

## A Visit from the Eye Fairy

Kat was excited because she had a loose eye, and, according to Western mythology, that just about guaranteed a visit from the Eye Fairy. Her first-grade teacher, Ms. Witherstone, was the first to notice.

“Everyone, everyone, gather around Kat’s desk, it’s time for a very special lesson,” Ms. Witherstone said, “Kat may be getting a visit from a very fun and magical stranger soon. Who knows about the Eye Fairy?”

Beth was the first to respond: “*My* daddy told me the Eye Fairy isn’t real.”

“What’s the Eye Fairy?” asked Nick, betraying the fact that he had been raised by neither his parents nor by television.

“Ewww!” said Tommy, who would spend the rest of the lesson poking at his own eye, and, to his disappointment, feeling it push back against his finger.

“Class, class, it’s okay if you don’t know who the Eye Fairy is. And, yes, he *is* real. And, Tommy, losing your eyes is not gross. It’s natural. You see, when babies are born, they are born with baby eyes. Because eyes are so special and have so many different and unique parts, they can’t get bigger. The rest of your body—your arms and legs and toes and nose—do get bigger...and bigger...and bigger! In fact, you keep growing until you’re too big for your baby eyes. That’s when they fall out—or, are plucked out.” Ms. Witherstone then made a beak by putting her thumb under her other fingers, which she used to skillfully pluck a mimed eye out of the air. Her class applauded.

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The Eye Fairy woke up and rubbed his peepers (the ones he took from children and kept in glass jars). The Eye Fairy—more precisely, the one named Boris who services the families of

Glendale, CA—applied, as part of his daily ritual, lotion to his body. His skin was rough like the leather that coats the flesh of cows. His profile, however, closely resembled that of a tripedal mannequin. The lotion did little to make the Eye Fairy’s face any more normal or less ghastly to any humans who might accidentally see it. But the Eye Fairy was nothing if not self-conscious, and mostly worked at night.

Boris watched Kat from a tree during recess. She was a sweet kid: humble and not at all a bragger. She had a few playmates but no close friends, though this was usual for her age. Boris rooted silently for Kat as she played round after round of doubles tether ball. He consumed a box of salty crackers.

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Fourth and fifth periods were always the longest, and today was no exception. Everything reminded Kat of her loose eyes. Grapes—eyes. Subtraction—eyes. Ms. Witherstone’s face—eyes. Kat sat on her fingers every chance she could, terrified that if she lifted the pressure even for a second her own hands would somehow dig into her skull and out would pop her eye. She’d have to use a plastic bottle to suck it up off the floor, but it would already be covered in floor hairs. She’d ask her parents to take her to the eye doctor so she could put it back, but Kat she knew they would say no. Kat said a quick prayer, and hoped the Eye Fairy was listening.

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“How was your day, sweetie?” asked Kat’s dad while driving her home. He looked at her via the rear-view mirror as he talked. Kat was quiet.

“Okay. Well what did you learn today?”

“Nothing,” she said.

“Nothing? Nothing is what I learned in grade school! I heard you learn things now. Math and stuff—or so I’m told.”

“We did subtraction.”

“Oh? What’s...uh...two minus...uh...one?”

Kat burst into tears, which quickly began to fill the space between her eye and its socket. She told her dad she wasn’t ready for adult eyes and was scared it would hurt when the string that kept her eye in would break. She knew it needed to happen so her new eye could grow in and that it wouldn’t even hurt, but even so she was scared.

Now, Kat’s father didn’t have the best loose-eye stories. He had five older brothers, and his father was an optometrist, so his brothers had both tools to experiment with and a subject to experiment on. The first time Kat’s father lost an eye was in the third grade. His brothers thought it was funny that he was so old and still had his baby eyes so they brought him to the roof, tied a toaster to his optical nerve, and threw the toaster off the roof. The second time he lost an eye was a week after his oldest brother had left the house to attend (against his family’s wishes) culinary school. He left behind his set of knives, which, combined with Kat’s grandfather’s collection of local anesthetics and surgical lights, provided Kat’s uncles with many hours of entertainment.

“When I lost my first baby eye, I put it in a plastic bag filled with glitter and salt water, and hid the bag in my closet,” said Kat’s dad. “The next day, I opened my closet door, and my eye was gone, but, in its place, was a card with a pack of wizard stickers!”

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Kat was playing with her eye in bed. She decided she was going to keep her baby eyes. She might need glasses. She might need to get her eye sockets filled. She might even go blind. But she wasn’t going to let anybody take her eyes. Then, her mom walked in.

“Your father told me that somebody has a loose eye,” she said.

Kat was petrified. She thought about hiding, but that wouldn’t make any sense. Her mother was looking right at her.

“We’re leaving tomorrow, Kat, to visit your father parents out East. How’s your eye doing? It’s probably very wiggly, isn’t it?” Kat’s mom approached her bed. “Do you mind if I give them a little tug?”

“No,” Kat said.

“Kat, I promise: I’m just going to give it a wiggle.”

“No.”

“Have I ever broken a promise to you?” asked Kat’s mom. She hadn’t.

Kat was staring at her mother’s fingers. Her nails were long, yellow, and had dirt underneath. Because Kat’s depth perception was off, she was unable to gauge how far away her mother’s hands were.

“Just a tiny, little, itsy-bitsy wiggle, okay? It’d very bad if they fell out while on the plane tomorrow, or at the airport—imagine how bad that would be? What’s wrong, my little kitten?” Kat tried to move her covers but her mother grabbed her wrist. There was no point in struggling. The room shrank and pulsed. The fingers came, though Kat could hardly see. They closed around her loose eye, popping it gently out of its socket. That’s when Kat noticed the scissors in her mom’s pocket.

“Just a test wiggle?” Kat struggled to ask.

“Of course,” her mom said, slowly reaching for the scissors.

What happened next happened was, strictly speaking, a moment. But not for Kat. Her mother lunged with the scissors and Kat turned away. The scissors landed square in her left eye,

poking a hole through it and breaking the optic nerve. (“It’s so fortunate that your little fitzy futz didn’t cause me to hit your good eye!” her mother would tell her, for years to come.)

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Boris sat in frustration outside Kat’s window. He did not enter that night. Nor the night after that or the night after that. He watched, grinding his teeth, as Kat did not sleep for three days.