

EGWUATU MEANS WITHOUT FEAR. RESPECT MUST NEVER EQUATE FEAR. IT IS THE GLORY OF KINGS TO SEARCH OUT A MATTER PR 25 V 2

NKIRUKA | CYNTHIA'S BOOK OF RECIPES | CYNTHIA NKIRUKA TOOLEY MBE

2026

NKIRUKA



A RECIPE BOOK
INVOLVING A CAT
AND
A "GOLD-DIGGER"

Cynthia Nkiruka Tooley MBE

NKIRUKA MEANS BETTER THINGS/DAYS ARE COMING

CYNTHIA'S BOOK OF RECIPES


TRUTH
NEEDS
A VOICE
JUSTICE
ACCOUNTABILITY
REFORM
FOR A FAIRER TOMORROW

CYNTHIA'S BOOK OF RECIPES

A practical guide to cooking with facts when someone else has already prepared the narrative

CYNTHIA NKIRUKA TOOLEY MBE

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Photos taken at my own home. This is relevant.











A NOTE AT THE OUTSET

This book examines institutional conduct, evidence and accountability. Its purpose is not to pursue or harass individuals, but to question whether the systems entrusted with administering justice, protecting vulnerable people and safeguarding the public are capable of identifying and correcting failures within their own processes.

In particular, it examines whether non-molestation orders, designed to protect vulnerable people, can be applied beyond their intended purpose in ways that restrict the examination, preservation or disclosure of potentially important evidence.

CONTENTS

1	Preface and Welcome	9
2	Cynthia's Book of Recipes	12
3	A Lie Left Standing Becomes Someone's History	13
4	Recipe One: Roast Journalist à la Receipts	19
5	The Bird Was Watching	21
6	Good Lords	37
7	Sean Was Actually There	46
8	Oh, What a Tangled Web We Reveal	53
9	And Then There Was the SAR	63
10	When the Record Itself Becomes the Problem	67
11	When a Civil Dispute Becomes a Newspaper Narrative	72
12	Open Justice Requires More Than an Order	75
13	When Safeguarding Became Something to Safeguard Against	78
14	When Oversight Travels Sideways	85
15	And Then There Was the SRA	95
16	A Newspaper That Asked Me First	104
17	Britain Has a Whistleblower Problem	106
18	How to Cook as a Whistleblower	114
19	They Are Not the Enemy	119
20	And What About the Owners?	125
21	And Then Comes the Bill	127
22	Truth Cannot Mean "You Couldn't Afford to Challenge Us"	136
23	This Is My Report	139
24	One Woman. Eleven Months. One Million Pounds.	142
25	Closing Arguments	144
26	The Recipe for Justice	147
27	The Last Recipe	152
	Dedication	153
A	Appendix: Summary Judgment Evidence	160

01
PREFACE AND WELCOME

On **19 September 2026**, I was honoured to speak at a Conference during a debate on reform of the Family Courts.

That was the first public airing of a small subsection of the puzzling circumstances I had encountered, and my first confirmation that the rest of the world, not privy to these hitherto secret goings-on *(more on that later)*, did not share the belief that I was vexatious, or a problem.

The simple questions I asked, outlined below, were deemed too fantastic to be real. MPs, Peers and ordinary citizens sought me out afterwards to ask me whether such a thing could actually happen.

I have received invitations to Parliament and to committees.

I will answer that question after I reproduce my speech.

Here is what I said ...

"*Conference, I support this motion and agree with a lot of the examples I've heard.*

As a result of my own experience, my charity has applied for and obtained funding to provide some legal support for people who have to walk through

the process alone because they're considered too rich for legal aid and actually cannot afford a solicitor.

If you're a homemaker married to someone who earns a lot, upon deciding to separate, that person can cut off your funding and you have no money. But because your name is on a property, you cannot afford legal aid.

However, there is a much more critical gap that I am aware of.

We must review the use of certain orders in the Family Court.

So I'm going to ask a few questions.

Is it lawful for a County Family Court to do any of the following?

Order someone to destroy evidence that online child abuse detectives are interested in?

Make it an instantly arrestable offence, carrying a penalty of five years in jail, should that person provide the evidence to anyone, including the police?

Ban a person's free speech and prevent them ever being able to respond to (likely) false smear articles in some national papers that have gathered hundreds, if not thousands, of abusive comments?

Make orders preventing other national papers from ever reporting on what the matter is really about to protect a political figure?

Make orders that are used to silence and threaten solicitors who, after seeing the evidence, were willing to act on a no-win, no-fee basis and even engage arguably the leading silk in this country?

Interfere with High Court defamation proceedings by making it an arrestable offence for the person to provide evidence in their own case, whilst

knowing that without a properly argued case they face bankruptcy, all because they have made a report?

Or inflict costs order after costs order when the person protests, driving that person to the brink?

Do any of these things using non-molestation orders, which are, perversely and sadly, actually designed to protect vulnerable people?

Now, if the answer to any of what you've heard is no, then we must consider amending some of these policies, or adding policies that can prevent such abuses of office by people that are actually funded by the taxpayer.

Because presently, anyone bound by such orders has to comply with them until those orders are set aside.

However, setting aside depends on approval by the same court.

I support this motion. Thank you."



To answer the question I was asked about whether such a sequence could happen:.

It goes beyond "possible".

02

CYNTHIA'S BOOK OF RECIPES

A practical guide to cooking with facts when someone else has already prepared the narrative

FOREWORD

A judge once very graciously indicated that, while there were matters concerning my own life about which I was not permitted to speak, I might, should the mood take me, publish a recipe.

Well.

Thank you, Your Honour.

I have given the matter some thought.

I do have recipes.

Not, on this occasion, for cake. After almost two years of newspapers, lawyers, courtrooms, whistleblowing, free-speech enthusiasts, injunctions, allegations, counter-allegations, missing cats and one apparently extremely confusing air pistol, I have accidentally developed an entirely new culinary repertoire. So, in the spirit of strict compliance, welcome to my recipe book.

03

A LIE LEFT STANDING BECOMES SOMEONE'S HISTORY

"Until the lion learns to write, the story of the hunt will always glorify the hunter."

AFRICAN PROVERB

I have recently learned something about history which changed the way I think about the weaponisation of information to control the public for votes.

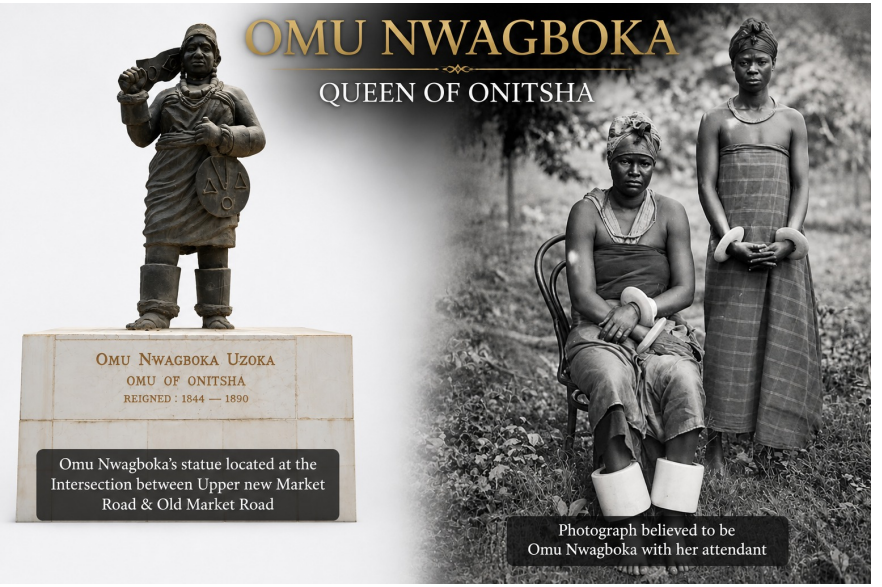
During the course of the relentless attacks I faced from members of a particular political party, I happened across a woman who was my own grandmother. Well, my great-great-great-great-grandmother. Her name was Omu Nwagboka.

This made me realise that this use of information had been deployed for a long time to control the British public.

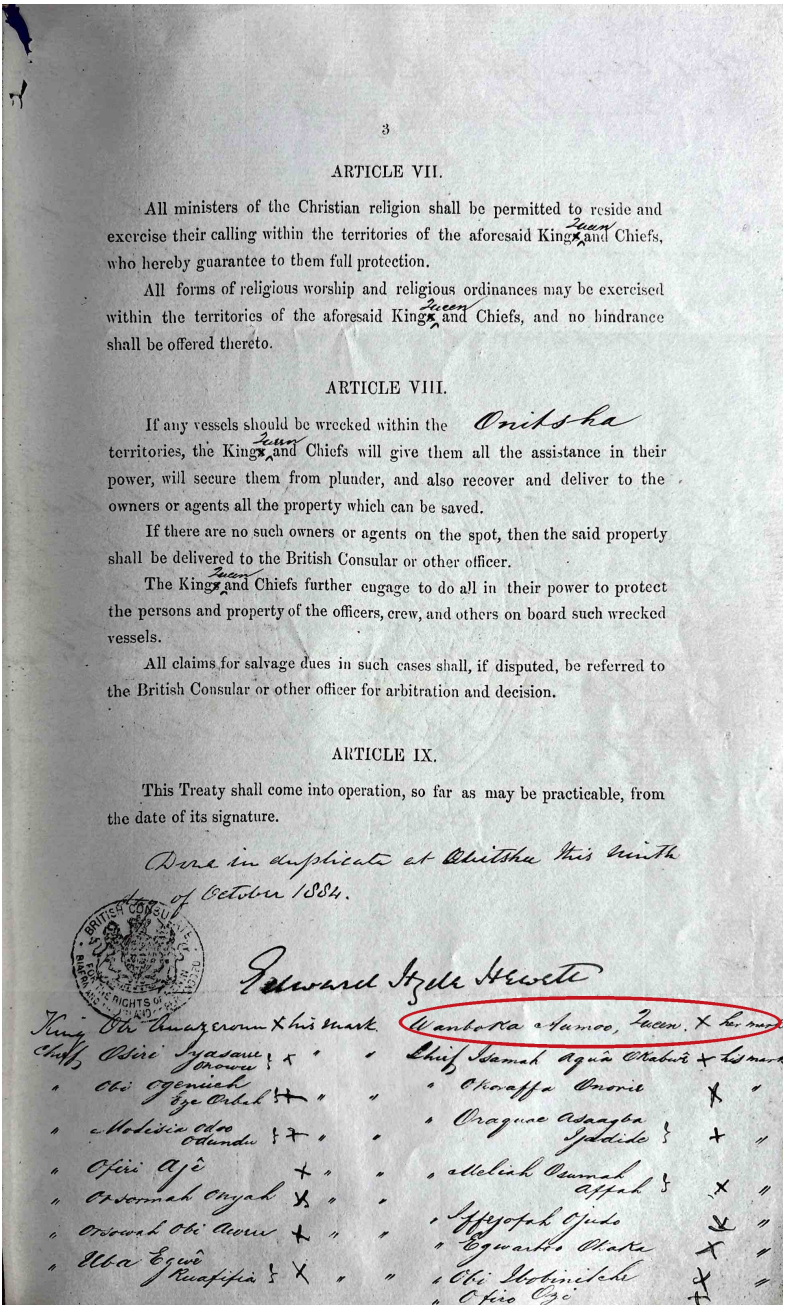
Omu Nwagboka was a queen. She was not queen because she happened to marry a king. She was a woman who co-signed one of the 300+ treaties between the Queen's consul and the natives of the River Niger area.

These treaties were ultimately the documents used to colonise the place that became Nigeria.

As I read about Nwagboka's influence, I found her statue and wanted to know more.



I went to the National Archives at Kew and saw the treaty myself. The treaty spoke of peace and British protection, but the more I read, the less sense it made.



3

ARTICLE VII.

All ministers of the Christian religion shall be permitted to reside and exercise their calling within the territories of the aforesaid King~~s~~ Queen and Chiefs, who hereby guarantee to them full protection.

All forms of religious worship and religious ordinances may be exercised within the territories of the aforesaid King~~s~~ Queen and Chiefs, and no hindrance shall be offered thereto.

ARTICLE VIII.

If any vessels should be wrecked within the Onitsha territories, the King~~s~~ Queen and Chiefs will give them all the assistance in their power, will secure them from plunder, and also recover and deliver to the owners or agents all the property which can be saved.

If there are no such owners or agents on the spot, then the said property shall be delivered to the British Consular or other officer.

The King~~s~~ Queen and Chiefs further engage to do all in their power to protect the persons and property of the officers, crew, and others on board such wrecked vessels.

All claims for salvage dues in such cases shall, if disputed, be referred to the British Consular or other officer for arbitration and decision.

ARTICLE IX.

This Treaty shall come into operation, so far as may be practicable, from the date of its signature.

Done in duplicate at Onitsha this ninth day of October 1884.

Edward Hyde Hewett

King Obi Anazcrown × his mark — Wanboka Aumoo, Queen × his mark

Chiefs Osiri Iyasanu Onoumu × " — Chief Isamah Aguâ Okabuê × his mark

" Obi Ogeniah Eze Ozlah × " — " Okwaffa Onorie × "

" Modesia Odoo Odundu × " — " Oraguae Asaagba Ipdidi × "

" Ofeii Aje × " — " Melelah Asumah Affah × "

" Orsormah Onyah × " — " Affeyofah Ojido × "

" Orsowah Obi Awuu × " — " Egwaffo Okaka × "

" Ilba Egwe Kwafifia × " — " Obi Mobimichi × "

" Ofeio Eze × "

The Onitsha treaty, done at Onitsha on 9 October 1884, with "Queen" inserted by hand throughout. Omu Nwagboka's mark, recorded as "Wanboka Aumoo, Queen", is circled. Photographed by the author at The National Archives, Kew.

Omu Nwagboka was not an insignificant woman. Historical accounts describe her as independently wealthy, influential and commercially astute. She traded in ivory and palm oil, and the statues of her show her wearing thick ivory anklets and cuffs. One account valued one of her consignments at £10,000, an extraordinary sum for the period.

So I wondered how the words of the treaty I was reading could differ so much from the other accounts. How could this treaty say she consented to, and sought protection from, people she didn't know, when she clearly knew the value of her land and assets?

And then, in the course of researching the dates around that period, I came across an extraordinary thing: three words. "Bombardment of Onitsha."[1]

This was in Hansard, 12 February 1880. It was a question asked by an MP, a Liberal MP, Henry Richard, who I later found out was known as the Apostle of Peace. He was questioning whether it was right for the Queen's Navy to be used to bomb and shell African natives whenever they were charged with being troublesome. The Conservative MP answering gave a justification for the use of the Queen's Navy.

As I looked further, I found that the true accounts of what happened varied from what the British public were told by the Conservative MP.

I should say that I grew up in Nigeria until 2004, when I came over to this country and subsequently became naturalised. It is well known, and well believed, that all white people supported what happened in Nigeria. It is also well believed that our ancestors sold their land for mirrors and beads. And I can now see from the Hansard records that

1. Hansard, House of Commons, 12 February 1880, "Africa (West Coast): Bombardment of Onitsha".

the British public were told that any attacks on the African natives were because the British were at risk from them.

But the original records revealed a far more troubling picture than the explanation given in Parliament had led me to expect. I found the account of the Queen's naval officer, Burr, who detailed at great length what took place.[2] His contemporaneous account showed that he destroyed Onitsha, a town of some 10,000 inhabitants, and left no wall standing, having deployed rockets and a Gatling gun and destroyed crops, buildings and other property over a period of seven days. All this, in an area where the most sophisticated weapons the people had were Dane guns, which would not even reach anywhere near where the ship was moored.

I subsequently made a detailed YouTube video on this.

I also realised that several Liberal MPs vehemently opposed the mistreatment of African natives. Most Nigerians did not, and do not, know this.

This also means that the treaty they said Omu Nwagboka signed, inviting the Queen's protection and recognising the longstanding friendship of peace, was also implausible. Not least because it was in a language she did not speak, talking about an invitation to people that had razed the town and burnt the palace in a place she was queen of, merely five years earlier.

Reconstructed records and one-sided records that gag the other side are dangerous.

It made me realise that misinformation isn't just about damaging the immediate target. It is also about obscuring the facts so that those

2. The National Archives, FO 881/4092, p. 10, Lieutenant-Commander Burr's report.

whom the oppressors are really scared of (that is, the British public) never question them. And it is about spreading hate, so that while people are fighting those they have been misinformed enough to fight, the true oppressors can go about their business of wealth acquisition because they have acquired the trust and votes of the public through fear and misinformation. Essentially, they have deflected the attention from their own actions to a conveniently placed alternative villain that they convince the public is the danger. Then they also simultaneously present themselves as the solution to this danger. This is the equivalent of patting the British public on the head, saying, "There, there now, I, your saviour, will deal with the bad bogeyman. Just don't look too closely at my own actions." In psychology, that is called authoritarian manipulation. That is why such people react with great anger when questioned. We can all think of one or two such in modern times. The way to neutralise their hold is facts, plain facts. Show facts or demand to see the evidence.

What you are about to read is my own direct experience of this. There are lots of things I am not yet legally allowed to talk about. But do please read on, because information truly is power. And we must trust the British public enough to give them facts, not narratives.

A lie left standing leaves longstanding damage.

04

RECIPE ONE: ROAST JOURNALIST À LA RECEIPTS

How to respond when somebody writes an extraordinary story about you but forgets to check whether it is true

INGREDIENTS

A journalist. One confidently written article. Several anonymous sources. One woman they have badly underestimated. Contemporaneous emails, to taste. Police records. A cat, optional but apparently irresistible. Receipts. **Lots of receipts.**

METHOD

Do not panic.

Do not immediately respond to every provocation.

Preserve everything.

Ask the journalist what they **know** and what they can **prove**.

When they helpfully put their evidential standard in writing, preserve that too.

Wait.

Compare what was published with what the primary documents actually say.

Serve cold.

Chef's note/African proverb: *When a bird is quiet, it is not because it does not know what to say. It is because it is watching very carefully.*

Fiat justitia ruat caelum

(Let justice be done, though the heavens fall)

Serving suggestion: *With receipts.*

05
THE BIRD WAS WATCHING

The Guy Adams Article in the Daily Mail: A Deep Dive Into a Deep Dive

You see, in Africa, we have that saying about quiet birds. For almost two years, I have been watching. And learning. And, goodness me, have I been learning. I originally thought I would deal with all of this in the conventional way. Go to court. Present evidence. Correct falsehoods. Move on with my life. **How sweet.**

Instead, I received what I shall call an extraordinary amount of *engagement*. And when I say *engagement*, please understand that I have now lived in Britain long enough to appreciate the extraordinary flexibility of the English language. When British traders wanted access to my ancestors' land, they apparently used the word **"intercourse"** in their documents. The intercourse, as it turned out, involved a Gatling gun and rocket tubes. (See Chapter 3.) So yes. I too have experienced considerable *engagement*.

After two years, many courtrooms, many judges, some exceptional legal and political minds, and a fairly comprehensive education in the workings of British institutions, I have decided that perhaps it is time to

speak. Because, you see, there is another African principle worth understanding:

Do not mistake quietness for stupidity.

And I think that may have been the first mistake. Perhaps somebody looked at me and saw a younger Nigerian woman. Cakes. Television. Big hair. High heels. Perhaps the conclusion was: *Airhead.*

Oh dear.

You see, I wanted to be a lawyer. I was raised by a barrister grandfather, born of a barrister mother and the niece of a barrister uncle. By eight, I was reading the old law books in my grandfather's chambers because I had already developed the inconvenient habit of reading everything extraordinarily quickly.

Looking back, I sometimes wonder whether our lives contain rather more foreshadowing than we realise. Before I was seven, the first two school plays in which I was cast in leading roles were about equality in the animal kingdom and *The Incorruptible Judge*. Equality and incorruptible justice. Go figure.

I have increasingly come to believe that our lives may be prepared for purposes we cannot yet understand. Over the past two years, remembering those childhood performances has made me smile. Apparently, I had been rehearsing for this particular production for rather longer than I realised.

I entered university at fifteen. At sixteen, I was selected as one of the final ten contestants in **Miss Lux Nigeria**, a national beauty competition. So apparently I had beauty **and** brains.

Shock. Horror.

I realise this presents a terrible problem for the established trope. Because surely if a woman is good-looking and intelligent, she must be de-

ficient somewhere else? God forbid she should be good-looking, intelligent **and** have morals.

I mean, really. **How greedy can one woman get?**

My formal education began with microbiology before taking me into business studies. Then, at twenty-one, I packed my possessions into two suitcases and came to Britain. I arrived at the University of Buckingham. *You may have heard of it.* I chose Buckingham because it would allow a twenty-one-year-old without the conventional work experience to undertake an MBA. I achieved the only distinction in my MBA class.

I subsequently won Hertford Entrepreneur of the Year. Then I won it again. Back to back. I won Wedding Cake Maker of the Year in the South East.

Built a business. Employed British people. Judged television programmes in the UK and Canada. Appeared on the BBC.

Received the British Empire Medal. Mentored young teenagers in three schools at the invitation of the headteachers. Set up an award-winning charity serving 5,300 families in the South East and Liverpool. Won Lloyds Bank National awards. Then received an MBE. Then set up two more branches of my charity serving 36,000 visits a year.

Unfortunately, while doing all this, I appear to have missed several important lessons at **Gold-Digger School**.

My apologies. I was busy.

Could somebody remind me how the course works? Am I supposed to be acquiring other people's property? Or am I supposed to be selling my own? Because in 2022 I seem to remember selling **my own property for £820,000** (marketed at £825,000).

Ah.

Clearly I should have paid more attention in class.


GOLD DIGGER SCHOOL
FINAL EXAMINATION REPORT CARD
Acquire · Marry · Maintain · Benefit
Student Name: Cynthia
Course: Gold Digger Studies
Year: 2022/2023
SUBJECT | GRADE
How to Acquire Other People's Assets | F
Strategic Marriage Planning | F
Lifestyle Without Labour | F
Maintaining Appearances | F
Basic Discretion | F
Overall Grade: F
TUTOR'S COMMENTS:
Cynthia, you have misunderstood the assignment.
You SOLD your own £825,000 property.
Must try harder to acquire other people's assets.
Better luck next time!

A toxic divorce, police ludicrously called over an air pistol — and a missing cat. GUY ADAMS unravels...

The Kafkaesque tale of how the boss of Britain's only anti-woke university, who's famous for attacking cancel culture, has been summarily CANCELLED



Guy Adams INVESTIGATES



Daily Mail, Saturday 19 October 2024, pages 38 and 39, by Guy Adams. Article text blurred; headline shown for the purposes of criticism and review.

WHICH BRINGS ME TO MR GUY ADAMS

Hello, Guy. Again.

Mr Adams described me as an **"interesting character."** He told readers about the £10-a-week period, my cake company and television career. He also described me as "co-founding" Jedidiah.

Interesting character? Absolutely.

But **co-founded**?

With whom?

I have searched. There appears to be only one possible candidate.

God.

Perhaps Mr Adams is simply an extraordinarily devout Christian and wished to ensure that the Almighty received proper attribution. In which case, Guy, I apologise. And thank you. Perhaps you were merely ensuring I did not become too big-headed. Because the charity I founded went on to feed enormous numbers of people, support thousands of families, open multiple branches and mobilise hundreds of volunteers. Apparently even achievement requires a chaperone. But never mind. I forgive you.

As I said at the time.

In fact, I literally told you so. After reading the article and seeing what was being said about me underneath it, I wrote to you: **"Please don't be a bad guy."** I told you that the article had shocked me, referred specifically to the hateful comments it had stirred up against me and said:

"I forgive you."

That was 25 October 2024.

But before we get there, we need to discuss something extremely seri-

ous.

My cat.

THE CAT WHO APPARENTLY BENT SPACE-TIME

Guy, I require assistance. Because your chronology has defeated both me and the cat. Your article tells the reader that my husband and I **"parted over the summer"**, that he asked me to move out of Ondaatje Hall, and that we thereafter communicated through lawyers. Fine. But a little later, we encounter the cat. You reported that I had left my cat behind when I moved out and that my husband believed the cat had been abandoned in a room **"that no-one has a key for"** for several days.

Guy. Please.

My cat and I have questions. If I moved out **over the summer**, when exactly did I lock the cat in the mysterious room? In the summer? October? Last Tuesday? Did I return months later specifically to imprison the cat? If nobody possessed a key to this room, how did the cat get into it? Who established that he was inside? Who fed him? Who released him?

Was the room perhaps accessible through Narnia?

Because your readers certainly understood the implication. One commenter declared that abandoning a cat in a locked room without food or water was illegal animal cruelty and demanded to know why it was not being investigated. Another hoped the "poor cat" had been rescued. So I have consulted the principal witness.

He remains uncooperative.

But he has authorised the publication of his photograph.

Quite.

The cat would like a Deep Dive.



Actual picture of my cat, taken recently. Of course it is enhanced. He does not speak. And he will absolutely not tolerate such a large tag.

AND THEN THERE WAS THE GUN

Now we leave feline jurisprudence and enter something considerably more serious. Your article said: **"I have since established..."**

Those words matter.

You then presented as established fact that police had been called to investigate a claim made by me that my husband was keeping an "unlicensed firearm", before stating that this was untrue because what he actually possessed was a small-bore air pistol of the kind commonly used by children for target shooting.



There is something I want to make absolutely clear. I did not telephone the police to report a gun. Any conversations I had concerning firearms arose during post-report housekeeping and safety questions. That distinction matters enormously, because reporting a safeguarding concern and answering subsequent police questions is not the same thing as initiating a malicious firearms allegation.

Not: *A source alleges.*

Not: *I am told.*

Not: *The parties dispute.*

"I have since established."

Wonderful.

Because I rather like establishing things too. On 25 October, after publication, I wrote to you and challenged the narrative. I specifically told you that your article had been built around the stereotype of a scorned younger wife and asked you to examine what you had been told rather than accept "breadcrumbs". The next morning, 26 October, you replied. And this is where you gave me a gift.

You wrote:

"With regard to the University's investigation I can report only what I *know* and can prove to be true."

Excellent.

You continued that one of the most serious matters involved an illegal firearm, and that police had "fairly quickly confirmed" that the firearm was actually a perfectly legal air pistol.

Guy.

There is an African proverb for almost everything. But occasionally the English language provides all one needs.

Prove it.

Because when I subsequently asked Thames Valley Police, they did not tell me that their written records described some harmless children's air pistol.

They told me:

"We can assure you throughout our written records the gun is referred to as a 'firearm' or 'rifle', so it would appear that the Mail have chosen to report this story in their own way."

They added:

"Records show that the firearm was recovered and dealt with ap-

propriately."

Oh.

"The Mail have chosen to report this story in their own way."

Such beautiful English restraint.

I am learning.

And please, let us not turn the police into villains. **The police are not the enemy.** They never were. When this story is eventually understood properly, individual officers are entitled to have their actions judged according to what they actually knew and actually did, rather than according to a newspaper narrative constructed around them.

THE DEEP DIVE

Which brings us, rather wonderfully, to your *Deep Dive* podcast.

Great title, by the way.

I should have called this book **A Deep Dive Into Guy Adams' Writing**. Never mind. You got there first.

I digress.

Distraction is a feature of ADHD. I have ADHD.

But still...

In your later work concerning Professor Jason Arday, the entire intellectual proposition of the *Deep Dive* was scrutiny. Extraordinary claims should be checked. Evidence should be examined. Stories should withstand interrogation.

I agree. Wholeheartedly.

So let us use precisely that methodology here.

Not my standard.

Yours.

What did you know? What could you prove? Who told you I had moved out in the summer? What evidence established it? How did that chronology coexist with the cat allegedly being abandoned in an inaccessible room for several days? Who told you I had made the firearm allegation in the terms you published? What did the police records actually say? Why did Thames Valley Police later tell me that throughout their written records the object was called a **"firearm" or "rifle"**? And why did the police say the Mail had chosen to report the story **"in their own way"**?

Those are not attacks.

They are questions.

A deep dive, Guy.

You like those.

And there is another reason these questions matter. Words have consequences. Your readers did not merely debate university governance. Some concluded that I was a "woman scorned". One said I should be stripped of my MBE. Another suggested I should be arrested for false accusations and wasting police time. One said the "toxic woman" should have been deported after completing her studies. Another wrote:

"Once nigerian, always nigerian."

You knew about the reaction.

Because I told you.

I told you on 25 October that I had seen the hateful comments stirred up against me. And you replied the following morning that you could report only what you **"know"** and could **"prove to be true."**

Splendid.

We finally agree on something.

Because perhaps what was misjudged from the beginning was the woman herself. Perhaps the Nigerian woman with the cakes looked frivolous. Perhaps the television judge looked decorative. Perhaps the beauty contestant looked like an airhead. Perhaps the woman who forgave you looked weak.

Perhaps silence looked like ignorance.

That is the danger of stereotypes.

They encourage you to stop investigating precisely when you should start.

I was fifteen when I entered university. Sixteen when I became a finalist in a national beauty competition. Twenty-one when I arrived in Britain with two suitcases and went on to achieve the only distinction in my MBA class. I built businesses. I won awards. I built a charity. I received a BEM. Then an MBE. I survived on £10 a week. I sold my own £820,000 property. I judge TV shows in the UK and Canada. And somewhere along the way, without ever attending Gold-Digger School properly, I also acquired an inconvenient habit from the lawyers who raised me:

I keep the receipts.

So no, Guy.

The bird was not empty-headed. The bird was not frightened. And the bird certainly was not asleep.

The bird was watching.

There is a reason Proverbs tells us:

"It is the glory of God to conceal a thing: but the honour of kings is to search out a matter."

So let us search the matter out.

Properly.

Your articles. My emails. The police records. The chronology. The cat.

All of it.

Because you once wrote that you could report only what you knew and could prove to be true. And after almost two years of silence, I have only one request:

Please do.

BUT WAIT...

Actually, Guy.

There is one small problem.

After all of that, we still have not discussed **what I actually reported**.

Isn't that extraordinary?

Thousands of words. A toxic divorce. A younger Nigerian wife. An air pistol. A missing cat. A £229,000 salary. Cancel culture. Free speech. My cakes. My previous marriage. My age. My £10 a week. My charity. Even poor Cat has somehow been called as a witness.

And yet...

What did Cynthia actually report?

How exactly does one write so much and communicate so little of the substance?

Was that accidental?

Or was it a very convenient distraction?

I ask the question.

The reader can decide.

Because I am learning a great deal about the selective application and

promotion of **free speech**. Some people's speech, it appears, must be defended passionately. Mine has been rather more curtailed.

For now.

But here is the difficulty. However entertaining the surrounding narrative may be, **it still has to hold water**. And if an enormous amount of energy is spent constructing a story around a thing while somehow avoiding telling the public what the thing actually was, perhaps the intelligent reader ought eventually to ask:

Why?

Why am I being shown the cat? Why am I being told about the cakes? Why does my age matter? Why does my nationality matter? Why am I being told what somebody's friend thinks about cancel culture? Why am I being taken on this magnificent guided tour around **everything except the allegation itself?** There is a behaviour one sometimes sees in nature. An animal perceives danger near something it desperately wants to protect, so it performs. It makes noise. It moves. It draws the predator's eye towards **itself** and away from the thing it does not want discovered.

A distraction display.

Fascinating things, distractions.

Especially once you realise that the most interesting question is not:

"What am I being shown?"

It is:

"What am I being prevented from looking at?"

And that, dear reader, is where our **real deep dive begins.**

06
GOOD LORDS

Lord Hannan. Lord Young. Lord Blackwater. Three champions of free speech walk into a story. Curiously, only one side appears to get a microphone.

First, congratulations, gentlemen. What an extraordinary amount of elevation has taken place since we last met.

Daniel Hannan was already Lord Hannan of Kingsclere, sitting as a Conservative peer, when he wrote about me in October 2024. Toby Young joined the House of Lords as a Conservative life peer in January 2025. And in January 2026, Simon Heffer followed, becoming Lord Blackwater.

Good Lords indeed.

Three gentlemen, three newspaper columns, and an impressive collection of parliamentary titles. At this rate, I was beginning to wonder whether writing about me came with a complimentary ermine fitting.

There has, however, been one small change to the seating arrangements. In May 2026, Lord Hannan ceased sitting as a Conservative-affiliated peer and became non-affiliated. He remains a Lord, of course. Apparently, one can change one's parliamentary affiliation without having to

return the title.

I have met all three gentlemen, although largely in my former capacity as **Spouse Plus One**, a constitutional office whose principal duties appear to consist of smiling pleasantly, remembering names and not asking the assembled political intelligentsia what, precisely, they all do.

Politics was not really my thing. Consequently, I never paid terribly close attention to their political philosophies. I knew they were clever men who wrote things. They knew my husband. There were dinners.

There were events and conversations. I probably smiled.

How innocent we all were.

Then something extraordinary happened.

You started writing about me. And suddenly I developed the most tremendous interest in journalism.

LORD HANNAN AND THE GIFT OF PROPHECY

Lord Hannan, you were first out of the gate. On 26 October 2024, you informed Telegraph readers that university authorities had, in effect, **"take[n] sides in a marital break-up"**, and later announced: **"A marriage has fallen apart."**

Extraordinary.

Because, and I am speaking here about **my own life**, no marriage I was involved in had broken down before the safeguarding report was made. So I must congratulate you on your foresight. Most journalists report events **after** they occur. You appear to have pioneered a more ambitious form of journalism in which the matrimonial breakdown is established in print before one of the people actually involved in the marriage appears to know that this is the origin of the matter.

Nostradamus with a Telegraph column.

Indeed, on 1 November 2024 I emailed you. The subject line was not especially cryptic:

"Your article about my supposed divorce."

There was, however, another little detail. Your article contained the magnificent phrase:

"In the spirit of full disclosure..."

Splendid. I am extremely fond of full disclosure. You then disclosed that you had been an unpaid honorary professor at Buckingham and had helped fundraise for the Margaret Thatcher Chair.

Very good.

Only, there appears to have been a tiny item missing from this **full** disclosure.

You knew us.

Rather better than a reader might have inferred. For example, when invited to our wedding celebration, you replied: "Sara and I would love to join you on 25 June." And we replied that we looked forward to celebrating with you. Now, perhaps I am being terribly literal. English is my second language, after all. But I had always understood **full disclosure** to mean disclosure that was, well...

full.

Not *Full Disclosure, Terms and Conditions Apply.*

Not *Full Disclosure Lite.*

Not *Full Disclosure, Selected Highlights.*

And certainly not:

FULL DISCLOSURE *Certain friendships may have been omitted for editorial convenience.* Had you written, *"In the spirit of partial disclosure..."*, I would have applauded the precision. The difficulty with calling

something **full disclosure** is that once a relevant fact is knowingly left out, the adjective begins doing some exceptionally heavy lifting. And given that the article invited readers to understand events through the lens of a supposedly bitter marital collapse, I would have thought the writer's personal connection to one of the spouses was not entirely in the category of **miscellaneous trivia**.

THEN CAME LORD YOUNG

Lord Young, by January 2026 you were explaining that the ordeal began when an **"ex-wife, whom he's in the process of divorcing"** made allegations to the university. You also helpfully explained something else. Professor Tooley was a member of the **Free Speech Union, "the organisation I run,"** and you said the organisation had been helping him navigate his ordeal.

Ah.

Now we are getting somewhere.

Because there is a question I have been longing to ask the Free Speech Union.

Nothing complicated.

No trick question.

No Latin required.

Does the free speech include mine?

I ask only because the arrangement has occasionally appeared rather asymmetrical.



One person speaks.

Newspapers write.

Commentators comment.

Readers speculate.

Friends defend.

Columns multiply.

And the woman being written about?

Shhh.

It is a fascinating interpretation of the marketplace of ideas. Rather like opening a debating society, giving one side the auditorium and the PA system, and giving the other side a lovely opportunity to contemplate the importance of free expression from the car park.

AND FINALLY, LORD BLACKWATER

Then came Lord Blackwater.

Your piece begins with a paean to Buckingham as a place of **"freedom of speech and of discourse"** and "proper academic liberty".

Excellent.

I was completely with you.

And then, having warmed up the orchestra for freedom of expression, you described me as the **"estranged wife"** who **"sought to damage him"** by going to university authorities.

Oh.

Apparently we had reached the interval in the freedom-of-speech concert. You went considerably further than merely reporting that allega-

tions had been made. You attributed a motive to me: **I "sought to damage him."** That is a remarkably confident statement about the internal intentions of a woman whom, as far as I can establish, you did not telephone to ask.

Not one call.

Not even a missed one.

Not so much as:

"Hello Cynthia, Simon here. Just about to tell the nation what was going on inside your head. Anything you'd like to add?"

Nothing.

One admires the efficiency.

Why interview the woman when one can simply **explain her motives to her?**

THREE LORDS AND A TELEPHONE



And that, gentlemen, is the bit I find genuinely fascinating. Between three distinguished writers, three formidable intellects and what must collectively amount to several centuries of accumulated opinion, I cannot identify a serious attempt by any of you to obtain my account before presenting conclusions about my motives and circumstances. I did write to Lord Hannan.

No engagement followed.

Which leaves us with the rather delicious spectacle of men associated with the defence of free expression writing extensively about a woman whose own version seems to have been remarkably difficult to locate in

the national press. Perhaps this is an entirely innocent coincidence. Perhaps every editor in Britain independently looked at the same story and thought:

"Interesting. But whatever you do, don't ask her."

Perhaps the nation's telephones simultaneously malfunctioned. Perhaps there was a national shortage of question marks.

I remain open-minded.

THE FREE SPEECH UNION: A CUSTOMER SERVICE ENQUIRY

There is one tiny matter I would dearly love clarified. If the principle is genuinely **free speech**, then surely it cannot mean:

Free speech for people with whom we agree.

Or:

Free speech for our friends.

Or even:

Free speech for the person whose version we have already decided is correct.

That is not a principle.

That is a **guest list**.

So here is my modest challenge.

One sentence.

No lengthy investigation required. No KC. No committee. No consultation exercise. No working group. No twelve-week review.

Simply say:

"Cynthia Tooley should be free to tell her own story and answer publicly what has been written about her."

That's it.

I will frame it.

I may laminate it.

I might even bake you a cake. Because right now there is something rather extraordinary about watching an enormous national conversation about free speech in which newspapers have repeatedly published accounts concerning me, yet the possibility that **I might possess some speech of my own** appears to have caused an unexpected administrative difficulty. And if there is some principled reason why your free speech extends enthusiastically to everyone **except the woman you were writing about**, do publish that too.

I dare you.

At least then we shall finally have achieved something I think we can all support.

Full disclosure.

07
SEAN WAS ACTUALLY THERE

And finally, for now, Mr Sean O'Neill of *The Times*. Sean presents me with a rather different challenge from everybody else in this book.

Because Sean was actually **there**.

The contemporaneous attendance note records that Mr Sean O'Neill, reporter for *The Times*, attended the **duration of the hearing**.

This is extremely helpful.

And also slightly inconvenient.

Because there are certain things about that hearing which, dear reader, **I am not permitted to tell you**.

So I won't.

See?

Growth.

There are allegations I cannot tell you about. There is evidence I cannot tell you about. There are documents I cannot tell you about. There was discussion about what might or might not reach the press which I am absolutely, categorically, definitely **not going to tell you about**.

Look at me complying.

I am practically glowing.

Fortunately, however, there is one person to whom none of this should come as a surprise.

Sean.

Because Sean was sitting there.

For the whole thing.

Indeed, at the end of the hearing Sean actually stood up and asked the judge for a copy of my sworn statement, saying that *The Times* already knew the identity of the individual concerned and had chosen not to name her. The judge declined to give him the statement. Now please appreciate the exquisite position this puts me in.

I cannot tell you what Sean heard.

But Sean knows what Sean heard.

I know what Sean heard.

The judge knows what Sean heard. The lawyers know what Sean heard. And somewhere in the middle of all this sits the British public, reading the following headline:

"DON'T DESTROY EACH OTHER, DIVORCE JUDGE TELLS SUSPENDED VICE-CHANCELLOR AND WIFE"



Headlines from The Times, 17 December 2024 and 8 February 2025, by Sean O'Neill. Recreated by the author using the published wording.

Divorce judge.

Oh, Sean.

What an economical little phrase.

Because Sean did not attend anything that might remotely resemble a divorce hearing. In fact, had a divorce even been filed for by then, I might have understood the confusion.

Not a single filing.

No divorce application.

No divorce proceedings.

No divorce hearing.

But never mind.

"Divorce judge."

Such a wonderfully economical way of telling the public what they were looking at. And *The Times* did not stop there. The opening transformed proceedings into a **"bitter divorce battle"** and announced that the **"divorce case which has rocked the university reached court on Monday."** Now, obviously, I cannot explain why that distinction matters.

Because that might require discussing the thing I cannot discuss.

So instead, let us have a recipe.

RECIPE: DIVORCE SOUFFLÉ

INGREDIENTS

One court hearing.

One reporter who attended the whole thing. Several matters we absolutely mustn't mention.

One large spoonful of **"bitter".**

A generous helping of **"estranged wife".** And the word **DIVORCE**, folded in repeatedly until everything else disappears.

Bake overnight.

Serve to the nation for breakfast.

Perfect.

THEN CAME FEBRUARY

And this is where things become even more interesting. I was arrested on 4 February 2025. I subsequently made a private video. Its opening words were:

"If you're receiving this, you're obviously a very close friend of mine."

I explained what had happened to me. Now, there are portions of that video which I shall not repeat here because, once again:

I am behaving myself.

Gold star.

Sticker.

Possibly a certificate at the end. But what matters for present purposes is that the video discussed the December hearing.

You remember the December hearing.

Sean was there.

And then, on 8 February, Sean wrote another article.

Its headline was:

"WIFE OF ANTI-WOKE PROFESSOR SAYS SHE WAS 'BULLIED' BY POLICE"

The opening said that I had **"claimed that she had been arrested"** and

that I had **"told friends"** I had been detained.

Claimed.

Wonderful word.

I particularly enjoy it because the article then reports that I was released without charge and that the police retained my telephone and laptop. Apparently I had merely *claimed* the arrest, but my electronics had somehow independently wandered into police custody.

Perhaps they were arrested separately.

I don't know.

I wasn't there.

Oh wait.

THE MYSTERIOUS MULTIPLICATION OF FRIENDS

But my favourite ingredient is **"told friends".**

Friends.

Plural.

How sociable of me.

There is only one slight difficulty. The pleaded case records that *The Times* subsequently changed that formulation, replacing "told friends" with "recorded her reflections" and recording that I had shared them with **"one person, not several friends".**

Ah.

The friends appear to have undergone a small editorial extinction event.

Several friends.

One person.

These things happen.

Perhaps they were standing very close together.

AND THEN, MOST CURIOUSLY…

Sean's February article returned to the December hearing. It reminded readers that a judge had told us to consider our conduct and that I had been required to give an undertaking regarding my future conduct. All perfectly capable of being printed. There was, of course, rather more context to that hearing. Context which Sean had personally heard. Context which might affect how a reader understood why an undertaking came to be given.

But unfortunately…

I can't tell you.

Isn't this fun?

So I am going to do something terribly old-fashioned. I am going to obey the court order. I shall simply place the two things beside each other. **Thing One:** Sean attended the entire hearing. **Thing Two:** Sean later told you what he considered the story of that hearing to be. And then I shall sit quietly. Because, as we established several chapters ago: **When a bird is quiet, it is not because it does not know what to say. It is because it is watching very carefully.** And perhaps the reader might now watch carefully too.

Not merely what is written.

But what is missing.

Because sometimes the most revealing part of a newspaper article is the part the journalist **knew existed but did not explain**. I couldn't possibly tell you whether that happened here.

That would be terribly naughty.

You'll have to read the articles and decide for yourself.

08

Oh, what a tangled web ~~weave~~ *reveal*
when at first we choose to write about
a woman whose version no one has heard.

AND THE ROTTWEILER COMES HOME

Now we come to another interesting figure in this story.

Guy Adams introduced Donal Blaney to *Daily Mail* readers as the "noted rottweiler solicitor" hired to fight said husband's corner.

Mr Blaney runs Griffin Law, the firm instructed to represent my husband in the legal disputes described in this book.

But Donal was not a stranger to me. He had been a guest in my home, and I had met him in New York during the period when I was performing my unofficial duties as Spouse Plus One.

And there were other connections to the University of Buckingham which, as I continued reading, became rather interesting in their own right.

So when he appeared in the newspaper narrative, he was not simply an unfamiliar solicitor arriving to represent an unfamiliar client.

We already knew one another.

And as I was beginning to discover, that was not the only connection worth understanding.

"Noted rottweiler solicitor."

Excellent. Evocative. Ferocious, even.

And apparently, the Rottweiler rather likes the description.

Because Griffin Law's own website reproduces a testimonial from Guido Fawkes describing Donal Blaney as the "Rottweiler of the Right".

So Guy Adams was not entirely inventing a colourful characterisation. He was introducing a solicitor whose own firm had chosen to display a remarkably similar description.

I rather admire the consistency.

Some solicitors advertise themselves as approachable, compassionate or client-focused. Others proudly display testimonials comparing them to Rottweilers.

Different marketing strategies, I suppose. But since we have become such enthusiasts for disclosure, I wondered whether there was anything else we might usefully know about the Rottweiler.

And apparently there was.

His own published biography says that Donal Blaney:

"...has written for The MailOnline."

Oh.

So now imagine the slightly fuller introduction: *Donal Blaney, the "Rottweiler of the Right", who has previously written for MailOnline...*

See?

Still a Rottweiler.

No less Right.

Nobody's reputation harmed.

Just one additional fact allowing the reader to understand that the person being introduced by the *Daily Mail* was not entirely without a previous connection to its own publishing world. And then, because our web apparently enjoys growing while I am trying very hard not to weave one, we discover something else. The Young Britons' Foundation's own material lists:

Daniel Hannan, President. (Lord Number 1 of Chapter 6)

Immediately followed by:

Donal Blaney, Chief Executive, whom it describes as the organisation's co-founder.

Oh, come on.

At this point I am not even investigating.

I am reading biographies.

And yet the biographies keep behaving like this.

LET US DRAW ABSOLUTELY NO CONCLUSIONS

So, to recap.

Donal Blaney had written *for* **MailOnline**. Donal Blaney was co-founder and Chief Executive of the **Young Britons' Foundation**. Daniel Hannan was **President of the same organisation**. Daniel Hannan subsequently wrote about me in the **Telegraph**. Guy Adams subsequently wrote about me in the **Daily Mail**. When Guy Adams introduced Donal Blaney to Daily Mail readers, we got the fabulously cine-

matic:

"Noted rottweiler solicitor."

What we didn't get was:

"...who has written for MailOnline."

Presumably **"Former Contributor Returns as Rottweiler"** lacked something editorially.

Then we discover that senior figures from the newspaper worlds we have been discussing had all appeared on the guest list for an intimate dinner at Daylesford House on 2 May 2024.

Dinner.

Just dinner, mind you.

Everybody remain calm.

Among those invited were Rebekah Brooks, CEO of News UK, the company behind **The Times** and **The Sunday Times**. Chris Evans, Editor of **The Daily Telegraph**. Allister Heath, Editor of **The Sunday Telegraph**. Lord Rothermere, Chairman and controlling shareholder of the **Daily Mail**'s parent company. And Ted Verity, Editor of the **Daily Mail**.

There was also Jeremy Clarkson, columnist for **The Sunday Times**, and Rob Colvile, another **Sunday Times** columnist who had previously held senior editorial positions at **The Telegraph**.

And speaking of previous positions, Chris Evans had spent eleven years reporting for the **Daily Mail** before joining **The Telegraph**. Keith Poole, Editor-in-Chief of the **New York Post**, had also spent more than a decade at the **Daily Mail**, with a subsequent career at **The Sun**. And lest **The Spectator** feel excluded from this delightful gathering, there was Douglas Murray, its Associate Editor, alongside historian and **Spectator** contributor Niall Ferguson and his wife, Ayaan Hirsi Ali,

who had also written for the magazine.

So there we have it. **The Times**. **The Telegraph**. **The Daily Mail**. And **The Spectator**.

Quite the literary supper club.

What a wonderfully well-connected collection of independent newspaper people.

And then, tucked among these distinguished biographies, was another guest.

An outspoken advocate of academic freedom and free speech.

The one Lord Blackwater assures us I "sought to destroy".

Oh.

How lovely.

Again:

Dinner.

They ate.

Perhaps there was pudding.

I make no allegation regarding pudding. Then Donal Blaney pops up again. His current professional biography records that he is a **part-time PhD student at the University of Buckingham**.

Oh, for goodness' sake.

Confused?

Do keep up.

I am trying.

At this stage I feel less like the subject of newspaper articles and more like somebody who has accidentally wandered into the final episode of a television drama without watching episodes one to seven. Every time I

turn over another document, somebody I have already met walks back through the door wearing a different hat.

"Hello, I'm the lawyer."

Two pages later:

"Hello again. I ran an organisation with the Telegraph columnist."

Turn page.

"Me again. I've written for MailOnline."

Turn page.

"Still me. I'm studying at Buckingham."

Meanwhile:

"Hello, I'm the Telegraph columnist."

Yes, I remember you.

"I was President of the organisation."

Of course you were.

Next document.

"Hello, we're senior newspaper people."

Wonderful.

"We're having dinner."

Naturally.

At this point, the only person who hasn't appeared in three different capacities is **the cat**. And frankly I am reluctant to investigate him. He has already contributed quite enough to these proceedings.

IMPORTANT NOTICE FOR CONSPIRACY ENTHUSIASTS

Before anybody gets excited:

Knowing somebody proves that you know somebody.

Working with somebody proves that you worked with somebody. Writing for a newspaper proves that you wrote for a newspaper. Studying at a university proves that you study at a university.

And dinner proves, at its highest, most scandalous evidential level...

dinner.

Possibly pudding.

That is not my point.

My point is becoming considerably simpler.

Why did I have to discover all of this myself?

Because when these people and institutions appeared in articles about me, they tended to arrive like freshly generated characters with no previous save history.

No connections.

No overlapping organisations.

No shared professional worlds.

No dinners.

No former writing relationships.

Just:

Journalist.

Lawyer.

Source.

Commentator.

Perfectly independent nouns floating serenely through the English language.

And then you start reading.

THIS IS NOT SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

This is beginning to feel like:

TWO DEGREES OF BUCKINGHAM.

Pick a person.

Any person.

Give me three documents.

We'll probably get them to the university, a newspaper, Donal Blaney or dinner before lunchtime. Still, absolutely none of that establishes that anybody coordinated anything.

And I mean that seriously.

But it establishes something rather important for a book about **journalism**:

relationships existed.

And relationships are context.

Perhaps they affected absolutely nothing.

Wonderful.

Then disclose them and let the reader conclude:

"Nothing to see here."

But don't remove the context and then complain when somebody eventually discovers it and asks why it wasn't there. Because I am not alleging a secret network. That would require the network to be particularly secret. I appear instead to have discovered: **a dinner guest list, a staff biography, a professional biography, an institutional partnership and several newspaper articles.** This is possibly the world's least sophisticated espionage operation.

I haven't hacked anything.

I haven't followed anybody.

I haven't hidden behind a hedge.

I have Googled.

And this is why I keep returning to those two magical words:

FULL DISCLOSURE.

Because the relationships themselves don't particularly trouble me.

The disappearing act does.

The question isn't:

"Were these people secretly connected?"

Some of the connections weren't secret at all.

They were sitting on websites.

In biographies.

On guest lists.

In organisational records.

The better question is:

WHY DID THE CONNECTIONS BECOME INVISIBLE PRECISELY WHEN CONTEXT MATTERED?

And perhaps that question can be answered very easily.

Perhaps none of it mattered.

Perhaps it is all coincidence.

Perhaps Britain really is just an extraordinarily small island.

Wonderful.

Then tell the reader.

Let **them** decide that it means nothing. Because that, surely, is what free speech and a free press are supposed to be about. Not deciding what context the public can safely be trusted with.

Giving them the facts.

And trusting them to think.

Again, I am not alleging a secret network.

I am discovering a disclosed network that repeatedly seems to become undisclosed when somebody writes about me. And, frankly, after everything we have discovered so far, I think I have earned the right to say:

What am I going to discover next?

I have a feeling there are more biographies to read. *No red string was harmed in the making of this chapter.*

09

AND THEN THERE WAS THE SAR

Just when I thought our biographies had finished behaving badly, I discovered something else. Griffin Law, the firm run by Donal Blaney and instructed to represent my husband in the proceedings described earlier, also acts for Reform UK in ***Good Law Project v Reform UK***, a High Court case concerning, among other things, alleged failures to comply properly and promptly with **subject access requests**.

Oh.

Subject access requests.

What an extraordinary coincidence of subject matter. Because I too have a subject access request.

With whom?

Go on.

Guess.

GRIFFIN LAW.

I submitted mine on **13 February 2025**. From the email address Griffin Law had already been using to communicate with me. Indeed, Griffin Law's own letter acknowledges that my request came from an email address **"with which we, as a firm, have communicated before."** But apparently an existential crisis followed.

Was Cynthia Cynthia?

Difficult.

They knew enough about Cynthia to correspond with Cynthia. They knew enough about Cynthia to write about Cynthia. They knew enough about Cynthia to identify various names Cynthia had used. They knew enough about Cynthia to identify multiple email addresses they believed Cynthia used. They knew enough about Cynthia to discuss Cynthia's marriages.

But when Cynthia asked:

"May Cynthia please see Cynthia's personal data?"

suddenly:

WHO IS CYNTHIA?

And I even went to another solicitor.

She inspected my original passport.

She watched me sign.

She confirmed my identity.

She confirmed my email addresses.

She subsequently wrote directly to Griffin Law confirming that she had personally met me and had seen my original passport.

Apparently:

Still insufficient Cynthia.

Later, another firm supplied Griffin Law with a Thirdfort identity report confirming my identification.

Still, apparently:

Not quite Cynthia enough.

And Griffin Law's position remained that until I supplied the particular certified passport copy it demanded, together with information concerning the names and email accounts against which it should search, it would not proceed with my requests. Now, Griffin Law says it has legitimate reasons for taking that position.

And perhaps it does.

That question can be determined in the proper place. But you must forgive me for enjoying what I subsequently discovered. Because while my identity was apparently presenting this almost metaphysical difficulty...

Griffin Law was acting in a High Court case about subject access requests.

Not just any DSAR litigation either. The judgment records that Reform's opponents alleged failures to respond within the statutory time limit and deficiencies in the eventual responses. Griffin Law acted for Reform. Reform tried to have that claim struck out or obtain summary judgment.

The High Court refused.

Mr Justice Murray held that whether Reform complied with the DSARs was a matter for trial. I make absolutely no suggestion that Reform's DSAR dispute and mine are legally the same.

They aren't.

I merely observe that Griffin Law has acquired what one might call…

SPECIALIST EXPERIENCE IN THE SUBJECT.

And somewhere in Kent, there remains a subject access request from February 2025 waiting patiently for everybody to establish the answer to one of the great philosophical questions of our age:

IS CYNTHIA CYNTHIA?

I have a passport.

I have visited a solicitor who saw the passport.

I have an identity-verification report.

I have the email account Griffin Law itself has repeatedly used to write to me. And, presumably, Griffin Law has quite a lot of correspondence identifying me as Cynthia.

Hence the subject access request.

At this point even the cat knows who I am.

10

WHEN THE RECORD ITSELF BECOMES THE PROBLEM

Over the last two years, my persistence has earned me various descriptions from various quarters.

“Unwilling to accept a ruling.”

“Unreasonable.”

Even “obsessive.”

Fair enough.

There is just one problem.

What happens when the record upon which I am being told to accept the ruling does not appear to match what happened?

That question has become increasingly important in my cases.

At Milton Keynes Courts, I have repeatedly experienced significant delays obtaining transcripts. In some instances, they have arrived long after the window in which I needed them for an appeal.

At times, I have been told to obtain a transcript from the other side.

That presents an obvious difficulty when the very purpose of the tran-

script is to establish objectively what happened between two opposing parties.

In one instance, the transcript obtained by the other side recorded significant portions of a hearing as missing.

Curiously, those included precisely the portions during which I had raised a very serious safeguarding issue.

When my own transcript was eventually produced by the official transcription company I had selected, approximately a year later, it became apparent that those portions of the audio were not missing after all.

And then there was the order.

THE ORDER I SAY I NEVER AGREED TO

The hearing had been due to be adjourned. Before that happened, I was pressed by a barrister to agree heads of terms.

For readers unfamiliar with the expression, heads of terms are essentially the bones of an agreement: short points recording what the parties have agreed, which can subsequently be converted into a formal order.

The barrister was extremely keen to return to court and tell the judge that we had reached an agreement, meaning the adjourned hearing would no longer be required.

We went back in.

The judge explained that he was late to collect his son from the train station. His laptop had already been closed. He did not reopen it and, to my observation, did not take his own note of what followed.

The barrister read the short heads of terms aloud. The judge agreed to vacate the adjournment and said we should go off and finalise the order and return it to him.

Up to that point, nothing particularly remarkable had happened. What happened afterwards was.

I began receiving proposed orders approximately three pages long containing provisions which, I said immediately, were materially different from the short bullet-point terms that had actually been read aloud before the judge.

I refused to sign them. I wrote to the judge, copying the other side in and asking for the adjourned hearing to be reinstated and letting him know that the order now being proposed bore significant extensions to the heads of terms.

My position was simple: we were plainly not going to agree the formal order because what had been sent to me was not what I had agreed.

I was chastised for emailing the judge directly, albeit that the other side had done so. I was even accidentally shown an email from the judge asking how I came to be writing to him directly, sent (wait for it) from said judge directly to the other side, without copying me in.

To my surprise, the order was approved anyway. The document even still bore the watermark:

DRAFT.

When I challenged what had happened, reliance was placed upon the principle in *Rose v Rose*: broadly, that a party cannot simply change their mind about an agreement reached before the court.

Perfectly understandable. Except for one rather fundamental problem.

I said I had never agreed to those additional terms in the first place.

The judge's position was that he had heard the agreement. My position was that the additional provisions subsequently appearing in the order had never been read to him.

Fortunately, there should have been an entirely neutral way of resolving that disagreement.

The recording.

So I applied for the transcript.

THE MYSTERIOUS FOURTH PERSON

Again, it was delayed. For nearly a year.

Eventually, I reached the point of sending pre-action correspondence concerning the failure to provide it.

Throughout these proceedings I have deliberately used the same official transcription company from the approved providers available to court users.

Eventually my transcriber contacted me. There was apparently a problem with the audio.

I was told: "The fourth person wasn't clear."

Excuse me?

What fourth person?

To my knowledge, there were three people participating in that hearing. Me. The barrister representing the other party. And the judge.

There was no fourth participant of whom I was aware.

And this matters for reasons far beyond a peculiar reference to an unidentified voice.

Because if an order is justified on the basis that particular terms were agreed orally before a judge, the contemporaneous recording of what was actually said becomes fundamental.

If I say: "Those were not the terms I agreed." And the answer is: "The judge remembers that they were." Then neither I nor the judge should

have to be treated as the final authority on our own recollection.

There is an objective witness.

The recording.

It should tell us what was read aloud. It should tell us what I agreed to. It should tell us what the judge heard. And, crucially, it should tell us whether the much longer provisions subsequently incorporated into the order were mentioned at all.

That is what an objective record is for.

I do not know what explains the reference to a fourth participant. And I am not going to manufacture an explanation.

That is precisely the point. I do not want the reader to believe my interpretation simply because I say so.

I want the record.

Give me the recording. Give me the transcript. Give me the original heads of terms. Give me the subsequent draft order. Give me my contemporaneous emails saying that I had not agreed to the additional provisions and asking for the adjourned hearing to be restored. Give me the judge's response.

Put them beside one another.

And let the record speak.

Because open justice should never require the public to choose between believing a litigant and believing a judge.

That is what records are supposed to prevent.

When the integrity of a process is challenged, the answer should be more transparency. Not less.

11

WHEN A CIVIL DISPUTE BECOMES A NEWSPAPER NARRATIVE

And this was not the only time the absence of a transcript became critical.

In another civil case, I arrived for what was supposed to be a two-day hearing and, on the day, was confronted with a summary judgment application.

I was a litigant in person. The application was argued by a barrister.

The applicable procedural rules require a minimum of 14 days' advance notice of a summary judgment application. Yet the application proceeded, and the ruling fundamentally altered what remained to be determined during the two-day hearing.

Naturally, I challenged it. Naturally, I needed the transcript.

And once again, there was a problem.

Eighteen months later, I was still waiting for it.

Meanwhile, the appeal remained stalled at the High Court while the ruling continued to stand against my name.

That civil dispute matters to this wider story because something else

had happened before the hearing.

In January 2025, The Guardian contacted me. It had been approached with an allegation that I had effectively behaved as a thief in connection with the dispute.

To its credit, The Guardian did not simply publish what it had been told. It contacted me and asked for my response. The Guardian itself was very concerned about the motive behind this, given the context of ongoing matters.

So I explained the background.

I had worked for a company whose owner had told me that I could run its e-commerce operation and report directly to him. I had also been instructed to route payments through an account set up in **my name**.

At the beginning of lockdown, the same owner told me that, in order to protect me and the members of staff I had recruited, we needed to be transferred to an older company belonging to the same owner.

We were given approximately two hours between being introduced to the proposed transfer and being required to sign. We signed. We carried on working.

Six weeks later, payment did not arrive. I submitted my invoice as I had previously done and was then told that the company to which we had been transferred was in financial difficulty and heading towards insolvency.

As I had done before without quibble, I paid my invoice from funds I held, submitted the paid invoice and resigned.

I subsequently learned from filed, publicly available documents that:

1. two months earlier, he had already been enquiring about the viability of the older company; and

2. on the very next working day after we had signed the transfer to the older company, the owner, as director, instructed FRP to prepare a Company Voluntary Arrangement proposal for the very company we had been pressed to transfer to in order to "protect us".

See the documents reproduced in the Appendix, page 172 onwards.

The legal consequences of all of that remain matters of dispute.

But there is an important distinction for the purposes of this book.

The proceedings brought against me were civil proceedings.

So when the dispute was subsequently described publicly using the language of "theft", I was entitled to ask how a contested civil dispute had travelled from one arena into another and acquired the language of criminality.

That question matters because court proceedings do not exist in isolation from public narratives.

A ruling becomes a headline. A headline becomes a search result. A search result becomes somebody's understanding of who you are.


Estranged wife of highprofile free speech academic 'stole £12,000 from company run by lover who was 28 years her senior'

Daily Mail headline. This appeared at 09:11 on 23 April 2025, before day 2 of the hearing commenced. No member of the public or reporter was ever present.

And once again, the underlying record matters.

Because if the court process itself is later used to authenticate a public narrative, then the accuracy and accessibility of the record from which that narrative emerged becomes more important, not less.

12

OPEN JUSTICE REQUIRES MORE THAN AN ORDER

I have sat in court and been told that I could not write a single note.

I was reprimanded for picking up my pen.

The transcript of that hearing remained unavailable to me months later.

I have sat in financial proceedings where, in my view, disclosure by the other side was treated very differently from my own expenditure, while I was questioned for six and a half hours over sums as small as £5.

During those proceedings, a female barrister described me as "young and pretty" and suggested that I could rebuild my life.

That is an extraordinary thing to hear in a financial argument.

What do my age or appearance have to do with the proper determination of finances?

But there is a bigger issue here than any one comment.

Open justice requires more than an order telling us who won.

The English legal system quite properly places enormous trust in judges. I understand why.

The starting assumption must be that judges exercise their powers

properly and in good faith.

But one of the safeguards accompanying that extraordinary degree of trust is transparency.

Justice should not merely be done. It should be capable of being scrutinised.

And that means there is an important distinction between an approved judgment and a verbatim transcript.

An approved judgment tells us the judge's reasons for the decision. A transcript tells us what happened in the room.

Those are not the same thing.

A judgment cannot necessarily tell us every submission that was made. It cannot necessarily tell us precisely what one party said and how the other responded. It cannot necessarily resolve a dispute about whether particular words were ever spoken.

A recording or verbatim transcript can.
That distinction becomes particularly important where proceedings are private.

If the hearing is private, the transcript is unavailable, sharing of any transcript eventually obtained is restricted, and the only surviving narrative available for scrutiny is an approved judgment, then the judge's account of the hearing can effectively become the only accessible account of what occurred.

Usually, that may present no difficulty at all.
But what happens when the accuracy or completeness of that account is itself the issue?

What happens when the litigant says: "That is not what happened."
There should be a simple answer.
Don't automatically believe the litigant. Don't automatically disbelieve

the judge.

Look at the record.

Because once the record itself becomes inaccessible, the argument is no longer merely about what happened in court.

It becomes an argument about who gets to define what happened in court.

And that is precisely why open justice requires more than an order.

DAMNED IF YOU DO

There is an additional difficulty when the disputed material is not merely private, but material which may relate to public safety.

If a court orders material to be deleted or destroyed while police subsequently seek to examine material connected with the same concern, what exactly is the citizen supposed to do?

Destroying potentially important evidence can itself have serious criminal consequences.

Disobeying a court order can have serious consequences too.

Damned if you do. Damned if you don't.

That is not an argument for ignoring court orders.

It is an argument for questioning what happens when the law appears to be acting against its own self.

It is an argument for ensuring that, before potentially important evidence disappears, somebody appropriately empowered has established what it is.

Because once evidence is destroyed, the question of what it might have demonstrated may become impossible to answer.

13

WHEN SAFEGUARDING BECAME SOMETHING TO SAFEGUARD AGAINST

Let me tell you something about safeguarding.

I had always understood that its purpose was to protect people from harm.

Perhaps that is a rather simplistic interpretation. I am not a lawyer, after all. But I had assumed that when somebody reports a serious safeguarding concern, the general idea is to establish whether that concern is justified.

Preferably by examining the evidence.

The material I had discovered was important. Not gossip. Not some petty domestic grievance dressed up as a public concern. This was safeguarding material. The sort of information that, as a parent, I would want to know about. As a student attending an institution, I would certainly want to know about it.

And I had not rushed recklessly into making allegations.

Before formally reporting my concerns, I conducted what I can only

describe as a sanity check with the Pro Vice-Chancellor.

I showed her the documents. I wanted another pair of eyes, someone with the professional experience and institutional responsibility to tell me whether what I was seeing was as serious as I thought.

She looked at them and said: "No. This is bad."

Well. That settled one question, at least. I wasn't imagining the seriousness of what I had found.

But what followed left me utterly baffled.

An independent KC had been appointed to investigate the concerns. There were documents capable of being examined, people to interview and a chronology to establish.

You would think this was an investigator's dream.

Yet the effect of proceedings in the Milton Keynes Family Courts appeared to be that the investigating KC would be unable to examine the very documents at the centre of my concerns.

As far as I could establish, the judges themselves had not examined the material either.

So we appeared to be heading towards an investigation in which the documentary evidence was excluded, leaving the investigator to weigh my account against that of the other party.

What, precisely, was independent about an investigation that could not independently examine the evidence? And why was I apparently the only person who found this arrangement extraordinary?

SMOKE, STEAM AND THE WOMAN WHO RAISED THE ALARM

Perhaps an analogy will help.

Imagine, for a moment, that I am a taxpayer. I pay for the emergency

services, as we all do.

One evening, I notice what appears to be smoke coming from a corner of my house. There are people inside. Naturally, I call the fire service.

I do not know whether there is a fire. That is precisely why I have called people who are trained to find out.

The fire service arrives.

Excellent.

Except that, just as I am about to show the firefighters where the smoke is coming from, somebody locks the front door of the house where the smoke is and prevents me from taking them to the source.

Instead, I am told that I may describe what I saw. So I describe the smoke.

Meanwhile, other people are confidently assuring the firefighters that there is no smoke. It was steam. Nothing more.

Now, ordinarily, you might think the obvious solution would be for the firefighters to walk over to the corner of the house and have a look. After all, they are already there. We have already paid for the fire engine.

But no. Apparently, looking at the corner is not permitted.

The firefighters must instead decide whether there is a fire by listening to my description of smoke and somebody else's description of steam.

And then something even more extraordinary happens.

While the firefighters are still trying to establish whether there is a fire, the people insisting that it was steam begin writing to everyone on the street.

Nothing to worry about. Just steam. Go back to bed.

So the neighbours go back to bed. Some are irritated at having been disturbed. Others are positively furious with the ridiculous woman who

called the fire service over a little steam.

Honestly.

What an attention seeker.

What a nuisance.

Why can't she just leave everyone alone?

And all the while, the firefighters still haven't been allowed to look at the corner.

Now, perhaps it really was steam. Perhaps I was entirely mistaken. Perhaps there was no fire at all.

But surely the way to establish that is to look at the corner, not to silence the person pointing towards it.

And if the people insisting that it was steam are also the people preventing the firefighters from examining the source, surely that is something worth questioning.

Because the absurdity is not that somebody might have mistaken steam for smoke. People make mistakes. The absurdity is that we have paid for trained professionals to investigate a possible danger, only to prevent them from examining the very thing they were called to investigate.

And then we have allowed a public narrative to develop in which the person who raised the alarm becomes the problem.

Not the unexplained smoke.

Not the inaccessible corner.

The woman who called the fire service.

And here is the part I find particularly difficult to understand.

I am paying for the firefighters. I am also paying for the machinery preventing them from looking.

Same taxpayer. Same house. Same possible danger.

Two publicly funded processes apparently working against one another.

Surely, at some point, somebody must ask whether this makes sense.

Because if it really is steam, I would be delighted to know. I have absolutely no desire for my house to be on fire. But please, for heaven's sake, let the firefighters look.

Because the fact that everyone on the street has gone back to bed does not mean the house is safe. It means they have been told it is. And those are two very different things.

TWO ARMS OF THE SAME SYSTEM

Now let us return to what actually happened.

The police considered my concerns sufficiently serious to send a detective to speak to me and review the evidence. A detective, on police time, at public expense.

Yet, in another extraordinary development, other police officers attended my property pursuant to a court order, at timing I found astonishingly coincidental, to search for and remove material that included documentation connected with the very concerns I had been trying to report.

I found myself struggling to reconcile these events. One part of the system was interested in examining the evidence. Another appeared to be facilitating its removal from my possession.

One institution had appointed an independent KC to investigate serious concerns. Yet the effect of the court proceedings appeared to restrict what that investigator could examine.

And somewhere in the middle was me, the person who had raised the concerns in the first place, wondering whether I had somehow misun-

derstood the entire purpose of safeguarding.

I appreciate that different arms of the law have different responsibilities. The police investigate potential offences. The courts adjudicate disputes and make orders. Universities have safeguarding responsibilities. Each operates within its own legal framework.

But surely, at some point, the law has to make sense as a whole. Because these institutions do not exist in separate moral universes. Their responsibilities may differ, but the underlying objective should not.

Establish the facts. Protect people. Prevent harm. Administer justice.

I am not criticising the individual police officers who attended my home for carrying out their instructions. Nor am I suggesting that police interest automatically establishes the truth of what I reported. It doesn't. And **that** is precisely the point, a judge's order made sure that it could not.

But it does raise a question about how different parts of a publicly funded system can act in apparently contradictory ways when dealing with the same material.

Because taxpayers do not fund the police, the courts and safeguarding institutions merely so that each can discharge its individual responsibilities without regard to what the others are doing. We fund them to protect people, establish facts, uphold the law and administer justice. And where their actions appear to work against one another, we are entitled to ask why.

I was not asking anyone to believe me. I was asking them to examine the documents, test their authenticity, assess their relevance and decide what they established. If they established nothing, so be it. But how could that conclusion safely be reached without examining them?

The law must surely be more than a collection of individually lawful ac-

tions which, when combined, defeat the very purpose of the law itself.

Because if the purpose of safeguarding is to protect people from harm, then the question cannot simply be whether every institution followed its own procedure. It must also be whether those procedures, operating together, allowed the safeguarding concern to be properly examined.

And that brings me back to the question I cannot shake.

When did safeguarding become a process of protecting institutions from the evidence, rather than protecting people from the harm that evidence might reveal?

Because if the evidence is never examined, how can anybody confidently say that the safeguarding concern has been addressed?

And if the system can prevent an investigator from examining the very documents they were appointed to investigate, perhaps we need to ask a rather uncomfortable question.

Who, exactly, is being safeguarded?

14

WHEN OVERSIGHT TRAVELS SIDEWAYS

So what happens when you believe something has gone wrong in the judicial process itself?

Judges have protections for very good reasons. Judicial independence would mean very little if every disappointed litigant could personally pursue a judge simply because they disliked a decision.

There are therefore formal mechanisms for complaints about judicial conduct. I used them.

When I believed that delays concerning transcripts were interfering with my ability to pursue an appeal, I complained to the Judicial Conduct Investigations Office, the JCIO.

The JCIO contacted the judge. I was subsequently told that my complaint was not upheld because the transcript had been signed off months earlier, in January. There was a problem.

Later that year, my transcription company told me that it had only just received the audio from the court. This is the audio needed for transcribing to begin.

So I asked what seemed to me to be a fairly obvious question.

If the transcription company had only just received the audio, what transcript exactly had been signed off in January?

I went back to the JCIO with the new information. The complaint remained closed. I could, I was told, take the matter elsewhere.

And this is where oversight begins to travel sideways. One institution refers you to another. The second tells you that the matter belongs somewhere else. You obtain new evidence. The first process has already closed. You are directed towards another process.

No ordinary person has time for that. I did it anyway.

These threads take months, sometimes years, to unravel. And while they are travelling from institution to institution, the original decision continues to have consequences.

WHEN "ACADEMIC" ISN'T ACADEMIC

The same problem appeared elsewhere.

A **Limited Civil Restraint Order** had been made against me.

For readers unfamiliar with the term, such an order restricts a person's ability to make certain applications to the court.

Mine was made during a hearing at which I was not present. There had also been communications to the judge from the other side which I had not seen before the relevant decision was made. The judge had been assured that preceding correspondence would be forwarded to me. It wasn't.

When I subsequently informed the court that I had not received it, the proceedings nevertheless continued. A significant remaining part of the financial proceedings then moved ahead rapidly, in fact scheduled within 34 days instead of the standard 90 days, while my ability to make ap-

plications remained restricted.

Months later, when I raised the circumstances surrounding the civil restraint order in the appeal process, I was asked, in substance, whether pursuing the point remained worthwhile because it had become largely ***academic***.

But consequences do not become academic merely because time has passed. If an order affected what I could apply for, what disclosure I could seek, or how I could participate in proceedings while it was operative, then what happened during that period matters.

This is a recurring problem throughout this story. Time passes. An appeal window closes. An order expires. A hearing finishes.

And suddenly the question becomes:

Why are you still talking about this?

Because consequences survive the procedure that produced them.

That is why.

WHEN THE SAFEGUARDING REPORT DISAPPEARS

The problem I am describing does not stop at the doors of the court. It extends to institutions.

The institution to which I made my original safeguarding report received a detailed account from me. I spent approximately an hour speaking directly to the Chair of Council. I know that the report was made. This is not dependent upon my memory alone. Its existence is reflected in contemporaneous communications which I have subsequently seen.

So later, when I made a subject access request to the institution, I expected to find the documentary footprint of that report. Instead, something extraordinary appeared to have happened. The substance of the

safeguarding report had effectively vanished from the material disclosed to me. A lengthy conversation concerning serious matters appeared to have been reduced to a brief reference concerning a gun.

That matters. Because once again we return to the difference between what happened and what the surviving record says happened. If somebody makes a serious safeguarding disclosure, the institutional record should not subsequently reduce that disclosure to something materially different from the substance of what was reported.

Safeguarding records exist for a reason. They establish what was raised. When it was raised. Who received it. What they understood. What they did next.

That chronology protects everybody. It protects the person making the report. It protects the institution. It protects the person complained about. And, most importantly, it protects anybody who might subsequently be at risk.

I keep records. Good records. And I back them up.

So I knew that what I was seeing in the subject access material did not, in my view, represent the substance of what had actually been reported.

Then something else happened. I subsequently received further SAR material, unbidden and unprompted, which contained somewhat more detail. That raised an obvious question. If the fuller information existed, why had it not appeared in the first disclosure?

Again, I am not asking the reader to manufacture an explanation. I am asking for the record.

THE CHARITY COMMISSION

I escalated my concerns to the Charity Commission. By this stage I had learned another lesson about institutional accountability. An email ad-

dressed generically can disappear into the ether. So I researched who was ultimately responsible and wrote directly to the head of the Charity Commission. David Holdsworth, Chief Executive.

I did not receive a response directly from him. Instead, I received an email from somebody else telling me not to email that gentleman. To this day, I do not know whether the Commission got to the bottom of what I had raised, sought further information, or examined all of the material I sent.

The underlying point was simple. An institution dealing with young and potentially vulnerable people should have safeguarding procedures. Serious safeguarding concerns should leave a record. That record should be retained appropriately. And when somebody later asks for their personal data, the substance of what they reported should not somehow have evaporated.

HOW DO YOU INVESTIGATE EVIDENCE YOU REFUSE TO SEE?

Then came the investigation. The institution told me that, because of Family Court orders concerning the deletion or destruction of evidence, its investigation would effectively have to proceed on the basis of what I remembered against what another person remembered. *She said. He said.*

But this was not merely a dispute about two people's recollections. I said there was evidence. Documents. Primary material. Material capable of being examined independently of either person's memory.

The investigating King's Counsel contacted me and told me not to bring documents, evidence or other materials to the investigation. So I didn't. The investigation proceeded. And the allegation was subsequently said not to have been substantiated.

But there is a question here which is so obvious that it almost asks itself.

How do you substantiate documentary allegations while refusing to examine the documents?

How do you test evidence you have instructed the person not to provide?

How does a matter containing primary material become reduced to:

She says. He says.

if the evidence capable of taking it beyond she says, he says is excluded from the investigation?

Again, this is not about demanding a predetermined conclusion.

An investigator could examine the material and conclude that it proves nothing. Fine. An investigator could examine it and conclude that I misunderstood it. Fine. An investigator could conclude that there is contrary evidence which outweighs it. Fine.

But first: Look at it.

That is the recurring problem. The newspaper should look at the evidence. The institution should look at the evidence. The investigator should look at the evidence. The court should look at the evidence. The regulator should look at the evidence.

Because an investigation cannot acquire integrity merely by being called an investigation. Its integrity depends upon what it actually investigates.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE COURT CANNOT ANSWER THE JURISDICTION QUESTION?

Eventually I began asking a different question.

Not: Was the order inconvenient? Not: Did I dislike it? But: Did the court have the power to make it in the first place?

That distinction matters.

I had discovered what I believed were serious jurisdictional questions concerning orders made in the Family Court. Among them were restrictions which appeared to prevent publication of the true nature of an allegation beyond the ordinary protections applicable to children, vulnerable people or victims of sexual offences. I also questioned whether a non-molestation order could properly be used to require the deletion or destruction of evidence, or to prevent me from speaking to anybody about aspects of my own life.

Those are not small questions.

So I did what a citizen is supposed to do. I went back to court.

At a hearing on 10 June 2026, I repeatedly asked whether the court had jurisdiction to make those orders. I asked the question five times. I did not receive an answer to the jurisdictional question.

So I asked for the orders to be set aside. I was told that the time for challenging them had passed and that I ought to have appealed within the relevant appeal period.

But by this point the reader already understands the difficulty. Appeals require records. Appeals require transcripts. Appeals require orders. Appeals require a litigant to understand what happened, identify the alleged error and put the necessary material before another court within a strict timetable. And I have already described what happened when I attempted to obtain some of those records.

More fundamentally, there remained the jurisdiction question itself. My understanding is that the passage of time does not magically confer a power upon a court which it did not possess when the order was made. If the court had jurisdiction, say so. Identify it. Show me the statutory provision. Show me the rule. Show me the authority.

Then the question is answered.

But if a litigant asks: "Where did the court obtain the power to make this order?" the answer cannot simply be: "You should have asked sooner."

Those are different questions. One concerns time. The other concerns power.

AND THEN CAME THE ENHANCED CIVIL RESTRAINT ORDER

My persistence in seeking review of these matters did not result in the jurisdictional question being answered to my satisfaction. Instead, another restriction followed. An Enhanced Civil Restraint Order.

For the non-lawyer, the practical significance is important. A civil restraint order restricts a person's ability to make further applications to the court.

So consider the sequence from my perspective. I say an order was made which the court did not have jurisdiction to make. I attempt to challenge it. I encounter difficulties obtaining the records necessary to pursue appeals. I return to court and repeatedly ask for the jurisdictional basis of the order. I ask for the order to be set aside. I am told that I should have appealed it earlier. And continued attempts to obtain judicial reconsideration ultimately exist alongside increasingly restrictive controls upon my ability to make further applications.

That creates an obvious systemic problem. Because the more serious the original error alleged by the litigant, the more persistent that litigant may become. And the more persistent the litigant becomes, the easier it may be to characterise the persistence itself as the problem.

"She will not accept the ruling." Perhaps. But what if the ruling was made without jurisdiction?

"She keeps making applications." Perhaps. But what if those applications are attempts to obtain an answer to a question nobody has answered?

"She is obsessive." Perhaps. But what if the record keeps changing?

This is precisely why restraint mechanisms must be used with extraordinary care. They serve an important purpose. Courts must be capable of protecting their processes from genuinely abusive litigation. Judges and opposing parties should not be subjected endlessly to applications which have no proper basis.

But the safeguard cannot become circular. A person must not be treated as vexatious merely because she continues asking for scrutiny of the very process by which she came to be labelled vexatious. Otherwise the label becomes self-proving.

You challenge the order. The challenge is treated as further evidence of the behaviour which justified the order. You challenge that. The second challenge becomes further evidence. And eventually the original question disappears entirely. Was the first order lawful?

That is why I keep returning to primary material. Not personalities. Not labels. Not whether somebody finds me difficult. Not whether I have asked the question once or five times or fifty times.

Show me the jurisdiction. If it existed, establish it. If it did not, correct the order.

Because secondary orders cannot manufacture jurisdiction retrospectively. And restricting access to the mechanism by which the primary order might be challenged cannot transform the primary order into a lawful one.

This is not an argument for disobeying court orders. Until an order is set aside, people subject to it may be required to comply with it. That is

precisely why this matters so much.

Because if citizens must obey court orders even while believing those orders to be unlawful, then the corresponding responsibility upon the system is enormous.

There must be an accessible, timely and genuinely independent mechanism for answering the question: Did the court have the power to do this?

Not eventually. Not after the transcript arrives a year later. Not after the appeal window has expired. Not after secondary orders have been built upon the first. Not after the person asking has been restrained from asking again. When it matters.

That is not hostility to the judiciary. It is the opposite. A judicial system worthy of extraordinary public trust should be strong enough to examine its own mistakes. And when the answer is that no mistake occurred, the record should be capable of demonstrating that too.

Because once again, I am not asking you to believe me.

I am asking you to look.

15
AND THEN THERE WAS THE SRA

When the court sends you to the regulator, and the regulator sends you back to court

By April 2025, I had become sufficiently concerned about the language being used towards me by Griffin Law that I reported the matter to the Solicitors Regulation Authority, the SRA.

For those unfamiliar with the SRA, it is the body responsible for regulating solicitors and law firms in England and Wales.

I had assumed that if a solicitor's conduct appeared oppressive, intimidating or professionally inappropriate, this was precisely the organisation to which one should report it.

And the language was extraordinary.

Among the expressions directed towards me were "hoist by your own petard", "foolhardy", "puerile", "vengeance", "above the law", "brazen", "ill-advised", "hopeless", "misguided", "unwarranted", "vexatious", "unconscionable", "inexcusable", "disingenuous", "obstructive", "unreasonable" and "baseless".

There were accusations including "provable lie", "lied to", "misled the

court", "actuated by malice" and "pretending not to know".

There were statements presenting disputed matters as though their outcome had already been determined: "manifest breach", "manifest contempt", "self-evident", "totally without merit", "bound to fail" and "no merit".

But the most concerning language went considerably further.

I was told:

"Candidly, now is the time for you to show some mature self-reflection and to stop taking steps down a path that will only result in your own financial ruin and which is likely to end in your eventual imprisonment."

And then:

"As a mother, one would hope that, no matter how much you might loathe our client, you will not want to ruin the lives of your children as a consequence of your own misguided and unwarranted campaign of vengeance that you have chosen to wreak."

Read that again.

As a mother.

The lives of your children.

Your eventual imprisonment.

Your own financial ruin.

These were not words spoken during a heated exchange between two private individuals. They appeared in professional legal correspondence.

I was a litigant in person, attempting to navigate complex proceedings while raising what I regarded as serious safeguarding concerns.

And I was being told, by solicitors acting for the opposing party, that

continuing along my chosen path was likely to lead to imprisonment, financial ruin and consequences for my children.

I considered that deeply concerning. So I reported it.

WHO REGULATES THE REGULATORS OF CONDUCT?

There was another detail.

Griffin Law confirmed that its Compliance Officer for Legal Practice, or COLP, was the senior solicitor involved in my case: a Mr Terence Donal Blaney (see Chapters 8, 9 etc.).

The COLP is the individual within a regulated law firm responsible for taking reasonable steps to ensure compliance with professional obligations.

That matters because the conduct I was questioning was not something I understood to have been confined to an inexperienced junior solicitor acting without senior oversight.

I therefore considered independent regulatory scrutiny particularly important.

And on 30 October 2025, the SRA wrote something significant.

> *"We are concerned that the correspondence sent by Griffin Law was oppressive/abusive in nature."*
>
> SOLICITORS REGULATION AUTHORITY, 30 OCTOBER 2025

Those are not my words. Those are the SRA's words.

The regulator continued:

"Where we identify serious breaches of our rules, Standards or Regula-

tions, or serious risks to consumers, the public or the wider public interest, we take action."

And then:

"We are at an early stage in our investigation and no decision has been reached yet as to what action, if any, we will take. We will keep you updated."

I understood that. An investigation takes time. A regulator must examine evidence fairly. The solicitors concerned must have an opportunity to answer the allegations. An expression of concern is not a disciplinary finding.

I was not asking the SRA to abandon due process. I was asking it to exercise due process before further harm could occur.

WHILE THE INVESTIGATION CONTINUED

Because, from my perspective, the conduct did not stop. My concerns escalated beyond the language of correspondence.

I raised with the SRA what I considered to be increasingly serious issues involving numerous one-sided communications with judges, applications for civil restraint orders, and representations concerning what courts had supposedly found.

One particular concern was that statements were being made to an institution suggesting that judges had made findings about disputed matters, when, on my reading, the actual court orders recorded no such findings of fact.

That distinction is fundamental. A court making an order is not necessarily the same thing as a court determining that an allegation is true.

An allegation repeated in correspondence does not become an established judicial finding merely because somebody introduces it with the

words “the judge found”.

And where those representations influence what another institution does with evidence, the consequences can be serious.

I repeatedly asked the SRA to examine these matters. I pleaded for the investigation to progress.

Because while the regulator was investigating, proceedings were continuing. Applications were being made. Orders were being sought. The consequences were not waiting patiently for the regulatory timetable to conclude.

The SRA’s response to a number of my concerns was that they were matters for the court. I could understand the distinction in principle. The SRA is not an appeal court. It cannot simply overturn a judicial decision because somebody complains about the solicitor who obtained it.

But that was not the entirety of what I was reporting. I was raising questions about the conduct of regulated professionals in obtaining, presenting and subsequently relying upon those decisions. That is a different question.

And when I raised concerns about the solicitors’ conduct in court, I was directed towards the SRA.

So there we were.

The court said: Take your concerns about the solicitors to their regulator.

The regulator said: Those are matters for the court.

Meanwhile, the disputed conduct continued to have consequences.

THE ACCOUNTABILITY ROUNDABOUT

And this is where the problem becomes much bigger than Griffin Law, the SRA or any particular judge.

Because what exactly is an ordinary citizen supposed to do when two institutions each identify the other as the appropriate place to address a concern?

The court has authority over proceedings and orders. The SRA has authority over professional conduct. Those responsibilities are different, but they can overlap.

A solicitor's conduct can affect court proceedings. Court proceedings can produce evidence relevant to a solicitor's professional conduct. An order may remain legally effective while questions about how it was obtained remain unresolved. And a regulator may need to consider whether a solicitor complied with professional obligations even where the court has not set aside the resulting order.

These are not mutually exclusive questions. Yet the practical effect of repeatedly directing a complainant from one institution to another can be that neither institution examines the complete sequence.

The court looks at the order. The regulator looks at its remit. The next court looks at what the previous court ordered. The next regulator looks at whether the previous regulator has already considered the complaint. And the person reporting the concern is left attempting to persuade each institution that the part it refuses to examine is precisely the part that makes the whole sequence intelligible.

This is the institutional problem I have been describing throughout this book. Accountability travels sideways. Responsibility moves from one desk to another.

Each institution can explain why a particular aspect of the complaint

falls outside its immediate function. And perhaps, individually, those explanations are perfectly legitimate. But collectively, what do they produce?

Who examines the whole? Who asks whether the professional correspondence was appropriate? Who examines whether disputed allegations were presented as established findings? Who considers whether the repeated use of restraint applications was proper? Who examines the consequences of representations made to third-party institutions? And, critically, who acts when a regulator has already acknowledged concern about potentially oppressive or abusive correspondence, but the person complaining says the conduct has continued or escalated?

AN INVESTIGATION IS NOT THE SAME AS PROTECTION

There is a distinction here which I believe our regulatory system must confront.

Investigating misconduct after the event is one thing. Protecting the public from potential ongoing misconduct is another.

A regulator may quite properly require months to investigate a complicated complaint. But if the conduct complained of is continuing, the question of what protective or supervisory steps are available during that investigation becomes important. Otherwise, by the time the investigation concludes, the consequences may be irreversible.

The litigation may have ended. The appeal window may have closed. The litigant may have been bankrupted. The evidence may have disappeared. And further orders may have been built upon the decisions originally complained about.

I am not suggesting that the SRA should automatically accept every allegation made against a solicitor. Nor am I suggesting that every forceful letter written in litigation constitutes professional misconduct.

Solicitors are entitled to represent their clients robustly. They are entitled to dispute allegations. They are entitled to warn of genuine legal and financial risks. But there must be a meaningful distinction between robust representation and oppressive conduct.

The SRA itself recognised that distinction when it wrote to me on 30 October 2025 expressing concern about the correspondence.

What I wanted to know was what would happen next. And, more importantly, what would happen while we waited.

Because regulatory oversight cannot be judged solely by whether an investigation eventually reaches a conclusion. It must also be judged by whether the regulatory system is capable of responding appropriately to serious concerns while they remain live.

SO WHO TAKES RESPONSIBILITY?

I began this process by reporting a safeguarding concern. I then found myself reporting concerns about how that safeguarding report had been handled. Then concerns about court orders. Then concerns about transcripts. Then concerns about the conduct of solicitors. Then concerns about the effectiveness of regulatory oversight. At every stage, the original question risked disappearing beneath another procedural question.

And that is how a system can become almost impossible for an ordinary person to navigate. Not necessarily because every person within it is acting improperly. Not necessarily because every institution is deliberately avoiding responsibility. But because a system divided into separate responsibilities can fail to take responsibility for the cumulative consequences of its own actions.

So I return to the same questions. Who knew? When did they know? What did they do? And when concerns were repeatedly raised, who was

responsible for ensuring that they were actually examined?

Because I do not believe that justice can depend upon a citizen having the time, money, knowledge and stamina to spend years travelling between institutions until one of them finally agrees to look at the whole picture.

The court cannot simply point to the regulator. The regulator cannot simply point to the court. Somewhere, somebody must examine the conduct itself.

And if every institution can explain why the responsibility belongs somewhere else, then we have not created a functioning system of accountability.

We have created a system in which accountability can disappear between jurisdictions.

16

A NEWSPAPER THAT ASKED ME FIRST

It is important that I am fair.

Not every interaction I have had with a newspaper followed the same pattern.

In January 2025, The Guardian was approached with allegations concerning the civil dispute I have described on page 72.

It did something remarkably simple.

It asked me.

It did not simply publish the allegation. It contacted me and gave me an opportunity to respond.

Ultimately, the proposed story was not published. Not by The Guardian, at least. Instead, the *Daily Mail* did run the headline (see page 74), in the exact same format The Guardian had asked me about.

Later, because I wanted to establish in writing who had supplied the allegation, I sought a Norwich Pharmacal Order (NPO) requiring The Guardian to identify its source in writing. This NPO application was necessary because without **written** confirmation of the source, it is im-

possible to pursue professional abuse where said source is breaching ethics and, potentially, the law, in making such smear attempts.

I did not obtain it. Mrs Justice Heather Williams declined to make the order.

And, although that was frustrating for me, I could understand the principle involved.

Journalistic sources cannot casually be exposed simply because somebody wants to know who said something.

There was another moment in that hearing which stayed with me.

Counsel for The Guardian stood in open court and said that the newspaper would not seek its costs from me.

It could have. It didn't.

The hearing itself was also open after an attempt to have the defamation proceedings heard privately was rejected.

There is something important in all of that.

Because this book is not an argument that every journalist is irresponsible; that every newspaper behaves identically; or that everybody who has ever opposed me is part of some single enterprise.

Conduct matters.

The Guardian asked me first. It did not publish the proposed allegation. It defended the confidentiality of its source. And when I unsuccessfully sought an order to compel it to name the source in writing, it did not seek its costs from me.

That deserves to be said too.

17

BRITAIN HAS A WHISTLEBLOWER PROBLEM

In October 2026, I read about the death of Simon Andriesz, whose name had been linked in reporting to the Epstein case. It prompted me to reflect on a much wider problem: the protection of people who speak up about serious wrongdoing.

Britain has a terrible problem with the protection of whistleblowers. We tell people to speak up. We tell them that if they discover corruption, abuse, safeguarding failures, fraud or serious wrongdoing, they have a responsibility to report it.

But what happens when they actually do?

Too often, the person making the disclosure becomes the problem. Institutions are extraordinarily good at protecting institutions. A whistleblower reports something serious and suddenly finds themselves treated as difficult, troublesome or dangerous. They may be isolated, discredited, investigated, threatened with disciplinary proceedings or subjected to extraordinary scrutiny themselves.

The question quietly changes from:

"Is what this person is telling us true?"

to:

"What are we going to do about this person?"

That is exactly how corruption is allowed to fester. Whistleblower protection cannot simply mean giving somebody an email address to which they can send a disclosure. Protection must begin the moment the disclosure is received. And there must be a permanent record. When a serious whistleblowing disclosure reaches an institution, there should be an auditable trail showing exactly who received it, when they received it, what they were told and what they did about it.

Responsibility must travel upwards.

The most senior accountable person within an organisation should not be able to say years later, "I didn't know." Serious disclosures should be escalated to an identified senior officer and that notification should itself create a permanent record.

But I would go further.

THE DEAD MAN'S SWITCH

I came across a phrase whose concept seemed beautiful back in September 2025: the dead man's switch. I then spent much time thinking it through, and I now believe that every whistleblower should have access to a simple, inexpensive system allowing them to preserve two categories of information:

THE EVIDENCE

and

THE EVIDENCE THAT THEY TOLD YOU.

That second category matters enormously.

Save the email containing the disclosure. Save the acknowledgement. Save the response. Save the letter. Save the attachments. Save the dates. Preserve the chronology showing exactly who knew what, and when. Those records should be stored independently of the organisation being reported and independently of the whistleblower's work devices and accounts. And then the whistleblower should be able to activate a **dead man's switch**.

The concept is simple.

While the whistleblower is well, *compos mentis* and acting freely, they prepare an archive of their evidence. They also prepare a separate **public-release package**.

The distinction is crucial.

The private archive may contain everything necessary to preserve the original evidence. The public-release package contains only the material that the whistleblower has consciously decided can appropriately become public if the switch is triggered. Children can be identified only by initials or anonymised entirely. Home addresses can be removed. Passwords and access credentials must never be included. Irrelevant medical or intimate information can be excluded. Vulnerable witnesses and confidential sources can be protected. Information completely unrelated to the wrongdoing can be removed. Where a document contains both important evidence and sensitive third-party information, a redacted copy can be prepared for public release while the original remains securely preserved. That work happens **before the switch is activated**. The whistleblower therefore decides, while capable of making that decision freely, exactly what the public will see. Then the material is encrypted, securely backed up and the switch is activated.

The whistleblower checks in periodically.

If the whistleblower stops checking in, the system should not immediately publish anything. There should be repeated warnings, attempts to contact them and a predetermined grace period during which an accidental missed check-in can be cancelled. Only after those safeguards have been exhausted does the switch execute the instruction previously given by the whistleblower.

And then:

Public release.

WHY NOT ANOTHER INDEPENDENT REVIEW?

I do not believe the ultimate safeguard should simply be another independent review. That only transfers power from one institution to another.

Who appoints the independent reviewer? Who writes their terms of reference? Who decides which evidence they receive? Who decides what they may investigate? Who decides what they are allowed to publish? And who decides whether somebody described as "independent" is actually sufficiently independent of the establishment they are being asked to investigate? There are circumstances in which independent investigations are enormously valuable. Nothing in this proposal prevents the police, regulators, courts, journalists or genuinely independent investigators from doing their jobs. But they should not have a monopoly on the underlying information. There has to be a final safeguard that sits outside the institutional structure altogether.

That safeguard is sunlight.

GIVE THE EVIDENCE BACK TO THE PEOPLE

For too long, we have behaved as though ordinary British people are in-

capable of receiving information, considering competing evidence and reaching conclusions for themselves.

We continually delegate that responsibility.

But if I am *compos mentis*, capable of receiving information, considering its reliability and deciding what I believe, why must somebody else always process that information before I am permitted to see it?

Give me the evidence. Give me the disclosure. Give me the email showing who received it. Give me their response. Give me the chronology.

Let me read it. Let other citizens read it. Let journalists investigate it. Let lawyers analyse it. Let academics interrogate it. Let the organisation concerned respond to it. Let people disagree about what it means. Let somebody produce evidence demonstrating that the whistleblower was mistaken.

But **let us see it.**

Public release does not mean declaring everyone mentioned in the documents guilty. It means making the evidence available for scrutiny.

That distinction is fundamental.

Evidence is evidence. Allegations remain allegations unless and until they are established. Anyone criticised must retain the right to answer the allegations and produce contrary evidence. Returning information to the public does not require abandoning fairness.

CHANGE THE INCENTIVE

This is where the dead man's switch becomes powerful. At present, silencing a whistleblower can sometimes silence the information. The dead man's switch reverses that incentive.

Taking someone's laptop achieves nothing. Deleting their work email achieves nothing. Closing their account achieves nothing. Removing

documents from an institutional system achieves nothing. And silencing the whistleblower does not silence the evidence. The existence of the switch should therefore be visible. A whistleblower should be able to place a simple notice on their website, social-media profile or email signature:

> **Whistleblower Protection Notice**
>
> **I have independently backed up the evidence supporting my disclosures and the documentary record showing when, how and to whom those disclosures were made. A dead man's switch is active. Interfering with my devices or accounts will not destroy that evidence.**

Imagine the change in incentives.

An organisation receiving a serious disclosure knows that the evidence exists somewhere it cannot control. It knows the correspondence proving receipt of the disclosure has also been preserved. And it knows that the whistleblower has already determined what happens to an appropriately prepared public-release package if the specified trigger occurs. The safest course for everyone suddenly becomes remarkably simple:

Keep the whistleblower safe. Preserve the evidence. Investigate what they reported. Do not retaliate.

ACCOUNTABILITY MUST FOLLOW KNOWLEDGE

There is one further reform I believe we need. Where a serious whistleblowing disclosure has been formally escalated, there must be a clear record identifying the senior person ultimately notified. If something subsequently happens to that whistleblower, that documentary trail

should not disappear inside the organisation. The public should be able to know:

Who knew? When did they know? What exactly were they told? What did they do?

That does not mean that somebody should automatically be presumed responsible for whatever subsequently happened. Accountability must still be based on evidence. But neither should senior people be protected by layers of bureaucracy that make responsibility impossible to locate. If evidence ultimately establishes that somebody knowingly suppressed serious wrongdoing, destroyed evidence, retaliated against a whistleblower or deliberately failed to take protective action required of them, there should be serious professional consequences. Power without traceable responsibility is precisely what allows institutional failure to perpetuate itself.

SPEAKING UP SHOULD NOT MEAN STANDING ALONE

This does not require an enormous new bureaucracy. In fact, the beauty of the idea is its simplicity.

SAVE

Preserve the original evidence.

PROVE

Preserve the correspondence showing who was told, what they were told and when.

BACK UP

Keep encrypted copies beyond the control of the organisation concerned.

PREPARE

Create a carefully redacted public-release package in advance, protecting children, vulnerable people, confidential sources and irrelevant private information.

ACTIVATE

Set a reasonable check-in period, repeated warnings and a grace period before anything can happen.

DECLARE

Tell the relevant people that the evidence has been independently preserved and that a dead man's switch exists. And, if the predetermined conditions are eventually satisfied:

RELEASE

Not because publication proves the allegation. Not because the public should conduct a trial by social media. But because nobody should possess the power to make evidence disappear simply because the person who discovered it can no longer speak.

The principle is extraordinarily simple:

The evidence belongs beyond the reach of the people it concerns.

And perhaps the most important evidence in the archive will not ultimately be the documents proving what the whistleblower discovered. Perhaps it will be something much simpler. The email proving **they told you**.

18

HOW TO COOK AS A WHISTLEBLOWER



DESTROY PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

Corruption thrives on plausible deniability.

"I didn't know."

"I never received the email."

"That wasn't what I was told." "That wasn't discussed at the meeting." "We were not aware of the seriousness of the allegation." Those sentences matter because institutions are made up of individuals, and individuals can protect a system for as long as responsibility can be passed from one desk to another. Everyone can claim that somebody else knew. Nobody has to admit that they did. So, as a whistleblower, one of your most important jobs is to **destroy plausible deniability.**

Leave a trail.

File documents. Keep copies. Send important correspondence by tracked delivery and retain the proof. Preserve emails in their original form where possible, including headers, metadata and attachments. Keep contemporaneous notes. Record dates, times, recipients and responses. Preserve accurate records of important meetings where you are entitled to do so. And never rely upon a single form of evidence. I have learned how extraordinary the difference can sometimes be between what was actually said in a meeting and what subsequently appears in the official account. A matter concerning public safety can be raised explicitly, yet somehow disappear from the sanitised record that emerges afterwards. (See Chapters 12 and 14.)

That is why redundancy matters.

The email supports the meeting note. The meeting note supports the contemporaneous diary entry. The delivery receipt proves the letter arrived. The original electronic file helps establish when it existed. The response demonstrates that somebody engaged with it. One piece of evidence may be dismissed. A coherent chronology built from independent records is considerably harder to explain away.

Make it implausible for the people in charge to say they did not know.

That changes the calculation.

It is much easier for someone to protect a colleague, friend or institution when they believe there will never be any personal consequence for doing so. Once an official understands that there is a preserved record showing exactly what they were told, when they were told it and what they did afterwards, silence becomes considerably less comfortable. If protecting somebody else might ultimately place their own position at risk, protecting that person becomes considerably less appetising. The ability to hide enables institutional failure.

Remove that ability and you begin to remove its power.

MAKE YOUR PHYSICAL WORLD EVIDENTIAL TOO

Do not preserve only documents. Think about the physical world around you. Use CCTV where you can. Consider vehicles with dashcams capable of recording what happens around them, including while parked where the equipment supports that function.

And make the cameras visible.

There is protective value in people knowing that their actions may leave a record. The objective is not indiscriminate surveillance. It is deterrence, accountability and preservation. But recording something is not enough.

Back it up.

A camera whose footage exists only on the camera is a single point of failure. Equipment can malfunction. Devices can disappear. Storage can be overwritten. Important material should exist somewhere separate from the device that created it. Configure secure automatic backups where possible, preferably so that the loss of one device or account cannot destroy the only copy. And do not make yourself the only person

capable of recovering the evidence. Have trusted people who know that your archive exists and understand how it can be recovered if necessary. Use secure recovery or emergency-access arrangements rather than casually circulating master passwords.

Ask yourself:

If something happened to me tomorrow, could somebody else find the evidence and understand what happened?

If the answer is no, the system is not finished. Build your archive as though one day a complete stranger may have to reconstruct the story without you sitting beside them to explain it. They should be able to establish:

This happened.

This person knew.

They knew on this date.

Here is the evidence.

Here is what happened next.

That is how an allegation becomes an evidential history.

BE VISIBLE

Do not allow the evidence to depend entirely upon your continued ability to explain it. Be visible. Speak. Where you can publish safely, publish. Make it known that records exist and have been preserved. You do not need to announce where every copy is kept, who holds it or how it can be accessed. Visibility does not mean surrendering your security. It means making disappearance an ineffective strategy. A whistleblower should never have a single point of failure.

Not one phone.

Not one laptop.

Not one camera.

Not one account.

Not one person.

Because nobody becomes a whistleblower for entertainment. It takes courage to challenge people or institutions with considerably more money, authority, influence or connections than you have. It means accepting that life may become uncomfortable because accepting what is happening is worse. And what you are preserving may one day be the information that keeps somebody else safe. So do not confuse courage with vulnerability.

Speak. Document. Preserve. Duplicate.

Make sure the evidence can tell the story without you. Because the most powerful answer to:

"We didn't know."

is:

"Yes, you did. And here is the record."

19

THEY ARE NOT THE ENEMY

There is something else I need to say. I have no idea what happened behind the scenes with Alex Cochrane, the solicitor who was acting for me under a conditional fee agreement. I do not know exactly how it happened, what pressures may have been applied, and what ultimately neutralised him. And I will not pretend to know something that I don't. What I **do** know is what I experienced. And I still believe Mr Cochrane was extraordinarily brave. He took the case in the first place.

He wrote what he wrote after seeing the original material I reported.

He was prepared to act under a conditional fee agreement. And he engaged **Hugh Tomlinson KC**, one of the country's best-known practitioners in media and information law.

Then something happened.

I was told Mr Cochrane had to pause while his conduct was investigated. As I understood it, the issue being raised was his assistance to me in defamation proceedings while certain Family Court orders were in existence.

You might reasonably ask:

How does a Family Court order end up interfering with a solicitor acting in a defamation case?

Yes. I share your puzzlement.

But even that is not quite the point. Because I understood that we were **paused**. We were, to borrow from *Friends*, on a break. Except that, while I believed we were on a break, documents were subsequently provided by Mr Cochrane's **colleague** to Griffin Law stating, in effect, that Mr Cochrane had not been told about the existence of the non-molestation orders from the Family Court (let us leave aside the *ultra vires* application of non-molestation orders to hinder defamation proceedings against a newspaper for a second). And that, as a result, Mr Cochrane no longer acted for me. There was one rather substantial problem with that.

I say it was demonstrably untrue.

The existence of those orders had been disclosed. There is documentary evidence capable of establishing what was provided, to whom, and when.

But there was another problem.

I didn't know our relationship had supposedly ended. So while I thought we were Ross and Rachel arguing about whether we were on a break, apparently other people had been told that we had broken up entirely.

Funny on television.

Rather less funny when the relationship is between a solicitor and client involved in serious litigation. Because ending a solicitor-client retainer is not supposed to operate like ghosting somebody after a bad date.

There are procedures. There are communications. There are professional obligations.

There may be client money to account for. There are papers and responsibilities to deal with. Most importantly, the client should not be left believing that her solicitor remains paused in acting for her while opponents are apparently being told that the relationship has ended. When I subsequently challenged whether the formal process had actually taken place, what followed felt to me like considerable fudging. The explanation appeared, in effect, to become that because we had not communicated for some time, I should naturally have understood that the relationship had ended.

I did not.

And silence is a rather dangerous substitute for clarity when somebody's legal representation is at stake. Now, several people have suggested the obvious response:

Sue the solicitors. Professional negligence. Breach of retainer. Complain. Make them answer for it.

Perhaps there are legal questions there. But for the moment, I have deliberately parked them. Because I think that response risks missing the much bigger question. I had watched Mr Cochrane demonstrate considerable courage. I had watched him take on a case others would be afraid to. Frankly, at the darkest moments of being psychologically tortured for merely making a safeguarding report, Mr Cochrane may well have saved my life. You see, being gagged inflicts a form of mental pain I cannot adequately articulate when false stories are spread and believed, proposing you as the villain. I had seen Mr Cochrane summarise what he saw in the evidence and engage formidable counsel on a no-win, no-fee basis. So my first question is not:

How do I punish this man?

My question is:

What happened to him?

What circumstances could place a professional whom I had previously experienced as principled and courageous in a position where something could happen that, on my account of the documentary record, appears so difficult to reconcile with the relationship and communications that preceded it? That, to me, is the more important question. Because if you want to understand a system, you cannot simply punish every person who buckles inside it. Sometimes you have to ask **what made them buckle**. And this is where I refuse to create convenient villains. I will not make an enemy of a solicitor whom I previously watched demonstrate bravery.

He is not the enemy.

I will not make enemies of four police officers who arrive at my home because they have been instructed to do their jobs and obey higher orders, even while other police officers are telling me they are deeply uncomfortable with what is being done to me.

They are not the enemy.

I will not automatically make enemies even of individual judges where I have watched the atmosphere change when uncomfortable facts were put before the judge that challenged the narrative they had been told about me. Because eventually, you have to stop looking only at the people standing immediately in front of you. You have to look at the structure surrounding them.

What happens when doing the right thing becomes professionally dangerous?

What happens when a solicitor has a mortgage, children and a career? What happens when a police officer has superiors? What happens when a journalist has an editor? What happens when an editor has an owner? What happens when a judge is confronted with orders and findings made by other judges before them? What happens when correcting

something requires acknowledging that decisions already made may have been built upon something wrong? At what point does institutional momentum become more powerful than individual courage? That is the question that interests me. Because until we build systems in which it is **safe to do the right thing**, we will continue to build systems in which power can make doing the right thing extraordinarily expensive. And that is why I have deliberately parked certain battles.

Not abandoned them. Parked them.

Because I do not want the lesson from this story to be: **Never stick your neck out for someone, because if circumstances later force you to retreat, she will destroy you too.**

What incentive would that create for the next solicitor? The next police officer? The next journalist? The next court employee? The next person sitting in a meeting who knows that something is wrong?

People have families. They have mortgages. They have children they want to keep safe. They have careers they have spent decades building. They have professional regulators. They have reputations. They have vulnerabilities.

Courage does not require pretending those things don't exist. And I will not make an enemy of a journalist who is afraid of going to prison for publishing something that a court has ordered them not to publish, even if that journalist privately believes that exposing it would be the right thing to do. It was, after all, a journalist who first told me that what was happening to me was likely SLAPP (Strategic Litigation Against Public Participation). SLAPP is tying a whistleblower or truth-teller up with legal proceedings because the stronger opponent **knows** that the public would overwhelmingly be in the whistleblower's favour if they discovered the whistleblower's report.

That journalist is not the enemy either.

The question is what kind of system puts people in that position. Britain exports its conception of law and justice around the world. Its courts and legal traditions have profoundly influenced legal systems across the Commonwealth and beyond. A THIRD of the world looks to Britain for its legal true north. That's an unprecedented honour and an equally massive responsibility. Fairness, open justice, due process and the rule of law are not peripheral to the story Britain tells about itself.

They are foundational to it.

So my question is not:

Which individual can I destroy for what happened to me?

My question is:

What combination of rules, institutions, incentives, fears and concentrations of power could allow all of these things to happen together?

And, more importantly:

How do we build a system in which the brave person is protected when they decide to say, "No. Something is wrong here"? Because that is how you change institutions. You don't merely punish the people who were frightened.

You make it safer for the next person to be brave.

And perhaps that is ultimately the point of everything I have been trying to do.

Not revenge. Not enemies. Not another person to sue.

A system in which telling the truth is safer than helping to bury it.

20
AND WHAT ABOUT THE OWNERS?

That brings me to the newspaper owners and editors themselves. Because courts are not the only institutions capable of asking questions.

Editors can ask questions.

Boards can ask questions.

And newspaper owners can ask questions. At some point, surely somebody above the individual journalist can say:

Bring me the file.

Show me what we published. Show me what she says is wrong. Show me the documents. Show me the chronology.

The national press is not simply a money-making enterprise. It can influence innocent people, encourage them to lower their guard, to hate or love this person or the other; it can influence their votes, frighten them or placate them. It is, in effect, a giant psychological remote control. All of which places an extremely high burden of responsibility on you, Mr Owner and Mr Editor: a responsibility to ensure no untruths or truth-bending occur within the literal or online pages of your pub-

lication. This is a responsibility that requires very strong and **flat** shoulders, not sloping ones to an underling.

Mr Owner or Mr Editor must be able to say: "Show me the connections she alleges. And then let us decide whether continuing to defend this purely through the technical machinery of defamation law is the only response available to us." Because there is a distinction between asking:

Do we have the finances to engage lawyers to argue this till thy kingdom come on technicalities and deadlines and such?

and asking:

Is this actually true? If not, should we continue to stand behind it?

Those are not necessarily the same question. Defamation law is technical. Litigation is adversarial. Lawyers are instructed to advance their clients' cases. But the people who ultimately control newspapers are not relieved of moral agency merely because lawyers have become involved.

Ownership means something.

Editorial responsibility means something.

Institutional responsibility means something.

You cannot enjoy the influence that comes with owning a newspaper and simultaneously behave as though everything published beneath its masthead belongs to some completely separate moral universe. And that brings us to another part of the system. Because eventually, after all the lawyers, all the applications and all the procedure, somebody presents you with the bill.

21
AND THEN COMES THE BILL

Having brought defamation proceedings, having sought to have these articles taken down while their truth or falsity could properly be determined, I also sought an injunction. For the non-lawyers among us, an injunction is simply a court order requiring somebody to do, or stop doing, something. In this context, I was asking the court to prevent the continued availability online of these articles while the truth of them was determined through the courts looking at the evidence.

Why?

Because while lawyers debated legal tests, the articles remained online. People could read them.

People could search my name and find them. And their continued presence was causing immense distress to me, to members of my family and to people connected with my charity, including significant mental distress to people very dear to me. The injunction hearings took place in March 2026 before Mrs Justice Steyn.

They largely failed.

The reason they failed might raise eyebrows. And questions.

They did not fail because a court had conducted a trial and de-

termined that the articles were true.

There had been no such determination of the truth of any of it. The main obstacle to ordering the articles to be taken down was apparently the fact that they had already been published, plus the passage of time. And this is where, as a non-lawyer, I, and most people who have heard this, struggle with the practical result.

Imagine someone is harming or violating you.

You tell them to stop.

They don't.

You tell them that not only is their article a lie, but that it is hurting you badly; that family members are being ostracised in public and treated badly because of their articles; that minors are experiencing mental health issues because of it. The publishers shrug metaphorically and keep doing it anyway.

You go to the courts, and the court says, in effect:

"But this has been happening for quite a long time, so we won't tell them to stop."

Would that make the continuing harm less important?

If somebody has been injuring you for twelve months, surely the fact that the injury began twelve months ago does not, by itself, make today's injury harmless. **You are not ordinarily entitled to continue harming somebody simply because you have been harming them for a while.** Yet the internet creates precisely this difficulty with publication. An article does not disappear because it is old.

Google does not develop amnesia. The article remains there. Searchable. Shareable. Readable by a potential employer. Readable by a donor. Readable by a school parent. Readable by anybody who types your name into a search engine. So while the **publication date** moves further into history, the experience of the person encountering the article

can be entirely new. For that reader, it was published five seconds ago. And for the person written about, the consequences can begin all over again.

WHAT WAS I DOING WHILE THE CLOCK WAS TICKING?

There is another reason the emphasis upon the passage of time troubles me.

Because you may reasonably ask:

What exactly was she doing all this time?

Well, dear reader, quite a lot. During the period in which I was apparently expected to pursue the immediate removal of these articles with sufficient urgency, my life as I previously knew it was disintegrating around me.

I lost my home.

Not in summer, à la Mr Guy and his difficulties with his creative narrative.

No. On the day of suspension.

Suitcase in a car, with nowhere to go.

The university told me to find a hotel for the weekend. That weekend became days, and stretched until, a week later, they told me they would not pay for a hotel anymore.

In effect, I was on my own. With two kids.

For a period, I lived in hotels with my children. I dealt with significant mental distress within my family. I was trying, throughout all of this, to keep my charity alive whilst I moved into an unfinished building. I carpeted the kids' room and, in my own room, I slept on a mattress on a bare floor covered with a rug. When this got too cold, I attempted to insulate beneath the rug with some insulation roll I found, and made my-

self ill. I thought it was the dust everywhere making me cough. It wasn't. It was insulation fibreglass in my throat.

And the articles did not exist in some sealed compartment marked "defamation litigation." They followed me into the rest of my life.

Donors could read them. And when people saw that the articles remained online, some appeared to conclude that their continued publication must mean there was truth in them. Donations were affected.



My room whilst I was bearing the tag of "gold-digger".

Eventually, the third branch of my charity closed. That branch had been serving, on average, **20 to 30 people every day** who needed us. So when we talk clinically about "delay", I want us to remember what the passage of time actually looked like. It looked like families needing food. It looked like trying to keep a charity operating. It looked like losing a home. It looked like living in hotels with my children. It looked like parenting two teenagers as a single mother, remaining cheerful, telling them I trust God and crying only at night or in the shower at the injustice of it all, so I didn't demoralise these two innocent kids who knew that the chronology of events claimed in the Daily Mail, Telegraph, Times and Spectator articles was not true. Because, you see, the children knew where we lived and until when. And I needed my children to know that being brave and doing the right thing really, really matters when many more vulnerable people are involved. It looked like two separate new allies for the other side emerging and giving one another supporting statements. It looked like Family Court proceedings running in parallel. It looked like appearing as a litigant in person at **more than 35 hear-**

ings, to the point where I genuinely have lost count. And being a litigant in person does not mean simply wandering into court carrying a handbag. It means preparing the material yourself.

Reading the orders yourself. Building the bundles yourself. Writing the applications yourself. Reading the other side's arguments yourself. Researching the law yourself. And then standing up, frequently against experienced lawyers, and arguing it yourself.

Again. And again. And again. With serious transcript issues.

During this period, I was also arrested. My devices were seized and retained for approximately nine months. They were eventually returned, with no charge brought against me. And then there was my defamation solicitor. The solicitor who had agreed to act under a conditional fee agreement. The solicitor who had put his assessment of the case into writing. The solicitor who had engaged **Hugh Tomlinson KC**. As I have already explained, something then happened which resulted in that representation effectively disappearing in circumstances I continue to regard as extraordinary.

And the timing matters. Because this happened shortly before the expiry of the relevant limitation period. Meanwhile, pre-action protocol letters had already been duly served. So this was not a person sitting at home doing absolutely nothing about publications she claimed were causing harm.

There had been lawyers. There had been correspondence. There had been pre-action steps. There had been a solicitor prepared to act under a conditional fee agreement. There had been counsel engaged.

And then that representation disappeared in the circumstances I have already described. The judge considering my application was provided with material from those solicitors, including writings and emails recording what they had seen, their assessment of the case and why they

had been prepared to act. I appreciate entirely that none of that obliged the judge to agree with their legal assessment. Nor does the fact that lawyers were prepared to act under a conditional fee agreement prove that my case would ultimately have succeeded. But it was surely relevant context for what had happened during the period now being characterised as delay. And still the threshold for being forgiven for not taking immediate action was not met. Apparently, even against that background, the circumstances were not sufficient to overcome the legal difficulties created by the passage of time. I understand that courts cannot simply give me special treatment because my life was difficult. I did not ask them to.

But I had rather thought that this was one of the reasons judicial **discretion** existed.

Perhaps I misunderstood. I stand corrected.

But none of that changes the practical reality. The articles remained online. And the alleged harm did not stop simply because the legal clock had moved on.

THEN CAME THE COSTS

And then came the bill.

According to the costs sought by the **Daily Mail, The Telegraph and The Times**, the figures arising from even asking the court to make them take down the articles, until such time as their truth could be proven or disproved, run into hundreds of thousands of pounds. And because the judge did not grant the injunction, I became exposed to substantial adverse costs.

Again, pause. Because we still haven't answered the question. Were the articles true?

The refusal of interim relief (i.e. to order the take-down of the articles)

did not establish that they were true. A limitation issue does not establish that they were true. Delay does not establish that they were true. A costs order does not establish that they were true. Yet the practical sequence can look like this: You say an article is false. You say it is harming you. You attempt to challenge it. Your life collapses around you while you are attempting to do so. You lose legal representation. Time passes. The passage of time itself then becomes an obstacle to obtaining urgent relief. The article remains online. And then the publisher asks you to pay its legal costs.

Hundreds of thousands of pounds.

All before the central factual dispute has been finally determined. And remember the other ingredient in our recipe. At the same time, I say restrictions arising from the family proceedings have prevented me from deploying elsewhere material which I believe may assist in demonstrating that aspects of what has been published are wrong.

So the articles can travel. The allegations can travel. The consequences can travel.

But the evidence I say answers them cannot necessarily travel with me.

There is another problem which is difficult to understand until you see the different proceedings operating together.

A newspaper publishes something about you which differs from your own evidence. That article can be placed before another court.

The existence of the article becomes part of the material before that court. People can read it. Lawyers can refer to it. The fact that a newspaper has published a particular narrative about you can be cited in a different court as proof that that narrative is legitimate.

And in my case, the Family Court was imposing restrictions on what I could disclose, even if I needed to disclose exactly that to prove those

articles were not true. So the newspaper articles are cited by Griffin Law in the Family Court. Then Griffin Law also applies to prevent the evidence from the Family Court being used in the defamation case against the newspapers. Suddenly the disclosure we sought in Chapter 8 takes on a rather particular importance.

By the way, when I keep saying "Griffin Law", save for my SAR request (Chapter 9), Griffin Law says its actions are *on behalf of* its client. But I remind the reader that, under the SRA Principles, solicitors in England and Wales must act "in a way that upholds the constitutional principle of the rule of law, and the proper administration of justice" and "in a way that upholds public trust and confidence in the solicitors' profession and in legal services provided by authorised persons". The SRA is clear: "Should the Principles come into conflict, those which safeguard the wider public interest (such as the rule of law, and public confidence in a trustworthy solicitors' profession and a safe and effective market for regulated legal services) take precedence over an individual client's interests."

So.

An article is published. That article is cited as evidence in Family Court proceedings. But material from the Family Court which might disprove the article is prevented from returning to the court which can determine the truth of the article. That creates a potentially extraordinary circularity.

Eventually the article can begin to look true simply because it has travelled through enough "respectable" places.

The article has effectively authenticated itself.

That is dangerous. Not because every allegation appearing in a newspaper is false. Not because every restriction imposed by a Family Court is improper. And not because material from private family proceedings

should simply be scattered indiscriminately across other litigation.

There are very good reasons why some Family Court material must remain private. Children and victims must be protected. Intimate information may require protection.

But privacy must not accidentally become an evidential one-way valve.

And remember what the defamation proceedings are supposed ultimately to determine. Was what was published true?

That question should not depend upon which piece of evidence happens to possess the correct passport to travel between courtrooms.

If relevant evidence genuinely cannot lawfully be deployed, then there should at least be a clear judicial mechanism by which the conflict can be identified and resolved.

Because otherwise one court can feed another. The second can feed the first. And before long, nobody is looking at the original source anymore. They are looking at what somebody else said about what somebody else said about it.

Sigh.

I would say I am speechless. But it is rather important that I am not.

After all, the consequences are felt in real ways. Against this unproven narrative, and with Griffin Law representing, a judge fast-tracked my financial remedy hearing, ordering me to pay Griffin Law's costs for the other side, ordering the sale of the home where I live with my children, and giving **conduct of sale to the person I made a report about**. Whilst the newspaper articles relied upon within family proceedings remain up... and their truth undetermined.

This, Britain, is **your** judicial system. And remember, once a thing has been done in law, it will be relied on as precedent to do it to others.

22

TRUTH CANNOT MEAN "YOU COULDN'T AFFORD TO CHALLENGE US"

Because there is something much bigger at stake here than my legal bill.

These are powerful newspapers.

Their importance is not simply measured by their revenue.

It is measured by **trust**.

Millions of people encounter journalism from major national newspapers believing that somebody, somewhere, has checked what they are being told.

Newspapers influence reputations.

They influence public debate.

They influence which allegations receive attention. They influence which people the public regards with suspicion. They contribute to the information environment in which people make important decisions,

including political decisions, like who gets their vote and who gets their donation.

That is enormous power.

And with enormous power must surely come an equally serious commitment to accuracy.

The standard cannot simply become:

Can this article legally remain online because we won on technicalities?

There is another question.

A much older question.

Is it true?

Because the defence of truth cannot simply become:

"You failed to have our article taken down quickly enough, so now pay our lawyers."

That is not a determination of truth. That is a determination about litigation. And they are not the same thing. I came to Britain at twenty-one. Nobody packs her suitcase at twenty-one and moves to a country where even the milk tastes different, where she does not know how half the systems work, and begins building an entire life from scratch without eventually adopting that country as her own. So when I say **our country**, I mean it. And I think something about the soul of our country is engaged by these questions. Because if newspapers are trusted to tell millions of people what is happening, accuracy cannot ultimately be measured by whether the person written about possessed the money, legal knowledge, emotional strength and sheer stamina required to force the question to trial. Especially when challenging publication can itself expose that person to costs running into hundreds of thou-

sands of pounds. Ask yourself what message that sends to an ordinary person.

You believe something seriously false has been written about you.

The publisher has experienced lawyers.

You don't.

The publisher can afford litigation.

You can't.

And if you attempt to stop the publication and lose an interim application, you may face a bill capable of changing the course of your life.

How many ordinary people will even try?

That is why I use the phrase **weaponisation of costs**. I appreciate that costs have a legitimate purpose. Successful parties ordinarily expect to recover an appropriate proportion of the expense of litigation. But we should still be capable of asking what happens when those costs become so enormous that the possibility of having to pay them may itself deter an ordinary person from asking a court whether something published about them is true. Because there is a profound difference between:

"A court determined that what we published was true."

and:

"You could not overcome the procedural hurdles required to make us take it down."

The first speaks to truth.

The second speaks to process.

And they are not the same thing.

23
THIS IS MY REPORT

Britain literally runs an advert telling us:

See it. Say it. Sorted.

The message is simple. If you see something that may endanger other people, report it. Speak up. Keeping people safe is a collective responsibility.

That is precisely what I have been trying to do. I tried to report a safeguarding concern. And in attempting to report that concern, preserve the evidence and understand what subsequently happened, the process itself uncovered something bigger that I believe also needs to be reported.

So consider this book **my report**.

And I need to say something clearly.

I do not believe that every judge involved in these matters, or every judge to whom I subsequently wrote, was complicit in wrongdoing.

That is not my case. The paperwork can establish who knew what and when. People may have been misled. People may have been drawn into a process without understanding everything that had happened before

their involvement. Judges may have made decisions entirely in good faith on the information placed before them.

But that cannot be the end of the enquiry.

Because once inconsistencies were repeatedly flagged, once missing records were identified, once questions of jurisdiction were raised, once discrepancies between accounts and transcripts were identified, and once the documentary trail was placed before those responsible, somebody needed to look again.

And if something had gone wrong, somebody needed to correct it.

It cannot be sufficient to say that too much water has passed under the bridge.

An improper foundation does not become proper merely because enough subsequent decisions have been constructed upon it.

Ten secondary orders cannot cure a defective primary order simply by standing on top of one another.

Indeed, the further an error travels through a system, the more important scrutiny becomes, because more and more subsequent decisions may come to depend upon it.

There is an old principle of English law which captures part of the point:

Fraud unravels everything.

I am not invoking that principle to ask you to conclude, without investigation, that any particular person committed fraud.

Quite the opposite.

Investigate.

Establish what happened. Establish who knew what. Establish when they knew it.

Put the original recordings beside the transcripts. Put the transcripts beside the approved judgments. Put the heads of terms beside the final orders. Put the emails beside the accounts subsequently given of them. Put the institution's own Chair of Council's emails beside its own official institutional record of what was supposedly reported. Put the dates beside the appeal windows. Put the police report beside the newspaper articles. Put the solicitors' emails and the petition for divorce beside the newspaper articles.

And then let the evidence answer the question.

Because this book is not about any one individual.

It is about whether the safeguards within a system are capable of detecting and correcting failure **inside that same system**.

That is a very different question.

And it is why I have preserved everything.

I am not asking Great Britain to believe me because I say so.

I am asking Great Britain to look.

See it.

Say it.

Report it.

And, when the evidence requires it:

Correct it.

In *Lazarus Estates Ltd v Beasley* [1956] 1 QB 702, Lord Denning stated: "No court in this land will allow a person to keep an advantage which he has obtained by fraud. No judgment of a court... can be allowed to stand if it has been obtained by fraud. Fraud unravels everything."

24

ONE WOMAN. ELEVEN MONTHS. ONE MILLION POUNDS.

Within eleven months of my original report, somebody connected to the various parties wrote that an estimated £1 million had been spent dealing with "her vexatious complaints."

If that estimate was accurate, that is actually quite impressive.

One woman.

Eleven months.

One million pounds.

And largely unrepresented.

But I can see how the numbers might add up.

On 13 January 2026, I stood alone at the Royal Courts of Justice. No barrister. No solicitor. Nobody sitting beside me.

On the other side were twelve lawyers, at what I was told was an estimated cost of approximately £75,000 for that hearing alone.

Today, the estimate I have been given is that the overall expenditure has passed £2 million.

Which leaves me with a fairly obvious question:

Who spends £2 million dealing with a vexatious report?

Because I haven't had an army of lawyers.

Quite the opposite.

And that was not entirely by choice.

At one point I had solicitors willing to represent me and willing to instruct one of the most notable silks in the field under a conditional fee agreement.

That representation subsequently came to an end in circumstances I have described earlier, involving concerns raised about the existence and effect of Family Court orders. I do not know precisely what happened behind the scenes or what pressures, if any, were applied. What I do know is that I lost the representation of solicitors who had been prepared to take on my case under a conditional fee agreement.

25
CLOSING ARGUMENTS

And now, finally, perhaps we can taste the finished dish. Because you can look at every ingredient separately and find an explanation for it. A Family Court restriction may be outside of its jurisdiction. Or not. A newspaper article may be fabricated. Or not. A Family Court order may itself be ordering a person to commit the criminal act of evidence destruction. Or not. A procedural decision may be a terrible violation. Or not. A privacy rule may be to protect an alleged perpetrator and vilify the person reporting them. Or not. Each ingredient, sitting neatly on a kitchen table, may be perfectly fine. Or it may be rotten.

But nobody eats the ingredients separately.

The question is what they produce when you put them together. And that, perhaps, is the central argument of this entire book. Because justice cannot be assessed one order at a time when those orders operate together.

You have to stand back.

Look at the whole thing.

Taste the finished dish.

And ask:

What did the system actually produce?

One with merely an off taste? Or one where so many spoiled ingredients have come together to create a potentially deadly dish?

Because a system can contain individually defensible decisions and still, through their cumulative effect, produce something profoundly troubling. And that brings me back to the people for whom this matters most.

Not lawyers.

Ordinary people.

I am reasonably well educated.

Admittedly, none of it in law. My education wandered from microbiology, to an MBA, to marketing, followed eventually by the rather less conventional professional qualification of teaching myself how to make extremely elaborate cakes.

But I can read.

I can research.

I can follow a chronology.

I can compare one document with another.

I can ask questions.

And I am exceptionally persistent.

So if **I** can experience what I have experienced as a litigant in person, imagine somebody who is frightened.

Traumatised.

Poorly educated.

Dyslexic.

Struggling with English.

Facing an experienced legal team.

Or simply unaware that something happening in front of them might be capable of challenge. That is when this story stopped being merely about me. Because justice cannot depend upon whether the person standing in front of the court knows enough law to recognise when something has gone wrong. The system has to work for the person who doesn't know.

For the frightened mother.

For the bewildered father.

For the person who cannot afford a barrister. For the person who has never heard of a procedural rule. For the person who would never dream of questioning a judge.

"My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge."
"Therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding."
– Bible

"Read! In the name of your Lord who created..."
– Quran

26
THE RECIPE FOR JUSTICE

And that takes me back to where we started. Perhaps I already have written another recipe book. Because when you put all of these ingredients together, something rather peculiar happens.

An allegation becomes an article.

The article becomes evidence.

The evidence enters another courtroom.

Material that might challenge it cannot necessarily follow it there. Documents that I say contain important evidence remain unread.

Orders accumulate.

Lawyers multiply.

Costs increase.

The person trying to challenge the publications becomes financially exposed. The people trying to help may themselves come under pressure. And eventually the machinery becomes so enormous that the original question almost disappears beneath it. So let us strip everything back.

Forget the £1 million.

Forget the estimated £2 million.

Forget the twelve lawyers.

Forget the 35-plus hearings.

Forget me.

Forget the newspapers.

Forget the judges.

Forget who is important and who isn't. There is one question underneath the entire thing:

Is it true?

That is all.

Not:

Who said it?

How senior are they?

How embarrassing would it be if they were wrong?

How many subsequent decisions have relied upon it?

How expensive would it now be to admit a mistake?

How many lawyers can defend it?

How much will it cost the person challenging it to continue?

Just:

Is it true?

And there is an extraordinarily simple way of beginning to answer that question.

Look at the evidence.

That is the recipe.

Put everything on the table.

Examine the documents.

Check the chronology.

Test what each side says.

Follow the evidence wherever it leads.

Correct what is wrong.

Protect what genuinely requires protection.

And tell the truth.

Because justice cannot depend upon whether the person asking for it is a KC, a professor, a journalist, a microbiologist, a mother, a litigant in person... or a cake maker somebody thought should go away and write a recipe book. Perhaps that little girl sitting on her grandfather's desk, reading cases she barely understood, really was being prepared for something.

Equality in the animal kingdom.

The incorruptible judge.

And finally:

The recipe for justice.

Look.

Listen.

Test.

Tell the truth.

Because after more than 35 hearings, after the lawyers, the orders, the articles, the costs, the arrest, the seized devices, the lost home, the hotels, the lost legal representation, the closed charity branch and the documents I am still asking somebody simply to read, I find myself returning to the most basic purpose of the whole enterprise.

Justice.

Not procedure for procedure's sake.

Not winning for winning's sake.

Not protecting an institution because correcting the record has become inconvenient.

Justice.

Perhaps every individual ingredient in this story can be explained. Perhaps somebody can produce a rule for every one of them. Perhaps somebody can point to a paragraph, an order, a practice direction, a costs rule, a privacy principle or a limitation provision and explain precisely how we arrived here.

I am willing to listen.

But explanations of the ingredients do not answer the final question.

What did we actually serve?

Because if the principal purpose of a functioning judicial system is that its procedures ultimately further justice, then after looking at all of

these ingredients together, perhaps there is only one question left to ask.

Not:

Was there a rule?

Not:

Was there a procedure?

Not:

Was there jurisdiction?

Not even:

Could each individual decision, viewed entirely in isolation, be legally explained?

But:

Was justice served?

And having tasted the finished dish, I am afraid I must send it back.

Justice has not been served.

27
THE LAST RECIPE

INGREDIENTS

Truth.

Evidence.

Courage.

A very good filing system.

METHOD

Speak.

Document.

Preserve.

Duplicate.

Correct the record while you are still here to correct it. Because one day, what happened today will be called history. And somewhere, perhaps generations from now, somebody may come looking for you.

Make sure they can find you.

DEDICATION

To God

The only One I can truly and deservedly dedicate this book to is God.

Every bit of the wit, the joy, the laughter, the courage, the extraordinary people who stood beside me, the family who supported me, the little miracles and the seemingly impossible coincidences. All of it.

God.

I do not believe that God is confined to church buildings. In fact, I often picture God aghast at what some churches do in His name. He is everywhere. He loves people who have never set foot in any church. Or even read the Bible. And He is responsive.

Very much so.

A friend of mine, a determined atheist, once laughed when I suggested she ask God for a sign.

"Yeah, God, if you're real, show me a llama," she jokingly said.

Two days later, she rang me, laughing rather shakily.

"Cynthia," she said, "I'm staring at a f**king llama!"

Her satnav had diverted her around a traffic build-up. She had taken an unfamiliar route home and, upon turning a corner, found herself face to face with...

A llama.

Of all the creatures on God's green earth.

God likes jokes. Or, as teens would say, *God's got jokes*.

And I have come to know Him as a God who understands the individual. The Bible says, "To the pure He shows Himself pure, and to the cunning He shows Himself shrewd."

I have known Him in the extraordinary calm that settles over me when I am facing injustice that would otherwise seem unbearable.

In the hundreds of bouquets that arrived after I whispered to Him that I wanted flowers.

In glorious sunshine and unexpected rainbows.

In dozens upon dozens of sundogs, those extraordinary halos of light that began appearing in the sky after I asked Him for something beautiful to cheer me up on the days when the unfairness of everything threatened to overwhelm me.

And in the moments when I was ready to walk away.

There were many.

But each time, something happened.

Not simply a comforting thought or an internal feeling. Something tangible. Something unexpected. Something so extraordinarily well-timed that I could only laugh.

Like Vim, a man I had just met, who knew absolutely nothing about my circumstances but suddenly told me not to lose my nerve, and not to fear the noise, because it would grow louder just before it stopped.

He said this on the very morning I had silently decided that I could take no more and wanted to drop my defamation claims.

He could not have known.

But God knew.

And then there were the people He placed around me.

The friends who stayed. The family who supported me. The people who made me laugh when there was very little, objectively speaking, to laugh about.

I remember joking with a teenage relative about why I could cross my legs so tightly.

"Because I don't have testicles," I explained.

He laughed, then suddenly stopped, looked at me with complete seriousness and said:

"Yeah, but you've got balls though."

And there it was.

Perhaps the most sincere acknowledgement of the pressure, the backlash and the sheer amount of endurance these years have required.

I laughed.

How could I not?

Because amid some of the most extraordinary difficulties of my life, God has given me more genuine, joyful laughter than I have experienced in decades.

Not just survival.

Joy.

Not just endurance.

Humour.

Not just the strength to keep going.

The ability to find something gloriously funny even in circumstances that were anything but.

And then there are the 1,001 coincidences.

The conversations. The chance encounters. The documents that appeared at precisely the right time. The unexpected connections. The people who said something they could not possibly have known would matter. The extraordinary sequence of events through which an increasingly comprehensive body of evidence came together.

I have learned to pay attention.

Because I believe God does not merely equip us for the lives we imagine we will lead.

He custom-builds us for the particular wrongs we may one day be called to challenge.

And when I look back over my life, I begin to see the pattern.

My ADHD.

My ability to learn quickly.

My insatiable curiosity.

My fascination with the law from childhood.

My grandfather, whom I adored, who trained as a barrister at Lincoln's Inn and whose home was regularly visited by government officials.

The extraordinary education I received simply by watching him.

My lack of intimidation by authority.

My love of Britain.

My experiences in business, charity, television and public life.

The people in positions of influence whom I came to know, not through any deliberate pursuit of power, but simply through the unexpected turns of life.

My appearance.

My skin colour.

Even the things that other people might regard as disadvantages.

All of it.

Every experience. Every gift. Every apparent detour.

I believe there is a purpose in it.

Perhaps I was never meant to become the lawyer I so desperately wanted to be as a child.

Perhaps I was meant to understand the law from an entirely different position.

Perhaps the girl who sat reading law books in her grandfather's chambers was being prepared for something she could not yet imagine.

And perhaps the very things that made others underestimate me were among the things God had equipped me with for the work ahead.

I cannot pretend to know every detail of His purpose.

But I know this much.

Our gifts are never given solely for ourselves.

If you have strength, it is partly so that somebody weaker may find protection.

If you have knowledge, it is partly so that somebody without it may find understanding.

If you have courage, it is partly so that somebody frightened may discover that they, too, can stand.

If you have a voice, it is partly so that somebody who has been silenced may one day be heard.

And if you have been blessed with the ability to see what others cannot see, you have a responsibility not to look away.

Both the Bible and the Quran are clear that true, sincere worship of God cannot be separated from the rejection of injustice and the duty to protect the vulnerable, particularly those who cannot defend themselves.

And both make something clear: God is neither blind to injustice nor indifferent to the suffering of its victims. He hears their cries and holds the powerful accountable.

That is what I believe.

And that is why, whatever anybody may think of the pages they have just read, I cannot claim credit for them.

Not for the humour, the courage, the evidence that kept popping up, or for the people who helped me.

Not for the extraordinary coincidences that somehow kept becoming answers.

Not even for the ability to keep laughing.

I am grateful beyond words to every person who stood beside me, loved me, encouraged me, challenged me, protected me or simply made me smile.

But I know whom I am thanking through them.

And so this book, with all its recipes, its receipts, its questions, its laughter and its stubborn insistence upon justice, is dedicated to the One who has been present through every single moment.

To God.

For the courage when I needed it.

For the laughter when I least expected it.

For the people when I could not stand alone.

For the evidence when the truth seemed impossible to establish.

For the beauty when the world seemed ugly.

For the peace when nothing around me made sense.

And for reminding me, again and again, that I was never doing any of this alone.

All the glory belongs to You, God.

So be it.



Appendix
SUMMARY JUDGMENT EVIDENCE

The principal documents concerning the civil dispute described in Chapter 11, reproduced as filed. Section 5 contains the insolvency advice and the instruction to prepare a Company Voluntary Arrangement proposal.

Curated documentary evidence concerning the B-Fab civil dispute, the later use of the language of "theft", the summary judgment application, and the transcript delay.

This pack reproduces only the principal documents needed to tell the sequence clearly. The original appeal bundle remains the source record.

You see, the alleged source of the smear knows I am of Igbo tribe origin. And in traditional Igbo society, theft is regarded as a grave moral failing, a betrayal of trust and an abomination: a trespass on honour. So whilst I do not strictly have to present evidence in this book, I do so here so that those who understand "honour" will understand:

1. why that headline on page 74 was particularly egregious to me;
2. why I did not believe it was an accident; and
3. why I sought written confirmation of the source who phoned newspapers trying to propagate this smear.

EVIDENCE MAP

1. 17 June 2019 - Owner describes the arrangement as self-employed.
Internal email: "Paying Cynthia as self-employed" and description of Cynthia as B-Fab's "key person" / "chief person".

2. 6 February 2020 - Accountant confirms there are no payslips.
Message: "There are no payslips you are self-employed."

3. Bonus agreement - 5% above £150,000.
The original offer email sets out a 5% commission structure once annual sales exceed £150,000.

4. 27 January 2020 - Amazon money is openly disclosed and accounted for.
Email to the accountant, copied to the owner, explains the Amazon payments into Cynthia's account, states the total, credits it against the invoice, and confirms the payment destination was changed back to B-Fab.

5. 20 March 2020 - Transfer to Pecksniffs.
The transfer letter was sent at 12:06 and the signed documents were returned shortly after 14:17. The letter presented the transfer as a protective measure during Covid and said undertakings would transfer to Pecksniffs.

6. 23 March 2020 - CVA instruction.
The Administrator's Proposals record that insolvency advice had been sought on 29 January 2020 and that, on 23 March 2020, the director instructed FRP to prepare a Company Voluntary Arrangement proposal.

7. 1 May 2020 - Invoice and bonus paid, balance remitted, calculation and resignation supplied.
Witness statement extracts record that the funds were released on 30 April; on 1 May, with no payment or payslip received, Cynthia paid her invoice and bonus, transferred the difference to the company's account, and supplied the turnover breakdown, bonus calculation, paid invoice and resignation.

8. Civil pleadings - conflicting descriptions.
B-Fab's claim alleged that Cynthia "illegally withheld company owned monies" and was PAYE. A separate B-Fab defence stated: "Cynthia Stroud was not employed by B-Fab UK Ltd."

9. 2025 - Summary judgment at the outset of trial.
The order records an oral application at the outset of the trial and summary judgment on the counterclaim.

10. Transcript problem.
The High Court required the lower-court judgment transcript for the appeal. Later correspondence records that the transcriber still had not received the audio recordings and could not begin transcription.

Note: the documentary evidence supports an approximately two-hour turnaround on 20 March 2020 from the transfer email to return of the signed documents. The witness statement separately says the transfer was presented as necessary to "protect" the engagement.

1 | SELF-EMPLOYED STATUS

Contemporaneous internal email from the owner, followed by the accountant's written confirmation.

From: Ian Clayton-Smith <Ian.ClaytonSmith@pecksniffs.com>
Date: 17 June 2019 at 17:30:48 BST
To: Anne Lander <Anne.Lander@pecksniffs.com>
Cc: Cynthia Stroud <cynthia.stroud@btinternet.com>, Michael Christie <mike@wilsondevenish.co.uk>
Subject: F-FAB

Anne

Its been a baptism of fire today but thank you for keeping calm while I have hit the ceiling

Hopefully I have given you a top line intro into all satellite operations/subsidiaries plus we had conversations/huddles etc with some. I will try and do separate emails on each for you!

As regards B-Fab the key person (only!) you met on Friday and her accountant is Michael. I have given you email contacts above of them both, and I am sure Cynthia will be in touch

Where we are with B-Fab financially is that very little has been done/set up. It's just got started. However we are way behind. The key things are

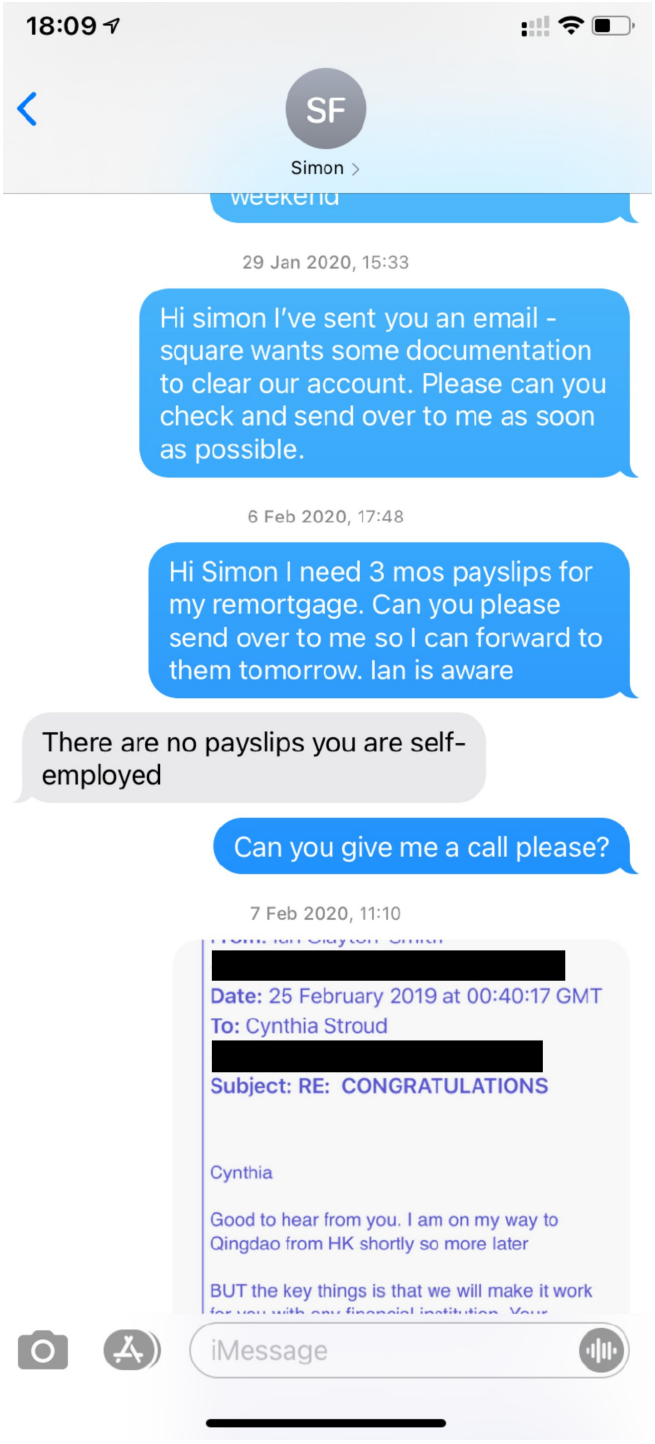
1. Paying Cynthia as self-employed. You may recall our conversation Friday. This is becoming an embarrassment!
2. There is a bunch of creditors not paid etc. I gave you the file, but I would verify the truth
3. We have some income, and where that goes I am not sure, but we do need to do a short term cash flow that involves squeezing the creditors till August
4. We need to start putting down some markers and come up with a financial plan/ budget to march 2020. I can give you some assumptions but Cynthia in her capacity as chief person may wish to add/subtract

I would recommend a meet asap with Cynthia so you can begin to get into the detail, but I will leave that with you. Please feel free to ask anything. Till further

Best

ICS
Ian Clayton-Smith

PECKSNIFF'S


18:09
SF
Simon
weekend
29 Jan 2020, 15:33
Hi simon I've sent you an email - square wants some documentation to clear our account. Please can you check and send over to me as soon as possible.
6 Feb 2020, 17:48
Hi Simon I need 3 mos payslips for my remortgage. Can you please send over to me so I can forward to them tomorrow. Ian is aware
There are no payslips you are self-employed
Can you give me a call please?
7 Feb 2020, 11:10
[redacted]
Date: 25 February 2019 at 00:40:17 GMT
To: Cynthia Stroud
[redacted]
Subject: RE: CONGRATULATIONS
Cynthia
Good to hear from you. I am on my way to Qingdao from HK shortly so more later
BUT the key things is that we will make it work
iMessage

2 | BONUS AGREEMENT

Original offer email setting out the 5% commission structure above the £150,000 sales threshold.

From: Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Date: 24 February 2019 at 07:53:54 GMT
To: [redacted]
Subject: CONGRATULATIONS

Cynthia

Well congratulations might be the wrong word!!

Firstly apologies for taking so long to get back to you, but there was a candidate that polarised opinion and whom was making claims that necessitated extra investigation. On top of that I have been without my computer while I was away from the office. Long story.

I am genuinely excited to be enclosing an offer to you. May be I have you wrong, but I think you are a winner and we will have a lot of fun together in you making a great success of the venture and a lot of money on the way. I am off to China shortly so I will keep it simple and ad some flesh and give some insights

1. If you want to call me my mobile is 07808329511. What's yours?
2. The attached letterhead may be confusing. Basically you are going to have your own company so you don't get unwanted interference form others, but more importantly there is no confusion/misunderstandings on how you are doing financially. There is only 1 way to measure how much fun we are having and that is by measuring the numbers. The company name is perhaps less than ideal so please feel free to suggest an alternative which is more E commerce focused
3. Start date. We will keep the offer open to May 1 but hope you can join by April 1
4. Bonus. This we will need to sort, but broadly how I see it is for you to have bonus structure that is for 2 yrs, which we then review and reset in light of actual events/prospects and not just a series of unknowns. To keep it simple I propose the following basis
    a. Any sales over £150k (exc VAT). 5% commission. Ie £150,001=£7500 bonus. I have set a threshold on the basis that the site currently turns over £45k and getting to £150k should not be too hard
    b. Once £150k annualised is reached I suggest we then pay the bonus twice a year
    c. No maximum. So in theory if the websites in total turned over say £1,000,000 in yr 2 you would get a bonus of £42,500

    We will need to ad flesh/detail but I hope you get the picture and feel it an exciting opportunity to make a lot of money for yourself.
5. Clearly if all goes to plan I see no reason we would not make you a Director and give you all the improved benefits that would go with that
6. Day 1 strategy and short term plan. I have views but nothing is set in stone. That we would do and agree through discussion. My style is let people get on with it while I do my best to support and only involve myself in strategy and material financial matters

I look forward to hearing from you. Till soon

Best

ICS
Ian Clayton-Smith

ASKED FOR THEREFORE MADE

This email and any files transmitted with it are confidential and intended solely for the use of the individual or entity to whom they are addressed. If you are not the named addressee you should not disseminate, distribute, forward or copy this email. Please notify the sender immediately by email if you have received this e-mail by mistake and delete this e-mail from your system. If you are not the intended recipient you are notified that disclosing, copying, distributing or taking any action in reliance on the contents of this information is strictly prohibited.
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- image001.jpg (3 KB)
- Cynthia Stroud - Offer Letter 21-02.docx (343 KB)

3 | AMAZON FUNDS DISCLOSED AND ACCOUNTED FOR

Invoice and contemporaneous email showing the Amazon receipts, the credit against the invoice, and the payment destination being changed back to B-Fab.

CYNTHIA STROUD

INVOICE

Date: 27 January 2020
To: B-Fab UK Ltd, 14 Wimbledon Avenue IP27 0NZ
Re: Consultancy

DESCRIPTION	UNIT	PRICE	COST
Gross payment for January 2020	1	£4583.33	£4583.33
Phone Bill			£70
Google spend January 2020			£138
Misc			£192
Mileage	442	£0.3	£132.6
		Subtotal	£5115.93
		VAT at 0%	£0
		Total due	£5115.93
		Paid via Amazon	£5359.73
		Balance	-£243.8

Invoice Number: 183

PAID

Payment can be made by BACS. Bank Transfers should be made to [redacted]

Please send remittance advice to [redacted]

Sincerely yours,

Cynthia Stroud

[redacted]

Subject: January Invoice
Date: Monday, 27 January 2020 at 13:59:18 Greenwich Mean Time
From: Cynthia Stroud
To: Simon Flory
CC: Ian Clayton-Smith
Attachments: 200126 B-Fab.pdf, INV0002.pdf

Hi Simon

I attach my January invoice, which Ive marked as paid.
Amazon had a fraud attempt end of December just before a payment was due and put a lock on the account. So i changed the payment account and £4510.95 was paid into my account on 31 Dec 2019. I told Ian about this at the time and last week.

Didn't realise Amazon pays biweekly though and have just seen another £848.78 was paid on 14 January.

I have changed Amazon's payment destination has now been changed back to B-Fab.

In total £5359.73 was paid so there's some credit there marked on the invoice.

Other payments due:

- Photographer £1500 (invoice attached)
- Cedar remains full time
- Lease (£0)- Decided not to pursue the unit lease
- Anna's invoice is due anytime now and will be around 18days worked i.e. 36hours

Kind regards,

Cynthia Stroud
Head of E-Commerce
Pecksniffs, Olivia Blake, London General Store

4 | 20 MARCH 2020 TRANSFER TO PECKSNIFFS

The transfer email, transfer letter and same-day correspondence. The documents show the transfer request being sent shortly after noon and signed documents being returned shortly after 2pm.

Subject: Private and Confidential
Date: Friday, 20 March 2020 at 12:06:04 Greenwich Mean Time
From: Vicky Riches
To: Cynthia Stroud
Attachments: image001.jpg, Pecksniffs letter to Cynthia Stroud.pdf

HI Cynthia

Please find attached a letter as per your discussion with Ian.

Please let me have Cedar's email or advise if you wish to send her letter on of which case I can send to you in a separate email

I would be grateful for a signed copy back asap

Kind Regards

Vicky

Vicky Riches
HR, Service and Support Manager
Direct Line: 01842 840228

PECKSNIFF'S
ASKED FOR THEREFORE MADE

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WARNING: Computer viruses can be transmitted via email. The recipient should check this email and any attachments for the presence of viruses. Pecksniff's accepts no liability for any damage caused by any virus transmitted by this email. Email transmission cannot be guaranteed to be secure or error-free as information could be intercepted, corrupted, lost, destroyed, arrive late or incomplete, or contain viruses. The sender therefore does not accept liability for any errors or omissions in the contents of this message, which arise as a result of email transmission.
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PECKSNIFF'S

Cynthia Stroud

[redacted]

20th March 2020

Dear Cynthia

Transfer to Pecksniff's Ltd

Covid-19 has left the world with an extraordinary problem. We are in unknown and uncertain times. In order to shore up the employees within Pecksniff's and B-Fab your contract of employment is to be transferred to Pecksniff's under TUPE regulations with effect from 23rd March 2020.

To enable this to happen we need to follow a few simple steps and advise you:

- We do not plan to make any changes to your contract of employment
- All undertakings will transfer to Pecksniff's Ltd and your employment with B-Fab Ltd will count towards your period of continuous employment.
- We are planning to transfer you for the March pay Period
- All Term's and Conditions of your employment remain unchanged

Please sign this letter at the bottom to confirm full agreement and understanding and return a copy back to us by return.

Kind regards

Ian Clayton-Smith
Director

Cynthia Stroud _____

Date 20/3/2020

Pecksniff's Bespoke Fragrances & Cosmetics Limited,
Pecksniffs House, 14 Wimbledon Avenue,
Brandon, Suffolk, IP27 0NZ
www.pecksniffs.com
Registered in England No. 3062275
VAT Registration Number 793 899 345

Subject: Re: HR Questions
Date: Friday, 20 March 2020 at 14:24:28 Greenwich Mean Time
From: Cynthia Stroud
To: Vicky Riches
Attachments: image001.jpg, Pecksniffs letter to Cedar Johnson Signed.pdf, Pecksniff's TUPE- Cynthia Stroud.pdf

oops, here they are

From: Cynthia Stroud [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 14:17
To: Vicky Riches [redacted] Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Subject: Re: HR Questions

Okay, I see its the contract side that is no longer needed. My mistake, I misunderstood Vicky's sentence.
My contract and Cedar's are attached- signed

Kind regards,

Cynthia Stroud
Head of E-Commerce
Pecksniffs, Olivia Blake, London General Store

From: Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 13:34
To: Cynthia Stroud [redacted] Vicky Riches [redacted]
Subject: RE: HR Questions

Hi

Vicky isn't Anna in Pecksniffs already as well?

Good thought Cynthia. Mind you the picture actions needed change every day!

KBO and

Best

ICS
Ian Clayton-Smith

From: Cynthia Stroud [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 13:17
To: Vicky Riches [redacted] Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Subject: Re: HR Questions

Vicky please send me Cedar's letter and I'll send to her once I've spoken to her first.

Ian please advise re Anna - I'd like to notify her by phone call rather than a letter out of the blues.

If warehousing is taking over the goods dispatch, Anna can give some training on what she does and how we send the orders to her etc.

Kind regards,

Cynthia Stroud
Head of E-Commerce
Pecksniffs, Olivia Blake, London General Store

From: Vicky Riches [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 13:02
To: Cynthia Stroud [redacted] Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Subject: RE: HR Questions

Hi Cynthia

I can answer point 2….yes – reporting line same

Only the HR paperwork comes to me for all Pecksniff's employees irregardless who they report to

Can you let me know on Cedar's letter please? And sending? She is the only one not yet sent

Kind Regards

Vicky

Vicky Riches
HR, Service and Support Manager
Direct Line: 01842 840228

From: Cynthia Stroud [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 12:59
To: Vicky Riches [redacted] Ian Clayton-Smith [redacted]
Subject: HR Questions

Hi Vicky, hi Ian

Thanks for your email & phonecall. Just to clarify following this:
a. Anna will no longer be required?
b. Does Cedar still report to me, and I to Ian? Ian please clarify

Kind regards,

Cynthia Stroud
Head of E-Commerce
Pecksniffs, Olivia Blake, London General Store

From: Vicky Riches [redacted]
Sent: 20 March 2020 12:30
To: Cynthia Stroud [redacted]
Subject: HR Housekeeping

Hi Cynthia

A couple of things

1 Anna [redacted] What do you want to do about her as she has a rolling contract with B-Fab. Are you planning to advise her that its no longer required and will this then transfer to extra hours still doing the B-fab stuff but under Pecksniff's still reporting to you? Let me know

2 I need to handle your HR/holidays/sickness etc moving forwards. You will also need to let me have the full file for Cedar. Holiday year starts April 1st so fairly simple for you both. 20 days + bank holidays and birthday as you know. I attach a form that needs to be completed from now on and returned to me for each request

I finish at 2pm today so please advise on Cedar before then re the letter as TUPE date is Monday

Thanks

Administrator's Proposals recording insolvency advice on 29 January 2020 and the instruction on 23 March 2020 to prepare a Company Voluntary Arrangement proposal.

FRP

A significant proportion of the Company's trade was outside of the UK and therefore, the nature of the markets that the Company bought from and sold within meant it was exposed to the risk of significant changes in foreign exchange rates.

These risks were partly mitigated by the use of natural hedges in matching currency received from customers with payments to suppliers. Any remaining exposure was covered via forward contacts fixing exchange rates.

The Company had historically operated on a satisfactory and profitable basis until the fiscal year 2019/20 when a series of factors impacted upon the Company's operations and resulted in the accumulation of significant losses. These factors are briefly summarised below: -

1) An extended period of illness in respect of ICS, who was hospitalised for several months during 2019. As a consequence, operational management and decision making was severely compromised.

2) Substantial overstocking occurred during 2018/2019, through an internal system failure, Brexit planning and TJ Maxx's overestimation of demand. Cash flow was, therefore, impacted, with large levels of stock held beyond operational needs.

3) A mis-judged gift giving programme, which resulted in excessive costs/ labour charges being incurred and, ultimately, a substantial reduction in sales.

4) The accumulation of substantial currency hedge losses due to the increasing likelihood of the UK leaving the EU in October 2019 without a trade agreement.

The initial plan to overcome the sales shortfall vs budget was to increase sales through a strong new product development programme to ship January to March 2020.

Sales were disappointing in December 2019 which further compounded cash-flow so on 29 January 2020, the director sought advice from FRP to discuss the Company's position and options available. A meeting was subsequently held on 30 January 2020.

At the meeting, the director (and subsequently the shareholder(s)) concluded that it was in the best interests of creditors to continue to trade while exploring all options, including a potential sale of the business and/or obtaining additional funding to support the business going forward. It was therefore decided, to confidentially seek a sale/merger of the business while alternatives to raise working capital were also explored.

While interest was high and a number of offers were received, it became apparent that the Company would be unable to raise sufficient funding itself to provide an adequate long-term solution.

The sale process identified a preferred bidder, a public company, which initially expressed a wish to acquire the Company as a going concern. During the course of negotiations orders began to increase, but the outbreak of Covid-19 in China added a complication to the supply line meaning most of the planned product launches to boost income had to be postponed.

Unfortunately, a sale of the business proved unsuccessful when the preferred bidder withdrew at the outbreak of Covid-19 in the UK and therefore a Company Voluntary Arrangement was proposed. As a consequence, on 23 March 2020, the director instructed FRP to prepare a proposal for a Company Voluntary Arrangement under part 1 of the Insolvency Act 1986, to be put to the members and creditors of the Company for consideration and approval.

Events leading to the appointment of the Administrators

While a proposal was being prepared, the global outbreak of Covid-19 and the UK's response to it, the director took the decision to semi mothball the business until its main customer, TKM, re-opened for business with a high proportion of staff being furloughed.

Witness statement extracts describing the Square funds, non-payment, payment of the invoice and bonus, remittance of the balance, and the documents supplied with the resignation.

The Third Party then told me to speak to his accountant friend, Simon Flory, who had ideas about how to process the payment. Mr Flory recommended that I use a platform called Square.

Para 47

On 20 March 2020, the Third Party phoned me and told me that to protect my contract, he would like me to agree to transfer my contract to his other company—Pecksniffs Ltd—because it had more turnover and history and therefore was under government bail-out protection. He stressed that it was the only way to secure my continued engagement. The PA to the Third Party sent me and my line report a "Transfer to Pecksniffs" agreement. I signed this.

Para 48

The Third Party then requested from me that I had to hand over full invoices for all my sales. I provided the invoices removing the buyers' details.

Para 51

On 16 April 2020 I told the Third Party that I am not contractually obliged to provide those details as there was no intellectual property clause in my service agreement nor had I ever received a contract of employment.

Para 52

Within 2 hours of making the statements in paragraph 51 above, the PA to the Third Party sent me a contract of employment to sign.

Para 52(a)

The offered contract of employment sent on 16 April 2020 omitted the bonus arrangement.

Para 52(b)

I refused to sign this because it was then apparent to me that my suspicions on the Third Party's motives were right.

Para 54

In the lead up to the 90-day limit when Square would release the funds, the calls became increasingly harassing with the Third Party making threats to me and asking me to ensure that the funds were paid into BFabUK's account by 29 April 2020.

Para 55

I reminded the Third Party & his accountant friend Mr Flory that according to Square's communications, the funds should be expected by 30 April 2020.

Para 56

On 30 April I did not receive any payment nor payslip. I contacted the Third Party who asked me to notify Mr Nick Hale. I was told there was a company-wide problem and that nobody had been paid. My direct report confirmed she had been paid promptly.

Para 57

On 30 April the funds were released.

Para 58

On 1 May 2020, I had still not received any payment, nor payslip. I transferred the difference to the Third Party's UK bank account having paid myself my invoice and bonus.

Para 59

On the same day I tendered my resignation along with:
(a) resignation letter;
(b) full breakdown of turnover exceeding the £150,000 threshold for the 5% bonus calculation;
(c) detailed bonus calculation;
(d) my paid invoice for the month including that bonus;
(e) confirmation that I would continue to work out my 3-month notice.

Para 61

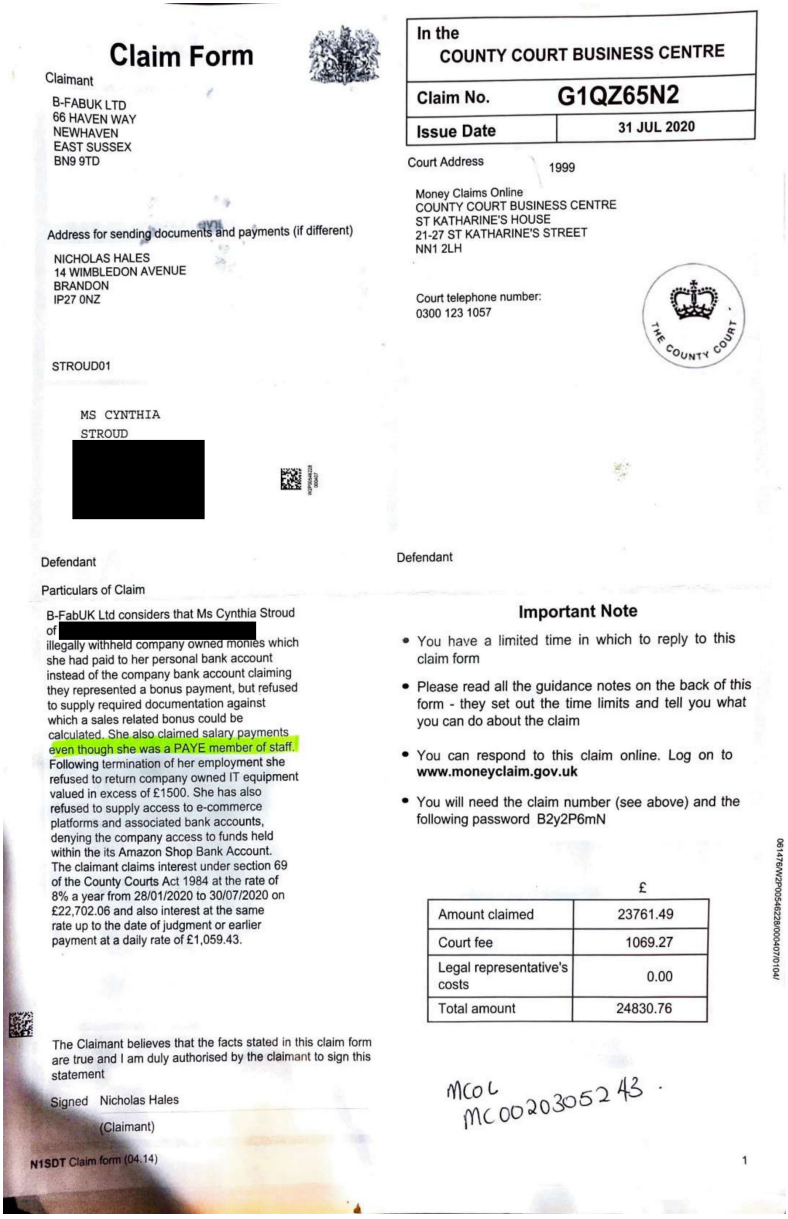
Over the next few weeks I received multiple threats and emails stating that my payment of my bonus was "theft" as I was now an employee under the contract provided on 16 April 2020.

Para 62

I responded that I did not agree to nor sign that contract and that I was operating on the only signed contract.

7 | THE CIVIL CLAIM AND THE CONTRADICTORY PLEADING

The claim alleging that company money was 'illegally withheld', followed by the separate pleading stating that Cynthia was not employed by B-Fab UK Ltd.



Claim Form

Claimant

B-FABUK LTD
66 HAVEN WAY
NEWHAVEN
EAST SUSSEX
BN9 9TD

Address for sending documents and payments (if different)

NICHOLAS HALES
14 WIMBLEDON AVENUE
BRANDON
IP27 0NZ

STROUD01

MS CYNTHIA
STROUD
[redacted]

Defendant

In the
COUNTY COURT BUSINESS CENTRE

Claim No.	G1QZ65N2
Issue Date	31 JUL 2020

Court Address 1999

Money Claims Online
COUNTY COURT BUSINESS CENTRE
ST KATHARINE'S HOUSE
21-27 ST KATHARINE'S STREET
NN1 2LH

Court telephone number:
0300 123 1057

THE COUNTY COURT

Defendant

Particulars of Claim

B-FabUK Ltd considers that Ms Cynthia Stroud of [redacted] illegally withheld company owned monies which she had paid to her personal bank account instead of the company bank account claiming they represented a bonus payment, but refused to supply required documentation against which a sales related bonus could be calculated. She also claimed salary payments even though she was a PAYE member of staff. Following termination of her employment she refused to return company owned IT equipment valued in excess of £1500. She has also refused to supply access to e-commerce platforms and associated bank accounts, denying the company access to funds held within the its Amazon Shop Bank Account. The claimant claims interest under section 69 of the County Courts Act 1984 at the rate of 8% a year from 28/01/2020 to 30/07/2020 on £22,702.06 and also interest at the same rate up to the date of judgment or earlier payment at a daily rate of £1,059.43.

The Claimant believes that the facts stated in this claim form are true and I am duly authorised by the claimant to sign this statement

Signed Nicholas Hales

(Claimant)

N1SDT Claim form (04.14)

Important Note

- You have a limited time in which to reply to this claim form
- Please read all the guidance notes on the back of this form - they set out the time limits and tell you what you can do about the claim
- You can respond to this claim online. Log on to **www.moneyclaim.gov.uk**
- You will need the claim number (see above) and the following password B2y2P6mN

	£
Amount claimed	23761.49
Court fee	1069.27
Legal representative's costs	0.00
Total amount	24830.76

MCOL
MC002030523

1

Defence and Counterclaim (specified amount)

- Fill in this form if you wish to dispute all or part of the claim and/or make a claim against the claimant (counterclaim).
- You have a limited number of days to complete and return this form to the court.
- Before completing this form, please read the notes for guidance attached to the claim form.
- Please ensure that all boxes at the top right of this form are completed. You can obtain the correct names and number from the claim form. The court cannot trace your case without this information.

How to fill in this form

- Complete sections 1 and 2. Tick the correct boxes and give the other details asked for.
- Set out your defence in section 3. If necessary continue on a separate piece of paper making sure that the claim number is clearly shown on it. In your defence you must state which allegations in the particulars of claim you deny and your reasons for doing so. **If you fail to deny an allegation it may be taken that you admit it.**

Name of court Hertford	
Claim No.	G64YJ838
Claimant (including ref.)	Cynthia Stroud
Defendant	Nicholas Hale

- If you dispute only some of the allegations you must
  - specify which you admit and which you deny; and
  - give your own version of events if different from the claimant's.
- If you wish to make a claim against the claimant (a counterclaim) complete section 4.
- Complete and sign section 5 before sending this form to the court. Keep a copy of the claim form and this form.

1. How much of the claim do you dispute?

☑ I dispute the full amount claimed as shown on the claim form.

or

☐ I admit the amount of £

If you dispute only part of the claim you must **either**:

- pay the amount admitted to the person named at the address for payment on the claim form (see How to Pay in the notes on the back of, or attached to, the claim form). Then send this defence to the court

or

- complete the admission form **and** this defence form and send them to the court.

☐ I paid the amount admitted on

or

☐ I enclose the completed form of admission *(go to section 2)*

2. Do you dispute this claim because you have already paid it? *Tick whichever applies*

☑ **No** *(go to section 3)*

☐ **Yes** I paid £ to the claimant on

(before the claim form was issued)

Give details of where and how you paid it in the box below *(then go to section 5)*

3. Defence (If you need to continue on a separate sheet put the claim number in the top right hand corner.)

No case to answer, Cynthia Stroud was not employed by B-Fab UK Ltd

(continue over the page)

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8 | SUMMARY JUDGMENT AT THE OUTSET OF TRIAL

The County Court order records the claimant's oral application at the outset of the trial and summary judgment on the counterclaim.

General Form of Judgment or Order

In the County Court at Milton Keynes	
Claim Number	G1QZ65N2
Date	9 May 2025

THE COUNTY COURT

B-FABUK LTD	1st Claimant Ref JC/B1315
MS CYNTHIA STROUD	1st Defendant Ref

Before His Honour Judge Davies sitting at the County Court at Luton, 4th Floor, Arndale House, Luton Point, Luton, LU1 2EN.

UPON hearing Mr Bain of Counsel for the Claimant and Mr Nall-Cain of Counsel for the Defendant

AND UPON the Claimant pursuing only its claim to recover from the Defendant the sum of £12,258.73 ("the Claim")

AND UPON the Defendant pursuing only her claim for 3 months' notice pay ("the Counterclaim")

AND UPON the trial of the Claim and Counterclaim

AND UPON the Claimant's oral application at the outset of the trial for summary judgment on the Counterclaim

AND UPON the court declining to summarily assess the Claimant's costs of the Defendant's application to join Mr Ian Clayton-Smith as an additional defendant to her counterclaim, being the costs referred at paragraph 2 of the order of DJ White dated 6 July 2023 (drawn on 14 July 2023) ("the Application Costs")

IT IS ORDERED THAT

1. There be summary judgment for the Claimant on the Counterclaim.

2. The Counterclaim is dismissed.

The court office at the County Court at Milton Keynes, 351 Silbury Boulevard, Witan Gate East, Central Milton Keynes, MK9 2DT. When corresponding with the court, please address forms or letters to the Court Manager and quote the claim number. Tel: 01908 302800 Fax: 01264 347938. **Check if you can issue your claim online. It will save you time and money. Go to www.moneyclaim.gov.uk to find out more.**

N24 General Form of Judgment or Order

Produced hi Gogishvili CJR065C

9 | THE TRANSCRIPT PROBLEM

High Court material showing that the transcript was required for the appeal, followed by the transcriber's later confirmation that the audio recordings had still not been supplied.

In the High Court of Justice

High Court Appeal Centre Royal Courts of Justice

On appeal from the County Court at Milton Keynes

Order of HH Judge Davies dated 28th April 2025

County Court case number: G1QZ65N2

Appeal ref: KA-2025-000115

BETWEEN:



KA-2025-000115

B-Fabuk Ltd ***Claimant and Respondent***

and

Cynthia Stroud ***Defendant and Appellant***

ORDER

Before the Honourable Sir Stephen Stewart sitting on 7th July 2025

UPON Considering the Appeal File and in particular the Application for a stay

IT IS ORDERED THAT

1 The Application for a stay is refused

2 The Appellant must file an appeal bundle containing the documents specified in PD 52B para 6.4(1) and, if relevant, any documents specified in PD 52B para 6.4(2), to include a transcript of the judgment of the lower court by no later than 4pm 15th August 2025. The appeal bundle must be paginated and indexed, and must contain only those documents which are relevant to the appeal.

3 **NOTE TO THE APPELLANT**; if you are unable to comply by 4pm 15th August 2025 and you wish to apply for a further extension, you must apply to the court (making a formal application on form N244) before 4pm 15th August 2025

4 The Appellant is hereby granted a transcript of the Judgment of the lower court at public expense. **NOTE**: This is a transcript of the Judgment only.

5 This Order has been made by the Court under PD 52B para 7.1, as the court has disposed of an application without a hearing and without service. Any party may apply to have this order set aside or varied within 7 days of the date of service upon that party, and must serve a copy of the application on all other parties at the same time

NOTE:

Stay

The fact that the Appellant alleges that the Judge came to a wrong decision is not a ground for staying the order. The general rule is that an appeal shall not operate as a stay of any order or decision of the lower court. Whether the court should exercise its discretion to grant a stay will depend upon all the circumstances of the case, but the essential question is "whether there is a risk of injustice to one or both parties if it grants or refuses a stay". Particular questions are as follows: If a stay is refused what are the risks of an appeal being stifled? If a stay is refused and the appeal succeeds, and the judgment is enforced in the meantime, what are the risks of the appellant being unable to recover any monies paid from the respondent? There is no evidence of these types of factors operating in this appeal.

The Appellant says that unless a stay is granted the Respondent may enforce recovery of "funds and legal costs", despite credible grounds that the decision is wrong and unjust. This is what the Respondent to an appeal is entitled to do absent the type of factors referred to above.

The Appellant also states that she seeks a stay "to avoid irreversible prejudice" but she gives no evidenced detail of the prejudice nor why it would be irreversible

Transcript

Although the Appellant made no application for a transcript of the Judgment to be provided at public expense, it is noted that financially she qualified for Fee Remission and, as stated in paragraph 2 of this Order, a transcript of the judgment is required to determine whether or not to grant permission to appeal. Hence paragraph 4 of the Order. The Appellant must now act promptly in making her application for a transcript of the judgment. The link to the relevant form is at

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/66ff9e68e84ae1fd8592ede9/EX107_0724.pdf

The relevant provisions of PF 52B paras 6.4(1) and 6.4(2) are set out below for ease of reference

6.4 Documents relevant to the appeal:

Appeal Ref: KA-2025-000115

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
ROYAL COURTS OF JUSTICE
APPEALS

BETWEEN:

B-Fabuk Ltd

Appellant

-and-

Cynthia Stroud

Respondent



ORDER

BEFORE the Honourable Mr Justice Ritchie, sitting at the Royal Courts of Justice, the Strand, London on 14.11.2025.

UPON the notice of appeal issued on 10.6.2025 in relation to the following case:
Claim number: G1QZ65N2
Court: Luton County Court.
Hearing date: 28.4.2025.
Judge: HHJ Davies.
Type of hearing: trial claim and counterclaim.
Order: judgment for the Claimant with costs.

AND UPON all such appeals needing permission for the appeal to progress and upon the Appeal Court Judge who is to decide permission to appeal on paper needing a proper bundle for the determination of the permission application (see CPR Part 52 Practice Direction 52B paras. 6.2-6.6).

AND UPON CPR Part 52, PD52B, para.6.3 requiring (must, not may) the Appellant to file an appeal bundle as soon as practicable **and in any event within 35 days of starting the appeal.**

AND UPON CPR Part 52 PD 52B requiring that the appeal bundle must include the handed down judgment or a transcript of the judgment below.

AND UPON the Appellant's application for an extension of time for filing the appeal bundle.

NOW it is ordered that:

Extension

1. Appellant's application for an extension of time is granted.

Directions

2. The Appellant must file an appeal bundle containing the documents specified in PD 52B para 6.4(1) and, if relevant, any documents specified in PD 52B para 6.4(2), to include a transcript of the judgment of the lower court by no later than 15.12.2025 or the appeal is struck out.

Costs

3. Costs reserved.

Set aside or vary

4. This Order has been made by the Court under PD 52B para 7.1, because the court has disposed of an application without a hearing and without service. Any party may apply to have this order set aside or varied within 7 days of the date of service upon that party and must serve a copy of the application on all other parties at the same time.

Transcriber:

5. The Appellant shall serve this Order on the relevant transcriber organisation. A director of that organisation shall file at court and serve on the parties a letter by 4pm on 01.12.2025 explaining why there has been delay in providing the transcript.

Reasons

Transcript delays

1. Transcript delays create unnecessary applications (for instance this one) and add to the work for lawyers and appeal Judges and court staff, which takes up time better spent on substantive consideration of appeals.
2. An explanation from the transcriber organisation would assist in understanding where the delay is being created. I have ordered this.
3. If delay has been caused by the lower Court in providing the recording of the judgment to the transcriber, the relevant senior manager of the staff in charge of

providing the recording is gently invited to provide a letter setting out the reasons why there has been a delay and filing that with the High Court appeals office.

Background

4. The order appealed was dated 28.4.2025 and issued on 9.5.2025. HHJ Davies ordered the Defendant to pay the Claimant £14,090 and ordered the Defendant to pay the Claimant's costs and £25,000 on account.
5. On 10.6.2025 the Defendant/Appellant's notice of appeal was issued. There are two grounds. No appeal bundle was filed on time (by 35 days after issue).
6. In an order made by Sir Stephen Stewart dated 7 July 2025 the Appellant was required to file an appeal bundle, including a transcript of the judgment of the lower court, by 4:00 pm on 15 August 2025.
7. By an application dated 12.8.2025 the Appellant asked for an extension of time to file and serve the appeal bundle until 21 days after receipt of the transcript of the judgment.

The delay

8. The Appellant states that on 11 July 2025, she submitted her completed transcript request (Form EX107) to the County Court at Milton Keynes, as required by paragraph 4 of the order, which granted her the transcript of the lower court judgment at public expense. I note that the hearing took place at Luton.
9. As of the date of this statement, the Appellant had received no acknowledgment from the lower court or from the transcription service. The Appellant asserts that she has made reasonable efforts to follow up but the delay appears to be due to administrative processing at the lower court/transcription service and is entirely outside my control.
10. What the Appellant asserts is not a proper reason for granting an extension. The process of getting the transcript does not just involve putting in the form. It involves getting the transcript. This may involve chasing up the transcribers or the Court. The Appellant has not provided sent a copy of the EX107 request not any chasers nor any response from the Court or the transcribers.

Signed: Ritchie J
Date this order is made [CPR r.40.2(2) and r.40.7(1)]: 14.11.2025

NOTES.

Note 1: Transcripts: Guidance on obtaining transcripts is available at: HTTPS://WWW.GOV.UK/GOVERNMENT/PUBLICATIONS/ORDER-A-TRANSCRIPT-OF-COURT-OR-TRIBUNAL-PROCEEDINGS-FORM-EX107.

If you are having difficulty getting your transcript from the court below, please ensure you provide the appeal court with a copy of the ex107/ex106/ex105 you sent to the court below and all communications with the court below and the chosen transcribers. If you seek a transcript of the Judgment to be provided at public expense, you must also make application on **Form Ex 105.**

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/64cce04e3c4564000d942a2b/ex105_0823.pdf

Date: 28 November 2025

To: Cynthia Stroud;Victoria Docker

CC: Clerk to Mr Justice Ritchie; Kings Bench Judge's Listing

Subject: Response to Judge's Order dated 14 November 2025

Dear Parties

I am writing in response to the court order dated 14 November 2025 regarding the transcript request for the hearing held at Luton County Court on 22 and 23 April for BFabUK Ltd v Stroud G1QZ65N2

Timeline of Correspondence and Actions:

- **19 November 2025:** We received an email from Cynthia Tooley forwarding her previous correspondence dated 11 July 2025, which had been sent to enquiries.luton.countycourt@justice.gov.uk. The court order dated 14 November 2025 was also attached. Prior to this email Epiq had not received any communication or a request for this transcript.
- **20 November 2025:** Epiq contacted Luton County Court by telephone to enquire about the status of the transcript request. Court staff advised that the request had not been received from the customer. We subsequently forwarded a copy of the email originally sent by Cynthia Tooley on 11 July 2025 to the court that had been forwarded to Epiq on 14 November 2025
- **21 November 2025:** Epiq informed Cynthia Tooley that we had not yet received the audio recordings for the hearing on 22 and 23 April 2025, and therefore, were unable to commence transcription.
- **21 November 2025:** Cynthia Tooley responded, expressing appreciation for the clarity provided.
- **24 November 2025:** Epiq followed up with Luton County Court to request an update on the status of the audio recordings and to ascertain when they might be made available for the dates in question.

Current Status:
As of today, Epiq has not received the required audio recordings for the hearing on 22 and 23 April 2025. We remain unable to proceed with the transcription until these materials are provided.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Kate Crowther
Director, EMEA Court Reporting