

JADE WALLACE

THE RECOVERING

MONIQUE ORGANIZED HER LIFE according to the principle that there is an objectively ideal place for each entity in the universe at any given time. This applied equally to the trinkets in her house as it did to her own body. She judged the perfection of the placement on a balance of moral, practical, and aesthetic considerations and adjusted accordingly, when necessary.

Monique had long ago decided that her correct place, between the hours of 9 p.m. and 5 a.m., was in bed. Since coming to that decision, there had only been one occasion on which an adjustment had been required. The night that her father died, Monique had not been in her bed but next to his in the hospital. By morning, her family consisted solely of distant cousins who she would have no need to associate with once her father's funeral was over. By the night after her father had died, Monique had re-established her regular schedule.

One night, a few months following her father's death, Monique was sleeping when she woke suddenly and stepped out of her body. She looked down and saw her body lying in bed, snuffling a bit in its unconscious state. Content that her body was still precisely where it was supposed to be, Monique turned away from it and went out of her apartment.

The air was cool and the sky was periwinkle blue. That night, and many nights after, she walked to the edge of the lake. She would often stop along the way to peer into the darkened windows of closed businesses and homes where families slept inside. It was the closest that Monique often got to other people or to unknown places.

A little before the night was halfway through, Monique would turn around, walk home, and step back into her body just before sunrise. It felt like wading into warm waters. She would close her eyes as her head went under and, when she resurfaced, take the weight of her body up with her. Then she would go to the kitchen and get ready for work.

A less devout adherent to Monique's guiding belief in the possibility of perfectly positioning oneself in the world might have been troubled by

the prospect of their consciousness unhitching itself from their body and wandering. But Monique felt that if body and consciousness were separable entities, then she had no reason to assume that the ideal location of the body and the consciousness would necessarily be the same at all times, particularly while the body was asleep and in no need of its complement. Thus Monique was able to smoothly integrate her moonlit roving into the rest of her impeccable routine.

Indeed, Monique took thousands of walks before her careful regimen was threatened. The city, the weather, and all other discernible factors seemed innocuous on the day that Monique discovered a troubling incongruity, which made her discovery all the more startling.

That day, Monique walked back to her bedroom before the sun had risen. The room was still dark. It therefore took Monique a few moments of scanning with both eyes and hands for her to realize that her body was gone from the bed.

She briskly searched the rest of her apartment. Realizing that her body was definitely not where she left it, she began trying to reason her way through the problem. If a consciousness could move without a body, a fact she had somehow spent a great deal of her life not knowing, then perhaps it was also possible for a body to move without a consciousness. Her body might be somewhere outside of the apartment without her being aware of it.

She wondered where her body would go at 4:30 in the morning when it had never previously found reason to go anywhere at that hour. Then again, perhaps the problem was that, without consciousness, the body did not know where it was going, and so flung itself about haphazardly like a beheaded chicken. Monique was profoundly disturbed by the idea of a body moving without knowing where it was going or why.

Reserving the possibility of her body being someplace completely arbitrary, Monique thought it made the most sense to first visit the places her body was familiar with—her workplace, the grocery store, the bank, her father's house. None would be open at that hour, but Monique hoped she might find her body skulking forlornly in a doorway.

When her initial searches failed, she sought her body in the places it knew less well. When that, too, failed, she confronted the possibility that her body had been moved involuntarily. She figured it unlikely that she had been the victim of a kidnapping or other interference, because her apartment had been in its usual undisturbed condition when she returned. But perhaps there had been some kind of audible emergency. Perhaps her body

had started crashing about or screaming and the neighbours had heard it and called for an ambulance and the landlord had let in the paramedics who, finding her body either chaotic or unresponsive, had taken it to the hospital.

Monique went to the town hospital and looked in every room. She repeated her own name softly, over and over, in case her body might hear it and come running to her.

When she turned up nothing at the hospital, Monique sat outside of it for a minute to think. The sun was long up. Soon, she would be expected at work. She put her face in her hands. She tried closing her eyes and emptying her mind and inviting thoughts to fill it. She hoped she might unintentionally commune with her body, or otherwise intuit where it had gotten to.

The hospital was growing steadily noisier. Optimistic parents hoping to get their children seen before school, night shift workers coming home ill and exhausted, old people waking up worse than the day before, were crowding the parking lot and bustling up to and through every wing. Monique needed a quieter place.

She walked to the cemetery and sat on a bench under a tree. Slowly, it occurred to her that her body might have died during the night. How would she know? Should she wait to see whether someone came to dig her grave? And if her body was dead, was she supposed to follow it underground?