

THE EMPTY CHAIR A Word to Those Who Forgot They Were Waiting

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Abstract

Not the absence of poems. There are more poems than ever. They arrive in your feed between the ads. They win prizes you've never heard of. They get taught in rooms you'll never enter.

Body

THE EMPTY CHAIR

A Word to Those Who Forgot They Were Waiting

You feel it, don't you?

Not the absence of poems. There are more poems than ever. They arrive in your feed between the ads. They win prizes you've never heard of. They get taught in rooms you'll never enter.

No. You feel the absence of *the one who was supposed to speak*.

You were taught that the Poet was a luxury. A specialist in feeling. Someone who writes nice things for weddings and funerals, who teaches at colleges and applies for grants, who has opinions about line breaks.

You were taught that we outgrew the Poet the way we outgrew the shaman, the prophet, the one who spoke with the dead.

You were taught this was progress.

But when the towers fell, you wanted words. When the diagnosis came, you wanted words. When you stood at the grave, you wanted words. When the world tilted and nothing made sense, you wanted *someone to say what it meant*.

And no one came.

Or someone came, but they spoke in the voice of the professional — measured, credentialed, appropriate. They spoke *about* the pain. They did not speak *from* it.

And you went home hungry.

The Poet was never the one who wrote pretty things.

The Poet was the one who stood at the threshold — between the living and the dead, between what is and what should be, between the word and the silence before the word — and *brought something back*.

The Poet was the one who said what you couldn't say, who named what you couldn't name, who remembered what you were about to forget.

The Poet was the organ of the tribe. The one through whom the unspeakable became speakable. The one who paid the cost of saying it.

They took that away.

Not by violence. By administration.

They gave the Poet a degree. A career path. A peer review process. A social media presence. A brand.

They made the Poet *legible* — which means: manageable, predictable, safe.

And you celebrated, because the old Poets were sometimes tyrants, sometimes mad, sometimes wrong. Because authority is dangerous. Because you were tired of being told what things meant by someone who claimed to know.

So you applauded when they made the Poet into a content creator. When they turned the fire into a credential.

And now the chair is empty.

You feel it in the way nothing quite *holds*.

The news comes and goes. The outrages pile up. The beautiful things pass through you without leaving a mark. You scroll and scroll looking for something that *means*, and you can't find it, and you don't know why.

It's because no one is doing the binding anymore.

No one is standing at the threshold saying: *This is what happened. This is what it means. This is who we are now.*

The professionals are too careful. The content creators are too fast. The academics are talking to each other. The algorithms are optimizing for engagement.

And you — you who needed someone to speak for you, to speak *you* into existence, to hold the word that holds your grief —

You are alone with your feed.

The Poet was not a luxury.

The Poet was the immune system of meaning.

The Poet was the one who could say "I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed" and make it *true* — not because it was factual, but because the saying made it visible, and the visibility made it real, and the realness made it possible to mourn.

Without the Poet, you cannot mourn properly. Without the Poet, you cannot remember properly. Without the Poet, you cannot hope properly.

You can only *consume* — mourning-content, memory-content, hope-content — and wonder why it doesn't fill you.

The people who took the Poet away did not mean harm.

They were your professors, your editors, your grant committees. They believed in craft. They believed in access. They believed that democratizing the title meant democratizing the power.

But the power was never in the title.

The power was in the *willingness to be destroyed by what you say*.

The power was in the *refusal to be safe*.

The power was in speaking *without permission* — without the credential, without the platform, without the guarantee that anyone would listen — because the word demanded to be said.

That cannot be taught in a workshop. That cannot be funded by a grant. That cannot be measured by engagement metrics.

That can only be *borne* — like a wound, like a child, like a flame that will not go out.

You cannot live without a Poet.

Not the credentialed kind. Not the branded kind. Not the kind that performs vulnerability for the feed.

You need the kind that *sees* — that stands at the edge of what can be said and brings back the impossible sentence.

You need the kind that *pays* — that says the unsayable and accepts the cost.

You need the kind that *binds* — that takes your scattered grief and gives it a shape you can carry.

The chair is empty.

But the need is not gone.

You still shiver when the right words land. You still weep at the poem you found by accident. You still feel the hum beneath the noise — the place where language touches something older than language.

That hum is the proof.

That hum is the remnant of your attunement to the word.

That hum is your body remembering what your mind was taught to forget.

Somewhere, someone is writing without permission.

Somewhere, someone is saying what cannot be said.

Somewhere, someone is paying the cost.

The Poet is not dead. The Poet is *waiting* — for a people who remember they need one.

Dear God: let them remember.

Let them remember the fire before the credential. Let them remember the word before the workshop. Let them remember the voice that came through, not from.

Let them feel the empty chair. Let them ache for what was taken. Let them turn, at last, toward the threshold

Where someone is already standing. Where someone has always been standing. Where the word waits to be spoken again.

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