

Excerpt from "Emergence"

By Myke Bartholomew

It's difficult to explain how I felt when the doctor told me I'd be dead. But for the sake of documentation I'll try to remember best I can. The first thing I recall vividly is his gentle reassurance I'd be safe. I found it odd that I'd be safe dead. It seemed ironic. He went over the grocery list of machines that would be monitoring me while I was on the other side. The intention was to stop my heart for three minutes. Even though he said, "It's only three minutes," I thought about how long three minutes would seem if I held my breath. I tried but only got to forty-five. Three minutes is a really long time. I remember looking at my shoes and wishing I had worn matching socks. It didn't seem like a big deal when I pulled them on this morning, but now the prospect of never coming back made me think my mom might judge me when the doctor hands her my belongings.

Before I could wander in that space too long, a nurse interrupted me to show me to the changing room. She was pretty. Classic pretty. Like one of the nurses I imagined caring for the soldiers who were wounded at Pearl Harbor. Her kinked brown hair fell from under the white cap and framed her jaw line perfectly. And her glossy red lipstick reflected the overhead lights in a manner that made her mouth look wet. I followed her down the corridor wondering about her life, until I became slightly irritated by the squeaking of her orthopedic shoes on the checkered linoleum. It made my skin tingle the same way it did when Steven Harper ran the metal edge of his ruler across the chalkboard in third grade. She opened the changing room door and smiled kindly as I passed. The way the corners of her eyes wrinkled when her lips curved upward made me forget I was irritated.

As I closed the door behind me, I faced the mirror and saw the me I might be seeing for the very last time. I scanned myself from head to toe analyzing my physical features and clothing. I admired the tips of my sandy brown hair and how they grew lighter in the summertime when I stayed outdoors longer. I stopped at the scar on my right eyebrow, which was from the time my older brother John hit me in the face with a stick while we were sword-fighting in the front yard. Then I got stuck staring into my own eyes for longer than I can remember anyone else looking at them. They've stayed the same mix between grey and blue since I was four. I remembered people used to compliment them all the time when I was younger, but couldn't recall the last time I'd heard them mentioned in my recent past. When I got to my jacket, I felt a little embarrassed. It's a jacket I've had since my body sprouted to this size sophomore year of high school. The olive color that once was the shade of military fatigues has now faded to what looks like a depressed version of lime green. Holes wore through the corners of the collar and the tear in the elbow has only gotten worse since Jeremy snagged it on the door of the cab when we were in San Francisco. I thought of all the times I had taken it off after school and thrown it on the couch in the front living room. And also about how many times I'd used it as a pillow when we were lying on the floor listening to records in Stephanie's dorm. I ran my fingers over the raised embroidery on our band patch that Lucas made me for my 19th birthday. It's been a good jacket. But I think I'll get rid of it after today.

While I was entranced in the memories of my coat, a knock on the door startled me. The nurse was checking to see if I was okay. I changed as quickly as I could and didn't bother to fold my clothes the way I had planned. I came out of the room and a different nurse was standing semi-patiently waiting. The look on her face was not as warm or sympathetic as the other nurse. Her lips pursed tensely like she just sucked a lemon and her eyes stared dully at me like I was her television on a lonely Saturday night. I didn't feel like she was in a rush for me to die, but rather that she was in a rush to do other things with her time altogether. I felt bad for making her wait.