

## Speaking without a voice.

This is a special day. You walk around me, as I lay in the bed. My dutiful husband. You brought me flowers -oriental lilies, you know they are my favorite- and breakfast on a tray. You take such good care of me, I don't deserve it.

Sitting on the bed next to me, you take the spoon and begin feeding me. Spoonful after spoonful, you patiently wait for me to swallow, wiping my spit-up as if I were a baby, only I don't provide the glowing hope of a happy and fulfilling future ahead of me. I am helpless. Useless. Quadriplegic. Completely paralyzed, except for my eyes and some movement in my throat for swallowing.

After breakfast it's time for my bath. I hate this, it is humiliating, even though it's you who's bathing me. You have seen me naked more times than I can count, but that was when I was young and vibrant, firm and toned. I used to dance around the bedroom, twirling my ass in your face, and you used to love it. Now, from the swift glances I catch of my pathetic body I can see a terrible difference. The bed sores for one thing. Red and raw, they look painful, but of course I wouldn't know.

You have undressed me with difficulty and put me in my chair. You're wheeling me to the bathroom and I avert my eyes from the mirror, but I'm not fast enough. An old woman stares back at me, her hair is a mess, eyes hollowed and skin papery. I am not even forty years old. You lift me again, grunting and heaving, and put me in the bathtub, in the water. I feel neither hot, nor cold, it could be freezing for all I know. Taking the sponge, you begin to softly wash me.

You look older too. Your dark hair is greying in your temples and a few wrinkles are creasing around your brown eyes. You haven't shaved in a couple of days -you know that I like you better this way. You are as handsome as the day we met, even more perhaps. There is truth to it then. Men do grow handsomer with age.

Ever since it happened you have taken care of me as if I am the most important thing in your life. You left your job for me, you bought a new house for me, all the equipment so that you could bring me home, away from everyone and their questions about the accident and their pitying eyes... You don't deserve this.

When the bath is over and you have dried and dressed me, you begin fixing my hair and putting on my makeup. You keep on buying the same lipsticks and mascaras as the ones I had in my purse that last day. You have no idea about these things. But you try.

“There.” You say in a voice hoarse from little use. “You’re ready.” You used to tell me ‘you’re beautiful’ but I suppose it would be a lie now. I don’t blame you.

Lying back in the bed I hear you go downstairs to answer the ringing door. My heart is beating fast with an excitement I haven’t felt in years. People are speaking to one another, and I hear stomping as they are climbing the steps to my room. Suddenly I feel self-conscious, knowing that I am as immobile as an ugly doll on display in a window, crowds walking by and staring. But it doesn’t really matter to them, does it? I tell myself. I am just another test subject for their new equipment.

You walk inside, ahead of the others, and I feel a wave of relief. You show them around the room, telling them where to leave everything, sounding important and bossy. I haven’t heard you so alive in a long time. The others are setting up a computer next to the oxygen tank and a man is untangling a set of long, multicolored wires connected to electrodes. He catches my eye. He is large and kind looking, with thick glasses and a light blue beanie on his head.

“Hi there.” He says to me, granting me a smile. “How do you like it? I hope you’re not afraid. I promise it won’t hurt.”

*I’m not afraid, I reply in my head. But you’re sweet to say that, thank you.*

I look for you in the hubbub of people –why are there so many? - and see you standing by the window talking to a young woman who is holding a notebook. You look laid back and casual. There is a glint in your eyes, a sparkle that hadn’t been there this morning. You’re chatting with her, laughing at what she is saying, with the kind of laugh you used to reserve for me. For me.

I look at her. She is short and chubby, with black hair held in a loose ponytail, and grey, colorless eyes. She is dressed in the unassuming way a woman does when she tells herself brains are more important than looks. I want to shake her and tell her, *you can have both you know!* To be fair, this one might indeed have only the brains. Oh, but I’m being mean.

You're laughing again. I realize with a sinking heart that she doesn't have to be beautiful. She is standing there, moving, talking, laughing, and living. That is more than enough. I want to cry, to tell everyone to go away, leave me alone. Especially you. You shouldn't be here, stuck with me. You should be somewhere wonderful, with a healthy woman by your side, living your life.

"Well, we're ready." The man with the beanie says to me. I tear my eyes away from you with difficulty and blink away the tears. I won't have everyone oooh-ing and aaaaah-ing, wondering why I might be crying, feeling sorry for me. "I am going to attach these electrodes to your head, okay?" I blink once and he gets going.

You have realized that something is happening and are at my side again. You take my hand in yours and my heart melts. I almost lose control of the tears. When all the electrodes are in place, the man turns the machine on and a couple of other people that I have paid no attention to, are typing on their laptops. Lights go off and beeps sound.

"Okay, so let's go over this one more time, just to be sure." The man in the beanie says, sitting straight in the armchair next to the bed. "This is experimental equipment, so results might not be what we hope for. But results are results nonetheless!"

*If that makes you feel better...* I say in my mind.

"These electrodes," he gestures to the wires, "will transfer your brainwaves, from your brain," he indicates my head, "to the computer." He indicates the machine.

*Yes, we know. Get on with it!* You seem to be thinking along the same lines. You are shifting your feet impatiently.

"Then the machine will translate the brainwaves to words. Simple as that!" he concluded. "Okay?"

"Yes." You say tersely.

"Okay, let's get started!" he types something into the computer and punches a few buttons, reading the screen carefully. "Okay, I will need you to start thinking about something, a memory perhaps, that makes you calm. I need to get some brainwaves for reference."

I blink once. A memory that makes me calm. That would have to be one of you.

It was the day before my nineteenth birthday. We had been in the same group of common friends and you had caught my eye from the start. Mostly because you were ignoring me, and I wasn't used to that. I kept trying to find reasons to sit next to you, to talk to you, and you seemed to care less. You were driving me crazy. Later that night when everybody began going home, you asked me what bus I was going to take and said you were taking the same one too. You liar... Speaking to you was fun and easy. I liked your sense of humor, it was similar to mine, sarcastic and a little mean. I had hoped you would kiss me but, of course, you didn't. However, you did the next day when you saw me again. You made a beeline for me, ignoring everyone else, walking through the crowd as if none of them were there, and when you reached me you grabbed me and gave me the most wonderful and exhilarating kiss of my life...

"Okay," the man in the beanie said. "That's good, keep it going a little longer."

The next most memorable thing would have to be the day you asked me to marry you. I think that was the happiest day of my life. Even happier than the wedding itself –last minute catering is a nightmare. We were older and wiser. We had calmed down from the passions of youth, and longing for something calmer and safer. You took me to my favorite restaurant, and just like in the movies –and you know I love those movies- you bent down on one knee and took out the ring. I barely glanced at it. You were all I could see.

That night we dreamt of our life together. You told me how much you wanted children. You had never told me that before, did you think it would put me off? I told you I wanted children too and your face lit up with happiness and love.

"All right." The man says, hitting a few more keys. "Now I need you to start thinking about something that upsets you, okay? Anything. I know this is difficult, but I need some irregular brainwaves for reference too." I blink once.

I turn my eyes onto you. You have left my side and are looking at the computer screen with confusion, probably trying to make heads and tails of things. The upsetting memories are easier to come up with.

I am sorry we couldn't have kids. There is nothing in the world I wanted more than that, and I know you did too. I guess it was for the best. I wouldn't want to have a child and be in this state anyway.

Those years were the hardest. The fertility treatments were a nightmare, I was all over the place, driving you crazy. I thought we'd never make it past that. I remember you'd leave for work in the morning and come home late at night. I was so paranoid, thinking you were sleeping with your secretary... But you would hardly speak to me and it was killing me. Then again, I had pushed you away in the first place, hadn't I?

Now, so many years later, here we are. You are my rock keeping me alive, although I wish I was dead. You don't deserve this life. I want you to know that. This wasn't your fault, you don't have to pay for it. I love you too much for that.

You walk back to me and sit on the side of the bed.

"You're doing great." You say to me quietly. You look tired.

I remember the last time I saw you before all this, before you suddenly began looking older. I was going to go to the mall and you were fixing the car's oils for me. You had noticed they were leaking, you always notice small things like that. I never do. I came to the garage, dressed in a red dress, with my red lipstick on. The last time I was beautiful. You were in overalls, dirty with grease. You looked gorgeous. I kissed you on the lips, careful not to dirty myself and got in the car. You waved to me, looking somber. Could you sense then that it would happen?

I don't remember the accident. I only remember waking up in the hospital room. Most of it is a haze, but things get clearer sometimes. I was lying in the hospital bed, much like I am right now and you were standing opposite me in the room. I wanted to call your name, move towards you, but I couldn't and I couldn't understand why. Then a woman walked in. She had red hair, and a red smile. Wait... What?

I stare at you and you look back at me, oblivious.

I saw you look at her, I saw her crying. You glanced at me but mustn't have seen that my eyes were open. You took her in your arms and whispered words of comfort, I don't remember what. She got angry and slapped you, looking at you as if you were a murderer, and slammed the door behind

when she left. Then I must have passed out because the next thing I remember is you speaking to two police officers who were investigating the accident. I think I remember one of them saying the breaks were broken, maybe cut, -but who would want to do something like that? They asked you when the last time was that you had worked on the car. This morning, was the correct answer. Months ago, you said.

Just as my confusion reaches its zenith, it begins to abate.

You lied. Who was that woman at the hospital, why was she in your arms? Why did you look at me that day like it was the last time you would ever see me?

The memories are flooding back, clear as day, and with them comes realization. All these years, I had been seeing only what I wanted to see. *You* taking care of me. *You* loving me. I was wrong. It was only because *you* feel guilty.

Because *you* cut the brakes.

The computer begins beeping incessantly.

“It’s starting to work!” the man in the beanie says with excitement. Then he looks at me. “Start talking!”