

The End

Surviving on the streets of a city like Sydney is fraught with perils and tragedy; I never in my wildest imaginings, envisioned that I would end up drinking on a park bench with other drunken bums.

Even those who possess "street savvy" cannot escape the impending annihilations administered by the street and its characters in their daily pursuit of whatever substance they are addicted to. You have no friends; only using or drinking buddies. These associations can end just as quickly as they started, depending on the needs of the day.

I have lived on and off the streets for about six years, and this time around I have dug myself in so deeply, that I have come to believe that this is my destiny: that this is where I will die. There is no light at the end of the tunnel, no miracle escape plan, no saviour that can rescue me.

The future is non-existent; every day is just another journey into the abyss; which is a drunken oblivion. Days merge into one another and time has no meaning. It's not like you can just get a job, get a life and everything will be just fine. I am beyond redemption. I have slowly but surely become the lowest of the low, sleeping on the street and stealing to survive, buy drugs and alcohol.

The streets are my lounge room and its quiet places my bedroom at night. I am barred from all of the homeless men's shelters for one reason or another and I have burnt all my bridges with long term friends and associates.

I am tired of the city and paranoid of its people. I know just about every junkie, drunk, prostitute and nutcase that frequents the street. I have to leave town; too many people want to kill me for one reason or another; or at least I think they do!

For the first time in twenty years, I am not on bail; I don't have to report to probation and parole, am not on methadone, in a relationship, connected to some sort of criminal group or have any drug addiction

dependent on the city for its maintenance. I am free to leave the city and its toxicity. This realization strikes a chord of adventure in my heart, for the first time in a long while, I am free to ramble.

"I'm leaving! I am going to buy a train ticket and get the fuck out of here! Yeah that's the plan" I say to my self in a drunken haze of enthusiasm.

I collect my dirty old army surplus sleeping bag from its hiding spot behind the power transformer on Bourke Street, and then head down towards Central Railway Station.

Navigating my way from Bourke Street down towards Central, is like running the gauntlet, I know all the hanging spots and the likely hood that I would bump into any of the numerous folks that haunt this part of town is high. The fear of such chance encounters is at the front of my mind, for I don't want any one to spoil my escape or sabotage my brilliantly disorganized plan. My eyes and ears survey the surrounds as if I am trekking through the jungle in some kind of world war, in which the enemy could ambush me at anytime. I pace down Devonshire Street, "After all, the only people that use this track are the methadonians" I mutter to myself.

I am in luck, as it is much too late in the day for the daily migration along the well worn trail to the methadone clinic and back taken by many of the addicts that live in the surrounding inner west of the city.

I stop in to see Rachael, (my ex) at work.

"Hi" she says, in that way that only she can; as if she really wanted to say it. "How are you? You look fucking terrible"

"I am O.k." I say convincingly, putting on a brave face that is part of my street savvy and it was no time to show weakness, after all I am in battle mode and the enemy is still at large.

"I haven't seen you for ages. I was beginning to worry that maybe you were dead. I know that you weren't in gaol, because you would have called me on the phone if that happened. So I just assumed that you were

dead.....or something” I could see the hurt in her eyes, there was no time for emotional espionage, I was already wounded so I cut to the chase.

“I dropped in to say goodbye and to say thank you to your mum for bailing me out of gaol that time, I’m going away today. I’ve had enough of this place. I really want to get out of Sydney!”

“That sounds like a good idea ...where are you going?”

I hadn’t thought that far ahead.

“Byron Bay” I extemporize.

“Byron Bay, that sounds great. Warren and I were up there not so long ago, you’d love it up there. What are you going to do? Where will you stay... I suppose it’s better than sleeping on the street down here”

Rachael knows what to say and what not to say, by the dulcet tone in her voice, something has changed. This she can not hide. She is happy.

“Give me a cuddle” She feels warm and smells so good; fuck I loved this woman.

Despite my overwhelming feelings of remorse for the loss of the relationship, I continue on my mission. I am about to enter the most dangerous territory of all; Central railway station. My pulse thumps in my brain as I draw nearer. The coast is clear. I cross Elizabeth Street into the Devonshire street entrance of Central Railway, and then make my way to the country trains ticket office.

The array of monitors displaying destinations, departure and arrival times, have that “Government Blue” hue about them; that seems to embellish the décor of every government institution or office, that I have ever visited or had the pleasure of being a guest in. I am perplexed. The thought of having some control over my own destiny overwhelms me; this soon passes as I approach the ticket office.

“Can I help you sir” the ticket guy says in a way that can only be described as austere.

"Um ...yeah, how much is a ticket to Byron bay, one way, pensioner concession"

I fumble through my pockets to produce a somewhat disfigured pass. He takes my card cautiously (in case it has the Ebola virus) places it delicately on the counter and starts entering details into the computer keyboard. I can tell that he is relieved that a window of glass shields him from me.

"\$2.20 if you use the travel voucher on this. Would you like to use it?"

"Yes please" I say excitedly. After all this concession card is not even mine. I fleeced some guy on the street when he had passed out drunk in the park. Nothing like an opportunity, is there?

The station attendant makes a phone call, he rattles off a litany of numbers, and this takes an eternity. Finally he brandishes the counter with my one way ticket to freedom.

"\$2.20 thanks. Your train leaves at blah blah on platform blah, blah and arrives" I am not listening, I am too excited, my head is swimming. I have things to do and places to go (for once). I am a real mover and shaker, I have my shit together and what's more I can prove it! I am going somewhere. I give him the money and proceed to the nearest seat. I open up my bag and pull out my mix which is in a cola bottle, undo the lid and brace my self. I take a sip from it..... swallow and breathe deeply. It burns; metholated spirits always does. Jeff Buckley's all time classic "So real" loops in my head: I think I am having a moment of clarity; there are many things to do.

I look up at the monitors, there is plenty of time. I scan my mental directory of bottle shops in the immediate vicinity that are easily robbed and set a course that will avoid the "dream terrorists" that wait patiently to launch there counter attack on my escape plan; by offering some drugs, or asking me if I can score. I would have to accept, as I cannot resist the lure of a shot of heroin or cocaine. This would be the end of my brilliant plan, as I know it. I only have enough staunchness of thought to get myself on today's train; tomorrow may never come.

I march up to liquor store behind Liverpool Street; this one is great if you need to steal a bottle or two of top shelf. The owner, an old Jewish guy, had some idea underneath his Kippah (those hats that Jewish men wear) that I was stealing, but never went any further than looking in my bag.

He never suspects that the stolen bottle of Bourbon is tightly stashed between my strides and my belly. Furthermore, I think he is too afraid to ask. I leave there, as casually as always, and head back to Central sporting a large bottle of Jim Beam.

Arriving back at the station, I still have about half an hour till departure.

Making a mix of Metho and coke is not the kind of activity done on a train station. It is best done in a clandestine manner, hidden away in some dark corner. I head into the toilets and find an empty cubicle. I carefully prize the top of a 2 litre bottle of vanilla coke, which I believe is scientifically designed to be mixed with Metho; as it seemed to soften the brutal flavour that can only be described as a "sting." I have a sip then pour about half down the toilet. I pour a full bottle of "sting" into the coke bottle, then force the cap back on so as it appears unopened.

I stuff the bottle into my bag, heading anxiously towards the platform. Checking my ticket, I board the train and make my way through the carriage and take my seat. A woman and her two children come and sit down in the other three seats that make up the cluster.

"Hi, how's it going? My name is Laurence" I extend my hand as the woman starts frantically checking her ticket.

"Hi"

"Beautiful day isn't it? "

I can tell something isn't quite right. The woman catches the attention of the guard, gets up and has brief words with him just out of earshot. He nods his head looking towards me.

"Excuse me sir, can I have a word with you? Bring your bag." He

gesticulates as to suggest following him hastily. He seems bothered as he minces ahead of me through the narrow passage between the seats.

"Have you been drinking sir?" I know that this queen of the rail has been around. He certainly appears alert and perceptive, besides you don't need to be Sherlock Holmes to work this one out.

"Yeah I had a couple of drinks"

"Sir I am going to have to ask you if there is any alcohol in your bag" He looks impatiently at my old black bag. I reach in and pull out the bottle of bourbon that I have purposefully stashed in anticipation of this event.

"Is that a bottle of coke in there sir"

"Yes it's unopened, see" I show him, he nods.

"I am confiscating this alcohol sir; you can have it back when you reach your destination. Can I see your ticket please?"

"Yep, no worries" I reach into my coat and he grabs the ticket out of my hand stuffing the bottle under his arm pit at the same time. This is almost rehearsed and everything is going to plan, almost like some well written denouement.

"Tony, can I see your pension card please?" I hand it over.

"You need to get yourself a new one. It's looking a bit worse for wear isn't it!" He is looking me up and down as if to say that it is actually me that was worse for wear.

"Yeah it's done a few miles" I say casually.

"Tony I am going to move you to another little seat. We have had complaints that you may have a personal hygiene problem" He states this sounding not unlike a mother who's baby just soiled there nappy, He takes out his pen to write on my ticket, and then ushers me to my new seat, in a less densely populated area of the Brisbane XPT.

"There you are Tony. If I hear a word out of you, you will be thrown off the train and if there is any drama, we will have the police meet you at the station. Understand?" He says ever so politely.

"Just come and see me when we get to Byron and I will give you back your bourbon, have a nice trip and Tony. Try having a shower sometime with soap"

Only gay people have such a way with words and I think this to be very entertaining; this young good looking guy who obviously deals with drunken bums every day, bringing all the qualities of an international airline stewardess to the trains.

"Only in Australia could you see this." I say to myself and chuckle under my breath as he minces down the train showing off the captured prize to his work mates. They all turn and look at me embarrassingly; so as if I can't see. I don't care what they are thinking; my mission is so far a success.

"Get fucked" I say to myself opening my mix and have a few gulps.

The train pulls out of Central slowly. The big diesel engines throb as it sways from side to side. I look out the window and feel my tear ducts starting to swell. A tear rolls down my cheek. I am not sure if I am happy or sad, just pissed and emotional I guess?

I start reminiscing; romancing about the people and places I am leaving behind. I take another drink and then another.

"That's better"

There seems to be three distinct personalities that would surface as I become intoxicated; the grumpy narcissistic, the playful happy go lucky socialite or the melancholy depressive. Sometimes they run in succession, other times they would run like a mode for days. Today the playful socialite is emerging.

The wheels click and clack as we sway through Hornsby. I start to desire

some company to share my excitement. Big mistake! I got up and started through the carriages looking for similar folk. There has to be other drunks on the train. Maybe I will get lucky and meet "Box car Billy" that legendary drunk who lives a care free life travelling up and down the coast playing his harmonica and telling incredible stories. Maybe we can exchange drinking adventures and share our collective wisdom. Maybe I am "Box car Billy" and didn't even know it! The possibilities seem endless.

Then I see her. A beautiful young girl with the most well kept dreadlocks I had ever seen, drinking a can of Gin. Can you believe it?

"Hi do you mind if I sit here for a while"

"No by all means sit down" she says welcomingly in a broad British accent. I have hit the jackpot. I can't believe my good fortune. I fall into the seat as the carriage lurches to one side.

"My name is Laurence" I hold out my hand, she takes it and firmly shakes.

"Marilyn"

"Please to meet you Marilyn. Where are you headed?" I ask in my best manners.

"Up to Brisbane to catch up with some friends I met when I was in Bali"

"Cool I am on my way to Byron to do some surfing" This is going extremely well, might even be love.

"A surfer"

"Yeah I surf all the time. I love it"

I hadn't been surfing for twenty years. I can't even walk up a flight of steps with out a drink let alone paddle a surf board.

"Where do you go for a smoke in here?" she asks ever so daintily. This is

my chance to prove what a great provider I am going to make as her husband. I will demonstrate my knowledge of "Train savvy". So early too; lady luck is on my side all the way, I can just tell.

"Follow me!" I stumble as we head into the disabled toilet. I figure that these would be bigger and less likely disturbed. Surely she was going to pop the question and within moments we would be making mad passionate love, caught up in an endless embrace. I know she finds me totally irresistible. I close the door.

She is incredibly gorgeous; her skin is perfect with big green eyes that compliment her tanned complexion. She fumbles through her bag suddenly emerging with what looks like a big bud of hydro skunk.

"Aphrodisiacs" I say to my self, this is getting better all the time. If only those scum bags on the street could see me now.

"Are you any good at rolling spliffs?" she asks handing the little bag to me.

"Yeah not bad, three papers? How much spin do you like?" I spout out like a pro from way back.

"Sounds great"

I do my best and within minutes as if by magic, I have manufactured a giant joint fit for royalty.

"Blow the smoke down the drain hole in the floor; it goes straight out of the train" as I light up, take a puff and pass it to her.

The goes straight to my head as it mixes instantly with the copious quantity of alcohol consumed already. I sit down on the sink and start feeling sick.

"Are you alright? Pretty good stuff isn't it" she says from what seems like one hundred yards up the street.

"Yeah" I start to remember why I don't smoke pot any more; I become

paranoid and messy. I put on a brave face. We start some small talk, open the door and make our way back to the seats.

"Are you any good at crosswords?" Marilyn asks.

"Oh yeah give me a look" Little does she know I am a fucking genius and now I have an opportunity to humbly display my prowess. I take another drink, a big one so as to over ride the pot. I am pretty stoned. The "sting" will soon sort that out.

"A four letter word....Starts with E and means to leave" she says gently. Surely this isn't a hint, couldn't be, just coincidence. I am paranoid.

"Um" and before I have even a chance, she starts to jot down "exit" at the same time as saying it.

"A six letter word ends with E means a marching show, I got it, parade"

I am not doing to well, believe it or not. It is nicer just to watch and listen to her accent anyway.

"What's that you're drinking? It smells like gin" she asks curiously, looking at my coke bottle.

"Home made gin" I say ever so proudly.

"Yeah I made it myself"

"Can I try some?"

"I must warn you its very strong, here, where's your glass?"

"I'll get a cup from the water machine"

In saying that she jumps up, squeezing past me. I try to hide wandering eyes as I check out her perfect feminine butt. She soon returns with a small white paper cup. I poured a small amount into her cup and watch for the reaction as she takes a sip.

"Phew!" She spits it out and starts dry reaching. After a moment, she composes her self and asks gaspingly.

"How do you drink that? It tastes like shit!" Just then a deep voice from across the aisle interrupts.

"He is an arse hole! That's how he drinks the shit" a burley guy with short cropped hair looks angrily at me.

"You smell mate and that's not home made gin, its Metholated Spirits" I look around and see a fork in his hand. He is eating dinner.

"Mind your fucking business mate or ill take that fork off you and stick it in your fucking eye... bitch!"

The next thing I remember is standing on the platform of Wauchope station, bottle of bourbon in one hand and my bag over my shoulder. I can see the Brisbane XPT as it speeds off into the distance. My head is sore and it is raining. No it is pissing down!

"Must have got me with a surprise punch"

One thing I've noticed about drunks, amongst other things, is that there all the hardest workers, the best fighters and above all the best lovers, I was no exception.

I stagger across the road and hail a taxi

"Take me to the beach"

The drive to the beach is a bit of a blur. I fall in and out of consciousness, only coming too when the driver forces me out of the taxi after collecting his money.

I fall asleep in a BBQ shelter mumbling to myself, as the bottle of bourbon disappears rapidly down my gullet. The brutal fantasy of "what if I and I should have" becomes more vivid as I slip into unconsciousness.

The Fig Tree

There is nothing more feared by an alcoholic than running out of booze. I am usually pretty organized, given the events of last night, I suppose I fared well.

Waking up before the sun is not unusual for me and this day is no different. The first thought that enters my mind is "Where the hell am I going to get a drink?" I roll a cigarette.

Having a smoke in the morning before a drink is not a habit that I normally take part in; the coughing episodes usually lead to a nice old gut wrenching chunder.

Now that is over, I set sail for the nearest 24 hour servo or convenience store. I hide my sleeping bag; hanging from a tree, so it can dry out then stash my bag in the bushes. I feel like shit.

I don't have your run of the mill hang over that "Johnny Barley Corn" might have after a big Saturday night. This is more like my brain had been run over by a Mack truck and some one had flogged me after wards just to finish me off. That's right, they did!

I shuffle along the highway until I come to an all night servo. I stuff a bottle of "sting" down my pants and pay for a tin of soup. This is always a good idea to buy some thing, as it diverts suspicion. I don't need any drama, well not before a drink anyway.

Walking back, I find an empty orange juice bottle as the sun starts rising. I make up a mix with water out of some bodies garden hose.

Metho and water is disgusting. This is nothing new; I am a stoic from way back. I was too frazzled to think about buying some Coke at the servo.

[Click to purchase a copy](#)