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Blameless

by Nick Barrett

“The Facts, as far as they could be ascertained, indicate that there was a breach of the peace involving the accused, who will not identify himself...”

“Call me Ishmael,” replied, the dishevelled man in the dock. Then rising to his feet he lifted a clouded eye to scan the empty public gallery, but a G4 security guard quickly placed a firm hand on his shoulder.

“Hands off me, copper,” Ishmael snarled.

“Be quiet you,” warned the magistrate, “and he is not a police officer. Have we heard sufficient evidence suggesting the accused is guilty of the charge?”

“Alleged charge,” ‘Ishmael’ muttered, what might be madness glinting from his cataract free eye.

“It is in fact a charge, it is the offence that is alleged,” the magistrate replied, fighting a very bad hangover headache.

“The alleged offence is breach of the peace, the charge is breach of the peace as well, so they’re the same thing so the charge must be alleged, you said it yourself your Honour.”

“Speak out of turn again and you will be in contempt of court. And I am not a judge so don’t address me as Your Honour. The established facts are...”

“You said they had been ascertained a minute ago, now they’re established, which is it? You haven’t been doing this job for long have you?”

The magistrate, known for a short fuse at the best of times, paused to concentrate on rubbing his throbbing head.

Taking a deep breath, he continued, “Mrs Dempster has given corroborated evidence that on the night in question she was lawfully preaching in the street. Her theme was Jesus saves, words which she cried out as you passed by.”

“I don’t think she’s a minister or a priest or anything you know,” said ‘Ishmael’.

“You shouted ‘Fuck Jesus’, Mrs Dempster ran up the road after you calling out, and I quote, ‘You can’t fuck Jesus, that’s the point, you can’t fuck Jesus.’ You chose to retort ‘Fuck the pair of you’. A fracas ensued.”

‘Ishmael’ jumped up: “You’re saying all that as if it was fact, just because that barrister did, and he shouldn’t do that, he should ask questions.”

“I am not a barrister,” piped up a man sitting at a table in front of the magistrate, “ I am Mrs Dempster’s solicitor, entitled to audience in this court.”

“You’re not a barrister?”

“He’s not a judge!”

“She’s not a minister!”

“This fella isn’t a policeman, and I’m not guilty!”

“You’re frauds, the lot of you. This trial is a fraud, I’m the victim here, you can’t punish me.”

Mrs Dempster, screamed ‘Jesus will punish you’. This pierced the magistrate’s pain only to intensify it. He muttered, louder than he meant, ‘Jesus fuck’ which was slightly misheard by Mrs Dempster who screamed, “But you can’t fuck Jesus...”

“See, we’re back where we started,” shouted ‘Ishmael’ above the ensuing hubbub. “You can’t blame me for it!”