



Source: Angus McDowall, 'Tehran Stories: 'Pain, maybe, never mind,' said the doctor as he reached for his power drill', *The Independent online*, 11/09/05.  
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"You can't predict the future. Anything could happen.' The older man looks meekly at his son standing in the hallway of their spartan flat, trying to sound hopeful enough to raise his father from the couch. Andy is still slight inside the uniform of the security firm that employs him to look after a cavernous shopping centre in the outer suburbs. Mick thinks it makes him look like a cop or a prison warden—someone in charge of everything Mick's doing wrong. Or isn't doing. 'Trust me, Andy, nothing will happen. Nothing has happened to me in five years.' His son picks up a bowl of half-eaten cereal and empty coffee mug from the floor, 'It might help if you left the flat once in a while.'

Mick reaches to stub his cigarette in a saucer on the coffee table, nudging a half-empty carton of milk. On the cusp of the spill, it flashes through his mind—a ghosted image of the long white splash—then the echoed reality, swallowed up by the carpet. He stares dispassionately—he didn't make it happen—he was just helpless to stop it. 'Jeezus, dad, you're bloody useless!' Andy sweeps up the carton and lobs it across the small space into the kitchen sink.

Mick watches his son scrub the floor, focussed, trying hard, his dark hair all mussed now. That's what they said at school, his teachers. Andy always tried hard. He tried to forget his mum had pissed off and his dad was lying gutted and filleted in front of cartoons. 'Did you go for a walk, like we said?' Andy looks at him, accusing. 'You don't have to go far—the bus stop on the corner—we agreed.'

Mick sighs with the effort of defending himself, 'Those shoes were too big. I tried.' Andy grabs a pair of running shoes from under the coffee table, irritated. 'How big? Wear another pair of socks! You're not running a fucking marathon.' Mick watches Andy pour himself a glass of juice. 'I'm going to bed.' Mick waits for the sound of the bedroom door. He grabs a couple of pills from a jar on the table and swallows them without water.

'Wake up!' Mick struggles for consciousness as a shoe box crashes onto the coffee table in front of his face. 'Size nine. Give me your foot.' As Mick comes to, Andy wrestles one of his socked feet into the front of the new running shoe. 'It'll fit. It's perfect.' Mick sits up and takes in Andy, home from work, early morning. 'The bus stop—that was the deal!' Andy dumps the remaining shoe in Mick's lap then heads for his bedroom again.

'Well!' Andy is by the couch again. He's wearing a t-shirt and track pants, his hair messy from sleeping and brushing his teeth. 'How far did you get?' Mick stirs, still groggy from his happy pills. 'What?' Andy pulls the rug away—his dad's still wearing the shoes—he lifts one foot,

checking for dirt, 'Least you made it outside. How far?' He drops Mick's foot limply back onto the couch. 'I walked. All right.' Andy heads for the kitchen, spitting in the sink, 'Doesn't matter to start—one foot in front of the other—that's what she said.' 'Who?' 'That chick on the radio. The more depressed you are, the better it works—so you should have no worries!' As Andy heads back to the bathroom, he stops by his dad. 'I mean it. I don't want you pulling another stunt, dad. You scared the shit out of me.' Andy's lip quivers. 'Hey..?' Mick reaches a hand, but Andy brushes it aside, 'You're the only cry-baby around here.'

'Fuck!' Mick wakes up with a jolt. He grabs his glasses to look at the digital clock on the video recorder—eight am. 'Fuck, me!' Mick stumbles in his socks, rummaging under newspapers and cushions to find the runners.

Mick is on all fours in a scrubby patch of front lawn by the front door. He has both hands tucked into the shoes, 'walking' them in the grass and dirt, musing them up as much as he can. 'Good morning.' For a moment, all Mick can make out is the silhouette of the square shouldered uniform and the cap—his own personal cop has caught him red-handed, 'Shit.' Andy shakes his head slowly, 'I can't trust you to do anything. I can't even trust you to stay alive.' Andy heads inside, slamming the door behind him in disgust. Mick sits pathetically in the dewy grass.

'Rise and shine, you lazy arsehole! We're going for a run.' Mick is back on the couch, huddled into himself. He uncurls a little, peeling the blanket back from his face. Andy is standing in front of him, wearing shorts and a singlet and the runners his father refused. Mick tries to turn over again. 'Go to work, don't worry about me.' Andy pulls the blanket off him again. 'This isn't for you. This is for me. You're doing this for me. Get your shoes on. And get out that door!'

Mick stands stock-still at the end of the short path to the flat, dazzled by morning sun. There's blossom on the raggedy tree by the front letter box. There are birds singing. A ginger cat nuzzles around his leg and moves on. A school-girl rides her bike along the footpath, smiling as she veers around him. Mick looks at his feet, then up at Andy, jogging on the spot to keep warm. 'There's too much bloody action out here.' Andy stops moving and looks hard at his father, daring him, 'Then go back to your couch.' Mick stares at his feet transfixed. Then, before he wills his foot to move, the ghost image of his foot lifts from the path, echoed by reality a moment later as he begins to move, one foot in front of the other...

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Deb Cox.*