

No Regrets

I did not really know where to look.

These English judges are ridiculous in their flowing gowns and their silly wigs, but this was no time, no place, for laughter. My breathing was shallow, my palms damp with sweat, and I could actually feel the racing of my heart. He was looking at me closely over the tops of his half-moon spectacles and I could tell from his long stare that he was confused.

‘Mr And- , Ander-’

‘And -ree -ef-ski. It’s Polish,’ I said, trying to help him out and then became quiet as his eyes bored into me.

‘Indeed. And I know,’ he said, adjusted his glasses, then consulted his notes.

‘It’s my job to sum up for the court the cases for both the defence and for the crown. A most confusing case...the prosecution maintains that you, Stefan Andrzejewski, an immigrant residing here, it seems, illegally, did attack and mortally wound, Derek Thornley, a newsagent going lawfully about his business.’

I struggled to understand this complex way of talking, but leant forward and nodded my head.

‘The prosecution claim that the defendant’s DNA was found on the deceased; CCTV pictures clearly show him backing away from the camera as he left the shop; and the Polish newspaper he’d bought and left behind bore traces of both his and the late Mr Thornley’s blood.

‘On the other hand, the defence counsel argues that he could not possibly have attacked Mr Thornley. At the time of the murder, he was a hundred miles away, living in a hostel for homeless young men. A number of witnesses – one of whom we have heard testify in this court – claim to have been playing cards with him at the precise time of the murder, and CCTV footage shows him, and the witness, entering the Red Lion public house in Nottingham, less than an hour later.’

A few minutes later the judge removed his glasses and turned to face the jury.

‘Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, take your time with your deliberations,’ he said.

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The door opened noiselessly and the jury filed in. Next, the judge returned and we all stood up again. Then everyone else sat down and it was I alone who remained standing. When the judge asked the foreman if they had reached a verdict, he answered that they had and I became aware of my hands gripping the edge of the dock - what a strange and nonsensical name – that I was standing in.

‘And do you find the defendant Guilty, or Not Guilty?’ he asked.

Almost before the word ‘Guilty’ was out of the foreman’s mouth, a familiar cough caused my head to jerk and me to look up at the public gallery.

There he was, a cheap grey hoodie concealing most of his face – my badass identical twin for whom almost everything was easy. Except, it seems, requiring the love I had given him all of our lives, and owning the terrible thing he’d done.

500 words