

Fresher

The Publishing House for New Voices

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ISSUE I

RELUCTANT HERO



Fresher

The Publishing House for New Voices



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Flashpoint

Steph Juniper

Wall: painted with trepidation,
Wall: ripped through the earth
Launching shards at all who might
Turn their head to see or think
and all who deign to know
and You with brittle fingers,
wrapped in sea waters,
and linked to some eager hammer.
It is yours now and you must
Take that which you own and pray

Don't think you are free –
There is your path
There is the tie
Which lulls in red;
And you are strangled.
You are the whispers
Cringling at your head.

My Aeneas - to take your hopes
And let the crumble press them down
To the dirt past that crust
Against the mantle
That bubbles and pops

And your dreams are smelted
Against the crucible – our inner core
It burbles delightedly
As you feed the mold.
And You – lightweight,
Butterfly-hitter,
Irresponsible Brute –

You must pluck your courage
From the branches, snatch it
And fill your legs against the shaking
Fill them until they are armor.

And step.

Under New Management

NE Salmon

‘Another blasted war!’ Delve slapped the corner of the newspaper with the remaining two digits of his right hand in disgust. The other hand clutched the paper as he leant his elbows on the bar. It always amazed me that Delve was able to read in the dark haze that constituted the atmosphere in *The Shield Maiden*. The small amount of light let in by the street facing windows was just enough to see most objects. Mags was always stingy with the candles, unwilling to spend what little profits we made on wax. ‘What is the King thinking!’

‘I’m sure he has his reasons.’ I tried to be diplomatic as I wiped a tankard with a cloth, in case there were any ears nearby who might want to gain a bit of coin by turning in dissenters. The tavern was quiet as patrons waited for the dinner time rush, and Delve was a safe hand-and-a-half so I shouldn’t need to worry. ‘This is the, what, fourth war in five years? I’m surprised we have any neighbours left to declare to.’

‘Technically it’s the fifth, though the sortie into Alu barely lasted two weeks’, he slammed the newspaper onto the bar and took a deep gulp from his foaming drink before wiping his grey striped beard with the back of his hand. ‘If I was in charge-’

‘Yeah, we’ve been down this road before’ I scoffed, jumping at the opportunity to move away from the world’s woes as I placed the tankard back on the rack behind the bar. ‘If I could fly, I’d be a bird. Hypotheticals don’t get us anywhere, my friend.’

I offered him another drink and he grunted in assent. I wondered what Delve had been like as a younger man, maybe when he was in his early twenties like me, was he as

filled with despair and regret as he was now? He'd lost his hand during the reign of the previous King, better times, when wounded soldiers were given enough coin to live out their lives in semi-luxury, not like now when they're thrown out onto the streets to fend for themselves like strays. I wondered if he had jumped at every official, terrified they would press-gang him into dying so the King could paint a map. Likewise, if I managed to still be kicking in forty years, would I see any good left in the world or would I choose to be drinking in the early afternoon with only the tavern owner for company?

'Still, though, if I was in charge, I at least wouldn't send all those poor boys and girls to war.'

'It's not all about war, you know.' I slid his refreshed tankard back over to him. 'There's the economy to think about, and relations with other countries, and the court, and, you know, honest folk like you and me.'

'You've given this some thought then.' Delve smiled 'I thought hypothetical didn't get us anywhere.'

'Yes, that is true.' I spoke quickly to move past my hypocrisy. 'Though it is always beneficial to put yourself in the blood of others, as it were. Useful skill when you don't know who will come through that door.' clearing my throat I continued. 'But if I *was* in charge, there's many things I'd change. First, like you said I'd stop the wars, and the conscription, all that death and carnage. Then, I'd reform the economy, put the coin back in the hands of the people.'

'You'd give out coin?'

'Not exactly! I'd give it back to them. You see I have this idea -'

'Oh no, don't listen to him, Delve!' came a voice from behind me 'That *plan* of his will rot away what's left of your brain!'

'Finished already, Mags?' Delve gave her a wide grin. She looped her arm around my waist and squeezed, easing the sting of her jibe. I could smell the mixture of sawdust, sweat and damp iron over the usual hops and woodsmoke that clung to everything in the tavern, especially its owners.

'Nearly there. Just a few more repairs and we'll be able to use that back room.' she shook her head, some of her shoulder length black hair had fallen over her headband and danced in front of the sadness that momentarily passed her eyes. I patted her hand gently.

'Your old man would be proud of what you've done to this place, lass.' Delve put into words some of what I hoped my touch had conveyed before hastily adding: 'You've done wonders, you both have.'

'Is it enough, though?' Mags wondered, rubbing a dark line of grime onto her eyes.

She had always been the one to worry, probably because she cared so much. It was one of the reasons we had met after all, her growing up without a mother had some sympathies with me not knowing either of my parents, which the other kids in our town saw as something to tease. Plus, with my aunt and uncle spending most of their time here we basically grew up together. I was always getting into fights, and Mags would tend my bruises and try to get me to stop fighting the world.

Suddenly, the few candles in front of me flickered, spinning wildly before tilting in the direction of the door. I could feel no wind, nor any change in atmosphere. Unsettled, I followed the flames' guidance and looked towards the entrance. The doors opened, a cloaked figure stood silhouetted by the grey haze of the mid-afternoon sun.

‘Get a load of the Wizard.’ Delve muttered under his breath and hunched over protectively.

‘You can’t know that from here.’ I replied as the hooded figure moved towards the bar.

‘Don’t need to, you can tell by the smell.’

‘It’s Ramsos.’ Mags said as I held in a gasp, not that I needed to worry as Delve cursed.

‘The Court Wizard? Dream on.’

‘That hooded cloak is too finely made for just your average mage.’ She rolled her eyes at our incredulity. ‘Plus, the beard is a dead giveaway.’

‘I’m not so sure.’ I replied, hoping that she was uncharacteristically wrong. ‘Can’t it be someone beating the dinner rush?’

‘Whatever you want to believe, dear.’ Mags turned away. ‘but there’s no good to be had from this.’

The man approached the bar and I had to concede that he was a Wizard. He had gone to the effort of resizing his staff, but, unfortunately or purposefully, had attached it to his belt. Pulling his hood back revealed sharp jagged eyebrows and long white hair tied back at the nape of his neck.

‘Can I get you anything, sir?’ I kept a passive expression as Delve shuffled conspicuously. The Wizard paid no notice as he stroked his long tri-forked beard. A sharp burning smell radiated from him, reminding me of the smell made when flint struck steel. He studied my face for some time, his mouth twitching.

'I suppose you look a bit like him.' he finally said aloud as though I had been involved in his internal conversation. The silence stretched out and I could feel Delve and Mags' attention boring into the back of my skull. I cleared my throat.

'Oh yes, of course,' he blinked rapidly. 'Do you have any Verutumite Red or some Berry-Wrinkle gin?'

'We have wine.' I ventured.

'Then one of those, thank you.' he grinned revealing blackened teeth as he made a wide sweeping movement and gestured away from the bar. 'Could you please bring a bottle over to me?'

'One cup or two?'

'Yes, thank you.' He replied absently and made his way towards one of the booths at the rear of the tavern.

I quickly selected a middling priced bottle of white wine and two cups, just in case, ignoring Delve as he crossed his fingers in a gesture to ward off evil then left the tavern. I could feel Mags' silent judgement as she slowly refilled the tankard rack.

By the time I reached the booth Ramsos was already seated, the flickering candle on the table causing the shadows to leap and twirl over the many crags of wrinkles on his face. *Strange, I thought, I don't remember having lit the candles yet.* Shrugging this off as a lapse of memory, I served him his drink, but no sooner had the bottle touched the table his hand snaked out and he grabbed my wrist.

'Quickly now, boy.' he whispered, 'take a seat. We haven't got much time.'

'Let go of me.' I struggled to pull my arm away, but his thin arm didn't even tremble as he held me in his grasp. I tried to yell but my voice stayed silent in my throat.

'I'm sorry, but please, just listen to what I have to say and then I will be out of your hair.' Unable to do anything else, I sank into the chair opposite, rubbing some feeling back into my bruised wrist after he finally relinquished my arm. I gestured for him to continue.

'Thank you. Once again, I'm sorry for the...measures I am taking, but what I am about to tell you is of utmost secrecy and every moment counts.' He delved into one of his voluminous sleeves and, after a few moments of rummaging, pulled out a thin roll of old parchment which he hastily unrolled onto the table. The contents seemed to be a long list of names with intricately wrought lines between them, a family tree of some kind.

'Tell me, what do you know of your parents?' he asked, his dark eyes twinkling.

The fact that I couldn't make a sound wouldn't change my answer.

'Oh yes, of course.' he waved, and I could feel that whatever was holding me to silence had disappeared. 'Just so long as you promise not to make a scene, eh? Now, where were we?'

'You mentioned something about my parents?'

'Quite right.' he nodded to himself and placed one long fingernailed hand on one of the names. 'This is Feram, Earld-, I mean King Earld's Great Grandfather, a rather odious man who treated his wife the same as his kingdom, that is, he neglected them both and spent most of his time away. As such, he had a slew of children, some say too many to count on your hands. Terrible time, as I'm sure you know from your history books. The Bairn's War I believe they called it?'

'I wasn't that good at history.' I replied, already finding my brain switching off from the names of old privileged ratbags 'And what does this have to do with my parents?'

'We're getting there, just be patient.'

‘I thought time was of the essence.’

‘It is, so stop interrupting me!’ The candle briefly flashed a blue flame before Ramsos took a deep breath and poked a long finger at the many undecorated lines trailing down from Feram’s name. ‘As you should know, at the end of the Bairn’s War only one of Feram’s children was left standing and he, naturally, took the kingship. Then he past it onto Fernen, then Enden who then Earld inherited it from when the Old King died. Obviously, to not have another repeat of the Bairn’s War, we made it so that only those with the direct family line can hold the sceptre and rule as King and it has, so far, worked. Is that making sense?’

I nodded slightly and tried my hardest to stop my eyes from glazing over.

‘But what they leave out, and I blame this country’s obsession with patrilineal succession, is that Feram’s wife was also his second cousin!’ his finger flashed a trail back to the smaller name next to the large sprouting root ‘and though her children with the king had died in the war, he wasn’t her only partner. Meaning that there was a whole branch of the family with royal blood undocumented, though they may be. Thus would be outside of the capitulation of the spell!’

Some spittle had built at the corner of Ramsos’ mouth, his eyes sparkled like a clear night sky. I was starting to understand, a weight building in my chest as the world around me simultaneously grew and shrank.

‘And it is from this branch of the family. This furtive, document fearing, branch, that you are the last scion of.’

A roaring in my ears started which I thought was some kind of spell from Ramsos but then recognised as my blood rushing passed my ears. *Royal Blood.*

‘And my parents?’ came my mouth’s shocked words, a hope I had kept buried since I was a child.

‘Gone. I’m afraid.’ Ramsos shook his head sadly. ‘I imagine they thought to keep you safe by abandoning you, but what happened to them afterwards is anyone's guess.’

The Wizard flicked his wrist and the parchment recoiled into his sleeve like a snake burrowing into its nest, before he once again took hold my hands.

‘The king is destroying this country, you’ve seen it for yourself. And you, Aryn, are our only hope to take back the throne. So, I must ask you, will you join us?’

‘What a load of rubbish!’ Mags said, emerging from the booth beside us.

‘Excuse me, and who are you?’ the Wizard replied, aghast. Unperturbed Mags dropped into the seat next to me, crossing her arms across her chest as she faced the most powerful mage in the land.

‘His wife, and, while I love the idea of becoming Queen, why do you think he should risk his life on such a foolhardy venture?’

‘It’s for the good of the nation! The King is possessed, whether by sorcery or some malady. He is going to destroy this country.’

‘He wouldn’t be the first to try, so what makes you believe that now is the time for a change of the guard?’

‘He sees everyone as an enemy.’ The Wizard's fist slammed against the table. ‘He even threw me out of court!’

‘There’s the rub.’ She leaned back in the chair as a look passed her face that I had seen many times before, like a wolf seeing a rabbit walk into its den. ‘You just happened to

find this loophole, a coincidental perfect blood match for taking down the king now when he has turned against you?’

‘How dare you!’

‘I don’t mean to insult my husband here, but how much experience do you think he has running a country?’

‘These things can be taught-’

‘And where would you get the time to teach him?’ She leant forward and the Wizard recoiled from her. ‘What makes you so sure he would do a better job than anyone else? Why does it have to be people from this bloodline anyway?’

‘It was decreed by the gods themselves!’ Ramsos decried. ‘Who are we to say otherwise?’

‘And these gods, do you see them now? Do they have to live with the decisions we make the same way we live by theirs? The way I see it, the people ruling this country have done an awful job of it for centuries. Wars, famines, plagues, dragons, embezzlement, all these things happen to all of us, so why is it they reap the rewards from our suffering?’

‘Hold on now, I didn’t make the rules.’

‘Is this a power grab? Why can’t you just set yourself up to take over? Or are you trying to set my husband up as some kind of blood puppet that you can manipulate behind the scenes?’

‘Of course not! I would train him to use his magic-’

‘He gets magic?’

‘He *has* magic but I can teach him how to use it.’

‘Another way to endear him to you.’

‘Enough!’ Ramsos roared. This time all the candles in the room burst into bright red flames and burned through all their wax. ‘I have had enough of this postering and idle chit chat. The longer we wait here the more time King Earld has to ruin us!’

Ramsos turned to me and took a deep breath.

‘Aryn, tell me, honestly, what do you want to do?’

Everything they had said span through my head like a tornado in a library. I had gone from worrying about balancing the ever-failing books for our tavern to overthrowing a monarchy in the space of an afternoon. The very ruler whose policies were making life harder not just for me, but for everyone. I could stop all those soldiers going to war for the King, and instead have them under my command. How many lives would be lost as our ideals clashed?

I took a deep breath and stared into Ramsos’ eyes, seeing the dark but exciting future which possibly lay in their depths.

‘I will go with you, Wizard, but on one condition.’ I flicked my gaze between Mags and the Wizard, hoping that I was making the right choice. ‘You see, I have this plan.’

‘Now that's more like it!’ Delve exclaimed as he slapped the corner of the newspaper with his new prosthetic fingers, obviously relishing the sound of it scraping the paper. Mag’s face, well a very good drawing of it, was giving a taciturn smile on the back with Ramsos close behind her showing a large dark mouthed grin.

‘They’ve finally put the bastard in his own dungeon, take that warmonger!’ Delve continued, shouting over the noise of the busy tavern and spilling his drink on the crowded bar.

'I know it, Delve. Believe me, it's all I've been hearing about every night these last few months.'

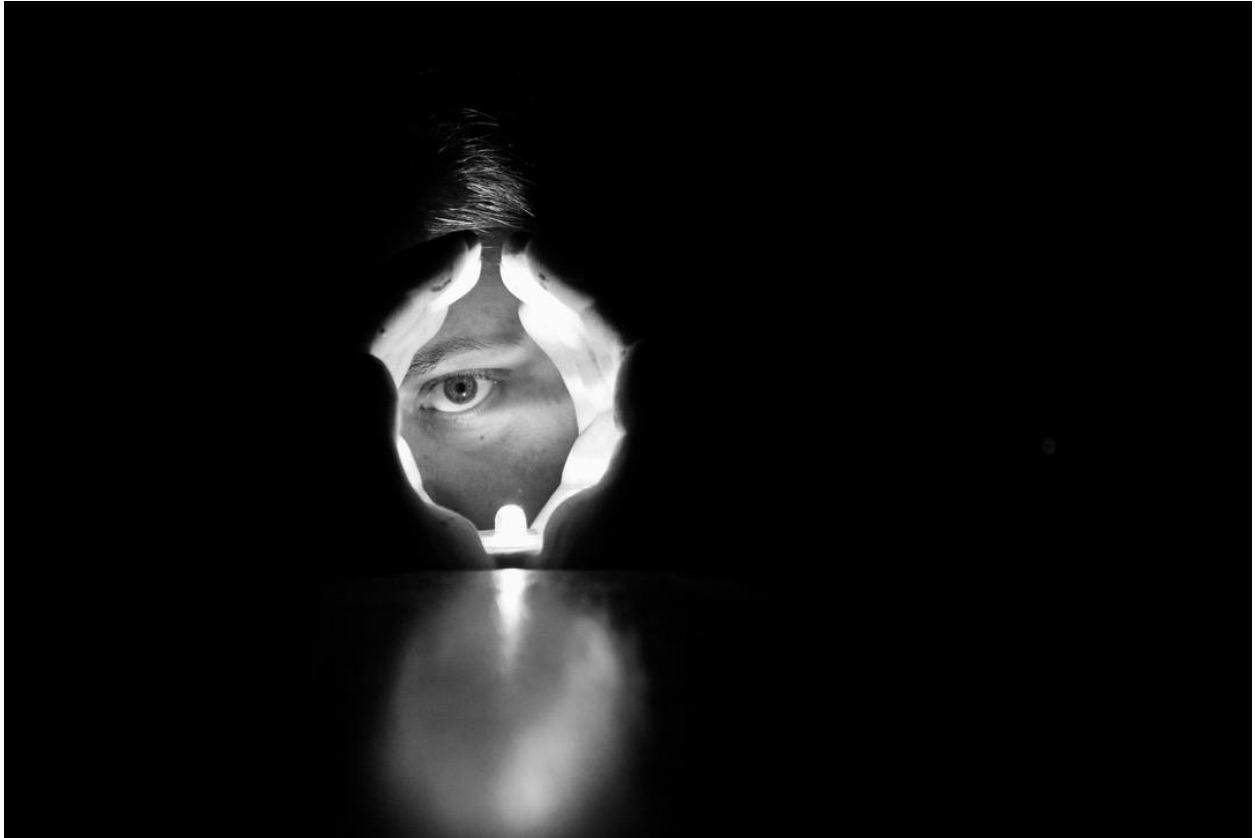
'You should be mighty proud of your missus, Lad. By the gods, I know I am!'

'*First Elected Official*, even now it feels unreal.' I smiled as I handed another load of drinks to one of the servers. 'You know, I could have been King.'

'Whatever you say, Aryn.' Delve shook his head and went back to his paper.

Hope: Looking for light during the darkest moments

Sarah Clark



Regretfully

Georgina Bollom

I watch the sunrise.
Bleeding crimsons and blossoms, ambers and vermilions,
Melting across the once fruitful hills,
Once fluorescence streets,
Once happy place.
There are people outside,
Waiting,
Waiting,
Calling my name.
Echoing across the empty tulip fields;
Cobbled courtyards washed anew from the stains of before.
Before that day,
Before that time,
Before *this*.
Silver meets my palm,
Bitter cold trickling between my fingers,
Melding into the grooves of my skin,
Like paths of the other lives set out before me.
Other words I could have said;
Other things I could have done;
Other ways I could have stopped *this*.
When the door eases open, and the shouts do not cease,
Muffled no longer by the press of timber and silk swallowing me,
Protecting me from what I must do,
Warmth brushes over me.
Turns cold.
Sunlight dapples, golden blotches of daylight,
But I do not feel it.
Not when my heels meet the stones,
Echoes in my ears,
Thundering drums,
Crashing waves upon the shore.
He kneels before me,
Gaze unfocused, feathering on the cobbles, blinking in the light.
My shadow smothers him.
I wish we could go back, I wish to whisper,
To those fruitful hills,
The fluorescence streets,
Once happy place.

*Lay in the tulip fields,
Skip across the fresh cobbles, hand in hand, heart in heart.
Fingertip to chin, tilting his eyes up until
Irises meet irises,
Soul meets soul.
But there is no *soul*,
Though I prayed there was.
Regretfully, I dare to think,
We cannot.*

Navigating uncertainty: re-finding yourself when you've lost your way

Sarah Clark



Ashes and Sulfur

Chiara Ghia

The bones lining the cave floor moved and cracked under her feet. Not for the first time since undertaking the journey she was glad for the quality of the boots she was wearing. Had she been wearing any of the embroidered slippers made for her by the palace shoemakers, she would have no doubt fallen and cracked her head open already. Instead there she was, treading through brittle, charred animal bones as if they were a simple grassy field.

Well, if said field had been plunged into complete, suffocating darkness, barely illuminated by her fading torch. It coiled around her, pressing down, squeezing, suffocating, swallowing her further and further down the cave's gullet. She hadn't expected to walk quite that far. For some reason she had always imagined it would be a simpler journey. All the knights declared it a banal challenge. So confident, eyes glowing with a promise of rewards to come.

The silver armor glimmered beneath the firelight.

All of those knights were long dead.

Wanda couldn't find it in herself to mourn them. They failed, one after another running at full speed into the same trap. They didn't do it for the good of the kingdom, perhaps a few months earlier, when she was a little more optimistic, a little more naive, she could have believed that they did. That they selflessly marched against the beast for the good of the farmers, the common village folk. But if that had been true, they would have

found a way to work together. A group of knights certainly would have stood a better chance than lone, pompous idiots charging in with a single sword and no concrete plan. Wanda couldn't pinpoint the exact moment when her attitude towards them changed, but it could be safely assumed that it was sometime between her brothers' deaths and the moment she became a part of the reward.

Half the Kingdom and my daughter's hand in marriage.

As Wanda stood in front of the glimmering skeleton, she wondered if they dreamed of wearing her father's crown as they lifted her white veil even when the flames melted their armor into their flesh. Silver, not gold. It would never be for them.

Her father never consulted the matter with her. She found out at the same time her gaggle of would be fiancées did.

Wanda had always known she wouldn't marry for love. That fate did not happen to princesses outside of fairytales and her storybook days were far behind her.

But she never expected to be made a prize. A pretty jewel to add to the collection. A thing used to sweeten the deal. She had hoped her father loved her more than that, respected her more than that.

Clearly she had been wrong.

The King had made it clear that any man in the realm could marry the princess. All he had to do was slay the dragon.

The dragon had been there for as long as she could remember. She had seen him take the skies from her bedroom window many times. A few times a month the beast would swoop down and steal a cow, a pig, a sheep, a horse sometimes. The people would

shriek in terror and hide in their houses but life always went on. The creature was simply hungry, no one could fault it for that.

But as the years went by it got bigger, hungrier, bolder. He took more and more, returning to the same farms until they ran out of cattle.

That, combined with the drought and shrinking crops, made the dragon a real issue. A challenge.

When they were little, her brother's used to imagine fighting the dragon, slaying it and presenting the head to their father. It was only childish imaginings back then, but then they grew. Bigger, and hungrier, and bolder. And suddenly they were deathly serious. They would defeat the monster. Be the hero. Be a father's favorite son. Be the heir. Be the King.

They would be a pile of bones and ashes buried deep within a dark cave.

They would be kind memories and hidden resentments. they would be cautionary tales, lost hopes of what could have been. They would make her an only child.

Wanda thought that perhaps at the end of the day, not even she would be left. She had hoped she could at least find something of them, a sword, a glove, a bone. Something to put in the empty caskets. But if she too was burnt to ashes by the dragon, perhaps they could rest together after all.

She did not allow herself to entertain the thought for long. She had not come to the cave to die.

She lowered her torch, taking a better look at the ground, and followed the path laid out by the small pieces of blue fabric.

A prideful fool charged in with only bloodshed and glory on his mind. A smart man planned his retreat.

Still, as she went deeper and deeper, she could not hear a sound apart from her own footsteps. No roars, no flapping of wings. For a moment she feared she may have come too late. And then she saw them.

A pair of big, shining, yellow eyes peering at her from around the corner. She froze, only for a second, before flattening herself against the wall, hoping to remain out of sight. It did not matter. The creature wasn't looking at her. It did not notice the light of her torch, its full, undivided attention focused on the fat sheep laying on the ground in front of it. It was hard to imagine how the animal could have wandered so deep on its own, but the dragon wasn't about to turn down an easy meal.

It crept closer, its eyes never leaving the target. Its maw opened, horrifyingly, unnaturally widely, as if showing all of its teeth was a point of pride for it.

“Wait!”

The girl jumped out from behind the corner before the creature could manage a single bite. Her eyes wide, her chest heaving with what she hoped to God wasn't guilt or regret. She could not believe she had actually done it, but there was no more turning back. She couldn't slink into the darkness like her predecessor.

The dragon stared at her, somewhat surprised, but it did not attack. Not her and not the sheep.

“Don't eat that. Its belly is full of sulfur, you will die.”

The best studied the princess inquisitively. It tilted its head and even though it's maw did not open again a voice echoed through the cage.

“*How?*”

Wanda took a deep breath and clutched the torch tighter in her hands.

“A man, a shoemaker. He cut it open, filled it with sulfur and sewed it back up.”

“*Why?*”

“To kill you.” The answer seemed obvious but as laughter roared through the cave, bouncing off the walls and digging into her skull, Wanda understood the real question.

“*Did you not like a common shoemaker for a husband, princess? Has your vanity spared my life today?*”

The mockery made her blood boil. She had not expected the creature to be grateful. In all honesty, she expected she might have replaced the sheep as its next meal. But not this. Not her father’s voice coming out of the scaled, monstrous mouth.

“I do not like the idea of a common shoemaker as my King. The same way I did not like the idea of any of those knights getting the crown. It is hardly personal.” She had liked the shoemaker well enough. He was an intelligent man, a resourceful man, perhaps even a kind one. But he knew nothing of ruling a kingdom. None of those men did.

“*Are you not wearing his gifts?*”

Wanda stared down at her feet. He did make the shoes. He did leave the cloth on the ground. He did try. It did not matter.

“If we were to name the new king based on murder or treachery we may as well put a crown on your head.” she sighed “My father is grieving. He will come to his senses.” He could not give the kingdom away to just anyone. She would not let him. Her brothers were a pile of ashes, but the realm would not share their fate. The princess could disappear but the dragon could live.

“*And what of you? Do you not mourn?*”

She could not.

The Power of Now

Dina Hussein

journey to the end
never look back
walk front
towards the white light
seconds away from the end
not too close to tomorrow
it was yesterday
it will be today
it never was and will always be
i the power of now
you the hour of sorrow
the never be
the to good to be true
i is i am i were.

Loplop is Reluctant to Face the Moon

Tom Masters



Mall Hero

Anna Goldhammer

I'm no hero, she said,
because if I was, I wouldn't be here.
So where would you be?
Somewhere else,
not hunched in front of a lukewarm Blonde Vanilla Latte
itching from your day-old stubble and
listening to the squeak of sneakers against
shiny linoleum.
I'd be in a frosty forest
smoke billowing from a campfire
the smell of pine
the fall of horse hooves.
I'm not sure that exists, I say,
and I laugh because she's joking,
I think,
but her eyes narrow
and she slides her glasses down her nose.
If I were a hero,
she says,
I wouldn't have to mess around with you.
I'd be on my own,
well, with my horse,
and she walks away
towards the pretzel stand.
But I don't think she's right.
Because if the mall weren't here,
if all of this were gone,
there'd be an empty field
and we could build a fire,
but she'd still look at me
through narrowed eyes
and wonder if this was all my fault.

Seven Days a Week

Abigail Nuttall

My dad has
Two old cars and
Two daughters and
Seven days in a week and
A headache.
But he doesn't have time to do everything.

My dad has
Strong power of will and
Endless determination and
A loud voice to ask
"Is anyone having a coffee?" and
"Who's putting the kettle on?"

My dad doesn't have time to do everything
But he cleans my headlights
And replaces my windscreen wiper
And hugs me seven times before I leave

There are seven days in a week
My dad spends them thinking
About my favourite colour
About how electric cars work
About whether I am safe
How much time before it gets dark?

A car with an open bonnet sits in the driveway
My dad wishes he had time to do everything
But it takes a lot of time to be my dad.

Biographies

Steph Juniper

Steph Juniper is a writer of poetry and experimental fiction. From Kentucky, USA, her work frequents themes of expectation, stereotype, and the weight that comes with existence. She is currently studying for her master's in creative writing and publishing at Bournemouth University.

NE Salmon

NE Salmon is a London born and Rochester banished writer. When he is not napping he is irregularly updating his blog and debating the ramifications of fantasy stories with anyone who would listen but mainly with his Wife / Proof-Reader / Support Network, all the while trying to contain the tornado in miniature which is his toddler daughter. He is currently also studying for his Masters in Creative Writing and Publishing at Bournemouth University.

Sarah Clark

Against all odds and despite severe illness, Sarah's succeeding in her MSc at BU (Clinical and Developmental Neuropsychology) which is evidently part of her "Hero's Journey" in raising awareness of Ehlers-Danlos syndrome and late-diagnosed Autism. These 3 images are from her photo exhibition "Seeking Meaning in Diagnosis" which is on throughout March 2024 in Atrium Gallery, BU. There's also a sub-theme of inspiring creative ways to manage wellbeing such as photography and time in nature.

Georgina Bollom

Georgina Bollom is a second-year Film Production student from Hampshire studying at Arts University Bournemouth, specialising in Screenwriting and Producing. In addition to writing poetry, creating endless music playlists, and perfecting her latte art, Georgina writes young adult fiction and is currently working on publishing her debut fantasy novel. She can be found hiding from the infinite piles of paperwork required by the short films she works on.

Chiara Ghia

Chiara Ghia is a Polish-Italian fiction writer who enjoys writing in a plethora of different genres with many of her works focusing on the themes of identity and belonging. She has an avid interest in history and folklore and enjoys tying them into her writing.

Dina Hussein

Dina Hussein is a Cypriot/ Lebanese creative professional with a passion for storytelling. Dina wrote, directed, and produced a play called 'The God's Phone.' Right now, she's studying Creative Writing and Publishing at Bournemouth University. She also hosts a show "The Majestic Unicorn" on Nerve Radio, where she interviews authors, gives book recommendations and hosts giveaways.

Tom Masters

Tom Masters is the Programme Leader of BA (Hons) English at Bournemouth University. *Loplop is Reluctant to Face the Moon* is from his series of nocturnes, in which a feathered being is cast into a world of moonlit dreams.

Anna Goldhammer

Anna Goldhammer recently moved from the corn fields of Iowa to the seaside town of Poole, England with her partner and three children. Anna is currently working towards an MA in Creative Writing and Publishing at Bournemouth University. In her writing, Anna explores the little crannies of magic hidden in everyday reality.

Abigail Nuttall

Abigail Nuttall is a Bournemouth born writer with an affinity for stories of narrators both loved and scorned. She finds time to write freely tightly packed between more restricted projects, which she enjoys far less, and is eager to begin sharing these pieces with a contemplative audience.

Letter from the Editor

Dear readers,

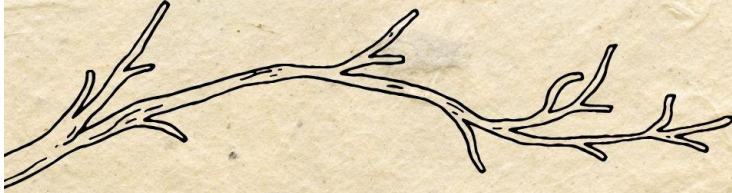
I cannot thank you enough for reading the pieces collected into our debut issue, RELUCTANT HERO. This is the first issue of *RE: Fresher*, and the first literary magazine imprinted with *Fresher*, and honestly, I was overwhelmed by the support and volume of submissions we received. *RE: Fresher's* inbox was filled with amazing work and even though it was a difficult selection, it was incredible to see how enthusiastic the submission call was received.

This began as a small place to uplift BU and AUB voices in the vast publishing industry. *RE: Fresher* is a magazine focused on re-imagining tropes—reinventing old ideas into something fresh. All our contributors have offered a glance into their inspirations, perspectives, voices--and to them, thank you for letting *RE: Fresher* be a home for your work. I appreciate you, your creativity, and your interpretations for RELUCTANT HERO.

I hope you enjoyed reading this issue and you look forward to the next. Thank you for spending some time with us.

Sincerely,

Noe
Editor-in-Chief
RE: Fresher



THANK YOU

Our first issue, RELUCTANT HERO, would not have been possible without our contributors:

STEPH JUNIPER

NE SALMON

SARAH CLARK

GEORGINA BOLLUM

CHIARA GHIA

DINA HUSSEINI

TOM MASTERS

ANNA GOLDHAMMER

ABIGAIL NUTTALL

Fresher

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