



TALIA SMITH

**woman at the rock show**  
GEMMA STRANG

tonight at the O2  
blink-182 reunite  
the punk crowd  
of my youth  
twenty years older

\*

a band tee strains over a pot belly  
a scalp gleams beneath thinning hair  
a chin fades to neck

I wonder how the rest of them are faring  
as I turn my back on the mirror  
and make for the tube  
to North Greenwich

## belly laugh

ALEXIS DEESE-SMITH

spilling is usually a mistake  
is clumsy is a quick slip on a laugh  
a slide into  
tangled arms tangled teeth but you laugh  
into my hair and i let myself spill over my edges happy silky buzz  
fizzle pop like soda better than alcohol better than sucking on vodka from a straw better  
than betting my hopes on the rind of a lime  
for once i am buoyant  
(though i can't spell it on the first try)  
as in i am not  
drowning in the air around me as in  
i do not count in out in out do not  
consult the instruction manual do not care  
that i make a mess with my breathing am not  
reminded that there is a finite amount of air and that  
*the universe does not always like to share so*  
on weekdays i respect its wishes keep my intake to a minimum  
carefully conserve the amount i allow myself and that is why  
this laugh feels like *fuck the patriarchy* or whatever *archy* i want to give the middle finger  
today if air wasn't invisible this room would be a pigmented cloud

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## Holiday in the Alps

KAPU LEWIS

Just when I think the path will turn  
and the brow of the hill  
will meet my feet  
you say something

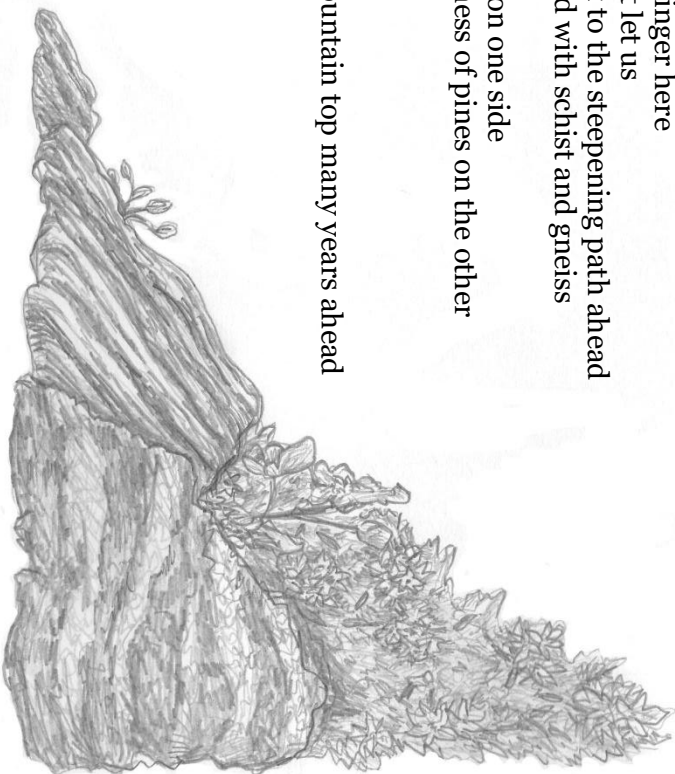
and the brow is no longer a brow  
but a mere undulation in the long ascent  
like a Ha-Ha  
in a posh British Garden

to hide the truth  
But you never do  
is that why I married you?  
in this meadow of alpenrose and aconite

we can't linger here  
you won't let us  
you point to the steepening path ahead  
sharpened with schist and gneiss

an abyss on one side  
the darkness of pines on the other  
you lead  
I follow

to the mountain top many years ahead



iii

Naked in the auditorium

a silly word

I'll audit YOUR orium

you sick Fuck

why are they looking at me?

blaze-slatted fingers

torch-squinted eye

I've foot my mouth again

but now I want it...

OUT

somehow that's not right either

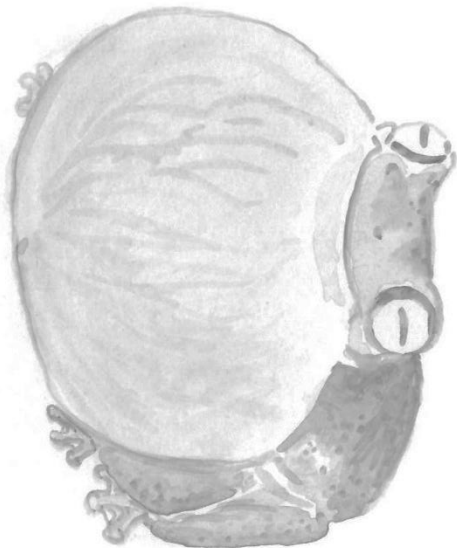
I'm a word fool

a naked word fall in the dark

Talk  
(not well hung)

. . . . .

i would be colouring outside the lines of my body i would paint the ceilings with the  
lick of my laughter i'd be full on it, this oxygen that belongs to me  
my list this morning suggested warm lemon water  
light stretching three moments of gratefulness  
but i know no better way to romance the word 'self' than this thesaurus:  
g r i n (giggle) shriek chuckle SNORT do these until you feel it in your belly  
feel each atom of atmosphere you take up



# Fool

DAVID WHITEHEAD

Her peated voice  
Lazed crocodile  
On the banks  
Of her afternoon curls  
Her slow smile  
Had songbirds in it  
And stretched tomcat confident  
Coral and cream  
Abashed and proud

She'd plucked her breath tight  
Made the tuning of her strings  
Into an overture  
Itching with restraint  
Composed in the key of expectation  
The choreography of desire  
Magnificent

She  
Pirouetted the conversation  
Just so  
Poised her offhand offer  
And broke in half laughing  
A feathery cadenza  
A revelation  
An almost comic  
Relief

I floundered, diffused  
Saturated, giddy idiotic  
With this meteorite  
This state of sweet

•  
ii

• The sea looks nice today  
clouds clear, air here.  
Weather.  
• Nice pimple-  
spot, the deference  
I do my stretches and shakes  
two bone applause  
holy palmer's kissup  
just about ready to dive...

• IN

• I am pocketed by the tide  
chewed up  
along someone else's gums

•

## SMALL TALK

FREDDY J. LAMBERT

i

The rope skips  
hits ground in rounds

a rhythmic pulse

Smile

Frown

Smile

Frown

apathy between the lines  
almost ready to jump...

IN

I've tripped over my own shoelaces  
tongues tied  
sole worn but I'll try again

Emergency

The man on the spot

The balance of the moment

The head of a pin

And with excruciating charm

I dredged unthinking

The very worst

Thing

To say

Her eyes of years and moments

Of there and then

Of here and now

Blinked

And sank without a ripple

Left without fanfare

And never more

An encore

Self centred and blind

As a lighthouse

I only saw

What passed me by

I hoarded my apologies

Ministered only myself

And like any injured fool

Did not see the blade in my hand

Til I cut my eye

And saw red

Clenched searing coals

An inflicted self

A confidential voodoo

A terrible warning is nearly

As useful as

A good example

And I will use mine to instruct

The fools of tomorrow  
May they recognise the good  
When it smiles  
And hear the music  
When it sings



## Remembering Dorian

NICOLA WRIGHT

And he said, “you have killed my love. You used to stir my imagination. Now you don’t even stir my curiosity... you realised the dreams of great poets and gave shape and substance to the shadows of art. You have thrown it all away.”

OSCAR WILDE

I think of that era and shiver again.  
A sad past buried, a settler ingrained  
Bursting with the memory of more disgrace  
To surrender flustered by his embrace.

The town mourns, for the girl will soon vanish  
A glance of the portrait sees his beauty tarnish,  
Cushions cold like gravestones at the church yard  
Now she stares at the walls of the morgue – scarred.

Did he care that her honour was robbed  
Or her right to privacy mobbed –  
Is she freed from her own prison of passion?  
Mischief, voyeuristic glee, fobbed –  
Off by faux love, torment and trickery  
I’m relieved to see she flees  
Her dark misery.

**Him, or me?**  
WILLOW TAYLOR-JONES

Nothing knows nothing as ignorance knows bliss  
Memory guides him as all else he will miss  
Be not aware of the hound as it bites harmless skin  
When it comes to the fall, let indomitable spirit win  
I do not excuse the weakness of a fool as he drops –  
Yet I envy the music in the chambers before it stops.  
The stars hold a grudge for the beauty of his light  
Though one is the other amongst fearful night  
Feet feel the ground as arms feel the air  
Pollution or sin is the absence of care  
Do you dare be the one to tell him to see?  
It takes blindness to life for the soul to be free.  
A lesson we've learnt; fortune favours the fool  
He is beginning and end, the gods' loyal tool  
Charm is the muse for his cataphatic way  
Earth is not beguiled enough to allow him to stay.  
To be cradled by youth in the gallows of man,  
It is he that I love. It is he I cannot stand.

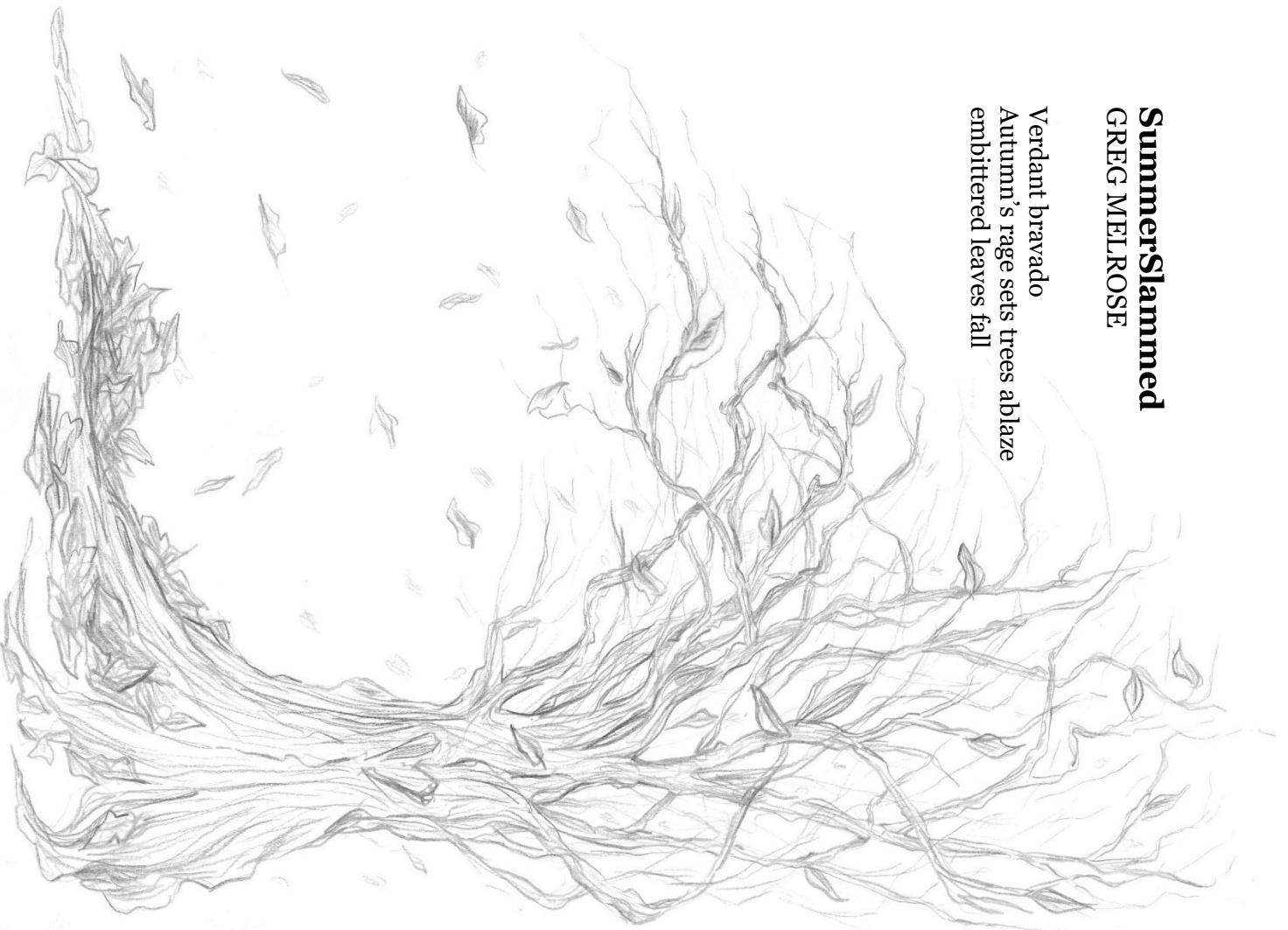


**Narcissus and Echo**  
FREDDY J. LAMBERT

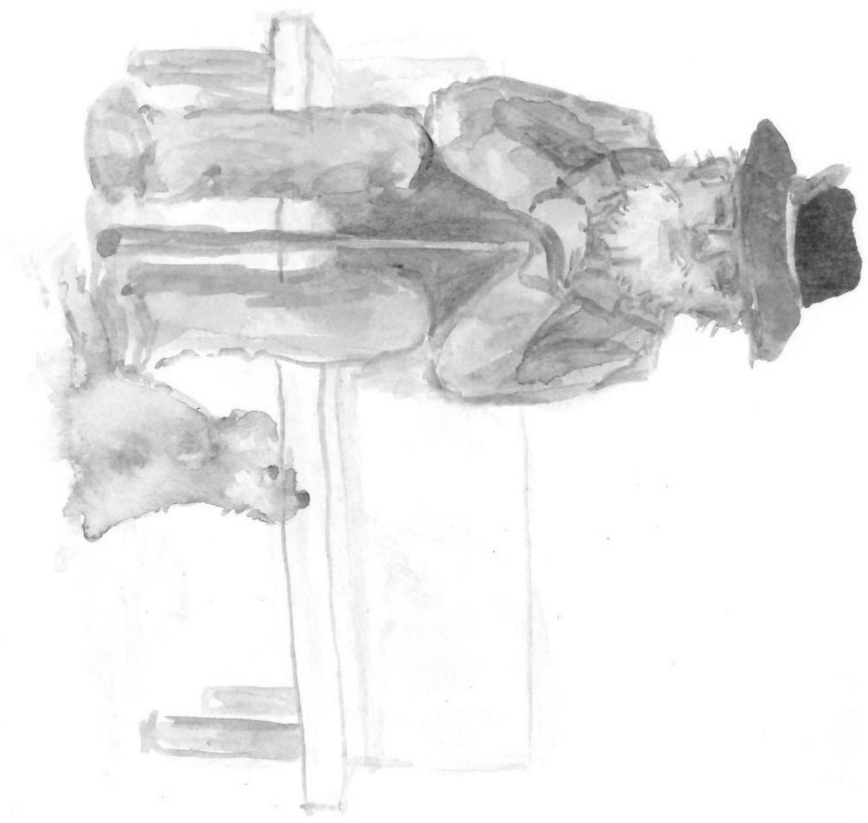
# Summer Slammed

GREG MELROSE

Verdant bravado  
Autumn's rage sets trees ablaze  
embittered leaves fall



I take his cold hand as he gives one-armed hugs  
He asks, "How are you, lad?", but my brother just shrugs  
"Fish and chips?" says my mum, and we all agree  
So family and dog all hurry home for our tea



## The Space on the Bench

DEBBIE TAYLOR

*Our first family visit to see my grandfather after my grandmother's death*

Nose against glass as trees blend and merge  
I begin to feel sick as the world starts to surge  
“Are we nearly there yet?” youngest sister opines  
My brother just scowls as he moans, and he whines

Mum says, “Will you stop making a fuss.”  
My brother says he wishes we'd taken the bus  
The ticket inspector is doing his rounds  
We search for our tickets until they are found

Our jumpers and fingers are sticky with pop  
Counting the hours as we wait for our stop  
I take out the book that was bought by my dad  
It's quite hard to read when I'm feeling this sad

There at the station, my grandfather's sat  
In his best coat, with his stick and his hat  
Checking train windows for a familiar face  
His grumpy old mongrel has started to pace

The train shudders and creaks as it comes to a stop  
My mum grabs our cases, and I spill my pop  
Into my pocket, I quickly thrust my book  
As my eyes scan the station, I look and I look

The place on the bench where my grandma should be  
Now houses a stranger who looks straight through me  
My grandfather smiles as we step out of the train  
He seems really happy to see us again

## In the paint shop

KAPU LEWIS

there's a lovely light over everything  
the colour of sour milk  
polluted sea foam  
bleached shop window  
a torch battery fading, you

*Buttercup Fool!*

the light itself is a ghost  
of red swimming costumes  
yellow gander beaks  
blue fishing boats  
framed in '70s prefab and concrete, not

*Hot Paprika, Banana Dream, Sapphire Seas, Shadow Chic*

it's the colour of your face  
when your heart stops  
on the bed in the corridor  
of the so-called hospital  
with the doctors who'd rather a

*Java Cream*

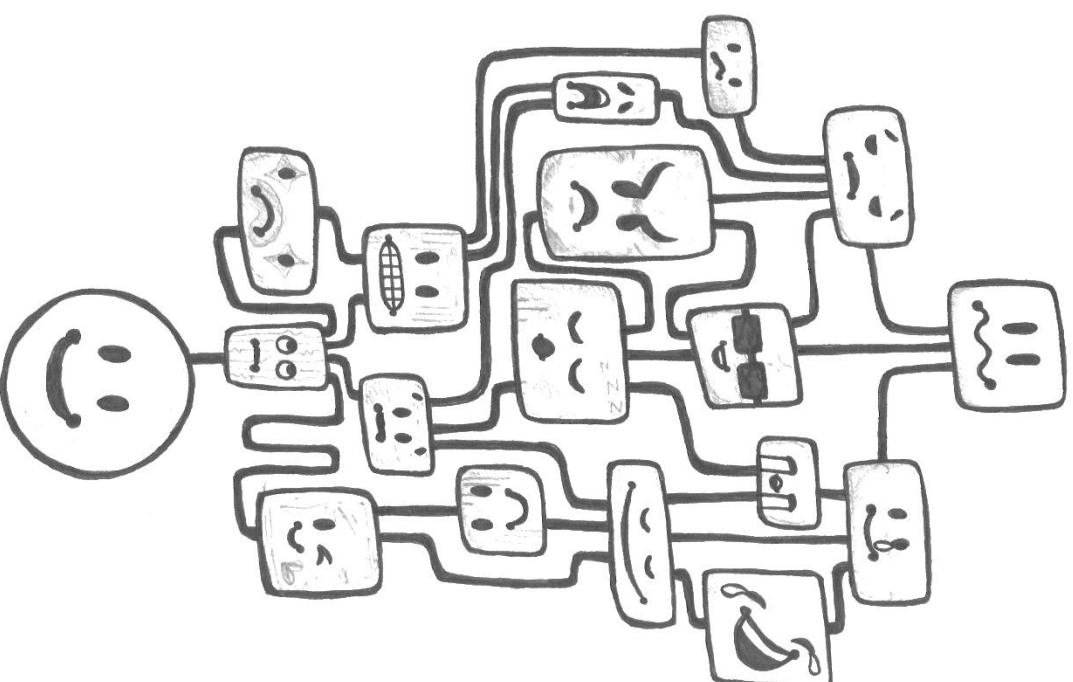
Let's be honest it's the colour of the room  
you say you enter  
when your body stops breathing  
while the nurses talk  
hairstyles and nail varnish  
it's the colour of your flat  
line

## Wash and Tumble

FREDDY J. LAMBERT

Carry me up on the wind  
and I'll sever the last dry  
seaweed stipes that holdfast  
to that pebbled beach  
I kept clambering on about  
rock slip not worth  
the handful of misted glass  
parsed from stone-turned dog  
days fisted as I fly  
updrafted into fresh quarters  
scatter me to cloud cover  
speckle me in cirrus spark  
or rain to condensate  
me true, down to dirt again  
fresh soil rising up  
to greet me in this  
new life my fingers and toes  
root for, hungry to  
bed my nails deep  
crease my lifeline with  
seeds this time til my  
pockets weigh me steady  
let earth bind me like an  
acorn cotton balled to shoot  
up and up and up again  
then to the river run

and I think that's a little harsh  
because having seen the data  
I think I am almost certainly happy



# Your Happiness Is Average

GEMMA STRANG

I Googled 'am I happy quiz'  
because how can you really know? Do you know?

I worry I am old too soon. I worry it's almost over. I worry  
I never danced enough. I worry I am a shouty mother becoming  
her shouty mother. I worry I am a distracted wife. I worry that  
ennui is a privilege. I worry my worries are cringe. I worry  
I have Paris Syndrome about everything except Paris

I answer the questions on the quiz  
which "is NOT a diagnostic tool":

*I often find goodness in myself and others*

*I sometimes feel life is rewarding*

*I sometimes feel joy from moment to moment*

*I rarely have a lot of energy*

*I sometimes have a sense of meaning and purpose in my life*

*I often reach out for support when times are tough*

*I sometimes accept my feelings throughout any given day*

*I sometimes actively keep in touch with friends and family*

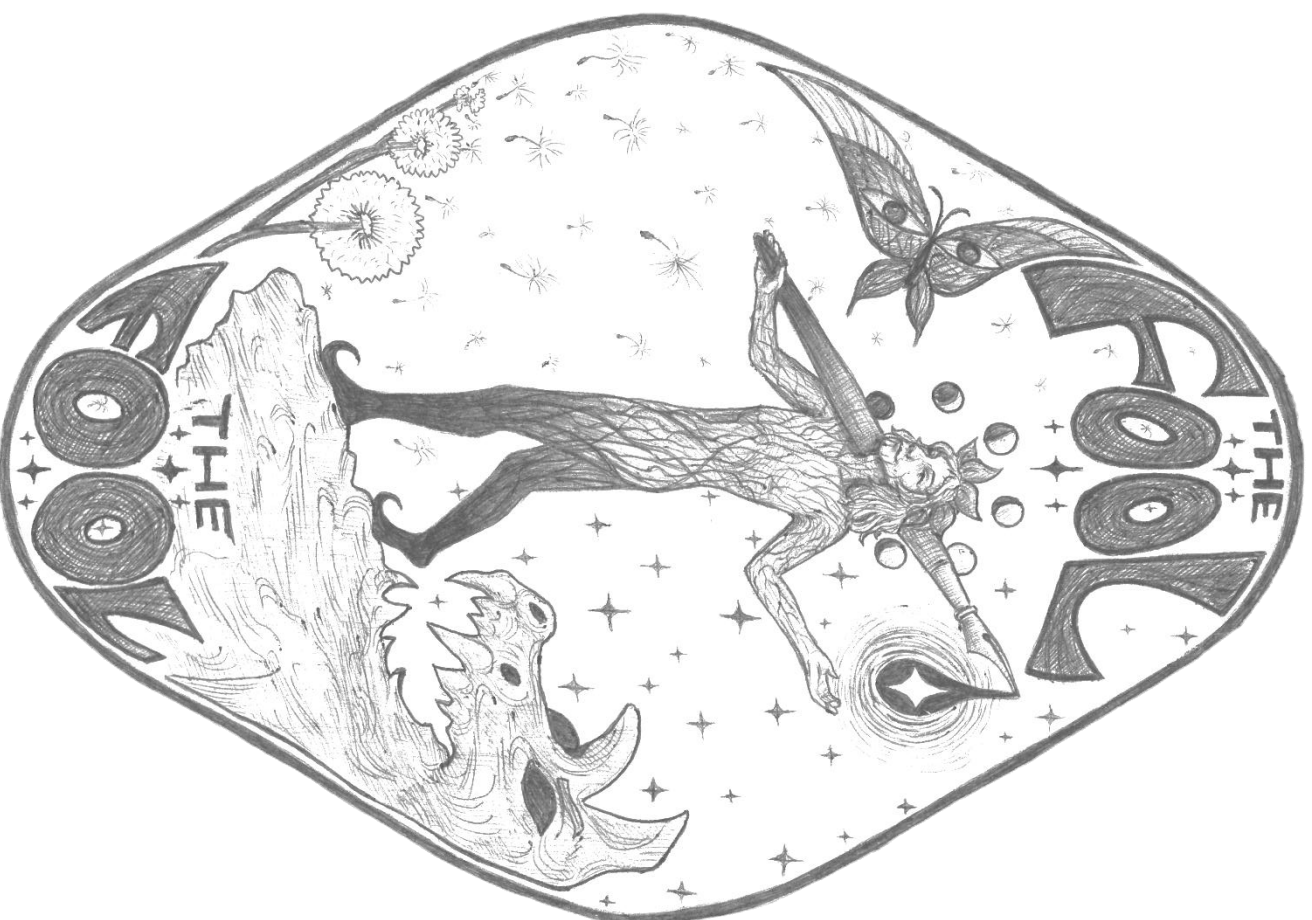
*I often feel optimistic about the future*

*I often feel grateful for what I have*

*I rarely let go of past disappointments or hurts*

Dumb as it is,  
the quiz betrays a rubric for happiness  
A sense of which dials may need adjusting  
which hurts need letting go

When the results come in, they say  
"Your Happiness is Average"



# The Fool

EDITOR'S NOTE

**Knights of Pen and Ink** was born from a fool's dream. We endeavoured to trial and error an accessible poetry and illustration magazine to showcase unique perspectives of cycles of life through universal archetypes.

Every Hero's Journey begins with a fool. It only takes a first step to set you on the path; a mark smeared across a blank page; a word spoken to break silence; an idea sparked from the darkness.

Our lovely artists and poets, who've taken this leap of faith with us, have each submitted pieces connected to the theme of this issue. We hope you enjoy our combined folly.

FREDDY J. LAMBERT

## CONTRIBUTORS

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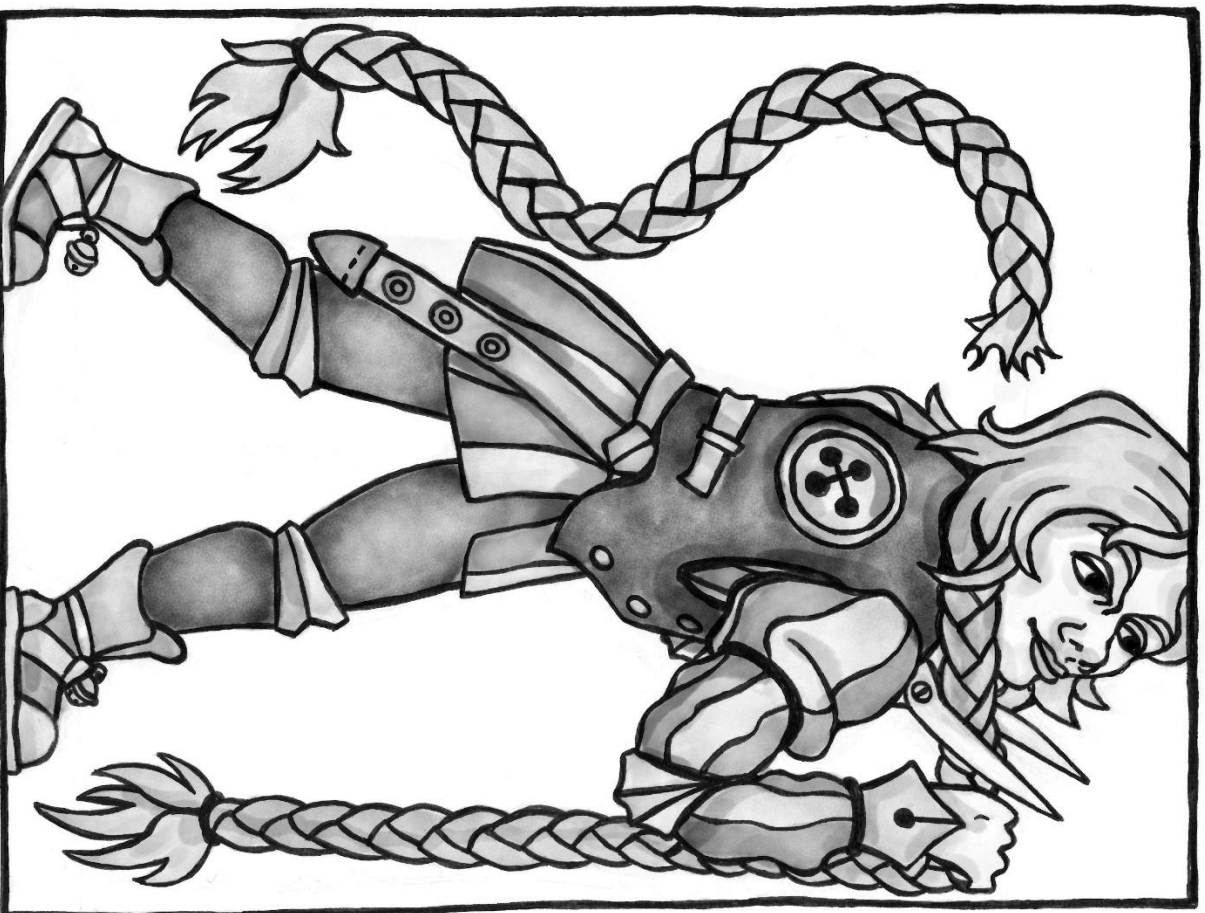
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A FINAL ROUND OF APPLAUSE  
AND A HEARTY HUZZAH FOR  
OUR CONTRIBUTORS

- Alexis Deese-Smith
- Freddy J. Lambert
- Kapu Lewis
- Greg Melrose
- Talia Smith
- Gemma Strang
- Debbie Taylor
- Willow Taylor-Jones
- David Whitehead
- Nicola Wright

Throw down your gauntlet  
for the next issue of  
**Knights of Pen and Ink!**

Visit the submissions page of our website for more information on the next issue of our poetry and illustration magazine.  
[knightsofpenandink.com/submissions](http://knightsofpenandink.com/submissions)



# The Fool 0

POETRY & ILLUSTRATION – OCT 2025