



Jurist Prudence

By
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Gloucester, Massachusetts**

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Chapter One

After twenty-three and a half days of listening, a day and a half of jury deliberation, too many late afternoons, and finally the ultimate affront, being picked as an alternate juror at the very end of it all, the 'not guilty' verdicts absolutely stunned me.

"Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, you have completed your duty within this judicial system. I will not detain you any further. Jurors, you are dismissed," the judge said, a pained look on her face. She doesn't believe it either, I thought. The prosecuting attorney sat, shaking her head, also unbelieving. Andrew Gornick stood, smiling smugly.

As a federal employee I had been excluded from jury duty for twenty-two years. I had never served before. Initially I had disliked the thought of serving on a jury, but did ultimately take it seriously nonetheless. I maintained an open mind, just as all the court officers had suggested. The opinion formed by the three other alternates and I in a room adjacent to the jury deliberation room was that Andrew Gornick and all of his associates were as guilty as sin.

Five weeks is a long time to live under a guise, having and sorting out and at the same time trying to hold in reserve pertinent information, which you are unable to share with anyone. While attempting to control dialogue with friends and family and my nosier neighbors concerning the trial, I had not leaked even one syllable, nor read a single newspaper, in fear I would chance on something about the case. As instructed when people started to talk of the affair, I merely walked away.

After being excused by the judge we sixteen followed the bailiff out the heavy wooden door at the side of the courtroom, as we had so many times in past weeks. When we gained the inner staircase outside the courtroom, I stopped and turned on my heels; I could feel anger and sharp disappointment building upon my face.

Melissa Markham, the juror walking directly behind me, stood with an uneasy expression on her face. "What was that all about?" I asked. "You guys didn't hear all those facts the same as I?"

"What do you mean, Cassy?" she said to me uncomfortably.

The bailiff tapped me on the shoulder, "This way," he said in his normal, seemingly uncaring, tone. With a jerk of his thumb I was moved along with that crowd of my peers, obviously my deaf peers.

The jury waiting room was in the basement level of the building, so that prolonged trial juries could come and go unharassed without having to run the possible news gauntlet on the granite stairs out front.

I walked into the room; no one looked at me. I stood by the door waiting for someone to look my way. They busied themselves with gathering their coats and putting them on. The room was strangely quiet, not like it had been before the verdict. "Well, I'm waiting," I said blocking the door. "Where did that verdict come from? Were we all sitting in the same courtroom?"

No one answered. The bailiff stood at his desk at the far end of the room looking at me, not saying anything either. I looked into his eyes and imagined I saw my own thoughts reflected there. His experienced eyes seemed to have as many questions as mine did. I walked out of the room disgustedly as no one replied to my question.

The case had many facets to it, in total, twenty-eight criminal counts, ranging from bookmaking to racketeering, drugs to prostitution. It was dirty, in some cases disgusting, and unnerving. In my line of work I had seen many things in twenty-two years and for the most part I felt unshakable. However, three times during this trial I had been uncharacteristically reduced to tears. And in all three cases, the tears were for the victims of this butcher and the mad men he led. I walked out to my car, got behind the wheel, and drove.

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My apartment, and office for that matter, is off the main road leading into town, which puts me one short block south and two short blocks east of the normal summer tourist hubbub. I like Rockport, Massachusetts because, first of all, it is right on the ocean. As a matter of fact, Rockport is surrounded on three sides by water, with the city of Gloucester on the fourth; itself separated from the mainland by a saltwater tidal river, truly making Cape Ann an island. Secondly, because the clients who call on me must really want me, if they have willingly driven to this far out of the way place to see me. And lastly, there is no one in this little town, to date, who has needed my service. Because of that I remain relatively unknown to the community, which is perfectly all right by me.

My full name is Cassandra Julia Crestfield, Cassy or Sandy; depending on how close you are to me, or what time in my life we met. To everyone in high school I was Sandy; in college the professors formally made it Miss. Crestfield. My Mom calls me Honey, Dad says Sweetheart, brother Ronald, four years my senior used to call me 'Hey You' to irritate me, which has been shortened to 'Hey' for fun's sake. I have always preferred Cassy just to be a bit different and, much to my liking, lately so has Ronald.

I was attached to the Treasury Department for twenty-two years, specifically, the Secret Service. I had, at one time or another, been on the security team for two Presidents of the United States, four Vice-Presidents, their wives, children, and family members, a Pope, many ambassadors and visiting dignitaries, and innumerable foreign leaders and heads of state.

I left my position when, in the line of duty, I took a bullet through my left breast and came quite close to losing it completely. Muscle damage on that side of my body limits the strength and use of my left arm, which led a service board to recommend a desk position or a pension. They also offered me a beautiful plaque of recognition to adorn whatever wall I wished, the proverbial gold watch, in this case a really nice Rolex, a full disability, and a huge cash settlement. With resentment and total disenchantment I told them to stuff the desk.

After a while I needed work to keep myself sane; so I started doing security-consulting work for businesses, both large and small. Located in Rockport I do not get a lot of work, which is all right with me. I can take life as easily as I want or need to, thereby taking only the work I really want. Because of my pension I can afford to be casual about my work.

The beaches here are among the finest you will find anywhere in the world. The seawater off of Rockport, Massachusetts, though, remains somewhat chilly even in the midst of the most oppressive summer heat. For my age, forty-six, I look reasonably good even in a bathing suit. Not a frumpy suit either, but a tasteful one piece, which accentuates what is supposed to be firm as well as what is supposed to be soft. I keep in pretty good shape, do not drink too much, and admittedly fall off the smoking thing now and then, but not for long. I consider myself pretty, with bluish hazel eyes and naturally graying reddish/brown hair, which looked horrible the one time I tried to hide the gray and make it all one color.

I am not active politically; working in Washington, D.C. can taint almost anyone. Frankly, you get sick of it all after a while. When you work closely with politicians you see beyond the flash and glitter. Early on you find out that they have an all too human side with its accompanying frailties. Most of them are fairly nasty people.

A passable, rather than a great cook, I often experiment with unusual combinations. At times in my life, as a result, I have not eaten very well. One of my favorite concoctions is a sort of stew, basically potatoes, peas, and hamburger with a spicy flour-thickened sauce, which to my knowledge has not got a name other than Glop.

Housekeeping is not my long suit either. It is not that I am all that bad at it, but I have always lived alone, mainly because I do not like being badgered into doing housework when I would rather attend a great play or concert. Though I realize that cleanliness is not next to Godliness, I would have picked up the practice had someone of substance ever asked to share my life and bed for the long haul, which only happened once. Somehow I, regrettably, let him slip through my fingers.

When I arrived at home that night I went directly to the kitchen. When I am depressed or frustrated I take it out on my galley. I bang pots and pans on the stove. Depending on the severity of the situation, I will then start one of my culinary undelectables.

This time I peeled potatoes while the hamburger browned in a skillet on the stove, simmering on a low heat waiting for the added ingredients to be thrown into the large stainless steel fry pan. I added the sliced potatoes, the peas and decided to toss in some carrots for color. Then covering the pan with a loose fitting lid left it to simmer for an hour, while I listened to light rock on my favorite radio station. As a product of the sixties, I loved the Beatles and a depressing song from that era will generate tears. But they did not that night; I was too angry.

The music barely reached my brain as I lay there staring off into the space that is my living-room ceiling. I drifted off to sleep and before I knew it my cooking timer was going off. My meal was done, but so was I. Shutting it off I opted to tackle it later. I lay back down and suddenly started the automatic rerun in my head of the trial, which I had started to do in the car on my way home.

I tried to put it away but could not. I was so frustrated that I felt compelled to discover whatever it was which lead my deaf peers to believe this low life was innocent of all charges.

I found myself infuriated beyond all reason. I would need help getting through this thing and I knew where to get it. A psychiatrist friend, Fred Abbot, who had helped me through the posttraumatic stress I experienced after being shot, would without a doubt see me right away. So I picked up the phone, punched in his number and left a message on his machine. I took a hot bath, ignored my dinner, tried to read a chapter of 'Beloved' and ended up in bed for the night. It was not even eight thirty yet.