
UNDISCLOSED SEASON 2: THE STATE VS. JOEY WATKINS**EPISODE 14: PRESSURE POINTS**
POSTED: OCTOBER 17, 2016

Rabia Chaudry:

In last week's episode we showed how reward money was used to entice potential witnesses to come forward in Isaac's murder case, specifically to help the police get information implicating Joey. We'd planned on following that up this week by showing how Stanley Sutton, who was struggling to pull a case together against Joey, then enticed other law enforcement agencies to join his fight. But the night our last episode aired, Susan landed an interview with Corey Jacobs, Stanley Sutton's grand-nephew, and the voice you heard at the end of the episode trying to convince his buddy to implicate Joey for the reward money.

After talking to Corey, not only did we want to update you on what *he* had to say, but Susan realized there was a pattern here – that Stanley Sutton had a lot to do with not just pulling new witnesses into the case, but influencing the *existing* ones about where they stood on Joey, to the point of completely changing their statements by the time of his trial. So this week, we'll show you exactly how that happened.

Hi, and welcome to *Undisclosed: The State vs. Joey Watkins*. This week's episode is 'Pressure Points'. My name is Rabia Chaudry. I'm an attorney and National Security Fellow at the US Institute of Peace, and as always, I am here with my colleagues, Susan Simpson and Colin Miller.

Susan Simpson:

My name is Susan Simpson, and I'm an associate at the Volkov Law Group.

Colin Miller:

Hi, this is Colin Miller. I am an associate dean and professor at the University of South Carolina School of Law, and I blog at *Evidence Prof Blog*.

[2:22]

≈

Colin Miller:

In Ian McEwan's novel, *Atonement*, Briony Tallis sees an interaction at a fountain between her sister Celia and Robbie Turner, the son of the family housekeeper, which she construes as Robbie being sexually aggressive toward Celia. Later, Robbie, who is attracted to Celia, drafts multiple versions of a love letter to her, accidentally giving Briony the version with the cruder language to deliver. The inquisitive Briony opens the letter, reads it, and has her suspicions regarding Robbie confirmed. When Briony later comes upon Celia and Robbie making love in the library, she misinterprets it as an act of rape. Subsequently, Briony sees her cousin Lola being sexually assaulted in the dark by a man she cannot identify, but based upon her past misperceptions, she pins the crime on Robbie, leading to conviction. Years later, however, Robbie and Celia are reunited, Briony learns the true identity of Lola's assailant, and Briony promises to begin the legal process necessary to exonerate Robbie for the crime he didn't commit. In the fourth, and final, section of the book, however, it is revealed that Briony was the author of the preceding sections of the novel. Robbie and Celia never reunited, and Briony never set out to legally right her wrong.

The question at heart of the novel is whether Briony can ever get atonement for the sin of her youth. And the answer, as Sylvie Maurel writes in 'Beyond Repair: Ruins and Rubble in Ian McEwan's *Atonement*', is that in *Atonement*, the damage seems to be beyond repair. The past may be rewritten but not reclaimed.

The same might be said about the prosecution of Joey Watkins, and both our case and McEwan’s fictionalized narrative feature similarities that we’ve touched upon before. As we’ve noted, focalization tells us that no narrator is completely objective. Instead, we must look at context and narrator bias. Authors have observed that focalization plays a huge role in *Atonement*, with the youthful Briony seeing but not hearing the interaction at the fountain, reading but not understanding the words Robbie intended for the adult Celia, witnessing the subsequent sexual act between Robbie and Celia but misinterpreting it, and hearing but not seeing the person assaulting Lola, leading her to fill in the blanks based upon her preconceived notions.

To what extent can we blame someone like Briony who, like all humans, seeks order in a chaotic world, and is acting on limited information? And to what extent does she need atonement? And how does her youth at the time of the event factor into the analysis? With this podcast, we end up talking to a lot of people who were young when they gave statements and testimony against defendants who were themselves very young. Often these statements and testimony were based upon knowledge about a very limited part of the case, and sometimes it was based upon misinformation.

This leads to the same questions asked in *Atonement* – how do *we* and how do *they* view their actions now, and can the damage, to the extent it exists, be undone?

[5:08]

≈

Susan Simpson:

Last week, we covered what we know about the reward money in this case, and the testimony of Stanley Sutton’s grandnephew, Corey Jacobs, whom you also heard on the wiretap trying to claim that reward, as well as trying to convince his friend, David Jones, to help him in coming forward with information that would lead to the reward being given to *them*. I was finally able to speak to Corey for the first time on the evening that we finalized that episode, so it was too late to add a real update, but we wanted to cover now what he says in 2016 about what happened all those years ago.

And, when I started talking to Corey, he told me, first off, what we all pretty much already knew:

[5:45]

Corey Jacobs:

I mean I’m telling you, that’s what all this was about.

Susan Simpson:

Uh-huh...

Corey Jacobs:

When they said that they were giving away \$40,000 for that, I mean, everybody and I mean-most of them willingly went. Like, me and David did not. You know, like, I was-- I was kind of like-- I ain’t going to say ‘forced’ into it, because I mean I was old enough to know, you know, consciously what I was doing. But... You know, kind of just like, you know, I don’t want Stanley on my ass. Excuse my French. You know? I need this dude off my ass.

Susan Simpson:

Mm-hmm. And Stanley was pretty relentless.

Corey Jacobs:

Yeah! I mean and even David was the same way, you know, like, we didn’t-- Stanley was tough. I mean when you heard that name, you was like, “Ooh...”

Susan Simpson:

But, Corey insisted to me, Joey *had* been bragging about the murder. Sure, the money got them to come forward, but Joey was still guilty and had still told everyone about it, essentially.

- Corey Jacobs:** *You know, Georgia Power had-- Had agreed to reward someone with \$40,000 for the-- You know, information and conviction of Joey, whomever, you know what I mean?*
- Susan Simpson:** *Mm-hmm.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *And, so, like, at that time, y'know, being 18, we were like, "Ooh..." You know, like, "That's a lot of money, ooh..."*
- Susan Simpson:** *Still a lot of money! [laughs]*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Yeah, I mean, it really is. I mean, especially it means, you know, go to the bank, cash that out, put it in your pocket. You know, that's great. But anyway, the only thing I remember what-- I mean, like, and Joey did. I don't care what he says, what he does, for the rest of his life. He brags. He brags. You know, they bragged about killing Isaac. Mark, not so sure, but Joey-- Joey did very-- Very blatantly, you know what I'm saying?*
- Susan Simpson:** *So I asked him about who else he knew might have known that was important to the case, or who else might've had information. He could only think of one name off-hand, but, he said, that money had been an enticing lure for just about everyone in the community.*
- [7:44]
- Corey Jacobs:** *Only things I really remember that were really vital to this case was um, Buddy Vines, uh... There was one more-- And I know his name as well as I know my own, because we were all friends, it was--*
- Susan Simpson:** *How was Buddy Vines involved?*
- Corey Jacobs:** *I really don't know, because me and him did not-- We were-- We were not even-- We were, I don't guess you could even call us... Um... We're not-- We're-- We know each other, I mean we know each other, like, we see each other, he's probably, "Hey, how you doing?" and, you know, and keep moving.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *But, I really don't know, so.*
- Susan Simpson:** *But you knew he was involved, somehow?*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Yeah, I mean, of course. I mean like this was-- This was a big deal. You know what I mean? And it was all about the money. And do you know know that nobody even got paid for that? Like the money was not even... There was like, over fifty people that testified against these people and the money was never distributed.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Really?!*
- Corey Jacobs:** *No!*
- Susan Simpson:** *Did-- Did-- No one got it?*
- Corey Jacobs:** *No.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Corey also told me that he'd never voluntarily come forward to give Stanley Sutton a statement. That Stanley had not really given him a choice in the matter. They were related, yes, but they weren't close, and if anything, his relationship with Stanley Sutton made him an easier target.*

[8:56]

Corey Jacobs: *That is my great uncle. His sister raised me. So, when he caught wind that I knew about, you know what I mean? Like, he was on me like... Stink on doo doo.*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah. You're not the first to say that.*

Corey Jacobs: *And... You know, this is my uncle, but me and him weren't close, like, you know what I'm saying, like?*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah.*

Corey Jacobs: *But he had-- He just never was really... He was good to me, like, you know what I mean? Like I'm not saying, but like, as far as-- You know, having an uncle, duh-duh-duh, you know what I mean? He wasn't-- He wasn't that one.*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah. Um, so, he-- When he-- Okay, so, Sutton came to you?*

Corey Jacobs: *Stanley?*

Susan Simpson: *Mm-hmm.*

Corey Jacobs: *Yeah, he come got me! Made me go with him!*

Susan Simpson: *Huh.*

Corey Jacobs: *Stanley didn't play.*

Susan Simpson: *How'd he find out that you knew something?*

Corey Jacobs: *I mean, I don't know this, 'Pug', like her name, if she heard me talking about it. You know what I mean? Like, we were kids. You what I mean? Like, we didn't... You know, maybe she heard about it and she said something to him because like, I dang sure didn't tell him. I didn't call him.*

Rabia Chaudry: Of course, at Joey's trial, Corey had testified to the exact opposite:

Question: Did you contact Stanley, or did Stanley contact you?

Answer: I contacted Stanley.

But although Corey had testified that he came forward on his own, perhaps to make him seem like a more credible witness, it seems that what Corey told Susan last week was correct. Because it's also what Stanley Sutton said had happened when he interviewed Corey for the first time. There, he states clearly that it was *he* that had gone to Corey, after learning that Corey may have known something:

[10:25]

Stanley Sutton: *Corey prior to going on tape we-- I was telling you about a case that I'm working on a young boy by name of Isaac Dawkins, 20 years old. Uh, and last night I talked to you by phone about it-- I had picked up some information that you had heard a little some them about this case-- that correct?*

Corey Jacobs: *Yeah.*

[12:18]

Susan Simpson: At the beginning of my conversation with Corey, like I said, he continued to maintain that he had heard Joey confess all those years ago.

Susan Simpson: *The story with Joey. You said he'd been bragging about it?*

Corey Jacobs: *Yeah, he did that a lot, he sure did.*

Susan Simpson: *Okay, did you-- Did you witness this? Or did you hear about it?*

Corey Jacobs: *Yeah, I've heard it. Yes. I've heard him do it. I sure have.*

Susan Simpson: *What would he say?*

Corey Jacobs: *Um, see that-- That's something I don't-- Because, like, in my testimony, like, you can even, I don't know if you've read the transcripts or not--*

Susan Simpson: *Mm-hmm.*

Corey Jacobs: *I don't really know what your role is here, but like, in the trial-- like I even, my-- My copy was, I had over heard that it was a shotgun that was used. Which is not true at all.*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah, I was wondering about that.*

Corey Jacobs: *[clears throat]*

Susan Simpson: *Did you ever think another type of firearm at any point?*

Corey Jacobs: *No, I did not. Because, I mean, that's what I heard. Like, you know what I mean?*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah.*

Corey Jacobs: *Word of mouth. And this is what I heard. So like, that's-- There was never really like, "Hey, look, I, uh, I used the .22 pistol, or a .9 millimeter" or...*

Susan Simpson: *Do you recall any places where you might've overheard Joey bragging?*

Corey Jacobs: *Mine was at Home Depot. Like, we were-- You know, when we were kids and we rode around, like Home Depot parking lot, things like that were the places to pull in and we all hung out and talked, you know, chitter-chattered and things like that.*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah.*

Corey Jacobs: *But that was the only time I ever seen and heard the bragging about it. He swears he didn't, but you did, buddy. Know what I'm saying? Like, I know you did kill Isaac. I mean I will say that out loud and put that on record. Like, I-- In my heart, I know you did kill Isaac. But you bragged about it.*

Susan Simpson: *Oh, he bragged about shooting?*

Corey Jacobs: *No, he never said, "Hey, I shot him", but just, you know, just bragging about Isaac getting killed, that they were responsible for his death.*

Susan Simpson: *You say, 'they', was... Did he-- Did Joey just say, 'they', or did he say names?*

Corey Jacobs: *Nah, he never said, like, "Me and Mark", he didn't do that.*

Susan Simpson: *Okay, so he never mentioned Mark at all?*

Corey Jacobs: *Mm-hmm.*

Susan Simpson: *Did you know who he was?*

Corey Jacobs: *No, I didn't know who he was. I mean, I have to like, I have to give it to them. Neither one of them ever turned State's evidence on the other one or anything like that.*

Susan Simpson: *That's pretty rare.*

Corey Jacobs: *They stood-- Yeah, it's very rare. But they-- They stood their ground.*

≈

Susan Simpson: Corey kept minimizing, though, what he'd testified about and what role he'd actually played in this case. I got the impression that he, well, clearly had some regrets about what he'd done back then and wished he hadn't, but it also seemed to me that Corey had managed to convince himself that nothing he'd said had actually really *harmed* Joey.

[14: 47]

Corey Jacobs: *I don't know what David said. Still, to this day, I don't know. We've never even spoked about it. You know what I mean, every now and then, I'd be like, "Hey, did that happen?" you know, blah-blah-blah. But me, personally, just don't believe anything I said was vital to his case. Because I mean, like I really-- I was shooting in the wind too, you know what I mean? [clears throat] That's a bad choice of words, but... That's what I was doing, was telling these people what I heard.*

Susan Simpson: *Mm-hmm.*

Corey Jacobs: *You know? And unfortunately, Georgia sucks. Because, I'm telling you, I did not want to be a part of anything that was going to be incriminating to Joey. I don't know-- I know that probably my testimony hurt at the time because it was small. You know, the juries here... You know, they heard all these people, many people before me. And blah, blah, blah. I even testified in court. They asked me, I mean, Tami Colston asked me, you know, why? I said, "Because Georgia Power is offering \$40,000!"*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah.*

Corey Jacobs: *That's, so, that's probably in the transcripts. I mean, I remember saying it like I just told you. You know? "Hey look, I'm here because they're offering \$40,000, I'm going to tell you what I know." Like I said, if I could go back and do this again, I would not have done it.*

≈

Colin Miller: So Corey was confident. His testimony was just cumulative to what all these other people were already testifying to and it hadn't really mattered. But Corey had been sequestered, along with all the other witnesses, meaning they couldn't hear what other people testified to at trial. And what he *didn't* know was that no one else had testified to hearing Joey confess.

[16:30]

Susan Simpson: *But you're confident whatever he said was definitely, like, an admission that he was involved in some fashion in the murder?*

Corey Simpson: *Yeah, I mean, because... [clears throat] I'm not the only person that ever said that he bragged. He did brag about it. There's no way that many people say that you said that and you didn't say that. I'm sorry.*

[crosstalk]

- Susan Simpson:** *Well, no one else... No one else says that. I'm sorry, I have to take that back. No one who was not in jail with Joey said that.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *[pause] Yeah, what, he basically never bragged about it like, publicly? Only in jail? Only people in jail were the ones who were...?*
- Susan Simpson:** *Well, there was one jailhouse-- Well, he also recanted. He said he was only doing it to get a better deal. And then he changed his mind and didn't-- At trial he said he changed his mind, "I made it all up". But you're the only person on the outside that has said that they heard him bragging about doing it.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Um. [pause] Well, like I said... This was a long time ago. And I really can't tell you what was... What I remember he said, but. [clears throat twice] At the time, you know, I mean, and I mean, like I said, at the time I was young and here I was, I had Stanley on me, I mean, and I was scared. We were scared of Stanley. We didn't want any part of Stanley.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Nope, you don't want to mess with that guy.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *You know, we didn't-- Not saying I was intimidated, or like, forced to say something, you know? We both know for a fact that people get in situations and they say stuff, I mean people-- People get confessions that really aren't guilty. I watch it on TV all the time, I'm like, wow. You know? So like- that's what I'm saying. Like, I wish I could take my words all back.*
- Because, I mean, I... You know what I mean, when you're in a situation, you hear something, you're nervous, you know, and like... Okay, well, now I'm starting to see why maybe I was so vital. Because you're saying I'm the only person who was like, on the street, on the outside or jail that said something that like, heard him say something like-- Now I see why like, it pinpointed.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah. And you're also the one that didn't recant. 'Cause the other guy-- I don't know, you probably didn't know. Reese Ellis...?*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Nuh-uh.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah, he was just some dude in jail. I don't think he was like, in your group or anything. Or your-- I think he was older. He was the other guy supposed to testify he heard Joey confess. But on stand he said that that never actually happened. So you were only one that-- I mean, 'cause, since you weren't in jail, obviously you're much more credible. I mean, the guys that were in jail were...*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Well, actually, when I did got to court and testify, I was in jail, on probation, on missing my probation violation. [clears throat]*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah, but he-- But he told you on the outside, so that's--*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Yeah, well, he didn't tell me directly. That's what I'm saying. I mean, it's not like it was, "Hey Corey, by the way, just want to let you know, we were the ones-- [clears throat]*
- Susan Simpson:** *[laughs] So yeah--*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Which is still hearsay. You know, if I hear something indirectly, I'm standing there listening to a conversation, you know what I mean? He could've been a John Wayne movie for all I know. You know what I mean?*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah.*

- Corey Jacobs:** *That's what I'm saying like, now, I did not mean to hurt him. You know? I did not mean to-- [clears throat]*
- Susan Simpson:** *So, was it your impression that there was a lot of people that were saying that he- he testified, or he confessed to them? Like, in trial?*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Well, I- Pug... Pug--?*
- Susan Simpson:** *Uh-huh.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *She- that was Stanley's sister. Well, her brother, Alan, works for the Sheriff's Department, been working there since I was a kid.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Mm-hmm.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *So like, there's a lot of law enforcement in our family. And like, he told me, verbatim, there was 51 people that testified against Joey Watkins. There were 51 people!*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah, it's a long list.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Yeah that's 51 people! [pause] So, yeah, I mean have to believe that. [laughs]*
- Susan Simpson:** *But, yeah, no one else other than that guy who was from the jail testified at the hearing Joey confessed.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *Well. I don't know. I just have to say that-- I mean, I'm not going to sit here and say that it was different, because, I mean, if I said I heard it back then, I mean-- [clears throat]*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah. No, no. Well, I was hoping is that you could think of some names of people who might've also heard him confess. But sounds like you don't remember that either.*
- Corey Jacobs:** *No, I really, truly don't. You know what I mean, it's-- [clears throat] basically to mean, it's the same, you know, like, hearing Mark say tell David, he didn't state a name, he just said, "I'm being investigated for, you know, this murder".*

≈

- Susan Simpson:** When I was talking to Corey, it was really striking to me how his confidence that he'd heard Joey confess to the murder seemed to evaporate the moment he learned that no one else had ever testified that they'd heard Joey confessing to it. Or, at least there was a sudden ambiguity to his statements to what he said he remembered of Joey's statements that night in the Home Depot parking lot. Like when he started saying Joey could've been talking about a John Wayne movie for all he knew.
- Well, if the bits and pieces that he overheard could've been about a *movie*, then it doesn't seem like he could've have heard *that* much about what was being said. And then, Corey seemed to be telling me that whatever he had heard Joey say was the same as what he'd heard *Mark* say that day when he ran into him with David Jones in the Governor's parking lot. But that hadn't been any kind of confession at *all*, what Mark was saying. It was just a true and mundane acknowledgement that he was currently the target of a murder investigation.
- And Corey's description of what he overheard Mark say to David seems to be right, or at least it matches what Mark remembers, but if that was similar to what Joey said, then it would seem all Corey overheard was Joey talking about Sutton hounding him for the murder, not Joey saying he'd *done* it.

And of course, that's all assuming this Home Depot thing ever happened at all. I told Joey about my conversation with Corey, and he pointed out something out that I'd glossed over before, that I hadn't put together.

[22:28]

Susan Simpson: Corey was interesting to talk to. He...

Joey Watkins: I can't. I just... You know what I said?

Susan Simpson: Mm-hmm.

Joey Watkins: I wouldn't know him if he walked up to me right now because I can't even remember what he looked like from trial.

Susan Simpson: Did you ever, like, meet him in person?

Joey Watkins: I never talked to that dude.

Susan Simpson: Did you ever fight him?

Joey Watkins: Never.

Susan Simpson: He says, on the wire, that like, you wouldn't fight him and that's why the cops picked him up.

Joey Watkins: Come on man. Do you believe that?

Susan Simpson: I mean, I could have! [laughs]

Joey Watkins: I mean...

Susan Simpson: I could believe you'd like, talk to him on the phone.

Joey Watkins: I never... I never had-- I don't even-- I wouldn't even know if he walked up to me now. That's the God's honest truth.

Susan Simpson: Okay, that part I didn't know. So he, I mean obviously, didn't seem like he was your kind of crowd.

Joey Watkins: No, he's not. He, uh... I know his brother. Me and his brother dated the same girl in like, seventh grade. Dustin. I had nothing to do with that dude.

Susan Simpson: But not only would Joey not have been able to recognize Corey... Joey's skeptical that Corey could've recognized him.

[23:33]

Joey Watkins: We probably didn't even hang around with the same crowd.

Susan Simpson: So, would he even have recognized you on sight?

Joey Watkins: He would have not-- He probably heard about me.

Susan Simpson: Mm-hmm.

Joey Watkins: You see, people, people back then like to, when they want attention, they'll talk about someone they know. And, "Oh, I did this to him, I did that to him", and everybody says, "Wow, you did

that to him? Oh, you're a badass!" You know, that's how people-- He probably probably piggy-backed off me to try to make himself known.

Susan Simpson: But then again, Joey and Corey did have mutual friends, they could've possibly run into each other at places and times. So there's no way to prove whether or not Corey really could've recognized Joey back in 2000, but there *is* a reason to think maybe Joey's *right*, that maybe Corey wouldn't have been able to. Corey's whole story at trial was that he had known Joey from High School – that they'd been at Pepperell together briefly when Corey was a freshman and Joey an upperclassman – but, um... Joey never actually went to *Pepperell*. Corey's claim for how he could've known who Joey was doesn't even make sense.

Joey Watkins: *Then he claimed I went to Pepperell?*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah, he said he knew you from school, from like, you were ahead of him and you graduated from Pepperell.*

Joey Watkins: *Never, never went to Pepperell.*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah. When I was talking to him on the phone, he was saying that he just saw you there, 'cause maybe you had friends there and you hung out there with them.*

Joey Watkins: *He is such a liar. Him and Adam Elrod need to get married and live happily ever after.*

Susan Simpson: [laughs]

[24:59]

Susan Simpson: When I talked to Corey, he said he'd seen Joey hanging out at Pepperrell, so maybe he just assumed Joey was a student there, who knows. So... *Maybe*. But if they didn't go to school together, and they never hung out socially, and Corey had never seen Joey again since his freshman year of High School... How likely *is* it that the one time he'd have run into him again, and been able to recognize him right off, was this time that Joey was supposedly in a Home Depot parking lot, preaching a sermon on his guilt in Isaac's murder?

Susan Simpson: *And then he said-- Maintained that he'd seen you at the Home Depot and you confessed.*

Joey Watkins: *Wow...*

Susan Simpson: *But then later on in the conversation, like he brought up, "Yeah, there were 51 witnesses on the list, I heard from my uncle at the FCSO office." And learned there were 51 witnesses, and he was like, yeah, so he was confessing to everyone. And then when I told him that no one other witness outside of the jail had said that you confessed, that he was the only one...*

Joey Watkins: *Mm-hmm.*

Susan Simpson: *He seemed to be kind of like blown away by that and started to suddenly backtrack.*

Joey Watkins: *Mm-hmm*

Susan Simpson: *Um, and he was like, "See I shouldn't have been testifying, I was only in it for money, who knows what he was saying in the parking lot, it could've been a John Wayne movie they were talking about".*

Joey Watkins: *Is that what he said?*

Susan Simpson: *Yeah!*

Susan Simpson: Joey, however, was not so quick to believe *any* of what Corey had told me though:

[26:24]

Susan Simpson: *I found it believable. I'm probably a dupe. But he seemed believable to me, when he was talking about this and how he's only ever done it for the money, and he said something like, would you believe it? They never gave the money out.*

Joey Watkins: *I don't believe it.*

Susan Simpson: *I don't believe it for a second. But he... I kind of believed him when he told me that Sutton told him the money was never distributed.*

Joey Watkins: *You want me to tell you what I believe? I believe he may have been coached already. And they knew that-- They knew, they probably told him, well, they're going to call you and they're going to do this, that and the other. Because his- Stanley Sutton, believe me, is still connected. Even though he's where he's at-- That, if he's any kind of coherent, he is aware of what's going on. That man--*

Susan Simpson: [sighs] *You know, Corey was telling me he was going... That he did go visit Stanley Sutton.*

Joey Watkins: *And I'm telling you, if they're-- If they're still connected- trust me, they know what's going on and they are not fooled. Or-- Or not unprepared. They are prepared. I promise you.*

Susan Simpson: *That's a very good point. I probably am a dupe.*

Joey Watkins: *No, no, you're very intelligent. It's just-- You're not-- You just don't know how this works. You're just learning this. This is-- This is stone age stuff how these people work.*

Susan Simpson: *You know, and I-- Well, I'm kind of kicking myself. He probably has talked to someone. He probably-- 'cause we did-- We tried really hard to find him and he would never get back to us, and now he suddenly does.*

Joey Watkins: *See what I'm saying?*

Susan Simpson: While I appreciate Joey's vote of confidence that I'm not a *total* idiot, after I spoke to him I saw something that made me wonder a little more if I *was*. Because, according to photos posted on social media, Corey had gone to visit Stanley Sutton the day after I'd spoken to him. Huh.

So, is it possible Corey expected my call, and knew what to say about the reward? Yes. But, is it possible that Stanley Sutton really *did* tell Corey that no one had gotten the reward... That it was never distributed? Yes. So in that respect, we're back where we started on the reward. With no idea where the reward money went.

[30:21]

≈

Susan Simpson: When I spoke to the jurors in this case, there were two primary issues that most of them identified as to what convinced them of Joey's guilt, and that is the dogs and the cell phone evidence, which we'll be getting to later. But there is a *third* runner-up, however, that I've heard again and again mentioned as irrefutable data point that lead them towards Joey's guilt.

And that was the testimony of James Hogue, the father of Joey's girlfriend Aislinn. Now, Mr Hogue, they said, had no reason to lie, and, unlike most of the other witnesses, he was a sane adult. So, to the jurors, his testimony had an extra weight to it.

And since what he said implied that Joey had far more knowledge of the murder than he should have, it made a pretty convincing case for Joey's guilt.

Rabia Chaudry:

But here's the thing: In the weeks and months after Isaac's murder, Aislinn's parents said repeatedly that there had been nothing unusual that happened the night he was shot, nothing of note and *nothing* that contradicted Joey's own statements. It was only eight months later that that began to change. Mr Hogue has passed away, and we can't ask him why his story changed, but based on what else we know of Sutton's investigation, there's a strong theory about what was likely behind it.

Colin Miller:

So, to refresh your recollection, on January 11th, 2000, Isaac Dawkins was shot between about 7:15 and 7:20 pm as he drove north on Highway 27 to his home in Armuchee. According to the State, Joey either shot Isaac, or drove a car while his passenger shot Isaac. And as we've noted, Joey's story has always been that he was driving south on Highway 27 on his way to see his girlfriend, Aislinn, when he saw Isaac's car, already wrecked. According to Joey, he called his sister about the wreck, stopped at the Cedartown Save-a-Ton to buy Aislinn a Gatorade, and then arrived at her house in Cedartown.

It seemed like the Rome Police Department initially doubted that Joey had gone to Aislinn's house that night – their notes express their surprise when they did confirm that Joey was dating Aislinn and that he had been there on the evening of January 11th. But although they tried on numerous occasions to speak to Aislinn, her parents were protective of her. They shielded Aislinn from the police at first, and then refused to let them interview her. Her parents did speak, though, to Detective Moser, and gave a straight-forward statement about what happened that night – which was pretty much nothing of note. On January 20th, a week after Isaac's death, Moser spoke to Aislinn's father, Mr Hogue, who told him simply that Joey had shown up in his own vehicle that night, nothing more.

Rabia Chaudry:

Following up on this story, officers with the Rome and Floyd County Police Departments spoke with Aislinn, her father, Mr Hogue, and her mother, Sharon, on several occasions, with the information that they got evolving over time. On January 25th, five days after initially talking with Mr Hogue, Moser spoke with Mr Hogue and Sharon over the phone. In this phone interview, Mr Hogue said that Aislinn was sick at her basketball game on the evening of January 11th, so Mr Hogue picked her up. Between 5:30 and 6:00 pm, Aislinn talked to Joey. Joey then came down to their house, not real late, and stayed no later than 10:00 pm. According to Mr. Hogue, the only thing that Joey said was that Isaac was in an accident.

Meanwhile, Sharon said Aislinn was sick on January 11th. That night, Aislinn talked with Joey on the phone. Joey came to their house at about 8:00 pm, driving a white Dodge truck. Joey told Sharon that he saw Isaac's wreck, that he was caught in traffic at the wreck scene, and that he didn't know that Isaac was a student at Floyd College.

And the following day, January 26th, Detective Moser spoke with Mr Hogue again, over the phone, and also talked with Aislinn for the first time. The notes from the interview with Mr Hogue are very similar to the notes from the interview the prior day – that Aislinn got sick at her basketball game, Mr Hogue picked her up between 5:30 and 6:15 pm, at around 7:00 pm, Joey was on the phone with Aislinn for 10-15 minutes, and at around 8:00 pm, Joey came to their house and stayed no later than 10:00. Mr Hogue thinks Joey drove a white truck to their house.

Detective Moser also spoke with Aislinn over the phone for the first time. She told him she got sick at her basketball game on the 11th, she went home, and called Joey at about 7:00. They talked for between five and 15 minutes. She called him at his house, and Tim Hughes

answered. Joey said he had already planned to come over to her house and then he arrived there at about 8:00 pm. The notes indicate that Joey didn't say anything about the wreck. According to Aislinn, Joey was driving his Dodge truck that night, and she'd never seen him drive his sister's car. Aislinn said she'd never *heard* of Isaac and that, on the night of the 11th, Joey called her from the Sav-a-Ton in Cedartown, where he was buying her a Gatorade.

Thereafter, on March 14th, Stanley Sutton was on the case and called the Hogues to set up a meeting with Sharon and Mr Hogue on March 16th. On that day, Stanley Sutton talked with the Hogues and Mr Hogue told him that, on the night of January 11th, Aislinn got sick at her basketball game and he went to pick her up between 6:00 and 6:30. Later, Aislinn got on the phone, and he thinks she was talking to Joey, who later came to the house, but he's not sure when.

According to the notes, Sharon apparently got angry with Detective Moser and said he lied to her. The notes show that she wouldn't let Sutton talk with Aislinn at *all*. They also indicate that she talked with an attorney, that Joey arrived in his white truck at 9:30 pm on January 11th, and that he was acting normal on the night of January 11th.

According to the notes, Sutton asked for permission to talk with Aislinn and while Mr Hogue gave permission, his wife refused, saying she didn't know anything. Instead, Sharon asked Sutton write down questions that *she* would ask to her.

Colin Miller:

So, yeah, at this point in the investigation, everything seems pretty routine, and in line with what Joey had to say about him arriving the night of the 11th in his truck, acting pretty normal, not having knowledge that Isaac was dead, but having knowledge of the wreck. And at that point, more than five months pass before there's any record of further contact between either police department and the Hogues.

But then, on August 18th, the Hogues talked with Chief Jim Free of the Rome Police Department in a Kroger parking lot in Cedartown. In this interview, for the first time, the Hogues say that something had been off about the night Isaac was shot. That Joey's behavior and words had revealed a knowledge of the crime greater than he should have possessed. For instance, according to Chief Free's notes, Aislinn's parents told Free that Joey was real 'hyper' and nervous on the night of January 11th. Sharon also told Free that Joey started having stomach problems after Isaac was killed. Chief Free's memo on his interview with the Hogues ends on a somewhat ominous note, though. He wrote, quote, "The Hogues are going to search their memory for statements that Joey has made about Isaac death".

[36:57]

Rabia Chaudry:

At trial, Mr. Hogue described the evening of January 11th, 2000, in much the same way he had before. He picked up Aislinn from her ball game because she was sick, then Joey came down to visit her, driving his white truck:

Lawyer:

When Joey came over that night, did he say anything about seeing a friend's, uh, wreck on 27?

Mr Hogue:

I didn't hear the word "wreck".

Lawyer:

What did he say?

Mr Hogue:

If I can remember, I was checking on her, and you know, I wasn't listening to their conversation or anything, but he told Aislinn that he just saw, uh, one of his good friends had just get killed.

Lawyer:

Didn't give you a name?

Mr Hogue:

No. [inaudible]

- Lawyer:** *Were those-- Were those his words? "Good friend?"*
- Mr Hogue:** *Yes, sir. From what I can remember, that's what he said.*
- Lawyer:** *Did he indicate how he knew it was a good friend?*
- Mr Hogue:** *No, sir, I didn't hear that. I-- I went back to the kitchen.*
- Lawyer:** *I understand, Mr Hogue. Mr Hogue... Did he indicate how he knew it was his friend?*
- Mr Hogue:** *No. I didn't hear him say that back then.*
- Lawyer:** *Okay, Mr Hogue.*
- Rabia Chaudry:** On cross, Mr. Hogue did acknowledge that this wasn't something he'd said before. That, in his first statements, he'd described something a little bit differently:
- [38:09]
- Lawyer:** *Do... You recall being interviewed by Mr Moser? Don't you?*
- Mr Hogue:** *Yes, sir.*
- Lawyer:** *Or, Detective Moser. Detective Moser asked you about Joey Watkins' demeanor.*
- Mr Hogue:** *Right.*
- Lawyer:** *And do you recall telling him that he was perfectly fine?*
- Mr Hogue:** *He was, as far as I knew. You know, I was worried about my daughter, her being real sick. And I didn't-- I wasn't around him that much, I-- You know, just passing in and out.*
- Lawyer:** *Do you recall previously testifying that--?*
- Mr Hogue:** *Yeah, he may-- He acted a little-- He acted a little strange. But you know, she was sick, and uh, I heard him say that he'd seen a good friend get killed or died.*
- Lawyer:** *And do you recall saying that there's nothing unusual about him and he's perfectly fine?*
- Mr Hogue:** *I didn't see nothing unusual, really. Maybe had a little-- He had like, a little funny, a little nervous. But that...*
- Lawyer:** *You didn't say that to Detective Moser, though, did you?*
- Mr Hogue:** *No. No, sir.*
- Lawyer:** *And he specifically asked you about the demeanor?*
- Mr Hogue:** *Yes, sir.*
- Lawyer:** *Alright, thank you.*
- Susan Simpson:** And I can see now why the jury found this particular testimony so important. Even though it seems, in comparison to a *lot* of the stories being thrown around at trial, pretty subdued. But the thing is, I mean, Mr Hogue is Aislinn's father. He is *not* one of these kids, he doesn't know Joey beyond being the father of his girlfriend. So if he says that Joey knew, on the night of the

11th, that Isaac had been killed, that must mean that Joey's story isn't true. Because, according to him, and what *he* saw, he couldn't have known that Isaac was killed and he couldn't have been shaken up by Isaac's death, because he wasn't even sure, not totally sure, that it had been Isaac that had wrecked. Let alone that it had been a fatal accident.

But the assumption that Mr Hogue had no reason to possibly shade his testimony in a certain direction, or had no dog in this fight, well, that might be unfounded. Because Mr Hogue's testimony didn't just change overnight.

Rabia Chaudry:

I've got to say, though, just to the point that you made before... Even if Joey had been responsible for shooting Isaac, or he had somebody else with him that shot Isaac, I mean, he had-- He still would have no way of knowing unless he actually went to the truck to look in to see if it actually connected and if it *killed* Isaac, I mean, he could have shot at him and Isaac just went off the road. He almost still would have had no way of knowing that he was actually killed in this incident.

Susan Simpson:

Yeah, I mean, how would he know the shot went true? It could have just scared Isaac who, you know, pulled the steering wheel, and... Then again, I guess theoretically, given how *long* the truck stayed in the median, how long it seemed to not have a responsive driver behind the wheel... Joey could've assumed that, and I guess it's what the jury thought. Because, again, whether or not Joey *could* have known that if he *was* the killer, he definitely couldn't have known it if he *didn't* do it.

Colin Miller:

Overall, I mean, this seems to be a case of false attribution pretty clearly. And you can see from all these prior statements, the months after the incident, there's no indication whatsoever that Joey has said in the night in question that Isaac had been killed, and it seems to me that eventually, after being told this over the course of the investigation, this became part of Mr Hogue's testimony. Probably unknowingly. Where he just created a false memory that it had come from Joey when in fact he had learned it from other sources.

Susan Simpson:

Then again, I keep coming back to the end of Chief Free's write-up in his conversation with the Hogues. I mean, he writes:

The Hogues are going to search their memory for statements that Joey has made about Isaac's death.

And then, next thing you know, he's in court saying, "Oh, wait, there *was* a statement that Joey had made about Isaac's death that I've suddenly recalled right after Chief Free said I should think really hard about what he might have said".

But again, *why*? Why would Mr Hogue do this? Well, I don't want to call it malice, because it's not *like* that. Because, based on what we can see in the record, he was acting out of a rational, and to him, very genuine fear for his daughter's life.

≈

Colin Miller:

Now, Aislinn and Joey broke up sometime in August 2000, and on Sept 8th of that year, a warrant was issued for Joey's arrest for stalking. He was arrested, and held without bond for 72 hours. But Joey's arrest doesn't seem coincidental. In fact, from Sutton's notes, we can see that he was heavily involved in the process. Aislinn lived in Polk County, not Floyd, so the warrant was issued by the Polk County Police Department, but Sutton's notes describe how he was in close contact with the Polk County officer the whole time, and arranged for the speedy arrest of Joey after it was issued.

Joey's arrest followed an incident in August where he had a confrontation with Aislinn in a Kroger parking lot, and then later showed up at her house to ask for the return of some of his things that Aislinn still had. And, eventually, Aislinn's uncle and cousin would also give statements in the case, claiming that in between the Kroger and Aislinn's house, Joey had followed them, mistaking them for Aislinn, and had acted aggressively, even trying to drive them off the road. The arrest affidavit stated:

Accused has followed, harassed, called victim on phone almost every night and day, confronted her on Main Street, called school, tried to get her to meet him at the Amoco Station on Highway 27 South. On August 13th, 2000, accused followed her to her home and had a confrontation with her father. He has been told not to come to her residence or call her, page her, or contact her in any way and still he phones or pages. On August 12th, 2000, a bond for good behavior was taken at the Polk County Magistrate. Victim is Aislinn Hogue, age 17.

Susan Simpson:

Later, the FCPD went and interviewed a guy named Jason Cheatwood. That's the boy Aislinn was with in the Kroger parking lot. And he does say that Joey showed up in the parking lot, pulled his shirt off and said, "Hey want to fight?" – only in much more 'brotastic' terms – and he and Aislinn then left. But I found it striking that as soon as Jason's story began to deviate from the narrative behind the stalking warrant, the interview was shut down almost instantly.

[44:19]

Stanley Sutton:

Did he follow you then?

Jason Cheatwood:

No, sir I didn't see him then.

Stanley Sutton:

You didn't see him then. And this is the only thing that you know about Joey?

Jason Cheatwood:

Yes, sir.

Stanley Sutton:

Okay, this is ending the interview with um, Jason Cheatwood on January the 9th.

Susan Simpson:

And as for the harassing calls... Well, Joey was calling Aislinn, we have the phone records and can see that. But she was also calling *him*. The stalking report makes it sound like he was harassing her against requests that he stop all contact, and there's no way to know now. These calls weren't recorded. But judging from the number and frequency of the calls that were going *back* to Joey from Aislinn's house, the two of them were still in regular communication. And the pattern of phone calls between them doesn't look like harassment, it looks like two people regularly calling each other and talking to each other.

What's also notable, though, is that you can see during this time period that at the same time that Aislinn would be calling Joey, *Brianne* would be calling Joey. And, according to Aislinn, yeah, she *had* been talking to Brianne during this time period. Brianne had been telling her about all the terrible things Joey was going to do to her. So, it's hard not to wonder if, from those calls, that was the result of Brianne calling Aislinn and Aislinn calling Joey, based on whatever intel Brianne had given her.

And Aislinn has said that, towards the end of their relationship, she and Brianne were talking. I mean, she never hung out with Brianne, but Brianne was calling her and telling her things about Joey, warning her about what he'd do to her. So it's hard not to think that some kind of drama was going on between the three of them during these calls.

[46:15]

Joey Watkins: *And she gave me my class ring, my CDs and my door key back. I never got my clothes from her. [laughs] But uh, she uh, after that, you know, I never went there again. You know, I never-- It was kind of over between me and her.*

Susan Simpson: *She filed a restraining order about two weeks after that.*

Joey Watkins: *After-- After...? Oh yeah! They came and got me for that. You know who filed that, right? They said her mom filed it, but when I got to the jail at Polk County, Stanley Sutton had been there already. And he had that set up. The investigator there, I can't remember his name, there was an investigator there that said, "You've pissed somebody off, buddy". He said, because this cop Sutton here seen to this restraining order. Seen to this getting done. Because what had happened, when they arrested me for that, they arrested me for supposedly harassing phone calls and misdemeanor stalking, and I want-- I can't remember.*

But what Stanley Sutton did... He went to Cedartown, got with her parents, then he went, himself, to the judge, or whoever, and got it signed for me to be picked up on this. Then he went back to Rome, filed an order in Rome, or whatever, to have me picked up, they came to my mom and dad's house and had me picked up that night. I went to Floyd County, he was there when I got arrested for this-- In Cedar-- For supposedly-- For this incident with Aislinn. He was there and he was laughing. And he-- He told me, in the jail that night, he said, "You're laying your own tracks, buddy. You're laying your own tracks." Or something-- Something-- He said, "You're laying your own tracks", or something like that.

And then he'd sit in the booking area until Cedartown came and got me. And then they took me to Cedartown and I stayed in Cedartown exactly 72 hours before they set me a bond.

Susan Simpson: *If I hadn't seen the paperwork, I'm not sure I'd believe you.*

Joey Watkins: *Yeah. That's what they did to me.*

Susan Simpson: *I mean, I've-- I've seen Sutton's contacts with the-- With the Polk people, so...*

Joey Watkins: *Yeah.*

Susan Simpson: *I know he was involved. But I'm sure, I mean, you realize that a lot of your stories probably sound to some people like--*

Joey Watkins: *BS?*

Susan Simpson: *Conspiracy theory stuff.*

Joey Watkins: *Yeah. I've heard that my whole bit. [laughs] The whole time I've been locked up. Every-- Nobody believes me. That's why nobody's ever listened to me. Everybody's like, "Yeah". You know, I had-- I had a deputy warden tell me at Phillips when I first got locked up, you're full of shit". I was like, "Okay." And I just shut up and I don't say anything else, you know? 'Cause people don't believe me.*

Susan Simpson: *So why exactly did Aislinn and Joey break up? Well, most of it probably had to do with the reason any overly dramatic teenage relationship ends.*

[49:01]

Susan Simpson: *You were calling Aislinn a lot. Even after things went bad.*

Joey Watkins: *Yeah. You know? Out of all the girls I done wrong, I regret that with her the most.*

- Susan Simpson:** *With Aislinn?*
- Joey Watkins:** *Yeah. Yeah. I don't deny that. But she was telling me one thing, and you know, it would be a whole different situation. I don't know. [sighs]*
- Susan Simpson:** *You can see from the call logs. It'd be, like, a call either to or from Aislinn. And then, like a second later, Brianne's calling.*
- Joey Watkins:** *Mm-hmm.*
- Susan Simpson:** *And I can just imagine the drama going on behind the scenes there.*
- Joey Watkins:** *Yeah. Aislinn wanted to jump on Brianne. And uh... It was just-- I don't know. I was a mess.*
- Susan Simpson:** But it seems like Stanley Sutton had a role to play in it, too. That he was involved in the end of Aislinn and Joey's relationship, as well as the beginning of the changing of Aislinn's parent's story. Because, we know from the trial transcripts and from some of the notes that Aislinn had learned at some point, well, she thought, that Joey had lied to her about what had happened on January 11th, 2000. She'd been told that Joey's whole story about going to Alabama that day and seeing his uncle and going fishing, well, that was all a lie. Because, she'd been told, his phone records proved it. He hadn't been in Alabama. He wasn't making calls from cell towers in Alabama, or Gaylesville, on Lake Weiss where he claimed to have been. And if he was lying about that, what else might've he been lying about?
- [50:42]
- Joey Watkins:** *You know they tampered with my-- I think they tampered with my phone records, also, because they tried to say I was not in Alabama when I was in Alabama that day. And they said the tower that my call connected to, or whatever, was inconclusive and they couldn't say for sure that my call phone was connected to the tower next to my uncle's house. And...*
- Susan Simpson:** *No, they were just idiots. 'Cause they didn't know they got the wrong phone records, but didn't show-- They only showed local calls. They pulled a special type of call detail record that did not include roaming charges, or didn't include roaming towers--*
- Joey Watkins:** *Okay.*
- Susan Simpson:** *So the only calls that showed up were the ones in Rome, so they're like, "Oh, look, he never left Rome!"*
- Joey Watkins:** *See, that's a lie. But there is a call on my records showing that a call went out, right?*
- Susan Simpson:** *On the real records, yeah. But on the ones the police had--*
- Joey Watkins:** *Yeah.*
- Susan Simpson:** *They-- That-- It's not there. It really isn't. So--*
- Joey Watkins:** *Okay. That call that was in question, I actually made that call from the creek bank with my uncle.*
- Susan Simpson:** Back in March, Aislinn agreed to meet with us on her lunch break one day, and her first words to me, as we were walking up to the restaurant where we were going to meet were, "I don't even know why I had to testify. I didn't know anything important." In kind of an annoyed tone, too, as if clearly the prosecutor's decision to call her to the stand was more of a nuisance than it possibly could've been worth.

Here's Clare and I hanging out in the parking lot after our meeting:

[52:11]

- Susan Simpson:** *She was fun. It kind of clicked together some of the comments in the transcript. Like at one point, someone's talking about Joey's new girlfriend and someone describes her as like, "She's sweet, but she can be real mean."*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Yeah. [laughs]*
- Susan Simpson:** *She was a-- I would not call her a soft woman by any means.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *No. And I did not-- I just thought it was going to be the most tortuous interview I'd had in a long, long time. But she did kind of soften up a bit at the end.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah, she but, you know, she was not going to take any crap and she was willing to talk. What'd you think?*
- Clare Gilbert:** *I agree. At beginning it was difficult to get her to answer--*
- Susan Simpson:** *Anything.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Anything! It was just very, "Yes, no, yes, no..." even then, that was hard. And then if you ever ask her, you know, what do you remember about that night? Nothing.*
- Susan Simpson:** *And it was clearly hard for her. Because, Joey was an asshole and she had a lot of bad memories. But even she acknowledged, being an asshole doesn't make you a murderer.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Right.*
- Susan Simpson:** *It just makes you an asshole.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *But she-- She did seem to verify that Sutton had showed her these phone records, and--*
- Susan Simpson:** *Oh, she did.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *And tried to convince her that Joey wasn't in Alabama.*
- Susan Simpson:** *He did convince her. She seemed convinced that he'd been lying to her to her. And she had no idea-- I think I believe-- She seemed to-- He just wasn't there when we told her that, well actually the full records with the roaming charges do show he was in Alabama making calls that day. And she kind of gave us the 'Wayne Benson smile'. Like, "Oh."*
- Clare Gilbert:** *[laughs] Yeah. The Wayne Benson Smile.*
- Susan Simpson:** *"You got me there." She had no idea that Joey was supposedly driving a little blue car that night. Or that he'd switched out the cars. And her first words were, "That's not possible."*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Right! I mean, she seemed to think the State's theory was Joey left his house, drove south, saw Dawkins, shot him, and kept driving.*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yeah!*
- Clare Gilbert:** *And any other theory that involves switching cars, or changing things out, she says, "That's not possible. That timelining doesn't fit. I've driven that many, many times. And it just can't be done."*
- Susan Simpson:** *And she heard the white truck pull up.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Yeah!*

Susan Simpson: *Which, I was kind of wondering that. Because she was clear she never got out of bed that night, because she was sick. And I was kind of wondering, well, how'd she know it was the white truck, and she volunteered. I should have asked, but she volunteered, "No I heard that car. I know what it sounded like."*

Clare Gilbert: *The truck... The truck. Yeah.*

Susan Simpson: *At one point she was like, "No, that's silly, 'cause Isaac was driving north from college and Joey was driving south, from Rome, so that can't be what the theory was." Well, yeah. It kind of is.*

Susan Simpson: *And when Clare explained that the State's theory was that Joey had lain in wait at the college, and that no, they'd both been heading north at the time, Aislinn started shaking her head. "That can't be what the State said," she told us. "that doesn't work." And when we explained to her about all the car switching and other subterfuge Joey had to engage in to do what he was accused of doing, she had a different type of objection: "Joey's not that smart.", she said, "He never thought nothing through."*

[55:50]

Susan Simpson: *She reminded me of Benson a lot. And the way she was-- She knew what she knew. And added those facts up the way anyone would. But was very receptive... To at least considering new information.*

Clare Gilbert: *Right.*

Susan Simpson: *And seemed to be particularly... Become more open when they'd learned of evidence that investigators hadn't shared with them before.*

Clare Gilbert: *Right. Right.*

Susan Simpson: *Like with Benson, like, kind of like a switch where they start talking.*

Clare Gilbert: *Mm-hmm. And when we first started talking with her, she was... I mean she had this very visceral sense that Mark Free had also committed the murder and had gotten off.*

Susan Simpson: *I don't know why that surprised me, but it did.*

Clare Gilbert: *It did. It surprised me, too. And- but by end she seemed to be much more open to the idea that Mark Free might not have committed the murder.*

Susan Simpson: *Because she didn't really know anything about him, it sounded like. Again, he was also sometimes an asshole. But I hadn't actually-- I don't think I've talked to anyone who felt that way yet, so I don't know why I'd be surprised by it, but I was. Because she was like, "He was the one who got away with it, right?" I'm like, "Uh... You mean the one who was acquitted? Yes. Okay." But I guess that's been her mindset. Like, she assumed that the State had a case and that the case involved Mark Free, so... Someone got away with murder.*

[59:55]

≈

Rabia Chaudry: *As for Isaac, Aislinn had no idea he existed prior to the murder. She said Joey had never mentioned him to her at all. When she was asked if she ever got a sense Joey might have had a grudge against him, she said "No", because she never even knew he'd existed.*

Now as for Brianne, Aislinn was aware of her. She said Joey himself never really mentioned her, although his mother and sister would say stuff about her sometimes. She said, "When Brianne would call me up to try and start shit, his mother would tell me, 'Don't listen to her,

she's crazy.'" Also Aislinn knew about Brianne from Brianne *herself*. Brianne kept calling Aislinn up, telling her to 'beware' of Joey, that Joey would hurt her if she didn't leave him, all kinds of stuff. Aislinn said that, in response, "I think I told her where exactly she could go."

Susan Simpson:

It was clear, though, that Sutton had had a very big impact on her when he told her that Joey had lied about being in Alabama that day. Because Joey was supposedly out in Gaylesville all afternoon, fishing. And Aislinn seemed to think if he was lying about that, well, yeah, clearly he could lie about the murder, too. When I asked Aislinn how she'd responded to learning what the phone records showed, she said, "I was 16, how do you think I responded?" And then in a tone mimicking how she'd been back then, she said, "Oh, no don't lie to me or we're done". So I asked her, had they ever updated her, and let her know that they'd been wrong? That Joey's phone bill *did* show calls to and from Alabama towers that day? Aislinn seemed visibly startled by the news that Joey's phone *did* make calls from Alabama that day. But she shook her head. No. No one had ever told her that.

[1:01:38]

Susan Simpson:

Sutton knew what he was doing and it was effective with her. To this day, until this day, she thought Joey had lied about Alabama.

Clare Gilbert:

Yeah, I mean, Sutton's investigation was--

Susan Simpson:

Sub-par?

Clare Gilbert:

Like a PR campaign more than an investigation.

Susan Simpson:

That's a very good way of putting it. It was the taking control of the Rome rumor mill and making sure everyone knew. That they knew Joey was guilty, and I think it's possible-- It is possible that Sutton himself didn't realize that he'd only gotten the local phone records and didn't have any roaming calls in the records he requested. Although it's also possible that he was aware that there were calls from Alabama. I don't know.

Clare Gilbert:

The defense introduced that bill at trial, but by then the damage was done, at least with the witnesses and the community that--

Susan Simpson:

Certainly with Aislinn. So, and you know what? At the end of the day, okay? He's in Alabama? That doesn't change anything. It only mattered because it showed he to be a liar and that didn't really matter so much by the time you get to trial. Just for the PR.

Clare Gilbert:

Mm-hmm. [sighs]

[1:02:54]

≈

Susan Simpson:

Later, Clare told Joey about our meeting with Aislinn and what we'd discussed:

Clare Gilbert:

We ate lunch with her at a Mexican restaurant. She also would not let us record. She didn't have a whole lot to add. She was very, very hesitant to give information at first. She was also... She really didn't like you... But she's also, like, there because, even though she didn't like you, she was not willing to pass judgement on you that you did this. It was kind of weird. Like, I think she came into it thinking you were where you were supposed to be, in prison... But it's like, she kept an open mind. Susan, do you remember any other take-aways?

Susan Simpson:

I kind of got the sense she had some doubts, which is the only reason she showed up in the first place.

Clare Gilbert:

Yeah.

- Susan Simpson:** *She didn't express them at first, and I'll say, Joey, she wouldn't start talking to us until we made it clear you we were not remotely implying you weren't anything but a jerk to her back then. She had strong feelings about that still, you could tell.*
- Joey Watkins:** *It's no secret. I wasn't good to her, as far as.. I mean, you know I was a teenager. I told you guys the truth about it from day one. I wasn't faithful to her, and I did her wrong as far as relationship-wise. And I don't deny that and I'm sorry for that, I can't take it back, it happened.*
- Susan Simpson:** *But once we-- Yeah.*
- Joey Watkins:** *And it's done. And I feel bad about that now, but she- Aislinn knows the truth. Did you guys ask her about night that supposedly her dad said that I said that my friend- that my friend had got killed. Her dad made a statement about it, did you ask her dad? Or ask her about that?*
- Susan Simpson:** *She didn't remember. That part I was really confused about. She seemed sincere, she seemed credible when she said it, but she didn't remember her dad testifying.*
- Joey Watkins:** *He did testify.*
- Clare Gilbert:** *Well, yeah. And she wouldn't have heard him testify, she would have been excluded from the court room. She did not hear you say that.*
- Joey Watkins:** *She didn't hear me because I didn't say it.*
- Susan Simpson:** [laughs]
- Clare Gilbert:** *Well, I know. But yeah, what I'm saying is she confirmed... Well, she didn't say that you didn't say that. She just said if he said it, I didn't hear it.*
- Joey Watkins:** *But yeah. I she knows that I didn't say that, because when I-- Every time I went to her house I went straight to her bedroom. And, you know, she was sick that night. And I remember when I pulled up her mom was standing in the kitchen and I don't even remember seeing her dad in the house that night when I went to her room. I don't even remember seeing him that night, period.*
- ≈
- Susan Simpson:** *But I think what happened with Joey's next relationship, with a girl named Kelli Robinson, gives us a window into what happened with the end of the relationship with Aislinn.*
- [1:05:49]
- Joey Watkins:** *Right around that time... I'll be honest, I didn't know. I was so... I was scared, I was mad. I didn't know which way my life was going. And then Kelli popped up. [sighs]*
- Susan Simpson:** *I talked to her dad.*
- Joey Watkins:** *Yeah?*
- Susan Simpson:** *He had the tape that he recorded when Sutton came to talk to him.*
- Joey Watkins:** *Yeah, did you guys-- You guys got to hear it?*
- Susan Simpson:** *Yup.*
- Joey Watkins:** *I never--*
- Susan Simpson:** *I liked Kelli, she was feisty.*

Joey Watkins: *Kelli's a sweetheart. Kelli was kind of my... Kelli was kind of a savior for me at that time in my life. She kind of grounded me. She came in the picture, she was like, "Look. You know, I wasn't here when this happened, but I know you well enough to know you didn't do this, so stop acting like a dummy." And she kind of grounded me. [pauses] She really gave me no choice when it came to moving in with her in that apartment.*

Susan Simpson: [laughs] *How'd that go down?*

Joey Watkins: *She's like, "You're coming with me." And I said, "No I'm not!" and she said "Yes you are." And she was like, "If I have to start packing your stuff, you're moving in with me. And I'm like, "No, I'm not." She's like, "Watch me."*

So she came and got me. One afternoon, from work. I was like, "Where we going?" She's like, "We're going to get a place." I was like, "We're going to what?" She's like, "Yeah, I'm going to see Ron Patton, and you're going to move in with me." And I was like, "Wow."

So, it actually worked out pretty good. And, you know, I was-- Just to be honest, I was happy with Kelli, when all this happened. I was probably happier when her, at that time, than I'd ever been with a female.

I don't know what to say. Sometimes I think, you know, what might have, you know--? What could have-- How would my life went if this hadn't happened. And I could-- I could see me being with Kelli. You know? If this hadn't have happened.

Susan Simpson: *Sounds like she wouldn't have given you much choice in the matter.*

Joey Watkins: *Yeah, she was a-- You know? She was a beautiful girl. I didn't-- I couldn't see why she wanted to be with me so bad. You know, with what all was going on with me at that time and the things people were saying about me, and...*

[1:08:48]

≈

Colin Miller: *Now, once the Floyd County Police Department got wind that Joey was dating a new girl, they had a lot to say about it. It's not clear *how* they learned about Kelli, but based upon Sutton's knowledge of Brianne's conversations with Kelli, it seems plausible *she* was the source of that information.*

Susan Simpson: *Now, since Joey wasn't dating Kelli at the time of the murder, or for many months after, she wouldn't have known much about the case. But based on some scattered rumors throughout Joey's case file, there was someone else in her family I wanted to speak to: Her father. Because, according to the notes, her father had a recording of Stanley Sutton from when he made a visit to their house to talk to them about Joey.*

*I didn't quite believe those notes. It seemed like another one of those things, one of the many, *many* things, that don't turn out to be true. But I wanted to check it out anyway, just to see if this mythical tape really did exist, *possibly*. So one day while in Rome, I went by his house to see if he would talk, and he was home.*

[1:09:46]

Susan Simpson: *I was kind of expecting him to be more of... Neutral-ish. I mean, for him, his daughter's suddenly dating this guy that's been accused of murder. And I would expect him to be like, not want anything to do with that, even aside from guilt or innocence. But he seems like he gave you a really fair shake.*

Joey Watkins: *He did.*

Susan Simpson:

He wanted to hear out all of the evidence.

Joey Watkins:

He did. He and I... We went to eat at Red Lobster. That he wanted to meet me, you know? And we went and ate at Red Lobster. We had a long conversation. I told him, I said, "Look, I am who I am but I'm not a killer. I didn't kill Isaac. You know?" And I told him, "I'm not an angel, you know? But, I'm not what they say I am." And any questions you want to ask, ask me. I don't mind telling you.

So, we kind of-- He asked me a bunch of questions and we sat and talked and he was like, "Well, look, you can date my daughter, but you know the rules." And you know, I told him I appreciated it. And we went from there.

Susan Simpson:

When we walked in he door in his house, he invited us in, and I told him that we were reporting on your case and we're working with the Georgia Innocence Project. And he said, "Well, it's about time y'all starting looking into this." It's been bugging him for awhile.

Joey Watkins:

He-- I bare him my soul... With Kelli and her whole family, you know?

Susan Simpson:

As for the tape or Stanley Sutton? Yes, he said. It was real. He'd talked to Joey and gotten his side of the story first, and then he'd wanted to talk to the cops, too, and hear theirs. But he'd wanted to be prepared, so he decided to record the conversation.

At first, he couldn't find it. It'd been 16 years, and who knew where it'd gotten to? But after we'd left his house, we hadn't gotten two minutes down the road before he called and told me he'd opened a drawer and BAM! There it was. The tape of Stanley Sutton and Bill Shiflett warning Kelli about the bad things that would happen to her if she didn't leave Joey:

[1:11:51]

Stanley Sutton:

During the time that I was investigating this, he was dating another girl named Aislinn in Cedartown. Well, I went down there to have an opportunity to talk with their parents because I was concerned about the-- The daughter. And I wanted to have an opportunity to talk to the daughter, see if in fact he might've said something, uh, to her concerning the Isaac Dawkins situation.

But they wouldn't let me talk with, uh, with their daughter. They, at that time, uh, said that Joey comes up real friendly and outgoing and had an outstanding personality. And I guess you know now that-- That, uh, that she took a stalking walk on him. You know that, and also because he was calling her, he was harassing her, he even pulled into the yard of the, uh, their home. And the daddy was there and he started his stuff, so the daddy, uh, grabbed him, he choked him down-- I'm sure that Joey told you that. And then when he, uh, got him to let him go he got back in his car and he drove off and then he got out and hollered, "F- you," and drove off and all.

So, I'm real concerned about you, I really am. You know? And, uh. You know, love is blind sometimes, but uh, you know. Maybe, you know, one of these days you might see the part that we're seeing. And I, you know, I'm concerned about you? You know, I really am. You know, and the thing about it-- We're not out here. You know-- Uh, you know, to just go kick people's doors in without proper cause, without a search warrant, we gotta cross our 'Ts' and dot our 'Is'.

There's no doubt in my mind that I'm on the right track with us. From all the people we've talked to, uh, yes, he had plenty of time to do-- Commit this crime. He-- And he had a motive, because there was confrontation prior to this. Uh, they've had verbal. They've uh, pulled up on Turner McCall [inaudible]. He's stalked her. There's tons of people-- Well, not tons, there's several people I've talked to he's pulled guns before. He fought at the mall, uh, with a guy, then him and another guy pulled a shotgun on other people. There's all kinds of things that lead me to indicate him as our primary suspect.

Isaac Dawkins, as long as I've been working thing, I have not found one person that disliked this boy. He was a good kid, a wonderful kid, all the teachers-- On the other hand, all I hear are nothing but back things about Joey Watkins. Nothing but bad things from people. Uh, just coming from me, the people that I've learned and gathered, and I'm concerned about you.

And uh, eventually, I hope to have enough to go for it with him. And I feel confident that we will. But I was primarily concerned about you. For one thing, I don't want you, you know, I don't want you, you know, to be hurt or harmed, but from what I've heard from people and-- And, uh, if you doubt me, you can call the parents if you want to talk to them, and they can, you know? Instead of hearing it from my lips you can hear it from them.

Susan Simpson: "Really", Sutton kept insisting, "We're here 'cause we're concerned about you. We're worried about what might happen if you keep dating Joey."

[1:15:11]

Stanley Sutton: *You know, and I've been doing this for 29 years. I have never, ever seen a drive-by shooting in Floyd County like this. You know, I've seen people getting shot in beer joints, or getting shot at, their home, self-defense or whatever, suicide. But he has never indicated to you that he-- He was involved in-- In the shooting?*

Kelli Robinson: No.

Stanley Sutton: And did he tell you who he was with when he was at home?

Kelly Robinson: Yeah, his mom, his dad, his sister and her boyfriend.

Stanley Sutton: Were all there?

Kelli Robinson: All four of them.

Stanley Sutton: *Alright, well, then primarily, the two folds that we wanted to come down here was see if in fact he might've told you, indicated himself, and second to warn you guys to be aware of what we have learned about him. And if it was my daughter, I would want someone to come to me and tell me what they've learned. And that's up to y'all's-- Y'all's discretion of what you'll allow her to do, not do. If you choose her to still see him, that's--*

Kelli Robinson: Well, I'm an adult, so that's pretty much decision.

Stanley Sutton: How old are you?

Kelli Robinson: I'm nineteen.

Stanley Sutton: Okay, that would be your decision, then.

Second Officer: *Well, let me-- Let me state, too, we're not here to run your life. Uh, we're here doing a murder investigation. What you do it what you do. That's up to you.*

Uh, like Stanley said, uh, three or four past girlfriends, when they break up with him, that's when he gets very possessive. I'll tell you that. And so, do what you want to do. You're an adult.

Stanley Sutton: *And my apologies to you, I thought you were like, sixteen or something.*

Susan Simpson: In fact, Sutton took it further. At one point, he pretty much tells Kelli, "Well, we've informed you what the deal is and if you get killed it's not on us, it's on you."

[1:16:54]

Second Officer: *So, it's just not us-- Somebody telling us something and we go run and tell everybody trying to not do stuff right with Joey. That's not what we're here for. All of this is documented. Anybody in town can go back and pull up every report, all of this is public record, it's open document. So, you know, we're not, quote, "breaking the law", or doing whatever about telling you this. This is all-- This is what we show. And we, uh, since you are associated with Joey, it's only our - our obligation to come talk to you to see if you know anything about the murder. [clears throat] If you say you don't, then we'll leave that.*

Stanley Sutton: *And not only that, just, concern for you. You know?*

Second Officer: *How do you-- How do you feel about being him being concerned about you?*

Kelli Robinson: *I don't buy it.*

Stanley Sutton: *You don't buy it?*

Kelli Robinson: *I don't mean to be rude.*

Stanley Sutton: *That's fine. I appreciate your honesty.*

Kelli Robinson: *But, uh, you're being honest with me, so I'll be honest with you.*

Stanley Sutton: *But I am. And you know, but I also-- I-- I am concerned. But on the same token. If, you know, I didn't come here and tell you, you know, to watch yourself, and then months down the road something happened it'd be on my heart, it'd be on my conscience.*

Kelli Robinson: *And I appreciate the gesture.*

Stanley Sutton: *Yeah that's not on mine now, you know.*

≈

Rabia Chaudry: It's always a bit fascinating to, as they say, 'watch the sausage get made'. And, sometimes seeing how it's done is also a little bit repugnant. Unpacking the investigation of Isaac's death, and how law enforcement built a case against Joey, is not very different. There is lots more to this sausage... This *hodgepodge* of a case that was presented to the Jury, including the State's case against Mark Free (Joey's co-defendant), and the cell phone evidence. And we'll be going over all that and more, and showing you how badly they got it wrong, in the upcoming weeks.

≈