

# Bullfry in the time of the Virus

In the early autumn of that year Bullfry lived in a shack at the coast that looked across the estuary and the ocean to Palm Beach. On the edge of the beach there were driftwood and boulders, dry and white in the sun, and the water was clear and swiftly moving and blue in the channels. Coles home delivery vans went by the house and down the road and the dust they raised powdered the leaves of the trees. The trunks of the trees too were dusty and the leaves fell early that year and we saw the vans driving along the road and the dust rising and leaves, stirred by the breeze, falling and the vans driving and afterward the road bare and white except for the leaves.

There had been little enough to do in Chambers as viral panic took hold. Alice had taken to polishing everything (including the skull on his desk) with a Dettol-soaked cloth – the air-purifier was on all day – the lifts were barred. Bullfry now wore an old bandana as a makeshift mask while seated at his desk. Occasionally the telephone rang but it was not a solicitor with a set of instructions but a fellow barrister condoling on the absence of work, and the general lassitude which inevitably followed. *Le penible fardeau de n'avoir rien à faire!*

The coffee shops of Phillip Street were shuttered; the street itself deserted. The Cooperative Book Shop, sad testament to the times, had closed its doors for the last time – his membership (first acquired almost fifty years ago) was now, presumably, worthless. On the corner where the old Law School had proudly stood, a new block of luxury apartments rose steadily and threateningly over the church of St James – the Sydney Bar at prayer – and yet, funnily enough, most of the lecture theatres in the law school's new campus site were internal, like the old. Why then sell the freehold along with most of the other Challis patrimony?

He had taught there for many years in the evening, unpaid and unthanked; but teaching had had its indirect forensic advantages. For many years he had shared his weekly evening timeslot with that great and lamented jurist, DG Hill, who lectured on all aspects of taxation law in the room next door. At the hour break in their respective LLM classes they would chat briefly – this camaraderie had meant he always received a kind and attentive hearing in that particular court.

And what of the Law Society Dining Room where he frequently enjoyed the

'two course' special over a shared bottle of rosé with an ageing retired jurist? The last time he had proposed lunch with his boon companion, the only possibility was a shared sandwich from the takeaway in the MLC Centre! Thus, he decided to go into 'lockdown' further North.

On this morning, awakened as the first kookaburras called across the water, he sat bolt upright in bed in his Qantas onesie. Was his knee holding up after the 'lunges' on the deck with his online yoga teacher? His blood pressure machine 'reported' in a Dalek-voice that his reading was 'pre-hypertension' – no doubt it was coming down as he lowered the number of 'units' of red wine he consumed each day, and no longer faced the distressing prospect of waiting to get on via a truncated telephone-hearing in the Federal Magistrates' Court. Besides, how many comorbidities could one barrister support?

The fires of summer had been bad enough – endless days with the temperature near to 40 degrees – smoke blackening the southern skyline – the atmosphere mephitic – then torrential rain which had washed away much of the vegetable patch and resulted in huge tree trunks, ash and kindling, and like detritus being carried downstream to be cast up on the beach – almost no cicadas (unlike Ethiopia which was experiencing a plague of them of Pharaoh-like proportions).

He thought back to the evening, decades before, when he had eaten pangolin on the China coast. He had crossed the border with anchor-clients for a signing to record the transfer of the client family's hotel businesses. Custom dictated that there be a large feast to celebrate the event, and that he, as an honoured *gweilo* adviser, be given first-choice of the exotic fauna on the Lazy Susan – how to choose between the novelty of the owl, and the pangolin? He had plunged in with his chopsticks, and done justice to both. From memory, the pangolin had been rather chewy.

Had eating pangolin decades ago conferred any immunity? It seemed unlikely, although he had had plenty of 'sharing' diseases in his career – amoebic dysentery in the jungle of east Africa from eating a tainted watermelon while heading to Dar on the TAZARA rail line, unwisely not refused when offered by his generous fellow passengers – hepatitis in Hong Kong after greedily consuming a large plate of pippies off Lamma – the week in ICU when his lungs had collapsed – on and on the list could go – he had looked death



in the face at least once a decade – he must surely be heavily immuno-compromised.

Would his practice 'snap back' once the viral fugue lifted? It seemed doubtful – the elasticity of his practice could be likened to a favourite pair of underpants, the waistband of which has gone after years of faithful service. Didn't a stretched tendon take much longer to recover than a simple break of the ankle? If that analogy applied then it could be many months before his practice (and income) recovered, if it ever did. At some stage, you outlive your solicitors. You become co-dependent for the odd stray brief on one or two older attorneys who continued to practise for want of anything better to do.

And in the interim, those counsel who depended upon a steady flow of appearance