

Traveling Companion: A Mysterious Visitor

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I am an avid reader. Some weeks ago, I went to Barnes & Nobles bookstore to browse through the latest publication in the hopes that one might wet my appetite for further exploration. Inside the door, I stopped to browse at the latest selection of new arrivals in hardcover. One title caught my attention. I picked it up and began to read the first paragraph. I couldn't leave it down. It began, "Looking back on it now, I can see there were signs. In the weeks before it happened, there was a string of unusual events that I noticed but did not recognize. Seemingly trivial, apparently unconnected, they were not even events really, so much as odd occurrences, whimsical, coincidences, amusing quirks of nature or fate. It is only now, in retrospect, that I can see them for what they were: eclectic clues, humble omens, whispered heralds of the approach of the miraculous.

They were nothing like the signs so often reported by other people who have had similar experiences. The sun did not pulsate, spin, dance, or radiate all the colors of the rainbow. There were no rainbows. There were no claps of thunder and no bolts, balls or sheets of lightning. There were no clouds filled with gold and silver stars. The moon did not split in two, the earth did not tremble, and the rivers did not flow backward. A million rose petals did not fall from the sky and then thousand blue butterflies did not flock around my head. There were no doves. There were no advance armies of angels. There was not even one angel, unless you care to count the squirrel."

If you are rather insightful, you have probably guessed who the mysterious visitor might be. If you are familiar with the signs that usually accompany such a mysterious visitor, then, you will have no trouble guessing the identity of the mysterious visitor.

I noted the title of the book, wrote it down as well as the author. I hadn't heard of the author before. Seeing that the book was in the fiction section of the newly arrived group of hardcover, I decided I would buy it at my favorite store, Amazon.com. The next day, I ordered "Our Lady of the Lost and Found: A Novel of Mary, Faith and Friendship," by Canadian author Diane Schoemperlen.

The author, a novelist and of the Methodist faith, receives a mysterious visitor, wearing a "navy blue trench coat and white running shoes. She had a white shawl draped over her hair like a hood. Over her right shoulder she carried a large leather purse. In her left hand she held the extended metal handle of a small suitcase on wheels that rested on an angle slightly behind her like an obedient dog."

During the next few weeks, the mysterious visitor gives the author a capsuled version of her memorable appearances down through the centuries. They encounter Catherine Labouré, Bernadette, Anthony, Ignatius, Teresa and many others.

They visit the mall, tour the city, walk around the neighborhood, watch the evening news. While the mysterious visitor lays in bed, the author wrestles with faith and doubt, evil and the meaning of life. She thinks that doubt and faith are mutually exclusive opposites, realizing that she did not know how to make sense of it all, and that, in the end, not knowing did not matter. In the end, she realizes that "it is time to venture out of the comforting land of either/or opposites and travel into the uncertain territory of both/and. Time to realize that irony is not cynicism, paradox is not chaos, and prayer is not wishful thinking. Time to accept the possibility that these, irony, paradox, and prayer are the still points, the thin places, the perfect quantum qualities. It is

time now to admit that reality is not as simple as we would like it to be and that, given half a chance, it will indeed expand to fill the space available."