

IN THIS QUEST TO LIVE FOREVER, THERE'S OCCASIONAL OPERATIONS INVOLVED

JOHN GREY

What do I know of my last day on Earth?
I do remember the surgeon with the very large scalpel.
He stood over me, used that blade to reflect light and blind my eyes.
He was there to cut me open but a doctor must be allowed to play.
I'm sure I have a lot of fan toys inside me.
I could feel my stomach tearing apart before he even touched me.
And there were nurses of course. Bandits in white.
They were there to steal all of the good years I've got coming.
Then the anesthetist jabbed a spear into my arm and,
for the next three hours or more, I dreamed nothing but coalmines.
When I awoke, I was like a beached dolphin, flapping and clueless.
A nurse confirmed the fact that yes, I was alive, the worst was over,
I could have fluids, would I like juice or tea etc etc.
What I really wanted was confirmation that I would never ever die.
I felt a pain over my gut like my skin was being run through
my grandmother's ancient sewing machine.
My fingers found the stitches. No way they'd last a thousand years.
I swallowed planet pain-killer, wash its oceans down with water.
The doctor's smile came by trailed by the man himself.
He was like an old west marshal, stethoscope in one hand, clipboard in the other.
"Success," he said. "We were able to extract the entire tumor, debt, family issue,
car problem, girlfriend quagmire, housing shortage..."
What he meant was that the bad guy was now behind bars.
His voice died like the patient in the bed beside me.
The man had a bad heart. He changed colors overnight.
His last words were a diatribe against hospital food.
I'd prefer my epitaph to be pithy, profound, and to rhyme.
But Marcus Welby left the room to go cheer up some other dead man.
Then I faced the terrors of people I know. They sat on the edge of the bed and gloated.
"We told you it was nothing." The Red Sox score when someone from
the other team pitches a shutout is nothing. My insides are no playing field.
"You gotta read this," said a friend, shoving a book into my weary mitt.
"It's a thrill a minute." No, it wasn't about some guy who opens up his friend's stomach
and goes looking for a malignant growth. There was a time-bomb involved.
That was such a relief to me. A man can never hear enough ticking.