

Going

John Turner

I. Going

We were down at the golf course, hanging around. There were tags on the shed that Rachel and Simmo had done. Punched a couple of cones, did a bit more tagging. Hardly even got the cans out of my bag to tell you the truth. Nothing serious. Not like breaking into the clubhouse. Not like pouring petrol on the greens. When Tommy used to visit the hospital he'd tell me that Rachel and Simmo and Whitey were doing that stuff. Tommy said he wasn't. He could have been though, you never know with Tommy.

As I said, just hanging around, watching the sun move behind a block of flats. We took the piss out of the hopeless tags and then pedalled down the gravel road that took us past the clubhouse. Tommy took off and I was skidding my back wheel, fishtailing out as I picked up speed. The clubhouse was on our left and Tommy - about 20 metres in front and gaining - kept looking back at me, making stupid faces, making me laugh.

The two guys in bright polo shirts and golf-club caps who walked out onto the road in front of us had been in the clubhouse drinking - I could tell, it's the sort of laugh I've heard too many times before. Tommy hadn't seen or heard them, but at the very last moment he sensed something and effortlessly turned and weaved between those two startled grandpas like it was the most natural thing in the world. The guy closest to the clubhouse, on Tommy's left, twitched and twisted and his buggy spewed up golf clubs all over the gravel.

Tommy was still looking backwards at the golfers and me, but he'd stopped pedalling and was coasting to a stop. Laughing and cackling, he skidded his back wheel around to face us. He was whacking his cap onto the handlebars, laughing.

A small gap between the spilt clubs and the clubhouse opened and that's where I pointed my bike, pedalling hard and fast, planning to get through and sprint off with Tommy. His right hand's in the air, trying to pull me towards him. One of the guys is picking up the clubs and the other's looking at Tommy up the road. I'm almost through and then – such a small movement in the corner of my right eye as a clubhouse light caught something – I was moving through the air wondering what the fuck had happened. My hands hit the gravel first, and then my knees, and I was skidding through the gravel rolling over onto my hip and crashing into a bush. My throat hurt and I couldn't get enough air.

Some time passed, but not much, and I heard Tommy's voice in my ear, asking if I was ok. He turned me over, took a look, told me I'd live and walked off towards the light. I didn't want him to leave and told him so and he said he'd be back in a second.

The soft, pleased laughter of the two golfers reached me as I lay there. Tommy's feet crunched on the gravel. I opened my eyes and saw the three of them on the road, their muffled and cloudy voices barely reaching me. A toilet flushed in the clubhouse. Tommy was standing just away from these two guys and, suddenly, their voices became clear. That's when I sat up.

"Aren't you that little Morgan prick? Didn't your brother get out of hospital last week? I know you, you little bastard. You're a Morgan. Your brother's Jerry and you're Tom. Just like in the cartoon, two little cartoon criminals: Tom and fucking Jerry," is what the fat one said.

"Piss off home, you little prick. Piss off up that fucking road and don't come back," is what his friend added.

They turned to each other and laughed like they owned the world. They were waiting for Tommy. Waiting to push him around.

The fat one threw his hat to the side and put his meaty hands on his hips. Tommy had gone still, really still. But I knew his eyes were moving. The other dickhead had a beer in one hand and raised it to his mouth and

that's when Tommy reached down to the back wheel of my bike and pulled the flat metal club from between the spokes.

It was probably a 3 or 4 iron that Tommy smacked into the side of his stupid head. It wasn't the real loud crack you'd expect a golf club to make when it hits the side of a head - this was more like he'd hit a lump of wet newspaper. The beer bottle smashed on the ground, pulling the light into it with weird glares and flashes. Tommy ran and his hoodie was grabbed and pulled back. He slipped out and wildly cracked the fat one on the front of the knee with the club. That dropped him, I can tell you. Tommy picked up my bike on the run, sprinted and threw it at me. I was upright and caught it and was already up the road and ahead of him before his feet had hit the pedals. I was still in front as we took off like mad bastards down the road and across the bridge towards the station.

II. Going

The train's moving on and we're one bit further away. It's dark outside and the rain's just started hitting the windows. I think this is the last train and I'm tired so I put my head back and rest it against the window. There's a shitty tag on the roof.

"You still got it?" I ask.

Tommy tilts his head back at me as he walks off. Halfway down the stairs he turns.

"Yeah. Course I have," he says and nods his head.

Walking down the stairs he moves out of my view. It's cold in here and my palms sting so I keep my arms folded across my singlet and my hands tight up in my smelly armpits. We always sit in this part of the carriage; it's like that place just inside the front door of Gary's house before you really go inside – what's it called? – Rachel'd know because she thinks she knows everything. There's only one other bloke in here and he's pissed, a footy

beanie pulled low over his forehead. From this part of the carriage we can see upstairs, downstairs and outside for any guards on the platform.

A voice out of the speaker say what the station is and the train slows and slows and stops. A tired woman and her bloke get on just as Tommy comes back up the steps. They move away from him. Other people getting on do the same but pretend not to. The train moves off and when I turn back Beanie-man is staring at the bandage on my neck. He asks what happened. It's lucky I rolled my track-pants down before we got on or he'd probably ask what I did to my knees.

Tommy goes really still and stares at him. He looks like Uncle Gary at my sister Fiona's birthday last year when he walked across the room and belted Matt, one of her friends. Apparently he'd been talking to Gary's wife, Michelle. Steve and Chris dragged him off and then Gary stood there, holding his hands out, saying stuff about how he was alright, that he was under control and that everyone could just fuck off and leave him alone. From where I was, over near the pool table, he looked really calm, really peaceful. But when he stepped forward and smacked that bloke in the face and blood started pissing out of his nose, well, ten sorts of shit hit the fan after that. Fiona still hasn't talked to him.

Tommy lets the train sway his body and he grabs a rail near the door with his hand. He keeps his right hand in his shorts pocket and I can see him opening and closing it, testing its strength. I don't know if he's still bleeding because he won't take his hoodie off. My bag's pushing into my back so I shift in the seat and the spray-cans rattle. I'm about to say something but Tommy starts and his voice is really soft as he tells Beanie-man about my tracheotomy.

"He was in hospital for nearly six months. Only got out last week, didn't you?" He says, turning to me.

I nod my head, keeping my eyes on him.

“Hang on a second, what’s that down there?” Tommy says, pointing underneath the seat, right between Beanie-man’s legs. I smile at our old game.

“Where?” The guy says and moves his legs apart. He puts his head down, looking at where Tommy’s pointing.

“I can’t see anything,” he says, looking up at us from his crouched and helpless position. I can’t help but smile.

“Just there,” Tommy says.

He points again, lets go of the rail and moves closer.

In one quick movement Tommy bends down, takes his right hand out of his pocket and reaches beneath the seat. He straightens up and his palm opens and there’s the now half-empty bag of dope we bought off Simmo this morning. Beanie-man is amazed; Tommy’s become a magician who can do things far more useful than pull rabbits out of hats. Tommy laughs way down, that menacing new deepness swelling in his throat. He puts the dope back in his pocket and grabs the rail again. When he looks at me I realise he’s not going to do anything to Beanie-man. That’s a good thing.

Not like those pricks at the golf course. They deserved it.

Tommy and Beanie-man start talking about dope or golf or something and I look out the window into the night. My eyes are heavy but my brain’s wired and I’m hoping that because it’s Friday no-one’ll be home when I get there.

“Gezza here, he’s a good golfer,” says Tommy, jerking his head towards me. He’s got that smile. “Aren’t you now?”

“Yeah right, Tommy. I haven’t played in ages. Been in hospital remember? Why don’t you tell him about your great shot today?” Tommy goes dark and his eyes narrow at me and maybe I’ve gone too far. He turns away and kicks an empty can down the steps. A bloke down there looks up and looks away just as quick.

The way my bike's facing I don't think Beanie-man can see the freshly mashed pedal and mangled brake lever. But so what if he did? He's not going to remember this tomorrow - not if he's anything like my mum when she's that drunk. My left knee starts to hurt and I rub it. Tommy looks across and raises his eyebrows and chin ever so slightly as a way of asking if I'm ok. I nod back and do the same. He laughs and comes over to sit down next to me.

The train stops again and Tommy gets up to look out the doors. He scans up and down the platform in that slow way with his eyes flicking everywhere looking for trouble. And he finds it. Two ticket inspectors get on a couple of carriages ahead of us and he calculates the distance between them and us, working out if we have to get off now or if we can make it to another station. He turns and I'm already on my feet with a bike in each hand.

"Don't worry. There's a bunch of loudmouths down there, they'll keep 'em busy. Next station's not far," he says. I put the bikes back and sit back down. He tells me we'll get off at the next station, that it'll be easier for us - easier for him. Not that I care.

I sneak a look at my hands and realise the gravel rash isn't as bad as I first thought. There's no real cuts and the blood only seems to be coming from one place near my thumb.

Tommy's asking Beanie-man if he's got a smoke and we're in luck. I haven't smoked for ages and know I shouldn't, but I follow Tommy to the space between the carriages and pull the door behind us. He lights it and drags heavily before passing it to me: the tobacco burns and swims in my body and my head swirls. I can't focus properly and Tommy laughs as he takes the smoke back. Through the scratched glass of the door I can see our bikes and the ticket-dickheads moving closer. Tommy's looking at a girl in the other carriage.

Out here the air is cold but the rain seems to have stopped. Beneath our feet the tracks clack their familiar rhythm. Across the road there're lights and a street and people moving away from and towards the station. Lucky fuckers. I look down and know that I want it all to finish. Everything. Now. The carriages shift backwards and forwards as we move through the night and we slow for the platform ahead. An announcement crackles through the evening. It's such a small distance down to the ground that I think I hear crickets and imagine I see cigarette butts in between the sleepers. Tommy turns, looking past me and through the window.

"Fuck. Those pricks are almost there. Come on, let's move. Now." There's an urgency in his voice that I try to respond to, but it's as much as I can do to lift my head.

"Come on. What the fuck are you doing? Move."

Tommy needs to get past me to get to the door. I've got a foot on either side of the pin connecting the two carriages and his hand is on my shoulder. The ticket-dickheads are moving towards Beanie-man, one from above and one from below, their heads swivelling, checking for trouble. Just like Tommy. Just like Tommy who's pulling me down below the eye-line of the window. His tensed and loaded right hand stays on my shoulder.

The train slows before the station and when it makes that tiny backwards shunt - just before complete stillness - the carriage door swings open. Tommy and I are crouched there, him with a half-finished smoke cupped in his left hand, me with a hand on my throat. I can see all the way down the carriage - there's a bloke with a red cap pulled all the way over his face, a woman eating a chocolate bar, a group of teenagers with their feet on each other - but no-one sees us. One of the ticket-fuckers is writing something on a pad, looking at Beanie-man, the other is chewing her thumb and looking out the window. We're invisible. Suddenly the door snaps shut, bouncing back with the last, final jerk of the train.

III. Gone

We climb up the embankment and hear the train move off. A voice in the darkness announces where we are and where others are going. I'm pissed off about my bike but Tommy reckons he knows where to get a couple more so I nod my head and shut up. The train disappears into the night and then there's all this silence around us. It's like when you've been in a car with the window down, driving for hours, and when you stop everything seems quiet - much quieter than it really is.

Tommy pulls me up the last bit and we find a hole in the fence to crawl through. I think we're a long way from home but Tommy seems to know where we are and we turn left, veering away from the train-line. He's a few metres in front of me when he stops, reaches inside his shorts and walks out into the middle of the road.

"Hey, come on Gezza, catch up. Check this out." He's walking backwards up the road and piss is spraying all over the place. I jog and catch up to him, swerving to avoid the stream of piss he's aiming at me. I'm laughing so hard I have to stop walking. My throat tightens.

"I'm pissing off up the road," he shouts into the night. "I'm pissing off up the fucking road and I don't give a fuck. I don't give a fuck about going back."

A light turns on inside a house and I stop laughing. By the time I turn back to Tommy he's almost disappeared into the night. His voice calls out. It's been calling out all fucking night.

"You coming or what, Gezza?"

Tommy is walking up the road, his back to me, right hand slapping his thigh. My throat's so tight I can't speak, so I mouth the words I don't want to say: Yeah Tommy, I'm coming. I'm coming.