

THE GIRL WITH THE GLASS EYE

As we sat next to each other on the side of the bed, our shoulders touching, the sides of our thighs pressed together, I was practically overcome with joy. I just couldn't believe that a girl this beautiful was sitting right here. With me! She was bouncing her knee softly – the one that wasn't touching mine. Was she nervous? Maybe a bit. Or was she feeling what I was feeling? Exhilaration. I think it was that. I think that's what she was feeling too.

I loved her. She was so beautiful. So beautiful and so... strong. She had been through so much and yet she never lost that glow. That charming glow of innocence, of knowing that each day was a treasure trove of new delights and surprises. I loved her so much.

Of course, I sure wasn't going to tell her this. Not now. Not with her sitting on the side of my bed for the first time. Not now, after our first date (a delicious dinner at Aaron's that was Mom's favorite place to grab a blackened chicken). No, revealing my love for her – while being honest, and oh how I wanted to always be honest with her, to never hold back my thoughts and to always be there to listen to hers – would come across as just too weird. No, in this shallow society in which we live, we're just not supposed to express our grand feelings for someone we've only briefly known. It's not how things should be, but I'm willing to play by these rules if it allows me the potential to spend my life with such a true soul. Yeah, I can do it.

I slowly tilted my neck and leaned in closer to her, gently pressing my cheek against hers. She lowered her eyelids and breathed out a short sigh. But not a bad sigh, mind you. It was a good sigh. An electric sigh that sent a ripple through my entire body. Oh, how I loved her.

She turned her face towards mine, her cheek rolling across my own. Until I felt the most magical feeling of my life – the touch of her lips on mine. They were so soft and warm. And they were opening. I could feel my lips doing the same.

And then we were kissing. Just like that. Just like all the magical moments that occur in life, it

happened so naturally. One day I'm thinking about how I'd love more than anything to feel the warmth of Angela's face on mine, and next thing I know, it's happening.

I needed to stop thinking about it and just enjoy it. Just live for the moment. The rest would come as naturally as the kiss did. For now, I needed to let things happen as they would, and not think so much.

It's what I did, and it was the most amazing kiss of my life. It's so different kissing someone that you love, isn't it?

After a few minutes, she put her hand on my face and gently pulled back. She was smiling. I could see the glisten of my saliva upon her lips. She was staring deeply into my eyes, and I stared into her eyes.

Well... her eye.

She only had one.

One bright and beaming beautiful blue eye. Her right eye. The left one was glass. But it was a fantastic replica of what must have once been a perfect left eye. It was a prop. A place-holder. A plug for that hole in her head. That empty black hole that was once filled with a gorgeous eyeball. A beautiful eyeball taken from a beautiful young child so many years ago.

A dog, in a pointless moment of primitive, mindless, soulless rage, forced upon her a future of pain and a kind of separation from all the others around her.

I could relate. I could empathize with how Angela must have felt throughout her childhood – being ridiculed and outcasted from the normal kids. I wasn't one of the normal kids either. But not because of a disfigurement. At least not a physical one. Mom, however, always told me not to think of mine as a bad thing, but rather as a gift. As an opportunity that God had given me to help those less fortunate. And I believed her. And I followed Mom's advice.

Angela was so beautiful the way she looked at me with the one real eye staring so brilliantly, making up for the other that just stared ahead, not seeing. Not knowing. It didn't *look* so much as it *pointed*. But it was still beautiful to me. Not because of the delicate craftsmanship that went into creating it. No, there was no amount of scientific and artistic perfection that could make it anything more than just an ordinary object. But it was beautiful because of its context – where it rested. Because of the beautiful pink skin wrapped around it.

I hated that dog for what it did to Angela so many years ago. For hurting her like it did. I shouldn't

have been thinking about something so horrible at that moment, but I was. And I wanted to punish that evil hound. I wanted nothing more than to have just one brief encounter with that dog. I swear that I would avenge Angela for what she'd had to endure. I would tear that vicious dog's eye from its head and hold the dripping ball up in front of it. Make it watch itself as it bled to death. Make it see in real-time what death looks like. And then I'd bring it back, and I'd do the same thing with its other eye. Make it see itself die a second time. For Angela I would do this.

Enough of that. I shouldn't have been thinking those cruel thoughts while staring into the eyes – eye! – of this terrific girl whom I loved with such passion.

“Bones?”

“Yes?” I responded. I must have been visibly drifting.

“What are you thinking about?”

“Ummm,” I stammered. “I...”

I LOVE YOU!!! SO MUCH!!!

“I... have... a gift for you,” I said.

“For me?” Her eye lit up with surprise.

“For you. A special gift just for you. The first time I saw you, I knew how perfect it would be for you. A perfect fit!”

She just looked at me, curious. I'm sure she thought I was referring to a sweater or a coat. But, oh no, a girl like Angela deserved so much more.

“Just hold on a sec,” I teased as I playfully tapped her on the nose with my index finger. “Just stay right where you are.”

I stood up and looked over in the direction of my bedroom closet. Oh, I was so excited. I must have felt what my parents did as they led me down the hall to the Christmas tree. The simple, pure joy of *giving*.

“Clair!” I yelled in the direction of the closet. “Clair, come out here!”

I didn't look down at Angela behind me. I didn't want to give away the excited expression on my face.

At first there was nothing. And then a loud bang echoed from within the closet. Something bumping into the back of the door.

I laughed out loud. It was accidental. I was just so excited that I couldn't even control my body.

She didn't understand the concept of a barrier.

I laughed.

“Clair!” I yelled as I tried to stifle my chuckles. “Open the door, Clair!”

“Open the door!”

“Bones?” Angela whispered from behind me. She sounded nervous. Was she? I guess I could understand why she might be. Or maybe my excitement was just rubbing off on her. I ignored her and called back to whatever it was that had bumped into the back of the door.

“Clair! Open it! Open the closet door!”

“Bones?” Angela again.

“Clair! Turn the handle and push open the door!”

“Bones?”

“NOW!” I commanded. I felt Angela jump back, not expecting that force in my voice.

The doorknob on the side facing us began to rattle. Softly at first. I watched, and I imagine Angela did too, as the rattling stopped for a moment, and the knob slowly began to turn, as if whatever was behind that door was finally beginning to understand – remember – how a doorknob worked.

Angela was silent behind me. Oh, I couldn't wait for her to see this!

The door slowly creaked open. Not much at first. Just enough to reveal a glimpse of the shadows within it. The hinges took over, and pulled it the rest of the way open.

There was a figure standing in there. Unmoving.

Angela gasped.

The shadows cloaked whoever, or whatever, was in there, masking any defining features. It remained frozen, standing there in the darkness.

It was time for the unveiling. Time for Angela to see her gift.

“Clair. Step out of the closet.”

She did. Slowly stepped out of the darkness of her sanctuary and into our collective vision.

I heard a faint squeak from behind me. I turned to see Angela staring wide-eyed (eye) ahead of her at her gift. Her face ghost-white. Her mouth stretched as far open as it could possibly go. The veins in her neck

protruding from the skin in an eerie fleshy spider web. She was frozen in a silent scream. And I swear to you, it looked like that glass eye of hers was about to pop out of its socket.

I turned back to our visitor and announced with glee, “Clair, I’d like to introduce you to my girlfriend, Angela.”

Clair didn’t move. Just stared forever in whatever direction her eyes happened to be pointed. Her jaw hung down lower than what should be humanly possible. Her face, well, her whole body for that matter, was whiter than Angela’s. Of course, that is to be expected for a body that hasn’t felt the flow of life-blood pump through it in two weeks. The bruises that wrapped her neck like a scarf were as purple and deep as they were on the day I clinched my hands around it and squeezed and squeezed until her pupils rose up into her head and the death shake rattled through her torso.

She stood there motionless. Two weeks dead. But you wouldn’t know it were it not for the flowering patches of burst blood-vessels circling her neck and that utter lack of comprehension that painted her face. But all the other signs of death that you might find on a two week old body – the decomposition, the smell – were missing. I’d done it right this time. Learned my lesson. I’d only allowed her to remain dead for an hour or so. The relatively brief span of time that it took to bring her back. Well, at least, bring her back in the way that I knew how.

Angela wasn’t screaming. Out loud, anyway. Things were turning out better than I could have hoped!

Sure, she was terrified. Who wouldn’t be? But I think shock had taken hold of her, for she remained sitting there on the edge of the bed, her arms at her sides, her hands pressed into the mattress beneath her.

“Angela!” I called out to her, burning with a joy I hadn’t felt since I presented my mother with her own gift last year.

“Angela, look at her eyes! Look at Clair’s eyes! Do you see them? They’re fresh! Can’t you see that? I’ve kept them fresh for you!”

Angela didn’t move. She just stared at the lifeless animation that stood before her. The gift that I’d given her.

“Angela! Look at them. Two perfect eyes! And she doesn’t need them anymore! You can finally have that eye you’ve yearned for all these years. I can give it to you! I can make it work! Just like your original one did! I can do it!”

“Angela!”

I bent down to her and put my hand on her shoulder. She jerked her head up to stare at me. She had a weird look on her face – the look that a rat has when its spine has been snapped in a mouse trap and its watching you as you step towards it with a hammer.

“Ha ha!” I laughed! “Are you as excited as I am? You can finally have two eyes again!” I began clapping my hands for her! “Happy Birthday, Angela!”

Angela just continued to stare at me. And then I noticed a movement coming from Clair.

I laughed louder.

“Look, Angela! Look!”

I grabbed her by the shoulders and turned her to face back in the direction of Clair, so she could see what she was doing.

Clair was mimicking her master.

She was clapping her hands!

I howled in excitement and clapped mine again. Loud. In rhythm with the limp slapping of palm against palm coming from Clair.

“Happy Birthday, my love! Happy Birthday, Angela!”

This must have snapped Angela out of her shocked state, for she began to scream. Out loud this time. A high pitched shriek. It was maddening. It angered me.

“Stop it, Angela! I demand it!”

She didn’t stop. Instead, she leapt off the bed and charged for the bedroom door, shoving me aside as she went past. She sure was a strong one. I respected that.

She threw open the door and raced out into the hallway.

Oh no! No! No! No! No! This was not good. This was not supposed to happen. She was supposed to be pleased with her gift! Maybe a little frightened at first, of course, but she was supposed to grow joyful in the knowledge that it was a gift given out of love.

She wasn’t supposed to run from me! How dare she!

Obviously I couldn’t allow her to escape... leave, I mean. Not after what I’d shown her!

“Stay right here!” I commanded Clair. Clair continued to stare straight ahead, still clapping her hands

in that lazy, flimsy fashion.

I charged out of the room after Angela and spotted her at the end of the hallway struggling with the front door. She was twisting and pulling on the doorknob, all the while crying out in frustration and terror, but to no avail. The door wouldn't open.

Of course not. I had locked the deadbolt earlier when I closed it behind us, and the key rested safely in my pants pocket. I had wanted to believe Angela would love her gift immediately, but I wasn't so naive to not prepare for alternative scenarios.

"Angela," I called out to her from down the hall, projecting the calmest tone I could muster. "Angela, come back here and talk to me."

She just continued to yank on the knob, occasionally banging on the door with her open hand, occasionally taking a quick glance back in my direction to make sure I wasn't coming any closer.

"Angela." I took a step forward.

She turned back to face me.

"Please!" she screamed, tears streaking down her face. "Please leave me alone!"

I took another step closer. Slowly. Calmly. I knew I was in the middle of a very delicate situation.

"Angela," I tried one more time. "I love you."

She screamed. It was a horrid sound. And she turned to her left and spotted the other door a few steps down.

"No!" I howled.

She ran to the door, swung it open, and raced inside. I charged down the hall after her as fast as I could.

I followed Angela into the room, and into a situation I had hoped I would not have to face so early in our relationship. Angela had entered another bedroom. She was standing just a few feet from the doorway, staring in what must have been disbelief at what was in there.

An old lady, her gray hair hanging long and loose down to her shoulders, sat in a wheelchair next to the bed. A tattered brown blanket lay across her waist, covering her lower half. She was leaning forward over the bed, using her hands to caress the dry, cracked head of the body that lay there.

It was an old man. His face gaunt and yellow, the skin pulled so thin it was almost translucent, barely

even covering the skull underneath. The few remaining hairs on his head were long and wiry like those of a corpse.

His eyes pointed blankly ahead of him, just as Clair's did. There was no up and down, inhaling and exhaling motion coming from his chest.

He had no legs.

It was a legless, living corpse that lay there on the bed. Dead but moving. Barely. The old woman in the wheelchair that stroked the pathetic patch of hair on his head, however, was very much alive.

Mother. My dear old mom.

So full of love. Such a strong soul. A woman who could remain committed to a man dead for almost a whole year now, who's only form of affection is a slight movement of his gray pupils in the direction of a bright light.

"Mom!" I yelled out to her. "This is Angela! The girl I was telling you about!"

Mom's eyes darted up at Angela, then over to me, then back to the terrified girl who glared back at her. She had the same look on her face as Angela did. Pure, unbridled fear. I hated when she looked that way.

"...And she's trying to leave me!" I yelled.

Now I was getting a little hysterical myself. Maybe feeling just a wee bit of self pity. But could I be blamed? Really? It hurts to be unappreciated. Especially when you do so much for somebody. When you *kill* for somebody. It hurts.

Angela had her hands out in front of her. One palm facing Mom and one facing me, as if by holding the universal "Stop" sign she might actually "stop" us. Silly girl. Little scaredy cat.

Her head kept turning back and forth, like she was watching a tennis match. Staring at mom. Then me. Then mom. Etc.

And then suddenly she caught me off guard with her last brave attempt at escape. She spun around, faced the sole window in the bedroom, braced herself – throwing her arms up to cover her face – and raced to the window and dove right through it. Glass shattered and flew in all directions. Indoors and out. I hated to think of mother walking around in here with all those sharp glass shards hiding in the carpeting.

I raced over to the window and stuck my head through the jagged-edged hole that was now there.

Angela was pushing herself up off the ground, pieces of glass sprinkling from her clothes, shining

mini flashes of moonlight. Her shoulder looked bad. Like she landed directly on it. It's a good thing that mom and dad and I lived in a one-story, or else I might have found myself with *two* dead girls stowed away in my closet.

Ok, that was an inappropriate thing to say.

She got to her feet and ran as fast as she could away from the house. Night had set in, and it wasn't but a second or two before darkness enveloped her and she disappeared.

It hurt my heart to think of how she'd feel when she discovered the eight foot fence that enclosed our back yard.

"Mom!" I yelled, pulling my head back in through the hole in the window, careful not to let those sharp edges touch my neck.

"Mother! Get her! Bring her back to me!"

Mom just sat there in her chair.

"Mother, get up and get her. Use your new legs and go get her!"

Mom, who for the past year insisted on remaining in that chair, refusing to enjoy the glorious gifts I'd bestowed upon her, to stand up and accept the wonderful byproduct of her only son's love, just remained there in her chair. I became a little bit angry. I lowered my voice, bent down towards her and spoke sternly. Slowly.

"Mother. Get up out of your fucking chair. And bring my love back to me. I demand it."

She could hear it in my voice. See it in my eyes. I *wasn't* to be ignored.

She looked up at me with sad eyes. It hurt my heart. But there was a problem at hand, and I needed her.

"Mother. Stand up."

She stood up.

The brown blanket that covered her lower half fell to the floor and revealed the gift underneath.

The legs that descended down from the mid-section of her calves, highlighted by the purple scar that ringed around each of them, didn't fit her right. Were much too thick for her womanly frame.

And they were hairy.

And they were rotted.

Pockmarks and cavernous gaps dotted them from the rim of the scars on her thighs down to her white sweat socks. Bloodless holes revealed the bones that lie underneath. The flimsy bulbous knee caps protruded outward like those of an old man's. Which was to be expected. Because that's what they were.

Dad legs.

She stood there, awkward, head lowered, eyes pointed up at me. Timid. She wobbled a bit, as if she weren't entirely comfortable on the limbs that held her up.

"Mother," I said as I scanned up and down at her legs, and then glanced over at the legless stump of my father on the bed.

"Mother. Use your legs. *My* gift. And bring my lover back to me."

She remained where she was, wobbling, looking at me.

"Now!" I screamed. "Now! Or you'll spend eternity lying on that bed with dad!"

I hated to yell at her. To threaten her like that. But sometimes you have to be tough. Even with the ones you love the most.

She gasped out a quick word of which I couldn't quite understand, grabbed the key that I held out to her, and ran out of the room. I listened as she moved down the hallway. Wow! Those legs could really move! Dad was always quite the athlete. She unlocked the deadbolt and entered the darkness that awaited her.

I looked down at the soulless shell that lay on the bed. Dad. He was a good man. And I had loved him. I still did, standing there, peering down at him as I waited for mom to chase down my bride-to-be.

He had been a good man. But, had he been a better man, he would have been there for mom. Would have been there to pull her out of the street before that car barreled down upon her. And took her legs. Her original ones.

Had he been there to protect her, he wouldn't be lying here on the bed, so pathetic and lifeless. But he hadn't been.

And mom needed new legs.

So I did what any loving son would do for his mother. I killed him. Strangled him as he slept. And then I spent three grisly hours sawing through flesh and bone to get those legs.

Because, you see, I'm a builder. I can fix. I can *rebuild* with my mind. I can give you what you need, and I can make it work. But I'm not a creator. I need parts. I need pieces to work with.

And I learned an important lesson with my dad. Parts can, and do, go bad. I let his body lie there for a couple weeks. I knew what I was going to do, but I was a novice at the time. I was nervous. And as my fear caused me to hesitate, the days passed, and the body rotted.

I'd only reanimated once before. I had made a dead cat move again. And it wasn't the same as it had been when it was alive the first time. It just drifted. It didn't play with its toys, it didn't scratch the couch. But it moved. And that was close enough.

Of course, when you reanimate a cat, you don't really take into account the details. When you take a maggot-ridden feline and you bring it back, the maggots are still there. You can scrub and wash and clean the cat. But how do you scrub its insides?

And I let my dad fester and rot before I took his legs, and by then they were... well, unpleasant. But, the important thing is, they *worked*.

So I gave them to Mom. I put them on her. I thought she'd be happy. She had been so sad after the accident. I would have done anything. Anything for her. Even using my dad.

When she woke up that morning and saw her legs – the rotted, abused things that they were – she wasn't happy with her son. Oh, and she called me all sorts of names. Murderer, abomination, demon, you name it. I knew she was mad that it was dad that I used. And so I brought him back. At least, in the way that I can.

I realized that, upon bringing dad back, there was no more rotting. No more decomposition. His body functioned like he was alive – soul or not. The rotting stopped.

Had I known this before, I would have taken his legs immediately. So Mom wouldn't have to walk around on those rat-infested limbs that she does. Had I known, maybe she wouldn't remain in that chair.

I wouldn't make that mistake again. Not with Angela. Not with a woman I love so much. No, I took to heart what I'd learned. And when I killed Clair – she with the most beautiful eyes I've even seen on a face other than Angela's – I immediately brought her back. I kept her fresh.

That's what love is.

I looked down at dad one more time. Oh, what a shame. Just a shell laying there on the bed. Mom spent way too much time in this room. She needed to move on.

I turned away from dad and went back to the window. I could hear voices siphoning through the hole

that Angela made.

I watched. And I listened.

Mom, with her hairy rotted legs that still had a hell of a lot of strength in them, was walking backwards towards the house. She had her arms wrapped around Angela. It was almost a hug, but a hug that the young woman wasn't going to escape. She was pulling her back to me.

Mom spoke to her. I listened.

"I'm so sorry," said Mom. I think she was crying. "I'm sorry."

Angela was crying too. I thought about how weird it must look to see a person cry from only one eye. But she wasn't screaming anymore. I think she had resigned herself to the situation.

"I'm sorry. I wish I could let you go. But he's told me before that, if I don't follow his orders, he'll turn me into... *them*."

"...and I'm afraid that he brings their souls back. Parts of them. He brings parts of their souls back and then they're trapped here. My husband. My daughter Claire. He's taken them both, and then he brings them back. But not *all of them*. And I'm the only one left. And I'm so sorry."

I heard Angela sobbing. Listening.

"Just love him," she advised in her wonderful motherly way.

"Just love him," she said as she dragged the sobbing resigned young woman back to me.

"Just love him and you'll be ok. We'll be ok. We'll be *alive*."

Ahhh, girl talk. A couple of chatty Cathys. Its funny how girls do that, isn't it? They just gab and gab and gab. And cry. And I hate to hear them cry. Mom. Angela. It upsets me so much.

See, true love is a special thing. It's magic. It's when two people feel a conviction that even this evil world in which we're stuck can't break. Sure, there will be crying. And there will be girl talk. And there will be sadness.

I'm a realist. I'm fine with this. I understand that even true love has its ups and down. And there will be tears. But it's worth it.

Of course, being a realist, I also know that sometimes the crying doesn't stop. That even the truest, purest love can't overcome the hard stuff. And if that's the case, well there's more fish in the sea, I guess. There's more love out there. It can be a wonderful world if you want it to be. There's so much potential. So

much potential for love.

And so if it doesn't work out with me and Angela - if the love can't overcome the tears. Well, I guess I'll just use her for parts.