PSI: Boston
Episode 1: The Salient Strangler
Scene 3

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FADE IN:

INT. COURTROOM.   DAY

Defense Attorney LAWRENCE is cross-examining the defendant in
the murder case, Mark CULPRETT. Culprett is tall, has
waist-length blonde hair, and has only one arm.

>   LAWRENCE
>   You were in Philadelphia the
>   night that your wife was
>   murdered, is that correct?

>   CULPRETT
>   Yes, I had driven there during
>   the day. I arrived at my hotel
>   at around 8pm.

>   LAWRENCE
>   I would like to note that that
>   was about the time victim was
>   murdered. Mr. Culprett, this
>   is surveillance footage of the
>   hotel parking garage at 7:43pm.
>   This is your car?

>   CULPRETT
>   Yes, you can see the
>   registration, PZ5-44E.

>   LAWRENCE
>   And is this you stepping out of
>   the car?

Video shows a tall man with long hair and one arm stepping
out of the vehicle.

>   CULPRETT
>   Yes, that is me.

LAWRENCE
(to Judge SCALE)
Your honor, I would also like to
enter into evidence a validated
parking ticket and a credit card
receipt for Mr Culprett's hotel
stay, both from that same night,
and...

While Lawrence is listing the items he is entering into
evidence, Dick SNOOPER is sitting directly behind the State's
Attorney, Prossy CUTER. He leans over the railing to whisper
to Cuter.

SNOOPER
(whispering)
Prossy, they're killing us with
this nonsense! We've got to do
something!

CUTER
(whispering)
What are we supposed to do?
He's in the surveillance video!
In Philadelphia!

SNOOPER
(louder
whispering)
Don't tell me you buy that load
of bull. That could have been
any long-haired one-armed man
driving a 2014 Dodge Durango
with registration PZ5-44E!

CUTER
(even louder
whispering)
Dick, there's nothing we can do
at...

SCALE
I'm sorry, Ms. Cuter, is there
something you would like to say?
I don't appreciate interruptions
in my courtroom.

CUTER
(contrite)
No, your honor, I'm sorry, I...

SNOOPER
(to Cuter)
I'm *doing something*.

CUTER
Dick, no, you'll get me in
trouble...!

Snooper jumps the railing between separating the audience and the court.

                    SNOOPER
               (to Scale)
          You know, what this case needs
          is a little more *science*.

The bailiff begins to move toward Snooper; Judge SCALE holds up his hand to stop him.

                    SCALE
          What do you mean, more science,
          Mr.... (looks at Snooper's name
          badge) Dick... Snooper?

There is light chatter in the audience; several people giggle at the Judge's pronunciation of Snooper's name.

                    SNOOPER
               (annoyed)
          SNOW-per.

                    SCALE
               (confused)
          What?

                    SNOOPER
               (emphatically)
          My name is pronounced SNOW-per.
          It's Dutch.

                    CUTER
               (nervous)
          Dick... Mr. Snow-per is on the
          expert witness list for today,
          your honor. I was about to call
          him to the stand.

                    SCALE
               (with a slight
               smile)
          Alright, then, go on.

                    SNOOPER
          This man is guilty. I don't
          know about all this talk of
          "surveillance videos" and
          "parking tickets", but I do know
          I can use science to demonstrate
          that *this man* (points to
          Culprett) killed his wife!

There is a rising chatter in the court room as the audience is shocked by the turn of events.

                         SCALE
          It is highly unusual for an
          expert witness to examine the
          defendant, but I'll allow it...
          as long as Mr. Lawrence agrees?

                         LAWRENCE
          What could he possibly say? We
          have Mr. Culprett on video 300
          miles from the crime scene at
          the time of the crime!

                         SCALE
          I'll take that as a "yes."
          Please continue, Mr. Snooper.

Several people in the audience laugh. Snooper glares back at
them.

                         SNOOPER
                (annoyed)
          SNOW-per.

                         SCALE
          Yes, sorry. SNOW-per. Please
          continue.

                         SNOOPER
          Thank you, your honor. Jury
          members, Mr. Culprett,
          (spiteful) Attorney Lawrence, my
          previous statement was not an
          exaggeration. I can prove that
          Mr. Culprett murdered his wife
          with absolute certainty. There
          is no trick involved, no magic.
          Just science.

                         CULPRETT
          That's ridiculous!

                         SNOOPER
                (triumphant)
          Is it though? Then I'm sure you
          won't mind participating in a
          brief experiment, right?

                         CULPRETT
                (trapped, yet
                confident)
          Whatever. I guess, yeah.

                    SNOOPER
Fantastic. Mr. Culprett, I'm
going to show you a series of
letter strings. Whenever you
recognize a letter string as a
word, I want you to say "word."
Whenever the letter string does
not make sense to you, I want
you to say "nonword."
Understood?

                    LAWRENCE
Your honor, this is highly
suspect. Does my client really
have to endure this?

                    SNOOPER
Indulge me, Lawrence.

                    SCALE
Proceed, Mr....(pronunciation
deliberately drawn
out)...SNOW-per.

                    SNOOPER
               (turns to
               Culprett)
Ready, Mr. Culprett?

Culprett nods. Snooper pulls out a folder labeled "FIELD
LEXICAL DECISION TASK" from his bag. From the folder Snooper
pulls a stack of cardboard pieces. Snooper holds up the
cards in turn, each displaying a single word: FLOWER –
STRANGLE – THURL – MURDER – PLORB – BLOSSOM – KEEM – KILLED –
LEAF – BUD – CORPSE – PERGNED. Culprett correctly identifies
each by dismissively saying "word" or "nonword",
respectively.

Snooper looks back at his assistant Dee PUTY, who has been
recording the responses and timing them. PUTY computes a
number and shows it to Snooper. He smiles and gives PUTY a
thumbs-up.

                    SNOOPER
That p will play.

                    LAWRENCE
Great, really great. Is this
going to be over soon?

                    SNOOPER
               (ignores
               Lawrence, speaks
               to the jury)
You just observed what
psychologists call a Lexical
Decision Task. My assistant Ms.
Puty will distribute copies of
the original publication in the
second 1971 issue of the Journal
of Experimental Psychology where
this diagnostic test was
introduced. The scientists used
this test to *(reads from the
manuscript)* "learn about the
nature of individual memory
processes." Exactly like we all
just did about the nature of Mr.
Culprett's memory.

                    CULPRETT
               (wary)
What do you mean, my memory?
What's the meaning of all this?!

                    SCALE
               (slightly
               annoyed)
Yes, Mr. *Snow-per*, the court
too would like some
clarification on this.

                    SNOOPER
Scientists all over the world
use the Lexical Decision Task to
measure chronic accessibility of
particular constructs – the
psychologist's word for
recurring thoughts. Doctors,
for example, always think about
things that have to do with
medicine – words like "scalpel",
"nurse", and "patient" will be
chronically accessible to them.
Construction workers often use
"bricks", wear "helmets", and
"whistle" after women, so those
words will have a higher
accessibility to them than to
most people. And to
murderers...

                    LAWRENCE
No...

                              SNOOPER
                    ...to murderers, words like
                    "strangle" and "killed" will be
                    more accessible than to innocent
                    folks. Just like they were for
                    Mr. Culprett.

                              LAWRENCE
                         (stunned)
                    Do you honestly think anybody is
                    going to buy this nonsense?

                              SNOOPER
                         (staring at a
                         spot without
                         looking at anyone
                         specifically)
                    I don't know...*(to the jury)*
                    People who believe in *science*
                    might.

                              LAWRENCE
                    Outrageous! Nothing about this
                    is scientific!

                              SNOOPER
                    Mr. Culprett, are you a
                    florist?

                              CULPRETT
                    What? N---

                              LAWRENCE
                         (interrupting)
                    Don't answer to that! What are
                    you getting at this time,
                    Snooper?

                              SCALE
                    Answer the question, Mr.
                    Lawrence.

                              LAWRENCE
                    He is not a florist, no.

                              SNOOPER
                    And is your client a murderer?

                              LAWRENCE
                    No! Absolutely not!

PUTY hands Snooper her tablet, showing SPSS output. The
output shows a bar graph showing two short bars and a tall
bar labelled as "Nonwords", "Flower", and "Murder",
respectively.

                          SNOOPER
                Then maybe you can explain to me
                why murder-related words were
                all significantly more
                accessible to Mr. Culprett than
                all flower-related words!

The audience gasps. The level of chatter rises.

                          LAWRENCE
                Maybe those words are more
                accessible for anyone! Maybe we
                are all more likely to think
                about violence than flowers.

                          SNOOPER
                     (condescendingly)
                Hey hey, a control group!
                Lawrence, someone paid attention
                in science class in 8th grade –
                I'm impressed! Luckily, I went
                to a psych 101 class at Harvard
                campus this morning to obtain
                standard accessibility values in
                a representative sample of the
                American population.

Snooper shows another graph, a bell curve with two red Xs
right at the peak of the curve.

                          SNOOPER
                Indeed, Mr. Culprett's
                accessibility of nonwords and
                all flower-related words is
                perfectly normal.

Snooper shows another bell curve, this time marked with a big
red X on the far right (label: "Culprett").

                          SNOOPER
                But his average accessibility of
                the *murder-related* words is 2
                standard errors from the mean.
                There is only *one logical
                explanation* for that extremely
                high accessibility.

Snooper looks at the jury, his eyes heavy with meaning. The
din from the audience continues to increase.

                          SCALE
                     (puzzled)
                But if the idea of "murder" were
                so accessible to Mr. Culprett,
                shouldn't he have *shorter*
                reaction times? On your last
                graph, it looks like he had much
                longer reaction times than those
                college students.

Snooper looks at the tablet. There is a moment of awkward
silence. For a split second, he looks at the screen with a
glimpse of panic. Then, he begins to laugh.

                    SNOOPER
                (smiling)
            Yes, you would think that ---
            unless he were a *very clever
            murderer* trying to suppress the
            idea of "murder" to *appear
            innocent*!

The rumbles from the audience reach their peak. Audience
members begin yelling "guilty!" and "murderer!"

                    SCALE
            I think I've seen enough. Jury?

                    JURY FOREMAN
            The science says GUILTY!

The other jury members nod in agreement, as Judge Scale
motions to the bailiff to take Culprett away.

                    CUTER
            Justice and science, working
            hand in hand. Today was a good
            day.

A shocked Lawrence holds his face in his hands.

                    SNOOPER
                (to Lawrence)
            Don't feel bad, my man.... your
            client just got *psyched*.

                    THE END