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Act One - Court 3

by Ivor John

Chelmsford Crown Court was not an attractive building. Built of red brick in a seventies brutalist style, the few windows had double-glazed panels and black aluminium frames. The front of the building projected out, providing a canopy over the two green metal double doors, which gave access to the foyer. A big painted coat of arms, the lion and the unicorn prominently adorned the building. The large waiting area had fixed metal benches, arranged in rows. Each end the blue painted perforated metal was flat, to provide a table on which were empty paper cups and the clear plastic sandwich packaging from the WRVS coffee shop in the corner.

"On the counter with the bags mate, from your pockets in this." The stocky security guard, standing on the other side of a row of metal tables, handed him a small plastic tray to receive the contents of his pocket. Putting the two black nylon holdalls which contained the papers they would need for the first day of the trial onto the counter. Another, smaller bag contained his wig. Made of course, from yellowy horsehair, proudly bought by his father at Legal Wigs in Holborn for £450.

Another, female security guard, younger and with amateur tattoos - probably a consequence of a drunken party, on the backs of her hands, unzipped the holdalls, to reveal the bundles of papers, each tied with the customary pink ribbon. After a cursory look into the bags and running her inked hand briefly over the bundles of documents, she zipped them up and placed them on a table behind her.

The girl, was quite pretty, he thought, probably early twenties, wearing black trousers, and a military style black pullover. Black court shoes with a kitten heel, her bare ankles adding some femininity to the harsh look. Her long auburn hair pulled back from her face in a tight ponytail.

"Pockets mate, please," said the other guard. Pointing to the small plastic tray, bringing his attention back. Rather than empty his pockets, he took off his blazer and put it folded onto the counter, where the bags had been. Taking his wallet, phone and some small change from his pocket to put into the tray. All of his personal possession on view to court security. He walked through the divers gate at the end of the tables, the last hurdle. It beeped as he walked through.

"Watch, belt?" the security guard said, rather tersely. Picking up a wand, he ran it over his belt and around his wrist causing its red light to flash. Otherwise he seemed happy.

"Go through."

He picked up the two holdalls, his jacket and wig from the table inside and walked into the foyer. 'What a performance,' he thought. He needed to find the lawyers robing room now. He didn't want to ask security as he wanted to appear casual, experienced. He did not want them to think it was his first time here. He was sure he would find a solicitor or another barrister whom he would ask.

It wasn't just the first time at Chelmsford Crown Court, this was his first case on his own. Previously he had always been with James, his mentor at chambers. Now though, he was on his own. Representing a burglar, who would be produced from HMP Chelmsford. He alone would need to lead the cross examination, to skillfully present the circumstances to the court, in the hope of allowing sufficient doubt of his clients guilt. It was a trial, so he would also have to cross examine the witnesses produced by Essex Police. Apparently a taxi driver had seen his client running away from the house he had burgled, chased by the owner's son. He hoped to get his dashcam video excluded.

He found the robing room, at the back of the building on the second floor. He walked in, seeing it was busy with other lawyers, he looked around for a space where he could put his robes on. Although now increasingly apprehensive, he wanted to look as if he new the ropes. That he wasn't a male ingénue, inexperienced and trying to follow the script.

"Haven't seen you before, you're not from local chambers are you?"

The voice came from another barrister who was looking into a small mirror, adjusting the angle on his head of a tatty barrister's wig.

"London chambers?"

"Yes, I am here for a trial, a prison production, burglary."

"Oh nice to meet you, I'm first chair on a murder, we're in one. Into the second week, you can tell the jury are getting a bit bored of it now. Particularly in this nice weather. You need to do something to entertain them or you'll lose them. You know, I enjoy court work, advocacy so much more than the prep. I love acting, so much more real than life. The trick is to get them to believe you."