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Will Self: Walking to Hollywood

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An Exclusive Excerpt from the Satirist and Flâneur's Latest Novel

Author, journalist, laconic TV personality, dedicated walker and tea drinker Will Self publishes *Walking to Hollywood*, his 8th novel, this week. A hybrid of memoir and fiction, its central focus is a 120-mile, week-long circumnambulation of the notoriously pedestrian-unfriendly Los Angeles. Straight off the plane from LAX, he walks to Hollywood, taking in Culver City, Mulholland Drive and Santa Monica, on a mission to investigate the "death of cinema" en route, in a surreal film-noir murder mystery that disappears down rabbit-holes and melts time and place. He is abducted by the church of Scientology, fights the re-animated corpse of Walt Disney, dines with Bret Easton Ellis and spends a few days at the Chateau Marmont, which is the setting for today's extract.

I came to again in a bungalow at the Chateau Marmont, getting ready for the party being given in my honour. (Well, not so much of a party—that implies an importance I wouldn't wish for a second to arrogate to myself; more of a gathering, really). I was still thinking about the burning of Los Angeles and waiting for Faye to get back—it was that kind of bungalow. Naked, fresh from the shower, I wandered from the small bedroom, icy with state-of-tech TV and music system, to the kitchen, which, with its humming rhombus of an icebox, its foursquare sink—suitable for tanning hides—its chintzy muslin curtains and linoleum pong, suggested a happier era of making do belied by the dishonourable tray loaded with potato chips, cookies, cashews and liquor bottles.

I dressed and went outside to where evening had sidled between the palm leaves, and cheery lanterns lit up the mini-homesteads of this dinky banana republic. From the direction of the pool I could hear a little pre-supper goosing going on: a splash, a cry, the wet thwack of a bikini strap. Behind my bungalow, Mike Myers's moon face rose up, cratered by the Mare Imbrium of his fake beard. *His Karma is huge...*

I walked towards the thwack, let myself out through the metal gate, skirted the portecochère, walked down the lane, then along Sunset, and, passing between two sharp-featured young women snapped into black Lycra, entered the Bar Marmont. My key fob bulged in the pocket of my short pants as I walked up some stairs, along a narrow corridor, through a barroom the width of a train carriage and into a second, narrow as a toilet stall, then into a third no wider than a chicken run, at the end of which I climbed through a trapdoor into a hutch cluttered with armchairs and oil paintings and people—most of whom were thrashing about in a purse seine smoking area, accessed via french windows the size of marmalade jars.

They were all there in the limelight: the Jeffs and Bret, Michael Lynton and Ellen DeGeneres, James Crespinel and Judy Brown, Michael Laughlin—who was explaining the genesis of his



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self-designed sneakers to a young woman whose name I never did learn—and Mac Guffin, who immediately drew me to one side: 'Jesus, man,' he said. 'I picked up five fucking tickets minding your back all the way up Cienega.'

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'No one asked you do to that,' I hissed. 'And if you had to, why didn't you ditch the wheels?' 'Aw, c'mon fellah, don't be like that—I'm just trying to look out for you; they're on your tail—y'know that, don'tcha? They're sharpening their knives, putting on their leather faces, cranking up their chainsaws, I mean, it's *because* you're paranoid that they're now coming to get you—' He broke off to take a highball glass full of fruit from a waitress struggling through the throng.

'Yeah, thanks for nothing, Mac,' I snarled; 'why not just piss all over my party.'

'Party?' He shook his Labrador head, then began slobbering on a pineapple chunk. 'Isn't that a little grandiose—it looks more like a—'

'Nice gathering,' Bret said, cutting in appositely. 'This is Brad.' A tall, good-looking young man in blue jeans and a silky-black hoodie, the pink drapes of whose top lip parted to reveal expertly bleached teeth.

'Hi,' said Brad chirpily.

'Brad is directing a movie called *The Shrink*.'

'Really?' I said with maximum disdain. 'And what of it?'

'He wondered if you might like to drop by the set—they're shooting on location down at Venice; wouldn't that be on your way back to LAX?'

'Uh, yeah, I guess,' I said, trying to sound unconcerned, although I was whining inside: *Is he trying to get rid of me?*

'Bret says you're walking clear round LA,' said Brad.

'That's the aim.'

'Any special reason?'

'I'm location spotting for a movie about a guy who circumnambulates Los Angeles,' I told him. 'I originated the script, did the development myself, put together a lot of the finance, then took it to Sony.' I jabbed a finger towards Lynton. 'They've green-lit the project and I'll be directing as well.'

'And starring?'

I really didn't like this Brad—he was snider than an ill-gotten Madison hidden in a coffee can.

'Well, no, since you ask—obviously not. I may have some profile as an actor but I'm not *that* bankable. Leo DiCaprio will be playing me—although he's gonna need a body double for the walking scenes.

Brad was smirking and I foresaw that our next exchange would cross the border at Tijuana into outright savagery. Luckily DeGeneres took my elbow and guided me away, throwing over her shoulder, 'Don't mind us, guys, there's some people I'd like David to meet.'

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