

To Make a Gin and Tonic

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The bike is heavy, low to the ground. It has no gears, no breaks, but wide tires that take me smoothly through piles of weeds and broken bricks. When the detritus gets thick, I lift my feet clear and coast.

A Buddha, shoulders above the palm trees, is golden in the setting sun. Two men plough a field with a smoke-spewing tractor. I ride to the highway.

The bike skids on the verge but rights itself. Lorries, piled high with sugarcane, two, three times their own height, pass slowly. Thatched huts increase in density until the town begins in earnest.

When I pull off the road at the cockfighting store, the roosters are calling to each other somewhere inside.

The roller-doors of the grocery are open halfway, the conditioned air spilling out foggy along the footpath. Voices in the store are coming from a television set, the owner is absent. The bottles come in clusters of six, joined by cloudy plastic film. I leave money on the til.

Outside again the air is alveoli-drying hot. I ride beside a blue and silver bus for meters before it accelerates ahead.

Flocks of white cranes are searching for fish in the muddy water as I park the bike beside the klong.

Watermelons are stacked in cairns, each pile topped with a melon cut open to display juicy, seedy flesh. The seller remembers my white face and greets me with warm, meaningless words. Her teeth look bloody with beetle nut. I take three small speckled limes from a cane basket on her counter and put them in my pocket. She holds up a splayed hand and I pass over a note.

Across the road on the return journey, I find the point of balance between the asphalt and the crusty verge. I approach two dogs eating the carcass of another. One of the eaters is hairless from the waist back, more monkey than dog. The one being eaten is intermittently hairy and red.

I cycle wide of them.

The house grows large.

I pull off the highway as a motorcycle passes, the children on the back waving, giggling. The roller-door is unlocked, and it squeals as I heave it open. I leave the bike and walk barefoot to the kitchen.

My glass is free of chitinous carcasses. I take ice from the freezer, and pour a stream of chilled gin from the blue bottle. The skin of the spotted lime is thin, soft and gives easily to

the pressure of the knife. The juice smells of cooking and seafood. I free one of the bottles from the plastic, the cap releases with a hiss.

At this moment—as the tonic foams and sizzles over the ice—the smell of the drink is clean and cool.

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