
I am improving. Slowly, I take one courageous step out of the darkness at a time. My knees tremble with the weight that they are forced to carry, but I beg them to stand up straight and propel my body forward. I started as the timid freshman that hid behind dorm room walls, avoiding social interactions that went beyond stating my name, major, and hometown. I looked fear in the eye as I practiced my introduction in front of the mirror, perfecting the way my name escaped my mouth with assurance. “I am Laura Perrault.” I stick out a firm hand, stronger than ever before, and my hand meets theirs and knows exactly what to do. Three seconds, then let go so that they don’t think you’re clinging on to their presence. “It was nice to meet you, we should get lunch sometime.” Do they really want to get lunch with me, or is it out of pity? We get lunch on Monday at 12pm, and days later those lunch dates turn into Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. I sit beside them again at dinner at 5:30 pm sharp. We’re regulars now, and there is a sense of comfort in their presence. I am given a new introduction, “this is my friend, Laura,” and the word never tasted so sweet. Friend.

Stares

I am beautiful. There is no way to erase the years that I allowed my birth defect to take the reins of my life and eliminate all happiness. Along the way, I met people who challenged my improvement, and encountered situations that made it almost unbearable to regain my balance to keep moving forward. However, in those darkest moments, I found others that stood by my side, building up my army to protect the castle inside that lay defenseless. They built up my walls and then slowly tore them down until my vulnerability was something that I was no longer afraid of. Sister. Daughter. Chemist. Academic. Researcher. Friend. The name Laura Perrault is sculpted by these words, making a definition that overpowers any other that once plagued the name. This new definition is added to the dictionary, making it permanent in the ink that bleeds the pages. This confidence is here to stay.

BLOOD TEST

GABRIELLE LATORRE

Blue Button

It was a routine blood test. Results were negative. She spends the next night writhing under pale pink, sweat-soaked, polyester sheets. Beads of perfumed perspiration drip trails and tributaries down her damp skin. A sharp, pointed pain shoots through the crook of her arm between forearm and bicep, lurching her awake. She brushes her fingers over the spot, feeling a distinct, cold swelling. Frantically, she fumbles for the light switch and sits up with a start. Her mouth gapes in horror as she watches what appears to be an iridescent blue button the size of a dime fight its way to the surface of her skin. She swallows a panicked, garbled scream, certain she must be dreaming, delirious with fever. Covering her eyes, she peaks cautiously through partitioned fingers, holding her jagged breath. It’s still there. A deep, hot jolt of fear courses through her veins like molten lava. Thoughts swirl in her mind, a cacophonous frenzy, clamoring over and crashing into one another, each vying for attention. She forces herself to take a deep breath, but it comes out shaky and she can’t steady it. Fingers twitching, itching to push the button, yet she refrains. She reflects on yesterday, yearning for clues, anything to latch onto. The quick, white swish of fresh ironed lab coat, the melodic clicking and scribbling of felt-tipped pen on clip board, the hushed tone and quiet arguing outside her hospital room. Too terrified to bend her arm lest the button get pressed, heart beating in rhythm with the swift hooves of a racehorse, she finishes the night with eyes stapled wide open.

Pressed

She felt her veins expand to heavy tubes through her once sun-soaked skin, now a translucent milky white. They pulsate with her heart, a steady thrum like the beat of an ominous marching band, processing into darkness. The blue tubes snake through her body and emit a dull glow, muted by clusters of cells. Blood swirls through them, like water through an enclosed amusement park slide. She can almost hear it sloshing through her. The urge to cut herself open and investigate what’s inside consumes her.

[This isn’t some warped sci-fi movie, this is her life. They told her the clinical trial might have unknown side effects, but nothing like this. It was supposed to save her, not ruin her.]

[The unknown is simply too deadly, a potential trapped door to fall through, never to recover.]