

Playing Harry (extract)

Harry Fingle was certain the jury would find him guilty and that he'd go to prison for several years. At the beginning of the trial he had no doubt that his case would be thrown out of court; dismissed as a shameful case of trumped up evidence manipulated by someone he'd upset in the past who'd convinced a corrupt policeman to press charges. But as the case dragged on and he listened to lie after lie, convincingly told by the prosecution witnesses and then highlighted by the skilful and eloquent prosecution barrister, Harry became more and more depressed and demoralised. He eventually doubted his innocence and gave up any hope of walking free. Philip Stacey, his friend and boss, gave a powerful testimony in his favour. He told the judge and jury that Harry had only been doing his job. But Harry didn't believe it convinced them.

'Please stand,' said a court official. The sound of the large wooden door that led from the judge's chambers creaked loudly as it opened. The noise rippled through the stifling and expectant silence of the courtroom. Harry stood up with his head down and stared at his shoes as he heard the judge walk back to his seat on the bench.

The judge motioned for everyone to sit. Harry, with his head still bowed, lowered himself slowly down onto the hard wooden seat he'd sat on every day for the last month. He looked up and glanced across to the seats directly behind his defence team's table to where his girlfriend sat. She wasn't looking his way. He returned his gaze to the ground around his feet and thought back to moments during the trial. The times when he'd thought she'd shown sympathy and belief in the untruths and downright fabrications peddled by the prosecution witnesses. He decided not to look her way again.

It'll be over shortly and then she'll be rid of me.

The trial judge, his white wig covering his hair and dressed in his red robe with thick black edging, proceeded at a slow pace to his seat followed by the other court officials. **AMIE LAU** touched her straight black hair and watched the deliberate and well-practised ritual. She turned to look at Harry. She kept her eyes fixed on him for some time, waiting for him to turn and see her so she could give him a sign of support. But he didn't glance her way. She felt nervous, a bit sick, a touch unsteady and was sure all colour had drained from her face. She turned back to watch the judge adjust his glasses to sit on the end of his nose. He looked over the rims towards the foreman of the jury who stood next to and slightly forward from the other eleven jury men and women. The judge leant forward. He rested his robed arms on the bench and motioned for all in the courtroom to take their seats. He turned back to the foreman of the jury. Amie found the tension almost unbearable. She shook.

'Members of the jury. Have you reached a verdict?' the judge asked.

'Yes, your honour.'

'Is that a unanimous verdict?'

'It is, your honour.'

The judge nodded to one of the court officials. 'Will the defendant please stand,' the court official said. Amie gripped on the sides of her chair. She turned again to look as Harry slowly stood up. He didn't notice her. His gaze focused on something on the wall above the judge's head.

'Do you find the defendant, one Harry Nicholas Fingle, guilty or not guilty...'