

Law & Peace

Tim Kevan | Bloomsbury | 2011

You've already set your trajectory. You just don't realise it yet. You won't until it's far too late. It's like when they used to warn you about the wind changing when you were a child. Whatever might be in those oh so earnest little hearts of yours, you're never going to be a UN Goodwill Ambassador or win a Nobel Prize. You're never going to climb Mount Everest, or even simply live by the sea and write a novel. Instead, cash will be king, your clerks will have more say over your lives than your family and you'll all have glorious careers at the great English Bar. So wake up kids and smell the stink of your lost dreams.

This gold standard cynicism belongs to OldSmoothie QC, one of the big cast of legal characters in Tim Kevan's second novel, *Law & Peace*.

Developed from a blog now appearing in *The Guardian* newspaper (www.guardian.co.uk/law/baby-barista-blog), Tim Kevan's first novel *Law and Disorder* chronicled the highs and lows of BabyBarista, a fictional pupil at the English Bar.

Having won a spot for a room, in Kevan's sequel we find out how BabyBarista fares in his first year as a fully fledged tenant in Chambers. *Law & Peace* (written again in the style of a diary) contains the same cast of eccentric members of Chambers. There is the barrister who claims a tax deduction for his cocaine habit in his tax return as 'motor fuel'. OldRuin now laments the 'weight of time' and 'the paths he never trod'. OldFilth, appointed to the Bench, now somewhat recklessly sends out messages to

followers on Twitter while hearing cases:

Very attractive counsel appearing before me at the moment.

Ha! They really think they can pull the wool over my eyes that easily?

Hmm. Must be almost lunchtime.

Whose side shall I pick? Attractive counsel or another bore? Difficult one.

UpTights is still having herself plied with Botox, and dreaming of younger barristers. She has also recently applied for silk. Upon being passed over, this sympathetic letter from OldSmoothie is an example of the regard that the barristers in BabyB's Chambers all have for each other:

Dear Uptights,

May I be the first to offer you my sincere condolences on your being rejected as a QC for the second time running. Whilst I'm sure that at your age rejection is something you have learned to manage, I realise it must still come as somewhat of a blow to have it confirmed at such a high level. I hope very much that you will at least take comfort in the words of the official press release which says: 'If you have not been appointed that does not mean you are not a valued and perfectly competent advocate'. Yours affectionately, OldSmoothie.

As for BabyB, once again his life and career are in turmoil. Having paid for his Oxford degree, his mother is facing financial ruin. So BabyB is engaging in insider trading and breaking all kinds of ethical rules to save her from the loan sharks. His love life is in crisis, and he has developed an arguably unhealthy desire for older women, given that the older woman in question is the former Alaskan governor, Sarah

Palin. Yikes. He is also deeply depressed about being stuck in a profession populated almost entirely by people who specialise in 'twisting the truth and taking technical points' and, even worse, by solicitors.

Law & Peace, however, is ultimately a story of salvation. For BabyB, the road to redemption comes from the lessons he learns from the wise group of senior citizens he is representing in a David and Goliath battle against a giant telecommunications company whose mobile phone masts seem to be neurologically harming, or at least neurologically altering (sometimes in good ways) the group of plaintiffs he represents. The catastrophic risks to human life that these mobile phone towers pose in this novel have not yet been accepted in Australian jurisprudence.¹

The travails of the bar are sometimes too much for BabyB, but in the end he gets his soul and his mojo back, and comes to realise the universal truth about all legal and life dilemmas: '*There's nothing a good surf can't sort out*'.

Law & Peace is a faster-paced and equally funny match for its hugely enjoyable predecessor.

Review by Richard Beasley SC

Endnotes

1. *Telstra Corporation Ltd v Hornsby Shire Council* (2006) 67 NSWLR 256 at [184].