



Pyathia



STYLUS

2019-20

HOW TO SUBMIT AND WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR PUBLICATION

STYLUS is looking for original, unpublished short stories, poetry, creative nonfiction, memoir, two-dimensional art (drawing, painting, collage, etc.), and photography. Any high school senior or any student currently enrolled at a college in the SC Technical College System is eligible to submit. Publication is subject to verification of your student status at the time of submission. Only Midlands Technical College students are eligible for the annual literary and art awards. Our regular reading periods are September 1 through December 10 and January 10 through March 10.

For production reasons, we can only take emailed submissions that comply with the following guidelines:

Submit all poetry and prose in Microsoft Word (.doc or .docx) or Rich Text (.rtf) formats attached to an email. Your name, email address, and a phone number should be typed at the top of the first page of your document file. You may submit manuscripts in both poetry and prose, but they must be submitted separately by genre.

Poetry submissions should be limited to no more than seven poems, single-spaced, and combined into a single document file. Please do not send poems as separate files.

Prose submissions, short stories, nonfiction, and memoirs should be double-spaced. Prose submissions should be limited to 5,000 words.

For art submissions, we prefer high-definition photography and/or digital scans (or photographs) of original art (600 dpi .jpeg or .tiff files, if possible). Digital photographs of paintings and drawings are acceptable, but you should make every effort to light the artwork adequately and crop the photograph so that it has no borders around the art.

Email your submission to stylus@midlandstech.edu as an attachment (document or image file). On the subject line of your email write either "Poetry Submission," "Prose Submission," or "Art Submission." In your email message, please include the following: (1) your full name (with your MTC ID number, if you are a Midlands Tech student); (2) your area code and phone number; (3) your school institution; (4) the business email address of a faculty member or administrator who knows your work.

The History of STYLUS

The publication history of STYLUS magazine begins in the mid-1980s with the first literary yearbook at Midlands Technical College. That magazine was called *Starshine* and was founded and edited by Maurice Duperre of the MTC English department.

By 1990, the magazine had changed its name and eventually grew into a 40-60 page journal of student writing and art. The publication became a full-color production by 2000, directed by editor Keith Higginbotham, who guided the journal for over a decade. Other editors have included Les Turner, Curtis Derrick, and Travis Gordon. During its history, *STYLUS* has won grant awards from the South Carolina Arts Commission and several awards from the Two-year College Humanities Council.

With our Fall 2011 issue, the magazine continued its evolution as an online publication and the cornerstone of the *STYLUS* web site. Selections for the magazine and its awards continue to be made by an editorial board of faculty members.

Editorial Policy

The *STYLUS* editorial board reads and judges all submissions. All published selections are read by at least three readers independently, ensuring objectivity in the editorial process. All published works are chosen according to their creative and artistic merits. Only works received by the deadline were eligible for awards.

Editorial Board

Scott Compton- Chief Editor
Kristi Castro- Assistant Editor
Jared Demick- Assistant Editor
Mike Horton- Assistant Editor
Abbi Phillips - Assistant Editor

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**Background photographs provided by Unsplash and Nathan Dumlo, Mehdi Imani, Tobias Keller, Wenniel Lun, Scott Rodgerson, and Zoltan Tasi*

Like a Raindrop

By Anna Halom

Like a raindrop in the deep icy snow, I fear the love
in my heart for you will cease to grow
Day by Day I ache for your call
only to be replied with nothing at all

The absence of your touch leaves me in mourn all night
for it was only you
who told me everything would be alright

My body is in peril and lost with no direction.
The only remedy would be
that of your love and affection

Please don't torture me with this excruciating silence
I would sooner die if another day goes by
without your presence

Have Mercy Dear Lord! And take me now,
for if he is dead, the air my lungs consume to breathe,
I cannot allow

Let your angels welcome me into death by rebirth
Or I shall make my own wings and search
for my Love to the ends of the Earth..

The Blue

by Doreen Griffin

When it comes...The Blue...

It's the only time I hear my soft words

Unintentionally unreturned

And thoughts lose their way

In this fog, this cloudy blue mind

It's hard to breath, The Blue is so, so heavy

And I'm choking on the dark things locked inside me

The Blue sings to them, calling out with a perfect key

A pied piper of melancholy

The Blue holds me tighter than any lover ever has

In its cold, critical arms, offering no comfort

And typically I find such pleasure in my aloneness

But it cuts when The Blue dresses it as loneliness

Still, my traitorous stupid heart embraces The Blue

And then it breaks, it breaks, it breaks

Ordinarily not bothered by alternative lives not lived

The Blue gives me tears

for those paths not taken

It makes me

sensitive to wounds

From non-existent injuries

And I know they will pass these eternal moments

When The Blue paints

an existence irrelevant

But while it hurts...

God, it hurts.

Glass Doll by Caroline Swords

(a film adaptation of Henrik Ibsen's A Doll's House)

FADE IN:

Glass shattering—the sound of footsteps.

I hear the heels of his leather shoes creaking on the floorboards as he comes nearer to my room. I quickly turn over in my bed to face my wall so he can't see my eyelids trembling—I shut them closed as tightly as I can. I feel tiny beads of sweat running down my cheeks to form the familiar sweat-stained silhouette face on my pillowcase, and my face slowly sinks into the damp outline.

White noise.

Sluggishly detaching my face from the mildewed pillow, I look to the opposite direction of the wall and see a black shadow of a man walking toward me. He sprouts—wings? No—senecio rowleyanus plants. These tiny green beads quickly crawl and fall out of him like maggots reacting to boiling water and bleach. I watch as these wings made of beads grow bigger and bigger, now pushing up onto a wooden blade of my ceiling fan, now crushing it slowly and completely. As the blade folds in on itself, making an unbearable creaking noise, the air created from the fan thins out and the shadow disappears. His footsteps—stop? I hold my eyelids shut for as long as I can, and the pressure on my eyelids eventually eases.

I see myself walking the long halls of Oneiros, and I unintentionally knock over a green glass vase. Glass shattering—head spinning. A swift sucking in—the sound of—wings? Two different worlds, but the same. A path flowing directly between the two worlds, the worlds almost holding the path up in the air.

White space.

I look to the opposite direction of the worlds and see a black, empty door.

Turning back around to face the worlds and whatever lies beyond them, I walk. As I emerge between the two worlds, the worlds fade and I am submerged into quickly rising waters. A lake?

Still silence.

No sound, but white noise. I am quickly swept up and along a thin bench board by the lake water, and the current is awake. In a backbend floating position, I feel myself—no, see myself—brush up and over three skeletons in the same position as me sprawled out over the bench board. As my bones are cracked in this position, an arm—not visible—quickly pulls me up out of the water. Peace has come to meet me at the top of Acropolis Hill.

FADE OUT.



No Mortal by Bridget Bedenbaugh

No mortal is fully accepted.

Their flaws, now ruling,
Are enhanced through media.

No mortal can meet
the standards it takes
To satisfy every follower.

Blinded by arrogance,
They instead, choose
The dictator to cut off
their tongues,
take their books,
Strip their freedom,
And curse our knights
in foreign lands — to death.

Accusations of prejudice
are made,

The thoughts of
the beautiful nation
Are being cleared.

The word of marking,
Is spreading through
the mouth of gossip.

It is apparent,
That offence of words
Are now unlawful
Unconstitutional,

Due to the sensitivity
Of the unemployed,
Low postulate civilians,
Who refuse to stand up
And defend, but instead

Will cowardly cry
Behind their brave angels,
They refuse to believe in.

You need a God in your Nation,
But refuse to accept Him.



Colorado Springs by Greg Anderson

The Curious Case of Mina Murray

By Amber Infate

It is true that most gothic novels of the late 19th century featured the prototypical masculine hero. There were few authors who dared diverge from the path of least resistance when it came to writing fiction. In Bram Stoker's *Dracula* we find an experiment in feminism, that may have been at least in part accidental, but is no less powerful than if it was in fact fully intentional. Conventions of Victorian England dictated that women be demure and chaste and that any variance from those principles indicated abject character corruption. Somehow, Bram Stoker was able to give us a heroine in a time and genre dominated by heroes. A character who embodied those traits which managed to appease the social norms of the time while challenging conventional wisdom about the abilities and roles of women. Mina Harker née Murray was and remains a heroine that girls and women can look to as an example of female empowerment. Stoker's skill in character building lies in his ability to utilize attributes that appear to be contradictory, but which develop into a swan song of complimentary virtues. *Dracula* revealed possibilities for women that had not been much explored in the Victorian era. Bram Stoker created a woman who personified the loyalty, fidelity, and chastity most associated with traditional values and flipped the script with a dash of feminism that continues to create controversy more than 120 years later.

Mina Murray presents an interesting conundrum, whereby femininity is viewed through the lens of tradition and modernity simultaneously, forcing the acknowledgement that this woman, as are all women, is greater than the sum of her parts.

Victorian England had a set of gender guidelines that could only be described as restrictive. In order to appreciate the significance of Mina, one must examine the era in which she was birthed. Kathryn Hughes of the British Library explained that "women were considered physically weaker yet morally superior to men." This concept is thematically important to *Dracula* in general and of specific significance to the character of Mina as our heroine and as the focus of feminine probity. Bram Stoker persistently illustrates the moral integrity of his female protagonist. In Mina's letter from Budapest to her dear friend Lucy, she describes receiving Jonathon's journal and his wish that she should never tell him should she read it. To put her new husband at ease and demonstrate her trustworthiness, she "tied it with a bit of pale blue ribbon...and sealed it over the knot with a bit of sealing wax" as an "outward and visible sign...that we trusted each other" (Stoker 119). As a Victorian woman, her primary concern as a wife was to immediately and constantly thereafter prove herself worthy of the man she had married. On its surface that hardly promotes her worthiness as a heroine and yet Mina's character recommends her to heroism, like so many of her male

counterparts across history. In fact, the public at large has recognized Captain America as one of the great fictional heroes since 1941 and many of the attributes outlined in Captain America's 10-Step Guide to The Likable Hero bear striking similarity to those of Mina Murray: morality, selflessness, determination, competence, loved by others, relatability, kindness, and wit (Weiland). Furthermore, in the same way that Captain America is quintessentially American, Mina is quintessentially British. However, despite her propensity toward modern endeavors and thinking, Mina still clung to tradition in a way that held up under the confines of what it meant to be a Victorian woman.

Further delving into the gender roles of the era, a distinct pattern emerges that leaves women stripped of any hint of sexuality, lest they risk being a social pariah. Bram Stoker was careful not to rock the proverbial boat on this matter. Marriage, not sex, should be the only desire of a woman's heart. *Dracula's* ravaging of Lucy Westenra is a parable about the dangers of any display of sexuality or desire outside of marriage. Her flirtations invited disaster, poor dear. In contrast, Mina seems to have no sexuality at all. Stoker avoids the issue altogether, knowing that Victorian society would struggle to accept a heroine, let alone one who displayed any hint of sensuality or wantonness. Victorian women were besieged with theory and conjecture about their gender by men who dictated their roles to them. One

mid-19th century scientific publication went so far as to proclaim "I should say that the majority of women (happily for them) are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind" (Acton 112). The dictates of the time that lead to marriage were in three parts: courtship, engagement, and marriage. Jonathon and Mina followed proper protocol in their relationship, which they spent largely apart until they married. Mina spent her wedding night nursing her husband back to health, rather than consummating her status as wife in true repressive, Victorian form. A fervent and elated Mina gushed over her new marital status when she proclaimed herself "the happiest woman in all the wide, world," offering her husband eternal trust and love and lifelong duty (Stoker 119). Given the obvious implications, *Dracula* followed an acceptable formula for character development and Mina became a product of her time.

Although Mina exudes qualities that are easily identifiable as traditional, she was also incredibly forward thinking for the time. Victorian England and particularly urban London were experiencing a social transformation that Stoker expressed through Mina. The New Woman was emerging in the wake of women's suffrage and shifts in literature. Roles for women were ever-so-gradually changing and expanding. Women were beginning to appreciate and exert a new breed of feminine authority, as evidenced by one of Mina's more cheeky journal entries: I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman'

with our appetites...Some of the 'New Women' writers will someday start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see one another asleep before proposing or accepting. But I suppose the New Woman won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too! There's some consolation in that (Stoker 101-102).

This was an early indication in the novel that Mina, while Victorian, was anything but typical. While Stoker may have been careful to avoid overt overthrow of social boundaries, this passage makes it clear that he sees progress favorably (Demetrakopoulos 110). Indeed, it illustrates that Mina realized that women would not be forever bound to the restraints of Victorian womanhood, but could go forward into the new century redefined. Stoker's portrayal of Mina lends credibility to the literary importance of the New Woman when it is understood that a "significant element of her power and fright located itself in the fact that women were defining her for themselves" (Schoch 3). *Dracula* carefully, yet successfully, delivers allegorical and literal representations of feminism through his female protagonist.

Our heroine, a picture of Victorian uprightness, also expresses the view that industriousness is a benefit to women. In one of her letters to Lucy Westenra, Mina writes, "I have been working very hard lately, because I want to keep up

with Jonathon's studies, and I have been practicing shorthand very assiduously. When we are married I shall be able to be useful to Jonathon, and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter, at which also I am practicing very hard" (Stoker 63). Albeit in the context of marriage, the benefit to herself is nevertheless implied. Aside from Mina's sense of marital responsibility, this passage reveals a firm grasp on what were new technologies of the time. Victorian women were commonly thought to be incapable of developing any form of technique and yet Mina was teaching herself to be proficient at stenography, a form a shorthand writing. Additionally, she was learning to type and, considering that typewriters were a cutting-edge technology at the turn of the century, the fact that a woman was gaining mastery of it was truly remarkable. Mina proves herself the intellectual equal of her male cohorts when she compiles an accounting, both in shorthand and typewritten, of the events leading up to Lucy Westenra's illness. Not only did she foresee the importance of keeping an account, she knew it would be practical to have it in a typewritten version. Before the documents were handed over, there was brief exchange between Dr. Van Helsing and Mina, during which she explains that she can relay the facts of her time with Lucy. To which Dr. Van Helsing responds with a question of Mina's ability to recall details, saying, "Oh, then you have

a good head for facts, for details? It is not always so with young ladies" (Stoker 203). Mina demurely points out that she has written the account down and will share it with him, which she does without explaining that it is in shorthand. Her cleverness delighted rather than angered Dr. Van Helsing, who exclaimed, "Oh, you so clever woman!" (Stoker 204). After this, she provides him with an account that he is able to read. The gifts ascribed to Mina are many, not the least of which is to be constructive with her time and talents.

The Victorian fin de siècle may have been the end to one age, but it was also the beginning of another, with the increasing emergence of the New Woman in society, as well as in literature. In his article, "Daughters of Decadence: The New Woman in the Victorian Fin De Siècle," Greg Buzwell defined the influence of the New Woman:

The New Woman was a real, as well as a cultural phenomenon. In society she was a feminist and social reformer; a poet or playwright who addressed female suffrage. In literature, however, as a character in a play or a novel, she frequently took on a different form- that of someone whose thoughts and desires highlighted not only her own aspirations, but also served as a mirror in which to reflect the attitudes of society.

Mina represented the nostalgia of what had been and the possibility of what was to come. Her complexity as a character originates from her duality, the fact

that she was not one thing or another, but multiple things at the same time. She is relatable to the broadest audience because she represents domesticity, maternal instinct, and marital connection; but she also represents female intelligence, acumen, and application of skills. *Dracula* is singular in the way Mina is held up as the feminine ideal of societal perspectives.

Many times, in literature as in life, feminine characters are written in such a way that forces them to be either intellectual or domestic, demure or aggressive. The inference is that these qualities are mutually exclusive, when in fact they do not have to be and arguably should not be. A woman who wishes to be a housewife should not be an affront to the woman who wishes to have a professional career. *Dracula* is, in its way, a prediction of women who are completely actualized and unlimited in their potential. Literary analysis of Mina's character provides insight into this concept of actualization: "Stoker's characterization of Mina centers on her intelligence and strength" which denote a more masculine quality; however, those traits "do not negate her femininity but rather show that she is less enthralled by her sexual role and less excessive in her stereotypical femininity" (Demetrakopoulos 110). A well written female character is one who is not relegated to one-dimensional development, something that Stoker conspicuously avoided in his construction of Mina.

Mina Murray (Harker) was a light at the end

of the tunnel. She was a glimpse of something small and distant that sparked hope for the feminine sex. Bram Stoker subtly introduced feminism in a way that was palatable to the Victorian sensibility and in doing so perpetuated the budding idea that women were much more than they had been given credit for up to that point. It is fair to say that this was meaningfully done, therefore the reasonable conclusion is that it was also intentionally done. Mina was a caregiver, in the way that she comforted Quincey and Arthur; she was intelligent, in the way that she grasped new technology; she was capable, in the way that she compiled and chronologically organized a multitude of letters and journals; she was a dutiful wife, in the way that she nursed her husband during his illness. She was conventional and she was contemporary. Through Mina Murray (Harker) femininity was being clarified by new definitions, “brave and gallant” among them, thereby casting her as exceptional and unique as a Victorian woman (Stoker 422).

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A Memory of Happiness by Shannon Benson

There was a time when my family was happy. Back when my mother made breakfast for us every morning while my father sat idly in the chair at the kitchen table drinking his pure, black coffee. I always thought it was disgusting. “Why don’t you use cream and sugar?” I would ask, even though I already knew what he was going to say. His answer was always the same. “Because it’s bold and strong. It makes a statement, and don’t you ever forget it.” I would always scoff, and he’d smile and pat me on the back, as my mother put a plate of hot pancakes on the table. If only I had known the value of that moment, I wouldn’t have scoffed, and I wouldn’t have made fun of him. I would have taken in every word he said.

My sister, Sylvia, would bounce down the stairs in her sweatshirt and jeans and black Converse. Her staple outfit. Sylvia was always very simple. Maybe it was because she was drop-dead gorgeous, and everyone knew it. It didn’t matter what she wore. Her long, silky brown hair fell in waves perfectly by her shoulders. She always wore the slightest bit of make-up to highlight her blue eyes, though she never needed it. She was beautiful. Despite her beauty, she had to be the kindest and most patient person I’d ever met. She wasn’t like those snobby cheerleader girls that had to put everyone else down to feel good about themselves. Not Sylvia. She was my sister and my best friend. “Good morning, family.” She would say, all sunshine and smiles. She was always sunshine and smiles. After breakfast, father grabbed his coat, gave mother a peck on the cheek, and left for work followed by Sylvia with her black, faded backpack.

The room was so light and filled with joy. My family was perfect, at least to me. But that was before it all went wrong. Before I grew to love Converse and sweatshirts. Before I knew how quickly life could change. Until it did. Before Sylvia died and my parents were never the same. The smell of pancakes faded from the kitchen and the words of “Good morning, family” were just a distant memory. A memory I would never get back because the family I had known was gone. My father didn’t talk much anymore, and my mother spent most of her days crying in her bed, holding onto Sylvia’s old sweatshirt for dear life. My sweet sister, Sylvia, was dead and it was almost unbearable.

Until I learned that it gets better.

Time heals most wounds and the wounds it doesn’t heal become almost a part of you and they become bearable. You learn to move on and pursue happiness, but not the happiness you thought. No, your life will still feel incomplete, but you learn to manage and find your own happiness despite the empty, gaping hole in your chest. That’s exactly what I did.

Sucrosted Idiot
By Doreen Griffin

I beg my release
From these sickly sweet dreams
They rot my brain
As surely as sugar candy decays children's teeth
The loss of reason and thought
So aptly reflected in an idiot's jack-o-lantern grin

The saccharine warmth of affection
Lulling away my alertness
As truly as the heated, honeyed kiss of opium
Robs the enthusiast of defense
Blissful indifference
To the painful probability of reality
No real distinction between the compulsions
And their destructive end results

Of course the cloying addiction has already won
Rendering the once wise feeble minded
Evidenced by a single silly thought
An ambrosial nectar of notion
Too tempting to be turned away
The preposterous pondering that plays
In the muddled mind
"Maybe this time it will be okay"



Red Landscape by Piper Lovell

Carnage by Andrew Crooks

The dust settles, and the sky clears. He is surprised that the sun is still shining. He can't remember when it started, and it feels as if years have passed. As if the man that he was before, he can barely remember.

He looks at his hands and is mesmerized. Blood mingles with sweat, and small new cuts decorate his fingers. He begins to pick his head up, gazing at the vegetation trampled underneath thousands of feet. Death begot of death. He shuffles his feet and begins to walk up the hillside, stepping over bodies of men who only have his face. He wipes his eyes as his vision blurs and paints his face red with the blood on his hands, but his feet continue to move. He sets a goal in his mind of reaching the top of the hill. If he can reach the top of the hill, he'll remember. He'll remember who he is, and where he's going. He'll remember what this is all for.

Mingled through the bodies, vines spread. As if they feed on the carnage, the vines comb through, growing faster before his eyes. They race him up the hill, and as fast as he pushes himself, the vines are always there, growing forward and upward. He grits his teeth and grinds forward, pushing burning muscles attached to feet he can't feel. The only sign of life is the vines that creep through the copies of himself.

He crests the hill and sees the vines have already passed over. He sits at the top and hangs his head. He failed. He failed to reach the top first and

he failed all those other versions of himself that lay beneath him at the bottom of the hill. The vines wrap around his legs and he's able to see it closer. Small flowers dot along the arms and he picks one off. A small petal falls off as soon as it's removed, and soon the flower, the only sign of beauty in his view, fades to black remains and blows away. He's left, holding an empty stem. What once was bright yellow, as bright as the sun in the sky, turns as dark as midnight.

He lifts his head up, and stares towards the horizon. Off in the distance, he makes out a small settlement. A blurry vision returns to him, as his mind begins to clear. A vision of a home he once knew. A peace that calls to him of a love and a warmth. During his rest on the hill, the vines continued their growth, mazing through the mass of bodies towards this town, towards his peace.

A resolve grows inside the man, and he drags himself back to his feet. He begins his descent, picking his way through the carnage, careful not to touch the new life spreading before him. His touch is death, and of death he has had his fill. Each step is a battle unto itself, and he focuses his mind. One step, one grueling movement that fills his body with fire. A single dot of focus clears his mind and he continues his struggle. Slowly the settlement inches closer, as the vines inch forward. Life covers death.

The sun overhead begins to sink as he reaches the small side gate. The gate is scorched with trauma, ash marks covering its sides. Dried blood spots the frame. His struggle towards his peace fills his mind with delusions and he sees the blood as a mark of artistry, as though the painter of life made an errant mark. On top of the hill, all he could see was black and death, but now his mind is filled with colors. The vines that marked his journey light up a world whose only previous color was the deep crimson of death. Yellows and blues, mixing in with the green. He looks behind him, at the field and the miles he crossed, at the reflections he left behind, and he can no longer see them. All he can see is the vegetation that has now taken over. He looks up, towards the sinking sun, and stretches out his hands. The takers of such life from such a few short hours ago. He sinks to his knees and closes his eyes, letting the fading light warm his skin. He does not know how long he sat like this. To him it felt like a lifetime.

He hears the door creak open behind him and hears a smattering of voices. They speak in hushed tones, reverence echoing through their tones. "Captain" a voice calls to him. Hushed at first, it picks up in urgency. "Captain!" it echoes through his mind. He rises to his feet, and opens his eyes. He turns to the voices and overheard he sees that the sun had not sunk much lower. The sky is painted to match the ground, bright colors swirling in his vision. Upwards

he sees the deep blues and bright oranges of twilight, with streaking lines of yellow brushed across the horizon. He turns away from the voices and peers out over the battlefield. He does not recognize it. Bright greens and yellows greet his vision here, too. He does not understand. The scarring scene from such a few short hours ago seems a distant memory, but a sharp one. Crossed through his mind and heart.

"Captain, we thought everything was lost" the same voice says as he feels a soft touch on his shoulder. He turns and peers into the face connected to the voice. It's familiar to him, a memory that he should know. "It was" he rasps, his voice burns forward. Seeing his deterioration, the hand tightens on his shoulder. Other hands come from the crowd and lift the Captain up. They carry him inside the settlement, his voice protesting that he can walk. He had already walked through madness, can they not see, and that rabbit hole extended deep, but they would not hear him. Perhaps they could not. He was not sure he was able to speak through the burning in his throat. He closed his eyes and darkness took him.

Dreams swirled into reality and the Captain was unable to tell where his life stopped and the dream began. The blurring of lines like wet paint on canvas, the strokes of the brush were infinite. Figures spoke to him. Figures he had watched get struck down in the field. Eyes lacking of life in waking looked at him with fire inside, sparks of life that came

through and burned into his. An overbearing sense of dread filled him. He had failed these men, as their leader and protector. He tried to speak, to scream his sorrow to them, but his mouth would not open. The figures continued to swirl and dance, painting the horizon in blue and yellow. They bore the wounds they suffered during the battle, wounds laid open and bare, deep cuts exposing bone, but they danced with the fiery passion of life. Vines wrapped their legs, covering their feet, with tiny flowers that seemed to dance with them.

His eyes eased open and it was dark again. An unfamiliar feeling of comfort and warmth surrounded him. A soft light came from a door, left slightly ajar, and he was heard hushed voices coming from the other rooms. The Captain sat up in bed and raised his hands to his face. The dirt and grime that covered his skin were gone. Faint pink and purple scars lined his fingers. A light ache in his legs were all that remained of his odyssey across the battleground. The room jarred images in his head. He swung his legs out of bed, and put his bare feet on the cool wooden floor. He stumbled out of bed and walked towards the door, with little of the determination that coursed through him in his last stint of consciousness. Opening the door to the other room, he finds the source of the hushed tones. It belongs to a woman and a small child. The child bore a slight resemblance to himself, the same dark hair wild and untamed.

Their voices stopped when the door opened,

and both the woman and the child looked at him with awe. The woman rose from her seat by the table and approached him, stepping softly, never taking her eyes from him. She slowly lifted her hands to his face, and he buried his face in her hair, breathing her in. A soft impact rocked him, as the child wrapped his small arms around the pair of him. The Captain stood there, with his eyes locked shut, sure that this dream too shall be taken from him. "How could such a moment exist for a man who had seen what he had, who had done what he had?" he asks himself. His mind flashes and he remembers all those that would never again have a moment like this.

He unwraps himself and sits down in a chair that was left by the table. "How long?" he asks his wife, surprised at the strength in his voice that he did not feel. "Six days ago you returned," she told him. "The doctors came and went and were unsure of when you'd awake, or even if you would." "How many others came back?" he asks, staring intently at her. The soft brown of her eyes never wavers and he struggles to remain present. He struggled not to lose himself in her. "Of the three thousand who left, you are one of ten that returned. You were the last to come back. We feared you wouldn't. The others that returned could not say when you were last seen, or if you had survived. They couldn't tell us much at all in fact," she answered. "Much of what they report seems broken, snatches of reality. They remember seeing bright flashes in the

sky come from your last known position. The group that came back were the line closest to home, the rear guard."

He tries to remember. Visions slowly enter his mind, brief exchanges of violence, the yells and screams of his men mixed with the enemy. Sweat mixed with blood, he can taste the salt in his mouth and feel it burning his eyes.

"Where are they? How many of them are injured?" he questions. She takes his hands and helps him to his feet. "None were injured. Most of them are currently guarding the wall, waiting to see if the enemy returns."

Aided by her strength, they walk outside. The sun bears down from high above and he takes a deep breath, expecting the pain of broken ribs, but still surprised. Together, with the child walking alongside, they begin a slow walk through the town. People about their errands stop and look at the trio, amazement filling their faces. A cool breeze rushes through the town and brings the Captain smells of food cooking on open fires, of leather, and of life. *How could this be possible?*

His mind races. The world that seemed full of such pain and blood recedes into serenity. The aches that filled his body fade with each step; his breath coming in deeper and fuller. He stares with wide eyes at the beauty of life surrounding him. His wife tells him that since his return, the plague of the enemy has lifted. People had started venturing out beyond the

walls, the fear of evil lifting from the town as curtain draws from a window. His son races ahead, proudly waving his toy sword overhead.

They reach the walls of the town and walk up the steps. At the top, he is greeted by what remains of his men. It seemed so few. Where he expected agony, their faces are filled with joy and excitement. They encourage him to stare out across the field, which he had avoided looking at. He turns and lets his eyes gaze out across the killing field. He panics, as he thinks that he is still lost in his dreams but the longer he stands there, the panic fades. Across his vision, a vast field of green has conquered. Where he feared to see a mass of bodies, left for carrion, a beautiful garden coats the field. "How can this be" he asks the group gathered behind him. One man steps up and speaks: "We don't know. The growth began shortly after we returned to the town. We feared it to be some final tactic of the enemy, but then you emerged. We helped get you inside, and when we returned to the wall, this is what we saw. A few people went out to explore, and it is as if this has always been. The carnage is gone."

The Captain stood there, atop the wall, still holding his wife's hand. Surrounded by his men, embraced by the cool breeze still coursing through town, a small spark of hope lights inside. Through the deepest of hells, this heaven sprang forth. Perhaps, it was all worth it. Perhaps, through the carnage, beauty came, and won the day.

Yet

By Stephanie Givens

Have you ever peeled the nail polish from your fingertips?

Watching the flakes fall on wooden panels,

The flakes thrown away,

Opportunities were peeling away,

Falling from my palms,

thrown away,

Institutions rapidly resort resources online,

Online.

A screen.

I must do this. I can't stop.

One family member,
Two family members,
Four family members,

Sick. Hospitalized. I can't visit them.

Media reports more news.

He says the president is holding us back.

She says our economy will fall before we're saved.

They all say we're doomed – that mother nature is playing chess unfair,

But which one do I believe?

Should I even?

Does panic make answers?

Or mistakes.

A spiderweb of fear connects the minds of man,

What can I lose?

Who can I lose?

The never-ending question for a future that doesn't exist.

Yet.

Life Vest
By Marissa Sligh

You send no reply
But no tear might I cry
At least there's no lies
The cat's won this fight

I didn't expect perfect
But each promise, you heard it
You replied sharp and smooth
'Round every corner I felt used

You aren't my problem anymore
Though we haven't settled our score
Life goes on for the both of us
And you've sunk my boat of trust

So I should've seen this coming
Yet my loneliness was numbing
No mascara may be running
But my temples I'll be rubbing

I've become your life vest
The one you remove without precaution
Because you know I'm what's best
But you choose the risky option

Possibilities
By Justice Nawman

A light in the darkness, a saving grace,
A tranquil escape, a hiding place,
Life can be extraordinary, at the same time unforgiving,
Yet somehow, we manage to keep on living,
Wear your heart on your sleeve, never settle for less,
Think of every negative outcome as your own "beautiful mess,"
There's so much left to accomplish, so much to explore,
It all depends on what this great big world has in store,

Trust that every piece of the puzzle
will eventually fall into place,
Don't lose sight of the finish line
when you haven't even started the race.

Poem #3

By Linda Gibson

I know what I didn't do

Fear paralyzing, you were right I should go

No one stops me

I've plunged into the depths

Alone in the night

Searching for a fire among the ice

The darkness is winning

Roses have thorns, they are a mix of love and blood

Suffering, the storm is winning, the leaves hit my face

you see a failure, never good enough

have I the courage to rise from my lows?

I cannot earn what I need the most

Everyday wondering, why I am not beautiful enough

A malfunction of life without victories

Who holds my head when I cry ?

My hands are so weary can't hold a thing

Miracles take too much time

Why, they secretly want to know

They are really afraid that one day They will be Me,

Undone, alone in the darkness no promise of happiness

I am too intense not worth listening to

People turn away as I hear the whispers

I failed in the most basic principles of my gender

Defective, and anguish is all I wear

Grace will never see me in the light

joy has crept away, pain is all I know

eyes black, round, like the dolls you shake

no one wants to see me, haunted by regret

I know I don't want a heart

The salt of tears, I am on my knees

The answer for once is clear to me

Broken, with scars that tell a half-finished story

I fall short of my true identity

can I be a whole person, completed

Till I hear my heartbeat

stop

A Concise Personal History By Doreen Griffin

I was born into a home full of love, screaming, and broken glass. But soon it divided. And that was better. As children my sister and I grew up between a hot place with a family that may have seemed cold, and a cold place with a family that tended to run hot. Love was unconditional, and unquestionable in both. I was a lucky little girl and everyone did their best to do their best by me.

Until the age of 11, I lived in the center of a humid triangle, in the care of a father of two girls who must have spent most of his time feeling confused about what to do for us. Whether he knows it or not, he saw very clearly. In these years I learned I was more sensitive than most, and it was best to keep that to myself. I learned that there are people who like what they shouldn't, and sometimes it's easiest to close your eyes for a minute. Many are predatory. I learned that singing and dancing is joy. I learned that friends are magical.

Then one day, my mother was ready, so little sister and I moved to the corner of a snowy rectangle and became Catholic. I realized soon that God and I couldn't speak to each other in that language, so I tried to

learn others. Eventually I found mine, and I understood The Divine, and The Divine understood me. We've been close ever since. I found that the cold can be lovely and comforting and slippy. I broke my ankle into three pieces. I joined a circus, painted on a purple frown, and learned to juggle scarves. I met my first soulmate. I fell in love with a sad, strange boy. I learned that I wasn't like most other people in a lot of ways. This made my life so much harder, and so much more interesting. I learned that interesting suited me more than easy.

And then I took my lessons with me, back to the hot and humid, when I was 16. It didn't take long for my sad, strange boy to break my heart after that. I resolved to make my heart a little more durable. I found myself then. I found my second soulmate. I lost my connection with my father, and it would take years to rebuild one. I lost my sister, my anchor in the world. I drifted off to sea...to see. I found sex, drugs, and rock-n-roll. A lot. I learned that music is air and that experience is life. And then I got tired.

So, I went back to curl up and rest in the snow. I tried being a real kind of adult. And failed. Twice. Then there was success. I learned that I was just like most other people in a lot of ways. Learning this made life so much easier,

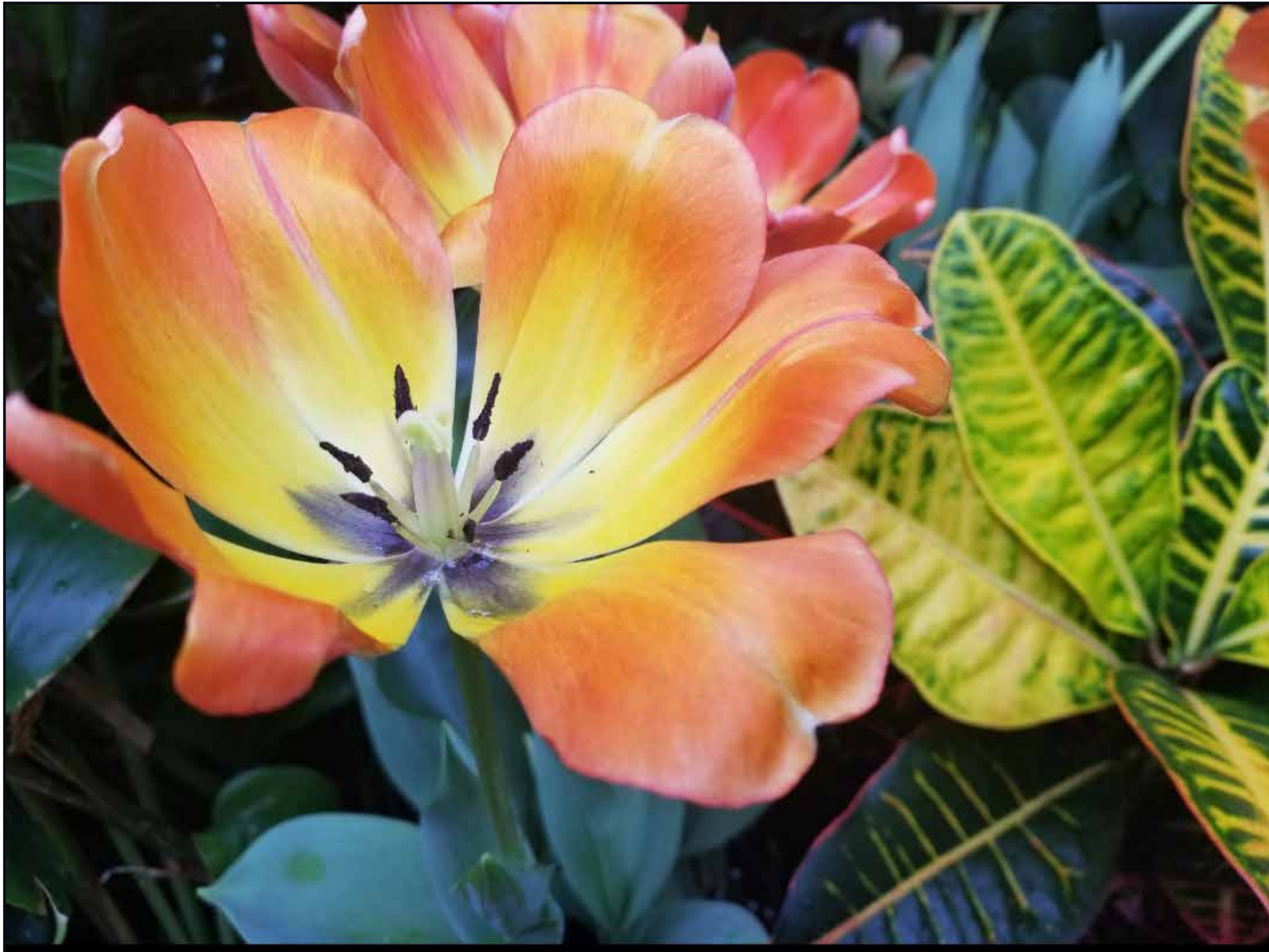
and so much more interesting. I learned that interesting still suited. I learned that art and theater are tools for the soul.

Then I started reading a book and I fell in love with the beautiful prince locked in a tower. I rode my horse across a country so that I could save him. And save him I did. In a brilliant plot twist, when the prince escaped he turned into a monster, and I a damsel in distress. But while I was trapped by love and hate and devotion and fear, I learned that there are angels everywhere. I learned they can only save you when you have enough willingness to let them, but they are there to sooth you as best they can in the meantime.

Then one day I took a deep breath and shouted to all of my angels "I'M READY", and they saved me. They brought me home, which as you know is where the heart is. And now I'm in the middle of a hot, humid triangle, standing still. I don't really know if I'm standing in the middle of the amusement park, watching the

motion around me, or if I'm standing in line for the next rollercoaster. But for now, I'm still. And that's good.

I know a lot of things now. I know that to be the hero of your story, there must inevitably be villains. I know that people say "I love you" a million different ways, most of them have nothing to do with words. I know that the words "I love you" often have nothing to do with love. I know forever is a fickle thing, and it presents itself differently to everyone. I know that most liars are lying to themselves more than to anyone else. As far as they know, they're telling you the truth. I know the hardest person to tell the truth to, is yourself. I know that I am loved more than so many people could ever even imagine, and I am very lucky. I know that life is brutal, and disappointing, and unpredictable...and it is so incredibly beautiful that it will blind you if you open your eyes enough to see.



Flower by Samantha Riggs
(William C. Goodwin IV
Memorial Art Award Winner)

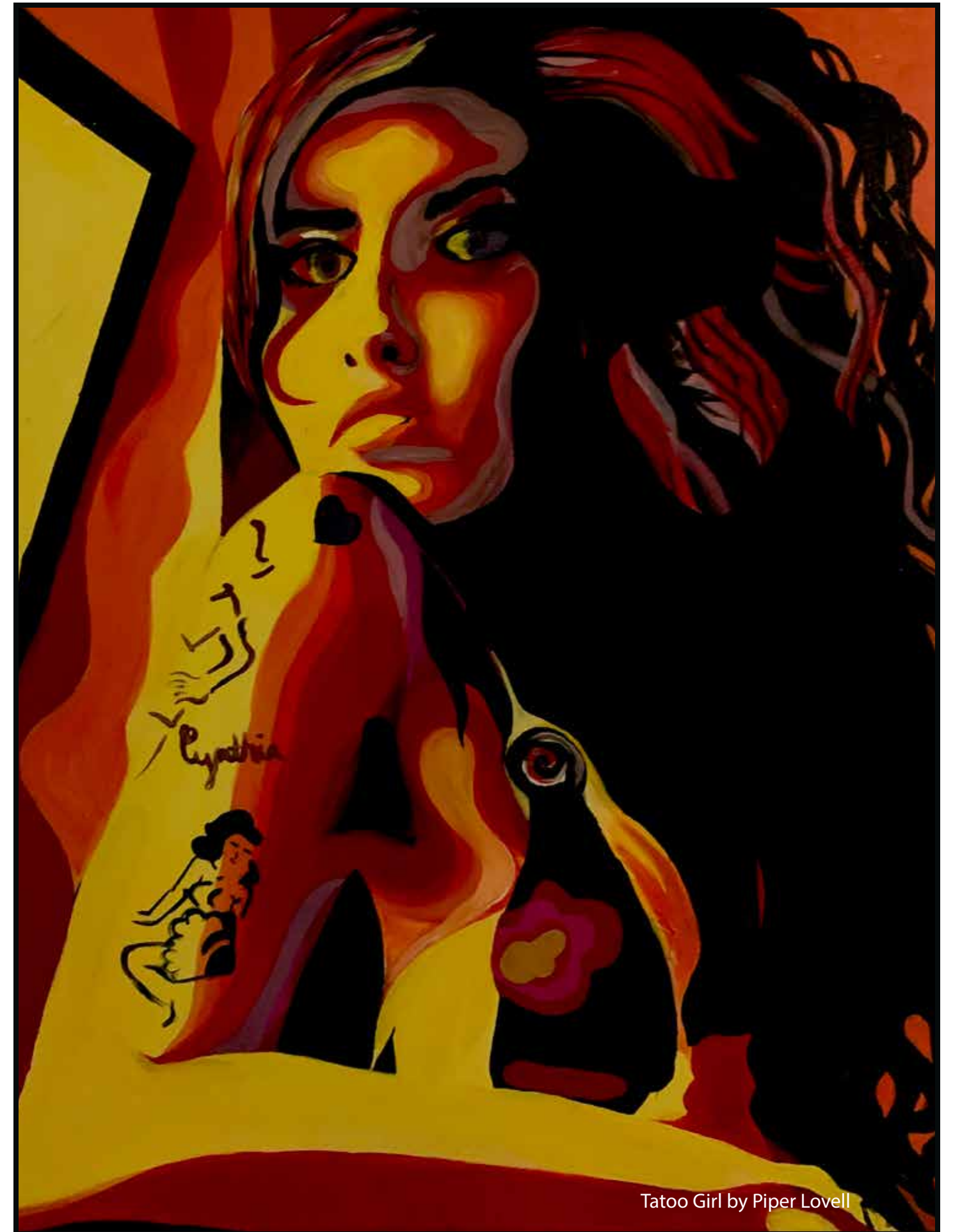
Foreclosure

By Cat Conyers

tried to dust the cobwebs out the corner
but the spiders are still here
and they are already
building more webs

tried to scrub the dirt away
but this house is filled with asbestos and mold
and I am choking
on the fumes

tried to patch the holes in the wall
but this house is crumbling at the foundation
and rotting to its core



Tattoo Girl by Piper Lovell

The Bird Birthed From Fire and Ice by Jaylen Saez

The air never seemed very cold for a place called the north. At least that's what Alecia had thought sitting on the floor of an old wooden porch.

The snowflakes falling from the sky felt so slow, like they could fall for hours and yet remain where it was moments prior. Before any more mindless thoughts progressed through her head, a thunderous shout came from the wooden door behind her.

"You'd better get that damn firewood soon, or we'll both freeze to death!" That voice was all too familiar, and it became toxic the more she heard it.

Without looking behind, she took a deep sigh, slowly got to her feet and made her way down the creaky stairs to a log pile a little ways away from the porch. With each step, the snow crunched deeper and deeper below her. She swallowed a few logs into her arms and began to walk to the only stump visible through the snow; unfortunately, it had been the one with the most scars. Dropping all the logs beside the stump, she clenched the axe next to the stump and began cutting each block into two. With every strike, the familiar voice got louder.

"You're the reason why she left!" The voice had lost a few years, but it didn't lose the drunken slurs, not in the slightest. Her grip got tighter, and her breathing got heavier.

"I was just a damn girl.... who the hell tells their little girl that?" she muttered, driving the axe into the next piece of wood.

After twenty minutes, there were only two pieces left, and it scared her, for each piece was another memory after all. When she placed her fingers around the next piece of wood, two voices appeared. The one shouting and screaming was the same man while the other one seemed to sound like a scared girl wincing and shuddering. The shouting never changed. She thought after hearing it so often it wouldn't hurt as much, but it still stung the same. This time, however, glass broke, and a yelp came from the girl's voice. Then the screaming stopped, and what was left was a whimper- a whimper and a quiet sob. She could hear fumbling and a small whisper, not very audible, but not soon after Alecia heard a loud crackling sound. The screaming reappeared except this time it came from the man.

The two pieces of wood slid off of the stump after the cut, while they slid a few spots on the snow beneath Alecia began to look damp. With her shaking hand, she touched the scar under her left eye letting the tears run down her glove. Alecia fixated her gaze on her hands; the more she stared, the more her hand began to heat. She quickly placed the axe down in the snow and left the last log where it was; she needn't relive any more of that. Alecia grabbed all that she could and slowly walked to the broken house. This was no life worth living, not at all.

The sun might have been settling, but Alecia was wide awake and ready to move. She remained on the porch until she heard the floorboard creak in rhythm to the steps of her father. When the sound dispersed, Alecia got up quietly and slowly crept inside. Her first thought was food; she wouldn't make it very far without it. Looking from shelf to shelf, she couldn't find much; however, her eyes discovered a bundle of cloth wrapped around something. She unwrapped it to find a small piece of bread; it had molded on the outer crust. Barely edible, but edible none the less. She folded it back and stuffed it into her pocket in her coat. After picking through the cabinet, Alecia noticed a flask on the floor and took a whiff to find out what was inside. Lucky she couldn't smell anything sharp, so she assumed it was water. While walking out of the kitchen, a glint of metal came from the table, she turned and noticed a small knife along with three silver coins.

"When the hell did he get all that coin?" Alecia thought while slowly creeping her way towards the table. She glanced around once again to see if she was alone; after finding no one, her attention fell back onto the items on the table. She picked up the light blade in her hand and brushed her palm against it. It was dulled to hell, but protection was essential in the north. What if she ran into a Northman? Not many of them were friendly. She placed the blade and coins slowly into the pocket alongside the bread. When Alecia began to walk away from the table, she came to a halt. Her sight fixed on her father's door. With reluctance, she turned around and placed two of the three coins back on the table. "I only need one." she said, "That's all."

When Alecia trailed off to her room, she began fumbling around looking for whatever she could find. She found a withered down coat on the side of her straw bed. It was in worse condition than her current one, but the more the merrier she thought. Using her pillowcase, she made a bag and placed her findings within it.

Alecia then went around the room and proceeded to pick up anything she could. She found two shirts, both of them white with a few dirt marks. She stuffed them inside her bag and kneeled beside her bed, placing her hand underneath the pile of straw. Having pulled a book from beneath the bed, she flipped through the parchment several times before staring at the front. It was a book on birds, an assortment of them; it was the

last thing she had that reminded her of her mother. Alecia picked herself up from the floor and peered out of the small window. The reflection showed every part of her delicate face. Her bright orange eyes flickered from the glass every time she blinked; her pale complexion allowed them to shine. Underneath her left eye was the dreaded scar, she found it hideous. She lowered her head then proceeded to place her golden locks up in a bun, though that didn't stop small tresses from falling. An orange hue began at the tips of her hair and didn't make it too far up. She took a look at herself and noticed that she was already dressed and ready to go. Peering from the window, Alecia felt as if it was too early. "Give it an hour or two, then I'll go," She whispered, slowly lowering herself to the straw mattress.

The time had passed, and Alecia was making one last glance around the small room; she found it humorous, even though there was so little in her bag, the room felt empty. Her breath began to get heavier; it was happening; tonight was the night she would make her move. Alecia took a few steps to the door, being as quiet as possible. She creaked the door open and began to walk along the wooden floor as if a mouse was skittering across it.

If Alecia were the personification of any animal, it would be a snail. Her movement was gradual, one wrong step, and she would surely be caught. Her inability to see in the dark made things harder, luckily the fireplace had been brewing, and she could maneuver adequately. "*I might not be the sneakiest, but I'd like to think I'm something*" Alecia thought while slowly moving inch by inch. Before she knew it, she had gotten past the kitchen and was a few feet from the entrance. Alecia could feel the cold wind breathing softly on her through the crevices of the door. She was almost there when suddenly she heard a wheeze coming from the rocking chair next to the window. The small flame from the fireplace had inched far enough to show the face of her father; it was seared from the temple down to his neck, her doing. Alecia rubbed at her gloves vigorously; how could she have not noticed? Was he awake? Was he staring at her as she was thinking? Her breathing started to get even heavier. Why was this so hard? Was she making the right choice she thought, could she really leave him, especially like this?

"No...by the dead, I'm doing it," she whispered, turning towards the door; with each step, it was almost as if she was already trudging through the snow. When she finally made it to the door, she placed her hand around the handle, slowly pulling it back, attempting to avoid its hideous creak. The cold air blew right into her face. Before she could take another breath, she dashed off the porch and into the snow. Alecia picked herself up quickly and sprinted away into the woods, leaving everything behind, every bad memory. She ran, ran until she couldn't breathe anymore, and even then, she continued to make haste. Alecia found

herself tripping over roots, crashing into branches, and running straight into trees. The moon provided no light, which left her with no path to follow; she was blind. After hours of running, Alecia's legs failed to move anymore; she couldn't help but lean on a large dark tree. She slumped down to the floor, her legs still shaking. Alecia took a long look into the dark sky, and a stream fell down the side of her scarred cheek. She was finally free.

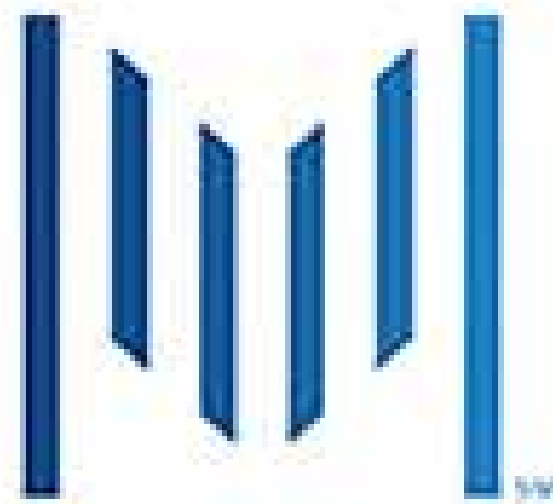
If there was one thing Alecia hated more than badgers, it was the concept of rationing. She found herself having to tear her small breadcrumbs into even smaller pieces to make them last a bit longer. If it were up to her, she would have swallowed the whole loaf the minute she entered the woods, but that wouldn't have been very smart. She had been walking for about four days now, and she was beginning to think the idea of freedom was a bit harsh. She didn't have much experience in hunting; her father was the one that went out in the morning to bring whatever he could catch.

"By the dead, where can a lass get some food around here." She said as she kicked some of the snow away. While slowly treading through some more of the white earth, she heard something skittering ahead of her. From where she was standing, she could see it, a small snow bunny, just digging a hole. She felt terrible for even thinking of touching such a small creature, but her stomach made quick work of those thoughts. She took the small dagger from out of her coat and made her way slowly towards the tiny creature. She could sense its vulnerability; it had no idea of what was to come; it was sad. With each step, she felt that it would scurry away, and she would be left hungry. The thought was terrifying. Alecia knew it, and she wouldn't let it slip from her hands.

In a split-second, Alecia moved as fast as the wind and springing into action. Leaping before the rabbit could move, Alecia pounced on top. It was underneath her trying to wriggle its way out. Having no other choice Alecia grabbed hold, pressing its body to the earth. She lifted her torso from the ground and bared witness to the scared creature. With tears in her eyes, she quickly planted the knife into its frail body. Dark blood began to ooze from its small carcass, her gloves stained red, and she felt sick. She turned away to hurl what little food she had in her stomach. There wasn't enough in her to begin with, so it resulted in heaving. When she was finished, she grabbed the rabbit by its ears, put its body in her bag, and attempted to make a fire. If this was freedom, she sure as hell didn't think it was worth much.

Cherry Tree by Breanna Gibbs





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