

Smelling the Taste of Sound

By

The Autistic Lawyer

EXT. NORTHERN CITY - ESTABLISHING - DAY

The vistas and wonders of a city, take us to a run down Law Firm. The building is large, old and poorly maintained. It's located in a deprived part of the UK, in a working class, tight-knit, built-up neighbourhood.

SUBTITLES READ: OCTOBER 2023

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

In my experience, people's understanding of neurodiversity and its manifestations is woefully inadequate. Because of this, society (and especially the workplace) is missing out. Neurodivergent people have much to offer an employer and I want our voices to be heard. I especially want the voices of autistic females to ring out loud and clear because autism has been seen as a male condition for too long.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

The Autistic Lawyer, comfortably dressed, sits behind her desk, typing on her laptop.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

My autism wouldn't have been 'picked up' years ago, but now we're seeing so many more people, (especially women and famous ones at that), receiving a diagnosis. I think this is probably due to an increase in awareness and a more refined diagnostic criteria.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

The office is overcrowded, untidy and shabby. Carpets are threadbare, furniture is old, the paintwork is peeling and chipped, window blinds are grubby and there's a mousetrap in the corner. Nobody has any money; not the staff nor the clients, and many of them know one another of old. Various other EMPLOYEES buzz in and out, doing their daily tasks.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I am not an authority on neurodiversity.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
I'm merely drawing on my own
experience and understanding of
autism and other types of
neurodivergence to help people and
raise awareness.

INT. PSYCHOLOGIST OFFICE - DAY

Autistic and her PSYCHOLOGIST are discussing her conditions.
She looks concerned and confused.

PSYCHOLOGIST
Autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyscalculia
and right-hemispheric deficit
syndrome...

AUTISTIC LAWYER
I don't understand... What does all
that mean?

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I was thirty-three, and it was a
Wednesday.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is listening to the testimony of a DOWN'S SYNDROME
client and her GUARDIAN.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
So, I had to learn quickly, not just
how to best manage the 'new me' but
how to best serve a diverse and
challenging client group.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is listening to the testimony of a TATTOOED MAN
with a shaven head, somebody obviously involved in criminal
activities.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Professionally, I dealt with people
accused of serious criminal offences,
people who'd been in prison for
decades, people with profound mental
health conditions and others...

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic looks on, as a DESPERATE WOMAN with a black eye, bitterly weeps, mascara all down her face.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
...who were facing the prospect of
having their children removed from
their care, to name but a few of the
areas in which I worked.

EXT. SWANKY CORPORATE OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is packing up her belongings into a box. Her
FRIENDS stand next to her, looking sad.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
At age thirty, I decided to pursue a
career in law. I left my job in the
corporate world to retrain as a
solicitor. Three years later, I was
diagnosed with several conditions,
including autism and Attention
Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder
(ADHD). Shortly after being
diagnosed, I joined a tough, gritty
law firm as a trainee solicitor,
where much of the work was publicly
funded.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is facing BRENDA, her boss. Around them other
EMPLOYEES keep working, but every now and then, they glance
at the newcomer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I always thought honesty was the best
policy, but surprisingly, that's not
true. 'Autistic honesty' and 'regular
honesty' aren't necessarily the same
thing, because when somebody asks a
question in search of an answer, it's
not always honesty they're seeking.
They might be looking for reassurance
or support. Now, I'm not saying that
I'm incapable of offering the latter;
however, it's not my signature dish,
so to speak. When my autism is in the
driving seat, I'm tense, intense,
detail-obsessed, socially awkward and
fraught with anxiety.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
In short, my ADHD is the accelerator,
my autism is the brake and I'm a
better motorist for hosting the two.

BRENDA
What will you do about it then?
What's next?

AUTISTIC LAWYER
A diagnosis doesn't facilitate any
'solution', but a diagnosis does
provide an opportunity to get to
grips with coping strategies.

BRENDA (FEELING HER CHIN HAIRS)
Give me an example of this.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
I am either very good at something or
very poor. By way of an example, I
struggle with sequencing. For some
people, sequencing could relate to
alphabetical order, directions or how
numbers relate to one another. I can
write legally complicated and
detailed representations for a
client, or explain an intricate legal
matter to somebody with cognitive
difficulties, but I can't accurately
put a court bundle of documents and
papers together. If I were a food,
I'd be a Scotch bonnet chilli, and if
I were to be a haircut, I'd be a
Mohican.

Brenda chuckles having not really grasped the explanation
and what it meant day to day in the workplace, but is now
distracted when noticing how much of her breakfast is down
her top. Brenda then notices a lawyer she's been wanting to
'have a word' with for a while, but forgot.

INT. LAW COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Autistic is sitting amongst a large class of STUDENTS with a
TUTOR giving a lecture next to a large screen that shows an
image of tax calculations.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Like most people in school, I'd gravitated towards subjects I was good at, such as humanities, but now, during my legal training, when I couldn't pick and choose to play to my strengths, basic balance sheets, accounts and simple formulae for tax calculations were anathemas to me.

SCHOOL TRIP - MUSEUM - DAY

Younger Autistic is with a group of STUDENTS looking over an exhibit on ancient Greece and various philosophers.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I'd always loved learning about history and literature, and what bit I didn't immediately grasp didn't matter, because I had something else - a visual memory. Pictorially, I could recall information and images and almost 'replay' them in my mind like a video. So, the discussion held in class around a concept or recalling the explanation given by a tutor to a student enabled me to 'revisit' things I hadn't been able to grasp or process at the time.

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - DAY

Autistic is reading a huge book.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I'd developed coping strategies without even knowing it. I'd remember where my fellow class members were positioned in which room and could even recall what clothing they wore at the time. I'd say my memory had compensated for many of my shortcomings in the classroom. From a young age, I'd mastered memorising voluminous quantities of data.

FADE TO:

INT. SCHOOL CLASSROOM - LATER

Now, she is taking an exam., finishing before her companions.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

That information could be facts, routes, conversations, methods or exactly where my favourite chocolate bars were on the sweetshop shelf. As I aged, I passed exams through my ability to arrange everything I knew into a series of images on the revision page. That way, I could 'read off' from my mental picture gallery and 'pull out' whatever information I needed for the respective question and 'plug' it into my answer. I did this in the first instance by designing the page containing the revision information to be 'visually recall-friendly'. That way, I could ensure that it was accessible on command in an exam.

INT. AUNTIE'S 1970'S FLAT - DAY

TODDLER AUTISTIC comes into the flat and looks around, scanning the room, mesmerised.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I can recall my auntie's flat I entered at age two in graphic detail. I can still remember the exact floor plan and where furniture and ornaments were located.

Toddler Autistic strolls through the flat, acting out what is mentioned in the dialogue.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

The 1970s and 1980s saw a lot of multicoloured soft furnishings and carpets, and I remember the colour and texture of these, too. I would take the time to look at the individual swirls of different shades, tones and colours within the carpet pile and note how each fitted into the larger pattern.

INT. AUNTIE'S FLAT - KITCHEN - DAY

Toddler Autistic plays with the drum stool and examines it carefully.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I can remember the red leather-topped drum stool in the kitchen corner and how I marvelled at its cylindrical shape.

She jumps on the sofa.

I can remember the heavily raised patterned sofa upholstery and the exact location of the cigarette burns. I didn't know that they were fag burns, but I did wonder why there were dry, frilly circles at random intervals on the sofa, which didn't appear to have a function or purpose. I liked the orange with green ceramic tiles making up the surface of the coffee table and the half-full red glass Murano ashtray occupying the centre.

She smells the spices on the spice rack, mentally cataloguing their individual olfactory nuances.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

As I recall the images, the smells return, too. Curry powder. Ammonia aromas began exactly two steps from the toilet door. Cigarette smoke, old and new. Remembering minutiae was only the beginning. I could and still do take enormous pleasure from things, particularly very small things, things which others may overlook. I can be fascinated by a very particular shade of colour, gripped by a single component of a smell or a taste of a wine or perfume and transfixed by a tiny section of a piece of music.

She carefully listens to the vinyl record player, playing a disco classic.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
In fact, when I first fall in love
with a fragment of music, I can play
that few seconds maybe fifty-plus
times, until I know every element and
nuance.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is watching the people outside her office.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Many people will (and I think
autistic girls are better than
autistic boys in my experience),
'mirror' the behaviours of others who
they think appear to know how it all
works, which will enable them to
integrate. Therefore, by 'masking'
the more obvious features of their
neurodivergence, they can spend less
time with their head below the
parapet, fit in and appear less odd.
But masking comes at a price and is
not without consequences.

She begins to twirl her hair and tap her foot.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
They could seek to mask these facets
which could be stimming, (a
repetitive movement used for self-
regulation or self-soothing), talking
about a special interest or avoiding
social interactions. Examples of
stimming can include hand and finger
movements, rocking or jumping around.
Stimming can also be less obvious,
such as hair twirling or foot
tapping.

A CO-WORKER comes into the office and Autistic does
everything possible to avoid eye-contact.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
In my case, one of the things I try
to mask is my poor eye contact. For
so many neurotypicals, eye contact is
the most natural thing to do. It's
human, expected and seen as a sign of
sincerity; but for me, it's
excruciating.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
It feels like I'm having a laser pen
shone in my eyes when I meet another
set of human eyes.

EXT. PARK - DAY

A DOG wags it's tail to Autistic, and she pets him,
immediately connecting with the animal.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Strangely enough, though, I find
animal eyes just fine.

EXT. CITY - NIGHT

Bright lights and city noise unnerve Autistic. She gets into
her car, frazzled. Once inside, a little peace and time to
disconnect from people and decompress.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I spend my days avoiding bright
lights, loud or high-pitched noises,
scratchy fabrics, clicking pens,
being hot, socialising, small talk,
hypocrisy and disingenuous people. I
like vertical lists, order, clarity,
detail, routine, punctuality,
symmetry, honesty and limited contact
with people, especially their eyes.
Life is full of all the things I try
to avoid and the things I need are
too frequently in short supply, so
like many autistic people, I have
developed coping strategies.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - NIGHT

Autistic is going through some tax exam. past papers, over
and over again.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
I particularly struggled with the
accounting and tax component of my
legal training in the classroom, to
the extent that I'd go through the
examples handed out in class seventy-
plus times at home, whereas my fellow
classmates had it mastered in a
couple of practice runs.
(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (cont'd)
Nonetheless, I passed and looking at my results on paper, you wouldn't think that I was any different from the other students, but if you knew what it had taken to get there, it was quite staggering.

INT. LAW COLLEGE CLASSROOM - DAY

Autistic is facing a STUDENT, trying to get a little compassion.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
These are things which are very stressful for me but would probably not stress a neurotypical, for example, sameness and consistency. The 'normals' can cope quite well with a change to their routine and are often baffled by the upset this can cause me.

STUDENT
That's life!

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A CO-WORKER is facing Autistic.

CO-WORKER
Get over it!

EXT. BURGER STAND - DAY

Autistic is trying to buy a burger.

VENDOR
What's the big deal?

AUTISTIC LAWYER
The ketchup must go before the onions and after the cheese. I can't take it like that!

VENDOR
You're nuts! Just eat your burger and piss off!

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Things which are paramount to us aren't paramount to you.
(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Some things may be annoying or get on a 'normal's' nerves, but I've never seen a neurotypical adversely impacted by having their daily routine disrupted, or by not being able to sit at the same desk, or having to sit by somebody loudly eating crunchy, strong-smelling food.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Autistic is making a sandwich, paying particularly close attention to the order of the ingredients, she strategically places on the bread.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I would not say that I am an observer, but I am a noticer, especially of small things. Small things appear small, but when you look at them and into them, they are quite often massive. These small things can be inanimate objects, situations, events or even people. I then like to watch how these small things influence other things and ultimately have a domino effect. For me, the detail of the minutiae is fascinating because it's so revealing and usually huge.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is facing a FAT CLIENT.

FAT CLIENT

I mean, it's not right, to call somebody fat like that. I'm not fat, am I?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Actually yes, you are very fat. Massive. Obese.

The client looks utterly disgusted by this. He gets up and storms out of her office. Brenda watches the exchange and rolls her eyes.

INT. LAW OFFICE - LATER

Two LAWYERS are speaking about Autistic, without knowing they are being overheard, but she is nearby, listening, unseen and impassive.

LAWYER ONE

She is rude with the clients.

LAWYER TWO

Diplomatically incontinent.

LAWYER ONE

She is making us look bad, and that's not easy.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I have my own particular brand of disdain for diplomacy at the expense of honesty and integrity. In the first instance, it goes against my values but also leaves me utterly confused and wading through infinite possibilities. I think being diplomatic is a form of masking, and not only does it not say what it means, but it's also shrouded with a variety of potential meanings and intentions. Being discourteous has never been my intention, but when you're honest, hurting somebody's feelings can result in collateral damage.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - NIGHT

Autistic is with her friend who is mature in years.

OLDER WOMAN

I'm fine, really. I know you didn't mean anything by what you said.

Autistic looks at her friend, obviously understanding the dishonesty of the words, but frustrated that being honest is so problematic.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

COLLEAGUE is showing her hair to Autistic who couldn't have been less interested.

COLLEAGUE

I need to get my roots sorted. See?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Yes, they need addressing if you want to conceal your grey. Did you intentionally choose to have your hair that particular shade of ginger to match your beloved spaniel or is it just a coincidence?

Gulps, gasps and sharp intakes of breath. The colleague leaves Autistic's office visibly perturbed.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Once I've been fallen out with, I'm never sure how long it'll be until things return to normal, which is frustrating for somebody who likes to know what's happening, and when.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic finds interesting information on her desk computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

There have been various attempts at rebranding my thinking and approach to matters, all of which failed miserably because being disarmingly frank and honest is just how I am. In recent years, when people have set up 'group chats' on messaging platforms, I've found myself being added in without my consent. I find these groups similar to a digital social event and have no desire whatsoever to be there.

EXT. CITY STREETS - DAY

Autistic gets a loud message notification on her smart phone. She picks it up and looks disgusted by what she sees.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I tolerated being in these groups for a while, but they took over my phone, so I left. Now, I leave immediately as soon as I'm added in as a participant, which has raised a few eyebrows, literally.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
However, I can't continue to pretend
I'm interested in the content and
would rather be considered
antisocial.

INT. LOCAL SCRUFFY GREASY SPOON CAFE - DAY

Autistic is sitting down with two CO-WORKERS having
breakfast. They are looking at her with puzzled faces, as if
she should be saying something.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I've never felt the need to fill in
the so-called 'awkward gaps' or
'prolonged silences' in
conversations. I'm quite happy to let
them remain, expand or morph into a
large vortex of quietness. I've seen
people agree to all sorts of things
or say something incongruous just to
avoid what they consider to be an
excruciating level of invisible
discomfort, which neurotypicals tend
to feel, usually, I'm told, located
in the core.

MONTAGE: VERY SHORT SCENES OF AUTISTIC SPEAKING TO DIFFERENT
PEOPLE IN DIFFERENT SITUATIONS, OFFICE, PARK, RESTAURANTS,
SHOPS, ETC.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
I have often wanted to stop them, but
a 'normal's' need to regain inner
composure is greater than the
inconvenience of having agreed to
take on something they really didn't
want to do. Next time you're in one
of these situations, just try and
refrain from offering to drive fifty
miles out of your way or taking on an
extra mountain of work just so you
don't feel like you're dying on the
inside and having to go through
sixteen shades of awkward. It may
cause discomfort in the first
instance, but I think some of you
'normals' could get better at it with
practice and become less of a dumping
ground.

INT. FANCY RESTAURANT - NIGHT

Autistic is having dinner with her FIRST DATE (Female). The date seems encouraged to ask her out again and Autistic shakes her head, "Not a chance!" breaking the moment.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Take my word for it: I've spent years 'rehearsing' what I have to do, to comply with neurotypicals, and it'd be good if they could learn something from us. I think it could also work well with other things, like saying no to a further date.

INT. PREVIOUS CORPORATE WORKPLACE - OFFICE - DAY

Christmas decorations tell us the time of year. Autistic is handing out raffle tickets around the office.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I was once tasked with selling charity raffle tickets at Christmas. As I went around the building, I asked the names of everyone who bought one, along with their department and role, so they could be easily located if they won.

She comes up to MAVIS - ETHICS LADY who gets a ticket and is asked which department she's from.

ETHICS LADY

I work in the "Ethics and Values" department.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

That's great. When are we getting some?

Ethics lady looks a little confused by the tone of the "joke". Autistic waits for an honest answer. LADY #2 comes to diplomatically intervene.

LADY #2

Don't fret Mavis, she's autistic.

ETHICS LADY

Oh, bless!

LADY #3

It's a shame. There's a lot of it about, these days.

ETHICS LADY

I wouldn't worry about having a bit of autism. I love your honesty, dear.

LADY #3

I agree. We're all a bit autistic, you know?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

No, we're not. Saying that is like saying that we're all a little bit pregnant. It's ridiculous.

The three ladies look a little embarrassed by this and move along, exchanging awkward glances.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - NIGHT

Autistic's WIFE comes over and gives her a kiss.

WIFE

Hello you! How was work?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

The 'normals' convey information through so many different methods. They may say nothing at all or they may gesticulate, deploy hand signals and generate noises. All of this clearly means something to those around them, but often not to those of us who are autistic. Deciphering and untangling body language is very difficult, especially as the 'normals' seem to have an inbuilt Enigma cipher machine, like the one Alan Turing cracked during WWII, which seems to decode everything for them so easily and quickly.

WIFE

But they don't have your accuracy for detail, pattern recognition or visual memory. You see the world differently too.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

There's such a huge labyrinth of unspoken information conveyed by the 'normals' and it can be utterly bewildering because we're often left mystified and perplexed, while searching for something more tangible and familiar to latch onto.

WIFE

What happened? Did you upset someone?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

I've been called "obtuse", "difficult" and "stupid" because, to others, it's just plain obvious, but it isn't to me; it's another language, and there's no online translation software for a raised eyebrow or frown.

WIFE

You are none of those things. And you don't need fixing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

I know. But it's so frustrating. I don't understand them and they don't understand me.

EXT. BUSY CITY STREET - DAY

Autistic is walking amongst a large CROWD. She is silently "people watching".

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Faces are and remain a conundrum to me. I only wish there were some formula to quickly work them out. What is elementary and taken for granted by my neurotypical counterparts continues to flummox me. From what I'm led to believe, I'm supposed to be able to tell how someone is feeling, what they're thinking, their mood or even whether they like something or not. Faces tell me little of that.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

A face is the front part of the head, the bit that looks outwards and while some are more appealing than others, the way they are moved and contorted reveals little, if anything to me about the thoughts and feelings of the occupant. For me, they are functional and hold some of the senses and not much more.

INT. AUTISTIC'S CHILDHOOD HOME - BATHROOM - DAY

CHILD AUTISTIC LAWYER pulls out the cardboard core of the toilet roll and looks at it with curiosity.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Monotropism means a constrained range of interests and is a characteristic feature of autism.

EXT. GARDEN - DAY

Child Autistic plays with the cardboard core.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I describe it to people, relaying my childhood love of the used toilet roll cardboard tube I redeployed as a makeshift telescope. You can only see what's at the end of the empty tube, and there's no peripheral vision, so you're drawn only to what you can locate at the end. You can't see anything else unless you shift the tube.

CHILD AUTISTIC LOOKING THROUGH THE ROLL.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

From what I have read about monotropism, I'd say that it facilitates my ability to hyperfocus on a task, so much so that I can become engrossed in it, regardless of people, space or time. I look at it from every angle and almost want to 'reverse engineer' it.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is frustrated with various documents on her desk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

However, the consequence of this is that it can exclude everything and anything else. I focus on one thing at a time because I only have the capacity for singular thinking, so multi-focusing or multitasking isn't an option. If I'm forced to be 'cognitively flexible', it won't work, and I'm liable to become confused and stressed. In 2021, only 29% of autistic adults are employed, and this needs to change, but it won't until there's a greater understanding, especially in the workplace.

EXT. FRUIT & VEG MARKET - DAY

Autistic is picking up a strawberry. She smells it.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Synaesthesia is a neurological condition thought to be genetic, so it's likely to be passed on from parent to child. The word synaesthesia originates from the Greek meaning 'to perceive together'. Information meant to stimulate one sense stimulates another, so senses which aren't normally connected become so.

SPECIAL EFFECTS: THE STRAWBERRY BECOMES A "PINK WORLD" WAVE WHEN SHE BITES IT.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

For example, you could taste a colour or letters, and numbers could be a colour for you. One person may envisage the letter 'G' as pink, or the colour blue may have a particular taste. The day Wednesday could be orange. You may be able to smell a shape or feel a sound.

EXT. BUSY CITY CENTRE - DAY

Absolute mayhem. PEOPLE shouting for some kind of celebration, STREET MUSICIANS, two THUGS FIGHTING, CHILDREN playing football. Autistic is clearly unnerved by all this.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Sensory overload. This can feel like drowning, and it's challenging to manage, so I do my utmost to avoid it, but it's not always possible. I can experience a sensory overload when my senses are simultaneously subjected to too much information, although sometimes straightforward 'people overload' can rapidly overwhelm me. I would most liken it to an intense multiple sensory assault or violation. I may not behave like a child does when they have 'overload'. Nonetheless, I can really struggle to manage it and although I can become very restless and fidgety, my meltdowns are largely internalised. They're more like shutdowns.

INTERNAL - ART GALLERY - DAY

A very psychedelic yellow display celebrating modern art causes stress to Autistic as she passes by it.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Colours can also overwhelm me, and I can feel them deeply. I think the brightest, most overwhelming colour in the world is yellow, and although beautiful, I have to treat it with caution; less is more. It's a bit like seasoning food with salt and pepper. A small amount enhances the food, but that little bit too much ruins it and makes it unpalatable and I have to push the plate away.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - BEDROOM - NIGHT

Autistic is trying to sleep but becomes deeply restless. She sits up on the bed, looking tired, but also unable to sleep. Her Wife snores next to her, sound asleep.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Then there's the sleep battle, and that's the mother of all wars because it invariably compounds sensory overload and leaves me more likely to need to withdraw from people or 'shut down'.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Poor sleep is the one feature I probably struggle with the most because not only is it difficult at the time but it's awful the next day, and the problem is only exacerbated and compounded over time, as my desperate need for sleep, and craving to switch off, mushrooms.

MONTAGE: VARIOUS SLEEPLESS NIGHTS

- Drinking milk
- Playing on the phone
- Fighting with the pillow
- Keeping her Wife up

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I'm a diabolical sleeper and always have been. Nothing works; even total exhaustion is often insufficient to knock me out. I try very hard but the ability to just drop off or wake up feeling refreshed has always eluded me.

INT. BUTCHER SHOP - DAY

The BUTCHER faces Autistic as she grabs her package from the counter.

BUTCHER

It'll do you good...

INT. BAKERY - DAY

The BAKER faces Autistic as she grabs her bread.

BAKER

What's best for you, is to focus on your people skills.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

People make such ignorant declarations that minimise autism and its impact.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 It's like putting a quadriplegic in a wheelchair at the bottom of a flight of stairs and saying, "Go on, have a go; you'll never know unless you try. You might even surprise yourself."

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is reading some documents at her desk when Autistic comes in with some tea for her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 To understand what daily life was like, firstly, you would have to understand Brenda and the 'Brendafication' of the office, which she had both built and butchered. Officially, Brenda was the manager. However, she was so much more. Brenda's energy and ethos seeped into every crevasse of the organisation over the decades. She was pivotal to the firm's culture, and nothing happened at any level without her sanctioning or endorsement. Whether somebody wanted to move a desk or something more substantial, it had to be filtered through Brenda's mindset. If she was feeling buoyant, it wasn't a problem, and she'd probably agree, with sprinkles and glitter. But no matter how reasonable or minor your request was, it'd be drop-kicked from view if she was annoyed, which was her default position, as aggression featured heavily in her arsenal.

Brenda goes from normal to purple in five seconds flat after reading a document. She's livid.

BRENDA
 Come here! Take a look at these leaving cards I've bought. What do you think?

Autistic takes them and has a look.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
 They're nice. Who are they for?

BRENDA
 That one's for Mary, and this one's for Rita.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
Oh, I didn't know they were leaving.

BRENDA
Neither do they yet.

And with that, she returns the cards to the cabinet.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is watching MARY leave and waves her off enthusiastically. Autistic stands next to her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
There was no genuine mechanism to handle a complaint impartially because she ensured that all complaints were triaged via her. This was tantamount to marking one's own homework and somewhat North Korean in nature. So, because the staff were without agency, people just accepted it, knowing that while she would wound, she'd never kill, and they were almost grateful for that.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is busy berating various EMPLOYEES, while gesticulating wildly. The more frenetically she speaks, the more her ill-fitting dentures move around on their own.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Brenda chafed against all known conventions of how one may be expected to conduct oneself in the workplace. I quickly learned that bad language and inappropriate behaviour were fine just as long as they came from her. I would often marvel at how she would berate one person for how they spoke to a colleague, and yet in the next breath, she'd be humiliating and insulting the very same person twice over. She'd then go on a tour around the office, stopping at different desks in different departments and telling everyone how individuals should and should not behave; just in case they'd forgotten. Staff just nodded.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is trying to make amends with a couple of secretaries for some of her more 'combative' comments, along with asking one of the girls, (who'd just be diagnosed with crippling OCD), if she'd like to go and clean *her* house, for her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

From time to time, Brenda would suffer from a pang of conscience where she'd make an effort not to snap and snarl. When she knew she'd gone too far with what she'd said or done, she'd remind those who'd been on the receiving end of her acerbic comments or startling conduct how she'd gone out of her way for them. They'd receive a recap of her generous gestures, such as giving them a small loan until payday or turning a blind eye to something they had or hadn't done. Then, having planted these 'seeds' of aide-mémoires, individuals would then 'water them' with thanks and appreciation, and the germination of the cycle of further poor behaviour was cultivated.

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - LATER

Brenda is now berating both Autistic and two more CO-WORKERS.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Alas, Brenda's attempts to remain professional lasted about as long as a heavy smoker's efforts to quit smoking on New Year's Eve because just as soon as she received any kind of vaguely bad news, she'd revert to type. In fairness, her approach was effortless, and she conducted herself with the same casual ease most of us employ when switching on the kettle or brushing our teeth. However, the pill was sugared because if you'd had your turn, you knew it wasn't going to be you for a while.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

The two Co-Workers from the previous scene smoke a cigarette near the back rubbish bags, which are alongside a couple of broken office chairs.

CO-WORKER ONE

Oh, thank fuck she's moving on to somebody else now.

CO-WORKER TWO

I know. It's a bit like when you've just had COVID-19; you know you're safe for a while and unlikely to be reinfected for some time.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - LATER

Brenda is stuffing pills into her mouth and holding her stomach, clearly in some pain.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

When Brenda summoned someone, they were expected to go to her immediately, and if they didn't, she became pregnant with rage. In fact, by the time she finally got hold of the individual concerned, she was in her third trimester of fury. The truth of the matter was that Brenda struggled to get about the large and sprawling building due to her array of medical conditions, which she'd regularly list and overshare how many tablets she took a day to combat their impact on her beleaguered body. The especially problematic condition was her prolapsed womb.

BRENDA (BREATHLESS)

Fucking hell, it's like having a dick between my legs.

She shuffles off, bow-legged, to her next destination - walking the long way around to avoid the stairs.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A YOUNG LAWYER comes out of her office and sees Brenda in apparent distress and discomfort.

YOUNG LAWYER

Are you okay, Brenda?

Brenda pulls her hand out of her pocket, unclenches her fist, and gives the V sign.

BRENDA

Are these yours? Go on - fuck off!

Brenda makes her way to the front desk where she begins to scream at the RECEPTIONIST.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The post of moral enforcer was vacant and had been for some time. Although Brenda had an 'Intellectual Butler', he was always conspicuous by his absence, especially when needed most. It always baffled me how a firm that was horrified by the injustice some people faced, outraged by inequity and fought so fervently for clients' rights for very little remuneration, could have such a cavalier approach to how their own staff were treated.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - MORNING

Brenda arrives to the office in her ancient rusty car, coughing up plumes of black smoke. She also ships in the countless family members she employs, (whether they're required or not). A few are still in their pyjamas, and disembark, yawning and stretching.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Brenda arrived very early most mornings. She and her entourage was audible before they were visible. Her car's struggling exhaust must have been more prolapsed than her knackered womb.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BATHROOM - DAY

A HOMELESS MAN is promptly ushered by Brenda into the office bathroom.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Now and again, Brenda would let a former client who was homeless and currently living in a nearby shed with his large dog on a string, use the shower. I didn't half get a fright when I first encountered them on the stairs early one morning.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM - DAY

There is a queue of EMPLOYEES (AKA FAMILY MEMBERS) for the bathroom; namely, the ones who Brenda chauffeurs daily.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

INSERT: BRENDA'S DECORATIONS.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Knowing Brenda was to know that she was a staunch Christian. She had pictures of Our Lady adorning her tangerine-painted woodchip office walls with ornate rosary beads hanging off their frames. Not far from Mother Mary was bottled water from Lourdes and miniature statues of Jesus smiling and holding out his hand, along with newspaper cuttings of modern miracles. There were even photographs of pieces of toast and plates of spaghetti which looked like Jesus both before and after he'd been on the cross. Brenda's daily conduct was incompatible with the Holy Trinity's lessons of love and compassion. Luckily for some, her memory was atrocious, and so occasionally, she'd forget that you were on her 'list' or your misdemeanours had been superseded by somebody else's, and so you might skip that particular cycle of maltreatment.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Furious, bashing on the keyboard, Brenda is trying to get into her computer, when an ASSISTANT comes in and calmly types her password for her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Brenda's memory was so poor, she'd assigned different people in the office to remember her passwords for different things, because she couldn't remember them, and writing them down would only result in them being lost in mountains of paper on her very untidy desk. The surface of the desk hadn't been seen in years.

INT. LAW OFFICE - JUNIOR LAWYERS OFFICE

Brenda storms into the Lawyers office and begins to swear, only to then realise she is not sure why she's annoyed with him.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Sometimes, she'd go into a room incandescent with fury and about to launch into some poor, unsuspecting person when she realised that she'd completely forgotten why she was annoyed and wanted to lambast them in the first instance. This then resulted in her being even more furious.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

A WORK EXPERIENCE BOY comes in with an envelope which Brenda opens quickly. Her face turns puce, and she begins to scream at the kid.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
As you might have anticipated, Brenda didn't take bad news well, which is perhaps why much of it got buried. This created further problems down the line, but that was considered a problem for another day by most.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A GANGSTER, and his MUSCLE MEN walk into the office making heads turn. Black pinstripe suit, scarred cheek and a gold tooth. The Mobster fulfils all stereotypes. Brenda comes out and greets him full of smiles and hugs.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Brenda's chums largely consisted of gangsters and career villains, most of whom had a tendency to either die or spend decades residing at His Majesty's pleasure.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is reading a headline with the Mobster's picture: NOTORIOUS GANG LEADER MURDERED. She is crying. She cuts his picture from the newspaper, kisses it and adds it to the wood-chip walls; wedged between the religious paraphernalia and Jesus iconography.

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is reading another headline with the picture of a notorious DRUG SMUGGLER. The headline reads: DRUG SMUGGLER RELEASED FROM PRISON. Moments later, the Drug Smuggler walks into her office.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Occasionally, when one of her cronies was released from prison, they'd come into the office and visit her. These visitors had to be given very special attention as they'd been away for 'years'. So much so, you'd think we were receiving a celebrity A-lister, not a former Category A, high-risk institutionalised inmate, who'd spent the best years of his life banged up.

INT. BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

The Employees watch the Drug Smuggler from behind the glass door. A SECRETARY goes in with a tray full of tea and toast. She's giggly and a bit starstruck.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
All work had to stop while everybody 'paid their respects'. This consisted of making them tea, shaking hands and back-slapping.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is explaining her 'legal opinion' to a client. The rest of the lawyers in the office listen with intrigue to the conversation and exchange a few side-ways glances to one another, but say nothing.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A pair of LAWYERS are discussing a case when Brenda suddenly appears in the hallway and they quickly shut down the conversation. She eyes them suspiciously.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Occasionally, Brenda would undertake file reviews and have experienced lawyers explaining their rationale to her, despite her having no legal training and not always understanding the law or legal processes. Other times, she'd just leave a sarcastic or glib comment on the file which didn't bring any value to either the client or the progression of the case. It was either ignored, or met with a wry smile from those who knew better than to query its value.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

The same pair of lawyers are now facing Brenda directly behind her desk. She's not understanding their explanations and they're nervous like school kids facing the Headteacher.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Trying to explain a legal matter to Brenda would challenge the most accomplished of communicators, and what's more, the task necessitated serious diplomacy so as not to irk her. She struggled with the complexities of the legal points. However, if she did not understand or disagreed with the statute, sentencing or, worse still, if she felt at all embarrassed by her own shortcomings or ineptitude, she'd adopt a particularly acidic means of letting you know what she thought of you and your explanation.

After hearing their explanations, she erupts, turns the proverbial purple and shoves them out her door.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda storms out of her office after the two lawyers and puts a message out on the Tannoy to the entire office.

BRENDA

Jordan has been to the court of appeal in London today on the Smith case. I am pleased to announce that the conviction has been squashed, which is good, because he never did it anyway.

Cringe reactions and grimaces from everybody. Firstly, she meant 'quashed', and whether he did or didn't 'do it', was a moot point.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

If Brenda were to have known that staff were managing her, she'd have gone berserk. However, the savvy ones never let this be known, and that is, (I later discovered), how they got through their day. They managed this febrile manager without the manager ever knowing that she was being managed. This was a skill I could only watch and admire, very much like a footballer who can routinely score a goal from the halfway line.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A member of staff exits the building, tearful, with her little box of belongings, having only been there a few days.

SHORT-TERM EMPLOYEE

I am more accustomed to working in an office where there is classical music playing, fresh flowers in the toilet and an altogether more cultured ambience. The only culture I ever found here is growing up the walls in the toilet and on the milk left floating in someone's breakfast bowl from last week under a pile of files.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is interviewing a new RECRUIT with a secretary taking notes nearby.

BRENDA

There is a lot of bad language in the office. Will this upset you?

RECRUIT

No! I swear like a fucking trooper!

BRENDA

That's not what I am looking for.
Thank you.

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - SAME

A SECOND RECRUIT is facing Brenda in similar circumstance as the first.

SECOND RECRUIT

I disapprove of bad language. We don't use it at home.

BRENDA

Well then, I'm not sure you'd fit in.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I often thought that if Brenda were to be provided with a verbatim written transcript of her own dialogue, or even worse, 'instructions', then perhaps she'd realise just how vacuous they were and, therefore, how difficult they were to follow, for anybody, but especially for someone who desperately needed clarity without a hint of inference.

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is giving Autistic instructions and Autistic is writing everything down faithfully.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I say this because when she spoke to me, I wrote pretty much whatever she said down so I could go and re-read it; however, when I looked at my page after a 'conversation', it was just a series of mostly disconnected words and gaps where she'd gestured or shrugged. And so even though I had a copy of what was said, it was invariably meaningless.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is desperately mapping out the instructions Brenda gave her on the wall, using all manner of bullet points, pins, and even strings to make sense out of it all. She's beginning to sweat and get flustered.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Some people with attention difficulties may find it difficult to keep on task, focus on what they're being told and not become distracted, despite desperately trying to keep their mind on the matter. All of this should be considered along with the additional anxiety many of us neurodivergents feel on a day-to-day basis, just trying to fit into and comply with the neurotypical world.

Frustrated and feeling defeated, Autistic throws down her pad on her desk, incapable of making sense of what Brenda had asked.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic goes into Brenda's office, feeling sick, nervous and apprehensive.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I would invariably have to return to her and ask further questions.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 Brenda didn't expect to have to say things more than once because, in her mind, she'd provided a perfectly adequate explanation, and either an individual had not been listening, or was being obtuse, and that individual was invariably me!

Brenda goes berserk and pushes Autistic out of the way.

BRENDA
 And now, you come in here, as if I didn't explain anything to you clearly. I thought you were supposed to be clever? It'd be easier to just do it my fucking self. Piss off!

AUTISTIC LAWYER
 Sorry, Brenda, I was just seeking clarification...

BRENDA
 Write. A. Letter. To. McPhearson. CC. Me, and Glendale. Make sense of stuff. Take a view. See what's what. Check the thingermigig...

Autistic gives her a blank look.

BRENDA (cont'd)
 Are you totally fucking stupid? What's wrong with you? It's like you're going out of your way to be a dick-head! What kind of moron are you? Imbecile!

Brenda, out of breath, slumps down in her chair, flustered and shakes her hand as if to dismiss Autistic.

EXT. GRAVEYARD - DAY

Autistic is standing amongst a group of MOURNERS as the casket of the deceased is lowered into the ground. Moments later, Autistic is giving a few (honest) words about the deceased that land badly on everybody present.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 Of course, there are times when the logic and clear thinking of autism aren't always appreciated or apposite.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I've been known to be very matter of fact and rational when pragmatism isn't necessarily in keeping with the mood, such as when somebody dies or is facing a life-changing event. At the same time, my ADHD hadn't done me any favours on these occasions either, because the words were often out before I'd had time to audit them or their impact.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is berating Autistic out loudly for something she hadn't completed, but Autistic was never actually told to do it. Brenda just thought she'd given instructions, but had forgotten to.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

As stated, there was no impartial means of complaining, and so nobody did, and Brenda knew this. Many people at this point would have left, but this was no ordinary job. Anybody who has ever tried to secure training in order to qualify as a solicitor will know just how difficult it is to get a firm to take you on. Not every firm is a training firm; some firms don't offer areas of work of interest to everybody, and competition for the small number of training places that firms have to offer has always been fierce. There was no way I was going to give up. But I knew it was an unhealthy environment for me.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is greeted by an untidy reception desk occupied by two lifeless pot plants, an old copy of a tabloid newspaper, a flickering lightbulb, and a well-thumbed clothes and jewellery catalogue.

BRENDA TO AUTISTIC

You have the 'Anne Frank' room for now.

INT. LAW OFFICE - THE 'ANNE FRANK' ROOM - DAY

Diminutive in size, hidden location and limited natural light. I can see how it got it's name. Autistic hears a strange noise coming from beyond the oppressive little room, and decides to investigate.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OUTSIDE THE 'ANNE FRANK' ROOM - DAY

PHILIP is outside, peering through a crack in the door. Terrible teeth, a nervous twitch, a stammer, a limp and no concept of personal space.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Are you okay?

He just shuffles and shrugs. The public address system booms out:

INTERCOM

Black Donna to reception. Black Donna to reception... Fat Kim to the back door. Fat Kim to the back door and bring your lighter, babe.

Autistic looks at the large speaker as if it were alive and knowing it was going to take some getting used to. It was loud, intrusive and went off with little warning.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A bunch of GIRLS are smoking cheap cigarettes outside the office. Autistic is just coming in from her coffee break and coughs slightly at the cloud of smoke just above their heads.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Young or old, nearly all the girls in the office smoked and smoked often. So as to avoid a nicotine-deprived stampede come 10:30 a.m., a strict 'fag 'n brew' rota was introduced and for the first few months at least, I think they adhered to it. The first batch would venture outside to draw the living daylights out of a strong foreign cigarette and the second batch would make the tea according to the wall list, which went something like this:

INT. LAW OFFICE - TINY GROTTY KITCHENETTE - DAY

We meet the various girls as they are introduced when they make their tea.

MONTAGE: QUICK SHOTS OF GIRLS MAKING TEA IN ORDER, ANNIE, JANICE, WHITE DONNA, BLACK DONNA, TRACY.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Part-time Annie: Builder's tea
 Big Janice: Milky tea 4 ½ sugars
 White Donna: Black anything
 Black Donna: Black coffee
 Young Tracy: Tea colour of 2p
 Part-time Annie was actually full-time but lazy. Big Janice was huge and only a few custard creams away from having to carry an insulin pen. White Donna was to be differentiated from Black Donna. Young Tracy was no longer that young but had worked there since she was very young and was still thought of as Young Tracy and so on. My name wasn't on the wall as I tended to make my own tea. I don't think I had a nickname, but if I did, I didn't know about it.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - BACK YARD - CORRUGATED CANOPY - DAY

Winter is in full swing with a strong rain keeping the girls huddled under a canopy near mountains of bagged rubbish and an old table. Unsurprisingly, some of the bags had burst open.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Due to the frequency of the inclement weather, the girls could invariably be located in the confines towards the back of the office. They'd be crowded together under a purpose-built canopy along with all the piled-up rubbish bags which were sometimes used as makeshift seats; that is, for all bar Big Janice, who would have required a hydraulic hoist to get her back to her desk.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is watching Janice with her visible tan-lines. Janice goes over to her desk and begrudgingly picks up the envelope for selling scrap gold.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Some months, you'd see a previously gold-cladded secretary with nothing left but the white marks betraying her spray tan where lots of chunky rings, bangles and necklaces were once worn with pride. Initially, I assumed that they'd forgotten to put them on, but after a while, I'd see that scrap gold envelopes were never far from view, particularly approaching payday.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

SNOW BOOTS comes into the building as Autistic watches her curiously.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

On one occasion, one of the girls spent the best part of the week in chunky knee-high snow boots. She'd fallen asleep in front of an electric fire with all three bars full on after one too many alcopops and had managed to burn her calves. She didn't like the mottled look she'd been left with and dug out a pair. It was August, which did little to showcase the zeitgeist of this winter classic, but they appeared to do the trick. She must have been sweltering, but as with many unusual things that happened, nobody said anything, and I thought it wise to follow suit because, remember, I lived in their world.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

WAG (Wife & Girlfriend of a football) sits next to Autistic chatting amicably.

WAG GIRL

Did you know I'm a WAG?

AUTISTIC LAWYER
I'm not a huge football fan, but
nonetheless, I am impressed.

WAG GIRL
My boyfriend plays for the prison
football team and not in a league as
such. But he's had trials...

AUTISTIC LAWYER
Oh, no wonder the others laughed when
I asked if you went to all the away
matches.

WAG GIRL
Are you serious?

AUTISTIC LAWYER
Of course.

WAG GIRL
I'm counting down the days until he's
released.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
It must have been very difficult for
you.

WAG GIRL
It's been awful. My growler is
chewing my leg off. I can't wait for
him to get out.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Many of this hardcore collective had
four interests: fun, fellas, fags and
'fangina' problems. And the 'normals'
say that 'We' have a narrow range of
interests.

INT. FISH AND CHIP SHOP - DAY

Janice and the WAG are chomping on some very unhealthy food.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
It wasn't just fags which took place
following a rota. Pretty much all
refuelling and replenishing took
place through a finely choreographed
schedule and lunch was no exception.
(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

The girls would copper up and frequent one of the many fast-food joints in the locality and buy something deep-fried with chips, the essence of which always clung to the air for the rest of the afternoon.

INT. LAW OFFICE - SHOWERS - DAY

Autistic goes into the toilet just as Janice does. She sits on the toilet and suddenly is assaulted by some serious grunting sounds from the stall next door.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I think the dietary choices of some staff could, at least in part, have contributed to what I often had the misfortune to witness when walking past the toilet just after lunch. All I can say is that it sounded like a closely fought match point between two tennis legends.

When Autistic comes out, Janice is nowhere to be seen, but the frown on her face tell us the smell is absolutely atrocious.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is kicking off in front of all the secretaries.

BRENDA

Christ! There's a woman in this place who shits like a man! They need help.

INT. LAW OFFICE - LATER

Autistic is walking around pensive.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

My pity was somewhat limited on the basis that as somebody with extremely heightened senses who can smell the common cold in my nose before its flourishing, this was truly shocking and I dreaded the afternoon bowel evacuations because I knew they'd squat in my nostrils until home time.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Even the homeless ex-client who sometimes used the shower would try to use it before lunchtime so as to avoid that area and its pungent aroma.

INT. LAW OFFICE - THE 'ANNE FRANK' ROOM - DAY

Autistic is reading an email and laughing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the most endearing members of staff was a lady called Linda. When one of her emails came through, I, like others, stopped whatever I was doing to read it because they were guaranteed to be amusing and often shocking. She'd publicly shame people if she caught them doing something they shouldn't or her emails were a rant including incorrectly spelt swear words.

INT. LAW OFFICE - CHRISTMAS PARTY - DAY

LINDA comes in. A sturdy woman wearing glitter and sequins sewn on a vest. In contrast, all the other EMPLOYEES seem in a festive mood, wearing Christmas jumpers.

LINDA

Well, why is everybody so quiet!?
Let's get the party started!

LINDA proceeds to dance to festive music, twerk and shake her booty around the room.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Linda's DAUGHTER drops off her BABY with Linda. Linda begins to strap the baby to her chest.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Sometimes, Linda's daughter would covertly drop a baby off via the smokers yard for her mum to mind while she ran some errands, and Linda would then strap this tiny little person to her chest in one of those baby hammocks and go about her business of charging through doors, shouting at people and undertaking missing stationery investigations.

INT. LAW OFFICE - KITCHENETTE - DAY

A bunch of FEMALE EMPLOYEES are chatting by the kettle. Autistic comes in, going directly to the refrigerator to look for her lunch.

EMPLOYEE
Hey, why don't you join us? We're going for a dirty kebab for lunch.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
I've never taken to socialising, especially in large groups, and the thought of it makes my irritable bowel absolutely furious. I know socialising is loved by most, but I dislike and dread it intensely. I am about as interested in these things as the Amish are in miniskirts and mankinis.

EMPLOYEE
Oh, for fuck's sake...okay, then. You don't have to. We're just being polite.

Autistic grabs her lunch and sits to eat it on the small and only table in the tiny, scruffy eating area, by herself. The rest of the girls seem a little uncomfortable by this but leave her to it.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic comes into the office and Brenda stops what she is doing for a moment to glance at her.

BRENDA
Yes? What do you want?

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Regarding this year's Christmas Party, I won't be attending any social events. I suffer from social anxiety and office parties cause me undue stress.

BRENDA

For fuck's sake. Don't you think you're just being an ignorant cunt?

Autistic cringes at the answer, but holds her ground knowing that verbal dexterity and diplomacy aren't Brenda's strength.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I'm glad I didn't attend the party, as one member of staff got so drunk, staff at the venue were feeling for a pulse in her neck as she lay slumped on a hotel sofa in a public foyer. They were about to call an ambulance, when she got up and started dancing again, totally rejuvenated after a sleep and carefully timed 'tactical chunder'.

EXT. LAW OFFICE STREET - DAY

We get to see the rest of the street: the law office is nestled near Dave-Downstairs, Shirley's Shoes, bookies, vape shops, barbers and an array of unusual eateries and bargain shops. Dave-Downstairs has an extremely impressive 'Fag & Mags' shop, with bulletproof glass. It opened when Dave gets up, and closes when he's had enough. Around the corner is Shirley's Shoes selling dominatrix-like footwear and rubber outfits, which catered for niche interests. The African and Caribbean eateries smell amazing. It was multicultural and diverse. African and Asian women in their colourful clothing walk around.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is with a rough-looking CLIENT, Kenny. They are both looking at her computer screen, reading a report.

KENNY

I do intend to hand myself in you know, but it has to be just after my daughter's birthday party next week.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
Promise me Kenny?

Just about that moment, DENISE shows up. Protruding yellow teeth, cropped hair, a lacquered quiff and oodles of gold. She's also the fastest talker in the west.

DENISE
Don't even talk to me yet, I haven't
had my three fags, two cups of tea,
and I need to change my slip-ons for
slippers.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Denise arrives on an untaxed moped. The moped is parked near the front of the building, and she resentfully dismounts.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DENISE'S OFFICE - DAY

She'd hurls back the blinds when she sees the local kids trying to mount her moped. She takes off her slipper and slams it against the window. The kids look up, give her the V sign and run off.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is screaming at Denise.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM - DAY

Denise is with Autistic and some of the other office girls.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Brenda's rules changed on a daily
basis and so she usually gave Denise
just enough rope to hang herself.
That said, Denise often over-played
her hand, so it was six and two
threes.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DENISE'S PUNISHMENT OFFICE - DAY

Periodically, Denise was temporarily moved away from the main reception area, which she loved as she was top-dog, to directly under Brenda's monitoring gaze. It was part punishment and part "mentoring". The two women look at each other with disdain.

Denise was desperate to be reinstated to her premium post in reception, but that would depend upon her behaviour and how involved she got in matters which had absolutely nothing to do with her, especially of the 'Human Resources' variety.

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Autistic sees KELLY - a receptionist and self-styled legal guru. Her main interest was sexual offending and she called herself a 'Sexpert'.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

What fascinated me was I couldn't believe Kelly was somebody's choice for front of house. She was the first person anybody saw (and smelt) when they arrived. Her thick orange foundation stopped cleanly around her jawline, so I have no idea how she always managed to get it all over the collar of her blouse. She had breath which could stop traffic, and if you'd put a canary on her desk, it would probably have passed away by the mid-morning fag break.

KELLY

Hey.. Guess what, did you know that just because you're married, you can't rape your wife. Who knew?

Autistic looks at Kelly as if she has lost her mind. Kelly loved reading old out-dated law books and would even share legal facts and cases from years back. She'd regularly predict the likely length of custodial sentences for clients at no extra cost. Autistic keeps walking. JIMMY JONES, a rough looking man comes up to Kelly.

JIMMY JONES

Hia. My name is Jimmy Jones, and I have an 11:00 o'clock. I'm up in the Crown Court soon.

KELLY

I know! Wait here, Jim.

Kelly grabs her very old and out-dated law textbook.

KELLY (cont'd)

Not good news for you Jimmy lad! If a man rapes a woman he's married to, it's now illegal. It didn't used to be, years back, but it is now.

JIMMY JONES

What are you on about?

KELLY

Sit down and you can read it
yourself, whilst you're waiting.

He storms off, angry and swearing. Now the whole of reception knows what he's been accused of. Kelly sticks two short sausage fingers up at him. Just at that point, there is a knock at the entrance door by a man with a swarthy complexion and a huge MEXICAN MOUSTACHE. Denise leans over to Kelly, gestures towards the door.

DENISE

Have you ordered a kebab, Kelly babe?

MEXICAN MOUSTACHE

Excuse me, I have an appointment! I'm
not delivering food!

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

DEIRDRE is on reception. She's a mature, well-to-do lady. Conspicuous by being well dressed and judgemental of criminal clients, whether convicted or not. She only liked dealing with Family Law clients. Another CRIMINAL CLIENT comes in. He looks at Deirdre's home-made name plate on the desk, which is by her elegant cup and saucer.

CRIMINAL CLIENT

Excuse me luv, who in the office
deals with defending armed robbery
suspects?

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry, I can't help you with
that.

CRIMINAL CLIENT

But you are a criminal defence law
firm?

DEIRDRE

I am just the receptionist. I don't
have any information for you.

The criminal client is dumbfounded by the answer. A SECOND
CLIENT comes in.

SECOND CLIENT

Excuse me, Miss. Can you do a retraction statement?

DEIRDRE

I'm sorry. We don't do crime.

The man is confused and doesn't know what to say. He shakes his head and leaves. The phone rings.

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

Good morning, Law Firm, Deirdre speaking. How may I help you?

PETER (V.O.)

Hiya. My name's Peter. I'm after help for my next parole hearing to get released. Can you help? I'm having my human rights abused. It's double jeopardy and it's not on. I'm being pushed from pillow to post here and have had enough. I want to get my sentence squashed because keeping me locked up like an animal isn't on.

DEIRDRE

Okay. What's your name?

PETER

Peter. Peter Sutcliffe.

DEIRDRE

Can you come into the office?

PETER

No. I'm locked up, and they won't let me out.

DEIRDRE

Do you get day release?

PETER

No, they don't trust me.

DEIRDRE

Ah, that's a shame.

PETER

I want a hearing. I'm fed up with being stuck in here; it's a shithole, and there's nowt to do. They've taken the satellite TV down.

(MORE)

PETER (cont'd)

I'm only allowed the games console twice a week, and they won't let us have any more of those Thai brides sent in. And the sweetshop won't stock chocolate finger biscuits anymore. I've had it, and I want out. I need to get out before I do something silly.

DEIRDRE

Okay. I've got all that down. What's your name again?

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Deirdre is still answering phones. It rings again. She answers it.

DEIRDRE

Good morning, Law Firm, Deirdre speaking. How may I help?

ANNE

Good morning. I'd like a divorce. I've had enough. I can't go on like this anymore. I'm at the end of my rope.

DEIRDRE

Okay, my love, what's your name?

ANNE

It's Anne.

DEIRDRE

And what's been going on, my darling? Tell me all about it.

ANNE

I'm fed up. It's all hunting, wrestling, jousting and birds, hawks in particular, and don't get me started on all the other women. I don't get a look in anymore. And he's really let himself go recently.

DEIRDRE

They're all the same, my love. I had forty-seven years of it. So, what went on then?

(MORE)

DEIRDRE (cont'd)

You know, just so I've got something for the form. What's your last name then?

ANNE

Boleyn.

Deirdre smiles knowingly. She's been pranked - again. Staff knew she didn't like the criminal clients and took matters into their own hands.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is typing on her computer. There is a commotion outside her office.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The word 'gate' is often attached to scandals in the media and equally, it came to be used whenever there was a period typified by investigation, controversy, scandal and conspiracy theories in the office. The most notorious for us was 'Speakergate'. It started as a bit of a joke, with people making comical statements over the tannoy. However, like most things, it promptly went downhill. Before long, there was burping, farting, impersonations, an order for Indian takeaway and general rudeness in foreign accents coming through.

Brenda walks in during the shenanigans and stands there listening and simmering with anger.

BRENDA

Alright, enough! Who is behind this bullshit? I try my best to make us look professional and proper and you lot do this - with clients around too!

Everybody looks at her and then heads go down. This is likely to get ugly. Despite her best efforts, codes of silence were enacted, and Brenda never got to the bottom of it. Fortunately, her poor memory was to everyone's advantage!

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is once again facing Autistic, annoyed that she is been asked if criminal law colleagues understand her neurodivergence and how they can best support her.

BRENDA

Do you think I've got nothing better to do all day than sit and fucking think about you? Christ almighty.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Predictably, Brenda hadn't discussed what 'reasonable adjustments' I may need and how others could best work with me. When I first started "working in crime", I was directed to a shelf with loads of paper files of varying thicknesses, and told they were all mine. I also knew they'd all be time sensitive and I needed to get to grips with them quickly, but I had no idea how to do it and nobody told me. There was no handover.

BRENDA

And don't make a fucking nuisance of yourself by asking too many questions either. This is a busy department!

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is going through a huge pile of files on her desk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Although there were some commonalities in each file, there were invariably numerous unique aspects, too, depending upon the case's merits. So, I'd do things like write to the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) who were conducting the prosecution and obtain information from them pertaining to their evidence against our client. When it arrived, I'd work through the bundle of documents, CCTV, interviews and statements. I'd listen to the police interviews, look at witness statements and take statements from our clients, based on their account of events, which tended to differ from the police's account of events.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
Sometimes I'd have to watch CCTV
footage too, if it was being relied
upon, and then see what the client
had to say about it when we watched
it together.

EXT. MAGISTRATES' COURT - DAY

Establishing of the building with numerous PEOPLE coming in
and out, including Autistic.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
In England, criminal cases start in
the Magistrates' Court, whether
somebody is being prosecuted for
stealing a loaf of bread or murder.
If the offence is the former, that's
where it's likely to remain. However,
if it's more serious, the Magistrates
will essentially send it up to the
Crown Court, as Magistrates have
insufficient sentencing powers to
deal with the matter. So, I was
involved with a variety of different
cases because I was predominately
dealing with cases at the beginning
of their life cycle. Some were more
serious than others, but many passed
through me in the first instance to
get them ready for court.

INT. MAGISTRATES' COURT - DAY

Lawyers and defendants face the Judge. Autistic arrives with
her attaché case, collects documents from the prosecution,
and hands them to her solicitor colleague.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
When the lawyers specialising in
criminal law attended the Magistrates
Court and the list of cases was
particularly lengthy, I was sent to
help as a 'runner', and I loved it.
It was frenetic and fast but a great
way to learn and see the law in
action. I'd collect the paperwork
from the prosecution bringing the
case to court, convey messages where
necessary, take instructions and
complete funding applications if a
client had been picked up on the duty
rota the night before.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

This rota is where different firms provide police station advisers, who are available out of hours on a rota scheme, should somebody who has been arrested require legal advice at the police station.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - LATER ON

Autistic brings in the files to Brenda.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

This was all while keeping in touch with Brenda, who had some 'trust issues' and thought everybody must be sitting around, drinking coffee and chatting. She regularly wanted to know exactly what was happening and when we'd be back from court. She didn't understand how lengthy court bureaucracy could be.

INT. CROWN COURT - DAY

Autistic sits behind the BARRISTER, taking notes. A CLIENT comes in and slouches, facing the Judge. He begins to swear at everybody and make threats. He has to be removed by SECURITY, kicking and screaming.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Now and again, I was sent to the Crown Court to sit behind the barrister and take notes for the instructing solicitor back at the office. It could be frustrating to see clients who appeared to go out of their way to give the worst possible impression to a judge and jury.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC OFFICE - DAY

Autistic faces a VODOO PRIEST behind her desk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the first cases I was involved with concerned the practice of Voodoo. Despite years of legal study, witchcraft, sorcery and black magic were new to me.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I was asked to take instructions from this client, which involved asking him questions about the allegation, taking his account of events and allowing him to put forward the information he wanted to present when the matter went to court, along with any mitigation.

VOODOO PRIEST

Manifestations range from disembodied footsteps heard around the house to my wife suffering fertility problems, which result from a negative entity having been lodged in her womb. The same entities visit during the night while we sleep. Anyone attending court needs protection too! Remember, the number 3 must be avoided at all costs, as it has sinister connotations.

EXT. COURT PARKING LOT - DAY

The Voodoo Priest is being loaded into a Police van under the dubious gaze of Autistic, (having being convicted at 3pm in Court Room 3.)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

He had been arrested on yet another very serious matter, and while in the police van, he performed what is sometimes termed a 'dirty protest'. To the uninitiated, this means protestations using one's own poo.

INT. PRISON - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Autistic is the waiting area. A couple of TODDLERS wearing gold identity chains and bracelets square up to one another over a toy they both claim. Neither of them are backing down. Meanwhile, their immaculately turned-out MOTHERS prepare to see their loved ones by applying even more make-up and spruce up their big hair.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of my first deployments while "working in crime" was to a prison to take instructions from a new client. I'd never been to a prison before, so I was curious and unsure what to expect.

INT. PRISON - RECEPTION - CONTINUOUS

Autistic checks in at reception but the TODDLERS go first. All clearly are well versed in the practice and stand there expectantly with their arms apart and legs astride as PRISON OFFICERS examine them for contraband.

INT. PRISON - SECURITY AREA - DAY

Autistic is alone in a small lift which is transparent on all sides. It's a very thick, bullet/bomb-proof glass 'security capsule,' which ascends and descends. It's not moving. She looks desperate in there: troubled face, eyes like saucers, flared nostrils, mouthing while her clammy hands are pressed against the glass. She's trapped. STAFF and GUESTS oblivious to her inaudible pleas and knocks. After what seemed like ages, it begin to slowly move upwards.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Naively, I was shocked to discover how many of our clients from all the different areas in which we practiced were illiterate, and clients in prison seemed to struggle more than most. I had to take this into account when writing to them and I took pride in making their correspondence as accessible as possible, even if the subject matter was complex.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda walking around the office like a high-ranking official, (bit of dinner down her top), inspecting the troops and assessing everyone's workspace for tardiness. Pushing piles of paper around...

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Around this time, Brenda had decided to be preoccupied with tidiness and orderliness. As I was in the office for much of the time, I witnessed this temporary, but intense new interest of hers. It was a bit like a 'special interest', except that it didn't bring her or anyone else any joy.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is now sharing the office of JEFFREY, a nervous unkempt little man, unfamiliar with deodorant.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I was seated next to a tiny man called Jeffrey. If he didn't qualify as having a condition, he couldn't have been far off. Jeffrey was particularly chaotic and disorganised and was therefore targeted by Brenda when she was implementing her new office sanitation regime.

Brenda comes in and starts to have a go at Jeffrey as his work space is a tip. He begrudgingly takes a large bag of unlaundered clothes out from under his desk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

For some reason, which I never quite got to the bottom of, Jeffrey would bring his clothes to work. He'd then change there, but wouldn't take the worn clothes home. At the end of some weeks, he had what can only be described as a 'floordrobe' around his desk. I remember coming in one morning and thinking how it looked like a changing room at a children's outfitter specialising in formal attire, with numerous tiny outfits and miniature waistcoats strewn everywhere.

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Denise and Autistic discuss matters, although Denise's smoker's cough and laryngitis was hindering her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

As I was "working in crime", my contact with Denise in reception inevitably increased.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Very quickly I realised how Denise would overplay her hand and depending upon where she was in the cycle of being subjugated by Brenda, she'd test the water with newcomers, by making capricious demands, such as instructing me to deliver her printing from the nearby machine.

Denise folds up a piece of A4 paper and "aeroplanes" a message to Kelly, as talking hurts her throat.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

So, to make herself understood at reception or assign Kelly tasks she had no authority to, Denise took to 'aeroplaning' messages written on bits of A4 paper to her sidekick, who didn't appreciate having her time with her "Bible" (in reality, it's just a very old law book which she prizes), playing on the internet or talking dirty to her latest boyfriend on the phone interrupted, especially at significant junctures...

INT. LAW OFFICE - LINDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic comes into Linda's office only to find it empty.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

"Working in crime" also ensured I saw more of Linda and the inside of her prized stationery cupboard. Linda fascinated me and was a law unto herself regarding holidays and time off. Just like other staff members, Linda booked her annual leave as usual; however, she seldom returned when anticipated. Before being au fait with this particular idiosyncrasy of Linda's, I remember looking for her on her supposed first day back and being told she might not be actually 'back' until the following week or perhaps the week after that. Seemingly, it was difficult to predict.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

A series of SHORT CUTS of CLIENTS coming in: MEXICAN WAVE DAVE, TOWER BLOCK TIM, PROSTHETIC PETER, HEROIN HANNAH, AND ROY.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

There were loads of interesting clients. There was 'Mexican-Wave-Dave', aptly named because he had short arms due to a birth defect. Then there was 'Tower-Block-Tim' who was, as his name suggested, very tall. Tim came on his bicycle, which he secured outside of the office, and the reception staff kept an eye on it for him. I never saw the bicycle, although given his height, nothing short of a Penny-Farthing would keep him aloft. Then, there was the client with his tag fitted to his prosthetic leg. He would switch to his spare prosthetic leg and go out and commit further offences. Or there was the client who was linked to a massive bag of heroin, as she'd left her National Insurance card in the bag because she'd used it to cut the drug and draw up the lines. However, my all-time favourite would have to be Roy.

Roy was a fascinating character who possessed spectacular, and almost unrivalled delusions of grandeur. His cut-glass eloquence and smooth, deliberate delivery were made even more poignant by his impeccable manners and immaculate tweed attire. He looked and dressed like a quintessential English country gent from the nineteenth century, who'd just been fitted out at a hunting apparel outfitter, complete with a deerstalker hat.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic walks through the office with ROY to an interview room.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Whenever we met, Roy took great pains to remind me of his regal lineage and links to the British and French aristocracy. Seemingly, 1981 was a busy year for Roy as he was made a lord, a marquis, an earl and a duke. He was also ordained by the Orthodox Church and was the reincarnation of Saint Francis of Assisi. Roy also received professorships from numerous prestigious universities. When we didn't meet in person, he'd write me letters on linen paper in fountain pen, which showcased his beautiful handwriting; his letters were like scrolls. Each of his letters reiterated his astonishing credentials in the first instance and then progressed onto the substance of the correspondence, which often paled into insignificance compared to his accolades and titles.

Sometimes, Roy would write to me about aspects of his criminal case. Then, other times, he'd tell me all about the problems he was having with the council, along with their tardiness when it came to fixing the damp patch on his bedroom wall and attending to the broken lifts and rubbish on the communal stairs. However, as I was not instructed on a housing matter, I could do little to assist with these difficulties. I advised him of this and suggested that I refer him to a colleague who dealt with housing issues.

Other times, he'd write informing me that as the council were fitting his new bathroom, coupled with his mouth ulcer, he would, therefore, be precluded from attending the Criminal Court the following week for his trial. Roy assured me that the judge would understand. I replied, explaining how I thought the court would take a dim view of his failure to attend, as his reasons were unlikely to be considered acceptable by the judge. Therefore, if he didn't want a warrant for his arrest to be issued, he'd best be there and on time.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic accompanies Roy outside, and they both look out for Paparazzi.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of Roy's concerns was that the press would hound him at court, and the paparazzi would sit in the public gallery and write terrible stories about him, given his regal ties and aristocratic links. I explained that this was unlikely to be the case and that he shouldn't concern himself with this but should instead focus on getting to court and seeing the pharmacist about his mouth ulcer.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Roy is once again in her office, this time a lot more subdued.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Having spent years awaiting his next set of instructions from 'The Authorities', Roy developed some insight (for a while) into his delusions. He was devastated to discover that he wasn't all that he thought he was, and I felt incredibly sad for him. That's not to say I'm minimising his behaviours or their impact on others, but it must be shattering to discover none of the grandiosity you've attributed to yourself is true. I hope when he was well, he never encountered any of those aristocratic photos he had taken of himself in full Baronial attire, as they could have been challenging to come to terms with.

INT. MAGISTRATES' COURT - DAY

Autistic is barely paying attention to the proceedings.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Publicly funded lawyers aren't paid handsome salaries; they do it because the cases are often very interesting, and they are passionate about facilitating justice for those who need it but can't afford to pay. Listening to some lawyers discuss matters was fascinating, although I remember on a few occasions, the discussions became quite arduous. I love semantics and nuances with the best of the pedants, but I sometimes remember thinking it was like listening to a bunch of bald blokes argue over a comb.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

A LAWYER is playing with her new smartphone and Autistic watches her, wanting to assist.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the lawyers, who disliked and was unprepared for advances in technology, was given a smartphone. That wasn't unusual for an office environment, but her response was. It shouldn't have been as she couldn't even use a calculator. Nonetheless, this very intelligent lady could be found trailing around the building, holding it up to the window, trying to work out which end to speak into and looking at it bemused and alarmed.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

ADRIAN, another of her clients comes in, accusing her of dreadful deeds for no apparent reason.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I recall one morning I had to see another delusional criminal client named Adrian. From day one, Adrian developed an immediate love and disdain for me in equal measure. Sometimes, he'd be my number one fan; other times, he'd tell me I was a diabolical human being.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

On this particular occasion, he was convinced that I worked for both MI5 and MI6 simultaneously. My assurances to the contrary did nothing to assuage his fixed beliefs, and he remained convinced that I was associated with, "men in dark suits" and "covert military personnel", the very same individuals, incidentally, who just the other day had been operating on his brain.

Suddenly, he stops, turns around and gives her a hug.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Just then, and for no apparent reason, he hugged me, offered me a £0.50 voucher for the local fried chicken shop and left.

EXT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - DAY

Establishing. Autistic, with her ever-present briefcase, goes inside the menacing building.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Having finished "working in crime", Mental Health was my second area of work. I'd be both in and out of the office during this time. Some clients did come to the office, but most were in the hospital wards in psychiatric units with varying levels of freedom.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC MENTAL HEALTH UNIT - DAY

Autistic walks through a long hallway full of PATIENTS being led along by staff in white uniforms.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Clients I encountered generally had a diagnosis of psychosis, bipolar disorder or schizophrenia and experienced many of the following: paranoia, delusions, thought transmission, along with auditory, olfactory, visual and sensory hallucinations.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Some thought they were being touched, some believed they were having thoughts inserted into their head, some heard voices saying derogatory things about them, and some even thought they were dead. Many of the clients during my training made a real impact on me, but the clients with mental health conditions moved me most of all.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - QUIET ROOM - DAY

Autistic sits next to STANLEY, a patient who looks clearly distressed.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Some clients accepted that they were being detained on a ward under the Mental Health Act to be assessed by a specially trained team, but some sought to restore their liberty. When a patient is detained, checks and balances are in place to ensure that there isn't an abuse of state power. Therefore, a patient has the right to have their case heard at a Mental Health Tribunal.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - TRIBUNAL - DAY

STANLEY is facing a TRIBUNAL of experts, while Autistic and a more experienced colleague of hers, are by his side.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I remember observing my first Mental Health Tribunal and thinking how daunting it must be for the client. Although the hearings were as informal as possible and not like a courtroom, they had a formality. Clients were legally represented; nonetheless, they must have felt completely overwhelmed by the process, especially as some would have been paranoid or suffering from persecutory ideations. Therefore, the idea of having a group of people sitting and talking about them must have been very disempowering, not to mention daunting.

STANLEY

Why is it that everything a doctor says is 'evidence' while everything I say is a 'delusion'?

EXPERT

Tell us about your children.

STANLEY

I fathered twins with a pop star, you know that already. I also sired at least twelve other children with staff and patients. Why are you asking this? It's part of my record.

EXPERT

How did you do this? Did you have access to other patients?

STANLEY

Yes! I mean no! I don't know.. I don't know how it happened.

EXPERT #2

What about money? Do you have any money?

STANLEY

I won two million pounds at the bingo. With my winnings, I bought a football club.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Stanley typifies what some medications do to the human body. Some of the psychotropic medications can have a devastating impact on the physique. Stanley had a dangerously high BMI and it seems that the medications had significantly contributed to his having the belly of a gestating rhino.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - LOCKED WARD - QUIET AREA - DAY

Autistic is interviewing LUKE, another client. He is inside a locked ward, dancing around the room and encircling Autistic and a colleague, to the extent that he is looping the room while launching punches towards an imaginary opponent, while making the requisite sound effects.

LUKE

I'm going to fight Lopez in Las Vegas next. He is the boxer who has been undefeated up to now, but I will knock him out, like this.. and this.. You know I've also mended the ozone layer. And I developed a cure for cancer! When I'm not boxing, I'm Jesus Christ.

He shows them his acne scars on his forehead.

LUKE (cont'd)

Look, this is where they placed the crown of thorns.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

An emphatic Adrian comes into Autistic's office, still convinced he's being interfered with by state officials.

ADRIAN

I had a stroke due to poisons being placed in the cheese I bought from the supermarket.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

A stroke? Are you sure?

ADRIAN

Yes! The supermarket is putting toxins in their milk, which resulted in me having a brain tumour. I'm being sprayed with poisons by the security services because I told the world that they'd murdered members of the Royal Family, and now they are seeking retribution by making me look paranoid when, in reality, I am the only one who could see what was going on.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Life for Adrian must have been petrifying. Although he couldn't produce any evidence, he genuinely believed he was being poisoned and harassed. Adrian spent much of his time contacting government agencies demanding action be taken against MI5.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is working on her computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

What's a disability to one person isn't necessarily so for another. I am not on a locked ward but I do believe that the conditions I have mean that I have a disability; not just because I fulfil the criteria set by legislation, but because I need adjustments to be made for me in order to make my life either a bit easier or some things at all possible. Adrian on the other hand didn't believe he had a disability, although many would disagree with him.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - QUIET AREA - DAY

Autistic is visiting DOUG, another patient.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Doug believed he'd made not billions, not trillions, but zillions of pounds on online auction sites. He believed he'd bought expensive cars for £1 and sold them for £100,000. According to Doug, he'd purchased many luxury items for pennies and then sold each item for an eye-watering profit. When talking to us, Doug explained how he was flabbergasted as to why everybody wasn't doing the same because it was the easiest money he'd ever made. Believing he'd made so much money, Doug cancelled all of his benefits because he no longer required financial assistance. Following this grand gesture, Doug found himself in increasingly compromising situations, resulting in his being detained under the Mental Health Act.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - QUIET ROOM - DAY

Autistic is now interviewing another client, SOFIA. Throughout the conversation, SOFIA has left and returned around eight times to change her outfit, each time showcasing something worthy of a Parisian cat-walk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Sofia also had bipolar disorder and
had led a 'normal' life, with a
regular suburban existence, a husband
and a few children. This was right up
to being picked up by the police,
having been found walking into
oncoming traffic on a motorway,
wearing just an elf costume.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - TRIBUNAL - DAY

Sofia enters the tribunal room and sobs uncontrollably.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
Why are you crying?

SOFIA
Look! Look! Everybody is wearing
suits and nobody wears wigs or gowns!
I want a proper court with proper
people, suitably attired. This is no
good. It won't do.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is typing on her computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I've noticed two interesting things
about mental illness, which Doug and
Sofia typified. Firstly, while some
people discriminate against those
with a mental health condition,
mental health conditions don't
themselves discriminate. They can and
indeed do strike anybody, at any
time, regardless of class or
demographic. Secondly, mental illness
can bring some very unlikely people
together.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Doug and Sofia are having lunch together, talking and
laughing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Doug and Sofia got on remarkably
well. They were in the same unit and
spent much time together.
(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

They were from very different social and economic backgrounds, and I suspect that their paths would never ordinarily have crossed; however, the mental illness they shared had broken down barriers, especially class and the stigma of mental health.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - CONTINUOUS

Autistic is walking around, looking for somebody.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Whenever I was on a mental health ward, more time was spent trying to locate the clients than anything else. The vast majority were prolific smokers, and the knack was working out where they'd gone to smoke, which could be anywhere, although many had their favourite locations within the confines of the locked areas.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - CAFETERIA - DAY

Autistic is speaking to Sofia.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I really struggled with clients' thought processes, which were seldom linear or fathomable, and this was so important for me in terms of how I think and process information, because I battle at the best of times with focus. So when somebody has a chaotic thought pattern, or relies on inference, it's like me trying to drive a car on ice with the handbrake on.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - QUIET AREA - DAY

Autistic is interviewing HOWARD. Howard's hand is bandaged and bloody.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Having visited this gentleman to take instructions, he wouldn't engage with me at all except to tell me that he was called Howard and his favourite subject at school was sex education.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Howard also expanded a little with regards to how much he hated his hand, which was his particular fixation. I assume that his hand had previously looked perfectly normal. However, we couldn't tell as it was covered in bandages following his attempts to remove it with an axe, because he believed that an evil entity possessed it.

INT. PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL - TRIBUNAL - DAY

Autistic and a colleague accompany Howard, who is barefoot, into the Tribunal, to face the PANEL MEMBERS.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Although we had few instructions, the tribunal went ahead. Howard entered the tribunal room, and all the normal procedural aspects took place. For some reason, Howard had come into the room without wearing shoes or socks. During the hearing, I looked down at his feet and wondered why he'd developed such a fixation with his hand when his feet were far more peculiar, but I didn't say anything.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is typing furiously on her computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Patients spent their lives under the microscope while detained under the Mental Health Act in hospital. When you read the medical notes and see the level to which they're observed, it's little wonder some are paranoid. Furthermore, the clinicians who have so much power and influence over people's liberty may be scientifically qualified to comment on their condition(s); however, a lot of the psychiatrists whom I've come across seem to possess extremely limited interpersonal and social skills. Therefore, in my opinion, they were not always best suited to assess the above.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
 How can such individuals be qualified
 to assess the character and prognosis
 of an individual when they are so
 socially inept themselves?

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Autistic is passing through reception, and the phones are very busy (due to an ill-coordinated nicotine and caffeine break), so she sits down and takes some calls to lighten the load from Deirdre, who's busy screening calls from numbers she thinks could be from a prison.

AUTISTIC LAWYER
 Law office, can I help you? One
 moment, please... Law office.. Can I
 help you?

There is a loud bang on the window, which faces the main road. Autistic looks up to see what on earth hit the glass, thinking there must have been some missile thrown from the busy roadside. But no, it's Brenda, looking in at the window from outside, by the main road. She's roaring with laughter. She's lifted up her top, boobs and belly meat smeared across the window and jiggles her load. As soon as her top goes up, it goes down again.

BRENDA (BELLOWING)
 See you next week, big tits!

She trundles off, nursing her prolapsed womb and chuckling.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Autistic is driving into the local Prison.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 Many clients in prison were very
 interested in the law, and one of
 their other favourite areas of law
 was the Human Rights Act. They
 absolutely loved it as many thought
 their Human Rights were abused on a
 daily basis. Some thought the Act
 could be used for almost everything
 and anything and would do their
 utmost to shoehorn all arguments in
 and around it. Obviously, they'd
 prefer a 'Judicial Review' by a Judge
 in court, but failing that, a bit of
 Human Rights was more than
 acceptable.

INT. PRISON - CELL - DAY

Autistic is reading a long document to an INMATE who listens with rapt attention.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Being able to read and write is something many of us take for granted, but too many appear to lack this skill in the prison estate.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic receives a phone call.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Most clients opted to phone the office. They could buy phone credit and call for legal advice, although I think many used it as an opportunity for a chat because they didn't have anyone else to call, which would explain why some called almost every day.

EXT. SECOND PRISON - DAY

Establishing. Autistic is going into the new Prison.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I visited a lot of prisons, and no two were alike, and this was largely based on their category. Prisons are categorised based on the level of risk posed by the inmates and the security measures required. Legal matters pertaining to many prisoners are about risk management and risk reduction. I spent a lot of time discussing with them how they could reduce their high-risk score, as this would help them on their road to freedom for certain sentences.

INT. PAROLE HEARING - DAY

A PRISONER, Autistic and a barrister face a PAROLE BOARD.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

When clients were subject to parole hearings, they often would want to demonstrate how they had taken heed of the advice of the probation officers and undertaken the requisite courses (for example, educational or offender-focused work), which they needed to access and complete before their next parole hearing.

INT. PRISON CLASSROOM - DAY

A number of INMATES are learning budgeting on a blackboard.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The difficulty many prisoners faced was the availability of much-needed courses and learning opportunities because of funding shortfalls.

INT. PRISON - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Autistic is speaking through a thick glass partition to her PRISON CLIENT.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the first clients I was assigned was unusual. He didn't want to come out of prison because he'd got to quite like it in there; in fact, he bloody loved it. He used to tell me all about his ailments in graphic detail, from his bowel movements and fungal toenails to his skin conditions. He'd tell me how he had many problems: physical, psychological, spiritual and mental. I knew about them all, chapter and verse.

INT. FEMALE PRISON MENTAL HEALTH WARD - VISITING ROOM - DAY

Autistic is waiting for a new client. Chairs and tables are nailed down. FEMALE PRISONER comes out in pyjamas escorted by two PRISON GUARDS. Every time she lurches towards Autistic, the Guards jump into action, but she was just unsteady on her feet due to medication. Autistic takes out a bundle of papers.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

I'm going to ask you some questions,
okay?

FEMALE PRISONER

No need. I'm guilty. Guilty! Jesus
save me!

She arranges herself into a crucifix shape, arms
outstretched, feet together and head tilted to one side, and
quietly returns to her cell.

INT. PRISON HALLWAY - DAY

Autistic is being escorted by a FEMALE GUARD back out and
they're chatting about the women and their relationships
inside.

FEMALE GUARD

It's called becoming 'prison-bent' or
'gay-for-the-stay'. They're all in
relationships of some sort, including
those who didn't previously identify
as gay. The full moon affects the
women too, you know.

Autistic chuckles.

FEMALE GUARD (cont'd)

You think I am joking. I'm not. A
full moon often precipitates some
riotous nights.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Autistic comes out of the prison; a PRISONER is released and
meets many FAMILY MEMBERS and FRIENDS outside. They are all
jubilant, and the newly released girl is handed a large
plastic bottle of cheap cider and she swigs from it and then
sprays it around like she's just won a Grand Prix.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic sits outside with the GIRLS. They sit on the
burgeoning rubbish bags, chatting and puffing away. One girl
rearranges her boobs, another straightens out a tiny
miniskirt, and another covers up a love bite with lots of
orange powdery paste.

GIRL 1

So, I got a right pounding last night when my bloke came over...

GIRL 2

Totally envious, but it's "jam booty week" for me.

GIRL 3

Well, my "poundings" aren't what they once were; after having kids I've got a right "baggy fanny".

GIRL 2

I'm worried my fella is becoming an "Enoch"...he's just not interested.

GIRL 3

Maybe you should shave your underarm pits. You look like you've got "Bob Marley in a headlock".

Raucous laughter and cat-calls fill the air, along with a few smoker's coughs.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is facing her troops with the proverbial dinner down her top.

BRENDA

Standards need raising, so, we'll start with timekeeping. I will be at reception in the mornings, giving you lot a chance to explain to me why you are late (if you are), and most are.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is typing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

My move to working with clients in prison meant I was now working with somebody I'd heard about before meeting him.

NOEL comes in, takes a seat next to her in the Prison Law room.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Few people in the office wanted to work with Noel. He wasn't a people person. He had quite a high opinion of himself, although I'm not sure where he got his confidence from.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Noel is using his considerable physicality, invading the small secretary's personal space and being intimidating by standing too close to her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

It wasn't unusual to see Noel stand over one of the secretaries, deploying his physicality and ordering her to complete his dictation first and not last, even though his work was at the bottom of the queue and other people's work was more urgent and higher up. Or perhaps he'd make some unsolicited cutting or personal remark about somebody's appearance if they'd had the audacity to question something he'd done, especially if they were lowly 'admin' and not a qualified lawyer.

INT. LAW OFFICE PRISON LAW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Noel is having one of his regular temper tantrums and takes himself off before he vaporises. The secretaries and co-workers are amazed at his infantile behaviour but are used to it and are just relieved he's left.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

The phone rings. One of the SECRETARIES grabs it. It's for Noel and she decides to take her chance, sick of his bad attitude and childish ways.

SECRETARY

Noel's not here at the minute; he's gone for a poo. Can you call back in ten minutes?

Autistic is amazed, but amused, while admiring their puerile, but comical revenge tactics.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Same again. The phone rings and another SECRETARY grabs it.

SECRETARY

Noel's a bit upset at the minute
because he's lost his superhero
action toy. He'll ring you back later
when he's calmed down.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Autistic puts on her headphones and turns on some classical
music, going into deep thought while reading a parole file.
Calm filled the air as Noel didn't appear to be returning.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Classical music became my saviour,
because it recalibrated my immediate
environment by creating an audio
'virtual reality' for my ears. I
could still see the chaos playing out
when Noel was around, but I could no
longer hear him, and my ears were
grateful.

INT. PRISON LAW ROOM - NEXT DAY

Noel is raging against the photocopy machine. He can't
figure out how to operate it and he's about to lose his
shit, again. Autistic is listening to classical music with
her headphones. Linda storms into the room.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I recall one occasion when all sorts
were kicking off, and the day was
especially chaotic. The phones were
ringing relentlessly, clients' calls
were unyielding, the loudspeaker was
persistently bellowing every two
minutes, and Noel was amid rolling
tantrums, having refused offers of
help with whatever was upsetting him
that day. I had my headphones on,
listening to classical music and was
reading at my desk.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I needed to escape from the mayhem,
and watching Noel on the verge of
launching the printer across the room
because it had run out of paper and
he didn't know how to refill it, was
like watching someone get tangled in
barbed wire.

She settles back to work and a shadow casts over the doorway
It's PHILIP (the one who hangs around doorways, peering
through the crack and has rotting breath and a twitch). Just
then, Linda exits the room like a bailiff and sends PHILIP
ricocheting into the wall. It was bound to happen at some
point. Linda picks him up off the floor, and continues on
her way.

INT. FEMALE PRISON - VISITING AREA - DAY

Autistic is visiting PAULINE, one of her prison clients.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the clients whose behaviour
necessitated regular prison visits
was Pauline. She was regularly in
trouble with the prison.
On one occasion I saw her, she was
alleged to have used every swear word
in the swear book towards wing staff.
This resulted in the prison bringing
sanctions against her. It transpired
(according to Pauline) that she'd
only used some of the swear words
she'd been accused of, which were in
a totally different order to those
reported. This was particularly
important to her. Having cleared that
unfortunate misunderstanding up, she
asked me if she could perform the
latest 'tune' she'd written.

MC Pauline begins to perform her latest rap for Autistic in
the legal meeting area. Pauline is marching on the spot,
pointing, and making beat-boxing sounds. Autistic stares at
Pauline impassively.

INT. PRISON - SEGREGATION UNIT - DAY

Autistic is being escorted by a GUARD to the segregation
unit.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Disciplinary matters in prisons consumed a fair bit of our time and usually took place in the bowels of the prison. An adjudication is a hearing within the prison which happens when the prisoner has been accused of breaking the rules. The adjudication hearings can be before the prison governor or a district judge, and this was determined by how serious the matter was. The hearing usually occurs in the Segregation Unit or 'down the block', as it's often called. The 'Seg' is a type of 'prison within the prison'.

A couple of K9s of the SPANIEL persuasion run around with their HANDLERS.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I didn't need convincing of the dangers and implications of drugs and weapons on the prison wing, and it wasn't uncommon to see dog handlers walking around with a couple of impatient Spaniels in hot pursuit of illicit substances.

INT. PRISON - CELL - DAY

A couple of GUARDS have located a haul of HOOCH from a prisoner's toilet and proceed to place the bottles of brew in an evidence bag.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The production of 'Hooch' or home-made alcohol was not uncommon. Some brewed it for their own consumption, and others to sell or trade. By all accounts, it tasted diabolical, but I guess when you're locked up and either fancy or need something to while away the time, your palate becomes less discerning. It was sometimes called 'toilet wine', because of where it was stored.

INT. PRISON - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Autistic speaking through a phone with the Hooch Brewer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I recall discussing Hooch with a 'Master Brewer' once after the matter was adjudicated. As somebody with a heightened sense of taste and smell, coupled with a passion for fine food and wine, I was curious about what Hooch tasted like, at least his particular brand. I was reliably informed that it tasted of petrol, but on the plus side, he assured me that while it was strong and an acquired taste, it improved a bit the more you drank.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is speaking with an ELDERLY LADY on the phone.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One elderly lady always sticks in my mind. Her young son had been given a substantial prison sentence, and by the time he was due to come out, he would be an old man, and she would be dead. No matter how often I tried explaining to her that he'd only served a few years of the decades ordered by the judge, and he wasn't coming home any time soon, she still came to the office to see when he would be home. She knew he'd done wrong, but thought that he'd done a few years, which should suffice. It was so difficult for her, and I couldn't give her any hope, which was heartbreaking.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Autistic is leaving the Prison, looking upset.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I was desperate to leave working with prisoners. It was interesting work, and I loved working with the clients, but Noel's conduct was deteriorating fast, and he was nowhere closer to learning how to regulate his emotions and behaviours.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Working with him resulted in my anxiety being at an all-time high, and his emotional incontinence was becoming increasingly problematic. What's more, Brenda affording him diplomatic immunity wasn't helping bring about any kind of positive change. Why she did this, I don't know, as I couldn't see that he brought anything positive to the party.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is speaking with Noel.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Sometimes, I watched him, and I could see the rages coming on because they were like seasons of the year. The skill was not to be about when he got so enraged that he almost gave himself a nosebleed.

She leaves him when she notices he's getting too upset. It didn't take much.

EXT. OUTSIDE LAW OFFICE - MAIN ROAD - DAY

An old ORANGE MINIBUS, full of window stickers arrives by the curbside, where all the LAWYERS are waiting for a ride to court. The driver is odd-job man DEREK. The lawyers are mortified at the state of it, but climb in. Brenda clambers in shortly after, thrilled with herself. Derek turns on a 1980s power ballad and takes off with his prisoners; window down, elbow out and mutton-chop sideburns blowing in the wind.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Brenda became sick of everybody drifting to and from court at different times and by different means, so she purchased a type of minibus to combat the advocates autonomy. As you may imagine, it didn't go down too well with the lawyers. Now Brenda was in charge of their day more than ever.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

The bus' windows steamed up, you could smell who'd had lots of garlic the night before, it was cramped and as my door wouldn't open properly, I had to get out of somebody else's door. I think I preferred being in the 'Anne Frank' room with Philip lingering around outside. The bus driver, Derek, on the other hand, bloody loved it as it gave him a break from Brenda as he ferried everyone about.

INT. PRISON - MEETING ROOM - DAY

Autistic, Terry's support advocate and Terry's sign language translator, enter the meeting room, looking for TERRY, a new client, who was profoundly deaf and learning disabled. An unknown INMATE comes in, and looks at the advocates with a perplexed look. Both the advocate and translator signed to one another, confused, questioning what was going on, and who this stranger was.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The prison was not particularly well equipped to work with someone with Terry's needs. When I first visited him, they brought in a different prisoner with the same name. This poor guy did not know us, and we didn't know him, so we all just looked at one another in total surprise. Meanwhile, our Terry (who was expecting a legal visit) obviously did not hear his name being called, and nobody went to get him, so it took a long time to locate the right Terry.

INT. PRISON - DAY

TERRY is wandering around, blissfully unaware that they are calling his name and looking for him.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

The particular difficulty Terry had was that he couldn't understand empathy. As a lifer, Terry had no release date, and so was, in theory, in danger of what was termed 'being warehoused' indefinitely.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

I could see how some people did get lost in the prison system and of course, Terry's situation was intensified by the fact that he had complex and profound needs, so access to offender-based work and courses wasn't straightforward due to accessibility.

INT. PRISON - OUTSIDE THE VISITING ROOM - DAY

After the meeting with Terry, Autistic gets into the same thick glass capsule lift she'd been locked in alone some time back. With her was Terry's advocate, but the sign language translator missed his entry and the glass door closed with him on the other side. But this time it didn't matter. It was fine that they couldn't hear or speak face to face, as they signed to one another through the glass. Arrangements were made where and when to meet downstairs and it demonstrated that hearing was useless in some circumstances, while signing was perfect!

OUTSIDE LAW OFFICE - QUIET - EARLY MORNING & BRENDA GETTING OUT OF CAR

Autistic is pulling up the pissed soaked security shutters, being careful to avoid a used syringe and half eaten Biryani.

BRENDA (O.S.) BELLOWING

Get the kettle on, fat arse. I'll be there in ten minutes.

Autistic looks up. Brenda is roaring with laughter, as the countless family members she employs disembark, half dressed, yawning and with bed-head hair. A couple of them start bickering.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is walking amidst the party-scene outside the office. PEOPLE frolicking and smoking pot. Music plays. The BBQs spark. Car engines rev up for no apparent reason. A mini-motorbike is driven by an intemperate youth and cruises around for a bit.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

During the summer, the area near the office took on a sort of carnival vibe, but with the ubiquitous police helicopter, customary patrols and smell of cannabis in the air. It didn't start too early, and the mornings tended to be peaceful, but it was in full swing come lunchtime. Think Rio de Janeiro, but without the glitz and glamour.

INT. LAW OFFICE - PRISON LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is writing on her computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I'd seen the state either fail to put adjustments in place for our clients (for example, Terry), or I'd seen how they'd fallen short of what, in my opinion, was 'reasonable'. After all, with the work we undertook, the state was bringing the case against the client, and yet they were behind the curve when it came to disability awareness, in my opinion. I think until there is a greater understanding of invisible disabilities, how does anybody know what is actually 'reasonable' and therefore, what needs to be put in place?

LOCAL KINDERGARTEN - DAY

Autistic is watching a number of CHILDREN play in a kindergarten.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

My favourite area of legal practice was Care, and by that, I mean Public Law Child Care matters. This is where the Local Authority, to varying degrees and respects, seeks involvement in a child's life. This is because they consider that child to have been harmed or be at risk of significant harm.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Some families had almost been living 'off-grid', and it was incredible to think that there were children who had never been known to the Local Authority before, especially when the risks and harm they were exposed to became apparent.

INT. LAW OFFICE - FAMILY LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is speaking to a MOTHER with her three young CHILDREN. The mother asks Autistic to put a used nappy bundle in the bin.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I suppose I wondered how effective the social workers and their methods must have been if each successive generation required a social worker, but that's what happened with a significant number of people. This, of course, oversimplifies some incredibly ingrained and complex societal issues, but if every generation needs help with their parenting, then something, somewhere, isn't working.

INT. FAMILY COURT - OUTSIDE THE COURTROOM - DAY

Autistic is pensively waiting for her client outside the court room, who she was told was always late.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of the first cases I was asked to go to Family Court on with a barrister was Patience's case. Patience's children no longer lived with her, as the Local Authority had obtained a Court Order so that they could be involved in making decisions regarding their day-to-day lives and welfare. This could include things like where they lived or went to school. In fact, it could involve pretty much any decision, and the idea is that they will act in the best interest of a child. The Local Authority had become involved due to a plethora of serious concerns; nonetheless, Patience wanted to have her children returned to her care.

Patience arrives and before entry, the Usher tries to inspect Patience's bag, but she goes into a tirade and he thinks better of the formality.

INT. FAMILY COURT - COURTROOM - DAY

Patience bursts in without any concern for her environment, her head held high. Patience proceeds to plonk herself down, chewing pink bubble gum like there was no tomorrow.

PATIENCE

Hiya! Have I missed much?

Then, without waiting for an answer, she dumps a voluminous and seemingly very full handbag onto the bench and proceeds to rummage and ransack her way through the contents. Out comes the compact mirror, and a large red lipstick pops up, checks out her hair from different angles, and then confirms that she was ready for action with a smile. Patience then realises that her look is incomplete, so she adds a quick squirt of perfume for good measure.

PATIENCE (cont'd)

What? So, I'm a bit late. I've got childcare issues, for fuck's sake!

Patience didn't have any childcare issues, as all of her children were in state care. A final warning by way of a glare from the barrister, Patience petulantly throws herself back in her chair - bored. At that point, she realises that her eldest daughter is in court too that day. She rummages through her bag and takes a pen out. Then, without asking, she rips a piece of paper from Autistic's pad and starts to write and write and write. Within a few minutes, she tries to pass a note to the SOCIAL WORKER to give to her daughter, along a row of legal REPRESENTATIVES, poking and prodding the ones she can reach.

PATIENCE (cont'd)

Psssssssst...pass it on, will you, babe? Go on, pass it down, that's right.

BARRISTER

Put it away...you cannot do that ...not now.

PATIENCE

Whatever...yeah, I know. Just pass it on, will you?

Patience realises that her note isn't going to be read by her daughter, and so tries to redeem herself and make a good impression, by loudly 'whispering' to her daughter across the court room, while gesturing her comments.

PATIENCE (cont'd)

Have you been reading your bible? The one I got you? Are you learning your psalms?

By the look on her daughter's face, she didn't know what a bible was.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

When it came to Care or child contact matters, I was astonished by the lengths some clients went to in order to prolong events. This was remarkable as they were instructing us to help them, so they had a vested interest in working with agencies and doing what they could to progress the case, but this wasn't always how it played out. Some clients even asked me to use 2nd class stamps to create delay!

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Autistic returns to the office and Kelly hands her a stack of grubby notes and shuffles off, the bottom of her trousers wet and dirty as they were far too long.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

If something is perceived as 'free', it can have less value for some. Occasionally, I'd return from court to a catalogue of messages. I had one client who would wait for me outside the front of the office and another, Jasmine, who left me lots and lots of handwritten notes, almost daily. No matter what the matter was and how serious it was (or wasn't), Jasmine's note was littered with the word "urgent!"

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
I do appreciate that what's central
to one person may be peripheral to
another, but I can honestly say
nothing was ever "urgent".

INT. AIRPORT - DAY

JASMINE and her two CHILDREN are about to board a plane when
a couple of AIRPORT POLICEMEN stop her as the children were
prohibited from leaving the country with her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
On one occasion, Jasmine was caught
trying to board a plane to the Far
East with some of her children. When
stopped and questioned, she just
explained it as a "misunderstanding"
and a "little mistake", which was
then backed up with the explanation
that it was only for one day, a sort
of day trip.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OFFICE - DAY

Autistic looks sick. She has red eyes and a snotty nose
while sitting at her desk, working on the computer. Brenda
is interrogating her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Brenda transformed into an urban
shaman when anybody rang in sick. She
really struggled to accept that
somebody was unwell or unfit for
work. She'd mentally catalogue their
symptoms, along with demanding to
know how long they'd had it for, how
long they thought they'd be off work,
if the person had been to the doctors
and if they were out last night. She
even knew who supported which
football team and would check the
fixture list on her tangerine wall to
see if there'd been a big match the
previous evening.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OUTSIDE THE BATHROOM - DAY

Big Janice comes out of the bathroom in pain and walking
like a cowboy. Brenda begins to question and quiz her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Big Janice was in pain. Poor Janice's haemorrhoids were particularly egregious that day, and she couldn't walk easily. However, Brenda was less than sympathetic when it came to others and their minor ailments as she saw them.

BIG JANICE

Do you want to look up my arsehole?

INT. LAW OFFICE - FAMILY LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is now with LLOYD, her new client. He is gesturing wildling, pantomime, play-acting, and role-playing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One of my clients with a Family Law matter tested my ability to understand non-verbal communication and inference like no other. Lloyd spoke Jamaican Patwah, and although the language is English-based, I found him incredibly difficult to understand. This was in part because he spoke astonishingly quickly, but also because his instructions to me were conveyed only in part via words; the rest was chiefly through actions, demonstrations, mannerisms and a type of role-play. My understanding of Lloyd's rapid speech didn't improve despite the frequency with which I saw him. The more I asked Lloyd to slow down, the more annoyed he became with me.

The play-acting culminates in his throwing his hat on the floor in utter frustration.

LLOYD

Hear me now, Momma!

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Lloyd leaves utterly frustrated, having asked if he can substitute me for Kelly in future. Autistic wearily greets MC PAULINE, who has just walked in off the street.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I knew I was going to have to switch onto reserves very quickly as I was greeted by MC Pauline as Lloyd left. Even though she didn't have an ongoing case with me, she was very angry and wanted to come to vent. Pauline was now out of prison and coming into the office. Pauline, like many of our clients, was ravaged by her lot in life, along with the 'toxic trio' of mental illness, substance misuse and domestic abuse. She bore the battle scars of somebody who was not ready for the life she'd been given and took a sledgehammer to everything in her path, good or bad. On that occasion, the carnage was quite terrifying.

Pauline kicks off and her tirades get more and more menacing until Brenda shows up to help with this troublesome client. Within moments, Brenda escorts Pauline out of the office. Nearby, CHANTELE, slept peacefully.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Brenda was called, and she managed to extricate Pauline from the building with skill and a surprising amount of sensitivity. The most remarkable part was that another regular client, Chantelle, had fallen asleep across a row of chairs in the waiting area while waiting for her appointment and had managed to sleep through the entire episode. I wish I could sleep like that.

Brenda storms back into her office, annoyed after the Pauline incident. PHILIP shuffles in and Brenda starts to scream at him.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Philip, who liked to hang around door entrances, thought it an opportune time to speak with Brenda. I couldn't think of anything important enough to necessitate a conversation at that point, but I hoped that it was worthy of disturbing her, because she was simmering just below boiling point. I would probably have left it for a while, because predictably, she didn't share his sense of urgency.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
Brenda spoke to him abysmally and with a similar level of contempt that many people have for those belonging to a 'flat earth' forum.

BRENDA
Whatever it is, start at the end and work backwards. I'm busy.

PHILIP begin stuttering and stammering and without further ado, Brenda shooed him out of her room before he'd said anything of substance.

FADE TO:

EXT. FAMILY COURT - DAY

Autistic is escorting ROSE into court.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
One of the clients infamous for her elusiveness was Rose, who never answered her phone, letters or emails. It would have been easier to secure a private audience with the Pope than half an hour with Rose. Rose belonged to the Traveller community. Her case was complicated and multifaceted, and because the number of children she had was approaching double digits, it took much longer than it ordinarily would for her case to be heard. Joe, the father of some of the children, was always in court. He seemed like a dream to handle compared to Rose (in fact, everyone else's clients always seemed like a dream to me). He knew what to say and what not to say. He knew how to conduct himself, when to be quiet and speak when spoken to. In contrast, Rose didn't, and her authenticity didn't help her one bit.

INT. FAMILY COURT - DAY

Rose is giving testimony to the JUDGE. She is quite agitated. JOE, her ex-husband, sits at the other end of the court, and she keeps pointing at him furiously.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Rose was habitually told, not just by us, but by everyone, not to start on Joe in court. But she did anyway, despite them having to sit on different rows in the courtroom like two kids in school who just can't be placed together. Joe had been told not to engage with Rose, and he did his best not to, but it can't have been easy for him.

ROSE

Joe? Joe? Joe? Joe? Can you hear me, babe?

Joe turns around to see her.

ROSE (cont'd)

I'm going to rip your fucking head off.

EXT. FAMILY COURT - DAY

Autistic escorts Rose out at the hearing and they bump into Joe.

ROSE

Any chance of a lift home, Joe?

JOE

Yeah, sure, babe.

EXT. FAMILY COURT PARKING LOT - DAY

THE CHUBSTERS, led by MRS. CHUBSTER, a very large family, arrive in a minivan and move as one-big unit. They are also all huge, and they all wear white.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

There was a client I had been going to the Family Courts with for a while, and she fascinated me because she arrived with her whole family. This 'unit' spoke and moved around the court en masse like one big collective. We only represented one person, but lots of her family came to court, too, so they needed to be managed as one.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
They got about in a minibus taxi, and
in the office, they were
affectionately referred to as the
'Chubsters'.

INT. LAW OFFICE - FAMILY LAW ROOM - DAY

Autistic is reading some documents when there is a smash at her window. Curious, she goes over and sees her WHEELCHAIR USER CLIENT downstairs, throwing pebbles to get her attention. She goes down to fetch her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Periodically, I'd be given new files to work on. I was told that the new client was arriving at ten o'clock to provide initial instructions. What I wasn't told was that she was in a wheelchair. She'd run out of credit on her phone, therefore, she did the next best thing and threw stones up at the window to get my attention as she couldn't get into the building with her chair.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is going to fetch the wheelchair user client when she runs into Denise and her DEBT COLLECTOR. Denise hands the cash over, and the debt collector lady marks it off in a big book. No words are exchanged. It's all very transactional.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic tries to get the wheelchair user client up the steps and into the building, but it is clear that it isn't going to happen. Sweating and exhausted, she looks in at the shop of Dave-Downstairs. She gets them both a can of lemonade and they talk outside. Wheelchair client begins to chain-smoke and Autistic gathers what information she can while sitting on a wall next to the client.

EXT. DERELICT HOUSE - DAY

SOCIAL WORKER relays to AUTISTIC the state of one of the houses some children of the client are living in. The grass has been churned up by a motorbike. The front door is open and there's smoke coming out from inside. It's filthy and uninhabitable.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

It was common to have to deliver bad news and the SOCIAL WORKER'S concerns had to be relayed to the client who often thought their house was absolutely fine and were often offended by the criticisms.

INT. DERELICT HOUSE - DAY

The SOCIAL WORKER makes her way to the rotting sofa. Overspilling ashtrays, bags of rubbish strewn about, and there's sticky multicoloured carpet tiles. DAD is a mentally ill, morbidly obese, chronic asthmatic, who also has a rotting leg ulcer and is surrounded by breathing apparatus. Dad has pictures of his favourite TV hosts from over the years tattooed all over his body to deter self-harm (cutting). The CHILD had twelve of his adult teeth removed due to dental decay. But remarkably, there is an immaculately cared-for litter of kittens under the stairs, in a beautiful bed with soft fluffy bedding.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Whether it was due to the home conditions being really poor, or parents being unable to meet the basic needs of their children, some of the conversations that needed to take place were problematic, as some parents and caregivers really knew no better and were quite taken aback to learn that if things didn't improve and they didn't sustain the improvements, their children wouldn't be living there. That was one really tough conversation.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is watching her co-workers critically.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

That said, I was exhausted. I was having to 'mask' on an epic scale. I couldn't be me, because as unorthodox as the office was, only certain kinds of unorthodox behaviours were seen as being within the 'normal' range.

She looks at Linda's empty desk.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
It was 'normal' for Linda not to
return to work if she was having a
good time on holiday.

Brenda raging at the other employees.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
It was 'normal' for Brenda to drag
her womb around the office, throw her
pencil across the room in a fit of
rage, or for her dentures to have a
mind of their own while still in her
mouth.

At Denise paying off more debts.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
It was 'normal' for Denise to have
her debt collector come to her place
of work to collect her dues, and it
was 'normal' for Noel to have rolling
tantrums and sulk if he couldn't work
the printer or photocopier.

Autistic arrives to her office and finds Noel there, already
having an outburst. She holds her tongue, as everyone was
expected to do.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
But it wasn't 'normal' to be brutally
honest, say what you thought, or
comment on what really wasn't normal,
but had become standard. Autistic
masking is like holding your breath
when you swim underwater. It serves a
short-term purpose, but if you do it
for any longer than a short period of
time, it's unsustainable and
detrimental to your health.

EXT. COURT PARKING LOT - DAY

Autistic is getting ready to go back into court.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
I have only covered a few areas of
law undertaken by the firm, but some
great lawyers were working in a
variety of fields, and as a trainee,
I could be pretty much utilised
anywhere and was.

INT. COURT - DAY

Autistic is with a HIGH MAINTENANCE CLIENT facing a Judge.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I was asked to attend a hearing for a very high-maintenance client during my training. It wasn't because I was especially good at dealing with high-maintenance clients, but because I was good at taking notes in court while the barrister spoke and capturing the essence of the day. The case was set to run for a while, so the lawyer with conduct of the case wanted a handle on things as she could not attend personally.

HIGH MAINTENANCE CLIENT

I need somebody else to represent me. Not her.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

This barrister is the most practised person in this area.

HIGH MAINTENANCE CLIENT

Practise? I don't want someone who's still having to practise! I want an expert who knows what they're doing.

EXT. COURT - PARK - DAY

Autistic sits outside. She sees NIGEL and JEREMY, two fantastically camp men frolicking their way towards her. One wears an acid green shirt with a frilly front and cuffs, and the collar spread out like a 1970s club singer, purple flares, a black sequinned waistcoat, winkle pickers, beautifully manicured nails and sunglasses perched on top of his newly bleached permed hair. The other man wears a dark suit with a cravat and looks comparatively low-key.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

Please, God, let that not be the client.

NIGEL

Hi! I am Nigel. This is my husband, Jeremy. He's a hair and makeup artist!

Nigel looks at a pair of girls watching him.

NIGEL (cont'd)

What you staring at, you dirty chavs with your thunder thighs and two tonne of makeup? Never seen a couple of poofs before? Go on, fuck off, you filthy bitches! (to Autistic) Do you think we'd be finished by four o'clock? I want to get out as soon as possible, we're meeting friends for cocktails. Then we need to get home and sort the rabbits out.

AUTISTIC LAWYER

It takes as long as it takes.

INT. COURT - WAITING ROOM - DAY

Nigel is telling Autistic his life's story.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Over the next forty minutes, while we were waiting for the panel members to convene, I was treated to chapter and verse of Nigel's life, up to and including his meeting Jeremy, the glitzy wedding, am-dram, and just before his first nipple piercing debacle.

INT. COURT - DAY

Nigel does a sound check as requested, as one of the witnesses is video-linked. Jeremy and Nigel sit themselves down, arms folded and legs tightly crossed, while managing to brutally dissect the PANEL MEMBERS, one by one.

JEREMY

You'd think she'd get her ends sorted, the dirty bitch.

NIGEL

You could do a lovely job of her make-up. A bit of contouring, I think.

JEREMY

I don't think so, darling. These are hands, not wands! I'm not a bloody magician. Anyway, never mind her, look at the one at the end!

NIGEL

Which one?

JEREMY

The one with more rings than
Liberace. Go on, check him out!
Dreadful. Common as muck.

NIGEL

What about the bloke at the other
end, the little crusty one with the
transistor radio? Fancy that,
bringing a radio into a place like
this. Would you believe it?!

JEREMY

Is it a radio? I cannot see from
here.

NIGEL

Yes, it is! Look at the headphones.
They've got orange foam on them. I
bet he's done loads of these, you
know. Oh yes, he'll know just how
dull they can be, and he's thought to
himself, I'll just listen to a few
80s classics and the shipping
forecast until we're past the first
interval. He looks like he'd like a
bit of soft rock to me, what with
that receding hairline.

JEREMY

Yeah, you're probably right, luv.

Nigel is called to give evidence. He is theatrical from
start to finish. At one point, the panel has to decipher
some references in the bundle of case papers. Nigel mouths
across to Jeremy, "How am I doing?" and, "Is my hair okay?"
Jeremy provided gestures, which seemed to reassure Nigel.

INT. COURT - CONTINUOUS

Nigel goes back to his corner.

NIGEL

Well, how did I do?

BARRISTER

Not only did you not answer any
questions, you didn't show not one
ounce of insight.

NIGEL

Okay, okay, so how did I do then?

BARRISTER

I'm off to lunch!

JEREMY

Well, I thought you did really well, babe! I wouldn't take any notice of her and her shitty hairdo. What does she know?

INT. POLICE STATION - DAY

KIDNAPPER'S MUM is calling the Law Office, much distressed.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

A call was received to the office from a distressed mother who was at a police station. She'd received a call from the police, who'd advised her that her adult learning-disabled son was being held on suspicion of false imprisonment.

EXT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

A DWARF collecting for charity is ringing the doorbell to a home. KIDNAPPER opens the door and grabs the dwarf.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

To cut a long story short, it transpired that the doorbell had rung, and the young man had duly answered it. Upon opening the door, he found a very small person who was collecting for charity. Without a moment's thought, he snatched him off the front doorstep...

INT. SUBURBAN HOME - DAY

Kidnapper shoves the dwarf under the stairs.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

...bundled him under the stairs and locked the door with no thought for his own safety. Fortunately, the small person had a mobile phone on him and alerted the police, who shortly appeared (no pun intended).

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)
During the interview, the young man
was asked why he'd taken that course
of action.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is laughing her head off.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Everybody was curious to know because
it was entirely out of character.
Evidently, when he opened the door,
he thought he'd been confronted with
a goblin and considered it safest for
all concerned that he be removed
immediately. I was reliably informed
that there was indeed a startling
similarity between the aggrieved
party and the fabled character. I
know I shouldn't have laughed, but
the very idea of a little person
going about his business, being
mistaken for a folklore relic and
being stowed away under the stairs...

FADE TO:

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

A MARRIED COUPLE consult with Autistic. As they tell their
story, she is once again hard pressed not to break into
laughter.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Then, there was another case where a
client came in for a divorce. The
Decree Nisi had been applied for, but
for some reason, the Decree Absolute
never was. This meant that the couple
weren't actually divorced. The client
went off, got on with their life and
was never heard from again for quite
some time. Anyhow, having reflected
on the 'divorce' and with the passage
of time, the couple later rekindled
their relationship, got back together
and eventually decided that they'd
been hasty in seeking a divorce and
so decided to remarry.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

When they went to the registry office, they were asked for a copy of the Decree Absolute to prove that they were divorced, as this was required if they wanted to marry. They didn't recall having received one, but said they'd go home and have a good look. Having turned the house upside down, they couldn't find the Decree Absolute and contacted the office to see what they should do next. After some enquiries, it transpired that there was indeed no Decree Absolute, because it had never been applied for, and they were still married.

INT. LAW OFFICE - OUTSIDE - DAY

Brenda is having a row with a huge BODYGUARD trying to look intimidating outside of the office. She then berates him loudly and tells him to "fuck off".

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

And then there was the bodyguard saga when a local ne'er-do-well had been a bit vocal with Brenda, and an even bigger ne'er-do-well got to hear about the matter and was furious. Now, for all her faults, Brenda was a mature lady who clearly wasn't in the best physical health. She couldn't walk particularly far without wheezing; her womb featured heavily in her daily planning, and even in her orthopaedic clogs, she was still not particularly tall. Nonetheless, this chancer, expressed his views a little too firmly with her, and this didn't go down well in the criminal fraternity as Brenda was extremely well thought of. So, having dealt with the chancer, a top-brass in the underworld deposited a large and frightening-looking man outside the office as a statement to all concerned. He wasn't there for long.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is swearing at her employees again.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 Brenda didn't appreciate this grand
 gesture and show of might, and
 despite her lack of height, she would
 regularly trundle outside, telling
 the 'Bodyguard' to "fuck off", until
 he did.

EXT. PRISON - DAY

Autistic is getting back into her car, getting ready to
 leave.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 Once I qualified, I came away with so
 much more than the title of
 'solicitor'. I got to see a side of
 life I'd never experienced before,
 but I did so safe in the knowledge
 that I could go home on a night. For
 those I encountered who were battling
 with their lot in life, they didn't
 get to leave.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - KITCHEN - DAY

Autistic is making herself dinner.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 A chronic and debilitating mental
 health condition was a life sentence
 for a significant number. And there
 were those for whom crime was an
 occupation and spending time in
 prison is as much an occupational
 hazard as eating too much over
 Christmas and having to face the
 consequences on the bathroom scales
 come the New Year.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is interviewing Roy again.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
 And then there was Roy.
 Who could forget him? There were his
 titles, his entourage, his Sikh chef
 and his lineage.

(MORE)

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

As I recall, Roy never received a call from 'The Authorities' advising him of his next appointment. Nonetheless, he still considered himself a feudal lord and was last heard of wearing his home-made diadem; sceptre in one hand and orb in the other.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

Brenda is once again screaming at some poor employee.

BRENDA

And then there was Brenda. Although there was a fist underpinning much of her behaviour, and while her atrocious language and belligerence often upstaged her many good deeds and considerable kindness, I learned over time that she was also capable of tremendous acts of compassion and benevolence.

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

Brenda is dealing with two large, rowdy blokes, squaring up to one another in reception. After she throws them out of the building, she notices a WEEPING WOMAN sitting quietly on one of the chairs, clutching a letter. Brenda goes over to her and sits down.

BRENDA

What's wrong luv?

WEEPING WOMAN

My husband wants a divorce, but I don't. He was angry, so he sent me a cursed letter, that curses me for all eternity if I don't divorce him. I don't know what to do.

BRENDA

Let me see it.

Brenda reads the letter. Then she just rips it up into tiny pieces.

BRENDA (cont'd)

Any ill fate will be coming my way and not yours.

(MORE)

BRENDA (cont'd)

Now go home and have a nice cup of tea. I'll get a lawyer to deal with this.

INT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

The office BOOKMAN rolls a cart full of books which he aptly catalogues and marks off a list.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Like many offices, our office had a 'bookman'; a person to come and leave numerous books of various kinds on different subjects for staff to peruse. It normally worked because he'd be paid for books bought and remove and replace unsold copies. However, our bookman was different in that he left books and came and collected the same books - week in, week out.

INT. LAW OFFICE - KITCHENETTE - DAY

The girls are laughing and having lunch. Autistic notices one of them making photocopies of one of the books.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

One lunchtime, I realised just why the bookman's trips had been in vain. The poor bloke had unwittingly done himself out of any sales by depositing the books on top of the photocopier, which, anywhere else, would almost certainly have been fine; however, he had patently not considered the wily ways of this creative crew. So, it would appear that they'd taken it upon themselves to carefully photocopy pages of interest, cautiously ensuring not to bend any edges. The books were then neatly re-stacked just as they had been when they'd been deposited. So, when the bookman arrived, they'd nonchalantly let him in and say how there'd been no interest for yet another week/month.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic contemplates going into the office once again.
LAMPPOST CLIENT is accusing a lamppost of fathering her baby.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
No part of my legal learning could
have prepared me for working there.
You're not taught how to deal with
the new client who comes in clutching
a notice of Care Proceedings for her
latest child fathered by a
"lamppost".

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic watches as a GANG MEMBER tries to sign his name
while holding a pen with only three fingers.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Or the client who struggles to sign
their name because a rival gang
member shot off three and a half of
their fingers.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Autistic speaks to ROCK STAR, who gesticulates wildly. He
has delusions and is a mental health client.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Or the client who thinks he's
fathered children with countless
famous girl band members against his
will.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - CONTINUOUS

Autistic speaks to CRIMINAL CHILDREN.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)
Or clients who are children and are a
mini crime-wave in their own right.

INT. FAMILY COURT - DAY

Autistic is with another CLIENT.

CLIENT

Can I go yet? What time can I go?
Will it be finished soon? This is
ridiculous. I'm fed up now. Why can't
I go?

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Nobody prepares you for the client
from whom you're taking instructions,
and they have one eye looking at you
and the other looking for you, and
you're not sure which one to focus
on.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Or the client who 'calls in' wearing
a floor-to-ceiling bubble gum pink
fur coat with a Dalmatian dog print
fur collar, while looking for the
right mobile amongst her four burner
phones.

INT. COURT - DAY

Autistic is trying to make HAT CLIENT take off his hat.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Or the client who insists on keeping
his huge floppy hat on in the dock,
despite being asked to remove it by
the judge, because it suits his
dress, shoes and handbag.

INT. LAW OFFICE - RECEPTION DESK - DAY

FOODY CLIENT eats his breakfast waiting for Autistic.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Or the client who sits eating last
night's takeaway for breakfast in
reception and washes it down with a
swig of cough medicine.

MONTAGE: POLICE HEAD-SHOTS OF VARIOUS "CLIENTS" SHOWN AS
AUTISTIC DESCRIBES THEM.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.) (cont'd)

Or the client who wears a suit jacket, vest and grubby tracksuit bottoms to court. Or the client who was given a prostitute for his fourteenth birthday. Or the client who'd set fire to buildings having removed all door handles. Or the client who froze their dead cat in the freezer, until they could decide where to bury it.

And where do I even begin with anticipating the client who drinks two bottles of vodka a day and then slurs her way through my dictating her court statement and keeps trying to light the wrong end of a fag in the office?

Or the agitated client who comes to see you before opening hours, because the office is on a different gang member's turf, and if he's spotted, there'll be trouble.

Or the client who sniffs the armpits of her jumper mid-conversation. Or the client who takes you through the differing etiquettes required for dogging, swinging and BDSM. Or the client who cries throughout the entire appointment and you achieve absolutely nothing.

INT. COURT - DAY

Autistic is taking instructions from a PAEDOPHILE.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

And where do you even start with the entitlement of a paedophile? I had to deal with them because they access state-funded lawyers, and you can't pick and choose. But it was okay, because I knew how to calculate Capital Gains Tax, explain a Restrictive Covenant and understand a Substantial Property Transaction, so all was well in the world.

INT. PRISON - DAY

Autistic is being sniffed by a POLICE DOG.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

And I certainly wasn't prepared for being told once I'd got into a prison that the drug dog had 'indicated', which meant that my legal prison visit would have to be behind glass as the dog had smelt cannabis on me. Given that cannabis was often in the air near and by the office, I wasn't surprised that it could be smelt on me, but I suppose I wasn't ready to be having a conversation through thick glass. You wouldn't believe how smug that drug dog was throughout all of this; we just stared each other out. I gave him a filthy look and vowed never to give any money to a canine charity again.

INT. AUTISTIC'S HOME - DAY

Autistic is relaxing on her couch.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Meanwhile, let's not forget, I was still very much coming to terms with and understanding my own diagnoses and how they fitted in with me while, at the same time, being very much part of me. There are times when somebody who should know better has spoken with breathtaking ignorance about autism. Then there are some who don't understand our need to undertake the mission at all. "What's the problem?", "You look normal.", "You're clever.", "You're a solicitor.", "You can do things I can't do."

EXT. PARK - DAY

Autistic walks among the trees.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

For me, one of the biggest things is to be authentic. I need you to listen, understand, and not assume you know how my conditions affect me. So, if we say that the carrots can't touch the peas or we need a fan on even when it's cold and we're wearing a jacket, the answer isn't for us to take our coats off or not to make a fuss about different food groups touching one another. Don't question it. It's just how it is, and it's the 'normals' job to get over themselves and stop applying their prototype to us and not for us to try and 'sell' the idea to them so they can try and reconcile it in their own mind and then consider if it's okay, or not.

INT. LAW OFFICE - AUTISTIC'S OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is typing on her computer.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

My primary requests were around things such as sameness, clear communication, not being blinded by sunlight, not having to sit next to someone who ate strong-smelling foods and wearing noise-cancelling headphones without someone thinking I was just listening to 80s classics to pass the time, being allowed to have my fan on rain, hail or shine and asking not to be pressured into attending painful social events that everyone would enjoy other than me. It's about understanding, willingness to learn and accepting difference. I've experienced some remarkable responses to my requests for 'reasonable adjustments', and I don't think any of my requests have been particularly burdensome or unreasonable.

INT. LAW OFFICE - BRENDA'S OFFICE - DAY

For once, Brenda is listening closely to Autistic.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I notice things others miss. I'm honest and reliable, and I can speak dispassionately with my head and not my heart about sensitive issues without becoming upset, which was very useful with some of the work I've been involved in. My attention to detail and my work ethic have often been praised. I have been specifically asked to undertake certain tasks that necessitated patience and a keen eye for the minutiae.

EXT. LAW OFFICE - DAY

Autistic is hanging out with the "smoking girls". Everybody is laughing.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

I know that everybody has their own 'Everest', and you may think mine is autism or being neurodivergent, but it's not. It's two other things. Firstly, it's other people's misunderstandings and preconceived ideas about autism and ADHD, and secondly, it's the woeful interpretation and appreciation of 'reasonable adjustments', especially in the workplace. Remember, only 29% of autistic adults are employed. This number won't increase unless we make changes. While a fair bit of my post-diagnosis experience has been a masterclass in how not to treat a person with a disability, I have to say that I have had some amazing people who have just got it. They didn't have specific training; nonetheless, they just listened to me and worked with what I communicated.

EXT. COURT - DAY

Autistic gets ready to go into court.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

Prejudice and discrimination can come in so many forms and guises, and I'd say, for the most part, it's not intentional or done with malice. Nonetheless, we're still receiving a raw deal. We're still the ones often having to make the adjustments for the 'normals', and not enough people really understand what an autistic life is like for us, especially in the workplace.

INT. COURT - DAY

Autistic argues her case to the judge.

AUTISTIC LAWYER (V.O.)

It's over to you now. You either now know a bit more about neurodiversity, or you've heard about it from a different perspective. I've tried to explain my lived experience of my 'Smörgåsbord of Disabilities', how I try to manage it, along with others' treatment and perception of me, and I'm sure of people like me. Being neurodivergent is like being a Lilliputian in a giant's world. We're not seeking to have everything lowered; just give us a ladder, and we'll take it from there.

The End.