

IN THE CIRCUIT COURT OF GREENE COUNTY

STATE OF MISSOURI

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STATE OF MISSOURI, )  
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 Plaintiff, )  
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 vs. ) Case No. 1746-CR02630  
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 REBECCA M. RUUD, )  
 )  
 Defendant. )

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VERDICT

The Court heard three days of evidence in this case; hours of testimony and viewed hundreds of pages of exhibits, also listened to recorded statements of Defendant.

- 1) Savannah Frances Lee Leckie (Victim) came to live with her mom (Rebecca Ruud, Defendant) in 2016 in Ozark County, Missouri;
- 2) The victim had been hospitalized in a mental facility in 2015 and 2016. The victim did “cutting” on herself. The victim had a diagnosis of mental illness with suicidal tendencies as determined by Victim’s mental health providers in Minnesota;
- 3) There was a brush fire on the property owned by Defendant on July 18, 2017;
- 4) Defendant suffered blistering burns on her left arm by the fire as stipulated to and received salve and hydrocodone for treatment. Defendant was treated by a voluntary fireman on July 18, 2017;
- 5) Bonfire on the property the next day, July 19, 2017. Peat (Defendant’s husband) testified the victim was alive on that day;
- 6) Victim was reported missing by Defendant on July 20, 2017, two days after the first fire on the property. There was a large search for the victim for several days starting July 20, 2017, until August 4, 2017;
- 7) Defendant knew Victim had not run away on July 20, 2017. The defendant burnt victim’s body on the bonfire on July 19, 2017; Defendant had talked with a doctor during this time as whether the drugs would be enough to kill the victim (tr 11). The doctor said there were not enough tablets to kill the victim. The defendant went to the doctor the next week with the

same question. "And I'd back the next week, and I asked if that was enough to kill her, and he said, no, she would have been really constipated." (Tr 12).

- 8) Victim's bones were found in the bonfire site on August 4, 2017;
- 9) Defendant and Peat were married on August 4, 2017;
- 10) Defendant met with investigators of Missouri Public Defender System on August 13, 2017. Defendant recorded this meeting without the knowledge of the Public Defender Office. The defendant stated on the tape that Defendant had burnt Victim's body;
- 11) Defendant and Peat were leaving on Greyhound bus the day Defendant was arrested;
- 12) One year later, Peat, who was also charged, agreed to testify for the State. Peat also turned over the tape to law enforcement from the recording at public defenders office;
- 13) Defendant never told Peat that Defendant did anything with Victim's body;
- 14) Victim had been hospitalized twice in the last two years for suicidal ideations.

These are the uncontroverted facts as found by the Court.

#### CONTROVERTED FACTS

- 1) Jessica Wollen (JW):
  - a) JW was in jail on criminal charges. Defendant said she was not getting child support;
  - b) Defendant asked JW if hydrocodone could be traced with testing;
  - c) Defendant said she crushed up hydrocodone and gave it to the victim;
  - d) JW said nothing to law enforcement at the time she spoke with them years ago about crushing up the hydrocodone. It only came up a week or two before trial in June 2022. That statement is different than what she told law enforcement in 2017 or 2018.
- 2) Sarah Johnson (SJ):
  - a) SJ was in jail with Defendant. SJ was told by the defendant that Victim ran away;
  - b) Victim was big on pills;
  - c) Defendant told SJ Victim's bones were not 100 percent match so was not Defendant's daughter;
  - d) SJ also sent letter to get special treatment on SJ's charges in each county for help with Defendant;
  - e) JW and SJ had been in jail with Defendant for several months.
- 3) Kathy Hilton (KH):
  - a) KH came into the Taney County Jail on May 19, 2018, on pending criminal charges;
  - b) May 20, 2018, the jail found KH had concealed drugs on her person;
  - c) KH was placed in segregation by herself;
  - d) KH may have been out of segregation when KH informed law enforcement on June 5, 2018;

- e) Normally segregation for drugs lasts 20 days in jail;
- f) After only a few days of KH and Defendant in jail together, KH says Defendant confessed to how Defendant murdered her daughter;
- g) KH had two convictions for not supporting KH's children;
- h) KH said she came forward because KH thinks people who mistreat children should be held accountable by the system.

#### BURDEN OF PROOF

In America, in the United States Constitution, a person is presumed innocent until the government has proved they are guilty beyond a reasonable doubt; i.e., not all doubt. Therefore, this is the government's burden, not the accused. The accused does not have to present any evidence of their innocence.

In law school, every student is instructed of this burden. In most law schools, this concept is presented in a way to say it is better to let guilty people go free to avoid one innocent person being convicted and going to prison for the rest of their life.

#### 402.04 BURDEN OF PROOF AND RELATED MATTERS

The charge of any offense is not evidence, and it creates no inference that any offense was committed or that the defendant is guilty of an offense.

The defendant is presumed to be innocent, unless and until, during your deliberations upon your verdict, you find her guilty. This presumption of innocence places upon the state the burden of proving beyond a reasonable doubt the defendant is guilty.

A reasonable doubt is doubt based upon reason and common sense after careful and impartial consideration of all the evidence in the case.

Proof beyond a reasonable doubt is proof that leaves you firmly convinced of the defendant's guilt. The law does not require proof that overcomes every possible doubt. If, after your consideration of all the evidence, you are firmly convinced that the defendant is guilty of the offense charges, you will find her guilty. If you are not so convinced, you must give her the benefit of the doubt and not find her guilty.

#### MOTIVE

Motive is not one of the elements the State has to prove at trial, only the elements of the crime as written by the legislature in each state need to be proved beyond a reasonable doubt. However, as a trier of fact, just like jurors, we all want to know why a crime occurred to a victim. Other than psychopaths, there usually is a reason. The Court follows the elements of a crime; however, "Why?" Motive can give a trier of fact some direction for the other elements of a crime.

#### ANALYSIS

So what happened in July 2017? The Court has to be firmly convinced of guilt.

- The Court knows the victim died;
- The Court knows the defendant hid this fact;

The defendant may have told her female jail mates some things, but the Court finds KH is totally not credible in this case.

So, what does the Court think may have happened? Is the Court firmly convinced the defendant is guilty of the murder charges of the victim? I think a judge or a person wants to know exactly what happened on each case. The judge many times still does not know what happened once the evidence is presented to the Court.

#### QUESTIONS

- 1) What more could the State have presented to prove the defendant was guilty?
- 2) Is defendant flight evidence of guilt?
- 3) Is burning of victim's body to conceal manner of death?

The court has thought, reviewed the evidence and written more than one verdict. Again, the standard is proof beyond a reasonable doubt. The court has worked with the evidence and testimony for over 50 hours.

For some reason the adopted mother and the defendant agreed that the victim would move to Ozark County in 2016. This move was to be a temporary, but not defined, period of time.

The defendant was never comfortable being a day to day mother. The defendant was the mother of four children. The defendant had placed all four children up for adoption. The defendant said she did not want to be a full-time mother. The defendant was very comfortable on her 80 acres, secluded in Ozark County Missouri before the victim came to live with her in 2016. There is no doubt that the victim was a troubled young woman. The victim could be a handful not only for the adopted mother but for her real mother.

In July 2016 the victim had lived with the defendant for several months. There had probably been escalating tension that the victim was there for that long with the mother.

The victim was alive on July 18, 2017. There was a brushfire and the defendant was badly burned on her left arm. The defendant did seek medical attention and did receive a prescription for pain killers. The victim was alive on July 19 during the daytime. After that night the victim was never found alive. The defendant said that she'd burned the victim in another brush pile that night.

The evidence in this case was hard to put together because there's actually only one person who knows what really happened those few days in July 2016. The troubling fact was that the defendant kept going back to the doctor to make sure that her daughter could not overdosed on her prescription medication. Why would she do that on two different occasions? Maybe to see if the victim's death could be attributed to the defendant either deliberate murder or by negligence aiding in the suicide of the victim.

The court was troubled by a couple of pieces of evidence. These two things could've been made clear by calling a toxicologist to establish that you could not actually die from the prescription drug in the manner in which the defense argued to the court. Also, the State never provided the bus ticket of

the defendant and her husband when they were arrested at the bus station to see where they were going on that date. The court did use this evidence of the defendant at the bus station when it became obvious to her that the efforts of law enforcement was no longer a search for a missing person but had turned to a crime investigation. The defendant and her husband then took flight to leave the jurisdiction to avoid arrest as part of the evidence in this case of guilt. However, even if these two pieces of evidence were provided to the court, that evidence would not be enough to leave the court firmly convinced beyond a reasonable doubt of guilt on counts 1, 2, 3, & 4.

As I said, I have worked on this case/verdict for over 50 hours trying to find evidence that the court could be firmly convinced, beyond a reasonable doubt that the defendant was guilty of murder. Finally, the court has determined there is not enough evidence to meet this burden of proof; it should not take more than 50 hours to become firmly convinced of murder.

#### Verdict

The court finds the defendant not guilty beyond the reasonable doubt on count one of the class A felony of murder in the first degree, count two class A felony of abuse or neglect of a child, count three the class A felony of murder in a second degree, count for the class E felony of tampering with physical evidence, but does find the defendant guilty of count five the class E felony of abandonment of a corpse. Court orders a SARS and set sentencing for 09/15/2022 at 9:30am.

**7/29/2022**

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Calvin R Holden". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.