

AWAKENING

Syndi looked around at the four bare walls surrounding her. What color were they anyway, and – when did this happen? The old yellowing paint was so smudged with dirt and age that, after seven eventful years, Syndi didn't recognize her surroundings anymore. Giant throw pillows deliberately tossed recklessly around the floor were dingy with years of soil and stains from obvious as well as questionable sources. The once brilliantly colored rug that she'd selected as an expression of her vibrant personality was now matted and dull with years of neglect.

Syndi was a successful performance artist. Her work had gained critical acclaim not in the mainstream but on radical fringes all around the world. She was able to make out a meager existence while doing the things she loved most. She wrote, she performed, she led workshops. She was respected and admired. But where and when did she lose her own sense of self. Where and when did her work become bigger than herself, leading her to neglect the person at her core?

Syndi stood before the chipped, dusty, full-length mirror and, for the first time in years, examined the reflection that stared back at her. Not examining a pose for some abstract dance move she was working on, nor a strange new facial expression for a character she was creating, but really examining the person she saw. That image was staring, staring out at her from its silvery prison. But the stare held nothing. It was empty, barren. As bare and as dingy as the walls around them, as dull and as lifeless as the rug at her feet. She wanted to scream--scream life into the lifeless figure standing before her. "Wake up, you zombie! Wake up!" her insides screamed. But all that came out was a whimper. A whimper and a silent tear rolling down a grey leathery cheekbone.

Syndi couldn't allow this level of decay in her life. She had to act, and act immediately. She bustled about the apartment trying desperately to figure out

how to clean house. She looked at everything as if seeing it for the first time. In the bedroom her walls were even more smudgy and dirty. Isn't it funny how these things happen so gradually that you don't even notice them happening? Her bed was an old, stained mattress on the floor, decently covered up with multicolored sheets and never-matching pillowcases. She'd always meant to get a bed. She knew exactly what kind of bed she wanted too. Its wood would be a light caramel brown, smooth and curvy, with four posts tall enough for her to design her own canopy. She didn't want one of those silly, frilly canopies you see in those upscale home magazines. Her canopy would be a creative expression of herself, full of the soft, soothing colors that defined her more somber moods, but with lots of the asymmetrical lines and patterns that define her need to stand out from the crowd.

The closet. Her closet was a mish-mosh of things old and new: fabrics, clothes, costumes, shoes, wigs, bags. Wrinkled, worn, dirty, clean, everything was tossed around inside, hanging here, swinging there. The mess spilled out onto the floor at her feet and would occasionally be shoved back inside for the illusion of some semblance of placement if not order. A dresser with loose and twisted knobs and broken drawers held underwear, tights, socks, leotards and other unsorted and sundry stuff. The mirror that belonged to the dresser is the one standing on its end in the living room for her professional use. There was no need for a mirror in the bedroom because, once she was dressed, Syndi was out the door regardless of how her ensemble ended up looking.

The bathroom is another story. Needless to say it reflected the same carelessness with which the rest of the home was regarded. It wasn't filthy, no. Syndi somehow managed to keep it reasonably clean. But its clutter and disrepair represented the same uninviting quality that marked the rest of her living space. Her kitchen showed the reckless ravages of a rampant health nut: half-opened vitamin jars and bottles oozing dark drippings of tonics and energy drinks; a blender crusted with remains of a soymilk shake once carefully prepared to provide the right balance of energy, vitality, bone and muscle support, and a touch of sweetness for good measure; countertops were caking and peeling; and

spills in need of wiping up seemed to be a part of the mottled pattern beneath them. The refrigerator held one of two half-empty containers of food remains from local restaurants, and the stove looked like it hadn't been used in years. Syndi couldn't imagine any way to resolve this mess save setting it on fire.

Her thoughts were interrupted by the ringing of the telephone. She instinctively went towards it, but stopped. The idea of communicating with anyone didn't fit into her current state of mind. The answering machine came on, "hey girl, it's Brett..." Syndi turned the volume down. Brett's voice would lead her back to her world and she didn't want to go there right now. Brett either called to tell her about a new boyfriend or to talk about preparing for the next gig. Syndi's thoughts were going in quite another direction right now. She wasn't ready to switch gears but desperately needed to get away from whatever it was she feeling.

She ran back into the bedroom, grabbed something long from her closet and threw it on over the sleep t-shirt. She stepped out of her pajama bottoms and left them just where she was standing. She had to get out. She was suffocating in her own environment and had to make an attempt at escape. At the front door she grabbed a hat, a coat and her keys. She pushed her feet into her old rubber boots and bolted out the door.

The door slammed behind her as Syndi leapt down the stairs, threw open the heavy metal door at the bottom of the stairs and inhaled deeply. Now bracing herself against the brick wall of the old building, Syndi stopped to catch her breath as the warmth of the sun and the cold bitterness of the wind simultaneously accosted her.

It was late morning. The din of people making their ways to work and children to school was long gone. The streets emitted a quiet hum as Syndi pulled her coat around her and started to walk. She passed a young man walking a dog, an old

lady pushing a shopping cart, and further up the street a delivery truck was making its way to its destination. The bitter March winds promised a season of change. Syndi knew something was coming but what, and when?

She stopped at a fenced-in playground where a few scattered toddlers ignored the cold as their bundled bodies ran here and there. They toddled towards slides and swings and a slowly rolling ball, as their guardians watched and assisted. She felt like she was watching eternity unfold as she observed these little lives experiment and explore.

Slowly she came back to awareness as the winter temperatures set in and she began to feel the sharp sting of the cold metal fence under her bare fingers. Syndi hurried the next two blocks to the café where she could warm up under a hot cup of coffee and placed her usual order. Wait. “No,” she changed her mind, “make that a peppermint tea.” Change starts now. Syndi never understood the contrast between her healthy and unhealthy choices. She never tried to. She just did what she was used to. But not anymore. She realized how her ability to make a small change now could snowball into monumental metamorphosis. She realized that she had taken her ability to survive on art as a measure of success, not noticing that she had been going through the motions, gig after gig, job after job, without really challenging herself to experience artistic growth and development. Syndi realized that she’d become exactly what she thought she’d avoided by pursuing the arts, a metaphorical paper-pusher, doing what’s needed to get by and nothing more. Not anymore. Something changed today, and suddenly she saw herself in this world and knew that she was destined for much, much more.

Syndi took her brimming cup, sat up high on a stool at the counter by the window, wrapped her bare hands around the warm cup, and watched the universe evolve.