

Eye Opener

It was meant to be a joke. Robbie had been bothering my friend, Claire. Nothing terrible, just stuff like pulling her hair, pushing her papers off her desk, name-calling, and taking her lunch. I mean, it really is gross to take your sandwich out of your bag only to find bites taken out of it and a piece of chewed apple spit into your lunch bag. Mr. Mooney caught Robbie once and yelled at the class “This is no way for ninth graders to act! Grow up and act your age.” Claire was mortified, but Robbie just laughed. To make matters worse, Robbie’s friends started teasing her.

I had known Claire since grade school. We had been in the same classes for three years in a row, which inevitably led us to become friends. In fourth grade she was involved in a car accident, and a piece of glass hit her in the face. The result was the loss of an eye and some scars on the left side of her head. She usually wore her dark hair swept across her face, hiding it from casual glances. If someone asked her what happened, she laid it on the line. No sympathy required. That girl had a strength of character, which led her to do what she did. She usually just shrugged her shoulders at Robbie’s remarks, but lately I noticed she frowned and squinted her eye. Claire put up with a lot from Robbie and his friends. But he would go on and on, teasing her, calling her “Cyclops”, asking her how it felt being a uni-eye riding a unicorn. Stuff like that. Very annoying. I thought Robbie was just plain mean. And it wasn’t just now. He had been bugging her for a while.

So, Claire decided that if Robbie liked bugging her about her fake eye so much, she would give it to him. Actually she decided to use an old one that was chipped, but it might work. She had several old ones. She didn’t mind that she was blind in one eye as much as the ongoing teasing that came from it.

With Christmas approaching, she got an idea. Claire carefully wrapped her old eye in a gift box, added slime and red food coloring, then put “To Katie” on it. Katie was Robbie’s girlfriend. Maybe this would cause a rift in their relationship. It would take a lot of backpedaling to explain such an obnoxious gift. Claire wasn’t trying to hurt Katie. I think her point was to embarrass Robbie by putting him on the spot.

The sparkly silver card with “ From Robbie” on it could be spotted two desk rows away. After lunch, Claire placed it in Katie’s open backpack by the coat hooks, and triumphantly sat back to watch.

We watched that afternoon all right. Snow, and more snow. It was the stillness that got our attention. Then tires were spinning on the street. Like most kids, we ran to the windows to watch. Being on the fourth floor of the school building, we scanned the parking lot below. Mr. Mooney also observed at the window. With snow up to the hubcaps, we grinned at the potential up-coming snow day. The principal called Mr. Mooney and a few other teachers out into the hall.

Coming back from the windows, Robbie slammed Claire’s books onto the floor saying, “Wanna play cards? You can be the one-eyed Jack.” Twenty pairs of eyes turned in their direction.

“That’s enough you jerk!” That, came from sweet little Katie. Blue eyes glaring, she growled, “I’m so tired of you bullying people. Everybody. Not only people with brains, (she glanced at Claire), but anybody you want, even little kids. You don’t have respect for anything or anybody. I’m sick of it and you can slither back into your hole and rot!”

Nobody would ever expect an outburst like that from Katie, let alone shouting at Robbie in front of his classmates.

The silence was deafening. Mr. Mooney strolled back into the room. School was closing early.

Claire looked at me, “Sherrie, we gotta get that eye back! I didn’t expect that from Katie.”

“How are we going to do that?”

Claire leaned in. “We can grab it. We’ll be leaving anyway.”

“But...”

“Don’t worry. Everybody’s fussing about the storm. Grab the box and get into the elevator.”

“But...” I stammered.

“It has to be now,” continued Claire, “ And we can’t get caught. Our timing is perfect. Just go.”

We got into the elevator and the doors closed as all the power in the building went out. We were in the dark.

After a few blinks and hiccups, the lights came back on, but the elevator was still. The doors opened. Hands reached in to pull us out. The box was knocked from Claire’s fingers.

“What’s this?” It was Katie. Claire acquired a sudden sunburn.

“It must’ve fallen from your backpack.”

Katie read the tag, then squinted and glanced at the crowd of students until she spotted Robbie.

“Hey, dirt-wad,” she yelled, “ You can keep your gift. That will be my present to you!”

Katie took aim. The box flew at Robbie. The three of us giggled and held our breath.

Robbie's expression as he opened it was a sight for sore eyes. Pun intended. It's hard to describe which shade of green he turned as he covered his mouth and ran for the restroom. We took the stairs and headed down to the bus.

At least for that school year, I never again heard Robbie tease or be mean to another person.