

## **Schneider Helm - Look them in the eye**

1163 words

Eunice was the only one seated in the classroom, while everyone else checked the exam results pasted on the blackboard. It was all beneath her notice; she was writing her history essay, which wasn't due until next week, confident of the bonus marks she would receive.

**Ok. So our POV character is a precocious, stuck-up, teacher's-pet sort of kid. Story is set in school.**

It was also a reason not to look up. At the distrustful, envious glances the other kids shot her. They wouldn't dare to speak against the top of their class (by a mile), but she might as well be telepathic. It wasn't hard to imagine faults in her--her curly hair was unruly despite her best efforts, and she never, ever looked above someone's waist when speaking to them, if ever. Cheater, the louder whispers accused.

**Established: The other kids are unusually polite to academic overachievers (very un-kid-like), they whisper behind Eunice's back, and she is cognizant of this.**

**This could be phrased better.**

It wasn't the reason for her shame.

**Ok. Now we need to know what the reason for her shame is... You've raised a question in the reader's mind, you *must* immediately answer it.**

I'll ignore them. I'll be above them soon enough that they'll never hurt me again, she reaffirmed. But when, when?

**AAARGH YOU LEFT OUT THE REASON FOR EUNICE'S SHAME. Detail blueballs - don't do this.**

**Also, this seems to set up that Eunice is being physically bullied.**

Eunice saw a familiar pair of scabby knees, hovering before her. "You aced them again," Philip confirmed.

**Hm. Ok, so Eunice is a serial overachiever. We kinda already know this, but I could let this slide.**

"And?" she replied without lifting her eyes off her paper.

**Ok, so Eunice is also flawed - she's a dick to the other kids.**

"They're talking again. Can I wait with you at the gate? Just in case, you know," Philip offered.

**This makes it seem like Philip is seeking protection from Eunice. He's asking her for permission to wait with her, instead of asking if she wants him to protect her again.**

It's not like I can't defend myself, Eunice thought. But what if she had to? She didn't want to be moving again. She'd lose Philip, who offered "protection" in exchange for her ancestors' myths. Not help with schoolwork, a partnership she wouldn't bring herself into. Just stories.

**Ok. So... Eunice gets beat up but can defend herself but still needs Philip's protection? This makes no sense. Also, the stories thing is very strange and will need to be explained. Otherwise, it must be cut.**

"I'll ask Mom to come early. You won't have to wait long," she conceded.

**Passable. OK, REVIEW.**

- Eunice is an overachieving, precocious, socially-awkward kid in a normal school. She believes she can defend herself, but still allows Philip to protect her, presumably from bullies.

- Philip is her friend (her only friend) and offers some kind of protection for her getting beat up. We're not sure why they're friends.

- There's a whiff that Eunice wants to be left alone and not bullied. The obstacle is that the other kids hate her and will therefore continue to bully her. This is a decent motivation.

The conflict is between Eunice's shitty attitude and her desire to not be bullied. She looks down on the other kids and seems to want to hold herself apart from them (out of a sense of superiority? This could be brought out more), but this is what makes them hate her.

There is also something of a conflict where Eunice seems to want to stand up for herself, but won't. We don't know why. This is very briefly mentioned and generally is undeveloped.

Ok, so I can surmise that this story's theme is "do unto others as you would have them do unto you", or something similar. That's a good, classic theme. Let's see if you develop the story around it.

\* \* \*

They sat on the steps, huddled to one side. Amidst the din of school buses picking up students, Eunice continued her essay on her lap. Out of the corner of her eye, she watched Philip square his shoulders, returning glares from their classmates who passed.

**Scene-setting. Also, shows us that Eunice is really a serious bookworm and that the classmates really hate her.**

"Tim's coming. He might try something," he whispered. Not that Tim would, probably. Philip was proud of his black belt.

**Ok, so Philip actually can provide protection. We should probably have known this earlier. It would strengthen Eunice's "i can protect myself" thought.**

"I hate him. I hate how he hates me," Eunice hissed.

**Authentic!**

Philip shrugged. "You know why, though? When you transferred, he was the first to try talking to you. And you ignored him, like he was invisible," he recounted.

**Ooh. He's pointing out her shitty attitude. He's basically presenting the moral: do unto others, etc. This is good!**

"It's not like I'll see him after a year, anyway," Eunice said. She could see and hear Tim stomping his feet on the steps as he passed. When the boy turned his head, Eunice ducked.

**Ok, and Eunice evades it, and demonstrates her need for protection. She refuses to change. This is fine for the beginning of a story.**

Minutes later, a car screeched into a halt right in front of the gate, its window rolling down to reveal a regal face framed in auburn ringlets. For the first time in the day, Eunice smiled. "See you tomorrow," she told Philip, taking the steps two at a time.

**Eunice has a good relationship with her mom. QUICK REVIEW.**

**Moral is definitely the "do unto others" bit. Eunice does not recognize or does not accept that her shitty behavior is part of the problem. We now understand that the other kids don't hate her because she's an overachiever, they hate her because she's a bitch.**

**This scene generally serves to deepen Eunice's character and our understanding of the situation. It's pretty decent.**

\* \* \*

Eunice reclined in her seat, having finished her meal. "Mom? Do you like it here? Living here, I mean," she blurted out the words.

**All right, Eunice would prefer to move out of town rather than deal with her shitty attitude problem.**

Her mother put her glass of wine down. "Why yes, I do, is there a problem, my dear?" she replied.

**And mom doesn't want to. Interests in conflict.**

"I want to move up grades. You know I can do it. Why, well..."

**Eunice doubles down. Thing is, what Eunice is suggesting is logically inconsistent - you shouldn't have to move to skip a grade. This conflicts with our understanding of the world.**

**Her mom would have to poke holes in it for this to be decent. Alternately, cut this and just go straight to "tell me everything", which would show that Eunice's mom is a good, concerned parent.**

Her mother blew out the candles one by one, until the center one remained. "Tell me everything," she encouraged. The flames painted a picture of calm on her olive face.

Eunice told her mother about her situation in class. The shunning and all.

**Clunky phrasing.**

"Have you tried talking to your classmates?" her mother probed.

**Ok, this is the second time Eunice has been challenged to change her attitude. It's the same way, so this better be good.**

"What? No, of course not. You know what could happen..." Eunice reasoned.

**Wait what. This seems to be Eunice afraid of being beaten up, but she's already said she could defend herself, and presumably this could involve teachers and shit... This doesn't make sense.**

Her mother twirled a lock of hair around her finger. Eunice envied her mother's hair, how it obeyed her completely. "You do know we can control it," her mother stated kindly, but firmly.

**NO. NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO NO.**

**DO NOT HAVE TWO CHARACTERS VAGUELY TALK AROUND AN IMPORTANT DETAIL. THIS IS NOT ACCEPTABLE.**

"But what if I get mad and lose it?" Eunice fidgeted. It had almost happened before. An incident in a playground. A child, lying bent on the sandbox, stiff and crying. A yelling mother. Her own mother, furiously apologizing, holding her hand so tight it bruised. The one time she tried making friends, and look where that got her.

**NO NO NO. This is all too vague for us to know anything other than Eunice may get angry and hurt people. As far as I can tell, she has rage issues or something. I had a roommate in university who was like that.**

**Also, the "one time she tried to make friends" bit does not work - we already know she has a friend in Philip. Sorry, no.**

Her mother shook her head. "You're older now, my dear. It won't be like that anymore. But you need to try before you can say you've done everything you could. Giving up is no way to live, even for us. Look them in the eye. It'll be fine," she assured.

**VAGUE. VAGUE. VAGUE. VAGUE.**

Eunice smiled. "Thanks, Mom. Um, can I have some of your wine? Please?" Eunice requested.

**She accepts this shit pretty fast. Not really satisfying for a character change. The character needs to face her fears, not just get told "oh, it's cool, don't worry." You just defused any tension there might've been about Vague Rage Problem.**

"Only for tonight," her mother consented.

**This scene is the biggest problem in your entire story. Two characters dance around an important part of the plot, in full view of the reader. This is immensely frustrating to read, and is a "throw book across room" moment. Were I reading this "for realz", I would have just stopped reading entirely.**

\* \* \*

Coming from the bathroom, Eunice returned to her seat only to discover her bag's gaping zipper. Fearing the worst, she dug her folder out and looked for her essay. Gone. And to think she had been ready to face the class with her mother's advice. The devils.

**Scene-setting. See sidenotes.**

"Looking for something?" Tim jeered, walking towards her. He dangled the pages right at her face. Eunice made a grab for it, but Tim pulled her essay away.

**Ok, so we know that Tim stole something from Eunice. This is good, we know Tim hates her and she hates him. Time to face your ultimate fear, Eunice!**

**You could draw this out for *one* more paragraph and raise the tension - make it clear Tim wants a fight, not just to tease her. That would really make her face her worst fear.**

Eunice brought herself to full height, lifting her head. Philip was already out of his seat, and she waved for him to stop. There are two ways to do this, she thought. An easy way, and a hard way. Only she couldn't tell which was which. She thought about her mother. They've moved so many times, and this was the happiest Eunice ever saw of her. If not for herself, then...

**Eh, I'm not super warm on this as written. It's necessary, but this is clumsy. Push the character up against the wall - the fight is *unavoidable*, she *has* to react. Then have her ruminate in the last moment before she gives in to her rage.**

"Tim," Eunice proclaimed, wielding her tormentor's name like a shield. Green spots danced in her eyes. She willed them away, steadying her breathing. "I know you don't like me at all. You think I'm some stuck-up girl who's too up in her head to talk to her classmates." The words came pouring out of her. But it could still go either way. Her hair swirled, the monster in her wrestling against the yoke of her will.

**Still clumsy. The bizarre-ass Carrie shit you're adding makes no sense as we have had no hints up until now that we're in some kind of supernatural universe. (This is the problem with you dancing around the issue in the prior scene.)**

**Also, she speaks reeeeeeaally calmly here. She needs to be UP AGAINST THE WALL, at her WITS END. She is being confronted with her WORST FEAR, the ULTIMATE TEST.**

**Also also, her dialogue is stilted as fuck.**

"I'm sorry," she apologized. She whirled around, addressing her classmates in the eye. "I just don't know how to talk to people. I've been hurt before, so I stopped bothering. So, yeah. I kind of pushed you away. I don't actually want you to hate me. So if you please, can we start over?"

**This is ok. Eunice learns that she has to expose herself emotionally, that she has to be vulnerable and nice to people, in order for them to accept her. This is a fine character change.**

Everyone stared at her, perfectly still. A wave of panic rolled over her, and Eunice hung her head right at the very moment Tim burst out laughing. Rip, rip, he tore the paper into bits, scattering it on the floor. He took his seat and acted like nothing happened.

**Ooh, at the last moment, Tim reject's Eunice's niceness. This is *necessary*. How will Eunice react to being pushed even further? Someone has done bad things to her, will she turn the other cheek? Remember, do unto others.**

Philip made for Tim. "No!" Eunice commanded, shaking her head. "No," she repeated, dropping to her knees to pick up the pieces. Their next teacher would come any time now. Philip helped her instead, his face red with suppressed anger.

**Ok. There's your climax. Right there. This paragraph. This COULD be stronger: Eunice would need to clearly resist the temptation to beat the living shit out of Tim herself, here. Just telling Philip to stop is halfway there.**

"Why didn't you let me?" he pleaded.

"It doesn't matter. I could write it again," Eunice mumbled.

**Ok.**

Anna walked over to her spot. "We'll help," she announced. Anna, who had made fun of her hair. "Sorry," she added.

**Yes. Lesson time! Eunice decided to be nice and Forgave Tim, so now the class Forgives her. This *shows* your moral. This is very good.**

Tim watched the entire class on their knees, picking up and disposing his handiwork. Eunice met his eyes; they were clouded in defeat.

**Not really necessary; the class pitching in is all we need. But, still, passable.**