The Phlebotomist
Shows You Her Tattoo

Marjorie Maddox

After she's sanitized, pricked (on demand), suctioned your blood, the phlebotomist bares her arm voluntarily, brags a tattoo as bright as RBCs in the vacuum tube. She never faints. Never flinches. Never, you imagine, avoids eye contact when someone's inevitable news, the worst-case scenario kind, pings on a screen or tumbles into Voice Messages without any specifics (Will you die? Will God care?), and results arrive as notifications, ask politely, pretty-please, at your earliest convenience will you schedule an appointment with the doctor (unavailable until 2025), who will be happy to explain in detail the missing pieces of any and all diagnoses. No this tattooed twenty-something, without blinking a pore, rolls up her left sleeve just as she asked you to do, as she herself has been asked to do a dozen times at Funky Art, Kingdom of Ink, Black and Blue, Tattoo Nation. And this same phlebotomist—who never faints, never flinches as you stare away from your post-punctured arm—this woman the age of your daughter automatically flexes her muscle and the red sun on her decorated bicep pops up—just like that—as mercy, as hope.