

You and Vi

A Short Story
by Kiara Falcasantos

In Which You Discover You Are Not Alone

“Haven’t you heard about Vi? They must be the most beautiful person on this campus.”

“Really? What do they look like?”

“You know, I’m not actually sure. They’re not online. You’d think someone would’ve found their accounts by now if they existed.”

“So no chance you could introduce me then.”

“Sorry. Can’t be helped though. Maybe you’ll run into them sometime. They shows up everywhere apparently. It’s like they exist across the whole plane of our campus or something.”

“Yeah, sure. And yet you still don’t know what they look like. If I didn’t know any better, I’d think you were making this up.”

“Na, you know me. I don’t have a big enough imagination to do that.”

“So true.”

You pull yourself away from the conversation being held at the next table over, audible now that enough students have left for early morning classes. The space in the dining hall is not designed to keep private conversations, allowing your attention to slip in and out. You hear the sounds of chairs scuffing across the floor, being pushed in as their occupiers finish their meal. You won’t get to hear any more about this mysterious person you realize.

With nothing left to overhear, your focus turns back to your friends’ conversation. It’s the same as ever. What classes everyone has today, the best professors to take classes with next semester, trying to organize time to hang out that fits with everyone’s schedules.

No one can tell that you haven’t quite been paying attention. This becomes apparent when they react blankly to your next question.

“Have any of you heard about Vi?” you ask.

Everyone shakes their heads. The second person may have had a point, you realize. If Vi was truly well known, at least one person would have heard of them. Yet, it may be worth it to ask around more. Your friends aren’t exactly known for being in touch with the campus gossip. They turn back to their previous conversation, and the topic of Vi becomes forgotten.

You go about your classes as normal, and over the weeks, you begin to hear more and more about this person known as Vi. Yet, as always, whenever you ask anyone about them, no one seems to know anything. Even the people who had been discussing them. When you run into them and ask, they don't recall that they had been talking about Vi in the first place.

b

And yet we can never meet

By chance you find yourself at a fireside, roasting marshmallows on short chopsticks. The cold air cannot compete with the heat of the fire, and you worry that the stick will burn up with the marshmallow. Your friend sits back to back with you, fighting with his marshmallow, which insists on catching fire. No one else here is familiar, as the two of you slipped into the aftermath of a meeting for a club that you do not belong to.

Once your marshmallow is safely secured in its chocolatey bed, you can turn your attention to the other people sitting on the rocks and benches beyond. No one seems to notice you except for one person. They stand near the back of the circle of students, their eyes locked with yours. You stare, transfixed, noticing the faint flickering lights in their eyes.

This must be Vi.

C

Uniqueness

You cannot explain how you know this. It just fits into place like the last piece of a well cut puzzle, crisply and cleanly. But there can be no alternative. Vi is unique, you realize. They may change from day to day, slipping in and out of people's memories, but even this change is constant.

Your friend nudges you, trying to ask you a question. You look away from Vi briefly. When you can turn your attention back to them, Vi is gone. Inside your head, you kick yourself. Perhaps you could have talked to them had you taken the opportunity sooner.

D

The place in which you are defined

As it turns out, you find a way to talk to Vi despite losing sight of them. The next morning, as you walk out of your room to breakfast, your foot slips on a sheet of paper left in the hall. You catch yourself easily, for the floor is covered in carpet. Had it not, the paper would have been recycled out of annoyance and this may have become a rather different story.

On the back of the paper, you find a short letter:

Dear You,

I did not believe in love at first sight until I laid eyes on you last night. I could not come meet you despite my wish to do so. Leave a letter to me in a classroom and tell me when I might next see you.

~V

Quite an odd letter. Curious as you are, you return to your room and write out your response. Breakfast comes every day, after all. It can wait a little longer for you. You read over the letter before departing and find yourself satisfied with your reply.

Dear V,

I was rather surprised to receive your letter. I almost slipped on it and fell. Yet I am glad to hear you felt the same. I now feel as though a hole in my heart has been removed. Now I know that I will always be able to find you.

I could barely take my eyes off you last night. If you could meet me in the basement of this building, we can meet again tonight.

~Yours Truly

You leave this letter in your math classroom, addressing it "To the one at the fireside". When you walk back past the door, through the window you see a shadow dart from sight. You peek in, but there is no one in the room. How strange, you think. There were no other doors.

e

Sign and Co.'s Creation

As you promised, you made your way to the basement that night. You head down the stairs and pause before the door, realizing that something isn't quite right. There is no light coming through the door window. Nervously, you open the door, and step into the darkness.

Your eyes gradually got used to the small amount of light coming from the stairwell at the other end of the hall. Yet the space was still eerie, as a red light shone down from the ceiling onto you. With the green light of the flickering exit sign, it was as if the hallway had decorated for the winter holidays. Only the first letter remained the same as the flicker derived new spellings. You can just barely make out the writing on the bottom that says Sign and Co. What a generic sounding company.

Moving your hand slowly around the wall, you eventually find the light switch. Yet only the few lights near the black board light up. On the board, done in the same neat handwriting as the letter in your pocket, were the words

...We Meet At Last...

f

Connection and the World Around You

"It's nice to finally meet you," they say from behind you. You turn around and see Vi leaning against the wall.

"Hi," you say, cursing yourself at your awkwardness even as you say it.

"Hi," they say back, a slight smile forming on their lips.

The two of you talk, down in the classroom of that dark basement for what feels like hours. Vi lays down on the floor, and though you question their decision, they don't seem to care about the dust bunnies and chalk dust. You sit next to them, chatting off and on. Eventually, the light flips off, plunging the two of you into darkness once more, though a softer one, now that the hallway light is on. Neither of you are willing to get up to activate the motion sensor once more.

Eventually you do need to get up. As you pull on your jacket, Vi leans over to you and lightly presses their lips to your cheek. It's so soft a touch you almost think you

imagined it happening. You blush and look away, trying to hide your face. There's no need with the lights still off, but it still feels necessary for some reason.

"Would you like to meet my friends sometime?" you ask without thinking.

"I don't think that will be possible."

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Reimagining the world

"...and then I went back to my dorm." You finish telling your close friend about meeting Vi. The whole time, she had burst in with gasps of "No way!" and "OMG". But now she falls silent.

"Why wouldn't they be able to meet your friends? I was really looking forward to meeting your partner when you found one," she said, disappointed.

"It's weird, isn't it? No one knows about them, they don't want to be seen, and they've been disappearing on me all week."

"Not to be this way, but like actually to be this way ... they do exist, right? You're not making this up?"

"Huh? Why would I do that?"

"I don't know, it just seems a little odd, doesn't it?"

h

Once more

You cross paths with Vi again in the dining hall that night, and the two of you find a table and sit together. You chat about your week, and at one point, Vi leaves to go get desert for the two of you. While they're gone, you see your friend come up the stairs with her food. You wave to her, and she smiles back, happy to see you even though she saw you only hours earlier. She gestures to say she's going to sit with your other friends, and you nod your head in agreement.

Vi comes back shortly, and the two of you chat until they need to leave. You would normally walk out with them, but then you would feel obligated to work on your complex analysis homework. So you go over to the friend who you waved at.

"Sorry I couldn't have joined you," you say as you slip into the seat across from her. "I ran into Vi and we decided to have dinner."

"Wait. But you've been sitting by yourself this whole time."

i

That which is imaginary

The semester ends slowly, with projects and exams piling up like powdery snowbanks. Every so often you hear from Vi, in a letter or words left on chalkboards. Sometimes you would write back to them, but it is always with a heavy heart. After that day, when you realized that Vi was indeed imaginary, the hole that had been removed once again appeared within your heart. You know the two of you will always be connected, each other's perfect conjugates, but you will never meet again.

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and that which must end