Writing Prompt

I Can Hear You

You were involved in a terrible car crash and have been in a coma for the past three months. What your family and doctors don't know is that you can hear everything they say. Things you don't want to hear. Write the scene.

My husband is expert at apologizing. He does it so well, he can make *me* feel guilty. Like when he tells me he can't make dinner with my parents on Wednesdays because he's pulling for that end of the year bonus at work.

So I can take you on that vacation you wanted, he says.

Except it wasn't me who asked to go away. It was probably his assistant. The one he's screwing.

He hasn't apologized for that yet. Well, not until now.

The beeping of the machines provides an appropriate backdrop for his laments. The constant alerts that I'm still alive, that he still has time to make things right, ringing in his ears as he clutches my hand like I'm already gone.

He slept here last night. The sound of his breathing ragged, as if he was the one in the accident. He sleeps as hard as a boy and wakes like a teenager who hates school. It was familiar, listening to him. Like white noise, except without the calming influence.

He doesn't know I can hear him. I can hear everyone. When I woke, in a manner of speaking, I heard the doctors say I had been under for three months. It didn't occur to me to panic. I didn't even try to scream though, I can imagine how that would have felt. I've had dreams like that before. The kind where you try to speak but your throat is thick with a traffic jam of words. You try to move, but you feel like you're stuck in quicksand.

Instead I thought, how many people get this chance? How many times in life can you listen without being expected to respond? There's no pressure to react a certain way, no expectations, no part to play. Extraordinary. The doctors are certain that eventually I'll wake. But right now, I'm rather enjoying being a spectator of my own life.

My husband's sobs bring me back. Maybe it's the injury but I find I can't focus my mind on any one idea. My thoughts are bubbles in the air. I think I have one but then it pops, leaving nothing but a soapy film as proof that it was there at all.

I can't remember the last time he cried. He didn't even shed a tear at our wedding. There was that one time he was supposed to close that deal but it fell through. I thought he might have cried then. His eyes were swollen and bloodshot when he got home, but I suppose that could just have been the alcohol.

Right now, he's in the middle of confessing his affair, telling me he won't ever do it again. What he doesn't realize is that I already know. I know about all the affairs. You would think he would see fit to tell me the whole truth on what could be my deathbed, but it seems I've given him too much credit.

The breeze from the open window grazes my skin and with it comes the scent of lilacs. Mother brought them yesterday. As if I don't already have one foot in the grave she chooses to suffocate me in my own hospital bed. I can picture them, a single branch with lavender blooms hanging over a glass vase, drooping under its own weight. I loathe flowers. They're pretty, cheery even, until they're not. Until they die and you wander from room to room wondering at the source of that putrid smell. I called an exterminator once, thinking a mouse died somewhere in the crawl space. It turned out to be the roses my husband brought home the week before as an apology for being late.

It wasn't him who put me here. It was me. I was leaving him. Judging by the fact that nobody has mentioned it, first responders didn't find my suitcase in the trunk. Nobody has asked why I was on Interstate 8 when I should have been at lunch at the club around the corner like I am every Tuesday. Trucks love Interstate 8. They can travel for long stretches without seeing a single soul and make better time. I know because it's exactly what I thought. I must have been in his blind spot when he changed lanes. I'm lucky to be alive, they say. Lucky.

There's nobody else, mind you. I wasn't running to a lover. I have no interest in hearing anymore apologies. No interest at all.