

How to Pass among Mortals

by Daniel Wallace

Take no form or face beautiful enough to cause warfare, or that which would provoke inanimate objects to song. If a tree wishes to flower in your presence, request that this happen very slowly.

Do not clarify the mysteries of existence.

Do not contradict the Mayan prophecies.

If a mortal expresses dissatisfaction with the weather, do not alter it to please them. The alteration will not please them.

Allow children to lose balls, dolls, and teeth. Ignore the discomfort this provokes.

When asked your name, say "Bill."

Take a shift in a local cafe, and at weekends clear tables in an out-of-town hotel. Do not hurry the work by existing in multiple places at once.

Be troubled by the closer presence of suffering. Its weight.

Share with Myra Skinner, the woman who shares your Tuesday shift, your hopes for January snow. If you sense that Myra is not interested in you, do not try to impress her by saying that you once hooked Leviathan. When she sighs about her sore heels, offer to massage them. See her eyes narrow, and notice that she soon requests a different shift. Understand that you have made a mistake.

Walk late at night, in the pleasure of the moon, enjoying the city's peace, the departed rain's slow drip. Walk until you cannot help but remember the pain and dying all around. Feel then even the moans of the cement and the brick, as each house around you buckles sloth-like towards oblivion. Hear without barrier the mollusc's death rattle, the amoeba's confused squeal, the aches of the old and the alone. Fear the trembling in your hands and the dryness in your mouth. Find no peace from the oppressive hurt until you cross a

stray kitty. Reach down and snap the cat's legs. Break them one by one. Exhale. Feel a little more at ease within the mortal world.

Sleep. Wake to distant voices calling you to return. Swallow a sleeping pill, and sleep again.

Hold a house party. Buy an onion, two avocados, one lime, cilantro, and combine with a quick fork. Uncork the Merlot and Chardonnay. Sitting at the kitchen table, wait for your guests to arrive.

Take an interest in sports. Make game-friends in a bar. Join a bridge club, and allow other members to invite you to dinner. Drive all day on Sundays, kill something, drive home. Attend free events in the library.

Befriend nine-year-old Samantha Lang who lives two streets down. Tell her that being thin and having braces does not mean she will never be loved. Console her when her cat Lulu disappears. Help her put up posters for Lulu on every nearby wall. Notice that each time you do the cat thing, the length of time you feel good again decreases.

Find a better job, one requiring the wearing of ties. Buy a house. Marry. Send money monthly to two good causes. Marvel at the life you have made. But when your wife is softly asleep beside you, oblivious to the world, and you lie on the bed like a plank, then stare once more at the groaning moon, the night weeping stars. Everything is ending—some of it slowly, some of it fast. Grip your shaking hands together, grip them tight. Consider how quickly you can murder a small animal, just to take off the edge.

Suspect that soon you will need something larger.

