

**04:44**  
**(WHODUNNIT)**

Story by  
Gonçalo Pinto

Adapted by Pedro Filipe Vasconcelos

INT. PRECINCT - BEN'S OFFICE - DAY

Dark room. A spotlight turns on to reveal Ben sitting back on his chair, continuous shot gets close to him as the narration occurs.

BEN (V.O)

Four fifty two in the afternoon, there is a stench in the air, I felt it as soon as I arrived to the precinct this morning, at first I thought it could be the newcomer's cologne but I've already gotten used to that. It was something else.

The camera keeps flowing around him, Ben sips his coffee.

BEN (V.O)

Four fifty three, the coffee machine was malfunctioning again, the coffee tasted like the usual shit, but somehow, today, it is even bitter. The office is quiet, almost too qui-

The phone rings, we see Ben's reaction before the camera pans with his movement as he answers it. You cannot hear his words, only the narration.

BEN (V.O)

Four fifty four, Dan Thompson is Dead.

CUT TO-- Mary Anne, the mother, walks in and is horrified by the what she sees, she then CUT TO-- Dan lying on the floor dead.

BEN (V.O)

The poor old woman cries on the phone as she explains finding her son's body lying on the floor of his office. The crime seemed obvious, Dan was poisoned, we need to wait for the toxicology report to confirm it but his attempt at calling his brother left quite a descriptive message of his death. Difficulty to breathe, nausea, mouth and tongue went numb. There was no doubt, but with this answer a lot of other questions came, who killed him, and why? The Thompson family might've made a lot of enemies along the years but would any of them do this? We contacted the brother in order to interrogate him but he has been out of the country for 2 years now, we had to rule him out, at least for now.

(MORE)

BEN (V.O) (cont'd)  
Joanne, the deceased's wife, was brought in for questioning shortly after the start of the investigation, apparently a flask opium and a copy of Dan's will with her name crossed out was found in her bedside table when investigating her enormous bedroom. This gave the woman probable cause, the officers were able to hold her for possession of illegal substances. Now, someone needed to piece this whole mess together. And that, would be up to me and my new partner, Josh. Thought it would be a good way to initiate the rookie. However, we have the mayor pressuring us to solve this one quickly.

BEN  
So tell me 'cub', what's our first move?

Ben says as he sits down with his hands on his belly, satisfied after a well deserved lunch break.

JOSH  
Still trying to decide on a catchy nickname, huh? Well, we have a suspect in custody, maybe we should go ahead and interrogate her?

BEN  
Wrong.

JOSH  
Sorry?

BEN  
WRONG 'trainee'. You must learn WHO we're talking to before doing so. Research provides us ground to lead an interrogation. So, I'll do background research and you'll read the initial case reports.

JOSH  
Sure thing Detective Brown.

INT.RESEARCH ROOM

BEN  
(Monologue)  
The kid's got good heart, but I need to teach him how to do things if I want some help solving this  
(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)

case. The search for Joanne Thompson wasn't easy. Those white boxes the DA calls computers can't load a load a page in under a decade, but it still beats having to search through all the physical records like in the old days. Interesting. Young Joanne was in and out of the system, gone through a lot of foster homes, however her bright mind allowed her a scholarship into the Stanford University. It was there she met 18 year old Dan. They got engaged soon after as the poor girl got pregnant. As a custom in the rich family, the couple had a huge wedding and it was all over national tv. Two years later, Joanne was arrested for DUI while baby David was in the car. Sent to rehab, she was released two months later. About a year ago she overdosed and the maid called the emergencies, she went back to rehab, has been out for six months now.

BEN

I wonder how many times she was really arrested.

Ben asks as he looks away from the screen as his old eyes got tired.

JOSH

What do you mean?

BEN

I forget you're new in town. The 'Thompson' family is a big deal around here, and there's not one but two reports of Joanne's arrests. So I guess the question is, how many times was the family actually able to cover up her arrests and drug abuse.

JOSH

Well, enough times to upset the victim's mother, Mary Anne. The reports say that she was anxious when talking to the police because she didn't trust her grandchild to Joanne. Seems like she has a good gut, perhaps she should take our jobs!

BEN

Well talk for yourself, I'm good  
where I'm standing.

JOSH

Or rather sitting you mean...

They both look at each other for a second then both giggle.

BEN

C'mon.

JOSH

Where're we going?

BEN

You said it yourself, there's  
someone we gotta interrogate.

INT.INTERROGATION ROOM

Ben and Josh walk into the small interrogation room, they  
sit in the two chairs opposite Mrs Thompson.

BEN

(Monologue)

Brown eyes, common. Blonde, but not  
completely, her roots are dark,  
usual, however suggest a small  
chance of attempt of change of  
personal identity. Pale skin, she  
mustn't go out much. Interesting  
choice of clothes for someone from  
such high prestige family. Legs  
tapping, nervous, arms crossed, she  
might be resistant to questioning.  
Frowned eyebrows, this is gonna be  
a pain in the ass.

BEN

Good night, Mrs Thompson, my name is  
Ben Brown lead investigator in your  
husband's case and this is Josh  
Stewart, my partner.

Josh smirks at Ben when he hears him call partner.

JOANNE THOMPSON

(Angrily)

What do you expect me to tell you  
that I haven't already to the other  
officers?

BEN

You could begin by telling us about  
your relationship with Dan.

Joanne looks at him to try and percieve if she can trust  
him, a suspicious look. As she talks to him she avoids eye

contact at certain moments.

JOANNE THOMPSON

It was a regular marriage, I don't know what you're trying to fish out of me.

BEN

Look Joanne, can I call you Joanne?

Joanne nods suspiciously.

BEN

Joanne, if you truly want us to find the culprit and want to leave this office without any problems you will have to be completely honest.

Joanne is baffled as she is going to start to argue with him, he cuts her off.

BEN

We're not here to judge your marriage, nor you. And honestly I don't give a single fuck about his reputation. What I do care about is justice, and whoever killed him deserves to be brought to face it.

Josh seems surprised and inspired by Ben's words. Joanne seems to be caught off guard by this statement but she decides to talk. Ben sits back as she starts talking.

JOANNE THOMPSON

You believe in justice? Then perhaps what happened was an act of justice. Don't get me wrong, I would never be capable of killing him, but Dan was a fucking asshole. A monumental one, abusive, manipulator, a cheater for sure! Say what you will but I am not shedding a single tear for him.

Ben maintains a straight face with everything she says.

JOSH

I apologise, we had no idea.

JOANNE THOMPSON

I don't need your sympathies, I just need you to clear my name and do your job. But listen, if I were you, I would leave it alone, one less douche in this world.

Ben and Josh exchange looks for a second and then Josh continues.

JOSH

Mrs Thompson, you mentioned him being a cheater, are you perhaps able to name any mistresses?

JOANNE THOMPSON

Have no idea, he was smart about it, not because of me, his reputation was the real problem. Then again, I didn't care, less nights at our house meant less beatings.

JOSH

(Concerned)

Why never report his abuse?

Joanne sits with her legs and arms crossed and shrugs as a response to that question.

BEN

Because it would never work. She isn't a Thompson by blood, their lawyers would debunk the whole case and protect him, and by the end she would be left with next to nothing and would have declared war with one of the biggest families of the district.

She looks at Ben and is kind of relieved that he understands it, however she still keeps it to herself.

BEN

Can you tell us about the will?

JOANNE THOMPSON

Look, as I said to the other officers, I know nothing of the matter, we didn't really talk as you might've concluded. That snake Mary Anne might know something about it.

JOSH

His mother? What about her?

JOANNE THOMPSON

She protected him like a golden child, the bitch hates me with a passion.

BEN

Why do you think she might know about the will?

JOANNE THOMPSON

I'm not sure, but if anyone know  
anything about it it will be her.  
They were weirdly fond of each  
other.

Ben and Josh exchange looks for a second.

JOSH

What about your daily routine? As I  
understand you're a stay at home  
mom?

JOANNE THOMPSON

Not like I had any choice. He made  
me clean the whole bedroom despite  
us having a maid, and even insisted  
on having me give him the nicotine  
patches his mother got him for his  
smoking addiction. Brat just wanted  
to control me.

BEN

(Monologue)

Officer Frank entered the room and  
signaled us. Apparently someone  
dropped off a package in  
headquarters anonymously. He  
described it as a disturbing  
journal belonging to Dan Thompson.  
Disturbing. What a peculiar choice  
of words.

Ben and Josh are walking rapidly towards the evidence room.

JOSH

Detective, what do you think sh  
meant by the fondness of Dan and  
his mother's relationship?

BEN

I think there's more to the  
Thompson family than meets the eye.  
But I'm not sure it necessarily  
affects our case. We'll see.

Ben finds the journal and opens it, his face moves just ever  
so slightly in surprise, but he tries to keep himself  
together. Josh however is baffled, and disgusted.

BEN

Josh look, you can go take a break  
if you want.

Josh is tempted but he cannot, he wants to prove himself to  
Ben.



JOSH  
No sir, I'm fine we need to go  
through the evidence.

*Note*

*Zoom into Ben's eyes.*

CUT TO:

INT.OFFICE

*Note*

*Zoom out of Ben's eyes.*

BEN  
(monologue)  
One twelve in the morning, none of  
us can rest after what we saw.  
There is something stuck in my  
throat, something I cannot explain,  
I need a shower, but we need to  
decide where to go from here before  
heading home for the day. The  
journal, that damn journal. Hard  
cover, cardboard and bits of  
leather, no title, recently  
varnished. It reminded me of my  
cherished first oxford style shoes,  
I used to varnish it almost weekly.  
Dan must've cherished that book.  
First page, Joanne Thompson written  
at the top and an explicit photo of  
the woman I just met. The details,  
the excruciating details of how he  
drugged, carried her and then  
forced himself on her the night  
they met. As the journal went along  
more pages with the same layout  
displayed different women and their  
sickening encounters.

JOSH  
Detective?

BEN  
Hum?

JOSH  
Do you think she was right?

BEN  
Who?

JOSH  
Joanne, what she said about Dan and  
justice. One less criminal in the  
world. Is it so wrong to think like  
that?

BEN

That woman, she did not deserve any of the atrocities perpetrated to her. None of these women did.

JOSH

No one in the world does.

BEN

Indeed. And still, it happens, and it is terrible, and unfair.

JOSH

So is it wrong to believe that maybe a monster like Dan Thompson didn't really deserve to be alive? That maybe whoever killed him just did the world a favor?

BEN

Stewart, individuals can't act alone as jury, judge and executioner.

JOSH

Is it so hard to conclude the piece of shit he was?

BEN

That is not the point, Dan Thompson deserved to pay for every single one of his crimes. But he needed to face justice, not just someone's clouded idea of it.

JOSH

So you think he simply deserved a place with a bed and free food at a prison. Think of what he's done!

BEN

He was human, was he mentally disturbed or afflicted by his past he deserved a chance.

JOSH

A chance to what, to abuse more women, to maybe kill them?

BEN

TO TRY, HE DESERVED A CHANCE TO TRY! Try and redeem himself, become human again, reflect on his mistakes, or recieve treatment. I know our system isn't perfect, but I try my best to make justice work within it. It is not through crime that you resolve crime. Whoever

(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)  
killed Thompson just blurred their line of right and wrong, they might go and kill another abuser, or they might end up killing a young adult who got high and drunk and made one mistake he would regret and pay for the rest of his life.

Josh is absolutely suprised by Ben's words, it hit him deep.

JOSH  
I suppose you're right. I'm sorry Sir this case has me going crazy by now.

BEN  
It's alright colt, trust me I have questioned myself countless times. And, you can call me Ben, kid. Anyways, any coments on the journal, apart from you know, the repulsing crimes.

Josh picks up the book again and starts going through it.

JOSH  
Not really, I don't think any of these women would be willing to-Detectiv- Ben...

BEN  
Josh? Noticed anything?

JOSH  
There's a page missing.

BEN  
What?

JOSH  
I'ts been torned out, the most recent one in fact.

BEN  
That's great! Here give it to me.

Ben grabs the notebook at takes a pencil out of his desk, in the page after the one that was ripped he starts to gently scribble the top of the page.

BEN  
As cliché as it is, that old movie trick sometimes gets the job done.

Ben stops and reads the name out loud.

BEN  
Rose Smith

JOSH  
THE MAID! Do you think she  
could've...

BEN  
I don't know, but we know who to  
talk to next. We'll have to send  
this to forensics to see if they  
can find something else but I'll  
warn the chief and we'll interview  
Miss Smith in the morning. Now get  
home tenderfoot and try to get some  
rest before tomorrow.

JOSH  
Sure thing Ben.

*Note*

*Swing through the feet.*

CUT TO:

INT.BEDROOM

Ben sits at the edge of his bed thinking, going over and  
over every single detail of the case.

BEN  
(Monologue)  
The victims, almost all from the  
suburbs, belonging to low class  
families. He seemed to play it  
safe, not to attract attention. But  
was his M.O. Where the attacks  
previously thought out, were they  
impulsively made? Unclear. Could the  
maid be the killer, was she his  
last victim and the one to finish  
his wrath. If it was her, can she  
be blamed for it, ending a circle  
of horrible crimes at an attempt at  
recovering what was stolen from  
her, at an attempt at righting the  
wrongs done to her. NO, I cannot  
think like that, whoever did it  
lost another part of themselves  
when they killed him. Dan deserved  
to face the consequences of his  
crimes and live with the guilt, not  
be victim of another crime. I must  
maintain my principles straight if I  
aim to guide that young man, I must  
focus. Four forty four in the  
morning, gonna try and get some  
sleep.

*Note*

*Ben lays back on his bed.*

CUT TO:

INT.INTERROGATION ROOM

Ben enters the interrogation room and sits

BEN

Hello Miss Smith, my name's Ben Brown, lead investigator in Dan Thompson's murder and this is-

Rose looks confused as there is no one else in the room.

BEN

Nevermind. I am here to question you regarding some advancements in the case.

ROSE SMITH

(Nervously)

I... I don't understand. I already spoke to the other officers they said all was fine.

BEN

And all is fine, as far as I'm aware. I just wanted to speak to you myself.

ROSE SMITH

Humm alright.

BEN

So tell me, how long have you worked for the Thompsons?

ROSE SMITH

3 years I believe, maybe 4, I was recommended by my aunt who used to be their previous maid.

BEN

And this those years, have you ever taken any property from the family without their knowledge?

ROSE SMITH

What are you suggesting? Of course not! I would never!

BEN

I know it's not uncommon for maids to take items of such wealthy families. Items they themselves might even forget they have, their wealth blinds them of certain things, so I was just wondering-

ROSE SMITH

(Angrily)

Detective Brown, I would never, by the life of me ever betray them like that! I cannot believe what you are imposing.

BEN

You're right Miss Smith, I apologise, I should not have imposed myself like that. Might we change subjects?

Rose nods but still with a disapproving face. Ben reaches for his bag and pulls out the Journal and drops it in the desk. Rose's face changes from disapproving to worried.

BEN

Do you recognise this notebook?

ROSE SMITH

(Hesitantly)

Humm... No I... I can't say I do, what does this have to do with the investigation.

BEN

Miss Rose Smith, my colleagues at the department received this notebook yesterday, it was delivered anonymously. Have any idea who could've delivered it?

ROSE SMITH

I told you I don't know what the book is, I don't understand how this is in any way relevant to the case.

BEN

Then may you tell me why the only page that contains your name was ripped off?

Rose is confused and surprised by this statement.

ROSE SMITH

I...

BEN

Rose, I know for a fact that you were the one that delivered this journal. And I cannot express how sorry I am for everything that happened to you, but I need you to cooperate.

ROSE SMITH

I... I'm sorry

Rose looks sad, her eyes start to tear up.

BEN

It's okay.

ROSE SMITH

I was cleaning the master bedroom and I noticed the vent's cover was a bit missplaced. When I went to fix it I found the book... I have tried to forget that day for weeks but I had no idea he did it to so many women, and wrote about it, TOOK PICTURES!...

Rose is crying at this point tears fall from her face.

ROSE SMITH

I wanted to expose him but I wanted by name out of it, I wanted to forget it ever happened, I thought that by stripping every piece of evidence of it I could pretend it never happened, I'm sorry, I'm so sorry...

BEN

It's alright Miss, I understand.

Ben waits a bit for her to compose herself.

BEN

Tell me, if it happened weeks ago, why not leave the house, why keep serving the Thompsons?

ROSE SMITH

I... I know what you think, but I couldn't leave... I couldn't leave David, he's such a sweet kid, despite his parents, he is growing to be such a great man! And Master Mary Anne she's like a mother to me, she likes to help me cook and take care of the garden! She even gave me those cute gardening gloves the other day. I couldn't loose it all. I had to stay.

BEN

I see. Can you just tell me, what was the relationship between Mary Anne and her son?

ROSE SMITH

I don't know much. My Aunt told me she used to be very fond of her children, she insisted on taking  
(MORE)

ROSE SMITH (cont'd)  
care of them even when my aunt was present. I guess she really liked being a mother. I remember Dan and her reconnected a bit more when Mr. William left to Canada 2 years ago. But I heard them argue a few weeks back and they hadn't really been talking to each other anymore.

BEN  
Hum... What do you think they were arguing about?

ROSE SMITH  
Oh I'm not sure. But don't get me wrong, Mrs Mary Anne is a lovely person, she loved her son immensely, despite his flaws, then again she didn't know everything. And she loves little David just as much! She only dislikes Mrs Joanne, but you can't blame her, she has proven herself a liability to the child before.

BEN  
Rose, thank you for talking to me, additionally to this case we are also building a case against Dan due to his crimes. We are contacting every victim if you wish to join it would be our pleasure. However I have to keep you here for a maximum of 36 hours, we'll keep you separate from Mrs Joanne, if you need anything, just ask.

ROSE SMITH  
Thank you.

Ben nods with a slightly sadden face.

CUT TO:

INT.HEADQUARTERS

Josh is sipping is coffee, Ben arrives and starts talking to him.

BEN  
Hey apprentice, where were you, I just conducted a very interesting interrogation to the maid.

JOSH  
BEN! Sorry, they told me we got a call regarding the case and advised me to answer it.



BEN

What was it?

JOSH

The mom, Mary Anne Thompson, she said she encountered evidence that incriminates Joanne. Among the many swears directed to the spouse, I understood she found a book on poisons amongst Joanne's belongings in the attic. Then she couldn't stop telling me how much she hated her and asking when she could file and appeal for guardianship of the kid, as if I had any idea!

BEN

Did you tell her about the Journal?

JOSH

Yeah I did, but-

BEN

(Angrily)

FUCK, STEWART, do you have any idea what you just did?

JOSH

I'm sorry sir, I know it escaped my mind I thought she deserved to know her son's actions. But that's the thing! She wasn't suprised, she didn't dispute it she just said 'Oh' and ended the call.

BEN

Odd, but then again, how do you react to a thing like that? Have you advised the officers to pick up the evidence?

JOSH

Yes, they're on their way right now.

BEN

Good, I'll wait in my office.

Ben starts to walk and then turns back

BEN

Josh, I know it was an honest mistake, but be careful, we cannot disclose information like that at any point in the investigation, specially at such a crutial point.

JOSH

I understand sir.

BEN

C'mon, you can stay in my office with me.

INT.OFFICE

BEN

Three twenty three in the afternoon, we're still waiting for the evidence to arrive, and I cannot stop thinking about this case. The mother's reaction to her son's action was a bit odd but then again what are the real standards in a situation like this? We have a victim of years of domestic violence and a rape victim both in custody as suspects and either one of them could face jail time. Something doesn't feel quite right but I can't pin-point what. Either one of these women were tortured and stripped of her basic humanity by this monster and now we are looking to prosecute one of them. But whoever did it was not defending themselves, they purposefully poisoned him as revenge, as a move of subjective justice power, because of interest? We still know nothing of the will, but the mother seems to be of no use yet, still brooding her son. There is something wrong about her, but I don't think it has to do with the murder, there is a bigger picture that I am still not getting.

A forensic scientist enters the room.

SAM

Hey Ben, the forensic analysis came through, the poison was Aconitum Napellus or Monkshood, known commonly as the Wolf's bane plant. It's touch can lead to cardiac arrest in under twelve hours and it makes the analysis a lot harder.

BEN

Hum... Thank you Sam. KID, the poison was applied to the skin!

JOSH

Yeah but I don't think anyone would just rub a plant in his skin!

BEN

Of course not, it would have to be natural, in his daily routine!!

Josh seems to just have made the connection.

JOSH

HIS NICOTINE PATCHES!!

BEN

GO CALL THE OFFICERS AT THE HOUSE, tell them to search every garbage bin and find all the patches they can, and send it to the lab.

CUT TO:

INT.COFFEE PLACE

Ben and Josh are eating donuts and they get the results back through text message

JOSH

BEN, WE GOT IT, there was a match of wolf's bane in the patches.

BEN

Shit, I guess the chief is gonna close the case then.

JOSH

You think so?

BEN

The Mayor just wanted to find an escape goat to finally close the case, and now with motive, a concrete method of murder and some proof all aligning on Joanne. It should be over. Joanne was tired of years of abuse and used the the only way she could get close to him to finally finish him. It wasn't even about the money, she just wanted it to stop.

JOSH

Did we do it?

BEN

I guess so...

JOSH

Why doesn't it feel like it then?

BEN

I'm sorry Josh, sometimes our line of work is more nuanced than we  
(MORE)

BEN (cont'd)  
wish it to be. The killer had no  
right to take a life, despite what  
they had been through.

They both sigh.

CUT TO:

INT. COURTHOUSE

BEN  
(Monologue)  
Four twenty one, I recognise a lot  
of women in the courthouse, not for  
a good reason unfortunately. They  
are there supporting Joanne,  
although meaningless to the jury  
it's a good sight. I looked around  
and I couldn't find Rose, which was  
suprising, but that's when I  
realised she was next to Mary Anne,  
not supporting Joanne, it must be  
hard to stand on that side but then  
again she did say the woman was  
almost like a mother to her-

Mary Anne is smiling at the front when the judge sentences  
Joanne for 10 years without parole.

BEN  
(Monologue)  
The mother didn't sound suprised  
when hearing her son's horrible  
acts. Perhaps because she had  
already found out, and it stemmed a  
discussion that changed their  
relationship. Therefore there were  
two people who she cared about who  
lived in that house. David, who now  
sees both parents unfit to raise  
him, leaving it to the care of his  
grandmother, and god knows what she  
will do to him the same way she did  
to her kids. And then there's the  
Maid, Rose. Who she purposefully  
offered some gardening gloves while  
they both picked certain plants.  
Perhaps because without them, Dan  
Thompson would not have been the  
only victim of the Wolf's Bane.  
That woman, she found the suposed  
book that belonged to Joanne, she  
was the one who usualy bought the  
patches, she knew who her son was.  
Am I going crazy, are these just  
the ramblings of a paranoid  
detective searching for a reason to  
save that poor victim of abuse?

Josh is by his side his face is frowned.

JOSH

This doesn't feel right. It was too easy, like a simple game of clue.

BEN

What're you suggesting partner?

JOSH

We need to see this through, the case isn't over. Hum, partner, I like that one.

BEN

Hey, don't push it, I might end up actually liking you by the end of this case.

They both look at each other and laugh.

END