

In Medias Res

by Mari Syrad Grieves

I lay belly down on the crystallised concrete, sparkling from the rain. My cheek pressed against the cool ground, turning my red face blue, sharp specks of gravel piercing my skin, the pain, a comfort, reminding me I'd survived. My body, hardened in fright at the impact, slowly regained its flexibility, my heavy breathing pushing my chest into and away from the ground. In the darkness, I couldn't have seen if anyone was there even if my eyes had been open. I opened them slowly now, sweeping the dust away as I did so. The rain was calm and welcome and persistent the way it had always been. I wondered whether I could move, get up, leave. No. Wait. I lay there, silent, hoping they wouldn't find me. Hoping she was safe.

'Please, you've got to listen to me. Please.'

Desperation infected my hands causing them to shake and seize as I wrote with furious speed. There was no time.

'Don't write. Don't come. I don't need it. It's not why I've written.'

I had hoped the words would be enough to dissuade them, though I knew deep down that they wouldn't be, not with everything else I had said.

I stood up. My eyes, heavy with rain and dirt, scanned the area. Nothing. The silence was so heavy I feared the next sound. Trembling, I anticipated from what or from whom the interruption would come. I extended my freezing fingers, pink and numb into the pocket inside my jacket, grazing the tattered paper.

'Fall. Wait. Save her.'

I repeated the message over and over. I couldn't breathe for the words, louder and louder, filling my brain, screaming at me until I submitted to them and jumped. 'I

should be dead', I thought. I took a laboured step, assessing the damage. The pain, like the cool drizzle that continued to soak through my clothes, was welcome.

There it was. The first sound. A rattling. Then quick, a rumbling, screeching cacophony surrounded me. As though it had always been there, as though the sound had remained but my hearing had not. My hearing had not. The realisation hit me. I turned around just as the glaring, monstrous face of a rubbish truck swerved, missing me by a hair's breadth as it swung itself urgently aside, tipping slightly before angrily hurtling ahead. My heart, fighting to be heard, threw itself against my ribcage. Gasping, I shook. Fear was in charge now, and I was its prisoner. Moving wild-eyed to safety, I shrunk against the dark damp wall.

"I can't do this." I cried aloud.

I fell. I waited. But what if I couldn't save her?