

# Justified

The adrenalin surging through her bloodstream hadn't yet overpowered the wretched stench of her own fear. She was scared but, somehow, she had kept her head. She had stayed at a reasonable distance. Fearful of being seen and petrified of losing sight, she had managed to keep her wits. Fearful that her apprehension had clouded her perception of time, she counted.

'One.'

Her hands were shaking, feet trembling; she fought hard against the urge to let her limbs give way as she gently shut her eyes. Fists clenched, jaw tightened, she struggled against her quivering muscles and stood motionless, listening... The silence was unsettling. There were no cries for help, no screams of agony. Nothing but the sweet songs of passing birds.

'Two.'

Her eyelids loosened their grip. At first glance, just a blur. But as the pupils contracted, and vision restored itself, she remembered why she was there. Panic and fear washed over her, resuming their stronghold as she fought to keep command.

'Three.'

The setting sun. The sinister house with its drawn curtains. The unnerving solid oak door. All stood before her, looking down on her with disdain. With its shadow at her feet, all that stood in the way of her and the house was the cold, black asphalt.

‘Four.’

She tried to flood her fear with hope, ‘maybe I was wrong, maybe it wasn’t him. Like the police said, it isn’t very compelling evidence; a man wearing a cap the same as your son’s. But her instinct knew better than them. She knew exactly who was in that house - she had followed him here and watched him go in – but, more importantly, she knew what he was.

‘Five.’

Confident she had waited long enough to rid herself of haste, she retraced his footsteps to the door. Now oblivious to the birds and ignorant to the fear, she found herself in a deafening silence, encased in shadow. She felt nothing - not the cold of the shadow cast upon her, not the gentle wind flowing through her hair, not even the hard, smooth surface of the door against her soft knuckles as she firmly knocked. She hadn’t thought it through; in fact, she questioned her reason for knocking at all. What would she say? Her mouth dried up. Her nerves had gotten the best of her wits. She panicked. She took a step back and failed in an attempt to regain control.

She glanced left briefly at the substantial undergrowth and wooden fence blocking her path before scampering hastily down the pavement to her right. The path turned and she followed it around the corner of the house. Her heart was in her throat. Her back pressed firmly against the cold brickwork. She was out of sight. Before her stood a six foot picket fence and, to the right, tall hedges acted as a veil between herself and the

street. To her left was a wooden gate, hanging slightly ajar, which led down the side of the house into his yard.

She felt trapped, claustrophobic. The air got thicker. Her breaths got deeper. Her heartbeat rapidly increased, she felt dizzy and light-headed. She needed to regain command of her body. She fought to keep her balance, pushing herself against the bricks. She held her breath and stood in silence.

It wasn't long before she heard the faint sound of footsteps, then a door gently swing open. She imagined him, standing in the doorway, his piercing eyes frantically searching the street. She couldn't go back that way.

'Hello?'

The deep voice satisfied her expectations.

'Hello, who's there?'

There was a pause, followed by more footsteps, but it was the missing sound - that of a closing door - that concerned her. It took a moment before she confirmed that the footsteps were, in fact, getting louder. He was walking towards her.

With nowhere else to go, she pushed open the gate and continued through. Careful not to make a sound, she returned it slightly ajar. With little time to notice her surroundings in detail, she ran onward. Moving swiftly over the immaculately kept

lawn, she entered the door that faced her. She calmly closed the door without a sound before leaning her back against it. She caught her breath; the adrenalin was fading. She crossed her arms, tightly squeezing her chest. Her knees bent and she slid her back down the door. As she reached the cold, cement floor she hugged her knees in against her chest and let her heavy head drop. She was mentally exhausted. She closed her eyes and tried to make sense of the inevitable events that had led her here - seeing the hat, the sceptical police, the decision to take things into her own hands; that's why she was here. She felt like surrendering to her fear, to her depressed state of mind. Of course, she knew that wasn't an option, she had come too far now and there was too much at stake. She lifted her weary head and opened her eyes.

The room was neat and tidy; she couldn't notice a thing out of place. Strange, she felt, for a garage. Even the smell, or perhaps lack of, suggested the air was somewhat cleaner than expected. The cement floor was smooth and clean; there wasn't a chip, stain or pile of dust anywhere. The walls were white, not cream or with a tinge of yellow, but untainted white. No cobwebs polluted the corners; the walls were completely flawless, except for four small specks on the furthest wall that caught her attention. Looking over her right shoulder, she scanned the room.

Above her, hanging neatly from the wall, was a pair of hedge trimmers. They were obviously for the hedges that fenced the front of the house, she thought, justifying their existence. Behind them hung a shovel, a spade and a mattock; again, the immaculate gardens came to mind. Next, hanging from the wall, was a small electric chainsaw. Odd, she thought, she didn't recall seeing any trees or bushes large enough

to warrant the use of a chainsaw. Stranger still, a large, yellow roll of industrial plastic, at least one and a half metres wide, stood upright in the corner.

A lawn mower rested against the far wall, leaving the rest of the north wall unscathed except for the four little black dots. The south and west walls were lined with benches and a large, steel cabinet in the north-west corner. Unable to see the bench tops from where she sat, huddled up in a ball against the door, she gathered her strength and got to her feet.

She could now clearly see the wooden bench top that furnished the south and west walls. They were spotless. Not a tool out of place or hanging slightly askew. She ran her finger along the top of the bench as she walked, checking for even the most minute amounts of dust. There were the usual chisel, screwdriver and handsaw. Then, the less predictable, but not necessarily unusual, binoculars and a book, “Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life”. But it was the tripod hanging alone on the wall, perhaps, that struck her as most out of place. As she reached the last metre of bench before the steel cabinet, she stopped. There was a blemish, a flaw, and it stood out as if someone had highlighted it with a tag saying “Take Note”.

On the bench lay a nail-gun, a small claw-hammer and five slightly bent nails. Perhaps she wouldn't have even given them a passing glance if they weren't lazily spread on an otherwise flawless bench top. After closer scrutiny, she became aware that the five nails lay in a thin puddle of water, as did the claw of the hammer. ‘Surely not!’ She thought. ‘Was this man so eccentric that he cleaned even his hammer and used nails?’

Her heart sank deep into her chest. She heard footsteps. She'd been there too long. He was coming! She violently threw her head from side to side, desperately searching the room. The spotless garage left her nowhere to hide. She saw a small gap between the steel cabinet and the wall – she'd never fit. Seizing her only option, she pulled desperately at the cabinet but it wouldn't budge. The cabinet was heavy and her feet were slipping on the smooth concrete. Slowing her breathing, she stopped to listen; hoping it was a false alarm. She could hear her pulse beating heavily behind her ears but that was all. It was silent. A calming flow of relief washed over her.

It was then, while her guard was lowered, that she heard the distinctive tune of 'Amazing Grace'. This time it was unmistakable. Someone was approaching the door, whistling. She sprinted. She was running towards the door; she was going to lock herself in. It wasn't foolproof, but she intended to buy some time. She was close now, close enough to observe the handle turning. She was too late. She threw herself against the wall, giving herself the slight advantage of having the element of surprise. The door opened, stopping just inches from her nose. She held her breath. The man stepped forward. Unable to see past the door, it was his presence alone that scared her. She clenched her fists and bit down hard on her tongue. She was quiet but the sound of his breath intimidated her.

The silence was broken as the man switched off the light and left, closing the door. It was still light outside so she hadn't realised that the light had been left on. She had been lucky. Now with the light off, she felt safe with the thought that he wouldn't

come back. Reassuring herself that she was safe, she quickly became calm as she locked the door and returned to the steel cabinet.

She only gave the cabinet a passing glance as she walked straight past it - her eyes were concentrated on something else, something on the north wall. She was now close enough to see that there were actually four small holes. The black dots she had seen earlier were actually small holes, nail holes. She walked up to them and ran her finger over one of the holes as if to satisfy her disbelief. She slid her hand now over the wall, in a larger perimeter. The surface wasn't smooth like she expected but was interrupted by the occasional bump. She scratched at one. Surprised at how easily the paint flaked off, she continued scratching. It crumbled beneath her fingernail to reveal another small hole, identical to the other four. The patch of wall was plagued with them, there were at least twenty holes that had been puttied up and painted over. Half the holes were just a few inches from the floor and the others were at head height. She questioned the idea of once hanging pictures or tools, the holes were too irregular. In fact, no excuse she could think of seemed remotely plausible, though she didn't spend much thought on the issue once she recollected where she was and, more importantly, why.

She needed something tangible; strange holes and having an immaculately kept shed weren't exactly causes for suspicion. She needed something incriminating if she was to convince the police to take her seriously. She needed to find something to warrant her actions, something to convince herself that her actions were justifiable, to remind herself that she was sane.



She turned and faced the steel cabinet. She couldn't reason with her urge to open it. There was no sound or odour coming from inside. It was deadly silent. Perhaps it was just the desperation to find something, anything, so that the police would assist her which motivated her. She reached out and seized the handle, turning it clockwise. The cabinet door swung on its hinges with ease. The walls were lined with yellow industrial plastic, identical to the large roll she had earlier seen.

There was something wrapped up inside it. She reached in and seized the plastic, attempting to haul it out onto the cement. It must have weighed at least forty kilograms. She shuffled her feet backwards with haste as the plastic slipped from her grip. It fell to the floor. The plastic unfolded around the sides, revealing its contents. She gasped as the shock hit her, followed by a wave of grief. She instinctively moved the plastic back over the young, bloody body, hoping out of sight meant out of mind. She closed her eyes, squeezing her eyelids tightly, trying to push the image out of her mind. She had only caught a glimpse of the body but the image would last a lifetime. It wasn't working. She could still see the cold, stoic face, the blue lips and the pale white skin; that was more than enough to send a mother off the edge but there was more.

Although her eyes were closed, she could still clearly see the body projected on the inside of her eyelids. The torso had several cuts and the neck was deeply slit from ear to ear. She could even envisage the stigmata on the boy's hands. She lifted her eyelids slightly, only to release her tears. No matter how hard she tried, she couldn't push the scene aside. She desperately needed to regain control of the situation. She was in his

garage, trapped. The fear kicked in and allowed her to place a temporary mental block on what she had just discovered; she was still running on borrowed time.

She reached into her jacket pocket. Pulling out her phone, she dialled zero. She paused before dialling a second. She let her thumb lie lazily over the last digit while she contemplated her options. She lifted her thumb, noting she had reception. Instead, she opened her contact list and scrolled down till she found William, a friend of the family since adolescence. She wrote a message: 64 Elmer St. Her last known location would surely be enough if things went down hill from here. She calmly walked over to the bench and picked up the nail-gun. The fear was easily kept at bay now, taking comfort in the fact that the worst had happened. Now all that could stop her was death – something she no longer feared.

Turning to the wall, she held arms outstretched, closed her eyes and pulled on the trigger. It was harder than expected but, with some exertion, she managed to pull the trigger far enough to fire a practise shot. The noise it made was minute compared to her expectations and the force that propelled the nail right through the wall. Ample she thought. She left the garage, traced her footsteps back out through the gate and stood at the front door, this time with much more confidence. She knocked again on the large oak door and stood, waiting. With her hands behind her back, she tightly clutched the nail-gun. She again heard the familiar footsteps before the door was violently swung open. Both figures stood motionless. She wanted to stare, to see the kind of man capable of such horrors; she felt the need to size him up. She wanted justice.

He stood before her, tall and thin; she couldn't help but notice his immaculate grooming. His short, mouse-coloured hair had obviously been washed dutifully and was combed neatly back. The thin-rimmed glasses over his hard, brown eyes made an appropriate target she thought.

'Do you live here?' she enquired as a precaution.

'Yeah.'

'Alone?'

'And happy that way.' He started to get short with her, 'not that it's any of your business to ask.'

Satisfied with his response, she drew the nail-gun. Arms outstretched, she stood rigid. She closed her left eye, correcting her double vision. The man had no time to react as she took aim for his right eye. Just as the man recovered from the initial shock, she closed her other eye and, taking care not to falsify her aim, pulled in the trigger.

She heard the conclusive sound of the nail being shot from the gun. This time, the sound of hitting the wall was replaced by the squelching sound as the nail pierced through the sclera and displaced the jelly-like vitreous before entering the temporal lobe.

There was a short, sudden gasp before she heard the man fall to the pavement. It was silent. She slowly opened her eyes. Her fear was gone, leaving her rage unsuppressed.

She shot him again. Almost enjoying the sight of the upwards-flying blood, she continued to fire nails into the back of his skull. Seven nails were protruding from his skull before her rage was satisfied. Convinced that justice had been served, she released her grip, letting the nail-gun fall. She sat down beside it, tucked in her knees, and let herself fall onto her side. It was getting cold and the images of her son - dead, cold and wrapped in plastic - were over-powering. With her anger spent and her fear suppressed, she was left alone with the haunting memories as she lay motionless on the cold pavement.

\* \* \*

“Miss Sarah Roberts, you stand before the court today accused of murder in the second degree.”

Her arrest, her immediate confession, her lonely nights of detainment in that cold prison cell; they all seemed so insignificant. Her son was killed. Tortured! And now she faced the consequences of her actions. She had killed a man. She didn't have to, it wasn't life or death, it was her choice and she chose to take away that man's life. A just decision in her mind.

\* \* \*

*It's today now. I've been patient and wise; buying my time. Too careful to fall victim to haste. I've waited. I waited for tomorrow. I'm not the victim, no, not today.*

He sat down on the wet slats of the wooden park bench. He lifted the book to his face

- "Darwin's Dangerous Idea: Evolution and the Meanings of Life" - but not to read. With his eyes closed, he just listened. There was the familiar sound of lorikeets, the gentle wind; the faint sound of traffic passing behind him in the distance. He pushed these sounds aside, homing in on the sweet sound of innocents, playing together, running, swinging, sliding. It was refreshing; such ignorance. He lowered his arms, sneaking a glance over his book. He counted six.

Four boys. Two girls.

The closest two were brother and sister - he recognised their bond and resemblance. They were playing together, energetically. He was tempted but two was too much of a risk - *I mustn't touch them.*

Three boys. One girl.

The boy on the swing, casually dressed in a white singlet and shorts, fell. He got up without a second thought and got back onto the swing. His knee, grazed and bleeding, didn't bother him - *he won't do.*

Two boys. One girl.

The girl was pretty, blonde, well dressed - she had been well cared for. She seemed sweet but her eyes told of a spoilt upbringing - *no, I mustn't. They could afford to find her.*

Two boys.

He couldn't decide, not yet. The older man standing adjacent to him was still there.

The older man watched as he did, though he was growing impatient - *it won't be long now.*

Still comfortably sitting on the park bench, the man watched as the children played.

His shoulders were relaxed, casually leaning against the bench. Hands steady, he smiled a little, almost smug. He was comfortable. He was in control.

Out of the corner of his eye, he saw the older man tap his foot and repeatedly check his watch.

“Jimmy!” the man called “it’s time to go, Jimmy!”

One boy...

The boy's most predominant feature was his eyes. They shone bright blue.

Exaggerated by his pale skin, they were almost entrancing. He wore a red baseball cap over thick locks of brown hair. The morning sun, bleaching his hair, added contrasting colours to his darker curls. His hair was long, comfortably covering his ears and occasionally blowing over his flushed cheeks in the gentle wind. His fringe, although long, was kept neatly out of his alluring eyes. Thin pinkish lips encased his white teeth. He was Hansel. He was the sweet little boy in fairytales; lost, with only bread crumbs to follow. He was vulnerable – *this will be easy.*

\* \* \*

The room was warm though a cold shiver navigated its way down her spine.

“Miss Roberts, how do you plea?”

The majority of the room was furnished with dark polished wood. The tables, the chairs, the waist-high balustrade – all wooded. Even the white walls were compromised midway with finely routed wooden slats. The room was large and well populated though it was quiet enough to hear the second hand ticking. The room gave off a sense of power. It reminded her of a school trip she took to Parliament House, the same polished wood theme gave an authoritative presence.

Behind her sat the public gallery, silent with anticipation and, to her right, was an almost perfect reflection, as though a mirror ran down the centre of the court room. Both sides were similarly furnished, portraying them as equal, though each side represented distinct opposites.

The judge sat up high. His positioning alone depicted a god-like quality. Reinforced by his wig and his purple coat, he represented the power that enforced justice. He was an older man, in his fifties she assumed, from his loose leather-like skin. His eyes were blue, covered by thin glasses and seemingly honest. Sarah felt she could tell a lot from a person’s eyes.

The judge looked down upon Miss Roberts as she stood behind the centre table. Her defence barrister - more or less the state's defence barrister as she couldn't afford her own - stood beside her and, sharing the right side of the table, sat the state employed prosecutor.

She felt alone.

\* \* \*

He was alone with the children now; the only adult at the park - *Now's my chance.* Without hesitation he walked towards the boy who was busy swinging. *Thomas? No, he definitely isn't a Thomas, a Sam maybe, or a Ben, something simple, something modern maybe.*

"Bradley, is it?" The man had approached the boy undetected. Startled at first, the boy stopped swinging to reply.

"Um, no. My name's David." The boy's soft words trembled from his mouth.

"Yes, that's right. All the kids call you Dave, don't they."

"No, everyone calls me David."

*Wrong twice!* The man started to panic. *Lollies? Money? Video games? Maybe a pet, kids loved animals. A cat, no, a kitten! Everyone loved kittens. I must be quick! His parents could be here at any moment. That's it! His parents. No. His mother.*



“Sorry kid, I’m not real good with names. That’s a nice hat you’ve got there.” *They like it when I compliment them.* “Your mum was supposed to pick you up from the park, wasn’t she?” The man smiled as he spoke - *smiles build trust.*

“Yeah, but not till one, I only just got here.” The boy’s words were stronger now, he had more confidence when he spoke.

*An uncle? A friend? I can’t afford any more mistakes. An emergency, perhaps? She couldn’t make it in time to pick him up. He was here to take him home. But not till one? No, that wouldn’t work.*

“I’m sorry kid but your mum can’t pick you up at one. She’s in hospital. She had an accident.” *A doctor, everyone trusts doctors.* “I’m a doctor at the hospital, your mother has asked me to pick you up. She’s pretty hurt. She wants to see you. You do want to see your mother, don’t you?”

\* \* \*

“The defendant pleads guilty your honour, requesting a reduced sentence on account of Extreme Emotional Disturbance. The defendant found the body of her son in the events leading up to the crime. The body of her son had visible torture wounds and showed obvious signs of death. We can only assume the effect this would have on a mother. The defendant’s statement matches the police report concluding that Miss Roberts did, in fact, uncover the body before committing the crime.” The defence

barrister's voice was strong with confidence. He stood comfortably as he spoke. Sarah couldn't help but wonder how many times he'd done this, whether her case was in his best interest or whether this was just another job he had been assigned to; he got paid either way.

His motives aside, he at least looked the part. He wore a dark navy suit, white shirt and a red chequered tie. It was simple yet it still made him appear respectable. The gold watch that clung to his wrist suggested he was a man of success, and his glasses gave him a sense of credibility. She hoped he hadn't picked his attire based on this. He was married, she had caught a glance of his ring; he had a tendency to talk with his hand. Perhaps he was a widower, he looked old enough. He had dark grey hair neatly combed over to one side covering his receding hairline. He was clean shaven with slightly wrinkled skin and deep impressions around his thin, colourless lips. His ears were out of proportion to his long slender face which he kept emotionless as he sat down, allowing the judge to speak.

"Do the prosecutors have any evidence or reason that I should not take into account the emotional state of the defendant caused by the discovery of her son?"

"No, your honour, we do not"

The words of the prosecutor were uncertain making it apparent that he was unsure whether to object to the claim. He was young and probably unmarried, if not, at least without a family. Who was he to tell the court how a mother would react?

“Very well. Miss Sarah Roberts, you have pleaded guilty to murder in the second degree. Taking into account your Extreme Emotional Disturbance, the court hereby sentences you to ten year’s imprisonment with a non-parole period of five years.”

As the last words left the judge’s mouth, he brought the gavel crashing down. The room broke from its silence, filled with the murmuring opinions of the gallery.

\* \* \*

The plastic he had laid out earlier squeaked gently under his shoes as he carried the boy to the wall. Kicking and punching, the boy struggled futilely to free himself, but inflicted more pleasure than pain. Gasping for air between muffled screams, the boy fought to breathe - he was gagged. He removed the boy’s red cap and placed it out of the way. He held the boy’s arm in place, almost crushing his wrist as he moved violently to free himself. Resting the nail-gun in the palm of the boy’s outstretched hand, he took strain on the trigger. The boy felt numbness in his fingertips as his circulation was restricted. He could feel the cold smooth metal press against his palm, but couldn’t see through the blindfold. A jolt of hot, sharp pain shot through the boy’s hand. The nail propelled through the flesh with ease, cracking the second metacarpal and displacing the muscle before piercing the remaining skin as it exited, pinning his hand to the wall. The boy resisted but the pain increased. It hurt to move.

*Yes, that’s it little boy, fight back. Let me feel your pain.*

The boy cried out in pain. He screamed for help, for mercy, but all that sounded was a subdued whisper. Stepping forward the, man placed his ear next to the boy's mouth.

*Speak to me. Tell me of the pain.*

The man listened as the boy screamed, then cried and, eventually, whimpered. Dissatisfied with this, the man lifted the boy's other arm and, without hesitation, fired a nail. The familiar sound of piercing flesh and cracking bone ensured the boy was securely suspended from the wall. The boy didn't scream or moan, he just cried in agony.

*Scream! Why won't you scream!*

Infuriated, the man dropped to his knees and tightly held the boy's ankle to the wall. The boy kicked so he tightened his grip holding the ankle still as he aimed. He pulled the trigger as the boy kicked. A third nail was driven through skin and flesh before being stopped by the fibula - he missed.

Grabbing the hammer sitting beside him, the man firmly held the boy's ankle. He brought the hammer down on the protruding nail with efficient force to crack and splinter the fibula. He followed up with gentler strikes, easing the nail through the remaining muscle before securing it to the wall. Shaking the boy's foot, he checked for its stability. The boy's muffled screams filled his ears giving him a sense of aspiration.

“That ought to hold you, what do you think?” He was unable to provoke an answer through the stifled cries of pain. “You’re right, let’s do one more, just in case.”

\* \* \*

This morning marked the tenth day she had spent here against her will. Or perhaps it was only the ninth. She couldn’t remember. She tried to count the restless nights she had spent lying awake, afraid to dream. She was too tired. She hated living like this. She did have her own cell, though, which she was very appreciative of, and she was granted some of life’s luxuries, such as a pillow and her toothbrush, but that was all.

Vertical steel bars entrapped her in this dystopic lifestyle. The walls were chipped and scratched. There were marks where tallies had been kept but not her own. She hadn’t seen the point of keeping track of time as it was the one thing that she hoped would slip away from her. Ironically, it was the only thing that hadn’t.

During the day, her prison bars opened so she could leave though she never did. Occasionally, the guards had forced her out onto the grounds at the request of the prison doctor but she was most comfortable in her solitude. The nights were patrolled on an irregular basis. One night, she only counted four guards that walked past. Keeping count of the guards each night made her feel safe. She had never missed one either, she never slept. She used to, though. She slept the first night, and part of the second but no longer after that could she bear the dreams. They haunted her. They

made her listen as her son screamed; they made her watch as a man cut the life from her only child.

\* \* \*

With the boy fastened to the wall, incapable of movement, the man reached for his knife. He held it flat against the boy's neck and seized his collar. With one smooth swoop, he brought the knife down, slicing open the boy's shirt. The air was cold against his bare chest but the boy welcomed the numbing sensation. The man continued to cut the boy's clothing, leaving him cold and vulnerable.

*Disgusting. Vile. Tainted.*

Getting to his feet, the man left. The boy could hear his footsteps fading. He heard a door open then close violently. The man had gone. Realising this was almost certainly his only chance, the boy clenched his jaws. First closing his fist, he tensed his arm, levering his nailed hand. The pain was tremendous. Still he continued. Despite how rigorously he pulled at his hand, the nail wouldn't dislodge. Biting down hard on the cloth that had him gagged, he pulled away from the wall. The nail, firmly secured to the wall, ripped through his palm as the boy tore his hand through the head of the nail. His hand was free. Frantically scratching at his other hand, he tried to attain a firm grip to free the nail that detained it.

"Well, now, aren't we the persistent one?" Deafened by the pain and fear, the boy hadn't heard the man return. Still blinded, he felt an impatient hand capture his wrist,

jerk it above his ear, and the all too familiar feeling of metal piercing flesh.

The man had returned with a bucket and sponge. He began cleansing the boy with the moistened sponge, removing dirt and the dried blood from his palms and ankles.

*Enjoyable. Pleasant. Clean - a blank canvas.*

The water was ice-cold on the boy's naked body. Grabbing his knife, the man stood back from the boy, admiring his exactitude. He had created a masterpiece in his mind, visualising every line, every smear. Stepping forward, he raised the knife above his head. He brought the knife down fast. The blade sliced through the boy's chest with ease, ricocheting off his ribs. Blood leaked casually from the cut and dripped from the tip of the blade. The boy tensed his stomach. More thick incarnadine blood oozed from the gash. The pain was intense. The boy reeked of sweat. The metallic taste of blood filled the air. The man inhaled, filling his lungs with the stench of fear. He fed off it. The boy's stifled shriek sent shivers down his spine.

*Beautiful.*

With his arm outstretched, he flicked his wrist sliding the knife's edge through skin, muscle and sinew like Jackson Pollack painting the "Blue Poles". Blood flickered and smeared as he relentlessly slashed the boy's torso. The boy's cries were weakening; his skin grew pale. Cutting deeper, the man chipped ribs and severed veins in an attempt to incite more tears. The boy had lost consciousness. The pain and acute blood loss had proven too much.

*No! I'm not finished!*

It was too late. Realising the end, the man took his knife and rested it just below the boy's left ear. He slit the boy's throat. The cut went deep, piercing the oesophagus; the blade sliced through the trachea as though it was butter. The main artery was severed, ceasing all blood flow to his head; instead, it poured vigorously, washing over the hacked up torso. The boy was dead.

Exhausted, the man grabbed the hammer and started to pry the boy from the wall. Beginning at the feet, he levered the blood soaked nails from the boy's dead flesh, washed them in the bucket and then placed them on the bench. The boy's bloody body fell from the wall onto the plastic lined floor. The man wiped clean the bloody torso - *failure.*

He secured the young corpse in the plastic and lifted it into a steel cabinet, wiped clean the wall of any blood spray and puttied up the holes before painting over them. Placing the hammer on the bench next to the nails, the man secured the boy's red cap firmly on his head. He left, taking with the bucket of bloody water, satisfying memories and a souvenir.

The man sat on the wooden slats of the park bench. He lifted his book to his face but not to read. Running his fingers along the rim of his cap, he remembered the feeling. He wanted more. *I mustn't be greedy. No, I must be patient.*



\* \* \*

She had lost count of the sleepless nights. She was exhausted. Having barely eaten, all her strength had been put towards trying to forget but she wasn't strong enough.

Unable to cope, she held her toothbrush firmly as she considered her lack of options.

There was nothing to keep her going; no revenge to strive for, no son.

She was alone. Even if she waited it out and served her time, then what? She'd have to start over, she didn't have the strength for that. She was alone when all that she wanted was to be with her son.

Again and again she questioned why this had happened. Was she a bad person? Did she deserve this? Was it her fault? She questioned how she had got here. How she had gone from a mother to an inmate. Could she ever go back? Would she just find herself in bed one morning, awakened by her son, upset from a bad dream?

It was all too surreal. She had trouble distinguishing between what was real and the horrific scenes she witnessed every time she closed her eyes.

Her toothbrush was still locked tightly in her grasp. Its edge, having been scraped against her wall for numerous nights, was as jagged as a handsaw. She had given herself a second option. She slowly pulled the serrated edge across her wrist, it was less painful than she had expected. The sharp teeth of the flaked plastic ripped at her wrist, scoring her skin. She knew she had to go deeper. Applying more pressure, she sawed back and forth. It hurt. She wanted to stop but knew she couldn't.

Blood poured vigorously from her wrist. She swapped hands, wasting no time before sawing into her other wrist. The colour in her hands was fading; her fingertips were tingling. The distressing images of her son, the guilt, the sorrow; she could feel them as they slowly drained from her wrists. She was in control now but, unfortunately, her time was running out. Her feet went numb and her head began to spin. None of it mattered, though; this was what she wanted. She was ready to die.

Her last thoughts were of her son. Not of death or guilt but, of a time before such worries when she had taken for granted what she had. A time when she was ignorant and trusting of the world. She thought of a time before all this, a time of justice, when she had nothing to gain not nothing to lose. And, for a moment, she was happy in this; for she wanted nothing more than to be with her son.

# Reflection Statement

*“When will our consciences grow so tender that we will act to prevent human misery rather than avenge it?”*

– Eleanor Roosevelt.

Law and justice are not always interchangeable. When they aren't, it is perhaps destroying the law that brings about true justice. This is the essence of my short story “Justified”. Like truth, justice is changed in line with perspectives, beliefs, motives and values. Inspired by the international best seller, “The Beast” by Roslund-Helström and personal experiences, “Justified” explores the boundaries of right and wrong and highlights the factors that determine justice. Language techniques such as the change from third person to first person narration and the integration of past and present, assist in portraying the purpose of my story.

I decided upon my purpose early on in the development of my story. I wanted people to realise that justice couldn't always be the simple case of white and black that people often envisaged it to be. I felt the need to raise questions about the legal system: Was it fair? Who is to gain from the decisions made? How do emotions and other influences, such as beliefs and values, alter a person's judgement of a just decision?

I believe the legal system can be biased, whether it's through formal inequality, giving wealthier people an advantage or just a lack of truth and understanding of the facts. I intended to show people a situation where justice is neither black nor white but

a shade of grey. “The words of the prosecutor were uncertain...who was he to tell the court how a mother would react?”

It was also my intent to warn the responder that, although an imaginative piece of writing, the situation could, and too often does, occur. As a result of this, I keep my descriptions of the protagonist and the antagonist vague, allowing the audience to put themselves or a familiar face on the characters. I believed this would help the responder to realise how easily this situation could become a reality. I also reinforced this intent with highly descriptive language depicting the grotesque scenes “More thick incarnadine blood oozed from the gash...The metallic taste of blood filled the air”. in detail to get across my warning more effectively.

In order to create my story successfully and achieve my purpose, I realised it was vital that I was to first determine my intended audience, thus moulding my language around their desires. Initially my target audience were parents, whose age can vary greatly as can their values and beliefs, I found it difficult to draw a distinct boundary around a stereotype of qualities. It’s as a direct result of this parental target audience and intent to warn that my writing reflected horror elements. I needed to make the responder squirm and become uncomfortable to achieve the desired impact.

By no means did I wish to restrict my audience to that of just parents (although I believe they have the most to benefit) but, instead, I aimed at all mature audiences capable of understanding the concept of justice. This older target audience is reflected in the strong imagery I used to depict the more violent and gruesome elements of my story - elements that are, perhaps, unsuitable for a younger audience.

However, after reassessing this I realised older generation either put down or skimmed over the grotesque parts of my work. Although my story still greatly impacted this generation, it was 'Generation Y' (whom are more accustomed to gore elements) that my story appealed most to.

In order to show the responder how fast their lives could turn and how quickly the consequences of their actions could catch up with them, I needed to make the story flow quickly. The use of integration and page breaks makes the second half, the consequences, flow much faster than the initial part of the story.

My research started off, similar to my story, based primarily around the court and legal system. This was needed and proved very useful. However, through the process of writing, I discovered the legal system played only a small role and, so, it became only a small part of my story. I realised the main issues that needed researching and expanding upon were revenge and the psychological effects of losing a child.

Research into the motives of a revenge driven mother helped the plausibility of my story and helped me to better understand the effects of such a loss. The rage experienced by the protagonist, "Seven nails were protruding from his skull before her rage was satisfied", is a recognised symptom of persons going through tragic events such as that evident in my work. Further study of the concept, revenge, showed that biblical references to the "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" system of punishment supported the protagonist's actions as being justified.

The techniques I've chosen to use in my story reflect the process and research I have undertaken through this course. I decided on the use of the third person, omniscient narrator after much consideration of the storyline and how I was going to represent the thoughts of not only the protagonist but also the antagonist. Although the omniscient narrator allows this, further characterisation of the antagonist was achieved through the use of first person narration of his thoughts, evident in italics. The fast flow of my story was achieved through page breaks, dashes and integration. These techniques proved very useful in accomplishing my purpose.

A lot of my motivation has been a direct result of personal experience. Reflecting on my ideas of injustice as a child (getting smacked for expressing my artistic ability on the wall) changed in young adulthood and, I presume, will develop further in parenthood. I have personally encountered the rage and hatred present in parents who have had their children taken away from them because, from the government's perspective, they are unfit parents. It is the conversations with people, like this hitchhiker, that are responsible for the motivation of my piece.

I will not lie and say that my experience in writing this story has all been thoroughly enjoyable. There have been times where I've felt like giving up. Having now completed, I am thankful that I pushed on though the hard times. I am extremely pleased with the story I have produced and have learnt a lot from the process. Writing my story has been more of an enjoyment than a struggle. I hope responders enjoy reading "Justified" and get as much out of it as I have.