

BEST SELLING NOVEL

CRISIS
OF
CONSCIENCE

YOUR NAME

BEST-SELLING NOVEL

Thank you for your interest in
Plot Prompts! I hope this
framework for a novel or short
story sparks your imagination
and jumpstarts your best writing
yet.

Millicent Anglin
Gap Year Press Founder

YOUR NAME

Proposed Title

Crisis of Conscience

Genre

Mystery

Themes

Justice - What do you do when the criminal justice system fails? Is it better to ignore injustice or to take matters into your own hands? Explore these questions through the protagonist's eyes as she witnesses the failure of the court system she pledged to defend and uphold.

Heroism - There are heroes among us who take on evil without superpowers or recognition, but what drives them? What motivates them to risk their lives and take on a problem that most people would run from? Are everyday heroes crazy or brave? Are heroes chosen or made, and what does my answer say about my potential for heroism?

Description

In the pursuit of justice, a criminal defense attorney launches a campaign against her own client.

Synopsis

Ellen Sullivan, a high-profile criminal defense attorney, is representing a man accused of leading a human trafficking operation stretching from Los Angeles to Eastern Europe. The accused, Sam Smith, maintains his innocence even as Ellen's research uncovers his guilt. In the course of her investigation, Ellen also learns that her client murdered his former business partner, and that an innocent man was convicted and sentenced to death for the crime. Struggling to defend a broken system, Ellen is forced to question the true meaning of justice.

Setting

Los Angeles, in the year 2000 when California was actively executing death row inmates.

Main Characters

Ellen Sullivan – A beautiful criminal defense attorney in her mid-thirties, Ellen has an enviable win-loss record and will soon be made the youngest partner in her law firm’s history. Though she typically represents LA’s moneyed elite, she often volunteers with Legal Aid. Most of her peers respect her as a fierce competitor, but few know the obstacles she had to overcome as a child when both her parents were incarcerated.

Susan Sullivan – A musician with a small following in Los Angeles, Susan is ambitious and has a strong work ethic—just like her big sister Ellen. However, unlike Ellen, Susan is in a serious relationship and is looking forward to starting a family one day. She worries about Ellen’s obsession with her job and is irritated by how often Ellen cancels their weekly dinner plans.

Sam Smith – Charismatic, wealthy, and confident, he’s a means-justifies-ends kind of guy. He treats everyone like a tool for the sole purpose of making as much money as possible. Despite his bravado, he confides to Ellen his fear of returning to prison. He was raped during a prior stint in prison and would go to any lengths to avoid another conviction.

Matt Evans – Smart, brash, good-looking, and ambitious, Matt comes from money and is used to getting what he wants. Assigned to Ellen’s team as a junior attorney, he initially comes across as a jerk, but slowly shows Ellen glimpses of his softer side. Though Ellen is his boss and is ten years his senior, he’s intent on getting to know her better—particularly outside work.

Plot Outline

ACT 1 (Exposition):

I. Setup

- Ellen fell in love with the law as a child. Though the law had been used to falsely convict her parents on robbery charges, she saw how her parents' attorney used it to exonerate them. Ellen decided as a teen to do for other families what had been done for hers, and chose to pursue a career in criminal law.
- Ellen has no social life to speak of, but doesn't regret her workaholic ways. Her career is her top priority, and she expects to be made partner after winning her next case.
- Looking to diversify their client base, Ellen's firm takes Sam Smith on as a client. Ellen is assigned to defend him against human trafficking charges.
- Matt, a new associate, starts at Ellen's firm and is assigned to the Sam Smith case. It soon becomes clear that Matt has more than work on his mind, and Ellen is surprised by his ability to wear down her defenses.

II. Inciting Incident - In the course of investigating the human trafficking charges, Ellen learns that an innocent person is on death row for a murder her client committed.

III. Plot Point #1 - Ellen considers anonymously tipping off law enforcement that the wrong person is in custody for murder, but somehow Sam Smith finds out and warns Ellen against violating attorney-client privilege. Ellen's sister is threatened as a warning sign to Ellen to do her job.

ACT 2 (Rising Action):

IV. Subplots that facilitate character development:

- Ellen worries there are leaks in her law firm, and isn't sure who to trust.
- Though dealing with guilt over the innocent man on death row, particularly as his case gains media attention, Ellen keeps Sam's secrets and zealously defends him against human trafficking charges.
- Ellen suspects that, if acquitted, Sam will murder more people to silence them. Using the attorney-client privilege exception, Ellen lets law enforcement know about her suspicions, but no action is taken due to insufficient evidence.
- Ellen and Matt grow close as she confides her angst to him.

- V. Plot Point #2 (Confrontation)** – Sam Smith is acquitted of trafficking charges and an innocent man is executed for the murder Sam committed. Despondent despite her success, Ellen takes a leave of absence from her job.

ACT 3: (Falling Action):

- VI. Climax** – Ellen sets off with Matt to warn those in Sam Smith's crosshairs, putting both of them in the line of fire.
- VII. Resolution** – Sam kills Ellen as she's shielding others from his gunfire. Sam is arrested and Matt joins the prosecutor's office.

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