

**Alice**  
**by Sean McCabe**

Time doesn't stand still. It accelerates. My father said that and I never believed him. Chalking it up to a cliché uttered in smoky VFW halls. But now, standing in front of Alice, blood pouring through the knee of my torn up jeans and holding a crinkled envelope in my hand, I finally understood what he meant. The red door. The peeling white paint. The rotting front stoop. It was all a punch in the gut.

I stood motionless at the bottom of the half-paved root infested driveway, hearing only my inconsistent breathing and the swoosh of traffic growing louder, then softer as it rolled past me on the street. I balled my fists together until my knuckles matched the envelope. Trying to stop time between my fingers—if only for a brief moment. My eyes came to a stop on the mailbox and I exhaled sharply. Scraping a toe against the ruts in the sidewalk. Not knowing if the next step would be the beginning or the ending of the best days of my life.

My mind leapt to the image of her face and then to her smile. It was an innocuous smile inside of a mundane day—just one of a thousand in all of all the others we had shared, but now, it was the only one I could remember clearly. Her face was fiery; with sunglasses perched precariously on the top of her head. The sun in her eyes causing her to squint uncontrollably. She leaned against a wall sprayed with the graffiti of a failed street poet. “Live everyday like it's your last,” it had said. Again she had smiled, and we chuckled at the sentiment as we stole a picture beneath it.

It was the kind of unspoken silliness that some had the ability to spout with conviction, despite it's rightful place on a motivational poster. But in a way I envied that a little. Caught up in a web of neurosis and hypothetical games of what if seemed so much more crippling than the idea of living blindly in pseudo-poetic sentiment. I squeezed the envelope again, two seconds away from dropping it or burning it to unrecognizable pieces.

The artists' tagged cliché failed to mention anything about consequences and hazards. The sickness that can be bred in your soul by making that choice. It failed to mention the regret of roads not taken, or the crippling catastrophe brought upon the mind by the idea of choosing the unknown. Like all inspirations, it existed in a vacuum. I wish I knew who was responsible for the tag now. I wanted to climb the steps to their apartment and tell them how wrong they were. I took two steps forward before stumbling and catching my balance on my injured leg.

The red door. The peeling white paint. The rotting front stoop. All reminders that I never wanted the last of anything. Only the first. To live moment to moment and never be able to truly seize of any of them. Existing as nothing more than a blur in the mind, allowing unrealistic romanticism to thrive. To sleep where and when I may. Because then I would never have to stare at the fading colours of the season and face the fear of what may be left behind. For a short time we knew that place. We lived in that place.