

# Julie's Light

## The Letter

I never liked being blind. The whole world felt like someone had pulled a dark shade over my eyes, and stuck it there, forever. Of course, I've always had Anna to describe everything I wanted to know, but that isn't the same as seeing it yourself. One thing I hate about being blind is not knowing exactly what the sun looks like. Anna says it's like a huge, fiery yellow ball in the sky in the daytime. At nighttime, there is a moon in the black sky. I can't imagine these things. What does nighttime and daytime look like? And what does yellow, red, and blue look like? I only understand black, or dark, which Anna says is the color blind people see all the time. I have decided that black is the ugliest color of all the ones Anna has told me about.

My sister, Anna, is so smart. She can read, write, spell, and cipher in her head. I can only spell and read Braille. Anna taught me with a book she bought in town. "A book is the best invention ever made, Julie," Anna told me. "It is covered with tiny letters arranged together to make words,

and words arranged together to make a story." Anna pressed a book into my hands one day. I opened it, and dragged my finger down the columns, but felt nothing. "Where are the words? Where's the Braille?" I asked Anna. Anna laughed. "The words are there, but you cannot feel them. They are flat, pressed into the paper. Sighted people read these kinds of books." I sighed. "Read me the story!" I said suddenly. Anna said, "Alright, let's go into the parlor."

Anna and I walked into the parlor. "Once upon a time," began Anna when we were seated, "there lived a King, a Queen, and their daughter, Princess Aurora..." I was whisked away into the story of how Aurora fell into a deep sleep from pricking her finger on a spinning wheel poisoned by her wicked enemy. I found myself thinking how much I and Aurora were alike. She had fallen into a deep sleep, and I, into deep, blind, eternal darkness.

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Most mornings I wake up and lie in bed, staring at darkness, thinking of what the day may bring. Some days I awaken with a strange feeling, that something important is going to happen, like today. I climbed out of bed late, hurrying to dress and wash. Then I sat down at the kitchen table; my nose met with the delicious aroma of sausage and biscuits. "Good

morning, Julie!" Anna said, her long hair brushing my arm. A clatter of plates being placed on the table filled my ears. Anna scooted into her chair with a creak, and grabbed my hands. "Oh, Lord, Bless this food, may it nourish our bodies and bring us strength. Amen." We recited, our eyes closed, heads bowed. I reached for the fork and knife that were placed to my right, the spoon on the left. "This smells so good!" I exclaimed after feeling around on my plate with my fork.

Anna and I ate in silence. Sometimes it is hard having only Anna as kin, because she is so quiet, but I am thankful for her. Anna has been my mother, the leader, my quiet, guiding older sister.

Our parents died when Anna was nine and I, twelve months old. I don't remember my parents. Anna says that Mother had beautiful long brown hair, and light green eyes. "You look exactly like Mother," insisted Anna to me. "I look like Papa, with my blonde hair." I'm glad I look like Mother. Even though I don't remember her, I will have something of her forever, her hair and her eyes.

"Shortly after they died and left us here at the house," Anna had explained, "You became terribly sick. I cared for you for weeks on end, feeding you broth, washing your forehead with cool water, praying. Then one morning you were strangely silent. I waved my hands in front of your

eyes, but you didn't blink." Anna heaved a sigh. "I was so scared! I grabbed a lamp and shined it in your eyes, but you didn't notice; you were blind."

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I was startled out of my nostalgia by Anna calling, "Julie, come outside! I have something to show you!" I quickly finished breakfast and made my way outside. "Come here and cup your hands," Anna whispered. I obeyed and, gasping, felt an object being placed in my palms. I stroked it carefully, because the animal was small and warm. It was covered in soft feathers. In awe, I whispered, "It is a baby bird." It gave several tiny chirps. I was surprised, and I smiled. "Ooh, the little darling," I cooed as Anna gently took the baby from me. "Oh, Anna, thank you!" I said as we walked into the house. "You're welcome," Anna replied, her voice cheerful.

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Later that week Anna and I walked into town. I love the town. It is always so loud and bustling. I think the noise is music. Anna thinks it sounds terrible. I like the *clip-clop* of horses' hooves and the *ding-dong* of the church bell. Anna remarked, "We're going into the post office." I was confused, because Anna and I rarely received mail.

"Hello, Anna, and Julie! How are you today?" The woman inside the post office said. "Is there any mail for me today, Mrs. Lebanon?" Anna inquired, sounding as if she was expecting a letter. "No, but there is a letter for Julie!"

Mrs. Lebanon handed me an envelope. "For me?" A hundred questions raced through my mind as I opened the envelope. I gasped when I felt a series of raised bumps on the paper. "Oh, it's Braille!" I gasped. "Read it, Julie!" Anna exclaimed. My hands shook as I ran my fingers down the page. A shiver of excitement went up my spine as I read,

*Dear Miss Julie Fisher,*

*Your sister, Anna, has written to us about you, asking us to accept you in our Mason School for the Blind. We were moved by the story of your life and would be honored to have you in our academy...*

I stopped reading. "You wrote them about *me*?" I asked. Anna placed her hands on my shoulders. "Yes." She said simply. "But..." I began. Anna shushed me. "Finish reading," she said firmly. I resumed my reading,

*The tuition is twelve dollars. The school is located in Corsly, not far from your town of Maryville, and will take about an hour to reach.*

*The students stay at the boarding house all week and return home for the weekend. The term is September to June. The school provides*

*room and board and all necessary school supplies. We will see you next Monday at nine o'clock.*

*Sincerely,*

*The Mason School for the Blind*

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Anna sighed as I walked home with her, later. "It sounds wonderful, Julie." I was a little excited too. "Yes, but the fee is twelve dollars! Where will you get the money?" "I'll find a way. Oh, Julie, you *must* go! You would love it there, and you'll learn so much more than I can teach you. Mama and Papa would have wanted you to go," Anna added softly. My stomach lurched. "Yes, you're right. I'll go." I said after awhile. Even though I couldn't see her, I knew Anna grinned. "I'm going to count out the money," Anna said as we entered the house.

I decided to go to my bedroom and start to pack. I don't have much; just a few pairs of clothes, a quilt Mama made, a doll named Molly, and the Braille book. I put all these things into a carpetbag.

A creak from the doorway made me turn around. "Well, we have seven fifty in our savings." "We need four more dollars," I finished. I rubbed my forehead thoughtfully. "I'll see if there's anything I can sell in town," Anna suggested. I heaved a sigh. "You know, I don't have to go..." Anna

was by my side in an instant. "No! You're going. No more words about it." Anna hugged me and whispered, "Please, Julie. You *need* to go." She stood and walked away.

I leaned back on my bed. Anna was banging pots and pans as she cooked. I could hear her muttering things under her breath. I was suddenly so exhausted from the day. *Maybe Anna is right*, I thought. *I do need this school. Then I wouldn't be a burden to Anna, and I would be away, learning so many new things!* I was satisfied with my thoughts, and stood up to get my Braille book. I needed to start practicing for the blind school!