



Seeing Cinderella (mix)

By Jenny Lundquist

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Sixth grade is not going well for Calliope Meadow Anderson. Callie's hair is frizzy, her best friend, Ellen, is acting weird, and to top things off, she has to get glasses. And her new specs aren't even cute, trendy glasses—more like hideously large and geeky. But Callie soon discovers that her glasses have a special, magical perk: When she wears them, she can read people's thoughts. Crazy glasses aside, Callie has more drama to face when she's cast as the lead in the school play—and instead opts to be an understudy, giving the role of Cinderella to Ellen. Can Callie's magic glasses help her see her way to leading lady, or is she destined to stay in the background forever?

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Jenny Lundquist grew up in Huntington Beach, California, wearing glasses and wishing they had magic powers. They didn't, but they did help her earn a degree in Intercultural Studies at Biola University. Jenny has painted an orphanage in Mexico, taught English at a university in Russia, and hopes one day to write a book at a café in Paris. Jenny and her husband live in northern California with their two sons and Rambo, the world's whiniest cat.

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Seeing Cinderella

Chapter 1



Once there was a girl with hair the color of dead leaves, teeth the size of piano keys, freckles as big as polka dots, and eyes that couldn't see squat. Everyone laughed at her and called her Polka Dot. Poor Polka Dot felt like a total weirdo, and always wished a fairy godmother would appear and cut her some slack.

But that was just too darn bad, because fairy godmothers only care about beautiful girls with wicked stepmothers. So when Polka Dot spotted a fairy godmother resting on a park bench, she kept her wish simple and begged for better eyesight. Sweet naive Polka Dot, no one ever told her some fairy godmothers have ginormous attitude issues.

"I'm on a coffee break, kid," said the fairy godmother. "Get yourself some glasses and stop pestering me."

"Could you please stop writing in the car and talk to me?" Mom asked, flicking the turn signal and heading into the left lane.

"There's nothing to talk about," I answered, putting the finishing touches on my new story, "Polka Dot and the Cranky Fairy Godmother." "I don't want glasses. People who wear glasses get made fun of."

"Callie, we've been over this already. Your headaches are happening for a reason. It could be that you need glasses. A vision test won't take that long."

"You're right, it won't." I closed my journal and tucked it under my seat. No way was I showing up to Pacificview Middle School—my new prison, as of tomorrow—with nerd-tastic glasses on my face. With my freckles and crazy-frizzy hair, it would be like painting a target on my face and handing out bows and arrows to the student body. So last night, I'd come up with a plan—a way to make sure I didn't get stuck wearing glasses, no matter how bad my eyesight was.

I shifted in my seat and looked at Mom. "Dad said I should get contacts instead of glasses."

Mom's lips stretched so thin they practically disappeared. "If your father were around—other than via his cell phone—maybe we could afford contacts. But he's not."

"Mommy, when's Daddy coming home?" Sarah, my four-year-old sister, asked from the backseat.

Usually when Mom kicked Dad out only a couple of weeks passed before they made up. But he'd been gone for a month already. He was staying with a friend up in northern California until they worked things out.

"Mommy's not sure," Mom answered.

Sarah started singing to herself, and Mom and I were silent. These days it seemed like if we weren't fighting, we didn't have much to say to each other. Our conversations were usually limited to arguing about chores or exchanging phone messages. I thought about holding my breath until she asked me something—like how I was feeling about starting seventh grade, or if there were any boys I liked—but I figured I'd pass out first.

Mom turned the car into a weathered strip mall. Squished between a dry cleaners and a doughnut shop was a tiny store with the word OPTOMETRIST painted in white block letters across darkened glass.

"It looks creepy. Are you sure we're in the right place?" I asked as we got out of the car.

"It's not creepy. And I need to pick up a few things for my classroom." Mom pointed to a teacher supply store on the other side of the dry cleaners.

Mom handed me a blank check. Then she took Sarah's hand and headed toward the supply store. I stared at the optometrist sign. I'd been to this strip mall a million times with Mom and never noticed an eye doctor's office before. Hadn't the dry cleaners been next door to the doughnut shop? And what was up with the tinted windows?

A small bell jingled when I opened the door, and the inside was seriously weird-looking. Heavy purple drapes hung behind red velvet couches in the cramped waiting area. Beaded lamps cast shadows on the walls. A single dusty display case housed a small selection of glasses frames.

A plump woman sat behind a large wooden desk. Thick glasses hung from a beaded chain around her neck. "Are you Callie Anderson?" she asked, smiling.

"Yeah."

"I'm Mrs. Dillard. Dr. Ingram is running late. Why don't you pick out some frames—just in case—and we'll finish up after your exam?"

I nodded and wandered over to the display case. After trying on several dorky-looking frames, I handed the least gross ones (caramel colored with rhinestones dotting the sides) to Mrs. Dillard. I tried not to think about all the weird looks I'd get if my plan didn't work and I had to actually wear them.

I did not want attention. I got nervous around people about as often as a mouse got nervous around a hungry cat. I didn't know why. Neither of my parents were shy. Mom taught fifth grade; Dad said she spent her days bossing people around. And Dad sold industrial vacuums to businesses and stuff like that; Mom said he spent his days turning on the charm. So who knew where my shyness came from? Maybe I was just a genetic mutant.

“Callie Anderson?” a male voice asked. I turned. A man with a shiny bald head and a bushy gray beard smiled at me. He wore a white overcoat and thick black glasses. “I’m Dr. Ingram. I apologize for the delay.” He motioned to his office. “Follow me.”

After I settled into the examination chair, Dr. Ingram spent the next several minutes trying to blind me by flashing a white light into my eyes and asking me to blink.

“Do you like wearing glasses?” I asked.

“What, these?” Dr. Ingram tugged on his thick black frames. “Of course. They’re quite useful. They help me see who merely needs eyewear and who requires vision correction.”

“Aren’t they the same thing?” I asked, but Dr. Ingram didn’t answer.

“Excellent.” Dr. Ingram switched off the light. “Your eyes seem quite healthy. Now we shall check your vision.”

“I’m ready,” I said, smiling. “Bring it on.” I might have been a C-plus student (and that plus was only because of my A in English), but I knew how to study when it really mattered. Last night, I Googled the eye chart and memorized the whole thing—from the ginormous E at the top, to the microscopic D at the bottom. Twenty-twenty vision, here I come!

Dr. Ingram flipped a switch, and a projector turned on showing rows of increasingly smaller letters. But instead of the E, there was a G at the top. As I scanned the rest of the chart—the rows I could actually see, anyway—I realized the letters were completely different from the chart I memorized.

“Isn’t there another chart we can use?” I asked. “Like maybe one that starts with an E?”

“Do you mean the one with an E, F, P? Followed by a T, O, and S?” Dr. Ingram asked.

“Yeah, that’s the one. Except it’s not an S, it’s a T. There’s no S on that chart.” I clapped a hand over my mouth, realizing what I’d just said.

“You’re very observant,” Dr. Ingram said, grinning. “But I think we’ll stick with this chart today.”

“Oh, okay,” I said, swallowing hard and wiping my sweaty palms on the leather seat.

Dr. Ingram quizzed me on the eye chart and my stomach knotted up like it always does when I take a test. And as the letters grew smaller, my answers grew unsure.

“Um . . . Z?” I said, squinting. “No, wait. S? No. G?”

“It’s not a spelling bee,” Dr. Ingram said kindly. “Though I’m sure you’re quite competent in that subject. But alas, your vision is impaired. We shall have to find a suitable solution. I’m afraid you require glasses.”

Dr. Ingram pushed a metal machine in front of my face. He loaded it with different lenses until I could read the bottom row of letters without squinting. Then he switched off the projector, and I started to rise from the exam chair.

“Not so fast. We’ve only begun to check your vision. We’ve still got quite a ways to go.”

Dr. Ingram flipped the switch again. This time, instead of letters, I saw really funky black-and-white pictures. My dad, who liked to paint, would’ve said they were abstract.

“What’s that?” I asked, pointing to a picture that looked like a spotted lump of nothing.

“You tell me,” Dr. Ingram said. “There’s no right or wrong answer. Tell me what you see. Better yet, tell me what that image reminds you of.”

“Um, okay.” I wondered if there was an answer that would get me out of his office without glasses. But after thinking about it for a minute, I decided to just tell the truth. “I see Charlie Ferris.”

“You see Charlie Ferris?” Dr. Ingram repeated, raising two bushy eyebrows.

“Charlie Ferris, yeah. He used to tease me last year—and the year before that—and call me Polka Dot. Because, well, you know.” I tapped my freckly cheek. “Almost everyone called me Polka Dot.”

The next picture showed an image of what looked like a swan fighting off a dragon.

After I told that to Dr. Ingram he said, “And what does that remind you of?”

“Um . . . I guess it reminds me of my best friend, Ellen Martin. She’s fearless. She wouldn’t care if anyone made fun of her. Not like anyone would. She’s really pretty. And really smart.”

Dr. Ingram showed me a few more pictures. The last one looked like a group of stones on one side, and a larger, solitary stone next to a square object on the other side.

“I see Ellen making a bunch of friends at middle school. Then I see me”—I pointed to the larger stone—“reading a book or writing a story in my journal.”

“Do you find that easier than making new friends?” Dr. Ingram asked.

I shrugged. “Books and journals can’t make fun of you or call you names.”

“I see.” Dr. Ingram switched off the projector. “I think that’s quite enough.” He scribbled on a slip of paper. “Here. Give this to Mrs. Dillard and she’ll take care of the rest.”

“Whatever.” I stuffed the paper into my pocket.

“Is something wrong?”

I stared at Dr. Ingram, and something in me snapped. I’d spent all summer dealing with thoughts about middle school the same way I dealt with chores, fights between my parents, and zits: ignore them and hope they’ll just go away. But now those thoughts crashed into me like a tidal wave.

I wanted to tell Dr. Ingram all the things I couldn’t say to anyone else. That I missed my dad, and wished he’d come home soon. That I felt nervous about starting middle school—especially since I’d gotten stuck with drama for my elective. How I worried that, just like elementary school, Pacificview would be a place

where I didn't fit. How I felt like there was some all-seeing eye fastened on me—just waiting for me to screw up so everyone could laugh at me.

I wanted to tell him those things—but instead I said the same thing I told Mom whenever she asked me that question.

“Nothing's wrong. I'm fine.”

Dr. Ingram peered at me through his thick black glasses and said nothing. He stayed silent for so long I thought he'd fallen asleep with his eyes open.

“Dr. Ingram,” I said. “Are you—”

“Do you want to see?” Dr. Ingram interrupted. “I mean, really see.”

“Uh, yeah,” I said, confused. “That's why I'm here, isn't it?” Duh, I wanted to add but didn't.

“Wonderful. I'll be right back.” Dr. Ingram disappeared through the door and returned a couple minutes later holding a small black case. “I spoke with Mrs. Dillard. Regrettably, there is a back order on the lenses we've selected. They should arrive in a few weeks—”

“That's okay. I don't really care when—”

“In the meantime, it just so happens I have a pair with your exact prescription that you may borrow.” He opened the black case and held up what had to be the ugliest glasses in the entire world. They were huge. Their thick black frames looked like they'd survive a bomb blast. Actually, they looked a lot like the frames Dr. Ingram wore.

Except he wasn't wearing them anymore, I realized. Now Dr. Ingram's glasses were thin silver frames.

“Hey, weren't you just—”

“These glasses are very valuable.” Dr. Ingram interrupted, placing them back in the case. “So please be careful.”

“Okay,” I said, thinking he'd probably tell my mom if I refused. “I'll take them.”

I grasped the case, but Dr. Ingram didn't let go.

“You realize these are just loaners? You must return them when the time is right.”

“When my other pair arrives, yes.” Out in the waiting area the bell jingled, and I heard Mom ask Mrs. Dillard if I was almost finished.

“You're sure you want them?” Dr. Ingram asked. “You never know what you'll see when your vision is corrected.”

“I'll take them, if you'll give them to me.” I looked down at his hand.

Dr. Ingram let go. "Use them wisely, Callie."

"Of course I'll use them wisely," I said.

Whatever that meant.

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