



The flashbacks had only started a month ago. It was six months after the event that destroyed everything, left her alone, broken and unable to pick up the splintered pieces of a once happy, perfect life. The memories plagued her, haunted her. They gave her no respite, like a lioness targeted on her prey or an arrow aimed at the target. Or like a jousting rider at top speed towards his injured opponent, with malice in his cold eyes. And, just as quickly as they came, they went, like a cheetah running across the savannah. It was all over in a flash, like lightning. She wished they'd stop and leave her in peace.

The flashbacks felt like fire and ice tumbling simultaneously over her body, sending her into a fit of sweats and chills that mingled with her salty tears. Somewhere, in the distance, she heard a voice calling to her. "Heidi..." it whispered hauntingly, reinforcing the terrifying flashbacks she kept falling into the abyss of.

"Please, no..." Heidi pleaded. "Stop..." Tears began to slip down her face as her armour disintegrated and the memories of that awful night began to take over.

"Heidi, help!" A voice called to her from afar. Heidi could hear the pain in the voice.

"I can't..." she replied. "Where are you? What can I do?" She felt her breaths start to stick harshly in her chest.

"Please! Stop the pain!" The voice grew more insistent. Heidi spun around, her long, blonde hair whipping her in the eyes. But she saw nobody there. Yet the voice was strong and loud.

"Just stop!" Heidi wailed loudly. Flames appeared in her blue eyes. They seemed to jump around her threateningly.

"Heidi, Heidi," this time two adult voices, one male and one female, called to her.

"No... No... Please... Leave..." Heidi fell to her knees, shaking.

"HEIDI!" Yelled a cacophony of mingled voices, their faces obscured by smoke and tears. Heidi curled into a ball, willing the flashbacks to stop, to leave her. They were always like this. Daily visions of screams, smoke and fire. And just like when the fire had ripped through her family home, killing all but her, Heidi was powerless to do anything.

Heidi remembered that night with horror and trepidation. That awful, hellish night from six months ago. It had been just before her sixteenth birthday...

*Heidi was on her way back from a school soccer tournament in the Blue Mountains. As the bus turned into her street in Mosman, the fire exploded and overtook the whole*

*house. Heidi jumped out of the bus and ran, screaming loudly. Chaos erupted down the street as she saw neighbours rushing out to help her. Then the police and firefighters arrived. Heidi's eyes began to water from the smoke and she squealed as somebody pulled her back. She felt everything around her fade to black.*

Heidi didn't remember much after her teacher pulled her away from the burning house. She blocked everything else out of her memory. Sitting up on her bed, she pulled her knees up tightly to her chest. She looked around the room that she now occupied in her aunt and uncle's house. The happy colours, books, trinkets and the shrine to her family – all things that her aunt and uncle and friends had given her.

But they didn't feel like they were hers, not completely anyway. One day they would, when the flashbacks stopped and gave her some reprieve, she hoped. One day she'd feel normal again, whatever that meant.

"Heidi!" She heard her aunt call. "Dinner!" She closed her eyes and breathed.

by Ashleigh Meikle

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