

ACTUAL INNOCENCE

Teleplay by
Christopher & Kathleen Riley

Based on the book by

Barry Scheck
Peter Neufeld
Jim Dwyer

January 11, 2002

Our procedure has always been haunted by the ghost of the innocent man convicted. It is an unreal dream.

Justice Learned Hand, 1923

The thing is, you don't have many suspects who are innocent of a crime. That's contradictory. If a person is innocent of crime, then he is not a suspect.

Edwin Meece, Attorney General
of the United States, 1986

ACTUAL INNOCENCE

FADE IN:

A JURY BOX

Twelve prospective jurors. Serious. Sober. Midwest simple.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

The defendant is charged with murder in the first degree. If you find beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant is guilty, can you consider each punishment, death, imprisonment for life without parole, or imprisonment for life? Mrs. Abbott?

ABBOTT

I couldn't consider death. I could consider life without parole and life.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mrs. Lee?

LEE

I think I can.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mr. Ballard?

BALLARD

I feel the same way about it.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mr. Mann?

MANN

Yes.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mr. Likowski?

LIKOWSKI

I feel the same.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Okay. Now, you feel the same as who?

LIKOWSKI

Yes.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

You could consider each possible punishment?

LIKOWSKI

Right.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mrs. Flowers?

FLOWERS

If there's no doubt in my mind I could do all three of those.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

No reasonable doubt?

FLOWERS

No reasonable doubt.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mrs. Dobbins?

DOBBINS

No, the death.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Mr. Black?

BLACK

Same, yes, sir, I agree with it.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Okay. Now, agree with who?

BLACK

Whatever you said, yes, sir.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Can you consider each of the possible punishments, each one, is that what you were saying?

A little hesitation.

BLACK

I didn't catch what you said.

But the old guy still smiles, ever helpful.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

A GUITAR STRING

is plucked. Out of tune. Fingers twist the tuning peg. Pluck again.

DENNIS (O.S.)

Better?

RON (O.S.)
 You deaf, Fritz? You can't hear
 how flat that sounds?

TWO MEN

sit on a low wall outside an Oklahoma bar, bundled in jackets against a cold wind, cradling guitars, tuning up.

SUPERIMPOSE: DECEMBER 1982.

RON WILLIAMSON is the big one, an athlete past his prime, gone soft around the middle. DENNIS FRITZ is trimmer, more polished, seems smarter.

DENNIS
 Only reason it sounds flat,
 Ronnie, is 'cause you're sharp.

RON
 Like hell I'm sharp. I got
 perfect pitch.

Dennis plays a rocky little riff. He's good. The guitar sounds fine but Ron shakes his head.

RON
 If you're not deaf you're a liar.
 Let me help you.

While Dennis strums, Ron reaches to Dennis's guitar and gives a tuning peg a sharp twist. The string goes hopelessly out of tune. Ron grins.

DENNIS
 You did not do that. You didn't
 just put my guitar out of tune.

RON
 Boy, that guitar's never been in
 tune.

Ron starts twisting all the pegs on Dennis's guitar, cracking himself up. Dennis can't keep from smiling a little himself.

As the sun sets over the town of Ada, Oklahoma, a neon sign lights up behind Ron and Dennis -- "THE COACH LIGHT CLUB."

HARD CUT TO:

CRIME SCENE VIDEO OF A WOMAN'S BARE BACK

It's GRAINY, UNSTEADY, HANDHELD work. The woman is face down, motionless. On her pale, pale skin is scribbled the name "DUKE GRAM" in crimson.

CAMERA OPERATOR (V.O.)

(shaken)

What does that look like to you?
Is it blood?

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

No, it's thicker. I think it's
ketchup.

(then)

Victim is a white female, age 21,
name of Debbie Carter.

(an aside)

You know her?

CAMERA OPERATOR (V.O.)

No, you?

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Yeah, she used to wait tables down
to the Coach Light. Real sweet
girl.

The body is rolled on its side. The word "DIE" is
written in thin letters on the woman's chest.

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Holy God, get a closeup. Now
what's that, fingernail polish?

EXTREME CLOSE ON CARTER'S THIGH

A loose hair is tweezed from her skin and put in an
evidence bag.

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Hair number seven found on
victim's right upper thigh.

DEBBIE CARTER'S FACE

Pretty, young, badly beaten. A red crease around her
throat. A gloved hand reaches inside her mouth, pulls
something from deep in her throat, a pale green wash
cloth soaked in blood. From O.S., an INVOLUNTARY
GAGGING.

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

If you need to sit down, sit down,
but you can't puke in here.

WORDS ON THE WALL

Painted in fingernail polish. "JIM SMITH NEXT WILL DIE."

DINETTE TABLE

On the formica surface, more writing in fingernail polish: "DON'T LOOK FORE US OR EALSE."

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

Else. That's not how you spell
else... Is it?

A BLOODY PALM PRINT

stains the apartment wall near the floor. A hand saw works to cut free the relevant chunk of drywall.

CAMERA OPERATOR (V.O.)

Hang on, I gotta change tapes.

CORONER'S ASSISTANT (V.O.)

It's alright. I think we got it
all. You can go ahead and put the
camera away.

The PICTURE GOES TO SNOW.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

INT. ADA, OKLAHOMA, POLICE STATION - DAY

No bigger than a 7-11. DETECTIVE SMITH sits at his desk, staring into a cardboard box. Oklahoma State Bureau of Investigation AGENT GARY ROGERS comes out of the john.

DETECTIVE SMITH

Hey, Gary. You know what a monkey
wrench looks like?

AGENT ROGERS

... A monkey wrench?

Detective Smith pulls a plastic evidence bag from the box, holds it up. Inside is the chunk of drywall with the bloody palm print.

DETECTIVE SMITH

This right here is a monkey
wrench. Screwing up the whole
case.

Smith drops the bag back into the box. Finally slaps a lid on.

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

EXT. BLUE-COLLAR KANSAS CITY NEIGHBORHOOD - EVENING

A pickup pulls into the driveway of a '50s-era two-story.

SUPERIMPOSE: "1987."

Dennis Fritz, the trim Oklahoma guitarist, now five years older, climbs out of the truck, painter's clothes, a brown paper bag under his arm.

INT. FRITZ HOUSE

Dennis comes through the door, steps out of his work shoes.

DENNIS
Elizabeth, you about ready?

ELIZABETH FRITZ breezes in, 12 years old, her best dress already on, a towel wrapped around her wet hair.

ELIZABETH
Daddy, the movie starts in 45 minutes. You're not going to take a shower, are you?

He hands her the grocery bag.

DENNIS
Bet I'm ready before you are.

She looks inside the bag. Can't believe it. Big smile.

ELIZABETH
You got me makeup?

DENNIS
Girl's got to look her best for her first date.

Now she's embarrassed.

ELIZABETH
It's not a date when it's with your dad.

Dennis is already crossing out of the room.

DENNIS
Hope you know what to do with that stuff. I'll be ready in ten minutes.

CUT TO:

INT. OKLAHOMA STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION - CRIME
LAB - DAY

Fingerprint expert JERRY PETERS is eating Chinese,
fielding a call by speaker phone at the same time he's
digging through old files.

PHONE VOICE (V.O.)

You remember the case I'm talking
about?

JERRY PETERS

It's been a while but yeah, of
course I remember it. Debbie
Carter homicide.

PHONE VOICE (V.O.)

It's been five years and I haven't
been able to bring a case. Folks
around here haven't forgotten.
How you think that makes me look?

JERRY PETERS

I understand your problem. I just
don't know how I can help you.

He finds the file he's looking for, pulls out a
typewritten report and a color photo of the chunk of
drywall with the bloody palm print.

JERRY PETERS

My report says the print doesn't
match your victim or either of
your suspects. Nothing I can do
to change that.

PHONE VOICE (V.O.)

Thing is, we've looked at this
case every possible way and we
think maybe the print does match
the girl. Just stands to reason.
(then)

Lotta ridge detail on a person's
palm, that's what I've been told.
Maybe you missed a little piece of
it.

JERRY PETERS

I took a good set of prints. I
was careful. I got every bit of
detail I thought I could.

PHONE VOICE (V.O.)

We know who did this, Jerry. But
we can't make a move so long as
there's some unknown print.

(MORE)

PHONE VOICE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

I mean, a smart defense attorney's going to say it belongs to a fella hiding in a banana tree down in South America. He's your real killer.

JERRY PETERS

I know. Believe me.

EXT. OKLAHOMA CEMETERY - NIGHT

Work lights illuminate a headstone that reads: "DEBRA SUE CARTER, 1961-1982, BELOVED DAUGHTER." The grass has grown in around the grave.

PHONE VOICE (V.O.)

Put it this way. That palm print is the only thing standing in the way of us making an arrest. You sure there's nothing more you can do?

JERRY PETERS (V.O.)

Nothing short of digging up Debbie Carter and trying again.

A DIESEL ENGINE GROWLS TO LIFE. A backhoe reaches INTO FRAME and bites into the ground just below the headstone. Digging down into the grave.

Cemetery workers hoist the dirt-caked casket to the surface.

Detective Smith and Agent Rogers watch as the casket is loaded into a hearse.

INT. FRITZ HOUSE - BATHROOM - NIGHT

Elizabeth in front of the mirror. Makeup spread across the counter. A heap of used tissues. She's wiping away too much eye shadow. There's a knock at the door.

DENNIS (O.S.)

How's it going in there?

ELIZABETH

I'll be out in a minute.

DENNIS (O.S.)

That base coat the right color?

ELIZABETH
 (rolls her eyes)
 It's called foundation, Daddy.
 Not base coat.

A PHONE starts RINGING.

INT. BEDROOM

Dennis has changed out of his painter's clothes. He's pulling on a dress shirt as he picks up the phone.

DENNIS
 Hello?

There's a woman on the other end.

WOMAN (V.O.)
 Is Dennis Fritz there?

DENNIS
 Yes.

WOMAN (V.O.)
 Is this Dennis Fritz?

DENNIS
 Yes it is.
 (after a beat of
 silence)
 Hello?

The LINE CLICKS DEAD. Dennis shrugs it off. Hangs up.

INT. MEDICAL EXAMINER'S OFFICE

The dirty casket sits atop a stainless steel autopsy table. Detective Smith and Agent Rogers watch as the examiner bends over the casket, fiddling awkwardly with its latch. He can't figure out how it opens.

DETECTIVE SMITH
 They really think we can get a
 print? After she's been in the
 ground five years?

AGENT ROGERS
 So they say at the state lab.

The examiner keeps working, prying with a sharp instrument. The casket lid pops suddenly loose. Smith and Rogers lean tentatively forward for a look inside. A criminalist steps toward the open casket with an ink roller and a sheet of blank paper.

INT. FRITZ HOUSE - NIGHT

Dennis grabs his car keys, makes sure he's got cash in his wallet.

DENNIS
Elizabeth?

ELIZABETH (O.S.)
Coming.

Outside, CAR DOORS can be heard CLOSING. A surprising number of doors. Dennis cocks his head. What's going on? He crosses to the front window. Looks out into the night. Sees dark shapes moving across the yard, men crouching. Do they have weapons?

EXT. FRITZ HOUSE - NIGHT

The front door opens. Dennis steps across the threshold. Two men in plainclothes materialize from the shadows. Dennis thinks he recognizes one of them.

DENNIS
Agent Rogers?

AGENT ROGERS
Are you Dennis Fritz?

DENNIS
You know I am. What are you doing in Kansas City?

AGENT ROGERS
Raise your hands. We have a warrant for your arrest.

DENNIS
What?

AGENT ROGERS
You're charged with murder in the first degree and rape in the death of Debra Sue Carter.

As Dennis slowly raises his hands, an army of SWAT commandos surrounds him. Elizabeth's voice rises behind him.

ELIZABETH
Daddy?

Dennis turns as his hands are cuffed. Elizabeth is coming toward him. She got the makeup just right.

SWAT OFFICER
Miss, you got to stay back.

They move Dennis toward the street.

ELIZABETH

Daddy?

DENNIS

Tell Grandma. She'll have to watch you till I can fix this.

ELIZABETH

What's happening? Where are they taking you?

DENNIS

Don't worry. I didn't do anything wrong.

(a solemn oath)

I'm coming back.

Elizabeth stands in the open doorway, watching as the armed company withdraws with her father. She looks suddenly lost and very young.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE (OKLAHOMA) - DAY

A simple building on the town square. WIND is HOWLING. Dust has turned the air orange.

SUPERIMPOSE: "1988."

PETERSON (V.O.)

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury,
Debbie Carter was brutally
murdered on December 8th, 1982 --

INT. COURTHOUSE

In the jury box, the final 12. Store clerks. The retired. The unemployed. An elderly babysitter with a hearing aid. A lumber yard worker. Prosecutor BILL PETERSON stands before them, a man with folksy charm. But also a man who is cunning, acerbic and relentless in pursuit of convictions.

PETERSON

-- and the evidence in this case
-- the blood and the semen, the
statements Dennis Fritz made to
Mr. Harjo, the hair found in
Debbie Carter's home that matched
these two defendants -- the
evidence is overwhelming that
Dennis Leon Fritz and Ronald Keith
Williamson took her life.

Dennis Fritz sits at the defense table, dressed and groomed in a navy blue suit and tie, a trace of sweat on his upper lip. GARY SAUNDERS, a bland civil litigator, slouches beside Dennis, suppressing a yawn. Peterson steps to an easel covered with crime scene photos.

PETERSON

Her young life was taken from her,
and I think you can see from the
photographs that she received
serious physical harm to her body
from the beating that she took,
the instruments placed in her
body.

Dennis's eyes are on the jury, searching the faces, revealing nothing of himself. Peterson approaches the jury, pouring every bit of himself into his next words, a man determined to see justice done.

PETERSON

I've done my duty. The witnesses
for the state of Oklahoma have
done their duty. And I'm going to
ask you to do your duty.

OLD WOMAN (V.O.)

(calling)

Elizabeth?

CUT AHEAD TO:

EXT. FRITZ HOUSE - EARLY MORNING

The same front door Dennis stepped out a dozen years earlier. ELIZABETH emerges, now 21 years old, all grown up and beautiful. She's got a garment bag draped over one arm.

SUPERIMPOSE: "1996."

ELIZABETH

I'm ready.

Her GRANDMOTHER stands in the driveway, house dress and slippers, scrutinizing the front end of a cute little Honda.

GRANDMOTHER

That left front tire looks low to
me.

ELIZABETH

I'll have someone check it when I
get gas.

The Grandmother pulls a thin wad of bills from her pocket.

GRANDMOTHER

Get the premium, with you driving
all that way.

Elizabeth smiles.

ELIZABETH

I've got money, Grandma.

The old woman presses the bills into Elizabeth's hand.

GRANDMOTHER

You just give him my love.

The women share a look. For both of them, this day cuts
close to the bone.

EXT. MISSOURI-OKLAHOMA STATE LINE - DAY

A big metal sign pocked by shotgun pellets welcomes
visitors to Oklahoma. Elizabeth's Honda passes, empty
green space before her.

EXT. DENNY'S RESTAURANT - DAY

The Honda pulls in. Elizabeth climbs out with her
garment bag.

INT. DENNY'S BATHROOM - DAY

Elizabeth exits a stall. She's changed into her best
dress. She's nervous. Pauses at the mirror to redo her
lipstick. Doesn't like the way she looks. Messes with
her hair. Heads out the door. Has to rush back in for
the garment bag.

EXT. GUARD SHACK - AFTERNOON

Elizabeth's car idling as a young kid in a uniform
studies her driver's license. He likes her looks. He
extends the license. She reaches for it. He pulls it
back, teasing. Grins at her. Finally surrenders the
license. Elizabeth pulls away. Ahead of her, the shiny
high fences of a maximum security prison.

INT. McALLISTER STATE PRISON - VISITORS' AREA - DAY

Elizabeth Fritz stands far back in a long line of
visitors waiting to clear security. She looks starkly
out of place among the mothers and wives, girlfriends and
children.

CUT BACK TO:

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - 1988

Peterson stands close to the jury, leaning on the rail, speaking confidentially, like he's talking to a group of friends. Dennis watches from the b.g.

PETERSON

You know, his whole defense reminds me of a story that happened to me personally. My little boy was in preschool, little bitty fellow. One day I walked into the house and looked into the dining room, and there on the wall was Crayola marks all over the wall. I called my boy in. I said, "Brad, do you know who did this?" And he looked at me just as serious as he could be, and he said "Jay" -- that's his 21-year-old cousin -- he said "Jay did it, and I won't do it anymore."

Peterson strides straight toward Dennis, finger pointed, thundering:

PETERSON

He's trying to say, "Ron Williamson did it, but I won't do this anymore."

INT. McALLISTER PRISON

Elizabeth finally reaches the front of the line. There's a GUARD with a clipboard.

GUARD

Name?

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth Fritz. F-R-I-T-Z.

The Guard checks her list. Elizabeth watches as a girl in her teens, probably eight months pregnant, slips through a doorway. There's a glimpse of prisoners and their visitors squeezed around tables, some engaged in desperate intimacies, before the door swings shut. Elizabeth edges forward. So close. The Guard looks up from her clipboard, frowning.

GUARD

What's the inmate's name?

ELIZABETH

Dennis Fritz.

The Guard rechecks her list. Shakes her head.

GUARD
Nope. I don't show him.

ELIZABETH
You don't show him. What does that mean?

GUARD
Means he didn't give us your name.

ELIZABETH
But he knew I was coming. He definitely knew.

The Guard just looks at her. Elizabeth has to look away. She refuses to cry in this place.

GUARD
Sorry, hon.

Elizabeth turns without a word and walks out.

EXT. GAS STATION - DAY

The prison visible in the distance. Elizabeth is on a pay phone, her eyes rimmed in red.

ELIZABETH
I drove all the way down here. I stood in that line. I got X-rayed. I saw the visitors' room. I understand why you didn't want me seeing what goes on in there when I was a little girl. But I'm 21 years old.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - CELL BLOCK

Dennis in prison clothes, on a public phone, 10 years older, his trim dark hair now salted with grey.

ELIZABETH
I don't care if people are screwing on top of the tables. Put my name on the list.

DENNIS
You don't know how bad I want to see you, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH
Then see me.

The pleading in her voice is like a knife to his heart.

DENNIS

My appeal is in front of the
federal judge right now.

ELIZABETH

There's always an appeal. And it
never ends up the way we want.
And I never get to see you.
Twelve years of letters and phone
calls aren't enough. I don't have
a mother. I need to see my dad.

(and)

Daddy. I need this.

A long, painful silence. Finally:

DENNIS

I know you do, baby. Don't you
know I feel the same? Just to
give you a big ol' hug, some days
I can't get the thought out of my
head. It's going to happen. But
not here.

(and)

Just please. Not here.

A long time passes before Elizabeth closes her eyes and
says so, so small:

ELIZABETH

Okay.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - 1988

Peterson strolls toward the jury, Dennis wiping the sweat
from his upper lip.

PETERSON

Mel Hett described for you the
science of hair comparison and how
it's done. And he told you that
he compared all of the hair
samples taken from all of the
suspects, both head and pubic hair
from all these men. And he
eliminated all the many suspects
-- except Dennis Fritz and Ronald
Williamson.

His folksy charm forgotten, Peterson drives his point
home hard.

PETERSON

What is the likelihood of two total strangers' hair appearing in Debbie Carter's home indiscriminately? Two unknown people out there that would somehow, somewhere, some way have hair similar to Ronald Williamson and Dennis Fritz, meet at Debbie Carter's apartment on the night she was killed? That's so far-fetched it's almost incredible.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - H-UNIT - DAY

Death row. A windowless cell made entirely of cement. Bare cement walls. Cement shelves. A cement slab supporting a single mattress. Ron Williamson, the lumpy, guitar-playing has-been, sits on the mattress. Forty-one years old. His hair is stringy, his face gaunt, his skin pasty white. Teeth are missing. He looks deranged. A young woman's voice calls:

YOUNG WOMAN (O.S.)

Ron?... Ron Williamson?

Ron looks around the cell.

RON

Who's there?

Ron is alone in the cell. But the voice comes again.

YOUNG WOMAN (O.S.)

Ron?... It's Debbie Carter.

(then)

Why did you kill me?

Ron presses his hands to his forehead. Squeezes his eyes shut.

RON

I didn't kill you, Debbie. I never killed nobody in my life.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - 1988

Peterson passing slowly in front of the jury, displaying a photo of a smiling Debbie Carter as she appeared in life.

PETERSON

It's murder in the first degree. Debbie Carter could tell you. Ligature around the throat.

(MORE)

PETERSON (CONT'D)
 Raping of her body. The beating
 of her body. Pubic hair. The
 numbers of pubic hair in Debbie
 Carter's bedroom circumstantially
 shows that this defendant was not
 merely standing by and watching.

Dennis shakes his head slowly, emphatically.

PETERSON
 And the statement he gave Mr.
 Harjo, "We didn't mean to hurt
 her." Just like my little son.
 "Jay did it, but I won't do it
 anymore."

Peterson pins the photo right in the center of the easel,
 leaving Debbie Carter smiling out at the jury.

PETERSON
 Ladies and gentlemen, it will take
 courage to come back into this
 court and say, "Your Honor, we
 recommend the death penalty."
 Courage has been defined to me as
 being scared to death, but
 saddling up anyway. And I'm going
 to ask you to come back in this
 court and say, "Dennis Leon Fritz,
 you deserve to die for what you
 did."

Dennis's voice cuts in, unexpected, unbidden.

DENNIS
 I didn't kill Debbie Carter.

Peterson roars right over the top of him, pointing at the
 picture on the easel:

PETERSON
For what you and Ron Williamson
did to Debra Sue Carter.

Dennis keeps shaking his head.

WITH JURORS

Their faces upturned like an audience watching a movie,
 light and shadow playing over their features.

PETERSON (O.S.)
 You've heard the witnesses.
 You've seen the evidence. Picture
 it. Picture what happened that
 night.

WHAT THEY SEE:

INT. SECOND-FLOOR APARTMENT - NIGHT

DEBBIE CARTER, 21, the pretty girl from the courtroom photo, leaning with all her might against her locked front door.

DEBBIE

You're drunk. Come on, guys. Go home.

The door bucks, rammed from outside. Debbie's getting scared.

DEBBIE

Don't make me call someone.

Porch light spilling in through a window at the top of the door suddenly goes dark.

Debbie raises herself up on her toes to see what's happening. She barely gets her nose up near the window when --

A fist SMASHES THROUGH the GLASS. A man's arm reaches in, feeling for the door lock.

Debbie screams.

The groping hand finds the lock. Turns it.

Debbie is overpowered, pushed back as the door flies open. Ron Williamson is first inside. Dennis is right behind him. Debbie retreats. Frightened -- but angry, too. She grabs her Mickey Mouse phone. Dials.

DEBBIE

Gina, it's me. Could you come and get me? There's someone here and I --

Ron grabs Debbie, covers the phone with his huge hand, close and threatening. Gives Debbie a terrifying look and silently shakes his head. Gives her back the phone. She can barely get out the words.

DEBBIE

(to phone)

You know what, never mind.

(starting to shake)

Just call me in the morning, make sure I'm up for work.

Ron hangs up the phone. Dennis takes it, rips it neatly from the wall. Tosses it.

INSIDE REFRIGERATOR

*The light pops on as the door opens. Ron leans in.
Grabs a bottle of Del Monte ketchup.*

DEBBIE'S BED

Dennis sweeps a pile of stuffed animals onto the floor.

A BEDSIDE LAMP

topples.

DENNIS

*rifles a basket of laundry, grabs a pale green wash
cloth.*

RON

*gets his fingers around the power cord of an electric
blanket. Jerks it free, its control box dangling.*

DEBBIE'S FACE

*Hits the floor. Her desperate pleading is silenced as
the wash cloth is rammed down her throat.*

BACK ON JURORS

Faces still upturned, unable to look away from the
horror.

Peterson turns from the jurors to look at Dennis sitting
wide-eyed at the defense table.

PETERSON

Can you see it?

FADE OUT.

FADE IN:

SUPER 8 FOOTAGE

A young girl, Elizabeth Fritz, maybe 10 years old. She's
playing with a German shepherd puppy and calling to
someone O.S. She finally runs PAST the CAMERA and leads
someone back INTO FRAME by the hand. Her father Dennis.
She poses him facing the CAMERA. Tries to corral the
puppy and push it up a child's plastic slide but it keeps
running OUT OF FRAME.

DENNIS (V.O.)

Her mother passed away when she
was just little, so it was always,
y'know, just the two of us.

INT. DENNIS'S PRISON CELL

He's in prison clothes, speaking almost DIRECTLY TO CAMERA.

DENNIS
You got any kids?

An unseen INMATE answers.

INMATE (O.S.)
Hell yeah. Though I can't say as I know all their names.

The Inmate laughs, thinks he's pretty funny. Dennis doesn't laugh.

DENNIS
You ought to look 'em up. It's important for kids to know their dad.

(then)
My little girl -- not so little anymore -- I can remember we wouldn't give her nothing with sugar her whole first year. Whole year. Then comes her birthday with ice cream and cake and she grabs a big old piece of chocolate cake and just shoves the whole thing in her mouth. One big bite and it's gone.

(and)
You just, you remember little things like that.

INMATE (O.S.)
You still keep in touch?

DENNIS
Nearly every day. Letter or phone call.

(beat)
Planning on seeing her real soon.

INMATE (O.S.)
She coming to visit?

DENNIS
No, I mean outside. I'm expecting to hear from the federal courts on this appeal I filed.

Dennis's gaze drops to the floor as he thinks about that.

DENNIS

I figure they gotta say yes.
'Cause if they don't, I don't know
how else I'm going to get back to
my girl.

Dennis seems to stare straight INTO the LENS.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - H-UNIT - DAY

MOVING WITH four guards, military precision, step-step-step along Death Row. The guard detail stops outside a solid cell door. Batons come out. The men ready themselves. The smallest guy, WHITE, seems to be in charge. Raps his baton against the door, calls:

WHITE

Ron Williamson.

White nods. Another guard grabs the cell door and slides it open.

INT. PRISON ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - CORRIDOR

Ron Williamson is on the march, shackled, hemmed in by the guards.

RON

Where we going?

The guards ignore his question, alert, ready for anything.

RON

I got a right to know where I'm going.

They pass open office doors. Nervous clerks clear out of the way.

INT. WARDEN'S OFFICE

A big room. The WARDEN sits at the head of a long table. Ron stands at the other end, flanked by the guards.

WARDEN

Sit down, Mr. Williamson.

RON

Why?

The guard White pulls out a chair.

WHITE

Come on, Ron, just sit down.

RON
I wanna know why.

WARDEN
I got a duty to carry out.

RON

sitting in the chair, breathing hard, eyes feral, a guard close on each side.

At the far end of the table, the Warden begins.

WARDEN
Mr. Williamson, who is your next of kin?

RON
Next of kin? What kind of question is that?

WARDEN
Our records show an Annette Hudson, a sister. Is that correct?

RON
Why you asking me that?!

The Warden refers to a single typewritten page, reading each word carefully.

WARDEN
Ronald Keith Williamson, you have been sentenced to execution by lethal injection and such sentence will be carried out at twelve-thirty A.M., the twenty-fourth of September, 1994.
(looks up)
You got 30 days.

Ron's breathing intensifies.

RON
Who told you to say that to me?

The guards move to take Ron by his arms. The Warden rises.

WARDEN
We're going to move you to a holding area near the death chamber.

RON

Did Bill Peterson tell you to say that?

The guards pull Ron to his feet.

WARDEN

At your convenience, we're going to need a list of five people who will be allowed to visit.

RON

You know Bill Peterson? He's the D.A. framed me and Dennis Fritz. Framed us both.

The guards muscle Ron toward the door. The Warden turns at his desk, an afterthought:

WARDEN

Oh, your sister will receive a form asking what she wants the funeral home to do with the body.

Ron comes to a dead stop in the doorway, blinking at that.

RON

She'll what?

INT. DENNIS'S CELL BLOCK

A half-dozen inmates gathered outside a cell, looking in. A CORRECTIONS OFFICER approaches.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

Move on, guys. Let's break it up.

As the inmates disperse, MOVE BETWEEN them, INTO the cell. FIND Dennis with an official-looking manilla envelope open in his lap and a hand to his face.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER

So what did the federal judge have to say about the big appeal?

Dennis sits frozen. One of the INMATES has lingered.

INMATE

Old Dennis Fritz the jailhouse lawyer. Must not be too good at it.

(grins)

You ain't going nowhere till they carry you out in a box.

And the Inmate laughs like hell. Dennis never moves.

ELIZABETH FRITZ

In a corporate office somewhere, dressed like the young professional she is. Cradling a telephone. Crying.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

FADE IN:

THE JURY BOX

Jury selection. Prospective juror BETTY LANDIS, 60s, fidgety, faces the unseen judge.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Do you have any physical problems
you're consulting a physician for?

LANDIS
Not really. I had my ears checked
when my husband was in the VA
hospital back in August.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
And are you taking medication at
this time?

LANDIS
No, they said I had nerve damage
to both ears, and it was pretty --
you know, hearing is pretty bad.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
But you're hearing me at this
time?

LANDIS
Well, I have a hearing aid on.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay. And does that correct your
hearing fairly well?

LANDIS
Uh-huh.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
And does it work all of the time?

LANDIS
Yeah, pretty well.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
How long have you had it?

LANDIS
I just got it about the first of
September.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay. So you've had it long
enough to get used to it?

LANDIS

(a guilty secret)

Well, I haven't been wearing it because there's so much outside noise and things until it makes me nervous and I can hardly wear it.

INT. ELIZABETH'S OFFICE - BREAK ROOM - DAY

Birthday cake and streamers. Elizabeth directs a couple of co-workers setting up for a party. In the corner, a TELEVISION PLAYS the noon news, turned down LOW.

ANCHOR (V.O.)

Coming up, a popular new diet supplement comes under fire. But first this from reporter Wayne Kenna in Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

ELIZABETH

Here are the candles, where are the matches?

No one seems to know.

ELIZABETH

I'll find some. Put together the punch, she's going to be here any minute.

She hurries out of the room, missing this from the little TV:

KENNA (V.O.)

Harlin Jeffords walked out of Angola Prison in Louisiana today a free man after nine years behind bars for a rape that DNA testing has now proved he did not commit.

In the b.g., Elizabeth can be seen rummaging in a desk drawer. The co-workers make punch. On TV, a large black man named JEFFORDS in a cheap suit exits a courthouse door and blinks at the sun.

REPORTER (V.O.)

The former airline mechanic's road to freedom began just over three years ago when he contacted the Innocence Project in New York.

Employees are gathering. Elizabeth starts back toward the break room. Somebody stops her.

REPORTER (V.O.)

There, a group of law students working under the direction of civil rights attorneys Barry Scheck and Peter Neufeld began looking into Jeffords' case.

On the TV, a shot of Jeffords in front of a cluster of microphones.

JEFFORDS (V.O.)

From the very beginning I told the judge, I told the jury --

Elizabeth rushes in.

ELIZABETH

Hurry, here she comes.

She strikes a match and starts lighting candles.

JEFFORDS (V.O.)

-- I told everybody, "I did not do this thing. I am an innocent man." Until now, nobody ever listened.

Elizabeth's head turns toward the TV.

KENNA (V.O.)

But today, thanks to the Innocence Project, Harlin Jeffords walks free.

A sixtyish woman enters the break room and the group starts singing, "Happy Birthday."

Elizabeth's eyes remain locked on the TV screen.

AT ELIZABETH'S DESK - LATER

She's on the phone, taut with enthusiasm.

ELIZABETH

Daddy, please just humor me and read back the address so I know you've got it... Okay, that's perfect. How soon do you think you can write them?

(then)

We've just never had the right kind of help. And I think maybe, finally...

(voice husky with emotion)

... this could be it.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY (1988)

The simple building on the town square.

JUDGE JONES (V.O.)

Call your first witness.

INT. COURTHOUSE

Prosecutor Bill Peterson and defense attorney Gary Saunders, hopelessly out of his depth, in conference at the bench with JUDGE JONES.

PETERSON

Judge, I meant to bring up in the chambers and I forgot to. I apologize for that. Glen Gore is my first witness and he has indicated that he does not intend to testify in this trial.

SAUNDERS

I think he will. I talked to him last night.

JUDGE JONES

Well, I mean, just call him.

PETERSON

Well just a minute. He's going to say I'm going to invoke my Fifth Amendment. I do not intend to answer any questions. You can hold me in contempt of court but I'm not going to talk to you.

SAUNDERS

I talked to him last night.

JUDGE JONES

You've already announced that you're calling him and what his testimony is. You have to call him. The jury is entitled to see him. He doesn't have a Fifth Amendment right, unless --

PETERSON

Or he can just say hold me in contempt. Judge, he's doing 50 years or so. He said, "I don't care, I'm not going to answer your questions."

JUDGE JONES

Well, I'm not going to debate
every witness that comes in here.
(the last word)
Let's proceed with the trial.

CUT TO:

GLEN GORE

On the stand. A dark-haired, heavysset man in his late
20s who claims Native American heritage. He smacks
bubble gum.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

If you have gum in your mouth,
would you take it out please?

GORE pulls the sticky wad from his mouth and looks for a
place to put it.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

Don't stick it on anything, just
hold it in your hand.

JUMP CUT TO:

GLEN GORE

Listening and responding. The questions are never heard,
just Gore's answers. It's weird.

GORE

Glen Gore.

He waits. Answers.

GORE

Yes.

Again.

GORE

I was at the Coach Light.

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. McALLISTER PRISON LIBRARY

Dennis bent over an old Royal manual typewriter. IN
EXTREME CLOSEUPS, his fingers punch the keys.

GORE

I'm not real sure. It was before
midnight.

Individual type bars swing up and slam into the paper, the SOUND of their IMPACT EXAGGERATED, trailing words across the page: "WRONGLY INCARCERATED."

GORE

The crowd I usually hung around with, you know, we'd always sit at a table together, and Debbie was out there, Ronnie Williamson was out there.

More words on paper: "SEPARATED FROM MY DAUGHTER."

GORE

I was going back up to get another drink, and Debbie was talking to Ronald, and he was facing me, the way I was headed. And she looked over her shoulder, tapped me, said, "Glen," said, "Help me out."

More words: "DNA TESTING."

GORE

I said, "All right." Well, anyway, me and her went to the dance floor and she said he kept asking her to dance; he was bugging her, so I said all right.

A new question. One that seems in the tiniest way to amuse Gore.

GORE

Am I a convicted felon? Yes.

More words: "PLEASE ACCEPT MY CASE."

GORE

Forty years.

Gore plays with the little ball of gum. Answers the next question.

GORE

Assault with a dangerous weapon. Kidnapping. Shooting with intent to kill, two charges of that. And I can't recall all of them.

The type bars slam home: "I'AM A TRUELY A INNOCENT MAN."

GORE

Oh. Against my ex-wife.

Gore pops the gum back into his mouth.

DENNIS

stops typing. He slowly rolls the page out of the machine and signs it.

AN ENVELOPE

is hand-addressed:

THE INNOCENCE PROJECT
55 FIFTH AVENUE
NEW YORK, NEW YORK

DENNIS

sits back and stares at the letter.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON

Rain and WIND. A postal employee loads packages and letters into a U.S. Mail truck. There's a HUGE GUST and a dozen letters dance into the air and scatter over the wet ground.

DENNIS'S LETTER

lies in the mud. The postal worker picks it up and wipes it on his pants.

BACK OF MAIL TRUCK

The postal worker secures the wayward letters and slides the door closed.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

CHARLIE CARTER, a strong, soft-spoken man in his 50s, moves slowly toward the front of the courtroom. It is one of the most difficult walks of his life. His eyes find Dennis seated at the defense table and his step falters. The look that passes between the men is painful and complicated.

CHARLIE CARTER

on the stand, his voice barely audible.

CHARLIE CARTER
My name is Charles Richard Carter,
and I'm a brick mason.

PETERSON

Mr. Carter, could you speak up just a little bit?

CHARLIE CARTER

(louder)

I'm a brick mason and I lay brick for a living.

PETERSON

I'd like to ask you if you could recall the date of December 8th, 1982. Do you recall that day?

CHARLIE CARTER

Yes, sir.

PETERSON

Did you have a daughter then named Debbie?

Beat.

CHARLIE CARTER

Yes, sir.

PETERSON

On the morning of December the 8th, sometime, did you have a reason to go to her apartment?

CHARLIE CARTER

Yes, sir, I did. Her mother called me at home and wanted me to go by and check on her. That apparently something was wrong up there. So I went over there and went in the apartment. The door was standing open and I found Debbie's nude body laying face down with a wash cloth stuck in her mouth. And I stood around there a little while and looked for some sign of life, but then I went ahead and touched her and found out that she --

(voice thickening)

-- I knew she was dead. And I reached down and picked her up, you know, one shoulder, and rolled her partially over, and just laid her back down.

Jurors are visibly affected by a father's unalloyed pain.

PETERSON

What did you do then, after you knew that she wasn't alive, what did you do then?

CHARLIE CARTER

Well, I kind of stood around there and looked things over and read a little of the writing on the wall. Then I went out the door and I called to a lady to go call the police. And she said, "Well, I'll go call the ambulance." I told her, no, she better --

(pause)

-- too late to call the ambulance. Just call the police.

Dennis gazes steadily at this bereaved father, in the grip of intense emotions. It's impossible to know exactly what they are.

The SHRIEK of SCREECHING TIRES.

CUT TO:

A NEW YORK TAXI

jolts to a hard stop inches from T-boning a mail truck in the snarl of Manhattan traffic. The mail carrier shouts and LAYS on his HORN, spots a minuscule opening in traffic ahead and jams his big vehicle through it, pulling away down 5th Avenue.

EXT. CARDOZO SCHOOL OF LAW (12TH STREET & FIFTH AVENUE)

The mail truck at the curb. The mail carrier rolls his cart full of packages and letters past a dumpster and in a side entrance.

INT. CARDOZO LAW SCHOOL - ELEVATOR

The mail carrier and his cart on board. Prominent atop the mail cart: a mud-stained envelope with a return address of "McALLISTER STATE PRISON." The elevator doors start to close. There's a shout from the corridor:

VOICE (O.S.)

Hold that!

An arm plunges between the closing doors and VICTOR CRUZ pushes in. He's early 20s, Puerto Rican, vaguely dangerous. He punches an elevator button and glowers at his cell phone.

VICTOR
Come on, come on, give me a
signal.

The elevator starts up. Victor's phone comes alive. He refers to a number inked on the palm of his hand and dials.

INT. LAW SCHOOL - 11TH FLOOR

The elevator doors part. Victor slips out past the mail carrier.

VICTOR
(to phone)
Raylene, it's Victor, you sitting
down? The lab is faxing in their
report on your brother's DNA right
now... You understand what that
means?

There's a glass wall ahead. He pushes through a door stencilled "INNOCENCE PROJECT" into a chaos of law students, clerks and volunteers shuttling files, answering PHONES, bent over computer consoles. Victor calls out:

VICTOR
That fax here yet?

From a side office, an intense young guy with a shaved head, Assistant Director HUY DAO, calls back:

HUY
Still waiting.

VICTOR
(to phone)
I'll call you the second I see it.
(then)
Raylene, you've got my personal
guarantee. Your brother's coming
home.

The mail carrier lifts a fat bundle of mail from his cart and dumps it on the front counter. Dennis's letter is on top. A clerk named JUANITA talking into a headset scoops up the mail.

JUANITA
... the chopped liver and egg
salad, one of those --

She pulls the rubber band from around the bundle and sorts past Dennis's letter, pulls out a phone bill.

JUANITA

-- and two of the pastrami, beef
and Swiss. Russian dressing on
both.

She slices open a manilla folder containing official
court papers, scrawls on a routing slip.

JUANITA

A grilled cheese. And a chocolate
egg cream. Got it?

PETER NEUFELD comes through the door, a 50-ish crusader
with curly hair, a strong face and no patience for fools
or hypocrites. He's got a tiny phone to his ear.

NEUFELD

Are you concerned at all with
truth and justice in Mr. Harvey's
case -- or are you just interested
in sustaining your win?

He spots Victor in Huy's side office, hovering over the
fax machine, asks:

NEUFELD

Do we know it's an exclusion? Did
the lab say?

A VOLUNTEER interrupts.

VOLUNTEER

Hey, how come I can't get onto
Amicus?

HUY

I'm downloading files, it'll be
tied up for three or four hours.

The FAX MACHINE CHIRPS.

NEUFELD

Did anyone tell Barry?

INT. CORRIDOR

MOVING WITH Neufeld as he strides into a corner office
heaped everywhere with stacks of paper. BARRY SCHECK
sits behind the desk, on the phone, every inch the
crusader his partner Neufeld is, but more diplomat than
street fighter.

SCHECK

(to phone)

Don't make a decision right now.
Let's sit down, have lunch, there
are some things about this case
I'd love to discuss with you.

NEUFELD

The lab report on Jaleel
Washington is coming off the fax.

DENNIS'S MUD-STAINED LETTER

Still lying on Juanita's desk. She's at the counter
signing for a package. Sits back down. Finally tears
into the letter. Neufeld passes still talking on his
phone.

NEUFELD

So you do allow DNA testing in
"appropriate cases."

INT. ASSISTANT DIRECTOR'S OFFICE

The FAX MACHINE HUMS to life. Neufeld enters.

NEUFELD

You've just never found an
appropriate case.

Another STUDENT steps in.

STUDENT

What's the word, Victor?

VICTOR

Fax is just coming through.

The page rolls halfway out -- then the MACHINE jams with
a solid BEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEEP.

VICTOR

Give it up --

He rips out the page. Scheck arrives in the doorway just
as Victor takes a look, anticipating the good news.

NEUFELD

(to phone; acid)

Then how do you suggest my client
pursue his claim of actual
innocence in the state of
Virginia?

It takes Victor a minute. This isn't easy reading.

But then his face clouds with disbelief and anger. It isn't good news.

VICTOR
How can this be true?
(his world blown)
Oh my God.

NEUFELD
(to phone)
I'm going to have to finish this
later.

He folds his phone, takes the page from Victor, scans it with quiet fury. The FAX MACHINE is still BEEPING, an UNBROKEN TONE like a heart monitor gone flatline.

NEUFELD
What's a guy like this thinking?
He knows he did it. Does he think
the DNA is going to lie?

Huy SILENCES the FAX. Scheck steps to Victor.

SCHECK
You worked the case, Victor. You
filed the motions, you tracked
down ten-year-old evidence, you
got it tested, you set legal
precedents in the state of
Pennsylvania.
(then)
The truth just wasn't what we
hoped it would be.

Victor seems disoriented.

VICTOR
I drove out over Christmas and
took him a new TV.

SCHECK
(beat)
I didn't know that.

Across the hall, a PHONE RINGS. Victor becomes aware of the room filling with students. Stares at the phone number written on his hand. A realization.

VICTOR
I have to call his sister.

Victor moves suddenly for the door.

SCHECK
Victor --

The kid keeps going, heading for the elevators.

Scheck and Neufeld exchange a look.

NEUFELD

I'll go.

He takes off after Victor.

PLASTIC MAIL BIN

Dennis's letter, open and stapled to a tan form, drops onto a heap of similar letters, hundreds and hundreds of them. More letters land on top of Dennis's.

Juanita lifts the full bin and sets it in the corner behind a stack of eight or ten others, also full. She pulls out an empty bin and sets it on top of the stack.

Beyond the mail bins and the glass wall, Neufeld can be seen talking to Victor, who's already aboard an elevator. Neufeld stops the doors from closing, keeps talking. Victor holds up a hand, so upset he can't speak, waves the attorney off. Neufeld finally lets the doors close.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

FADE IN:

THE JURY BOX

Jury selection continues. Judge Jones questions prospective juror SHIRLEY SCROGGINS, 30s.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Now, have you heard anything about
this case before today?

SCROGGINS
Yes, sir.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
And is that as a result of a
conversation or media exposure or
some other source?

SCROGGINS
Both ways and other sources too.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay. Now, you understand that
I'm really -- I'm trying to avoid
information that should not come
into the trial, so I'm asking
about sources.

SCROGGINS
Okay. She was my sister-in-law's
bride's maid's best friend.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
She?

SCROGGINS
Debbie Carter.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Debbie Carter's sister-in-law?

SCROGGINS
Bride's maid.
(and)
She was her bride's maid.
(one more try)
She was her best friend at the
wedding.

Beat.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - H-UNIT - DAY

The death chamber. Hospital clean beneath blue-green fluorescents. Unmistakable in purpose. TRACK SLOWLY PAST a row of solid steel double-locked cell doors. A MUFFLED SOUND GROWS. A man's deep-throated cry.

MOVE TOWARD one of the cell doors, THROUGH a narrow slit of glass into:

INT. DISCIPLINARY CELL

Ron Williamson's eyes are at the little rectangle of glass and he's bellowing like a wounded bull elephant.

RON
I DID NOT KILL DEBBIE CARTER.
(sucks a breath)
I DID NOT KILL DEBBIE CARTER.
(another breath)
I DID NOT KILL DEBBIE CARTER.

Ron has aged 30 years in three weeks, his salt-and-pepper hair now snow white. He cries with everything in him:

RON
I AM AN INNOCENT MAN.

Someone moves behind Ron in the cell. A young woman. Familiar. Debbie Carter.

DEBBIE
It won't be long now.

Ron looks at her with a heavy burden of grief.

DEBBIE
Seven days.

His tongue seems to search for his missing teeth before his words come as a kind of groan:

RON
Debbie. I'm -- I'm sorry. I am
so sorry.

Silence settles over the cell. Ron slumps onto the concrete bunk. Thrashes around before finally looking back at Debbie.

RON
They never tried to find out who
really killed you. They just
picked me and Dennis and did what
they had to do.

She regards Ron inscrutably. He returns to the tiny window in the door, staring out at what lies beyond. At last he turns back.

RON
 What's it like?
 (long, long beat)
 To die?

Another long beat before:

DEBBIE
 I'm not supposed to tell.

CUT TO:

INT. McALLISTER CELL BLOCK

The big common area surrounded by cells. A CORRECTIONS OFFICER passes out mail.

CORRECTIONS OFFICER
 Covell... Luck... Kassel... Fritz.

Dennis receives his letter, glances curiously at the return address -- and loses a step. The next instant he's on the move, folding his arms protectively over the envelope and pounding up the stairs toward the second-tier cells.

INT. DENNIS'S CELL

He slides the door closed behind him and stares at the letter. The return address: "THE INNOCENCE PROJECT."

Dennis is afraid to open it. His heart is beating fast.

In a single motion he tears into the envelope and digs out its contents. Scans the document he finds inside. He doesn't know what to make of it.

AT PUBLIC PHONE

A line of inmates waits for a turn at the phone. Dennis holds the papers and bends close to the receiver, creating what little privacy he can.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)
 So what did they say?

DENNIS
 They didn't say anything. It's been nine months since I wrote and now they send me some form asking the same things I already answered in my letter.

INT. PRISON LAW LIBRARY

Dennis is tired. Rubs his eyes. He's typing. Trying to make his answers fit into the little boxes on the questionnaire.

His fingers punch the keys. The type bars swing up and impact the paper, imprinting: "JAMES HARJO."

Dennis realigns the paper. Under "James Harjo," he types: "TESTIFIED."

And under that he squeezes in: "FALSELY."

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

JAMES HARJO, a small-potatoes burglar with a flair for drama, addresses jurors from in front of a dry-erase board.

HARJO

It happened on Halloween night. Dennis and me, we was serving time in the county jail together. Dennis was sitting there at the table, so I asked him, I said, "What's you worried about?" And he said some guy named Gary Allen was going to testify against him that he seen him washing blood off him. Him and Ron washing blood early in the morning. That's what Gary Allen was supposed to testify.

Harjo awkwardly uncaps a marker.

HARJO

And so I asked Dennis, I was just playing around with him, and I said, "Dennis, do you have a water faucet?" And Dennis said no. So I put a little line.

Harjo draws a small line on the board.

HARJO

I can't hardly read or write, so I put a line where I can remember them, and I tried to write water. I could write water, you know. I can't write faucet, so I just put "water" and "f."

On the board, he writes "water f."

HARJO

Then I said, "Dennis, do you have a water hose?" And Dennis said no. So I put a line right there and I put a "water" again, and right there I put a "h-o-e," I guess that's how you write it.

Harjo scrawls more secret code, warming to this game.

HARJO

And I asked him if he knew Gary Allen. And he said no. So I put a little line right here.

(illustrating)

And I put "G-a-r-y" and I just put "A." And after that, you know, I just sat there and looked at him for a little bit. And I said every house's got water faucets. Jim Walters can build you a home in the Sahara Desert, and he'll build a water faucet with it. He said, "Yeah, yeah, there's one right behind our house."

Harjo seems to think this is a critical admission and gives the jurors time to absorb it.

HARJO

So I put a little X right here over that line. Now he's got a water faucet. And I asked him, I said, "Do you know Gary Allen?" He said, "No, I don't know him." And we just sat there for a little bit and then he said, "Yeah, yeah, I think I do." He said he used to live in the garage apartment right behind his house.

Harjo spreads his hands before the jury. Ta-da.

HARJO

So my mind right there, that made what Gary Allen said was true. Gary Allen seen them washing blood off each other in the back yard.

(pointing at Dennis)

He said he didn't have a water faucet -- then he said he did. Said he didn't have a water hose -- then he said he did. He said he didn't know Gary Allen -- then again he said, "I think I know him."

Harjo nails Dennis with his best Colombo "gotcha."

PETERSON

Then what did you say to him?

HARJO

I just said -- I said, "I think you're guilty, Fritz."

(marks board)

And there was a little "g" up there, like that, for guilty. I don't know how to write that. And he got upset.

Peterson jumps on that, eager for more.

PETERSON

What happened? What happened next?

HARJO

He got up, and he was walking back and forth. And he sat down in front of me, and I looked at him. We looked eye to eye. Man, that just, you know, a big old chill hit me, and I just looked at him. "Man," I said, "man, this guy really did do it." And I grabbed me a donut, and I went in my cell.

In contrast to Peterson, Dennis's attorney Saunders appears absorbed in unrelated paperwork.

HARJO

Dennis came in there, and he sat down where I was at, and he said, "You want a cigarette, man?" I said, "Yeah, I'll take a cigarette." And he sat down and gave me that cigarette. I lit that cigarette up, and it was a Marlboro. We was sitting there, and I looked at him, and you could see tears coming down his eyes, and he said, "We didn't mean to hurt her. We didn't mean to hurt her."

Dennis looks at his distracted attorney, angry.

DENNIS

I never said that.

HARJO

He goes, "What do you think my daughter would think of me as a murderer?"

DENNIS

Never.

Saunders shushes Dennis.

HARJO

"What do you think my daughter would think of me if I went to prison?" And I just didn't know what to say.

PETERSON

Did he say anything at all about what had happened that night?

HARJO

He said they was drinking beer, and they was drunk, and they took their beer cans out and wiped everything down.

DENNIS

(louder)

No, sir, I never made that statement of any such kind.

Peterson talks over the top of him.

PETERSON

And did he ever tell you when he said we, who he was talking about?

HARJO

Be Ron Williamson.

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY - NO. 9 TRAIN - NIGHT

Inside a packed CAR as it SQUEALS around a bend. Victor holds an overhead rail, two cardboard boxes at his feet. He looks exhausted.

INT. NARROW STAIRWAY - NIGHT

Victor makes his way up to a fifth-floor apartment lugging the heavy boxes.

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

Victor dumps huge stacks of paper from the boxes, two thousand pages or more. A cover sheet reads:

STATE OF OKLAHOMA V. DENNIS FRITZ
JURY TRIAL TRANSCRIPT
VOLUME 1

Victor stares at all that paper.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - 12TH FLOOR ELEVATORS - DAY

Scheck punches the button and waits. The doors open. There's only one passenger inside. Victor. Eyes closed. The kid doesn't move.

SCHECK

This your floor?

Victor's eyes pop open. It takes him a second to get his bearings and step off the elevator.

SCHECK

Late party?

VICTOR

Yeah, I wish. I was up all night reading trial transcript.

Scheck looks at Victor. Lets the elevator doors close.

SCHECK

I thought you weren't going to do this again.

VICTOR

Yeah, well I talk a lot of trash.

SCHECK

You know enough to know this might not have a happy ending.

VICTOR

I also know enough to know there are guys locked away for crimes they didn't commit.

(then)

I thought I'd found one.

(and)

I still want to.

(finally)

Mistake I made was giving a damn.

SCHECK

And this time you won't.

VICTOR

I'm sure not going to be giving out any more TVs.

Beat. Scheck punches the elevator button.

SCHECK

Welcome back, Victor.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Neufeld and four students gathered around a table, piles of case files open in front of them. Neufeld looks at HUGH WALKER, a Boston frat boy who comes from money but languishes near the bottom of his class.

NEUFELD

The James Harvey case.

Hugh fumbles through his files.

HUGH

We requested access to the biological evidence, I sent them the Department of Justice guidelines on post-conviction DNA testing and pointed out why this was an appropriate case, but, ah --

(finds letter, holds it up)

They said no.

JO KOLAZINSKI, short hair, bicycle shorts and shoes, a native New Yorker, pragmatic and passionate, grabs the letter.

JO

Did they say why?

DOMINIQUE GRAHAM, brilliant and ambitious and very little interested in the notion of justice, cuts in.

DOMINIQUE

It's what Virginia prosecutors always say. Convicts don't have any right of access to evidence for DNA testing.

NEUFELD

It's a fundamental flaw in our system of laws. Legal guilt means everything. Actual innocence means nothing.

JO

So, Hugh, he's got no recourse in the courts?

HUGH

This guy has exhausted all his remedies at the state level.

DOMINIQUE

Virginia only gives you 21 days after conviction to introduce evidence of innocence. Never mind that DNA testing didn't exist at the time.

HUGH

He begged the governor for help. And he blew his federal habeas appeal years ago.

NEUFELD

So we've got a client with a credible claim of innocence doing 25 years and every legal avenue is blocked. What do we do?

HUGH

If every legal avenue is blocked, there's nothing we can do.

NEUFELD

Wrong. We invent a new avenue.
(looks at the group)
Ideas?

No one says anything.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT - DEAD OF NIGHT

Victor sits on the floor, an open pizza box beside him. He's deep into the transcript. Reads something that makes him frown.

PETERSON (V.O.)

What is your job with the sheriff's department?

TENNEY (V.O.)

I work in the jail.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Peterson is questioning MIKE TENNEY, a 35-year-old Okie with close-cropped hair.

PETERSON

Okay. And was Dennis Fritz an inmate of the county jail?

TENNEY

Yes he was.

PETERSON

Did you have a conversation with Dennis Fritz that you thought was important enough to write down on or about August 2nd?

TENNEY

Yes I did.

PETERSON

What was the gist of that conversation?

Tenney refers to a page of handwritten notes.

TENNEY

Okay. Mr. Fritz said he needed to talk to me and to come back to his cell when I got the time. And we were talking about him making some type of a deal. And he said --

(reads)

"Let's say that it might have happened this way. Maybe Ron went to the door and broke into Carter's apartment. And then, let's say I went ahead and got a little."

Sitting behind the defense table, Dennis listens stiffly.

TENNEY

"Ron got a little bit carried away and was going to teach her a lesson. She died."

The jurors' eyes track from Tenney to Dennis. This is damning testimony.

TENNEY

"Let's say it happened this way. But I didn't see Ron kill Debbie Carter, so how can I tell the D.A. something I really didn't see?"

Dennis shakes his head.

DENNIS (V.O.)

But, no, see, that isn't --

INT. CELL BLOCK

Dennis on the phone, adamant.

DENNIS

-- That isn't what I said. Mike would come back and tell me I ought to make a deal with the D.A. And I just told him, I said, "Look, Mike, if I was guilty and if I had been up there and Ronnie had broke in and went ahead and got a little" -- I used the word, expression, got a little -- "and I was there, do you think that I would be going through all of this and going before a jury that was picked for the death penalty? Don't you think I would try to make some kind of a deal, you know, short of the death penalty type thing?"

VOICE ON PHONE (V.O.)

So basically you were telling Mike Tenney --

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. CARDOZO LAW SCHOOL - INNOCENCE PROJECT OFFICES

Victor on the phone, hunkered in a cubicle, surrounded by stacks of paper, a dozen conversations going on around him.

VICTOR

-- you couldn't make a deal because you were innocent? Is that your story?

DENNIS

It isn't a story. It's the truth. I always told Mike Tenney I was innocent.

VICTOR

I see from the record that you can't account for your whereabouts the night of the crime. Where were you that night?

DENNIS

I don't know, I don't remember.

VICTOR

Then you didn't show up the next day at work. Didn't call. Is that just bad luck?

DENNIS

I don't know if I called or not.
They didn't arrest me till five
years later.

VICTOR

But they questioned you within a
few weeks. You knew the police
were looking at you for murder.
You didn't think to go back and
look at your calendar, your work
records, figure out where the hell
you were?

Dennis is silent for a moment. He gives the impression
of a man not telling the whole truth.

DENNIS

I don't know what to tell you, Mr.
Cruz. I don't remember where I
was. But I sure remember where I
wasn't.

(then)

No offense, but you're a student,
right? I've been in contact with
the Innocence Project for almost
two years. When do I get to talk
to Mr. Scheck?

The door to the corner office flies open and Neufeld
emerges in mid-argument with Scheck. Scheck continues
arguing from behind his desk.

SCHECK

What, you don't agree that's a
given?

NEUFELD

If it was a given we wouldn't be
debating it.

(and)

I've got to get to my deposition.

Neufeld closes the door and moves off. Jo jumps up from
her cubicle and latches onto him as he strides toward the
elevator. She talks fast.

JO

The James Harvey case, inventing a
way to get access to his evidence.
What if we file under Section
1983, make it a civil rights case?
Argue that Harvey has a due
process right to test the evidence
under the Fifth and Fourteenth
Amendments?

Neufeld reaches the elevator and punches the button.

NEUFELD

It's been tried.

The elevator opens.

INT. ELEVATOR

Neufeld steps aboard. Jo stays with him.

JO

And what happened?

NEUFELD

The federal courts have always ruled that it was really just a petition for habeas corpus relief and they've rejected it. Look at Hamlin v. Warren.

JO

So Harvey's already had his one and only shot at federal court and that's it.

NEUFELD

It's a problem in half our cases -- the prosecutors denying us access to the evidence. You want to solve it, you're going to have to do some original thinking.

The elevator doors open. Neufeld strides out.

EXT. FRITZ HOUSE (KANSAS CITY) - MORNING

Light rain falls. Elizabeth hurries out the front door juggling coffee, bagel, umbrella and keys. She rushes to her car, apparently running late. Reaches to unlock the door and spills coffee on her bagel, pants and shoes. Drops the keys. Bends to pick them up.

And sees that the front tire is flat.

ELIZABETH - LATER

squats at the flat tire, bent over the jack, wrestling it into position. She pumps the handle. Nothing seems to happen. She's so frustrated she could spit. An elderly NEIGHBOR backs an aging Cadillac from his driveway, rolls down his window, calls:

OLD NEIGHBOR

Hey, sweetheart, isn't there some fellow you can get to help you with that?

There isn't. And somehow, that only increases Elizabeth's frustration.

ELIZABETH

I'm okay. I can do it myself.

But now she starts to cry. Turns back to the car. Wipes at the filth on her clothes. And says just for herself:

ELIZABETH

I just shouldn't have to.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT OFFICES - CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY

Scheck in the heat of a noisy meeting with law students, Victor among them. SUSU GAMBARDELLA can barely contain her rage.

SUSU

The evidence to exonerate Julio was there. Swabs from the rape kit in a shoe box in the back of a closet in the basement of the courthouse. For ten years they save it. Then a week before I call asking to test it, guess what happens?

SCHECK

Time to clean out the closet.

SUSU

Everything goes in the dumpster.

EMILY LAMASTER, plain, earnest, smart, jumps in.

EMILY

So what happens to Julio?

DAVID BLOCK is straight out of *GQ*.

DAVID

Julio's done.

SCHECK

If there's no biological evidence, there's nothing to test. He serves his time.

VICTOR

And once again, kids, evil triumphs over good.

SCHECK

Now I'm in a bad mood. Victor. Give me your best case.

Victor has six or seven case files in front of him. He considers them. Impulsively pulls one from near the bottom. Flips it open.

VICTOR

The client makes a claim of innocence and there's evidence to test in this one. I've read the transcripts, the appellate briefs, and when I talk to this guy on the phone he's very passionate, he's articulate, he's persuasive. But I look at the evidence... and I don't know.

SUSU

What's the name?

VICTOR

Oh. Fritz. Dennis Fritz.
(hands Scheck the file)
He's serving life on rape-murder.

Scheck scans the file.

SCHECK

Two witnesses testified that he confessed?

VICTOR

Yeah, but one's this very questionable jailhouse snitch, you know how that goes --

DAVID

Yeah. "Don't go to the pen, send a friend."

SUSU

"If you can't do the time, drop a dime. Call 1-800-HE-TOLD-ME."

There's laughter around the table.

VICTOR

Exactly. The other wit's a guard at the jail and Fritz's statement to him was pretty damn ambiguous.

SCHECK

(from the file)

What about the physical evidence?
What about all this hair?

VICTOR

Well... it's hair. Hair microscopy. You're the one who always calls it junk science. Never been scientifically validated.

SCHECK

Yeah, but we're not talking about one or two hairs. They've got 13 hairs, head and pubic, all found at the crime scene and all linked to your client.

DAVID

Helluva coincidence.

Scheck studies the status report on Dennis's case.

SCHECK

Even if both confessions are bad, you've got an eyewitness. You've got semen. And you've got all the hair. Either this guy's been framed six ways from Sunday -- or he really is guilty.

(then)

It isn't a good case.

Scheck closes the file. Slides it back to Victor.

SCHECK

What's next?

CUT TO BLACK.

END OF ACT THREE

ACT FOUR

FADE IN:

THE JURY BOX

Jury selection continues. Prospective juror GALE PENLEY, 50s, a delicate woman, responds to questions.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Have you been the victim of a
crime?

Penley's gaze drops.

PENLEY
Yes, sir.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
What was the nature of that?

Beat.

PENLEY
I was raped.

Beat.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Would that affect your
consideration of this case at all?

PENLEY
I don't think so.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay. You're not going to
transfer your feelings about that
to this case, are you?

PENLEY
No, sir.

Beat.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Victor loads the thousands of pages of trial transcript back into the boxes. Tapes on the tops.

AT CARD TABLE - LATER

Victor highlights a passage in a textbook.

A TV PLAYS LOW in b.g. Victor's eyes go to the boxes stacked at the front door. He picks up a remote and changes the channel on the TV. His eyes return to the boxes.

VICTOR - LATER

The TV is off. Victor stands over the boxes. Bends and rips the top off one. Dumps out the stack of paper.

PETERSON (V.O.)
State your name for the record
please.

INT. OKLAHOMA STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION LAB - DAY

Criminalist SUSAN LAND bends over her lab bench, reaches with a pair of tweezers into an evidence envelope.

LAND (V.O.)
Susan P. Land. That's L-a-n-d.

TWEEZERS

pull a single pubic hair from the envelope, mount it with care on a glass slide.

PETERSON (V.O.)
And your profession or occupation?

SUSAN LAND

adjusts glass slides beneath a pair of microscopes joined by an optical bridge.

LAND (V.O.)
I'm a criminalist with the
Oklahoma State Bureau of
Investigation.

She bends to the eyepieces.

THROUGH MICROSCOPE

Two samples visible side by side, human hairs, backlit and hugely magnified.

PETERSON (V.O.)
Did you have an occasion to
receive hairs from bags placed on
Debbie Carter's hands at the crime
scene and from a washcloth removed
from her mouth?

LAND (V.O.)
I believe so, yes.

The hair on the right is rotated to bring it into alignment with the one on the left.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - CELL BLOCK

Dennis waiting in a long line for the public phone. The guy in front of him is talking to himself.

DENNIS

finally getting his turn. He's unhappy.

DENNIS

(to phone)

No, I've been speaking to Mr. Cruz for months, I'm asking to speak with Mr. Barry Scheck personally.

(then)

He's out of the country for how long?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT OFFICES

Juanita at the front desk talking to her headset, Victor beside her.

JUANITA

The whole week. But I'm sure Mr. Cruz would be available to take your call.

DENNIS

Mr. Cruz gave me the feeling I was wasting his time.

(and)

I'll call back next week for Mr. Scheck.

Neufeld passes with Dominique at his side. Calls toward the cubicles:

NEUFELD

Hugh, Jo, you have a minute?

The students gather.

NEUFELD

Dominique came up with an idea in the James Harvey case.

DOMINIQUE

We file in federal court, make it a 1983 case.

JO
 (to Neufeld)
 The civil rights code. You said
 that had been tried.

DOMINIQUE
 But here's the difference. We
 make it clear we're just asking
 for access to evidence for
testing. We don't know how the
 tests are going to turn out. They
 may even confirm Harvey's guilt.

HUGH
 And that's a stronger argument
 than saying he's innocent?

NEUFELD
 Yes, because we're not arguing
 that he should be released from
 jail. That's the key. So the
 court can't dismiss it as some
 kind of camouflaged habeas corpus
 claim.

DOMINIQUE
 It's a genuine civil rights
 action. The court should hear it.

NEUFELD
 It's a long shot, it's really
 pushing the envelope, but I think
 we should file a brief.
 (to Dominique)
 Write it up.

Neufeld moves on. Jo looks at Dominique.

JO
 You stole my idea.

DOMINIQUE
 And made it work.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON - DAY

Seen from a great distance. The day is hot as hell.
 There's no air moving. The GENTLE RATTLE of CHAINS.

WHITE (V.O.)
 (hushed)
 You ready?

ANOTHER VOICE (V.O.)
 Ready, yeah.

WHITE (V.O.)
 You're gonna have to hold tight to
 him. He ain't gonna go easy.

The sound of a HEAVY LOCK TURNING.

SOLID STEEL CELL DOOR

RUMBLING open. Four guards, led by White, swarm into the cell. Ron Williamson leaps up from the bunk with a rasping cry.

The guards shackle Ron and wrestle him from the cell. He fights wildly, his voice so painfully hoarse he can barely be understood.

RON
Too soon!... Five days!

The guards drag him forward. The death chamber is ahead. Ron's eyes are locked there.

RON
I have five more days!

They've reached the door to the death chamber. They can barely control him. White shouts in his ear.

WHITE
 Ron! Ron! Easy, man.
 (a smile)
It's good news.

Ron gives White an uncomprehending look as he is manhandled past the death chamber and away.

INT. ISOLATION CELL

Ron sits panting, sweaty, mouth hanging open, gawking at a YOUNG MAN in a suit.

YOUNG MAN
 Ron, my name is Mark Barrett. I'm
 an attorney with the Oklahoma
 Indigent Defense System. I've
 been filing motions on your behalf
 in the federal courts.

Ron looks at the man. Sensing an ally. The first one he's met since forever. A moment of sanity.

RON
 You have been? Why would you do
 that?

BARRETT

It's one of the perks of being on
Death Row. State provides
representation for your appeals.

(then)

Point is, a federal judge just
granted you a stay of execution.

Barrett smiles a like a guy who just won the lottery.

BARRETT

Ron? Do you understand what I'm
telling you?

After the longest time, Ron croaks out:

RON

I did not kill Debbie Carter.

INT. McALLISTER CELL BLOCK

Dennis reaches the front of the phone line and dials.

DENNIS

(to phone)

Collect from Dennis Fritz.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT OFFICES

High octane activity all around.

JUANITA

(to headset)

Mr. Fritz, you're calling for
Barry Scheck? You just missed
him... No, tomorrow he's in
Washington all day. But I can
take a message.

(beat)

Mr. Fritz? Hello?

She's lost the call. Susu passes on her way in, grabs
mail from her box, calls out:

SUSU

Yo, David, I need my notes back on
civil procedure, we've got our
final on Monday.

She passes Victor, in his cubicle, feet up, speed reading
through a slab of trial transcript.

VICTOR

The civil procedure final? Good
luck. You'll need it.

He finds something of interest in the transcript. Lowers his feet and leans forward to take a closer look.

PETERSON (V.O.)

From your records, Ms. Land --
let's see, to whom did you submit
it --

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Susan Land in the witness chair.

PETERSON

-- The hair that you received that
was on the washcloth, who did you
submit that to?

LAND

I submitted those to Mel Hett.

PETERSON

From the bedding, you received a
number of hairs. What did you do
with those hairs?

LAND

I mounted some of those hairs on
microscope slides.

PETERSON

Okay. And to whom did you submit
those to?

LAND

Mel Hett.

Peterson turns to look at Dennis sitting at the defense table. Dennis looks right back.

PETERSON

Did you receive some items labeled
"known scalp hairs of Williamson"
and "known scalp hairs of Fritz"?

LAND

Yes I did.

PETERSON

Okay. And to whom did you submit
that item to?

LAND

The hairs were submitted to Mel
Hett.

A HUMAN HAIR

Backlit, magnified, adjusted INTO SHARP FOCUS.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

Ms. Land, have you told us
everything that you have done to
these hairs?

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Defense counsel Saunders stands skeptically before Land.

LAND

That's what I do to them, yes,
sir.

SAUNDERS

That's everything you had to do
with them?

INT. OKLAHOMA STATE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION LAB - NIGHT

It's late and the place is empty except for Susan Land, who peers wearily through her microscope. Makes notes on a sheet of paper. The work is stacked up and she looks very, very tired.

LAND (V.O.)

Yes, sir.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

And you held them from late March
of 1983 to September of 1983?

LAND (V.O.)

That's correct.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Saunders checks his notes, seems not fully prepared,
turns back to Land.

SAUNDERS

Are you a hair and fiber examining
expert?

LAND

I do examine hairs and fibers,
yes, sir.

SAUNDERS

Why didn't you examine them here?

INT. OSBI LAB - NIGHT

Land at her microscope. She removes one slide and carefully inserts another. Looks through the eyepiece. Makes another note.

LAND (V.O.)

Well, sir, at that particular time and under those particular circumstances, I felt that I could not do a thorough examination and that it would be in the best interest of this case for it to go to another examiner.

INT. COURTROOM

Saunders cocks his head.

SAUNDERS

Did you think you were not qualified to do it, Mrs. Land?

LAND

It wasn't a matter of not being qualified. It was a matter of that -- the time, the particular circumstances, I felt that I could not be objective.

SAUNDERS

Did you conduct some examinations on some of this hair and decide that, or did you just decide it without doing anything?

INT. OSBI LAB - NIGHT

Land continues studying hair and making notations. The page is nearly full.

LAND (V.O.)

Sir, I believe that I may have started to look at some of the hairs microscopically, but I did not make a complete examination.

As Land works, someone walks up behind her and watches over her shoulder. His face is not seen.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)

Okay. Did you just not come up with the desired results --

LAND (V.O.)

No, sir.

SAUNDERS (V.O.)
 -- and then decide to get somebody
 else to do it?

INT. COURTROOM

Land almost comes out of her seat.

LAND
No, sir, that wasn't it at all.

Dennis is sitting up straight, leaning forward, like he smells blood in the water. Saunders studies his notes. Can't seem to figure out what to ask next. Decides to let the moment pass. He turns for the defense table with a feeble:

SAUNDERS
 I believe that's all.

Dennis isn't happy.

INT. DENNIS'S CELL - NIGHT

Dennis sits on his bunk, introspective, watching his cellmate, a malnourished guy named DeFORREST, obsessively brushing his teeth.

DENNIS
 You think I'm a proud man? You
 think that's my problem?

DeFORREST
 What are you talking about?

DENNIS
 I hung up on Barry Scheck today,
 the lady who takes his messages.
 (then)
 I wouldn't even talk to the D.A.
 about making some kind of plea-
 bargain deal. Wouldn't hear of
 it.
 (then)
 I don't let my daughter see me. I
 tell myself it's for her own good,
 but --
 (finally)
 Maybe I'm just too proud.

DeFORREST
 Well, you're the one studied all
 that psychology stuff at college.
 You'd be the one to know.

DeForrest rinses and spits, leaving Dennis with his doubts.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE (NEW YORK) - DAY

Heavy lunchtime foot traffic. Scheck hurries into a little Italian joint.

INT. ITALIAN RESTAURANT - DAY

Neufeld rises from a booth near the door to meet Scheck.

NEUFELD
Where have you been? I've been waiting an hour.

SCHECK
I got hung up.

Scheck sits, picks up a menu. Neufeld sits down and studies his partner.

NEUFELD
You went down there, didn't you?

SCHECK
No I didn't.

NEUFELD
No, you told me your daughter was sick and couldn't go to the game. You went down and stood on the street outside Yankee Stadium and scalped your tickets. Didn't you?

Now Scheck declines to answer.

NEUFELD
I would have bought them.

Beat. Scheck looks up from the menu.

SCHECK
Really? For how much?

Neufeld's PHONE RINGS. He unfolds it.

NEUFELD
Yeah.
(doesn't like what he hears)
Thanks.

He hangs up.

SCHECK

Bad news?

NEUFELD

The James Harvey federal appeal. We're asking for a ballsy decision on a novel legal theory and we just drew the most conservative judge in the 4th District.

SCHECK

You're going to need some positive press. Let me talk to the Washington Post.

(remembers)

Oh God, I promised Dwyer a summary of the Bogna case for a column he's writing for the Daily News.

Now Scheck's PHONE RINGS. He digs it out and answers.

SCHECK

Yeah... I don't think I know a Mark Barrett. Who is he?

(sighs)

Okay, sure, put him on.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - SCHECK'S OFFICE - NIGHT

The windows look out over nighttime Manhattan. Scheck is multitasking, pounding his computer keys, referring to a blizzard of documents and notes and simultaneously talking to Victor.

SCHECK

I told you it was a bad case.

VICTOR

It is a bad case. But when has that ever stopped you?

Touche. Scheck's eyes flick toward Victor.

SCHECK

What makes you think we should make it a priority?

Victor teases a color photo from an envelope. Drops it on Scheck's desk.

INSERT - PHOTO

A ragged chunk of wall board, stained with blood.

VICTOR (O.S.)
Back in '82, at the time of the
murder, there was a bloody palm
print on the wall of Debbie
Carter's apartment.

BACK TO SCENE

Scheck keeps pounding the keyboard.

VICTOR
You going to take a look?

SCHECK
I've got to finish this. Just
keep talking.

VICTOR
Oklahoma's print expert said it
didn't match Carter, Fritz or
Williamson. It was a huge
roadblock to the case; they
couldn't charge anyone. But five
years later, they decided to dig
up Carter and take a new set of
prints. Suddenly Jerry Peters,
the print expert, says he's got a
match. The print belongs to
Debbie Carter after all and now
they can charge Fritz and
Williamson.

(and)
But guess what?

SCHECK
You had someone else look at the
palm print.

VICTOR
And he says it does not match
Carter. Or Fritz. Or Williamson.

SCHECK
But the Oklahoma expert testified
that it did.

VICTOR
Everything about this case, the
confessions, the hair, the palm
print, it's all just weird.

Scheck stops typing and turns, looks hard at his student.

SCHECK

Victor, what happens if you get testing for Fritz and he comes back guilty? You're not going to run off and become a corporate tax attorney?

VICTOR

Not a chance.

SCHECK

(rising, coming around the desk)

Good. Because I got a call today from an attorney named Mark Barrett. He's now representing Ron Williamson. Williamson is getting a new trial. Five days from execution and a federal judge put on the brakes.

Scheck searches his desk, fishes out a scrap of paper.

SCHECK

Listen to what the judge wrote.

(reads)

"God help us if ever in this great country we turn our heads while people who have not had fair trials are executed. That almost happened in this case."

VICTOR

Preach it, Judge.

SCHECK

Yeah. Sometimes the system works.

VICTOR

So what does this mean for Fritz?

SCHECK

Williamson's getting DNA testing for his new trial. You've got to make sure Fritz is part of that.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FOUR

ACT FIVE

FADE IN:

THE JURY BOX

Jury selection continues. Prospective juror WAYNE SANDERS, 50ish, assured, in conversation with the Judge.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Appearing for the State of
Oklahoma is Mr. Bill Peterson.
Representing the defendant is Mr.
Greg Saunders, and with him is the
defendant, Dennis Fritz. Do you
recognize any of these three?

SANDERS
Yes, sir. I know Greg and I know
Bill.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
And how do you know Mr. Saunders?

SANDERS
Well, I just -- he's an attorney
here, and --

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Do you know him personally, know
who he is in the community?

SANDERS
Well, I know him as an attorney,
you know, and I don't know where
-- I guess we've had a -- at
different times I've been out to
the office.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Okay. And how do you know Mr.
Peterson?

SANDERS
I've said hello, and that's about
it.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
He's a public official. You know
who he is and --

SANDERS
Just about like I know you. You
know what I mean, I just know you.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)
Have you heard anything about this
case before today?

SANDERS

Yes, sir.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

And what would be the source of that information?

SANDERS

Chief of police.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

And you and he had a conversation about this?

SANDERS

Well... yeah.

JUDGE JONES (O.S.)

(beat)

You recognized the names of Detective Smith and Agent Rogers. If they are to testify in this case, would you evaluate their testimony using the same standard that you would when evaluating the testimony of a person you did not know?

SANDERS

Well, probably. When you know them kind of personally, it's kind of hard not to evaluate theirs a little more, I guess, than somebody I didn't even know. But -- I -- I don't believe they come any more honest than I am.

The juror seems to be looking directly INTO LENS for:

SANDERS

And I wouldn't be any different sitting here than you would be.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON - DAY

High noon. Two wild dogs cross the highway in f.g. A car HONKS and swerves to avoid them.

GUARD (V.O.)

Dennis Fritz?

INT. CELL BLOCK

Dennis appears in his cell door. There's a guard there, a guy named MORRISSEY, about Dennis's age.

MORRISSEY

You got a phone call.

He looks at Dennis like he's something the guard just scraped off the bottom of his shoe. Hands him a slip of paper.

MORRISSEY

From your attorney in New York City.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - FRONT DESK

Juanita answering calls. Throws Victor a look.

JUANITA

(to headset)

Yes, Mr. Fritz.

Victor grabs a phone, punches into the call, talking fast like he expects to be cut off.

VICTOR

Dennis, it's Victor Cruz. I know we got off on the wrong foot --

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. McALLISTER CELL BLOCK

Dennis on the public phone.

VICTOR

-- but if you give me five minutes I think we can help each other.

Dennis says nothing. So Victor keeps talking.

VICTOR

As you may know, your codefendant is getting a new trial, which means he's finally going to get DNA testing, and that could give us an opening. I've got a bunch of questions I need to ask you --

And now Dennis does cut him off.

DENNIS

And I've got a question for you.

VICTOR

Sure. Anything.

DENNIS

You sound very young, Mr. Cruz.
Do you happen to have any
children?

Beat.

VICTOR

Actually I do. I have a daughter.
Same as you.

Dennis thinks about that. Stays quiet.

VICTOR

Mr. Fritz?

DENNIS

I have another question.
(not an easy one)
If Ron Williamson's test somehow
shows he's guilty -- what does
that mean for me?

The question surprises Victor.

VICTOR

You think that might happen?

Dennis looks over his shoulder, makes sure no one can
hear him.

DENNIS

At Ronnie's trial, a lady
testified about him busting into
her house, wanting her to have sex
with him. He apparently tore her
shirt off, beat her up, said he
was going to have to kill her.
There was little kids in the
house. He did everything short of
raping her. So that's why I got
to ask what happens to me if it
turns out Ron did this thing.

Victor blows out a long breath.

VICTOR

I'm not going to lie to you,
Dennis. You guys are basically
joined at the hip. You both get
out together or nobody gets out.

A COMPLICATED SERIES OF CHARTS

Filled with drawings of hair. Graphs comparing
percentages of various hair types.

Lists of hair shapes and colors. Terms like medulla, scale protrusion and cortical fusi. It goes on and on.

HETT (O.S.)

State's Exhibit 37 depicts several other types of characteristics seen in hair comparison.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

MEL HETT, the state's hair expert, stands before the charts like a professor lecturing the jury.

HETT

Pigment distribution. Generally in Caucasians there's an even distribution but there can be clumping. There can be streaking and variations within that, so it's not only Negroid individuals that would have the clumping. Even in Negroid individuals there are different amounts of clumping and also some clumping within Mongoloid individuals.

Dennis stares from his seat. Unnerved by the impressive presentation.

HETT

There can be slight clumping, average, or very dense clumping where most of the pigment would be in definite aggregates or definite little pockets within the hair --

Something in the jury box catches Peterson's eye. He interrupts.

PETERSON

Your Honor, may we approach the bench?

Saunders joins him.

PETERSON

Could I ask that the court ask the jurors -- one man is asleep. I wonder if you could admonish the jurors to please try to pay attention.

Judge Jones glances toward the jury box.

JUDGE JONES

Closing your eyes is not an
indication of sleep in court.
(impatient)

Let's proceed.

And that's that. Peterson regroups. Studies his notes.
Addresses his witness.

PETERSON

In the course of work did you have
an occasion to receive from -- my
mind's gone blank -- Susan Land
certain exhibits?

HETT

Yes I did.

PETERSON

And did you conduct an examination
of certain known and unknown
hairs?

HETT

Yes, I did quite a large number of
examinations.

PETERSON

You received a hair from Susan
Land identified as hair from
washcloth, did you not?

HETT

Yes, sir.

PETERSON

And what did your test -- your
comparison reveal?

HETT

It's my opinion that the
questioned pubic hair from the
washcloth and known pubic hairs
from Dennis Fritz are consistent
microscopically and could have the
same source.

Peterson lets that sink in before:

PETERSON

Did you compare a pubic hair from
the floor under Ms. Carter?

HETT

The questioned pubic hair from the floor which would be No. 27 and known pubic hairs from Dennis Fritz are consistent microscopically and could have the same source.

DISSOLVE TO:

HETT

Rolling along in a damning cadence.

HETT

... Of the three pubic hairs from the torn blue panties, two were consistent microscopically with Dennis Fritz and could have the same source...

DISSOLVE TO:

HETT

... There was seven pubic hairs from the bedding that were consistent with Dennis Fritz and could have the same source...

DISSOLVE TO:

HETT

... There was one scalp hair from the bedding that was consistent with Dennis Fritz and could have the same source.

Peterson steps forward.

PETERSON

The pubic hair. How many as a total were microscopically consistent with that of Dennis Fritz?

HETT

Eleven pubic hairs were consistent with Dennis Fritz.

PETERSON

Eleven.

Peterson waits as jurors scribble notes.

PETERSON

How many scalp hairs?

HETT

A total of two scalp hairs
consistent with Dennis Fritz.

Jurors keep scribbling. Dennis looks from the expert flanked by his charts and graphs to his overwhelmed attorney, understands he's just suffered a mortal blow.

INT. PONTOTOC CITY POLICE STATION - 1982

The FOOTAGE is odd, with an UNEVEN, HANDHELD, DOCUMENTARY feel. Glen Gore sits at a small table. Addresses the CAMERA.

GORE

Yeah. I heard what happened to Debbie. Damn. I just saw her last night at the Coach Light. We were talking about me painting her car.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

What time did you get there?

GORE

Must have been about 10:30.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

And you stayed about how long?

GORE

I probably left a little after one, say 1:15.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

You say you talked to her?

GORE

Yeah, we were friends from high school.

DETECTIVE (O.S.)

She mention if she was having problems with anyone? Maybe one of the customers hassling her?

Gore thinks about that. Shakes his head.

GORE

Never said one word to me about having a problem with anyone. Not a word.

VICTOR (V.O.)

Which is not what he said at trial.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - CONFERENCE ROOM - NIGHT

A half-dozen students, dozens of open files, the remains of Chinese takeout. Victor's addressing Scheck.

VICTOR

Gore went on the stand and swore that Ron Williamson was at the bar, hassling Debbie all night, kept asking her to dance. And that Debbie begged Gore to rescue her.

SUSU

But this other story, that Gore never saw anybody bothering Debbie, how do we know that's what he originally told the police?

VICTOR

(waves a document)

Because we've got his statement right here. The original one he gave police the day after the killing.

He slides the page in front of Scheck, who scans it.

SCHECK

Why didn't defense counsel make more of this at trial?

VICTOR

Defense counsel never knew this piece of paper existed.

DAVID

It was never turned over?

SUSU

So what was up with Fritz's attorney? Why didn't he catch it?

VICTOR

How's he going to catch it? He's this small-town civil litigator trying his first criminal case and getting paid a grand total of --

DAVID

Let me guess. A thousand bucks.

VICTOR

Three hundred dollars. Total. For a capital case. And I think he decided up front that Dennis was guilty so he was just going through the motions.

SCHECK

That's the common thread in all
our cases. Poor representation.
(then)
Time to talk to the local
prosecutor.

VICTOR

Bill Peterson. I'll call him.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

The jury box is empty. Dennis is at the defense table,
straining to make out what's happening at the bench where
Judge Jones, Peterson and Saunders are in conference.

JUDGE JONES

All right. The state's announced
it rests.

SAUNDERS

I have one other motion. It's
come to my attention that Mr.
Cecil Smith who is a juror in this
case was the chief of police here
for 40 years here in Ada and is
retired as such. And he, I feel
like, concealed that from several
questions and I ask that he be
disqualified and one of the
alternates be seated in his place.

JUDGE JONES

I can't recall that he was ever
asked about that.

SAUNDERS

I asked him -- I think I also --

JUDGE JONES

Well, I don't recall anybody
giving a broad answer like that.
Probably the only question asked
of him would have been my question
as to when he said he was retired
what he retired from.

PETERSON

Oklahoma Corporation Commission.

SAUNDERS

Well, he also retired from the Ada
P.D. He retired from Ada P.D.

JUDGE JONES

But I don't recall any specific questions to him about that, so --

SAUNDERS

I think I asked the question if anybody was related to a police officer.

JUDGE JONES

But that could have happened at some point when he wasn't even in here.

SAUNDERS

I think he was one of the originals.

JUDGE JONES

No. No.

PETERSON

No, he was a substitute.

JUDGE JONES

He was.

Saunders kind of raises his hands in a helpless gesture.

SAUNDERS

Okay.

JUDGE JONES

He took the place of one of the jurors we had step down because of his hearing problem.

SAUNDERS

Okay.

JUDGE JONES

Now I've heard your motion. I'll deny it.

Unable to make out a word of what was said, Dennis watches quizzically as Saunders crosses back toward him.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT OFFICES - DAY

Victor at his cubicle, on the phone.

VICTOR

Yes, this is Victor Cruz calling from the Innocence Project in New York on behalf of our client Dennis Fritz.

(MORE)

VICTOR (CONT'D)
Is District Attorney Bill Peterson
in?

(then)
Okay, when would be the best time
to catch him in the office?

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

The jury in their seats.

JUDGE JONES
Mr. Saunders, you may present your
case.

SAUNDERS
Thank you very much, Your Honor.
The defense would call Mr. Fritz.
Have a seat up here, Mr. Fritz.

Dennis rises like he's been waiting a very long time for
this. He crosses the room toward the witness chair, eyes
always on the jurors.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT FIVE

ACT SIX

FADE IN:

INT. COURTROOM - DENNIS

On the stand.

SAUNDERS

Dennis, have you ever been convicted of a felony?

DENNIS

Yes, sir, I have been.

SAUNDERS

What was the charge, the nature of the conviction?

DENNIS

It was cultivation of marijuana charge.

SAUNDERS

How old a man were you then?

DENNIS

Twenty-three years old. I can remember exactly.

SAUNDERS

Are you married at this time?

DENNIS

I'm going through the process of a divorce. The papers have been filed.

SAUNDERS

Were you married prior to this time?

DENNIS

Yes, sir, I was.

SAUNDERS

What happened in that marriage? How did that marriage terminate?

DENNIS

(beat)

My wife was murdered. She was shot in the back of the head.

(drops his gaze)

It was a terrible thing that happened.

SAUNDERS

Was that case ever prosecuted?

DENNIS

Yes it was.

SAUNDERS

Was the perpetrator convicted?

DENNIS

Yes he was.

SAUNDERS

Do you have any children by that marriage?

DENNIS

Yes, I have a daughter that is 14 years old.

A moment. Then:

SAUNDERS

Did you know Debbie Carter?

DENNIS

No, sir, I never met Debbie Carter in my life.

SAUNDERS

You'd been out at the Coach Light?

DENNIS

Yes, sir.

SAUNDERS

She worked out at the Coach Light. Had you ever seen her out there to your recollection?

DENNIS

Not to my recollection. If she ever served me, I don't recall it. I didn't, you know, I don't -- I don't know her. I didn't know her then.

SAUNDERS

Have you ever been in Debbie Carter's apartment?

DENNIS

No. No, sir, I never have been in Debbie Carter's apartment, never.

SAUNDERS

Dennis, did you kill Debbie Carter?

DENNIS

No, I did not. I did not kill Debbie Carter, and I don't know anything about the death of Debbie Carter whatsoever. I've been locked up over in that county jail for 11 months on circumstantial evidence, and I'm the kind of person that I've never taken a life. I've never thought about taking a life. I've never wanted to rape a woman. I've never had any thoughts of this kind of activity in my life.

The jurors study Dennis. Trying to divine the truth.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - MEN'S ROOM

Neufeld is at the sink, cleaning a spot off his tie. The door pushes open and Hugh pokes his head in.

HUGH

Peter, there's a ruling in the Harvey case.

INT. CONFERENCE ROOM - LATER

A handful of REPORTERS gathered. A cluster of microphones. Cameras and lights. All waiting. A reporter pops open a soda can and it fizzes out on the carpet. Neufeld strides into the room with Dominique, Jo and Hugh. The students are smiling broadly. Neufeld isn't. If anything, he's fiercer in victory than he is in battle.

NEUFELD

We ready?

REPORTER

Go ahead.

NEUFELD

(to microphones)

The Innocence Project is announcing a major victory today in U.S. District Court in Alexandria, Virginia. Judge Albert Bryan ruled that when Fairfax County refused James Harvey access to evidence used to obtain his conviction, they violated his civil rights. Judge Bryan ordered the evidence sent to the state lab for DNA --

There's a POP as one of the television LIGHTS BLOWS.

CAMERAMAN

Hold on. We're going to have to start again.

He goes to work fixing the light.

REPORTER

Peter, while we're waiting, what's the headline here?

DOMINIQUE

(steps forward)

The headline is, for the first time a federal judge has ruled that convicts have a right of access to evidence that may prove their innocence.

NEUFELD

This is huge. The court is saying we care more about the truth than upholding flawed verdicts.

REPORTER

(to Dominique)

What's your name?

DOMINIQUE

Dominique Graham. D-O-M-I-N --

Jo rolls her eyes.

INT. VICTOR'S APARTMENT - DAY

Victor on the phone, insistent.

VICTOR

I've been trying all week to get in touch with Mr. Peterson. It's about the new Ron Williamson trial... Well, we need to talk about including our client Dennis Fritz in that DNA testing.

(frustrated)

Victor Cruz. You have the number.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Another conference at the bench.

JUDGE JONES

All right, we're going to recess for the day, we'll let the jury go and we'll resume the trial in the morning.

PETERSON

That will be fine. I'll agree to that.

SAUNDERS

Can we wait a little bit later than 8:30? I'm awfully tired. Really, I'm serious, I'm really tired.

JUDGE JONES

(sacrilege)

You mean not start at 8:30?

SAUNDERS

Yeah, I'd like to start a little later.

JUDGE JONES

Depends on how long you're going to argue.

SAUNDERS

I'm not a big arguer.

HOLD.

SUPER 8 FOOTAGE

Young Elizabeth and Dennis laughing as the German shepherd puppy tries to run up the plastic slide. The dog claws like mad but can't make any headway. Comes sliding back down.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Judge Jones turns to the defense table.

JUDGE JONES

Mr. Saunders.

Silence in the courtroom as Saunders sort of pats Dennis on the back, rises and crosses to stand before the jury.

SAUNDERS

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, before I get started I want to tell you how much I appreciate your time.

(MORE)

SAUNDERS (CONT'D)

If it was not for the juries, we wouldn't have a jury system. And I certainly can't contemplate in my own mind anything that would be any worse for the country.

He gives the jury a smile.

SAUNDERS

Also, I'd like to apologize if I've said or done anything that you would have said or done differently. I apologize and ask you this: Please do not hold it against my client. Hold it against me.

He takes a moment. Clears his throat.

SAUNDERS

I've never stood before 12 people before and asked for a gentleman's life, and that's the position I'm in at this point in time.

Dennis sits up straight, doing his best to look innocent.

SAUNDERS

I'm not going to tell you which way to go. That's not my place; that's not my part.

Dennis's expression congeals. What?

SAUNDERS

You have your own conscience and your own set of values and you have to live with yourself. So I would ask you to search your soul and come forward with a verdict that you can live with. Thank you very much.

Saunders turns and retreats toward Dennis, who is aghast.

INT. DISTRICT ATTORNEY'S OFFICE (PONTOTOC COUNTY) - DAY

End of the day. Peterson's loading a briefcase when an unseen secretary calls through the open door:

SECRETARY (O.S.)

Another call from New York on line one. It's Barry Scheck.

Peterson snaps his briefcase shut, says knowingly:

PETERSON

It's not Barry Scheck, it's some student of Scheck's.

SECRETARY (O.S.)

No, Bill. I really think it's Mr. Scheck himself.

Peterson stops and looks at the flashing light on his phone. Two full beats as he decides what to do. He puts down the briefcase and snaps up the phone.

PETERSON

This is Bill Peterson.

(suddenly flustered)

Yes, hi, how are you? I keep reading about the work you're doing with your, uh -- shoot, it's gone right out of my head -- Innocence Project, right, the DNA and so forth.

(listens)

The Sooners? Oh, you bet. We're expecting, you know, an excellent season. As per usual.

(laughs a little)

... Yes. I understand you've expressed an interest in this Ron Williamson retrial we've got going down here.

(then)

Well, see, I really do wish I could help you but my hands are tied because it's Williamson who's getting the new trial and the DNA testing, not your boy Fritz. I mean, you can read the law. Fritz has no legal right to the testing. None. And I do try to follow the law.

Peterson picks his briefcase back up, glances at his watch.

PETERSON

You know, I have to apologize, Barry, I'm so sorry to have to cut you off but I'm due in a meeting. It has been so nice talking to you.

And he hangs up.

EXT. CARDOZO LAW SCHOOL - NIGHT

Scheck and Victor together at the side entrance. Scheck folds his phone.

SCHECK

This guy's not going to give us an
inch.

VICTOR

Makes you wonder if he has
something to hide.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - NIGHT

A full moon. A few lights burning inside the building.
A few cars in the parking lot.

INT. COURTHOUSE - JURY ROOM

No sound. A juror yawns. Another comes out of the
bathroom. The others are distributed around a big table.
There's Betty Landis, the lady afraid of her own hearing
aid. And Shirley Scroggins, the sister-in-law's bride's
maid's best friend. And Gale Penley, the rape victim.
And Wayne Sanders, a friend of the judge and both
attorneys. And Cecil Smith, retired chief of the Ada
police. They talk among themselves. But mostly, they're
looking at those impressive hair charts.

INT. COURTROOM - DAY

The jurors file in and take their seats, tight-lipped,
not looking at Dennis, who is already on his feet, facing
them.

JUDGE JONES

Mr. Sanders, has the jury reached
a verdict?

SANDERS

Yes, sir.

JUDGE JONES

Okay. Would you hand the papers
to the bailiff please?

Sanders does, and the bailiff hands the papers to the
COURT CLERK.

JUDGE JONES

Read the verdict.

Dennis holds his breath.

COURT CLERK

The State of Oklahoma versus
Dennis L. Fritz, defendant.

(MORE)

COURT CLERK (CONT'D)

We the jury do upon our oaths find the defendant guilty of murder in the first degree. Signed, Wayne Sanders, foreman.

The verdict rocks Dennis.

JUDGE JONES

I'll poll the jury. Ms. Landis, is that your verdict?

Dennis interrupts.

DENNIS

Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I would just like to say to you --

JUDGE JONES

Excuse me --

SAUNDERS

(a hand on Dennis's arm)
Dennis, you can't do that.

JUDGE JONES

Mr. Fritz --

DENNIS

My Lord Jesus in heaven knows that I didn't do this. I just want you to know that I forgive you. I'll be praying for you.

JUDGE JONES

Go ahead and be seated, Mr. Fritz. That's all right.

As Saunders helps Dennis into his chair:

JUDGE JONES

Is that your verdict, Ms. Landis?

LANDIS

Uh-huh.

JUDGE JONES

And, Ms. Dobbins, is that your verdict?

DOBBINS

Yes.

SUPER 8 FOOTAGE

Dennis and young Elizabeth are smiling at the CAMERA.
The puppy is on top of the slide between them.

JUDGE JONES (V.O.)
Ms. Flowers, is that your verdict?

FLOWERS (V.O.)
Yes.

The FILM CATCHES and SKIPS.

JUDGE JONES (V.O.)
Ms. Hobbs, is that your verdict?

HOBBS (V.O.)
Yes, sir.

The FILM SHATTERS. The IMAGE DISINTEGRATES.

JUDGE JONES (V.O.)
Ms. Tracy, is that your verdict?

TRACY (V.O.)
Yes, sir.

FADE OUT.

END OF ACT SIX

ACT SEVEN

FADE IN:

INSIDE A REFRIGERATOR

The door opens and the light pops on. A bottle of Del Monte ketchup stands in f.g. Debbie Carter looks in. Just waking up. She reaches in, pushes the ketchup out of the way and grabs a carton of milk. The door closes.

INT. BILL PETERSON'S OFFICE

The district attorney breezes in. His SECRETARY hands him a bouquet of message slips.

SUPERIMPOSE: "1999."

SECRETARY

There's three in there from a Jim Dwyer, says he's a newspaper reporter in New York, wants to talk about Fritz and Williamson.

Peterson stops and sorts the messages.

PETERSON

I told Scheck his boy wasn't getting DNA testing.

Peterson finds the messages from New York.

PETERSON

Time he learned that when we say no in Oklahoma, we mean it.

He crumples the messages and drops them in the trash.

INT. DEBBIE CARTER'S APARTMENT - MORNING

The milk on the table. Debbie gobbling cereal while she's getting ready for work. Her Mickey Mouse PHONE RINGS. She picks it up.

DEBBIE

Hello?
(smiles)
Hey, Mom.

She pulls a warm coat from her closet while she talks.

INT. PETERSON'S OFFICE - DAY

He's in conversation with Detective Smith, comparing calendars, when the Secretary pokes her head through the doorway.

SECRETARY

Bill, I've got an Alex Pelosi on line one, she says she's a producer with *Dateline* and wants to talk to you about the Fritz and Williamson case.

Peterson's eyes flick toward his Secretary. He looks the tiniest bit like a deer caught in the headlights. Beat.

PETERSON

You'll have to take her number. I'm in a meeting here.

It takes him another beat to turn back to the calendars.

INT. NEUFELD'S OFFICE - NIGHT

It's late and everyone else has gone home. There's paper everywhere. Neufeld pours himself two fingers of Scotch and sits at his desk. Sorts through the mail from his in-basket. Finds something interesting and rips it open. Reads. What he reads elicits a long, weary sigh. He picks up the phone, finds a number and dials.

NEUFELD

Hugh, it's Peter Neufeld. I need you to make a phone call.

(beat)

James Harvey. We just got notice that Fairfax County is appealing his case to the 4th Circuit.

(listens)

No, that's what I want you to explain to him. Even though a federal judge ordered testing for Harvey, pending resolution of the appeal, his testing isn't going to happen.

(then)

Yeah, God forbid someone should perform a laboratory test and determine the truth.

EXT. ADA, OKLAHOMA, NEIGHBORHOOD - NIGHT

A great house with a giant lawn. A Lincoln pulls into the driveway and Peterson climbs out with his briefcase, heads for the front door.

INT. PETERSON HOUSE - NIGHT

The PHONE is RINGING as Peterson enters. He picks up.

PETERSON

Hello?

INTERCUT WITH:

INT. SCHECK HOUSE - NIGHT

Scheck is at home, loading the dishwasher, the TV news muted.

SCHECK

(to phone)

Bill, it's Barry Scheck. Glad I caught you. Listen, I know you're hesitant to test my client --

PETERSON

I'm not hesitant, Barry, I can't do it. Can't. I've got no legal basis.

SCHECK

So you said. But here's the thing. When those tests come back in the Williamson trial, the DNA profile of the evidence will become public record.

PETERSON

Yeah, I'm familiar with how this all works.

SCHECK

Then you understand that at that point we'll be able to run our own tests on Fritz, make our own comparison.

Beat. He hadn't necessarily thought about that.

PETERSON

... Okay.

SCHECK

And I'm just a little concerned with all of the media attention suddenly focused on this case -- how is that going to make you look? I mean, people might think you weren't interested in knowing the truth. Might be better for you to go ahead and test Fritz now.

Peterson says nothing, just stares at the phone.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON - ADMINISTRATION BUILDING - DAY

A rainy morning. Mark Barrett, Ron's attorney, waits beneath an umbrella. OSBI Agent Gary Rogers climbs from a state car and approaches.

AGENT ROGERS

You ready?

Barrett nods and the men head inside out of the weather.

INT. DENNIS'S CELL

A corrections officer at the cell door, watching Barrett and Agent Rogers inside. Rogers pulls on a latex glove. Produces a Q-tip. Steps toward Dennis.

AGENT ROGERS

Open your mouth.

Dennis does. Rogers reaches in with the Q-tip and swabs the inside of Dennis's cheek. Drops the Q-tip inside an ordinary white envelope. Repeats the process with a second Q-tip, then seals the envelope and peels off the glove.

AGENT ROGERS

Okay then.

Dennis looks at Barrett.

DENNIS

That's it?

BARRETT

That's it.

INT. BROCKWAY GLASS FACTORY (ADA, OKLAHOMA) - DAY

The noise of HEAVY EQUIPMENT. Sheets of glass moving along a conveyor. Debbie Carter enters the employee break room. KATIE looks up from the coffeemaker.

KATIE

Hey, Debbie. You want to catch a movie tonight?

DEBBIE

Oh, hon, I can't. I'm working tonight at the Coach Light. How about tomorrow?

KATIE

Sure. Tomorrow's good.

Debbie drops change into a soda machine.

EXTREME CLOSEUP ON WHITE ENVELOPE

Gloved fingers tear it open and remove two Q-tips. A razor blade descends toward one of the swabs. Precisely cuts the cotton tip into a series of slices.

TWEEZERS

pick up the slices one after another and drop them into empty test tubes.

A DROPPER

is squeezed. Various dyes are dripped into each of the tubes.

A CENTRIFUGE

The test tubes are secured inside. The lid is closed. The MACHINE is switched ON.

INT. McALLISTER CELL BLOCK - NIGHT

Dennis holds the phone close, his voice low, intimate. He seems different somehow. Painfully vulnerable.

DENNIS

I'm just saying, you shouldn't think I'm some kind of saint. I'm no saint. A man does things, you know, things he may not be proud of. When alcohol and women are involved. He can do things he doesn't necessarily want his daughter to find out about. Because then, you know, what would she think of him?

(beat)

But you have to know, I haven't been a saint.

INT. ELIZABETH'S BEDROOM - NIGHT

She sits cross-legged on her bed, phone to her ear, almost too frightened to speak.

ELIZABETH (V.O.)

What are you telling me, Daddy?

INT. DNA LABORATORY (RESEARCH TRIANGLE PARK, NC) - DAY

A lab technician meticulously compares strips of printout that look like they're covered with bar code -- the DNA fingerprints.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - DAY

Victor in his cubicle, frustrated, rummaging through mountains of paper.

VICTOR
What the hell happened to my Fritz
and Williamson transcripts?

Emily's head pops up from her side of the divider. She waves a page of transcript.

EMILY
This is good reading.
(and)
Mr. Fritz has quite a history.

VICTOR
What history you talking about?
The marijuana thing?

EMILY
Not the marijuana thing.
(beat)
The Holiday Inn thing.

Victor rounds the divider into Emily's cubicle. She's got the thick trial transcript open on her desk.

VICTOR
What Holiday Inn thing?

She gives him a reproving look.

EMILY
You didn't read the penalty phase.

INT. SUBWAY CAR - NIGHT

The No. 9 TRAIN RUMBLING north. Victor is reading pages of transcript.

PETERSON (V.O.)
Ms. Brewer, would you relate to
the jury what happened to you
about the time the band quit
playing and they were ready to
close up?

BREWER (V.O.)

Okay, the defendant had asked me
out --

EXT. HOLIDAY INN (NORMAN, OKLAHOMA) - NIGHT

*It's raining. LAVITA BREWER, 20s, exits double doors to
find Dennis standing beside a beat-up orange sedan.*

BREWER (V.O.)

-- and I had told him that I
really wasn't interested. That I
had plans.

Dennis opens the car's back door.

DENNIS

Come on over here. Let me show
you this little bar I got in the
back of the car.

*Brewer looks toward a pickup truck where a musician is
loading equipment.*

BREWER

My friends are waiting.

DENNIS

Come on. It'll just take a
second.

Brewer reluctantly steps toward the car.

BREWER

Just real quick.

*She sits tentatively in the back seat and looks at a
lineup of liquor bottles. Dennis immediately drops into
the driver's seat and STARTS the CAR. Ron is already in
the passenger seat.*

LAVITA

Hey.

Dennis HITS the GAS and the rear door snaps shut.

DENNIS

I'll let you out over by your
friends.

*But when he nears the truck he FLOORS it, PEELING out of
the parking lot.*

EXT. STREETS OF NORMAN - NIGHT

The orange sedan races through rain-soaked streets, running red lights.

BREWER (V.O.)

They said they were just joking, that they were going to take me back, but they took me all around Norman at a high rate of speed.

PETERSON (V.O.)

About how long did this ride take?

BREWER (V.O.)

Maybe 15, 20 minutes.

(then)

I got hysterical and started crying and begging to be taken back. The other man, Mr. Williamson, he said, "Well, I wish you'd just shut up."

In the middle of an intersection, the car slows, the ENGINE RUNNING ROUGH. The back door flies open and Brewer bolts out, running like a bat out of hell.

BREWER (V.O.)

They hadn't actually threatened me, but I didn't want to stick around and find out.

As she runs, she turns a corner and spots the orange car idling ahead, at the mouth of an alley, its hood up and Dennis and Ron out, looking at the engine, talking and laughing their heads off. She runs the other way.

INT. NEW YORK SUBWAY

Victor looks up from the transcript.

VICTOR

Oh crap.

The TRAIN SHRIEKS around a bend.

INT. DNA LAB - DAY

The DNA tech is at his desk, eating from a bag of microwave popcorn as he two-fingers his report into a computer.

INT. FRITZ HOUSE (KANSAS CITY) - DAY

Elizabeth's Grandmother rolls out pie dough, watching an anxious Elizabeth eat ice cream straight out of the carton. Elizabeth puts the ice cream in the freezer. Immediately gets it back out.

GRANDMOTHER

You want me to get you a bowl,
honey?

ELIZABETH

Everybody keeps saying it's going
to be okay, it's going to be good
news.

GRANDMOTHER

Well you know it is.

ELIZABETH

What if it isn't?

A possibility neither woman can bear to consider.

EXT. COACH LIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

Debbie Carter arrives dressed for her waitressing job. She walks toward the entrance.

INT. COACH LIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

A big room with dance floor, tables and a bar. It's early and there's hardly anyone here as Debbie greets another waitress.

EXT. FIFTH AVENUE (NEW YORK) - DAY

Victor hurries toward the law school. Something's up.

INT. DNA LAB

The lab tech slides a report into a fax machine and dials a number.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT

Deja vu. Scheck, Huy Dao and Victor stand in silence, watching the FAX MACHINE. It suddenly CHIRPS. The MACHINE HUMS. Victor steadies his breathing. A sheet of paper rolls slowly out. Victor doesn't move. Scheck reaches in and grabs the page. Reads.

And looks up to lock eyes with Victor.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - DENNIS'S CELL - DAY

Dennis writes a letter. DeForrest lies on his bunk. There's a COMMOTION outside the locked door, a man's voice SHOUTING something that sounds a lot like "Dennis Fritz." Dennis moves to look through the narrow window in the cell door.

He sees Mark Barrett coming toward him fast, shouting. Only two words can be made out through the steel door:

BARRETT

... DNA...
 (and)
 ... innocent...

Dennis's breath catches. Like a man in a dream, he can't find his voice. He finally croaks:

DENNIS

What'd you say?

Barrett pounds the cell door like a madman and shouts at the little window:

BARRETT

The DNA tests exclude you. You
 and Ron both. They prove you're
 innocent.

Inside the cell, Dennis holds onto the door for dear life.

INT. ELIZABETH FRITZ'S OFFICE - DAY

Elizabeth holding the phone, jumping up and down, screaming with joy, her arms around a co-worker who can't figure out what's going on.

INT. McALLISTER PRISON - CAFETERIA - DAY

Dennis going through the food line. Everyone is looking at him. Especially the guards. As if for the first time they're seeing a fellow human being.

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT - DAY

Victor comes through the door. David Block offers a high-five.

DAVID

Hey, guy. Hail the conquering hero.

Victor ignores the high-five.

VICTOR

I'll celebrate once those guys are free.

Huy interrupts. Terse.

HUY

Victor. Barry's looking for you.

VICTOR

What's wrong?

HUY

(puts up a hand)

Just... talk to Barry.

INT. SCHECK'S OFFICE - DAY

Victor waits with foreboding while Scheck finishes a phone call, finally hangs up and turns.

SCHECK

I spoke to Bill Peterson. Asked him to release Dennis.

VICTOR

(already knowing the answer)

And?

SCHECK

He said no.

VICTOR

We proved he didn't do it. He's already served 12 years. How can he not release him?

SCHECK

He got the judge to seal the results. He wants more tests. He says the fact the semen didn't match Fritz or Williamson proves nothing. He's still got all that hair evidence and he wants to test it.

VICTOR

He wants to test the hair?

SCHECK

He's got 13 hairs his expert swears belong to Dennis Fritz. He intends to check the DNA on every last one of them.

INT. McALLISTER CELL BLOCK

Dennis on the phone, adamant, angry.

DENNIS

You've got to stop him. Listen to me. I taught science. I know what can happen here. They took so many hairs from me, all they have to do is plant one in the evidence, one hair.

He looks around at the prison that holds him, overwhelmed with the frustration.

DENNIS

Oh, God. These bastards are never gonna let me out.

INT. COACH LIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

The place has filled up. The MUSIC is LOUD. Scattered couples dance. Glen Gore sits with friends around a big table. Debbie Carter delivers a tray of drinks, passing a series of men, some of whom look her way as she brushes by, each male face strangely sinister.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Out front, a cop is writing parking tickets.

SCHECK (V.O.)

This is Barry Scheck. Peter, are you on?

NEUFELD (V.O.)

I'm here.

SCHECK (V.O.)

Okay, Peter, why don't you describe what we had in mind.

INT. COURTHOUSE - JUDGE JONES' CHAMBERS - DAY

Across the desk from Jones sits Peterson. Neufeld's voice comes over the SPEAKER PHONE.

NEUFELD (V.O.)

Our client has a real concern, and we don't think it's far-fetched, that these hairs could have been tampered with, so we're proposing --

PETERSON

Now hold on, Judge. I take exception to that. No one tampered with any evidence.

NEUFELD (V.O.)

How can you know that? Have these hairs been in your possession 24 hours a day for the last 12 years?

JONES

(a look to quiet Peterson)

Now just -- Mr. Neufeld, tell us what you want to do.

NEUFELD (V.O.)

We propose that the hairs be washed sonically -- with sound waves -- before they're tested. We'll test the hair and whatever washes off the hair --

JONES

And what might that be?

NEUFELD (V.O.)

Dried blood or other biological material. I mean we're talking about hairs that came from on and under the body of Debbie Carter. If the washings don't contain any of her DNA, there's going to be reason to suspect those hairs were planted.

PETERSON

Here we go again, hair is being planted, evidence is being tampered with.

JONES

But you're agreeing then that the hairs will be tested.

SCHECK (V.O.)

Absolutely. In fact, we're even proposing an additional step. Run the DNA from the semen and the hair through the prison data bank. See if you get a match with anybody you've already got locked up.

JONES

Bill, you have a problem with that?

PETERSON

I say it's a wild goose chase. They're afraid some of this hair is going to match Mr. Fritz and they're just trying to muddy the water.

JONES

Well. Let's run the tests and see. Agreed?

Peterson throws up his hands.

JONES

Okay. Looks like we have ourselves a deal.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON - ISOLATION UNIT EXERCISE YARD - DAY

Ron Williamson paces a perfect square in the dirt, a restless sanity struggling to emerge.

RON

John Adams, elected 1796 with 71 electoral votes. Thomas Jefferson, elected 1800 with 73 electoral votes, reelected 1804 with 162 electoral votes. James Madison, elected 1808 with 122 electoral votes...

INT. DENNIS'S CELL - LATE NIGHT

Dennis lies on his bunk in darkness. The NOISE is OVERWHELMING: INMATES POUNDING and SHOUTING and MOANING. Dennis rolls over, eyes wide open, no hope of sleep.

EXT. COACH LIGHT CLUB - NIGHT

It's very late. The parking lot is nearly empty. Debbie Carter exits the club and walks toward her car. From behind her in the shadows, a male voice.

MALE VOICE

Debbie, hey, wait up --

Debbie turns with a nervous half-smile. Peers into the darkness.

DEBBIE

Who's there?

INT. CARDOZO LAW SCHOOL - MOOT COURTROOM - DAY

Student judge, student jury, student lawyers. Victor sits at the plaintiff's table. Emily is on her feet, addressing the court.

EMILY

When the plaintiff arrived at the emergency room, she described a list of symptoms that included headaches, nausea and double vision. She requested an MRI but the hospital refused, claiming the symptoms didn't warrant such an expensive test --

The doors at the back of the courtroom bang open. Scheck strides down the center aisle, reading loudly from a handful of pages.

SCHECK

"The DNA profile obtained from slide 27-1/hair 2, slide 32-3/hair 5 and slide 30-4/hair 1 is different than the DNA profiles obtained from the reference samples of Dennis Fritz and Ronald Williamson; therefore, both of these individuals are excluded."

Everyone turns toward Scheck, who reaches the rail and pages swiftly to the end of the report. Victor rises to his feet.

SCHECK

"None of the analyses performed on the seventeen hairs submitted show an inclusion of Ronald Keith Williamson or Dennis Leon Fritz."

(looks up)

Seventeen hairs. And the state's hair expert got it wrong every single time.

Victor's eyes burn.

VICTOR

And based on that they stole
twelve years of Dennis's life.

EMILY

How could that happen? Isn't there any science to this at all?

SCHECK

It's all subjective. And when the state examiner goes in knowing who the prime suspects are, what do you think is going to happen?

SUSU

Dennis would have done better if they'd just flipped a coin.

Victor turns for the door.

VICTOR

I've got to call him.

SCHECK

Hold on.

Victor stops. Now what?

SCHECK

There's something else you'll want to tell him. Remember we ran the DNA against the prison data bank on the chance we'd find the real killer?

VICTOR

There was a match?

SCHECK

(a tiny smile)

The state's only eyewitness.

EXT. COACH LIGHT PARKING LOT - NIGHT

Seen from a distance, Debbie Carter is at her car, door open, straining to make out the figure of a man walking toward her. He steps from the shadows. Glen Gore.

He steps close to Debbie and says something to her, unintelligible at this distance. She tries to climb into her car. Gore reaches for her. She pushes him away. Gets the door closed. FIRES UP the ENGINE and reverses away, illuminating Gore in the blaze of her headlamps.

INT. DEBBIE CARTER'S APARTMENT - NIGHT

Debbie leans with all her might against the front door as it bucks and a fist smashes through the glass. A man's arm reaches in and unlocks the bolt.

DEBBIE

Talking on the Mickey Mouse phone, as angry as she is frightened.

GORE

rips the phone from the wall. Tosses it.

INT. KITCHEN

Gore hauls Debbie, screaming, into the room. Grabs a wash cloth, shouts at her, yanks open the refrigerator and finds the bottle of ketchup. He drags her OUT OF FRAME.

HOLD ON the open refrigerator.

EXT. McALLISTER PRISON - DAY

A prison van waits, a driver and a guard smoking beside it, waiting.

Dennis Fritz emerges from the intake building, dressed in horizontally striped prison pajamas right out of the 1930s, shackled hand and foot. He is led toward the van.

Ron Williamson, dressed similarly, is led from another direction toward the van. The prisoners come face to face for the first time in a dozen years. It's an awkward reunion.

RON

Fritz.

DENNIS

Ronnie. Long time.

(then)

You still playing the guitar?

RON

Taught myself the blues.

The van door slides open. The men climb inside, shackles rattling.

EXT. WILL ROGERS TURNPIKE - DAY

Elizabeth Fritz's Honda in line at the toll booth.

INT. ELIZABETH'S CAR

She's a mess, somewhere between heartbreak and euphoria. She clears the booth and steps on the gas. Racing south toward Ada.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE - DAY

Something big afoot in this sleepy county seat. News vans and rental cars line the street. An Oklahoma City television REPORTER is interviewing Peterson.

REPORTER

Twelve years ago, you asked jurors to sentence Ronald Williamson and Dennis Fritz to death.

Peterson's answer is smooth and immediate.

PETERSON

Twelve years ago, unfortunately, science was not what it is today. We presented the testimony of experts. The jury did its best to weigh that and a great deal of other evidence, and judged the defendants guilty. But when these new DNA tests became available, I ordered them for both men. Both of them. Because no one is more interested in getting at the truth than I am.

INT. ELIZABETH FRITZ'S HONDA

Parked behind the courthouse. She's got makeup containers scattered all over the dashboard as she looks in the mirror, applying eyeliner with fanatic care. But she's crying and it keeps getting screwed up.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY JAIL

Dennis wears his old blue suit. He's struggling to remember how to tie the tie. Mark Barrett helps Ron straighten his collar. Scheck just stands back and watches, arms crossed, filled with emotions he's having a hard time concealing.

Finished dressing, Dennis and Ron offer their wrists to be cuffed.

EXT. COUNTY JAIL

Dennis emerges first, handcuffed, with Scheck at his side. Officers escort him across a lawn toward the courthouse, surrounded by local news crews. Ron follows with Mark Barrett and more officers.

INT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Reporters and curious locals watch from the gallery. One woman in the last row looks vaguely familiar, one of the original jurors come to see her work undone. And in the front row, dressed with perfect elegance, her makeup flawless, is Elizabeth Fritz.

Scheck and Barrett sit behind one table, Peterson behind the other.

A side door opens. Dennis and Ron are led into the room. Dennis's eyes search the gallery. It takes him a minute to spot the stunning woman his daughter has become. Her smile is incandescent.

The sight rocks Dennis. His knees shake. Out of desperation he finds his chair and drops onto it like a stone.

EXT. PONTOTOC COUNTY COURTHOUSE

Photographers' strobes flashing and television cameras rolling as Dennis and Ron address a forest of microphones. Dennis's arm is tight around Elizabeth and tears now streak her makeup. His voice is steady.

DENNIS

My daughter has made my life
whole, has kept me a whole person.

He pulls her closer. A REPORTER calls to Ron.

REPORTER

How do you feel, Mr. Williamson?

Ron doesn't respond. The question comes again.

REPORTER

Mr. Williamson, how do you feel?

Ron's eyes focus on the Reporter and he steps closer to the microphones.

RON

About what?

INT. INNOCENCE PROJECT

CLOSE ON Victor, a kind of despair in his eyes. He's reading. A stack of letters in his hands. Before him stands the heap of plastic mail bins filled with thousands of prisoners' letters. At last:

EMILY (O.S.)

Victor. You okay?

Victor doesn't look at her.

VICTOR

We're students.

(beat)

We shouldn't have to be the final
arm of justice.

(and)

It shouldn't be up to us.

PULL SLOWLY AWAY FROM Victor, Emily standing over his
shoulder, other students coming and going.

SUPERIMPOSE:

TWO YEARS AFTER THE RELEASE OF DENNIS FRITZ AND
RONALD WILLIAMSON, GLEN GORE WAS FINALLY CHARGED
WITH DEBBIE CARTER'S MURDER. IT HAD BEEN 18
YEARS SINCE HER DEATH. GORE IS AWAITING TRIAL.

TO DATE, OVER 40 MEN HAVE BEEN FREED THROUGH THE
EFFORTS OF THE INNOCENCE PROJECT.

THOUSANDS OF LETTERS WAIT TO BE READ.

The elevator doors open and the mail carrier emerges,
rolling his cart toward Juanita at the reception desk.

FADE OUT.

THE END

Get help writing a script that grabs Hollywood's attention – from writers who've done it.

Arrange for a professional script consultation from Christopher and Kathleen Riley, the screenwriters of *Actual Innocence* and the multiple-award-winning film *After the Truth*, at www.scriptHollywood.com.

“The Rileys constantly made me dig deeper into the characters and go for the emotional truth. Thanks to their input I now have a fellowship at Disney and a script that gets managers and agents to call me.”

Amy Snow
Winner
2004 Disney Screenwriting Fellowship

Find out more about how a consultation with the Rileys can help you by visiting www.scriptHollywood.com.

www.scriptHollywood.com