

I kissed her gently on the forehead and waved goodbye. My eyes glistened and sparkled as I managed to hold back a tear that was fighting to burst out. The thought of my daughter growing up so quickly hurt me, it hurt that she might forget about me, it hurt me that she wouldn't need me anymore. I stared at her until the doors of the school shut tight after her. I didn't know yet that, that was the last time I was ever going to see her again.

I lived right across the street from the school; I'd always glare my eyes out of the window and scan the oval of the school for my daughter. I could hear and smell everything. As I sat down at my usual spot on the armchair and gazed at the towering school again, I heard it. Bang. Bang. Bang. I immediately sat up the words echoed out of the school and into the streets. Screams. Shouting. Sirens. I slammed the door open and ran out to the nearest police car. I saw adults carrying children out from the building and laying them on the soft bed of grass outside, I was about to breathe a sigh of relief when suddenly something caught my eye. Briana.

I kneel on the grass, the damp earth pressing against my knees, my hands trembling just above Briana's still body. Her chest does not rise, her face pale in the fading sunlight, her dark hair fanned out across the ground like spilled ink. The wind stirs the leaves around us, whispering in a language I can't understand, and for a moment I almost convince myself she's just asleep. Her fingers curl slightly, so small, so familiar, and my stomach twists at the sight—I want to scoop her into my arms, but she is already gone. The world goes on around me: birds call, a distant car hums, yet nothing touches the frozen silence of her lying there, and I feel every heartbeat that isn't hers echo through my chest. I kiss her forehead and whispered goodbye and cradled her head in my arms. I howl. No one hears. Its empty. My soul.

After that, the house felt impossibly quiet. Each morning, I moved through it like a ghost, tracing the edges of memories. My daughter's laughter seemed to echo in empty rooms, a cruel reminder of the life that had been stolen. At first, even leaving the bed felt impossible, but slowly, I learned to breathe again. I planted flowers in the garden my daughter loved each bloom a small act of defiance against grief. I spoke aloud, telling stories to the air, imagining my daughter listening. One evening, as the sunset painted the walls gold, my phone chimed unexpectedly. A familiar melody drifted through the room—Briana's favourite song. Tears streamed down my face, but this time they carried a fragile, shimmering hope and I danced in my shadows imagining her there. She's still her.