

## WHAT GIVES HIM THE RIGHT TO HAVE A SECOND CHANCE?

The whole aspect of killers living among us fascinates me, especially when we are unaware of their crimes. The unnerving concept that it is just in these killers' nature to kill, especially the young, disturbs me greatly.

The concept of killers having a family of whom have no idea who they really are, makes us question who surrounds us and their undisclosed past. Through this family having one single son, it questioned the father's authority to have his own child when he killed another, introducing the idea of the father resenting his own son complicated this idea further.

I wanted to create an effect that would leave the reader confused in some areas and frightened in others. The change is tense made the story more complex and reflected the idea that despite the killer's fake identity, he will always contain aspects of his past self.

The outcome of this story has also made me question the true extent to which we know people. And question, is giving a killer a false identity the best way to introduce them back into society, especially when someone's safety is jeopardized by their naivety that a killer is living among them?

## Boxing Day

His eyes stared back into mine as the life was drained out of them. He was no longer screaming- I had made sure of that- and his tiny hands fell lifeless by his side. I stood over him, this new-found power acting like a drug, its stimulation filling my body, addictive and indescribable.

I dragged his body along the ground, determined to find a place no one would ever discover him. I admired his body as it lay on the muddy ground, blood staining his clothes, seeping through his small shirt that he kept telling me his mummy would get mad about if he got it dirty. His innocence seemed almost pressurizing, this hesitation halting me for the first time in my life, but the feeling of emotion was quick to leave me, and never return.

So, I stripped him of his clothes, revealing his bruised, bloody body, laying limp, covered in fresh cuts from the rocks. As I piled his clothes into a bag, I looked into his eyes-which were almost shut by this point- one more time. A new feeling of justice and enjoyment overcame me, he had been so helpless, and I had been so powerful.

It was Christmas eve as we made our way to the church service, Ryan's hand gripped mine on one side and Sally's on the other. His eyes lit up as they fell upon the emerald Christmas tree, covered in beads, lights, bells and crosses.

"Look Daddy! Look", Ryan exclaimed, as if I had managed to miss the 8ft object in front of me.

"I see it Ryan, I know buddy, now let's get inside before the service starts- we don't want to be late for Santa, do we?"

We pushed open the heavy doors of the church and were greeted with the familiar faces of the minister along with those of the community. We politely shook hands and traded smiles with families before making our way into the actual service. Ryan was pulling my hand, eager to sit down, sing and then get home before Santa had even left the North Pole. He guided us towards the second row of pews and as we took our seats my eyes fell upon a familiar badge- a police badge. They controlled my life for years, taking away my childhood, my family, my identity.

"Honey, you okay?", Sally whispered over Ryan, a look of concern that was still new to me despite all the years that had passed.

"Yeh, I'm fine just thought I saw someone I knew, that's all", I muttered back, worried the anger I felt would slip out and be projected onto her. Sally was the love of my life, I would never do anything to hurt her, but if she knew what I had done she wouldn't believe that for one second. That's why no one can ever know who I am or what I did.

The minister walked up the aisle towards the altar, greeted by the creaking sound of everyone standing up from the pews. I always wondered why we should stand up to someone who has no proof of importance, no evidence their creation is real. In my opinion, God is bullshit, always has been and always will be. If this loving, caring, powerful God did exist, then why would he have made me?

The service followed a similar pattern as the past few years, hymns, stories, more hymns and usually more stories. It finally ended with the lighting of the last candle, peace, following on from joy, love and hope, all non-existent in the real world. How can there be peace when there is war? How can there be joy when there is despair? How can there be love when there is too much hate overpowering it? and how can there be hope when the whole human race is corrupt?

My thoughts were interrupted by Ryan, nearly pushing me out of the aisle, eager to get back home and prepare for Santa, another make-believe character to fool people into happiness. But I wasn't going to spoil something like that for my son, not just yet. I let him almost fall out of the pew towards the door, reaching for Sally's comforting hand, my hand intertwined with hers and I felt the comforting object of the ring on her finger. A sign of promise and commitment to me, no matter what I've done.

Back home, we helped Ryan lay out the cookies, milk and carrot before tucking him into bed. The clock stroked nine as I loaded the presents into his sack, heaved it upstairs and left it resting against his door. I spent the rest of the evening with Sally, preparing for tomorrow, before making my way to bed at 11. I lay silently once Sally came in, memories overwhelming me, almost drowning me. Seeing that police badge tonight reminded me who I was, the lifeless body I lived in. The empty space where my emotions were meant to be. The constant psychiatric tests, the court cases, hiding from the press until I was sent away.

The flashbacks are debilitating, suddenly I'm back in my cell, back in society's limelight with everyone in the world knowing my name and what I did. Inmates requesting to move cells just to avoid interacting with me. Everyone repulsed that I had done something so horribly wrong, but as my lawyer kept saying, "He's just a kid, he didn't know what he was doing". I knew exactly what I was doing.

I woke to the feeling of my body being hit with full force-by my son- as he jumped onto our bed with his stocking. It was filled to the brim with small gifts, wrapped by Sally and I- sorry- Santa and his elves. The excitement illuminated his eyes and his whole-body shock with anticipation of what was in that big red stocking. His happiness pushed last night's thoughts out of my head temporarily as I focused on my life now, I had to forget the past no matter how I feel about it.

My eyes caught Ryan's, while his hands ripped open his first gift, and I felt a sense of sudden hatred towards his life. He sat in a warm house surrounded by gifts from multiple family members, most of whom have never met him- I have made sure of that- and he has the freedom to do what he pleases. What did I get? A cold, enclosed cell, no family ever wanting to engage with me again, and not being able to go outside without the fear of being murdered. Why did Ryan get to live such a life of privilege while I had all my privileges stripped away from me at his age? What gave him the right to live as his true self while I had to hide behind a fake William Smith persona? What gave him the-

"Dad, look, look, look what I got!" Ryan disrupted my thoughts once more. "A new boat, we can sail it tomorrow outside of town, thank you Santa", his cheerful tone made me sick. I gave him a brief nod to acknowledge his gift and remained focused on not bursting with pure rage as he slowly made his way through his stocking.

The thoughts were getting too loud, almost screaming inside my mind, I quickly excused myself to the bathroom and took a big, deep breath. I loathed my own son, and I wanted him dead.

We have spent Christmas alone ever since Ryan was born. Sally insists year upon year that her parents or siblings come join us or we travel to theirs. Every year I deny her request with another excuse, "Ryan likes it to just be us, he feels happier that way" or "We are already cooking and preparing for 3 of us, we don't need an extra 2 or so people". However, this year I was all out of excuses, Sally was having none of it. "William, my parents are coming around for Christmas this year and I don't want to hear you moan or groan about it once, you hear me?". Sally's use of words gave me no choice in the matter, it was decided, her parents were spending Christmas day with us.

I have met Sally's parents only 5 times, one of those being our wedding, and have avoided the majority of family events in case of recognition. It had only been 2 decades ago, her parents would have been 40 or so, they could easily remember the thousands of newspaper front pages, my face plastered over each. Pictures from old school photos or ones alongside my siblings- with them cut out of the frame, that used to sit on my family mantlepiece, till they were taken down because my father couldn't stand to look at his son's face any longer. The whole world knew me in 1999, what stops them from knowing me now?

I prepped the potatoes, the sprouts, the turkey. My hand gripped the knife firmly, its familiarity coming back to me. My fingers glided across its ridges, my tips tracing the blade. A small cut formed where I had pressed too hard, tiny droplets of blood fell onto the counter where my eyes fixated on the dark red substance.

"William, so great to finally see you again", I jumped around, startled.

“Oh, Steve, Hi, sorry you caught me by surprise”, I stammered back, quick to use the edge of my apron to wipe away the tiny pool of blood that had formed.

“Feels as though we haven't seen you in years”, Steve replied, a strong dose of sarcasm lacing his voice.

“Sorry-I-um-been busy with work”, his presence was increasingly intimidating me, just as any adult older than me did. Anyone could remember because everyone knew.

Small talk was made for the next 5 minutes, social interaction with anyone apart from Sally and Ryan left me impatient and frustrated, so by the time we entered the living room I was ready to send them out the door.

It was almost the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Christmas since then had never been a time of joy and merriness but a time of isolation, praying that no one recognised the young boy in the newspaper as me. While Ryan opened his gifts each year after year, I counted the hours till I had to shelter myself from society. The 26<sup>th</sup> of December, a date that neither the Blake's nor the Hunt's forgot. A date when the Blake's lost their beloved child and my parents lost their own son. The date the crime of the

“So, William, how's work been?”, Sally's mum asked politely, trying to extinguish the awkward silence that had occurred without my knowing.

“Oh, it's been good, just the usual driving night deliveries and my boss getting angry if I'm 10 seconds late!” I joked, a foreign emotion that I still struggled to execute well today. Forcing emotions is harder than expected.

Truth is, my boss was nice, almost too nice. His attitude almost made me want to tell him the truth about who I was and what I had done, almost. Of course, his only records of me were what I had done since I left prison, before that all the information was fake. My name, birthplace, school, grades, my whole childhood was a lie to cover up who I truly was. Who I truly am.

We spent the rest of the day eating, opening gifts, watching movies and forcing conversations every now and then. By the end of the day I was exhausted. We said our goodbyes and I gladly sent them on their way. I refused to let them stay over, fearing a reading of the morning newspaper of the 26<sup>th</sup> could be the last time I saw my family.

I quickly called it a night and got into bed, leaving Sally to clean up the kitchen. 1am. I opened my phone. The bright screen blinded my eyes for just a second before I saw it trending. #Blakemurder, #Childkiller, #SimonHunt. My real name plastered over Twitter, then Instagram, then Facebook. Random mothers sharing old and new articles about the incident, as if they were involved somehow. The sudden anxiety was replaced by hatred once more. Hatred for these mothers who felt they had a right to interrupt my new life, to bring up past memories and threaten my identity.

This hatred steamed back to my 10-year-old self. When I walked home that evening, I threw his clothes into some random bin and put my own clothes in the washing machine, watching the foamy water turn red, hypnotised by the spin of the drum. I sat there for 2 hours, just watching the cycle go round and round, even once it had stopped, waiting for something to hit me, a rush of regret, guilt, remorse, anything. Yet I felt nothing. I feel nothing.

I remember popping my head into the living room to wish my parents good night. Them asking if I had a fun time at Sam's house and my reply being yes. I thought lying to my own mother would be hard, but it was too easy. I strode into my bedroom and turned on my TV, animated by the screen's picture but not listening to the words coming out the character's mouth. My mind was somewhat occupied. 'They won't find him', I comforted myself, 'no one ever goes that deep into the woods'. I feel asleep with the reassurance I would be safe and tomorrow would be like any other day. I didn't know that I would never set foot in my town, let alone my school ever again.

2 dog walkers found him early the next morning. His naked, bloody body purple from the wintry night yet his innocent face still very much recognisable. His parents were quick to identify him. The police were even quicker to identify me as his killer.

I thought I had covered it up, cleaned himself from me, every inch of my crime hidden from the world. Yet my DNA might as well have been all over him, nearby they found the Good Samaritan badge I had just got from the Scouts with my initials 'SH' engraved on the back. My 10-year-old self was so confident that no one would ever find a trace of me, but I had pretty much been dropping breadcrumbs from his body to my own bloody bedroom. I woke that morning and got ready for school, ate my breakfast, brushed my teeth and was just packing my bag when they knocked on our door at 8:10. Asking me to come with them, their hands gripped my shoulders hard while they pushed my head into the police car. And suddenly everyone knew Simon Hunt killed 4-year-old Jamie Blake.

The door creaked open as Sally made her way into bed. Her eyes caught my illuminated screen and she sighed, "What kind of sicko kills a 4-year-old, it's disgusting". I winced. "Hmm" I responded, wishing her to change the subject. I locked my phone as a hint for her to stop, but she kept going. Talking about the poor 4-year-old, the careless upbringing of Simon, his evil nature and ugly personality. My personality.

"It's not that bad, maybe the kid deserved it", Sally turned to face me, a look of outrage entering her innocent, beautiful eyes.

"Are you really defending a child killer William? That makes you just as disgusting as Hunt". I flinched as she turned over to face the wall.

I woke that morning with a pounding head, clouded with worry and fear of what could happen today. It was the 'could' that left me tortured by fear each day for the past 20 years. I slouched at the kitchen table as I slurped my bowl of cereal, time seemed to be moving much slower, dragging the day out for as long as possible. The noise from the TV boomed through the house, making my head splinter.

"Turn that Goddamn thing down Ryan!", I yelled, Sally was the one to flinch this time.

"William, language, what has gotten into you today? You look like you've seen a bloody ghost". Sally questioned me, no emotion entering her voice like the tone I was used to, clearly last night's conversation was still present in her mind. Yet I am not going to apologise for being right.

"I have a splitting headache," I replied, leaving the forced emotion out of my own voice.

"Well, you can take Ryan out to try out his new boat and get some fresh air while you're at it", She said as she wandered through to the living room, leaving me to peer into my now soggy cereal as my only source of company.

I couldn't think straight. It hurt to move. My whole body ached. Fresh air did sound nice and at least one of us would have to take Ryan out or he would be bugging us all day.

"Ryan, get ready were taking your boat for a ride!" I shouted back to him, the enthusiasm in my voice sounding a bit too artificial.

I bundled myself up to keep warm -and hidden-and walked out the door to the car, while Ryan skipped behind. As we drove out of town, I spotted countless newsagents with magazine stacks outside their doors. Some with Boris Johnson's face on it talking politics, while others had my face plastered on the front page talking murder and outrage. Most of the pictures were from that very day in the police station, my eyes peering into the camera with curiosity of what was going to happen next, almost a sense of excitement in those eyes. My lips forming a sort of smile, revealing how little remorse I truly felt. However, other photos were those from my birthday parties and other family events, as if now people had the right to judge a little boy laughing and smiling surrounded by friends, those friends he would never see again.

I forced my eyes to focus on the road ahead, Ryan singing to himself in the background disturbed my strong need for silence. But, I held my tongue, he was just happy after all, an emotion I have never been able to fully process.

I parked our car just a minute walk from the lake, it's clear water choppy and unnerving in the cool, brisk air. Ryan grabbed his toy boat and ran towards the lake with me trudging behind, my head still splitting.

"Dad, Dad, hurry up", He called to me, I sighed and quickened my pace to meet him by the side of the lake. He set off his boat and the wind picked up the sail as it sped across the lake, meeting each wave with force yet managing to overcome it. His smile beaming from eye to eye, and for a moment I felt a deep sense of love for my own son, followed by disgust and jealousy. While he was absorbed in his boat winning the non-existent race, I took a stroll around the lake, my head down, my mind elsewhere.

He was quick to catch up to me, hugging me around my waist, the type of contact that was still foreign to me. We came across a dog, and I crouched down as a distraction from the rushing thoughts and throbbing head that were weighing down my body.

"Cold day isn't it?", The man above me said, I clenched my fists, I wasn't in the mood for small talk.

"Hmm", I replied, hoping he would get the message. His dog suddenly jumped up at me, giving me a fright and nearly toppling me over.

"Woody! Down!", He commanded, "I'm so sorry, are you ok?", the concern in his voice made me sick, I still couldn't believe people felt such empathy to strangers.

"Yes, I'm fine", I looked up to ensure he knew this and hoped he would bugger off. Instead I was met with the eyes of Harry Blake, the father of Jamie. I looked across at Ryan and my whole world stopped.