

## The Scientific Method of Walking Home

### Formulation of a Question:

What is it about the night that makes us brave?

### Hypothesis:

It starts with paranoia; an interesting place to begin, like opening a novel by the spine and flying straight to the climax, but nevertheless paranoia is our opener.

The shroud of dusk has dimmed to the shade of the ocean, roads have become bottomless wells interrupted by the occasional chemical glimmer of a streetlight.

I relish each clack of my shoes on cobblestone, strong enough to echo amongst the empty windows and sleeping storefronts that surround me. The sound assures my existence, but also that of another

—here is the paranoia—

not heels but something heavier, boots or muted loafers, their stride wider than mine and favoring the left side. Orpheus might have looked back but I won't. I tell myself

be *rational*, be *sane*, *abstain* from conclusions, chest pain is just a panic attack, a pedestrian is just a stranger, and a man is just a man until he's not.

### Prediction:

But why take the chance? Maybe step into a store, employ someone else's employee as your "control," see your faceless subject as a foil to someone you trust

but only insofar we seem to trust anyone on a payroll, except that it is 3am and workers will be just people unconscious in their after-hour beds, dreaming about everything

but the girl who wishes they were behind a counter selling 3 euro Bueno Bars. So I will continue walking, counting steps and counting breaths, as though it were a choreographed dance.

Testing:

To take a random left and test his intentions means straying farther from home, but I know a certain street that might be crowded. So I turn to find

Analysis:

an empty street is just as empty when filled with Christmas lights.

“Salut, toi” when used amongst friends is sweet Nutella crepes and la bise

but his is something else, dripping with something other than sugar loud enough to

be impossible to ignore but not so powerful as to wake the neighbors and I have to wonder,

what is it about the night that makes us brave,

and also so afraid?

## **Catholicism is a Girl in a Tiny Skirt**

We were baptized not knowing yet who to worship,  
or what that even meant; Christ was both a man  
and a picture book to be held with a sturdy grip.

Mass is not merely a unit of measurement but a clan  
of believers synchronized swimming through verse,  
or whatever that means to them. Christ. Was both man

and woman created at the conception of time? The curse  
that knowledge carried was really just the promise  
of believers synchronized swimming through verse

until we drowned in the sound of our own voice.  
Still, we wore our plaid skirts and closed our eyes,  
the knowledge we carried was just the promise

that one day, death would not be our true demise.  
We were cannibals, eating His wafered body we stayed  
still, wore our plaid skirts and closed our eyes,

drank blood and whispered for health, we prayed.  
We were baptized not knowing yet who to worship.  
We became cannibals that ate his wafered body and stayed  
true to the picture book. We always held it with a sturdy grip.

## **La langue**

Put in the mouth guard that allows you to slip into another tongue. Not the tongue in between the palette, teeth, and lips, but the effervescent sounds that compound within those appendages until they've produced something with "meaning." Within this other tongue you will find a different You, imbued with traits undeniably not yours. You might develop shifty eyes or a habit of leaving sentences hanging on clotheslines until the wind wastes them away. You force the native speakers around you to witness your babbling attempts at wearing one language when you have mouthfuls of another, like marbles stuffed in the cheeks of someone who is trying to eradicate a stutter but instead chokes on round balls made of glass. I, myself, have discovered that when I don the language French I almost always have little or nothing to say. I've given my tongue to the chat—or *ma langue au chat*?—and now my words are tumbleweeds that wish to be gardens, thirsting for a dictionary oasis but finding only enough to sustain a polite passenger-on-the-train conversation. A curse on all of us for learning language, as Caliban would say, although you know it seems unfair the way he was so easily endowed with the English of Prospero just because Shakespeare decided it should be so. I would ask the author of my tale to strike a similar accord but I've yet to make their acquaintance donc I'm bloqué between *les deux langues*, struggling to find a balance between who I am *en anglais et qui je suis* in French like some kind of unmute mutant muddling through the few phrases that *je sais*, hoping that to try is also to triumph, that my home won't be missing from me even in my state of un-country-ing, and that I never forget to preserve is *préserver* but a *préservatif* in French is a condom.

## **A Hypochondriac is Always Asking Questions**

You're sitting in your room, a space where you can be complacent in the skin that [your] god gave you when you notice a strange lump on your knee. It's discolored but not itchy, not small but not large, and only slightly angry. You're five years old and much too young to die or even know if this is deadly. Naturally you run, crying, to your mother and tell her of your malady. It's cute, she says, the way you worry.

When you're ten, a strange rash manifests itself in a ring around your belly and you're convinced it's staph until a doctor assures you it's shingles.

All doctors have nice smiles and bad breath, you know.

At fifteen your brain grew a tumor. You felt it behind your headaches like a pebble dropped into a well, rippling cancer through your frontal lobes until you couldn't see behind the curtain of your panic. Breath is not a gift, but a privilege reserved for those with clear minds.

Your heart stopped at twenty-two. You felt it, you knew because ten beats at a time it whispered that your end had come, that your blood would curdle like spoiled milk and your skin would dye itself to the shade of the afternoon sky.

And wouldn't you call an ambulance for a stopped heart? If you were sitting in a coffee shop sipping on a cappuccino and your suddenly very sweaty palms were also trembling while your vision was tunneling your chest closing in on itself like an imploding star and everyone around you was acting like nothing was wrong like your world wasn't about to end and your body wasn't about to become a puppet without any strings,

like watching Pinocchio in reverse, the magic wearing off until you were just a block of wood. Wouldn't you believe

that death was near if your body told you so?

## **dating in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Brandon doesn't stress over the small stuff; his blood is as cool as a chilled Miller Lite. He loves dogs and guns, but only when combined, and isn't looking for Mrs. Right.

Steven is a barista, but don't ask him to make you a drink. His interests include sketches of wolves in leather-bound notebooks and single malt whiskey on the rocks. He's in touch with his feminine side and would love to touch yours too.

For Matthew, God comes first and last. He's completely accepting of other religions, but doesn't trust atheists. How could he? They don't believe in an omnipotent anything and therefore can't be believed themselves.

Josh's profile says he's 23 but really he's 20; doesn't know why or how to change it. From Carter County, new to Johnson City. Go Bucks.

Sebastian is a European traveling the US with his buddies from Uni. His pictures are comprised of stock-worthy views and groups of men with eyes half-closed from all the booze. He's only in town for the weekend, and wants to see the best of American hospitality.

A quick dictionary, for those who need it:

**A conversation** is a script written by an entire generation.

**A personality** is a profile in 100 words or less.

**A match** is a mutual agreement that you're both bored and alone.

Swipe through these baseball-carded humans collecting matches in an inbox until you've amassed thousands and do not entertain their advances but attain even more. Pain cannot be felt by a picture on screen or the person behind it, and besides, you're not the one who thinks you'll find true love online, you're more than what your photos make you out to be, you don't take this seriously, you're just here for fun, just here to see, just here for friends, just here for sex, just here sometimes, just here alone, just here.