
"Hello? Isabel?"

I hold the handset to my ear and consider whether I am, indeed, Isabel. Something about that seems familiar.

"Isabel. Are you all right?"

I'm in bed in my downtown-Ottawa hotel room and someone I know is on the line. I wonder who?

Awakening as if from a coma, I have just managed to grab the handset as the bedside phone rang. Some corner of my brain is surprised that I heard the noise at all; another is impressed that I didn't take it for the fire alarm and head groggily for the stairwell.

As the other voice gabbles on, my life starts to come back to me and I interrupt with some kind of reassuring noises: *Yes, this is Isabel. Yes, I'm all right.* But then something else slips out: *Why are you calling at this hour?*

"Do you know what time it is?"

It's obviously early. The clock radio says 5:30, which seems like an unbelievably unreasonable time for the proposal manager (*Ah, that's who it is.*) to be calling me. Is there no peace? I mumble something. There's a pause.

"It is 5:30.

In the afternoon."

That's ridiculous. I cast about to find the last thing I remember.

I'm standing on the corner a block away from my hotel, right beside a pizza-by-the-slice shop. It's 6PM-ish and I've just left work after an 11-hour day. After a day where I worked until midnight and lost track of the count. After two 10-hour days. We've been getting ready for the executive review of our proposal. The work might or might not be done, but I am for sure.

Walking to my hotel, I reach a tricky decision point when I have to cross the street. Should I get some pizza for supper now? Or should I change and go to my 7PM Tai Chi class and eat later? Completely stumped by this momentous decision, I stand at the corner, unable to move because unable to decide.

Maybe I'll just go lie down for a while and then decide.

Roughly 24 hours later, the phone rings.

"Hello? Isabel?"