

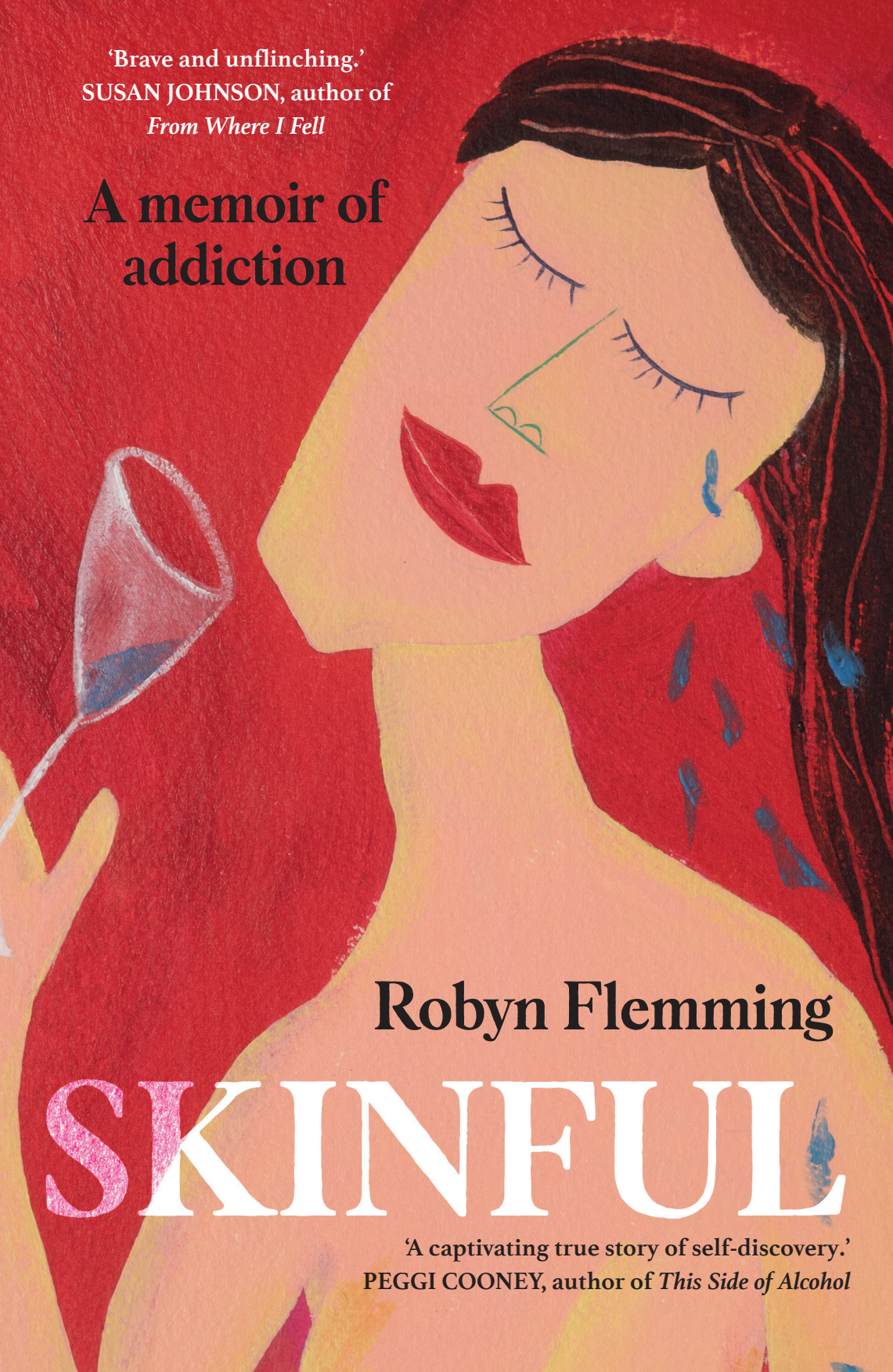
'Brave and unflinching.'
SUSAN JOHNSON, author of
From Where I Fell

A memoir of
addiction

Robyn Flemming

SKINFUL

'A captivating true story of self-discovery.'
PEGGI COONEY, author of *This Side of Alcohol*



SKINFUL

A memoir of addiction

Robyn Flemming



‘You are so fucking ugly.’

The taunt is from the passenger in a sedan that has slowed alongside me. It skewers me like a spear.

I hear laughter as the car accelerates away, before the shock and the thumping pulse in my temple block all sounds of the night.

What has he seen? Is my shell cracking apart? Is my jitteriness in my own skin apparent now even to a passing stranger?

Charlie is pawing and sniffing at a patch of grass beside the path. Butch is motionless at my feet, gazing up at me intently. I look away; it’s too much, all this scrutiny.

I turn back, aborting our walk. The serrated edge of my house key bites into my palm. At my door, it takes three stabs before I can insert the key in the lock.

I don’t want to feel this.

‘Sorry,’ I text to Diane. ‘Won’t run tomorrow. Sore knee.’

My need for numbness is greater than the shame of lying to a friend.

I break the seal on a new bottle of wine and pour large dollops into the glass I’d used earlier. The first cold mouthful tastes like the answer to any question I could ask.

PART ONE

Can't find reverse

CHAPTER ONE

‘I don’t want to alarm you,’ my boss said one day when we were having after-work drinks, ‘but I need you to go up to Hong Kong for a week.’

Our boutique publishing company was producing a four-colour business guide that was being typeset and printed there. I was the production editor.

‘There isn’t time to courier the proofs. You can go up to do the final checks.’

I exhaled cigarette smoke and reached for my wine glass.

‘I’m not alarmed.’

Ten days later, I was in a taxi headed to Quarry Bay, an area that was home to Hong Kong’s big English-language publishers, one of them a sister company to ours. As the small red-and-white sedan wove in and out of traffic on overpasses, underpasses and in-between passes, I swivelled my head from side to side, wanting to see everything at once.

I’m definitely not in Woolloomooloo anymore.

‘Here, missy,’ the driver said, pulling up outside an unremarkable commercial building.

I stubbed my cigarette in the ashtray near the door handle and dug in my purse for enough of the unfamiliar coins to include a tip with the fare.

It was exciting to be in a new place. I hadn't travelled much: to New Zealand as a teenager in the 1960s, and to visit my parents after they moved there from Australia a decade later; to Bali and Java in my twenties; to England on a three-month work assignment at age thirty. The extensive travel that a psychic had predicted seemed unlikely, although I gave some credence to an astrologer's comment that I had a tendency to change my circumstances instead of myself.

On the flight up from Australia, I'd done some reading about the British-administered territory's status as a gateway to China. The motherland had reversed its former economic policy and was now receptive to foreign direct investment in all its forms. Like a puppet master, China's silk-clad arms were pulling all of Hong Kong's strings and making it dance.

It seemed that everyone wanted to jump on board, and within days I wanted to do the same. The entire city hustled and bustled around the clock. It was exhilarating to walk the streets, or to perch upstairs on the front seat of a double-decker tram or to ride the Star Ferry across Victoria Harbour to Kowloon. The energy of the place suited me.

At the office where I would be based for the week, I went in search of a coffee. In the kitchen, an Englishwoman introduced herself as Linda. 'I heard we had a visitor from the Sydney office,' she said. 'Welcome!'

That evening, I took the funicular tram from Central up to The Peak and walked around Lugard Road. The city lay at my feet, the noise of traffic muted. Across the harbour, beyond Kowloon Peninsula and the New Territories, lay the border with China. It was a stunning looking city; vibrant, like Sydney's Chinatown on steroids, yet familiar, perhaps because of Britain's colonial imprint.

‘With your experience, you could probably find a job here, if you wanted one,’ Linda said. We were having drinks at a hotel in Central a few days later. I’d mentioned that I’d hopped from job to job during my ten years in publishing, seeking variety and new challenges. ‘There’s a lot going on here. And it’s a good place to be an expat.’

‘I *have* been thinking about it,’ I said, and reached for my cigarettes and lighter. ‘I can picture myself living here, but it’s a big decision. I like my job in Sydney and my life there. I wasn’t planning to make any changes.’

‘It could be your destiny. This trip might be a turning point in your life.’

A curl of smoke wafted in the air between us.

‘Maybe ...’

A HOTEL DOORMAN pocketed my small tip as he opened the taxi’s rear passenger door. Soon, the cab was caught up in the stream of traffic winding up Cotton Tree Drive towards the towering apartment blocks of Mid-Levels. Just past a white, colonial-style building, we turned off and headed to Lan Kwai Fong, a narrow, sloping, cobblestoned street lined with bars, cafés and restaurants. My destination was 1997. The name of the restaurant referred to the date, still twelve years away, when British rule would come to an end and Hong Kong would again become part of China.

I drank Australian chardonnay with my meal and thought about Linda’s comment. Was I at a turning point? Did my future lie in Asia? It was an unexpected notion. Sydney had been my home since 1971, when I moved from Albury, in regional New South Wales, to start my university studies. It hadn’t occurred

to me to live anywhere else. Would I find a job if I moved to Hong Kong? Or could I find enough work as a freelance editor? I liked the security and salary that came with a full-time position. I didn't have any savings to fall back on. Would my lack of Cantonese be a problem? I had a busy social life with friends in Sydney, mostly seeing live music in pubs and wine bars, and eating in cheap ethnic restaurants. I ran a couple of mornings a week with a bunch of guys along Bondi Beach and in Centennial Park. Would I want to leave that life behind and start again from scratch in a foreign city?

And what about Tom? I sighed and reached for my glass. *If only he were different, we'd be perfect together.*

We had met in our mid-twenties, seven or eight years before. I'd just started working in publishing; Tom was finishing a degree. From the moment I met him, I wanted to be with him. He was intelligent, creative, handsome, funny. But the pull was almost biochemical: the water in every cell in my body sloshed towards him. As I came to know him over the years, I continued to want him, but I couldn't figure out if he wanted me. Although he sought me out, he could be remote, critical, and dismissive of emotions. Sex was the only way to connect with him, and I became addicted to breaking through his barriers by bringing him to orgasm. For that brief time, he was mine.

Tom's closest relationship was with his dog. Whenever I slept over at his house, I had to compete with Rufus for his attention and affection. When Tom turned on his side, ready for sleep, Rufus would leap on to the bed and stretch out alongside him. Tom would wrap an arm around the dog's chest and nestle against his back. Soon, I'd hear the sound of man and beast gently snoring. If Tom later moved over to my side of the bed, Rufus would be lying flat on his back, his head on Tom's pillow, limbs splayed.

SKINFUL

I wanted not just physical closeness – for him to touch me more and to welcome my touches – but also a close emotional connection. Instead, each time we got together was like starting over. Every disappointment was a reminder to hold back, to protect my heart, to expect little.

I finished the last of the wine and gathered my things. No, it would be a mistake to put my life on hold for Tom.

CHAPTER TWO

The following Monday, back in Sydney, I gave four months' notice at work. 'I'm going to try my luck in Hong Kong,' I said to my boss. 'I can stay for ninety days on a tourist visa. I'll see what happens in that time.'

At the last major turning point in my life, at eighteen, I'd become independent of my family. In March 1986, at thirty-three, I was again embarking on an uncertain future.

Tom drove me to the airport and sent me on my way with just a brush of his lips across my cheek. If he regretted my leaving, he gave no sign. Even as I was about to reinvent myself, I wanted to know that he wanted me.

In Hong Kong, a serviced apartment next to a massage parlour in the red-light district of Wanchai would be my base for the first month until I found somewhere more affordable to live.

For the past few months on Sunday mornings in Sydney's Chinatown, I'd pored over the classified job ads in the English-language *South China Morning Post*. That exercise hadn't borne any fruit beyond noting the names of a few people to contact again on my arrival. I would have to wing it. With limited funds, I needed to find, complete and be paid for some kind of work within a month. I had an open return ticket to Australia, but I didn't want to have to use it just because I hadn't tried hard enough to make something happen.

When my reference books and stationery supplies were arranged neatly on the desk by the window that overlooked a grimy tenement building, I took a deep breath, gave myself a pep talk, then picked up the phone and called an editor at the *Post*.

‘Send me samples of your work,’ he said.

‘Um, I don’t have any. I’m not a journalist. But if you’ll give me a chance, I’ll give it a shot.’

‘The China Sea Yacht Race is coming up. Put together something on that and we’ll consider it. Give such-and-such a call. He can give you the names of some people to talk to.’

Enthusiasm counted for little against my inexperience, and I made a hash of the short piece on the famous ocean race from Hong Kong to Manila.

‘Thanks, but no thanks,’ the editor said. ‘You could try *The Standard*.’

The alternative English-language paper wasn’t interested either, but someone I had talked with about the race invited me out for a drink. At the main bar of the Foreign Correspondents’ Club, home to reporters and photographers who were covering events unfolding in Asia, I met someone who knew someone at a publisher of textbooks for the local secondary-school market. When I followed up the next day, I was invited to an interview. The publisher offered me a month-long contract to work in-house with another editor, Sue, on an illustrated geography textbook. The first payday would be the last day of the month, just before I ran out of cash.

My life as a freelancer had begun.

With guidance from Sue, I learnt how to shape raw text from specialist writers to suit the English reading level of Chinese-speaking teenagers. The book was also a perfect introduction for me to Hong Kong’s development from a largely barren rock,

when it became a British Crown colony in 1842, into a densely populated city.

Sue, too, was a smoker, and we worked companionably and productively in our cubbyhole of an office blanketed by a fog of cigarette smoke.

‘We’re having a party at our place tonight,’ she said one day. ‘Come along.’

A few hours later, my back was against a wall and a guy was chatting me up. I had a cigarette in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. The scenario was familiar, but the guy was American and I was on a small island off the coast of China. I was still getting used to the fact that my life had changed so dramatically.

Sue introduced me to a woman with a room for rent in an apartment in Mid-Levels.

‘It’s available now,’ she said. ‘A month’s rent in advance and two months’ security deposit.’

It was beyond my means, but she mentioned a members’ club, the Helena May, that rented out rooms. ‘It’s a bit more affordable than a flat. There are lots of rules, but it might suit you until you find your feet.’

‘I’ll check it out. It could be just the thing.’

The next week, my work contract was extended for another month and I was accepted as a resident at the Helena May from the start of April. The ‘HM’, the white colonial-era building I’d spotted from the taxi during my first visit, offered a respite for its members from the noise and smells of the city just outside its doors. It also provided affordable accommodation for single women with a foreign passport who were in Hong Kong on a work contract. As a self-employed freelancer I didn’t meet the last criterion, but the manager made an exception for me.

My large furnished room was on the second floor, with a

shared bathroom at the end of the hall. Downstairs, the lounge had wicker furniture, English and Australian women's magazines, and slowly turning ceiling fans. Filipino and Chinese staff served lunch and morning and afternoon teas to members and residents. The basement housed a lending library and a ballet school for tots. When Japanese forces had occupied Hong Kong during the Second World War, horses were stabled there.

Double doors from my room opened on to a concrete balcony that extended along the back of the building and overlooked a leafy, paved garden, the Peak Tram tracks and, just beyond, the feeder road to the upper slopes. To my right, apartment blocks were stacked one upon another up the hillside.

I smoked a cigarette and surveyed my new home with a happy heart. The shouts of children at play in a nearby schoolyard were audible over the sounds of the city: car horns and the constant swoosh of traffic, the distant clanging of a pile driver from a construction site, the rumble of the funicular tram. I'd given up my life in Australia to follow an impulse to move to an unfamiliar city in a different hemisphere. With no financial resources to fall back on, I'd known that I would have to swim hard, or sink. One month after my arrival, it seemed I might stay afloat for the time being.

WHEN THE WORK on the geography textbook wound up, a university press offered me a job editing a book about planned towns in the New Territories, the area between Kowloon Peninsula and the Chinese border. I loved that I was being paid to learn more about my new home.

I became pals with a group of Brits who lived at the HM. We would start each day at our regular table in the small breakfast

room for residents. We knew how we each liked our toast and our eggs, and who didn't like papaya. If it was someone's birthday, we might add champagne to our orange juice for a mimosa.

After breakfast, my new friends headed down the hill to their places of work in town. My editing project was to be done out-of-house, so I would set myself up at a table in the lounge with my papers, pens and correction fluid, and a second cup of coffee, and sign on to my time sheet. The job was straightforward: mostly smoothing out the language, applying the publisher's house style consistently, and fixing the spelling, grammar and punctuation. Residents weren't permitted to run a business from the HM, but as a freelancer I was in a grey area that the manager had decided to tolerate.

The lounge had a regular rhythm. Mid-morning, members trickled in to meet a friend, return a library book, or play a game of bridge or mahjong. At lunchtime, there was a flurry of activity. Located on the edge of frenetic Central, the HM was a civilised oasis that offered familiar comfort foods: pumpkin soup, toasted sandwiches, baked cheesecake. The place then largely emptied until mid-afternoon, when there was a surge of after-school comings and goings. All the while, the ceiling fans revolved languorously, occasionally rustling the manuscript pages on which I was working.

By late afternoon, my friends would start to straggle in and we would settle in the generously sized upholstered armchairs for a chat about our day.

'Glass of wine?' someone would suggest.

'Don't mind if I do.'

Work on the urban planning book was scheduled to wind up just before my tourist visa expired at the end of May. I was planning to take a jetfoil to the Portuguese-administered territory

of Macau for a night or two and then get a new visa when I re-entered Hong Kong.

‘Missy, telephone.’

‘Hi, Rob,’ said my old boss. ‘Any chance you could come back to Sydney for ten weeks and manage a big project for us?’

‘I’m on my way ...’

A paid interlude in Australia would top up my coffers, and the tourist visa stamped in my passport on my return would permit me to stay for a further ninety days. I would have to do something about my immigration status soon, though, if I wanted to make Hong Kong my permanent home and work there legally.

CHAPTER THREE

In Sydney, I stayed in a private hotel in Potts Point, the more salubrious neighbour of the formerly bohemian but now seedy Kings Cross. Most nights, I ate dinner alone in a small restaurant on a leafy side street: pepper steak with a salad, and a couple of glasses of wine. Back at the hotel, I'd read in bed for an hour or two. Tom was out of the country. I saw a few friends for an occasional meal or film, but otherwise I didn't try to re-engage with the city. I'd been away only three months, but the umbilical cord that had bound me to Sydney for a decade and a half had been cut. Perhaps I didn't want to be tempted to make it my home again. In any case, the book project was challenging, with contributing writers, researchers, photographers and advertisers to coordinate. It was satisfying to pull it all together, and to return to Hong Kong with a nice wad of cash for my efforts.

MY NEW ROOM at the Helena May looked across to the flower shop on the corner of Garden Road that faced the US Consulate General building. On a chest of drawers beside a small, rented TV, I placed a drinks tray with two squat glasses, a bowl for ice, a pair of tongs, and a bottle of Johnny Walker Black Label whisky I'd bought duty-free. I'd always thought of myself as a social drinker with a busy social life. I'd never considered not drinking,

even on those mornings when death seemed preferable to the latest hangover. All my friends drank. It's what one did. And I did all my drinking in company. I never kept alcohol in any of the many homes I'd lived in between leaving the on-campus residential college that was my first Sydney address and moving to Asia in 1986. Now, the prospect of having a nightcap in my room whenever I wanted one seemed sophisticated. The girl who had lived and worked in Sydney for the past fifteen years, studying, learning about men and starting her career, was now a woman. I was independent, self-employed and energetic, and I'd embarked on an exciting adventure in a rapidly changing part of the world.

Soon after my return from Australia, a runner's guide to Sydney was published that had been my idea and mostly my work. Seeing it in print reminded me that I always felt a sense of wellbeing when I was physically fit. When I'd first arrived in Hong Kong, I'd joined a local offshoot of the international Hash House Harriers. It was a way to meet people, and the weekly runs through coastal villages and country parks, following a trail of torches in the dark, were fun and took me to places I wouldn't otherwise have seen. But I'd somehow let it slide. The start of my second stint in the territory seemed an appropriate time to get back into an exercise routine of some kind and try to cut back on the ciggies.

I'd taken up smoking at twenty-seven, when a boyfriend and I started sharing a packet of cigarettes on the nights we hung out in inner-city bars listening to bands. It seemed a way of co-habiting a headspace, creating intimacy, in the same way that a shared marijuana or hash joint did. Cigarettes also helped to keep in check the addiction to sweets and fried foods I'd acquired as a teenager. Within three years of starting smoking, I had made my first unsuccessful attempt to quit.

I'll look at doing something about it when I'm more settled, I promised myself in Hong Kong.

The Helena May was close to Bowen Road, a flat and picturesque bitumen path that hugged the wooded lower slopes of the hilly north side of Hong Kong Island. I set my alarm for an early start for my first run in many months.

A steep flight of steps followed the tramline to the stone bridge that was my starting point. The new Norman Foster–designed Hong Kong & Shanghai Bank building in Central loomed in the pale morning light. Other runners and walkers were about. Two Filipino domestic helpers exercised their employers' dogs. A lone Chinese man at a viewpoint overlooking the luxury hotels clustered in Admiralty did vigorous arm and vocal exercises. In a small garden with concrete seating and paving, a group of elderly men and women performed a gentle, fluid tai chi routine accompanied by tinny, discordant music from a portable tape player. I could see, across on Kowloon side, Kai Tak Airport's runway jutting into the harbour. The city was literally at my feet, the start-of-day sounds muffled by altitude and foliage.

A wave of contentment washed over me as I found a steady rhythm. Near the Adventist Hospital on Stubbs Road, high above the racecourse at Happy Valley, I turned for home.

MY WORK AS a freelance editor was picking up. A travel-guide publisher offered me a job working in-house a couple of days a week. And Linda recommended me to Yin, a publisher newly arrived from England, who was developing a list of books about doing business with China.

When I heard I'd got the China books job, I knocked on Sarah's door, just along the corridor from my room. In the months that

we'd been neighbours at the HM, I'd grown less intimidated by her proper British accent and manner. She was always up for some fun.

'Fancy a drink? I'm celebrating. I got a big new client today.'

'Sure. Downstairs?'

'No, let's go to the Hilton.'

Later, at a bar called Joe Bananas, we flirted with expat lads and danced to Wham!, Simply Red and The Pet Shop Boys. JB's had become our go-to place whenever we wanted to make a night out of an evening.

A taxi deposited us back at the HM, where a buzzer by the side gate raised the night watchman, who had been asleep on a camp bed in the kitchen. 'Sorry, John,' I said, as we stumbled inside. 'Can you spare a ciggie? Promise I'll pay you back tomorrow.'

I had found my feet in my adopted home, no longer a stranger in a strange land. It was easy to meet people. The Australian Association of Hong Kong hosted regular cocktail parties and other events. There were trips to the outlying islands on pleasure junks for seafood lunches with my HM chums. Sue introduced me to the budget-priced Mariners' Club, which had a decent swimming pool.

It was exhilarating just to walk the city's streets and be caught up in the constant activity. Chinese men, their singlets rolled high above their stomach paunches, trundled trolleys piled with slabs of Tsing Tao beer, or shallow polystyrene boxes of flopping fish, or woven baskets spilling out bok choy and other vegetables. Cooking smells wafted from *dai pai dongs*, which served as neighbourhood kitchens for locals whose minuscule flats were piled one upon another in the decayed looking buildings that lined the roadside. Older women, dressed in mauve or grey or green loose cotton tunic tops worn over wide black trousers,

perched like white-crowned birds on the concrete benches in tiny community gardens, chattering loudly together in the Cantonese or Hokkien or Hakka dialect of their ancestral villages. Smartly dressed young office workers crowded The Lanes in Central, or the outlet stores in the back streets of Wanchai and Causeway Bay, or Temple Street night market on Kowloon side, in search of bargain-priced fashions.

I now had steady freelance work editing travel guides, China business books and technical trade manuals for a polytechnic. I also became the assistant editor of the *Hong Kong Law Journal*. Occasionally, fascinated by the lives they revealed, I sat in on murder trials at the Supreme Court, where the accused was usually a local Chinese and the proceedings were conducted in English.

My stars seemed all to be aligned, except for the imminent expiry of my latest tourist visa. I'd applied to the Immigration Department for a work permit as a freelancer but was turned down. In the government's eyes, freelancing for half a dozen steady clients didn't measure up to being employed by a single company that would act as my sponsor. I was going to have to take things up a notch.

I rolled a sheet of paper into my typewriter and wrote to a senior official in the Hong Kong Government. My former boss in Australia had given me his old friend's name in case I ever needed high-calibre help. Now was such a time, and I had nothing to lose by asking for it.

Later that week, an assistant to the official phoned to set up a meeting. On the appointed afternoon, I arrived at a private club in Central for a chat with one of the most important people in the colonial government. We settled in plush armchairs and a waiter took our drinks order. I wanted a gin and tonic, to take

the edge off my nerves, but a soda water with fresh lime seemed prudent.

‘What do you hope to achieve here in Hong Kong?’ the official asked.

‘I want to work across many areas of publishing – education, travel, business, the law,’ I said. ‘And I can only do that if I freelance. I don’t want to be restricted to just one area, as I would be if a single company vouched for me. I’ve been trying to get the Department to consider my case on its merits.’

‘There’s certainly a need for your skills here.’

When we later emerged on to the street and shook hands, I thanked him for his time. A Chinese man opened the rear passenger door of a black limousine that was parked by the curb and stood aside, waiting. ‘My driver will drop you back at the Helena May. Good luck.’

If John’s on duty, he’s going to be so impressed, I thought, as I stepped into the car’s plush interior. The HM doorman was more used to seeing me fall from a taxi after a big night out than alighting from a limo with an impressive number plate.

The following week, I was again called to the phone. The Immigration Department wanted a word with me. I should bring along my passport. I hadn’t heard anything more from the posh official.

Have I been busted for working illegally? Am I going to be escorted to Kai Tak and put on the first plane back to Oz?

‘Please, take a seat,’ the officer said. ‘Would you like tea?’

‘Thank you.’

His manner was unexpectedly friendly.

‘Cigarette?’ He held out a gold pack of State Express 555s and offered a light.

Is this normal?

‘May I have your passport, please?’

My breath caught in my throat as I handed it across.

‘Your situation has been reviewed. You can work in Hong Kong as a sole business operator.’

‘Really?’

‘An exception has been made for you. We will review your situation at a later time.’

That night, I wrote a letter of thanks to the government official. It seemed that his endorsement had given my application the green light.

My new status as a legal self-employed alien called for another celebration. Sarah was in her pyjamas when I knocked on her door. ‘Fancy going to JB’s?’

‘Give me five minutes.’

AT LA BELLA DONNA, where we ate two or three times a week, Sarah announced one day that she wanted to run 5 kilometres. ‘I’ll never be a real runner, Jim. But I’d like to run that far just once.’ (We had taken to calling each other ‘Jim’ after the catchphrase, ‘It’s life, Jim, but not as we know it.’)

‘That’s easy,’ I said. ‘Start with walking the distance, then gradually add in more running until you can go the whole way.’

Over the following weeks, I helped her build up the running component of her 5K walks until she ran the whole distance non-stop.

Yet another celebration was called for.

‘Whisky soda?’ the waiter asked as he led us to our usual table beneath a poster of Napoleon with his hand down the bodice of Josephine’s empire-line gown. When he returned with two hefty tumblers tinkling with ice, I clinked Sarah’s glass with mine.

Many hours later, we were perched at the bar in a Wanchai pub known to regulars as The House of Doom, cigarettes in hand. When I tipped back my head to drink a B-52 shot, the stool overbalanced and I fell to the floor.

‘You okay, Jim?’

I could see Sarah’s face, framed by the legs of our stools, peering down at me.

‘Ah, yep.’

But *was* I okay? That afternoon, I’d easily run the few kilometres that were my friend’s goal. Now, in the lost hours of the night, I was lying on the sticky floor of a dingy bar. Was I a fit and focused woman who’d just had a teensy bit too much to drink, or was I simply a drunk?

*For my mother
And for my father*

First published in 2022

Copyright © 2022 Robyn Flemming

All rights reserved. The author asserts their moral rights in this work throughout the world without waiver. No part of this book may be reproduced, or stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without express written permission of the publisher. For information about permission to reproduce selections from this book, write to editions@booktopia.com.au.

ISBN 9781922598479 (print)

ISBN 9781922598806 (ebook)

Cover and text design: Christabella Designs

Cover image: Dee Dee Choy, *A Glass of Tear* (detail)

Cover photograph: Jules Boag

Author photograph: Carla Lidbury

Typeset: Polly Yu

Published in Australia and New Zealand by:

Brio Books, an imprint of Booktopia Group Ltd

Unit E1, 3-29 Birnie Avenue, Lidcombe, NSW 2141, Australia

Printed and bound in Australia by SOS Print + Media Group

The names and identifying characteristics of some people have been changed. This is my story, not theirs, but I am grateful to them for being a part of mine.



**Proudly Printed
In Australia**

booktopia.com.au

It's never too late to make a new path to a different future.

When Robyn Flemming left Australia in 2010 to wander the world as a freelance editor, it wasn't the first time she had shed an old skin for a new one. Now nearing sixty, she packed her laptop, clothes for different climates, a favourite pair of orange knickers and a well-used corkscrew. Was her decision to risk everything yet again an act of faith or of folly?

For two decades, she had known she was in trouble with alcohol and that a day of reckoning would come. As a permanent traveller, would she find the courage to change herself and not just her situation?

Skinful is about the questions we ask at life's turning points: Who am I? What life do I want to live?



Robyn Flemming is a freelance editor with clients across the globe. She lived in Hong Kong from 1986 to 1993 and was a global nomad from 2010 to 2020.

Robyn had her last drink during a hurricane in New York City in 2011.



booktopia.com.au

Memoir



RRP \$32.99