Tesserooti

a story for my very
only almost granddaughter.
Dedicated to the artists in my family:
my mother, my sister, and my two children.
By Joe A. Oppenheimer
d3: June 7, 2016
4076 words
Once upon a time a very, very short time ago, way after all the dinosaurs had disappeared, and after people started eating peanut butter and jelly sandwiches, there lived a girl. She was born on June 16, 2012. Then she grew up to become a wonderful big girl, call Tesserooti.

Tesserooti lived in a far away state called New Sneezy, in a teeny, tiny, itsy, bitsy town. The town was so small you couldn’t even find it on the map.

Once, when giants still roamed the earth, a big giant walked right where that town would be built many years later. He was so enormous, that each step he took flattened mountains and hills. But there was still one big hill left, right next to one of his footprints. The hill went clear up to the sky. That is how the town got its name. That is also why, the sign at the train station says “Mount Clear.”

Mount Clear may be small, but it is big enough for Tesserooti and her family. It has a wonderful library, a park, a pizza shop, a school, and lots of other wonderful things. Oh yes, it also has Tesserooti’s family’s house. That’s the big yellow old house on the side of the big hill. Tesserooti loves her house. And back at the beginning of this story, everything was beautiful and wonderful for Tesserooti. Except . . .

For Tesserooti even the best days always had something bad in them. Like whenever she went to the zoo. Her big brother, Owenski, would snatch her very best piece of popcorn. It was always the one she had saved to eat last. And on those glorious days when she felt like running, her mother would yell, “Tesserooti, don’t you run down the hill!” And even when her Dad made her a peanut butter and jam sandwich (she liked raspberry jam best) he wouldn’t let her lick off the jam. No, nothing was perfect, not even . . . not even . . . this is so hard to say . . . not even Tesserootti.

You see, Tesserootti was different. All the kids she knew, even Owenski, yes even Mr. Popcorn Snatcher, were different from her. Tesserooti had black hair. Lots of kids had black hair. She had blue eyes. Some other kids had black hair and blue eyes. She was full of fun and laughed a lot but she could get very angry. Still a few other kids had black hair and blue eyes and were full of fun and laughed a lot and could get very angry. Those weren’t the things that made her different.

Tesserootti had three eyes.

She had an extra eye in the back of her head. Imagine that, if you can! She didn’t know any other kids with three eyes. Probably no other kid in Mount Clear had three eyes. Maybe noone in New Sneezy had three eyes. Maybe she was the only one in the whole wide world! Now that is different.

Don’t get me wrong, Tesserootti didn’t mind having three eyes. She liked it some of the time. That back eye made it harder for kids to sneak up from behind to tease her. It made it easier to win a game of tag. It let her cheat in hide and seek. But it wasn’t always good.

Three eyes makes it a lot harder to concentrate on things that you do with only two eyes in the front of your head – like reading or drawing. And Tesserootti loved reading and drawing. She’d be reading and see something with that eye in the back of her head. Why just last week, she was reading The Cat in the Hat. Then suddenly she spied her brother reaching into her hidden Halloween candy bag. He took her very favorite raspberry licorice candy. That sure stopped her reading!
Tesserooti’s Mother noticed everything. She even noticed Tesserooti’s trouble concentrating to draw and read. Her Mother made a special floppy hat. The hat was colored black inside. When it covered her back eye, the eye would just get sleepy and would shut down. Tesserooti wore the hat whenever she wanted to just use her front eyes. Outside, the hat had many colors and a big feather. It was one of the coolest hats Tesserooti had ever seen.

*********

But last week, in school, Tesserooti’s friends, Janey and Karina, teased her. They called her a three-eyed monster. That made her cry. But Janey and Karina didn’t mean to hurt her. Later they said they were just joking. They even gave Tesserooti a big hug. Still, Tesserooti knew it had happened because she was different. Tesserooti really wished that she wasn’t so different from her friends.

Whenever Tesserooti was mad, or sad, she liked to draw. And last week was no different. After school, she took a few big pieces of paper, her box of crayons and went outside. In her back yard, she sat at the plastic table. Her Mother had put it under the big tree. Tesserooti put on her special hat. She was going to draw.

Tesserooti started with blue and did the sky. She took a brown and drew a tree. She took some green and put in leaves and grass. And then she began to paint a small witch. Now the witch didn’t have a crooked nose, or black clothes. Tesserooti gave her nice yellow-striped pants, red shoes, and a pretty face. The only thing that made her a witch was her green skin.

Tesserooti stopped. That witch looked great! It was the best picture she had ever drawn. She was going to show her Mother. She put her crayons away. She looked at the drawing again.

Tesserooti began to talk to the witch. “Would you like to be my friend?” she asked. Of course, the witch didn’t answer.

“I’m naming you Itchy,” Tesserooti told her witch. “Would you take away my third eye, Itchy?”

But of course, Itchy couldn’t answer. Tesserooti began to feel tired. She yawned and put her head down on the table. Soon she fell fast asleep.

*********

She had just fallen asleep when something really strange happened. That red-shoed witch with striped pants, opened her eyes and looked around. “Itchy am I?” she quietly asked and carefully stretched. Then she walked right off the paper on to the table. Itchy grew very quickly and soon she was big enough to jump off the table. She walked behind Tesserooti. She took a deep breath and like a soft breeze, blew that floppy hat right off Tesserooti’s head. There she could see Tesserooti’s third eye.

Itchy didn’t have an easy life. She lived in a town full of witches. Most witches are not very nice. But Itchy was very sweet and gentle. She didn’t like all the tricky things that witches did. Other witches would sneak up on her and pinch her, or put a frog or toad down her back. Sometimes they would put spiders in her hair. She didn’t mind frogs and toads and spiders. But she didn’t like them down her back or in her hair. And Itchy had often wished she had a third eye in the back of her head so she could tell when those witches were going to play tricks.
So this was a real chance for Itchy. She quickly went to work. With all the magic she knew she took out Tesserooti’s third eye. Tesserooti didn’t even wake up. And magically it didn’t even hurt! With all that magic she then put the eye in the back of her own head.

“Wow! I can see things behind me and in front!” she said. She spun around in happiness. That made her twice as dizzy because she saw everything spin in front and behind at the same time.

“Those bad witches won’t catch me anymore!” she said happily. Then quietly, Itchy took a walk to the front yard. Looking around she found she was at a beautiful yellow house on a hill. She had never been in a real house before. Luckily the front door was easy to open. So she opened it and stepped inside.

Now Itchy was inside a real house! She looked around and smiled, “This is a home!” There were books and toys. Itchy loved books. And what should she find, but a book called The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe. Itchy did what any good witch would do. She took the book under her arm and walked back to the back yard and tried to read.

But she couldn’t read because of all the things she was seeing with her new eye. Suddenly she remembered Tesserooti’s hat! She put it on. That solved the problem. Soon she was completely involved in the adventure of the book. She didn’t hear anything else going on. And something important was going on.

*********

Tesserooti woke up. She first just sat up. Then she noticed that her drawing didn’t look the same. There was the sky, the grass, and the tree. But Itchy, the nice little witch was no longer in the picture. She had disappeared. Fled. Gone away. How could that be?

Now Tesserooti was really awake. With her eyes opened wide, she suddenly realized that she wasn’t seeing out the back of her head! She reached around with one of her hands and found just hair. No eye back there! And then another thing – where was her hat? Did it blow off? She stood up. Tesserooti looked on the ground. It wasn’t there. She looked around. There was a girl with red shoes, a pretty pair of yellow striped pants, and green skin. She was just sitting quietly under the tree.

“You’ve got my hat!” cried Tesserooti angrily.

“Oh, I’m sorry. I needed it. So I borrowed it. I couldn’t read because I have an eye in the back of my head. When I spy anything interesting out of that eye, I can’t pay attention to what I am reading. And your hat was just lying on the ground.”

“That’s not just my hat you took! You have my eye, too!” cried Tesserooti. She was so mad, she stamped her foot. “Give it right back to me.”

Poor Itchy. She knew she had taken these things. But hadn’t Tesserooti said she didn’t want her eye? She tried to explain. Itchy said she really needed it. She said there were many nasty witches in Itchy’s town. Every day the bad witches played bad tricks on her. Couldn’t she have her eye?

But no, Tesserooti was firm. It was her eye. And so, what could a poor witch do? She threw Tesserooti’s hat on the ground. Then she jumped on the table and went back into the picture.
If a stranger was passing by, she might think everything was normal. But not to Tesserooti. After all, Itchy how had gotten back in the picture? How had she made off with Tesserooti’s eye? Of course, no one could see the eye in the drawing. But Tesserooti knew it was on the back of Itchy’s head. It was in the world of that picture. She picked up her hat and put it on. What was to be done?

Tesserooti looked at her drawing. She was trying to develop a plan to get her eye back. Suddenly, she saw something new. There was a rainbow in the picture’s sky. She hadn’t drawn it. How did it get there? Again she moved her hand to the back of her head. Definitely no eye. She was trying to figure out just what sort of world she was living in. But she was interrupted by her mother calling “Dinner time, Tesserooti and Owenski.” And so she had to go in. She took the picture with her of course.

**********

Inside, no one noticed her missing eye. After all, she was wearing her hat. But they did notice the picture. “What a beautiful picture!” said her mother.

“That’s a great drawing of a tree,” said her father.

“And look at that rainbow! That’s the best rainbow ever, isn’t it?” cried Owenski. And suddenly everyone noticed the rainbow. It was magically shining. It looked almost real. Better than in any photograph.

“How did you ever paint that rainbow?” asked her father.

“How could you do that with crayons?” asked her brother.

“Your picture of the rainbow is unbelievable! I’m putting it right up on the refrigerator,” said her mother. And she took the picture and put it high up on the door of the refrigerator.

Tesserooti was not happy at all. She liked the picture too. But she hadn’t painted the rainbow. And that was all that people were talking about.

The next day Tesserooti went to school. During recess, the kids played tag. Without her third eye, she couldn’t help but lose. She didn’t do any better in hide and seek either. After school, she decided to get her eye back. But this was no simple task. She knew how to get cookies out of the cookie jar. She could even get strawberries out of the refrigerator. And she could tie her own shoes. But this was different. How could she get her eye back?

She had no ideas. Which made her sad, so when she got home, she took down her crayons, and a big piece of paper and walked into the back yard. Of course, she picked up the blue crayon and drew the sky. But she was still thinking about her eye. She picked up the brown crayon and drew a tree. A green crayon and she got leaves, and grass. What to do about that eye, though?

Then she got an idea! She began to draw Itchy right into her new picture. But this time from her back. She drew the same yellow striped pants and the same red shoes. Tesserooti knew this would be the most important picture she’d ever drawn. She even bit her lip because she was doing it so very carefully. And then she drew the eye in the back of Itchy’s head. There was Itchy all right just as she had been in real life. Very carefully, Tesserooti then took her best eraser – one made especially to erase these crayons, and she erased that eye she just had drawn.
Poof! Like magic, the eye was back in her head. Happy with her discovery, Tesserooti went inside. With everything back to normal, she slept very well that night.

*********

The next morning she was up bright and early. It was Saturday. Saturdays were always special. Unlike other days, Mother and Father liked sleeping very late on Saturday. That meant she and Owenski could quietly play in the play room. There they did anything they wanted until their parents got up. Then Father made blueberry pancakes. Always.

Owenski was up too. Down stairs they flew. First they had a pillow fight. Then they started playing tag and jumping around on chairs. For a brief minute, Tesserooti was ahead. Owenski was running behind her. She jumped on a chair, and leaped up to the top shelf of a small book case. She could see he was catching up. She jumped off the book shelf just as he decided not to leap onto it. He would catch her by running on the floor in front of the shelf. But out of her back eye Tesserooti could see that the book shelf had come unbalanced. It began to fall. Her brother was going to be hurt if all those books fell on him. She turned around and threw herself at him, knocking them both out of the way of the crashing book case.

“Wow, that was close!” said Tesserooti.

“Thanks,” said Owenski. “Do you think I would have broken an arm?”

“Maybe. Maybe even a leg,” answered Tesserooti.

The noise woke their parents. Down the stairs the parents raced. Seeing the mess they became very angry.

“Just what do you think you are doing?” demanded their father.

“I was just . . . ,” began Owenski.

“Don’t you know how to play gently and quietly?” asked her mother, who seemed as angry as she ever could be.

“It was an accident, and . . . ” said Owenski.

“No blue berry pancakes this morning,” announced Father.

So they had oatmeal, and all was gloomy. One nice thing happened when Owenski whispered to her, “I sure am happy you have a third eye. It finally did something really wonderful.” And then he gave her a big hug.

Saturday seemed to drag on forever. It was raining, and anytime the two kids got to playing loudly their parents told them to quiet down. Three times they were sent to their room.

Sometime a few days later, Tesserooti was alone in the kitchen. She had just gotten a fruity yogurt out of the refrigerator. As she was closing its door, something strange happened. At first, she heard a rustle, as if someone were walking through leaves. Then a leaf actually fell onto the floor next to her. She looked up, but there was nothing but the vast doors of the refrigerator, and near the top was the picture she had painted of Itchy. The one with the rainbow. A few seconds later she heard a soft voice from above saying, “Watch out, I’m jumping down.”

*********
Then who should jump to be standing right next to her? Itchy, that's who. And very quickly, she had grown to Tesserooti’s size.

“You and I need to talk, girl,” said Itchy.

But Tesserooti was so startled she hardly heard what her newly arrived guest was saying. She just stood there, paralyzed with her mouth wide open.

A few seconds later, a very impatient Itchy repeated, “You and I need to talk, girl.”

Gaining some control over her surprise, Tesserooti complained, “Well, hello to you too!” She had been taught to be polite. And she expected at least a greeting from this witch she had created. Especially since she had not been invited. Nor had she rung the door bell.

“You took back my eye, didn't you?” demanded Itchy.

“Your eye? Remember whose head you stole it from – *mine*!” Tesserooti said.

“Well, I needed it!”

“Don't you think I needed it? It helped me save my big brother. Without it he would have had broken bones, thank you. And how do you think I could do that? Because I could see out of the back of my head, that’s how,” argued Tesserooti.

“Oh yes, I watched the whole thing. You were wonderful. Heroic even. Of course, thank goodness you had your eye back then. But all the other times you just use it to help you win tag and other games.”

“What's wrong with that? Are you going to tell me you need to save your brother? Or what?”

“No. I'm going to tell you what happened to me yesterday. The evil witches burned down my house while my back was turned. I was caught inside. I could have . . . ,” Itchy carefully thought before she said, “. . . I could have died.”

“Oh! . . . I had no idea!” exclaimed Tesserooti. “I am so glad you made it out.”

“Not as happy as I am. Look, I know a third eye could be useful to anyone. But you only need it very rarely. And I absolutely need it every day.”

“Well, I don’t know. It helps me in games. And it *is* mine.”

“But, Tesserooti, you've begged me to take it away. That's why I came out of the picture to begin with. You don't like being teased about it, and if you gave it back to me, you wouldn't be teased. You wouldn't be different.”

“Itchy, there are some things I have learned by being teased. I realize everyone is different. And if you are teased just because you are different, well, you just have to stick up for yourself. Being different is all about being alive, and being yourself. You have to like yourself for who you are.”

“So you are going to keep the eye, Tesserooti?”

“Well, maybe. But not because of being different. Even if I give you the eye, I'd still be different. Just like everyone. And I think you need it a lot more than I do. But I don't know if I
should give it to you, Itchy. I mean, I can see it is useful in emergencies. It helped me save my brother.”

“You’re right. Everyone is different whether it’s because of their eyes, or their body, or the way they think. We are all different? Me too. I’m a nice witch. That makes me very different, doesn’t it? And you are also right, it is useful in emergencies. So I just got an idea.”

Itchy then went on and said, “Let’s make a deal. You are right, you could need the eye in an emergency. But you know, as a witch, I have a lot of magic in me. I can tell what’s going on in your life. If I sense you are in danger, I could get it back right away. Then, when you’re safe, I’ll take it back.”

“Wait, Itchy! You mean, we can share it? You’d use it sort of everyday, and I’d get it back whenever there is an emergency.”

“That’s the idea,” said Itchy.

“But how will you know when there is an emergency?”

“I’ll know right away. Remember, I am a witch!”

“Are you sure?”

Itchy nodded her head. “And we can try it. If you find that there were times you needed it, and didn’t get it you can tell me.”

“How can I find you or even talk to you? You don’t have a telephone, or even a house.”

“Hey, I told you, I’m a witch. You think you want me to be there, and I’ll be there.”

“That doesn’t sound real.”

“You want to test me? I’ll disappear, and then you just think, ‘come on back, Itchy,’ and before you can touch your nose, I’ll be right next to you.”

“OK. I’ll see if that works,” said Tesserooti. And she did. Itchy disappeared. Tesserooti sat down at the kitchen table with her raspberry yogurt. Then she realized she hadn’t gotten a spoon. So instead of getting up, she thought ‘come back, Itchy.’

Lo and behold, there was Itchy, so quick it was surely magical.

“Wow! I can’t believe that!”

“And I brought you a spoon,” Itchy said, handing her a spoon just like the one’s that were in the house.

“OK. I trust you. I’ll just think of you as my favorite witch. And it’s a deal,” said Tesserooti.

“Wow, thanks. You are a real friend, girl,” said Itchy.

And Tesserooti and Itchy gave each other a big hug. And magically, Tesserooti’s third eye left and went into Itchy’s head. When the hug ended, Tesserooti added, “I need to ask you one big question.”

“Sure, go right ahead.”

“Did you paint that rainbow in the picture?”

“No.”
“Neither did I. But it’s still there.” said Tesserooti.

“But if neither you nor I painted it, it must be real. And real rainbows don’t last, that’s why we always have to look up and see what’s in the sky. Maybe there’s a rainbow there. Promise me you will always check the sky for rainbows.”

“I will,” answered Tesserooti.

And then with a graceful leap, Itchy floated into the picture on the refrigerator. There she was just as Tesserooti had drawn her. But as she looked, Tesserooti noticed the rainbow was dissolving. Soon it wasn’t there at all. And then she noticed Itchy was walking in the picture, she was going far away toward the back, getting smaller and smaller. Soon she wasn’t there at all.

Sad to have lost Itchy, and the rainbow, Tesserooti did what she always did when she was sad. She took her crayons and a big piece of paper outside to the little table by the tree. She slipped on her hat. Itchy would have to get her own hat. She sat down. Then she remembered what Itchy told her and she looked up at the sky. There was an airplane writing letters in the sky that said

Tesserooti, all art is magical!

and as the writing in the sky faded away she picked up her crayons to draw another picture.