



## Layla's Room – Synopsis

Layla lives day-to-day having to endure the struggles of being a teenage girl. At home are her Mum and her younger brother Kai. Her mum and dad separated when her Mum finally stopped lying to herself about her sexuality and got together with her girlfriend. Layla's dad moved out and is currently living and working in Dubai. At the outset of the story, Layla is about to move house. She recalls the friendship, love and anguish of the past few weeks that have confined her to her room. Layla's room is full of the belongings and memories that she's taking with her. She considers feminism in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – from make-up to sexuality to the thigh gap - and how much of an effect it has had on her life.

Layla and her best friend Monica are squatting by the sinks in the girls' toilets and reminiscing. Layla recalls how close they used to be and how their relationship has changed. She illustrates this shift by telling a story which involved the two girls trying to steal some lipstick. In the story Monica is distracted by a boy in the shop while shoplifting and doesn't realise she's been spotted by a security guard. Eventually they manage to convince the security guard that they are victims of advertising and the media, which leads Layla to realise that Monica's obsession with her appearance isn't healthy for her.

Soon after Monica realises that Layla's trying to become indifferent to her appearance she meets Joe. Joe and Monica flirt and start dating quickly. Layla is unsure about him, calling him 'perky' and strange. Monica thinks that Layla is jealous of her as she has never had a boyfriend. Layla has liked a boy at school – Reece - for two years but nothing has ever happened with him.

The next day, Joe insults Layla for her mum being gay, and they get into an argument culminating in Joe suggesting that Layla might want to kiss Monica. Furious, she storms off and writes a poem in the library about identity to siphon her anger. She is about to read the poem in an English lesson when Joe intimidates her and she sits down. Reece approaches her, asks if she's OK and whether they can meet over the weekend. Layla says she's busy but gets angry with herself for saying so.

Soon afterwards Monica suggests, to Layla's disgust, that she should date Joe's best friend Ryan. When Layla refuses, Joe and Ryan start harassing her, and after Layla is attacked, she runs home in panic. Joe falsely tells Monica that Layla asked him out before they were in a relationship causing a rift in their friendship and leading to them sitting apart in class

Reece asks Layla if they can work together on their History homework and Layla accepts. They go back to Layla's house and inadvertently confess to having feelings for each other.

Layla and her mum make a complaint to the school about harassment but it goes unheeded when no-one can corroborate her claims. Reece tells Layla that they can't be seen together any more as a photo of Layla has been spread about the school, framing her assault as a consensual, sexual act. Reece, however, neglects to tell her that Joe and Ryan have been bullying her into it.

As the situation goes from bad to worse Layla's mum suggests that they move house. Layla is shocked and reacts to by trying to 'better' herself. She comes into school the next day wearing make-up like Monica and as the teacher's back is turned Joe and several others grope her. Layla screams. When she gets home accepts that she should move house – and also move schools - as Monica and Reece begin to realise that they were wrong not to stand up for Layla.

Layla Skypes her dad and he tries to boost her confidence but as she walks outside she is surrounded and stripped semi-naked by Joe, Ryan and their friends. Reece, realising that he was wrong in not standing up for Layla before, approaches and the gang of boys scatter off laughing. He hands Layla her clothes and she runs back home. Monica and Reece try to contact her but she ignores their messages.

Layla sinks into a depressive slump triggered by the assault. She knows she is moving schools, but she still has to endure the rest of the term and is desperately sad. Layla contemplates suicide, but as she reaches for the pills she trips on something. It is her little brother's toy dinosaur. Layla realises that the love of her brother, and her family, is worth too much to her.

With a renewed sense of closeness to her family Layla starts to feel better but still refuses to go to school. When her mum asks her what would make her return Layla suggests writing a gender equality manifesto – one that could be used to help other girls that find themselves in the same position as her. She plans to read it aloud in the end-of-term talent competition.

Reece, who has come to the door every day since the incident, apologises to Layla and tells her Monica is also sorry. At this very moment Monica calls in a panic, having been locked in a shed by Joe who suspects her of cheating on him. Reese and Layla help Monica escape and whilst she finally understands that Joe isn't good for her she doesn't know whether she can give him up.

Layla packs the last box with her most important belongings, hoping that the future can learn from the past. We see her read her manifesto to the whole school and know that, for her at least, everything is going to be alright.