

GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

A Radio Play

by

Donald E. Baker

Suggested by the Career of D.C. Stephenson,
KKK Grand Dragon and Political Boss of Indiana in the 1920's.

Adapted by the Author
from his Stage Play of the Same Title

Duration: 1 Hour

Cast: 5M, 1F (Doubling)

The premiere of this audio adaptation of *Grand Dragon in Power*, directed by Lisa Lippincott, was performed before a live audience by The Radio Theatre Project at The Studio@620, St. Petersburg, Florida, on March 26, 2018. The cast included Jim Wicker, Christopher Rutherford, Mark Hanks, Bob Heitman, Dean Wick, Robin O'Dell, Mildred Mattos, and Foley artist Matt Cowley. That performance is available on SoundCloud.com.

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PLOT SUMMARY

When the Grand Dragon takes charge, nothing is sacred and no woman is safe.

In the 1920's, Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson rises to power in Indiana on a platform of anti-immigration, anti-Catholicism, and traditional Protestant moral values. He controls the state government through a puppet governor.

The *Indianapolis Times* leads the resistance to Stephenson, but he counters their influence with a newspaper of his own—"There, my friends, is where you will find the truth. There, and there alone." Soon Stephenson begins to believe in his own invincibility. "I am the law in Indiana," he brags.

But Stephenson has a tragic flaw. In public a paragon of virtue, in private he is a sexual predator. He is finally brought down only when he is convicted of assaulting and murdering a young state employee. In a final act of vengeance, Stephenson takes the Indiana political establishment down with him.

This is a "history play" but with startling parallels to the current politics in America.

CHARACTERS (5 M, 1F)

MALE 1	<u>D.C. STEPHENSON</u>	Age 34, KKK Grand Dragon
MALE 2	<u>JOHN NIBLACK</u>	Age 23, reporter
MALE 3	<u>EARL GENTRY</u> <u>STANLEY HILL</u> <u>MR. OBERHOLTZER</u> <u>WILL REMY</u>	Age 30+, Stephenson bodyguard Age 35, Madge Oberholtzer's boyfriend Age 65, Madge's father Age 30-35, prosecuting attorney
MALE 4	<u>ED JACKSON</u> <u>ASA SMITH</u> <u>SHERIFF</u> <u>EPH INMAN</u>	Age 50, Governor of Indiana Age 50, lawyer Age 50+ Age 50+, defense attorney
MALE 5	<u>ORCHESTRA LEADER</u> <u>TRAIN CONDUCTOR</u> <u>JUDGE</u> <u>PENITENTIARY GUARD</u>	Age 50+
FEMALE 1	<u>MADGE OBERHOLTZER</u> <u>EUNICE</u> <u>IDA KLEIN</u> <u>NEWSBOY</u>	Age 25, Stephenson victim Age 30, secretary Age 30, reporter Adolescent

Note: If a second female actor is available, she might read Madge and the other might take the other female roles.

SETTING

Various locations in Indiana

TIME

The stifling, monochrome 1920's of the American Midwest.

SCENES

- 1: Kokomo, Indiana, City Park, July 4, 1923
- 2: Speaker's Platform, Immediately Following
- 3: Kokomo Hotel, Later That Afternoon
- 4: *Indianapolis Times* Offices, July 11, 1923
- 5: Hotel Ballroom, January 12, 1925
- 6: Stephenson's Office, March 15, 1925
- 7: Train Sleeping Room, March 16, 1925, 1 a.m.
- 8: Hammond Hotel Room, March 16, 1925, 10 a.m.
- 9: Hammond Hotel Room, Later That Day
- 10: Stephenson's Office, March 23, 1925
- 11: Oberholtzer House, March 28, 1925
- 12: Indianapolis Street Corner, April 20, 1925
- 13: Hamilton County Courthouse Men's Room/Press Room, October 29, 1925
- 14: Courtroom, October 29-November 14, 1925
- 15: Prison Cell, October 25, 1926

CAST BREAKDOWN BY SCENE

Scene	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	F1
1	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry			
2	Stephenson		Gentry			
3	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry			
4		Niblack				Eunice
5	Stephenson		Hill	Jackson	Orchestra Leader	Madge
6	Stephenson					Madge
7	Stephenson				Train Conductor	Madge
8	Stephenson					Madge
9	Stephenson		Gentry			Madge
10	Stephenson	Niblack		Smith		
11		Niblack	Oberholtzer	Smith		Madge
12		Niblack				Newsboy
13		Niblack		Sheriff		Klein
14	Stephenson	Niblack	Remy	Sheriff/Inman	Judge	
15	Stephenson	Niblack			Guard	

SCENE 1: KOKOMO, INDIANA, CITY PARK

JULY 4, 1923

MUSIC: VINTAGE RECORDING OF “BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA.”

NIBLACK: Reporter’s notebook: Dateline: Kokomo, Indiana, July 4, 1923. Byline: John Niblack, *Indianapolis Times* political reporter. In a crowded park on a hot, humid Indiana Fourth of July, thousands of Hoosiers swelter in their Ku Klux Klan robes. Despite their discomfort, they eagerly await the arrival of the man known only as Steve, their beloved Grand Dragon.

SOUND: AMBIENT CROWD NOISE.

MUSIC (OVER): BRASS BAND PLAYING “AMERICA (MY COUNTRY, ‘TIS OF THEE).”

SOUND: APPROACHING OLD-TIME AIRPLANE.

SOUND: (OVER): CROWD ROAR

SOUND (OVER): OLD-TIME AIRPLANE BUZZING CROWD.

FADE.

SOUND: TWO MEN’S FOOTSTEPS APPROACHING

NIBLACK: Mr. Stephenson! John Niblack, *Indianapolis Times*. How about a word for the press before you go on stage?

STEPHENSON: I always have a moment for the press, even the *Indianapolis Times*. My people will wait. Niblack, did you say? What sort of name is that?

NIBLACK: Scotch-Irish.

STEPHENSON: Celtic, then. Protestant?

NIBLACK: Presbyterian.

STEPHENSON: Almost as good as Anglo-Saxon. Do you know my associate? You can just call him Earl.

GENTRY: Don’t forget, kid—you and the rest of the press corps signed agreements not to use our Grand Dragon’s real name.

NIBLACK: I remember. (SMART-ALECKY) Mr. Dragon, then.

GENTRY: Wait a minute. Who you think you're talking to?

STEPHENSON: It's all right, Earl. You have questions, Mr. Niblack?

NIBLACK: Sir, I hear some Republican politicians worry the Klan may alienate the Negro vote.

STEPHENSON: I can assure my very good friends in the Party of Lincoln that the Klan in Indiana will do nothing to disturb good submissive Negro voters. We let our brethren in the South deal with the "Negro problem."

NIBLACK: You don't believe we in the North have a "Negro problem"?

STEPHENSON: Most Hoosiers in the crossroads hamlets have never seen a Negro outside of a minstrel show. They've never seen a Jew, either. Most of *our* bankers are Methodists. Catholics, on the other hand...well, just listen to my speech, Mr. Niblack. Afterwards I'll be available at our headquarters downtown if you have more questions.

NIBLACK: I'll see you there, then.

STEPHENSON: Earl, why don't you keep our young friend company while I freshen up and get into my robe?

GENTRY: You go ahead, Mr. Stephenson. I'll watch him.

SOUNDS: FOOTSTEPS RETREATING

GENTRY: You got a death wish, kid?

NIBLACK: Death wish?

GENTRY: That "Mr. Dragon" business. A word to the wise: ever'body 'round Stephenson has a gun, and we're willin' to use 'em when we see some palooka disrespectin' our boss.

NIBLACK: You included?

GENTRY: Me especially.

NIBLACK: It just all seems so silly. We all know who Stephenson is but everybody has to pretend they don't. And what's with the robes, the masks, the secrecy? Not to mention all the weird names for the officers—klegals, kligrapps, and kludds who meet in klonvocation in klaverns? All those "k" sounds.

- GENTRY: Why you think this little shindig's bein' held in Kokomo? Anyhow, what's the differ'nce between the Klan and the Masons or the Odd Fellas? They all got secret rituals and special titles and outfits.
- NIBLACK: Well, Earl, the regalia of those other fraternal orders don't include boxes of matches and cans of kerosene and they don't go around burning crosses. I will say Stephenson's a master of stagecraft, flying in low over the crowd like that.
- GENTRY: Yeah, he knows how to get the rubes charged up. He says prophets can't descend from the heavens in a fiery chariot no more. But nowadays a bright, shiny airplane works just as well.
- SOUND: VINTAGE AIRPLANE APPROACHING THEN FADING INTO THE DISTANCE.
- NIBLACK: Looks like the plane's leaving. Stephenson's not flying back to Indianapolis?
- GENTRY: Nah. He'll return home in a differ'nt fiery chariot, one manufactured by the Packard Corporation.
- NIBLACK: The pinnacle of luxury.
- GENTRY: Nothing but the best is good enough for Stephenson. Whether you're talking about his car or his wardrobe or his women. Especially his women. (BEAT) I best get myself up on the platform. Ceremony's about to start. Oh, and our little conversation, it's off the record too, a'course.
- NIBLACK: There is such a thing as freedom of the press, you know.
- GENTRY: You got any idea how many subscribers to your *Indianapolis Times* are Klan members?
- NIBLACK: No.
- GENTRY: No you don't. And your editor don't. And your publisher don't. But Stephenson—he knows. You can take that to the bank, kid. He knows.

SCENE 2: SPEAKER'S PLATFORM

IMMEDIATELY FOLLOWING

SOUND: CROWD NOISES. FADE.

GENTRY: Brother Klansmen!! Wives, sisters, children! I give you our exalted leader, our beloved Brother Steve, the Grand Dragon of the Indiana Realm of the Invisible Empire of the Ku Klux Klan!

SOUND: CROWD ROARS IN WELCOME. FADE AS STEPHENSON SPEAKS.

STEPHENSON: Fellow Klansmen! As I look out over this glorious sea of white, extending as far as the eye can see, it fills me with joy so many of you have brought your wives and children to witness this historic gathering. Our women are the vessels through which we insure the purity of the white race. That is why God has laid a heavy obligation on white Christian men like us. We must defend our weak and trusting women from smooth-talking deceivers who would lure them into unclean passions.

SOUNDS: CROWD APPLAUSE

STEPHENSON (CONT.): You may be surprised to learn I was just talking with a representative of that poor excuse for journalism, the (CONTEMPTUOUSLY) *Indianapolis Times*.

SOUND: CROWD BOOS

STEPHENSON (CONT.): To help their pitiful circulation numbers, that miserable rag has begun a crusade against us. You will not read accurate stories about us in the *Times* or in newspapers like it. That is why we have begun publishing our own newspaper. We call it "*The Fiery Cross*," named after the glorious symbol of our movement. There, my friends, is where you will find the truth. There, and there alone. (BEAT) My brothers, our enemies call us "Bigots in Bedsheets."

SOUND: CROWD BOOS.

STEPHENSON (CONT.): But when I look out at this magnificent multitude, I do not see bigots! I see patriots! I see men willing to do whatever they must to preserve the precious liberties handed down to us by our white, Protestant forefathers.

SOUND: CROWD CHEERS.

STEPHENSON (CONT.): Today our liberties are threatened by traitors on our very doorsteps. Our Roman Catholic neighbors—immigrant Irish, Italians, Poles—all of them are plotting to take over this great

STEPHENSON (CONT.): Protestant nation. They are stockpiling weapons in their church basements. They are turning their steeples and belfries into watch towers and sniper's nests. They intend to force every one of us to bow down to their foreign Pope! And what do our politicians do to stop it? Nothing!!

It is clear, my brothers! Only the Ku Klux Klan can prevent our country from being stolen away from its rightful inheritors.

SOUND: CROWD CHEERS.

STEPHENSON (CONT.): Fellow Klansmen, soon our burning crosses will illuminate every crossroad in the land. Guided by those pillars of fire, we will bring our people in triumph through the Valley of the Shadow.

March with me, brothers and sisters. March with me and I will lead you into a great and glorious future! A future that is ordained for us by God Himself! A future that is white! A future that is Protestant! A future that is one hundred per cent American!

SOUND: CROWD ROARS.

MUSIC (OVER): BRASS BAND PLAYING "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS."
FADE.

SCENE 3: KOKOMO HOTEL

LATER THAT AFTERNOON

GENTRY: That was a terrific speech, boss.

STEPHENSON: Thanks, Earl. One of the great orations in history, if I do say so myself. But after all that crowd adulation, this hotel meeting room is a blessed oasis of quiet.

SOUND: DOOR KNOCKING; DOOR OPENING.

STEPHENSON (CONT.): Ah, Niblack! What did you think of my speech?

SOUND: DOOR CLOSING.

NIBLACK: An impressive performance, Mr. Grand Dragon.

STEPHENSON: Glad you liked it. That speech was just the beginning. Tonight Klan truths will light up the darkness. Our masses

STEPHENSON (CONT.): will march through the city in a magnificent torchlight parade. Afterwards we'll put on the largest fireworks exhibition ever seen and cap it off with the lighting of a cross sixty feet tall. I hope you and the *Times* publish an accurate account so your readers can see how Klansmen enjoy a patriotic American holiday.

NIBLACK: Well, sir, I'm sure our readers are already aware the Klan does its best work in the dead of night. But you can always count on accurate reporting from the (IMITATING STEPHENSON'S DELIVERY) *Indianapolis Times*.

STEPHENSON: Ah, if only that were so. Now, what would you like to know?

NIBLACK: Well, first, do you have a comment on the immense size of today's crowd? Some people are estimating 10,000 people. They say it's the largest Klan rally in history.

STEPHENSON: Oh, that estimate of only 10,000 is very low. When I was seeing it from the air, it looked to me to be at least 50,000. Maybe more. No doubt newspapers like yours will use the lowest number they can get away with.

NIBLACK: Speaking of numbers, I understand Klan membership in Indiana is growing by leaps and bounds.

STEPHENSON: Earl, you have the latest figures?

GENTRY: Sure, boss. Last I saw we're up to 250,000 members and we're still growin' by 2,000 every week.

NIBLACK: So, basically a quarter of all the white Protestant men in the state!

GENTRY: When you add in our auxiliaries—Women of the Klan, Junior Klan for boys, Triple-K Club for girls—our total numbers get up to nearly half a million.

NIBLACK: Impressive.

STEPHENSON: I certainly don't want to take *all* the credit for our successes.

NIBLACK: Sure you do. But don't worry, when I write my story I'll give credit where credit is due. ... Mr. Grand Dragon ...

STEPHENSON: Why don't we skip the formality? You can just call me "Steve." All my friends do.

NIBLACK: If it's all the same to you, I'll stick to "Mr. Grand Dragon."
Let me just get all my other questions out there and you can take them in whatever order you like.

First: What do you actually plan to do with the Catholics, Negroes, and Jews? Run them out of the country? Or can they stay here in some kind of second-class citizenship?

Second: It's common knowledge Indiana Secretary of State Ed Jackson plans to run for governor next year. Has he made any deals with the Klan—or with you personally—to gain your support?

And finally, Mr. Stephenson, how much money do you make out of your Klan activities? Dun and Bradstreet says you're worth at least 900,000 dollars, but I imagine you'll say that figure is low.

STEPHENSON: Niblack, you can just stop right there. Those questions tell me you're part of the national conspiracy against the Klan. I can also see you're a bigot.

NIBLACK: *I'm the bigot?*

STEPHENSON: If you're not for us, you're against us. Earl, get him out of here.

EARL: C'mon, kid. You heard the man.

SOUND: A SCUFFLE.

NIBLACK: (V.O.) Get your hands off me you big gorilla.

EARL: He said get out!

SOUND: SCUFFLE ENDS. DOOR SLAMS.

EARL (CONT.): Stupid punk.

STEPHENSON: Earl, first thing tomorrow I want you to call the editor of our *Fiery Cross* newspaper. Tell him I think we've been too easy on the *Times*. I want him to start hitting them hard. Tell our people any paper that's against the Klan must be anti-American. Tell them the *Times* must be conspiring with the Pope. Say it's rumored their owners are Bolsheviks. *Jewish* Bolsheviks. Tell him I want him to lay it on thick.

SOUND: TRANSITION MUSIC.

SCENE 4: INDIANAPOLIS TIMES OFFICES

JULY 11, 1923

SOUND: TYPEWRITERS, FADE.

SOUND: OLD-TIME TELEPHONE RING.

EUNICE: *Indianapolis Times* office. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? You object to our editorials about the Ku Klux Klan? ... Very well, when would you like us to stop delivery. ... Immediately? Of course. ... Excuse me? ... You think we should take our newspaper and go where? ... Really, madam, that's pretty strong language ... Hello? Hello?

SOUND: TELEPHONE HANG UP.

NIBLACK: Morning, Eunice. Bad day already?

EUNICE: Good morning, Mr. Niblack. One more of your anti-Klan stories and the only thing this newspaper will be good for is lighting the kindling at the foot of their crosses. And the language they're using over the phone! Words no good Christian ever learned in Sunday school.

NIBLACK: Good Christians are the bedrock of Klan support. There may be rumors that Stephenson's a drinker and a womanizer. You might hear whispers about wild parties at his mansion. Still, the church people think he was sent by God Himself to defend their Protestant way of life.

EUNICE: What's that under your arm?

NIBLACK: Latest issue of the *Fiery Cross* newspaper. They've stationed one of their newsboys right outside our front door. You know there were 200,000 people at that Klan rally in Kokomo?

EUNICE: Your story said 10,000.

NIBLACK: Nope. Says here 200,000. If the *Fiery Cross* prints it, it must be so.

SOUND: NEWSPAPER RUSTLING.

NIBLACK (CONT.): Of course, here's yet another editorial against the *Times*. And, surprise, surprise, they're endorsing Secretary of State Ed Jackson for governor. If Jackson wins, it'll give

NIBLACK (CONT.) Stephenson control of both the state government *and* the Republican Party.

EUNICE: Aren't they the same thing?

SOUND: OLD TIME TELEPHONE RING.

NIBLACK: Another one of our fans, no doubt. I'll see you later, Eunice.

EUNICE: (FADING) *Indianapolis Times* office. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? ... You believe the *Times* is treating the Klan unfairly? ...

MUSIC: DANCE ORCHESTRA FINISHING PLAYING A VINTAGE TUNE
PUBLISHED BEFORE 1924, SUCH AS "IT HAD TO BE
YOU"

ORCHESTRA LEADER: Ladies and gentlemen. The orchestra thanks you for allowing us to provide music at this prestigious inaugural ball. And we wish also to congratulate Mr. Edward Jackson on his election as the thirty-second governor of Indiana.

SOUND: POLITE APPLAUSE.

ORCH. L. (CONT.): The boys and I will take a short break now. We'll be back shortly for your listening and dancing pleasure.

JACKSON: Well, Stephenson, what do you want? A waiter said you wanted to see me. You know, since I became governor, most people approach *me*. They don't summon me into their presence.

STEPHENSON: Jackson, just get off your high horse and sit down. And remember who's really in charge. The election doesn't change a thing between us. Not a thing.

JACKSON: You didn't have to make a public demonstration of it. That's all.

STEPHENSON: I want you to come to my office tomorrow.

JACKSON: Me. Come to *your* office.

STEPHENSON: Of course. Just like always. Now that I have you safely elected—along with the best legislature money can buy—I've got a few bills I want passed.

MADGE: (CLOSE) Stanley, you promised if I came with you, you'd introduce me to Governor Jackson.

STANLEY: (CLOSE) Be patient, Madge. He's sitting right over there with D.C. Stephenson. I'll introduce you as soon as he goes back to his own table.

MADGE: (CLOSE) Oh, no! I want to meet Mr. Stephenson, too. The gossip around the Statehouse makes him sound fascinating. They say he's the power behind the throne. They say all the politicians are afraid of him because he's got little black boxes full of incriminating dirt about all of them. I want to find out what he's really like.

STANLEY: (CLOSE) *They* also say he's something of a lady's man. I don't think—

MADGE: (CLOSE) Please, Stanley. I can take care of myself.

STANLEY: (CLOSE) Oh, all right. You know I can't ever say no to you. (NORMAL) Excuse us, gentlemen. We're sorry to intrude. I'm Stanley Hill. When I invited this young lady to accompany me tonight, I sort of promised her she'd meet some important people. Since you are the most important people in the room, here we are. I hope you don't mind.

STEPHENSON: Always happy to meet a gentleman with an attractive young lady on his arm. Right, Governor?

JACKSON: As long as my wife doesn't notice. And speaking of Mrs. Jackson, I'd better be getting back to our table before she starts to think you're holding me hostage. Nice to meet you, Mr. Hill. And Miss...

MADGE: Oberholtzer. Madge Oberholtzer. You might say I'm one of your employees, Governor. I work in the State Department of Public Instruction.

JACKSON: Charmed, I'm sure, Miss Oberholtzer. It's always nice to meet one of our dedicated civil servants. Now if you'll excuse me.

STEPHENSON: Remember, Governor. We have an appointment tomorrow.

JACKSON: I'm sure you won't let me forget it.

STANLEY: And, Madge, this is Mr. D.C. Stephenson.

MADGE: I'm so happy to meet you, Mr. Stephenson. I told Mr. Hill I particularly hoped I'd meet you this evening.

STEPHENSON: Is that so? Well, since I've been abandoned, why don't you join me here at my table?

MADGE: We'd be delighted, wouldn't we Stanley.

STANLEY: It wouldn't be good for us to take up Mr. Stephenson's valuable time, Madge. He must have a lot of other people he needs to talk to.

STEPHENSON: I can't think of any right this minute. Mr. Hill, do you think you could go find us some refreshment?

HILL: There's a waiter. I'll call him over.

STEPHENSON: No, I think it'd be better if you go scout out the buffet table yourself. You're sure to know what Miss Oberholtzer would like.

MADGE: Yes, please, Stanley. I'll be fine here with Mr. Stephenson.

HILL: Well, if you say so. Please excuse me, Mr. Stephenson. I'll be right back, Madge.

STEPHENSON: Now, Miss Oberholtzer, where did you say you worked?

MADGE: The Department of Public Instruction, Mr. Stephenson. I wish I could have talked longer with the Governor. We've heard rumors his budget will cut positions in our office.

STEPHENSON: Well, Miss Oberholtzer, I may have some influence with the governor. I don't think you'll have to worry about losing *your* job.

MADGE: Oh, thank you, Mr. Stephenson. My parents will be so relieved. They need my paycheck to make ends meet. And please, call me Madge.

STEPHENSON: And you should call me Steve. All my friends do. And I hope we'll become good friends. Very good friends, indeed.

ORCHESTRA LEADER: Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your patience. To start off our next set, we'd like to play for you that old favorite, "Let Me Call You Sweetheart."

SOUND: DANCE ORCHESTRA PLAYING "LET ME CALL YOU SWEETHEART."

STEPHENSON: (V.O.) Madge, may I ask you for this dance?

MADGE: (V.O.) Of course...Steve...I'm honored.

STEPHENSON: (V.O.) Oh, no. The pleasure will be all mine.

SOUND: DANCE ORCHESTRA FADES.

SCENE 6: STEPHENSON'S OFFICE

MARCH 15, 1925

SOUND: OLD TIME TELEPHONE RING.

SOUND: PICKING UP TELEPHONE.

STEPHENSON: Hello. This is Stephenson.

MADGE: (D) Steve, It's Madge.

STEPHENSON: Madge, in the two months we've been dating, how many times have I told you not to call me at the office.

MADGE: (D) I sorry, Steve, but I just found out about something, and I really need to talk to you.

STEPHENSON: Whatever it is, make it quick.

MADGE: (D) It's not something we can discuss over the phone. Besides, I want to see your face when I tell you. I'll come to your house tonight after supper.

STEPHENSON: I have a meeting this evening. It may be after ten o'clock before I get home.

MADGE: (D) It doesn't matter how late. Just call me when you get in, and I'll come right over.

STEPHENSON: Oh, all right, if it's really that important. But for now, *good-bye*, Madge.

MADGE: (D) I can't wait to see you. Good-bye, Dear.

STEPHENSON: And how many times have I told you not to call me that?

SOUND: TELEPHONES HANGING UP.

SCENE 7: TRAIN SLEEPING ROOM**MARCH 16, 1925, 1 A.M.**SOUND: STEAM LOCOMOTIVE WHISTLE.

TRAIN CONDUCTOR: Ladies and gentlemen, this is the last call for Monon Railroad train number 36, the “Midnight Special,” service to Chicago, Illinois, via Frankfort, Rensselaer, and Hammond, Indiana. Last call, train number 36.

SOUND: STEAM LOCOMOTIVE WHISTLE.SOUND: STEAM LOCOMOTIVE GETTING UP SPEED. FADE UNDER DIALOGUE.

STEPHENSON: C’mon, Madge. Try to stay on your feet.

MADGE: (SLURRING) Wh-where are we? It’s like everything’s moving.

CONDUCTOR: Can I help you, sir? Is the young lady all right?

STEPHENSON: Just a little under the weather, Mr. Conductor. Where’s our sleeping room?

CONDUCTOR: If I could see your ticket. ... Oh, it’s this one right here.

SOUND: COMPARTMENT DOOR OPENING.

STEPHENSON: Thank you. C’mon, Madge, here we go, right through here..

CONDUCTOR: Will there be anything else? If the lady needs a doctor, we happen to have one riding in the next car—

STEPHENSON: No, that’ll be all. She just needs to lie down. Thank you!

SOUND: COMPARTMENT DOOR CLOSING.

MADGE: (SLURRING) What’s happening? Why are we moving?

STEPHENSON: We’re on the train to Lake County. Now, get in that berth.

MADGE: No. No, I don’t want to.

STEPHENSON: Get in that bed, you stupid woman! ... I’m going to teach you nobody—nobody!—makes a fool of D.C. Stephenson.

SOUND: TRAIN NOISES BUILD.

MADGE: (V.O.) What are you doing! No! Let me alone. No, stop!
Steve, you're hurting me!

SOUND: A WOMAN'S SCREAM BLENDING INTO THE WAIL OF A STEAM
LOCOMOTIVE WHISTLE.

SCENE 8: HOTEL ROOM

MARCH 16, 1925, 10 A.M.

STEPHENSON: Madge, honey, wake up.

MADGE: (EXHAUSTED) Steve? Where are we.

STEPHENSON: We're in Hammond, baby. Nice comfy hotel suite. We got
off the train in Lake County, just like I told you we were
going to.

MADGE: The train! Oh, God!

STEPHENSON: I'm so sorry, honey. I know I treated you horribly.

MADGE: How can I ever tell my mother what happened? What am I
going to do?

STEPHENSON: I'm a brute, that's all. But I'll try to make it up to you. Maybe
we could get married like you always wanted. Would you
like that? What do you say?

MADGE: Marry you?

STEPHENSON: Yeah. You can be Mrs. D.C. Stephenson and I swear I'll
never lay a hand on you in anger again.

MADGE: *Now* you want me to marry you?

STEPHENSON: We could even do it today if you want.

MADGE: I've done everything I could think of to get you to marry me.
And now ...

STEPHENSON: Yeah. Today. When Earl gets here from Indianapolis with the
car, we can drive over to the courthouse in Crown Point and
we can get married.

MADGE: Now? After you've ruined me? Oh, but you still don't really
want to marry me. You just want to save your own skin.
You're afraid the world'll find out what a beast you are.

STEPHENSON: No, Madge... baby ... it's not like that.

MADGE: Beating up a woman. Biting her like some animal. Even your precious Klansmen and pet politicians would turn their backs on you. No self-respecting woman would even speak to you. (PAUSE) I need a hat.

STEPHENSON: A hat?

MADGE: No lady can be seen in public without a hat, you know that. If somebody saw us, they'd wonder what sort of woman you're with. Little would they know.

STEPHENSON: Yeah. Sure. Anything you need. I'll have Earl take you to a millinery shop. Get whatever hat you like. And pick up anything else you need. Just tell him. I'm so sorry, baby. But you'll be okay. Get some rest, comb your hair, put on a little makeup, and you'll be fine. I promise. You'll be fine.

SOUND: TRANSITION MUSIC.

SCENE 9: HOTEL ROOM

LATER THAT DAY

GENTRY: O.K., boss. Car's downstairs, all gassed up and ready to go.

STEPHENSON: About time, Earl. Remember to keep to the speed limit on the way back to Indianapolis. I don't want some cop stopping us to give us a ticket. Go tell Madge to get herself ready. She's in the next room.

SOUND: POLITE KNOCKING

GENTRY: Miss Oberholtzer? Madge?

SOUND: DOOR OPENING:

GENTRY (CON'T): Madge? C'mon, wake up, it's time to go. ... What's this? ... Oh, heck no! ... Boss, get in here! She won't wake up! Looks like she took pills.

STEPHENSON: What're you talking about? ... Madge! Madge, you foolish girl, what have you done?

MADGE: (MOANS)

STEPHENSON (CON'T): What'd she take?

GENTRY: Bottle says mercury bichloride. Should be eighteen pills. Looks like she took six.

STEPHENSON: Madge! Madge! Wake up, honey. ... Where'd she get mercury bichloride?

GENTRY: (RELUCTANTLY) Uh, well...After the hat shop, she said she needed lip rouge. Had me stop at a drug store. Maybe she got it there.

STEPHENSON: How would she do that without you seeing her? ... Earl?

GENTRY: I didn't see a back entrance, so I went out on the sidewalk for a smoke while she was pickin' out her cosmetics and stuff.

STEPHENSON: A smoke? You went out for a smoke. You idiot. What if she'd told the pharmacist to call the cops?

GENTRY: She seemed real calm and cooperative. And she didn't call the cops, did she.

STEPHENSON: No. She just bought herself a nice little bottle of poison while your back was turned. Madge!

MADGE: (WHIMPERS)

STEPHENSON: Madge, baby, you're going to be all right. We're going to take you home and you'll be all right. ... Earl, go down and drive the car around to the alley. Then come back and give me a hand. We'll take her down the back stairs.

GENTRY: You sure you don't want to get her to a hospital, get her stomach pumped or something? At least get a doctor?

STEPHENSON: No! No doctors. Too many questions. We'll take her back to Indianapolis and decide what to do on the way.

MADGE: (GROGGILY) I want to die. Can't you just leave me alone and let me die?

STEPHENSON: You're not going to die. I won't let you. You know me, baby. I can fix anything. Anything.

SOUND: TRANSITION MUSIC.

SCENE 10: STEPHENSON'S OFFICE

MARCH 23, 1925

SOUND: KNOCKING.

STEPHENSON: Come in.

SOUND: DOOR.

NIBLACK: Good afternoon, Mr. Dragon.

STEPHENSON: Hello, Niblack. Long time no see. Who's that with you.

SMITH: Mr. Stephenson, I'm Asa Smith.

STEPHENSON: I recognize you now. Republican lawyer. Not one of ours, though.

SMITH: Not one of yours, no sir.

STEPHENSON: Well, since you're here, go ahead and sit down but don't make yourselves too comfortable. I'm a busy man. I can maybe give you three minutes.

NIBLACK: You know Miss Madge Oberholtzer.

STEPHENSON: I've taken her out a few times.

NIBLACK: I had a very disturbing call from Miss Oberholtzer's father. He knew my byline from the *Times* and asked me to help him find an attorney without any Klan affiliations.

STEPHENSON: Your three minutes are almost up.

NIBLACK: Mr. Oberholtzer told me Madge left their house at 10 p.m. on March 15 in response to a call from you. They became very concerned when Madge did not return that night, or the next day, or the night after that.

STEPHENSON: Madge is an adult. Surely she can stay out overnight without her parent's permission.

NIBLACK: About noon on the seventeenth, a man arrived at the Oberholtzers' carrying Madge, who was all battered and bruised from head to toe. There were even open wounds. The man *claimed* Madge had been in an automobile accident. I put the Oberholtzer's in touch with Mr. Smith.

STEPHENSON: I'm grieved to hear this terrible news. But, Mr. Smith, I don't see how I'm involved.

- SMITH: Come now, Mr. Stephenson. Miss Oberholtzer told us what really happened. You assaulted this girl. You beat her. You bit her for heaven's sakes! Then you kept her captive and refused to obtain medical help.
- STEPHENSON: She must be delusional. Never happened.
- SMITH: If she recovers—and I repeat, *if* she recovers—she will need to move far away.
- NIBLACK: Her reputation will be destroyed when word gets out about this ungodly episode.
- SMITH: The Oberholtzer's are not in a position to provide what their daughter needs. You, on the other hand, are well able to do right by her.
- STEPHENSON: So, Smith, it's money you're after. I might have known. And, Niblack, I suppose you have a juicy story ready to publish if I don't cooperate.
- NIBLACK: Something like that.
- STEPHENSON: Look you two, I'm warning you, I've been blackmailed by experts. Amateurs like you guys can't get away with it. Besides, why should I pay anything? It's only her word against mine.
- SMITH: Oh, I suspect we can find support for Madge's account. Your face isn't unknown in this state, despite your habit of wearing masks in public.
- STEPHENSON: You'll never touch me. As you know, I have friends in high places, very high places indeed.
- NIBLACK: I've interviewed a lot of your so-called friends. Off the record, of course. I think you'd be surprised how eager some of them might be to get out from under your thumb.
- STEPHENSON: Hang on a minute. Smith, you said "if" she recovers.
- SMITH: Her doctor says she is very weak. If any of the wounds you inflicted become infected, she will most probably not survive. Then no amount of money or influence will protect you.
- STEPHENSON: Well, not to be callous about it, but if she dies you have no case. She couldn't testify against me from the grave.

SMITH: I understand you brag you're the law in Indiana. But apparently you have no idea what miracles may be possible in an Indiana courtroom.

SOUND: OLD-TIME TELEPHONE RING.

STEPHENSON: Hello. This is Stephenson. ... Yeah, he's here. Smith, it's your office. They say it's important.

SMITH: Hello, this is Asa Smith. ... Thank you.

SOUND: HANGING UP.

SMITH (CON'T): Well, Stephenson, it looks like we've wasted your time. Miss Oberholtzer has taken a turn for the worse and her doctor now believes her recovery is impossible. Her parents are ordering me to see you are prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law. The *real* law in Indiana, Mr. Stephenson. Good day to you, sir. We'll see you in court.

NIBLACK: And in the newspapers, of course. I can't wait to see how your *Fiery Cross* tries to spin this.

STEPHENSON: My supporters will stick to me through thick and thin. They won't believe anything you print. Now get out. Get out of my office.

SOUND: TRANSITION MUSIC.

SCENE 11: OBERHOLTZER HOUSE

MARCH 28, 1925

SOUND: KNOCKING. DOOR OPENING.

OBERHOLTZER: Good evening, Mr. Smith, Mr. Niblack.

NIBLACK: Good evening, Mr. Oberholtzer. How's Madge?

SOUND: DOOR CLOSING.

OBERHOLTZER: Declining rapidly, Mr. Niblack. Doctor says it's only a matter of days, maybe hours.

SMITH: Mr. Oberholtzer. I spoke to your wife earlier. Did she tell you why we're here?

OBERHOLTZER: Something about a Dying Declaration I think she said, Mr. Smith.

SMITH: That's right. The State of Indiana presumes a person facing death will not lie. No one wants a falsehood on his tongue when he meets his Maker.

OBERHOLTZER: My daughter never told a lie in her life.

SMITH: I'm sure of that, Mr. Oberholtzer.

NIBLACK: Sir, I made detailed notes of everything Madge told me about what happened. Nine typewritten pages. But now Mr. Smith says we have to read every word to her so she can swear that her accusations are the truth.

OBERHOLTZER: But Madge is on her deathbed! And you intend to put her through her ordeal with Stephenson all over again?

SMITH: I wish there were some other way. But we have to follow the legal procedures to the letter if we want Stephenson to pay for what he did to your daughter.

OBERHOLTZER: The law can be a cruel thing, Mr. Smith.

SMITH: Less cruel than Stephenson, Mr. Oberholtzer.

OBERHOLTZER: Well, here's her bedroom. Go on in.

NIBLACK: Madge? Are you awake?

MADGE: (VERY WEAK) Mr. Niblack? Mr. Smith?

SMITH: Madge, your doctor tells me you understand you cannot get well. Is that true? In making this declaration, it's necessary you realize you're soon going to die.

MADGE: I welcome death. I can't go on living in this misery.

NIBLACK: Madge, we have to read this entire statement to you.

SMITH: We'll try not to distress you any more than is necessary. But you must hear all of it. Then you must swear that what we read to you is true.

MADGE: Do whatever you have to. I don't want that monster to go free.

NIBLACK: You're a brave girl, Madge. Go ahead, Mr. Smith.

SMITH: All right. The document starts, "My name is Madge Oberholtzer. I stand on the brink of death, and this is my

SMITH (CONT.): Dying Declaration. I first met D.C. Stephenson at the banquet given for the Governor early in January, 1925. After the banquet he asked me for a date several times....”

FADE.

SCENE 12: INDIANAPOLIS STREET CORNER

APRIL 20, 1925

SOUND: TRAFFIC, OOGA HORNS, ETC.

NEWSBOY: *Times! Indianapolis Times! Get yer Times here! Shocking news! Young woman dead! Grand Dragon accused of murder! Times! Get yer Times here! Grand Dragon arrested!*

**SCENE 13: HAMILTON COUNTY
COURTHOUSE MEN’S ROOM/PRESS ROOM**

OCTOBER 29, 1925

SOUND: TWO-FINGER TYPING.

SOUND: KNOCKING.

NIBLACK: Come on in. Door’s open.

KLEIN: Where the heck are we? There’re two signs on the door. One says “Press Room.” The other says “Men’s Room.”

NIBLACK: If you’re looking for the sign that says “Women’s Room” it’s across the hall.

KLEIN: Ida Klein, *Chicago Tribune*. I’ll be sending dispatches to newspapers coast to coast.

NIBLACK: John Niblack *Indianapolis Times*. Well this’ll be awkward. Courthouse isn’t exactly set up for reporters covering a big trial so they ran extra phone lines into the men’s room and provided these elegant accommodations. Obviously they weren’t expecting any female reporters to show up.

KLEIN: I can stand it if you can. When you’re a working girl pretty much every room is a men’s room.

SOUND: TOILET FLUSHING.

SHERIFF: Niblack, you’re outta toilet paper. And you probably ought to avoid using stall three for a while.

NIBLACK: Good to see you made it out alive, Sheriff. I was beginning to think you'd died in there.

SHERIFF: Who's the little lady?

NIBLACK: Klein, this is Sheriff Charles Gooding. Sheriff, this is Ida Klein from the *Chicago Tribune*.

SHERIFF: Wow! We've hit the big time. Welcome to Indiana, Miss Klein.

KLEIN: Thank you, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: I'll be back to let you know when the judge is ready to get the trial started.

NIBLACK: Thanks, Sheriff.

SOUND: DOOR CLOSING.

KLEIN: So bring me up to speed. What's the jury look like? They hadn't finished seating it when I left Chicago.

NIBLACK: About what you'd expect in this neck of the woods. Manager of the local gas company. Truck driver. Ten farmers. All white, of course.

KLEIN: Sounds like a roster of Klansmen.

NIBLACK: This county's had more than its share of big rallies and cross burnings, that's for sure.

KLEIN: No women?

NIBLACK: They never have women on juries in Hamilton County. There's only one toilet in the jury room.

KLEIN: They keep women off juries so they won't have to share a restroom with men? Really?

NIBLACK: Here in Indiana we're very protective of our womenfolk.

KLEIN: Who was protecting Madge Oberholtzer?

NIBLACK: Stephenson was supposed to be.

KLEIN: How about the lawyers.

- NIBLACK: Chief prosecutor is Will Remy. He's young. It's his first big case. Nobody knows how he'll handle the pressure. Defense attorney, on the other hand, is Eph Inman. Been around a long time. Made a fortune convincing Indiana juries his guilty clients are innocent as newborn babes.
- KLEIN: You know, something keeps bothering me about all this. If Stephenson wanted to assault the girl, why get on a train to do it?
- NIBLACK: She wouldn't have been the first young lady ravished at his mansion, that's for sure. What *I* keep wondering about is her choice of poison. Mercury bichloride. There are a lot more effective things she could have used if she really wanted to kill herself.
- KLEIN: Well, if you don't mind hearing from a city girl, I may have a little theory about that.
- NIBLACK: Sure. Go ahead.
- KLEIN: Suppose, just suppose, Miss Oberholtzer was pregnant and told Stephenson he was the father?
- NIBLACK: There was an autopsy. The doctor didn't say anything about her being pregnant.
- KLEIN: Maybe there was a false pregnancy. Maybe her monthly female complaint was overdue. Or what if she lied to force him to marry her?
- NIBLACK: None of that's been suggested by anyone.
- KLEIN: But it fits. Stephenson gets mad as heck this girl's trying to bamboozle him. He gets her to his house, gets her drunk, and gets her on the midnight train to Chicago.
- NIBLACK: Stephenson never got her to Chicago. They got off in Hammond. Assumption is he sobered up and realized if they crossed into Illinois they'd get him for transporting a woman across state lines for immoral purposes.
- KLEIN: And Hammond's in Lake County, not far from Gary. You know why young women, at least young women from Chicago, occasionally travel to Gary?
- NIBLACK: For the fresh air and pristine Lake Michigan beaches?

KLEIN: Oh, no. They go to Gary because in that lovely town of smoke and soot there reside a couple of very accommodating female doctors, well known in certain circles. ... They specialize in helping girls who find themselves in trouble.

NIBLACK: You don't mean ...

KLEIN: And what is one of the compounds such doctors give their patients to, shall we say, take care of the problem? ... Oh, come on, Mr. Niblack! Even in Indianapolis you can't be that naïve.

NIBLACK: (QUIET REALIZATION) Mercury bichloride.

KLEIN: Give the man a cigar! As I say, it's only a theory.

NIBLACK: Too bad I can't float it in a family newspaper. Our readers prefer to imagine Madge Oberholtzer as an immaculate virgin, ten years younger than she really was, despoiled by Lucifer himself.

SOUND: KNOCKING.

NIBLACK: Door's open! Oh, hi, Sheriff.

SHERIFF: Just wanted to let you know, court'll convene in a few minutes.

NIBLACK: Thanks, Sheriff. Well, Klein, the drama begins.

SCENE 14: COURTROOM

OCTOBER 29-NOVEMBER 14, 1925

SOUND: AMBIENT LOW-LEVEL CONVERSATION.

NIBLACK: Reporter's notebook: Dateline: Noblesville, Indiana, October 29, 1925. Byline: John Niblack, *Indianapolis Times* political reporter. After months of hearings in front of three different judges in two different counties, and following two weeks of trying to find twelve jurors, the stage is finally set for the trial of accused murderer D.C. Stephenson. The defendant is already in place, sitting at the defense table with a smirk on his face, confident the trial is merely a sham. And now the prosecutor enters, stage left. ... (CALLS OUT) Mr. Remy!

REMY: Make it quick, Niblack. The judge will be here at any moment.

NIBLACK: Are you concerned there may be Klansmen on the jury?

REMY: As I understand it, the Klan believes in defending pure womanhood. That's precisely the sort of juryman we want.

NIBLACK: I heard Stephenson had a visitor from the Klan in his cell last night. Some guy came and threatened to kill him if he told any of their secrets in his testimony.

REMY: How did you find that out?

NIBLACK: Turns out the jail's an old building with a lot of leaks.

REMY: Off the record, I've spoken to Stephenson's attorney and agreed to avoid asking questions about Klan activities. They're irrelevant to his actions on that train.

NIBLACK: So no Klan questions.

REMY: No Klan *questions*. Now, if you'll excuse me.

NIBLACK: And right on cue, here comes the ablest and most expensive lawyer Stephenson could find. (CALLS OUT) Mr. Inman! May I ask you a question?

INMAN: Not now, Niblack. I have to speak with my client before court convenes. ... Good morning, Steve.

STEPHENSON: Morning, Eph. You talk to Remy about my visitor last night?

INMAN: I did. He's agreed not to ask sensitive Klan questions.

STEPHENSON: Then we're home free. No jury in Indiana will ever convict me of anything. And even if they did, the Governor won't let me go to jail. He'll pardon me before I set one foot in state prison. Frankly, I'm surprised he hasn't done it already.

SOUND: STAFF STRIKING FLOOR (3x):

SHERIFF: All rise! Oh, yes! Oh, yes! The Circuit Court for the County of Hamilton is now open and sitting in the matter of the State of Indiana versus David Curtis Stephenson, Judge William Sparks presiding. God save the state of Indiana and this honorable court. You may be seated!

JUDGE: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Before we begin, I see the galleries are unusually crowded. I would remind you that we are engaged in solemn business here. Please conduct

JUDGE (CONT.): yourself accordingly. ... Mr. Remy, does the prosecution have an opening statement?

REMY: Yes, thank you, your honor. Gentlemen of the jury: this is a case of murder. The state's main witness will be the victim herself, Miss Madge Oberholtzer. From beneath the shadowy wings of the dark angel of death, she will tell you how she was kidnapped, assaulted, beaten, and lacerated with beastly fangs.

After those vicious brutalities, despairing the loss of all a good woman holds dear, she took deadly poison. But there can be no doubt. It was Stephenson's savagery that brought on the devastating infections that took her life.

SOUND: APPLAUSE AND CHEERS. GAVEL STRIKES (2x)

JUDGE: Ladies and gentlemen, I will not tolerate any further vocal outbursts. I hope I make myself clear. ... Mr. Inman, you may open for the defense.

INMAN: Thank you, your honor. Gentlemen of the jury: this is *not* a case of murder. Madge Oberholtzer died because she willingly took poison. Well, you may say, in that case, Mr. Stephenson might be considered an accomplice to her suicide. Ah, but suicide is not a crime in Indiana. No crime, no accomplice, no conviction.

NIBLACK: (CLOSE) Reporter's notebook. Now the parade of witnesses begins. *Fifty* of them. Ticket agents, Pullman porters, desk clerks, and hotel maids for the prosecution. A lineup of Stephenson's cronies providing their boss with well-rehearsed alibis. Doctors who say Madge died of the infection from Stephenson's bite. Other doctors who swear she died of self-administered poisoning. Finally the show's headliner, Stephenson himself, takes the spotlight.

INMAN: All right, Mr. Stephenson. Why don't you tell the court what happened the night Madge Oberholtzer came to your home.

STEPHENSON: Well, Mr. Inman, when she came in, she was very upset. Said she was in trouble. Pleaded with me to loan her one of my cars so she could leave town for a day or so to take care of things. I wasn't surprised, to tell the truth. I knew what kind of girl she was.

REMY: Objection. The defense attorney should instruct his client to refrain from commenting on the deceased's character.

STEPHENSON: O.K., Mr. Remy, I get it. Anyhow, she and I had seen each other socially and I hated she was so distressed. I loaned her a car and driver and said she could go wherever she needed to. The driver was my former assistant, Earl Gentry.

INMAN: And you did not accompany Miss Oberholtzer yourself?

STEPHENSON: No. I stayed home all weekend, doing some paperwork and playing cards with my associates.

INMAN: And what happened when the two of them returned?

STEPHENSON: Miss Oberholtzer was in a very bad way. Gentry said she had him take her to an address up in Gary, where she stayed two or three hours. When she came out she didn't look well at all. On their way back to Indianapolis she suddenly screamed for him to stop the car, she was going to be sick. When Gentry slammed on the brakes, the back door suddenly sprang open and Miss Oberholtzer fell out into the brush and gravel on the side of the road. She ended up all bruised and bloody.

When they got back to my house I was shocked at her condition. I had her rest for several hours, then had Gentry take her home. That's the last I knew anything until Mr. Smith and a reporter came to my office and attempted to extort money from me.

REMY: Objection!

JUDGE: Sustained. The jury will disregard that last remark.

INMAN: Mr. Stephenson, did you do anything to Miss Oberholtzer that might have caused her death?

STEPHENSON: I never touched the girl. Never.

SOUND: ANGRY AUDIENCE REACTIONS. GAVEL STRIKES (2x)

JUDGE: Order! I *will* have order in this courtroom!

INMAN: No further questions. Mr. Remy, your witness.

REMY: That was quite a tale you just spun, Mr. Stephenson. Is the driver Earl Gentry available to testify any of it is true?

STEPHENSON: I'm afraid I don't know his whereabouts. He quit the day after he brought Miss Oberholtzer home.

REMY: Some might say that's very convenient. At the beginning of this trial you pled "not guilty." Do you still maintain your innocence in the face of Madge Oberholtzer's Dying Declaration?

STEPHENSON: I do. There isn't a word of truth in it.

REMY: Why do you think Miss Oberholtzer would lie?

STEPHENSON: She was a vindictive little... I mean, she wanted to get back at me because I refused to marry her. She asked me several times, begged me in fact. I said no every time. As I said, I heard things about her, things that led me to believe she would not be a suitable wife for a man of my standing in the community.

SOUND: COLLECTIVE GASPS.

REMY: We've heard witnesses who place you on the train and in the hotel just as Miss Oberholtzer described.

STEPHENSON: Two of those so-called witnesses were a negro Pullman porter and a chambermaid fresh off the boat from Ireland. No one would take their word against a respectable white man.

REMY: Perhaps not a *respectable* white man, no.

STEPHENSON: Are you saying I'm not respectable?

REMY: Respectable men do not go around assaulting young women.

STEPHENSON: Well, I never did, that's for sure. ... I can't speak for other respectable white men.

REMY: I thought that's exactly what you did for a living, Mr. Stephenson. Speak for respectable white men. And before we go further, let me assure you I will not be asking you any questions about your Ku Klux Klan connections. I understand you have some concern they might murder you if you talk about them too much.

STEPHENSON: Where'd you hear that? The Klan are my brothers. I have nothing to fear from them.

REMY: If you say so. I know I would be afraid if someone threatened to kill me.

STEPHENSON: Well, Mr. Remy, I'm no coward.

REMY: Aren't you, Mr. Stephenson? Don't you hide behind all sorts of masks? Aren't you the sort of cowardly little man who conceals his weakness behind a curtain of bluster and blackmail and bullying? The kind of coward who only feels powerful when he brutally assaults women and then discards them like so much trash? That's who you are, Mr. Stephenson. *Isn't* that who you are?

INMAN: Objection!

STEPHENSON: (OVERRIDING) I didn't kill her! It wasn't my fault! She was responsible. It was all her!! (QUIETLY) It wasn't my fault.

SOUNDS. TUMULT IN THE COURTROOM. BANGING GAVEL.

JUDGE: Order! Quiet down or I will clear this courtroom. Order!

SOUNDS: TUMULT FADES.

JUDGE (CON'T): Mr. Remy, do you wish to continue?

REMY: I have no further questions, your honor.

JUDGE: Mr. Inman?

INMAN: The defense rests, your honor.

JUDGE: Mr. Remy, are you prepared to make your closing arguments?

REMY: I am, your honor.

JUDGE: Then go ahead.

REMY: Thank you, your honor. ... Gentlemen of the jury. If this man, this degenerate sadist, can kidnap a young lady, and defile her, and bite her, and then deny her medical help—how can he not be found guilty of taking her life? He murdered her, and then he tried to paint a scarlet letter on her tomb.

Mr. Stephenson boasts that he's the law and the power in Indiana. Yet, I know you men are brave enough not to set him free to commit further outrages against the young women of this state. I know it because I know what is in the hearts of the twelve good men sitting before me.

SOUNDS: APPLAUSE AND CHEERS. BANGING GAVEL.

JUDGE: Order! ... Mr. Inman?

INMAN: Thank you, your honor. ... Gentlemen of the jury. Of her own free will Madge Oberholtzer purchased and took the pills that ultimately ended her life. No one forced her to do so. One wonders, how did she learn about the effects of mercury bichloride? Sometimes even girls in our best families do things that are wrong.

Gentlemen, I urge you to uphold true 100% American principles. This man is innocent until proven guilty beyond a shadow of a doubt—and there is plenty of doubt in this case.

JUDGE: Gentlemen of the Jury. The State has charged the defendant Mr. Stephenson with committing first degree murder with extreme cruelty. The penalty on that charge would be the electric chair.

You also have the option of finding Mr. Stephenson guilty of murder in the *second* degree. You can do so if you believe Miss Oberholtzer died as a result of the defendant committing a separate felony, such as assault. The penalty for second degree murder is life in prison.

The court will recess for lunch, after which you will retire to the jury room and begin your deliberations.

SOUND: TICKING CLOCK. FADE.

NIBLACK: (CLOSE) Five hours and counting. People are calling their bookies to place bets on how many days it'll be before we get a hung jury. Meanwhile, Stephenson and Inman huddle at the defense table. Stephenson is not happy.

STEPHENSON: What happened to your agreement with Remy, Eph? You said he wouldn't bring up any Klan stuff.

INMAN: What he said was, he wouldn't ask you any Klan *questions*. Technically, he didn't. He just mentioned the Klan off-hand, and you fell right into his trap.

STEPHENSON: So *technically* he outsmarted you. Anyhow, what's taking the jury so long?

INMAN: Steve, I told you they could take days going through all the testimony.

STEPHENSON: Why? All they need to do is vote to acquit me and then come in here and say so. But just in case, where's my pardon? I told you to tell Governor Jackson I wanted him to issue it before the jury hands down their verdict. What'd he say when you talked to him?

INMAN: I didn't get to speak to the governor directly. I got ahold of one of his aides. He said Jackson had important meetings all afternoon and wasn't available.

STEPHENSON: Important meetings! This is the most important thing on his plate and he knows it. What's he trying to pull?

INMAN: Probably just keeping up appearances. The aide said Governor Jackson was very aware of what you expect of him.

STEPHENSON: What he better be aware of, is I can take him down anytime I want to.

INMAN: Huh. It looks like the jury's coming back.

STEPHENSON: See, what'd I tell you, Eph. They were just stalling long enough to justify having lunch at the county's expense.

JUDGE: Ladies and gentlemen. The jury has reached a verdict and I have it here before me. ... On the charge of murder in the first degree, they find the defendant David Curtis Stephenson *not* guilty.

SOUNDS. SHOCK AUDIENCE REACTIONS.

JUDGE (CON'T): (OVERRIDING) On the charge of murder in the second degree, the jury finds the defendant David Curtis Stephenson *guilty* and recommends he be incarcerated in the Indiana State Penitentiary for life! So ordered!

SOUNDS: CHEERS AND APPLAUSE. GAVEL BANGING.

STEPHENSON: (OVERRIDING) They can't do this to me! I am the law in Indiana! Get Jackson on the phone! I wanna talk to the governor! Now!!

SOUNDS: CROWD NOISES FADE.

SCENE 15: PRISON CELL

OCTOBER 25, 1926

SOUND: CELL DOOR CLOSING.

PRISON GUARD: Prisoner Number 11148, you have a visitor. Right in here, Mr. Niblack.

NIBLACK: So, Stephenson, instead of calling you “Mr. Dragon” I should make it “Mr. 11148”?

STEPHENSON: Hello, John. By this time, you could be calling me “Steve,” don’t you think?

NIBLACK: Better men than I, have discovered getting that close to you can be dangerous. Speaking of which, Governor Jackson long since refused to issue you a pardon. He tries to give the impression he hardly even knew you.

STEPHENSON: What a disappointment that weasel turned out to be. I hear they’re writing him up in the scientific journals. The wonder of our time! A man his age suddenly growing a spine. It won’t do him much good at this late date.

NIBLACK: Frankly, I was surprised to get your invitation to visit. I thought the warden was pretty strict about how much contact you have with the outside world.

STEPHENSON: Oh, I have my own system for smuggling out letters—friendly guards on the inside, a nice lady on the outside who thinks she’s in love with me. Promised to marry her when I get out. And I *will* get out. You can count on it.

NIBLACK: Those friendly guards wouldn’t be Klansmen by any chance? Or maybe ex-Klansmen? I understand membership is plummeting since your conviction. A lot of folks seem to be putting their robes in the garbage and pretending they were never members.

STEPHENSON: Temporary setback, that’s all. Fear of foreigners. White supremacy. Religious bigotry. They never go completely out of style. They always come back, bigger than ever. And there’s always somebody around ready to exploit his opportunities.

NIBLACK: Is that what you were doing? Exploiting opportunities?

STEPHENSON: Of course. Conditions were ripe for a guy like me. The Protestants were afraid of the Catholics. Natives were afraid of the immigrants. The politicians were willing to be

STEPHENSON (CONT.): corrupted. And the women were just plain willing. Most of them anyway.

NIBLACK: I'm curious. Now that you've had time to think about it...

STEPHENSON: Nothing but time...

NIBLACK: ...do you think you got what you deserved?

STEPHENSON: I never killed Madge Oberholtzer. Oh, I may have played a little rough with the girl, but she took the poison and got the infection all on her own.

NIBLACK: So—still—none of this is your fault.

STEPHENSON: You know what's my fault? My fault is I trusted people to play by the rules, and what'd it get me? Politicians I bought fair and square suddenly got religion. But I'll get my revenge. Because I'm very grateful to the *Indianapolis Times*, I've arranged for you to receive two black boxes...

NIBLACK: They really exist? I thought they were just a part of the Stephenson legend.

STEPHENSON: Oh, they exist all right. Inside of 'em you'll find a number of very interesting documents. Enough to take down the governor and the whole Indiana political establishment.

NIBLACK: What do you mean you're grateful to the *Times*?

STEPHENSON: We thrived on your attacks. Every time you editorialized about how the Klan was a terrible organization because we were against Catholics, Jews, and Negroes, our membership rolls swelled and I got richer. Every time you ran a story about how powerful I was, more politicians decided they'd better jump on my bandwagon. I couldn't have done half what I did without your help.

NIBLACK: That certainly wasn't the intention.

STEPHENSON: But it was the result. I'm in your debt and it's payback time. Once the *Times* runs its exposés, hand the boxes over to our friendly prosecutor Mr. Remy. Tell him I'll testify any time, any place. I'll teach them to double-cross D.C. Stephenson. They'll see. They can shut me away, but they can't shut me up.

NIBLACK: Well, thanks, I guess.

STEPHENSON: Don't mention it. I hear they're talking up the *Times* for a Pulitzer Prize for your Klan stuff. This'll clinch it. And when you make your acceptance speech, just give me a little credit.

NIBLACK: We've always given you the credit you deserved ...
Mr. Grand Dragon.

STEPHENSON: You know, John, Indiana was just supposed to be a stepping stone. I had plans to become the most important man in the United States. You know why that didn't happen?

NIBLACK: Because you killed Madge Oberholtzer?

STEPHENSON: Nah. My only problem was, the country just wasn't ready for me yet. That's all it was, John. I was just ahead of my time.
(BEAT) Just. Ahead. Of. My. Time.

MUSIC: CLOSING BARS OF "BACK HOME AGAIN IN INDIANA."

END