

How to Walk to the Library

Best of Fiction

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Shrug your backpack over your shoulders and lock the front door behind you. Readjust your plastic-frame glasses and maybe your bra, if no one is looking. Check to make sure you remembered your wallet and take to the streets. Stand at the bus stop and observe the horizon. Watch as the clouds drift, and feel the gentle spring breeze play with your hair and shake the tulip buds. Board the bus, and spend the duration of the ride in 1964 South Carolina with Lilly Owens and Rosaleen from *The Secret Life of Bees*. Get off at your stop. Go along your way. Admire the art district, and the comic book stores and boutique shops bathing in the late afternoon glow. Think about the concert this weekend, and pull your skinny jeans up a little. Wave at your friends that you see as you pass. Keep walking, and turn the corner now.

Notice the strange man leaning on the stop sign at the end of street, wearing jeans and a dark jacket. Draw your head up; push your shoulders back. Keep walking. Try to think about your book, or your trip to the library. Glance about for people you know. Now look around for anyone. Inhale, exhale. Keep walking. Feel mechanical, like a robot thumping down the sidewalk. Imagine your knees are screws, your brain a motherboard. Inhale, exhale. Keep walking, even though you're nearing him. Raise your chin a little higher. Curl your robotic hand into a fist, and make sure your thumb is in the right place, just in case. Imagine that your flesh is metallic; you are no longer human. Inhale, exhale. You're getting closer now. He's looking at you, and he's standing a little too tall, staring a little too long. Keep walking. Wait for it. You're next to him now. His mouth falls open. Keep walking, and purse your lips, letting his voice ring in your metallic ears. When he finishes jeering, resist the urge to fight back.

Keep walking, and feel your metal skin convert to rubber. Your hair is plastic, too. Feel disgusted, dejected. Lower your chin. Imagine you are human.