

## Remember To Breathe

by Miriam Silver

She finally made it to the front door, automatically smoothing her best black dress while saying to herself, “I have to breathe.” As her chest felt constrained, and tying her scarf under her chin she made herself breathe, her only thought being, “must get out, get home,” and forced herself to put one foot in front of the other, “get to the Tube, breathe, hurry.”

Little did she know that this moment would be replicated many times, though just now she must remind her heart to beat as she flattened her hair without looking in the mirror and opened the front door without looking back, ignoring the laughter and noisy music, and made her way to the Tube.

Clutching her handbag all she could see were feet, hers moving automatically, party shoes preventing any speed, ‘couldn’t wear trainers, boots, would be better, never knew I’d have to run’. People moving, strolling, ‘can’t go faster, empty mind, don’t think, get away, forget’.

No one was in the house she shared with two others. The other nurse was on nights, she had to be on duty in twelve hours, all she wanted was a wash, remembering in time, ‘no don’t, evidence, call the police, report what?’ She’d gone to that party on her own accord.

She couldn’t stop shaking, never mind make a decision, all she could do was cry, sit, wait, breathe, in, out.

“What the hell...” the voice of her housemate woke her as she reluctantly opened her eyes finding herself on the floor.

“Come on,” said Julie anxiously, “here, hang on, soon get you up.”

As Liz eased herself onto the sofa she burst into hysterical tears, “but no one will believe me.”

“Here, just a mo. I’ll get you...take this...” and Julie pushed a glass of something into her friend’s hand, “go on knock it back, our best brandy, it’ll help calm you, don’t speak.”

Minutes passed while they both sat in silence until Liz blurted out,

“Didn’t know anyone at the party, only went to get out of the rut I’ve been in, it was kind of you to encourage me, but it was my own choice, and I know I drank too much, a cover up, being on my own you know how it is,” she trailed off as the tears started again.

“Let it all out Liz dear, best out,” leaning to tuck a blanket over her, “keep warm, you’re in shock, take a deep breath.”

Amidst crying, hiccups and deep breaths Liz told her story.

“I was glad someone started to chat me up, I felt relaxed, he brought the drinks, he was interesting too, though I don’t remember much more, there was a lot of noise and laughs, loud music too, it was nice, no one had taken so much interest in me for a long time, and well that’s it really, until I woke up, bruised, naked from the waist down, no one in sight in a strange bedroom.”

Liz stopped there realising her story had an immediate effect on her friend who blurted out, “stay there, don’t move, don’t wash, everything you’re wearing is evidence,” and she came back with a black bin bag.

“But it was all my fault, I walked home, caught the Tube too, no one will believe me, do you think he put something in my drink?”

“I even wrote the address down, looked up the nearest Tube, it’s all here in my bag and I didn’t think of taking a taxi, I’ve done it so wrong, how could a woman of my age be so naive?” she wailed and sunk down under the blanket.

Julie was adamant now, “get out of those clothes, in here with them, we’re going to the police, I’ve called a taxi.”