

Virtual Mentor

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PERSONAL NARRATIVE

Through the Patient's Eyes: A Valentine Story

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When it became apparent that the solution to my drooping eye and ongoing eye infections was surgery, I was ready to schedule it for the earliest possible date.

That would be February 14th, Valentine's Day. Valentine's Day hadn't been special to me for years. I didn't have any Valentine obligations. Neither Hallmark Cards nor Russell Stover's Candies, nor florists—nor anybody else—had profited from me for some time. I was a cynical Valentine Scrooge as it were. Still there was something about scheduling that day that seemed peculiar, strange, ironic—I didn't know quite what. But I went for it.

When they rolled me into the operating room I was somewhere in the twilight zone. I had to be able to open and close my eyes on demand but not to wrestle the knife from her long delicate young fingers. I joked with her not to make me look any younger than about 40. I don't remember whether she promised not to remove more than one quarter of a century or not. I do remember her drawing lines on my eye lids for the knife to trace.

Later I became conscious of a young male voice speaking softly to her, encouraging, supporting, agreeing as she removed some of the excess folds of my right upper eyelid. I asked where this coach had come from as she tightened and shortened my lower lid, but there was only soft laughter as she reattached the lower, and upper lids in the corner of my right eye.

The left eye was simpler. It didn't take long just to remove part of the upper eyelid and suture it back together. Then the young male came up alongside me. I think he made eye contact but I only remember seeing one black eyebrow beneath a blue surgical cap as he explained he was her husband—an ear, nose and throat man—and that he liked to come watch her when his schedule permitted so that he could learn to improve his own plastic surgery skills.

It sounded like a love story to me.

FR Burdette lives, writes, and walks the seawall in Galveston, an island off Texas, in the Gulf of Mexico.

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