

Why Are You Alive?

Category: In Pain

written by Katherine Munro | October 23, 2017

It was the last evening of July, the summer I turned sixteen. I lay on a hospital bed on my left side, looking across the empty bed beside mine toward the window and the waning sunshine. The window was cranked open as far as its hinge would allow, wide open to the summer city evening—faraway traffic noise an undercurrent to the waves of hot pavement smell and the increasing music of a cooling breeze. I was floating in an ether of fever. Leaves rustled as beech trees shook off the heat of the day. Sparrows chirped. Relief! Respite! Perhaps the window was closed.

I was drowsy from anesthesia and a multitude of drugs—gifts that would eventually restore me. Recovering from surgery and my ruptured appendix in this plain, blue-green room, I was to learn about pain and the medicines that are married to it.

I don't remember the intravenous syringe taped to my arm or the gastric tube that ran from my stomach up through my nose, emptying into a glass bottle on the floor under my bed. But I know they were there. They had become part of me. Part of who I had become.

Two nameless, faceless student nurses, who had just finished their shift, appeared in the doorway.

"Would you like a back rub? It will make you feel better."

The bleached white bedsheet was weighted, pinning me, wrapping me in sweaty discomfort. My mumbling must have conveyed a positive response.

As these two women chatted to each other and laughed quietly, one of them began to massage a refreshing lotion into my bare back. With every touch, my senses spiral—I am released into a cloudburst...their voices become distant...a cascading, icy waterfall...I splash, inhale, gasp...at some point they leave...I am soaring in the open air of azure evening skies...I am twilight...

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