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BOOGER JONES

A Dark Comedy in Two Acts by

Gary Britson

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Booger Jones

by Gary Britson

CAST OF CHARACTERS

STAN; *a retiree, early 60s*

LOU; *his neighbor, 45-50*

HANK; *Stan's son, 18*

STEW; *Hank's friend, 18*

MATTHEW; *A neighbor, About 25*

RACHEL; *Lou's daughter, 16-18*

TIM; *A classmate, 17-18*

BRENDA; *Rachel's mother, 45-50*

ELDON "BOOGER" JONES; *16-18*

HOYT; *a lawyer, 35-45*

SETTING

Stan's House

Booger Jones
by Gary Britson

ACT ONE

(AT RISE: The home of Stan Cuff, 55, a retired factory worker. HE is a muscular man with a crew cut and smiles rarely. HE is at his kitchen table, playing cards with his friend and neighbor, LOU, who is a few years younger. The kitchen shows all the signs of a bachelor mess; beer bottles, a whiskey bottle, glasses, cigarettes, etc. Sitting in a corner, in a wheelchair, is Stan's son, HANK, 18. In a terrible series of recent events, HANK, who has never been very smart, has lost the use of his legs; and his arms have very limited utility. On the tray in front of HANK is a glass of whiskey. STAN and LOU have been playing hearts together for many years, and they are not used to having HANK around. HANK, who has great difficulty talking, makes a whining, gurgling sound which HE substitutes for speech.)

STAN

Beating you ain't near as much fun as it used to be.

LOU

You ain't won that much.

STAN

Since I retired, a lot of things ain't as much fun as they used to be.

LOU

You been retired three weeks.

STAN

Coulda been three years. Or thirty. I was to go back today, no one would remember me.

(HANK makes a gurgling sound.)

STAN, *Continued*

(Responding to HANK'S gurgling) Whatsa matter? You need some more whiskey? You'll be fine. *(HANK whines)* You know another thing? Whiskey don't taste as good as it did when I was working.

LOU

(Dealing another hand.) The longer I'm married, the better it tastes.

STAN

Since Edie died, every time I have a few shots, I get to thinking: What's the point?

LOU

The point is to get drunk.

STAN

I used to drink to forget about work. Now I'm retired, I got nothing to forget.

LOU

You was drinking whiskey before you started that job. What was you getting away from then?

STAN

My old man. The army. My first wife. I dunno. I'm retired now. I'm a widower. I got no boss. Seems, a man don't have nothing to get away from, there ain't much to do.

LOU

Retirement's got you thinking too much. You better be careful.

STAN

All those years, getting away from being poor, getting away from not having nothing. You get away from all that, life gets boring, you know?

LOU

No, I don't know. I ain't retired yet. Brenda won't let me.

STAN

Don't golf, never did take to fishing. I don't like the outdoors that much. (*Looks at HANK*) Not that indoors is any great shakes.

LOU

You sure he ought to be here?

STAN

You know anyone that wants him?

LOU

Not really.

STAN

My insurance on him ran out. He don't have insurance of his own. The hospital kicked him out.

LOU

Didn't know they could do that.

STAN

They can.

HANK
(Struggling to talk) Get him!

STAN
Take it easy.

HANK
Get him!

STAN
(Rising) I'm working on it already.

LOU
I think he's out of whiskey.
(STAN pours more whiskey for HANK.)

STAN
There you go. You're all right.

HANK
Get him!

LOU
What's he want you to get?

STAN
Booger Jones.

LOU
Oh yeah. Old Booger Jones.

STAN
He wants me to kill him.

LOU
That's nice.

HANK
Get him!

STAN
Drink your whiskey before it gets cold. *(Looks at clock)* It's almost time for the game.
(STAN turns on radio. SOUND: CROWD NOISE and the ANNOUNCER Calling a high school football game.)

LOU

You sure Hank wants to listen to that game?

STAN

I don't give a damn if he wants to listen to it.

STAN

I got twenty bucks on that game. When Hank was playing, I never bet more than ten. Your son's the quarterback, you shouldn't bet much, you know? But since he got shot, I figure it's okay.

HANK

Get him!

LOU

I don't know.

STAN

What's the matter? It's perfectly legal.

LOU

It might make him feel bad. All his friends are playing football and he's stuck here with us.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

He don't have feelings no more.

LOU

Everyone's got feelings.

(There is a knock at the door.)

STAN

Come in.

(STEW enters. HE is 18, athletic, and HANK'S friend.)

STAN

Hi, Stew. Hey, why aren't you at the game?

(STEW crosses immediately to HANK; sits by his side and puts his arm around him.)

STEW

I quit the team.

STAN

Son-of-a-bitch! I wish you'd told me that before I put twenty bucks down on you guys.

STEW

I can't be playing games at a time like this.

STAN

Stew, you get to be my age, you realize that this is exactly the time a man needs a game to play.

HANK

Get him!

STEW

It's okay, Hank. I'm here for you, bro.

STAN

You ought to be out on that field tonight. The game's starting.

STEW

And you ought to be taking care of business. Instead of playing hearts with old shit-for-brains here. No offense, Lou.

LOU

We like to play hearts. Nobody ever got killed playing hearts.

STAN

Tell that to Wild Bill Hickok.

STEW

I'm talking serious here. There's business to be taken care of. My bro can't walk, can't talk. I want to know what you're going to do about it.

STAN

Business? I'm retired. Thirty years. I'm out.

STEW

You just got un-retired. You got a full-time job now.

STAN

What's that?

STEW

Booger Jones dies. That's your job.

STAN

I didn't know Booger Jones was going to die.

STEW

He is. Booger Jones is dead. The only question is who and how.

STAN

I don't know, Stew.

STEW

You're Hank's father!

STAN

Don't rub it in.

STEW

Get with the program!

STAN

I got nothing against Booger Jones, whoever he is.

STEW

(Puts arm around HANK) See this?

STAN

I see.

STEW

This used to be my best friend, my number one best friend in the world. Greatest quarterback we ever had. Look at him now.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

I know, he was great. Those days are gone.

STEW

What are you gonna do about it?

STAN

Stew, look at him. The boy's a cripple. They kicked him out of the hospital. Said there's nothing else they can do for him. What can I do?

STEW

You can get revenge.

STAN

Revenge ain't gonna get him insurance.

STEW

The guy who put my friend in that chair is gonna die. The only question is: How?

STAN

Fine. Kill him. Leave me out of it.

STEW

I think you oughta do it.

STAN

What makes you think that?

STEW

You're his father.

STAN

And because I'm his father, you want me to kill a guy so I can go to prison and spend the rest of my life getting butt-fucked by niggers.

LOU

I wouldn't worry about that, Stan. Old guy like you. You're not very attractive, no offense.

STAN

No offense, Lou.

LOU

Them niggers'll probably knock your teeth down your throat, but I don't think you need to worry about anything more intimate.

STAN

Thanks, Lou. That's a load off my mind.

STEW

Dammit, I'm talking serious here.

STAN

So am I. You want to spend the rest of your life getting worked over by coons, you be my guest. Go ahead. Kill Booger Jones. I don't care. Just leave me out of it.

STEW

You're gutless.

STAN

No, just retired. Thirty years with the same company. I earned my rest. Leave me in peace.

STEW

How can you have any peace when the boy that put your son in a wheelchair is out running around, having a good time, free as a bird?

LOU

Now, that ain't true, Stew. Booger Jones is in jail. His bond is steep. Nobody's gonna bail that little *retard* out.

STEW

He's alive!

STAN

So is Hank there. Here, Stew. (*Hands STEW the whiskey bottle*) Pour him some more whiskey. Take a pull yourself. He'll be fine.

STEW

(*Drinks from the bottle; pours some for HANK*) You call this "alive"? He can't even talk any more. This here is a shell of my bro. Far as I'm concerned, Booger Jones killed this man. No offense, Hank. And Booger Jones is going to pay. With his own life.

LOU

Booger Jones is a *retard*.

STAN

That's right, Stew. He's a *retard*. You can't go around killing *retards*. It don't look good.

LOU

Right.

STAN

And I'm not going to prison. I got nothing against niggers. I just don't want to dance with them.

LOU

Right.

STAN

I mean, I know all men are brothers, but I never liked my own brothers, so why the hell should I like anybody else's?

STEW

You ever listen to yourself when you talk, Stan? 'Cause I listen to you and you got me thinking you must be crazy. Your son was shot. This guy here is crying out to you for revenge. And all you can talk about is you don't like spades. This don't even involve spades. The spades don't got nothing to do with this. Booger Jones is white. Booger Jones shot your son and put him in this here wheelchair so he can't even talk right anymore. And what I'm here to say is: Stan, what are you gonna do about it?

STAN

I'm gonna play hearts, take Lou's money and drink whiskey.

LOU

Stew, one thing I learned early on: Don't mess with *retards*. Or Mexicans. Learn that lesson and you'll live a long time.

STEW

I'm here as a friend. Me and Hank played football together soon as we learned to walk. Nobody could throw the ball like Hank, and nobody could catch it like me. We are brothers to the bone. I'm talking about blood here. This is a lot deeper than ordinary revenge. If I wanted Booger Jones dead and that was all, then he'd be dead right now and I wouldn't be bothering you. But I thought you'd want to be involved. So I came here to offer my services. I'm doing you a favor.

STAN

I accept your favor, I end up in prison with a roommate named Demetrius. I don't need no favor.

HANK

Get him!

STEW

Hear that?

STAN

Do I hear that? I heard nothing but that ever since the hospital kicked him out. I can't even get him a nurse, someone to come in and mop up his mess. No one wants a job like that. He used to have a million friends. Girls hanging around the house all the time. That all ended the day he got shot. Nobody comes around no more. A guy starts shitting his pants, can't do nothing about it, that puts the old kibosh on friendship real quick. If I kill Booger Jones, I go to prison and become some nigger's girlfriend, who's gonna pay the rent? Who's gonna take care of Hank and give him his whiskey and mop up after him? Lou here? You? No way. I'm not here to pay the bills, they're gonna cut off the heat, the

STAN, *Continued*

electricity. They're gonna seize the house as soon as nobody pays the property taxes, and they're gonna come over here and they're gonna put Hank and his wheelchair in a snow bank. And if I get a letter in prison, and if the niggers who are in love with me let me read the letter and I find out that Hank and his wheelchair are in a snow bank, I'm going to write a letter to the City Council or the Board of Supervisors and the County Home and say, "Hey, isn't there something you can do to help my boy? He's in a snow bank." And you know what they're going to say? They're going to say, "Mr. Cuff, we are not communists. Do it yourself." That's what they said to me at the hospital. When they said they were kicking Hank out on account of my insurance ran out, I asked one of the doctors if maybe I could get some help, a nurse or something. You know what she said? She said, "Mr. Cuff, we are not communists. Solve your own problems. This is America." She said, "Pick yourself up by your bootstraps. Don't expect us to solve your problems for you. Don't be a communist." Don't be a communist. Christ. If you'd have been with me then, Stew, and you'd have offered to kill that bitch quack, I'd have taken you up on your offer on the spot. That'd almost be worth having a nigger roommate. Don't be a communist. Christ. I served my country. Marines. Semper fi. I come home. Thirty years with the same company. I retire. I get ready to enjoy my only boy's senior season of football. He's getting phone calls and letters from colleges that want him to play football for them. My son, never read a book in his life, is getting phone calls from colleges. He's got girls all over the place. Somebody named Booger Jones shoots him. He's in a wheelchair the rest of his life. And when I ask for a little help, a little advice, some doctor calls me a communist. I don't need anybody's help. I don't need anybody's advice. He makes a mess, I'll clean it up. This is America, so I'll clean it up. I hope I outlive him, 'cause if I don't, he'll end up in a snow bank. While I'm alive, I'll help him by myself. You want some whiskey?

STEW

Maybe I shouldn't have come over here.

STAN

Don't get me wrong. You're always welcome.

STEW

He's my brother.

STAN

No, he's not. He's a guy you used to play ball with. Only he can't play ball no more. You want my advice, I'd say get yourself another playmate.

(There is another knock on the door. Without being invited in, MATTHEW enters. HE is 25 and has probably never had a real job in his life. Overweight, well-groomed, dresses nicely, HE could be a professor of botany at the junior college, or HE could be a serial killer. No one knows, and no one wants to find out.)

STAN

Matt.

MATTHEW

Mr. Cuff. Lou.

LOU

Matt.

STAN

How's your uncle, Matt?

MATTHEW

He's fine, Mr. Cuff. Thank you for asking. He's still eating through a straw, but he needed to lose some weight anyway.

STAN

Glad to hear it.

MATTHEW

Of course, you can't eat steak through a straw. Or chili. So he's in a pretty foul mood most of the time. He drinks a lot of gin. You can get gin through a straw, no problem.

STAN

That's good.

MATTHEW

Hey, Stew. How come you're not at the game?

STEW

I can't play no game when my bro is in pain.

MATTHEW

(Pause; considers) Was that supposed to rhyme?

STEW

What?

MATTHEW

"I can't play no *game*/When my bro is in *pain*." Was that an intentional poem, or did it just come out like one?

STEW

Did your mama want you to be a fag, or did you just come out like one?

STAN

How about a drink, Matthew?

MATTHEW

No thanks, Mr. Cuff. I haven't tasted spirits since last November. It's been three hundred and seven days. My liver is happy and singing.

STAN

Why'd you quit drinking?

MATTHEW

I quit drinking so I could go to A.A. meetings.

STAN

Geez, Matt. I didn't know you was an alcoholic.

MATTHEW

I'm not. It's just that the folks at A.A. meetings are the only people left in town who can stand me.

STAN

I hear you.

MATTHEW

They let me talk about art and literature. They're very patient.

STAN

They'd have to be.

MATTHEW

Alcoholics Anonymous is the last refuge of the unwanted intellectual. If you're willing to tell those people you're an alcoholic—even if, as in my case, you're not—they'll let you sit there for hours and hours, talking on and on at tasteless length about darn near anything. Alcoholics are the best listeners in the world.

STAN

I imagine they're so stoned they can't hear you.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

(Glaring at the radio) Jesus! It's fourteen-zip already. We're getting killed. I wish you was playing tonight, Stew.

MATTHEW

You get kicked off the team again, Stewart? What was it this time? Narcotics or pre-pubescent baby-sitters?

STEW

I quit the team to help my bro here. Be with him in his hour of need.

MATTHEW

Is there anything I can do?

STEW

You could help me get Booger Jones.

MATTHEW

(Laughs) Sorry.

STEW

What's funny?

MATTHEW

What's funny is the notion that you or I need to "get" Booger Jones.

STEW

What are you saying?

MATTHEW

I'm saying that we can't "get" old Booger Jones. He's already been "got." He was "got" at birth. He's a *retard*, his legs don't work right, he can hardly walk, he weighs about twenty-two pounds, he's eighteen years old and looks a hundred and ten, he's half blind, he's stupid, he stinks, no one washes his clothes or lets him take a bath, his teeth are rotting in his deformed skull and everybody hates his guts and wishes he were dead. There isn't anything left to do to him. God's beaten us to the punch.

STEW

He's still alive.

MATTHEW

If you want to call it that. He's in the county jail. They make you eat TV dinners for breakfast, lunch and supper. You want a smoke, they probably give you a TV cigarette. You're up for a little fellatio, they probably serve you up a TV dick. I had an uncle who spent nine months there waiting for his trial.

STEW

Life in jail is still life.

MATTHEW

That's not what my uncle said.

STEW

I knew a guy was in prison five years. He said you can get anything you want. Even a woman, if you got money.

MATTHEW

The concept of prison as a playground is the product of Hollywood and television, which would have us believe that incarceration is a mad roundelay of cocaine, porno, and constant erotic amusement. It is, in fact, a weary, wearying miasma of crude weaponry, second-hand smoke and inadequate laundry facilities. You go in feeling like a gold mine and come out smelling like a tugboat filled with dirty socks.

STEW

I still say Booger's got it better than my bro.

MATTHEW

Booger's got it *better* than my bro. How long have you had this gift for alliteration?

STEW

How long have you been a queer?

MATTHEW

Since I got tired of boffing your sister.

(STEW advances on MATTHEW. STAN intervenes.)

STAN

Shut up and sit down, both of you. If there's to be any ass-kicking done around here, I'll be the one to do it, and I don't feel like it tonight. I'm trying to play hearts.

HANK

Get him!

STEW

It's okay, bro.

MATTHEW

If it's any consolation, Stew, I think I can assure you that young Booger is suffering even as we speak. His real name is Eldon, by the way. The nickname is a result of the almost total neglect of his education in matters related to hygiene. Having neither muscles nor wit, the boy's a sitting duck for every hillbilly sadist and alcoholic misanthrope dumb enough to wind up as a guest of our fair county. I think I can assure you all that at this very moment Eldon is acting, inadvertently, as a love object for a generation of local drug addicts, panderers and assorted sociopaths. It's an existence I wouldn't wish on Hitler.

STEW

Booger Jones shot my bro, and he's going to pay.

MATTHEW

He's paying right now.

STEW

Not enough! Besides, he'll get a trial, some judge'll give him a medal, and he'll go scot free. I'm not gonna take it.

STAN

What you ought to do is go over to the stadium, put your uniform on, and kick some ass on the football field, 'cause we're losing twenty-one-zip.

STEW

How can you think about football?

STAN

How can you not think about it? I'm losing twenty bucks!

STEW

You don't care about your own son.

STAN

Now, wait just a second there. You can accuse me of a lot of things, but you don't accuse me of not taking care of that boy. I raised him right. Gave him everything he needed or wanted, that I could afford. I did my best by him. Then he went and got himself in trouble, and now he's paying the price.

STEW

Hank's not the one should be paying. Booger Jones should be paying. Booger Jones, not this guy. Not my bro.

MATTHEW

Booger Jones has been paying all his life.

STAN

No offense, Matthew, but why are you here?

MATTHEW

My mother told me to go away for a while, so I thought I'd drop by, pay my respects to Hank, see if there's anything I could do.

STAN

You still living with your mother?

MATTHEW

Only since I got my last Ph.D.

LOU

What's that stand for?

MATTHEW

"Piled Higher and Deeper."

STAN

Still looking for a job? I got some friends down at the plant. I could put in a good word for you.

MATTHEW

Thanks, but I don't want a job.

STAN

Jeez, all that education, it's too bad you never found any use for it.

MATTHEW

That's what my mom says. But you both miss the point. I don't want to find a use for it. That would spoil it.

STAN

Still, it's a shame, being supported by your mother and all.

MATTHEW

I support myself. I bought my parents' house right after dad died. I was a junior in college, and mom was having a tough time. I bought the house with the advance on my second book, paid off all her bills. Sent her an allowance for years. After I finished my post-doctoral work, I moved back home. I like home. It's nice. My work is done.

LOU

You're looking for something to do, Matt, you can mow my lawn.

MATTHEW

I'd be glad to, Lou. For my usual consulting fee of ten thousand dollars an hour.

STEW

You guys are crazy. Man's dying here.

STAN

He's not dying. The doctor said he could live a long time, as long as he doesn't get pneumonia. *(Turning to radio and frowning)* They scored again. I wish you were on that field tonight, Stew. Twenty bucks.

STEW

Hell with that damn game! We gotta start acting like men. We got a problem. I want to know what we're gonna do about it!

LOU

Me and Stan are gonna play hearts. Matt here is gonna mow my lawn. And you, you talk about acting like a man. Why aren't you out on that football field acting like a man? We're getting killed out there and you're talking about Booger Jones and all that baloney. Stan here's losing twenty bucks.

STAN

Jesus. Twenty-eight-zip.

STEW

You guys go to hell. I'll take care of it myself.

(STEW storms out. MATTHEW hangs around; watches STAN and LOU play hearts, although THEY clearly don't want him around.)

MATTHEW

So. Anything I can do? To help with Hank, I mean.

STAN

Hank is what he is. And he's gonna be what he is for a long time. Nothing the doctors can do, nothing you can do. Thanks for asking though. You're a good kid. Even if you do still live in your mother's house.

MATTHEW

Actually, it's my house. I own it. I pay the taxes. I've always been kind of a homebody. Even when I was at Princeton. I tended to stay in my room a lot. I never went to the movies or anything. Studied, mostly. Same thing when I was at the Sorbonne. I like small rooms, not a lot of noise. Keep everything simple, that's my motto. I was going to stay in Paris, become a French citizen. They wouldn't let me. I think they were jealous. Anyway, I like the simple life.

LOU

I always thought you was simple, Matt.

STAN

Yeah. That's right. Simple Simon. That's you. Thirty-seven hot-shot college degrees. Living with his mother. No job. Simple Simon.

LOU

I been working since I was eleven. Been working at the packing plant since I was eighteen. Worked the midnight shift eighteen years. Lotta sixteen-hour days. These hands belong to a working man. I mean real work. Ugly, hard, mean work. Backbreaking work.

MATTHEW

(Pause) Are you waiting for me to congratulate you on having a job you hate?

STAN

If you want to be helpful, Matt, pour Hank there some more whiskey.

(MATTHEW pours HANK more whiskey.)

MATTHEW

When Stew was talking about getting revenge on Booger Jones, I agreed with him. But I didn't encourage him, because I didn't want him to get the idea that I'd ever consider collaborating with him on a project. He's too emotional. I can't work with that kind of individual. I do something, it's got to be objective and well-considered. I do something, I look at the problem from all angles. Then I consider each option. When I decide on a plan, I pursue it relentlessly. I take no prisoners. That's why I never paid a nickel in tuition. All those years, they paid *me* to go to college. It's true I'm unusually smart, but what I really am is careful. There are lots of smart guys. The county jail is full of smart guys. They're very smart. But they're not careful. They don't think. Take Stew. He's not smart and he's not careful. He'll wind up drunk and dead in a ditch. But I understood him when he was talking about revenge. This is a primal need. It goes to man's earliest instincts for justice and societal order. That's why I had to break my Uncle Ned's jaw the other night. He came over to the house, we got to talking about Camus and the early existentialists. He said anyone named Camus was a fag, so I broke his jaw. This is revenge. But like anything else, revenge usually has to be considered coldly and dispassionately. Stew wants to charge out into the night – drunk, of course – and shoot Eldon Jones in front of God and everybody. That way he gets shot too, he goes to jail, and things are worse than before. That's not the way I do things. However, I know a guy who will gladly kill Eldon. But you probably couldn't afford him. I could do it myself, though. I wouldn't mind. I've never killed anybody, but I'm always up for new and exciting experiences.

LOU

You are one dumb son-of-a-bitch.

HANK

Get him!

LOU

You couldn't kill time.

MATTHEW

It would be a favor to Stan, of course. I've always looked up to you, Stan. You were sort of the father I never had.

STAN

No, I wasn't.

MATTHEW

You weren't? I thought you were.

STAN

You were wrong. I never liked you.

MATTHEW

You never really got to know me. I was just the crazy kid next door.

STAN

I never wanted to know you. And I never thought you were crazy. I just didn't like you. Like vitamins. I never liked vitamins, either. I got nothing against vitamins, I just don't like them, is all. Now you take Edie. She could eat a whole bushel of vitamins. I think that's what killed her.

LOU

Edie got killed when her car went off the bridge in a hail storm. She was going to visit her sister.

STAN

Car probably went off the bridge, she was reaching for some vitamins.

LOU

Could be.

STAN

You can't drive and eat vitamins simultaneously.

MATTHEW

You used to take me to ball games when I was a kid and my dad wouldn't take me. You took me to the state fair.

STAN

No, I didn't.

MATTHEW

I remember it well.

STAN

No, you don't. I never took you any of those places. I don't like those places. I never even took my own son to any of those places. Why the hell would I take you?

MATTHEW

You took me because my old man was too drunk and you felt sorry for me.

STAN

Your old man didn't drink. He didn't take you because he didn't like you any better than I did.

MATTHEW

We used to play touch football together.

STAN

That's a laugh. No one would have you on their team.

MATTHEW

Hank looked up to me. I was kind of the older brother he never had.

STAN

Hank couldn't stand you. You were way older than him and he still used to beat you up.

MATTHEW

I used to help him with his homework.

STAN

By the time he started getting homework, you were in college, bothering someone else.

MATTHEW

I've always had an affinity for your family.

STAN

We've never liked you.

MATTHEW

Hmm. I must have been thinking of someone else. Are you sure it wasn't you?

STAN

I'm sure. But if you're so smart and full of—what's that thing you said you always had?

MATTHEW

Affinity.

STAN

Maybe you can do something useful and plan Hank's future for him. He's eighteen. He could live a hell of a long time. He might as well be something besides a paperweight on wheels.

MATTHEW

All right. I'll tell you what to do about his future. You should kill him. That's what you should do about his future.

LOU

That ain't right.

MATTHEW

And what is right, Lou? Letting him suffer in frustration and pain for decades, with no hope of recovery?

LOU

Killing Hank's illegal.

MATTHEW

So is killing Booger Jones. I didn't hear you objecting to that.

LOU

That's different.

MATTHEW

What's different about it?

LOU

If you was to kill Booger Jones, nobody'd care. You kill Hank here, that'd upset Stan.

MATTHEW

Is that your moral criterion, Lou? Whatever upsets Stan?

LOU

My moral what?

MATTHEW

I suppose it's as good a system as any. But I won't kill Hank. He's the brother I never had.

STAN

No he isn't. He hated you.

MATTHEW

But I will kill Booger Jones for you.

LOU

Now we're getting somewhere. You sure you're up to it, Matt?

MATTHEW

I'd have to get in shape first. There are a lot of things to consider, a lot of plans to make. I'll have to choose a method.

LOU

Why don't you just sit down next to him and talk a few hours? That'd finish him off.

MATTHEW

Killing someone isn't a movie, you know. It takes a lot of forethought, a lot of work.

LOU

That lets you out. Look at yourself. You ever done a day's work in your life?

MATTHEW

When I was at the Sorbonne, I wrote a new translation of *L'Etranger*, by Albert Camus.

LOU

Like I said: You ever done a day's work in your life?

MATTHEW

I showed my translation to Jean-Paul Sartre. He said it was okay, but he thought it needed more sex. So I put lots of screwing in it. That's why I couldn't get it published. Intellectual publishers hate sex. That's why great literature is so boring and dull.

LOU

You gonna answer my question?

MATTHEW

Usually, anything with lots of sex in it gets published right away. But you go putting sex in with existentialism, you haven't got a prayer.

STAN

These books you're always talking about, that you say you wrote. How come I ain't never seen none of them?

MATTHEW

You don't go to book stores.

STAN

I go to the grocery store. They sell lots of books at the grocery store. How come I never seen none of your books there?

MATTHEW

They're not that kind of books.

LOU

What do you mean by that?

STAN

He means they're not the kind of books that anybody wants to buy.

(STAN and LOU laugh.)

LOU

Yeah. Who'd wanna read some book *you* wrote?

MATTHEW

I write for a very distinguished and select audience.

LOU

Very distinguished and select audience that never worked a day in their life.

STAN

Hey, we gonna play hearts, we gonna talk?

LOU

I was just wondering, Stan. Matt here thinks he might be a killer. I'm kind of curious how he plans on doing it.

STAN

I don't want any killing. I can't afford to be hiring assassins. They just raised my electric bill.

LOU

Okay. *(Looks at his cards, then at MATTHEW)* But if you *was* gonna kill Booger Jones, how would you do it?

MATTHEW

I read once about how some Huns drove a bunch of stakes in a barrel, stuck a guy in it, and rolled it downhill.

LOU

Yeah, well, you ain't got no barrel, and you ain't got no stakes, and you ain't got no hill. So what you gonna do?

(MATTHEW stroke an imaginary beard, furrows his brow; pauses thinking.)

MATTHEW

I could shoot him.

LOU

You got a gun?

MATTHEW

Not really.

LOU

I'm not gonna loan you mine.

MATTHEW

I'd take real good care of it. I'd treat it like it was my own.

LOU

That's what I'm afraid of. Got any other bright ideas?

MATTHEW

There's always poison.

LOU

Forget it. He's in jail.

MATTHEW

I could wait until he got out, then hit him over the head with my Louisville Slugger.

LOU

What if he never gets out? What if they give him fifty years for attempted murder and you can't get at him?

MATTHEW

In that case, there's no problem. He's gotten his punishment and there's no need for us to do anything.

LOU

(Disgusted and condescending) No. See, that's not the way an assassin is supposed to think. A true assassin, he doesn't care if his man is in prison, he'll kill him anyway. He'll get inside the prison, if he has to. Poison his guy, stab him, drop a barbell on his Adam's apple, whatever's necessary. He'll blow the prison up, if he has to. A real killer, he won't let a little thing like prison stand in his way. Prison or no prison, he'll get his man.

MATTHEW

You want me to sneak into the county jail and poison Booger Jones?

LOU

You'd need contacts inside the jail. You know anyone works in there?

MATTHEW

No.

LOU

I didn't think so. So, you ain't gonna get in.

MATTHEW

(Relieved) Well, that's that.

LOU

How do you make a living?

MATTHEW

I live by my wits. I write books. I invest. I'm a very shrewd investor.

LOU

That's good. 'Cause you ain't no killer. A real killer, he'll go through steel walls, Mt. Everest, the bottom of the ocean, ice ages, meteors, he don't care. He's paid to get his guy, he'll get him.

MATTHEW

Maybe that's the problem.

LOU

What.

MATTHEW

I'm not being paid. Maybe compensation would give me the incentive to do the job right.

LOU

You need money? What about your books? Your shrewd investments?

MATTHEW

The market hasn't been kind to me lately. My books have never been duly appreciated in the marketplace.

LOU

What'd you write?

MATTHEW

I wrote a good calculus textbook once. Then there are my Camus translations, my works of scholarly criticism, my scientific treatises. Other than that, they're mostly about nice guys who can't get laid. Plus a few lesbian bondage novels.

LOU

Yeah? You got any on you?

MATTHEW

Are you kidding? My probation officer won't even let me read my own stuff.

LOU

What are you on probation for?

MATTHEW

Conspiracy.

LOU

Conspiracy to do what?

STAN

Conspiracy to be a damn nuisance. We gonna play hearts or what?

HANK

Get him!

(There is a knock at the door. Lou's daughter, RACHEL, enters. SHE is a teen-ager, and unless she marries well, she is going nowhere.)

RACHEL

Dad, mom wants you home.

LOU

(Studying his hand) I'm busy.

RACHEL

She wants you home.

LOU

What for? It's Friday night.

RACHEL

We're going to Omaha tomorrow.

LOU

So we'll go tomorrow. I'm playing hearts tonight.

RACHEL

She says to start packing.

MATTHEW

Hi, Rachel.

RACHEL

(Without enthusiasm) Hi.

LOU

Packing what? We'll be there one day.

RACHEL

Mom says we're staying over. You have to pack a suitcase.

LOU

What suitcase? We're going to a funeral, we leave in the morning, we'll be back at night.

RACHEL

Mom says we're staying over.

LOU

You tell her we're not staying over. Whenever we stay over we stay in one of those motels where it's always somebody's wedding night. It upsets my ulcer.

RACHEL

She wants you home.

LOU

Tell her: "Wantin'" ain't "Getting".

RACHEL

She says now.

LOU

Tell her: "People in hell want ice water."

RACHEL

Dad.

LOU

I'm playing hearts.

STAN

(Glaring at the radio) Holy Toledo. Thirty-five-zip.

MATTHEW

How's it going, Rachel?

RACHEL

Fine. *(Firmly)* Dad.

LOU

I'll be home when I'm done playing hearts.

RACHEL

She says now.

LOU

She says, she says.

RACHEL

Dad...

LOU

(Throws down cards) I never get to have any fun. Stan, don't do anything to Booger until I get back from Omaha. I get back, I'll be so mad I may kill the little *retard* myself.

(LOU exits.)

RACHEL

Sorry, Stan.

STAN

Okay, Rache.

MATTHEW

Hey, Rache. How's school going?

RACHEL

(Bored) Fine.

MATTHEW

(Desperate to break the ice) How's your mom?

RACHEL

Fine.

MATTHEW

She still dating that milkman, the guy from Bosnia?

RACHEL

I don't know. She wears a lot of hats.

MATTHEW

I don't know anyone from Bosnia.

RACHEL

I don't like him. He has too much hair. Is that whiskey?

STAN

Sure.

RACHEL

I'll have a little, please. I used to have a cold.

STAN

Help yourself.

(RACHEL helps herself to some whiskey and sits at the table.)

RACHEL

Is it hearts?

STAN

Yep. Thirty-five to nothing.

RACHEL

Hi, Hank.

HANK

Get him!

RACHEL

Is he getting better?

STAN

Nope. And he won't.

RACHEL

I'm sorry.

STAN

It ain't your fault.

(Deals a hand of cards to RACHEL.)

RACHEL

So. You guys going to kill Booger Jones or what?

STAN

Not in my house. Not on my dime.

RACHEL

Don't you want him killed?

STAN

You didn't ask that question, and I didn't hear it.

RACHEL

Everybody at school says he should be killed. Eddie Henderson says, he ever catches Booger Jones, he's going to impale him at the fifty-yard-line of the football stadium. Just like Vlad the Impaler.

STAN

Who Impaler?

MATTHEW

Vlad the Impaler, Stan. He terrorized central Europe in the fifteenth century by impaling his enemies on giant stakes. Some think he was Bram Stoker's prototype for Dracula. Other than that, he was a real nice guy.

(RACHEL studies her cards.)

RACHEL

Hearts really isn't my game. I like poker. *(To MATTHEW)* I heard you beat up your uncle. I heard he's going to have you killed.

STAN

(To MATTHEW) Maybe your uncle could kill Booger Jones. As long as he's going to prison anyway, for killing you.

MATTHEW

(To RACHEL) That wasn't a beating, Rachel. That was a literary discussion. I get slightly agitated when I discuss existentialism with amateurs. Besides, it was only my uncle. He still likes Hemingway, so what the hell does he know?

STAN

He don't know how to take a right upper-cut from a fruitcake, apparently.

MATTHEW

He'd been drinking, so it looked a lot worse than it actually was.

RACHEL

What's existentialism?

MATTHEW

It's a philosophical construct originated by Jean-Paul Sartre after World War Two. Basically, it holds that everything is pointless, there is no God, and life is a lot of crap.

RACHEL

That's what my dad thinks. He won't go to church, so mom gets mad and yells at him every Sunday and throws things at him until he puts on his suit. Mom loves church.

MATTHEW

God is love, so they say.

RACHEL

Mom doesn't care about God. She likes to sing in the choir and have coffee and cigarettes with her friends after the service. Dad won't let her smoke in the house.

MATTHEW

With what church are your parents affiliated?

RACHEL

Episcopal, but mostly we just like to drink coffee and smoke.

STAN

Want some more whiskey?

RACHEL

Just a shot. I'm trying to cut down.

MATTHEW

Are you old enough to drink whiskey?

RACHEL

My dad says you're never too old to drink whiskey.

HANK

Get him!

RACHEL

So. Who's gonna get Booger Jones?

MATTHEW

We haven't decided.

STAN

Nobody's gonna get him.

MATTHEW

Apparently I'm the de facto nominee.

RACHEL

What's "de facto"?

MATTHEW

It's Latin for "Nobody else wants to do it."

STAN

It's not that nobody wants to do it. Everybody wants to do it. I just don't want to go to jail.

RACHEL

Aw, lighten up. Nobody's going to jail for killing old Booger Jones. That guy's a *retard*.

STAN

The law don't say you can go and kill a guy, just because he's a *retard*. The law don't work that way.

RACHEL

Everybody hates him. People who never heard of old Booger Jones hate him. Grady Jackson kicked Booger Jones's nuts right through the top of his head in front of the popcorn stand at the Homecoming game one time and nobody even called the cops. The cops wouldn't have come anyway. They don't like football. (Shaking her head.) Old Booger Jones. How you gonna kill him?

MATTHEW

I haven't decided.

RACHEL

You better do a better job on him than you did on your uncle. Mom says your uncle's pretty mad and he's like to come at you with his snowmobile.

MATTHEW

He sold his snowmobile.

RACHEL

Mom says he bought a bigger one.

MATTHEW

(Looks out the window) It's not snowing.

RACHEL

Wait a couple months. Mom says that boy gets the jump on you and it's snowing, you're toast.

STAN

What's he gonna do to Matt here with a snowmobile? Hit him over the head with it?

RACHEL

He's gonna run him down with it. As a convicted felon, he can't have a gun, and he's too clumsy to use a knife effectively. So mom says he likes to run folks down with his snowmobile. If he's drunk enough, he doesn't even need any snow.

STAN

That's a heck of a note.

MATTHEW

Maybe we could pass the hat, get him to mow down Booger Jones.

RACHEL

I don't know. He's your uncle. Only, the way mom tells it, he's not in any hurry to go doing you any favors. Got anything to eat around here?

STAN

No, I'm retired.

RACHEL

How you gonna kill Booger Jones?

MATTHEW

I can't rush into this. I have to look at the problem from all angles, apply the theories of science and reason I picked up at the Sorbonne.

RACHEL

Sore bones? (*STAN laughs*) You got sore bones?

MATTHEW

I can't just rush out and kill him. There must be a certain technique.

STAN

Sore bones!

MATTHEW

I must develop a plan.

RACHEL

When it comes to fighting, my dad always says, "Hit first, hit worst." Then hit the road.

STAN

Good thinking. And don't tell anyone I said that. I don't want to get involved.

MATTHEW

Stan here's afraid that he's going to be blamed for anything that happens to Booger Jones.

RACHEL

Relax, Stan. Jail's not so bad. Three hots and a cot. Meet some interesting people. You'll be all right.

STAN

You're damn right I'll be all right. 'Cause I'll be right here.

RACHEL

(Laughing) Sore bones! Sorry.

MATTHEW

It's all right. I expect working people to make fun of my education. It's your way of protecting yourself against my superior intellect.

RACHEL

Well, why don't you get on your superior intellect and ride on over to the cop shop and get old Booger Jones and bring him over here and kill him, if that's really what you want to do?

MATTHEW

I need time to plan.

RACHEL

Sore bones!

STAN

Sore bones!

RACHEL

By the way. What'd old Booger ever do to you?

MATTHEW

He shot Stan's son. He put Hank in a wheelchair.

RACHEL

I know that, dummy. I mean, what'd Booger do to *you*? He shot Stan's son, so let Stan kill him.

STAN

Not me. I'm on a pension.

RACHEL

The way I see it, you shouldn't kill someone who hasn't done anything to you. You should just slap 'em around a little.

STAN

You're getting carried away there, Rachel. When I went overseas to fight a war, those guys hadn't done nothing to me.

RACHEL

So...how'd that come out? The war.

STAN

I lost.

MATTHEW

Why did Booger shoot Hank?

RACHEL

Where the hell have you been?

MATTHEW

I'm out of town a lot. I heard about what happened. I just never heard why.

STAN

All I know is, my boy was in class one morning, leading the class in the Pledge of Allegiance, when some *retard* named Booger Jones up and shot him. Bunch of Hank's friends beat the snot out of Booger Jones, but that didn't help my boy none. Ever since then, Hank's been just like you see him there, and Booger Jones has been in jail. And every day it seems someone shows up and asks me if I want them to kill Booger Jones, and I say fine, just leave me out of it. Killing Booger ain't gonna get my boy out of that wheelchair, but if it makes everyone happy, go ahead. Me, I ain't going to jail for my boy or nobody else. The thing I can't understand is how something like this can happen at a school. Maybe schools are different from when I was young. I don't know what the school is like any more. I never go there.

RACHEL

I only go when they're having pizza for lunch.

MATTHEW

You're smart. It's a dangerous place, school.

RACHEL

I never noticed any danger. It doesn't smell good and the hamburgers are dog meat and guys are always stealing my clothes. But I wouldn't say it's dangerous.

STAN

It was dangerous for my boy. Getting shot when you're saying the Pledge of Allegiance. It don't get any more dangerous than that.

RACHEL

I don't know if it's my place to say this. But it's time you faced up to the fact that Hank didn't get shot while he was saying the Pledge of Allegiance.

STAN

He didn't?

RACHEL

It happened in the boys' locker room. Hank and his friends had just finished gym class. They did calisthenics, played some volleyball, a little gymnastics, a couple laps around the gym, and then they beat the snot out of a few of the weaker kids, like they always did when class was winding down. Then they all went in to take their showers, and when Hank was standing naked in front of his gym locker Booger showed up and shot him. I'm sorry, but that's what happened.

STAN

You sure it wasn't when he was leading the class in the Pledge of Allegiance?

RACHEL

(Gently touching STAN'S arm) Stan, I think we both know that Hank, as great a guy as he was, wouldn't know the Pledge of Allegiance if it bit him.

STAN

I knew he was never much for memorizing things. But some people told me—

RACHEL

I know. Sometimes people tell little lies to make you feel better in times of tragedy. But I think that you have to know the truth sooner or later, don't you?

MATTHEW

I didn't know it happened in a locker room.

RACHEL

Shows how much you know. Everyone knows Booger Jones shot Hank right in front of his locker after gym class. He was naked.

MATTHEW

Who's naked?

RACHEL

Hank. He was getting ready to take his shower after gym class. My friend Julie Bloom heard the shot. And, not being too bright, she goes running down the hall into the locker room to see what happened. Most people that heard shots would go tearing in the opposite direction. But you don't know Julie Bloom. She always told us she wanted an excuse to go in there and see what it was like, all those steamy guys standing around. I bet she heard those shots and said a bunch of Hail Mary's to God for an excuse to go running into that locker room and see Hank naked.

STAN

Did she?

RACHEL

Did she! She must have stood there half an hour. Stood there while guys were beating the snot out of Booger Jones and the ambulance guys were running around. Julie's like that. She likes to go places and then not do anything, just stand around. Her dad's a Mormon.

MATTHEW

Why'd he do it?

RACHEL

I don't know. I don't hang out with *retards*. Booger probably thought it was funny. His mother was twelve when she gave birth to him. You knew that, didn't you?

STAN

I didn't know he had a mother.

RACHEL

Everyone's got a mother.

MATTHEW

If you're conceived in a test tube you don't have one.

RACHEL

Sure you do. You got the egg. The egg is the mother.

MATTHEW

I wouldn't want an egg for a mother.

RACHEL

I bet your mother wishes she was an egg, so she didn't have to watch you beat up your uncle like you did. It was her brother you punched in the jaw.

MATTHEW

He had it coming. He called me names.

RACHEL

What names?

MATTHEW

I choose not to discuss it.

RACHEL

If you don't have the nerve to discuss a little thing like that, where you gonna get the nerve to kill old Booger Jones?

STAN

He's not killing nobody. I think it's time for you to go home, Matthew.

MATTHEW

You're probably right. I'll go home and think on it.

STAN

I don't want you thinking. Just stand in the corner and be quiet.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

Your mom's probably looking for you, Rache.

RACHEL

Dad's the one who gets frantic if I'm gone two seconds. He wants me to be a nun. Can you freshen this up a bit? Thanks.

STAN

(Pouring her a drink) I didn't know you guys was Catholic.

RACHEL

We're not, but Lou's willing to convert if it'll get me into a convent.

STAN

You want to be a nun?

RACHEL

No. I'm going into fast food. I firmly believe that the future of American business lies in a really good corn dog at a very high price. I have a head for business.

STAN

That's nice.

RACHEL

Speaking of business, how much is it worth to you to have Booger Jones snuffed?

STAN

It wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel to me. But Stew would probably pay through the nose.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

Hank would too, if he had any money, which he don't and never will. There's all kinds of people who would pay to have Booger killed. Me, all I want to do in my retirement is play hearts and drink whiskey.

RACHEL

I could plan assassinations from the convent. It'd be a perfect cover. I'd hire some monks to do the actual killing, but I could mastermind everything from behind my cloistered walls. The monks would probably work cheap. It'd be neat. Nuns have a lot of extra time. I could pray and stuff and do all the religious junk in the morning. Then in the afternoon when everybody else is out digging in the garden or making wine or nursing the poor, I could be in my cell, directing executions from my computer. I'd bring in so much dough, they'd probably make me the head nun. What is that? What do they call the head nun?

STAN

They probably call her Sir. Look. I'm not hiring anyone to kill Booger Jones. I'm no killer and I don't want to go to jail and nuns make me nervous. They used to hit me with a ruler.

RACHEL

Look on the bright side. Even if you do hire someone to kill Booger, and if he gets caught and you have to go to prison, at least Matthew won't be there.

STAN

That would be a big plus. That guy is crazy. Ever since he came back from Sore Bones.

RACHEL

That's a laugh. He never went to the Sorbonne. They wouldn't even take him down at the junior college. I heard he knocked up a chick in Kansas City and went to jail for not paying his child support. I don't believe it. That guy couldn't get laid in a whorehouse.

MATTHEW

Au contraire. I have had warm, rewarding relationships with any number of interesting young ladies.

RACHEL

Name one.

MATTHEW

You'll have to buy a copy of my memoirs.

STAN

Either one of you ever thought about getting a job and being a normal person?

RACHEL

Oh, right. Like, who's going to hire me?

STAN

You got a point there.

RACHEL
You could hire me.

STAN
You want to mow my lawn?

RACHEL
I'll kill Booger Jones for you.

STAN
If you do, don't tell me about it.

RACHEL
You can trust me.

STAN
Last time I heard that, I wound up paying child support.

RACHEL
You lie.

STAN
What's a nice girl like you doing talking about killing people?

RACHEL
Booger's not people. He's a retard.

STAN
Nice girl like you. You should be home doing your algebra or helping your mother bake a pumpkin pie.

RACHEL
My mother tried to bake a pie once. The fire department was in our house for three hours. They wouldn't even take their boots off. And when they left, all my lingerie was missing.

STAN
You should be sewing, knitting. You know, nice girl-type things.

RACHEL
Nah. Lately I been checking out law schools. So, what you're saying, you wouldn't mind if I killed Booger Jones. You just want to be immune from prosecution. Is that right?

(STAN lunges at the radio and turns it off.)

STAN
Forty-nine to nothing. Twenty bucks down the drain.

RACHEL

I'll get Booger for five thousand dollars.

STAN

What?

RACHEL

Payable in increments. You could put it in escrow for when I go to law school.

STAN

We need more whiskey.

(STAN picks up the empty whiskey bottle and exits to the kitchen.)

RACHEL

(To HANK) How about you? You want me to kill Booger Jones for you?

HANK

Get him!

(There is a knock at the door. Enter BRENDA, Rachel's mother. SHE is very disappointed with the world.)

BRENDA

What gives here?

RACHEL

We're playing hearts, mother.

STAN

(Entering with a fresh bottle) Hi, Brenda.

BRENDA

What's wrong with you people? Haven't you killed Booger Jones yet?

HANK

Get him!

STAN

I ain't killing no one.

BRENDA

Why not? Rachel, get home. You know I don't allow no whiskey after Labor Day.

RACHEL

Mother.

BRENDA

Go!

(RACHEL exits. BRENDA sits at the table.)

BRENDA, *Continued*

What's the game?

STAN

Hearts.

BRENDA

Lou says you're gonna kill Booger Jones.

STAN

Lou is wrong.

BRENDA

You don't have no more enthusiasm than that, I'd forget the whole thing, I was you.

STAN

He shot my son. Still, life is no picnic. A man's gotta be a man. I provided for Hank before and after his mother died.

BRENDA

Eddie was a saint.

STAN

She ate too many vitamins. Other than that, I didn't have any problem with her. We raised our boy. He was what he was and he is what he is. I can't change things.

BRENDA

I'm glad to hear you talking sense. Because I've been worried. I saw Stew coming out of your house. I saw Matthew coming in and out. I knew my husband was over here. It all spelled bad news. You shouldn't hang around those guys. Especially my husband. He's a bad influence on everyone. Look what he did to me.

STAN

I don't know, Brenda. He's done all right by you.

BRENDA

Are you kidding? When I married him I looked like Brenda Lee in her prime. Now I look like a Chicago Bear with breasts. It's all his fault. He drove me to eat like a pig to conceal my frustration and grief over being married to a guy I have to throw ash trays at to get him to go to church with me.

STAN

He's not much of a card player, either.

BRENDA

If it wasn't for Krikor, I don't know how I would have made it these last few years.

STAN

Who's Krikor?

BRENDA

The Bosnian milkman I shack up with when Lou's over here playing hearts with you. I've always been partial to refugees. They really know how to appreciate a girl.

STAN

I wouldn't know, Brenda. I always buy American.

BRENDA

Krikor is what America's all about. Hard work, initiative, stick-to-it-iveness, the down-home Christian values that made this country great.

STAN

I'm happy for you.

BRENDA

He never gets tired.

STAN

Glad to hear it.

BRENDA

He's got endurance like a steam locomotive. *(Makes train noises)*

STAN

All right! Enough already. Locomotives.

HANK

Get him!

BRENDA

Sorry. Anyway, Krikor doesn't think you should kill Booger Jones, either.

STAN

Who cares what some Bosnian milkman thinks? He may be a stallion to you, but as far as I'm concerned, he's just another wetback.

BRENDA

You don't understand. As the victim of constant political oppression and malice since childhood, Krikor has a deep and abiding sense of justice, way more than your average American, who is nothing but a spoiled brat when it comes to fundamental liberties. Justice is much more than a word to Krikor. He's seen his grandfather machine-gunned by Cossacks at midnight. His grandmother was run through with a pitchfork and left to die in a snowdrift. His sister was trampled by goats. His cousin Ramdash had his tongue cut out with a saber and roasted on a spit right before his eyes. They sautéed it with onion and tomatoes and washed it down with vodka.

STAN

I wish I had some right now. You want some whiskey, Brenda?

BRENDA

Thanks. As I was saying: Krikor doesn't speak too good English, but his sense of justice is right on the money. He thinks that Booger Jones must be spared. He thinks your son is the one who needs a comeuppance.

STAN

I see.

BRENDA

However, he needs a job and is willing to off Booger Jones for two hundred dollars.

STAN

How do they kill people where he comes from?

BRENDA

Same ways as here, basically. More sabers than guns. They drink a lot of vodka before the fun starts, so details are often sketchy the next day.

STAN

I'm not interested. But—let's say I was. How would this Krikor kill the *retard* that ruined my boy?

BRENDA

He'd slit his guts open with a machete, put live baby snakes inside him, then sew the sucker back up. Have a little vodka and a few beets. Then sit back and watch that little *retard* lose what's left of his mind.

STAN

When you say "sew" do you mean sew like sew a button on a shirt?

BRENDA

Sure.

STAN

Who's gonna hold Booger down while your friend is doing the needlework?

BRENDA

I'll do it.

STAN

I suppose you'd have to be paid, too.

BRENDA

Let's just say contributions would be welcome. It's for the good of your son.

(STAN slowly rises and pours HANK some whiskey. HE looks at him.)

STAN

I never wanted kids. Edie, she's the one that wanted them. One's all we had. He was a hell-raiser from day one. Kind of reminded me of myself as a youngster. I was always in trouble, fighting, even stole a car once and totaled it. Cops didn't get me, thank God. My old man would have shot me. But I didn't want Hank here to grow up scared of his old man, the way I was scared of mine, so I was always good to him. Tried to be. But he was a mean kid. I'd take him to a ball game, he'd get in a fight right there in the bleachers. I took him to a Cubs game at Wrigley Field when he was eight years old. Drove all the way to Chicago. He beat up two St. Louis Cardinal fans right there in the cheap seats. He was a strong little cuss. We was asked to leave. On the way out, he grabbed a beer out of somebody's hand and threw it in an usher's face. That made me proud, on the one hand, 'cause he was standing up for his rights and was going down fighting. On the other hand, it made me sad, on account of he was turning out just like me. His mother didn't want that. Neither did I. I tried to tell him that you can't go around beating people up, just because you don't like them. He looked at me and said, "Why not?"

BRENDA

What'd you say?

STAN

Nothing. I just smacked him across the mouth. Told him if he ever got me kicked out of Wrigley Field again, he'd be sorry. But he never wanted to go back.

(There is another knock at the door. TIM, carrying a knapsack containing textbooks and notebooks, enters. HE is a puny lad who wears glasses with thick black frames. TIM enters without looking at STAN or BRENDA. HE drops his knapsack, rummages around in it, pulls out a book and starts toward STAN. HE sees BRENDA and stops.)

TIM

Oh, sorry, I... *(Holds up the book for STAN to see)*

BRENDA

Hi, Tim.

TIM

Hello, I...

BRENDA

Well, come on in. What's the matter with you?

TIM

Hi. Hi, Mr. Cuff. You want me to come back later?

STAN

Do I know you?

TIM

No. I got a...a book. A book for Hank.

(TIM Holds out a book to STAN.)

BRENDA

You guys know each other? No? Stan, this is Tim. He just lives down the street a couple blocks. Tim, I'm Brenda. I know your mother. Sweet lady. *(Looking critically at TIM)* You don't look like much, but your mother's a dear.

STAN

(To Brenda) I seem to be having an open house.

TIM

It's an algebra book. They said I could bring Hank his homework. I could help him with his algebra. I'm real good at algebra.

BRENDA

On Friday night? There was a football game tonight. You should be drunk or in jail by now.

TIM

I quit going to the games. I always got beat up. You want me to come back later? *(Heads to door)* I'll come back later.

BRENDA

Nah, stick around.

(TIM hesitates.)

STAN

As you can see, Tim, Hank doesn't need help with algebra. He needs help eating, breathing, staying alive— stuff like that. You want to help him breathe?

TIM

I could help him read.

STAN

He couldn't read before he got shot so he probably can't read now. They only kept him in school because he was good at football. Now he can't play ball, nobody wants him. School don't want him, hospital don't want him.

BRENDA

You want him?

STAN

I got him.

TIM

(Mildly insistent) I just came over to give Hank his algebra book. *(Hands the book to STAN)*

STAN

Oh, sure. Algebra. Thanks. You say your name is Tim? Well, Tim. Do you play hearts?

TIM

No.

STAN

What do you do?

TIM

Algebra.

STAN

(Offering him the bottle of whiskey) Have some whiskey.

TIM

No thank you. My mom says that's what killed my uncle Paul. She says whiskey turned his liver into pate.

STAN

It's done all right by me.

BRENDA

What's pate?

TIM

It's what you put on crackers when you run out of liver. *(To STAN)* What's Hank gonna do, he doesn't go to school?

STAN

Lotta things. He's gonna watch me and Lou play hearts. He's gonna listen to football games on the radio, he's gonna drink whiskey. He's gonna listen to all my friends and neighbors tell me how much they want to kill Booger Jones, only nobody quite gets around to killing him. What about you, Shorty? You wanna kill Booger Jones?

TIM

Heck no. Booger never did nothing to me. I like him.

BRENDA

Watch your mouth, young man. This here's the father of the guy Booger Jones shot.

TIM

Yes, I know. I'm sorry, Mr. Cuff. It's tough, what happened to Hank and all. I like Hank, too. I saw him play all lots of times. That pass he threw last year, that forty-five yard job in the last game, with no time on the clock and five guys in his face, and us down nineteen to fourteen, and Hank throws this beautiful bomb to Stevie Moses, who catches it on his fingertips and lands flat on his belly on the goal line at the gun. Everybody was out on the field getting crazy. Man, that was great. If we had a hall of fame, old Hank'd be in it.

STAN

Great days, great days.

TIM

On the other hand, there are those that say Hank got what's coming to him, on account of what he did to old Booger Jones.

BRENDA

Shut up, you little brat. He didn't do nothing to Booger, is what I heard. Booger's crazy and brought it on himself.

TIM

Sure, if you call getting locked in a trunk with a skunk bringing it on yourself.

BRENDA

Get lost.

TIM

Being locked in a trunk with a skunk'd make anybody crazy.

BRENDA

You're crazy.

TIM

It's true. Hank and some of his boys found Booger Jones walking along Highway Eighteen, picking up pop cans. That's what Booger does. Otherwise, he'd starve. They don't give you much to eat where he lives.

BRENDA

Nobody cares.

TIM

Hank and his boys stole a car. Then they found Booger picking up pop cans by the highway. They drove him out in the country. They stripped Booger's clothes off, threw them in the river, got a live skunk, and put old Booger and the skunk in the trunk and locked it. Then they went away.

BRENDA

Two skunks in a trunk. Who cares?

TIM

Somebody saw this hot car parked where there weren't supposed to be any cars. The cops had it towed into town. When they opened the trunk, there was old Booger Jones. He jumped out and split. Nobody saw him for a long time. Nobody tried to find him, 'cause nobody reported him missing.

BRENDA

He wasn't missing. *Retards* like Booger Jones don't go missing. They're just gone, that's all.

TIM

I thought everyone already knew all this.

BRENDA

I been busy. Go on.

TIM

Every so often somebody would see Booger Jones when they were out hunting pheasants or fishing or burying something. People said he was living out in the woods. He was never seen at the library, that's for sure. The library's where I spend most of my time.

BRENDA

I'm sure it is, you little weird-o.

STAN

My boy put Booger Jones in a trunk? If that don't beat all.

TIM

With a skunk. A live one.

BRENDA

That does it, Tim. You ain't speaking at the testimonial dinner I'm organizing for Hank.

TIM

My cousin's a cop. He couldn't understand why the skunk was dead and old Booger survived.

BRENDA

The skunk committed suicide.

TIM

The cops didn't bother to return the car to its rightful owner. They threw it in the river.

BRENDA

You're not allowed to attend my dinner, understand? Telling stories like that about Hank. You're not getting in, and if you try to get in, I'll have my nephew Ernie deep fat fry your little keester. He makes his own doughnuts, you know.

STAN

Sure you don't want some whiskey, son?

TIM

No thanks.

STAN

I do.

TIM

For a long time, nobody knew where old Booger was living, or *if* he was living. When somebody's dog is missing, they put up signs. Nobody put up any signs about Booger.

BRENDA

Nobody cared then. Nobody cares now.

STAN

I never heard of Booger Jones until he killed my boy.

HANK

Get him!

BRENDA

Hank's not dead.

STAN

That's a matter of opinion.

BRENDA

You know anything else we don't know?

TIM

Nobody knows what I know. Well, hardly anybody.

BRENDA

All I know is the best quarterback we ever had was saying the Pledge of Allegiance and the next thing we know, he's in a wheelchair, thanks to your buddy Booger Jones.

TIM

He's not my buddy.

BRENDA

How do you know so much about him?

TIM

I listen. I hear things.

STAN

Maybe Brenda here doesn't want to hear about it.

BRENDA

Nah, let him go ahead. I been so busy with Krikor lately I never did get the full story on what happened to Hank. Go ahead, punk. I'll let you know when I get bored.

TIM

Booger showed up at school one day. He was covered with dirt. He looked like a possum. He didn't go inside, just stood out by the curb, looking. Everybody called him names and told him to leave. He didn't hear. Just stood there. *(Pauses; Picks up the algebra book)* I'm really good at algebra, Mr. Cuff. Maybe a little algebra would take Hank's mind off his troubles.

STAN

Algebra *was* one of Hank's troubles. He couldn't spell it and he couldn't do it. If something needed throwing, he could throw it. If it needed kicking, he kick it. He could also hit it, punch it, yell at it. But he couldn't read anything that needed to be read or figure anything that needed figuring. Hell of an ass-kicker, though.

TIM

Booger Jones kept doing that. Showing up at school. Dirty and wretched. You could smell him across the street.

BRENDA

I smell something right now.

TIM

He stood out by the street a long time. When everybody went inside, he headed for the locker room.

BRENDA

Why'd they let him in?

TIM

You can walk in and out of a school anytime you want. It's not a prison.

BRENDA

They need to put a sign out front: "No Retards."

TIM

Booger can't read. He walked along the hall, clear down to the gym. He went into the locker room and waited.

BRENDA

Where'd he get the gun?

STAN

It's a free country, that's where he got it.

TIM

He sat down and waited until gym class was over. The room stunk. Booger Jones stunk.

MATTHEW

The room reeked of justice.

BRENDA

What is your problem?

MATTHEW

I'm going to write a book about this. I'm going to give it some real literary style. I have to say these things out loud to see if they work: "The room reeked of justice." What do you think?

STAN

I think it stinks. Does your mom know you're a homo?

MATTHEW

I'm not. But if I was she wouldn't care. As long as I stay out of the house, she doesn't much care what I do.

BRENDA

So what happened?

TIM

Hank and the boys came into the locker room. They were laughing and poking each other and screeching like wild birds of prey. When they saw Booger Jones, they froze. They knew something was up. For one thing, they could see Booger wasn't scared no more. He sat there, serene. The boys couldn't believe it.

BRENDA

(*To STAN*) You told me this had something to do with the Pledge of Allegiance.

STAN

The way I heard it, Hank was leading his class in the Pledge of Allegiance. He was holding a Bible in one hand and the American flag in the other, when the *retard* drilled him. That's what everyone told me.

TIM

Hank and his friends thought they were seeing a ghost.

MATTHEW

(*Getting caught up in the excitement of writing a true-crime novel*) "They were seeing a ghost. This wasn't the old Booger Jones. They'd killed the old one. This here was a new man who had risen from the ashes of his wounded past." That's great. I'll have to put that in the book. (*Reaches into his pocket and produces a pencil and a small notebook and scribbles furiously*) "...ashes of his wounded past." All right! Keep going, Tim.

BRENDA

He was mad.

TIM

Not really. He was way past that. That's why he was calm. They couldn't believe it.

MATTHEW

(*Scribbling with great excitement*) "They formed a circle around him and looked at him like he was a lost god." (*Scribbling*) Wow. (*Writes*) "...a lost god." Good.

STAN

My Hank did that? Hank never did believe in no God. He thought he was a god.

BRENDA

How does a little twerp like you know all this?

TIM

My parents don't like me to be in the house much, so I have lots of time to observe things. I saw Booger Jones going into the locker room. I knew something was going to happen.

BRENDA

Did you see anything?

TIM

I know someone who saw the whole thing. I can't tell you his name.

MATTHEW

That's right, Tim. We have to protect the confidential sources for our book.

TIM

What do you mean "our" book?

MATTHEW

My agent will give you very generous terms. Go on with the story.

TIM

Anyway, they started to call him names. Especially Hank. He called him a *retard* and every other name he could think of, but it didn't change anything. What was going to happen was going to happen. It was a bad dream, only nobody woke up.

MATTHEW

(Scribbles in his notebook) "...bad dream...nobody woke up." I'm on a roll.

STAN

This ain't what I heard, Tim. What I heard—and the Principal of the school told me this, and so did the cops—was that Hank was in his home room class, leading the Pledge of Allegiance. He'd just got through singing "America, the Beautiful." He had the Bible in one hand, and the other hand over his heart, and the American Flag between his teeth. And when he was done he was gonna go out and take up a collection for blind kids and orphans and the poor and the homeless. And Booger Jones walked up to him and cursed God and America and prayed to Satan and then he shot him.

TIM

Hank was standing naked in the locker room. He had one hand on his whatchamacallit and the other hand in his nose. He was taking a whizz in Booger Jones's face.

STAN

(To BRENDA) I didn't really believe that part about the Pledge of Allegiance anyway. And what would he be doing with a Bible, when everybody knew he couldn't read? It makes you wonder how these rumors get started. He don't even know the Pledge of Allegiance. *(To HANK)* Do you?

HANK

Get him!

STAN

I didn't think so.

BRENDA

Go on, kid.

STAN

I think we've heard enough, Tim. Brenda's heard all this before—

BRENDA

No, I haven't. This is all new to me. Go on, kid.

TIM

Somebody snapped Booger in the ear with a wet towel. It didn't mean nothing, on account of Booger's ears were already frostbit and ragged because his mom and dad used to make him stay outside, even in winter, even when it was forty below. My mom lets me come in when it gets real cold. He just sat there while they snapped him. That made them even madder, that he didn't try to get away. Just sat there. They kept taking a whizz on him and snapping on him. Some of the guys spit on him. Pretty soon, they got tired of it. Everyone just stood there. Some of them were laughing. Some of them were mad. When there wasn't nothing left to do except kill old Booger Jones, it got real quiet.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

Maybe when you've been beaten up as much as Booger Jones, and locked in a trunk with a skunk, catching a whizz in the face isn't all that bad.

BRENDA

Why didn't they just kill the little *retard*? No one would have minded.

TIM

It wouldn't have been no fun. After you shut a guy in a trunk with a skunk, killing him is kind of an anticlimax. It wouldn't mean nothing.

BRENDA

What happened?

TIM

The other guys took their showers and got dressed. They went away. But Hank liked to look at himself in the mirror, so he stayed there, looking at himself. Booger Jones stayed too, but Hank was tired of snapping him. He forgot Booger was even there. Booger Jones

TIM, *Continued*

reached into his coat pocket. He reached in and took out a folded up newspaper. Hank said, "What in hell is in that newspaper, scumbag?" Booger stood up with the newspaper still folded in his hands. He said he was reading about the big game. That made Hank kind of curious, on account of if there'd been a big game lately, Hank would have known all about it, because he would have been in it. So he said, "What big game?" And Booger Jones said, "Overtime." And Hank said, "What the hell overtime you talking about?" And Booger Jones stood up and unfolded the newspaper. There was a gun inside. Booger Jones said, "Sudden death overtime. I win." Then he shot Hank in the mouth. When I heard about it, I remember thinking: I didn't know Booger Jones knew that many words.

STAN

(To HANK) Everybody told me you got shot leading the Pledge of Allegiance. Is what Tim just said here true? That what really happened?

HANK

Get him!

STAN

(Pouring a drink) You can never get anyone to tell you the truth about anything anymore. *(Pours and downs another drink)* You know something else? Since I retired, whiskey ain't what it used to be.

(LIGHTS FADE OUT as STAN pours another drink.)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

(AT RISE: The same; but kitchen remains dark as Eldon "Booger" Jones is lit center stage. HE is as hapless and hopeless as everyone says he is. Though in his teens, HE looks several decades older, like he just finished a long stretch in a very old prison. ELDON is bald, or nearly so, malnourished, confused, and perpetually bewildered. HE is stunned. His clothes are rags. HE is a rag. HE has been whittled down to one sentence, which HE mumbles to himself.)

ELDON

I don't know. I don't know. I don't know.

(ELDON shuffles offstage, mumbling. LIGHTS UP on the kitchen. It is mid-morning of the next day. HANK is just where we left him. RACHEL is at the card table playing solitaire; the algebra book is on the table. There is a knock at the door, but SHE doesn't pay any attention to it. After another knock goes unanswered, HOYT BARGER enters. HE is a neighbor and Stan's attorney. HE dresses well and carries a briefcase. When HOYT was young HE drank a lot of beer and did his share of hell-raising. When he was in

college and law school, he violated his share of narcotics statutes. But now that HE is an officer of the court and sworn to uphold the law, HE is law-abiding, clean-cut, and would be perfectly willing to stand up in court and say with a perfectly straight face that all beer-drinkers and hell-raisers should be exiled to Elba, if someone would pay him to do it. If HE were offered a job burning dope-smokers at the stake, he'd take it in a heartbeat, and do a darn good job. But no one has, so he's a private practitioner. HOYT takes whatever case walks in the door. HE is what the law casebooks like to call "a reasonable man"; objective, conscientious, amiable, more or less sane, good-natured, well-read, modest, a good neighbor, and content without being fatuous about it. His age isn't important. What is important is that HE is unflappable, pleasant, and willing to look at all sides of any problem, preferring, of course, the side that pays.)

HOYT

Excuse me. Have you seen Stan Cuff?

RACHEL

(Not impressed by him at all) I don't know. Have you seen my mother?

HOYT

That depends. What does she look like?

RACHEL

We're going to Omaha. That's what she looks like.

HOYT

I see Hank is finally home. Hi, Hank.

HANK

Get him!

RACHEL

He doesn't play much football any more.

HOYT

Well, they say that when God closes one door he opens a window. No...

RACHEL

No, it's "When God opens a door he closes a window." No.

HOYT

No. I think it's, "God never closes a door without opening..." Something. I forget. The point is, God gives you various options.

RACHEL

Around here, God never closes a door without opening a bottle of whiskey.

HOYT

That's it.

RACHEL

Since I started drinking whiskey, I find I don't need weed like I used to.

HOYT

There are studies which show that marijuana use can lead to drinking.

RACHEL

Being born led me to drinking. My mom and dad never used to drink at all until they had me. I never used to drink at all until I found out they only drank because of me. *(Pause)* I wish I had a little brother so I could turn him into an alcoholic.

HOYT

What are you going to do in Omaha?

RACHEL

My mother's going to the funeral of her sister Rose. My dad's going to play poker with Rose's husband Floyd. I'm going to sit in my cousin Lucy's room and listen to her listen to her Debussy records while she complains that she never gets laid.

HOYT

Why doesn't she ever get laid? I'd always heard that Omaha was a paradise of erotic stimulation.

RACHEL

She can't get laid because she's in her room all the time, listening to Debussy. Guys don't like Debussy.

HOYT

What do guys like?

RACHEL

What do you think?

HOYT

In my day, we liked...I can't remember.

RACHEL

Mom sent me here to get dad, then she came over and sent me home. Now dad's all set to go to Omaha and we can't find mom. What do you want?

HOYT

I heard Stan needs a lawyer.

RACHEL

It's too late for that.

HOYT

On the contrary. I can take one look at this room and tell you, without fear of contradiction, that a lawyer is precisely what is called for under these circumstances.

RACHEL

Why? Things couldn't get any worse.

HOYT

Oh yeah? Watch me. And learn.

RACHEL

I don't think an old guy like you could teach me anything.

HOYT

Can you bake a cherry pie?

RACHEL

Well...no.

HOYT

See?

MATTHEW

(Entering without knocking) Stan around?

RACHEL

No. He's in the kitchen, getting inspired for his next round of hearts with Lou.

MATTHEW

You mean he's trying to figure out, at long last, how to *play* hearts?

RACHEL

I mean he's asleep.

MATTHEW

You shouldn't be here alone, a nice young girl like you. The world is full of creeps. This is a dangerous street.

RACHEL

I'm not all that nice.

HOYT

She's not alone. I'm here.

MATTHEW
So am I.

HOYT
So there you are.

MATTHEW
Right on.

RACHEL
Gee, I really feel protected.

MATTHEW
I'm Matthew. You can call me Matt.

HOYT
I'm Hoyt Barger, attorney at law. You can call me Sir.

MATTHEW
Are you Stan's lawyer?

HOYT
I'm supposed to be helping him out with some tax problems. But I heard there could be a *lot* of people around here who might need representation in the near future. I live down the street. I drive by here every day. This house is radiant with potential litigation. It glows in the dark. A house like this has so much bad news in it, it could support a medium-size law firm for an entire decade. (*Points toward HANK in the corner*) For example. Just exactly what is his problem?

RACHEL
He cut himself shaving. What the hell's it look like?

MATTHEW
You watch your mouth, young lady.

RACHEL
Up yours, college boy.

MATTHEW
You should be at home with your mother and father. Nice girl like you. You should be home, learning some domestic skills. You should be crocheting, knitting, cooking. Nice girl like you.

RACHEL
I tried to crochet once. I almost bled to death. (*To HOYT, who is examining HANK as though HANK were an interesting piece of sculpture*) He got shot.

Who shot him?
HOYT

Lee Harvey *Retard*.
RACHEL

Who?
HOYT

Booger Jones.
RACHEL

Why?
HOYT

RACHEL
Hank here and his buddies locked Booger in a trunk with a skunk. They'd been on his case for years, on account of they're jocks and he's a jerk. Booger got fed up with it and shot him.

That's too bad.
HOYT

RACHEL
He wanted to kill him, not just put him in a wheelchair. He had the gun pointed right between Hank's eyes, but something happened and the bullet went into Hank's mouth. It came out the back. It cut his spinal cord, I think. He used to be a fine young stud, and now he's an acorn squash.

HOYT
No doubt about it. This guy definitely needs a lawyer.

MATTHEW
No. He needs money to pay for a lawyer. He also needs money for a nurse, a physical therapist, long-term hospitalization, and a lot of high-octane narcotics to ease his fevered dreams. He needs God, is what he needs.

HOYT
What about you? You need a lawyer?

MATTHEW
Matter of fact, I was thinking about seeking legal representation in a civil action I've been contemplating

HOYT

What kind of civil action?

MATTHEW

I'm thinking of having my mother evicted.

HOYT

It might be cheaper in the long run to just have her shot.

MATTHEW

I can't do that. I went to the Sorbonne.

HOYT

Just a thought. I don't think you could afford my services anyway. (To Rachel.) Are you old enough to be drinking that stuff?

RACHEL

I always have an eye-opener before I do my homework. I can't do algebra unless I'm half in the bag.

HOYT

Have you considered a career in the law?

RACHEL

If they put a bar in school, I'd be a straight-A student. With a buzz on, I can do algebra like you wouldn't believe. When I'm drunk, I can name all forty-four Presidents of the United States. When I'm sober, I don't give a rat's ass.

HOYT

With me, it was criminal law. In law school, I never really understood criminal law unless I'd had a few boilermakers.

MATTHEW

Is that because criminals are usually drunk?

HOYT

No. Criminals are mostly just working stiffs like you and me. They get up, they go to work, trying to scratch out a living from increasingly barren soil. Time they get home, they're too tired to drink. It's the judges that are bombed most of the time.

MATTHEW

Did somebody send for you?

HOYT

Nobody sends me. I go where I'm needed.

MATTHEW

We don't need you.

HOYT

Where's Stan?

RACHEL

(Pointing offstage) He's in there. Asleep.

HOYT

Anybody else in there?

RACHEL

No. He's a widower. But even when his wife was alive, she wouldn't sleep with him.

HOYT

Why not?

RACHEL

He worked at the packing plant. He'd come home, he'd have blood all over him. She said it was like sleeping with a big hamburger.

MATTHEW

I don't have anything against sleeping with food, but I prefer bakery products.

HOYT

(Pointing at HANK) Has Stan seen an attorney about this problem?

MATTHEW

That's no problem. That's his son.

RACHEL

What's the difference? Guy's history.

HOYT

(Sniffing the air like an animal picking up a scent in the wind) Smell that?

(RACHEL and MATTHEW sniff the air.)

MATTHEW

What. Smells like yesterday's booze.

RACHEL

Smells like hearts. Smells like my dad, too. Yuck.

HOYT

That, my friends, is the smell of justice. That most subtle of aromas. It's difficult to detect, but it will become more apparent to you as the day wears on. The longer I'm here, the clearer the scent will be.

(TIM, with school materials under his arm, enters without knocking. HE goes to RACHEL.)

TIM

Hey Rachel. I figured it out.

(TIM hands RACHEL a paper.)

RACHEL

What.

TIM

The value of x.

MATTHEW

Oh?

TIM

(Proudly) It's four. The value of x is four.

MATTHEW

They'll be very interested in that at the Sorbonne.

RACHEL

Great. My mom always said she wouldn't let me get a job until I passed algebra. When I get a job, I can make some money, steal a car and start having abortions. I can't wait.

HOYT

What kind of job are you looking for?

RACHEL

Fast food is the wave of the future, although there is a burgeoning market for fine dining, if you can get a good interior decorator. Of course, I'd be willing to sell my body, if the price was right. But I have to pass algebra first.

MATTHEW

You're a fascinating young woman. I've got a great recipe for steak tartare, if you'd like to drop by tonight.

RACHEL

I wasn't talking about selling it to you, shit-for-brains, so don't go getting any ideas.

TIM

You oughta wait and go to college first, then start selling your cookies. To brain surgeons and investment bankers. Establish an educated clientele. You gotta think ahead.

HOYT

(Still studying HANK) Excuse me. Has the individual who shot this guy been found?

RACHEL

Booger Jones? Sure. He's been in jail a long time.

TIM

Old Booger's way too retarded to make a getaway.

HOYT

What's the status of the case?

RACHEL

It doesn't have any status. We're all losers here.

MATTHEW

The procedure, such as it is, has been this: Booger shot Hank, Booger got his guts stomped out by a room full of jocks, and the judge has ordered him held in the county jail until his wounds have had time to heal, at which time the other guests of the county will stomp his guts out again. In between beatings, let's just say his social calendar is always filled.

HOYT

Who are this Jones person's people?

RACHEL

He don't have any people. He's a *retard*. His old man is drunk all the time and his old lady hasn't been seen in sixteen years.

MATTHEW

If you're looking for a fee, pal, or even a modest retainer, you've come to the wrong place. Besides, Stan's not prone to litigation.

HOYT

Neither am I. The last place I want to spend my days is court. There's no future there. You meet a very low quality type of individual in court. At the courthouse, I have yet to meet anyone who can discuss art intelligently. And it smells like disinfectant and bad news. No, I'm just looking for justice, that's all.

(STAN enters. HE sits at the table and begins shuffling the playing cards.)

STAN

Who wants to play hearts? Who needs a drink? Where's Lou? Where'd I leave my algebra book?

RACHEL

It's right here. Lou went home. Where's my mom?

STAN

(Looks at his watch) Halfway to Vegas by now, I suppose.

RACHEL

Dad's packed and ready to go.

STAN

She won Hank's car in a poker game last night. I let her have it. He won't be needing it any more and I got no use for a car that looks like a Saigon cat-house. What's my lawyer doing here? Are my taxes done yet?

HOYT

I heard there was trouble here. I came by to offer my services.

STAN

I've been meaning to call you. You never gave me your business card.

HOYT

No. I try to leave as few traces as possible.

STAN

My taxes were due in April and here it is, football season. What gives? Want some whiskey?

HOYT

No thanks. I only drink at the office. Your taxes were already eleven years late when you hired me. What's a few more months? What are you going to do about Booger Jones?

STAN

You people talk about Booger Jones like he's a tornado warning. Well, let me tell you something: The storm's come and gone. It's too late to do anything.

HOYT

There are certain legal avenues—

STAN

I ain't suing Booger Jones. He's a *retard* and he's broke. And I ain't suing the school, 'cause it's not the school's fault that Booger Jones is a *retard*. And it ain't the school that stuck Booger Jones in a trunk with a skunk, and it ain't the school's fault that my boy stomped Booger Jones's guts out every chance he got for years and years. It's not the school's fault that Hank liked to beat up *retards*. Maybe Booger Jones oughta sue Hank. It wouldn't do no good though. Hank's as broke as Booger. So am I.

HOYT

You can get justice without filing a lawsuit. Lawsuits are a last resort. When all else fails, you go to court.

MATTHEW

(Reaching for his notebook.) Do you mind if I write that down?

HOYT

What.

MATTHEW

That rhymed couplet you just tossed off: "Lawsuits are a last resort/When all else fails, you go to court." I could start an anthology.

HOYT

(Looking at STAN; pointing at MATTHEW) Who's the problem child?

STAN

He's Matthew. He's all right. Everyone's got to be somebody.

(The door flies open. Enter STEW dragging BOOGER JONES who is every bit as homely and threadbare as he is said to be: Filthy, dazed, stupid; completely unfit for society. STEW drags him in and throws him viciously to the floor. There is a pause while EVERYONE stares at the lad.)

HOYT

Let me guess. Booger Jones.

(ELDON grovels on the floor. Since HE has been beaten all his life, HE is good at groveling, and does not ask for nor expect sympathy.)

STEW

There you go, Stan. While you people were sitting around wondering what to do about Booger Jones, I went out and did it.

STAN

Is this who I think it is?

MATTHEW

It ain't Cary Grant.

STAN

What did you do to him?

STEW

I got him out of jail. Never mind how.

STAN

You didn't have to stomp him.

STEW

I didn't stomp him. He always looks like that.

TIM

He's been stomped all his life. (*Looking closely*) I'd say, for Booger Jones, this is a pretty good day.

STAN

I don't want to be a party to no jail break.

STEW

Relax. I didn't bust him out of jail. I just sort of...borrowed him.

STAN

Can you do that?

STEW

If you know the right people.

RACHEL

I bet he hasn't changed his socks since last year.

HOYT

Does anyone smell skunk in here?

STAN

Okay, Stew. Now what are you going to do with him?

STEW

Wrong question, Stan. The question is: What are *you* gonna do with him?

STAN

Eddie was here, she'd give him a bath.

RACHEL

Don't look at me. Just because I'm the only female in here doesn't mean I have to wash every pervert that comes down the pike. I'm not into that nurturing woman stuff.

MATTHEW

Hold on, Rachel. There's a big difference between a pervert and a *retard*. A lot of perverts are quite intellectual. Look at Marquis de Sade, for example.

RACHEL

A skunk's a skunk, boy. You and your Sore Bones.

STEW

You guys talk too much. This here is for Stan to decide.

STAN

I just want to play hearts. I haven't had my French toast yet. Rachel, how's about hopping into the kitchen and rustling us up some breakfast?

RACHEL

I don't hop. And I'm not your maid. You got any syrup?

STAN

Sure I got syrup. It's in the cupboard, right next to the Oxycontin.

RACHEL

I'm a little irritated about that car, Stan.

STAN

What.

RACHEL

You were going to get rid of Hank's pimp-mobile, you could've at least given it to me. My old lady won't know what to do with it.

STAN

She looked like she knew what to do with it when she was peeling out of here at two o'clock this morning. Now, how about that French toast?

RACHEL

All's I know how to cook is burritos. You got a microwave?

STAN

Burritos sound a little fancy for me. All's I want's a couple slices of French toast. Nice basic American food.

RACHEL

You think French toast is American?

STAN

Sure it's American. They just call it French 'cause you put wine in the batter. I love France. Of all the places I don't know anything about, I like France the best.

RACHEL

You want bacon with that?

STAN

No, but I could use some more whiskey. Maybe put a little orange juice in it. I need some vitamins.

STEW

Excuse me, people. I didn't borrow Booger here for no cooking class. Now we gotta get things rolling.

MATTHEW

What'd you have in mind?

STEW

I have "in mind" doing what's right. Justice is what I have "in mind." And by the way, I was at the jail, I ran into your uncle. He was talking to the cops about you. Cops told him, he wants you, he'll have to take a ticket and get in line, because you're wanted in most states west of the Mississippi.

MATTHEW

There aren't that many states west of the Mississippi and most of them are sparsely populated. I'll be all right.

STEW

The ball's in your court, Stan. What do we do?

STAN

That boy looks like he needs a drink. Here. Give him this. *(Holds out a glass of whiskey)*

RACHEL

Ooooh, ick. He'll get cooties all over your glass.

MATTHEW

The cootie is a mythical beast.

STEW

Goddammit, Stan! I went to a lot of trouble to bring the *retard* to you for justice. I even brought you this. (*Takes a gun from his coat*) Exhibit A. Now, that ain't the same piece he shot Hank in the mouth with. When the cops got to the gym, the gun was gone. Somebody copped it. They don't know who. But this is the one they're planning to use at Booger's trial. They'll just *say* this is the one they found. They got to have a weapon. They can't say somebody stole the gun out from under their own nose. It don't matter. Same difference. There ain't gonna be no trial anyway. (*Puts the gun in front of STAN*) There. Now, Booger obviously broke out of jail, got his gun back somehow, and came over here to finish the job he started at school. So, what do you want to do?

STAN

Rache. French toast.

RACHEL

Okay.

STAN

And don't skimp on the wine!

(*RACHEL exits to kitchen. OTHERS look at STAN.*)

MATTHEW

You're putting Stan in quite a spot here, Stew.

STEW

He's a man. He knows what to do.

STAN

I think Booger here deserves a fair trial.

STEW

(*Pointing at HANK*) What kind of fair trial did my bro have?

HOYT

Stan's right. Everyone deserves a fair trial. We could do it right here. I'll be counsel for the defense. Since I'm not going to be making any money out of this, I can at least get in some practice on my adversarial skills.

STEW

He don't need no defense.

MATTHEW

Everyone is entitled to a defense.

STEW

What in hell's the point? Everyone knows he did it. There was a room full of witnesses. Let's kill the little *retard* now and get it over with.

HOYT

You're missing the point, Stew. The point of a trial isn't to figure out if someone "did it." I'll take your word that he "did it." He's dirty, he stinks, everyone hates him and he has no money. So I'm quite willing to believe he "did it." But so what? The purpose of a trial isn't to find out if the defendant "did it." Of course he "did it." Everyone "did" something, and if what they're on trial for "doing" isn't what they "did," then they no doubt "did" something they didn't get caught "doing," and it all evens out. You get what I mean. The point of a trial is to allow a jury of twelve—twelve good men and true—to go home at day's end and say, "Honey, today I did a good thing. Today I stood up for the little guy. I stood up for justice. I did what's right. I struck a blow for down-home Christian values. Screw the law. Hooray for me." It's a chance for people who don't usually get a chance to congratulate themselves on anything to pat themselves on the back. We can do that right here, right now. Trust me on this. You'll feel a lot better when it's over than you'd feel if somebody just shot old Booger right now. It's not every day you get a chance to stand up for justice and drink free whiskey at the same time. Although, when you guys reach the punishment phase of the proceedings, I'll have to leave the room. I'm in enough trouble with the bar association as it is.

MATTHEW

Actually, Stew, you stole my thunder here. I'd already promised Stan and Lou that I would personally kill Booger Jones. I'd already made plans, taken out extra insurance, contacted a literary agent and some friends of mine in Hollywood. I've got an investment in killing Booger Jones myself. Then you go and kidnap him and haul him over here. It's disrupted my arrangements.

STEW

You want to kill Booger Jones?

MATTHEW

I never said I "want" to, and Stan will vouch for me on this. What I said was that I *would* kill him. Not that I want to. But I'd be *willing* to. I don't want to kill anyone. Pacifism is something very near and dear to my heart. I learned it at the feet of Jean-Paul Sartre. Did you catch that? "Pacifism is something very near and dear to my heart./I learned it at the feet of Jean-Paul Sartre." It's another poem. That one's definitely going in the anthology. There's something about this room that brings out the best in everyone. Or, in your case, Stew, the worst.

STEW

(*Tossing the gun at MATTHEW; it lands on the floor*) You *would* kill Booger Jones, Matt? Well, there you go. Kill him. If you *would*.

MATTHEW

(Picks up the gun; studies it) I hadn't planned on using weaponry quite this crude. I purchase mainly German firearms. This thing was designed for niggers to shoot clerks at liquor stores.

STEW

Come on, tough guy. Booger ain't gonna know if he's shot with a Smith and Wesson or a Saturday night special. Dead is dead. Go on. Shoot him. If you *would*.

MATTHEW

This is all rather sudden.

STAN

Don't do it on my account, Matthew. Edie would never approve of anyone getting shot on her living room floor.

STEW

I'm sick of waiting.

MATTHEW

In a room full of witnesses?

STEW

There aren't any snitches here, and anyone who does snitch will have to deal with me.

HOYT

May I consult with the defendant first?

STEW

(Out of control) He ain't no defendant! He's a *retard*!

(STEW savagely kicks BOOGER then tries to pull the gun out of MATTHEW'S hand and the gun discharges, killing STEW.)

MATTHEW

Proving once again that the Second Amendment, wonderful as it is, does have certain drawbacks.

RACHEL

(Entering from kitchen at sound of gunshot; looking at STEW) Who's the stiff?

STAN

Somebody at the jail is going to be in deep guacamole over this. They let Stew borrow one of their prisoners, and now he ain't coming back.

TIM

You say you're going to return a library book, and you don't bring it back, they can put you in jail.

STAN

I don't think the library wants this book back.

MATTHEW

I wonder if anybody will mind.

STAN

Hell yes, somebody'll mind. Stew here has a mother and father, cousins and uncles. A lot of people will mind, and they won't rest until some jailbird named Tyrone has me for a dance partner.

MATTHEW

No offense, Stan, but I think you're overestimating your desirability. You're a nice guy, but you're not all that attractive. And I say that with the utmost respect.

TIM

Not so fast, Stan. I think you're all right. Stew's dad ran off to Minneapolis with a stripper last summer, and Stew's mom kicked Stew out of the house a few weeks ago. He's been living over at his girlfriend's place, but I happen to know she's sick of him. If we handle this right, no one will know or care if Stew's gone.

HOYT

(To MATTHEW) You'd better call your friends in the publishing industry and tell them there's been a slight change in the plot of your story.

RACHEL

(To STAN) Here's your French toast.

STAN

That don't look much like French toast.

RACHEL

You're out of bread, so I used salami. You're out of eggs, so I used whipped cream and mayonnaise. And you're out of syrup, so I used grape jelly and vermouth. Other than that, it's just like French toast.

STAN

Give it to Booger. He doesn't look like he's eaten in the last couple years.

HOYT

I object. He may be a menace to society, but he doesn't deserve to be tortured.

RACHEL

Hey, numb-nuts, why don't you try and make French toast with what's in that kitchen, see how good you do?

STAN

No offense, pal, but instead of worrying about Booger Jones here, shouldn't you be home doing my taxes, like I'm paying you to?

HOYT

I heard that somebody needed a lawyer right away. (*Studying MATTHEW*) As it turns out, I was right. You might not need a lawyer, but I can tell this guy will, in the very near future.

MATTHEW

If I require legal representation, I happen to be on a first-name basis with the Dean of the Yale Law School.

HOYT

Very nice. But I don't think the Dean of the Yale Law School has much clout at the county jail, which is where you're headed. Your fingerprints are on the weapon that killed this young man. Shall we discuss my fee first, or do you want to wait until after you've been sentenced?

MATTHEW

My fingerprints are on the weapon that *accidentally* killed him.

HOYT

Guns do not accidentally kill anyone. Neither do people.

STAN

You two love-birds will have to do business on your own time. Right now, I've got a problem. (*Looks at HANK*) Well, two problems. But first things first. I gotta get Stew out of my house. He ain't sanitary.

HANK

Get him!

STAN

Good morning, Hank. Sleep okay? Here.

(*Pours whiskey for HANK.*)

TIM

Hey, Rache. We could take Stew to school, slice him up for biology class.

RACHEL

Think we could get him in a jar?

STAN

And you, Matt, you better hit the road. Cops'll be here soon and those boys are going to be mad. There are enough bloodstains in this room as it is.

MATTHEW

I appreciate your concern for my well-being. But there's no need to worry. This kind of thing happens to me a lot. I can handle it.

STAN

Yeah? They used to arrest you at the Sore Bones?

MATTHEW

They tried to pin the murder of DE Gaulle on me for years.

HOYT

I didn't know DE Gaulle was murdered.

MATTHEW

Shows how much you know. What are we gonna do with Booger Jones?

HANK

Get him!

MATTHEW

Good idea. If Hank's the victim, Hank should decide the punishment.

STAN

I say: Let's teach Booger to play hearts.

RACHEL

Why don't we take him outside and put him under the garden hose? Clean him up and see who he really is. Under all that dirt, maybe there's a real guy in there.

HOYT

Perhaps a more pressing question might be: What are you going to do with Stew?

MATTHEW

I have some friends in the construction business. People like Stew have been known to turn up in cement mixers and various football stadiums.

STAN

How much is this gonna cost me?

MATTHEW

I wouldn't ask you to pay, Stan. You're my oldest and dearest friend.

STAN

I'd rather just pay than have to be your friend. No offense.

HOYT

Speaking of paying, Stan. I could file your tax returns for you any time. But eleven years worth of penalty and interest. It could run into some dough. It might be best to hold off and hope the I.R.S. just forgets about you.

STAN

Do what you have to do. I just don't want to pay.

HOYT

I could raise some constitutional issues.

STAN

How much do they cost?

HOYT

Oh, the constitution is very expensive. Most people can't afford the constitution.

MATTHEW

A lot of jurors are going to say Booger shot Hank in self-defense.

STAN

What was he doing in my boy's locker room? If he hadn't been there, he wouldn't have gotten beat up.

MATTHEW

It's a room in a public school, like any other classroom.

STAN

It ain't for *retards*! And what's he doing bringing a gun to school? In my day, you brought a gun to school, you kept it in your locker, or you were finished.

MATTHEW

Well, Booger brought a gun to school, and he sure looks finished to me.

(LOU enters without knocking.)

LOU

Hey, there's a milk truck blocking my driveway.

STAN

Yeah, and I got a stiff and a *retard* in my living room. Top that.

LOU

Anybody seen Brenda? One minute she's all hot to go to Omaha, see a funeral and talk about babies and orgasms with her relatives. The next minute I can't find her. Hey, which one of you bozos plugged old Stew? (*Laughs*) Whoever it is, you saved me a lot of trouble. That kid really got on my nerves.

STAN

You ain't kidding. Plus, he cost me twenty bucks on that game.

(LOU sits. STAN deals LOU a hand as LOU picks up RACHEL'S glass, eyeing it disapprovingly.)

LOU

Young lady, I thought I told you never to drink whiskey unless you put a little water in it.

RACHEL

Aw, that's kid stuff.

LOU

And what do you think you are? You may think you're some kind of hot shot at school, those stuck-up friends you hang around with. But don't you forget, I'm still your father, and until you get out on your own, you'll do as I say.

MATTHEW

Say, Lou. You got a pick-up truck. Maybe you could help us out. Haul Stew here out to the country. Plant him someplace. The flats, maybe. What do you say?

LOU

I say, for a college boy, you're even dumber than I think you are. Why would I put that stiff in my truck? Something tells me you plugged him, too. Is that right, Stan? Matthew here plug old Stew?

STAN

When you came in, we was trying to figure out what to do about Booger Jones. Got any ideas?

LOU

Is that Booger Jones? I thought it was somebody's dirty laundry wiggling around on the floor down there. He don't look so good.

MATTHEW

Au contraire. For someone who's spent eighteen years being beaten, molested and tortured, I'd say he's a miracle of survival. We could all learn something from Booger Jones, although I, for one, certainly don't want to.

RACHEL

We ought to take him outside, lay him out on the lawn, and turn the sprinkler on him. When the crud melts off, it might turn out he's not who we think he is. Maybe he's somebody that's been missing for a long time and it turns out he's just been in disguise. Like maybe he's Amelia Earhart.

STAN

You need another drink, Rachel.

LOU

On second thought, don't put any water in it.

(MATTHEW crosses to HANK and puts a hand on his shoulder. HE speaks to him in a condescending manner, much too loudly as though HANK was hard of hearing, which HE is not.)

MATTHEW

What do *you* think, Hank? What should we do with Booger Jones?

(HANK tries heroically to speak, but HE cannot. Overwhelmed with impotent rage, HE cries.)

MATTHEW

Could you make out any of that, Stan?

STAN

Yes. He said he'd give what's left of his life to be able to kick your sorry ass into Omaha.

MATTHEW

Aw, the heck with you guys. I'm trying to be helpful, and all I get is abuse.

STAN

You're so smart, *you* tell us what to do with Booger.

MATTHEW

(Thinks hard for a few seconds) Burn him at the stake.

HOYT

You might run into some legal problems there, Matt. I doubt if this neighborhood is zoned for medieval executions, although I think a little low-key torture would be acceptable, if it's done by contemporary community standards.

MATTHEW

If we're going to do something, let's do it right. In the middle ages, they knew how to do an execution. There was none of this junk about, "Well, he's guilty and he's got to go, but let's do it humanely." No! If you decide that a guy's committed a capital crime and he's got to pay with his life, then make him pay! Burn him. Let his flesh melt from his face as he screams for mercy, let his blood turn to steam in his veins. Have the courage of your convictions, for Christ's sake! Show a little initiative! Do it up right!

STAN

Is that what you really want to do? Burn Booger Jones at the stake?

MATTHEW

Sure. Or we could burn Hank. Or we could burn them both together. Solve all our problems.

RACHEL

And then we'd still have you. Right now, I'd say you're the real problem.

MATTHEW

Nobody listens to a genius in his own time.

RACHEL

You're such a genius, how come it took Tim here to tell me the value of x? How come you didn't do it, you're so smart?

HOYT

All this is very interesting, but it's not solving our problems. Now we've got Stew here to deal with, which I would say is our most urgent problem. And then we've got to figure out what to do with Booger. Because, well, let's face it: We all want to get rid of him, right?

RACHEL

He looks a little like a drummer in a band I used to date.

LOU

What band was that?

RACHEL

The Snot Rockets. They were good. They were only together three weeks, though, on account of they kept getting arrested. I have one of their CDs. It's called *Nuns in Leather*.

HOYT

Although Matthew suggested that we let Hank determine the punishment, I think we've seen that it's just not possible. Matthew's own suggestion, while it has a certain gut-level emotional appeal, does have some practical drawbacks, such as all of us being charged with conspiracy to commit murder, and I, for one, am not willing to eat jailhouse food for

HOYT, *Continued*

the rest of my life just to satisfy Matthew's wish for perfect justice, admirable though that wish may be. What do you think we ought to do, Rachel?

RACHEL

I don't know. I used to like Hank.

STAN

Don't say "used to." You're talking like he's dead. He's alive. You can still like him.

RACHEL

Sure, he's neat. I just think he went too far. It's okay to hate someone, but you don't have to lock them in a trunk with a skunk. You know what I'd do? I think we ought to lock Hank in the trunk with Booger Jones for half an hour. Teach them both a lesson.

HOYT

We're getting a little off the track here.

LOU

You ask me, here's what I think: Hank beat up Booger. So Booger shot Hank. Hank and his crew had their fun and Booger got his revenge. Everybody had their fun and we're all even-Steven. Now, why doesn't somebody put that stiff in that milk truck, hot-wire it, and drive it down to the flats. In half an hour, the truck'll be stripped, and so will Stew. They'll probably sell old Stew there to the medical school, in case anyone wants to cut him open and see what the brain of a real mean little son-of-a-bitch looks like.

HOYT

Your suggestion has a certain logistical appeal. It's simple, direct, and solves everybody's problems, except for Hank's continuing lack of adequate medical care and health insurance. But it's not very satisfying, spiritually.

LOU

If I had a Rolls-Royce blocking my driveway, I'd let you have it. All's I got's a milk truck. Take it or leave it. What do you want from me? I work in a packing plant. I deal with blood all day. I come home, I like to solve things in a way that don't involve any more dying, you know what I mean?

RACHEL

Hey dad, can I have that milk truck? It'd be a neat tour bus for the Snot Rockets.

LOU

If I catch one of them little hermaphrodites hanging around my house again, he'll be wearing his thingamajig around his neck come morning.

RACHEL

Why not let Booger Jones finish what he started?

HOYT

What are you talking about?

TIM

Bad idea, Rache.

RACHEL

Shut up and finish my homework. I'm serious. Why not? Booger tried to kill Hank. He didn't get the job done. He has to be punished, right?

HOYT

The guilty must be punished, of course, but only within the framework of the law.

LOU

What does that mean?

HOYT

It means they get punished when I get paid. It's the law.

RACHEL

Law, shmaw. We're not talking about a bunch of high-rollers here. I mean, we're a bunch of people whose idea of a big weekend is a trip to Omaha, and we can't even seem to do that right. Come on. Does the law really apply to little people like us?

HOYT

If you're suggesting that the Supreme Court has carved out a "We Like to Go to Omaha" exception to criminal procedure, right off-hand I'd have to say probably not.

RACHEL

Let's talk about reality for a minute, okay? Why don't we solve all our problems right now? (*Goes to STAN*) Stan, I say this with all due respect, but Hank's got to be an awful pain in the wazoo to you, right? Be honest. You can't get the hospital to take him off your hands, he's got no insurance, the hospice don't want him because he's not really dying yet. He's got a lot of miles left on him until he croaks. He could live another sixty years as a human zucchini.

STAN

What are you talking about? He's my own flesh and blood.

RACHEL

Sure he is, and we all love him. But you still got a lot of time left yourself, you know? I mean, you got time. You could find yourself another wife. Settle down. You been spending all your time taking care of Hank. Pardon me for saying it, but you're making a one-way investment. Hank's going nowhere. We're all your friends here, and it breaks our hearts to see you going to waste like this, trying to take care of a hopeless situation.

STAN

He's still my son. I've got to...

RACHEL

You've got to start thinking of yourself. You don't have much of a life now. Frankly, neither does Hank. It's not fair to either of you. It doesn't need to be like this.

MATTHEW

My sentiments exactly.

STAN

Matt, don't you have a book to write, or something?

MATTHEW

As a matter of fact, I've had offers from several publishers about penning Volume One of my memoirs. I was thinking about starting that this afternoon. I could be the next Proust.

STAN

Now's a perfect time, Matt. We'll be seeing you.

HOYT

A La Recherche des Dickheads Perdu? Just kidding.

RACHEL

Look, Stan. What I'm saying.

STAN

I think I know what you're saying, and I don't like it.

RACHEL

You're not supposed to like it.

STAN

Get lost.

RACHEL

Stuff that's true, it's not likeable.

TIM

Like the Snot Rockets.

LOU

I don't like them.

RACHEL

You never heard them.

LOU

I don't like lots of stuff I never heard.

RACHEL

(To MATTHEW) Hand me that gun.

MATTHEW

Why should I?

(RACHEL punches MATTHEW in the stomach and takes the gun.)

RACHEL

That's why. Now. Stan, I think we should let Booger Jones finish what he started.

STAN

He's my boy.

RACHEL

He was your boy. Look at him. He doesn't want to live like that.

STAN

(Vaguely starting to warm up to the idea) He can't keep himself clean.

MATTHEW

He never could. All jocks have serious hygiene problems.

RACHEL

(To STAN) Now, what would you say if you and me and Lou was playing cards here, real natural, having some whiskey, and maybe Tim here was helping me with my algebra, we was listening to the radio, maybe talking about last night's game, wondering what we're going to do this afternoon...

LOU

I thought we were going to Omaha. Does anybody know where Brenda went?

MATTHEW

(Sitting at the table with LOU and TIM) Lou, have you ever thought about cutting your home deliveries, and just buying your milk at the store? I think it'd solve a lot of problems for you.

(RACHEL crosses to BOOGER JONES and starts to help him up. SHE makes a face when she gets close to him.)

RACHEL

Come on, Eldon. Get up, you big retard.

(ELDON stands slowly. It's clear that HE expects a beating, but HE doesn't resist.)

STAN

Be careful around Booger Jones, Rache. You might catch something.

RACHEL

I used to hang out with Snot Rockets. I'm immune to everything. Stand up straight, Eldon.

(RACHEL walks the frightened ELDON toward HANK. HE does not walk so much as cower, and SHE has to steer him along.)

RACHEL

Now, what happened was, we were all sitting around the house, playing some hearts, doing our algebra—nice down-home stuff.

LOU

Waiting for your mother.

RACHEL

That's right, waiting for mom, who's probably in Vegas by now, singing back-up for Tony Orlando.

LOU

What?

RACHEL

Just kidding, dad. I'm sure she'll be here any second.

STAN

Take it easy, Lou.

RACHEL

Now. We were sitting around here being sociable, like neighbors, when shit-for-brains here walks in. *(ELDON recognizes the term of endearment more than his own name, and smiles up at her)* That's right, Eldon, I'm talking about you, sweetie. He walks in with a gun, the same one the cops say he had in the locker room.

(RACHEL positions ELDON so that HE is facing HANK. SHE stands behind him, and wraps her arms around him, lifting his arms and planting the gun in his hands. SHE helps him lift the gun and point it at HANK.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

Before we knew what was happening, he had the gun in Hank's face. We tried to reason with him, but he held us hostage. *(She swings Eldon around so that the gun is pointing toward the others. Her tone of voice is that of a TV anchorwoman.)* He was desperate. We were just ordinary people at the mercy of a madman. He gunned down poor, innocent Hank as he sat in his wheelchair. Then, in an act of stunning bravado, a local degenerate by the name of Matthew, who happened to be in the neighborhood, boring everyone to death, disarmed the crazed gunman, killing him with a single shot to the head. *(To MATTHEW)* Think you can handle that, Mr. Sore Bones?

MATTHEW

I could never take the life of someone who was intellectually challenged.

LOU

Hey Rachel, when did you start talking like that?

RACHEL

I'm thinking about majoring in broadcast journalism, if I ever make it to college.

TIM

You want to go to college, you'll have to pass algebra first.

RACHEL

I never sweat the small stuff.

MATTHEW

You'll also need a facelift. People who watch television news want a woman who induces erotic fantasies, not projectile vomiting.

(MATTHEW laughs heartily at his own joke.)

RACHEL

That's great, Matthew. Why don't you fantasize on this? *(Pistol-whips MATTHEW; HE falls)* Had enough erotic fantasies now, dip-stick? Been checked for prostate cancer lately? Maybe you'd like a digital examination with this, huh? *(Waves the gun in his face)* You want some of this?

MATTHEW

Somebody help me!

(RACHEL holds MATTHEW by the shirt collar with one hand and points the gun at his face with the other.)

RACHEL

I want you to ask yourself a question: If you're so superior, why are you getting the slats kicked out of you by a broad? Huh? Why is that?

MATTHEW

Help!

RACHEL

(Disgusted; releasing him) Are you okay, Eldon?

ELDON

I don't know.

RACHEL

Where was I? Oh, yeah.

(RACHEL clears throat. SHE resumes her TV persona and positions herself behind ELDON, both of them holding the gun.)

RACHEL, *Continued*

Paralyzed with fear, we could do nothing but wait; frantic hostages at the mercy of a crazy man with a gun.

LOU

I don't know, Rachel. He still looks like old Booger Jones to me, gun or no gun.

(RACHEL walks ELDON up towards LOU and points the gun right at him.)

RACHEL

Take a closer look, Lou.

LOU

Sure. Now I see what you mean.

RACHEL

While everyone looked on helplessly, Booger Jones finished the job on Hank. There was nothing anyone could do to stop the mad dog killer.

MATTHEW

(Caught up in her act) We were all paralyzed with fear.

RACHEL

Well, some of us were paralyzed with fear, and some of us were just plain chickenshit. Now, right away, bozo here *(Slapping MATTHEW'S shoulder)* leapt to our defense. He took the gun away from Booger Jones and shot him in the head. Think you can do that, Nimrod?

MATTHEW

It's a little out of my line.

RACHEL

(Motioning toward STEW) Tell that to Stew. I think it's right down your alley, college boy. I'd do it myself, but I have my future to think about. You've already had yours.

MATTHEW

I'll have to think about it.

RACHEL

You think too much, you'll talk yourself out of it. Soon as Booger's dead, we all get in the milk truck and head for the flats. We'll kick back, have some milk. I wonder if he's got orange juice in there. Anyway. The cops won't care about Booger. They'll thank us for getting rid of him so they don't have to admit he escaped from their jail. *(Gently placing her hand on HANK'S shoulder)* And nobody'll miss Hank here.

HOYT

I must say that's the most amoral, repellent, sociopathic scenario I have ever heard from the mouth of a young person.

RACHEL

I read a lot.

HOYT

You should be institutionalized. How could a young girl concoct something so morally bankrupt?

RACHEL

When you can't get a date on Saturday night, you have lots of time to develop your imagination.

LOU

I don't know how to drive a milk truck. Besides, how do we know it's insured? And what if we get accused of stealing it?

STAN

You don't need to worry about that, Lou. That milkman, he's a lush, he's shacked up with Mrs. Henderson down the street. Time he sobers up and she kicks him out, we'll be back and he'll never be the wiser.

LOU

Yeah, well, I ain't driving.

RACHEL

I'll drive. I know how to get to the flats, and I know my way around there. I know the perfect place to dump these guys. We'll come back here, Stan can start his life over, Hose-Head here can write his next book, and I'll try to pass algebra. We'll all live happily ever after, whatever that means.

STAN

I don't know, Rache. You're asking an awful lot. Of course... *(Looks at HANK)* Matthew. Listen to the girl.

MATTHEW

I'd like to use the phone, if I might. I have a friend at the Sorbonne who could tell us what Jean-Paul Sartre would make of all this.

STAN

Is that gonna be long distance?

MATTHEW

He'll accept a collect call. I just need—

(RACHEL crosses to ELDON and turns him so that HE and HANK are almost touching. Standing behind ELDON, SHE puts her arms around him, one arm on either side of him, and puts the gun in his hands. HE holds the gun and SHE holds his hands. The gun is two inches from HANK'S nose.)

RACHEL

Lou, go start the truck. Matthew, get over here and prepare to introduce Eldon to his maker, right after we take care of Hank.

MATTHEW

Can I drive the getaway vehicle?

RACHEL

Sure, if you know how to hot-wire a milk truck. I doubt if the guy left the keys in it. Stan, you go wait outside. Take Stew with you. Lou, you better stay here and help me drag Booger and Hank out to the truck. Tim, you go home and do your algebra homework. Make an extra copy for me, and I'll pick it up tomorrow after church.

STAN

I don't think you should use that gun, Rachel.

RACHEL

Why not? It's a perfect piece. It's the cops' own gun, for Christ's sake. It can't be traced to us.

MATTHEW

I just remembered. I promised my mother I'd mow the lawn this afternoon.

RACHEL

You wouldn't help your mother out of a burning building.

MATTHEW

Au contraire. I have a very deep sense of filial responsibility. It's just that she hasn't been pulling her weight lately. She needs to be evicted, to teach her a lesson. It's for her own good. I have to go home now. Have a nice day, everybody.

RACHEL

(Points gun at MATTHEW) You're in this with us, college boy. If you turn sissy on me now, I'll bury you in the flats with everybody else.

MATTHEW

Young people today have no manners at all.

STAN

Rachel, there's a reason I don't think you should use that gun.

RACHEL

(Positioning the gun inches from HANK'S face) Ready, Eldon?

ELDON

(Mournfully) I don't knoooooow.

RACHEL

You're doing fine, kid. Keep it steady.

ELDON

I don't knoooooow.

STAN

Rachel, you got a minute?

RACHEL

I've got my hands full at the moment, Stan. Can't it wait?

STAN

Rachel, I don't think you should shoot him with that gun.

RACHEL

(About to fire) Why not?

STAN

Because if you do, this one might go off.

(STAN opens the algebra book, which has been hollowed out to serve as a carrying case for a hand gun, and removes the gun inside.)

RACHEL

(Turns long enough to see it) What's that?

STAN

(Pointing the gun at RACHEL) It's a gun.

RACHEL

Why do you have that gun, Stan?

STAN

Home protection, mostly. A little target practice. Odd jobs.

ELDON

I don't knooooooow.

RACHEL

Why was that gun in the algebra book, Stan?

TIM

Because I carry an algebra book around with me all the time. I start carrying a gun around where people can see it, there might be questions.

RACHEL

What's the algebra book got to do with the gun, Tim?

TIM

There are books and junk lying around the locker room all the time. It was easy.

STAN

The way I figure, maybe somebody told Booger Jones to go in the locker room and sit down where there was a book. Maybe somebody told him to open the book. Maybe somebody told him, he opens that book and does what he's told, there might be something in it for him.

TIM

A case of pop bottles. That's how Booger Jones eats. He walks up and down Highway Eighteen picking up pop bottles. Somebody offers him a whole case of pop bottles just for opening a book and doing something with it...

(RACHEL lowers her arms along with Eldon's, removing the gun from his hands.)

STAN

I guess there are no secrets in a little town. Anybody want a drink?

RACHEL

Are you saying...?

STAN

I hate it when people ask me what I'm saying. You never need to ask me what I'm saying. I always say exactly what I'm saying.

RACHEL

Couldn't you have told me this yesterday?

STAN

I'm not telling you anything. I'm just saying the gun you got there ain't the gun to go shooting Hank with. Booger and Hank never seen the gun you got there. That gun never shot anybody. That gun you're holding is some piece of junk the cops came up with because they needed a weapon for the trial of Booger Jones. That gun you're holding don't mean nothing. Dump it in The Flats when you're getting rid of Stew.

RACHEL

What about that gun you're holding there, Stan?

STAN

This gun here? This gun's been around, you might say. Now it's going back in the book. (*Returns gun to book*) And there it's gonna stay. It deserves a rest.

RACHEL

How'd you teach Booger Jones to shoot Hank?

STAN

I taught Lou here to play hearts. Tim's teaching you algebra. You can teach anybody anything, if you got a willing pupil. Right, Eldon?

(*ELDON smiles.*)

LOU

I thought it was me taught *you* to play hearts.

RACHEL

You got me wishing I was in Omaha right now.

STAN

Have some whiskey. You drink enough whiskey, it's just like being in Omaha.

TIM

Maybe Booger should shoot me.

RACHEL

You can't die. I'll never pass algebra.

TIM

I'm sorry, Stan.

STAN

What's to be sorry? There was a problem. I tried to take care of it. It didn't quite work out like I planned.

RACHEL

Your own son, Stan?

STAN

(Quietly) You said it yourself. You ever listen to yourself when you talk, girl? You said it just now. It's no kind of life for a boy. Or for me.

RACHEL

I was talking about *after* he got stuck in that chair.

STAN

It was no kind of life before.

LOU

Come on, Stan. Let's play some hearts.

STAN

He's been no good all his life. It's bad enough he goes around beating up every *retard* who can't stand up for himself. You think I hadn't heard about that business with the skunk in the trunk? You think that's the worst thing he's done? Brother. The stories I could tell. You don't know the half of it. I spent more time at the police station than I did in my own home.

LOU

Come on, Stan. Boys'll be boys.

STAN

How many boys kill their own mother?

LOU

Don't talk crazy. Have some more whiskey. Play hearts.

RACHEL

Eddie? Hank did something to Edie?

STAN

Broke her heart is all. Killed her is all.

LOU

Play hearts, Stan.

RACHEL

Eddie died in a car wreck.

STAN

Eddie died of a broken heart. All that woman ever asked was that he be a good boy. What's so hard about that? Huh, Lou? That asking so much?

LOU

It's time for hearts, Stan.

STAN

Ever wonder why Edie never had any friends, Lou? Not one friend in this whole town. It's 'cause of him. (*Points to HANK*)

TIM

We all need to settle down here.

STAN

All that woman wanted was one friend. One friend in her life. A little friendship, a little respect. He ruined it all. Drove everyone away with his meanness. Evil, drunk meanness.

RACHEL

No offense, Stan, but you're not exactly telling us the news. Hank's been bad since day one. I always liked Edie. So did Brenda.

STAN

Everyone liked Edie. Best girl I ever met. But nobody wanted to be her friend. People were afraid to be around her. Because of that. (*Points again at HANK*) The best damn girl I ever knew used to cry herself to sleep at night because of that... (*Points to HANK, unable to finish the sentence*) We'd get calls in the middle of the night. Hank was at the police station, drunk. Hank'd run his car into a store front somewhere. Hank had busted somebody's jaw. Hank'd put somebody in the hospital again. Hank was drunk, takin' a whizz in somebody's front yard at three o'clock in the morning. Hank'd thrown somebody into a swimming pool and was trying to drown them at four a.m. I'd get up, go downtown, bail him out. I'd bring him home. We'd walk in. Edie'd be standing there. "Why?" she'd ask, that little quiet voice of hers. A lot of people would have gone through the roof. A lot of people'd yell and carry on. Not Edie. She'd just stand there in her

STAN, *Continued*

bathrobe, looking like a lost little girl, somebody'd spoiled her birthday party. "Why?" she'd ask. "Why?" And do you know what he'd do? You know what Mr. Quarterback would do? (*Approaches HANK*) He'd laugh at her. He'd stand there laughing at her. And she'd cry. And the harder she'd cry the more he'd laugh. We'd lay in bed at night, and she'd be crying. There was nothing I could say. I kept thinking, he's just a boy. I was his age, I was no choirboy, believe me. I thought he'd get better. He didn't. Sometimes I'd go sleep on the couch, I couldn't stand the crying. I'd ask Edie what she wanted me to do, she'd just shake her head and go on crying. One thing I know: She didn't want that boy in jail. We hired lawyers to keep him out. He beat up the lawyers. They sent him to shrinks. He beat up the shrinks. Pretty soon, nobody'd even try to help him any more. But I figured if we could just hang on a little longer, maybe if he was good enough at football, some college would take him. He'd go away, get his bell rung by a bunch of guys who were even meaner than he was, teach him a lesson, maybe things would be different. But then he crossed the line.

MATTHEW

(*Raising his hand*) May I go home, please?

RACHEL

Shut up and sit down. Man's talking here.

LOU

Anyone seen Brenda? We gotta get to Omaha.

RACHEL

Shut up, Lou. The funeral's over. Go on, Stan.

STAN

Where can I go? She blamed herself. She said it must be something inside her, something he got from her that made him bad. Can you imagine that? My sweet little Edie, never hurt a soul, thinking she was to blame. That was just like her, always taking the rap for everyone else. Those little shoulders tried to hold up the whole world, and one day they couldn't hold no more. I think she believed that maybe if she was gone it'd make Hank better somehow. It was like she was thinking about sacrificing herself. A lot of people that are going to kill themselves, they give you a chance to stop them. Not Edie. She always did things right. She fixed it so that by the time I read her letter, she'd already be gone.

RACHEL

Stan?

STAN

The phone rang when I was reading it. It was the sheriff. He said Edie'd driven her car off the bridge. I laid down on the bed. I must have laid there a day, two days, I don't know. I heard the phone ringing, people outside, I didn't move. Just laid there. When I was laying there, know what I heard? Him. (*Points to HANK*) He was laughing. He was out here, laughing. Drinking. They're pulling his mother out of the river; guy's in here laughing. I laid there on the bed. That's when I knew. My boy had to change.

TIM

I told Booger to aim right between the eyes. The bullet wasn't supposed to go in Hank's mouth, cripple him all up like this. I'm sorry, Lou.

STAN

No, Tim. You did good. I'm the one that messed up. It wasn't Edie at all. It was me. It was something inside me that made Hank no good. I don't know what. But it had to be something from me. It's fairer this way, Tim. Me and Hank, we're each other's punishment. Maybe if we sit here long enough, we'll figure out what we're being punished for. Whatever it is, we got a lot of time to find out. Long time. Right, Hank?

RACHEL

That's it. I'll do it myself.

This is Not the End of the Play

Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes