

Ars longa

No one heard the branch snap or the splash
as I fell headlong into the water.
Everyone was surprised though
I'd been clinging to that bough for years.

It was warm at first, heated by lust and I
lay singing like a fool while he, consumed
by work he said, just let the fire go out.
Feverish and scorned, I took to my bed.

I covered myself in clovenlip toadflax –
notice me, please, I said. But I was bogged
down
in bulrush, too docile. Humble like the broom.
Forsaken as the creeping willow. Weeping

I left a note, said it with flowers;
Aloe, I said, I grieve, for my love-lies-bleeding,
forget-me-not. But no one speaks
the language of flowers any more.

I pour my libation on the water – stillborn child
and murdered father. I bless it with laudanum,
let go and sink, my vision clouding.
Too tired to wave, intent on drowning.

THE PK POETS

The PK Poets is a series of free to print poetry leaflets highlighting the poetry of a single poet. It is intended to be a sample introduction to the work of a poet.

The Poetry Kit is a free online resource for poets listing competitions, events, open floor events, online and print magazines. <https://www.poetrykit.org/>

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ABOUT Petra McNulty

Petra McNulty is an award-winning milliner and trained architect from Liverpool who also holds a First-class degree in Sculpture. She has just completed her Ph.D. in Creative Writing at Lancaster University where she has been teaching for several years. As well as completing her second novel, *The Wind off the River*, she has written numerous short stories, several of which have been highly placed in writing competitions: shortlisted for the Bath Short Story Award 2018 – *Nanook's Igloo* was published in their 2018 anthology; Highly Commended for the Costa Coffee Short Story Award 2018, longlisted for the Exeter Short Story Prize 2018; Longlisted for the Hourglass Literary Magazine Short Story Competition 2016; Longlisted for the Fish Prize 2015 and shortlisted for Fish Prize 2014. A prose writer currently at work on her latest novel, this is her first foray into the world of poetry.

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For further details, to make comment, or to contact the poet or the publisher please email; info@poetrykit.org

THE PK POETS SECOND SERIES #7 Petra McNulty



(View from Devil's Bridge by Petra McNulty)

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Les Trois Pignons

There are two paths through the forest;
you choose the blue.
 We stride out, sand shifting
beneath our boots.
 Sometimes the signs disappear,
we take the wrong route, have to
 turn, retrace our steps.
The ghost of the ancient river flows
between us. We climb around limestone
boulders
 hacked from the Alps.
The water roars through the trees,
tossing and scouring
the rocks, winnowing,
 cleansing them of iron.
Its watery teeth grinding them into fine
white grains,
leaving them stranded beneath our feet
as it makes its final retreat.
A limestone whale with one watchful
eye, rises from its alluvial bed.
 Surprised, I'd bet, to see trees instead of
 water,
love-tourists trampling the dry riverbed
 of marriage.
You begin to doubt our path – the one
you chose –
 want to go back to where we'd
parted ways with the old couple;
 want to follow them –
 old people know best.
But we've come too far for that.

We swim through rough-barked masts
 of pines moored
in the sand. Honeyed sap dripping
from unseen wounds
binding us together.

A scaly turtle thrusts its neck
from a rocky outcrop
pointing the way.
 We stop to rest, take stock.
You are reflected in a shallow pool
formed in a crevice,
 an algae-coloured alien trapped
below the smooth, hard pane of water.
 I walk ahead. You follow at a
 distance.
When I turn, I can't see you
until you step coolly from the shadows into a
furnace-blast
 of sunlight.
 Transubstantiated.
I don't recognise you; how exciting
it will be to have you in my bed tonight,
 a stranger, risen from the depths of the forest.

An imperious limestone camel posing
as a Sphinx casts a riddling eye
 on us as we near the carpark.
Even as we reach the car you still
believe
 we've gone off piste,
 taken the wrong path.

The sun fires the pure silicates,
turning them to glass.
We sink into its molten transparency
becoming cooler and brittle as we
harden.
 Glass, I've just discovered, is a kind of
 frozen liquid.
Beneath the surface its atoms are
constantly shifting.
 Tonight I will sleep next to you as you
shift
constantly beneath the sheets,
 amorphous.

Moonwaves

He stands beneath the moon-waved clouds
between the aquarelle rakes of earth –
unearthly in their watery heathered hues.
A smear of viridescence sludges down
the nearly-there slope of a painter's
 imagination.
He has his back to the tiny figure
that floats lonesome towards a pencilled
 horizon
where sky and land will never meet.
Disconsolate or proud,
mesmerised perhaps by the spinning
 of the dead crows tethered
to the planted branches,
 macabre children's toys.
Buoyant in the breeze, the crow-scaring carrion
twist and writhe
in the light-spilled landscape.

Retreat and Silence

(A revisit of *Those Winter Sundays* by Robert Hayden)

My father reigned from his sparse living room
– a plain monk's cell with curtains, the TV
and broadsheets - ironed - for company.
A shadow in the sunlight, hair-shirt thin.
I served him food which he returned half-eaten.

From time to time we tried to talk, two crabs
in combat, brittle carapaces cracked,
claws yearning yet unable to embrace.
Retreat and silence sanctified our peace.

My tonsured father never should have left
the tranquil cloisters, Latin, chant and Sext.
I didn't understand it at the time,
now, with my age-softened shell I see
we were two halves of one imperfect whole.