



A Walk in the City

Michele Marie Bradshaw

Dreary clouds skulk about the air. They hover over my apartment like gargoyles perched on a cathedral ledge. It is as if they are trying to shield me from the day I'll soon face. I pay them no mind. Disregarding the drizzle against my window, the howling breeze, and the urge to crawl back in bed and drown in the emotional sounds of the Cure...I get up. The steam from the shower, with help from the smell of apartment 3G's breakfast wafting down the hall, invigorates me. Today is the first time I've a clear schedule in weeks, and I am ill prepared to waste it. I wash up, comb my hair, and brace myself for the world outside my door. I hustle down the dim hall to the all-too-slow elevator—I quickly decide to take the stairs. I breeze through the lobby, barely dispensing the usual pleasantries.

The city is mine today. All my plans center on doing much of nothing and experiencing all I can. As I look upon the street, I can see the sidewalks are nearly deserted; even some newsstands have taken hiatus due to the impending storm. Still, I take it all in stride and stroll down the empty walkways.

I pick up a super-charged espresso from the coffee shop on the corner and begin to make my way to the Amish market at the Redding Terminal in Center City. It's the edge of spring. There are blossoms for sale, fruits I haven't seen in what seems like decades, as well as crafts and quilts laden in warm pastel shades. The sheer color of the market overwhelms me, so I walk onward to explore new ventures.

It seems laughable on such a day as this to see bathing suits along with invites to visit the Easter bunny decorating department store windows; they had been flooded just weeks before with hearts and cherubs—though I must admit I was happy to see them go. I can do without the reminder of couples in love being as I no longer belong to that sect. The city streets, though lined with colorful storefronts, —in some cases even neon—are still taunted by the smells that rise up from their manhole covers. The stench of cigarettes, sweat, and beer permeates even the prettiest shop windows. I glide past it all and move on to the park.

Rittenhouse Square is a lush green pasture in the middle of the city dappled along its edges with dogwoods—not yet in bloom. Every large city has one of these. Paris seems to have several, in London you'll find Picadilly Circus, and of course in New York there is Central Park. Philadelphia has Rittenhouse Square. I come here often to write or simply to relax—just to let life roll by at the gentle pace it seems to in the park. Life beats along to a soothing rhythm in the park; it doesn't feel wasteful just to sit. I'm content to let my mind aimlessly wander.

Suddenly, as I gaze out at the impending lunchtime crowd, my heart stops. I lay eyes upon someone I wasn't ready to see ever again—the love of my life. I try not to notice he's arm in arm with the woman he swore he wasn't cheating on me with—the final blow—they look happy. A storm begins to brew in my gut. I'm not sure whether I feel the need to retch, cry, or scream out, "Liar!" I really believe it's a mix of three as my espresso rises in my throat. Of course, he doesn't even see me, and they walk on canoodling. I begin to contemplate how much I will let seeing him affect me, when the sky opens up and it begins to pour. Umbrella-less and too far away to run home, I suck it up and drudge through the city, all the while wishing I'd stayed in bed.

When I reach my apartment, I'm drenched. Bugged down with sopping wet clothes and a load of heavy thoughts. The light conversation I now long for is not initiated—I ascend to my floor alone. The lights that line the corridor flicker as the power sputters out—a final reminder I should have stayed home. Regardless, I make my way into my apartment, change into my warmest pajamas, and curl up in a soft recliner with my Walkman and a view of the storm-ridden skyline. I drift to sleep still selling myself the thought that indeed tomorrow is a new day.