Call Me Back

There's a reason depression is called the silent killer. Not only does it work from the inside out and change how you perceive the world, but it also changes the way you feel about where you belong in it. Sometimes depression takes your voice, it did for me. It made me feel like a spare part in a world that was an industrial machine. It made me feel like a burden, and then made me feel like I couldn't tell anyone I was suffering without dragging them down with me. It made me not want to talk to people in fear of hurting them the same way I was hurting myself. Naturally, I did the only thing that I could think to do. I gave up on the world and myself, and I did it in a very simple way.

I stopped answering calls, both literally and figuratively. I would see my phone ring and I'd let it go to voicemail. I wouldn't call back. My mother would call me and I wouldn't answer. My father would call me and I wouldn't answer. I didn't answer my brother, I didn't answer my friends. In my mind, if it was important enough they would call again or they would text me. In my mind, if someone really needed me, they would call more than once. If someone did call me again, say within a half-hour of their initial call, I'd answer after the third or fourth ring, come up with some excuse about being busy, hold the conversation for as long as I had to, then I'd hang up again. I would never bother to listen to the voicemail if they bothered to leave one. I would never follow up a call with a text.

I didn't really answer my texts either. I would read the message from the notification bar, and then not respond for another 2 to 8 hours depending on my mood. When I did respond, I claimed to have been busy, then I'd do the bare minimum and leave again. I didn't want to answer, I didn't want to interact with the people who loved me. I thought I was a burden, I felt

that if my sadness was killing me then it might kill them too. I thought I didn't need anyone, that I was better off by myself because then the only person I could disappoint and the only person who could disappoint me was myself. I pride myself on being an intelligent person, but for someone who claims to be intelligent, I was being really stupid.

Looking back, I want to scream at myself to pick up the phone. To get my head out of the sand and look around me, to see how much those people I gave up on refused to give up on me. I want to tell myself to call them back, to call every single one of them back, and apologize. Call them back and tell them that I love them and I'm sorry for running, but I was scared and felt like I was a burden. Call them back and tell them my sadness was killing me and I thought it was better to die silently than to put up a fight. I was stupid and I was scared and I did the only thing I could think to do. I gave up on myself and I gave up on them and I hated myself for it. The one time in my life I should have answered all the calls and all the texts, I went silent.

I stopped answering the figurative calls too. The wake-up calls that my own mind kept sending me. I stopped responding to them, dismissing them as one dismisses an annoying ad. I dismissed the reminders to eat, the reminders to wake up and go to bed on time. I dismissed the reminders to talk to someone about what I was feeling, I dismissed the desperate calls of my brain to find help. I dismissed them all. Every single one telling me I was loved, every single one begging me to do something, every single one telling me to wake up and find a way to fix myself. I felt like a burden to myself of all things. I was so stupid back then. I mean how stupid do you have to be to dismiss your own brain, the thing that quite literally makes you, you? I did all of this while being hyper-aware that this was most likely going to kill me, yet being powerless to force myself to fix it. I should have taken a minute to call myself back. The person I was before all of this happened, the person I was before I gave up. I should have called the little girl I

was back. She knew how to live, she knew how to love. She knew who she was and what she wanted. And above all, she knew she could never, ever be a burden. I could have learned a thing or two from her. I did learn a thing or two from her.

I don't remember exactly when I called her back. All I know is that I realized I needed to, so I did. I called back the girl who loved living, who danced even though people were watching. The girl who had sunflowers for eyes and fireworks in her soul. The girl who loved music, who loved to look for beauty in places there wasn't any. I called back the girl who loved stars and who loved her friends. The girl who laughed over the stupid things and fell in love every time the seasons changed. I called back the girl who was unafraid to be herself and who knew how to ask for help. I knew she was there inside me, and I needed her kindness, I needed her joy. I needed the girl I was to overpower the girl I had become. So I called her back. We had a nice little conversation over my soul. She told me that the reason we fall is to have a reason to get back up. She told me that I was not a monster for how I handled my depression, that I was not a burden for wanting help. I didn't believe her at first. I thought she was telling me what I wanted to hear. I told her as much. She laughed and told me to go back and listen to all my unopened voicemails, truly listen to what people were telling me.

I started listening to all my unopened voicemails on Christmas. I don't know why I chose that day, maybe as a present for myself? Who knows. The point is I listened to them. I listened to all 67 voicemails. Every single one of them was more or less the same. Some variation of hello plus a nickname only that person called me, the person's message, and then the same phrase. "Call me back". Every single person told me to call them back, and I could hear a different emotion in every single "call me back". I could hear my mother's desperation to reach her daughter, I could hear her fear that she had already lost me. I could hear the worry in my best

friend's voice, the disappointment in my brother's. I could hear the acceptance in my father's, I think he might have been the only one who realized I wasn't going to call back. I could hear the love, the worry, the fear, the acceptance, the denial. I could hear it all. You never realize how much we express our emotions in simple phrases like, "call me back", until you truly look. All of those messages were telling me more than just "call me back". My best friend's "call me back" was telling me that she was worried, that she loved me. My mother's was telling me she was sorry she couldn't help me, but to not give up on her. My father's was telling me he understood, but he still hoped to hear from me. My brother's was telling me he missed his best friend and older sister, and that he would do anything to get her back. They were all telling me that they loved me, that they needed me. It took hearing all 67 of those messages to finally get me to listen.

I started walking the long road of recovery shortly after. I stopped doing everything by myself, I stopped getting in my own way. I asked for help and I took all the help people gave me, I let them be my support. I called them back. I called myself back. I finally felt like I wasn't a burden anymore. I realized I never was. What I'm trying to say is call them back. When things get hard, call back the people you love and the people who love you. Call back the person you were and call the person you want to be. Listen to what they tell you. And above all, remember that you are not a burden but a blessing. Everything has a purpose. I imagine the world is one big machine, and machines never come with spare parts. They always come with the exact amount of parts they need. So if the world is one big machine, you can't be a spare part, you can't be a burden. So next time you see your phone ringing, answer it; and the next time you miss someone's call, call them back.