

Still Here: Aria of Decay



a mini-issue

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Artwork by Mario Loprete



Bare to Death by Erika Joy — The Poetry Seer

Bare to Death,
Revealed in frantic vibrations,
Is a bitter desire
To run and worship delirious whispers,
Found in silk sheets and the silk lining of coffins

Because I search for thrill,
For a sense of life,
And purpose,
Even if that means
My words only hold value in my final collapse

Bared to all of humanity,
Engulfing in flames that lick church walls,
I wonder,
Why the cross doesn't burn,
And the foxed pages of the Bible are only singed

Why the Holy Water does not boil,
Yet the pews are ash,
The wood floor littered with scorched footprints,
As I walk toward spiritual release,
While my skin drips akin to votive candle wax.





Between the Snow and Hell by Erika Joy —

The Poetry Seer

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Wrapped in the horrors of Winter
The cold drowns my smiles
Gelid torments, as my skull speaks

My lips freeze,
Frost my lipstick
To cover and kiss the corpse of time

Affection in my veins
Hardens and crumbles
From red to blue to ebony

My tongue a dense nub
Unable to lick away iridescent dreams,
Temptations consume me

Impale me
As fallen icicles to the snow below,
So I may evoke my smokey soul in the air
Heaven's light algid,
The sun snuffed out,
Black ice spreading as plague
Over eyes gone glazed

Clouds of flurries suffocate even shadows
As my heart beats,
and I regret



phantasia by Riley Shin

A dozen white lilies languish a fragrant death by the vanity light. Fluorescent bulbs like radioactive decay. Afternoon heat, the rabid underbelly of an infernal sun. And like a petal herself, the Prima Donna wilts under a face of melting powder and rouge.

She is young, too young for a leading lady. Too young for her own dressing room of chocolates and bouquets and calling cards from prospective suitors. That's what they told her, but she did not mind their sensible words. Prima chased her dreams all the way to the Opera House on two spry legs and a lung full of gold. Her melodies elicit applause and affection. An enchantress, says the cardstock pamphlet. And so she is, at least for the duration of the show. But no aria lasts forever. The fat lady will sing. The curtains close.

Now Prima is all alone without so much as the memory of the girl she once was. The girl who played by the sea with her sister, who relished caramel ice cream cones after music lessons, who believed stars heard the wishful murmurs of her heart. Where was she? What was her name?

Prima wonders if they were right after all.

She slumps on a velvet-cushioned chair in the corner. Through curled and painted lashes, a bottle of liquor shines with the gloss of forbidden treasure. An expensive gift from a cheap man, undoubtedly. The liquid is marvelously clear. Alabaster-white, crystal-clear, and shamelessly candid. There is something exotic and familiar all at once in its beauty. Prima looks around. There is no manager to scold her, no mother to mourn her innocence, no witness to her only crime.

phantasia by Riley Shin

Clink.

She toasts to nobody in particular. The crystalline liquid burns like a wildfire—an acrid, cruel trail down the straight of her soprano throat. She opens her eyes to a void of dark and still. Every bulb has dimmed, every candle snuffed, and every color drained from the world she knew. Lonely is the traveler far from home. It is a solo that the nightingale sings. Prima is utterly alone. Save for the company of a thousand ghoulish figures rising from their perturbed graves. They appear, as spirits do, in a hazy mist of shapeless abstraction and musing. Before condensing into their true forms: the ones they left behind in the mortal realm. But Prima's visitors are no vindictive rivals or wistful ex-lovers. They are roses with phantom fragrance and thornless stones.

We are the bouquet Maggie and Lucas bought for your first performance.

Maggie and Lucas. The names of her parents, the ones who begged her to chase the lights that glimmered like stardust and forsake their humble origins. How long has it been? Long enough for Prima to forget the name of the womb that bore her and the arms which carried her. A shiver trickles down the strait of her spine.

The roses return to their hazy state and dissipate like luminescent smoke. Prima blinks in the dark, watching the impish haze shift and turn and wrestle with the air. The cloud morphs into a field of daffodils floating, blooming at eye level.

phantasia by Riley Shin

Do you remember his name? The boy with a smile like summer and a parcel of sunshine. He called you his songbird, swore you were the One.

Atlas Parkings. The hotelier's son with a penchant for the grand piano and an endless appetite for melody. Broad-shouldered and mild in manner. He was the only boy who ever loved Prima. Not like the silly men who desired only performance and pretendings. When Atlas died at sea, Prima could not bear to hold another daffodil.

Just as Prima savors the last taste of longing on her lips, the daffodils vanish like their rosy predecessors. Prima waits with anxious, weary eyes for their next costume change. Graciously, the mist does not delay in taking its final shape. A single dandelion, wispy against the illusion of wind.

I am not a flower, but you once thought of me as one. Hope, you had in spades, my dear. Hope enough to see potential even in a strange fuzzy weed plant like me.

The vanity lights whir back to life, and with it, everything from the dead shut down to its rest. Prima grimaces in the nauseating brightness, barely supporting herself to inspect the notecard waiting patiently on the countertop. In gold lettering, the Mystery Caller writes:

“Hullo! I thought our song was good. But you looked sad. Do we still love to sing?”

—Cordelia

Prima collapses to the floor, unmindful of the pins of her coiffure or the pinch of her hemline.

phantasia by Riley Shin

The aroma of a dressing room full of fresh lilies diffuses like an olfactory blessing. For the first time in years, Prima hears the sacred song in her heart. It is slow and delicate and brilliant and most perfectly hers. There is only one lyric:

Cordelia.

Finally, Prima Donna remembers her name.





Hullo! I thinked our song was
good. But you looked sad. Do we
still love to sing?

—Cordelia

Artwork by Mario Loprete



Thanks to the Contributors!

Erika Joy —The Poetry Seer



Bare to Death, Between the Snow and Hell

E. Joy (She/Her) is a poetess who views the world in melancholy sweetness; finding the beauty in decay and love in tragedy. She is a young author who utilizes her creative abilities from an ADHD and Autism (Asperger's) perspective to evoke intense feelings from her audience. When E. Joy is not writing, she is baking, embroidering, repairing headstones, and enjoying nature; usually feeding the chipmunks in her backyard. E. Joy has been published by Moonstone Arts Center, BareHill Review, THEL & others. In 2025 she won first place in Cardinal Sins poetry contest and selection for their Winter Issue of that year.

Riley Shin



phantasia

Riley is a dorky kid who writes poetry, short stories, and novels. Her work has been featured in several publications including Sonder Literary and recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She hopes her work inspires her audience to find something beautiful in and around themselves. Riley's debut novel, *Oh, the Marvelous Fabric of You!* is available on Amazon.

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Thanks to the Contributors!



Mario Loprete is an Italian artist who has distinguished himself in the contemporary art scene through innovative use of materials and a unique vision of urban art. His work lies at the crossroads of painting and sculpture, exploring themes of memory, identity, and urban transformation. In summary, Mario Loprete is an artist who, through his art, invites us to reflect on our urban existence, memory, and identity. His works, although seemingly simple in their materiality, are profoundly complex and rich in meaning, making him a significant figure in the contemporary art landscape. Please visit my Instagram profile for more information:

www.instagram.com/marioloprete



Decay does not mean silence.