

cattails



April 2024

cattails

April 2024 Issue

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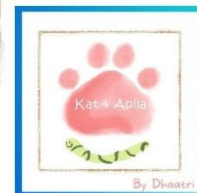
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Contents

Introduction	5
In memory of Adjei Agyei-Baah	6
Haiku	14
Haiga - part 1	41
Senryu	47
Haiga - part 2	70
Tanka	76
Haiga - part 3	104
Haibun	110
Haiga - part 4	159
Tanka Prose	165
Haiga - part 5	189
List of Poets and Artists	195

The Headlines

Introducing Issa-bella



Introduction

“. . . There is nothing new under the sun.” (Ecclesiastes 1:9). Indeed, the Japanese short forms we showcase in *cattails* have a venerable history. Both the haiku and the tanka derive from *waka*, a form in use for thousands of years. The Bard poses the question that “if there be nothing new” “how are our brains beguil'd to “labour” “for invention”? His metaphor of a labouring womb that brings forth a new life, seems a cogent parallel to our use of these ancient forms in articulating what we experience, dream of, hope and long for.

The selections in this issue are a labour of love and commitment of Geethanjali, Lavana, David and Jenny. You know from your personal contacts with them how each of these editors go beyond the remit of their editorial briefs to work with you. My deep appreciation and thanks to them. I cannot reiterate adequately enough that without Mike’s quiet dedication and commitment *cattails* would not be possible.

Our imaginative and enthusiastic cartoonist, Dhaatri Vengunad Menon, brings us yet another thought-provoking feature. We feature the wonderful art of Rohini Gupta, a well-known poet-editor and artist from Mumbai. This issue also carries a tribute to Adjei Agyei-Baah, a pioneer Ghanian poet and editor of haiku and senryu.

For the October 2024 issue, we welcome Shobhana Kumar, a widely published and recognised poet, from Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, as co-editor of haibun.

Sonam Chhoki

Notes: Sonnet 59: William Shakespeare

In memory of Adjei Agyei-Baah

June 29, 1977–December 18, 2023

ADJEI AGYEI-BAAH died unexpectedly on December 18, 2023. He was a prolific poet of haiku and senryu and won accolades for his debut haiku collection, *Africu* (2016) and his senryu collection, *Piece of My Fart* (2018) which was the first book of this form from Africa. He championed African haiku (*Afriku*) celebrating the experiences and settings unique to this rich and varied continent. He was the co-founder of Africa Haiku Network, the Poetry Foundation Ghana, and *The Mamba*, Africa's first haiku journal.

I first made acquaintance with Adjei in 2015 when he submitted to *cattails*. Since then, he has been a regular contributor, featuring in almost every issue of the journal, with the exception of April and October 2023.

There was a generosity of spirit in Adjei and I remember with gratitude how he regularly emailed me the link to the latest issue of *The Mamba*. In 2019 when he was in New Zealand for his doctorate degree in English Education at the University of Waikato, he wrote how very different it was from his native Ghana and that he was embracing the 'greenness' of the country for his writing. He was putting together his collection of senryu, *The Fury of My Fart* and asked me to write a blurb. Big-hearted to the last, he emailed in late 2023 to say how much he enjoyed my haiku in the THF volunteers' anthology, *The High Lonesome*. Little did I know that I would not hear from him again. He leaves a remarkable legacy of his all too brief but inspiring stint in the haiku community.

Aristotle is said to have observed, 'Man is the only animal that laughs.' The French philosopher, Henri Bergson (1859–1941) took this idea further that man is also a being who is the source of laughter. Bergson argued that 'laughter is complicity' and thus it is a social act. Laughter challenges mindless conformity and fosters greater flexibility and sociability.

I've often been struck by the Bergsonian vein in Adeji's use of humour. It is often self-deprecatory but packs a sharp and powerful punch, thus making the personal, social and universal. His poems were rooted in his Ghanian locale and experience but he effectively engaged readers across the globe as fellow poets and observers.

Here are his poems published in *cattails*.

deserted shore
the wind sharpens its voice
over a conch

September 2015, Editor's Choice

dark moon—
an owl's shriek unsettles
a dream

January 2016

dozing on a bus
the head of a passenger
comes for a kiss

January 2016

evening meal
a network of aromas
from neighbors' kitchens

anwumere aduane yɔ
nkwan hwam di afra firi
m'afipamfoɔ mukaase

May 2016

sleepless night
caught between her snore
and my toothache

May 2016

after the rain
the sagging bellies
of funeral canopies

September 2016

midnight stars
plugging the holes, where
the rain comes down

September 2016

first sail
inside his paper boat
the weight of water

September 2016 (Haiga)

10% kickback
the fresh dimples
of potholes

September 2016

a charred martyr —
the scarecrow after the passing
of forest fire

April 2017

top honours—
my name under
someone's haiku
April 2017

morning streetlight—
the shed wings of termites
carpet the ground
October 2017

church harvest
the church gate beggar
returns his coins
October 2017

a party
before the farmer's party—
locusts!
April 2018

old mattress
my wife sinks deeper
than I
April 2018

moonlight seeps
through the bamboo
a robin's song
October 2018

floating soap bubble
I bump
into my childhood
October 2018

summer beach
the shadow of an urchin
joins couple for lunch
October 2018

where the two streams meet
the color
of my morning coffee
April 2019

in her sleep
the smile she keeps
denying me
April 2019

lightning . . .
for a moment
a river in the sky
April 2019

winter train . . .
I travel home with
a distant cloud
October 2019

loose tile
a fresh fracas
with my landlord
October 2019

early on a date
adjusting my tie
from a silver spoon
April 2020, Editor's Choice

end of year
my son requests a shave
for teddy
April 2020

divorce day
I rehearse
my composure
October 2020

dawn rumble
the moon rolling
on a train
October 2020

Sunday sermon
the bare cleavage
of the pastor's wife
April 2021

the switch of scent
between hay and cow dung
countryside delivery
April 2021

barn roof holes . . .
racing mice plug
and unplug sunrays
October 2021

Fatherhood
things for myself
I put last
October 2021

out-going tide—
the tipped posture
of a beach shell
April 2022

church gate
the beggar's reflection
on his mirror shoe
October 2022

my life
in circles—
coffee rings

m'abrabɔ
kɔ ntwaaho
kɔfe nkawa
October 2022

I am deeply saddened at the passing of Adjei, a singular voice and presence.

Sonam Chhoki



The news of Adjei Agyei-Baah's demise left me in shock. A regular contributor to *cattails*, we had had a few interactions about poetry and poetics. Generous as he was, he always shared the latest issue of *Mamba* as well as his many books of poetry with me, the last exchange being on World Poetry Day in 2023, where he shared his chapbook, *Tales of the Kite* by Buttonhook Press. Adjei's haiku were filled with images from his native land, sometimes embodying joy and at others, tinged with wabi. Here is a favourite of mine from the October 2020 issue of *cattails*:

dawn rumble
the moon rolling
on a train

I will miss the interactions and the poetry, Adjei.

Geethanjali Rajan

Haiku



Poppy Pod

very first moon month long rains

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

dark matter
the star magnolia's
constellation of hollows

Laurie Greer, USA

a persimmon halo
around the wolf moon
white noise

Richard Tice, USA

retention pond overflowing snow geese

Kim Klugh, USA

spring cleaning
some lint still left
in the sky

curățenie de primăvară
câteva scame rămase
pe cer

Mona Iordan, Romania

children's footprints
around a puddle
spawning frogs

Rick Tarquinio, USA (EC)

how tender
to her single chick
mother condor

Ruth Holzer, USA (EC)

spring snow
school children singing
louder and louder

Robert Witmer, Japan

a young fox
rolls on dewy grass
flattened crocuses

Tony Williams, UK

April snowfall—
cherry blossoms only
on my kimono

zăpadă-n aprilie—
flori de cireș doar
pe kimono

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

spring noon
the soft thud
of a hatchling

Ravi Kiran, India

taking no prisoners
a wildling
in the glade

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

tucked inside
the soldier's wallet
pressed bluebells

John Pappas, USA

for when we meet again lily of the valley

Robert Epstein, USA

after the tanks
the scent of
wild lilacs

след танковете
ароматът
на диви люляци

Vladislav Hristov, Bulgaria

a raging sea
will this war
ever end

C.X. Turner, UK

martyrs' day
a flower girl counts
the fallen heads

అమరవీరుల దినోత్సవం
ఓ పూలమ్మాయి లెక్కపెడుతోంది
రాలిన తలల్ని

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

hailstorm
the past left
in dents

క్లుషాదలర ఊత
అతాత రక్షణాఙ్ఘ్రి
ఙ్ఘ్రి తిక్క రె

Biswajit Mishra, Canada

daylilies reblooming the world to come

Joshua St. Claire, USA

wing-lift
the sunrise
of a tidal river

Paula Sears, USA

sunlit morning
a family of pochards
in procession

Neena Singh, India

a blue-tongue skink
lies in wait on the basalt—
mosquito hour

Lorin Ford, Australia

watercolor sun
Birmingham blackberries
warm to the touch

Daniel Robinson, USA

the veins
inside a darter's wings . . .
red quartzite

Debbie Strange, Canada

summer heat
screening my shadow
from the sun

Quendryth Young, Australia

beach day the curl of wavelengths

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

leaving one shell
for another
hermit crab

John Paul Caponigro, USA

white caps
a flock of black-backed gulls
treading air

Rick Jackofsky, USA

learning to bait the hook
a faint tremor enters
my hand through his

Mike White, USA

blooming
from a single cell . . .
red tide

Bill Fay, USA

spider's web
a solar system
of birch seeds

Ben Oliver, England

woodland trail
a line of stones rubbed soft
by hiker's boots

Jay Friedenber, USA

cholla burrs
the desert hitches
a ride home

Cynthia Anderson, USA

walking path
a worm-shaped
string of ants

Michael J. Gallo, USA

summer twilight
sky and cherries
melting together

tramonto d'estate
ciliegie e cielo
si fondono

Mariangela Canzi, Italy

not lost
in the woods
Iceland moss

bez lutanja
šumom
islandski lišaj

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

goldfinches
flushed from chicory
another explosion

Jon Hare, USA

the deer's stare
pinpoint focus
in all directions

Lori Becherer, USA

a skipper drifts
over a landmine
July darkness

Anna Cates, USA

scorching day
the arms of the port dredger
submerged in the sea

gorący dzień
bagier zanurza
ramiona w morzu

Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

perpetual whirl
the nautilus echoes
its fossil shell

Barbara Sabol, USA

sand dunes—
top of the peaks blow
into valleys

Diane Webster, USA

kayak descent
the unexpected silence
between white waters

Sébastien Rivas, Canada

stone faces
with lips puckered—
the utility of a waterless fountain

Craig Kittner, USA

wet summer
still smoke haze
from three bushfires

Rohan Buettel, Australia

returning home . . .
children scaring each other
under the banyan tree

*Sankara Jayanth Sudanagunta,
India*

petunia perfume
the scent
of belonging

Susan Farner, USA

Dunn's swamp . . .
toadlets and bullfrogs
harmonising

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

wild eels
this tangle
of sargassum

Jeff Hoagland, USA

peony blooms drooping
summer hanging
by a stem

Edward J. Rielly, USA

cascade mountains
a native flute mourns
day's end

Susan Lee Roberts, USA

quiet of midnight
a chuck-will's-widow
calls out its name

Kevin Valentine, USA

monsoon dark
typewriter frogs tap out
more love letters

Ruchita Madhok, India

flood warning
the town mural's
red sky

Mark Smith, USA

midnight windstorm
the cypress
sweeps the stars

Kelly Sargent, USA

lightning flash
an otter freezes
at the river edge

Keith Evetts, UK

fire ritual
invoking the sacred
conch shell echoes

Gwen Bitti, Australia

rough night—
an owl gets in
a last hoot

Curt Pawlisch, USA

a bruised apple in his voice the scent of rain

Jacob D. Salzer, USA

evening showers the bellylaughs of bullfrogs

Julie Schwerin, USA

taking shelter
in an acoustic shell
the sound of rain

Ernest Wit, Poland

a quartet in the piazza
night arrives
note by note

Frank Hooven, USA

gibbous through fronds the language of tango

Bill Cooper, USA

laughing faces
in the firelight
lantern-eye fish

Jerome Berglund, USA

moonlit lake
a breeze leaves footsteps
through the stillness

John Hawkhead, UK

the cold stone path
through this labyrinth . . .
a chickadee sings

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

swaying shadows
on both sides of the bridge
grape picking

sjene se njišu
s obje strane mosta
berba grožđa

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

deep in the woods
a stone wall joins me
on the walk back

Brad Bennett, USA

garden rockery
moss and stone
holding silence

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

black-eyed Susans
folding over, bending down
mom grabs the rail

Robert Erlandson, USA

where he once played
a sandbox
of white chrysanthemums

Mimi Ahern, USA

a departure—
the smell of rust
on windowsills

una partenza—
l'odore di ruggine
sui davanzali

Daniela Misso, Italy

the heaviness
of untold words . . .
fall foliage

Suraj Nanu, India

just moss on the headstone our day-to-day battles

Arvinder Kaur, India

ghost gums
melting into dusk
a currawong's call

Gavin Austin, Australia

still leaning
on the porch rail
my grandpa's scythe

još uvijek nagnuta
na ogradu trijema
djedova kosa

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

mussel harvest
the growing emptiness
dredging up words

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland, UK

autumn afternoon
the shadow of the walnut tree flees
over the fence

jesenje popodne
sjena oraha bježi
preko ograde

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

waiting
as it's poured . . . the silver
sound of tea

Kathy Kituai, Australia

autumn twilight
the momentary glow
of hillside sheep

Tom Bierovic, USA

twilight song
at times the rain
at times the mistle thrush

Meera Rehm, UK

long night . . .
how short the life
of bonfire sparks

Srini, India

steel skeleton
workers patting leather gloves
in the north wind

Randy Brooks, USA

tightly wrapped in a silk quilt
frost on the trees

木々の霜シルクキルトの我が身かな 千秋

Christina Chin, Malaysia
Translated by Chiaki Nakano, Japan

small steps on ice
holding the chestnut cane
once in my father's hand

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland, UK

curled umbels
of Queen Anne's lace
they talk hospice

Kristen Lindquist, USA

against my arm
the moribund cat . . .
a maple leaf falls

Aron Rothstein, USA

as if it would illuminate
the moonless night
derelict lighthouse

comme s'il allait éclairer
la nuit sans lune
phare à l'abandon

Marie Derley, Belgium

white lotus
going wherever
prayers go

Edward Cody Huddleston, USA

winter stillness
a raven
on the stupa

冬天的寂靜
一隻烏鴉
在佛塔頂端

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

new fallen snow
the shape
of untouched light

Angela Terry, USA

December rain
the dust on the pennants
still on his wall

Jim Chessing, USA

snow drift . . .
our cat moving
from my lap to his

Rowan Beckett, USA

talking to her trails left in winter fog

Ishan Anagh, India

snowflakes
the altered shapes
of hawthorn

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

snowy solstice
water lily pads hold
their place in ice

Tyson West, USA

a child's faith—
barn animals kneeling
to a midnight star

Dan Curtis, Canada

X-mas tree –
bead garlands cradle
the moonlight

božićno drvce—
perlice ljuljaju
mjesečinu

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia

Translated by D. V. Rožić, Croatia

passing through
the city ferris wheel
sheets and sheets of snow

Ben Gaa, USA

MRI . . .
the shifting shapes
of winter clouds

Stephenie Story, USA

confirmed diagnosis
windows slam
in the winter wind

diagnosi confermata
le finestre sbattono
nel vento invernale

Maria Concetta Conti, Italy

heavy snow
the mailman
is a snowman

暴雪
郵差
變雪人

John Zheng, USA

half dusk . . .
footprints on the snow
before dying

metà tramonto...
le orme sulla neve
prima di morire

Carmela Marino, Italy

wind shear—
bending sounds
until they cry

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

winter mist—
when these fields
were ours

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

leaving the past behind:
from a hanging glacier
an avalanche in midair

Nola Obee, Canada (EC)

frosty daybreak—
feeling the roughness
of a cat's tongue

mrazno svitanje -
osjećam hrapavost
mačjeg jezika

Nina Kovačić, Croatia

mixed signals
a few clouds stained
with sunrise

Vandana Parashar, India

robin on the fence—
are you the same bird I saw
when I was five?

Robert Lowes, USA

the shortest day
across the stubble field
a scarecrow's shadow
(For Adjei Agyei-Baah)

Bryan Rickert, USA



Editor's Choice (EC)- Haiku

Thank you for your submissions to the haiku section of *cattails*. The quality, variety and number of poems we receive point to the fact that the art of haiku writing is flourishing across borders. Perhaps, in these uncertain times we must return to the simple and the tangibly calming qualities of being with nature. I hope you strolled along with our poets through the four seasons (shunkashuutou, 春夏秋冬 in Japanese), adventured through scorching heat, sheets of snow, wildfires, floods, and also paused to smell the lilacs, watch spawning frogs or the blue-tongued skink, feel the roughness of a cat's tongue, and listen to toadlets.

How complex should haiku be? Should they necessarily make us run for our dictionaries (or internet searches) or is it possible to capture the moment and present it without artifice and intellectualisation and yet, come up with something that will engage the reader? Here are a few poems for you to engage with. These haiku have

simple words but the poet's observation, 'eye', successfully brings the moment to us so clearly. I hope they warm your heart just as it did mine, with the simplicity that is haiku.



children's footprints
around a puddle
spawning frogs

Rick Tarquinio, USA (EC)

The poet brings us the joy of Spring through the curiosity of children. Their naturally inquisitive nature (observing spawning frogs) brings us the innocent joy of childhood. The children themselves are absent from the scene and are seen and felt only through their footprints. A simple scene that brings a smile. The poem also points to birth and the cycles in nature that will move forward.



how tender
to her single chick
mother condor

Ruth Holzer, USA (EC)

The condor is a bird with one of the largest wingspans, known for its strength and ability to glide long distances. Revered by some as a symbol of spirituality, it is also one of the longest living raptors. Such a grand bird to be associated with tenderness, makes for a special image. The poet brings out the softness of a mother to her offspring in this haiku. Regardless of the toughness on the exterior which the world sees, there is a tender, nurturing side to a vulture. In just 8 words, here is a message for us to tap deep into 'nurture'.



leaving the past behind:
from a hanging glacier
an avalanche in midair

Nola Obee, Canada (EC)

The poet captures one forceful moment of nature, when an avalanche is mid-air. The haiku freezes that moment when what is past and what might happen are all immaterial. It is completely rooted in the present, when the avalanche has left its source, the hanging glacier, and is paused mid-air. The might of that moment is juxtaposed with the first line, “leaving the past behind”. Is the poet reflecting on leaving the past behind or is it just a statement about the avalanche? That is left to the reader. I looked at it as a reflection of what happens when we leave the past behind and have to sometimes navigate leaving our zones of comfort, not knowing where the force of the moment and the direction of our paths will take us. A layered haiku with many possible interpretations.

I also request you to read the one-line haiku in this issue in ways more than one. There are many fine examples of mono-ku here.

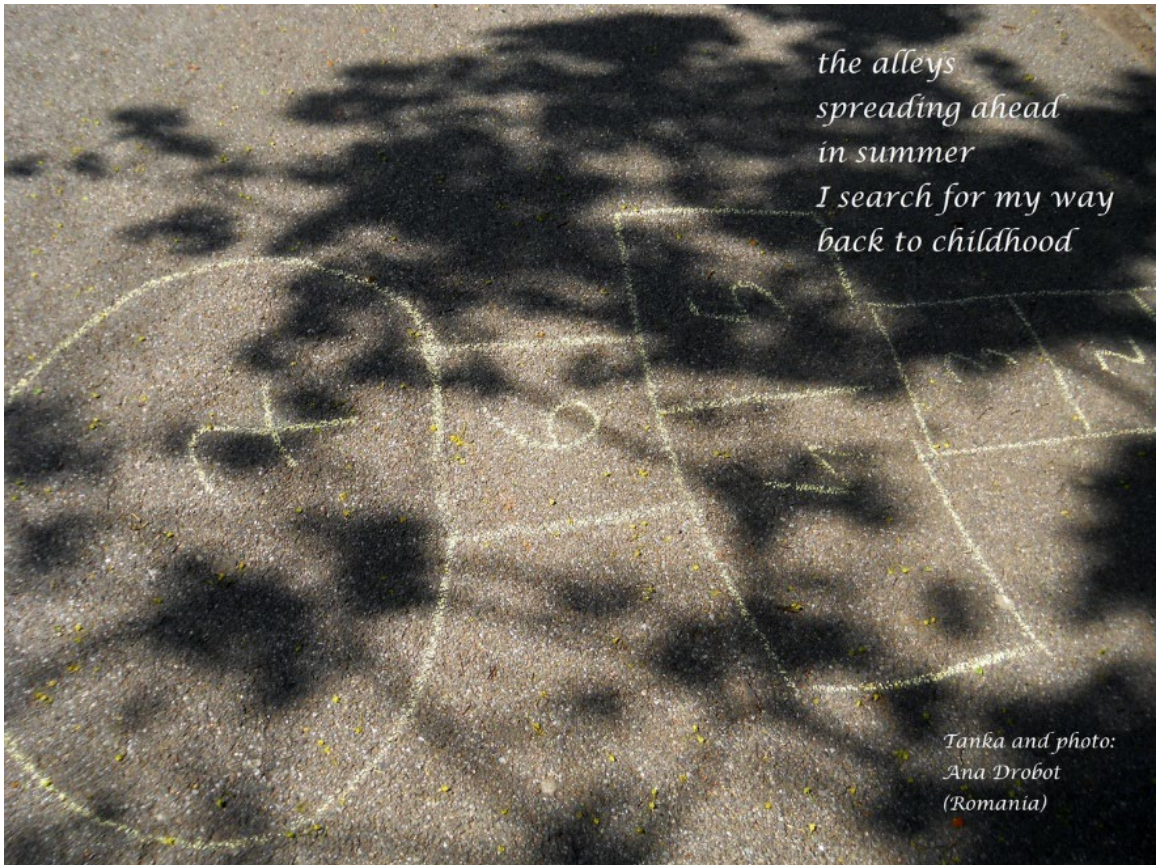
With gratitude,
Geethanjali Rajan

Haiga – Part 1

Amin Jacek Pędziwiater – Poland



Ana Drobot—Romania



*the alleys
spreading ahead
in summer
I search for my way
back to childhood*

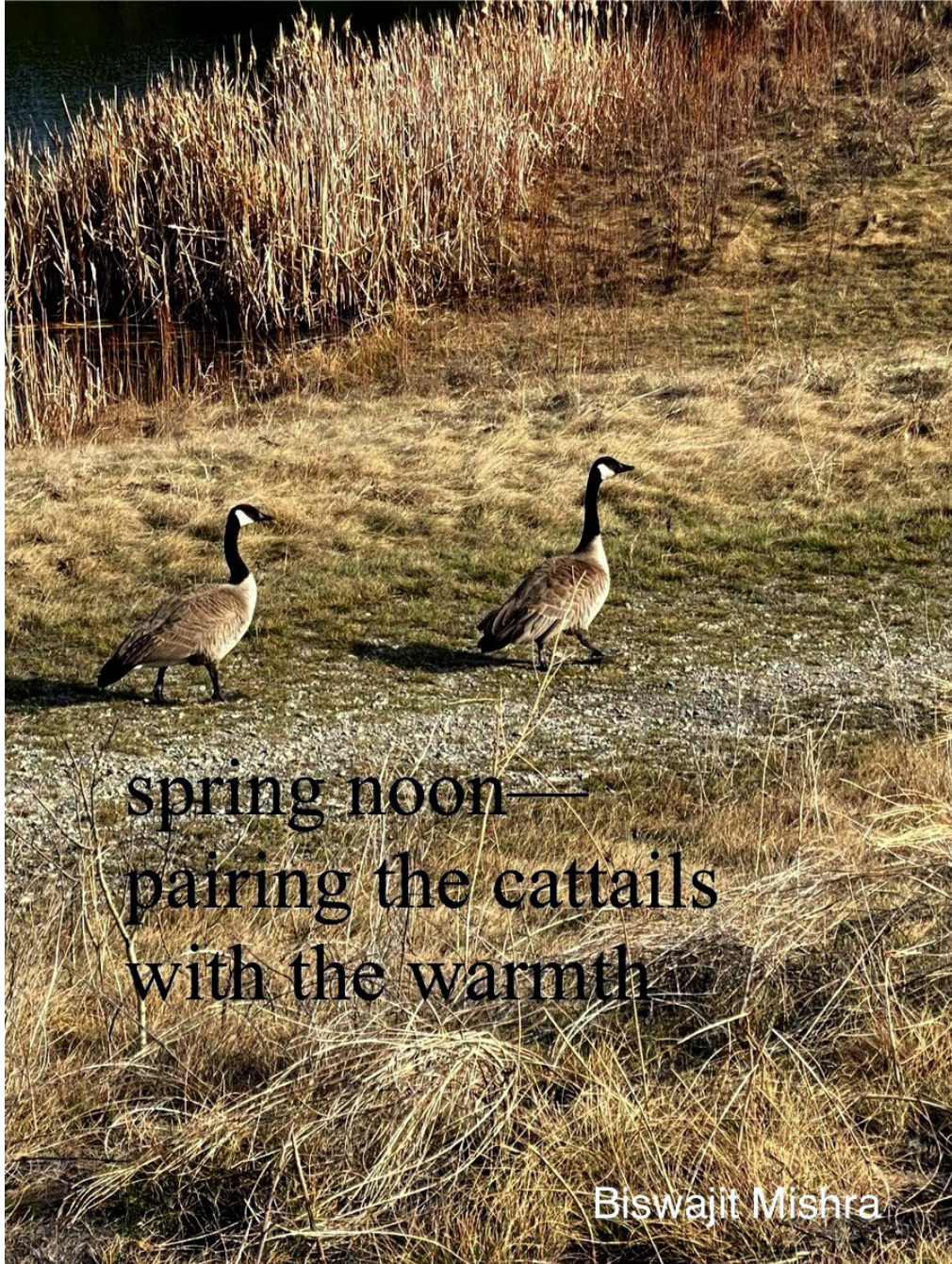
*Tanka and photo:
Ana Drobot
(Romania)*

cattails—April 2024

Barbara Kaufmann—USA



Biswajit Mishra — Canada

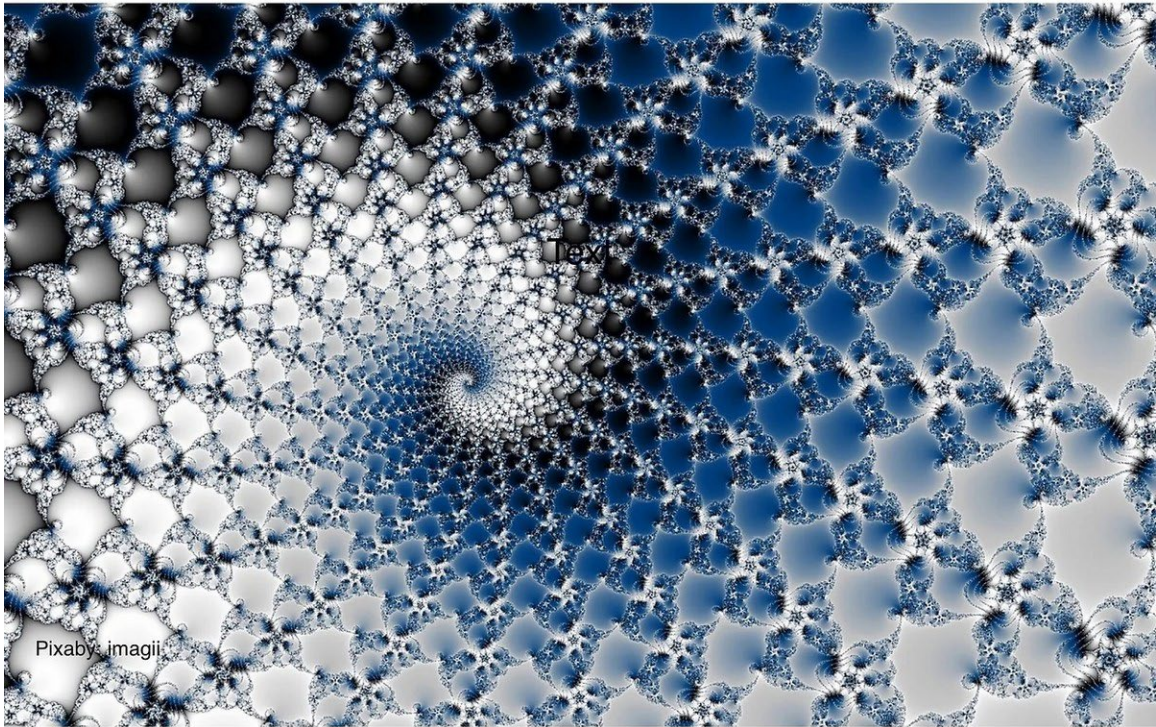


spring noon—
pairing the cattails
with the warmth

Biswajit Mishra

Bonnie J Scherer—USA

*clades of ice worms
in tight twisting bundles
you pull me close
then before daylight ...*



... you coldly turn me away

Bonnie J Scherer

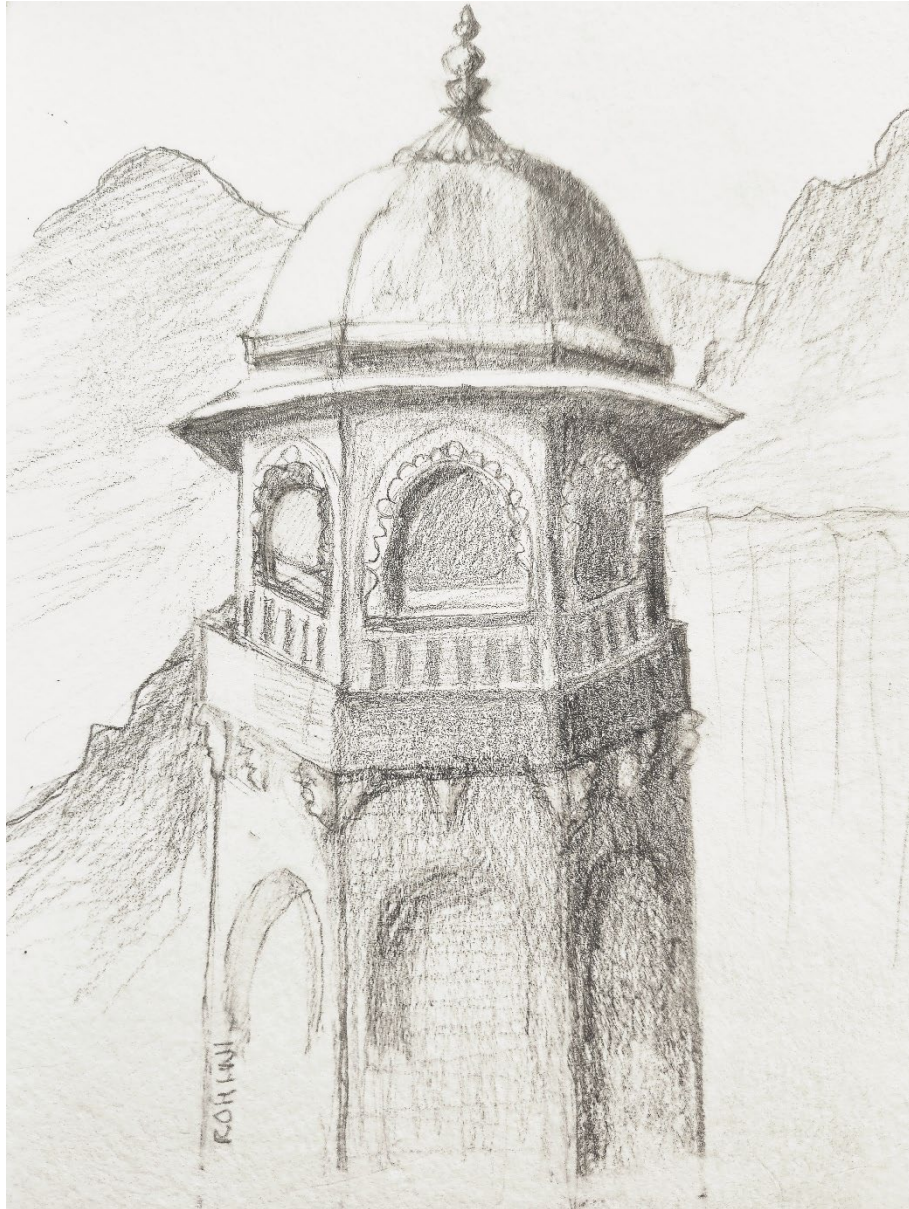
Capotă Daniela Lăcrămioara & Capotă Codrin George – Romania



retirement –
she returns
to the doll house

Haiku: Capotă Daniela Lăcrămioara
Photo: Capotă Codrin George

Senryu



Watch Tower, Rajasthan

cemetery
every body
recycling

Quendryth Young, Australia

Coriolis Effect
the rumors swirling
around one teenaged boy

Joshua St. Claire, USA

birthday
the handmade coupon
for a hug

Bill Cooper, USA

soft-tail motorcycle
his and her
ponytails

Thanksgiving leftovers
giving thanks
with less enthusiasm

Randy Brooks, USA

eye exam
so many clicks
and drops

Michael J. Galko, USA

rolling with the waves
creaks of ancient galleons
in all of my joints

politician's pledge
if only there was more
than teeth in his smile

John Hawkhead, UK

chemotherapy
the holy trinity burns
through my veins

Patricia Hawkhead, UK

hailstorm --
like the fish that got away
bigger with each telling

posturing
for all he's worth
the yoga instructor

Angela Terry, USA

hysterectomy
removing a conflict
of interest

strange
new
worlds
i
venture
into
settings (EC)

Julie Schwerin, USA

my mother's lullaby –
the voices she made
singing books to life

Jennifer Gurney, USA

deep winter
i wrap myself around
my pen

old love letters
your i dots
out of sync

Brad Bennett, USA

a child covers her mouth
with spread out fingers
the fan of a peacock

Suzanne Leaf-Brock, USA

autumn wind
whistling through
a gap-toothed smile

Rick Jackofsky, USA

roadside temple
between pressed palms
a mobile phone

Ravi Kiran, India

thunderstorm
the static on the radio
on top of the news

मेघ गर्जन तुफान
रेडियो पर स्थैतिक शोर
समाचार के ऊपर

Govind Joshi, India

shady grove
my little love
is a deerfly

Laurie Morrissey, USA

dart board
from our first flat—
targets we missed

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland, UK

gram's nature
dried leaves tucked
in her bible

Karen O'Leary, USA

a red dragon
on her long dress
Lunar New Year

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

insomnia—
the garden gate stutters
in the wind

his parallel parking—
the tensile strength
of love

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

scattering Mother's ashes — the drift of things (EC)

photo album —
much of the '60s
. . . missing

Lorin Ford, Australia

morning breeze
a hungover teen emerges
from a bush

jutarnji povjetarac
mamurni tinejdžer izlazi
iz grma

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

city bus ride
half of a stranger's
life story

after the funeral
the first family photo
without him

Bryan Rickert, USA

day off
the gravedigger buries
a stinking mushroom

Suraj Nanu, India

qiviut
the belly of the beast
in my beanie

walrus blubber —
my thick skin
when you bellow

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

flight anxiety
my luggage last
from the chute

Rohan Buettel, Australia

wedding anniversary
forgotten altogether
for the first time

godišnjica braka
prvi put
posve zaboravljena

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translator, D. V. Rožić

global warming
we fill the fridge
with frozen food

Robert Witmer, Japan

crazy mirrors—
parts of me I hide
from the world

dusklight
the old horse takes
his master home (EC)

Mona Bedi, India

a cough
a baby's cry
an empty lectern

Mark Gilbert, UK (EC)

New Year
not enough change
in my pocket

wild mustard
our conversation
in emojis

Vandana Parashar, India

night train
at each stop
a dream interrupted

Nachtzug
bei jedem Halt
ein Traum gestört

Pitt Buerken, Germany

impermafrost
an ancient bear
thaws in the tundra

Cynthia Anderson, USA

stillness
how gently
he closes her eyelids

a lesson
in letting go
late summer roses

Gavin Austin, Australia

dog walkers
village tour marked
by biscuits

Jon Hare, USA

walking with dad
through the mist . . .
autumn woods

grandad's funeral
everyone brings their piece
of his story

Barrie Levine, USA

melting snow . . .
my past no longer
just a blank

neaua topindu-se—
trecutul meu nu mai e
doar un spațiu gol

Ana Drobot, Romania (EC)

burning
an incense stick . . .
another damp dog day

Tony Williams, UK

dancing barefoot
in the snow
lost morning

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

birthday morning
I make faces at the old man
in the mirror

生日的早晨
我對鏡子裡的老人
做鬼臉

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

keeping her side of the bargain half moon

girl in a hijab
squeezing her prayer beads
emergency room

Ann Sullivan, USA

carrion crows
the group becomes
a mob

Debbie Strange, Canada

ongoing war—
the darkness of the world
seeps into me

rat koji traje—
tama svijeta
prodire u mene

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

confession
sunlight coming through
the stained glass window

Ernest Wit, Poland

river murmur
the change I hear
inside myself

C. X. Turner, UK

goodbye
a word I would banish
ospreys take flight

Joan Gibson, UK

date no show . . .
the apple strudel
tastes just as good

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

zoo flamingo
I also have
clipped wings

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

holiday feast
brothers compare bad backs
and divorces

Tyson West, USA

election campaign
the acrobatics of
a violin spider

campagna elettorale
le acrobazie di
un ragno violin

Carmela Marino, Italy

how cleverly
he tackles dust in his eye—
bride's dad

କି କୌଶଳ ରେ
ଆଖି ରୁ ଧୂଳି କାଢ଼ନ୍ତି—
କନ୍ୟା ପିତା

Biswajit Mishra, Canada

throbbing pain
the rooftop raindrops
keep time

Hazel Hall, Australia

windshift—
disclosing my politics
to her parents

Curt Pawlisch, USA

wolf moon
we talk about
known unknowns

John Pappas, USA

new tattoo
she wears her heart
under her sleeve

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

high tide
the uneaten oysters
on my tray

прилив
неизядените стриди
по чинията ми

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

pink chiffon
helping my daughter dress
for her first date

rendezvous . . .
releasing my French twist
in the moonlit garden

Stephenie Story, USA

man
snow
the
for
the sidewalk freshly shoveled except

Seth Friedman, USA

his hat on the sidewalk
an old busker collects
a round of applause

Kim Klugh, USA

cooler air
a barrier of politeness
between us

Mike Gallagher, Ireland (EC)

remission . . .
the gathering darkness
pierced by distant light

pizza night
the kids put down
their phones

Kevin Valentine, USA

childproof
i pop the top off
a middle aged morning

Ben Gaa, USA

spring frost
again he tries his key
at the wrong house

Richard L. Matta, USA

slowly bending
to tie a shoelace
the creak in one knee

Bernadette O'Reilly, Ireland

the girl next door
I first fell in love with
wild pansy blossom

съседското момиче
в което за първи път се влюбих
цветче на дива теменужка

Radostina Dragostinova, Bulgaria

broken pencil tip
the missing father
in her drawing (EC)

счупен връх от молив
липсващият баща
в рисунката ѝ

a pit
in the cherry jam -
grandma's shaky handwriting

костилка
в сладкото от вишни -
треперещият почерк на баба

Kristina Todorova, Bulgaria

prison tour guide
describing convict tats
her bluebird throat pulsing

Paul Bregazzi, Ireland

Editor's Choices – Senryu (EC)

Ancora Imparo

This Italian expression is frequently translated as “I am still learning” and is often attributed to Michelangelo (scholars are not unanimous on that). Each submission window brings a bonanza of new poems to me and provides me with the privileged opportunity of selecting from them. Each time this happens, I am confronted with new voices and new perspectives. New words for familiar images and new images from experience or imagination. The versatility of senryu never ceases to amaze me. The human experience is a vast one and it is wonderful to see how haijin continue to investigate its gamut.

A heartfelt thanks to all authors who submit their work to *cattails*. There would be no journal without your creative energies and your commitment to these Japanese short forms. Thank you too to all readers. One of the best ways of learning about literature is to read other writers of your chosen form. I hope you, like me, will find inspiration and encouragement here.



strange
new
worlds
i
venture
into
settings

Julie Schwerin, USA

Julie Schwerin offers us a way of sharing the strangeness of her experience by laying out the words of her poem in an unusual way – each word with its own line. Strange
New

Worlds may recall the adventures of a starship crew across distant galaxies, but we discover that the strange new world is much closer to home. It's an alien menu. In a smartphone, perhaps. A menu which, on first encounter, may appear to be fiendishly designed to outsmart the user.



scattering Mother's ashes — the drift of things

Lorin Ford, Australia

Lorin Ford presents us with an image of stark reality. The death of a parent and their cremation. Following that, the scattering of the ashes. The second half of the poem (it isn't clear to me whether one half deserves the title 'phrase' and the other 'fragment'), offers a potentially gentler image. Drifting. One could imagine that as the ashes are scattered, some of them might drift on a breeze. Yet I sense more to this word. Following such a monumental event, it is not unusual to reassess the importance of everything else in one's life. During such a period of reassessment, many mundane tasks can be ignored. People can start to drift between days. And so, the word 'drift' has a far more chaotic connotation than that of a gentle breeze. By arranging the poem on a single line, we are presented with a visual tug of war between the two halves. I see the conflict of considering one's daily life while processing the grief of death.



dusklight
the old horse takes
his master home

Mona Bedi, India

Mona Bedi has related a story I would consider a timeless image. This is surely something that could have happened centuries or even millennia ago. Why the old horse is taking the master home is not clear. The master may be very tired after a hard day's work. They may be drunk after a long celebration. They may be injured and

unable to guide the horse with clear commands. The reason doesn't feel like the heart of the piece. For me, it's the shift of power. The horse is taking control. It's a journey they've made many times before. Even if there may be minor variations in the route, the horse knows the destination. The familiarity of home awaits both horse and rider, as do the rewards of rest and restoration.



a cough
a baby's cry
an empty lectern

Mark Gilbert, UK

Mark Gilbert gives us a thumbnail sketch. For some, this poem may be considered *tanshi* rather than *senryu*, as it lacks a familiar structure. Leaving that aside, the piece offers the reader an immersive experience. We are given few details, but the word 'lectern' is very specific. It puts me in mind of a religious building. We only get that detail at the end. This means we need to work backwards to reexamine the information before us. A cough and a baby's cry. These are sounds one might hear from a crowd of people who are trying to be quiet. So it puts me in mind of a religious service. Is it an awkward silence? Is the speaker missing? Delayed? What fascinates me is that from so few details, it is possible to build such a complex story. Very clever writing.



melting snow . . .
my past no longer
just a blank

Ana Drobot, Romania

Ana Drobot places us in a seasonal setting. Perhaps, as the snow is melting, it may be spring. We start with this striking image, but we are soon led to question whether the snow is metaphorical, rather than literal. The author seems to be looking back in history. Some information has come to light. Maybe it arrived fortuitously, as if

discovered within a pile of paperwork. Perhaps one piece of information led to another, and so a pattern has started to take shape, where there were only question marks before. It is fun to compare this idea with a landscape appearing from a blanket of snow. In both cases we see the emergence of detail from essentially blank canvasses.



cooler air
a barrier of politeness
between us

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

Mike Gallagher sets us off on a seasonal journey. Yet, once again, we are soon questioning whether the air is literally cool or metaphorically cool. I am full of admiration for the second line. How curious and yet how precise to refer to “a barrier of politeness”. This line speaks of a history between the “us”. One imagines a falling out in the past, which now requires each of them to process their conversation more carefully. In such a scenario, it is unclear whether the “us” will ever be friends again. As with such things, the future of the friendship may lie in their own hands.



broken pencil tip
the missing father
in her drawing

Kristina Todorova, Bulgaria

Kristina Todorova introduces us to a pair of broken images. On first reading, it seems that the broken pencil is responsible for a drawing of a broken family. On re-reading, I wondered whether the missing father was represented in the family drawing. Perhaps the missing father is represented by a substitute figure? Do we have Superman instead of Dad? Or have we started from the wrong place? Is the family apparently happy and

whole on the outside, but the child has not included a father when drawing the portrait? I find ambiguity in these short pieces offers lots of scope for exploration. I wonder what Kristina meant by this piece? And whether our readers understood the same thing?

David J Kelly

Haiga - Part 2

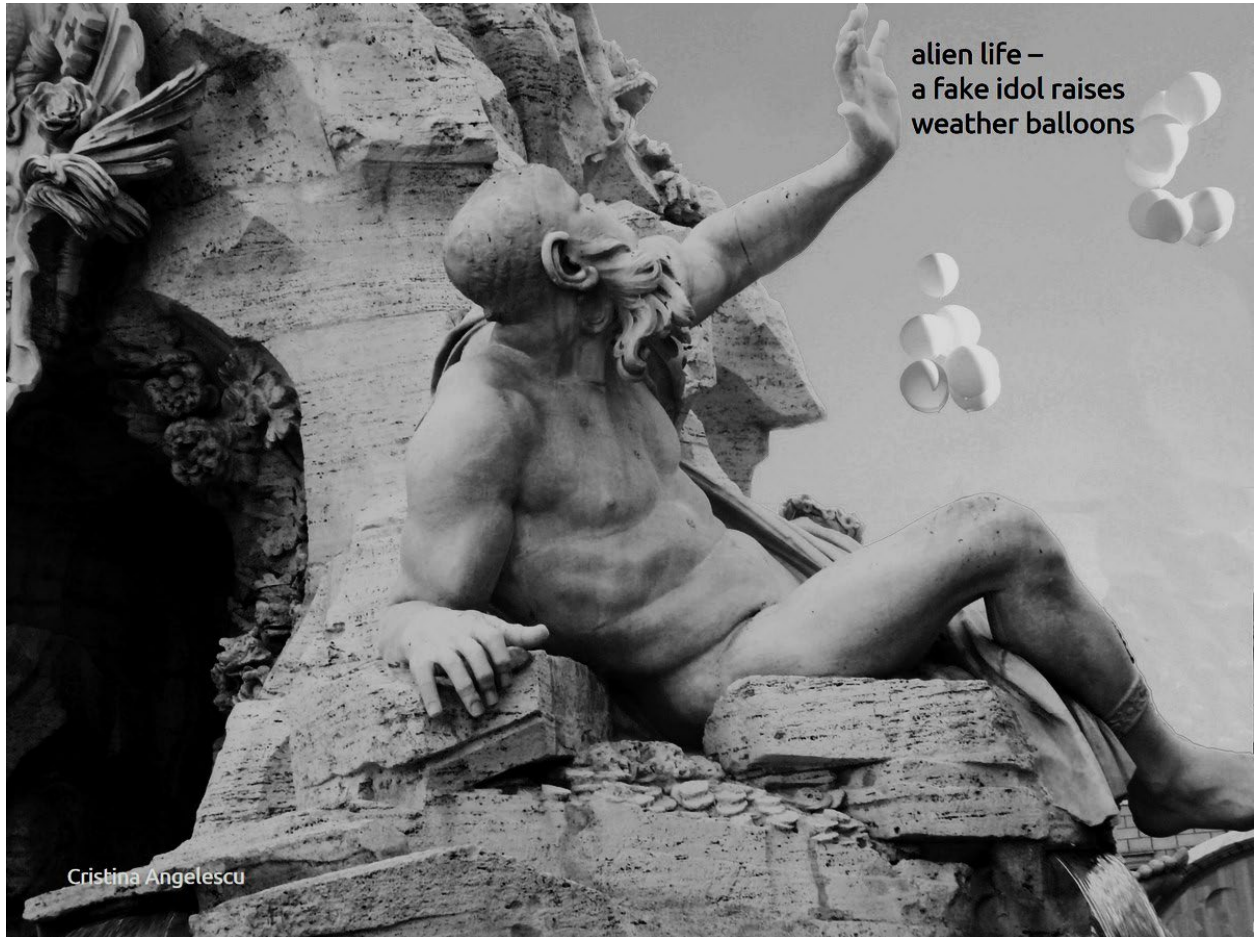
Cezar Ciobîcă & Dan Doman—Romania



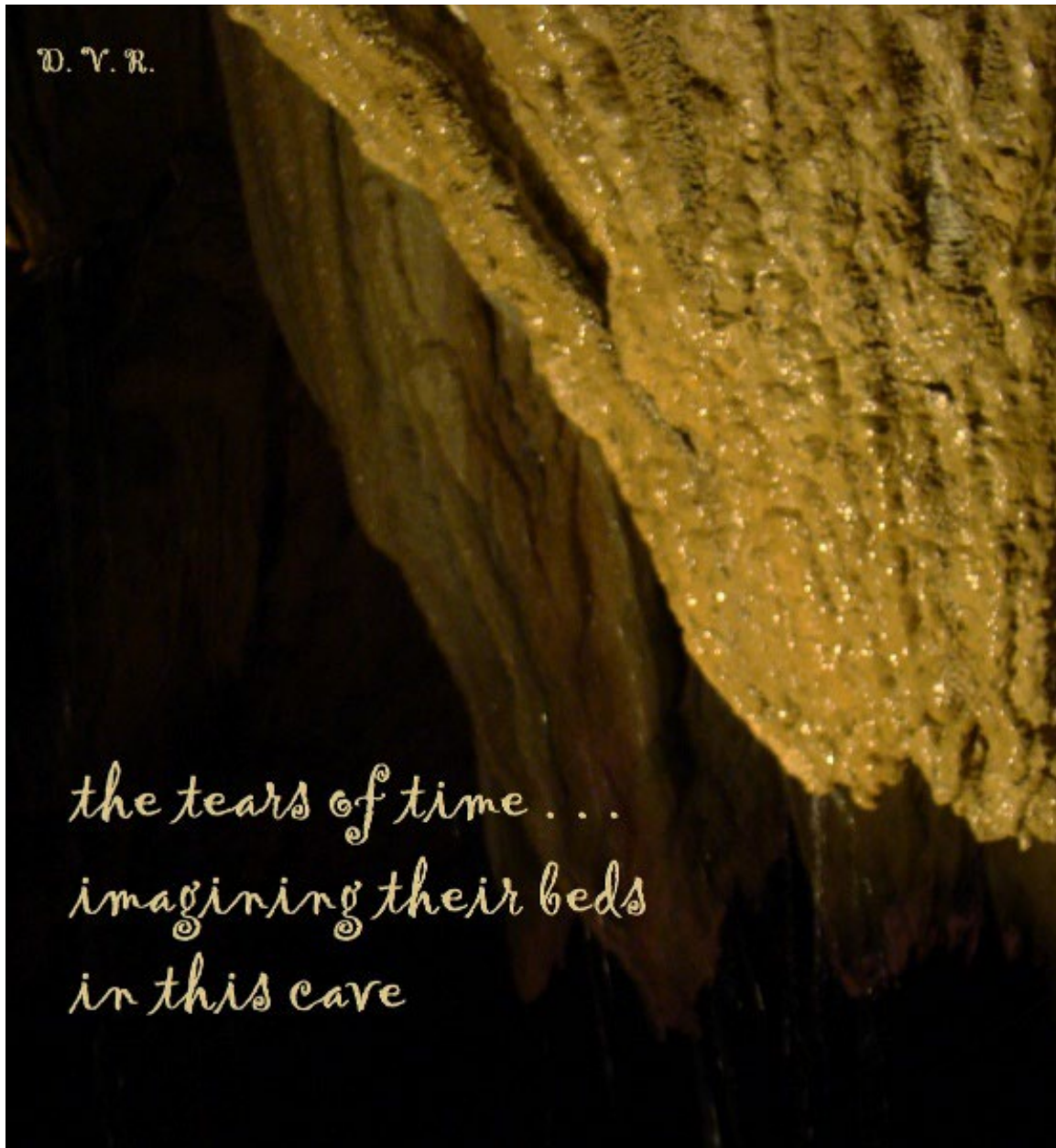
old pond
cattail fluff brushing
a cacophony of croaks

Haiku : Cezar Ciobîcă
Photo: Dan Doman

Cristina Anjelescu — Romania



D. V. Rožić—Croatia



D. V. R.

*the tears of time . . .
imagining their beds
in this cave*

Debbie Strange—Canada



WORDS/IMAGE(C)DSTRANGE

Dian Duchin Reed — USA



*winter night
the comforting glow
of your smile*

*Dian
Duchin
Reed*

Eugeniusz Zacharski & Jacek Pokrak – Poland



Tanka



Cherries

everyday
I find myself alive
at sunbreak
a lapwing beats its way
in the eternal flux

Suraj Nanu, India

it vanished
into the purple sky
just echoes remain
reminding me to honor
a blue heron's space

Richard L. Matta, USA

Shinrin yoku –
slowly becoming one
with birdsong
the cacophony within
settles to a whisper

शिन्रिन योकू -
धीरे-धीरे एक हो रहे हैं
पक्षियों के गायन के साथ
भीतर का शोर
एक फुसफुसाहट में स्थिर हो जाता है

Mona Bedi, India

warm tears
roll down their cheeks
the cascade
of a garden fountain
heralding spring

Nicholas H Rossler, USA

it flies ravishingly
from flower to flower
white butterfly
no fear
of the new generation

zanosno leti
s cvijeta na cvijet
bijeli leptir
nema straha za
novu generaciju

Glorija Lukina, Croatia

mustard flowers
from the red clay
to the hillcrest
three primary colors
are more than enough

Joshua St. Claire, USA

a gale
carrying away cherry petals
through a windmill . . .
my wheelchair wheels
wrinkling a white carpet

nalet vjetra
nosi latice trešnje
kroz vjetrenjaču
kotači mojih kolica
gužvaju bijeli tepih

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translation: D. V. Rožić

a mallard
tucked into the reeds
hiding
a little piece
of myself from you

Bryan Rickert, USA

a magpie fledgling
inert beside the highway
she dives first
he follows to lift
the other wing

Kathy Kituai, Australia

watercolor sunset
two geese waddle
to the shore
paired for life
bequeathing generations

Anna Cates, USA

empty nips
and red bull cans
on the roadside
among the weeds
wild asters bloom

Jon Hare, USA

at the gas station
the cashier calls them weeds
I wonder
if fireweed care about class
I remind myself not to

Biswajit Mishra, Canada

orange light
in the late afternoon
kisses the tops
of the gum trees . . .
gleaming, then dusk

Keitha Keyes, Australia

red rock canyon
native flute melody lingers . . .
ghosts chant
from within deep crevices
sending notes back to the ancients

Diane Funston, USA

I always leave
the river with regret
will I see it again
through summer haze
or swollen with snowmelt

Ruth Holzer, USA (EC)

ice shards jostle
against each other
on the shore,
a symphony played
for no one but me

Debbie Strange, Canada

the furrowed bark
of many species
remains blackened
for years and years after fire . . .
some scars never heal

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

fresh water . . .
in this dry land
tall, white-barked gums
act as signposts
to the *underground gold*

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

a drive to the country
to look
for northern lights
the distant orange smoke
of a forest fire

Randy Brooks, USA

northern geese
fly south
in tight formation
a flowing V
I refuse to wait in line

Royal Rhodes, USA

gazing upon
a mottled orange
persimmon leaf
until, without wind,
it falls

Jim Chessing USA

dusk-light cycle ride
skylarks dart
above the national grid
magpies chatter
the pylons trail away

Thomas Farr, United Kingdom

when we talk
more caesura than words
I listen to the bulbuls sing
grateful
you're still here

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan (EC)

no plans this Losar¹
just steaming bowls
of ramen and suja²
the late winter moon
misting my window

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

¹*Losar: Lunar new year February 2024*

²*Suja: butter tea*

so alone
since her youngest left—
in a cage
by the open window
her canary without song

Gavin Austin, Australia

folding my umbrella . . .
the fall rinsing the colors
from my zinnias
after a long illness
my hair silvery gray

sklapam kišobran...
jesen ispiri boje
sa cinija
nakon duge bolesti
moja je kosa sijeda

Silva Trstenjak, Croatia
Translation: D. V. Rožić, Croatia

a moment
with a fallen leaf
on the river . . .
the past will be past
in this floating life
(for William Faulkner)

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

a butterfly
alights on a new bloom
my fingers
reach gently to touch
your wasted face

Hazel Hall, Australia

the sailor hat
he wore coming ashore
shrunken now
ages of him unreachable
as he slowly goes under

Jeanne Cook, USA

a black-brown leaf
on the tip of the spider's web
how much more
of the autumn winds
will he survive

કાળું-ભુરો પર્ણ
કરોળિયાના જાળાની ટોચ પર
કેટલું વધુ
પાનખર પવનો
શું તે બચી જશે

Lakshmi Iyer, India

these leaves
turning silver in sunlight—
may I
accept my end
with memories of such grace

Curt Pawlisch, USA

the winter breeze
wraps his quiet goodbye
in the geriatric room . . .
one by one he leaves a shadow
of the years he lived

शियाणानी पवन
तेनी शांत विदाय लपेटी
वृद्धावस्थाना ओरडामां . . .
अेक पछी अेक ते पडछायो छोडे छे
ते जे वर्षो ज़ुव्यो

Lakshmi Iyer, India

spring rain
a green willow sways . . .
slender arms
soothe with stoic grace
the pain of your parting

वसंत वर्षा
अेक हरी विलो लहराती है. . .
नाजूक बाहें
स्थिर अनुग्रह से शांत करें
तुम्हारे बिछड़ने की पीड़ा

Neena Singh, India

sudden wind
over a small port
boats are rocking
like cradles
in a maternity ward

iznenadni vjetar
ponad lučice
ljudaju se barke
kao kolijevke
u rodilištu

Boris Deverić, Croatia

the cold window
turning pink
she smiles
a taste of milk
on the baby's breath

Robert Witmer, Japan

time slows
on a Sunday morning
a mother holds her toddler's hand
as they meander home
with bread and milk

Anne Curran, New Zealand

a bouquet of colors . . .
grandmother's brushes
lie upon the easel
as she steps away
to pick wildflowers

Stephenie Story, USA

coins of light
freckling the footpath
to your grave . . .
our granddaughter tries
to put one in her pocket

Debbie Strange, Canada

moonlight
on snow-covered pines
as the fire grows dim
the untold stories
in grandma's eyes

Jacob D. Salzer, USA

sudden shower
the hastily grabbed jacket
a women's XL . . .
still the warmth and scent
of mother's embrace

Aron Rothstein, USA

at times
a family reunion
with the clink of glasses . . .
smiles and tears
at the end of the day

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

Mircea Moldovan, România

old buttons you saved
weigh heavily
in my hand . . .
unwanted heirlooms
force me to think of you

Jacqueline Korschun Hyman, Canada

flipping through
the family album
grandma's smile
trying to shield the hurt
her eyes give away

Kala Ramesh, India

obon –
on the paper boat
grandma's
candle flickers
as it floats downstream

Richard Tice, USA

cold afternoon . . .
with the arrival of clouds
it starts snowing
my hug protects you
from the rush of snowflakes

hladno popodne...
navlačenjem oblaka
počeo snijeg
moj zagrljaj te brani
od navale pahulja

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

like a butterfly
I flit from one bright flower
to the next
a frail beauty
afraid to be caught

Anne Curran, New Zealand

timely rain
young lovers
move closer
under
their umbrella

John Zheng, USA

prunus blossoms
falling over us
the sky trembles
when you
are in my arms

florile de prun
căzând peste noi
tremură cerul
când te afli
în brațele mele

Ana Drobot, Romania

hours from twilight . . .
on your bare shoulders
a cricket
in the attic
woos a cricket in the wall

Tim Krcmarik, USA

blanketless,
we dine on the look
of the lake . . .
Sunday's sun hangs low
ripples take on its fire

Carol Raisfeld, USA

moonlight spills
through the holes
in our tent
we fill the gaps
in each other's sentences

हमारे तंबू के छेद से
छलकती हुई
चांदनी
हम एक दूसरे के वाक्यों
के अंतराल को पूरा करते हैं

Vandana Parashar, India

you pour the tea
from a height
letting in oxygen . . .
this long partnership
enriches our souls

Tony Steven Williams, Australia (EC)

when you are not here
I talk to you with passion . . .
so many years
angry or happy, I'm helpless,
the gaze of love in your eyes

kad si odsutan
pričam ti sa strašću...
sve te godine
ljuta, sretna, ranjiva,
ljubav u tvojima očima

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

how sweet the start
& how bitter the end . . .
in between
calm waters reflect
the light of the moon

Kevin Valentine, USA

sun and moon
swallowed
in this drowning sky –
it has rained too long
our relationship muddied

Tony Steven Williams, Australia

photo exhibit—
far-off scenes of the world
next to each other
the two of us untouchable
each in his/her own frame

izložba fotografija—
daleki krajolici
rame uz rame
nas dvoje nedodirljivi
svako u svom okviru

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

we fought, she left
filling my aching body
I apply rue
to my being
toxic though it may be

Robert Erlandson, USA

not wanting
to be her partner
this moonless night
two leaves drift apart
in the water's darkness

Jacob D. Salzer, USA (EC)

love's equanimity
the loss and gain
both shape the heart
a potter's hands
slip across the wheel

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

we awaken
to another morning
of frigid rain
oh, how the runoff
has left its tracks

Daniel Robinson, USA

waiting for a train
in the gray hour
before dawn
dewdrops gather
on the station bench

Rick Jackofsky, USA

in a neighbor's orchard
crack of a wood chipper —
a pre-spring
look in the mirror
says it's time for a haircut

Amin Jacek Pędziwiater, Poland

first light
slips through cracks
in the window . . .
I close my eyes
to listen for the clock

第一束光
从窗户的缝隙中
悄悄地进来...
我闭上双眼
待听时钟

David He, China

living rough . . .
all her memories
tightly held
knotted
in a headscarf

Gwen Bitti, Australia

looking out
towards the Salish sea
I grapple
for something tangible
to spark my silent muse

Reid Hepworth, Canada

the harvest moon
over Gold Mountain Diner —
a migrant and I
chat around the edges
of our longing for home

Chen-ou Liu, Canada (EC)

the later it gets
the more pieces
I lose *en prise*
the lowly pawn
outlasts them all

Ron Scully, USA
(*en prise* - chess term)

tonight
the full moon hangs
below the stars
shining like new pennies
. . . anything seems possible

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

when we cycled up hills
my husband called me
his butterfly
emerging from illness
i'm recovering my wings

Celia Hope, Aotearoa/New Zealand

a decision, whether
to continue the journey
or change direction . . .
happy are the flyers
in front of the precipice

odluka treba li
nastaviti put ili
promijeniti smjer...
sretni su letači
ispred provalije

Brigita Lukina, Croatia

mama
puts her needs aside
for too long . . .
a bungee jump
she never thought she'd do

C.X. Turner, UK

after the matinee
no holds barred—
the operatic tenor
belts out an encore
in the parking garage

Cynthia Anderson, USA

full of verve—
the aged maestro
conducts
the old people's home
orchestra, in a wheelchair

voller Elan—
der greise Maestro
dirigiert das Orchester
des Seniorenheims
im Rollstuhl

Pitt Buerken, Germany

harvest election
blade by blade before the wind
swaying gold . . .
the promises to come
crushed to empty husks

Mike Gallagher, Ireland

the sound of a violin
disappears into the woods . . .
by an old well
the sad eyes of a stranger
staring into the void

zvuk violine
gubi se u šumi...
kraj starog zdenca
tužne oči neznanca
zagledane u nigdinu

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

a sunlit day . . .
outside the thunder
of an aircraft crashing—
no mystery
in a cruel supersonic war

Florian Munteanu, Romania

inviting a cure
from another world
for our continuity
a black butterfly's takeoff
from the palm of my hand

Richa Sharma, India

I bought the flowers
like Woolf's Mrs. Dalloway
and celebrated
the freshness, beauty of life—
but all were dead by nightfall

A Tanka for Virginia Woolf

Margaret D. Stetz, USA

all along its path
crashing against the rocks . . .
learning from the creek
to persist
against the odds

Nitu Yunnam, India

Editor's Choice—Tanka (EC)

you pour the tea
from a height
letting in oxygen . . .
this long partnership
enriching our souls

Tony Steven Williams, Australia (EC)

The simplicity of this image is engaging, as tea is for many, a lifelong tradition. However, in the moment of pouring the tea from a height, an encompassing movement, drawing attention, the idea of *letting in oxygen*, turns into a key. The use of this, along with *this long partnership enriching our souls*, now becomes a deepening well. An ongoing reflection seems to waver between the two images. The multiple short consonant sounds of 't' are followed in the last line by long vowel sounds, prolonging the pleasure of pouring. A tanka to contemplate.



not wanting
to be her partner
this moonless night
two leaves drift apart
in the water's darkness

Jacob D. Salzer, USA (EC)

Inevitability appears to invade personal circumstances; *not wanting to be her partner*, *moonless*, *drift apart*, and *water's darkness* are powerful thoughts, summoning leave-taking and departure. There's an underlying pathos highlighted in *two leaves drift apart in the*

water's darkness. This compounds with the notion it could be the fall. The tanka moves from beginning to end as a continuous flow, paralleling the movement of water. There seems to be an underlying regret, yet acceptance that flows together.

The short, repetitive consonant sounds of 't' bring a tut-tut, perhaps hinting a disappointment. The shape of the tanka seems to reflect the theme of moving apart. Thank you for sharing this tanka.



the harvest moon
over Gold Mountain Diner —
a migrant and I
chat around the edges
of our longing for home

Chen-ou Liu, Canada (EC)

This tanka seems to carry an underlying wabi-sabi. Although there's a subtle humour in having *the harvest moon and Gold Mountain Diner* in one breath, they appear to allude to the second part of the tanka. It's as if this is the time to reap what has been sown and, in this case, it is *longing*. The fact that they *chat around the edges* suggests there is nothing conclusive, although there is a reaping in a sense of their shared harvest of *longing*. A pathos is woven through a glimmer of humour. There is both rhythm and reflection. A fine tanka, thank you.



I always leave
the river with regret
will I see it again
through summer haze
or swollen with snowmelt

Ruth Holzer, USA (EC)

Both longing and uncertainty, infuse this tanka. There's a certain nostalgia. Many have a close association with a body of water. Here, it is the river, perhaps close by or at some distance, regardless, it is cherished in all seasons. The question, *will I see it again*, brings an apprehension. The veil of the unknown is present. There is the colour of uncertainty. The beauty of *summer haze and snow melt* brings forth a sweep of memories. This is a beautifully crafted tanka carrying the rhythm of the river.



when we talk
more caesura than words
I listen to the bulbuls sing
grateful
you're still here

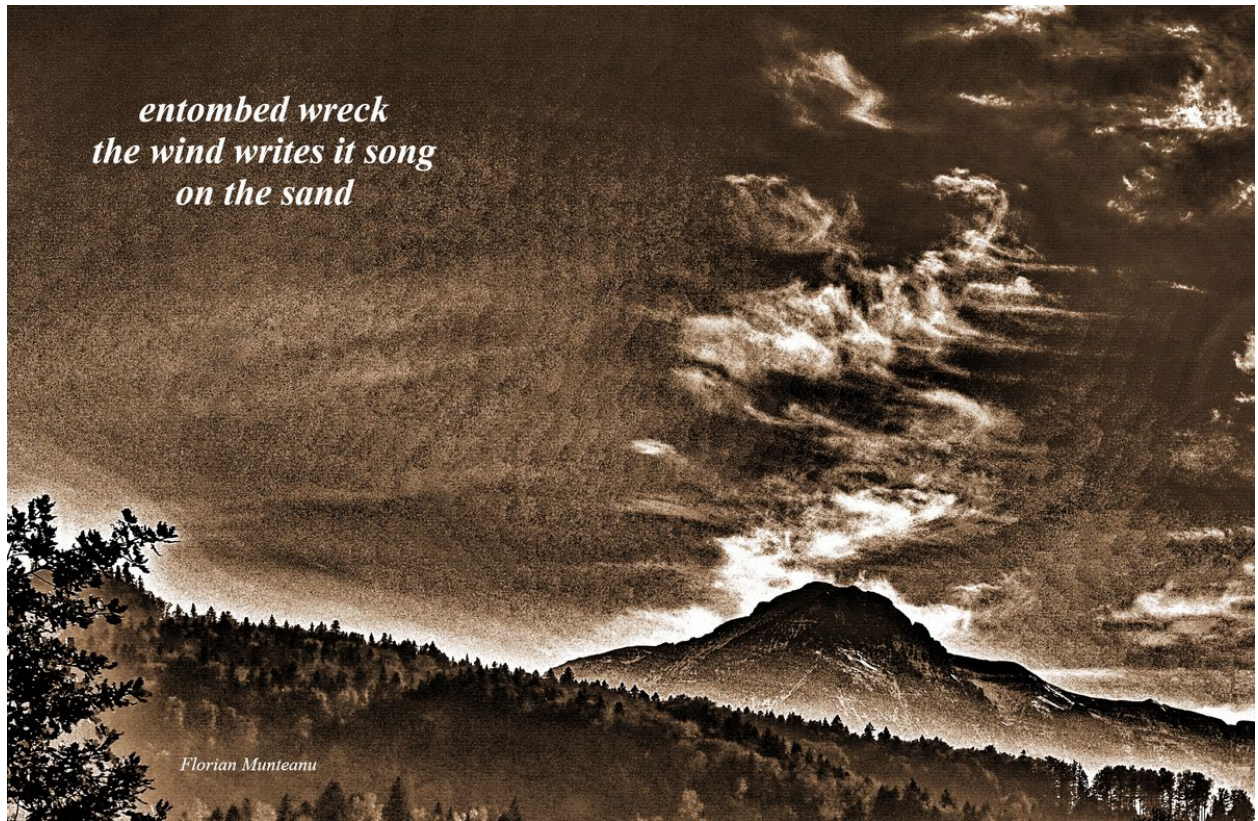
Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan (EC)

This tanka carries a simplicity and a feeling of being at ease, while portraying the challenges in the warp and weft of everyday life. The unavoidable difficulties of love and ageing are shared implicitly, while a moment is taken to listen to the song of the bulbuls. The pivot line is one of hope. It lifts us out, gives endurance and 'feet' to stand. The last lines of gratitude, raise spirits and bring a reassurance of carrying on. It is the simple, direct way this tanka is written that inspires, little said, yet so much implied. There is 'ma,' room left for us, the readers. Thank you for this inspiring tanka.

Jenny Fraser

Haiga – Part 3

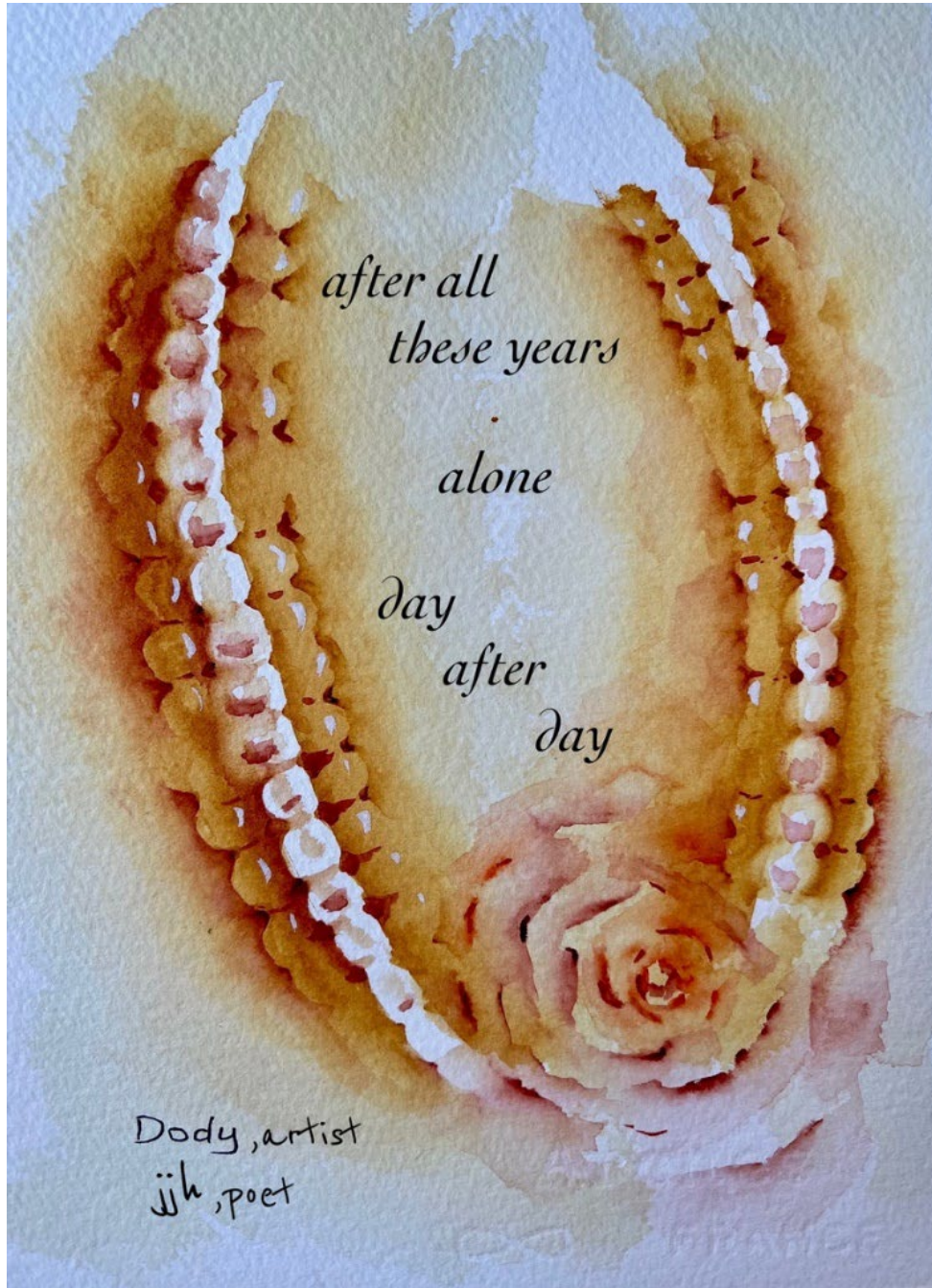
Florian Munteanu – Romania



Jenny Fraser—New Zealand

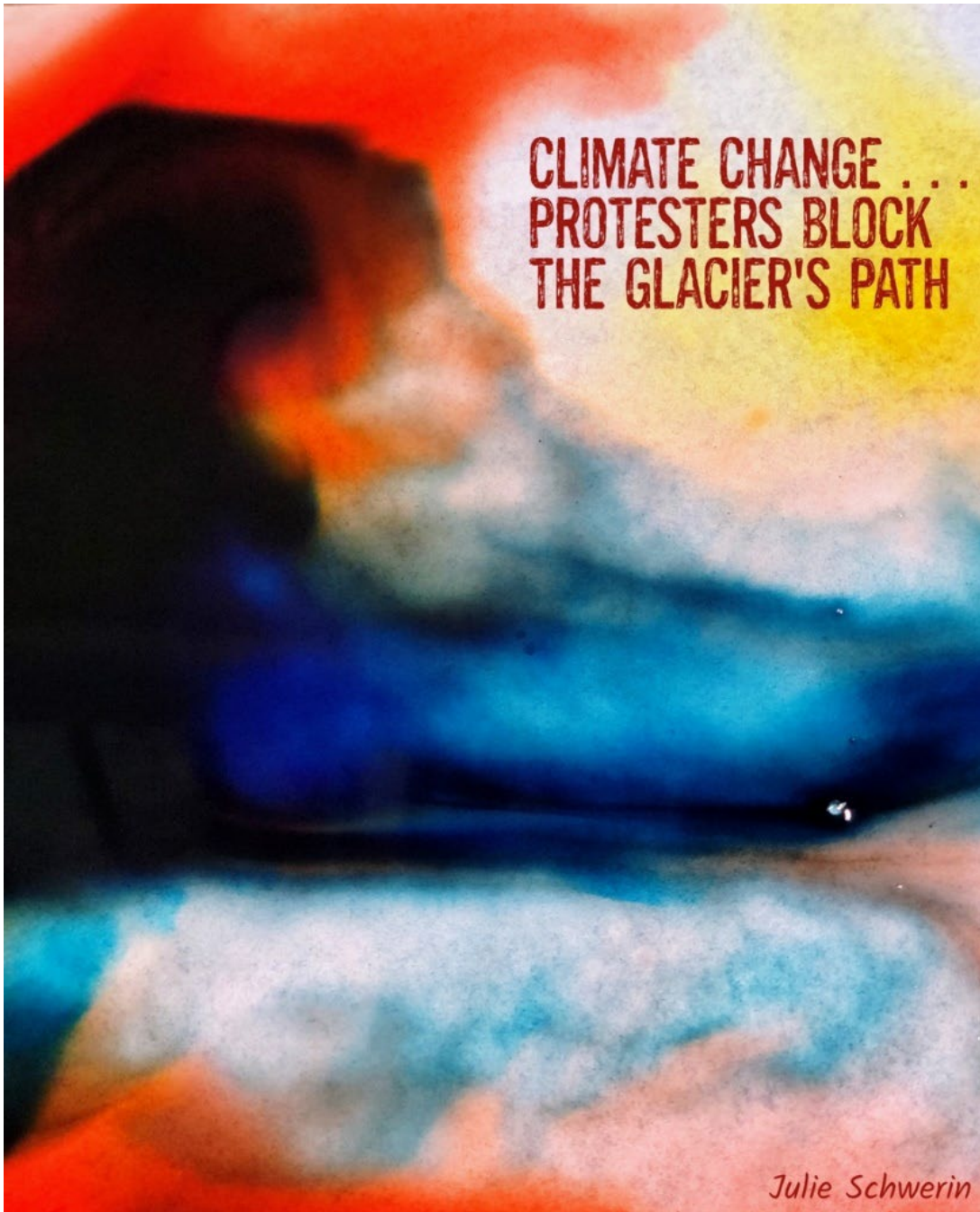


Johnnie Johnson Hafernik & Dorothy M. Messerschmitt—USA

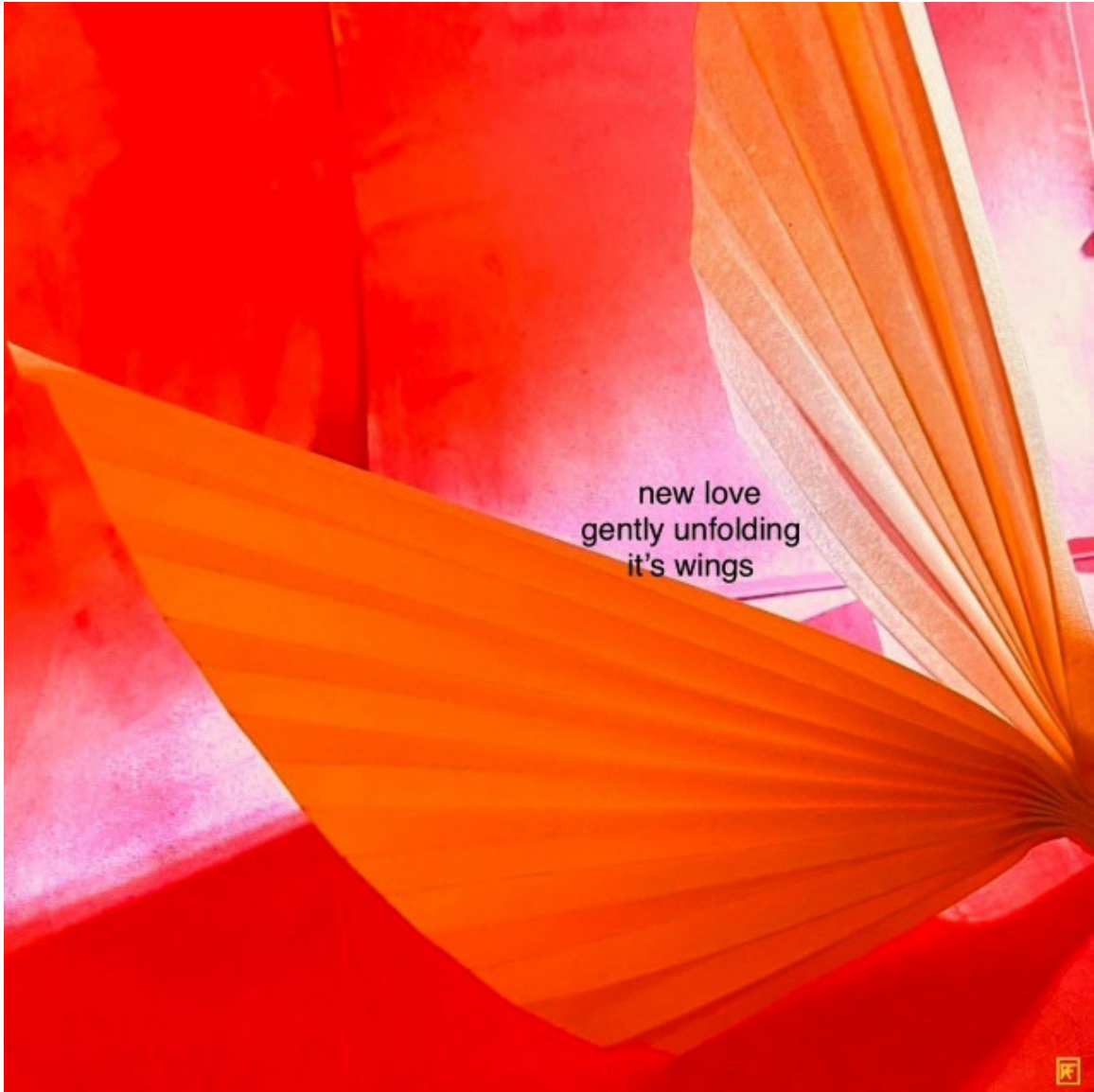


cattails—April 2024

Julie Schwerin—USA

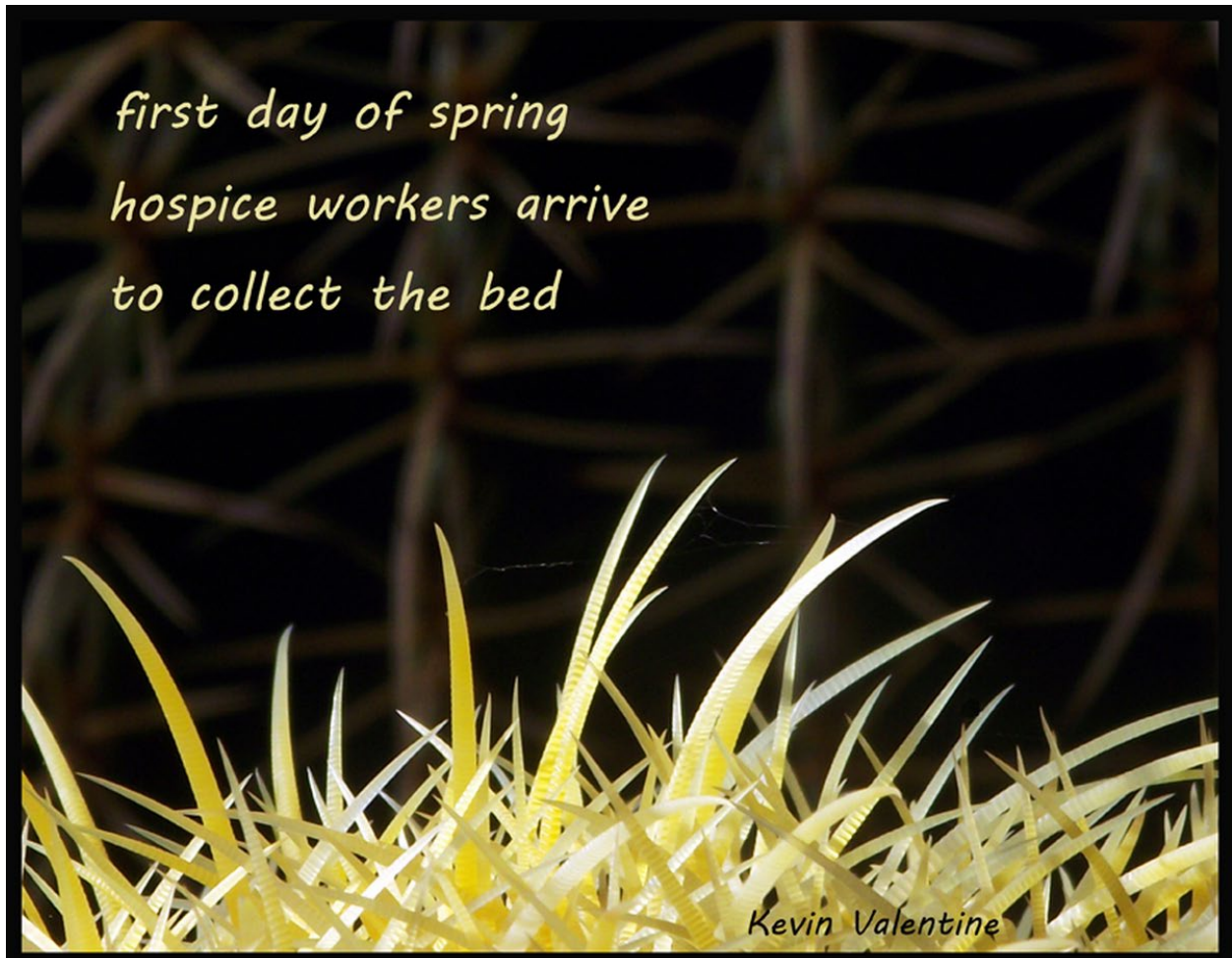


Katja Fox—England/UK



cattails—April 2024

Kevin Valentine—USA



Haibun



Coffee Beans

Deliverance

Glenn G. Coats, USA

We lower her down
gently
like a piano
over the side
of the boat;
wonder
if the dog will jump,
instead
a seagull catches
her eye—
the hum of the motor
lulls her to sleep,
head rests on the side
of a paddle,
sky big above her
as if this is all
she has ever known.

moonlit waves
a lost canoe bumps
the pilings

As Long as We Are Lost

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

At the baggage carousel they say, "Welcome home!" Back on the island, friends will say the same when I return. So, I wonder about the connections between heart and habitation.

pennsylvania winter remembering how

It is a low, cold sun. A blunt shadow from the sundial lumped in the snow. Yet despite all that, a din of change here. Modernization making me miss the sound of old growth.

northside moss shades of yesteryear

I walk to the mirror pond. Coarse clouds ride winter winds at this cattail hour. The water now the same grey as my tousled locks. Back in the car, the sanguine in poinsettias.

noonday shadow yet another funeral

Then again, this mountain man to the big city. To the old sangha. Crossing a stone bridge and those asleep beneath it. A bit of drunken dharma in the emptiness of myriad bottles.

earth witnessing pose of the lame dog

The train back. The quiet car. Outside winter twilight and a sinking kettle of vultures. Pressing against the cold window the winter fly too wants an escape.

state line random tracks of evening frost

Parting gifts

Nicola Schaum, England, UK

He grabs my face with both hands. I sigh, the tension of months of not knowing, the anguish of guessing, finally melting away. I no longer notice the rain. I forget the asphalt under my feet, the tightness in my shoulders from a hard week at work and the cold on my hands this wintery night. I only feel his warm fingers cupping my cheeks. His lips . . . soft. I take a mental image to add to the collection of emotional clutter that I have been curating.

He doesn't look back as he disappears into the darkness. I notice the rain again. The falling drops, distinctly visible and shimmering in the glow of the solitary street light on the corner.

nightfall
the day leaves
silent echoes

Again And Again

Carol Raisfeld, USA

It seems there is little similarity between a disembodied e-mail consciousness and a real-life encounter. On-line correspondence makes people feel they have a strong connection. After a flurry of romantic correspondence filled with emotional intensity, it all usually fizzles abruptly upon the first meeting. All the while mom is tapping her feet wanting wallet-size photos of grandchildren.

coffee shop
I pretend to wait
for someone

Switch Blades

Joanna Ashwell, United Kingdom

You know when you're asked a question, but the person really doesn't want you to answer. You're in that sludge point of non-agreement, yet to disagree publicly would be fatal. So, you shuffle, cough, choke on a few platitudes. Dodge out of the banter as quickly as if clearing rapid gunfire. Today you held on to your job, or a relationship. Tomorrow the turnstile spins again.

the split of sky
to pterodactyl wings
lost in mudflats

A Pound of Flesh

Caroline Giles Banks, USA

My late uncle's artworks, including the etching, *Nude With Bracelet*, are in the permanent collections of major art museums. But what to do with the remaining etched copper plates, tarnished green with age? After removing the plates' protective wrappings, I take them to the recycling center to be weighed and sold for scrap. The workers' eyes widen when they gaze into the box. I wonder if they might set aside an engraved plate or two for private viewing during lunch breaks.

waning gibbous
not looking back
in the rear-view mirror

Blue Period

Cristina Angelescu, Romania

The museum of immersive art has just opened and I decide to visit. I am immediately sucked into the atmosphere. Flocks of herons fly over bluefin tuna shoals, that swim over the giant turtle, that holds the Earth. The curator releases a scarlet butterfly. First flap of wings. A wave wipes away an unknown shore. Somebody's dreams have died so he shouts silently. A naked girl has luncheon on the grass. The time melts and drips. In the left ear, I hear the ocean. In the right, a voice is telling me how to feel. I close my eyes. The paint streams through my veins and washes away the red cells. My blood turns navy-blue so I can exit like I came . . . alone.

starless night—
a half-yellow moon watching
through the looking glass

Rereading *for one more day* by Mitch Albom

Anthony Lusardi, USA

if all butterflies disappeared. would the world suffer? or just the flowers? or would the flowers find another way to bloom? and yet . . . still wait for them.

around her urn

dusting

the family photos

Season's End

Bryan Rickert, USA

The entire stream is banked with wild honeysuckle. Every time the wind blows, hundreds of flowers are knocked into the water. The current slowly draws them over the lip of the spillway.

how brief
our journey together
blossom regatta

Burned

Ruth Holzer, USA

This summer the air has been more polluted than usual as heavy smoke drifts south from the wildfires in Canada. Its monitored quality has changed from an unhealthy Code Red to a very unhealthy Code Purple and then so far into the hazardous Maroon range that it falls off the chart. Workers who can't afford to stay safely indoors for even a single unpaid day are outside breathing it as they labor on the houses and lawns of people who despise them for their broken English.

rusty haze running through his repertoire a mockingbird

A Forest

Michael McInnis, USA

The smell of a New England upland forest is musty, decaying and growing, always renewed, always replenished. I follow the trace and kick aside the downed branches and sticks. The switchback is blocked by a fallen striped maple an arm thick. It makes for poor burning and even poorer woodworking. Nectria sugars the beech the striped maple leans against. The beech will live in agony, eventually forsaking her nuts until a storm pulls her down across the path. The beech will burn.

birch whisking in the wind
at my window
a chickadee searches for home

Moonrise

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

On a warm summer night, I stand at the edge of a road cut in the southern Appalachians. My headlamp probes each nook and cranny of the dripping rock face, searching for a glimmer of small, moist bodies foraging under cover of darkness.

Everyone I know is pursuing an advanced degree in something or other – so by default I am, too. But do I really want to capture these elfin creatures and clip their toes so I'll know them when we meet again? Do I want to freeze their glistening bouquet of colors on dry ice so I can dissect their gonads? Secretly, I just want to meet their tiny bright eyes peering out at me from the salamander safety of their crevices.

A passing car slows to a halt behind me. I hear the window crank down and a woman's voice pierces the darkness: "What in the world are yew lookin' for?"

an old path
through older mountains
this web of stars

Oceans of Light

Janet Ruth, USA

Our bright star burns, sinks toward a wall of conifers west of Pelton Creek in the Medicine Bow.

Just before it disappears, the sun illuminates thick air rising from the creek – one last hurrah before night falls. Struck like a million matches, insects – mosquitos, mayflies, stoneflies, caddisflies, midges – burst into flecks of flame.

Aerial plankton drifts through liquid gold. Booming nighthawks swoop, a stutter-flutter of narrow wings with bands of white. They plunge and dive through upwellings of insects in a sea of air, open their wide mouths rimmed with hairy bristles, trawl the deep, swallow the ocean. They row their wings through a thick brine of burning.

star-struck
adrift in a vessel
of dreams

Delta View

John Zheng, USA

Choosing a back road for a leisurely drive on a weekend afternoon is always a way of killing time when we feel bored to death at home. Sometimes we stop by a roadside pond to see hundreds of egrets standing in the shallows or flapping over waters; sometimes we lower the window to allow wind to scoot in and out like squirrels, snap a shot of an abandoned church tilting among high weeds, or pause for a silly moment before a large field of green shoots of corn. On our way back we are often amazed by the red sun sinking into a splendid gloaming—a skyful of thriving poppies and bluebonnets in full bloom as if bestowing a dreamscape on us.

hunter's moon
starlings' hubbub
fills the dogwood

Rhythm of silence

Biswajit Mishra, Canada

After a three-day-long drive, I arrived late at the campsite, a bit later than I had planned. By the time, I got through the registration process and setting up the tent, I was dead tired to cook. I drove to the town finding almost everything closed; all I managed to get was a bottle of wine. I fired up my stove and heated some packaged food in the dark when it started drizzling. I struggled to sleep under the patter of raindrops on the tent on a quiet night.

driving rain
a magpie snuggles
in the pines

Waking up in the morning, I make my tea on a wet stove on the wet picnic table. The first day is difficult but I have had a couple of first days already; still, every new place makes it a first. I walk with my tea and a twin pack of “Biscoff” to the bridge behind my tent. Standing over the Yukon River under the bright summer morning sun, just me with the gurgling sound of the river – the flowing sound blending with the silence like a hidden pattern that can only be felt beyond the five senses leaving the silence undisturbed.

buzzing bee –
almost in tune
a monk’s chant

Atlantic Gems

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

May Day dawns and the first dories are out on the flooding tide across the chill calm of Malpeque Bay, Prince Edward Island.

Astride the prows, lone fishermen scissor long poles like giant chop-sticks, feeling for the clank of shell. Then tonging oysters from their beds in basket scoops to swing for triage on the culling board. A toil of strength, dexterity, rhythm.

Little has changed over the centuries since Malpeque oysters graced the tables of Europe, crowned best at a World Fair beside the Eiffel Tower.

Now, luscious cousins of the Malpeque flourish in the Island's bays, each with notes drawn from its merroir. . . . Colville Bay's hint of melon, Raspberry Point's salted sweetness, sweet and sour Lucky Limes in their green jackets, earthy Valley Pearls, salty fat Pickle Points.

Slurping time! Shucked and rosetted on bone-China oyster plates, a milky iridescence. Perhaps a dab of hot or soya sauce, a squeeze of lime or lemon, or a touch of horseradish . . . whatever takes your fancy. Au naturel is my choice. Then, the gentle inhalation . . . savoring sea brine and flavours of the wild. Memories of seaweed ride the aftertaste, rinsed with a fine Chablis. Heaven on the half-shell!

slack mooring lines
flapping
a pungency of kelp

Blue Plates and White Linen

Terri L. French, USA

When I was a kid, we didn't have the luxury of dining out at fancy restaurants. On special occasions like Easter or my mother's birthday, the whole family would go to Frankenmuth, a Bavarian village with two restaurants. The staff dressed in lederhosen and dirndls. They served all-you-can-eat fried chicken dinners which I assumed, at the time, was German food. After the meal they brought little bowls of vanilla ice-cream or orange sherbet with a plastic monkey or elephant stuck in the top, this I surmised was a German tradition.

candlelight dinner
amuse-bouche served
on a silver spoon

Sometimes, when dad got paid, we'd go to the local Four Corners Diner for fish and chips. If I finished my meal mom let me have a sugar packet which I emptied and licked from the palm of my hand. That or a thin mint from the bowl by the cash register was dessert. My grandparents took us to Eat-More Restaurant – they also had good fish and chips. I remember the waitress carrying plates up both arms, the coleslaw dressing dribbling a line on the floor from kitchen to table.

red or white?
a suggestive look
in the sommelier's eyes

When we'd had enough with the fried chicken and fish and chips, we'd mix things up and go to Mitch's for pizza. They had a large, crowded, smoky bar/dining room. If you were lucky, you got seated three stairs up in the smaller dining room – The Plywood Room. A table in The Plywood Room was really "uptown." The waitress even took the bill and cash to the register and came back with change and Andes mints for my sister and me. We knew Andes mints were only for fancy people.

the way it rolls
off the tongue –
mignardise

Lasagna

Richard Tice, USA

Mom loves lasagna. Everyone in the family loves it, too, because of her. She hasn't made it for a long time, though. Too much trouble. Too time-consuming. She settles nowadays for the frozen family-size meal. But I remember watching Mom lay out the wide, ruffled noodles that she had softened in hot water and create layers: two noodles, ground beef, cottage cheese (ricotta, if we had it), tomato sauce, spices, and repeat.

Surprisingly, Mom loves lasagna. For her, it was a game-changer because it was a "foreign" food—one of the many foods she learned how to cook that she never ate as a child. She grew up in Hawaii, one daughter of twelve children of Chinese parents, the father an immigrant and the mother second generation. She was eleven when Pearl Harbor was bombed. The family lived on the Damon estates, part of which became current-day Moanalua Gardens. My grandfather was a gardener there, and it was country back then. They lived in a wooden house on stilts (to survive frequent flooding) with part-time electricity. They ate what they grew and raised. A creek ran by the house, full of frogs and minnows. Mom says she and her siblings would catch frogs and sell them. My aunt Ruby says they sometimes ate the legs, but I think she's pulling my leg. I have never seen my aunts and uncles actually eat frog legs.

At any rate, lasagna belonged to a different world, a food she wasn't introduced to until she married a seaman and moved, of all places, to a base on Kodiak Island, Alaska. She says that at first anything with cheese made her gag, but she learned to like it and then to love it.

stocking the freezer —
as a child she picked snails
from the taro patch

Nights of Youth

Shannon Trotter, USA

Sometimes, there are escapades that start in the evening and end when you stop wondering what time it is or what time it will be before you can finally get to sleep. For me, it was riding bikes or skating with my brothers down our neighborhood streets—cumbia music blasting from my janky headphones, the three of us showing each other cool tricks we think we can do, and yelling CAR!—rushing to pedal to the sidewalk, anxiously laughing it off as the vehicle finally goes past. Those evenings of stargazing, dancing, and storytelling, forever preserved beneath the glow of moonlight, street light or other.

an overture
of bat wings . . .
the desert queen blooms

Lakshmi Iyer, India

Chachabhai

we called our favourite conductor of the school bus. He loved kids, especially those of us who were prompt and always showed him gratitude. We heard that he passed away a while back.

I still remember his lanky and unkempt looks. He always wore a grey striped shirt. He was half bald and yet he combed his hair with a broken comb. His pastime was to tell us stories of his grandparents in the village of Saurashtra. He spoke of the drought, the empty mud pots, the women of the house with ghunghats, the strict rules and traditions. His storyline ended with 'death' and his wish was to be with his 'ancestors in the land of happiness'. I asked him, 'Chacha, how do you know that it's a land of happiness and not sorrow?' He replied, 'my perdada is good, my parents are good, I am good!'

the persistent smell
of wood smoke . . .
a memory returns

Within Margins

Sandip Chauhan, USA

My English teacher had a peculiar rule – no pencil stubs, she said. She firmly believed that they ruined our handwriting. I diligently tried to hold my hefty pencil and write. The scratch of the pencil against the paper and the soft, rhythmic sound it made, along with the earthy scent of wood shavings, filled the air as I wrote. Everyone admired it and said, 'Your writing is like delicate petals unfurling on a page.' As I traced the curves and lines, my thoughts began to take shape, blossoming into phrases and stanzas. Before I knew it, my thoughts turned into poems.

Now, my shaking hands struggle to grip the pen, leaving illegible scribbles on the paper that I can't even decipher.

cow-dung walls
a beetle crawls
by the inkwell

The Things My Father Saw

Debra Murphy, USA

My father was in the war – the Big one. Semper Fi. Before the emphysema and the cirrhosis took him, he talked about turning 17 on Parris Island, fermenting coconut milk in Guam, and sailing to China as a teenage sniper – a boy doing a man’s job, but maybe even a man couldn’t do it without being broken.

Lucky Strikes
tropical nights
of homemade hooch

The yellowed photo

Stefano d'Andrea, Italy

One day I rummage through an old rusty biscuit box. Among a lot of trifle there is an envelope full of vintage photos. In one I barely recognize the face of my maternal grandmother.

So, I find myself sitting next to her again, in the small room where she lived, a retired former maid. Young as I was then, I was often parked there by my parents. It was like an amniotic cave – warm and soft like a cat's fur – in which I enjoyed intervals of sweet idleness.

On a cloudy autumn afternoon, in the amber luminescence of the lampshades she offered me the usual meagre snack of hot milk and dry biscuits. At the end of this ritual, for the first time she took out a small velvet envelope from a chest of drawers and showed me, as if it were the image of a saint, a small, very yellowed photo, in which hovered a young officer in uniform from the First World War.

While I was scrutinizing this character unknown to me, my grandmother spoke in a low voice, in a heartfelt tone that I had never heard before. She said: “See, this was my husband . . . your grandfather, do you understand? He never came back from the war” Soon after she quickly dismissed me.

It was the last time I saw her. A few days later she disappeared, and I heard nothing more about her.

gold specks –
what remains beyond time
in the shadows

La foto ingiallita

Stefano d'Andrea, Italia

Un giorno frugo in una vecchia scatola di biscotti arrugginita. Tra tante sciocchezze c'è una busta piena di foto d'epoca. In una riconosco a malapena il volto di mia nonna materna.

Così mi ritrovo di nuovo seduto accanto a lei, nella piccola stanza dove viveva, un'ex domestica in pensione. Giovane com'ero allora, spesso venivo parcheggiato lì dai miei genitori. Era per me come una grotta amniotica – calda e morbida come la pelliccia di un gatto – nella quale godevo intervalli di dolce ozio.

In un nuvoloso pomeriggio autunnale, nella luminescenza ambrata dei paralumi, mi offrì il solito magro spuntino di latte caldo e biscotti secchi. Al termine di questo rito, per la prima volta tirò fuori da un cassetto una piccola busta di velluto e mi mostrò, come se fosse l'immagine di un santo, una piccola foto, molto ingiallita, in cui aleggiava un giovane ufficiale in uniforme della Prima Guerra Mondiale.

Mentre scrutavo questo personaggio a me sconosciuto, mia nonna parlava a bassa voce, con un tono accorato che non avevo mai sentito prima. E mi dice: "Vedi, questo era mio marito... tuo nonno, capisci? Non è mai tornato dalla guerra"

Subito dopo mi ha rapidamente congedato.

È stata l'ultima volta che l'ho vista. Pochi giorni dopo è scomparsa e non ho più saputo nulla di lei.

granelli d'oro –
ciò che resta oltre il tempo
nell'ombra

Imago

Thomas Festa, USA (EC)

without question
the inward curl
of the flowering yucca

Before I was born, she painted a picture of me as a young boy. I had always assumed she'd painted the portrait from life, but no, she told me much later, it's me as she imagined I'd be while I was growing in her womb.

Visiting her childhood home after a long absence, I can't shake off the feeling that, in her creative hope, she somehow conjured a version of my future self, more real, more authentic, than the one that, fifty years later, I remember being.

its trunk
both one and many
the weeping fig

First Light

Kelly Sargent, USA

I examine a faded photograph of my twin sister, born profoundly deaf, and me at age four years sitting cross-legged on a manicured, midwestern lawn. A shimmering pile of rainbow trout, freshly caught by Daddy, rests between us. Captured in the frame is one of us saying to the other: “I have an idea!”

We created our own signed language as toddlers because we wanted to communicate. Our parents had no idea what we said to each other, as they never learned our mother tongue.

spring bulbs
a sprung index finger
ignites the tungsten

Resolution

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

Today I return to the house where I spent my childhood. I smile at the bridge boards familiar rattle over the river crossing. Turning left along the gravel track still overshadowed by athels to the house. The red tin roof is faded now. Green paint peeling from warped wood walls. Mum's well-ordered garden is a tangle of weeds and thistles. No one has lived here for many years. Unsettled, I acknowledge why I moved away.

riverside
the stick arms
of winter willows

Has-Beens

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland

If this town were a set of teeth, I would recommend a visit to the dentist for it is full of gaps. However, the hotel on the main street sparkles like a polished molar, after a recent renovation. It seems out of place amidst this yawning emptiness.

The people I knew as a child long dead: the school teacher who beat and threatened the children (including my brother), the grocer brothers in their brown coats . . . who were fond of young boys, the man, from the tick tock shop where the musty smell lingered.

Many buildings that were once businesses have been demolished. There is a library where the church used to be and the mission hall has been converted into housing. The pharmacy where my father worked now dispenses fish and chips. I remember all the outhouses out the back and a maze of rooms upstairs where he photographed children.

So many nightmares . . . trying to escape.

the colours
of spring now
vacant eyes

Cat's Meow

Robert Erlandson, USA

Sally lies on grandma's lap and purrs gently as she's petted. Occasionally she will stretch her paws out, then curl up again. Grandma says at night when she's watching TV, she can feel Sally's breathing and heartbeat. Grandma lives in a nursing home and is struggling with advancing dementia. Sally was purchased online, free delivery, batteries included.

robo-cat—
her anti-depressant
without side effects

Year Off

Ana Drobot, Romania

I once managed to live in two worlds. During the day I was living in the ordinary or real world, as they say. At night I managed to go beyond the mirror and enter a past in which I was not even born. At some point, however, a legacy situation arose that began to preoccupy me for the day. Some would have said that I better not bother about it. Someone else, from the past, must have solved the problem by now. I took a year off so that I could stay in the past and deal with the legacy during the day. I woke up in therapy.

transference—
the way I wait for
your eye contact

Behind God's back

D. V. Rožić, Croatia (EC)

The Bible and most urban dictionaries agree, “behind God's back” is concerned with spatial, not timely affairs. It means long distance. Thus, why worry?

the war
somewhere
behind God's back

Nowadays I know, the childhood I spent in a village behind God's back. Back then, the village cemetery was thought to be behind God's back. When angry with her, my uncle would reproach my auntie, for immigrating from behind God's back.

worrying toddler -
so many backs
behind God's back

My grandfather tells me his brother lives in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. And that's behind God's back, indeed. He also mentions his oldest cousin, now an Australian, totally behind God's back.

wondering child
the unseen
face of God

Two white horses pull a cart with a coachman, the priest and my paternal grandmother in her casket. Villagers follow them.

funeral procession
all but one returned
from behind God's back

I learned, that horses arrived in Europe from the North America, via Beringia.
Nowadays under the sea, beyond unthinkable time. And still behind God's back.

virtual world . . .
nobody hides
behind God's back

Rewind. Fast Forward.

Alan Peat, England

It must be the 1980s. I've just bought a top loading VHS video player. I own five films. One day I might have a library of perhaps fifty. I live close to a video rental shop and am on friendly terms with the chain-smoking owner. I also smoke.

I judge that I know him well enough to put it out there:

I'm looking for 'A Clockwork Orange'

The pirate copy he takes from under the counter has a plain white cover. He tells me that it won't look as good as his regular tapes. I tell him I don't mind.

Back home I start watching, but instead of droogs there's a grainy cat. It cuts the tail off a grainy mouse. I take it back. He exchanges it.

Back home I start watching, but instead of droogs there is a grainy coyote. It picks up a frying pan and flattens the face of a man with a moustache. I take it back. He exchanges it.

Back home I start watching, but instead of droogs there is a grainy puppet man. He kills his puppet child with a club.

| |: without strings
all these things
i can't unsee: | |

On Discovering I Was a Formalist

Joshua St. Claire, USA

Every morning glory suspects he may be a god, but it wasn't until I finally became a four o'clock that I found out I was right. One dewy morning, my fingers grazed the tohu wabohu and, without warning, outshot planets, stars, and then even galaxies one by one. I saw them and they were good. The more I made, the better I got. Soon, I could make a Cosmos Redshift 7 in the time it takes to brew a pot of coffee and a Coma Pinwheel while I draw a bath. After reading a few craft essays, I begin to pay closer attention to my syntax. My brow furrows as I notice that even when I make a Hoag's Object or a Medusa Merger, it's basically all protons, electrons and neutrons. I try bit harder and out pops photons, down quarks, and a positron. I really turn up the heat, and a whole flurry of assorted neutrinos, some strange quarks, and 3 muons burst from my fingertips. I grit my teeth and spit out 23 top quarks, some red-antigreen gluons and 17 Higgs bosons. Then, I collapse like one of those dying stars I keep making, utterly bereft of anything new.

cicadas screaming sestinas into anti-de Sitter space

What's in a Name

Mimi Ahern, USA

My daughter, who graduated from Oregon State (as did I) sends me an email blog about one of the University professors who through experimenting on one thing, finds another.

long night
YInMn Blue flames
beneath the boiling water

And now, months later, she sends me a second email: Crayola plans to add the new blue color to their crayon boxes. They have named it Bluetiful.

What's in a Prayer

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury, USA

As I get older, I find myself getting more and more angry. I see decay everywhere. The human body, the human mind, all spiralling downwards, losing beauty, losing dignity. I wonder why Nature has written the program like this- why not just shut the operating system down after a specified number of years? And if she did have to write in the downfall, why include the capacity for suffering? And who assigned pronouns to Nature anyway??

stiff upper back

 I color my roots
with mom's hair dye

Measure and Cut

Cyndi Lloyd, USA

The moment slips through the eyehole of this needle lodged in my heart. I pull the pricker out. Let it drop from my fingers. Memories surface. Anger and hurt whoosh into my heartspace. As I look in every direction, straw shifts under my footsteps. I grasp handfuls of fodder and dirt to sort and sift. Yet, I struggle to forgive—myself and Mom. I imagine weaving stalks and stems, making a basket to hold our hearts. Keep them safe while we take time to reflect.

window glare . . .
rearranging the frame
of my mind

I was born to be vulnerable, born to love and be loved. Life is about braving this hard world, to trust I'll return again and again to my core filled with light, where I have always been whole. Where I can find the needle, pick it up, and sew a stitch of peace here and there.

patchwork . . .
the shape of her hand
in mine

Foundering

Gavin Austin, Australia

Emptiness, an icy poultice, draws the warmth from his body.

He stands, feet spread, on shifting sand as the tide rushes by. Sharp teeth of the waves gnash at his ankles. Frozen fingers grip, dragging him under. With a closing ripple, the dark sea carries him to its silent depths.

in the dark with the demons a nightly dance

Window Dressing

Gayle Worthy, USA

You like that dress? I knew you would. When I drove by the store and saw it in the window, the Lord told me it was the dress you should wear to the wedding.

And, oh, that toaster I'm giving to the newlyweds? I never doubted that's something they need because as soon as I walked into the store, the Lord guided me straight to the toaster aisle.

You're wondering where my little dog is? Well, I had to give her away when I realized she meant more to me than the Lord. Oh no, I don't miss her at all. The Lord satisfies all my needs.

My husband and the boys? They understand my vocation. They don't mind at all when we eat out and I leave a religious tract in place of a tip. You can't put a price on a person's soul.

And mine is white as snow. Let me help you work on yours. You've got a way to go.

the carpet bag
a nightgown and her Bible

Translation

Jill Muhrer, USA

After months of extensive training, I am finally doing Medicare counselling as a volunteer at the local senior center. I have organized the conference room table with informational pamphlets which are all in English. I make a mental note to find translations.

I feel ready. I welcome my first beneficiary, Yotumbe who wears a gold, red and orange patterned dress with a matching head wrap. Her warm smile puts me at ease.

Yotumbe has no insurance and finally qualifies for Medicare, a special benefit of aging. Time is of the essence. Others are waiting, and I've been advised by my mentor to be efficient.

After brief introductions she asks, "Can you spell your name?"

"Jill," I answer. "J as in Jack, I as in Irene, and L as in Linda. L as in Linda. Jill." Yotumbe is silent for a moment.

"Ok," she says, "I see. You mean J as in Jemo (to connect), I as in Igbo(forest) and L as in Lokun (strong), L as in Lokun (brave)!"

And I imagine a forest.

birds on the cable wire pictographs

"Even better," I reply.

Yotumbe's voice has a gentle rhythm. "I am confused but determined," she explains.

She thanks me for taking my time, and I reassure her. "Medicare is complicated. I have faith in our ability to figure out which plan works for you." She smiles.

Now we focus on setting up her Medicare account, the final obstacle a password.
Patiently, she creates a combination of birthdates and letters of her family's nicknames.
I transcribe each one carefully and as I do I drift. What was her life like in Nigeria? Who
are those family members? How does she find life in the USA?

A gate unlocks, the website – smiling Medicare recipients, lists of programs, prompts,
questions, arrows, surveys, directions, a tsunami.

Together we lean in, navigate, a path opens.

curtains float
 on the summer breeze
 a hint of jasmine

N.A.B.

Dr Brijesh Raj, India (EC)

wall art
the panels
left unfinished

Each handloom weaver has a distinctive rhythm. The elderly lady's leitmotif is a steady, rhythmic clacking, with brief pauses for digital inspection. The balding man's, is a faster, more heavy-metalsque clatter admixed with a light jingling in the background. Like the sound of bells on a racing khillar bull. Her weave is red, blue and yellow, candy striped on a white background whilst he creates a serenely solid, baby blue skyscape.

warm glow
the spreading aroma
of a baker's wood oven

Tea-break over, the spindles resume zip lining to and from across the swath of warp threads. The gentleman puts his right shoulder into the task. His visage is fixed in a grimace, focused on the simultaneity of moving staccato arms and legs differently.

Her's is the calm, relaxed mien. Like those of the beautiful plants flowering outside, out of her sight.

driftwood
the bob of thoughts
on a moonless river

N.A.B: National association for the Blind

If he's gone

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

what am I supposed to do? Hit my nagging wife when she keeps on like rain dripping? my old neighbor whines at the trial coverage, while holding a half-empty bottle of wine.

trance

after

trance

Trump

atop

us

Editor's Choices-Haibun (EC)

Behind God's back (EC)

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

The Bible and most urban dictionaries agree, “behind God's back” is concerned with spatial, not timely affairs. It means long distance. Thus, why worry?

the war
somewhere
behind God's back

Nowadays I know, the childhood I spent in a village behind God's back. Back then, the village cemetery was thought to be behind God's back. When angry with her, my uncle would reproach my auntie, for immigrating from behind God's back.

worrying toddler –
so many backs
behind God's back

My grandfather tells me his brother lives in Cleveland, Ohio, USA. And that's behind God's back, indeed. He also mentions his oldest cousin, now an Australian, totally behind God's back.

wondering child
the unseen
face of God

Two white horses pull a cart with a coachman, the priest and my paternal grandmother in her casket. Villagers follow them.

funeral procession
all but one returned
from behind God's back

I learned, that horses arrived in Europe from the North America, via Beringia.
Nowadays under the sea, beyond unthinkable time. And still behind God's back.

virtual world . . .
nobody hides
behind God's back

In this haibun, D. V. Rožić rings the changes at various stages of life in the phrase "behind God's back", equivalent to "the back of beyond", and assumed to be a delineation of space not time and also referring to God's casting of sins behind his back and thus pardoning the sinner and perhaps the promise to Moses that he shall see God's back but not his face. The poet is Croatian, so must have experienced the civil war in former Yugoslavia. This makes the ironic comment that war is "somewhere/behind God's back" particularly heart-rending.

"behind God's back" become a mournful intonation for other significant occurrences like emigration, the splintering of the family and death. The poet's use of a child's viewpoint of these events is acutely touching. The toddler worrying about all that is behind God yields to the child wondering about the "unseen" face of God. The recurring lacuna that the child faces in life is embodied in the funeral of the "paternal grandmother", which is attended by those that have emigrated. Ultimately, distance becomes absence, absence becomes death. The anguish the poet evokes in this haibun is so affecting that one cannot but help being struck by the peculiar similarities with the current conflicts that have brought about displacement, fragmentation and alienation of families and communities. There is real pain, but the poem ends in another irony - "the virtual world" which is always at hand so the pathos of distance and God is lost in a glare.



Imago (EC)

Thomas Festa, USA

without question
the inward curl
of the flowering yucca

Before I was born, she painted a picture of me as a young boy. I had always assumed she'd painted the portrait from life, but no, she told me much later, it's me as she imagined I'd be while I was growing in her womb.

Visiting her childhood home after a long absence, I can't shake off the feeling that, in her creative hope, she somehow conjured a version of my future self, more real, more authentic, than the one that, fifty years later, I remember being.

its trunk
both one and many
the weeping fig

Thomas Festa's haibun presents us a deeply personal scenario with a universal resonance. Have we not thought about what our progenitor might have envisioned us to be? The poet seems to have the answer to this when his mother's portrait of him is revealed as one conjured before his birth. The two haiku pose the question of identity, thereby mirroring this central motif of the haibun. The question-mark effect of the curl of the yucca in the opening haiku, is quite an adept use of imagery in this context. The poet wonders if the mother's imagination created a figure more real than his actual self. Her anticipation becomes his memory in an elegant telescoping of time, made more poignant by him visiting not his, but his mother's childhood home, reminding him that the parent was once also a child. The tension of past and present, image and reality are resolved with the evocation of the fig tree, echoing the yucca with the poet wondering whether it is one or many and how various generations of growth are housed in the tree's trunk.



N.A.B. (EC)

Dr Brijesh Raj, India

wall art
the panels
left unfinished

Each handloom weaver has a distinctive rhythm. The elderly lady's leitmotif is a steady, rhythmic clacking, with brief pauses for digital inspection. The balding man's, is a faster, more heavy-metallic clatter admixed with a light jingling in the background. Like the sound of bells on a racing khillar bull. Her weave is red, blue and yellow, candy striped on a white background whilst he creates a serenely solid, baby blue skyscape.

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driftwood
the bob of thoughts
on a moonless river

N.A.B: National association for the Blind.

Finally, this haibun by Brijesh Raj is with a surprise: We read the title and perhaps skim over the acronym, NAB and proceed to the depiction of a fine dance of mutuality between a balding man and an elderly lady tracing jointly, yet individually their very different weaves. The reader is

blind to the pathos of the weavers' sightlessness, enchanted as one is by the luminous colours which are interlaced in their work. What struck me was how the poet skilfully uses images to evoke the sounds of the loom: "heavy-metallic clatter" and "sound of bells on a racing khillar bull." These make the narrative palpable and engaging.

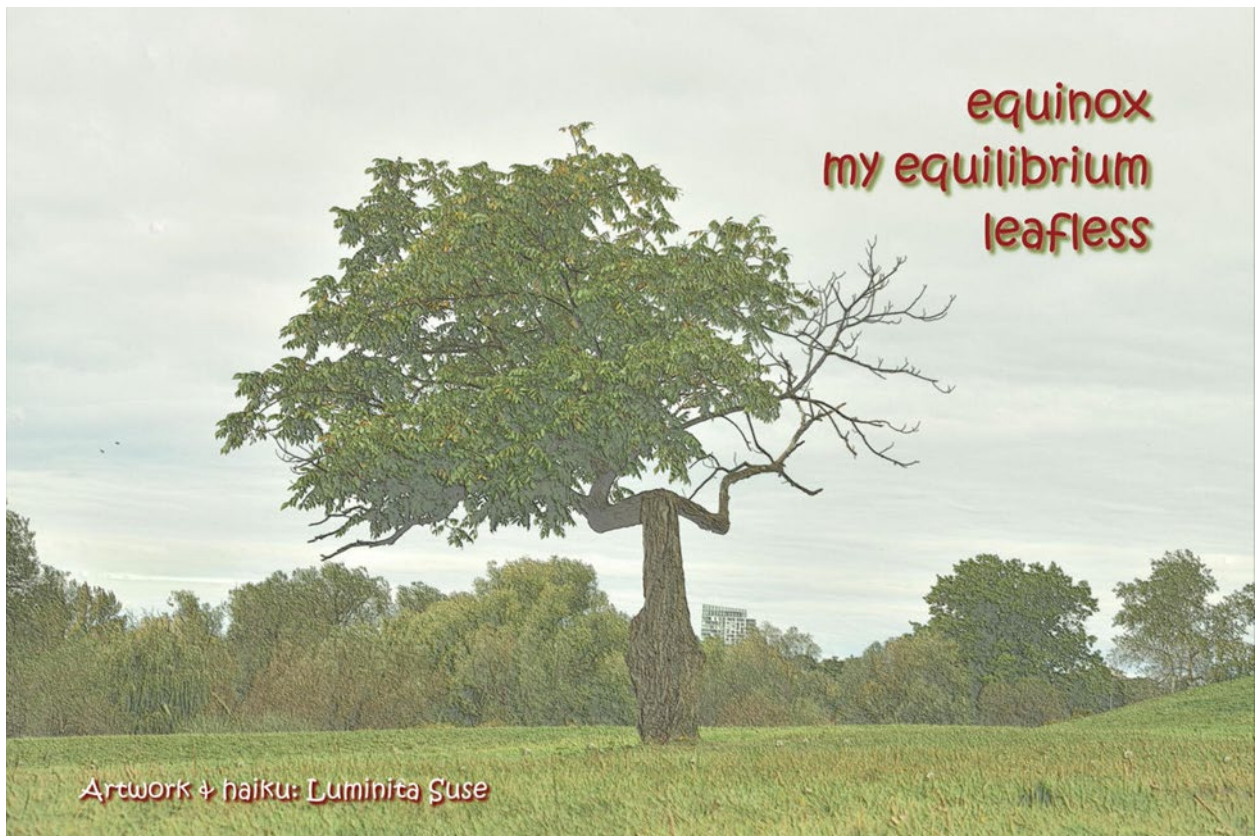
Yet another feature that enhances the sensory experience in the haibun is the second haiku with the elicitation of the heat and smell of the wood oven and the aroma of freshly-baked bread. It also creates a tangible sense of the rich and varied entwining of lives and livelihoods in the neighbourhood.

The opening and the closing haiku bookend the haibun with quiet thought that makes us read the haibun with new eyes now trained to the phenomenon of blindness and its potent poignancy.

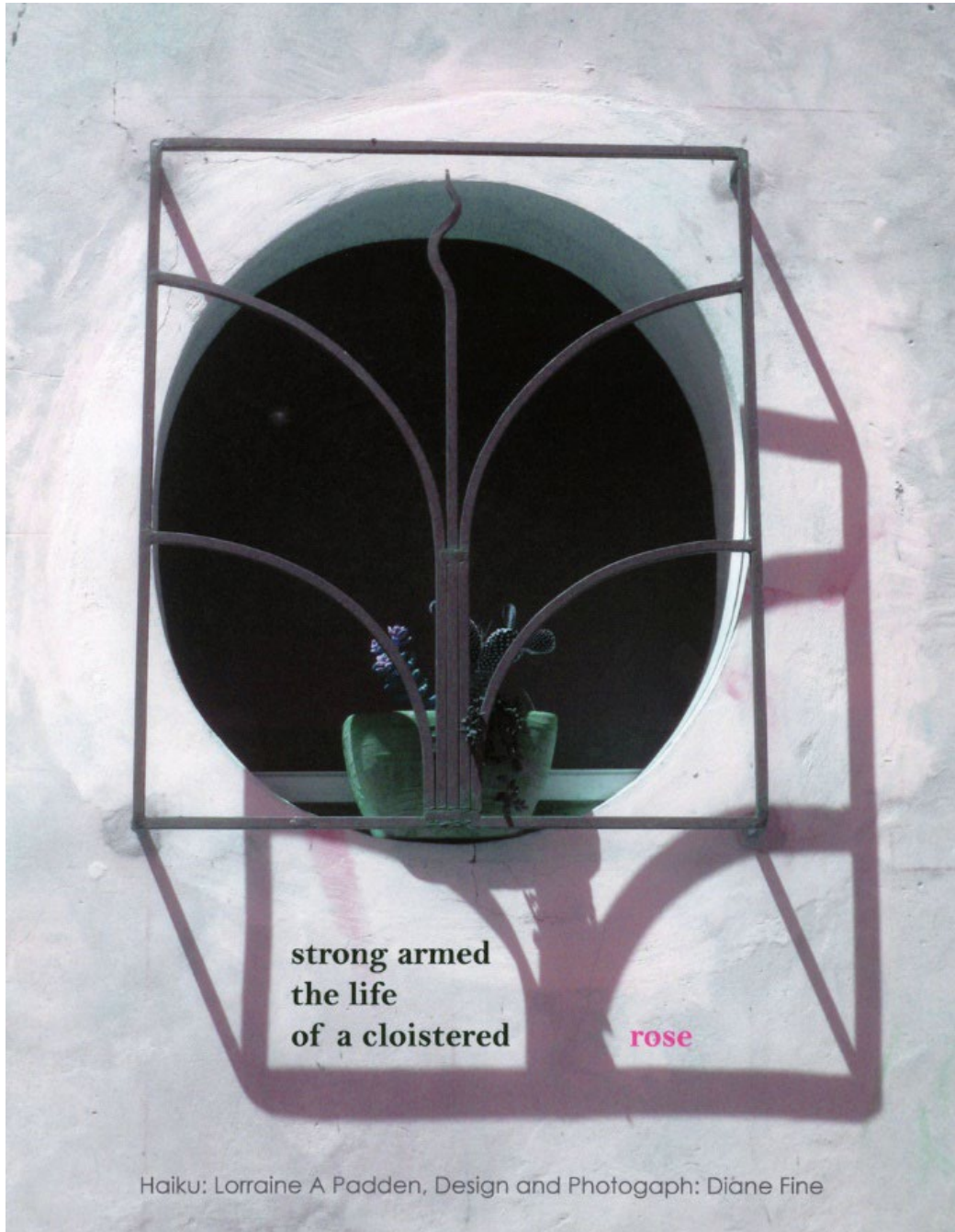
Sonam Chhoki

Haiga – Part 4

Luminita Suse—Canada



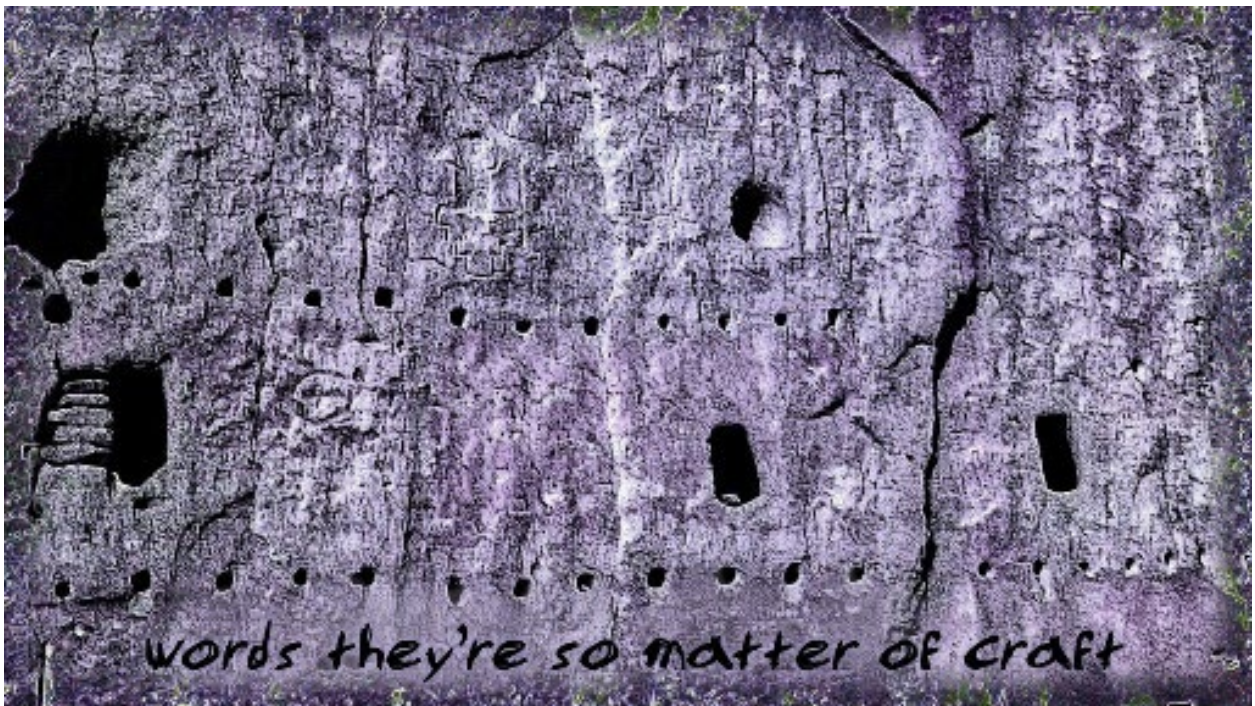
Lorraine A Padden & Diane Fine—USA



Maryam Mermey & Akiba Mermey—USA



Maxianne Berger – Canada



Mircea Moldovan & Daniel S. Gelu — Romania

*shot down...
a pilot sends
emoticons*



Haiku: Mircea Moldovan, Photo R&D: Daniel S. Gelu

Neena Singh & Eydis Einarsdottir – India



going nowhere
i drink the silence...
zazen

photo: eydis einarsdottir
haiku: neena singh

Tanka Prose



Black Cat Watches the World

Bastion

Gavin Austin, Australia

He is the new boy at school. Dark hair and dark eyes, with the brashness of a city kid. He has the locker next to mine, and we swap sandwiches at lunchtime. When we walk to the bus stop, he slings his arm around my shoulders. On weekends we ride our bikes or, as legionnaires, we practice sword games with pointed sticks, ready to defend our territory. In the bushland we build a structure of logs and sacks; our secret fortress in the jungle to keep us safe from the tigers. To keep us safe from the world.

His funeral is in the old stone church on the edge of town. No one says it is okay to cry. At the cemetery, as I watch him lowered into the ground, a chill wind stings my eyes so savagely they run. I stand, in white shirt and navy tie, on the lawn near his grave; flowering gums scatter scarlet blossoms. On the battlefield, among a troop of consoling pats, I remain motionless, a lone legionnaire.

amber eyes glow
in another forest
a soft roar
as big cats prowl
the grey pre-dawn

As It Goes . . .

Pitt Buerken, Germany

I'm really shocked. The editor of my favorite journal doesn't accept my submissions any longer. Searching for reasons, I read the magazine again and again. Finally, a brainwave came to me. My poems are obviously not florid enough. That's why I pasted a flowery wallpaper in my writing room. Now I'm successful again.

fall again
the wallpaper
yellowing
my wife advises
to paint it over

On the Death of My Brother (Ed Cates 2/23/69-11/12/23)

Anna Cates, USA

No one ever said the journey would be easy.
Some days we envision our respite through the trees,
oak groves to Illiana wilds, where you trod
with your Gandalf staff, amusing your little brothers.

I've come to believe, even on the darkest days,
naked branches exude their beauty. Even dead trees
manifest some magical charm . . . Wise as a wizard,
you once said, "God didn't always give me
what I wanted, but always what I needed."

First born, your parents' delight, a winter rose,
ruddy as David . . . In the old black and white photo,
along the coast of the Pine Tree State, a babe,
cuddled in loving grasp, reaches out
for a lobster claw, the wonderment just
within reach, the whole world amazing!

In Christ, who is our life, we bloom into abundance,
become our best and truest selves. Infirmity's pallor
lasts only a second, but the blood endures forever.
Alive in Christ, you will be absent from us but awhile,
big-hearted, beautiful-minded, big brother.
We will miss you, but we will see you later!

a thrush
lingers in the pine
twilight
how dear you remain
gone, but not forgotten

Recited 11/16/23 at Robison Theater, Edison State Community College for the Rhyme & Rune: Poets of the Miami Valley Read, an event sponsored by the Edison Foundation

An unwitting pilgrim's guide

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan

There's a trio of trees on the ridge: a chestnut, a maple and a dog cherry. How did these come together in this part of the valley? Many in the neighbourhood ask but no one quite knows. Against the pallor of a winter dawn or the cold gold of dusk, each holds its own with its distinct tracery of bare branches.

I once watched the setting sun linger as if taking its time to examine these sentinels. For the sparrows these provide a vantage point from which to map out their forays into the hedges and the fields. The ravens too circle, perch and clamour for a while before setting out across the valley or returning to roost in the woods beyond.

The wet end-of-year phase has morphed into a prolonged period of biting cold. My regime of anti-inflammatory medication has run its course and the swelling has reduced but a stiffness and pervading ache remain. The doctor says that rheumatoid arthritis affects more women than men and adds, 'You got it early and it is long-term.' . . . As he expands on a prognosis of increasing affliction, in a parentheses of thought, an image of the trees on the hill comes to me.

'Exercise,' he says, as if reading my mind, 'is known to help ease . . .'

And so begins a mission to trudge the slope and behold the custodians of my hope.

waking up
in a fog of pain
the early sun tugs me
bird song by bird song
out of vacant dreams

Salad Bar Diva

Sharon D. Cohagan, Germany

She teeters on silver stilettos, weaving her way past other buffet guests. The turbulent waves beyond the windows do not slow her down. Her embroidered peasant blouse slips, baring a tanned shoulder and deep décolleté. Shapely legs peek through the front slit in her long skirt.

A waiter rushes to her side, takes her plate, and carries it to her table. She sets herself next to a young man who is staring at his mobile phone. I cannot hear her words to him, but he puts his phone aside with a laugh, showing whitened teeth.

With a graceful sweep of her hand, she removes a wide-brimmed hat, rings flashing and bright red nails glistening. Platinum blond braids tumble down, dangle over her bosom.

My table neighbour is staring openly and leans closer, whispering, "It was her birthday yesterday. You should have seen what she was wearing!" Then, with a sigh, she says, "I can only hope I look that good when I turn eighty-five."

add fresh parsley
a bottle of frothy beer
stir and let simmer —
Thursday's Irish mutton stew
still tastes good on Saturday

Untitled

C. Jean Downer, Canada

I pick up my daughter from university on a quiet morning. We carry her bags to the car and drop her laundry in the trunk. She climbs into the passenger's seat and disappears into her phone. Patting her baggy hoodie, my hand sinks too far before finding her arm. Out of the corner of my eye, I take her in from head to toe. We drive home in silence, swallowing air.

watering
bloomless orchids
I fear my care
will never
be enough

Awakening

Ana Drobot, Romania

I became aware it was truly spring. All throughout winter, every now and then, the smell of spring could be felt. The lark and the sparrows would sing loudly, amid all the snow. Now, it was different. The warmth struck me. It was as if I had been half asleep in the cold days, not fully aware of what was going on. It was as if I was getting out of bed at night and then returning back to the dreams that had been put on pause.

above me
out of the blue
white blossoms
I touch them gently
on my smartphone

What's real?*

Robert Erlandson, USA

FedEx just delivered my new VR Headset and I can start playing *Me Against Whatever-Online*. I've turned off my phone and left messages for my mom and dad. I'm so geeked. The adrenaline's flowing. The headset literally links to the VR world, and once there I must overcome all the obstacles or die. It's so cool – if I die the headset explodes and I die here as well.

which way to go
Earth's core spinning around
things all messed up
the North pole is moving
metaverse becoming real

** This tanka prose, pure fiction as of now, was motivated by the virtual reality product described in the on-line article cited:*

<https://www.euronews.com/next/2022/11/09/oculus-founder-claims-he-made-a-vr-headset-that-actually-kills-you-if-you-die-in-a-game>

In the Coffee Grounds

Ivan Gaćina, Croatia

The symbols in the coffee grounds tell a story from the cards of life while a mysterious dark face is outlined at the bottom of the cracked cup.

As the fire in the fireplace awakens my bygone memories, the outlines of people rise from the flames and join the shadows dancing on the wall.

And then, as if by magic, the coffee grounds swallow the dilapidated walls and creep in every crack of my soul as if it were part of me and my destiny.

As I think of us, your unfinished love letters float across the ocean stretching across the universe of my imagination.

The scenes of past experiences unfold like riddles as the summer we spent in the Caribbean branches into a myriad of untold stories carried away by bitter chocolate waves.

As time passes irrevocably, the coffee inspires me and drives away the darkness as my body is overwhelmed with an unknown power getting back the reality into balance.

Hiding her intentions, an old fortune teller reads the encrypted messages from nightmares as the cosmic cognitions flow in a whirlwind of coffee moving circularly through the center of the universe.

rafting in solitude
across a sleepy valley
under the stars . . .
in the distance, contours
of corns gleaming gold

Nemesis of neglect

Tim Gardiner, UK

Time offers little insight, there's no justice for the living and the dead don't care. The case is cold, confined to a lonely bedroom in No. 6, Mornington Crescent. On a chair by the window a cowed black figure peers through blind slats every morning. His view has changed, open fields snuffed out by the monolithic cigarette factory. It's hard to be certain there's anyone there; shadows play tricks on the unwary.

indistinct . . .
the crimes of one
and another
leave little room
for absolution

Uncharted Territory

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

The first time I noticed tremors in your hands I knew you would leave me. Even after the diagnosis we continued with our usual activities, camping, visiting the outback and motorbike riding. Medication worked for a while until the speedy downward slide.

twilight grey
darkens to black . . .
in an alien sky
I search for familiar
constellations

Hunter Gatherers

Keitha Keyes, Australia

my collection
of old irons and trivets
the result
of many happy years
searching, bargaining

Then things changed. Antique shops began to source items from overseas at the request of collectors. The thrill of the hunt diminished.

And members of the iron club became predatory, feral. The usual routine at meetings was to socialise and have lunch before the uncovering of a table filled with items for sale. People jostled to get to the table. They appropriated things before even looking at them carefully. Polite conversation was suspended.

I decided enough was enough.

The Message

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

at my friend's door
two military officers
in morning chill . . .
his son and mine battle
with rows of toy soldiers

A long, heart-piercing scream shakes the living room. My friend's son starts crying uncontrollably in fear, and my son does, too. I am tongue tied and feel frozen in time.

In my mind's eye, I see my friend in a West Point cadet's uniform. His girlfriend, now his wife, stands by his side. His youthful, proud face mingles with his wife's tear-streaked face.

Daylight Saving

Biswajit Mishra, Canada

From the sidewalk, I see the leaves gathered up around trees in the front yard of the senior centre. Purples and yellows spread behind the railings of the fence and I wonder about the absurdity of fallen leaves being trapped. The days are already getting shorter, and I must've been late in my walk.

I take out my phone and click a few pictures.

my wife keeps
growing her donation bag . . .
I tell her
about my vow to stop
buying new clothes

The Book of Tremors

Curt Pawlisch, USA

Today it's the double tap of the "o," for its single counterpart, "soon" for "son." These double taps of letters, inadvertent, are now all too frequent. My career as a concert pianist is over. Since I've never had such a notion, it's not the end of the world.

And so, I get by. This haiku stuff keeps me out the taverns. I can still think and reason, although a friend suggests senility is God's way of softening perceptions of one's slow demise. Perhaps. But what if instead of some pastoral senescence, we are entangled in the thorns of a ghastly misapprehension? What of the fear of the Alzheimer's patient who thinks her well-meaning daughter is instead trying to steal her money?

In old age, there are no easy answers. Nothing is clear, nothing is black and white.

walking through fog
I stop on the verge
of finding my way
only to see I'm still lost
in layers of gray

Hopeful Vibes

Carol Raisfeld, USA

The reality, for those seduced by the dream of finding the perfect mate on the internet, is that success stories are rare. The intimate correspondence, the heart-pounding first meeting, the walk down the aisle, all support the notion that it can happen.

Subjecting one's self to hundreds of doltish profiles about candlelight, fine dining and walks on the beach while investing so much time and energy can be overwhelming and sad. What you lose with text is the dynamic of behavior. With no way of gauging whether people are looking for a lifetime mate, a one-night stand, a free dinner or something to do on Saturday night, the medium sucks you in.

Silence itself has meaning in real life and that is also missing. Your imagination fills in the blanks with exactly what you want. Without question, on the internet, love is blind.

home movies
mom in a polka dot dress
hoping
my father would propose
before summer ends

Black Ice

Bryan Rickert

Rain only halfway falls. The rest of it just hangs in the air as winter fog. Tonight, the forecasters say temperatures will drop below freezing and all of this January grey will become tomorrow's hazards. The morning commute to work will, no doubt, be slow and the ditches dotted with drivers who couldn't keep it on the road.

caution tape
ripples in the wind
if only
I'd seen the warnings
before loving you

Love

D. V. Rožić, Croatia

My aunt had a villa in the south, close by the sea. Although being old, she would not let me cook, clean or do any chores while visiting her. You are now the queen, your job, your family, your problems, all well taken care of, she used to say.

Sometimes she would join me on the terrace. There was this endless sea blueness in the front of us, and a thought of us being two tiny dots in the Universe. Invisible, non-essential, and yet, so important to each other. The taste of salt on the lips, the scent of herbs and cricket chirping filled the air. Don't read, don't phone, she would say. Just watch this sight and inhale it, listen to it, so you keep it with you for as long as possible.

in the book of life
there are so many ways
to love someone
it takes long to understand
how to read between the lines

Performance Review

Joshua St. Claire, USA (EC)

Come in and have a seat. This is your annual evaluation. I won't sugarcoat it. It was a rough year. As we have been instructed by HR, I will be using "camera check feedback" and only discussing things that I have personally witnessed. It might be uncomfortable to hear some of this, but I have to be honest. Hopefully, by being confronted by your shortcomings, you have a chance to improve under my leadership. Your performance issues this year have primarily revolved around our flexible workplace policy. Your team has taken advantage of this and has regular start and end times of 6:30AM—5:30PM. On February 3, right in the middle of busy season, I stopped over at your desk at 7:15AM to ask a question and you hadn't arrived yet. When you arrived at 7:53AM and I asked where you were, you said you had worked until 9:00PM the prior night and were coming in as soon as you could. I don't care how many hours you work in a week, you have to be here to support your employees. You are salaried and all of your time belongs to the company. If your employees are here, you are here. Period. You must be in the office to provide your employees with the flexibility they need to maintain their morale! I was shocked, not even a month later, on March 1, when I swung by your desk at 4:38PM and your remaining employee told me that you had left for your wife's doctor appointment. At that point, we had already discussed your attendance. I will repeat myself. You need to be here during your assigned hours. What if your employee had a question? What would she have done? Now, I can't believe that I am even bringing this up, but we have to talk about your paternity leave. You gave me a call when your wife went into labor and then did a "peace-out." You were out six weeks and didn't check your email or voicemail once. Yes, I do understand that paternity leave is a benefit we provide, but that is beside the point. I also understand that your out of office replies were on, all of your backups were informed, and HR had received the appropriate paperwork, but, as I said, you are a manager and even your time off still belongs to the company. Yes, I know your team exceeded all their numbers and goals last year. That is beside the point. We are talking about your performance as a manager. Come on now, Josh. You won't even come out to happy hour like Steve and Megan. It's no wonder we're having trouble making a connection. I have already discussed this with HR and they fully and totally support all of the feedback that I have

given you today. Things have to change. I will have to give you an “occasionally meets expectations” rating and put you on a performance improvement plan. I need you to sign these. They are legal documents. That means no merit increase and no performance bonus this year. As you know, those funds will be reassigned to other, higher-performing managers. Managers who understand what I want. Managers who give me what I need.

photocopier

he compliments

her miniskirt

guffaws at the locker room talk
around the water cooler

Migration

John Zheng, USA

Lucky to have lived in both hemispheres, my life is like two halves of ying-yang. One spent in the East is like the blinding whiteout, and the other, being lived in the West, is like banked coal that will burn higher or into ashes.

Life is one way. To live through it for the true essence of life or afterlife is a way to live beyond the self, beyond physical existence. That's why I am oftentimes stupefied with the question of when I reach the end, will I be born again as an earthling and marry the same woman I have loved my whole life, or whether my soul will be everlasting on Earth or drift like a jellyfish to an exoplanet?

zugunruhe
caged birds
flap wings
longing
to go north

Editor's Choice (EC) – Tanka Prose

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As soon as I saw the title "Performance Review," I knew that I was going to have a fun time reading the prose part. Joshua St-Claire did not disappoint.

As I was reading, my mind went back to my working days as an employee and as a supervisor for my group of techs. You must listen to your supervisor (mine) if you want to advance. What a crop of BS Sure. I'm already at the top of my tech pay scale. Any more platitudes and fake wisdom you want to educate me. As for my three, it was a simple twenty-minute talk to each, and answering questions I did not have answers to. And, I was not going to give them fatherly advice; I didn't want to become my supervisor.

Thank you, Joshua St. Claire, for a trip down memory lane.

Mike Montreuil

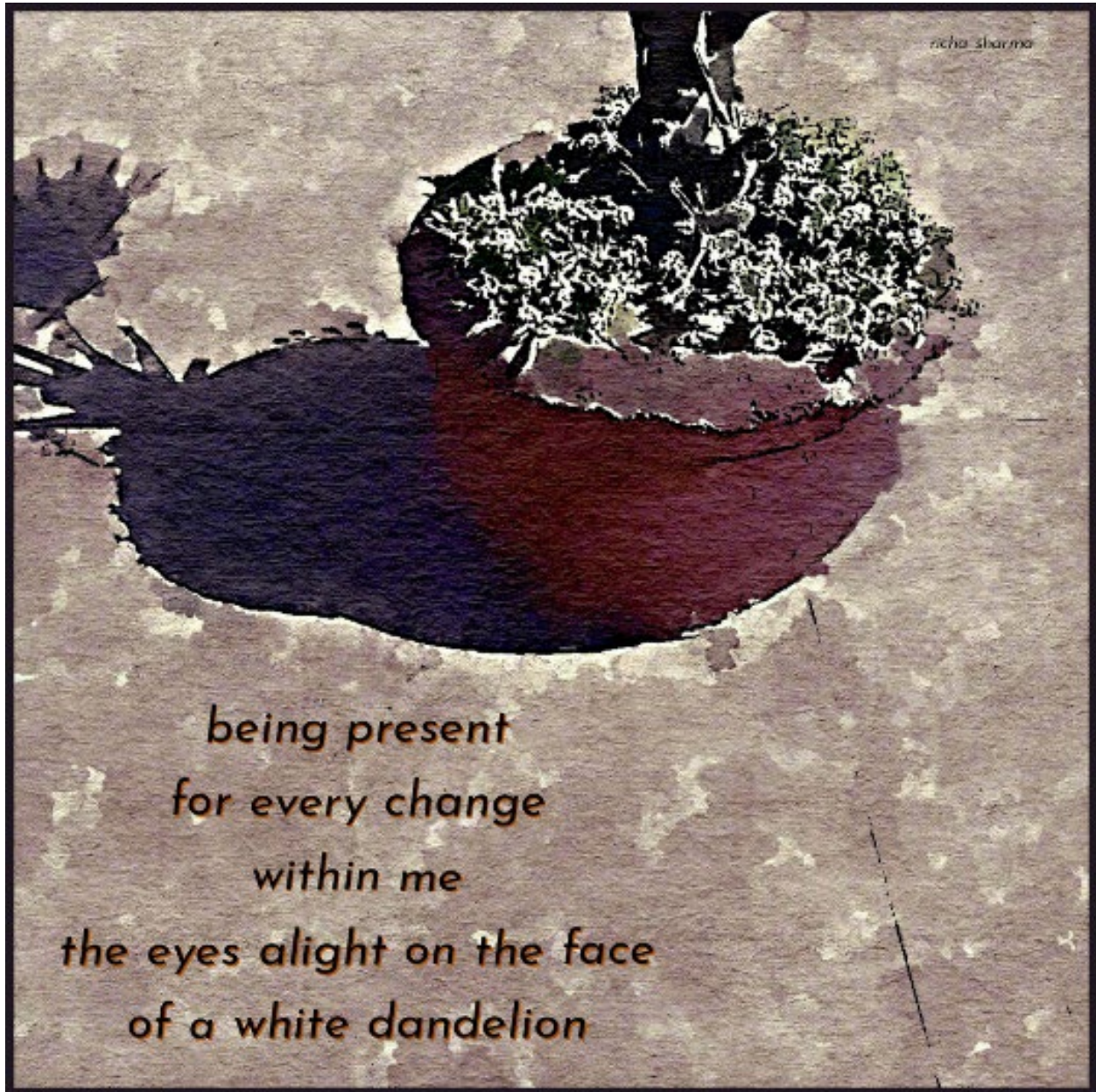
cattails—April 2024

Haiga – Part 5

Oscar Luparia – Italia



Richa Sharma – India



being present
for every change
within me
the eyes alight on the face
of a white dandelion

cattails—April 2024

Robert Erlandson — USA



Silva Trstenjak & Stjepan Rozic – Croatia



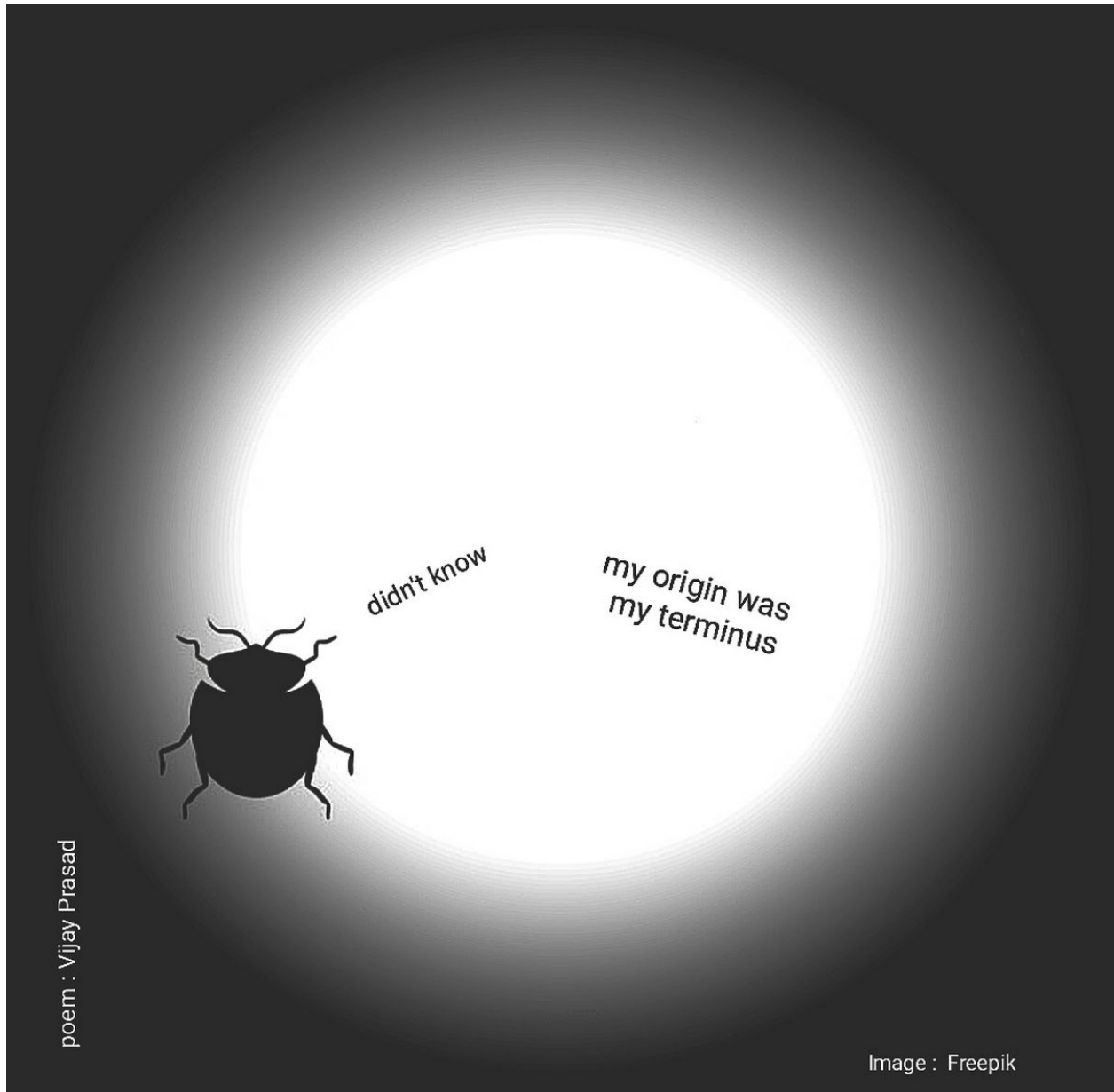
Haiku: Silva Trstenjak
Image: Stjepan Rozic

the ice age park - / not enough straw / for his sweetheart

Sonam Chhoki – Bhutan



Vijay Prasad—India



List of Poets and Artist

A

Adjei Agyei-Baah, 6-13
Mimi Ahern, 29, 145
Ishan Anagh, 34
Cynthia Anderson, 21, 56, 98
Cristina Angelescu, 71, 117
Jenny Ward Angyal, 28, 122
Joanna Ashwell, 29, 95, 115
Gavin Austin, 30, 56, 83, 148, 166

B

Caroline Giles Banks, 116
Lori Becherer, 22
Rowan Beckett, 34
Mona Bedi, 55, 66, 77
Brad Bennett, 28, 50
Maxianne Berger, 162
Jerome Berglund, 27
Tom Bierovic, 31
Gwen Bitti, 26, 96
Paul Bregazzi, 64
Randy Brooks, 32, 48, 82
Pitt Buerken, 55, 99, 167
Rohan Buettel, 24, 54
Sondra J. Byrnes, 37, 52

C

Mariangela Canzi, 22
John Paul Caponigro, 19,
Matthew Caretti, 15, 112
Anna Cates, 23, 80, 168
Sandip Chauhan, 131
Jim Chessing, 34, 82
Christina Chin, 32

Sonam Chhoki, 83, 103, 169, 193
Cezar Ciobîcă, 70
Glenn G. Coats, 111
Sharon D. Cohagan, 170
Maria Concetta Conti, 36
Bill Cooper, 27, 48
Bryan D. Cook, 126
Jeanne Cook, 85
Anne Curran, 87, 90
Dan Curtis, 35

D

Stefano d'Andrea, 133, 134
Maya Daneva, 61
Marie Derley, 33
Boris Deverić, 87
Tuyet Van Do, 52
Dan Doman, 70
C. Jean Downer, 171
Radostina Dragostinova, 63
Ana Drobot, 42, 57, 67, 91, 140, 172
Tim Dwyer, 32, 52

E

Eydis Einarsdottir, 164
Robert Epstein, 17
Robert Erlandson, 29, 94, 139, 173, 191
Keith Evetts, 26

F

Mike Fainzilber, 17, 57
Susan Farner, 24
Thomas Farr, 83

Bill Fay, 21
Thomas Festa, 135, 156
Diane Fine, 159
Lorin Ford, 19, 53, 66
Katja Fox, 108
Jenny M. Fraser, 103, 105
Terri L. French, 127
Jay Friedenber, 21
Seth Friedman, 62
Diane Funston, 81

G

Ben Gaa, 35, 63
Ivan Gačina, 28, 99, 174
Michael J. Galko, 21, 49
Mike Gallagher, 34, 62, 68, 99
Tim Gardiner, 175
Goran Gatalica, 30, 58
Daniel S. Gelu, 163
Capotă Codrin George, 46
Joan Gibson, 59
Mark Gilbert, 55, 67
Laurie Greer, 15
Rohini Gupta, Cover
and Section illustrations
Jennifer Gurney, 50

H

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, 106
Hazel Hall, 60, 84
Jon Hare, 22, 56, 80
John Hawkhead, 28, 49
Patricia Hawkhead, 49
David He, 96
Reid Hepworth, 96
Florence Heyhoe, 30, 138
Jeff Hoagland, 25
Ruth Holzer, 16, 39, 81, 102, 120

Frank Hooven, 27
Celia Hope, 97
Vladislav Hristov, 17
Edward Cody Huddleston, 33
Marilyn Humbert, 24, 97, 137, 176
Jacqueline Korschun Hyman, 89

I

Mona Iordan, 15
Lakshmi Iyer, 85, 86, 130

J

Rick Jackofsky, 20, 51, 95
Roberta Beach Jacobson, 20
Govind Joshi, 51

K

Barbara Kaufman, 43
Arvinder Kaur, 30
Keitha Keyes, 80, 177
Ravi Kiran, 17, 51
Craig Kittner, 24
Kathy Kituai, 31, 79
Kim Klugh, 15, 62
Nina Kovačić, 37
Tim Krcmarik, 91

L

Capotă Daniela Lăcrămioara, 46
Suzanne Leaf-Brock, 51
Barrie Levine, 56
Kristen Lindquist, 32
Chen-ou Liu, 33, 57, 84, 97, 102, 153, 178
Cyndi Lloyd, 147
Robert Lowes, 38
Glorija Lukina, 78
Oscar Luparia, 189
Anthony Lusardi, 118

M

Ruchita Madhok, 25
Carmela Marino, 36, 60
Richard L. Matta, 63, 77
Michael McInnis, 121
Dhaatri Vengunad Menon, 4
Akiba Mermey, 161
Maryam Mermey, 161
Dorothy M. Messerschmitt, 106
Biswajit Mishra, 18, 44, 60, 80, 125, 179
Daniela Misso, 29
Mircea Moldovan, 89, 163
Laurie D. Morrissey, 52
Jill Muhrer, 150, 151
Florian Munteanu, 100, 104
Debra Murphy, 132

N

Suraj Nanu, 30, 53, 77

O

Nola Obee, 37, 40
Karen O'Leary, 52
Ben Oliver, 21
Bernadette O'Reilly, 63
Maeve O'Sullivan, 59

P

Lorraine A Padden, 160
John Pappas, 17, 61
Vandana Parashar, 37, 55, 92
Curt Pawlisch, 26, 60, 85, 180
Alan Peat, 143
Amin Jacek Pędziwiater, 41, 95
Jacek Pokrak, 75
Vijay Prasad, 194
Slobodan Pupovac, 31, 53, 90

R

Carol Raisfeld, 92, 114, 181
Brijesh Raj, 152, 157
Kala Ramesh, 89
Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, 59
Dian Duchin Reed
Meera Rehm, 31,
Royal Rhodes, 82
Bryan Rickert, 38, 53, 72, 119, 182
Edward J. Rielly, 25
Sébastien Rivas, 23
Susan Lee Roberts, 25
Daniel Robinson, 19, 95
Nicholas H Rossler, 78
Aron Rothstein, 32, 88
Suraja Menon Roychowdhury, 146
D. V. Rožić, 22, 35, 54, 72, 79, 84, 93, 94,
141, 154, 155, 183
Stjepan Rozic, 192
Margaret Owen Ruckert, 81, 82
Janet Ruth, 123

S

Srini, 31
Barbara Sabol, 23
Joshua St. Claire, 18, 48, 78, 144, 184, 184,
187, 188
Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, 18
Jacob D. Salzer, 27, 88, 94, 101
Kelly Sargent, 26, 136
Nicola Schaum, 113
Bonnie J Scherer, 45, 54
Julie Schwerin, 27, 50, 65, 107
Ron Scully, 97
Paula Sears, 19
Richa Sharma, 100, 190
Neena Singh, 19, 86, 164

Mark Smith, 26
Stephenie Story, 35, 61, 88
Debbie Strange, 19, 58, 73, 81, 88
Margaret D. Stetz, 100
Ann Sullivan, 58
Luminita Suse, 159

T

Rick Tarquinio, 16, 39
Angela Terry, 33, 49
Richard Tice, 15, 90, 128
Kristina Todorova, 64, 68
Shannon Trotter, 129
Silva Trstenjak, 35, 54, 79, 84, 192
C. X. Turner, 18, 59, 98

V

Kevin Valentine, 25, 62, 93, 109
Steliana Cristina Voicu, 16

W

Diane Webster, 23
Christine Wenk-Harrison, 61
Tyson West, 34, 59
Mike White, 20
Tony Williams, 16, 57
Tony Steven Williams, 92, 93, 101
Ernest Wit, 27, 58
Robert Witmer, 16, 54, 87
Gayle Worthy, 149

Y

Quendryth Young, 20, 48
Nitu Yumnam, 100

Z

Eugeniusz Zacharski, 23, 75
John Zheng, 36, 91, 124, 186



Goose Berries and a Fig