

Appearances Can be Deceptive

by Chris Robinson

She warned him not to be deceived by appearances but judging by the look on his face her warning had gone unheeded. Sitting in the corner of the room, looking out the window, was a small child. She turned as they entered the room and Jonathan let out a small gasp as he took in the vision before him.

This child, this little girl was the most beautiful looking creature he had ever set eyes on. She had jet black hair, cut into a sharp bob, which framed her elfin shaped face perfectly. Her nose was small but softly pointed and her lips were pink and plump. But it was her eyes that startled him most. They were cat like and, as she looked up from under a mass of thick, long black eyelashes, she revealed the most striking dark violet eyes that seemed to pierce his very soul. She had unnerved Jonathan and he found he couldn't hold her gaze so he looked down at his notes and, in a hushed tone he said "Hello, you must be Elizabeth".

Saskia had been watching this scene unravel from the doorway. Once again she was witnessing this child cast a spell over a total stranger and, whilst she found it fascinating to watch, she also had to remind herself of just what they were dealing with here. She knew that Jonathan was probably their last chance of helping this little girl. He was the top expert in his field but Saskia wondered if he had finally met his match.

Elizabeth Maxwell was ten years old when she was first referred to the child psychology unit at Bartlett Hospital. Her parents had been concerned about her behaviour for a while but it was an incident at school that had made them act.

Apparently Elizabeth had been caught pushing a child roughly in the playground causing her to fall and scrape her knees and chin. The incident had been dealt with and Elizabeth had to forfeit her playtimes for the rest of the day. No one thought any more of it until two days later when Elizabeth had tied the same child to a tree and forced twigs and leaves into her mouth so she could not scream. The child victim had been left extremely traumatised, had begun to have nightmares and wet the bed and ultimately had refused to go to school.

Elizabeth was excluded for a week but other incidents occurred on her return. She appeared to enjoy physically hurting people. She had been known to kick and pinch when unobserved but the behaviour escalated until she didn't care whether she was caught or not. She never, ever showed remorse preferring to smile like a maniac when confronted. When Elizabeth randomly thrust a pair of scissors into her teachers thigh one afternoon everyone agreed that the child needed urgent help. The problem was she looked so angelic that initially people struggled to believe she could behave in such a cruel, spiteful and violent way.

Elizabeth's first contact at the unit had been Saskia but she had quickly felt out of her depth dealing with what appeared to be a deeply disturbed child exhibiting strong psychotic tendencies. She had contacted her former tutor and mentor Jonathan Mayhew for advice. He had the view that no child was beyond help but she couldn't help feeling that he might be wrong in the case of Elizabeth.

They had agreed that he would talk to Elizabeth alone so Saskia left them to it but not before noticing how the child was already working her magic on Jonathan. She stood on the other side of the door for a while, listening to the sounds of laughter filtering softly through the keyhole. Feeling encouraged Saskia went outside for some fresh air. Elizabeth frightened her but she couldn't pinpoint why. She hoped that Jonathan would shed some light on the situation. He was certainly the best person for the job.

Saskia glanced at her watch and was surprised to see that half an hour had passed. Returning to the room she put her ear to the door. There was silence so she knocked gently and was taken aback when she heard Elizabeth's voice say come in. She entered the room and tried to take in the scene before her. She felt the bile rise up from her stomach and her hand covered her mouth trying to stifle a silent scream. Elizabeth was still sitting in the corner on her chair looking out the window. Jonathan was slumped on the floor next to her. His throat had been cut .