

Futures

Blue eyes

The right look. By Marie Vibbert



ILLUSTRATION BY JACEY

I stand in line, shaking like a sick dog. My fake ID is immaculate, though. Sunny already used it to cross out and back as a test. Doesn't stop me quivering. Sunny works for Rev Gas in a suit job. This is as close to the perimeter fence as I've ever got, with its towers and guns. It's taller up close, its shadow over me for what feels like an hour as we inch forward one at a time, showing papers and opening purses. Through the two walls of chain link I can see this glittering sea of cars waiting to carry people away from this shit town.

When I reach the front, the guard doesn't even look at my papers. He looks at my eyes and says: "Go on back with you. You know the rules."

"But I have —"

He raises his gun. "Go on back!"

My bowels clench and I go on back as fast as I can without running. I'm crying. I don't have any disease. Some of us came out good. But all my life people have looked at me like a warm bag of shit, fit to break.

And I can understand the fear, when so many

of us died horrible or popped open an artery in public, but it's been 20 years and nothing's broke on me yet. Some of us came out good.

No one would know if it weren't for my damn blue eyes.

I find my friend Sunny. His dark eyes are wide. "You didn't make it?"

"Didn't even try to look at my ID."

Sunny takes this personal. He curses the guards to high heaven and back down again.

I have to interrupt before he goes all night. "What am I going to do? I don't want to live here forever." I'm mad at him, but don't say that. Of course the ID worked for him. No guard would stop a suit for nothing.

I asked my mama once why modified kids all had blue eyes, if it was so they could tell which babies they'd tinkered with, but she said, "No, child. The doctors asked us, 'what colour eyes do you want on her?' and who wouldn't want to have blue eyes?" I found out later that there was an upcharge for the blue eyes. Easy money for the gene doctor, too, because of course they'd figured out eye colour ages ago.

All around my neighbourhood, kids with brown faces, but the whitest, bluest eyes. We'll never look enough like the people on the other side of the fence.

Sunny stands with me this time, both of us in suits, both his, but we'd spent some time with pins getting the one to fit me good.

That cold shadow from the fence. The guard's narrowed eyes. I take a step back but Sunny holds me at his side. "Aren't you going to check her ID?" he demands.

The guard looks at him. "She has blue eyes." "So? Some people are born that way."

I force my head up high. "Yeah." I try to sound annoyed. How would a natural blue-eyed person feel? What would she call me? Boojie tech-baby of upward-reaching parents, illegally modified to fool the world into considering her as good as the well-born. How dare your nose bridge so high, your cheekbones slant so sharply, your unnatural eyes a sign of the masses too stupid to stop at fixing what is broke.

I shake with anger at myself and my not-self,

Futures

and I almost miss the guard handing my card back. “Get out of here, kid. This is obviously a fake ID. I’ll let you go this time if you walk away now.” The chilling edge of his voice is a machine gun.

The black market bioprinter was in a dirty shanty worse than the chicken shack we won’t eat at, but the contact lenses still cost as much as the ID. My eyes itch the second I put them on, but Sunny says: “It’s psychosomatic. You look great.”

We wear the suits again, as itchy and ill-fitting as my eyes. It won’t work. Neither of us has any money left to feed ourselves if it doesn’t work. Yet I almost hope it doesn’t work.

The guard doesn’t even glance at me. He scans my ID, hands it back and steps aside. I stare hard at him. A speech wells up in my guts, a hot gas ball of How Dare You? He sees my anger, looks alarmed. I see the edge of contact lenses around his brown irises.

Thank goodness for Sunny’s hand on my back, pushing me forward.

And we’re through. In the successful crowd, more suited, more uniform than those held back. All the blues eyes here are accompanied by pale faces.

I start to take the contacts off, but Sunny stops me. “Not yet. It’s not safe.”

My tears run. I’ve fantasized this walk enough times that it feels routine. There is

the train, behind the cars. The ticket machine. I’m out.

On the train we find a pair of abandoned dark glasses and I can take the burning contacts off at last. The minute I have citizenship, I’m showing everyone my proud blue eyes, but when I have kids, I’ll just fix what’s broke.

Marie Vibbert’s fiction has appeared in *F&SF*, *Analog*, *Science Fiction World* and many other places. By day she is a computer programmer in Cleveland, Ohio. Her grandmother’s favourite song was ‘Don’t It Make My Brown Eyes Blue’.