

How to travel with your Demons (3)

by Lillian Ann Slugoeki

As this story begins she is wearing black straight legged jeans, cuffed at the ankles, brown suede clogs, a white tailored shirt, black pearl necklace, bronzer on her cheeks, a wool jacket that buttons at the waist. Silver blond hair. Impeccable. Chic. Watch her now as she tries to not smoke. Considers, reconsiders. Checks her nylon bag for her phone charger, and lights a cigarette anyway, which she immediately extinguishes in the kitchen sink.

She thinks the world changes on a dime. Like that Twilight Zone episode. Maybe when she got change at the bodega yesterday for her coffee, a quarter landed on its side, and balanced there precariously, a fluke of quantum mechanics. And this somehow altered the course of her life. Because when she walked out the door, hot coffee in hand, into the late winter afternoon, a time of day she normally loves, her phone rang, and she answered.

She replays that moment over and over:

If I had let it go to voice mail I would've had one more hour of my old life. I would've walked down my street, book bag and coffee, through the familiar world, so familiar, its practically invisible. She wonders has anyone ever noticed this? How invisible reality is, the day to day quality of it, until something smashes it to smithereens?

I'm just walking downhill on a road that stops at the river's edge. I'm just drinking a cup of coffee. I'm saying hey to the guy who's 25 and still lives with his mother, and hey to Penelope with a parrot on her shoulder. My neighbors. Like I always do. And because the sun is setting, maybe I walk all the way to the river. And stand in there in that beautiful light. The sun just drops into the water, like its being baptized. And then I walk home. For another cup of coffee and internet. But no, she thinks, I never made it down to the river. I walked out the store, and answered the phone.

And it's still snowing.

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Hi, I have a car scheduled for 5:30 p.m.

Miss, it's barely one in the afternoon.

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So this is how its gonna go. The minutes crawling by. Like ants at a picnic. They are stealing such tiny pieces of watermelon that nobody notices or cares until the entire fucking thing is gone. It's snowing out and I don't leave for the airport for four and a half hours. What becomes of time like this? Does it serve any purpose at all. The time spent waiting. It's a special kind of existential hell. The news of a death, the paralyzing blow to the senses. The knock out punch to the face, to the groin. You are left barely standing. And the words, one foot in front of the other, come to mind with annoying frequency. Safety in the the mundane, in rituals. I sit for long moments in the bathroom, underneath the skylight. Because I really wish I could sit outside catching snowflakes on my tongue. I'd be about six or seven, covered head to toe in shiny red fabric, with matching rubber boots. White trim on my red mittens. My cheeks the color of apples. Red. And that smile is so perfect. So symmetrical. Like the miraculous polyhedrons in ice crystals.

Got my ticket online. It waits for me in the digital universe. I am free to ignore the summons if I choose. I know I won't. It calls to mind the trip I took with my sister ten years ago.

