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What Matters Most

Have you ever piloted a kayak in a hurricane,
 Only to find it capsized amidst thunder, lightning, and buffets of rain?

I have.

The waves threatened to engulf us and the rain steadily pattered against the surface of the water
 Like a drum roll preparing the environment for our execution.
 The doomed ship, overturned and gradually sinking into the restless lake,
 Remained our only key to the world above.
 The swirling grey sky and miniature bullets that fell from it
 Made the aquatic life below seem peaceful.
 If it wasn't for my flip-flops, I might've let go,
 And let myself become immersed in the tranquility and the silence.

Have you ever found yourself in a dire situation,
 Where the seemingly insignificant begins to matter?

I have.

It was a pair of red flip-flops,
 Purchased absentmindedly at a swimming competition
 And earlier decaying at the bottom of a chlorine-eaten duffel bag.
 I had subconsciously removed them from my feet
 And grasped them in the same hand that feebly held onto the dying vessel.
 I should've let them go, given them permission to float downward,
 Allowed them to exit from the turbulent surface
 Let them find their journey end at the bottom of the lake.
 That is, to find themselves in tranquility and silence,
 Resting gently in the plants and sand, finishing the process that the chlorine had started months
 Earlier. It would have been best to focus on more important factors at hand,
 To salvage what mattered most.

You're going to be okay.

The words spoken by an absolute stranger, caring, but still subtly serious,
 As if given by a teacher who feared the worst in his student's future.
 He had been there, even as a child who had never experienced a trip to the emergency room,

(No Stanza Break)

I knew he could see the world from my perspective.
He had traveled the road before,
And although his understanding of the world and his troubles were far beyond my own,
He still had the ability to look through my eyes and visit his origins once again.
He knew where to direct his attention, he knew what to protect, he knew what mattered most.
And I, still clutching my pale hand where two razor slices had made their permanent indent,
Watched in fear and awe as the man, with staples, blood, bandages,
And stiches lining his stomach,
Looking vaguely like an absurd imitation of the game 'Snake,'
Departed through a set of double doors and left me pondering.
How?

Approaching their end, have you ever watched someone muster the strength
To dispose their anger and fear
And comfort those around them?

I have.

My Luck had danced with death for years, but now fate managed the last laugh.
I would've expected him to isolate himself during his final days,
To retreat to some remote section of our home to reflect upon his life.
Yet, I found him residing in my lap and looking up at me with his bright green eyes as if to say,
Now is my only chance to tell you how much you mean to me.
The expected emotions of the afflicted often manifest in those around them.
He was ready, we were not.
To allow us to grieve and move on, to allow us to accept his death and persevere,
He knew this mattered most.
His final days were spent watching the outdoors, residing in a chair,
And lovingly looking up at us as if to say,
You're going to be okay.

How is it we are drawn to the concern of others,
When our utmost interests should be self-centered?
How is it that a man, patched together like a child's self-created school puzzle,
Can find time to express compassion for a kid who is only in need of a few stiches?
How is it that a cat, withering at the back of a chair,
Can display his affections for his family and ignore his own unfair destiny?
How is it that when my own life is threatened by a merciless storm,
I'm more worried about the safety of my flip-flops than my own well-being?

The boat, filled with dark water and vile muck, is pulled upon a distant shoreline.
My foot, wounded from contact with a foreign object after we landed,
Clouds the immediate area with a swirl of red, much like the clouds circling overhead.
The passenger is overcome with fear and shock,
The boat is out of commission, and rescue is a distance away.

(No Stanza Break)

And despite the shade of red that poured from my foot,
The stiffness of my muscles, and the frailty of my legs,
I dove back in and swam across.

Perhaps, self-interests are not motivators for survival.
Perhaps in the most crucial of moments we learn what is most important to us.
That we have already reached peace with ourselves, and it is our job to reconcile others.
That we, regardless of our own fate, could never overcome the guilt
Of losing everything we cherish.
For if we are left with only self-interests, we are left with no purpose to trudge onward.
When our own existence is threatened, we move to protect what matters most.
And that is why, before I dove, I glanced at the passenger as if to say
It's going to be okay.