

STM: NYK29/LN JULY 20 78 MSG: PLA

TO: LONDON

FROM: PRESS

SLUG: TEST TUBE TEMPEST CLOSE: 7/20 EOH:

THE FOLLOWING STORY SENIOR-EDITED BUT UNCHECKED,
IS SENT TO YOU FOR COMMENTS AND CORRECTIONS.

MEDICINE: CVR BOX (MORRISON) GW

LJ

FRENZY IN THE PRESS

THE FIRST PUBLIC HINT OF THE IMPENDING BIRTH OF A BRITISH
TEST TUBE BABY CAME LAST SPRING NOT FROM LONDON'S FLEET
STREET BUT FROM MANHATTAN, IN A STORY BY NEW YORK POST
REPORTER SHARON CHURCHER. WHILE REPORTING A LAWSUIT FILED
OVER A HALTED IN VITRO FERTILIZATION EXPERIMENT AT NEW
YORK'S COLUMBIA PRESBYTERIAN HOSPITAL, CHURCHER RECEIVED A
TIP THAT DR. PATRICK STEPTOE WAS ON THE VERGE OF SUCCESS
WITH THE SAME TECHNIQUE. WHEN SHE PLACED AN OVERSEAS CALL TO
STEPTOE IN OLDHAM, HE CONCEDED THAT SUCH A TEST-TUBE BABY
MIGHT SOON BE BORN, AND CHURCHER BROKE THE NEWS ON APRIL 19
IN A STORY THAT THE POST PRINTED ON PAGE X.

CHURCHER'S CAREFULLY-WORDED STORY WAS SCARCELY NOTICED BY
THE PUBLIC. BUT IT DID NOT ESCAPE THE ATTENTION OF THE
SENSATION-SEEKING NATIONAL ENQUIRER. WITHIN 48 HOURS, A
FLYING SQUAD OF FIVE REPORTERS HAD LEFT THE ENQUIRER'S
LANTANA, FLA., HEADQUARTERS AND ARRIVED ON STEPTOE'S

DOORSTEP WITH A SIX-FIGURE OFFER FOR WORLDWIDE RIGHTS TO STORY OF THE TEST-TUBE BABY. WHEN STEPTOE STALLED, THE FLORIDIANS LOOKED TO OTHER SOURCES. ACCORDING TO LONDON'S SUNDAY TIMES, THE ENQUIRER TEAM TRIED TO BRIBE JUNIOR NURSES AT OLDHAM HOSPITAL, AND OFFERED HOW MUCH TO THE ADMINISTRATOR OF A RESEARCH TRUST FOR STEPTOE IN RETURN FOR THE NAME OF THE BABY'S PARENTS.

THE GREAT PRESS CIRCUS WAS ON.

THE DAILY MAIL OFFERED ^{AN OLDHAM PAPER BEGAN} £90 TO AN OLDHAM REPORTER FOR THE PARENTS' NAME, AND JOURNALISTS BEGAN POURING INTO TOWN FROM AROUND THE WORLD. THREE JAPANESE PHOTOGRAPHERS SET UP THEIR CAMERAS IN THE HOSPITAL LOBBY AND BEGAN SHOOTING PICTURES OF EVERY PREGNANT WOMAN IN SIGHT.

ON THE ADVICE OF STEPTOE, THE STILL-ANONYMOUS LESLEY AND JOHN BROWN THEN HIRED AN ATTORNEY TO SOLICIT BIDS FOR THEIR STORY, INSISTING THAT BIDDERS KEEP THE DETAILS INCLUDING THEIR IDENTITY QUIET UNTIL THE BABY WAS BORN. DOZENS OF BRITISH AND AMERICAN PUBLICATIONS INCLUDING THE ENQUIRER, THE NEW YORK TIMES AND A REPRESENTATIVE OF PUBLISHER RUPERT MURDOCH (THE NEW YORK POST, THE NATIONAL STAR AND THE LONDON SUN) SUBMITTED BIDS. THE LONDON OFFICES OF ABC AND CBS NEWS WERE ASKED TO BID ON NORTH AMERICAN BROADCASTING RIGHTS, BUT DECLINED. A REPRESENTATIVE OF NBC NEWS HAD TALKS WITH THE BROWNS' ATTORNEY BUT SOON PULLED OUT. FINALLY, ON JULY 9, THE BROWNS ACCEPTED A HIGH BID OF DLR570,000 FOR WORLD PRINT RIGHTS FROM ASSOCIATED NEWSPAPERS, PUBLISHER OF LONDON'S DAILY MAIL, WHICH QUICKLY RETAILED NORTH AMERICAN PRINT RIGHTS TO THE ENQUIRER FOR AN UNDISCLOSED SUM.

ALL THAT DID NOT SET WELL WITH THE MAIL'S PRINCIPAL TITS-AND-BUMS RIVAL, THE EXPRESS, WHICH HAD DROPPED OUT OF THE BIDDING AT DLR500,000. EXPRESS REPORTERS HAD LEARNED THAT THE YET-UNIDENTIFIED FATHER WAS DRIVING THREE HOURS

EACH WAY TO VISIT HIS WIFE. SO THEY STAKED OUT THE HOSPITAL PARKING LOT, JOTTED DOWN LICENSE NUMBERS OF MALE MOTORISTS WHO LOOKED LIKE EXPECTANT FATHERS AND TRACED THEM THROUGH BRITAIN'S MOTOR LICENSING BUREAU. HOW? "BY SUBTERFUGE, EVEN BRIBERY." CHARGED AN ANGRY LICENSING OFFICIAL. THE EXPRESS SOON DISCOVERED THAT THERE WAS ONLY ONE MAN VISITING THE HOSPITAL REGULARLY WHO LIVED ABOUT THREE HOURS AWAY, AND A CHECK WITH NEIGHBORS CONFIRMED THAT HIS WIFE WAS PREGNANT. EXCLUSIVE, THE EXPRESS SCREAMED ON JULY 11, BABY OF THE CENTURY. THE PAPER GRACIOUSLY DID NOT NAME THE PARENTS OF THE CENTURY, BUT MOST OTHER DETAILS WERE THERE. GLOATS EXPRESS EDITOR DEREK JAMESON: "IT WAS A CLASSIC SPOILING OPERATION. THERE WERE MURDOCH, THE MAIL, THE NATIONAL ENQUIRER PUTTING IN BIDS OFF 300,000, AND THERE WE WERE OUT GETTING THE STORY BY OLD-STYLE JOURNALISM."

THE MAIL RECOVERED NEXT DAY WITH A WORLD EXCLUSIVE IDENTIFYING THE BROWNS AND QUOTING LESLEY BROWN EXTENSIVELY, UNDER THE HEADLINE OUR MIRACLE BABY. YET MURDOCH'S SUN THAT DAY ALSO IDENTIFIED THE BROWNS AND QUOTED JOHN BROWN EXTENSIVELY, UNDER THE LABEL SUN EXCLUSIVE. THE MAIL TRIED NEXT DAY TO REGAIN THE INITIATIVE BY PRINTING THE FIRST EXCLUSIVE PHOTO OF LESLEY BROWN BUT THE SUN AND THE EXPRESS BOTH PICTURE THAT DAY AS WELL. TO PROTECT ITS FAST-DEPRECIATING DLRS570,000 INVESTMENT, THE MAIL QUICKLY STATIONED A SECURITY GUARD OUTSIDE LESLEY BROWN'S ROOM AND PERSUADED OLDHAM HOSPITAL OFFICIALS TO REFER ALL INQUIRIES ABOUT THE BIRTH TO THE MAIL'S SYNDICATION DEPARTMENT. WHEN A TIME CORRESPONDENT CALLED THE PAPER TO CONFIRM LESLEY'S AGE, AN EDITOR OBLIGED BUT ADDED: "THAT'S FREE. THE NEXT ONE WILL COST YOU."

AS EXCLUSIVE FOLLOWED EXCLUSIVE, BRITAIN'S MORE SERIOUS DAILIES WERE BEGINNING TO FIND THE AFFAIR DISTASTEFUL. THE

Jul 13
? OK

TIMES FRETTE^d THAT THE ORGY OF PUBLICITY MIGHT BE TRAUMATIC FOR THE CHILD IF IT CONTINUED. THE GUARDIAN DENOUNCED "CHEQUE-BOOK JOURNALISM" AND THRASHED OLDHAM HEALTH OFFICIALS FOR ALLOWING THE MAIL TO CONTROL NEWS FROM THE HOSPITAL. EMBARRASSED, THE LOCAL OR WHAT HEALTH DEPARTMENT ORDERED THE HOSPITAL TO PROVIDE INFORMATION TO ALL CORNERS. "THIS IS NOT A STORY WHICH SHOULD HAVE BEEN SOLD," SNIPPED GUARDIAN EDITOR PETER PRESTON. "THE RESEARCH, THE DOCTORS, THE HOSPITAL ALL WERE FUNDED BY THE TAXPAYER. IT'S AS IF THE PRIME MINISTER SAID, 'FOR 350 QUID I'LL GIVE YOU A PRIVATE BRIEFING.'"

*see
Hobbs
Bulletin*

AT THE MAIL LAST WEEK, PLANS WERE PRESUMABLY STILL AFOOT TO PRINT THE BROWNS' EXCLUSIVE STORY ONCE THE BABY IS BORN, THOUGH EDITORS THERE WERE UNCOMMONLY UNCOMMUNICATIVE. THE ENQUIRER THIS WEEK WILL PRINT ITS VERSION OF THE STORY ("THE WARMER ASPECT THAT READERS CAN'T GET ANYWHERE ELSE," ONE EDITOR PROMISED), AND HAS PREPARED THREE VERSIONS OF AN ACCOMPANYING TELEVISION SPOT ONE IF THE BABY IS BORN BY PRESSTIME, ANOTHER IF IT HAS NOT YET BEEN BORN, A THIRD IF THERE IS A TRAGEDY. MURDOCH'S STAR, A MANHATTAN-BASED COMPETITOR OF THE ENQUIRER, WILL BE OUT SIMULTANEOUSLY WITH SOME COLOR SNAPSHOTS OBTAINED FROM FRIENDS AND NEIGHBORS OF THE BROWNS AND A 3500-WORD ARTICLE.

AT THE TRIUMPHANT EXPRESS, EDITOR JAMESON DENOUNCED THE MAIL FOR TRYING TO BE SO PIGGY. SAID JAMESON: "THIS STORY IS BIGGER THAN MAN CONQUERING THE MOON. FOR THE MAIL TO

INSIST THEY HAD THE EXCLUSIVE THAT'S LIKE BUYING UP LOUIS
PASTEUR, AND THEN SAYING YOU CAN ONLY BUY ANTISEPTICS
THROUGH THE DAILY MAIL SYNDICATION DEPARTMENT. AS THE
BIRTH APPROACHED AND THE COSTLY 'EXCLUSIVE' GRADUALLY
ERODED AWAY, IT LOOKED AS IF THE CRITICS OF CHECKBOOK
JOURNALISM HAD MADE THEIR POINT. ID

TAPE PO/1055A

ETX: