

cattails



October 2026

cattails

Oct 2026 Issue

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Cover: Crimson stars – *Sphagnum capillifolium*

Michela Griffith is a visual artist who mixes photography with words and water-soluble media. Her work is quietly evocative and often abstract. The photographs selected for Cattails share seasonal details from a lowland raised bog – known simply in Scotland as a ‘moss’ – from the hidden colours of winter to the unexpected vibrance that may be found in a drainage ditch or managed moorland. Climate talk often overlooks biodiversity; here is a call to notice and to care about the small beauty found at your feet.

Letters from the Moss <https://www.michelagriffith.substack.com>

Artist website <https://www.michelagriffith.com>

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Introduction

In memory of Profit

8.8.2010 ~ 11.5.2026

Hello,

I am the resident cartoonist of cattails and have a tiny corner to myself in this journal, where I draw Kat, Apila and Issa-bella, observing the world through their lens with peace, calm and kindness and also, a pinch of satirical humour. Today my focus is on my muse Kat, whose real name was Profit (as in Profiterole, the round choux pastry with yummy custard cream filling). She was my best friend, fond companion and partner in crime for 16 beautiful years. In 16 years she saw me find art and grow to become an artist, and inspired me every day.

I had earlier worked on a few characters for the cartoon — a Huskey and a ginger cat, two kittens (link and shift), but these ideas didn't seem complete. One day, I thought why not have 2 characters that get along well in real life or real nature (our old garden). And that's when Profit's nature of a quiet introverted, kind presence, yet satirical and capable of getting quite annoyed by us humans, morphed into the character, Kat of the Kat & Apila feature. Her goofiness and playfulness (it's ok to try, it's ok to be silly) inspired me.

From Profit, a being that didn't know how to be anyone else, I learnt how to be myself. She also taught me to set boundaries and not get pushed around. She is the reason I found a voice to protest about injustice albeit gently (although she herself was quite vocal about her meal timings, the nests in the garden, or the tailorbirds that disrupted her nap).

I am truly grateful to my muse. Kat, Apila and Issa-bella will continue to carry forward Profit's and my take on the world.

Dhaatri Vengunad



Haiku



Sky meets water and biofilm

spring blooms
the bright pink
of a child's gumboots

Dan Curtis, Canada

morning sunshine
pug pups chew on
each other

Randy Brooks, USA

mountain bog —
filling the emptiness
a skylark's song

Clodagh O Connor, Ireland

cat's paw breeze . . .
crushed iris
at the creekbank

Stacy R. Nigliazzo, USA

pale blue dot
the egg
of a tadpole

Jared Frank, USA

twinning
with trillium
cabbage whites

Kathryn P. Haydon, USA

cloud of peony petals
the chickadee precipitates
a downpour

Julie Schwerin, USA

she and Tolstoy
where the pansies grew
color of wind

Robert Hirschfield, USA

april showers
park swings empty
after the shooting

Rowan Beckett Minor, USA (EC)

cold desert spring
in the poplar grove
blossoming wind

Vishal Prabhu, India

hay fever
grandma's spices
in a gourd

Ibrahim Nureni, Nigeria/USA

saharan migration
swifts filling
the castle's maw

Ann Sullivan, USA

uneasy truce
stray cats line up
at the saucer

Melissa Dennison, UK

this one life—
a rain-drenched bicycle
filled with flowers

Seth Friedman, Canada

not for the driftwood rush hour

Srini, India

double rear kick
as cows leave the winter barn –
white clover

Norman Silver, UK

egret among swans
white and black pirouette
on the mud flats

Ivan Cole, Australia

overcast sky
a blue-winged teal lifts
from the wetlands

Paula Sears, USA

first rain
your sandals no longer
at the door

ਪਹਿਲੀ ਬਾਰਿਸ਼
ਬੂਹੇ ਅੱਗੇ ਹੁਣ ਨਹੀਂ
ਤੇਰੇ ਪੈਰਾਂ ਦੇ ਨਿਸ਼ਾਨ

Arvinder Kaur, India

bending for the morning news
I help a worm
regain the earth

Laurie Greer, USA

cloudburst the chakra drum symphony

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

flooded paddy —
the morning sun
in a newborn's eyes

Shiva Bhusal, Nepal/USA

a hiss
before the rattle
desert lightning

Brad Bennett, USA

thunder clap —
the playground swings
left swinging

Kim Klugh, USA

lightning flash
desertscape peopled
with saguaro

Richard Tice, USA

monsoon wind
through the tahli tree
a raga of sparrows

برسات کی ہوا
ٹاہلی کے درخت سے
چڑیوں کا ایک راگ

مون سون دی ہوا
ٹاہلی دے رکھ وچوں
چڑیاں دا اک راگ

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

tempest—
the whole ocean
drop by drop

burza —
cały ocean
kropla po kropli

Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

dripping garage
the rhythm
in the disused pan

टपकता गैराज
लय
पुराने पड़े बर्तन में

Govind Joshi, India

shingle pathway
following the raindrops
to an open gate

Joanna Ashwell, UK

hidden
beneath huge hosta . . .
a house sparrow

Catharine Summerfield Hāna, USA

a squirrel's belly
catches a sunbeam
wind lull

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

Blue Heron
steps into a Blue Heron. . .
river shallows

George Skane, USA

nine o'clock bells—
the sparrows' chorus
fades in the cherry tree

zvona u devet –
jenjava sabor vrabaca
u obližnjoj višnji

Sanjana Zorinc, Croatia

noonday bells
a swoop and pitch
of wings

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

outdoor class . . .
two golden orioles
keep chatting

K. Ramesh, India

park afternoon
the back and forth
of lawn mowers

Ben Gaa, USA

hilly pasture
the tic-tac-toe arrangement
of brown and black cows

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

solstice night
one season's drought
becomes another's

Bryan Rickert, USA

tumbleweeds
roll to the fence-line . . .
full stop.

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

alpine tarn
a brooding darkness
in the brumby's eye

Gavin Austin, Australia

a giant spider
stalks the desert plains
Nazca lines

Jay Friedenberg, USA

turning tide
a line of shells
laid upon the shore

Simon Hanson, Australia

sea cave
the waves play an organ
of basalt columns

Debbie Strange, Canada

overcast winds
wild barnacles ride
on a whale's back

Sheikha A., UAE

scudding clouds the freedom of seagulls

nuvole in movimento la libertà dei gabbiani

Mariangela Canzi, Italy

the lough
beyond the houses
tip of a sail

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland/ USA

alpine meadow
my alarm clock
of cowbells

Michael J. Galko, USA

trebling chimes
a shimmering hummingbird
flutters in place

Wendy Cobourne, USA

farmer's basket
sunflowers facing
every way

రైతు బుట్ట
అన్నివైపుల తిరిగిన
పొద్దుతిరుగుడు పూలు

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

adrenaline plunging into the sea northern gannets

Jon Hare, USA

sailors in berets
wave from the rigging
harbor sunset

Bill Cooper, USA

barefoot summers
the distant cry
of a lost calf

Anne Fox, USA

tidal pool
a crab escapes
the shadow of my hand

Frank Hooven, USA

morning scorcher —
a squirrel sploots
in the car's shadow

Louisa Howerow, Canada

sultry heat —
sharing the shade
with a beggar

caldo afoso-
condividendo l'ombra
con un mendicante

Carmela Marino, Italy

lingering drought . . .
garter snakes dart
under the sprinkler

Debbie Scheving, USA

smoke pillars
smudge an orange sky —
no sound of wings

Gwen Bitti, Australia

summer raging waves —
the sunken ship fills with bioluminescence

夏荒波沈没船に生物発光

Christina Chin, Malaysia
Translation- Nagata Mitsunori, Japan

high wind warnings
pinwheels spinning
amileamminute

Michael Henry Lee, USA

after the tornado
the sand castle
still standing

Michael Lamb, USA

tanabata —
a paper prayer
cornflower blue

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

rain forest
healed by songs
of hummingbirds

Helen Sokolsky, USA

evening walk
a stray cat's eyes
follow us home

Bhawana Rathore, India

yellow grass
past mowing
the heron's shadow

Mark Forrester, USA

summer rain
churning up the soil –
cello lesson

ploaia de vară
învolverând pământul -
lectia de violoncel

Mircea Moldovan, România

rush hour
the highway a river
of stars

Anju Kishore, India

meteorites
in the dark hours
a shower of wishes

Richard Kakol, Australia

tepid breeze
dust of a night butterfly
twinkles on a curtain

mlačni povjeterac
na zavjesi svjetluca
prah noćnog leptira

Nina Kovačić, Croatia

over the llano
a day moon
sliver

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

cumulonimbus
dad's
flock of sheep

nori cumulus
a tatălui
turmă de oi

Cezar Ciobica Sr., Romania

holding on to summer —
a baseball mitt
atop the toy chest

Nicholas Gentile, USA

last light of summer
my boy kicks arc after arc
of sand

夏末的餘暉
我的孩子踢出一道又一道
的沙子弧線

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

a skipping stone's
last click
katydids

Tom Bierovic, USA

wind eddies
through the grassland
the stop-start crickets

Ben Oliver, UK

old riverfront store
sunlight peels off
a faded Coke mural

河畔舊店
陽光剝落
褪色的可樂壁畫

John Zheng, USA

corn tassels
his burial
tomorrow

Susan Farner, USA

pink embers
dipping into the sea
sunset flamingoes

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

full moon shining snail path

John Pappas, USA

carving
calligraphy into fog
a pair of antlers

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

autumn pruning
the whine of a mosquito
grazes my ear

Tony Williams, Scotland

lunch time
the cheese-yellow linden
losing leaves

Adrian Bouter, Holland

smoke haze
over the cane fields
harvest's end

Mark Miller, Australia

short day
the remaining mangroves
air their mudflats

Zara, New Zealand

crabapple tree
among the fallen fruit
wild yeast

vackorfa
potyadéka közt
vad erjedés

Zsolt L. Rakusz, Hungary

rustling reeds
even the flamingos
in greyscale

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

barn raising —
the last clank of a hammer
becomes a church bell

gradnja sjenika —
zadnji udarac čekića
postaje crkveno zvono

Martina Matijević, Croatia

fading light . . .
a chorus of tree frogs
singing in rounds

Terri L. French, USA

pink sunset
the blue-black arc
of raven wings

Louise Hopewell, Australia

chinese lanterns
each papery husk
holding dusk

الفوانيس الصينية
كل قشرة ورقية
في أنتظار الغسق

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

farm sale
the old farmer
keeps one cow

Edward J. Rielly, USA

alone in the razed field the oak tree

Timothy Daly, Italy

hunter's moon
a dreamy tremble
to the old dog's paw

David Gale, UK

intermittent wind
the rustling
of song dogs

Jeff Hoagland, USA

brushing leaf fall
from a grave . . .
evening silhouette

Anna Cates, USA

lunar eclipse
the forest cloaked
in silence

Kevin Valentine, USA

sparkling
in the matryoshka's eyes . . .
supermoon

Nicholas Klacsanzky, USA

temple bell
through the mist
a whiff of wild plum

Angela Terry, USA

stunted junipers
scattered by the wind
across the ridgetops

zakržljali grmovi kleka
raštrkani vjetrom
po vrhovima grebena

Goran Gatalica, Croatia

mountain stream
a fisherman knee-deep
in the morning mist

Rick Jackofsky, USA

tree gloam
the false eyes
of an io moth

Dylan Stover, USA

power outage
an autumn moon watches over
the village houses

pană de curent
luna de toamnă veghează
casele din sat

Steliana Cristina Voicu, Romania

exotic mushrooms
Grandma sees distant lands in
a pot of soup

egzotyczny grzyb
w garnku babcinej zupy
odległe lądy

Urszula Marciniak, Poland

arms folded
the full moon
at the door

Jamie Wimberly, USA

autumn sun
the shadow of a pine tree
hangs down the steep slope

jesensko sunce
sjena bora
visi niz strmu padinu

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia

hay dolls—
an old lullaby
from the attic

ਸੁਆਪੀ ਟੋਛੇਫੀਡੀ—
ਟੀਥਾ ਏਲੁਲਾਥ ਨਲੋਂ ਘਰ
ਏਥੇ ਘੋਸ਼ਘੋਸ਼ਾਥੀ

Jagajit Salam, India

leaf litter
a lizard dives in
head first

Cynthia Anderson, USA

autumn chill —
a fairy ring circles
yesterday's rain

शरद की सिहरन —
परी-वृत्त घेरे
कल की बारिश

Neena Singh, India

a shooting —
the plops of chestnuts
on the asphalt

une fusillade
les plops des marrons
sur l'asphalte

Marie Derley, Belgium

on either side
of twilight
kites and sky-lanterns

Ravi Kiran, India

freight train . . .
in the last carriage
harvest moon

teretni vlak
u zadnjem vagonu
žetveni mjesec

Mihovila Čeperić-Biljan, Croatia

harvest moon
the bruised apples
set aside

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

chilly clatter
of pachinko balls
autumn deepens

秋深き パチンコ玉の 音冷えて

Keiko Izawa, Japan (EC)

nor'easter
a teacup
warms my hands

Joshua St. Claire, USA

early frost—
the last marigold
still burning

Thomas L. Vaultonburg, USA

winter sun
the black duck's
golden eye

Ruth Holzer, USA

pitted field
mud-lodged shrapnel
catching snowflakes

Joost ter Braake, the Netherlands

ice crust dawn
crows play pick-up-sticks
with scattered bones

John Hawkhead, England (EC)

winter rain
the bus shelter full
of sheep

Lev Hart, Canada

clear ice
a stairway of bubbles
into the dark

David Liu, USA

starlight
on a frozen pond
sliding geese

Robert Witmer, Japan

where they end
his tracks
in the snow

Alexander Groth, Germany

glacial lake
the little chapel built
from left-behinds

Jim Chessing, USA

dad's grave . . .
a butterfly lands
on my shoulder

Stephenie Story, USA

morning frost—
the spider's web
holds nothing

Jacek Margolak, Poland

hugging the baobab voices of my ancestors

Rupa Anand, India

saline lagoon
a diving bird returns
from the otherworld

Thomas Powell, Northern Ireland

mother's old diary
does not mince words
baby dead

Simon Wilson, UK

ash-blue sky
to the west a string
of dead volcanoes

Janet Ruth, USA

old letter
his tender voice still heard
between the lines

Mona Iordan, Romania

winter hush –
two mute swans ruffling
in the millpond

Stephanie Newbern, USA

late afternoon
a blackbird tests
the thaw

C.X. Turner, UK

Editor's Choices (EC)—Haiku

A deep bow of gratitude to the ever-growing tribe of haiku poets who trust us with their work. In these times of flux, it is invaluable. We have been getting more and more submissions every issue and that to me, is a reflection of our collective poetic spirit of hope in peace. I hope you enjoyed the journey through the many seasons, through seas, wetlands, forests, bogs and rivers, through drought, monsoon, snow and fog, with pug pups, katydids, a brumby and an io moth for company! The haiku section is a portfolio of the vastness and diversity of our environment, its creatures (us included) and a wide range of emotions.

I should be writing a few lines on each of the haiku that were selected for this issue (and on some of those that unfortunately could not be selected this time). But here are a few thoughts on three poems that I came back to many times.



april showers
park swings empty
after the shooting

Rowan Beckett Minor, USA (EC)

Rowen Beckett Minor brings us a haiku about the reality of our times. It's a normal day and the weather is just about right – it's April and there are showers. And when it rains, what does one expect? The park swings will empty out as worried parents usher their children home before they catch a cold. This is what came to mind as I was reading the haiku. And then, the poet deftly lands a punch that leaves the reader out of breath in line 3. The shocking last word – 'shooting' – reaches us, jolts our being, continuing to occupy us, pushing us to grieve our state of existence amidst violence. The understated tone of the haiku leaves the impact of the message in the reader, far more powerful than stating it in bold or italics or screaming it from a microphone. This, to me, is a priceless quality in haiku. The park swings show us that the victims are children. April showers show us that it was just another lovely day till the aftermath of violence took it over. These details are not told to us, just shown through the images. The poet has crafted the

haiku with skill, paying attention to the structure, making it as bare as possible, unveiling the punch and landing it as intended in the last word. The poem also makes us think of haiku as a form that deals with contemporary situations and realities and not as a form that can only speak of soft images. The reader can see that the poet has used 'april showers' with intent and not just as a nature word/season indicator that is sometimes treated as a 'necessary' detail in haiku. I invite you to engage with the image of line 1 and its significance, along with the other two powerful lines. For instance, does April showers bring hope that the month of May might bring blossoms? Thank you, Rowan Beckett Minor for the poem and the message.



ice crust dawn
crows play pick-up-sticks
with scattered bones

John Hawkhead, England (EC)

John Hawkhead brings to us many emotions and multiple layers in this haiku. An 'ice crust dawn' is delicious enough sensorially – you can see, feel, hear the dawn all at once. And then, the visual of crows is ushered in. Describing their activity as 'pick-up-sticks' brings a levity to the verse. (The poet is preparing the fertile ground for the final line.) 'scattered bones' is a powerful image by itself. But the poet insists, in his trademark style, that we the readers do our bit by uncovering the layers of meaning and the gravity of the situation. What type of bones are they? Leftovers or something more sinister? Is it a battlefield? All of this depends on the reader. It could be just a jolly morning in the poet's neck of the woods or it could be a mirror to our collective existential state. The words flow lightly onto the page but how we read them is a reflection of how far and deep we are willing to carry the image. Thank you, John Hawkhead, for this fine haiku.



chilly clatter
of pachinko balls
autumn deepens

秋深き パチンコ玉の 音冷えて

Keiko Izawa, Japan (EC)

Keiko Izawa brings us a contemporary scene through this haiku that awakens multiple senses and yet, hints at more than what meets our sensorial engagement. For the uninitiated, 'pachinko' is a mechanical pinball machine that is used to gamble. The word 'pachin' itself is a reference to the clatter of steely pinballs. The poet uses the word 'chilly' to invoke the chill of the year-end in line 1 and goes on to linking 'clatter' to pinballs. Lines 1 and 2 to me, were only a description of the process, albeit beautifully accurate. However, when read with the 3rd line 'autumn deepens', the layers unfold and the discomfort and reality of what could be a social challenge of addiction to gambling and financial challenges comes through. To add to this, is the layer of life being a game of chance. And as autumn deepens, the things we take a chance on, the moments we gamble on, may all be adding to the chill! Again, the poet may have only intended a pachinko parlour as autumn deepens, but I couldn't help but think about the hinted social significance. Again, a haiku of understatement but with a classic kigo that pulls its weight in adding gravitas to the poem and ushering us into the darker winter nights. Thank you, Keiko Izawa, for allowing us the opportunity to deep-dive.

With Gratitude,

Geethanjali Rajan

Haiga – Part 1

Adelaide B. Shaw – USA



Bonnie J Scherer — Alaska/USA



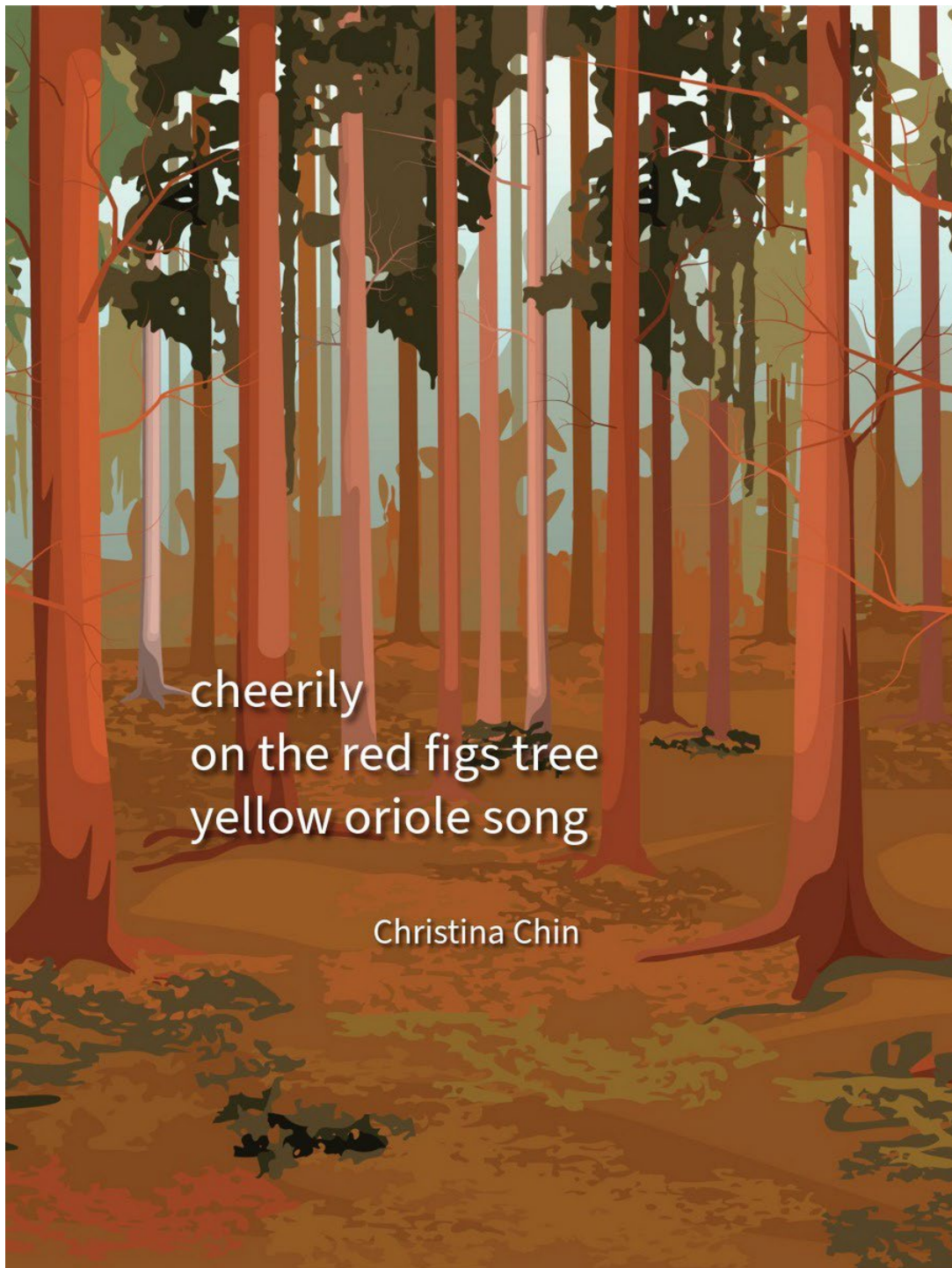
crashing waves
my sneakers
fill with sand

Poem/Image: Bonnie J Scherer

Christa Pandey — USA



Christina Chin — Malaysia



cheerily
on the red figs tree
yellow oriole song

Christina Chin

Dan Hardison — USA



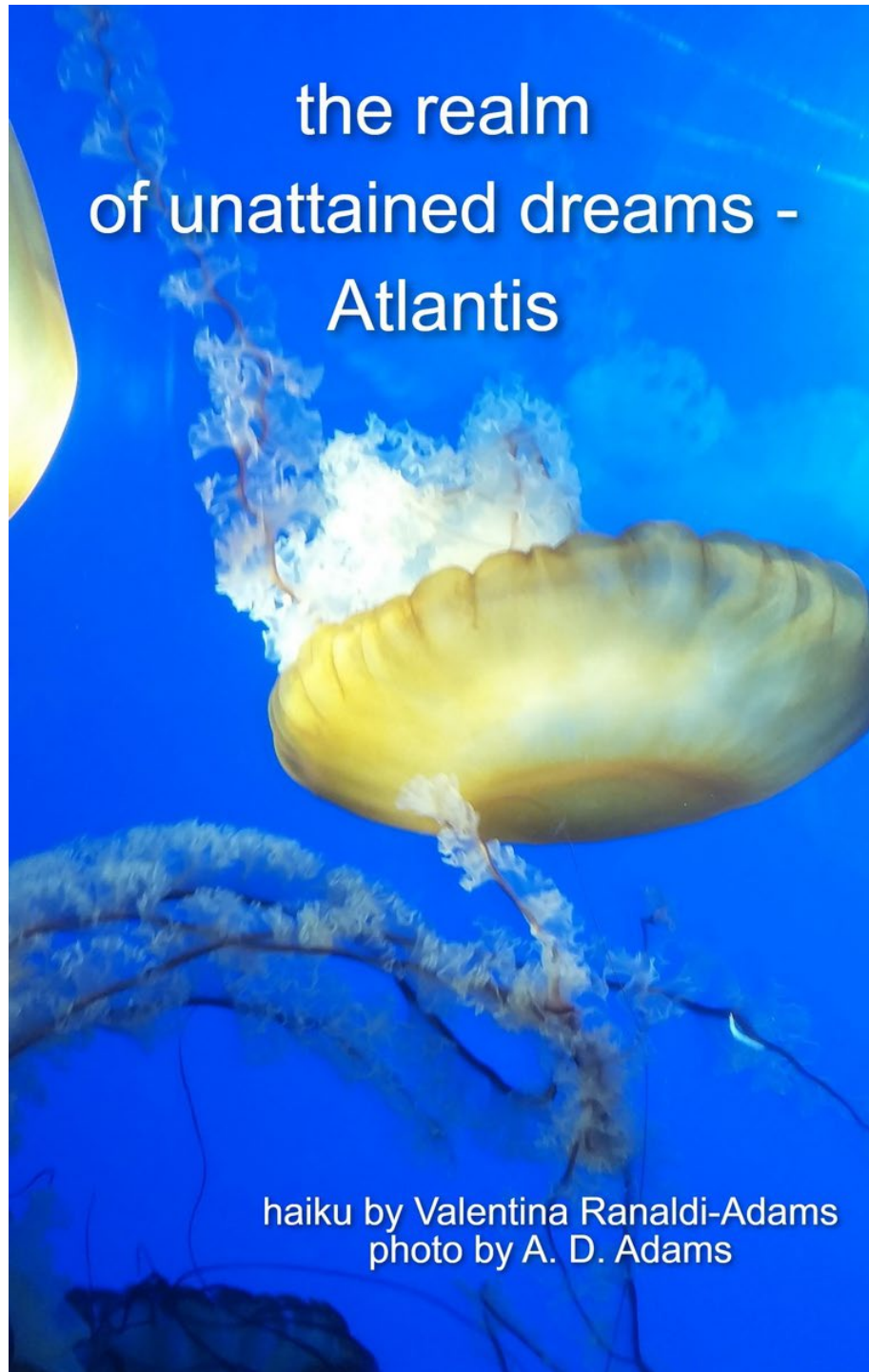
*under the sea
a world of wonder
blue silence*

Dan Hardison

Daya Bhat — India



Valentina Ranaldi-Adams & A.D. Adams — USA



Senryu



© Michela Griffith

Lichens map slow growth on fallen birch

the delicate art
of tearing out
the insurance disk

Ben Rowsome, Ireland

dog days
a blade missing
from the ceiling fan

M. R. Pelletier, USA

the inner red
of grandpa's dust-covered lip
parched corn

Bill Cooper, USA

birthday party
not enough cake
for all the candles

Sean Murphy, USA

recounting his weekend
the f-bomb
as every part of speech

Joshua St. Claire, USA

rehab walk
my soft spot
for fallen leaves

Brad Bennett, USA

garden party
mistaking a monarch
for a viceroy

Gordon Brown, USA

old geology book
between the Mesozoic and Cenozoic
a pressed flower

vecchio libro di geologia
tra il Mesozoico e il Cenozoico
un fiore pressato

Oscar Luparia, Italy

toxic chemicals
the boy who developed
in a dark room

John Hawkhead, UK

handsewn voodoo doll
all the pins
in his crotch

Randy Brooks, USA

wasp season
I'm an insect
salt lick

Nola Obee, Canada

powdered sugar on
fresh beignets
first snow

Catherine Puma, USA

end of Balloon Fiesta
Frankenstein collapsed
in our back yard

Janet Ruth, USA

drive-thru window
she recognizes
the dog first

Travis Park, USA

prickly pears parenting

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

some to the water . . .
some to the wind . . .
father's ashes

Terri L. French, USA

boxcar train
one graffiti canvas
after another

Michael J. Galko, USA

family dinner —
the silence
between the potatoes

rodziny obiad —
cisza
przy ziemniakach

Jacek Margolak, Poland

inside the casket —
his phone
ringing

Dave McLaughlin, USA

kintsugi . . .
more gold than silver
in her hair

кинцуги...
повече злато отколкото сребро
в косите ѝ

Vladislav Hristov, Bulgaria

deadheading
the last of the geraniums
your scent lingers

Jon Hare, USA

decollage
the parts of myself
I keep hidden

Debbie Strange, Canada

staycation
the surf sounds and breeze
from your CPAP mask

Carol Ann Palomba, USA

tornado warning—
she grabs her cell phone
and ruby slippers

Angela Terry, USA

men's choir
the dissonance
resolves

Rohan Buettel, Australia

Easter day in Oz
a guest lands on our doorstep
pink frangipani

Paula Ann O'Reilly, Ireland

night walk a take-away box dances in the March wind

Fionnuala Waldron, Ireland

picnic etiquette
I blow a weevil
off my thumb

Dylan Stover, USA

rosewood cupboard —
in grandpa's snuff
a pinch of autumn

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

a calico cat
just crossed my path . . .
the future uncertain

Rick Jackofsky, USA

ninth month
a blue flashing light
colours the moon

neuvième mois
un gyrophare bleu
colore la lune

Marie Derley, Belgium

blending into
the subway mural
a busker

Ravi Kiran, India (EC)

as close
as I come to prayer
the park bench

Tim Dwyer, Northern Ireland/USA

post office
the long line
to the speed post counter

తపాలా కార్యాలయం
శీఘ్ర తపాలా కిటికీ ముందు
పోడవాటి వరుస

*Nivedita Narsapuram, India
(tr. Srinivasa Rao Sambangi)*

hospice garden
we take the tumor
for a walk

Bryan Rickert, USA

on the clothesline
your little black dress
doing the jitterbug

Brian Kates, USA

cigarette butts
in the ashtray
a whiff of war

niedopałki papierosów
w popielniczce
powiew wojny

Eugeniusz Zacharski, Poland

the baby
who had no name
blood moon

Nancy Orr, USA

airplane mode...
powering down
for a nap

Michael Lamb, USA

shadows
dapple Buddha's butt
half-enlightened

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

graduation day —
dad lets me touch
the thermostat

Thomas David, UK

tule fog the ghost of friendship past

Cynthia Anderson, USA

thunder —
on the sofa
I hug my dog

رعد
على الأريكة
أعانق كلابي

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria (EC)

cataracts removed
all the blues
I was missing

David Liu, USA (EC)

concentration
as a child baits the hook . . .
her twisting tongue

George Skane, USA

dance classes
my daughter discovers
that she can fly

lekcje tańca
moja córka odkrywa
że umie latać

Aleksandra Rybczyńska, Poland

delayed train
clouds going somewhere
I'm not

Tony Williams, UK

fading apple blossom
she moves from daddy
to dad

Ben Oliver, UK

beach walk
grandpa's footprint
holds a baby crab

समुद्र-तट की सैर —
दादाजी के पदचिह्न
थामे नन्हा केकड़ा

Neena Singh, India

war
what most people know about
gnus

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

teacher's red corrections
the kid cries
for her wounded words

Pegah Rahmati Nezhad, Iran

four decades . . .
some jigsaw puzzle pieces
missing

Mohua Maulik, India

end of polls —
the crows return
to peck at leftovers

انتخابات کے اختتام پر —
کوئے لوٹ آتے ہیں
بچا کھچا چگئے

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

thrift shop jacket
an unused plane ticket
in the breast pocket

Mark Miller, Australia

under a willow
he loses her
to Mr. Darcy

Elaine Wilburt, USA

summer vacation
letting
the hay grow

Tim Cremin, USA (EC)

talk of war
a smear of gnats
on my cheek

談論戰爭
臉頰上一小撮
蚊蚋污痕

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

crescent moon —
the child winks
with his blind eye

luna crescente—
il bimbo fa l'occhiolino
con l'occhio cieco

Carmela Marino, Italy

temple bells —
how softly a prayer
unfolds

मंदिर की घंटियाँ —
कितनी धीरे-धीरे एक प्रार्थना
आकार लेती है

Mona Bedi, India

one kitten
asleep in a basket . . .
three children, waiting

Barrie Levine, USA

breakup
last year's buds
open

Vikram Kolmannskog, Norway

barefoot in the park
pink plastic shoes
on the fence post

Susan Farner, USA

little mountain town
the train's horn rattling
our whole house

Rowan Beckett Minor, USA

small town
locals wave at me —
a stranger on a stroll

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik, USA

wild child
sagging tattoos
wrap the grandchildren

Gavin Austin, Australia

hottest summer
the migrants' clothes
swaying over the weeds

Lakshmi Iyer, India

school run
bored mothers
sharpen tongues

Natalia Gameson, UK

shooting stars
the students I used
to shout at

étoiles filantes
les élèves que
j'engueulais

Timothy Daly, Italy

the taste of every colour
on my tongue
burning oilfield stench

Mark Gilbert, UK

the two of us
crunching cookies
all the words unsaid

Jenny Sharpe, Canada

on the train
to far from here
I get off at my stop

in 'n trein
noar wied vot van hier
ik stap oet bie j mien halte

Joost ter Braake, the Netherlands

first snow . . .
the little girl puts on her boots
by herself

prima zăpadă...
fetița își pune cizmele
singură

Steliana Voicu, Romania (EC)

something to cling to pocket buddha

Matthew Markworth, USA

nightgown
an old woman folds
at the belly button

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi, India

decree absolute
pocketing small change
from the back of the sofa

David Gale, UK

the tiny straw
in my sex on the beach . . .
first date

Violet Avery Hall, USA

chemotherapy
her classmates
cut their hair

Stephenie Story, USA

a homeless man
tells a story to the teddy bear . . .
end of summer

un om fără adăpost
îi spune o poveste ursulețului de pluș...
sfârșitul verii

Mircea Moldovan, Romania

prairie graveyard
we make our trip to dad's stone
when wild plums ripen

Tyson West, USA

he is
all in . . .
chair yoga

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

reunited . . .
turning our clocks
back

Kevin Valentine, USA

beachcombing the stories the tides cannot tell

Mike Fainzilber, Israel

garden walk
my secret spot
not so secret

Ben Gaa, USA

distant thunder
her tight grasp
on my forefinger

Neha Singh Soni, India

another bottle of rosé
the conversation still
going nowhere

още една бутилка розе
разговорът все още
върви на никъде

Nadejda Kostadinova, Bulgaria

after the argument
two teacups
cool together

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

lobster red —
the deepening hue
of the plein air painter

Katie Montagna, Ireland

rainy weekend
the poems
dry up

John Pappas, USA

deep spring cleaning
she leaves one web
in a corner

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

the sleeping baby's mudras long haul flight

eitilt fhada múdraí an bhabaí ina choladh

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

grandma's tintype
the sharp edge
of our jaw line

Lori Becherer, USA

mom's china teacups
the brittleness
of her bones

Kim Klugh, USA

rushed breakfast
toast crumbs
on a stranger's plate

Simon Wilson, UK

cold water
one towel hanging
instead of two

Emil Karla, France

new glasses
the world sharp enough
to hurt

C.X. Turner, UK

trick or treat
the candy heart's
Red Dye #3

Seth Friedman, Canada

tariff news
another dollar
in the "swear jar"

David Green, USA

Sunday visit
the kettle boiling
on the stove

Mike Montreuil, Canada

memory club
a rusty garden gate
creaks open

Patricia Hawkhead, UK

Editor's Choices (EC) – Senryu

What a wonderful collection of themes and images there are to muse upon in this issue. My thanks to all the submitting authors for sharing their writings. They have offered flying children, spiritual infants, pressed flowers, social butterflies, voodoo dolls, frangipani petals, take-away cartons, weevils and cigarette butts. A generous gallimaufry of English language senryu and translations.

I was struck by the ambiguity within several pieces in this issue. When opening out a poem, there's a fine line to tread. If the ambiguity stretches out to infinity, it may not restrict the possibilities in any meaningful way. By contrast, if the scope is too restricted, there may be no room to consider alternatives.



blending into
the subway mural
a busker

Ravi Kiran, India (EC)

Ravi shares an urban setting with us. Somewhere underground, a busker is shown to be merging into their background. This piece encouraged me to investigate that idea. Is the busker so essential to the experience of a subway that their presence feels as natural as a mural? In essence, they have become a vibrant, but essential, element of the experience? Alternatively, has the busker been worn down by their day? Perhaps they are performing with less energy and, effectively, disappearing into the mural background.



thunder –
on the sofa
I hug my dog

رعد
على الأريكة
أعانق كلبتي

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria (EC)

On the surface, Fatma appears to have provided a simple domestic scene. If we take everything at face value, we still don't have a clear description. Does the person hug the dog to comfort themselves, or is the dog upset by the thunder? If we consider some alternatives, the thunder could represent other sounds. Explosions of fireworks, gunshots or even bombs. At that point, the domestic scene might be far from cosy. Perhaps, in such a situation, the dog and the person are comforting each other.



cataracts removed
all the blues
I was missing

David Liu, USA (EC)

David appears to be telling us a simple story; how one's vision may improve following the removal of a cataract. And yet, the choice of colour offers a further reading, echoing an idea from C. X. Turner's senryu. Now everything has become clearer, is it harder to avoid the unpleasantness in the world? It's remarkable how the interpretation of a single word can pivot the reading of a poem. When there are so few words, that possibility feels almost magical.



war
what most people know about
gnus

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

I don't claim to fully understand this piece, but I think it's brilliant. Robert sets the scene in line one with a single word. War can conjure some extremely unpleasant images. The direction of the poem appears to be a dark one. However, the third line pulls the rug from under us and leaves us trying to work out what happened. I would have found the poem interesting if it had ended with the word "guns". In the UK, I don't see any marketing around handguns, but I believe there is a remarkable amount of money spent on promoting them in countries where they are on sale in supermarkets. In those places, people are constantly being told about gun specifications. We are not given the word "guns", but the word "gnus", which looks like it might be a typo. Gnu is another word for wildebeest. I like to think this remarkable last line is asking us to take a moment to look at the wider picture. Outside our immediate sphere of influence there is a world of remarkable diversity. If we never pause to consider that world, it may be lost before we realise its gone.



first snow . . .
the little girl puts on her boots
by herself

prima zăpadă...
fetița își pune cizmele
singură

Steliana Voicu, Romania (EC)

For many people who have been enduring summers with record temperatures, the snowy scene which Steliana paints will come as a welcome change. It is the cool climate of the first line which offers me a potential pivot to the reading. If this is the natural progression of the seasons, then the little girl is simply learning a degree of independence as she grows. That's another 'landmark' in the growth of a child. But what if winter is metaphorical, rather than literal? The little girl's life may have been

deflected by unfortunate circumstances. Now the person who used to help her with her boots is gone and she must perform that task by herself. How important it is to understand the intention of the first line here, but how fascinating it is to explore the alternatives.



summer vacation

letting

the hay grow

Tim Cremin, USA (EC)

This feels like it might be a line from Huckleberry Finn. An explanation where doing nothing was an act of benevolence and ultimate productivity. Having a grounding in ecology, this idea rings true. Isabella Tree and Charlie Burrell (the owners of the Knepp estate in the UK) frequently espouse the idea of “sitting on your hands”, especially when trying to wild (or rewild) your land. It’s often the hardest thing to do, because intervention always feels like it will be useful. And yet, by sitting and watching natural changes play out, one can learn much more about ecology and succession. There’s a story from New Zealand which follows this pattern. Hugh Wilson left a large area of the Banks Peninsula to regenerate in the 1980s. It was initially covered in gorse (considered by many to be an invasive pest species), but this served as cover for native trees to develop. Now, the area is one big native woodland. A lack of intervention may be the key. When the journey is a complex one, understanding each step may well be beyond a casual observer.

David J Kelly

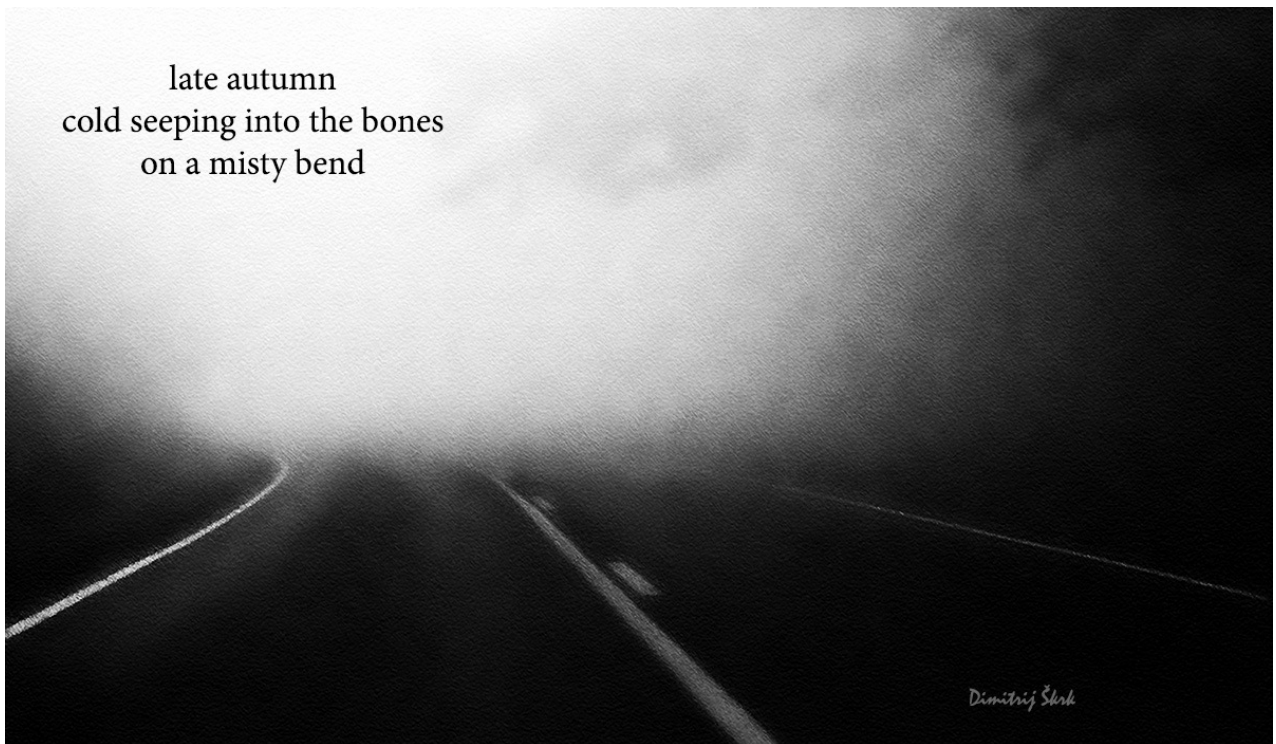
Haiga – Part 2

Debbie Strange — Canada



Dimitrij Škrk — Slovenia

late autumn
cold seeping into the bones
on a misty bend



Dimitrij Škrk

Elliot Diamond & Mathew Cohen—USA



*after sunset—
the branch
heavy with silence*

haiku: Elliot Diamond
photo: Mathew Cohen

Eugeniusz Zacharski & Jacek Pokrak — Poland



Franjo Ordanić & Sandra Šamec — Croatia



Photo by: Sandra Šamec, Haiku by: Franjo Ordanić

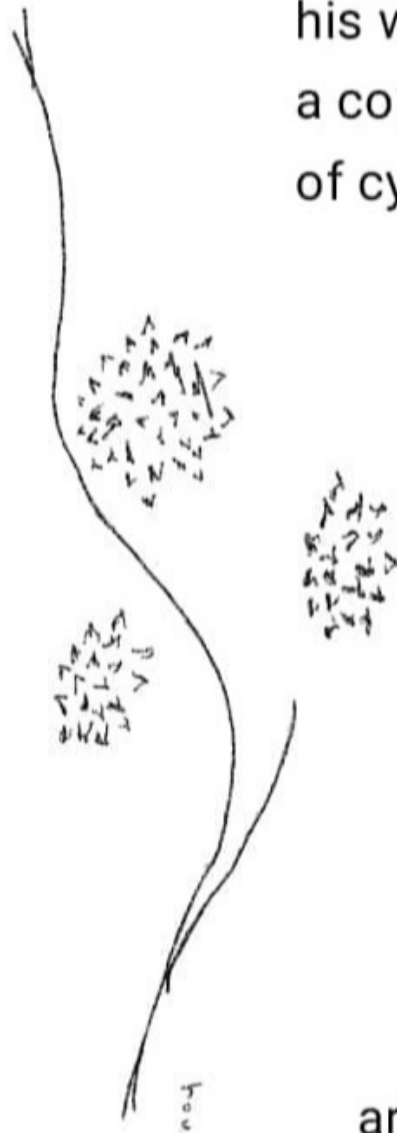
Gavin Austin — Australia



Sheikha A. & Josiah — U.A.E

sunlit litter
of fallen pines...
his wife's ultrasound
a comet
of cysts

Sheikha A.



artwork by Josiah

Tanka



© Michela Griffith

Summer fireworks: ling heather and blaeberry

half-laid floorboards
you send the photograph
without thinking
how quickly a body
learns the shape of belonging

C.X. Turner, U.K

delicate blossoms
of white bougainvillea
beside the river path
with gentle fingers
you weave a wreath into my hair

nježni cvjetovi
bijeke bugenvilije
put uz rijeku
mekim prstima pleteš
vjenčić u mojoj kosi

Sanjana Zorinc, Croatia

sun's golden light
on a lighthouse rock
a girl sings softly . . .
offshore a sailing ship
slowly fades away

Florian Munteanu, Romania

wind makes no choice
it blusters & gusts
tests & disrupts —
the space between us
will never be chaos

Mark Gilbert, UK

dry well
I count the pebbles
to forget you
the full moon always returns
I wait for your long absence to end

بئر جاف
أعد الحصى
لأنساك
البدر يعود دائماً
أنتظر انتهاء غيابك الطويل

فاطمة الزهراء حبيس، الجزائر
Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

if a loon with nothing
can fill the night with calls
why is it that I
rich with memories of you
lie here full of melancholy

Sally Biggar, USA

on a first name basis
with the widow three doors down
weeding her front yard
the dusky fragrance
of her hot lips salvia

Jim Chessing, USA

looking for love
in all the wrong places
a rain-soaked crow
stepping gingerly around
all the puddles

Edward Dewar, Canada

I give up
weeding the garden
how useless
this attempt to control
your restless heart

Bryan Rickert, USA

the afternoon sun
filled with raindrops
sorting through
each leftover cloud
tarnished by you

Joanna Ashwell, UK

coffee rings
from your mug
on polished teak
the castaway part
of you that stays

Gavin Austin, Australia (EC)

we travelled
together on this journey
of mine
five years symptom free
now you're not here to celebrate

Celia Hope, Aotearoa New Zealand

an old wooden bench
beneath the fading sunset
holds silent echoes
I carry the warmth of love
through the shadows of goodbye

Manasa Reddy Chichili, India

we two are now
one elderly couple
peering from the beach
over waves and mermaids . . .
seeking one more sunset

Simon Wilson, UK

sitting beside
the rocking chair
without thinking
a push to watch it sway
the way it used to

Nicholas Gentile, USA (EC)

huddled together
the last warmth of embers
outlives the flames
we hold hands in failing light
night closes around us

Thomas Smith, USA

the vortex
of a falling
feather . . .
the gift
of each day

Timothy Daly, Italy,

intoxicating beauty
a wild orchid mimics
a wasp's mate
seeding colors to warm hearts
clasping flowers after rains

Douglas J. Lanzo, USA

a bluebird
on the windowsill
meets my gaze —
for a heartbeat
our wings touch

Jenny Ward Angyal, USA

vacation
in a river town . . .
I hear
the river's ageless song
even in my dreams

Srini, India

spring again
the storks migrating
northward;
the old nesting sites
already waiting

wieder Frühling
die Störche ziehen
nach Norden;
die alten Brutplätze
warten schon

Pitt Buerken, Germany

stray leaves
gather in the pool . . .
I kneel to see
how even fleeting things
find a place to rest

बिखरे पते
ताल में एकत्रित. . .
मैं घुटनों के बल बैठ देखती हूँ
कैसे क्षणभंगुर भी
पा लेते हैं ठौर

Neena Singh, India

a star-studded
moonless night . . .
how often
we overlook the little things
that brighten our lives

Mohua Maulik, India

grey clouds
settle over blue hills
sheep dot fields
checkerboard farms flash past
holding me still

Gwen Bitti, Australia (EC)

wildfire smoke
choking the air
this blessed rain clearing
the sky...
flash flood warning

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

purple and white phlox
transplanted from woodland
to garden
my plan and nature's . . .
mine losing again

Adelaide B. Shaw, USA

if asked
what is the world ...
poppy seeds
in the hands
of a child

Dylan Stover, USA

a blue jay
from branch to branch
what would I
be doing
if not this?

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

Sunday morning
I foraged in the forest
for mushrooms
my footprints remain
mingled with animal tracks

nedjeljno jutro
šumom u potrazi
za gljivama
moji tragovi stopala ostaju
pomiješani s tragovima životinja

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia (EC)

waves lazily slap
the shore and shingle
pushed and pulled
by the moon's phases
your ever-changing moods

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

grey cloud —
resting on the mountain
a spot of light
God in the grey
God in the light

Florence Heyhoe, Northern Ireland

red maple leaves
and the impermanence
of everything . . .
you remind me to live
one season at a time

Debbie Strange, Canada

anniversary
of a death —
the waist-high apple tree
opens
five leaves

Michael Battisto, USA

wildflowers
filling a vacant lot
give it time
be patient
and forbear the rain

Anna Cates, USA

Windsor Ruins . . .
a haunting silhouette
against red sunset
sinking into
shimmering ashes

John Zheng, USA

the way the tide
draws into herself
now I too
take on the shape
of loss

Farah Ali, UK

stratocumulus
lower and lower
across Long Mountain
a wild pear tree
breaks into bud

Joshua St. Claire, USA

overnight rain
the curtain of fog still thick
over the valley
a bowl of poha*
steams from the porch

*poha: flattened rice crisps

Vishal Prabhu, India

caring for her . . .
every day we complete
a new jigsaw puzzle
driving home the subtle variations
in cloud colors more noticeable

Debbie Scheving, USA

autumn leaves
with rusty edges
trying to cover
with foundation
the first age spots

runzele toamnei
cu rugină pe margini...
încerc s-acopăr
cu fond de ten primele
pete de bătrânețe

Cezar Ciobica Sr., Romania

another login
another password reset . . .
at sunset
the hill is exactly where
I left it yesterday

Nalini Shetty, India

tilting
on the cliff's edge
a gull poised
how does a mother know
when she's ready to fly

Suraja Roychowdhury, USA

just when I thought
I had figured it out
a thunderstorm —
an uprooted eucalyptus tree
on the roadside

Bhawana Rathore, India

waiting at the rain's edge--
novice monks enter
the hotel lobby
joyous like their chanted prayers
the monsoon's hypnotic sobbing

Ivan Randall, Cambodia

braving the wind and rain
i cycle along
with my friend
exploring new paths
we recover our old selves

Sathya Venkatesh, India

my secret desire
a cartwheel
when no one is near
righting the upside down
of childhood

C. Jean Downer, Canada

downsizing
I hear my first attempts
when sorting sheets
of music from childhood . . .
they refuse to let me go

Margaret Owen Ruckert, Australia

breakers
crashing on the rocks...
I open myself to the dark
and no longer know
what holds me on shore

Louisa Howerow, Canada (EC)

on the other shore
of the surging Pacific
an immigrant
I look past what once was
and wonder what now is

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

curled up street cat
sleeping in a corner
i stop by
just to praise
the innocence

Pegah Rahmati Nezhad, Iran

beneath the sidewalk
bitter orange trees,
flashlights in hand
on a cold night
two wanderers hunt for bread

زیر نارنج‌های پیاده‌رو،
چراغ‌قوه به دست،
آذرماهی سرد،
— دو مرد شبگرد
نان

Seyed Edris Hosseini, Iran
(Persian original):

the house rules
are relaxed these days
for our old dog —
he wipes his muzzle
on the new upholstery

Keitha Keyes, Australia

fluids pool
in my leg
I don't dream of marathons
just walks with
a granddaughter

Ivan Cole, Australia

gallery images
frozen in time
smiles and stoics —
my family memories
in black and white

Mary E. Gastmeier, Canada

there is a park
by my mother's house
with a swing set
I leave memories there
to sway in the breeze

Jared Frank, USA

purl stitches
with a long stray hair
entwined . . .
even when I knit alone
my child still with me

Cynthia Bale, Canada

she asks
why no girl . . .
a cold wind through
the cracked window
ripples the tea

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

crisp marine salute
I hold father's coffin flag
after the burial
now I stew grey silence
speaking never of my war

Tyson West, USA

reunited . . .
three daughters
rummaging the attic
find a tattered shoe box
with dad's medals

Stephenie Story, USA

at the bus stop
clutching his wet palm —
all the years
since mama's fingers
slipped out of mine

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

a quilt frame
spread out between
two sisters
the piecework
of forgiveness

Randy Brooks, USA

butter chunks
in the mustard saag
mom and I
return to the time when
everyone was home

مکھن کے ٹکڑے
سرسوں کے ساگ میں
میں اور ماں
پلٹ جاتے ہیں اُس زمانے میں
جب گھر بھرپور آباد تھا

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

making sujebi*
for an ailing daughter . . .
why didn't I ever tell mother
how her rice consommé
comforted me

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan (EC)

**sujebi: traditional Korean hand-torn pieces
of dough simmered in a broth of vegetables and anchovies.*

mom's new cathedral
never in one place
always changing
but never boring . . .
the trees overhead

Anthony Lusardi, USA (EC)

puddles of light
in a rutted road
the quick footsteps
of a child
squeezing his coins

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

released
by the autumn wind
a yellow leaf
clings
to the hospice window

Rick Jackofsky, USA

helping you
to the beach
unsteady
at first and then
a smile from long ago

Jon Hare, USA

I catch
the sun playing
with gossamer
and for a moment
I feel no pain

Lynne Schilling, USA

early morning
an empty bench on the hillcrest
every visit
to the rest home
I covet that view

Anne Louise Curran, New Zealand

graveside
I recite the poem
she wrote for me
when we
were sixteen

Kevin Valentine, USA

a soldier
embraces his frail shadow
beneath a wild apple tree
on the first day of peace
pompous speeches

un soldat
îmbrățișează umbra sa fragilă
sub un măr sălbatic—
în prima zi de pace
discursuri pomposae

Mircea Moldovan, România

the first cold day —
she follows their usual route
every day now
to his gravestone
which is always cold

Urszula Marciniak, Poland

after the bombs
they are rebuilding a life
ever more precarious . . .
more fragile my hopes
in the days to come

après les bombes
ils reconstruisent une vie
toujours plus précaire...
plus fragiles mes espoirs
dans les jours futurs

Marie Derley, Belgium

sublime
this smoky, orange sky
at sunset
lost on those fleeing
the burning bushland

Richard Kakol, Australia

these small gourds
with their streaks and stipples
what use are they
to one who loved autumn
but isn't here

Ruth Holzer, USA

wildfire smoke
choking the air
this blessed rain clearing
the sky...
flash flood warning

Dennis Owen Frohlich, USA

scraping off hills
for a better roadway
we hardly care
for the breath of the jungle
whose voice remains unheard

Lakshmi Iyer, India

Editor's Choices (EC) – Tanka

sitting beside
the rocking chair
without thinking
a push to watch it sway
the way it used to

Nicholas Gentile, USA (EC)

There is an ease about this tanka that evokes a letting go. A compassion and bringing of space builds for the reader to enter as we're drawn into the movement of rocking. The poignancy comes in the last line, "the way it used to." Here is a sudden shift. Suddenly, there is a sense of grief, of the memory of what has been and is now gone, of the writer's loss. Sadness arises, the mind disappears. The words in the last line, "the way it used to," bring a welling up of grief at the writer's loss.



grey clouds
settle over blue hills
sheep dot fields
checkerboard farms flash past
holding me still

Gwen Bitti, Australia (EC)

Gwen's tanka catches our imagination as we follow an unfolding motion picture of clouds, hills, animals and farmland. The last line, "holding me still," is unexpected. It's a dramatic shift, bringing the reader to a stop. We jump from a motion picture to a still. A welling silence arises. An echo is heard deep in the writer's memory, one that may hold us too. The potency of this tanka is in the turnaround in the last line.



Sunday morning
I go to the forest to forage
for mushrooms . . .
my footprints remain as I leave
intermingled with animal tracks

nedjeljno jutro
šumom u potrazi
za gljivama
moji tragovi stopala ostaju
pomiješani s tragovima životinja

Slobodan Pupovac, Croatia (EC)

A wonderful scene is set for foraging for mushrooms in the forest. The poet's line, "my footprints remain," invites our imagination and brings a feeling of warmth. The mix of animal and human prints intermingling helps the reader picture the path, the trees and the search. I like the expanded sense of well-being that grows from this shared space and that of connecting nature and community



making sujebi*
for an ailing daughter . . .
why didn't I ever tell mother
how her rice consommé
comforted me
**sujebi: traditional Korean hand-torn pieces of dough
simmered in a broth of vegetables and anchovies.*

Sonam Chhoki, Bhutan (EC)

This reflection of a mother caring for her ailing daughter may raise personal questions. Did I ever thank my mother for the years of tender care and support? The untold years where thanks was never asked for. The phrase, “why didn’t I ever tell mother,” invites a moment of reflection. “Did I ever?” The short phrase “comforted me” gives the final line a deep impact. This tanka’s quiet questioning stays with us, leaving room to wonder.



puddles of light
in a rutted road
the quick footsteps
of a child
squeezing his coins

Robert Witmer, Japan (EC)

This engaging picture of a child's delight is captivating. Where is he off to, or is it just the child’s pleasure of having coins, perhaps for the first time? The puddles of light, “rutted road, and “quick footsteps” are inviting. The simple strength of the last line about “squeezing his coins” may bring a moment of excitement and memory for the reader. Either way, it is the simple act of the child's pure glee that resonates and uplifts.



mom’s new cathedral
never in one place
always changing
but never ever boring . . .
the trees overhead

Anthony Lusardi, USA (EC)



The tanka begins with an unusual thought, "Mom's new cathedral, never in one place, always changing". This idea is intriguing, drawing the reader in while unsure of what will come next. The final line, "the trees overhead," is unexpected. Suddenly, a space opens for the imagination, shifting our view to towering trees and open sky. It's a bold leap, one that stays after the reading is over. Perhaps the reader will be left with feelings of uplift, too.



coffee rings
from your mug
on polished teak
the castaway part
of you, that stays

Gavin Austin, Australia (EC)

The subject, "coffee rings from your mug," makes the reader wonder if the cup belongs to an old partner or a roommate. The ring on the teak wood acts as a physical trace of an absent person. The phrase "the castaway part of you that stays" highlights the poet's focus on the permanent stain. Coupled with "stays," it points to a hard truth and a heavy, daily reminder. While the tanka tells a story of lost love and memory, it also brings up the need for acceptance with a subtle touch of humor through a multi-layered play of color.



breakers
crashing on the rocks ...
I open myself to the dark
and no longer know
what holds me on the shore

Louisa Howerow, Canada (EC)

A dramatic scene is set on a stormy coastline at night. The writer has immersed herself in the darkness and power of the ocean. There's a sense of being one with the elements. The strength of the last line poses an ever-deepening question for the reader, "What holds me on the shore?" It's as if the writer becomes part of the dark expanse where there are no boundaries, only a growing spaciousness. The reader may be left with a sense of that welling spaciousness, too.

Jenny Fraser

Haiga – Part 3

George Skane & Richard Skane – USA



diversity . . .
we need to take a lesson
from beach stones

Photo: Richard Skane Senryu: George Skane

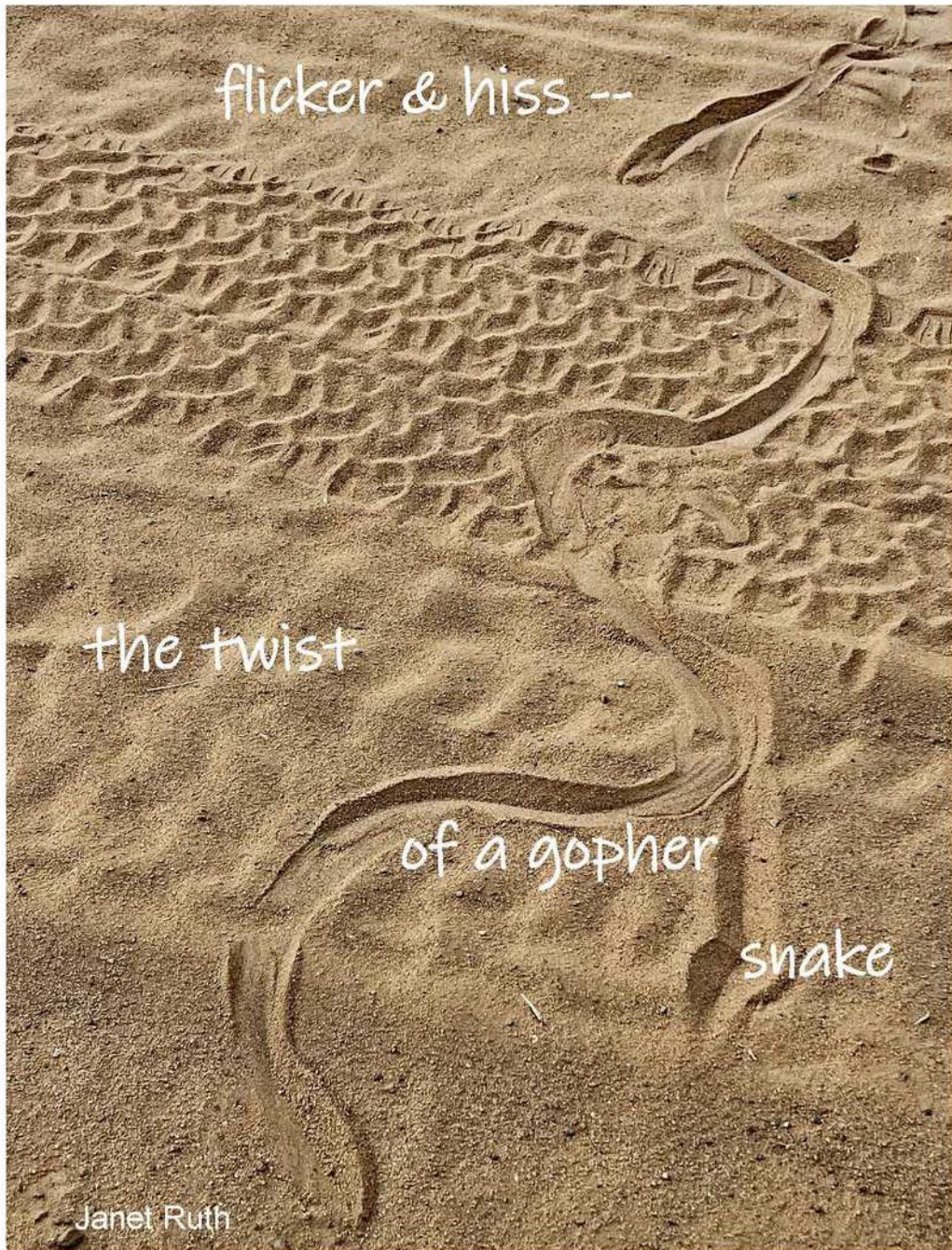
Gil Jackofsky & Okuhara Seiko/woodblock print — USA



Hifsa Ashraf — Pakistan



Janet Ruth — USA

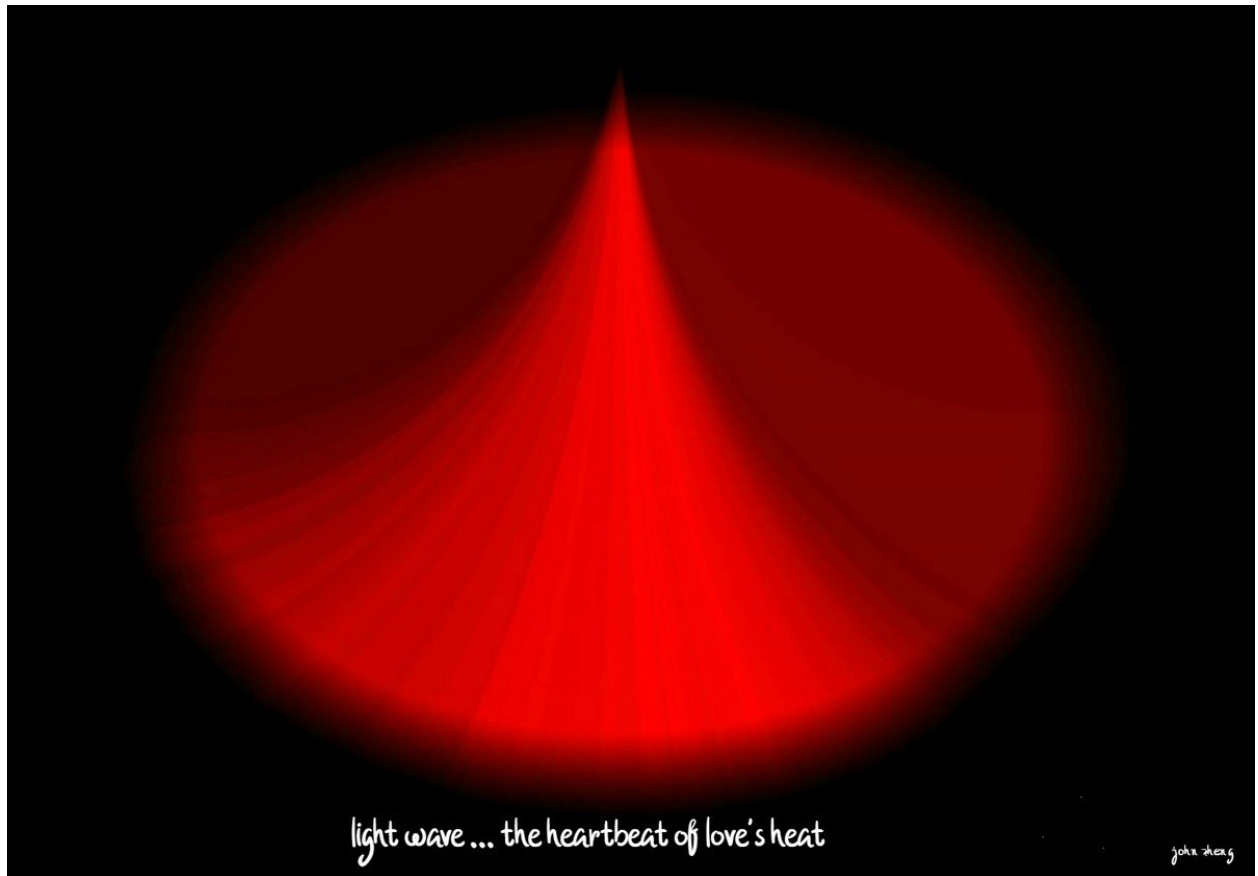


Jenny Fraser — New Zealand

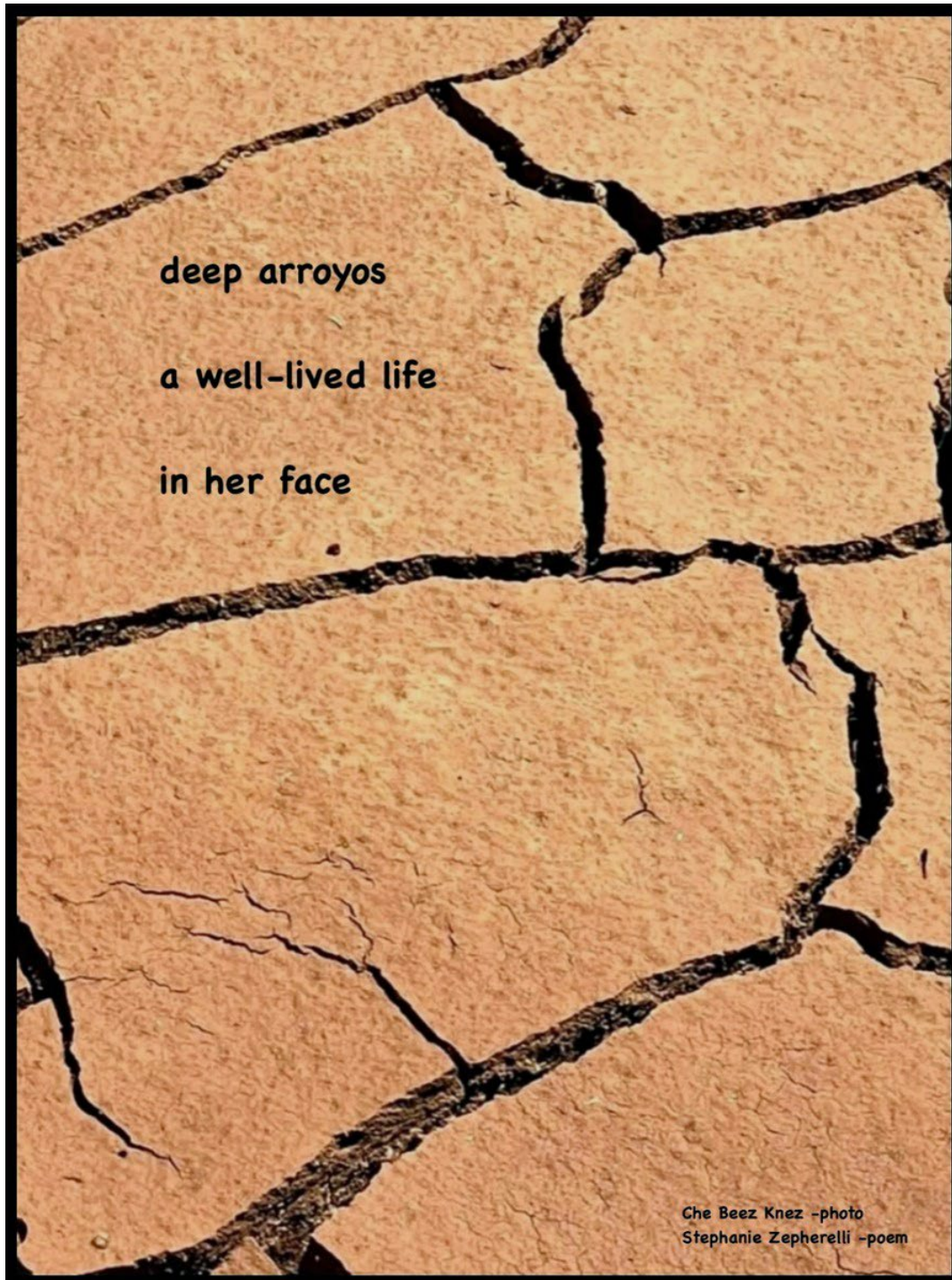


green bird
the weight
of a quiver

John Zheng -USA



Stephanie Zepherelli / Hawai'i — USA & Che Beez Knez — Australia



Haibun



© Michela Griffith

A sheet weaver spider's web

First Daylight

Amir Kapetanović, Croatia

I am patching up an old, unfinished haibun. Night is closing in, and the contest deadline is at midnight. Did I really write this three years ago? I cannot feel a single word left in the text, and any new one I try to add sticks out like a patch on a leaking pot where my grandmother used to cook her sweetest stews. I smirk at the sentences where I tried to show how a married couple went blind, marvelling at the beauty of sunsets.

As I struggle, a glowing disk sinks through the clouds. The last rays of the day find me, streaming through the window and falling across the unfinished lines. In a flash of light, they vanish before me. I reach for them, closing my eyes tight.

beneath my eyelids
a black orb emerges
past hills of letters

Sequences

Mircea Moldovan, România

. . . I'm waiting for the girls to come so we can play hopscotch . . . the postman walks
past the widow's house, whistling . . . a dragonfly writes calligraphy across the air with
its restless flight . . . the watermelon seller slips into the bushes — only he knows why . . .
bad news: the church bell tolls at an unusual hour . . . I'd better grab my slingshot and
hunt down that foolish cuckoo that wakes me every morning . . .

the day's bustle —
mother picks sour cherries
for the pie

Dry Spell

Douglas Sylver, USA

After I'd been complaining about my broken sleep, he responded . . .

What I wouldn't give to have my love roll over in the middle of the night, pulling the blanket off me . . .

. . . or, as she's coming back to bed after a trip to the bathroom, throwing her long hair into my face . . .

It's been three years; three long years she's been gone . . .

. . . and what I wouldn't give, rolling over, to feel my love's soft breath on my face, as she's sleeping silently beside me.

precious and few
what we never knew about
evaporation

Succour (EC)

Taofeek Ayeyemi, Nigeria

I rush out of my home into the street, weaving through a train of hustlers. I leap into a *korope*, while a *molue* and a *danfo* splash from the puddle in a pothole. The journey is smooth and swift until we get to a part where a truck topples and sprawls across the road. Three and a half hours into what should have been a thirty-minutes trip, I begin to renegotiate language. Is this a 'hold-up' or a 'go-slow'? I conclude it is hold up, because there is no movement here at all, let alone slow motion. My word bank suggests it is 'grid lock'.

There is no going back, and the front refuses advancement. The smell of sweat thickens in the air. It is too early for stench, but hours of being canned in a *korope* justifies it. A sharp bite in my stomach reminds me of my returning ulcer and that I had skipped breakfast. I am not hungry — I am starving. I have money but cannot chew a naira note.

Then I notice the 'hisses' and 'calls' of highway hawkers I did not pay attention to earlier. All I need to do is look out the window — or maintain eye contact with one of them — and they will be at my service. To save me from my starvation, four of them hurry across the culvert, nearly crashing and colliding on the asphalt, flinging choices toward me: *gala* sausage, cashew nut, cocoyam chips, plantain chips, Pepsi, American cola, bottled water. I make my selection.

hotter days . . .
the thunderous howl
of the bus exhaust

Bridal Power

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

Proud of our first home, we decide to build an add-on greenhouse so we can grow veggies all year round. Such youthful and naïve ambition! First, a trench is hand dug 10 feet down into heavy clay. The digging's bad enough but then we hit large boulders left by ice age glaciers. There's only one thing to do, harness up my beloved bride . . . she's Russian and keeps saying that her folk are "strong like bull"! I push from below and she hauls them up onto the lawn where I am instructed to build a rockery with them.

We never finish that greenhouse before our growing family needs a larger home. Then comes the kicker . . . "if we are moving, I want those boulders and the rockery plants moved as well in memory of my effort." There is no denying her if we are to produce more children! So, with the help of friends and a U-Haul rental, we transport them to a fresh garden in suburbia. There they rest, a constant reminder of how insensitive a husband I am. Still, I smile at them and swear that they smile right back!

last of the snow
impatient sparrows
rebuild their nest

After Dark

Richard Kakol, Australia

"Can I pray for you?" asks the young man in the street as I pass.

"Yes, if you like," I say, smiling briefly at him before turning away.

"No," he says. "You have to stay here with me."

Shaking my head, I continue walking, my white cane tapping the path in front of me.
I cross to the opposite side of the street, contemplating a passage from the gospels —

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who transgressed, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents transgressed," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him." (John 9: 1-3)

as night falls
locating insects
a circling bat

the rosary —
knots of faith
entangle my hands

Trail

Andrew Grossman, USA

We return to the set of woven chairs that were in place before the cancer that took her away in six months. We tell old stories from school, just as we always have on these chairs. Many a meal charred while we drank. The leaves are now fully in control of the woods, and the lake is in full reflection of them.

The urn of ashes sits in a corner of the patio. Glenn sits by the urn with his hand on the lip. Helen had left wishes to have them spread from each of our kayaks as we drift along on the lake. We divide the ashes into smaller urns.

“Yes,” Beryl says. “This happened, this is happening, and there is nothing we can do about it.” Before she died, Helen had us promise that we would be present in every moment.

We go down to the dock and push off. Yellow and red leaves already dominate the shoreline. Which ones represent her? She was jet blonde until the chemotherapy took her hair. It grew back in white. She did not make it to the second round.

We align our boats as one. We softly paddle a few hundred yards from shore and pour the ashes into the placid water. They tail off behind us. We paddle to the end of the lake, to give her time, and when we come back, Helen is gone. She is everywhere.

a kayak sends a ripple
across the lake surface
soft on the ankles

Flavour-some (EC)

Brijesh Raj, India

The perfect cuppa is a dear friend's dream. And yet it has become the itch I cannot reach these insipid days. I turn to the beverage section, in mother's handed down, mental manual.

Recipe:

Take 240 ml of crystallized somnolence. Add a tablespoon of torpor and a generous dollop of winter cool. Stir gently, at odds with those loud, anabolic driven clock-hands. Dawdle... whilst your blood pressure comes to a boil.

Choice of seasoning:

One capful of essence of late night, prefixed by a work-rich early morn.

Or

10 damns of dull paperwork and fasting, with a break at 4 45 pm. Much after the brazenly caffeinated, roasted aroma from the neighbours', teases its chicoried way through your consciousness.

Or

A knife-tip of memories. Morning walks with retired friends, ending at the local Irani's for bun-muska and chai.

beating dad's tea . . .
that growing distance
between parents

Ducklings

Jared Frank, USA

in the rapids they lose their mother.
though the swells of the river
are well known to them all
it is still dangerous and unforgiving
especially with recent water runoff.
they are carried far away from their nest
into unfamiliar reeds and rocks that batter
their tiny bodies.
when the river calms, all they have is each other
and in the manner of their instinct
they form a line
as a burnt orange appears in the sky
they follow the river
bend after
 bend after
 bend.

bursting
a black bear dreams
of feathers

Only You

Mariola Grabowska, Poland

Wedding day. She wakes up in her maiden bedroom for the last time. How beautifully the dress and the veil sparkle! The mature roses are beginning to shed their petals. Suddenly, their scent brings a sadness she doesn't understand. She squeezes her eyelids shut: "I want to wake up one more time!" From downstairs, she hears the first sounds of her mother bustling about.

streak of light
when drawing straight lines
a twitch of my hand

Tylko ty

Dzień zaślubin. Po raz ostatni budzi się w swoim panieńskim pokoju. Jakże pięknie lśni suknia i welon! Dojrzałe róże zaczynają upuszczać płatki. Nagle z ich zapachem przyplýwa smutek, którego nie rozumie. Zaciska powieki: „Chcę obudzić się jeszcze raz!”. Z dołu dochodzą pierwsze odgłosy krzątania matki.

smuga światła
przy malowaniu prostych linii
drgnięcie ręki

Of Biblical Proportions

Janet Ruth, USA

dressed up for
Sunday grocery shopping
red high-top sneakers

I wheel the cart at an intemperate speed past shelves of pasta and polenta, fish sauce and bean sprouts. Ignoring its unbalanced wheels, I wonder whether I'm predestined to pick this freaking, squeaking vehicle?! I call down fire and brimstone on the oblivious moron parked in the middle of the aisle as he contemplates orecchiette options. Winking at the pixie-ish girl trailing her mother in purple tutu, sparkly Mary Janes, and cat-eye sunglasses, I tell her she is the most righteous person in the store. Mea culpa! I too am a stumbling block, obstructing access to the refrigerator case while searching for a box of unblemished eggs. The hair shirt donned in penitence for my sins is giving me a rash. After getting baptized by the veggie mister in produce, I cull the pile of organic carrots for a bunch with healthy green tops, an offering for my neighbor's chickens.

Like a Prayer

Madonna's hymn plays over
the intercom

On the narrow path to checkout, I shield my eyes from the temptation of miniature Phalaenopsis orchids clamoring to be redeemed. Here I pay for the error of my ways and choose the slowest checkout clerk — a trainee. With a distracting tic in my left eye, I smile benevolently when she has to "VOID" and start over. Then the bagger drops my eggs.

the final amen
a deluge in the parking lot
and a plague of frogs

Who carries an umbrella in the New Mexico desert?

State of Play

Jill Muhrer, USA

Face etched in pain after his recent hip replacement; he attempts to stand. Falling back, a gasp of air escapes from his cushioned chair. He quickly realigns his smile before launching into his list of upcoming projects . . . building the vacation house, summer training, buying a camper, hiking in the Grand Canyon . . .

Don't forget he reminds me that he is "Ace," the top scorer on his basketball team despite being the smallest. Speed, agility, and on the spot strategies make him a team leader. Weakness, disability, physical limitations — not in his vocabulary, which is why he relishes all of his titanium joint replacements but adamantly refuses treatment of aggressive prostate cancer. "Not his style." Building a bionic body yes, but "pansy surgery" for his prostate no way. He is a genius at beating the odds.

Uncharacteristically, he asks me to make his lunch, a "booster meal" with protein powders, kale chips, foods abnormally vibrant, as eerie as his cheerfulness. Frightening how his high potency cereal is still floating in a bowl of milk from earlier this morning. I want to state the obvious that it isn't natural for cereal to float for hours.

I resist. Not the time to question his path to infinity, the everlasting.

Northeaster
the lean-to shelter a tangle
of mold and moss

Shades

Gwen Bitti, Australia

Along the slippery path, brown gravel crunches beneath my boots. A white butterfly hovers over shrubs. Petrichor lingers.

pagoda roof —
a plump pigeon shakes
raindrops

At the moon pond, laughter echoes from grandma to grandchild. A little one in an oversized hat chases scrambling ducks. Koi rise with gaping mouths, theme park clowns in search of food.

stone lantern
a myna and magpie
hold court

Trifecta (EC)

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

what the clarinet knows of moonlight
the bassoon trudges through streets
carrying what the oboe makes of melancholy

together they scatter the rose petals of their union

apart they are
 the horse's mane,
 the reins
 the cart
clatter of cans and tangle of strings

 a child peeking through window curtains
 and the distant look of an old man

merry-go-round riders, stair hoppers
reminding us
 to breathe

at the intersection
of seeing and feeling
music

Treasure

Elaine Wilburt, USA

“Now what?” pouted the baby, trying to sweep the cards onto the floor as Dad caught his hand.

“How about the box? Look,” shouted his brother, drawing the puzzle card over the sunken ship to reveal a chest of gold.

stoplight eclipses
the day moon—
empty nest

Gardener

K. Srilata, India

She can't remember a time when she wasn't tending to feet. The flat feet of young women who hurry in and out, barely remembering to smile. The no fat-pad feet of middle-aged women. The calloused feet of really old men who hobble in from the street, settle down on the only bench and whisper blessings when they are done. And then there are the amputation cases for whom she custom-makes prosthetics. These she loves most of all. That feet carry the world's weight is something she has never allowed herself to forget. Her slippers and sandals have been named with love: Golden Girl, Elite Gentleman, Marathon Runner, Soft Cloud, Flights of Fancy...

Her daughter worries she is getting too old for this. Her knees can't keep up with all the kneeling she must do to measure feet, to account for fallen arches, splayed toes and creeping ones, toes that resemble buds. "Quarter inch extra room on the right," she tells her assistant, "So that madam's feet don't chafe against the sides. And use the hard arch, not the soft one".

amid the weary chorus of horns
a call to prayer
by the muezzin

To Close the Circle

Louisa Howerow, Canada

Reach across to the dead — your mother, your grandmothers —
and in their absence bless the sun and the earth as they once did.
Let this be a gift to them.

Travel back home with your children.
Stir kasha with a wooden spoon.
Add raspberry compote to tea.

Give yourself time to rummage in closets and drawers.
Unhook regrets.
Pack each wound with star moss.

Let your children sink their hands into the friable earth.
Sink your hands with theirs. Harvest the hardneck garlic.
Gather ribbons and wild flowers.

Trust your children to braid their own stories.

in the commons
an oak
the trunk five hugs round

How to Scuttle *Skandha* and Free the Mind

Robert Witmer, Japan

silence
inside a stone
God's will

When a monk asked, "What is the mind of the Buddhas of antiquity?" the Master replied, "Flowering groves, multicolored forests." For centuries the Patriarchs struggled to understand. Speech would not accord with the situation. Yet some knew there was more. Wealth lay in a Great Transformation. Graves were overturned and treasures hidden underground were smelted into light. Darkness blossomed and we colonized the stars. But as would spring give way one day to spring, the blossoms fell. Nickel and iron of cosmic origin, heated to incandescence, carried with their dying glow fools' wishes lost in words. Flowering groves, multicolored forests—poppies painted on coffins. A palace carved in snow. Thought and habit inseparable. Stay together, and laugh, don't cry.

eternity . . . a day lost to dancing

Two Score and Twelve Years Ago

Iliyana Stoyanova, Portugal

My inner child stands tall. I feel the warmth of the African sun, I hear the sea, I even recognise the curly blonde girl with her missing tooth, smiling at me from the photo . . .

the itch
not to wash my hands—
banana flavoured ice cream

Before the Zenith

Diana Webb, United Kingdom

A few doors away from this hospital where I am in Epsom, well known as the venue for the Epsom Derby, is the mansion where the painter John Constable stayed for quite a while. From the opposite side of the road, from a bus, the chandelier in the entrance hall is clearly visible as is the fountain in the forecourt. The view from the window of this ward is from quite high up and trees which he is likely to have painted are clearly visible. Constable was born in 1786.

So, this is his 250th birthday year. Much has happened since. The bulbs or candles in that chandelier are no doubt shining out their congratulations in this big year for him. From up here I pay witness to his genius...

solstice sunrise
the Epsom grandstand
full of light

Festival of Lights

Ruth Holzer, USA

One year you can't find Grandma's menorah from the old country, a silver-plated heirloom decorated with the lions of Judah and the star of David. You had stored it in a very special place. So special that now it's basically lost. So, no Hanukkah. The next year you find the menorah in a drawer under aprons and tablecloths, but you don't have any candles. You chase all over town, but the holiday candles are sold out everywhere. So, another Hanukkah passes. The following year you have the menorah and you go shopping early and buy half a dozen boxes of candles. In reserve for the future, you should live so long. But now you can't find any matches. Who uses them anymore? A search throughout the house and you dig up a crumpled matchbook from a restaurant from maybe twenty years ago. Of course, they're dry and don't work. You strike one after another. Nothing. But the last one does catch, a brief flame, enough to light the first candle, a miracle.

dreidel spinning
winning
a chocolate coin

Celebrations

Urszula Marciniak, Poland

Unexpectedly, in the middle of a hot season, news spread through a small town that the end of the world was imminent. During the preparations, a dog, a city mutt named Future, went missing. Deeply saddened, the people searched endlessly for him. Meanwhile, Future was eating dumplings on a side street. After the meal, the restaurant owner, unaware of the commotion, walked the dog to the town hall, where he lived. Thanks to the residents' unity for a just cause, the end of the world was averted. The residents were delighted that Future was with them and that the future lay ahead.

midsummer

oh, for a moment without
plans for tomorrow

Circling Death

Gavin Austin, Australia

lamp glow
the returning moth
drums on glass

Summer is ending. Soon dove-coloured dawns will waken the hills. Sunlight simmering into a sleepy Gippsland winter, easing the pace of life to a smaller world I remember. Only the odd icy blast to destroy the environmental peace, encouraging trees to dance frenetically on the hilltops and in the valleys. Perhaps a dusting of snow on the Strzeleckis.

school album
a crooked tie
and unsure smile

“Doesn’t a world end every time somebody dies?” I ask the sad walls of the highway motel room, in his hometown, our hometown. Haunting Garry’s past, I try to find solace among the lingering memories. Tomorrow, I will place flowers on his grave, questioning if his shattered body can really be beneath the slab of marble. And shun the sweeping bend of bitumen that took him away.

endless shore
the sting
of an old sunburn

I see Garry everywhere in this town. In the dark-haired young man’s friendliness at the service station. The unabashed smile of the boy on a bike. Or hear him in the abandoned laughter of mates enjoying a schooner in the corner pub. Garry can hide almost any place.

Blowing Out the Candles (EC)

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

I wish upon entropic stars
a predictable unpredictability,
a soundly casual causality,
a consistency so inconsistent
that even sunrise wonders
at its own coming.

after morning devotions warm cassava

Again those opposite facing
kingfishers singing dawn blues,
this time longing futures over
a troubled past. The slow arc
of a rainbow settling on just one
place to call home.

even when there's rain again frangipani

Gloss

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

Grade 3. New leather shoes. It was a game of catch during the lunch break when I landed on my face. A blinding throb behind my nose as my front teeth hit smooth granite. The gushing taste of salt and iron. At the dental hospital, four stitches to suture my lower lip. The weeks of ice cream left me nauseated. For a month, I had to learn to swallow my spittle.

mad about mauve —
the flavour of strawberries
over zirconium

La Viega*

Terri L. French, USA

A loaf of white bread, a bag of *masa harina*, three cans of sardines, a jar of instant coffee, a half dozen cans of chicken pâté cat food, a half-gallon of orange juice without pulp, a fifth of Patron Silver (she has taste in tequila at least) and a pack of Marlboros of which she takes half out giving me the rest to bring back the following week. Every Friday I trudge up three flights of stairs to hand her the paper — not plastic — bag of groceries. Surely this can't be all she lives on, but it is all she ever orders from the corner *Tienda* on the one night I deliver. It's been over 5 years and she is always generous with her *propina*, but only after we each take a shot of the Patron and have our one dance.

a slower swivel
in her old hips —
Mambo Jambo*

* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLrDoAWonWg>

A Special Visit

Antonio Mangiameli, Italy

I stop for the night in the countryside. The house is modest, like the old Sicilian peasant homes. The heat is heavy, almost suffocating. The air hangs still; not a single leaf moves. Inside it's unbearable, so I sit outside on a worn wooden deck chair and wait for the night to cool.

Hours slip by. I watch the moon and listen to the silence. At some point I drift off. I wake to the sounds of the countryside stirring. Night has gone, the moon with it. Time to leave.

distant echoes
of old peasant songs —
another dawn

Untamed

Rupa Anand, India

It's monsoon season and trim time. I start with the backyard banyan that tends to outgrow itself rather quickly. Ladders are adjusted, and the gardening help goes out on a limb to shape unruly branches.

the things we cut for things to grow morning rush

Stepping back, we address the wild Rangoon creeper that roams free, strangulating the solitary magnolia. Gliding like a witch on scissors, I clip, crop and shear.

A faint drizzle begins, the sap oozing from banyan stems sticks to my palms and the thorns of a bougainvillea poke my soles.

suddenly a splattering a crow flies past poop

By now the drizzle has developed into a steady *rimjhim*. The gardener indicates to stop but I want to continue. There is this satisfaction of 'less' replacing 'more' as space deepens between the greens.

The skies decide as dark clouds ominously roar overhead. We move under an awning.

a chirp from the orange bush August smiles

The Turning Year

C.X. Turner, United Kingdom

The ghosts are strung higher this year, white fabric caught in the branches. I walk alone, though I've known lonelier years. Cold spreads through my fingers. Spilt drinks and rain blur together at my feet. I watch the water hold every reflection, the lamps, the children, the dark. For once, I don't hurry the night.

cool wind
my coat's weight
enough tonight

Transcendence

Kirk Lawson, USA

Your first and only job interview out of college with a teacher at a Summer Hill School in upstate New York. Your future boss answers her door nude. Invites you to enter. Five others — also naked — join for lunch and conversation.

layered
touch of cotton on flesh
edge of Bear Mountain

Once employed, you swim naked, streamside by the waterfall with faculty, staff, and students. Two years later — in yet another experimental community — you enjoy a sweat-lodge. Heating up to soak in the adjacent stream by an orchard. Cells howling. As you tell me the story, you quote Maurice Merleau-Ponty and “The Phenomenology of Perception:” the more exposed, the more we open.

to float
above the water line
bobbing for apples

Perhaps all in preparation for your peak experience, a pilgrimage to Helsinki and the International Sauna Society. Locals share the bathing tradition with you, including a frigid plunge into the Baltic Sea. Years later, we build our own sauna next to a mountain stream and immerse ourselves. We share a passage of Walt Whitman, each mad to be in contact with the air.

song of myself
each hot and cold
rush

The Warrior of Light (EC)

Carmela Marino, Italy

plum blossoms:
rain walking with me
step by step

A gleam of dawn forces its way through the curtains: my son takes his first steps; he laughs, falls, gets back up, and wanders back and forth through the house. Proud of his progress and the battles he has overcome, I wait for him with open arms. Suddenly, a vortex in the sound of his footsteps drags me down a corridor that is far too long, pulling my mind back and plunging me into the darkness.

late winter . . .
under black clouds
the azure sky

I hold my breath and my wound, one step at a time, until I reach the glass. Outside, the ambulance speeds away, carrying a piece of my body with it; I watch him shrink until he vanishes. One hand presses against my stitches, the other trembles against the window. I cry to cling to the horizon, trying to bridge the distance, while the only thing left on me is his scent, lingering in the emptiness of the room."

twilight:
the weight of a hand
upon silence

My legs are like stones; my body feels stripped bare. And yet, the pain of the surgery fades before that heartbeat lingering in my eyes. I ask to have the catheter removed. I grit my teeth and begin to pace the corridor, step after step, from morning until night. I do not stop: every stride is a meter of darkness I leave behind to become whole again.

starless . . .
a path traced
by the snail

Darkness falls. It's just me, the moon, and a silent vow: to reach him. At dawn, I sign my discharge papers, finally free to run to his side. A sudden flash of lightning tears through the sky; the warmth of his tiny hands frames my face, pulling me back to the surface.

a hole in the curtain . . .
the moonlight finds
its way out

The Scent of Rain

Deborah Karl-Brandt, Germany

One of the first places I discover in my new hometown is near the river. A massive black marble stone stands proudly in a bed of pink petunias. The old gravestone was found after the river's water receded. "No one knows God's will" is inscribed on the stone in bronze letters. No name, no dates. Nothing else...

survivor guilt
the hidden scars she bears
my new neighbor

Tamasoma Jyotirgamaya

Geethanjali Rajan, India

the sun catches
a peacock's glimmer
bluegreengold

As a child, whenever the *Vellichappadu* or 'the revealers of light' would appear, I was intrigued. In Grandpa and Grandma's old house in Valluvanad in Kerala, the appearance of the Oracle meant that he was received with respect and prayer. He would adorn a red saree-like cloth, his long hair would fly in the wind, and his dance and rhythmic steps would make his *chellanga* (anklets) tinkle and jangle. The heavy, hooked sword would rise and fall and he would be in a trance, divining the Goddess and bringing answers from the heavens onto the gardens and backyards of mortals. At dusk, the vision would come back to me and lacking the courage of the day, I would slink into my grandparents' room and rest there in fear of swaying tresses, ritual dancing and everything red.

shadow-boxing
in the crevices of night
a swinging lantern

Note - *Tamasoma jyotirgamaya* is (part of) an invocation meaning "Lead us from darkness to light", from the Shanti mantra of the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad.

Lights in the Night

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

We arrive after a long drive in the rain from Sydney. Tired and apprehensive after negotiating large waves of water covering the windscreen as vehicles pass going the opposite way on the busy roads. The house looks the same. A golden oak door set in the neat brown brick frontage, surrounded by a well-kept green lawn and blooming winter flowers, snowdrops, violets and cyclamen. His smile welcomes us at the side door, more stooped, and shuffling. A little fluffy white dog bouncing around his feet yapping.

His voice wavers, his wife and life partner of 76 years marriage has been moved from his care in the family home into an aged care facility. He's now learning to live alone.

make a wish . . .
falling stars brighten
the darkness

It's There

Robert Erlandson, USA

Reading Tagore, Rumi, Sandburg, Whitman, Galasso, and Bashō, I hear the voices of wisdom.

the wren's song
drowned out by a passing train
I can still see him

Bell's Mill Park

Melissa Leaf Nelson, USA

The Boone River wasn't much of a river, but it was our playground. Wading with shoes on, as my mother instructed to protect my feet from fishhooks and broken beer bottles, I was a great blue heron on the lookout for frogs.

When it came to skipping rocks, I chose chunky round stones and didn't understand why they sank. Chris taught me to seek out flat rocks and showed me how to whisk them level, so they could hit the water and skitter up, skipping three, four, or five times before sinking beneath the surface of the muddy water. I imitated him as best I could but my flat pebbles plunked into the water and disappeared just like the rest.

Always quick to give up if something didn't come easily to me, I sat on shore, content to watch my big brother. He scanned the rocky beach and tossed his chosen rock in the air a couple of times to learn its weight and heft before flinging it out over the water, keeping a stone afloat for as long as summer lasted.

gathering dusk
I trip over
exposed tree roots

Late Run

Timothy Daly, Italy

I work from home on a screen, so the gym is a sanctuary for my body and mind. But I am never alone amidst the music, the meatheads and the tight shorts. I started jogging, where I can just be with my breath and the hill while I pay heed to all the things I otherwise miss, and nobody else knows how big this small victory is for me.

standing tall
in a field of wheat
the sunflower

Mary Lou Williams's Zodiac Suite

John Zheng, USA

A tour de force of fingers reels out an intricate rhythm, weaving diverse styles and movements across black-and-white keys. Slowly, she dazzles a room of attentive listeners, sparking a sudden explosion of claps and bravos — a lingering aftertaste of her piano touch.

harvest moon . . .
waves jazzing up
on the shore

Error Code 401

Anna Cates, USA

atomic café
something wriggling
in my cocktail glass
do not lie to me and
say you're not a robot

Caliban moon
the smoke and sizzle
of dysfunction

Shock of Spring

Glenn G. Coats, USA

My grandsons
take off their shoes
and socks;
roll their pants up
to their knees;
step gingerly
into the clear creek,
minnows darting
like sparks.
The boys bend
at the waist —
noses skirting the surface
like swallows
until I give them all
a gentle splash.
“What’s mom going to say?”
they wonder.
“It’s a long walk back,”
I tell them,
“Lots of sun and maybe
we’ll be dry
by then.”

the road home paved in song tree frogs

There is Always Streaming

Lynn Edge, USA

I haven't been to a movie in nine years, but I am anxious to see the Bob Dylan biopic, "A Complete Unknown." At the ticket counter, the cashier shows me a chart and asks where I want to sit. This is new to me. I check a box half-way up the theater.

While I wait for my eyes to adjust to the darkness, I experience some dizziness. To reach my seat I face a Mount Everest of stairs. There is a railing and I grab it with each step. Before the movie ends, I stumble down to the ladies' room, but instead of going back to my seat, I leave.

long winter night . . .
filling my pill box
yet again

Gig Work

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

The frantic pace of the shift slows to a crawl. Exhaustion settles over me like a wet blanket pressing on my shoulders, but a quiet peace follows. With only a few minutes remaining, the last shipping manifests are signed. I wipe the grease from my palms and walk out into the night. The warehouse lights fade behind me.

last bus gone
I follow
the milky way

Cravings

Jenny Sharpe, Canada

Once again, I come home to sofa cushions scattered on the living room floor. Two mugs, one smeared with lipstick, sit on the coffee table. The scent of her perfume mingles with the smell of his cigarettes. He's made no attempt to tidy up after this newest conquest.

"But sweetheart," he says later, "I've told you before: if I chat up enough birds, one of them will come home with me. Don't worry, I'll never leave you."

caged canaries
all those songs
about love

Jumble Sale (EC)

Joanna Ashwell, UK

It began with a jar of breadcrumbs; then there was a thorn framed in a mirror. I gathered these curiosities on a shelf, alongside the glass slipper and hunter's knife. The basket was a bartering exercise, with a wolf's claw embedded in the side. There was a motheaten red cloak, hung in a corner of a lean-to garage. I wrapped a trail of ivy, with a half-eaten gingerbread man and left a few coins. The beans were advertised as magic but I doubted their shimmer. I managed to angle a beanstalk as part of the deal. The seashells were sold as a job-lot with a trident and pendant as thingamabobs.

bluebird song
these old curiosities
cording our heart

Rain of Steel

Simon Wilson, United Kingdom

Flickering shadows on an HD Smart TV. A mother cradles her baby as flies drink moisture from its eyes. Curtains flap in broken windows. Bones found buried in a field. The crunch of boots on gravel never far away. When the war is over, the billionaires will steal the pennies from our eyes. AI marches on, a fleet of rockets aims for Mars. Humanity is not needed on the next stage of our trip.

running
on the white beach
bleached coral

wayward parabolas

Mark Meyer, USA

zenith to nadir a biography in tangents

Time, gravity, distance, direction, momentum, force, velocity, friction, acceleration (and I suppose you can throw in some spin, too)—all those variables, and likely others, in a nutshell. So, in a way, one's lifetime might be described as a set of uniquely skewed curves whose geometrical properties obey both Newtonian and quantum mechanics. You can apply the various equations, the differentials and integrals, vectors and tensors, and try to grok where it takes you. Though it's quite easy to subjectively sense if you're plummeting, it's much much harder to calculate and predict your final destination—when, where, and how you will ultimately land. And that's thanks to Heisenberg, Schrödinger, Dirac, and all their pals.

inertial guidance
balancing at the vertex
of past and future

Editor's Choices — Haibun (EC)

Succour (EC)

Taofeek Ayeyemi, Nigeria

I rush out of my home into the street, weaving through a train of hustlers. I leap into a korope, while a molue and a danfo splash from the puddle in a pothole. The journey is smooth and swift until we get to a part where a truck topples and sprawl across the road. Three and a half hours into what should have been a thirty-minutes trip, I begin to renegotiate language. Is this a 'hold-up' or a 'go-slow'? I conclude it is hold up, because there is no movement here at all, let alone slow motion. My word bank suggests it is 'grid lock'.

There is no going back, and the front refuses advancement. The smell of sweat thickens in the air. It is too early for stench, but hours of being canned in a korope justifies it. A sharp bite in my stomach reminds me of my returning ulcer and that I had skipped breakfast. I am not hungry — I am starving. I have money but cannot chew a naira note.

Then I notice the 'hisses' and 'calls' of highway hawkers I did not pay attention to earlier. All I need to do is look out the window — or maintain eye contact with one of them — and they will be at my service. To save me from my starvation, four of them hurry across the culvert, nearly crashing and colliding on the asphalt, flinging choices toward me: gala sausage, cashew nut, cocoyam chips, plantain chips, Pepsi, American cola, bottled water. I make my selection.

hotter days . . .
the thunderous howl
of the bus exhaust

Taofeeq takes us with him on a voyage on Nigeria's roads. It was very much like witnessing one here in India, for me. The scenes of street hawkers, the endless traffic hold-ups, the visceral pangs of hunger — all this, told in a manner that is both unassuming and heartwarming. This haibun

does what the art form is meant to do – allow the reader a glimpse into a world that does not always translate into a real-life experience. When one reads this piece, one is transported to the place that Taofeeq writes from, and there, in that moment, the reader and poet share something that cannot be really described in words.



Flavour-some (EC)

Brijesh Raj, India

The perfect cuppa is a dear friend's dream. And yet it has become the itch I cannot reach these insipid days. I turn to the beverage section, in mother's handed down, mental manual.

Recipe:

Take 240 ml of crystallized somnolence. Add a tablespoon of torpor and a generous dollop of winter cool. Stir gently, at odds with those loud, anabolic driven clock-hands. Dawdle . . . whilst your blood pressure comes to a boil.

Choice of seasoning:

One capful of essence of late night, prefixed by a work-rich early morn.

Or

10 damns of dull paperwork and fasting, with a break at 4.45 pm. Much after the brazenly caffeinated, roasted aroma from the neighbours', it teases its chicoried way through your consciousness.

Or

A knife-tip of memories. Morning walks with retired friends, ending at the local Irani's for bun-muska and chai.

beating dad's tea . . .
that growing distance
between parents

Brijesh Raj's haibun is a delightful spin on a cup of tea, using the cuppa as a conceit. One that the narrator stirs his mind with. The play of words is sharp and playful and cleverly done. Look at the words like 'insipid' – something we commonly use to describe an awful cup or caffeine (the legendary Maggie Smith's sharp wit comes to mind as she admonishes her co-star on handing her one). Or the interesting use of the word, 'chicoried'. And as the cup is being savoured, the mind runs amok – from neighbourly aspirations to the sights that greet the morning tea drinker. This haibun is a great example of pushing the form. The senryu at the end elevates the experience, taking it beyond the life of that morning brew, into a whole lifetime.



Trifecta (EC)

Agnes Eva Savich, USA

what the clarinet knows of moonlight
the bassoon trudges through streets
carrying what the oboe makes of melancholy

together they scatter the rose petals of their union

apart they are
the horse's mane,
the reins
the cart

clatter of cans and tangle of strings

a child peeking through window curtains
and the distant look of an old man

merry-go-round riders, stair hoppers
reminding us
to breathe

at the intersection
of seeing and feeling
music

An intriguing title, immediately made clear in the first three lines of prose poetry. The connection leaps and yet links in a manner that makes you want to go back and savour every word. What stood out in this haibun is the manner in which Agnes connects music with the ordinary goings-on as she bears witness to it. The line spacing is intuitively done, allowing the reader to build one world in the mind before moving to the next. She illustrates it again with the horse's mane, reins and cart. So, there is a gentle unravelling of the title too.

The senryu threads it all masterfully. This is clever, devoted work.



Blowing Out the Candles (EC)

Matthew Caretti, American Samoa

I wish upon entropic stars
a predictable unpredictability,
a soundly casual causality,
a consistency so inconsistent
that even sunrise wonders
at its own coming.

after morning devotions warm cassava

Again those opposite facing
kingfishers singing dawn blues,
this time longing futures over
a troubled past. The slow arc

of a rainbow settling on just one
place to call home.

even when there's rain again frangipani

Matthew Caretti writes from a place of bearing witness to the immediate world around him. His poetry, therefore, is one of urgency, and yet, there is a slowness to the experience with which he savours every kind, and lays it out as an offering for the reader. The one-line haiku that break the poetic lines are examples of how much can be said with such few words. Notice them:
after morning devotions warm cassava

This is at once ritual, culture, the insignificant moments of everyday, and an entire lifetime. Again, in even when there's rain again frangipani. The unending spirit of nature to give and keep giving—in the cycle of rain and the frangipani blossoms that turn up despite it all. Matthew's work is one of minute attention to detail. His is a poet's eye, and there is always something to learn from every piece of his work.



The Warrior of Light (EC)

Carmela Marino, Italy

plum blossoms:
rain walking with me
step by step

A gleam of dawn forces its way through the curtains: my son takes his first steps; he laughs, falls, gets back up, and wanders back and forth through the house. Proud of his progress and the battles he has overcome, I wait for him with open arms. Suddenly, a vortex in the sound of his footsteps drags me down a corridor that is far too long, pulling my mind back and plunging me into the darkness.

late winter...
under black clouds
the azure sky

I hold my breath and my wound, one step at a time, until I reach the glass. Outside, the ambulance speeds away, carrying a piece of my body with it; I watch him shrink until he vanishes. One hand presses against my stitches, the other trembles against the window. I cry to cling to the horizon, trying to bridge the distance, while the only thing left on me is his scent, lingering in the emptiness of the room."

twilight:
the weight of a hand
upon silence

My legs are like stones; my body feels stripped bare. And yet, the pain of the surgery fades before that heartbeat lingering in my eyes. I ask to have the catheter removed. I grit my teeth and begin to pace the corridor, step after step, from morning until night. I do not stop: every stride is a meter of darkness I leave behind to become whole again.

starless . . .
a path traced
by the snail

Darkness falls. It's just me, the moon, and a silent vow: to reach him. At dawn, I sign my discharge papers, finally free to run to his side. A sudden flash of lightning tears through the sky: the warmth of his tiny hands frames my face, pulling me back to the surface.

a hole in the curtain . . .
the moonlight finds
its way out

During the course of these past few weeks, I read this piece several times. It is difficult to retain the interest of the reader especially at a time when our distractions are one too many, begging us to leave the nobler tasks of reading and writing and devote it to the screen instead. But here, Carmela makes us read every line over and over again. This is storytelling that is masterful. The haibun works like a short story, slowly leading the reader on to the happenings over a few days in the narrator's life. Every incident is gripping, moving and she does not let the momentum drop even for a moment. The tone is warm, urgent but never telling the reader more than it should.

This haibun could well become a great example of how to learn the art of writing one. The leap, the link, the shift and the newness of the haiku only deepen the reading. This is clearly work that has arrived on the page after numerous edits. Well done, Carmela.



Jumble Sale (EC)

Joanna Ashwell, UK

It began with a jar of breadcrumbs; then there was a thorn framed in a mirror. I gathered these curiosities on a shelf, alongside the glass slipper and hunter's knife. The basket was a bartering exercise, with a wolf's claw embedded in the side. There was a motheaten red cloak, hung in a corner of a lean-to garage. I wrapped a trail of ivy, with a half-eaten gingerbread man and left a few coins. The beans were advertised as magic but I doubted their shimmer. I managed to angle a beanstalk as part of the deal. The seashells were sold as a job-lot with a trident and pendant as thingamabobs.

*bluebird song
these old curiosities
cording our heart*

As editors, we are constantly seeing work that wants to be extraordinary. The task gets tough when we try to straddle the visceral and the abstract all at once. Here, Joanna is very sure of where she wants to lead the reader. It is a Hansel and Gretel's trail, one delicious moment unravelling into another. What delighted me with this haibun is at the first reading, there is a sense of Deja vu. We know what she is getting at, only we cannot articulate it. We go back, read it and another titbit surfaces. And then suddenly, as the haiku is read and mulled over, it strikes you. And you laugh at the cleverness of craft. And you dive right into it again and read it. The best of all the tales we grew up with, come alive in this one short piece. Bravo, Joanna.

Shobhana Kumar

Haiga – Part 4

Johnnie Johnson Hafernik & Dorothy M. Messerschmitt – USA



*manuscript
fonts*

*dance
each night
in my
dreams*

*last
night . . .*

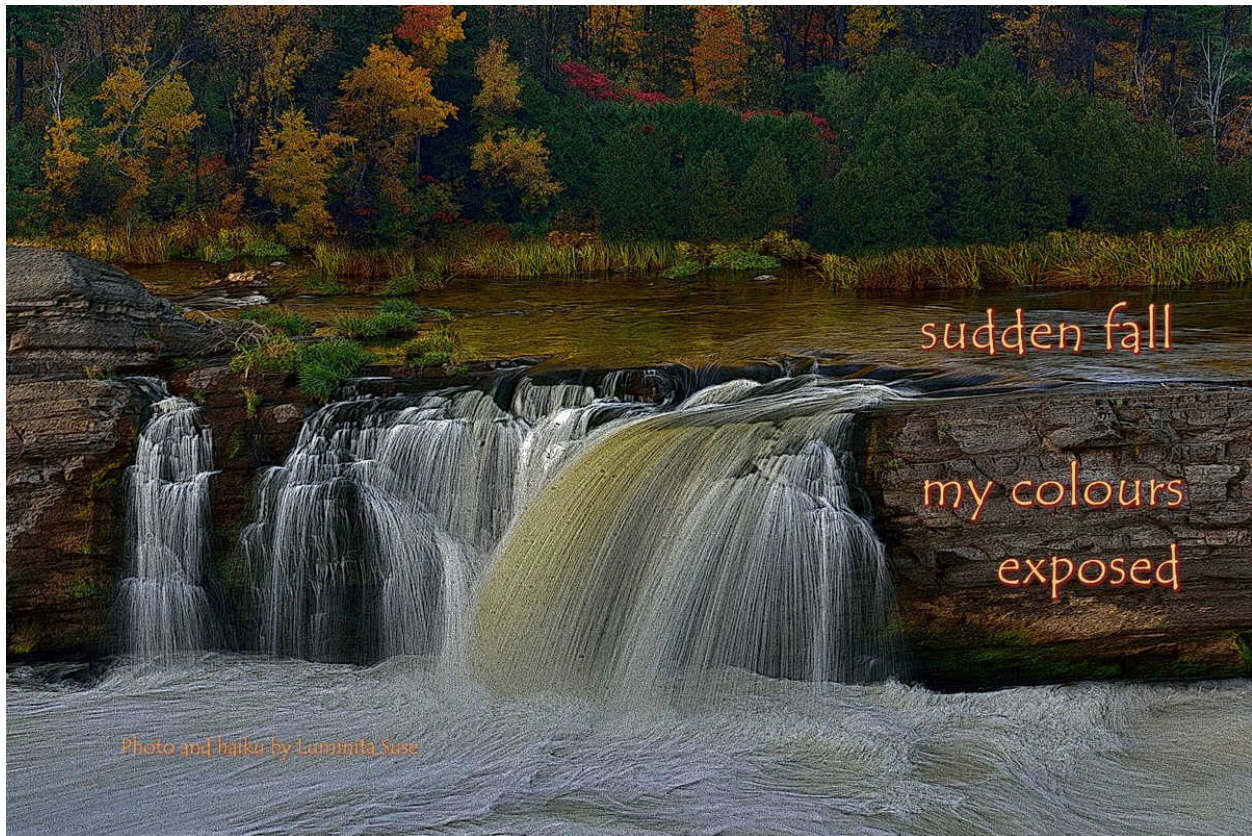
*the
tango*

jjh, poet

Kathleen P. Decker — USA



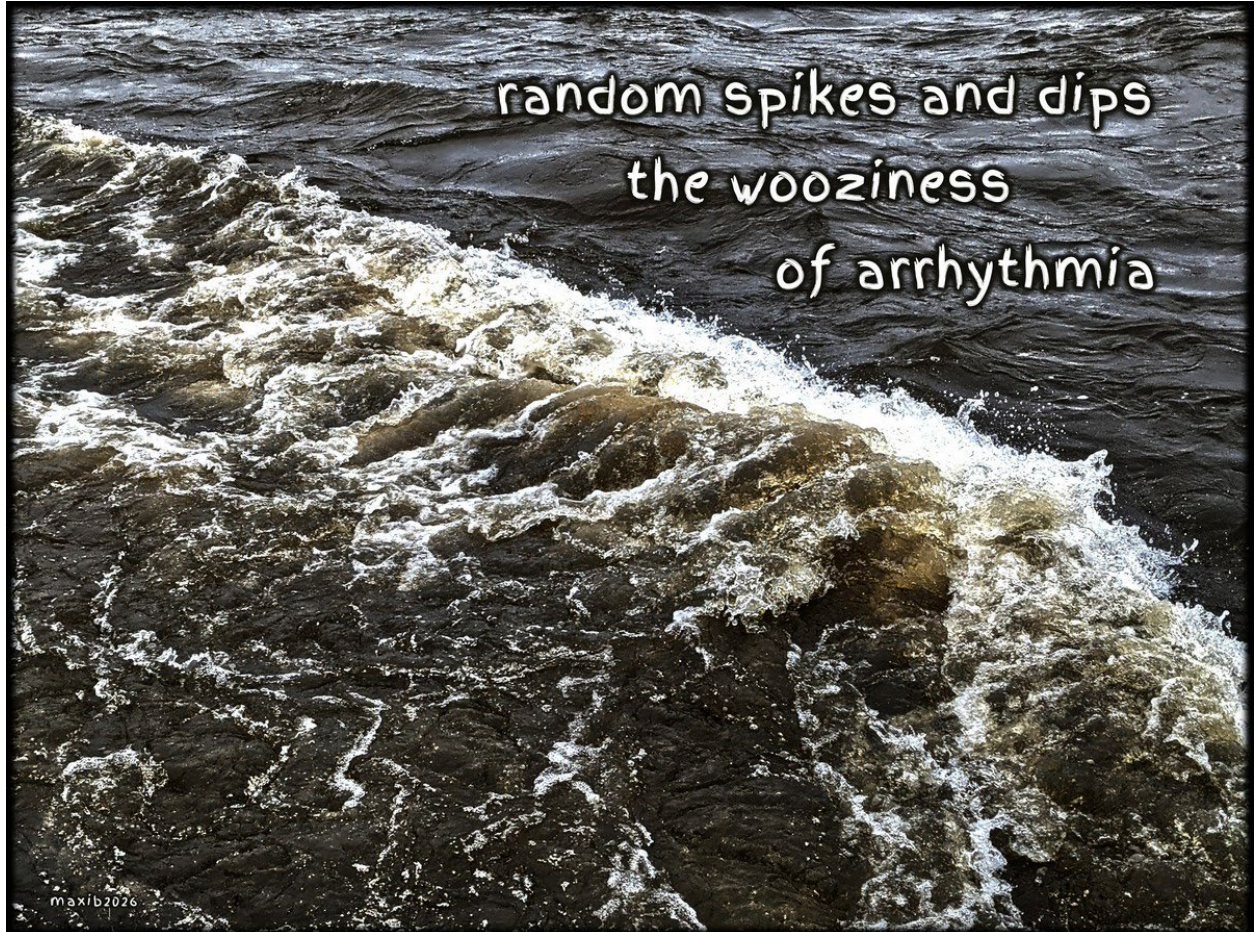
Luminita Suse — Canada



Mark Teaford — USA



Maxianne Berger — Canada



Mircea Moldovan — Romania



Subhash Roy Choudhury — India



Tanka Prose



© Michela Griffith

The wind makes marks amid birch and rush

Shadows

Gavin Austin, Australia

in a dream
or another life
he looms
through darkness
the face I know

Beneath a death of winter branches, he sets down the tattered bag that contains his universe; his grimy coat a bandage to hide ineffable scars. Naked trees rest in concrete coffins on the wasteland corner where time intersects fortune. White spirit is his woman now; she warms his frozen nights. The skin on his hands and face as weathered as an iguana pelt. His haunted eyes search the silence that falls between heartbeats, a bitterness that dribbles down the dark pane of night. He hears the city breathing through the pitch, feels her pulse, sees the winking neon-signs. In fitful dreams, he hears music, recognises the smile and shining eyes steadily upon him, as they dance to a slow waltz. His old hands grope for her. Lips cover the waiting mouth.

shabby grey
of another dawn
at my window
I box our story
to bury in daylight

Deep Clean

Caroline Giles Banks, USA

Breezes bring dust, insects, and cottonwood fluff inside the porch. Time to scrub the floor, furniture, and screens, to banish intruders from the tidy space.

Millennia ago our ancestors carried their stuff — tools, clothing, shelter — with them as they accompanied migratory herds. Did they fuss over smoke and ashes, fur and feathers, pebbles and leaves? First dogs zigzagged on and off trails to mark inchoate classifications of ‘them’ and ‘us.’

walkway ravens

philosophize

yard art

mediates

‘culture’ and ‘nature’

A Room of Her Own

Anna Cates, USA

I lived in a quaint little house, what realtors call “a doll house.” I was arranging my furniture, looking forward to a tea party I planned to host. The room was barely large enough for all the chairs I needed. The house was more like a single room; it was that small.

I heard men’s voices outside. In the dream, these men arrived in every silly stereotype, including a clubbed barbarian with a diaper-like fur around his loins. The intruders were kicking me out of my house.

Before I left, however, I picked up the cute little creature that had climbed up the antique bureau onto the accompanying mirror. The darling little beastie was like a miniature King Kong, but with sharp little claws like a kitten. It was like some charming alien life that cosmonauts might adopt as pets if settling on a distant planet. I stroked its soft little belly and cuddled it against my chest, bonding with it. It was like nothing else on Earth.

Later, disenfranchised, I was sitting outside on the grass, stoically watching one of the men circling the house, taking stock of what he’d gained. “You didn’t have a baby,” he told me.

“I have this,” I replied and set my little pet on the grass. Seconds later, the man was torn to shreds.

a weeping blossom
envelops me . . .
lotus pond
the cosmos expanding
my dreamscape

Banksia

Ivan Cole, Australia

Behind the house is a garden of banksia. They grow stranger, weirder and more beautiful as they age. Their limbs, twist, turn, grow up then down. Some could be wrestlers with a hundred limbs, trying to hold on flittering in the air. Others are old men with walking sticks, trunks bend over, branches flowing down to the ground. Covered with knoblets like dead coral and cones craggy and tough, seeding only through fire. They are surrounded by blackwoods, slender and tall whose seedlings encroach on the banksia grove

banksia cones
opening
on the wood fire place
now we must
reseed our lives

Alice

Timothy Daly, Italy

A long time ago I fell in love with someone with your name, who lived rent-free in my head for several years. So, I would never have expected to give this title to a text about a stranger working at the town hall of the new place I call home whom I met for five minutes to get an ID card. But your kind smile knew nothing of my lifelong administrative phobia, nor my nervous fumbling for the right words in Italian, nor this sense of never belonging anywhere.

fingerprint . . .
the uniqueness
of the touch
of her hand
against mine

Plan B

Edward Dewar, Canada (EC)

who doesn't want
a playful puppy
especially when
they chase their tails
and fall asleep in the food bowl

I love dogs especially those large northern breeds that can pull a sled and utter long doleful cries for no apparent reason. But mindless cursing can't be my last option.

There's this Pomeranian that starts yapping the moment his owner pushes him into the yard. It isn't until late in the day, usually after supper, the back door opens and that little dog disappears until the next morning. This afternoon I'm going to my local library and check out every book on falconry I can find.

The stones don't speak, yet they remember

Robert Erlandson. USA

In northern Saudi Arabia and southern Jordan, immense V-shaped stone walls, the desert kites, still stretch across the land, their arms reaching for miles. Built during the early Neolithic, some ten thousand years ago, they once guided herds of gazelles and oryx toward waiting enclosures where entire communities gathered the bounty of a successful hunt.

The stones have kept other secrets as well. The kites were not merely traps; they were threads in a web of exchange. Among the bones and tools, archaeologists found cowries and fragments of sea snails, shells carried hundreds of miles from distant shores. One can imagine dried meat, hides, sinew, and carved bone changing hands across vast landscapes, linking desert hunters to peoples of the Red Sea and the Levant.

Most astonishing of all are the engravings. Carved into stone are accurate, scaled images of the kites themselves. Plans of structures so large they can only be fully seen from above. Long before writing, long before maps, people gathered and imagined a design spanning miles, then found a way to share it with others. The lines remain, a message from minds that could imagine together, and build what they imagined.

kneeling together
scratching lines upon a slab
beneath desert skies
never knowing they'd create
the world's first blueprint

* Motivated by de Lazaro, E. (2023, May 18). *Neolithic engravings are oldest architectural plans of human-made mega-structures*. *Sci.News*. <https://www.sci.news/archaeology/desert-kite-plans-11926.html>

Two Tanka Prose

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

Vectors

We skip the small talk to contemplate the calculus, the rates of change in transmission dependent on initial conditions. First towns reporting cases. Temporary clinics. Airport travel patterns — those particular petechiae now dotting our map of the Ituri. While we wait for lab data, his Zoom picks up the *wok-wok-wok* of an *Itombwe* owl awakening in the twilight haze.

the flutter
of fruit bat wings
flitting
through a valley
to patient zero

Shadow Dance

A howling wind whips my shutters to-and-fro as if they're long-lost lovers tangoing in the moonlight. Half-asleep, I reach for his side of the bed, sighing.

a soft pillow
filled with his scent
beside the urn
gleaming his ghost
across cold sheets

In the Time of Downy Woodpeckers

Louisa Howerow, Canada

My brother bends over his empty bowl, as if doing anything else would cause him to break.

I shake the cereal box, push it closer, urge him to eat. And if not eat, at least to move outside himself: unbend, turn to the window, the bird feeder where a downy woodpecker beats out a furious staccato on dead wood — head-beak — head-beak — head-.

A bony, almost cadaverous face meets mine. So quiet. Lost. Too far away to reach. One more morning like this and I'll do him in, do myself in. Best to let him muddle through. And, yet . . .

I rest my hand on his shoulder, turn back to the feeder.

an armada
of birds carries us off
a cradle, a hammock
rising on an updraft
houses fading away

Three Tanka Prose

Chen-ou Liu, Canada

The Eleventh Crescent

Moths strike the yellow porch bulb, casting frantic, erratic shadows across the deck. I sit alone in the damp night air, gazing down this dead-quiet street lined with lookalike bungalows, yet memory lives in the nerve endings of my palms. I close my fists against the slanted moonlight, trying to trap what warmth remains.

nothing belongs
to me in this brief life —
still my hands recall
the curves of my wife's body
ten full moons since she left

The Weight of This Humid Night

We sit on the front porch, sharing a post-dinner silence with things left unsaid. His hands are spotted with age, trembling slightly as he reaches for his tea.

The passing years have laid a paper-thin peace between us, then he rises without a word, his shadow falling across my lap as he takes a step, stirring through the quiet of my mind.

memory lies,
softening every edge —
still my shoulders
tense at father's footfalls
exactly as before

Cont . . .

In this dark place of ink and dread

It's me alone, the page, and the spectre of rejection.

once again
my blood pressure soars
and depression
dogs my drunken shadow . . .
the blank page stares

triteness and grayness
like uninvited taxmen
stay in my mind . . .
poem after poem thrown into
the waste basket of Life

Karaikudi Dreams

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

Daybreak.

The morning lamp lit. Three cups of over steeped ginger tea steaming on the counter. The cat litter scooped. A fresh grind of coconut chutney for the dosas. *Rasam*, curd rice, potato fry, packed into lunch boxes. Spun dry clothes on the line. Vessels washed.

Sponge scrub. The grime dissolves on a patch of red and yellow *Athangudi* tile on the wall.

Five moves. Fifteen years. Shuffling from rooms echoing with lived-in voices to a cubicle of a house with windowless walls. Packing and unpacking a life worn smooth.

fresh linen
fraying at the creases
broken crockery . . .
a transit wrapping up
the tarnish of vintage brass

An Oasis of Sorts

Ray Rasmussen, Canada

I've arrived in early spring in my new, and maybe forever, residence, busy today putting annual flowers in an array of pots. This is meant to establish what could generously be called a tradition, or less generously, evidence that I plan on staying a while.

Over weeks of watering and care, petunias line the edge of the deck – blue, yellow, purple, spreading, growing tall and showy, the way the helper at the local garden centre promised.

I send my friend John, an artist, images of the deck with a surround of potted flowers. "What a nice little oasis you have," he writes back.

Oasis, implying a surrounding desert, doesn't ring right. My flower display is in Edmonton – Canada's largest northern city, with its dense housing, sidewalks, paved roads, shopping centres – the whole humming, beehive works. No desert in sight, unless you count the parking lots, sidewalks and roads. Best to call it my Tiny Lush Patch of Beauty, or some such.

Gardening takes my mind off my friend Gary, terminally ill, who recently cleared out his house and sold or gave away nearly everything. Good thinking. His kids will inherit cash instead of a houseful of decisions and a basement of things no one wants.

I'm not terminally ill (yet) but am long of tooth. I go downstairs and gaze into the dimness of the basement, the antithesis of a flower garden. Since I've never been able to throw anything away, it holds fifty years' accumulation – mine, plus my parents, my daughters and sons-in-law, plus a plague of boxes left by my daughter's earlier boyfriends. It's all in plastic and cardboard containers, easy to stack, but also easy to ignore.

Following Gary's lead, I have a plan to clear the boxes and their contents, but over time, not all at once. The question is, how much time do I have? Put another way, how long can I procrastinate. Nobody's saying, so I may end up leaving a lush garden on the deck

and dark chaos below to my family. If I don't clear it, I fear my ashes will land someplace undesirable.

This week I've been outside enjoying the garden while watching a robin build a nest in the linden tree. The robin's project is on schedule, but she has neither a basement nor offspring wondering why she never straightened up the meadow.

The joy of gardening and sunshine is balanced with the thought of leaving this Lush Patch for whatever shelter comes next – a step I refuse to think about. Yet, something I can't quite name stirs – not grief exactly, more like its waiting room.

Meanwhile, the petunias and robin send pleasant thoughts in the warm evening air. I planted the flowers expecting to be here, and maybe I will be, for a few more seasons.

*yard sale
a stranger buys
grandpa's suspenders
I gift her with
grandma's wig*

*estate sale
free if you carry it
up the stairs
returns
not permitted*

One Time I Blew a Clay Pigeon out of the sky

Janet Ruth, USA

Stumbling through the corn field. Standing dry stalks, some bent over to trip me up;
crisp strap leaves slap my twelve-year-old face. Trying to stay even with my father, two
rows over with the shotgun. He is the hunter and I am the dog.

the thunder
of pheasant wings
erupts at my feet
a moment later the blast
my thundering heart

We know where our food comes from. My brothers hunt pheasants, rabbits, squirrels
and deer with Dad. I am satisfied with my bird dog role. Part of the job of hunting is
helping to pluck the pheasant or skin the rabbit.

transforming
animal into food
meat in the freezer
my favorite lucky rabbit's foot
those soft deerskin gloves

Just as important are my parents' lessons on how to see. Mom fills the bird feeder, and
we consult the well-worn *Golden Guide*. At 70 mph on the Pennsylvania Turnpike, Dad
points out an antlered buck at the edge of the woods.

that little girl
now all grown up
— crouched in the grass —
she holds binoculars
scribbles in a field notebook

On Jean-Honoré Fragonard's "Inspiration"

Joshua St. Claire, USA

This morning, dawn is just a bit of lavender at the hill crest. The house is cold and silent. I am the only one awake. I cast my eyes back over my shoulder, through the quiet, through the dark, past miles, past decades. There it is. At the end of the dirt lane. Under the shadow of the manicured privet. Inside the velvety tightness of a chestnut burr. The nameless thing that writhes in steely flames, casting its shadows on every moment since.

night fills
the Euclidean space
of the blank page
prismatica breaking forth
from the tip of my pen

Reference work: "Inspiration" by Jean-Honoré Fragonard. Oil on canvas, 1769. The Louvre, Paris France.
<https://www.wikiart.org/en/jean-honore-fragonard/inspiration-1769>

Connections

Jenny Sharpe, Canada (EC)

I'm nearly five when I first meet immigrants who've come to Canada in the aftermath of World War Two. That year, I dress up like Little Red Riding Hood for Hallowe'en. Tied under my chin, my cape floats over my snowsuit. Mummy and I crunch through the drifts on our rounds. "Trick or treat, please," I sing out, as we near an insul-brick shack. When a woman opens the door, I hold out my fruit basket. Someone hides behind her.

"We just move here," the woman says. I can't understand her accent.

Mummy takes it all in and explains. "Give your daughter a pillowcase. We'll take her with us for candy." The girl's mummy points at my cape and shrugs. "Cut holes in an old sheet. She'll be a ghost." By the end of the evening, Yolanda and I are best friends. Soon, our mothers are too.

in a new world
unfolding promises
hand in hand
shadows
behind us

Uprooted

Nalini Shetty. India

By late morning the shade had reached the stone step. I emptied the weed basket beside the compost pit and sat for a while, listening to water drip from the outdoor tap. Somewhere beyond the wall, a pressure cooker released a brief hiss, then the neighborhood settled again into heat.

seed tick
crossing the canyon
of my fingertip...
some journeys begin
without knowing the scale

Let Them Lie

Douglas Slyer, USA

A lovely aspect of my neighborhood, at the very edge of the big city, is its alleyways. It's mostly modern all around but, between the streets, here and there, these old alleys. Some are potholed asphalt, some cobblestone, many simply dirt. Been that way for decades and more.

One near my house, running slightly downhill, tunnelling through tall leafy trees, has a house's backyard beside it and a flimsy bamboo fence along the edge. Two German Shepherds reside there, usually lying on the grass sound asleep as I pass through. I've learned to be extra quiet and careful.

But if I sneeze or step on a stick and wake them, they'll rush at me with a barking ferociousness. One day they'll push right through that flimsy fence and devour me and not a soul would notice.

when push comes
to shove
between a rock
and a hard place
the cost-of-living skyrockets

Two Tanka Prose

C.X. Turner, U.K.

Conservation of Wonder

A child asks whether a pond remembers being a cloud. The question follows me into the garden. Water gathers in the old stone basin. A small snail climbs the rim.

rain barrel
holding pieces
of the sky
a beech leaf turning
on the water

Bearing

Watching him make tea, I wonder how he knows when the first cup is full. He lines the cups along the worktop, holding the first by its rim with one finger inside. Water rises towards his fingertip. He lifts the kettle before it spills.

first frost
the worn path
through long grass
clear all the way
to the gate

Bayou Blues

John Zheng, USA

On a byway curbing a bayou near Tchula, Mississippi, a rotten alligator offers a luscious feast to gray flies buzzing a song of grief and joy. Was the gator crushed by a pickup truck or shot by local hunters to show their killing spirit?

reflecting pool...
the globe today
a golf ball
blasted into
a water hazard

Editor's Choices (EC) – Tanka Prose

Connections (EC)

Jenny Sharpe, Canada

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in a new world
unfolding promises
hand in hand
shadows
behind us

In 'Connections' Jenny Sharpe reminds us of many things, following the struggles people had during and in the aftermath of WW2. It's about starting over whether it's in a small Canadian town or as an immigrant learning the language and customs in their new country. It also reminds us that we are all human beings, struggling our even struggling planet.



Plan B (EC)

Edward Dewar, Canada

who doesn't want
a playful puppy
especially when
they chase their tails
and fall asleep in the food bowl

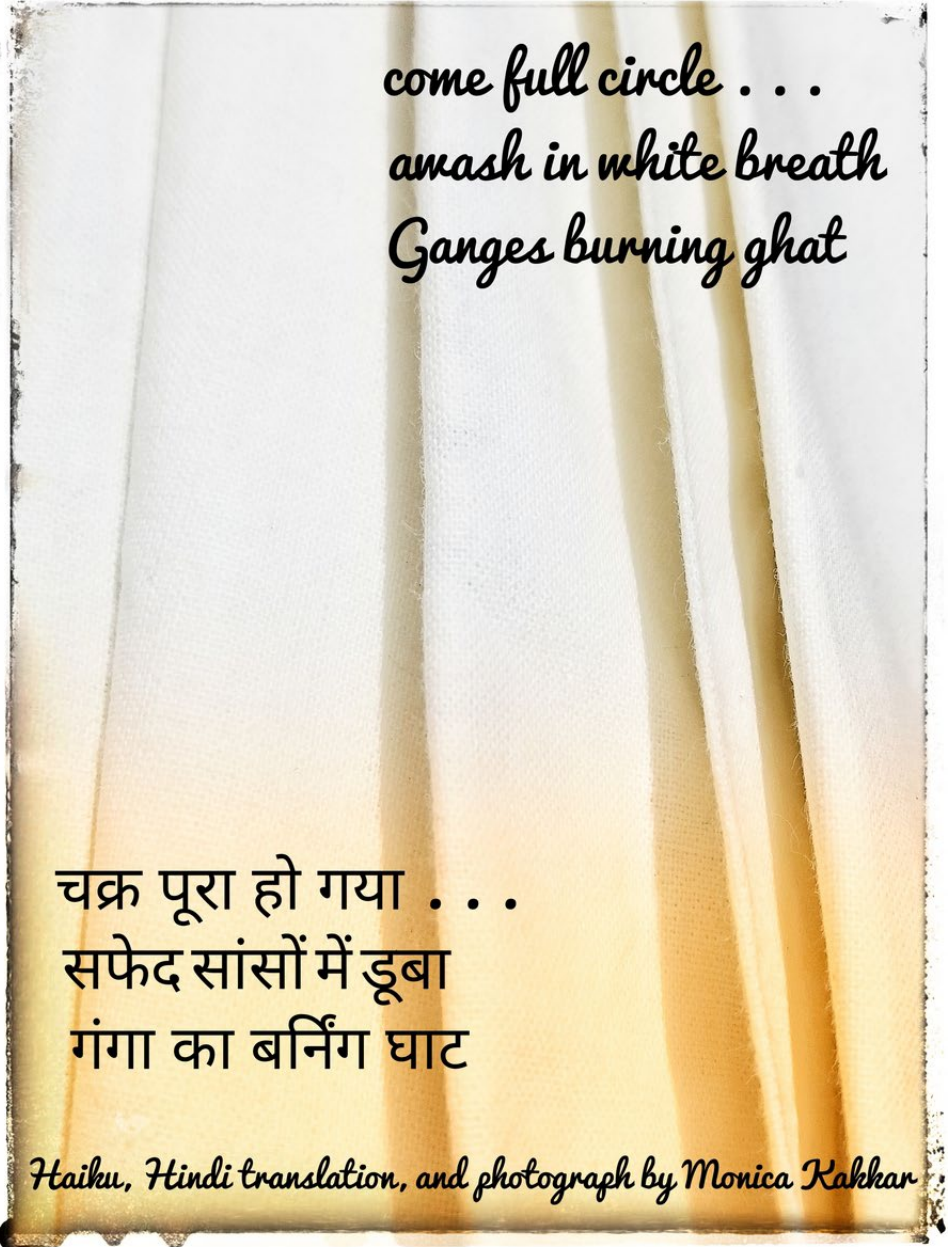
I love dogs especially those large northern breeds that can pull a sled and utter long doleful cries for no apparent reason. But mindless cursing can't be my last option.

There's this Pomeranian that starts yapping the moment his owner pushes him into the yard. It isn't until late in the day, usually after supper, the back door opens and that little dog disappears until the next morning. This afternoon I'm going to my local library and check out every book on falconry I can find.

Mike Montreuil

Haiga – Part 5

Monica Kakkar — India/USA



come full circle . . .
amash in white breath
Ganges burning ghat

चक्र पूरा हो गया . . .
सफेद सांसों में डूबा
गंगा का बर्निंग घाट

Haiku, Hindi translation, and photograph by Monica Kakkar

Nalini Shetty — India



every goodbye
borrowing another syllable
from my name

nalini

Neena Singh — India



Nick Taylor — USA



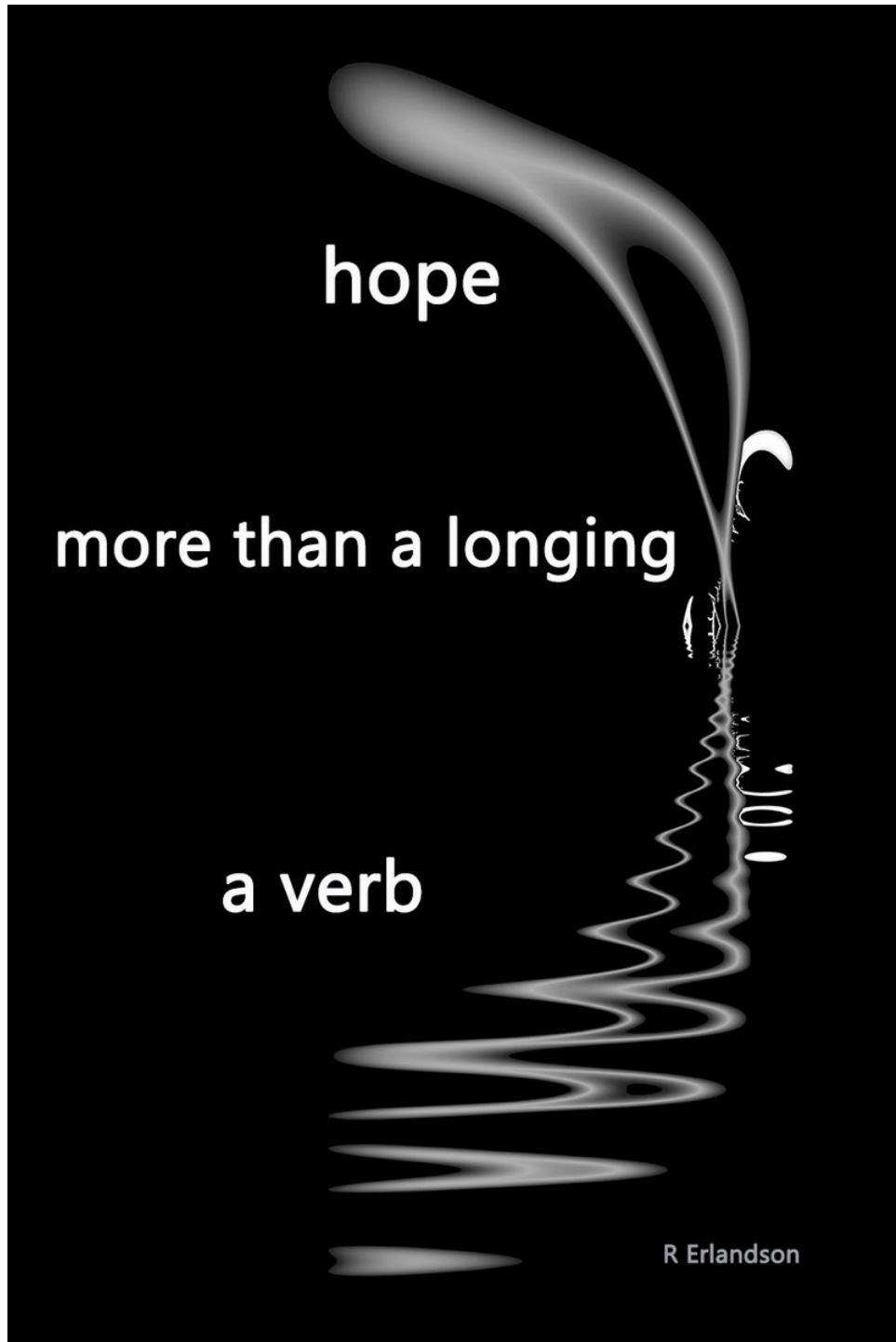
Oscar Luparia — Italy



*spring equinox
day after day my glass
will fill up*

poem & photo: Oscar Luparia

Robert Erlandson — USA



Urszula Marciniak — Poland



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The delicate architecture of midsummer grassland