

To See or Not to See?  
Totem Head's 2014 Story Contest  
By Emma Fecteau

So there I was, watching my favorite movie in the living room. In the background, I hear the steady chopping as my mother and my aunt prepare dinner. My younger sister, Cora, is listening to music, her head bobbing rhythmically. I stare at her for a second. I stare at her messy black hair, with a terribly uneven part, and at her pretty diamond earrings and ruffled orange dress. Yet mainly, I find myself staring at her unseeing, gold eyes.

"Gen, it's rude to stare at her." Mom snaps. My mother looks so similar to Cora it's almost scary. They have the same long dark hair. My eyes are leaf green, like Mom's. Cora's eyes are golden brown, like our father's.

Except our father isn't blind.

"What are we having for dinner?" I ask, pausing the movie.

"Arugula salad and tomato soup," Mom replied. I stiffen and wrinkle my nostrils. Mom frowns at me, "Don't be like that. Dad loves arugula."

"My father has horrible taste when it comes to food," I say.

Mom's eyes turn from warm to cold in seconds, "Well you should have more respect for your father."

I roll my eyes when she turns around. Of course I respect my father! Both my mother and father are military heroes all over the world, famous for winning the war against Paea, a country that broke up and scattered after losing the war. Being their daughter, you'd think I'd have a more interesting life rather than eating arugula salad and watching movies.

Later, we're sitting at the round dining table. I pick at my arugula, scowling. My aunt, Genesis, is sitting across from me. Dad is sitting at my left, and Cora at my right. Mom is still setting steaming bowls of soup down on the table. I hear Cora thank my mother, then feel around the placemat for her fork, before digging into to her salad. I watch her drop arugula into her lap, and I can't help but snigger.

"Genifer," Mom says quietly. "Eat your food."

"I hate arugula," I say.

Dad glares at me sternly, "Gen, listen to your mother."

"When you were fourteen you didn't have to listen to your mother," I groused.

“When I was fourteen, I didn’t have a mother at all,” Dad said shortly. I shut up.

I hear Cora stomp her foot on the ground in frustration as she dropped another piece of arugula into her lap. I can’t help myself. Smirking, I held up three fingers. “Hey Cora, how many fingers am I holding up?”

Cora sticks out her tongue, “That’s a mean joke, Gen.”

I smirk. Dad slaps my hand out of the air, fixing me with the fatherly “*I-do-not-approve*” stare.

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After pretending to eat my arugula (though actually feeding it to our housecat, Emma), I storm out of the kitchen and slam the door of my room, locking Cora out. After listening for a minute of her wailing and pounding and Mom screaming at me to open up before she sawed off the hinges, I finally unlocked the door. Cora stomped in, eyes red-rimmed and angry.

I bury my head in my pillow without changing into my pajamas. The mattress is stiff and lumpy, and the sheets are musty. Cora was my sister. I have tried to make an effort to be nicer, *honestly*. Yet it’s impossible, with Mom always complimenting her and scolding me. When Cora’s around, nobody cares that I’m there. So what if she’s blind? That doesn’t mean I shouldn’t get special treatment.

That’s why I don’t like her. That’s a pretty good reason, if I do say so myself.

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The next morning, I wake up.

Or at least, I *think* I wake up.

I hear talking in the next room, and open my eyelids. That is, I *think* I open my eyelids. I feel them opening, but yet I don’t see anything. That’s what’s scary. I blink several times, and nothing shows up. There is nothing, no blackness, no anything.

I kick off my sheets, screaming and poking myself in the eyes and pulling at my eyelids. “I’M BLIND I’M BLIND!!!” I shriek, rolling off the bed and hitting my head on the floor.

“Good gracious Genifer!” I hear Mom approaching. “You’ll have to clean up later, you know.”

“I can see!” I hear Cora’s voice.

I sit up, electrified with horror.

“What do you mean you can see?” I exclaim.

"I can see everything!" Cora gushed. She described the colors, and everything around her. She even described me.

"Genifer, are you okay?"

Dad's voice.

"No, I am not okay, thank you for asking," I huffed. "I'm blind! I can't see anything!" I back up into my bed, feeling for my dresser to steady myself on it. "Call the doctor!" I wail.

"Hang on a second," Mom said sternly. "This better not be another one of your jokes, Genifer."

"She's not lying," Dad says grimly.

"So you're saying," Mom sounds unconvinced. "Something happened overnight, and now Cora can see and Genifer can't."

After tripping over my own feet twice, I manage to find Cora's bedframe. "You!" I snapped to Cora, unsure if I was facing her or not. "You were the one who did this!"

"Oh yeah?" Cora shot back, getting out of bed. I could feel her breath on my face. "What do you think I did, prayed to God? Wished on a star? Talked to the genie? Used a magic wand? No! I know as much as you do, you idiot!"

"That's enough," Dad snapped. I hear him talking to Mom, "Take them both to the hospital, and see what the heck is going on here."

"Are you sure Genifer's not lying?" Mom asked, unsure.

"I'M NOT LYING!" I roar at Mom.

"If we're leaving, we need to leave now. Let's go," Mom snapped.

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Several hours later, I returned from the hospital with Mom and Cora, in an even worse mood than I already was. It's not everyday that you wake up blind. Both the doctor and nurse reported nothing unusual, and couldn't understand how Cora could see and I couldn't. I don't believe in magic, but I can't help but accuse Cora of witchcraft. What, do you have a better idea?

Moaning, I lay down on my bed, pulling on my eyelids and waving my hand in front of my face. My feet are sore from tripping over chair legs all day. *How the heck does Cora manage?* I think. Cora's been happy all day, probably because this is the first time she can see in her life.

I hear someone approaching, then Mom's voice. "Gen, dear, whatever it is, we'll find out. Your father and I scheduled an appointment next week."

I groaned, "So I'm blind until next week? School starts soon! What if they don't fix me and I'm blind forever?"

"I think you're overreacting a little bit," Mom says. Yet I can hear it in her voice that she's just as doubtful as I am.

"Tell you what," Mom is saying, caressing my shoulder. "How about we all go out for icecream this afternoon."

"You think icecream is going to fix this?" I grumbled.

"No," Mom admitted. "But I don't want you to be sitting around all day, complaining about how oh-so-horrible your life is. Because in case you haven't noticed, you've only had to deal with this for half a day, and Cora's been blind her entire life."

I stiffen, "So you're saying you want me to feel bad for her?"

"Have some empathy, okay?" Mom sighed. I hear her getting up and leaving.

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That night, after a dinner of leftover arugula salad with meatloaf, I'm ready for bed. I don't watch the movie that night (I wouldn't be able to see it anyway), so instead I go to bed early. I'm grateful to shut my eyelids, and imagine that I was never blind at all.

I fall asleep early that night.

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The next morning, I hear shouting and I open my eyes.

I sit up. Light flows through the window and bathes the room in sunlight. I'm dressed in the same clothes I wore to bed the day before yesterday. I see Mom, with green eyes and waist length raven hair. I see Dad, with dark brown hair and pale eyes. Then I see Cora, long dark hair and golden eyes magically restored to blindness.

"I can see!" I exclaimed.

Mom turned to me, raising an eyebrow. "Yes, of course you can see, dear. The problem is, Cora can't."

I frowned, "But she did yesterday?"

Dad stared at me, "No she didn't. She was blind yesterday, as always."

"Is there something wrong?" Mom asks.

I want to tell them, but some part of me says they won't believe me.

I shake my head and grin, "No, not at all."