

## **Substandard: Erica Griffiths**

I shifted my gaze away from my borrowed clothes, trying to meet her full direct glare. She was powerful and immaculate in a crisp white shirt, perfect hair under her Barrister's wig, rounded vowels emphasising her sarcasm.

'Indubitably you enjoyed the attention this brought, you revelled in the limelight didn't you?'

The drama had swelled during the week, with the courtroom gallery now overflowing and the atmosphere heavy with anticipation of what I would say.

Being popular at work wasn't important to me, I worked through lunch rather than joining the pack for chatty conversations and coffee runs. So I shrugged into a corner, segregated from the cool crowd. But I believed in our work, and I was good at my job, and the laboratory results were just not adding up. Customer complaints were increasing, our processes were somehow becoming substandard, our product output unexpectedly tainted. Our specialists were being criticised and our technicians condemned.

I was convinced it wasn't the people, but I wasn't permitted to see the results of the new automated cleaning machines. I wasn't allowed to read what the auditors thought, and my concerns were dismissed by management.

'We don't have time for this. We'll review everything in six months and make improvements then.'

But the review didn't happen, instead the business became more lucrative with all the bosses rejecting my complaints and even Human Resources focusing on the money.

'Thanks to our increased processing times, everyone is guaranteed a bigger Christmas bonus!'

Then, remarkably it took just three little letters FOI - Freedom of Information, to provide me with the company documents criticising their own cleaning procedures and requiring more testing and calibration. It was clear the company was complicit. They knew the automated systems meant less down time, happily trading profit for the health consequences of poor quality results. So I became the 'unidentified source' blowing the story wide open with emotive headlines: *Laboratory Pursues Money over Patient Care*. Still, the CEO was cocky, confidently fronting the cameras.

'Our procedures are world class, we have nothing to hide.'

But now, here in Courtroom No. 6 the gallery was delighting in the disclosure of those failed audits, relishing in the detail of those company reports and savouring my words. Today I was the cool one, the one with power, and my ill-fitting jacket didn't matter because I was the star witness revealing their dirty little secrets. But I didn't do it for the attention.

'No' I quietly replied, 'I'm a whistle blower because my colleagues are blameless. We are simply scientists trying to act with skill and care. We value society's trust and it's important to us that no one blames the science!'