Crumble
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First Draft—Written in 30 minutes

I measured my breaths: in and out, more slowly, in and out. In . . . pause, hold it, now out. I willed the extra oxygen to travel through my pumping blood and find its way to my red, over-heated face. I cursed silently as I semi-jogged to 2nd period. Every day. Every single day. Why, oh why did my skin have to turn beat red within a moment of working out? Why was I the only 16 year-old-girl who sweat like an obese 40 year old man? Why did my 1st period have to be drill team?

Why was my life so hard?

I skidded into class 20 seconds before the bell rang and plopped into my seat next to Kim, co-drill team frenemy. I wiped the back of my hand across my forehead, gathering the sweat beads still clinging to my brow while consciously considering if the pool of moisture in my armpits would be noticeable through my t-shirt.

Kim looked perfect.

She turned to me and smiled, and I hated her in that moment. I hated how easy everything was for her. I hated her perfect teeth and cute clothes. I hated how much I hated her.

Why was my life not like hers?

I flipped open my notebook and scanned the messy “To-Do” list scribbled in the front. So many words. So many steps. So many pressures and expectations and *things* to do. *Things* that absolutely mattered. *Things* that were absolutely crucial. *Things* that absolutely determined my worth.

Why was the list so long?

In that moment, I knew it. I knew that I could work and sweat and scratch out those items. I could take my pencil and draw a line, dark and hard, through each and every to-do item. I could cross them off one by one. Over and over and over. Day in and day out. I could work forever, and the list would simply keep going. It would never end. It would never, ever end.

And I would never be enough.

Kim: “Why’s the t.v. on?”

Kim: “Holy crap. Is that a *plane* that just hit that building?”

Kim: “Where is this? Where is this happening?”

Kim: “*New York?* Is this a movie? Is this a joke.”

Kim: “There’s *more*? How many? How many planes?”

Kim: “Are they coming for us, too?”

Kim: “I can’t. I can’t possibly breathe.”

Kim: Tears.

Kim: “Are those *bodies* falling out of the building?”

Kim: “They’re *jumping*. Oh my God! They’re *jumping* from a million feet up.”

Kim: “Don’t they realize they are all going to die?”

 Kim: “I’ve never heard of that place. Where are they, again?”

 Me: Breathe, in and out. Eyes close. Open. Close again. *The noise.*

 I slammed my textbook closed, squeezed my eyes shut. Harder. Harder. Squeezed them so tightly that stars erupted and galaxies filled my vision. I wished I could squeeze my ears shut, too. I wished I could squeeze my world shut. I wished I could shut every open door, close every open window, seal every open letter, and fill every open hole. I wished I could squeeze close my world and my heart.

 I opened my eyes. And there, on the back cover of my textbook stood two metal towers, perfect and solid and complete.

 And now they were nothing but ash. Ash and body parts and missed dreams and incomplete to-do lists. Lists that were made and made and added to and continued and so long. Lists that had “Urgent” written across the top. Lists that determined what 2,996 people did with their last Monday night, Tuesday morning, hours, minutes, seconds. To-do lists that were now forgotten, incomplete, ignored. To-do lists that were now ash, crumbled and buried under so much weight. So much pressure.

 I ripped out my to-do list and threw it away.