

Never Again

by Olivia Sun

Spotted colours dance before my eyes as if someone's waving pokadotted flags in front of my face. My vision is blurry which confuses me. I blink, once and then twice. I still can't see clearly.

My eyes dart around for clues to tell me where I am. Old buildings with ivory columns are everywhere and busy business men rushing about fill up the cobble streets. The sun beats down on me and I squint to see clearly. Everything and everyone is still a blur.

Suddenly, a girl with long, curly hair as dark as black coffee wearing knee-high boots with a rainbow striped bag slung over her shoulder comes walking my way. Her body is turned; therefore I can't see her face, but a sudden connection zings inside of me. I try to make my way towards her but my feet seem to be glued to the ground. I open my mouth to shout and get her attention but nothing comes out.

Out of nowhere, something large and heavy collides into me, causing me to fall to the floor with a thud. Instead of feeling pain like I was expecting, the world spins out of control and the colours before my eyes go wild. A pair of knee-high boots dash across the cobble and they stop right in front of me. She's kneeling down and-

I lurch upright into a sitting position, my forehead covered in sweat as if the hot sun actually was scorching me the whole time. My breathing is heavy but I quickly recover

by gulping down the shock. I run a shaky hand through my lanky hair which is plastered to my skull from the sweat.

It's just a dream, I tell myself, as I do every morning.

Each night, I end up giving into my demons and seeing the exact same scenario: being lost, spotting that mystery girl, and then getting hit; except, the thing is, I know exactly who she is. I wish I didn't.

Quickly changing, I brush my teeth in record time before going into the kitchen. It doesn't matter if my teeth are dirty. Speech is non-existent to me anyways.

"Sleep well?" My mom asks as she sets the table for breakfast. I ignore this and pour myself a bowl of milk. "Do you want me to drop you off today?" I shrug and she sighs. "I'll start the car."

"Hey, Mrs. Rinwi! How are you?" Mike calls out and he waves with a grin on his face as we pull into the school.

"Hello Mike! I'm fine, thanks." My mom replies as I open the passenger door and step out onto the school grounds. I can't help but notice how she always answers with "I'm fine" when we both know she's not. "Just keep an eye on Ashton for me, please?" I roll my eyes. She tells him this everyday.

“Aw, Ashton doesn’t need taking care of,” Mike says and playfully punches me in the shoulder. “See? Tough as nails.”

Mom doesn’t look satisfied with this answer but she nods anyways. “Alright then, see you two later!” I raise my hand as a goodbye and she drives away.

“What do you have first today?” He asks as I open the door and we step in, the smell of perfume and body odour wafting into my nose. I take out my schedule and point to debate class. He looks at me quizzically. “How are you supposed to have debate class if you don’t...you know.”

Slipping my phone out of my back pocket, I type in, *teacher never calls on me*.

He nods and we’re both quiet for a moment-I’m always silent anyways. I don’t talk anymore. At least this way, no one can tell me to shut up. I wasn’t born like this though. Five months, two weeks, and sixteen days ago, was the day I officially stopped speaking.

Briana and I had gone to Italy for a trip, just the two of us. To say the least, I was having the time of my life; going on romantic boat rides down the Venice River, exploring the bustling markets-it was all a beautiful wonderland-until the accident. That’s when I learned that I couldn’t be Alice.

She was carrying the rainbow striped bag I had given her on her birthday and we were talking although I don’t remember what it was about. It makes me furious that I forgot; that I’m already starting to lose grip of her.

I was a little bit ahead of Briana, heading towards a small café when it happened.

“Can you believe it!” I laugh, turning around so I can face her. “I mean-“

Suddenly, a big truck comes driving down the street right towards her and it feels as if time is moving in slow motion. My legs want to run but they move like molasses and before I can yell at her to get out of the way, the truck rams into her, sending her delicate body flying onto the cobblestone street and me into a horror film.

“Briana!” I screech and I sprint to her lying there, completely still, blood tainting her forehead. Everybody has stopped what they’re doing to watch what has happened but I’m not paying attention to them. The only person that matters right now is her.

I’m hugging Briana into my chest and sobbing like a madman, ignoring the fact that I can’t feel her heartbeat thumping in time with mine like it should be. “She’s not dead.” I whisper to myself over and over. “You’re not dead.”

The person driving the truck steps out and anger I had never felt before burns in the pit of my stomach. “You!” I scream at him and I’m torn between staying with her and punching the man across the face. “Do you see what you did?!”

He backs up but I stand and carefully lie Briana down on the ground, her luscious dark hair tickling my fingertips. Marching over to the driver, I look him in the eye furiously and then I punch him square in the jaw.

“Hey!” Someone shouts from the crowd and I hear police and paramedic sirens but I’m too angry to stop, despite my throbbing fist. I kick him in the gut while he’s stumbling and he falls down.

“Hey!” I hear again and this time, a pair of arms locks mine behind me.

“Let go!” I scream as I struggle against the grip wildly but whoever it is is too strong. Out of the corner of my eye, I notice Briana being placed onto a stretcher and being carried into an ambulance.

“What are you doing with her?!” I yell and I flail around wildly. It feels as if trapped emotions are coursing through my veins instead of blood. Finally breaking free, I rush over to where Briana is and I grab a paramedic by the shoulders, my eyes red from crying. “Is she going to be okay?”

“We don’t know sir.” He simply says and lifts the stretcher up, his Italian accent thick.

“Wait!” I protest as they’re closing the doors. “You have to let me go with her!”

“Sorry, not allowed.”

“No, you don’t understand!” I place myself in the middle of the door gap, refusing to let them close it. “I’m the closest person she has! I love her!”

One of them pushes me out of the way and while I’m stumbling, they close the doors and drive off, blue and red sirens flashing.

I collapse to the ground, crying into my hands as the chattering of Italians surround me but the only sound I can hear is my heart shattering into a million pieces. “I love you,” I whisper, my voice cracking from sobbing in between. I’m not stupid; I know she’ll be dead.

I got the call later that day explaining the tragic news. In that moment, a spark of darkness emerged and it soon invaded my body, killing my soul. All my thoughts remained inside me from that day on and the last words I ever said were the words she never got to hear, “I love you.”

“Ashton?” Mike’s hand waves in front of me. “You dazed off for a second.” I wave it off like it’s nothing though I still feel paralyzed. He looks concerned. “Were you thinking about... *her*?”

My insides clench at the mention of Briana. Tears form at the corners of my eyes and I try to blink them back but they end up spilling out anyways. Having the sudden urge to be alone, I run out of the school, ignoring Mike’s shouts to come back, my vision blurry from crying. Eventually, I’m not sure where I am anymore and I fall to the ground. The words “I love you” replay like a broken record over and over again in my head and I let out a cry of agony. My heart is internally wounded. I may as well be dead.

Dead. Just like she is.

