARD

I try to be a good husband and father.

KEITH

I'll bet you do Mr. Curtiss. How long you been married?

HOWARD

No.

KEITH

Nothing at home.

HOWARD

My wife has one.

KEITH

Wrong answer.

HOWARD

We were robbed and my wife is very nervous. Our son is....challenged.

KEITH

You don't know how much I hate that answer.

HOWARD

It just makes her feel safe. I don't think I even know where it is.

KEITH

Good answer. ( Pause) Black Man?

HOWARD

What?

KEITH

I asked if he was a black man who robbed you..

HOWARD

I don't know.

KEITH

Good answer. You're wife still scared of strangers coming in?

HOWARD

She's always been a very fearful person.

HOWARD

I just wanted to come by to you and explain why this hurts me so much.

KEITH

People stealing mac and cheese under their kid's coat cause they hungry is what hurts me. Girls stealing a condom 'cause they don't need no more kids hurts. You got a nice coat, leather shoes with no scratches, a family - and what you did tonight was stupid. So why don't you tell me why you really came back to see Officer Keith Johnson.

HOWARD

I wondered what you had written down in your report.

KEITH

I wrote what I'm required.

HOWARD

Nothing more

KEITH

I got this citation that says you, Howard Curtiss, shoplifted goods worth eighteen dollars and whatever....that was our little talk, right?

HOWARD

Right?

KEITH

(Pause) That is all I am required to write. Or did you think I was writing something more personal like between you and your priest?

HOWARD

I talked to a reporter tonight.

KEITH

Are you crazy! What'd you do something dumb like that for?

HOWARD

I know the editor.

KEITH

You don't talk to the paper.

HOWARD

Her mother was my secretary at the high school.

KEITH

They are your enemy.

HOWARD

You could see Abbey was going places when she just walked down the hall.

KEITH

What did she promise you?

HOWARD

I helped her get a scholarship to college.

KEITH

She say Mr. Howard Curtiss would not be on the front page?

HOWARD

We talked.

KEITH

Exactly. She did not promise you that because that would be a lie. You should not have gone to that woman's house.

HOWARD

We're like family.

KEITH

Don't you know newspapers running scared? Some places thinking of putting the perps online right off the log. Good for us. Bad for you. She didn't promise you nothing.

HOWARD

She just said it looked like tomorrow's front page was done.

KEITH

Till something better comes along.

HOWARD

They had some ice fishing story.

KEITH

I got your story is what she said, didn't she? Right in the palm of my hand. Go back to the cop and get him to lose her front page story. Right? And then you just came here and watched me work my work.

HOWARD

I needed to talk.

KEITH

You got a wife? Talk to her.

HOWARD

I can't go home.

KEITH

Talk to your lawyer. Talk to God but don't go back to that woman's house 'cause she knows I have to turn this in. That manager called. He described you and knew your name.

HOWARD

She thought people would say I was probably distracted.

KEITH

Distracted? Nice. I can see you're getting real comfortable with that already.

HOWARD

She's worried about her job.

KEITH

You think I can't be laid off? Law and order second to paying the bills in this county. I was the last hired and will be the first fired.

HOWARD

I could have been coming down with the flu. You saw how sick I felt.

KEITH

Rattled. Old. Sick. It makes sense you want to steal a bottle of red wine. Happens every day.

HOWARD

It will never happen again.

KEITH

(Interrupting.)

I didn't write it down here in my book but I remember what you said and it wasn't the flu. Don't you go back to that woman's house tonight, okay?

HOWARD

Can I just stay a few more minutes?

BLACK OUT.

## SCENE EIGHT

Sitting at a small table in a cafe. The two are laughing like old friends.

HOWARD

You tell a good joke.

KEITH

I messed up the end. It wasn't right. But it was funny.

HOWARD

You tell cop jokes, I tell biology jokes.

KEITH

No way that's funny.

HOWARD

My students loved them.

KEITH

Okay, you made me need to hear a biology joke.

HOWARD

(HOWARD writes on his napkin.)

Which of these is the scientific term for a cold-blooded animal.

KEITH

Wait, don't tell me. Cold blooded. Frogs, toads, fish and snakes. All cold-blooded

HOWARD

Excellent.

KEITH

You thought I was just a dumb cop from Camden. Scorpions and spiders and chameleons. I loved those chameleons.

The waitress comes to the table. It is ABBEY dressed in a full waitress outfit and strange make-up. It should not be obvious they are in a dream.

ABBEY

More coffee?

HOWARD

Very good coffee.

ABBEY

Extra cream, right?

HOWARD

This woman has a wonderful memory.

ABBEY

You've been here long enough.

KEITH

Hey, we're big tippers.

ABBEY

You wanted decaf again?

KEITH

You can mix it up. I'll live a little dangerously tonight.  
(ABBEY leaves)

HOWARD

Now get this right and you get extra points.

KEITH

Wow, extra points. I love this guy.

HOWARD

The answer to what is the scientific term for a cold-blooded animal is A. Homeotherm b. Prosecuting Attorney C. Cryotherm D. Poikilotherm.

KEITH

Geckos. Forgot the geckos.

HOWARD

The answer is Prosecuting Attorney.

KEITH

What?

HOWARD

I thought you would like my little attempt at criminal humor.

KEITH

You didn't tell that reporter everything you said to me.

HOWARD

Can we have some more coffee, please?

KEITH

You just let her think you got confused.

HOWARD

You are one smart young man.

KEITH

Ph.D. from Camden High.

HOWARD

A tough school.

KEITH

Nobody there dumb enough to steal crackers.

HOWARD

That's a good one.

(They both laugh as if in a dream.)

KEITH

Gotta go.

(KEITH walks out. Howard grabs his coat and is putting it on when ABBEY appears.)

ABBEY

Are you going to pay this?

HOWARD

I'm sorry. How much is it?

ABBEY

Well, let me see. Okay, it's eighteen dollars and --

HOWARD

No, no, no, no, no.

(HOWARD runs out leaving ABBEY holding onto the check.)

ABBEY

I can't believe you are going to stiff me on this old man. You come in here and take up all my time and then this! You run out and leave me with the bill! Are you some kind of freak telling me what a big tipper you guys are. You know a girl's gotta work and make ends meet. I'm a good girl, you know. I worked for this. I waited on you all night. Just you and your friend and this is what you do? Run out. What the hell is that supposed to mean.

(CROSS FADE to HOWARD asleep in the car and KEITH pacing outside.)

KEITH

You sleep in a car on a night like tonight and you could die. You want me to get you home?

HOWARD

No, no, I can get home myself.

KEITH

You take a warm shower and slip into bed with your wife, you know what I mean.

Kiss her a little and tell her you missed her. They love that. Rub her feet and they forgive you anything.

HOWARD

You believe that?

KEITH

I believe you won't go through this night again. Tell your lawyer the truth. He'll cop a plea. You'll be fine. Trust me. The system doesn't want you. And next time steal a ten pound rib roast. They take alcohol serious so the kids get scared. The truth is, Howard, this is the end of it your life of crime. (Pause) How long you been married?

HOWARD

Forty-four years.

KEITH

I got thirty-nine more to catch you.

HOWARD

Children?

KEITH

She got pregnant the first time and that is no joke. New little girl here six weeks ago.

HOWARD

You love her?

KEITH

She's a good woman. She makes me a good man.

HOWARD

Be grateful.

KEITH

That newspaper woman you went to talk to. She lives in Porter?

HOWARD

Abbey Winter. Right across from the high school. Big tree in the front yard hit by lightning twice. Can't miss it.

HOWARD

You think you'd remember me if we run into each other?

KEITH

I got you on speed dial right up here in my head.  
(Thunder.)

BLACKOUT

## SCENE NINE

ABBEY's living room. Knocking at the door. Then doorbell. ABBEY turns on the light and comes into the room.

ABBEY

I'm coming. I'm coming. Slow down it's the middle of the night --

(Sees KEITH standing in a police uniform)

Who's dead?

KEITH

I'm officer Keith Johnson, ma'am. Burlington County Sheriff's office.

ABBEY

I repeat my question. Who is dead?

KEITH

That is one incredible tree out there.

ABBEY

Please. Don't make me ask you again.

KEITH

No one is dead, ma'am. May I come inside and talk for a minute?

ABBEY

It's Abbey or Ms. Winter, not ma'am, and the right answer is "someone is dead somewhere".

KEITH

How many times has it been hit by lightning?.

ABBEY

(looks at her watch)

It's a little late for tree talk, officer and would you mind showing me ID?

KEITH

Oh, sorry.. Miss Winter, here's my identification.

ABBEY

Okay. No one's dead and you have a real ID. Why are you here at 2 in the morning.

KEITH

We have a "friend"....in common and I wanted to talk about him. White male, almost seventy....

ABBEY

Now this is getting freaky.

KEITH

Maybe 5' 11", silver hair....

ABBEY

---You're the arresting officer!

KEITH

It was just a citation, ma'am, there was no actual arrest.

ABBEY

(runs to her desk to check her  
notes.)

Howard Curtiss.

KEITH

That is correct.

ABBEY

You're what's-his-name. I wrote it down here  
(Checks her notes)

KEITH

Johnson.

ABBEY

Johnson! Yes, that's your name.

KEITH

I know my name.

ABBEY

He didn't mention you were black.

KEITH

You wrote down notes?

ABBEY

You're here because you made it go away.

KEITH

No.

ABBEY

You didn't file the report after all.

KEITH

...I don't know what he told you about me.

ABBEY

He told me you cited him for shoplifting and when he left  
here no one at the paper knew anything about it.

KEITH

I just came off shift.

ABBEY

If you filed it why are you here? And how do you know where I live?

KEITH

Mr. Curtiss came to talk to me.

ABBEY

Howard came back after he left here?

KEITH

That's what I want to talk about.

ABBEY

Is this professional?

KEITH

I went off shift twenty minutes ago. He said he came over here and talked to you.

ABBEY

He stayed a few hours. He was cold and wet and ....

KEITH

Scared.

ABBEY

Yes. He had never been arrested before.

KEITH

What time did he leave here?

ABBEY

About midnight. I wanted to be sure he wasn't sick.

KEITH

He was sick when he came here?

ABBEY

A little weak and sweaty. He thought it was....

KEITH

Not his heart.

ABBEY

I don't think so.

KEITH

Did you call 9-1-1-?

ABBEY

Are you interrogating me?

KEITH

He came to watch me. That's how I found out where you lived. He said he'd been here. I'm just trying to get the facts.

ABBEY

He told you he was watching you?

KEITH

This is definitely off the record between us, right?

ABBEY

He asked you to come here and talk to me, didn't he?

KEITH

No. He doesn't know I'm here.

ABBEY

Unless he followed you  
(looking out the window.)

KEITH

It's very warm in here.

ABBEY

Oh, I'm sorry. I have the heat up. Please take off your jacket. Coffee?

KEITH

I know it's not a regular thing to do.

ABBEY

Nothing about tonight has been regular. But I admit this is weird. Did you say coffee?

KEITH

I drink tea.

ABBEY

Okay. Tea. What kind?

KEITH

Just tea. Sweet. My Grandmama watched me and she was Southern.

ABBEY

So is my family. Charleston?

KEITH

Tuskegee,

ABBEY

What's the chance of that in Porter.

KEITH

(ABBEY runs the microwave.)

He said you were friends.

ABBEY

He was my teacher. Then my principal. Lately he's been cutting ribbons all over town and I get to put his picture in the paper. Don't ask me who will do that when the print's gone.

KEITH

He said you were a reporter.

ABBEY

Acting Editor.

KEITH

Important.

ABBEY

It won't last.

KEITH

You go to his church, too? He said he was something.

ABBEY

He's a Deacon. I'm a heathen. Here. Plenty of sugar.

KEITH

Nice place.

ABBEY

It was my mother's.

KEITH

I remember Mr. Curtiss telling me about your mother.

ABBEY

He talked about my mother to you?

KEITH

She worked for him, right?

ABBEY

At the high school.

KEITH

That high school right across the street.

ABBEY

That's the one.

KEITH

He said you got some scholarship.

ABBEY

Where's this going?

KEITH

You must be smart. I like smart people.

ABBEY

I'm in the newspaper business. How smart can I be?

KEITH

You got a sense of humor. I like that too.

ABBEY

You read our paper?

KEITH

I'm a county cop. I got to keep up.

ABBEY

You pay for it?

KEITH

I got a computer.

ABBEY

My point exactly.

KEITH

My son, K. J., he wants to be an engineer. He's only six but he's already a champ.

ABBEY

Trust me. At six he's talking trains or fire engines.

KEITH

By the way, it's Keith and Rosa Johnson and we have our subscription paid up through January. So you think you can bury this story in your paper?

ABBEY

A little more cop humor.

KEITH

You don't need him. He's small fish. You know it.

ABBEY

So he wasn't shoplifting?

KEITH

Did I tell you I don't like reporters.

ABBEY

Let's not get all coy and first date here just because I opened the door and let you in.

KEITH

Howard seems to have gotten both of us involved tonight.

ABBEY

It's already Sunday and I can report that as of now, he will not be in today's paper.

KEITH

What about tomorrow?

ABBEY

Tomorrow is a different story.

KEITH

You can say where it will be in that paper, right? Front? Back? Stuck in small type.

ABBEY

Do you take an interest in all the old men you arrest?

KEITH

I don't arrest many people like Howard Curtiss. And I don't hang out with reporters.

ABBEY

You filed it. We report it. You know the drill.

KEITH

Page One? Big Headline? Picture?

ABBEY

Did I tell you I have no great love for cops either?

KEITH

Look, there's something about this dude that's got under my skin.

ABBEY

Howard has that way about him. He's very appealing.

KEITH

So, when he first told you he was arrested for shoplifting some wine and crackers what did you really think?

ABBEY

I assumed it was a mistake.

KEITH

Bingo!

ABBEY

Maybe he was talking to someone and forgot.

KEITH

Distracted?

ABBEY

Exactly.

KEITH

Maybe even sick from his flu shot.

ABBEY

He told me about the flu shot.

KEITH

Something.

ABBEY

Yes, definitely not Howard Curtiss.

KEITH

(mimicking)

"Definitely not Howard Curtiss", so it must have been the cop who made the mistake picking up Mister Porter, New Jersey, right, or I would have let it slide, right?

ABBEY

You don't know me and you obviously didn't know him.

KEITH

He had the goods. Like they say, he was caught red-handed. I think I made a mistake coming here.

ABBEY

Did he come back tonight to ask you to lose your report?

KEITH

Why did he come to you first? Not his lawyer or his wife. You. You and Mister Porter good friends Miss Editor?

ABBEY

We are old friends.

KEITH

Good friends?

ABBEY

I don't like what you're suggesting. He was my mentor. He helped me....

KEITH

I know what a mentor is! And that mentor was sweating and wouldn't go home but he would come here. That means something.

ABBEY

He was never arrested before.

KEITH

First timers get scared sick. Throw up on your shoes. Piss their pants. Shake. I've seen it all. But he was different.

ABBEY

Exactly what was different?

KEITH

You think I messed this up. But it was him. In my world I don't do things like this. You ask my wife. "Keith don't talk except when he has to," she'll say and she's right. I don't know why I'm breaking every rule in my book for him. I don't know what I want you to tell me. But I am serious as a heart attack. Lady, if you put that man's face on the front page of your paper he thinks he's going to die.

ABBEY

Don't you put this on me. You filed the report.

KEITH

The manager called. I responded. He had the goods.

ABBEY

He obviously forgot to pay.

KEITH

No receipt.

ABBEY

No gun.

KEITH

He wouldn't stop talking.

ABBEY

No one can tell Howard to stop talking.

KEITH

No, I mean the man talks until I wanted to tear up that citation just to get him to shut up. Believe me I've tried. And those jokes.

ABBEY

He loves his jokes.

KEITH

Biology jokes ain't funny. But he just keeps on.

ABBEY

He and my mother were sleeping together.

KEITH

You think he was "sleeping" with your mother?

ABBEY

I know he was sleeping with my mother.

KEITH

Shit! He said he has a wife.

ABBEY

Carole.

KEITH

But he was coming here for sex?

ABBEY

Whenever they could.

KEITH

Did you like that?

ABBEY

I loved it. I loved him. He made her happy. He made me happy. It was as close to a family as I ever got.

KEITH

She's gone?

ABBEY

Died in an auto accident my senior year. He's not crazy.

KEITH

He said he felt guilty.

ABBEY

About stealing?

KEITH

I don't know the man.

ABBEY

He was never arrested before.

KEITH

That's what it says. (pause) But it wasn't his first time.

ABBEY

He told you he'd shoplifted before?

KEITH

He was no virgin.

ABBEY

That's crazy. You're crazy. Cops are crazy.

KEITH

You know your business. I know mine. The manager called to be sure he was arrested. It was not his first time.

ABBEY

Okay, I want you to go now, because my head is really hurting

KEITH

You want me to just go right now?

ABBEY

Yes. Just go.

KEITH

The man was sleeping with your mother and that didn't make your head hurt?

ABBEY

You want me to think he's a jerk, right? You want me not to care because he's just some....thief.

KEITH

The store manager said it wasn't Howard's first dance and then there was Howard who would not stop talking...

ABBEY

(Turns up the music and covers  
her ears.)

No, no, no! Blah, blah, blah. I don't need this shit! Would you just go home.

KEITH

(Turns off the music.)

I can't take this home. That's why I'm here. We need to get this straight between us before I can leave.

ABBEY

You drop this nugget of truth at my feet and I'm supposed to pat you on the head and say, "Good job, Mister Policeman." Well, Fuck you!

KEITH

Fuck me or not. You put his picture on that front page and that man is dead.

ABBEY

Your report is public record. That's justice in the United States of America.

KEITH

Okay, I understand if you want to hurt him for what he did.

ABBEY

Hurt him? I still love him.

KEITH

Like they don't mix?

ABBEY

Tonight was the first time he was in my house in almost twenty years. I didn't want him to come in and then I didn't want him to leave. I wanted him in my life forever, but my mother died and he went home to his family and I still forgive him.

KEITH

I know that look in his eyes. It's not good.

ABBEY

Don't you tell me about the look in his eyes.  
(ABBEY goes over and pours herself a drink.)

KEITH

Bury it in the back page with the comics nobody reads.

ABBEY

I'll take that to the morning staff meeting. Now you want me to tell you how to do your job?

KEITH

You're not driving. And I sure hope you don't have a gun.

ABBEY

Abbey Winter has no guns. Believe me. I barely keep sharp knives. (pause) All these years I always knew where he was. I watched him.

KEITH

He watched you. He called you a superstar.

ABBEY

Now there's a joke.

KEITH

No, joke, you must have been special.

ABBEY

I was eighteen when I got that scholarship. I dreamed the romantic life of being a reporter. Look at me now.

KEITH

You got a job. A house. You live in Porter.

ABBEY

The house was paid off when my mother died. This is her furniture. My exercise equipment. Her taste. My dirty clothes. I've barely moved the furniture since she sat in it. I work at a newspaper which may not exist in a year and since I stopped going to bars I could qualify for the convent. I dreamed this life and Howard made it happen. All I can promise is that tomorrow's Star will not have his picture on the front page. No one wants bad news Christmas week. Cheers.

KEITH

Even if it would sell a helluva lot of papers.

ABBEY

He's safe tonight.

KEITH

We got a deal.

(KEITH exits. ABBEY tuns up the music. Pops a cork on a bottle of wine and starts to dance.)

BLACKOUT.

SCENE TEN

ABBEY is laying on the couch in the dark, music is playing very loudly. There is an empty bottle of wine by the couch.

There is a louder knock at the door and then the doorbell rings.

ABBEY

I'm coming. I'm almost there. I'm....

(ABBEY opens the door and KEITH pushes his way thru the door and goes to her computer.)

KEITH

We had a deal, bitch. A real deal.

ABBEY

The paper's gone to bed and don't call me bitch.

KEITH

It's on the inter-net!

ABBEY

Jesus....I totally forgot.

KEITH

It came up on my phone fifteen minutes ago. I was almost home.

ABBEY

(ABBEY goes to her computer.)

It's not here.

KEITH

Check the Philly NewsBreak24/7 site.

ABBEY

That's not our site.

KEITH

"Porter Principal Pops Cork on Stolen Wine..."

ABBEY

No one takes this site seriously.

KEITH

Nice picture Of Howard in a suit, another one cutting a ribbon and the story right off the police log with a dancing headline. What'chu going to do now Miss Superstar?

ABBEY

It's a trash site. Look at that. Shit!

KEITH

News breaking headlines every minute of the night and day directly to your phone even when there's no news.

ABBEY

Who subscribes to this crap!

KEITH

I repeat my question. What'cha going do about it now?

ABBEY

...first, I do not consider that journalism! Second, that is shit. I hate the fucking internet!

KEITH

You do have a website, right?

ABBEY

We can do better than this. We will do better. Shit! What time is it.....

KEITH

Almost six am.

ABBEY

When did this go up?

KEITH

Twenty minutes top. I was almost in Camden. My phone beeped.

ABBEY

(Gets her cell phone out and pushes.)

Answer the phone asshole. Answer.....Hi. It's me. Just checking. I know the Sunday's out. I was just wondering when the online....what? Shit! Nothing.

(flips the phone shut and bangs on the table.)

Fucking online geeks and nerds. Reporters should.....Shit.

(ABBEY is putting her shoes on, her coat. Searches in her coat.)

KEITH

What's going on?

ABBEY

Give me your gloves.

KEITH

Where are you going?

ABBEY

I need your fucking gloves, damn you, I have to go right now and find Howard.

KEITH

What are you talking about? You've been drinking and what's wrong?

ABBEY

Damn you fucking pieces of shit.....and it isn't even journalism. Life in twenty-six words or less. It's shit!!!

KEITH

Sit down. Tell me.

ABBEY

I just tried to get a little sleep. I swear I didn't think about the online. I just forgot. I gotta find him.

KEITH

I don't understand.

ABBEY

He said he was going home. It's not far.

KEITH

That's a crap site. You said it. I believe it. You'll do better. I can't let you drive and I do have a gun.

ABBEY

They update the site for the day at six. If it's posted on there and filed on the police report those little geeks will find a way to have on our site by six. What time is it?

KEITH

Almost six. Why?

ABBEY

How close.

KEITH

(Pause) Now.

ABBEY

Damn it! Damn it to hell. My whole fucking life is tied up on a screen without a soul.

(ABBEY folds.)

I can't stop anything up there now.

KEITH

You kept it out of the print.

ABBEY

You know, the first newspaper was printed in Boston in 1690. The publisher was immediately arrested, and every copy destroyed. I loved that story. I loved being a reporter.

KEITH

He went home. I followed him after he left me. He did go home.

ABBEY

You didn't.

KEITH

I stopped before I went in and went to a diner. My mother-in-laws with the kids and my wife. They're fine.

ABBEY

It's funny. I don't even want a drink. That's new.

KEITH

I arrested hundreds of people already and one droopy assed old biology teacher is just stuck in my brain.

ABBEY

Quote: "Popular teacher caught shoplifting". Quote: Porter's Acting Mayor cuts his on throat. Quote:

KEITH

You kept your word.

ABBEY

All I can see is one headline after the other.

(KEITH goes to the computer.)

NO! I don't want to look. Not right now..

KEITH

You said it was your night off.

ABBEY

Friends don't get night's off.

KEITH

Even when I kept saying don't talk to me he couldn't stop. Like I was some priest and he was in confession. People don't say those things to a cop. I didn't put everything he said in my report. He was ashamed but he is a tough old man. I swear. Howard Curtiss will be okay.

ABBEY

I can show you a hundred pictures of Howard Curtiss smiling and cutting ribbons in our paper. We was our hero. I loved that part of my job.

KEITH

Hey, we're not giving the man credit. Howard Curtiss is one tough old man. Howard is still here and we're talking like he's already gone when he definitely is not.

(PHONE rings. ABBEY seems frozen.)

KEITH

You going to answer that?

ABBEY

(Phone rings again.)

I got some good cold pizza if you're hungry.

KEITH

It won't go away.

(phone rings again.)

ABBEY

(Picks up the phone.)

Hey, what's new? (Pause) What? Look at the online? Why. What's so important? Tell me. Just came in. Okay I'll look it up.

(Whispering to KEITH)

Check the website. None of your business who is in my house. I'm your boss. I'm bringing the page up right now. So what's so exciting that you had to call me.....

KEITH

Oh, God. No. No.

ABBEY

Let me call you back!

(ABBEY hangs up. KEITH seems shaken to his core. He tries to block ABBEY from the computer.)

KEITH

Don't. You don't want to see this.

ABBEY

(pushing KEITH away she gets to the computer screen)

We knew that Howard was going to be ...Jesus. That's his car. on the front page.

KEITH

Probably black ice on River Road. He's still alive.

ABBEY

This is my fault.

KEITH

It was an accident. You are not God.

ABBEY

I told him to do this.

KEITH

Everyone knows that county road is bad. You didn't tell him to drive into a tree. You didn't make him do anything.

ABBEY

A fiery auto crash always gets page one. I said that as he left through that door.

KEITH

Not even reporters are God

ABBEY

Tragedy trumps theft any day of the week.

KEITH

Even Howard could have a real accident. That tree is....

ABBEY

Famous. Page One every time.

KEITH

This is not right.

ABBEY

(Cleaning up the room in a frenzy.)

Hallelujah!

KEITH

What your thinking is not good.

ABBEY

Howard knocked Howard right off the front page. I said Hallelujah, Officer.

KEITH

Now I know why you live alone.

ABBEY

He saved me one more time and we both know it. The man is amazing. Amazing I tell you.

KEITH

(Stopping ABBEY. They seem very close together.)

Sometimes shit just happens.

ABBEY

Tell me what he said to you before the phone rings again.

KEITH

Who wants to know?

ABBEY

He confessed to you, didn't he?

KEITH

Confessions are privileged. You know that.

ABBEY

You're not a priest.

KEITH

It goes to my grave with me.

ABBEY

Now who's playing God.

KEITH

You ever slip Abbey Winter? Have dark side?

ABBEY

Who wants to know?

KEITH

Only liars say "no" without thinking.

ABBEY

No.

KEITH

Some spaces bigger than others.

ABBEY

Did he tell you his secret?

KEITH

Maybe you drove a little drunk. Smoked a little weed? Had sex with a stranger?

ABBEY

Tell me.

KEITH

We all got to live with our stuff.

ABBEY

Please....

(KEITH and ABBEY are very close. They can smell the other person's breath on their faces. They are frozen until KEITH's cell breaks the spell. ABBEY goes into the kitchen.)

KEITH

(KEITH's wife is Puerto Rican and he can slip in some Spanish.)

Hey, baby, I was just on my way home. Your Mama's there? Bueno! No trouble. I had to stay late, you know. One of those long nights you gotta have if you gonna be a good cop. No overtime. That's the way it is. I'm fine. No, baby, don't cry. My heart breaks when you cry. It really was busy and then - there was a big accident. A car, yeah, you'll see it on the front page. We don't know that yet. He just went to the hospital. Yes, I'm glad you called when you did. I needed to hear your beautiful voice. I'll make my great pancakes. I know she loves them. I love you, too. Rosa, I promise. I'll drive slow. I will.

ABBEY

(Bringing in the pizza from the other room.)

Trust me, this pizza is a whole lot better cold.

KEITH

I got company at home waiting for me.

ABBEY

Take the pizza. It's good. Your kids will love it.

KEITH  
You are one funny chic.

ABBEY  
Cop funny?

KEITH  
No. Nothing to do with cops.

ABBEY  
Good.

KEITH  
So maybe I'll arrest you for speeding sometime.

ABBEY  
Maybe I'm going to get out of this business and live all alone in the desert. No deadlines, no headlines and all the pizza I can eat.

KEITH  
Free at last, huh.

ABBEY  
Sure. Why not. Free at last.  
(PHONE rings as KEITH walks off  
and into the parking lot with  
HOWARD,)

SCENE ELEVEN

FLASHBACK.

HOWARD CURTISS stands at the entrance to the EXIT sign at the Red Cardinal.

HOWARD wipes his nose with a crisply starched white handkerchief then walks out under the EXIT sign into a well lighted parking lot.

A Sheriff's deputy, KEITH JOHNSON approaches HOWARD.

KEITH  
Could you stop, sir.

HOWARD  
(Tipping his hat)  
Good evening, officer.

KEITH  
Could you just stand still a moment.

HOWARD

I'm already late, officer.

KEITH

Please, don't make this difficult.

HOWARD

Why would I do that?

KEITH

Would you open your coat?

HOWARD

(Checking his watch.)

I'm Howard Curtiss. Don't you recognize me?

KEITH

Open your coat Mister.

HOWARD

Curtiss. I taught biology at Porter High? Principal....

KEITH

I'm officer Keith Johnson and you left Porter when you crossed that line back there.

HOWARD

I'm a deacon of the First Congregational Church on River Rd.

KEITH

Thank you Jesus, but I got to follow up on a complaint.

HOWARD

Everyone knows me.

KEITH

Look Mister, I'm from Camden so somebody doesn't know you.

HOWARD

There must be some mistake.

KEITH

You got a wife?

HOWARD

Forty-five years.

KEITH

You finish this up real quick and make it forty-six.

HOWARD

I'm a good man.

KEITH

See you being a good man is not the question. How it works is the manager calls up the dispatcher and says the perp took something - describes the perp in some detail so the cop can get the right man who took whatever which he is most likely concealing in his coat, which is why I am asking politely, again, please open your coat.

HOWARD

I'm sure there's been mix-up.

KEITH

Raincoat. Check. Hat. Check. White hair. Check. Glasses - fogged up but check. Umbrella....No, you the one until you open up that coat and prove me wrong.

HOWARD

It would be easy to confuse me if you didn't know who I am.

KEITH

Manager called it in not me. I'm just doing my job.

HOWARD

And if the manager knew me he would not have called. I'd stake my life on that.

KEITH

It's Saturday, it's cold and my shift is just starting.

HOWARD

Could we just talk. You look like a reasonable man.

KEITH

You are confusing me and it ain't even seven thirty which means I got a long Saturday night ahead.

HOWARD

I just want to explain.

KEITH

This is not about talking.

HOWARD

I need to explain so it makes sense.

KEITH

It doesn't have to make sense to me.

HOWARD

For once, I want this to make sense.

KEITH

Just open your coat and this is over. You don't have to explain anything to me. I'm a stranger to you.

HOWARD

But....

KEITH

(HOWARD doesn't move.)

Please don't make me touch you.

HOWARD

Why would you touch me?

KEITH

Pat you down, it's the job. Nothing personal.

HOWARD

I swear this is the first time.

KEITH

You ever been caught. That's what you mean. First time you ever been caught, right?

HOWARD

I'm a good man.

KEITH

--just hold your arms out wide Mister Howard Curtis and then we'll all know just what kind of a man you are.

HOWARD stretches his arms out like a great stricken bird. Then turns back.

HOWARD

I swear, officer.

KEITH

Johnson.

HOWARD

Just let me talk to you Mr. Johnson. Let me talk to you like old friends and this will all make sense.

BLACKOUT

SCENE TWELVE

ABBEY

(Lights up on ABBEY holding a notebook.)

Biology. The Study of Life. Mr. Curtiss. Opening Lecture: Who doesn't want to learn more about life...

(CROSSFADE to HOWARD now standing to deliver his opening biology lecture. ABBEY and KEITH are now frozen.)

## HOWARD

(HOWARD has undergone a physical, emotional and spiritual change in front of our eyes. This HOWARD CURTISS is electric and charismatic. He stands up straight, full of energy and life. Inspired. He is the teacher again. )

Who doesn't want to learn more about life...its origins, its mysteries, its changing possibilities? Who doesn't want to crawl inside that mysterious egg? Or chicken? Which came first? Who knows. At least, not yet. That's why you're here. To learn to search for life's most enduring questions. I may be dull sometimes. And you may not laugh at all my jokes all the time, but I also know that life can be magical if you just take that leap and trust me. Trust me. Together we can walk and talk through time just as the old philosophers did. As Darwin himself did. As all men and women of curiosity and faith have done. Don't hold back. This is the adventure of a lifetime. Together we will plunge into life's greatest mysteries. Ask life's most enduring questions. The choice is always up to you. To learn or not to learn. That is the question. So take out your pens, turn on those computers, and let's go on the adventure of a lifetime.

(LIGHTS OUT ON HOWARD.)

BLACK OUT

END OF PLAY.

9/9/11