

# ASM TUITION ACADEMY

## THE MAN HUNT

### **The Manhunt**

By Simon Armitage

After the first phase,  
after passionate nights and intimate days,  
only then would he let me trace  
the frozen river which ran through his face,

only then would he let me explore  
the blown hinge of his lower jaw,  
and handle and hold  
the damaged, porcelain collar-bone,

and mind and attend  
the fractured rudder of shoulder blade,  
and finger and thumb  
the parachute silk of his punctured lung.

Only then could I bind the struts?  
and climb the rungs of his broken ribs,  
and feel the hurt  
of his grazed heart.

Skirting along,  
only then could I picture the scan,  
the foetus of metal beneath his chest,  
where the bullet had finally come to rest.

Then I widened the search,  
traced the scarring back to its source  
to a sweating, unexploded mine  
buried deep in his mind,  
around which every nerve in his body had tightened and closed.  
Then, and only then, did I come close.

### **Context:**

"**The Manhunt**" was written by Simon Armitage and originally featured in a documentary called *Forgotten Heroes: The Not Dead*, which focused on the experiences of soldiers returning from war, particularly those suffering from physical and psychological injuries. The poem is based on the real-life experiences of Eddie Beddoes, a soldier who served in Bosnia, and his wife, Laura. The poem is written from the perspective of Laura, who is attempting to reconnect with her husband after he has been physically and mentally scarred by war.

The title, "**The Manhunt**," has a dual meaning: it refers to both the literal search for a fugitive and the metaphorical search for the man her husband used to be, prior to his injuries. The poem deals with the aftermath of war and the emotional and physical toll it takes not just on soldiers but on their families as well.

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### Themes:

#### 1. **Trauma and Healing:**

- The poem explores the process of healing after trauma, both physical and emotional. The speaker describes the painstaking journey of reconnecting with her husband, who has been changed by his experiences in war. His injuries are both external and internal, and the poem suggests that the emotional scars are perhaps the hardest to address.

#### 2. **The Impact of War:**

- Armitage highlights the devastating effects of war on individuals, particularly the long-lasting consequences that continue to affect soldiers after they return home. The husband's body is described as fragile and damaged, with war leaving permanent scars on both his body and mind. The poem portrays war as not just a physical battle but an emotional one that continues long after combat ends.

#### 3. **Love and Intimacy:**

- The poem examines the **fragility of intimacy** in the face of trauma. Despite the speaker's love and desire to reconnect with her husband, the process is slow, careful, and difficult. Each stanza represents a small step in their journey toward emotional closeness, as the speaker navigates the physical and emotional barriers that have been created by her husband's experiences in war.

#### 4. **Patience and Understanding:**

- The speaker's journey to reconnect with her husband is filled with patience and gentleness. She recognizes the delicacy of the situation and approaches his injuries with great care, emphasizing the idea that healing, especially emotional healing, takes time. The poem shows how relationships can survive trauma through persistence, empathy, and tenderness.
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### Poetic Devices:

#### 1. **Extended Metaphor:**

- The entire poem is built on an extended metaphor, with the husband's body and mind compared to fragile, broken objects. The metaphorical language illustrates the **delicacy of his injuries** and the process of repairing the relationship. For example:
  - "**The frozen river which ran through his face**" symbolizes both the physical scars on his face and the emotional coldness or distance that has developed as a result of trauma.
  - "**The parachute silk of his punctured lung**" suggests the fragility of his body, comparing his lung to something lightweight and delicate.

- **"The fractured rudder of shoulder-blade"** likens his shoulder blade to a broken rudder, symbolizing a loss of control.
2. **Imagery:**
- **Visual imagery** is used throughout the poem to vividly describe the husband's injuries:
    - **"Frozen river"** creates an image of something cold and unmoving, suggesting the deep emotional damage alongside physical scars.
    - **"Porcelain collar-bone"** emphasizes the fragility of his injuries, comparing his body to something delicate and breakable.
    - The description of his **"grazed heart"** conjures both physical and emotional pain, implying that his heart, metaphorically, has been wounded by his experiences.
  - The use of delicate and fragile images emphasizes how vulnerable the husband has become.
3. **Repetition:**
- The repetition of **"only then"** at the beginning of several lines reinforces the idea of slow progress in the healing process. It shows that each step in the wife's journey of understanding and reconnection is difficult and must happen carefully and gradually.
  - The repetition of the phrase **"let me"** also shows the husband's hesitancy and the slow rebuilding of trust. Each time he **"lets"** her explore a part of him, it signifies a small victory in overcoming the emotional barriers between them.
4. **Metaphor of a "Hunt":**
- The poem's title, **"The Manhunt,"** frames the poem as a metaphorical search for the husband the wife once knew. The **"hunt"** represents the process of discovery and exploration, as she seeks to reconnect with the man who has been lost to trauma. Each physical and emotional scar she uncovers brings her closer to understanding his pain, though the poem ends with the acknowledgement that some parts of him remain elusive, symbolized by the **"unexploded mine"** buried deep in his mind.
5. **Symbolism:**
- The **"unexploded mine"** is a key symbol in the poem. It represents the trauma buried deep in the soldier's psyche, an unresolved emotional wound that could still cause great damage if triggered. The fact that it is **"unexploded"** suggests that his trauma has not been fully dealt with, and it continues to pose a threat to his mental well-being and to the relationship.
  - The **"bullet"** that has come to rest in his chest is another symbol, representing the permanent impact of his experiences in war. Although the bullet is no longer in motion, it is still embedded in him, symbolizing how the trauma of war remains a part of his identity.
6. **Tone:**
- The tone of the poem is **tender and intimate**, reflecting the wife's careful approach to her husband's pain. There is also a tone of **vulnerability**, as both characters are emotionally exposed. The wife's careful handling of his body and emotions suggests the delicacy of their situation. The overall tone is patient, empathetic, and reflective, conveying the slow process of healing and reconnection.
7. **Structure:**
- The poem is composed of unrhymed couplets, creating a sense of fragmentation that mirrors the fractured nature of the husband's body and the

relationship. The lack of rhyme and the varying lengths of the lines give the poem a free-flowing, organic quality, reflecting the wife's gradual exploration of her husband's injuries.

- The couplet form also reflects the couple's relationship. Each couplet feels like a step in the process of reconnecting, as the wife carefully navigates her husband's trauma.

8. **Alliteration:**

- Alliteration in phrases such as **“handle and hold”** emphasizes the tenderness with which the wife approaches her husband's body. The soft, repeated “h” sound creates a sense of gentleness and care.
- **“Mind and attend”** reinforces the idea that she must be cautious and thoughtful in her approach.

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**Conclusion:**

**“The Manhunt”** by Simon Armitage is a powerful exploration of trauma, healing, and the emotional distance that can form between individuals after a traumatic event. Through the speaker's patient and careful attempts to reconnect with her husband, the poem portrays the delicate process of repairing a relationship strained by physical and emotional scars. Armitage uses vivid imagery, metaphor, and repetition to convey the complexity of trauma and the slow, careful process of healing. The poem emphasizes the fragility of both the body and the mind in the aftermath of war, and how love, patience, and tenderness can help rebuild intimacy.

**COMPARISON WITH,**

**1-NETTLES**

**2-ONE FLESH**

**Context:**

- **“The Manhunt”** (Simon Armitage):  
This poem explores the emotional and physical aftermath of war from the perspective of a wife trying to reconnect with her husband, who has been physically and mentally scarred by his experiences in combat. The poem reflects on the slow and delicate process of healing both the body and the mind after trauma, showing the challenges couples face when one partner has been through a life-altering event.
- **“Nettles”** (Vernon Scannell):  
This poem is about a father's protective instincts after his son is stung by nettles. The father takes revenge on the nettles, but the poem suggests that no matter how hard he tries to protect his son, pain and suffering are inevitable. Scannell, a former soldier himself, often explores themes of war and conflict, and **“Nettles”** reflects both the vulnerability of a child and the futility of trying to shield loved ones from harm.
- **“One Flesh”** (Elizabeth Jennings):  
In **“One Flesh,”** Jennings reflects on the emotional and physical distance that has

developed between an aging couple, likely her parents. The poem explores the loss of intimacy over time, showing how the couple has transitioned from passionate love to quiet companionship. It conveys the quiet sadness that can accompany the passage of time in long-term relationships.

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## Themes:

### 1. **Trauma and Healing:**

- **"The Manhunt"**: The central theme is the emotional and physical trauma caused by war. The wife's careful, patient exploration of her husband's body mirrors the process of emotional healing. The poem emphasizes how trauma can create distance in a relationship but also shows the potential for healing and reconnection through love and understanding.
- **"Nettles"**: While not as explicit as **"The Manhunt,"** **"Nettles"** deals with trauma in the form of a child's injury. The father's response to his son's pain reflects his deep love and desire to protect him, but the poem suggests that protection is limited, and that pain is an inevitable part of life.
- **"One Flesh"**: This poem deals with the quieter trauma of emotional distance in a long-term relationship. The couple has lost their physical intimacy, and while there is no explicit conflict, there is a sadness in the separation that has developed over time. The trauma here is more subtle, caused by aging and the inevitable changes in relationships over time.

### 2. **Love and Protection:**

- **"The Manhunt"**: The wife's love is expressed through her tenderness and patience as she attempts to heal her husband's physical and emotional wounds. Her love is protective but cautious, as she navigates the emotional minefield of her husband's trauma.
- **"Nettles"**: The father's protective love is central. His anger at the nettles reflects his desire to shield his son from harm. However, the poem ultimately conveys the futility of trying to protect loved ones from all the dangers and pains of life, highlighting the limits of parental protection.
- **"One Flesh"**: The love between the couple is quieter and less overt. While the passion of their youth has faded, there is still a bond between them, though it is more rooted in shared history than physical intimacy. The poem suggests that love can take different forms as time passes, but the distance between the couple also indicates a certain sadness in their emotional disconnection.

### 3. **Time and Its Effects on Relationships:**

- **"The Manhunt"**: Time is significant in the sense that the healing process is slow and gradual. The wife takes small steps toward reconnecting with her husband, and the poem implies that the emotional scars of war may take much longer to heal than the physical ones.
- **"Nettles"**: Time in this poem is cyclical. The father's destruction of the nettles is temporary, and they will regrow. This suggests that pain and danger are constant, and no matter how much effort we put into protecting those we love, new challenges will always arise.
- **"One Flesh"**: Time is a central theme in **"One Flesh."** The couple's relationship has been shaped by time, and while they were once passionate lovers, they are now more like companions. The poem reflects on how love

changes with age, and how physical intimacy can give way to emotional distance.

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## Poetic Devices:

### 1. Imagery:

- "**The Manhunt**": Armitage uses vivid, delicate imagery to describe the soldier's body and injuries, such as "**frozen river**," "**porcelain collar-bone**," and "**grazed heart**." These images evoke a sense of fragility and suggest that the man's body and emotions are delicate, damaged by his experiences in war.
- "**Nettles**": The **nettles** themselves serve as a key image, symbolizing danger and pain. The father's destruction of the nettles is described in violent terms, such as "**slashed in fury**" and "**burned them to the ground**," but the nettles are resilient, representing the persistence of harm in life.
- "**One Flesh**": Jennings uses quiet, domestic imagery to reflect the couple's emotional distance: "**separate beds**," "**book**," and "**shadows overhead**." The lack of physical closeness is symbolized by their separate beds, while the "**shadows**" suggest the presence of unspoken thoughts and memories that loom over their relationship.

### 2. Metaphor:

- "**The Manhunt**": The soldier's injuries are compared to fragile objects like "**porcelain**" and "**parachute silk**," suggesting the fragility of his body and the delicacy required to heal his emotional wounds. The metaphor of the "**unexploded mine**" symbolizes the psychological trauma that remains buried within him, potentially dangerous if triggered.
- "**Nettles**": The nettles are a metaphor for the challenges and pains that life brings. The father's act of destroying the nettles represents his desire to protect his son, but the regrowth of the nettles shows that danger and pain will always return.
- "**One Flesh**": The poem's title itself is a metaphor, derived from the biblical notion that married couples become "**one flesh**." However, the poem contrasts this ideal with the reality of the couple's separation, showing how time has turned them into individuals again, lying apart in separate beds.

### 3. Tone:

- "**The Manhunt**": The tone is **tender and cautious**, reflecting the wife's careful approach as she tries to heal her husband's physical and emotional wounds. There is a sense of vulnerability in the poem, as the wife explores her husband's fragile state.
- "**Nettles**": The tone is **protective but resigned**. The father's desire to shield his son from harm is intense, but there is a recognition that pain is inevitable, and his efforts will only offer temporary relief.
- "**One Flesh**": The tone is **melancholic and reflective**. Jennings portrays the couple's relationship with a sense of sadness, emphasizing the emotional distance that has grown between them over time. The quiet tone reflects the calm, though emotionally charged, nature of their current state.

### 4. Structure:

- "**The Manhunt**": The poem is written in unrhymed couplets, reflecting the fragmented nature of the husband's body and the slow, step-by-step process of

healing. The structure mirrors the tentative and cautious approach the wife must take in trying to rebuild intimacy.

- **"Nettles"**: The poem is structured as a single stanza with a regular rhyme scheme (ABAB). This formal structure reflects the father's methodical approach to destroying the nettles, but the lack of any stanza break suggests that his efforts are futile, as the nettles will inevitably return.
- **"One Flesh"**: Jennings uses three six-line stanzas with a regular rhyme scheme (ABABCC), reflecting the structured, controlled nature of the couple's relationship. The formality of the structure mirrors the couple's quiet, ordered life, but it also emphasizes the emotional distance between them.

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