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Jan Nielsen Little

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San Francisco

White-Collar Criminal,
Securities &
Complex Civil Litigation

Jan Nielsen Little is nationally recognized as a top white-collar criminal defense attorney. She can't talk about many of her cases, especially ones she

can dispose of before charges are filed. But other times, her clients are caught up in high-profile scandals.

And sometimes, it's a little of both. She represented a former Wells Fargo C-suite executive who played a role in the bank's controversial sales practices several years ago. Although one executive went to prison and the bank paid a \$3 billion fine, Little's client did not.

"I was able to navigate my client through it so that he had no criminal prosecution, no SEC prosecution ... [nor] any civil case liability," she said. The client did pay a fine to the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency.

"That was one of those four-dimensional chess games that are tricky, and we managed to walk our way through it without stepping on any land mines."

She did well for a client in another high-profile scandal. That client was convicted but only had to pay a relatively small fine. Little and partner John Keker represented San Francisco real estate broker Victor Markas, who was charged with bank fraud along with former PUC commissioner Harlan Kelly in the investigation of corruption among local officials. *U.S. v. Kelly*, 3:21-cr-00402 (N.D. Cal., filed Oct. 19, 2021).

Little said Markas only assisted Kelly with a dubious mortgage application. "A very good thing we did was ... move for and ob-

tain a severance" of her client's case from Kelly's so that his trial was not entangled in the larger corruption allegations.

A jury convicted him in August, but the judge sentenced him to supervised release and a \$15,000 fine. "As these things go, that was a pretty tolerable result," she said.

She is now involved in an unusual civil case. She represents an insurance company being sued by a U.S. company that leased an airliner to a Russian airline. Because of the war in Ukraine, the Russian government won't allow it or other leased airliners to leave. The company has put in a claim for the value of the plane, but the insurer counters that the plane is not destroyed and has not disappeared.

"It's an interesting case," Little said. "What is a loss? If a plane's been trapped in Russia, does that mean it's lost, or do you just have to wait and see what happens?"

She added that one aspect of her law practice that she has always enjoyed is learning about new businesses. "You're always learning something new. That's what keeps it fresh and interesting and alive," she said.

"I've done a lot of banking cases. ... But I've never done a case about airplanes in Russia. That's a new one."

— Don DeBenedictis