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FICTION | SPRING 2015

## **EMERGING INTO THE LIGHT**

By **Kimberly La Force**

“Are you ready William? Cut him open.”

Without the slightest hesitation, William showcased his skill of putting scalpel to flesh. A “y” dissected the body, first across the clavicles, then joined at the sternum and finally lengthened into the umbilicus. His double-gloved hands spread apart the graying flesh to expose the ribcage below. A small electric saw cut effortlessly through each rib, revealing the liver, heart, lungs, intestines and stomach.

In this small hospital mortuary, a doctor and William, the mortician, began to investigate the cause of death. I watched their movements, documenting their activities in my nursing notes. We slowly approached the body. Its lean, dark figure lay frozen. Its sunken yellow eyes and grimaced expression forever captured by rigor mortis.

“Draw the blood, William.”

William’s skillful hands grasped the syringe and without sourcing the location of the aorta, he violently forced a four-inch needle into the unyielding flesh and gradually withdrew two vials of blood. Its dark red volume moved sluggishly, staining every inch of glass with its opaque grip, each cell synthesizing the story of the man that lay before us.

I envision a young man sitting cross-legged at the seashore. He leans against the side of a small wooden boat, his hands move rhythmically over patches of salt-frayed ropes, restoring regularity to his damaged fishing net. He breaks focus and pays tribute to the sun god becoming preoccupied by the oranges and pinks that transition this new day. He feels energized with promise as he pushes his shabby boat into calm waters, patches of paint float away with the contact of each wave. His arms throb intensely paddling against the tide to reach open waters. The sun beats mercilessly upon his slippery skin as he casts his net and waits. He is caressed by the splashing waves and the savory smell of the ocean air. He allows his mind to wonder about his wife, Maggie, who would be travelling to the market at this time. The rent will be due in two days and they are still short by several bucks. A sudden thought changes his mood: today's catch will cover the rent, he is sure of it.

William startled suddenly. His attention was diverted by an outburst of cries in the neighboring room, where a daughter mourned her father and a wife silently contemplated suicide. They waited with sad anticipation for the cause of death.

“Take out the organs, William.”

William moved swiftly and thoroughly to the rhythm of the cries and excised the lungs, spleen, heart, liver, kidneys and bladder, placing them gently on a small side table. A lonely tear streamed down his left cheek and stubbornly remained. William glanced at the gray hand projecting off the slimy wooden table, escaping from the curious glances of both the doctor

and myself. He surveyed its rough texture, tracing with his eyes the scar tissue that dissected its palm.

This rough hand encircles the taught mesh and hauls in a school of Mackerel. The fish wiggle desperately for freedom through the checkered pattern, pounding their silvery scales against the boat. Once thrown inside their bodies concave and convex in sporadic movements, their gills expand, their struggle is degraded into occasional squirms. This catch will cover the rent he thinks with a smile. He hauls in the rest of the net surveying the remainder of his catch. He looks at his treasure and becomes overwhelmed with happiness. Suddenly, his hands sweat profusely. He shakes vigorously mimicking the movements of the fish in his boat. He clasps his chest and stands abruptly, placing his palm over his heart. He grabs into the flesh feeling immense pain. A billion sparkles congregate on the surface of the ocean, a distorted reflection of the afternoon sun, and merge into a sheet of white that surrounds him. In short desperate attempts he grasps and gasps for air. He falls swiftly in the boat; losing life in the same manner he took the life of his catch.

“You want me to do the brain now, doc?”

“Not yet, William, that will be done last. You, nurse, let’s dissect the organs and examine what’s inside.”

A spark of excitement jolted my body and I moved forward willingly, but when I touched the organs, I froze. I saw the time line of this man’s life. I felt him heaving in his daily catch and

my body ached with exhaustion after a long day at sea. And when I sliced into his heart, I startled over the black masses that lodged in its valves. I saw a heart that had met its fate.

I imagine a small wooden boat resting softly on the open sea, rocking a fisherman and his catch in silent soliloquy. A floating nest cradled by water, fed by sunlight, cleansed by misty rain. No autopsies or coffins, burials by soil or fire; no kind words thrust upon death's ears. Just light drifting on the ocean's surface, guided by the sway of gentle currents.

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**Kimberly La Force was born on the island of St. Lucia and moved to New York in her early twenties. She has written several poems, plays, and fiction pieces and has been published by *The New Tech Times*, *City Tech Writer* and *Pulse*. Her feature screen play, "A Marriage Proposal" was published in *Best American Short Plays 2010-2011 Anthology* and was a finalist for the Lou Rivers Drama Writing Award. This one act play was performed at the Literary Arts Festival in Brooklyn, NY and at the St. Louis Community College Theater. She is a Registered Nurse by profession and is a 2015 Master's degree candidate in Narrative Medicine at Columbia University.**

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