



Eye of the Beholder

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Erin loved fairy tales when she was younger. She'd always thought he'd died. He'd died in the version her father had read to her, and it explained everything. But in the old ones, he hadn't. He'd been there all the time. She pushed Grimm's away from her.

Erin turned and stared into the mirror, looking for something. Tilted her head left, then right. Tried several smiles. But she couldn't find what she was looking for. She 'd seen it once, in a window, as she and her best friend walked past—the face she hoped she had ... the face she hoped others saw.

"Erin!" Her father's voice carried all the way upstairs. "Dinner!" She quickly stepped away from the mirror, as if he'd actually seen her looking in it.

"Coming, Dad!" She began to run down the stairs, but stopped halfway and slowed to a walk. Eleven-year-olds didn't run in the house. She continued, walking in the self-conscious way of girls her age—aware that her gait should curve and sway, but unable to master it yet.

The table was set for dinner. Erin was one of the few girls she knew whose family still had dinner together—her and her mom and her dad. Her father was already sitting down, face tight with concerns that he would not raise at the table. Her mother rested her hand on Erin's shoulder as she set the chops on the table, and then sat down as well.

"How was school?" Her mother asked her that every day, but she meant it.

"Fine." Erin glanced at her father.

"How did you do?" Her father asked her that every day, too.

"I think I did good. Ms. Grisham said it looked good," she offered.

"Well," her father corrected.

"... it looked well," said Erin.

"No. You did well," he pressed. "It looked good."

"Okay."

Her father started on his potato. Erin started on her beans. Her mother felt the silence stretch, so she filled it with another question.

"How was history?"

"I like it." Erin didn't. "I'm going to get an 'A', I think."

Her father moved on to his chops.

"I had to pick an essay topic," Erin's raised voice invited interest, "and I picked Braddock's defeat." It was a story her father had first told her. He always read history when he had time at home. "Mr. Willis thought it was a good idea. Said he'd never had a student pick that before." She looked at her father. He spit out a piece of gristle.

Erin began the rest of her meal. After a minute, "Dad, maybe you can tell me more about Braddock?"

Her father paused until he found his place in the conversation—like a bookmark in a tome. "Sure. I'll give you the book after dinner."

Erin offered a fleeting half-smile. "Thanks."

Her mom brushed Erin's hair back understandingly. "Hon, maybe you could help Erin a bit. I'm sure it wouldn't take long."

"She's a smart girl. She doesn't need my help," said her dad.

Erin's mom didn't reply. Eventually, she asked Erin's dad how his day went. Erin let them talk. After a while, she turned to her mom.

"I'm finished now. Can I go upstairs?"

"Sure, sweetheart. Don't worry about the dishes tonight."

Erin ran upstairs.

She sat down on her bed and picked up Grimm's again. Found Cinderella. Re-read the beginning. See, he lived. Cinderella's father lived. He didn't die before the wicked stepmother made Cinderella a servant. He just stopped seeing her.

She wondered how it had happened.