

Code of Honor  
A one-act play

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## **Code of Honor**

### **SYNOPSIS**

William (Bill) Houlahan, District Court Judge, Greene County, TN, has built a national reputation for implementing an innovative Addiction Recovery program for drug felons. There are allegations of corruption in the program's implementation. How will Judge Houlahan deal with these while maintaining order in his court?

### **CAST OF CHARACTERS**

**JUDGE WILLIAM (BILL) HOULAHAN:** Male, 50s, practical, confident

**BAILIFF:** Male, 35

**PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER:** Male, 40s, confident, persistent

**SHIRLEY ADAMS,** Female 35

**DEPUTY SHERIFF EVAN FARMER:** Male, mid-thirties

**MAGGIE THURMAN:** Female, 30s, Editor, The Sun newspaper, attractive, sharp

**SHERIFF TREVOR WATSON:** Male, 40s, nervous

BAILIFF and PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER could be played by the same actor.

SCENE 1

The year 2016. A courthouse in rural Appalachia, stage left. Defendant Shirley Adams is seated in a chair.

BAILIFF

All rise. United States District Court in Greene County, TN is now in session. The Honorable William D. Houlahan presiding.

Judge Houlahan enters from stage left and takes his seat.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

(striking his desk with a gavel)

Please be seated. (Beat) Will the defendant please rise?

Shirley Adams stands.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

(Pause) Ms. Adams, during the past week, this court heard testimony from victims and their families whose lives were torn apart by your illegal distribution of Fentanyl in Greene County, TN. Your actions have resulted in the overdose deaths of several residents. The minimum sentence for your crimes, under federal law, is twenty years in the state penitentiary, with no possibility of parole for the first ten years. However, given that you yourself are a victim of Fentanyl and dependent on it, this court orders you to enter an Addiction Recovery program for 90 days. Six months after the successful completion of your Addiction Recovery Care program, the court will revisit your sentencing. Staying crime-free during those six months will influence the court in its revised sentencing. You will be required to wear an ankle monitor 24 x 7 monitored by the Sheriff's office, and your movements will be restricted to Greene County. Do you have any questions?

SHIRLEY ADAMS

No, your honor.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Very well then. This court is adjourned.

Judge Houlahan strikes his desk with his gavel. Adams claps, shouts "Yeah", and says "Thank You". Lights off

SCENE 2

A year later. Another courtroom in neighboring Jefferson County. Sheriff Watson, in uniform, is in the witness chair. Evan Farmer is in the defendant's chair.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

(to Sheriff Watson)

Please state your name and title for the record, Sir.

SHERIFF WATSON

Trevor Watson, Sheriff of Greene County, TN.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Do you know the defendant, Sir?

SHERIFF WATSON

I do.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Kindly state his name and title.

SHERIFF WATSON

Evan Farmer, Deputy Sheriff, Greene County.

Maggie Thurman enters the courtroom. As Maggie walks, Judge2, Plaintiff's lawyer, Evan Farmer, Sheriff Watson all stare at her. Maggie sits in chair for the courtroom audience.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

How long and in what capacity have you known the defendant?

SHERIFF WATSON

I've been his supervisor for, I don't know, two or three years?

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Is it closer to two or closer to three years?

SHERIFF WATSON

I'd have to look it up.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

You hired this man as your Deputy. Yet you can't remember how long he's worked for you?

SHERIFF WATSON

I'd say closer to two years.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

(reading from a file)

Evan Farmer was appointed Deputy Sheriff, Greene County, TN on October 17, 2014. That's two years and 9 months.

SHERIFF WATSON

Whatever.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

During the past 2 years and 9 months, how frequently did you meet Deputy Sheriff Farmer and how long were those meetings?

SHERIFF WATSON

We met almost daily except for vacations or sick days. Our daily meetings may have been for about 30 minutes. On Fridays, we had our scheduled case review meetings for a couple of hours.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Evan Farmer's statement is that you had a one-hour lunch together almost every business day. And your case review meetings were on Thursday, not Friday.

SHERIFF WATSON

Whatever.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

My client, Shirley Adams, was ordered to be released from detention wearing an ankle monitor by Judge Houlahan a year ago, on June 27, 2016. Are you aware of that?

SHERIFF WATSON

Sure. I reviewed the release order, then turned it over to Farmer for needed action.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Sheriff, did you know that Deputy Farmer made a deal with my client to release her without an ankle monitor in exchange for sex?

SHERIFF WATSON

(distracted)

What?

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Let me repeat the question, Sir. Did you know that Deputy Farmer made a deal with my client to release her without an ankle monitor in exchange for sex?

SHERIFF WATSON

Of course not.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

My client, in sworn testimony, has said that Deputy Farmer had sex with her after hours. In Judge Houlahan's courtroom.

SHERIFF WATSON

Your client is a lying drug addict.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

Let me ask my question, Sir. (Beat) Sheriff Watson, did Deputy Farmer tell you that he had sex with Shirley Adams in return for releasing her without an ankle monitor?

SHERIFF WATSON

That low-life bitch.

PLAINTIFF'S LAWYER

I have no more questions for this witness.

Lights out.

SCENE 3

The next day. Stage right. A sheriff's office, with a desk and two chairs. A USA flag is next to the desk. There's a knock on the door. Maggie walks in.

MAGGIE

Morning Sheriff. Maggie Thurman from The Sun.

SHERIFF WATSON

Oh yes. The new editor. Weren't you at Farmer's trial yesterday?

Maggie sits down.

MAGGIE

Glad you noticed.

SHERIFF WATSON

How could I not? You made heads turn when you walked into the courtroom.

MAGGIE

(Beat) That's what I wanted to talk to you about, Sheriff. The Farmer trial.

SHERIFF WATSON

OK.

MAGGIE

Why was the Farmer trial transferred to Jefferson County when the alleged crimes were committed here in Greene County?

SHERIFF WATSON

The charges by Shirley Adams were initially brought before Greene County District Court Judge William Houlahan. But Judge Houlahan recused himself and transferred the case to Jefferson County because he had worked with Deputy Sheriff Farmer.

MAGGIE

Judge Houlahan seems to be an upright jurist.

SHERIFF WATSON

Sure is. I've known him for a long time.

MAGGIE

Sheriff, why were you nervous on the stand?

SHERIFF WATSON

Was distracted. Burning with anger inside. At Farmer.

MAGGIE

I talked to the plaintiff's attorney later. He suggested that Farmer learned about sextortion from those around him.

SHERIFF WATSON

Nonsense.

MAGGIE

On the record, Sheriff, did you know that Farmer was having sex with drug felons?

SHERIFF WATSON

Absolutely not.

MAGGIE

Is sextortion rampant in Greene County law enforcement?

SHERIFF WATSON

No. One bad apple doesn't spoil the whole sack. (Beat) Ms. Thurman, if we're done, can we talk off the record now?

MAGGIE

Sure.

SHERIFF WATSON

You're new in town. (Pause) Do you have family?

MAGGIE

Nope.

SHERIFF WATSON

Any boyfriends? Girlfriends? Other attachments?

MAGGIE

Why Sheriff? Am I under investigation?

SHERIFF WATSON

I'm single myself. Given that you're new in town, I thought you may like a little company to show you the local sights sometime.

MAGGIE

Thanks for the offer, Sheriff. I'll think about it.

Maggie exits.

SCENE 4

The next day. Judge Houlahan's chamber with a desk and two chairs. On the wall behind the desk is a law school diploma, a certificate from the Federal Judges Association, and a photograph of two men. Judge William Houlahan is seated at his desk reading. Sheriff Watson walks in and sits down.

SHERIFF WATSON

Bill, I need to talk to you about my testimony at the Farmer trial.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I read about it in the paper. Your answers were brilliant, like the Sun during a solar eclipse.

SHERIFF WATSON

That bitch Maggie Thurman. She writes I didn't train Farmer properly. Well, I tried! I showed him the pictures in the training manual. Read it out to him line by line! But you can't teach common sense, can you?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

It wasn't just the training. You made a lousy choice hiring Farmer.

SHERIFF WATSON

You know we're limited to hiring available talent. We don't always get the sharpest crayon in the box.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I know that all too well. Remember, I hired you as my bailiff when you were a greenhorn out of high school?

SHERIFF WATSON

I do. And I'm grateful for your support over the years until my election as Sheriff. But I feel for Farmer.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Don't. He exercised terrible judgment.

SHERIFF WATSON

His career will end with a shattered reputation, you know. Maybe jail time?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

That's what he deserves.

SHERIFF WATSON

(Pause) I think I may be in a pickle, Bill.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Yeah?

SHERIFF WATSON

See, the lawyers... they're like vultures, you know. And Farmer? He's opened up a mountain of stinking garbage. I'm worried they'll come after my office next!

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Do you suspect anyone else in your office lacked common sense?

SHERIFF WATSON

Oh no. (Pause) Hypothetically speaking, if any charges were brought against me or my officers, you could throw out the case on technical grounds, couldn't you?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I don't understand where this is going, Trevor.

SHERIFF WATSON

Farmer's been talking. I need to be prepared, you know.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You worry too much, Trevor. Farmer has no credibility. This will end with him.

SHERIFF WATSON

OK. Thanks, Bill. I'll see you later.

Watson gets up and exits.

SCENE 5

Judge Houlahan visits Deputy Sheriff Evan Farmer in his cell.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

How are you, Evan, my boy?

DEPUTY FARMER

Never thought I'd be holed up inside one of these, Judge.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

They treat you alright in here?

DEPUTY FARMER

The food's awful. We're better off in Greene County.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Are you allowed family visits?

DEPUTY FARMER

Sundays, from 12-2. That's when my wife brings me a nice home-cooked meal.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

How's your wife taking in all this, Evan?

DEPUTY FARMER

She was mighty upset initially. But she's a good, simple woman. Believes what I tell her.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Good. How would you like it if I called my friend, Judge Wilson, and arranged for two more family visits a week for you?

DEPUTY FARMER

I'd love some more home-cooked meals, Sir. If it's not too much trouble.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

It's the least we can do. Now listen. You have the best public defender in the county, Lee Griswold. I've been in touch with him. He tells me you're doing good. You're gonna take the stand tomorrow. Remember, just answer the questions briefly. Don't be evasive and don't volunteer any additional information. You got that?

DEPUTY FARMER

Yessir, Judge Houlahan.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Sheriff Watson and I have your back. Lee will try to work out some sort of plea deal with Judge Wilson for you. With probation and community service, you'll be out in no time.

DEPUTY FARMER

What about my employment, Judge?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

There's a shortage of good deputies in rural Tennessee. With my connections and Sheriff Watson's recommendation, I'm sure you'll be able to find a similar position in another county.

DEPUTY FARMER

Most grateful, Judge.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Alright. Remember, don't get rattled by Shirley Adams' lawyer.

DEPUTY FARMER

How's Sheriff Watson doing?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You saw his testimony, right? That's exactly what you need to avoid tomorrow.

DEPUTY FARMER

I'll do my best, Judge. Thanks for dropping by.

Lights out.

SCENE 6

Sheriff Watson meets Shirley Adams in a pub.

SHERIFF WATSON

Hey Shirley, thanks for meeting with me. Can I buy you a drink?

SHIRLEY ADAMS

I'm trying to stay clean Sheriff. No thanks.

SHERIFF WATSON

I didn't mean alcoholic. Lemonade or coffee?

SHIRLEY ADAMS

My lawyer would kill me if he knew I was talking to you. I can't stay long.

SHERIFF WATSON

Why'd you come down so heavily on Farmer? He made a fair deal with you.

SHIRLEY ADAMS

I had no money, Sheriff. He wanted \$100 for the ankle monitor.

SHERIFF WATSON

He waived the fee for you, Shirley. And asked for a favor in return. That's fair.

SHIRLEY ADAMS

He exercised power over me, Sheriff.

SHERIFF WATSON

We're simple folk. We give our word. We keep it. That's fair.

SHIRLEY ADAMS

My lawyer says it's coercion.

SHERIFF WATSON

Your damn lawyer's taking advantage of you. If you lose the lawsuit, you get nothing for all the effort put in. If you win, the lawyer gets the lion's share of the settlement. Is that fair?

SHIRLEY ADAMS

So what's your proposal Sheriff?

SHERIFF WATSON

Tell your lawyer to work out a plea deal with Farmer. Don't be greedy.

SHIRLEY ADAMS

Easy for you to say. First time in my life I got a shot at getting out of poverty and retiring from being a Fentanyl peddler.

SHERIFF WATSON

The state got you cleaned up. Judge Houlahan and I can provide you with recommendations for a steady job. Start a new life, a Christian life.

SHIRLEY ADAMS

I wanna start a new life. But I'd rather start with a comfortable safety net. Gotta go Sheriff.

Shirley exits. Lights out.

SCENE 7

The next day. Judge Houlahan's chamber. Judge Houlahan is seated behind the desk. Across the desk from him is Maggie Thurman.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Your predecessor, Ed Blinken, and I were friends. Still haven't come to terms with his untimely demise.

MAGGIE

That's his picture with you up there?

Maggie gets up and goes to the wall to look closer at the picture.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Sure is. He was the best man at my wedding.

MAGGIE

(Beat) Judge, I'd like to know more about your innovative Addiction Recovery Program.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

The opioid crisis is crippling our country. State attorney generals are going after the big fish - the manufacturers, large distribution companies, prescribers. At the district level, we have the small peddlers whose numbers are skyrocketing.

MAGGIE

A consistent story across America.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I'm proud of the results we have achieved in Greene County. Accelerated trials. Repeat offender rates only around 17%. It's all about meting out justice in a humane way.

MAGGIE

But Judge, some people say that you are too lenient. That has caused the number of peddlers to skyrocket. Now there's not enough jailhouses to hold people before sentencing.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Non-violent drug felonies can be released wearing an ankle bracelet.

MAGGIE

Doesn't work for felons who can't afford the setup and monitoring costs.

MAGGIE

Judge, did you know that Deputy Sheriff Farmer let a drug felon off without an ankle bracelet in exchange for sex?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I'm aware of the charges. If true, I hope they nail Farmer.

MAGGIE

Judge, did you have any inkling of what Farmer was doing?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Of course not.

MAGGIE

The buzz is that it happened in your courtroom. After hours.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Nonsense. (Beat) I thought you were going to write about my Addiction Recovery Program for drug felons.

MAGGIE

Ed Blinken would have written what you wanted, Judge. Not me. Thanks for your time.

Maggie exits.

SCENE 8

The next day. Judge Houlahan is in his office. There's a knock on the door. Sheriff Watson walks in with a newspaper in his hand, which he hands to Judge Houlahan. Judge reads the newspaper headline.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

"Sextortion is rampant in Greene County Law Enforcement".

Judge Houlahan continues to look at the newspaper.

SHERIFF WATSON

Maggie Thurman is dangerous, Bill.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

She quoted my denials correctly. But she cites an anonymous source who confirms that sextortion is rampant in my court.

SHERIFF WATSON

That bastard plaintiff's lawyer.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Maggie must have had another source corroborate what the lawyer told her.

Sheriff Watson shrugs.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Don't fuck with me, Trevor. (Pause) Did you talk to Maggie?

SHERIFF WATSON

...

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You asshole. Next, she'll name you and me in her reports.

SHERIFF WATSON

Sorry...She twisted my arm, you know. Said she would publish my name with allegations if I didn't provide the confirmation.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Bitch made you piss in your pants.

SHERIFF WATSON

That's why I need your help, Bill. Throw the case out on technicalities if it comes before you.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I can't let friendship influence my rulings. You know that, Trevor.

SHERIFF WATSON

We've known each other for twenty years, you know.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I'd have to recuse myself. Just as I did in the Farmer case.

Watson goes to the wall and reads the commendation from the Federal Judges of America.

SHERIFF WATSON

"Federal Judges of America recognizes and commends Judge William Houlahan for the innovative Drug Addiction Recovery Program in Greene County, TN". (Beat) You give drug defendants a second chance. Do the same for me.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I can't, Trevor.

SHERIFF WATSON

Fuck you, Bill.

Watson gets up and storms out of the office.

SCENE 9

The next day. Judge Houlahan and Sheriff Watson are both standing. Sheriff Watson has a newspaper in his hand and hands it to Judge Houlahan.

SHERIFF WATSON

(agitated)

She's done it, Bill.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

(reads headline)

"Sheriff Watson Allegedly Participated In Sextortion".

SHERIFF WATSON

Bitch!

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You trusted Maggie. Now she's got you by the balls.

SHERIFF WATSON

I should never have//

JUDGE HOULAHAN

//Did you sleep with her Trevor? Pillow talk?

SHERIFF WATSON

...

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Your years of experience were no match for her charm.

SHERIFF WATSON

(Beat) If I go down, you go down with me.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

What?

SHERIFF WATSON

Remember Shirley Adams, Bill?

Houlahan enters a dream-like state.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

How could I not? Shirley did everything I asked. And more.

SHERIFF WATSON

And Penny Tierney?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Gorgeous.

SHERIFF WATSON

If you don't throw out my case, I'll spill more ink on the newspaper.

Houlahan returns to reality from his dream-like state.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

(pointing to the newspaper)

Nobody will believe you after this headline.

SHERIFF WATSON

I kept meticulous records, you know, of dates, times, and names of women we've had fun with. Right here in your office for the past three years. I've turned those over to Maggie.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You scumbag. I could never imagine you stooping so low.

SHERIFF WATSON

Gotta take care of myself.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

This could take me down. But it's not going to help you.

SHERIFF WATSON

Huh?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Your reputation is already mud with this headline.

SHERIFF WATSON

Maggie will retract her article. She'll say the allegations were unsubstantiated.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You fool. If she published the article after sleeping with you, what makes you think you can still trust her?

SHERIFF WATSON

She loves me.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

That's what they all say when they want something.

SHERIFF WATSON

Hmm.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Even if I throw out your case, the plaintiff's lawyer could refile in a neighboring county. Maggie's articles could be used as evidence to influence the jury.

SHERIFF WATSON

You think they could do that?

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Sure. The plaintiff's lawyer will not stop at anything in search of gold.

SHERIFF WATSON

Damn.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

The only real solution, my friend, to both of our problems is to take care of Maggie.

SHERIFF WATSON

I can't do that.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

I understand you are emotionally involved with Maggie. Think it over. Let her issue the retraction tomorrow. Then put your Glock to good use.

SHERIFF WATSON

I don't know. Homicide is a huge jump up from sextortion.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

We've always gone for the big risks and rewards, Trevor. That's the logical next step. Get rid of the body and the weapon. We keep our jobs and reputations intact, and Farmer gets probation from a plea deal. Then we go back to business as usual.

SHERIFF WATSON

It can't be business as usual Bill.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Why not?

Sheriff Watson takes a phone out of his pocket.

SHERIFF WATSON

Maggie gave me her phone. I've recorded our conversation. She's outside in the lobby.

Sheriff Watson goes towards the door.

SHERIFF WATSON

Maggie, you can come on in.

Maggie Thurman walks in. Sheriff Watson gives her the phone and puts his arm around her.

SHERIFF WATSON

Babe, you've got everything you need to write a juicy article about Judge Houlahan. Including conspiracy to murder.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Now wait a minute. Don't you want to stay out of jail too?

SHERIFF WATSON

I'll work out a plea deal. I'm sure the court will cut me slack when I give testimony against you.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

Maggie, talk some sense into this guy.

MAGGIE

Trevor will serve his time. Then we'll start a new life together. You, Judge, will be put away for a long time as the Big Kahuna.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

You're a lying bitch. Don't believe her, Trevor.

MAGGIE

My job is to write. My passion is to write the truth. I'm not going to stop now. You'll be in tomorrow's headline, Judge. (Pause) Let's go Trevor.

Maggie and Sheriff Watson exit. Judge Houlahan sits down slowly in his chair.

JUDGE HOULAHAN

There is no honor among thieves.

**END OF PLAY**