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Volume 41 *Fall/Winter* 1994–95

Article 15

November 2014

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Recommended Citation

Bienen, Leigh (2014) "He Was a Big Boy, Still Is," *Ontario Review*: Vol. 41, Article 15.

Available at: <http://repository.usfca.edu/ontarioreview/vol41/iss1/15>

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He Was a Big Boy, Still Is

LEIGH BIENEN

A WOMAN in her 30's or 40's, a public defender, is speaking.

- Come in. Come in. No. I'm just glad I was here. That's all. No. It doesn't matter about the other appointment, I just wanted to be here when you came. Some forms have to be signed.

-

- No. No. It's not inconvenient. I was just working. That's all.

-

- What a pretty hat. You don't see hats with real feathers on them much anymore. Bird of paradise? Lots of women wore them in the twenties. That bird's extinct now.

-

- Oh, no. I didn't mean that hat looked old. It's beautiful. Really. The colors. They're beautiful. Such a long tail.

-

- I understand. Of course, you didn't come here to talk about your hat. Yes, I am his lawyer. No, really. I am. Yes, I know, you have to leave at twelve. Well, that's fine. OK. Look. Your son. Jackson. Here's the score.

-

- No. That's just a phrase.

-

- Yes. I saw him yesterday.

-

- He did seem a little better. He was still in the ward. But he spoke a little. He wouldn't answer any questions.

-

– Why would they want to kill him?

–

– Oh, the electric chair. You mean, if he were convicted. Well, we're a long way from being there yet. Besides we don't have the electric chair anymore. Not in this state.

–

– It's a different sort of thing. They kill you differently. Anyway, they want him alive now. He hasn't even been tried yet. They definitely want him alive at this point.

–

– The State. So that they can prove their case against him. Sure. That's why they put him in the hospital. So he couldn't try to kill himself again.

–

– They can't just execute him. They want to keep him alive now, so they can kill him later? Well, there are lots of problems with the prosecution's case.

–

– You know. With what they have to prove. They haven't proved he killed anyone yet.

–

– Like on TV? Not really. You see they have to prove that Jackson, your son, murdered a particular person on a particular day. And they haven't got his head.

–

– The victim's head.

So you see they haven't got a real murder yet.

Anyway, that's their problem.

Look. I know you're in a hurry. But it's important.

Jackson, your son. Is he married?

–

– Well, what do *you* call him?

–

– Oh, it's the other way, then. George Washington Jackson. What *do* you call him? What name does he prefer? They're not about to let him out any time soon.

–

– What about when you're not mad at him?

–

– Georgie? Well, for the moment I'll stick to Jackson. All his records say Jackson George Washington.

–

– Yes, he really is hard to talk to. I know. I have the bruises to show for it, don't I? Ha-ha.

–

– Well, he's in jail already, isn't he? He's on suicide watch. He's in Ad Seg. Twenty-three hours a day. But it's really a prison. I mean, he couldn't walk out of there, could he?

–

– Look, if you have to go, let's at least get those forms done. Then you won't have made a trip for nothing. OK?

–

– With all the crazies? He's just there for observation now. I'm trying to make sure that the doctors are not giving him more drugs. After he attacked me they put him on Haldol. But I can't really do much for him until someone signs his papers.

–

– No, not those kinds of drugs. The ones the doctors give you.

–

– Yes, the ones that make you crazier when you're crazy.

–

– You haven't got time to go see him? OK, what about his sister? I wasn't afraid. Ha-ha. But look what happened to me!

–

– Yes, there are guards there. How old is she?

-
- Well, it might be a bit of a shock for her. All those men locked up.
-
- Oh, she's been inside herself. What for?
-
- She could probably get that expunged. If it's been five years. Might be worth her while.
-
- That just means erased. Taken off her record. So that every time she's picked up it wouldn't show up on the computer.
-
- No, I can't really do it for her. It's just filling out some forms. She can do it herself. Can she read?
-
- Cruel. Yes, I know, filling out those forms can be cruel. You forgot your reading glasses? Well, maybe I could help her if she came by. Then she could do the forms.
-
- Maybe—I'm awfully busy. Mostly with Jackson's murder case.
-
- She could come at lunch time? OK. I'll put it down. Twelve o'clock. What's her name?
-
- No, we don't do divorces either. No, the public defender is just criminal... That's our jurisdiction.
-
- Just means I can't do it for you. Legal Aid are the folks who do that. Now let's go through this means test—to prove how poor you are. I know, another silly form. There is lots of that around here. You know what they say. If the State went any slower they'd have to change the calendar. Ha-ha.
-

– Yes, if Georgie had a real lawyer he wouldn't have to fill out any of these forms. I know. But then there'd be the bills, wouldn't there. Don't forget that! You'd be paying.

–

– Up front? Most of them want their money up front. Yes, I suppose they do. About how much up front?

–

– Pricey, and in cash. Hmm. Anyway *we* have to do this form. Otherwise I can't help him. Is he married? I don't know. No, he doesn't own a house. No, don't laugh. Or a car.

–

– Why else would he steal one? People who own cars don't usually steal them? You'd be surprised. To get a better one. Or for someone else.

–

– Why? You know. If he was part of a car theft gang. Now let's move on. Jewelry?

–

– Yes, they ask about jewelry on the form. You can lie, of course. Lots of people do. It takes years for them to catch up with you. And they only do on real estate. You know, if you own a home. That's when they get you. They take a lien out on the property when it's sold. Don't worry about it...unless you own a house...

–

– Really? Yes, I'm sure about the divorce. I can't help you there. We don't do divorces.

–

– That diamond ring? Is that an "Item of substantial value"? I'm sorry. I just assumed it was fake. Besides it isn't his, is it? It's yours.

–

– Your husband gave it to you? Well, he can't be all bad, then.

–

– Oh, he can, can he?

—
— How do you know what it's worth.

—
— Oh, they told you that at Tiffany's. Well, I'd believe them. They ought to know. Nice piece of change. Any other assets? You know, cash in the bank?

—
— Well, I don't believe in banks either. Charge you a bloody twenty bucks when your check bounces... Darn right they're crooks.

—
— Oh, you mean those kinds of crooks. Bank robbers. It might get stolen. But it might get stolen at home, too. We know that, don't we?

—
— Stocks? Bonds?

—
— Ha-ha. Certainly if I had them I wouldn't be sitting here. Just sign. I know it's almost 12:00. But if we could cover a couple of more things. I wouldn't want you to have to come all this way again.

—
— Hang on. It will help me later. Let's start with childhood injuries. Especially head injuries or illness. Any time when he was growing up when he...well, behaved peculiarly. Got into trouble at school? Acted up.

—
— Yeah. That's the kind of thing.

—
— What kind of an operation?

—
— Even if you can't remember the name. Try and describe the kind of operation.

– Done at the State school. Uh-huh.
Sounds like a lobotomy. Hang on a sec. I just want to catch that. Do you know the year? Just approximately.

–

– OK. The year you lived in Baltimore with your husband when he was working in the shipyards. When Jackson was living with his grandmother. OK. That's when it must have been...

–

– That's close enough. It was an operation on the brain. You're sure about that.

–

– The name isn't important. They did a lot of those operations back then.

–

– No, there wasn't anything in his medical report. But then he probably wouldn't have told the doctor about it. Or me. Course he hasn't told anyone anything, has he? Not even his name.

–

– Why was his grandmother afraid of him?

–

– Go on.

–

– Did she recover?

–

– Did she ever speak again. Was she ever able to tell anyone what happened? May be it *was* an accident.

–

– And no charges were brought.

–

– Just sent him to the school where the operation was...

–

- I understand. He was a big boy, still is.

- Even at 14 he was six feet? He must weigh 250 now. You did sign the papers then?

- There were lots of papers? Yes. There usually are. But your recollection is you did sign something. Uh-huh. Of course. Seemed like a good idea. A blessing.

- Someone else signed for you?

- But you agreed to the operation. Hang on. Let me make a note about that. If you would just slow down then my notes will be more accurate. More useful later on.
Now, how was he different after the operation? This is very important.

- What do you mean skipping?

- Oh, *slipping*. OK. Slipping in what way?

- Yes I'm quite sure I can't do your divorce.

- An annulment? I don't really know anything about annulments.

Is your husband dead, then?

I don't think you can get an annulment because he just hasn't been around for a while.

- Too ornery to die. Yes, we all know about that. Well, if we could get back to the slipping. How was he not the same afterwards?

- What do you mean different voices?

-
- Which one of these people might be more likely to commit a crime?
To get into a fight?

-
- Not Georgie.

-
- No, I won't tell him you told me about his grandmother.

-
- Yes, I'm sure he does have quite a temper. Remember, I've got bruises
to show for it. Ha-ha.

-
- Like his old man. Hmm. No, it doesn't sound like an annulment is the
answer when you lived together fifteen years and have three children.
Let's just finish up. I know, it's after 12:00. I eat lunch too.

-
- Yes, tomorrow with your daughter.

-
- How old was he when he went in the Army?

-
- His grandmother thought it was a good idea? A lot of people thought
it made a man out of you. Unfortunately there was a war on.

-
- Well, if you really think he's dead you could try to get him declared
dead. But it has to be something like seven years. I can't remember. It
often does seem like those who most deserve to, don't die. Well, that's
justice for you, or God's will.

-
- No, I didn't mean to bring up religion. It's just, well... noteworthy. If
you have any proof of the fact that he might be dead you could
try it.

Look, do you have my phone number here? Before you go. Be sure and
take that.

-
- You can call collect. I'll accept the charge if I'm here. Just sign.
-
- Legal Aid is the place to try. They're right down the street.
-
- They're probably open now. Maybe if you just scooted right over there you could get someone to help you with that divorce. Or maybe they know about annulments. Shall I try the office for you? Here's the number. Shall I call now and ask? Why not?