

**SECOND PLACE  
MIDDLE SCHOOL  
6<sup>TH</sup>, 7<sup>TH</sup> & 8<sup>TH</sup> GRADES**

**HANA  
◀By Jessica Liu▶**

**Y**ou said you liked flowers with bright, dazzling colors.

And these days I look to the window, summer reborn, and all these flowers blooming madly. I wondered if you would have said what you did again.

\* \* \*

Living in the countryside is where everyday was a sunny day. Rays from the hot boiling sun hitting your skin – like most boys I am tan, sweat dripping down my face as I work in our family farm.

It was a surprise to the town that someone had moved to the empty house not too far away from the hill. It was a little house, not a farm. No one had any uses for it. For my mother’s conscience and politeness, I am made to come along to say hello to the new neighbors, hearing that there’s a boy about my age.

I am smiling politely as I hear the broken English from the Japanese family, my mother shaking their hands wildly with grin too wide for comfort. They sat down in the living room, I’m urged to go upstairs and meet their son. The wooden stair creaked as I walked.

I went and what I saw was an almost empty room: a bed, a closet, and a desk, surrounded by the plain white wall. And you, the boy that I met at this moment and never forgot. You were sitting on your bed; every movement you made was without a sound. Your smile was quiet and done in the gentlest way. Skin paler than the bed sheet and your pajamas, but dark hair that glittered under the sunshine down to your shoulder, the eyes that shone even with the dullness around you.

Hana. The name that meant flowers in Japanese, the name anyone would think did not fit you. I was the only one that understood – this is the name for you.

\* \* \*

Oliver-kun. That’s what you inform me as. You explained it was a normal address for a young boy in Japanese. I nodded, just a bit bored.

“There are a lot of pretty flowers out there, Oliver-kun. Their colors are so wonderful.” You looked outside the window. That was your view of the world. You were forbidden to be outside, because somehow something out there is harmful to your fragile body. To most of the folks around town, who ran their mouths feeling rather unashamed, call your body “will swift with the wind if it hits him”. Cancer is a disease that tries to take you

away. You survived, obdurately. You wake up, open your eyes every morning, though it's just another start of pain you must take in.

“Those flowers are nothing.” I spoke. “I see way more than these.” I said in despise of your blindness. But not criticize from anyone brings you down; I admire that, in secret. A young teenage boy can never lose their insolence.

“You're very lucky, Oliver-kun, to see all those things out there.” You said with the look longing in your eyes; a littler bitter, but then you were never defeated. “But I will get cured, you know, then I can walk outside, play soccer with the boys, and maybe even do a little farm work. And I can see more flowers.”

Your eyes then shone with hope, as if tomorrow you could jump off your bed and run outside, free.

I fell silent. Mom has been talking about it at dinner, how your disease was could not be cured, how you would not live pass 16, how your family is having trouble paying your medical bills, how they wanted a child that was healthy and strong, how I needed to be by your side, be your friend, until the wind takes you away.

Like those flowers I planted in spring. Some of them are dying, and you know you can't help it, but watch its ephemeral life to the end, heart broken.

Life is a story. Places and characters, twists and events – it seems it's all set in the script, immutable.

\* \* \*

It is your 14<sup>th</sup> birthday. I bought you some pot-grown flower seeds and things needed for it to grow. You were excited; you wanted them to grow well. You told me if I could just please bring some more fertilizer, some water, some this some that. I laughed, I joked and said So now I'm less important than some flowers?

Your face becomes flushed. You stuttered as you spoke: “No – no! Of course not! Oliver-kun is a lot more important than flowers!”

I cracked up and watched you kept on trying to make out your words correctly. I rub your head and made your smooth black hair messy. I'm glad at that moment that you are not losing your hair like all those cancer patients I have heard from. It is too beautiful to be lost. You told me it's in the medicine, chemo, as they're called. I don't really know much about cancer, I didn't want to. Perhaps it would pain me to know what kind of things you go through each day. You accept my cowardice, as you did with my arrogance.

“Alright, quit talking before you really embarrass yourself.” My laughter rang through the room.

You blushed again, holding the pot in your hand; silently you press the seeds into the

dirt. Your fingers are long and bony, slender, fitted for piano playing. I know few girls in my school that plays piano. The way they play upon those black and white keys, the music they make out of it – it is beautiful. I wish you could learn it too. Me being your only friend, I would be honor before all others to hear it.

I lean on the wall by the window; the sun was warm today. You hum as you worked.

“Ay, Hana.”

You looked over to my direction.

I didn't know what to say, I just felt like calling out your name.

Before you're gone.

Before you disappear.

“You like your presents?” I grinned.

“Yes. Thank you, Oliver-kun.”

I notice how you smile then, those smile contain of pure happiness, that image was somehow never gone from my memories, no matter how much time can wash away.

\* \* \*

The flowers grew to our friendship alike. I came to your room everyday, telling you about my life. You act like a child hungry for those fairytales each night.

I found my first crush. I told you about that too, how her red hair was so beautiful, how her eyes shock me when it meets mine, so on. You always listen to my words with interest, nodding along the way.

“There must be lots of pretty girls out there.” You held your knees with your arm; you always sat like that.

“Che, yeah.” I sat next to the window; looked to your direction, pinch your face lightly. “If you were a girl, I guess you could be called pretty.” I have no interest in boys, but if being honest, that is the truth plainly. You can't really tell that Hana is a boy by looking, and by his feminine name it's just more confusing. His features are rather delicate, with long lashes, big round eyes full of spirit despite his illness, pale skin because he never faced the sun. A pretty boy, end of judgment.

I see you blushed and smiled, shyly, quietly, in your own little way. That's just you. A flower blooming though its stems and roots are weak, but still with pride and that brightness that was beautiful no less.

You touched the flower buds lightly. “They’re growing, Oliver-kun.” You smiled again. You adored these flowers. You forget to take your medicine on time but you don’t forget to water them. You have a little notebook, a diary, and every page you draw or write about the flowers, things outside the windows, and me.

A little circle of your life. Your parents, your room, your window, your flowers.

And there stands me, in the middle, in the center of your attention, always.

I was 16, you were 15.

\* \* \*

And comes the twist, the turn in this scenery – our family moved to the city. Away from the countryside, the flowers and grass and farms.

You couldn’t come to say goodbye. I understand. We said we did write to each. You still smiled, like always, but somehow your eyes’ shines seem to be faded.

\* \* \*

We wrote, but less and less. Whether it is my life moving forward and you’re becoming the smaller parts of it, or your strength is finally fading, so much so that to hold a pencil would be a struggle.

Everything moved on so fast with the wind and clouds, going forward. It took some time to get use to, but I learn to like the neon nightlights and the rushing people of the city; it was different type of beauty. Things were fine, my role and such, a boy that loved sports, hard worker, energetic, has some girls around him – too fine, that I have forgotten the country’s vibrant blue sky, the green grass, and a boy named Hana, waiting for me. I bought girls flowers: roses, tulip, daffodil, lilac, corsage, iris, pansy, lavender. It reminds of you and your flowers. I would remind myself to write a letter, see how you’re doing, but it never came to be so urgent. Time washed everything away. You faded from the picture. I didn’t realize, I was still your center, though I am gone.

Every time I look back, I regret. Why had I not remember you, recall your name, why had I not know you were still waiting, a little flower, waiting for someone to come to him, to see him, to care for him?

And I know there is the part of me that forever remained to long to be by your side. But then I was denying it for whatever reason.

\* \* \*

I was 18 then.

I went back to take care of some business. See the hills of flowers and blue sky, sniff the fresh air. I looked around. It seemed as if nothing has changed. And then there was that little house by the hill.

Hana.

My memories rushed, my head rushed, my body rushed.

I bang on the door so loudly your parents seem to be cursing in Japanese. As they open the door, the surprise spread their face to see me. I couldn’t catch my breath. Didn’t dare to.

I look to your father's eyes, earning to ask the question burning inside, but no sound came. He studied my face for a little while, and merely closed his eyes and shook his head.

Gone.

16 years was your penalty of death.

\* \* \*

A boy that's locked in a room with dullness of white walls and illness, a boy that longed for the hills, desired for the colors of life, those eyes never faded, no matter what comes in the way.

No matter how agonizing waking up everyday would be. No matter how lonely looking at the white walls would be. No matter how hard it is to accept, to know, the solemn fact of your death's date.

And for the knowledge of I was gone, why had your eyes faded away.

\* \* \*

The part about dying is not the pain go through beforehand, it is the memories and the pain you left behind.

Your parents said you waited for my letter, for me to visit. Your body was weaker each day, yet the plants grew well, you took care of them. You wrote more in your diary, took notes, hoping, praying.

The day you left, they said you sneaked outside and walked a long road over the hills. I know how excited you must have been, to be free, to see more things and colors as you desired so, though your body at that time was so fragile, moving so much could have brought you down instantly. They said you wanted to see me, to get on the bus and go to the city. But they found you the next day, lying in the flowers near the city road, eyes closed, holding an envelope, with flower seeds you took in there.

Your parents hand me the letter and the diary. Their eyes showed no sign of sadness, now that they have a new child. You were the past for them, something that was gone, and better to be forgotten.

I didn't read your letter or the diary. I didn't dare to. I'm afraid if I do, the tears would wash away the writing.

\* \* \*

Your grave was at the place you slept and rested; forever and no longer need to face the pain. You liked flowers, with bright, dazzling colors, and so I planted them for you. In heaven, you could hold them in your arms.

The seeds you gave me rest in the envelope. In the way of life, it has always been blooming, beautifully.

I pray for cleanse of sin.

\* \* \*

"I'm Hana, my name means flower in Japanese. Nice to meet you, Oliver-kun."

"I like flowers, Oliver-kun."

"Don't you think those colors are beautifully?"

"Thank you for being with me."

"One day I will run through the hills of flowers with you, and rest there."

\* \* \*

Your name is Hana, a boy named after the flowers, that desired freedom, that longed for the hills of flowers and colors, the boy that left a seed in Oliver's life, grew silently, till the day you disappear, is only when he then felt the pain, through and through.

\* \* \*

Your name is Oliver, a boy like any others, forgetful, a bit selfish but has one's conscience. Someone that liked to have a person to talk to, that would look up to you, to accompany with no one else was there. That was Hana. You didn't realize his place until he is gone, and your remorse remains forever.

\* \* \*

I see the flowers in the field, on the hills, through the window, and you're missing sitting next to me.

For a sec in the flowers appeared a slender boy in white pajamas and black hair and eyes that shone. My heart quickens a beat. Was it you? Could it possibly be?

I ran outside the door, I ran to you. You were still smiling, in your quiet, gentle way. You looked happy. I am with tears. I mouthed your name.

Ha. Na.

You raised your arm, your hand swift against my face gently. The wind bellowed, the flowers' buds are flying, your fingers brushed away my tears.

"Oliver- kun." You say my name like you always did, your voice so nostalgic, the somewhat low, comforting voice.

You smiled. You put down your arm.

"The flowers are very beautiful, Oliver-kun."

The wind started again, carried you away along with the flower buds, and your voice remained ringing.

I shut my eyes, I hug the flowers. Hana. Flower.

In the end, you were still there by my side, I just didn't know it.

\* \* \*

Then, there was a flower shop in the little countryside named Hana's Garden. The owner was benevolent and spends his lifetime earning money and donates to the cancer association. He passed away at the age 87, holding a diary and a letter in hand, lying in the flowers next to a grave.

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Many years later, Oliver Smith and Hana Hoshino's graves were still in the hill of bright, dazzling flowers.

