

YL Short Story Competition:

THE 2011 YOUNG LAWYERS INAUGURAL SHORT STORY COMPETITION WAS A GREAT SUCCESS. AGREED THE QUALITY OF ENTRIES WAS EXCEPTIONAL. CONGRATULATIONS TO THE WINNER "IMAGINATIVE, CLEVER AND BELIEVABLE".

The Court's Order

by Chris McDermott

Golden, world-weary, his Honour sat pensively upright in his seat, ruefully aware of what he would shortly have to do. His duty, legally and morally, was to determine, finally, the issue before him.

What a task! his Honour thought. *What a terrible task!*

His Honour's eyes rested carefully on the twin pillars, or more aptly *hydra*, now before him that were to agitate this burdensome trial.

The Tall Man standing before him was, as ever, a figure to behold. Impenetrable, Santorini blue eyes stared back at him, recesses of dark brilliant thoughts reflecting the depths of unbounded sophisticated terror. His Honour noted his calm, his unnerving calm, as the Tall Man adjusted his left silver cufflink on his startling white Thomas Pink button cuff shirt. The Tall Man's Zegna, magnificently black, shimmered ominously beneath the light. The Tall Man's thick, meticulously set hair was an awful reminder of his Honour's own tragic hair loss.

If he's put half the effort into his submissions as he did his ensemble, I am in trouble, his Honour brooded.

To the Tall Man's left sat "She".

She had been before him now too long and knew far too much. Her knowledge exceeded his, yet he had been appointed (and highly so as Chief Justice). She, dressed in Carla Zampatti, decorated with a Burberry kerchief draped round her long, elegant neck, sat menacing despite her slight frame. So very beautiful, his Honour mused, so touchingly seductive in her gaze. Her actual age indiscernible under her pale doll-like skin. Her emeralds set in gold earrings matched perfectly the golden hazel eyes now set on his Honour, sweet threats marking time.

Throughout his illustrious career, marked by accolades and respect from the profession and the community, his Honour had prided himself on his stillness, on his ability to keep his temper, his "poker face", his stoicism under fire, a steely resolve rarely betrayed by his feelings. But She knew just what to say and just when to say it, just how to look and just how to stare such that his resolve began to crumble.

His Honour was the finest of judges and a good Chief Justice. But these advocates from Dante's Inferno were the only two that could make him feel faint-hearted.

The Tall Man spoke first.

His beautiful, dark and triumphant voice outlined in no uncertain terms the ambit of this extraordinary, horrible case. The Tall Man opened with a brief précis of the historical background, the scope of the dispute, what was sought. And then he launched calmly and methodically into his devastating attack of his opponent's case.

All the while, She, resplendent, her normally straight blonde hair trapped in a French twist bund, stared coolly at his Honour.

How he wanted this to end! How many years had it been since he first laid eyes on this formidable duo? How many gladiatorial disputes had his Honour determined between these two titans? His Honour felt that this decision, another in a line of impossible dilemmas brought to his lap by these devils, had deep and abiding consequences which he had hitherto yet to fathom.

The two of them were like a case study in damned symbiosis, each thriving only because of the other's existence. And he, facilitating their warfare into yet another determination, could do nothing but listen silently. The Tall Man and She knew each other better than his Honour knew himself. Locked, intertwined in the ultimate advocacy, the Tall Man and She almost looked pleased in the discomfort they knew they were causing him.

The Tall Man concluded, and sat, turning his awesome gaze to his Honour in the centre of this carnage. His Honour cursed quietly as he briefly matched the Tall Man's gaze. Which malevolent Queen's Counsel had taught him this brilliant technique of intimidation, this weapon of mass distraction of staring, unblinking? His Honour briefly speculated, his mind churning with images of former foes in advocacy, now much richer than he. Were these eyes Burnsian or Meyers-like? His Honour dared not say.

She then rose and spoke. Her voice, much softer, did not match the eloquence of her savagery. Soft and sweet, she corrected the Tall Man and countered effectively every and all of his hitherto convincing arguments. Her words, sharp as a scalpel, rested briefly on the air before they landed somewhere in the deep pit of his Honour's (unfortunately) ever expanding gut.

The Tall Man pithily responded to She's arguments as She garishly pursed her lips together in her signal of contempt. Now

Tall orders and true

THE JUDGES, LIV PRESIDENT CAROLINE COUNSEL AND LIJ MANAGING EDITOR MICK PASKOS, CHRIS MCDERMOTT FOR HIS WINNING STORY WHICH WAS DESCRIBED BY THE JUDGES AS

the Tall Man had undone the safety switch of his Magnum pistol and squarely pointed it at his Honour's chest.

And now they were both staring. Their horrific twin sets of awful eyes met his timid, tired gaze.

His Honour's mind was suddenly racing. Could he abdicate this responsibility to decide ultimately this matter? The jurisdiction had been invoked. A vague High Court haunting of authority bouncing through his mind: "... the Court upon an application properly made is under a duty to exercise its jurisdiction and is not at liberty to refuse to deal with the matter".

But his cowardice, his fear gripped him, throttled and strangled his brilliant mind.

Perhaps bias? Apprehended or actual? After all, he despised them both and could say so, but for his lack of courage. But they would not have it – they would demand that he decide, notwithstanding his repugnance.

There is no justice in this determination. This decision has no precedential value.

The decision would be of inconsequential moment – *de minimis non curat lex*. Yet, his Honour knew that this decision would somehow determine his own fate, his own being.

The Tall Man and She sat waiting.

Their silence filled his soul with dread. Worse still, his Honour could not reserve. Justice required Reasons *now*.

Justice delayed is justice denied. Justice denied is cowardice.

Here goes.

"I have made my decision," his Honour said.

"Yes, darling?" queried She sweetly.

"This'll be good!" the Tall Man sardonically quipped.

His Honour rose from his seat, briefly checked his Baume-et-Mercier watch and stared sadly out of the study's bay window. He commenced his Reasons.

"I do not think that Vue de Monde is the best choice for the reception."

She's eyes narrowed, slits of darkness suddenly cutting through the stillness of his Honour's broad, full study. Striding purposefully to the alcohol cabinet and pouring herself a generous Riedel glass helping of rich golden Cognac, She sipped, turned quickly, before she let her soft and awful voice lance across the room towards his Honour.

"That is *unfortunate*."

The Tall Man, now demonstrating mock restraint through his nuanced hubris, allowed a small smile to creep upon his ridiculously handsome face.

"So, you've decided that Grossi Florentino is it then?"

His Honour now braced himself.

"No."

Lightning fast in their unison, She and the Tall Man turned to each other, then his Honour and exclaimed "What?!"

His Honour continued bravely.

"This reception calls for restraint and simplicity. For our families to come together comfortably, and for our friends to have the opportunity to laugh and, well, have fun. This is *her* day after all."

Total bemusement mixed with alcohol and contempt exploded throughout the room.

"What the hell are you talking about?" The Tall Man had now lost all semblance of restraint.

His Honour turned back from the window.

"I think we'll have the reception here."

She and the Tall Man rose. Erect, beautiful in their postures, they turned their superiority to full beam.

"Just ridiculous!" the Tall Man snarled.

"You are a fool. A stupid, silly fool!" She insulted. "What the hell are you thinking? Clearly, you're not!"

The Tall Man now: "Dad, you cannot have this reception here!"

She now: "We're *not* having it here!"

His Honour finally: "Actually, darling, we are. My decision is final. I am paying for this event. And I have decided. My wife, you have no choice in this matter."

She and the Tall Man, glaring with rage, turned and stormed out of his Honour's study. In a huff, She turned and blurted:

"I wish you'd never retired from the Court! All you do now is sit in quiet judgment in this silly study! Why can't you just accept what I say when I say it? I am your wife after all!"

And then they were gone and his Honour was left in his study alone with his studious thoughts. He turned, now very weary, and sat in his favourite armchair. He turned to the book he'd been reading prior to the commencement of today's proceedings – *The Joy of Cooking* – and began to take notes for making *foie gras*.

From the quiet of his study, he could hear hard wooden doors cruelly slamming in the distance. His Honour smiled in the pyrrhic realisation that his decision was to be challenged by the *hydra* counsel and to be overturned by a higher Court of Appeal: his darling daughter. ●

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