



The Fool 0

POETRY & ILLUSTRATION – OCT 2025



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ISSUE 0

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

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0 ISSUE

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

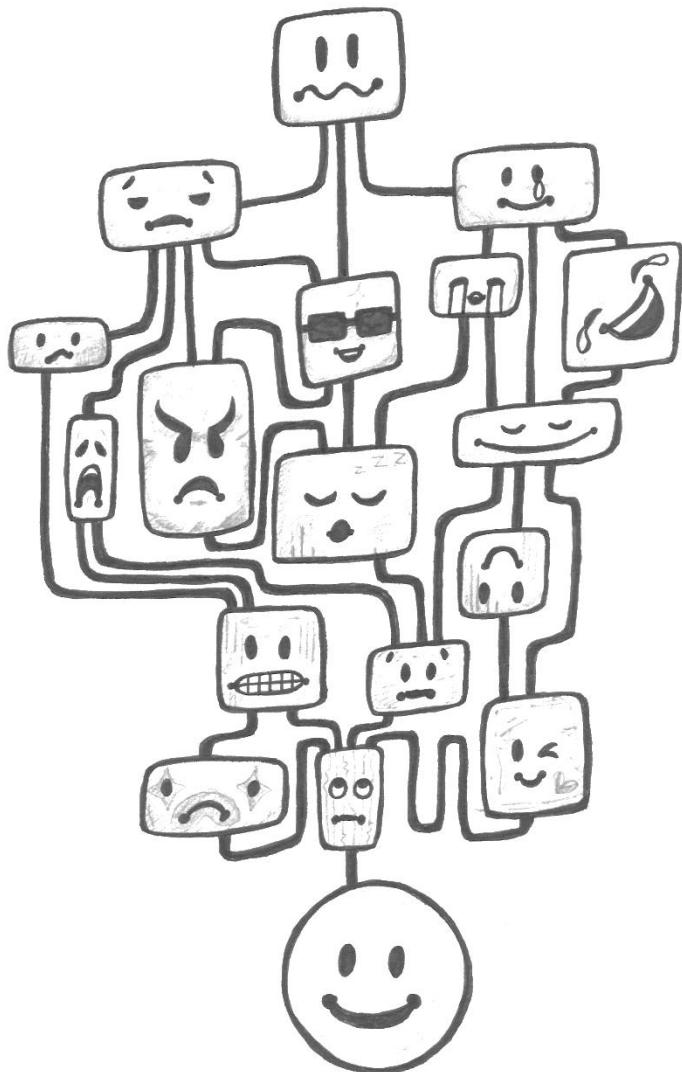
I answer the questions on the quiz
which “is NOT a diagnostic tool”:

*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”

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



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

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





Narcissus and Echo
FREDDY J. LAMBERT

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 settee 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.

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

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

iii

Naked in the auditorium
a silly word
I'll audit YOUR orium
you sick Fuck
why are they looking at me?
 blaze-slated 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)

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

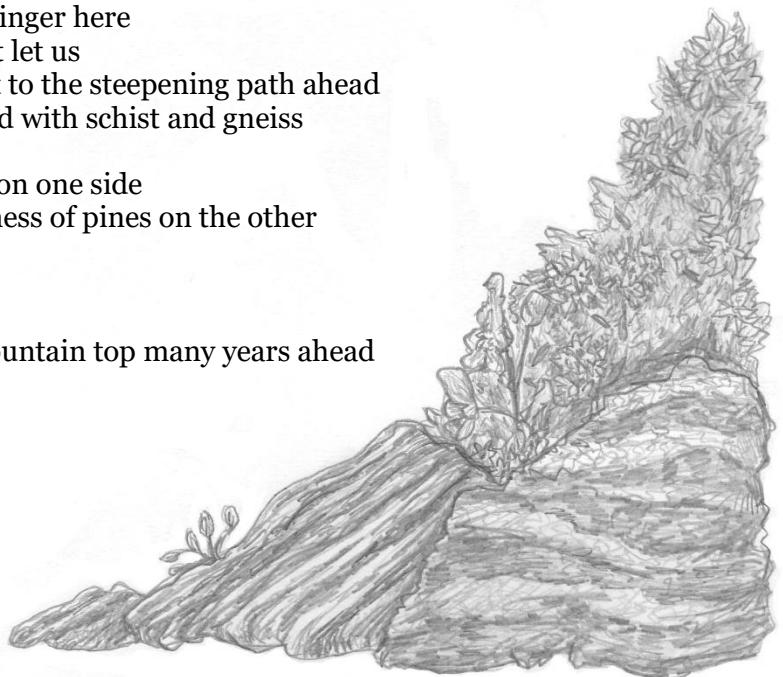
and the brow is no longer a brow
but a mere undulation in the long ascent
like a Ha-Ha
in a posh British Garden

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



I MAY BE A
DANCING



BUT I'LL ALWAYS
HOPE YOU'LL
DANCE WITH
ME

AGAIN...

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)

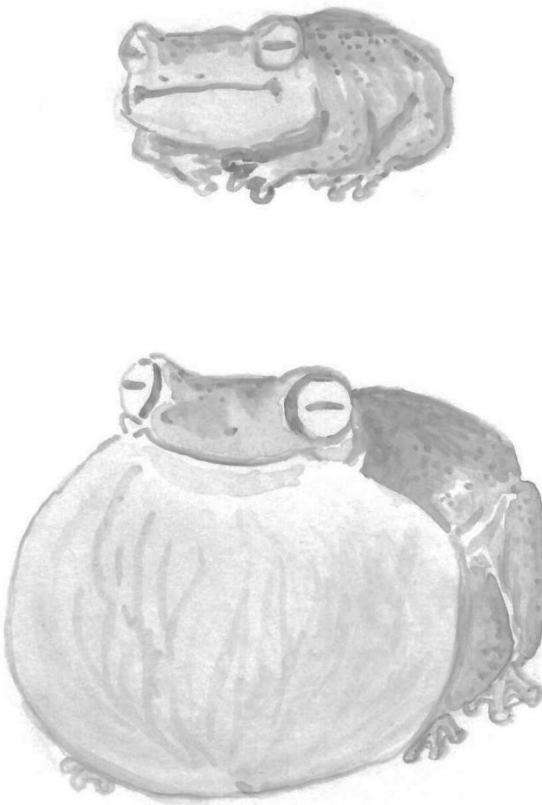
as in i am not
drowning in the air around me as in

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

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

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



Him, or me?

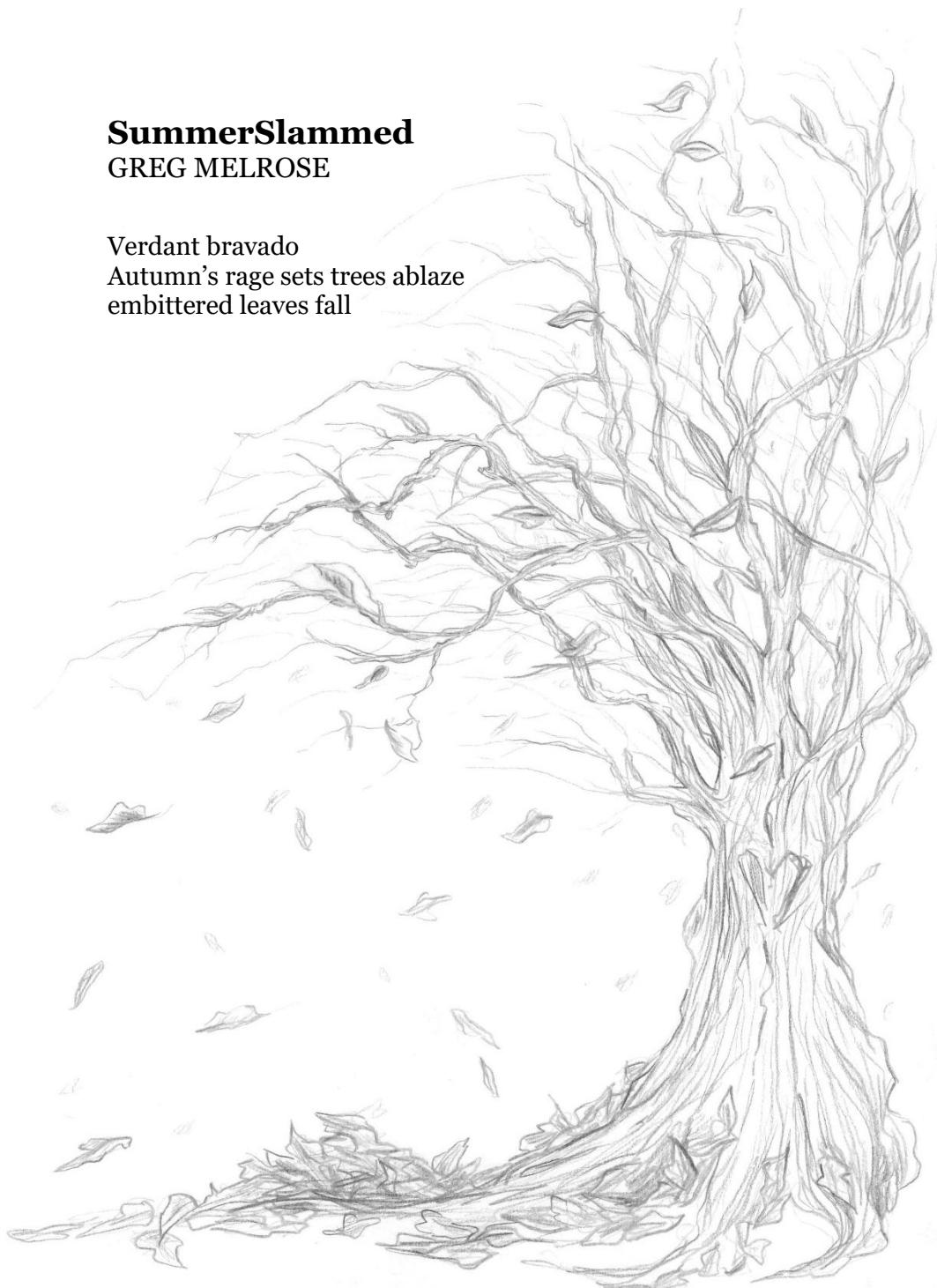
WILLOW TAYLOR-JONES

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.

SummerSlammed

GREG MELROSE

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



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





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

Alexis Deese-Smith
Freddy J. Lambert
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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

