

Gift of Sight

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Dear Sir/Madam,

I turn one year old today and I'm so excited to share my experiences so far with all of you. I was born on a beautiful Monday morning and was overjoyed to be in mother's arms finally! "She is going to be an influencer on social media for sure!" beamed my proud father as he clicked a million pictures "look how beautiful she is!" he said. Damn right he was!

Little did I know that my life was going to change forever. Out of the blue, I was yanked away to this strange room with other tiny humans like me called the ICU. Oh! How I yearned to be with my mother again but more importantly, the room got dimmer and dimmer as the day passed.

The doctors informed my mother that I had a white spot in my eye and I needed a corneal transplantation to restore vision in my affected eye.

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I could sense the anxiety creep through my mother as she heard the news. I cooed in her arms to try and comfort her but my effort went in vain. "Isn't transplantation a major surgery with poor outcomes doctor?" she asked the doctor with glasses as she rocked me back and forth. The doctor gave her an all knowing smile; he probably had been asked this question multiple times before. "Corneal grafting is the most successful of all tissue transplants" he said. Corneal grafting? what's this now? I wondered. I was told my entire eye needed to be transplanted. I frowned. "We were told she would need an eye transplant doctor. What is this corneal grafting?" my father quizzed. Daddy reads my mind so well sometimes I thought. "Of course she needs an eye transplant, but not the whole eye. Only the outer portion of the eyeball called the cornea is transplanted in these surgeries" he explained. "Being a transparent tissue, the cornea acts like a glass window through which we see the entire world and since it is devoid of blood vessels, it is an ideal tissue for transplantation" he added. "We can safely transplant it without matching the donors as it is the case in other transplants" he explained.

WOW! Isn't that simple! I tried to send a telepathic message to my father sitting across the room.

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Ok daddy, Let's go buy me some corneas. "That's fantastic doctor! No matter the cost, we are willing to pay the donor for the cornea" my father quipped. I smiled thinking my telepathy worked. "Absolutely not" said the doctor in haste. "Eye donations are done free of cost. Only a person who has pledged his eyes or relatives of a deceased person can give consent for eye donation. One can neither buy nor sell donated eyes. It is the most noble form of charity." All of us were awestruck.

"May God bless the one who donated their eye so that my granddaughter can see" said my grandmother. She muttered a silent prayer for the unknown person and asked, "So you must be getting a lot of eye donations every day, right doctor?". "Unfortunately that is not the case ma'am" the doctor sighed. "Most people are superstitious. It is hard to convince them otherwise" he replied. "How can this be?" exclaimed my grandmother, who was the most spiritual amongst us all. "No religion can be against such an honourable deed" she guaranteed. "Well said ma'am. It is the mindset of the people that needs to change." remarked the kind looking nurse in white uniform. We all nodded in agreement

"Can a living person donate their eyes doctor?" asked my elder brother. My heart swelled with love for him at that instant. "Only the deceased can, little boy" replied the tall junior doctor with a smile. My brother tried to hide his disappointment. "But you can pledge your eyes, buddy" encouraged the other red haired doctor with a smile. "There is no age limit for eye donation" she said, patting him.

My family processed all this with a sense of hope growing within. "Is the eye collection a complicated process doctor? Does it delay the cremation proceedings of the deceased? Is that why people shy away from pledging their eyes?" inquired my curious grandfather. This is a valid question, I thought. "That is not the case either. The entire procedure of retrieving the eyes takes less than 20 minutes and does not delay the cremation process. We have trained personnel and doctors who finish the process with absolutely no waste for the family to clear." The doctor replied. "Also, the eyes are collected only if the relatives of the deceased give their consent" the doctor further added. "All that we ask of the relatives is to inform us within 6 to 8 hours after the demise and to switch off the fans or cover the eyes of the deceased with a moist cloth to prevent the cornea from drying. It's fairly simple. In fact, we never refuse an eye donation unless the donor had died from or had been diagnosed with AIDS, Hepatitis, rabies, septicemia, Covid or some prion associated diseases. Even if the eyes cannot be used for transplantation, they can be used for medical education and research" he explained.

"Will the face of the donor have holes in them after you remove the eyes doctor?" asked my little brother sheepishly. The doctors and nurses laughed in unison. "Of course not, my boy, we place an artificial eye in its place. You wouldn't know the difference even if we told you" said the doctor with a wink. The smile was back on my brother's face now.

An eye donation counsellor then handed the eye pledge form to all my family members. My grandparents scurried through it.

“But we have had a cataract surgery doctor. Does that mean we cannot donate our eyes?” They asked in worry. Nobody can do for little children what grandparents do. “This is a common misconception” the doctor clarified. “Even people with eye diseases can donate their eyes. Even I wear glasses but that has not curtailed me from pledging my eyes” he pointed out.

Ah! There are so many aspects of this eye donation, I marvelled. What a beautiful way to leave this world, I thought as I slowly drifted to sleep. I hummed my favourite rhyme as I yawned.

Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall.

Humpty Dumpty had a great fall

All the king's horses and all the king's men

Couldn't put Humpty together again

So Humpty Dumpty left his eyes behind.

So children like me wouldn't be blind

All the king's horses and all the king's men

Lauded Humpty for being so kind.

We were then sent to meet the anaesthetist. She was hands down my most favourite person in that hospital. She wrapped me in her arms like I was her own while I tried to pull the pink beads dangling from her spectacles all the while. “Such a cutie” she gushed pinching my cheeks. “Say hello to your new friend” she said as she brought me close to my new bestie, Baby Z, also with a white patch in her eye. We were scheduled for corneal transplantation on the same day. Isn't it amazing that a single donor changed both our lives by just donating their two eyes?

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