

## Jesi Nelson

### Silence the Soul

Darkness. I'm lying naked on a cold, hard surface surrounded by complete darkness. I can feel goosebumps raising on my skin as the coldness from the icy surface touching my back begins to permeate my body. The chill begins at my heels, creeps up my calves, onto my buttocks and into my back. I shiver. I feel a paper thin cover laying over me, as if protecting me from the coldness, but it doesn't help. I reach up and touch my eyes; just to be sure they're open. My eye lashes flutter on my fingers. I can feel my fingers lingering on my eyes, but I can not see them. Slowly, anxiously, I reach my hands above my body. My fingers press firmly against another cold, hard surface. I slide my hands along this ceiling and quickly, a little too quickly, find the corners where the ceiling meets the walls. I raise my hands above my head, elbows bent, and bang them into another wall—closer than I had hoped.

I take a deep breath, although I can't seem to feel the air filling my lungs, and try not to panic. I listen intently for sound, any sound, that will give me a clue as to where I am. Nothing. I can't even hear the sound of my own heart beating, and the intense quiet is deafening.

"HELLO?" I scream, hoping someone will hear me. "GET ME OUT OF HERE!" I listen. Again, nothing. I begin to frantically bang on the sides of the enclosure, the twang of the metal sound echoing through the area, as I scream to get someone's attention. I don't know how much time has passed, but my hands hurt, and I'm tired. I close my eyes and allow exhaustion to overtake me.

I am awakened by the loud sound of a click, like a lock being opened. Again, I begin to scream. "HELLO? CAN YOU HEAR ME?" A door opens at my feet, and light begins filling the area. "Please, you have to get me out of here. I don't know what's going on." I can hear the grinding of metal as the surface I'm lying on begins moving out of the box. The heat from the light above begins warming my toes, my legs, my stomach, my chest. Apprehension overwhelms me as I'm pulled further out of the box, anxiously waiting for my head to clear the opening so I can sit up. I'm jolted to a stop as

the locks on the mechanism engage, preventing the surface I'm lying on from falling to the ground.

The florescent lights in the ceiling blind me as my eyes try to adjust to the change. I close my eyes as they burn from the intense brightness, and try to take a deep breath. I hear the gentle rhythm of shoes on the ceramic floor moving away from me. I can hear the rapid click of the keys on a computer keyboard as someone is typing. "Hello? Where am I? What's going on?" No response. I open my eyes and blink at the light. "Please, tell me what's going on." I plead. I try to sit up, but suddenly feel as if the sheet that's covering me weighs a hundred pounds. Why can't I sit up? What the hell is going on? Where the hell am I? Okay.....okay.....don't panic.

The gentle patter of shoes moving across a ceramic floor returns, getting closer. "Please. You have to help me. You have to get me out of here. PLEASE!" Again, no response, although I can feel someone standing next to me, hovering beside me. He leans over me and now I can see him. He's an older gentleman with short gray hair and chocolate brown eyes, covered by glasses. He stares at me for a moment with a somber look on his face. I'm frightened. Again, I begin to plead with him. "Please, sir. Please tell me what's going on. Where am I? What's happening?"

"Okay." he says. "Let's get you ready."

"Ready? ....for what?" I can't contain the panic. I again try to sit up, still unable to move. "Please," I beg, "please just tell me what's going on." A lump has grown in my throat, and I try to swallow it, suddenly realizing that my throat is dry. "Please sir. Whatever it is....I'm sure we can work something out. Please just tell me what's going on."

He reaches above my head to grab something, and when his hands return to my line of vision, I can see that he is putting latex gloves on. The panic swells in my chest and I struggle to control it. I hear a clunk as he pushes a button and the surface I'm lying on begins to tilt so that my head is above my feet. It comes to an abrupt halt when my head is at a forty-five degree angle from the floor. The man slowly backs away and I begin to hear scraping across the ceramic floor as he pulls something closer to him. "Oh God! Please help me!" He returns to his position at my right side and pulls a small metal table up next to him. I hear a clink as he picks up something metal off of it. He leans over me and the lights from above bounce off the

metal object in his hand.....a scalpel.

“Oh my God! NO!” I scream. I struggle to move but feel as though I’m paralyzed. I try to frantically kick my legs and flap my arms, but they remain weighted to the table. I try to thrash my head from side to side, but it, too, doesn’t move. He places a hand on my shoulder. “PLEASE DON’T DO THIS. I’ll do whatever you want, just PLEASE!” I can no longer control the panic and the tears start to flow, although the wetness never touches my skin. He tilts my head to the left, and although I can’t feel the blade, I can hear the soft tearing of skin as he makes two incisions in my neck. I begin to sob uncontrollably, but the wetness never comes, and my body remains completely still.

I hear the plink as he drops the scalpel back on the metal table. I feel the pressure, although no pain, as he gently pushes plastic tubes, one in each hole, into the incisions in my neck. A click and the soft whirring of a machine soon follow. “Stop! Get away from me! We can talk about this! Just give me a chance. I don’t understand. Why are you doing this?” I plead. Soon, he turns the machine off and the whirring stops. He pulls the two tubes out of my neck and places them on the table above my head. He reaches up and, again, picks something up off the table. He appears to be threading a needle. He leans close to the incisions and begins sewing them closed. I close my eyes and attempt to cry, trying to make sense of it all. I’m so confused. I feel no pain, there are no tears, he’s not responding to me. It’s almost like he can’t hear my pleas.

The gentle patter of shoes on the ceramic floor indicates that he is walking away from me. I again try in vain to get off the table. I hear a squeak, followed by the gushing of water and the loud consistent whoosh as a bucket is filled. He returns to my side, bends down to place the bucket on the floor and removes the sheet. This is my chance! I have to get out of here! I try to jump off the table and realize that it wasn’t the sheet that was holding me down. I still can’t move. Oh God! He must have given me something! Did he drug me? Why can’t I move! He bends down and pulls a sponge out of the bucket. I hear the drips of water as they drop off the sponge and land back in the bucket on the floor. He gently rubs the sponge over my arms, my legs, my stomach, my chest. He pauses as he looks at my face. Fear and rage run through me. He gently places the sponge on my cheek and begins

washing my face. The sponge makes a splash as he drops it back into the bucket. He grabs a towel from his table beside me and begins drying my face. He places the towel back on the table and pulls the sheet back over me, covering my naked body. The clunk of the button being pressed returns, and the table begins to descend to the starting position. Soon, my entire body is, once again, parallel to the floor.

The table beside me scrapes against the ceramic floor as he pushes it away from him, and pulls another one near. “You’re very pretty. It’s not going to take much.” I hear a clink as he picks something up, places it back down, and chooses something else. In a moment, I feel the soft bristles of a makeup brush gently rub across first one cheek, then the other. Thoughts begin to swim in my head.

“Makeup? Why are you putting makeup on me? Please, just tell me what’s going on!” I feel an overwhelming sense of despair and I want to cry, but my eyes are dry.

“Lillian.”

I suddenly feel the weight holding me to the table begin to diminish. I turn my head to the left as I hear my name called. Standing by the door is a figure that resembles a man, though something about him, I’m not sure what exactly, gives the implication that he is not human. The warmth and tranquility in his gaze and the softness of his voice has a soothing effect on me. I instantly feel safe in his presence.

“Everything’s going to be okay, Lillian. Sit up.” He instructs.

I’m confused. “I can’t. I think he’s given me something. Please help me. I don’t know what he’s doing to me, or why I can’t feel it, but you’ve got to stop him. I think he’s insane!” I plead.

“Lillian, trust me. Sit up.” He calmly instructs again.

I slowly place my hands on the sides of the surface and push myself to a sitting position. I look down at my arms and realize that I am no longer naked, and am instantly confused. The realization that I can move slams into me. I throw my legs over the side of the surface, push myself to a standing position and quickly run to the figure, anxious to get out of there.

He wraps his arms around me as if protecting me. I look up into his eyes and see a troubled expression on his face. I push him away and turn to look at the man at the table. I’m frightened by what I see. There, lying on the

surface I just left, is me. The man is still applying makeup to my face.

“WHAT THE HELL???” I’m extremely confused.

The figure places his hand on my shoulder as I gaze, bewildered, at the scene in front of me. “I can explain everything, Lillian.”

“What’s going on here, and how do you know my name?” Anger is beginning to rage through me as I struggle to make sense of it all. I can’t take my eyes off my body lying on the table.

“My name is Michael, and I’m here to help you.”

“That doesn’t explain anything!” I yell at him. The panic returns and I begin to shake uncontrollably. The man continues to work on me, uninterrupted, as I watch intently, waiting for some semblance of clarity to return to me. Thoughts begin to run through my mind. Is this a dream? Surely I’m going to wake up and this is all just going to be a dream....no, a nightmare!

“It’s not a dream, Lillian. You were in an accident and you didn’t make it.” Michael begins.

I spin on my heels and glare at him. “What are you saying exactly?”

“You’re dead.” He explains.

“Dead? I can’t be dead! I was moving when I was in that box thing over there! I was banging my hands! I could feel the coldness! I’ve been screaming, trying to get him to understand that I’m still alive. I’m standing here talking to you, aren’t I? I walked, well, RAN over here to you, didn’t I? If I’m dead, how do you explain that, huh?” Now I’m furious. “I don’t know what kind of game or hidden camera show this is, and I don’t know how you found someone who looks identical to me to put on that table over there, but I’m done playing! I want to go home!”

“Sometimes, when a person passes, their soul doesn’t immediately realize what’s happened. You weren’t really moving and couldn’t really feel the coldness. Your subconscious knew you were in a refrigerator. That’s why you thought you could feel the cold and bang your arms. And that’s why that man over there didn’t respond to your pleas. He couldn’t hear you because you weren’t really talking.”

“You’re wrong!” I reply through gritted teeth. “Now let me go home!”

“I don’t usually do this, but it appears that you are a little more difficult than some of the other souls I try to help. Let me show you

something. Follow me, please.” Michael turns and exits through the door. I stand there staring after him for a moment, bewildered. Although I feel safe in his presence, I’m still really confused. I turn and take one last look at my body on the table and the man putting his tools away before I bolt out the door.

I catch up to Michael and he leads me down a long, dimly lit hallway to a set of stairs. We climb the stairs to find the door at the top is open. Passing through the doorway, we enter into a large hallway with several doors on both sides, and a large door leading to the outside at the end of the hallway. I pause for a moment and consider bolting out the front door, but curiosity as to what Michael wants to show me gets the best of me, and I continue to follow him. He leads me to a set of doors, one of which is ajar, and steps aside so I can peer into the room.

The room is set up for a funeral. A large mantle to hold the casket has been placed delicately at the front of the room and is surrounded by large sprays of flowers. Chairs have been placed neatly in rows, facing the mantle. Flower arrangements of different sizes and colors have been placed sporadically throughout the room, and a table has been set up in the front corner of the room and holds what appear to be pictures. Slowly, I push the door open so I can enter the room. Michael silently follows me in. I cautiously make my way to the front of the room and stop in front of the table. As I look down at the table, I see reproductions from many aspects of my life; my first birthday, the day I learned to ride a bike, my first car, prom, graduation. Pictures of me with my family are scattered all about. I am instantly filled with sorrow, as the realization of what is happening begins to radiate through me.

Soft voices in the distance, getting closer, break me from my reverie. I turn and look at Michael, who is standing behind me. As I look into his eyes, understanding begins to wash over me. Before I can speak, I’m startled by the sound of both doors to the room swinging open. My mother, my father, and my sister slowly, somberly enter the room.

“Mom!” I yell. As I begin to race over to her, Michael places a hand on my shoulder, stopping me.

The three of them make their way to the table where I’m standing. My mom looks down at the pictures scattered about and tears begin to well in her

eyes. She picks up the picture of our last vacation together and begins to cry.

My father wraps his arms around her and pulls my sister close. They stand there in a loving embrace, crying because I'm gone.

I'm no longer confused or afraid. I'm certain that what Michael has been telling me is the truth. I take one last look at my family, and know that this is the end. "Okay," I say to Michael. "Take me home."

Michael gently places his hand on my back and guides me out the door.