

What Have I Done?

By Zak Lembarra

My truck's engine erupted in flames, which grew larger despite the cold nighttime rain. A road which had once seemed so empty now felt congested and overwhelming. Adrenaline coursed through my body, and yet, my leg remained unable to overcome the crushing force of the crumpled metal. I heard nothing except the pounding of my heart. The dizzying flames grew, dancing in the night, and my eyelids grew heavy.

How close was I to dying?

The darkness crept in and I began to close my eyes. I was suddenly forced awake by screams and crying. The sharp ringing in my ears began to fade and was replaced by the pounding rain, the crackling of flames, and the desperate cries of a child. When I looked out the driver's side window, the situation suddenly sank in. An upside down minivan blocked the road in front of me. Shattered glass scattered across the shiny black pavement. Inside of the minivan, a child, held in place by her seatbelt, called for her mother. My eyes moved slowly to where the girl called to.

I knew what I'd see, so why'd I look?

Behind the steering wheel, glued to her seat by the seat belt, a woman hung. From her neck, a golden cross necklace stood out against the dark silhouette. The world began to spin. Darkness advanced into my vision. The distant sound of sirens comforted me. She'll be all right.

"That's all I remember." A sigh came out from under my breath.

"May God have mercy upon your soul." The judge looked onward, a sad look in his eyes. Across the aisle, a golden cross necklace glinting in the sunlight caught my eye. Around the young girl's neck, tears made its surface slick. An elderly man hugged her and held her close. As the jury stood, the room took on a somber tone. The quietness of the crowd, judge, and jury made her cries that much louder.

"Mom," she said in between sobs and gasps of air, "Why you?"

Two police officers lifted me by the shoulders. The click of handcuffs was the last thing I heard as I was escorted out of the courtroom.