

HIS HEINOUS CRIME

(A Play in Two Acts)

by

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THE CHARACTERS

ROBERT, A textbook salesman, 50

LOUISE, His wife, 50

BUCK, Their son, 30

CHARLIE, Their neighbor, an attorney, 50

BERNIE, Robert's boss, 60

BERNADETTE, Howard's daughter, Robert's Supervisor, 30s

STANLEY, A waiter, 20s

THE SCENES

A kitchen; An office; A restaurant

THE TIME

Recently

ACT ONE, Scene 1

(ROBERT's and LOUISE's kitchen, dimly lit, as ROBERT comes in)

ROBERT

(Bangs his knee on the door) Damn!

LOUISE

(Enters from another room) Robert! You're late.

ROBERT

I know.

LOUISE

Very late.

ROBERT

I know it. I'm sorry.

LOUISE

Do you want to tell me why you're so late?

ROBERT

No.

LOUISE

You don't! Why not...

ROBERT

It's not important. I simply lost track of the time, Louise. I said I'm sorry.

LOUISE

So nothing happened?

ROBERT

What could have happened?

LOUISE

You didn't have another accident with the car, did you?

ROBERT

No, I did not have another accident with the car. I've only had one!

LOUISE

I was worried.

ROBERT

Louise, I told you. Everything is all right. Do I *look* all right?

LOUISE

You've looked better.

ROBERT

Well... I had a couple of beers.

LOUISE

Robert, I don't mean to nag. My mother nagged my father and I knew I never wanted to be like her, after the day dad tried to shoot her.

ROBERT

You think I could do that to you?

LOUISE

Hm...

ROBERT

When I don't even have a gun.

LOUISE

But I'm only worried because sometimes, lately... you forget things.

ROBERT

What have I forgotten? I can't remember forgetting anything.

LOUISE

There! You see!

ROBERT

Listen to me. Everything is all right.

LOUISE

That's good. (Pause) And our son was here earlier.

ROBERT

(Suddenly a little nervous) When was that?

LOUISE

Not long ago...

ROBERT

(Very nervous) What did he say?

LOUISE

Robert... I'm worried about our son.

ROBERT

What are you talking about? He has a good job, he makes plenty of money; he's doing just fine, and he's probably home now in bed, asleep. I wish to hell I was.

LOUISE

Am I stopping you?

ROBERT

Yes! Because you're going to tell me why you're worried about our son!

LOUISE

Well, for one thing, why isn't he married?

ROBERT

He has plenty of girls. He probably can't choose.

LOUISE

Robert, I'm sorry I have to say this, but our son is a selfish person. That's bad enough, but what makes it worse is that in the end, he'll be very unhappy, because after while we won't be around, and then he'll have no one.

ROBERT

Louise, he works hard. He has a right to enjoy himself while he can.

LOUISE

You're always making excuses for him. You've spoiled him. All right, I suppose we've BOTH spoiled him. Do you remember how popular he was?

ROBERT

I'd say he still is.

LOUISE

In high school, all the other kids worshiped him. They fought to carry his books. He was class president, Homecoming king, captain of the football and the baseball teams. But in the long run, maybe all that doesn't really mean anything.

ROBERT

No, it means something.

LOUISE

But in time things change so much.

ROBERT

That can't be helped.

LOUISE

I mean look at this house! It seems so small now. We're so boxed-in! It's almost like living in a casket! But do you remember when we bought it? We were so excited. At that time it was almost in the country. And then, over-night, it's as if we were living in the middle of a trash heap.

ROBERT

First you said a casket.

LOUISE

Well then, a casket in the middle of a trash heap.

ROBERT

Wow... Well, I'm sorry, Louise.

LOUISE

You didn't cause it.

ROBERT

But I *did*. God knows I've let you down.

LOUISE

No, no! I never meant that!

ROBERT

Yes, you did! I've failed you.

LOUISE

Nonsense! You're not a failure: not to me.

ROBERT

Do you really mean that?

LOUISE

Well... I do most of the time.

ROBERT

I can live with that.

LOUISE

And so can I. And now I'm going to bed. Are you ready?

ROBERT

I'm going to have a sandwich.

LOUISE

If you've been drinking, you'd better take your Metamucil.

ROBERT

All right, all right! And is there any cheese?

LOUISE

I just bought some Limberger.

ROBERT

(He stares at her) What! Why in the world would you do that?

LOUISE

Robert, trying something new just *one* time won't kill you.

ROBERT

If it's Limberger cheese, it might.

LOUISE

(Martyr) Oh, forget it! It's terribly late, but I'll go out and get you some cheddar.

ROBERT

No. I'll try that... (Choking) limberger.

LOUISE

Well, if you'll just try it, I'm sure you'll like it.

ROBERT

And if I don't! Now where's that Metamucil?

LOUISE

Well, if you don't like it, you might as well blame me.



ROBERT

You bet I will! But what good will that do me? Oh, goodnight.

LOUISE

And come to bed soon. (She kisses him on the cheek and exits).

ROBERT

(He looks in the refrigerator, removes mustard, Limberger cheese, etc. Makes himself a sandwich, takes a bite, chews hopefully, then chokes) My god! Is this really made for human consumption!

LOUISE (Off)

How do you like the Limberger?

ROBERT

(Catching his breath) I hardly know what to say.

LOUISE

You see? I'm telling you new experiences can be exciting. So now will you please come to bed?

ROBERT

(He frowns) What does she mean by that?

(Then their son, BUCK, comes in. He has clearly been drinking)

BUCK

Dad! That you?

ROBERT

Buck! Thank god! Where have you been, son?

BUCK

Well, I had to buy the guy a couple of drinks.

ROBERT

Then you talked to your friend in the State's Attorney's Office? Good. So what did he say?

BUCK

He said he'd do what he could for you, dad.

ROBERT

He did? That's wonderful. I'm greatly relieved.

BUCK

He thinks that maybe he can keep your name out of the paper.

ROBERT

That's ALL he can do?

BUCK

Well, the case probably won't be assigned to him, but, anyway, at least mom might never find out.

ROBERT

But...You're sure that's *all* he can do for me?

BUCK

Hey, dad, I'm sorry, but you got charged with a DUI. They take that pretty seriously these days, you know. I talked to the man for you, okay? I did the best I could.

ROBERT

I appreciate that, but did you tell him I'd only had three or four beers, and I only got stopped because my tail light had burned out?

BUCK

They hear that story all the time.

ROBERT

But damn it, son, it's TRUE!

BUCK

I did what I could.

ROBERT

This is incredible! What am I going to do?

BUCK

Look, you go to court, you plead guilty, you take your medicine and, hopefully, mom will never even find out.

ROBERT

Take your medicine? You make it sound like I got a sore throat.

BUCK

(Laughs) That's good one, dad. And I forgot to tell you. I'm up for a promotion!

ROBERT

Are you? Well, that's fine... fine.

BUCK

Fine! Yeah, I guess it is fine, dad. I mean we are only talking junior partnership here!

ROBERT

I'm glad to hear it, because, you know, your mom is worried about your future.

BUCK

So then was that a 'Congratulations'?

ROBERT

I should say it was... Congratulations.

BUCK

I mean what is this? Okay. I know you're upset, but I did try to help you out with your problem, and I'm expecting, maybe, to get congratulated on my promotion, but I get criticized because of... what! I'm not married? Listen, dad, let me tell you most of my friends are married. They have the mortgage, the minivan, the kids, the in-law problems, and honestly, I find I don't envy them, and I say 'to each his own happiness.'

ROBERT

Maybe your mom wants you to have those headaches, too, son.

BUCK

Don't I know it!

ROBERT

She loves you. Anyway, I'm not trying to tell you how to live your life... I got my own problems.

BUCK

I mean mom can be a little... Anyway, I understand... (He shrugs)

ROBERT

Now hold on, I know your mom nags a little.

BUCK

That's what I understand.

ROBERT

(Gets slightly heated) No! Now that's not fair. Believe me, she has her reasons. Let's face it, son, I'm not a great man. I'm a book salesman. Don't think I'm ashamed of that, but I've never made a lot of money. My name was never in the newspaper. (He shudders) Oh God, at least not yet! But the point is your mother has put up with that, and god knows, before this business is over, she might have to put up with a lot more!

BUCK

Well, like I said if you work it right, she might never know.

ROBERT

I don't even know if that's right. I mean if I don't tell her, and then later she does find out—

BUCK

Well, I've got to go.

ROBERT

Okay, all right. And thanks for trying to help... And, son, congratulations on that promotion, okay? (BUCK exits)

(After BUCK exits, ROBERT sits alone a moment, musing. Then, there's a knock on the door; ROBERT looks up, as CHARLIE enters)

CHARLIE

Bob? I heard some shouting a minute ago, and all your lights are on. Is everything all right?

ROBERT

Yes.

CHARLIE

(Looks at him) You look a little purple. Are you sure?

ROBERT

Well, actually, no, it's not, Charlie. Oh, forget it, everything is fine... Well, no! No, it's not exactly *fine*.

CHARLIE

Bob, it's got to be one or the other.

ROBERT

Okay, look... Charlie, I need your help. I mean as a lawyer. Earlier tonight... I got a drunk driving charge.

Oh boy.

CHARLIE

That bad?

ROBERT

How did you manage that?

CHARLIE

The officer stopped me because my tail light had burned out. Then he asked me if I'd been drinking. Charlie, I said I'd only had a couple of beers, and I *swear* I only had four beers, Charlie. Tops.

ROBERT

Did you take the breath test?

CHARLIE

No. Frankly, I was afraid to! What do I know about these things? I mean four beers seem like nothing, but the way things are today? I think the last time I had more than three beers, if you'd had a few too many, you could *call* the cops, and they gave you a ride home! So what can you tell me?

ROBERT

You're up the creek.

CHARLIE

How much do I owe you for that?

ROBERT

Boy, I can just imagine what Louise said.

CHARLIE

I haven't told her yet.

ROBERT

CHARLIE

Well, I assume you're hiring me to defend you. So first thing in the morning, I'll go read the police report.

ROBERT

Thanks, Charlie, I feel better.

CHARLIE

But I might as well warn you right now. They'll try to crucify you.

ROBERT

Crucify me! For four beers! And Charlie, I swear to you, I did nothing wrong. I obeyed all the rules of the road. I was going five miles UNDER the speed limit. I was stopped three blocks from home, simply because my taillight had burned out.

CHARLIE

It doesn't matter. From now on, you'll be treated as if you'd sexually molested little children.

ROBERT

I get it. You're telling me I'm in trouble.

CHARLIE

I'm telling you a cocky teenager going a hundred miles an hour might get a hundred dollar fine. Yours will be a thousand. If you're lucky! And that is only the beginning.

ROBERT

You're telling me I'm in BIG trouble!

CHARLIE

You'll also have to take classes in which, because of those four beers, you'll be treated as if you were pulled kicking and screaming from a gutter.

ROBERT

You're saying I might as well be dead!

CHARLIE

Of course those classes will cost you a few hundred more. At this point, don't even ask my fee, which is why we lawyers aren't protesting the inequity of all this. And I hardly need mention because you didn't take the breath test you'll lose your license immediately, but hopefully not forever.

ROBERT

It's not fair!

CHARLIE

Hell, you know it. I know it. Anyone who's had four beers knows it. So what?

ROBERT

I obeyed all the rules, I drove perfectly and you tell me: 'So what?'

CHARLIE

Now you're getting it.

ROBERT

But it just doesn't seem fair!

CHARLIE

It doesn't have to be 'fair,' Bob. It's simply the law.

ROBERT

Okay, you made your point. So what is your advice?

CHARLIE

Get some rest. Eat well. And try not to worry.

ROBERT

You're saying to leave it to you.

CHARLIE

Hey, I'm a lawyer. What do you expect me to say?



ROBERT

I can't face Louise.

CHARLIE

Well, at the moment you're upset.

ROBERT

I'm not upset. I'm coming apart at the seams!

CHARLIE

Listen to me, Bob....

ROBERT

I know, I know. You're going to tell me to 'Calm Down.'

CHARLIE

No. You're upset, and believe me you have good reason to be. Not for what you did, but for what some people think after four beers, you *might* have done. That's not the way our justice system is SUPPOSED to work, but that's the way it works in this instance. So what are you going to do about it? Well, first you're going to be upset. And then you're going to get some sleep and start to deal with the problems you can actually deal with... like telling your wife about this.

ROBERT

Can I ask you a question?

CHARLIE

Of course, Bob! You already owe me money.

ROBERT

It's not necessarily pertinent to the case, but I'm curious... do you believe there's such a thing as a *propensity* to screw up? You know... to fail? I mean we hear an awful lot about genes these days...

CHARLIE

Now let me get this straight. Are you asking me if I think there's a GENE that causes people to fail?

ROBERT

I guess that is what I'm asking you.

CHARLIE

I wouldn't know, Bob. I'm not a scientist.

ROBERT

Well, maybe we're better off not knowing.

CHARLIE

Why do you ask?

ROBERT

Forget it.

CHARLIE

And you do that, too. You have enough to worry about. And so I'll see you in the morning.

(CHARLIE exits. Then after a moment, LOUISE enters, in bedclothes)

LOUISE

Robert, was that *Charlie*? What was he doing here at this time of night?

ROBERT

He thought he heard something.

LOUISE

What did he hear?

ROBERT

It was nothing.

LOUISE

He came over because he heard nothing! NOW are you coming to bed?

ROBERT

(Thoughtful pause) You know, I've been thinking about my brother. We were so different. How do you explain it? I mean we had the same parents, we grew up in the same environment, but Edward was a very successful man. At the age of nineteen he walked into a swamp and at the age of twenty-one, he walked out, but he'd discovered oil and he was a rich man.

LOUISE

Robert, Edward wasn't successful, he was *lucky*. I mean he could have just as easily stumbled into quicksand and drowned, and he wouldn't have been rich, he would have been dead.

ROBERT

But maybe he just sensed where to stumble.

LOUISE

But what did he ever do for anybody?

ROBERT

He gave mom and dad some oil. They liked that.

LOUISE

And so aside from giving away some oil, of which he had billions of gallons, he never did a single thing for any other person in his entire life! Well, what I'm saying is you're twice the man your brother was and there are many people who know that!

ROBERT

Louise... are you telling me you love me?

LOUISE

Oh. I see. You're fishing for compliments.

ROBERT

Well, damn it, I haven't gotten one yet.

LOUISE

Oh shut up. Have you finished your sandwich?

ROBERT

I sure have. That limberger... what is the word?

LOUISE

Delicious?

ROBERT

Um...not quite.

LOUISE

Well, I told you you'd like it.

ROBERT

Yes. You did.

LOUISE

But you never listen to me.

ROBERT

The great mistake of my life!

LOUISE

Oh shut up. (They both laugh).

LOUISE

All right. You've had your sarcasm. So now will you come to bed? It's been a long day.

ROBERT

You're telling me! (He walks to the door, looks out).

LOUISE

(Sighs) Now what is the man doing?

ROBERT

I want to look at the stars.

LOUISE

At this time of night?

ROBERT

They're only *out* at night!

LOUISE

(Sighs) Why do I put up with you?

ROBERT

You're asking me that?

LOUISE

No. I'm asking you to come to bed.

ROBERT

Listen, did I ever tell you about my grandfather? He drove all the way across the country, selling flutes. Now that was a remarkable thing to do. Who'd have imagined back then so many people wanted to buy flutes? But the man took a gamble, and it paid off. After a while, he came to be known as 'The Flute Man.' (For a moment the melancholy sound of a flute is heard).

LOUISE

(To herself, as ROBERT is speaking) Something has happened tonight to him. I know something has happened. I wonder what? (Then suddenly, except for the sound of crickets, there is a silence; and then, slowly, the lights begin to fade into...)

A BLACKOUT

ACT ONE, Scene 2

(The next morning; LOUISE in a man's robe, is sitting at the table and drinking a cup of coffee, when ROBERT enters the room)

ROBERT

There's my robe!

LOUISE

Mine needs washing.

ROBERT

Well, you look—

LOUISE

Don't say it!

ROBERT

I was going to say you look better in it than I do.

LOUISE

I'll bet you were!

ROBERT

(Pouring himself a cup of coffee) More or less. Did Buck happen to stop by?

LOUISE

At this hour? Why would he do that?

ROBERT

(Pause) Well, I thought he might have some news for me... for us... something about his promotion.

LOUISE

You know, maybe I was wrong last night. Maybe he's going to be all right after all.

ROBERT

Of course he is!

LOUISE

I guess a little selfishness is simply part of human nature.

ROBERT

You might express that a little more benevolently.

LOUISE

Self-interest then?

ROBERT

While we're on the subject, I'll tell you something about self-interest. That promotion of his has motivated me, too!

LOUISE

What do you mean?

ROBERT

Louise, but I'm tired of so much traveling.

LOUISE

What do you intend to do about it?

ROBERT

That's what I'm trying to tell you, if you'll let me. A little while back, Bernie told me whenever I felt like it, he'd find me a spot behind a desk, and I guess now I feel like it.

LOUISE

You *do*? Just like that?

ROBERT

It's not just like that. I've been thinking about it for a while. I just didn't want to bother you with it until I was ready, and now I'm ready.

LOUISE

I just find it strange you never mentioned it to me.

ROBERT

Well, I'm mentioning it now damn it!

LOUISE

When you're ready to act on it.

ROBERT

Are you saying you're against the idea?

LOUISE

No, I just want to know what's happening. Robert. Is there something you're hiding from me?

ROBERT

For God's sake! What would I be hiding?

LOUISE

If I knew, you wouldn't be hiding it very well, would you! Now, is there something you should tell me?

ROBERT

Louise, I'm simply tired of so much traveling. I used to enjoy it. I mean when I was younger. Meeting the teachers and the professors, speaking about the material, face-to-face, was enjoyable. But now I'd like to spend more time at home on the computer. I've earned that.

LOUISE

And nothing is wrong?

ROBERT

Stop saying that, woman! Wouldn't I tell you if something was wrong?

LOUISE

That depends on what it was.



ROBERT

So help me, Louise!

LOUISE

All right, but please do me a favor. If you're going in to see Bernie, will you put on a tie?

ROBERT

Okay, okay, now what about some eggs? (He exits).

(LOUISE then goes over to look for eggs in the refrigerator, and while she does this, CHARLIE enters. He only notices the robe)

CHARLIE

Morning, Bob... I'm just on my way down to check that police report.

LOUISE

(Comes out from behind the refrigerator) Charlie! What police report?

CHARLIE

Oops! Louise... isn't that Bob's robe?

LOUISE

Don't change the subject, Charlie.

ROBERT

Which subject?

LOUISE

What's this about a police report?

CHARLIE

Didn't Bob tell you?

LOUISE

No, he didn't. But I can promise you something. He is definitely going to tell me now!

(At that moment, ROBERT re-enters, looks uneasily at CHARLIE)

ROBERT

What am I going to tell her?

LOUISE

What police report?

ROBERT

(To CHARLIE) You *told* her?

CHARLIE

No, Bob, I didn't. But why didn't you?

ROBERT

I was just going to tell her.

LOUISE

Tell me what?

ROBERT

I was going to.

CHARLIE

You should have told her by now.

LOUISE

Well... TELL ME!

ROBERT

I was just waiting for the right time.

LOUISE

The right time for WHAT!

ROBERT

(To CHARLIE) I didn't know how to say it!

CHARLIE

That's a poor excuse.

LOUISE

Excuse for WHAT!

ROBERT

Louise... there's nothing to get excited over.

CHARLIE

I don't think I would tell her *that*.

ROBERT

What should I tell her?

LOUISE

Well, you'd better tell me SOMETHING! And RIGHT NOW!

ROBERT

(Pause, as they both look at LOUISE) I was charged with drunk driving last night.

LOUISE

Oh my God! No! Don't tell me that!

ROBERT

(To CHARLIE) You see! I shouldn't have told her!

LOUISE

(To CHARLIE) Oh my God! What's going to happen?

CHARLIE

I'll do what I can.

LOUISE

But the *expense!* And your job!

ROBERT

Louise, I swear to you, I only had four beers.

LOUISE

Then how did this happen?

ROBERT

I got stopped because my taillight had burned out.

LOUISE

What! (She looks at CHARLIE).

CHARLIE

(He shrugs) It happens.

ROBERT

(To CHARLIE, sarcastically) Thanks for your support. Finally!

LOUISE

WHERE did it happen?

ROBERT

Seventh and Elm.

LOUISE

You're telling me you were stopped three blocks from home because your taillight had burned out and you've only had four beers and you're charged with drunk driving?

ROBERT

I swear to you, Louise! That is exactly what happened. I broke no driving rules. I did nothing wrong.

LOUISE

I don't believe you.

ROBERT

It's true.

LOUISE

Charlie!

ROBERT

Believe him. It happens.

LOUISE

(To CHARLIE, very angry) All right! I guess it has happened! But can you tell me what is *going* to happen now?

CHARLIE

Hey, Louise, are you angry with ME?

LOUISE

No. No, I'm sorry, Charlie. I guess I'm just angry. I mean I find it hard to believe. I don't know what to think.

CHARLIE

All right, Now look, the first thing I have to do is go downtown and look at that police report. I wish I could tell you 'Don't worry,' but I know you don't want me to lie to you. Right? (He looks at ROBERT and LOUISE; ROBERT looks uneasily at LOUISE; LOUISE looks very angry and....)

THE FIRST ACT IS OVER

ACT TWO, Scene 1

(BERNADETTE's office. She has a video recorder; ROBERT looks in)

ROBERT

(Sticks his head in the door) Excuse me, Bernie. You busy?

BERNADETTE

No. Come on in, Bob. Actually, I want to talk to you.

ROBERT

Well, the truth is, I want to speak with your dad.

BERNADETTE

Weren't you supposed to be somewhere this morning?

ROBERT

That's what I wanted to talk to your dad about.

BERNADETTE

I imagine. I read about it in the paper.

ROBERT

It was in the *paper*?

BERNADETTE

They always report arrests the next day, Bob.

ROBERT

But I thought—

BERNADETTE

So I'm sure dad knows all about it.

ROBERT

But that wasn't what I wanted to talk to him about.

BERNADETTE

No? What was it?

ROBERT

I'd prefer to tell your dad, if you don't mind.

BERNADETTE

I'm afraid you'll have to tell me.

ROBERT

(An uneasy pause, then, referring to the video recorder) Say, what's that?

BERNADETTE

(The joy of her life) My new mini camcorder! These are terrific! (She shoots ROBERT).

ROBERT

(Nervous) So you're recording me now?

BERNADETTE

I hope that doesn't make you nervous.

ROBERT

(Incredibly nervous) No. No. Why would I be nervous?

BERNADETTE

You tell me.

ROBERT

Um, that's quite a gadget, Bernadette.

BERNADETTE

Don't you have one?

ROBERT

You mean one of those cameras?

BERNADETTE

(Continuing to shoot him) Uh-huh...

ROBERT

No, I don't. Not exactly.

BERNADETTE

Not exactly? What does that mean?

ROBERT

I got a Polaroid.

BERNADETTE

(Laughing) Oh, no way, Bob, not even in the same league! Let me tell you, there is nothing in the world like these babies! They're incredible. (Shooting in ROBERT's face).

ROBERT

(Non-plussed) Well, I can see where they'd be a lot of fun.

BERNADETTE

Oh absolutely. They're great for the kids. I mean you get their entire life on film. Let me tell you something, Bob. They say 'Time flies.' Well, believe me, that is so terribly true!

ROBERT

(Unable to control the sarcastic edge, but BERNADETTE doesn't get it) Yes, Bernadette, I've been told that.

BERNADETTE

But my point is it's never too soon to start capturing those precious moments. I have my kids riding their bikes, swimming in the pool, eating watermelon. In my personal opinion this is what life is all about.



ROBERT

My son's a little old for that now.

HOWIE

Grandkids, for goodness' sake, Bob! Look, you truly must do yourself a favor and get one of these.

ROBERT

Yes. I'll do that. But Bernadette, I really wanted to talk to your dad.

BERNADETTE

Sorry. No can do.

ROBERT

Why is that?

BERNADETTE

Dad's not here.

ROBERT

When will he be back?

BERNADETTE

I can't tell you that.

ROBERT

Now don't kid me, Bernadette.

BERNADETTE

Dad has gone into semi-retirement.

ROBERT

What! He never mentioned anything about that to me.

