

Non omne quod licet honestum est

By Emma Dallas¹

Driving.

I am driving on the M4 towards Parramatta and the University of Western Sydney, Rydalmere campus, running over and over the last four and a half years. The quiet charcoal of the M4 contrasts with chalk-white walls bearing bas-relief echoes of the landscape that was. Closer still to the James Ruse Drive turn off and company flags, fair-day bright, ripple surreally at right angles with the world. Eastbound, or southeast bound, in any case it's the opposite of West.

Suddenly I feel that that I need more time. I see the law hover in front of me and note the piece I have learned to carry is small, worn smooth and grubby with use. I try to think of the whole of the law. It is a rolling horror and instead of standing well clear, notebook in hand, to observe its effects I stood transfixed before it.

The first day at university I held my books and notes across my chest. I had already read the prescribed readings, made the compulsory notes. I had no idea. I had no idea. I read the cases over and over and I had no idea. I wrote down the name of each case, the story of what happened and left room to make more notes. The tutor saw my notes. He took them, held them aloft and explained to everyone why they were inadequate in complex jargon flecked language I didn't understand. The first day, that was the best day.

Four and a half years later I have not prepared for the day's classes and fear that I will spend the better part of today in an advanced state of

¹ emma.dallas@gmail.com

confusion, making notes and relying on retrospective enlightenment.

Anne.

A guest lecturer once expounded the heightened intellect of the lawyer, the headaches we should have experienced as the law burrowed deep into neural pathways, the new kind of thinking that leaps over counter intuitiveness without breaking stride. I have been thinking about this lecture for four years. Anne says I'll never be able to think like a lawyer, she thinks I'm too smart to fall into that pothole. I'm not sure she's right. Perhaps just this once Anne is wrong and thinking like a lawyer is less a pothole and more an elevated viewing platform.

Inadvertently, Anne has become my lighthouse. I want to tell her that despite many headaches I feel my neural pathways blocking, joining forces to stop the legal invasion. I want to think like a lawyer. I want to think like a lawyer at will, to be able to switch it off at night, before I sleep.

I struggle not to cling to Anne. I know she despises those that cling and sink tiny teeth into her. She has mastered the trick of standing firm on this earth and wonders aloud at those that float and moan. I feel as though I came here on a half price ticket clutching an out of date guidebook. I want to throw my hands around her ankles and be dragged somewhere with a sense of purpose.

I first met Anne in feminist jurisprudence where we joyously shouted and argued amongst homogenised women in frowning masks. Occasionally we unwittingly agreed. Once when we argued words of force, logic and reason fell out of my mouth.

Afterwards, Anne introduced herself properly and said with a wink, 'I knew you had it in you.' She grasped my shoulders and said, 'You think deeply, don't waste your time amusing people.' She hugged me. 'No hard feelings, right? I look forward to hearing your opinion every week.' I watched her walk off, swinging her old satchel. She placed one hand against the wall, palm flat, as she stepped down onto the lawn, her shoes sinking in the soft grass. She was short, I realised. Short, middle aged, jersey wearing and unstyled.

Next week Anne was on the shuttle bus to the station. I first noticed her eyebrows and then the haircut that men used to wear. She moved to sit near enough to talk, wobbling, clutching books, metal poles and shoulder bags. She took three steps towards me.

I was different from the flat-packed straight from school others, insisted Anne. I came here with purpose, with determination to think. Not on a flood of school prizes, paddled by parents and grandparents. I did come to think but I hadn't yet managed it, despite Anne.

Rushing past Florence at the front desk I walked as quickly as I dared

down the law school hallways, round the corner, past the American Law Books strangely in the hallway to Anne's Office Door. I could barely see her past the neat stacks of white paper all over her office, shelves and desks. 'Anne? Anne, it's time for lunch, I've got an hour before class.'

'Sorry, no lunch today, I'm marking.'

'You still need to eat.'

'I'll eat my sandwich in here. I really don't have time. Bloody George wants a markers meeting in two days time.'

'All right. Good luck.'

I wandered over to the café. There were strangers sitting at my table.

Home.

For the fourth day in a row, Sydney stopped and turned inwards to watch the streets fill with people. The cold eye of the television hardened the cares of masses into flying chairs and they fought over the idea of war. I took my binoculars and gazed over Western Sydney. I will never become accustomed to the view. On a clear day you can see the jagged outline of the city calling me in to the bottle glass harbour. Follow the arrow of my eye over the river, lowlands, Richmond, the edge of urban sprawl and you will feel a sense of stretching. No one can reach the city from here, glass box trapped.

On a cloudy day you see only the driveway that is steep and the curve of the single road plunging towards Grose Vale. I fear that the brakes on my car will give way, I fear fire will trap me here, I fear the river will suddenly swell and pour through the air vents of my car. I fear my friends will follow valleys instead of ridges and I will not be discovered.

Tribunal.

On the train heading to the Administrative Appeals Tribunal I was smug, apprenticed to the rule of law, learning to weave webs that suspend us all. I made a show dragging heavy texts from my bag, stacking them chest high. Earnestly positioning glasses, highlighter and pen. Distracted, conspicuously bent over bible thin pages the law, sensing its chance, burrowed in, cocooning my sense of self.

Breathless, I climbed from the platform to the street. Laden with fresh coffee and cigarettes joyously city crowd lost I took big steps and littluns towards the tribunal.

Inside I recognised the bare feel of the rooms, no one responsible for the odd piece of paper here and there. The over full bins in the hall. Scratches in the government funded facade.

Waiting in the hall people in suits were handcuffed and guarded. Men and women in uniform relaxed, drinking tea from foam cups while the handcuffed ones sweated. Relatives and supporters stood respectfully aside, checking and rechecking watches and handwritten notes.

Exactly as the clerk opened the doors inviting us in, the solicitor for the Minister swept past wafting perfume away with her leather briefcase. I noticed how clean she was, smoothing down her neat skirt suit.

Ms Solicitor spoke first and paused only twice in forty-five minutes to glance at her notes. She was spectacular. Her rendering of the relevant laws was meticulous, effortless. I followed her through legislation, tribunal decision, rulings and rules. I was convinced. Applicant Tran was not entitled to apply to have his bridging visa application reviewed. The law simply would not allow it. The tribunal was not granted powers other than the power to review the original decision of the decision maker. Applicant Tran had not made a valid application therefore there was no decision to review. Simple.

Applicant Tran was unrepresented. Applicant Tran spoke in hesitant heavily accented English. Applicant Tran spent five minutes thanking the tribunal and Australia. Applicant Tran wanted to say that he loved it in Australia very much. He loved his wife very much, he loved his baby very much. Applicant Tran's father asked to be heard. Applicant Tran's father thanked the tribunal and Australia very much. Applicant Tran's father said he loved his son very much and his wife loved her son very much. His brother loved him very much. Applicant Tran's father held his hands still by his side as he said of his son, 'He bought his baby many presents for Christmas. He always went to family barbecues. Please, he is to stay in Australia. He has no family in Vietnam. He does not speak right language for Vietnam. He has no job in Vietnam. He has no house in Vietnam. In Vietnam he knows not even one person. Please thank you very much. I hope very much my son allowed to stay here with his family.'

Ms Solicitor did not wish to respond. If it pleases the Tribunal Member she has a personal appointment in one hour. In seven minutes the Member outlined his decision. The Tribunal did not have the power to review a decision, as there had been no valid decision. Applicant Tran's application was not a valid application. Applicant Tran remained an unlawful non-citizen and as such would continue to be detained until such time as deportation to Vietnam could be arranged.

Mrs Tran was in the lift leaking tears silently as she stared at the floor indicator. I stared at her and stared at her hoping she might vaporise or change into a piano. I fell through the window of the law as Mrs Tran clutched her baby to her chest.

I reeled from the tribunal foyer into the street searching for a place to vomit. I was hot cold sweating. A sea of people surged around me. Shiny sleek masses glancing, moving only their eyes. Hand over mouth I made

it to the theatre toilets. Fumbling I vomited in the sanitary bin.

Back on the street I made it to Town Hall. I couldn't remember how to get home. My heart got louder, breathing louder. So many stairs. Pushed along by the crowds I loosened my legs and plunged downwards in a uniformed march of automatons.

I travelled up and down the grinding escalators asking everyone in uniform, 'Please, how do I get to Richmond? Please. Can you help me?' 'Over there, over there,' they pointed. I didn't know where and turning to ask they were gone.

I caught the train to Circular Quay in a desperate bid to find my bearings. Everyone can navigate home from the Opera House, surely.

I walked amongst buskers, silver painted top-hatted people and all the woeful saxophonists the Harbour could muster.

Past the MCA, past expensive restaurants I crossed a small bridge down to a floating pontoon. Discarding shoes, socks, jacket, backpack, glasses. Face down peering through the cracks I watched the bottom of the harbour sway, the city fell quiet. The bare wood rose and fell, warm glass harbour. I dreamed of Applicant Tran at home with his wife and child.

Lying in bed I felt the swell and retreat of the ocean. All night I dreamt I was vomiting out the law. I dreamt I was screaming, holding my head as words and books and judges poured into a river flowing down the mountain.

I had to purge myself of the law. I woke early and boxed all my textbooks, notes, research and essays. All I needed was someone to take them.

Mandy.

A day of choices. Swimming pool hollows in shadows against walls and trees. Sun patches lizard rock warm. Today is the long day, the hard day, something to train for. Classes from nine to nine. My friend Sebastian thinks it's awesome. He says, 'If you pack as much in to one day as possible that's less days at uni, more days at work, more money for me.' He seems genuinely excited by this.

I step directly onto the café veranda from the wide lawn and old trees with secret arbours. Anne perches lumpishly on a high stool bent over the crossword at a long bench flanked by students, including Mandy. 'Hi Anne, have you time for another coffee? I went to the tribunal yesterday, I...'

'Mirabel Clarke! What are you talking about? Time for another coffee? Do you know what time it is?'

'What?'

'The time. It's almost time for my Law of Associations lecture. It's non-

profit incorporated associations today, do you want to come?’

‘I can’t Anne. There’s just so much to think about. Anne?’ But she was already packing her bag, folding away her lunchbox and newspaper.

The only person I knew in the café was Mandy. Mandy’s all shaved head and low pants, dangling scarves and wraps like banners. She appears suddenly, all around campus, in my favourite haunts. Places I didn’t think to feel at home in til third year.

I tried to be subtle, started by talking to her about the price of textbooks, how difficult to raise the money, semester after semester while your clothes become ugly and your hair grows into wild split ended shapes. She is unconcerned, swaggers about wrapping some kind of old cloth artfully around her head. She sits leaning toward me asks, ‘So, you’re a good friend of Anne’s are you?’ I can see the wheels turning. She rattles her bangles, comes closer and almost whispers, ‘It’s just that she’s my lecturer and, as I’m sure you already know, it can help if you understand their style, you know.’ She straightens up and stirs five sugars into her health drink. ‘You know, you should quit smoking,’ she tells me. I raise an eyebrow and sip at my latte. She crosses her legs again leans forward over her lap, cup in hand. ‘So, what kind of marks does Anne normally give?’ I’m amused but not yet deterred. ‘Mandy, I’m thinking of giving all my textbooks away after exams are over. Would you be at all interested in them?’ I centre my eyes on her and watch. She doesn’t even stop to blink before asking again about Anne and her marking preferences. I tell her that Anne always gives people what they deserve. She picks up her books and bags and saunters off without even a backwards wave.

I had thought that I recognised in her, despite the pants, something familiar, that maybe she had been drawn out by the tide. I thought I saw in her eyes that horrible skyscraper of will she’d need to construct, just to keep up, be average. It must have been my reflection.

Horrorhead.

There is this other girl I call Horrorhead. First name Horror last name Head. Once, in the café she said, ‘Can I sit here?’ and I thought, why not? She said, ‘You can be my new best friend.’ I laughed and paid for her coffee. I thought she was joking even when she started to tell me, right to my face, that she was only just hanging on. That her Mother was going crazy again, she couldn’t leave because of her little brother, her step father had raped her when she was so small that now her uterus doesn’t work properly. She said any day now she was going to snap and become one of those crazy fuckers, like prostitutes on the Great Western Highway, although, she would never be a junkie because junkies are fucked and ought to be lined up and shot. She told me when her and her Mum lined up for food parcels from the Salvos that the fucking

junkies were there too, them and their fucking children, asking for food and blankets. Fucking junkies trying to take the stuff that poor people needed. I told her, 'I think we might have quite different opinions on this matter but I have to go now. Have to go to the library, so, I'll see you around maybe.'

She came with me to the library.

Next day in Criminal Evidence she shouted, 'Hey Mirabel!' and threw her bag on the desk next to mine. 'Now we can sit together.'

All through the lecture she whispered at me, rasping, filling my nostrils with foul air.

'You know that it doesn't matter what happens to the laws of evidence on domestic violence. You know that there's nothing anyone can do. Most of those women don't really want to be rescued.'

'No,' I said. 'No, you are wrong.'

She whispered louder and louder, 'I grew up in Queensland, on a farm, and all those women on farms got smacked up and there's nothing they can do about it. If they try and leave the men will kill them. If they try and call the cops it doesn't matter cause they never follow through, they just get bashed until they say it was a mistake, an accident. There's nothing anyone can do.'

I told her she was wrong, she had to be wrong. 'We aren't sitting here debating the operation and merit of the law for the hell of it, you know. You're wrong.'

After class, I gave her cigarettes, paid for her can of coke, cut my lunch in half, so I could tell her about Sally.

Sally.

Sally used to work for an organisation that employed solicitors to travel all over regional NSW offering covert advice. Sally went to Griffith, Wagga, Dubbo, Forbes, Narrandera, and Gunnedah, driving and driving until she learned to write legal documents in her head. Word perfect and spell checked.

Sally advertised Australian Cooking Classes: 'Learn to cook for your Australian husband.' Sally picked the women up in a minibus. She wore a cotton printed dress and a cooking apron, ugly shoes and big glasses, thick flesh coloured stockings, flour down her front. Sally got out of the bus and knocked on every front door asking for the Missus in flat broad vowels.

In community halls solicitors, doctors, counsellors demonstrate mashing spuds, pricking sausages, making rissoles. Sally would sit with the women asking, 'How many children, do you have any family, and do you need to see a nice lady doctor? That lady making tea, she's a doctor.'

Sally engineered escape plans, arrests, briefed prosecutors and boxed lamingtons. Sally opened bank accounts, tracked down documents, filled out forms. Gave driving lessons, arranged emergency housing, wrote resumes and paid for international phone cards. At the end of each session Sally handed out the boxed lamingtons whispering, 'Tell your husband you made them in class.'

Once Sally found her boss sobbing on the floor. She said, 'Don't worry, just one of those days, we all sob on the floor after a while.' Sally told me it was tough but rewarding, she was making a real difference changing the course of lives, until Rita.

Rita met her husband back home, outside Manilla. He was so nice, so rich. He told her, 'If you come to Australia with me, I can give you a better life.' When they got back to Wagga Rita's new husband took her passport, burnt her papers. He hid the car keys and locked all the sheds. He kept the telephone locked in his office. He went out for days at a time. Rita had started to doubt that this was a better life. She signed up for Sally's cooking classes.

Rita's husband beat her, held her hand to the hotplate when she burned the chops, killed all her chickens with his bare hands when the eggs were underdone. Rita's new husband kicked her so hard he broke her leg. He tore her favourite dress into little pieces and pulled out half her hair. He punched her nose flat and raped her twice. Then Rita's husband Bob tied her to a tree with the dog's chain, went away for a week. When Sally found Rita tied there she was more dog than woman. Sally tried to describe the smell, the blood, the skeleton shape Rita had become. There were bones pushed her through her skin, bleeding and covered in dust.

Rita told the police that her husband was a good man. He sends five dollars every week to her mother in the Philippines.

Sally moved to Adelaide where she specialises in electronic financial transactions law.

Horrorhead laughed and said, 'I told you so, women like that are so stupid. Sally probably earns heaps more now anyway.'

That wasn't the point. Horrorhead always missed the point. Horrorhead spun slowly in a circle, arms wide and yelling, 'This isn't Wagga, this is Western fucking Sydney but it doesn't matter, it's all the fucking same.'

Walking backwards through a stone archway I watched her turn, eyes closed, palms turned to the sky.

I turned away.

'Mirabel. Mirabel, wait.'

It was Sebastian.

'Hey Mirabel I've been trying to find you. The Law Nazi's put up the marks for our Constitutional moot. I came second and I want to know who beat me.'

'Just be happy for once.'

'Come on Mirabel. Everyone's in the bar, Tamara's so drunk! She's sitting on some second year's lap. We're taking turns to sneak past her and report back to the others.'

'Not today, Sebastian. Not today.'

Adam.

This is Western Sydney. This is where boys film themselves doing burnouts and hand it in as art. This is where Governor Macquarie's vision of a new town amongst drastic cliff edges, bellbirds, valley bottoms blue scented eucalypts and worn velvet horses turned into an 80s suburban nightmare. Where the community celebrates its agricultural history by concreting wires into the footpath. Where UWS Hawkesbury has the highest number of reported rapes and almost the smallest student body. People blame it on the cowboys who come in from the country. Suddenly there are no rules so they travel in packs, cornering women under trees, against fences, behind the stables. Some people say it's inevitable, it's what boys do when they're not properly supervised. Some people say it's the girls. Prick tease. Can't blame a young man for doing what comes naturally. My friend Adam blames everything, everyone. Usually drunk, from the roof of his student dorm.

Adam's parents suddenly bought a farm near Mudgee three days after he finished high school. He was delighted to accept a scholarship to attend UWS Hawkesbury. His parents moved to Mudgee and Adam walked three blocks with a backpack and a milk crate to his new home on campus. I met him there one morning with take away coffee and a vase for his room. We snuck into the greenhouses and stole flowers.

Later there was a fire drill and fifteen cowboys suddenly filled the room shouting and dragging us by our armpits into the hallway. They kicked us. 'Stop struggling, you're supposed to be unconscious.'

They do this once a week. Adam asked them why he always had to be the unconscious one.

'It's because you're a fucken poofter mate.'

'I'm not gay.'

'Course you are. Why else would you be doing nursing?'

At first Adam thought their homophobia was hilarious. 'What does it matter if I'm not actually gay?'

'What if someone who is gay moves into your dorm? Don't you think you owe it to them to set an example of tolerance and understanding?'

'Not bloody likely. No one gay would dare go to UWS Hawkesbury. Everyone knows that in Richmond you get bashed if you're gay.'

The next week walking up the uni driveway at midnight, drunk, he was surrounded by four policing students. They took turns holding him

while the others danced about and punched him in the face. When he was lapsing in and out of consciousness they threw him on the ground and raped him. One of them yelled, 'That'll teach you to be a fucking faggot,' as they bolted.

I want to tell Sally about Horrorhead. I want to ask her what to do with Adam. How to stop him calling me at four am.

Anne.

Anne once told me to stop looking after Adam. She said, 'You can't drive over and talk him down off the roof every time he calls. Sit him down one day and present him with a list of all the reasons why you don't think he should jump off the roof. Tell him to refer to it when necessary.'

Anne said if he phones at four in the morning don't answer.

'But what if he jumps?'

'He probably won't.'

'What if he does?'

'Not your fault. If he's going to do it you can't stop him and if he's not going to he should stop bloody pretending and wasting everyone's time.'

Mandy.

Three hours later I have two lists, Why I Don't Think You Should Jump and Secretly Why It Might Be Best If You Do. Mandy wanders in to the café, she points at me and winks. 'Mirabel, looking good. I like your turban.'

Turban? I assume she is referring to my headband. I say thanks and spread out my books and papers a little more. Mandy twirls her scarves and sits on the chair right next to me, close enough to see her pores.

'Mirabel?'

'Yes.'

'How do you think you might feel about...?'

She's obviously come straight from mediation class. 'What Mandy?'

'How do you think you might feel about reading my essay for Anne, and, you know, like helping me with the tone of it and stuff?'

'I'm not really -'

'Great! That's great. I knew you'd do it. Thanks for all your help Mirabel. So, I'll call you tomorrow to set up a time to go over my essay. It would be best if you came to my house. Just so you know, I told them you were paying for my coffee as well. Sorry.'

She slapped down an enormous pile of paper and sauntered off

dragging her beaded scarf on the ground.

Fucking Mandy. She's somehow force-fielded against social norms. I can't think of a friendship close enough for me to order coffee and have them pay without asking. I can't think of a time when I could swallow my pride enough to ask.

Flipping through the essay I noticed the paper was heavy and watermarked, the edges were slightly rough, and the whole pile smelled vaguely of lavender.

'Hey Mirabel. Nice paper. I saw Horrorhead with some the other day. All the girls have got it now. Why's yours got M.F? I thought your initials are M.C?'

'What?'

'The paper, you know when you order the monogram.'

'Monogram?'

'Very funny. How did you go in Criminal Evidence?'

'I did as badly as it possible to do without actually failing.'

'How much?'

'Fifty one percent.'

'Really? Why? Hello, Sebastian speaking. Yes, of course.'

Sebastian pulled things out of his backpack and yelled, 'What?' repeatedly into his phone. I sat staring at Mandy's paper. I stared at it until Sebastian came back.

'I want some of this paper.'

'Why?'

'I don't want my essays to look worse than the girls. If they get extra marks for presentation I'll make a complaint.'

'Sebastian. I don't think anyone will get better marks for having expensive paper.'

'Of course they will.'

'Anyway, running late for Golden Keys. See you this afternoon in Civil.'

He's probably right about the paper. Once the Law Nazi subtracted five marks from my Constitutional Law essay for incorrect margin widths. It brought my mark down to a pass.

I decided to visit Anne and ask if she'll look over my list for Adam. I'm not sure any list will be enough for him. He's still got stitches in the back of his head. He hasn't heard anything from the police since they interviewed him on his third day in hospital. The policeman asked him if he thought he'd been asking for it by pretending to be gay.

There's a new door in the Law faculty, a massive pine green wooden door that blocks off the entire hallway from the reception area. It's supposed to be for security, to keep the staff safe from the students. Every morning Anne takes down a pile of American Law books and places them neatly on the floor, to hold the door open.

Anne isn't in her office. I leave my lists on her desk hoping she'll find them and call me.

Driving.

I am driving into darkness. The streetlights don't end altogether until after North Richmond, where the road curves crazily left and climbs into the night.

Feeling bottomless again I can't reconcile myself to this. Each heavy, scented page of Mandy's pushed me further from the law. Her grasp of counter intuitive concepts and complex reasoning is perfect. She swam effortlessly through three centuries of logic, theory and the evolution of legal reasoning. I imagine her sleeping peacefully, the floating forms of law texts dancing around her head while I stand at the window and watch.