



Second Prize Winner, 2022, Category 14-18, Alexandra Yates

## **You've Been Framed**

My body was found at 4pm on a fresh November afternoon.

Brenda, my elderly neighbour, was taking her yorkie for a walk in the park when she was alerted by a nearby stench. Upon closer inspection, she found me lying in a bush, blood oozing from a large gash on my head, my cold hands clutching a note. Twenty minutes later, the police arrived, and the area was cordoned off. My parents arrived in their black Aldi, screamed when they saw me. My mother sunk to her knees and howled; my father just stood behind her, pale and unseeing. It was all very surreal, very movie-esque.

I watched all this through a cracked television screen, my hands bound, feet chained to the wall. The man hadn't spoken since we had got here, just forced me into a chair, shoved a gun at my head, and switched on the TV which I now stared unblinkingly at. I could probably take him out if I swung my hands up hard enough, got a good knock to his head, but then what? I was sure, from the voices I had heard when we first arrived, that there would be men waiting just outside, and besides, there was no way I could wriggle my way out of the chair. I might as well sit and wait. As I had been telling myself for the last two days, the police would surely investigate. They'd find me.

"They're not coming."

I jumped, jerking around so suddenly that the ropes around my wrists cut into my skin, and I felt a cold trickle of blood spill down my hand. The man was watching the screen as calmly as ever, as if he had never spoke, but a slight smile tugged at his lips. I scowled.

“You sure about that?” I didn’t have to be a genius to know that it wasn’t a good idea to pick a fight with a guy who had a gun pointed at my head, but I didn’t care. After 36 hours of being shoved, shouted at, and starved of information, all I wanted was to get something, *anything*, over the people who had done this to me.

“I’m sure.” I glared at him, and he smiled, revealing a row of pointy, white teeth. *Like a shark*. “You’ll see.” And without another word, he turned and left.

That night was the longest of my life. I soon accepted that there was no way I was getting any sleep, sat upright in a cold, metal chair, head aching and wrist stinging. The TV turned off a few minutes after the man had left, and I was left with my thoughts. I knew I should be forming a plan, but my mind kept replaying images - my mother screaming; tears seeping out of my father’s eyes; my cold, white and very-much-dead body.

There was no way to keep track of time. Minutes passed by agonisingly slowly, then hours. At what I guessed to be 8am, the man came back. This time, he walked around me, kneeled before my chair, and simply looked at me. His eyes were grey and cold, like pools of water. I waited, but he didn’t speak.

“What’s the time?” I asked, with as much aggression as I could muster.

He laughed, and turned to face the television, which switched on as if by magic. I immediately recognised the place - two people were sat in my sitting room. A tall man I

didn't recognise. And my brother, sat nervously opposite him.

"What happened between you and Cecily last night?" the man asked calmly. Michael glanced around, as if expecting somebody to jump out and rescue him, before looking back at the man. He was clearly terrified.

"I -"

"Yes?" the man prompted. I guessed he was some kind of detective.

"I went in her room," Michael said, and then it was as if some gates had opened and everything came rushing out. "I broke a picture of her and her boyfriend. I smashed the glass, but I didn't mean to. She was so angry." Tears pricked her eyes. "She punched me." He gestured to his stomach. "It hurt so bad."

"Were you angry?"

"No... yes. But not - not enough to - I would never... it *wasn't* me!"

The detective ignored him, glancing down at a notebook. "Michael, a knife was found last night under your bed. It had your sister's blood on it."

"It was a set-up." Michael said firmly. "I wouldn't... no."

The detective leaned forward. He tore out a page from his notebook and handed it to my brother, along with a pen. "Michael," he said quietly, "I want you to do something for me. I want you to spell something for me. Can you do that?"

"Yes." Michael whispered.

"I want you to spell deserved."

Michael gulped visibly. He placed the tip of the pen at the paper, then looked back up at the detective, who smiled. "Go on."

I could see him trace every letter.

D-E-E-S-E-R-V-E-D.

"Thank you, Michael. That's perfect."

"Why... why did you want me to do that?"

The detective didn't smile this time. He simply took a piece of paper from his pocket and placed it carefully on the table before looking back up at my brother. "This note was found in your sister's hand."

***She deeserved it.***

I whipped around, and this time I barely noticed the blood that began oozing out of my wrists. "No" I gasped. The man behind me smiled. "No!"

I spun back, eyes wide, and watched as men poured into my sitting room, grabbing my brother's arms, his neck. His screams pierced the air, pure terror, as he wriggled and thrashed. "No! It wasn't me! *It wasn't me!*"

"No" I rasped, tears pouring from my eyes. "No! Please! Michael!" I screamed now too, an inhumane shriek that tore from my throat and hung heavy in the air. "MICHAEL!"

And then the TV switched off.