

Letters from the Asylum

(2)

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

July 5, 1910

Dr. Leo Berlin
Geneva, Switzerland

Dearest Leo,

I really didn't expect you to drop everything and run to my publisher even though his half wit assistant is still editing my manuscript, I thought perhaps you could just look into it. I really am feeling much better and I didn't mean to sound so annoyed when we last spoke. I've decided I don't want to wear white for our wedding. I want to wear blue, ice blue, the color of the lake down the hill, the bluest of blues, that is the color. And the light is like diamonds. I've decided, Leo, that these are the colors of our wedding, sapphire and diamonds. Can you think of anything more elegant?

Nurse is here with my lunch, but I close my eyes and pretend I am eating with you, in the café in Paris, succulent little morsels, snails in garlic and cream, a baguette that you rip with your teeth, butter so fresh it still smells like the dew, home made red wine that stains our teeth. I loved our waitress, didn't you? She's missing two front teeth, but as you say, "Most convenient to dangle her cigarettes." You can always make me laugh, always. I will not write here of what we did in our hotel room after lunch.

I will not write about how the chambermaid knocked at the door, "Ca va, ca va?," because someone was crying out, but I won't say who! Leo, leo, leo, leo, the word itself imprinted on my brain, carved

with a pearl handled blade into my cerebral cortex, into the medulla, burrowed deep into my dreams, I miss your kissing.

But if you can speak to my publisher, it is vitally important that his half wit assistant remember to stop editing my semi colons, they are a pause, a breath between thoughts, not a complete stop, not a comma, certainly not a period, it ruins the rhythm of the line!

I dream of you constantly.

Gilda

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July 21, 1910

Dr. Leo Berlin

Geneva, Switzerland

Why do you insist on ignoring me, my love? I know what the doctors have said to you, "You are not good for her, she is not good for you, she is hallucinating, how many times can she go the absolute brink of madness and then be pulled back---?" That is worst kind of hypocrisy and don't you listen to a word of it. Leo, when two people love each as other as we do, as madly, as passionately, as insanely as we do, there is no force that can keep us apart.

And now I will let you in on a secret--- my vision, the one I described in my earlier letter? You must bring me down from this mountain and let me get back to work. This is a love story the whole world should hear. I know that you are afraid that this is a manic stage and it is. But is that so awful in light of the stories that I have yet to tell? Will you consign me to this mountaintop for the rest of my life?

I have a purpose in life, Leo. And that is to love you and I always will, but, come, let us acknowledge once and for all, that I am crazy and it will be much easier on both of us. Is there not an ounce of mystery to such a designation? Some play? Mischief? Am I not the woman who has taken you to such heights of physical ecstasy? I let you devour me and then only ask that you do it again. What woman alive would allow such a thing to happen? No civilized woman.

But if you want a quieter version of me and you shall get it. That is my solemn vow, my blood oath to you. Only let me come down, bring me down, Leo, love, I beg you. Athena is bursting from my skull, fully grown, fully formed. When we first met, I said, "You are Dr. Leo Berlin, the esteemed psychoanalyst from Vienna, and I am Gilda Renee Prado, a madwoman. We are a match made in heaven, sir."

You laughed, took my arm, because of course you recognized my name from my other books. You led me across the room, and ordered a cherry cordial. Then with our arms still locked, took me out onto the patio, I pointed to the south, said, "Look, Doctor, that's Cassiopeia, the crown, and there, the Seven Sisters. They are so bright it is as if someone has punched holes in the sky." You thought me so charming. Do you remember?

You of course did not know me when I was a child, but even then I was charming. I wore adorable velvet frocks with enormous bows. I remember Elizabethan portraits on gilded walls, I remember French architecture, leaded glass, silver serving dishes, long damp corridors, shadows. I remember bone china so translucent, it seemed to glow. I remember gold, the sapphires my mother wore, the whisper of her ballgown on the marble stairs, elegant in a red cape on the arm of her latest viscount.

I loved the fireflies that darted through the topiary. I spent hours in the hedges playing princess and sometimes I heard voices. Mother held court on the first Sunday of every month, with every count and noblewoman she could buy, and I was dressed by nanny. I didn't mind the velvet dresses, but the linen was hateful. It was my job to pirouette for her guests, sample one, never two, sugar cookies, curtsy, and take my leave. But I was charming, nanny said so. I was a funny, exuberant child, blessed with too much imagination. Nothing a trip to the mountains couldn't cure.

Sigh. Let me come down, Leo, love, please. You thought I was so charming the first night we met. You took me by the arm, bought me cherry cordial, I showed you the stars, then you asked me to dance, a Strauss waltz. Afterwards in the shadows of the potted palms, I told you my father was a jewel merchant and banker with dreams of aristocracy, so he bought them. And when he died, his wife carried on the tradition.

You said, "So cynical for someone so young, you should be carefree, wearing ball gowns and breaking hearts," and then you kissed me, there on the terrace, under the southern sky. That is it, Leo, that is the day, the minute, the second when both of our lives changed forever. Because you broke my heart and I broke yours. And that is love in the modern age. Can you blame me for being obsessed with the processional down the mountain, my vision, my hallucination, my love.

I close this letter to you on a happy note. Tonight is the Perseid meteor shower. I see fire falling from the sky in long graceful arcs.

Yours forever,
Gilda

