

Bullfry and the Queens Square blues

'*Militavi non sine gloria*' said Bullfry in an equity whisper into his large glass of warm milk. In what lists, forensic and philandering, had he not carved the casques of men, and won the admiration of women? And now all changed, all changed utterly.

The solemn advice, given that morning with measured *schadenfreude* by Dr Bomberg, his Macquarie Street adviser, had brought him up sharply. (He relied on Bomberg for all procedures save the one he reserved for his begloved, pneumatic internist at Double Bay.) Bullfry had sat, half-naked and in a ruminative mood, counting the liver spots on his upper abdomen. He had just reached double figures when Bomberg returned from his pathology room, poring with relish over a long, furred document (the blood 'printout'). It reminded Bullfry distinctly of the 'priors sheet' he had been used to brandish as a young prosecutor. 'I've never seen so many asterisks' the quack had said, shaking his head disconsolately. Bullfry had looked closely at the offending asterisks, each indicating a large variation from the acceptable norm. He realised slowly, but with mounting horror, that he had no properly functioning organs left. Bar one? Perhaps, even that was contingent.

And yet, when he sought to share his woes with discreet coeval acquaintances, he received no sympathy. To the contrary. Every second interlocutor had a more sinister tale to tell. One man's legs were being deep-mined to remove the damage caused by a year of standing in front of a country magistrate; another common law counsel contemplated a wholesale internal diversion, joining trachea and duodenum, to undo the ravages of exorbitant alcohol consumption; a hypertensive episode had almost killed a criminal hack who had been 'attending a conference out of chambers' at a block of flats in Coogee.

Bullfry scratched the nasty weal caused by his pedometer which had dug its way deep into his abdomen - only two thousand steps and it was already lunchtime. He turned to look on the mournful vista which was Queens Square spread out below him. A litigant in person, bright placard in hand, inveighed against the criminal sanctions attaching to zoophilia; some jackanapes from a select, larger firm, had lost control of his trolley and had run headlong into a funeral cortege at the church; a van from Long Bay giving gaol delivery was honking sonorously at the gates of justice.

How times had changed! In his youth, the Square had represented all his dreams and aspirations; he had thought of it upon his arrival from Wee Jasper as one of the most wonderful architectural confluences of ferro-concrete that his young eyes had ever seen. He had thrilled to stand at the juncture of those two great esplanades, so close to the Paris end of Castlereagh Street, on a wet and windy day, wildly clutching a folder and reversed umbrella, exulting as the gale tempted him airborne.

Now, to his tiring eyes, it hardly looked like the epicentre of the entire Oceanic legal world. For thousands of kilometres in any radial direction, this was it. Forget the oddities of a mundane Brisbane practice, or the furbelows and rosettes of Collins Street; forget the autochthonous jurisprudence of Auckland, forget Singapore, or the perfervid legal haunts of the Kowloon magistracy - forget all those other venues where the common law in her majesty in whatever polyglot version there obtained. This was it. Until one reached the further shores of the Pacific and the lawless regions of California, this was it. And at that thought, Bullfry's heart sank within him.

As he gazed at the Square he espied a shambling figure. What a difference a day makes! It was one of his old enemies, a now-retired jurist who had treated Bullfry shamefully in many subtle ways when presiding and who now more lately lurked hoping for the cast-off reference, or a day's mediation for a trading bank.

He looked wistfully around his chambers. Even the skull of the former judge (purchased from its wanton executrix) looked forlorn, and the inscription on its base - '*hodie mihi, eras tibi*' - sent a slight shiver down Bullfry's spine.

Perhaps his general dysphoria could be traced to the modern judicial officer. With a diastolic which hovered constantly above 110, Bullfry knew that any extended passage of arms with a rebarbative beak could prove fatal to him.

Matters had not been improved by his perusal of a recent biography. To learn that the pre-eminent jurist in the Commonwealth's history had had no relevant holiday in forty years, wrote all his judgments in long hand, and at the end, had taken to reading the classics and not the *Commonwealth Law Reports*, was enough to shake the steadiest of temperaments. Was it Kafka, or someone else, who had likened legal studies to chewing sawdust which had been chewed by other mouths for centuries?

He turned as Alice, changeless in her unmannerliness, reminded him of the next conference. What was it about? Bullfry recalled a recent incident in which it was only after he had advised the client for fifty minutes and radically and cruelly deconstructed the plaintiff's case that his solicitors had reminded him that he was for the plaintiff. He had never used that junior again. Bullfry scrambling through the *dissecta membra* of forty briefs piled promiscuously across his floor, looked up as the senior partner and his assistant were announced. Barrakesh had been briefing him since his earliest days at the Bar. He had a rare and now quite old-fashioned belief that counsel should not be retained unless money was being held on account.

'How are you, Jack? It must be almost time for a drink. But before we begin to analyse this unit-trust, may I introduce my new assistant, Miss Chloe Rutwell?'

Bullfry looked around, and at his first glance (the slight venerean strabismus; the ill-concealed décolletage) that old feeling came over him, inspired by Dionysius, or his riotous son. 'I am delighted to meet you, Chloe'. The skull whispered

to him another Latin tag - '*sublimi flagello tange Chloen semel*' - and a large ray of sunlight shone in from the Square, and reflected briefly off the decanter which he now preferred with a gibbous smile to his old, and newer, retainer.