

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

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45-year-old Ricky Ellsworth had survived a sort of tough life. She struggled with alcohol addiction for years, and her husband had a problem with drugs. Ricky was successful beating her urge to drink.

She found a job that she liked as an overnight clerk at the Memphis Inn in Tennessee, and she had her life together. On February 7th of 1997, she showed up for her shift as usual. She really liked meeting new people, maybe even getting to know them a little bit. Ricky was gregarious and affable, but that night and the following morning, her friendly personality would cause her to open the door to unknown perils.

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## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

Ricky had an unforgettable grin and light brown curly hair. Described as kind-hearted, forgiving, and honest, she was also very dependable. So that Friday night, she was punctual as usual.

Her night at the hotel began when her husband woke her up after she slept a few hours at home. He kissed her goodbye and she drove to work in her 1989 Dodge Dynasty. Her shift started at 11pm and she was right on time. At about 1.30am, one of her hotel guests needed a snack. She got into the elevator, rode to ground level, and quietly walked into the vending area next to the front office where she saw Ricky at her desk. They exchanged friendly glances and smiles.

Another guest also ventured into the snack area about 10 minutes later and also saw Ricky. But this time, she was opening the locked security door and letting a man inside. An hour later, a railroad yardmaster nearby needs to check on his crew, who are all staying at the hotel. He calls the front desk but no one answers. He calls again a few minutes later and again, there's no answer. He thinks this is strange, but he really needs to talk to one of his workers. So he has no choice but to drive to the inn in the wee hours of the morning.

Just above 40 degrees, this morning is chilly from Memphis. He throws on a jacket, gets in his vehicle, and big grudgingly makes the trip. When he walks through the doors, he immediately sees that no one is manning the front desk. He looks on the counter for a bell to ring, but doesn't see one. For a few brief seconds, he wonders what to do since there doesn't seem to be a staff anywhere. So he makes a bold move and helping himself to the area behind the desk. Off to the side, he sees an office. The door is open, so he assumes there's someone in there. And besides, he hears running water coming from the office bathroom.

He's starting to get a little nervous about being in an area meant for staff. But this is so weird, so he keeps going, not knowing what he'll walk into.

Oh my god, there's a lot of blood on the floor. What is this?

He's scared now, but he knows something is wrong, and he wants to know what it is.

Inching quietly toward the open restroom door, he's now very concerned about what he's about to see.

He peeks inside, but still, no one is there. What he does see, though, is a shocking scene of blood everywhere. Too much blood to overlook. He knows he has to act fast because it's clear someone is in trouble. He debates for just a few seconds before rushing back out the doors into the dark rain to find help. He's been in dire situations before, but this one is different.

In a state of panic, he doesn't even think about using the front desk phone,

so he heads for his truck. What he leaves behind in his rear view is a set to a horror movie.

Fortunately, though, right outside, he spots two police officers in the nearby parking lot, and starts yelling at them, telling them what he's stumbled upon inside the manager's office.

He realizes his voice is becoming too loud. The police try to calm him before radioing in for additional help. This is now getting very serious. When MPD crime scene detectives got there and began investigating the office area, they could tell some kind of bloody brawl had just taken place. Puddles of blood were obvious red flags. Blood was dripping in the basin of the cracked sink and trickling from the toilet. Someone had ripped the toilet seat from the base and bloody towels laid on the floor. A 39-foot bright red trail took them from the office bathroom through the equipment room and office reception area and passed the vending machines. It continued down the hall and to the curb just outside the night entrance.

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

39 feet. That's the length of a typical flagpole or a four-story building.

With police permission, the hotel manager looks around carefully and realizes that \$400 is missing from the register and another \$200 is missing from the lockbox in the back room. She tells them that Ricky would keep a key to it in her pocket at all times. Together, the manager and the police spot Ricky's purse and the wedding ring she never took off, lying on the floor surrounded by crimson liquid. Under a blood-soaked towel, they find a green cigarette lighter and notice that several sets of sheets are missing. The good news is there were witnesses, but the bad news was exactly what they witnessed. Sometime between 1.30 and 2 a.m., a couple of tourists parked near the night entrance because they wanted to drop in and pick up a map. While the woman patiently waited in the car, the man went in to go find one. As he walked towards the entrance, the woman saw a maroon car parked just outside the doors. The car's trunk was open, which was weird because it was raining that night. Her partner, on his way to the building, saw a man standing next to the trunk with something rolled up in his arms. The object, measuring about five feet long, was then placed into the trunk, causing the hole back into the car to sink with its weight. He holds the door open for the man with the maroon car, and at that moment he sees that the man has blood on his hands. Forget the map, he thinks. I'm not going in there. So he returns to the car where his partner is waiting, seeking help crosses their minds, but it's late and they're tired. Besides, cell phones weren't a thing yet, except for the very well connected and rich. They decided to just leave because what they'd seen was already terrifying enough. While leaving, the man jokingly turns to his girlfriend and says, this doesn't look good at all. And then he thinks to himself, did I just witness the tail end of a murder?

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As the investigation began and gained speed, information from witnesses was becoming more and more detailed. Several people saw a suspicious maroon car and the couple previously mentioned saw even more than that. According to another report, Ricky was missing from behind the counter and two men had taken her place. One was behind the counter handing money through

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

the window opening to another man. They assumed the one behind the counter was the actual clerk until they noticed his knuckles were covered in blood. They described the first suspect as being in his early 20s and having long red hair. He was wearing an orange ball cap and jeans and had a tattoo on his left arm. The other man looked around 30 with long brown hair, a mustache and jeans. Even though there were more than several witnesses, no one was able to identify the men in a lineup. This included the man who saw the transaction and described the figures. He couldn't pick them out amongst photos shown to him either. Meanwhile, the suspect is on a mission. The night before Ricky's disappearance, his brother gets an evening visitor. His brother Richard Rimmer lives on a large amount of property, complete with woods and a lake. At the door, it's Rimmer. He wants to come in and hang out, drink a few beers. Richard listens to his brother telling him he has a date later that night and they shoot the shit for a while before Rimmer leaves. But the next morning, Richard is woken by another house call from his sibling. Rimmer looks disheveled and tired. He's also kind of out of it. Richard keeps a neat house and his brother has mud all over him. So he asks Rimmer to take off his muddy shoes and wash them.

Since he happens to be a carpet cleaner, his brother wants him to take a look at his car. Richard's first thought is, you don't have a car. And he starts wondering about where his brother has borrowed this maroon vehicle. Then he sees mud covering the lower half of the car and caking the wheels. His brother wants him to clean the car, both outside and inside. So he opens the door and

sees the back seat as wet. Next, his brother nonchalantly asks him if he knows how to get blood out of carpet. Of course I do, he thinks, but he doesn't do him the favor. Then he catches sight of a shovel in the car. What is my brother up to now? For God's sake, he thinks.

Rimmer asks if he can just lie down on the floor for a while and rest. But Richard is suspicious and tells him to just get out. But later, when he learns of Ricky's disappearance, he realizes he could be complicit in something very bad. He starts to get scared and gets rid of the shovel for his fugitive brother. Thinking that his brother may have been involved in this mystery wasn't all that much of a stretch. After all, they both knew Ricky Ellsworth.

The suspect, Michael Rimmer, first heard about Ricky when he was in prison for what seems like a minor infraction these days, a marijuana purchase at the age of 18. His friends did a little jail time, but Rimmer served a prison term. While he was there, he met an inmate who was dating the victim, Ricky. After the inmate and Ricky broke up, Rimmer was there to start fresh with her after he got out of prison. He described living with her and her children as the happiest times of his life. This took place while Ricky and her husband were divorced in the late 70s, but by the late 80s, the relationship with Rimmer began to sour when Ricky started to feel smothered, so she cut ties. Now, Rimmer doesn't want to split. He's perfectly happy and content in the situation, and he's crazy about Ricky, so instead of getting therapy, he gets revenge. He robs her. He violently assaults her, and he rapes her. Rimmer is put back in prison, but Ricky, who participates in prison ministry after getting sober, continues to see him, even though he raped her. Ricky is a forgiving sort of person, so she offers to take Rimmer's mother to see him when she goes to ministry. Rimmer's mother notes, not only does Ricky convince her son to commit to Christianity, she remembers that the two were very affectionate with each other, causing her to believe that the spark was still there between the two. In 1993, Ricky was practically engaged to Rimmer, who was still in prison.

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

Little did Ricky know that Rimmer was talking shit about her to other inmates. She still owes me money, he says, disgruntled. She's the one who put me in here with her rape allegation, he stues. His animosity towards her grows with every boring prison minute after every boring prison minute, and he tells his friends behind bars that he's going to kill her when he gets out. He also details how he will get rid of her body. So Michael Rimmer is released from prison in 1996 and begins working at an auto body shop, but his mind is still racing with thoughts of murdering Ricky for revenge. At this point, Ricky is now remarried to her first husband and perfectly happy. That is, until February 8th of 1997, when she goes missing. Now, Rimmer didn't have a car, but his employer had numerous cars as part of his business, so Rimmer helped himself to one of them. Detectives were about to track Rimmer down based on the description of the stolen car alone. Almost a month after the incident, the Indiana deputy stopped a maroon Honda that matched the description, and sure enough, it was a stolen car. The driver was Michael Rimmer, drunk. When questioned about the murder, Rimmer smugly answered, you can't have a murder because you don't have a body. When the car was impounded and searched, blood stains on the carpet and seat belt matched the victim's DNA. Among other items found were a white towel with blood stains, receipts from multiple states, duct tape with hair on it, a pillow with blood, and a hammer. Rimmer is put back into jail, but he's not having it and makes several escape attempts. When he's first locked up, he and another inmate make a tool and saw through the jail bars like a character from the Old West, breaking the window and repelling down the side of the building with a self-made rope. For another attempt, he uses nail clippers to cut through the fence, and while in route to the Tennessee jail, he successfully overtakes the transportation van until he's caught hours later. The cellmate who served time with Rimmer in 1993 and knew some of Ricky's relatives remembered that he would just get spit in the corner of his mouth like a salivating dog when he talked about her. A short time later, he said Rimmer wanted him to deliver a message to Ricky's family during a holiday furlough. The message was, tell them I'm going to kill Ricky. The inmate claimed that Rimmer further explained how he would dump Ricky's body in a Mississippi lake. In 1996, he revealed to another inmate that he was going to, quote, kill the funky bitch, end quote. He again talked about getting rid of bodies, putting them in a barrel with lime. It eats the bones and all up, he thought. This inmate also described Rimmer's agitated demeanor. He got high strung and into talking about it and would sort of foam at the mouth when he talked about killing her. He tells a later cellmate exactly what he did to Ricky this time. What follows is a recreation of the events based on what Rimmer said and what a forensic expert could piece together. Rimmer says excitedly that on the evening of February 7th, he leaves work in a stolen Honda from his employer's auto body shop. He knows Ricky is working at the hotel because they have maintained some sort of contact. She thinks they're on good terms and that he's a full blown Christian now, but he secretly despises the fact that she has remarried her husband and he feels rejected. If he can't have her, no one can. And in his own mind, she owes him money from a settlement that she won. So he goes to collect what is his, what he's owed, both the money and Ricky herself. He saunters into the hotel like he's just there to say hi rather than to savagely kill her like the monster that he is. He approaches the desk and makes small talk with Ricky, convincing her it'll let him into the area behind the service desk to use the office restroom. The minute she turns

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

her back on him, he grabs her by the hair and slams her head into the sink. Bleeding, she turns around in disbelief. She tries to get past him, but he pushes her against the wall. When the struggle is too much, he grabs the toilet lid that has already been ripped from the seat during the scuffle and bashes her over and over on the head. She doesn't go down easily though, she's flailing, slipping on blood. And while she's down, he pulls out a gun. He's tired. He wants her dead. So he shoots her point blank in the chest. As he's preparing for the heist, he turns his back on her thinking she's dead. But Ricky comes to and pulls herself up from the floor groaning, massively bleeding and begging for her life. So he shoots her in the head. He gloats over the bloody crime scene, all the blood spatter and brain bits on the walls and in the sink. He also remembers how the blood smears contrasted with the white porcelain. Rimmer thoroughly enjoys basking in the thoughts of his gruesome accomplishment. And then he gets a giddy childlike grin when

he announces that he stole sheets to wrap her body and dragged her out to the waiting car. He's sure she's dead now. All he needs to do now is dump her body somewhere remote. Killing her and getting rid of the body was exactly what Rimmer did. And he would soon find himself in front of a judge and jury. Little did they know that Rimmer would try to escape his fate one more time.

In 1998, a week-long trial took less than four hours to find Michael Rimmer guilty of killing his ex-wife, Ricky Ellsworth. Really, it only took the jury three hours, considering they had an entire hour for lunch. Rimmer was convicted of one count of premeditated murder, one count of aggravated robbery, and one count of theft of property. The jury gave a death sentence in the penalty phase. But the death sentence was reversed, and he was given a new trial after a successful appeal. Rimmer was sentenced to death, but cracks in the procedural integrity resulted in a resettencing. In 2004, a second jury sentenced him to death. Rimmer was supposed to die by electrocution on April 7, 2004, but he appealed again, of course, and was awarded a new trial due to defense mistakes and prosecutorial misconduct. The misconduct amounted

to the original prosecutor failing to disclose information that could have provided reasonable doubt. In 2012, a Shelby County judge overturned both Rimmer's conviction and death sentence. He also found Rimmer's defense counsel failed to effectively investigate the capital case. For the next session in court, the defense wanted a mitigation specialist to be called in to investigate Rimmer's background. Apparently, Rimmer's parents married very young and had three children in a short span of time. First of all, Rimmer was the middle child. His father had a history of minor offenses, and his parents divorced. When they remarried, both parents were working full-time, and Rimmer was 11. That's when he began acting out. Although he was a C student, he allegedly would have benefited from special education, which he never received. The specialist also testified that both he and his father had been treated for mental health issues. Rimmer was hospitalized more than twice for bad behavior, including having an affair with an older woman who was a teacher. Despite the arguments, he was retried, convicted, and sentenced to death again in 2016. That decision was upheld

by the Court of Criminal Appeals and the Tennessee Supreme Court. Rimmer has appealed numerous times since then, but hasn't won any of them. He was again scheduled for his come-to-Jesus moment on May 10th, 2022, but the Tennessee Department of Correction granted

## [Transcript] Sword and Scale Nightmares / Check Out

Rimmer

a stay. His legal team argues that being tried again in 2016 violated his right against double jeopardy. The most recent Shelby County judge told Rimmer that he'll be in prison until all appeals have been exhausted and an execution date is set. At that point, he will be put to death by electrocution or, at his option, lethal injection. It looks like Rimmer probably won't get executed anytime soon, though. The judge overseeing the case says the next round of appeals could take years to resolve. Now, you may be wondering, what about the second man? Remember that a witness did claim to have seen two men with bloody hands on the night of Ricky's disappearance? The witness claimed that one of the photos showed a man named Voiles. When Voiles was brought in, he also brought with a list of eight people cops could call to verify that he was not even in Tennessee that night. Authorities never identified the second man. So as you lay your head to sleep this evening, remember that we live in a society with laws and social norms and people that almost always do the right thing. Ricky Ellsworth thought so and was going about her life like we all do every day. Little did she know that the pretty little existence she had carved out for herself was a lie. After all, there was a monster who thirsted for her blood, who hungered for her demise, and he would get his fill once the society of laws and social norms was foolish enough to let him out of his cage. There's another thing that Ricky didn't know, and that is that years later, after her whole life, her whole existence here had all but been forgotten. That second monster would still be out there as we, the society, argue about what to do with the first. If you enjoyed the show, please consider joining plus at [swordandscale.com](http://swordandscale.com) slash plus. But if you can't, consider leaving us a positive review on your preferred listening platform. Sweet dreams and good night.

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