



MY LEARNED FRIENDS

By: Karm Arger

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(Being the biography of an Asian Barrister)

Karm Arger



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<http://www.karmarger.com>
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CHAPTER ONE

Silently, the single wooden door leading to a long passageway inside the building swung open. From within, and out of the dark secret recesses of the large edifice, came eight women and four men. Striding purposefully, casting their eyes quickly around as they emerged through the doorway, they made their way in single file to what were, quite obviously, their own places; seats situated precisely in two rows along one side of the large room. This close-knit group who had been thrown together for several days were powerful people; they made up the jury. It was a long time ago that they had retired to consider the evidence in the case; this was their case, theirs the duty to convict or acquit. Now, at last, they had returned to give their verdicts. Suddenly, a hushed silence hung in the air enveloping the entire court. Members of both sexes of the general public sitting in the open gallery, who had been following the case, waited in suspense.

The Clerk of the Court, a short stout woman with close cropped fair hair, stood up. She was robed in a black gown, its extra long court-sleeves drooping down almost touching the ground. She lifted up her head to look at the defendant sitting in the dock. "Will the Defendant please stand?" It was a demand brooking no challenge. A crumpled, forlorn figure at the very back of the court slowly stood up. The prison officer guarding him arose with him. The Defendant shot a quick glance at the jury; he was terribly anxious; he wanted, and he tried, to read their minds but could not. Were they about to condemn him? He wondered about the future. His fate lay absolutely in their hands. This was a most important time, indeed, it was a crucial moment for him; now it was he wanted to speak with his

barrister but that was impossible, for his counsel sat remotely in counsel's row nearly twenty feet away, up there, in front of him. Even his solicitor's representative was out of his reach because he too was sitting just as far away, close behind his counsel.

The Clerk of the Court addressed the jury. "Will the foreman of the jury please stand?" A slim, tall man dressed very smartly in a dark blue suit sitting nearest to her at the very end of the front row, straightened up.

"Mr. Foreman, are you all agreed upon your verdicts?"

"Er-yes." He looked round at his compatriots as if to make sure. There was a noticeable faltering in his low, voice as he replied. Why? The response then was not so firm. Was that a good or bad omen?

"On count one, how do you find the Defendant, guilty or not guilty?" She was looking at the copy-indictment she held in her left hand as she spoke.

"Er-not guilty."

"On count one you find the Defendant not guilty and that is the verdict of you all?"

"Er-yes." Using her right hand, she noted down the result on her sheet of paper.

Then again she spoke, her voice flat and even: "Mr. Foreman, on count two, how do you find the Defendant, guilty or not guilty?"

"Er.....not guilty." The low deep response was, as infirm, as faltering, as before.

"On count two you find the Defendant not guilty and that is the verdict of you all?"

"Er-yes."

Unwavering from her even tone, her voice flat and impersonal, the Clerk of the Court continued repeating the same formula five more times receiving on each occasion the same negative, exculpatory reply. Well, the truth was there plain for everyone to see; this jury of eight women and four men had just seconds before acquitted the Defendant of seven charges alleging sexual abuse.

His counsel Prem Iyer, in whom he had put so much faith throughout the trial, was immediately on his feet. “Your Honour may the Defendant be discharged?” After these verdicts and realising the Defendant’s traumatic experience having undergone such a painful ordeal, he did not want his lay client to stay under penal restraint for a moment longer than it was absolutely necessary.

“Yes, of course.” The Judge spoke choosing his meaningful words with care and directed them to the Defendant. “Mr. Eastwood, you may leave this court and let me add that you do so without a stain on your character. Let him be discharged.” The prison officer standing head and shoulders above the defendant politely unlocked the door to the dock, releasing his prisoner. Mr. Eastwood stepped out, a free man.

Abruptly, for Prem Iyer the tension then broke; finally, relieved of the tremendous burden he had been carrying during the whole week the trial had lasted, he turned his head round momentarily to look at his lay client Mr Eastwood and then sat down - more for a brief rest than to collect his papers from the desk - prior to making his way back to the robing room. By and by, as he walked past the others milling about in the courtroom there were nods of acknowledgment from the people around. When he strode outside the room, there were nods even from those he did not know. He slowed down his pace to smile back. After that suddenly, quite

unexpectedly, there came a burst of thanks, showering down upon him like a deluge. It was Mr. Eastwood pouring out his earnest feelings of gratitude to him. The happy man had been waiting patiently for him, not too far from the courtroom. Poor man, Prem Iyer thought, at least, he does look really sincere. Of course, acquittal meant a lot to the Defendant. From this day onwards not only would he be free from the stigma such a conviction brought - nothing could be worse in life than being condemned as a sexual pervert - but also he could look ahead to a reasonable existence once more. His character had remained untarnished. Career-wise, what was most important for him, perhaps, his future prospects remained undamaged. His employment and pension rights, which could easily have been subject to loss and forfeiture in the event of a conviction - be it even on a single count - they too were, thankfully, safe. Only Mr. Eastwood knew how much he owed his counsel for his deliverance.

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If you are interested in reading how Prem Iyer dealt with his more intriguing cases, please order the book on our website at:

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