VENGEANCE IS MINE

 It's a story, perhaps, as old as Cain and Abel.

 One son is good, the other...very troubled.

 Karen and Samuel Parker of Hartford, Connecticut had two boys, born a year apart. Michael was the older, then came Anthony. As head of a blue-collar, middle-class family, Sam worked as a pipe-fitter and Karen was a typical homemaker.

 At first, both boys were treated with equal care and attention. But ever so gradually -- although parents should never give into the impulse -- one son became the favorite.

 Michael.

 Anthony sensed the unfairness at an early age, yet he never blamed his brother. In fact, the two boys would remain close for the rest of their lives. They often went fishing and bicycle riding together, and did the usual boy explorations.

 Michael was better-looking, better in school, better at sports, and more popular. His personality was charming, his manner easy-going, his deportment admirable and exemplary. Anthony, however, was more shy and hesitant around others, more sensitive, more awkward, and less confident. He also struggled with his studies at school. Yet despite these social shortcomings, Anthony was a good observer and an unusually perceptive and deep thinker.

 One night, lying in their bunk beds, Anthony asked his brother if he believed in the Bible -- and if he did, did he like the Old Testament or the New Testament stories better? Both boys had been attending Sunday School classes at their local Protestant church. Michael was nine years old at this time, and Anthony was eight.

 "Hmm...I'll have to go with the New, Tony, once Jesus begins His ministry," Michael declared after a moment's thought. "I like His ideas of love and forgiveness and stuff like that."

 "I figured you would, Mike. Me, I like the idea of a powerful God who crushes His enemies. I like words in the Bible like smite, wrath, and cursed. I looked them up in the dictionary. They are how I feel sometimes. I want to smite my enemies, ya know? Like Zeus sending down his thunderbolts, or Thor with his hammer. I've seen pictures like that in the mythology book I've been looking at from the library."

 Anthony hated unfairness in all of its forms, and the assorted bullies at school, and especially when others didn't care if they hurt your feelings. "I want justice to come down hard on those who do wrong and need to be punished," he confessed to his brother one day.

 Over time, Anthony noticed how both his parents' eyes lit up whenever Michael added another accomplishment or success to his ever-growing roster. The younger brother's feelings were naturally hurt whenever his parents chastened him for not being more like his older brother. Although Anthony tried his best, it was never good enough. Tony's school grades, athletic ability, and social popularity forever came up short when judged in comparison to Mike's by Sam and Karen. Mike tried to help his brother and coach him and tutor him -- offering this tip and that trick -- but Tony was simply stuck with how he was. Average and ordinary, in fact, like mostly everybody.

 It wasn't long before Anthony was openly and negatively referred to his neighbors and relatives -- almost as an afterthought -- by his parents as the "other one," "the second fiddle," and, even cruelly as "the benchwarmer."

 By the time he was ten, Anthony couldn't stand it anymore. After a critical tongue-lashing for bringing home yet another mediocre school report card, Tony angrily lashed back at his parents at the dinner table, saying, "Why don't you both ever show me some love and support? I do the best I can. I obey all the rules. Why do you hate and reject me? I know I'm not as good as Mike, but I can't help it. It's not my fault!" He started crying, red-faced and choking up. His older brother was embarrassed yet compassionate, and tried to calm Tony down.

 "Oh, don't be silly, Anthony. We both love you equally," his mother proclaimed. "We just need you to try a lot harder, that's all." But her facial expression in just that instant bespoke her true insincerity, and his father said nothing as he looked down towards his plate of food, picked up a greasy fried chicken leg, and avoided Anthony's eyes. "So Mike, how did baseball practice go today?" he cheerily asked when looking up again, to change the subject.

 Later that night, Tony confessed to Mike that he hated his parents. "If I was older and done with school, I'd leave this stinkin' place," he remarked. "They don't want me. It's like being punished for something I never did. I'm innocent! I just wish they were both dead! I wish somebody would sneak into the house one night and kill them."

 Michael was horrified. "Don't say such things, Tony! It's wrong and you know it. Stop thinking those bad thoughts. You'll go to Hell and burn forever."

 "Mike, there needs to be some kind of justice for all of these things, don't you see? Where is fairness? My life can't go on like this," Anthony lamented.

 But it did, day after day. Almost like some kind of undeserved punishment.

 That is, until one golden summer day, right after he turned sixteen. That was when Tony met Sheila Tibbits. She had transferred to Hartford High after her sophomore year and had moved in down the street from the Parker's house. They met when she was walking her English bulldog, Cosmo, at the community park near the pool where Anthony happened to be taking swimming lessons.

 Shelia was a petite but perky brunette, with confident brown eyes and a winning smile. After the usual awkward preliminaries, the pair soon began dating and became a steady couple. Sheila would be Tony's first serious love.

 Mike was relieved that his younger brother had finally found someone to get his mind off of his own troubles and dark thoughts. Happy days and sunny skies at last for Tony!

 But after the couple's junior high school year together, Sheila dropped a bombshell on Tony's life -- she didn't want to see him anymore! She had found someone new.

 Anthony was crushed. The shock came without warning. He assumed Sheila and he would eventually get married when they got older. So he weakly asked her the age-old, end-of-relationship question: Why?

 "Oh, Tony, you're sweet, and you've been loyal and good to me this past year, and all that. You were the first to make friends with me when we moved here from Norwich. But now I need more excitement and some new, fun experiences. To tell you the truth, you were getting kind of boring. I was getting tired of being with you, doing the same old stuff. Brad Conway asked me out and I said yes. He's really tall and handsome, and he's on the football team too. All the other girls at school are crazy about him, so I was thrilled that he actually chose me to ask out on date! Look, Tony, I'm sorry, but that's the story."

 In a panic, Anthony pleaded. He promised he'd do better. He pledged his undying devotion and love to the Tibbits girl. He begged her to reconsider. But all to no avail.

 "Oh, stop it, Tony! Don't be such a weakling. Don't be such a loser!" And Sheila walked away, hardly caring, out of young Tony's stunned life.

 Although neither realized it at the time, this event would cripple Anthony's relationships with women for the rest of his life. The hurt, the betrayal, and the desertion in these, his vulnerable teen-aged years, left permanent emotional scars. Love could be unjust and unfair, and morph into misery without warning, he now knew. He had learned that awful lesson the hard way. That night, he laid silently in bed, feeling empty and abandoned. He curled up in a ball, clutching his bed sheets, and wished he would fall asleep and never wake up. Brother Michael was already out of the house and off to college, so Tony felt especially alone.

 Senior year was a nightmare, and it was more than just seeing Sheila and Brad holding hands in the halls and kissing by the lockers between classes. Anthony was stuck with the worst teacher at Hartford Public High. His name was Karl Dwight. He was the biology teacher, a physical education coach, and a dreaded, unfettered bully of the innocent young.

 After just a few weeks in class, Anthony felt the first stings of Mr. Dwight's cruel public embarrassments.

 "Well, Parker (he never stooped to calling any of his students by their first names), looks like you'll never measure up to your brother," the teacher sneered.[Michael had graduated that June -- having lettered in both baseball and track, starred in the class play "South Pacific," and been crowned Prom King. He had been awarded a full scholarship to Yale, based on his outstanding grades, his various stellar extracurricular activities, and many glowing letters of recommendation from notable Hartford civic leaders. Mike planned on studying law, to the added delight of his parents.]

 Mr. Dwight continued. "Your lab reports are pathetic, Parker, and your handwriting is atrocious." He held up one of Anthony's papers (frankly, it was average-looking and not such a disaster as the teacher was claiming). "I can barely read this scrawl. You'll have to do it all over if you want to pass this class and graduate with the other seniors here. Get up here and retrieve this mess."

 Tony flushed with hurt and shame, avoiding the eyes of his grinning classmates, some of whom chuckled or smirked, as he took his lab report back and resumed his seat. He didn't mind the crude boys' reactions, however, as much as the girls'. The agony of teen humiliation, in front of one's peers!

 The months at Hartford High dragged on. Anthony began dreading even getting out of bed on school mornings. Although his other teachers treated him with unenthusiastic, minimal 'normality,' Tony felt his stomach and head hurt whenever he walked into Mr. Dwight's biology or p.e. classes.

 "Parker, you're a mess. Where's your sense of grace and coordination? No wonder nobody wants you on their team. And look at your fingernails -- ragged and chewed down to the bone," the coach announced during one awful p.e. period. "You think that the girls around here fail to notice such things on a date? You need to straighten up, boy! Have some manly pride!"

 The irony of this and other situations was that Mr. Dwight's wife had left him and he was divorced. He was also a borderline alcoholic, and he wore tight, unstylish clothes that only accentuated the portly rolls of flab around his belly.

 Jesus...look in the mirror for once, would you, Mr. D? You repulsive slob with your bad breath...Anthony thought to himself. But Tony was powerless under these circumstances and he knew it. And so did mean old Mr. Dwight. One day, justice will be served, Anthony silently vowed, his anger and disgust smoldering into black hatred. He would remember...

 Meanwhile, Michael phoned home to speak with his parents every week from Yale. He talked briefly with his younger brother too when Tony was around during such calls, and offered his steadfast encouragement and support.

 "You'll be out of high school soon, little bro', so just hang in there...then you can get a job and move out of the house and be on your own. I know you never wanted to go to college, Tony. Mom and Pop couldn't afford the steep tuition anyway even if you did, and I know your grades aren't good enough to win any kind of scholarship. Maybe you should try to become an apprentice electrician or a plumber or repairman. If not, maybe try sales or truck driving. There are always job openings in those areas," Mike counseled. "Once I finish law school and pass the Bar I can try to help you out financially if you ever need it. But that's still a few years off." Tony was grateful and thanked him.

 The day after his eighteenth birthday -- having earlier graduated from high school -- Anthony was not that surprised when both of his parents announced that he had a week to pack up and move out. "You're on your own now, boy. We can't support you anymore, now that you are a legal adult," his father blandly decreed, his mother nodding in agreement, her arms crossed in a gesture of uncaring finality.

 "Fine...I'll go. You don't want me here anyway," Tony admitted. You never wanted me, he realized in his heart. The unfairness of being born unto parents like this gnawed at Anthony over the years, and he thought with burning anger: You'll both pay for this somehow and someday. I swear it. Justice will be served...

 For the next four years, Anthony Parker worked a variety of different jobs in the Hartford area. He had found a cheap studio apartment in one of the poorer sides of town. He worked hard and didn't waste his money. He had no close friends, however, and he rarely dated any women unless one of his coworkers set him up on a blind date. He went on long walks alone in nearby forest preserves on the weekends. He read books and watched TV. He was especially a big fan of Western movies, where the good guy always gets the bad guy or guys in the end. But once a month, his older brother Mike called him from New Haven and they talked. His parents, however, never made any effort to contact their youngest son. He could have been dead for all they cared.

 When he was twenty-three, Anthony got a good-paying job as a delivery truck driver for a large medical supply company. His route covered virtually the entire state of Connecticut -- mostly to public and private hospitals and to doctor's clinics. He even got to visit his brother a few times down at Yale on nearby delivery trips. It was great to hug big brother Mike again! They liked to go out for beer and pizza and talk.

 Tony's luck continued when he was offered a salesman job for the same company he was delivering for. He would be paid both a regular salary and a commission on new sales. He jumped at the opportunity.

 Things went quite well for Anthony during his first year on his new job. But suddenly, a new sales manager was unexpectedly hired. His name was Dick Ripley. And it didn't take long for Ripley to focus on poor Tony and harass him.

 Nightmare memories which had lain dormant for years in Tony's heart and mind now resurfaced: all the uncaring meanness, the relentless humiliations, and the barely-veiled insults from his childhood and school days came back to haunt him -- cold, bleak, merciless. Awareness that his best was never good enough was a reality again, a painful ache that never left him. Anthony reached out blindly to others, in dire need, looking for any crumbs of acceptance and caring. But he was always rebuffed. Why? he inwardly cried. Why me?

 Dick Ripley was your classic bully, whose type, in reality, tries to hide their own sense of inferiority and low self-esteem by preying on the weak or the outcast. He had a face like a rat: a long nose with a clipped, graying mustache underneath, bucking teeth with an overbite, and a short chin. His hair was deserting his scalp, and he was going to pudginess. Ripley was the kind of boss that everyone quickly learns to either avoid or grows to hate -- an undeserving dullard, charmless and tactless. He was the medical supply company president's new brother-in-law, however, so that was that.

 "Parker, come in here!" Dick barked one morning from his open office door. Anthony entered and sat down.

 "I've been looking over your sales reports. Not a single new client in over two months. What's your problem, pal?" Ripley demanded. "We need some renewed vigor around here, someone with real initiative -- not some chair-polishing slacker."

 Tony was taken aback, but quickly responded.

 "Well, Mr. Ripley, in my defense, I would say that my regular clients all speak highly of me, and my work record is spotless. It's well-known that our nation's economy is currently in a slump, but I'm sure our sales will rebound and then expand. I'll redouble my efforts then and bring in new accounts. I'm doing the best I can, sir, under the circumstances," Tony added.

 "Your excuses don't impress me, Parker. Shape up or ship out. Or I'll push you out. And if you don't like it, tough. There's nothing you can do about it because I'm your supervisor, and don't you forget it!" Dick threatened. "Now go," he ordered. Anthony detected a subtle smirk on his boss's thin, cruel lips.

 In the ensuing weeks, young Parker got the message: his new boss unfairly hated him, and was determined to make his work life miserable. When Tony was not on the road and needed to work at the office, Ripley made Tony feel unwelcome in front of his other coworkers. Dick would make a show of telling a joke in the lunchroom, but when Anthony would walk in, Ripley would stop and ask, "Well, what do you want now, Parker? Why don't you either sit down and eat or leave. We're trying to have a good time here." Tony's fellow salespersons looked appalled at such rude, totally uncalled for behavior, but they were afraid to say anything in Anthony's defense for fear of getting fired themselves. The pathetic reality was that they had to kiss up to their bullying boss.

 Twenty minutes before the end of work the day before the Christmas holidays, Dick Ripley walked up to Anthony's desk and casually tossed an official signed letter down upon it.

 "Parker, we can't use you anymore. I informed the company president that you can't cut the sales mustard around here. You're terminated as of this moment. You have until five o'clock to pack up your personal belongings and surrender your office keys. Security will escort you to your car in (he glanced at his watch) about nineteen minutes. Oh, by the way, Merry Christmas. Goodbye, Parker."

 A stunned Anthony had no choice but to comply. Connecticut was a "no-will" state, whereby employers could fire any non-union employee without any advance warning or cause. Just like that. No recourse.

 Driving home in his aging Buick on cold and snowy roads to his modest studio apartment, Tony felt a disturbing wave of disbelief, anger, outrage, and disgust permeate his entire being. He wanted fairness. He wanted justice. And then -- from the darkest depths of his crippled emotions -- something finally clicked (some would say cracked), and he knew he wanted: ultimate revenge.

 Vengeance must be mine, his wounded mind cried out. Unleash the wrath. Smite the guilty. Fight back for the rights of the innocent.

 Anthony Parker sat alone in the dark that night, thinking. His older brother, Mike, called to wish him a Merry Christmas on the 25th, but Tony avoided mentioning that he had lost his job. Nor did he share what he was considering doing to all those who ever hurt him.

 The young man obsessively read articles on the internet about philosophy and theology over the next weeks into the New Year, and kept a notebook with his findings. Even with his simple, average intelligence, he was trying to discover definitive answers to some of humanity's age-old questions: Why did evil exist? Why did bad things happen to good (or innocent) people? Why didn't God smite the wicked in the here and now, rather than wait to judge them after they died and then condemn them to Hell? What constituted the law, fairness, and justice? Was vengeance and revenge ever justified? To relax, Anthony watched more Western movies. The clarity of the morality in their typical story plots was both refreshing and inspiring to the troubled young man.

 He carefully researched, then finally decided to purchase a pistol at a local gun dealership. A 9mm Glock 19, with a 15-round clip. It was the most popular handgun sold in America. He practiced for several days at an indoor/outdoor gun range. When he felt confident and proficient, he also purchased a silencer for the weapon, and practiced with that too. It went softly 'pop-pop' rather than the much louder 'bang-bang.'

 His mind was clear as to what he intended to do. He had always abhorred violence. The idea of hurting innocent people he didn't even know was absurd. He loathed those sick individuals on the news who horrifically slaughtered school children or shot up shopping malls. To kill randomly was wrong and ridiculous. Prisons were filled with such mentally-ill types, and those who were simply sadistic murderers who actually got perverted pleasure from their actions. But Anthony felt he was different. And he would prove it to the world.

 It was a typical dreary, frigid New England Saturday morning in January when he took a small backpack and drove to his parent's house.

 His father, Sam Parker, answered the door.

 "Well, what do you want?" he suspiciously demanded. Not even a kindly hello to his youngest son, whom he had not laid eyes on in over five years.

 "I just wanted to come in for a minute to talk with you and Mom," Anthony replied.

 "Oh, alright...but make it quick. You're letting in all the cold air," Sam allowed.

 Karen had heard the doorbell too, and came out of the kitchen. "What's this all about?" she asked.

 "Mom, Dad, I just wanted to ask you both why you never loved me like you did Mike. What did I ever do wrong against you? I was just an innocent child, trying his best to adjust to the world. I knew I wasn't exceptional. But I simply reached out for acceptance and support. Isn't that the basic duty for every parent? I needed you both to help me. But you both turned your back on me. Why?" Anthony pleaded.

 Sam and Karen looked at each other with a fleeting glimpse of guilt and shame. But then they recovered and re-hardened their hearts.

 "What's done is done, boy. No use trying to change the past or analyze it. We gave you food and clothes and a roof over your head. We're happy that we raised at least one good son...Well, you should probably leave now," Sam replied. "Live your life as best you can, but keep us out of it from now on." Karen stood mute, but her eyes were watering.

 This final, bitter rejection hurt Anthony to his core, but the response of his parents hardly surprised him. If they would have just talked openly and honestly for once with their son, or asked for his forgiveness, or simply said they were sorry for giving him all those years of pain, what happened next might have been avoided.

 "Well, I guess it's goodbye forever then," Tony sighed, as he calmly took off his backpack and removed his pistol with its attached silencer, then pointed the Glock at his father's face. "Thanks for nothing." He pulled the gun's metal trigger once...pop...and a shocked Sam went down, his blood spraying the wall behind him as his head burst open like a ripe watermelon from the 9mm slug. In the next instant, by way of reaction, Karen raised both of her hands in front of her face, to both gasp in horror and perhaps to try and futilely block what was coming next. Pop. The bullet easily passed through her left hand and into her face, and she likewise crumpled to the floor, dead.

 All was quiet now. Only the acrid smell of gunpowder was left in the air. Anthony felt an unexpected sense of peace and relief, like a dark, clawing hand had finally released its long, iron grip from inside the back of his brain.

 Suddenly thirsty, Tony went into the kitchen and poured himself a glass of milk and drank it down. Then he went upstairs and used the toilet to pee, feeling somewhat shaky from his body's adrenaline arc. He passed by his parent' old bedroom, which had been partly decorated in celebration of his brother Mike's achievements: sports trophies, framed certificates, opened scrapbooks with newspaper clippings praising his various accomplishments, and dozens of photos of Michael in all his glory. But when Anthony went by the old bedroom that he used to share with his brother, he found the room had been turned into a storage area, with stacked cardboard boxes and plastic tubs, and the childhood bunk bed was gone. There was nothing of Anthony's saved. It was as if he never existed, and it was clear that his parents had no wish to be reminded of him.

 So young Parker left his childhood house for the last time. Anthony had earlier researched the current Hartford address of Sheila Tibbits. She was divorced now and had kept her married last name of Lasko. Tony headed there next.

 He rang the doorbell and waited. The door opened a crack and a face peaked out. Although it was only five years since he last saw Sheila in person, she looked terrible and had aged badly. She sucked on a half-smoked cigarette, her long fingernails painted a garish color, and chipping.

 "Tony Parker...is that you? What the heck do you want?" Sheila asked.

 "I just want to come in and talk for a few minutes," Anthony answered. "I was in the neighborhood, and thought about you."

 "What exactly do you want to talk about?" she asked suspiciously.

 "Well, if you can invite me in for no more than five minutes, I'll explain it to you, O.K.?"

 Sheila Lasko hesitated for a moment, then agreed. "But just for five minutes," she insisted. The sliding security chain on the door was removed and Tony stepped in.

 Her apartment was a mess and stank of cigarette smoke. She put out her latest butt in an almost full ashtray. "O.K., tell me what's on your mind, Tony," Sheila demanded. She didn't invite him to sit.

 "Sheila, I wanted to know why you ended our relationship so crudely and abruptly back in high school. I adored you, and felt we had a wonderful future together. I hoped we would eventually get married and raise a family. I would have done anything for you. But then you dumped me for some dumb football jock on a girlish whim. And you tore my heart apart. You called me a weakling and a loser when I was down and cast aside. I thought you cared about me. But apparently you didn't. Why did you treat me so terribly, Sheila? Why?"

 The room was silent as the two people stood a few feet apart, facing each other, eyes locked. Time seem suspended.

 "Hey, look, that was five years ago, Tony." She coughed. "I hardly remember anything back then. After I got married two years ago to a sharp-looking guy named Hank, I thought that it was forever true love. But he turned out to be abusive and a tom cat and I caught him cheating one too many times, so I filed for divorce. Life is a bitch sometimes. People do things they can't explain. People hurt each other. So I can't be held responsible for everything that happened to us with 'you and your feelings.' Shake it off and get on with your life, Tony. I did...or at least I'm trying to. Now you need to leave. This is not worth discussing anymore."

 "Not worth discussing, she says..." Anthony echoed, then looked at the woman with disgust. He carefully removed and opened his backpack with the Glock inside. He took it out, then pointed the weapon with its silencer at Sheila's chest -- her heart. Her eyes bugged out in terror.

 "Whaa...wait! Wait! What are you doing, Tony? Oh my God, no..."

 Pop went the pistol. "From my heart to yours," Tony announced. But Sheila was probably dead before she heard those final words.

 Things went similarly with the killings of high school teacher Karl Dwight and work supervisor Dick Ripley. Anthony reminded Mr. Dwight how cruel and sadistic he was to make him, his former student, suffer in front of everybody back as a senior. "Why did you have to pick me out and make me so miserable?" Anthony demanded. But Karl, who had been drinking and smelled of booze, had no answer.

 "Look, fella. I guess I vaguely remember you. I've taught hundreds of kids over the decades," Dwight confessed. "So what's the big deal? Why are you so pissed off?"

 It was as if Karl really didn't care about living anymore anyway, Tony sensed, as he shot him. As for the bully Dick Ripley, he was the only one of the five victims that dark day who actually broke down in tears and begged on his knees for mercy. But Anthony simply replied, "Vengeance is mine now, Dick, and you must pay the ultimate price for the terrible and unfair things you did to me." And Tony gave it to him.

 With ten rounds left in the Glock's clip, young Parker removed his remaining ammunition and placed his weaponry back in his backpack. Then he went to the nearest police station and turned himself in. He bluntly told the surprised female officer in charge at the front desk that he had killed five people that day, and that his unloaded Glock was in a gray backpack on the passenger seat of his parked brown Buick. Anthony was quickly handcuffed and read his rights, then placed in a holding cell after he was booked for five suspected murders. He calmly gave the police the addresses of his parents and the other three victims.

 With his one allowed phone call, Tony called his brother and confessed what he had done. Michael was frankly stunned, yet not completely surprised. "Oh, Tony! You should have talked to me and maybe I could have stopped you from doing such an awful thing! Don't you remember that old Bible verse we learned in Sunday School, Romans 12:19?

 *"Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."*

 Mike then promised to visit his younger brother as soon as possible.

 Anthony Parker was given a court-appointed defense attorney named Mark Jardine. Parker wanted the lawyer to enter a guilty plea on all counts on his behalf, and told Jardine that he would willfully accept the death penalty and wanted to file no appeals. "This will be the easiest case you ever had," Tony remarked. "I admit I did it all, and I'm ready to pay the penalty."

 The local and national media clambered for access to the murderer, but Tony refused. "I'll give my complete and final statements to the world from the courtroom when it's time," he announced, "and not before." He wanted no publicity circus or obscene notoriety. Anthony also declined exclusive interview offers by several true-crime authors, such as what Truman Capote had done for Perry Smith and Dick Hickok for their four 1959 murders of the Clutter family in Holcomb, Kansas ("In Cold Blood"), or Norman Mailer for serial killer Gary Gilmore ("The Executioner's Song").

 Due to public outrage and demand, Parker's trial date was speeded up. Soon, both the prosecuting attorney -- Leonard Steadman -- and defense attorney Mark Jardine had selected their jury: the usual, easily-persuadable mix of the unemployed, the unemployable, the lower-educated, and the daytime TV binge-watchers. But this case was deemed so 'open and shut' that it hardly mattered which twelve ordinary citizens were chosen. After having visited his brother twice in his jail cell, Michael Parker would sit, in Tony's support, every day in the County courtroom.

 The judge would be a seasoned judicial veteran, William Matheson. He ordered a complete psychological examination of the defendant for starters, which usually took three days. When the results were publicly released during the resumed trial, Anthony was said to have been of sound mind. Nothing was found to prevent the State from proceeding.

 As directed by his accused client, Jardine entered a guilty plea on all five counts of murder on Tony's behalf. The prosecutor then went into the gruesome details of the killings for the benefit of the judge and jury. There were no objections raised, or any witnesses called, or any other legal wranglings. Jardine then called Parker to the stand -- as Tony had earlier requested -- so that the defendant could honestly tell in detail exactly what each of his victims had done to him and why he felt compelled to kill them. The trial took just two hours in the morning, and three more hours after lunch. Then it was over. The jury went out to arrive at its verdict.

 Ten minutes later, the jury returned with their decision: guilty on all five counts. The court recorder typed away in the otherwise silent courtroom.

 Judge Matheson ordered the defendant and his attorney to rise.

 "Anthony Parker, you have been found guilty on all counts, by an impartial jury of your peers, for the cold-blooded murders of five innocent human beings. Do you have any statement to make before this court renders its sentence?"

 Parker, in a calm voice and standing erect, said, "Yes, your Honor, I do." He looked back briefly and caught his older brother's eye. Michael looked very sad and distressed but attentive. "Although I truly cannot say that I am sorry for what I have done, I am sorry that the circumstances that drove me to such extreme lengths ever had to happen. I am a normal, simple, gentle person, and by nature not a violent one. I would never hurt anyone I didn't know, nor anyone who didn't really deserve it. All I ever wanted out of life was honesty, fairness, acceptance, and caring. But when I was met with never-ending abuse, ridicule, abandonment, and injustice, I felt that I had to strike back. Don't you see? I was innocent. It wasn't my fault. In fact, I bet that mostly everyone in this courtroom has wanted to do exactly what I did, out of sheer hopeless necessity: Punish those like I did: bad parents, an evil boss, a cruel teacher, or an unloving partner. This horrible behavior had to be called out, condemned, confronted, and finally dealt with. It was impossible to let it endlessly continue unpunished, year after year, for thousands and thousands of people, generation after generation. It has to stop somewhere, don't you see? So your Honor, I am at peace, and I freely accept the State's ruling on my fate. I thank you for the opportunity to speak my heart and mind to everyone here today." He sat down next to his attorney again and folded his hands.

 There was a considerable pause before Judge Matheson spoke.

 "Mr. Parker, you have expressed your thoughts and feelings in a sincere manner. But I fear that you are missing a very, very important point. It's true that most of us may have wanted to kill someone for one reason or another. We all yearn for swift revenge and vengeance now and again. Perhaps it is our primitive nature, which still lurks just below the veneer of our civilization. Yet all societies must have precise laws to keep us from falling off the cliff into carnal barbarism and chaos. One of those laws is that we do not kill like you admit you did -- regardless of the cause of the overwhelming hurt and pain which can propel us. Young man, you took five innocent human lives. You murdered them in cold blood. They were not armed or able to defend themselves. Those lives are forever gone, and nothing can bring them back. Mr. Parker, you believe that what you did was right. You fatally brought down the wrath, and smote your enemies, like an avenging, white-bearded God in the Old Testament. But you were absolutely wrong to do what you did, son. It was terribly wrong. Perhaps you will realize this truth in the days to come."

 The judge looked down for a moment, sighed, then raised his eyes up to the assembly.

 "The State of Connecticut sentences you, Anthony Parker, to death by lethal injection, at its earliest convenience, in accordance with the law. You have previously waived your right to any appeals. So let it be noted. I am sorry for you, young man. May God have mercy on your soul." William Matheson banged his desk gavel once. It echoed in the hushed room. "Court is adjourned." Reporters covering the proceedings rushed out to file their story.

 Because Anthony was deemed not a suicide risk, he was not put on a suicide watch in his new Death Row cell. Brother Michael came for weekly, one-hour visits. Other than that -- and daily, one-hour exercise periods or a hot shower outside his cell, alone --Tony spent his time reading, watching DVD movies on a compact player that Mike had gotten for him, or writing in a diary. His meals, of course, were delivered to his chamber.

 Eighteen months later, the night before his execution, Anthony met with his brother for one last time. "Mike, you were the best brother a guy could ever have. You always accepted me, and I always loved and looked up to you. I hope that what I did to our parents and to those other people didn't shame you in any way. I had to do it. It had to be done. I truly hope you understand."

 "I love you too, Tony. I just wish that you had let God have the vengeance. Maybe the rest of your life would have turned out differently. So many things like this are disturbing and unexplainable. Sometimes I just don't understand this world, this crazy life...Well, goodbye, little bro.' I'm really going to miss you. I won't be here to watch you get executed tomorrow, because I always want to remember you instead when we were kids, fishing and riding our bikes together."

 Then the two brothers hugged, with heartfelt tears running down their cheeks...

 THE END

 by Jack Karolewski

 June 7, 2021