

FILL IN THE BLANK

Written by

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INT. HALLWAY - MORNING

Your typical suburban family hallway. Pictures of the child of the house line the walls and age as we move further down. There's toddler VALERIE with a Fisher Price camera, Valerie age 7 getting her very first camera for Christmas, Valerie age 11 taking a photo of the photographer, Valerie graduating from high school, etc. She has an infectious, genuine grin.

There are also several professional-looking fine art shots of Oakland Cemetery coming in around Valerie's high school years and carrying on into college. They show a great deal of skill and a passion for the subject.

We've now reached:

INT. KITCHEN - MORNING

Valerie herself sits at the kitchen table staring off into space, wrapped in a ratty bathrobe with a steaming mug of something caffeinated forgotten in front of her. She looks neither happy nor sad, just blank.

Her extremely capable, can-handle-anything MOTHER bustles around the kitchen putting the finishing touches on her morning routine - packing her lunch, pouring coffee into her travel mug, etc.

Mother sneaks a glance at Valerie, then proceeds to hide the sharp kitchen knives in her briefcase. She carries on with her routine as if that were an everyday occurrence.

MOTHER

Good morning, sweetheart! You're up early today. Feeling better?

Silence. No reaction from Valerie.

Mother decides to try a different conversational tactic.

MOTHER (CONT'D)

What are you planning to do today, sweetie?

VALERIE

Nothing.

MOTHER

Same as yesterday, huh?

Valerie looks up at her. Tries a small smile. Fails.

Her mother comes over and puts an arm on her shoulders.

MOTHER (CONT'D)
Take your pill yet?

VALERIE
Yeah.

MOTHER
And?

VALERIE
Nothing.

Her mother gently squeezes her shoulders and gives her a kiss on the top of her head before departing.

INT. VALERIE'S ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Valerie attempts to read a large photography book on Oakland Cemetery. It takes all of her concentration to focus on it, but her furrowed brow doesn't seem to be doing any good.

She sighs, shuts the book, and tosses it away from her.

FATHER (V.O.)
Well, the doctor said it would take
a few weeks to work, right?

INT. VALERIE'S ROOM - MID-MORNING

Valerie is on the phone with her FATHER, a caring man who does his best despite the distance.

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Give it time.

VALERIE
I'm giving it time. I'm just-- I'm
tired of feeling like this.

Valerie sighs. The burden is exhausting her.

VALERIE (CONT'D)
I thought that once we gave it a
name, once it was officially
depression, it'd be easier to
fight.
(beat)
I just want it to end.

FATHER (V.O.)
Valerie. You're strong. You can do
this.

(MORE)

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
And I love you and your mother
loves and your friends love you and
your kitty loves you.

Max, Valerie's friendly furball of a cat, jumps in her lap.

FATHER (V.O.) (CONT'D)
Don't give up, ok? For us.

Valerie scratches Max between his ears. He purrs.

INT. VALERIE'S ROOM - A LITTLE LATER

Valerie sits in front of her computer at a cluttered desk. She's chatting with a friend, John, online.

The screen pings. The words pop up: "How are you doing?"

Valerie types rapidly: "I feel like I'm trapped in a cell and there's no way out and suddenly I see a door and I open it but it just leads back to the same cell. And it never ends."

She then furiously deletes all that and replies, "OK."

INT. LIVING ROOM - AFTERNOON

Valerie has a delicious-looking lunch arrayed on the coffee table in front of her on a tray.

She hasn't taken one bite.

She idly channel surfs, slowly at first and then with increasing speed. Nothing is worth lingering on.

In a moment of frustration Valerie throws the remote across the room. She then pulls her knees up to her chest to sit in a little ball and slowly slides sideways onto the couch.

INT. LIVING ROOM - LATE AFTERNOON

The sun has sunk low in the sky. Valerie hasn't moved. Dried tear tracks cover her face, and fresh tears are flowing. She's not even aware that she's crying.

INT. VALERIE'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Valerie lies asleep in bed. She doesn't seem to have had a restful night - the covers are tangled at the foot of the bed, and she's curled up in the fetal position.

Max jumps up on the bed and begins bothering her. She pets him, half-awake, then tries to go back to sleep.

Max is having none of that. He gets in her face until she gives up the battle with a deep sigh.

Valerie sits up. Rubs her eyes. Looks around her room.

Wonders what the hell she's going to do with another day.

INT. KITCHEN - A LITTLE LATER

Valerie shuffles tiredly over to her spot at the kitchen table, a steaming mug of tea in hand. She looks down to see a small pile of papers on her placemat.

It's a printed-from-the-internet ticket for a photography tour of Oakland Cemetery with a sticky note on top of it that reads: "Thought you might enjoy this. At least give it a try. Love you! Mom"

EXT. OAKLAND CEMETERY - GATE - AFTERNOON

Valerie pauses in front of the massive brick entrance portal. She takes a deep breath and walks in.

EXT. OAKLAND CEMETERY - BELL TOWER

The group is gathering for the photography tour in front of the bell tower. It's not an especially large group, maybe 10 to 15 shutterbugs, but it's more people than Valerie has been around in a long time.

She can't do this.

She turns on her heel to leave but stops after a few paces. Balls up her fists.

VALERIE
(fiercely, to herself)
No.

Valerie turns around, marches up to the TOUR LEADER, and thrusts out her ticket. The tour leader accepts it.

TOUR LEADER
Alright, folks, I'm just going to run these tickets inside, and then we can start the tour!

The tour leader disappears into the bell tower building. The group chatters amongst itself excitedly.

Valerie tries to make herself as small and unnoticeable as possible.

The tour leader reappears from the building.

TOUR LEADER (CONT'D)
Ok, everyone. Let's go!

EXT. OAKLAND CEMETERY - MONTAGE

-The group is paused in front of the Thomas Neal family monument, a poignant Victorian statue of two seated women. The tour leader talks, the shutterbugs ooh and aah and snap away. Valerie makes a halfhearted attempt to join in.

-Everyone walks while the tour leader gestures. Shutterbugs snap wherever he points. Valerie trails by a few paces and doesn't lift her camera.

-The group completely encircles the Lion of Atlanta. The tour leader stands to one side while everyone gets their shot. Valerie sits listlessly on a nearby bench.

-In the background the shutterbugs crane their necks and cameras upward trying to get the perfect shot of a statue on top of a tall column. In the foreground Valerie walks away from the melee.

END OF MONTAGE

EXT. OAKLAND CEMETERY - LATER

Valerie is wandering - no real goal, no real plan. She glances idly at the headstones as she passes.

She passes by one perfectly ordinary looking one with writing on the back. Gives it a glance - and pauses. Moves closer to read the verse: "FEW HEARTS LIKE HERS, WITH VIRTUE WARM'D,/ FEW HEADS WITH KNOWLEDGE SO INFORMED./IF THERE'S ANOTHER WORLD, SHE LIVES IN BLISS:/IF THERE IS NONE, SHE MADE THE BEST OF THIS."

Valerie takes a moment, lost in thought.

VALERIE
(to herself)
"She made the best of this."

She then raises her camera and deliberately takes a picture.

MONTAGE

-Valerie lines up a macro close up shot of flowers in bloom.

-She circles a statue trying to determine the best angle.

-She frames a view of the Atlanta city skyline interspersed amongst the tombstones.

-She gets down on her knees on the ground to get a dramatic, low-angle shot of a statue.

-Valerie strides out of the front gate, head held high.

END OF MONTAGE

INT. KITCHEN - EARLY EVENING

Valerie's mother sits at the kitchen table relaxing and reading the paper. She puts it down when Valerie comes in.

MOTHER

Did you have a nice day, sweetie?

Valerie thinks about it and is surprised by the answer.

VALERIE

Yeah, I did.

Her mother smiles. Some of the tension leaves her face.

VALERIE (CONT'D)

Do you want to see my pictures?

MOTHER

I'd love to.

Valerie pulls up a chair next to her mother's. Both of them bend their heads over the display screen on Valerie's camera.

Both sound and picture fade out as Valerie has her first real conversation with her mother in weeks.

INT. VALERIE'S ROOM - THE NEXT MORNING

Valerie seems to have passed a peaceful night. She's curled up all cozy under the covers, and her face is smooth and devoid of tension.

Her feline alarm clock, Max, begins nudging her. Valerie sits up with a yawn and begins petting him.

VALERIE

Good morning, beautiful boy.

Max purrs at the attention but being a cat doesn't tolerate it for long. He hops down from the bed.

Valerie stretches, yawns, looks around her room. Sunlight pours in through the blinds. It looks like it's shaping up to be a gorgeous day.

Valerie smiles a small smile. It's a shadow of her former grin, but it's a start.