Welcome back to Stream Cast, Alice

Users online:

WesleyCycles67	**tokyo--drifter**
Online for:	Online for:
3 mins	4 hours

Users offline:

destroy_roy	**_1mp0ssibledream_**	**daddycool-007**
Last online:	Last online:	Last online:
14 hours	1 day	50 days

Connect to a channel to start watching.

Connecting to **WesleyCycles67** . . .

1

WesleyCycles67

And now I am strapped to the chest of a middle-aged man called Wesley as he straps his feet on to the pedals of his bike.

It's still dark, but I can just about see his hand as he sets his watch to zero and pushes off.

His little street with the Monopoly houses curves round to a main road and we don't have to stop and wait for the traffic today – we just cycle right into it and we're riding – faster and faster – as the street lamps putter out behind us and the world is swallowed by darkness. Flashlight cars overtake us, and I can see glimpses of scarecrows in the fields. Eyes peering from bushes.

He checks his watch and cycles faster. Today we could beat his commute record. This morning could go down in history.

The road dips and everything blurs, but still we keep pedalling. His legs are going so fast I'm not sure if he'll be able to keep up with them, but he does. And, when the road levels, we overtake the traffic-stuck cars that passed us before, and we glance through their windows to see the drivers' looks of surprise – a quick flash – before we're gone again.

The sun raises an eyebrow above the horizon and the lights from the cars stretch into neon lines, criss-crossing lanes like a stampede of metal, and we're in the thick of it, zigzagging between bumpers, beating amber traffic lights, mounting pavements and jumping down kerbs to avoid belly-lit bollards and parked cars.

And we can see the finish line now – the bell tower jutting into the clouds from the middle of the school Wesley works at. And we have sixty seconds and one set of traffic lights to go through. They're on red, but the way is clear so we don't slow down.

And then.

Very much from nowhere.

A car.

And we brake and we brake and we brake.

And I'm screaming, because we're going too fast and the car wasn't there a moment ago and now it is.

I listen as Wesley's heart leaps out of its cage as the rest of him

stops.

Carbon fibre fractures. The camera that he had strapped to his chest. Shatters.

WesleyCycles67 is no longer streaming.
Please choose another channel.

2

Alice

Two weeks ago, I died.

But I'm trying not to think about that, as today is a burst of brand new. The sun shining from under my closed curtains is turning Manta's fish tank into rainbows, and Mum is absent-mindedly singing one of her old show tunes downstairs while she dishes up my breakfast and sorts out my meds.

I smile at her as she comes into my room, and the singing stops. 'Oh, sorry, sweetheart, I hope I didn't wake you.'

'That's okay,' I say. 'You can keep singing.'

But she doesn't. She's all tiptoes and hushed tones now as she opens the curtains and sets the bed to snail speed. And the room's much too quiet for the angry buzzing of the bed motor slowly lifting me up, so I slide on my headphones and disappear into violins and flutes. I lie back and listen, trying to remember what it felt like to be cycling through fields with Wesley at weekends, chasing sheep while looking out at a sea of green cut against an almost perfect line of blue sky.

And then that car comes out of nowhere and everything stops again.

By the time I'm upright, I'm already out of breath.

Mum slides off my headphones. 'How many spoons are we starting with today?'

'Ten, I think,' I say, although I said that yesterday and I was spent by eight.

Sitting up in bed = 1 spoon

Spoons are units of energy. When you're trapped in bed by a chronic Illness, like I am, there are only so many units to go around. You might have an endless cutlery drawer full of spoons, but these days mine are all in a wobbly pot.

One unit of energy = 1 spoon

We started talking in spoons after we read a blog by Christine Miserandino, who used them as a metaphor for energy loss. Somehow, they've found their way into our everyday, now.

When you wake up with only ten spoons, you need to make every single one count.

Mum passes me my breakfast and I try to look happy about having smoked salmon again, for the fifth day in a row.

'I know.' She sighs at my strained smile. 'It's your dad's fault. They had an offer on it and he's packed the fridge full of the bloody stuff. We'll all be eating it for the next year.'

Dad sticks his head round the door. 'It was two-for-one, though. You never see that on salmon.'

Mum rolls her eyes and mutters, 'Thinks we have money to burn, that man.'

The salmon is nice. So are the eggs. But I can't shake the image of that car racing towards us and swallowing seems to take up more spoons than it should.

Eating breakfast = 2 spoons

Dad sneaks in as Mum disappears, and sits on the edge of my bed.

'How's tricks, kiddo?'

I smile, but keep my eyes on the skirting board. 'Oh, I'm fine.'

He's still looking at me and I can tell that smiles and pleasantries aren't going to cut it today. So I pull my eyes over to his and try to keep them steady. 'How was the funeral?'

'Oh, you know – typical funeral really. A barrel of laughs.'

I wouldn't know. I've never been to a funeral. But the dark circles under his eyes tell me that they might not be a laughing matter.

'I recorded it for you.'

He picks up my plate and starts eating my leftovers like it's nothing.

I swallow. 'Oh?'

'Yup. Took a camera in specially. Sat at the back – although you'd think I'd brought in a fricking clown from the dirty looks I was getting. You're welcome, by the way.'

I pick at my nails. 'That's okay. Thank you, but I don't need to watch it.'

Forgetting is a far more difficult task at a funeral.

He stops eating. 'Alice. This is Wesley we're talking about. I know you never met him in real life, but you were with the bloke every morning on that bike. You were with him when he died, for crying out –'

'Yes, okay!' I say, panic jumping up my throat.

Dad looks at me. Hard. I take a breath.

'Okay,' I say. 'I'll watch it. Thank you.'

Dad pats my hand. 'Let's get you ready, then, and we'll pop it on.'

Getting ready. Walking unsteadily to the en suite. Brushing my hair. Brushing my teeth. Having a wash. Staring at myself in the mirror for a good long time and wondering if I'd look less like my Black Moor goldfish if I bleached my hair blonde, or lost the fringe.

Getting ready = 5 spoons

I'm at eight spoons already and it isn't even ten o'clock, so Dad helps me back from the en suite and into the black dress I wore for my sixteenth birthday last month. I climb into bed, panting like I've been cycling up a hill.

The footage Dad took at the funeral is set up on the laptop, ready to go.

I want to complain. Make up an excuse. Tell him that I don't need to watch this after all, thank you. That I'm happy in my room, keeping my mind on meadows and music and goldfish.

But there aren't enough spoons left to protest.

Dad leans over and presses play.