

Miranda Comes of Age

Short Story Runner-up

by Melanie Klimchuk

Once upon a time, there lived a lovely post-pubescent princess named Miranda. She had long, curly locks of golden silk, classic features molded in marbly skin, and a pink strawberry mouth which protruded over slightly buck teeth—her only visible imperfection. She had eyes a charmed young prince could drown in, clear quicksand eyes of deepest blue. Her preference for pastel silks ran into a bit of money, but what the heck her family was rich, and besides, Daddy didn't mind, so she indulged herself. Anyway, her family had long been patrons of the arts, so small eccentricities were allowed. Being an only child, she expected to reign one day. That is, it was expected of her. In truth, she found her well-guarded life a trifle dull. Even "Lofty Keyholes," the society scandal sheet, could find nothing worse to say about her than that she was "an artist's vision, a poet's sonnet, nature's finest masterpiece, and still very eligible, blablabla." In short, the superlative princess.

Well, one day she awoke to see a topaz and raspberry sunrise bouncing off her bedroom walls. She looked outside, saw the celebration, the quivering, jellied gem of a sky, and decided.

"I can't stand it," she thought, "there must be more to life than endless lessons in art appreciation and advanced etiquette. Philosophy and physics and French are all just too, too tedious. If something exciting, even just interesting doesn't happen to me soon, I'll go crazy. Quite utterly mad!"

It was time. Here she was, in her prime, and life was passing her by, her youth being wasted. And so bored she thought she might actually die from it. Terminal Boredom, a loathsome disease.

"What I need," she thought, contemplating the ripe orange orb spilling onto thirsty clouds, "is a taste, a big, juicy bite of life." She bit her lower lip and stared wistfully at the morning, which by now had swirled itself into an apricot-amethyst parfait. Suddenly, she was hungry.

"Parfait!" she said in her best French accent, and hurried down to breakfast.

That morning, when Arlow (her tutor) turned, as he always did, to pass the time of day with Bob the guard, she escaped. Ran right out the door, across the drawbridge (let down for the paperboy), over the moat, and onto the mountain, in search of adventure, to find some mischief, to seek her fortune, and to see the world. She anteloped away, panting and squealing with terror and joy, as astonished guardsmen shouted behind her, and hordes of butterflies cheered her on.

Miranda tripped lightly over and down the ripening hillside and into the valley below, taking care not to trample the trembling wildflowers that everywhere burst into being that early spring afternoon. The flowers dotted the slopes in bohemian bunches and fluttered their petals as Miranda breezed by. She didn't have to hurry at all, for the others gave up the chase long ago. They must have thought her quite mad, for this strange landscape was rumoured to be full of the magic of witches and dragons, about which explorers told such frightening, fascinating tales. Of course, she wasn't afraid. Her eyes glittered like sapphires in the sun and excitement. She slowed to a lanky amble as she came now to the floor of the valley. A giraffe walk it was, with a gangly yet graceful flop-flying of limbs.



Photo Diana Wiberg

She jumped back with a gasp when, all at once, these tree tops she hadn't noticed before sprang out of the earth and stretched up to the sky. She ran her eyes up the smooth grey pillars and bulging totems of trunks, all so awesomely huge. Dare she go in? The place was enchanted, no doubt about that. But the shade looked so cool and inviting, and it was so frightfully hot where she stood; there was no breeze in the basin to play with her hair, whip her skirt 'round her legs. So Miranda took her first tenuous step into the woods where all the old things became new once again.

She stood for a moment to adjust to the light, her arms all angled askew. She looked like some immortalized servant from Egypt of so long ago, with one hand on her hip, the other arm raised to her eyes. After some time had passed, the darkness was gone, and she could see all around.

Gold flickers of light filtered down through the dusky green mist, igniting young shoots on the fertile floor, sparking and sparkling on fledgling leaves. So, a magical forest looked, she decided, like an emerald inside. She kicked up her heels and walked on, just thrilled with herself for being so brave.

Now, what "Lofty Keyholes" would have to say about this, she wondered, and laughed. But she did hope her father wouldn't think she was bad.

Miranda's curls danced in a halo of gold as she turned her head this way and that. As she moved through the mist, and watched the light shift, it seemed that the colors and shapes were all changing. The trees were writhing, and dancing, conspiring to sweep her in circles. She got dizzy, had to plunk herself down for a rest, and watched, as still the trees bowed and whirled their colors before her. She was hypnotized. She was hungry. She was very, very tired. Then, she nodded softly to sleep, and dreamed of eating wonderful food, of delectable mushrooms like gumdrop jewelry.

She hadn't really noticed she was walking again until she lost her footing and plunged into a stream of consciousness. What with the undercurrent's insistence, and the slippery sand's indifference, in she slid. She spluttered and shrieked; the water was cold.

What she had yet to realize was, that at this very moment, she was in fact skittering and swirling through Claude Monet's famous and delightful painting: "Lily Pond." That is to say, she wasn't actually in the paint, on the canvas, in some Paris museum, but, rather, suspended in the state of mind which first celebrated itself through Monet's hand.

Even if she did know, it is unlikely she would really care because as she was floating along she remarked, at first with surprise, then with disgust, and finally with horror, certain changes in her person. Her long golden hair, for example, became slithery yellow seaweed, which insisted on rudely wrapping itself around her neck and getting caught in her teeth. When she tried to brush it off, she saw webbing, if you can imagine, between her fingers, which had, incidentally, picked up a distinctly distasteful greenish tinge. So had the rest of her skin, and for that matter, what were those scaly warts doing on her marbly limbs? At this point, Miranda became a little concerned. Something strange was going on here. Definitely. Her eyes grew ever wider in fear and surprise.

"Oh my goodness," she squeaked, froggy eyes bugging out of her head.

"Oh my goodness, I do believe a rather wicked person is at this instant turning me into a lizards-newt, a Medusa girl!"

All of this was happening because of light play, because of those foolish impressionists freezing and dissecting an instant in time, and splattering it all over their canvases. They should have listened to Sir Isaac Newton, who, of course said, upon discovering one of the great, immutable natural laws, that for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction. So all these combined artistic, scientific, idealistic energies and visions had collided at the same time Miranda happened to be walking through the forest, happily minding her own business, and had ambushed her with devious and perverse designs. This, of course, proves (and all artists take note), that it's not nice to fool around with Laws of Nature.

So she ended up looking like a piece of Pointillist's art. This was not so very bad. But when her jaded green skin