

Gin and other Drugs

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THE STENCH OF piss lingered in the cobblestone alleyway. It was daylight and the sign on the bar door said 'Closed'. *Hell*. The street was filled with polished boots, neckties and ambition. I looked at Remo. *What are we doing here?* He passed me a bottle in a brown paper bag. Then it suddenly occurred to me how we got here. It was that evil substance, cheap gin. I took a nice, long swig. It crept down my neck like second-rate razor blades. *I was in Hell*.

Now the battle to get home. It involved crossing a river. Remo said that he hoped no canoe was involved. I laughed with relief at that. I only became aware of the reek of liquor on my clothes when I boarded the tram. I became nervous and hoped to hell that the passengers would be too polite to draw attention to it. No one did. But I could tell they were only too aware of it. We may as well have been wearing signs that said 'fare evaders', I thought. We made it into town where Remo suggested we go to a bar to take the edge off for the next tram trip home. *Maybe one drink*.

The one gin and juice turned into a couple of golden ales and a couple of golden ales turned into a couple of whiskies and an argument with an old drunkard about Paul Kelly. *I didn't care for Paul Kelly*. We left the bar about six hours later to find the streets of Melbourne crammed with polished boots, neckties and the stench of battered ambition. We stumbled onto a tram making our way back home. Home, where the streets would be littered with lowlifes and drunks and deadbeats and junkies. I sighed with relief.