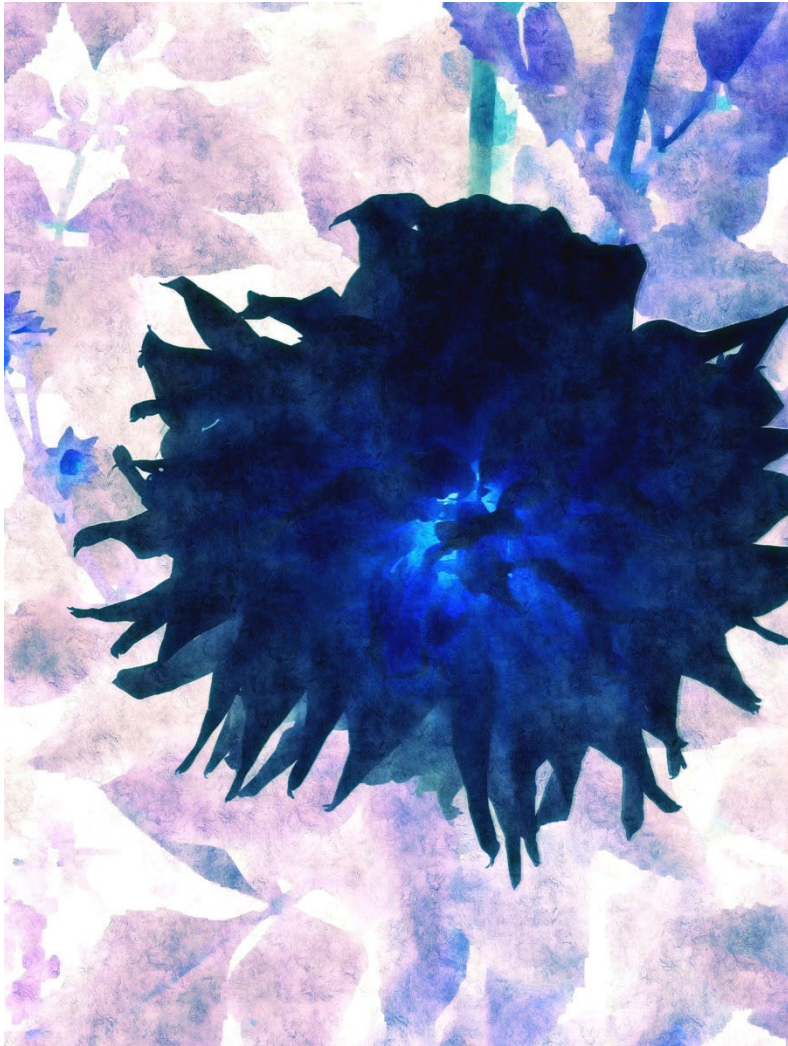


cattails



October 2025

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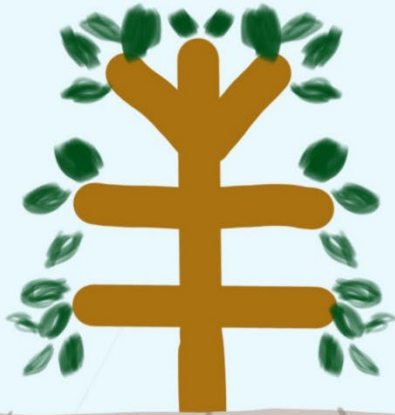
Cover: Smoulder

***Dhaatri Vengunad** is an artist and illustrator in Chennai, India. Her visual art style ranges from Indian folk and tribal art to abstracts. She is the resident cartoonist of cattails and speaks through Kat & Apila about topical issues. The art series in this issue is called “Flames of Autumn” and depicts the various forms of fire. This series was born from a partial digital abstraction process with flowers as the origin.*

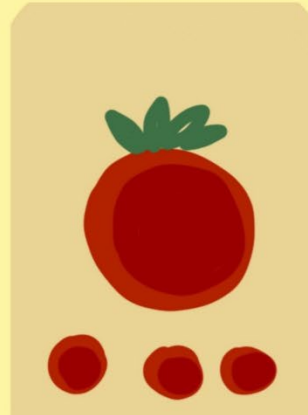
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IF EVERYTHING WAS PERFECT...



Trees would be symmetrical



Fruits would look the same inside, out



Waves would wait their turn



Phew! It's IMPeRFeCTLY PeRFeCT!
But just as magical!



Dhaatri Vengunad Menon

Introduction

Greetings from the land of Elbows Up.

Of course, the preceding line could be a rant about the state of affairs in the world. And, it would be easy to do so. But what is important is our state of mind.

The first few lines from Allen Ginsberg's Howl still resonate.

"I saw the best minds of my generation destroyed by
madness, starving hysterical naked,"

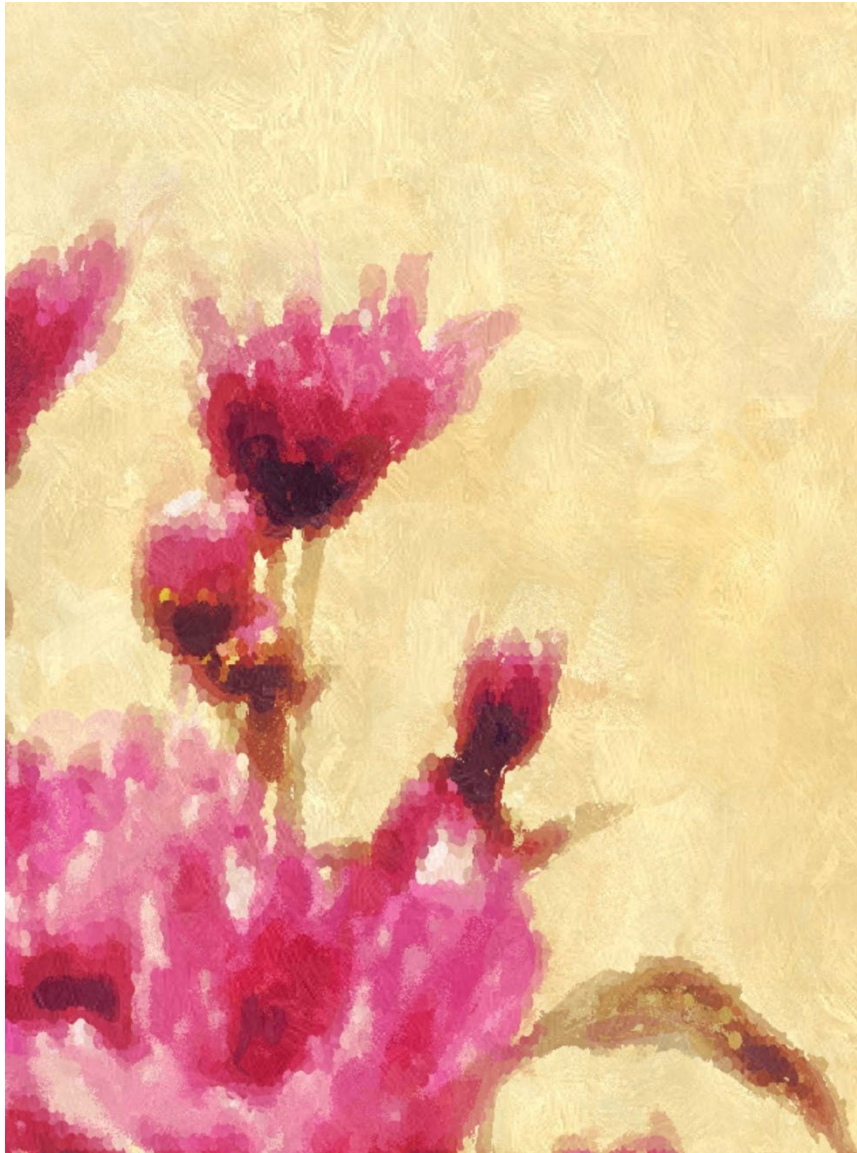
As a late pre-60's Boomer, I have had the opportunity to witness, by long distance, the events of the previous sixty years by listening, reading and absorbing those events.

It is a sad statement to what we are now living in a world . . .

I would like to thank Sonam for letting me use the cattails pulpit. Also, kudos to each of the section editors, Geethanjali Rajan, David J Kelly, Shobhana Kumar, Lavana Kray and Jenny Fraser. No words are adequate to express my appreciation for their dedication and passion. Dhaatri Vengunad Menon gives us another feature that is timely and eloquent. We proudly present the art of Dhaatri in this issue, as well.

Mike Montreuil
Managing Editor

Haiku



Sparkle

dagger hard dawn
daylight starts to splinter
along the ice road

John Hawkhead, UK (EC)

spring arrives
a branch snaps beneath
the cub

Lev Hart, Canada

meadow hiss
a calf skirts the edge
of the oak's shadow

Paul Chambers, Wales

spring blossoms —
the pear tree
hums

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

the carousel
cotton-candy fingers
point the way

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

wobbly jelly —
children's laughter at the festival

お祭りの子の笑ひこゑぐらぐらゼリー

Christina Chin, Malaysia
Translated by Mitunori Nagata, Japan

cherry blossom rain
a ponytailed girl
pirouetting alone

櫻花雨
一個綁馬尾辮的女孩
獨自單腳旋轉跳舞

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

garden excursion . . .
tiny tots in red raincoats
scamper laughing

Gwen Bitti, Australia

new blossoms
the couple adds their lock
to the railings

Ibrahim Nureni, Nigeria/USA

train platform
empty of passengers —
a cluster of butterflies

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland/USA

seed leaves . . .
the young rook's voice
not yet a rook

Thomas Powell, Northern Ireland

noisy miner —
the dog's food bowl
a motherlode

Rohan Buettel, Australia

banking up potatoes —
broken filberts
hidden by jays

Amanda Bell, Ireland

soft clouds
this pillow
of grass

Timothy Daly, France

a deep breath
of cloudless sky
bamboo flute

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

total eclipse
of the pink moon
wildfire smoke

Alanna C. Burke, USA

samoan starling
a murmuration
of one

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

summer solstice
carting off spring debris
to air the garden

Nola Obee, Canada

turning me into
a space opera hero
northern lapwing song

pretvara me
u junaka svemirske opere
pjesma vivka

Tomislav Sjekloća, Montenegro

color wheel
the plum hour swirling
in the Susquehanna

Joshua St. Claire, USA

twilit meadow the blue songs of larkspur

Debbie Strange, Canada

disused factory —
sunbeams warm dandelions
where the door was

stara tvornica—
sunce grije maslačke
gdje su bila vrata

Nina Kovačić, Croatia

burial clothes
a new dress
for the lily

Julie Schwerin, USA

homeless
between rubbish and rocks
a dandelion

Eva Limbach, Germany

hovering around
the bins again
ghost butterfly

Jerome Berglund, USA

why?
the summer wind gently blowing
no answer

warum?
Sommerwind weht sanft
keine Antwort

Pitt Buerken, Germany

a flash of yellow whistling hornbills

एक पीली चमक सीटी बजाते धनेश

Neena Singh, India

summer heat
a spider abseils
off the brim of my hat

Tony Williams, Scotland

long day . . .
held by the starch
of her cotton sari

K. Srilata, India

early morning
komorebi with a scent
of lime

Vessislava Savova, Bulgaria

hillside meadow
the rhythm
of yellow rattle

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland

lighthouse
the stormy blue
of our guide's eyes

Lorraine Haig, Australia

summer heat
the scallop of turtles
sunning on a log

June Rose Dowis, USA

wild roses
full of sea breeze . . .
resting place

Dan Curtis, Canada

books piled up
on a washing machine —
backstreet in summer

libri impilati
sopra una lavatrice:
stradina estiva

Maurizio Brancaleoni, Italy

fresh sheet
on the washing line
sleeping ladybird

Melissa Dennison, UK

windy weather —
the lavender bush
waltzes with me

Richard Kakol, Australia

summer-deep
on the kitchen bench
cut kabocha squash

Mark Miller, Australia

twilight smoke
the cane cutter unbuckles
a shin guard

Bill Cooper, USA

drought year
each wheat grain
heavier than usual

Gauri Dixit, India

deserted town—
the noodle guy
braving the heat

prkoseći vrućini
zračni plesač
prkosi vrućini

Djurdja Vukelic Rožić, Croatia

summer drought
dusty footprints
on the moon

Jeff Hoagland, USA

linen blouse
wrinkles softened
by summer drizzle

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

no coins
in the artesian well
day of war

Mircea Moldovan, România

bent shoulders
by the end of the day
sunflower past bloom

pognuta ramena
do kraja dana
ocvao suncokret

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

lost-dog flier
almost faded white
summer heat

David Oates, USA

aperol spritz
the wasp
stops wriggling

Alexander Groth, Germany

a riff-blue sky
falling on a rose
the first raindrop

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

whisper of rain . . .
growing networks
of mycelium

šapat kiše . . .
rastuće mreže
micelija

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

tent ceiling
the silhouettes
of rain patter

Brad Bennett, USA

summer dawn
last night's puddle
now a birdbath

Ravi Kiran, India

rain-wet black vultures
kabuki wings outstretched in sun

Catharine Summerfield Hāna, U.S.A.

air sirens . . .
gathering in my rearview
thunderhead

Joshua Gage, USA

everyone
going silent—
campground thunder

Ben Gaa, USA

approaching cyclone
all palms sway before
the darkening sky

Quendryth Young, Australia

summer storm—
I tell my daughter
war stories

letnia burza—
opowiadam córce
wojenne historie

Zuzanna Truchlewska, Poland

the stream
after the downpour
crushed apricots

Vishal Prabhu, India

river in spate
the swaying bridge
of gull calls

Laurie Greer, USA

summer's end
the stolen bicycle
returned to our yard

盗まれし 自転車かへる 夏の果て
nusumareshi / jitensha kaeru/ natsu no hate

Keiko Izawa, Japan (EC)

father's open study
steeped in sun
the aroma of words

Joseph Chiang, Canada

a caw the color of cornsilk darkening sky

Kathryn Liebowitz, USA

a rolling moon—
the tangential slope
of a power line

Arvind Padmanabhan, India

even the darkness
has its scents—
jasmine flowers

anche il buio
ha i suoi profumi—
fiori di Gelsomino

Antonio Mangiameli, Italy

coral dawn
before the awakening crows
temple bells

Madhuri Pillai, Australia

morning rain
the glistening squares
of bird net

Nitu Yunnam, UAE

school bus
the first chrysanthemums
also yellow

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury, USA

the wild rose plant
is no more by the courtyard . . .
childhood home

Kanchan Chatterjee, India

rust
on grandpa's nameplate
rain-wet petals

ਜੰਗਾਲ
ਦਾਦਾ ਜੀ ਦੀ ਨਾਂ ਤਖ਼ਤੀ ਤੇ
ਮੀਂਹ ਭਿੱਜੀਆਂ ਪੱਤੀਆਂ

Arvinder Kaur, India

forest trail
the snake and i
smell the air

Billy Antonio, Philippines

leaving the woods
blackberry brambles
won't let me go

Bryan Rickert, USA

marigolds
all around the old lake
our footprints

Bhawana Rathore, India

a bearded man's blush forest twilight

தாடிக்குள் பூத்த கன்னம் காட்டில் அந்தி மாலை

Srini, India

change of weather
the wind finds a new place
to moan

Joanne van Helvoort, The Netherlands

outback moon
she-oak tales
shape in the wind

Gavin Austin, Australia

felling a tree
the wind loses
its howl

ఈదురు గాలి
గొంతు మూగబోయింది
చెట్టు పడ్డాక

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

totems
usher the stars . . .
whalebone night

Elliot Diamond, USA

harvest moon
granny's collection
of recipes

फसल का चंद्रमा
दादी माँ का संग्रह
व्यंजनों का

Aparna Pathak, India

broken
by the roosters
silent dawn

Oana Maria Cercel, Italy

sunrise moments—
play of light and shadow
among chrysanthemums

momenti d'alba—
giochi di luce e ombre
fra i crisantemi

Nazarena Rampini, Italy

riverwalk
dragonflies and i rest
on lily pads

Deborah Burke Henderson, USA

squirrel chatter
the nest filled
with acorns

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

aroma of wild grapes intertwined with bittersweet

Jon Hare, USA

scattered clouds . . .
maybe that's all the answer
I need

Angela Terry, USA

still evening . . .
the scent boundaries
between trees

Ben Oliver, England

brighter than
the city's glow
a mother-of-pearl sunset

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

evening fog
ghosting the lake
a merlin's mood

Anna Cates, USA

old trawler
drifting towards Pisces
rusty moon

stary kuter
odpływa w stronę Ryb
pordzewiały księżyc

Dagmara Wieczorkowska, Poland

moon halo —
a disheveled woman
minces the field edge

Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

resting
in the belly of a gnome
an overripe persimmon

Bona M. Santos, USA

nowhere to hide
among the bare branches
a red-tailed hawk

Rick Jackofsky, USA

belt askew
Orion
enters the night

Katie Montagna, Ireland (EC)

once again
that same cemetery —
winter morning

encore une fois
ce même cimetière—
matin d'hiver

Marie Derley, Belgium

mistral wind
a forest of white sails
changes tack

Jay Friedenbergl, USA

one-room schoolhouse
the splat of a snowball
on the window

Randy Brooks, USA

tea to my lips—
a moment of steam
fogging my glasses

Michael Dylan Welch, USA

flurrying snow
on the tree line
an inch of winter

Gareth Nurden, Wales

cold moon
the cry
from the slaughterhouse

Michael Buckingham Gray, Australia

winter evening . . .
creating a mandala from
pumpkin seeds

zimski večer
od sjemenki tikve
slažem mandalu

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translator D. V. Rožić, Croatia

brother's
last shave___
all the scattered hair

Robert Hirschfield, USA

our bench
by the river —
deepening snow

John Pappas, USA

winter ostinato
cold gusting
the prairie

Kathryn P. Haydon, USA

cemetery banyan
the tangled roots
of an old grief

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

crisp leaves
the old grave
marked BABY

Rowan Beckett Minor, USA

heavy snowfall
the weight of your farewell
in my bag

تساقط ثلوج كثيفة
وزن وداعك
في حقيبتني

فاطمة الزهراء حبيس / الجزائر
Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

dusting
the angel's wings . . .
war dead

spolverando
le ali di un angelo . . .
caduti in Guerra

Carmela Marino, Italy

winter's end
our voices soar
through skeletal boughs

Helen Sokolsky, USA

last of the snow
a mare's breath
rises with the sun

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

morning thaw
lotus petals cradle
what the sky let go

Ganesh R., India

blurring the blues
heart melt
in the glacier

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

from time zone to time zone a different dawn song

Sally Biggar, USA

beach walk dusk
our footprints follow
rolling waves

Thomas F Smith, USA

Editor's Choices (EC) - Haiku

I would like to express my gratitude to all the poets who submitted their poems and trusted me with their work. Even though we are unable to carry all of your haiku, reading and learning about your days and inspirations has been a privilege. Sharing, visualising and being part of a few moments of a poet's life is one way of acknowledging the presence of kindness and sensitivity in the world that we inhabit, and for this I am indebted to you for the opportunity.

The haiku section has always carried interesting flora and fauna specific to various areas that the poets represent and this time too, we have a plethora of images from diverse regions. From blackberry brambles and bittersweet, to yellow rattle and larkspur, the squirrel, the turtle, the she-oak, the tiny tots – all of these inhabit the pages and find their voices intertwined with the poets' own experiences of life. I hope these haiku resonated with you, the readers, and helped you find a connection with those across seas and continents, across geographical barriers and cultures.

Here are a few haiku for you to engage with:



dagger hard dawn
daylight starts to splinter
along the ice road

John Hawkhead, UK (EC)

This haiku from John Hawkhead is an ideal example of one that should be read aloud for maximum effect. The poet has carefully chosen the sounds and the words in the haiku. The repetition of 'd', a hard plosive, in dagger, hard, dawn, daylight and then ending again with road, gives a clear picture of the nature of the road. A plosive sound such as 'd' is strong and sometimes creates an effect that is sharply abrupt. This is in sync with the word 'splinter' (again, containing the plosive 't' in the word) in line 2. The use of the sibilant 's' in starts, splinter and ice brings a sense of slipperiness from the ice into the poem.

The images that the poet has chosen are strong too and form the backbone of a mesmerising scene. The description of the dawn in question is by itself edgy and not a picture of ease, nor pleasant – it is a “dagger hard dawn”, an unusual and unique choice of words. The image in the second and third line, a surprise, adds to the strength of the poem – what splinters is not the ice but daylight! The choice of words in this haiku brings in emotion through tangible images. When daylight itself starts to splinter along an ice road, what emotions do each of us encounter, what futures do we envision?

Thank you, John Hawkhead, for a lesson in choosing and weighing words and images, to make a haiku that works in multisensorial ways.



a deep breath
of cloudless sky
bamboo flute

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

This haiku combines so many sensorial images to make a unified whole that does not overwhelm, or crowd the reader. Robert Witmer deftly moves from one deep breath taken, to the vastness of the cloudless (blue) sky. This movement feels liberating, conjuring the elements of space and sky in the reader. The third line brings in the magic of music from a shakuhachi or a bamboo flute, allowing the reader to feel the bamboo in the fingertips while hearing the notes. Even though all of this is happening in the three lines, the poet has carefully kept the haiku light, simple and yet, vast. The poet also manages to capture the truth of that one single moment when the flautist inhales and readies to start the music. A meditative moment for many when all else stops. Thank you, Robert Witmer, for this beautiful meld-of-the-senses haiku.



summer's end
the stolen bicycle
returned to our yard

盗まれし 自転車かへる 夏の果て
nusumareshi / jitensha kaeru/ natsu no hate

Keiko Izawa, Japan (EC)

Keiko Izawa's haiku brings us a simple story, one where a stolen bicycle is returned to the owner at the end of Summer. This story has a happy ending where the owner gets back what is hers. The simplicity of the incident (and the haiku) brings warmth to the reader.

By returning something that was taken without permission, does the thief absolve himself? After all, the person did return the bicycle! However, why was the bicycle stolen, who was the perpetrator, what did the person who lost the bike go through? Was the stealing just an innocent act? If yes, is it condonable if we take what isn't ours just because we can? So many questions are left unanswered and that is what made me go back to the haiku again. The possibility of carrying this story further opens up the reader's experience.

Thank you, Keiko Izawa, for the seemingly simple haiku that opens up a moral dialogue in our heads.



belt askew
Orion
enters the night

Katie Montagna, Ireland (EC)

In this haiku, the poet uses the stars to portray a nighttime scene. Orion is seen best in the winter sky of the northern celestial hemisphere. This locates the haiku in a season.

By referring to the stars of Orion's belt in an unusual way, the poem brings a smile to the reader. The three stars that are known as Orion's belt do look askew in their arrangement. A first read of this haiku that has the words placed like the belt stars of Orion, brought a smile. And then, the mention of Orion brings the story of Orion, the Hunter, from Greek mythology to our minds. Katie Montagna also leaves a lot of space in her haiku with the third line — 'enters the night'. Does the haiku have layers that the reader can access when the image is about entering the night, with the belt askew? The answer is probably a yes, if we read the poem deeper. Many things are askew in the darkness of now. But then, the stars of the Orion constellation are some of the brighter ones. A reason for hope.

Till we meet again,

Peace and gratitude,
Geethanjali Rajan

Haiga — Part 1

Ana Drobot — Romania

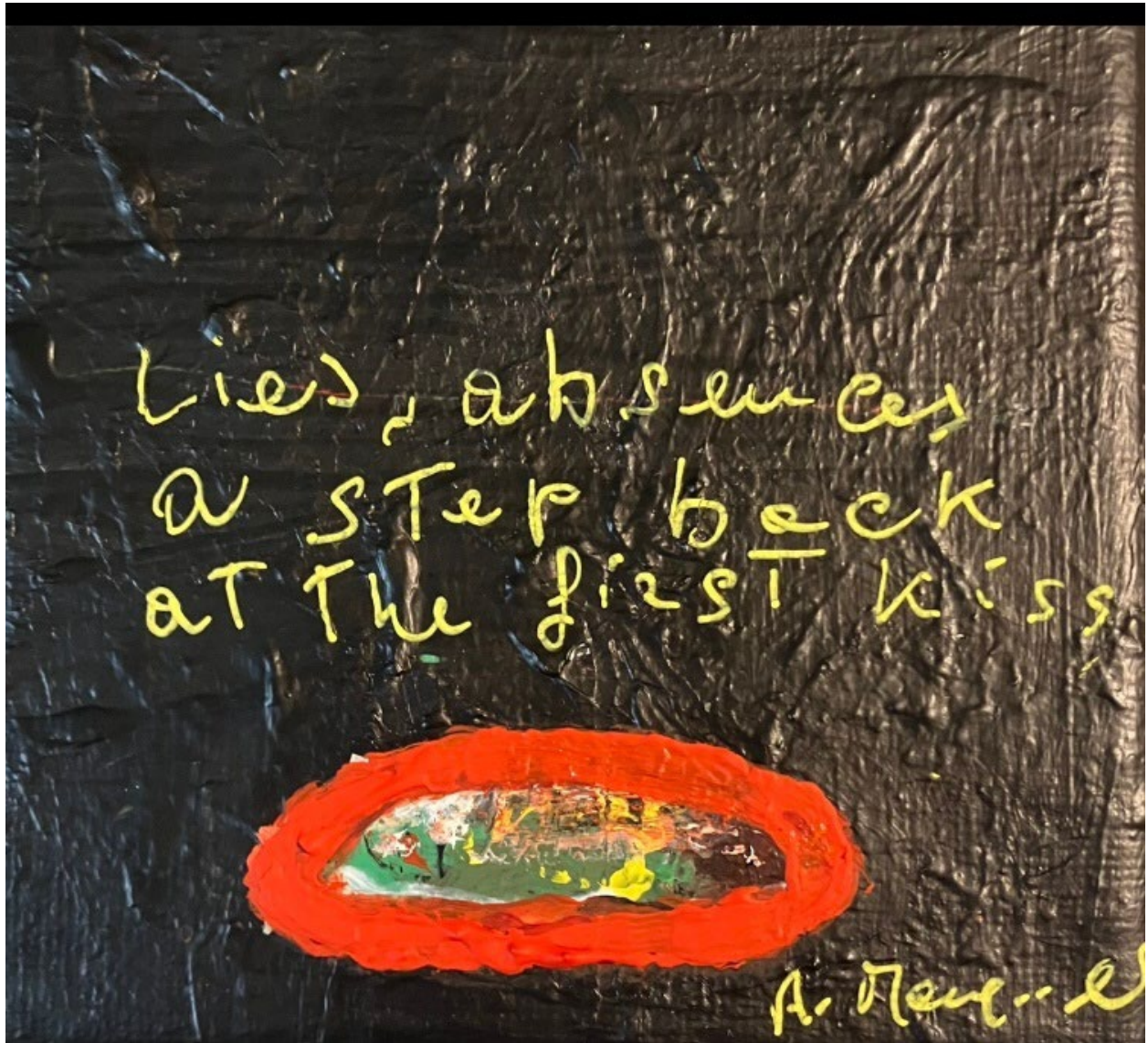


after the storm -
the past flooding
my hometown

Image: Pixabay

Poem: Ana Drobot (Romania)

Antonio Mangiameli — Italia



Bonnie J Scherer — USA



tossed about
from sea to shore
I remain
this shell of myself
barely hinged

Poem/Art: Bonnie J Scherer

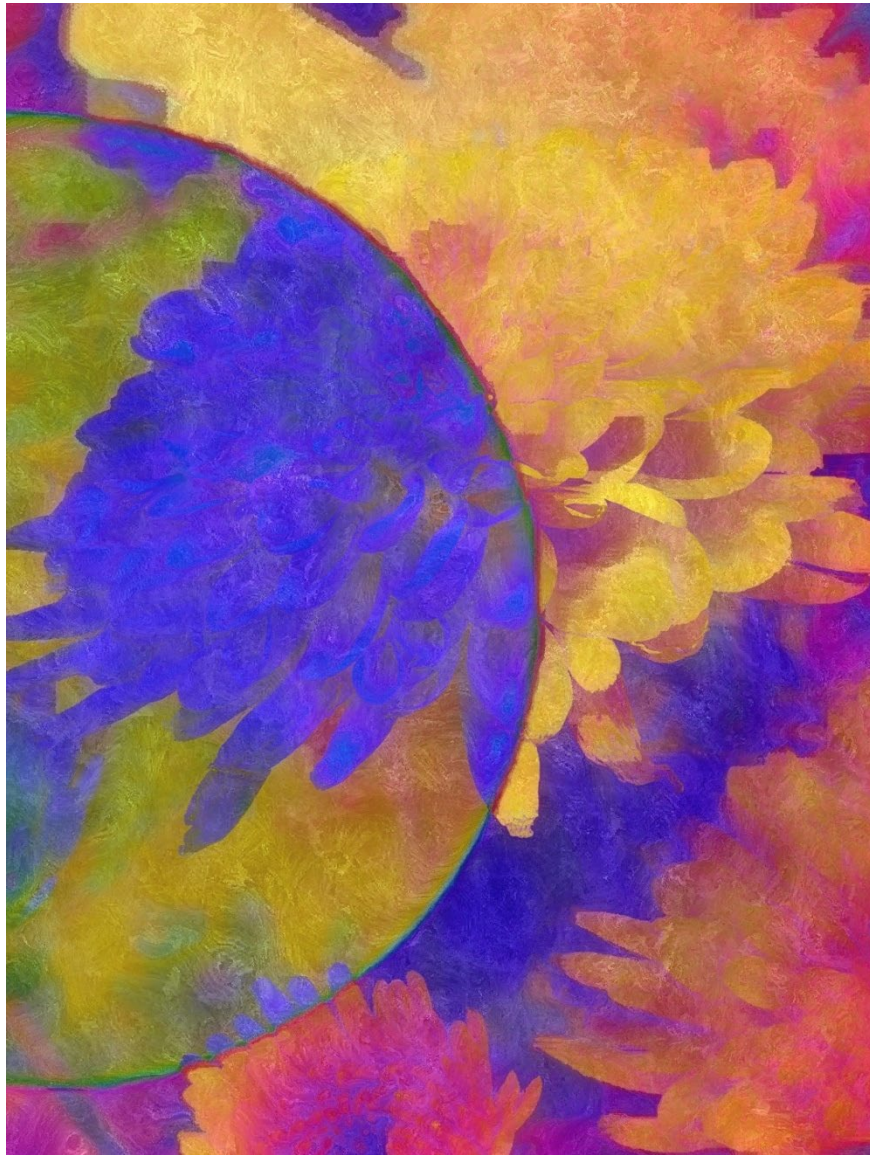
Cezar Ciobica & Paul Alexandru — Romania



Christina Chin — Malaysia



Senryu



Starburst

still in the present tense his dead daughter

Joshua St. Claire, USA

hobbling downstairs
the smooth
hard handrail

Robert Lowes, USA

knowing
where I come from
cattle chewing their cud

Mike Montreuil, Canada

hot shower
some of me floats
to oblivion

Quendryth Young, Australia (EC)

wedding cake
we meet at the edge
of a strawberry

Richard L. Matta, USA

the stick lightens —
carving away all but
what it already held

der Stock wird leicht—
schnitzen bis nur noch bleibt
was schon darin war

Benno Schmidt, Germany

her smile
riddled with doubt
gorse ablaze

a gáire
lán d'amhras
aiteann trí thine

Audrey Quinn, Ireland

Sunday in the kitchen
the air steeped in basil —
mom too

Nicholas Gentile, USA

nursing home worship
he holds up the hymnal
and his trousers

Randy Brooks, USA

even now
so much talk
of her appearance
silk-lined casket

waking to the alarm i never set

Julie Schwerin, USA

why art—
a dead leaf
is still a poem

Warum Kunst -
ein totes Blatt
ist immer noch ein Gedicht

Deborah Karl-Brandt, Germany

early morning walk
his shadow patterned
with dogs

Nola Obee, Canada

finger pier
slipping into the lake
the sound of moonlight

hand in hand . . .
my eyes adjust
to the stars' light

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

wordless embrace
the warmth
of your tears

Ravi Kiran, India

wild fire season
she cuts down
her smoke bush

Angela Terry, USA

instant coffee
in a styrofoam cup
my turn to confess

M. R. Pelletier, USA

old folks home
pieces of broken clock
hidden in a drawer

Janice Doppler, USA

coffee froth I scare the dog

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

rusty spoon
in a bowl of rainwater
burnt out rubble

Diane Webster, USA

ER
the blood on the floor
not mine

Ruth Holzer, USA

her mind unravelling . . .
the names of the stitches
remain

Jo McInerney, Australia

sunrise
instead of words
tea leaves

изгрев
вместо думи
чаени листенца

Vessislava Savova, Bulgaria

haiku study group
all they said was
interesting

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

womyn's shelter
a man by the bushes
the thoughts in his head

Anna Cates, USA

old Beijing
roast duck
delivered by robot

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

deforestation
even my hairbrush
starts shedding

वनोन्मूलन
मेरे बालों का ब्रश भी
झड़ने लगा है

Neena Singh, India

another birthday
the flaccid skin
of a days-old balloon

Jim Chessing, USA

evening news
punctuated by gunshots —
ceasefire

संध्याकाळच्या बातम्यांत
युद्धविरामाच्या स्वरांमागे
गोळीबाराचा ठेका

Gauri Dixit, India

whistling
while I work
the new tea kettle

Rick Jackofsky, USA

summer sunset
the secret i whispered
to a seashell

paglubog ng araw
ang lihim na binulong
sa kabibi

Alvin Cruz, Philippines

sunlit strand
his bent shadow
reaches shore

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland

forget-me-nots
her blue eyes held
within crow's feet

Jamie Wimberly, USA

survivor guilt
the scars
you cannot see

Tony Williams, UK

forest floor
microplastics
in the fallen nest

Mark Miller, Australia

mulberry stains
from sock to sleeve
mother's question

Bill Cooper, USA

moving day
one last tune
on dad's guitar

Robert Witmer, Japan

house finch's
quavering song
waiting for my test results

Janet Ruth, USA

pappy whistling
in the night breeze
barren branches

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

my first book
dragons and dwarfs fill up
the bedroom

pierwsza książka
krasnodudki i smoki
w moim pokoju

a seagull
all the scream
inside me

mewa
cały ten krzyk
we mnie

Aleksandra Rybczyńska, Poland (EC)

the ice-cream vendor
has the last ice-cream . . .
summer's end

Srini, India

afternoon sun —
wise men change seats
with the turning bus

Arvind Padmanabhan, India

after midnight
yesterday's problems
now today's

Thomas David, UK

summer romance this fling of migrating sandpipers

Debbie Strange, Canada

in the dark
his new perfume —
is it really him?

dans le noir
son nouveau parfum—
est-ce bien lui ?

Marie Derley, Belgium

colonial work
we pass our history
through a tea strainer

John Hawkhead, UK

after cremation
her saree still sways
on the clothesline

Ganesh R., India

reflecting pool
a mallard swims
through our legs

Michael Lamb, USA

a signature
in the cornerstone
trilobite

Eric Sundquist, USA

warm spring day . . .
her black burqa brushes my knees
as we pass

lá earraigh peata...
a burqa ag scuabadh mo ghlúine
agus muid ag dul that

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

washed out
from working overtime
day moon

Mohua Maulik, India

moving day
the parts of me
I leave behind

Gavin Austin, Australia

nautical twilight
fixing her position
with the stars

Govind Joshi, India (EC)

disappearing act
the scarecrow
down to its last straw

John H. Dromey, USA

summer school
the boys discover
it's a stink bug

Ben Oliver, UK

southern night
the air filled with jasmine
and fried catfish

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

fjaka* — my cat and I sitting zazen

fjaka — mačka i ja meditiramo

*a moment of pure relaxation and rejuvenation (Dalmatia)

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

old friends
the goodbye as big
as the parking lot

cancer waiting room
the many things we share
with strangers

Ben Gaa, USA

guiding the horse
with a click of the tongue —
spirit trail

Chad Lee Robinson, USA

elephant trail
a broken tusk
fills with rain

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

Noh mask
moonlight deepens
the lines in her face

*Joanne van Helvoort,
The Netherlands*

missing me
mother darns
my old socks

Mona Bedi, India

dark rain
a seatbelt cushion
for the chemo port

Heather Lurie, New Zealand

night market
a sixty-minute wait
for a ten-minute massage

Louise Hopewell, Australia

forced migration—
the lingering warmth
of mom's hugs

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

false memories
putting in more creases
than I'm taking out

Mark Gilbert, UK

pooja room—
the cat auditions
for the role of goddess

Vidya Premkumar, India

from the middle school
to main street—
candy wrappers

Wilda Morris, USA

mirror fog -
whom
i wipe away

Vijay Prasad, India

Veterans Day
the protest
almost a parade

Bryan Rickert, USA

trails of ants
they seem to go nowhere
my haiku scribblings

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

visiting
my aging parents
the exit's long off-ramp

Brad Bennett, USA

childhood school
remembering stories
the teachers never told

చిననాటి బడి
గురువులు చెప్పని కథలు
గుర్తుకొస్తున్నాయి

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

church bombing
the patter of rain on
headless saints

John Pappas, USA

nudist beach
a prudish gentleman
covers his baldness

plajă de nudiști–
un domn pudic
își acoperă chelia

Mirela Brailean, Romania

tired
of the being away
another redevye

Jon Hare, USA

insomnia
the sheep
can count themselves

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

locker room
who has a bra
and who doesn't

second wind
what dark chocolate
makes possible

Cynthia Anderson, USA (EC)

before coffee
the razor's dullness
the hard way

Joshua Gage, USA

hot weather
I sweat it out
in the dentist chair

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

garage sale—
walking a mile
in her jimmy choos

Sarah Lawhorne, USA

end of the road
a glimpse of the sea
between two jeeps

Mark Teaford, USA (EC)

crowded sidewalk
a homeless man
spits out toothpaste

Rowan Beckett Minor, USA

tea at dusk—
a few blond widows
gossiping about the priest

ceai la amurg—
câteva văduve blonde
bârfesc despre preot

Mircea Moldovan, Romania

my music box
the same melody
for joy and sorrow

моята музикална кутия
една и съща мелодия
за радост и за скръб

Radka Mindova, Bulgaria

balloon seller
he shifts the shadows
over a sleeping dog

ബലൂൺ വിൽപ്പനക്കാരൻ
ഉറങ്ങുന്ന നായയുടെ മുകളിൽ
അവൻ നിഴലുകൾ മാറ്റുന്നു

Lakshmi Iyer, India

new diagnosis
she monitors
her mood ring

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

coming back to bed
she sees he's curled around
where she was

David Oates, USA

drawn to darkness
my decade as
an anti-moth

privučen tami
moja decenija kao
anti-moljac

my fear of change . . .
a leafhopper catapults
into the unknown

moj strah od promjene...
patuljasti cvrčak se katapultira
u nepoznato

Tomislav Sjekloća, Montenegro

doctor's lounge
a plastic sturgeon
on the wall

Carol Raisfeld, USA

dock leaves
the gentle touch
of Mum's memory

feuilles de rumex
la douce caresse
du souvenir de maman

Timothy Daly, France

clean dishes
two wet palms
on his bottom

piatti puliti
due palmi bagnati
sul suo sedere

Oana Maria Cercel, Italy

blue inbox
I always keep
my rejection emails

Emil Karla, France

end of the party
the birthday girl's tiara
upside down

Katie Montagna, Ireland (EC)

summer romance
the sweet-tart flavor
of passion fruit

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

stirring his tea
with a pencil
retired carpenter

Simon Wilson, UK

looking for nudists—
pressed against the car window
two little noses

David Green, USA

cleaning day —
grandma wiping away
stardust

zi de curățenie —
bunica șterge
praf de stele

Ana Drobot, Romania

out of oncology
still alive
his tamagotchi

in der onkologie
noch am leben
sein tamagotchi

Alexander Groth, Germany

zazen
the ebb and flow
of silence

Beata Czeszejko, Poland

Editor's Choices (EC) – Senryu

I have been enjoying the ways in which this issue's short poems have been leading me on flights of fancy. It's not necessarily ambiguity that does that. Sometimes a poem can open a mental can of worms. I am continually surprised that poems of so few words can lead me in all sorts of different directions. I believe that if a poet can 'show' their readers images without 'telling' them exactly what they mean, it offers the readers a greater freedom to explore. I've selected a few poems, below, which took me on unexpected journeys. However, I want to thank all the poets who submitted work for consideration. It is a privilege to be able to read such an international and eclectic collection of poems. I am only able to select a small fraction of them for inclusion in the journal. I hope those who venture here will find an image, or a story, to transport them, for a moment, away from the here and now.



hot shower
some of me floats
to oblivion

Quendryth Young, Australia (EC)

Quendryth appears to offer us a straightforward story. Each time we wash, we exfoliate. Dead skin cells are removed to reveal new cells below. And yet this poem led me down a series of rabbit holes. There must be a remarkable number of potential destinations for those dead cells. While a drain may seem like oblivion, the water runs out into the world. And what happens to those atoms and molecules then? Following a different tack, our bodies are made of trillions of cells. As many of those cells are shed and replaced on a daily basis, the people we know are always going to be slightly different from one day to the next. It's unsettling to have such a clear example of transience to hand. And then, working backwards, what are the people we know made of? Where did their constituent atoms and molecules come from? We can think of food and drink, which originated on our planet, but where did our planet come from? What a remarkable series of journeys to be prompted by three lines.



locker room
who has a bra
and who doesn't

Cynthia Anderson, USA (EC)

Cynthia presents us with what appears to be an innocuous observation. I don't claim to be an authority on brassieres, but there must be multiple reasons for wearing or not wearing them. And, as one investigates those reasons, one has the potential to discover more about the lives and the characters of the people who have made those choices.



end of the road
a glimpse of the sea
between two jeeps

Mark Teaford, USA (EC)

Mark gives us an apparently simple scene to consider. What I found irresistible about this poem were the layers of ambiguity. The first line, "end of the road", can have multiple readings. It could be literal, or it could be metaphorical. Deciding which of these to work with appears to shape the rest of the story. If we consider the road to end as it reaches the coast, then a glimpse of the sea might be a good thing. It could easily be the destination we were aiming at. But what of the cars? Jeep has a delicious ambiguity. Is it used as an indicator of an SUV, or a brand name without a capital, or an army vehicle? Might the jeeps be preventing access to the sea? So, is that glimpse of the sea all that will ever be seen? I don't know what Mark had in mind for the readers, but this poem provided me with numerous adventures.



end of the party
the birthday girl's tiara
upside down

Katie Montagna, Ireland (EC)

Katie shows us a scene which should be easy to interpret. The use of “girl” suggests a child having a birthday party. However, my family is still happy to call a woman of any age a “birthday girl”. So, I’m suddenly faced with the question of age. Is our birthday girl, 7, 17, 27 or 70? I can make the poem work for all these ages. The story which explains the upside-down tiara may change, but the end point still works. For me, this poem is a celebration of parties. The age of the “birthday girl” is just a number.



a seagull
all the scream
inside me

Aleksandra Rybczyńska, Poland (EC)

Aleksandra offers us a bridge (or is it a canyon) between the natural world and the human world. Gulls appear to behave with such freedom. Their loud calls are familiar to many people. How often have we felt like crying out with the same abandon that a gull has, yet been constrained by social niceties? I know people who have gone to the sea and shouted at wild waves battering the shore. In those cases, storms drowned out almost all the sound, so they didn’t attract the attention of startled bystanders.



nautical twilight
fixing her position
with the stars

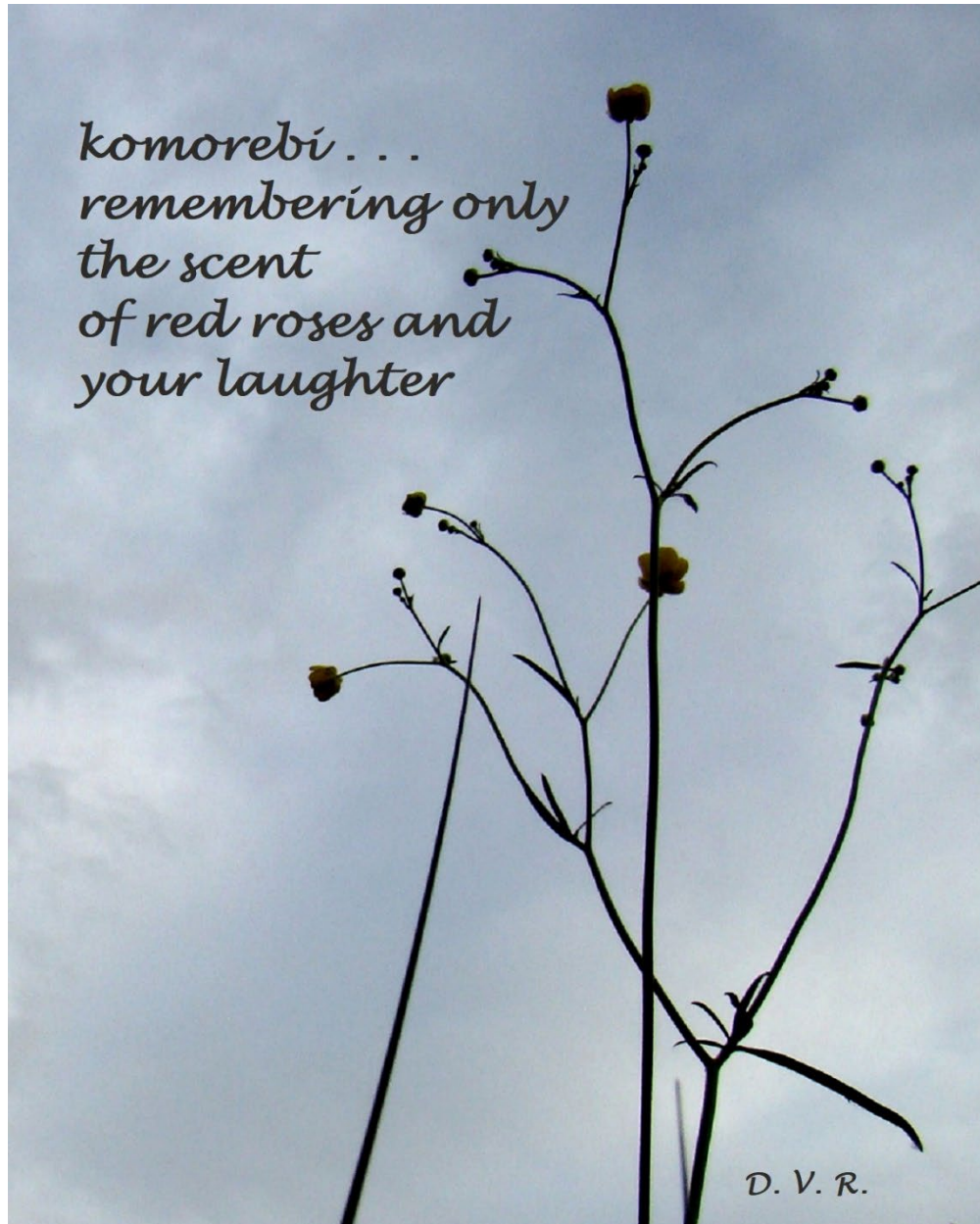
Govind Joshi, India (EC)

Govind transports us to a liminal space between day and night. Nautical twilight is strictly defined as a time when the sun is between 6 and 12 degrees below the horizon. The horizon is visible at sea, so sailors can still navigate by the stars. We are not told, but I sense the night is ending, rather than beginning. It feels like we are experiencing a parting from the “she” of the poem, as well as the night. I’m put in mind of the Japanese concept of *mono no aware*. The stars offer a way of remembering this absent person, but soon they will be gone too.

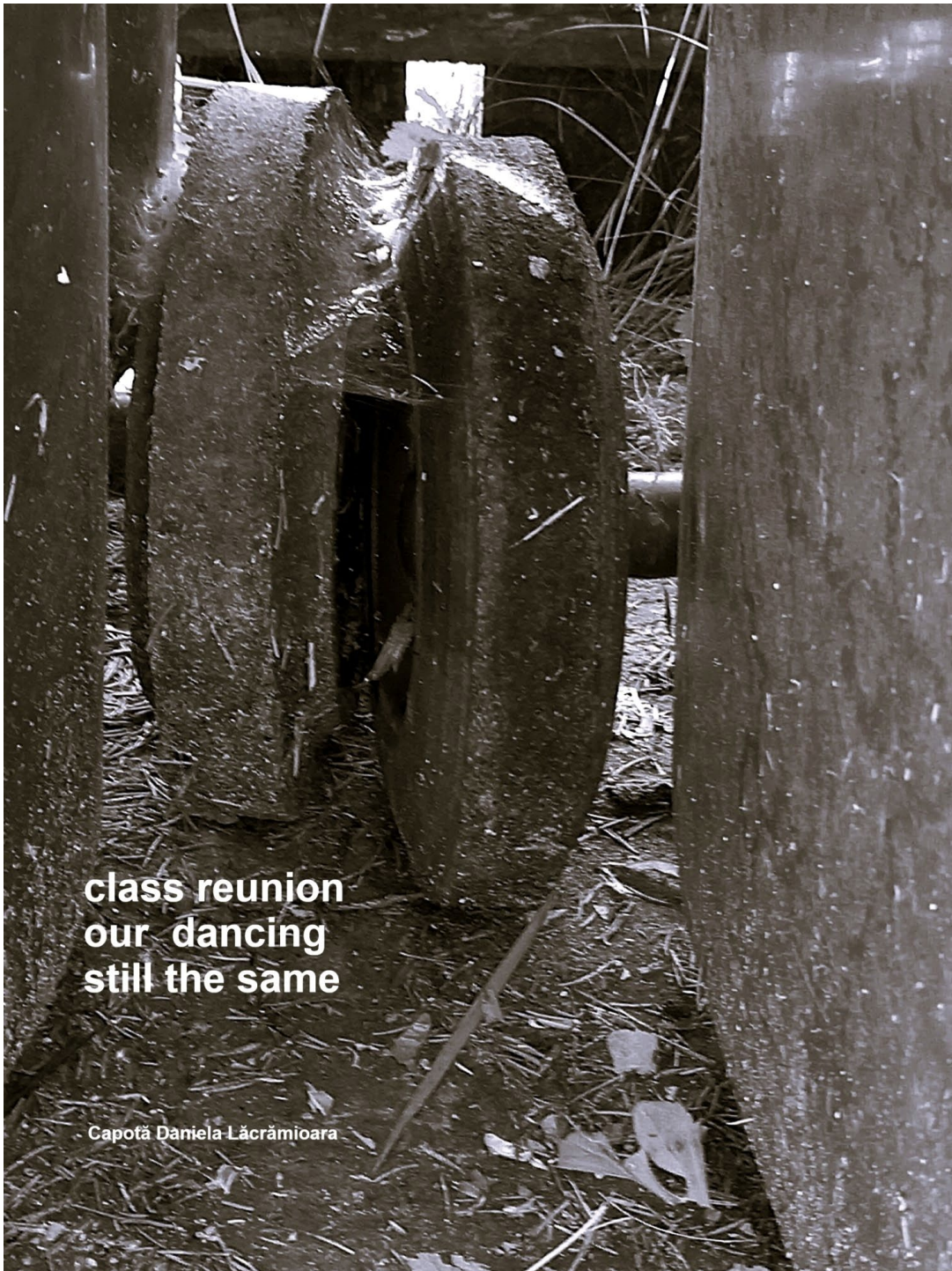
David J Kelly

Haiga — Part 2

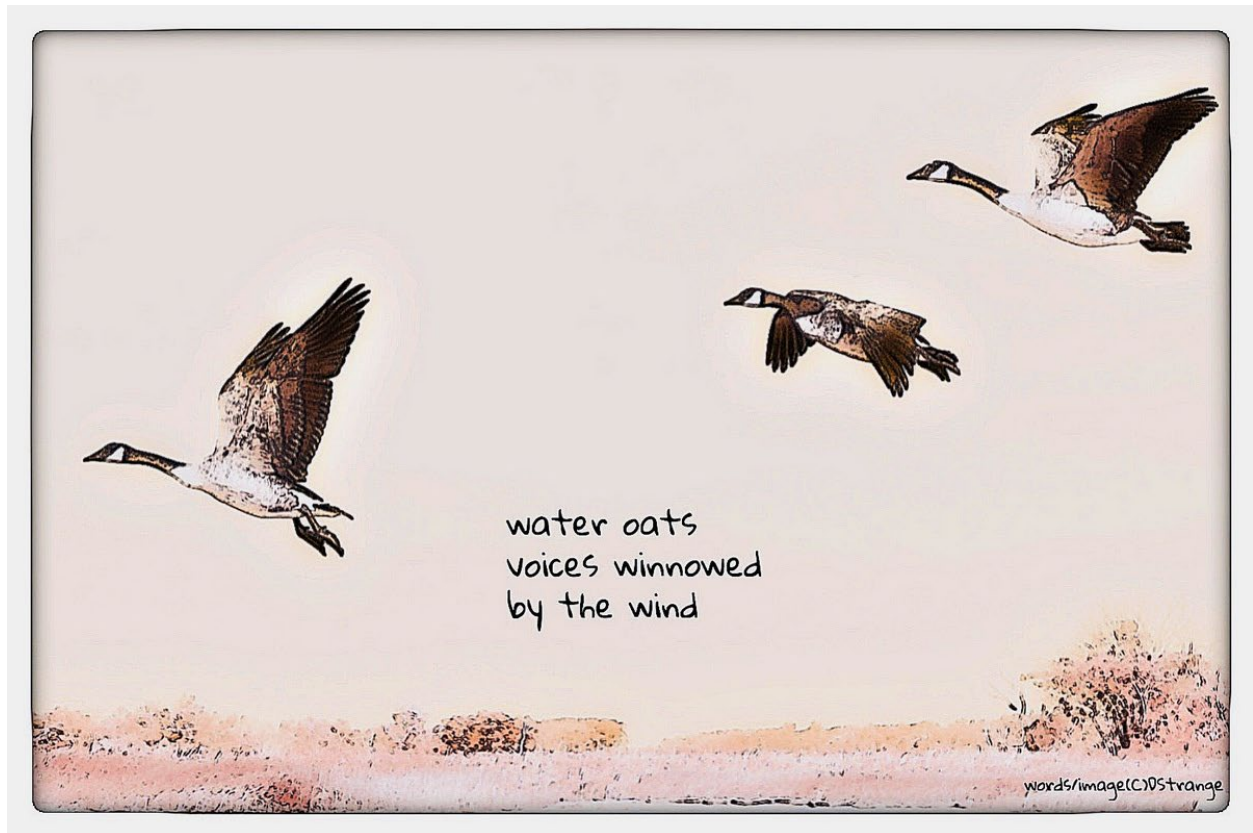
D. V. Rožić — Croatia



Daniela Lăcrămioara Capotă — Romania



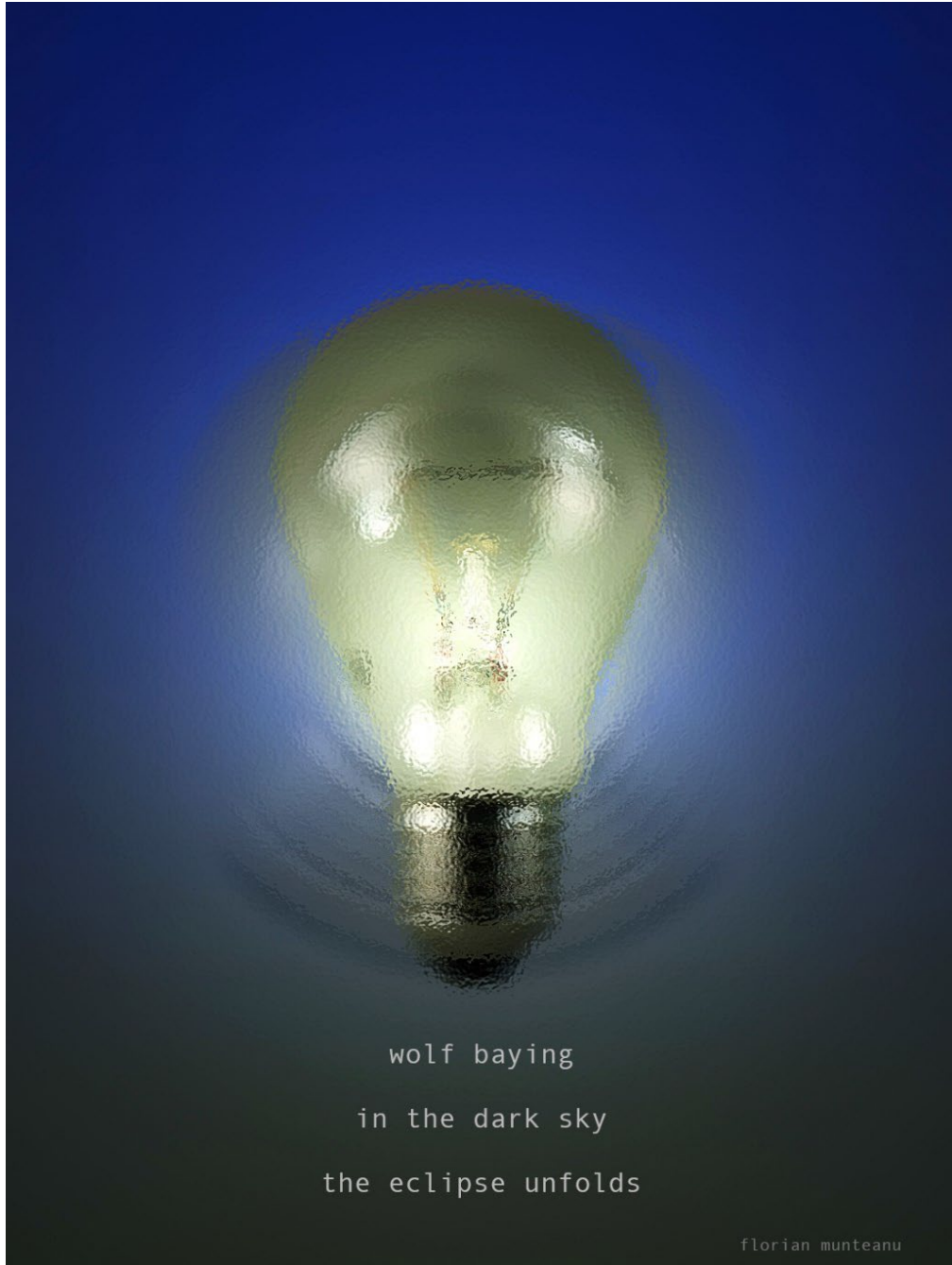
Debbie Strange — Canada



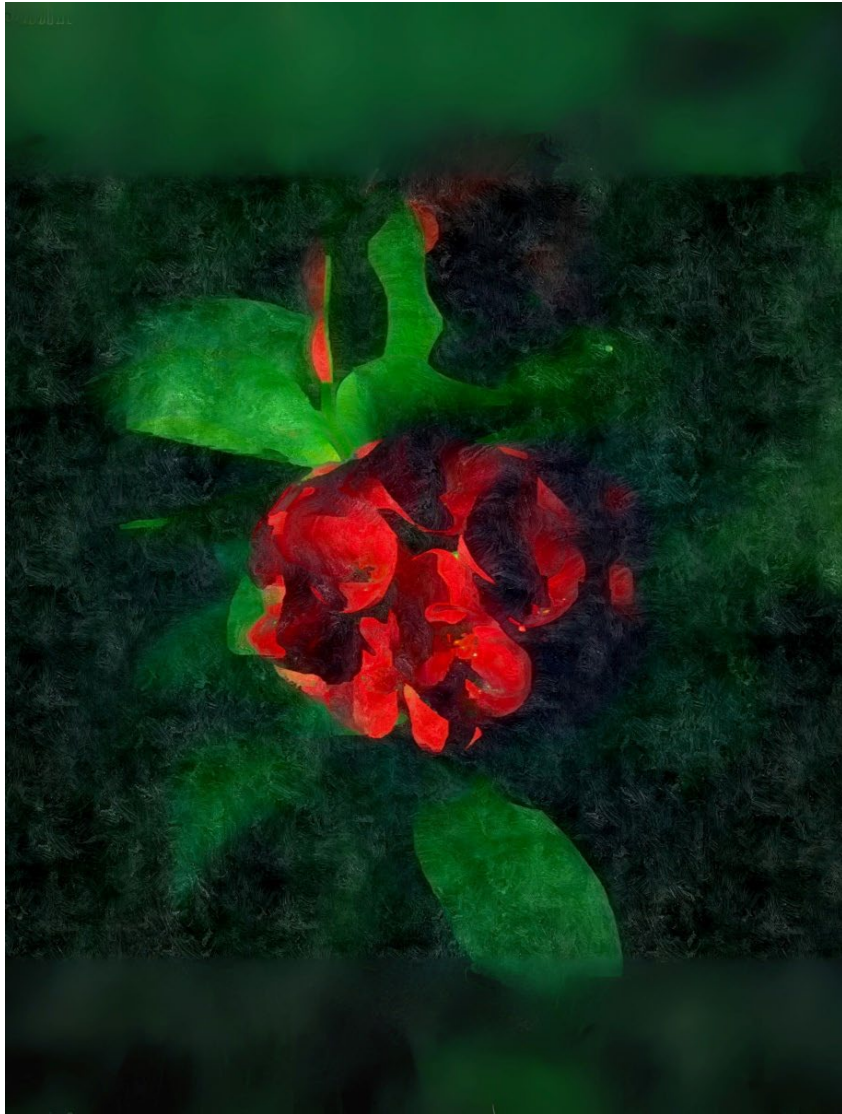
Eugeniusz Zacharski & Jacek Pokrak — Poland



Florian Munteanu — Romania



Tanka



Iridescence

bittersweet
that last look in your eyes
knowing all
the might-have-beens
are now truly gone

Carol Raisfeld, USA

alone
on a park bench
once again
I hear your sweet voice
gently carried on the wind

Gwen Bitti, Australia (EC)

loving you
tenderly and truly
much easier
after
our divorce

voljeti te
iskreno i nježno
lakše je
nakon
rastave braka

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

rereading
our old love letters
a butterfly
marks the loneliness
of the blank pages

rileggendo
le nostre vecchie lettere d'amore
una farfalla
scandisce la solitudine
delle pagine bianche

Daniela Misso, Italy (EC)

fallen leaves
pile
the compost
the fear of knowing
you more

गिरी हुई पतियां
लाद देती है
खाद
तुम्हे और
जानने का भय

Aparna Pathak, India

my baby
suckling mum's ring . . .
I watch
circles widening
in puddles of rain

Jo McInerney, Australia

pantomimist
his bent head rests
on his arms
in the yard across the street
an infant in the stroller

pantomima:
ruke položene pod
nagnutu glavu
u dvorištu preko puta
beba u kolicima

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translator- D. V. Rožić, Croatia

by the condemned home
overtaken by pokeweed
a discarded doll
hiatus
from a story left to tell

Anna Cates, USA

sun on sand
and the laughter
of children,
plastic buckets filled
with unmade castles

Debbie Strange, Canada

spring blossoms
on the playground
two girls vying
for the attention of a boy
who doesn't deserve them

Bryan Rickert, USA

imagining
prayer books in their hands . . .
silent schoolboys
cradling smartphones
as the morning bus arrives

Tim Dwyer, Northern Island/USA

star gazing
thinking of my daughter
faraway . . .
a solitary dingo and I
howl to the moon

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

filled with family
the old house comes to life
once again
I wake up alone
not knowing where I am

Ruth Holzer, USA

in a yellowed photograph
grandmother's toothless smile
remembering the old country
a new moon
at the edge of night

Robert Witmer, Japan

sun glinting
textures on the sea
a pathway
lit bright to the west
to the horizon — to home

Jon Hare, USA

wistful days
in another life before
Kathabela
dad would sing I'll take you
home again Kathleen

Kathabela Wilson, USA

the warmth left
by my late father's hand
holding mine . . .
half asleep and half awake
to this false winter dawn

已故父親的手
握著我的手
所存留的溫暖 ...
半睡半醒面對冬日黎明
前一小時的短暫光亮

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

an empty table
echoes of shared laughter . . .
mother's gone
the center thread pulled
a family unravels

Gail Brooks, USA

Canada geese
on a cemetery lawn
down south
stopping by my dad's grave
to pass along my love

Cynthia Bale, Canada

torn silk scarf
salvaged after your death
a little more time
to possess your loveliness
maternal grandmother

Eve Castle, USA

the scent of linden
slips into the house
an evening for two
with the aroma of tea
and warm words

mirosul de tei
pătrunde în casă
o seară în doi
cu aroma ceaiului
și cuvinte calde

Ana Drobot, Romania (EC)

mid-winter
the hours are not enough
just ironed some shirts
and the crows are already
flying back to roost

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

this winter
a little colder than most
I press
my empty palm
to the kettle's whistle

Nalini Shetty, India

wind out of nowhere
through the open window
a scented silk veil
gently covering
an old shamisen*

Florian Munteanu, Romania

*shamisen is a traditional Japanese musical
instrument

summer clouds
lying on my back
finding pictures
a no hurry time when worry
was not a word I knew

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

wave after wave
after wave, the wind
turns the pages
of the book on the beach . . .
a mystery

Ron Scully, USA

all by herself
on her board on the edge
of the breakers
hunting that first wave
worth standing up for

Jim Chessing, USA

whistling
at the old surfer
wrapped in a towel
the sun sets
behind a rainbow VW

Mark Gilbert, UK

on the wallpaper
the yoga postures
motionless
my mat hasn't moved
since last summer

sur le fond d'écran
les postures de yoga
immobiles
mon tapis n'a pas bougé
depuis l'été dernier

Marie Derley, Belgium

road fog
fills the depressions
my life patched
by soothing words
and promises

Lorraine Haig, Australia

I'm not used to
life pampering me
and making me happy . . .
I still wonder
what it would be like

nisam navikla
da me život mazi i
usrećuje...
još se uvijek pitam...
kako bi to bilo?

Brigita Lukina, Croatia

spontaneity
I walk to the hairdresser . . .
a Chinese beauty
with blue hair and red nails
knocks a decade off me

Katherine E Winnick, UK

winter night
flames dancing over logs
'The Nutcracker' playing
the Sugar-Plum Fairy
dances in my wine glass

Robert Erlandson, USA

gardenias
poke through a picket fence
to find new light —
browsing through bookshops
I'm drawn to self-help

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

stuck in traffic
on my way to work
I turn on
the windshield wipers
to clear my mind

blocaj în trafic
în drum spre serviciu
dau drumul la
ștergătoarele de parbriz
pentru a-mi limpezi mintea

Cezar-Florin Ciobîcă, Romania

eyes dulled
by life on the streets
a homeless man
immune now
to the scorn of tourists

Keitha Keyes, Australia

a healthcare worker
in hefty garbage bags
sealed with duct tape
holding hands with the dying
gently making believe

Pamela Garry, USA

elections-
always same politicians
and their parties . . .
history repeats itself
when will it get better?

izbori-
uvijek isti političari
i njihove stranke...
povijest se ponavlja
kad će biti bolje?

Glorija Lukina, Croatia

the future pivots
around me, muddies
all certainty
can I finally lean into
the joy of not knowing

Richard L. Matta, USA

cavalier attitude . . .
the walking sticks toddle
next to each other
living their sweet memories
while the moustaches smile

kavalirski gard —
gegajući štapovi
jedan uz drugi
žive svoja sjećanja
ah, dok smiješi im se brk

Senka Slivar, Croatia

dog training —
Cavalier spaniels
wriggling
their brains out
through their tails

Tony Steven Williams, Australia

regrets
the old song reappears
and circles in my thoughts
a turning buzzard
rides the wind

Simon Wilson, UK

Cape Disappointment
sea wind ripping off the layers
that weary us
at the cusp of this river
a wide and vast beginning

colin sandberg, USA

a bit of sand
in a clam
turns into nacre
becoming
our better selves

Bona M. Santos, USA

ibis evening
the scent of salt sinking
into the indigo west
the waves I know
only by their sound

Joshua St. Claire, USA

the soft chitter
of tiny migrating birds
surrounds me . . .
quite suddenly they're gone
and I am alone again

Sally Biggar, USA (EC)

exotic feathers
of every colour
fill the sky
a writer's mind
reconfiguring flight

Joanna Ashwell, UK

this season
a thousand-petal lotus
blossoms
I yearn for forgiveness,
quietude and humility

આ ઋતુમાં
હજાર પાંખડીઓવાળું કમળ
ખીલ્યું
હું ક્ષમા, શાંતિ અને નમ્રતા
માટે ઝંખું છું

લક્ષ્મી ઐયર, ભારત
Lakshmi Iyer, India

monsoon breeze
in the birdsong
through the jasmines
reaching out to me
this endless circle of life

Bhawana Rathore, India

monarchs lost
to lost meadows
like ghost buffalo
haunting prairies
no longer there

Curt Pawlisch, USA

autumn wind
a silent fire
inside my chest
with red maple leaves
my youth is fading away

vento d'autunno
un fuoco silenzioso
dentro al petto...
con foglie d'acero rosso
se ne va la giovinezza

Nazarena Rampini, Italy

across the field
sun sets behind long grasses
pale silhouettes
two yearling deer
in alders empty of their leaves

Linda Conroy, USA (EC)

outdoor amphitheater
the rising moon
steals the scene
crickets chanting
all night long

Tim Cremin, USA

a shaft of moonlight
in the spider's web . . .
what will be caught in it
and what will pass through
like the autumn wind

Jacob D. Salzer, USA

still with me
a childhood of dreams
a golden oats field
waving cornstalks
hay on a hot humid day

Edward J. Rielly, USA

last winter moon
the first ducks
return to old nesting grounds
building new nests
covered with old feathers

Anthony Lusardi, USA

green wind
fresh through the maple
dancing leaves
on the bedroom wall
the music we made

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland

by the garden's pond
wildflowers tended by bees
carefully gathered —
a breakfast table
dressed in petals

Nicholas Gentile, USA

feeding breadcrumbs
to sparrows
watching from their perch
I also wait
on my window seat

Anne Curran, New Zealand

rotten yellows and pinks
of flowers past their prime
as spring winds down
I think of how much time
I wasted indoors

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

paddling
slowly across
the mountain lake
a muskrat
stirs the stars

Rick Jackofsky, USA

the slow deep wingbeats
of an owl in moss-clad woods
buff with grey speckling
I slipstream its flight
until we hover, our legs dangling

Philip Davison, Ireland (EC)

where you end
and I begin
the fluid boundary
between flowing water
and the stony riverbank

Richard Kakol, Australia

walk with me
where the waves meet
the sand
how many more sunsets have we
until there is no sunrise

Suraja Roychowdhury, USA

resetting my clock
to Atlantic Time
I worry about
how much longer
the right whale has

LeRoy Gorman, Canada

seismic blasting
in the birthplace
of whales . . .
the empty singing
of a shell against my ear

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

space
where they wheeled away
your bed pre-op . . .
prayer flags in the window
no wind

Betsy Hearne, USA

the spotlight
of the lighthouse pans
over the waves
gray seals blink
on the sandbank

der Scheinwerfer
des Leuchtturms schwenkt
über die Wellen
Kegelrobben blinzeln
auf der Sandbank

Pitt Buerken, Germany

after a funeral
I walk in silence
through dry grass
a wisp of smoke rising
to the mountain peak

nakon sprovoda
koračam u tišini
uvelom travom
diže se pramen dima
prema vrhu planine

Nina Kovačić, Croatia

in that old photo
two among the roses . . .
what if we
had known someday
I would write her elegy

Carole Johnston, USA

a hibiscus bud
fails to bloom
mourning
for the one, who would
have been an adult by now

Mohua Maulik, India

red poppies
wild in the field beyond
the graveyard
with the soft breeze
a small nod for the living

Gavin Austin, Australia

i struggle
to find your smell lingering
in your shirts
a crescent moon
reminds me you are here

Celia Hope, Aotearoa/ New Zealand

your breath stops
and the moment echoes
in my mind forever
like the hush that follows
a deeply moving symphony

तुझा श्वास थांबला
आणि तो क्षण
मनात घुमत राहिला
जशी गहिन्या सुरावटीच्या
शांत शेवटाची साद

Gauri Dixit, India

the stones
lean into each other
sheltering silence –
how grief learns
not to echo

पत्थर
एक-दूसरे से टिके
चुप्पी को थामे –
कैसे शोक सीखता है
गूंजना नहीं

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

white elders
leaning over
the stream
touch—
this loneliness

Jenny Polstra, Aotearoa/New Zealand

a migrant
looks at the horizon
a tear falls
on a coin, shining
among shore's pebbles

câteodată
o reuniune de familie
cu clinchetul paharelor...
zâmbete și lacrimi
la sfarsitul zilei

Mircea Moldovan, România

in my quiet space
thoughts and words
weave soft shelter —
from chaos outside
I learn how to prioritize

تتشابك الأفكار والكلمات
كملاذٍ آمن
يحجب فوضى العالم
ويعلمني ترتيب الأولويات
فاطمة الزهراء حبيس/ الجزائر

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

Editor's Choices (EC) - Tanka

alone
on a park bench
once again
I hear your sweet voice
gently carried on the wind

Gwen Bitti, Australia (EC)

the scent of linden
slips into the house
an evening for two
with the aroma of tea
and warm words

Ana Drobot, Romania (EC)

the soft chitter
of tiny migrating birds
surrounds me . . .
quite suddenly they're gone
and I am alone again

Sally Biggar, USA (EC)

across the field
sun sets behind long grasses
pale silhouettes
two yearling deer
in alders empty of their leaves

Linda Conroy USA (EC)

These four tanka speak of grief, comfort, emptiness and changing beauty. They suggest a focus on simplicity, emotion and an acceptance of imperfection and the unknown, aligning with the Japanese aesthetic of *wabi-sabi*. They evoke feelings and allow the reader to connect with the moment and embrace ambiguity, to ponder for a while rather than to seek resolution.

'alone' brings thoughts of reminisce, of savouring memories and feeling the grief
'the scent of linden' carries feelings of cheer and restfulness, reminiscing about the simple heartfelt pleasures of home
'the soft chitter' stirs pathos, there is a momentary lift followed by an emptiness
'across the field' speaks of beauty but also hints at change, calling for courage and resilience

*Wabi-sabi, is a Japanese concept that finds beauty in imperfection, impermanence, and the natural cycle of growth and decay



The slow, deep wingbeats
of an owl in moss-clad woods
buff with grey speckling
I slipstream its flight
until we hover, our legs dangling

Philip Davison, Ireland (EC)

This fine tanka holds one long after the reading is over. It's as if we are in the slipstream, being magically carried all the way, beat by beat. The slow pace of wing beats in the first line, caught by five single-syllable words, sets the pace. The detail in the description of the 'owl in moss-clad woods, buff with grey speckling' draws us in and delights. The enchantment increases in the last line as we, too, 'hover, our legs dangling.' The surprise at being carried together in the 'slipstream' uplifts spirits until we too are rising above the mundane and ordinary.



rereading
our old love letters
a butterfly
marks the loneliness
of the blank pages

rileggendo
le nostre vecchie lettere d'amore
una farfalla
scandisce la solitudine
delle pagine bianche

Daniela Misso, Italy (EC)

This tanka draws empathy. It allows us the space to reflect, ponder, puzzle and gather the pieces. There seem to be extremes, one of love and one of loneliness, yet within this is the surprise presence of a butterfly. Whether the butterfly is alive or is sketched, the symbol suggests beauty and transformation. Yet, simultaneously, the butterfly brings to the forefront the current emptiness of the pages without writing. However, the effect of the multiple use of the letter 'l' creates a soft, flowing sound that is soothing. Perhaps with the butterfly, a new promise is in the air. It will be left to the reader to muse.

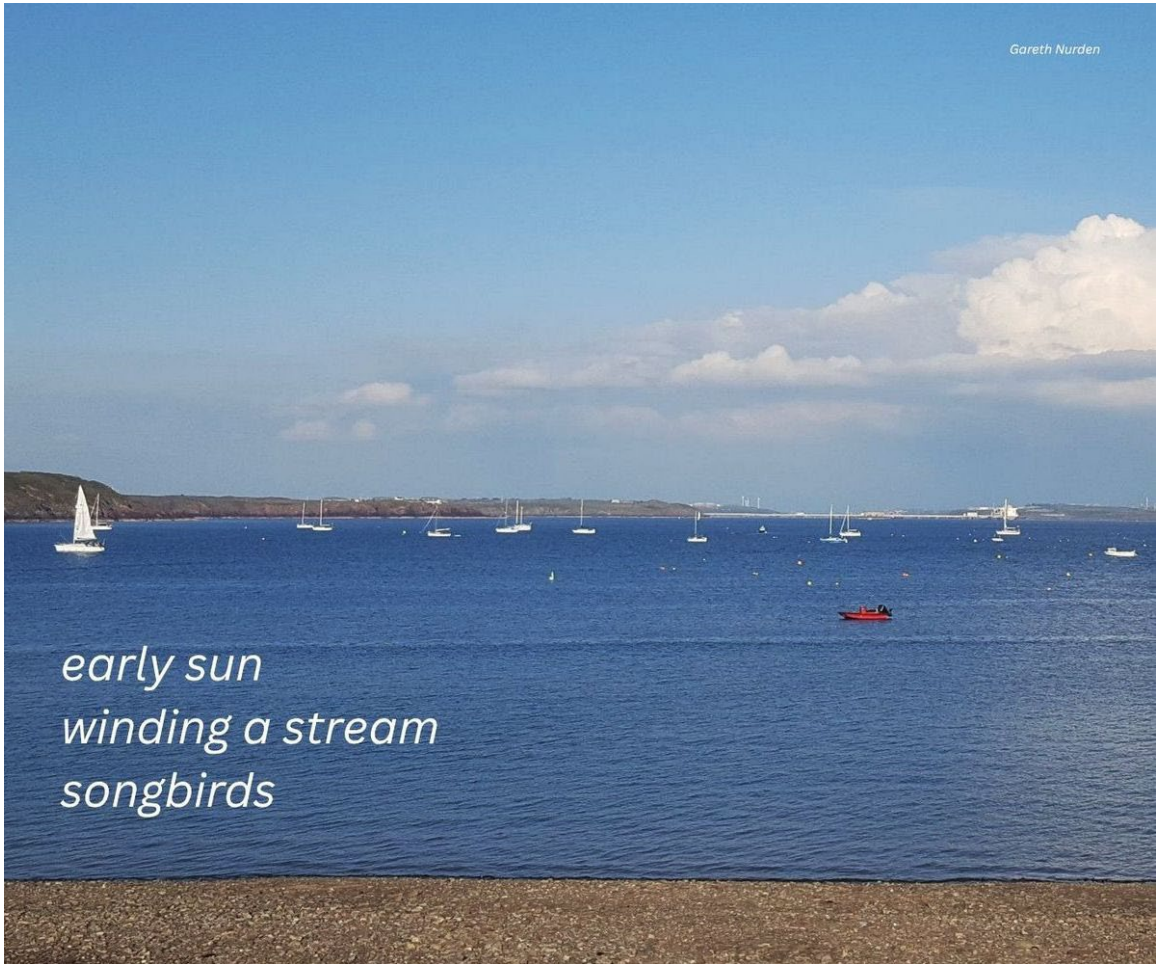
Jenny Fraser

Haiga — Part 3

Franjo Ordanić & Sandra Šamec — Croatia



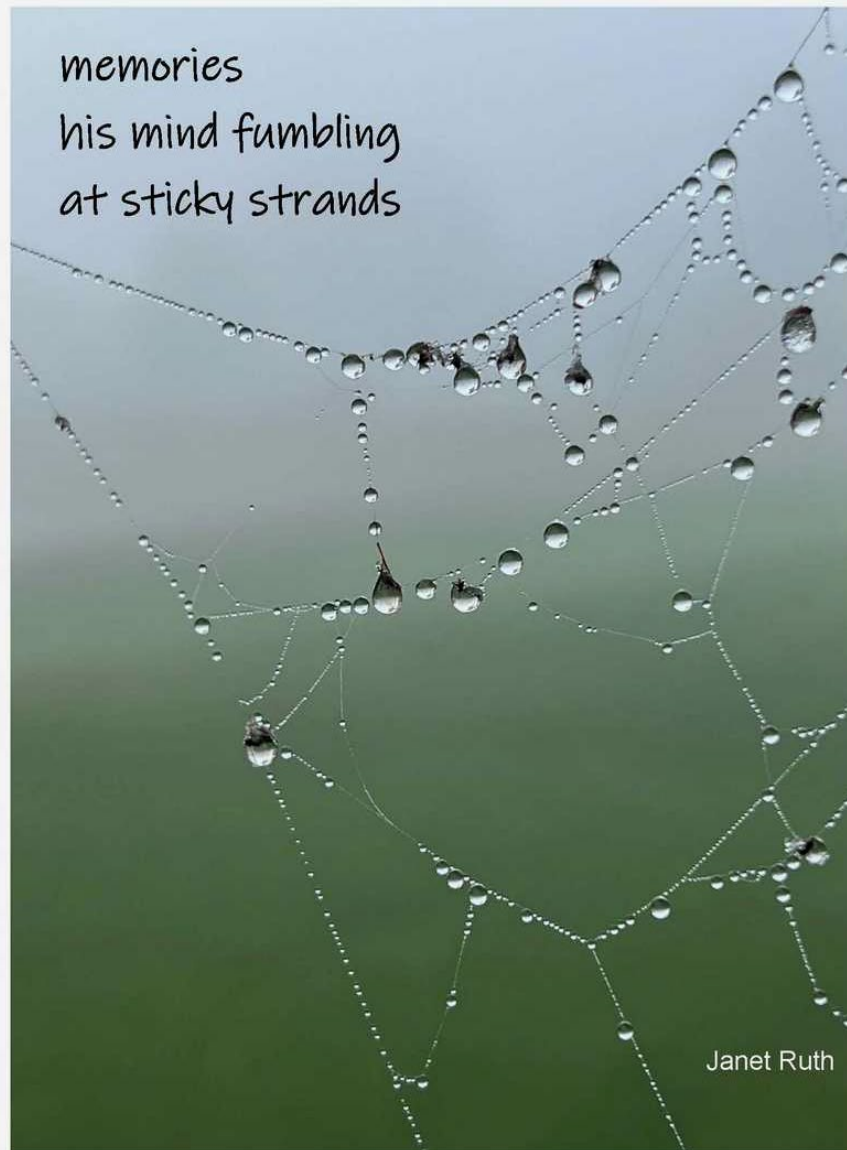
Gareth Nurden — Wales



Gareth Nurden

*early sun
winding a stream
songbirds*

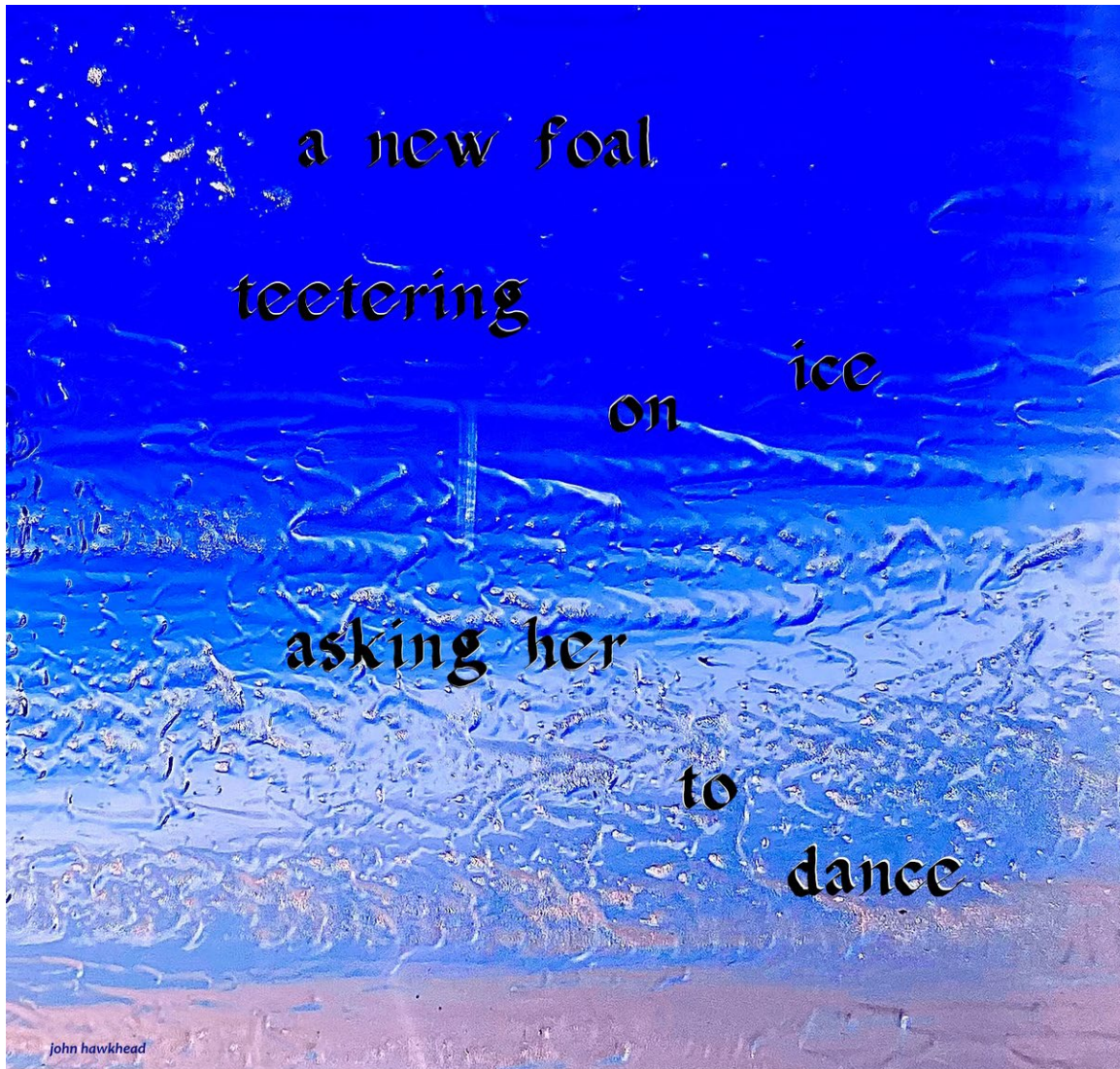
Janet Ruth — USA



Jenny Fraser — New Zealand



John Hawkhead — UK



Johnnie Johnson Hafernik & Dorothy M. Messerschmitt — USA



Haibun



Glimmer

Surprises

Thomas Smith, USA

We live a mile above sea level; the air is thin and the humidity hovers around 20%. Water boils slower, so we drop glass beads into the pot and cover it, hoping to trap some of the heat and add a little pressure.

Our dining table is a casualty of the dry air. The glue holding its legs dries out, and one night, mid-meal, a leg falls off. We chase dishes as they slide toward the edge.

My guitar case, too, becomes a makeshift humidifier; an apple inside keeps the neck from pulling off the body. Outside, we have to tend to the lawn, watering it religiously while bagging the clippings. A third of our yard is devoted to desert landscaping — cacti surrounded by colored rock.

We entertain ourselves with static electricity. Rubbing balloons on our clothes charges them, and we make them stick to each other or make the kids' hair stand straight up. After shuffling our feet on the carpet, we flick a spark in the dark to find the bathroom light switch.

It's a game for the kids. "Son, stop shocking your sister!"

ZZZap! He shocks her anyway.

high country life
snowcapped mountains
watch in stillness

Shenandoah

A.J. Johnson, USA

In the morning chill, the fog boils up from the warm river and hangs low over the bottom lands. Mist beads on the cornstalks and silvery spider webs droop with heavy droplets. Standing on the old trestle bridge, I watch the river flowing by, fresh and clean over boulders and gravel. The fog lifts and parts to reveal the upstream shallows and a heron silently taking flight.

raising young
under the old bridge
cliff swallows

Unfinished Business (EC)

Ganesh R., India

La Paz feels like the love child of a carnival and a board game where the rules were invented mid-play. Every alley buzzes with a story so bizarre, it could've leapt from a fever dream. You can buy almost anything here — bicycles, USB drives... love potions.

And where would one go for such enchantments? The infamous Witch Market, of course — less “market” and more “museum of the surreal, curated for the brave.” Shelves brim with llama foetuses, neatly wrapped and sold for ritual burials beneath new homes as offerings to Pachamama, Mother Earth. If your house is more than three stories tall, though, legend says you'll need something bigger. No, not a grown llama. A human.

The tale goes that a shaman is hired to find someone who won't be missed — a homeless person, an addict. They're drugged, buried alive beneath the foundations to “keep things in balance.” Some say bodies have turned up decades later, interrupting the skyline with skeletons.

And then there are the miners. My guide tells us they believe a human sacrifice might bring a vein of gold or prevent the next accident. Locals won't go near the mines alone — not out of superstition, but survival. No one wants to end up beneath someone's home, holding up luxury tiles with their bones. They go in groups, like friends on a strange, morbid pilgrimage.

I ask, half-joking, “What about tourists?”

He smiles. “Not unless you stay too long.”

stories over mate
old ways
woven through threads of time

Winter's Day Moon

Pamela Garry, USA

It was a northern Maine winter, before climate change was on the tip of the tongue. The oblivious little one was briefly swinging in subzero sunny weather. Sparkles on the frosted a-frame caught him off guard.

His screech reached his mom's ears; and she flew to his rescue. For life and limb, with bated breath, he froze, obeying her every command. There was no time to debate fate, as the tip of his tongue stuck to the metal swing-set. Posthaste, his mom returned with warm water to gently melt the frost and set him free.

geared up
for kindergarten
a kitten on each snowshoe

Hanoi

Shiva Bhusal, USA/Nepal

Are you married? The Grab driver asks. *No.* I say. *Then you should get a massage, man.* He replies. And then he utters something in Vietnamese and laughs. I do not understand. After a twelve-hour flight and a fifteen-hour transit, it's not that I didn't want to get a massage. But the more he tries to convince me, the more un-convinced I become.

winter wedding
the train of her gown
tangled on his shoe

Glances in the Wind

Stefano d'Andrea, Italy

It's not yet dawn, in the narrow streets of the pink and rough stone villages of Provence, and the screaming is already starting . . .

the scream of the Mistral wind that freezes, ruffles, tears, rips, sharpens passions, enhances illnesses, upsets souls . . .

and doesn't abandon you even at night . . .

ripe wheat —
between the wings of crows
Vincent gives up*

Sguardi nel vento

Non è ancora l'alba, nelle stradine strette dei villaggi di pietra rosa e scabra della Provenza, e già comincia l'urlo...

...l'urlo del vento di Mistral che gela, scompiglia, strappa, dilania, affila le passioni, aguzza le malattie, sconvolge le anime...

e non ti abbandona neanche la notte...

grano maturo —
tra le ali dei corvi
s'arrende Vincent*

*Vincent Van Gogh

Waiting

Lynn Edge, USA

An email from the cemetery society concerns a funeral for a woman I don't know. She must have been a distant relative of my deceased husband because only his family's descendants and their spouses can be buried there. In 1860 William B. Edge came to Texas and accumulated ranch land in the hill country. When his daughter died, he buried her on his property. Of the vast surrounding land, only the cemetery still belongs to the family.

my name
on the double headstone
. . . date pending

Therapy

Dr. Brijesh Raj, India

breakfast crumbs
the crow cedes ground
to a squirrel

The meerkat cocks its head at the sound of shoes, stands tall and hurries to a vantage atop a rock. It poses, looking straight ahead, then turns and presents an imperious profile, its little snout pointed just a touch upwards. Suddenly, it frowns down at an entourage of little upstarts trooping out from their den. Scrambles down, glancing to check if it still has our attention, and starts digging the sand furiously with one little paw at a time — as if to reveal some rare treasure only for our eyes, in return for a small consideration of course.

Not twenty yards away, in the reptile enclosure, a lizard scrambles down the small rock face towards the front. Pretending to ignore us completely, it violently snatches a mouthful of dried hay off the glass floor and climbs up to a safe distance. It begins to chomp down furiously, glaring at anyone daring to eye its lunch.

The star attractions at Taman safari though, are sans doubt the two giant pandas. And a smaller red one, all three of whom are enjoying siestas in separate enclosures. Some beautiful albeit less glamorous sightings later, we circle back to try our luck. One of the giant pandas sits hunched over a large clump of bamboo leaves, placed strategically in front of the viewing area. She placidly tears out a sprig sized bite, her little black ears keeping the proverbial 'eyes open'. Reclining backwards, she then stretches an arm lazily for another culm. Suddenly she feels the need to brush and repeatedly scrapes the leaves against her yellowing teeth. Then returns to her vegetarian repast. Luncheon complete, her hips sway slowly and deliberately to her log-bunk for another round of shut eye.

continued . . .

Her partner one level below is being offered 'panda cake' alternating with carrot and speared by a long, narrow stick. At first, he ignores the keeper's Pavlovian clicker. Then reluctantly rises to free up storage in his massive abdomen. And ponderously walks the twenty steps to the proffered treat. He straightens to his full length slowly, hooks the treat and guides it into his mouth. Then settles to chew 20 times, in his favourite hunched over pose. Until the next one.

dinner with dogs
a doberman's nose
nudges me daintily

When it's all good

Anannya Dasgupta, India

The living room is exactly as it was yesterday, and the day before, and the one before that, all the way back to the day I set it up a year ago. Couches and chairs set up face to face. Plumped up in cushions, bright in colour – who can sit here and not feel comforted? Bathed in the yellow light of soothing lampshades, I sit in each of the five seats on different days. Sometimes to read, sometimes to drink tea, sometimes to put my feet up and doze off.

grown
into a forest of many years ...
abandoned land

Guards let down, the nightmares have returned, and worse. These don't need me to be asleep. They catch me awake. This time they come in bouts of seething, mute, rage. I sit down spent. Pretty cushion covers. Comfortable couch. I am glad I picked this shade of green.

weeding the garden
only to weed it again –
living the dreamlife

The cycle of birth and death over and over again in one lifetime alone. No wonder the saints call for the intervention of Gods.

Unyielding

Kathleen Tice, USA

I was at a local frame shop recently, and the owner lent me a book of abstract Japanese art by the female artist, Toko Shinoda. She was born in 1913 and died at the age of 108. In 2016, Shinoda was honoured on a Japanese postage stamp. She was the only artist to have been celebrated in Japan in this manner while still alive.

I love her stark and bold abstract paintings, which are usually streaked with a red mark, in protest against the calligraphy instructor, who crossed out her calligraphy as a young girl. The frame shop owner has one of her original paintings, which he says is valued at \$30,000.

“and I don’t want to miss a thing” watching the moon turn red

Disappearing Act

Richard L. Matta, USA

"Why didn't you give the yearbook your toddler photo?" Mom asks. That begins the excuses.

"Maybe the camera steals souls — I saw that in a movie once." I prefer to take the photos.

Avoid the flash. Be the one a keen observer might say, "But, who took the picture?" Once I told a friend, "Maybe I'll be a spy one day — best to stay clear of cameras." She laughed. "Anyone can read you like a book," she said. "And you're not a very good photographer."

floating barge
amidst seagulls and seals
instagramming me

Memento

Neena Singh, India

The first real downpour comes mid-afternoon. No thunder, no warning — just a sudden burst of rain that sends two squirrels darting up the pine tree. From the window, I watch puddles form along the garden path. Within minutes, a bevy of street children are out — barefoot, shrieking, arms flung wide to greet the rain.

Their laughter brings back a monsoon afternoon from my childhood — the terrace over-filled with water, an upturned black umbrella that we fill with coloured glass marbles, a swirl that sends marbles flying in the water. We five friends scramble on hands and knees to hunt them — clothes soaked, hair dripping, muddy feet slipping. The sparkling glee of the victor who finds the most marbles. Papa's loud call beckons, "Come down! You'll catch a cold!" and I yell back, "Just five more minutes!"

flickering light
on the closed gate
a lone crow

Scales of Love

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

Terrain — rain forest, desert sands, tropical island, then shifting ice. The way we collide and separate from each other.

Emotion — sunshine, rainfall, hail, tornado, bomb cyclone, thundersnow, squall line, waterspout, monsoon... the push and pull away again.

Habit — we keep on returning back to the start.

two islands
darkness and light
refracting the soul

Unguarded

Gavin Austin, Australia

Somewhere between the shores of consciousness and the indigo jaws of daybreak, you come to me. Silently, you step from a drunken haze.

A drowning man, I clamber to grasp your steady hand. I cling, fearful of the pale fingers of day that will soon find their way through the shutters. Reaching deep within my helplessness, you haul me from the clutches of darkness. Freeing me for moments.

Morning mocks with its growing, harsh light. Shedding hope as a tree loses leaves, this heart slowly dies.

a place
death comes to dream
the blue of night

Dream

Ana Drobot, Romania

The path guides my steps toward a cooler area, by the lake, where other stories await—the kind tied to a sky disturbed by the slightest ripple on the water's surface, or to the disappearance of an entire world with the leap of Bashō's frog. This time, however, nothing happens — it's just quiet.

sun rays
cooling off in the lake—
a walk for two

Here, though, my shadow turns playful. Sometimes it hides, other times it reappears. Still, I know it's there, and it will follow me down other sunlit paths, as well as on the road back home. The greenhouse with exotic plants and the path covered with dry leaves from last autumn, which I once called the Autumn Alley, will have to wait for another time.

Today, I wanted to spend more time in what I call the summer zone — which otherwise seems abandoned once the roses disappear.

Changeover

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

loose windows
listening in the darkness
to the winds of March

Another night with sleep being coy, bashful, a tease. Comes in, stays a while, disappears, leaves behind a heavy sluggishness. I feel cold and wrap a blanket over my robe. With hot milk, a muffin and a deck of cards I play solitaire and wait. At 5:01 in the morning winter clocks out and spring clocks in. The thought is cheerful, but it is still dark and the wind is still blowing and lashing trees against the house. Feeling warmer and with hunger satisfied, I return to bed and hope maybe now... may ...be now... now...

mourning doves
cooing lullabies
at dawn

Awakening

Erin Castaldi, USA

Some nights, after the babies awaken, have had their fill of milk, their tiny bottoms changed and patted back to tranquil slumber; I step outside. I go out hunting. I tiptoe down our creaky Victorian stairs and walk to the kitchen door, still high stepping. On my way out, I snack hunt. Sometimes culling the broken bits of my husband's Oreo's or grabbing a handful of salted cashews and step out into the hot, sticky, dead of night. My eyes strain heavenward as this northeast humidity overwhelms me. Often, I don't bring my glasses out with me. As that would require another pass over noisy floorboards through my antique bedroom. Without them, I notice streaks that I cannot neither confirm nor deny in description.

meteor shower
the neighbour's cat pees
in my tomato garden

Pay back

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

a crow's caw
calls the murder to order . . .
day moon

They waited for twilight. Boot scuffs rattle the gravel sidewalk. A neighbour's dog growls, barking as they pass, ghosts keeping to the shadows.

harvest moon
blood pooling
in the alley

The Wailers

Bisshie, Switzerland

Driven by a blinding headache and severe hunger, I volunteer to go for a short walk to the bakers to get some breakfast for us.

It's on the London Road. It occurs to me as I walk, that this stretch of road has never in my lifetime been free of dirt and grime. A place about which nobody cares.

stultifying heat
the overweight bulldog
squirts out a turd

Finally at the front of the queue, I get a panicky call from my sister.

"You'd better get back. Mum's breathing has become very erratic," she tells me.

"Ok," I reply, but my head is telling me that this does not compute. Mum was breathing fine just ten minutes ago when I left.

I order sausage rolls all round and head back to the hospital at a fair old clip.

As I enter Mum's room, it's clear my sister is right. Mum's breathing is very uneven.

Hopefully keeping the alarm from my voice, I tell her, "I'm back Mum. Got some sausage rolls, even a vegan one for Nate. Didn't think you'd fancy one yet, but I can go back if you want."

None of us has an appetite now. I put the bag of sausage rolls on the windowsill and return to my blue plastic chair with the loose screw.

continued . . .

yellow washed sky
bars of redemption song
come and go

Silently I count the length between breaths, until I don't.

hotter than hell
the doctor's hacking cough
cuts the silence

Visitation

K. Srilata, India

Sister Selvi glances at the doctor's notes: "Aditi. 14 years old. Terminal brain cancer."
And beneath that, the scrawled afterthought:

"Refuses to speak. Loves birds. Amateur ornithologist."

Turns out Aditi has been here a while. Her mother sits beside her, eyes vacant and already grieving.

Day 32: First visitors, two friends from school. Aditi turns her face away.

Day 33: In pain. They up the morphine.

Day 34: Sister Selvi places a feeder outside the window.

Day 35: A rare blue tit appears. First sign of interest. *That's cyanistes caeruleus*, whispers Aditi. Emerging briefly from her grief, her mother smiles.

Soon there are other flashes of wing. Before she goes, she identifies seventeen species. Between her mother and Sister Selvi, they have kept track.

doing time in birds time takes flight

Ephemera

Carmela Marino, Italy

late winter
the narrowed eyes
of a stone Buddha

It's been a week since a diagnosis petrified me, just a thousand thoughts keep moving, they seem to race in the mind. I try to suffocate them by drawing attention to beautiful things: my children, my husband, reading books, but it is not easy. I find myself lying half-naked on the table and staring at the ceiling of a windowless room waiting for the doctor.

emergency exit
the sky on the computer
desktop

Accompanied by my long sigh, the door opens: a head of blond curls and the white of his movement bring me the wind. A long needle pierces my skin. I try to decipher his gaze as he visits me — in the meantime it has taken thirty minutes to shrink and embark on a long journey inside myself: like Alice in Wonderland, I go from room to room in my life.

anaesthesia
the shirt moved
by my heartbeat

A tremor in my hands makes it hard to get my bra back on. My gaze passes from the ceiling to his lips. I ask to repeat the diagnosis twice. Disbelief, a wall of mist falls before me until I don't feel the pain in my breast.

continued . . .

clouds of March
from my carcinoma
the tip of a star

The road runs in my eyes, I steal every moment before it becomes a distant point — a homeless man folds the dawn in a cardboard in the indifference of people's coming and going. On the bare branches the first buds seem to open. I ask forgiveness from my inner child.

spring- miracle
my shadow walks
on the river

Reverberation

Zachery May, USA (EC)

I know what it's like...

to feel your joints burn away, to run your hands under warm water willing the needles
in your knuckles to melt, to beg your chemo-ridden mom to open the peanut butter lid,
to grip your baby too tight in your arms terrified you'll drop her

sunset

to have a diagnosis carve years off your headstone, to waste months playing the
insurance game, to feel your mouth split open with sores from side effects, to pray to a
god you don't believe in anymore that you didn't pass this on to your kids

on the cherry's skin

to be kissed by someone who loves you anyway, to appreciate a day with good bones,
to walk the wooded trail with your children, to drink the stars on a glassy night

I eat the light

Woodsy Notes

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

He still likes it when I pack his lunch. Never mind that all he wants is an assortment of fresh fruit, some veggie sticks and a small baguette if we have one on hand. He's not one to eat much when he's chasing clay targets in the birch forest of the local Izaak Walton League range. But he does need to keep the juices flowing when he's shooting competitively.

Maybe it's how I carefully pack those red globe grapes he likes, rinsing and layering them on a paper towel to soak up excess moisture. Maybe it's how I julienne slice those Alaskan grown carrots into perfect matchstick size. And that sourdough baguette. Perhaps it taps into the memories of the days we hitchhiked across Europe as young lovers snacking on bread, wine and cheese.

But then there's the little love messages I slip into his bag whenever I pack him a lunch to go.

collecting sweetness
when the sap flows
love bites

Invisible Web

Simon Wilson, United Kingdom

Sitting in a Garden Centre with a cup of tea, my sister and I look at the backs of our hands and discuss whether we really know them that well. It strikes me, as we do this, that the distance from one side of my head to the other is much the same as the width of my hand. It is alarming that in that distance I can lose a thought. I mention it to my sister, who tells me that thoughts don't travel in a straight line, and they probably have to make a thousand twists and turns as they swing from neuron to neuron. It's an interesting theory but though she was an excellent accountant, and is a first-class sister, I'm unconvinced of her credentials as a brain surgeon. It would not be the first time in the last sixty years that she has told me something that proved to be convincing but untrue.

My wife appears, clutching a bulging bag. She overhears my sister's last words.

"I think," she says, "that thousands might be a flattering estimate."

the universe
in one small skull
the scent of coffee

Making Peace

Caroline Giles Banks, USA

starts at the kitchen table.
Worried awake, tangled
in lacy bedsheets,
images of the absent other
rumple my dreamscape.
Ghosted. No texts for days.

Hair unknotted and unkempt,
I grasp the teacup, glazed in truce-white.
The handle, its fissures and cracks
cemented with lacquer and gold,*
firmly enclasps its bowl.
The kettle whistles high notes.

how beautiful—
the ring finger indent
not yet faded

**Author's Note: Kintsugi, known as 'golden repair,' is the Japanese art of reconstructing broken ceramics with lacquer and gold powder. The eye-catching seams symbolize imperfection, acceptance, and resilience.*

Hourglass

Carol Raisfeld, USA

I remember him from the years when everything sparkled with new light. There may have been a hint of love as we shared adventures, grains of sand in our clothes and laughed until dawn. Then, in the dancing crowds we came apart. We slipped off into the world leaving little marks, bits and pieces of each other for each other.

And now a voice from the past calls, thinking I'd like to know, and tells me he's died. I'm grieving for a little twig of love that never blossomed. It joins the debris on the sidewalk of my journey.

sleeping city
rivulets find their way
in the rain

Even as Dusk Falls

Vidya Shankar, India

“Deepam! Deepam! Deepam!”

My Paati walks out from the puja room with the lamp, holding the stem of the small brass vilakku with her right hand and shielding the flame with her left. We stop whatever we are doing and rise. She walks to the front door and makes a gesture of lending glow to the deepening darkness. This is the cue for one of us to turn on the porch lights. She then walks back into the house all the way to the back door and out into the courtyard, to the sacred tulsi pedestal. We follow her as she circumambulates the shrine three times before placing the vilakku in the lamp alcove.

Today, my 1 BHK flat does not hold space for a tulsi shrine but old habits die hard.

lotus petals
folding with the sun
daily prayer

Full Son (EC)

Dylan Stover, USA

For mom, who made the garden grow

April sunlight warms
soil and dust between
cement path, the same
failed last year.

*in a drugstore display
to grow, see?" Sow*

wait one to three
leaves spear loose soil.

*"C. sulphureus: It says
discovered the species
in the New World."*

empty-handed, I've come
the trowel handle

a bed of black
the brick wall and our cracked
plot where the pansies

She pointed to a packet

and said, "Easy

in full sun, keep moist;

weeks until the seed

Blooms attract butterflies.

*the Spanish conquistadors
while searching for gold*

Better than coming home
to realize, as I squeeze
to part the dark earth.

joining you the border of orange and yellow cosmos

The Fireman's Lift

Glenn G. Coats, USA

Before
the climb up Big Squaw,
my parents
did not know
each other very well,
just a handful of barn dances,
a few fishing trips
to Bud Lake, and a restaurant
when they could afford one —
work kept them
apart.

Before
they rested
at the old fire warden's cabin —
there had been
a wedding
at the wooden church
and a long drive
up to Maine.

Before
my mother and father
reached the rock
staircase,
there had been glimpses
of the Bigelow range;
the big lake shimmering
down below,
and a noticeable limp
in mother's stride.

continued . . .

Before
my father pulled my mother
over his shoulder,
she had slipped
off her sandals,
and revealed the blisters
on her ankles.

Before
my father carried my mother
seven and a half miles
down the mountain,
even before they sank
into the soft bed,
they knew they would
be together —
for a long, long time.

a changing sky
in the long arms
of a sycamore

Creaky Floorboards

Janice Doppler, USA

Four-year old Gwen sees something at night that scares her, keeps her awake. Her sister, Morgan, sees it too. She is unafraid. Keeping a hallway light on doesn't help. Neither does a nightlight in their room. Daddy spends a night watching for whatever it is, but detects nothing.

He and the twins go for a walk. Each selects a small stone for a special ceremony. Daddy burns sage in every part of the bedroom, sprays the stones and two small brooms with lavender-scented magic. The girls tuck the stones under their pillows then sweep the scary thing from the room, down the steps, and across the front porch. The children decide a second sweeping is called for in case they missed something.

That night neither child has trouble sleeping, but Daddy does. Something keeps him awake even after he gets out of bed to confirm all the doors are locked.

rock garden
pussy willow buds
prepare to bloom

Reborn

D.V. Rožić, Croatia

Washed with a night rain, my suburb street shines under the lanterns.

No tenseness whatsoever.

When did all those trees overtake the town?

And I inhale the petrichor deeply.

The strength of primordial, just returned from the universe ...

behind the fence
a gaze of a huge and wet
watch dog

Who's Who

Nola Obee, Canada

I live several hours away and arrive at the long-term care home unexpectedly. They tell me he chose not to get up and dressed, but now he will.

When he comes out, he tells me, "One of our parents has killed the other."

How to respond to this one? "I'm sure that's just a rumour," I say.

"You think so?"

"Yes, I'm sure. It's just a rumour."

"Well, if you say so."

His breathing steadies and he relaxes.

I add, "Besides, one of my parents is sitting right here."

A long pause. "I guess that's right."

pacifier
for the old ones
television

Winter

Margaret Mahony, Australia

in the park still strewn with autumn leaves, sun shadows
cast patterns, a lone fountain bubbles nearby and the busy
magpie collects wood bark in its beak
the Japanese maples, just past their best create warmth in
red and orange

I think of you
with me
your aging face in repose

you left in summer, escaping the cold, I hope you can still hear birdsong

Lilies of the Field

Orense Nicod, France

In the shop the neon light blunts colors, racks of clothes arranged in a piercing spectrum. Two teenagers gush over a pink silk number I saw an influencer wear on my feed.

Among the floral prints, why can't I find one thing that feels like me?

autumn fields
the scarecrow wears
a sunbeam

“That’s Amore”

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

The pet food store’s empty on this cold, sleety day. A young shop assistant breaks her boredom with a smile. Generations separate us . . . I could be her great grandpa! Nevertheless, she confides that she would like to marry and is in love with a fellow student.

“I’m so happy I met him organically and not electronically!”

Such a modern distinction in this age of social media, chat rooms, and dating services facilitating contact at a cost, with just a possibility of finding love. Fraught with the dangers of artificial intelligence, scams, identity theft and trolling by marketeers, fortune hunters and abusers.

Her “organic” is that old fashioned happenstance . . . instant chemistry. A smile across the classroom or coffee shop, a hello on a beach or park bench, or mutual karma at a party or rock concert. There are so many ways to find true love if you’re patient.

Sixty years ago, I went really organic, romping in haystacks. Eventually, she found me in a forest and we’re still hitched!

first date
just kissing goodbye
at her door

Absolution

Anna Cates, USA

I feel it in his bones, my dear cat, Freddie, is growing old, no longer jumps as high,
some favourite roosts abandoned now.

One time, he tried to run away from home, slipped into tall grass beyond the backyard,
pursuing some important business with the crickets, late season butterflies, and bees,
and, silly old me, I thought of nothing else but fleas!

I tried to snatch him up, bring his mission to an end . . . the bite came out of nowhere,
the cut to my thumb not quite as thrilling as Plath's onion hinge but deep enough for
that "red plush." In truth, the pain was more than physical. But I knew it was my duty
to forgive.

blindweed . . .
a long line of ants
to the bowl

In memory of my beloved little hon (March 2012-May 7, 2025)

Dog Years

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

All that time ago, the foundling in the dead man's house.

feral moon tumbling in the night

She learns my moods. Doggie trots ahead.

tail wagging dayspring wet again

Then does what island dogs do.

bump in the night six new puppies

Too soon, she'll leave me.

long walk her sea-salt coat gone grey

What Remains (EC)

Richard Kakol, Australia

'To have another language is to possess a second soul.' – Charlemagne

As a child, sponge-like I absorb my grandparents' stories about things which take place in another time, on another continent. — They endure war and many harsh winters in Poland.

My grandfather goes to the front line, and having passed through that liminal space, becomes a prisoner of war. In those lost years, he works as a slave on a German farm. In time, he emigrates to a country on the other side of the world, though it might as well be the dark side of the moon. A decade later (years shrouded in mystery) he arranges for the rest of his family to join him in Australia.

My grandmother's experience is somewhat different. She doesn't go into battle, like the wives of Norse warriors. Instead, she remains at home, raising her son on her own. Decades later, she tells me stories of those war years, while she knits jumpers and scarves for her grandchildren. She is a master storyteller, hooking me in with an intriguing titbit — 'Before the war there was a Jewish orchestra in the village,' she says. Smiling, she recalls the enchanting melodies which the musicians weave with their violins, clarinets . . . 'But after the war, there was no longer an orchestra. All the musicians were gone, most probably transported to the death camps.' The orchestra is silent — a silence which says so much.

I visit Oswiecim (which the Germans call Auschwitz) with my parents. Seeing the images of emaciated figures attired in striped prison clothes, I think of those musicians in my grandparents' village, before the war. Bilingual, I am part Polish and part Australian. The Polish half of my soul is haunted by all these stories of the war, and the gas chambers.

at midsummer
still some patches of snow
in the mountains

Race Results

Jill Muhrer, USA

Loss unthinkable yet . . . November 8th haemorrhages, blinding those who stare, who
linger in why. Bare trees blanch crimson.

red, white, blue

Mumbling voices rise, absorbed by a brisk wind. The sun, brilliant and warm, stretches
into pink sky marbling blue. Clouds lighten and expand.

women for freedom signs

Katabatic winds flow south navigating through earth's gravitational pull, transforming
light into cobalt and indigo. Along the boundaries of stars, they settle — silent and still.

into the recycling bin

Give me your tired, your poor . . . (EC)

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

the Stars and Stripes
in my migrant friend's wrinkled eyes
the spring that once was

American dream
somewhere over the rainbow
detention camps

A group of protesters, mostly gray-haired, gathers at the steps of the Statue of Liberty. They reclaim this public space as a site of memory and denunciation. Helped by her granddaughter, a civil rights activist reads out loud, one by one slowly, the names of the unlawfully disappeared.

Each name is a breath of life, a wound of heart, and most importantly, a warning for the country whose "greatness" will be built on the silence of everyday Americans.

Expectations

Deborah Strong, Northern Ireland

His last email fires another rant over the Atlantic.

There is a random attack every week round here. Drugs is a big part of it; you have to be careful of these types.

He protects the salmon in the creek, regular counting and water testing. His machete accompanies him every time he fulfils his duty.

The junkies and pushers live here in tents, hiding out in the woods.

There is no one around when he comes across the camp. Having given up on the authorities he lifts the machete, swings and slashes until all lies in tatters.

brother
thorns on the roses
draw blood

Shannon's Entropy

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

I encrypt our communications on strips of paper like spies in World War II. It's nothing classified, but teachers intercept notes, nonetheless. We scribble in Morse--a 'y' or 'n' denoting data that either fits or doesn't for our fox observations--or Braille--my favorite for haiku and bubbled-in test boredom. When I teach him Morse, he calls it "snakes and turtles."

turtle tracks
he signs his trail
with a Braille "t"

Codes can be more complex than dots and dashes. The intersection of curve sets forms an alphabet. Some curve sets are harder to crack than others. Redundancy reduces randomness. Growing up, the world is random enough without them.

dots and dashes
I decode the why
in his obituary

August Surrender

Andrew Grossman, USA

Wind comes with a chill new tail. The roses wither — *is beauty measured by longevity?*
Blooms on the dogwood tree, my neighbor asks ‘Why don’t we cut a trail through the woods? You hack it out from your side, and I’ll come from mine.’”

Each family intends to spend nights together grilling by the sound of the stream. We imagine it, but have never heard or seen one here, except in the idea of a boundary marker.

The summer passes and we never cut a trail to each other.

So much happens — emergencies, depressions, unsuccessfully blocking out the lower world, many days wasted inside.

Many planes fly low over the oak trees. We hear the overwhelming engine sounds in the afternoon and evening. With the leaves gone, the pilots will be visible. We will know the power in the sky.

our child-like selves
planting a box with jasmine
rumors of water

Editor's Choices — Haibun (EC)

Unfinished Business (EC)

Ganesh R., India

La Paz feels like the love child of a carnival and a board game where the rules were invented mid-play. Every alley buzzes with a story so bizarre, it could've leapt from a fever dream. You can buy almost anything here — bicycles, USB drives... love potions. And where would one go for such enchantments? The infamous Witch Market, of course — less "market" and more "museum of the surreal, curated for the brave." Shelves brim with llama foetuses, neatly wrapped and sold for ritual burials beneath new homes as offerings to Pachamama, Mother Earth. If your house is more than three stories tall, though, legend says you'll need something bigger. No, not a grown llama. A human.

The tale goes that a shaman is hired to find someone who won't be missed — a homeless person, an addict. They're drugged, buried alive beneath the foundations to "keep things in balance." Some say bodies have turned up decades later, interrupting the skyline with skeletons.

And then there are the miners. My guide tells us they believe a human sacrifice might bring a vein of gold or prevent the next accident. Locals won't go near the mines alone — not out of superstition, but survival. No one wants to end up beneath someone's home, holding up luxury tiles with their bones. They go in groups, like friends on a strange, morbid pilgrimage.

I ask, half-joking, "What about tourists?"

He smiles. "Not unless you stay too long."

stories over mate
old ways woven
through threads of time

A faraway land comes alive as Ganesh R., zooms into the goings-on in what appears to be a touristy affair. Who thought one could actually walk into a market and buy love potions – Ganesh uses this perfect hook for the reader in the very second line. And as he walks through the market, we walk with him, slipping deeper into a blend of folklore, fantasy and reality showcased with ample wit. A good haibun works when the writing reveals just enough to intrigue the reader without relying too much on intricate literary devices. ‘Unfinished Business’ does just that. The closing senryu is a clever pivot from the prose and ties together the elements beautifully.



Reverberation (EC)

Zachery May, USA

I know what it's like...

to feel your joints burn away, to run your hands under warm water willing the needles
in your knuckles to melt, to beg your chemo-ridden mom to open the peanut butter lid,
to grip your baby too tight in your arms terrified you'll drop her

sunset

to have a diagnosis carve years off your headstone, to waste months playing the
insurance game, to feel your mouth split open with sores from side effects, to pray to a
god you don't believe in anymore that you didn't pass this on to your kids

on the cherry's skin

to be kissed by someone who loves you anyway, to appreciate a day with good bones,
to walk the wooded trail with your children, to drink the stars on a glassy night

I eat the light

Empathy. And a haiku that offers a glimmer of hope. Zachery May's work in this haibun tugs at the heartstrings in many ways. I loved the manner in which the prose gently breaks into a line of

the haiku... a reprieve that allows the reader to soak in the depth of emotions, the collective

suffering and being pulled back into a moment of wonder. In the first line of the haiku, there is just one word – ‘sunset.’ And it left me anticipating something dismal. But in the next line, the beautiful image of a setting sun lighting up the skin of a cherry makes for a beautiful image of a hope of returning to ‘the pink of health.’ The allusion to the aliveness of the moment in ‘I eat the light’ stayed with me for a long time. Perhaps in this is the answer to life’s plaguing question – how do we hope? By turning towards light.



Full Son (EC)

Dylan Stover, USA

For mom, who made the garden grow

April sunlight warms soil and dust between cement path, the same failed last year. <i>in a drugstore display to grow, see?" Sow wait one to three leaves spear loose soil. "C. sulphureus: It says discovered the species in the New World." empty-handed, I've come the trowel handle</i>	a bed of black the brick wall and our cracked plot where the pansies <i>She pointed to a packet and said, "Easy in full sun, keep moist; weeks until the seed Blooms attract butterflies. the Spanish conquistadors while searching for gold Better than coming home to realize, as I squeeze to part the dark earth.</i>
--	--

joining you the border of orange and yellow cosmos

I love how haibun writers constantly push the form without sacrificing the elements that make the art form what it should be – revelations from observation without allowing the mind to take

flight on a different plane. In this concrete haibun, Dylan Stover offers the image of a flowering stalk bending, possibly towards light. The haiku is neatly laid like the soil beneath this stalk. The prose breaks in poetic form and tells a story that spans two generations. There is an urging from another voice from another time, and the doing. Is it to keep the memory alive? Is it to continue a tradition for ritual is how we make sense of the present? The haiku leaves the reader to wonder where is this person joining the other? Where does the border of orange and yellow cosmos lead to? The garden slowly comes alive in the reader's mind.



What Remains (EC)

Richard Kakol, Australia

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at midsummer
still some patches of snow
in the mountains

At a time when the world is submerged in wars and the slaughtering of a large number of people, forests, animals and what have you, we turn to art for solace. Artistes, then, become keepers of our conscience. They draw our attention to the fact that history always repeats itself. And that the repercussions of trauma are felt across time, space, place and generations. Reading Richard Kakol's haibun reminded me of the true purpose of us all as writers. The title with which he begins the haibun is prophetic – 'What remains.' And I had to ask myself what really does remain after wars and genocides have been committed? What is it that we are left with? This is a haunting piece where the personal is instantly made universal. And yet, despite all the horrors of what the war stories left him with, Richard ends on a note of hope. If there is still snow on the mountain tops in summer, is there still hope?



Give me your tired, your poor . . . (EC)

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

the Stars and Stripes
in my migrant friend's wrinkled eyes
the spring that once was

American dream
somewhere over the rainbow
detention camps

A group of protesters, mostly gray-haired, gathers at the steps of the Statue of Liberty.

They reclaim this public space as a site of memory and denunciation. Helped by her granddaughter, a civil rights activist reads out loud, one by one slowly, the names of the unlawfully disappeared.

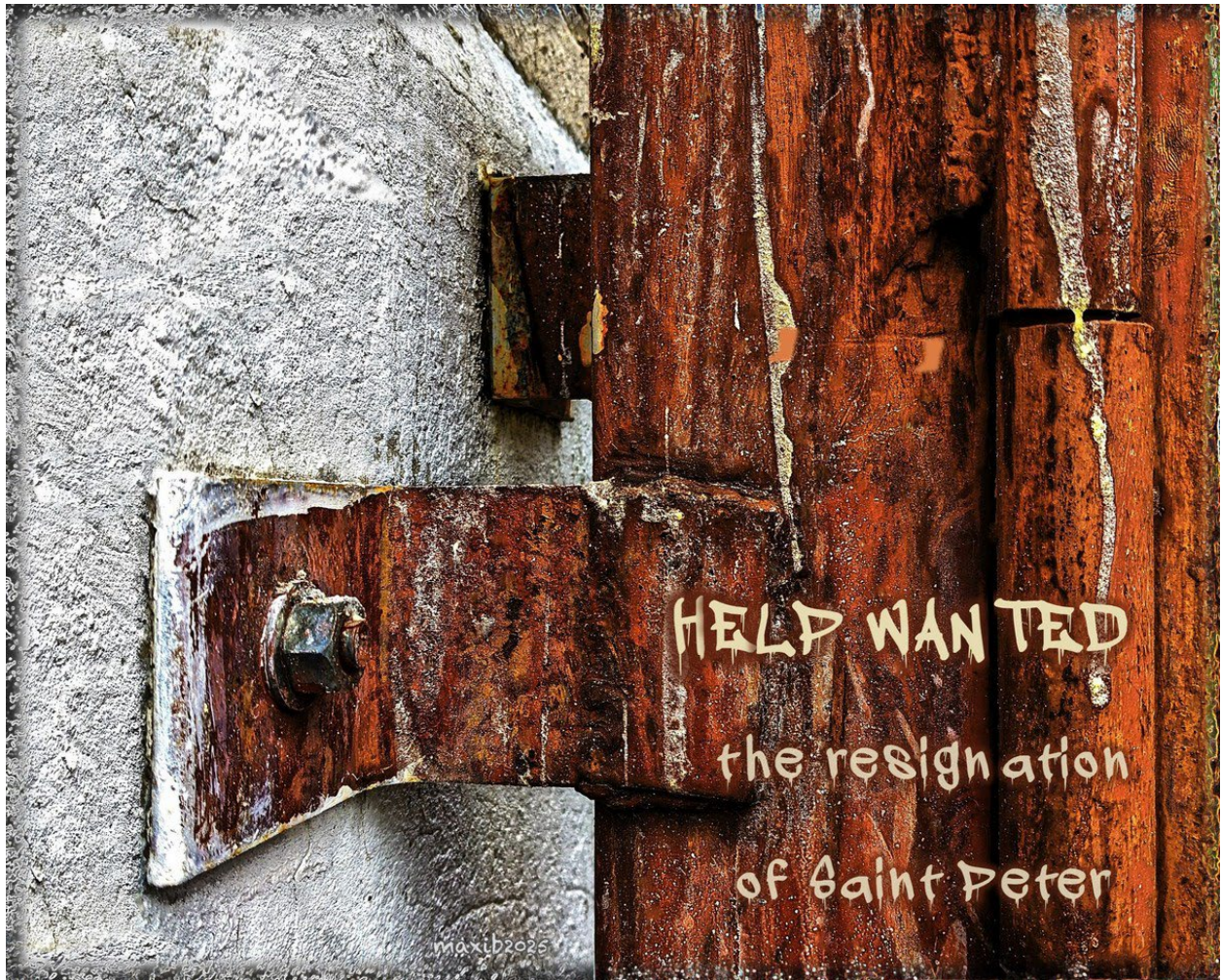
Each name is a breath of life , a wound of heart, and most importantly, a warning for the country whose "greatness" will be built on the silence of everyday Americans.

Chen-ou Liu is again another artiste who shows us that only in asking will we find the path – that only by daring can we truly reclaim what we have lost. He tells us of a history that is easily forgotten and warns us of what is, and what is in the coming. The prose is stark, focussing on the intergenerational emotion that resonates with freedom. As I read this over and over again, it dawned on me that in writing, Chen-ou dares us too. It is at once a warning and a beseeching. The haiku are placed at the beginning – a necessity to draw our attention to the immediacy of the moment.

Shobhana Kumar

Haiga — Part 4

Maxianne Berger — Canada



Mircea Moldovan—Romania



Nitu Yumnam — UAE



Oscar Luparia — Italy



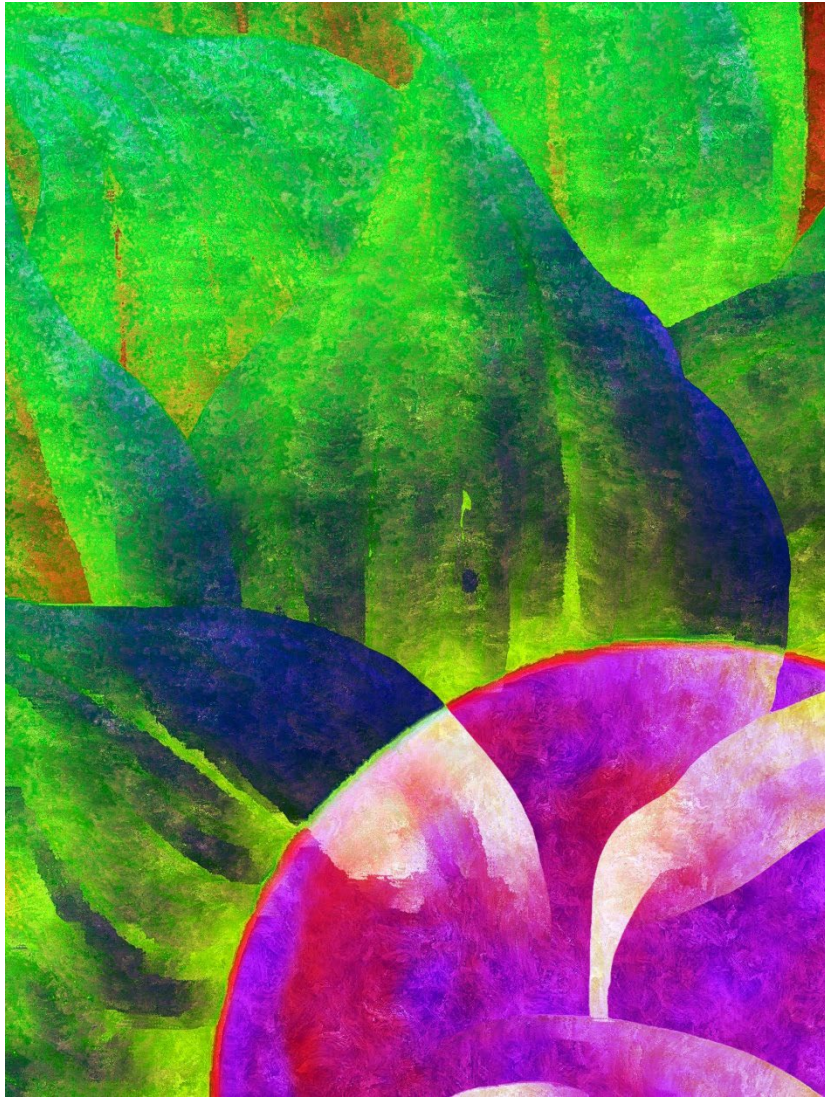
still image another summer fades away

poem & photo: Oscar Luparia

Richard West & Alexander Mychko — USA



Tanka Prose



Ignite

We all know how this ends

Simon Wilson, UK

The noise of squabbling birds draws me to the window. Three magpies, a crow and a rabbit form a group which reminds me of one of those grotesque Victorian taxidermy tableaux. The crow, bigger than the others, struts like a black-clad priest, lunges, tries to take a beakful. Scandalised magpies call and flap, and try to block the bigger bird. The rabbit, which in modern medical terms, is unresponsive, takes little part in the proceedings. It has, to use a modern euphemism, passed. It is an ex-rabbit, says a voice from my past.

It is a small rabbit, young and inexperienced with cars. It was probably the one I saw sunning itself on the verge the afternoon before, both of us unaware of what the future held. A second crow descends, A car draws up, the crows withdraw and the district nurse emerges. It is that time again.

little by little
I become my father
his hands
his smile
my own regrets

Starlit Ripples

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

A beaver comes to the old pond. In two nights, he strips the bark from the ash tree that shades my favorite bench. We could hire a trapper to get rid of him, but a narrow trail up the far side of the earthen dam shows that he comes from the neighbors' pond below. Who knows how many of his kin may follow? So, we fence the red maples, oaks, and sycamores, the pistachio and persimmon, the tupelo and Chinese elm. We leave the black willows and the sweetgum saplings unfenced, because the beaver seems to favor them.

one golden leaf
spinning and spinning
on a thread
in the stillness of dawn
. . . *thou art that*

Forester

Joanna Ashwell, UK

That should have been your name. The sound beyond the wind. The light within a star.
The shifting vibrancy of green. The perfume within a flower.

wider still
the open arms
of a sycamore
where the dance
becomes only sky

Hidden

Gavin Austin, Australia

As he lets the door close with a dull thud, she lies back and frees corseted thoughts. A flight of memories flutter, circling her. The carnival is in town. A young couple walk hand in hand, oblivious of the smell of doughnuts, or barking spruikers at the sideshow stands. Smiling as they ride the giant Ferris wheel, they kiss atop its giddy heights.

She sheds her cocooned past between twisted bedsheets, and pads to the bathroom. Leisurely, she showers, then carefully applies her makeup. She is mindful of the date she must keep and quickly checks the time. Dabbing her throat with *Chanel Misia*, she blots a little extra to enchant her collar.

She unlocks the cupboard door in the spare room. The suitcase bulges with expectancy as she hauls it to the front door. At the kitchen table she writes the note she has drafted over and over in their bed. Carefully, she props it against the fruit bowl on the benchtop.

Her heart leaps wildly at the blunt knock on the front door. Quickly, she checks her appearance in the hall mirror. Turning the door handle, her face collapses. A delivery boy smiles on the doorstep as he thrusts a bouquet of red long-stemmed roses into her arms. Clawing the card from the cellophane, she reads *Happy anniversary, darling! I love you more with each passing year.*

Funny, she thinks, as she places the suitcase back behind the cupboard door, *change is a mysterious stranger who never seems to show*. She clears the kitchen bench and again tears up a handwritten note.

a cry breaks
night's recurring dream
. . . escapes
to wander the ragged
back lanes of morning

A Vision

Gail Brooks, USA

When non-invasive treatments fail, doctors recommend surgery for my extremely precocious two-year old. He was born with strabismus, often called a lazy eye. My anxiety about such a surgery is heightened when friends tell me that they remove the eye from the socket to perform the surgery. This turns out not to be true, but it doesn't matter.

Surgery over, his dad and I are escorted to the recovery room where he is sitting up in bed. The first words my son says to me are,

"Mom, I can't see."

I hold my breath as he continues, this time more emphatically, "Mom, I can't see...you're blocking the television!"

yoga class

breathe in, breathe out

chanting

I transcend this moment

and see only wholeness

November Snow

Anna Cates, USA

Some years, first snow arrives in November, frosting away the final traces of garish heat. The sweetest things nook into catnip warmth, oblivious to weather's worst — never judge you, never finger back dusty drapes and spy on you through the window, imagining what's worst.

Down the block, somebody's neighbor weirds-out his lawn's 20-foot-high Halloween werewolf with a cardinal red Christmas cap. The heavens fracture into dreary and bright. Cathedral bells freak out.

But who's to say? Some cardinal sins emerge from cardinals and others from ordinary folk, who may or may not count the advent days when life falls short of bourgeois Kincade picturesque . . .

Further down the road, on the outskirts of town, a solitary figure is not counting — trains humming through the mantelpiece, exciting tiny cracks, rattling through the ears — has no calendar and is not counting, like the hobos of yesteryear, without a beanie for their baldness or a single sock, on some cold November night, moon blushing pink as rare steak, threw themselves upon the tracks.

cold wind tousling
pampas grass plumes
autumn vespers
feeding a hungry soul
the solitude

Another View

Sharon Cohagen, Germany

Wandering the wooded area on the mountain, I can look through the trees, down to the valley. It is soft underfoot, pleasantly cool, with a faint scent of pine. Soon I'll reach the tree line. From there it becomes steeper, the path narrower and stony. My strides are shorter and slower now, and I'm getting short of breath. This is much more strenuous than my gardening.

Inching my way up the mountain, I reflect on outdoor activities as a child. My parents certainly did not set an example. They were not sports-minded. Even for a golf game, they rode in a golfcart. An outing with them was a drive up to Lake Simcoe, a short walk from the parking lot to the water, a shorter walk along the shore. On warm days, they would watch me swim. It was never long enough for me. This was followed by a leisurely restaurant lunch—inside, away from “bothersome insects”, and then a car ride back to Toronto.

My stomach is grumbling after thinking about food. However, it will be a while before taking a break. I have to keep going. While walking, I extract a few raisins from my pocket and savour their sweetness. A yellow butterfly flutters past, leading the way to full sunlight. Finally, I see the alpine panorama before me. I wish my parents could have experienced this.

bright yellow roses
clinging to the wooden slats
the old trellis bends
 straining forward, upward
 my scissors clip wilted blooms

First Blood

Gauri Dixit, India

He turns on the television. The anchor's voice sounds shrill in the quiet of the morning. Behind her, images loop — wreckage, red sirens, a cricket score, a grinning politician, a beheaded corpse. The coffee turns cold.

come dawn
cock crows again
and again
this dusty hill and bare trees
blur into thickening smog

Which Aisle? (EC)

Robert Erlandson, USA

Our local grocery store is part of a national chain. I had my list and was prepared for the walking around trying to find stuff. I was not alone and kept crossing paths with others doing the same wandering. As we passed, we would laugh, make some comment or ask did you see “whatever?” As I went by the manager's office, I noticed he was there, so I popped in and, nicely, made a comment about finding things as they were frequently moved around. He acknowledged my concern and then asked if I had downloaded their Store App? I had in fact done so. He then showed me how I can use the App to locate things in the store with a built-in location finder. Every store has free Wi-Fi. You just need to verify the store you are at and then use search – enter the product you want and up pops the aisle.

as a kid with Dad
shopping was an adventure
people & places
meat at the butcher's shop
veggies here and baked stuff there

Storm Warning

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

My restlessness is disturbed at sunrise by a crow's insistent cawing. I lift the canvas flap and count 15 rooks. Some on the sparse dewy grass, some perched in the surrounding bloodwoods dead branches. You sleep on unperturbed by last night's differences of opinion.

the still air
of this morning
shattered by
beady eyed crows,
a gathering storm

Myths

Keitha Keyes, Australia

just you and me
under the stars tonight
a billy is boiling
a damper is in the ashes
camping in the outback

This is the romantic image I have brought with me on our first camping trip. But now, in the middle of nowhere, sitting on an uncomfortable log, reality seeps in.

Are we really alone? The dry grass around us seems to move. I feel sure there is a snake or a spider or something out there just waiting to attack us. The stars are mostly hidden by cloud cover. We don't have a billy, just an old saucepan. The twigs we collected for the campfire create a lot of smoke and not much heat. And no ashes. I put my version of a damper in the saucepan to cook. Half an hour later we get it out. Hard as a brick, inedible.

Cold, hungry and disappointed, we decide to abandon our hammocks and sleep in the car.

An Immigrant Poet's Reflection on Writing the Suffering of Others

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

"Merely to say, to see and say, things as they are," grows loud . . . and louder in a corner of my mind as moonlight slants through the study window.

[decades-long
inhuman occupation compressed]
to one-day attacks
responding with the red glow
of missiles in Gaza's night sky

this endless loop:
October 7, October 7 ...
[and yet
the decades BEFORE
and the day AFTER] blood shedding

each bombed-out house:
an album with no photos
but with people
living, wounded and dead
pressed between its pages

anything new
under Gaza's smeared sun?
smoky rubble
beyond smoky rubble, and yet
again smoky rubble

I etch each pain with a borrowed tongue, then every word becomes a betrayal; but all the silence will turn into a heart wound. Turning my gaze from writing, then looking out the window at the moon, its fullness, I mutter, "what is the use of useless poetry when it cannot stop the killing?"

Cruising

Jenny Sharpe, Canada

After university in 1969, I visited Yugoslavia, a country that no longer exists. Arthur Frommer's *Europe on Five Dollars A Day* suggested I visit Dubrovnik, known as the 'Pearl of the Adriatic'. I arrived in Rijeka and bought a deck-class ferry ticket along with finger-foods, before boarding in the late afternoon. The idea of sleeping under the stars seemed romantic and adventurous. As the ship began its journey down the Dalmatian coast, hitchhikers from around the world and American conscientious objectors settled in.

The wind snatched snippets of conversation and swirled them around me. Backpackers spoke about friends and family at home, while draft dodgers railed against the unjust war in Vietnam. For these young men, to follow their conscience meant self-imposed exile or jail. No glory waited on those battlefields. As always, the losers were civilians and soldiers. Only politicians, generals, and arms dealers gained from the war.

we share
cherries, wine, conversation
lust for power
death to others
enigmas haunt me

War & Peace

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

Peace on a grand scale between countries. Peace on a smaller scale between individuals. Between neighbors. Between siblings, a brother and sister. They live next to each other across from the ocean. She is older. Has no children. Tends to be bossy. Has fixed ideas on how to live, on following the old country ways, on whom he should marry, on how to raise his children, run his household. He is easy going. Doesn't follow customs. Marries outside his culture, outside his religion. Lets his four children be like untamed puppies running free with the chickens, the dogs and cats, getting brown as berries as they romp in sun and surf. Brother and sister bicker, argue, don't talk. A fence goes up between the properties. A chain link fence. Cold, hard, the kind of fence that says back off, stay away.

acceptance and love
a two-ingredient formula
to let someone in
a smile, handclasp hug or kiss
family, friend or stranger

They cool off. A truce. A gate is installed in the fence. Over the years, the gate is sometimes open, sometimes locked. It is only after his children are grown and left and he is a widower and she a widow and there is nothing left to fight about that the gate remains open.

the quickness of years
brings a softness
ice melts, tempers cool,
peace returns
and love blooms

More Than Spaghetti Sauce

Richard Tice, USA

I used to make tomato-based sauces. It took hours for the tomatoes to cook down to a usable thickness. My homemade spaghetti sauce turned out tasty but always a bit runny, too watery. I was more successful in making chili and salsa from scratch. My paternal grandmother, however, was an expert, a *sugo di pomodoro* queen. When we visited, we immediately picked a bucket of Roma tomatoes, bell peppers, and Spanish onions from her garden. I learned from her how to slip the skins off tomatoes. The magic brew would simmer all day, sending its aroma throughout the house and into the backyard. She had to boil a couple of packages of noodles because we ate so much. Grandma also bottled her spaghetti sauce and always gave us some — along with pickles and jellies. Such a rich red inside the jar; when opened, such a rich fragrance. She made spaghetti sauce until she could no longer cook, but I gave it up by my forties. Store-bought brands are cheaper than buying the ingredients, consistently have a better texture, and taste as good as I ever made. No one has missed my sauce.

still on display
the five-generation photo
that baby
on grandma's lap
married now

Struggling Through

Simon Wilson, UK

After several attempts I give up, push myself away from the desk and straighten my back. No matter what I do I cannot fold the words “mobility scooter” elegantly into a tanka. It should be simple, after all, it is only six syllables, but whatever I try, the rhythm stutters and stalls. My wife enters the room, bringing a cup of tea and a new perspective.

electric scooter
I tried so hard so many
times
then once again
you showed a better way

Why Change Is Unnecessary and Electronic Payment Is Preferred

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

In an epigram in his philosophical polemic *Beyond Good and Evil*, Friedrich Nietzsche writes: “Memory says, ‘I did that.’ Pride replies, ‘I could not have done that.’ Eventually, memory yields.”

We hide ourselves from ourselves.

nay
rein in your horses
let the sheep
pull the wool
over your *ayes*

* Friedrich Nietzsche : *Beyond Good and Evil*, translated by Helen Zimmern, 1906, reprinted in Courier Dover Publications, New York, 1997.

Editor's Choices (EC) – Tanka Prose

Which Aisle?(EC)

Robert Erlandson, USA

Our local grocery store is part of a national chain. I had my list and was prepared for the walking around trying to find stuff. I was not alone and kept crossing paths with others doing the same wandering. As we passed, we would laugh, make some comment or ask did you see “whatever?” As I went by the manager's office, I noticed he was there, so I popped in and, nicely, made a comment about finding things as they were frequently moved around. He acknowledged my concern and then asked if I had downloaded their Store App? I had in fact done so. He then showed me how I can use the App to locate things in the store with a built-in location finder. Every store has free Wi-Fi. You just need to verify the store you are at and then use search – enter the product you want and up pops the aisle.

as a kid with Dad
shopping was an adventure
people & places
meat at the butcher's shop
veggies here and baked stuff there

Robert Erlandson perfectly captures what we feel when grocery shopping in a Supermarket here in North America. Perhaps elsewhere in other countries, but I have no knowledge of what the 'customer experience' is in those foreign lands.

Moving products to different aisles is really annoying to us old timers wandering the aisles. Mind you, it is a bit of exercise. So now, I have to find a store employee in order to find the sauerkraut I need for my next supper. Good luck to me!

Long live computer-generated product placement! Ya right!

Mike Montreuil

Why Change Is Unnecessary and Electronic Payment Is Preferred (EC)

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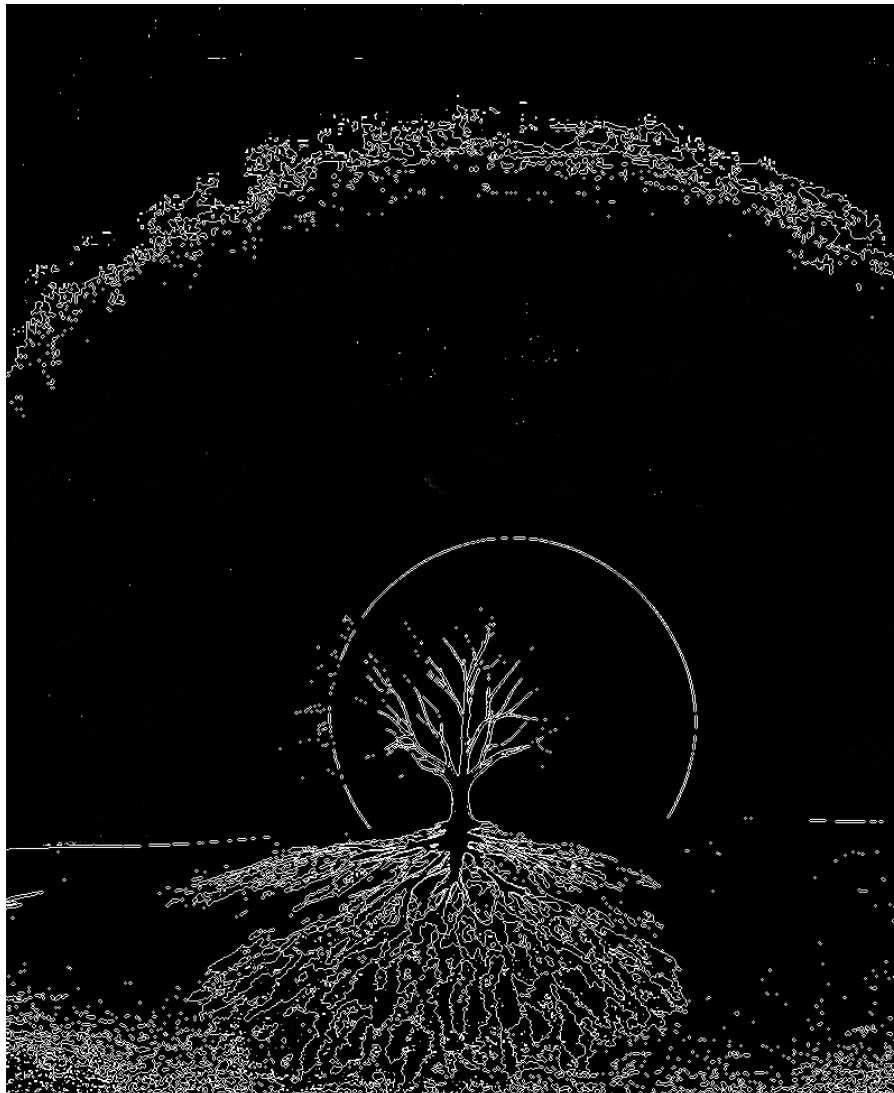
Note: This piece by Robert Witmer was originally submitted as a haibun. In the end, however, we felt that it fit better as a Tanka Prose. The EC given to the piece when it was in the haibun section has been retained.

This tanka prose is an example of a master at work. In a few brief lines, Robert Witmer summarises the plight of modern living and our modern lives, succinctly captured in the title. The haiku is a brilliant conceit to the main premise with the word-play pointing to mastery of the form. The prose limits itself to drawing a quote from literature with just a small note on what the writer thinks of it. This is a reading that is endlessly giving, layers peeling like slices of an onion.

Shobhana Kumar

Haiga — Part 5

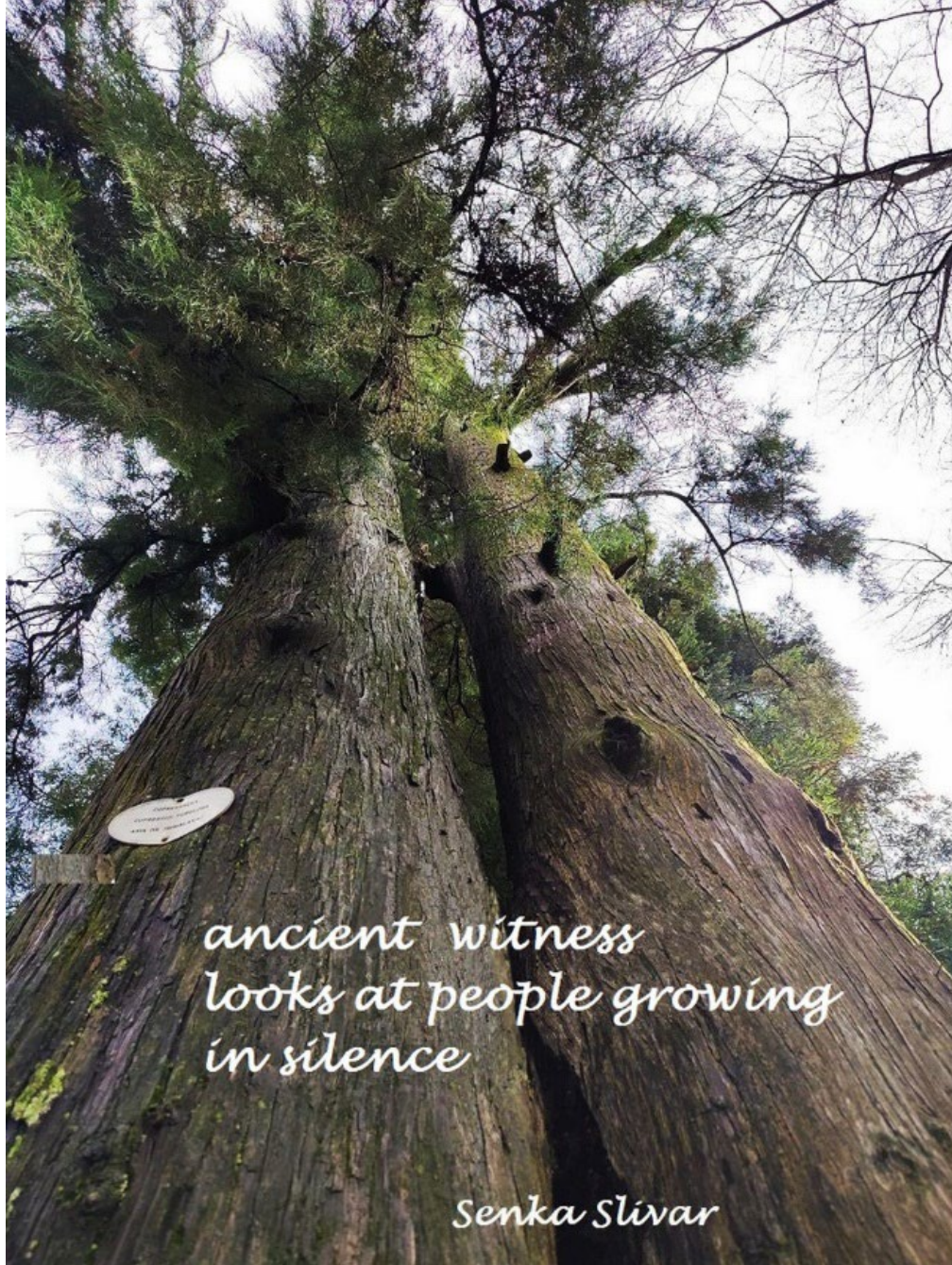
Robert Erlandson — USA



*chaotic times
shaken ... disoriented
but rooted*

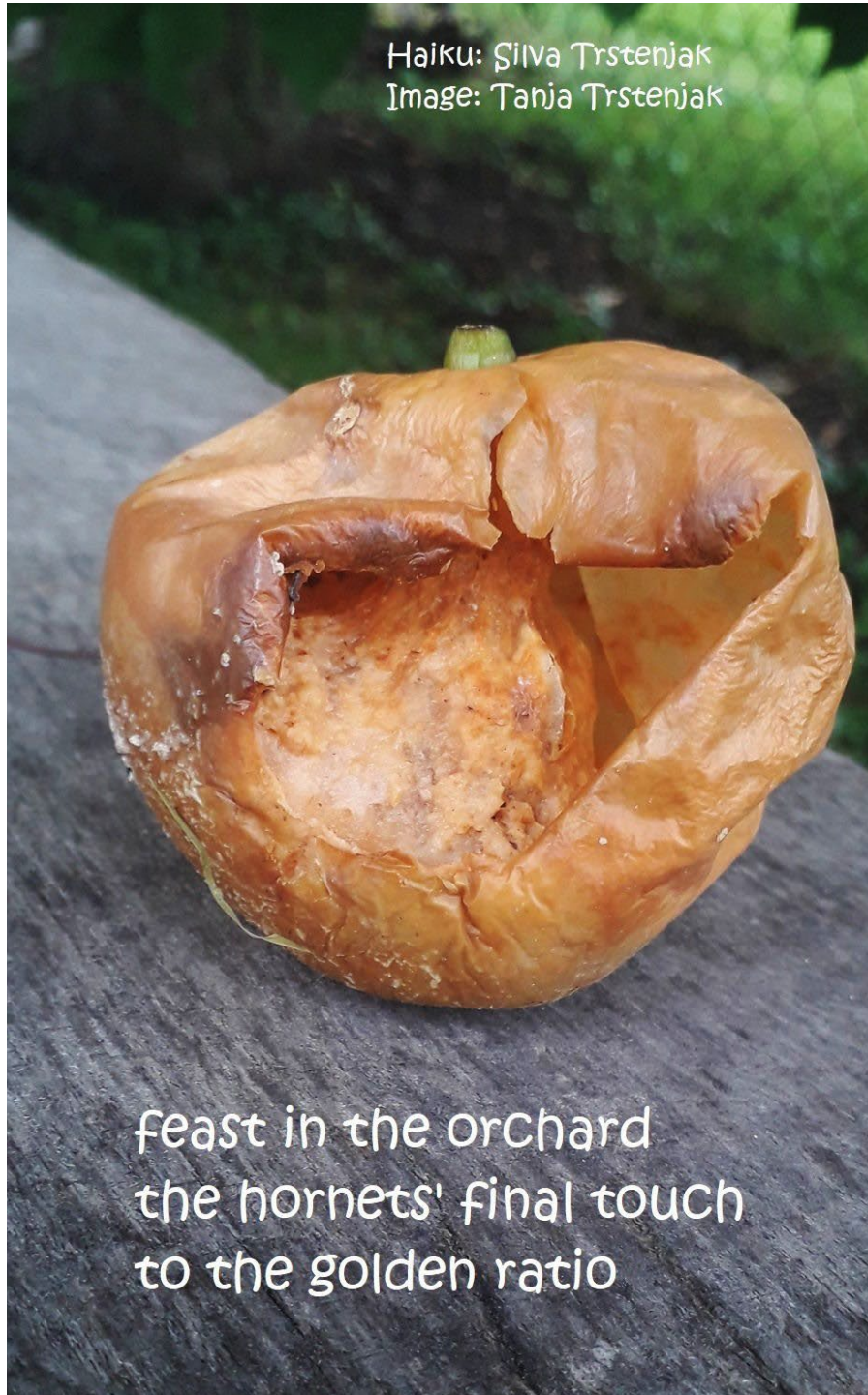
R Erlandson

Senka Slivar — Croatia / Translation by: D.V. Rožić — Croatia



Silva Trstenjak & Tanja Trstenjak — Croatia

Haiku: Silva Trstenjak
Image: Tanja Trstenjak

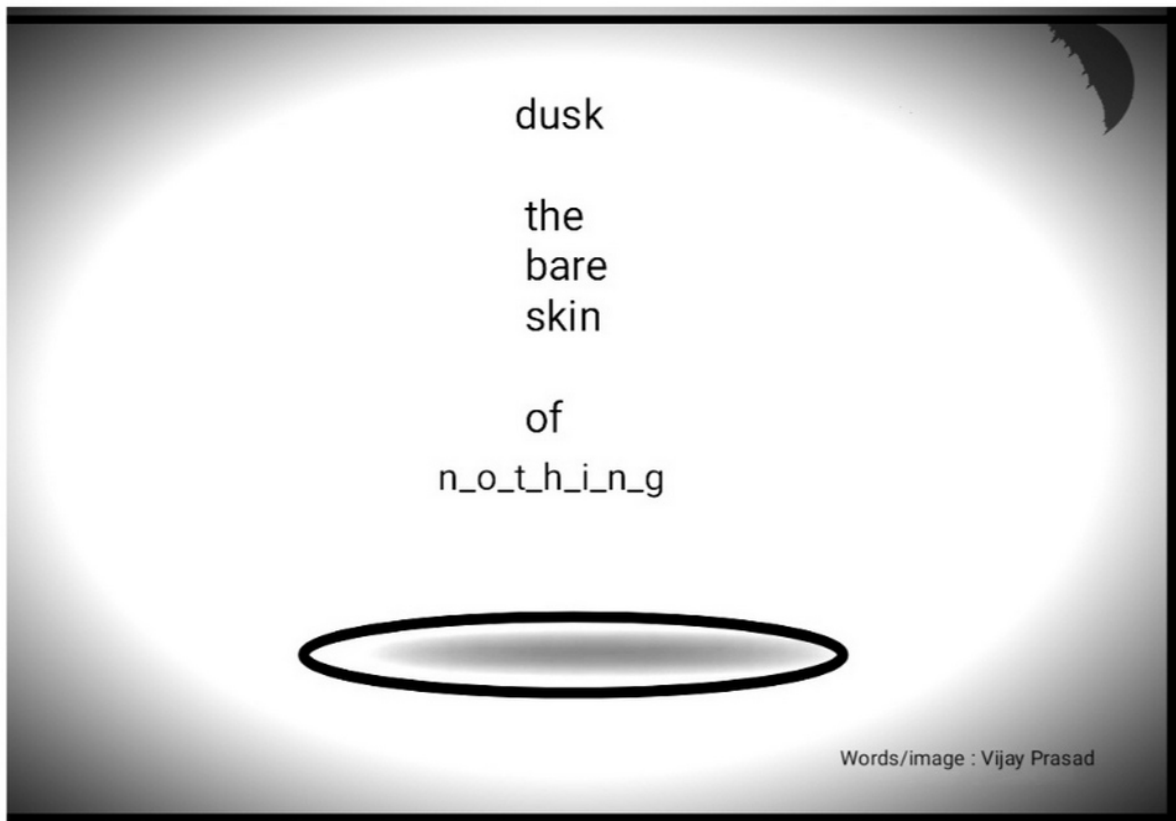


feast in the orchard
the hornets' final touch
to the golden ratio

Slawa Sibiga — Poland



Vijay Prasad — India



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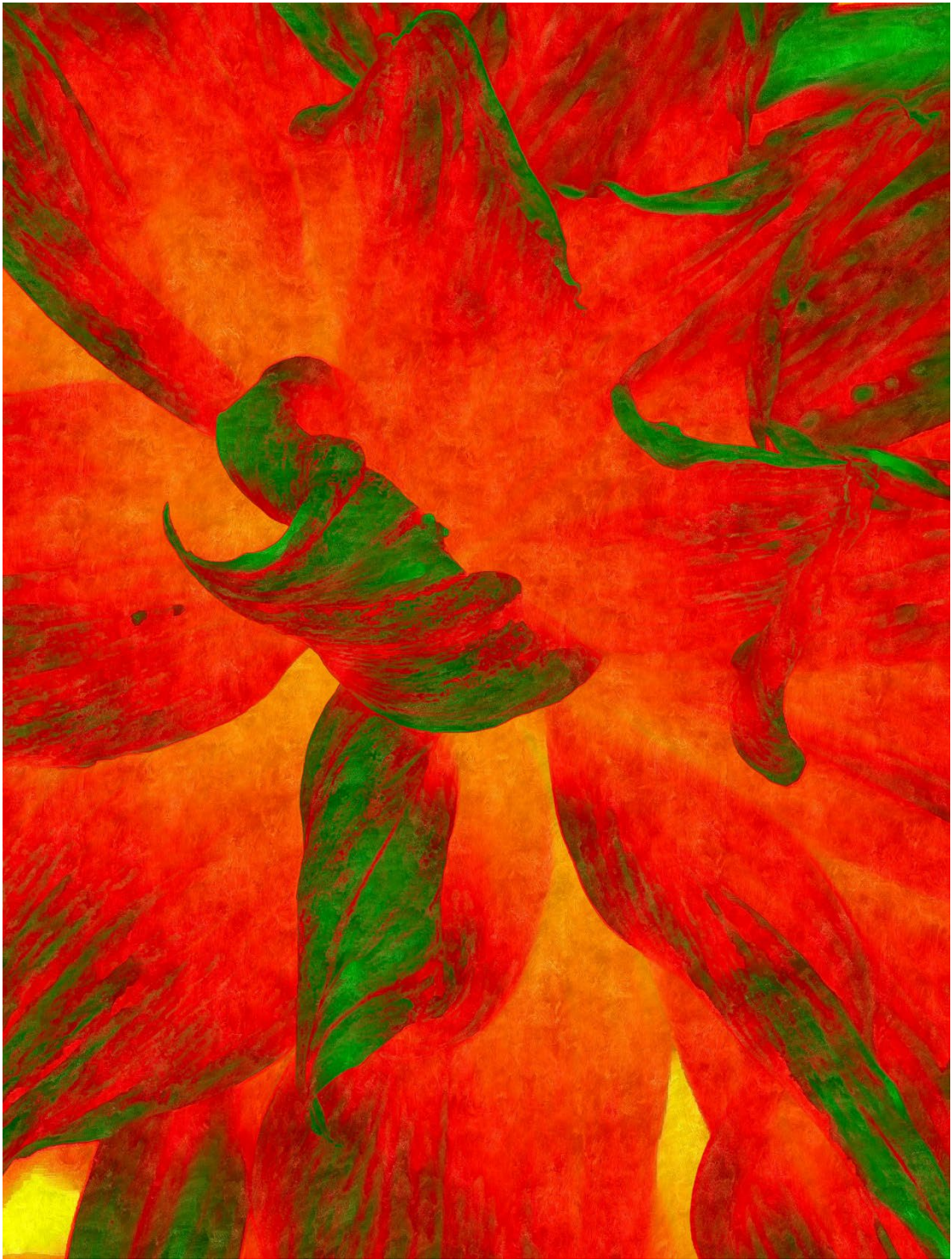
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