

they make 'em (just) like they used to

Posted originally on the [Ad Astra :: Star Trek Fanfiction Archive](http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1780) at <http://www.adastrafanfic.com/works/1780>.

Rating:	Teen And Up Audiences
Archive Warning:	No Archive Warnings Apply
Category:	Gen
Fandom:	Star Trek: Deep Space Nine
Character:	Miles O'Brien , Sean Aloysius O'Brien
Additional Tags:	Time Travel , DS9 S04E16: Bar Association
Language:	English
Stats:	Published: 2024-09-07 Words: 4,515 Chapters: 1/1

they make 'em (just) like they used to

by [meriwethersays](#)

Summary

An anomaly sends Miles back in time to 1902, the day that Sean O'Brien is due to turn up dead in the Allegheny River.

Miles steps up to the pulpit and clears his throat. His eye is swollen shut, his lip thick, and he must look a right sight. He's never been one for speeches, but he's supposed to be Sean, at least for a few minutes more. "I don't know what you all heard," he says, and he tries to grin, "but I'm very much alive."

Notes

See the end of the work for [notes](#)

This sector of the quadrant is infamous for anomalies and sunspots that can send a man who-knows-where in the universe. Usually, Miles would never venture into it without a real pilot at the helm, but there are Jem'Hadar patrols everywhere and he's got to get back to DS9 with these parts as quick as he can. He's almost not surprised when an energy wave swallows the runabout and he finds himself tumbling through the air, the runabout headed straight for heavily forested ground.

Miles manages to pull up just in time for a hard landing. The sensors scream at him, but he knows which ones mean something and which can be set off if a man looks at them funny, and he knows she's sturdy enough to survive it. "Computer," he says, when he's settled the ship down. "Where are we?"

"Earth," the computer says primly. "In the United States geographical designation of Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania."

He's got a bad feeling about this. "What's the date?"

"It is 6:33 AM on October 17, 1902. Local time."

His heart skips at that, and it takes Miles a moment to remember why. His ancestor, Sean Aloysius O'Brien, is here—still alive, as far as Miles recalls the dates, but only just. Miles should stay in the runabout, figure out how to get her flying again as quick as he can to avoid affecting the timeline—his Temporal Mechanics instructors were emphatic about that—but something draws him to the door. "Computer," he says, "Run level five diagnostic. If I don't make contact in 12 hours, activate transporter."

It's chilly out and still dark. It's been years since he was a soldier, but Miles has some experience in keeping out of sight. The town is silent, and this is absurdly reckless of him, but he grew up with stories of his ancestor and there's not a photograph to be found of him. Miles only wants to see him, see what he inspires in others—

"Hey, you!" Someone grabs him by one arm and yanks him around. "What are you doing, skulking around?" It's a big, rough-looking man, with a black top hat and a heavy coat buttoned down the front. The badge on his chest reads COAL & IRON POLICE. "Boys, looks like we caught ourselves a saboteur!" Two more men appear at his side, both carrying heavy batons.

"I was only out for a walk," Miles says, and winces when the lead policeman grins.

"A mick, out for a walk at this time of morning? In those funny clothes?" When Miles starts to speak, another of the policemen strikes him in the side with a baton and Miles collapses to one knee, wheezing. Maybe he should've told the runabout to only wait an hour. "Cuff him."

He doesn't like his odds trying to resist. He might get off one shot with his phaser, but a well-placed hit from one of those batons would break his neck. The third policeman digs a knee into Miles's back and is yanking his arms back when there's a crack of gunfire. The policeman releases him, looking around frantically, and there's another *bang*. It's enough of a distraction for Miles to take advantage, and he twists and yanks—Julian is going to have a fit about his shoulder—and gets the baton away from the closest policeman. He can't risk killing them if

they're not supposed to die, not when he's traveled back in time, so he hits the man in the guts and watches him go down with some satisfaction. Another of them is on the ground, bleeding from the face—Miles's rescuer must have handled him—and the lead policeman is coming at Miles like a freight train. Someone clubs him in the knee with the butt of a shotgun and he yells out in pain, collapsing. The rescuer, whoever he is, grabs Miles by the wrist and hisses, "We've got to get to cover before more of them arrive!" and Miles follows blindly.

His rescuer leads him to the outskirts of town, into a big ramshackle barn. It's only there, as they pant for air, that the man says, "Who would be fool enough to get caught out in the open at a time like this?" A match strikes, and the lamp illuminates a face very much like his own. "Jesus, Mary, and Joseph," Sean O'Brien mutters. "What are you doing here, Miles?"

Miles gapes at him. "You know who I am?" As opening lines go, it's not a great one.

Sean frowns. "My cousin Miles? From back home? We've not seen each other in years, but me mam always said you were a hothead. I suppose you've come to join the strike?"

"Yes," Miles says. "Yes, that's why I'm here." He supposes it's not so outrageous that Sean should have a cousin named Miles, not when Miles was named after a family member all these years later. Fortuitous, though.

"You stick out something terrible in those clothes." Sean takes in Miles's uniform. "Not a bit of sense in your head, is there?"

"Sometimes. They might've knocked some of the sense out of me with those batons."

Sean's lip curls. "We've been living in the stranglehold of the yellow dogs since before I was born. That's one of our demands, stripping the Coal and Iron Police of their authority. Not much hope of that, but something worth fighting for." He shakes his head. "Here, I'll get you some clothes and something to eat. There's a meeting this morning—maybe seeing that others are coming to join us will help boost morale."

He takes the lamp and leaves Miles in the dimness of the barn. It smells of hay and cow manure and sweat. This is bad. Miles certainly didn't intend to get pulled into this conflict, especially not when he knows how it ends. Sean looks about Julian's age, but he's got a long nasty scar through his left eyebrow all the way down to his left cheek—it's a miracle he's still got the eye. Miles taps his communicator and says, very quietly, "Computer, postpone transport by 12 hours."

Sean returns with a stack of clothes and a mug of something steaming. "Soup's all we've had for months," he says. "The strike fund is running very low, and we've got to stretch it as far as we can."

Miles accepts the mug and drinks it down—searing hot broth, weakly-flavored, with a few chunks of something or other in it. "I don't mean to stretch it thinner," he says. "I'll do what I can to contribute." Sean has hours left to live, a day at most. He hands the mug back to Sean and changes out of his uniform. Fortunately, the dim light makes it easier for him to slip his badge and his phaser into one of the pockets of his new coat.

They make their way out of the barn just before the sun rises. Sean doesn't talk much and doesn't ask a lot of questions. "It's so quiet here," Miles can't help saying. The entire town has the feeling of a place holding its collective breath.

"Aye, we've been on strike for months now. You never realize how much noise you come to live with until it disappears." A cloaked figure is waiting for them outside the big church, and she lowers her hood to kiss Sean on the cheek. "Miles, this is my wife Brigid. Love, this is my cousin Miles, from back home."

"How d'you do," Brigid says. When she hands Sean what looks like a well-worn printed book, her cloak shifts and Miles sees that she's very pregnant.

"It's nice to meet you." Miles feels acutely awkward. Sean O'Brien is going to die, tonight or tomorrow, and of course Miles knew that he must've had a son, but it's a bit different to meet his future widow and his unborn son face-to-face.

Brigid nods in acknowledgment. "They're waiting, love," she says. Sean takes a deep breath, squares his shoulders, and strides into the church with Miles and Brigid trailing after.

The pews are packed full, with men and women lining the aisles too. It's humid and smells strongly of people and funny perfumes, and the chattering turns to a low murmur as Sean walks up to the front of the room. A man all in black—a priest, Miles remembers—beckon Sean up onto the raised area, and the room falls silent.

Sean draws in a deep breath, and then the words pour out like thunder. "Do you recall how many of us died at Avondale, suffocated or burned alive? More than a hundred! And what did they do? Tried to blame it on us, on the union men! Another hundred at Mammoth Mine, men like you and me who came here, who brought their families here, because we were promised better lives! And Rolling Mill, three months ago to the day—more than a hundred men lost, and it was only four days before the bosses sent men right back down there again!" Up there on the pulpit, Sean's face is red and his eyes are shining with some combination of rage and sorrow. "How many more times can they say that we're disposable, that our lives mean nothing, before the world believes them?"

"I know it's been a long strike, lads. I know it seems like it'll never end. They say we're to blame for the violence, they send the yellow dogs after us and our families—it's only a mark of how desperate we've made them. Winter is coming, lads, and a country without coal in winter is a country brought to her knees." He's breathing hard and Miles understands how it is that all of these men and women are still following him, even after all these months. "The world is behind us. My own cousin came all the way from Ireland to support us," Sean says, and he points to Miles. A few heads turn toward him, but it's Sean whose presence is magnetic, Sean who builds the crackling energy in the room. "Stay strong. We're not asking for much—enough money to live on, enough hours to spend a moment with our wives and wee ones, a little less chance of dying down there. We'll win this fight yet." His voice carries such conviction that it's almost as though he's had a vision, like he truly *knows* that they will.

The church echoes with the cheers and the stamping feet. Still, Miles sees the hollow faces, the clothes that hang too loose, the marks of men

and women suffering for lack of food. Sean steps down from the pulpit and shakes hands, talks to people, coaxes the ones who look skeptical back into a smile or a determined frown. Sean is keeping this thing together with chewing gum and a half-busted tricorder—metaphorically, of course—and Miles can't see how it'll last for a day without him, let alone an entire week.

Only when there's no one left but the priest does Sean return to Miles. "You see," he says, and he's breathing hard. "You see, they all believe. It's been hard and it gets harder every day, but if we can only hold on a little longer—"

"You'll do it," Miles says, almost automatically. "You'll win. The mine owners and the coke companies, they'll yield."

Sean gives him a strange look. "You've an odd way of saying that. I believe it, but you *know* it somehow."

Miles shakes his head quickly. "Only from listening to you and seeing the way they look at you—and seeing how the police could be scared away by one man standing up for his fellow man."

Sean snorts. "Don't give me too much credit for that. If it'd been daylight and I hadn't had a gun, they'd've happily broke both our necks and gone home for lunch. Speaking of," he says. "We should leave now, get off the street before they come sniffing around."

"What about—"

"Father Kelly?" Sean nods at the priest, who nods back and then retreats into—a different part of the church, Miles doesn't know what all these different rooms are called. "They'll harass him a bit, but they'd never hurt a priest. Even they have some standards, it seems." The tightness of his mouth suggests that those standards are minimal.

The streets are full of muddy slush, dirty snow shoveled out and heaped up to leave a path to and from the church. There are a few scattered shops open, with no custom, and it reminds Miles a little of when they first came to DS9, when the people walked around like they didn't know quite what was happening and weren't sure that they wanted to. The gray sky above is heavy and cold.

They're nearly off the streets when someone cries "There he is!" and the damned policemen are converging on them again, batons at the ready.

Miles is ready to fight—Sean has hours left to live, he can't die now—but Sean shoves him away hard and hisses, "Get to Brigid!" and then charges the police with a yell. When Miles reaches for his phaser in his jacket, his fingers meet sharp broken metal. Of all the times for the bloody thing to fail him—maybe it's for the best, because he thinks he would've used it without regret. Sean is down on the ground now, two of them grabbing him by the arms, and much as he hates it, Miles turns and runs.

He takes a long, looping route back to the barn where he and Sean first hid, at first because he doesn't want to be followed and then because he's not entirely sure where he's going. Brigid is already there, waiting, and she takes one look at him and turns white. "Where is he?" she asks. "Where's my Sean?"

"They arrested him." That's one way to put it. He thinks Sean was still alive when they dragged him away, but Miles isn't sanguine about how much longer that would last. "He pushed me away—he told me to get back to you and tell you what had happened."

"You'll forgive me if I'd ha rather had him," she says sharply. "The strike needs him, the men need him—" Miles hears the unspoken *I need him* and swallows back the sudden bile in his throat. Sean O'Brien was doomed to die long ago, but it's a great deal more real now that he's been taken. Miles wants to say *we'll get him back*, but he knows a lie when he sees it. "You might as well come into the house."

The house is small, just two cramped rooms. In the corner of the kitchen, there's a mostly-carved wooden crib with a chisel lying next to it. Brigid sees Miles look at it and she smiles a little. "Sean wants a girl," she says. "But I think it'll be a boy."

"I've got one of each, myself," Miles tells her. "Molly and Kirayoshi. They're both right terrors. Molly looks just like me, poor girl. I'm hoping Yoshi will take after his mother."

Brigid's smile wavers. "There's more stew on the hob, if you're hungry."

"You should have it." She's his great-great-however many greats-grandmother, he realizes abruptly. Barely more than a teenager now, with a hard life behind her and ahead of her. It's a hard time to be alive, and he can't help thinking that even with the Dominion advancing and the millions upon millions of lives lost every day, he's glad that his children will grow up in their own time. If he can save this timeline, that is.

They eat something like an early lunch in near-silence. Then there's a knock on the door and Brigid hisses, "Get out of sight." Miles shuts himself into the pantry closet, the door cracked enough that he can see what's happening. He keeps one hand on his phaser, even though it's useless.

"Mrs. O'Brien." It's Father Kelly, his face very pale. He looks like he's been crying.

"I knew it," Brigid says, and her voice is faint but steady. "As soon as I heard they took him, I knew."

"They—left him in the church yard. I've got his body hidden away safely, but rumors are already starting. What will we do? I'll see you're looked after, but the strike—the men are already on the verge—"

That's no story of gunfire, no heroic sacrifice. That's not the way it's supposed to be—and it all crystallizes then. Miles opens the closet door and steps forward. "I know what to do," he hears himself say.

The priest breathes something in Gaelic. "You're the cousin? Seeing you up close, I would've sworn—"

"That's what they'll have to think," Miles says. "That's not how Sean O'Brien dies."

Brigid looks uneasy and Father Kelly makes as if to cross himself. "What are you saying?" she asks. "What do you mean, that's not how my

Sean dies?”

Miles being here must have changed something—maybe the goons decided to hurry up and kill Sean after they saw Miles, or maybe they mistook him for Sean in that early scuffle. “It has to be something—big. He has to be a symbol, even in death.” Miles takes a deep breath. “One more speech tonight, a thumb in the eye for the police. They only have to hold out a little longer.”

“And who’s going to give the speech? Father Kelly? Me?” Brigid’s voice doesn’t shake, but she’s very pale, and Miles reminds himself that she’s just lost her husband. Sean’s death hasn’t always been a foregone conclusion for her. “Sean’s the silver-tongue. That’s why we all followed him in the first place.”

“Sean will.” Miles points to his face. “Everyone knows they took him—if I turn up with my face badly bruised and what looks like his scar, if I sound like him, they’ll believe. They’ll *want* to believe, and they will. That defiance—that could be enough.” He doesn’t know what will change in history if Sean O’Brien doesn’t die with 32—or was it 34?—bullets in him, but he doesn’t want to take the risk.

“Go on then, you want us to beat you until you’re bloody enough to look like Sean after the yellow dogs got done with him?”

Miles winces. “It doesn’t have to be *too* terrible, only enough that anyone who thinks my face looks a little odd will assume it’s because of the beating.” Julian is going to want to know if there’s a holosuite program of a coal miner’s strike, when Miles gets back. Maybe Miles will have to make one. “And one of you will have to be the one to do it. No one else can know. You can bury him after tonight, whatever you’d like, but for tonight he’s got to be alive still.”

Brigid looks to Father Kelly. “D’you want to do it, or shall I?”

Miles braces himself. “Not my nose, if you can help it,” he says. Julian can repair bruising, even an orbital socket fracture, relatively easily, but a broken nose has to be mashed back into shape. He’s had enough to last him more than one lifetime.

Brigid throws the first punch, and she doesn’t pull it. It sends Miles reeling and makes his eyes water, and the next time she hits him her wedding ring splits his eyebrow. “Brigid,” Father Kelly warns, and she hits Miles one more time before turning away, gasping out silent sobs.

“I know,” Miles says, though his lip is swelling. “There have been times—when my daughter was lost, when I was in prison, when my wife was held hostage—that my world nearly ended.” All too many times. He puts one hand cautiously on Brigid’s thin shoulder and squeezes.

Brigid clamps her own hand over his, so tightly it hurts, and when she turns around her eyes are fierce. “We’ll make them pay for my Sean.” Her other hand hovers over her belly and Miles swallows back his sorrow about the lad that’s going to grow up hearing stories of his hero father that he’ll never meet. She looks at him critically. “Once the bleeding stops, I’ll see about—drawing on Sean’s scar. Father, can you make sure everyone is gathered, or enough of them, in two hours? It’ll seem strange, but we can’t let word spread too far without answering.”

“I’m sure the police will be there as soon as I get up onto the pulpit,” Miles says. “I’ll make it quick.”

* * *

The people gathered in the pews look even more ragged than they did this morning. Word has already started to get around, Miles realizes. The police have put it about that Sean is dead in the hope of breaking the back of the strike. He’ll have a minute or two, maybe less, to convince the miners to hold out before the Coal and Iron Police ‘arrest’ him again and shut Sean up for good.

When he steps out from the vestry, the room begins to buzz. Miles steps up to the pulpit and clears his throat. His eye is swollen shut, his lip thick, and he must look a right sight. He’s never been one for speeches, but he’s supposed to be Sean, at least for a few minutes more. “I don’t know what you all heard,” he says, and he tries to grin, “but I’m very much alive.” The desperate hope in their eyes hurts his heart. “There’s a time,” he starts, and swallows hard. “There’s a time when the operation of the machine makes you so sick at heart that you can’t take part—you can’t even passively take part! And you’ve got to put your bodies upon the gears and upon the wheels, upon the levers—and you’ve got to make it stop!” The men before him are nodding, some of them clenching their fists, and there’s energy in the church meeting hall again. “And you’ve got to tell the people who run it, the people who own it—that unless you’re free the machine will be prevented from working at all!” There are cheers. “We’ve got the mine owners by the throats, lads. Another week and they’ll come to the table. They’ll learn to treat us like men and women, not cogs in their machines, not disposable bodies. Another week, that’s all it will take!” He knows that it’s true. The people are cheering louder again, stamping their feet against the wooden floor, and in the din Miles sees Brigid smiling through tears, one hand on her belly. A rousing speech isn’t enough, though. He knows that now—he watched Sean give one this morning, and already people were on the verge of despair again.

The door creaks open, and Father Kelly comes running in from where he was standing watch. “They’re coming,” he hisses. “The police—they’re coming for *Sean* again. You’ve got to get out now, before they get here—”

“No,” Miles says, and he keeps his voice strong, loud enough for everyone to hear. “No, let them come. Let them see that we don’t fear them.” Easy for him to say it when he’s counting on his transporter to save his life. The doors burst open and five policemen advance on Miles, their guns drawn. “This is a house of worship!” Father Kelly cries. “A sanctuary—”

“Don’t worry, Father,” one of them says as he grabs Miles by the collar. “We’ll take him outside before there’s any blood shed.”

“It’s all right, Father,” Miles says. He’s got his thumb on his communicator, on the button that will trigger a transport. “Tell them all—” The policeman punches him across the face and Miles spits blood onto the floor. “Remember me, lads,” he says to the assembly, as sharply as he can. The last thing he wants is a riot. These people aren’t supposed to die, not now, and what a stupid way to die it would be for him, here, four hundred years away from the Dominion, away from Keiko and Molly and Kirayoshi. But the story has to exist—Sean O’Brien has to be martyred. He’s not about to let them shoot him full of thirty-two (or was it thirty-four?) bullets, but that part of the story will have to take care of itself. “Remember Sean O’Brien—they can try to silence one of us, but the union goes on—”

“Shut your mouth,” one of the policeman says, and hits him across the mouth again. It hurts like hell—two of his teeth are a little loose in his

gums and there's blood collecting in the back of his throat. Julian is going to have a fit. When he sees a few of the men start forward, he shakes his head sharply, and thank goodness they still trust Sean O'Brien enough to follow his orders.

The police march him out behind the church, down by the muddy banks of the river, and force him down onto his knees in the snow. The sun is just beginning to set behind the church. "It's five hundred dollars to the man who kills Sean O'Brien," one of the men says, and they back away a few paces, drawing their guns again. "This time, we'll be sure you're dead. Men, ready!"

Miles triggers the transport as the policeman yells, "*Fire!*" He hears the gunshots, one after another, and he thinks he can almost feel them zipping through the spot where his body used to be. There inside the church, everyone will have heard the gunshots. Maybe it'll be one of the policemen who spreads the story far and wide, mistakenly believing that it'll sow fear. Maybe it'll be Brigid, or Father Kelly.

He re-materializes in his shuttle to discover a woman he's never met in the co-pilot's seat, a stern expression on her face. "You could have done *irreparable* damage to the timeline," she says. A temporal agent, then. "All for a day of sightseeing—"

"Did I preserve it?" he asks. "Was it enough?"

The temporal agent enters something into the runabout's computers. "I suppose we'll find out," she says. "You'd better get out of here." Then she taps her wrist and disappears.

He flies up into low Earth orbit under the cover of darkness. As soon as he crosses the Kármán line, whatever the temporal agent did to the computer kicks in; the stars blur in front of him, the shuttle's interior twisting and turning in ways that it was never meant to move. Then he's flung out into normal space again like he's been shot from a rubber band, and there's DS9 in front of him.

"Computer," he says carefully, "have we returned to our previous temporal coordinates?" Much as he wants to hold Keiko and Molly and Kirayoshi close, he's not going to risk fouling up time again unless the computer says it's safe.

"Confirmed. Begin docking procedures?"

"Aye," Miles says. "Let's go home."

End Notes

Miles has taken his speech to the union from Mario Savio's 1964 [speech at Berkeley](#). I have taken some, though surprisingly few, liberties with times, dates, and locations. Sadly, I did not invent the Coal and Iron Police. People called them "yellow dogs"; as far as I can tell, that does not have a racist origin, but please let me know if I'm wrong and I'll edit accordingly. If you think you recognize this general plot from *Back to the Future, Part III* or the DS9 episode *Past Tense*, you'd be right.

Please [drop by the archive and comment](#) to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!