



JUDICIARY OF
ENGLAND AND WALES

R v Peter Morgan

Sentencing remarks of Mr Justice Garnham

Newport Crown Court

21st December 2016

Peter Morgan, you have been convicted of the murder by strangulation of Georgina Symonds. That murder, of a woman you said you loved, was carefully planned and calmly executed. It ended the life of a young woman who, whatever her faults, was very greatly loved by her family and friends. You killed her out of cold anger at what you discovered she had done, and out of fear at what she might do in the future.

It now falls to me to sentence you. Where it is necessary that I determine the facts on which the sentencing should proceed, I adopt the same standard of proof as have the jury; in other words, I proceed on the basis that I should only make findings of fact against you when I am sure of those findings. I aim to make all findings of fact in a manner consistent with the verdict of the jury.

You first met Georgina Symonds in 2012 when she was working as an escort. You paid her for sex, as you had with many other escorts, or prostitutes, you had met over the proceeding months. But for some reason, your feelings towards Ms Symonds were different from the other women you had used in this way. You had never arranged to see the same escort twice before, but you arranged to see Ms Symonds a second and a third time. In fact, your meetings with her became a regular feature of your life over the following three years.

And you spent a great deal of money on her; initially you had paid for each sexual encounter separately but, as time went by, you would instead buy her presents or pay for her shopping. On one occasion, at her suggestion, you gave her a second hand Landover and thereafter did not need to pay her each time you had sex. By the beginning of 2015, your financial arrangements were put on a more regular footing; you would pay her £6,000 per month and arrange for one of your tenants to pay their rent to her, almost another £1,000. In return Ms Symonds ceased actively advertising for new clients and you became, if not her exclusive client, then one of very few.

Those changed financial arrangements were also reflected in your changing relationship. It was not just sex that you enjoyed with Georgina Symonds; you also enjoyed her company. Whether it was riding quad bikes, motorcycles or farm machinery around your land, or going shopping together, you simply enjoyed being with her. And you came to believe she enjoyed being with you.

But kid yourself as you might, this was no normal relationship. You were 54 and she was 25 and the arrangement between you was essentially commercial. You paid her money and she gave you sex and her company.

Furthermore, as it has emerged, your trust of her was limited. Concerned at her continuing abuse of drink and drugs, you installed a listening device in the home you had provided for her at the Bungalow at Pencoed Castle. You could dial into that device and eavesdrop on what was happening inside the house.

The flaws in your relationship became more visible and more damaging when her former partner Peter Deem took his own life in November 2015. She purported to blame you for his death, although you knew you bore no real responsibility for it. She was increasingly rude to you, and dismissive of you, both to your face and, as is revealed by the text messages we have had to consider, behind your back. She would be ill-tempered and insulting towards you, but you would take it all, convinced you loved her and that eventually she would see sense and resume your former relationship.

She pretended to be especially angry with you about social services interest in her daughter. You had advised her, when one particularly heavy session of drug misuse

put her in hospital, to tell the clinician she saw about all her problems, including her extensive use of cocaine. But it was probably not that report, but rather the reports by Ms Symonds' mother to her own GP about her daughter's drug addiction, that led to Social Services learning of Ms Symonds' difficulties. In any event, they arranged an interview with her on 5 January 2016. Ms Symonds blamed you, or pretended to blame you for that, blame she expressed forcefully over the Christmas and New Year period last year.

Then on the evening of 10 January 2016 you dialled into the listening device once again and heard much that you did not like. You heard her tell the man at the other end of the line that that she thought that by June 2016 she would have persuaded you to make over the bungalow to her and that thereafter she would "dump" you. She said that she would "do you over", which you took to be a reference to her exploiting you financially, and then go back to working as an escort in London. She said she wished that Peter Deem had killed you before he killed himself so that she could have the benefit of the insurance policy you had taken out for her benefit. You learned, in essence, that Georgina Symonds had absolutely no respect and absolutely no time for you. You might have loved her; she did not even like you.

There were two other elements of that conversation which caused you particular pain and anxiety. First, you heard her refer to photographs and videos she held which showed you and her engaging in sexual acts in your family home and which she was threatening to send to your ex-wife and daughters. Second, you heard her say that she had not been telling you the truth about social services. She had been told on 5 January 2016 that social services were not concerned about her and her daughter.

You then realised that Georgina Symonds had been lying to you about her fears of losing her daughter. She had known for almost a week that that was not going to happen but she had let you go on believing it remained likely; let you go on blaming yourself, beating yourself up with the thought that you might be responsible for Emily being taken from her. She had gone on blaming you when she knew full well Emily was safe with her.

I have no doubt that that made you extremely angry. Allied to that anger, was the fear of what it would do to your daughters if the pornographic videos Ms Symonds had of you and her were sent to them. These were circumstances you simply could

not tolerate. You could not give in to blackmail and continue to put up with this abuse at the hands of the young woman to whom you had become devoted. You could not accept after all you had given her, all you had done for her, all the love you had shown her, that she could treat you like this - deliberately hurt you for no good reason, deliberately exploit you financially when you had given her so much, and then threaten to humiliate you before your daughters.

And so you resolved to put a stop to it all.

You could see only two options. Persuade her to change and go back to how your relationship had been formerly; or kill her. The persuasion could be by carrot or stick. The carrot would be the offer of further financial support; the stick the threat of murder.

And so on Monday 11 January you began to plan your response.

You wrote out a list on your phone of the items you would need – “string” or bailing twine to use as a ligature, “poly” or polythene sheets to wrap up the body; “tape” or duct tape to tie up the polythene sheets, a “handle”, namely metal tubing to use to lift the body. All these were items more obviously necessary for a killing, then for a mere threat to kill.

Then later that morning you visited a phone shop to buy a SIM card. The purpose for doing so was to provide yourself with a means of making telephone calls that couldn't be traced; you had in mind moving Ms Symonds car away from her home after you had killed her, and you would need to call a taxi to get you home. So you found the numbers of some Newport taxi firms and stored them on the pay as you go SIM card. You were already planning a way of deflecting attention for the killing away from you.

Later on Monday you picked up the string and the handle from your home at Beech Hill Farm. You prepared the bailing twine by tying in it loops which could go over your wrists so that, after you had tied the twine round Ms Symonds neck, you could still hold on to her hands and prevent her from trying to stop you. As you acknowledged in evidence, that would not be possible if you used an unknotted piece

of bailing twine. You had plainly determined the way in which you could kill her before you went to the bungalow.

On the Tuesday, you took polythene sheets from the farm and placed them in the boot of your Porsche. The duct tape was already in the boot of the car.

You then needed to engineer an excuse to visit the bungalow where you knew you would not be especially welcome. You arranged for a bath and Emily's quad bike to be delivered there that day by your workmen and arranged to meet them at the bungalow. You took with you Ms Symonds' safe, her jewellery box and £400 in cash so as to reinforce your pretext for visiting her that day.

You drove to the bungalow at 10 o'clock on Tuesday 12 January. When you arrived you found Ms Symonds on the phone to her friend Alexi Butcher. You heard her say that she would see Alexi at 4 o'clock after she had picked up her daughter from school.

You carried with you into the premises the safety deposit box, the jewellery box and the insurance documents. You had in your pocket the money and the ligature. You placed the £400 on the arm of the sofa. You placed the jewellery box and the safe on the floor, the term assurance policy on top of the safe.

When she came off the phone, you said that the insurance document had to be put into the safe and passed it to her, to see if that provoked any reaction. It did not. You asked after Emily. She replied it was all your fault if she lost Emily and, if she did, she would hang herself. It was obvious to you then that money, or being made the beneficiary of the insurance policy, was not going to change her attitude towards you.

She told you to put the boxes in her bedroom which you did. Then, as you came out of the bedroom you slipped your left hand through the loop of the bailing twine and pushed the rest of the twine up your sleeve.

Ms Symonds was sitting in the corner of the sofa. You sat down beside her. Then you pulled the string down from your sleeve, reached across and wrapped it around her neck. As you did so you grabbed her wrists, one with each hand as you had planned, and pinned her down in the corner of the sofa. You had placed the twine

around her neck so as completely to encircle her throat. You pulled it tight. Then you loosened it. Ms Symonds asked you what you were was doing. You tightened it again. When you released it a second time, she said “you’re going to pay for this”.

It was evident to you that the threat of strangulation was not working; Georgina was not reacting as you had hoped and expected. She was remaining defiant and not indicating she would behave as you wanted her to. So you tightened the ligature around her throat for a third time. There was a towel or throw on the back of the sofa and you pulled it over her face. You couldn’t bring yourself to look at her whilst she died, whilst you killed her. Then you held that twine tight around her neck, until she was dead.

Once you had established that she was dead, you went out to the car, fetched the polythene, more twine, the duct tape and the iron bar. You laid the polythene down on her bedroom floor and then carried her body and placed it there. You took off her boots and taped her lower legs to the back of her upper legs, covered her whole body with the polythene and taped it up.

You tied the body to the iron bar so as to make a handle. You then carried Ms Symond’s body out from the bungalow and put it into the boot of your car. You went back to the bungalow and picked up her handbag, the listening device, two pairs of her shoes and a coat. You put these items in a bin bag and carried them to the back of the car with her keys. You put her mobile phone into your pocket. But, unfortunately for you, it was still switched on, a mistake that was to cause your plan to avoid responsibility for the killing to start to unravel.

You then returned to the bungalow a third time, fed the dogs, tidied up and waited for the bath to be delivered. You collected together black bags of rubbish which you put outside and fetched a motorbike from the garage. You did all that despite having Ms Symond’s body lying in the back of your car. After helping the workmen carry the bath into the house and the quad bike into the garage, you locked up and left the house. You drove to Beech Hill Farm, your ex-wife’s home, and placed Ms Symonds’ body behind an electric saw in a workshop there. Then you simply went about your ordinary business of the day. It is perfectly plain that it was your intention then to try to avoid responsibility for the killing, if you could.

When no one turned up to collect Emily from school, the alarm was raised. You spent the rest of the day pretending to help in the search for her. You phoned her phone number as if to try to find her, knowing all the time that she was dead and her phone was in your car. You kept up the charade throughout an interview with the police that was recorded on an officer's body-camera. But one thing you could not explain was why her phone had been detected near Beech Hill Farm earlier that day. The reason, of course, was that you had carried it there when you transported her body to those premises.

Eventually, in the early hours of the following day, you could take it no longer and confessed to what you had done.

Central to the issues in this case has been the question of your mental health. You argued that the killing of Ms Symonds was the result of a loss of self-control. Alternatively, you said that your responsibility for the killing was diminished by the fact that you were suffering from an abnormality of mental functioning which substantially impaired your ability to form a rational judgment or to exercise self-control, and that that provided an explanation for your actions.

By their verdict, the jury have rejected both of those partial defences. In my view they were plainly right to do so. Nonetheless, it is necessary for me to indicate my conclusions as to the nature and extent of any mental disability you have.

I have read and re-read the psychiatric and psychological reports in this case, prepared by Dr Ajat Sanikop for the Crown and Dr Philip Joseph and Prof Simon Baron Cohen for the defence, and I have reconsidered their evidence to this court. I find as a fact that you suffered from Asperger's syndrome. I reach that conclusion primarily on the basis of Prof Baron Cohen's evidence, whose diagnosis I found compelling. But, in my judgment, you have only a mild form of that condition. I reach that conclusion first on the basis of Dr Joseph's evidence to precisely that effect, and secondly on all the evidence of your ability to function tolerably well in your business life, your social life and your family life until this event.

I accept that that condition had some modest effect on your ability to deal with other people and to reach sensible conclusions when faced with stressful situations. But it follows from the jury's verdict that you understood what you were doing, you were

able to form a rational judgment and you were capable of exercising self-control. In my view, the plans you made for the killing of Georgina Symonds and the steps you took on the day of the killing to cover up what you had done, demonstrate perfectly clearly that you retained self-control and the ability to understand your own actions.

In determining the appropriate starting point in fixing a sentence, I am obliged to have regard to Schedule 21 of the Criminal Justice Act 2003. In my judgment, you took with you to the scene of the killing the ligature you had manufactured for the purpose, intending to use it to kill Georgina Symonds, if that should prove necessary, as you decided it did. I reject the suggestion that that action was simply a product of the Asperger's syndrome. That fact brings this case within para 5A of schedule 21 and, accordingly, my starting point has to be a life sentence with a minimum term of 25 years.

In my judgment this offence is aggravated by a number of factors, which taken together would justify an increase in that sentence:

- First, as I have explained, this killing was premeditated and carefully planned; that is an aggravating factor which, by statute, I am obliged to take into account;
- Second, a further statutory aggravating feature, in my judgment you must have caused Ms Symonds significant mental and physical suffering in the minutes before her death, as you strangled her, paused to speak to her, strangled her again, paused to get her reaction and then tightened the ligature for a final time. She would have realised over those minutes that you were intent on holding her down, tightening that ligature and slowly snuffing the life out of her.
- Third, yet another statutory aggravating feature, you concealed her body behind the saw in the workshop at your ex-wife's premises. That concealment only lasted until early the following morning when you told the police where she was, but concealment it was.

I have had regard to the victim impact statement of Debra Symonds, which explains the devastating effect on the family of the death of Georgina.

I set against that a number of statutorily recognised mitigating feature, which serve to reduce the appropriate sentence:

- First, your Asperger's syndrome which, although not sufficient to provide you with a defence, lowered your degree of culpability to a modest extent.
- Second, I accept that you suffered a significant degree of provocation in the behaviour of Ms Symonds. That provocation, as the jury have found, did not produce a loss of control of a type or degree sufficient to provide you with any defence to the charge of murder, but it is a factor I should take into account in fixing the penalty I impose. I accept the submissions of Mr Harrington that the abuse you received was vicious, persistent and extreme. I accept that the blackmail threatened by Ms Symonds was both gross and an appalling abuse of trust

I also take account of the following non-statutory mitigation:

- First, within 24 hours of the offence, you admitted to the police that you had killed Ms Symonds and told them where you had hidden the body. Thereafter you have co-operated with the authorities throughout.
- Second, you were hitherto a man of positive good character. Save for a trifling matter 30 years ago, there no offences or cautions recorded against you. Furthermore, a number of impressive witnesses spoke of your positive qualities.
- Third, it is plain to me that for many years you were a good employer and a positive asset to your community.
- Fourth, at least until 2012 you were a decent and supportive husband and father to your two daughters.
- Fifth I have had regard to letters from the Samaritans about your good work as a "listener" in HM Prison Cardiff and from the Governor of Cardiff prison about the steps you took to help save the life of another prisoner;

- Sixth, I have seen the certificates you have earned in prison for completing courses in alcohol awareness, harm reduction, and the possibility of change.
- Seventh, you are now aged 54 and I take your age into account.

I have had regard to decisions of the Court of Appeal Criminal Division relevant to the sentencing task I have to perform. I note, in particular, the judgment of that court in the manslaughter case of Thompson [2014] EWCA Crim 2892 which bears comparison with this one and which I have found instructive. Ultimately however, I have to reach a judgment of my own on the facts of your particular case.

My task is to balance these aggravating features and mitigating features and set them against my 25 year starting point. In my view, the mitigating features cancels out the aggravating features and my starting point ends up my finishing point. Credit will be given for the 343 days you have spent on remand in calculating the minimum term to be served.

Now stand up

Peter Morgan, for the murder of Georgina Symonds, you will go to prison for life and you will serve a minimum of 25 years.

-ENDS-