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Monologue

On Pens and Swords

Just be quiet and this will go faster. I know you think you've got this interview all figured out. You've already outlined my answers in your head. Let me see if I've got it. You'll say, how could a man of your stature and position end up in prison, like a criminal? You expect me to say that I just couldn't handle losing my wife and child. I snapped. I killed a man. Well, here's your newsflash: you killed me first.

There you go! Jot that down in your little notebook. Take it back to your boss at the Times. I bet they're just licking their chops, waiting for you to toss the next piece of innocent flesh in front of them. I'll tell you my story, sure. My lawyer told me not to talk to the press, but I've learned my lesson. The less I say, the more holes I leave, the more room you snakes have to wriggle. So here it is, will all the gory details. Complete with heartbreak, sexual deviancy, God, and murder.

You've already convicted me of that last one, by the way. I've had no trial, made no statement, but not one paper in the country gives a damn... excuse me. There were five cameras on me when I hit that reporter. Twenty-three microphones. They all heard and saw the same thing. A woman from the Post asked: how does it feel to have everything back to normal? One from your own Times said: do you think your wife will take you back? A man from ABC told his partner to stick the camera in my face and he said: are you going to return to the church? I ignored all of them. Just stood there while

they asked questions they knew I wouldn't answer. They just needed to give their audiences something to think about. To entice them.

Finally, the Fox reporter, Phil DeManned, leaned in through the crowd, smiling, and said: you don't still believe in God, after all, do you? And I hit him. Just like that. He fell down, hit his head on the pavement, and died from the concussion before the ambulance even arrived. They got it all on camera. Me turning red just before I pulled my fist back. The screams of the reporters as they all scrambled for their cell phones. Call 911! Stop the presses! Reverend Fahls, what have you done? Keep the camera on him!

You already knew this; you've seen the footage. But there's plenty you never saw. That's why I'm talking to you. I don't want you writing up some chop job on my life. Reverend Snaps, Kills Reporter. Even better: Fahls Falls. I can't believe you're writing that down! You need to start listening. Seen through bars, everyone looks like a criminal. If you don't pay attention, you might walk away believing what you saw on TV.

You reporters always start your stories at the end, at the climax. People are going to read five lines, get bored, and walk away remembering me as an enraged killer. Why don't you start at the beginning? One month ago, I was a respected church leader. I was married to a beautiful and loving woman named Elizabeth. We had a daughter, Bethany. She was a girl scout. You should write about that. That's who I was.

One day, the police showed up at my home. Reverend, they said, I'm sorry, but I have to do this. You're under arrest for... Well, look, a young girl from my church, she told them that I touched her. She's eleven. Do you remember the headlines? Are you from around here? I don't remember seeing you at church. Anyway, the story was everywhere by the next day. Corruption in the Church. Scandal in a Small Town. You

monsters had a ball. In one day (one day!) the media had made sure that every member of my church knew exactly what I had been accused of. You printed the allegations in detail. Everything this girl told you made it to print, while I refused to say a word. Sure, the articles were sprinkled with ‘allegedly’ and ‘claims’. But not the headlines, no! Reverend Faces Allegations? No: Reverend Strays From Flock!

Do you know what happened the following Sunday? I went to the church, to my church, and a crowd of fathers informed me that they no longer wanted me there. They were looking for someone else. Just like that. Unemployed.

I went home and found suitcases. Did you see this coming? Elizabeth was taking Bathany to stay at her parents’ house. She believed me, she said. Are you listening? She believed me. But while the papers continued to say that I was a pedophile, she couldn’t stay. She said she hoped I would understand. Just like that. My wife left me.

Elizabeth gave me two minutes to talk to my daughter. I told Bethany I was sorry, I wouldn’t be able to see her for a while, but that it was only temporary. She told me the kids at her school were talking about me. They said you did bad things to that little girl, she told me. My baby. My angel. Just like that. Gone.

While my life was crumbling, the police were talking to the girl, Kaitlin. They were piecing together her story. You probably know this part, but let me remind you. There were holes in her story. Not the kind that the media wanted to fill in, but the kind the police wanted to explore. Kaitlin was changing small details, forgetting important ones. It took them only seventy-seven hours, following my arrest, to realize that the girl had made up the whole thing.

Well, that's not quite right. She only made up the part about me being involved, and the part about it happening to her. One of the investigating detectives, it turns out, watches 20/20. So did Kaitlin, with her parents. Her parents did this a lot. They watched TV while she starved for attention. She saw her parents' eyes as they watched the special piece on sexual abuse by members of the clergy. She wanted them to look at her with that much interest. So she made up a special story of her own.

Are you getting all of this? Did you get the part about me being innocent? Make sure you put that right before the part where my life is destroyed. It'll be good for contrast. The Times'll love it. Speaking of which, I just wanted to thank you folks for printing that retraction. I mean, you sure must have felt bad about ruining my marriage, smearing my daughter's image of her father, and costing me my job and the respect of an entire town. Yeah, it's a good thing you printed that retraction. Those twenty-seven words of apology, tucked inside a thin black box on the thirteenth page... It really offset my losses.

Wait! Sit down. Your story isn't done yet.

This is the best part. This is where I talk about what was going on in my mind when I punched that reporter, Phil. You need to understand two things: I didn't mean to kill him, but I made a decision to hit him. Have you tried to put yourself in my position? I was standing in front of my empty house, surrounded by the very people who had taken my life from me. My family, my friends, my job. Phil's question was not really a question, in the strictest sense. It was a statement. He was making an accusation. The only thing that I had left was my faith in God, and here was a man, in front of thousand of viewers, trying to steal that from me.

Do you want to know what we're going to say in court? Have you gotten it yet? I didn't strike out in rage. I wasn't blinded by self-loathing. I was defending myself. Don't look so surprised. An unanswered question implies everything. I couldn't stay silent. And I couldn't yell out that I still believed in God, because why should a Reverend have to defend his faith? Unless... had he lost it? All I could do was make him be quiet. Stop the questions; stop the doubt; stop the rumors.

You forget that sometimes, don't you? That you don't write about what's news, you make the news. What you print becomes important and it becomes true. There is no such thing as an idle rumor, not in a town like this. The only way that I can get my good reputation back is if you tell everyone that I never lost it.

Wondering how to end? End it how it began. Reverend Fahls, loyal servant of the church, loving husband and father.