

Hero

The flickering of fluoro lights cast shadows on white walls. Clean. Sterile. Safe. Through heavy eyelids, and fuzzy consciousness, Sam struggled to understand where he was lying. A morgue? A hospital? Alive? Dead? One way to find out – Sam tried to move his hand – it felt tight, heavy, trapped – but it moved slightly. Corpses don't usually move – so he was probably alive. A relief – maybe – if only he could figure out what had happened.

Snatches of sound drifted into the room. A TV in the background somewhere. Reporters, news, drama? Reporter's words drifted through the foggy veil.

... Children ... Western Childcare Centre ... tragedy ... gunman ... massacre hero intervened some dead some saved.

Was I there? Was I part of that? Western Childcare Centre – sounds familiar – is that the one near my home? I walked past a childcare centre often. My neighbour's daughter Annie played there. Is that the one? Sam's mind struggled to piece the memories together – warm memories of Annie and her mum.

... 40 children at the centre and staff All staff safe Only children confirmed dead

Good news maybe – adults are safe. Only children killed. ONLY children?

... numbers still coming in.

Numbers. Sam liked numbers – he was good with statistics – always working out the numbers, figuring out the odds – although he never gambled. Sam liked certainty.

... families gathered ... support ... counsellors ... priests ...

Support. Counselling. Priests. Sam had warm feelings for these things. His wandering mind drifted back to his church. Western Evangelical Church – what a name – what a place - his

family and community. Pastor White. A source of truth and light for the community – that was their hope and dream.

... events still unclear ... waiting for complete picture ... true story ...

Truth – that’s what Pastor White preached – nothing but the truth – it might seem hard, but people needed to hear the truth. About the great things - God and Jesus, salvation, freedom, heaven. Heaven – what a great place – our destiny – at least for us believers. Relief flowed through Sam – heaven – even if he died on this hospital bed, he would go to heaven, to be with the God who loved him.

... still unclear ... many children saved

Saving children. He’d had that discussion with Pastor White. Sam struggled to recall the details. He’d been concerned about what happened to young children who died, who were too young to understand how Jesus could save them. Would they go to hell? Permanent, horrendous suffering with no hope of escape? Dark pictures of hell drifted through Sam’s mind. Dante’s inferno – a picture of the horrors and suffering for the unsaved. How could they not realise it? How could they ignore Jesus? But – Pastor White had assured him – something about accountability – an age of accountability – that all people reach an age where they have the maturity to make a conscious decision about becoming a Christian – following Jesus. And prior to that age, God doesn’t hold them responsible for their sin – so, and this is the good news, if they die they will go to heaven. Sam smiled at this thought – reassuring. Being a numbers person, Sam had pushed Pastor White asking what the actual age for this accountability was. But the pastor had been surprisingly vague, considering how adamant he was on so many other things. Sometime before puberty? Before the turbulent teenage years? At least, Sam thought, the children killed at the preschool centre today will be in heaven now. That’s a relief.

.... tragedy ... mourning ... incredible suffering ...

Suffering – in hell – for eternity – for ever – with no hope of escape. That was hell. That was what Pastor White described. That was the future that ‘we’ evangelical Christians were fighting to save people from. A hell of a future. But an easy escape – just accept Jesus now. That was the message. That is what Sam and his church family were living for. That is what they should die for. “Greater love has no man, than he lay down his life for his friends”. Pastor White often quoted these words of Jesus. And reminded his flock that they should be laying down their lives for their neighbours – for the people around them – to save them from an eternity of suffering in hell.

... numbers still unclear ... waiting to hear...

Numbers. Sam had asked Pastor White about the numbers. How many will end up in hell? What proportion of the world’s population will be there? How big will heaven be in comparison to hell? Again, strangely, Pastor White had been reluctant to speculate. But Sam had pressed him – and eventually Pastor had given his best estimate. Probably something like 10% of people were born again Christians – so that leaves 90% heading for hell. Of course, Pastor reminded Sam, they all have a choice. Free will. It is their decision to reject Jesus. It is their choice to go to hell. And we must do everything we can to save them. Numbers. 90% going to hell – those are the ones that Sam had decided to try to save – even just a few. That would be a good use of his life. Something worthwhile to “lay down his life” for – somehow.

... hero ... saved many

A hero. Someone saved many of the children. Who? Me? Sam struggled to recall. Images flashed through his mind – the childcare centre – blood – children screaming – children pleading – his young friend Annie, bright hopeful young eyes looking up at him. He’d been there. He’d been part of it. Had he helped? Had he helped save any? Sam’s head throbbed, as

he struggled to pull his thoughts together. He wasn't brave. Wasn't a hero. But Sam loved children. Maybe?

... numbers coming through ... 20 children confirmed deadand 20 children confirmed alive

Numbers. 20 dead. 20 alive. 50%. Symmetry. Numbers.

20 young lives cut short. Sam had talked with Pastor White about this too. A young girl Sophie in the church family had died – life cut short tragically by cancer at the age of 4. Pastor's eulogy talked about Sophie being in heaven now, with Jesus. A beautiful picture. Sam had been sad – he had loved Sophie – and missed her. But he looked forward to being with her again in heaven. And he'd done the math. Numbers. If Sophie had lived to be a teenager, or adult – what then? Would she have stayed true to the faith? Or would she have rebelled like so many of the teenagers in the church family – despite the community, and the clear truth preached from the pulpit, they rejected the faith. Numbers. 10% saved. 90% in hell. Numbers. If Sophie had lived longer, where would she end up? 10% chance of getting into heaven? Or 20%, because she was part of a church family? Or 30%, because her parents and Sam prayed for her? But still a gamble – only a small chance of going to heaven. But Sophie was safe, Dying at that young age took her straight into the arms of Jesus. This was the assurance – Pastor White described it well.

... 20 children confirmed dead ...

Are these children like Sophie? Or worse? Probably no church family – most people don't come to church these days – the large sanctuary is usually sadly empty. No-one praying for them – except maybe Sam when he walked past – but that probably wouldn't help much. Numbers? 10% maybe? 10% chance of these children going to heaven – if they'd lived

longer. 2 children – out of the 20 – likely to get to heaven. Sad. Depressing. But – the good news – despite the tragedy of their death, Sam knew that all 20 would be in heaven now.

Numbers. 18 more in heaven than if they had lived full lives.

.... 2 people in hospital ... injured Police waiting to interview them ... gunman ... hero who intervened ...

Hero – was Sam a hero? He'd never thought of himself as brave, or a hero. But he wanted to save people. He wanted to live a good life. He hoped he would be willing to lay down his life for others. Maybe that's what he tried to do. 20 children dead – not great success – but it could have been worse. Sam struggled to recall what had happened.

A noise. The sound of a door opening. Footsteps. The faces of two policeman looking down.

Sam struggled to move – even to raise a hand – but couldn't – restrained?

... we need to talk with you about what happened at the childcare centre your gun ...

Realisation swept over Sam. A hero. He remembered. His gun. His actions. He'd saved Annie. He'd saved 18 children. Laying down his life for them. And he'd be with them in heaven soon.