

Letters from the Asylum (1)

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

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Dr. Leo Berlin
Geneva, Switzerland

Darling:

I'll be honest and tell you that I am in a bad way. The weather is very hot up here, extremely so, almost hellish. I can't imagine what it must be like at the lower altitudes, but up here, in the mountains, my God, we are so much closer to the sun. By 10:00 a.m., whatever respite the night has brought completely dissipates so that by early afternoon, everyone vanishes, driven indoors, the drapes closed, shutting out the light, followed by five or six hours when my esteemed asylum becomes a ghost town. One could almost see the dust balls tumbling down the empty antiseptic corridors.

I cannot hide in my room, like the others, I feel the walls closing in, and then there are the visions, or *hallucinations* as my doctor, your colleague, insists on calling them. Once I did hide out in my rooms, but only succeeded in repeatedly banging my head against the wall which resulted in a three day headache. As you can imagine, I am not anxious to repeat this history.

I've told you about my visions, haven't I? I do not see them every day but often enough to assure me that I'm not just "seeing things" (my quotes). What I mean is this; I'm sure it's someone else's memory that is somehow living in my head. I know it sounds crazy, but before you dismiss this, Leo--- let me say this; this one is

different from the others. This is a story, with a beginning, a middle and I don't know the end yet, but it is most assuredly not a hallucination.

On good days, on good days, when I am allowed short forays, I hike up towards a snow covered peak that I call the blue mountain. There is a small meadow of the most amazing variety of wildflowers; bluebells, violets, snapdragons and daisies. And the grass is so soft it is like rain. I like to lay on my back and watch the clouds transform themselves, now a chariot with a rider-less horse, then a stern man in profile, then a crown, until the wind shreds them apart.

But on some afternoons, Leo, I hear the ringing of bells, and see a man carrying a standard of some medieval design. He leads a processional of the most august type; men and women all dressed in velvet smocks and lace, the women carrying armfuls of white and pink lilies. I see them at a distance, traversing down the western slope of the blue mountain, always in the same place, and always at the exact same time. After the crowd passes, a bride and groom, walking slower than the rest, follow on their heels. The train of her ivory colored dress trails many, many feet behind her, like a spray of water.

And it is like she has bribed Goethe's devil because she is so beautiful, surely some god had to die to create such beauty; her auburn hair, tied off in blue and white ribbons, and so slender, so tall, so young. Leo, in the beginning of this story, it seems they are always so happy. The both of them. The way they hold hands, supremely confident in the way lovers are, *amore vincit omnia*: a total possession of body and soul, even when you know that life teaches you otherwise.

Leo, this is real. It is not a hallucination, their undying love is as palpable as the ink stains on my left hand. This is why you must arrange to bring me down the mountain. You alone have the power

to make this happen. It is your signature on all the documents of my "hospitalization and rehabilitation" even though you are not my husband or even a relative. You are, as you know, my doctor, who then became my lover, and while I love, love, love you--- I need to come home.

In short, I am begging you to reconsider your position. I am haunted by these visions and as such the reverse is now true; my rest cure is now a nightmare, and has outstripped all my other disabilities. I want to research the history of this mountain, this village. I am sure I can tease out the secret of my visions, reveal the true story of their love. It is my next book, I can feel it. I promise I will not be a burden to you. I know that your business is extremely important and I will not encumber you in any way.

Just give me a small room somewhere, access to a library, some paper, some ink. Surely this is not too much to ask from someone who loves you so very much?

Yours forever until the heavens collapse,
Gilda

