

Park after dark

He had gone to the City Convenience Store for a Coke but Hyde Park across Liverpool Street looked inviting in the December heat. Shadowy trees and cool grass. An invitation for a brief escape from the smog, grime and humidity of the city.

He waited for a break in the traffic, preferring to take a risk rather than tramp to the crossing crush at the intersection, 200 metres up the street. Street lights, neons and tail-lights snapping on and off were fuzzy in the hazy, grey light.

Cars vroomed by. Radios reported traffic conditions for those who needed to get somewhere in a hurry. Boom boxes thumped out rock, funk or rap. It was hard to tell.

A walk down the park's avenue of overhanging trees and around the fountains could be refreshing, and take his mind off other problems.

He knew about parks after dark, but it wasn't really dark yet. Kids, especially girls, were forever being warned about parks after dark. Not safe after dark. If the truth be known, you could say that about any time in some parks. And it was not only parks. Trains. Even railway stations. Car parks. Public toilets. Taxis. Some well-lit streets.

Still he knew it could be dangerous, even though as a small kid he had always associated parks with peace and quiet. A park was a place to play and romp. A place to chase pigeons or seagulls. A place where older people walked dogs. A place where young couples sat on the grass holding hands—and kissed.

He wondered if thugs and hoodlums actually waited in parks for their victims, crouched down behind shadowy bushes. It didn't make much sense to hang around for ages just in case a poor victim wandered close enough to be subjected to an unexpected attack. And often, after dark, it would be a *poor* victim.

A brief break in the traffic. He stepped off the footpath and, ignoring the heat, hurried across the six lanes to the opposite footpath. He ascended the four steps into the park as he pulled the ring-pull off his drink can.

