

1.

Rain pattered on the panes, waking him up before his alarm.

It was going to be a good day.

He stretched while still in bed. The mattress slid under his calves in a satisfying way. Why bother getting up quickly? He propped himself up on his elbow on the soft surface, briefly wondering what he would call himself today. Olaf? No, something with one syllable. He was feeling simpler today. Lai? Luff? No, that one he had decided to put away since that annoying anime came out with a protagonist of the same name plus y.

He tabled the budding internal discussion. Names were ultimately meaningless anyway.

Not so, another part of his mind objected. In fact-

Not going to get caught up in a convoluted musing. Not when he had such a good start. He decided his slow moving was the source of this temptation, and fluidly ripped off the covers, spun, and landed lightly on the balls of his feet all in one motion. Action. That's what would work.

He snatched his phone and turned off the alarm, relishing that he wouldn't have to hear it blaring. Would he remember to turn it back on for tomorrow? Maybe. Maybe not. "Living dangerously." He quipped sarcastically. He laughed out loud to himself.

He bounded down the stairs of his small house, lightly caressing the smooth wood of the railing topper. He *loved* wood. Suddenly he wanted to visit the old church with the huge rafters again. He hadn't visited there in- how long was it?

He was actually up early enough to put a few small branches in his fireplace, too. Soon smoke of fir trickled into the room. Not the best wood for the *warmth* of a fire, of course- soft wood always burns out faster than hard wood- but he wanted the scent. One day, he was going to recruit someone for a blind test to see if he could distinguish different subspecies by that alone.

He dug out some mushrooms and bell peppers to add to three fried eggs and savored each bite of his breakfast. It was excellent when you didn't have to grab the closest snack and rush out the door.

He didn't bother putting on a coat- it wasn't *that* cold, especially for Quebec- and he liked feeling the rain. Whatever building he entered was usually stuffy and warm enough to dry him out in a reasonable amount of time, especially since he wore athletic material that was water resistant.

As he strode along the sidewalks, he did avoid puddles, though. Nothing was worse than soaked socks. He also studiously avoided everyone's gazes, and the gazes of the buildings. If he got caught up in either, his mood would surely spiral.

2.

He focused on the drip, drip of the steady but light rain, amused at how one big drop could make it

all the way to his scalp in one go while the next would fall on his short spongy hair and take a second to make the journey down. He was sure he must look comical and out of place, with already rare dark skin riddled with rivulets of-

No.

Don't look at other faces, don't think of how you look to them, he scolded himself. Not right now. There's a time and place for that. The rain quickly tamped down the brief temperature flare of his face, not that anyone would notice.

The rafters seemed to greet him like an old friend. Square and solid, like him, they were also as easily big around as he was. And as dark. They belonged to an alien religion however, so if they were welcoming, it was in a different language than his native tongue. The doors of the church were always open, and no one ever bothered him. The tattoo on his shoulder was in an equally alien language to them, but somehow, he suspected, they could intuit what it meant. That, or they thought he projected an unfriendly demeanor, which while not correct, was not entirely far off the mark, either.

Again, he didn't want to get caught up in complicated musings at this moment. This was simple. He wanted to see the rafters, with their ridges and grains, and he wanted to see the stained glass muted and streaked by rain. That they could be beautiful, even not in full sunlight, was reassuring somehow. That they were his opposites, those that were created to crave clear and cloudless days, yet still be here fulfilling their purpose, doing their job, sitting neatly in their places.

He wouldn't come back any more often than last time, he had long since decided, or they would lose their effect.

He entered the wet world again, making a beeline for the lecture hall. Since he had decided not to shield against the rain, he obviously could not have kept any paper dry. So he sat in the back, as usual, and resolved to pay close attention. Sometimes it seemed he learned more when he didn't have to split his attention between working fingers and understanding and absorption. Maybe he could look up a psychology or education paper to investigate whether his hunch was right. He drummed the knuckles of his fingerless gloves on the table in irritation.

Today they were learning about methylation of genes, where cells' responses to the environment determined which traits were expressed. It overturned the previous understanding of science, that genes "controlled" expression of traits, were the ultimate arbiters of destiny and the body.

3.

Once the lecture was over, he made his way to a cafe to sit down and have coffee. The table umbrellas directed rain to the curves between spines, and he looked out between the artificial mini waterfalls. This was when he could examine faces at his leisure. In this position, he wasn't towering over people, as he was when standing. That was nearly always awkward for all involved. Here, he could blend in as best he could with the European blooded customers, and look down at his drink surreptitiously if anyone unintentionally caught his gaze. A man in a blazer and an orange scarf gestured animatedly while talking into his phone, making displeased faces but keeping his voice soft. He caught the eye easily because of his movements.

Mil, he thought as he breathed in and then sipped his coffee. My name for the day will be Mil if anyone asks. Grinding up coffee manually on a mill stone would be an interesting undertaking.

He focused on the man more intently. From the way he was agitated yet controlled, it was probably a work matter, not a personal one.

A woman towing a grade schooler along with her was standing in line next door at a produce vendor. The smaller girl was fidgeting and squirming, loudly complaining about the “stinky” smell of coffee. He smiled. If that was the worst she had to put up with, she had no idea how lucky she was, and he hoped it would stay that way for a long time for her.

His eyes roamed for a closer face, one he could watch for little wrinkles and details rather than broad brush impressions. Two tables over, another man was absorbed completely in his laptop. He had somewhat bushy eyebrows and tousled brown hair with ringlets that were not at all effeminate. His nose was the slightest bit pink from the outside air. While there was plenty to admire about his looks, he yielded no information whatsoever.

Mil’s gaze lingered for a moment or two more, hoping to catch an expression change. He had a feeling he would equally like to see a smile or a frown on that face. But it didn’t come, so he turned his head to the people on the street. Every time it rained he wondered if he would see another like him, head either tilted up towards the sky or a slight spring in a step. But everyone always seemed to wilt in the rain, unlike plants. And those who were visibly happy were very obviously enthralled by something that had nothing at all to do with the weather. Soft, unfocused eyes or grins or whistling. Still, he took it. It was something.

After an hour or so, he stood up, trying not to notice when two nearby women who had been chatting quite comfortably went silent until he was a few paces away. He meandered to the campus library. A new installation of Inuit art had been put up. There were huge blown up pictures of- bead circles? He skimmed the description. The red and white beads signified the mixing of Inuit and European ancestry and identity. He thought that was a bit much to ask of just patterns. As if triangles and dips of beads could adequately speak of conflict and blood.

His fists tightened in his gloves and his heart hammered as he batted away old remembrances. Ones older than most of the people in the room.

He breathed in and out a few times, deep from the diaphragm. He walked away, mostly calm, and browsed the nonfiction section, looking for a good biography. Autobiographies, he found, were far too sanitized for his tastes. No one liked to reminisce about what they’d done wrong, or broadcast it for the world to hear. The same property applied to nations writing their own meta-autobiographies, i.e., self-written histories.

After a while of reading first chapters and cover inserts, he picked a few and memorized them for later. After all, it was still raining and he had nothing to carry books in to keep them dry, either. Now he would need to make a circuit back to the library tomorrow, and that would round off his goal for distance walked this week. When he got home, he would do some calisthenics. If he happened to have an itch to drag out his old punching bag, he asserted to himself, it didn’t mean it hadn’t overall been a pretty good day . . .