

Easter Eggs

VANESSA BLAKESLEE

Julie wished the problem of the Easter eggs wouldn't turn into a blowout fight, but Amanda refused to listen to why Julie wouldn't let her color eggs alone, despite reasoning: the boiling water, the messy yolks and dyes. The Easter egg project seemed destined to stink like a bad egg. Amanda had been fully blind since the car accident with their parents several years earlier. The time since had been agonizing for both sisters—Amanda's frustration with her slow progress at re-learning how to do simple tasks, and Julie's need to swallow her impatience. Julie worried for them both.

One day Julie came home from class at community college and discovered Amanda at the kitchen table with the Easter egg kits torn open. Amanda had arranged glasses and mugs on the table in a crooked row; as Julie approached she heard the dye tablets fizzing at the bottom of each. A pot of water simmered on the stove.

Julie hurried and shut the burner off. Then she snatched the dye kit from Amanda's hands. "Do you want to burn yourself?"

"No," Amanda said, sticking her chin out. Her blind eyes stared blankly ahead. "I'm sick of waiting for you," she added with a sigh.

Julie cleared off the rest of the kitchen table and slid the kit supplies from the boxes. "Why are you so obsessed with coloring Easter eggs? You can't see them, so what difference does it make?"

Amanda said nothing, just ran her fingers over the materials from the kit. She lifted up a plastic sheet. "What's this?"

“Stickers with little lambs and chicks,” Julie said. “I really don’t have time to decorate eggs with you right now. I have to study.”

“I want to color the eggs,” Amanda said. “By myself.”

“Unless I help you, they’ll turn out all muddy,” Julie said. “It’s silly.”

“I like being silly,” her sister retorted, peeling off a lamb sticker and placing it onto her forehead. “So there, Sourpuss.”

Julie hated that nickname which Amanda had taunted her with since they were little kids. Lately she felt her responsibilities made her too serious and snappy, even with her lab partner at school, so she reconsidered. “I’ll arrange the dyes for you from left to right,” Julie said. “ROY G BIV. Okay? But first we have to boil the eggs.”

Julie dropped the dozen eggs into the pot and set the timer. Amanda shadowed her every move, as underfoot as a puppy. Gripping Amanda’s shoulders with both hands, Julie faced her younger sister toward the table. But Amanda wrenched her shoulders away, leaned on the counter and pouted.

Bubbles rolled over the eggs in the pot. Amanda cried a few tears. Finally she stood up, wiped her eyes and said, “Can we do some shrink wrapped ones?”

Julie nodded. She set a separate pot on the stove for the shrink wrapping. When Amanda tugged the first egg through the plastic sleeve decorated with cartoon Easter animals, she giggled and asked if that’s what it felt like to put a condom on a guy. They shared a moment of laughter. Then Julie wrapped her hand over Amanda’s and together they lowered the sheath-covered egg, wobbling on its spoon, into the boiling water.

The next morning, Amanda announced that she wanted to dye more eggs and this time she didn’t need Julie’s help. One of her

friends had told her about the process of blowing and then coloring eggs. Amanda thought she could blow the eggs more easily on her own, since they didn't require boiling, and decorate the shells herself.

"Blowing eggs will make even more of a mess," Julie answered, bent over her anatomy book.

"I can clean up," Amanda said. "Please?"

"This is your idea. I'm not going to help you."

Amanda didn't move. She hovered next to Julie's elbow.

"Go ahead," Julie said. "I'm studying."

Amanda dragged herself to the kitchen. The clattering of bowls and fridge door opening and closing made a racket. Please don't call me in there, Julie thought.

A few minutes later, terrible huffs and snorts sounded from the kitchen, followed by a shell crushing and a whimper. The breathing and blowing started up again. This time when the shell broke, Amanda cursed.

Julie rose halfway out of her chair and sat back down. She tried to concentrate on memorizing the cardiovascular system but found herself straining to hear the sounds from the next room.

The huffing and blowing grew harder, more violent. Julie remembered blowing eggs for a few Easters and ending up with a headache every time that made her swear to herself she would just stick to the usual boiling-and-coloring method. The next break sounded like a real crack-up—the egg victim striking a surface with force, probably the floor.

"How's it coming with those chicken embryos?" Julie called.

"Fine," came Amanda's weak reply. "Just not as easy as I thought."

“Well, I’ve never seen anyone with such a passion for Easter eggs,” Julie said, chuckling.

The faucet blasted and suddenly the garbage disposal burst to life. Julie shot out of her seat and into the kitchen.

Amanda stood over the garbage disposal, a mess of eggs and shells streaming from her cupped hands and dripping onto her wrists. A pile of yolk pooled on the tile at Amanda’s feet.

“Just drop all that into the sink,” Julie said. “You sure know how to create a disaster.”

“It’s not my fault that I can’t see,” Amanda threw the broken mess down and set bits of shell and egg splattering almost everywhere but the disposal hole. Then she jerked the faucet toward her and fiercely soaped the sticky globs from her hands.

“Why do you keep insisting on decorating these eggs?” Julie asked.

“I know the things I can do,” Amanda said. “I’m blind but I’m not a retard!”

Julie said nothing. She wet a sponge and began wiping the puddle of yolk from the floor.

“Stop it!” Amanda screamed. “I don’t need you to do that!” She drummed her fists on the counter. “Go wipe your own ass. Go, get out!”

Julie quit mopping the mess. She studied her sister flailing in rage and felt helpless. But she got up, gripped her sister’s pounding fist. Forcing open Amanda’s hand, she pressed the sponge into her palm, hard.

* * *

Back at the dining room table with her anatomy book spread open, Julie wondered about the problem of the Easter eggs. Why was

Amanda so unwilling to give up on decorating eggs when she couldn't see the colors or the designs? Did she just want to color them for the fun of playing with materials? But that hardly seemed the case. Look at what had just happened—the chaos in the kitchen, Amanda's agonizing outburst. Julie had no doubt that coloring the eggs was of dire importance to Amanda—that her sister wanted to express something she otherwise couldn't communicate in words, but could only show by completing this odd, self-assigned project. But Julie loved Amanda too much to stand by and watch her grow more disappointed in her blindness and get hurt. Just that afternoon, for instance, the garbage disposal grinding made Julie sick with fear. She had expected to run into the kitchen and find Amanda sprayed with blood.

* * *

That night Julie sat in the kitchen alone and started blowing the remaining raw eggs. The cups of dye sat out from the evening before. As she finished each egg, she rinsed the shell carefully and chose a color. So far she had two pink, one green and one blue drying in the carton.

Amanda shuffled in, sleepy and hair askew from her nap. "What are you doing?" she asked. She felt for the back of a chair and slumped into the seat.

"I think I figured out how this works," Julie said.

"Good for you," Amanda answered. "It's not like I can create anything. I'm blind." She picked up a plain white egg and rolled it around and around between her two palms.

Julie eyed her sister. "Just what is this egg business all about?"

"I don't know," Amanda said. "I don't expect you to understand,

but I really don't care how great the eggs turn out. And even though I got angry cleaning up those shells this morning, somehow I still feel like decorating the eggs will end up being worth all this trouble."

She traced a pattern on the white shell with her index finger then replaced the egg in the bowl with the others waiting on deck.

"You need to stir up the inside by poking a pin through the other end of the shell. Then with the pin you break up the yolk," Julie told her.

"You better do that part," Amanda said. "I just want to decorate." Her fingers crept over to the carton. She picked up an emptied, dried eggshell. "Wow, it's so light. What color is this one?" She held her palm out flat, the egg balanced in the center.

"Green," Julie said.

Amanda wrinkled her face. "I want a pink one," she said.

"But ROY G. BIV doesn't include pink," Julie said.

"I'll have to figure out my own system," Amanda replied. "Pink is my favorite color."

Julie reached over and handed her a pink egg, then resumed position at the spit-coated straw jutting out of the egg-in-progress. She wished her sister could see the silliness of the procedure and they could laugh together.

"I'll make you one first," Amanda said. "But I hate blowing eggs. I felt like every time I let go a breath, my brains spewed into the bowl." She plastered Julie's egg with stickers: lambs, tulips and ones that read "Peace" in tiny letters.

* * *

Julie awoke in the middle of the night and couldn't fall back asleep because she kept thinking of Amanda. How could colors still be so important to a person who was unable to see them? If Amanda still wanted to decorate the eggs, why wasn't she more consumed with what she could perceive by touch—the lamb and bunny stickers, the glitter packets? She hadn't shown the least interest in the glitter shaker with its coarse, sticky granules. Instead Amanda's obsession kept reaching into the realm that would now and forever be closed off in darkness. Pink was only a distant memory to her, yet she still believed in pink whether she could see or not. Faith was accepting that even a barred path will draw you closer into an unknown splendor as long as you keep up the pursuit: blind and wobbling, but always trusting in things as simple as the color pink.

* * *

A week later, so much had happened that Amanda hardly seemed like the same girl who had thrown a fit in the kitchen over some broken Easter eggs. Mid-week, Amanda had approached Julie and asked for her help in completing forms for college. She wanted to attend a regular university and not a fancy college for the blind as her counselors had pushed her towards.

On the morning of Easter Sunday, Julie awoke extra early to set out the baskets she had prepared late the night before and hidden in the closet. When she tiptoed to the living room, she couldn't believe the scene she stumbled upon. A giant basket, elaborately decorated with ribbon and candies towered over the coffee table. But inside the basket had been filled with eggs—all hand-blown, they had been decorated carefully with fancy glitter patterns, painted shapes and Amanda's loopy cursive handwriting.

Amanda lay curled up on the couch, sleeping. Julie tried to keep quiet, but her rustling through the basket soon woke her sister.

“Do you like the basket?” Amanda asked.

Julie didn’t say anything. She kept picking up the different eggs, reading the sayings. No two were alike. On one egg Julie had painted an Egyptian looking eye in the colors of a peacock feather.

“How did you do all this?” Julie asked. “When?”

“It’s a secret,” Amanda said. “Do they look okay? Pick out your favorite one.”

Julie lifted the egg with the eye to examine it more closely. Even before she looked it over in detail, she knew none of the others would compare. Then she saw Julie had written some words in careful block print on the back—“LOVE IS BLIND.” □