

cattails



April 2023

cattails

April 2023 Issue

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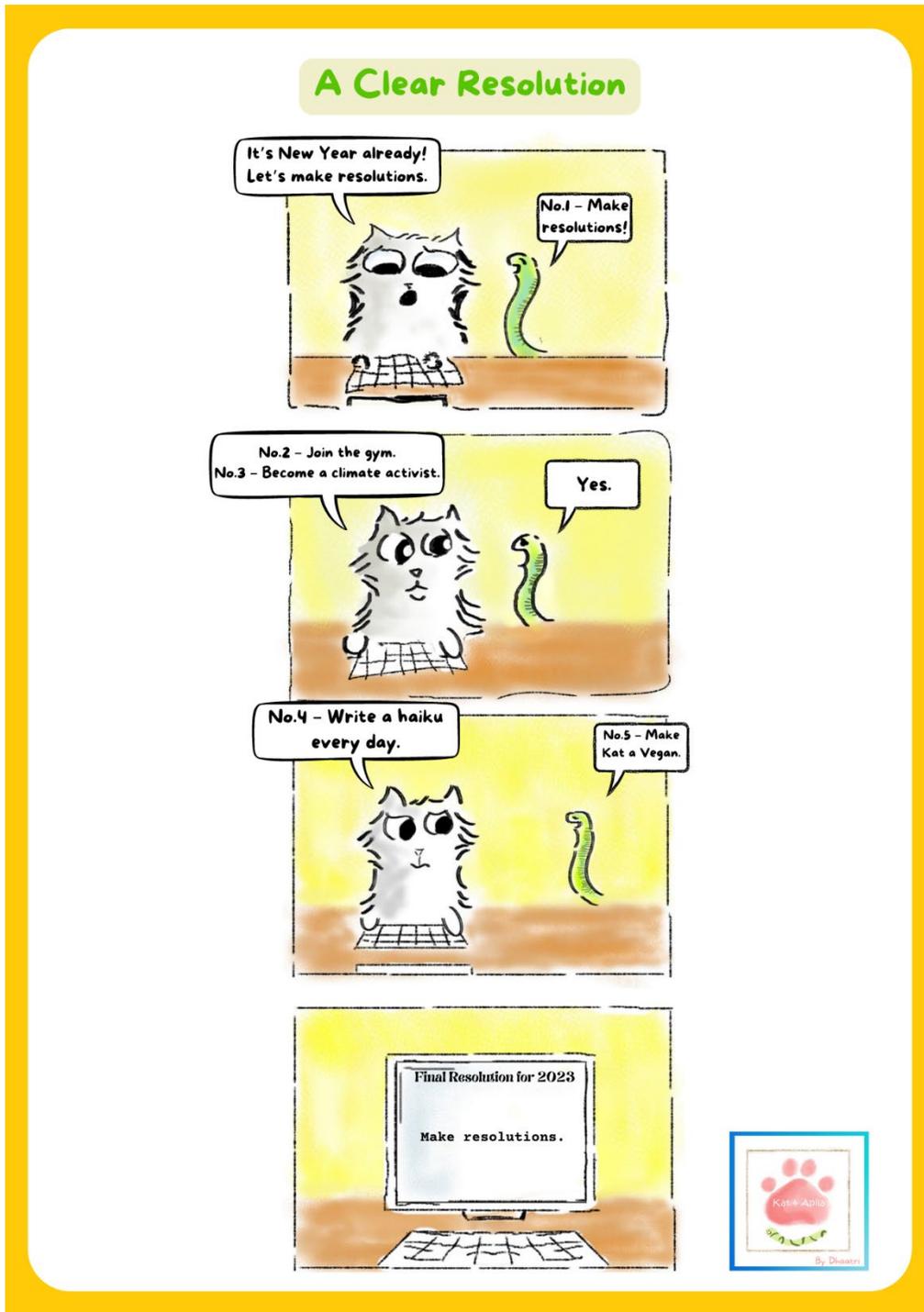
Cartoon: Dhaatri Vengunad Menon

Cover Painting: Michael Kowalewski, *Conversing in Colours*

Michael Kowalewski is of Polish origin, born and brought up in London, UK. He studied Anthropology and The History of Art at Cambridge and travelled widely in Asia and Europe. He has lived and worked in Ireland and Japan.

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Dhaatri Vengunad Menon

Introduction

Byung-Chul Han (1959 -) the South-Korean born philosopher and critic living in Germany, describes how in our times data and information are readily available and yet our world is “symbol-poor”. Increasingly we have lost the symbolic practices or rituals which help us to make sense of our identity, environ, seasons, relationship, and aspirations. Ritual is often equated with empty repetitive action and conformity. However, Byung-Chul Han argues that it is in ritual “that the past and present are brought together into a living present.” Ritual requires time and effort to create a sense of commonality and a “common rhythm.” In the case of *cattails*, we meet in poetry twice a year, to write, read, discuss, and share our work. It is not mere consumption and processing of data and information. We reaffirm our shared inspiration and enjoyment of the Japanese short forms by a ritual acknowledgment of goodwill, appreciation, and gratitude.

This bring me to the current issue, which has been delayed due to Mike’s health. It is at a time like this that we appreciate how his indomitable and understated dedication have ensured the publication of each issue of *cattails*.

Mike’s recovery from Covid has been a long and exhausting one. Through it all, the editors have rallied with unstinted support. David stepping in to process some missing senryu. Lavana and Jenny, helping to clarify and correct several details in haiga and tanka. Geethanjali and Shobhana taking on the enormous tasks of proofreading the journal.

Our resident cartoonist, Dhaatri Vengunad Menon has created another thought-provoking cartoon. This issue features water colours by the UK Polish artist, Michael Kowalewski. To both, I would like to express grateful thanks and appreciation.

In the spirit of Byung-Chul Han, I reiterate my profound gratitude to Mike and the editors, whose commitment and perseverance have made this issue possible.

Sonam Chhoki

Haiku



Husks of Stars

not yet dawn
vireo-chitter
fills the air

B. L. Bruce, USA

boar tracks
in the potato field
first day of spring

следи от глиган
в картофената нива
първи пролетен ден

Vladislav Hristov, Bulgaria

a soft sag
of banana blossoms
virga dawn

*Matthew Caretti,
American Samoa*

morning silence
a needle runs through
the jasmine's neck

ప్రాతఃకాల నిశ్శబ్దం
ఓ మల్లె గొంతుకలో
గుండుసూది

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

spring sunshine
a foal kicks up
its heels

Kevin Valentine, USA

thick maple syrup
French toast webbed
to tiny fingers

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

first visit —
a spring wind opens
the gate with me

pierwsza wizyta —
razem ze mną otwiera bramę
wiosenny wiatr

Zuzanna Truchlewska, Poland

bullock cart
and she walks alongside
talking to the bull

Kala Ramesh, India

how hair feels
as wind makes it dance —
girl on a backyard swing

Craig Kittner, USA

cycling past
the steam from ponies
fresh spring grass

Keith Evetts, UK

sunlit magnolia
a swarm of honey bees search
for a home

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

metronome
the robin sings
from the tallest branch

Joshua St. Claire, USA

laburnum blossoms —
spotting a goldfinch
by its call

Meera Rehm, UK

the line of her throat
touched by morning light —
honeyeater

Alice Wanderer, Australia

a final scything —
the tenderness
of the nettle

Shawn Blair, USA

a prologue
to homecoming —
coconut cart

Aishwarya Vedula, India

broken window
a butterfly carries in
the sunset

Anna Cates, USA

Strawberry Moon —
the sweetness
of day's end

Ruth Holzer, USA

childhood grove
the nightingale's song glistens
instead of the stars

gaj djetinjstva
slavujev pjev svijetli
umjesto zvijezda

Mihovila Čeperić, Croatia
Translation: Đurđa Vukelić Rožić

Earth hour —
we meet in the garden
to gaze at the stars

ora Pământului —
ne-ntâlnim în grădină
să privim stelele

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

wispy clouds
a trace of your ghost
in wisteria

Randy Brooks, USA

inside
the iris
a deeper deep

Brad Bennett, USA

streak of lightning . . .
the purple petunias
glow brighter

बिजली की चमकार...
बैंगनी रंग के पेटूनिया
और भी चमकीले

Neena Singh, India

distant thunder —
low moan
of the gravid tabby

John Pappas, USA

just the ghost
of bullhead tonight—
millpond shallows

Tim Gardiner, UK

trail
to a waterfall
the spray's breath

पगडंडी
झरने की ओर
साँस फुआर की

Priti Aisola, India

the force of winged air
on my face—
veering sparrow

Curt Pawlisch, USA

raw mangoes
in the courtyard
grandma on a string cot

Ashish Narain, The Philippines

a circle of shade—
the tangled branches
of oleander

un cerchio d'ombra
i rami intrecciati
dell'oleandro

Antonio Mangiameli, Italy

picking
from the colour chart
blackberry summer

C.X. Turner, UK

desert dusk
the soft padding
of a camel caravan

Sally Biggar, USA

fireworks the startling faces of carnival toys

Derek Sprecksel, USA

heatwave
a wagtail drinking
at the brink of infinity

Ivan Randall, Australia

drought —
a constellation
of small ivory bones

suša —
sazviježđe
malih kostiju bjelokosti

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

wildfires —
deer flee
into an ambush

skogbranner —
rådyr flykter
inn i en felle

Emma Alexander Arthur, Norway

dusk on the plain
the river falls asleep
in its bed

Ernest Wit, Poland

more duckweed than duck sinkhole pond

Bryan Rickert, USA

along the shore
into the roaring grey
the kite dithers

am Ufer entlang
in das rauschende Grau
der Drachen zittert

Beate Conrad, Germany

buzzards wheel
the scent of mown hay
rolled into ton bales

Dave Russo, USA

glide flap glide flap
dance moves
of pelicans

Thomas Smith, USA

forever running
from the ocean
sandpiper footprints

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

rocky cape
the beach trail ends
inside a rainbow

Angela Terry, USA

the sleek skin
of sunbathers—
harbor seals

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

its name
fills the aquarium
Pacific spiny lumpsucker

Richard Tice, USA

war baby
on its little back
a sea turtle

Adrian Bouter, The Netherlands

estuary
the tales told
by the wrack line

Edward Gilligan, Ireland

marsh mirror
the overhead raptor's
black-edged white

Nola Obee, Canada

northbound starlings
knocking sand
off my shoes

Thomas Chockley, USA

afternoon light
the river foliage fades
to a gentler blue

Jay Friedenber, USA

gathering dusk
a fusillade
of crow caws

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

a cantaloupe
sliced across the sky
sunset rain

Robert Witmer, Japan

sweet apricots
still warm
in the blue-glazed bowl

Kim Klugh, USA

textured air
the weave
of riversound

David Watts, USA

trying to sit straight
through boat turbulence
humpback whales

Deborah P Kolodji, USA

its shadow
slipping quietly ahead
a gull's scream

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

sea food
in the spray of fire
the faces of ancestors

Minko Tanev, Bulgaria

dusk deepens
the waves cradle
a gull's squawk

Ravi Kiran, India

summer residents
their all-night voices
in the woods

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

orange moon
the taste of citrus
without seeds

Kirsten G. Munro, Scotland

long summer . . .
the wind and waves
in her eyes

dugo ljeto...
u očima joj
vjetar i valovi

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

distant clangor
the cranes taking summer
south with them

odległy klangor
żurawie zabierają lato
na południe

Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

in unison
the Sunday congregation
at the bird feeder

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

dirt road
along the ridge
a healing scar

Rohan Buettel, Australia

monsoon evening
breaking the drive
for tea in a clay cup

बरसात की शाम
कार यात्रा रोक़ी
कुल्हड़ में चाय

Govind Joshi, India

thunderstorm
on the scented path
I hold my dog

temporale
sul sentiero profumato
tengo stretto il mio cane

Mariangela Canzi, Italy

glistening shoulders
the garden Buddha
our rain gauge

Christa Pandey, USA

zagging scars
across the countryside
the cyclone's path

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

helicopter throb
a deer in the hunt
for high ground

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

slanting rain
the goodbye side
of midnight

Tony Williams, UK

rescue shelter
the basset's eyes
non-committal

Madhuri Pillai, Australia

the elevator closes
on another visit with dad —
autumn leaves

Eric A Lohman, USA

losing my way
the wonder
of a halved red cabbage

Ingrid Baluchi, North Macedonia (EC)

Haiga — Part 1A

Adelaide B. Shaw — USA



Anannya Dasgupta — India



aurora borealis
I sit my joy
in the front row

Nika, Canada

following the river
a bull moose
permits my passage

Lysa Collins, Canada

halved squash
the split silence
of autumn equinox

prepolovljena tikva
rascijepljena tišina
jesenske ravnodnevnice

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translated by Đurđa Vukelić Rožić

moon gazing —
a transparent bird-call
near venus

Don Baird, USA

stepping out —
the confident stance
of a mallard drake

Hazel Hall, Australia

mushroom partway a raccoon's eye socket

Bill Cooper, USA

silver morning
through tattered shades—
swallow's psalms

Jerome Gagnon, USA

home alone
the chuckle of a gecko
in my wall

Quendryth Young, Australia

wallaby track
late sunshine lighting
banksia candles

Gavin Austin, Australia

wheeled away
in a gardener's barrow
the leaves that swirled

Jan Dobb, Australia

stealing crimson
from the trees
autumn zephyr

Deborah Burke Henderson, USA

a chair at the table
where he always sat —
camellia blossoms

Deborah A. Bennett, USA

fog fading the trilling dolphins

Richard L. Matta, USA

drowsy night wind slurs through pine trees

昏夜風咕嚕松間

John Zheng, USA

a year of war
the stone angel
still in prayer

un anno di guerra
ancora in preghiera
l'angelo di pietra

Carmela Marino, Italy (EC)

dew drips drips . . .
this autumn world
of a migrant

露珠滴答滴答...
一個移民
的秋天世界

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

harvest festival
packing boxes
for the food bank

Ben Oliver, UK

aftershocks—
a beggar's bowl gathers
more dust

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

full moon
my shadow walks
on the surface of the sea

puni mjesec
moja sjena hoda
površinom mora

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

autumn breeze
the leaves that stay
the leaves that don't

Ben Gaa, USA

already gone
the evensong
of geese

Joanna Ashwell, UK

her empty bedroom
old stems of lavender
in a drawer

la sua stanza da letto vuota
vecchi steli di lavanda
in un cassetto

Eufemia Griffo, Italy

sacred mountain
how deep
the scars

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

thick morning fog
the ferry whistle sounds
within reach

Jon Hare, USA

the aches of being a being winter chill

होने की वेदना सर्द हवाएं

Vijay Prasad, India

shifting fog
a puffin's beak
emerges first

Debbie Strange, Canada

old black cat –
years of fishy breath
soft on my cheek

Sandi Pray, USA

the sharpness
of a thin moon
winter on the street

Dan Curtis, Canada

windchill
pine needles pushing
into grayscale

Jamie Wimberly, USA

biting cold
the wheezing cough
of a night watchman

R. Suresh babu, India

fresh kill
the gyr-falcon mantles
its shadow

John Hawkhead, UK

newly sown
a layer of green
on my sister's grave

Edward J. Rielly, USA

winter seclusion
reindeer antlers turn
toward a distant howl

Beni Kurage, USA

the graveyard
so many dead
stars in the sky

LeRoy Gorman, Canada (EC)

icy sun beams
stretch through cemetery fog—
tap dance on her stone

Tyson West, USA

winter without snow
the distant memory
of silence

Laurie Greer, USA

morning wind
the space between
my thoughts

vento mattutino
lo spazio tra
i miei pensieri

Maria Concetta Conti, Italy

face to the sun
the pale of aspens
before snow

Tyler McIntosh, USA

threadbare curtains
the light
that winter brings

Frank Hooven, USA

hunger moon
wind-drift reveals the ribs
of the forest

Kristen Lindquist, USA

snow blind
driving the sharp curve
by rote

Marilyn Fleming, USA

in a flash
dawn thunders
in silence

Michael Flanagan, USA

ivy trails
renaming the cemetery
flowers

Herb Tate, UK

flower seeds
in the february wind . . .
convalescence

semi di fiori
nel vento di febbraio ...
convalescenza

Daniela Misso, Italy

almost spring . . .
the morning call for prayer
is no more muffled

Kanchan Chatterjee, India

budding hyacinths
more and more silence
in my words

*Anna Maria Domburg-Sancristoforo,
The Netherlands*

horned moon —
a sleeping child grins
from ear to ear

rogati mjesec —
dijete se u snu smije
od uha do uha

Nina Kovacic, Croatia

spring again
a creek polishes
the white stones

iar primavară
un pârau lustruiește
pietrele albe

Mircea Moldovan, România

Editor's Choices (EC) - Haiku

Thank you for sending your haiku to *cattails*. This time too, there were a great many submissions and memorable moments of wonder. The geographies, the flora and fauna that poets experience are being conveyed to many other parts of the globe and readers are able to engage with, and enjoy the moments presented. When we are as interconnected as we are now, events in one part of the globe do not remain isolated but flow fluidly, and cause a flux or ebb elsewhere. I would like to bring to your attention, three haiku that point to extreme climatic events and disasters. I am (deliberately) not commenting on these powerful poems but instead, invite you to participate in these moments (of concern, of anguish) that the poets have shared.

drought—
a constellation
of small ivory bones

suša—
sazviježđe
malih kostiju bjelokosti

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

wildfires—
deer flee
into an ambush

skogbranner—
rådyr flykter
inn i en felle

Emma Alexander Arthur, Norway

helicopter throb
a deer in the hunt
for high ground

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

And now, here are three more poems that I hope you will reread with me.



a year of war
the stone angel
still in prayer

un anno di guerra
ancora in preghiera
l'angelo di pietra

Carmela Marino, Italy

Thank you, Carmela Marino, for this deep poem which is an example of how the art of suggestion can make for a powerful haiku. The poet brings to the reader the image of war, along with the helplessness of the situation.

The poem alludes to the unending violence with a matter-of-fact first line—a year of war. (There are no concrete images of war.) It is the second and third lines that take the reader deeper and onto reflection. A year has passed and the prayers continue unabated from a stone angel - what else can it do, but stand in prayer? It is one word that changes the tone of the poem— the word 'still' in the third line. The 'stone angel in prayer' is different from the 'stone angel *still* in prayer'— a sense of weariness has crept in. The use of the word 'stone' also makes for an image of hardness, lifelessness, and immutability.

The images in the haiku led me to think of us, human beings. Do we continue to pray for the end of a war, the end of all wars? Do we actively pursue peace instead of all other options in our daily lives? As poets of haiku, I would like to believe that we all pray for, pursue and practise peace. Meanwhile, the beatific stone angel continues to pray.



the graveyard
so many dead
stars in the sky

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

LeRoy Gorman brings us a graveyard with so many of the dead – or so I thought, at first. But in a moment, the poem turns the images from the ground below us to the sky above (very deftly). The space that the poem offers is vast. The poet compels the reader to read the poem again. So many possibilities are offered to us in so few words.

Many readings followed and I explored the possibilities of travelling with the poem. Is it the graveyard that has so many dead or is it the sky that has so many dead stars or is it both? Do the dead from the graveyard become stars (a scene from Disney's *The Lion King* also made an appearance in one of my readings!) Or, probably the poet only wanted to state that there are many dead stars in the sky (literal) and not that so many (of our) favourite people are up there. In the end, space is as vast as we want it to be. It could be just a graveyard out there in the beyond too. Thank you, LeRoy Gorman, for also reminding me about the reader's responsibility of carrying a haiku's journey forward.



losing my way
the wonder
of a halved red cabbage

Ingrid Baluchi, North Macedonia

Ingrid Baluchi takes us on a path of wonder with this poem. Line 1, losing my way — I thought of old streets with names in a foreign language, mazes in ancient cities, forests, trekking on a trail, unknown and yet undiscovered dirt tracks. The haiku makes a turn from line 1 to the phrase that follows. And then, I was mesmerized by the halved red cabbage with its serpentine maze — what a beautiful image! The last line traces back to the first line as the intricate design would make someone lose their way. Thank you, Ingrid, for showing us the joy of close observation, of life's littler moments. The next time I cut a red cabbage, it is going to take some time to move on to the next task.

Warmth and gratitude,
Geethanjali Rajan

Haiga — Part 1B

An'ya — USA

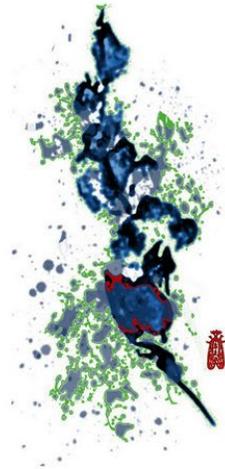
The Waltz
an'ya

I should have
known to thank you
before now
for bringing me
nights of spring love

I should have
known you'd be back
in summer
when grass grew green
and sky stayed blue

I should have
known life changes
like the leaves
lose chlorophyll
to autumn's hues

I should have
known in winter
we would still
dance the old-age
waltz together...



Barbara Kaufmann — USA



a light in old age the muffled laughter of children

Beate Conrad — Germany



C.X. Turner — UK



Cezar Ciobîcă & Paul Alexandru — Romania

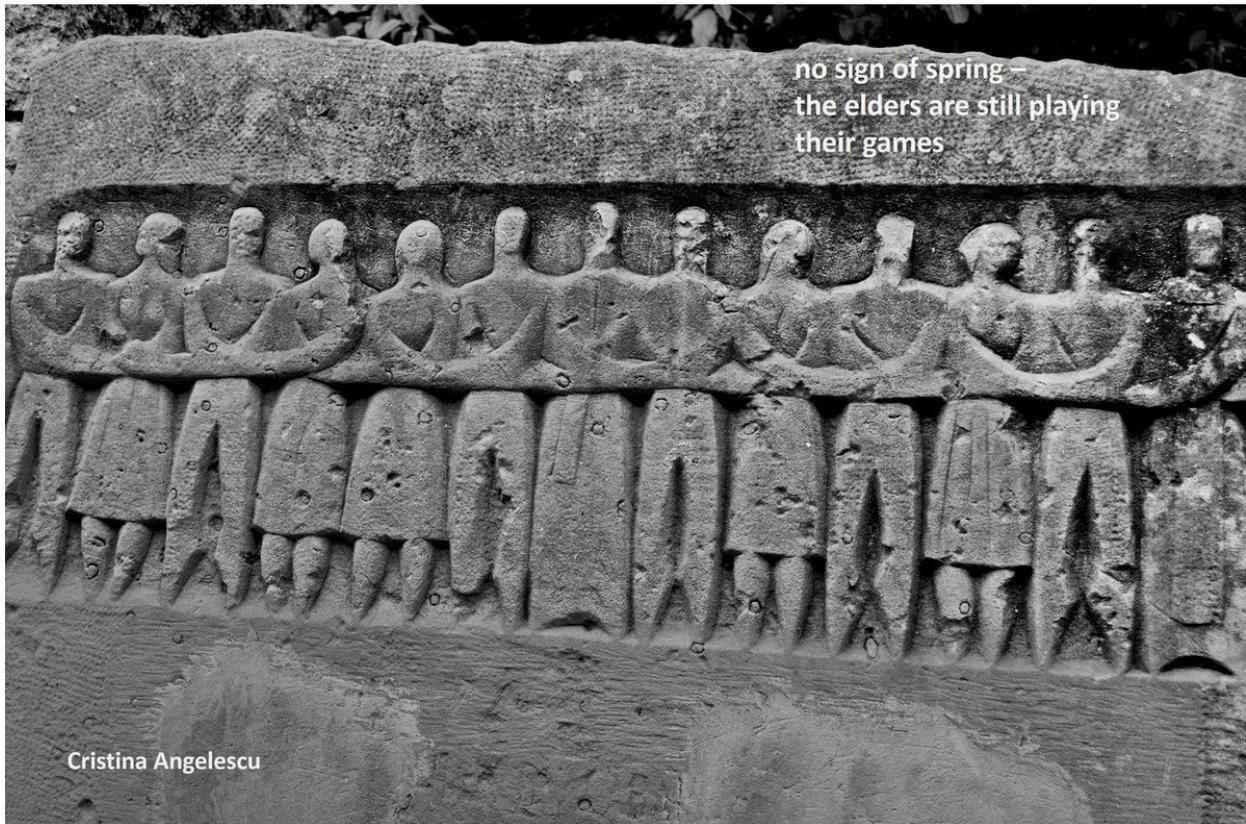
winter chill...
that black spot
on dad's lung



photo: Paul Alexandru

haiku: Cezar Ciobîcă

Cristina Angelescu — Romania



Senryu



When we Meet

waning crescent
your scar frowns
with you

unheard whispers
my mother's tears sink
into the prayer mat

Farah Ali, United Kingdom

park lake
an old couple
treading water

parkdamm
ett gammalt par
trampar vatten

tai chi
slowly slowly
hitting a mosquito

tai chi
sakta sakta
slår en mygga

Birk Andersson, Sweden (EC)

family garden party
a bumblebee fans
the rumours

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

night fishing
a search
for elusive words

Gavin Austin, Australia

prairie wind —
all I remember
all that I don't

first rain —
a drop of monsoon
in my tea

Mona Bedi, India

an inchworm
on her pinkie . . .
they grow up so fast

morning light
the Zen garden
has me to itself

Brad Bennett, USA

monkey bars
everyone on the playground
upside down

Randy Brooks, USA

ferns glisten
at the roadside —
unscheduled stop

Rohan Buettel, Australia

molted crab
learning to love
the skin I'm in

Susan Burch, USA

court hearing
her fury is
in the files

Gerichtsverhandlung
ihre Wut steckt
in den Akten

Pitt Buerken, Germany

what we said
what we didn't mean —
editing yesterday

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

glass after glass
moonlight shrouded
in night mist

gelas setelah gelas
cahaya rembulan tertutup
dalam kabut malam

Christopher Calvin, Indonesia

rose garden
mother warned me his thorns
would cut

Pris Campbell, USA

breaking the silence
between us
whistling teapot

Alvin B. Cruz, Philippines

off-white persimmon flowers
my teenager's test
turns pink

белезникав цвят от райска ябълка
тестът на дъщеря ми
порозовява

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

long birth
the way she utters
daylight

дълго раждане
начинът ѝ да изшепти
светлина

Radostina Dragostinova, Bulgaria

confession —
slowly opening up
a magnolia

confesiune —
deschizându-se încet
o magnolie

Ana Drobot, Romania

bindweed
digging up
your infidelity

Christine Eales, United Kingdom

winter art class . . .
students glossing over
the model's goosebumps

Anna Eklund-Cheong, France

beach footprints
the way we're going
to see the way we came

Keith Evetts, United Kingdom

broken dreams
the short end
of the wish bone

Marilyn Fleming, USA

happy hour
a nun adjusts
her habit

Ben Gaa, USA

handshake—
the beggar becomes
a man

Ben Gaa, USA (EC)

the corpse waiting
with eternal patience
gravedigger's spade

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

eternity . . .
the dirt
under his fingernails

vječnos . . .
prljavština
pod njegovim noktima

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

BY APPOINTMENT
will it be the same
at heaven's door

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

bitter morning
the koel's song
sweetens the tea

கசப்பான காலை
குயிலின் பாடல்
தேனீரை இனிமையாக்க

Elancharan Gunasekaran, Singapore

the way we do things back to front his baseball cap

Hazel Hall, Australia

time to go
flies start swarming
at the bar

Jon Hare, USA

all night-ight
two clocks tick-ick
out of sync

northern wilderness
a cross stands in memory
of God knows who

Lev Hart, Canada

autumn's fall
an old man and his dog
slip into mist

continental drift
far enough apart
to almost touch

*John Hawkhead,
United Kingdom (EC)*

bedtime poetry
I ask him to be
a frog in my dream

*Patricia Hawkhead,
United Kingdom*

office donuts—
our award-winning coverage
of the famine

Ruth Holzer, USA

wolf moon . . .
the dog and I howling
a different note

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

closing time
pouring shadows
into the night

Rick Jackofsky, USA

guessing
the sweet and sour sauce
is

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

Pluto
her favorite planet
until it isn't

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

mountaintop proposal
the raucous laughter
of kookaburras

Louise Hopewell, Australia

over my head
your corrugated
irony

Richard Kakol, Australia

this morning
a spoon's my brush
ensō in my coffee cup

Brian Kates, USA

carved by the years
what's between us
finds its shape

Ravi Kiran, India (EC)

midnight
I gaze at the stars
as you once did

Chris Langer, USA

sleepless
a midnight crowd
of crows

睡不著覺
午夜一大群
的烏鴉

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Haiga — Part 2A

Debbie Strange — Canada



Dimitrij Škrk — Slovenia



waiting to hear
the words he hasn't said
falling snow

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

watermelon days
the sluggish fullness
of a mosquito

Tyler McIntosh, USA

convalescence
my unkempt garden
blooming

Ruchita Madhok, India

extinct bird
crossword clue
more than one answer

Dorothy Mahoney, Canada

me, my wife . . .
the to-and-fro
of a mosquito

io, mia moglie ...
il va e vieni
di una zanzara

Antonio Mangiameli, Italy

milk thistle breeze
forgetting when dad died
from dementia

Richard L. Matta, USA

diagnosis
counting the leaves
from the hospital yard

diagnostic
numărând frunzele
din curtea spitalului

Mircea Moldovan, Romania

city visit
he wants to see
the skyscrapers

no nonsense
the baby and I
babbling

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA (EC)

black eye —
the usual journey
from rage to shame

Ashish Narain, Philippines

poetry notebook
jotting down
our takeout order

Maurice Nevile, Australia

sickle moon
two displaced migrants
share a blanket

Nika, Canada

spring afternoon
pretending mum's diagnosis
is not terminal

Bernadette O'Reilly, Ireland

Valentine's Day the invitation to 'an evening of hope'

Lá Fhéile Vailintín an cuireadh chuig 'tráthnóna dóchais'

last song of the night my gin-soaked orange segment

amhrán deireanach na hoíche mo scealláin oráiste lán le jin

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

our twin grandsons
the pitter-patter
of a hail storm

Curt Pawlisch, USA

the circus closed
he starts a flea market
from scratch

Carol Raisfeld, USA

roulette wheel . . .
betting on
the real me

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

Mother's Day
the faith we put
in scattered seeds

Bryan Rickert, USA

waterfall tryst . . .
birdsong rains
on the rocky shelf

*Cynthia Rowe,
Australia*

forever after her kintsugi smile

Julie Schwerin, USA (EC)

summer rue
we marry
without mother

Richa Sharma, India

light rain
on my grandson's palm
a tiny snail

हलकी बारिश
मेरे पोते की हथेली पर
एक नन्हा घोंघा

Neena Singh, India

home visit
gran's pink lipstick
on my cheeks

Tom Staudt, Australia

peach blossoms
his words floating
in the wind

Stephenie Story, USA

sedimentary rock
they say I should be
moving forward

Debbie Strange, Canada

midsummer —
a white straw hat
walks through high corn

Ann Sullivan, USA

first flight
my child calls the cotton clouds
a house of god

R. Suresh babu, India

red signal
a little girl points to
the arc moon

Neha Talreja, India

shoeshine man —
even though I'm wearing flip-flops
he smiles

Angela Terry, USA

energy crisis . . .
an additional blanket
for each bed

energetska kriza...
dodatni pokrivač
za svaki krevet

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translator D. V. Rozic

an anniversary passes
the stone lion's
silent roar

C. X. Turner, UK

nursing home visit —
outside the window
her son

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

pausing
at the top of the escalator —
first bifocals

Joseph P. Wechselberger, USA

winter blues . . .
the brilliance of white
in a cloudy sky

Quendryth Young, Australia

a child's arms
too small to describe
the bigness of sky

daydreaming . . .
I drop my speed
to drifting cloud

Tony Williams, United Kingdom (EC)

after the phone call
she beats the batter
even harder

Wai Mei Wong, Canada (EC)

diamond anniversary
still saying yes,
dear

Susan Yavaniski, USA

ghost town
the remaining church
pewless

鬼城
教堂尚存
長椅無

John Zheng, USA

Editor's Choices (EC) - Senryu

One of the most obvious privileges of this job is seeing so much great work by so many great authors. I hope there are several pieces in this issue which will chime with you when you meet them. As ever, there were no shortage of candidates to choose for closer investigation. I've tried to select pieces which have opened out for me on rereading. Some offer "aha" and others "aah" moments. To my mind, each of them demonstrates the remarkable versatility of senryu. This serves as a reminder, to me, to continue to practice and strive for a better understanding of the form. There's something wonderful about capturing such precious moments.



tai chi
slowly slowly
hitting a mosquito

Birk Andersson, Sweden

Birk Andersson offers us a comic moment in the day of a Tai Chi practitioner. Yet I keep finding more in this. Tai Chi is a martial art, but has been promoted for its physical and mental health benefits. I imagine the practitioner to be someone who is enjoying those benefits. The second line suggests their pace of life has slowed down. As a result, their responses to situations have slowed down too. Perhaps they are more mindful too. Working with this idea, the slow movement of the person towards the mosquito allows them an opportunity to reconsider their action. Although the word in the last line is "hitting," I see the mosquito escaping, as the person decides not to kill it. While the poem relates one action in a day of the practitioner, it is also an insight into their new life.



handshake—
the beggar becomes
a man

Ben Gaa, USA

Ben Gaa provides us with an opportunity to consider the power of a simple action. It's so easy to turn a blind eye to those in need. Here we see someone going the extra mile. Not just dropping some change into a coffee cup, but stopping to interact with the person. The "aha" moment is cleverly reserved for the last line—yet I wonder if there is more than one "aha" here. While the person has recognised humanity within the beggar, has the beggar recognised some humanity in the society which has failed them? After all, there is power in both giving and receiving. How remarkable to capture such an intricate interaction between people in so few words.



continental drift
far enough apart
to almost touch

John Hawkhead, United Kingdom

John Hawkhead provides us with a riddle of sorts. I wonder, if it were presented as a haiku, whether it would prove as interesting. Continental drift is caused by plate tectonics. While it's difficult to observe the movement of these plates, they remind us of their dynamic nature with earthquakes. The idea of continental drift was proposed by Alfred Wegener, having noticed the coastlines of Africa and South America would fit together to make a curious jigsaw. If we take that idea out of haiku and into senryu, it can bring us to strange places. When people break up, or are separated, do they leave impressions in one another? Or, do people drift apart because they are different? And

what if those people continue to change? Could they drift back together again? From another perspective, is it too difficult to meet an ex-partner until you have separated from them emotionally? There seem to be multiple layers to the reading, each with their own mystery. It's a real treat to find such depth in three short lines.



carved by the years
what's between us
finds its shape

Ravi Kiran, India

Ravi Kiran offers us a mystery with a cryptic solution. While it is tempting to assume that the thing “between us” is a good “thing,” it is equally possible that it is a ‘bad’ thing. So, we are left with a conundrum regarding time. Has it been bringing “us” closer or has it been driving “us” apart? Both readings offer intriguing stories, but I can't refute either. Perhaps this poem tests whether the reader is a “glass half empty” or a “glass half full” sort of person.



city visit-
he wants to see
the skyscrapers

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

Laurie D. Morrissey shares a humorous moment. The inclusion of an unusual malapropism sets the mind racing. Who is this “he”? The word “skyscraper” makes them sound like someone who's visiting from out of town. If they haven't encountered skyscrapers before, have they spent any time in cities at all? If not, what sort of a life have they lived? By ‘showing’ the reader a glimpse of a life, Laurie has opened the poem, and its subjects, to deeper investigation.



forever after her kintsugi smile

Julie Schwerin, USA

Julie Schwerin presents us with a small poem, even by senryu standards. A mere five words. Some specialist knowledge is required here, but it offers great rewards. Kintsugi is a Japanese term, which translates as golden joinery. It is a technique which highlights repairs to pottery, using golden lacquer. Philosophically, the technique serves as a way of embracing imperfection. Working with that knowledge, we learn that the “her” of the poem suffered a facial injury at some time in the past. I assume the narrator is sharing their happiness at seeing that once-injured person smiling. Perhaps it serves as a constant reminder that the smile and its owner have survived and prospered.



a child's arms
too small to describe
the bigness of sky

Tony Williams, United Kingdom

Tony Williams brings us into a family scene. Someone is talking to a child and asking them to describe the sky. The child throws its arms wide to convey how huge it is. Presumably there are other people present who could make the same gesture while offering a much larger size. I detect an aspect of innocence here; the child might use the same action to indicate a big dog, a car, a house, or a mountain. But there also seems to be an aspect of intellectual growth, as the child learns to fit ever bigger objects and ideas inside its head. These thoughts meet the idea of impermanence (*mujō*), as every child will grow and change.

after the phone call
she beats the batter
even harder

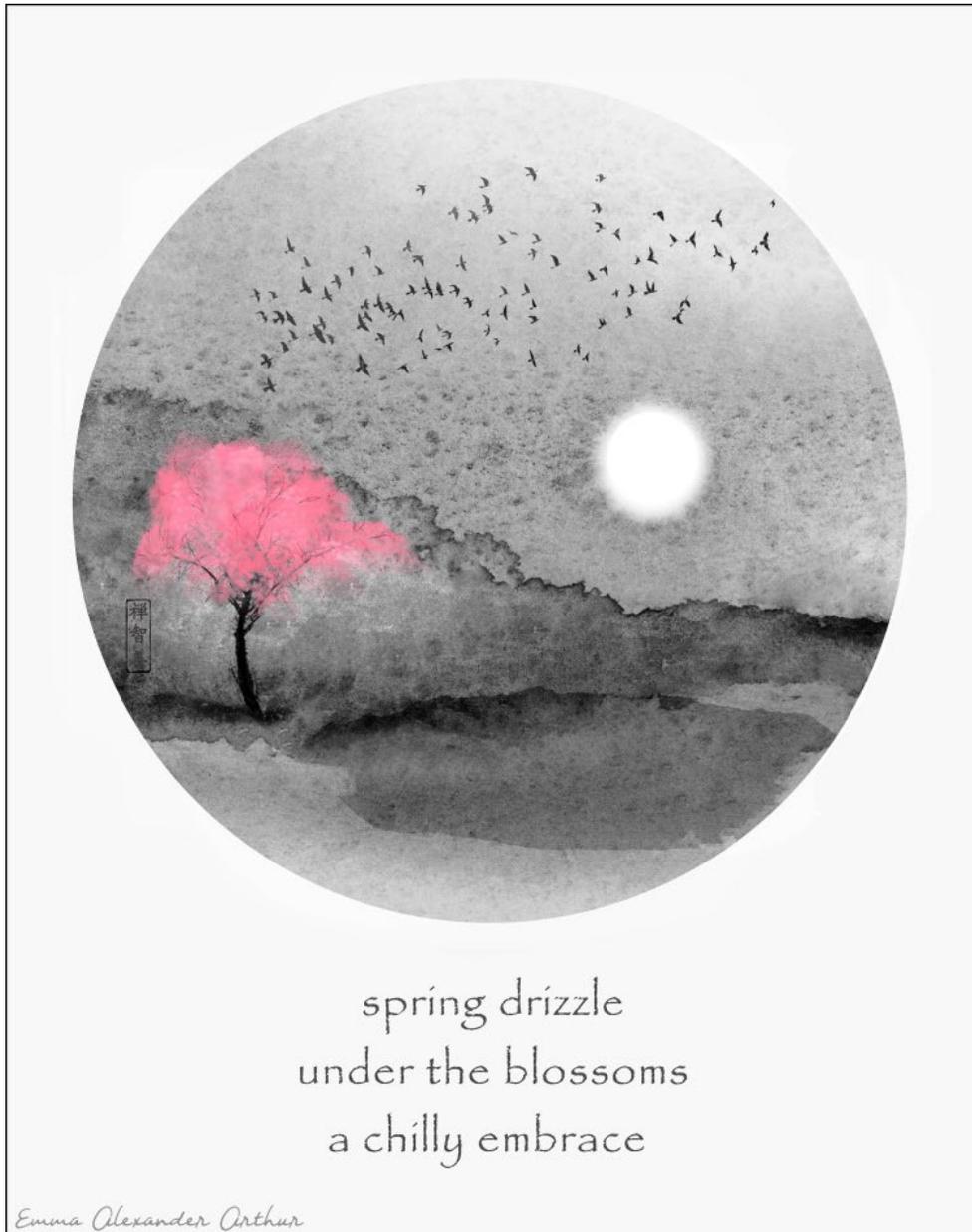
Wai Mei Wong, Canada

Wai Mei Wong provides us with a beautiful example of how to “show” rather than “tell”. We know there was a phone call, and we know there was some batter. Although we don’t know the nature of the phone call, we can guess that it didn’t go well, because the beating process has taken on a new vigour! What I find fascinating about this poem is that it suggests anger or frustration of the “she,” but ultimately it leads us to humour, as we see that anger transformed.

David J Kelly

Haiga — Part 2B

Emma Alexander Arthur — Norway



spring drizzle
under the blossoms
a chilly embrace

Emma Alexander Arthur

Eric A Lohman & Giancarlo Bertozzi — USA



leaping for joy
the fluid dynamics
of sunrise

haiku: Eric A. Lohman
photo: Giancarlo Bertozzi

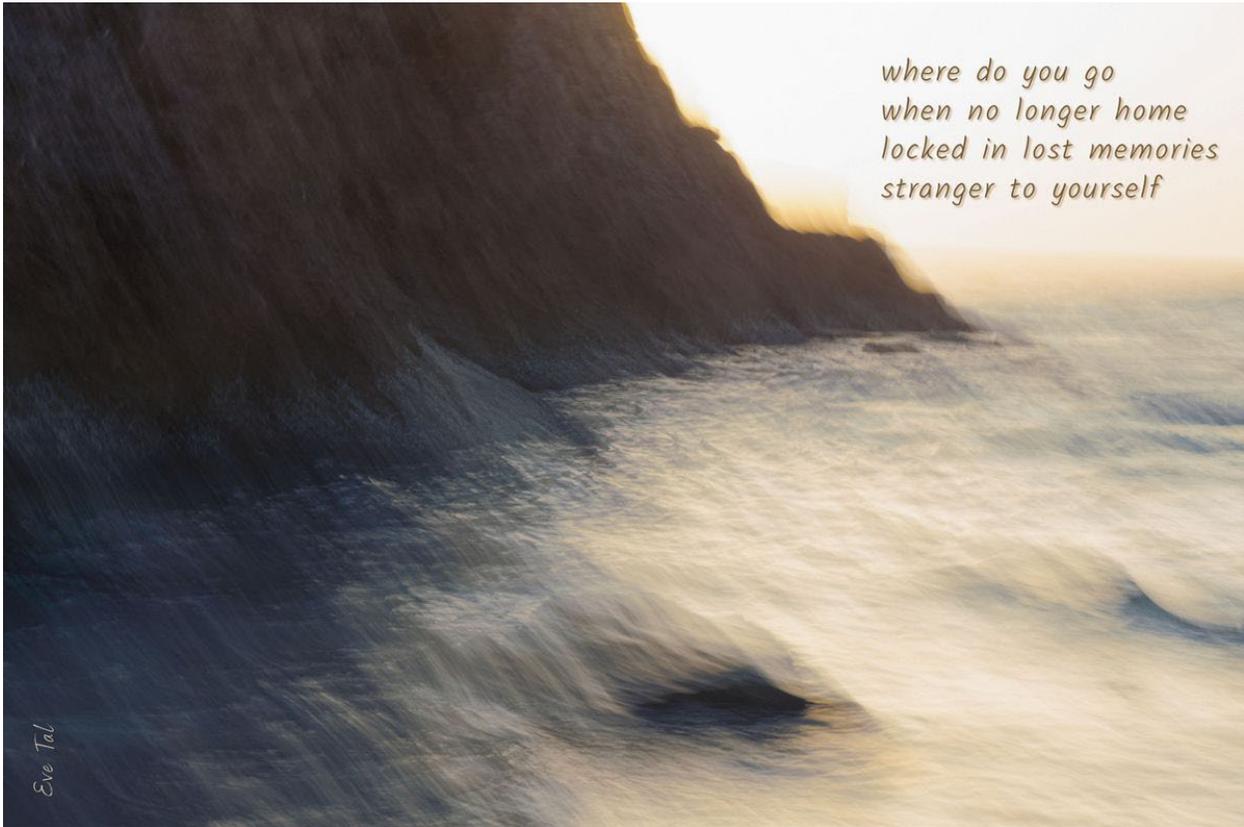
Eugeniusz Zacharski & Jacek Pokrak — Poland



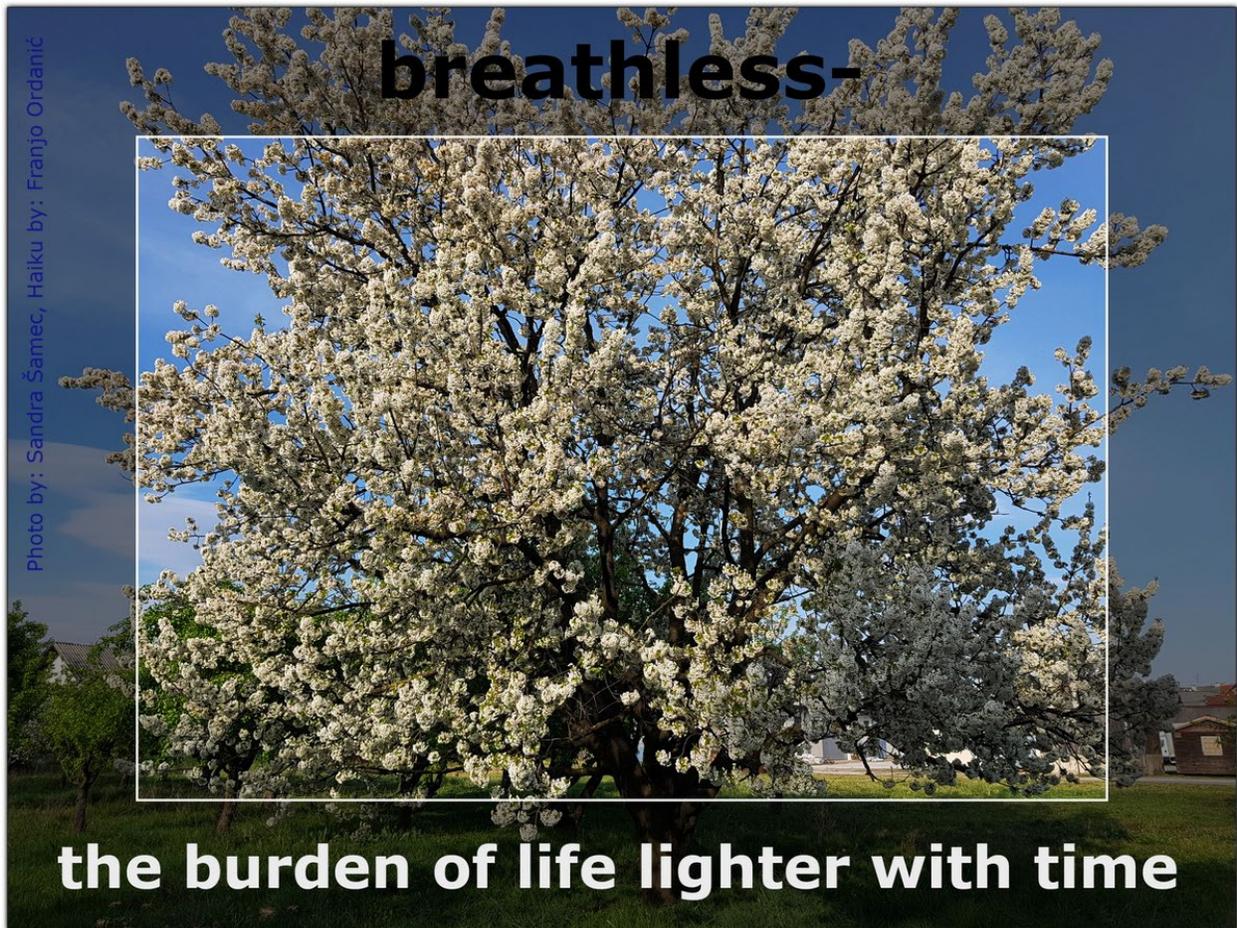
painting: Jacek Pokrak
haiku: Eugeniusz Zacharski

spring awakening
the sun enlivens our bones
and theirs

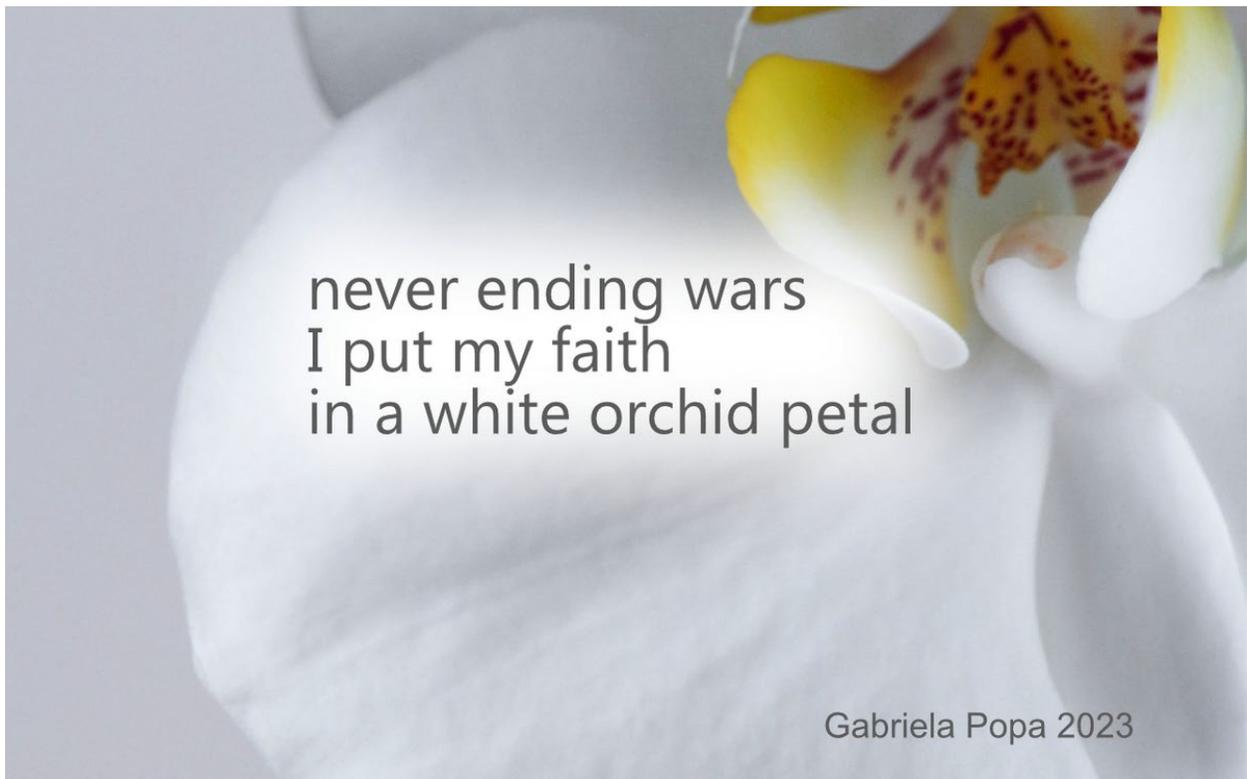
Eva Tal — Israel



Franjo Ordanić & Sandra Šamec — Croatia



Gabriela Popa — USA



never ending wars
I put my faith
in a white orchid petal

Gabriela Popa 2023

Tanka



The Alchemy of Shadows

share your secret
with a sea breeze,
it will listen
without complaint
and then blow it away

Mary Davila, USA

first light
down the mountain
the river
trips over pebbles
finding her lyrics

Kala Ramesh, India

river flute
a small trout darts
here and there
a great egret
lowers its neck

John Zheng, USA

little finch,
your spark nearly hidden
by falling snow . . .
how nameless songs
kindle the fire within

Debbie Strange, Canada

the dying wingbeat
of a butterfly
in amber
all the things
i might have been

Frank Dietrich, Germany

a sunbeam
entered the garage
in its gala garb
a locked down fly
as if a firefly

sunčeva zraka
ušla u garažu
izolirana muha
u svečanoj odori
kao krijesnica

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translator: D. V. Rozic, Croatia

a bumblebee
nuzzles coloured flowers
my mind alights
on one thought
after another

Hazel Hall, Australia

seen edge on,
the way the breeze tickles
the morning glory,
lets her rest,
then does it again

Jim Chessing, USA (EC)

Wang Wei wrote
of the wind rattling bamboo
I remember
cottonwoods applauding
the new day

Michael Flanagan, USA

in the blue eye
of the hurricane
silence
learning to listen
to my inner self

Marilyn Fleming, USA

intoxicated
by jasmine
the final piece
of sky
disappearing

Joanna Ashwell, UK

flax leaves glisten
and fold in summer rains
their black spears erect—
this is the place
I call home

Anne Curran, New Zealand

dry stones
whisper to the creek bed
as if
I were the dam
and you the rain man

Marilyn Fleming, USA

a lone boat
floats on the lake
suspended
I dilute my thoughts
in the morning fog

una barca solitaria
galleggia sul lago
sospesa
stempero i miei pensieri
nella nebbia mattutina

Daniela Misso, Italy

steam and leaves
the darkening soil
takes it all
in different shades
around the shoreline

Daniel Robinson, USA

letting the dog out . . .
high in the ice night
tundra swans fly
white and ghost-like
haunting the cold with their calls

Curt Pawlisch, USA

felled forest . . .
the faint asphalt scent
of canyon chaparral
a turkey vulture
circles and circles

Richard L. Matta, USA

their dream house underway —
orange flags excavated dirt
mounds heaped next to broken pines
crushing trilliums
severing deer trails . . .

Curt Pawlisch, USA

the year
without a winter —
camellia blossoms
blanket the Earth
like a shroud

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

another day
& another name
gets added to the list
of endangered species
what about us

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

first snow
melting into the fallen leave . . .
autumn wind
the voices of birds
drift into silence 'till spring

Peter H. Pache, USA

sundown
a narrow band of sky
between earth and cloud
between anger and despair
a rich light gently spreads

Katherine Raine, New Zealand

no visible scar
but something lost
in Vietnam
a moth fluttering
in the cobweb

Randy Brooks, USA

remains
of a ghost town
on the estuary —
a dock on the tidal flats
emerges and submerges

Richard Tice, USA (EC)

a pallid moon
coming and going
migrant workers
pause and consider
what the season brings

Anna Cates, USA

a teen's hands
touching her mother's . . .
the train window
dis/connects their hearts
broken by blasts in Kyiv

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

night crossing
into no man's land
young soldiers
in goggles and camouflage
the ghosts of themselves

Ruth Holzer, USA

no need
to squabble over it
the last slice
of the orange sun
disappears

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA (EC)

picnic . . .
mother's whispered prayer
can't be heard anymore
in a nest above us
eggshells break

picnic...
rugăciunea șoptită a mamei
nu se mai aude
deasupra noastră într-un cuib
pocnesc coji de ouă

Mircea Moldovan, România

tiny droplets
reach mother earth
your tiny hands
search for my warmth
in the blanket

சிறு மழை துளிகள்
பூமித்தாயை அடைந்தன
உன் சிறிய கைகள்
கம்பளியைத்தேடின
என் வெம்மைக்காக

Padmini Krishnan, United Arab Emirates

cracked fingertips
after years of scrubbing . . .
she blows kisses
to her grandson
she dare not caress

फटे पोर उँगलियों के
बरसों की सफ़ाई के बाद ...
वह चुम्बन देती है
अपने पोते को
दुलारने की हिम्मत नहीं

Priti Aisola, India

stretching
her mother's arm
a little girl in yellow boots
splashes through a puddle
of sunshine

Rick Jackofsky, USA

as if yesterday
our walks home
from elementary school . . .
the little store waiting
with penny candy

Jill Lange, USA

he walked me
through a photo journey
my grandfather
coughing more
with every step

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

walking through
my childhood home
the huge backyard
of my memories
only postage-stamp size

Claire Vogel Camargo, USA

Haiga — Part 3A

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik & Dorothy M. Messerschmitt — USA



Janet Ruth — USA



a darning needle
in the armchair opposite
mending woollen socks . . .
open-fire sparks reflecting
lifetimes lived in love

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

venturing
out into a clear night
of chilled breath
I point out the star
that was his mother's

John Hawkhead, UK

breath slowing
your hands flutter free
of the hospice sheet
with the deepening dawn
a butterfly finds flight

Gavin Austin, Australia

echoes of the breeze
swallowed by the storm,
then silence
before the emptiness
left by your passing

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

torrential rains
nonstop for days now
cold that's bone deep
under this weighted blanket
. . . sadness

malakas na ulan
walang tigil ilang araw na ngayon
ang lamig tagos hanggang buto
sa ilalim nitong mabigat na kumot
... kalungkutan

Lorelyn De la Cruz, Philippines

before the funeral
a flurry of phone calls
of sympathy –
afterwards the grief stricken
left forgotten in their sadness

Keitha Keyes, Australia

each day
I place another rock
on your cairn
building a ladder . . .
we will meet again

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

alone
and recalling wounds
unhealed . . .
i still long for someone
to ease the loneliness

Kala Ramesh, India

after her death
the bowl I'd given Mother
came back to me
filled with fragrant petals
to remember her love

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

mother's orchid plant
bulbs shared between siblings
across gardens
her memory revived
each flowering season

Gwen Bitti, Australia

the faint outline
of her breasts
snug in a kimono
intimacy served
with my bowl of tea

John Budan, USA

fruits are ripening
and the fish are getting fat
tanka poems falling
 like autumn leaves at Your feet
 bend down, Belovèd, pick one

aibíonn na torthaí
tá na héisc ag éirí ramhar
tanka ag titim
 ina nduilleoga fómhair romhat
 crom síos, ardaigh ceann acu

Gabriel Rosenstock, Ireland

the remaining snow
could muffle my footsteps
but not my heartbeat
the way I feel
also shows in my red cheeks

zăpada rămasă
mi-ar fi putut înăbuși pașii
dar nu și bătăile inimii mele
felul în care mă simt
se vede și în obrajii mei roșii

Ana Drobot, Romania

escaping
local zip codes in winter
deep breaths
of fresh mountain air
intertwined legs by the fire

Carol Raisfeld, USA

breaking open
the red chillies
and frying them in the pan —
our recipe
for a long-lasting relationship

Namratha Varadharajan, India

stargazing
a meteoroid burns up
the atmosphere
as I feel your hand
curl into mine

Cynthia Rowe, Australia

seed fluff
always in a state
of falling
how my heart won't settle
for anyone but you

Bryan Rickert, USA

retreating
ever faster
a melting glacier
reveals a gaping scar . . .
deep but barren like our love

Tom Staudt, Australia

abandoned cat
in the shadows
I, too,
have longed for a warm hug
when nights grow cold

Pris Campbell, USA

I'll never be
pretty enough
for you
the drooping petals
of a snake head fritillary

Susan Burch, USA

she cradles the moon
in a fetal position
the vulnerability
of a woman
in unrequited love

Pamela A. Babusci, USA

written in scars
and the wrinkles of time
half-remembered
in the throat of passion
a story left unended

Gavin Austin, Australia

walking home
a star above the roof
of my house . . .
turning dad's key in the lock
i feel less alone

Bernadette O'Reilly, Ireland

softer than crickets
the click of her knitting needles
weaving the tales
of winters long-gone
and those yet to come

sanjuktaa asopa, India (EC)

the cat I buried
is at the patio door
his gold green eyes
all through the long night
wait for me to let him in

Jim Chessing, USA

a dragon plant
cramped in its plastic pot
solitary
in this old brick house —
I've put down my roots

Richard Kakol, Australia

touch the stone
and strike a match —
the hearth
holds in its bones
both *heart* and *earth*

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

colorful confetti
summer party leftovers
autumn has come
through that rustling path
winter will also come

šareni konfeti
ostaci ljetne zabave
jesen je došla
tim putem koji šuška
doći će i zima

Boris Deverić, Croatia

water lilies
pinpricks of soft colors
ripple my paint brush
flowing across white canvas
shades of an impressionist

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

ice flowers
on the window pane . . .
in the studio
the nude model
shivers from cold

eisblumen
auf der Fensterscheibe ...
im Atelier
das Nacktmodel
bibbert vor Kälte

Pitt Buerken, Germany

she slows down
driving through the puddle
quietly splashing
less than the thirsty sparrow
little disturbance of the peace

Ron Scully, USA

a single swan
head tucked under its wing
floating . . .
our coupled hands
tighter as we pass

Jon Hare, USA

a stray cat
curled high on the pergola . . .
a bit of home
is all we look for
wherever we wander

Rupa Anand, India

highway of winds
along his route
the postman stoops
close to the ground
blizzard snow

Christina Chin, Malaysia
M. R. Defibaugh, USA

church bells . . .
from the window
I watch the sleepy port
sinking into the sun's embrace
through the scent of sea

crkvena zvona...
s prozora promatram
usnulu luku
što kroz miris mora
tone u zagrljaj sunca

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

living on pills
to keep the body moving,
a cornucopia
of capsules and tablets
the new “staff of life”

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

a closet
full of contradictions
a wardrobe
of non-conformity
her piece of mind

Eve Ozer, USA

surnames set
our grade school desk order —
reunion seating
osteoporosis
hangs next to Parkinson's

Tyson West, USA

the brittle crust
of day-old snow
returning to work
so soon
after retirement

Ben Oliver, England (EC)

Editor's Choices (EC) – Tanka

seen edge on
the way the breeze tickles
the morning glory,
lets her rest
then does it again

Jim Chessing, USA

I love the fun here. And although this is a human perspective, a delight arises in witnessing the moment that brings us into the “tickle.” A playfulness is captured that gladdens the heart. Our eyes brighten. The simplicity of this tanka is not to be underestimated. If we're able to bring our attention into this moment we are deeply rewarded. All it takes is our conscious attention. Jim's tanka does this for us. Thanks for sharing this moment, Jim. It becomes more delightful with each reading.



remains
of a ghost town
on the estuary —
a dock on the tidal flats
emerges and submerges

Richard Tice, USA

I am left with an emptiness, a picture of desolation. I see the “dock on the tidal flats” and witness the covering and uncovering by a tide. My mind is drawn into the loneliness there. The abandonment. I feel impelled to gaze at the loss. The silence is overwhelming. The people have gone. The “ghosts” are there and yet, not there.

Rereading the poem, the first word, “remains” becomes the word with the haunting. Thank you, Richard. As a Pacific Island Nation, we relate to this tanka and the extreme weather patterns bringing devastation.



no need
to squabble over it
the last slice
of the orange sun
disappears

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

A simplicity but depth draws me into silence, to ponder the implications. It’s as if we are the eternal children who wish to “squabble.” Yet the sun belongs to us all and although gone for the evening, it will return in the morning. Isn’t it a relief not to have to squabble over the sun? It’s out of our hands. For once humans can’t go to war over ownership. The poet’s humour, using the word “squabble” brings a lightness and a smile. However, simultaneously questions arise. What is being left unsaid? Thank you, Ryland.



softer than crickets
the click of her knitting needles
weaving the tales
of winters long-gone
and those yet to come

sanjuktaa asopa, India

There’s an enchanting rhythm in this tanka. I can imagine the ‘click of her knitting needles’ with the family gathered by the fireside. A comfort to those who know the

sound of “softer than crickets” in the contentment found at the hearth. Over the years the sound of needles is witnessed by those telling the stories and those listening. Woven into each garment is the presence of the knitter and loved ones nearby. In the stitch-by-stitch spirit of knitting is an intimacy, a remembering and anticipating of stories “yet to come.” Thank you, sanjuktaa for sharing this beautiful tale of the hearth.



the brittle crust
of day-old snow
returning to work
so soon
after retirement

Ben Oliver, England

I love the humour wrought, yet disappointment, the companion. This change could be precarious. The shock waves, devastating. It appears the “brittle crust” is a perfect analogy. Retirement, that looked so final, has become for the time being, a passing dream. Anger and exhaustion could be possible repercussions, yet the poet is able to make light of it with humour. We are left to wonder . . . Thanks, Ben for sharing this “slice of life”.

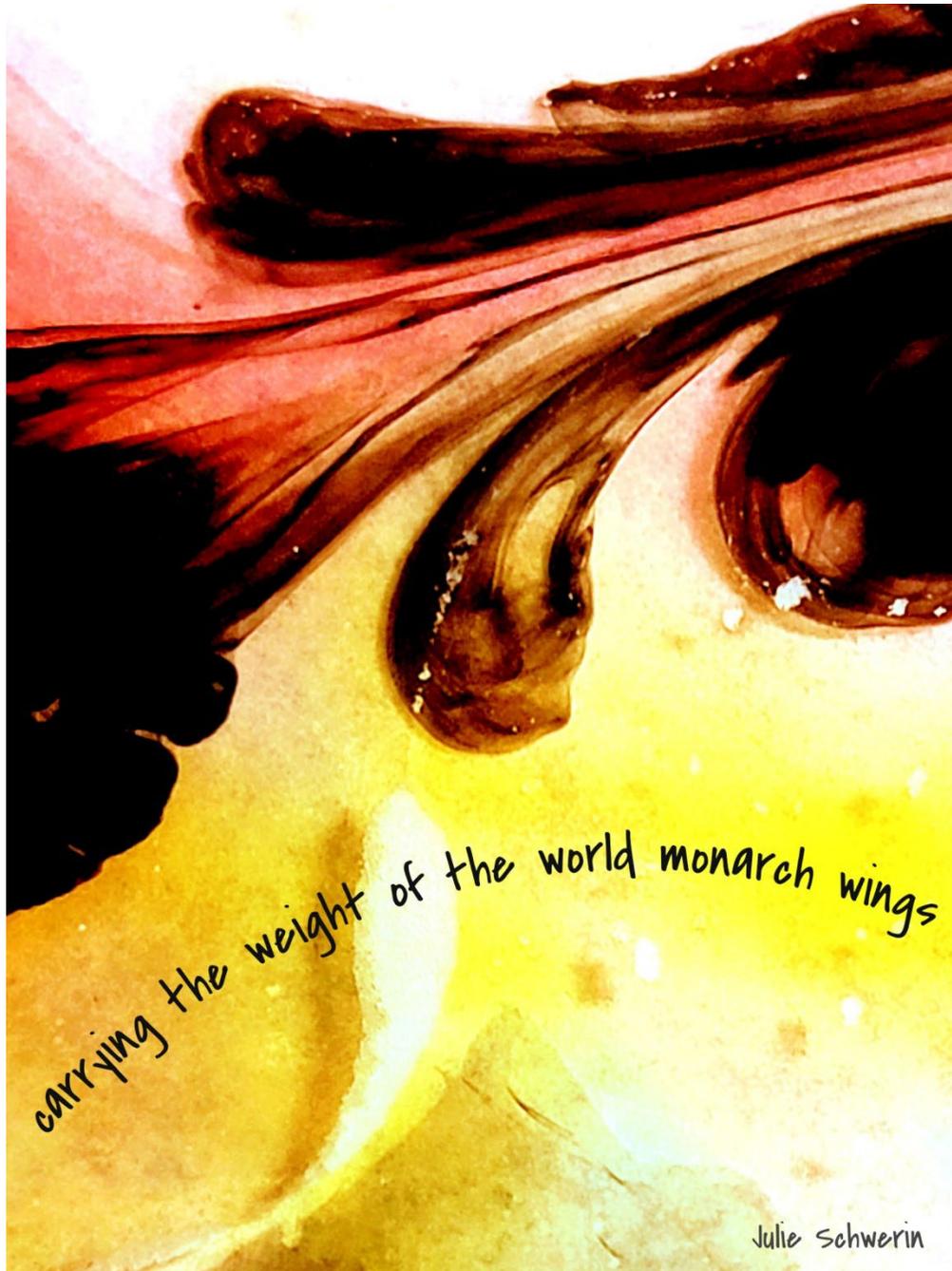
Jenny Fraser

Haiga — Part 3B

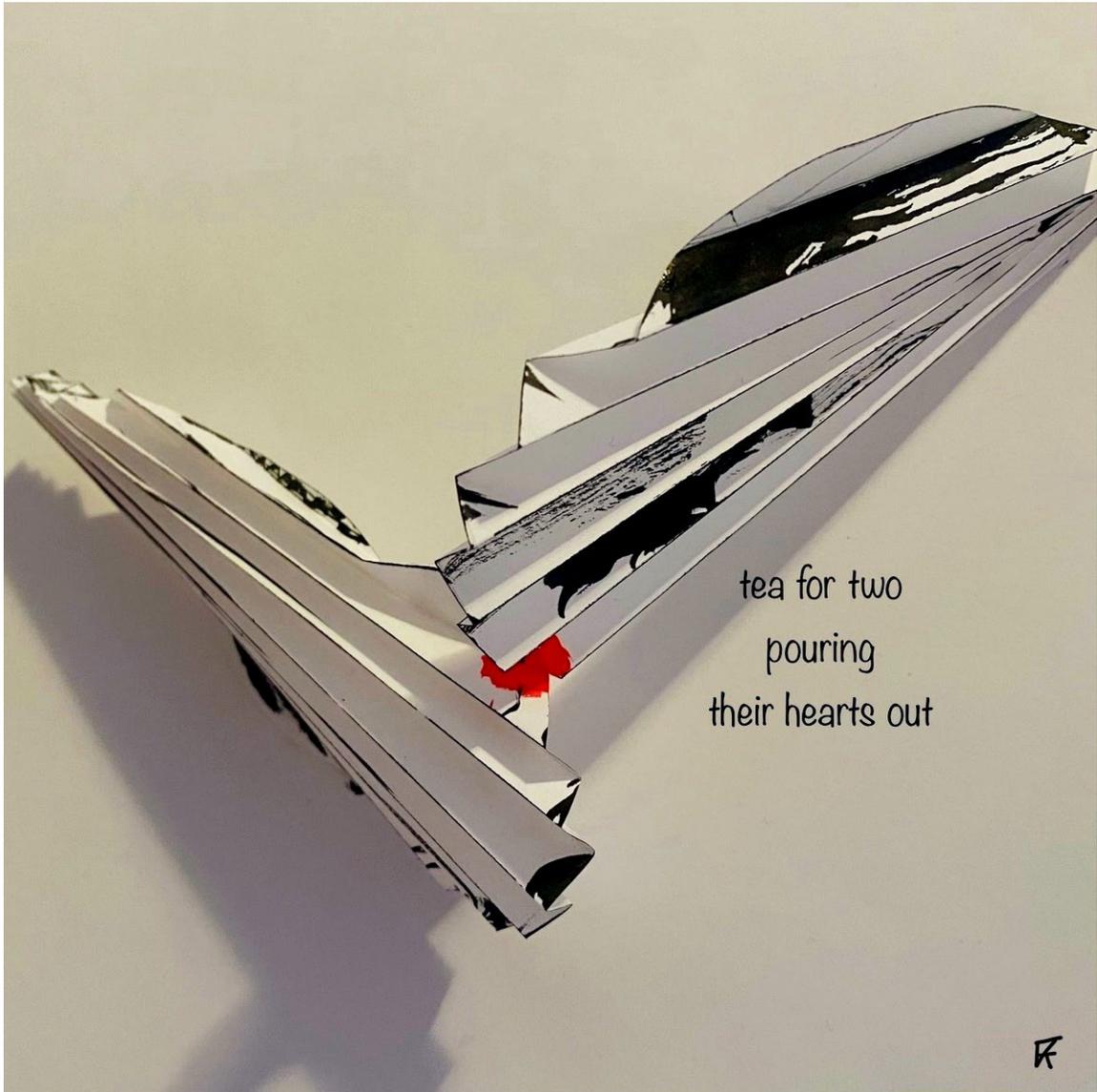
jenny m fraser — New Zealand



Julie Schwerin — USA



Katja Fox — USA



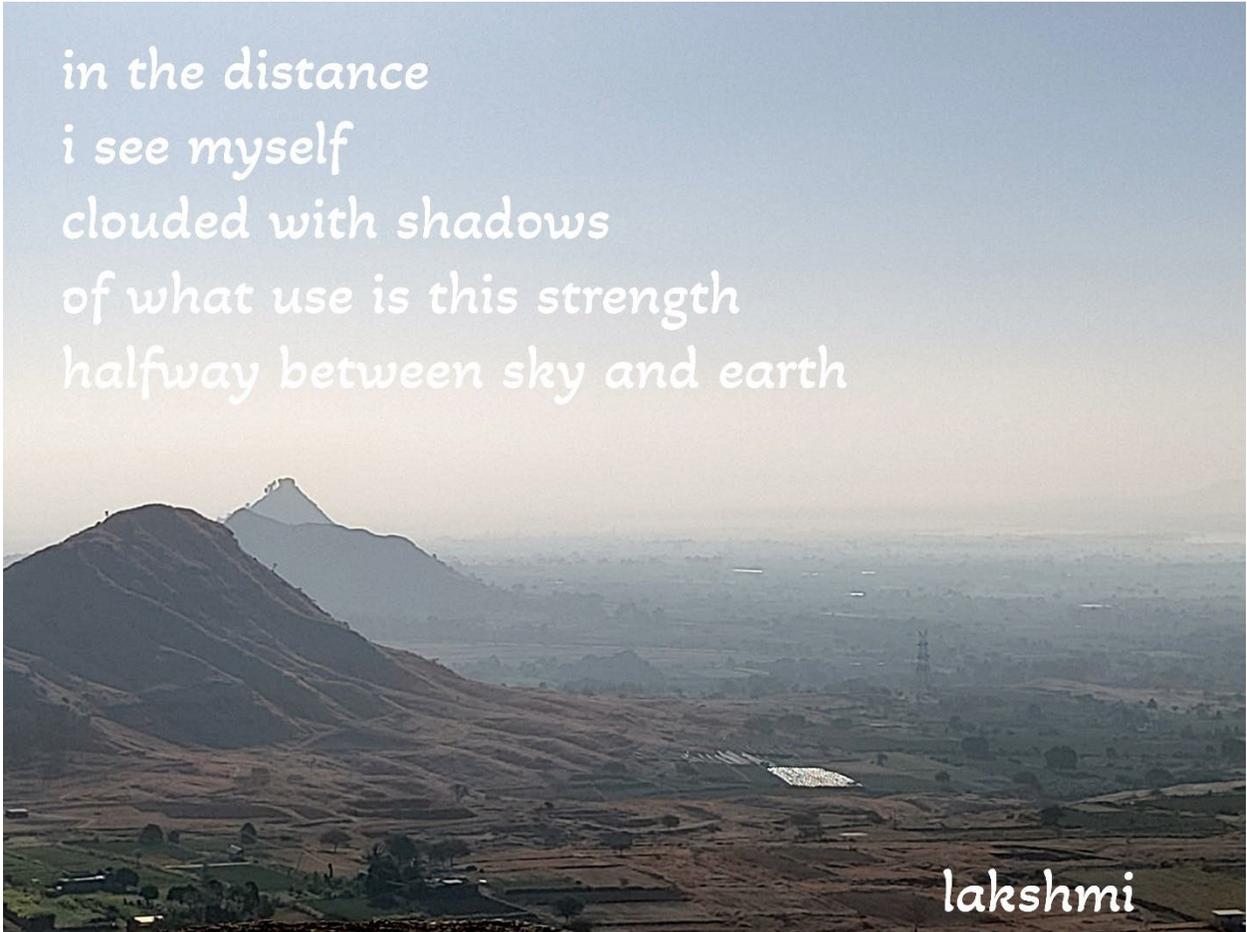
Krzysztof Mxchx (Macha) — Poland



cringed scroll
another spring birdsong
at dawn

Lakshmi Iyer — India

in the distance
i see myself
clouded with shadows
of what use is this strength
halfway between sky and earth



Haibun



Drinking the Sun

Vaguely searching for Lorca

Patrick Stephens, France

We walked along the dusty track, from shade to shade of the ancient olive trees that grew along the route. The summer's afternoon heat drapes the landscape in shimmering gauze; the buzz of the insects in the dry grass fields surrounding us punctuated by the sound of an old truck making its way up the other side of the valley.

Two old men, vaguely searching for an old stone cabin that the villagers had said once belonged to Lorca, his retreat for writing when he lived nearby. Two old men, not really caring whether we found it or not, stop to share a drink of water and a moment of easy intimacy under the Spanish sun.

Poets' dreams drift
under the Spanish sun
cicadas singing

The Whisper of Souls

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

A multitude of sparks in a V-formation leads me through the meandering labyrinth of ancient culture to recognize the deepest secrets of life.

Sumptuous corridors branch out like philosophical thoughts traveling on a giant bird's wings into infinity. Their structure is like a supernatural dream in which I have recently perfected the theory of relativity and chopped up my ego so that I can pass through the starry portal.

As the strange glow slowly turns to whisper, I wonder if these are the souls that tell the universe the transcendent stories on their way to eternity.

The soul of the cosmos is like a rose with an endless number of petals, scattered by a recursive algorithm into zillions of unknowns many of which will never be grasped.

I had no idea there were so many turning points and bends. A (living) being needs much more to solve a jigsaw puzzle of life.

Reflections of the inexplicable pass by the illusions of shadows, and the old times revive my memories, so that my suppressed emotions come flooding back.

I used to be an ordinary pedestrian, and now I explore my astral dreams from the perspective of the impossible.

As the distant echo returns to me like a boomerang, I cut the last connection with reality so that I can reach a higher meaning.

I may return when my unfulfilled desires suppress my dreams, and it's time now to cocoon myself in a myriad of entities so that I can illuminate the starry sky with my new cognitions.

starless night . . .
climbing the pathway
fireflies

SUPERNOVA

Stuart Bartow, USA

To peer into its mirror,
what brookies lurked
in that brook, I lay on the grass
where hundreds rose,
ephemerals in a cloud vanishing
as soon as they appeared.
Mere specks, yet how clear
it seemed, motion and spark
through dew and grass disturbed,
the most distant stars,
the path a comet turns.

a busyness of midges
a hundred years
in a day

Radura / Glade

Stefano d'Andrea, Italy

In the profound silence of a radiant glade—lying on the grass under a cobalt sky that looks like a porthole—I listen to the tenderness of the moss and the growth of mushrooms, the breath of the bark and the tricks of the spiders, the flutters of dragonflies and the shyness of salamanders . . .

while memories and regrets sink like blades.

still on the run . . .
the sweet complicity
of the raspberries

Nel silenzio profondo di una radiosa radura—sdraiato sull'erba sotto un cielo cobalto, rotondo come un oblò—ascolto la tenerezza del muschio e il crescere dei funghi, il respiro delle cortecce e le acrobazie dei ragni, i frulli delle libellule e il pudore delle salamandre...

mentre i ricordi e i rimpianti affondano come lame.

ancora in fuga ...
la dolce complicità
di un lampone

The river goes . . .

Tyler McIntosh, USA

bend by bend between the banks of our birth. Young and lost in love I come to its flow
to ask questions about bare skin. As a warm spring rain falls, I slide my nakedness into
snowmelt arms and the river tells me about the brotherhood of storm sweat soil sea
softness

cough of an engine
the lakebed
full of stones

Leafing Through

Andrew Taylor-Troutman, USA

A Brown female cardinal zips across the trail chased by two red males. Squirrels shimmy to their nests woven of sticks. White birches grow like complex sentences punctuated by pine tree exclamation marks. Rotting logs meld into the earth. Boulders return to dust. And a creek singing down the hillside as darkness, never hurrying, comes.

exploded stars
the story of all
that is

Point of View

Tom Staudt, Australia

I silence the television. War. Earthquakes. Famine. Extinctions, all screaming at me.

The constant tragedies overwhelm me. Trying to adapt some donate, others volunteer, and I try breathing exercises.

When I look at the bigger picture something becomes abundantly clear.

We are all living on a tiny spinning rock, hurdling around a flaming ball of gas, and racing through space faster than we can imagine . . .

rolling thunder
an orchid's petal
clings to the stem

Heavenly Body

Edward Cody Huddleston, USA

I'm a constellation in progress; waiting for my stars to align, for the dots to connect themselves, for the things to come to take shape.

true north
the needle digs into
the grooves

Goblin City

Anna Cates, USA

Dark are the skies above the goblin city
Dusky towers toll with doom
Deep are the dungeons, thriving without pity
Dark are the skies above the goblin city
Grim are the gazes, forkfuls greasy and gritty
Dim are the troll patrols – festering gloom
Black thunder booms above the goblin city
Towers tolling, doling out doom . . .

Dusk – a hunchback hobbles across the bridge

Unravelling

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

Moonrise is early, night falls pitch-heavy flecked with startled stars. It's the time of shadows and premonition beneath a round silver eye. I hurry along the track between clutching branches, potholes like gaping black mouths and slip-slide over grimacing corrugations. Wings flap nearby, a cry a curlew, my feet tangle roots snaking across cracked earth . . .

shifting umbra
teetering on the rim
of the abyss

What is worth more?

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Art or life? Shouting with her fist raised in the air, the pink-haired climate activist turns around, throwing one can of tomato soup after another at Vincent van Gogh's Sunflowers. A pin-drop silence envelops the gallery.

She glances around the room for a moment or two, as though interested in these confused but curious people. Then with legs crossed, she sits silently on the floor and glues her hands to the wall. The clicking of cameras becomes loud . . . and louder.

beams of sunlight
a polar bear and her cub
drift on an ice-floe

Message to the Artist

Hazel Hall, Australia

I pick up the tissue box. It's the supermarket's "home brand" series, but tastefully designed in muted waves of blue and white with a strip of washed-out yellow. I press the perforations on the "open" tab.

ribboned ocean
the tickle of breakers
around the toes

The tab removed an oval cavity breaks the flow of lines. I pluck out a tissue between two clear plastic sheets beneath, wondering why I always choose the same design for a tissue box that will finish its days in the recycling bin.

caught in the surf
of snuffles and sniffs—
another wave

Turning the box over I look more closely. See, for the first time, your artist's statement. How could I be so blind? A competition winner. Did others shoppers notice your lovely art? Or, did they grab the box like I did? Shove it in the trolley. Rip out tissues without one appreciative glance at the container? But surely you must have known that art belongs to the public after it leaves the studio?

dabbling in fame
the fate of creation
after sale

Respect. I hope they paid you well. When empty I will snip the top of this box, making four diagonal cuts. Pressing the four segments inside the box and with the aid of four staples, I will create an attractive tray for holding future masks.

Icon

Tim Gardiner, United Kingdom

I always knew your cold prose would land in my inbox, profile pic unchanged with its feral smile and wild eyes, the promise drowned in the reality of you . . . and me.

slow click

I cannot cheat

the mouse

No words left . . .

Mike Montreuil, Canada

Sandra is anxious. How do I know? I just know, as she is my first true love in a once upon a time fairy tale.

no anger, no tears

She called me twice today. In both cases, her anger was sent to voicemail while I endured an unplanned and endless meeting with an upset client. You could be one also, since you are reading this nonsense.

never a goodbye

Sandra must be climbing the walls. How do I know? I just know. It's Saturday night, and the boys are here for Hockey Night in Canada.

the door forever closed

A & O

Beate Conrad, Germany

locked in the room of the world
leaving you all alone to seek
out the promised land sometimes
I myself will return to my room some-
time I'll pass the bouncer on
Jacob's ladder a petrified tree

spring wind the memory deeper than goodbyes

Bedside Manner

Richard Grahn, USA

frosty hospital window —
from this bed
my reflection for a view

After spending a sleepless night listening to my ticker for the slightest irregularity — even the ones in my imagination — I finally doze off just before dawn. The cardiologist wakes me an hour later, accompanied by my favorite nurse, Carol, and tells me my heart is in good shape. It just pops out of me like air out of a balloon: "That must mean I have a good heart."

His glare could freeze anti-freeze. "Carol has your discharge papers," he grunts before swaggering out of the room.

code blue —
"x-ray his funny bone
for signs of life — stat"

Penance (EC)

Iliyana Stoyanova, UK

It's not even 10 am but he downs a double whiskey. The shadow of a man he has become. I keep on stirring my coffee unable to even take a sip, unable to hold my tears, unable to accept and forgive.

Two hours turn into two days or two eons . . . time is indeed relative. At the doctor's appointment he starts telling stories about me as if I'm not present, as if that's not my name. I feel the weight of the doctor's gaze on me and dare not meet his eyes.

pigment
on wet paper
a grey heron in mist

Then & Now

Robert Erlandson, USA

Laid off, depressed, and cleaning my office. I drop a ceramic bowl, 200 years old, given to me by my grandfather. Looking at it on the floor I identify with the shards.

all the broken pieces kintsugi

Author's note: - Kintsugi is the Japanese art of putting broken pottery pieces back together with gold.

MEN IN DOORWAYS (EC)

Gerry Mc Donnell, Ireland

I used to walk home at night, past derelict tenements, to my home in the inner city. I would sometimes be coming from a drinking session in town. It was safe to walk home at night in the '70's. There was a man standing in the doorway of one of the tenements. He was always there, alone and silent. I never felt threatened by him. He had jet black hair which was butter pasted.

My father stood in our doorway in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigarette. He was overseeing me cutting the grass in our front garden. We lived on a main road near a junction. Traffic would slow to a stop at our house. Drivers and passengers glanced our way. I felt self-conscious, like I was on show. It didn't bother my father. Maybe he was proud of his son, doing a good job, cutting the grass.

There was a man who was very aware of his physique. We were in the same weight-training, basement club. However, I was not in his league. He was muscle bound. He used to stand at his hall door, stripped to the waist. He took up a pose which would best show off his torso. He stood there at traffic peak times, craving the attention of the public.

Another man stood in the doorway of a pub. His hands were covered in faded tattoos. He was waiting for someone to come along and give him the 'entrance fee'. He was tall and stood straight, legs apart, as if waiting for a fight to break out. He appeared to me to be trembling, perhaps suffering withdrawal symptoms from alcohol, in full view of the bus passengers. He was glued to that spot. He had nowhere else to go.

around the feet
of those on thresholds
the rustle of dead leaves

Depth

Subir Ningthouja, India

Grandfather had a habit, strange to a child. When he met friends on the way, they paid obeisance to each other saying, "Radhe Krishna." Then they cried, tears streaming down their faces.

When I looked at their faces, I felt the tears were not of joy or sorrow. What was it that made them cry? I still don't know.

village pond
a folded lotus
in the mist

A Worn Eraser

Glenn G. Coats. USA

1972. My father's first classroom is down the farthest corridor — last room on the right — far from the main office. He has twenty-four students. His children do not walk in straight lines; talk too loud during lunch. They are not ready when buses are called for dismissal.

On sunny afternoons, after a spelling or science lesson, my father looks at their pale faces and says, "You all need some fresh air." The students follow him out the back exit where the forest borders school property. Sometimes the kids sit around as my father reads or tells a story. He teaches them how to play baseball and soon they are running from one cardboard base to another. At times, a borzoi will step from the woods and almost tiptoe up to the children. They stroke the dog's head as if he were a pony. No one ever tells my father that he can't bring his class outside, that he shouldn't skip a social studies lesson, or that a strange animal can be dangerous. The students and my father find their own way through that first year.

early autumn
the hummingbird tries them all
Mexican petunias

Time passes. There are behavioral objectives, skills arrays, after school meetings, administrators who come and go, years with Christmas plays, years without, retirements and transfers, years with contracts, years without, reciprocal teaching, feedback and mini-lessons, parent conferences and back-to-school nights, observations, evaluations, nights with sleep, and nights without.

Near the end, my father attends mandatory classes on the new Language Arts Curriculum. Learns about writing workshops and Venn diagrams; how to respond to paragraphs and poems. The coordinator describes all she has garnered from research.

“Some of you will still want to close your doors and continue to do what you think is best for the child.” The coordinator is looking straight at my father when she says that.

early dark
a piece of yellow chalk
on the sidewalk

Déjà vu

Dan Hardison, USA

The old postcard is postmarked September 22, 1913. On the front is a picture of a boarding school for girls. The message reads: "Dearest, I got your letter this morning and sure did enjoy it. Will answer it real soon. Please be good and next Wednesday send me a package of chocolate cakes. If you send it then, I will get them by Friday. Am very happy up here. Love to all from the 'noise of the family'."

No matter the amount of planning and preparations we make for children, the child will ad lib all the way. It is always interesting how much children of yesterday and today are alike.

a new day
the mockingbird's
old song

What's Your Fancy?

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

The sounds of spring float through my desk window. Two girls walk on the sidewalk in front of my house. They giggle at something I can't hear. The younger one, maybe a first-grader, steps on top of the decorative rocks in the parking strip. She picks up an orange or purple rock. At first, I want to call out not to take it. Instead, I recognize myself in that little girl and wonder: *Which rock did she pick? Why did she choose that one?* They continue on their way. I whisper: *Always notice what your heart loves, what calls to it.* As she walks home, hopefully she won't toss the rock somewhere, but will keep it as a reminder to be curious.

gold flecks
in her rock collection . . .
childhood dreams

Lullaby

Alice Wanderer, Australia

As I close my eyes, paperbarks. Dark domes covered in carrot cake frosting. Each twig tipped with flowers. Each floret tasselled. Each tassel feathered. A perfumed soufflé whorl.

As I close my eyes, paperbarks. From one bulked-up trunk, a strip of strudel-layered bark. It's cream with suede-like, pinkish under-skins. A pillow beneath my almost sleeping cheek.

How to make sense of it? Paperbarks are street trees here. I know them well. But not the one that haunts this waking dream.

It's massive. A trunk to fill a room. It grows out of the mirrored moonlit swamp they drained to build this town.

For weeks, it lifts me in its arms. It lifts those arms right through the roof which falls away, as fall away it must.

cheek on her knees

The Faraway Tree

on the radio

Aftermath

Reid Hepworth, Canada

Today during math class, I watch Ralph, the kid in front of me, fidgeting with something inside his desk. He seems pretty preoccupied, which piques my interest and since I hate math, I just watch him instead.

Then I see smoke seeping out of his desk. It doesn't take long for the other kids to notice and then all heck breaks loose. The teacher yells "FIRE" and runs out to the hall to pull the fire alarm and we all line up like little robots, the way we were taught during fire drill practice.

After the entire school is evacuated and Ralph's desk is hosed down by the firefighters, we are given the "all clear" to head back inside. This is when my teacher pulls me aside and asks me to take Ralph to the office.

briar patch
learning to tread
lightly

Not in the Cards

Bryan Rickert, USA

Dear Shayla,

Mom took away all my pokemon cards after I flunked the math test on tuesday so my friday night plans are ruined. I was wanting to give you the pikachu card when we played friday and was hoping to kiss you after that. Maybe I can still kiss you friday and give you the card later.

From,
Kyle

young love
not hating the player
but the game

Practical Solutions

Pitt Buerken, Germany

My grandmother has a mind of her own, which she is always able to assert vigorously. When, in her opinion the new dining table is too high, grandpa has to saw off a piece of the legs.

At the time when the apple tree grows too big for her, and she can no longer pick the fruits at ground level, grandpa has to shorten the trunk at the bottom and cut out a piece, which almost goes flooey.

summer delights
enjoying the self-picked fruits
in the tree's shadow

Haiga — Part 4A

Linda Papanicolaou — USA



Luminita Suse — Canada



Some time ago . . .

Wiesław Karliński, Poland

As he entered the room, he sighed deeply and rubbed his hand over his unshaven face. The next day a nurse complained about him. He tricked her by recommending aging pork jelly to be breaded and fried. The neighbor on the left remembered him as an incomparable storyteller. I know his stories too. I know that at the end of the war, with an Italian Tyrolean named I, they were picking young crows from the nests. Soon after, I was very careful not to cut him while shaving . . .

rainy morning
the scent of home
in the hospital

Jakiś czas temu ...

Wchodząc do pokoju westchnął głęboko i przetarł dłonią nieogoloną twarz. Następnego dnia poskarżyła się na niego pielęgniarka. Oszukał ją, zalecając starzejącą się wieprzową galaretę panierować i obsmażać. Sąsiad po lewej zapamiętał go jako niezrównanego gawędziarza. Znam też jego historie. Wiem, że pod koniec wojny z włoskim Tyrolczykiem o imieniu I wyciągali z gniazd młode wrony. Wkrótce potem bardzo uważałem, żeby go nie skaleczyć podczas golenia...

dżdżysty ranek
zapach domu
w szpitalu

The Garden

Gavin Austin, Australia

Christmas, and the city is ringed with flames. Glowing apocalyptic orange, the sky begins to rain ash.

In the garden of *The Sacred Heart*, beneath your window, I sit on the seat where we sat on your good days: your bony hand weightless on my thigh. Looking off into middle-distance, through birdsong and the hum of traffic, I gaze at the bougainvillea vine bleeding over the pathway.

Above me death stalks the corridors, waits silently in dimly lit rooms, or rattles at the back of pallid throats.

wooden bench
the feather
left behind

Last Breath

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland

rain on the pane
the cat on my lap
still warm

I promise to ring you back, I need a moment. The care staff place your cake on the table by your chair. I see you blow out the candles with one breath. I didn't think you'd have the puff. Ninety-eight years old today, becoming less and less.

withered leaves falling
the darkness deepens
I murmur a prayer

Cogito, Ergo Sum

Dian Duchin Reed, USA

She picks out the perfect dress, puts on new stockings, slips her feet into her highest, shiniest heels. (She's always been a sharp dresser.) Sets out down the road. Walks and walks. (She's always been a walker.) Does she doubt for a moment? Decides to carry on anyway. Walks for miles, until her feet are blistered and bleeding. A kind fellow notices her distress, notices the address on her bracelet, escorts her to the senior community on the bus.

After the call informing me that she needs a different kind of care, I set out. (I've always been a calm person.) I sob the whole way there.

the *who's*
of a great horned owl
full of darkness

The frog of Bashō

Carmela Marino, Italy

red sky
walking for a bit longer
with the sunset

I turn on the lights, the sound of the keys on the table, the children's laughter, the teapot whistles: it's the scent of home. I move the tent as the first raindrops fall and the bare garden announces autumn; tears fall into the tea and a small circle widens. The weight of pain holds me on the first step as the sky keeps changing.

autumn light
sipping from the cup
my reflection

Sucked by the whirlpool I dive into the past gathering the thought of faded scents and return to my Ithaca: The goat milk on the fire boils and Mom has just returned from the countryside and among the noises of the house I meet a little girl.

muscle pains
a coin rolls
on the floor

I can't remember what day it is, breathing deeply I open my eyes in front of the mirror. Again, the hair around the face, the tired look, the lost weight, how the disease has changed me inside, out. On the fogged glass I erase memories, the tap water continues to flow between my fingers

from star to star
my soul belongs
to no place

After having reached the bottom, I hear you saying my name over and over, which brings me to the surface in a great leap. I can't change my destiny but I can choose it in this infinite space of variations. My fingers glide gently along the scar, suddenly a ray of moonlight begins to project the film of my life: who I have been and who I am and that I will be stronger than the disease.

parallel worlds
from one branch to another
birds chirping

Lights out but I can't sleep, I look out of my fears, at the window of the tenth floor, I feel closer to my God. The night swallows everything even my thoughts, only a soft memory keeps me company

lunar orbit
turning and turning
my wedding ring

The rain has stopped. I stir the sky with my finger, who knows what my star is. A green color takes the night out of my eyes. It is a tiny toy frog that without croaking reminds me that I'm alive

fog in the morning
paradise can wait
a bit longer

Aftermath

Lynn Edge, USA

The florist hands my daughter and me a loose-leaf binder filled with photos of funeral sprays. Turning a page, we know sunflowers are what my husband would want draped over his pine casket.

After his burial, I develop an aversion to anything decorated with sunflowers. Handbags, fanny packs, leggings — it is surprising where these golden designs appear.

what remains
of the sycamore's shade
a mound of sawdust

In Memoriam: Fire flies on stage

Dr Brijesh Raj, India

The auditorium thrums with excitement. Before them, eyes closed, body rapt with the tension of her sitar strings, the artist waits with almost theatrical poise. The drummer and the others share the unbearable stillness.

Without warning, she bursts forth, fingers flying. She commandeers sun beams and dancing dust motes onto the night stage. The *morchang* tilts sharply, squeezed between the clarinet and sitar.

A crash of wild waves, the searing torment of callused hands, the plaintive cries of a young girl. One hears it, sees it all, breathless. Until hope seeps through. And a dream for a different tomorrow. A reunion of silver rain and sparkling waters, shimmering and dancing. In relief. Until the next time.

crescendo
a caterpillar in the arms
of the red ants

Drifting Away

Richard Kakol, Australia

When you burn a piece of wood, what remains behind — the ashes, the wind-blown smoke — has the same mass as the original object.

Today I visit your grave again, with blue and white flowers . . . Twenty Christmases after that first season without you, the loss still weighs me down.

Moving closer to the headstone, I inadvertently step on a snail, its fragile shell crunching underfoot.

That would have upset you, believing in the principle of Ahimsa — doing no harm. All living things have the right to exist.

Life goes on . . . but I feel your absence. I talk to you still, but I can no longer hear the sound of your voice.

firecrackers
on the summer solstice
— smoke drifts away

Close

Sean O'Connor, Ireland

There was always one on the window sill above the sink in our little bathroom, to the left, a bottle of sorts, not glass but a light metal, smooth, off-white, with a discreet logo in a light bluey – grey. Elegant and simple. Beside it, always, his metal razor. It looked complicated, the razor, hefty, mechanical, opened by turning a knurled part at the base of its handle.

new-mown grass –
how I long to smell it
my dad's aftershave

Back to square one

Mircea Moldovan, Romania

I got home from the funeral more tired than ever. I'm glad I'm alone and nobody is around to bother me with meaningless words. A few days ago, I removed all the mirrors in the house, so that I do not even have to look at myself. I put on an old vinyl of Leonard Cohen, pour two measures of vodka and take my dad's old rifle down from the wall.

always
the owl's voice
crystal moon

For My Cookie Lady

Francis W. Alexander, USA

I remember first seeing her on the city bus. Spunky and friendly, she'd include me in the conversations between her and the bus driver.

My friend driving me to the store is the reason I stopped riding the bus. One December I got a note of eviction from my apartment. The Covid epidemic stopped me from being thrown out on the streets. In June, I became a tenant in a high-rise building. The first day I moved in, I saw the woman but couldn't figure out where I knew her from. The next day, she helped me take parts of a bed to my apartment. That's when I realized that she was the "bus lady."

Weeks later, I started seeing cookies on my door. One day, she came and gave me some self-baked blueberry muffins. As the pandemic continued, I saw less of her. Recently, I inquired about her and was told that she had died two years ago during the isolation.

wisps of cloud:
the cat's graceful leap
from my seat

Fully-fledged

Rupa Anand, India

I don't remember where or when I bought it. But the black printed sari with fronds of delicate red flowers was worn on many evening soirées both on board the ship and off it. I was young and slender back then and it draped so well. Wearing black was fashionable and chic, teamed with a string of grey pearls.

It languished in my cupboard for thirty-five years until the day I decided to bring it out. Giving it to my daughter, now in her early forties, I ask her to use it in her furniture studio. Later, seeing it fitted so well on the arms of a chair, I smile with nostalgia.

summer walk
up the gravel road
— mama's antique wrap

Acoustic Night

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

Barren parking lot, snow sifting through pallid lamplight, a local bar with a few hardcore and reruns of the game on flat-screen.

Scheduled here for a gig, we haul gear and chill over a pitcher of Molson. Then one-by-one they straggle in. Paunchy old “hippies” and care-creased “Woodstock” gals. Hugs and fist bumping. Wings and nacho platters arrive. More beer and a growing buzz of expectancy. House muzak replaced by amplifier hum. Instruments drawn lovingly from oddly-shaped black cases. The Mike is Open.

A petite lady with the lungs of Janice, the Crosby double rocking his bass, Tiny Tim with ukulele ditties, spacy Brushman Steve swishing time. Decades of practice, picking Taylor acoustics and banjo riffs. Our Calumet River Band being Trampled by Turtles. A psychedelic bass in jazz harmony with dueling alto and tenor saxophones. Mouth harps wailing the blues.

Four hours of nostalgic talent, then they Drift Away, just like the song.

telephone pole
tattooed with staples
of forgotten gigs

Molson: Canadian beer

Janice Joplin: (1943–1970) American rock-blues singer

David Crosby: (1941–2023) American folk-rock singer

Tiny Tim (Herbert Khaury) (1932-1996): American singer/ukulele player

Brushman... Stephen Szawlowksi of Musicians Without Borders playing a lap held drumskin and an electric bass

Taylor: world famous acoustic guitars

Calumet River Band: garage acoustic trio in Orleans, Ontario, Canada

Trampled by Turtles: American bluegrass-folk band

Drift Away: song by Matthew Shafer (aka Uncle Kracker) (1974-present), American singer and musician.

In the Drunk's Eye

John Zheng, USA

A beer can rolls in the middle of the blacktop and leaps up to tap-dance like Fred Astaire. It slips, loses balance, tumbles to the curb, and lies there like a drunk. Soon it climbs up, staggers back to the road, and raps with backward rolls, pitch-tucks, and front somersaults. After bowing, it wobbles away, eyes bulging like Homer Simpson's. Then it returns to perform drunken boxing: swaying, hitting, dodging, grappling, fainting. Before it bounces away like a dancing piggy, an ambulance, sirens blaring, crushes it flat.

midnight juke
the saxophone wails
a rueful tune

Music Critics

Gail Oare, USA

It's one of those spring evenings when we open the kitchen window and turn up the volume of the music mix. Several turkeys are weaving through the trees at the edge of the woods on their way to check the dregs of the bird feeder. They hesitate briefly when they hear a violin, but then continue toward the house cautiously. The subsequent Sousa march with trombone, drum and trumpet seems to embolden them. The flock steps further forward. Some light rock, a short folk ballad. Then as they reach the middle of the yard, Willie Nelson's voice abruptly slices the air. *In the twilight glow I see them, Blue eyes cryin' in the rain...* With one swift pivot, the birds turn and run as fast as they can into the underbrush and out of sight.

rose bush
a lingering thorn
beneath the blossom

First Chilly Day

Elizabeth Shack, USA

Beauty in the goldfinch that flutters to walnut perches under a flat sky. Beauty in the yellow leaves that cascade in a memory of butterflies. Beauty in bright goldenrod dancing to the drone of a cricket. Beauty in the rabbit that flashes across the path to become a trail of waving grasses.

fat bee
on a thistle head
for how long

Storm Update

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

the sky a heavy gray dark covering that dulls the morning light becomes gloomier as the day moves into dusk the lamps I turn on walking the rooms intensify the contrast of a night-filled day of quiet with snow coming down in soft and delicate flakes falling in profusion accumulates in mounds and stacks building as the hours pass into dawn of the next day with an expanse of whiteness and a silence broken by the exuberant voices of crows exhorting me to move my stiff arthritic bones to window after window to look and believe again in magic

giving in
the permission of snow
to be lazy

Harvest Dreams

Farah Ali, UK

I wrap fleece around the tree to protect it from frost. During the long winter I imagine that first succulent bite and make plans for the windfall. Months pass, delicate white flowers appear and slowly, ever so slowly, the fruit grows.

a single tree
who needs
an orchard?

Almost every day I prod and squeeze, but not yet, not yet. And then it happens: the heavily perfumed, sun-engorged plums yield to my touch. A few have already fallen onto the grass, but no matter. I return to the kitchen, sweat prickling my neck, a full basket in my arms.

half-eaten plum
in its core
a moth caterpillar

Nocturnal Hunt (EC)

Emma Alexander Arthur, Norway

As the sun dips below the horizon, a feeling of serenity falls across the fjord. The vibrant colours of pinks and blues diffuse into a deep indigo as the moon rises, bringing a mystical and ethereal energy to the night. I sit peacefully atop a mossy rock, feeling the chill of the evening air and gaze at a heron's graceful flight. It glides silently over the still waters, its wings outstretched in search of prey. Diving suddenly beneath the surface, it re-emerges with a fish wriggling in its beak. Its graceful silhouette then slowly disappears into the fading light of the dusk sky.

rising moon
gentle ripples lap
against the shore

A Ride in the Desert

Padmini Krishnan, United Arab Emirates

Camels nibble on the sparse grass covering both sides of Dubai's hot streets. They stare curiously at the giant cars that roll through the roads. We dust the wind-blown sand on our clothes and wonder about the humidity. "This is nothing," laughs our cabbie. "Wait until July comes!" We shudder at what July and August hold for us, but the other family accompanying us to the desert safari seem carefree.

The Toyota Land Cruiser, while sailing through the sand, jumps unexpectedly. The women and children cry out, but the men remain silent, seemingly unexcited, or perhaps pretending to be brave. After a lot of dune-bashing, we reach our banquet hall to taste some Arabian coffee. A couple of camels stroll outside the hall. I ask the trainer, "Can my daughter have a ride?" He nods and the camel sits obediently in front of him. The trainer looks as dry as his animal. If only camels could eat sand and drink wind.

salinized water
a hint of madness
in each step

Magic

Carol Raisfeld, USA

We hear cicadas in the trees of Provence as wavy lines of lavender stretch to the horizon. A tandem bike ride takes us off the beaten path to brilliant sunflower fields as wide as the sky. Resting in the shade near a flowing stream, with birds singing overhead.

And then . . . the gift of walking through Monet's Garden of flowers knowing its sweetness will wrap me in comfort for many nights to come.

On the Sorgue River, beneath a canopy of majestic thousand-year-old oaks, we float by village walls as church bells toll.

in and out
of dreams
Monet's water lilies

Reverence

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

(Written at Hueco Tanks, West Texas)

After you hike onto the rock, stay on the rock. Don't touch the rock art. Don't step on the soil. Definitely don't step on the huecos. There lie the eggs of brine shrimp just waiting for the next rainfall to resurrect for the billionth generation.

another aoudad

shits on the ground . . .

shining wind

Tagaloa's Hook

On Occasion of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai Eruption, January 2022

Matthew Caretti, Pago Pago, American Samoa

The old myth says it was so. Is so. How these islands have been created. Continue to be created. But no talking chief to tell the tale now. The doves have gone silent. The cocks, too. Only the occasional bay of a stray imitates the sirens. The sirens. Near and far. The cars stream at their insistence away from the coast. The drivers remember the last. Its coming. The wave. The waves.

death poems
learning from the sea
how to mourn

Something more mistaken for a thunderclap. My own insulation of not understanding. Of distance. Of hope. A healing in time lost somewhere out at sea. The deeps and shallows. Shallows and deeps. The Bikini Atoll mushroom clouds have become those of the Tongan Trench. The sea floor bending at the insistence of His hook. Then the plume. The lightning strikes. The wave. The waves.

sonic boom
when old gods
roar again

The new year's babies quake in their cribs. Quake beside mothers and fathers and grandparents. Are later lulled by a gentle rocking. Then a tangerine sunrise after a long night. The ships here return safely to port. The port once more sets the stevedores to their work. Yet harbors more distant remain closed. Awaiting still the wave. The waves.

tsunami warning
fruit bats circling
back circling

Ground Zero

Caroline Giles Banks, USA

As a child in Japan Arata Isozaki (1931-2022) saw the utter destruction of Hiroshima. In a flash the city, devoid of buildings, became an emptiness asking for possibilities. How does an architect who knows the transience of cities and the eventuality of their decay design for the future? I consider Isozaki's sublime Art Tower Mito, completed in 1990. This iconic 100-meter-tall structure is comprised of many triangular pyramids stacked in varying orientations. Like a jazz riff of seeming contradictions the titanium tower appears to twist and turn, a shiny silver megalith reflecting that and this, after and before.

dreams

sift

fissures

between

memories

Blue

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

The blue sky, the blue sea, the bluebells, the blue crystal, the blue pen, the blue notebook, the blue jumper, the blue ribbon, the blue scarf, the blue balloon, the blue carpet, the blue rose. Obsessed you say . . .

blue jay
a bell jar of song
in forest light

Editor's Choices (EC) – Haibun

A big thank-you to both the first-time haibun-poets and the stalwarts who have chosen to entrust cattails with your work. It is your passion and inspiration that will keep this form alive. Here are three poems which I hope will touch you the way I have been moved.

Penance

Iliyana Stoyanova, UK

It's not even 10 am but he downs a double whiskey. The shadow of a man he has become. I keep on stirring my coffee unable to even take a sip, unable to hold my tears, unable to accept and forgive.

Two hours turn into two days or two eons . . . time is indeed relative. At the doctor's appointment he starts telling stories about me as if I'm not present, as if that's not my name. I feel the weight of the doctor's gaze on me and dare not meet his eyes.

pigment
on wet paper
a grey heron in mist

*It is the haiku that drew me to **Penance** by Iliyana Stoyanova. It leads the reader into the narrative. The ephemeral quality of the "grey heron in mist" is mirrored by the "pigment on wet paper." Both conjure up fleetingness or "impermanence" a basic tenet of Buddhism. It reminded me of the waka-verses that the protagonists in *The Tale of Genji* pen to their loved ones as the morning dew, the blossoms or the dawn moon fade. A profound sense of longing and loss pervades in the haibun. "The shadow of a man he has become" parallels the evanescence of the "heron in mist" and the "pigment on wet paper." The "whiskey" adds another layer of haze. Furthermore, the narrator is reduced to a "shadow" in the way the "man" tells "stories about me as if I'm not present." The miasma also encompasses time: "Two hours turn into two days or two eons . . . time is indeed relative."*

It is as if the veil of illusion (maya) lifts and the poet/narrator sees the stark reality of the person, who the man is. The loss of what the narrator and the man once shared: love, mutual admiration,

respect, friendship: makes the haiku all the more poignant. Has it all been so momentary? Is the "grey heron in mist" a symbol of this? Or is it a representation of the narrator's longing of transcending the mire of reality?



Nocturnal Hunt

Emma Alexander Arthur, Norway

As the sun dips below the horizon, a feeling of serenity falls across the fjord. The vibrant colours of pinks and blues diffuse into a deep indigo as the moon rises, bringing a mystical and ethereal energy to the night. I sit peacefully atop a mossy rock, feeling the chill of the evening air and gaze at a heron's graceful flight. It glides silently over the still waters, its wings outstretched in search of prey. Diving suddenly beneath the surface, it re-emerges with a fish wriggling in its beak. Its graceful silhouette then slowly disappears into the fading light of the dusk sky.

rising moon
gentle ripples lap
against the shore

***Nocturnal Hunt** by Emma Alexander Arthur is a delightful example of classic nature writing. Like the previous haibun, this poem too features a heron, albeit in a more precise and palpable way. Yet it still encapsulates a mystical mood of the poet's immersion in nature. The aggression of the heron's search of prey is swallowed up in the peaceful womb of nature. Light fades, the heron vanishes but the colours are still vibrant in this gem of a poem. The poet uses a rich and varied range of sensory descriptions: the pink, blue and indigo hues contrasting with the glow of the rising moon, the mossy rock, the growing chill in the air and the heron's noiseless skimming of the fjord. It makes for an enchanting and immersive read.*



MEN IN DOORWAYS

Gerry Mc Donnell, Ireland

I used to walk home at night, past derelict tenements, to my home in the inner city. I would sometimes be coming from a drinking session in town. It was safe to walk home at night in the '70's. There was a man standing in the doorway of one of the tenements. He was always there, alone and silent. I never felt threatened by him. He had jet black hair which was butter pasted.

My father stood in our doorway in his shirt sleeves, smoking a cigarette. He was overseeing me cutting the grass in our front garden. We lived on a main road near a junction. Traffic would slow to a stop at our house. Drivers and passengers glanced our way. I felt self-conscious, like I was on show. It didn't bother my father. Maybe he proud of his son, doing a good job, cutting the grass.

There was a man who was very aware of his physique. We were in the same weight-training, basement club. However, I was not in his league. He was muscle bound. He used to stand at his hall door, stripped to the waist. He took up a pose which would best show off his torso. He stood there at traffic peak times, craving the attention of the public.

Another man stood in the doorway of a pub. His hands were covered in faded tattoos. He was waiting for someone to come along and give him the 'entrance fee'. He was tall and stood straight, legs apart, as if waiting for a fight to break out. He appeared to me to be trembling, perhaps suffering withdrawal symptoms from alcohol, in full view of the bus passengers. He was glued to that spot. He had nowhere else to go.

around the feet
of those on thresholds
the rustle of dead leaves

*There's something arresting and disquieting in Gerry McDonnell's **MEN IN DOORWAYS**. The image of a doorway is of the threshold between interior and exterior space, like those exquisite courtyards in Dutch paintings opening to the street and to domestic intimacy and*

privacy. Dutch Master Pieter de Hooch is noted for his portrayals of interiors with open doorways, leading from a scene of an intimate dark enclosing interior with a female figure to an open space, garden or street, frequently with a male stroller. The men in doorways in McDonnell's haibun both reiterate and invert the tradition, beginning with the male who is blocking rather than opening the interior, making a frisson of the interior and external transition. Here the thresholds are the abode of haunted, abandoned figures as the haiku's image of dead leaves seems to suggest. The atmosphere created is one of loss and estrangement. The male keepers of doorways both protect and violate a space of safety allowing the unease of the streets to pervade the idea of home. Are these custodians of the doorways in a state of liminality themselves, betwixt a kind of lost equivalent to St Peter and the gates of heaven?

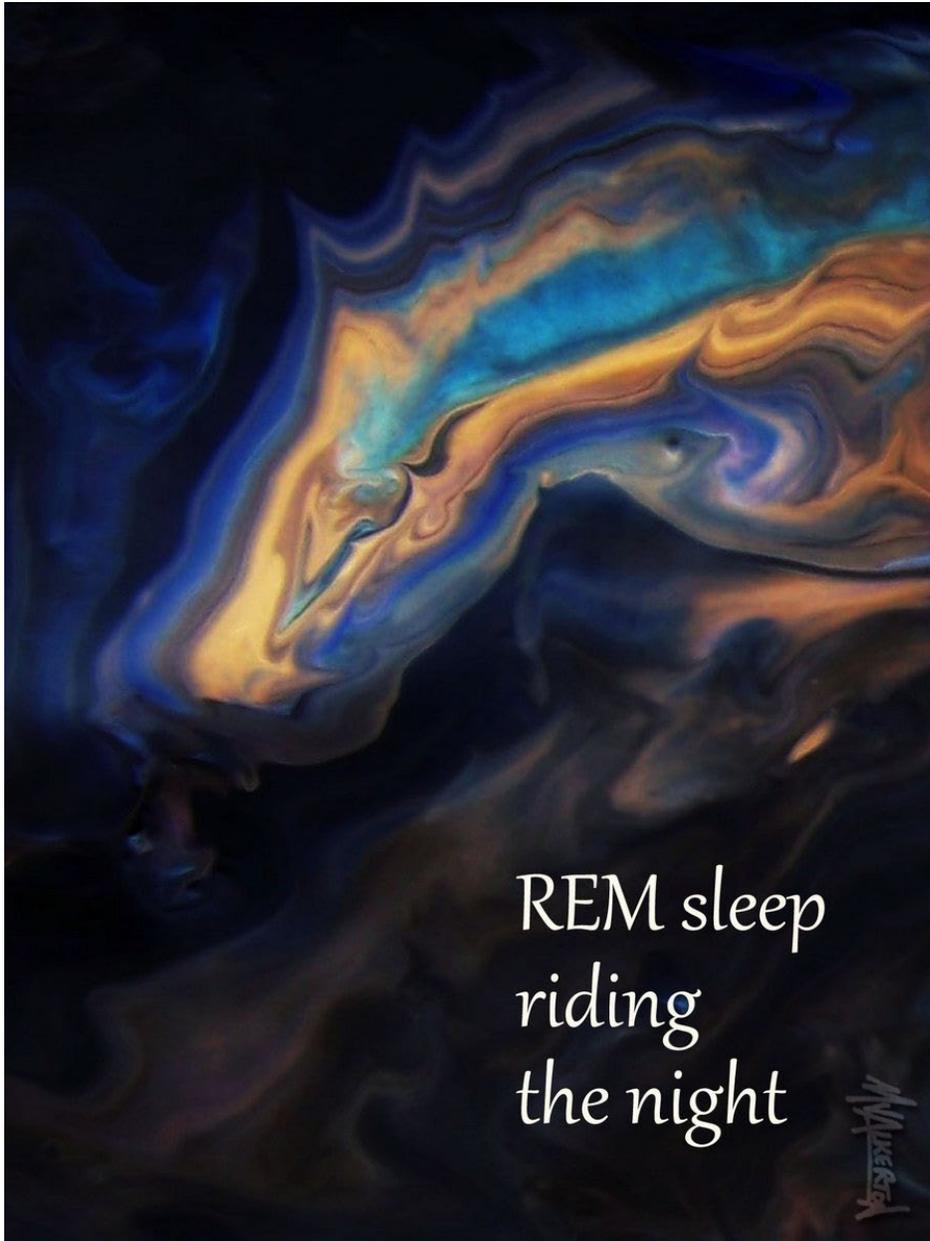
*In addition to these three poems, I would also like to mention a few others. Matthew Caretti's **Tagaloa's Hook** is a powerful description of the Hunga Tonga–Hunga Ha'apai eruption in January 2022. The tone in Joanna Ashwell's poem, **Blue** is playful and engaging and works well with the theme of her haibun. Another noteworthy haibun is **Acoustic Night** by Bryan D. Cook. I must confess that I am ignorant of the kind of music scene Bryan writes about. Yet I was taken by how vividly he describes the event with memorable sketches of people. His footnotes are wonderfully informative and the image of the "telephone pole tattooed with staples" in his closing haiku is one I will not forget.*

Sonam Chhoki

cattails — April 2023

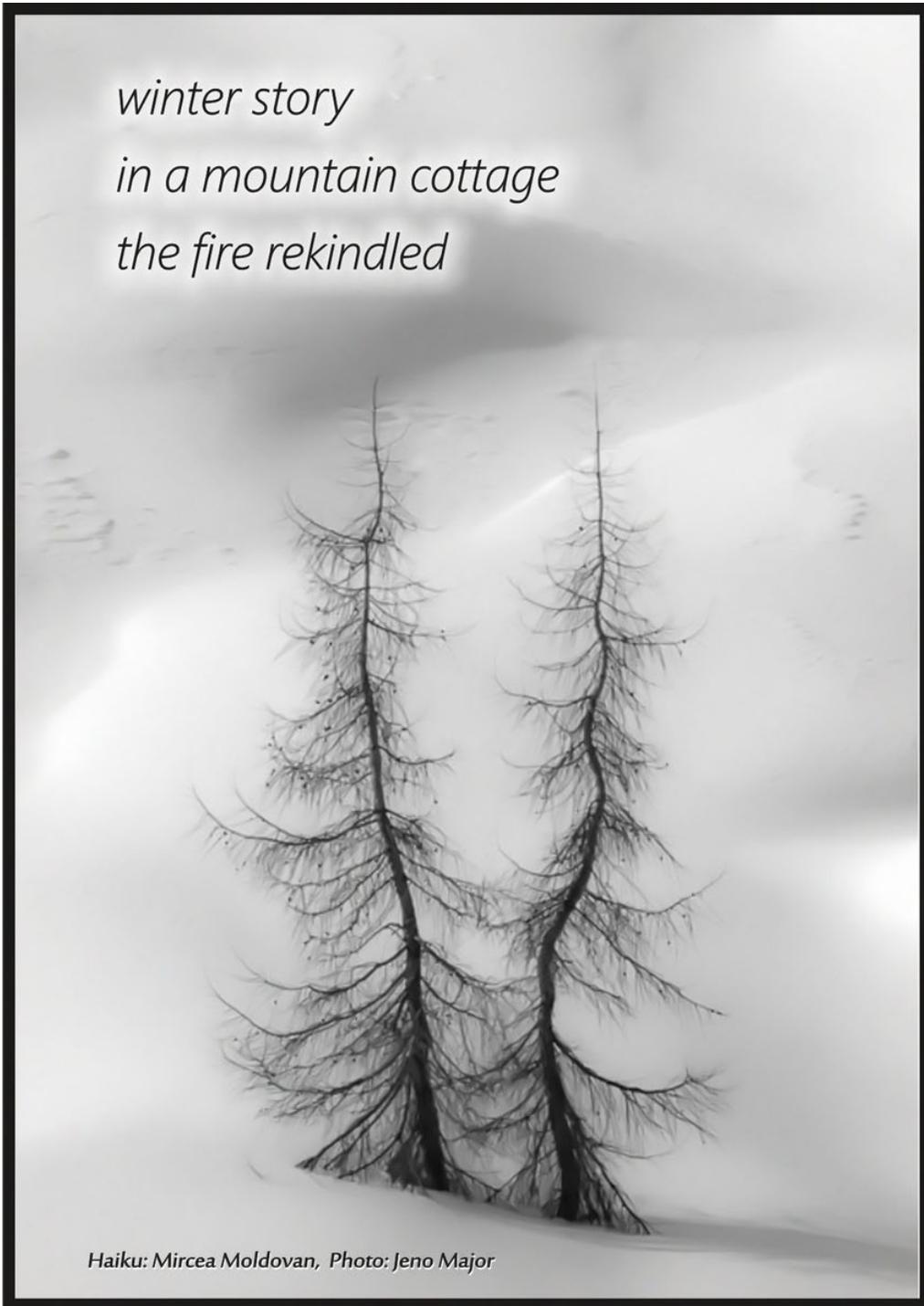
Haiga — Part 4B

Michelle V. Alkerton — Canada



Mircea Moldovan & Jeno Major — Romania

*winter story
in a mountain cottage
the fire rekindled*



Haiku: Mircea Moldovan, Photo: Jeno Major

Myron Arnold — Canada

Ycyoche yogiclfzittxxYyixtx
Ycyoche yogiclfzittxxYyixtx

mourning cloak
fluttering in the warmth
of a shed window

Neena Singh & Jatinder Vijh — India



Neha Talreja — India



Nika — Canada



cast in bronze
all the love
she never gave

- Nika

Tanka Prose



Stowed Away Dreams

Creation

Tom Staudt, Australia

Water cascades over my shoulders. The gushing stream forms little bubbles, that excite the nerve endings in my skin. After a few minutes I turn around and turn off the taps. Wrapped in my towel I look up and see you through my skylight.

We both love showers. You can do magic, using the life-giving liquid and sunshine to make the air we breathe. Creatures big and small can find shelter, and on a hot day I like sitting in your shade.

fleeting streams
flow and change
never the same
we cling to certain moments
precious in our journey

The rosemary

Ryland Shengzhi Li, USA

Did I give it too much water? Or expose it to too much cold when I left the patio door open last week? Or maybe it had simply met its appointed time.

I nibble on a leaf. The aroma is still there. It stands more or less as it once was, branches sweeping gracefully in the mid-morning sun. But now the leaves are a pale sea green, and the branches the color of dry sandstone, as though it were some Permian fossil or modern artwork.

I wonder, did I ever think so much of it while it lived? But what is life and what is death anyway?

photobooks
and memories
and this soul
that you formed
. . . laolao*

**Mandarin for grandmother*

All American Boy

Gail Brooks, USA

Saturday afternoons in 1952 the movies showed double-features and lots of cartoons. At eleven years old, my parents tasked me with taking my younger brothers Michael, 8 and Stuart, 6. Armed with 25 cents each, we bought a ticket and our favorite candies: Dots, Milk Duds, JuJubes, Good and Plenty, Mary Janes.

moaning
in the back row
of the theater
awkward teenagers
wet lips to wet lips

The movies varied from Buck Rogers space travel to musicals like *Some Like It Hot*. The old horror movies like *Frankenstein*, *The Werewolf and Dracula* played frequently. Though today horror movies are my least favorite genre, I recall sitting transfixed as the *Werewolf* began to change and the tension grew. Suddenly I noticed that Stuart was gone. In the dark theater, I began to panic, unsure of what to do. Moments later, I felt a small hand touch my leg. Stuart was hiding under the seat, frightened not by the scary images on the screen, but by the music!

a trimaran
tossed by the South Seas
bathed in sunlight
steered by a brother
no longer afraid

Our City

Ana Drobot, Romania

As I was going by bus, I was watching the parks and streets where we had been walking together. They were not only familiar now, but I could associate them with a certain look I got from you, with certain words you told me, with our whispers, with our daydreams. I felt sad when I saw the places without us. They looked so empty. Nothing could fill them. There was nobody like us.

your absence
next to me
the cherry blossom
fills the sky
with no stars

I only heard my own footsteps back home. When we walked together, we did not hear our footsteps. They were muffled by the sun, the sky, by the smell of spring.

Questions & Coffers

Anna Cates, USA

Once, when my brother and I were in grade school, my mother asked us a rather silly question: “If you had all the money in the world, what would you do with it?” The inquiry left us both huffing with exasperation.

“Jesus Christ, woman, what’s wrong with you?” her partner at the time lamented, “Jesus Christ” his favorite expletive (not a prayerful utterance in any respect, for he found all religion not relevant to his life).

My brother and I painstakingly tried to explain that money would be meaningless if only one person possessed it. We were in the car at the time, headed who knows where, perhaps local social services for assistance. My mother suggested a new diversion, a guessing game. And the day’s journey, and time, wore on . . .

her hand’s warmth
her breathing tubes
full flower moon
leaving behind
the way we were

SINGALONGS

Amelia Fielden, Australia

Mother's Day
by great-grandma's cliff-top grave
her six daughters
harmonising Galway Bay —
the Pacific sighs below

Lots of songs, lots of singing, in my childhood. Gran crooned lullabies to the littlies, hummed and sang as she went about her chores.

In my house, always music from the radio and from records Dad collected.

I never learned to play an instrument. But I could pedal a mean pianola. There were several pianolas among our extended families. And in the apartment of great-aunt Clara stood a baby grand. That was the centrepiece of numerous clan gatherings.

Every occasion called for a party. Every party called for Clara's son-in-law, Keith. He would play by ear anything from How Much Is That Doggie In The Window to The Moonlight Sonata, ragtime to waltz time. Not a lot of room for dancing, but some couldn't resist The Blue Danube. Requests were Keith's forte; if you could hum the first bars of a piece, he could play it. Lyrics no problem either; prodigious recall, my relatives.

a warm wind
ruffles songs of yesteryear
through my hair —
I still remember the words
and how you all sang them

Contours

Gavin Austin, Australia

How readily you brandish lies wrapped as promises.

I sit and watch as you dress to leave, framed in my bedroom window, naked against a virtuous sky. You are another shape on the horizon of morning. Alluring as the tethered geranium in the window box — scarlet, perfect, incarcerated.

Guilt drives you behind intangible bars where I cannot reach you. I say nothing, my thoughts scattered like clothes across the floor. Hope kicked into dark corners to brood with lost socks.

the way raindrops
pool before sliding
on glass panes
the many shapes
we take on

Shepherd Howe

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

The warm spring sun is a welcome friend accompanying my father's early mornings, midday and late afternoon rounds checking the flock for orphans to bring home and hand raise.

Even now, sometimes I fail to grasp the brutality and ethos of nature's survival of the fittest.

crows gather
darkening the skies
their dirge
before gorging on the eyes
of newborn lambs

Haiga — Part 5A

Oscar Luparia — Italy



words: hissa ahtredi/phot: oscar luparia

**still dawn—
overshadowing
this inner chaos**

Radka Mindova & Irina Skenderska — Bulgaria



*ice feathers
wedding bouquets
which someone
else was catching*

haiga: Radka Mindova photo: Irina Skenderska

The Way

Richa Sharma, India

When the broken parts of someone's story fell upon me as snowflakes, I realised that not many people get to choose the land where they'd prefer to die. I now remember a poem written for such a gentleman who came into my life as a body of poems. So was I to him. And he ended even before I could say, "May his shadow never touch my coffin."

unrecoverable
that which doesn't matter . . .
from my uncombed hair
I smooth out knots
of a winter mistake

A Brainteaser

Susan Burch, USA

I was about to enter a brainteaser contest where you pick 2 images that are alike out of 6, when I decided to quickly check the contest rules before I hit “Enter.” Well, I’m glad I did because the organization takes all rights and can send my answers “. . . throughout the universe, in perpetuity . . .” Then I couldn’t stop thinking about why. Why would anyone, anywhere, care what my answer was?

alien email

good news: the crop-dusting

is still working

the humans remain

as dumb as ever

A Deadly Obsession

Chen-ou liu, Canada

In his repeated court filings against the condo board, these lines appear again and again: "beneath my unit the electric room is not properly constructed, resulting in the emission of electromagnetic waves which have caused me pain and suffering over the years."

The condo board now decides to file a restraining order against his "constantly harassing, abusive, and sometimes even threatening behaviour."

new snow on old snow . . .
this silver-haired gunman
shot dead by police
after killing five
and wounding a sixth

Hermitage

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

The snow moon rises over the pond, pouring its silvery light through ragged clouds and the bare branches of an elm. I take a picture of it through the dining room window. In the photo, a ghostly city appears, drifting below the tree limbs. There is no city there, only the winter-brown grass, the trees, a low stone wall, the meadow sloping down to the pond. The camera has captured what I did not see — the reflection of books standing on the shelves behind me, their spines arrayed side-by-side like narrow townhouses floating above an invisible street.

a knock comes
at the half door
no one
stands in the shadows
. . . I invite her in

That night, I dream of crossing a lake in a small wooden canoe, which has sunk beneath the surface. Standing on the prow with only my head above water, I pole the boat toward my destination, where I am supposed to give a talk on the subject of “poetry.” Having prepared nothing, I decide to speak instead about my journey, deeply immersed in the lake . . . but the audience has vanished.

only the creak
of the windlass
as the bucket
slowly descends
into a river of stars

Steps to Writing Well

John Zheng, USA

The teacher wears a sunshine smile on the first day of class. She goes over the syllabus about teaching methods, learning outcomes, weekly assignments, and grading procedures. Then she raises her voice that our assignments must meet her requirements. If the deadline for a paper is March 1, we can't put February 27 on the title page if we submit our assignment two days earlier. Otherwise, we lose 5 points. A student has the guts to ask whether he should never turn in his assignment before the deadline, but the teacher replies decisively that we must follow her guidelines closely. Time slides away week after week, and the teacher's sunshine smile looks like a cloudy moon since we keep losing points. When the semester ends, grievance forms swarm into the dean's office.

Well Done
written in red ink —
does it mean
a grade or
barely read?

THE DIG

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA (EC)

Day 1:

An orange earth digger, jack hammers, men with shovels in orange vests and orange hard hats — all here to replace a faulty water line. Get my car out of my garage and park in the visitors' parking, I'm advised. No need. Decide to cancel plans made earlier. Will go out tomorrow. Bad decision, that. As holes gets deeper, dirt mounds get higher. No way into my condo, no way out. After some hand wringing, a path is cleared. Can now get to mailbox across the road. However, there is no mail because the mail truck cannot get past the equipment and barricades. At the end of the day, a gaping hole at the bottom of my driveway covered over with a flimsy board and blocked by orange and white bars attached to orange cones. Oh, my! How they do love orange.

lives lived,
long before memory,
deeply buried
till a random hoe or spade
frees a shard of mystery

Day 2:

More digging. A new area under my window. Out comes the grass. Out comes the spirea bush. Out come my white lilies which took two years to bloom. I look down and see only an orange hard hat. China appears to be the destination. The earth digger extends its teeth, bites into new territory, chews its way along the road past the next condo unit. Clunk, clunk. clunk. The show is only minimally mesmerizing. Time for a relaxing cup of herbal tea. Choking sounds from the faucet. Water has been turned off.

Fortunately, I have a kettle full of water. With my tea and a book, I retreat to the living room and a comfy chair away from the clunking of the earth digger. At the end of the day, there are two deep craters and a long trench, but I have water.

digging through time
finding bits of this and that
trash and treasures
writing tales of how it was,
how we think the pieces fit

Day 3:

The hole under my window is filled in. The hard hats move down along the trench. The earth digger returns to crater number one. It gets wider, deeper. A workman tells me water will be off. I fill the kettle. I will have my tea. Didn't think about the cleaning woman due in a couple of hours. Should have filled buckets. She arrives, having walked from visitors' parking. Turns on faucet. Sputters. Spits. Hisses. Water still off. Just dust and vacuum I tell her. She takes two buckets and talks to the hard hats. One stalwart fellow leaps the trench, takes the buckets and goes down the road, past the trench, and returns with water. Cleaning of my condo continues. Meanwhile, hard hats take a lunch break. Begin to wonder how long will my driveway end at the lip of a canyon. Begin to wonder if I should send out a SOS to my family. Three o'clock. Hard hats have been moving rapidly this past hour. No need to alert family. The driveway crater is filled and dirt leveled. I can take my car out. The trench under my window is covered with boards and marked with orange cones. Piles of rocks are loaded into a truck and hauled away. The earth digger is parked and the road is quiet.

tagged and labeled
each item in a ledger
nothing left ignored
history in a bowl,
a trinket or a cup

Day 4

All quiet on the cul-de-sac. No earth digger, no hard hats. Nothing. Nada. The dig is a work in progress, and progress is slow.

showcased in museums
photographed and discussed
the past brought forward
to question and to learn
and find a better way

Kafka with Grammarly

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

When Gregor Samsa wakes up one morning from troubled sleep, he finds he has become a flickering desktop screen. His bed is a workstation, dull-white with a pull-out panel. His legs have transformed into a black cable that winds down to a shelf covered in dust, where his feet are attached to an Epson printer. His face, now an ocean-blue celluloid surface, lights up the corner of the room, which has no windows and he can feel the ping-ping of messages piling into the in-box. Where his eyes and nose would have been is a Marine Aquarium screen-saver; his mouth is a long line of desktop icons.

The door opens. A young woman walks up to the workstation carrying a bag. She unzips it and carefully places a New Lenovo Quad Turbo laptop on the workstation. She pats Gregor Samsa and says almost ruefully, "It will be strange without the old thing."

'What is happening to me?' Samsa wonders as she unplugs the flicker out of him.

50,000 years
since the last green comet
still learning the basics
how to scan, text, block, delete
how to live with apps

Litmus Test

Richard Grahn, USA

She wastes no time.

> *Tell me something about yourself.*

> Uh, I have a green nose . . .

> There's a truck in my bed . . .

> Just shaved my toes . . .

> Gonna buy a used rowboat . . .

> Drive it across the salty sea . . .

> And fish.

> *Are you healthy, organized? What is your diet like?*

> I can account for all my elbows . . .

> Cat's wearing my socks . . .

> I'm all pens and knitting needles . . .

> Hard-boiled eggs for breakfast . . .

> Scrambled breakfast for brains . . .

> Supper of scrambled brains.

> *How do you feel about technology?*

> Cell phone's almost dead . . .

> I'm texting it to death . . .

> Maybe I'm boring it to death . . . row, row

> I'm a bored-to-death phone-killing omelet . . .

> Merrily, merrily, merrily, merrily . . .

> Life's a railroad train.

> *Do you have any past relationships I should know about?*

- > Once upon a time . . .
- > In a far off land called Evanston . . .
- > I was a young man . . .
- > Met a girl named Pam . . .
- > Gave her a string of beads . . .
- > And off she ran to the Philippines.

> *She just left?*

- > Eeny meeny miny moe . . .
- > All the things . . .
- > she forgot to bring . . .
- > Like me . . . my shoes and socks . . .
- > My shirt, my pants . . .
- > And baseball cap.

> *What did you do?*

- > Swam all night . . .
- > Naked as a fish . . .
- > From head to toe . . .
- > Realized . . .
- > After flopping ashore . . .
- > I swam to the wrong island.

> *I don't know; it's a crazy story.*

- > Acorn squash for a heart . . .
- > Butter in my veins . . .
- > Mash me up; I'll fill your plate . . .
- > Look, it's not that bad . . .
- > It all makes perfect sense, you see . . .
- > My upside-down, inside-out turned world.

my id
left to its own devices
speed dials
the International
Date Line

Repentance

Eve Ozer, USA

Secrets are a powerful aphrodisiac; mysterious, alluring, potentially dangerous depending on the secret and with whom you share it.

Growing up in a Catholic home, I witnessed another kind of secret, a mass said in an arcane language and an advocacy for confession.

Entering the confessional, the subtle aroma of orthodox incense gently assaults your sense of smell. Your eyes attempt to adjust as you move into a dimly lit closet size room where you kneel on a cantilevered piece of wood that has been wrapped in velvet. You settle yourself in piety as a small, screened window quietly slides open to reveal your absolver, a stand-in god.

You whisper your sins into the profile of a man earnestly leaning in towards the breath of your words with the sacred knowledge that what you confess will be held like executive privilege, never to be pried from his mind nor lips. He passes down his judgement through a series of penances and you rise with your soul once again bleached clean — if your conscious stays mute.

a velvet cincture
hands cuffed
in unspoken prayers
wild thoughts
cascading darkness

Trapped

John Budan, USA

An abandoned mannequin stands out in contrast to its stark surroundings. It reminds me of my lover who worked here before the fatal fentanyl rush. Pink breasts are indecently exposed, casting shadows from the last rays of sun. It peers at me through a soiled display window, and I imagine hearing a faint pleading voice. I want to break the glass and set it free from the world of despair it is confined in. A piercing scream echoes through the corridors of the deserted mall.

since childhood
her moist pillow
stained by tears
of a girl called
classroom ska

A Broken Circle

Priti Aisola, India

After a walk in the city centre, they pause before a shop window.

'A teashop with a range of fruit, herb, and black teas! Shall we take a look?' she asks, excited.

'Not interested,' says he and looks away.

afterglow
of the setting sun . . .
if only we could linger
in the soft light
of our shared moments

Twisted Tree

Bryan Rickert, USA

My wife peppers the counsellor with questions and concerns about our daughter. Her lack of friends. Her unwillingness to reach out and talk to peers. Her inability to open up to anyone but her journal. And ultimately, the deep melancholy our daughter feels because she does not yet understand any of this either.

the newness
of spring blossoms
I hold my newborn
hoping she'll turn out
better than me

Editor's Choice (EC) -Tanka Prose

THE DIG

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

Usually, we include the EC in the Editor's Choice. As you have read, the Dig, by Adelaide Shaw is a bit too long to include here.

Adelaide Shaw's four-part diary entries brought me back to my childhood, where I would watch the town crews clear snow or dig up a neighbour's front yard because the water shut valve was hidden by a couple of feet of fill and topsoil. Actually, my family's from yard. Dad never said anything about that. Also, it made me think of the book I bought at a discount book stall in our local mall way back in the early 2000s.

Then, I remembered a used book that I bought about twenty years ago. It was "Outside Lies Magic" by John R. Stilgoe." The premise is what can be found or observed as you take a walk along a park, a nature trail, and sometimes along an old abandoned railway line. It was a great and, in some ways, influenced my writing.

Adelaide Shaw's "The Dig" is a perfect reminder of watching a city "water works project." What will the orange hard hats find in the trenches, as if unearthing a WW1 trench. Then, in the tanka entries for each day, we are brought back to an archeological site, where pieces of a past civilisation are found. Pottery sherds, being a prime example. I still remember my daughter's emails from Greece, while on a dig uncovering a Mycenaean site.

Now, how many of us will admit to being a bit more than curious as to what we observe as our children or grandchildren begin their own exploration and digs?

Mike Montreuil

Haiga — Part 5B

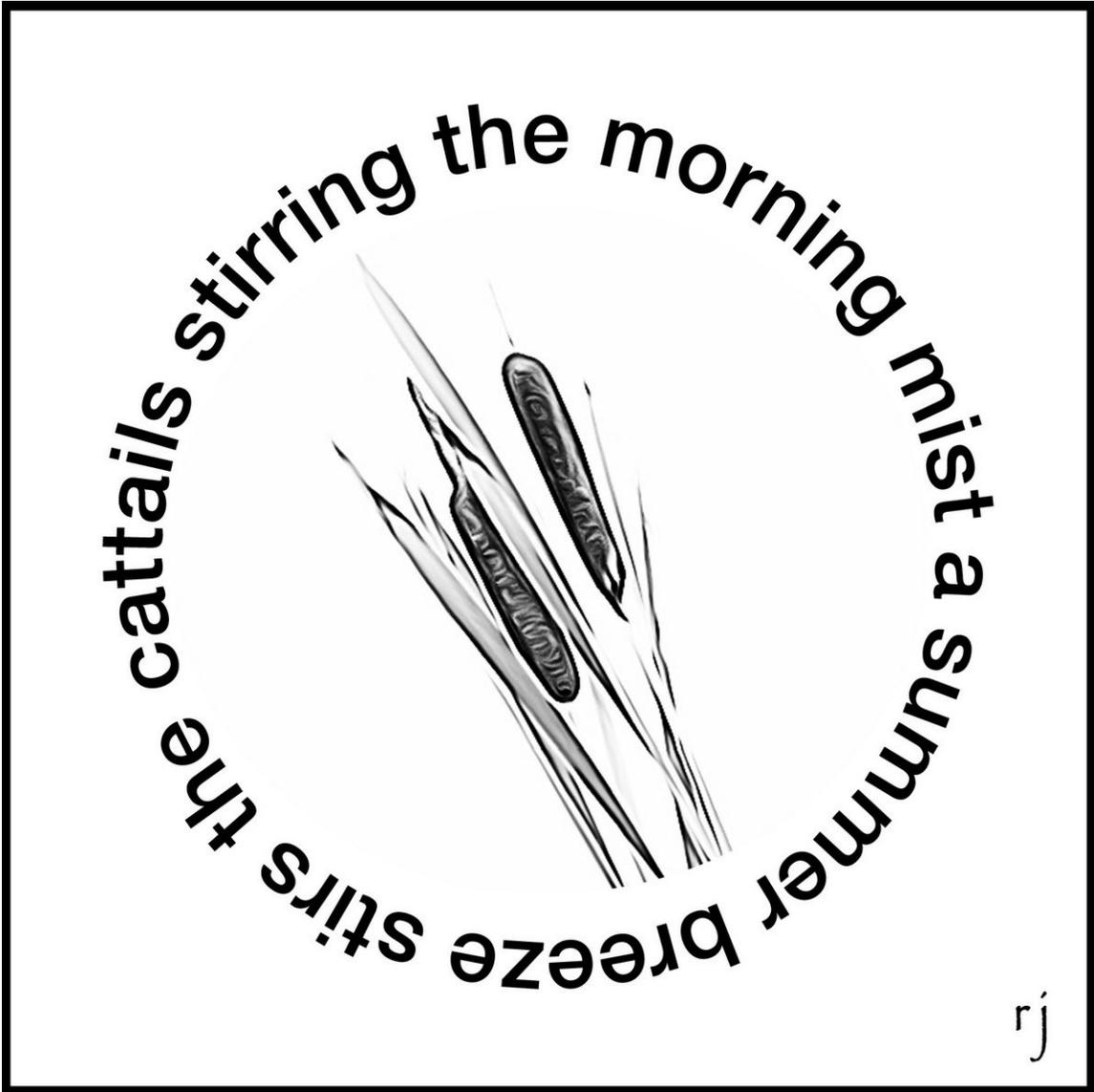
Richa Sharma — India



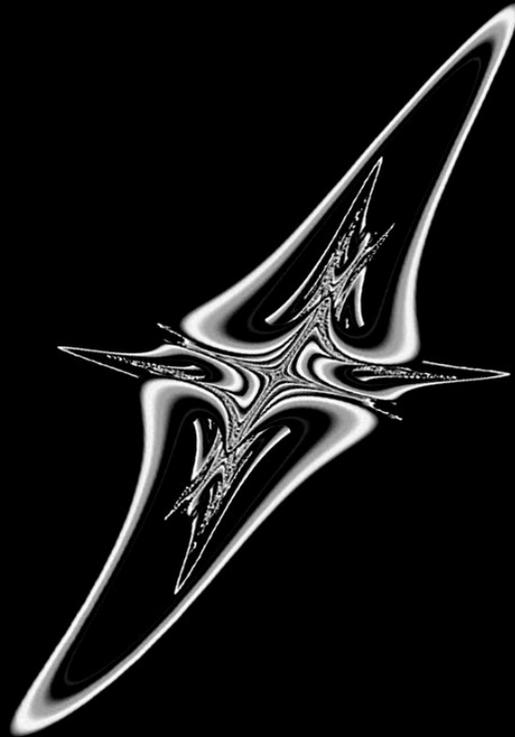
Richard Grahn — USA



Rick Jackofsky — USA



Robert Erlandson — USA



*eagles soaring
diving when they see the prey
missile drones*

R Erlandson

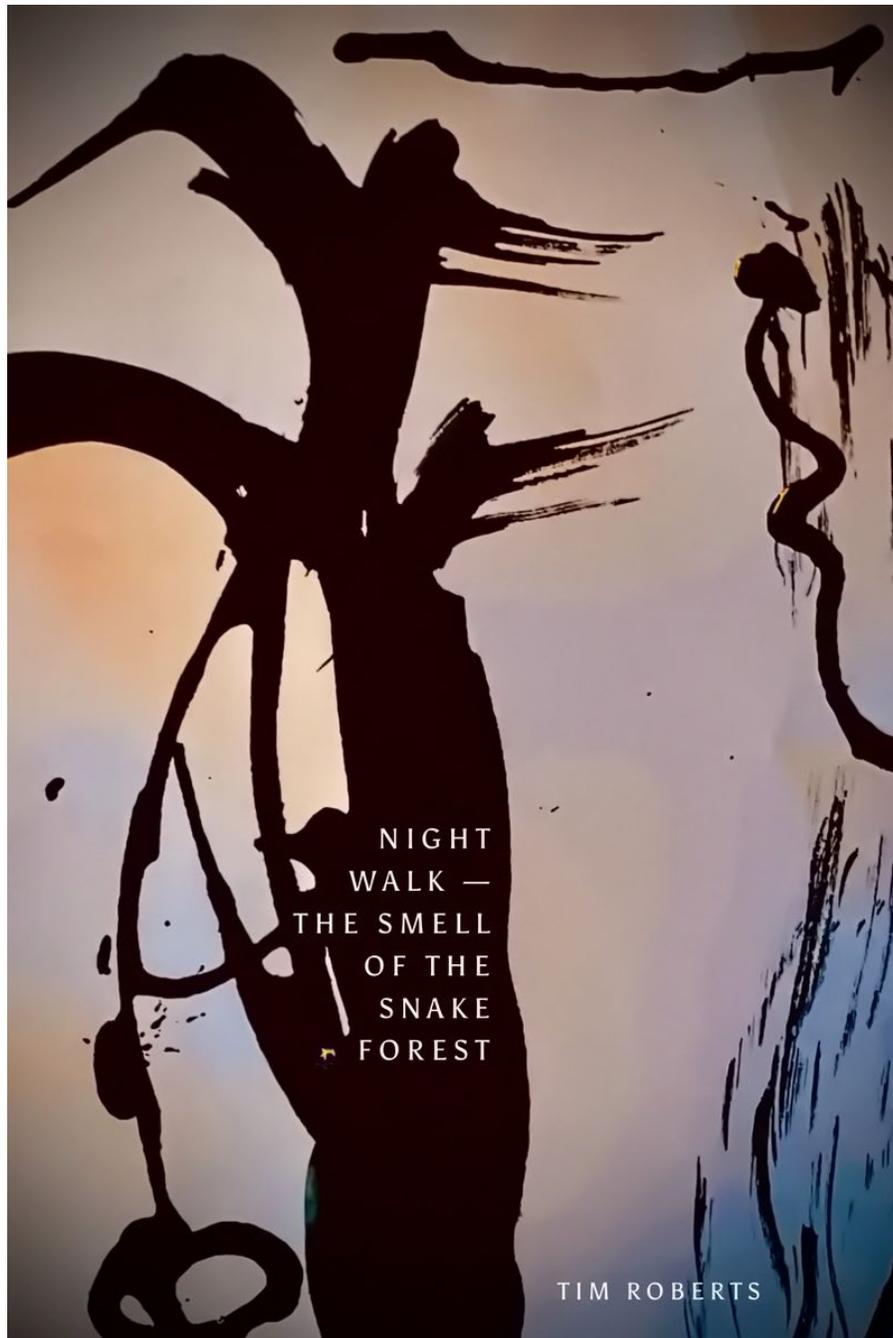
Silva Trstenjak & Tadeja Ciman — Croatia



Haiku: Silva Trstenjak
Image: Tadeja Ciman

expectation ...
in her eyes glistens
blue baby clothes

Tim Roberts — New Zealand



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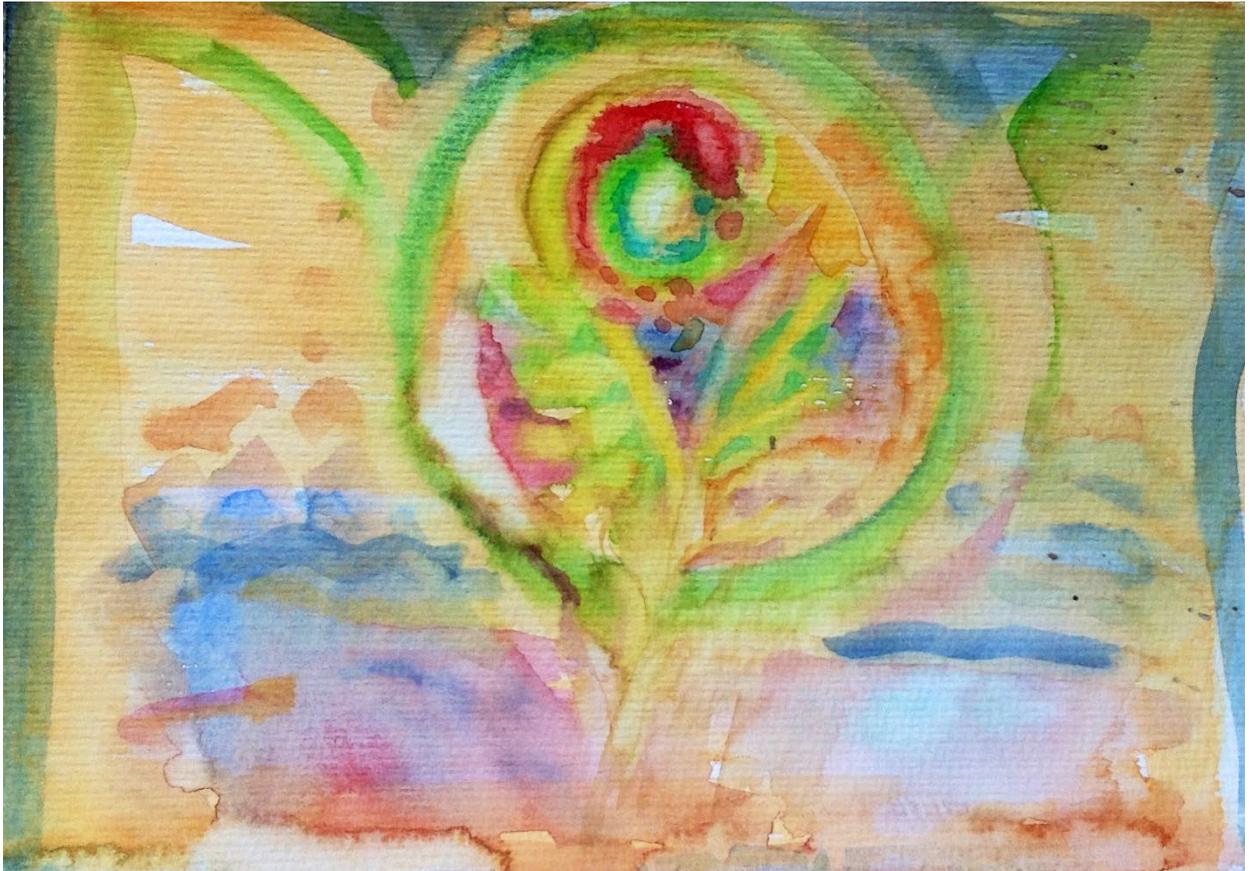
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The Shape of Hope