



**The King**

**-v-**

**Scarlet Blake**

**Sentencing Remarks of Mr Justice Chamberlain**

**Oxford Crown Court**

**Monday 26<sup>th</sup> February 2024**

**Scarlet Blake**, you may sit down while I deliver my sentencing remarks.

- 1 You have been convicted by the jury of the murder of Jorge Martín Carreño. I have to sentence you. The sentence is fixed by law. It is life imprisonment. My task is to determine the minimum term. This is the term you will serve in prison come what may. Even after you have served that term, you will remain in prison unless and until the Parole Board decide that it is safe to release you.
- 2 I base my sentence on facts of which I am sure, having heard the evidence in the trial, and the victim personal statements read today with great dignity by Jorge’s brother Gerardo Martín Carreño and his mother Carmen Carreño.
- 3 On 25 July 2021, Jorge had just turned 30. He was one of three triplets, who grew up together and were best friends. His brothers and parents describe him as someone who radiated kindness and humour and spread joy with his wit and contagious curiosity. He was always ready to help and lend a listening ear to others. His life was full of love for music, photography, climbing and sports. He had studied electrical engineering and dreamed of making a difference in the world. He used his engineering skills in his work here in Oxford, at the BMW plant in Cowley.
- 4 The victim personal statements speak to the profound effect his death has had on his family. They have suffered sleepless nights and days drowned in sorrow. They describe the deep wound that Jorge’s loss has left in their hearts.
- 5 The court also heard evidence during the trial from Jorge’s ex-partner Irene Hidalgo. She described him as the kindest person she had ever met. She spoke to him on 7 July 2021, his birthday, and said that he was positive and looking forward to the future. She remembered the “bright of his eyes”. Her grief at the death of the man she had loved was palpable.
- 6 Jorge was taken from his friends and family because you, Scarlet Blake, killed him. You did so by the River Cherwell at Parsons Pleasure at about 5.15 in the morning of 25 July 2021. It is not possible to say exactly how. Most likely, you hit him on the back of his head from behind with a vodka bottle or something else you had brought with you in your backpack, then strangled him by applying pressure to

the blood vessels just beneath his jawline using your hands or a broad ligature, then put him in the river, where he drowned. You may have held him down in the water while strangling him. Either way, you intended to kill him and you did kill him.

- 7 Your decision to kill Jorge was not a reaction to something he had said or done. It was not a momentary mistake. It was not a decision made in anger or because your emotions overcame you. It was the culmination of a plan you had been considering and formulating for months.
- 8 The messages you sent before and after 25 July 2021 show an obsession with harm and death. You shared that interest with Ashlynn Bell, another trans woman whom you had met on the internet. You and she developed an online relationship.
- 9 You told the court that you didn't want to kill a living creature, let alone a person, and it was Ashlynn who pressurised you to do so. You attributed your morbid interests to a split or dissociative personality, using the language of psychiatry or psychoanalysis. You adopted the persona of a cat. You talked about the difficulties you had had since transitioning in childhood to live as a woman and about your troubled relationship with your parents.
- 10 All this was part of an elaborate attempt to rationalise what you had done and shift responsibility to others. There is no evidence that you suffer from any relevant mental illness or other mental disorder. What you did is not the fault of a society that didn't accept you. It is not the fault of your parents. Whatever role Ashlynn Bell may have played in encouraging your interest in killing, she remained in the United States. She did not control or direct you. Even if the decision was motivated in part by a desire to please her, the decision to kill was entirely yours.
- 11 In March 2021, as a present for Ashlynn, you decided to carry out, film and livestream a grotesque act of cruelty towards a cat belonging to the Siebold family, who were neighbours. You planned to lure and trap this cat. You purchased a cat carrier and cat food and used them for that purpose. You set up lights and a camera on a tripod to record what you were doing. You suspended the cat by its neck, using a ligature made from ribbon. But, although you strangled it, you made sure that it remained alive for at least three minutes, during which it endured intense pain while you cut open and eviscerated it, before stabbing, dissecting and removing its heart, which you kept as a memento. As the audio makes clear, the thing you enjoyed most was seeing the animal gasping and panicking before it died. After you had killed the cat, you put a scalpel into its eyes, skinned it and decapitated it. You disposed of the body by putting it into a blender.
- 12 In your evidence, you told the jury that you did all this to please Ashlynn Bell and derived no pleasure from it yourself. Apparently seriously, you invited the jury to believe that you disapprove of people who are cruel to animals. The audio we all heard and the stills and video clips we saw of you smiling and laughing while posing with the animal's severed head leave no doubt whatsoever that you personally enjoyed what you were doing, as well as the pleasure that Ashlynn Bell derived from it.
- 13 Once you had dissected the cat, you said, "Well, one day I want to learn how to do this to a person". The video was carefully put together and featured the track *True Faith* by New Order, played on a loop. The same track features in the Netflix documentary *Don't Fuck With Cats*, about a man who kills cats and then goes on to kill people. You said in evidence that the choice of track had nothing to do with the documentary. I am sure that this was untrue and that the documentary played a part in cementing in your own mind the link between killing a cat and killing a person.
- 14 At about 2.30 on the morning of 25 July 2021, you took a picture of yourself wearing a combat jacket. You accepted in evidence that the aim was to look dark and menacing, a look that Ashlynn Bell would appreciate. You sent the photograph to her. I am sure that, when you left your home some time after 3 o'clock that morning, wearing the combat jacket with the hood up, a mask and a backpack with a bottle

of vodka in it, you were intending to look for a victim to kill. You later sent Ashlynn Bell the combat jacket you had worn on the night you murdered Jorge, having told her of its significance. When it was recovered, it had Ashlynn Bell's semen all over it.

- 15 You went into central Oxford, where you knew you would find people who were vulnerable after drinking. You walked around the centre of town looking for someone suitable. You found Jorge sitting on the ground near the Radcliffe Camera. He was lost. You could have helped him find his way home. Instead, you persuaded him to come with you in a direction that was not on his way home. You took him to Parsons Pleasure, where you had been many times before. You did so because you knew that it was a secluded spot and, at that time in the morning, before sunrise, it would be a good place to kill him, unseen and undisturbed.
- 16 Not only did you show no remorse for what you had done, you returned to the scene in the days after Jorge's body had been found, to take photographs of the memorial left by his grieving family and the tree next to which you had killed him. You did so in order to burnish your credentials as a killer with Ashlynn Bell. You returned to the same spot more than a year later with another partner to whom you had also boasted about killing Jorge. She took a photograph of you next to the same tree. This photograph was another memento of the murder you had committed. It reflected the pleasure you derived from your status as a murderer.
- 17 The taking of these photographs and the use to which you put them showed a profound contempt for the suffering you had inflicted on Jorge's family. You were completely indifferent to this suffering. There was another indication of that contempt, though it does not affect my decision about the minimum term. This was the suggestion, pursued on your behalf and no doubt on your instructions, that Jorge might have committed suicide. The suggestion was bound to be profoundly distressing to Jorge's family and friends. If there had been any truth to it, they might well ask themselves whether there was anything they could have done to save him. There was no truth to it whatsoever. All the evidence showed Jorge to be happy and looking forward to the future. There was no way his family or friends could have known what you had planned for him and nothing they could have done to save him from you.
- 18 I have to apply the provisions of Schedule 21 to the Sentencing Act 2020. I have considered carefully whether the seriousness of the offence is "particularly high" for the purposes of paragraph 3(1). By paragraph 3(2)(e), cases which will normally fall into this category include murders involving sexual or sadistic conduct. That phrase has been considered by the Court of Appeal in *R v Maynard-Ellis* [2021] EWCA Crim 317, [2021] 2 Cr App R (S) 38. In that case, at [38], the court emphasised the need to focus on the conduct, meaning "all the activities that occur". It is these that have to be sexual or sadistic to engage paragraph 3(2)(e). A sexual or sadistic motivation is not enough, though such a motivation has a part, and maybe an important part, to play in the overall evaluation of the seriousness of the offence.
- 19 This is consistent with *R v Walker* [2007] EWCA Crim 2631, [2008] 2 Crim App R (S) 6, where, at [26], it was said that the focus should be on the acts that resulted in the death of the victim or accompanied it. It is also consistent with the decision in *R v Raheel Khan* [2021] EWCA Crim 428, at [14], approving an earlier statement that, sadly, it is often the case that those who attack others derive pleasure from so doing; and this is not enough to engage paragraph 3(2)(e) of Schedule 21.
- 20 The authorities therefore require me to focus on the conduct involved in this case, as distinct from the motivation for it. With that in mind, I bear in mind that there was no evidence of any sexual assault on Jorge, either while he was alive or on his body after death; nor is there any evidence of any sexual activity occurring at the scene or immediately after the killing. Although there is ample evidence that you derived sexual gratification from strangulation, and I am sure that you did strangle Jorge, that is not enough to bring what you did within the category of sexual conduct as that phrase has been interpreted by the Court of Appeal. It is difficult to reach a firm conclusion about how long it took you to kill Jorge,

but it seems likely that you did so relatively quickly. At all events, there is no evidence of the kind of sadistic conduct required to engage paragraph 3(2)(e).

- 21 I have borne carefully in mind that the categories mentioned in paragraph 3(2) are examples of cases in which the seriousness of the offence will be particularly high. As the Court of Appeal noted in *Height and Anderson* [2008] 1 EWCA Crim 2500, [2009] 1 Cr App R (S) 117, at [28], the list of examples is not exhaustive. Nonetheless the cases in which paragraph 3(1) is engaged outside the categories listed in paragraph 3(2) are likely to be rare. I have concluded that this is not one of them. Although it has many unusual aggravating features, these are not such as to make it equivalent to the categories mentioned in paragraph 3(2).
- 22 I have considered next whether paragraph 4(1) applies. It would apply if you took a weapon to the scene intending to commit an offence or have it available to use as a weapon and then used it in committing the murder. It is likely that you did take a weapon in your backpack. This may have been the garotte about which you bragged to Ashlynn Bell. It may have been a ligature, such as the cord from your leopard print bathrobe. Or it may have been something you could use to cause a blunt force injury. But I cannot be sure that you took any of these with you. The only thing I can be sure you brought with you was the vodka bottle. If, as appears likely, you used that to hit Jorge on the back of his head, I cannot be sure that you brought it intending to use it as a weapon. I cannot exclude the possibility that, whatever you had planned, you killed Jorge using only your hands and/or things you found at the scene.
- 23 This means that the case is one to which paragraph 5 applies. The starting point set by Parliament is therefore 15 years. It is, however, very much more serious than most cases in that category. There are five particular features which make it so. There is an interrelation between them, but they are in principle distinct and each is important when assessing the seriousness of what you did.
- 24 First, there was a very significant degree of premeditation. I am satisfied that the idea of killing a person had already occurred to you before you killed the cat in March 2021. That is why you said that you wanted to learn how to do this to a person. No doubt with the encouragement of Ashlynn Bell, the fantasy of killing a person became a plan. That plan became settled and concrete over a period of four months between March and July 2021. When you left home in the early morning of 25 July 2021, I am sure that you had intended to kill someone for some time.
- 25 Second, the murder also involved substantial planning. The date and time were not coincidental. It was the first weekend after nightclubs were permitted to open following the lifting of the Covid restrictions. You knew that, between 3.00 and 4.30 am on a Sunday morning, you stood a good chance of finding someone vulnerable. That is why you picked that time to walk into central Oxford. You took considerable care over what you would wear, taking a photograph of yourself in the jacket which then became a macabre symbol of what you had done. And you had identified Parsons Pleasure in advance as a location where you could kill without being seen or disturbed.
- 26 Third, although you knew nothing of your victim, your process for selecting him was quite deliberate. You can be seen on CCTV sizing up potential victims. When you happened upon Jorge, you selected him precisely because you thought he looked vulnerable, sitting as he was on the ground at 4 o'clock in the morning, smaller and slighter than you and likely to have had something to drink. You must have discovered after you engaged him in conversation that he had lost his wallet and couldn't find his way home. You selected and confirmed him as a possible victim because of his vulnerability.
- 27 Fourth, you decided to kill someone because you believed Ashlynn Bell would find it sexually exciting, as in fact she did. As you later said to another partner, you killed "because my lover said it'd be hot". There was, therefore, a clear sexual motivation for the killing. You also believed that you would derive pleasure, whether sexual or not, from the experience of killing a person. I am sure you did derive pleasure from killing Jorge, as you had from killing the cat.

- 28 Fifth, you revelled in what you had done, returning at least twice to the scene to take photographs, and made conscious use of your status as a murderer to secure the admiration of others who shared your interests in harm, death and killing.
- 29 There is very little that can be said in mitigation, though I have borne in mind the fact that you were 23 years old at the time of the offence.
- 30 For the offence of causing unnecessary cruelty to a protected animal, Parliament recognised in the Animal Welfare Act 2021 that the maximum sentence then available for this offence was inadequate and increased the maximum to 5 years' imprisonment. This case demonstrates why the increase was necessary. If you had committed this offence after that Act came into force, I would have imposed a substantial custodial sentence. Because you committed it in March 2021, the maximum sentence available to me for the animal cruelty offence is 6 months' imprisonment. Because you pleaded guilty to that offence, you are entitled to a discount of one quarter.
- 31 Criminal damage is an offence against property, so the sentences available for that offence depend on the monetary value of the property. It may justifiably be thought that this is an inadequate way to mark what you did to an animal which, Mr Siebold's statement makes clear, was a beloved family pet. The maximum sentence available in the present circumstances is three months' imprisonment. You are again entitled to a discount of one quarter.
- 32 I have reflected the criminality involved in the animal cruelty and criminal damage offences in the minimum term for murder, bearing in mind that the short determinate sentences that could have been imposed would not have been served in full. For the reasons I have given, they make hardly any difference to the minimum term, though the detail of what you did to the cat has enabled me to gain a clearer impression of the reasons why you committed murder.

**Scarlet Blake**, stand up. For the murder of Jorge Martín Carreño, I sentence you to imprisonment for life. The minimum term will be 24 years, less the 196 days spent in custody awaiting trial. The minimum term will therefore be 23 years and 169 days. There will be concurrent terms of 4 months for causing unnecessary suffering to a protected animal and 2 months for criminal damage. The statutory surcharge applies.