

Through Her Eyes

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Prologue

Although I know within myself that she is better now and healthier as a person, that doesn't change the fact that I miss her sometimes. The way the sun reflected against her golden hair, the way her cheeks sunk into dimples every time she smiled, and the way her green eyes shined with joy when we would meet up after school. Veronica was and always will be my best friend, and the person that understood me the most. Sometimes I sit alone and think of how different our lives would have been if she hadn't introduced me to her family. We helped each other through thick and thin, shared our deepest of secrets, and made sure to spend almost every free moment together. If that would have happened, Veronica may not have had her healthy life back. But it's just sad to know that for her to be happy, I have to leave. By now, she would be 32 years old, and hopefully leading a very happy and fruitful life. Before I tell you all about what led to today, allow me to introduce myself. My name is Omar. I am 14 years old. For you to understand my story, we need to go back to when Veronica and I met, back in Lebanon.

Chapter 1: A First Impression

The day Veronica and I met wasn't the best of days. I still remember that I was riding my bicycle down the street and noticed a yellow patch ruining perfectly cut green hedges. As I rode closer, it became clearer, and I noticed her looking into the distance through red eyes. Tears were still hanging from her eyelashes, while she was gripping the white metal bars of her backyard's fence. I really didn't have friends at the time, and in turn she seemed like she could really use someone to talk to since she was feeling profoundly down. I chained my bike to a nearby stop sign and walked towards her. Before I could say a word or even introduce myself, she looked at me and said "She really doesn't understand me sometimes. It seems as if she is not even trying to". It was as if she expected me to know exactly who and what she was talking about, as if she is talking to a friend that has known her for years now and knows everything about her. I quickly said "Do you want to talk about it? I'm a good listener and have nowhere else to be, so here I am". She let go of the fence and walked back to the gate to open it and let me into the backyard. The well-kept grass smelt freshly cut, casting a short yet sharp shadow across the basalt tiles that lead to the pool. After closing the gate behind me, she started wandering aimlessly around the area, allowing the grass to hug her dainty toes, until she rested against the steps of her treehouse. Her flowery sundress was fluttering along with her hair, while her sun-kissed cheeks shined pink. I found myself answering without thinking, as if I knew what she wanted to hear, and said "She is really trying, she always did; it's just the way you see things is different". She opened her mouth to take a breath and answer me, but before she could do that, the glass door leading to the big white house opened, and a kind-faced lady walked out, holding her hand high to save her eyes from the strong light of that fall day.

“Vee baby, did you put all your stuff on my bed for me to pack?” At this point, my new friend raised her head and screamed “I did, but I’m still mad at you”. The woman near the glass door smiled and said, “Okay angel, we will talk about this at the dinner table, I promise”, and walked back inside. “Vee, that’s a nice name” I said, only for her to say “Oh no, Vee is what my parents and close family friends call me; my real name is Veronica. What’s yours?” I found myself smiling without intending to and replied “I’m Omar. It’s a pleasure to meet you Veronica”.

That was how a beautiful, yet complicated relationship began.

Chapter2: An Unlikely Friendship

I would be lying if I said that I didn’t enjoy her company. Something about her showed Purity and honesty, and I longed to have such a friend. After our first-time meeting, we started treating each other’s company like appointments. Every day for three days, after Veronica would finish her lunch, we would meet in her backyard to talk. She told me all about her hopes and dreams to become an astronaut someday in the future. She lay down on her back and placed her legs up against the sunbed, “This is captain Veronica, we are ready for takeoff. Five. Four. Three. Two. One. BLASTOFF!” Then she stood up and started running around the backyard making sounds that she thought a rocket would make while soaring through the sky, until she climbed to the top of the tree house, standing with her chest puffed out and holding her hand out as if she was holding a flag. “I will be one of the first girls to reach the ends of the universe” she yelled and giggled as she jumped back down to the soft grass. I spent hours lying on the blue wavy slide attached to her

tree-house, listening to her telling me about all the adventures that she had with her younger sister Zoey. They would have races to see who would reach the pool first, and spend their afternoons playing in the sun. “That woman you saw calling me from inside the other day is mommy. Her name is Tiffany and she is from Australia” she continued. I was surprised “Woah! Lebanon is a long way from her home. What’s she doing here?” She replied as if she was reciting a memorized lesson, “Daddy went to Australia to show people his new theory in math. While he was having dinner, he heard mommy on another table explaining to some people why planes are not built now in the best way. That’s when daddy got into the conversation and showed her how she is right using math. That is how Tammam and Tiffany started dating and later got married”. Suddenly her face dropped, and she stared off into the distance saying “I really don’t want to leave Lebanon. I never visited Australia before, and all the people I love are here; I really don’t want to leave tomorrow”. The first thing that came to my head after she mentioned people caring about her were school friends and peers, so I asked her about them. She took a long sigh and looked at me with the saddest eyes I have ever laid eyes on, saying “I really don’t have a lot of friends at school; they don’t like me here because they think that I am different. Even if they don’t like me, at least I know people here”, another thing that surprised me! “Different is what makes us special, and everything that your friends make fun of you for, is in fact all that you should embrace about yourself” I heard myself saying. Speaking about the other students at her school seemed to lower her energy and bother her in a way, so I asked her to tell me about her friends in grade six. “Now that we are on summer vacation, I get to have some time away from them. They really make sure that I feel like I don’t belong, just because only dad is Lebanese. Although my Arabic is very good, but I am always picked last in the sports teams, and no one wants to be my partner in projects. They call me names and always pick on me. The teacher doesn’t believe me when I tell her, because they

never do these things in front of her. I know that they don't know better, and maybe they don't even know how to treat their friends well, but it still hurts me" she explained as a tear ran down her cheek reflecting the setting sun. It was at that moment when I knew that I have found a friend whom I will never be able to let go of. I just couldn't let our friendship end all because she is leaving the country! I stood up and looked her straight in the eye with a smile on my face and said, "I really can't convince your parents to keep you here; and it would be even harder to stop that plane from leaving the airport in Beirut, but I can help you in the only way I could. You will not be alone in Australia because I will be there to keep you company". Her eyes lit up and she started jumping and screaming "Really? Really? Really?". I just smiled.

It was at that moment that our true journey began.

Chapter 3: New Beginnings

It was natural for me to assume that Australia was going to be very different from Lebanon, but I was not as ready to face that difference as I had thought. The way people spoke there sounded funny, and the atmosphere there was so much nicer than the one in Lebanon. But regardless of the differences, I was going to make sure that Vee and I make the best out of the time we had in that country. After she found out that her family will be living in a compound, the first thing on her to-do list was to explore the playground near the house that she was living in in the new country. Knowing that, I rushed to the playground in order to meet her, thinking about the endless possibilities in this country. I sat down on a swing and waited for her. I cannot help

but notice the soft smell of rust as the other kids laughed in joy while going down the slide. The playground seemed like a nice place to spend time, with two slides, three sets of swings, a jungle-gym, and small tricycles parked on the sides waiting for children to enjoy them. Every structure was colored brightly, filling the place with somewhat a joyful atmosphere. To pass time, I tried knocking my legs back and forth while gripping the chains of the swing, but it refused to move no matter how hard I tried. "Must be too old to use" I thought to myself. It was at that moment that I lifted my head up and saw her. She was running towards me in the distance, her blond hair stuck to her forehead, her arms swinging from side to side, as the road moved fast beneath her feet. She sat on the swing right next to mine, and in a panting breath said, "You made it, I'm so happy that you did". That's when I smiled and told her "I wouldn't have missed it for the world, I know a lot is going to change for you now, but I will be by your side through it all". She smiled and said "Pinky?" She could tell by my facial expression that I was confused by her one-worded question. She laughed and said "Do you pinky promise that you will be with me through it all?" "Pinky" I replied. As the sand of the playground continued to go back and forth dancing in the wind, and occasionally deciding to use the orange slide to go back down, we sat for hours talking about all the things that we could do here, and what might school be like. When the wind grew stronger and started hurting our eyes, I told her that she should go home, and we will continue talking tomorrow. She lowered her head in disappointment and seemed somewhat anxious, "I lied to daddy today. The truth is I really am scared about next week; being in a new class with new people and having to survive year seven with only you as my friend. This will be a little bit hard" she said nervously. I replied while still thinking about her words "We will find a way to make it through this, but for now don't worry; it is not yet the time to worry about this already". Time seemed to pass by so fast back then. It was as hours were spent in seconds in our

heads. One Sunday evening, she looked at me with eyes lost between excitement and fear, and said “Tomorrow is already making me nervous, I don’t know if the other students will like me, especially that they probably will know that I am not from here because of the way they talk”. This is when I got on my knees and make sure that she was looking into my eyes when I said, “I will go with you, and whenever you feel like you want me there, just look outside the window and I promise you that you will find me looking back at you!”

Her first day of school in a different country was not as bad as she thought it would be. She was able to make two new friends, and her teachers were asking her so much about Lebanon. She presented twice in two classes about the Lebanese part of her heritage, the customs and culture of the Lebanese people, and she was also asked to speak Arabic in front of her whole class! Every time she felt her heart race, or the blood came rushing up to her cheeks from nervousness, she looked outside to see me smiling and regained her confidence. She was ready to embrace what makes her different from the rest, especially that her teachers were actively showing her that it was a strength and not a weakness. Vee was ready to face the world. During their break time, while she and I were sitting down talking about her classes, a girl approached her and asked her if she wanted to join the rest of her class for lunch. I knew that she wouldn’t say no to having friends, so before she could even answer, I walked away. On her way back home, she sat next to me on the bus, and we spent the whole ride talking about how we are going to make the best out of the time spent here, until one girl turned around and in the meanest way retorted at Vee, “You’re weird”. I was clearly able to see that this made her slide down in her seat, and look down in shame, as if reminding herself of the people who used to make fun of her

back in Lebanon. Before I could stand up for her, the girl sat back down as if she didn't notice my anger and laughed with the two girls sitting by her.

Vee was not to be put in a situation similar to the one in Lebanon.

Chapter 4: Shifting Tides

As the following year passed by, it seemed as if more and more of her peers were starting to view her in a negative way. Less students were finding her interesting, and she was receiving the same mean comments as she were in school back in Lebanon. It truly broke my heart to see her leave her classroom and come straight to the sand area of her school's playground just so she could cry while talking to me about her classmates kept making fun of her for being strange and weird. As part of being a good friend, I was there by her side trying to help her get back on her feet telling her that everything will be better if she only believed in herself. One day, while we were talking about how different the school books are, the same girl that was in her bus approached her and laughed after looking at her. "Come on Vee, you can do this. Even if they are mean, you should tell her to stop bullying you. Show her the daring astronaut in you. You know you can face her, I'm right here by your side as always". That's when she took a deep breath in and whispered to herself "I can do this. I can do this. I can". She stood up, walked towards the girl and said "You are really mean. What's your problem? Look, the girls that stay around you are not really your friends; they are only scared of you. Try to be kinder and nicer, maybe more people will like you". The girl frowned and said, "Go back to your bench weirdo. If

you want me to be nice let me give you some advice, find some friends instead of doing whatever it is you're doing". Vee was shocked at the girl, she turned around and walked slowly towards me with eyes full of tears. Later that day, things changed drastically. I saw one of her supervisors call her out of class through the window I was looking through. She left the classroom and started walking with him down a long corridor, but I wasn't able to step inside the office that they entered. The door was made out of dark wood and had a placard on the side reading "Counselor Taft" engraved in bold letters into the bronze colored block. During the bus ride back home, Vee didn't seem as talkative as she usually would be after a school day, but she did tell me that something important was going to happen that day. When we reached her home, which usually is when I leave, she stopped me saying "No. Please stay near the house, I want to show you something", and walked in through the front door. After the longest 20 minutes of my life, Vee stepped back out and called me inside her house. The white marble floors were so clean that they were reflecting the bronze-colored chandelier hanging from the ceiling. The dark wooden doors of the living room were wide open, showing a set of brown leather sofas, with bronze-colored cushions keeping them company. A large white wooden dresser was showcasing beautiful sets of glasses and plates, while the family was sitting watching a movie from the TV hanging on the wall. I didn't understand why she let me into her house for the first time. Now that I think of it, I didn't even ask for a reason back then. Before that, Vee never introduced me to her parents or her sister Zoey. Her father Tammam looked really scary. He had a beard reaching the lower part of his chest, with both arms tattooed like pieces of art. He wore a leather vest, along with black jeans, but something about him showed care and kindness. It was obvious that he has lived a harsh life, but this did not get in the way of being a caring man. Vee politely asked her dad to turn off the TV since she wanted to tell them something. At that moment, while

she was trying to say something that really didn't make much sense to me, it felt as if my stomach was turning inside of me, as if the world that I knew and was happy being a part of was going to face a huge change. "...Mrs. Taft told me that before I continue talking to her, I have to introduce you to him", she said to the seemingly anxious audience. "Anything wrong sweetie? Did anything happen at school that you want us to know about?" her dad said, while standing up ready to help his girl with anything she could possibly need. Vee had a wide smile on her face when she pointed at me and said, "I want to introduce you to my best friend, Omar". Zoey burst into laughter, her dad's face was showing nothing but confusion, and her mom grew pale.

That moment changed my life as I know it.

Chapter 5: Doctor Rose

It showed clearly on her dad's face that he was trying so hard to find the words to say next, but he couldn't find the right ones. Her sister just walked up to her room still laughing while her mom looked straight through me. Her mom asked, "Vee baby, when and where did you meet Omar?" Vee started to narrate the story of how we met back in Lebanon, and how she really doesn't know how I followed her here, but I still go with her to school every day. Her mom said "Is this where you've been going every day after lunch? Is he outside baby?" Before Vee could answer, her father turned around and sharply said "Tiffany, she is introducing us to him. He isn't outside. Vee, we are happy to meet your friend, but now that we met your friend can you meet ours?" She smiled and said "Of course! I have been having trouble making friends here especially that everyone in school thinks that I am strange, so I would love to daddy!" She

walked me back outside, and I still could not get rid of the queasy feeling that was deep in my guts. After we reached the front door, I looked at her and said, “It seems like your parents aren’t fond of us being such close friends, Vee”, she replied saying “Oh no, daddy just seems scary, but deep down he is a really good person, they love you already”. I turned around because I didn’t know what to say after that meeting and started walking away from the house, thinking about what could possibly happen next to our relationship. The next three days passed as normal, we would meet during her lunch break, and take the bus back home together. On Saturday, I went to the playground to wait for her like I always do, but this time she came holding her father’s hand. He stood towering over her, looking around for anything that may put Vee in danger. After she reached the swing that I always sit on, she said “I am going with daddy to see his friend. Her name is doctor Rose. Can you please come with me?” I told her I would love to, if her dad agrees. She looked up at him and repeated my reply, only for him to say, “that would be even better. He will be there to support you”.

Dr. Rose greeted us into her office with a wide smile on her face. She was a woman that seemed to be in her late 40’s, with short red-colored hair that just grazed her shoulders. Her jawline was sharp and fell under her eyes with the brightest shade of green that I had ever seen. Vee’s dad waited outside after she asked the kind doctor if she can bring another chair for me to sit on. She smiled and gladly accepted, and then shut the door behind us. When we sat down, she started asking Vee about me and asked me about Vee. But every time I would talk, Vee would recite my answer to her because she couldn’t hear me. Maybe she needed a doctor too to hear me. Her office was filled with books and cream-colored files with labels on them. When Vee would talk, she would look at her with a smile while writing something down on a notepad that

she kept in her lap. Pictures hung on the wall of the doctor next to a lot of children; one of them was holding his arm up as if showing his muscles. After forty-five minutes spent in her office, she looked at Vee and asked, “Did you enjoy this talk?” Vee looked at her with wide eyes saying, “I really did, I know have another friend whom I can also talk to and share my days with”. As we were walking out, a boy was sitting next to Vee’s dad. It was the boy from the picture!

During our ride back home, Tammam asked Vee about her session and if she liked the doctor, to which she replied, “She seems really nice daddy, even Omar felt comfortable in her office”. He smiled and nodded in agreement saying, “Would you like to see her every Saturday?” Her smile grew even bigger, and she nodded intensely. “That’s my girl” he said, “She is a really good friend of mine so play nice, she already loves you and how smart you are my angel”. After five Saturdays of seeing Dr. Rose, we continued seeing the boy from the picture walking into the office right after we leave. He would always be waiting outside until our time with her was over. On the fifth time, the doctor seemed a little different. I felt as if something was going to change very quickly. As we sat down, the kind doctor asked Vee if her moods were changing fast, if she was waking up in the middle of the night, and if she liked everything being perfectly neat and in place. Vee said yes to all, but neither she nor I understood why the nice doctor would ask such things after five times of only talking about me and her school performance and friends. Then the smile left the doctor’s face as she asked if I had ever hit her, and Vee told her that I would never. She opened a drawer and put a small white bottle on the smooth wood. “Vee, you are showing signs of a disorder that is not really common for a beautiful girl your age” Dr. Rose said, “It is called Prodromal Schizophrenia. It means that sometimes our head wants to help us in what we

go through, so we start seeing things that are not really there. We will continue to see each other every weekend because you are such a nice friend, but you have to start taking one of these pills every day. They will help you to see what is really there and not what your smart head wants you to see”. The bottle looked like the scariest thing I have ever seen. I knew that the doctor was not being nice because she really was. She was being nice because she wanted to get rid of me!

It was at that point that I knew things will never be the same.

Chapter 6: Pinky

While leaving the office, I was very angry. I knew that meeting the people around her was a bad idea. It was clear that neither of her parents liked me nor understood the friendship between her and me. As we were walking out of the office, the boy stood up from the chair ready to walk into the office as I stood in Vee’s path. “Can we please talk downstairs before we go home?” I asked impatiently. She looked at her dad for a second and repeated the question to him. He smiled and nodded saying, “I will be in the car angel, but stay somewhere I can see you”. To which she said “Always daddy”. When we got down, she sat on the bench and watched me pace back and forth. “You do realize that they are trying to get rid of me, right?” I screamed angrily. She looked at me with sad eyes and said, “But this is daddy’s friend, come on Omar, if she was not trustworthy then daddy would not like her that much. He is very good with choosing who to be nice to”. My voice went even louder when I said, “But they don’t know us, they don’t know how close we are or how we met. We have been friends for so long now Vee, so long. They can’t just take that away from us”. She looked at me angrily and said, “Are you saying that my daddy

doesn't know what's best for me? He loves me very much, and he will never do anything that would hurt me. He likes and trusts you too. If he didn't then he wouldn't let me sit alone with you while he is waiting in the car for us to finish, right Omar?", so I said, "I know he wouldn't hurt you, but those pills are evil, they will keep us apart". At this point Vee stood up and looked me firmly in the eyes, "you taught me to be strong and stand up for what is right. You helped me fight for myself if someone treats me unfairly. Omar, I love our friendship. I love everything that we are, but we must trust daddy. If he thinks that I will be better if I take the evil pills, then I will". I took a step back, not believing what I was hearing her say. Her fingernails sunk into the purple painted bench right before she said, "I guess this is our first fight then". I fought back the feeling of my stomach sinking and replied, "I guess so, my pinky promise did not prepare me for this". Just as we were falling deeper into silence, a voice came from behind her saying "Do you mind if I sit here?" Vee turned around, changing the direction of the tear that was sliding down her cheek with her movement, and nodded sadly. "I'm Ahmad, Dr. Rose told me that I should start trying to talk to those around me and get over my fear". Vee said "I'm sorry, I'm not usually crying like this. It's just that Dr. Rose is telling me to do something just as big. We are having a fight now". "I had to take those pills too you know" he said, "I know it's hard at first, but it really gets better as you go. I promise you, things will get better with time". Vee looked down and stared at a crack in the gray pavement that her feet rested on. "I really don't want to be lonely again", she said in hesitation. Ahmad looked at her and smiled saying, "You won't be". Vee looked at him and said "pinky?" He smiled and put out his hand with his short pinky finger raised to the sky and replied, "Pinky promise".

Life was different from that point on.

Epilogue

For the next few months, I saw Vee sporadically. Those evil pills succeeded to keep us apart. We would exchange smiles, or just pass by each other, but we didn't talk after that day years ago. The evil pills started making our meetings harder to do, but I know that it was hard on her just as it was hard on me. I saw her looking outside of her classroom window when she would get nervous and look directly at where we used to sit when she would leave her classroom for her lunch break. Today would be Vee's 32nd birthday, and I really do hope that she is as happy as she deserves to be. She probably has a family and a little Veronica of her own. No matter where she is, I will always wish her the best that could ever be wished for. She was really my best friend, she always will be. But being a best friend means that we care about them and want what is best for them. Living a normal friend-filled life is the least I could help her get. Yet, I can't help but wonder, if she does have a little Vee of her own, would she too see the world through similar eyes?