

CRIMINAL



Episode 109: Homewrecker

Air date: March 1, 2019

Copyright © 2019 Criminal Productions. All rights reserved. This text may not be published online or distributed without written permission. Transcripts are generated using a combination of speech recognition software and human transcribers, and may contain errors. Please check the corresponding audio before quoting in print.

Monika Glennon: To be honest with you, I just looked at the phone. I said, "Nothing is that important at 6 o'clock in the morning," and I turned it off.

Phoebe Judge: Monika Glennon grew up in Poland, but today she lives in Huntsville, Alabama, where she works as a real estate agent with RE/MAX. At 6 in the morning in September of 2015 she got repeated phone calls and texts from a colleague.

Monika Glennon: And I thought, "Oh, maybe a bad review." So many years in real estate, 16 years in real estate, it eventually was going to happen. I'm not perfect here. And I called her up and she says, "You don't understand." So she sent me screenshots of what was posted on the RE/MAX Facebook page and also was sent to the RE/MAX corporate office. And I have to tell you, I think honestly I went into shock. Everything seemed to close in and I started reading it, and it was so awful.

Phoebe Judge: It was a link to an anonymous post. It had also been sent to Monika's friends and members of her family and directly to her husband, Scott Glennon, with the message, "Sorry to be the one to let you in on this."

Monika Glennon: This lady claimed that her and her husband have hired me as their Realtor. And she wanted to see a home and she couldn't make it so she went ahead, told her husband to go with me and go take a look at the house. So she said all of a sudden, she was able to make it, so she drove over to the house and she ended up walking in. She saw both of our cars. She walked in and she found me and her husband having sex on the floor. And that she has pictures of all of that, and nobody should ever hire me as a Realtor because I'm an enemy of all decent women out there.

Phoebe Judge: The anonymous poster began by saying she and her husband had been happy working with Monika, that she'd shown them eight to 10 houses. On the day of the alleged incident, the anonymous poster had admired the granite countertops and gas stove in the house before walking in on her husband and Monika on the "plush white carpet." From there, it becomes graphic.

Monika Glennon: And I live in Bible belt, and I did think that she definitely used a kind of story that could be very believable to people.

Phoebe Judge: At the end, the anonymous poster writes, "She knew he was married," and in all caps, "DO NOT USE THIS PERSON AS A REALTOR." Then, they included a large photo of Monika, along with all of her contact information.

I'm Phoebe Judge. This is Criminal.

[Music.]

Scott Glennon: I was still sleeping and then she came in and woke me up and said, "You need to see this." And so I walked outside, she had her computer fired up, and had the story pulled up on the website.

Phoebe Judge: Monika's husband, Scott Glennon.

Scott Glennon: So I read the story and then, yeah, I definitely wanted to find out who did it and, let's just call it, have words with them.

Phoebe Judge: Did you for a second, when you first read the post, think, "What has she done?"

Scott Glennon: No, not for a minute. Not for a minute. There's just no way.

Phoebe Judge: The link had been shared all over Facebook by someone named Ryan Baxter. Scott and Monika had no idea who Ryan Baxter was. It was a link to a website called shesahomewrecker.com. The site's tagline is, "Did you think it would stay a secret?"

Everything on shesahomewrecker.com is posted anonymously. Anyone can submit an entry accusing anyone else of being a so-called homewrecker. The entries have photos of the accused women's faces, their full names, where they live, some say where they work. In most cases, the posts are short. Things like, "This girl is 27 years old and sleeping with my 54 year old husband," and, "She'll go to the ends of the earth to ruin a marriage. Ladies, watch out." The post about Monika was much longer. It was full of details.

Scott Glennon: The damage was immediate and it was severe. Before the story came out I think she had like 22, 23 active listings. A week later it was down to four. The phone calls were coming in every day of people just pulling their listings away. And it wasn't just the business side of that, it was the self-confidence hit. So she'd be talking to them on the phone, and I'm watching her talk to them on the phone. I can't hear the other end but I can see her and she's nodding her head a lot, and she's using her cheerful real estate voice going, "Oh, I'm so happy for you!" And you can just watch the confidence draining from her.

Phoebe Judge: Scott says he and Monika had hoped this would become old news and they could move on, but it didn't go away.

Scott Glennon: The damage kept coming, the phone calls kept coming. Creepy men somewhere in the country that would just breathe heavy or they would ask for a hookup and things like that. So we couldn't ignore it. It was just too big of a thing.

Phoebe Judge: Did you suspect people in your life?

Monika Glennon: I did. I did. You just start looking around and going, "Could it be this friend? Maybe she was mad about something. Maybe a rival Realtor." That was actually my biggest guess. I had to look at everybody around me and say, "Could it be that person?" It's really funny but we even talked saying, "What if one of my children did it because they got mad at me?" But, you know, your mind just starts wandering in every direction, and that's an awful way to live.

Scott Glennon: We found ourselves questioning all of my friends and business contacts, all of her friends and business contacts, all of our mutual friends, all of our family members. We didn't know who did it, so we found ourselves questioning every human relationship in our lives. When you stop trusting every human in your life, that's a big problem. So we couldn't ignore it. We had to find out who did it, just for the sake of sanity.

Monika Glennon: But the whole time I was thinking, "It must be somebody I've had contact with. Maybe somebody I did a deal with. Somebody that I crossed paths with."

Scott Glennon: It did not make any sense. That story was so mean and so personal, we figured it had to be somebody we knew. There's no way a stranger would go to that length.

Phoebe Judge: RE/MAX deleted the post from their Facebook page right away, but it was still up on shesahomewrecker.com. Monika emailed the website and sent a message to their Facebook page asking them to take the entry down.

Monika Glennon: I was very naive. I thought if you tell people, "This is not true," then they're going to go ahead and take it down. And I just got one answer from the Facebook, whoever's in charge of their Facebook, that said that they will look into my case. And that was the last I've ever heard from them. And I thought, "All it's going to take is cease and desist letter." So I had an attorney generate that letter and I right away signed it. And I sent that over to She's A Homewrecker, and I got no response. I just could feel that this is not going to end well when I was starting to get no responses from those websites. I'm like, "What am I going to do?"

Phoebe Judge: Not only could she not get anyone to remove it from She's A Homewrecker, but the post, along with Monika's name and picture, was picked up by similar websites designed to shame people. One, called Bad Biz Report, says, "There's no way in hell to get off of Bad Biz Report." And, "American lawyers make us laugh." As the post about Monika was picked up by other sites, it moved higher up search engine algorithms, so when people in Huntsville, Alabama, saw a for-sale sign in a yard and Googled Monika Glennon, that's what they saw.

Monika Glennon: And it ended up becoming number one search result of my name and basically destroying my reputation.

[Music.]

I don't think I stopped crying for weeks. I walked around and I felt like I walked around with a scarlet letter on my chest. And a lot of people were making really awful comments saying, "Hey, if there's smoke, there's a fire. For sure she did it." I thought, "Oh my goodness, what's going to happen is some crazy men out there are going to make appointment with me just thinking that's what's going to happen when I show a house." So we decided we going to go ahead and, priority number one, find out who it is. I don't want to walk for the rest of my life wondering who did that to me.

Phoebe Judge: They found a lawyer in Huntsville named George Kobler.

Scott Glennon: He was literally the lawyer that would take the case. Nobody else would take it. Maybe he was just the only guy crazy enough to take it, but everybody we talked to said, "No, I'm not touching it."

Phoebe Judge: The problem with Monika's case was that it's extremely difficult to compel a website to remove something one of its users posted. Shesahomewrecker.com, along with websites like Reddit, YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter are protected by Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act of 1996, which shields them from liability. It's been called the most important law protecting internet speech. For example, if someone posts a death threat against someone else on Facebook, Facebook isn't responsible. As of very recently, Section 230 no longer protects sites responsible for and that profit from content related to sex trafficking. She's A Homewrecker says in their terms of service that false, defamatory material is prohibited. We contacted them for this story but haven't heard back. Monika and Scott knew that George Kobler wasn't going to be able to sue the website to get the post removed, but what he could do was file a lawsuit against the person who wrote the post about Monika, even without knowing who it was.

Scott Glennon: George took the case. His idea was to use the fact that her professional photo was taken as a way to get it into the federal courts, because he felt that this would get more traction in federal court than in state court. So we sued for both libel and for copyright infringement. And it worked, it got into the federal courts.

Phoebe Judge: Whoever wrote the entry uploaded the same photo Monika used on her business cards and real estate signs. Monika owns the copyright, and anyone posting the photo without her permission is breaking the law. Attorney George Kobler.

George Kobler: And then we had to find the identity of John Doe by having the court issue a subpoena to the website to find out where the post came from or which internet service provider allowed that post to go through. And then we had to issue a subpoena to the internet service provider to find out who the individual was — in other words the internet service provider customer that put up that post.

Phoebe Judge: So a judge can compel someone to reveal IP addresses and then names?

George Kobler: Yes. Yes.

Phoebe Judge: This isn't that easy to do. Courts have to balance a user's right to say what they want against the damage their comments may cause. It's usually pretty difficult to prove that the damage of a critical comment outweighs a person's right to free speech, but not always. So, whatever we think we're saying anonymously online could be traced back to us. That's what happened in Monika's case.

Monika Glennon: And we found out that this person who wrote it was a woman who lives in Athens, just about 45 minutes from here.

Phoebe Judge: Did you know her?

Monika Glennon: No. I have never met her in my life. A total stranger.

[Music.]

Scott Glennon: It took a long, long time to finally figure out whodunnit. And then when it turned out to be a complete stranger, we were both flabbergasted. It just did not make any sense.

Phoebe Judge: The stranger's name was Molly Rosenbloom. And while she and Monika had never been in the same room, they had interacted before, kind of. Years earlier in 2014, an Alabama teenager posted a photo of herself at Auschwitz. In the photo, the teenager is smiling. The caption says, "Selfie in the Auschwitz concentration camp." And then she posted a smiling emoji. The photo went viral and the teenager was harshly criticized. She responded, saying she'd always wanted to visit with her late father, and that they'd studied World War II together. That made things worse. A local television station in Alabama posted a story about the teenager on Facebook and asked readers to share their thoughts. Some people commented on the post sticking up for the teenager. Monika was one of them.

Monika Glennon: I just said, "Teenagers do really stupid stuff, and all she is is a teenager. There's no need to go after this girl." So I defended her.

Scott Glennon: Molly interpreted that as so inappropriate that she went online and attacked my wife with that story.

Monika Glennon: I angered her so much that she ended up spending a couple hours figuring out who I was, where I worked, where I lived, and she wrote it and she forgot I existed.

Phoebe Judge: When Monika learned the name Molly Rosenbloom, she searched for her on Facebook. And then, against the advice of her attorney, Monika reached out to Molly directly.

Monika Glennon: I ended up Facebook messaging her saying, "Look, this has done such a huge damage to me. It's just getting ridiculous. What is it that you want from me? Let's meet. Ask me anything you want to ask me, and I'll answer all your questions, because this is crazy." And she agreed.

Phoebe Judge: The two women met at a diner for breakfast. Monika was nervous. Her husband drove her and waited in the car. When Molly walked in, Monika recognized her from Facebook right away. They sat down. Monika was too uncomfortable to eat. Molly told Monika that she assumed from their exchange on Facebook that Monika was a neo-Nazi. Monika told her that wasn't true.

Monika Glennon: So she started asking me questions, and I explained to her who I was, what kind of person I was. And she told me about her life.

Phoebe Judge: Molly told Monika that she'd been through a lot. She'd lost her husband, she'd had a long-term struggle with drugs. They talked about politics and books and growing up.

Monika Glennon: So it was a very long meeting, and I cried and she cried. And she said I was a kind person, that she wishes she knew what I was like back then. And she promised right away to take everything down from online. However, I already knew she couldn't.

Phoebe Judge: There's no deleting posts on these sites, even if you're the person who wrote them.

Monika Glennon: So she went online and she made apologies on all those sites.

Phoebe Judge: Molly Rosenbloom wrote the She's A Homewrecker post, but as Monika discovered, she wasn't the person who spread it on Facebook. That person, Ryan Baxter, turned out to be another complete stranger, unknown to both Molly and Monika. Ryan Baxter was the fake persona of a 20 year old woman in California, who Monika describes as a kind of vigilante.

Monika Glennon: So you can see, actually, Ryan Baxter taking multiple stories off of She's A Homewrecker and even making comments under the stories that say, "Somebody needs to tell the employer. Somebody needs to get this person fired. Somebody needs to tell the husband." Basically, taking over as a person who is going to set this right for the family and shame that person.

Phoebe Judge: It's amazing that a stranger can totally ruin your life in the middle of the night with you completely not being aware, and then all of a sudden...

Monika Glennon: I find it outrageous, and I just don't know how this is still allowable. And anybody can do this to anybody.

Phoebe Judge: In the end, Monika says she lost about half her income. She's been slowly rebuilding her business. The post is no longer on shesahomewrecker.com. In its place is a legal notice indicating that the claims made about Monika were false and constitute defamation. But the post wasn't removed because of legal action, it was removed because Monika kept writing to the site's owners, asking them to take it down and that worked. The post still lives online because other sites reposted it, including Bad Biz Report, the one that says American lawyers make them laugh. Monika is working with attorney George Kobler to see what she can do. If she can't force the site to take the post down, she'd like it to be de-indexed from search engines. That's very difficult. And Monika says she's already spent more than \$130,000 in legal fees.

Do you still comment on news articles on Facebook?

Monika Glennon: Yeah, a little bit. [Both laugh.]

Phoebe Judge: It hasn't stopped you?

Monika Glennon: I do comment once in a while but I really, really stay away from controversial subjects. I really do.

Phoebe Judge: Has it changed how you feel when you hear gossip about other people?

Monika Glennon: Yes. I get actually very upset. I had a couple comments I've made to my friends before saying it really doesn't matter, because it really doesn't. If the story is true... Let's just say infidelity. Whether the story is true or it's not true, it is nobody's business and people just need to stop being those keyboard heroes behind a computer screen and do this to people. It's just not right. This is their lives, this is their businesses, their families.

Scott Glennon: If I had any reason to believe that infidelity could be true, this might have been enough to break up the marriage. I didn't, but if the marriage were different, if we'd had some infidelity in the past or something and if I had some reason to believe it, this could have been enough to kill it, right?

Phoebe Judge: Has this changed anything about your marriage, this whole experience?

Scott Glennon: Yeah, it's changed... So let's go good and bad. It's good in the sense that we've persevered things before, but we've persevered this now as well. So it's made us stronger, it's made us closer. And the number of hours that we spent talking about it has put us more in touch with each other's feelings. So that's a very positive thing. On the negative side, the girl I married had this belief that if she just lived her life a certain way and treated people a certain way, that all the good she was putting out would bring good back. This has shattered that belief, and she's never going to believe that again. So there've been real changes to her. And even though her self-esteem has mostly recovered from this, there are still little moments where I can see that it still hurts. There's still a scar there.

[Music.]

Phoebe Judge: Criminal is created by Lauren Spohrer and me. Nadia Wilson is our senior producer. Audio mix by Rob Byers. Special thanks to Susannah Roberson, and Kashmir Hill at

Gizmodo. We have a link to her reporting about Monika in the show notes. Julianne Alexander makes original illustrations for each episode of Criminal. You can see them at thisiscriminal.com. We're on Facebook and Twitter, @CriminalShow.

Criminal is recorded in the studios of North Carolina Public Broadcasting, WUNC. We're a proud member of Radiotopia from PRX, a collection of the best podcasts around.

I'm Phoebe Judge. This is Criminal.

Jingle: Radiotopia. From PRX.