

cattails



April 2025

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April 2025 Issue

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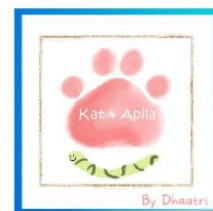
Jenny Fraser, an internationally published haiku-form poet and painter takes inspiration from the world around her, allowing colour and form to express themselves through her hands. These pieces are often published as haiga. She recently gained second place in The Jane Reichhold Memorial Haiga Competition 2024.

Her current watercolours range from free form to working from pencil drawings. Jenny's background of working with colour and design comes through years of experience, managing her company, Riverweaver ~ designer handwoven scarves, wall rugs, throws and baskets from 'found fibres'. Her work has found a home in countries around the world. Riverweaver has six pieces in The Permanent Collection of the Waikato Museum, Hamilton, New Zealand.

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make my mark



Dhaatri Vengunad Menon

Introduction

Milarepa (1040-1124) the Tibetan poet and saint resorted to black magic when his world upended at the death of his father. The paternal uncle reneged on his promise to Milarepa's dying father to be trustee until Milarepa came of age and seized the property. Milarepa, his sister and mother were driven into destitution and starvation. He trained with master sorcerers and learned the magic of destruction. At the wedding feast of his uncle's son Milarepa brought down the house killing the guests. He then caused fierce storms to destroy the crops in the village. He later turned from these extremes of vengeance and violence to become one of the greatest teachers of Tibetan Buddhism. His songs of compassion are part of the oral repertoire in Bhutan and Tibet.

Perhaps the sense of injustice and outrage that the young Milarepa felt is not dissimilar to what we now experience with the escalating wars (Middle East, Ukraine and Sudan) and civilised and decent interactions between people discarded. Faced with unprecedented shifts in the political and social paradigms as well as the climate crisis how do we as individuals and as poets react to and reflect this reality?

Paul Celan (1920 – 1970) held that language was the ultimate hope. In this issue the poets have articulated a gamut of reactions to the current predicament.

To Mike and each of the section editors no words are adequate to express appreciation for their dedication and passion. Dhaatri Vengunad Menon gives us another feature that is timely and eloquent. We proudly present the art of Jenny Fraser.

Sonam Chhoki

Notes

Tibet's Great Yogi: Milarepa: A biography edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Oxford University Press, 1969

The Hundred Thousand Songs, translated and annotated by Garma C.C. Chang, Shambala, Boulder and London, 1997

Haiku



primrose diary
sunbeam by sunbeam
into the forest

Joanna Ashwell, UK

flickering birdsong
joggers run through clouds
of breath

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

as the bluejay
chokes it down
locust song

Bryan Rickert, USA (EC)

cold spring wind —
the osprey's beak
slices into a fish

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

the crushing weight
of red ink
cherry blossoms

Joshua St. Claire, USA (EC)

the blue sky
won't sit still
purple martins

Jeff Hoagland, USA

words words words
the birdsong filling
my parents' yard

Timothy Daly, France (EC)

first embrace
from the adopted child
desert lily blooms

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

piano arpeggio . . .
spring rain tumbles
leaf to leaf

Meera Rehm, UK

spring dawn
a wife and child protect
a chicken

Ranice Tara, India

our puppy's nose
nested in the day lilies
quail eggs

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

deserted mill
a spring day starts
the waterwheel's clatter

napušten mlin
proljetni dani pokreću
klokot kotača

Mihovila Čeperić-Biljan, Croatia
Translation: D.V. Rožić, Croatia

quiet calico sky
my youngest cries
for a kitten

Adrian Bouter, The Netherlands

daily greeting
over the fence
morning glory faces

Diana Davison, Australia

stepped fields
planting rice saplings
in the rain

सीढ़ीनुमा खेत
धान लगाते हुए
बारिश में

Govind Joshi, India

weight of rain
bends the hydrangeas —
filling in my tax form

les hortensias ploient
sous le poids de la pluie –
remplir ma déclaration d'impôt

Marie Derley, Belgium

midday pastureland
just the cattle
and their egrets

Ravi Kiran, India

boulder beach windswept heaps of bull kelp dreams

Catharine Summerfield Hāna, U.S.A

sunny morning
a small stream jumps
over an oak root

sunčano jutro
mali potok preskače
korijen hrasta

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

straw on my porch—
the coming and going
of swallows

paglia sul mio portico –
il continuo andirivieni
delle rondini

Mariangela Canzi, Italy

shells on the wall
the morning sun with
a scent of sea

školjke na zidu
jutarnje sunce ima
miris mora

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translated by D. V. Rožić, Croatia

parched May
the sugarcane-juice vendor
pours afternoon

sanjuktaa asopa, India

sandpiper squabble
over an inch of mudflat—
rising tide

Janice Doppler, USA (EC)

a hawk snares
a snake in the dunes
ocean mist

Joseph P. Wechselberger, USA

mackerel sky
ripples where the creek
joins the lake

Brad Bennett, USA

stopping just short
of the web—eye-to-eye
with an orb weaver

Richard Tice, USA

the steepness
of the underlying mountain —
midday heat

strmina
podnožja planine —
podnevna vrućina

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

rainforest
a thrush whistling through
the sunlit paths

Kala Ramesh, India

long shadows
the cattle herd encircles
a waterhole

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

ambuscade
a frog's tongue measures
the ripples

Jagajit Salam, India

the toy soldier grows taller morning frost

Gregory Piko, Australia

smoke-filled sky
the dove's wing
trembles

Leon Tefft, USA

El Nino summer —
one freshly painted sunflower
on the steel mill's wall

Kanchan Chatterjee, India

homeless camp
a raccoon's accumulation
of broken things

Randy Brooks, USA

evening purples
the restless sea
clam bubbles

Robert Witmer, Japan

buoy clang
the rounded apron
of a female crab

Bill Cooper, USA

flute sounds
floating on the water
one lone loon

Mimi Ahern, USA

spouting rainbows
around the yacht
a pod of killer whales

Richard Kakol, Australia

off the beach . . .
a lumbering grey seal
discovers its grace

Ben Oliver, England

slow rain
every puddle
gets a few drops

Michael J. Galko, USA

camping holiday
lullaby of raindrops
on canvas

Jenny Shepherd, UK

storm warning
the shadow of a butterfly
on the veranda

Ruchita Madhok, India

passing through the eyewall morning robin

Dylan Stover, USA

quayside
something of myself
in the creak of old boats

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

a friend in hospice
goldfinches return to
the refilled feeder

Edward J. Rielly, USA

harvest moon . . .
in mom's hands
the last chrysanthemum

есенно пълнолуние...
в ръцете на мама
последната хризантема

Radostina Dragostinova, Bulgaria

scattered ashes
filling the empty urn
with daylilies

Rick Jackofsky, USA

waxing moon . . .
a heron keeps its head
above water

luna crescente...
un airone tira la testa
fuori dall'acqua

Carmela Marino, Italy

autumn pile
of tumbling children
leaves laughing

Thomas Smith, USA

another crow
on the crossbars
past park curfew

Ron Scully, USA

half moon
on the pastry shop roof . . .
half in the cherry tree

jumătate de lună
pe-acoperișul patiseriei
cealaltă-n cireș

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

windmill suburb the stars brighter

Srini, India

rice paddy
a harvest of straw hats
and song

Gwen Bitti, Australia

deep in rippling corn
the running bark
of a fox

Mark Miller, Australia

last load leaving
the scarecrow's arms
hold open to the wind

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

misty dawn
a moonlight nocturne
turns into a prelude

Rita R. Melissano, USA

first light
the rising hum
of shankha

Nitu Yumnarn, India

a lone boat
oars the sunrise . . .
misty hills

Neena Singh, India

amber eyes
beheld awhile
in the mind of a cat

Simon Hanson, Australia

lightning strikes —
a robin soothes the
ash tree's scars

Jahnnavi Gogoi, Canada

911 —
a falling tree holds onto
it's neighbor

911 —
padajući drvo se drži
za susjeda

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

scattering the ashes
of trees
tempest

Gareth Nurdén, Wales

passing gust
squabbling bats rock
into harmony

Quendryth Young, Australia

a sadness of rain
climbing through the valley
light's slow decline

John Hawkhead, UK

november rains
at the monastery
soaked in silence

Dan Curtis, Canada

the day has gone down
behind the hill —
passing of a friend

il giorno è tramontato
dietro la collina
la scomparsa di un'amica

Maria Concetta Conti, Italy

thin winter —
deer on the lawn
after dark

Tony Williams, Scotland

frosted grass —
the old saddle astride
a sawhorse

Sandra Simpson, New Zealand

scraping a living
from tussocks and stumps
the winter wren

Ruth Holzer, USA

nurses move her
to a private room . . .
blackthorn winter

Debbie Strange, Canada

bipolar
the dark matter
between stars

Wendy Cobourne, USA

a nice side street
in Summer . . .
soles now crunch ice

Jerome Berglund, USA

bitter wind stream
one more veteran
under the bridge

Archie G. Carlos, USA

patchwork quilt
in shades of white
winter farms

Morag Elizabeth Humble, Canada

night blizzard
unheard by anyone
the owl's lament

viscol de noapte
neauzit de nimeni
bocetul bufniței

Mircea Moldovan, România

calling me by no name winter wind

Vijay Prasad, India

sudden thaw
icicles drop
in minor chords

Kathryn Haydon, USA

winter light
the near-empty pews
of the village church

John Pappas, USA

snow to slush
in morning dreams
dead relatives

Anna Cates, USA

leaning headstones
ten generations
of lichen

Eric Sundquist, USA

forest thaw
the many dialects
of cawing

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

watery sunlight
the tiny blazes
of winter jasmine

Janet Ruth, USA

day moon
a snowberry
shadows the earth

Thomas Powell, Northern Ireland

windswept coast
a bent old spruce
among the stumps

Keith Evetts, UK

curled tightly
with his holstered stinger
winter bee

Richard L. Matta, USA

catkins
flutter in the breeze
my father's clock ticking

Simon Wilson, UK

cold sunshine
fish scales glittering
in a stretched net

hladni sjaj sunca
u razapetoj mreži
svjetluca krljušt

Nina Kovačić, Croatia

my home valley
the drowned silence
of river stones

Gavin Austin, Australia

maintaining balance,
stone upon ancestral stone —
this cairn of my spine

hålla balansen,
stapla förfädersstenar –
min ryggrads röse

Daniel Gustafsson, UK

abandoned temple
the sound of footsteps
on the old stones

tempio abbandonato
il rumore di passi
sulle vecchie pietre

Eufemia Griffo, Italy

chapel vestibule
the old man's shadow leaned
on the obituaries

Krzysztof Kokot, Poland

after the river an immersed god

Arvinder Kaur, India

sunset —
light still lingering
on the train track

Tomislav Maretic, Croatia

Kumbh Mela
a long traffic jam
in the night sky

కుంభ్ మేళా
వినువీధిలో
చుక్కల తొక్కిసలాట

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

starlit sky
the great poem
filled with ellipses

Seth Friedman, Canada

last cigarette
flashes of fire
light up the horizon

Jay Friedenber, USA

last embers
the whispered song
of a thrush

Kevin Valentine, USA

folded into
a different universe
origami stars

Angela Terry, USA

white dawn
the long spaces
between piano notes

Robert Hirschfield, USA

crocus
the balloon-man returns
to the park

Carol Raisfeld, USA

madly singing
in the mountains
the white pony

Lev Hart, Canada

*Note: "The White Pony" [An Anthology of Chinese Poetry], Robert Payne, ed.;
"Madly Singing in the Mountains" [an appreciation and anthology of Arthur Waley], Ivan Morris, ed.*

Editor's Choices (EC) - Haiku

My gratitude to all the poets who submitted haiku to the Spring 2025 issue of *cattails*. As always, my faith in haiku is renewed by the number of poems that we receive and more specifically, the quality of haiku that reflect the enriched lives of the participating poets. While I enjoyed reading all of the submissions, we cannot, unfortunately, include them all. In this ninth year of reading your haiku at *cattails*, I have had the privilege of being part of moments that are glorious marvels of nature and also, of times that are heart-wrenching in our treatment of the Earth and its peoples, of personal tragedies and losses. I am humbled and grateful for your trust in sharing your poems with me. In this issue, I hope you enjoyed the blossoms of Spring, the beaches and mountains of Summer, the forest trails of Autumn and silent valleys of winter, the bluejay, the purple martin, the adorable cats, puppy, the ancestral stones and the starlit skies in the haiku section. Some of these layered haiku skilfully bring in the human condition through the interaction and observation of nature, alluding to the environment and conditions in the world around us. Here are a few haiku for you to engage with.



as the bluejay
chokes it down
locust song

Bryan Rickert, USA (EC)

Bryan Rickert brings us a raw moment of immediacy through his haiku, that moment when a bluejay is devouring a locust. The haiku is visual, aural and visceral. The economy of words is hard to miss. This bare, unadorned haiku hits the mark with its bare-bones approach. Till the very end, the locust doesn't give up, singing away and relinquishing its right to remain silent. While the haiku brings to us the natural cycle of 'bird eat insect', the whole process of eating is brought out with the words 'chokes it down'. Bluejays are known for their strong beaks and their ability to glean prey

effectively. However, the discomfort is clear here and the point of view is perhaps, more from that of the locust that is being choked down. I am reminded of lore where the bird sings from the heart till death, but to find the reversal in the scene with the prey singing till death, is refreshing. There are layers of meanings that can be uncovered in this haiku which could well be a social commentary of our times. The stronger ones will prey and the preyed shall sing till the last breath. Thank you, Bryan Rickert, for this gem.



the crushing weight
of red ink
cherry blossoms

Joshua St. Claire, USA (EC)

At first, I thought that Joshua St. Claire has brought us a *sumi-e*, an ink painting, of the archetypal cherry blossoms of Spring. I saw an artist drawing the cherry blossoms and then, fixing the red stamp at its completion. With Japanese calligraphy and *sumi-e*, the stamp is placed strategically and for it to be transferred properly to the paper, there is a bit of weight (of the arm) that is borne by the stamp. The poem uses very tangible images and the scene came alive to me.

However, the juxtaposition of the words ‘crushing weight of red ink’ with the lightness and transience of the Sakura blossoms, makes for a layered haiku. The image of red ink (used to draw the Sakura), takes us to another plane when placed very near the words ‘crushing weight’. Red ink can imply so many things – the losses in a flailing business with red ink in accounting, the debts incurred in an economic downturn and all the associated repercussions of it. In another arena, a teacher’s correction pen with red strikes on the paper could be a student’s nightmare. The poem is open enough for readers to interpret the image as they want to. The negative implications of the ‘red ink’ are hopefully transitory and like the cherry blossoms, will fade away in time (rather quickly). The poet probably gets a respite from the heaviness of the situation when he sees the beauty of nature, in this case, Sakura blossoms. Thank you, Joshua St. Clare, for a layered poem with multiple possibilities.



words words words
the birdsong filling
my parents' yard

Timothy Daly, France (EC)

Timothy Daly brings us a haiku with a surprising first line – ‘words words words’. The use of repetitive words in haiku can be a problem for any poet. After all, minimalism is the key and one has to justify (only to oneself) the use of the same word more than once in a short poem. But here, the poet uses it effectively to show the surplus of words. Were they meaningful? Probably not. It is the second and third line, ‘birdsong filling my parents’ yard’, that give the haiku the image from nature. What is interesting here are the possible ways of interpreting the poem. Is the poet juxtaposing his life now (words words words) with the idyllic world of the past (birdsong in his parents’ yard)? This was the first scenario that came to my mind – a rueful expression of what is versus what was. What we would do to travel back to the days of meaningful conversations, as well as carefree communion with the sweet songs of birds! Then again, were words the equivalent of birdsong in the parents’ yard? In the past they were meaningful but now they aren’t? Or is the lack of green spaces and being in a concrete jungle (many of our cities), surrounded by words, what the poet is alluding to? Whichever way one reads this haiku, it fills us with wistfulness.



sandpiper squabble
over an inch of mudflat –
rising tide

Janice Doppler, USA (EC)

Janice Doppler brings us a scene from the shoreline in this haiku about sandpipers. These birds are known to be territorial and fight over food resources as well. The use of alliteration in the first line, ‘s’, gives the haiku an emphatic beginning. The layers in this

poem are difficult to ignore, given the conditions in the world around us. Across the last few decades, we have had squabbles, fights and serious wars on territory. The poet uses the well-thought-out words 'an inch of mudflat' to convey the pointlessness of these squabbles. The last line can be ominous – 'rising tide'. This shows that the situation is heating up. Where will these 'squabbles' end?

While there is no direct commentary on world affairs nor any derision in the haiku, the reader is drawn in by the layer that can be unpeeled and observed. The poet has skilfully used very tangible images from an everyday scene of nature by the coast to point us towards larger issues.

In times such as these, thank you for reading, writing and engaging with haiku.
Peace and gratitude,

Geethanjali Rajan

Haiga – Part 1

Antonio Mangiameli – Italia



an'ya & Peter B. — USA

a double rainbow
on the distant horizon
beginning and end
this road to immortality
if only we could reach it
an'ya



Photo: peterB

Barbara Kaufmann — USA



alone at midnight
and never getting over it
screech owl

bkaufmann

Carmen Duvalma—Romania



loneliness-
more and more distant
our lives

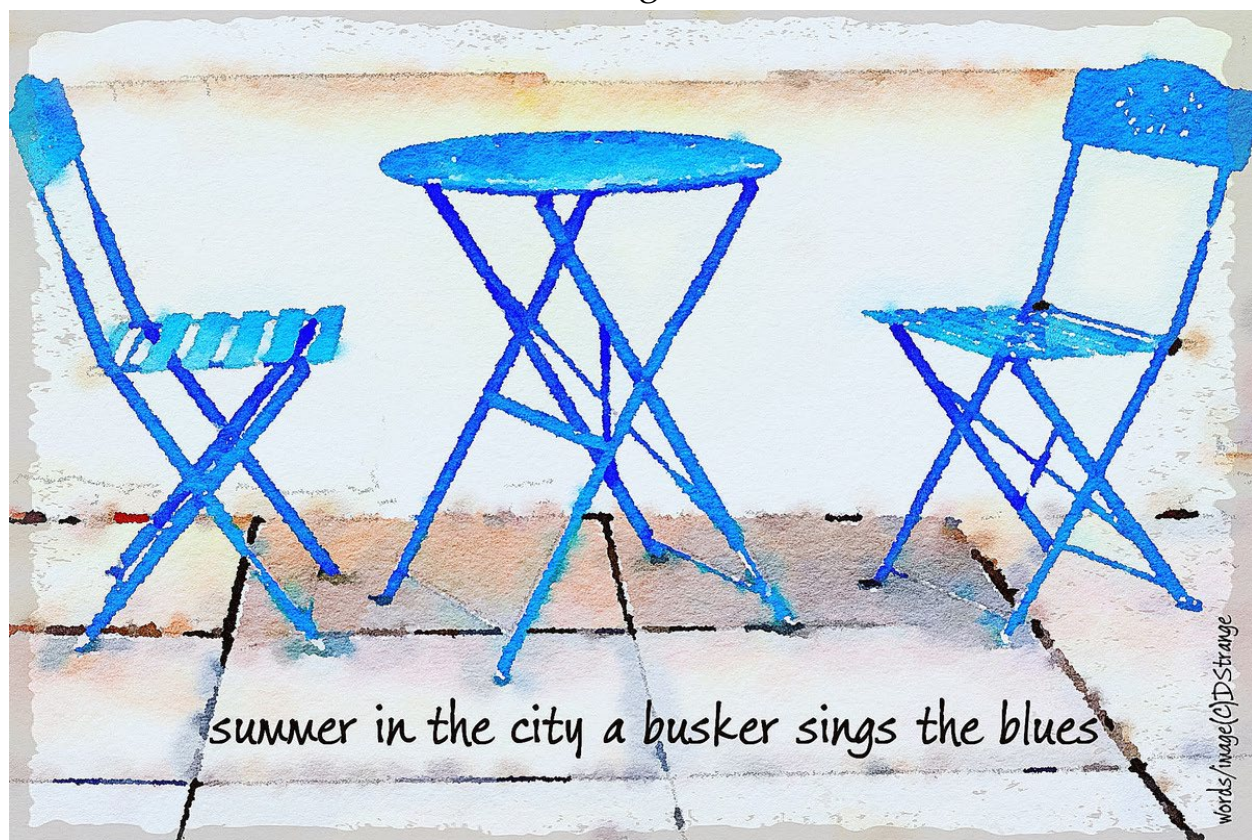
Carol Reynolds — Australia



Daniela Lăcrămioara Capotă — Romania



Debbie Strange — Canada



Senryu



broken veins
a mosaic of fungus
on the raspberries

the way he grips me
as the sun goes down
fire in the hold

Patricia Hawkhead, UK

breaking down
over her body
breaking down

blistered light
a newborn's fist
clutches at life

John Hawkhead, UK

trimming back the chives
the fresh scent
of baozi stuffing

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

morning run
my problems
come with me

Thomas David, UK

keeping it classy
he spits his chaw
into a Perrier bottle

Joshua St. Claire, USA

misdelivered mail —
getting to know
the neighborhood

Michael J. Galko, USA

watermelon sunset
spitting my worries
over the side

always moving —
the hill we thought
we were over

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

collecting eggs
I go halves
with the chickens

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

not seeing the point fingerless gloves

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

artificial intelligence —
taking my self
for granted

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

melting winter
my son sings a lullaby
to the snow

топяща се зима
синът ми пее
приспивна песен на снега

sunny morning . . .
in the bomb shelter
still night

слънчево утро...
в бомбоубежището
все още нощ

Vladislav Hristov, Bulgaria (EC)

a week of rain
in every room the smell
of wet dog

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

barefoot in creek water
the mosquitoes like
my wife

Randy Brooks, USA

pruning peach trees
still a stretch to reach
my potential

Janet Ruth, USA

listening to her
discuss her affairs
cold coffee

Ruth Holzer, USA

random memory
Dad buying onions
from a fez

Anna Cates, USA

first crush . . .
falling hard for
the novel's villain

erste Verknalltheit ...
sie verliebt sich schwer in
den Bösewicht des Romans

Deborah Karl-Brandt, Germany

school reunion
at the dance hall entrance
a line of mobility scooters

Mark Miller, Australia

cemetery tour . . .
a docent's nod to the little boy
who died in her house

Julie Schwerin, USA

consultation room
stress lines all over
the doctor's face

Ravi Kiran, India

divorce —
their parents
fighting too

rastava —
i njihovi roditelji
posvađeni

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

doo wop
seniors twist
more or less

Bill Cooper, USA

global warming
the line at the ski lift
stretching into spring

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

towering sunflower
mother's green fingers
skip a generation

Audrey Quinn, Denmark

family reunion
outside the circle
dad's faded lawn chair

Nicholas Gentile, USA

first warm day
carefully oiling
my wonky knee

bitter morning . . .
dropping kindling
on last night's embers

Jo McInerney, Australia (EC)

Mothers' Day
in her son's hands
a green frog

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

the colours
in her wedding sari . . .
spring rainbow

அவள் திருமண சேலையில்
இருக்கும் வண்ணங்கள்...
வசந்த வானவில்

Srini, India

veteran's parade
the widow watches
from her window

John Pappas, USA

week three
of heat wave two
the fan begins to squeak

Rick Jackofsky, USA

Perseids . . .
we fall asleep
back to back

Perseide...
adormim
spate-n spate

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania (EC)

a stranger waves
outside my window -
morning train

Bona M. Santos, USA

first day in kindergarten
a young father's knees
by his ears

prvi dan u vrtiću
koljena mladog oca
kod ušiju

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia (EC)

what he chose to hide
in his underwear drawer
passing clouds

Brad Bennett, USA

carol concert
an angel scratches
at their halo

Ben Oliver, UK

azure
ultramarine
the boats between

azur
outramer
les bateaux entre les deux

Marie Derley, Belgium

lighthouse keeper
bright eyes
flashing

der Leuchtturmwärter
strahlende Augen
blitzen

Pitt Buerken, Germany

furtive glances
the urinal fills
slowly

verstohlene blicke
die ente füllt sich
allmählich

Alexander Groth, Germany

gran all dressed up
a tiny little fart
with every step

oma op sjiek —
een piepklein scheetje
bij elke stap

Joanne van Helvoort, The Netherlands

peacetime
not much about it
in the history books

Bryan Rickert, USA

milk and cookies
my six-year-old's
first sleepover

Barrie Levine, USA

birth of a grandson
she finally agrees
to surgery

Rituparna Maji, India

morning blues the melting glaciers in my eyes

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan (EC)

air raid siren—
my son drops
the f bomb

Susan Burch, USA

show & tell . . .
her tiny nose dusted
with buttercup pollen

Sally Biggar, USA (EC)

enough worrying that it is not

Joseph Chiang, Canada

in the café
words
and distances

Mark Gilbert, UK

dry fountain
the stains of betel spit
on the rim

R. Suresh babu, India

final viewing
his smile
not his
smile

Ann Sullivan, USA

his Sunday drives
always the journey
never the destination

Deborah Burke Henderson, USA

winter contrail
the coming and going
of her promises

冬季飛機尾跡
她的一長串承諾
來來去去

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

after I remove
my hearing aids
silent rain

Jenny Shepherd, UK

confession . . .
the most essential thing
I have ever done

ispovijed . . .
najvažnija stvar
koju sam ikada učinio

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

how to cut
a watermelon
we agree
to disagree

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

roadside shops —
the mango vendor
talks of climbing the tree

Noureen K. Ajmal, India

temple visit —
a thief swoops up
my new slippers

Aadithya Sreeraj, India

summer clouds
her smalls hung out
to dry

bus ride
plus full bladder —
a prayer to St Jude

Tony Williams, Scotland

my life lines come as you are

Rita R. Melissano, USA

drifting through the afternoon
someone else's
fart

timing my poke
of the campfire
ghost story

Ben Gaa, USA

in remission
the beat and glide
of butterfly wings

Gavin Austin, Australia

laundry
still warm from the dryer
our puppy crawls in

Angela Terry, USA

arthritis
the crooked branches
of a sycamore

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

winter stars
the fine print
of the expiry date

stelle invernali
la data di scadenza
scritta in piccolo

Carmela Marino, Italy

news of her illness . . .
mother wipes away
my tears

Alvin B. Cruz, Philippines (EC)

relativity
time never drags
with you

Melissa Dennison, UK

county fair —
by the chicken coops
barkers hawking

George Skane, USA

sunrise coffee
the grind and press
of a new day

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

new moon—
the hospice nurse
no longer needed

Kevin Valentine, USA

late to work
rushing past
a butterfly

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

the same page
still doesn't make sense
insomnia

la même page
ne veut toujours rien dire
insomnie

Alfred Booth, France

sunday school
sealing the cracks
where the light gets in

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

light sensitive
the white supremacist
in dark glasses

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

red lipstick
a child watches Nana
kiss toilet paper

Mary White, Ireland (EC)

ageing spouse
feeling the harmony
shrivelling

Quendryth Young, Australia

crematory chapel
her porcelain forehead
cool on my lips

Eric Sundquist, USA

dinner date—
my fish, his fish
eyeing each other

Carol Raisfeld, USA

first kiss
on the quadrangle
after geometry class

Wilda Morris, USA

morning ritual
a drop of blood
on my fingertip

Stephenie Story, USA

her second flute
of brut rosé
blushing bride

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

the peeling paint
wounds which
lie beneath

Nitu Yumnam, India

short stoppage
the platform vendor
serves cold curry

अल्प रुकाव
प्लेटफार्म विक्रेता
परोसते हुए ठंडी करी

Govind Joshi, India

death comes
screaming across the sky
Gaza

Curt Pawlisch, USA

lighting-up time
one after another
the stars go out

Keith Evetts, UK (EC)

late for mass . . .
recognizing mom by the sound
of her coin dropped

закъсняла за литургия...
разпознавам мама по звука
на пуснатата монета

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

Christmas pageant
the tiny finger
in a camel's nose

X. A. Graham, USA

clearing Father's grave
blossoms when he died
now apples ripe for picking

Aine Flynn, Ireland

tenth wedding anniversary
his ex's name
in his sleepy mouth

Padmini Krishnan, UAE

weaving the lace
for her daughters' home —
first snow

țesând dantela
pentru casa fiicei —
prima zăpadă

Ana Drobot, Romania

in tonight's sky
a new constellation—
fireflies

в небето тази нощ
ново съзвездие —
светулки

Kristina Todorova, Bulgaria

I wipe the mirror
— my dad's eyes
staring back

Simon Wilson, UK

face down
in the mud
his He-Man lunchbox

Seth Friedman, Canada

the jiggle
of her Jell-O
unmolded

Mimi Ahern, USA

feeling lighter
leaving Winter
on the salon floor

Katie Montagna, Ireland

Editor's Choices (EC) – Senryu

What riches the human experience offers to writers. Although haikai are restricted to a handful of syllables, they are still able to conjure the most remarkable stories. And, in many cases, there are layers, or alternative readings to those stories. This makes life much more interesting for the reader. Potentially, they can select the direction in which they would like to take those stories. As a reader, I'd like to thank all the writers who submitted work to this issue. It's always an honour to be trusted with a writer's work. It's been a real pleasure to read the poems and a genuine challenge to whittle the original submissions down to the selection you see here. Below are a few pieces which caught (and held) my attention.



sunny morning . . .
in the bomb shelter
still night

Vladislav Hristov, Bulgaria (EC)

Vladislav's poem offers multiple readings. The English word "still" allows us to take the third line in various directions. The stillness (and relative safety) of a bomb shelter must be a great consolation when bombs are falling. However, it also traps its occupants in a sort of eternal night. It's only once you emerge from its safety that you can be sure of what's happening outside.



news of her illness . . .
mother wipes away
my tears

Alvin B. Cruz, Philippines (EC)

I admire the way Alvin shows us the interactions between mother and child here and lets us find our way into the story. The child might be almost any age, but I think of them as an adult. The mother is the bearer of bad news regarding her own health, and yet she also needs to be the comforter of her child when they learn that bad news. Someone I knew went through the difficult process of reporting their terminal illness to friends. They told me that they not only had the unpleasant job of sharing that news, but they also had to console their friends, once they'd told them. What reserves of strength and courage are required to take on both of those roles?



global warming
the line at the ski lift
stretching into spring

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

Robert gives us a big idea on a grand scale in line one. That's a lot to wrestle with. But we are provided with a manageable way of thinking about this; a transition between the familiar ski season (winter) and its successor (spring). I really enjoy the way Robert offers us an elegant transition to consider, rather than a definitive explanation. The gentleness of presentation is masterful.



bitter morning . . .
dropping kindling
on last night's embers

Jo McInerney, Australia (EC)

How many times has this question been asked? Is it a haiku or is it a senryu? If we are

dealing with the literal images, this looks a lot like a haiku. However, if we allow the kindling and the embers to be metaphorical, we are immediately in senryu territory. If we follow the metaphorical route, is the morning “bitter” because of regret? Jo has given us a lot to think about here. There are rich rewards for those who invest the time to do so.



Perseids . . .
we fall asleep
back to back

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania (EC)

Steliana seems to present a conundrum here. Falling asleep “back to back” might suggest some sort of intimacy, if the backs are touching. However, if the people are facing away from each other, and apart, does this suggest all is not well between them? Having tied myself in knots with lines two and three, I went back to the first line. “Perseids . . .”. This is a meteor shower which is visible in the Northern hemisphere in summer. Apparently, the Romans considered the Perseids were a gift of fertility from the Gods. So, maybe these sleeping people have been drawn closer together after all.



first day in kindergarten
a young father’s knees
by his ears

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia (EC)

There’s a delightful sense of rediscovery in this piece. A young father appears to be able

to replicate the elasticity of their child's limbs. Silva does not tell us how difficult those movements are. I can't help thinking that the passage of time has taken its toll on the flexibility of even a young adult body. The image of a young father joining their small child's games is a heart-warning one.



show & tell . . .
her tiny nose dusted
with buttercup pollen

Sally Biggar, USA (EC)

Is it simply a happy accident that the literary terms "show" and "tell" are included here? Sally provides the incredible image of buttercup pollen on a child's nose. How did it get there? That's something the reader must figure out. What a delicious conundrum to face and what a delightful prospect to construct a story to explain it.



red lipstick
a child watches Nana
kiss toilet paper

Mary White, Ireland (EC)

What a wonderful scene Mary paints. A child watching their grandmother and potentially wondering whether they have gone completely mad. The child is too young to know the difficulties of red lipstick and the need to blot it. So, one wonders, what sort of story they are telling themselves to make sense of it?



lighting-up time
one after another
the stars go out

Keith Evetts, UK (EC)

Keith's poem appears to subvert expectation. We're given a fixed point in the day, when the lights go on, and yet we're told that lights are going out. Here is an example of a daily evanescence which has both literal and metaphorical aspects. Astronomers are still learning a great deal from solar systems and galaxies beyond our own, yet the remarkable night sky is visible in an ever-diminishing number of places.



morning blues the melting glaciers in my eyes

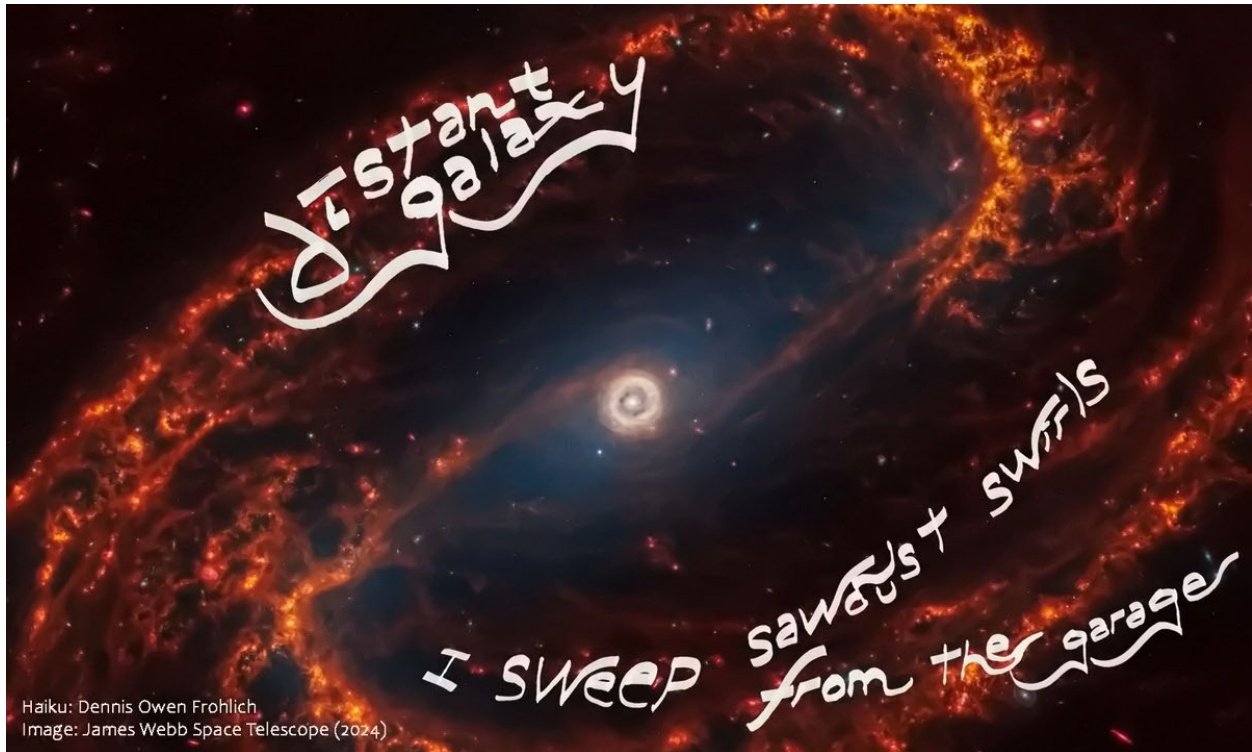
Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan (EC)

There are some poems which inspire essays. I think this piece by Hifsa is one such. It offers so much to think about. Superficially, we are given the solid images of morning and glaciers. However, there is the tantalising possibility that these images may be metaphorical, rather than literal. So, is morning the start of the day, or the beginning of a new realisation? Or could it be both? Are the melting glaciers being observed or considered in the mind of the writer or, maybe, just alluded to? Is this poem documenting climate change or is it saying "Cry me a river"? The Japanese aesthetic of *mono no aware* feels strong here - a gentle sadness at the impermanence of things and a potentially deeper sadness in the realisation that this is the reality of life. I find it profoundly beautiful and deeply moving.

David J Kelly

Haiga – Part 2

Dennis Owen Frohlich & James Webb Space Telescope – USA



Dian Duchin Reed — USA



*arm in arm
we let the wind
talk for us*

Dian Duchin Reed

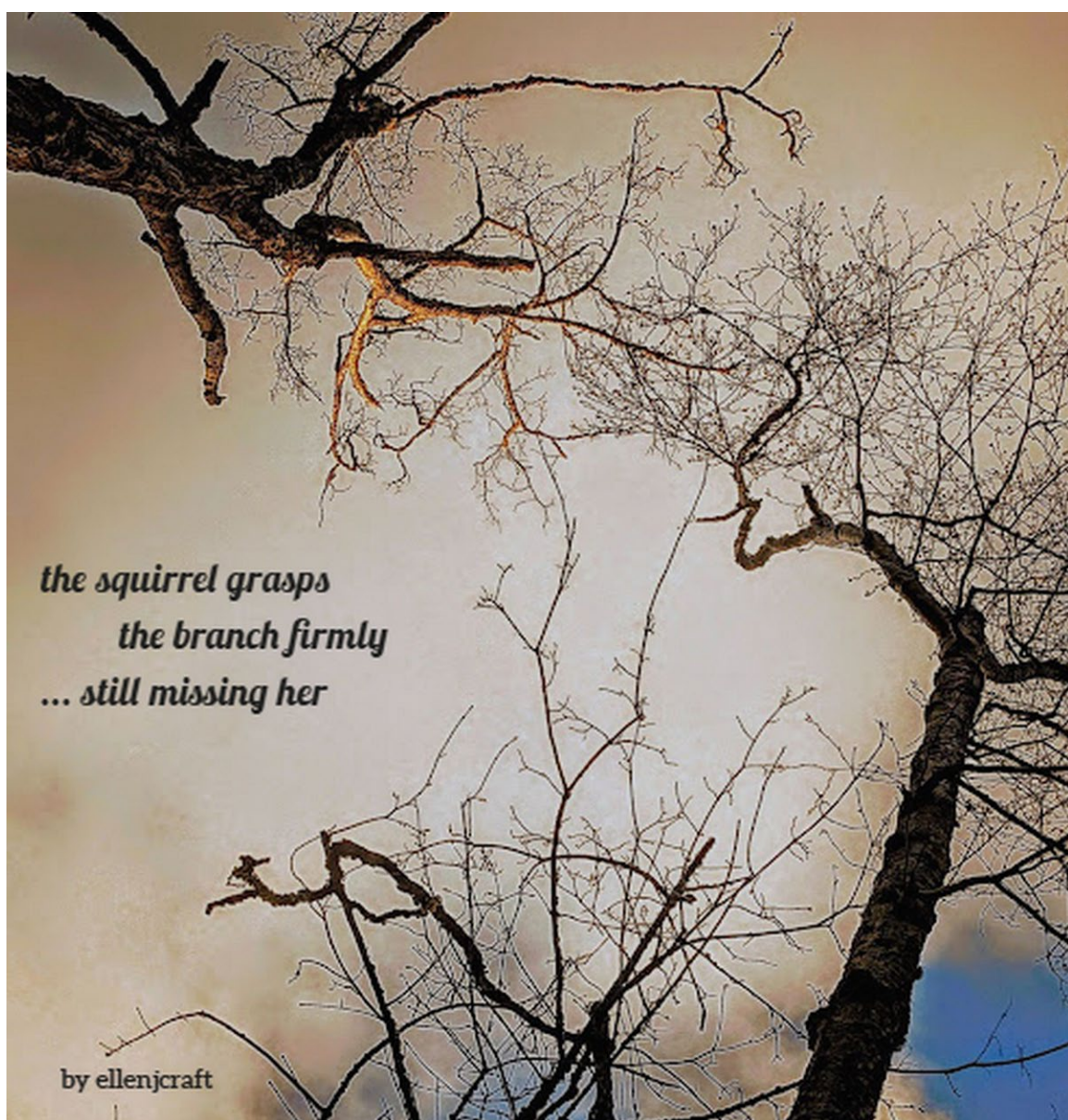
Dimitrij Skrk — Slovenia



D. V. Rožić — Croatia



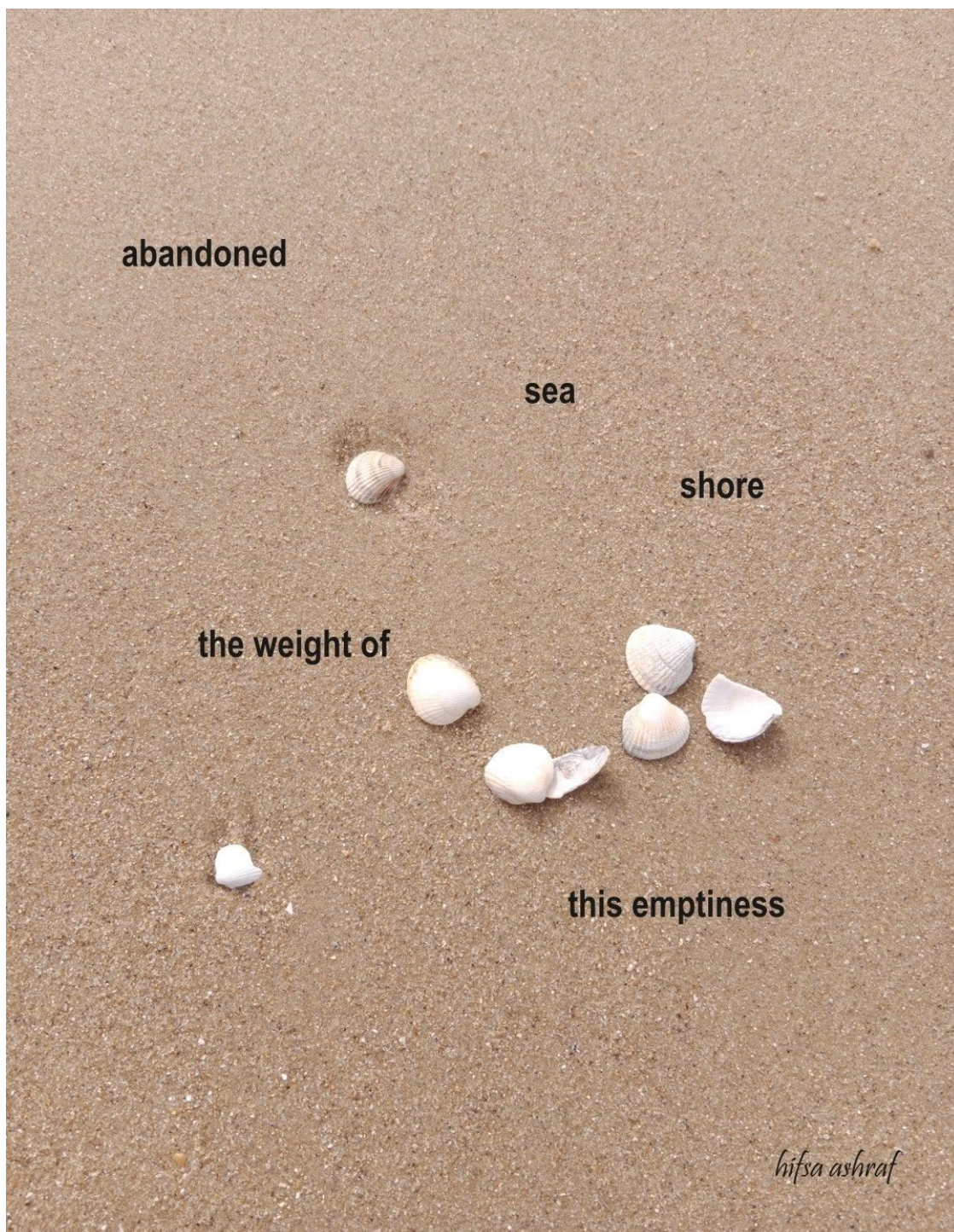
Ellen J. Craft — USA



Eugeniusz Zacharski & Jacek Pokrak — Poland



Hifsa Ashraf — Pakistan



Tanka



grandmother's shadow
next to the walnut tree's . . .
afternoon silence
broken by the cracking screech
of a glacier

Mircea Moldovan, România

the wind returns
through the field of empty hands—
somewhere, a crow
calls to the dusk
and nothing answers

Charlotte Bird, USA

forest fire haze
the hot sun at its zenith
a climate change sky
in our short shadow we feel
the long shadow cast by man

Eve Castle, USA

wetlands reclaimed
to feed urban appetites
we mourn
the habitat loss
of a dying species

Bona M. Santos, USA

limbs of dead trees
emerge from a river
like ancestral ghosts . . .
don't forget, they whisper
we were the landscape

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

on the roof
solar panels harness
the sun's power . . .
deep in the colliery
my mineworker dad

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

two planets
right above the house —
mythology
still fresh in my mind
I forget about the cold

două planete
chiar deasupra casei —
mitologia
încă proaspătă în mintea mea
am uitat de frig

Ana Drobot, Romania

from a cocoon
the butterfly will emerge
I wait patiently
for the dawn to break
after a dark night

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

with a finger on lips
I peep at the first starlings . . .
alone in a wild orchard
not silencing anyone
at this quiet hour

z palcem na ustach
podglądam pierwsze szpaki...
sam w dzikim sadzie
nikogo nie uciszam
o tej cichej porze

Wiesław Karliński, Poland

not returning
to the hive
the grey honeybee
lingers longer
for sunset

Randy Brooks, USA

the homeless man
envies
the vineyard snail:
what a house
in such a place

der Obdachlose
beneidet
die Weinbergschnecke:
welch ein Haus
in solcher Lage

Pitt Buerken, Germany

perfect . . .
a day walking on paths
by the water
my gaze slowly moves away
from the mind's labyrinths

Rita R. Melissano, USA

twisting and turning
the corkscrew willow
grows quickly . . .
too soon our youthful figures
give way to bent bark

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

the river
in which we dip our feet
and the river
before which we dry them . . .
the same only in name

Srini, India

lunchtime
on the barnacled pilling . . .
the gray gull
waits the whole half hour
to go back in

Ron Scully, USA

a dog-tooth violet
yellow in the yellow
shade of a maple
this urge to read
Bashō again

Joshua St. Claire, USA

corn stalks
standing above the snow
is there anything
more to say
about life after death

LeRoy Gorman, Canada (EC)

trees reclaim
the old farmstead
with it
the wild abandon
of my youth

Bryan Rickert, USA

alone, uncertain
to walk or not to walk
the last mile
to the mountain orchard, I slip
further into my migrant past

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

crossroads:
on the right side a kindergarten
cemetery on the left . . .
sakura by the road
shedding its petals

raskršće:
desno vrtić
lijevo groblje
trešnja uz cestu
otpušta latice

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translated by D. V. Rožić, Croatia

fading fragrance
of grandmother's lilac . . .
petals falling
will this be
our last spring

Jon Hare, USA

swollen with eggs
the mantis
turns her gaze on me —
what does she know
of death?

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA (EC)

sanderlings skitter
across the backwash
before the next wave . . .
the secrets that will stay
when the waves come for me

Jim Chessing, USA

her smile fades
beneath the darkening scars —
how I wish
I could give her the light
to soften this growing dusk

Gauri Dixit, India

I forget
why I opened the fridge
staring at milk . . .
a life measured
in smaller and smaller things

मैं भूल गई
क्यों खोला था फ्रिज,
दूध को ताकती . . .
छोटी से छोटी चीज़ों में
सिमटती ज़िंदगी

Nalini Shetty, India

cancelled
Resurrection service —
candle
after candle lights up
in every balcony

slujba
de Înviere anulată —
candelă
după candelă se-aprinde
în fiecare balcon

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

hesitantly
he asks me who I am
again
I hold his hand
tell him I am his son

Simon Wilson, UK

lunch with mother
we listen to
quicken steps
in the ward corridor
another code blue

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

the writer's ashes
poured into the sea —
mourning waves carry
untold stories
echoing through the tides

Nicholas Gentile, USA

we return
from the funeral
to eat
the fruits of the earth —
Dad's mouthful of dirt

Ruth Holzer, USA

a rectangular plot
full of weeds
and gravestones
some with bouquets
some with buttercups

Mark Gilbert, UK

a lifetime learning
how to love . . .
in old age
an empty forest
where a tree falls

Leon Tefft, USA (EC)

crevasses mar
the surface of her face
unbearable
the weight of winter
for those left standing

Reid Hepworth, Canada

one more vet
one more tombstone
its service medallion
glinting in winter light . . .
no one there to salute

Curt Pawlisch, USA

endless rides
on the school bus
first on, last off
no one ever knew
where I came from

Sally Biggar, USA

scent of honey locust
wafts on the wind
I memory-walk
on the schoolyard lawn
into a clicking of marbles

Cyndi Lloyd, USA (EC)

tears of my daughter —
nothing I say
can assuage the pain
and confusion
of first love's end

Kevin Valentine, USA

bluegrass tunes
tumbling with twins downhill
in bales of hay . . .
whistling grandpa's favorites
to banjo, bass and fiddle

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

I gave you
my favorite journal
now it's just
scrap paper
for your kids scribbles

Susan Burch, USA

after his father
buried the collie
the boy asking
again and again
'you sure she's dead?'

Edward J. Rielly, USA

filling
her basket
with colored eggs
a snow angel
lingers in the shadows

Rick Jackofsky, USA

moon in and out
of clouds . . .
my rising heartbeat
at the glitches
in the ultrasound

Padmini Krishnan, UAE

newborn grandson
his crinkled fingers curl
around mine
I picture the future . . .
replacing window panes

Gwen Bitti, Australia

a boy racer burns rubber
on the street
a fiendish squeal —
an acrid smell
of hopelessness

Anne Curran, New Zealand

family
like dental floss stretched
way too thin
those volatile bonds
will they fray and snap?

Pamela Garry, USA

taking our pleasure
in a secret mid-day nap
the dog is quiet
even birds are silent
as if they, too, are aware

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

from the night sky
the stars fell
in your eyes
with my gentle kiss
I intensified their shine

sa noćnog neba
spustile se zvjezdice
u tvoje oči
svojim nježnim poljupcem;
pojačah taj njihov sjaj

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

from bare branches
raindrops scatter and fall —
a bleak morning
yet everything feels so warm
when you come closer

s golih grana
truse se kapi kiše
otužno jutro
a sve je tako toplo
kad se približiš

Sanjana Zorinc, Croatia

empty branch
after the robin's flight
how silent
these house walls
in your absence

Nitu Yumnarnam, India

he said it was the best life
he could ever wish for . . .
does he know
how empty mine is
without him?

Carol Raisfeld, USA

sepia winter
surrenders to the sunshine
I sketch you
on a parchment of promise
with every colour of spring

Gavin Austin, Australia

I walk the bay
she swims beside me
in serene shallows
never coming up
the moon so near, so distant

Richard L. Matta, USA (EC)

long winter night
the last log burns
beneath the mantelpiece
her faded smile
in a torn photograph

Robert Witmer, Japan

wattle birds
perch in the iron barks
beside the path
you scorn the rust
of my scrap metal dreams

Richard Kakol, Australia

the ruby glow
of Chianti Classico . . .
in a swirl of thoughts
she contemplates
divorce

Oana Maria Cercel, Italy

like the holy man
who tears apart
the scriptures
as too literal,
I burn your letters

Jimmy Pappas, USA

at the traffic signal
a rumble of idling cars . . .
I still wait
for this yellowing life
to turn green someday

sanjuktaa asopa, India

barricaded garden
the morning glory peeks out . . .
this wish
to live a life of freedom
from stereotypes

Mona Bedi, India

what if
I had walked the path
I walked away from . . .
a different blue sky
and a different greener grass

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury, USA

waiting and working,
rejection at every turn
dreams unwavering
how much more can I endure?
the sun rises, the moon sets

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

I flip through
our photo album,
is life
only about being a part
of a huge jigsaw puzzle

Kala Ramesh, India

still fresh
the roses
in the temple bin
what price does nature pay
as we venerate the gods

Rituparna Maji, India

starless night . . .
sparks from our campfire
transforming
into constellations
we have no time to name

Debbie Strange, Canada

take my hand
and follow me
into the darkness
where courage is shaped
with only a spark

Joanna Ashwell, UK

misted window pane . . .
I draw a line connecting
uphill lamps
distant windows blinking
as if the Milky Way

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

couch by the hearth
Bouvier's head on my lap
a winter night
both chasing sheep
my book on the floor

Robert Erlandson, USA

the grandfather clock
chimed into my dreams . . .
every fifteen minutes
I counted the rhythm
until birdsong

Alfred Booth, France

cycling across Canada
he picked me wildflowers
back without him
i'm given a jersey
with each province's flower

Celia Hope, New Zealand

composing
the song of the day
as I sing it into the wind
not getting very far
and never heard again

Tim Cremin, USA

a blues singer . . .
at the window in sun
where a cat sleeps
a girl in a kimono
painted with canaries

Florian Munteanu, Romania

the street's gone upscale
Wally's Jazz Club is still here
the young tenor sax
plays my favourite Coltrane —
his high notes roll back time

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland/USA

snow moon's face
crisscrossed by branches . . .
in the next apartment
my deaf neighbor slams
her kitchen cabinets

Joshua Michael Stewart, USA

snippet of a dream
all day deep inside me
this cornfield —
my decisions get lost
in the labyrinth of thoughts

bribe de rêve
tout le jour au fond de moi
ce champ de maïs –
mes décisions se perdent
au labyrinthe des pensées

Marie Derley, Belgium

homeless . . .
bindle over handlebars
he cycles away
down the bike trail
just after dawn

Anna Cates, USA

Editor's Choices (EC) – Tanka

corn stalks
standing above the snow
is there anything
more to say
about life after death

LeRoy Gorman, Canada (EC)

This tanka catches my attention. It is clever, succinct and funny, despite its ironic twist. I'm amused by its provocative stance. We can ponder this way and that about life but the certainty here is, the corn stalk is left standing in snow. These thoughts are not subtle, they are laid out bare. LeRoy covers the breadth of life's journey from A to Z in a few words, leaving us like the corn stalk, to wither, or weather it out.



swollen with eggs
the mantis
turns her gaze on me —
what does she know
of death?

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA (EC)

I like the power and humour here. An intrigue is set in the first line, 'swollen with eggs'. In the following two lines, 'turns her gaze on me,' our anticipation deepens. Is the writer viewing this in a playful or serious vein? The last two lines, 'what does she know of death?' completes the story with wry humour. Many cultures believe that seeing a praying mantis will bring good luck. For the Kalahari bushman, the mantis was considered the trickster-deity, Kaggen. This tanka leaves us to pivot in the moment and contemplate the possibilities.



scent of honey locust
wafts on the wind
I memory-walk
on the schoolyard lawn
into a clicking of marbles

Cyndi Lloyd, USA (EC)

This tanka spontaneously conjures a warmth within, without knowing consciously how or why this is happening. Maybe it is the long-forgotten child being given a chance to awaken. Who knows! It is inviting us to go along and be there again for a moment or two, tapping into the warm haze of our buried memories of a 'schoolyard'. The power of the sense of smell in the first two lines arouses our reminiscing. The last line, 'a clicking of marbles' drawing on the sense of hearing, awakens long faded recollections of a childhood's delight.



I walk the bay
she swims beside me
in serene shallows
never coming up
the moon so near, so distant

Richard L. Matta, USA (EC)

This haunting tanka leaves space to ruminate. It draws us into the 'serene shallows' without alluding to who the swimmer is. We're left in limbo. Is this the spirit or the flesh and blood of a woman? We must surmise. The last line 'the moon so near, so distant' hints at the pain of separation. Like the writer, we are left with an experience that is compelling yet elusive. We too are caught in its sentiment of yearning.



a lifetime learning
how to love . . .
in old age
an empty forest
where a tree falls

Leon Tefft, USA (EC)

Pathos lingers reading this tanka. It is a concertina of life's loves and losses. When dear friends 'fall' and are gone an 'empty forest' may grow, becoming a soundless, soulless thing. In human terms, the growing isolation of ageing calls on an inner strength to remain upright. Weathering alone life's ongoing blasts with the emptying out of loved ones is no small task. The poet has cleverly brought this idea together in the last three lines using a powerful metaphor.

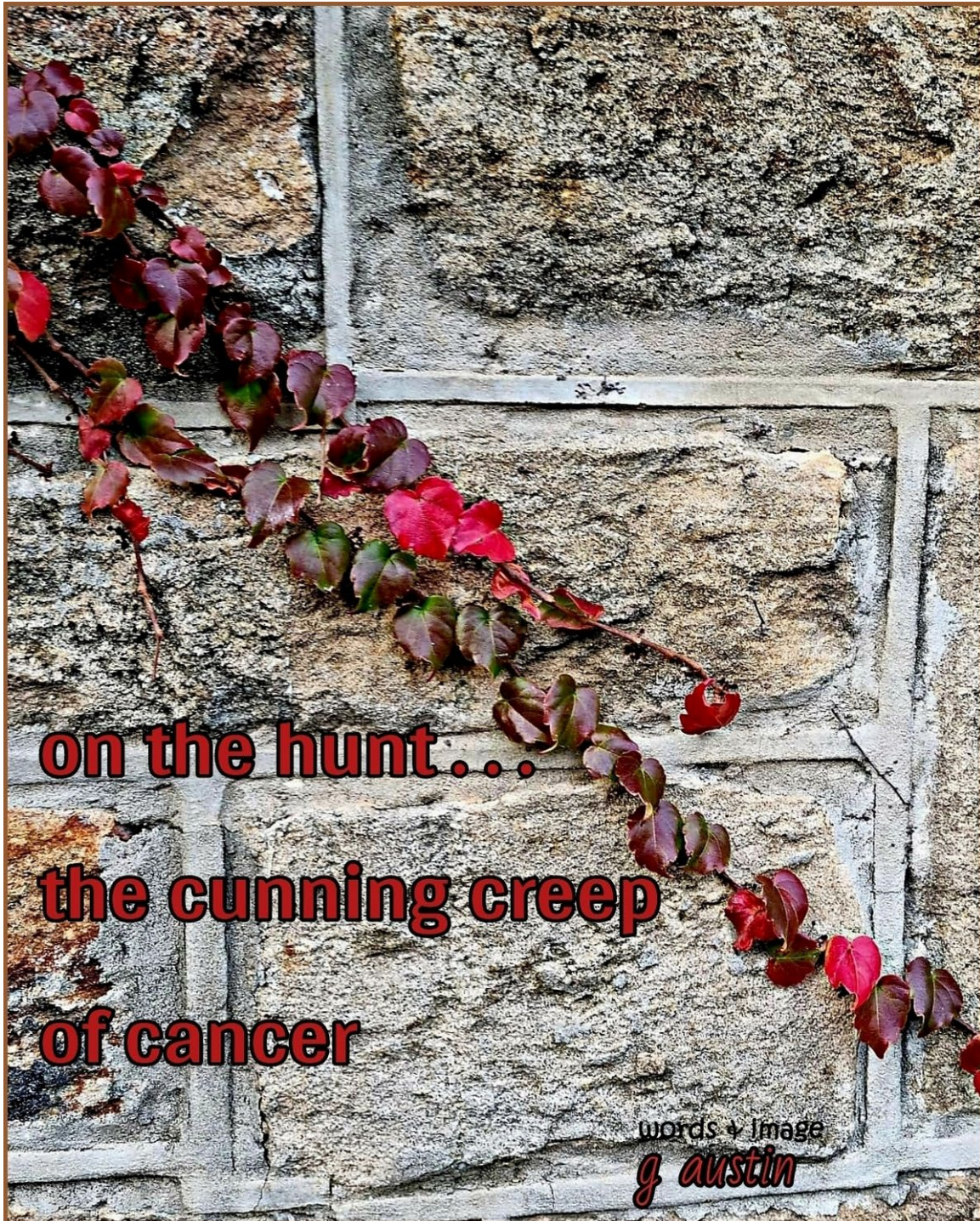
Jenny Fraser

Haiga – Part 3

George Skane & Richard Skane — USA



Gavin Austin — Australia



Janet Ruth — USA

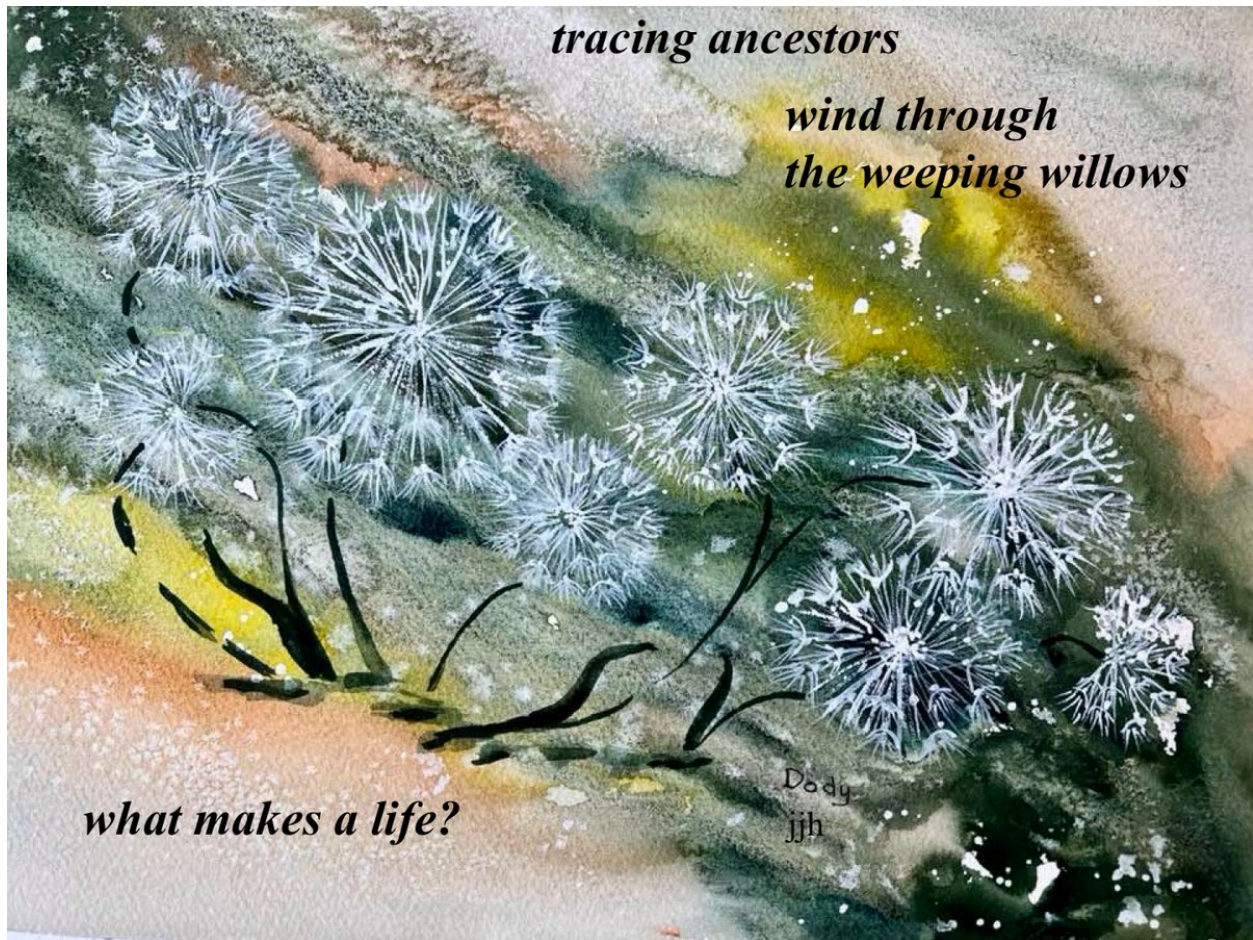


Major League Baseball's Spring Training, a series of practice and exhibition games, runs from mid-February until the "regular season" starts with Opening Day on March 27 this year.

Jenny Fraser — New Zealand



Johnnie Johnson Hafernik & Dorothy M. Messerschmitt — USA



Luminita Suse — Canada



Marilyn Ashbaugh — USA



Haibun



First Fear

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

I am lying in my crib, staring at the dark ceiling. This is one of my first memories. Above the window is an empty, white plant hook. When cars drive by, their headlights bathe the room in blue. When they come down the hill, the light washes from left to right: when they come from the highway, right to left. A shadow stretches from the hook, long and distorted. It looks like a man in a trench coat, collar flipped up, wearing a fedora, his eyes barely visible between the top of the collar and the hat's wide brim. When two cars pass at once, the shadow moves back and forth, back and forth. His outstretched hand is knocking . . . knocking . . . knocking . . . on an old woman's door.

I complain to my parents for days to remove the hook. My two-year-old logic cannot explain, but they comply, confused. Yet the shadow remains knocking in my mind.

even now . . .

in clouds, treetops, churches
silent swirling shadows

A gift

Robert Erlandson, USA

Over the years I pressed Mom about her premonitions. She reluctantly told me they started with a dream when she was a child. It was close to Christmas. She dreamt that people from her village were standing around a hole in the ice at a funeral service. Shortly after the dream, a friend was traveling with her family in a horse-drawn carriage to town across the ice. The ice cracked. She revealed that over the years she experienced many forebodings about something bad happening to people she knew. I asked if she was ever wrong.

She cried . . . answered no.

faded memories
and no longer dreaming
yet . . . her smiling face

Ritual

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

The dog and I like to walk early. The grass slick with dew makes my steps slip a little. The dog paces beside me, ignoring my wobbles. Through the sandstone gates to the seat by the fountain. My left hand folded on the blade in my pocket I wait for the sun to rise above the tree canopy, daydreaming of stars and flowers and watching people.

The dog lounges at my feet, eyes shut, keeping the world out. A pack of rowdy kids jostle each other running to school. Some folks smile as they pass, the wary turn their heads away.

At ten o'clock the walk and doze complete, we stand, turn for home. The blade, heavy in my pocket. The dog trails behind.

park bench
the shadows
in perfect slices

Nocturnal

Anna Cates, USA

inside the darkness there is sleep
do not burn the shadows for light
the earth is cool, the silence deep
inside the darkness there is sleep
arrest your grief, and do not weep
let it be a gentle, peaceful night
inside the darkness there is sleep
do not burn memory for light

windblown fescue . . .
where the fawn fell
a single feather

Even Old Ghosts Become Obsolete

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

from the fire pumice night of the path

His belly swells beyond the silhouette of his sunken chest, his distended navel beyond that, like a new mother's breast overfull with milk. His though sustenance for the aitu, the aged ghosts who secreted him into the bush as a child, who baptized him in their ways, who raised him as their own.

dark visitation of what's been flying fox

Now as he too grows old and their frail presence wanes, he becomes the source and savior, a mute preserver of myth, drunk in the reverie of his silence. Stories flowing instead from bloodshot eyes framed in silver locks and beard — an anniversary of knowing what it's meant to be of these islands, what it's meant to be found and lost again.

solstice moon on balance white plumeria

February

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

The longest month. On its first day, I wake alone to the snow crystals on my bedroom window.

It takes me twenty minutes to get up, then I sit on the edge of the bed, wondering what my married life has become: trapped in this black hole of what-ifs, a tug-of-war between mind and heart played out nightly in my dreams.

another surge
of Arctic air
this wall between us

That moment of calm

Geetha Ravichandran, India

Those were the days when even visits to the hospital were restricted. I wait for news, for the phone to ring. A friend calls and tells me firmly, “You will not for a moment think that he will not recover.” The words strike me as a wondrous possibility. There could be another outcome, other than the one that plays out in my mind. I look out of the window. The long-leaved false Ashoka tree grows in unkempt profusion. A Bougainvillea climbs on its branches. Suddenly, in this scramble, I catch a glimpse of the purple rump of a sunbird. Three tiny beaks surface for feeding.

scaffolding the nest
after the storm
sprouts of green

Pick the Day

Ernest Wit, Poland

The expensive watch on the wrist of the man in the large poster by the road was intended to be a symbol of eternal success, the victory of youth over time, the staying of the best moment. But in fact, it was a sign of transience as old as time. The old masters used to stop the passing world in a still image. They showed all the more painfully that it had already passed. Like the man in the poster.

lowering sun
we stand on our toes
to reach the last plums

Guilt-edged

Keith Evetts, UK

I must be a bad person because when I see the five-star review of two young men trapped by institutional abuse in an intensely moving story of a racist reform school, I don't want to watch the movie.

communication tower
the bones all around
a bald eagle's nest

jeremiad

for kevin reilly

Anthony Lusardi, USA

a brown leaf falls and drifts into a stream behind the library along the currents like a boat with no sail until it hits shore or gets stuck on a submerged rock or some hiker comes by to clear the debris.

some leaves pile up on the overflow, while others create larger waterfalls and new paths. an elm falls and the hiker walks over it like a bridge above white crocuses, skunk cabbage, soda cans, cigarette butts, a pair of boxing gloves, and a worn text of cormac mccarthy's blood meridian.

the evening gets darker and there is a keening for the hiker to return home just as how the monarch butterfly longs for the last lobelia. but the hiker no longer comes by as he has gone further beyond the woods, never to return.

the only thing that travels through are traffic sounds from the nearby highway, lined with cypress, lilies, roadkill and memorial crosses. but sometimes, some library-goers will glance at the woods, feeling the urge to explore and see if there is anything to discover and clean up.

autumn dusk —
smaller than I remember
his old travel-hat

Crabapple

Andrew Leggett, Australia

I read on the Boulder local news that the numerous sirens sounding across the plain yesterday were responding to a local councillor shooting a teenager. The boy drove onto the shooter's property with the intention of taking photographs for his high school homecoming. The councillor was granted bail on a \$5000 surety. There was much reported in the media about the Colorado 'Make My Day' law, requiring that the intruder has illegally entered the respondent's home, that there are grounds to believe that the intruder intends to commit a crime and that the intruder may use physical force against an occupant. The local council was reported strong on gun control. Three years ago, a gunman killed ten people, including a police officer, at a grocery store in town. The trial continued today, following another shooting at Boulder on the weekend. There has been another one at Broomfield today, just thirteen miles away. On Facebook, I posted a photograph of me embracing my beloved in front of a black bear statue beside the Chautauqua General Store. I wrote 'In the arms of the bear.' Someone commented: 'In the USA, you have a right to bear arms.'

leaf carpet

twigs break underfoot

the crack of a rifle shot

The Gulf of America

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

How can I stop oligarchs messing with my head through their puppet, POTUS. The rough and tumble of the schoolyard taught this carrot head to stand up to bullies. But how do I do this when he is out of reach of a solid punch and a kick in the balls?

How can I ignore his taunts of making my country the 51st State with the help of his brown-shirt army of goons and murderers. The justice system is in his pocket. Are the World Wars forgotten lessons?

How sad is it that folk of alternative sexualities are being hounded from their jobs. That refugees from poverty are being rounded up and sent back to squalor. That he threatens Panama and Greenland with invasion. That his trade wars will spread misery and depression.

How will this precious Earth survive his rapaciousness for fossil fuels, pulp wood lumber, water; his dismissal of human rights; his rejection of global warming?

I think I will hunker down in a trench with my tin hat* on for the next four years.

spring equinox
the old pond
full of slime

*Tin Hat or Battle Bowler were nicknames for the steel helmet worn by the British Tommy and Commonwealth soldiers during World Wars I and II

OURstory

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury, USA

Where there were forests there are now a forest of houses.

high nests
a bald eagle
in freefall

Hummingbirds at their fingertips, their breezes the voice of generations of whispered secrets, the great old trees. Now going, one by one. Their shadows will linger awhile, like the fading glow of sunset until they slowly become creatures of myth. The great mycelium of social media will ensure their eternal existence when even paper becomes extinct.

I am, because you are.

susurrations
the tendrils on my nape
come alive

Revisiting the Past

Carol Raisfeld, USA

Running along the length of Korea are majestic timeless mountains. Covered in lush forests filled with aromatic Hinoki trees, they provide a comforting escape from the rush of city lives. For millennia these mountains have stood as sentinels, calmly watching the flow of time and the journey of humans.

rain forest café
the waiter in a zebra shirt
and leopard pants

Those Were the Days

Pris Campbell, USA

I mentor two students from the East-West Center at the University of Hawaii. They come from Japan to spend the summer getting adjusted to American ways before graduate school on the mainland. Today is their first home-cooked meal in an American home.

We sit in my Oahu apartment after a meal of fried chicken, green beans, homemade biscuits and gravy, prepared by my visiting Carolina mother and aunt. It's like a different planet for my relatives seeing leis around necks, Hawaiian dancers, Waikiki Beach strolls. They are thrilled to meet my co-workers who are Japanese, Chinese, Portuguese and one descended from Hawaiian royalty. Now, they were eager to help with my students.

sizzling sun
freshly-picked pineapples drip
down the tourists' chins

Friends drop by after the meal and provide a divergent group to socialize. I sit between the two students. "Ask me if you don't understand something," I whisper. Soon my mother and aunt are the center of attention, drawling story after story about our family past in their thick accents . . . "Rememba when cuz'in Sudie cheated on tha bible ex'ham an' was tha preacha's dawter. What a rukus . . ." followed by roars of laughter from the group, including my two wards.

getting old
still, so much left
to share

I drive the two students back to the Center. Their English is pretty good but they stumble at times. We talk about their impressions of the gathering. "It was fun," they assure me, all smiles and eager to please. I look into their eyes and say, "Tell me the truth now. How much could you really understand." They look at each other. "I understood her and him and her", one says, "but what language were those two ladies speaking?"

I laugh all the way home.

Living on Line

Anju Kishore, India

Winter dawns are meant to stay buried in bed, my daughter, working from home, says. For us, a generation way before Gen Z, winter dawns meant perching on the kitchen counter, warming fingers on a stainless-steel tumbler full of frothing filter coffee while dosas sizzled on mom's iron griddle. It meant trudging to the bus stop down a foggy road and riding in the packed public bus to college many miles away. Gossip and giggles always warmed things up nicely.

And then, that trooping together into the college canteen for some steaming badam milk and crisp medhu vadas.

spreadsheet —
a patchwork of fallen
almond leaves

Notes:

Dosa: a South Indian pancake made from finely ground rice and lentils. It can be prepared either crisp or soft.

Badam: almond

Medhu Vada: fritters, crisp on the outside, soft inside made out of a batter of spiced black lentils

Now and Then

Srini, India

The train comes to a sudden halt some half an hour after leaving Hyderabad. Between taking a phone call, typing something on his laptop, and taking a long sip of water from his thermos, he looks out of the barred window of the air-conditioned compartment. Through the grey-tinted glass window, he sees three cricket matches being played on a dusty playground that is half the size of a football field. He casts his mind back to those days when, as a teenager, he used to be part of one of those matches and was confused about which match he was fielding in. The memory makes him smile, but before he can indulge in nostalgia, he gets another call and the train starts to move.

ancestral village . . .
time stops in the shade
of mango trees

Into Sight

Gavin Austin, Australia

My muscles clench beneath the skin of my rigid limbs. The pillow is twisted and uncomfortable as I stare, unseeing, into the darkness. Again, I turn to try the other side. Murmuring and sighing, I pull the sheet over my head, then toss it aside again. The light flicks on and I feel my mother's hand on my clammy forehead. She tries to stroke away my tenseness so sleep can overtake me.

'I am going to tell Mr. Richardson you will not be able to run again. Look what it is doing to you!' she says. 'It's a school sports day, not the Olympics, for heaven's sake.' Slowly she backs away from my bed and snaps off the light. No, I must race, I mutter to the dark. And I must win. My father might notice.

moonlight
at my window
the power of flight

Lamb Chops and Jell-O

Barrie Levine, USA

Our mom disappeared for three weeks when I was seven years old. Dad hired a woman to do the laundry, make breakfast, and cook dinner for me and my little brother while he worked at the machine shop. No one explained where our mother went or if she was even coming back. Dad said that children were not allowed to visit because mom needed her rest.

Every day, when I got off the school bus, I looked for my mother in the living room, in her bedroom, and in all the other rooms too. One afternoon, when I walked through the front door, there she was, sitting quietly on the brocade wing chair, holding out her arms to me.

u-pick farm . . .
biting the red
out of autumn

One Summer Evening

Padmini Krishnan, U.A.E

Some moms, helpers and grandparents are assembled in the playground, watching over their kids. A few older children jump furiously on the rope bridge while the younger kids scream. My daughter looks at the monkey bar for a few minutes, but runs over to the swing.

The helpers chat noisily, sharing cookies, candies and chocolates. A young mother tells her son not to take anything from the helpers. The noise ceases abruptly and we stare at her. Now we are interrupted by a loud crash. The rope bridge has broken and a 6-year-old girl comes crashing to the ground.

mid-summer
the sandstorm rattles
a rag-doll

Last Lights

Ana Drobot, Romania

It is a beautiful winter day, which I would have said feels like spring if I didn't have the calendar everywhere: my phone, my computer, the wall. The Japanese have a special term for these days: small spring.

The sun infuses everything with beauty: from the branches that have begun to bud, to the magnolia that is also preparing to bloom, to every house and even the supermarket. The boulevard spreads wide ahead of me as I advance towards the park. I stop to get coffee to go.

black coffee —
I add dreams
instead of sugar

When I is for U

Pamela Garry, USA (EC)

He intended to include a classic haiku in his email:

the fragrance of plum blossoms
on a foggy path:
the sun rising

— Bashō (Trans. Michael R. Burch)

But he goofed while keying that final line.

on Bashō's foggy path
with a slip of the fingertip
— the sin rising

The Novice

Stefano d'Andrea, Italy

A long time ago I had a dear friend who, after an intense life of work and an even more intense life of worldly and erotic dissipation, having reached saturation with a nausea for life or a thirst for atonement — had retired to a Franciscan convent in central Italy.

One fine day I received an invitation from him to visit this famous monastery. Very happy to see him again after many years of separation, I decided to go and visit him.

Once I got there, and seeing each other as we both grew older, the mutual demonstrations of affection and remembrance were long and warm. But the thing that surprised me most was to discover that my old “wild” friend had in the meantime become the abbot of the monastery.

And so, after having eaten a very frugal dinner in the refectory with the other monks, my friend took me to a monastic cell. Before taking his leave, out of pure courtesy, he asked me: “Do you also want to participate, before dawn, in the liturgy of the *Matins?” I, who have always been very sensitive to the austere and magical beauty of Gregorian chant, declared myself enthusiastic about the idea. We said goodnight making an appointment for the middle of the night. Exhausted by the long journey and by the intense emotions of meeting again, I immediately fall into a deep sleep.

After a few hours, in a very dark and remote point of the night, hearing a knock on the door of the cell, I woke up saturated with torpor. Still dazed by the situation and the severity of the hour, I got up, light the candle on the bedside table and opened the ancient and heavy door. I found myself facing a young monk, certainly a novice, who, after greeting me formally said: “Get dressed and hurry up, I have the task of accompanying you to the choir loft ** to celebrate Matins***. Not wanting to keep him waiting and, driven by enthusiasm, despite the hour, we quickly descended the stairs together still immersed in darkness.

continued . . .

Once the liturgical function ceremony was completed, the Lauds followed, — still celebrated with the ancient Gregorian notation that makes the apse and the nave vibrate with arcane and profound resonances — the group of monks dispersed, each one turning to their own tasks. My friend the abbot dismissed me, leaving me free to visit the church, but making an appointment with me shortly thereafter, for breakfast in the refectory.

Having arrived in this hall — much more illuminated than the rest of the monastery — I sit down at his side as a guest of honor. While waiting to be served by the monks on duty for the meal, I expressed my heartfelt thanks for the courtesy of having a young monk wake me up in time. But, to my immense surprise, my friend, the abbot replied: “I wish . . . Right now, and for a long time unfortunately, we no longer have young monks in the monastery.”

To my incredulous and insistent complaints, the abbot seraphically pronounced, “All the monks are gathered here with us for breakfast: do you see anyone who is not old?”

choral dawn . . .
in the curves of time
a visitation in habit

** / *** (liturgy / office of Matins = the first part of the Liturgy of the Hours celebrated with singing in ancient monasteries)*

*** (cantoria/choir loft = part of a church or monastery dedicated to sacred chants)*

Making Friends

Simon Wilson, UK

This morning, my first in the new retirement bungalow, I walked to the shops and, in the fashion advised by Mr. Dale Carnegie in his book “How to Win Friends and Influence People” spoke to a woman with a toddler in the queue and then engaged the shopkeeper in conversation about his choice of career. On the way back, I nodded to a neighbour and complimented him on his Japanese Maple, a blaze of crimson in the autumn gloom. None of them, I have to say, showed much enthusiasm for being won over as a friend.

fallen leaves
point the way
— first unsteady steps

Mandate

Diarmuid Fitzgerald, Ireland (EC)

This is my first time, canvassing, and a lady shows me the ropes: how long to stay at a door, what kind of a 'talk' to give, and most importantly when to move on. We take turns with one talking and the other smiling and handing over a leaflet. Her brown hair falling over her face, the strong cheeks, and her deep voice.

street rubbish
the flow of my breath
in the wintry air

At one door a teenager answers, with a spliff in his hand. He takes a long drag and puffs the smoke in our direction and says he is not voting. I argue with him to do it for the greater good. My friend guides me away as the door slams shut.

frozen toes
a cold sun dips
under the horizon

My friend invites us back to her house. We swap stories over chocolate bars and hot cups of tea with her wife and daughter. I assume that this would be a regular occurrence, but it turned out to be a once-off.

After the result, an article appears in the newspaper about her transition many years earlier.

an Irish summer
rain glazes our placards
proclaiming the change

On the Scarriff Road

Ruth Holzer, USA

The man who stopped to give me a ride asked if I was on holiday. I meant to say, no,
I'm in self-imposed exile from my native land, but I said yes.

soft rain
the wayside cross
sinks deeper

The Immigrant

Mimi Ahern, USA

smoke curling
from his pipe
scent of December

What are you doing, Daddy, I ask, as my father walks back and forth on the uneven sidewalk in front of our old house in Danville.

Getting my exercise, he replies.

Why don't you walk around the block?

He pauses, puffs, and answers: I've already seen it.

Dreams of Flight

Richard Kakol, Australia

The beggar has only one hand. He wears a shabby suit of a faded black material which might have been fashionable before the war . . . the Great War. The man is a silent, solitary figure, amid the noise of the city, the exhaust fumes of Volkswagens and Skodas. My mother and I pass by quickly, on our way to a medical appointment in Lublin. Suddenly mama stops and fishes out a banknote from her purse.

'Go back and give him this,' she says, handing me the twenty zloty note. I return to where the man is standing, backed up against a wall. He doesn't make eye contact as I drop the note into his hat which he holds out with his one good hand. To him, we are probably just rich foreigners who can easily spare the cash.

the raven
with a fractured wing
falls from the sky

Real Estate

Jonathan McKeown, Australia

There is a property in the horizon that no man has but he whose eye can integrate all the parts ... Emerson, Nature.

This morning, I had to shut down the water to a residential building in Kirribilli – to replace a faulty isolation valve in one of the apartments. I found myself standing in their kitchen looking out the window: nothing between me and the Opera House – between me and Circular Quay – but the Harbour, a Manly Ferry, a luxury yacht cutting its way in . . . Like spectators the City's crowd of impressive buildings formed a kind of amphitheatre . . . It was a gorgeous spring day. And just as my heart began to envy the owner of that view – a lone seagull intervened, winging its way out toward the Heads, taking my eye . . .

eviction notice
the waning moon's light
on the back yard

Late Season

Andrew Grossman, USA (EC)

The lake ice is sweating, and will soon break up. As the only resident during the last five months, I have been the opposite of a caretaker. I have dumped my trash in unoccupied yards to keep my own yard clean. I have broken into pantries and feasted on cans of pineapples and red beans. These fine people do not believe in burglar alarms.

Loneliness makes me walk across the ice to the fisherman. He unlatches the door to his hut when I knock.

"You've been busy," he says, "I think you've caught more food than I have."

He knows what I've been doing. My face is already red.

He motions me in. When I sit on the overturned crate that he uses as his guest chair, he looks closely at me.

I realize he has seen everything through the slats, and what he has not seen he can guess by my facial expression.

"I don't know what's brought you here," he says. "I can tell you're not a bad person. You're just desperate. That happens to everyone at one time or another."

We sit for hours. The malicious side of my personality, the resentment at being alone all winter, recedes. We talk about other subjects: Spring training, his family's Easter dinner plans, the size and number of the trout he's caught, the woman who has abandoned me. I look away after a while. The slats have gone dark. He lights the lantern, and pulls in his line.

"This might be the last time I fish this season." He holds the lantern up to my face. "Be kind to the summer residents," he say, | and be kind to yourself."

creaking boots
on the edge of the ice field
drifts of snow

Indigo Flame

Leon Tefft, USA

Yesterday was unusually cool, but the heat wave has resumed. Through the wrought iron fence, a duskywing flutters past a rose whose pink petals briefly waver. Tracing dizzying zigzags across the yard, it suddenly comes to rest on the back of my hand. We study each other here in the calm shade, then a gentle flicker of wings, and I'm left alone again. How quickly yesterday's breeze is forgotten.

windswept day
in and out of my thoughts
a butterfly

Skyfall

Susan Burch, USA

What if every time it snowed, it snowed a different color, so you'd never know what it was going to be?

dark time of year
the wicked witch of the west
sticks out her tongue

Slipstream

Brijesh Raj, India

The homestay balcony oversees an egret's shadow slipping across flooded paddy squares. Time stays submerged here, alongside a variety of fishing avians. Every once in a languid while the shadow takes a step forward, and waits in hushed silence.

Meanwhile, a dragonfly prostrates itself on the railing, compound eyes covered by gossamer wings. A little later, a spider with straw limbs hurries across. In the background, a bird's snake neck spears a ripple.

walk of the plover
each step
a poem

No crocodile teeth to floss here. But the buffet is bountiful. A stork leans into its pearl white shadow, looking closely inside eddies of its own making. A large, dazzling white form arrows across the fields to land with an implosion of brown; merged perfectly with a stack of cut hay.

Fronds and tendrils await against a landscape broken by the lumbering winks of butterflies. One hangs upside down from the leaf tip of a young rain tree.

A kingfisher, nattily turned out in an electric blue suit, drops like a stone into the rain water run-off. The orange beak vigorously bashes its prey against the perch. Draws itself up and unveils a startling white breast whilst flapping to ward off a doppelganger.

water hyacinth . . .
on the skyline
the remains of a hill

The airways are invaded by a dissonance of squabbling herons. They grumble in weird hag-like tongues.

bared teeth . . .
the insatiable appetite
on full display

Twisted

Janet Ruth, USA

In the morning, the mountain slopes are bathed in light. Sometimes eyes closed, jaw set, my face is turned away. Its presence is hidden, even from my heart. The sun's first glance brightens the sky but darkness remains wrapped around me. I look west at sunrise, thoughts clothed in jagged shapes and shadows, neck stiff, heart walled away behind bricks of my own making. And yet the mountain stands witness, waits in her veils.

cool caress
of pine needles and owl feathers
my burning cheek

Testament

Glenn G. Coats, USA

After the kids
are off the bus
and tucked
into their own corners
of the house;
after my wife
is home
from the hospital
and resting
on the couch,
I look out
a window and spot
a rustle
in the freshly fallen
leaves.

Maybe she dove
from the top
of a telephone pole;
caught a wing
on a long branch
of the sycamore —
her eyes fixed
on the soft blur
of a rabbit.
The hawk's head follows
as I move
in a semicircle
around her —
talons spread wide
to keep steady;

continued . . .

I study the dark bars
on the wings
eyes
yellow like the sun —
no raspy scream
not a sound,
it's getting dark
and I think about
the fox and coyotes
that prowl,
and I stay as long
as I can knowing
she'll be gone
by morning.

hunter's moon
shades of night
in a feather

Mud Season

Joshua St. Claire, USA

the way the sun could warm us when there was no wind and when the snow was gone
despite the sun the touch of a crocus petal could chill us to the bone

where you used to be returning geese

Spring Bears on the Hughes River

AJ Johnson, USA

Blue Ridge first light and hiking down the mossy slope, I flush a ruffed grouse, leaves and blossoms scattering as he lifts off to freedom. I reach the old cabin, and with feral urgency dig into soft earth to squat like a bear, my dignity still intact. And like a sleek bear, I silently stalk upstream, pool to crystal pool, planning the perfect cast to conjure up the brook trout. I shout, "hey bear, yo!" on my way back up the trail, as if it were right to startle him in this way — a spring black bear, rooting grubs.

dogwood blossoms
almost as white
as my beard

Cool Travels

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

The Japanese maple leaves are the first to feel it. They sway gently, revealing the grayish red undersides. It then begins a progression across the patio, moving from the north to south, stirring the petunias and geraniums and the mock orange bush. Then I feel it, a two second breeze, brushing across my arms and shoulders, a teasing hope of more to come.

dozing in the heat
the slow in and out buzz
of an airplane

Before and After

Iliyana Stoyanova, UK

My dad was a keen photographer, so my early years were thoroughly documented in a thick leather album, its pages separated by creased rice paper that crinkled softly when turned. Images of a cute baby, an even cuter toddler with long curls – and yet I hardly recognize myself. While I have sporadic memories of those early days, my first full-blown recollections are at the age of four when we left our familiar surroundings for the unknown adventure of life in Africa.

Fifty years later I am standing on a sun-drenched beach overwhelmed by the sweet scent of oleander and snippets of a life long-gone.

Crete holiday

wishing a skipping stone can reach
the Libyan coast

Free Rein

Kala Ramesh, India (EC)

My granddaughter's dance class is over, and the kids sit on the floor to remove the tinkling salangai from their ankles. This little girl loves to dance through malls and parks, oblivious to the people around her.

My mother, living in Madras, as it was called in her teenage years, loved to dance, too, but she says that girls were not taught classical Bharatanatyam dance in her day because it was something a girl from a respectable family wouldn't do. Shouldn't do!

My thoughts go back to the bronze dancing girl of Mohenjo-daro. Wearing twenty-five bangles on her left arm and four on her right, the girl stands with her head tilted and one hand on her hip.

a patter of rain—
 peacocks
spread their feathers

*salangai – the ankle bells worn by Bharatanatyam dancers.

Magic Hands

Joanna Ashwell, UK

Shapes, colours, textures and scent. His fingers begin with one part, never really knowing how it may end, only the knowledge of what to take. A scrap of paper, a grain of sand, paints, rosewater. There is no studio or gallery, just a loose branch or an empty hallway. Mirrors sometimes catch a flash of creation. Then it is gone. The star you can't name, the aurora uncatchable, the wingbeat of a myth.

potter's wheel
filigrees of light spinning
a cloud's watermark

Editor's Choices — Haibun (EC)

WHEN I IS FOR U

Pamela Garry, USA (EC)

He intended to include a classic haiku in his email:

the fragrance of plum blossoms
on a foggy path:
the sun rising

— Bashō (Trans. Michael R. Burch)

But he goofed while keying that final line.

on Bashō's foggy path
with a slip of the fingertip
— the sin rising

Pamela Garry's haibun has a lightness of touch with a wordplay on a Freudian slip when the typo in "I" instead of "U" takes on a whole different nuance. It is a poetical dialogue with one of the great haiku Masters with an unintended comic effect. There's also a pun with "I" as in the ego and the "U" as in "you". I returned to the haibun each time with a big smile.



Mandate

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rain glazes our placards
proclaiming the change

***Mandate** by Diarmuid Fitzgerald portrays a snapshot of contemporary Ireland with its complex and layered social and gender issues. The narrator and his “lady” friend with a “deep voice” navigate apathetic or even hostile responses on the doorsteps while out canvassing. However, the narrative voice is even-toned and non-judgemental. The poet adeptly uses the haiku as accents of emotions and thoughts. I very much like how the each of the accompanying haiku opens up the prose passage enhancing the intended impact of the narrator’s perspective. Although Fitzgerald tackles an intricate and knotty theme, he succeeds in engaging the reader in a deeply affective way.*



Late Season

Andrew Grossman, USA (EC)

The lake ice is sweating, and will soon break up. As the only resident during the last five months, I have been the opposite of a caretaker. I have dumped my trash in unoccupied yards to keep my own yard clean. I have broken into pantries and feasted on cans of pineapples and red beans. These fine people do not believe in burglar alarms. Loneliness makes me walk across the ice to the fisherman. He unlatches the door to his hut when I knock.

"You've been busy," he says, "I think you've caught more food than I have."

He knows what I've been doing. My face is already red.

He motions me in. When I sit on the overturned crate that he uses as his guest chair, he looks closely at me.

I realize he has seen everything through the slats, and what he has not seen he can guess by my facial expression.

"I don't know what's brought you here," he says. "I can tell you're not a bad person. You're just desperate. That happens to everyone at one time or another."

We sit for hours. The malicious side of my personality, the resentment at being alone all winter, recedes. We talk about other subjects: Spring training, his family's Easter dinner plans, the size and number of the trout he's caught, the woman who has abandoned me. I look away after a while. The slats have gone dark. He lights the lantern, and pulls in his line.

"This might be the last time I fish this season." He holds the lantern up to my face. "Be kind to the summer residents," He say, and be kind to yourself."

creaking boots
on the edge of the ice field
drifts of snow

Andrew Grossman gives an account of a man who has reached the very nadir: pilfering the neighbours' pantries, tipping the nearby open spaces with his garbage. He describes a bitter, unhappy person who has crossed the line into an unimaginable transgression of basic social norms. Yet, his neighbour, the fisherman passes no judgement and instead shows him compassion and understanding in his moment of alienation and misery. His words offer the narrator hope and healing:

"... I can tell you're not a bad person. You're just desperate. That happens to everyone at one time or another."

I found this haibun deeply moving particularly given the current rhetoric that damns those who have lost any agency and are outside the social and economic mainstream. Perhaps a timely reminder that the transformative effects of kindness should be embraced.



Free Rein

Kala Ramesh, India (EC)

My granddaughter's dance class is over, and the kids sit on the floor to remove the tinkling *salangai* from their ankles. This little girl loves to dance through malls and parks, oblivious to the people around her.

My mother, living in Madras, as it was called in her teenage years, loved to dance, too, but she says that girls were not taught classical Bharatanatyam dance in her day because it was something a girl from a respectable family wouldn't do. Shouldn't do!

My thoughts go back to the bronze dancing girl of Mohenjo-daro. Wearing twenty- five bangles on her left arm and four on her right, the girl stands with her head tilted and one hand on her hip.

a patter of rain —
 peacocks
spread their feathers

**salangai – the ankle bells worn by Bharatanatyam dancers.*

Finally, Kala Ramesh's haibun bridges past and present and nature and culture. She compares the contemporary granddaughter mad about dancing to her own mother, who, although she "loved" the art was unable to participate due to social disapproval at the time. This makes Kala wonder about the significance of the one of the earliest depictions of a "Dancing Girl" unearthed in the ruins of Mohenjo-Daro, one of the famous cities of the Indus Valley Civilization that flourished some 5000 years ago. The free-standing bronze statuette is of a female dancer complete with coiled hair and bangles on both arms.

The dance is eternal, Kala implies. Then, in a delightful connection of imagery and thought, the dancer is linked in the haiku to a dance of peacocks in the rain. "Rain" puns on "Rein" in the title of the poem enhancing the undercurrent theme of the freedom of movement and form. I found this haibun enchanting and memorable.

Sonam Chhoki

Haiga – Part 4

Mark Meyer — USA



Maxianne Berger — Canada



Mircea Moldovan — Romania

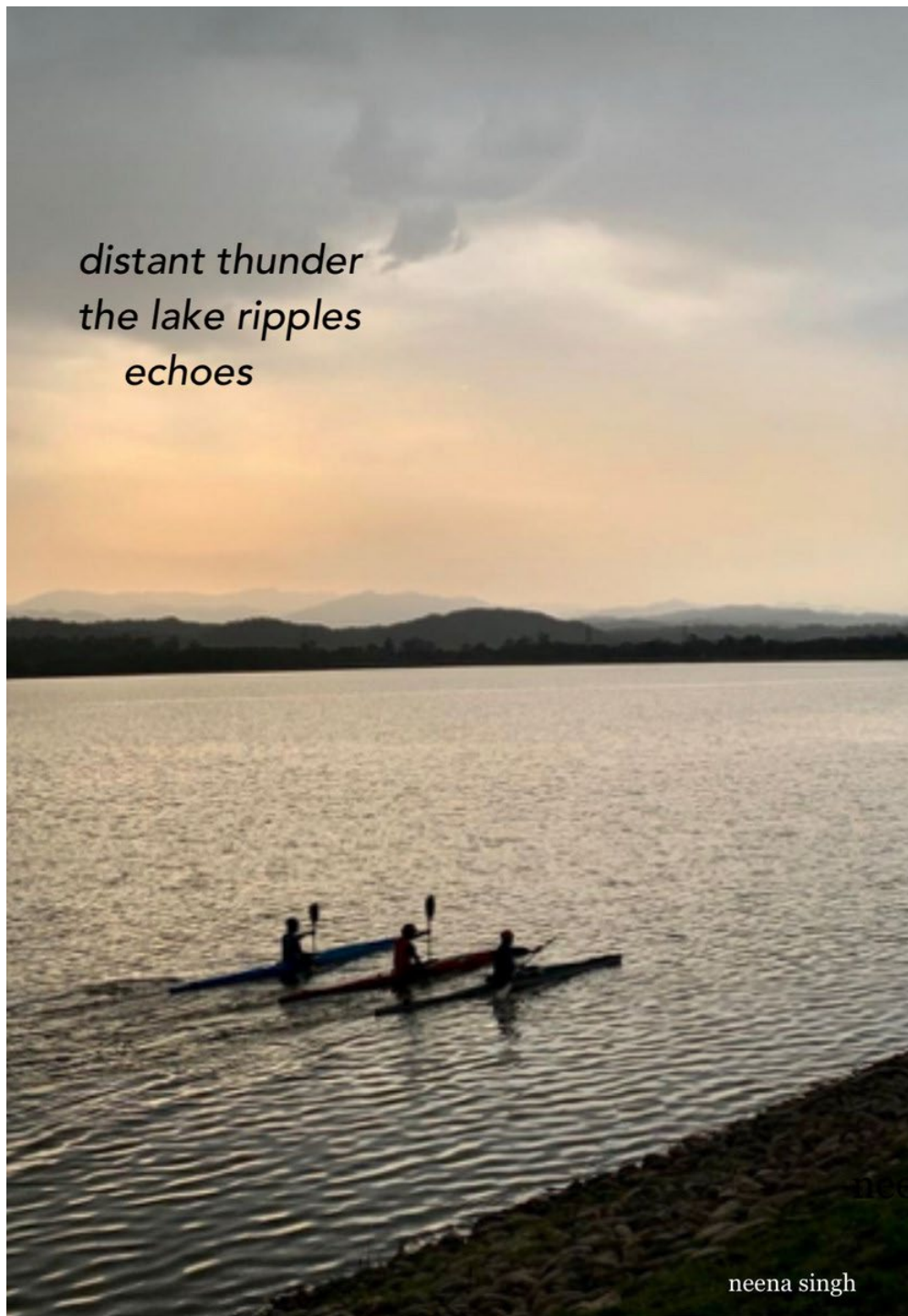


Nalini Shetty — India

spring thaw
what's left of us
on separate shores



Neena Singh — India



*distant thunder
the lake ripples
echoes*

neena singh

Oscar Luparia — Italia



Pamela Garry — USA



Tanka Prose



Heart Held

Rupa Anand, India

for Mama Lucy

In the woods, there's a clear path bordering the trees. I spend a lot of time walking on it and watching the birds.

On the far side there are five women chattering and laughing. On the edge of the ficus are seven babbler sisters, pecking and foraging and making a lot of noise.

Beside me, is a fat affectionate tabby, walking alongside. This is very unusual behaviour for a cat but this is what she does, always. My circular rounds are accomplished in her company. As we walk together, a group of ninja bulbuls keep swooping overhead into my face. I assume they have assessed the cat's presence (and mine) as predators!

Taking a break on a bench, the cat continues its affectionate nudges at my ankles. I know nothing of her history. For four years she has adopted the park grasslands and me. With her I'm never alone. I linger a bit more watching the squirrels darting quickly up and down tree trunks. Dusk, we return home, me to my house, and she to her corner of the park under the bamboo bushes.

the greens
continue to ripple with life
rueing the Sunday
I find her broken body
in the street at first light

Castaway

Joanna Ashwell, UK

When I finally cleared the last box from the attic, it was like being cast adrift on an island of memories. The crash of one final tsunami, the jitters from school. My first attempts at writing, the cursive script dipping over and above the watermarked lines. Oversized pictures, crayoned in bold colours, beyond all recognition of reality.

There were bound exercise books — of wallpaper . . . The pride we showed to classmates of an off-cut of paper that was left from a wall. There were doodles over the patterns, huge hearts — of undying love for school crushes.

recycle or save
some traditions lost
in the digital age
erasing his name
key by key

The Lake House

Gavin Austin, Australia

He sneaks a glance into windows of the regimented houses lining the backstreet. The grey afternoon warmed by fires glowing in lit living rooms. Faces peer from behind lace curtains, quickly looking away as hands reach to lower blinds, or draw drapes. He bites his lip and shuffles faster.

As he unlocks the front door, an unfamiliar silence greets him in the hallway. Heading to their room, he climbs onto the bed. An indentation remains in the pillow on the other side of the mattress; a white-linen crater, cradling a lifetime of secrets, and the hint of Old Spice.

moonlight
silvers sleepy water
the dirge
of a lone swan
unsettles a small town

Confluence

Alfred Booth, France

Many times, we have gone to the tip of the presqu'île where the two rivers meet. The best moments are in the summer when, from over the edge of the banks, I let my feet bathe in the waters while you listen to my childlike joy. Farther out, the rush of the Rhône mingles with the lazy flow of the Saône.

our separate paths
often met and lingered
we grow old
with a growing desire
to merge as one

Exodus

Pitt Buerken, Germany

The frustration is written all over His face. The Lord looks at Africa with helplessness, even despair. War has been raging in the eastern part of the continent for decades; and peace is nowhere in sight. "People can't manage to live together peacefully. I have to separate them." And He draws a broad line from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean near Madagascar.

Now, there is an African Plate and a Somali Plate drifting apart. "I am separating what doesn't belong together," the Lord says. "One day they will live on different continents, and I hope that there will finally be peace."

Mose parted the waters
and the Israelites passed
through dry-shod
the waters closed again
and there was peace

Hooked

Susan Burch, USA

Now that Redbox* is closing down, their machines are up for grabs and boy would I like one! It would be fun to have them all in that cool machine that displays exactly what you have and in some kind of order. Want Men in Black? There it is! Minions? No problem! Instead, I have a wall of DVD's that are all mish-mashed together in pure chaos.

Apocalypse Now
not wanted . . .
please
be a darling
and find Peter Pan

My husband says no to the Redbox, that it's outdated technology, but I like to think it's classic. And even more importantly, DVD's work.

streaming
No Return to Neverland
the irony
when we lose the feed
for good

**Redbox was a company that offered DVD rentals and streaming services through kiosks/vending machines and online. At its peak, Redbox had over 43,000 kiosks in the U.S. and Canada. Unfortunately, in July 2024, the company went bankrupt and shut down the kiosks.*

A Tale of Two Poets

Anna Cates, USA

A: “. . . writing is hard work, so I don’t push myself.
I write only when the muse compels me.”

B: “For the past year, I’ve challenged myself
to write a poem a day, everyday.”

A: “What do you do when a poem you write
isn’t up to your standards?”

B: “Not a problem. I just lower my standards!”

a sparrow trilling
in a sycamore tree
tiger lilies
evening shadows
deepen the meaning

Bordeaux—Marseille

Oana Maria Cercel, Italy

I feel like I'm experiencing something that has already happened, something so familiar that I have no desire to stop this levitating convoy, even though I feel the deep furrow imprinted by the wheels that welcomes my presence and its existence. All I do is sharpen the perception and awareness I have in my heart by pointing out through the window, with its almost veiled glass, the irregularity and amphitheatre of the hills, sometimes green, sometimes desert. Their gathered ripeness where nothing remains of green but the high walls of topless trees or firs that stand like silent sentinels, facing the sky. The multitude of rows of grapes, the Rhone, the flamingos and the autumn mistral showing me the way, the storm clouds chasing us, and in his open, soft arms I would like to stay.

He is dry land for my body that has been on the track for hours towards the cobalt sea. He is the stop and every station. He is the journey to the old port. In him, I find myself at home as his breath draws near with warm lips kissing my neck, my hungry mouth, my soul forever waiting for him.

On this journey the green landscapes change, as do the shapes of the gothic cities and those of the villages dotted here and there. The harvested fields and rows of grapes ready for picking change, but the sky does not. The sky dotted with a refined symphony of intense cobalt clouds above the roar of the waves and the smell of the sea coming in through the window of the train that no longer stops, accompanying me towards the milky ways that make me dream, leading me

looking at me
in the middle of nowhere
this solitude
a creaking door
far away

Epigram of love

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

There are no pens and bits of paper on your desk. The laptop occupies the centre with its charger at the side. The lamp is free of dust. With their spines clearly displayed, the Tibetan-Sanskrit, Dzongkha and Sanskrit dictionaries line the shelf nearby.

My table is strewn with scribblings on receipts, shopping lists, books with old postcards for markers and the ballpoints invariably have no caps.

On our walks, I want to know the names of the birds, you're content to listen to their song. How did you learn the range of colour-palette words to describe the light and hues of the clouds, the trees and shrubs in the changing seasons?

You initiate conversations. "How is it going?" You ask as I stare blankly at the screen. "Are you're alive?" You tease first thing in the morning.

Nothing fazes you, while so much riles me.

our early rendez-vous
in landslides and raging rain
hair flattened with sweat
clothes patterned with dirt
and you always said, "I've come"

It is You

Ana Drobot, Romania

In the psychotherapist's office, I saw you so clearly. All his gestures, his tone of voice, and the way he asked me to open up in order to talk to him were right there. I would smile at him, just like I would do with you, yet he was sitting behind me, as I lay down on the couch, never seeing my smiles. However, maybe he felt them in my voice, as I was speaking.

a story
from long ago
your steps
inside
my dreams

And in my dreams . . . it is still you. It is still you who offers me chocolates, smiles, and takes me on a walk.

Mormor har demens*

Robert Erlandson, USA

My parents immigrated from Sweden and as a child, they made it clear to me that, “This is America and English was our language.” However, they used Swedish whenever they thought I couldn’t hear or spoke about things they didn’t want me to know. My secret, I understood.

I panicked
grandma had demons —
hugging me
mom said, “no ... not true”
tears and a laugh comingling

* mother’s mother (*grandma*) has dementia

On the Run

Mary Gastmeier, Canada

My baby's back is rigid and arched in anger. Her hands grasp the air trying to reach me. A once peaceful face contorts to red and her powerful screams are punctuated by faltering gasps for air. Her sister buries her face into my thigh and silently sobs as her thin frame trembles. I rub her back attempting to soothe. My body vibrates in outrage. With one motion, the Federal Marshal disdainfully throws our Australian passports on the seat and dumps my baby girl into my arms. Hands on hips, an action which reveals both badge and weapon, the Marshals watch while we sit and buckle up. I feel the questioning stares of our fellow passengers and hear my children's muffled whimpers. I am numb with grief and unable to find the words that will make it better.

explanations come
too late in life
their expressions
will haunt me until
humanity returns

The Miner

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

our spaceship
struck by sunlight
turns towards
the unknown
our new destination

We live beneath the dome's protective shell. Sustenance and air is generated by machines recycling our waste. We dress in weighted suits and air tanks to leave the dome and mine precious minerals to fill Earth's insatiable greed. The atmosphere is thin on this chunk of rock and gravity minimal. Outside I never tire of the view. The impenetrable black void spangled with distant stars sparking in rainbow colours. Over my right shoulder is home, a patchwork blue-green ball embroidered with brown deserts and circling white clouds. And a life left behind...

before sunrise
in the summer garden
our bare feet
glossed with dewdrops
leave patterns on the lawn

Long Shadows

Sangita Kalarickal, USA

Releasing the creamy cashew nut from its fruit is like hiking to a mountain summit barefoot, hungry, and injured. The sweet buttery flavor is forged by the fires of the chulha* through rivers of acid. Even after the pan is taken off heat, the liquid, released by the cashew-skin, bubbles away for a while.

Hypnotizing.

Mesmerizing.

Beckoning.

And I, a mere toddler. The proverbial moth invited by the flame.

Much later, after Mother changes bandages with salve, my tears are assuaged. Beneath the relief though, her face is taut. There's the look of happiness at my good luck of not losing my life. And there's the underlying tension. Her worry is blazoned onto my young brain. The worry that scars would remain long after the cool balm heals.

air raids rain
a burning death
pink clouds
sprinkle
a white shroud

**chulha: a small earthen or brick stove.*

Until when?

Keitha Keyes, Australia

I used to run a household and give dinner parties. I had beautiful pictures on the walls and interesting knick-knacks everywhere.

Now, in this aged care home, my walls are bare and sterile. I have one little shelf for photos and other important stuff.

There is nothing for me to do except wait. Wait for a meal to be delivered. Wait for a nurse to attend to me. Wait and hope that someone will drop by for a conversation.

day to day
I live vicariously
through the stories
of people who visit me —
wishing it were more often

My Lucky Seven Night

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

Mars, Jupiter, Uranus, Venus, Neptune, Mercury and Saturn will align and be visible from Earth late tonight. The scientists say planets always appear in a line in the night sky, because they orbit the sun in a relatively flat, disc-shaped plane. However, seeing them simultaneously with the naked eye is an extremely rare occurrence.

in slanted moonlight
I utter those three words
to my housemate ...
where her lips are silent again
my heart has a thousand tongues

putting a finger
to her crimson lips ...
the eyes of my heart
now see the actions of love
first with the silence of words

A Night, Forever?

show me yours
you first, no, you first ...
wrapped in moonlight
you and I, teen explorers
undress each other mentally

three words uttered ...
our bodies listening
to moonlight
as the summer grass bed
holds the shape of our night

Drifting, drifting in and out of my dream. My first love, now merely a number I could reach,
and a door I could knock?

Re: PROGRESSIVE DISCIPLINE

To: *Joshua St. Claire, USA*

From: Mrs. T

I am contacting you regarding the pink slip that was sent home with your son. He was defiant again in class, and, per the Student Handbook, because this is a repeat offense, his punishment has escalated to a detention. Details on the detention will follow from the principal. I have confiscated his book, "Where the Sidewalk Ends," because it has become a distraction. Similar to the incident last Wednesday, your son completed his math assignment before the other children. I instructed the students to work on homework or study for the spelling test on Friday, when they completed their seat work. Your son defied my simple directions and pulled out "Where the Sidewalk Ends" and began reading. As soon as I saw him with the book, I corrected him by pointing out his disobedience and demanding that he put it away and begin working on homework or studying as instructed. He said he had done his homework and had already studied and he refused — quite loudly I might add — to put it away. I reminded him that studying was never done and that the Lord loves an obedient heart. Then, I sent him to the principal's office to cool down. I am sure you agree that this was unacceptable.

millstone moon
a mayfly emerges
from the Susquehanna
to see where he comes from
for the first time

Aftermath

Jenny Sharpe, Canada

When Mount St Helens blew itself apart in mid-May, 1980, I lived in the province of Ontario situated more than 2,000 kilometres east of the blast. Ash, carried eastward, soon coated rooftops and automobiles in my city of Thunder Bay. For a short time, I could feel the volcano's tiny particles when I breathed. We also knew that these fine particles in the atmosphere acted as filters and stained the sun, moon, and stars. The hazy sky appeared to be in mourning.

At the same time, my parents and I took turns visiting a family friend who was in our local hospital dying of cancer. She was either heavily sedated or comatose, as the pain, visible in her contorted face, marked the cancer's silent progress. Her fingers clawed the blanket covering her abdomen until her final release.

the crimson moon
through grimy clouds—
while our hearts beat
gods mark time
with pillowcase stains

Darkness at Noon

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

Look! Look up! No. Don't look up. Look through your fingers. Just a quick peak. Did you see it? That shadow on the sun.

What's happening? It's getting darker. Where are the elders? Do they know what's happening? The shadow keeps moving.

Stop crying children. We must pray to the sun god, to all our gods that the shadow will pass. It's happened before, so I've been told. Many suns and moons ago, before my birth. The sun came back. We must believe it will come back again. No, don't be afraid children. Stay close to me. It is dark now, but the sun will come back. I believe. I believe.

from birth to death
discovery and learning
knowledge and faith
in those who understand
all that I don't

The Hardest Month

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

March comes in with a bluster and leaves with a whisper. it's the weather we expect.
It's the month for looking ahead, for summer plans and carefree days. It was the month
of his worsening health, of days in a nursing home, of him in hospice slipping this
world.

seven years —
is it a long or short time?
perception changes
from an eternity
to just a blink of an eye

one day at a time,
one foot before the other
all the cliches
to get where I am now
expecting warmth and flowers

The Bigness of Small

Tony Steven Williams, Australia

I'm sitting in a comfortable chair in our club, sipping a glass of red. My three companions are silent compared to my usual company. However, their movements are constantly irritating, as they mist and glide around my drink, occasionally flicking on my face like a passing thought. These are fruit flies, *Drosophila*, despised orchard pests, meandering winged specks of darkness. They have wonderful benefits though. Their rapid life cycle and simple genetics have enabled many key discoveries to help humankind, especially with diseases. I studied them as a unit in first-year biology. Now it appears these three tiny flies are researching me. Anything smelling fruity, fermented and/or fragrant is a *Drosophila* turn on, and few patrons are flyproof in this bar. Fruit flies have a special preference for the aromatic, full-bodied Shirazes I like, and on a couple of occasions have over-enthused, drowned, contaminating my drink. It is likely that I have consumed fruit fly body parts unknowingly. My partner says that might explain a few things.

moths in the wardrobe
ants swimming in honey
spider on the wall
even when we're alone
we're never *quite* alone

The Descent of Man

Simon Wilson, UK

The day is over and darkness falls. Through my window I watch the sky lose its lustre - the pinks and pearl greys are short-lived tonight. I fail, again, to see the promised Parade of the Planets, and catch just four of seven. Tomorrow night I will try again, but am prepared for one more disappointment in my life of cheap coffee and depressing small economies.

what did she see in me
where did the old me go
the blonde boy
became a silver fox
. . . and fades to grey

Editor's Choice — Tanka Prose

Exodus

Pitt Buerken, Germany (EC)

The frustration is written all over His face. The Lord looks at Africa with helplessness, even despair. War has been raging in the eastern part of the continent for decades; and peace is nowhere in sight. "People can't manage to live together peacefully. I have to separate them." And He draws a broad line from the Red Sea to the Indian Ocean near Madagascar.

Now, there is an African Plate and a Somali Plate drifting apart. "I am separating what doesn't belong together," the Lord says. "One day they will live on different continents, and I hope that there will finally be peace."

Moses parted the waters
and the Israelites passed
through dry-shod
the waters closed again
and there was peace

Those that have read this tanka-prose may be wondering why I chose this piece as my Editor's Choice. It's really the fictional tale of Him (God—Hebrew, Christian, or Muslim.) But is it? Can we really say that there was peace on this planet since the beginning of life on this planet?

Mike Montreuil

Haiga – Part 5

Pris Campbell – USA



Rita R. Melissano — USA

a seat in the sky riding the night



Rita Melissano

Robert Erlandson — USA



Silva Trstenjak & Tamara Ciman — Croatia

***Haiiku: Silva Trstenjak
Image: Tamara Ciman***

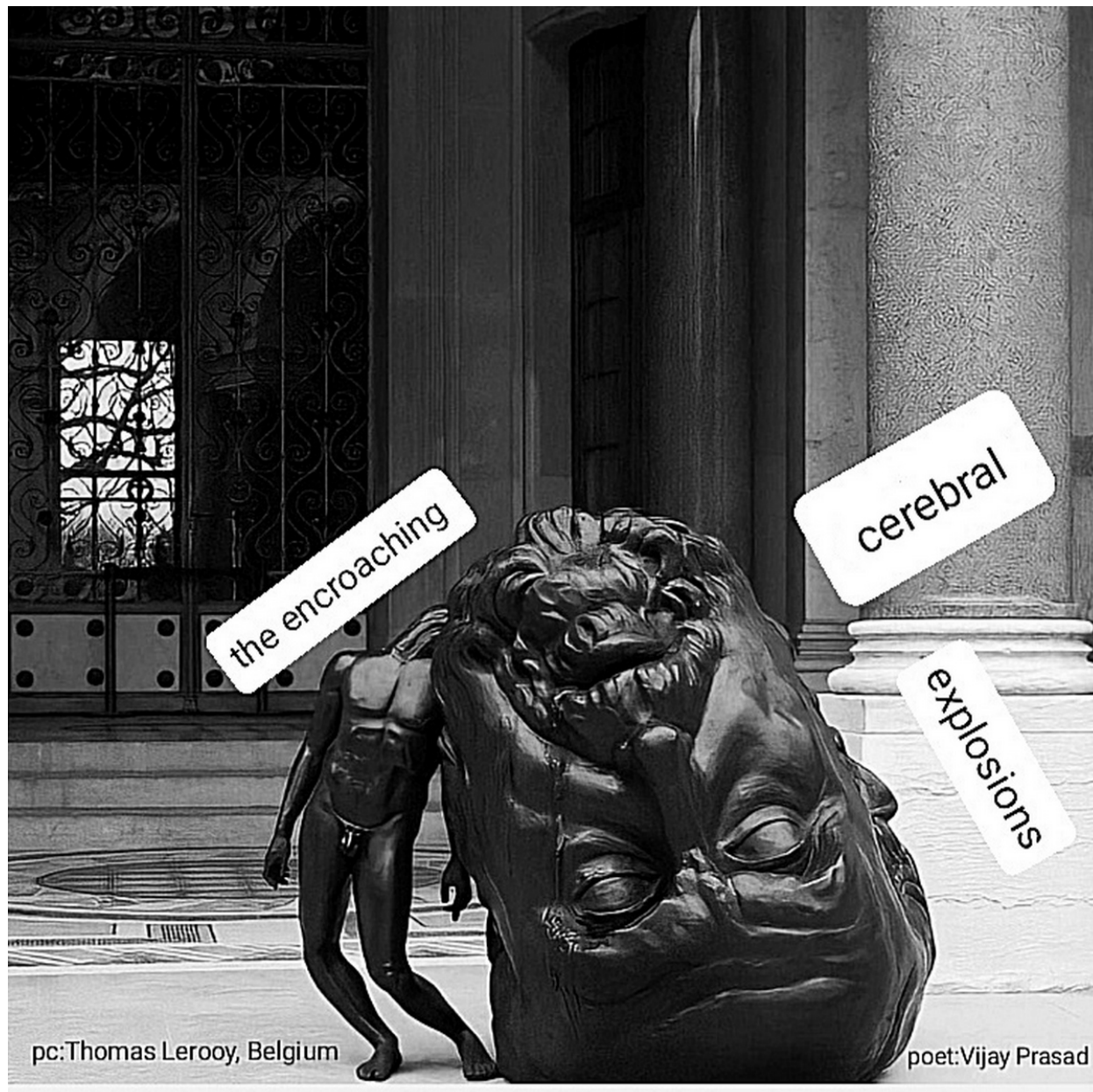


expectant mum smiles / a baby with curls / rolling

Terri L. French & Kelly Moyer — USA



Vijay Prasad — India & Thomas Lerooy — Belgium



John Hawkhead — UK



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