

At the corners of her vision, blackness started to creep. She could feel it's cold, dark claws pulling her, urging her to fully embrace it. She could feel her breath shortening, each inhale harder and more painful than the last. Her muscles were tightening, movements becoming nothing more than a slight tremble. It was like everything was all coming crashing down on her. Each mistake, each thought, each feeling, all at once barging into her head and crying out for her attention.

Why did she care so much?

Why was she being so dramatic?

Why?

Why?

Why?

Why? ...

It was like every bad thing that had happened was being pushed into her thoughts, forcing her to relive every painful moment. She could see last week, her sitting on the couch, waiting for her show to come back onto the tv. She couldn't really remember what show she was waiting for. All she could remember was the look of absolute horror on her parents' faces. The sound of panic in the news reporter's voice as the news story came on. She could remember the montage of people running for their lives. See the flashes of explosions as buildings fell. Hear the sound of heartbroken people, devastated for all they have lost. She hadn't even been there, didn't even know anyone affected and yet she felt this deep sense of grief and agony. She felt as if she had lost so much even though she hadn't really lost anything at all. What right did she have to feel this way? To feel such crippling sadness when she didn't know half of what they went through. Even a week later it made her heart clench. Made her want to crawl up into a ball under her bed and never come out.

Her vision was starting to blur. She couldn't hear anything except for the muffled sounds of her family outside, eating dinner. Couldn't feel anything except for the uncontrollable shaking of her hands. It felt like icicles cutting her lungs as she drew air into her lungs. But her mind was elsewhere. It circled back to when she got her maths test results. The nausea in her stomach as her teacher brought around the test papers. She already knew she had failed. Already knew that she should have worked harder. And yet, she was still crushed. She wanted to believe she could just dust herself off and do better next time but she was absolutely paralysed with doubt.

What if she didn't get better?

What if this was the reason why she couldn't achieve her goals?

What will her parents say?

What?

What?

What?...

Her breath was now nothing more than just short pants, barely getting any air into her lungs. Her mind was churning, barely able to hold a single thought. It was like she could barely feel her body anymore, numbness spreading throughout. She was so tired. She just wanted to give up. To stop feeling everything at once. To stop feeling at all...

“Sweetie, I need you to listen to my voice, I need you to breathe”.

She could feel warm arms wrap around her. Her vision seemed to clear, her breathing slowing.

“That's right Layla, keep breathing”.

In and out

In and out

In and out...

Her mind was clearing, her mother's voice cutting through all the noise. It didn't hurt to breathe anymore. She could feel her fingers wiggling, warmth coming back into them.

“Just breathe...”