

# Cat O'Nine Tales

## (Gift Edition)

Jeffrey Archer

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Extract

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The Man Who  
Robbed His Own  
Post Office



## The Beginning

**M**r Justice Gray stared down at the two defendants in the dock. Chris and Sue Haskins had pleaded guilty to the theft of £250,000, being the property of the Post Office, and to falsifying four passports.

Mr and Mrs Haskins looked about the same age, which was hardly surprising as they had been at school together some forty years before. You could have passed them in the street without giving either of them a second look. Chris was about five foot nine, his dark wavy hair turning grey, and he was at least a stone overweight. He stood upright in the dock, and although his suit was well worn, his shirt was clean and his striped tie suggested that he was a member of a club. His black shoes looked as if they had been spit-and-polished every morning. His wife Sue stood by his side. Her neat floral dress and sensible shoes hinted at an organized and tidy woman, but then they were both wearing the clothes that they would normally have worn to church. After all, they considered the law to be nothing less than an extension of the Almighty.

Mr Justice Gray turned his attention to Mr and Mrs Haskins's barrister, a young man who had been selected on the grounds of cost, rather than experience.

'No doubt you wish to suggest there are mitigating circumstances in this case, Mr Rodgers,' prompted the judge helpfully.

'Yes, m'lord,' admitted the newly qualified barrister as he rose from his place. He would like to have told his lordship that this was only his second case, but he felt his lordship would be unlikely to consider that a mitigating circumstance.

Mr Justice Gray settled back as he prepared to listen to how poor Mr Haskins had been thrashed by a ruthless stepfather, night after night, and Mrs Haskins had been raped by an evil uncle at an impressionable age, but no; Mr Rodgers assured the court that the Haskins came from happy, well-balanced backgrounds and had in fact been at school together. Their only child, Tracey, a graduate of Bristol University, was now working as an estate agent in Ashford. A model family.

Mr Rodgers glanced down at his brief before going on to explain how the Haskins had ended up in the dock that morning. Mr Justice Gray became more and more intrigued by their tale, and by the time the barrister had resumed his place the judge felt he needed a little more time to consider the length of the sentence. He ordered the two defendants to appear before him the following Monday at ten o'clock in the forenoon, by which time he would have come to a decision.

Mr Rodgers rose a second time.

'You were no doubt hoping that I would grant your clients bail, Mr Rodgers?' enquired the judge, raising an eyebrow, and before the surprised young barrister could respond Mr Justice Gray said, 'Granted.'

Jasper Gray told his wife about the plight of Mr and Mrs Haskins over lunch on Sunday. Long before the judge had devoured his rack of lamb, Vanessa Gray had offered her opinion.

'Sentence them both to an hour of community service, and then issue a court order instructing the Post Office to return their original



investment in full,' she declared, revealing a common sense not always bestowed on the male of the species. To do him justice, the judge agreed with his spouse, although he told her that he would never get away with it.

'Why not?' she asked.

'Because of the four passports.'

Mr Justice Gray was not surprised to find Mr and Mrs Haskins standing dutifully in the dock at ten o'clock the following morning. After all, they were not criminals.