

ER Chronicles (1)

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

She called up crying. She was on the highway, driving fast. She'd been drinking. Where are you, I said. *I'm nowhere. I'm nothing.* Where are you. No answer. Where are you, I screamed. What exit? Slow the fuck down, get off the road. She must've thrown the phone down. I heard the dull roar of traffic, the shriek of a car horn, a long slow fade, then nothing. The phone went dead.

Three months later, I was in the emergency room. Outside my locked door, a man with a gun, his ass straining against the cheap fabric of his polyester pants, a sad moustache. A man who neither ignored me, nor really acknowledged me either. I read my book of feminist theory, the part where the French girl says, time is a male invention. Time doesn't have to move forward. Time can move in concentric circles, can come back to where it started. My wrists throbbed. I waited for the fat shrink on duty.

I knew he was fat because I'd seen him waddling down the white tiled hallway, clipboard and pocket protector, stained navy blue tie, greasy hair. He'd poked his head in and said, *Be here in a minute.* Smiling, chipper. Like he was meeting me for a drink. Despite the locked door in the psych ward, and the man with a gun, I knew I was smarter than he was--- which might've been my real problem. I started the day at 6:00 a.m. gingerly unwrapping the bandages, expected to see the perfect geometry of razor blade on white flesh--- but instead a gash, a bubble of infection.

When my shrink finally arrived, I couldn't take my eyes off his immense belly, how the fat roiled and gyrated and billowed, like it was a living breathing thing, separate from his tiny eyes, his rosebud lips. Look, he said, I'll be frank. I think you're depressed. Hilarious. I think you're right, I said, good call man. Really on top of your game. Just stitch me up and give me a tetanus shot, and I'll be on way. Not so fast, I had to fill out a form, and then another form--- was I still a danger to myself, was I moderately depressed,

severely depressed or just crazy. I correctly answered the questions, but longed to write, *somebody sprinkled star dust on my cunt*.

Hours later, I bit the plastic bracelet, and pulled it off my wrist. Absurdly happy to buy a cup of cheap deli coffee, the sun setting, and the leaves on the trees golden in the late afternoon sunlight. I stopped at my lover's on my way home. He said, *You're staying here tonight. I'll take you out for breakfast tomorrow morning*. I couldn't bear the fear in his eyes. I tried to tell him, but couldn't that the worst was finally over. Yes, I had pulled myself apart, but now I was back together again. That's all I really needed.

Three blocks from home, I bought a tiny exquisite kitten with topaz eyes. I named it after her. *Here you go girl, here's a can of tuna, a bowl of water, isn't this nice? Isn't this good?* That night she slept on top of my head, her body purring, a tiny engine. I was back at the beginning, I was a pebble thrown into the water, I was the future inside deeping concentric circles. Thank christ for feminist theory and fat good natured shrinks and tall men who stand guard over me with real guns, real bullets.

