

A SERIES OF BAD DECISIONS

By Dan D'Amario

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CHARACTERS

Samuel Collins	high school senior on trial for vehicular manslaughter
Jayne Mansfield	prosecuting attorney for the state
James Dean	overly-dramatic, assistant prosecuting attorney
Judge Slaughter	presiding judge (male or female)
Ryan Tucker	Samuel's party friend
Partygoers	a group of teens at a party
Patrolman Faden	policeman chasing Samuel's car
Elizabeth Herman	60-year old traffic fatality victim
Mrs. Collins	Samuel's mother
Jury of Your Fears	members of the jury (6 – 12 people)

SETTING

Current day.

DIRECTOR'S NOTE

The courtroom is described as a surreal setting—somewhere between real life and the hereafter—and the characters act accordingly.

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SETTING: Courtroom-like setting, can be surreal. A table and chair for the judge. A table and chairs for the prosecuting attorneys. A small table and chair for the defendant. The jurors are seated together.

AT RISE: *Everyone in the courtroom is dressed in full-length robes or toga-like garments. The judge, jury and attorneys await the arrival of the accused. Samuel enters looking confused and lost. He is wearing a similar garment to the others.*

JUDGE: Over here.

SAMUEL: What?

JUDGE: (*pointing to the small table and chair*) Here! Over here!

(*SAMUEL makes his way to the table and sits.*)

JUDGE: Finally! We can get started, now.

JAYNE: Jayne Mansfield, prosecuting attorney for the state, Your Honor.

JAMES: James Dean, assistant prosecuting attorney for the state, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Very well. Start your case.

JAYNE: If it pleases the court, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, we intend to show, with undeniable facts, that the defendant, Samuel Collins, on the night of April 22nd, did make a series of judgments and decisions that led directly to the untimely death of Elizabeth Herman.

(*SAMUEL cautiously raises his hand.*)

And, that he did so with his motor vehicle . . .

JUDGE: Uh . . . just a minute, Ms. Mansfield. (*to SAMUEL*) You are not supposed to interrupt. Haven't you ever been to court before?

SAMUEL: It's just that . . .

JUDGE: Ms. Mansfield is in the middle of her opening statement. When she is done, your side will get its opportunity to speak. Do you understand?

SAMUEL: But . . .

JUDGE: But what?!

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SAMUEL: Shouldn't I have a . . . you know . . .

JUDGE: No, I don't know! What are you trying to say?

SAMUEL: (*timidly*) Where's my lawyer?

JUDGE: Where's your lawyer?!

(*The JURY MEMBERS look to the left, then right.*)

Why would you think you need a lawyer?

SAMUEL: Everyone gets a lawyer. Right?

JUDGE: Do I need to explain the rules to you?

SAMUEL: Yeah, I guess.

JUDGE: Very well. Excuse me please, Ms. Mansfield, but, I must explain the rules of court to Mr. Collins. It's very simple, Mr. Collins. Ms. Mansfield and Mr. Dean over there are going to explain what you did wrong and what the consequences of your actions were. When you are asked a question, you will give the court an answer. That's it. Very simple. Do you understand?

SAMUEL: Yeah, I guess. But, shouldn't I still have a lawyer?

(*The JURORS shake their heads no.*)

JUDGE: (*getting frustrated*) And what good would a lawyer do you, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: I don't know. Keep me from saying something I shouldn't say? Dispute the facts presented by them?

JUDGE: I don't think you heard me clearly, Mr. Collins. Ms. Mansfield and Mr. Dean are presenting the *facts* of the case. The facts cannot be in dispute. The facts cannot be challenged. When asked a question, you will answer – honestly, of course. It would make no sense for you to give an incorrect answer, now would it?

(*The JURORS shake their heads no.*)

SAMUEL: I guess . . . not.

JUDGE: And, the facts of the case cannot be in dispute, now can they? They are facts!

(*The JURORS nod their heads yes.*)

SAMUEL: I guess.

JUDGE: You see? It's all very simple. Can we proceed?

(*SAMUEL shrugs. The JUDGE signals to JAYNE to continue.*)

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JAYNE: As the defendant committed the atrocity with a motor vehicle and caused the death of an innocent victim, we seek the charge of vehicular manslaughter.

(The JURORS cover their mouths in horror.)

JAMES: There are also a number of other charges against the defendant that I will be addressing, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Did you get all that, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Yeah. The charge . . .

JUDGE: Vehicular manslaughter, Mr. Collins. Do you know what that means?

SAMUEL: Not really.

JUDGE: That means you killed someone while driving a motor vehicle with disregard for the safety of others. You could be punished for a very long time.

SAMUEL: Oh.

JUDGE: Oh, indeed! Anything more, Ms. Mansfield?

JAYNE: No, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Now, Mr. Collins, do you have anything to say?

SAMUEL: *(trying to collect his thoughts)* I don't really . . . remember everything that night. I guess I had a few drinks and . . . I remember starting to drive home and . . .

JUDGE: Mr. Collins! We have not yet begun to discuss the facts of the case. Do you have anything to say about your case?

SAMUEL: I . . . didn't mean to hurt anyone.

JUDGE: Well said, Mr. Collins. See there. You don't need a lawyer, now do you? We are ready to proceed with the presentation of the facts of this case and questioning of any witnesses.

(SAMUEL raises his hand.)

Yes, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Do I get to have witnesses?

JUDGE: This is a court of laws, Mr. Collins. Of course you get to call witnesses. However, I believe the prosecution is calling all the witnesses needed for a full finding of fact, and you will get to ask them any questions you desire. If any witness has been left out, you can request them during your defense. Does that sound fair, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Yes.

JUDGE: Wonderful! Proceed, Ms. Mansfield.

JAYNE: Thank you, Your Honor. I'd like to start by submitting this arrest report – Exhibit A. The defendant was stopped while traveling in his

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vehicle and subsequently charged with driving while intoxicated – and this was only two weeks before the accident in question.

JUDGE: Is this true, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Yes.

JAMES: Your Honor, the defendant was clocked traveling 63 miles per hour in a 40 mile per hour zone at 1:25 am.

JUDGE: I used to be able to stay up that late. I used to watch Carson. Not any more.

JAMES: In addition, the defendant's blood alcohol level measured .15!

SAMUEL: That's all true, Your Honor.

JUDGE: Of course it's true. This is a presentation of facts.

JAYNE: The defendant's license was suspended for six months and he was ordered to attend alcohol rehabilitation classes.

JUDGE: How old are you, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Eighteen.

JUDGE: You are not old enough to drink legally, are you?

SAMUEL: I guess not.

JUDGE: Would you like to rephrase that without guessing, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Yes, I was not old enough.

JUDGE: But you drank anyway?

SAMUEL: Everyone does.

JUDGE: I'm sure they do. We've seen plenty of them here, too. On top of drinking illegally, you then used prudent judgment to operate a motor vehicle and exceed the speed limit?

SAMUEL: I . . . yes.

JUDGE: And, although your license was suspended for six months, you were driving again only two weeks later?

SAMUEL: Yes.

(The JURORS shake their heads.)

JAYNE: We also have documentation that the defendant did not attend any of the rehabilitation classes.

JUDGE: Why not?

SAMUEL: I dunno.

JUDGE: Mr. Collins, if you don't know, no one does. Of course you know. You know exactly why you didn't attend court-ordered classes.

(Pause.)

SAMUEL: I guess . . . I mean, I didn't think I needed them.

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JUDGE: If an 18-year old driving drunk and speeding doesn't need rehabilitation classes, who does? Why do we have these classes, anyway? Do you wish you had taken the classes now, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: Yes.

JUDGE: See what a difference a little time makes in your maturity. Anything else on this matter?

JAYNE: No, Your Honor.

JUDGE: (*for SAMUEL's benefit*) Good. See how quickly we can go through this when the facts are presented and people answer honestly? Next issue?

JAYNE: We move forward to the fateful night in question – April 22nd.

JAMES: (*overly dramatic*) It was a night like any other night. The skies were clearing after a day with periods of rain and sun. The people of our fair city were going about their normal routines.

JAYNE: The defendant arrived at the home of nineteen-year-old Ryan Tucker at approximately 6:45pm.

JAMES: Mr. Tucker was having a small, intimate, dinner party with friends.

JUDGE: Alcohol?

JAMES: Of course!

JUDGE: Drugs?

JAMES: Ask!

JUDGE: (*to SAMUEL*) Drugs?

SAMUEL: Well, uh . . .

JUDGE: Do I need to lecture you, again, Mr. Collins?

SAMUEL: We . . . smoked a little . . . pot.

JAYNE: Of course you did!

JUDGE: And Mr. Tucker served you alcohol?

SAMUEL: Yes.

JAYNE: Over four hours later, at approximately 11:20pm, the defendant left the home of Mr. Tucker.

JUDGE: How did you get to Mr. Tucker's home?

SAMUEL: I . . . drove.

JUDGE: But, you had no license!

(*SAMUEL shrugs. The JURORS shake their heads.*)

JAYNE: The defendant was intoxicated at the time he departed the Tucker residence.

SAMUEL: You don't have any proof of that!

JAMES: We could ask you . . .

JAYNE: Or, we could call our first witness. The prosecution calls Ryan Tucker.

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