

Quite Alive

Ollie's grandma liked to say that he saw the world with dead eyes. He woke up each morning pondering what exactly she meant by it from the start of a nightmare to the hazy grey of early sunlight streaming in through white curtains.

He couldn't think of an answer.

Ollie thought his eyes were quite alive, powdery blue irises that reflected the scenes around him as he walked through the hallways at school, despite the fact that his head was down. They told stories of what he saw, and he was okay with that. Existing in others' lives as a shadowy figment in the peripheral of their thoughts.

Some people had suddenly become frightened of Ollie when they had never noticed him before.

He wasn't exactly sure why.

Because when he stood in front of the mirror while getting ready for another day of school, he didn't see much. He had wispy, thin strands of hair that resembled the darkest part of the night, no streetlights in sight just like the picture from his window on the nights when he couldn't go back to sleep. He was as pale as the bones his skin clung to, save for the periwinkle and sea foam that pooled under his bottom lashes like the ocean at dusk. Tea roses gathered on his face and formed into downturned lips, never budging from their position as if frozen. Ollie didn't think it was that. He had always been so stoic, apathetic-looking, impassive. Maybe it was his eyes, his quite-alive eyes. They stared back at him. Filmy.

Cold.

Dead.

The word seeped into the back of his head and choked his drowsiness with gnarled, frigid fingers. Stubborn, the dazedness stayed with him: even after he dressed his eyes in makeup, even after he floated down the stairs in a fog of silence, even after his grandma sat across from him at the table.

"Get enough sleep?"

When Ollie looked up, steam from his grandma's Earl Grey tea curled at him expectantly as if asking the question itself. Ollie only shrugged.

He liked to shrug nowadays.

A routine resumed; one that involved only the crunches of cereal, the gentle clink of silverware, the faint hum of a passing car from the street. The cat, a plump cow of a feline named King Kitty by a three year old Ollie, waddled into the sterile room and plopped on one of the remaining chairs.

Family breakfast was complete.

Minus two.

The bus came the way it always did: screeching like fingernails on chalkboard to a halt at the intersection.

Ollie boarded it with his shoulders hunched and brow furrowed. He felt like glass, ready to splinter through his own skin dripping scarlet to the time of his heartbeat stuck in his throat. He wanted to throw up.

"Oliver." Condolence oozed from the bus driver's syllables and lodged itself to muffled sounds around Ollie. The next words he heard only faintly, far away. "I'm sorry about Alice and Vinny."

Alice and Vinny.

Dead.

Ollie opened his mouth to answer, but it came in the form of a wheeze, low and so only he could hear. He sounded like an injured animal, lost without his pack.

The Laizure triplets were a team, a group to remember. Alice had the most potential, Vinny was in line for

a soccer scholarship. Ollie? They balanced each other out. Ollie liked to fade into the background, it's where he thrived best.

He didn't think he'd have to be brought into the spotlight like this.

The bus ride was only twenty minutes, but Ollie could feel himself aging; his insides shriveled to dust. He spent his school day with his quite-alive eyes telling the stories of the students who found their ways into the halls of the Hell he liked to call high school.

At one point it was the story of the girl who bumped into him with running mascara and a red nose. Vinny liked to say she was like starlight when they were together, soft and glimmering, but now the sun had risen and she bleached into another life, one without her boyfriend. She whispered an apology to the air, and Ollie nodded back.

Then it was the story of the boy who sat in front of him in calculus that kept bouncing his leg in the silence. Ollie had come to make a habit of counting how many bounces he could get in a minute rather than take notes or complete an assignment. It always fascinated Ollie, the fact that everyone could do the same thing for different reasons. It used to annoy Alice, but he didn't mind it so much.

"Mr. Laizure." The tone shredded through Ollie's spine and landed in the pit of his stomach. He looked up from his thoughts.

"Yes." It never sounded like he was asking questions.

"Your attention please."

"Yes, ma'am."

At least he had a sense of normalcy to cling to.

Ollie's final story of the day came from the pair of twins at the school, a rugged male duo from the opposite side of town that were always finding ways to land in detention. They were identical: green eyes, blond hair, freckle smatters. Or was it dirt? It was hard to tell.

They came to him when Ollie took a bathroom pass to wander the halls and clear his head. An elbow rested on his shoulder while a hand ruffled his hair. "So did you do it on purpose?"

Ollie shrugged them off. "Do what." His intonation fell flat once again. As expected.

"Y'know."

"What. No." Ollie walked a little faster, but they kept pace. He knew they would.

The one to his left licked his lips. "Some people say ya did, being the only survivor. And the driver. Everyone thinks you snapped or somethin'! Blew your gasket, facade finally cracked! That's a little rumor roaming around like you are right now." The one to the right patted his shoulder.

Ollie shrugged in return, too emotionally drained to argue. He wished he had just stayed in class. "You'd think they'd already have me locked up if I did it," he hissed, reaching the end of the hallway.

Ollie turned the corner alone.

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Home was a relief, which was something to say due to the recent series of events. His grandma was out at the store, the cat was lying on the vent while the heat blasted through the house. Ollie set down his backpack by the door, forgetting if he had any homework during the haze of the day. Kitty called for him in the living room, and Ollie dutifully sat against the wall and stared at nothing while fur reached up and touched his fingertips. He didn't want to look down at his hands.

He was too afraid he'd see blood.

Ollie's grandma liked to say he saw the world with dead eyes. For a week now he woke up from the memory of the crash that killed his siblings and wondered what she meant. He thought his eyes were

quite alive, but when they closed for the night, he saw what wasn't.
Alice's eyes. Vinny's eyes.
Filmy. Cold.
Dead.