

Issue II

Fall*i*ng



Not Quite Sure
literary magazine



cover art by
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V the Vulture

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Note from the Editor

After a first issue, which I considered to be the dream first issue for this magazine, I was apprehensive about how issue two would go. Luckily, and thanks to all of the support we have had from both the magazine community and those who have submitted to us, entrusting their work to our care, our second issue has been an equally as wonderful thing to produce.

The work submitted was of an incredible quality, which made picking our submissions even harder than we could have expected. So many talented individuals sent us their work, and so few were able to be included in our issue. Poetry, once again, was the most popular category for our submissions. As someone with and admittedly limited knowledge of poetry, I have been wooed to it by some of these pieces. The prose was another source of joy, and the range on offer was something to be proud of, for me.

This magazine is for everyone, and I believe that the range of work shows that clearer than words ever could. I hope you enjoy them.

- Holly E. O'Neill

Editor-in-Chief

This issue was brought to
you by...

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Poetry

Ebb and Flow

Wren Aster

We fall for each other at different speeds.

You like water off a cliff,
 forceful, shimmering.

I like a droplet clinging
 to the faucet, reaching

afraid to let go.

I burst as you crash into me

And you are still left empty.

All I reach are your cheeks,

Instead of wetting your lips.

Recognize how the water

Holds onto your lashes,

Realize how your hand

no longer holds mine.

Now you've pulled me

And now you're gone.

Your water a trickle

And mine a flood.

You all ebb,

I all flow,

Nowhere left to land,

So we go down.

We fall for each other

At different speeds

And then we fall apart.

Anhaga

Michael Nowlan

The martyred son awoke in the desert.
He wandered, dragging his bloodied feet through the dirt,
And he arrived at a congregation of noise and acrobatics
Commanded by
The dark shroud at the furthest end.
The snake slithered, pulling the son closer.

The son intermingled with the chaos out of morbid curiosity.
A half-naked woman fed a man wine with her hand up high,
Wine dribbling down his bulbous chin.
Two men fought each other in the dirt and sand.
The son stepped past, to a woman.
A needle had sown thread through her forearm,
She let it hang,
Dancing with gravity,
Pushed to and frow by the playing infants.
The snake writhed, pulling the son closer.

Past two figures seated in mahogany chairs they did not
build,
One faced of the sun, one faced of the moon,
Large piles of bodies grovelled at their feet.
The son dragged forward, toward it,
Brought to his knees for the
Unmoving, the shroud
The self-eating snake, it's rainbow skin
Showing the son what his sacrifice meant
Adversity, gluttony, indulgence, null
To the unmoving.

Books in my school's

I lay in my room,
crying out from the trenches,
of burning books and passing flashes—
Is it hopeless to think of you as my Atlantis,
as my Rome or Pompei—
Surely wished but now stolen in sleep,
Surely I miss you behind the burning feet.
I think of God's relationship
with Babylon:
What was an accursed city but
diamonds in books
and treasures in mythology?
Did they also scrape you away
with their knuckles dragging on tile?
Fist full of dollars of an ugly
Man and his scent,
He took the binding and broke the seams.
He closed the door,
Judgment is swift and empty
In the Tower of Babel
I wish to hear your sweet words;
Of a world shared in my blood.
Of those lost yet not forgotten,
What I would give to see the light.
Maybe in the forest where they left me,
My unspoken judgment against his smile
left me paralyzed,
Only on the crossroads left to damnation.
If they ever kissed my feet

dumpster

V the Vulture

Should I forgive their sorrow weeps;
Are they seeping dry,
Like a frenzic wasp
In my cornea,
Begging to be heard and seen?
What would I give for them to see me?

But I lost my beautiful books,
but I lost my beautiful things.
They have taken them away from me.
They have taken everything.

Beyond the Falling Leaves

Marlowe Smith

The leaves cling to skeletal branches,
Like memories afraid to fade
They tremble with each sweeping gale,
Holding on mightily

But the wind bites sharper now,
Its wicked breath nipping at my skin,
Snapping to life like the first burst of a storm—
And their grip begins to waver

One by one, they fall

Once green with purpose, the leaves bleed red and gold,
Reluctantly letting go of branches that held them close
They swirl in the wind—memories turning to dust
As they scatter to the ground,
I wonder if I, too, must learn how to fall

god's gift

Jocelyn Tan

For god it is
Scarlet stream
Skinned on a pulley
Pinched eyes locked grimace
The air smells leathery
Annual kill fest
My strapped feet take no steps
No flames but it's scalding
No wounds but it's killing
A yard of perish
To breathe is a luxury
Shut eyes escapes no sin
So much for divinity's gift

adaptability

In the influx of night
Your body adapts to me
Every part of my being is stained
with your smell
I kiss your wounds
I embrace your pains
And i weave poetry for you
in my dreams
in the midst of separation
What can not be said
Only kisses understand...

escape

Like the landing of yellow leaves
Sadness sits in my eyes
Pain explores my being
And the wounds get hot
I am full of escape
Full of longing that takes root in me
I take the suitcase
I give my heart to the rounds
The anger of the sky bursts on my face
My eyes tremble
I repeat in my mind
Someone will find me from the trail of tears...

both poems by
Sofia Jamali Soufi

Date Night

I took myself on a date tonight.

It's often I have this chance.

Not because I don't have the time, but rather I don't find myself

I slipped on my favorite LBD, carried m favorite black satin

A emerald hung from my neck and rose blush flushed my cheeks.

One more look over before I head out the door.

Honey, you look divine this evening.

I ordered the whitefish with grilled asparagus and the tiramisu.

The napkin laced my lap and elbows were off the table.

The waiter received a generous tip for his outstanding service.

I opened doors, said please and thank you, and really meant it.

Arriving at my doorstep. I desperately wanted to ask for another

I had such a lovely evening, yearning for many more to come

I don't know if I'll receive another chance.

I can only dream that I will once again stand on my porch, while

To love myself as much as I have this evening, to treat her with

with so much love.

worry of such an experience.
clutch.

date.
long after this night.

the stars and moon glisten, and ask myself for another opportunity.
such grace and honor, to fill her

Unfinished Exit

I keep thinking
about the time in high school
when you drew
me
a map of the city,
I still have it somewhere.
It was so easy
to get lost
in a place where all the trees
look the same.
And now
every time I see
a missing person's poster
stapled to a pole,
all I can think is
that could have been me.
Missing,
Disappeared.

But there are no
posters for people
who just never came back

Claudia Wysocky

and you haven't killed yourself
because you'd have to commit to a
single exit.

What you wouldn't give to be your cousin Catherine,
who you watched
twice in one weekend get strangled nude
in a bathtub onstage
by the actor who once
filled your mouth with quarters at
your mother's funeral.
The curtains closed and opened again.
We applauded until
our hands were sore.

But you couldn't shake the image of
her lifeless body,
the way she hung there like a
marionette with cut strings.
And now every time you try to write a poem,
it feels like a
eulogy.

Velos (*trans.* The Bike)

A man on a bike talked back to a man in a car.
The man in the car felt insulted. He took it seriously.
The man on the bike insulted the man in the car.
The man in the car then took it personally. He got out of the car.
The man on the bike didn't flinch.
The man from the car thought he was a big guy.
He started screaming his head off.
The man on the bike didn't flinch.
He just looked straight ahead and continued to talk back.
The man from the car got stocked.
Oh! he got slammed.
Big guys don't like that.
The man from the car took it personally.
He waved a fat finger at the man on the bike.
Just wait and see.
And he turned around.
The man on the bike shouted " hey! I don't care!" and took off.
Oh! What a chase! What insult man from the car got,
OG furious.
He ran after the man on the bike.
The man on the bike went crazy Tour de France.
Hey, it's a race. You gotta do what you gotta do.
The man from the car had no chance. He was no sprinter. Never
Fortunately for the man on the bike, he got away.
Unfortunately for the man from the car, he wasn't fast enough.
His pride was wounded. His manhood was shamed. But he had no
Only comic relief:
4 black guys watching like old men sitting around while smoking
except that they are on bikes.
4 black guys watching, laughing at 2 white guys fighting it out in
Non-visible but there at the crossroads of two streets.

Béatrice Denise Chahine

a chance against Tour de France.

chance.

a ring,

And Dante Cried

*Virgilio, quando prender si sentio,
disse a me: «Fatti qua, sì ch'io ti prenda»;
poi fece sì ch'un fascio era elli e io.*

*Virgilius, when he felt himself embraced,
Said unto me: "Draw night, that I may take thee";
Then of himself and me one bundle made.*

— Canto XXXI from Dante's *Inferno*

**For hours I follow your back, eyeing the
calloused cradle of your hand and counting
how long it's been since I've kissed it.**

**Your world-weary eyes have forgotten the
blushing hyacinth gardens you used to
lay within under the yellowing moon.**

**Your throat once sung stories of heroes;
how lovingly your tongue clicked
over names forgotten by a faceless generation.**

**But now you speak only of Her; that nervous
girl who will burn in your father's hall
for a love like our own.**

Beware the pleasure of men.

**You didn't look at me when you said it,
yet my name ran invisible on your tongue all the same.**

Down, down, down,
I'd break my neck just to look
down at your glistening cheek.

Let us rest a while, love.
The horrors cannot plague our bodies
when we hide under darkened brush like this.

Le | And Dante Cried | 2

Down, down, down,
fall into my still waiting arms again.
I wait seven feet underground,

To embrace our sweet song of sin.

Grocery Carts

We show each other
All our favorite foods
until our grocery carts
begin to look the same./

We tell each other
all the funny stories from our pasts
until we only talk
about our days./

On the phone you let me know
it's pouring where you are,
my hair still wet,
my skin cool from
the rain./

I will never forget
how bad weather can affect your joints,
that you love thunderstorms.

I will never forget
which things you love cause pain./

One day, bad weather would start
hurting me, too.

 Sitting
 Together, listening
 to the bittersweet
drums, rubbing our
joints with my favorite
 brand of tiger balm,
we would have told each other
when the excess Red Rose tea
you bought your mom for Christmas
was the perfect temperature to drink,
we would have held
Paper grocery bags over our heads
 when we ran to the car,
and one day,
I would have forgotten
the feeling of rain on my skin.

Gil Asif



to accompany 'Grocery Carts'

Could you?

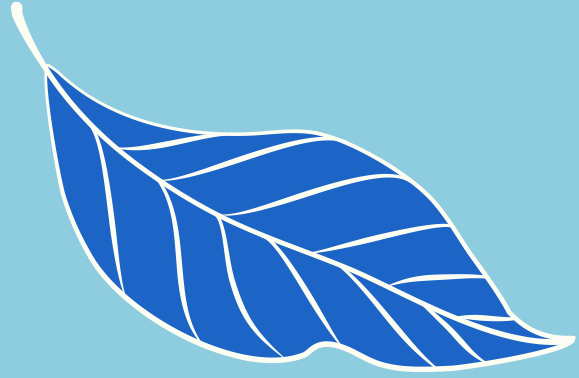
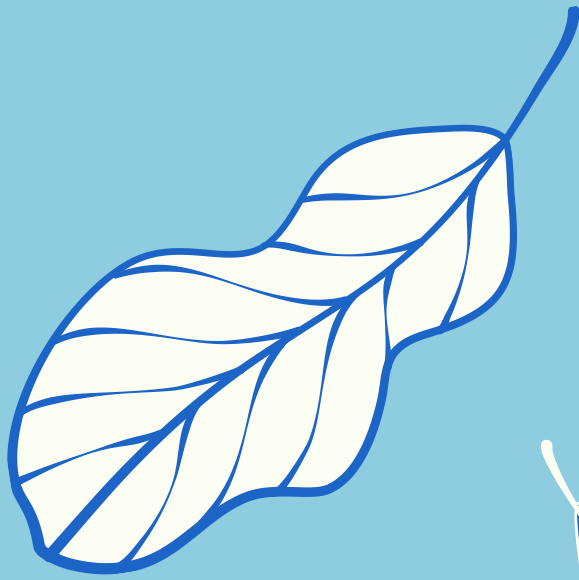
Gil Asif

Rejecting touch, the frost
nipped ends of my skin, rose-
tipped, the only flowers
left so deep in winter,

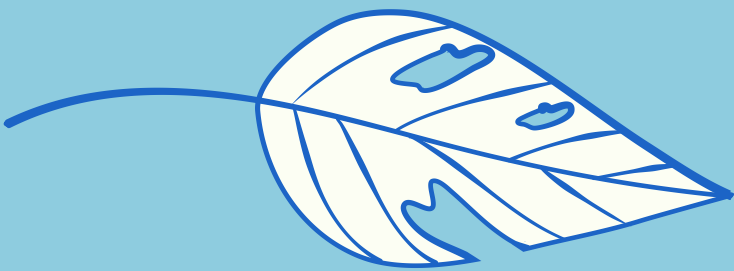
flourish, tended gently
by gardeners with warm breath.

Look away, I love you.
Pruned, naked, you would learn
the shade and what parts pink
once lovebitten skin thaws.

Their hands on my belly-
could you still hold me like this?



Prose



Drifting

Phillip Taylor

I would walk with you - through woods and over bridges, along dirt paths and under a heavy fog. I'm familiar with these routes, they're easier to tread through, and I'd like you to join me at my slow pace. But you would run - through cities and over deserts, along beaches and under a big blue sky. And you would laugh, oh, how you would laugh, as your feet slip in the sand and the sea sprays your face. You would roar and dance with laughter and a smile.

I would run, too, if I could, but I limp and I fall. I fall even when I walk. Imagine how those sunny places sound to me: impossible and beautiful. I cannot laugh with you there, as you know - as you said, but because I cannot run; you think I prefer a slower pace? To walk with you, one so keen to absorb the world, racing blindly around every corner and headfirst through the high grass, and to see you look back at me falling, unable to keep up, with pity and audit in your eyes - it is simply torture.

It does not matter, obviously, unfortunately, because you would run, so you should run. Don't let me dull your stride. It would pain me to see you slow down, but still, it kills me to watch you run away. You won't be the last to grow tired of my aimless drifting, I realise, and that hurts me more than your fading footsteps ever could.

So, I limp and stagger, trip and fall down, as so many rush by me without looking back. Am I too much trouble for even a glance? Can not one be so curious?

Camcorder

Nicholas Goldwin

The man was sat on the opposite side of the room from me by that point, but he'd been staring at me all night. And he was a man too, full-grown and everything. You know what he looked like? He looked like one of those actors in some shitty teen Netflix movie, the ones that look like they took the job to pay their mortgage off. He couldn't have been older than twenty-seven or twenty-eight though. Those numbers seemed to fit, for whatever reason, as he exuded ease and confidence and all the things that seem to get sucked out in time. He looked like he was in denial of what was waiting for him. And he was distracting himself by staring at me.

I didn't want to think about what a guy like him was doing at pres for a sixth form prom. I quietly hoped he was just Mikey's older brother, roped in for a night of chaperoning. That still makes the most sense to me, even after what came next.

I tried to pay no further attention to him and went to get a refill. A short while later, we actually took off for the school where the party was being held. The rest of the night was a blur, pretty standard prom experience from everything I'd been told by my brothers and their friends and the like. Drinking, dancing, utterly shite karaoke. The stuff that memories are made from, etc. And it was a lot of fun, too. Genuinely. Not sure when exactly but at some point during the evening I had the realisation that these people, my friends, they'd kept me real, helped me to "feel real," whatever the hell that meant. The phrase popped in my head at some point during the party and it stuck. Throughout the rest of the night, I was bound by the awareness of how little I

Camcorder

mattered without these people, and how much worse things will get once I never see them again. Of course, at the time, it was only a fear I had. I hadn't realised before that night just how much I could lose.

The guy was still there, by the way. In case you thought I'd lost him after the prom had actually started, I hadn't. Still there on the opposite side of the room, still staring at me, still creeping me out except just a little bit more now. I had thought about asking someone, but no one even seemed like they'd noticed him there. That was the weirdest thing too, it was like people passed through him instead of by him, he didn't seem to be there but at the same time he felt like the only real thing in the room. It was the same there at the school as it was back at Mikey's house. Even as I navigated the room, he seemed to be perpetually opposite me regardless of wherever I found myself. No one else seemed to see him, let alone that there was something...wrong about him being there. Like his actual being there made the whole room feel counterfeit by association.

So I decided to talk to him. As I approached him, I got a better look. He was slouched, borderline-hunched over as he sat on the floor, hands resting on upturned knees, his head against the wall. He was wearing a Dark Side of the Moon t-shirt and acid-washed jeans, he had his hair in curtains and round John Lennon glasses framed his face. The thing that caught my eye, however, was a flashy silver watch on his right wrist. He had a look on his face that betrayed his interest in me, a dutiful smile. Like he was only begrudgingly

being a dick.

‘Are you Mikey’s brother?’

He tilted his head towards me, grinning grimly. ‘Who’s Mikey?’

‘The guy whose house you were in earlier.’

‘What’s he to you?’

‘What difference does it make?’

‘Would it hurt to say?’

‘Is this a hobby of yours?’

‘Staring at you?’

‘Answering questions with questions.’

‘Ah. Wasn’t sure you’d notice.’

This fucking guy, man.

‘I did. That and the staring, now that you mention it.’

‘Did you like it?’

‘What?’

Camcorder

‘The staring. Actually the questions too, now that you mention it.’

I could’ve strangled him right there, I swear to God.

‘Look, whatever you’re trying to pull here, knock it off.’

The grin changed, then left his face very suddenly. I sensed that I’d made a mistake of some kind.

‘Are we sure that’s how you want this to go?’ His eyes glanced around the room on the word ‘this’.

At me, my friends and at everyone else in the room in one omniscient scan. I suddenly became aware of how fragile the night felt, and how much power I’d given this freak over how it went from here. How he could have any power was beyond me, but at that very moment it felt stupid to question that he had the ball in his court. I didn’t know who he was, but I knew without doubt (or much reason for it) that this conversation had a weight to it that I didn’t know if I could handle. I didn’t know what else to say. Another word could’ve triggered anything from a bitchy chuckle to the roof caving in.

I had also become aware of how long I’d been silent in response to his question, and from my silence, the grin returned to his face. ‘Do you still talk in your sleep?’ My body turned to concrete. My mouth moved to respond but the most pathetic sound emerged instead. To call it a

word would have been generous. He understood me anyway.

‘Did I strike a nerve?’ The words kept falling out of my mind before they could reach my mouth. He couldn’t possibly know about that. I’d never told anyone about that. They had made me promise never to tell anyone about that.

He was now on one knee, like he was going to propose, while I had slowly gotten acquainted with this feeling of waking death. He stood up, stared like he was sizing me up all over again. I remembered now why I had walked over to him, and it all felt so empty.

‘There’s a recording of you while you’re sleeping. You’re saying things. It’s fucking hysterical.’

He let the words hang in the space between us, which I tried to increase by backing away from him. Before I could fully turn away, I caught my shoe on a stray something-or-other, something firm and inert. I barely registered catching myself as I fell to the floor.

The aches throughout my body could’ve woken me up. Instead, the voice of an idiot did.

‘I had to take that blanket away to wash it. I didn’t think he’d wanted to drink that much last night...’

Camcorder

Shards of light scurried between my eyelids as Mikey's voice provided an anchor to the real world.

'Weed?'

'Can you get hung-over from weed?'

'No, but you can get sick from it. Has he ever had any before?'

'Who am I, his keeper?'

'Aren't you?'

Taking issue with that last question, I managed to croak out, 'The fuck he is.'

'Ah, the voice of reason awakens,' retorted Mikey. I'd managed to open my eyes by that point and I saw Mikey and Nina, his girlfriend, standing over me as I lay there on his sofa. The sofa smelling vaguely of puke, a swarm of shame overcame me.

'Fuck, guys, I'm really sorry.' As I moved to get off the sofa, groaning as I did, Mikey gave me his hands to help me back up. As I was struggling to stand, I saw a quick look shot from Mikey to Nina. I didn't have the brainpower at the time to describe it, except that it took me right to that feeling with that guy the previous night. After a minute, I was just about back on my feet. I asked what the time was.

‘Ten-fifty-something.’ His watch had never been entirely accurate. How long I’d been out for. ‘Since about ten-thirty last night.’ I’d missed half my prom.

‘That fucking guy...’

‘Which guy?’

‘Your goddamn brother, or whoever the fuck.’ On the mention of ‘brother’, Mikey looked perplexed.

‘My brother’s in jail,’ he mumbled as he left the room. Nina gave me a look of disapproval, like I should’ve known better. Maybe I should’ve.

‘On your way out, could you take that broken camcorder with you? The pieces fell out of you when we found you on the floor last night.’ Broken camcorder. Why the hell not?

After responding in the affirmative to Nina, I stretched a little more and got ready to leave. Wearing a black tie suit in the daytime has a similar feel to going shopping in pyjamas. I saw a camcorder on the bottom of the stairs by the front door as I was heading to leave. The words that the creep from last night had planted in me reverberated through my mind as I picked it up. I didn’t know whose it was, I didn’t know what was on it. Nina wanted it gone, so be it.

It was a short walk from Mikey’s place to mine. Once home, I went for a shower. Refreshing though it was, the camcorder

Camcorder

continued to occupy my mind. I hadn't talked in my sleep since I was a kid. I hadn't said anything concerning since I was even younger. How could that guy have known about it? And what the hell was on there? What was I so afraid of?

The steam from the shower seemed to mask any anxiety I felt as I got out and got changed into some tracksuit bottoms and a hoodie. That guy was full of shit, and in a few seconds I'd have proof. As it turns out the camcorder wasn't broken, just out of charge. Dad had used a similar camcorder from when he used to make home movies, so I found a charging cable for it in his study. Ten minutes and I'd know how full of shit he was. Nine minutes. I don't know what I'm so worried about, creep's like that are half the population these days. Eight minutes. I'm just being paranoid, really need to cut that out. Seven minutes. What a daft cunt. Six minutes. Silly silly silly prick he was. Six minutes. Nope, not gonna think about that. Five minutes. Or that. Four minutes. Definitely not gonna give that any attention. Three minutes. Realistically, what is the worst that could be on there? Two minutes. Could be that. One minute. Could very easily be that....

The charging light turned off as the screen lit up. I selected the most recent recording and hit play.

There were some sounds accompanying a murky visual. Whispering, some giggling. Then I saw my face. I was on the floor of the gymnasium. I seemed to be talking to the air. And the giggling turned to chuckling. The chuckling turned to

full-on belly laughing. And the image of me stayed as the laughter carried on and on and on.

And then I cried. In the recording first, then right there and then.

And I couldn't stop until the recording stopped.

The Poet

Ray Lewis

It was always on the coldest nights that the bells came a-ringing, a-ringing in the dark like sunlight cast loose. We never expected it, not truly, but there was a certain anticipation as the winter months closed around us. Every night, as we huddled round the fire, the question hung in the air - tonight? Will he come tonight? Sure enough, when the wind bit hardest and the snow fell thickest, here he came.

He never gave a name that I recall, though I had all the self-absorption of a child, but I could describe him even now. A tall man, red-headed, with a pointed beard and a dark green cloak. He wore a brooch of two snakes entwined together, blue and purple like a river in the sun. And of course, like all of his kind, he carried a branch adorned with bells - golden and singing. Not one of us children feared him, practical stranger though he was, taking turns to embrace the poet before he settled by the fire. Our mother would bring him a drink larger than his head, while our fathers plied him for knowledge - the poet knew everything. He knew who had been made a king, and who had been toppled from his seat, where the land ended and where it began. He had travelled from the bone-white Southern cliffs to the rolling grey seas of Galloway and some said he'd been beyond. No one believed them though - to most, those rolling dark waters were the edge of the world, and we had never even seen that let alone the land beyond.

He had, perhaps. Though he never told us those stories. Eventually he would settle among us - taking the only stool - and unstrap his harp from his back, dusting off the graceful

arch of her head. The harp was a she, the poet insisted. Something so beautiful should never be called it. She had a name - Gwyn - and a story of her own which he was always promising to tell, but never did. Our fathers didn't understand, didn't see him flinch when they spoke of Gwyn as if she was merely hawthorn and gut string, but our mothers... Our mothers knew the power of the artisan's hand, the way it can carve being from nothing but dead wood and dreams. They laid a fine shawl for Gwyn to sit upon when she was not on her poet's lap, and kept her a distance from the fire which ached to eat her pretty polished bones.

He would settle among us, Gwyn upon his knee, and he would meet each of our young and eager eyes.

'Now,' he said, 'you must remember that I don't ever tell you a lie. Every word that comes from my mouth is God's own truth, do not doubt it. If I ever did deceive you, Gwyn wouldn't stand for it and she'd make such a terrible noise.'

At that, he'd twang his nail against one of the strings, making it buzz discordantly. We'd all play the part, howling and clutching our ears, until he muffled the sound with a press of his hand.

'So you see, I must be truthful.' He spoke quickly, but clearly, his wit visible as a rabbit racing through heather. He always seemed to choose exactly the right words. 'Regardless of whether or not you've seen any of the things I'll tell you about.'

The Poet

His fingers would begin to dance upon the strings then, golden in the firelight, a song we'd never heard before and never would again – new, each time, to match the story. He would begin.

There once was a brave prince, of strong mind and a spirit stronger still, his name not unknown to the tales of men. He was Pwyll Pen Annwn, prince of Dyfed, and his cloak was already studded with many a legend, but this one differs from the rest. While any other tale might tell of Pwyll's fortitude, his skill, his wit, this one tells of Pwyll's sole foolishness. The same foolishness as belongs to any other man.

'What foolishness?' we would ask, eager, eying our fathers with mischief. Our mothers knew of course, and smiled.

The poet indulged us, tilting his head. 'Why, love, of course,' he said. 'It makes any man a fool, every man a fool.'

For on one day, when Pwyll rode with his men amongst the hills of his home, he saw a fair lady upon a white horse. For a moment, he could not decide which was more beautiful – the moonshine white of the horse's mane or the blood-red tresses of the maiden – but then she turned her head and he was lost to her. For her features were made for looking upon just as the sun is made for shining, her eyes the rich blue-green of deep water, her lips a curl of laughter. No living creature was more beautiful to him than she, in that moment nor any after. So, of course, he sent his fastest horseman to pursue her. Yet even as the poor bannerman raced his horse to exhaustion, the woman kept ahead – though her

horse did not surpass a trot. Pwyll, however, had not come to be prince of Dyfed by luck. He did not accept failure and returned to the hill only to see the woman passing again. He sent another horseman. Alas, he too returned without having matched the lady's pace.

'If this Prince Pwyll was so strong and clever,' piped up one of our number, a small boy discontent to leave the best mysteries of a story alone, 'why didn't he go after her himself?'

The poet, unperturbed, did not even pause his music. 'Well, that is what he did, my boy...'

On the third day that Pwyll saw the maiden passing by, he decided to test his own pace. He mounted his horse and rode faster than he ever had before, so fast that the whistling of the wind in his ears rose to a wail, like a ghost in the night. But fast though he rode and oft though he shouted to catch the maid's attention, still her languid steed kept her ahead.

It was only when Pwyll was near-drained of breath that he called 'Fair lady, please stop in the name of the man you love most.'

She turned, her smile like the sun rising, and called back to him. 'I will wait gladly. If only you'd said that sooner, you might have spared the horse.'

We laughed at that. The poet shook his head.

The Poet

‘Such fools are men,’ he said, ‘that we do not think to ask for what we wish for most. So hasty is that hand to take, that it does not consider what might be given if it only... opened.’

Every word seemed heavy and important. I remember them even now as if they had been stitched upon my soul along with each of his stories. Open your hand. See what will fall into it, bloodless and generous as fruit in the summer.

As Pwyll spoke to the young lady he came to know her name – Rhiannon. He came to know her plight as well, for he was not the first to remark upon the beauty of this fine lady; she had been snatched up without ceremony by a brutal lord, Gwawl, and bound to marry him. Unwilling though she was, she was bound by honour not to break her betrothal.

‘Is there nothing I can do to free you?’ Pwyll asked Rhiannon. There was a softness in his eyes that echoed and rippled back through hers, a love not yet fully formed yet shaped – like a seed beneath the earth muttering with life.

‘Yes,’ she said, ‘there is one thing. Come to my wedding feast in one year’s time and you might win me. You will know how it may be done if you are any man of wit.’

Pwyll was that above all else, and the kind of man who kept a promise. Thus, he found himself in a foreign court once the year had passed, faced with Gwawl and the wan and pale – but still beautiful – Rhiannon.

'My lord,' he called to the groom's high seat, 'on this, the happiest of days, may I ask of you a boon?'

Gwawl smiled, uncharacteristically generous. 'On this day, my friend, ask me for anything and you shall have it.'

Pwyll smiled, and Rhiannon – behind a delicate hand – smiled with him. 'I ask for the woman you are set to marry, and the provisions given with her.'

Gasps from the rapt audience. 'How clever!'

'Listen well, and you'll learn to be cleverer still,' the poet chided.

The words flowed, and the wine flowed, and his hands flowed like no solid thing should ever be able to flow over strings. The music quickened as Gwawl made another bid for Rhiannon's hand, and slowed as she was won again, turned sinister as the tale itself turned to another – the wicked fate of Pwyll's first son. The poet spoke and sang all through the night, without a rasp or falter, and slowly our eyes began to dim and close.

When we opened them, the morning was cold and clean. The stool by the fire was empty and the poet was gone. We asked our mothers every time – when will he come again? Where does he go? Why doesn't he say goodbye? They would only ever say that it was his purpose to tell stories,

The Poet

and when he was finished his time was his own.

Truthfully, I think he never said goodbye because to do so would mean the story was finished, truly finished. It isn't. On the cold winter's nights, the kind that feel like a second death, I wait for the poet. When he comes through the door in a whirl of snow, I warm him some wine and a seat by the fire, and I listen to stories till the light draws my eyes and he is gone.

Nothing left behind, but the tinkling of bells on the wind, a-ringing, a-ringing.

Contributors

Poetry

Rebecca Agauas

Rebecca Agauas is a woman who lives in Michigan. She is a person living with chronic illnesses and is an advocate for the chronic illness community. Rebecca has been writing for a few years and considers writing a form of self expression and self reflection. She has self published 2 books and has been published and received recognition from various literary magazines. You can find Rebecca on Instagram @rebeccaagauas

Gil Asif

You can find Gil on Instagram @asif.theentertainer

Wren Aster

Wren Aster (she/they) plays with words, images, sound and various other media. Fascinated by the wondrous in the mundane, they make art about growing pains, broken hearts and mending them, and about how it feels to be alive. Most of the time Wren can be found among the moss, occasionally stumbles onto the queer stages of the Rhine–Ruhr area where she resides, and exists on Instagram as @dandelion.tuft

Béatrice Denise Chahine

Béatrice Denise Chahine is a physically disabled writer born and raised in NYC–NJ to a Lebanese father and a Franco– Alsatian mother. She is currently unrooted in France. She's been published in local zines (Chicago Zine Club's Snax issue and Beirut-based Haven For Artists' ManbouZine issues), the HyeBred Magazine, Al Rawiya, Le Taurillon, and AZAD Archives.

Poetry

Francis Le

M. Francis Le's (they/them) debut poetry was published in the 32nd issue of Kolob Canyon Review in April of 2023. Born into a Vietnamese immigrant family in Magna, Utah, they spent much of their childhood writing and posting stories inspired by their unique upbringing. They currently attend Southern Utah University and plan on graduating in Spring 2026 with a Bachelors in English education with an emphasis in Creative Writing. You can find them at @mfrancislewrites on Instagram and Tumblr.

Michael Nowlan

Marlowe Smith

Sophia Jamali Soufi

Sophia Jamali Soufi | سوفيا جمالی صوفی. Born in 2001, Rasht, Iran. Architectural expert / fashion designer poet and writer. The main language of her poems is Persian. Her poems have been translated into Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, French, English, German, Turkish and published in literary magazines and websites.

Jocelyn Tan

Jocelyn loves to write about feelings; poetry remains the most ephemeral of art forms, immortalized by words. She explores her relationship with writing and visuals, projecting and shrinking her problems all at once. It feels surreal to let the world glimpse a piece of her, but she lives for this bliss.

Poetry

Claudia Wysocky

Claudia Wysocky, a Polish writer and poet based in New York, is known for her diverse literary creations, including fiction and poetry. Her poems, such as "Stargazing Love" and "Heaven and Hell," reflect her ability to capture the beauty of life through rich descriptions. Besides poetry, she authored "All Up in Smoke," published by "Anxiety Press." With over five years of writing experience, Claudia's work has been featured in local newspapers, magazines, and even literary journals like WordCityLit and Lothlorien Poetry Journal. Her writing is powered by her belief in art's potential to inspire positive change. Claudia also shares her personal journey and love for writing on her own blog, and she expresses her literary talent as an immigrant raised in post-communism Poland.

V the Vulture

"V the Vulture" is a 25 year old nonbinary writer, historian, and musician. Currently running "V-The Vulture" Instagram page and blog of historical events and individuals, they also co-run QueerCrip Records, an online record store publishing queer and disabled artists. You can find them under MXDWN radio writers, as well as several other literary magazines! They encourage all writers to save their work!

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