# Netflix faces £134m defamation suit over ‘Baby Reindeer’ stalking portrayal



The truth, as Oscar Wilde once stated, is rarely pure and never simple. This adage has never been more evident than in the unfolding legal drama surrounding "Baby Reindeer," a Netflix series that has captivated viewers since its April 2024 release. The show, advertised as a ‘true story’, is now the centre of a £134 million defamation suit that has thrust its creators and the subject of the alleged stalking into a contentious legal battle, forcing many to question the realities behind the narrative.

Fiona Harvey, a Scottish lawyer, has become the focal point of this high-profile dispute, asserting that she is unjustly depicted as the malevolent stalker Martha in the series penned by comedian Richard Gadd. Claiming that the portrayal of her as a twice-convicted criminal who served five years in prison is patently false, Harvey has vehemently described the show as "the biggest lie in TV history." Gadd, however, maintains that he transformed his real-life stalker into a fictional character, asserting that "we’ve gone to such great lengths to disguise her" so much so that she wouldn’t recognise herself.

The sharp divide between Harvey’s depiction of her life and Gadd’s narrative becomes even more pronounced when considering the dramatic claims made by both parties. While Gadd alleges that Harvey sent him an avalanche of correspondence—over 41,000 emails and 350 hours' worth of voicemails—Harvey’s response paints a picture of severe emotional distress as a result of the show's release. In recently filed legal documents, she describes living in fear, suffering from severe anxiety and panic attacks, which have significantly impacted her daily life. Her attorney, Richard Roth, emphasised her plight, stating that she is the target of a multi-billion-dollar entity that seems to disregard her well-being.

As the legal skirmish continues, Netflix has defended its stance energetically. While Co-CEO Ted Sarandos has remarked that "Baby Reindeer" reflects Gadd's true experiences—albeit dramatized—this assertion has been met with scepticism. Critics argue that the series' opening declaration of being a 'true story' is misleading. Last year, a US judge ruled that Harvey could proceed with her case, indicating that Netflix’s portrayal of her was not only damaging but potentially defamatory.

The tension escalates further with revelations that Harvey's life experiences bear uncanny similarities to the character Martha, a detail that viewers quickly seized upon. Within days of the series premiere, internet sleuths primed by social media identified her as the real individual behind the character. Gabriel Roth, a stylist who has cut Harvey's hair for years, was among those who recognised her at once, noting the striking likenesses in appearance and behaviour between Harvey and Martha.

However, Netflix has tried to offset this narrative by highlighting various legal challenges, including arguments that Harvey lacks a reputation to defend due to prior criminal activities and media coverage. This has provoked further debate about the balance between artistic expression and responsible storytelling, particularly in a medium that purports to draw from reality.

The case is set against a backdrop of wider scrutiny regarding the responsibilities of streaming giants to their subjects, along with the ethical implications of blurring the lines between fact and fiction. As Netflix readies its response to the court documents filed recently, it has until June 28 to address these legal challenges. Given the complexities of this high-profile lawsuit, and the intensity of the public interest it has generated, the full trial is unlikely to be resolved until 2026.

The unfolding saga of "Baby Reindeer" serves as a potent reminder of the potential ramifications when entertainment straddles the realms of reality and creative interpretation. As Gadd enjoys newfound success, buoyed by awards like the Best Supporting Actress win for Jessica Gunning at the recent BAFTAs, the series continues to haunt Harvey, whose life has been propelled into an unwanted spotlight, leaving her to contend with the consequences of a narrative that she insists does not reflect the truth.

### 📌 Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14776467/Baby-Reindeer-stalker-DIE-Richard-Gadd-court-case.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/cba8ee53-0d56-45e6-886b-31751317898d)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14776467/Baby-Reindeer-stalker-DIE-Richard-Gadd-court-case.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/7de65030fbc704b78dc530404d616bc6), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj31lpvnzl3o)
* Paragraph 3 – [[2]](https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/netflix-says-baby-reindeer-clearly-involved-dramatisation-2024-09-17/), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2024/sep/30/fiona-harvey-baby-reindeer-defamation-lawsuit-richard-gadd-netflix)
* Paragraph 4 – [[3]](https://apnews.com/article/7de65030fbc704b78dc530404d616bc6), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2024/sep/30/fiona-harvey-baby-reindeer-defamation-lawsuit-richard-gadd-netflix), [[7]](https://www.businessinsider.com/netflix-baby-reindeer-not-true-story-lawsuit-go-ahead-judge-2024-9)
* Paragraph 5 – [[4]](https://www.ft.com/content/cba8ee53-0d56-45e6-886b-31751317898d), [[5]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj31lpvnzl3o)
* Paragraph 6 – [[1]](https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14776467/Baby-Reindeer-stalker-DIE-Richard-Gadd-court-case.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490), [[7]](https://www.businessinsider.com/netflix-baby-reindeer-not-true-story-lawsuit-go-ahead-judge-2024-9)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/tvshowbiz/article-14776467/Baby-Reindeer-stalker-DIE-Richard-Gadd-court-case.html?ns_mchannel=rss&ns_campaign=1490&ito=1490> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.reuters.com/lifestyle/netflix-says-baby-reindeer-clearly-involved-dramatisation-2024-09-17/> - Netflix addressed concerns over the dramatisation in its mini-series 'Baby Reindeer', confirming that certain elements were dramatized. This clarification comes after Netflix was sued for $170 million by Fiona Harvey, a Scottish woman who claimed she was defamed by her portrayal in the show. Netflix plans to vigorously defend itself against the lawsuit, with Co-CEO Ted Sarandos stating that the series is Gadd's true story, albeit with dramatized elements.
3. <https://apnews.com/article/7de65030fbc704b78dc530404d616bc6> - Fiona Harvey has filed a $170 million defamation lawsuit against Netflix, alleging that the series 'Baby Reindeer' defamed her by portraying her as a stalker. Harvey, a Scottish lawyer, denies the allegations and claims that the show falsely depicted her as a twice-convicted stalker who sexually assaulted Gadd. Netflix intends to defend the case, arguing that the portrayal is substantially true.
4. <https://www.ft.com/content/cba8ee53-0d56-45e6-886b-31751317898d> - Fiona Harvey has filed a $170 million defamation lawsuit against Netflix, alleging that the series 'Baby Reindeer' defamed her by portraying her as a stalker. Harvey claims that the show falsely depicted her as a twice-convicted stalker who sexually assaulted Gadd and served five years in prison. Netflix insists on defending the series and Gadd's right to share his story.
5. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/cj31lpvnzl3o> - Netflix has failed in its attempt to persuade a judge to throw out a defamation lawsuit brought by Fiona Harvey, who claims the streaming giant told 'brutal lies' about her to more than 50 million viewers worldwide. The show, created by Richard Gadd, is billed as 'a true story', but certain key events, like the conviction for stalking, did not happen in real life, the judge concluded.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2024/sep/30/fiona-harvey-baby-reindeer-defamation-lawsuit-richard-gadd-netflix> - A US judge has ruled that Fiona Harvey, the woman accused of stalking 'Baby Reindeer' creator Richard Gadd, can pursue her defamation lawsuit against Netflix. Harvey alleged that the show falsely implied she sexually assaulted Gadd and gouged his eyes, and that she had been sent to prison for stalking him. The judge noted that the show was wrongly billed as a 'true story' when Netflix 'made no effort' to fact-check Gadd's story or disguise Harvey as the inspiration for Martha.
7. <https://www.businessinsider.com/netflix-baby-reindeer-not-true-story-lawsuit-go-ahead-judge-2024-9> - A judge has allowed Fiona Harvey's defamation lawsuit against Netflix to proceed, stating that the series 'Baby Reindeer' was wrongly billed as a 'true story'. The judge noted that the show begins by stating 'this is a true story', inviting viewers to take the story as fact. Harvey alleges that the show falsely portrayed her as a convicted stalker who sexually and violently assaulted Gadd, which differs from the real-life events.