

The Eye of the Storm

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It all started very innocently.

Well, actually, I'm not sure if a person who tells a group of seventh graders to look outside at a coming tornado can realistically be considered to be doing anything innocently. That's more like insanity, but Mrs. Webb's particular patent-pending brand of craziness often took on an aura of child-like innocence. So we, as actual children, were right there with her, leaning as far out of the second story, science lab window as we could and watching the swirling beginnings of a really big storm.

It wasn't until Mrs. Webb—who, upon further reflection, was definitely working with one of her mental tent flaps firmly unstaked—was driving me to the emergency room that I remembered what my parents had often said about what to do during tornadoes, like avoiding windows and hiding in bathtubs...under mattresses.

My dad was out of town, and my mother was working at the hospital toward which Mrs. Webb and I were unsafely hurtling in her car. So alone in my pain, I berated myself about my stupid choice to take a jump off the proverbial bridge following the lead of this woman who was talking to herself quietly in the driver's seat as we swerved toward the hospital.

Needless to say, when I saw my mother, I ran to her in desperation. I looked up at her like Quasimodo from "The Hunchback of Notre Dame" with my one good eye, as the other was too painful to open. I told her how, when every-

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one else ducked back inside the room to talk about how cool the storm was, I had left my small head out just a second too long and had actually turned my face directly into the path of an eddy of menacing dust particles. One of which was stuck in my eye despite countless efforts to remove it.

After an interminable wait, my mother and I were escorted back toward an examining room. As we approached the door, I happened to blink the offended eye and felt the speck move, so I quickly looked down and let gravity take it out. In exultation I told my mother how we now had no need to see the doctor, but she wanted him to affirm there was no harm to my eye.

Now I'm sure this doctor was a nice man, but someone had not been nice to him when they did not kindly inform him that when one sports a full, bushy forest of chest hair that it should never be paired with a low-collared shirt. I felt as though small woodland creatures might peek out at me as I lay staring up at it. I couldn't look away, mostly because they had put clamps on my eyelids to prevent them from closing. He was just declaring how he didn't see anything when my unblinking eyes beheld a small hair dislodging itself from the middle of that patch of chest hair and began a slow, wafting descent toward me.

Predicting the unavoidable trajectory, I began to struggle in mute horror. My only thought was, "I can't close my eye. I can't close my eye." My parents raised me to be polite, so I didn't know how to tell the man that one of his big fat white chest hairs was about to land on my eye.

The doctor told the nurse to hold me still because he was

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going to release the clamps. In a dance that was almost choreographed—in hell—he freed my eyelids right as the hair touched down on my eye, and they slammed shut over the renegade hair. If the piece of dust felt like a golf ball in my eye, that hair felt like a tree had been felled from the red-wood forest directly into it.

My scream of pain alerted the doctor that something was still wrong. He forced me back down on the table to peer over me again and with a pair of tweezers extracted his own chest hair from my eye. He wanted to double-check my eye for damage, and sure enough, there was a tiny scratch on my cornea which, he commented, had not been there before.

This man's chest hair had managed to do in one blink what a small piece of a tornado had not done in two hours of residence in my eye.

Perhaps I would have been able to release this scarring childhood experience had it not been recently mirrored in my adulthood. When my eyes began reddening without accompanied pain or itching and for no apparent reason, my dad insisted that I visit an eye doctor here in Arkadelphia...alone. I wanted my first solo medical consultation to be pleasant, so I asked for recommendations from trusted residents. A few people mentioned a particular physician who we will call Dr. Teed.

Upon arrival at the clinic and after the typical wait, I was ushered into a room by a female nurse who instructed me to look up. When I did, she placed a drop of some unknown liquid in each eye before dimming the lights and half-closing the sliding door to the hallway. This was the first time in my

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life that I had had my eyes dilated, but I didn't know this at the time. No, at the time I thought that I was going blind as the room slowly became dimmer and blurrier.

Finally through this haze, I made out the figure of the doctor entering. He had with him a slim, dark-haired woman who carried a clipboard and another woman who looked like Ms. Trunchbull or Nurse Ratched. She stood behind my right shoulder in that spot where you can see that someone is behind you, but you cannot tell what they are doing.

Dr. Teed asked me what seemed to be the problem as he pulled an instrument over in front of me. I placed my chin in the appropriate place as he shone an intensely bright beam of light in my eye. After this he suggested that I might want to grab the handles that were attached to the contraption. Hesitantly I agreed. No sooner had my hands cautiously grasped the handles than creeper nurse behind me grabbed my head in an iron grip. I was so startled that I didn't notice until it was too late that the doctor had placed a cotton swab below my eye. He then seized my eyelid and flipped it over the swab. It was at that moment I realized that I was being tortured for information.

My eyes darted around in terror as he gave my other eye the same treatment as the first, mumbling all the time to the woman writing furiously on her clipboard. The second and last sentence he uttered to me was that I should hand a slip of paper to the nurse at the front desk. He left without my knowing any more about my condition than when I arrived in that dungeon of horrors. The woman at the front spoke as little as possible to me before sending me and my dilated, light-sensitive eyes out unprotected into the excruciating

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brilliance of the mid-day sunshine. I immediately understood how vampires must feel. Covering my eyes with my arm, I searched hopelessly for my car and prayed for death to come quickly.

I guess sometimes we see bad things coming and are helpless to stop them. Other times we stick our faces directly into the middle of them, and still other times we're not given an ounce of warning. Many situations work out on their own while others have to be pulled out or just suffered through. I was going to try to extend this thought into a cleverly tied in life lesson, but I feel the analogy really just stops there. I mean I can't say that having an old doctor's chest hair in my eye really brought about anything good in the end. So the best I can do for words of wisdom is this: don't look at the eye of the storm unless you want the storm in your eye.

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