

# A sex assault that reveals the dark side of the City

How Britain works

A visit with colleagues to a wine bar became an enduring nightmare for a young woman banker. And then the police and her bosses botched the investigation. **David Connett** reports



**F**riday night drinks in the work-hard, play-hard world of City investment banking are the stuff of legend. An invitation to join the boys to celebrate her successful presentation that day was a feather in the cap of the high-flying banker: "a shameless career-ladder-climbing move", as she described it to a friend. But in truth, she didn't want to be there.

Her boss, already at the bar, sent a minion to tell her to leave her desk and join them. It was an imposition. "Had one meeting at work that sucked the life out of me and I can't not for the life of me concentrate," she emailed. "And these jokers I work with aren't helping. Tired of taking schtick for my outfit." Nevertheless, up to this point it was just an everyday tale of City folk.

Within two hours it had spiralled into a horror story of drink, drugs and, she says, sexual assault, made all the more disturbing by the way it was handled by those in authority. She says she suffered a humiliating sexual assault in a busy wine bar after she was plied with a cocktail and a strong sedative, possibly put into her drink.

She had joined colleagues at a bar close to the bank's main offices in east London, but after a couple of drinks she found herself alone with a senior banker. She started a third glass of wine but has no recollection of finishing it. Her memory of what followed is vague but she was dimly conscious of her colleague's tongue in her mouth, his hands all over her body. "I can remember seeing his face close up to mine and him saying: 'I'd love to go with you to a hotel' ... I remember someone saying 'Get a room'. I felt ashamed,"

she told police. She later found out her colleague had admitted to police "touching her vagina". She broke down. "I didn't know that he had done that, and it was really humiliating to think it had happened in public."

CCTV footage recovered after the incident shows her lurching into view outside her employers' office; she falls to the ground where she is sick. A security guard is seen escorting her into the foyer, where another camera shows her slumped unconscious on a sofa. The senior banker phoned her boyfriend to suggest he come and collect her as she was feeling "delicate".

Her boyfriend's first thought on arriving was this was not her normal reaction to a few drinks. He wondered if the alcohol had reacted with antidepressants she had been taking to cope with work-related stress - though there had been no previous ill-effects. Naturally, he also wondered whether her drink had been spiked, a thought that struck her medically qualified sister when the woman recounted what had happened. The idea seemed even more plausible when she woke the next morning feeling ill: it felt like no hangover she'd had before. A short while later, accompanied by her boyfriend, she went to Limehouse police station, east London, and accused her boss of sexual assault.

The manner in which the Metropolitan Police and her employer, a major investment bank, dealt with the matter was shocking and shameful, highlighting growing concern about the way sexual offences against women are dealt with in the UK.

The blunders began almost immediately. Suspected cases of drug-facilitated sexual assault should,

according to guidelines, be assigned to a specialist squad - a Sapphire Unit - set up specifically to improve how police deal with sex crimes. However, for reasons never explained, it was passed to local detectives.

A urine sample was taken from her but inexplicably it was decided a blood test was unnecessary. As a result, though the urine test found the sedative diphenhydramine present, without blood analysis it was impossible to tell how much she had consumed or when.

Four days after the incident she repeated her story to her employers.

**'It was humiliating to think it had happened in public'**

**'Things don't tend to end well for women who report this'**

They said they would delay their own investigation until the criminal case had ended but took immediate steps to separate the pair at work.

The following day, she was interviewed by the female detective constable handling the case. The young banker alleges the "aggressive and bullying" detective insisted she "could not possibly have been drugged". The detective also failed to examine forensically the banker's vomit-stained overcoat. The banker says she was told to get it dry cleaned. The detective's scepticism remained even after toxicology results came back positive. Diphenhydramine is found in the over-the-counter sleeping pill Nytol, which the woman





admitted having taken in the past. Emails show the detective decided this to cast doubt on the spiked drink theory, even though the banker insisted she had not taken Nytol for several months.

When the banker told her employer of the toxicology results, she received a sharp email from the police officer - copied to the bank's own security head - which said: "You have been warned before of interfering. This is a serious allegation that you have made and you are not helping your case." It concluded: "I hope I have made myself clear."

The reaction was surprising given that only months earlier Scotland Yard had been publicly criticised by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) for a series of failings that left John Worboys, a cab driver, free to drug, rape and sexually assault at least 85 victims despite numerous women reporting his attacks. A key criticism by the IPCC was that officers had behaved insensitively towards alleged victims.

Police arrested the senior banker, who admitted kissing the young woman, fondling her breasts and touching her intimately. He denied drugging her, saying there was no sign that she was sedated and insisted it was consensual. He says he has been shocked and distressed by her allegations.

Lawyers point to the difficulties of prosecuting sex offences in the absence of independent forensic or eyewitness evidence. The Worboys report rebuked officers for failing to appeal for witnesses. Emails in the banker's case reveal the detective refused the banker's request for a witness appeal at the bar where the alleged assault took place because "it is commonplace in bars for people to

be kissing". Consequently, whether anyone else could have shed light on the encounter is impossible to say.

Not surprisingly, the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) decided not to bring charges. She says the bank also did nothing despite its own internal policy prohibiting intimate or sexual relationships between senior and junior employees.

In a letter to her lawyers the bank claimed it was "apparent ... that the 'sexual assault' was, in fact, a kiss". This was written despite the fact the bank was aware of the toxicology report and had copies of other police statements. It declined to investigate further. The senior employee remains in his job. The young banker, feeling betrayed, resigned.

Frustrated by the lack of action, she used data protection laws to obtain files held by her employer and the police. The documents she obtained showed the detective had been in close contact with the bank's security boss throughout. She had shared vital evidence with him, including witness statements and photographs of her in her underwear taken shortly after the alleged attack, showing bruises where she had fallen over.

The detective had also sent the security boss emails containing details of the banker's medical history and a copy of the toxicology report. In the emails the detective discusses "doing lunch" and makes derogatory remarks about the alleged victim whom she refers to as a "very bitter young lady". After the investigation ended, emails show the detective had "lost the file" containing statements from fellow bank employees, and asked the security boss if he had copies.

Alarmingly, the young banker also discovered her alleged attacker had been given her home address by her



# IGNORED

A female banker felt betrayed by the reaction to her assault claim

JASON ALDEN

employer. He had used it to send her a legal letter ordering her never to repeat her allegation again.

As a result of these disclosures she complained to the Metropolitan Police and the Information Commissioner. The latter ruled the bank was likely to have breached data protection laws in giving her address and retaining the intimate photographs. The bank insists it acted "appropriately at all times and took into consideration the rights of both employees in line with our policies and with our duty as an employer".

Scotland Yard reopened the case, this time using the specialist Sapphire Unit detectives. In contrast with the initial investigation, they forensically examined the woman's vomit-stained coat. These confirmed the sedative was in her stomach on the night of the alleged assault. They also appealed for witnesses in the bar but had no success. Despite their best efforts, they were unable to gather evidence about how she came to have taken the drug. Again, the CPS decided there was insufficient evidence to prosecute.

She complained to the IPCC, which referred the matter to the Met's own disciplinary unit, the Directorate for Professional Standards. As a result of its internal inquiry, the detective who originally investigated the case was set to face a disciplinary hearing. The officer resigned before the hearing.

The banker, who is now employed by another bank, said: "Things don't tend to end well for women who report these things. But I thought that because I work very hard, I never go out and get drunk and I have been faithful to one man for 10 years, I would not be dragged through the mud. It is very distressing that, despite that, I am left in this position."