

# Blackout

*Rachel Factora*

In the tunnel. I can't hear anything but System of the Down blaring from my iPod. I start doing high knees. I pretend I'm running up the mountains. I imagine I am running from all the pressure falling down on my shoulders like rain. I hold my breath to expand my lungs for this battle, and I do this till my lungs burn with satisfaction. There's no way my lungs will give out before hers. I'm surrounded by others feeling the same fears of losing, hopes of defeating great warriors, and of coming back through the tunnel the victor. Some are already defeated, going into battle with heavy hearts. I sip water from my bottle to keep my throat wet.

On deck. Moving toward the staging area. Everything is just the same as I stand in line with the other contestants. It's not until I slowly move up the line and round the corner that the nausea hits. The raging crowd comes into view. The arena is packed, and the lights are blinding from all angles. The screaming, like a crowd in the gladiator days, is calling for opponents to massacre each other. Then I see her. The cause of the pressure, the cause of the disappointment I've felt the past week. She thinks she's got this. I can tell by the way she flexes her traps. The other girls fear her because she is built like an Olympic weight lifter, but I know from experience that she's all image. Fake strength. I've made her taste defeat so many times that it sickens me that I allowed her one victory last week. Yet, I doubt myself. The pressure takes hold, and I'm scared.

Up. The moment has come, and we step onto the huge mat that swallows us whole. My hands shake as I wrap on my ankle. I'm red and she's blue. We line up on the opposite sides of the lines and crouch into our stances. Lions waiting to pounce, and at the sound of the whistle we attack. She's big, I'm small. I doubt myself as I move. If I lose, I face disappointment in so many eyes. But then I remember his eyes. My new guardian angel, the reason I've excelled this season. Grandpa would have wanted me to win this, and I want to. I now have two people to put my trust in: God and Grandpa. They've got me. I've got this.

Third period. The last period of the match. I don't know how I got here. There's not much memory of the last two rounds, all I know is that I'm winning and that I'm in top position. All I have to do is ride her out for the whole round and victory is mine. My bald-headed coaches scream, as they dig their fingers into their pants, sweating from the adrenaline of coaching my match. The suspense pushes them to the very edge of sanity, as if they're about to run onto the mat and wrestle for me.

"Wrestle smart! Wrestle smart!" They both attempt to yell over the crowd.

They want me to stall her out, so I must be winning. I feel the burn in my arms and my legs are about to give out. The whistle blows, and she explodes up to escape my lock, but I bring her back down to her side.

Stalling. She tries to stand again and tripod up. Her head and arms are still on the mat, but her butt is in my gut. She finally stands up and tries to rip off my lock. I step my

right leg in front of hers and trip her back down onto the mat. That takes a lot out of me; it's like trying to hold down a pitbull. My arms burn as much as my throat. Man, I must look like complete shit right now. I hope I'm far enough from the stands that the crowd can't see how fat I must look in my singlet as my gut bloats while it sucks more oxygen.

"Wrestle smart here! Two minutes left!" Thank you, coaches, a.k.a Captain Obvious.

One minute forty left. She makes another mistake and leaves her right arm up. Perfect. I scoop my right arm under it and hook it over her head. I start to run the Half on her. I get her to break 90 degrees for back exposure points, but she barely has her back off the mat by an inch. I'm definitely winning now. I know she's already defeated. I've broken her before. Now all I have to do is hold her here until time runs out. I know she isn't going anywhere, I'll just tire her out. But then all of a sudden...

Anger. Oh, hell no! This female dog ruined my undefeated streak for this season and caused me to get so much grief for it the past week. She rubbed that one win in my face as if it made up for the last two seasons I trampled her in every match, all at the same time being a good sport and always showing good sportsmanship. Hell no, holding her out is not enough. I want her to break and know who trains harder, and who has earned this win once and for all. That one win for her was a present from me. I snap. I begin to tear at her arm and push all my weight on her. I wait till she lets out air to push in harder, hoping to make her breathing even harder. A handy trick I learned at a clinic called a Spider Bite. The ref scrambles all over the mat keeping an eye on her back to call a pin. Her back is facing the mat, yet she's still on her knees. What in the world is in her thighs? Hidden weights? I feel her adjust under me, and I automatically adjust my body and sink into hers. I knew I had her, and a second later I hear the whistle.

*Wap!* The ref's hand smacks the mat. Done.

"Pin!" says the ref.

Blackout. I finally snap out of my rage. Then I can't process anything. I know the crowd is going crazy but I can't hear anything. It's like I've woken from a dream and I didn't even know if I was in reality. Where am I? What did I just do? This is State, right? Apparently I've pinned her, so that means I've won. If I remember correctly this is finals so if I just won....then I just won State? I won...no way. I'm a state champion?! It feels like it took me forever to answer all my questions and to process that this is reality, when really it took less than 10 seconds. I cover my face as my legs somehow stand up without me even thinking about it. I want to cry but I'm so happy. Not because I won a title, but because of all the work I put into it. Because two years ago, I never thought I'd get this far. But I was mostly happy because the one thing I was working for, the whole drive for my successful season was to be able to look up at the sky, and point up to heaven.

"For you, Grandpa."