

To See You With

by Zoe Cannon

She stumbled on the stairs as her vision darkened again without warning. She steadied herself against the wall, and once she had reached the top of the stairs, kept her hands on the wall to feel her way towards the door she thought was hers. What did those numbers say? She squinted through the gray haze. 608? No, 606 – her apartment was the next one over, then. She moved along the wall to that door, then leaned against it while she fumbled for her key. Through the dark blur of her vision, she searched for the keyhole; it took her three jabs with the key before she found it. She heard the click as the lock released; letting her breath out in relief, she entered the apartment.

Just in time to hear the phone ring. She followed sound and habit to the desk where the phone sat. "Hello?"

"Hello." The woman's voice was cold and faintly mocking. Her mother. "And how are you finding life on your own?"

"Adequate," she answered. Best to strike a balance between superiority and truth.

"Adequate? Is that the best you can do?" She heard a hint of laughter in her mother's tone.

"I would love to say that life is wonderful, and that I've never been better. I would love to rub that in your face. But I won't lie."

"I see. And is this little experiment of yours over yet?"

"No. It never will be." She had said it many times before, and she knew she would have to say it again and again. No matter how many times her mother heard it, it would never sink in.

"Then you will live in a world of darkness forever." An unnecessary statement of truth. She had already come to terms with this; surely her mother knew that.

"So do many of us. In prison. At least I'll be free."

"That only happens to the ones who aren't careful. The rest of us live lives that are far better than adequate. We are cursed; there is no changing it. But we can live quite comfortably with our curse, as you did until you got these silly ideas in your head."

Her vision grew darker yet again. She reached for the chair that she knew sat by the phone, but felt only empty air. She saw the table as a faint blur, slightly darker than the rest

of the room, but couldn't tell which part of that blur was the chair. She gave up and leaned against the table instead. "I choose not to accept the curse."

"The curse does not allow you to choose."

"Nevertheless, I choose not to accept it." She hung up the phone.

She lay back on her bed and closed her eyes. The darkness behind her eyelids was only slightly different from the way the world now looked to her with her eyes open. But she would survive; blind people did. She would find a way. Later. For now, she would just rest for a moment...

Her dreams were dark and violent. In her dreams, she did what her mother had taught her to do, and had expected her to continue doing for the rest of her life. In her dreams, she cornered a homeless man alone in an alley, dug her fingers into his eye sockets and ripped out his eyeballs as he screamed. She swallowed the eyes, and watched as her vision grew sharp again. Now she could clearly see the blood that ran from the man's empty eye sockets in place of tears.

She had cried when, at ten years old, she had learned what her mother ground up and hidden in her dinner every night. For two weeks she had refused any food her mother tried to give her. Then her vision began to fade. She could barely make out the letters on the blackboard at school, and her teacher sent a note home asking if she had seen an eye doctor recently. Her mother read her the letter, her voice thick with self-satisfaction. She became clumsy, bumping into tables, tripping on the curb as she crossed the street. Four days after she received the letter from her teacher, she accepted the food her mother offered, hating herself for her weakness.

Six years later, her mother taught her to hunt.

She approached the man in a bar that reeked of cigarette smoke and stale sweat. She flirted clumsily with him, as her mother watched from the shadows. Awkward as her efforts were, the man was interested, and she got into his car with him at the end of the night. He reached to turn the key in the ignition, and she laid a hand gently on his arm, stopping him. Then, not so gently, she stabbed her fingers into his eyes, curled them under the eyeballs, yanked out the bloody and crushed orbs. His hands clawed at his face, now a face out of nightmares. She wondered if he had seen her tears before she had taken his sight. She

swallowed the eyeballs. They felt warm and slippery sliding down her throat, and she tasted the metallic tang of blood. As she exited the car she saw the same blood dripping from the man's eye sockets, and she fought the sudden urge to throw up. If she emptied her stomach, this night's hunting would be wasted.

Later, back at the house, tears still ran from her eyes as her mother congratulated her on a job well done.

"What about all these people?" she protested. "Once we take their sight, it's gone forever."

Her mother shrugged dismissively. "There are more born every second."

"But how is the sight of all these people worth the sight of the few in our family? Wouldn't it be better for us to go blind so that all those others can see? Why are we worth more than them?"

"You have never lived without sight," her mother responded. "Since you were a baby, I hunted for both of us. I mashed others' eyes and put them in your food. Your vision has always been clear. My own parents, however..." She closed her eyes for a moment, then continued. "My mother never knew of the curse, and my father felt guilty for what he had to do to maintain his sight. He found a middle ground; he hunted only when his vision was almost gone, and lived most of his life in a hazy twilight. He raised me the same way. He never disguised the eyes for me, as I did for you. He wanted me to be horrified by what we had to do. But the horror of watching my vision slowly disappear was worse. I lived for the times when I would swallow the fresh eyes he brought me and see the world clearly again.

"When you feel like living in darkness, you may certainly do so. Once you try it, you will see why I live the way I do."

She opened her eyes to light and clarity. She could see the blue of the walls, the tan of the wood floor, the sharp right angles of her bedside table. She whooped in jubilation, not caring whose sleep she might be disturbing. She had beaten the curse. It was gone. She could see, and see clearly. So much for her mother's assurance that she would come running home.

She looked at the clock beside her bed, the numbers glowing in a wonderful vibrant red. The clock said 10:30; she had slept for fifteen hours. She didn't care. She didn't care if they fired her. She had her sight, and what mattered compared to that?

Her father died when she was two. In a mugging, her mother told her when she was old enough to understand. A senseless death. When she was older, and understood more, she wondered what she would have seen if she had opened her father's coffin. She wondered if two empty eye sockets would have stared back at her.

She wondered what happened to her victims after she left them sightless. Did they die? Did they come to accept their blindness? Would they grow old still bitter at the loss of their sight?

Did they ever describe her to the police?

She drank in the sights around her. She swallowed them raw, not caring what meaning they had in the larger world. A woman, vibrant red hair flying in all directions, her face all harsh angles, contrasted by the roundness of her glasses. Each lens held the fluorescent lights in miniature. The shirt the woman placed on the counter, neon green and covered in pink hearts. Small – meant for a child. Some sections, hidden under the folds, were darker, in shadow.

"Hello?" the woman said, shoving the shirt further across the counter. "Are you going to ring me up or not?"

She brought herself back to the task at hand. She ran the scanner over the shirt's tag. Red scanner light, flickering, over the black-striped barcode. "Twenty dollars and ninety-two cents."

The woman handed her the money; she admired its intricate lines as she placed it in the register. She placed the shirt in a bag for the woman and handed it to her, staring at the shadow the bag made as it passed over the counter. The woman grabbed the bag and flounced away.

She noted how every shirt on the rack was sharp and defined, none blending into the others. She stared up at the fluorescent lights and imbibed the brightness. When her eyes began to sting and water from staring so intently at something so bright, she didn't look away.

After work, she had barely enough strength to climb into bed; still in her uniform, she pulled the covers up over her. Again she dreamed of stealing eyes. She felt the juice on her fingers as the eyeballs burst; she heard her victims' screams. She woke up disgusted, with

the taste of blood still on her lips, but it was forgotten as she opened her eyes and saw that her vision had not darkened.

For the next week she overslept; she began setting herself two alarms in the evening, then three, then four, but every morning she slept through them all. After a week she was fired quietly, with little ceremony, and she found that she didn't care. She spent her days in image and exhaustion – waking up at noon, wandering the city for a few hours, collapsing into bed before the sun went down.

She memorized the nuance of every building. The way the light shone off the fur of the dogs in the park. The contrast of colors on candy bar wrappers and magazine covers in the convenience stores. How the light changed as the day went on.

At first she didn't understand her obsession with memorizing every sight and every aspect of what vision was. She thought she flooded herself with images to make up for her too-long drought, but even after she had more than made up for her time of being nearly sightless, she continued. After awhile, she realized she was doing it in preparation. If the curse came back to her, she would now at least remember what freedom had been.

One night she fell asleep with her body burning from fever. She woke in the middle of the night drenched in sweat, surprised by the darkness but not by the nausea she felt. She tried to control it; she huddled in her blanket, convincing herself that she felt fine. She could see, she told her stomach; she couldn't feel sick, because now that her vision had been returned to her, everything was perfect. She was invincible. Nothing could bring her down.

After an hour of this futile argument, she ran to the toilet. She heaved, knowing that the toilet bowl would be empty except for a little bile. When was the last time she had eaten? The day before yesterday? The day before that? It didn't matter. She didn't need to eat. She could see. What was food compared to vision? She would sustain herself with image and light.

She felt something round and slimy squeeze up her throat and out her mouth. What had she eaten, and when?

After her stomach calmed, she stood up, resting a hand on the sink to steady herself. She looked down into the toilet bowl. An eye, blue and perfectly round, stared back at her.