

## Grade 12 Winner

Sarah Gorman

### The Final Awakening

I am young. I don't remember how young. My memory fails me even in my dreams.

A girl with a curly waterfall of dark hair sits beside me. I can't remember her name. "Wake up," she tells me, laughing.

I do, and as I lose her with the dream it's to a bright room with bright walls and bright, crisp sheets tucked in around my old body. An elderly woman with a frazzled mop of grey hair sits beside me. "Are you a nurse?" I ask.

She tries to smile, only producing a pitiful shadow of the expression that makes her seem sadder for its effort. "Go back to sleep," she tells me without answering. I do, eventually.

I am older, now. Twenty, maybe thirty. I don't know if it makes a difference. I am no longer a boy, and the girl who sits beside me is no longer a girl, her curls pulled up around her face. She is laughing. She is always laughing, this woman I seem to remember. "Wake up," she tells me; with a smile so full of happiness it spills into her eyes, crinkling her skin.

When I open my own eyes, the bright room and the bright walls don't look any different. The elderly nurse beside me hasn't changed. I have no concept of time, and as though the nurse can sense my disconcertment, she says: "You only just nodded off for a moment, there."

I can't recognize the expression on her face.

Now I am older still. My youth has fallen away like spent laughter. Am I asleep? The grey-haired nurse sits beside me. "Wake up," she tells me; though I can already imagine her mouth forming the words that will commend me back to sleep.

"I'm not a nurse," she says suddenly. I am awake now. This I know - I can feel the weariness in my bones.

"I'm sorry," I tell her. "Who are you?"

"I would tell you my name," she says with her echo of a smile, "but you'll forget it by tomorrow."

I don't hear her tell me to go back to sleep, because I already am.

I am young. A girl sits across from me. I can't remember her name. My memory fails me even in my dreams. "Wake up," she tells me, laughing. She always seems to be laughing, the version of her I remember.

I wake, and it's to the face of the elderly nurse who never seems to be laughing, the lines entrenched in her pale skin unused. "I'm not a nurse," she corrects me before I ask. "But you'll forget it by tomorrow."

Now I am older. No longer a boy. Twenty, maybe thirty. I feel things would be different if I could remember. The woman sits across from me. "Wake up," she laughs, and I do.

I lie in my old body under my bright sheets within the bright walls of a bright room that has gone dark. The elderly nurse sits beside me as always. I can't recognize the expression on her face.

Today, a new question.

"Am I going to die?"

Even as I say it, I know the answer. For once, I recognize the elderly nurse's expression. I just can't remember what it means.

"I would tell you the truth," she says. "But it won't matter by tomorrow."

I am young. I don't remember how young. I can no longer feel the weariness in my bones.

A girl sits across from me. Her name is Katherine, I remember.

"Wake up," she tells me, laughing.

But finally, I don't.