

INCIDENT IN A DINER LATE AT NIGHT ON A BLUE HIGHWAY

By Michael Druce

Copyright © MMXXIV by Michael Druce, All rights reserved.

ISBN: 978-1-61588-548-0

CAUTION: Professionals and amateurs are hereby warned that this Work is subject to a royalty. This Work is fully protected under the copyright laws of the United States of America and all countries with which the United States has reciprocal copyright relations, whether through bilateral or multilateral treaties or otherwise, and including, but not limited to, all countries covered by the Pan-American Copyright Convention, the Universal Copyright Convention and the Berne Convention.

RIGHTS RESERVED: All rights to this Work are strictly reserved, including professional and amateur stage performance rights. Also reserved are: motion picture, recitation, lecturing, public reading, radio broadcasting, television, video or sound recording, all forms of mechanical or electronic reproduction, such as CD-ROM, CD-I, DVD, information and storage retrieval systems and photocopying, and the rights of translation into non-English languages.

PERFORMANCE RIGHTS AND ROYALTY PAYMENTS: All amateur and stock performance rights to this Work are controlled exclusively by Heuer Publishing LLC. No amateur or stock production groups or individuals may perform this play without securing license and royalty arrangements in advance from Heuer Publishing LLC. Questions concerning other rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC. Royalty fees are subject to change without notice. Professional and stock fees will be set upon application in accordance with your producing circumstances. Any licensing requests and inquiries relating to amateur and stock (professional) performance rights should be addressed to Heuer Publishing LLC.

Royalty of the required amount must be paid, whether the play is presented for charity or profit and whether or not admission is charged.

AUTHOR CREDIT: All groups or individuals receiving permission to produce this Work must give the author(s) credit in any and all advertisement and publicity relating to the production of this Work. The author's billing must appear directly below the title on a separate line where no other written matter appears. The name of the author(s) must be at least 50% as large as the title of the Work. No person or entity may receive larger or more prominent credit than that which is given to the author(s).

PUBLISHER CREDIT: Whenever this Work is produced, all programs, advertisements, flyers or other printed material must include the following notice: ***Produced by special arrangement with Heuer Publishing LLC.***

COPYING: Any unauthorized copying of this Work or excerpts from this Work is strictly forbidden by law. No part of this Work may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form, by any means now known or yet to be invented, including photocopying or scanning, without prior permission from Heuer Publishing LLC.

HEUER PUBLISHING LLC
P.O. BOX 248 • CEDAR RAPIDS, IOWA 52406
TOLL FREE (800) 950-7529 • FAX (319) 368-8011

INCIDENT IN A DINER LATE AT NIGHT ON A BLUE HIGHWAY

By Michael Druce

SYNOPSIS: In this dark little drama of what goes around comes around, circumstance brings together two men in a small-town diner late at night. Clark Devon, the rich and powerful CEO of ConQuest, is on trial for bankrupting his company, costing thousands of employees their jobs. Stu, the owner of the diner, is on the rebound after coping with a personal tragedy. Over coffee, both men relate how circumstances have affected their lives. As each man's story unfolds, details surface that link the two men and build toward a startling conclusion.

TIME: Present.

SETTING: Small-town diner.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

(2 either)

STU/LOU (m/f)Late forties to mid-fifties. He runs the diner. He is weary, but not haggard. (64 lines)

CLARK/CLARE (m/f).....Approximately the same age as Stu. He is tanned and well-groomed. He is aggressive, impatient, and manipulative, a man clearly used to having his way. (64 lines)

CASTING NOTE: If Stu becomes Lou and Clark becomes Clare, permission is granted to make textual changes consistent with renaming the characters.

COSTUMES

STU/LOU – dressed in jeans, a work shirt and a soiled apron.

CLARK/CLARE – dressed in an expensive suit and shoes.

*THIS SCRIPT IS PROVIDED AS A COURTESY FOR INTERNET READING.
NO PERFORMANCE RIGHTS CONVEYED.*

SETTING

A small-town diner. It is night, raining, a few minutes past closing time. At right is a counter with a pair of stools in front. Left of center is a table and two chairs. Behind the counter are a coffee pot, coffee mugs, tape dispenser, and a rag for wiping spills.

Out of view of the audience are a pay phone and a photo of the owner and his family.

PROPS

- ☐ placemats on the table
- ☐ umbrella (CLARK)
- ☐ wallet (CLARK)
- ☐ two fifty-dollar bills (CLARK)
- ☐ coffee pot (STU)
- ☐ coffee mug (STU)
- ☐ tape dispenser (STU)
- ☐ wiping rag (STU)

LIGHTS

At the end of the play when Stu turns off the lights, the remaining lines are played entirely in the dark. Or Stu can turn on the lights again when he returns.

AT RISE: *STU is wiping the countertop, preparing to close the diner for the night. CLARK enters with an umbrella in hand. He drops the wet umbrella onto the counter, unconcerned that STU has just wiped down the counter.*

CLARK: That was a waste of time. *(Drops wet umbrella on the counter.)* Here's your umbrella.

STU: Small town. I told you it wouldn't take long.

CLARK: You call this eye-blink a town?

STU: It's just a place on a blue highway halfway between here and there. Ever since the interstate went through, it's been wasting away. Most folks sold out, gave up, or just died.

CLARK: When people need gas or repairs, what do they do?

STU: Wait until morning. Mechanic gets here around eight.

CLARK: I don't have that kind of time. *(Reaching for his wallet.)* I still owe you for the sandwich.

STU: Five-ninety-five.

CLARK: Six bucks for that?

STU: Something wrong with it?

CLARK: Yeah! It wasn't worth six bucks. *(Pulls a fifty from his wallet.)* You break a fifty?

STU: No. You can write a check. Make it out to Stu's Place.

CLARK: Keep it.

STU: Forget it. It's on the house.

CLARK: I need my car fixed, not charity. Look, there's got to be someplace else.

STU: I was supposed to close thirty minutes ago. If there was some other place, I would tell you. Like I say, the guy who runs the station won't be in until eight.

CLARK: Does he have a phone?

STU: He lives about sixty miles from here. He's not coming back. Not on a night like this.

CLARK: You know what I've got parked outside? A hundred and twenty-thousand-dollar car.

STU: Sounds nice. What did you say is wrong with it?

CLARK: A tire blew out.

STU: That's it? Just a flat?

CLARK: No, it was a blowout. It tore up the rim.

STU: You don't have a spare?

CLARK: It's a hundred and twenty-thousand-dollar car. Of course, it's got a spare.

STU: Then what's the problem?

CLARK: It's pouring rain. Do I look like I'm dressed for changing tires? That car parked in the garage next door, is it yours? Can we pull it out?

STU: It belongs to the mechanic. It's a restoration. No engine, no wheels.

CLARK: Figures. *(He pulls out another fifty.)* There's two of these in it for you.

STU: I'll pass.

CLARK: I don't want to be standing up to my ankles in mud. This is a fifteen-hundred-dollar suit; these are custom made Italian shoes. I paid more for these shoes than most people spend on their mortgage payment.

STU: There's some chest-waders in the back I use for fishing.

CLARK: They smell of fish?

STU: Fish smell.

CLARK: *(Pointing off stage.)* That pay phone work?

STU: Not on a night like this. Pay phones, cell phones, nothing's working. Now, can I get you something else? I need to close.

CLARK: You can't close.

STU: Yeah, I can. It's been a long day. My feet are tired, and my butt is dragging.

CLARK: What am I going to do?

STU: I don't know. You can't stay here. Last call.

CLARK: Alright, hang on. I need to think. Give me a cup of coffee. Black.

STU pours coffee into a mug.

CLARK: *(Looking off stage.)* Who's in the picture?

STU: I need to close.

CLARK: That your family?

STU: Once.

CLARK: What does that mean?

STU: It means my wife left me and my daughter is dead. About seven years ago my daughter came down with leukemia. She was stable while I was working, then I lost my job. Long story short, the insurance ran out and we lost her.

CLARK: What about your wife?

STU: We didn't have anything to keep us together.

CLARK: How did you end up here?

STU: You know what the job market is like for guys my age? This diner is my daughter's legacy. This is what life insurance gets you after you've paid the bills and divided the property.

CLARK: (*He's heard enough.*) Sounds like the rain is letting up a bit. (*Another angle.*) Would it make a difference if I told you who I am?

STU: I know who you are. You're all over the news. I recognized you the moment you walked through the door. You're Clark Devon. My guess is you're on your way to your vacation home to spend the weekend before your trial resumes.

CLARK: Name your price. I'll pay it.

STU: Clark—you don't mind if I call you Clark—do you?

CLARK shrugs.

STU: It's cold, it's dark, wet, muddy. Even a guy like you doesn't carry around that kind of cash.

CLARK: I get it. You enjoy this, don't you? The little guy cuts the big guy down to size.

STU: Is that what you think of me? I'm just a little guy?

CLARK: What I mean is a lot of people would like to bring me down.

STU: Maybe people expect more from a guy like you.

CLARK: Stu, you shouldn't believe everything you hear on T.V. If the truth means anything to you.

STU: The truth? You're going to give me the truth?

CLARK: Do you want to hear it?

STU: One refill. That's all. (*Pours another cup of coffee.*)

CLARK: Before I took over ConQuest it was nothing. It was weeks away from going under. You don't build a nothing company into one of the most profitable companies in the world by luck. That doesn't happen without talent, hard work, and dedication. I don't have to apologize for anything. A lot of people made a lot of money because of me.

STU: I respect that. The thing is, when the company went under, a lot of little people lost their jobs, lost their life savings, their pensions.

CLARK: You don't think I'm suffering? I hate it for those folks. I wish it hadn't happened. It was out of my hands. I had thousands of employees. You couldn't expect me to know everything that was going on.

STU: But it happened on your watch. If one of my customers gets food poisoning, even if I'm not here, and I didn't cook the food, it's still my café. I'm responsible.

CLARK: That's a bad analogy and you know it. Food poisoning can be fatal. Nobody died on my watch.

STU: You don't think being fifty years old and having lost everything isn't death?

CLARK: We all lost, Stu.

STU: We? You're still driving an expensive car and wearing fifteen-hundred-dollar suits and custom shoes. You still have vacation homes.

CLARK: I lost millions. No one wants to talk about that.

STU: You were making a hundred million a year, and now you're making half that.

CLARK: Do you know what it feels like to lose fifty million dollars?

STU: Does it feel like losing a daughter?

CLARK: (*Suddenly uncomfortable.*) You got any antacids back there?

STU: Something the matter?

CLARK: Yeah, my stomach hurts. I need an antacid.

STU: So, what does it feel like?

CLARK: I don't know, crampy, I guess.

STU: I'm talking about trying to make ends meet on fifty million. Do you replace the diamond tableware with gold? Is it really harder to live on fifty million than a hundred?

CLARK: What am I supposed to do, apologize? Do you know anybody who apologizes for what they make?

STU: Nobody apologizes. If something goes wrong, they blame someone else.

CLARK: It didn't turn out the way I wanted. But I worked hard. Not like those whiners they'll trot into court, who did nothing but sat in their offices all day surfing the internet and sending emails to their friends. They didn't do anything except what they were told. They didn't think of anything, they didn't create anything. All they did was draw their paychecks, use the company gym, and steal paperclips and rubber bands. They didn't even know they were alive. They'll sit in that witness chair sobbing and choking and pointing fingers. And not once will any of them take responsibility for their lives. Well, you know what, Stu, I don't care. And that's the truth. It doesn't bother me one bit. I don't lose sleep, because everyone of them had the same chance as me, but none of them had the talent or the willpower to be anything more than cattle.

STU: You forgot tape.

CLARK: What are you talking about?

STU: *(Reaches under the counter and puts a tape dispenser on the counter.)* Besides the paperclips and rubber bands, tape was a hot commodity.

CLARK: You worked at ConQuest.

STU: I was one of those cattle. Not that you would know that. The ivory tower and the cubicles were light years from each other. This is where I ended up—flipping burgers. Funny thing is, I consider myself one of the lucky ones. All I lost was my daughter and my wife. Others did a lot worse.

CLARK: Listen, Stu, I'm sorry for your loss.

STU: Save it for the court. There aren't any cameras here. No jury. It's just you and me. I don't need your sympathy.

CLARK: There was nothing I could have done. I had my hands full. Running a corporation isn't nine to five. I couldn't know everything that was going on.

STU: You're right, you couldn't have known. But here's what you could have done. You could have been a man of honor and integrity and stayed with your original vision. But you didn't. You and your cronies got greedy, started working deals, and playing shell games with the profits. You looted the company. You looted my life and everyone else's.

CLARK: You've got to believe me, Stu, I do feel for you. But I've heard all this before. What I need from you right now is your help.

STU: I need to close. I told you, there's nothing I can do.

CLARK: But you can, Stu. As you say, it's just you and me, no cameras, no witnesses. You just lack the proper motivation. And I'm a great motivator. *(He pats his pocket.)* Concealed carry. Can't be too careful these days.

STU: Are you going to rob me again, Clark?

CLARK: It's time to be clear headed. I know what you think about me. You believe rich guys like me can get away with anything, so let's just play it that way. We can even get away with murder. You know we can. That's what power and privilege and money can get you. You need to decide if what you have left is worth changing a flat tire in the rain.

STU: The funny thing is, if you shoot me, you'll still have to fix your own tire.

CLARK: You know what the funny thing is? If I put out your lights, nobody will even miss you. So, what's it going to be?

STU: I guess that's how it is for cattle.

CLARK: You see, Stu, in a perfect universe—*(He is seized by a sudden and intense pain. He grabs his stomach and falls to the floor, writhing in pain.)* Oh, God, my stomach, my stomach. It's killing me.

STU: What's the matter, Clark?

CLARK: My stomach is killing me. I think I need a doctor. Call a doctor.

STU: I can't call a doctor, the phone's not working.

CLARK: My stomach is killing me. What did you feed me?

STU: You think it was something you ate?

CLARK: What did you give me? Did you poison me?

STU: Uh, oh. Did I make that sandwich with the wrong tuna? Was it the can with the hole in it? You know what happens to tuna when the can is punctured? Things start to grow in it. Parasites! You know about parasites, don't you, Clark?

CLARK: Help me, please.

STU: I don't think I can help you. I don't know what I can do. I'm not a doctor. The phones are out. We're in the middle of nowhere. You're all alone and you don't have any options.

CLARK: What do you want?

STU: What do I want? What do I want? What does any man want, Clark? Maybe what you want right now. Hope. Security. Peace of mind.

CLARK: Name it. Anything. I swear. I'll give you anything. I'll sign a paper. I'll have my lawyers draw it up. Whatever you want: my car, my wallet, my shoes.

STU: Your shoes? You think I want your stinking shoes. What kind of a man are you? You stole my life from me, and you think you can make it up to me with a pair of shoes.

CLARK: What's wrong with you? Are you crazy? I told you I'll give you anything.

STU: Can you give me my life back, Clark? Can you give me that?
(*Crossing back to the counter.*)

CLARK: Where are you going?

STU: I'm closing up. I'm going home to my trailer, fix myself something to eat, and feed my dog.

CLARK: You're leaving me here? You can't leave me here.

STU: You can leave whenever you like. The door will be unlocked. We don't have any crime around here.

CLARK: People know I'm here. They'll come looking for me. I made some calls before the phones went out.

STU: Good, I can use the business.

CLARK: Please, Stu, I'm begging you. Don't leave me.

STU: (*Picks up the umbrella and pockets the two fifties still lying on the counter.*) Earlier you were about to say something about a *perfect universe*. I don't know where you were going with that, but sometimes things work out like they should. Lights out, Clark.

Blackout.

CLARK: Stu, don't leave me. Stu? Stu? I know you're still here. I didn't hear the door slam. You're not that guy. I know you're not. You're not—me.

We hear the door slam. CLARK moans and whimpers. A moment later we hear the door re-open. Still dark. (Optional: lights can be turned on).

STU: By the way. The tuna was fine. *(Beat.)* I'll call when I get home.

We hear the door slam shut.

THE END