

The Sentence

Interactive small talk in low toned barely audible whispering was silenced by the bailiff calling the courtroom to order. "All rise. Court is back in session. Honorable Stanley Abraham Driver presiding." Into sight walked Judge Driver with his head downward. Everyone in the overcrowded courtroom with a seat rose to their feet joining those lined along the walls already standing. Into his crimson colored, chair the judge eased with onlookers following his lead. Up and down his gavel went with solemn purpose but only a single time. After clearing his throat his eyes finally rose.

A bench trial for Samuel Landon proceeded into its final stage with attorneys making their final arguments. Prosecuting Attorney Daniel Armstrong would go first. "Mr. Armstrong." To his feet the prosecutor rose. "Judge Driver." A click was heard triggering a power point slide presentation. Into view on a wide span screen for all to see was an image of a 10-year-old playful girl about to kick a soccer ball. A second slide is moved forward displaying a mangled front end of a four -door sedan.

Within the final slide is an enlarged bottle of Jack Daniels that has its cap beside it. Uncurling from within the cap is an inscription with bold sized 30 lettered words with a message from the bottle that reads; "ONE FOR THE ROAD IS ONE TOO MANY." Prosecutor Armstrong takes ahold of a facsimile Jack Daniels bottle on his desk. He turns the cap counter clockwise until it separates from the bottle sending a strip of paper flying into the air. Grabbing the paper, the prosecutor stretches it to its maximum extension before reading aloud. "One for the road is one too many. There's a message in every bottle. The defendant was not illiterate. Without question there should be accountability for this careless irresponsible act.

"I rest my case."

Looking in the direction of the defense attorney Judge Driver acknowledges his turn to present a closing argument as his client Mr. Landon sobs with his face in his hands. "Mr. Beam." A request is made. "Your honor if the court will allow, my time will be subscribed to my client. Judge Driver grants permission. "You may." To his feet Samuel Landon rises on wobbly legs. In broken up words with a shaky voice he speaks. "I never intended to hurt anyone, especially her." To his right he glances toward the ten-year-old victim. "My heart is broken. I'll never be the same. Never! I am sorry. So sorry. I wish I was." His final word is swallowed without being heard as tears roll down his cheeks sending Samuel Landon back into a seating position.

Silence consumes the courtroom with only the sound of accompanying sobs. Intertwining his hands in a near prayer appearance Judge Driver begins to finalize the proceeding by rendering his verdict. First looking toward the prosecutor and then to the defense counsel there is a summation decision offered. "This is a case within which there will be no winner. While it is true

beyond any reasonable doubt Mr. Landon you will not ever be the same equally true is the fact that she is not going to be. How are the scales of justice to be balanced in a case like this?"

"This is my decision. Your driver's license is permanently revoked. You shall never be behind the wheel of an automobile again. Grief counseling is mandated. There should always be mercy within our judicial system. For your failure to heed the message within the bottle a suspended 10-year prison is recorded. Mr. Landon the court recognizes you are already serving a life sentence." Outward toward those in attendance Judge Driver looks offering a recommendation. "Pay attention to the message in the bottle. One for the road is one too many. Don't ever place yourself in the position Mr. Landon is in." A final sounding of his gavel is heard.

Turning on her electric wheelchair 10-year old Madison approaches Samuel Landon and says; "Let's go home Dad."