

2CAUGHT

CHARACTER BREAKDOWN

HOWARD CURTISS, 70's All American citizen

KEITH JOHNSON, 20's African American police officer

ABBEY WINTER, 30's reporter/editor

PLACE

Riverton, New Jersey & the Township

TIME

Winter, 2010

ACT ONE

SCENE ONE

A well dressed older man with silver hair wearing a wool winter coat, scarf and hat approaches an EXIT sign in a big box grocery store. A siren goes off. Sixty-eight year old HOWARD CURTISS, freezes. It is an ambulance siren wailing in the distance. HOWARD wipes his nose with a crisply starched white handkerchief then walks out under the EXIT sign into a well lighted parking lot. An African-American police deputy, JAMES HENRY approaches HOWARD.

JAMES
Could you stop right there, sir.

HOWARD
(Tipping his hat)
Good evening, officer.

JAMES
Could you just stand still a minute.

HOWARD
I'd love to chat but I'm already late.

JAMES
You might be even later if you don't stop now.

HOWARD
They'll be expecting me.

JAMES
Don't make this difficult.

HOWARD
I'm making a toast.

JAMES
Would you open your coat?

HOWARD
I'm Howard Curtiss. You must know me.

JAMES
I know you just left that grocery store.

HOWARD *
Everyone knows me. *

JAMES *
I don't. *

HOWARD *
I'm Mr. Curtiss. Biology? *

JAMES *
No. *

HOWARD *
The Principal of Porter High for fifteen years. *

JAMES *
If you want to get out of here tonight you should start *
cooperating. *

HOWARD *
I helped cut a ribbon last month at the new station. *

JAMES *
I don't give a damn what you cut Mister. *

HOWARD *
The Porter Police station where you work. You are a *
policeman? *

JAMES *
Oh, yes. But you left Porter when you drove your car into *
this parking lot. See that line of trees? You're standing in *
Burlington County which is under the complete and absolute *
control of Sheriff Maxwell Tecumseh "tougher than a bag of *
nails" Taylor. *

HOWARD *
I'm a deacon at First JAMESt Church. *

JAMES *
I'd arrest Mary Magdalene if she was hooking out here tonight *
to keep my job. *

HOWARD *
I was the Teacher of the Year Award three times. *

JAMES *
(Takes out a pad and pen.) *
Look, Mister Curtiss....I'm from Camden, not Porter. You *
weren't my principal, my teacher and you didn't cut the *
ribbon on my station so put your arms out before I lose one *
more minute of what is shaping up to be a long night. *

HOWARD
 Please. (Moving to put his hands on Keith's coat) *
 *

JAMES
 Don't touch me. *
 *

HOWARD
 (Overlapping and then physically withdrawing.) *
 *
 I am sorry. *
 *

JAMES
 Don't you touch me. *
 *

HOWARD
 I just wanted to make you understand. *
 *

JAMES
 Nice wool coat. Check. Hat. Check. White hair. Check. Not *
 much of a fashion statement - You know, this is taking way *
 too long. *
 *

HOWARD
 I am who I am. *
 *

JAMES
 And it's only the beginning of my shift. *
 *

HOWARD
 Can't we just talk man to man. *
 *

JAMES
 No. *
 *

HOWARD
 Citizen to citizen. *
 *

JAMES
 How many times do you need to hear no. *
 *

HOWARD
 I'm trying to show you who I am. *
 *

JAMES
 You are not trying to show me who you are. I am going to show *
 you what you are right here in this parking lot tonight. *
 *

HOWARD
 Let me explain.... *
 *
 (HOWARD moves toward JAMES) *

JAMES *
Don't make me touch you. I don't want to touch you. *

HOWARD *
Why would you touch me? *

JAMES *
Because that's what happens when I go to arrest someone. *

HOWARD *
Arrest? *

JAMES *
You know the drill. *

HOWARD *
I don't. *

JAMES *
You stop. I pat you down. *

HOWARD *
I swear this is the first time I have ever been stopped for *
anything since 1978. *

JAMES *
You got a wife? *

HOWARD *
Carole. *

JAMES *
How long you married? *

HOWARD *
Forty-six years. *

JAMES *
Finish this up and you can make it forty-seven. *

HOWARD *
I swear I am a good man. *

JAMES *
See you being a good man is not the question. That's between *
you and God and your wife. How this ends up tonight is *
between you and me and the law. I swore an oath -- and I *
don't take my swearing light. So what is the point here. That *
is the question. And that means we start with the manager *
calling up the dispatcher and saying the perp took something *
that didn't belong to him without paying the bill - and he *
describes the perp in some detail so the cop - who is me - *
can know him or her as someone special from all the other law *
abiding people doing their shopping for real. *

Now, law abiding, that is the key word. So when that call comes to me, I listen. 'Cause that's what the good people of Burlington County expect. That's what they pay me for. They say, "Officer Henry - do your job" - and they give me the description and that someone special happens to be you tonight which is why I am asking you so very politely -- like maybe I'll be deputy of the year - Please open your coat.

HOWARD turns around and stretches his arms out like a great stricken bird.

BLACK OUT

SCENE TWO

The living room of ABBEY WINTER's home is littered with clothes hanging on exercise equipment, little ceramic, plastic and other cactus collectibles and a bright light for Seasonal Affect Disorder. A microwave and a mini-fridge sit atop an upright piano. There are many faded photos of a child and a woman around. ABBEY is lifting weights and humming herself to the tune of "Stayin' Alive"

ABBEY

(Doorbell rings.)

Go away.

(Doorbell rings again)

Read the schedule. I'm off tonight.

(Doorbell rings again.)

Okay, okay I can hear you...I can hear....

(ABBEY opens the door and sees HOWARD CURTISS)

ABBEY

Mr. Curtiss?

HOWARD

I'm sorry to bother you so late on a Saturday night. You must be having company.

ABBEY

It's been crazy storming out there Mr. Curtiss, come in.

HOWARD

You look wonderful, Abbey. And please call me Howard.

ABBEY

Your coat is wet.

HOWARD *
 Snow, thunder but not dangerous as the blizzard of 1978. *

ABBEY *
 My mother would kill me if I didn't get these clothes dry. *
 (Hangs it on some exercise *
 equipment) *
 What are you doing out so late? *

HOWARD *
 I guess I lost track of time. *

ABBEY *
 You're driving around in this storm? *

HOWARD *
 It's really good to see you. *
 (Goes to hug her and she pulls *
 back.) *
 It's been too long. *

ABBEY *
 I'm really sweaty from pretending to exercise. *

HOWARD *
 You look *

ABBEY *
 Lumpy. *

HOWARD *
 ---wonderful. *

ABBEY *
 You were always a good liar. I mean I'm almost getting *
 flapping wings under my arms and I'm not even forty. Coffee? *

HOWARD *
 No trouble, please. *

ABBEY *
 Coffee is life, never trouble. Black with cream, right? *

HOWARD *
 Exactly. *

ABBEY *
 My mind is a steel trap. *

HOWARD *
 I saw your lights on. *

ABBEY *
 I have the night off. *

HOWARD *
I was over in the old high school parking light. *

ABBEY *
The new one is so much better is all we write but it's a lie. *
It's just bigger with a bigger football field. *

HOWARD *
I was on my way to a retirement party for Helen Springer. You *
must remember her? *

ABBEY *
Newspaper adviser extraordinaire. *

HOWARD *
She was still a young teacher when you were in school. *

ABBEY *
Time marches on. *

HOWARD *
This coffee is... *

ABBEY *
Heavenly, I know. My mother was a coffee goddess. *

HOWARD *
She was. She'd be proud of you. *

ABBEY *
Look at her living room. I think she'd scream for days. *
Cleaning and order are just not in my genes. *
(ABBEY opens the mini-fridge *
freezer) *
Food is in my genes. *

HOWARD *
I couldn't eat a thing. *

ABBEY *
Really? You were always up for a pizza with mushrooms. *

HOWARD *
I just wanted to see you. *

ABBEY *
Really? *

HOWARD *
You know. Catch up. *

ABBEY *
Okay, let's sit and have some coffee and catch up. What's it *
been. Ten...fifteen....no twenty years. *

HOWARD
 (stopping her in front on him)
 You were always very kind.

ABBEY
 My mother was the Saint. She had the spark.

HOWARD
 Your mother --

ABBEY
 --is dead. I live here now. I have no spark. She would never see the wing thing coming with my arms. She had beautiful long arms like an angel. Graceful fingers. I took after my father. Wrestling coach of the decade. Except I have absolutely no athletic ability. A double whammy.

HOWARD
 I shouldn't be here.

ABBEY
 No, you should be here. Like the old days when you'd drop in after school and never leave. I'm glad you came Howard.
 (HOWARD holds his head)
 Jesus, low blood sugar, I knew you were hungry. I've got food everywhere. Here. Cheese. Peanut Butter. Doodles. What do you want?

HOWARD
 I need you to help me.

ABBEY
 Anything. Sit. Eat. My mother will come back from the dead if you don't eat in her house.

HOWARD
 Abbey?

ABBEY
 Cheese, crackers, celery?

HOWARD
 I've been arrested. I guess cited is the legal term.

ABBEY
 I don't understand.

HOWARD
 Earlier tonight. A deputy.

ABBEY
 My God, you're not kidding.

HOWARD *
No. *

ABBEY *
Who did you kill? Because you look like you killed someone. *

HOWARD *
I guess the legal term is shoplifting. *

ABBEY *
What? *

HOWARD *
The biblical term would be "stealing. *

ABBEY *
Jesus. You were arresting in Porter for stealing? *

HOWARD *
Not in Porter. *

ABBEY *
I need a drink. *

HOWARD *
I was just coming out of the Red Cardinal Grocery about 7 pm *
when the Sheriff's deputy stopped me. *

ABBEY *
What do you want? *

HOWARD *
I want this to go away? *

ABBEY *
It's obviously a mistake. What did Carole say? *

HOWARD *
I haven't told her. *

ABBEY *
You said it happened around --- *

HOWARD *
Seven. Maybe seven fiftenn. *

ABBEY *
That was three hours ago. What have you been doing? *

HOWARD *
Driving around. *

ABBEY *
It's storming out there? You need to call Carole. *

HOWARD *
I can't. *

ABBEY *
She's your wife. Call her. *
(Holds out the phone) *

HOWARD *
Help me, Abbey. *

ABBEY *
She's your wife. *

HOWARD *
I trust you. *

ABBEY *
I'm nobody to you. *

HOWARD *
I spent my happiest hours here. *

ABBEY *
What do you want to drink. I'm switching to vodka. *

HOWARD *
I haven't had a drink since your mother died. *

ABBEY *
You need a lawyer more than a newspaper reporter. *

HOWARD *
Editor. *

ABBEY *
Acting Edito. Roger will recover. *

HOWARD *
It's what you always wanted. Congratulations. *

ABBEY *
Acting editor. Roger will recover. Though I can't say the *
same for the newspaper business. *

HOWARD *
You haven't asked me yet. *

ABBEY *
What? *

HOWARD *
You haven't asked me why I was arrested. *

ABBEY

No, You need to talk to a lawyer but you want to talk to me.
I'm not taking notes. Talk.

*
*

HOWARD

It was just after 7 pm. The snow was starting to fall. There
was even some thunder but no lightning. Not like 1978.

*

ABBEY

What did the officer say?

*
*

HOWARD

Eighteen dollars and thirty-two cents.

*
*

ABBEY

What did you steal? A candy bar and a flashlight?

*

HOWARD

A bottle of red wine and a box of white wafer crackers.

*

ABBEY

You forgot your wallet, right?

*

HOWARD

It's late. You need to get some sleep, I'm sure --

*
*

ABBEY

(stops him) You haven't been here in twenty years, you steal
a bottle of red wine and crackers and you want to leave
before you tell me what the hell is wrong? It's not like you
used a gun, right? Answer me, damn it. Did you have a gun?

*
*
*
*
*

HOWARD

I was arrested.

*

ABBEY

Eighteen dollars and change of stupid. People are starving,
oil is seeping all over the gulf of Mexico, there are no
fucking jobs and you think people will remember this?

*
*
*

HOWARD

I...

ABBEY

Plead it out. It goes away.

*

HOWARD

NO! I am looking at your face. It's not the same face I
remember.

*
*

ABBEY

Of course not. I was eighteen when you last sat making witty
conversation with me.

*
*
*

My mother was in the other room laughing, making some cute little appetizers she'd just defrosted that you loved and mixing up some crazy drink she had just discovered that would bring the red out in her eyes and your cheeks. You both couldn't keep your eyes off each other. I could feel you pushing me out the door, hoping I would go out with my boyfriend of two weeks or some mythical best friend I had alienated the month before. But you both wanted me gone so I made something up and went back to school to work on the newspaper so you and Mom could get all hot and sweaty in the bedroom, or maybe the couch or on the floor or somewhere in this house when you were alone without the girl who always seemed to be hanging out, hanging on to you or her, so happy to be a family even if we weren't. I wanted to be here with Mom and my favorite teacher - no principal. You weren't just a biology teacher now, you were the principal and she was the principal's assistant. No secretary title for my mother. She was important. You were important. And you were delightfully, charmingly meaningful in my life. So don't think you're eighteen dollar indiscretion means shit to me because what meant something was having you here and her happy and that ended when she went driving in her car totally loaded to get something from that Red Cardinal that she never came home with because she never came home. That's important. Wine and crackers. Doesn't mean shit.

HOWARD

You were a star, Abbey. Anyone could see you were going to do something important. Your mother would have been so proud.

ABBEY

You were the star Howard. You lit up the whole world and the rest of us just rode in on the light.

SCENE THREE

JAMES

(Lights from his cruiser is flashing, JAMES is writing in up a couple of unseen drunks.)

No, this is not TV and that is not a mini-cam connected to the inter-net. No, I don't care if those...those are real, Miss, please, tell her no, okay. Don't do that again, okay. About your tail light. Yes, I am a married man. A father. No I have no interest, tell your friend I have no interest so please keep your coat on. Yes, this is a real gun and no, do not get one inch closer to me because you smell real bad and oh, no, jeezus. Too late. Yeah, just let her blow it all out. I know she didn't mean it. But these were new shoes. Here, I got a towel in my car. You can help clean her....Oh, here it comes so hold her head, yeah, yeah, good, hold it up and keep her hair back. Good job. You did real good.

This is a good lesson so you pay attention cause when you get drunk on cheap wine and eat bad assed burritos it ain't pretty, little lady. Let her just sit there a minute. No, I won't arrest her for being drunk cause you were driving. She'll get it bad at home, right? Yeah, honors at Porter High? You're a real friend but don't expect nothing from her in return. Why? She won't remember. No, it's true. She's pretty gone. She won't remember a thing. Then if you remind her of something she doesn't remember you won't be her friend too long. Fair? Nah. But it happens. Good thing you were driving because otherwise she would be going to jail and that is not where you want to be on a Saturday night. I got a towel in my car but thanks for asking. You seem like a real nice girl. Going to Rutgers? Good for you. I'm taking some courses myself, huh? Sure there's courses for cops. Now you take her home okay? And make sure you get that tail light fixed, you hear? Next time it's a ticket for sure or worse.

SCENE FOUR

HOWARD stands fingering pictures.

ABBEY

You protected me.

HOWARD

Some would have gone the other way after something so terrible.

ABBEY

I went every way possible.

HOWARD

I knew you were strong.

ABBEY

I just never got caught.

HOWARD

I believed you would have the life you wanted.

ABBEY

I believed you were the greatest teacher I ever had.

HOWARD

You didn't take Advanced Biology.

ABBEY

I didn't love biology. I just loved "the study of life with Mr. Howard Curtiss." Were you seeing my mother then? Or just later when you became principal.

HOWARD

Carole hoped we could have a little more financial security.

ABBEY *
You did it for money? *

HOWARD *
You know our son. He won't be leaving home. *

ABBEY *
You loved teaching. *

HOWARD *
It was the best job I ever had. *

ABBEY *
You became principal for more money? *

HOWARD *
Carole suffers from a lot of anxiety. *

ABBEY *
All you talked about was finding your calling in life. *

HOWARD *
It can't always be about yourself. And there were things that *
made being principal worth that sacrifice. Your mother was an *
made every day amazing. So much.....positive energy. *

ABBEY *
She hated every job she had but being your assistant. *

HOWARD *
She saw possibilities. *

ABBEY *
She saw me ending up a hooker in a topless bar and you were *
the only one that could get me into college. *

HOWARD *
I admit I was hoping you might go into a career in biology. *

ABBEY *
I was not a scientist. *

HOWARD *
You had wonderful grades. *

ABBEY *
I cheated. *

HOWARD *
No. *

ABBEY *
Yes. I sat right next to Trevor Martin. He was brilliant. I *
was going to do something that would not cure cancer. *

HOWARD *
You didn't cheat. *

ABBEY *
I cheated. You got me a scholarship. We're all going to hell. *
Sure you don't want to drink? *

HOWARD *
You were special Abbey, no matter what you think. I didn't *
just give you that scholarship. *

ABBEY *
You gave me that scholarship and I owe you my life. So how *
can I make that up to you? *

HOWARD *
After your father died I promised your Mother I would look *
after you if anything happened to her. *

ABBEY *
So you were seeing her before the principal's office. *

HOWARD *
She was a woman alone. *

ABBEY *
I always wondered if Carole knew. *

HOWARD *
Carole is not a very strong woman. *

ABBEY *
But my mother, the widow, was? *

HOWARD *
Nothing is ever as simple as it seems. *

ABBEY *
You were never going to leave your wife for my mother, were *
you? The scholarship was just a pay off. *

HOWARD *
I promised your mother. *

ABBEY *
My mother worried about whether you would leave Carole and *
then she worried that you would. She worried that I wouldn't *
go to college and then you got me a scholarship so I could. *
Now what the hell am I supposed to do? *

HOWARD *
If you run that story on the front page my life is over. *

SCENE FIVE

JAMES

(Standing under a flood light
yelling to someone.)

Don't talk that way to anybody. You hear me. And Never.
Never. Never talk that way to a cop. Yes. That's the rule
when you're driving on an expired license with cheap wine on
your underage breath.
What did you say? Say it again, please. You won't repeat it,
right? Suddenly all shy and stupid. You should be cause next
time you pull your damn pants down in the middle of the
parking lot of St. Patrick's Church on a Saturday night bingo
you will not be standing tall the next day. No, that is not a
threat. Yeah, the black cop said DAMN PANTS. But don't bother
reporting me because you don't have no standing with the
upper echelons of the law enforcement community in this
county tonight. You lost that when you showed your cherry red
butt cheeks in a public parking lot. So, take this as your
JAMEStmas present for tonight and eternity -- one get out of
jail free pass. Why? Cause I feel like it so get back into
your old beater before I change my cop brain 360 degrees and
take you to a place you never want to ever see in this life.
(pause) Really?

(Tbunder. JAMES looks up.)

What the hell is that?

SCENE SIX

ABBEY is sitting on the couch. HOWARD
is standing by the window.

ABBEY

Maybe the officer will take pity on you.

HOWARD

I don't think so.

ABBEY

You gave him your name.

HOWARD

He didn't know me.

ABBEY

Everyone knows you Howard Curtiss.

HOWARD

He's not from Porter.

ABBEY

If he's from New Jersey he knows your name.

HOWARD *
He's from Camden. *

ABBEY *
Oh. *

HOWARD *
He says he's new to Burlington County and he was just doing *
his job. *

ABBEY *
Not good. *

HOWARD *
He said he wanted to do his job. Well. *

ABBEY *
Young men at their first jobs are very dangerous. Especially *
when it involves a uniform. And doing their job well. I know. *
I lived to do my job well. Could stay up all night on *
caffeine and headlines. Now I wake up in the morning and just *
pray there's still a job to go to. *

HOWARD *
There will always be newspapers. *

ABBEY *
That's what the guy shoeing horses said when he saw the Ford *
Model "T" driving down the street. *

HOWARD *
People need to know what happens. *

ABBEY *
Not as much as they used to. *

HOWARD *
Nothing can replace a good article. *

ABBEY *
How about nobody cares. *

HOWARD *
I don't even read those blogs or *

ABBEY *
Twitter *

HOWARD *
Twitter....even the name sounds.... *

ABBEY *
Short enough to keep a kid in the right demographics *
interested. *

	HOWARD	*
Kids are smart.		*
	ABBEY	*
They don't care about a rolled up piece of wood pulp thrown at their front door.		*
	HOWARD	*
You'll find a way to make it work.		*
	ABBEY	*
Jesus. Howard, no. I am not Jesus. I'm not even Mary Magdalene.		*
	HOWARD	*
You're a problem solver.		*
	ABBEY	*
How nice do you think this young man really is who didn't know you?		*
	HOWARD	*
Very nice.		*
	ABBEY	*
But not from here.		*
	HOWARD	*
Camden.		*
	ABBEY	*
A black cop from Camden arresting an old white guy .		*
	HOWARD	*
He seemed very nice. And he didn't know me.		*
	ABBEY	*
Nice enough to lose the citation?		*
	HOWARD	*
I don't know.		*
	ABBEY	*
Forget to call it in?		*
	HOWARD	*
I couldn't tell.		*
	ABBEY	*
Let you off the hook?		*
	HOWARD	*
You can get me off the hook Abbey.		*

ABBEY

You just forgot to pay before you walked out. Probably saw someone you knew and stopped to talk. That's exactly the kind of thing you would do, right? And you said you were going to a retirement party. Your mind was in too many places. You were worrying about the party, about Carole, her emotional state, whether Peter is all right because we all knew Peter was never going to be right.

HOWARD

You could do this.

ABBEY

Let me call and find out if it's been put on the blotter.

HOWARD

He's not even off his shift.

ABBEY

That's even better.

HOWARD

Why is that better?

ABBEY

The night is still young, Howard. Still plenty of time for a really good tragedy.

HOWARD

This feels like a tragedy to me.

ABBEY

It's a blip in an otherwise pristine life, right?

HOWARD

What do you want me to say?

ABBEY

I'm in the newspaper business. We love tragedy. Big, messy tragedies. A nice hot fire that leaves a young family without any presents on JAMEStmas Eve. A drunken husband whose wife accidentally blows his head off while he's almost beaten her to death in front of their crying newborn. A drunken husband beating his wife half to death and then she takes his gun while holding their newborn baby and blasts his face off the planet. Gore. Drama. Revenge. That's the lifeblood of newspapers. You can tweet the news. But tears. Suffering. Pictures. That's what sells papers. Shakespeare sells not some letters sent over a phone.

HOWARD

A car wrapped around a tree on the woman's birthday while her daughter sits next to her in the car listening to her breath her last breath.

ABBEY *
Absolutely front page. *

HOWARD *
But no one knows why she was drinking that night. *

ABBEY *
No one cares about the back story if it wasn't a crime. *

HOWARD *
Was it a crime? *

ABBEY *
My mother's death was an auto accident. It was a tragedy. *

HOWARD *
How about your favorite biology teacher getting arrested for
shoplifting at the local grocery store on a stormy Saturday
night in December. *

ABBEY *
Might sell. *

HOWARD *
Teacher of the Year three times. *

ABBEY *
Definitely more human interest. *

HOWARD *
Left his teaching job to become the longest serving principal
in the history of the high school. *

ABBEY *
But he never won a football championship. *

HOWARD *
That would have made him better. *

ABBEY *
The better the man the harder the fall. *

HOWARD *
Worth a shot on the front page of the Burlington Courier? *

ABBEY *
Maybe. *

HOWARD *
Maybe even the big city papers? *

ABBEY *
So that's why you're here. *

HOWARD *
I told you. *

ABBEY *
You were just driving around. *

HOWARD *
I couldn't tell Carole. *

ABBEY *
But you could come to see me. *

HOWARD *
Yes. *

ABBEY *
The daughter of the woman you were screwing. *

HOWARD *
Yes. *

ABBEY *
And now that girl just happens to be the acting editor of the *
local newspaper. *

HOWARD *
You're all I have. *

ABBEY *
You show up at my door after twenty years without even a *
birthday card? *

HOWARD *
I have been watching you. *

ABBEY *
Don't tell me that. *

HOWARD *
I always kept up on what you were doing. *

ABBEY *
You never came here. *

HOWARD *
I was ashamed. *

ABBEY *
Now you're ashamed. *

HOWARD *
What could I say? *

	ABBEY	*
Now what are you saying to me?		*
	HOWARD	*
Save me.		*
	ABBEY	*
Great.		*
	HOWARD	*
Pity me.		*
	ABBEY	*
Perfect.		*
	HOWARD	*
Please.		*
	ABBEY	*
I'm not God, Howard. I never have been.		*
	HOWARD	*
Forgive me.		*
	ABBEY	*
Why?		*
	HOWARD	*
You look just like her.		*
	ABBEY	*
No, I look like my father and he was not attractive.		*
	HOWARD	*
I wish I could have been your father.		*
	ABBEY	*
You had a fine house, a good wife and the complete love and affection of my motherand me. You had everything.		*
	HOWARD	*
I was not a brave man.		*
	ABBEY	*
I can see that now.		*
	HOWARD	*
Maybe this was the only home I ever really had.		*
	ABBEY	*
You could have had it all.		*
	HOWARD	*
I did.		*

ABBEY

What am I supposed to say?

HOWARD

I deserve your anger.

ABBEY

You had my love. Her devotion. What more did you want?

(HOWARD starts to breath
heavily)

HOWARD

I've got to sit down.

ABBEY

Why did she go out in her god damn bedroom slippers in the middle of a blizzard with her only child if she didn't think she was coming back?

HOWARD

Abbey.

ABBEY

What's wrong. Howard? You're all sweaty.

HOWARD

I can't breath. Oh, God, Abbey. I can't breath.

SCENE SEVEN

JAMES

(on his cellphone)

Rosario? Yes, it's me. I got a couple minutes to talk No, you my best baby love always. Sabes que te amo. Yes, I do love you. Is my Angel sleeping? No, good. I know she should be asleep but I'd like to say hell. Angel? Si, si, si. My little Angel. It's Daddy. Daddy. Si. Daddy te ama. Daddy te ama.

(Trying to speak with an
accent.)

Rosario? Oh, that was beautiful -- siempre está con sus bromas? See, I'm trying to learn my baby's language....I love your lips, your eyes...Okay, I can hear the baby crying now. Okay, I know you got to go. Rosario don't listen to your grandmother. This baby is healthy and loved.... don't get upset, please. No, no, no, baby. Don't cry. I want you to know that she just loves her mama so much she hates to miss her sleeping. It's true. You know I would never lie to you. Si, si, si....Amo sus Oh --your eyes. I love your eyes. I know I will never learn all those words. It snowed for a while. Even some thunder. No, a few drunk girls -- not pretty girls and the one got sick on my new shoes. I'll see but I don't think they'll buy me a new pair. Rosario, please don't cry. I can hear it in your voice. Really. Don't listen to your grandmother. She makes you feel bad.

I want you to feel good. Beautiful Rosario mother of my
Angel.

(Horns blare and there is the
crash of autos.)

Two cars just hit at the intersection of River Road and 130.
No fire. Don't worry. Just a couple of fenders. No fire,
honey. I'm fine. See you later. It's a long shift. Go to bed.

SCENE EIGHT

(HOWARD has a thermometer in
his mouth, ABBEY is taking his
pulse and looking like a
nurse.)

ABBHEY

If I knew what your pulse was supposed to be it might help.
(Takes the thermometer out of
his mouth)

I'm not sure this is the right end for this one.

HOWARD

I just had a flu shot.

ABBHEY

You'll go home and everything will be fine. No chest pain,
right?

HOWARD

Just sweaty and a little chilled. I'm sure it was the shot.

ABBHEY

You should go home.

HOWARD

I don't want to be sick, Abbey.

ABBHEY

I don't think you're sick.

HOWARD

I don't want sympathy.

ABBHEY

I just texted the office. It'll be a minute. Then we'll know.

HOWARD

That officer didn't know me at all.

(phone rings)

You should answer that.

ABBEY *
(phone rings) *
Hi. Yes. No, really? Oh, well call if anything more happens. *
(hangs up phone) *
Some old couple got into a fight on their anniversary and the *
woman shot up the house. They took him to the hospital and *
her for a psych evaluation. I think they had thirteen cats *
and dogs. It will definitely make page one. *

HOWARD *
Then no one knows. *

ABBEY *
Just you and me and that officer. *

HOWARD *
JAMES. *

ABBEY *
JAMES who isn't from Porter. *

HOWARD *
I should go. *

ABBEY *
You've had a great life. *

HOWARD *
But if it came up you'd do your job. You always did your job. *

ABBEY *
You got me that journalism scholarship. *

HOWARD *
You earned it. *

ABBEY *
You gave it to me. That's the truth. *

HOWARD *
You wanted to be a reporter. *

ABBEY *
Sometimes you should be careful what you wish for, right? *

HOWARD *
You'll do your job. *

ABBEY *
I was trained to show compassion for the lives of the people *
I write about. To consider what it would mean if we published *
their names. That we would think about our actions. Those *
were the ethical problems I was thinking about. *

Not how to capture readers from reality TV to reality newspapers. Where's the ethics in that?

HOWARD

Am I your ethical problem tonight, Abbey?

ABBEY

Do you want to be?

HOWARD

I want to be able to go home and sleep.

ABBEY

Go home. Carole will understand?

HOWARD

Do you understand?

ABBEY

There wouldn't be newspapers if we were perfect. That's why I'm not rushing to heaven. No work there.

(The phone rings again.)

Hey, You're going to lead with the ice fishing story? No, I'm not telling you what to put on the front page. I thought you might have something more local. No, I don't know what would be better. Roger, listen, I'm home. Not bored. Mike went to the hospital. Where the hell did he eat? Really? Jesus, I hope he wasn't sitting at my desk. Angel must be going crazy trying to get the page done. Really? It's that dead, huh? No, I wasn't asking for a murder, but a good fire is always nice in color. Yes, that was a joke. So call if you get lonely. No, not that kind of lonely. I'd be arrested for child endangerment if we hooked up and that would make the front page. Nighty night.

(Flips the phone back)

Go home and go to sleep.

HOWARD

Nothing?

ABBEY

Howard Curtiss shoplifting would beat out six guys ice fishing in their pickup any night.

SCENE SEVEN

JAMES

Busted. That's right. You will be spending the night compliments of the Burlington County Sheriff. No, keep your hands behind your back...I'll look the other way. I promise. What's that mean? I'm a cop. I hate Saturday night.

SCENE EIGHT

HOWARD
You would do that?

ABBEY
Till then, no one knows anything about but the two of us.

HOWARD
The officer knows and I was a complete stranger to him.

ABBEY
I'll call you when it comes in.

HOWARD
You can't call my home.

ABBEY
Carole loves you.

HOWARD
Please, do not call my home.

ABBEY
It's not like you were having sex with a fourteen year old behind Mickey D's, right? (silence) There isn't anything else, you're not telling me, is there?

HOWARD
(pause) That's all that happened tonight.

ABBEY
You swear?

HOWARD
Nothing else.

ABBEY
Then we'll wait out the cop's report. It's almost too late for the morning edition anyway. Time's on our side.

HOWARD
You always said the life or death was in the headlines.

ABBEY
I was eighteen. My mother was dead. I thought I was Lois Lane with superpowers.

HOWARD
They wouldn't need Clark Kent with Abbey

HOWARD
 People just remember headlines, sometimes they don't even
 bother with the stories.

ABBEY
 Who said that.

HOWARD
 Abbey Winter. High school graduation speech. You said you
 wanted to write great headlines.

ABBEY
 It was a high school graduation speech. I was eighteen and
 grieving my mother. What the hell did I know.

HOWARD
 You didn't lie.

ABBEY
 You've had hundreds of photos in our newspaper in my
 lifetime. lifetime. Smiling, cutting ribbons, getting some
 award. Enough good works for two lives.

HOWARD
 People remember headlines.
 (Gets his hat and coat)

ABBEY
 You said God has a plan even if it doesn't make any sense for
 us - it does make sense to God.

HOWARD
 I said that at your Mother's funeral.

ABBEY
 Was that a lie?

HOWARD
 I wouldn't lie about God.

ABBEY
 Then you have to believe that this is for a reason.

HOWARD
 It's not the same.

ABBEY
 What makes it different?

HOWARD
 Your mother was hit by a drunk driver.

ABBEY
 You said it would be all right.

HOWARD *
You turned out fine. *

ABBEY *
Then this will turn out fine. *

HOWARD *
You said you didn't believe in God and stopped coming to church. *

ABBEY *
There isn't anything else, right? *
(Lightning flashes.) *

BLACKOUT *

HOWARD *
I don't think I could eat or sleep. *

ABBEY *
I'm texting David on the desk and if there's nothing exciting you can go home and sleep. I promise I will stay up and check in to see how it comes in off the police log. You look fine now. A little color in those cheeks. *

ABBEY *
You look good. *

HOWARD *
You should have been a doctor, not a journalist. *

ABBEY *
When I went to college journalists were trusted more than doctors. *

ABBEY *
You probably were just talking to someone and forgot to pay. *

HOWARD *
You think I forgot that night? *

ABBEY *
You picked up the crackers and then headed over to the other side of the store for the wine. *

HOWARD *
I see your mother's face every day. *

ABBEY *
And then right in front of you is Mary Ann Greene or Marcia Pickens, *

HOWARD *
I dream about her. *

ABBEY *
So you started talking and the exit was right there and *
someone looked at their watch and - *

HOWARD *
I dream about all of us. *

ABBEY *
And before you knew it you were out the door and *
Whoosh.....Red light. *

HOWARD *
I didn't mean for that to happen. *

ABBEY *
You know why you never had a winning football team in Porter? *
Because you played the boys. Put the girls on the field and *
you would have kicked some ass. *

HOWARD *
I never meant to hurt you. *

ABBEY *
Howard listen to me. Most people will assume it was a *
mistake. One slip of the memory in a long life of good works. *

HOWARD *
Old Howard getting a little loose up here? *

ABBEY *
You had other things on your mind. *

HOWARD *
Distracted. *

ABBEY *
Exactly. *

HOWARD *
Howard Curtiss is not the man they knew. *

ABBEY *
Exactly. *

SCENE NINE -

Two Hours Later.

Midnight. The Parking Lot. JAMES is standing under the light talking on the cellphone. *

JAMES *

Yes, baby it's a good thing when she sings herself to sleep. *
 Why? It means she's growin' up and that's good. Sure it's *
 good. Everything you do for that baby is good. You don't need *
 to cry so hard, 'cause it hurts to hear you out here in the *
 middle of a parking lot and you all alone. (Pause) Soon, I
 got to put in my time at the log book before I check out.
 (Pause) No, just some stuff from the vending machine. No, I
 promise I did not eat the greasy fries or the chili. I'm
 watching and I know you're watching. You're always watching
 my back, baby, and that's why it's always so good. (Pause)
 We'll get through this, I promise.

(A figure has been standing nearby. JAMES mouths his text message) *

Love you too, baby.

HOWARD *

(stepping out of the shadows.) *

I hate to bother you.

JAMES *

Jesus, what are you doing old man. *

HOWARD *

I just wanted to talk. *

JAMES *

You're the old guy who stole the wine and crackers. *

HOWARD *

Only a few minutes of your time. *

JAMES *

No. *

HOWARD *

Please. *

JAMES *

No!

HOWARD *

I just wanted to talk to you. *

JAMES *

This is not good.

HOWARD *

I have been waiting for you.

JAMES

No. No. No. Do not tell me you have been waiting for me.

HOWARD

Just listen.

JAMES

Imagine a chalk line right between us running right down the middle of the world. You're on that side as the perp. I'm on this side as the law. Okay, you can't quite see it right now but it's there, and you don't cross that line tonight. You're a smart guy, Mister, I remember that, a principal right? All kinds of awards and people know you from one end of Porter, New Jersey to the other. But I do not know you. I do not want to know you so just imagine that line that 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. It's like one of those science laws you probably loved to teach about. Like gravity. It's not just a good idea. It's the law. This is the law. I can't talk to you.

HOWARD

You've had a long night.

JAMES

You're not listening.

HOWARD

I've been waiting.

JAMES

You are not listening to me to me tell you the law.

HOWARD

But.

JAMES

DO NOT CROSS THIS LINE!!!

HOWARD

You seem like a terribly decent guy.

JAMES

I'm a cop. First. Cop. Remember that.

HOWARD

I just meant...

JAMES

No just meant or wanted to mean or I should have or could have.

HOWARD

You seemed to have a good heart.

JAMES *
And you can tell that by looking at my face? *

HOWARD
You didn't enjoy what you did to me.

JAMES *
This is my Cop face, right? Cause that's all you see. *

HOWARD *
I see a man. A good man. *

JAMES *
Tonight I am a good cop. *

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

JAMES *
You hurt you. Got that straight. Because any other way is all *
wrong. *

HOWARD
I'm sorry.

JAMES *
Save the sorry.

HOWARD
I know what I did was wrong.

JAMES *
I did my job. Score is even now go home and let me clock out. *

HOWARD *
You didn't look like what you did made you happy. *

JAMES *
You some kind of head doctor now? *

HOWARD *
You have to read people quickly when you're in charge. *

JAMES *
You can not know what makes me happy cause you do not walk in *
these shoes....which right now are covered with some teenaged *
girl's burritos and beer. *

HOWARD *
I know all the police in Porter. *

JAMES *
Yeah, I know. *

HOWARD *
They are all good people. *

JAMES *
Next time steal something in your own backyard. *

HOWARD *
There will never be a next time.

JAMES *
Right. *

HOWARD *
You can count on that.

JAMES *
I count on these ten fingers because they're mine. I make'em *
move. I make'em stay. You. I got nothing to do with how you *
live your life. *

HOWARD *
Right now you have all the power. *

JAMES *
Is that why you came back here? *

HOWARD *
I came back because I swear this was a mistake. *

JAMES *
Mistake was you getting caught. *

HOWARD *
After forty-two years in public service I am retired.

JAMES *
Congratulations. *

HOWARD *
I have no where to report to anymore. I have nothing to ever *
give me as much pleasure as being a teacher made me. *

JAMES *
You had a job made you happy every one of those thousands of *
days. *

HOWARD *
I was a biology teacher. I called my class the study of life. *

JAMES *
You think I don't know life? *

HOWARD *
I could tell you are a smart man.

JAMES *
I got a PhD in the study of life. *

HOWARD *
You have seen life close up. *

JAMES *
Yeah. Stared right into its mouth. *

HOWARD *
I'll bet you have memories. *

JAMES *
I could curl your hair if I got started. *

HOWARD *
Camden is not easy. *

JAMES *
You survive Camden you know it's all going up from there. *

HOWARD *
You are going somewhere. *

JAMES *
I ain't going back to rot. *

HOWARD *
You're a serious man. With a family. *

JAMES *
A beautiful family. *

HOWARD *
You can sense things about people after so many years in the
classroom. You can tell who is going to be a star. *

JAMES *
Do not go down that road. *

HOWARD *
It is the truth. You will make something of your life. *

JAMES *
Telling me this and that truth. "I am Howard Curtiss, the
Mayor of Riverton." Like that changed something about us. *

HOWARD *
I am no longer in that position to change anything. *

JAMES *
'Cause the law has to be the law evenly or it isn't the law. *

HOWARD

It will never happen again.

JAMES

Everyone who is caught says that. No one says they will do this or that thing again. It doesn't work that way. Everyone swears to the Lord Almighty on a stack of bibles that they will never drive too fast, hit their wife, touch some child....

HOWARD

I didn't murder or rape.

JAMES

No. You didn't. But I think you feel like you did something pretty bad.

HOWARD

I was a teacher, then the principal of the high school, then the Mayor. It meant something to me to do things right for people.

JAMES

(Pause) Okay, I didn't enjoy writing you up.

HOWARD

I could feel that.

JAMES

I also don't enjoy stupid pet tricks or having to give up Gertie's chili which has too much salt but I do it.

HOWARD

I fell short of people's expectations.

JAMES

I am the cop who wrote you up. I had no expectations.

HOWARD

I just meant....

JAMES

...I hope you don't think...

HOWARD

...that you seemed...

JAMES

....I would consider....

HOWARD

...a man who.....

JAMES

I don't take bribes, Mister Mayor.

HOWARD

I would never have offered you money.

JAMES

I don't care if you're the local hero or the local pimp, I got to be even handed. You think it would be like this if you were a young man, dark skinned and taking that bottle of wine for yourself and your fifteen year old girlfriend?

HOWARD

You obviously have character.

JAMES

Where is this going?

HOWARD

You would never be tempted to help me.

JAMES

A few hours ago you were a guy with a bottle of wine and some crackers you didn't pay for and now you want to tell me about my character? I still have not heard one word that makes me think you have a character besides being Mister whoever you are?

HOWARD

I am deeply ashamed.

JAMES

That's a start.

HOWARD

I have let everyone down.

JAMES

Do you think it should matter to the manager who you are?

HOWARD

No.

JAMES

Keep that. It's good. Tone is good. The judge will like that.

HOWARD

I don't want to talk to a judge.

JAMES

You get a good lawyer, with big balls and you won't need a judge. Trust me, they'll make this go away.

Now don't you repeat that 'cause I'll say you are a liar. I have to do that, you know. I'm a cop and we're supposed to hate lawyers but it's true.

HOWARD

Then you haven't reported it yet?

JAMES

Do I look like I've been off duty tonight?... Just smell my shoes if you think I'm having coffee and donuts. Wait a minute. You have not talked to a lawyer, but you have been watching me? Thinking up ways to get me to lose this? Is that your plan? Appealing to the nice new rookie cop from Camden 'cause that is not going down here.

HOWARD

I don't have a plan.

JAMES

But you have been thinking about getting out of this?

HOWARD

Wouldn't you?

JAMES

There are a lot worse crimes than walking out with a bottle of wine and crackers.

HOWARD

Wouldn't you?

JAMES

People have respect for what I do if I do it right.

HOWARD

Wouldn't you try to change the world if this was happening to you?

JAMES

I wouldn't have been carrying that bottle of wine and you shouldn't have been either. Haven't heard "I'm sorry" - or better yet -- " I got a problem, Mister Cop."

HOWARD

I didn't mean to make it seem that I wanted you --

JAMES

You won't be going to prison. Trust me.

(HOWARD clutches his chest and sputters.)

Jeezuz, don't you go and die on me or I'll kill you.

(HOWARD collapses and the cop holds him.)

Just breathe, damn it. Take a deep breath.

HOWARD

It hurts.

JAMES

Hurts like a knife or two hundred pound weights. You sweating orTell me Mister cause the last thing in the world I can have tonight is some old man everyone knows in Porter dying on my shift.

*
*
*
*

HOWARD

It's better.

JAMES

Let me see your face?

*

HOWARD

Really.

*

JAMES

How come I don't believe this yet.

*
*

HOWARD

I wouldn't lie.

*
*

JAMES

Just steal, huh?

*
*

HOWARD

I'm not having a heart attack. I'll just sit down a minute.
(sits on a park bench)

*
*

JAMES

You are one scary dude, you know that?

*

HOWARD

It's better.

JAMES

Not like a knife

*
*

HOWARD

Not like a knife.

*
*

JAMES

Life a million butterflies.

*
*

HOWARD

What's that.

*
*

JAMES

Just scared.

*
*

HOWARD

It's passing.

*
*

JAMES *
Don't say what you think I want to hear. *

HOWARD *
No. It's really passing. I know. *

JAMES *
You had this before?

HOWARD
A few days ago.

JAMES *
Do me a favor. *

HOWARD *
Anything. *

JAMES *
Go to your doctor after the lawyer, okay?

HOWARD *
It wasn't this bad before. *

JAMES *
You weren't this scared before. *

HOWARD *
Have you ever been this scared? *

JAMES *
You asking if the cop ever stole something? Cause you know
what answer this man is going to give. *

HOWARD *
You do know. *

JAMES *
I got some water in the car. You might be dehydrated. *

HOWARD *
You know.

JAMES *
I never got caught or I wouldn't be wearing this badge. You
go down in Camden you don't get back up so easy. No matter
how many people know your name. *

HOWARD *
You know how I feel. *

JAMES *
Sit down and just breath, okay? Nothing fancy. Just in and
out. *

(HOWARD sits quietly humming to himself and hugging himself for warmth. JAMES brings him a bottle of water.)

	JAMES	*
You cold?		*
	HOWARD	*
Not now.		*
	JAMES	*
We can sit in the car.		*
	HOWARD	*
No.		*
	JAMES	*
First time I drove that car I couldn't believe I was in the front seat.		*
	HOWARD	*
Have you ever had to shot someone?		*
	JAMES	*
You watch too much TV. Most night its just someone throwing up on your shoes and maybe calling backup on a domestic. Now they are scary. Two people shouting death at each other like they were bullets -- wishing they were bullets and the other one was dead. Two people who maybe loved each other a few nights before, now all daggers and death. Makes you wonder.		*
	HOWARD	*
About God?		*
	JAMES	*
About love.		*
	HOWARD	*
Have you ever watched someone die?		*
	JAMES	*
Why would you ask me that?		*
	HOWARD	*
Someone you loved.		*
	JAMES	*
You don't have a gun on you, do you?		*
	HOWARD	*
Why?		*

JAMES *
 Cause I didn't pat you down before and now you are asking *
 weird stuff so now I'm getting nervous. *

HOWARD
 I wouldn't hurt anyone.

JAMES *
 Come over here and let me rest my mind.

HOWARD
 I swear I am a man of faith.

JAMES *
 People got faith in a gun. *

HOWARD
 I couldn't do that.

JAMES *
 When you were young you didn't think you would steal but you *
 did. *

HOWARD
 Why now? *

JAMES *
 Let me pat you down then we can talk philosophy. *
 (HOWARD turns and faces the *
 audience this time as JAMES *
 pats him down.) *

HOWARD
 This evening is my most personal humiliation.

JAMES *
 Confession is good for the soul. *

HOWARD
 I am just trying to explain why this hurts so much. *

JAMES *
 Hungry people stealing mac and cheese under their kid's coat *
 cause they want to feed them hurts. They get caught and it *
 hurts me to hurt them. You got a nice coat, leather shoes *
 with no scratches, and what you did tonight was stupid. *

HOWARD
 Did you write down what I said? *

JAMES *
 Is that what this is about? *

HOWARD

I just wondered if you had written down our discussion.

JAMES

Our discussion was not written down. The citations says that you, Howard Curtiss, shoplifted goods worth eighteen dollars and....that was our conversation. Period. End of discussion.

HOWARD

That wasn't everything.

JAMES

That's all I am required to write.

HOWARD

Nothing more.

JAMES

This is police work That's for you and your lawyer to come up with something else like "Sorry, I didn't see the speed limit was only 35 miles per hour officer?" Because I don't want to think about what you think happened in that store tonight, so why did you come back?

HOWARD

You asked me if I felt sick.

JAMES

You were sweating. It was snowing. I was afraid. I work to be a good cop but I could lose my job and I got two kids with asthma and a wife with what they call post partum and if I lost my health care we're down at the food pantry licking the shelves. I get scared there won't be enough cops on the streets and I'm a black man who's been followed like a thief getting a toothbrush for my daughter at 3 am on vacation without my uniform. In case you hadn't notices, most men stealing are hungry. Not all shined up and ready for party time and talking without me asking about how they stole lots of times before but never got caught and what am I supposed to feel about that. "Really, you telling me you ain't even a virgin perp" and you talking about the "thrill" of it like it was a dance or a ride on a ferris wheel. Then you're sweating so hard in the cold the water is freezing on your face and I'm afraid you'll crack all over me and then what do I do except feel bad because you're finally caught and you die on my watch. Then I got to tell your family you died on a cold night in front of some fucking Cardinal with a stolen bottle of red wine and crackers for what? For what? And I am afraid I won't be able to keep what you tell me about your stealing out of my head and I don't want that junk in there cause you are a good man, like you said, and I got ideas about what's in the head of a good man and that ain't it.

(No answer. HOWARD is walking away.)

I hope you are going home. You said you was a Deacon in the Church. God sees it all and he has a heart bigger than...us. You do believe that. Believe that. Your lawyer will cop a plea and you will not go to jail because...Remember that when you plead because Judges ain't God. They run blood, and juries make mistakes.

HOWARD

I went to see the reporter at the paper. Maybe she can help.

JAMES

Hold on there.

JAMES

You called the paper?

HOWARD

I went to her home.

JAMES

Are you crazy! Stalking a reporter on a Saturday night?

HOWARD

I know her from high school. Her mother was my secretary. She died in Abbey's senior year. She was a rock. Abbey was friend's with my son who died the year after they graduated. She is a good woman. A star really. You could see that when she walked down the hall.

JAMES

You can see that in a walk down the hall?

HOWARD

I helped get her a scholarship.

JAMES

That was all legal, right?

HOWARD

That's what a good teacher does to help someone claim their future.

JAMES

And when nobody says you got a future?

HOWARD

Everybody has a future.

JAMES

But not everybody gets help.

HOWARD

I could help you.

JAMES

I got my future now as long as I don't blow it talking to you.

HOWARD

People elected me to be their optimist.

JAMES

You should not have gone to that woman's house.

HOWARD

I needed to know if she has to put it in the paper.

JAMES

And what did your "star" tell Mister Optimist?

HOWARD

She said the reporter reads.....the police log.

JAMES

So now it's all on me?

HOWARD

She didn't say that.

JAMES

'Cause she don't have to slap it on the front page, you know. She can bury the sucker back in with the underage college kids drinking.

HOWARD

She didn't say it would on the front page.

JAMES

She didn't have to. Blame the black guy and let the star walk. You are nothing to me but a perp.

HOWARD

I saw your compassion.

JAMES

I'll do my job and she'll do hers. And don't go to her house again.

HOWARD

She's worried about her job.

JAMES

You don't think I'm worried about my job? This is the dead end shift. Money's low, I'm gone.

HOWARD

You cited me for taking a bottle of red wine and a box of white wafer crackers.

JAMES

You are not a priest and that was not for some communion ceremony. You are a thief. Hear the word because this was not your first time doing wrong, just the first time you got stopped.

HOWARD

She thought people would say I was probably distracted.

JAMES

Distracted. Nice. But it's a lie.

HOWARD

I'm almost seventy. I have been having trouble remembering things.

JAMES

You are getting comfortable with that?

HOWARD

I could have been talking to a former student or someone with a problem with their water service. That's what the mayor does you know. Helps people. Probably in a rush. Going to a party. Rattled. Old. It makes sense.

JAMES

Get out of here, old man. I can't listen to you anymore.

HOWARD

I will have all the time in the world soon.

JAMES

You said it was a thrill. You told me it wasn't the first time. Not by a long shot. You'd been stealing from that store for years. That's what you said. I didn't even write that part down. Maybe I should have but I didn't. Now go home before I change my mind. Otherwise this is over.

HOWARD

Have you ever hit black ice? It's called clear ice too because even though you can't see it, it's there. Waiting. For you or someone else. Glazed on the top of the road. Invisible to the eye until you hit it and lose all control. You can't hit the brake or it will only make it worse. You have to go with it. Go all the way with that one moment. When you hit the ice, time just stops. Even though we know in our rational mind that isn't really possible, it seems suspended above us so that suddenly we are looking straight down at our own life. Such a small space in time. Like the space between the windshield wipers on a rainy day. The mud all over the window - no sun - just gripping the wheel hoping nothing is coming to the left or the right. A terrible moment you think. When will this pass? And maybe the car hits the ice and spins and you think, this is it?

But you come back around and no one was on the road but you. Black ice. "Thank you Lord, I will never drive so fast again," but of course, you do. Time passes and you forget until the next time, and the next time. You forget the fear and the sweat beads on the back of your neck, how your fingers ache and your jaw is too tight to open. You forget that you got saved the last time and your prayers were answers. And then you forget you even prayed. Get me through another ride, you say. And then you put your foot on the gas pedal and push down, remembering only the sweet, sweet sound of the road and the rubber and your life passing too, too quickly.

BLACK OUT.

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

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

HOWARD

You can tell cop jokes, I tell biology jokes.

JAMES

Hit me. I need to hear a biology joke. *

HOWARD

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

HOWARD

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

HOWARD

Excellent.

JAMES

Scorpions and spiders too. And of course, chameleons! I loved those chameleons. *

HOWARD

You have earned an A in Biology. Now get this right and you get extra points. The answer to what is the scientific term for a cold-blooded animal is A. Homeotherm b. Prosecuting Attorney C. Cryotherm D. Poikilotherm.

JAMES

Geckos. Forgot the geckos. *

HOWARD

The answer is Prosecuting Attorney. I thought you would get that joke.

JAMES

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

HOWARD

Can we have some more coffee, please?

JAMES

You just let her think you got confused.

HOWARD

I wish you had been my student. I wouldn't have let you down. Who knows where you would be now. Finished college somewhere.

JAMES

Nobody gets everything they want, Howard. I have made peace with my life.

HOWARD

You are one smart young man.

JAMES

Ph.D. from Camden High.

HOWARD

Tough?

JAMES

They don't risk anything to steal crackers.

HOWARD

You had toughness. I can see that. But you stayed true to your principles. That is the most difficult part of life. "This above all: to thine own self be true, And it must follow, as the night the day, Thou canst not then be false to any man. Farewell, my blessing season this in thee!"

JAMES

I'm still working at it everyday. Like you, I guess. You still working at being true to yourself?

HOWARD

Somebody saw something good in you. Was it a teacher?

JAMES

My mother said I could be anything but bad and still come home. She loved me more than any woman should love a child. gave her life working to keep me in clothes and school.

HOWARD

That is a beautiful tribute. And your father?

JAMES

Don't you want to go home sometime?

HOWARD

Not yet. I'm not ready yet. Anyway, you are quite the storyteller. Was that from your mother?

JAMES

My father could tell stories make your hair stand up.

HOWARD

He must be proud of you.

JAMES

The divorced when I was seven and he moved away with his new family. We could be passing each other everyday and never know it.

HOWARD

I can't understand losing a son that way.

JAMES

We do stuff. We live with it. He walked away. That was his choice. I don't try to understand it.

HOWARD

You have a son?

JAMES

You should go home, take a warm shower and smell good when. Then you slip into bed and kiss her.

HOWARD

She goes to sleep early.

JAMES

You can wake her up. She's your wife.

HOWARD

A few weeks ago one of my college roommates found me on the inter-net. He came up and there we were finishing each other's sentences like all those decades had never happened. Except they had and we weren't drinking or talking about our sex. We were just trying to connect with someone who knew us when everything was still unknown. When I asked him why he was here he said he had found his first love on the internet too. This brilliant man was here to meet another a woman he hadn't seen for fifty years in the hope that she would be the real love of his life at last.

His wife was dead a year and his children wanted him to move near to them but all he wanted was to find that missing piece of his life he thought he would never find. Can you imagine?

JAMES

My wife got pregnant the first time we had sex. I can imagine anything.

HOWARD

What do I tell my wife?

JAMES

Tell her you made a mistake, Howard, a mistake that won't ever happen again.

HOWARD

When we were little, my Mom used to say, "No matter what you do, never lie to your Mother." And for a long time we didn't. Then one day something happened, I can't tell you the exact moment when it changed, but I knew I would never tell her the whole truth again. I knew I wouldn't because it would break her heart. I couldn't bear to see that look of disappointment when she realized the son in front of her was not the son she wanted. So I began to lie, in little bits and pieces, just leaving out the smallest details, so the holes would never be quite seen, the truth never totally missed. When I grew into being a man I understood that she knew about the lies, not what they were or which parts were not true, but that she wouldn't ask for more. When I became a parent, I told my children the exact same thing. "Don't ever lie to me, son, I told my boys, and they didn't in the beginning either. But just as day turns into night, and spring to summer, they started down their own path and left the truth by the side just as I had so many decades before. It is a blinding thing, the truth, and perhaps the good Lord never meant us to fly too close to it either, knowing how hard it is to be human, and how much harder it is to know the imperfections of those we love. And so, hand in hand, each year we hold lied a little and then as I got older, a little more. Just as I saw my own children draw away from me with complete openness that only stays for a little while when we're young. My father loved Richard Nixon. He believed he had been treated unfairly. One mistake he said. Just one terrible flaw in a life of service.

(Pause)

JAMES

I think I found out enough to make me know it's true.

HOWARD

Do you believe I will steal it again?

JAMES

Tell your lawyer the truth.

HOWARD

It's important to me.

JAMES

Tell your lawyer everything. He'll cop a plea. You'll be fine.

HOWARD

Just one traffic ticket when I was twenty. Speeding in a school zone. I still remember the feeling. Caught.

JAMES

Trust me. Cop a plea. The system would explode if everything went to trial.

HOWARD

Cop a plea?

JAMES

You have friends.

HOWARD

They will all be so disappointed.

JAMES

You won't be able to shop here again.

HOWARD

They would do that?

JAMES

They do that with shoplifting.

HOWARD

But this is where I live.

JAMES

Steal a ten pound rib roast next time.

HOWARD

It was just over eighteen dollars.

JAMES

You are debating this with me?

HOWARD

I'm....debating this with me.

JAMES

They got to take alcohol serious. You got to be tough with the kids or every fifteen year old in your old high school - would be filling up their pockets. So you scare them just enough to make it feel bad.

HOWARD
I know how that feels now.

JAMES
And a little scared.

HOWARD
I'm really scared.

JAMES
They are just starting out. You want to straighten em out so they don't do it again.

HOWARD
I could never shop there again.

JAMES
You're not a bad man.

HOWARD
I hope now.

JAMES
The truth is, Howard, you are not growing into a life of crime.

HOWARD
I swear it won't happen again.

HOWARD
I know where everything in that store is on every aisle.

JAMES
(Pause) You don't own a gun, right? Shit. I should have checked it out with you back when I wrote you up. What with the wine thing. I didn't check for a gun but with the booze I should have. Damn. I just saw some old guy with a bottle and some crackers.

HOWARD
I would never carry a gun into a store.

JAMES
But you don't have one at home?

HOWARD
I'm the Mayor. Who would hurt me?

JAMES
Yeah, that's right.

HOWARD
My wife has one.

JAMES *

No. Shit. No.

HOWARD

Yes...

JAMES *

Why'd you have to say that?

HOWARD

It's true.

JAMES *

Damn.

HOWARD

We were robbed a few years back. A young man just out of prison. Robbed everyone up and down the block until he got caught and they sent him back to prison. Something about him wanting to be caught.

JAMES *

Black man?

HOWARD

African-American.

JAMES *

Some people been in prison so long it feels like home.

HOWARD

He's rob people when he thought they were home. That was part of it they said.

JAMES *

People got needs even in crime.

HOWARD

We just forgot to lock the door. Now she gets scared when she's alone so she takes a pill to sleep.

JAMES *

You put in a police report?

HOWARD

They left. Didn't take a thing.

JAMES *

So no one knows about the gun.

HOWARD

I don't announce those things.

JAMES *
Good. Keep it that way.

HOWARD
I hate seeing her frightened.

JAMES *
No one was hurt.

HOWARD
Women feel things differently.

JAMES *
My wife feels things I haven't even thought of.

HOWARD
I won't get in trouble for not reporting the break-in.

JAMES *
Don't say anything. That's the best way in this world. Only answer when you are directly asked a question. Keep it to yourself. Okay?

HOWARD
I watched you tonight.

JAMES *
How long were you out there?

HOWARD
I don't remember. After I left ABBEY's house on Vine I came looking for you.

JAMES *
You saw the girl throw up on my shoes.

HOWARD
You work hard.

JAMES *
You were stalking me?

HOWARD
I wanted to make sure you were alone.

JAMES *
Stalking a cop ain't good.

HOWARD
I just wanted to talk to you alone.

JAMES *
Well now we have talked.

Yes. HOWARD

Alone. JAMES *

Yes. HOWARD

And you don't need to talk anymore, right? JAMES *

You have been very....patient. HOWARD

I am Mr. Patience. JAMES *

Thank you. HOWARD

But don't push it, okay? JAMES *

No, of course, no. HOWARD

What was that reporter's name? JAMES *

Abbey Winter. She lives right by the high school with the old split tree in the yard. HOWARD
(Puts out his hand)

Rain. Maybe even fog tonight. The weather is a source of constant fascination to me.

You sure you're okay? JAMES *

At least I know tomorrow's paper will be fine. HOWARD

Forget about the damn paper and watch the road. JAMES *

I am a very good driver. HOWARD

And no talking on the cellphone!
(Thunder.) JAMES *

Damn weather.

BLACKOUT

SCENE FIVE

ABBEY's living room.

Knocking at the door. Then doorbell.

ABBEY

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

(Sees JAMES standing in a uniform)

Who's dead?

JAMES

JAMES Johnson.

ABBEY

Abbey Winter. Who's dead?

JAMES

Sorry, but I'm just off shift.

ABBEY

I repeat my question, officer. Who is dead?

JAMES

That is one incredible tree.

ABBEY

It's a little late for tree talk. Or early. You want coffee? No reason to sleep tonight.

JAMES

I can't believe it's still standing.

ABBEY

Wake me when you're ready to talk because it is way too late for this conversation.

JAMES

Here's my identification.

ABBEY

Who's dead?

JAMES

We have a "friend"....in common.

ABBEY

Now this is getting freaky.

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

*

JAMES *
I didn't come here to upset you.

ABBEY
I don't believe in social networking. Why are you here?

JAMES *
Howard Curtiss, white male, Silver hair, sixty-

ABBEY
You're the arresting officer!

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

ABBEY
You were the arresting officer and please don't call me
ma'am. You dumped it, right? That's why you're here? I mean
the man is not a serial killer.

JAMES *
This is not good.

ABBEY
There isn't anything more to this.

JAMES *
I can't even believe I'm doing this.

ABBEY
Howard asked you to come here?

JAMES *
No, he just came to talk to me.

ABBEY
He talked to you after the arrest.

JAMES *
Citation.

ABBEY
He came back again to talk tonight?

JAMES *
We went out for coffee.

ABBEY
Details. I'm a reporter, remember.

JAMES *
This is definitely off the record, right? Like whatever he
said to you.

ABBEY

He told you he came here?

JAMES

That's how I knew where you lived. That big tree out front. *

ABBEY

He told you to come here?

JAMES

Oh, no. He doesn't know I'm here. Unless....No, He said he was going home. To his wife. *

ABBEY

Carole.

JAMES

Carole. That's right. Two kids, too. *

ABBEY

What the hell is going on here?

JAMES

I know it's not regular. *

ABBEY

Nothing about tonight has been regular. Go on.

JAMES

We went out for coffee when he came back. *

ABBEY

After seeing me.

JAMES

Right. He said he'd talked to you. He said you were friends. *

ABBEY

He was my teacher. My principal. My mother worked for him. They were very close.

JAMES

And she died. *

ABBEY

I'm the reporter.

JAMES

In a car crash. *

ABBEY

And I was his star material, right?

JAMES

Right. Right. You saying there was something more here?

ABBEY

I had no other arrangement with that man, believe me. He was a father figure to me. He helpd me...

JAMES

-with a scholarship, right?

ABBEY

Yeah.

JAMES

You must be smart.

ABBEY

Not that smart. I'm in the newspaper business and we're going out of business.

JAMES

Sorry to hear that.

ABBEY

You read our paper?

JAMES

I keep up. I'm a cop.

ABBEY

You pay for a newspaper?

JAMES

I do not steal. I am a cop. I read what I need online. I got a computer. I'm not illiterate. My son's really interested in science. Wants to be an engineer. He's only six.

ABBEY

Trust me, at six, he means a train or a fire truck.

JAMES

So you think you can bury this story, I mean it's not really a story, is it?

ABBEY

This is strange. I need coffee. You drink coffee? I hate drinking alone.

JAMES

Coffee's good. I swear....

ABBEY

You were the officer that caught him and he came to see you and you went out for coffee with him and somehow now you just happen to show up at my house and talk about my tree and whether or not I'm going to bury a story and we're going to have coffee together and talk about how I'm supposed to bury something you did.

JAMES

It was my job. I had to issue that citation. The manager called it in. He fit the description.

*

ABBEY

Go on.

JAMES

He had the wine and crackers on him.

*

ABBEY

And no receipt.

JAMES

No receipt and no gun.

*

ABBEY

You checked Howard Curtiss for a gun.

JAMES

He says his wife has one.

*

ABBEY

Carole probably has a gun, a machete and a baseball bat by the door. She is one paranoid woman. Did he say my tree was ugly?

JAMES

It is no as beautiful.

*

ABBEY

Good, but no cigar. It is my tree, and what else did he say?

JAMES

He said you talked about his....citation.

*

ABBEY

Shit!

JAMES

Then he came back to see me.

*

ABBEY

Double shit.

JAMES

He said you run that newspaper.

*

ABBEY

You don't even read it.

JAMES

Yes. I do keep up like they say.

*

ABBEY

You steal. Bet you download music without paying too. It's all stealing, but nobody gives a damn.

JAMES

Did I tell you I don't like reporters.

*

ABBEY

Let's not get all coy and first date just because I opened the door and let you in. I don't like this anymore than you do but you're here and we both know something the other one doesn't right now so let's have a cup of coffee and get it over with.

JAMES

Coffee's good. Thanks. How long did you say you knew Mr. Curtiss?

*

ABBEY

He was my biology teacher, then my high school principal, then my mayor, and yes, in between there was a small stretch of rumors about him and my mother, what else are you hunting for?

JAMES

You're good.

*

ABBEY

It's a small town. Everyone talks.

JAMES

So, Howard seems like a nice guy, huh?

*

ABBEY

This is creepy.

JAMES

I mean he doesn't seem like a dude that'd go off the rail and do something stupid

*

ABBEY

I think he used up his all his stupid points tonight.

JAMES

What'd you think when he told you what happened?

*

ABBEY

I assumed it was a misunderstanding.

JAMES

Is that what he said?

ABBEY

I assumed the manager saw him walk out with a bottle of wine and a box of crackers which Howard obviously had forgotten to pay for because he can't stop talking and shaking hands with every person in this town.

JAMES

His son died, right?

ABBEY

Ruptured his appendix.

JAMES

So you think that put the Mayor over?

ABBEY

His son died fifteen years ago. What happened tonight?

JAMES

I don't know about being a reporter, but being a cop on the street you got a few seconds to figure it out.

ABBEY

Howard's no criminal.

JAMES

First week on the job I read someone wrong. I don't like making mistakes.

ABBEY

Someone just made a mistake about his intention. You know, he didn't actually go there to steal. It jut happened.

JAMES

I shouldn't be here.

ABBEY

But you are.

JAMES

We shouldn't be talking.

ABBEY

We are.

JAMES

And he definitely shouldn't have come over here to see you.

ABBEY
And you.

JAMES *

Definitely not me.

ABBEY
He is like a mentor to me. You know...

JAMES *

I know what a mentor is!

ABBEY
More like an old friend and he needed to talk.

JAMES *

You're old friend was sweating and it was snowing and I thought he was going to be sick. Or have a heart attack or worse.

ABBEY
He had chest pains?

JAMES *

He said he was experiencing some chest pain.

ABBEY
And you called an ambulance.

JAMES *

We talked, he said the feeling had passed and then we had coffee.

ABBEY
He was feeling sick and you let him go?

JAMES *

He didn't want me to do anything else. Just get it over with, you know. First timers caught get sick and scared. He needed to talk and I was going off shift.

ABBEY
And you always listen to the person you've arrested

JAMES *

One fucked up night shouldn't mean so much but it did to him.

ABBEY
I'm impressed.

JAMES *

Let's get something straight. I didn't come here to impress you.

ABBEY

No, I can tell that but I still don't know why you are here.

JAMES

You think I messed this up, but it was him, don't you? *

ABBEY

I think there was a problem and you handled it the way you were supposed to in your world.

JAMES

My world? I came here to talk to you here in your house - your world - and that's a big deal for me- call my wife. She'll say - "Keith don't talk." So when I come here to talk, it's because I am as serious as a heart attack. *

ABBEY

Let's go over the facts.

JAMES

Okay. *

ABBEY

He came out of the store and you stopped him.

JAMES

They called me and I was waiting. *

ABBEY

He obviously forgot to pay -

JAMES

He fit the description. *

ABBEY

He had the wine and crackers.

JAMES

No receipt. *

ABBEY

No gun.

JAMES

No gun and yes, the man was old and scared. I saw that, but the manager was clear that the guy was taking the wine and alcohol is -- a crime. It was a crime scene. He was a criminal. I was a cop. *

ABBEY

Store management calls, you answered. Understood.

JAMES

And then he wouldn't stop talking. *

ABBEY
Howard talks.

JAMES *

Talk to kill you.

ABBEY

Everyone loves Howard.

JAMES *

He told me things he shouldn't. And then he asked you to find out what I had written up? Right?

ABBEY

What kind of things did he tell you?

JAMES *

The man needs help.

ABBEY

You think he's sick.

JAMES *

No one in his right mind would talk to the cop that way.

ABBEY

You think he's crazy? *

JAMES *

I'm not his doctor. I'm his cop. But I can tell you one thing. You don't wear a good pair of wool pants and leather shoes, a nice tie and an expensive jacket, take a bottle of cheap wine and crackers and then tell the cop this is not your first time. *

ABBEY

He's been caught before? *

JAMES *

He didn't say that anything about being caught. Non, I'm just repeating what he told me and that was real clear. He was not virgin. *

ABBEY

I want you to go, okay, my head is really hurting right now and I don't want to hear anything else about what Howard Curtiss told you tonight in that parking lot, okay? *

JAMES *

This was stupid.

ABBEY

Why would he say that?

JAMES *
Store Manager confirmed.

ABBEY
No, no, no!

JAMES *
He knew Howard real well.

ABBEY
(Turns up the music.)
Blah, blah, blah.

JAMES *
(Stops the music)
I can't take this home.

ABBEY *
I have this image of him in my head.

JAMES *
You put his picture on the front page and that picture is dead. That man is gone. You have the power. I had to report it. But I didn't put everything in it that he said and that's between him and God, see, that's the decision I made. What are you going to do?

ABBEY
You don't think he'd do something stupid over this?

JAMES *
He's got no place to go but this town.

ABBEY
Why would you care about him. You didn't go to school here.

JAMES *
Do I look like I graduated from your high school? Because you sure don't look like the girls I went to school with in Camden, New Jersey.

ABBEY *
He loved me, he came here a lot when I didn't have a father around, and yes, he was probably having sex with my mother who was his secretary. Anything else you need to know? *

JAMES *
I know what it feels like to be so scared your chest wants to fly apart. He felt that way tonight. From me. A mall beat cop just doing his duty on a Saturday night. Most weekends I got teeny weenies all hopped up on their first booze or sex or something makes them feel they can do anything.

But tonight I had a man who had done his life to a "T" and still I was making him want to die right in front of me because he stole a bottle of wine and some crackers. He stole them and he knew he was a bad boy. All man and all boy at once. And the hurt was so big it wanted to swallow both of us. I hated even patting him down but he was scary in his fear till I was worried he was packing something besides guilt. But no, it was all bad in here. In his heart. In his private self he was a bad man and there was no law breaking punishment anyone else had to give him. . His chest hurt and I thought "Please Jesus don't let this man die on my watch". Not that he is so much more worthy than the next perp I catch, but because he is no less worthy to have the dream die of who he is die so close to the end of it all. He couldn't keep it up till the end and I know how hard that must feel. Cause everyday I get up and make myself make a life for me and my wife and kids that I never knew. It scares me to think what I feel for him because it's what I feel for myself. You thought you knew him but you didn't. He knew himself and he prayed to get out of this life with no one else knowing that shame. No matter what he has done in his past, he won't do it again. Not after tonight. I want to be a good man tonight more than a good cop. He trusts you to do him right. He's got issues with you. A history. He called you a superstar. Said everyone could tell you were going places. You can be a good woman tonight too.

ABBEY

I'm living in my mother's house sitting on her furniture which I have barely moved since she died. I work at a newspaper which may not exist in a year and I don't have any idea what else I would be? I couldn't have a relationship with another human being if I tried. Or maybe I don't try. You are fortunate. There will always be criminals. I work at a newspaper which is like being a grave digger in a town where no one dies.

JAMES

Like you said, it's the holidays, no one wants to read bad news at the holidays. Even if it would sell papers. *

ABBEY

People won't believe it.

JAMES

Like you said, it's the holidays.
(Starts out the door.) *

ABBEY

I need to know everything.

JAMES

Only God knows everything. And he ain't a reporter or a cop. *

BLACKOUT.

SCENE FIVE.

HOWARD

I was sixteen when I wanted to be a biology teacher, just like Mr. Miller. He was the most inspiring teacher I had ever met. He could just stand at the front of the class and make me interested in what was coming next. It was a wonderful world, he said, if we just looked at it closely. It was better than life in that classroom, It was better than life. Right there and then I wanted to be like Mr. Miller. I wanted to be his acolyte, a new word I had just mastered. I tried to master one new word a week. I tried to do it every day but that was never possible. My brother Charles could master everything in a day. I was his modestly accomplished young brother and that is the way I wanted it to stay. Accomplished. I was always going to be his younger brother. Then he died. Just out of the blue. Something in his heart he was born with and no one knew til it set off like a rocket and whoosh - he was off to heaven. That's what the minister said. Whoosh. See him in the next life. It almost killed my mother and my father never really smiled the same way again. I suddenly became an only child. The oldest. The youngest. The only one. I studied twice as hard. Nothing was as easy for me as it was for my brother, but I tried my best. I met Carole and we married the month after graduation. She was going to be a music teacher but somewhere along the way she stopped playing music. I never asked her why. Not once in all these years. Three children, bridge with our best friends every other week. Dinner out and then cards. Later golf, though I have never been very good. No Music. We avoided fights about politics or things that might be too painful, like when our boy died. It wasn't like my brother all whoosh and off to heaven. Just a box and a boy off the back of a plane. I noticed then that people don't know what to say about death. It leaves them speechless which is why we need ministers and priests and rabbis to speak for us in all that terrible silence. People want to say something but nothing comes out of the hole in the middle of their faces that changes the dead boy in the ground. It's just the way. So you do your best and try to live a good life that people will remember you as a good person. That would be the whoosh in my own life. They would say when I died that Howard Curtiss had been a decent man, a good citizen. He would be missed. That is the epitaph I had written for myself. In stone I thought until tonight. Funny how that works out. Your heart gives out while your running down the football field. . Your appendix burst while your peddling your heart out in the mountains of France - your dreams fulfilled in an instant of ecstasy and then - whoosh. It's gone. Maybe it should have been me with the bad heart. My brother would never have taken anything from anyone in this life.

He would have been someone to be proud of right to the end.
He would have been a star. You could see it in his eyes.

SCENE SIX

ABBEY is sitting in the living room doing a puzzle and listening to her music on ear phones. There is a knock at the door. It is very faint. She looks up and then there is a silence and she goes back to her puzzle.

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

ABBEY

(opens the door to reveal
HOWARD standing there in his
suit, well groomed and stiff.)

Sorry, I was listening....

HOWARD

I know it's your day off. I called the office. They said you weren't there.

ABBEY

The place is a mess. I got into this puzzle. Makes no sense to have all one color. You can't find any clues.

(There is an awkward silence.)

Something to eat or drink? I made some really heavy muffins.

HOWARD

Now that it's appeared in the Philadelphia newspaper I assume you will be forced to print something.

ABBEY

It was buried in the back page.

HOWARD

It's still in print.

ABBEY

Yes.

HOWARD

You will have to print something.

ABBEY

I will. In the end, it's my job and you know you always told us to do our job's well.

HOWARD

I appreciate your honesty. No need to stay any longer.

ABBEY

Howard, it was a simple misdemeanor. Everyone will assume you simply made a mistake. Forgot to pay.

HOWARD

Otherwise engaged.

ABBEY

Yes, exactly. Everyone knows you.

HOWARD

Mr. Curtiss was simply not thinking.

ABBEY

Overlooked.

HOWARD

Maybe even a little dotty in the old beaner.

ABBEY

I don't think that.

HOWARD

What do you think?

ABBEY

It was a simple misdemeanor.

HOWARD

"Good citizen gone bad", was what the paper said.

ABBEY

That is crap journalism and they are a crap paper! No one should have even considered that kind of a headline.

HOWARD

Yours will be better.

ABBEY

I don't think I will be writing it.

HOWARD

You don't think or you don't want to say?

ABBEY

It's done. Move on. Your life isn't about that moment Howard. It was a million trillion zillion spaces of life that mattered, not that one bad night in a grocery store.

HOWARD

(Pause) How soon do you think it will appear?

ABBEY

Soon.

HOWARD

I need to prepare.

ABBEY

You can't let this thing ruin you.

HOWARD

I understand you can't stop it now. There's no one to blame except myself. I understand that Abbey.

ABBEY

You used to teach us about the meaning of life. Can't it be more than this piece of shit moment?

HOWARD

It should be more, of course. And I would teach that, of course.

ABBEY

You can't let this break you all apart. You can't. Your life is so much more. It meant so much to so many people. Like me. Look at me. I'm here and standing - even in this stupid life I've made - I've done it because of good people. You were one of those people. She loved you.

HOWARD

So you knew?

ABBEY

She never told me.

HOWARD

But you knew?

ABBEY

She was happy when you were together working, anything, just to be near you.

HOWARD

I thought no one knew. I thought it died with her.

ABBEY

I knew. I always knew. She was happy. You made her happy. No one else could do that.

HOWARD

You are a sweet girl, Abbey Winter. I love you like a daughter. I always have.

ABBEY

Then it's okay?

HOWARD

You did your best.

ABBEY

It was just a misdemeanor.

HOWARD

Of course.

ABBEY

No one will even care.

HOWARD

Thank you.

(HOWARD LEAVES.)

SCENE SIX

JAMES is at the door. *

JAMES *

OPEN UP BITCH! OPEN UP TRAITOR! OPEN UP KILLER OF MEN!

ABBEY

Whst the hell. Come in here.

JAMES *

I just came to talk. Not to drink so don't offer me anything, okay.

ABBEY

I'm sick. I have a sore throat. I didn't go into the office.

JAMES *

It's on the front page.

ABBEY

It was in the Philly paper. Howard knew it was coming out.

JAMES *

He knew you were going to put it on the front page with that headline and his picture?

ABBEY

I didn't know that part when he was here.

JAMES *

You bitch, you knew. u have always known it would end him.

ABBEY

No.

JAMES *

You have the power.

ABBEY
I didn't do the story.

JAMES *

You did.

ABBEY

I was home sick.

JAMES *

That doesn't mean shit. You knew.

ABBEY

Stop it!

JAMES *

I figured you'd buckle.

ABBEY

I got to put on my sweater. This weather is crazy.

JAMES *

I thought we had a deal.

ABBEY

We did. The Philadelphia papers did not. Once they printed it because you reported it.

JAMES *

I reported it because it was my job.

ABBEY

We reported it because it was our job.

JAMES *

Mayor caught shoplifting was your job or your joke? I never took you for a pussy reporter.

ABBEY

Fuck you.
(ABBEY swings at JAMES and falls over) *

JAMES *

You going to assault an officer of the law. Do it so you don't land in the hospital.

ABBEY

You're a fucking creep.

JAMES *

You're a fucking wimp.

ABBEY

I had to publish that story.

JAMES

Gun at your head?

ABBEY

What does it look like if the big city paper publishes the story about our own mayor, popular principal and teacher walking out with a bottle of cheap wine on a Saturday night and we don't cover it?

JAMES

Gutless.

ABBEY

Showing favoritism?

JAMES

I'm a cop, remember?

ABBEY

Like you don't ever do what you hate?

JAMES

Not a don't do nobody nothing to harm them full of bullshit philophizing reporter.

ABBEY

Reporter. Yes. Still a reporter. And that's what I will be until they fold my fucking paper.

JAMES

This story will kill him.

ABBEY

Don't you dare hang that on me.

JAMES

He is not strong enough.

ABBEY

You don't know him. He loved my mother and he never left his wife and my mother loved him back and they never told anyone.

JAMES

TRust me.

ABBEY

You didn't see him in the hallway.....cutting ribbons....

JAMES *
I know a man who hasn't got it anymore. I see them every day
in my neighborhood. And Camden and Riverton are the same on
that.

ABBEY
You're wrong.

JAMES *
You're scared.

ABBEY
I'm sick.

JAMES *
Be scared.

ABBEY
You're crazy.

JAMES *
You shut everything out don't you.

ABBEY
This is not about me.

JAMES *
You're right.

ABBEY
He is strong. I could see it in his eyes.

JAMES *
He is done.

ABBEY
You are scared but it isn't about Howard Curtiss.
What do you know about him? About me? About any fucking thing
besides arresting drunk kids and knocking up your wife.

JAMES *
I've been following him.

ABBEY
What?

JAMES *
I have been following him everywhere for the last two days.

ABBEY
You followed him?

JAMES *
I took two personal days. I did not call in sick.

ABBEY

Why?

JAMES

I can't tell you why. I just needed to do it.

ABBEY

What was he doing?

JAMES

He walks around the library. Drives around the park. He stands and looks at the river. A long time looking at that cold damn river.

ABBEY

The river is half frozen in this winter.

JAMES

I'm telling you. He's been waiting for the other shoe to drop and you just gave it to him. Right here on the fucking front page of your rag.

ABBEY

I had no other choice. Once it was reported in the Philly paper, I was toast.

JAMES

On the front page.

ABBEY

He's always been front page news. He loved it.

JAMES

This was different.

ABBEY

I can show you a smiling Howard Curtiss shaking hands on a hundred front pages of that paper and he loved them all.

JAMES

I thought we had a deal.

ABBEY

I did the best I could.

JAMES

Which means the black cop from Camden ruined this man's life.

ABBEY

I did not say that.

JAMES

You don't have to say it. You believe it.

ABBEY

You did your job. I did mine.

JAMES

Tell that to your friends. It doesn't work with me. I went to the wall. I kept stuff hidden. I lied for that man and you folded like a cheap date.

ABBEY

He's had more than most people in this life. He's been happy. Respected. This won't destroy him. You come in with an attitude. Life isn't what you think. Trust me, he's not walking into the Delaware River. This is no cheap novel.

JAMES

I don't know. Maybe you're right.

ABBEY

Trust me.

JAMES

I mean I hardly know this guy.

ABBEY

But you been stalking him.

JAMES

It sounds worse than it was.

ABBEY

You don't have enough work?

JAMES

I did it on my off time.

ABBEY

I didn't think cops had off time.

JAMES

You and my wife.

ABBEY

Want some cold pizza?

JAMES

Just so long as it ain't jelly donuts.

ABBEY

Seriously.

JAMES

Seriously, I could eat a cow.

ABBEY
How about cold pizza.

JAMES *
There is the plainest looking pizza I have ever seen.

JEN
Thanks.

JAMES *
Seriously.

ABBEY
SEriously, I am a boring person. Sometimes I even put myself to sleep. Obviously I have put a lot of men to sleep. But don't worry, their are no bodies in the basement. As a matter of fact, there is no basement.

JAMES *
You are funny.

ABBEY
Cop funny?

JAMES *
Funny funny.

ABBEY
I've been alone in this house so long I forgot what it sounds like to hear someone else laugh.

JAMES *
You don't laugh a lot when you're a cop.

ABBEY
You have a wife and kid.

JAMES *
Twins and a new baby.

ABBEY
I envy you.

JAMES *
I envy a long night in a hot tub with no kids at the door. See no one is ever happy.

ABBEY
(phone rings.)
No way.

JAMES *
I envy cave men. Quiet.

Nomads.	ABBEY	
	JAMES	*
Living on the top of a mountain.		
	ABBEY	
Yes!		
	ABBEY	
	(Phone rings)	
NO!		
	JAMES	*
Say it loud, baby. NO! to the phone!		
	ABBEY	
No.		
	JAMES	*
Say it louder. I am unavailable.		
	ABBEY	
I'm on the ice flow. Out in the river. Off grid.		
	(phone rings)	
	JAMES	*
Out on Mars.		
	ABBEY	
We will not be caught.		
	JAMES	*
Pizza!		
	ABBEY	
Yes, cold Pizza.		
	JAMES	*
You are free.		
	ABBEY	
Tell me now. Before you forget. Tell me what he said that you haven't told anyone else.		
	JAMES	*
No, no, no.		
	ABBEY	
Tell me. Please. Before that damn machine kicks in.		
	JAMES	*
I can't.		

ABBEY

We're in this up to our necks.

JAMES

No.

(The answering message clicks
on. It is ABBEY's voice.)

"Sorry you've missed me this time so leave your message and
we'll talk. BEEP."

VOICE

Abbey, it's Chuck, pick it up if you're there.

ABBEY

Fuck you.

(picks up the phone.)

I'm in the tub. Call right back. It's too cold to stand here.
(She slams the phone down.)

JAMES

Whoa.

ABBEY

We're in this together or we're not.

JAMES

We're not.

ABBEY

We are and you know it up to your eyeballs. No secrets.

JAMES

You should learn to close your eyes and your ears.

ABBEY

Now. Before that damn phone rings. Tell me.

JAMES

He did it for the thrill.

ABBEY

No.

JAMES

I knew you didn't want to hear it. That's why I didn't tell
you.

ABBEY

He couldn't be that man.

JAMES

He was two men caught and you just don't like the other one.
(ABBEY walks around wounded.)

Let him be. No one will know. I swear. You swear.
(Phone rings again.)

JAMES
Pick up, damn it.

ABBEY
(picking up the phone)
Chuck! Yes? No. What do you mean? I was in the bathroom.
You're sure it was Howard Curtiss with two "ts"?

JAMES
He saw that damn article on page one and you....

ABBEY
He's in the county hospital?

JAMES
Damn, he's still alive.

ABBEY
How bad? Oh. Thanks. Sure. Call me if you hear anything
else.

JAMES
What did he say?

ABBEY
Good news.

JAMES
Good news?

ABBEY
He had a stroke.

JAMES
A stroke?

ABBEY
He hit a tree but he's alive.

JAMES
That's a good thing.

ABBEY
It's a tragedy and that's good in my business.

JAMES
Damn, I don't understand your business.

ABBEY
He's made it, that's what I want to read on his lips. "I'm
home".

He talked about being a teacher astronaut the first year and then the shuttle happened and he never said it again. I want to think of Howard Curtiss standing there on the moon living his dream. Not Howard all in pieces. When he dies, and he will, I'll write a real front page picture and an editorial thanking him for the life he lived. Not the last five minutes of misery he suffered. What you told me dies in this room.

JAMES

He's not dead.

ABBEY

He can't speak. He can't move. They don't think it will change.

JAMES

Then he's happy.

ABBEY

And that's how he will be remembered.
(HOWARD IN A SPOTLIGHT.)

HOWARD

The important thing about studying biology is that it is the study of life. Life with all its possibilities. Dangerous? Yes. Changing. Yes. Forgiving? Not always in the way we can see with the naked eye. But life is always evolving. Perhaps we can't grasp the master design but we can study and appreciate its sheer power. Evolving. That's the best thing I can tell you about studying this semester. Study life. It's full of possibilities. A surprise every day. A new start everyday. That is the mystery and the majesty of being alive. That is why I love the study of Biology. And you will too.

- END OF PLAY -

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

2CAUGHT is a recently completed full length play exploring the role of building - or destroying - a life by perception.

Howard Curtiss has lived the outwardly perfect life of service and self.

But on the night the play opens, Howard is caught stealing a bottle of red wine and a box of white wafer crackers from the local grocery store in the township near where he has lived his life. Suddenly, the teacher, principal, mayor role that has guided his life seems meaningless. The question is whether this is a powerful enough character and situation to engage the audience immediately.

The tension within the play presently revolves around whether the article about this town "leader" will be on the front page of the local newspaper. A young woman Howard helped in school, Abbey Winter, must decide whether she can help or destroy this man by doing her job. Similarly, JAMES Johnson, an African American policeman from Camden feels drawn to help this man with whom he shares little in common. Or does he?

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