

# Lost in the Transfer

The Honorable Barry Samson adjusted his robes as he lowered himself into the padded chair behind the bench. No one spoke amidst rising anticipation—a common occurrence for any murder trial.

Trying not to think about it, Samson shifted the holster strapped to his belt. He hated wearing a weapon in the courtroom, but one could never be too careful, especially in a house of law.

He cleared his throat and said, "You may be seated." Chairs scraped along the linoleum floor and echoed off windowless walls. For the first time, Samson looked up. On his left, a trio of sleek prosecutors sat high in their chairs. A handsome fellow flanked by two beautiful women. They seemed like cutouts from some high-end fashion E-zine—flawless features in designer suits.

Behind them, sat a score of whitewashed faces—friends and family of the victims. Their clothing and features were gray, drained of color. The only flash of life came from their eyes that were red-rimmed and watery. Many of those eyes were downcast, but the others—mostly the older ones—were aimed towards the other side of the room where the defendant sat in a bright orange jumper with black numbers across its front.

Steel shackles bound his wrists. With black hair falling in his eyes, the defendant slumped beside his state appointed lawyer—a twenty-something pale-skinned man with hair shaped into a plastic dome. He sat back in his chair, his arms folded and his lips curved into a half smile. It was an expression brimming with arrogance despite the incoming glares from across the aisle.

"We'll begin this preliminary hearing," said Samson, "with an account of all charges being filed against the defendant." All eyes shifted toward him. Even the defendant looked up with blank, unreadable eyes. The gravity of the situation did not show on his face. In fact, his lower lip was slightly upturned and eyes wide in an expression of "Why are you being so cruel?" It was an emotion the defense would want to exploit, no doubt.

At times like these, Samson often thought of his son. He had been only eleven years old when he was gunned down on his way home from a friend's house. It was such an illogical occurrence because he'd never made an enemy in his life. The investigation discovered that his death was a case of mistaken identity. His killers had assumed he was from a rival gang, but they were wrong, of course. And after a few years in a correctional facility, they were released back into society. Their debt paid, it was said.

In the seven years since, Samson often wondered what was the point of justice. Was it to punish or reform? Rehabilitation or retribution? Both? With over twenty years as a judge, he still didn't know. Often, his thoughts about these things scattered in the wind without settling on any strong convictions for long. At times, Samson could think of justice as an emotionless example of cause and effect. The initial crime would trigger a natural recourse in the same way Newton's law required an equal and opposite reaction. This was logical and it was what he based his career on. There were other times, however, when Samson wondered if the law was enough. He thought of the smiling faces of his son's killers. On the day they were released from juve, they embraced their families with jubilant enthusiasm. They had forgotten the boy that now lay dead beneath their feet.

Samson caught himself staring at the defendant—forming an opinion of his own—and forced himself to turn away. "Would the prosecution care to present the charges?"

The prosecutor closest to the aisle—an attractive, narrow framed woman with dark hair pulled up into pins rose out of her seat. Her name was Melanie Harcourt. Samson knew her from previous trials to be a straight to the point kind of prosecutor. While other lawyers often put on a show, Harcourt usually opted to stick with the facts. It was a trait that Samson admired.

"Your honor," Harcourt said, "the city of New Anaheim charges the defendant, a Mr. Vincent D'Angelo of several crimes including assault with a deadly weapon, police evasion, and two counts of murder in the first degree." She paused and put her hands on the table in front of her. "We are prepared to prove beyond reasonable doubt that the defendant committed these crimes." With a quick glance towards the defense lawyer, she sat back down.

Samson leaned forward and said, "A murder conviction carries the punishment of death in this jurisdiction. A very serious charge. Is there sufficient evidence?"

"Video, forensic, and eye witness testimony all confirm the charges."

"Very well," said Samson. "Trial will be set for—"

"Your honor," the dome-headed defense lawyer was now standing. A ripple of angry whispers followed his interruption.

"What is it?" snapped Samson.

"Mr. D'Angelo is innocent."

Samson's teeth clicked in frustration. He tapped heavily on the tablet on his desk, pulling up the information for this intrusive lawyer. Samson wanted to know this fool's name before he was put back into place.

"Mr. Trevani," said Samson. "I don't know whether you are ignorant, arrogant, or both, but this is a preliminary hearing. Your client already made a similar plea at the arraignment. Now, sit down!"

Trevani didn't sit down. Instead, he raised his hands in a gesture of appeasement. "Your honor, I mean no disrespect, but the prosecution is charging the wrong man. A case of mistaken identity."

Samson didn't know if it was annoyance or curiosity that encouraged him to ask, "Is this *not* Vincent D'Angelo?"

"Yes and no," said Trevani. Across the aisle, Harcourt glared with the utmost contempt. Trevani paid her no mind. "This is indeed Vincent D'Angelo, no doubt about it. However, he's not the *same* Vincent D'Angelo who committed murder."

"Your honor," said the prosecutor, "the defense is trying to confuse the court. We ask that the matter be resolved in trial."

"Perhaps," said Samson, "but I'd like to hear what he's talking about." He fell back into his chair and puffed out his chest. While facing Trevani, he said, "Make it quick."

"Of course," said Trevani. "You see, the confusion comes from teleportation."

At Trevani's words, all three prosecutors erupted into frenzied movement. Harcourt slammed her hands on the table and began whispering into the ear of the man on her right—her words twisted her colleague's handsome face into unbelieving disgust. And on the far end of the table, the third prosecutor—a cream-skinned woman with

crimson hair—was furiously scratching at her tablet—in search of something that might help them, Samson supposed. If anything, this only further enticed Samson's curiosity. Now, he needed to hear more.

"Teleportation? What do you mean?"

"There was an issue with teleportation, your honor. We do not deny that a man named Vincent D'Angelo killed a newly wed couple outside the Avalon Night Club in the entertainment district three nights ago. A botched robbery, it looks like."

"Botched robbery?" said Harcourt with unmasked disgust. "The defendant ambushed Kyle and Lily, killed the husband, assaulted the wife and would have done much worse if police hadn't arrived. The defendant ran off, but it was too late. Lily died from her injuries."

Trevani smiled primly and said, "We don't deny it. There is plenty of vid to prove that. We also can't deny that the same man lead police on a chase through the city streets and even fired a laz pistol at his pursuers, injuring an officer. This man possessed the same name and physical appearance of my client."

"Because he *is* your client!" someone said from behind the prosecutors' table.

"Silence," said Samson. "If the gallery can't remain quiet, they will leave." He stared at the onlookers for a moment, made eye contact with the person he believed had spoken up and didn't look away until the man had shifted his eyes towards the floor.

If Samson could have his way, he'd order everyone but the lawyers out of the room. Unfortunately, a series of high level scandals and activist court decisions made all proceedings open to the public. Now, much of what usually took place behind closed

doors was put on display. In Samson's opinion, this made law appear more messy than it needed to be.

Samson turned his attention back to Trevani and said, "I don't see any confusion. Best get to the point."

Trevani was more than eager to continue. "This man, who *looked* like Vincent D'Angelo, found himself near a Port Station. He wanted to escape so he shot his way through the front door, injured a security guard, and forced his way into a teleportation chamber." He spoke with an odd giddiness as if he was nearing the end of a long joke.

Samson was not amused. "All of this is in the police report, Trevani. There's no need for a play-by-play."

Trevani smiled and said, "So you know what happened next?"

Samson glanced at the report and said, "There was a brief exchange of laser bursts with the pursuing peace keepers. D'Angelo teleported to a Port Station in Sydney, then was quickly subdued by Teleport Authority. End of Story."

"But that's not the *whole* story," said Trevani. "Right before he teleported, peace keepers fired on the man who looked like my client. Security Vid shows that lasers struck that man in the leg and stomach. The lasers also punctured several holes in the teleportation device's operating system. So, although the teleportation occurred, it didn't go off without a hitch."

"What hitch was that?" Samson asked, but looking at the defendant, a man who showed no signs of charred flesh from laser wounds, Samson was beginning to see where this was going.

"As everyone knows," Trevani turned slightly towards the prosecution and raised his voice when he spoke—it was a patronizing gesture in the least, "teleportation is the complete transfer of a person or object from one location to another. The transfer is instantaneous, happening in a blink." He paused and actually blinked for dramatic flair. "First, a computer makes a complete digital copy of the subject. Then, the chamber breaks the body down, converts it to energy, then shoots it towards the new destination. Once obtained, the receiving chamber converts the energy back into physical matter and—*using the digital copy*—it rebuilds the body. A very complex process. So many things could go wrong." Trevani seemed genuinely pleased by the prospect.

"I know how a teleportation chamber works, Trevani. There's one on the lower levels of this very building. Get to the point or you'll be silenced." Samson held his finger above an orange button that if pressed, would seal off the defense lawyer behind a wall of sound dampers.

Trevani's smile faltered for a moment before he continued in a rush. "In this case, the computer that makes the digital copy was damaged during the laser fire. The digital copy didn't survive, so the man guilty of all these crimes died when the chamber turned his body into pure energy."

"Then who's that?" said Samson, pointing at the prisoner next to Trevani. The one who looked an awful lot like the Vincent D'Angelo in question.

"As an emergency precaution," said Trevani, "teleportation chambers revert back to a previously saved copy if a current one is lost. Similar to the backup on your computer in case the system crashes."

Samson moved his hand away from the mute button. "What are you saying, exactly?"

"The last time my client teleported was two years ago. That was the last time a digital copy was recorded. Since the present copy was lost during the fire, the teleport chamber was forced to use an older copy and rebuild a Vincent D'Angelo that was two years younger. And by a matter of consequence, completely innocent."

The gallery erupted into rasping curses. Taken aback, it was a few moments before Samson could collect himself enough to call the court to order.

When the gallery had quieted again, the prosecutor rose from her seat. "Your honor," she said, trying to remain calm but her flushed cheeks betrayed her. "The defense is grasping at straws. The man is still D'Angelo. Teleporting can't change that."

"Can you prove it?" said Samson.

"Your honor?"

"Can you prove that this man is the same Vincent D'Angelo who murdered two people in cold blood?"

Harcourt gave Samson a sideways glance as if she expected he was only kidding. When his demeanor didn't change, she scrunched her face like she had caught a horrible smell. "Of course I can prove it. For one thing, he's got the same fingerprints as the murderer, hasn't he?"

"Of course he does," said Trevani. "And not just fingerprints. His DNA, dental records, tattoos, those all match, but what about his actions. Can you prove that this is the same man who committed those crimes? He is D'Angelo from two years ago. He has no memory of the crimes because for him, they never happened."



"They *did* happen!" said Harcourt. "The victims' families know all too well that they happened. They live everyday with the consequences of D'Angelo's actions."

"D'Angelo of the present, you mean. D'Angelo of two years ago—the only D'Angelo in this courtroom—is innocent. Because after all, what determines a man's guilt? His actions or his fingerprints?"

The courtroom was silent. Harcourt was biting her lower lip and her eyes bulged. Finally, she said, "Whether he remembers his crimes or not is irrelevant. He must pay for what he's done. For all the pain he's caused."

"Why?" said Trevani. "Is revenge the sole purpose of our great justice system? Do the courts aim to cut down a person so they can never be whole again or to build them up so they can return as fixed, remorseful members of society?"

"Each case is different, Mr. Trevani. It's not our decision what path justice must take."

"But it is our decision whether or not it's *right* to prosecute an innocent man."

"He's not innocent. Teleportation is simply a form of transportation. It's not baptism. It doesn't wash away your sins."

"But in this case, it did. D'Angelo entered the teleportation chamber, a fugitive with blood on his hands. When he emerged on the other side, he had no memory, no long line of poor decisions leading him to commit murder. Any guilt he had was lost in the transfer."

Harcourt was growing more and more flustered with each passing moment. Now, her cheeks were red and glistened with a thin layer of sweat. She opened her mouth to say something, snapped it shut, creased her forehead, and began again. "What about his

soul?" she said. "His spirit must have made the leap from one chamber to the other. It's his soul that carries the guilt."

"So the court must prove that he has a soul, now? Can you prove that there even is such a thing?"

Harcourt slammed her hand on the table. "There has to be *justice*. If there isn't, everything will collapse. If no one believes the higher powers will right the wrongs, then, what's the point?" She was pleading now. Her sense of decorum devolved into utter frustration. Behind her, several women in the gallery broke into tears and shuddering sobs. The men just looked defeated. Blank stares burning with hatred.

Beneath the bench, Samson was wringing his hands. He was watching D'Angelo throughout the exchange. The defendant sat motionless. Letting the waves of emotions wash around him as if they didn't matter. As if he wasn't responsible for the ruined lives. As if he really was an innocent man.

And with a cool logic only judges can earn, Samson had to admit this was indeed the case. With his history of violence removed from his mind, D'Angelo was not a murderer. At least, not yet. Only time would tell if his new self would follow his old self's path of destruction. And since fortune telling was outside the court's jurisdiction, Samson was forced to deliver the news.

"This court dismisses any and all accusations against the defendant."

The courtroom broke into chaos and the bailiffs swarmed in to clear the gallery. There was crying, shouting, cursing. Men threatened the defendant, threatened the defense team, they even threatened Samson. If he'd said something, they could have been thrown in jail for making such threats, but Samson remained silent.

He sat at the bench for a long time and the courtroom was cleared out. He was still, very still. All the while, he thought of his son. He thought of justice.

The prosecution followed the last of the victims' families through the double doors leading out to the hallway beyond. Harcourt was the last one to leave. And before the door slammed shut behind her, she made eye contact with Samson. The expression of betrayal on her face was unmistakable. The pained look in her eyes was burned into Samson's head long after she was gone.

It was a minute before he realized someone else was speaking to him. Samson shook his head, looked to the right and found Trevani beaming at the edge of the bench. He was grinning from ear to ear with a smile that looked just as plastic as his domed hairdo.

"I just want to say, thank you, your honor."

"Huh?" said Samson.

"Thank you for seeing that the law was followed here today."

After a moment of silence, Trevani said, "We'll be leaving now."

A jolt shook Samson's core and he refocused on Trevani and the man who was and was not actually Vincent D'Angelo.

Two young people were dead. Their families had no choice but to trudge through an unfair, desolate future. Meanwhile, the man resembling their killer would go on to thrive in plain sight. A terrible crime had been committed, but thanks to Trevani and his callous distortion of law, not a single person would pay for it.

A memory of an eleven-year-old corpse fluttered in Samson's mind. At the same moment, something fundamental broke deep inside the judge's black robes.

"Just a minute," said Samson. "I was wondering if I could speak with you two privately."

"About what, your honor?"

"Just a curiosity." He stood up and stepped down from the bench. "You brought up an interesting question I was hoping you could help me answer." Samson opened up the side door leading to the hallway and his own personal chambers. "Would you mind just a moment of your time?"

Trevani glanced at D'Angelo whose only response was a vacant stare. The defense lawyer turned back and said, "Sure, if it'll only take a minute."

Samson gathered his robes before him and led Trevani and D'Angelo out of the courtroom, through a narrow hallway, and down three flights of stairs. Samson moved quickly to avoid any questions from the trailing attorney.

They emerged from the stairwell into a crescent shaped room with a black, mirrored wall before them. Samson stepped over to the wall and pressed his hand to a security panel protruding out of the gleaming surface.

"Where are we?" asked Trevani. His voice carried a high note of uncertainty—or maybe it was fear. Samson didn't think so. People like Trevani didn't feel fear. They created it.

"Every courthouse is equipped with a Port Chamber. For emergencies and such. I've only used it once. Seven years ago when my son—" Samson stopped himself.

"Yeah, but why are we here?"

The security panel made a chiming sound and said, "Welcome, Barry Samson. Please say or enter your location." Without answering Trevani's question, Samson typed in an address for a nearby Port Station.

"Your honor," said Trevani. "We really should be getting back—"

"Just a minute. I only have one question." Samson finished typing the address and the mirrored wall split open to reveal a large capsule reaching from floor to ceiling. Inside the capsule were several pulsing bars of light. That light could blind you if you decided to look for too long.

Samson said, "I can't help wondering about your issue with teleportation. Do you think such an issue could happen again?"

"I...I don't know," said Trevani. The fear in his voice was unmistakable now. And there was something else. Something that made Samson smile to himself. "I suppose it might happen again if the scanner got broken somehow."

"Ah, yes, the scanner. That was damaged during the original D'Angelo's fight with police, right?"

Trevani nodded.

"Where is that scanner, Trevani? Show me."

Trevani lifted a hand that shook with a heavy pulse. He pointed to a front panel. The same panel that had been obliterated on the port chamber D'Angelo had passed through. *Surely, he wouldn't*, Trevani must have thought. *Surely, a judge wouldn't do such a thing.*

"Thank you," said Samson. And from beneath his robes, Samson pulled out a small laser pistol and fired directly at the chamber's scanner. Sparks flew and the room was instantly filled with the white smoke of flame suppressors spraying from the ceiling.

"What are you—" Trevani began but fell silent when the pistol was leveled at his head.

"You know," said Samson. "As a judge, I'm forced to follow the law. But the law ain't always justice."

There was a flash of light and Trevani's corpse fell smoldering to the floor. D'Angelo tried to flee, but Samson shot three beams of light through his back.

Footsteps were pounding in the stairwell. Security was quickly approaching, but Samson wasn't worried. He stepped into the teleportation chamber, took a deep breath, and activated the transfer.

THE END