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Revelations and Scandals: Boston and Beyond

Introduction

The EMTs brought the corpse to the hospital about an hour after an alert had been sounded at the maximum security prison. Dr. Richard Freniere, the attending physician on duty in the emergency room, declared the man dead at 1:17 p.m. Several days later, the chief medical examiner in Boston, Dr. Richard Evans, listed the official cause of death as ligature strangulation, blunt chest trauma, broken ribs, and a punctured lung: in short, a homicide.

The deceased was known as a “skinner” in jailhouse slang, the name inmates use to identify a child molester. Confined in cell no. 2 at the Souza-Baranowki Correction Center in Shirley, Massachusetts, the predator existed in a stifling space. It had a bunk, two shelves for his possessions, a toilet, a small sink, a footlocker, and a piece of metal that served as a mirror.

The skinner was in protective custody, living within 20 feet of the guard’s duty station. That way, he could be watched closely by the officers 24/7. This particular inmate, however, who needed so much attention, was frequently harassed by other felons and sometimes by his jailers, too. They taunted him and often told him that he would burn in hell for his crimes. Within the prison walls, skinners...
were the worst of the worst, and this one was no exception because he was a serial pedophile.

The skinner’s murderer, Joseph Druce, was already serving a 30-year life sentence without the possibility of parole. He had beaten a guy to death for making a pass at him while he was hitchhiking, an assault he would never forget. That could have motivated Druce as he began to think about killing the skinner in the cell next to him.

The murderer had originally been assigned to cell no. 3, but had been sent to solitary confinement for awhile for a fight. When he returned, Druce was transferred to another cell, no. 21, further away from the child molester. Nevertheless, he continued to become increasingly interested in teaching the skinner a lesson.

Druce was going to take care of the little old man that some said looked like a kindly uncle or a friendly neighborhood shopkeeper. The future killer, however, saw somebody else: a dangerous, convicted, unre- morseful felon—living close enough to him to be made to pay with his life for his disgusting past acts.

Druce planned to kill the molester for more than a month, and stalked him with his eyes, according to an inmate. He decided that his type of justice would take place on a Saturday because the normal lunch procedure was different then. On that day, groups of inmates were allowed to leave their cells, get their own food off a cart in the middle of the cellblock, and eat it in their unlocked cubicles.

The Saturday of the murder, however, the guards deviated from their usual lunch practice. Instead of mechanically opening a group of cell doors a few at a time, the guards automatically opened all of the 24 cells in the maximum security wing at once. This made it possible for all of the inmates to leave their cubicles and mix with each other in the center of the cellblock. No one was sure why the guards changed from the normal procedure, but Druce instinctively realized that this shift in the meal routine would be his opportunity to kill the skinner.

He watched as the molester looked over the food cart and took some pizza. And, he continued to eye the skinner as he carried his lunch back to his cell and ate alone. When the molester went to return his tray to the open space, Druce quickly followed him and sneaked into his prey’s small living area. Then, just before the guards were to close the doors automatically, Druce jammed the upper track of the cell door mechanism with a paperback book, and the lower track with the prisoner’s nail clipper and a toothbrush. That way he could be sure that the door