

## **Awakening**

### **Katie Killman**

My eyelids meekly open to beaming light. It takes a moment to fully adjust to the new world around me. To my immediate right, I notice a rusty, grey table on wheels decorated with a minute portion of breakfast; it looks almost edible. With a brief yawn, my head rolls toward the window. The city seems heavenly from this height, almost like it is floating beneath me. In the distance, the highway is overflowing with the busy Buffalo residents breezing to work. The parking lot below is mildly filled; visiting hours have yet to begin.

Directly across from me, a worn out television hangs miserably alone, a sea of asylum white surrounding it. The room is a miniscule box shape that encases me. The incredible quietness of my surroundings is strangely piercing. The only noise inside the room is the humming and rhythmic beating of the heart monitor connected to my elbow through an IV. An occasional ring from the nurse's station telephone is the only sound that jolts my trance. My mind is consumed with the previous night's endeavors and drastic mistakes. Just as I am beginning to wander into the land of self-pity, a nurse enters.

She is a short, plum-shaped woman with a smile that is too wide for this early hour. She speaks, her voice raspy, but confident, "Hello. My name is Maria, and I'm the head nurse of this floor and will be

overseeing your care for the duration of your stay.” She does not wait for my reply - which gladdens me. My mind is too exhausted for a conversation. Maria moves quickly around the room, her feet gliding, collecting the tray next to my bed and pushing it into the hallway. She hurries back to my bed and begins to examine my bruised arms.

Her hands are overworked and her skin is too wrinkled for her age. Her fingers are frigid and her touch sends chills down my spine. Maria continues to conjure topics to discuss as she tries to find a plump vein to insert her needle. But, she soon notices that I am too distracted to be polite and continues with her work quietly.

It takes her only a few seconds to find the proper place; this was obviously not her first time. As she slowly forces the needle into my beat up skin, she smiles, gloating at her inner victory; I am shocked that this never gets old. When the needle enters me, I wince and shift a little. Maria smiles at me, trying to relax my nerves. I force a smile back. When the tube is a thick red, she pulls the needle out and applies a Band-Aid. This whole process is so rehearsed that it feels like a dance. Maria stands up and informs me that she will be coming back every few hours to perform this same dance. “Finally,” I say to myself, with scorn, “I’ll get to be a ballerina.”

After that, I am completely alone again. I reach for the remote control attached to the bed and I am

instantly consumed with pain. The IV in my elbow is numbing. My hand feels like a bowling ball and I can barely lift it an inch off the bed. I finally manage enough strength to turn the TV on. I flip aimlessly through the channels and stop at some random Lifetime movie filled with characters whose lives are worse than mine. Just as I am managing comfort, Maria disturbs my world again.

Followed by the portly nurse is a middle-aged, pleasant looking woman dressed in street clothes. She is the first person I notice not wearing a marshmallow coat. Maria leads our introduction. Her name is Karen and she is to be my designated “observer.” I am on suicide watch.

Karen sits down next to me, and I immediately notice the dark circles under her eyes; she is just as worn out as I am. Only a few seconds go by without speaking (although it feels like a few years) and Karen finally breaks the silence. She asks me how I am feeling and if I need anything. To both questions, a simple shake of my head from left to right is a satisfactory answer. She understands now that I am not yet ready to speak, despite the racing of my thoughts.

Karen takes out her book, *A Message in a Bottle*, and I turn back to the assortment of crazies on Lifetime. I am pleased for a moment. It is nice to have company, even a stranger’s. Throughout the day, new “observers” relieve the old ones and, each time, my world is invaded

by yet another stranger. This whole procession has been leading to the grand finale. My mother is coming.

Time creaks along, and the moment I have been dreading since the light hit my face this morning is finally here. My mother and I have been different since I took my first steps. She is a hardworking, dedicated optimist, and I am a lethargic cynic. I remember growing up desperately wanting to pour my soul out to her, but I was always too terrified that she wouldn't comprehend my innermost feelings; I could never have survived such a crushing defeat. But today was different. Today, I had to make her understand.

My mother creeps into the room. I immediately recognize her waddle and my stomach swallows my heart. This is it. The second our eyes meet for the first time in days, a tsunami of emotion crashes over me and I am instantly deluged with tears. My mom envelops my hands and without uttering a word; she provides me with all the support I need. We sit for hours in a peaceful silence. She never inquires about the IV, the bruises, or Maria. All of these answers will come with time. But as we sit here, in this bleak, empty room, hands and hearts entwined, I have never felt more alive.