

# CALCULATED TO DEPRAVE & CORRUPT

FANNY COCKERELL

SCENE: A courtroom. *Mr. Justice Simpleton* presides.

CLERK OF THE COURT: The Court is in Session. Case of Crown versus Charlotte and Byers, accused of publishing an obscene article, to wit one book, *The Last Entry to Brewer Street*, which said book is calculated to deprave and corrupt those who read it. Counsel: For the Prosecution: Mr Porge. For the Defence: Mr George. Next Witness: Amelia Muggins. Take the Stand.

*Amelia Muggins takes the stand.*

CLERK: Raise your right hand and swear.

*Amelia Muggins is sworn in.*

PORGE: Miss Muggins. You have seen this book?

MUGGINS: Oh yes, sir.

PORGE: What do you think of it?

MUGGINS: Terrible. Quite terrible. Disgusting. Shocking. I mean to say . . .

JUDGE: We get your point.

MUGGINS: But I mean to say. Languid like that. I ask you. I don't know how anyone can bring themselves to read it. I don't really.

GEORGE: Have you read it?

MUGGINS: What me? Certainly not. What, read a filthy book like that? What d'you take me for?

GEORGE: How do you know it's a filthy book if you haven't read it?

MUGGINS: Oh everybody knows that, don't they? I mean even the postman said . . .

JUDGE: What the postman said isn't evidence.

MUGGINS: Fancy that. Not the postman?

GEORGE: Your honour I object to this witness.

JUDGE: Objection sustained.

PORGE: As you say, M'lord. [*Exit Muggins.*] Next witness. Mr. Juggins.

JUDGE: Has he read the book?

PORGE: Er er er . . . I I I . . .

JUDGE: Because if he hasn't . . .

PORGE: It's very hard to find people who have read it, my lord. You just heard . . .

JUDGE: Nonsense. I've read it.

GEORGE: And has it depraved and corrupted you, my lord?

PORGE: Your honour, I object.

JUDGE: Objection overruled. It's a very pertinent question. After all if it had (*sneezes*). But the point is I cannot be called as a witness.

GEORGE: (*hopefully*) You're sure you can't?

JUDGE: No. I can't come before myself. In any case it would prove nothing. The point is that this book is *may be* liable to corrupt and deprave ordinary people. I am an extraordinary person.

PORGE: Certainly your honour. Here is Mr Juggins.

*Enter Juggins.*

JUDGE: Have you read this book Mr Juggins?

JUGGINS: Certainly, M'lord.

JUDGE: Take the stand. *Juggins does so.*

PORGE: How did you like this book?

JUGGINS: I didn't. I found it obscene, disgusting, filthy. It uses words no gentleman would use and describes things no decent person would do. It made me quite sick.

PORGE: Thank you (*grins*). Your witness.

GEORGE: You would describe yourself as an average citizen, Mr Juggins?

JUGGINS: Yes sir.

GEORGE: Do you usually read books like this?

JUGGINS: Certainly not.

GEORGE: Why did you read it?

JUGGINS: Mr Porge asked me to. He promised if I did he would—

PORGE: Objection. What I said is not evidence.

JUDGE: Objection sustained.

GEORGE: I see. So you read this filthy book because . . . well never mind why. And did it deprave and corrupt you?

JUGGINS: Did it what? What are you insinuating?

GEORGE: Deprave you. Corrupt you. Make you want to do the things it describes in this book.

JUGGINS: Certainly not. I think they were horrible.

GEORGE: You don't think it would make anyone want to do them?

JUGGINS: (*indignantly*) No I don't. I think it would put anyone off. Not anyone decent. Not if they wasn't depraved and corrupted before they started reading it.

JUDGE: In that case you could hardly say the book had done it, could you?

JUGGINS: (*out of his depth*) N-no my lord.

JUDGE: You may go.

PORGE: M'lord you're making it very difficult for me. The sort of people who read this book aren't likely to come forward as witnesses against it.

JUDGE: True, very true.

GEORGE: What about the Jury, m'lord. They've had to read it.

JUDGE: Very good. Call the foreman of the jury.

CLERK: Call *Jane* Top.

TOP: Here I am, sir. (*He is sworn in.*)

PORGE: You have read this book?

TOP: Oh yes.



PORGE: How did you like it?

TOP: Very much, thank you.

PORGE: Perhaps you did not hear my question. I will repeat it.

TOP: I heard. I said very much.

PORGE: You would not call it a dirty, disgusting, filthy...

GEORGE: Your honour I object.

JUDGE: Objection sustained. Disregard that question. You have not heard the question.

TOP: But I have heard it.

JUDGE: Put it out of your mind.

TOP: Well that's not the way my mind works your honour. I can't put something out of my mind because I'm told to. It's just been put in.

JUDGE: Well, go on.

PORGE: What did you think about the book?

TOP: I found it very interesting.

PORGE: Why?

TOP: Well it opened a new world to me as you might say. I didn't know things like that existed.

PORGE: And you enjoyed reading about them?

TOP: Oh yes, very much (*grins*). Very spicy. Very unusual.

PORGE: Really. Really.

JUDGE: This is most interesting. Most interesting.

PORGE: And do you think it might make people who read this book want to do some of the things described in it?

TOP: Oh I do. Yes, indeed I do.

PORGE: (*delighted*) In other words you think it might corrupt and deprave them?

TOP: Well, yes I suppose I do.

GEORGE: Objection. He is putting words in the witness's mouth.

JUDGE: Objection overruled. Go on this is most interesting.

PORGE: Thank you, m'lud. Now Mr. Top, would you say you were depraved and corrupted as a result of reading this book?

TOP: Yes, I think I should. Yes definitely. Definitely.

PORGE: You admit it?

TOP: Oh yes.

JUDGE: And the other members of the jury?

TOP: All of them. Without a doubt.

JUDGE: You think it is a satisfactory state to be in?

TOP: It's a very enjoyable one.

PORGE: (*to George*) Your witness. (*George shakes his head.*) M'lud, my case rests. (*Retires, grinning with delight. George looks crestfallen.*)

JUDGE: Thank you. You will now return to the jury box and consider your verdict.

TOP: We have considered it.

JUDGE: What do you mean? You hadn't heard the evidence.

TOP: Oh they knew what I was going to say. We pronounce for ~~the defendant~~.

JUDGE: Wait for me to sum up. And go and consult with your colleagues.

TOP: As you say M'lud. (*Goes back to jury box, whispers to someone off stage.*)

JUDGE: There are three points. First, is this book one which is liable to corrupt and deprave the reader? Two: are the defendants guilty of publishing an obscene article? Three: should the book be suppressed? Have you considered your verdict?

TOP: Yes, M'lud.

JUDGE: How say you. On count one...

TOP: Not guilty M'lud.

PORGE: But you just said—we all heard you—someone's been getting at this jury.

JUDGE: Do you find the defendants guilty? *On count 2.*

TOP: Oh no, M'lud.

JUDGE: Should the book be suppressed?

TOP: Certainly not. We want to go on reading it. We want all our friends to read it.

*Pandemonium in court.*

PORGE: I don't understand. What's happened?

JUDGE: Let me explain. It is quite simple. The jury, on their own admission, and because you insisted that they read this book, have become depraved and corrupted. You can't expect a corrupt and depraved jury to give an honest verdict. As simple as that.

PORGE: Then I demand a re-trial.

GEORGE: My learned friend is wasting his time. The same thing would only happen again.

PORGE: (*desperately*) You can't be sure. You can't be sure. Perhaps they wouldn't be depraved and corrupted at all. No no, it's quite likely they wouldn't be...

GEORGE: Then, you would lose your case. (*Tucks his papers under his arm.*)

JUDGE: Case dismissed. (*Everyone leaves the court. The Judge waits a moment, then picks up the book.*)

I must read this again.

*(Exit grinning)*

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