

The Tattoo

by Lin Edwards

The eyes on his arm winked. There was no doubt about it. The eyes were tattooed wide open, but when she started to look away, she distinctly saw the left eye winking. It was only a tiny movement seen in the corner of her eye, like an evanescent rainbow in a waterfall disappearing the moment you see it, but there was no question in her mind—the tattooed eye had winked at her.

The cat-green eyes were tattooed on his arm with the words: 'Here's looking at you kid' under them.

It was the life-like eyes that had attracted her to him in the first place, or rather, the words beneath them echoing the famous line from her favourite film, Casablanca.

Here's looking at you. She loved that he loved her film so much he would have a tattoo reflecting it. At first she merely found it a little spooky that when she was with him the eyes on his arms really did seem to be looking at her with a penetrating stare, but she dismissed it. After all, in an art gallery the eyes of portrait subjects stare at you and follow you around the room, but there's nothing odd about that, nothing sinister. It's just your imagination, and that was how she thought about the green eyes looking at her.

She said the same thing to herself the first few times she thought she caught the left eye winking at her. But then it became clear that the eye really was winking at her, and it wasn't an illusion or trick of the light. They were not winking in general and not winking at anyone else. The eyes were looking at her, and one of them winked every time it thought it could get away with it.

She tried to ignore it and laugh it off. She tried to think of it as quaint and cute, and even as attractive. But try as she might, she failed, and the eyes began to haunt her even when he wasn't there.

He noticed her eyes kept wandering down and across to the eyes tattooed on his left arm, and joked that it was usually the man whose eyes strayed downwards .

She found herself thinking angry thoughts sometimes: why can't he wear a long-sleeved shirt? Why can't he wear a jacket? Why does he always have to have that tattoo showing? He loved it, that's why. Probably more than he loved her. She had said that to him once and had jokingly asked if he would ever remove the tattoo, but he had laughed it off, saying it was just a tattoo and it shouldn't bother her. Besides, he had said, I thought you loved Casablanca and the line, 'Here's looking at you kid.' She had no answer, and dropped the subject, at least aloud.

The night he proposed, they were in a classy restaurant with soft classical music playing and the wall was adorned with paintings instead of the ubiquitous flat-screen TV. The ambiance of the candle-lit room and the faint odour of the single Mr Lincoln rose in the vase between them were designed to foster friendship, trust, and even love. And the food was magnificent and beautifully presented. The autumn chill had arrived, and she was wearing a cashmere cardigan over her blouse, but he was still in short sleeves and the tattoo on his left arm was wearing the cuff of his turned-up sleeve like a cap. As he took her hands, kissed them, and proposed, the left eye winked at her.

She was troubled by the concept of tattooed eyes winking, because tattooed eyes cannot wink. They are tattooed on, which means that if they are tattoos of open eyes, they must always and forever be open. And yet the left eye winked at her, and there was no question about it in her mind. It wasn't the skin wrinkling, because the eyes were tattooed on smooth skin and not some wrinkly fold. The left eye had also become more brazen over time. What had begun as a slight movement barely glanced from the corner of her eye had become a confident full-fledged wink by the time he proposed.

It meant, of course, that she could not accept his proposal of marriage. There was something about him that was not right. The tattooed green eyes wanted her to marry him—they wanted her to marry *them*. Images flooded her mind of making love to her new husband, with the eyes watching and winking like a cat's eyes glowing in the dark. She couldn't imagine going through married life with her eyes closed every time they made love.

She couldn't tell him that, of course, which made it difficult when he asked why she was turning him down. 'I thought you loved me,' he said. How could she tell him she did love him and it was just his left arm she had trouble with? Or more specifically, the eyes tattooed on his arm? Eyes that peered out, knew everything, and winked at her.

To marry him was to marry his left arm and those winking, tattooed eyes.

She answered his protests by crying out, 'I just can't marry them—you!' and fled the restaurant in tears.

The eyes on his arm widened in surprise and then narrowed. He stood up, called after her to come back, and then sat down again in resignation. The eyes on his arm wept.