

Legally Blind

Elizabeth Gasgoine | 2009



In what she describes as a 'cautionary tale', Elizabeth Gasgoine, in her debut novel *Legally Blind*, lays bare the life of a newly qualified female solicitor working in a Sydney firm. Rather than being a feminist tract, this is a comedic romp based on Gasgoine's experiences as a solicitor. Think *Bridget Jones's Diary* meets *Hell has Harbour Views*.

While lacking the polish of those two seminal works, this novel is nevertheless a solid first attempt at the genre. The plot is ambitious yet well thought out and intriguing enough to keep the reader interested to the end. There are some good lines: when the protagonist, Genevieve Selwyn, is asked whether she

remembers signing her employment contract she thinks 'all it meant to me was, 'Have job. Pay rent. Buy shoes''. The critical court room scene is particularly well written and experienced advocates will find it entirely authentic.

Some of Gasgoine's characters are well observed, in particular the three long-lunching, work-shy, male partners for whom Genevieve works. I suspect that these characterisations may have ruffled a few feathers in a particular law firm in Sydney.

From the protagonist's self-absorbed barrister boyfriend to the brutish male counsel Genevieve instructs, barristers are cast as misogynistic, dismissive and devoid of even the most basic of people skills.

For anyone who started out as a solicitor in a mid-to-large sized city firm this novel will resonate: impatient judges lacerating the ego; clients with dubious motives and the tyranny of accruing billable hours. One male colleague had to stop reading *Legally Blind* as it 'cut too close to the bone' in relation to his own experiences as a junior solicitor.

Warning: the New South Wales Bar is not portrayed in a favourable light in this novel. Gasgoine's rancour for its members is palpable. From the protagonist's self-absorbed barrister boyfriend to the brutish male counsel Genevieve instructs, barristers are cast as misogynistic,

dismissive and devoid of even the most basic of people skills. The members of 'Sir John Kerr Chambers' are a particularly pathetic set. I did not recognise in these characterisations any fellow members of the bar. However, I am sure that members of the bar who have been around longer than me will derive amusement from working out who is who.

So this is a cautionary tale for the bar as well. We need to think about how we treat our instructing solicitors and bear in mind that today's bumbling, inexperienced baby

solicitor is tomorrow's partner, empowered to make (what is to us) the all important decision as to who to brief.

Or empowered to write and publish a novel holding the bar up to ridicule.

Legally Blind is self-published and can be purchased through the web site: www.legallyblindthenovel.com for \$24.95 plus shipping.

Reviewed by Melissa Fisher