

GRAND DRAGON IN POWER

A Full-Length Play

By Donald E. Baker

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

Casting
4M 2W (doubling)

65 Pages

Content Warning
A rape enacted in darkness but described in detail.

Panglossian Productions of Williamsburg, Virginia, produced a staged reading of an earlier version of this play and uploaded a recording of it to their Facebook page, November 28, 2020.

A radio adaptation was performed before a live audience on March 26, 2018, by Radio Theatre Project, Studio@620, St. Petersburg, Florida, and uploaded to Soundcloud.com.

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...any gang daring enough and unscrupulous enough and smart enough not to seem illegal can grab hold of the entire government and have all the power and applause and salutes, all the money and palaces and willin' women they want.

—Sinclair Lewis *It Can't Happen Here*

When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross.

—Attributed to Sinclair Lewis

CHARACTERS

The play calls for a minimum of six actors: four men and two women playing multiple roles. For the list of characters and a tracking chart see pages iii-iv.

SETTING

Various locations in Indiana implied by minimal easily rearranged furnishings.

TIME

The stifling monochrome 1920's of the American Midwest.

SYNOPSIS

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 and traditional Protestant moral values. He dominates the state legislature. The governor is his man. Klan precepts echo from Evangelical pulpits.

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 raping and murdering a young state employee. His trial is the dramatic climax of the play.

In a final act of vengeance Stephenson takes the Indiana political establishment down with him.

PLAYWRIGHT'S NOTES

Fully realized sets and heavy furniture are not required for this play. It will flow more easily and quickly from implied scene to implied scene with light, easily moved pieces doing double-duty—tables can represent desks, a simple cot can be a bed or a railroad-car berth, etc.

Grand Dragon in Power is set in the 1920's, but it is the stifling monochrome Midwestern twenties, not the technicolor Jazz Age twenties. Although the play is inspired by actual events and people and is informed by extensive research, it is not a documentary and some liberties have been taken for dramatic effect.

CHARACTERS

Minimum 4M 2W

See doubling plot on the next page.

MALE 1	<u>DAVID CURTIS STEPHENSON</u>	Age 34 KKK Grand Dragon
MALE 2	<u>JOHN NIBLACK</u>	Age 23 <i>Indianapolis Times</i> reporter
MALE 3	<u>EARL GENTRY</u> <u>WILL REMY</u>	Age 30+ Stephenson bodyguard Age 30-35 prosecuting attorney
MALE 4	<u>HIRAM EVANS</u> <u>ED JACKSON</u> <u>ASA SMITH</u> <u>EPH INMAN</u>	Age 50 KKK Imperial Wizard Age 50 Indiana Secretary of State Age 50 lawyer Age 50+ defense attorney
FEMALE 1	<u>MADGE OBERHOLTZER</u>	Age 28 Stephenson victim
FEMALE 2	<u>EUNICE</u> <u>ARLENE</u> <u>IDA KLEIN</u>	Age 30 <i>Indianapolis Times</i> office worker Age 30 Stephenson's secretary (offstage) Age 30+ <i>Chicago Tribune</i> reporter

RECORDED OR OFFSTAGE VOICES

RALLY CROWD
ORCHESTRA LEADER
RAILROAD ANNOUNCER
NEWSBOY
COURTROOM SPECTATORS ETC.
BAILIFF
JUROR
PENITENTIARY GUARD

SCENE BREAKDOWN

Prologue	
Scene 1:	Melfalfa Park, Kokomo, Indiana. Mid-Day. July 4, 1923
Scene 2:	Same. A few minutes later
Scene 3:	Hotel meeting room. Shortly after Stephenson's speech
Scene 4:	<i>The Indianapolis Times</i> office. Morning. July 11, 1923
Scene 5:	D.C. Stephenson's office. Later That Day
Interlude	
Scene 6:	Governor Jackson's inaugural ball. Evening. January 12, 1925.
Scene 7:	Stephenson's office. March 15, 1925.
Scene 8:	Sleeping room on a train. 1 a.m. March 16, 1925
	<i>Optional Intermission</i>
Scene 9:	Hotel room, Hammond, Indiana. 7 a.m. March 16, 1925
Scene 10:	Same Later that day
Scene 11:	Stephenson's office. March 23, 1925
Scene 12:	Madge Oberholtzer's bedroom. March 28, 1925
Scene 13:	Men's restroom/press room, courthouse, Noblesville, Indiana. October 29, 1925
Scene 14:	Courtroom. October 29-November 14, 1925
Scene 15:	Prison cell. October 25, 1926

DOUBLING PLOT

Scene	M1	M2	M3	M4	F1	F2
Prologue	Stephenson	Niblack			Madge (off)	
1	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry			
2	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry	Evans		
3	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry	Evans		
4		Niblack				Eunice
5	Stephenson	Niblack	Gentry	Jackson		Arlene (off)
Interlude	Stephenson				Madge	
6	Stephenson			Jackson	Madge	
7	Stephenson				Madge	Arlene (off)
8	Stephenson				Madge	
9	Stephenson				Madge	
10	Stephenson		Gentry		Madge	
11	Stephenson	Niblack		Smith		Arlene (off)
12		Niblack		Smith	Madge	
13		Niblack				Klein
14	Stephenson	Niblack	Inman	Remy	Madge	Klein
15	Stephenson	Niblack				

PROLOGUE

Indeterminate space, Indiana, 1923. Time and place are established by a vintage recording of "Back Home Again in Indiana." Lights come up on an isolated part of the stage to reveal NIBLACK standing with his notepad. He is a young reporter who can barely afford a decent suit.

NIBLACK

John Niblack, *Indianapolis Times*. My fellow Hoosiers like to think God is especially good to Indiana. The white, Protestant ones anyhow. They believe they live in an earthly Garden of Eden, where the dreamy Wabash wanders on through paradise. But although they read their Bibles diligently, sometimes they miss the fact that Eden was only a paradise until a snake showed up.

Lights fade on NIBLACK as they come up to reveal STEPHENSON in a space apart. He is dressed in an expensive suit. (The historical Stephenson favored blue serge.)

STEPHENSON

You can call me Steve. All my friends do. Indiana's a paradise alright. Those salt-of-the-earth types are scared. Afraid somebody is going to come along and take their nice little Eden away from them. Well where there's fear there's opportunity. If a guy knows how to stoke fear it begets anger. And if you fire up the anger it begets hate. And if you keep stirring the pot before you know it you've got plenty of hate to go around. You've got Protestants hating the Catholics. Natives hating the immigrants. Whites hating the coloreds. And everybody hating the Jews. Where there's hate there's power. And where there's power there's money. And where there's money there're politicians who are willing to be bought. And there're women who are just plain willing. Most of them anyway.

MADGE (off)

No! Let me alone. I don't want to! No stop! Steve you're hurting me!

STEPHENSON

I never killed that girl. Oh I may have played a little rough with her but she took the poison and got the fatal infection all on her own.

Sound of staff hitting the floor.

BAILIFF (off)

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.

STEPHENSON

No Indiana jury would ever convict me of anything. I am the law in Indiana. The juries are packed with my Klansmen. My people. And my people love me.

Lights down on STEPHENSON, who exits as sound comes up on the rumblings of 10,000 or more excited people. At the sound of an approaching airplane the crowd erupts into a roar. Sounds of the crowd and the airplane diminish.

SCENE 1

Implied setting: Mid-day. Melfalfa Park, Kokomo, Indiana, July 4, 1923. Lights come up to reveal NIBLACK consulting his notepad..

NIBLACK

Dateline: Kokomo Indiana July 4 1923. Byline: John Niblack¹ *Indianapolis Times* political reporter. Independence Day 1923 is hot and sticky as only an Indiana Fourth of July can be. But despite the heat thousands of proud Ku Klux Klansmen and their families have crowded into a sun-drenched Kokomo park. They swelter under their robes. Behind their masks, sweat pours down their upturned faces as they wait for their beloved Grand Dragon to descend from the heavens.

STEPHENSON crosses carrying his King Kleagle Ku Klux Klan robe. He is followed by his bodyguard EARL GENTRY who is already in his Klan white robe but not masked.

NIBLACK

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

GENTRY

The Old Man hasn't time for reporters right now kid. Especially reporters from the *Times*. He's late to his own investiture. The Imperial Wizard is here for God's sake.

STEPHENSON

It's all right Earl. What do you want to ask—Niblack did you say? What sort of name is that?

NIBLACK

Scotch-Irish.

STEPHENSON

Celtic² then. Protestant?

NIBLACK

Presbyterian.

STEPHENSON

Almost as good as Anglo-Saxon.

¹ Niblack has a short "i": NIB-lack.

² Soft "C" Celtic like the Boston NBA team not with a hard "Keltic."

GENTRY

Don't forget—you and the rest of the press corps signed agreements not to use our new Grand Dragon's real name.

NIBLACK

I remember. (*Barely containing his contempt.*) Mr. Dragon then.

GENTRY

Watch your mouth, smart aleck.

NIBLACK

Some Republican politicians worry the Klan may alienate the Negro vote.

STEPHENSON

I tell my good friends in the Party of Lincoln they need have no worries on that score. The Klan in Indiana will do nothing to disturb good submissive Negro voters. We let our brethren in the solid Democrat 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. And in the bigger cities like Marion when the darkies get uppity they know how to put them in their place.

GENTRY

Swingin' from a tree limb on the courthouse square.

STEPHENSON

The necessity for such demonstrations is unfortunate but nothing to do with us. Those last comments are of course off the record. Now I do have to get cleaned up and robed. My adoring subjects would await my appearance till kingdom come but the Imperial Wizard is not so patient. Just listen to my speech young Niblack. It'll tell you everything you need to know about the Klan's program and concerns. After the ceremonies the dignitaries will retire to our headquarters downtown where we will be available if you have more questions.

Mr. Gentry why don't you keep our young friend here company until we're ready to begin the investiture.

STEPHENSON exits.

GENTRY (producing a flask)

You wanna swig? I used to be a bootlegger and this is good hooch if I do say so.

NIBLACK

No thanks. Prohibition is still the law of the land I believe.

GENTRY

Gee. I better get rid of this demon rum then. (*He takes a drink and replaces the flask.*) 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 some palooka doesn’t show proper respect.

NIBLACK

Everybody?

GENTRY pats his robe where a shoulder-holster might be.

GENTRY

Ever’body.

NIBLACK

It just all seems so silly. The robes, the masks, the secrecy. We all know who Stephenson is but everybody has to pretend they don’t. They call him “Brother Steve” or else “the Old Man” even though he’s just in his thirties. He’s a coal broker. Coal! He preaches white supremacy but makes his living selling the blackest stuff on earth.

GENTRY

Weren’t coal got him the big house in Indianapolis. Or the fleet of fast cars. Or the yacht on Lake Erie. Nope. It was a little piece of ever’ membership fee and ever’ item of regalia bought by all those white supremacists out there.

NIBLACK

And what’s with the weird names—klegals, kligrapps, and kludds who meet in klonvocation in klaverns³. All those “k” sounds.

GENTRY

Why you think this little shindig’s being 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 passwords and special titles and outfits.

NIBLACK

The big difference I can see is the regalia of those other fraternal orders don’t include boxes of matches and cans of kerosene. The Klan venerates the cross but they burn it. I just don’t get it.

³ Klegal like beagle; kligrapp like flytrap; kludd like Elmer Fudd; klavern like cavern.

GENTRY

The way Steve explains it the cross of fire symbolizes Christ as the light of the world. And purification by fire. And the beacon of truth. A holy trinity of meaning he says.

NIBLACK

I'll give him this. He's a master of stagecraft flying in low over the crowd like that.

GENTRY

Yeah he knows how to get the rubes fired up. Stephenson says prophets can't descend from the heavens in a fiery chariot no more. But in this here modern era a bright shiny airplane works just as well.

NIBLACK

So he considers himself some kind of prophet.

GENTRY

Kid, near as I can tell he considers hisself the whole Old Testament—Moses, Elijah, King David and Solomon the Wise all rolled into one.

NIBLACK

Solomon the king of all he surveyed? The man with 700 wives and three hundred concubines?

GENTRY

Well Steve only had two wives so far—that I heard him admit to—but he's startin' to catch up on the concubines.

NIBLACK

I've read up as much as I can find on him—and that's darned little—I never came across anything about two wives.

GENTRY

He don't talk about his past much, leastwise when he's sober. And surely not with reporters. I best get myself up on the platform. Ceremony's about to start. Just watch your step o.k.? 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.

As GENTRY exits, NIBLACK tears the sheet out of his notebook, crumples it, and throws it to the ground.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

Outdoors a few minutes later. An implied speakers' platform facing the Klan multitude, that is the theater audience. Sound of a brass band playing "America (My Country 'Tis of Thee)." STEPHENSON stands in his white King Klegal robe, his face covered by a mask. GENTRY in his white mask and robe stands a step or so behind him. (If STEPHENSON is to change from his white robe to a gold Grand Dragon robe later in the scene, GENTRY holds the gold robe over his arm.) EVANS in his purple Imperial Wizard robe and mask is also present. NIBLACK stands at a downstage corner taking notes.

STEPHENSON

Citizens of the Invisible Empire! Klansmen all! Because I love and trust every one of you I dare to stand before you unmasked. (*Dramatically removes his mask as the CROWD cheers.*) I fear I must apologize to you and to His Excellency. It grieves me to be late. But the President of the United States detained me seeking my counsel upon vital matters of state. So without further delay, let us give our most heartfelt ovation to our illustrious national leader, Brother Hiram, the Imperial Wizard of our Invisible Empire!

CROWD goes crazy as EVANS acknowledges the crowd. He attempts to silence the ovation, but STEPHENSON keeps encouraging the crowd until he finally motions for silence. It is an unsubtle demonstration of who is really in charge. EVANS is not pleased to suddenly recognize a potential rival, but he has no choice but to carry on as if he and STEPHENSON are the best of friends. STEPHENSON finally stands aside.

EVANS

Brothers! Thank you for that generous welcome. Like our brother Steve, I choose to stand before you unmasked. (*Removes his mask as CROWD cheers.*) Fellow Klansmen! I bring you greetings from the Imperial Kloncilium and all the Dark Denizens of the Imperial Palace in Atlanta. We congratulate you on this splendid demonstration of the vigor of our cause here in the Midwest. This magnificent rally is the largest aggregation of Klansmen every assembled! It is a testament to the abilities and talents of our chief recruiter, our King Klegal, your own brother Steve.

CROWD cheers. EVANS holds up a scroll.

EVANS (cont.)

Those manifest talents have brought me here bearing this official document addressed to the Hydras, Titans, Furies, Giants, Kleagles, Cyclopes, Terrors, and All Citizens of our Invisible Empire. Signed by all our national officers, and duly attested, it officially confers on our, uh, *(almost choking on the word)* beloved Brother Steve the exalted office of Grand Dragon of our Realm of Indiana. By Virtue of God's Unchanging Grace. So be it!

CROWD cheers as EVANS hands the document to STEPHENSON, who passes it on to GENTRY. If a gold Grand Dragon robe is not available, omit EVANS' next speech and the following stage directions enclosed in brackets.

[EVANS (cont.)

We will now invest our Grand Dragon with the golden robes of the high station to which we have appointed him.

EVANS and GENTRY help STEPHSON change robes. GENTRY takes charge of the white robe as he and EVANS step aside and reveal STEPHENSON in all his golden glory.]

The CROWD goes wild, and STEPHENSON basks in the adoration before finally gesturing for calm. The spaces between the paragraphs of his speech should be filled with enthusiastic crowd responses.

STEPHENSON

My worthy subjects! As I look out over this glorious sea of white extending as far as the eye can see I can only pray God will give me the strength and the wisdom to lead onward this mighty army of Christian soldiers. To Him I say "Thy Will Be Done"!

It fills me with joy so many of you brought your wives and children to witness this historic gathering. Never forget the vital role our women play in our movement. They 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.

You the multitudes that fill this space, you are the Invisible Empire today made visible. Our enemies will tremble when they consider how many millions more of you are yet hidden from their sight.

Speaking of our enemies. *(Possibly glances at NIBLACK.)* I was talking earlier today with a representative of that poor excuse for journalism the *(drawing it out contemptuously)* *In-di-an-ap-o-lis Times*.

STEPHENSON (cont.)

To help their pitiful circulation numbers that miserable rag has embarked on a crusade against us. You will not read accurate unbiased 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.

Our enemies call us "Bigots in Bedsheets." (*CROWD boos.*) Look around you my friends. Do you see bigots? (*CROWD: No!*) Nor do I. 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—liberties which we are duty-bound to pass on to the generations yet to come.

Today those liberties are threatened by traitors in our midst.. Our Roman Catholic neighbors are plotting to take over this great Protestant nation. They're stockpiling weapons in their church basements. They're 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! (*Hisses. Nos! Nevers! from the CROWD.*)

Day after day thousands of Catholic immigrants come pouring in from Ireland, from Poland, from Italy, from places nobody's ever heard of. They're overwhelming us with their alien lawlessness and immorality. On Indiana's very doorstep they've taken over Chicago and made it a cesspool of sin! Corruption! Violence! Italian bootleggers—Catholics every one of them from the Pope's own country!—they're flooding our state with liquor. They're defying the prohibitions enshrined in our sacred Constitution! They're poisoning our youth! And what do our politicians do to stop it? Nothing!!

It is clear my brothers and sisters! Only the Ku Klux Klan can save us from the evils that beset us on every side. Only the Ku Klux Klan can prevent our country from being stolen away from its rightful inheritors.

Fellow Klansmen our fate is in our own hands. With the help of Almighty God those hands will soon clasp in victory from sea to shining sea. 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 the great and glorious future 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!

CROWD roars. Band strikes up "Onward Christian Soldiers."

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3

Hotel meeting room shortly after Stephenson's speech. STEPHENSON and EVANS sit at a table. GENTRY stands behind them.

EVANS

Good show, Stephenson. But we need to talk. I was approached last evening by two of our fellow Klansmen with information about you, information that was so disturbing if I'd known about it earlier you would never have been appointed Grand Dragon.

STEPHENSON

There are a lot of jealous guys who don't like looking up the ladder of success and seeing my ass. Don't believe everything you hear.

EVANS

They said your wife filed for divorce. On grounds of cruelty.

STEPHENSON

Those records were supposed to stay confidential.

EVANS

Be that as it may they had a copy of her complaint. She says you're a violent drunk. She went into detail about what you did to her. Shocking, sickening detail. Those men also told me about wild parties at your mansion. They went so far as to use the word "orgy."

STEPHENSON

Lies. All lies. Somebody's obviously out to get me.

EVANS

The Klan movement is all about sober morality and the sanctity of marriage. Your behavior has to be above reproach. In private as well as in public. I've got my eye on you, Stephenson. Never forget that. I've got my eye on you.

STEPHENSON

Save me your pious little sermons, Hiram. What the Klan is all about these days is Stephenson. Before I came along you were presiding over a miserable bunch of Southern Negro lynchers. If the Klan is suddenly spreading like a rising tide it's because ambitious guys in other states are seeing how I've achieved my success in Indiana. They aren't looking to Atlanta for leadership. They certainly aren't looking to you. They're looking to Indianapolis. They're looking to Stephenson. You may not like me or my methods but you sure like the money flowing into the Imperial coffers. So suck it up Brother Hiram, and stay out of my way.

NIBLACK enters.

NIBLACK

Excuse me, gentlemen. Are you ready for me now?

STEPHENSON

Sure, Niblack. Come on in.

EVANS

This the reporter you warned me about? The one from the anti-Klan paper?

STEPHENSON

It is. I thought we should give him a chance to hear the truth about us for a change. Before you ask your questions, Mr. Niblack, let me remind you today's program will continue far into the night. First our multitudes will march through the city in a magnificent torchlight parade. Then we'll put on the largest fireworks exhibition ever seen. We'll cap it all off with the lighting of a cross sixty feet tall. Tonight the light of Klan truths will truly overcome the alien darkness. I hope you will cover every event so your readers can see how Klansmen enjoy a patriotic American holiday. All we ask is for the *Times* to publish an accurate account.

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*) *In-di-an-ap-o-lis Times*.

STEPHENSON

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

NIBLACK

If you'll bear with me, I have several questions. First, do you have a comment on the immense size of today's crowd? Some people are estimating 10,000 people.

STEPHENSON

I think the Imperial Wizard will agree the report of only 10,000 is very low. When I was seeing it from the air it looked to me to be at least twice that. And I wouldn't be surprised if the actual number were 50,000 or more. No doubt papers like yours will use the lowest number they can get away with.

NIBLACK

This is for the Imperial Wizard. What did the authorities in Atlanta see in the new Grand Dragon that convinced them to elevate him to this exalted position in so short a time?

EVANS

When brother Steve joined us, only two years ago, we had just a few hundred members north of the Ohio River. As King Kleagle he demonstrated remarkable organizational skills and, as you saw earlier today, an impressive ability to communicate our message to the masses—

STEPHENSON (barging in)

As of today we're organized in all ninety-two Hoosier counties. At least 250,000 members and still growing by 2,000 every week. When you add in our auxiliaries—Women of the Klan, Junior Klan for boys, Triple-K Club for girls—our numbers get up to nearly half a million.

EVANS (not pleased at having been interrupted)

Yes. So as you can see, the new Grand Dragon's our rising star. (*Insincere grin at STEPHENSON.*) I just hope he doesn't have his eye on *my* job.

NIBLACK consults his notes.

NIBLACK

My other questions are for the Grand Dragon. Let me just get them all 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? Kill them? Run them out of the country? Allow them to remain here in some sort of second-class citizenship?

Second: What's the ultimate objective of the Klan? Do you aim to take over the national and state governments?

Third: 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. Grand Dragon, 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

Just stop right there. I see you're a part of a national conspiracy against the Klan. Except for that impertinent question about Secretary of State Jackson—a shameful attempt to malign a dedicated public servant—as I say except for that I've been asked the very same set of questions at least thirty different times.

NIBLACK

Well I don't know anything about that. I made up the list myself just yesterday.

STEPHENSON

I can also see you're a bigot.

NIBLACK

I'm the bigot?

STEPHENSON

You are not for us. You are against us. Earl get him out of here.

*GENTRY comes out from behind the table and roughhouses
NIBLACK off the stage.*

END OF SCENE

SCENE 4

Offices of The Indianapolis Times. Morning. July 11, 1923. Sound of a telephone ringing. EUNICE sitting at a desk answering the telephone and taking notes.

EUNICE (answering telephone)

Indianapolis Times circulation desk. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? Certainly sir, but may we know the reason? ... You object to our editorials about the Ku Klux Klan? ... Very well, when would you like us to stop delivery. ... Immediately? Of course. ... Thank you for reading the *Times*. ... Yes sir. Never again. I understand.

Hangs up. Telephone immediately rings again.

Indianapolis Times circulation desk. ... You wish to cancel your subscription? Certainly madam, but may we know the reason? ... You believe we are not being fair in our reporting about the Ku Klux Klan. ... You think we should take our paper and go where? ... Really madam!

She reacts when apparently the receiver on the other end has been slammed down.

Hello? Hello?

Hangs up. NIBLACK enters with a Fiery Cross newspaper.

NIBLACK

Morning Eunice. Bad day already?

EUNICE

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. We're down at least five hundred subscriptions. And the language they're using over the phone! Words they sure never learned in Sunday school.

NIBLACK

Good Sunday-school Christians are the bedrock of Klan support. Somehow he's made them believe he was sent by God Himself. Have you seen the latest issue of their *Fiery Cross* newspaper? (*Opens the newspaper.*) You know there were 200,000 people at that Klan rally in Kokomo?

EUNICE

Your story said 10,000.

NIBLACK

Nope. 200,000. Says so right here. Also says the crowd gave him “the greatest ovation ever given a private citizen in Indiana.” On page three we find yet another editorial against the *Times*. And surprise, surprise, the Klan’s endorsing Secretary of State Ed Jackson for governor. If Jackson wins it’ll give Stephenson control of the state government *and* the Republican Party.

EUNICE

Aren’t they the same thing?

Telephone rings. EUNICE answers.

Indianapolis Times circulation desk. ... Sir I can’t help you if you can’t speak rationally. ... Yes I know. Jesus plans to send all of us at the *Times* straight to hell. Frankly sir I think he already has.

Hangs up

NIBLACK (still perusing paper)

Speaking of the Christian connection here’s a story about Klansmen visiting a church and leaving an offering on the altar. Happens somewhere almost every week.

EUNICE

Couple months ago they showed up where my grandma goes to church. Bunch of them came in right in the middle of the service. Paraded down the aisle in their masks and robes. Laid an envelope on the communion table and left. Turned out to be fifty dollars. Grandma said a big argument broke out whether they should keep the money considering the source.

NIBLACK

Did they?

EUNICE

Of course. Fifty dollars is a lot of money for that little congregation. Besides their preacher is a member and the local Klan meets in the church basement.

Telephone rings.

Indianapolis Times office. ... He’s standing right here.

Hands Niblack the telephone

NIBLACK

This is John Niblack. ... Yes Mr. Gentry. I remember you. The bruises haven’t faded yet. ... Really? Tell him I’ll be right over. (*Hangs up.*) Eunice, if I’m not back by tomorrow file a missing person report. The dragon just invited me into his lair.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 5

Stephenson's office later that day. Desk and chair for STEPHENSON, additional chairs for guests. A window downstage is indicated by the acting. On the desk are an intercom box and two 1920's telephones, one of which is adorned with a U.S. Presidential seal. Lights come up on STEPHENSON in his suit, sitting at the desk. GENTRY stands in front of him.

STEPHENSON

Earl, I need you to nose around. Find out which of our people are loyal to me and which ones are hanging onto the Imperial Wizard's apron strings. I hear he's already trying to dig up enough dirt on me to replace me as Grand Dragon. And you know how it works. What they don't find they'll make up. I have to have around me only men I can trust. Once we know who the tattle-tales are we can do what we need to do to root them out.

ARLENE (off)

Mr. Stephenson. There's a reporter from the *Indianapolis Times* to see you.

STEPHENSON (into intercom)

Thank you Arlene. Send him on in.

Flips switch on the intercom. Addresses GENTRY.

I think it's safe to leave me alone with him. Go out and watch for Jackson. If he gets back from his little errand before I'm done with Niblack, hide him in one of the empty offices.

GENTRY exits as NIBLACK enters. GENTRY gives him an intimidating look. STEPHENSON stands up and he and NIBLACK shake hands. STEPHENSON will be as charming as can be wooing the reporter. NIBLACK doesn't fall for it.

STEPHENSON

Good to see you again Mr. Niblack. Glad you could come over.

NIBLACK

You have quite an establishment here Mr. Stephenson.

NIBLACK wanders over to where a window might be indicated. STEPHENSON rushes over and pulls NIBLACK away from the "window."

STEPHENSON

Don't stand there in front of that window! There're people in the building across the street with high-powered rifles trying to kill me. They might shoot you by mistake! Come over here and have a seat where we can talk in safety.

They sit down.

NIBLACK

Who do you think would want to kill you?

STEPHENSON

The Imperial Wizard of course.

NIBLACK

What? Just last week he was singing your praises to the sky.

STEPHENSON

It'd all been organized beforehand and confronted with 50,000—more or less—of my ecstatic subjects he had to go through with it.

NIBLACK

The *Fiery Cross* now puts the number of ecstatic subjects at 200,000.

STEPHENSON

Who am I to dispute the reporting of the *Fiery Cross*? So His Excellency had to make nice in front of 200,000 people. But don't let his crocodile smile fool you. This is a guy from Dallas who could hardly make a living as a dentist. You know how he got to be Imperial Wizard and move into the palace in Atlanta? He staged a coup. Deposed his predecessor. He's pretty sure I want to do the same to him. But he's safe from me if he only knew it. My ambitions go way beyond Atlanta. I plan to become the most important man in the United States.

NIBLACK (skeptically)

Really.

STEPHENSON

Really. Now John...can I call you John?...and please call me Steve. All my friends do. I'm afraid in Kokomo we kind of got off on the wrong foot and I feel bad about that. So just between friends what do you really want to know about the Klan?

NIBLACK

And about you?

STEPHENSON

About the Klan.

NIBLACK

Well Mr. Stephenson—

STEPHENSON

Steve.

NIBLACK

Mr. Stephenson.

STEPHENSON gives up graciously. He'll hook his fish sooner or later; he always does.

What I don't understand is why so many people want to join the Klan. And how you fit in. Sources tell me you're from Oklahoma. Or is it Texas? Or maybe Iowa? Hoosiers are usually pretty suspicious of strangers coming into the state and telling them what to do.

STEPHENSON

They've greeted me and my ideas with open arms. To answer your question, at the heart of our movement is a cadre—huh, cadre; you know I was in the army in the Great War; sometimes these military expressions just come out of my mouth unbidden—anyway a cadre of fierce patriots and true believers.

NIBLACK

I didn't know you were in the war. As I say biographical details are hard to come by.

STEPHENSON

Joined up right after the jerrys sunk the Lusitania. Uncle Sam made me a recruiter. As you can imagine I was quite successful at it. My only regret is I never went overseas. Never got to help Pershing's boys chase down Kaiser Bill. A lot of the guys that did get to the trenches came back pretty disillusioned. America went "over there" to save Europe. Now they see Europe coming over *here* to destroy America. But those former doughboys are still hankering to be part of something bigger than themselves. They cherish American ideals and under the robe and mask all men really are created equal.

NIBLACK

All *white* men that is.

STEPHENSON

All *Protestant* white men. But it doesn't matter one guy's a farmer and the guy next to him's the banker that holds his mortgage. We unite them all in a set of common beliefs and that's a powerful thing. That's why the Klan was created and under my leadership in Indiana we've done very well.

NIBLACK

These offices certainly speak prosperity. There are three secretaries out there and a couple telephones on every desk.

STEPHENSON

Eight phone lines and we still can't handle all the business.

NIBLACK

A waiting room full of lobbyists and legislators wanting your advice and support. And that phone on your desk—is that the presidential seal on it?

STEPHENSON

Direct line to President Harding. ... Now John the real reason I asked you here. How'd you like to take over as editor of the *Fiery Cross*? I know what you're making at the *Times*—don't ask; trust me I know—and I'm prepared to double it. No doubt you'd like a little time to think about it.

NIBLACK

No Mr. Stephenson. I don't need any time at all.

STEPHENSON breaks out in a triumphant smile. The fish took the bait.

I won't be accepting your offer.

STEPHENSON'S smile disappears.

Near as I can tell the job of *Fiery Cross* editor amounts to inflating your audience numbers and kissing your ass. No thanks. I'll stay at the *Times*.

STEPHENSON

Then I think there's nothing more to say. Good day to you Mr. Niblack. And of course everything you heard today is off the record.

NIBLACK (standing)

As usual. But tell me. Is that phone really a direct line to the President?

STEPHENSON

What do you think?

NIBLACK

I think it's as phony as you are.

NIBLACK exits. After a beat STEPHENSON picks up the telephone.

STEPHENSON

Arlene. Get me the editorial offices of the *Fiery Cross*. The number is Lincoln 5351. ... Hello. This is Stephenson. Looks like we've been too easy on the *Times*. Next issue I want you to hit 'em hard. Tell our people any paper that's anti-Klan is anti-American. They must be conspiring with the Pope. Say it's rumored their owners are Bolsheviks. *Jewish* Bolsheviks who want to mongrelize our population. You know the drill. Lay it on thick.

Hangs up.

ARLENE (off)

Mr. Stephenson. Secretary of State Jackson has been waiting to see you.

STEPHENSON

It's about time. While he's here I'll leave the intercom on so you can make a record of our conversation.

ARLENE (off)

I understand sir.

STEPHENSON

Send Gentry in with him.

STEPHENSON checks to make sure the intercom is on. JACKSON enters; he wears a suit and carries a small suitcase. GENTRY, in civilian clothes, accompanies him and takes up a place standing behind STEPHENSON. STEPHENSON does not rise but indicates one of the empty chairs. JACKSON sits holding the suitcase in his lap.

JACKSON (indicating GENTRY)

Does he have to be here?

STEPHENSON

I find his presence discourages any misunderstandings.

JACKSON

I don't know why I do your dirty work for you.

STEPHENSON

Because you want to be governor and the road to *that* office leads through *this* office. You see Governor McCray?

JACKSON

Yes but he wouldn't take the money.

STEPHENSON

Why not? We know he's in debt so bad he's embezzling government money to try to keep afloat. Why shouldn't he accept our generous offer of \$10,000 to help his cash flow? All we asked was for him appoint one of our guys to the county prosecutor vacancy.

JACKSON

When I showed him the cash he got this look of disgust on his face. He said "You can just take your money back to your master Ed. Even if I was willing to hand Stephenson the last shred of my integrity you're too late. I already filled the position."

STEPHENSON

Integrity? Ha! More likely we just didn't bid high enough. So who's our new prosecutor?

JACKSON

William Remy.⁴

STEPHENSON

So all McCray did was promote the deputy prosecutor. Waste of a good appointment. Think Remy can be bought?

JACKSON

Doubt it. He's really young and they're usually pretty idealistic when they're young.

STEPHENSON

Yeah I know all about that. Once upon a time I was a Socialist. If you're going to survive in this world you learn to shuck off the idealism pretty quick.

JACKSON

So I'm finding out. As he's throwing me out the governor says "I know you have ambitions to occupy this office Ed. Too bad you thought you had to sell your soul to get it." I felt humiliated standing there holding the bribe money.

STEPHENSON

Oh stiffen up. You knew if you wanted our support we'd ask for a few favors in return. Go on back to your office. I'll call you later if I need you to do anything else.

JACKSON stands and moves toward the door carrying the suitcase.

JACKSON

I know you will.

⁴ Remy is pronounced with a short "e": Remmy.

Ed?
STEPHENSON

Yes?
JACKSON

The suitcase?
STEPHENSON

Of course.
JACKSON

JACKSON puts down the suitcase and exits.

Arlene? You get all that?
STEPHENSON (into the intercom)

Yes Mr. Stephenson.
ARLENE (off)

STEPHENSON
Give me the transcript when you get it typed up. It'll go into my special black-box file. Then destroy your shorthand notes.

STEPHENSON flips the intercom switch and turns to GENTRY while pointing his thumb at the intercom.

STEPHENSON (cont.)
Love this new intercom gadget. Just installed it this morning and here I already got a record of the secretary of state admitting to trying to bribe the governor. American ingenuity is a wonderful thing.

END OF SCENE

INTERLUDE

An indeterminate space with a chair occupied by MADGE OBERHOLTZER, a twenty-eight-year-old brunette. She wears a long gown, the kind a working woman with little spare cash would sew for herself for a special occasion. She is handsome rather than beautiful, but her face is animated and would interest a man. She has not yet met STEPHENSON but very much hopes she will.

MADGE

My name is Madge Oberholtzer, and I'm thrilled to be one of the hostesses for Gov. Jackson's inaugural banquet tonight. All the important people will be there and I plan to make sure I meet every one of them. The man I'm really interested in meeting is D.C. Stephenson. He sounds fascinating. They say he's the real power behind the throne. So powerful he's untouchable and he can get by with whatever he wants. They say the politicians are afraid to cross him because he's got little black boxes full of incriminating information, enough to destroy them all. I find power very attractive, don't you? I can't wait to find out what he's really like.

MADGE is radiant with anticipation. STEPHENSON enters and moves to stand ominously behind MADGE's chair, his hands on her shoulders.

STEPHENSON

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.

The lights fade leaving STEPHENSON'S grinning face in a pin spot for a few beats. Then darkness segueing into the next scene.

SCENE 6

Governor Jackson's Inaugural Ball, January 12, 1925. Bistro table and two chairs. The sound of a dance orchestra playing a public domain tune from the 1920's or earlier. STEPHENSON sits sipping a drink. Being Prohibition, the drink presumably is non-alcoholic. The music ends and the voice of the ORCHESTRA LEADER is heard.

ORCHESTRA LEADER (off)

Ladies and gentlemen. The orchestra and I thank you for the honor of providing music at this elegant event. And we wish also to congratulate Mr. Edward Jackson on his election as the thirty-second governor of Indiana.

Sound of polite applause in which STEPHENSON absent-mindedly joins.

The boys and I will take a break now. We'll be back shortly for your listening and dancing pleasure.

JACKSON enters carrying a drink.

JACKSON

Well Stephenson what do you want? Gentry said you wanted to see me. Since the election most people approach *me*. They don't summon me into their presence.

STEPHENSON

The election didn't change a thing between us. Not a thing and don't you forget it.

JACKSON

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

STEPHENSON (standing)

Let's take a little walk. Somewhere we're not so easily overheard.

STEPHENSON picks up his drink; the two of them walk to another part of the stage.

JACKSON

Well?

STEPHENSON

Now that we have you safely elected—despite losing a good percentage of the colored vote—

JACKSON

That was disappointing. First time some of those Darkies *ever* voted against a Republican.

STEPHENSON

The party of Lincoln is now the party of Stephenson. We're better off without them. Anyway I also provided you with the best legislature money can buy. I'll send over a list of the bills I'd like to see get passed.

JACKSON

Like what?

STEPHENSON

Religion and patriotism to start with. A bill to outlaw all parochial schools. Another to require public school teachers to teach the U.S. Constitution and read portions of the King James Bible to their students every day. And one to establish a state agency to censor immoral motion pictures. I really don't care if any of that crap passes. It's just red meat for the base. The bill I'm most interested in would reform the State Highway Commission. I want to make the commissioners directly responsible to the governor.

JACKSON

And you'd expect me to appoint friends of yours. Who would then award road construction contracts—worth millions of dollars—to *other* friends of yours. Friends who might be inclined to let you skim some off the top. Someday Stephenson you'll go too far. As powerful as you are you're not above the law.

STEPHENSON

Above the law? Where've you been Jackson? I *am* the law. I own the sheriffs, the prosecutors, the judges. I bought and paid for 'em with my Klan voters my Klan money and my Klan poll workers. No Indiana jury would ever convict me of anything because every jury in the state is packed with my people. But even if they did, who has the power to pardon? The governor that's who. And who owns the governor? ... Of course it'd never come to that. You know everything is fine in Indiana politics as long as you don't get caught in bed with a live man or a dead woman.

JACKSON

They may never find you in bed with a *dead* woman but they're sure likely to find you in bed with a live one. What'll our good Christian supporters do when they find out you've broken every commandment in the book?

STEPHENSON

They'll follow me into hell if I ask them to, that's what. Besides I do keep the big commandment.

JACKSON

Really. Which one is that?

STEPHENSON

"Love your enemies." The more enemies you got the more important you are.

JACKSON

You're supposed to love your enemies *as yourself*. You don't love *anyone* that much.

STEPHENSON

Let's get back before people get too curious about what we're up to. Put on a nice smile so they know we've just been having a friendly little conversation

They return to the table. Before they sit down MADGE approaches them.

MADGE

Excuse me Governor. I'm Madge Oberholtzer, one of the hostesses. I wanted to ask if you're enjoying yourself and whether there was anything you needed.

JACKSON

Everything has been just perfect Miss Oberholtzer. Do you know Mr. D.C. Stephenson?

MADGE (extending her hand)

I'm so happy to meet you Mr. Stephenson.

STEPHENSON (shaking her hand gallantly)

And I'm always glad to meet a lovely young lady like you Miss Oberholtzer.

JACKSON

I understand all of you hostesses work at the state house. What office are you in?

MADGE

Public Instruction. But I may not be there very long I guess. We've heard your new budget might cut some of our staff. I hope that isn't true.

JACKSON

Well Miss Oberholtzer, I also hope it won't be necessary but of course the state constitution requires a balanced budget. There will undoubtedly have to be sacrifices in some agencies.

MADGE (disappointed)

Of course. I understand completely.

JACKSON

I'd better get back to my table before my wife begins to think Mr. Stephenson is holding me hostage. It's been lovely meeting you Miss Oberholtzer. Steve, I assume we'll be speaking in a few days.

STEPHENSON

Let's make it tomorrow.

JACKSON exits.

Miss Oberholtzer, since I've been abandoned would you care to join me?

MADGE

Um ... I guess I could take a few minutes' break. The girls back at the office will be very jealous I got to talk to the man responsible for the governor's landslide victory.

STEPHENSON

I promise not to keep you to myself very long but I always enjoy feminine company.

STEPHENSON pulls out a chair for MADGE and then seats himself.

Now where did you say you worked?

MADGE

The Department of Public Instruction.

STEPHENSON

Well Miss Oberholtzer, it's possible 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. In fact I feel like I know you already.

MADGE

I live not far from you Mr. ... Steve. You may have seen me with my mother on one of our evening walks around the neighborhood.

STEPHENSON

Of course! I knew you looked familiar. I'm not a man who ever forgets a pretty face.

ORCHESTRA LEADER (off)

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."⁵

Music begins under.

STEPHENSON

Madge may I ask you for this dance?

MADGE

Of course...Steve...I'm honored.

STEPHENSON (standing and pulling out her chair)

Oh no. The pleasure will be all mine.

STEPHENSON and MADGE assume a waltz embrace and dance off, their gazes locked into each other's eyes.

END OF SCENE

⁵Or similar vintage love song.

SCENE 7

Stephenson's office, March 15, 1925, set up as previously. STEPHENSON is at his desk.

ARLENE (off)

Mr. Stephenson. You asked me to get Walter Bossert⁶ for you. He's on line one.

STEPHENSON angrily grabs the phone.

STEPHENSON

Look, you sniveling little piss-ant. I don't know who you think you are. But just because you got a piece of paper from the Imperial tooth-puller saying you're the new Grand Dragon doesn't mean a thing. Not a damned thing. You can't replace Stephenson. My people will never stand for it. This state is mine. Hell, everything north of the Ohio and west of the Mississippi is mine. Now you just crawl back to whatever rock you live under and if you're lucky I may forget you even exist.

Slams down the receiver.

ARLENE (off)

Mr. Stephenson? Now Madge Oberholtzer is on line two.

STEPHENSON (flipping intercom switch)

Tell her I'm busy.

ARLENE (off)

I did but she won't take "no" for an answer.

STEPHENSON

In the two months we've been dating I've noticed that about her.

Flips intercom switch and picks up telephone.

Madge what do you want? You know you're not supposed to call me at the office.

Lights come up on MADGE standing apart with a telephone.

MADGE

I know Steve but I just found out about something and I really need to talk to you.

STEPHENSON

Whatever it is make it quick.

⁶ Boss like your employer. BOSS-ert.

MADGE

It's not something we can discuss over the phone. Besides I want to see your face when I tell you. I'll walk over 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

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. Now *good-bye* Madge.

MADGE

I can't wait to see you. Good-bye Dear.

STEPHENSON

How many times have I told you not to call me that?

Hangs up angrily.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 8

STATION ANNOUNCER (off)

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 of a steam locomotive getting up speed as lights come up to reveal a Pullman sleeping room on the Monon Railroad, 1 a.m., March 16, 1925. Berth with a chair to one side. Low-level train sounds continue as STEPHENSON and MADGE enter. STEPHENSON is intoxicated but mobile. He has to support MADGE, who is so drunk or drugged she can hardly stand. MADGE is dressed nicely but has no hat. Both are wearing coats. STEPHENSON removes his and throws it over the chair. He then none-too-gently begins wrestling MADGE out of hers. Train sounds fade.

STEPHENSON

C'mon Madge. Try to stay on your feet.

He throws her coat onto the chair.

MADGE (slurring)

Where are we? What's happening? It's like everything's moving.

STEPHENSON

We're just taking a little train trip. Now get in that berth.

MADGE

No. No I don't want to.

STEPHENSON (exploding with anger)

Get in that bunk you little bitch.

He shoves her down into the berth. As he speaks he removes his jacket and unbuttons the fly of his trousers.

I'm going to teach you nobody—nobody!—makes a fool of D.C. Stephenson.

He gets on top of her in the berth as lights dim. The sound of the train becomes more noticeable.

MADGE (from the darkness)

No! Let me alone. I don't want to! No stop! Steve you're hurting me!

Her screams blend into the wail of a steam locomotive whistle.

END OF SCENE

OPTIONAL INTERMISSION

SCENE 9

*Indiana Hotel, Hammond, Indiana, 7 a.m.
March 16, 1925. Bed, bedside table, chair
holding cast-off coats. MADGE is sprawled
on the bed. STEPHENSON paces nervously
then goes to her.*

STEPHENSON (shaking her gently)

Madge honey wake up.

MADGE (exhausted)

Steve? Where are we?

MADGE comes to a sitting position on the side of the bed.

STEPHENSON (kneeling next to her)

We're in Hammond honey. 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 baby. I know I treated you horribly. 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

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

Gentry's bringing the car up from Indianapolis. We can drive over to the courthouse and we can get married.

MADGE

Now. After you've ruined me. Oh but you 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 baby. It's not like that.

MADGE

Beating up a woman. Biting her like some rabid animal. Even your precious Klansmen and pet politicians would turn their backs on you. No self-respecting woman would even speak to you let alone sleep with you. ... Where's my hat? 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. When Gentry gets here I'll have him take you to a millinery shop. Get whatever hat you like. And anything else you need. You can wear your coat over your dress.

MADGE

To hide the bloodstains you mean.

STEPHENSON

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.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 10

The same hotel room later that day. Same set-up as the previous scene with the addition of a bottle of pills on the bedside table. MADGE is lying on the bed looking as though she had collapsed onto it. STEPHENSON and GENTRY enter.

STEPHENSON

Did you see that desk clerk giving me the fisheye when I went to pay the bill?

GENTRY

‘Course he did. You checked in in the middle of the night with a woman who looked like she’d been through a ringer. He assumed you brought her here for some illicit hanky-panky.

STEPHENSON

Well I tipped him enough he ought to keep his mouth shut if anybody comes snooping around. Car gassed up?

GENTRY

Filled her up when I got into town.

STEPHENSON

Keep to the speed limit on the way back to Indianapolis. I don’t want some cop pulling us over.

He attempts to rouse MADGE.

Wake up Madge. Time to go. C’mon baby. Madge?

GENTRY picks up the pill bottle.

GENTRY

Uh boss?

STEPHENSON

What? Madge! Wake up.

GENTRY

Boss! Looks like she took pills.

STEPHENSON

What the hell? Madge! You foolish girl what have you done? What’d she take?

GENTRY

Bottle says mercury bi-chloride. Should be eighteen pills. Looks like she took six.

STEPHENSON

Jesus. Madge! Madge!! Wake up honey. Where'd she get mercury bi-chloride?

GENTRY (knowing this news will not be welcome)

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? (*GENTRY is reluctant.*) Earl?

GENTRY

I didn't see no 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. Just bought herself a nice little bottle of poison while your back was turned. Madge!

MADGE has been coming around during the preceding dialogue, perhaps whimpering occasionally.

Madge baby you're going to be all right. We're going to take you home and you'll be all right. Gentry go down and move 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 take her to a hospital get her stomach pumped or somethin'? At least get a doctor?

STEPHENSON

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

GENTRY exits.

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.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 11

Stephenson's office, March 23, 1925, set up as before. STEPHENSON sits behind his desk.

Mr. Stephenson?

ARLENE (off)

I told you I didn't want to be interrupted.

STEPHENSON

ARLENE (off)
I'm sorry sir but a Mr. Asa Smith is out here. He says he's an attorney. He insists he has to see you immediately.

STEPHENSON flicks the intercom switch during the following as appropriate.

What about?

STEPHENSON

ARLENE (off)
He only says the matter is personal and confidential.

Pause. SMITH knows he is there so he can't get out of it.

O.K. Tell him I can give him three minutes.

STEPHENSON

ARLENE (off)
And Mr. Stephenson? That reporter Niblack is with him.

STEPHENSON angrily flicks the intercom to off. ASA SMITH enters carrying a briefcase, accompanied by NIBLACK.

Mr. Stephenson, I'm Asa Smith.

SMITH

STEPHENSON
I know you. Republican lawyer. Not one of ours though.

SMITH

Not one of yours. No sir.

STEPHENSON

Hello Niblack.

NIBLACK

Always a pleasure Mr. Dragon.

STEPHENSON

Ever the smart aleck. Have a seat but don't get too comfortable. The meter's running. What's this about?

SMITH and NIBLACK sit.

SMITH

You know Miss Madge Oberholtzer.

STEPHENSON

I've taken her out a few times.

NIBLACK

More than a few according to my sources. 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. One without any Klan affiliations.

STEPHENSON

Your three minutes are almost up.

NIBLACK takes notes from his pocket and consults them. He will continue to do so during the following dialogue.

NIBLACK

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

STEPHENSON

The woman is an adult. Hell she's pushing thirty. Surely she can stay out overnight without her fathers' permission.

NIBLACK

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

STEPHENSON

If Miss Oberholtzer was in an automobile accident I don't see how I'm involved.

SMITH

Come now Mr. Stephenson. We've spoken to Miss Oberholtzer. There was no accident. You raped this girl. You beat her. You bit chunks out of her flesh. Then you kept her captive and refused to obtain medical help.

STEPHENSON

Never happened. She must be delusional.

SMITH

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 it's money you're after. I might have known.

SMITH

We suggest 10,000 dollars would be a fair settlement.

STEPHENSON

Out of friendship for the girl I might consider 5,000.

SMITH

Ten thousand dollars. This isn't an auction Mr. Stephenson. Of course Madge's parents want no publicity and no lawsuits. She's suffered enough. And I've no doubt you'd like to avoid publicity and gossip as well.

STEPHENSON (to NIBLACK)

I suppose you have a juicy story already written saying I abuse women, a story you'll 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 can't get away with it. Why should I pay anything? It's only her word against mine.

SMITH

Oh I suspect we can find support for her story. Your face is not unknown in this state despite your habit of donning masks in public.

STEPHENSON

You'll never touch me. I have friends in high places, very high places.

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

They wouldn't dare double cross me. But hang on a minute. You said "if" she recovers.

SMITH

According to her doctor she is very weak and if her wounds become infected she will most probably not survive. In that case Mr. Stephenson, no amount of money or influence will protect you.

STEPHENSON

You're bluffing. 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.

ARLENE (off)

Mr. Stephenson. There is a telephone call from Mr. Smith's office. They say they have an urgent message for him.

STEPHENSON (operating the intercom)

He can take it in here. We're about finished with our business.

SMITH stands and picks up the telephone from the desk.

SMITH

This is Asa Smith. ... Thank you.

Hangs up and replaces the telephone on the desk.

Stephenson it looks like we've wasted your time. Miss Oberholtzer has taken a turn for the worse and her doctor says her recovery is impossible. Her father is 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* editor tries to explain this.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 12

Madge Oberholtzer's bedroom, March 28, 1925. Bed and chair. MADGE lies on the bed propped up on pillows. SMITH and NIBLACK enter and stand somewhat apart from MADGE. SMITH has his briefcase in which resides the Dying Declaration.

NIBLACK

So what now?

SMITH

Now we arrange for Madge Oberholtzer to testify against Stephenson from beyond the Pearly Gates. There's a legal document called a Dying Declaration. 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.

NIBLACK

Sounds like something an Indiana lawyer'd dream up. Would that theory hold up in the case of an atheist with no Maker to meet?

SMITH

I don't know. Never been tested. But in this case there's no question. Madge is a good church-going girl. I made detailed notes of everything she told us. Nine typewritten pages. Now we have to read every word to her so she can swear that her accusations are the truth.

NIBLACK

You intend to put a girl on her deathbed 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.

SMITH and NIBLACK move to MADGE's bedside. SMITH sits in the chair.

SMITH

Madge. Your doctor tells me you understand you cannot get well. Is that true? In making a statement of this kind it's necessary you realize you're soon going to die.

MADGE (very weak)

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

SMITH takes the document from his briefcase.

SMITH

I am afraid I must read this entire statement to you very slowly and carefully. You must hear all of it and then say whether or not what I read to you is true.

MADGE

I already told you what happened. You too Mr. Niblack. Over and over.

SMITH

The law requires we do this. Otherwise Stephenson will most probably never be punished for what he did to you.

MADGE

Then go ahead. Do whatever you have to.

Lights fade as SMITH begins reading.

SMITH

You're a brave girl. The document starts "My name is Madge Oberholtzer. I stand on the brink of death and this is my Dying Declaration. I first met D.C. Stephenson at the banquet given for the Governor at the Athletic Club early in January 1925. After the banquet he asked me for a date several times...."

END OF SCENE

SCENE 13

NEWSBOY (off)

Times! Indianapolis Times! Shocking news! Grand Dragon arrested! Stephenson accused of murdering young state employee! Times! Get yer Times here! Shocking news! Grand Dragon arrested!

Men's room/press room, Hamilton County Courthouse, Noblesville, Indiana, October 29, 1925. The reporters' room is also one of the courthouse's restrooms. Chairs and table with candlestick telephones and a vintage typewriter. NIBLACK's coat is draped over the back of his chair. He sits two-finger typing. KLEIN enters carrying a large purse.

KLEIN

Where the hell 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 "Ladies' Room" it's across the hall.

KLEIN (extending her hand)

Ida Klein *Chicago Tribune*. I'll be sending dispatches to papers coast to coast.

NIBLACK (standing and shaking her hand)

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.

They sit down. KLEIN's purse makes a distinct clinking sound when she puts it on the table.

So 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

Could well be. This is a hotbed of fervent Klux-ism.

KLEIN

Not one female juror?

NIBLACK

They never have women on juries in Hamilton County. There's only one toilet in the jury room and they don't clean it very often.

KLEIN

And they're afraid it'll offend women's delicate little noses. Apparently these men have never changed a baby's diapers.

NIBLACK

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

KLEIN

So who was protecting Madge Oberholtzer?

NIBLACK

Stephenson was supposed to be. In some people's minds that's what he's really guilty of. Violating the social contract. Women are subservient to men and in return men protect and defend their women.

Klein pulls two bottles out of the bag.

KLEIN

Yeah yeah. I've heard it all before. Knowing I was about to leave civilization and venture into deepest darkest Indiana I supplied myself with several pints of Mr. Al Capone's favorite beverage. Templeton Rye Whiskey, the best Iowa has to offer.

NIBLACK

You and Mr. Capone drinking buddies are you?

KLEIN

Let's just say I'm familiar with his tastes. Here. My treat.

KLEIN puts a bottle in front of NIBLACK and opens one for herself.

NIBLACK

It's a little early. I just had breakfast.

KLEIN

C'mon, you can't let me drink alone. What'd they teach you in journalism school anyway?

Although the whiskey isn't really very good, NIBLACK and KLEIN sip it as the dialogue continues. Klein rummages in her purse.

KLEIN (cont.)

Damn. I'm out of cigarettes. You wouldn't happen to have any would you?

NIBLACK (shocked)

Sorry. I don't smoke.

KLEIN

Of course you don't. What're you looking at me like that for? Like I'm some kind of side-show freak.

NIBLACK

Women who cuss and smoke cigarettes and drink whiskey, especially in the presence of a man they just met, are a pretty rare species down here in deepest darkest Indiana.

KLEIN

Well you'd better get used to it buster. It's the twentieth century. Women are tired of letting men having all the fun.

NIBLACK

Fun? With all due respect to Mr. Capone this whiskey's terrible. *(Reads label.)* "For medicinal use only."

KLEIN

Best I could get considering our nation's present unenlightened attitude toward spirituous liquors. So what do you think? Does Stephenson walk or does he get the electric chair? My bookie in Chicago is taking odds on a hung jury. I stand to make a few bucks if he's right.

NIBLACK

He could well be. Any Klansmen among those twelve jurymen are in a tight spot. Their Imperial Wizard and their Grand Dragon hate each other. They've been fighting for control of the Invisible Empire for two years now and so far neither of them has been strong enough to eliminate the other. Now the battlefield has shrunk to the size of an Indiana courtroom. Some Klansmen probably joined up because they believe heart and soul in what all the Klan stands for. Now their Imperial Wizard expects them to get Stephenson out of his way at last. Find him guilty of first-degree murder and send him to the chair, or second-degree murder and send him to prison for life. Other guys are only in the Klan because of Stephenson's charisma. They believe

(more)

NIBLACK (cont.)

he is the very embodiment of their grievances, the savior they've been looking for to lead them against their enemies. Their Grand Dragon expects them to vote to find him not guilty and let him get back to being the Stephenson they know and love. All it'd take is one of each on that jury and you've got a mistrial.

KLEIN

So what happened to Madge Oberholtzer doesn't matter? This is all just a contest between powerful men and the pain and suffering and death of one young woman doesn't matter?

NIBLACK

The prosecutor's job is to *make* Madge's death matter. The question is whether he's up to it. His name's Will Remy. Appointed by Gov. Jackson's predecessor so not Klan. It's his first big case. The pressure has to be enormous. Defense attorney on the other hand has been around a long time. Ol' Eph⁷ Inman's made a lot of money convincing Indiana juries his guilty clients are innocent as newborn babes. Very expensive. He's costing Stephenson a fortune.

KLEIN

You know, couple details about this whole affair don't add up. If Stephenson wanted to rape somebody why get on a train to do it? I can't imagine Madge would have been the first young lady ravished at his mansion.

NIBLACK

He also kept a suite at a hotel downtown. Could've done the deed there. Hotel detective would've looked the other way.

KLEIN

I've come up with a theory. Want to hear it?

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? One of my old school chums landed herself a rich husband that way.

⁷ Eph like the letter "F."

NIBLACK

None of that's been suggested by anyone.

KLEIN

But it fits. Stephenson gets mad as hell when he figures out this girl's trying to bamboozle him. So he lures her to his house and gets her good and drunk. Maybe he drugs her. Then he gets her on the midnight train to Chicago, works himself into a drunken rage, and attacks her. And attacks her. And attacks her until she breaks.

NIBLACK

Except they got off the train 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

My guess is he never intended to take her all the way to Chicago. I think he meant to take her to Gary. If you're riding the Monon Railroad Hammond's the closest station stop.

NIBLACK

Gary?

KLEIN

Do you know why many young women, at least young women from Chicago, occasionally travel to Gary?

NIBLACK

For the fresh air and pristine Lake Michigan beaches?

KLEIN

They go to Gary because in that lovely town of smoke and soot there reside a couple of very accommodating lady doctors well known in certain circles.

NIBLACK looks perplexed.

KLEIN (cont.)

They specialize in making female problems go away.

NIBLACK (aghast)

Abortion doctors?

KLEIN

And what is one of the compounds such doctors give their patients to induce shall we say a miscarriage? (*Bewildered silence from NIBLACK.*) Oh come on! Even in Indiana you can't be that naïve.

NIBLACK (quiet realization)

Mercury bi-chloride.

KLEIN

Mercury bi-chloride. The very thing the girl took to try and end her life. But 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.

KLEIN

She won't be an immaculate virgin after Stephenson's lawyer gets through blackening her memory. The sure-fire way to get a bad man acquitted is to convince a jury the woman was worse. (*Stands and gets her stuff together.*) I need to see if I can get a statement from the judge before court convenes.

NIBLACK (standing)

A word to the wise. The judge is a teetotaler. Before you get too close to him you might want to do something about the smell of Iowa on your breath.

KLEIN exits. NIBLACK sits and types a few pecks then takes the paper out of the typewriter and reads over what he's written:

NIBLACK

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 and former Klan Grand Dragon D.C. Stephenson. Through it all the defendant has steadfastly maintained his innocence.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 14

Circuit Courtroom, Hamilton County Courthouse, Noblesville, Indiana, October 29-November 14, 1925. Tables and chairs for prosecutor and defense with a witness chair centered between them. Remarks to the jury are directed to the theater audience. GALLERY responses are recordings. STEPHENSON sits at the defense table. NIBLACK and KLEIN stand with their notebooks on either side of the stage. Prosecutor WILL REMY enters.

NIBLACK

Mr. Remy!

REMY

Make it quick, Mr. Niblack. The judge will be here 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

You heard Stephenson had his own private Klan visitation in his cell last night? Some guy came and threatened to kill him if he testified.

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 not to ask questions about Klan activities. They're irrelevant to his actions on that train. Now if you'll excuse me.

REMY moves to his place at the prosecutor's table. INMAN enters. He is courtly and, where KLEIN is concerned, condescending.

KLEIN

Mr. Inman! May I ask you a question?

INMAN

And who might you be, little lady?

KLEIN

Ida Klein, reporter for the *Chicago Tribune*.

INMAN

Here to cover the “woman’s angle” for your female readers, I presume. Well, as much as I would enjoy talking to a pretty little thing like you, I have to speak with my client before court convenes. Perhaps we can meet later. For dinner? There’s a very nice restaurant right off the square.

KLEIN

Well, as much as I would enjoy having dinner with a handsome *older* gentleman like you, I’m afraid I have other plans.

INMAN moves to the defense table and sits down.

STEPHENSON

You talk to Remy about my visitor last night?

INMAN

I did. He agreed not to ask sensitive Klan questions.

STEPHENSON

Then we’re home free. This jury’ll never find me guilty of murder. And even if they did the Governor’ll pardon me before I set one foot in state prison. Frankly I’m surprised he hasn’t done it already.

Sound of staff hitting the floor. REMY, INMAN and STEPHENSON stand as the offstage voice of the BAILIFF opens the court.

BAILIFF (off)

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!

NIBLACK (reading his notebook)

Dateline Noblesville Indiana October 29 1925. Lawyers for both sides present opening arguments in Stephenson trial.

REMY (standing)

Gentlemen of the jury, this is a case of murder. The state's main witness will be the victim herself, Miss Madge Oberholtzer. She will tell you her story in her own words, as recorded in her Dying Declaration. 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.

The spirit of MADGE enters. She wears her bloodstained outfit. Speaking from beyond the grave, she tells the audience her story as STEPHENSON tells his.

MADGE

I, Madge Oberholtzer, being in full possession of my mental faculties and conscious that I am about to die, make this, my Dying Declaration.

REMY

After those vicious brutalities, despairing the loss of all a good woman holds dear, she took deadly poison. But what ended her life was not the poison. Oh, no. What killed Madge Oberholtzer was the devastating infection brought on by Stephen's savage attacks.

REMY sits as the offstage GALLERY erupts in cheers and applause. Sound of a gavel banging until order is restored. INMAN rises.

INMAN

Gentlemen of the jury, this is *not* a case of murder. Madge Oberholtzer died because she willingly took poison. A type of poison only the lowest sort of woman knows about. (*Angry noises from the gallery.*) 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.

INMAN sits as NIBLACK writes in his notebook.

NIBLACK

Dateline Noblesville Indiana November 14 1925. Background notes. Two weeks into Stephenson's trial and over fifty witnesses have testified.

KLEIN

Ticket agents, Pullman porters, desk clerks and hotel maids corroborate the facts in Madge Oberholtzer's Dying Declaration.

NIBLACK

The defense counters with a lineup of Stephenson's cronies who provide their boss with well-rehearsed alibis.

KLEIN

Prosecution doctors are certain Madge died of the infection from Stephenson's bite.

NIBLACK

Defense doctors swear she died of self-administered poisoning.

KLEIN

The courtroom is full to bursting with spectators. Many of them are women who are there to support Madge Oberholtzer's memory. Day after day they come to glare at Stephenson with anger and disgust. They are church ladies, sorority sisters, women she worked with, her best girlfriends, her weeping mother. The jurymen must see them as women just as sober and respectable as their own wives and daughters. Stephenson's lawyer makes Madge out to be the worst sort of round-heeled floozy. But if that were true, would such women as these ever have associated with her?

NIBLACK

Through it all the readers following the trial in newspapers across the nation keenly await the only witness they care about—the show's headliner, Stephenson himself. Finally he takes the spotlight.

STEPHENSON moves to the witness chair. INMAN stands.

INMAN

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

MADGE

At about 10 p.m., Mr. Stephenson sent his associate Mr. Gentry to pick me up at my parents' house and walk me the two or three blocks to Stephenson's mansion.

STEPHENSON

When she came in she was very upset. Said she was in trouble, if you know what I mean. Pleaded with me to help her leave town for a day or so to take care of things. To tell the truth I wasn't surprised. I knew what kind of girl she was.

The GALLERY reacts angrily.

REMY (rising)

Objection The defendant should refrain from commenting on the deceased's character.

STEPHENSON

O.K. I get it.

REMY sits.

MADGE

Stephenson and Gentry forced me to drink something I didn't recognize. It made me very ill and dazed.

STEPHENSON

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.

MADGE

Stephenson and Gentry put me in an automobile and drove to Union Station. I begged them to let me out of the car but they refused.

INMAN

And you did not accompany Miss Oberholtzer on her errand?

STEPHENSON

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

MADGE

Stephenson took me aboard a train and immediately into a private compartment. He pushed me into a berth and attacked me. I tried to fight but the drink had made me weak and unsteady. He was too strong. He bit me all over my body, my face, my back, my legs, my ankles.

STEPHENSON

My driver said she had him take her to an address up in Gary where she stayed two or three hours.

MADGE

When the train stopped in Hammond he took me to a hotel, holding a gun to my ribs to keep me quiet. After a time Mr. Gentry brought the car up from Indianapolis. I obtained a bottle of bichloride of mercury tablets. I took some and became very ill and delirious.

STEPHENSON

The driver said when she came out of the Gary location she didn't look well at all.

MADGE

When Mr. Stephenson saw what I had done, he and Mr. Gentry put me into the car and drove me back to Indianapolis.

STEPHENSON

On their way back to Indianapolis she suddenly screamed for the driver to stop the car, she was going to be sick. When he 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 and she'd thrown up all over herself.

INMAN

And what happened when Miss Oberholtzer returned to your house?

STEPHENSON

I was shocked at her condition. I had her rest for several hours then had her taken home.

INMAN

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

STEPHENSON

I never touched the girl. Never.

The GALLERY reacts angrily. Sound of a gavel.

MADGE

He chewed my breasts until they bled.

INMAN

No further questions. Mr. Remy your witness.

INMAN resumes his seat at the defense table. REMY rises and approaches STEPHENSON.

REMY

That was quite a fairy tale you just spun Mr. Stephenson. A story worthy of Hans Christian Andersen. Or the Brothers Grimm.

INMAN

Objection.

REMY

I'll withdraw the comment. Who did you say drove Miss Oberholtzer?

STEPHENSON

I didn't, but it was my associate Earl Gentry.

REMY

Is Mr. Gentry available to support your version of events?

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.

Gasps from the GALLERY.

MADGE

You asked me. But you didn't really want to marry me. You just wanted to save your own skin.

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 colored Pullman porter and a dago chambermaid. No one would take their word against a respectable white man.

REMY

Perhaps not a *respectable* white man no.

STEPHENSON (bristling)

Are you saying I'm not respectable?

REMY

Respectable men do not go around raping 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. ... 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.

MADGE

You're afraid the world'll find out what a beast you are.

REMY

Aren't you a coward Mr. Stephenson? Your Ku Klux Klan mask isn't the only mask you hide behind is it? Aren't you the sort of cowardly little man who hides his weakness behind a curtain of bluster and blackmail and bullying?

INMAN

Objection!—

REMY

—The kind of coward who only feels powerful when he brutally rapes and beats up a woman and then discards her like so much trash?

MADGE

Biting her like some rabid animal.

REMY

That's who you are Mr. Stephenson. *Isn't* that who you are? Nothing but a sadistic rapist and killer!

INMAN

Objection!!

STEPHENSON (overriding)

I didn't kill her! It wasn't my fault! *She* was responsible. It was all her!! It wasn't my fault.

Tumult in the courtroom. Sound of a banging gavel.

NIBLACK

Dateline Noblesville Indiana. Closing arguments conclude marathon Stephenson trial.

REMY steps forward as STEPHENSON returns to the defense table.

REMY

Gentlemen of the jury. If this man, this degenerate can kidnap a young lady—and despite the efforts of Mr. Stephenson and Mr. Inman to besmirch her character, Madge Oberholtzer truly was a lady, a credit to her parents and to her Christian upbringing. If Stephenson can kidnap *her*

(more)

and defile her and bite her and then deny her medical help—how can he not be found guilty of taking her life? Stephenson boasts he’s the law and the power in Indiana. Yet I know you men are brave enough not to set him free because you know if you do, you will be enabling him to commit further outrages against the young women of this state. Perhaps even young women you know. Perhaps even your own daughters. No. You will *not* set him free. I know it because I know what is in the hearts of the twelve good men sitting before me.

REMY takes his seat. The offstage GALLERY applauds and cheers. Sound of a banging gavel. INMAN steps forward.

INMAN

Gentlemen of the jury. D.C. Stephenson did not cause Madge Oberholtzer’s death. Seeking to eliminate what she considered a “problem,” she of her own free will purchased and took the pills that ultimately ended her life. No one forced her to do so. Mr. Stephenson is an honorable man. A respected businessman. A pillar of the community. Yet here he sits before you accused of a crime he did not commit and in peril of the electric chair. Why? Only because powerful persons, lurking in the shadows, find his continued existence inconvenient to their ambitions. 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.

KLEIN

Dateline Noblesville Indiana November 14 1925. Jurors to begin deliberations after recess for lunch.

NIBLACK

Courthouse regulars agree jurors could take weeks to reach a verdict.

Sound of a ticking clock. MADGE exits as lights dim then come up again to suggest the passage of time..

STEPHENSON

What’s taking the jury so long? They’ve been in there almost five hours already.

INMAN

Steve I told you they could take days just going through all the testimony.

STEPHENSON

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 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 the Governor 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. What happened to your agreement with Remy? 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. I didn't pay you all that cash to be represented by a loser.

INMAN

It looks like the jury is coming back already.

STEPHENSON

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

STEPHENSON, INMAN, and REMY stand; NIBLACK and KLEIN take notes.

JUROR (off)

On the charge of murder in the first degree we the jury find the defendant David Curtis Stephenson *not* guilty.

*Shocked reactions from MADGE and the GALLERY;
STEPHENSON grins in triumph.*

JUROR (off) (overriding)

On the charge of murder in the *second* degree we the jury find the defendant David Curtis Stephenson *guilty*. We recommend he be incarcerated in the Indiana State Penitentiary for life!

Applause and cheers erupt from the GALLERY. Gavel strikes.

STEPHENSON (overriding)

They can't do this to me! This farce was a set-up from beginnin' to end! It's nothin' but a god-damned travesty. Get Jackson on the phone! I wanna talk to the governor! Now!!

END OF SCENE

SCENE 15

NIBLACK stands in an indeterminate space.

NIBLACK

With Stephenson locked away, Indiana politicians from the governor on down allow themselves a chance to exhale. They forget. Even after you cut off a serpent's head, the snake can still bite.

Indiana State Prison, Michigan City, Indiana, October 25, 1926. The cell has a chair, a bunk, a vintage typewriter, perhaps the suggestion of bars on the back wall. STEPHENSON sits on his bunk. He is in civilian clothing rather than a prison uniform. In front of him is a chair on which there is a typewriter, which he is using.

PRISON GUARD (off)

Prisoner Number 11148 you have a visitor.

NIBLACK enters.

NIBLACK

So instead of calling you "Mr. Dragon" I should make it "Mr. 11148"?

STEPHENSON moves the typewriter off the chair and motions for NIBLACK to sit. NIBLACK moves the chair a little away from STEPHENSON and sits down.

STEPHENSON

Hello John. Glad you could make it. By this time you could be calling me "Steve" don't you think?

NIBLACK

Better men than me have discovered getting that close to you can be dangerous. Speaking of which, Gov. Jackson still refuses 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 writin' him up in the scientific journals. The wonder of our time! A man his age suddenly growin' a spine and a complete set of balls. They won't do him much good at this late date. That's strictly off the record of course.

NIBLACK

Didn't even bother to bring my notebook. 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. Very helpful. Promised to marry her when I get out. And I will get out. You can count on it. I was just typing up my appeal to the state Supreme Court.

NIBLACK

Those friendly guards wouldn't be Klansmen by any chance? Or maybe *ex*-Klansmen? Since your conviction a lot of folks seem to be hiding their robes in the attic and pretending they were never members.

STEPHENSON

Temporary setback that's all. Fear of foreigners. White supremacy. Religious bigotry. They've been around forever and they never go out of style. They always come back bigger and better than ever. And there's always somebody like me around ready to exploit his opportunities. Always.

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

Madge Oberholtzer wasn't any different from all the other women who lined up at my door. They knew what was expected of them. If some of them suddenly decided not to cooperate they deserved what happened to them. Nah, the Imperial Wizard wanted me gone so he trumped up a murder charge. I'm told he laid out 100,000 dollars to buy a conviction. He's too stupid to know that without Stephenson the whole structure's gonna come down around his head. Membership isn't just falling here. It's falling everywhere. Ohio, Illinois, Oregon, New York. Everywhere but the deep South. Down there they're a lot more worried about the Negroes than they are about one dead woman in Indiana. If Brother Hiram has just left well enough alone, we could've swept my little difficulty under the rug. We'd've paid off the right people and it would've all blown over. We had such a good thing going and that purple-robed molar-yanker had to ruin it for everybody.

NIBLACK

So—still—none of this is your fault.

STEPHENSON

You know what *is* my fault? 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. One proves our old friend Gov. Jackson attempted to bribe his predecessor. You'll also find leads enough to take down a whole bunch of mayors city councilmen and legislators.

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. I'm in your debt and it's payback time. Once the *Times* runs its exposés, hand the boxes over to Remy. Tell him I'll testify any time any place. I'll teach those sons of bitches to cross D.C. Stephenson. 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 coverage. This stuff'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 were due ... Mr. Grand Dragon.

STEPHENSON

I told you once 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.

*During the following the lights dim on NIBLACK leaving
STEPHENSON alone in a narrowing pin spot.*

STEPHENSON

Nah. It was because the whole system's rigged.

Or else...who knows? Maybe the country just wasn't ready for me yet.

Yeah that's it. That's all it was. The country wasn't ready for a guy as talented as D.C. Stephenson. I. Was. Just. Ahead of my time.

STEPHENSON'S grinning face is visible for a few beats. Then:

BLACKOUT

END OF THE PLAY