

(AMBI SOUND: paddles clashing and cheers coming from the ping-pong hall, faintly echoing in the air)

CZ:

I stand at the entrance...and a familiar smell hits me... The rubber floor and fresh plastic balls.

I hold my racket and approach the table...ALL the memories are coming back. I try my best to recall my past skills, but quickly I realize I'm rusty. Each swing challenges my former self.

I forget almost everything...how to stand, how to move, and what to do with a forehand push or a backhand slap. My returns are sluggish and awkward...so much so they resemble a slow-motion dance.

My opponent's balls come in like a tidal wave and I am stuck in a cycle of picking up the ball again and again. With each miss, it is as if memories of the past are laughing at me.

[PAUSE]

CZ:

If I were to play never have I ever, I'd say, I have never thought I'd step foot on a table tennis court ever again. I quit almost a decade ago. I used to be a regular and played competitively for five years.

I moved to a house far away from the training court, and my mom wanted me to focus on academics. To be honest? I was relieved. Winning never really mattered to me... I enjoyed the sport., I never cared if I won the competition.

So after 10 years, I played again... This time, not sweating about the score...just playing for fun.

[PAUSE]

CZ:

The final ball bounces away. I stand there, a bit breathless and a lot overwhelmed. Two hours pass like two minutes... as though the last ten years have been squeezed into these two hours.

And the final score for this time? Me 3 - my opponent - 11.

[MUSIC]

Onomatopoeia - Sounds like New York - is a production of the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. This episode was written and produced by me, Charlotte Zhao. Joanne Faryon is our professor and executive producer. Music by blue dot sessions. Special thanks to Peter Leonard.