

## 1000 Words Just For You - Indigo, Year 6, VIC

My hands grappled around the inside of the bin, reaching to see if any bottles had found their way there for me to collect. Further down my arm went, but the bin was just as empty as my thoughts. No, not empty. I had one thought. Grace.

*“Yasmin, Yas! I think this bin’s gonna be good!”*

*“How many bottles do you think you’re gonna get, Grace? A thousand?”*

I thrust the lonely bottle into my near-empty bag and trudged towards the next bin, with a dull hope that some partygoers had passed, throwing their bottles and cans into the bin from the night before. Then again, that was unlikely, they probably chucked all their rubbish on the ground without more than a thought.

Again, my hands sifted through the bin to find a bottle, and a can. I threw them both into my bag and thrust my hand back in, grabbing at least five more before finding myself clutching a small empty bottle of Grace’s favourite drink. My hands shook as my view of the bottle blurred as silent tears ran down my face.

*“Happy Birthday dear Grace, Happy Birthday to you!”*

*“You didn’t have to do that Yas. Thanks though.”*

“Y’know what else I’ve got? Ta-da!” I presented her with a little pink bottled drink with an exaggerated bow.

Her eyes lit up and she glanced at me, then at the bottle, before throwing herself at me, tackling me with a hug saying, “thank you, thank you, thank you!”

#

The day wore on as I collected bottles until my bin bag was full. At one stage during the day, I looked up at the sky to see it darkening, but had to look away before the tears returned. I wished I had something to do to prevent the memories from flowing in, but I had to stop for the night. I dumped my bag of belongings undercover and spread my blankets, preparing for a long night of little sleep.

This time I couldn’t stop the tears as the memories flowed over my fragile dam.

*We watched the grey-streaked clouds dance across the sky, yelling out what shapes we saw.*

*“Goldfish! Over there! Next to the tiny orangey cloud, can you see it now Yas?”*

*“Yeah, yeah, I see it!”*

*We watched as dogs ran across the sky, dragons flew high above the city and fluffy white elephants stampeded in herds. The sky faded from day to night, leaving us under the warm glow of the street lamps counting all the bottles we had found, adding our cents to food, to water, and one day, even a home.*

*“Yas, how ‘bout I count the bottles you collected, and you count mine, so we can see who got the most?”*

*“What, you think I’d cheat? Make sure you don’t cheat and make mine less, Grace!”*

*“That’s Madam Grace to you, servant!”*

*“Sir, yes sir!”*

That night I couldn’t help myself as I reached deep into her jacket pocket to read her last connection to me, for what I knew was the thousandth time.

*Hey Yas,*

*I told you once a long time ago, that in what I thought would be the far future, when I got old and left the world, I would find a way to talk to you. Now I have, and I wish I could write 1000 words for you to read, over and over as the days pass by, to remember every memory of us together, but I can’t do that, but I will write, write as much as I can, even if that is not very much at all.*

*I have not grown old, but by now I have probably left this wretched world, and I am sorry. Sorry that I have now left you without a sister to lean on, but I hope the world is good to you and you make friends, friends that are like sisters to you, so you can have a better life than we have had together.*

*Together we fought the hard battles of survival on the cold streets, but we walked together with all the warmth of hope and each other. Let hope warm you again, Yas, let yourself find someone to lean on, and let them lean on you. Don’t stay there waiting for something that is impossible, for me to come back.*

*I want you to be strong and grow stronger. Just be ready for whatever the world throws at you and be prepared to throw it back if you're not ready. The world is cruel to us all, but I know you're not the only one carrying the burden of being alone.*

*I want you to remember for today, and tomorrow, and for all the days after that, hold your head high and find your place in the world. But for before, yesterday, and the day before that straighten your back and remember that you have survived yet another day. Think that every*

*bottle you find, every can that you find, will be taking you a step closer to food, water, and one day, a home.*

*Let me tell you this now, so every day when you are down, or when you are sad, or even when you're happy, to remember. To laugh. To cry over such good times, wondering where the time all went.*

*We were eight and we pretended we were birds, flying across the seven seas, watching pirates as they raided fleets, or searched for buried treasure. We imagined watching the mermaids sitting near our favourite rock pools at the beach, thinking of flying together, through towers of our favourite princess's castles. This is my favourite memory of us. It reminds me of us together as we walked along the streets, only stopping here and there, seeing more than most. This is probably as broken as my thoughts right now, but remember me, and remember us, together.*

*Spread your wings Yas, fly high above the world, and find your world, your people, your home. Just make sure you don't fall.*

*Goodbye Yas.*

*Love always, Grace.*

That night I curled up into a ball under the same blankets we used to share, crying myself to sleep thinking how much I had taken for granted. Back then I had no idea how lucky I was. Lucky enough to be alive, to have enough food and water to survive out on the streets. Lucky enough to have a sister to share everything with. To laugh with, love with, live with.

My thoughts threaded through my sleep, woven with wishes that I knew when the end was near. Wishing I knew when to say goodbye. I had no idea that our time together was so short, that the cold shadows of grief would soon come closing in, selecting me as a victim to strangle in the folds of its long dark cloak. I had no idea that my sorrows would follow the long trail of gasps and cries that followed death like a shrouding mist.

#

The next day I packed my belongings and started to trudge slowly past the last bin I had looked through and onto the next. I looked from the general waste bin to the recycling bin and decided to take my chances with the recycling bin, there was really nothing to lose. I was going to look in both anyway.

I dug my hand into the bin for the thousandth time and automatically began feeling around for the familiar shape of a bottle or can before realising that another person was doing the same to the bin next to mine.

I stopped. She stopped. She blinked. I blinked. Our hands retracted from the bins cautiously and we stared at each other as the rest of the world woke up. She was dirty with bloodshot eyes that must have mirrored mine. In her hands a black bin bag trailed behind her as full of bottles as mine.

"Who are you?" we both asked at the same time.

Suddenly, I remembered what Grace had written for me.

*Sorry that I have now left you without a sister to lean on, but I hope the world is good to you and you make friends, friends that are like sisters to you, so you can have a better life than we have had together.*

#

*Let hope warm you again, Yas, let yourself find someone to lean on, and let them lean on you.*

#

*The world is cruel to us all, but I know you're not the only one carrying the burden of being alone.*

#

*Spread your wings Yas, fly high above the world, and find your world, your people, your home. Just make sure you don't fall.*

Grace, you don't need to worry anymore now that I have told you my one thousand words of life after your death. My one thousand words until I found someone good in my life.

These are my one thousand words just for you.