

WALKING

short fiction by

Sean O'Leary

brief extracts from

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Stories from the streets of the city ...

“You’ll hear that song five years from now,” she says, “and you’ll think of this little moment. This perfect day we spent on the beach at Geraldton.” We swim again and laugh and talk of Takahashi, Kaoru, Eri and Mari and *Norwegian Wood* and she thinks *Franny & Zooey* is better than *The Catcher in the Rye*. She makes a good argument too.

Back at the hotel we lie down on my single bed and she takes her top off and we kiss but she won’t allow any more and so we kiss for hours and listen to music and I give her my copy of *Twelve*.

(from ‘Pawn’)

As they drive Jess says, “Ten thousand back to me within three weeks, might let you have a month. Good quality grass, plenty of E. Speed as always. Some ice because I know you’re always looking for new ways to get your friends high. They are your friends aren’t they? Don’t screw anyone’s girlfriend, mate. Don’t use violence at all. These kids’ll rat you in to the cops. Whatever you think you’re not one of them.”

(from ‘Somebody’)

“I liked the sense of transitory moments in the lives of the characters, of encounters and connections that might lead to something major but probably won’t, of characters not quite ready to commit or settle down but who would probably like to do so if the promise was great enough.”

(Garry Disher)

“... the prose is as clean and clear as a window pane. O’Leary easily transports you to the dingy underside of each city, from the cheap motels to the heat-soaked taverns.”

(from the *Bravado Magazine* review of *My Town*)

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All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

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‘Walking’, ‘Going all the way’, and ‘Pawn’ first appeared in *FourW*; ‘Son’, ‘Somebody’, and ‘Kalgoorlie ... and disappointing Annie’ in *Quadrant*; ‘Swings’ and ‘Blues for a boy’ in *Wetink*; ‘This life’ in *Takabé*; ‘Slipping away’ in *Bravado*.

‘Blood on the chinos’, ‘Proktor Man’, ‘Connections’, ‘The Shotguns’, ‘Osiris’, ‘Fifteen’, and ‘The Sunbather’ are original to this volume, and appear here for the first time.

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**Tonight by Kings Cross Station, I have no destination.
Surrounded by temptation, no sign of salvation.**

(from *Queen of Everyone's Heart* by Perry Keyes)

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Walking

I look at the nurse, she nods; a buzzer goes off, the door clicks when I push it open. “How easy was that?” I say out loud. I walk through the hospital car park onto Punt Rd and turn right. The social worker has organised a room in a boarding house in St Kilda. I decide to walk. I was legally insane for the eight weeks I spent in that ward. I’m still on a ‘Community Treatment Order’. I can live with that. Kind of schizo parole. How strange just to walk out like that.



I look at the tram timetable and the next one’s not due for fifteen minutes and I say to Andrea, “Shall we just keep on walking down Carlisle St, catch the tram from Chapel St?”

“What is it with you and walking, always wanting to walk everywhere?”

“Walking always makes me calm. I used to count a lot too, from one to ten, when I had ... had weird thoughts, it seemed to help.” She doesn’t say anything and I wonder if I’ve said too much. I don’t like to give away my secrets because they can be used against you later on, during those times. *That’s old me*, I tell myself. *Gee, I mean, she’s invited me to stay at her flat, she’s fine, she’s with you.*



Going all the way

“Mate, I’m just about done. I haven’t worked for nine months. The union’s made sure no building site will employ me. The mortgage is out of control. Bank’s talking about taking the house. Jan took the kids to her mother’s. Pretty much told me to get nicked. Didn’t know why she married me. Fuck.”

“Told you last time. We do a robbery. Got it all worked out. Need two blokes though. Be in it, Mondo. I know you got the balls, the way you punched out that bloke on the site.”

“Gotta go, Ned. Talk to you soon.”

Bloody hell. *Do a robbery*. Save me from idiots. If only I’d just taken a breath, walked away from Tommy when he came at me all guns blazing. I had to belt him. Connected to the boss of the biggest bloody union going around. I was a labourer; he’s a tradie. Union rules.

...

Son

He walks in towards the city from Richmond Station across the roof gardens over the old railway yards with the MCG on his right. He's a little nervous, very nervous, because he's meeting his son for the first time. He looks over his left shoulder to check the time on the digital clock on top of the Siemens' building. He has a twenty-year-old son from a short relationship he had in 2013 with a woman called Sally Breen. She called him three days ago and the twenty-year-old rang him the day after and now they're meeting at George's, a café in Federation Square. His son's name is Andrew. A good enough name, Thomas thinks.

He walks on and follows the red brick path they created through the gardens, surrounded by colourful garden beds and near full-grown trees and there is a coffee van on his right and he can see AAMI stadium, home of the Melbourne Victory on his left and he continues on and over the Yarra past Swan St and through Birrarung Marr and up into Federation Square from the steps near the wharf. He read somewhere that Ganesh is the Hindu god of beginnings, so do your stuff, Ganesh.



Swings

Sam loves Elizabeth, his girlfriend of two years, but all he can think about, after those two times, is Susie. That long wild blond hair hanging down over her eyes as she ground down on him, making him submit to her. That first night she threw her hair back and looked him straight in the eye and rode him, bucked on top of him three or four extra times after he'd come just to make sure he knew she wanted more. Elizabeth manages an upmarket shoe shop, dresses very sharp, a brunette, wears her hair pulled back tight; her father is a wealthy well-known businessman. Sam doesn't want to lose that connection because he's just starting out in real estate. Elizabeth likes her sex clean, nothing kinky. Missionary. Susie's rock and roll; an indie rock chick who wears tight faded blue jeans, a thick black belt and a black or red tight t-shirt that finishes an inch or two above her belt. Both times she wore red lacy underwear. That's embedded in Sam's thoughts. Susie swings.



Proktor Man

Proktor lives to work. He drinks too much and he smokes. He has sex with prostitutes and he'll kill and do whatever the Commander wants him to do. He lives in Zone Eight, just next to Seven, near the beach, which is not overly polluted and it has waves and he bodysurfs. The water is always warm and he bodysurfs in the rain *every* day, it frees him, cleanses him of his sins. Everything now is warm or hot, very hot. Proktor is separated from his wife and his daughter won't talk to him and right now he's driving along South Road to Zone Seven.

Android cops are the most feared because they don't take bribes and they're hard to kill but the Government won't put them into Zone Seven because they want their cops to take bribes, they want the kickbacks to go all the way to the top. Androids can't negotiate bribes. Proktor is the exception, he doesn't take bribes and some people have wondered if Proktor may be an android.



Rhia is lying on a big double bed in her room in Zone Seven. The bed dominates the room. She moved here yesterday. Nobody, not her friends or clients know that she is here, no-one except Salem, her beautiful, super-smart, hacker boyfriend, who wears his net-enabled glasses nearly 24/7, taking them off only to shower and sleep. Most people have super-tech watches but Salem sticks

with his glasses. He's lying beside Rhia. She smoked some dope a little while ago and she looks at Salem and says, "I might have something for you lover-boy."

Salem is eighteen and Rhia is twenty-one.

"What?"

"I stole this small bag from a client of mine, he had quite a bit of cash, nearly \$20,000, but there was a mem-stor stick too. Want to check it out?"

"Yeah, hand it over."

"It has a zillion numbers and weird names but I think it might be important." She doesn't know yet that Samuels is dead and she couldn't care less about watching news bulletins or monitoring news sites.



Connections

He looks at the picture. She's a cute kid, but most ten-year-old kids are special in some way. He's standing at the front gate of the school when the bell sounds and for some reason it makes him laugh. He steps inside the gate just as the avalanche of kids comes out of the wide doors. He spots her straight away and it seems like she spots him too. They walk towards each other and Rachel says, "Mr Kincaid?"

Tommy smiles and says, "You can call me Tommy. How'd you know me?"

She shows him her phone and it's his picture from his PI website and Tommy says, "You're a smart girl, Rachel."

"Thanks, where's your car?"

She has her long hair in two pigtails and she's slim and won't stop smiling. Tommy likes her already.

"It's on Kangaroo Road, c'mon."

She takes his hand and they walk out the school gate and along to Kangaroo Road and Rachel sees his red Datsun 2000 and she says, "Wow! What a cool car. Can we go for a long drive somewhere?"

He opens the passenger door and helps her with her bag and closes the door gently. He climbs in his side of the car and starts the engine and says, "My orders are to take you straight home."

"I can call my mum, she'll be OK about it."

“How about I drive you home and we can both ask her, alright?”

“Alright.”

And Tommy revs the car and on the drive he takes a few corners pretty fast and guns it down Clayton Road pretty fast too and Rachel smiles the whole way there.

Sally and Rachel live in a small single-fronted house in Black Street, Clayton, near North Road and Clayton Road. Tommy helps Rachel out of the car. They walk up the drive and the front door opens and there stands Sally Dixon. She looks much the same. Mousy brown hair, a short fringe at the front and with rats' tails at the back, wearing black jeans and a tight green T that shows she's slim and has a good body but she has a very plain face and Rachel goes to her and hugs her and straightaway asks, “Can I go for a long drive with Tommy?”

“We'll see. Hello Tommy. Though you might have outgrown Tommy but that smile says you haven't.”

“That's nice of you, Sally. You look good too.”

“Thanks. Do you mind taking her out?”

“No. not at all. We'll drive down to Beach Road, drive along to St Kilda and then come back. Maybe get ice cream too, what'd you think?” he says, looking at Rachel.

“Cool, that'd be neat.”

“Neat,” Sally says, “is like the best.” Tommy looks at her and she says, “We'll talk when you get back, OK?”

“OK.”

Tommy turns right from Warrigal Road onto Beach Road and Rachel asks, “Can you put the top down?”

“It's cold.”

“It's OK.”

“Your wish is my command,” Tommy says and presses a

button on the dash and the top slowly peels back and Tommy looks at Rachel and smiles. He hasn't had much to do with kids. He has no brothers or sisters so no nephews or nieces and it is fun just hanging out with her. He drives quite fast and overtakes a lot and he can see Rachel's enjoying it. He turns off Beach Road up Barkly Street when they reach St Kilda and then turns left about two hundred metres past Acland Street and he says, "Do you like New Zealand Ice Cream or Trampoline?"

"What's Trampoline?"

"They sell ice cream."

"I like mint with choc chips."

"Me too. We'll go to New Zealand."



The Shotguns

Pete was my greatest friend and he could sing. Man, he could sing; blues, soul, rock 'n' roll, country and all variations. We went to uni together and picked up girls and got drunk and stoned and he formed The Shotguns. In my humble opinion, the greatest rock 'n' roll band in Australia's history. I'm not the only one to have written that. Some people say that I owe my career to him. That I was merely driven along on his coattails and that all I did was record his journey on my way to becoming a respectable music journalist. They say I owed him. Forget all the others, Pete Salinger was the man.

I wrote an article about The Derelicts, having seen them at The Bandstand in Richmond. They were white hot that night and all I did was record the moment and the editor at *Hipster* liked it and I was in. *Hipster* was a free music press mag here in Melbourne. The kind they dump outside music stores and cafés. Mike Collins was the editor and he told me he wanted a review article every week, preferably on the latest new entry to the live music scene. So I told Pete about it and in my mind this is what got him thinking about maybe making it as a singer in a band. We met in a politics lecture, he was a Whitlam freak. He introduced himself and in the very same sentence said if this was 1975 we wouldn't be paying to get an education. I had to laugh and right there and then the friendship started. He asked me to

come over to his place in Collingwood that night. He lived in a share house with three others. I agreed.

At 8pm on a Wednesday night in 1996 I walked along Sturt Street, Collingwood. I stopped at the front door of number 10 and I could hear Marvin Gaye singing *What's Going On*. Only when I pushed the unlocked door open and wandered through the house to the large room at the back, it was The Shotgunns, and there was Pete, this thin, tall, white man, singing like Marvin Gaye and when he saw me he just adjusted the little pork pie hat he had on and continued singing with a grin from ear to ear. I sat down, totally blown away. They went straight into The Beatles, *Here comes the Sun*, and man, it was just amazing. They stopped after that one and Pete looked at me and said, "What'd you think?"

I looked at him and said, "Do you do any originals?"

"Yeah man, of course," he said, "and we have our second gig on Friday night at The Crane in St Kilda, on Grey Street. I heard you write for Hipster, can you cover it for them."



Osiris

Captain Eoin Marshall has been sent by Commander Marco Boerio to bring his wife, Latisha Boerio, back to Pine Gap, which is now held by the Rebel Forces.

“Madam Boerio! I am Captain Eoin Marshall of the Rebel Forces. You must come with me now, quickly! There is no time.” And he takes her hand roughly and she stands and rushes with him outside and onto the field, into his silver flier.

The flier takes off almost immediately. They reach high altitude quickly and fly through the celestial night sky. After an hour, Latisha Boerio looks out at the night sky and Eoin Marshall says, “Do you see Orion?”

She looks out at the hunter and says, “Yes, it’s beautiful Captain, and are you the great hunter bringing me back to my husband?”

Marshall’s not sure if she’s taking the piss or not but *she is* the Commander’s wife so he says, “See the bright red star?”

She looks again and says, “Yes, yes I do.”

“It is Betelgeuse, a red supergiant.”

“It’s beautiful. Back there, at our base, why did you say there was no time?”

“The Commander ordered me to get you and bring you back to Utopia or Pine Gap, depending on where he is right now. He said there was intelligence that Sydney was soon to be under attack again. What the hell were you doing there anyway?”

“I work in the soup kitchens and the homeless shelters.”

"You're kidding me, right?"

"No, my husband hates it too. Hence, you, the great hunter, bringing me home."

Marshall's had enough of her slightly sarcastic comments and says, "You know flying down here like this is no picnic ..."

"Look Captain! Government attack ships, coming now!"

"Shit! There's three of them!" Marshall says.

Latisha says, "Try to lead them to within range of the guns at Pine Gap and radio to the base that they're coming."

"Madam! Take the gunner position. My flier is more agile than those ships but I'm gonna need you." Then Marshall does as he's told and increases the speed of his own flier but the Government attack ships are gaining on him, hailing laser missiles all around him. He tacks left and right recklessly. *Shit*, he thinks, *I need to do something special*. He banks the flier left, in an arc of increasing severity, then straightens suddenly, and they find themselves directly beneath the underbelly of one of the enemy ships. Latisha Boerio fires a missile from the gunner position at the flier's rear and Marshall rolls the flier clear of the fireball as the Government ship explodes.

Latisha yells, "Head straight for the base Captain, stop jerking around, let the anti-aircraft guns ..."

And the guns take out the final Government fighter and Eoin Marshall yells out, "Yeah, fucking A! Thank God and thank you Madam, nice that you got in here and radioed. I couldn't do it myself. It took everything just trying to shake those jets. You're a cool customer."

"I did my armed forces training in camp at Utopia and I'm not so cool, Eoin, but thanks."

Pine Gap radios back to Eoin Marshall and tells him that Commander Boerio is in Pine Gap and that he's clear to land now. He says to Latisha, "We're going into Pine Gap not Utopia."

•••

About the Author



Sean O'Leary has worked as a farm labourer in South Australia; in a general store on Elcho Island-Galiwinku; in a roadhouse on the edge of the Nullarbor Plain and in various hotels in Kings Cross as a night manager. He has lived and worked in Sydney, Melbourne, Yulara, Alice Springs, Kakadu, Darwin and throughout Western Australia. He has schizophrenia which he doesn't like much but shit happens. He lives and writes in Melbourne.

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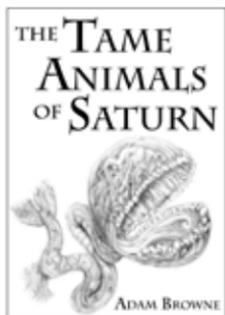
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