

SLOW

by

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Stop.
Zed turned his sign to
Slow
And cars went on their speedy way to speedy destinations.
He wondered where they were going
And thought of the places he'd go, if only he could.
Hawaii floated through his dreams.
But someone had to guide the traffic,
So he was stuck here.

Stop.
Slow.
Stop.
Slow.
"I'm bored," thought Zed
as he moved slow
and thought how unlucky he was
to work such a boring job
and live such a boring life
on this boring street
in this boring neighborhood
in the boring city of Los Angeles
in the boring state of California.

Once a man took a picture
While Zed was passing by. He thought nothing of it

Until he found the photo in the newspaper.
It was clearly he in the photo, albeit small and blurred.
He thought of the millions of copies
On their speedy way to speedy destinations
And thought of the places he was going, if only in newsprint

And realized that his photo was having more fun than he.

Zed did not at first begrudge his photo its good fortune.
He was not, after all, a jealous man by nature.
But he became more aware of

Pictures

Being taken all around him, when he happened to be in frame.
Friends snapping a group shot at a café.
Tourists posing at a landmark.
By no choice of his own, he was in all of them.
Who knows where they were headed?
Who knows what adventures they would have?

One night, he found out
When his photos visited him as he slept:

One rested beneath an umbrella-laden beach drink,
One stretched out in the hearth of a mountaintop ski resort,
One was pinned to a bulletin board in a child's bedroom,
One lounged on a yacht in the Pacific,
One hung framed (8x10!) in a warm country office,
One was on the breakfast table of a movie star,
One lay in a scrapbook in the south of France,
One clung to the refrigerator of a happy family,
Another relaxed in a royal restroom,
Yet another rode in a limousine,
And millions more swirled through the internet
On their speedy way to their speedy destinations
And their smiles seemed to mock him,
For they were not working his boring job
On his boring street
In his boring neighborhood
In the boring city of Los Angeles
In the boring state of California
And indeed they were having more fun than he.

"It's not fair!" screamed Zed,
As he threw down his sign
And raced with furious envy on his speedy way
To destroy every last photo who dared have more fun than he.
He ran here, he ran there, he ran every-which-where,
To the far corners of the earth and beyond.
He tore them and diced them and sliced them, even iced them
Until, at last, all the photos were gone.
He stood in the shade and kept a careful watch

For cameras.

This would not happen again, he would make sure of that,
And he growled at those who came close.

"Why are you so angry?" a passing man asked.
Zed told the man his tale, to which he simply replied:

"My dear boy, look at your suitcase."
And when he did, Zed saw for the first time that it was covered with

Stickers

From ports of cities all over the world.
Zed had just been everywhere he'd ever dreamed of

And he'd missed it.

Zed's heart sank.

He looked around for the first time to see where he stood, and saw

Hawaii

Surrounding him.

It no longer floated through his dreams: He was here.

Its beauty overwhelmed him; he sucked the fresh air deep into his lungs.

He bought a disposable camera and took a picture.

As his shutter clicked, a Waitress who happened into his frame
Dashed up and snatched his camera.

"It's not fair!" she screamed,

And recounted with sadness

how her photos always had more fun than she

While she was stuck working this boring job

And living this boring life

On this boring island

In the middle of this boring ocean.

"But this is the most wonderful place I've ever seen,"

Zed remarked, incredulous.

"This is nothing," she replied. "The place I want to go is

Los Angeles."

And all of a sudden, she produced dozens of photos of Zed's hometown.

Zed looked at them and saw

A magician performing a card trick.

A palm tree enjoying the wind.

A cellist bowing a tune with her eyes closed.

Shimmering lights salting a downtown highrise.

A labrador sniffing a tree trunk.

Freeways intertwined like ribbon on a package.

An open bottle of cabernet.

Seashells sleeping at the edge of the ocean.

Steaming hot dogs smothered with chili and onions.

Rolling hills spying a tapestry of homes.

An old movie palace dressed in blazing neon.

Lovers' fingers locked.

An ice-cream stained child laughing his heart out.

Zed wept

And thought how lucky he was

To live on such a wonderful street

In such a wonderful neighborhood

In such a wonderful city

In such a wonderful state

In such a wonderful country

In such a wonderful world.

"The only problem I see is here," she said, pointing to a picture
Of a very bad traffic jam
On a very familiar street
Which was in need of someone to guide it.

Zed raced home and took up his post.
He looked at all the cars on their speedy way to speedy destinations
Whizzing by all the wonderful things
Zed now saw for the first time with his own eyes.
He wanted to tell them what he now knew,
He wanted to shout from the rooftops at the top of his lungs

But he was so moved he could not speak.
So, he raised his sign and simply told them:

Stop.
Slow.