

[Transcript] True Sunlight / TSP #13 - "I Don't Think He Cared": Cory Fleming Pleads Guilty To State Charges + Murdaugh's Enablers Get A Taste of Big Creighton Energy

I don't know how much time Corey Fleming deserves to spend in state prison for what he did to the Satterfield and Pinkney families.

But after Fleming pleaded guilty to all 23 state charges this week, it is clear that the state is going to go where the feds wouldn't, to hold Corey and Alec Murdoch's co-conspirators accountable.

And that is a big deal.

My name is Mandy Matney.

This is True Sunlight, a podcast exposing crime and corruption previously known as the Murdoch Murders podcast.

True Sunlight is a Luna Shark production, written with journalist Liz Farrell.

This week, a headline in the Hampton County Guardian, the local newspaper of Alec Murdoch's hometown, read quote, one by one, Alec Murdoch's accomplices are falling like dominoes.

My initial reaction was, are they?

Because it doesn't feel like it.

Then I thought about it more, and I got angrier.

This isn't a game of dominoes with Alec Murdoch's co-conspirators, it's whack-a-mole.

Every single time one of his boys goes down, or we think they're down, two more sprout up from the surface showing their beady little eyes and empty souls.

Then you focus on getting these guys down, and you put all of your time and energy into really making sure they don't get back up again.

And just like that, that one mole that you thought was for sure defeated pops up again, showing his stupid little eyes.

You can't win, not unless you have a bunch of really pesky people whacking at the bad guys along with you, and refusing to give up even when victory seems impossible.

This is the game we have all been playing for the last two years.

And by we, let's be honest here, I mean Sled, I mean the Feds, I mean the US Attorney's Office, I mean the State's Attorney General's Office, I mean the public at large who is tired of this system, and I mean the journalists who are doing their best to expose these guys who made a joke out of the legal system.

In the moles, I'm talking about Eliq Murdoch, his doofus defense team, Corey Fleming, and Russell Lafitte.

Also, the lingering moles in the background who aren't making much noise, but they're definitely still up and about.

Carmen Mullen.

Domino's don't get back up after they fall.

If they were actually Domino's, if Eliq Murdoch's co-conspirators were actually Domino's who accepted defeat and responsibility for their actions, then the last two years would have been much easier on a whole cluster of people.

And because of that, we have to keep fighting.

I've said this many times, but our team is definitely experiencing Murdoch fatigue.

But we've noticed that the second that we back off the story even a little, shenanigans that need sunlight start back up again.

The bad guys want us to move on, which is why it's so important.

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We keep playing whack-a-mole, even if we never win.

We at least have to make it harder for them to get back up.

This podcast alone is not going to change the South Carolina justice system.

We need lawmakers, we need community leaders, lawyers, judges, law enforcement, solicitors, and most importantly, voters to do that.

But what we can do is shine a harsh spotlight on South Carolina.

We can expose the misdeeds we see in the justice system and we can keep making noise until something is done about it.

We can keep shouting to the world about how we have two systems of justice here in South Carolina and in the United States.

I know many of you have asked about the Solomon case and I assure you we are working really hard on future episodes and we have a lot to talk about there.

But we realize this month that we just can't abandon this story because we are tired of the South Carolina good old boys and their endless audacity.

There are too many loosens that we have to see through, including Stephen Smith, which we are patiently waiting for sled to announce progress on.

We have come so far, we have exposed so much.

We can't just walk away because we are tired and we hope you don't either.

The work we are doing here and the work you are doing by listening is ultimately leading to accountability and we have to focus on that.

Sunlight is a key ingredient to accountability.

It's the first step to ensuring justice.

Journalists can't guarantee their work will lead to justice.

There are too many things outside of our control.

We have no say in how Cory will be sentenced at the state level, but we can make sure that lots of people know and understand exactly what he did.

And when we do that, when Cory's egregious actions are aired out for the world to see, I like to think that it makes other Cory-like men out there who are thinking about using their positions of power to steal from the vulnerable.

Maybe they're thinking twice before they do bad things.

I hope that people who thought that they were untouchable hear about Cory's story and think, huh, and maybe I don't want my neighbors knowing how horrible I was, and maybe I shouldn't do the bad thing, I should stop doing the bad thing, or I should do the right thing and come clean.

I've thought about this a lot in the last week as all of my extra angry energy has been dedicated to watching the horrific story in Marion Kansas unfold.

As a journalist born and raised in Kansas, I couldn't look away, and I had to mention it in this episode because it strikes to the core of what we're doing here, why sunlight and accountability matter, and how off course our justice system is right now, well beyond South Carolina.

In a nutshell, what happened was earlier this month, Marion Kansas police illegally raided the Marion County Record Newspaper's office and the publisher's home where his 98-year-old mother, Joan Meyer, lived.

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I want to play this part of the video that captured the raid of Joan Meyer's home and was posted on the Marion County Records YouTube page.

Police took reporters' phones, computers, financial documents, and even Ms. Meyer's Amazon Alexa that she uses for emergency purposes.

Less than 24 hours after that raid, Joan Meyer died of a heart attack.

Her son said it absolutely was caused by the police raid.

The stress of it was unbearable for Joan Meyer, who worked in newspapers for decades.

There has been a lot of great reporting on this case from the Kansas Reflector, the Kansas City Star, and KSHB to name a few.

And here is what they found.

Well the police chief, in charge of the investigation, was being investigated by the newspaper for his checkered past at another department, huh?

The judge who signed off on the absurd warrants had two previous DUI arrests that were not listed in her application, huh?

The warrants, which have been withdrawn after police found no criminal evidence, were all based on an absurd allegation that the newspaper reporters had obtained a local business owner's driving record illegally.

It was confirmed that they did not, and the police chief needs a lesson on the First Amendment and public records.

Bottom line, the allegations for which police attempted to justify the raid were much less concerning than the cops' actions during the raid.

They trampled over the rights that so many have fought for, and a woman died after the unlawful raid.

There must be accountability.

Every American citizen who doesn't want to live in a country where its people are not protected by the First Amendment, and police who don't understand the Constitution have the power to intimidate and silence citizens through illegal raids, all of us need to be making noise about this.

Here's the thing, I would be willing to bet that the Marion police never in a million years expected media around the world to cover this story.

I have written a lot of stories about men like Chief Cody, who used their positions of power to intimidate and control instead of serving and protecting.

He probably didn't want dozens of newspapers looking into his record, questioning why he suddenly left a much bigger police department several months ago and combing over his every move.

And now that his headaches are multiplying, thanks to many Kansas journalists doing their job to fight an attack on journalism with good journalism, as someone on Twitter put, you have to wonder if he would do it all again.

We hope the KBI, which is Kansas' sled, holds the Chief of Police and the judge who signed off on these warrants accountable.

We hope they send a message to the rest of the world that this totalitarian behavior by authorities will not be tolerated in the United States.

But mostly, we hope the Kansas journalists shining sunlight on this town where officials

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broke the law stay on top of the story until we see accountability.

This is how the Fourth Estate is supposed to work.

That is how democracy is supposed to work.

It's why journalism is more important now than it has ever been.

This episode is dedicated to the pesky Joan Meyer, who lost her life fighting the good fight, standing up for herself in the First Amendment.

Let's give you a little background on how we got to Wednesday so you can understand where our heads were at right before Corey Fleming's hearing started.

On Monday morning, in the middle of recording our latest Cup of Justice episode, we got word that a status conference in Corey's state case, which had been scheduled for Wednesday, was no longer going to be a status conference.

Instead, we were told it would be a sentencing hearing.

We were told that Corey was likely going to plead guilty to all 23 charges, and the sentencing would be left up to Judge Clifton Newman to decide.

Naturally, we were like, oh, stop right there, kid, because as you know, we've been siding Corey's single federal charge and his federal plea deal last week as nothing more than a hardcore press to escape these state charges.

Since this was coming so quickly after his meager federal sentencing of 46 months, and Judge Richard Gurgle's repeated lament about the state's insistence on pursuing charges, it seemed like this could be the next step in Corey's master plan.

If he could get to Judge Newman while Judge Gurgle's words about not tarrying and feathering him were still hot off the presses, maybe Judge Newman would take that sentiment to heart.

Up until this past week, it had looked like the state attorney general's office was going to push for a hefty state sentence for Corey, hefty as in 14 years, which 14 years in the South Carolina prison system is psychologically like, I don't know, 50 years in federal prison.

And this might explain Corey's seeming nervousness at the defense table Wednesday, but we'll get into that.

Obviously, if that 14 year offer was on the table and we're hearing that it was somewhere around that number, it wasn't something Corey was ever going to accept, ever.

That's why we were fully prepared for this case to go to trial in September.

We figured, given how confident our sources have been about the state attorney general office's resolve not to back down, that this was Corey's best option.

And in fact, we were hoping it would go to trial because ultimately it would end up putting more information on the record about what Ellic and Corey had been up to and how things worked in that world.

We were also hoping it might lead to the identification of more co-conspirators.

Some people's hopes, of course, are other people's deep worries.

We have to imagine the idea of Corey going to trial might be nerve wracking to the unidentified Murdoch co-conspirators.

So we had to wonder if that had anything to do with why Corey was willing to plead guilty and take his chances with the sentencing.

In other words, is this not only Corey trying to minimize his own punishment, is it Corey

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trying to protect whatever malevolent thing lies beneath all of this?

Another thing we found out on Monday was that attorneys in Beaver County were rallying for Corey.

They were trying to get as many of their colleagues as possible to write letters in support of leniency and traveled to Williamsburg County on Wednesday for what they themselves were calling a sentencing hearing.

Let's pause for a second here.

You heard what I said, right?

attorneys in Beaver County were rallying for Corey.

They were trying to get as many of his colleagues as possible to drive up to Williamsburg County to sit behind Corey in solidarity.

This is one of the most gross things that has happened in all of this.

To hear that attorneys, the very people who should be insulted and disgusted by what Corey did, were trying to help minimize the sentence.

It's yet another sign that nothing has changed here.

Let's be super clear.

Even though Corey says he's ashamed and even though he seems to be remorseful, this wasn't a one-time slip-up.

This was behavior that spanned at least 10 years and its behavior he denied up until recently.

But okay, fine.

His colleagues are minimizing the criminal element of this, their attorneys.

Many of them literally do that for a living.

What about the professional conduct part?

It seriously wouldn't surprise us to find out that these same attorneys are the ones who have been complaining about the backlash that they have been getting from their clients not trusting them the way they used to trust them because of hearing about everything that Ellic had done to his clients and everything Corey had done to help him.

And just to give context, this would be like Mandy and me standing in support of a journalist who made up sources or who plagiarized other people's writing or who straight up and knowingly wrote lies about people.

We would never do that.

There has to be a firm line in the stand between what is right and wrong when you're in a profession that values ethical behavior and largely operates on trust.

At any rate, this was what was on our minds Tuesday when we found out that Corey's status conference turned sentencing hearing was now going to be just a hearing in which Corey entered his plea.

The sentencing we were told would be held at a later date.

I know Corey's friends think we're beating a dead horse here, but let's look at where we're coming from.

Corey pleaded not guilty in March 2022 when he was first arraigned.

He wrote a 50-some odd-page letter to the Georgia bar denying every tiny aspect of this that made him look bad beyond a few innocent mistakes getting made, meaning he thought

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he would still be a lawyer after this.

Corey wasn't sent to jail to await trial and wasn't required to wear an ankle monitor while out on bond, and when the AG's office filed more charges against him in May 2022, Corey didn't even have to appear in court again to enter his second not guilty plea.

Corey did not come clean about his crimes until after it was clear that Ellick wasn't going to get away with murder.

He didn't actually cooperate with state investigators and he didn't quote substantially assist the federal government.

This guy was now pleading guilty to the state charges, and this guy's sentencing hearing was put off so that it could be scheduled for Buford County so that victims could attend.

Which, obviously, that's a good thing if we're truly talking about making it easier on the victims, but it's really unusual to schedule a plea hearing and a sentencing hearing on two different days, at least in our experience.

So we have to ask, was this for the victims or for the attorneys who were trying to rally up the troops in support of Corey?

It sure does make things more convenient for them and gives them the benefit of more time.

Since Judge Newman is presiding over the case, we're going to err on the side of this decision being for the victims.

But here's the thing, having his lawyer friends there might actually be really helpful to Corey.

It would certainly send a message to Judge Newman that Corey's crimes were mere professional aberrations and that this really isn't who he is because with all these lawyers who should be mad at him, be here otherwise, it'll be interesting to see who shows up now that the world has seen Corey Fleming in stripes.

Seems like it could be a real there but for the grace of God go I situation for a few of them.

We'll be right back.

Okay, let's talk about what happened Wednesday.

We've got to start by talking about those stripes.

I cannot overemphasize how surreal this was seeing the mighty men in the Murdoch world wearing literal stripes.

Last week, Corey looked like a broken man as he left the courtroom flanked by US Marshals.

This week, he looked like that same broken man had morphed into an Instagram post of a sad looking dog whose owner put a shame sign around his neck that said, I had an accident in the house while the Roomba was running.

From all outside appearances, Corey looked about as humbled as one could look in court.

His family sat a few rows behind him.

It was almost like he couldn't bring himself to look at them.

Oddly, he was wearing his wedding ring, which please tell us the jail isn't allowing that.

Also that was all before Creighton Waters started to outline his crimes and how they were being carried out.

How each crime required a decision on Corey's part, a fork in the road between doing what was right and what was illegal.

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Remember when Eric Bland tried to do this in federal court last week?

When he told the court it was important for the people there supporting Corey understood what this was all about and important that the public record reflect what he did.

And then Judge Gurgle smugly shut him down.

Well, Creighton had E.B.s back on Wednesday and yes, he brought big Creighton energy.

Actually it was the biggest big Creighton energy we have seen to this date.

Maybe we should start calling him BBCE because Creighton really seemed to rattle Corey and his attorneys.

It seemed like something happened that they did not plan on happening.

Some of our sources seem to think that they were not counting on Creighton reading all of the facts of the case, but why would they ever think that he wouldn't do that?

We were wondering if it was a case that wasn't mentioned in the indictment, the case that we told you about already and we'll get to that in a minute.

Whatever reason the rattle, it isn't a stretch to believe that what we've witnessed in Corey in real time, realizing that he'd made a very risky gamble by pleading guilty to all of the charges.

A strategy that has a lot of people scratching their heads right now.

Creighton started by telling Judge Newman that he had been informed that Corey intended to plead to all 23 charges.

Corey's attorney, Debbie Barbier, told the judge that this was in fact the case.

I want to know, there was someone at Corey's table this week.

He was apparently at Corey's federal hearing last week, but we didn't see him.

It was Nathan Williams, a federal defense attorney out of Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, who used to be the chief criminal prosecutor at the U.S. Attorney's Office.

In fact, he is one of the attorneys who prosecuted Dylan Roof after the Charleston Church shootings in 2015.

He has a lot of experience.

Real quick, here is what he says himself on his website.

Over the years, I witnessed companies and individuals miss critical opportunities to get ahead of investigations in charges due to an attorney's lack of experience.

As a result, the client suffered rep-reputational harm, career damage, and sometimes prison time.

I left my position as criminal chief at the U.S. Attorney's Office in South Carolina to start a boutique firm because I felt these companies and individuals deserved better.

Huh, could this be why the federal government swooped in and offered Corey one charge?

Huh, whether it is or not, there was a point during the hearing when we started to notice just how rattled Corey and Debbie seemed that Nathan took on the spirit of Corey Fleming in August 2021 when he sat next to Ellick Murdoch and Sled's office and listened as agents laid out some of the evidence against him.

At the start of the hearing, Judge Newman had Corey sworn in and asked him some big questions.

Mr. Fleming, the attorney general in the case of shoes here to plead guilty to all of the pending indictments against you in Hanson County and Uter County.

Is that correct?

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Yes, sir.

And you indicated your desire to plead guilty by signing out the indictments indicating you're pleading guilty?

Yes, sir.

Of course, we're in Williamsburg County and typically the cases will be handled heard in Williamsburg County where the charges are brought, the weight venues of those cases in Hampton and Newford so that this matter can be heard today in Williamsburg.

I do, sir.

And have you reviewed with your counsel all of the pending indictments that were here today concerning them?

Yes, sir.

And Ms. Bartlett, you indicated that you're in total agreement with his decision to plead guilty?

I am not.

And Ms. Fleming, you are well aware the Newford County indictments are scheduled for trial the week of September the 11th in Newford County, correct?

Yes, sir.

And if you would have a trial and, of course, as you know, the state would have a burden of approving each and every charge against you, each and every indictment against you, the evidence would be reasonable doubt to Azure.

Yes, sir.

And you plead guilty to deal with those important constitutional rights?

Yes, sir.

And also, you waive any defense that you might have to those charges?

Yes, sir.

And knowing all of that, how do you plead to these indictments?

And with that chief here, they told her 23 times.

So 23 times.

Guilty.

And you're familiar with the possible punishment as to each charge?

Yes, sir.

Creighton took the floor and beautifully summarized what this case is about.

Making advantage of the state's judicial system.

Your Honor, this case is an extremely important case and the reason why it is extremely important like everything that's been associated with this larger matter is that today in state court is the first time that we're going to see accountability for abuse of the state court system.

And it's a very complex way in which it was done.

But I have to remind the court that these were, this is a state lawyer who had a state law license to abuse that state law license in state court actions before state court judges with state court settlements and state court things that happened within the state of South Carolina.

Yes, how the system was abused and that's why it demands a resolution the state judicial

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system has to have accountability for someone who has abused that very system.

Creighton told Judge Newman that right after the AG's office got the case in the fall of 2021, the state grand jury immediately began looking into Ellic Murnock's financial crimes.

Immediately, like us, began seeing red flags with Corey Fleming.

And as we looked into that, one of the first things we heard from Mr. Fleming was that he had been put to you by Ellic just like everyone else, that he had been tricked, that he had been one of the ones led down the path by the deceit of Ellic Murnock and that he had been most tricked in the case involving the Satterfields.

And one of the first things that we uncovered was that Mr. Fleming had been stealing money out of the Satterfield account, independent of anything to do with Ellic Murnock and Fake George.

And as we continued to investigate and look into another matter that came to our attention from payments that were made to the Fake Forge account, the Pinkney case came to our attention, Ms. Pamela Pinkney.

And that was one of the big cases that Ellic had.

It was a huge recovery, but he had to bring Corey in to represent Pamela Pinkney because she had been a driver in that particular incident.

And one of the things we saw, and I'll go through this in greater detail in a moment, was Corey Fleming authorizing money going from the trust account that should have gone to Pamela Pinkney and instead sending back to PMBD, which Ellic Murnock had promptly converted.

And as we looked further into that, we started looking at the expenditures.

And one of the things that we saw over and over again as we looked at this case, as we look at how the system is abused, is that when settlements were received, these attorneys would often retain in trust an amount sufficient to cover any medical liens that were on the case.

And what they're supposed to do, as your Honor is well aware, what they're supposed to do and what they often do is they negotiate with those medical providers for a lesser amount. So if it's \$200,000, hey, we'll pay you \$125,000.

And then if the medical provider agrees, what they're supposed to do as a service to their client is they return that delta, return that difference that \$75,000 to their client.

But instead, for Mr. Fleming, that was an opportunity to steep.

Creighton then gave us some more insight about what went down in 2012.

When Ellick Murdock, Corey Fleming, and Chris Wilson, who is still an attorney by the way, flew to Omaha, Nebraska on a private plane to see the University of South Carolina baseball team play in the College World Series.

Your Honor may recall that back in 2002 and 2011, the South Carolina Gamecocks won the College World Series back to back.

Mr. Fleming is a huge Carolina fan, as was Ellick Murdock.

And they wanted to go to 2012, which was the third appearance.

Gamecocks ended up losing that one, but it was the third appearance.

And we were looking at that delta, that difference between what Mr. Fleming had retained in his trust

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account with Pamela Pinkney's money and what he had actually settled the lien for.

We said, we've got to look at those expenses.

That's where something's fishy.

And one of the things we saw in there was a reference for a medical expense to Crosswind.

A medical expense to Crosswind.

Well, some didn't see right about that.

And State-ranking jury staff and SLED started looking around.

And instead of finding any medical entity called Crosswind, what we found,

you can see the invoice right here, was a Crosswind in the aviation,

which provides private plane services.

And so, SLED goes and interviews the pilot.

And he's like, yeah.

I took Alex and Corey out to the College World Series.

They wanted to probably go out there and already have a good time.

There were no business to be discussed.

They turned me out for drinks.

It was like, I'd be able to go to the College World Series.

This year on was August 21st, 2012.

And this represents counts five and six of the indictment of 2022 GS4702.

One fake check paid out as a trust account belonging to Pamela Higdon

for the amount of \$6,490 to pay for a private plane.

So they could go party at the College World Series.

And number two would be in check for \$1,588.46.

Back as far as 2012, the facts have shown Mr. Fleming has been stealing along with his buddy Alperot.

And so, instantly, we know that things were different.

That this claim from Mr. Fleming that he had been hooded by Alperot like everybody else was not true.

And then as we go on deeper, we discover that he was a willing, co-conspirator for nearly a decade with this man.

Y'all, Sled interviewed the pilot.

It is such sweet justice.

Notice how Creighton said Corey tried to mask the private flight as a medical expense?

Independent sources have told us Corey isn't the only one who did that.

We fully expect to learn more about how Elick and others used fraudulent expenses in his cases.

And we hope that the South Carolina Office of Disciplinary Counsel has the fortitude to follow through on other fraudulent billing practices

that might have been going on in Elick's heyday with others.

One thing we really appreciate about Creighton was his analogy for the judge about what Corey was essentially going to do by pleading guilty.

It's important to the state judicial system that the truth and the light is shown of how it can be abused, that there be accountability for that.

But also, I think that in the end, what we're going to see here is kind of like if this was traffic court

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and I'm a trooper.

And Mr. Fleming and the speed limit is 55.

And Mr. Fleming is going to, I think, stand up and admit, hey, I was doing 58.

And if I'm a trooper, I'm saying, no, you're not. We caught him doing 90.

And he was weaving in and out of traffic like it was a video game.

That's going to be the rub here.

And the real rub is going to be what did Mr. Fleming know was going to happen with those millions of dollars that he delivered to Elick.

We're not supposed to go to the sand fields and never did.

That's going to be the rub.

Because he's going to admit, I believe, that he stole money and that he openly conspired with the defendant.

And that he, by doing so, committed the crimes of breach of trust and money laundering and computer crime and the various ones that we've alleged.

But he's going to say, I believe, that he didn't know when he delivered those checks to Elick, we're not, that Elick was going to convert any of that money.

And your honor, the facts that we're going to go through here as quickly as I can are going to show otherwise.

Oh my gosh, did he show otherwise?

Creighton Ben shocked the court, especially Cory's team, by bringing up a case that wasn't mentioned in the indictments.

A case that involves his own family in the crosshairs.

A case that true sunlight listeners should recognize.

And one thing I want to point out, and this is one charge conduct.

But in 2012 to 2014, after around the same time that Mr. Fleming is stealing money to pay for his private plane trip out to see the Palo Alto series.

He has a case where his family member is the defendant.

And another family member is the plaintiff, essentially.

And what they do in that case is really what happens in Southerfield.

Essentially, Mr. Fleming, who's effectively defendant, is doing the work.

And using Elick Murdoch's name with his consent, who's supposedly the plaintiff's lawyer.

And then they put in an order that is signed by a judge that the plaintiff's lawyer, Mr. Murdoch, supposedly, is receiving \$48,000 in legal fees.

But it doesn't go to Mr. Murdoch. It goes in his pocket.

It's the same thing just in reverse.

It's the plaintiff's lawyer and the defense, the defendant, essentially conspiring to put money that's supposed to be for the plaintiff into the defendant's pocket.

Sound familiar?

Remember when we said this in episode two of True Sunlight.

For instance, is anyone looking into a 2012 civil lawsuit that involved Corey's cousin, his son, his wife, and Elick Murdoch?

In and of itself, this case isn't necessarily suspicious, but it does warrant some questions being asked to determine just how deep all of this goes.

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And is the federal government actually asking these questions?

In this 2012 case that we found, Elick Murdoch sued Corey Fleming's wife on behalf of Corey Fleming's son, who was injured in some type of automobile accident in 2010.

What was that?

Yup, that is the gauntlet that BCE threw down in court on Wednesday.

I went back and rewatched this moment when Creighton brought up this 2012 case involving his own family.

I swore the room shook a little when he said that.

This appeared to be the prosecution's ace in the hole, judging purely from the body language shift on the defense team when Creighton told the court about how Corey sued his own wife with the help of Elick Murdoch.

I noticed that Corey and his two male attorneys all simultaneously whipped their heads to glare at Debbie Barbier.

They had this look on their faces like, oh my god, he went there.

I thought he wasn't going to go there, Debbie.

What should we do now?

It was weird.

And for the rest of the hearing, Team Corey seemed visibly frazzled for the first time, like they were knocked off their feet and forced to shift to Plan B.

This case that Creighton mentioned was not in the indictments.

The only mention of this case publicly that we know of was from yours truly on True Sunlight.

And I have to wonder, could this be Creighton dropping breadcrumbs like Taylor Swift?

Giving us little hints of the hell that's going to come down on the good old boys if they don't start telling the state everything right there, everything they know.

The case that was mentioned is particularly concerning for Corey because it involves his own family. Whether his wife knew about it or not, I'm not sure what is worse.

Corey's bad deeds with Elick Murdoch extended to his own family.

Is this Creighton saying we're going to keep going through every single one of your cases until you tell us everything about what went on in the criminal Murdoch operation?

Also, I have to point this out, Creighton mentioned the judge who signed off on it.

Let me just play this part of True Sunlight episode 2 real quick to remind y'all of this 2012 case.

And Elick got a whopping \$48,000 off of that settlement.

That is for essentially telling an insurance company that a kid broke his arm and that the mom is at fault.

And by the way, Eve Fleming, Corey's wife, is an attorney too and is still licensed to practice in South Carolina.

And guess which judge approved this settlement?

Carmen Mullen.

So five years later, when Corey was suing Elick and Gloria Satterfield's death for a suspicious amount of insurance money,

shouldn't Carmen have said, hum, wait a minute, y'all just sued each other a few years ago and y'all are BFS?

What is going on here exactly?

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And is this insurance fraud?

Yep, Judge Carmen Mullen.

We hope that Creighton said that judge comment on purpose.

We hope that the AG's office is asking those same questions that we asked.

Creighton continued on, in court on Wednesday, and shoved the knife deeper in with every word.

And so when he tried to claim to you later on, that when Satterfield happened, when he was at his dirtiest, his motives were most pure.

And he thought all that money was going to the boys, even though he never contacted them, never had any interaction with them.

But he never had any interaction with the Satterfield boys.

And his own staff testified that everything Mr. Fleming did in the Satterfield matter was different.

It was totally different. It was not the way it was supposed to be.

So think about that, your honor.

I would ask, and I would respectfully submit, when you hear him try to claim that even though he was stealing some money,

he thought that when he gave all that money to the defendants, that the defendants actually didn't get everything down to the point.

Because he did. The man he had been stealing for a decade.

Creighton told the court about what Corey did with Pamela Pinkney's money in 2017, a full six years after the first disbursement in her case.

He sent an email to his staff and told them to cut some of the \$89,000 in checks from Pamela's account.

From money that was supposed to have been spent on Pamela's expenses or returned to her. Instead, the money went to Ellick Murdoch.

He had had a relationship with Ms. Pinkney for a long time.

And over and over again we talked to staff, and your honor knows this,

there is no matter for people doing this kind of work, there is nothing better whether it's the attorney or the staff

than calling up the client and saying, guess what?

I am the best lawyer in the world. I got \$89,000. He didn't know you were getting money.

Come on down. Get your check.

I think it says a lot that he doesn't call Ms. Pinkney at all.

He does not call her at all to say, guess what, Ms. Pink?

I got \$89,000 for him.

Bonus, Merry Christmas. Instead, it gets converted.

And we'll be right back.

So we're trying really hard not to bog you guys down with all the money that changed hands and how it went down.

Creighton spent some time outlining each check, each transfer, each time money didn't go where it was supposed to go.

But what he was really good at was showing the court how Corey, the guy who pleaded not guilty a year and a half ago,

had tried to pretend he didn't know how structured settlements work.

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The important things to know here are number one, when settlement money gets structured, the money is supposed to go straight from the insurance company to the structured account.

Number two, the real Forge is run by Michael Gunn.

You might remember him from Elix murder trial.

Remember when Forge said they were planning legal action against Elix?

Hmm, wonder where that stands.

Michael Gunn is also who was texting Elix on the night of the murders,

these sexualized comments about a colleague of theirs.

Number three, Forge is a company that makes these structured settlements happen.

They basically broker the best annuity deal they can find for the plaintiffs.

They do not handle money, meaning that check Corey sent to Elix made out to Forge for almost \$3 million.

Corey had to have known it wasn't going to the actual Forge because number four, Creighton had receipts.

He had an email from Forge to Corey that essentially laid out how this arrangement works and how the money doesn't go to them.

And number five, the money is supposed to go right into that annuity account

because anything else such as the settlement being made out to Chad Westendorf means the plaintiff will be losing a huge chunk of change to the IRS.

But no one has to worry about the IRS when the money was only meant to be stolen.

Here's where Creighton drives it home for the judge.

And the second thing is Forge doesn't take money.

And the lawyers know this. Mr. Plenning is a lawyer.

Creighton was really good about pointing out all the places where Corey, as a lawyer, should have known better.

But also, he gave us more insight into what the Satterfield heist looked like from the inside.

I'm going to show you what's been marked as states exhibit six, Your Honor.

And this is an email from Forge to his staff member November 13, 2018.

And attached to it was the letter from the defense attorney for the Lloyds Club and the insurance company

pretty much saying, we're going to tender the policy limits.

And what does Mr. Plenning say?

He tells the staff member, we need to hold this until we can get the PR changed.

We need to hold this until we get the PR changed.

That's on November 28, 2018, Your Honor.

Before disbursement.

So he holds on to that settlement.

He doesn't call the Satterfield and say, great news.

So when that money gets disbursed to Forge and handed out Murdoch, again, it's inconsistent with this idea that Mr. Plenning thought

that that money was really what they were supposed to be.

It doesn't make sense.

And less his defense is, I am the dumbest man alive.

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And we all know about Corey Fleming.

He's been a lawyer for a long time.

He's not the dumbest man alive.

Okay.

Is this the best line BCE has had in all of this because it caught to the bone.

Corey Fleming in a striped jail jumpsuit in shower shoes, having his ghosts of Christmas past, present and future there to haunt him,

had to sit and listen to the plain truth of his case.

You knew what you were doing.

And the only way you wouldn't have known what you were doing is if you were intellectually challenged.

And turns out you're not.

So Crayton also gave the court more insight into how things went down when Corey was trying to claim those inflated fake expenses in the Satterfield case.

The disbursement statement that was signed by Mr. Westendorf, that was prepared by Mr. Fleming's staff.

But at his direction, she started to fill out the numbers.

Not really understanding why.

Why is this different?

Usually if I have prosecution and sentences and I have receipts, Mr. Fleming always provides me this information.

I can calculate it.

And she's like, I don't have the information.

He's like, you just put these numbers down.

Put these numbers down.

One of the things Crayton pointed out was that a nautilus insurance adjuster had kept asking Ellick's attorney, John Grantland,

who was basically the insurance company's attorney in this and representing Ellick on their behalf.

For more information about the settlement and where the money was supposed to go,

Grantland pushed those questions to Corey.

And Corey's answer showed that, guess what?

He knew the check wasn't going to a structured fund.

The evidence shows, of course, is that Mr. Fleming is having no conversations with Will Forge during this time.

He's not reached out to them.

They don't have a case.

He's had a few interactions with Mr. Fleming.

Seeing them at the trial of a large conference, which, of course, is where all these kind of issues are discussed,

there are a huge presence there because of the services they provide to plaintiffs' attorneys.

Well, that doesn't answer the question.

And so, again, Mr. Grant, on March 30th, 2019, is sending the letter from the adjuster saying, please, let me know what I need to tell her.

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And this is Mr. Fleming's response, Your Honor.

This is the state's 15 and this is very telling.

He says, standard check.

Chad Weston-Norwell's PR and most couldn't put it in place.

Standard check.

The question is structure or standard check.

And Mr. Fleming's answer is standard check.

If there's any illusion whatsoever about whether or not he thought there was a real structure, first of all, the way he's got it in the check doesn't work.

And he answers the question right there, Mr. Grant.

Standard check.

Now, one thing in all of this that we've all been wondering is why?

Why did Alex Steele, why did Corey, a successful and by all accounts smart attorney, have to steal?

Creighton shared his theory of Corey's motive.

Going back to that first check he had cut in January for \$8,000.

When we look at his account, Your Honor, when he went down to his staff member and said,

I need you to cut me this check, his account was getting really low.

And the second that money comes in, he pays his mortgage in a large credit card debt.

He's referring to Mr. Fleming.

Yes.

When he steals that first \$8,000, if we look at his account, it's pretty low.

And the second he gets that money in, he's making those two large payments that needed to be made.

If that tells you anything about the motives, it's right there.

The second check, the one I just referred to from April 4, 2019, for \$8,500,

he puts that in his account.

And what we see is that immediately he has to pay pretty much all of it to the IRS.

And his account again was low.

He needed that money to make that payment.

He also spent some of that on video games, iTunes, and Florida as well.

Again, the motive is clear from his bank account when he's stealing his money.

Again, Crichton gives us insight into what went down when Corey received the \$3.8 million Nautilus Settlement Check.

They have \$3.8 million.

What do they do with it?

Well, Mr. Fleming, his staff member dutifully starts to try to put together a disbursement sheet, as she normally would, where she's trying to identify expenses and liens and hold that money and figure it all out.

And she prepares her best initial attempt, which is States 18, by Mr. Fleming Stauffer.

She says, no, no, no.

No, no, no, no.

States 19, you put these numbers down.

You put these numbers down.

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And what he has on there is that he is getting \$168,333.33 in attorney's fees from the Lloyd Settlement,
and he is getting \$1,266,667 from the Nautilus Settlement, which would be the standard percentage cut.

That's very significant, too, when Mr. Fleming tries to claim, as he does, that he didn't know that Alec was going to take his half of the fees,
because what the math works out to be, what the math works out to be, is what's very common in the playing world,

which is exactly what you're on for testimony about the trial of Alec.

The fee split with Chris Wilson.

And when you look at the math, the math works out to be a fee split between Corey Fleming and Elmerman.

And that's how the case was conducted.

And again, if we go back, we look at what they did with the case back in 2012 to 2014, when Corey was the beneficiary of getting legal fees that were supposed to go to the plaintiff's attorney.

We look at what we know about what Corey knows about how Forge works.

We know that the check doesn't cut. We saw the email where he says, cut standard check.

And then we look at the dispersal sheet that he actually gets Chad Westendorf to sign, and it's got the full amount of attorney fees in there.

It also has \$105,000 even to the Nautilus of prosecution expenses, which are private.

It doesn't exist.

And Creighton didn't forget to mention the utter cruelty of what Alec and Corey had done.

He tells the court about how the Satterfields were in dire straits financially.

It's very interesting that during this time, family is going through hard financial times.

Mr. Fleming and his co-conspirator Alec Murdoch are playing around with millions of dollars of money that belong to them.

It's also very interesting in that dispersal sheet that he has the full attorney fee amount.

And when you work out the amounts that he also delivered to Alec and the amounts that he retained, the math works, Your Honor, it works out to the fee level.

It works out to about \$790 for Corey and \$750 for Alec with expenses included in it.

The math works, Your Honor.

And the facts add up.

And the only defense he has to say, and I think this is the only hiccup we have,

I'm going back to, is he doing 58 miles an hour, or is he rolling pot at night?

His only defense is, oh, I thought when I gave those checks to my co-conspirator that I'll hold that one every time he goes into the stores.

Didn't bother to check. I don't think he cared.

I don't think he cared.

This was another BCE line that was so powerful and says everything Corey needed to hear.

For years, Corey didn't care to tell the Satterfields or the Pinkneys the truth.

He didn't care that one of Gloria's sons was left scrambling to find a home when they couldn't afford payments on the trailer after she died.

That is horrible.

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And the line, the math's math.

Brilliant.

Maybe we should make that a t-shirt.

Finally, on Wednesday, Creighton told Judge Newman that Corey isn't a man who made mistakes, but rather a man who had an active role in these schemes.

So for Mr. Fleming to try to claim that he didn't think out he was going to get a share of this, your honor, the facts don't bear that out.

Comprehensive doesn't bear that out.

These two men looked at the cases they had as if they were a pantry and they could just open the door and goodies would just drop out.

If it hadn't been for the good work of the St. Mary's Jury staff and Sled and other partners, there would never be accountability in a state court that there's going to hopefully be today.

And Mr. Fleming might be on his boat wearing a true man.

You might be on his boat.

On his boat.

On his boat.

Yes.

Uh, Rue?

Uh, boat, he said.

Is this another Easter egg that's going to make a lot more sense later?

Creighton made it a point to say this and it felt meaningful.

Like another, we got you Corey and there's more coming if you don't fess up.

At this point, Judge Newman asked Corey whether he agreed with the state's accounting of the facts. Here is what Corey said.

Your Honor, I agree that there are facts that Mr. Leroy stated that established my guilt and used the indictments.

How are there certain facts that are not material to my guilt that I would like to be able to address in a sentence?

Do you disagree with any of the statements by Mr. Fleming and your responses?

Do you disagree with any statements made by Mr. Wadlish and your responses?

I do disagree with some of the statements that were made by Mr. Wadlish.

Yes, sir.

I, however, agree that there were sufficient facts provided to the court that I agree with that established my guilt on each of the indictments.

All right.

Ms. Bargiela.

Yes.

Any comment, Ms. Bargiela?

As Mr. Fleming stated, we do agree that Mr. Fleming had guilty of each of the offenses and the indictments that were pleading guilty to you.

And we agree that there have been sufficient facts put into record today that established his guilt, that meet the elements of each of these offenses.

Your Honor, we have some agreements, some disagreements with respect to certain facts, but I

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believe it will be appropriate to take up a sentence.

I think Mr. Waters has indicated throughout his presentation that he understands that Mr. Fleming disagrees with certain facts, and I think he agrees that he's still guilty, even that he disagrees with certain facts of these offenses.

I can get into any specifics of anything we disagree with that the court would like, but I do think it's appropriate for sentencing.

We will be prepared at sentencing to address all of these facts that we disagree with for today's purposes.

We agree that he's established facts to establish his guilt for each of the offenses and each of the indictments.

They're agreeing to disagree with the state on certain facts.

Something we'll apparently learn more about during the sentencing hearing.

I have to wonder if the certain facts had to do with the 2012 lawsuit involving his own family, and that's why he wanted on the record that he didn't agree with certain facts.

But also, he said that he believed the facts that established his guilt for each offense.

Creighton had a response to that.

If Mr. Fleming wants to say I'm doing 58, okay, he's doing more than 55.

But I think the overwhelming way the facts show that he's doing 90.

And we will be arguing at sentencing, assuming the court accepts the plea, and want to make sure the court will consider the state's evidence that Mr. Fleming in fact was doing 90.

Your Honor, I do need to also point out that it is the official position of the Attorney General and of SLED that Mr. Fleming has not lived up to his cooperation obligations.

And that obviously could be another matter that would be discussed at sentencing.

But as long as the full basis of the facts as have been presented are available to be considered by the court and arguments by the court,

if Mr. Fleming is going to say I crossed over the line, and your Honor is willing to accept that plea, then the state is as well assuming that we can still make the full case as we have here today.

Big Creighton Energy, told ya.

Here, Creighton drew the line between the state and the feds.

He made it clear to Corey, you might have helped the U.S. Attorney's Office to secure your stay at Club Fed, but this is state court, and these are state crimes that you have admitted to.

Here, it's clear that Creighton is saying Corey didn't help us when it mattered.

When it mattered, Corey claimed that he was duped by Ellick.

We have to remember that at sentencing.

Judge Newman, unlike Judge Gurgle, was quiet and patient throughout the process.

He allowed the prosecution to state the facts, and then he accepted Corey's guilty plea on all counts.

I find that there is sufficient factual basis to establish guilt in each of the counts of the indictment.

Mr. Fleming through counseling individually has acknowledged guilt as each indictment, and I accept the guilty plea to each indictment.

Corey's sentencing is expected to take place September 14th in Buford County.

After this was decided, the state informed the judge that they had made arrangements for Corey to go from there, Williamsburg County, straight to the Buford County Detention Center.

We're not sure if this is something Corey expected, because when the judge said this, he turned his

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head and consulted with Nathan Williams.

After the judge seemed to dismiss everyone, Debbie and Nathan went to talk with the state. Their concern was based on whether Corey would still be designated as a ward of the federal government.

We're not sure if that distinction is important to Corey's team, but since he turned himself in a week ago,

Corey has stayed in the Charleston County Detention Center, which has an agreement with the federal government to house inmates and those going to prison until they can be processed.

Debbie returned to her table and told the judge, I think we are straight on that.

My understanding is that he's currently in primary custodial jurisdiction as a federal DOV, and he's been rented out in the state custody, so my question was how is he being held in Buford?

The response was that this is a detainer who's being held along, and so with that circumstance, it's my understanding that he's still in primary custodial jurisdiction as a federal DOV.

My response to that, Your Honor, is that that's all very dense area, VOV, and federal case law, and that's not my problem.

I make no representations.

I'm not trying to make a position one way or the other.

That's really just to figure out.

So I'm making no representations.

How that will ultimately play out legally.

What she would express is accurately how he is right here now.

That's my understanding, Corey.

Very well.

Thank you.

Thank you.

As of Thursday afternoon, it did not appear that Corey had been booked in Buford County according to the jail log.

It's not clear why Corey was being moved to Buford County other than maybe to preemptively deal with his transport sooner rather than later.

But it's an interesting place to put him because up until almost two years ago, he had spent decades representing Buford County defendants.

It's not far-fetched to wonder if he's going to know a few of his fellow inmates.

Okay, real briefly, we want to talk about Russell because, yes, Russell was there too, looking bedraggled with a new crew cut.

Now, you'll remember that Wednesday was not the first time Corey and Russell had hearings on the same day in the same courtroom.

This past May, Russell's attorneys had asked the court for more time before scheduling a trial in his 21 state charges.

State Representative Todd Rutherford, you know, the guy he used his influence to set a murderer free 15 years before his sentence was over, had just joined Russell's team literally that day.

Why was Todd added to Russell's case?

Well, one reason might be legislative immunity because Todd is a state representative.

He gets to invoke a privilege that allows him to only schedule court proceedings when the

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legislature isn't in session.

As you can imagine, adding a legislator to one's case is a common strategy in South Carolina.

Greg Parker, for instance, did it in the Boat case.

Anyway, the first thing Russell's defense team did Wednesday was ask the court for permission to get at the hundreds of thousands of dollars sitting in escrow at Russell's former attorney's office.

That money is from when Russell sold his house and moved into his vintage at best trailer.

The court had ordered that it be held.

Interesting side note, Russell stopped paying his former attorneys after he was found guilty.

Judge Newman agreed to allow Russell's escrow money be moved to his new attorney's office.

The state asked that that money continue to be protected and not spent.

After that, Russell's attorney Mark Moore then lobbied the judge to hold off on scheduling anything for Russell until the fourth circuit rules on his appeal.

Your honor should be aware that Mr. O'Fee has received a designation from the Superior Prisons.

He had a court date of September 14th.

Judge Verbal has extended that until September 21st to give the fourth circuit time to decide to appeal on this.

So I just wanted to get the court of those facts because I think they may be relevant to the scheduling discussions that were about that.

Creighton was like, well, if we don't do this as soon as possible, then we're looking at next year when you take a legislative immunity into consideration.

Which, by the way, that needs to change.

If legislator lawyers can't work when the legislature is in session, then they ought not take the job plain and simple.

Or if they're not willing to give that up, then they need to disclose how much they're earning from these cases and what work they've done in the case.

I do think that it is appropriate for us to understand whether or not Mr. O'Fee is going to be reporting to prison or not.

As we look to that, I don't want to completely remove any possibility of trying to get this case scheduled sometime prior to the beginning of session in January.

I do understand the defense is opposed to that.

But the state is also thinking that we need to have all the information about what's going to be going on with Mr. O'Fee before we make that final decision.

And that would be a big factor, would be obviously whether or not he's going to appeal or not and whether or not he would be reporting to an FCI.

Then Judge Newman was like, but Cory just did this very thing.

Which Fleming has been sentenced already and he's on his way. It didn't preclude any activity on his case.

The bottom line is this. Russell's attorneys say they haven't had time to prepare at all for the state case.

And the state says it's basically ready to go to trial before January.

Russell's attorneys also say that they need several months to prepare if they're, quote, expected to try this case.

They say that this is a relatively new case and that they have older cases that need to be addressed

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first,
that there are doctor's appointments that are getting in the way,
and that they need to know whether the state plans to try all these cases in the same county and whether they plan to try Russell with Ellick or separately from Ellick.
Creighton said no to the cases being tried in the same county.
And he couldn't answer the second question because they need to have Dick Harpoolian and Jim Griffin there to talk about scheduling.
Ultimately, they agreed to meet September 14th to meet with Russell, Ellick, and their attorneys to talk about sentencing.
And finally, Mark Moore ended the hearing by telling the judge he plans to ask the court to reconsider Russell's bond agreement and allow him to use his money to pay his legal fees.
Creighton didn't waste much energy arguing with Team Russell.
He had the vibes of a tired mom dealing with two terrible toddlers and didn't have anything left to give the one who was less of a problem at that moment.
So he looked at Russell like, I'll deal with you and your ridiculousness later.
I was stunned at the end of court yesterday.
It was a refreshing turnaround from federal court a week ago.
Did that really happen?
Did Creighton Waters just show the feds how to handle Ellick Murdock's enablers?
I had to watch it again to make sure I wasn't seeing things.
The second time around, it hit me.
Wednesday's hearing was Creighton Waters' best performance and it was perhaps his most defining moment as an attorney.
It is one thing for a prosecutor to be on top of their game throughout the grueling six-week Ellick Murdock trial with millions of people watching from around the world.
But it's another for that attorney to keep pressing on even after the national media vans roll out of town.
When a lot of people have, quote, moved on from Murdock, Creighton did his state proud by showing the world he isn't done.
Creighton is just getting started and he sent a message on Wednesday.
That message was, if you abuse the system, if you enable a monster like Ellick Murdock, if you keep playing games until the moment your back is up against the wall, even if you're privileged and powerful in a former attorney, you will still be held accountable.
And for those who haven't been charged, I think Creighton was saying the state is coming for you too.
So you best be telling them everything.
Now, Creighton wants accountability.
He wants to fix the system, not just make a dent in it and perform for popularity.
Corey Fleming, wearing prison stripes, looked absolutely destroyed by the end of court.
He looked more broken than he was last week as he was being escorted off into federal custody.
For the first time, it felt like Corey's team wasn't in control of the courtroom.
It felt like even the best attorney cannot get Corey out of this mess.

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The message was clear to every single one of Ellick Murdock's co-conspirators.

The state isn't done here.

Creighton isn't done playing whack-a-mole, and neither are we.

Stay pesky, stay tuned, and stay in the sunlight.

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True Sunlight is created by me, Mandy Matney, co-hosted by journalist Liz Farrell, and produced by my husband, David Moses.

True Sunlight is a Luna shark production, right Luna?

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