

It is the night before the Justice Select Committee hearing in July.

The current Justice Secretary has had a good evening. All of his friends came round. Harry had regaled them all night with tales from his long and illustrious career at the Bar. What a pity he'd had to end it prematurely to pursue an even more successful career writing fiction. Bob wished he could have matched the countless anecdotes but couldn't and so sat there a little grumpy as Harry's stories got more and more fantastic. Bob thought Harry was a little snobbish. Trevor had to leave early as he was on tag. And Dominic was strangely silent. He was still suffering from that undiagnosed condition which had rendered him speechless since 9th April when somebody had mentioned Bournemouth.

Then suddenly they were all gone.

CG was pleasantly tired.

It had been quite a long day. All those actors paid for at public expense had gone on a bit in the JSC simulation role-play exercise organised by Dr Giblets earlier. Asking this and asking that. Why did people have to keep asking questions he asked himself? So much easier if no one asks anything.

And why did they have to hire 12 actors each playing the various members of the committee? Over-manning surely? It felt a bit like the last supper which is doubtless why Dr G had done it; she was trying to tell him something. Of course! Clever Dr G was sending him a clear sign.

13 had always been his lucky number unless you added three 000s on the end.

Anyway, he now knew all the answers to all the questions for the next day. Even to question 18 which had baffled the Lord Chief Justice, no less, in the JEB response.

CG would sleep easily.

No question of Belfast after this.

And so after a little bedtime story courtesy of the MoJ press office and a complete Horlicks he went up to Bedfordshire, which was his first mistake since his second home was in Pimlico.

His head hit the pillow and he drifted off. Or did he? It was a fitful sleep. Something was amiss. There were eerie noises outside. Wailing and growling. Gnashing of sharp teeth. Were those badgers or Mail on Sunday journalists in the garden? Was he awake or asleep? It was that middle of the night feeling when the mind begins to play tricks. He tossed and turned. A bloody face kept appearing in front of him in the darkness. Tormenting him. Pricking him. Inviting him.

Then he sat bolt upright. He was in committee.

The questions came thick and fast. Was it Sir Alan and the others asking the questions or was it Sir John of Humphrys or, God forbid, Sir Jeremy of Paxman? Dr G said only over her dead body would she send him out to bat against those two, or anyone else for that matter. He was strictly a non-playing captain. They would make dog food of him.

He began to answer the questions in a dream or had the whole thing become a nightmare or was it real? He felt as if *he* was on trial even though he thought he had turned all trials into guilty pleas. If only he had someone of his choosing to represent him.

The First Question

Q. What is name of the sometimes controversial annual prize awarded to artists?

CG is confident. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[Off the wall question but maybe it was just a friendly loosener to me from a previously on-side Tory member.]

The Second Question

Q. Who painted the Battle of Trafalgar?

CG is less confident. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[This is a little troubling. Painters are a bit too close to home. They'll be asking me questions about my secretary next.]

The Third Question

Q. In cricketing rhyming slang the term a *Bunsen Burner* for a spinning wicket is translated as a what?

CG is getting even less confident. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[Maybe they know I'm an MCC member and are trying to help but this wicket is getting a bit sticky. Balls up all over the place].

The Fourth Question

Q. Who were famous for Nutbush City Limits?

CG is looking a little uncomfortable now. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[Presumably this one is about the geographical procurement areas but I'll stick to the script Dr G has given me. She always knows best.]

The Fifth Question

Q. Who was the American actress who starred in Body Heat?

CG is beginning to look like someone on a roadshow platform. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[I'm beginning to feel a bit overheated myself now. When will I get a question I know the answer to? PCT is my specialist subject but I don't seem to know anything about it. I've started so I'll finish, subject to the re-shuffle.]

The Sixth Question

Q. What is the name for a skilled lathe operator?

CG now looking to Dr G for help but she's defected to the board of G4S. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[I don't know the answer to any of these questions. There are so many of them. 468,000 in fact. I'll get one soon I can field surely? Can I outsource my answering to a private company that knows even less than I do about the CJS?]

The Seventh Question

Q. Which Anthea, *Celebrity Big Brother* contestant, is generally credited with giving the MoJ the definitive and incontrovertible legal opinion that PCT is compatible with section 27(4) of the Legal Aid, Sentencing and Punishment of Offenders Act 2012 and Article 6 of the European Convention on Human Rights and not susceptible to a successful judicial review which is handy since there won't be any Treasury Counsel to defend it?

CG thinking Belfast might not be such a bad bet after all. A: *We have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[I think I'm going to get evicted soon.]

Then just as that nice lady who gets lost in her own questions was about to speak suddenly the nightmare was at an end.

CG awoke.

Like PCT it had all been a bad dream.

He was now sitting there in the JSC room. Sir Alan was beaming even if inwardly he was wondering if the Liberal Democrat Lawyers Association would kick off when it all went Baroness Tonge.

Dr G was back, riding shotgun in the motorbike and sidecar she had requisitioned from Bonkers Lucy.

The Eighth Question

Q. Why won't you meet the Chairman of the CBA to see how public money properly can be saved without destroying the rule of law and undermining democracy in a previously civilised country?

CG knows that finally he's nailed this one. The smile returns. Self-assurance flows from every pore. A: *My ministerial colleagues and I have regular meetings with leading figures in the legal profession and with leading probation staff, and will continue to do so. I most recently had meetings with both the Bar Council and the Law Society within the past couple of weeks and we have the most expensive Legal Aid system in the world.*

[What, end up with an ashtray wrapped round my head? I may have given the green light to PCT but I'm not completely stupid.]