

CONTRARIETY

I put it off for weeks at a time. My sneakers eye me with judgement every time I go into my closet and choose my boots instead. For one thing, it's too cold to run very far before my lungs feel frozen, and if I forget to cover my ears I'll end up with sore ears and a cold for about a week. But more than that it's the imaginary mocking I hear from others who drive by me or pass me on the sidewalk, as if they're really concerned with how slow or awkward I am, as if they care at all as much as I do if I have to stop to walk for a minute. If it's too early in the day I worry about having to get back and shower before my evening activities, and if it's too late at night I worry I'll get hit by a car that doesn't see me or get abducted in the murky darkness where the streetlamps don't reach. I run faster and faster to get away from invisible monsters, and that just exhausts me even more. So, I don't run very often.

But every once in a while the sneakers hold out an invitation instead of a prison sentence. I remember how great it feels to expand my lungs and feel my whole body working, pumping, flying. I am refreshed. Energized. Exhilarated. Exhausted. I focus on my running form. My arms swing fast and strong, working with my legs, mechanically and organically all at once. It's nighttime and it's raining. I watch the colors of streetlights and headlights run together like watercolors on the asphalt. My lungs ache and my breath runs loud and my heart shakes, and I smile because I know here, purely, that I am alive, alive, alive.

My sneakers go back on my shelf when I get home and start looking at me with shifty eyes again because they know it will be at least a week before I pull them out again.