

"ORDER AND LAW: DEATH OF AN OILMAN"

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Adapted From:

"The Body in Room 348" By: Mark Bowden

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CHARACTER LIST (IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE)

GREG FLENIKEN: an oilman who was mysteriously murdered

DETECTIVE SCOTT APPLE: the narrator, recounting his memory of a murder case in which he was the lead detective

DR. BROWN: chief medical examiner

SUSIE FLENIKEN: wife of the deceased, Greg Fleniken, a true Southern Belle

LANCE MUELLER: electrician in room 349

TIM STEINMETZ: another electrician in room 349

KEN BRENNAN: famed private detective, thick New York accent

PROLOGUE

FADE IN: ONLY AUDIO. IRON MAN 2 PLAYING IN THE BACKGROUND. A MAN IS BREATHING AND DRINKING OUT OF A CAN. THERE IS ALSO THE RUSTLE OF THE CANDY BAR WRAPPER AS HE OPENS IT AND THEN THE SOUND OF HIM LIGHTING UP A CIGARETTE. WE HEAR A COUGH, THEN GUNFIRE. A BODY FALLS TO THE GROUND WHILE THE MOVIE CONTINUES TO PLAY IN THE BACKGROUND.

SCENE 1

Location: the autopsy room, opening music

Detective Scott Apple begins telling his story of the case of Greg Fleniken.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

This case began like any other murder. Not that that is something that you can get used to. The victim in question was a mild-mannered man named Greg Fleniken

At first, nothing about this case seemed too serious. No break in. No struggle. Looked like natural causes to me. Off he was for the post-mortem exam and I thought no more of it. Until...

DR. BROWN

The discoveries from the examination are most extraordinary.

APPLE

Didn't he just keel over from a heart attack?

DR. BROWN

Actually, he sustained a one inch abrasion on his left cheek and also a half inch laceration on his scrotum. The sack was swollen and discolored and around the wound was a small amount of edema fluid. When I furthered my investigation, I discovered some of the partly digested food was torn from his intestines as well as two broken ribs and a hole in the right atrium of his heart.

APPLE

You mean..?

BROWN

My guess? He was murdered.

(Transition music)

Scene 2

Location: Apple's office

APPLE (NARRATOR)

I wasn't expecting this to be a homicide. Just seemed like a run of the mill "natural cause of death" case. Now I had to go questioning who may have killed a man with no enemies.

First person I went to was his wife Susie...

SUSIE

I'll help you any way I can, detective.

APPLE

I realize this is a difficult time, Ma'am. I'll try to get this over as quickly as possible. Now, start by telling me about Greg... did he have any enemies... Anyone that might want to see him dead?

SUSIE

Greg? Oh no!! Everyone loved Greg. He was the nicest man I ever met. *(breaks down crying)* He never drank, never messed around with any other women. His only vice was not takin' care of himself properly.

APPLE

When was the last time you heard from Greg?

SUSIE

It was the night before this happened. It was in an email. I was filin' for our tax extension and I was updatin' him on my progress. He emailed back, "You're doin' good babe." And that was the last I heard from him. *(begins sobbing)*

SUSIE

You find whoever did this to my Greg. Promise me!

APPLE

I promise.

(Transition music)

Scene 3

Location: interrogation room

APPLE (NARRATOR)

My theories weren't leading me anywhere. I questioned his brother (who was also his business partner) but he said the same thing as Susie. No one had any reason to want Greg dead. My next move was to question the guests in room 349. Some electricians in town for a convention...

LANCE MUELLER

I didn't hear anything last night. Mighta heard a guy coughin' but that was it.

APPLE

Nothing else? You didn't hear a struggle or any thuds?

MUELLER

Naw... I didn't hear anything like that...what happened to that guy anyway?

APPLE

Hell I don't know. That's what I'm trying to figure out. It was almost like something fell on him. We're just trying to see if somebody heard something or maybe if somebody knows somebody who heard something, or maybe if somebody messed with him.

TIM STEINMETZ

(surprised) There's nothing in these rooms heavy enough... I don't know how this could've happened. But hey we're going to be in town for a bit. We'd be happy to cooperate in any way we can.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

The guys were friendly enough. I didn't have any reason to suspect their involvement. No one seemed to have any information. I had run out of leads to follow. This was starting to look like another one for the cold case files.

(Transition music)

SCENE 4

Location: a golf course. A cell phone goes off. A man answers the call on the first ring.

KEN BRENNAN

Ken Brennan speaking.

SUSIE FLENIKEN (*FLUSTERED*)

Oh my God, you don't have a secretary?

BRENNAN

Why should I?

SUSIE

It's just you answered on the first ring. Usually that occurs in Mob hits but...(*recomposing herself*). Look, they couldn't do anything else, so I heard you're the guy to go to.

BRENNAN

How did you get this number?

SUSIE

The Internet is a lovely resource. My friend gave me an article in Vanity Fair about your work back for that Miami case. 2005 right?

BRENNAN

Yes.

SUSIE

Well, she told me to find you. And I did.

BRENNAN

What do you want?

SUSIE

My husband was murdered. The Medical Examiner said that the crime was...*is* a homicide. It's been months since he died and nothing is happening. Police interrogated and investigated and nothing. I need your help.

BRENNAN

Send me some files and I'll take a look.

SUSIE

Thank you. I'm sorry for sounding this way. I've been feeling under the weather lately. But, I'll try to pull together what I have.

BRENNAN

Well, you need to fuckin' take care of yourself. Let me ask you something. Was there anything about the crime scene that didn't seem right to you?

SUSIE

Well when Greg's co-workers got there, the room was so warm. Greg liked it cold.

(Transition music)

SCENE 5

Location: sports bar, people are chatting in the background

APPLE (NARRATOR)

I met Brennan at a sports bar when he got to town. I knew that he was to re-investigate the Fleniken case. If there was one thing I observed about Brennan, it was that he was straightforward.

BRENNAN

Listen, I'm not a maverick. I don't go doing things half-cocked. If I decide we're going to do it as a team. There's nothing I'm going to do that you're not going to know about it, and there should be nothing that you're going to do that I don't know about. The one thing I won't do is fuck up your case. I've been doing this for a long time. But I also know that you're the guy in charge here, so it's your case. I don't want to work with somebody I don't like.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

At least he had people skills.

(Transition music)

Scene 6

Location: Room 348 of the MCM Grand Elegante Hotel in Beaumont, TX. We hear a door open. There is a slight pause before Brennan speaks.

BRENNAN

I think I know how this guy died. I think I know when he died. I think I know who killed him. And I think I know how we're going to catch him.

APPLE

Come on!

BRENNAN

Hear me out. I'll tell you what I think, but first I got to call the guy's wife. *(He reveals his phone and calls Suzie)* Your husband, was he left- or right-handed? Right-handed? Great. And when he smoked, did he smoke with the cigarette in his left or right hand? His right? You sure? Positive. Thank you. *(Ken hangs up)*

APPLE

You sure?

BRENNAN

Positive. Damn it's hot as fuck in here.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

After working the scene to the best to his ability, Brennan and I went to see the co-workers we didn't interview. One of 'em said heard a gun went off in a boarding house.

BRENNAN

We need to go back to the hotel.

APPLE

What are we going back there for?

BRENNAN

We're going to look for a bullet.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

He was right. When we couldn't find anything in Room 348, we went to look at room 349. Turns out there was a hole in the wall that was patched with what looked like dried toothpaste. Brennan was right. A bullet had gone through the wall.

BRENNAN

This motherfucker was shot.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Dr. Brown was not convinced.

(Transition music)

SCENE 7

Location: Dr. Brown's office

DR. BROWN

So, the Fleniken case. Did you catch the guy that beat him up?

BRENNAN

No. We're not there yet. I called you because I need to tell you about a change in the case. Greg was shot.

DR. BROWN

You're telling me that you think this man was shot? Well I'm telling you he wasn't.

BRENNAN

(Ruffling of pictures) Well, let me show you this.
(He shows the pictures) What's this here?

DR. BROWN

The liver.

BRENNAN

And this?

DR. BROWN

The intestines. Wait...

BRENNAN

Doc, could all this damage have been caused by— besides blunt force trauma, could a bullet cause the same damage?

DR. BROWN

Yes, it could, but that's not what happened here. This man was beaten.

BRENNAN

Okay, doc, but could it have?

DR. BROWN

You could get the same thing from being beaten.

BRENNAN (*FRUSTRATED*)

DOC!

DR. BROWN

What?

BRENNAN

That's a bullet hole.

DR. BROWN

What?

BRENNAN

That's a fuckin' bullet hole. (*intense music*)

DR. BROWN (*PAUSING*)

Yeah, that's a bullet hole. (*Pause*) Damn it. The media is going to kill me on this.

APPLE (*NARRATOR*)

Two years later, Dr. Brown left the Medical Examiner position. I wonder if this case was the catalyst.

(*Transition music*)

SCENE 8

Location: Chippewa County Sheriff's Department, interrogation room

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Brennan called Tim Steinmetz back to the Sheriff's Department to re-question him. Steinmetz sat in a swivel chair on one side of a big wooden table and we sat opposite him with our notebooks open and files handy.

STEINMETZ

Yes, we heard the guy next door died. We had no clue what the hell was goin on, though. No bangin, commotion, nothing. Weird, man. (pause) So uh, that's it?

APPLE

That's it.

BRENNAN

We just need you to look over these statements, make any corrections you may see fit, and sign your John Handcock when you're finished. Then we're done.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Steinmetz rushed through this. He made some small changes. He initialed his changes, and with a drop of the pen, he was free.

STEINMETZ

We all finished?

BRENNAN

See, we were. But then you signed that statement. (tone turns harsh) Sit down. Now you've got a problem. Don't bullshit us. We know what happened. You know what happened. We know you know what happened. You can tell us the truth, or you can go to jail with Mr. Mueller. You wanna go to jail with your buddy, huh?

STEINMETZ

What? Wait, huh? Why would I go to jail with Mueller?

BRENNAN

Signing a false police report. That's why.

APPLE

Listen, Steinmetz. I know how it is, you want to protect your friend. You want to show loyalty. But it's not worth it. We know the whole story, we just need you to be honest with us. Don't get your family into trouble trying to be a hero.

STEINMETZ

(With a deep breath) Okay, here it goes...

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Steinmetz and another electrician, Trent Pasano, gave us just what we needed. They had been drinking that night. Drinking a lot. Mueller sent Pasano out to his car to fetch him a bottle of whiskey-and a 9-mm pistol.

STEINMETZ

...and he kept playing with it. He would point it at all of us. Liquor makes Lance crazy. We were all like, "Dude, what the fuck are you doing?" Then BANG! Trent thought he was hit, but no-siree. It went through the wall. He freaked out, kinda sobered up real quick. Wrapped up his pistol and ran it to his car. Pasano left, horrified. Me and Lance had to shake it off, I couldn't sit in that room no'more. We just went back down to the bar. I saw the gurney the next morning. I thought he killed the guy.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

He didn't think, he *knew*. But he let the liquor and the fear lie to him, he made it a distant thought. They all did. The electricians heard the victim the night before. They didn't recall until the shot was fired, too fearful, too cowardly to go check on Mr. Fleniken. But we were past that now, and we needed Steinmetz to do something else for us.

(Transition music)

SCENE 9

Location: Interrogation room, Steinmetz dials a phone, the other line is ringing...

STEINMETZ

Hey Lance

MUELLER

Hey there, Tim. What's goin' on?

STEINMETZ

Not much. Just you know...yeah... umm listen, I just came from down there.

MUELLER

How did it go, you stick to the plan.

STEINMETZ

Yeah, yeah. I told them the story how we planned it. But then-

MUELLER

But then what Tim, spit it out.

STEINMETZ

I thought it was over. We were fine like your lawyer told us. But then they were like, "Listen, we know the truth. So just tell us. Or you'll be in big trouble"...so I told them.

MUELLER

Everything? Even the gun?

STEINMETZ

Yup

MUELLER

What did they say?

STEINMETZ

Nothing really. I don't know what they're going to do. If they're going to call you, Lance, I don't know.

MUELLER

(groaning) How'd they bring the gun up? What did they mean "tell us the truth?"

STEINMETZ

Look, they said they knew everything that happened already so I had better confess. They seemed pretty pissed, so I just told them it all. They probably are going to come and get your ass, now that they know the truth and everything. You should probably try to make some kind of effort, you know? ... The guy, he died from the gunshot.

MUELLER

No way! My lawyer! He told me it wasn't from a gunshot wound. If there was a gunshot, that he was killed from, you know, a firearm, they would have said something on the damn news! I had this together in my head, man. Shit!

STEINMETZ

I know Lance, it's crazy. I can't believe it myself.

MUELLER

How are you doing with it all?

STEINMETZ

I need a beer.

MUELLER

Yeah, a beer. I gotta go Tim. Ugh, we can talk later.
(hangs up phone)

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Mueller apparently applied the same remedy, because he later phoned Brennan, clearly intoxicated, and started trying to explain himself. He said he wanted to make a statement. Mueller was in way over his head.

BRENNAN

Hello?...wait who?...aww stop...no stop...I don't need to hear it. You're drunk. I suggest you call your fuckin attorney.

(Transition music)

SCENE 10

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Brennan and I were sweating bullets in the courtroom as we were waiting for Lance's sentence to be read. The electrician had entered a no-contest plea to manslaughter. The judge had begun the trial but saying that this whole tragedy might be seen just as a terrible accident. So we knew the verdict could go either way. But the judge started cataloguing the long list of willfully irresponsible choices that had led to this day and finished with giving Mueller 10 years.

Before Brennan and I went out for a celebratory lunch, we watched as Susie approached Mueller directly.

SUSIE (FORCEFULLY)

I have waited over two years to look you in the face, eye to eye, and simply have the chance to speak directly to you. You knew you killed him. He meant nothing to you. **You have met your match.** I would have spent the rest of my life tracking you down. And I found you. Greg's murderer. I brought you to justice.

APPLE (NARRATOR)

Later, Susie told me that she watched Mueller's face as the sentence was pronounced, and that he had looked terribly shock. Greg Fleniken did not know what hit him in his final moments, but Mueller knew what hit him when that sentence was read and he was taken away.

Gavel sounds. Jail cell door slams shut. Coughing comes from within. Playoff music.

End.