

Story for performance #993
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Source: Adam Entous and Joseph Nasr, Reuters, 'Hamas admits killing Israeli students', *The Age online*, 09/03/08.

Tags: [streets](#), [surveillance](#), [water](#)
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It was the beginning of Autumn when I saw him for the first time. I had just moved to the city. It was not only a new city to me, but new in and of itself. Inland, it had developed from the original small town on the site with a spurt of growth in the 1970s as it became a regional centre. Then the burgeoning IT industry located itself there in the 1980s and fuelled its growth through the 90s until now. It was a silicon valley and everything about it shone with newness. A cradle of new development set around a man-made lake and ringed by undulating taupe hills, when I had arrived in the middle of summer, cresting the pass into the valley the city glistening below, like a large reflective glass scattering shards of sunlight. It was hard to look at.

The light had then become cooler, clear and brittle but the council's adherence to native plantings meant there weren't any russet tones or falling leaves. This was Australia. The bike track wound around the lake and through the surrounding parkland.

I saw him walking. A big man, solid: burly, rather than fat. He had tufty grey hair. Probably early sixties. I approached him on the path from behind. He was in 'walking clothes': a striped sports shirt with a soft collar, tracksuit pants and runners. His head was down. I never saw his face, as his head was always down, as if he had to concentrate on putting his feet in the right place, one in front of the other. He was always head down, bowed, as if he were weighted down. Perhaps with sadness. This was what sparked my irrational empathy and fascination. I felt we had something in common.

I had had to come back—come back home. But I could not stay in Melbourne. All they wanted to do was talk, my friends. Talk all about it. They call it the talking cure. They said I should keep talking. But I didn't want to talk at all. It didn't undo anything. It didn't help. And they didn't really understand anything of what it was like. What had happened. What would happen. I got sick of translating. Looking for things that would fit with their experience, drawing analogies. And I didn't need their understanding. I just wanted them to shut up.

This contract position came up: three years. I got it. I took it. As a computer programmer you don't have to do much talking. And in a new city I didn't have any friends. I looked forward to years of silence.

He was a man for all seasons. Autumn passed and with each week, the days got shorter, it got colder and on occasion snow fell. But he was always out. Walking. Head bowed. One foot in front of the other. The only thing that changed were his clothes. In the coldest part of the year, that first year, he adopted a

garish coloured parker, stuffed like a snow jacket: red with yellow sleeves and purple trim. It was a bit disappointing taste-wise, but it meant I would always see him coming or going—off in the distance, and in the dim light of early morning.

At first I just happened upon him, when I was out riding. Every so often. Then it became more regular. Over time as I got to know the bike tracks I also got to know his routine: his route, which was always the same, and when he would be where, which was always the same too. I found myself—not following him, but rather synchronising with him. While at the beginning it was fairly unconscious, whatever route I took, whatever variation of the ride, I would pass him at some point, coming from one direction or the other. It was a bit of a game, but I wanted to see him. It gave me a lift. I enjoyed it.

It wasn't until the middle of the second year of my time there that I fully realised what I was doing. It was winter and he had changed his jacket. I got a shock, although it happened over several days. That first morning light was just starting to break, and there was a mist that had rolled in off the lake. There was no wind, it was completely still and there was a very soft drizzle. And it was cold. It was a section of path on the promontory which reaches out into the lake, wooded closely on either side. There was a pungent eucalyptus smell in the air coming from the damp build-up of leaf matter in the surrounding bush. He turned the corner coming into view ahead of me, but enveloped in mist. I didn't realise it was him until we passed each other and he was behind me, gone. And even then I wasn't sure. He was wearing a white jacket, quilted like the Michelin man.

The weather conditions continued all week, and every morning I saw him, with the same tufty grey head, bowed down, moving at a regular pace in that white jacket, ghost-like in the distance in the open parkland, walking away from me, on other occasions appearing suddenly from a turn in the path coming towards me. I would zip past him.

From that point I was aware of my compulsion, my need. I had to see him. I don't know if he was aware of me. We never had eye contact. I more consciously varied my approach to him, our meeting points, so that he wouldn't think it unnatural if he did notice, but just chance. He felt like a friend and confidante to me, but I knew I was a bit like a stalker to him. Summer came and went. Another winter and then summer again. He was back in short sleeves and stripes. My contract finished. I left the city.

Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Robyn McKenzie.