Flashes - Short Story

"It had to be done. The doctors all said it was time. You had to face your demons. Face the crowd. Face the flashing lights and the choking noise. It had to be done."

My therapist coos this as I sit in his penthouse office, relaying the events of last night.

...

Click, flash, step, twist, smile, repeat. Click, flash, step, twist, smile, repeat.

Breathe, you're forgetting to breathe, Cara.

Smile, don't let your guard down, Cara.

Posture, don't let your pose waver, Cara.

"Cara! You look amazing, it's so good to see you here tonight! Who are you wearing?"

Crap. Who am I wearing? Who cares? I've seen this one before, one of the brown-nosers they send from *E!* or *People.* He doesn't really care about seeing me here, he cares about the bonus he'll get for his *Exclusive First Interview With Cara! Only in This Month's People Magazine!*

Flash, click, flash, click, it's blinding.

I feel myself wince. My stomach lurches and my hand instinctually flies to catch it in its place. Swallow, breathe, smile. Come on Cara, you know the pain's not real. The doctors told you this would happen Cara, but there's nothing kicking, I repeat to myself. It's all in my head, just shake it off.

Click, beep, click, beep.

The camera flashes turn into the steady up and down of the heart monitor in that dreary room. A shiver runs up and down my spine, as I flash back to the fuzziness that

attacked my brain when they told me. "Cara? Are you okay there?" he asks again.

Focus, Cara. Don't think, just smile and answer. "Yeah, of course! Sorry, could you repeat the question for me please?" I shove the words out of my rapidly closing throat.

"How have you dealt with losing the baby?" No. He couldn't have asked me that. That's not how these robots are wired. He shouldn't be so assertive, they would have taught him. Blink, breathe, smile. "Sorry, one more time, it's a little loud in here," I grin. "I asked how you've dealt with all of the fan mail you must be getting now that the movie's out?" See, it didn't happen. "Well, I just have the most amazing, supportive fans who I really couldn't love any more!" The standard response I spew back, as the phantom kicks beat me from the inside.

The shouts from the photographers are changing. I no longer hear the calls of grown adults trying to make rent. I am haunted by the deafening cries of children that claw at my flesh from behind the velvet rope. "Mommy! Mommy!" they sob. A boulder throws itself against the inside of my chest, rebounds off, and tries again to break through my sweat-covered skin.

Breathe, blink.

A heart monitor beeps.

Breathe, blink.

Baby clothes cover the floor of the creamy yellow nursery.

Breathe, blink.

"We're sorry ma'am, but unfortunately you've lost the baby."

Exhale.

The air keeps thrusting itself from my body, but I can't bring myself to drag it back in. My shoulders break, caving in as the pit of my stomach plummets towards the bottom of my pinching designer pumps. I feel it oozing out of the sky-high heels and spilling out, blood blending in with the carpet that matches the shade of MAC's "Mind Control" smoothed over my cracking lips. Clenching, the walls of my insides grasp for one another, pulling my entire body towards the centre.

Okay, just walk away, Cara, then go home.

"Well, it's been really great catching up, but I can't stand to hog you all night! See you soon!"

 I hear the words escaping my barely moving scarlet lips, but I feel nothing through the numb skin on my rouge-covered cheeks.

Grace, as I turn and swiftly glide away.

Grace, what we were going to name the baby if it was a girl.

I will not follow the parade of glitter into the theater, but do what I should have done in the first place. I need to go home. I don't care that the doctors said this had to be done. I am not strong, I am not elegant, I am not ready. I am broken, and I cannot heal amongst the clashing chaos that surrounds this machine of a life.