

### **“A Girl in Class” by Vanessa Tasé Sueiro**

There is a girl in class who speaks worse than you, dresses weirder, thinks differently, and you are, unavoidably, glad she does. She is on the outside of the circle. Heck, she’s in a whole new one. People throw looks at her that were once your own to cry about, and you suddenly become just another kid in school. Your limited English still poses limitations, but now you have jokes with Emily Davis and Katherine Peters. The new you, Sule, has jokes with her old friends in Turkey, most of whom she still messages on Facebook, and you wonder: what teenager in America has Facebook?

Sule has a Hello Kitty, bright, pink backpack that draws the attention of all the middle school bullies. Worst of all: you’re in on it. You try to divert the attention from yourself by making fun of her: her too-highly-pitched voice; the overpriced perfume she bought because you did; her car, the one so similar to yours; the cell phone that she has, that you don’t have.

Sule looks like you, but sadder. She smells like all the realities you try so hard to avoid, the ones you pinch your nose at. The stench of new, the foreigner’s alien scent, never to be called your own. So, Sule becomes the enemy, and you, the villain of her story.

The villain should have been the bear, the Emily’s and Katherine’s of the world. The monstrous forces forcing you off the cliff. But hey, you don’t have to run faster than the bear, just run faster than the other guy. Run faster than Sule; let her be mauled by the big brown bear, teeth in leather skin that, despite its strength, will break, let her be forced off the cliff. And you do. She jumps.

Years later, you frantically search the internet for the Turkish girl who made your middle school experience better, on the backs of her own special, American moments. Her iconic Facebook account with the silly, toothy, twelve-year old smile for a profile picture is gone, like the girl, like the dream, like the nightmare. She haunts you in your sleep. The words you said to her. She is nowhere to be found. Your apology too is lost in your far too heavy heart.

Years later—at the verge of being Emily and Katherine, at the verge of being a monster—you open your eyes. You realize the beauty of the girl you used to be, and you want more from her. You need her to talk to mom and dad. You need her accent, her spice, her café con leche undertone, her pink-from-head-to-toe innocence. You need her bravery to be unapologetically you.

Years later, you find new friends, real friends. They encourage you to dance salsa and reggaetón like you’re twenty-one and there’s no tomorrow. They laugh a warm smile when you mis-pronounce simple words, as they do too. You build your own circle, and now you welcome all the Sule’s of the world. In becoming a global citizen, you earn the visa to every corner of the Earth, the translation to every story written, spoken, the power to know all the people of the world, the courage to understand them.

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