

Curse of the Golden Eye

The Color Chronicles: Book One

Lorraine Lander

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Cover Art: The cemetery picture on the cover is adapted from “The Cemetery Entrance” by Caspar David Friedrich, 1825.

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What is Sustainability?

Author's Notes and Dedication

Sustainability is about living our lives so that others, now and into the future, can also have good lives. It sounds simple, but actually can involve thinking in new ways and doing some things differently. The Color Chronicles series is dedicated to trying to help readers think about important ideas that may help them move to living more sustainably. Below are a few ideas to think about. If you'd like to know more, please check out my website www.lorrainelander.com.

The Good Life is an idea that's been around for centuries. It isn't really about just being happy, it's also about taking care of others and our planet. The idea of the Good Life has been studied by psychologists who've found that there are two types of happiness. The first kind is about laughing and having a good time, but the second kind turns out to be stronger and last longer. That kind comes from caring about others and not just ourselves.

Greed is a problem. There can be a lot of peer pressure on us to live our lives in ways that aren't very sustainable either for the planet or for other humans. Greed can also be a problem because we are bombarded by messages in the media about buying and owning things. We need to be careful consumers and think about how what we buy affects others and the planet. Think about the DIRNT group that Jessie's grandmother is starting and the questions they ask, "Do I really need that?" and ask others, "Do you really need that?"

Awareness is the first step toward being more sustainable. Learn as much as you can about where things come from and where they go when you're done with them. All humans are part of

interconnected systems, so try to learn about who else is in those systems with you and how your actions affect others.

The Color Chronicles series also raises awareness of important environmental problems like the need for water and clean sources of energy. Our planet is changing and there is much that we can do to help direct those changes in positive directions. I hope you'll join me in working toward living a more sustainable life and help others to do the same.

Curse of the Golden Eye

David:

My life was dull, boring and going nowhere, until I was cursed. Cursed might sound better than boring, but you should know that being cursed makes life really complicated. Boring is simple.

I'm not sure I'd recommend cursed, if you ever have the choice. And if you find yourself having to decide between staying cursed or going back to dull and boring, well, good luck, let me know what YOU decide.....

Chapter One

A quiet tapping caught my attention as I sat in my 6th grade social studies and doodled a sports car. Jessie Jenkins, a girl who sat next to me and the only real friend I'd made all year at my new school, was holding out five fingers. She tapped them again lightly on her desk, just loud enough for me to hear. I nodded slightly in her direction, but was momentarily confused. What did I miss?

Arrgh! It hit me. Grant, our teacher, must have said something really weird to earn a "5" from Jessie. I pictured judges holding up scores for teacher weirdness, like the old scores for figure skating where six was a perfect score. We hadn't heard a "5" all week. That was a long stretch for Grant. I tuned in for several seconds to what he was saying, but then it quickly faded to gibberish as I daydreamed about someday driving a Fiat like the one I was drawing on the back of my notebook. Mr. Grant's voice droned in the background, something about the Civil War. He could even make war sound boring.

The squeak of a marker on the white board and a faint chemical smell made me look up. Grant was writing something. At the same time there was a quiet "Oops" from next to me, followed by a soft splat of something hitting the floor under my desk. I glanced over at Jessie. She was leaning way out of her chair, reaching toward whatever had fallen.

"I can't reach," she whispered after a few seconds, giving me a pleading look.

I moved my lips just enough so she could read them. "I'll get it." A quick glance told me Grant was still busy writing. I leaned over and took a look under my desk. I couldn't see anything at first.

I sat back up and gave Jessie my best puzzled look. She mouthed the words, "Way under."

Okay. I put my hand down, feeling around on the floor near my feet. I felt nothing at first. Then my fingers bumped into something cool and a little slimy. I grabbed it and straightened up quickly. Then I slipped my hand under the desktop. A quick "recon" glance in Grant's direction showed he was still writing, so I took a look. It was a green-brown blob. I turned it over to get a better look, but still couldn't figure out what it was.

Just then Grant must have turned around because I heard, "David?"

I looked up quickly. "Ah, yes, Mr. Grant?"

"David, why don't you come up to the board and write three causes of the Civil War for us?"

I froze for a second. Did I have a choice? No. So, I closed my fingers over the blob and stood, but then hesitated. I tried to act normal, well, as normal as I was able. I knew if Grant found out about the thing in my hand, he'd take it away and Jessie'd probably never get it back.

I stared at Grant and he was staring back at me. A few seconds ticked by. "IT," the thing in my hand, began to feel warm, further distracting me from figuring out how to get out of going

to the board right then. Then IT seemed to move like it was alive. I tightened my grip, not wanting to drop it.

Grant tipped his head and continued to study me over the top of his wire-rimmed glasses. I kept standing waiting for him to make the next move. IT got hot and began moving so much it almost got out again. I tried to focus and remember what he had asked me.

“Causes of the Civil War? Up on the board.” Grant repeated, as if he read my mind.

Think of something or make something up, I thought, but my mind was blank. “People were fighting each other?” I blurted out.

Grant gave a dry laugh. “Nice try, but why were they fighting each other?”

I shrugged, hoping he’d move to his next victim.

Grant went on. “Maybe you can write the causes for us, even if you can’t explain them? I see you’re doing a lot of writing on the back of your notebook today. Perhaps you’d like to copy what you’ve got there.”

I glanced down at my sports car doodle. “Ah, ah,....” I managed to stammer out. How could I go to the board with this squirmy thing in my hand? I definitely wasn’t copying my sports car up there either.

“Yes, David, were you trying to say something?”

“Ah, I guess not, Mr. Grant. The Civil War just seems so complicated to me,” I said, giving my best “confused” face. IT started to feel wet, making it even harder to hold. I could feel icky, underarm sweat starting to soak my shirt.

Grant studied me for a few more seconds, then shook his head slightly and let out a disgusted sigh. “Well, Mr. Johnson, I don’t think the Civil War is all that complicated. I do think it’s clear you’ve not been listening. And even more obvious, not doing the assigned reading. I’d like to see you after class.”

Several students snickered.

“Sit down. Let’s see if someone else knows the answer,” Grant said.

I sat down and wondered what the average number of times an average kid like me was asked to stay after class. If I’d known, maybe I could have messed up more at the beginning of the school year and gotten them all over with. Then I’d be relaxing right now.

As Grant turned his attention to a kid on the other side of the room, I decided it was safe to check out the squirmy thing. It wasn’t moving any more now that I’d sat down. I slowly opened my fingers and looked. In the dim light under the desk, all I could see was a glistening green and brown, now lifeless, blob.

I jiggled my hand a little to try to wake it up. Nothing. My stomach knotted up. Did I kill it with squeezing?

Just then Jessie whispered, “Give it back.”

I quickly handed it over. “Sorry,” I whispered, just in case I’d messed it up.

The class dragged. Grant was going on about this and that. I couldn’t concentrate, thinking

about the thing Jessie dropped. Then my hand began to itch right where IT had felt wet. I took a look and was surprised to see little sparkly bits of gold stuff on my hand, so I brushed them off. That's when I saw that there was a bump right where I'd touched IT, an itchy little bump at the base of my little finger. I scratched it, but that only made it itch more. I finally shoved my hand in my pocket, even though if Grant looked in my direction it was going to be even more obvious that I wasn't taking notes.

A faint hum caught my attention, like it always did, just before electricity set off the end of class bell. My body relaxed at the sound. The room filled with the clatter and rumble of books closing, bodies jostling, and desks sliding as kids hurried to escape. I gathered my binder, then looked over toward Jessie. She was already gone. It always amazed me how fast she could get out of a classroom.

I headed toward the door and was almost out into the hall, when I heard, "Mr. Johnson, where do you think you're going?"

I paused in midstride and spun around. Grant was sitting at his desk tapping a pencil on his grade book, staring at me. I almost forgot about staying after class! What an idiot I was.

I approached his desk, holding my breath.

"David, why--?"

I stopped paying attention almost immediately and hung my head, looking ashamed. I'd practiced ashamed in front of the mirror a few times and thought I was pretty good at it. And it had gotten me out of big trouble several times since then. Besides, I knew if I nodded once in a while, I didn't really need to listen. I kept worrying what that thing was that Jessie dropped and if there was a connection to the itchy bump on my hand.

After a few minutes, Grant began to wind down. So I nodded more often and mumbled how sorry I was. If I had learned one thing in dealing with teachers it was this: when in trouble, don't actually admit to anything. Just tell them you're sorry and say it won't happen again. Whatever it was! *See*, if you say it won't happen again, they always let you off. Sometimes even when it does happen again, you can still say it won't and they again let you off. Adults can be so weird, sometimes, like that. Once I figured this out, teacher lectures went more smoothly.

Mr. Grant sighed. "David, your records from your old school suggest you could be a great student. I can't understand why you're doing such mediocre work."

"I don't know, either," I said, keeping my head down. I told myself not to say anything more. He's almost done, don't get him started again.

"Well, I don't know what to do with you...." Mr. Grant shook his head, looking frustrated.

I held my breath, waiting for him to finish.

"I have no choice. I'll going to request an end-of-year, parent-teacher conference." Grant waved his hand toward the door. "You can go."

I momentarily froze. No choice? Parent-teacher conference? Arrgh! My stomach did a flip flop. This was worse than detention. Visions of lectures from my parents and grounding to the

house for the rest of my life flashed through my mind.

Feeling like I weighed a ton, I dragged myself out of the classroom and down the hall. It was lunch period, so I plodded toward the cafeteria, studying the gouges and scratches in the ugly gray-brown pattern of the fake tile flooring. I sighed. At least 6th graders got to eat at a reasonable time. The hall was mostly empty, just a few stragglers muttering into their lockers before banging them shut and hurrying off.

Thoughts jumbled in my head. What would happen when Mom and Dad talked with Grant? More important, what was I going to say when they got home from the conference? Maybe Dad would make me try that new virtual classroom software that his company was developing for struggling students. Avatars of perky teachers sounded like torture. And if they made me use it during summer vacation time, only two weeks away, my summer would be totally messed up.

I shook my head as I walked, hoping that Jessie would have some ideas. Even more important I needed to find out more about that thing that made my hand itch.

Chapter Two

As I walked, I began to hear the roar of voices mixed with clinks of dishes and silverware and the occasional crash of a tray hitting the floor. It wasn't hard to find the cafeteria, you just needed to follow the noise. And, of course, there was the smell. I sniffed the air; smelled like boiled hot dogs with mac and cheese.

At the door of the cafeteria, I found new healthy eating posters on the double door entrance. I smiled as I looked closer. Someone had doodled a small drawing of a worm on the picture of dancing apples and a few bugs in the salad, next to the smiling milk carton. The cafeteria was supposed to serve us healthy food, but mainly that meant we had a choice of an apple or brownie for dessert. Most kids took the brownie.

I skipped the line and went directly to the tables to find Jessie, who was sitting in her usual place by the windows. How'd she always manage to get such a good spot? I mean, there wasn't much of a view, just the dusty yellow back doors of dozens of school buses, parked and waiting for the end of the day, but sitting near the window made it slightly easier for us to hear each other.

Jessie was easy to spot among the other girls because she was different. She was *really* colorful. Today she had on a purple sweatshirt, a long necklace of gold beads, and a fluffy pink skirt. Her dark brown hair had purple streaks that matched her shirt.

As I walked up, Jessie began to laugh. "I couldn't believe the look on your face when you picked up the gimlit and Grant called on you."

I checked the chair across from her to make sure there was no food smeared on it before plopping down. "What's a gimlit?" I asked. Here I was worried that I'd hurt the thing and Jessie was laughing like a hyena.

Jessie held out her hand showing me a squishy green and brown piece of rubber. "This is a gimlit. Somehow it responds to the warmth of your hand and the pressure of being squeezed, then it moves like it's alive. I think it's one of those joke shop things."

"Really? What joke shop? Did you drop it on purpose?"

Jessie stopped laughing and shook her head, although she still had a big smile. "No, of course not. It slipped out of my hands." She shrugged. "I don't know how it works. My brother got it at a garage sale. The woman there told him it was magic, but I don't believe that. Joey's obviously making things up, trying to see how gullible I am." She held her hand out closer. "Here. Look."

I shook my head. "Magic? Ha, ha. Another one of Joey's not so funny jokes, I'm sure. I'm not touching that thing again. When I picked it up in class it got hot, then was squirming in my hand. I almost dropped it. You're lucky I didn't because then Grant would have taken it away and put it in one of his desk drawers, never to be seen again. Besides, it gave me this itchy

bump—or, at least I think it did.” I showed Jessie the bump.

She leaned closer and studied it, then said, “It looks like an eye. Actually it looks a *lot* like an Egyptian kind of eye. That’s really cool!”

An Egyptian eye? I took another look and she was right. The bump was oval shaped and seemed to have a dark center circle for the pupil. There were lines around it that radiated out from the eye and into the normal lines on my palm. My stomach clenched up as I looked at it, so I closed my fingers over the bump.

Jessie put the gimlet on the table and it just sat there. I leaned a little closer and thought it had some of that same gold powdery stuff that I’d had found on my hand. I didn’t want to look like a wuss, so I took out a pencil and poked at it. Nothing happened. Why’d I think it was alive? Now it just looked like a piece of rubber.

“Joey let you borrow this and bring it to school?”

“Nah, I snuck it out of his room just before I came. He took my wireless mouse, again, so I took something of his. This seemed the most interesting. Social studies was the first chance I’d had to look at it.”

I stared at Jessie. “You really are insane. Aren’t you worried what’ll happen if Joey finds out you took it?”

“Well, yeah, a little.” Jessie reached over and straightened the gimlet so it looked like a tadpole with a tail, rather than a blob. “See it looks like something that used to be alive, maybe a kind of fish.”

I shook my head at the thought that it was dead stuff. “Remember the time Joey thought we were listening to his phone calls to that girl? He booby trapped the door of your room with newspaper and shave cream. Then when we opened the door, we got plastered. He not only took a picture, but wrote a story about it for the school paper about how the suction of the door opening propels the shave cream and all that. Like it was some kind of science project rather than revenge.”

“Yeah, I know. But we *were* listening to his phone calls.”

“Yes, and he caught us, remember? Got us good.”

“Okay. Don’t worry so much.”

“Well, it’s your funeral, I’ll just try to stay out of the way and watch what happens.”

Joey was in 10th grade. High schooler! I’d learned to avoid them most of the time. Something happened to kids when they moved to the building next door and the results weren’t good. My sister was clear evidence of that. She hadn’t been the same since high school and cheerleaders and boyfriends. Joey was weird, but really interesting, especially with his job working as a reporter for the school newspaper. I followed Jessie’s lead and we kept an eye on him.

“This is the box it came in.” Jessie held up a small, white plastic box, the kind that looked waterproof and about the size of a deck of playing cards. On the top was a hand-written label

which read, "Specimen #256. Gimlit."

I studied the label. "Look. I think something else was written here before. I can't figure out the first word, but the second looks like 'Orb'."

Jessie nodded. "Yeah, someone must have reused the box."

I looked in the box and saw more gold powdery stuff. I pointed it out to Jessie. "It looks like gold glitter or something in here."

She shrugged. "Yeah, like I said, they must have reused the box. Listen, Joey's going back to the garage sale after school today to buy something else. How about coming over and we can try to see what he gets? You know, if he'll let us. This looks kind of cool, so maybe there's more interesting stuff there."

"Sure." I poked the gimlit carefully one more time.

"Did Grant give you detention?" Jessie asked.

"Nah, worse than that. He's going to talk with my parents about my 'not working up to my potential' and being 'mediocre.' Do you think 'mediocre' is worse than 'average'?"

Jessie flashed me a sympathetic look. "Gee, David, I'm not sure. It does sound a little worse."

I shrugged and shook my head. "Who knows? Anyway, all this is going to happen soon. So, I'm trying to figure out what I'm going to say when they come home. I was looking forward to summer vacation being relaxing. I'm worried this could mess that up."

"Think they'll ground you when they hear?"

I scratched the bump on my hand a couple times. "I don't know. Maybe they won't care that I'm doing mediocre work. Sometimes I don't think they care at all how well I do in school, only what I wear and how much I use my cell phone. They worry about me fitting in and weird stuff like that."

Jessie laughed.

I told myself that I should stop scratching my hand, so I put it in my jean's pocket. "Listen, what do you think I should do about the bump?"

She shrugged. "Most things like that just seem to go away. So, unless it gets worse, I wouldn't worry about it. Why don't you get something to eat?"

"Do you think it's okay if I touch food with my hand that has the bump? It's on my right hand, which is the one I use."

Jessie shook her head like I was hopeless. "Go on. If you're worried, wash your hands first."

I hurried to the lunch monitor and got a pass to use the restroom. There wasn't much time since I was already late for lunch. When I got to the sink I pumped a whole bunch of the smelly green stuff that was supposed to be soap, but which some of us thought was toxic sludge. I rubbed my hands together really well, then rinsed them. The lighting wasn't that good by the sink, so I darted over to the window and held up my hand to take a good look. The Egyptian eye stared out at me from my hand and there seemed to be a golden glow about it. I squinched my

eyes shut, then opened them and took another look. I brought my hand closer to my face. There was no doubt about it. The eye was glowing faintly.

Chapter Three

I quickly rushed back to the sink and ran water on the eye. Then I scrubbed it with my other hand, not trusting the weird green soap this time. After running water on it, I took another look. The glow now seemed gone. It must have been my imagination, I told myself, over and over, as I dried my hand. I was sure that a blob couldn't make a mystic eye symbol on my hand much less one that would glow.

I sneaked my cell phone out during my last period study hall and texted my mom that I was going to Jessie's after school. The battery died just as I saw her response to be home for dinner by 6. When the final bell rang, I joined Jessie in front of the school and we grabbed our bikes and rode to her house.

Parked outside Jessie's was a black, dirt bike that belonged to George, Joey's best friend. He was a hulk-like guy that I tried to keep away from as much as possible because I was sure he could flatten me if he wanted. I left a good distance between his bike and mine, just in case.

The Jenkins lived in an older section of the city. Jessie's house was big with lots of windows and three porches. Jessie's grandmother, who lived with them, was sitting on the front porch, rocking in one of the mismatched chairs. She was retired and was always telling us stories about jobs she used to have, like when she was a waitress, then an actress, then a construction worker, then a detective. I questioned sometimes just how many jobs she'd really had and how much she was making up. Jessie's grandma drove an old, dark blue, Fiat convertible, model 128, though, which I thought was really cool. Everyone called her "Grandma," even me.

"Hi, Grandma," I said and sat down.

Jessie smiled and pointed. "David, look at Grandma's sweatshirt."

I took a look. It read "DIRNT" on the front. Grandma turned enough so I could see it read "DYRNT" on the back. "What are 'DIRNT' and 'DYRNT' and aren't they pronounced the same?" I asked.

Grandma smiled and nodded. "'DIRNT' stands for 'DO I REALLY NEED THAT?'" and 'DYRNT' stands for 'DO YOU REALLY NEED THAT?'" And yes, they're pronounced the same. It's a new environmental group I'm working on with some students over at the university. You know people are getting better about recycling, but there are three "R's" – reduce, reuse, and recycle. DIRNT is focusing on the first two R's." Grandma took a sip of her tea. "Jessie and I have been talking about bringing the DIRNT group to your school. In fact, you could work with us on getting the message out about how it can help the environment to be more careful about what we buy."

"Sure, I'd like to help," I replied, but was asking myself what Dad and his sales company would think about making less money.

Grandma leaned forward like she was studying me. "You feeling different today, David?"

"Not really. Why?"

"Your aura looks different. It's got some gold in it. It's starting to look like a hero's aura."

Grandma liked to tell me I had this colorful glow around me that she called an aura. I think it was her way of cheering me up.

"Hero's aura?" I told her, "Ha, ha."

Grandma smiled and said, "Never mind. Just thought I'd ask."

"Hey, Grandma," Jessie said, as she looked at me. "David's got this weird bump on his hand that looks like an eye. Can you take a look at it?"

"Sure," she replied.

Tentatively, I held out my hand and she took it in both of hers, tipping it toward the light and taking a good close look. "Hmm, it looks like a mystic eye."

Mystic eye! My mouth went dry.

She nodded and let go of my hand. "Yep, just like something we used to call a mystic eye back when I did a little archeology. It could be a sign of something."

"L-L-Like what?" I stammered out, wondering if a rare disease could make an eye symbol show up on your hand.

She shrugged. "Maybe something ancient, probably Middle Eastern."

I thought back to the gimlet. It didn't seem like it fit either of those descriptions.

"Ah, does it look gold to you?" I asked, shoving it a little closer.

She shook her head. "Not really," she said, then stood up. "Sorry kids, I've got some work to do in the greenhouse before I head to my class. My friend Mark wants some hot peppers for a new dish he's cooking this weekend. As far as the eye thing, it'll probably fade away." She went down the steps and then paused at the bottom and turned back. "Keep an eye on it," she said and was chuckling to herself as she walked toward the back of the house.

"Very funny," I muttered under my breath and closed my hand tight. I hoped that Grandma was right. I didn't want anyone to think I was a hypochondriac always worrying about strange diseases. "Didn't you get your homework done in study hall last period?" I asked, looking at how thin and heavy Jessie's backpack looked

Jessie nodded. "No, of course not. There's hours of stuff to do."

"Mine's done."

Jessie raised her eyebrows. "When did you have time?"

"In study hall."

Jessie shook her head in disbelief. "You finished ALL our homework in 45 minutes? How can you do that and do a good job?"

"It's good enough. Most of what we do is so boring, I just do what I have to do. It's not like my parents care much. They worry if I'm a "typical" enough teenager, so why should they worry if my grades are only average? Isn't that typical?"

"I hope you're right come conference time when Mr. Grant talks with them. Anyway, I think you could do better than that." Jessie looked down toward the floor and said quietly, "You're really smart."

"Nah, you can be the smart one. I'll play the dumb sidekick. You're the one who always does a great job, gets all A's, and hardly seems to break into a sweat to do it. You help everyone when they have problems with homework."

"I just do what the teachers ask and do the best job I can."

"So do I."

Jessie shook her head slightly and frowned, but said nothing.

I leaned forward in my chair. "Listen to this. I forgot to tell you that when I got home yesterday my mom was cleaning the bathroom with a snorkel and scuba mask to not inhale the fumes, which is clearly at least 5.8 or even 5.9 for weirdness. Maybe it's even a perfect score of 6.0. Then my dad gave me a lecture on not using my cell phone enough. I think that's at least in the middle 5's. After that, he gave me twenty dollars to buy junk food. My parents are so weird. Even stranger than that, they think they're *normal*."

Jessie laughed. "I don't know. I think mine are weirder."

"Yes, but yours are weird in a cool way."

"If you say so, but you know their scores are just as high."

We went inside. I thought again of how much I liked Jessie's house. One room seemed to open into another. There was a living room, but there was also a parlor with something called "pocket" doors and "wainscoting," which I'd been surprised to find was a type of wooden paneling. There was wallpaper on the walls and faded oriental rugs spread around the wooden floors, bits of color everywhere, like one of those paint shakers at the hardware store had gone crazy. It was nothing like the "neutral" decorating my mom had done in our new house. Jessie's house always smelled interesting, too, sometimes of foods cooking, sometimes of flowers, and often of smells that I couldn't identify. I found myself relaxing as soon as I walked through the door.

Jessie stopped as we stepped inside. "Dad's home early from the restaurant and is working on a project. Do you want to check it out?"

"Sure. I'm starving."

We walked into a large kitchen painted in bright yellow. "Hi, Dad," Jessie said, with a smile.

"Hi, Mr. Jenkins," I told him, and sat down at the old wooden table. I traced my finger over a big gouge near my seat. Jessie said there was a funny story for most of the dings and dents, like it was a good thing. Jessie's mom called it *wabe sabi*, some Japanese word about accepting imperfection. I thought maybe that I should move to Japan since they were more cool about things not being perfect.

Mr. Jenkins was working at the end of the table on a fancy sculpture of vegetables in a large white bowl. It vaguely resembled a herd of sheep grazing on a hillside with a few trees

here and there. Looking more closely I realized the sheep were pieces of cauliflower, the trees were broccoli, and the green hillside was piles of lettuce pieces.

Wiping his hands on the white apron tied around his waist, Mr. Jenkins smiled at us. "I can't seem to decide between the stream in my food sculpture being blue or clear. I can use a recipe for making blue coloring from cabbage and baking soda so it'll be healthy, but then I can't use vinegar or lemon in the dressing. I'm worried about the taste. Want to be my taste testers?"

Jessie smiled. "Sure. How about you, David?"

I wasn't so sure about blue salad dressing with cabbage and baking soda; but, not having my usual after school snack meant I was hungry. "Sure, Mr. Jenkins. Give me some of both."

"Okay." Mr. Jenkins poured a river of blue liquid down one side of the hill and a river of clear liquid down the other, then he laughed, "Help yourself. A little later, I'll going to work on some fruit sculptures. Feel free to stop back in about an hour."

My stomach growled, as I asked, "What's it going to look like?"

"I'm not sure. It seems too common to just do flowers made of fruit. I was hoping to make bugs out of the different things, like use blackberries to make ants. If I just get a few more ideas together for menu items, I think I'll be able to go ahead with my plans to open my own restaurant. You know, a place where people can make things from food, then eat them."

"It's a great idea, Dad," Jessie said. "I can't wait till you open your own place."

"Me, either. Sorry I don't have more ingredients for you guys to take a stab at making something, but help yourself to the salad. You can think of yourselves as giants eating the countryside," he said and was laughing as he walked into the pantry.

I eagerly put some of the salad in a bowl, mainly avoiding the blue dressing. Jessie didn't seem to notice and took equal amounts of both. I picked up a fork, and sat back down at the table. "This is great," I mumbled between bites.

"Great job, Dad," Jessie told her father, as he walked back into the room with his arms full of different fruits. I didn't recognize most of them.

"Thanks, Mr. Jenkins," I said between chewing, "the food's great."

Jessie and I got up and walked into the hallway, but she stopped me at the bottom of the stairs. "Joey and George are upstairs, so they must be back from the garage sale. So, use stealth mode, we don't want him and George to know we're nearby."

We tiptoed up the stairs and peaked through the upper wooden railing toward Joey's bedroom. The door was still closed, so we carefully slipped past and down the hall to Jessie's room at the end. Inside, I looked around to see what might be new. Jessie had a huge four poster bed in one corner with yards of mosquito netting hanging from the overhead supports. There was a bench in a bay window that faced the backyard where she could sit and read.

Jessie walked over to her desk. "Over here. I want to show you something."

I approached and she pointed to an aquarium. Inside swam dozens of very tiny fish.

“What are they?”

“I’m breeding convicts.”

“Convicts?”

“They’re a type of cichlid, a kind of tropical fish. They’re hard to raise, so it’s pretty cool that the parents hatched this many from the eggs they laid. Look at how protective they are.”

I noticed two larger fish swimming around, herding the little ones this way, then that.

“This is amazing. You’re amazing. You’re so lucky you have a lot of talent. You can build computers and you know a ton about reptiles and fish. You’re good at so many things and I’m not good at anything.”

Jessie gave me a sympathetic look. “Well, you might be a late bloomer. My parents think I’m a late bloomer since they read this child development article, because I haven’t developed a single overwhelming talent or passion yet. It said something about a spark that ignites an eternal flame when kids turn ten or eleven, then they have this special talent and passion for one thing.”

Talent and passion? Sparks? Going down in flames like a crashing fighter jet was more the way my life was going.

Jessie scowled. “Besides I’m a homebody that hates to go outside or leave the house, mostly I also don’t finish things. Look at the computer stuff that I was working on. It’s just sitting there. I’m into fish now and a new project on journal writing that I started last weekend.”

The sound of loud, hysterical laughter burst through the wall between Jessie and Joey’s room. Jessie turned and looked toward the noise. “Wow! It sounds like they got something really awesome at the garage sale.”

“How can we find out what it is?”

“Let me think a minute.” Jessie looked off into space for a couple of seconds, then suggested, “Let’s try listening at his door.”

“Ah, okay –”

Leaving Jessie’s room quietly, we tiptoed down the hall until we were just outside of Joey’s room. I was about to put my ear near the door, when there was a loud crash and the door rattled like a heavy object had hit it. Jessie and I jumped back.

I heard someone laughing say, “Don’t break the door.”

A couple seconds went by while Jessie and I stared at each other, trying to decide what to do. Suddenly, there was another loud crash as the door flew open. Joey fell into the hall laughing.

Chapter Four

Joey scrambled to his feet, then noticed Jessie and me standing there. He was wearing a pair of kid's pink-framed sunglasses with pink lenses that barely fit him. They were tilted to the side from when he hit the floor.

"What are you two looking at?" He asked in a weird "higher than normal" tone of voice, as he flashed us a big smile, straightening the sunglasses.

Jessie and I stared back.

Joey nodded a couple of times, like he was thinking about something. "Hey, I have an idea. Come into my room. I want to show you both something I think you'll really like."

I looked at Jessie. She had a puzzled look on her face, but I took a step toward the door of Joey's room.

Jessie grabbed me and held me back, then asked, "What are you and George doing?"

Joey gave us both another big smile. "Just having a good time *that* we want to share with my favorite sister and her best friend."

"I'm your only sister," was Jessie's terse response. She had a concerned look on her face, like she wasn't sure what to do.

I looked back and forth from her to Joey, thinking that the pink sunglasses looked odd on him, given he was sixteen, and close to six feet tall, like Jessie's father. And they especially didn't seem to go with the bulldog-dripping-saliva-from-snarling-teeth, hockey-team logo on his sweatshirt.

Joey walked over and grabbed me by the front of my shirt and pulled me into his room. "Come on. What have you got to lose? Don't be chicken. George and I are having a really good time with these new glasses and want you to try them, too."

I turned to Jessie. "It's okay. Let's see what's going on. I want to know." I let Joey lead me into the room. Jessie reluctantly followed.

I loved Joey's room. The few times I'd been allowed inside, I thought it was as cool as Jessie's. It had a big window that faced the street with a place to sit where you could read or look out. The best part was an old wooden desk with a chair that swiveled. I noticed a faint smell of pizza. Looking around, I saw a crushed, cardboard pizza box from the local deli on the edge of the dresser.

Joey sat down at the desk and began swinging back and forth in his chair and silently watching us. I looked at Jessie, who was frowning and shaking her head. Then I noticed a colorful box on his bed.

Joey smiled and nodded in the direction of the bed. "Go ahead, take a look."

I glanced at Jessie, who shrugged, so I walked over to look inside.

"RRAAAHHH!!!!" Suddenly George popped out from behind the bed yelling and waving

his arms at me.

I jumped and George began laughing. George was shorter than Joey and more muscular. I knew he played fullback for the high school football team. He was also wearing a pair of the strange, kid's sunglasses with pink lenses that fit even tighter on him than on Joey. I started to glare at George for scaring me and a quick thought of revenge flitted through my head. I was curious what the other football players would think of the pink glasses? If Jessie and I could get a picture, we could use it against them.

Just then George stepped close and slapped me hard on the back. He asked in a loud voice, "How're ya doin' today?" And then he laughed some more. I quickly gave up the idea of blackmailing George about the pink glasses, reminded of how strong he was.

"What are you laughing at?" Jessie asked, looking at Joey and George, a frown on her face.

"It's the rose-colored glasses," Joey answered between laughing and giggling. "Don't you guys know anything? Rose-colored glasses make everything look good and make the wearer happy about everything they see. That's why we're happy to see you two. So, why don't you try on a pair?"

Jessie and I looked at each other.

"Where'd you get them?" Jessie asked.

"From the garage sale on Emerson Street. Ha, ha, ha. Here, just try on a pair for a minute."

Jessie pulled me over near the door and whispered, "I'm suspicious, but something is clearly making them happy. Maybe the glasses are working. What do you think?"

"It could be another of Joey's tricks. Do you want to go first?"

"I guess so." Jessie sighed. "He is *my* brother. Yeah, I'll go first." She walked over to the bed and reached into the box. Pulling out a pair of pink sunglasses with pink lenses, she turned them this way and that before she slowly unfolded the sides and slid them on. She immediately began to smile as she looked around the room. Then she began to laugh. "This is great," she giggled.

Jessie walked around the room studying things and chuckling. Then she stopped at Joey's desk and began looking at the school newspaper lying there. She pointed at a picture and laughed loudly. "Mr. Stout is so funny."

I thought to myself, this has to be a trick. Mr. Stout is definitely not funny.

"Jessie, how're you feeling?" I asked.

Jessie glanced briefly in my direction as if she couldn't take her eyes off the newspaper. "This is so cool. Go on, David." Jessie could barely could it get out between giggles.

It wouldn't hurt to try a pair, I decided. They all seemed so happy and they were just silly kid's sunglasses. I walked back to the bed and looked in the box. At first, I didn't see anything. It looked empty.

I turned to Joey. "There're no more glasses left."

Joey shook his head like I was hopeless. "There has to be. There's supposed to be four pair.

It says so on the box.”

“Look again,” George said, then the three began to ignore me as they laughed about the school paper.

I took another look and noticed a cardboard piece was loose in the bottom. Moving it to the side, there did appear to be another pair of sunglasses. I pulled them out. I was excited until I noticed that something was wrong. They did have pink-colored frames like the others, but there was a gold-tinted lens on the left side, and no lens on the right.

“Hey, something’s wrong with these glasses,” I called to the others.

They glanced at me and laughed. “Everything’s cool, man. Chill out,” said Joey, spinning in his desk chair.

“No, these don’t match. And the lenses aren’t rose-colored.”

Joey sat there smiling. “Just put them on.”

I noticed that at least the other two had stopped laughing, although their smiles were so big they looked like clowns at the circus.

Well, what did I have to lose? I opened the glasses and put them on. Everything looked strange with one side being gold and the other side clear. I wasn’t feeling like smiling or like laughing. Something wasn’t right. I turned to the others.

“Hey, these don’t work.”

Joey, George, and Jessie looked at me with the broken glasses and began to laugh hysterically.

“Come on, guys. This isn’t funny. How about letting me try a pair that works?”

They ignored me.

“Jessie. How about giving me a turn?”

Jessie laughed even harder, which didn’t seem like her usually nice self. Just then Joey spun in his chair with his feet stretched straight out in the air, knocking George into Jessie. George and Jessie both fell toward me.

“Watch out!” I said, but too late. George’s hand went out and hit my shoulder, knocking me to the ground. Jessie fell on top of me, with George on top of her. The sunglasses smashed into my face. I saw a bright flash of gold light, then felt a sharp pain in my left eye before everything went dark.

Chapter Five

Yeowww! My eye hurt and my head was pulsing like it would explode. I just couldn't seem to move either. I tried to say something, but only a moan came out.

I could hear George and Joey laughing loudly. What's so funny, I wondered, in a daze.

I was barely able to hear Jessie say to Joey and George, "George, get off me! Joey, George, stop laughing and take off your glasses! I think something's wrong with David!"

A couple seconds passed and the pain got a little better.

"Hey, man. Are you okay?" I heard Joey ask.

I'd been hardly breathing, without realizing it. I took a deep breath and managed to answer. "My eye hurts. And I have a headache."

"Let me see your eye," he said.

Then I heard George say, "Joey, your mom's going to kill us if someone got hurt."

I felt someone carefully pull the glasses off my face. "Open your eyes so I can see what's going on."

I slowly opened my eyes to find the three of them leaning over me, looking worried. The more I opened my eyes, the bigger their eyes got. Then they all gasped and jumped back.

Jessie said, "Whoa!"

While Joey and George added, "Cool," in unison.

"What?" I asked.

Jessie hesitated, then said, "Well, uh, your eye looks kind of funny."

"It feels weird, kind of cold. What do you mean 'funny?'"

She responded, "Well, it's sort of a different color than it used to be." As if to make sure, she leaned her head to the left to get a better look. Then she nodded with a puzzled look on her face. "Yeah, it's definitely different."

"What color? Like a black eye?" Actually I thought the few "black eyes" I'd seen were more purplish-red or faded to yellowish-brown, but never really looked black.

"It's gold."

I started to sit up, felt dizzy, and lay back down.

"What's wrong?" Jessie asked.

"Just a little dizzy. Can you help me sit up?"

She grabbed my arm and Joey grabbed the other and got me sitting in the desk chair. My head felt light and my eye felt heavy. The room slowly came into better focus.

"How's my eye now?"

"Same." Jessie said, as they all continued staring at my eye.

"Let me see," I told her.

"Are you sure?"

“Of course. Why not?”

Jessie turned the chair toward a mirror hanging on the wall. I leaned forward to check out my eye.

I was surprised to see that the skin around my left eye looked fine. Then I noticed the eye itself. IT WAS GOLD!! The iris of my left eye, the part that used to be plain, boring brown, was gold!...? Shiny, metallic gold!

I looked again. I blinked. I squinched my eyes and looked again. Still gold!

I turned and looked at Jessie. “What happened?”

“Don’t look at me,” George said, backing away.

“Me, neither,” said Joey, shaking his head.

“I think it had something to do with the glasses you put on,” said Jessie slowly. “The lens was the same color gold.”

I looked closely at Jessie. “Your eyes aren’t pink like the glasses you had on.”

“Well, your glasses were different. Maybe it had something to do with your falling down and hitting your head when you were wearing them. Or because only one side had a lens or something like that.”

“Where are the glasses?” Joey asked, searching around on the floor.

George bent and picked up the glasses I’d worn or what was left of them. They were still missing one lens, but the lens on the left that had been gold was now clear.

Jessie went and got the box the sunglasses came in, dumping the content on the desk. Several pieces of paper fell out. She picked them up and began to read them out loud one by one. “This one says, ‘Danger, to avoid injury, do not engage in strenuous activity while wearing these glasses.’”

She read another. “All warranties or claims of usefulness are nullified if glasses are damaged. Do not wear if glasses become damaged, serious injuries may result.”

“Effects of happy thoughts from rose-colored glasses are temporary and for entertainment purposes only. Side effects of prolonged use may include dizziness and headache.”

A small piece of yellow paper with a corner missing was the last that Jessie picked up and read. “Log 4-235: Gold dust from the Golden Orb artifact forms the basis of the transparent gold layer and should contribute to a good test of my hypothesis since--”

“Since what?” I asked.

“That’s all it says,” Jessie explained. “The rest of the page is missing.”

Joey looked closer at the glasses. “Look it has a little label which says specimen #235.”

I felt really weak and sick to my stomach. What’ll happen to my eye? Will I go blind? One gold eye. I’m a freak. I pictured walking into school on Monday with one gold eye. Maybe no one will notice, I mean, who really looks that closely? Ha! Of course people would notice. Worse than that, though, even before Monday, Mom and Dad will notice for sure. And my sister Denise will definitely make fun of me--. Arrgh!

“What should I do?” I asked the others. “Should I put the glasses back on? Hit myself in the head and see if the gold comes back out?” The more I thought about deliberately hitting my head as hard as when I hit the floor with Jessie and George on top of me, the more I didn’t like that idea, especially since I still had a headache.

There was a long silence. Jessie finally suggested, “Why don’t you go into the bathroom and try washing it out?”

“Sure, that’s probably what I need, to rinse it out,” I said, glad to have something to try. I went across the hall to the bathroom and closed the door. Standing in front of the sink, I stared at my eye. The gold color was definitely inside my eye, but I turned on the faucet and splashed some water in it anyway. I dried my face and stared again. No change. I squinched my eye shut really tight, hoping to somehow push the gold back out of my eye, but it didn’t help. My eye was GOLD!