

“Ode to the Hot Dog Guy”

by

Keayva Mitchell

There's a man who sells bacon-wrapped hot dogs down on West 3rd. I walk by him sometimes on my way home from work. He usually always has a customer or two standing in front of him as the meat sizzles and pops on his little grill. They hand him bills and I think, *trading bacon to get bacon.*

Isn't that the way it always works?

--

It's past midnight and my feet hurt. I just want to get home. Still, something about the night crowds pushing down Pine Street in search of fulfillment keep me somewhat hopeful about life. Don't ask me why. A man twice my age tries to hit on me. I shake my head and smile ruefully. *Sorry, man,* my smiles says. *I look nice but I'd eat half of you for breakfast and then probably just get bored.* *Chomp.* I cross the street and see the bacon hot dog guy. We make eye contact. I think of smiling. But then I don't.

--

I'm sure bacon dog guy doesn't really exist. It's the fact that I can never remember what he looks like unless I'm looking right at him down on West 3rd. If I passed him anywhere else on any other street I would have no idea who he was. You know, unless there was a little gray grill in front of him. Maybe I dreamt him up. Better yet, maybe he's a spy. An M16 operative staking out the Starbucks across the street for all the illicit drug trading going on in the back? *Pass the "sugar," will ya?* He *did* show up out of nowhere one day... And what's a better cover than a guy selling bacon-covered hot dogs on the street?

If you think of one let me know.

--

I don't eat hot dogs. But I still love bacon. Tonight I stop right beside his grill, watch him handle his customers and think *Oh yeah, that's what he looks like.* I start to try to memorize his features, but then I stop. One, because it's creepy. Two, because when it comes down to it, he's just the guy who sells bacon dogs on the street. And I don't eat hot dogs. Environmental reasons. So in actuality, I should hate everything he and that little grill stand for.

But it's late and I can't summon up the energy to hate.

So I just walk away.

--

Oh, Bacon Man

*Makin' hot dogs with bacon, Mr. Bacon Man
Makin' bacon with yo bacon, Mr. Bacon Man
Went into work and heard tales of your creations
"Hey, do y'all make 'em with bacon
Like that guy on the street?"
"Umm. No. We don't."
And his girl looked at him stupid, Mr. Bacon Man.
But I wonder if you sell just bacon, Mr. Bacon Man
And if I passed someone on the street
Whether I'd recognize your bacon, man...*

--

"I've been thinking about that guy who sells hot dogs wrapped in bacon a lot."
"Who?"

"That guy on third."

My sister has no idea who I mean. Probably because she's never walking down Pine at midnight. I explain who he is.

"So yeah, I've been thinking about him."

"That's weird."

I can tell she's only half-listening so I say, "Yeah, I've been thinking about having his bacon-covered babies and whatnot."

She laughs. "Ha. You're stupid."

Guess she was listening after all.

--

I took a shortcut the last few nights on the way home from work. But I feel edgy and need the crowds so I walk down Pine again. I flash my rueful smile at creeps and keep one eye peeled for the police cars cruising down the street, just in case my smiles don't work.

They do.

West 3rd's coming up. I can already hear the sizzle from his grill like it's ingrained in my veins. Why is it people think eating hot dogs at one AM is perfectly acceptable sustenance? Is anything really proper sustenance at one AM? I ruminate on this all the way until I'm practically right on top of his crackling grill. No customers tonight. He looks at me and I smile politely, pretend that I don't think about him and his hot dogs nearly as much as I really do.

I stop. He stares at me, unsure. I think, *I'm such a tease*. I should probably just hold up a hand and say, *Look dude, I'm never going to buy a bacon hot dog from you. I just like to wonder if you're a spy, all right?* Something in my face must convince him that I am not going to be a paying customer tonight so he doesn't even pretend to be interested in me.

This makes me smile. I walk away chuckling.

--

I pull some crazy psychological shit out of my ass one night and figure out where my weird pseudo-obsession with the hot dog guy is coming from. Here it goes:

I haven't eaten cow in almost two years. So, yes, every so often I crave something from In-N-Out's secret menu, and the hot dogs we sell at work smell pretty kick-ass sometimes, and fine, I admit it, the bacon hot dogs look really good. I want one. Just, you know, not enough to ever cheat. I'd feel way too guilty. I'd convince myself I'm killing the planet with my bacon-wrapped hot dog.

Still. I'm obviously psychologically craving it.

But instead of admitting it to myself, I've shifted my craving onto the hot dog guy. Never mind that I still don't remember ~~(or actually care)~~ what he looks like. He's a spy; he's good at blending in.

I am a walking, talking, classic case of...what's the word I'm looking for? Transference? Yeah, maybe.

So there it is. I probably just saved a couple hundred dollars on future therapy bills. Maybe I was Freud in a past life. Wait. Unless he was the I-Wanna-Do-My-Dad guy. 'Cause, you know, then again, maybe not.

--

It's windy tonight. The hot dog guy is nowhere to be found.

--

No show again tonight. Mission complete? I gaze across the street at the Starbucks, still full of people. Ugh. Crackheads.

--

He's back. It's only been two days but still, I feel a weird sense of glee. *Issues. I have major issues.* I stop in front of him. Well, behind this couple who's behind this guy who's in front of the grill that hot dog guy is behind. So I guess it's never really possible for me to be "in front" of him. That grill will always be between us.

I'm struck with this thought, feel it taking on a life of its own, becoming all deep and existential.

But then I just walk away, because who am I kidding?

--

I think about telling these two friends I have about this guy. But I don't know why. Just some vague inclination. But I already know what they'd say. They'd laugh and call me a creeper and tell me to "Sneak attack, yo." Which would really make me an even bigger creeper and I'm semi-but-not-really trying to get off of the whole 'taking pictures of random strangers with my cell phone' kick I've been on. But I'd laugh too, because I know they're right. But inside, I'd still be driving myself banana sandwich.

Where's I-Wanna-Do-My-Dad guy when you need him?

--

I find it really stupid that I've never said a word to this guy. I try to change this. As I approach West 3rd, I stop at the spitting grill that is Mr. Bacon Man's center of the universe. To me, anyways. Wait for the guy in front of me as he counts out his money. I blink, wonder how much a hot dog costs.

Realize, I'm standing in line. He's going to think I want a hot dog. *Stupid. Too late now.*

I hear hot dog guy's voice for the first time. I can't understand him. Well. It's pretty obvious what he's probably saying, *Hey, idiot girl. Want a hot dog or not? It's got bacon.* Either way, he takes in my skin color and my obvious lack of understanding and switches to English. He said pretty much what I thought he did. Just without the idiot girl.

I open my mouth to ask if he could sell me just the bacon. But then I close it.

One, that's a stupid question. What do I expect him to do? Just unfurl the crispity crackity bacon and hand it to me?

Two, bacon cooked on a hot dog is probably cheating. I'm not a cheater--disregarding the Slim Jim incident of '09.

Now I realize: I. Will. Never. Have. Anything. To. Say. To. Him.

Ever.

This makes me laugh.

And I'm aware that I'm on West 3rd laughing like that drunk person I passed earlier. But it's just so funny that I've finally realized this that I can't help but laugh.

I get out of line and walk away.

--

So I've just made a mental decision not to think about the hot dog guy anymore. I don't eat hot dogs, I never really liked hot dogs, and I still don't remember what the hot dog guy looks like.

Still. Hot dog guy needs to go out with a bang. I think about buying a hot dog and burning it in effigy, but then roll my eyes. I am not the type of person that should be allowed to mess around with fire.

So I do what I know. I open up this laptop and write, at 4:28 in the morning. I giggle and think about hot dog guy Googling himself and finding this ode to him. He'll probably go, *hey, that's me!* and remember that strange black girl who kept staring at him when she passed by. Damn. Now he'll know I was quasi-obsessed. But. This theory makes no sense--what's he going to type to Google himself? 'Hot Dog Guy?' *Google's not a verb.*

Whatever.

I think I've paid him sufficient tribute. And, of course, I know I'm going to see him when I pass by on the street. But I'm actually going to make a real effort to stop thinking about all the undercover M16 missions he must've gone on and whether the grease pops from his grill ever hit him in the eye like when I (~~attempt to~~) make bacon and you know, to just stop wondering in general.

So now I'm stopping. This is my last bang to the hot dog guy. It was fun while it lasted and your hot dogs smell good.

So here's to you.