

Standard Deviation

A Comedy

by

Alan David Perkins

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Revision 9/28/01

STANDARD DEVIATION

The play takes place in the sheriff's office in the fictional town of Stillman's Corner, Alabama - a small rural town in West Central Alabama. The office is small and dusty, almost comically clichéd with a desk, a small jail cell and a door.

CHARACTERS

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| <u>DEPUTY CHIP TURNER</u> | Male, early 20's. Stillman's Corner's Deputy. Very simple. |
| <u>DR. ELI KRONENBERG</u> | Male, late 30's. A sharp, edgy, angry, sarcastic, very brilliant Columbia University biochemist. |
| <u>MOZELLE HUTTO</u> | Female, 40's. The Sheriff's wife. Alluring and forceful. |
| <u>SHERIFF WAYNE HUTTO</u> | Male, 40's. The Sheriff of Stillman's Corner. Very broad caricature - large and loud. |
| <u>NITA-KAY ZIRLOT</u> | Female, 19. The Deputy's fiancé. Mousey and naïve. |
| <u>DR. JOANNE KING</u> | Female, late 30's. Psychologist/biochemist from California Polytechnic University who has been studying Eli's findings. |
| <u>BILLY LADNIER</u> | Male, mid-30's to late 40's. Manager of the wire plant in Stillman's Corner. |

ACT 1 An early fall morning at the Sheriff Office in Stillman's Corner, Alabama.

ACT 2 SCENE 1: The next morning.
 SCENE 2: Later that day.

ACT 1

(The door flies open. ELI leads in, being rudely pushed by CHIP. ELI's hands are handcuffed behind him. CHIP pokes him with a shotgun. ELI acts very sarcastically.)

ELI

Hey, hey, hey! Watch it, Gomer! That hurts!

CHIP

You just get yer butt in there. Sheriff gonna have a field day on you.

ELI

Yeah, yeah. I'll bet.

CHIP

Resistin' arrest is a serious offense. Now, y'all gonna cooperate or do I have to lock ya up now?

ELI

I just love multiple choice.

CHIP

That does it, mister smart-mouth. You gettin' locked up.

ELI

Oh? On what grounds?

CHIP

Resistin' arrest, tress- ... uh ... tress- ...

ELI

Trespassing, perhaps?

CHIP

You jus' wait 'til Sheriff gets here. He gonna LOVE you.

ELI

Yeah, YOU HEAR THAT EVERYBODY?! I'M A DANGEROUS TRESPASSER! HIDE YOUR DAUGHTERS!! NOBODY'S SAFE WITH ME AT LARGE!!

(CHIP pushes ELI into the jail cell, upstage left.)

CHIP

There. Now stop yer caterwallin'.

ELI

Hey, Clem - what about the cuffs?

CHIP

(As he removes the handcuffs from ELI) My name is "Chip" ... not Gomer, or Goober, or Clem, or Cleetus, or Buford, or none o' them names you been callin' me. Jus' plain ol' "Chip."

ELI

A man named "Chip" with a badge.

(shudders)

Okay, Deputy Chip. When do I get my phone call?

CHIP

I'd rather wait 'til Sheriff get's here. 'Sides, he don't even know I caught me a real live tress- ... tress- ...

ELI

Trespasser?

CHIP

Yeah! A trespasser.

ELI

Your parents wouldn't happen to be brother and sister, would they?

CHIP

(Taking the rhetorical question seriously, giving it very serious thought)

Naw ...

(ELI dismisses his attempted insult, but CHIP is still thinking about it)

... but I think they's cousins.

ELI

(Exasperated) Oh, God.

CHIP

Prayin's a good idea right now. You may be locked up a loooooong time.

ELI

I'd better not be. My life's work is at stake. If you interfere I'll sue you for everything you've got.

CHIP

Go 'head. I ain't got much.

ELI

Surely you jest.

CHIP

I'm warnin' ya; Sheriff usually don't like slick city folk like you. Where you all from anyway? Huntsville? Birmingham?

ELI

Staten Island.

CHIP

Is that 'round Mobile a-ways?

ELI

NEW YORK!!! STATEN ISLAND, NEW YORK, YOU REDNECK, BACKWOODS, GRIT-EATING, SKOAL-DIPPING, INBRED DIPSHIT!!!

CHIP

Insultin' an officer o' the law ain't somethin' you wanna be doin'. That WAS an insult, weren't it?

(thinks)

Yeah, I think it was.

(CHIP sits at the desk and starts writing this down.

ELI paces nervously.)

CHIP (cont'd)

Could you repeat that insult please? I wanna be sure.

(beat)

What came after "backwoods?"

ELI

What test did you have to fail to become deputy?

CHIP

There weren't no test. I was just swore in. Name.

ELI

Excuse me?

CHIP

It's for the report. I need your name.

ELI

Kronenberg.

CHIP

Wassat?

ELI

Kronenberg - like the film director but with a "K."

CHIP

You're a film director?

ELI

When you went to school, did you ride the big bus or the little bus?

CHIP

I rode the big bus, of course. The little bus was for them special students.

ELI

Isn't that special.

CHIP

So, Mr. Cornberg, how you spell that?

ELI

Kronenberg. K-R-O-N-E-N-B-E-R-G.

CHIP

(Writing with great effort) And your last name?

ELI

Kronenberg IS my last name, putz. And it's DOCTOR Kronenberg, thank you very much.

CHIP

Oh. (erases profusely, then writes again with the same effort) First name?

ELI

Eli.

CHIP

Do not.

ELI

Eli! E-L-I! My name is "Eli!"

CHIP

Oh, (chuckles) I thought you was callin' me a liar.

ELI

Lord help me ...

CHIP

An' what was you doin' at the water tower, Mr. Cornball?

ELI

Oh, no you don't. I'm not telling you anything. Not until I make my phone call.

CHIP

That ain't happenin' til Sheriff gets here.

ELI

What's the matter? Can't dial a phone unless the Sheriff's here to hold your hand?

CHIP

You shouldn't say things about the Sheriff.

ELI

Why not?

CHIP

Because he's the Sheriff.

ELI

And that makes him special?

CHIP

You bet it does. Everybody looks up to the Sheriff.

ELI

Like you?

CHIP

Sheriff is the most wonderful person in the world, an' I wanna be just like him. He's even more loved in this town than the preacher!

ELI

So, where is his eminence? Getting his weekly shave and haircut?

CHIP

I guess you must'a passed him.

ELI

You mean he's actually ...

CHIP

Shave an' a haircut. 'Could take a while. You know how it is at them barber shops.

ELI

The cultural center of this burg, no doubt.

CHIP

Okay mister smart-mouth from Satin Island, you jus' hush up an' make yourself comfy for a while. You ain't goin' nowhere anytime soon.

ELI

You like reminding me about that, don't you. And, what did you do with all my equipment?

CHIP

It's in the back o' the truck.

ELI

You have a two hundred thousand dollars worth of scientific equipment, not to mention all of my PRICELESS research, in the back of a broken-down pick-up?! Step over here so I can rip your lungs out!

CHIP

It's safe in the truck ... providin' it don't rain, and it ain't broken-down. Just got the brakes realigned last Tuesday week. Your stuff'll keep til you get out.

ELI

I hope you won't take it personally that at this very moment I hate your guts.

CHIP

Naw. I'm just doin' m'job.

(CHIP leans back to read an "Archie" comic book.)

ELI

"Archie"?

CHIP

You can't read it til after Sheriff gets done with it. He loves Archie.

ELI

(A beat) He's gay, you know.

CHIP

(Long pause) Who? The Sheriff?

ELI

Archie.

CHIP

Naw he ain't.

ELI

Has he ever gotten laid?

CHIP

Sheriff's married.

ELI

I mean Archie.

CHIP

Oh. He's a bachel'r.

ELI

Think about it. Betty and Veronica have been chasing after him for years and he hasn't slept with either of them. He's gotta be gay.

CHIP

You don't know nothin'.

ELI

I think he's got a thing going with Reggie.

CHIP

Will you hush!

ELI

I mean, think about it. They're both young, attractive, virile ... Archie's submissive, Reggie's dominant ... grabbing ass in the locker room ...

CHIP

You're a sick man, Cornburn.

(ELI laughs at CHIP's reaction. Long pause as CHIP reads the comic book.)

ELI

So ... what do you do here?

CHIP

I'm the deputy. Now hush.

ELI

What does a deputy do? Exactly?

CHIP

I keep the peace. Hush.

ELI

By locking up trespassers? Awesome responsibility.

CHIP

(Annoyed) I serve the people by patrollin' the streets and answerin' calls. I do an important job 'round here.

ELI

(Sarcastically) I can imagine there's a real seamy side to this town.

CHIP

We get our share o' trouble.

ELI

Oh?

CHIP

Why, just last weekend I had to take in ol' Tommy Bosarge after the football game. Seems he put back a few too many and commenced to show off his private parts to some passin' females.

ELI

You should be proud.

CHIP

A few months ago we had two fellers hold up the Pack-a-Sack. Shot ol' Kevin Zirlott in the arm.

ELI

And you caught the men?

CHIP

Actually Sheriff Hutto did. But I helped with the reports.

ELI

A wise decision, I'm sure.

CHIP

He knows what he's doin'.

ELI

(A beat) So, do you see yourself having a future in law enforcement?

CHIP

What'cha mean?

ELI

Beyond this? You don't expect to be deputy forever, do you?

CHIP

Hmm. Never thought about it, really. I like it fine just as things are.

ELI

What kind of life is just being a deputy?

CHIP

Heck, I don't know. B'sides, I'm engaged t'be married to Nita-Kay Zirlott. She's Kevin's sister, you know - the one who got shot? I figure that's a good kind'a life.

ELI

Amazing. Does she know?

CHIP

Does she know what?

ELI

That you'd have to cram to be a moron?

CHIP

Sure she knows. (beat) Hey ... !

(MOZELLE storms in. She is definitely angry about something. She carries a large basket covered with a cloth napkin.)

MOZELLE

'Mornin', Chip. (kisses him ritualistically on the cheek)

CHIP

'Mornin', Mozelle. Sheriff ain't here.

MOZELLE

(Sniffs) No wonder it don't stink in here. Well, you can tell that worthless tub o' lard to pick up Junior from football practice after school today.

CHIP

Will-do. What's in the basket?

MOZELLE

Ol' Blubber Butt forgot his breakfast again. If I didn't bring it to him he'd take it outta my hide when he got home.

(beat)

If that man had half a brain he'd be dangerous.

ELI

That can be arranged, you know - the "half-a-brain" part.

MOZELLE

(Notices ELI - surprised, flirting) Well looky here. A prisoner. How nice. You findin' the cell comfy, sugar?

ELI

(Looks around - he really hasn't up until now) You know, now that you mention it, it's really quite nice.

MOZELLE

Quite nice. Y'hear that, Chip? Quite nice. I decorated it myself.

ELI

I'm impressed. I mean, I realize there's only so much you can do with cinder blocks and steel bars, but this is really quite nice ... in a retro low-tech sort of way.

MOZELLE

Thank you. So, you from around these parts?

CHIP

He's from 'round Mobile a-ways.

ELI

Staten Island.

MOZELLE

Wow, a New Yorker.

ELI

Please tell me, do they come any stupider than him around here?

MOZELLE

(Laughs) No, he's about as stupid as they come ... next to my husband.

ELI

Like I said, that can be fixed.

MOZELLE

(Extends her hand) Mozelle Hutto.

ELI

(Shakes her hand) Doctor Eli Kronenberg. It's a pleasure.

MOZELLE

Oh, the pleasure is all mine, I'm sure. So, DOCTOR, what they bring you in for? Murder? Robbery?

ELI

Trespassing.

MOZELLE

(A little put off - directed angrily to CHIP)
Trespassing?!

ELI

Yup. Just trespassing.

CHIP

Don't forget resisting arrest and calling me a ... a ... (looks at his notes) redneck, backwoods, grit-eating, skoal-dipping, inbred dipshit.

MOZELLE

(Laughs) That's accurate.

(ELI laughs with her.)

CHIP

It's not funny.

ELI

Yes it is. Go read "Archie."

CHIP

Sheriff won't take too kindly to this.

MOZELLE

(Mocking) "Sheriff won't take too kindly to this. Sheriff won't take too kindly to this." Son, I do believe your lips are super-glued to that man's butt. (to ELI) So doctor, what was you sayin' about my husband's stupidity bein' fixed?

ELI

(Bragging) You see, I'm a doctor of biochemistry. Lately I've been doing work with electrochemical neuronc stimulation. I believe there are ways to stimulate the brain to actually make a person smarter.

MOZELLE

(Swooning a little) Really? That's fascinating, Eli. I CAN call you "Eli," can't I?

ELI

Huh? Oh, of course ...

MOZELLE

Tell me more, Eli.

ELI

(A little hyped) Well, I've been experimenting with a formula that will actually stimulate some of the neurons in the frontal lobe just a little - sort of like waking up somebody who's asleep. There's so much of the brain we never use that if even a fraction of it is stimulated it could increase a person's intelligence tenfold!

MOZELLE

My, you do say such wonderful things.

ELI

I mean, do you realize the implications these findings can have sociologically by raising the mean I.Q., even by one standard deviation?

MOZELLE

I've never thought about it ...

ELI

I'll tell you, the possibilities are ASTOUNDING. I mean, take into consideration the crime rate, divorce, economy, school enrollment, national test scores ...

MOZELLE

(Interrupting) You married?

ELI

(Jarred) What? Oh, no. Why do you ask?

MOZELLE

Just curious. Get around much?

ELI

Uh ... no ...

MOZELLE

How do you feel about married women?

ELI

Mozelle, I think ...

MOZELLE

No need to answer now. I can wait. How long you in for?

ELI

Uh ... I have no idea. Hey, Deputy Chip, how long am I in for?

CHIP

At least twenny ... uh ... twenny ... uh ...

ELI

Two?

CHIP

Yeah. Twenny two hours.

MOZELLE

Twenty FOUR hours.

ELI

Who's side are you on?

MOZELLE

Sorry, honey. I'll try to make it up to you. Here, I got some homemade biscuits and gravy in the basket if you'd like.

ELI

Biscuits and gravy?

CHIP

Mozelle makes the best sawmill gravy in the whole state.

ELI

(Leary) Well, then, how can I refuse?

(MOZELLE takes a plate out of her basket, opens a biscuit on it and slowly pours on it a generous portion of white, thick gravy.)

MOZELLE

Now, if you like it there's more.

ELI

What on earth is that stuff?

CHIP

Sawmill gravy.

ELI

It looks like something that came out of a sore.

MOZELLE

C'mon Eli, give it a try. You wouldn't want to hurt my feelings.

(ELI closes his eyes and takes a reluctant bite. He chews painfully and eventually relaxes. He actually likes it.)

ELI

Not bad! What's in this stuff?

CHIP

You don't wanna know.

ELI

Maybe I should send it off to the lab to be analyzed. Then again ... (eats)

MOZELLE

So sugar, what exactly brings you to Stillman's Corner?

ELI

(Eating) Research. That's why it's important I get out. I can't miss anything.

MOZELLE

Research? Who'd wanna do research here?

ELI

Oh, you'd be surprised. Say, can I have some more of that stuff?

MOZELLE

Anything you want, sugar.

SHERIFF

(Off-stage) MOZELLE!!

CHIP

It's the Sheriff!

MOZELLE

Oh, you really think so? I thought it was a cow in labor.

(SHERIFF bursts in the door, making the grandest of entrances. CHIP obsequiously stands at attention.)

SHERIFF

Mozelle Arlene Hutto, what the hell are you doin' here?! You know how I hate it when you come to MY office!

MOZELLE

Well, if you hadn't forgotten your breakfast I wouldn't have had to stop by YOUR precious office.

SHERIFF

You know it's my "shave an' a haircut" day. I had breakfast over t'City Cafe with the mayor.

MOZELLE

Then I guess I wasted my trip.

SHERIFF

I guess you did.

(MOZELLE takes her basket and starts to leave.)

MOZELLE

(Grumbles to herself) Far be it from me to try to do something NICE for a change ...

(to SHERIFF)

Oh, by the way - make sure to pick up Junior from football practice after school.

SHERIFF

Here we go with the taxi service again.

MOZELLE

Sorry, your highness. I'm busy this afternoon. Besides, he's YOUR son too, or have you forgotten that as well? (tries to leave)

SHERIFF

Where do you think YOU'RE goin'?

MOZELLE

Dolores asked if I could help out at the needlepoint shop.

SHERIFF

You know how I feel about any wife o' mine workin'.

MOZELLE

And you know how I feel about sittin' at home doin' nothin'.

(MOZELLE storms out.)

SHERIFF

Lord, why do I put up with that woman?

ELI

I don't know ... she seemed alright to me.

SHERIFF

Who the hell are you?

CHIP

Uh ... Sheriff Hutto ...

SHERIFF

Chip, would you mind explainin' to me who this gentleman is in my jail cell and why he so chooses to comment on my wife?

CHIP

Well, this mornin' I was ... I was drivin' in to work this mornin' like I always do ...

SHERIFF

Is this gonna take long? Christmas is only a few months away and I wanna start shoppin' before the sales are over.

CHIP

Yessir. Anyways, I was passin' by the water tower like I always do and I sees this man up there messin' with some fancy machines and stuff. So I pick him up for
(takes his report to remember the word)
... tresspassin'.

(SHERIFF snatches the
report and reads.)

SHERIFF

It also says here resistin' arrest and insultin' an officer of the law.

(a beat)

Did he really call you this?

CHIP

Yessir, he did.

(beat - taking SHERIFF aside)

He also said Archie was a queer.

SHERIFF

(A beat) Who the hell is Archie?

CHIP

Archie Andrews.

SHERIFF

(A beat) Who the hell is Archie Andrews?

CHIP

(Showing SHERIFF the comic book) Archie Andrews. He said Reggie was a queer, too.

SHERIFF

Chip, sometimes you amaze me.

CHIP

Thank you, sir. I try real hard.

SHERIFF

(Pause - looks at report) New York, huh?

CHIP

Yessir. He tried to fool me and say he was from 'round Mobile a-ways.

SHERIFF

(Looks at report) Hmm. Cornyberg. Jewish?

CHIP

I didn't ask him, sir.

SHERIFF

(To ELI) Hey, Cornshit, you a jew?

ELI

If you're asking me if I ascribe to the Jewish faith, the answer is "yes."

(Long pause. SHERIFF eyes CHIP with a stern look, circling and pondering. Finally he holds his arms out and hugs CHIP.)

SHERIFF

Good work, Chip. I'm proud of you.

CHIP

(EXTREMELY relieved) Thank you, sir! Thank you!

SHERIFF

Imagine, a New York Jewish doctor in our jail. Your daddy would be bustin' with pride.

CHIP

I know he would, sir.

SHERIFF

(To ELI) So Doctor Cornfield, why exactly was you tresspassin' up on the water tower?

ELI

I know my rights. I'm allowed one phone call. I'm not talking until I get my phone call.

SHERIFF

Chip, did you allow this man his phone call?

CHIP

No sir.

SHERIFF

Why the hell not?

CHIP

I figured it'd be best if you was here when he made it.

SHERIFF

I swear, Chip Turner, you're the best deputy I ever had.

ELI

I'm in trouble.

SHERIFF

Okay Doctor, make your phone call and make it quick.
Is it a local call?

ELI

What do YOU think?

(SHERIFF pulls a phone to the cell and ELI starts frantically dialing. CHIP and SHERIFF sit at the desk and prop their feet up. SHERIFF leafs through the "Archie" comic book.)

ELI

(Into the phone) Hello, Lloyd?! Jesus, am I glad to hear your voice . . . what do you mean?

(beat)

What do you mean?! It's MY office, why SHOULDN'T I call you there?!

(beat)

WHAT?! Since when?!

(beat)

But that was my grant!

(beat)

They did, huh?

(beat)

Did they say why?

(beat)

But it works! Every test across the board came up positive. Didn't you show them the results?

(beat)

When I win that Nobel prize every university in the WORLD will be offering me grants.

(beat)

And they STILL pulled me?

(beat)

Me? I'm in jail.

(beat)

Stop laughing, Lloyd.

(beat)

ELI (cont'd)

Who? Dr. King? Cal Poly, right? Yeah, I've heard of him.

(beat)

Why would he come looking for me?

(beat)

What did you tell him?

(beat)

Oh, never mind why. How long ago did he come looking for me?

(beat)

Well, Lloyd, this sucks big time. But you've always been a good lab assistant. It was good working with you.

(beat)

The research? It's not going ANYWHERE until I get out of jail. You think they'll let me use one of the law professors?

(beat)

Anyone? Come on, Lloyd, I need help here.

(beat)

Just do something, please?

(beat)

Mmm hmm.

(beat)

Alright. I'll keep in touch. 'Bye.

(hangs up)

SHERIFF

WHAT was THAT all about?

ELI

I lost my grant. I'm out of a job.

SHERIFF

(Goadin') Cryin' a shame. From where, exactly, did you get fired?

ELI

I worked in the biochemistry department at Columbia University in New York.

SHERIFF

And what did you do?

ELI

Research. I headed a study on electroneuronic stimulation. I was here on sabbatical.

SHERIFF

Doing research ...

ELI

Yes, doing research. Look, I'm apparently high and dry. Just let me take my lumps. How much is bail?

SHERIFF

Bail? Until I know why you was trespassin' 'round the water tower there ain't gonna be no bail.

ELI

You can't do that!

SHERIFF

Sure I can. In this town I'm the law. I can do anything I want. Now, what was you doin' at the water tower?

ELI

I told you, I was doing research.

SHERIFF

Really? What kind of research?

ELI

You wouldn't understand.

SHERIFF

Try me.

ELI

This is my life's work! Explaining it to you in monosyllables is impossible.

SHERIFF

You're a real smart-alec, Dr. Cloneberg.

CHIP

See? Jes' like I tol'ja!

SHERIFF

Chip, son, shouldn't you be on patrol about now?

CHIP

I suppose I should.

SHERIFF

Then don't you think you should git?

CHIP

(Putting on his hat) Yes sir, I'm leaving right now.
(starts to exit)

SHERIFF

Say "hello" to Nita-Kay for me.

CHIP

I will, sir. Thank you, sir. (exits)

SHERIFF

(A beat) What a moron.

ELI

Finally something we agree on.

SHERIFF

Just 'cause I call him a moron don't mean YOU can do the same.

ELI

I'll watch myself.

SHERIFF

Okay, all the kids have gone to bed. Why don't you tell me what the research was all about 'fore I force it out of you?

ELI

I was checking water saturation levels.

SHERIFF

Saturation of what?

ELI

You know ... chemicals, minerals ...

SHERIFF

Now, I may be a small-town sheriff, but I'm not so stupid as to believe that a biochemist who does research and development on electroneuronic stimulation would be checking mineral saturation in Stillman's Corner, Alabama.

(ELI looks surprised that SHERIFF not only understood him but could speak in words of more than one syllable.)

SHERIFF (cont'd)

Do I look that stupid to you, Doctor Pittsburgh?

ELI

No sir ... and it's "Kronenberg."

SHERIFF

I know it's "Kronenberg." And I know you think I'm an idiot.

ELI

Does it show?

SHERIFF

All too much.

ELI

Okay, all insults aside. When can I get out of here?

SHERIFF

You'll be here til the Second Coming 'less you tell me what's goin' on.

ELI

I can't.

SHERIFF

Why?

ELI

It'll invalidate the research.

SHERIFF

How?

ELI

By biasing the data.

SHERIFF

Wha'd you do to the water, boy?

ELI

Nothing.

SHERIFF

What did you do to the water?

ELI

I don't know what you're talking about.

SHERIFF

I can hold out as long as you can. We're talkin' somethin' far more serious than tresspassin'. What did you do to the water?

(JOANNE KING barges in,
right on cue.)

JOANNE

I know what he did.

SHERIFF

Ah-HAH!

ELI

Oh, thanks a pant-load! I had him going!

JOANNE

(Shaking ELI's hand) Sorry. Doctor Joanne King. Call me "Jo." It's an honor.

ELI

(Surprised) Jo King? You're joking! (long pause as he realizes what he just said and starts laughing)
That's very good.

JOANNE

Actually I'm very serious.

(they both laugh)

My parents had a sick sense of humor. You must be Doctor Kronenberg. I saw you speak in Chicago.

ELI

I read about your work at Cal Poly. I never realized "Jo" was short for "Joanne."

JOANNE

It's a common mistake. I've been reading your findings in the journals as well. Some pretty impressive stuff.

ELI

Publish or perish.

SHERIFF

Jo King? I used to know a Joe King from High School. You any kin?

ELI

So, what are you doing here?

JOANNE

Your lab assistant said you'd be here. You lost your grant, you know.

ELI

I know. They didn't like me too much.

JOANNE

Your reputation precedes you - even at Cal Poly.

SHERIFF

Reputation? What reputation?

JOANNE

Grantless revolutionaries are never received well. They tend to be classified as, well, "crackpots."

ELI

Yeah, but it's us crackpots who come up with the really great discoveries that change the world.

JOANNE

Exactly. That's why I took your reports seriously and tracked you down.

ELI

So, why did you come? Trying to hitch your wagon to a winning horse?

JOANNE

Wouldn't you?

SHERIFF

Great. Now, what'd he do to the water?

ELI

Don't tell him - it'll bias the data.

JOANNE

How long ago did you introduce the agent?

ELI

(Irritated now that SHERIFF knows he'd done) Jesus! Why don't you just broadcast it on local TV?!

JOANNE

I'm sorry. I've never done this kind of field work. I'm still flaky on the procedures.

ELI

It's okay. We'll work around it.

(beat)

I dumped yesterday. It should be taking effect as we speak.

SHERIFF

You been dumpin' chemicals into our water?!

ELI

Look, Sheriff, it's nothing to worry about. Nobody will be harmed.

SHERIFF

I don't care! If you New York intellectual-types think you can just waltz into some backwoods, hick town and use 'em as guinea pigs you've got another thing comin' to ya.

ELI

I assure you that what I'm doing will not only benefit your community but all mankind!

JOANNE

He's right! I've read the journals! Do you have the control data?

ELI

The Greene County Board of Ed let me log into their database. In my briefcase I have school records and test scores for everyone in town, PLUS permission from the schools to re-test anyone I want! I also have three cross-sectioned groups ready to go. I retested them only four days ago. It's too bad I'm locked up.

JOANNE

But you already proved the experiment a success.

ELI

Only in the lab. This time I want to measure the sociological ramifications of an entire city effected.

JOANNE

Yes, but who can you use as a control group if the whole city is effected?

ELI

You see, Watsonia is only a few miles down the road from here and they have their own water supply. I can travel back and forth and compare the results. I have their stats as well ... in my briefcase.

JOANNE

Demographics?

ELI

Almost identical right down the line.

SHERIFF

'Cept our boys beat 'em every year at football.

JOANNE

(Beat) You picked a good town.

ELI

Except for this one snag in the plan. I need to be outside.

JOANNE

(To SHERIFF) Excuse me, Sheriff ...

(looks at his desk plate, mispronounces)

... Hootoe, but this man's work is very important and must be released in the name of science.

SHERIFF

(Patronizing) Is that a fact.

JOANNE

You ... uh ... you have to release him.

SHERIFF

I do, huh?

JOANNE

Yes, you do.

SHERIFF

And what if I don't?

ELI

He can't be reasoned with. Rethink your strategy.

JOANNE

How? Hit him over the head?

ELI

Maybe. Or maybe we just wait for the chemical to take effect.

SHERIFF

Take effect?! You mean I drank your chemical?!

ELI

I'm sure of it.

SHERIFF

How? I didn't drink any water ...

JOANNE

All you need is contact with water through immersion or consumption of any kind - coffee, foods ...

SHERIFF

(In shock, sits down) Am I gonna die?

ELI

I'm afraid not, at least not because of this. The chemical effects your brain, not your physiological make-up.

SHERIFF

(Starts feeling his head) What's gonna happen to me?
Will I go insane?

ELI

Hey, you can't take out what God didn't put in there in
the first place.

JOANNE

Sheriff Hootoe, I promise that you'll be absolutely
fine for the rest of your life. Now if you could just
release Doctor Kronenberg ...

SHERIFF

Are YOU insane? This man's goin' into the state pen,
but first I gotta tell the mayor ...

JOANNE

You will do no such thing!

SHERIFF

Why not?! This man poses a threat to an entire city!
The good people of this town elected me to maintain
justice and keep them safe from harm and the likes of
you two. We ain't much, but we're still good people
who pay taxes and are protected by the same
constitution and laws as you. There ain't no way I'm
lettin' a couple of slick New York fast-talkin' Jewish
doctors with degrees all over the place tellin' me what
I can and can't do in my town.

JOANNE

First of all I'm a practicing Catholic from California,
thank you very much. And second, if you breathe one
word of this to ANYONE there'll be such a panic that
you'll NEVER be able to control this city again.
People always think the worst in these situations and
you can be rest assured that these people will think
it's the end of the world. One word and you'll lose
all your respect, credibility AND, once Dr. Kronenberg
wins his Nobel prize for chemistry, you'll be the
laughing stock of the world. So make your decisions
wisely, Sheriff Hootoe. The damage has been done and
it can't be un-done and nothing you say or do can
change these facts.

SHERIFF

I can't change the law, darlin'. You can't conduct an
experiment on an entire community without permission.
An' here in the bible belt bein' Catholic is almost as
bad as bein' Jewish.

JOANNE

I'm sure Doctor Kronenberg has permission, don't you?

ELI

Sort of ...

SHERIFF

Sort of? You mean our city's law says you can use us for your experiment?

ELI

No, but it doesn't say I can't. It's actually all a matter of interpretation.

SHERIFF

Mmm. I see. Maybe I need to re-think MY strategy.

ELI

Maybe you do.

JOANNE

You don't have permission?!

ELI

Shh! It's all a matter of how you look at it.

(trying to look on the bright side)

I got permission from the school board to retest ...

SHERIFF

(Annoyed) You hush. You still ain't is goin' nowhere ... not til I figure out what to do with you. I got some folks at city hall who'd love to do some research of their own.

(picks up the phone, dials and waits)

Hello, Mavis. This is Sheriff Hootoe ... Sheriff Hutto. I need to do some checkin' into local laws. I'll hold.

(holds)

Hello, this is Sheriff Hutto. Who am I speaking to?

(beat)

Walter, is it? Well, Walter, I need for you to do me a favor. I need to find out the city's laws concerning conducting experiments ...

(beat)

... scientific ones. That's right.

(beat)

It does?

(beat)

Can't you find ANYTHING I can use?

(beat)

Okay, call me if you something. Take yer time - he ain't goin' nowhere. 'Bye now.

(hangs up)

(To ELI) This ain't over yet, boy. So while our boy Walter finds me a piece o' rope to hang you with you can just make yourself comfy. You're about to become a fixture here. I guess it'll most likely be between the feds or the state police who'll wind up with you. Either way, you're ass is grass and I'm holdin' the lawn mower.

ELI

(Sarcastically) Ooooooh, I'm scared.

SHERIFF

You should be.

JOANNE

What can I do?

ELI

You?

JOANNE

Me. I want to help with the experiment.

ELI

You do?

JOANNE

That's why I came.

ELI

I couldn't ask you to do that.

JOANNE

Sure you can. Come on.

ELI

But ...

JOANNE

Come on, Eli. I'm a scientist, too. I've been following your studies since you began. Lord knows I'm qualified. For that matter I've got one up on you. I have a PhD in psychology as well as biochemistry.

ELI

(Ponders) Are you in Mensa?

JOANNE

Yes I am.

ELI

Could you get me a re-test?

JOANNE

I'll see what I can do.

(MOZELLE returns.)

MOZELLE

I'm back. (to ELI) I thought you might like some coffee, sugar.

ELI

Coffee. That would be nice. Thanks.

SHERIFF

Woman, I thought I told you never to come here.

MOZELLE

(Serves ELI the coffee) Since when do I ever listen to YOU? I'm just showing our guest a little southern hospitality.

ELI

(Drinking) And it's greatly appreciated. Thank you, Mozelle.

MOZELLE

(Looking at JOANNE - a little jealous) Where'd SHE come from?

JOANNE

Doctor Joanne King, California Polytechnic. (shakes her hand) Call me "Jo."

ELI

Get it? Jo King? She's Jo King!

MOZELLE

I knew a Joe King from High School. You any kin?

SHERIFF

Mozelle ...

MOZELLE

You hush. (to JOANNE) Eli here has been telling me these interesting stories about makin' people smarter and everything. Do you do that too?

JOANNE

As a matter of fact, I do. I hold PhD's in biochemistry and psychology. I hope to be assisting Dr. Kronenberg with his most recent project.

(to ELI)

So, what did you tell her, "Eli"?

ELI

Nothing ... really.

SHERIFF

You're gonna make folks smarter?! Is that what you did?

JOANNE

So much for confidentiality.

ELI

What the hell - why keep it from him? According to him I'm already a goner. And remember, just a few minutes ago YOU were singing like a bird to Sheriff Bubba over there.

MOZELLE

Some people just can't keep their mouth shut.

JOANNE

So what do we do now? They already know too much.

ELI

Do both of you swear to secrecy?

MOZELLE

(Eager) I swear.

SHERIFF

Why?

ELI

If it gets out what we're doing the results will have no validity.

SHERIFF

Tell me and I'll think about it.

ELI

Within the next few hours everybody's I.Q. in the town of Stillman's Corner will jump up one standard deviation.

JOANNE

Basically that's fifteen points.

ELI

That means Deputy Chip would almost be up to "idiot."

MOZELLE

Really! That's marvelous!

SHERIFF

What if we don't want them extra points?

ELI

It's too late now. The experiment has already begun.

JOANNE

Now, this has to remain a secret or the entire experiment will be ruined. Nobody can know. This information can NOT leave this room.

MOZELLE

Oh, I get it! This is what you meant by seeing how it effects everything - like divorce rate and stuff.

ELI

Very good.

SHERIFF

I think it stinks.

MOZELLE

(Angry) Wayne ...

SHERIFF

Don't you "Wayne" me, Mozelle Arlene Hutto. I don't want my brain messed with and neither do you - and neither do the good people in this town ... all of whom are under my protection.

ELI

Yes, I'm living proof of the quality of your work.

SHERIFF

You hush.

MOZELLE

I don't know. Bein' a little smarter may be pretty good. Maybe I'll come to my senses and finally leave your sorry butt.

SHERIFF

I doubt THAT'll ever happen.

ELI

It could. This could have significant sociological implications.

JOANNE

You know, if you'll give me a go-ahead to let the guys at Cal Poly take a crack at this we may be able to bump things up even another standard deviation, or maybe even more!

ELI

Jo, please tell me you're kidding.

JOANNE

Why? Just think of it ...

ELI

I am, and that's what scares me. All we need is a society of super geniuses. It'll be just like *Brave New World*. We need the balance. Who's gonna work the post offices?

SHERIFF

I'm a little confused. What if you drink lots of this stuff? Or just a few drops?

ELI

Apparently the section of the brain the chemical stimulates only needs one jump-start. It doesn't matter how much or how little you consume. Fifteen points is ALL that will happen - permanently.

JOANNE

It's still an incredible breakthrough. If the results go well here, Dr. Kronenberg is a shoe-in for a Nobel Prize for chemistry.

ELI

Chemistry? Think of what we can do for society! Lower violent crime rates, divorce rates, increase productivity. It's worth a Peace prize if anything.

JOANNE

That's a long shot. You lost your grant, remember? Nobody respects a scientist who lost their grant.

(NITA-KAY quietly enters.
She is very mousey.)

ELI

Well, now those stuffed shirts in Mensa will be BEGGING me to join once the experiment is ... (stops in mid-thought when he notices NITA-KAY)

SHERIFF

Nita-Kay, what are YOU doin' here?

NITA-KAY

Is Chip here?

SHERIFF

Naw, honey. He's on patrol.

NITA-KAY

Oh.

(NITA-KAY bursts into
tears. JOANNE and MOZELLE
rush to console her.)

JOANNE

There, there. It'll be okay.

MOZELLE

You don't even know what's wrong.

JOANNE

Well, it seemed like the thing to say ...

NITA-KAY

I'm sorry ... I'm sorry ...

MOZELLE

That's alright, sugar. Now, what's got you so upset?

NITA-KAY

(Still sobbing) Nothing really.

ELI

Maybe she's mourning for the town since Deputy Chip is on patrol.

SHERIFF

You hush.

NITA-KAY

Actually, I'm very happy. This is more'n likely the happiest day of my life. (starts bawling loudly)

MOZELLE

(Realizes what is wrong) Oh my ...

(Pause. JOANNE gets a little frustrated but the two still attempt to console NITA-KAY.)

MOZELLE (cont'd)

Wayne, do something ...

(SHERIFF takes out a handkerchief and gives it to NITA-KAY, who blows her nose with it.)

MOZELLE (cont'd)

That's not what I meant. Call Chip in.

SHERIFF

Why?

NITA-KAY

No.

MOZELLE

Just do it, you big fat idiot. (points to his radio.)

SHERIFF

Oh.

(SHERIFF gets on the radio.)

NITA-KAY

Please don't call him.

SHERIFF

Chip, this is the Sheriff. Report to the station right now. Nita-Kay's here half in hysterics.

CHIP

(Over the radio) Okie dokie!

SHERIFF

(Turns off the radio) He otta be here any minute now.
The town ain't that big.

NITA-KAY

This isn't necessary.

MOZELLE

When'd you find out, sugar?

NITA-KAY

This morning, just now. (bawls)

JOANNE

You know what's wrong?

MOZELLE

Shoot girl, you have to be BLIND not to see. And you call yourself a doctor? Hell, I ain't half as smart as you and I can see that this poor girl is pregnant.

SHERIFF

Pregnant? From sweet, innocent Chip Turner? Damn - I never knew he had it in him.

NITA-KAY

You don't know him like I do. He's an animal.

MOZELLE

(Victorious) I KNEW it!

SHERIFF

I don't wanna hear this.

JOANNE

Oh my ... I had no idea.

MOZELLE

No kidding.

SHERIFF

(Into the radio) Chip Turner, you get your butt back to this station NOW!!! (turns off the radio) That boy ... I'm so proud. He's like the son I never had.

ELI

That's probably what his folks wished.

MOZELLE

I'm sure your own son will be happy to hear that.

NITA-KAY

Please, you can't say anything to Chip.

SHERIFF

Don't tell me it ain't his.

NITA-KAY

No, it's his. He's the only one.

SHERIFF

Then I'll make sure he does the right thing.

JOANNE

Oh? And what's that?

SHERIFF

Why - by marryin' her, of course.

NITA-KAY

But I'm too young. I'm only nineteen years old.

MOZELLE

I was married when I was sixteen.

NITA-KAY

My whole life should be ahead of me.

(directly to JOANNE)

Right?

JOANNE

I ... uh ... sure it should ...

MOZELLE

What do you know about this poor girl's life? Maybe this is the best thing that could happen to her.

NITA-KAY

(Still to JOANNE) How? How could being tied down to a husband an' a child be the best thing for me? There's so much out there I've never seen. Right?

JOANNE

I really shouldn't be involved ...

MOZELLE

What? What's out there? This is Stillman's Corner, honey. This ain't New York or California.

(to JOANNE)

All this girl has to look forward to is bein' promoted to head cashier at the Winn-Dixie, rentin' video tapes and once in a while goin' down to Demopolis to go shoppin'. Most girls her age are havin' their second already.

JOANNE

But she's so young ...

MOZELLE

You big city folk know nothin' about people. This is why we're here - this is what we're raised to think about. Family and children. While you two are out changin' the world, we're supplyin' you with one to change. So don't you come here puttin' your citified ways an' tryin' to change us. We like it here just fine, and poor Nita-Kay here is bustin' with happiness - right Nita-Kay?

(NITA-KAY moves from
MOZELLE to JOANNE and
bawls harder.)

MOZELLE (cont'd)

Then again, maybe not.

SHERIFF

(Laughs loud and broad) That's tellin' her, Mozelle!

MOZELLE

You hush - big ol' tub o' lard ...

NITA-KAY

There's so much I want to do ... so much I want to see. I want to see New York. I want to see Paris. I want to see Atlantis.

ELI

Atlantis doesn't exist!

JOANNE

Quiet!

NITA-KAY

I always felt like I wasn't livin' the life I should be livin'. I've always done what other folks wanted me to do. Now I'll never be able to do anything. I'll be tied to a husband and a baby.

MOZELLE

This is what life is all about, sugar. It ain't so bad.

NITA-KAY

Yes, it is. Have you ever traveled? Have you seen the world?

MOZELLE

Well, I been to Mobile once for the Mardi Gras - and we went to Graceland the summer before last ...

NITA-KAY

(To JOANNE) What about you?

JOANNE

(Awkward) Me? I've ... I've been around. Look, I shouldn't get involved ...

NITA-KAY

(Interrupting) Have you ever seen Chicago?

JOANNE

It's really windy.

NITA-KAY

New York?

JOANNE

The homeless are everywhere.

NITA-KAY

Paris?

JOANNE

The people are so rude.

NITA-KAY

Atlantis?

JOANNE

It's so ... wet.

ELI

I told you, Atlantis doesn't exist!

MOZELLE

I thought you WANTED this girl to see the world?

JOANNE

I have no right to tell this girl what she should or shouldn't do. I just think she's too young to be tied down to a family.

MOZELLE

Then what should she do?

JOANNE

I don't know - get an abortion? Go to college?

ELI

I don't think they believe in either in this town.

JOANNE

You're making this worse for yourself, you know.

ELI

Oh yeah? So who made YOU a social worker?

NITA-KAY

Seein' the world is my own idea. I been readin' books and magazines all my life about travel and stuff. This lady didn't give me any ideas I already didn't have.

JOANNE

Seeing the world isn't all it's cracked up to be. Everyone knows that the best journey's take place inside your own mind. Besides, it's less expensive that way and the living conditions are more reliable.

NITA-KAY

I know. I just don't know what I want to do.

MOZELLE

You'll marry Chip and raise a family, that's what you'll do.

JOANNE

And what if she doesn't want to? What if she doesn't love him?

MOZELLE

You ever been married?

JOANNE

No, but that has nothing to do with it ...

MOZELLE

Then you wouldn't understand.

JOANNE

Oh? You two are a marriage counselor's nightmare!

NITA-KAY

Please, Sheriff, don't tell Chip anything. I have to figure this out myself.

SHERIFF

Chip's a responsible boy. He'll be a good husband and father.

ELI

On a deputy's salary?

NITA-KAY

Please don't tell him.

SHERIFF

But ...

NITA-KAY

(Interrupting) Please.

SHERIFF

Nita-Kay, I ...

NITA-KAY

(Interrupting) Please.

SHERIFF

(A beat) Alright. I could never turn you down, Nita-Kay. But you best do the right thing one way or another.

NITA-KAY

I will, Sheriff. Thank you.

(hugs him)

I best be gettin' over to the Winn-Dixie. They won't take too well to me bein' late.

SHERIFF

Chip'll be here in a minute. He'll give you a ride.

NITA-KAY

No, I'd rather not see him. Not just yet. (exits)

MOZELLE

(Calling after her) Nita-Kay ...

JOANNE

She's gone.

MOZELLE

Don't you talk to me. You don't know nothin'.

JOANNE

I'm sure she'll do the right thing.

MOZELLE

Seein' the world ain't the right thing.

JOANNE

I never said she should.

MOZELLE

You sure sounded like it.

JOANNE

Everybody's different. What's right for you may not be right for someone else.

MOZELLE

It is in Stillman's Corner. And where do you get off talkin' about me and Wayne like that?!

JOANNE

Well, you always seem to be at each other's throats. And the way you dote over Eli ...

MOZELLE

What me and Wayne do ain't none o' your business. And besides, you got no claim on Eli.

ELI

Hey, don't drag ME into this.

JOANNE & MOZELLE

(Unison) HUSH!

SHERIFF

All o' you hush! I got work to do!

(Suddenly BILLY bursts in.
He is quite upset.)

BILLY

Sheriff ...

SHERIFF

Billy Ladnier! What brings you here?

BILLY

Sheriff, put out an A.P.B.!

SHERIFF

Calm down, Billy. What's the trouble?

BILLY

The wire plant's been robbed.

MOZELLE

(Gasps) Oh my God ...

SHERIFF

Are you sure?

BILLY

Positive.

SHERIFF

What'd they get?

BILLY

The payroll - almost thirty thousand dollars!

SHERIFF

WHAT?!! Who did it?!

BILLY

I don't know.

SHERIFF

Did anyone see 'em take it?

BILLY

I don't think so.

SHERIFF

When'd it happen?

BILLY

I don't know.

SHERIFF

Where'd the money come from?

BILLY

I don't know.

SHERIFF

(A frustrated beat) Billy Ladnier, you ain't cooperatin' too much. You sure you the wire plant's been robbed?

BILLY

Positive.

SHERIFF

Care to tell me how?

BILLY

(Checks his watch) Well, as you know I been managin' the wire plant since my daddy died - some six years ago.

SHERIFF

Go on ...

BILLY

(Checks his watch again) Well, this mornin' when I log onto the computer to do payroll I notice the general account is shy about thirty thousand dollars. So, I think, this might just be a bookkeepin' error. After all, I did have to fire Evelyn last month for dippin' into the petty cash.

SHERIFF

Yes, I remember.

BILLY

I always s'pected Evelyn was up to no good, but the petty cash problems didn't seem to go away after she left. So I start lookin' and pokin' and proddin' into the accounts and there seems to be almost thirty thousand dollars missin' from the payroll account.

SHERIFF

Any checks written lately that you didn't know about? Any expenditures?

BILLY

Nope. It's business as usual. Someone cracked into the system and took thirty grand. (checks watch)

ELI

Excuse me ...

SHERIFF

What you want now?

ELI

I just have a question for Mr. Ladnier.

BILLY

Me?

SHERIFF

Keep out of this, Kronenberg.

BILLY

It's alright, Wayne. (checks watch) What's on your mind?

ELI

It's just that ... is the wire plant located anywhere near the water tower?

BILLY

No, it's right smack dab b'tween here and Watsonia.

ELI

Oh. That's all. Sorry to trouble you.

BILLY

But I live right off the chlorination treatment facility.

(ELI looks concerned.)

SHERIFF

What you gettin' at, Kronenberg?

ELI

Nothing. We'll talk about it later.

BILLY

(Impatiently checks his watch) So Sheriff, what do I do now?

SHERIFF

(Trying to rush BILLY along) I'll send Chip over to fill out the reports. 'Mean time you just go 'bout your business. We'll get to the bottom of it.

BILLY

Have him hurry, will you? Insurance purposes and all. I have a bunch of employees waitin' for their paychecks.

SHERIFF

Don't you worry 'bout a thing.

BILLY

(Getting up to leave) I appreciate this, Wayne.

SHERIFF

No problem. Give my best to Shelly.

BILLY

I will. Thanks. (exits)

(Long pause. ELI knows something and is pensive. SHERIFF is furious and circles as he steams.)

SHERIFF

Alright, Kronenberg. What's goin' on.

ELI

Look, I was afraid something this might happen. But not so soon ...

JOANNE
Oh my ...

SHERIFF
This wasn't part of your experiment too, was it
Kronenberg?

ELI
Not exactly ...

SHERIFF
Talk to me, Kronenberg.

ELI
(Nervously) The sociological ramifications of this
experiment can range from the subtle to the dramatic.
Some shifts will take place. Some will be very
noticeable, but some will go virtually unnoticed.

SHERIFF
Kronenberg ...

ELI
Imagine someone standing on the edge of a cliff, unable
to jump. Just one little push ...

SHERIFF
Kronenberg ...

ELI
Even the best cures have some side effects.

SHERIFF
Get to the point before I whup it out of you.

ELI
You see, in my original hypothesis of the social
experiment I predicted many things. It just so happens
that one of the predictions involved a decrease in
violent crime but an increase of white collar crime.

SHERIFF
The point, Kronenberg ...

ELI
Fifteen points may have been all it takes to turn a
would-be embezzler into an actual embezzler.

SHERIFF
You think Billy did it?

ELI

All I'm saying is that theft could have something to do with the experiment. It's all in my notes.

SHERIFF

I wanna see these notes. Lord knows I want to know what ELSE to expect.

ELI

Feel free. Deputy Chip has them locked up in his truck.

(CHIP bursts in.)

CHIP

You call?

SHERIFF

Chip, you incompetent boob, get Doctor Kronenberg's belongings out of the back of your truck b'fore I tan your hide.

CHIP

Yessir. (goes to exit) What was you sayin' on the radio about Nita-Kay?

MOZELLE

Wayne ...

SHERIFF

(Grumbles) Nothin'. Just get Doctor Kronenberg's belongings.

(to ELI)

So, a little smarts ain't necessarily a good thing, is it doctor?

CHIP

(Notices JOANNE, he takes off his hat) Oh my. Who's this pretty woman?

JOANNE

(Takes his hand and, unfortunately, his heart) Doctor Joanne King. Call me "Jo."

CHIP

Anything you say, Jo. And might I say that ...

SHERIFF

(Interrupting) Chip? The truck?

CHIP

(Snaps back) Oh, sorry Sheriff. (exits)

JOANNE

I can see why Nita-Kay has reservations.

SHERIFF

Don't you go bad-mouthin' my deputy. Only I can bad-mouth my deputy.

JOANNE

That's a stupid policy.

ELI

Hey, don't make things any worse, okay?

JOANNE

YOU should talk.

SHERIFF

I don't think things can GET much worse for you, Kronenberg. As far as I'm concerned YOU'RE the one responsible for that robbery.

ELI

Oh? How do you figure that, Sherlock?

SHERIFF

For starters, Billy Ladnier is an upstanding, church-goin' member of this community, as was his daddy and his daddy 'fore him. Now, I'm not saying that he don't have what it takes to break the law, but when you grow up with someone you tend to know what they're made of. Billy wouldn't do something like that.

ELI

Maybe not before.

SHERIFF

So if you're saying that it was your experiment that caused the robbery, it would likely go that it's your fault.

ELI

WHAT?! I can't believe how stupid you are!

SHERIFF

Stupid? Stupid?! No, DOCTOR Kronenberg, it's smart. I got a boost in the brain too, remember?

ELI

I don't think it's taken effect yet.

SHERIFF

Oh? How can you tell?

ELI

BECAUSE YOU'RE STILL A FUCKIN' IDIOT!!

SHERIFF

That's it! That's it! I've had it with you,
Kronenberg.

(starts frantically dialing the phone)

Research or not, I'm callin' the mayor, an' the
governor, an' the president if I have to. Hell, give
me a rope and a tree an' I'll take care of this myself!

(MOZELLE hangs the phone
up while SHERIFF is
waiting for an answer.)

SHERIFF (cont'd)

Goddamnit woman, what the hell are you doin'?!

MOZELLE

Stopping you from making a terrible mistake.

SHERIFF

Get off that phone, woman, or ...

MOZELLE

Or what?

SHERIFF

Or you'll be tastin' the back of my hand!

MOZELLE

You wouldn't dare.

SHERIFF

(Hysterical) You get away from that phone, you
worthless tramp! You was nothin' when I met you and
you're nothin' now, and you'll ALWAYS be nothin'! And
don't you EVER get in the way of me doin' my job,
y'hear me?! Do that again and I'll KILL you!!!

(CHIP suddenly enters
carrying a large box
decorated like a Christmas
present with a briefcase
on top of it. CHIP rams
SHERIFF in the back,
practically knocking him
down.)

CHIP

Oh my gosh! I'm so sorry, Sheriff.

MOZELLE

(Laughs nervously) Chip, I take back all the bad things I've ever said about you.

CHIP

Thank you, Mrs. Hutto. (a beat) What bad things?

SHERIFF

(Groggy) Chip ...

CHIP

Uh-oh. (backs up)

SHERIFF

Chip ... is that, uh ... is that the doctor's equipment?

CHIP

(Scared) Yessir.

SHERIFF

Do they all look that stupid?

ELI

Heh ... it's camouflage.

CHIP

There's four more boxes like it, an' a bunch o' jugs.

SHERIFF

Then I suggest you get them all in here.

CHIP

Yessir. (exits)

SHERIFF

Mozelle, I want to apologize.

MOZELLE

Don't make me laugh.

SHERIFF

But ... I'm sorry.

MOZELLE

You're always sorry. When'll you stop bein' sorry?

JOANNE

I think she's got a point ...

SHERIFF

Stay out of this, Jo. It ain't your business. (pause)
Jo. King. Jo King. (chuckles)

JOANNE

What's the matter with you?

SHERIFF

Jo King! (laughs HARD)

MOZELLE

(Realizes the joke) Jo King! I get it! (Laughs HARD with the SHERIFF)

ELI

It's happening.

JOANNE

What's happening?

ELI

The chemical.

(CHIP returns with another box. He smiles and chuckles along with everybody.)

CHIP

Hey, what's so funny?

ELI

Deputy Chip, do you remember this woman's name?

CHIP

Sure I do. It's Doctor Jo King.

(a beat)

Jo King! Jo King! (joins SHERIFF and MOZELLE)

ELI

(To JOANNE) In the briefcase there's permits, test results, control information, saturation levels, schedules, everything you need to know. I need you to be my eyes and ears.

JOANNE

(Taking the briefcase) Doctor Kronenberg, it's an honor to finally be working with you.

ELI

It's going to be a lot of work, Jo. We're making history.

JOANNE

I know. I'm ready. And by the way, from now on you'd better call me "Joanne."

Fadeout

* END OF ACT 1 *

ACT 2, SCENE 1

(Next morning. SHERIFF and CHIP sit on either side of the desk, reading.

CHIP reads a book, SHERIFF looks through a stack of papers and folders. Both are quite involved. ELI sits in his cell reading "Archie.")

ELI
(Laughing) Gay!

SHERIFF
Fascinating.

ELI
Gay, gay, gay!

SHERIFF
These results are astounding.

CHIP
Shh!

ELI
He should be wearing a dress!

SHERIFF
I like Veronica's hooters.

CHIP
Will you two hush?!

ELI
Come on, Sheriff, you can't tell me that Archie is straight?

SHERIFF
Naw, he's queer as a three-dollar bill. (laughs)
That's why I read it.

ELI
I thought it was for the intellectually stimulating scenarios and realistic adolescent characterizations.

SHERIFF
Nope. Hooters and fairies.

CHIP
Doggone! Some of us are tryin' to concentrate!

SHERIFF

Oh, come off it, Chip. Who peed in YOUR corn flakes?
And what you readin' anyway?

CHIP

(Shows him) Textbook. Criminal law.

SHERIFF

What on earth are you readin' that for?

CHIP

I dunno ... I just been thinkin' about bein' a deputy
an' workin' here and all ...

SHERIFF

It ain't necessary for you to be thinkin'.

CHIP

Yeah, but while I'm here I thought I might just ...

SHERIFF

(Interrupting) As long as you're here you just do as I
say and everything'll be fine.

CHIP

Yessir. It's just that I was thinkin' about my future
...

SHERIFF

I told you to leave that alone! You've got a fine
future here with me.

CHIP

But I might want something else.

SHERIFF

You're my deputy and that's it and that's the way it'll
always be.

CHIP

But I was thinkin' that I ...

SHERIFF

(Interrupting) You ain't fit to be thinkin', Chip.

CHIP

And why not?!

SHERIFF

(A beat) Did you just talk back to me, son?

CHIP

Yessir ... I mean, nosir. It's just that ...

SHERIFF

(Takes CHIP's book away from him) You don't need to be learnin' anything like this. I'm the law of this town, not you.

CHIP

I'm sorry, sir, but I have to think about my future.

SHERIFF

You won't have a future if you keep talkin' stupid like that.

CHIP

But Doctor Kronenberg said that I should ...

SHERIFF

(Interrupting) KRONENBERG?! I knew he had somethin' t'do with this. Kronenberg, you keep your mitts offa my deputy, y'hear?!

ELI

I didn't do anything!

SHERIFF

Chip, what has Doctor Cornball been tellin' you?

CHIP

Just that there ain't no future in bein' deputy an' I should think about my future.

ELI

That's not what I said at all!

CHIP

Sure it is. An' you're right. I mean, some day I want to marry Nita-Kay. What kind'a life can bein' a deputy be for her?

SHERIFF

This is about money, ain't it.

CHIP

Nosir. It's about respect.

SHERIFF

People respect you.

CHIP

No they don't. They respect you 'cause you're the Sheriff. They laugh at me.

SHERIFF

Who laughs at you?

CHIP

Ever'body. You do. You think I'm stupid.

SHERIFF

Chip, I don't mean those things.

CHIP

No, it's true. I'm just a backwoods redneck with no education after high school who got t'be deputy 'cause you an' my daddy was best friends once. I ain't fit t'wear this badge. (takes off his badge)

SHERIFF

Chip, wait. What will you do?

CHIP

I'm goin' to Demopolis and join the Police Academy.

SHERIFF

They'll eat you alive, son.

CHIP

They might. But at least I can wake up in the mornin' and respect myself. Right now I ain't nothin' but ashamed. (exits)

SHERIFF

(Long pause) This is your fault, Kronenberg.

ELI

Sure. Why not.

(CHIP returns.)

SHERIFF

Wassamatter, son?

CHIP

I don't even know why I just walked out. I didn't have nowhere to go. Sheriff, what am I gonna tell Nita-Kay?

ELI

How about the truth?

CHIP

Hmm. It might work.

SHERIFF

But what about me? What'll I do without a deputy?

CHIP

My shoes ain't that big. Someone'll fill 'em easy.

SHERIFF

(Pause) Chip ... son ... any chance of you stayin' on til I get a replacement?

CHIP

(Pause) Okay, sure. I just sent my application off t' the police academy this mornin' anyways. I ain't been accepted yet.

SHERIFF

You know, a few phone calls an' I'll have you in there faster'n you can say "Paul 'Bear' Bryant."

CHIP

I know, an' I appreciate it. Jus' let me do this on my own.

(SHERIFF hands CHIP his badge back. They hug.)

SHERIFF

I'll miss you, y'know.

CHIP

I'll miss you, too. I'll make you proud.

SHERIFF

Make yourself proud. I'm already proud.

(They hug again. JOANNE pensively enters.)

JOANNE

Excuse me, gentlemen. May I see that folder I left you, Sheriff?

(CHIP snaps to attention and straightens his appearance.)

SHERIFF

Huh? Oh, sure. Sure.

ELI

Joanne! Mazel Tov! How goes the research?!

JOANNE

No time. Lots to do. (takes the folder) See ya.

ELI

Whoa! Wait! You have to tell me - what's happening?

JOANNE

It's amazing. Truly amazing. But I can't talk now ...

ELI
Joanne ...

JOANNE
Later.

CHIP
Uh ... Doctor King ... can I give you a lift anywhere?

JOANNE
Huh? Oh, certainly. Why not.

CHIP
Y'mean it? Oh boy!

ELI
Hey, Chipper - be careful. She can eat you alive, too.

CHIP
Don't be talkin' dirty about Doctor King. She's a fine woman.

JOANNE
'Bye, Eli.

(JOANNE takes CHIP's arm.
They exit.)

ELI
I can't believe that!

SHERIFF
Neither can I. That boy's fixin' t'be married to Nita-Kay an' he's comin' on to an older woman.

ELI
Not that - I mean Joanne wouldn't tell me what's happening! It's MY research and she deliberately brushed me off!

SHERIFF
It is unusual. I fig'rd she was sweet on you.

ELI
Who, her? No, she just want's to ride on my coattails.

SHERIFF
Sure she ain't tryin' to steal your limelight?

ELI

It's too unethical. Pulling something like that could hurt her credibility, and then who'd want to work with her? We scientists don't forget anything. On the other hand, I wouldn't put it past her to try to get her cronies at Cal Poly to muck with the formula.

SHERIFF

Think it can be done?

ELI

Hey, I didn't think fifteen points could be done. The chance of that bumping up even more is not only probable but likely.

SHERIFF

If those notes o' yours were accurate, there's nothin' from stoppin' your basic idea from bein' modified to customize anybody's I.Q.

ELI

Just like *Brave New World*. (Beat - suddenly frantic)
Sheriff, you have to let me out! She could ruin mankind as we know it!

SHERIFF

Like you did?

ELI

No! I improved it.

SHERIFF

Billy Ladnier's a crook, Chip's leavin', Doctor King's up to no good - I don't think you're improvin' much 'round here. At least Mozelle isn't goin' off the deep end.

(MOZELLE flings open the door. She stands in the doorway, looking like a cross between the Tazmanian Devil and the Incredible Hulk. She is, in a word, livid. She holds a dozen flower stems and the same basket from Act 1.)

SHERIFF (cont'd)

(Nervous) Mozelle, honey! Glad you could stop by.

(MOZELLE commences to beat
SHERIFF over the head
continuously with the
flower stems.)

MOZELLE

(Syllable beating) You fat, ugly, stupid, heartless,
inconsiderate, foul-smellin', son of a bitch, bastard!

SHERIFF

I said I was sorry!

MOZELLE

And I said I hated you.

SHERIFF

Aw, Mozelle honey. Please come home.

MOZELLE

Not on your life, fat boy. (plunks some papers down in
front of him)

SHERIFF

What's this?

MOZELLE

Divorce papers.

SHERIFF

Mozelle, honey ...

MOZELLE

Don't you "Mozelle honey" me, Charles Wayne Hutto. I
plan on making you pay for all of the hell you've put
me through for the past fifteen years. All the
yellin', all the fightin', all the slavin', all the
bullyin' ...

SHERIFF

But honey, I love you ...

MOZELLE

You sure got a poor way of showin' it.

SHERIFF

I apologize. I apologize for everything.

MOZELLE

A little too late, don't you think?

SHERIFF

'Zelle, I can change ...

MOZELLE

You said that fourteen years ago ... and thirteen ... and twelve ... and at least once a year since.

SHERIFF

We could go back to that marriage counselor you liked ...

MOZELLE

He won't see us since you gave him a summons for jay-walking that last time. It's over, Wayne. Finally over. And you know what? I feel great! This is the best thing I've ever done! For once I can think about me.

SHERIFF

What about Junior?

MOZELLE

You can have him.

SHERIFF

WHAT?!!

MOZELLE

You've always been a poor father, Wayne. You treat Chip like your son and your son like nobody. He needs you, Wayne, but you keep pushin' him off on me. He needs you, and you need him.

SHERIFF

What about you? Where will you go? What will you do?

MOZELLE

Oh, I don't know - travel? See the world. Go to New York, or Chicago, (to ELI) or Atlantis.

ELI

Why does everybody think Atlantis exists?

MOZELLE

Or maybe I'll just go wherever you go, Eli. I brought you some breakfast. (starts to unload the basket for ELI)

SHERIFF

(Pensively) I hadn't had breakfast yet ...

MOZELLE

I'm through cookin' for you. Now I'll cook for Eli.

ELI

Mozelle, I don't think this is right ...

MOZELLE

Why not? In a few weeks I'll be single. Hell, in a few hours we can be legally separated from bed and board, so I can sleep with whoever I want and HE can't use it against me.

ELI

Somebody's been doing their homework, I see.

MOZELLE

It could work, Eli. I know you find me attractive.

ELI

Mozelle, that's not the point.

MOZELLE

Oh? What is?

ELI

You'll be on the rebound.

MOZELLE

I've been on the rebound for the last fifteen years. I'm ready for something better as soon as possible. I'm ready for you, Eli.

ELI

But what about all you said about saying here where you belong? What about family? What about providing people like me with a world to change?

MOZELLE

Did I say that?

ELI

Just yesterday.

MOZELLE

(Pause as she ponders) Screw it.

ELI

What about Nita-Kay?

MOZELLE

She's a grown-up. Let her think for herself. You can't talk me out of this.

(to SHERIFF)

Look over the papers. I'll be back later to pick 'em up.

(to ELI)

G'bye, sugar.

(gives ELI a big kiss, who resists)

I'll see you later, too.

(MOZELLE exits.)

ELI

(After a very long pause) I know that this is a bad time, but when do you think I can be released?

SHERIFF

(Distant) You're right - it is a bad time.

ELI

I didn't think there would be a good time to ask.

SHERIFF

(Still distracted) You're right.

ELI

So?

SHERIFF

I got two calls comin' in. One from our buddy Walter at City Hall and one from the State. 'Til they figure out how to classify you, you're stuck right here.

ELI

I was afraid you'd say that.

SHERIFF

Whassamater? You don't like it here?

ELI

Sheriff, come on. I don't want to fight with you right now.

SHERIFF

Why not? Ain't I good enough for you neither?

ELI

No, no, it's just that I can appreciate how you feel ...

SHERIFF

Feel? FEEL?! You appreciate how I feel? I'll show you how I feel ...

(SHERIFF takes out his
pistol and shoots
something - a picture, a
coffee pot, etc.)

ELI

Sheriff! For Chrissake!

(SHERIFF takes aim at
ELI's head.)

ELI (cont'd)

Uh ... heh ... what are you doing?

SHERIFF

It was you who caused this.

ELI

You won't.

SHERIFF

Try me.

ELI

Don't do it, man.

SHERIFF

You ... slick New York Jewish doctor. There ain't nobody here to stop me. Shit, I should'a done this yesterday. Start prayin' to your hebrew God, Kronenberg. You're life ends here and now.

ELI

You're smarter than this.

SHERIFF

Just yesterday you said I was a fuckin' idiot.

ELI

Well ... I'm sorry about that.

SHERIFF

Yeah? Well, I'm sorry 'bout a lot of things.

ELI

You're just upset about Mozelle. And Chip. And Billy Ladnier. (beat - whimpering) I'm a dead man.

SHERIFF

That's the smartest thing you've said all day.

(cocks the gun)

Now say "goodbye," maggot.

(ELI bends to look at the front door.)

SHERIFF (cont'd)

What you doin?

ELI

I was hoping someone would come in and ... oh, never mind.

SHERIFF

Goodbye, maggot.

(NITA-KAY enters.)

ELI
Thank God ...

NITA-KAY
Am I interruptin' something?

SHERIFF
Yes!

ELI
No!

NITA-KAY
Oh. (beat) Is Chip here?

SHERIFF
He's out on patrol.

ELI
No he's not. He's out with ...

(SHERIFF cuffs ELI on the
head.)

SHERIFF
He's on patrol.

ELI
(Nods) Patrol.

NITA-KAY
You two are actin' real funny.

SHERIFF
Think nothin' of it.

ELI
Yes, think nothing of it.

SHERIFF
Hush. (cuffs ELI)

ELI
Will you quit it?!

NITA-KAY
I ... I think I'd better go.

ELI
No! For chrissake!

(SHERIFF casually puts his gun aside.)

SHERIFF

It's alright, Nita-Kay. How you feelin'?

NITA-KAY

Not so good. I don't think it's from bein' in the "family way" and all. I just got lots on my mind.

SHERIFF

I understand. Seems we ALL have lots on our minds these days.

NITA-KAY

Oh, Sheriff Hutto, what am I gonna do? I can't leave Chip but I can't stay here and squeeze out babies one after t'other while workin' at the Winn Dixie for the rest of my life. You understand, don't you?

SHERIFF

Nita-Kay, this is really something you should work out with Chip.

ELI

Have you told him yet? About ... ? (indicates her stomach)

NITA-KAY

You're from New York, ain't 'cha?

ELI

Don't pull me into this.

NITA-KAY

What's it like?

ELI

Please, don't get me involved ...

NITA-KAY

Please tell me. I gotta know.

ELI

You really want to know what it's like? I'll tell you.

In New York the people are rude and selfish and all they care about is how much money you make and how much power you have. The last thing they care about is YOU.

They'd no sooner stab you in the back and throw you out in the street then say "good morning." The prices are high, rents are astronomical, there's trash in the streets, homeless on every corner and if it's not owned by the mafia it's owned by the Fat Cats up in Greenwich, Connecticut or by power brokers on the East Side. And nobody cares how much you try. All that matters is if you succeed. There are no "A"'s for effort.

NITA-KAY

You don't make it sound too good.

ELI

Let me level with you. Sure, it's got some exiting things, but someone like you would be chewed up and spat out like yesterday's grits.

NITA-KAY

Don't you see that I know that? That's why I have to go. I need to be someone that won't be chewed up and spat out. I need to get that ... crust that people who've been around get. Right now I'm all pink and soft. I wanna be hard and strong. You think I LIKE bein' sweet and innocent an' gettin' stepped on all the time? I wanna be like Jo. I wanna be a woman of vision and direction. In Stillman's Corner the only direction is nowhere.

ELI

It can't be that bad.

NITA-KAY

How would YOU know? You don't live here.

ELI

I'll tell you something - there's one thing they don't have in New York and that's Community Spirit. Here, the people around you actually care about you. You talk to your neighbors and you're polite and kind to people. You all grow old together and look out for one another. And if somebody's hungry or cold they've got a whole town to keep them fed and warm. I've been wandering around this city for the past week before my unfortunate incarceration and I've yet to see a homeless person or someone treated poorly.

NITA-KAY

Bein' part of everybody's business can be a pain.

ELI

So can being a nameless face in the crowd.

NITA-KAY

(Long pause - she extends her hand) We've never been introduced. My name's Nita-Kay Zirlott.

ELI

(Shakes her hand) I know. Doctor Eli Kronenberg. You can call me "Eli."

NITA-KAY

It's a pleasure, Eli. (giggles a little) You know, after talkin' to you I feel a little better.

ELI

You know, so do I.

NITA-KAY

You wouldn't happen to have a guest room in New York, would you?

ELI

No, but I have a couch.

NITA-KAY

If I came to New York, could I stay on your couch?

ELI

You? Certainly. Anytime.

NITA-KAY

Is it warm and comfy?

ELI

Depends on the season ... and the boiler.

NITA-KAY

Good enough. (starts to exit)

ELI

So, when are you gonna tell Chip?

NITA-KAY

Oh, I almost forgot. Soon. Very soon. Tell him I came by. So long, Sheriff Hutto. 'Bye, Eli. (exits)

SHERIFF

Do you plan on movin' in on every woman in town?

ELI

I have no intentions of the kind.

SHERIFF

They sure seem to like you 'round here.

ELI

I'm a stranger.

SHERIFF

I'll have to make sure we don't get no more strangers.
(beat) Now, where were we?

ELI

I think you had a gun to my head.

SHERIFF

Oh. Thank you. (takes out his gun)

ELI

I was hoping you'd have cooled down by now.

SHERIFF

What gave you that idea?

ELI

Look, Sheriff, I think you're taking this all wrong.

SHERIFF

Oh really? You've turned this whole town upside down!
You've ruined my life!

ELI

No, I think YOU ruined your own life.

SHERIFF

Pretty brave talk for a man who's about to get a bullet
through his head.

(prepares to shoot, shakes a little and pulls the
gun away)

Shit. I can't do it. I can't do anything.

ELI

It's alright.

SHERIFF

No, it's not. That's why everythin's fallin' right
through my fingers. I talk a big game but always
fumble the ball at the five-yard-line.

ELI

If it will make you feel any better, I actually
believed you were going to kill me.

SHERIFF

(A little happier) Really? Well, Kronenberg, the day
ain't over yet.

ELI

Me and my big mouth.

SHERIFF

Just tell me one thing. Why'd you do it? Why have you ruined my life?

ELI

Believe me, Wayne, it wasn't personal. I CAN call you "Wayne," can't I?

SHERIFF

No.

ELI

(Long pause as he paces and pulls himself together) I did it because they didn't let me in Mensa.

SHERIFF

Who's "they?"

ELI

The Mensa people.

SHERIFF

Who's Mensa?

ELI

Mensa is an organization for people with high I.Q.'s. I was a few points shy of the cut-off.

SHERIFF

This Mensa - what does bein' part of it get you? Tax breaks? Free car rentals? Annual fish frys?

ELI

Nothing, really.

SHERIFF

Then why do you want to be a member?

ELI

It's very prestigious. It's an elite group. I've always wanted to be in Mensa. But I flunked the test.

SHERIFF

But I thought you was a genius.

ELI

I'm very close.

SHERIFF

Let me get this straight. You play God on an entire town ... MY town ... because some eggheads wouldn't let you play in their sandbox?

ELI

Mm hmm. That's about right.

SHERIFF

I think I'll shoot you now.

ELI

So what makes YOU so different? You like playing God, too.

SHERIFF

It's different.

ELI

No it's not. What's your excuse?

SHERIFF

I have my reasons. They ain't as STUPID as yours ...

ELI

Come on, Sheriff. We all do things for stupid reasons.

We win Nobel Prizes because our mothers didn't pay enough attention to us ... we conquer nations because someone picked on us when we were children ... we kill people because our father beat us when we were small. We all have our motives and they all sound stupid and they're all very personal. So what's your motive?

SHERIFF

It ain't none o' your business.

ELI

Come on, I'm a research scientist. I have records on almost everybody in the entire town, including you. I've seen your dossier. Graduate of the University of Alabama ... PolySci major ... Dean's List ... Phi Beta Kappa ... worked for the Wallace administration ...

SHERIFF

I tried that road.

ELI

What happened? Too bumpy?

SHERIFF

No. I like what I do now.

ELI

You mean you like being the town bully and getting away with it. Sounds like playing God to me. What happened? Who did it to you?

SHERIFF

Shut up.

ELI

Come on.

SHERIFF

You're a king-sized pain in the ass, Kronenberg.

ELI

Come on. Who was it?

SHERIFF

(Frustrated) Nothin' I ever did pleased that man. Straigh A's? I got the backhand. Scored the winning touchdown? I got the backhand. National Merit Scholarship? Backhand. Post on the Wallace administration in Montgomery? Backhand. Y'see, I didn't follow in his footsteps so I was dog shit. (beat) I could never prove it but I still say he killed Momma. She just couldn't live with him. One day she ups and dies. Just ... dies. Doctors couldn't find any cause. She just lost her will. I despised that man.

ELI

Where is he now?

SHERIFF

Dead. Good n' dead.

ELI

How ... ?

SHERIFF

Shot down. Line o' duty.

ELI

Which war?

SHERIFF

No war. He was the Sheriff 'fore me.

ELI

Who shot him?

SHERIFF

You ask too many questions.

ELI

What happened to his deputy?

SHERIFF

He got elected Sheriff.

ELI

(Beat) You?

SHERIFF

Shut up. (shoots a remaining standing object)

ELI

Christ! I wish you wouldn't do that!

(SHERIFF goes over to a little refrigerator and pulls out two bottles of beer. He opens them both and pushes one in ELI's hand.)

ELI (cont'd)

It's ten in the morning.

SHERIFF

Breakfast of Champions. (tugs on his bottle)

ELI

(Considers) L'chaim. (drinks)

(Phone rings. SHERIFF answers.)

SHERIFF

Sheriff Hutto.

(beat)

I see.

(beat)

I see.

(beat)

I see.

(beat)

Thank you, Walter.

(hangs up)

That was our boy Walter at the courthouse. He seems to agree with your story. There really IS no law about experimentation. It's all a matter of interpretation.

ELI

So now what?

SHERIFF

I got a few more answers comin' in. State ... feds ...

ELI

Aw! You didn't!

SHERIFF

Had to. I'm a law man.

(CHIP returns quietly.)

CHIP

Hi everybody. I'm back.

ELI

(Mocking) Y'think?

SHERIFF

'Bout time, boy. Nita-Kay came by here lookin' for you.

CHIP

She did? I need to talk to her anyways.

ELI

So, what's it like out there?

CHIP

Sunny. 'Bout eighty degrees. Real humid.

ELI

I meant the people. What are they doing?

CHIP

OH! Doctor Kronenberg, it's the weirdest thing! Everythin's real quiet and all. I was thinkin' people was home sick or somethin'. Turns out a whole bunch o' them was at the li-berry, and the rest was at home fixin' their cars an' stuff. I couldn't figure out why or nothin'. But Joanne says that sometimes people have the urge to do things or learn somethin'. She's somethin' else, that Joanne. While everyone's readin' an' stuff at the li-berry she just sat there and wrote in this notebook. Watched and wrote. Watched and wrote. I asked her what she was writin' an' she said I shoul'n't worry 'bout it and to go back to the office. Lordy, I never seen so many people at the li-berry before. I even got myself a li-berry card. Lookie here! (shows his card)

SHERIFF

What possessed you to do that?

CHIP

I dunno - just seemed like the thing to do.

SHERIFF

(Stands, holsters his gun) I need some air. Chip, I'm gonna pay Billy Ladnier a visit. Do me a favor and keep an eye on Doctor Kronenberg for me, will ya?

CHIP

Sure, Sheriff. Anything you say.

SHERIFF

Don't try anything funny, Kronenberg. I hadn't decided what I'm gonna do with you yet.

ELI

YOU?

SHERIFF

Walter said it was up to me.

ELI

I'm doomed.

SHERIFF

(Sheepishly) Yeah. I know. (exits)

CHIP

Somethin' funny's goin' on out there, Doctor K. People's actin' real different.

ELI

Must be something in the water.

Fadeout.