

I SAW HER AT THE TRAIN STATION

Ingshwan Zhang

Rebecca,

If you're reading this, I'm already dead.

I burned her letter in my backyard that afternoon. What was she thinking? Why was she pulling this thing? What did she want? Forcing myself to take slow, steady breaths, I stamped out the flames, streaking black soot across the dirt. *It didn't mean anything.* She was just trying to scare me using dirty tactics. *She's just lying.* With one final stomp, I tossed my hair back and headed inside. I repeated that thought until my thundering heartbeat quieted and my hands stopped shaking.

...I'll keep this short. I don't think I need to spell out the reason why you're getting this letter from me. You're smart enough to figure it out. You're smart enough to clear yourself of all association to me, after all. I reckon that even during the investigation of my death, nobody's really gonna bother you. That's what infuriated me the most about you.

The sky was brilliantly bright as I huddled in my puffer jacket on the station platform the next afternoon. My hands were clenched into fists in my pockets, desperately trying to dispel numbness. Around me, juniors from my school clamoured, chatting and laughing. I stared at my feet, watching out the corners of my eyes as the checkered skirts of their uniforms would flicker by when a girl got too close. *Just how late is the train going to be today?* 2 minutes, read the timetable, though it had been saying that for the past five. That's when I saw her. Across the tracks, on the opposite platform, she sat on a bench under the overhang. The sun was angled in such a way that only her face was shadowed. Dark hair draped over the white sleeves of her blouse. She looked up, her eyes locking straight onto mine. She smiled. The train rolled into the station, obstructing my view. I slung my bag over my shoulder and boarded. Through the carriage window, the opposite platform was empty.

...Everyone knew what Violet was like, but you? Two-faced bitch. But I'm not angry. I'm letting go.

"Mum, I'm gonna go over to Violet's now."

She nodded, not turning to look. "Just don't stay out too late alright?"

"Actually, I *will* be 'staying out late'. I told you I was sleeping over tonight."

Reaching over for her coffee, she took a swig, still fixated on her laptop. "Oh, is that so?"

I rolled my eyes. "Yeah I told you two days ago—"

"Becca, can you not talk to me right now? I need to get this done or we can say goodbye to that promotion and you can say goodbye to your school and friends." she snapped. "Sorry. I'm just—" Sighing, she rubbed her temples. "Lots of work stuff. You're a big girl now, you understand, right?"

"Yeah. Alright." I closed the door to the study behind me.

...This letter is one last scream before I disappear. Let me have the last word for the first and final time.

Suburban roads were always quiet that time of night. I wandered with my hood drawn up, breaths puffing into clouds. Eventually, I lost track of time. My strides carried me from streetlight to streetlight, alternating from light to dark. Sometimes a car would pass, making me squint against the oncoming starbursts of brightness. I'd look at the concrete, or at the sky. When I did, the LEDs blotted out the stars.

...It doesn't make you special that you know what Violet did to me. Do you know what you did to me though?

I found myself at the top of the bridge. Pairs of train tracks ran underneath it, the occasional rumbling of trains disturbed the silence. On each side of the tracks, a few hundred metres further, station platforms were lit by flickering fluorescent lights. Stairs ran down the side of the bridge that led to the footpath below. I sighed. *It's too damn cold. Just go home.* But I was rooted to the spot, my eyes fixed on the tracks. The metal glinted under the streetlights, looking like streaks of meteors.

"Hi." Her voice disrupted my quiet. My hands gripped the railing. I kept staring down.

"It's funny how things turn out, huh?"

A sick churning twisted in my gut. *Stop imagining things.*

"Please, I'm as real as your guilty conscience is," She laughed. "Oh wait. I guess that does complicate things."

My lips felt paper dry.

"Alright, I guess I'll do all the talking then. I suppose it is my turn to talk, after all." Out the corner of my eye, she turned to face me, leaning her elbow against the railing. "It wasn't easy even before you guys started tormenting me. My parents don't have the money that all of yours do. Think about it, the two of them coming from a completely foreign land in hopes of their daughter having better chances. Getting into a private school on scholarships and loans is already enough stress, don't you think?"

I dared to tilt my head slightly towards her. Her bloodless complexion glowed under the streetlights; jet black hair carved geometric shapes out of her silhouette. "W-why are you here?" I managed.

Her eyes narrowed. "It's my turn to talk. Listen." Rearranging her features back into one of neutrality, she continued, "I already felt like I couldn't belong here. Thanks for really driving that point home for me. Say, was Violet at school today?"

"No."

She scoffed. "And yet you're free of consequences. My point is—" her dark eyes bore into mine, "—you made me feel like a fucking freak. You made me believe that I shouldn't even exist."

My eyebrows knitted. I pushed myself back from the railing and finally turned to face her, fists clenched at my sides. "Shut up," I spat. My face felt hot. "It's not me! It wasn't me and you know, and everyone knows. It's Violet!"

A bewildered smile played over her face. "You still really think that?"

“She was the one that said all that about you, that did those things! I didn’t—”

“Didn’t do anything?” She scowled. “Please. You thrived when you saw fear in my eyes when I was around either of you. You laughed the hardest out of anyone.” Shrugging, she reached out to touch my arm. I flinched backwards. “But I’m not scared of you now. You can’t hurt me anymore.” Her fingers were stone cold.

“I didn’t think you’d actually—” I groaned, tangling my fingers through my hair and clutching my head. “Why? Why did you have to make things so complicated?”

At that, she doubled over laughing, giggles that turned into chortling, hysterical barks. Finally, she straightened herself, flicking away a tear from her eye. “Wow. Just wow.” She exhaled deeply. “I said I wasn’t angry, didn’t I? Damn, you make some promises hard to keep.” Shaking her head, she turned to the tracks. “Oh, whatever.” Her uniform skirt swayed as a breeze blew past. “Fuck you. For the longest time I really believed that all this was my fault. Seriously, *fuck* you.” She turned away and began walking to the stairs. “I’m gonna go home now. See you at school. I—” Midstep, she paused. “I feel bad for my parents,” she said, so quiet I could barely hear. “That’s what I feel the guiltiest for.”

...There really wasn’t anything special about me. I think you knew that, but it didn’t matter. You and Violet could fabricate me to be different for your own purposes, and that was enough.

I watched as she went down the steps. The urge to scream was unbearable. “Wait!” I shouted at her back. “You don’t understand. I didn’t mean for you to— I’m not rich either...” She didn’t turn as she reached the bottom and walked towards the platforms. “It wasn’t personal! I need her! Violet’s the reason I’m— If I don’t, she’ll—” I bent over the railing, out of breath, frustrated tears stinging my eyes. Still, she didn’t look back. “She’d ruin my life!” I screamed. “I’d lose everything!” My voice broke.

In the distance, she stood by the edge of the train platform. She finally looked back. Stepping over the yellow line, she hopped off the platform, onto the tracks. With a disturbing saunter, she walked back towards the bridge. From behind me, a quiet rumble approached. Getting louder, the screech of metal became deafening. *Watch out!* I wanted to shout, but didn’t. She angled her head up at me. Powerful beams of light washed over her. She waved. *I’m sorry, okay?* I wanted to beg. The words stayed stuck in my throat. They wouldn’t be meant for her anyways. Brightness enveloped her as the train shot forward. My empty apology shriveled into a cold numbness. The night fell silent as the train disappeared into the distance. The tracks were empty.

...I guess even the most boring rock can be beheld as a shooting star if it crashes and burns.
Goodbye Rebecca,
Mai.