

THE PAN HAIKU REVIEW (PHR4)

**HAIBUN & TANKA-BUN EDITION
WINTER 2024**

EDITOR: ALAN SUMMERS



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ISSUE FOUR

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cover photograph by Alan Summers (January 2015)

The Head, a [Rick Kirby](#) modernist sculpture in a central position outside Calne library on The Strand (England, UK). Winner of the competition to celebrate the millennium in the Wiltshire town of Calne:

The Head

[Rick Kirby \(b.1952\)](#)

Church Street, Calne, Wiltshire

The Head, Calne

'The Head' was created for the Millennium competition run by the Mayor of Calne in 2000, and won by Rick Kirby. The open head facing the library supposedly represents being open to learning and challenges. However most Calne folk seem to think it more accurately (and appropriately) depicts someone lying on the ground with their head kicked in: <https://www.blipfoto.com/entry/567029>

Alan's note:

This reminds me of the sometimes Janus (two-headed god) aspect in some of our own haibun!

Description	English: Sculpture by Rick Kirby.
Date	30 August 2017
Source	Own work
Author	Tjhavenith

PHR4 FONT CHOICE:

Mostly: Avenir (Book)

12pt and 12pt *italic*

CAUTION :

These are not tame works, some may require content warning and cautious reading.

EDITOR: ALAN SUMMERS



Alan Summers, *Pushcart Prize*, and *Best Small Fictions*, haibun nominated writer; and mentor for *Call of the Page*. He's also been a guest haibun editor for the British Haiku Society's *Blithe Spirit* (2018); and is an Editor Emeritus, Red Moon anthologies series (2000-2005).

Haibun-commissioned by the Bristol Old Vic theatre (2003), his very first haibun dates back to Australia, 1997, republished in Japan, and then anthologised in *Journeys 2015, An Anthology of International Haibun* ed. Angelee Deodhar.

He has been a joint winner for haibun in two categories **poetry** (January 2017); and then **flash fiction** (2024) for *Snow Hill to Selfridges* (Bournemouth Writing Festival Flash Fiction & Poetry competition, with *Arts University Bournemouth*, and *Dithering Chaps* publishing house) and published in *Lines in the Sand* (pub. Bournemouth Writing Festival with Dithering Chaps).

Alan founded *Blōō Outlier* journal (2020-2023) & *Babylon Sidedoor* (2022) which have both featured haibun, and now both have become part of *The Pan Haiku Review*.

ESSAY:

Two Favorite Haibun: Unsettling Clashes by Alan Summers
(December 1st 2024):

<https://contemporaryhaibunonline.com/table-of-contents-20-3/articles-reviews-20-3/alan-summers-two-favorite-haibun/>

Alan Summers
founder, *Call of the Page*:
<https://www.callofthepage.org>

Is haibun a mistake?

Alan Summers

I will attempt to prove otherwise, with the help of over 100 haibun in this issue.

When two very different genres (sometimes more) become one package it can be a celebration, perhaps a challenge, but never surely a barrier.

Can haibun sit across “more than one genre”?

The genre is neither just separate poetry, or separate prose, can it. After all, writing genres (not just creative) are communication and a joint act: novels need the book format as a vehicle, and Wet Floor signs require a plastic stand to get our attention, and safety!

Myself and fellow authors will try to justify the addition of short verse with prose, and consider or re-consider why or how prose benefits from haiku and tanka “interruptions,” and vice versa!

I see haibun as multiple ‘word’ streams dovetailing, plus the often overlooked opportunity of the title as a feature in its own right.

From prose storytelling approaches to rogue elements making appearances as poems, and darned short ones at that, it may all seem radical, yet both are story carriers, though.

Are there Four Ways Into Haibun, instead of one way or even three?

After supporting hundreds of haibun writers new and seasoned over the years, I’ll attempt to reveal some expanding viewpoints, with a grateful nod and thanks to those writers/poets who also see things differently. The haikai literature genre continues to grow and evolve, and I wish to adapt too, for my own writing and mentoring.

Titles

Those little things that sometimes feel like placeholders, or a brief summary or explanation of what follows.

I tend to see them as potential opening lines, a lyrical line, a distilled first stanza. A theme might not be obvious from a title yet its resonance can echo down the whole piece.

We arrive there first after all, in a land called Title! It's a wonderful treat rather than perfunctory or pedestrian; they act in many ways from *an anchor of imagination* to adding unbidden and surprising dimensions.

After the title does the individual territories of poem and prose address us comfortably and equally? Can a title be the shoo-in? A title can be like a gift, to unwrap slowly—or to rapidly rip off as a bandaid—to see what's glinting naked in early light.

The Land of Prose and Poetry

Two countries that are both Lilliput and Blefuscu and yet two countries never at war, perhaps purely playful sparring partners.

Quattuor

The outer border of a coin. The other edge of a coin: plain, reeded, lettered, or decorated, inscribed with *stantem humeris gigantum* or *Here Be Dragons!*

To be continued...

Be warned!

babylon sidedoor

**PHR4 forms the first of a two-part haibun and tanka-bun special feature.
Babylon Sidedoor was absorbed into The Pan Haiku Review during 2023**

TITLE CHALLENGE

Which titles gain your curiosity...

1. (un)common vision correction
2. "Five foot two, eyes of blue..."
3. I've Had The Time of My Life
4. Crosshairs
5. All in a Line
6. Unfinished
7. Gagged
8. Fork In The Road
9. Shadows Of Ageing
10. In the Sway of Grasses
11. Repossessed
12. Zero decibel
13. *Playing the Long Game: How They Plotted Revenge and Became the World's Greatest Superpower*
14. Duck!
15. abandoned apartment blues
16. A downmarket Ozymandias
17. Nirvana
18. Tête-à-tête
19. "Enchanté Mademoiselle!"
20. Nothing Bad Ever Happens in British Home Stores
21. Asperitas Clouds and Other Things That Come in Waves
22. The unknown face(t)
23. Taking home the common denominator
24. Standing in Front of the Hallmark Section at CVS
25. Tick-Tock
26. Steeped in the fragrance of sky
27. Unbound
28. A Marvel Universe
29. F_mil_ Games
30. Blindside
31. Unpreventable
32. Alarm Clock
33. The Empty House / La casa vuota
34. Push-button / Pulsante
35. Fantasy in glass
36. Miscalculation
37. Tangible Metaphysics
38. Unconscious
39. Or Smoke and Mirrors

40. Quinquennial
41. Alone/Together
42. autobiography
43. Blue Ruin
44. Nightmare on Queen Street
45. Colour of Things
46. dodging quicksand
47. Oracles
48. @martha4 that's a life after smashing pumpkins
49. The Tower
50. Butter Wind
51. Carpe Diem
52. Gone Too Soon
53. Never Mind
54. The Emperor's Smile
55. The Immortal Artist
56. Bulging
57. A Momentous Occasion
58. Spritz
59. As the Crow Flies But Not in Venice
60. The tilt of the earth and the turn of our gaze ...
61. Healers
62. Saturday
63. Always death!
64. Bardo
65. Second chance
66. Talk later,
67. Omnibus
68. Parking lots
69. Dawn
70. Soul Food
71. Holiday Cheer
72. that you will be afraid...
73. Did She Look Like Me...
74. Reaching for daylight and Finding Moonlight Serenade
75. Agraharam
76. Aham Brahmasmi
77. Who Discovered Antarctica?
78. *I Ink*, Therefore I Am (Tattoo Confessional)
79. Neurosis #3
80. First Joy Ride
81. Last Sound
82. Christmas Ornaments in the Sky
83. When the Boom Comes About
84. Held in Passing
85. Tangled Reverie
86. Centuplicate
87. Belonging

88. Golden Hour
89. ON THE WILD SIDE
90. REVIVALS
91. In Plain Sight
92. Something Not Right
93. Buttoned Up
94. Unfinished Exit
95. Party Voices Whisper from the Ramparts
96. Kryptonite
97. Rolling Stone
98. At Large,
99. Unleashed
100. *The Brief* case **Encounter**
101. Thumbscrew
102. Paint Sample
103. It was the owl that shrieked
104. Juice Just as Sweet
105. Dreamer's Emporium
106. Land of Kettles
107. Loose switch
108. Follow-up prescription
109. Apple Pie
110. Permafrost
111. Amongst the trees
112. Shared
113. The Small Print
114. Reservations Around A Conference
115. The Reckoning
116. My ears prick up
117. Why hast thou forsaken me?
118. Sehnsucht
119. Hiatus
120. Space being
121. Dwindling
122. Scars
123. Freehold
124. Not Quite Renunciation
125. the changing room
126. The haibun incognito
127. Flow of Time
128. Ruapeho's face
129. Andamooka Lapidary Club, Mash sells a Rainbow Matrix Opal to an alien

BOOK REVIEWS:

- loss is a river (Reid Hepworth) by Kelly Sargent
- longing for sun longing for rain (Geethanjali Rajan) by Sangita Kalarickal

PHR visual artist-in-residence: *ONCE upon a time* by Tim Roberts

The Blōō Report: Quotes about writing; the PHR4&5 *Babylon Sidedoor* special 2024/2025 theme(s); dates and details about sending work for the Summer 2025 haibun & tanka-bun edition.

(un)common vision correction

This is how I can best explain why I have turned my instinctive imperative to write outward and share my work, why I even want to publish to begin with, and it requires a bit of backstory that I hope is not too tedious. I volunteered in Iraq with Yazidi survivors of the 2014 genocide committed by ISIS and the women who had escaped sexual slavery, and heard countless stories of precisely what "genocide committed by ISIS" as well as their particular form of kidnapping entailed. Yet when a new friend brought me to his village to stay with his family, all strangers to me, I was welcomed by his community immediately, one still decimated and recovering, so completely I could feel it physically, and I am not easily made comfortable. And on the way there and back, driving along the Syrian border (better to see the plumes of smoke rising from unknown casualties in their civil war than drive close to still-occupied-by-ISIS Mosul), my friend and the complete stranger, a peshmerga, hitching a ride with us did not hesitate at the checkpoints when the masked men holding their guns altogether too casually drew very, very close and tried to take me to the small, windowless building that was somehow always there, or walked away with my passport and a meaningful, lazy hand on those large, never-dusty guns. They kept me (and my passport) safe every time. Waved away my gratitude as if I were thanking them for—well, for the bottles of water no one would let me pay for in that part of Iraqi Kurdistan if I needed nothing more at a shop, or the tea and cookies another friend and I were given whenever we sat for lunch near a certain construction site, always ignoring our butchered Kurdish "thank yous" for their commonplace treatment of guests and foreigners in a country considered radically unsafe, particularly as a lone American.

I have seen the best and worst of humanity in its most extreme. And that has given me a vast spectrum to draw on when I feel something needs to be heard.

Because it's my duty to use my voice, I promised the elders of my friend's village that I would do what I could to help—them, the world, anyone I could—as my heart broke that they were reduced to asking me to speak for them because no one else was listening. The strongest tool I have is my voice. And I promised I would use it. So when the world makes me think that stories and feelings and memories and fantasies which (hopefully) inspire a particular something that needs to be heard, even if just by one person, I do it through poetry. And right now, this is what I think readers might need in the times we live in.

While her bubblegum
insurance expired in
the stiff, blue-and-white
checked waiting room, ankles crossed,
she sees life in sepia.

Diving into you
through that hole called the *pupil*
while your glasses make
bounce-bounce-bounce so suddenly
we are tangled and we see—

Maia Brown-Jackson

"Five foot two, eyes of blue..."

In my large extended "family of origin" just one of the many blessings was being raised by many strong women. Women who were adored—cherished—by their husbands, strong in their own way—but not like the women. And when it came to strength, they didn't get any tougher than Tunie.

Tunie was accepting and gracious. You could practice religion or not—your way. It didn't matter if you were a hard-rock Southern Baptist or a Voodoo priestess (*yes, really*), or your race, political views or SES. Just be kind—and don't hurt anyone she loved.

My cousin Becky and I tested Tunie's strength.

The first time I remember was when Tunie took us shopping. It was the spring we were three and a half. We went to the big department store downtown. One Tunie once modeled for so we were all dressed up for this excursion to the glittering palace of wonders—like the big tube that whooshed your money up to somewhere or the elevator with an attendant.

The ground floor was Tunie's last stop. And while she sniffed at Chanel N°5 or White Shoulders we saw IT. A big white cart with wheels with a bar for pushing it on one end. Filled to overflowing. It was meant for us! So Becky climbed in and I pushed with all my might. Down the department store aisle.

Somebody must have alerted Tunie because when she turned and saw us her eyes widened, and narrowed. Becky was sitting regally in the pile of be-flowered and be-ribboned Easter bonnets. The only ride I got was the one back to the house. Tunie made a promise that day—she vowed to never ever take the two of us shopping again.

This wasn't the only time we tested Tunie.

On a Sunday afternoon with countless aunts, uncles and cousins sitting in grandmama's living room, Becky and I made our way to the attic. In a far corner we found a trunk. In the top tray was a pile of envelopes tied in blue silk ribbon. Addressed to Tunie. We started to read. We started to laugh. They were funny. They were pure mush. They were from a man named Clyde—the whole family knew him.

Certain everyone else would find them as hysterical as we did, we took the pile downstairs—stood in the middle of the living room (*drum-roll*) and I began to read-aloud. Tunie's eyes bulged—so did Sam's—and Tunie's sister. Well, pretty much all the adults. Somebody—I think it was grandmama—gently removed the letters from our hands. Becky and I got to leave pretty quick. It was VERY quiet in the car.

Tunie called us "Trouble with a capital T".

She said if it could be found we would find it. Like the summer morning we dragged a heavy old stepladder to the high bathroom window to see if we could peer in while Sam took a shower. Couldn't see a thing but someone spied on us and told. I'm pretty sure I know who but since we were supposed to be watching after her, it might have been good if we had noticed she was missing. We were sent to cut a switch off the sweet gum tree in the backyard. *"Itchin' for a switchin,"* Tunie said.

It wasn't the last of our adventures.

But it wasn't just with Becky and me that Tunie showed her strength. There was the day after the hurricane that destroyed countless Carolina homes. She called—standing knee deep in the black mud inside the house to say not to worry, they were just fine. Or the morning she called to say she had come back from her beach walk to find that Sam had died while she was gone. She was quietly waiting for the ambulance. Or the day I will never forget when I had to tell her that her son, her youngest child, was dead. She comforted me. And the morning after a routine surgery when she told me *"Go ahead and keep your appointment. I'll be fine."* But she wasn't. Ten days later—when her eyes opened, we were overjoyed— but Tunie looked off into the distance, blue eyes bright and said *"Mama, Mama."*

And on the day we buried her, Tunie had never ever taken Becky and me shopping again.

fifty-seven years
later Mama's promise unbroken

Margaret Walker

I've Had The Time of My Life

Waiting for the Story to Begin

Sixth grade, one Friday night a month, the boys sitting in a row on one side, the girls on the other, skirts measured, the boys in button-down shirts and khakis, we wait for the chaperone's signal. Steve Lawrence *Go Away Little Girl*

arm's length apart
we box step
dreaming
of a Patrick Swayze
to sweep us off our feet

Land of 1000 Dances

Someone's rec room, "Spin the Bottle," friendship rings, the boys in Gant shirts with the longed-for "locker loop," the girls with a flip, Cokes in a bucket of ice, how low can you Limbo? The Beatles *I Want to Hold Your Hand*

the girls talk boys talk football

Do You Wanna Dance?

Worn wooden planks, Pabst on tap, fake IDs, bleeding madras and short sundresses. Sweating in the salt air long before the band takes a break. Ben E. King and the Drifters *Stand By Me*

8 steps in 4/4 time
Carolina Shag
the beat of our soles

Dance With Me

Gin and tonic, a hotel bar, minidresses and khakis, high above the beach, before the band's last set. The disco ball spins. Andy Kim *Rock Me Gently*

This Magic Moment
two steps back in time

Could I Have This Dance?

Oceanfront porch, low tide, no footprints in the sand. The slight creak of empty rockers,
single malt, faded jeans, sweatshirt, bedroom slippers old and comfy. The Righteous
Brothers *Unchained Melody*

Thanksgiving toast
the swing slows
at *Twilight Time*

Margaret Walker

Crosshairs

Sultry evening. The barber sweeps up the last of the hair and closes shop, unaware of the young man watching from the alley. As he puts on his hat and leaves, the young man follows. First at a distance and then much closer.

“Hey, Mister. Can you spare some change?” he whispers.

Turning, the barber looks at the young man, and the glint of steel in his hand.

anything
for a dime bag
buck moon

Reid Hepworth

All in a Line

It's August and the monsoons have birthed moss everywhere. The routine of a daily walk in the park is punctuated by laziness, humidity, and the fear of a fall. A monkey family hovers in search of food. Poor chaps, we humans have not left a single square inch of earth space for them.

Overcoming an overcast mind I step out, my feet crisscrossing the dirt, mud, and sludge surrounding huge rain puddles. Making it to the sagging wrought iron gate of the green, I jump to crash land on spongy moss. It's everywhere. Different shades of bright green, and neon.

Walk time is my time. The moss is a distraction that I need to accept as nature's way. The cats zigzag across my feet as I steady myself to feed them. After one round, I return home unscarred and breathe cross-legged on my yoga mat.

slipping
through the cracks
a millipede

Rupa Anand

Unfinished

I haven't lost my way: Merely come to the end of the road. There is a turn to the left and one to the right: There is no desire to venture on either. The air muggy with the scent of autumn, the earth soaked with falling leaves, and endings, and departures, & goodbyes.

I will not tarry long. Like a phoenix, I rise, to soar into the expanding skyline over clouds, then vanish.

a companion
holds me
across the flat lands
over the hills
& beyond

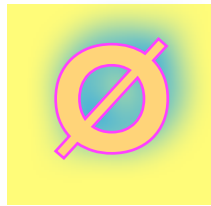
Rupa Anand

Gagged

She sat across from me, her gaze on the floor. I'd rehearsed the words for days, for now, sitting there, they caught in my throat. The space between us a chasm of unsaid things. I wanted to close it. Something kept me still, kept me silent. The world outside the café was busy, loud, but here, between us, it's all quiet, tense. The moment passes. I leave, and she stays, everything slightly open.

a single breath
hangs in the doorway—
I leave it there

Nalini Shetty



Fork In The Road

I find the offer lying there on my desk, still untouched. The world outside is gray and heavy, rain taps at the window like a call. It could be a step forward, or perhaps a detour. I stand at the edge of decision, the weight of each path ahead.

mist in the fields—
two roads diverge
and neither calls
with more than
a hint of promise

Nalini Shetty

Shadows Of Ageing

The street contours before me in unabashed spring colours, flauntingly loud, evoking a breeze to serenade its beauty. The lure of the evening sun to step out is irresistible.

Acknowledging my fellow walkers, stopping occasionally to pat dogs on leashes, I wind my way through neighbourhood roads. Then I spot the For Sale sign on her fence. Curious, I peer in.

The ominous and loaded stillness: A garden untended, no sight of her with a cheery wave, no friendly chitter chatter, no tummy rub which Anya my dog loved. Leaning against the fence, ruminating, a neighbour's voice intrudes. My fears are confirmed, Gwen passed away a few months ago while I was elsewhere.

First my beloved dog Anya and now Gwen. I wonder when the train will stop at my destination.

slipping
into the cloud
the moon winks
springing from nowhere
an old song I hum

Madhuri Pillai

In the Sway of Grasses

for a season
white clouds
of lilacs perfume
a neighbor's newly
seeded garden

My Oma (grandmother) of Scandinavian—Dutch heritage was a beauty—sky blue eyes that crinkled at the edges when she smiled, her strawberry blonde hair always braided into a tight chignon, at the nape of her neck.

the petals of a white rose—
only a priest-collar could match
such precision

Oma was ill and diagnosed with Alzheimer's Disease. She began to wander off as if just going to the store, but there was no store. Our family had round the clock health care, and too soon, hospice health care.

Oma, actually, was a lot of fun—always happy. As a collective, we tried different methods of helping her remember who each of us was—after all there were ten of us in one family, let alone our spouses and children. I could not remember everyone! To top it off, I am a twin and the poor woman thought she was seeing double—she cleaned her glasses multiple times during the visit. After that, my sister and I decided to go there at different times.

playing tag
in the sway of grasses
two hairy toads

All of us, including some very energetic five year olds, were trying to help Oma as she seemed to want to identify us, so we all had pictures individually taken and placed in a row on the wall with our names in bold letters—which lovingly we called the "The Great Wall of China." Just us, thoughtfully, we left all fifty kids off! We had to use another wall for all of them with their biggest grins ever. All we needed was a few terracotta soldiers hanging around to fascinate and keep the children in tow. Although, most of us were not sure if Oma knew who all the people on the wall were; she just loved them and took the tour each day, smiling back at each one—"bless you darlings . . . "

In Spring, Oma seemed to manage better when the neighbor's lilacs were in bloom. It was a surprise that Oma was almost herself. Aromatherapy might be a soothing alternative. All of us turned into alchemy students and science sleuths, looking to find the perfect bouquet of scents to help Oma remember.

ocean breeze
our day-sailor
switches course

The consensus was that this therapy did a lot for Oma in her last days. Mothers and daughters looked at older photos to see what flowers and plants were abundant in Oma's garden and then bought the scented candles and oils to mimic its essence. These items were not as available and varied as they are today. Much of what we used was home made.

Our little super sleuths gathered some pine branches/needles and fallen bark to put in a small electric potpourri, and put rose scented hand soaps in the bathrooms. Oma loved the clean linen scent as she always hung her bedding and linens outside in the sunshine and fresh air.

I was surprised that everyone enjoyed participating in all of this and there was much laughter, storytelling and fun. Oma was just as silly as her great-grandchildren—they loved her.

(aside)

I had to keep reminding myself she is in hospice care and we were the caretakers. I read that the decline becomes harsher and harsher in Alzheimer patients, and I was worried for all of us not knowing what to expect.

The little time I had alone—

so many prayers
so many tears
so heavy
I thought . . .
I might drown

(end aside)

bulbous moon
deep in the sweet gum tree
a mockingbird snores

Oma became joyful and coherent. Just one little caper when we were all getting ready to take her to a beautiful restaurant, she got herself ready and came out of her room, smiled with a curtsy and said, "Am I not beautiful?" She was, except for the bra worn outside of her dress rather than under it, someone gently took her into her room and corrected the little faux pas.

In early autumn Oma did pass away rather gracefully, considering how this disease whittles one down, first destroying the spirit, then challenging existence, bit by bit. Oma fought for the safe-keeping of her spirit until she became a shell of herself, although still smiling and that twinkle never died.

within the pages of Oma's journal a lilac slumbers

*The aromatherapy treatment, that is described in this haibun, is the property of the author, and is not a recommendation for public usage, or application without contacting the Alzheimer's Research Center In New York, NY or other reliable sources, as well as personal physicians.

While aromatherapy is used widely to soothe patients and calm them and their caretakers in some cases, it is not a one size fits all approach of the descriptions that the oils and scents have been attributed. Our family used those resources and adjusted the therapy and personalized it to the person's, Oma's in this case, history of natural and chosen surroundings.

Karina Klesko

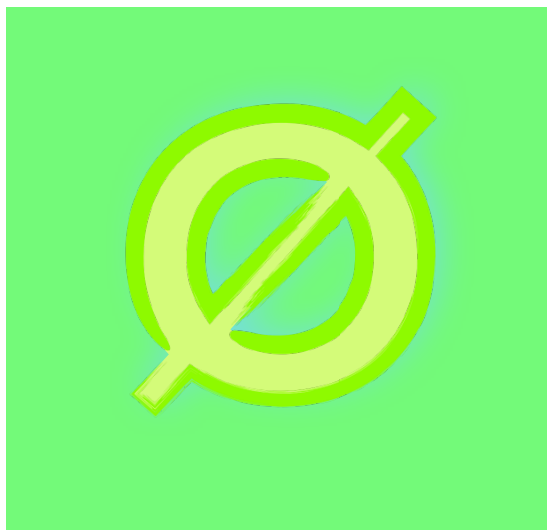
Repossessed

Ghosts look for an alternate accommodation because it's spring and the robins are back. Robins have taken the pine in front of our house. Robins are long-distance travelers; they don't have time to hang out and stay put in gossip. They have to build their house, breed, find food for themselves and their kids, and even find time to sing. By night they are fast asleep because they are early risers too. So, what can the ghosts do to them? Robins have no time for ghosts, nor room.

I fear of the time when winter comes and snow is back.

camping
in the oasis
no room
for a mirage

Biswajit Mishra



Zero decibel

Knock, knock.

Who's there?

It's my house, I am asking.

Your tenancy laws don't work here my friend.

What do you mean? You can ask anyone.

I can say the same and the verdict will be the same, just the head for your tail.

You are a parasite who can only come after
I am born. I have a name and I work for it.

Yes, yes, but is your shadow even yours? You need a sun to see it. So, think, who's born of whom. But don't think of me like a mother either because I won't let you get away as easily.

I ...see..(everything). What do you do?

I see (that too). And what you don't. Look out; what do you see?

You mean the backyard: the grass. It's
getting greener. Last night's shower must
have helped.

No, you see green and I see grass. Color is the threshold of your sight but you make it a wall.

I am real and I think, therefore, I am.

I don't. I just am.

Okay, let's be practical and make a deal:
you work after my shift.

Sure, I would love to, if I could get that break.

*neither you nor I
just the breadth
of
air*

Playing the Long Game:

How They Plotted Revenge and Became the World's Greatest Superpower

Kamala says Iran is our greatest threat, but what if it's not? What if it's a country that's not even on anyone's radar?

underground lab –
after raiding China's
pyramids,
they have alien tech,
impervious to anything

A country that's been biding its time since WWII, making the world forget about them, while they secretly built the greatest nuclear weapon ever, based on their own epic stories...

feeding it stories
of world domination
the orange eyes
of Mechagodzilla
are turned on

Japan finally gets its revenge on the countries who took what they thought was rightfully theirs. And no one can stop them.

what Iran?
we watch
The Middle East
obliterated,
just for show

Susan Burch

Duck!

I don't want to find out if his bite is worse than his bark, so when I'm walking around the neighborhood and get near the dog's house, I think in my head, *I'm a duck! I'm a duck! I'm a duck!* And project that image into the dog's head so he knows I'm not a threat.

laying low
the anger
in your eyes

A few years later I realize I've been saying duck, but really been picturing a white goose. Luckily the dog doesn't care.

how you pick apart
my words
national autopsy

Even accounting for the dog's possibility of being asleep, thinking duck works half the time.

shake-weight
what doesn't kill us
makes us stronger

Susan Burch

abandoned apartment blues

shell-less hermit crab
crawls up the polluted beach
searching for home . . .

It's safe up here, safe up here in my womb on the seventh floor, safe from the driving rain, the traffic's blare, safe from the street stink far below, the beatings and bleatings of beggars and sex workers whose business is down, down there in the driving rain. Safe from druggies, itinerants, predators who sell, predators who slay, forced laughter spilling from lips, shadowed faces creased in uncertain light.

Yes, that's where I've been, beyond the neon, needles in gutters, spittle on city canyon walls, a cask of red, a swag-style bed, down there in the driving rain. Life is hard, the rain is hard, and like acid it shows no mercy on whom it falls. It must be acid rain — a joke!

So why can't I laugh? Why can't I laugh?

Because laughter is luxury. Laughter is memory.

Before I hit the streets and the streets hit me, I was quite the man, you must believe. Come over here, these snaps, so cool, my darling wife, my little girl. Oh, look at me, all suit and smiles!

before AI
the truth
of how things were

Yes, I was really somebody once, but they must not know the man I've become, that worthless crumb, that sad old bum, from down there in the driving rain. Tomorrow this building will fall, condemned to a gap in the map. Perhaps they'll find me, but they'll bury me first beneath the rubble before I ever go down, go back down, to that driving rain.

trapped bubble
always searching
for release

Tony Steven Williams

A downmarket Ozymandias

This old independent petrol station is indeed stationary: bowser-less, powerless, motionless, all the light and sharpness drained out. It has the bearing of a heavily tattooed warrior fallen on his side; windows and grey walls swamped under a heavyweight of scattered graffiti. The concrete, which bore the tonnage of cars and trucks, is exhausted and weakened, cracked open by persistent clumps of weed, sapling and grass. The proprietary wooden sign at the front of a failing roof has worn to anonymity, and it's been a while since I remembered the wording. Scents of diesel and petrol long gone, I inhale spirits of earth and bush. Inside, brown stains indicate where displays and counters once stood, all fittings and materials stripped away for reuse or rubbish. I see – or see possible evidence of – flies, spiders, birds, rats and pint-sized fauna. Who would want this ruin? The real estate value surely diminished to near nothingness by the isolation of its surrounds.

obsolete building
abandoned by humans
acquired for zero
by Mother Nature
successfully repurposed

Tony Steven Williams



Nirvana

It all began with a cup of coffee, a brush pen, and your unblemished skin. With you sprawled across my bed, I keep the steaming cup on the nightstand and pick up the pen.

The contours of your perfect back beckon me, rising and falling with each breath. Ready with the pen poised, I feel like Michelangelo, and almost regret sharing Shakespeare's opinion about one's name.

rainbow clouds
I don't need
the pot of gold

Surashree Joshi



Tête-à-tête

I distinctly remember the day I met my friend from college for a cup of tea. She was at a crowded stall with some of her other friends. She used to intimidate me, seeing as she was so much better than me in every way possible. While joking around with her and her friends, I made an offhand remark. I never expected them to go so quiet. Finally, her friend said, *"Who even says that? What do you mean by "I love language?"* Then he turned to my friend and said, *"Congratulations! You have managed to find someone as weird as you."* My smile, that day, could have lit the darkest and gloomiest of days.

flood tide
my toes holding
more than sand

Surashree Joshi

"Enchanté Mademoiselle!"

In the beginning. . .

maple leaves out of the bud
burst forth naked

tributes of wind-dry newborn leaves
as birdsong ascends into clouds

the worm moon holds sonnets

pollen from the male
maple tree flowers
afloat on a windy day
to pollinate the female
maple flower's stigma
the inception of
a fleet of seedlings
in hidden harbors
a folio of four seasons
take root

quills of nectar overflow
reddish-purple petals
before gardens
and
flashes of yellow-black
honeybees darting

a gossip of maples
railed
at a NYC bus stop

inflorescence
of a hermaphrodite
black maple tree
its decayed branch
now collapsed
the very loss
dilutes the essence
of its strength

in this state
of weakening
the change from male
to female means
birthing
winged seedlings
instead
of the wind borne pollen's
in whispers
of seduction . . .

"enchanted mademoiselle"
pas plus!

In some cases, only the damaged part of the male tree may transition to female,
this occurs
at the spring debut of leafing only at the point of weakness or damage.

The colors of the transitioned autumn leaves may be a plethora of red,
yellow and orange on a single tree puzzled by the wind.

a diadem
shimmers at sunrise
autumnal swell

underfoot in the distance a stag sniffs the air

Deer see color differently than humans, unable to distinguish red from orange but can see
a spectrum of color ranges, see blue in its richness as well as yellow and green
in the shorter wavelengths further into the ultraviolet range.

danger significant
copperheads camouflage
among the fallen

a codex of nature
only the wild and widows
may know

As days grow shorter, the chlorophyll in maple leaves begins to fade
and male maple will turn red and female maple leaves turn yellow and orange
due to lack of processing, converting sunlight into energy, the sun's waves lengthen.

the males rankings
of deeper reds
in contrast
a females sunny score
of yellow, orange leaves

red bark
red seeds
red-headed
woodpeckers
pecking

in the maple forest
woodland fairies
stash secret spells
inside
woodpecker hollows

a sap bucket hangs on tree dreams

Karina Klesko

Nothing Bad Ever Happens in British Home Stores

With my father off at the rugby, Mam and I swept down the middle of Queen Street, like a pair of ducks parting a red tide of Welsh supporters. We'd been in and out of the dusty shops looking for something on the sale racks that I could wear to the St Luke's Ball. I wanted a pink satin slip of a thing, tied at the neck with a chiffon bow, as soft as smoke but Mam turned up the hem, and then her nose, when she saw the uneven stitches. Instead, she took down a dress as black as tarmac with white pockmarked sleeves. Trying it on I looked so much older it was perfect. After, we went for a treat to BHS where they served tea in silver pots, and the scones came with little pots of jam and pats of butter decorated with waves. To the piped in smell of baking bread I told her about the boy I'd just met at uni who teased me about being Welsh, and Mam talked about the difference between knowing something, and feeling it. Then she smuggled the extra pot of strawberry jam into her handbag to take home.

afternoon tea—
spreading cream
on mam's radiation burns

Adele Evershed



Asperitas Clouds and Other Things That Come in Waves

I search through old albums for that photo of us on the beach. I know it's there somewhere—pressed flat and aging like all those old hankies that I keep in my top drawer, though I never use them. Once, when someone asked me what I would grab if my house were on fire, I said my photos. They seemed so irreplaceable. Of course, we've moved on—all the things I used to run my fingers over, I now hold in a cloud. Was it in Thailand? That beach? You know, the one where they filmed that movie with Leonardo DiCaprio, about a false utopia. What was it called? Anyway, I think I was wearing a scrap of black bikini, my hair short and buzzy. I can't remember what you wore, but I know you were pulling a face as if you'd just bitten into a durian for the first time. Turning the sticky pages I find the photo, me in a scarlet halter-neck swimsuit standing on a rocky beach, with wild waves breaking loudly in the background like a chronic cough. I'm looking up to where you should be, but there are only clouds.

overcast day
clouds massing
on your lungs

Adele Evershed



The unknown face(t)

If the changing hues and melodramas are any auguries, one returning wave is enough to wreck my sandcastle. I pinch myself to lend my muse a physical dimension while my awkwardly persistent mind throws up the word *dormiveglia* yet again.

Sharad Purnima, what we call the hunter's moon in my land, tells me I am already walking on its ruins. Not only of the wrecked, also on the new I am yet to architect. I tell the doggie—he disapproves being called a stray after all our miles along the beach—it's a little late to recall how this began. He nods. Together we blow the sand stories to the sky.

karmic equations
forming constellations
in Timbuktu

At this point I ponder over a name for the doggie. Leading me to totems only dogs see, he is set to go down in my history. For the stinging truth he comes up with, 'spider' it is! And also for the home he weaves for us, here under the stars, Spider tells me there's nothing anymore to guard. So we stretch ourselves out. I watch the sky of the sea while Spider watches the sky.

blind spot
 now i need
a new name

I haven't really overstretched, have I? That I have pledged my elasticity to overthinking, sky becomes the limit. All the coffee conversations still doing the rounds in my head, I become ground for coffee rings and leftover egos.

The sea has churned up a moonbow, I tell a sleepy Spider, and that I am not making it up. Toying with my sharp sense of colour, it is the truth of the moment. When the whole universe conspires, what a single woman sees no dog sees.

Meanwhile alpenglow ascends the mountain buddha.

the lake
i grow to be
water hyacinths

Daya Bhat

Taking home the common denominator

With a delayed domestic flight staring in my face I look out the waiting lounge glass pane. As if one restless metro wasn't enough, the slow rain is doubling it up. The other is losing its voice and sharp edges.

With every repeated announcement of an apology for the delay I watch the solemn faces around. My sighs run out of breath. I feel like a crazy ant caught in the O of dog tail. This trip is turning out to be as unplanned as expected. Everything is born with a predestined shape, I let my destiny take its own.

half-time
i let him shift
the goalposts

Rain catches momentum. Little streams seem like they're gushing to nowhere. The cloud doesn't teach every droplet to battle the pull of the salt of the sea. Rising and falling infinitely from and to the sea each time it's a new path leading to the same destination.

The focus shifts to boarding as the snag is resolved. I pick up my cabin case and join the tail end of the slithering queue. I settle down in my seat and feel lucky to be sitting next to a smiling little girl. The flight takes off, for God's sake, and my thoughts. Memories are like buried nuts, having but not having. I try to pick the rosy and the palatable.

eulogy
putting startled sins
to sleep

Other than adding miles to frequent flying nothing has ever come of these fruitless trips. In my heart I know the weight of what I have gathered in the past few years. The weight of it arching my back.

I think of how we both loved and lived autumns, and how each time we caught the leaf litter ending with a bigger sky. Now there's neither him nor the same autumn.

playing down
the empty silos
grain moon

The turbulence hardly allows anyone a wink of sleep. The girl next seat grabs the book from her mom, and gives up soon after: She has serious concerns about the colour prefixing the word 'lie'. Her mother tries her best to explain how and when a lie changes from white to black.

My head begins sorting our attic: Those that we both had put away for too long tumble out. Rather than two neat piles I get an ocean of grey. I end up swallowing it alone as there's neither him nor the possibility of him to share the honours.

The flight lands taking me beyond me and mine.

...
to the kid's question –
is mine a brown lie?

Daya Bhat



Standing in Front of the Hallmark Section at CVS

I tell my father I'm back
from a ten-day women-only
hiking trip in Scotland,
he says his arthritis is terrible
in the mornings, that he has to lie
on a heating pad for an hour
before starting his day.

I say in a few weeks we're taking
M and J to Acadia National Park
for M's spring break, he asks if I've seen
the new Dodge convertible that comes
in all the colors of the rainbow
and costs \$67,000.00.

Says his downtown is full
of queers, you should see
those faggots prance and parade around,
it's disgusting! I say nothing,
picture myself at PRIDE Toronto,
tell him I have to go, hang
up the phone, and remain
his daughter.

But this can't be right.
Have I never called my father
in June? I remember waking up
with dread, feeling blood
simmering under my skin
like how my church's holy water
would boil while dipping
my finger in to make the sign
of the cross.

I remember all those days,
throughout the years, waiting
until the last possible minute
before it seemed as if I had forgotten
to pick up the phone and say
Happy Father's Day.

a bad connection coming out cards reading my daydreams

Tick-Tock

Dear Future Therapist,

Sometimes, when I hear poets say,
my therapist tells me it makes me want
to be back in therapy. Maybe

the poems in me know our future,
and that's paralyzing, because what if
we've exhausted all the living
we can do in a relationship
meant to last a lifetime?

dead host

But then I remember why I hesitate
to go back. How my past
therapist's eyes would always double-
dog dare me to open, popping
out of their sockets, floating
toward my mouth, tap dancing
on my upper and lower lips

an alien in disguise

while I sat on the crack
of her love-
seat with prone hands tucked
under my thighs, fingertips gripping
the piping along the cushions.

trying to eat me

And when I grew tired
of her performance,
I'd open my 90° angle Pac-
Man mouth and swallow her brown Mary
Tyler Moore eyes, but not before
I'd lick the red, irritated
vessels clean like an ASMR junkie
shrinking jawbreakers.

little did she know

Sometimes, I'd press
the red button on my Atari joystick
with my right thumb and explode
into a thousand little fucked
up versions of myself like Harry
Potter's floating candles so she wouldn't
know which flame to extinguish first.

I was drawing her in

But in the end, it was the way
her polite smile grew in slow
motion as if she had just won
a Daytime Emmy for Lead Actress
in a therapy session for playing
who can be quiet the longest
and how she'd hold it with jazz
hands framing her face until saying
the words —*time's up!*

to eat her first. . . Snap! Crackle! Pop!

Peg Cherrin-Myers
&
Susan Burch

braided Sedokabun

Peg Cherrin-Myers wrote the free verse
Susan Burch wrote the braided Sedoka



*There must be always remaining in every life,
some place for the singing of angels, some place
for that which in itself is breathlessly beautiful.*

Howard Thurman

Steeped in the fragrance of sky

. . . you enter the nursing home buoyed not only by the sky and a refreshing wind, but also by the words of Howard Thurman on NPR while driving, and as you find your way to your friend it seems pleasant enough, the open space, a small café where four women sit around a table, but it is a complicated building, you have difficulty locating 210 “*by the first right angle on the left*” as pointed out by the person at the desk, though you eventually find the room, greeted not by singing angels, but a single inconsolable person in the middle of rumpled sheets, waving arms and crying about the attendant that took her heating pad she’d had for thirty years, her only comfort when she had headaches, and now it’s gone, ripped out of her hands, and she has *nothing, nothing* that is worth living for and even though you try to sooth her you can’t, so you take action and hail an assistant to help pick up the used Kleenex strewn over the floor yet it is obvious that a tidy room is not making her feel better as Mother always said it would because this problem is of a complexity Mother never faced as she was not forgotten and isolated from everything she once loved—you can see there are so many edges and unequal parts in this equation that it can’t be solved, and so you turn to the uneaten food on her side table (Mother again—food heals all) and tell her she must eat, she is too thin, a fraction of what she was but she says, I will not eat because they keep giving me food with gluten and they know I can’t have it but they don’t care and today it was barley soup again so I’m going to quit eating because I want to die, and even my boys don’t care and they put me in this awful home because they spend as little as possible on me, their only mother and I am left in this nursing home alone, without any recourse and she starts crying again—and you tell her you will be back tomorrow with some gluten-free food knowing your mother was wrong, that none of her remedies will help, for your friend has reached a place far beyond anything you’ve ever imagined.

sound of river ice
through the dark night
b r e a k i n g

Jo Balistreri

Unbound

At first, I try a sestina but Van Gogh bursts through the rigid form, throws out formal end words, expands the vision, creates explosions of a whir-swirling, ocher-orange world, one that spins like stars, moon, and sun.

Following him into the exuberant expanse, I unfurl my shadows, my darkness, touch a sky alive and exploding with stardust, absorbed in the glow until Van Gogh and I are beyond anything we've ever known. Nothing matters but that cobalt blue sky and the floating

floating

floating

mill pond
all the leaping carp
in a harvest moon

The Starry Night

—Vincent Van Gogh, 1889, Museum of Modern Art

Jo Balistreri



A Marvel Universe

In 1902, the philosopher and psychologist William James had this to say about the miraculous:

*"Most of us can remember the strangely moving power of passages in certain poems read when we were young, irrational doorways as they were through which the mystery of fact, the wildness and the pang of life, stole into our hearts and thrilled them."**

It seems that drowsy's not on the horizon just yet. It takes three stories, an extended family of stuffed animals, and a half glass of milk before she's finally able to ease off the bed and turn out the light. She gently closes his door.

past bedtime...
a lunar landing glows
through the keyhole

*The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature (1902)

Lorraine A Padden

F_mil_ Games

She shakes the bag of tiles and pulls out a 'd'.

daybreak –
the neighbour's rooster
yet to rise

Dad draws a 'p' and places it on the rack.

preterm –
the baby is still
in the incubator

Ma gets an 'f'.

full mug of aroma –
a little filter coffee
at the bottom

The nanny is handed out a 'y'.

Grandma wants the 's' but draws a **blank** tile.

steadying the lamp flame
with one hand on her walker
a soothing prayer

With his eyes shut, Grandpa feels the tiles in the bag. He knows that his other senses work better when his eyes are closed. He takes—

breakfast in the porch
feeding green chillies
to the parrots

Geethanjali Rajan

Blindside

Winter dusk
a ripe grapefruit palette
on the PET scan

The doctor leans back on his swivel chair and makes small talk with my frail mother. He listens to her recall some of the cases they worked on together in the early years, and remarks that the patients are faring well, even now. Despite his demeanour, I sense something's off.

Later, as we prepare to collect my father from the chemo ward, a nurse touches my arm. She discreetly says that my brother and I are to meet the doctor again. Alone. Not with mom.

We walk into the room. He looks uncomfortable, squirming in his seat. He doesn't meet my eye, says to my brother that this will be the last chemo. *"There's no point in continuing it,"* he trails off.

aftershock –
the swoosh of my breath
as the windows rattle

Geethanjali Rajan

Unpreventable

I am taking a nutrition class, working out, and losing weight. I'm thrilled by the new muscle in my right leg. But it keeps growing.

I ignore it until I can't. I take a photo in the bath and see with clarity a large hard lump protruding from my thigh. I set up an appointment.

Never in all my life have I seen so many doctors so quickly. Fear lodges in my throat, afraid to speak. They have to rule out the C word.

digital image

Inside my quadricep, there's a benign giant lipoma the size of a mango. I latch onto *benign* with such joy. I'm sent to a rock star orthopedic surgeon. Apparently, this is extremely rare because it is fully inside this thigh muscle.

made from the scans

So rare that this Dr. and all his interns couldn't be more excited to take it out of me. It's too big and could grow. It might hit nerves and cause pain. Or, worse, a femoral vessel. Oh, and by the way, you'll need someone to take care of you for a week or 2. You can't drive for a month, and did we mention, you'll be giving yourself shots daily?

peaks and valleys

My mom flies in to help me during the surgery and the first week of recovery because I'm single and live alone. I'm 43, and I haven't needed this kind of aid since I got my tonsils out at 5. They end up cutting through nerve endings. So it could be years until my thigh feels 'normal' again. I'm sent a home nurse to change my bandages. The scar is 6 inches long. The stitches will dissolve.

Eavonka Ettinger

Alarm Clock

My husband slipped out early to go to work, and I'm sleeping in when, suddenly, intrusive noises. Was he home so soon? But these are violent sounds. A struggle. Is someone there?

the leap

I go to the door calling out. Nothing, oddly quiet. I tip-toe from the bedroom then quickly pivot when I hear a rustle from the kitchen.

Feathers, so many feathers, and there, pressed up against the closed outside door, a mourning dove, beneath the paw of Merlin, our 18 year old cat. I back away, reeling. I grasp onto a thought. Where's the blood?

of a beating heart

And swiftly then, a scuffle, the flutter of wings. I rush back, relieved. The bird, shivering atop the frame of our sink window, is trying to peck its way out. Merlin is crouched below. Some memory of youth has transformed him to his former glory. I lift him at once and trap him in the bathroom.

I run back to open the door and just like that, out the dove flies, a flurry of fear. I see its mate on the telephone wire flapping its wings with worry.

all clear

Eavonka Ettinger



The Empty House

In the largest room, in the center of a large carpet, only a chess board covered in dust with a few pieces in disarray from a suspended game. As I bend down to the floor and try to resume the game, shreds of wallpaper peel off the walls and slowly fall to the floor.

Perhaps, boxes of rusty toy soldiers locked in closets await a signal.

Someone, sooner or later, will ring the doorbell, but no one knows whether to come in or go out.

old letters . . .
what's left
of a glade

Stefano d'Andrea



La casa vuota

Nella stanza più vasta, al centro di un grande tappeto, solo una scacchiera coperta di polvere con alcuni pezzi in disordine di una partita sospesa. Mentre, chinandomi a terra, provo a riprendere la partita, brandelli di tappezzeria si sfogliano dalle pareti e cadono lentamente sul pavimento.

Forse, scatole di soldatini arrugginiti chiusi negli armadi attendono un segnale.

Qualcuno, prima o poi, suonerà alla porta, ma nessuno sa se per entrare o uscire.

vecchie lettere...
quello che resta
d'una radura

Stefano d'Andrea

Push-button

In an unknown country of the world, desperately searching for a certain office in a labyrinthine building, I find an anonymous room, the only one without a name and a title on the door. Slightly widening the half-open door, I glimpse an unknown and faceless human who has in front of him a simple screen with a single large button.

He doesn't know, nor will he ever know, what will happen if he presses that button? Has he only received the order to do so from his superior in rank? Every minute, of every day?

Perhaps, with every press of his hand, a human being of any race, nation, age and social condition, will die. Instantly or after a few seconds, minutes, days, weeks, months . . . Even if it seems like it, it is not a video game.

I have heard that someone calls it "depopulation".

early winter –
a swing ride
before dark

Stefano d'Andrea

Note: grande pulsante is okay to keep as it just translates a big button in general.

Pulsante

In una ignota nazione del mondo, cercando disperatamente in un labirintico palazzo un certo ufficio, trovo una stanza anonima, l'unica senza un nome e una qualifica sulla porta. Allargando lievemente, la porta socchiusa intravedo un umano sconosciuto e senza volto che ha davanti a sè un semplice schermo con un solo grande pulsante.

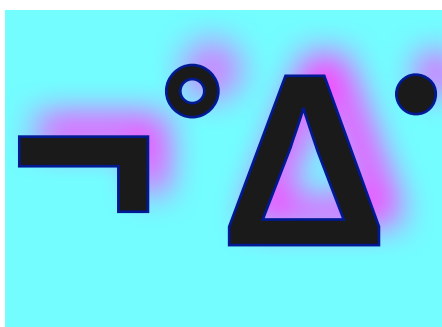
Egli non sa, né dovrà mai sapere, cosa accadrà se schiaccerà quel pulsante? Ha solo ricevuto l'ordine di farlo dal suo superiore in grado? Ogni minuto, di ogni giorno?

Forse, a ogni pressione della sua mano, un essere umano di qualsiasi razza, nazione, età e condizione sociale, morirà. Istantaneamente o dopo pochi secondi, minuti, giorni, settimane, mesi... Anche se lo sembra, non è un videogioco.

Ho sentito dire che qualcuno lo chiama "depopolamento".

precoce inverno –
un giro in altalena
prima del buio

Stefano d'Andrea



Fantasy in glass

Butterflies circle a vase, their pale wings, gather the light and shimmer. On display in a Japanese museum the unmatched beauty and craftsmanship of Gallé. Each piece tells a story and I'm entranced.

half-light
I flutter between
night and day
was it you reaching
for me across a meadow

Butterflies in a sky of lemon, spiral in an endless chase. But what if after one hundred years they took flight, left the darkness and shadows of the gallery.

waking
as the sun streams in
I thrill
to the warm touch
of your fingers

Butterflies. Imagine. Soft thoraxes quivering on the open window ledge, wings spread to sponge the pure light under their first blue sky.

try as I might
I cannot see beyond
each moment
resting a while
on the temple door

Lorraine Haig

Miscalculation

chain saw
stretching out
to sever a limb

I hear the thump and rush outside. You're there, on the ground, the breath knocked out of you.

In an instant I'm back all those years to our home on a small island. I wake to the ruckus of our hens. Once again, our scaly visitor has come to steal eggs. I grab the broom and wallop the goanna's thick hide. It escapes, egg yolk dribbling from its mouth.

Two days later it's back. Talons, like butcher's hooks, grip the crumbling bark as it climbs to the top of a burnt-out tree trunk that was hit by lightning. A long tongue probes the darkness in search of the creamy termites. A moment later it leaps towards the tall gum close by.

sickle moon
the ground teeming
with meat ants

Lorraine Haig



Tangible Metaphysics

There was a temple right next to our school, its courtyard often becoming our impromptu playground during gym class. Inside, Shiva sat in his sanctum, flanked by smaller shrines to Ganesh, Hanuman, and Jhulelal—the Sindhi sage with his lotus throne and silverfish attendants. The temple caretaker, a man with a volcanic temper, would scold us for straying into the sacred spaces, but our teachers' nonchalant glances emboldened us to keep playing.

We lived just across from the school, so my friends and I often hung around the temple. One day, flush with pocket money, my friends decided to offer coins to the gods, hoping to secure a steady stream of future gifts. Mimicking the rituals we'd seen, we made our rounds, shadowed by the caretaker's eagle-eyed scrutiny. As the last coin clinked into the donation box, he pounced, raging about our unworthy offerings and banishing us from the temple.

I remember the anger bubbling up. I bolted from the temple, taunting him as I ran. But I forgot my sister and friends, who weren't as quick. They got caught and reprimanded. I hid under the bed at home, feeling the weight of my betrayal.

That day, whatever charm I found in stone idols crumbled. I still visit temples, but it's not the deities I respect. In the chisel marks and weathered stone, I no longer seek gods but the ghosts of the artisans who brought them to life.

a fossil leaf
 only the now
can tell the then

Vidya Premkumar

Unconscious

I was Thondana:
the dark skinned, growling monster,
among the fair-skinned Sindhis and Punjabis.
The Ramsay brothers never had a fair monster,
in their bear-suited, long-fanged and clawed ghosts.

When our imaginations mimicked
Thekhana, Dak Bangla, and Purana Mandir
in an era without filters or parental guidance advisory notes,
the ghost had to be dark-skinned.
I became the inevitable Thondana,
hiding behind the water tank
repurposed as a dilapidated, abandoned temple,
rising with a roar and chasing
the meek white-skinned girl around
the garden, biting her to death.

After four decades,
as she recovers from her burns
in a hospital, I call her
and we reminisce
about our childhood.

She ends the call softly,
'Bye, Thondana'.

black eye
 my help believes
in husband's rights

Vidya Premkumar

Or Smoke and Mirrors

We share stories by the fire, watch embers against a midnight sky. Smoke tendrils meander: The higher they rise, the taller the tales become. Yarns are not meant for sweaters alone. We take these colorful threads and attempt to unravel the mysteries of life. Stories are drop-spun from our spindles. The frog queen reigns, she plays pinochle with water bears. Guppies grow to the size of trophy fish. Then again it is the natural wonders of flora and fauna with unexpected abilities that never cease to amaze us. Maybe the immortal jellyfish will share stories about the two legged walkers who like to write three lines.

ginko stroll
nighttime magic
 the glow of platypuses

Marjorie Pezzoli

Quinquennial

A brown envelope filled with letters, tucked away in my filing cabinet. Mother's sweeping handwriting. Her words are an attacking army of advice, opinion and unedited thoughts. Father's words are typed, clipped missives produced on a computer, which he personifies as a devil trying to mess with him. I read these letters every five years. Just to hear their voices again.

where are
the dead ones?
today when I
opened my mouth
you spoke

Mother writes to me when I leave home after university graduation. She recounts the plot of three soap operas. She describes a new outfit she bought, and raves about the wonders of Expo 67. Her enthusiasm jumps off the pages. She is a storyteller like me. Why didn't I notice before?

Mother liked a single malt
before her mind failed
tonight I sip on
Glenlivet and
feel her presence

Father's letters are short and upbeat. His dark side never shows on these white pages. He has taken up oil painting at the retirement home. The walls of his room are filled with blue skies, canoes and horses. He sends his love to my second husband, whom he calls the Commodore because we have a sailboat. He seems to be one step ahead of the black dog of depression that brought chaos into our lives when I was young. If only I were one step ahead myself.

in my darkness
I see my father's demons
finally understand
his struggle
for sanity

I open another letter. Mother's pen is on a roll. My girlfriends are flawed. I must find new ones. Then she rages against the boys I am dating. I should find a Protestant boy with an English name. Reading this, her words make my heart pound just like they did when I was twenty. I sit on the couch in my grown-up house, breathing quickly, as her voice echoes around the room.

words stolen by Parkinson's
Mother's blue eyes
gaze upon my face
as she silently
says goodbye

You were a mistake, Father writes. But don't worry, he says, probably more than half the world was a mistake. Then he prattles on about his golf game. Doesn't say any more about the act of my creation. Doesn't say he was glad to have me anyway. Just leaves me labeled, forever, as a mistake. Reading this letter, I laugh out loud.

roll-your-own black cats
lit before feet hit floor
I miss the smoke
and your Johnny
Carson smile

After Mother's dementia took hold, Father grew a beard and went on cruises by himself. She would never have allowed any of that, but she was beyond knowing. It was his secret rebellion. Then she rebelled by dying first. He refused to believe it and tried to telephone her, dialing zero and asking the operator to find her, weeks after she had been buried. I had to tell him over and over that she had died, to keep him off the phone.

leaving you
the last time at the home
your blue ascot
and sad eyes
elevator door closing

I bundle up the letters again, filing them away to read again in five more years. What lies between those lines? If only I had asked more questions.

roots of ancient cedars
hug the rocks as I hike
the Niagara Escarpment
I ponder my ancestors
and their lost stories

Leslie Bamford



Alone/Together

After I retired from forty-two years in offices with windows that didn't open. My soul yearned for an animal companion to walk with me in nature, something I had rarely done. I was sixty-seven. Knowing nothing about dogs. I dove into the deep end and brought home a four-month old Labradoodle from a farm up north. Though he was not ready to be my dream companion. I had to manage and train this wild puppy while my husband was still working. No longer free to come and go, I decide each day would bring on the spur of the moment. On Monday mornings, a week of days, with a crazy creature whirling around my feet.

I saw my post-retirement emancipation disappearing, and with a sinking heart. The dog's appealing brown eyes and curly joie de vivre saved me from going into a complete tailspin. But only barely. I was lost at a crossroad. I didn't know that privilege comes in many forms, that making a commitment to love someone, or something, can look like you are losing yourself, when in fact you are about to find yourself.

dressing up
was once slinky black
for dinner
now I take off
my long johns

wearing Ralph Lauren
to the leash free park
I hope the dogs
appreciate
my outfit

When the reality of lost freedom became clearer, I thought I'd lose my mind. Dog stewardship came clearly into focus, even though I tried to stay in denial as long as I could.

It went like this:

- Every day is about the dog.
- There are no days off.
- The dog needs to pee, poo, eat, sleep, play, exercise.
- Be supervised, socialized. and trained.
- Every day.
- For his entire life.

Which would be twelve to fourteen years.

Did I mention there are no days off? Twelve years times three walks a day equals twelve thousand seven hundred and forty-four walks. And at least that many poo bags. I tried to shake off my panic. But that voice in my head came back with "What have you done?" When doggy daycare didn't work out, I realized that the pup just wanted to be with me. I bought a new wardrobe of hiking clothes. waterproof boots, fanny pack for car keys, treats and of course, endless rolls of poo bags. When the pup got his first taste of trail walks, he was delighted. I had my companion, after all. And we were off.

a young dog
and me
growing old
I grab the leash
keep my promise

Leslie Bamford



autobiography

boy's deck shoes, soft and worn
a paisley tie, pink and torn
compression socks, old breasts compressed
beneath the stretch of tight spandex
thin legs wrapped in loose capris
called yoga pants, meant for ease
no tender curve, no daring line
to mark me female, or define
but the faded script, barely in my sight
a birth certificate, my only right

vanishing point
when i meet myself
do i know

co-conspirators: Lorraine Pester and Rick Hurst



Blue Ruin

I recently heard that Hansel and Gretel were the real baddies of that story. I suppose they did burn an old lady in her own oven—but then again, wasn't she fattening up Hansel to eat him? Or did he kill a decent woman who had a great recipe!

This sort of gruesome stuff fascinates me.

While living in Leatherhead, Surrey, my husband and I frequented *The Running Horse*, a local pub on Bridge Street on the River Mole. We lived in the town long enough to call it 'The Runner' and were treated as locals by the staff. The story of this pub dates back to 1403—it's even mentioned in the Doomsday Book. The landlady back then reportedly opened a trapdoor to let clients who displeased her drop into the river below.

I'm not sure how true this is, but she featured in a poem '*The Tunnying of Elynour Rummyng*' by John Skelton, Henry VIII's Poet Laureate. It's also said that Queen Elizabeth I actually stayed in the pub when floods made it impossible for her carriage to cross the Mole.

after midnight
an old lady waves at us
from an upstairs room

Marion Clarke

Notes:

'*The Tunnying of Elynour Rummyng*' by John Skelton
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Tunnying_of_Elynour_Rummyng

Hänsel and Gretel allegedly murdered the woman:
<https://spoonfulsofgermany.com/2014/12/02/the-truth-about-hansel-and-gretel/>

Nightmare on Queen Street

creeping mist
the glow from a cottage window
shows us the way back

As a child I was completely fascinated by fairy tales set in the forest. I gasped at bedtime stories of talking trees with long branches that could grab you; a witch who waited in her gingerbread house for unsuspecting children to stop for a nibble; even a wolf disguised as the human he had just eaten.

My siblings and I loved visiting my grandmother. There was an old-fashioned sweet shop near her house, and the town park was directly across the road. We would make a beeline to the playground, with its swings, roundabout and slide. But Granny told us to run past the man who always stood at the park gate. He wore a long coat, a trilby-style hat and had watery eyes and a beaked nose.

occluded moon
how many children
know their abuser

Marion Clarke

Colour of Things

The flight-path through the void always screws with the human mind, bending the psyche like light through a prism.

Orbiting the planet, the view through the porthole obscured by blanketing red clouds, is this earth or have we shifted into another dimension...

Our craft drifts and settles on a plain of purple grass, iced tips glinting. I follow the crew through the capsule's door beside a river of rippling black. Shaking my head, wondering, am I waiting for Charon's wherry.

Meanwhile the crew have vanished from sight.

Suddenly giant shadows skittering across the ship's metal hull catch my eye...

an early sun
strikes frosted cobwebs
I count
the parcels bound
in silken threads

Marilyn Humbert

dodging quicksand

estuary dawn
through the saltmarsh
tidal spill

early sunlight sneaks through the tent flap. curlews are on the move probing and sifting
the tumbling brine among edge-reeds. whisper-quiet I scrutinise each word uttered over
the last days...

which path
through the brambles
mind games

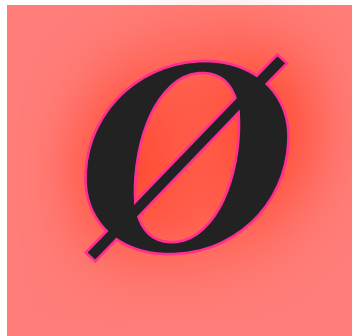
Marilyn Humbert

Oracles

more and more it's little things
that hold import
I count them at summer's end
how many berries
have fallen from the tree
of his dementia
two for sorrow one for joy
I've become superstitious
the phase of the moon
affects memory
waning waxing waning
maybe because we live near the sea
there must be some way to keep him
from drifting away

could it have mattered
that windblown seagull feather
I didn't pick up?

Shelli Jankowski-Smith



@martha4 that's a life after smashing pumpkins

4 apples

2 tbl cinnamon

80g butter

70g flour

70g oats

40g sugar

(4 portions)

Martha lives right on the periphery of the city. The street in which her house is situated is not that different from other streets, but she says it is, she says *in MY street*. When Martha goes to the bakery round the corner, she sees the pastries on display, *I used to buy them for my children*, because. No time, no time. Martha lives on the outskirts of the city and knows her routes and routines by heart.

She takes four apples and weighs them in her hand, looking for bruises, wormholes.

She is not old. Of course, that depends on who's the judge. I don't know if Martha really exists, or the street, but I'm sure there are others like Martha. And there are streets just like this one.

It's okay to make your crumble first and slice the apples afterwards. It's okay. No matter how you start, it will taste okay. Apples react with the air, turn brown, so. Have a bit of lemon juice at hand, if you want to prevent that. Sometimes things need to be treated immediately to keep them from reacting irreversibly.

how many houses

build a hometown

it's a struggle

so she helps the child bend

almost all its fingers down

Martha learnt the best thing is to persevere and not touch the food supplies. That means not answering the phone when you're in a rush, or refusing to daydream about what you want to do, sometimes. By the time you actually get to it, you're too exhausted. It's all irrelevant. You haven't dreamt about it.

She will listen to the answering machine later. Later.

These apples are juicy, not mealy. There is a decision to be made, should she keep the skin or remove it? She opts for the latter and watches the peel spiral grow. She still tries to make one very long strip of apple peel, as if this might turn it into a day of Records & Celebrations. As if a peel is more than just a peel. And it is.

Doing things for yourself can be a challenge, can't it. Like a wing feather made of iron. Once Martha went upstairs to get a book from the shelf and ended up on the sofa without it, from where she didn't get up again until late afternoon. Sometimes she watches her will melt on the stove. *It's good enough as it is (is it?)*. In summer she hangs it up to air out, in winter it lies carelessly in a small mountain of folds in front of the radiator. Martha no longer knows what it's like to know what she hungers for.

winging the unwinged *the*
Hachiko

Crumble can be made with oats, too. There are many options. It feels weird crumbling up the butter, sugar and other dry ingredients with your fingers and it will stick at first. The texture is all over the place. Keep going.

She calls herself *weak, weak*. She dips her finger in the batter. She suspects that others say the same about her.

She made a list this morning, and she swiftly ticked off *shopping, picking up a prescription, and the library*. She strokes her arms and looks at her reflection in the window. The other day, someone she hadn't seen for a long time said (when greeting her) *you've put on quite a bit of weight and you look just like your mother*. She just smiled. Later, when she drove home to the edge of town, she clutched the steering wheel. *They shouldn't have commented on my body. They shouldn't have told me what I don't want to be reminded of. And I didn't think for one moment of commenting on THEIR appearance. What is wrong with them? What is wrong with me?* She was worth a half-baked comment, and it tasted chunky, strange.

it's so important
to eat everything
that's on the plate
to walk through the umpteenth room
in the museum complex

She's good at not committing. It feels like a lie, all the time.

*When you put it into the oven, take care to set an alarm. You want apple crumble,
you don't want coal.*

It smells, the cinnamon is prominent. She opens the window. When she looks out, she can see, a lot. Someone yelling at their children, children riding their bikes in a slalom to the end of the street and back. Women with their dogs. People with their smartphones. Squirrels, rubbish bins, delivery vans, guitar chords, a children's TV programme, skies in all kinds of shades of blue, white and grey, framed by a landscape of rooftops. Condensation trails. It feels like Berlin, it's not. Everything is a story. *Martha has apple trees, but she can't climb very high up the ladder, she's afraid of heights.*

mixing it all up the vessel the ingredients *hi jack*

Apple crumble is comfort food, but when you don't like apples or are allergic, you can replace them with your favourite fruit. Maybe not bananas. They just get very, very brown and that doesn't look very nice. Sometimes looks do count. When all is eaten, it's time to bake another apple crumble to bridge the fact that the first is already gone.

da capo
a string
snaps

The kids have grown up fast. But that's not true. Time is a dot on a swinging rope. What is true is she grieves and doesn't tell anyone. What is true is she cannot forget she dies every day. She lives every day. *That is life?*

At that point, the kitchen doesn't look very clean. Put everything into the dishwasher.

(Clean in 5-minute chunks, followed by short breaks. Dance while you clean. Put on your favourite podcast. If you sit down, you won't do it. If you need to sit down, prioritise it, and that's okay. Dirty dishes are just that: dirty dishes.)

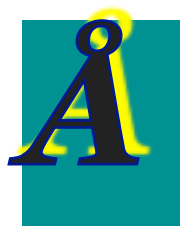
Martha thinks, a lot. She's human, a real human. Martha is still trying to figure stuff out. Discarded books on the floor. The colour selection cards for a new wall colour in the bedroom. Cobwebs. She says to herself *I don't want to label myself*. But who will, in case? Martha is quite strong. Martha is often clueless.

new weather strip no warmth escapes

Enjoy your apple crumble with ice cream. Better still, savour what you've just created.

I don't know if Martha really exists, or the street, but there are many others like Martha, for sure.

Kati Mohr



The Tower

]]] *beautiful* [[[

monochrome dawn
the exponential rise in rice
on 64 fields

]]] *cosmic girl* [[[

wardrobe clothes on every hanger, shelf her hand about to pause
she reaches deep inside there's nothing there to wear a T-shirt,
jeans, despite... so anything goes... with a black leather jacket
highs & lows in a rush now earphones, bag she runs ~~why do I~~
~~even go there? — i am fine. i'm fine. i'm fine. i'm~~ hot black coffee
and she dances on the kerb

]]] *she's leaving home* [[[

a hospital destruction site view tourist spot

]]] *decode* [[[

On the psychosomatic ward, sitting on the floor of a corridor with her back to the white wall: the woman (T-shirt, jeans, leather jacket) who almost looks like a girl. Another cup. Almost everyone else is standing, waiting for the psychoeducation session. When the meeting starts, the psychologist hands out the usual form on which each patient is asked to fill in how they're feeling; hers remains blank. One corner of her mouth is pulled up slightly, the other is dripping from her nervous fingers onto her thighs.

]]) *zombie* [[[

macro with no macro in its micro soup

]]) *spirits* [[[

The psychotherapist still has the taste of hazelnut cake on her tongue. She looks intently at the woman who has already been here for three weeks as a patient and whose hands are clenched in her lap. She tells her how it is. That she has hidden all the little splinters deep inside her flesh so that she doesn't have to see them. All the sutures bear the same headline: Function At All Costs. Then life shook her, shook her until the pressure was too much. And then? She wanted to die. She came here. Was everything, and everyone, every splinter of herself. One by one. The therapist sees the tears gathering in the corners of her patient's eyes, slowly beginning to run down. She fights for every single one.

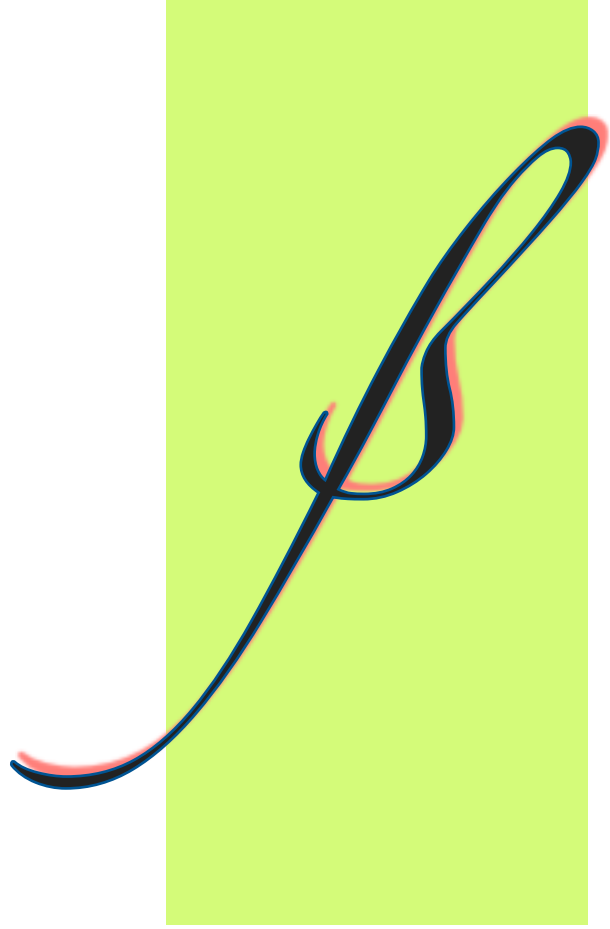
]]) *haunted* [[[

at the end of summer solstice the cork is out

]]) *hurricane* [[[

Kati Mohr

Beautiful (Christina Aguilera)
Cosmic Girl (Jamiroquai)
She's Leaving Home (The Beatles)
Decode (Paramore)
Zombie (The Cranberries)
Spirits (The Strumbellas)
Haunted (Poe)
Hurricane (I Prevail)



Butter Wind

breathing in the lap of an ocean

Glitter ball. She pivots the moment. Stays with breath. Waits
for the wave to collapse Glides as in a dream The Watcher

the slippery light in a breaking wave
shoreline froth

Pulls the mask tight Walks the corridor without enquiry
Slips from dress to gown Led to *The Machine*

a flurry of air palm fronds cross hatch the sun

Lies on a hard bed Arms to sides
Waits for the shift into a parallel world

autumn gust a rattle that wakes her

Recalling the words Cat Scan She inhales and holds

riffling back and forth among pages trader wind

Jenny Fraser

Carpe Diem

*roadworks
an employee leans
on a shovel*

It's not as if anything will change, the physical is riveted into each moment. Can jump shift, crank it up, drift, squeal or sit back and watch.

*roadworks
an employee moves
a red cone*

Jenny Fraser



Gone Too Soon

I think he faked his own death.

After college, he began a slow withdrawal that lasted 10 years: hanging out with us less and less, no longer returning our calls, avoiding us for no reason that we could figure out. After that, we heard from someone that his parents had died and that he was still living in their house. And then, just recently, we heard he'd passed away too.

Surely he faked his own death and is living incognito — lost to us, perhaps, but happy at last. The impression he made is completely out of proportion to the place he actually occupied in our lives, and we want him to be out there — somewhere; anywhere.

is that . . . ?
your face
in the faces of strangers

Bill Waters

Never Mind

Nicole

I do sometimes wonder what happened to our friendship.

Certainly we were so much younger back then and there was a lot going on in our lives.

Often I remember that you left like a ghost, never to be found again.

Love is really something, isn't it?

Eight days ago YOUR NAME in the inbox...

earthquake
long after it passed
shaking breaths

Deborah Karl-Brandt

The Emperor's Smile

"Let me go!"

Until you mean it. Do you mean it?

a tease
quite out of reach
the butterfly

Deborah Karl-Brandt



The Immortal Artist

My timeless masterpiece that will guarantee my fame. Studying the style. Tasting the style. I feel it in me. It is me. Labouring over my work, word by word. A prisoner of my ideas and my genius. Demolition. This is not my magnum opus yet. Despair. I need to cut back, pair back everything. Cut off friends, disconnect from family. Keep building: word by word. Remove all human connection. Only the words matter. Isolation. Endless isolation. Have I made the right choice? Yes, only the words matter. Only this work counts. Years upon years. Decade after decade, until the final line is written. My magnum opus is ready.

I send it out to the world, and the responses come back, one after another:

wasting time

readers, critics say passé, tiring

a pointless, useless journey

along disused paths

futile work

Jer Hayes

Bulging

They carry books in backpacks up to the top of the hill even in the 21st century from a college class to class like Sisyphus, as if all their textbooks could not fit on their phones or a Smartwatch. Yet there are problems with backpacks on campus for what they can hide. It may be explosives, a gun, knife or something yet to be more daily and equally hazardous such as the perpetual and chronic mistrust of never having anyone at closer than arm's length, panic to leave home at all or paralyzing inaction to even try anymore to connect, to give up before knowing what's up?

"Hey, a piece of gum?"
It could be poison or not.
Choose and we will see.

Michael Shoemaker

A Momentous Occasion

The pump organ blurts out an indistinguishable glob of sound and fury, filling the air with dissonance and fate and causing churchgoers to sit bolt upright and the organist to murmur to herself, mortified "*More practice, yes, needs more practice.*" The twins are already wrestling beneath the pews for the seating pole position. A teenager asks for two sticks of gum, one for after the first one falls flat and flavorless. The limp green-grey globe willow tree leans slightly left outside the stained-glass window in the churchyard, it waves greetings in the wind and catches one speck of clouds on its return, while baby chicks chase one another in "ring around the rosie" among overgrown blades of grass and drowsing tulips. The chorister braces her weight with both hands on the music stand with worry lines rising on her brow, but pioneer faith and courage bulge in her heart. The air conditioning rumbles and finally turns on. Two old men in wool three-piece suits pat one another on the back and then shake calloused hands, an outward expression of their covenant of neighborly kindness—the unsaid promise to stand by and help forever in bad times and good. Little is said, but much is meant. *Someone sneezes widely, erasing a chalkboard of thoughts, reverence and reverie.* She looks back from the front pew, smiling heaven's own guiding light.

I suppose one hears, sees, and knows all for one split moment when time stands still, contemplating a proposal of eternal marriage, sending chills up the spine.

Michael Shoemaker

Note from the editor:

Enjoy the hidden haiku.

Spritz

I'm passing through St. Marco's Piazza. It's the cigarette smoke wafting past me that captures my attention first. I turn and catch her eye. Valerie?

crossing the square
in the evening light, the past
overtakes me

Sophia Conway

As the Crow Flies

But Not in Venice

crossword puzzles
easier to navigate than this
european city

It's not possible to get anywhere in Venice in a straight line. There's an angled bridge to cross or turn to mislead you every few steps. But of course, you know that already. You were there with me last Spring before the summer crowds descended on the city. I think we walked two miles backwards before we found a narrow cobblestone alley that would take us in the right direction. I had blisters on my feet by the end of that day and you were limping again.

Did you ever tell me what the Dr. said about your swollen ankle?

final steps
this old city continues on
with him

Sophia Conway

The tilt of the earth and the turn of our gaze ...

A drive through drizzling dairy country anticipating the local scribblers' inaugural writers' forum.

pugged paddocks
sprained ankle pending

Patrick Morgan, historian and collector of Gippsland literature is the keynote speaker. He talks of nineteenth century poetry celebrating the beauty of the forests: the tree ferns, mountain ash and lyrebirds. The poverty and hardship of the pioneering days which generated a number of grim novels of the destruction of the great forest, the mud, the lack of roads, the fires. He mentions *Bracken* by Bernard Cronin, a story about a young man dealing with the misery and back breaking work of milking and cutting out *Pteridium esculentum* with a fern hook year after year.

Being familiar with horizontal rain and Gippsland slippers, the local name for gum boots, we all laugh at the reading of Nathan Spielvogel's essay '*Fortnight of Rain*' and the '*week in which no rain fell... and lo, there was a drought in the land.*' Farmers around here complain if there's no rain for a few days. Visitors complain. I recall when some friends stayed in our house while we were away one time: I rang to see how they were faring and Yves bewailed in his French accent. '*Misérable. When we arrived it started to rain and we felt like killing ourselves...*'

Back in my car, a white box truck pulls up in front of me. Through the wet windscreen I see the driver unlatch the tailgate. It's dark in there. I wait. The back lowers further to reveal stiffened legs pointing higgledy-piggledy. Five dead cows. Somehow I can't look away.

Nearly home the sun emerges lighting the country. Eucalypts shake mirrored leaves and yellow blooms of the Blackwoods flare. Hundreds of white ibis wheel and land to forage on boggy farmland. A soft rain begins again.

cow getting warmer a winter rainbow

Julie Constable

Healers

aerosols of scent
from the veins of gods
this is when
I can smell the rain
in our memories

ruby-throated charm
on a journey to Mexico
an autumn flyway
no need to save a place
for us

No mention of words such as: silence, silent, silently, still, stillness, reflection, reflected, old, young, alone, lonely, lone or other variations of the above. Synonyms offer a fresh choice rather than tired tropes or clichés.

Thomas Smith

note:

In Native American culture, hummingbirds are healers. Hopi and Zuni legends tell of hummingbirds intervening on behalf of humans

Saturday

When I arrive at the hospital, my sister-in-law and nephew are in the ground-floor café.
My brother is being moved into a different room.

After the massive bleed on the brain, he no longer needs all the equipment.

brown orthopaedic boots trolley

Fokkina McDonnell

Always death!

There is no best time to write
a death haiku.

too many people
I know
talking to oncologists.

Fokkina McDonnell

Bardo

The window of a home across the street is closed to the cool night. Yet it opens a sanctuary, framing a figure seated before a grand piano. Loose at the shoulders and white next to the piano's black, their shirt folds over breasts, puddles at the hips. One strand of hair — the color of last year's baled straw — dips toward their right eye as the profile bows to address the keys. A hand rises. Like smoke. As if in response to a struck chord, then settles unmoving in the figure's lap. Perhaps to drink its rush through the restraint of un-bounced balls, children asleep only dreaming of running, keys hanging at their place beside the door. The player's chin rises. A slight tilt of the head. Perhaps listening to memories stored in hands that pulse with scores learned, practiced, and played to unguarded applause. Perhaps noticing scuffing of feet — light and busy — behind the bedroom door.

Twigs, string, and hair
smoothed to a concave bowl —
broken branches pile by the road

JC Williams

Second chance

The new neighbor opens the door, I'm going to confront her habit of frying fish as late as midnight, is petite with kind eyes. Soon enough I'm seated with a photo album on my lap and "call me Sissy" is showing me her extended family. She insists I help myself to the sweets reserved for guests: The pink one tastes of sticky old cellophane, just as I remember.

She reminds me of my grandma. The one who also married young and spent her days in the kitchen cooking for the tribe. Who kept the family together when they landed as immigrants and lived in a tent. The one whom I ignored as a teenager because I had better and cooler things to do. The one who died from stomach cancer, although none of her children believed her when she complained of pain.

She reminds me of Rosa. Perhaps it's not too late.

wrapped candy
and doily tray
that kind of neighbor

Ella Aboutboul

Talk later,

Her email starts with So.

We are new friends and pen pals (her initiative) wanting to stretch our creative borders and experimenting with poetry.

You mentioned shadow triggers you process in the writing. What are those?

The invitation draws me in. I feel secretly flattered and also cautious, as if she can see my thoughts behind the screen. Words gush out claiming a life of their own, confessing doubts over self-image and authenticity.

power line
two pigeons slipping
winging it

I am typing and deleting typing deleting. Deleted. Perhaps I should say something about her poem.

Yes of course I always want to know your opinion! (smiley)

I can tell her. The work comes across as confrontational in an awkward but courageous manner, which I admire. Her exposed vulnerability triggers childish shame, like, I am glad it's not me. I don't add the last bit.

day moon sliding behind skies too near

Got any summer plans?

Ella Aboutboul

Omnibus

I knock on our house door, but it's not my mother who opens. Seeing my doubt in front of the door, the wind smacks it against the wall. Something that looks like a being, a steamy silhouette wearing a long flowery printed dress, swirls around, engulfs me, while its imprints fly all over the room. What a fresh plum blossom scent! Suddenly, the wind calms down, the clouds wash out, and the ghost is gone, but all these white petals left on the floor are a sign that I'm not the only one coming home now and then...

honeycomb –
a butterfly alights
on the sweet knife

Lavana Kray

Parking lots

There was still grass here last year, now it's a new parking lot. A burning-hot asphalt carpet laid over the flower bed, in front of my grandparents' house, where I have always returned, enjoying the orchard, and the little lake that has dried up in the meantime.

Fewer trees, many more parking lots, so they cut down the orchards too.

The only one left is chainsaw redefined, I feel it's my grandfather's walnut tree, by the way he holds the head bowed, looking at his beloved land.

the branches of a tree
tied up behind its back –
tightlipped birds

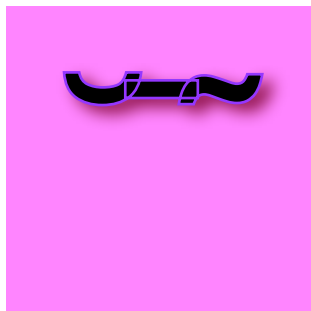
Lavana Kray

Dawn

Sixteen, her blinks and puffs turn the evening sky pink. Having played tag all day long,

sleeping in clouds
she hides
last night's kiss

Lakshman Bulusu



Soul Food

newly exotic
sage bush sporting pagodas
of purple flowers

But I must hasten from touring my garden of exultant-staged flowers to the tedious confines of a dentist's chair. On my last visit I learned I must have a wisdom tooth extracted. At the time, the dentist's chortle of encouragement (*'as useful as socks on a rooster!'*) came across as rather sinister but did have the effect of strengthening my resolve to give up sugary food.

After enduring the dental session, I have the consolation of meeting a friend for lunch at **Ye Olde Black Bear Inn**, a well-known place in Tewkesbury. I chose this place in the Bardiolotric belief that a youthful William Shakespeare had come here when a traveling actors' company performed on the bank of the River Avon right behind the inn. Waiting for my lunch companion, I take a selfie under the inn sign. It's a wooden silhouette of an upright bear chained to a post. It gets me wondering whether Shakespeare ever witnessed the bear-baiting 'entertainment' which took place here. There's no record of an actual date but actors' entertainment wouldn't have been allowed to sully the sacred Easter weekend so he wouldn't have been there to see the local custom (Christian Outreach?) of feeding the bear a treat of Hot Cross Buns.

My friend arrives and we choose a table inside, avoiding the one featuring a bear's neck chain and collar displayed high above it on the wall. My friend is a bit breathless, having rushed to find the inn: *'I thought it was called **The Bear and Ragged Staff**,*' she complains, *'and everyone I asked was a tourist looking to buy a pretty pot of the famed Tewkesbury mustard which they weren't sure how to use so I seem to have run through the town chanting 'Ham! Ham! All you need is Ham!'* I felt like a goofy John Lennon. *'Well you must have built up a decent thirst,'* I say, only half listening because I'm still reading my phone, where I learn of the Chairman of Tewkesbury Civic Society's sniffy refusal, to let **'Ye Olde Black Bear Inn'** suffer a name change to **'The Famous Olde Black Bear Inn,'** on the grounds that the word 'famous' relates to people like Madonna or Gary Glitter. Did he not appreciate Shakespeare was once actually here!!! Trod here, sauntered over the bridge to imagine Ophelia floating down the river... or even if he just stood holding the horses' heads for wealthy travellers, the very town should still celebrate his footprint!

Lunch arrives, a healthy portion of salmon which claims to be Atlantic, not farmed. I'm reluctant to start eating because now I'm looking at something funny on my phone: The Olympic Artistic Swimming event. *'Hours of training to wave your arms and legs and twirl about! For what? To entertain onlookers for a few minutes.'* I turn my gaze to the heavily trafficked crossroads outside the window and imagine the blacksmith's forge that once stood there. Wonder if the blacksmith was proud of his skill in making a sturdy chain and collar for a raging wild bear. Or whether during a summer dinner-break, they calmly and drowsily shared the same spacious shade of the old elm tree outside the forge. I try to summon up a pleasant scene: Perhaps a nimble kind-hearted lad creeping up to befriend a mangy exotic beast with the offer of a stick smeared with honey. Probably not. Honey was expensive back then, not an everyday staple. Maybe he passed a sliver of salmon from the nearby River Severn which he'd just explored where it joined the Avon. Or even, as he made his escape from his home-town, a chunk of that famously poached deer...

It's been a day of contrasts, so in the evening, back home, I just fancy a simple supper of bread and honey. But first a tour of the garden. Not as calming as I had hoped:

no comfort
seeing peony buds: the bulge
of bulldog heads

Sheila Barksdale

Ye Olde Black Bear Inn

<https://www.gloucestershirepubs.co.uk/pubs/ye-olde-black-bear-68-high-street-tewkesbury/>

The Best Mustard in England

as described by Thomas Fuller's *Worthies of England* 1662

<https://www.tewkesburymustard.co.uk>

Holiday Cheer

All there is, is rain and more rain. Through which lights twinkle brazenly as if to say—our party's much more fun! The darkness presses closer to dawn as the earth spins mindlessly. "I hate this season," says the woman, crushed with a weight of nameless sorrow.

nose pressed
to the window
outside
no invitations ever
to life's celebrations

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

that you will be afraid...

/////movie

Certain types of horror films (*slasher movies*) require the death of five human archetypes. My question, as we move to and fro in society, and even sideways, is how my investigation will run:

the knife that cuts the butter

Macrovipera lebetinus

The blunt-nosed viper, a species when it basks in North Africa.

Guns of course means money. Butter means we're toast.

another chance—decide/run—barbed wire

Whether the ripgut fence is real or a metaphor, many humans in the movies, and in actual life, have "another chance" which inevitably ends up in... *boo!!!*

The jumpscare is one of the most basic building blocks of horror living inside of movies and government *reforms*. In animals, such as we are, *the startle response* starts. It's an unconscious response to threat that could be a sudden noise or movement, or a tweaked item of news too bored with facts.

It's a brainstem reflectory reaction (*reflex*) that serves to protect the wrong people in power. We see this from the back of the neck (**whole-body startle**) and the eyes (**eyeblink**). It's found across many strains of humanity, throughout all of our attempted stages of life.

George Orwell might approve of an individual's emotional state; body posture; preparation for execution, or other such daily activities.

pond life another jailbreak

This is also slang for those deemed *human* by appearance mostly, who slithered out of the primordial ooze as if it was only the day before. What's behind you?! *Oh oh...no...*

queen of snow how the Labrys buries each slight

The labrys was an important symbol of Minoan religion on Crete (c. 2700 – 1450 BC) belonging to female goddesses, and empowerment. It's mostly deemed illegal to be female in many parts of the world; history casts an opaque shadow over who really brought the universe to us.

Cynthia Chiang is searching for signs of the universe's first light: The Experimental Cosmologist Hunting for the First Sunrise, ever.

Cynthia Phillips

"I was often the only woman in my science and physics classes in college, and my classmates made it difficult to connect and break into a "members only" culture."

There are others around our sacred facts.

into shade cat

I named our neighbourhood cat Bandersnatch, almost invisibly thin during the Covid19 Quarantine Eras, he has a Cheshire Cat Snarl that follows or leads.

John Lennon finds a marmalade-colored half-Persian stray cat in a snowstorm escaping from a child's globe, he would name the cat Tim. We have no record what he named the snowstorm.

The cat sleuth Francis of Felidae will solve many mysteries through many tins of flaked fish brought from the shores and seas north of Japan when the warm Kuroshio Current visits the sangfroid Kamchatka Current.

Alan Summers

Sacred Facts (that you will be afraid...):

/////movie the five other human archetypes

Caroline Herschel was the first person (woman) to discover a comet, and be awarded a prize by the Royal Astronomical Society (1835), and paid for her contribution to astronomy.

Jocelyn Bell Burnell (born 1943) is a Northern Irish astrophysicist discovering radio pulsars, one of the most significant scientific discoveries of the last 20th century.

<https://heritagecalling.com/2017/03/08/5-stellar-women-of-space-science/>

Cecilia Payne (who went by Cecilia Payne-Gaposchkin mostly) is one of the most influential and overlooked (female) astronomers in the history of science. She's instrumental in discovering the ubiquity of hydrogen in our current universe.

<https://www.snopes.com/news/2019/08/23/cecilia-payne-harvard-astronomy/>

Cynthia Chiang builds her own equipment to find the first stars (13 billion years ago) and peer beyond the universe: *"If we see these childhood photos of the universe, then we can understand... what we call home..."*

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/impact/article/cynthia-chiang-explorer-story>

Cynthia Phillips, Planetary Geologist - NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL)

<https://science.nasa.gov/people/cynthia-phillips/#hds-sidebar-nav-8>

Did She Look Like Me...

Ours is a matrilineal society, the Nairs of Kerala—it really is true. So it's a funny thing, thinking of your mother-ancestors. Because, you see, while the DNA in my nucleus comes from both dad and mom, my mitochondrial DNA is only inherited from my mother. And she, from her mother. And so on. You can go as far back as possible, but the little twirls of mitochondrial DNA that those women carried is what I carry, practically unaltered, in every single cell of my body. A family tree where the trunk is the woman, the branches are the men ...

in my son
the seeds of the goddess
daughter
the mother
of my grandmother

They were, once upon a time, young girls, living through the Independence struggles, the various colonisations, the royal courts, the muslim invasions; the christian conversions, and on and on. Who did they love? What did they eat? How did they play? How did they celebrate? What stars did they see when they looked up? I feel their tug strongly today ...

makar sankranti my jilebis in a twist of kites

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

Reaching for daylight and Finding Moonlight Serenade

Light creeps through
with leaves reaching out
they try to hide
secrets that only darkness
can ever truly contain

A howling by moonlight is only just broken by the distant noise of my heart skipping a beat, until I see you again.

Joanne Macias



Agraharam

I stand tall
almost 35 year old
a witness to two generations
my trunk as tall
as grandpa's eyes can see
my coconut flowers
blossoms the sky

The Bharatapuzha
runs behind our houses
grandma soaks her clothes
in the running water
aside a tiny stream
the child lets her paper boat
float to reach
her mother's ashes

And then finally
the chariot festival
sounds of nadaswarams
and bangles tinkle
beside the huge wheels
our family lights the kuttuvilikku
of smiles and tears

whispering walls
the tunes of abhangs
mixes with mist

Lakshmi Iyer

Aham Brahmasmi

*barefoot
holding the breath
of wood beneath*

I am I
or am I not I

I just want
to respect that I in me

not ego

My bucket list
has wings
that take me
to Mt. Kailash
108 Divya Deshams
take one more dip
in the Ganges
and stand for hours
in knee deep water

My varicose veins
can be put to rest
with stretched legs
over pillows

My lungs can be made
strongest with
anulom vilom
chanting
Gayatri mantras

*summer ends
one last game
of cowry shells
under the stars*

Lakshmi Iyer

Who Discovered Antarctica?

350 BC

Perhaps it was the Greeks whose mind's eyes first imagined the land at the southernmost pole. For Aristotle, a hypothetical continent, a stable bottom to balance the world. Named after the bear-shaped constellations Callisto Ursa Major and Arcas Ursa Minor, Arktikos needed its opposite Antarktikos.

in and out of the darkness
monsters imagined
mirrors mostly

650 AD

Possibly it was the Polynesians who first sailed the Southern Ocean. Hui Te Rangiora captained the Te Ivi O Atea with his canoed crew through visions of wonder in a frozen world; stars, currents, winds, wildlife, all strange. Yet, they were never lost at sea.

old stories
never prepared us for this
what's sung's forgotten

1820 AD

Maybe it was the Russian Bellingshausen who first saw the massive ice shelves of Queen Maud Land. Maybe it was British Bransfield who first spotted the tip of the Peninsula. Maybe it was the American Davis who first set foot on frozen land. The debate still rages over who won the race of 1820.

present tells the past
the way it wants to be seen
rewriting futures

Now

Arguably, the news about the region keeps flooding in from more than 3,700 scientists, to say nothing of the 56,000 tourists, or the watchers behind the eyes of live cams and satellites. Discoveries are made every day. His story, her story, your story, my story – they're all connected.

John Paul Caponigro

I Ink, Therefore I Am (Tattoo Confessional)

Waiting in the Auckland airport for our return flight home, I was sitting by myself minding our luggage as Rob was briefly away.

A few seats down sat a dark-haired, twenty-something male sporting a tattoo that completely covered his left bicep. An obviously new tattoo as the ink was black and clearly delineated with a greasy ointment. The fact was, he was picking at it, as if it were itchy and irritated, yet there was a satisfied expression being manifested by his body language.

As a general rule, I am not particularly impressed with tattoos as there is little that I would want engraved upon my person permanently, but I have to admit that this tattoo caught my eye with its Maori-like swirls, yet was also reminiscent of a Celtic knot.

To look or not? To speak or not? I chose to look; I chose to speak. "*Fresh ink?*" I asked, and he nodded, shoving the sleeve of his white t-shirt up to his shoulder, showing it off further.

"*It's the souvenir of my trip,*" the dark brown-eyed youth said. The pride in his voice was obvious, and smiling, he allowed me a closer look. I could see that it was not his only ink as there was a small, less visible tattoo on the skin of his wrist, but this one was the one upon which I was focused.

"*Very cool, truly nice,*" I said, and it was true. I could believe it was the souvenir of his trip as this tattoo would have been costly. Moreover, it was the kind of tattoo I could understand as I had traveled this land for two weeks. I realized the power of the land of the Maori with their ritual tattooing, each one designed by the village chief to symbolize both paternal and maternal families, their *haka*, a war-like dance even performed by the national rugby team, the fairness-for-all doctrine that ruled throughout the country, and the pride of every citizen who had even one drop of Maori blood, to change a person. I know the marks are invisible, but I too was ritually tattooed, never to forget this land and its people.

moonlight
on the footpath
—silver ferns

Nancy Brady

Neurosis #3

During a trip to Maui, he bought me this tacky plastic pen imprinted with hibiscus flowers. It could be called a cheap souvenir. But this pen and only this pen has been writing poetry ever since and I find myself starting to panic as the ink runs out.

composition
the effort required
to appear effortless

Alanna C. Burke

First Joy Ride

When I was younger, I lived in a rural area of Nevada. There was no public transport at the time and I had no choice but to learn to drive a car

joy ride
after a block or two
my brother adds a second seat belt

Madeleine Kavanagh

Note:

We owned a 1968 Ford Pinto and they had a shoulder belt and a lap belt in the front passenger seat.

Last Sound

It's been getting cold recently
and the sound of the insect which
has been quite loud since the beginning of august
has disappeared. A few nights ago
I heard them for the last time.

travel moon
wrapped up
in a cricket's song

Madeleine Kavanagh

Christmas Ornaments in the Sky

Fireworks explode just above our roof as I watch from the front porch. The shapes and colors of Christmas ornaments. I've not seen fireworks launch and burst this close to me. The shockingly loud bangs scare me. With each of my little jumps, I hear, see, feel clearly how terrified the dogs and other animals must be. And more so, those with PTSD. Still, I look up and watch, enthralled.

a piece falls from the sky
thumps my eyeglasses
the eye I still have

Claire Vogel Camargo

When the Boom Comes About

The winds of campaign rhetoric seem to keep pivoting this year. I feel the wear and tear of messaging, of fear-mongering in this presidential election. Whether it is more than in past elections, or I am paying more attention, I am not sure. I hesitate to share this. Fear being judged over what is clear-cut to others. Distracted, distraught, exhausted, my thoughts swing back and forth like a pendulum. Perhaps unnecessarily if my state has a predictable outcome. Still, the weight of responsibility ... I put on myself. Regardless.

coming about over and over my vote

Claire Vogel Camargo

Held in Passing

When I arrive home from school, my mother's gaze says it all. I ask to see him, but my hamster is already gone, laid to rest under a small mound in the garden. His cage sits vacant, the quiet pressing into every corner of my bedroom.

a last breath –
the wheel still turning
in darkness

In botanic art class, we sit among older hands that glide like clockwork, tracing each curve with practiced care. My friend and I stifle laughter, children again, as we try to capture the fragile essence of a rose. Our brushes hover, hesitant, the page filled with promise.

fingerprints
we paint the walls
in every colour

The night markets of Kowloon thrum with life, thick with spice and incense. Beneath the neon glow, the world spins into sound and scent. Vendors shout, and I weave through all the people, letting the pulse carry me, just for a moment, into the vibrant flow of everything.

the crowd parts –
a moth spins slowly
through lantern light

C.X. Turner

Tangled Reverie

pulsing rain
the slow creep of winter
in unlit rooms

In the ink-drenched dusk of a countryside graveyard, I step carefully, mindful of disturbing the dead, though the brittle crack of a snail shell betrays me. Fatigue blurs my senses; I trace the trees' hollowed knots, as if the land itself is bruised and tired. By an old water station, a wind chime shivers in the breeze, its faint notes my only guide. The even older church looms ahead, cloaked in ivy, forgotten but steadfast. Nearby, snowdrops glisten in the dew. I resist picking them, instead brushing away moss to uncover a gravestone: "my beloved".

nettles climb –
some memories remain
tarnished green

C.X. Turner

Centuplicate

On the way home from Mary's memorial service, I pull into Arabelle's driveway and knock on her door. *Come on in.* I find her sitting on her curvaceous Victorian sofa with its detailed floral patterns. An image of the Mona Lisa hangs on the wall behind her head. The long chain of white pearls peeks out of her bright blue dress, a contrast to her glowing brown skin. Reading glasses sit lowered on her nose.

A tall white vase filled with long-stemmed roses and flowering dogwood stands on the coffee table surrounded by books. Books on shelves, end tables, and one resting in her arthritic hands. *Please have a seat,* she points to a cushioned chair. *Would you like a cup of tea?* We drink out of dainty tea cups as we reminisce about Mary, laugh until our bellies hurt... we cry. As our conversation flows, stories of Arabelle's life spill into my lap. *I was the school librarian,* she proudly shares. *I don't drive anymore. My daughter takes me where I need to be.*

Her wide-open eyes meet mine: *What is today's date?* I tell her. *Oh my, it is my birthday. I'm four score and twenty more.*

light hidden in the shadow's white lilies

Norma Bradley

Belonging

The pen resting in my hand records memories of talking to my parents about their past. They usually found an excuse. Why do you want to know? my mother asked. Life in Kiev, family, revolution, escape. "Life is like writing with a pen. You can cross out your past, but you can't erase it."

their feet on solid ground
the Statue of Liberty

Norma Bradley

Golden Hour

It's a rare day without any after-school activities, my daughter and I decide to stop at Webb Lake to feed ducks. We park next to the Chinese restaurant. We hear an unexpected din: My daughter races it. I follow. The lawn is dotted with first autumn leaves.

the bridge across summer roses have lost their scent

At the water's edge the surface is unbroken. Mallards rest on the nesting isle, a couple of Canadian Geese loaf on the far bank. This isn't the scene I imagined in the parking lot. I look around to see hundreds of black birds perched in the cattails in the middle of the lake.

cacophony the truest sense of the world

I don't remember ever seeing a flock like this. I take out my phone, use the Merlin app to identify them. From the clatter, the app picks out the calls of the Brown-Headed Cowbird, the European Starling, and the Great-Tailed Grackle.

four and twenty the rocks seem bigger back then

My daughter pulls me away from the dark swarm: *We're here to feed the ducks.* She opens the bag of bread that we brought and tears it into pieces. The competition is fierce. *We should feed them something healthier,* I say, tossing out a few leaves of lettuce, which largely go ignored.

tick of the hour hand savoring my bit part

Nearby, on the muddy bank, a mature man is scattering oats: ducks and geese go waddling. And grackles and starlings abandon their perch. *They are migrating,* the man tells us. I watch my daughter watch them. *I want to fatten them up,* he says. *You know, for the second leg of their journey.*

where the basking turtles have gone almost dusk

Marcie Wessels

ON THE WILD SIDE

We watch the tree grow. Tree and we, framed by the same window. Is it the wind in the tree or the tree in the wind that blows our minds so?

taking hold
in the ghost forest
one young palm

Pamela Garry

REVIVALS

One cold winter's day, while physically isolating during the pandemic, my daughter texted to me 'Apricity: the sun's warmth in winter'. She dared me to put this rare wintry word in my poetry.

It is icy-cold, the morning of my mother's funeral. I sit with my father before her casket, before verklempt grandchildren as they take turns speaking from the heart, before the clearstory behind them.

the frozen drip
from snowcapped apples
hanging on

Before the service ends, my father and I look toward the light outside the window. We see squirrels frisking in apricity along fence finials, behind the funeral home.

Pamela Garry

In Plain Sight

For the last several months, my friend Jenny and I have gotten together every Wednesday morning. Last week, she cancelled. At the last minute. I was disappointed but I didn't text her to ask why.

ash-throated flycatcher the pale-yellow hitch in its song

When I learn that our mutual friend, Janice, was visiting over the weekend, I asked to tag along.

numbers the safety on

Sunday morning we meet in Jenny's driveway. Say hello, debate whether to wear masks while visiting.

a red-shouldered hawk alights flash of a cottontail

We're met at the front door by Jenny's daughter: She leads us to her mom's room, we both know the way. There's a caregiver seated in a corner, a dark-skinned woman with the longest eyelashes I've ever seen.

headlights the eye of the doe warm and wide-open

We take a seat next to Jenny. I put my hand on Jenny's arm. Jenny's daughter sits on the bed at her feet. Jenny's son stands by her bedside. We chat, *this and that*.

Jenny struggles to get comfortable, asks her son to remove the blanket. With her legs and feet uncovered, I see Jenny's painted nails.

heavy in
winter berries
the heavenly bamboo

When Jenny shifts and sighs, Janice suggests we put a pillow under her legs. It doesn't work, we raise the foot of the bed. Jenny complains about the angle of her right leg. The four of us clamber to adjust it.

Minutes later Jenny orders her daughter off the bed. She asks me to remove my hand from her arm. Then, she closes her eyes.

No one speaks.

As Janice and I stand up to leave, Jenny opens her eyes and murmurs, “*What’s with the Rambo shirt?*”

black camouflage
I catch
a whiff of smoke

Marcie Wessels

Note:

ash-throated flycatcher the pale-yellow hitch in its song

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Anthology credit:

skipping stones: The Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku 2022

ed. Jim Kacian and the Red Moon Editorial Staff (Red Moon Press 2023)

Something Not Right

At the window Ian looks down on a mass of opened umbrellas – no faces. He delays leaving the office and heads to the kitchen area to make a cup of coffee almost slipping on the mushrooms that have suddenly sprouted from the floor. The patter of Rain continues.

rattling
the fossil jar
rattles

Annie Bachini

Buttoned Up

Unable to be repaired, the coat that served two siblings finally wore out. They had thought that was the end of it until at the gathering after their mother's funeral it unexpectedly appears.

sweet and sour
nibbles
offered to all

Annie Bachini

Unfinished Exit

I keep thinking
about the time in high school
when you drew
me
a map of the city,
I still have it somewhere.
It was so easy
to get lost
in a place where all the trees
look the same.
And now
every time I see
a missing person's poster
stapled to a pole,
all I can think is
that could have been me.
Missing,
disappeared.

But there are no
posters for people
who just never came back
from vacation, from college,
from life.
You haven't killed yourself
because you'd have to commit to a
single exit.
What you wouldn't give to be your cousin Catherine,
who you watched
twice in one weekend get strangled nude
in a bathtub onstage
by the actor who once
filled your mouth with quarters at
your mother's funeral.
The curtains closed and opened again.
We applauded until
our hands were sore.

But you couldn't shake the image of
her lifeless body,
the way she hung there like a
marionette with cut strings.

And now every time you try to write a poem,
it feels like a
eulogy.
A desperate attempt to
capture something that's already
gone.
But maybe that's why we keep writing,
keep searching for
the right words,
because in this world where everything is
temporary,
poetry is our only chance at
immortality.
So even though you haven't
found the perfect ending yet,
you keep writing.
For Catherine, for yourself, for all the lost
souls
who never got their own
missing person's poster.
Because as long as there are words on a page,
there is still hope for an unfinished exit
to find its proper
ending.

Claudia Wysocky

Party Voices Whisper from the Ramparts

It's the day of her meeting with the mentors. Actually it's a party. Usually she sees them one at a time. At wide spaced intervals. On Mondays. But today it's Tuesday. Two days before a special birthday. So she decides to send out an invite to all of them with promise of balloons and goody bags. She'll never experience the penultimate day of being this age again so she really wants to know how to get out of it. And what should her projectile be for the following day. So she's made them all place labels with names she's invented beginning with each of the six letters forming the word haibun.

Helen heart in it

Angela absolute insistence, always adhere to the ancients

Isabel insisting on invisibility

Bessy basics basics basics

Ursula Unequivocal Unable to stand alone unacceptable

Natalie never never nail it down

She's blown up seven balloons in every colour of the rainbow, one for each of them and one for herself and put an appropriate sticker in each of the goodybags.

For Helen who'd written endlessly of grandma. Of step grandkids and step grandkids kids. Of parks from long gone childhood where she'd ferried them and found denuded. Of Turner and the Fighting Temeraire. Of mother's tears and how she'd never measured up. Not even one small honourable mention.

bruise coloured

heart shaped sticker

blue balloon for blues

Angela. Assiduous as she always added notes. Of saijiki. Of kasen. Followers of all the masters. Average as one known expert said as never having written one where you could say *'Ah Angela has made a splash!'*

sticker

in the shape of a frog

a green balloon

Isabel. The I in blink. You'd miss her if you did. But would you. She'd never really been there in the first place. Lower case. Invert it. Judges' thumbs down.

wand shaped sticker
to make her vanish
shrinking violet balloon

Bessie. Bought the basics. Paid a fortune for it. Never knew there was a bargain pack.
Held her back from saving up for the advanced.

pound sign sticker
a yellow balloon
glittered in gold

Ursula. Unwavering about unacceptable if unable to stand alone.

a sticker of Nelson
on his column in the sky
indigo balloon

Natalie. She never nailed it. Never nailed the knack of how to win it. Didn't want to. Never got the point.

spanner sticker
before the rust
an orange balloon

And now they are all round the table. All agog including herself.
She goes through all their counsel carefully.

dark summer sky
in bloom under the awning
plastic sunflowers

Helen. Heart-shaped. Really really ought to do well.

Angela. Ancients. Bashō basics. But that's more Bessie's cup of tea . Always adhere . Yes
But atrophy Angela. We need to advance.

Isabel. Invisibility. Some have said that. Yes. The poet stays out of it. But how much can they get out of it?

Bessy. Basics. Bashō knew them. His name meant banana tree. But what would he say to
Yes we have no...

Ursula. Unable to stand alone. But aren't we all like that. I don't believe that point of view has a leg to stand on.

Natalie. Never nail it. Good advice. You never know when what you thought was dead can leap up behind you. Completely surprise you.

She's taking stock of all of it now. She's paid the bill in the cafe. Apologised for litter left behind. Apologised for the raised voices of some of her mentor guests . Hope we didn't disturb your other customers

poppy petals
to the end of the path
shrivelled red balloon

hair thin as granny's
the dolly safe in the pushchair
tufted egret's rasp of a cry

morning sun
far side of the cafe awning
shadow birds

She's back in her room on this the day before the first of the rest of her life contemplating all the projectiles she'd bought for the goody bags but kept for herself.

the baby's
turquoise sunglasses
kingfisher's dark space

wagtail
by wagtail
shifts in the mist

The paper dart. The boomerang. The one from the Star Wars Lego set. The light sabre. The pair of plastic lips to send out a bright false smile. And the thistle seed she'd seized from the air as it drifted who knows where. This she now decides to let go, worried she may have tampered with fate, wondering what all the mentor guests are up to at this moment. Which of them might turn up at next week's regular meeting. Or might there be someone new. Someone with no known allergies to anything served in that place .

between tall grasses
a gap
don't mind it

Something tickles the palm.of her hand. Beside the open window she opens her fingers.

a white butterfly
from where the goatsbeard stood
ghosts

Diana Webb

Kryptonite

Bedtime. In my urge to pee, I totter, legs wobbling. My walker won't fit through the narrow door to the tiny en-suite bathroom. It's an old home. I hang to the door frame and sink but suddenly my legs buckle under me. My muscles won't hold me and superman doesn't fly in to catch me. My bad knee feels like the tendons are tearing as I sink lower and lower, then tumble backwards. I'm falling, falling back onto the hard tile floor, knee screaming, once-broken shoulder ramming the rim of the shower door rider, head lolling into the open shower. I hear my husband running to help.

desperate
for better days
hidden rainbows

A neuroimmune illness, called chronic fatigue syndrome, takes me down other than just in bathrooms. I wonder if my neighbors know how special it is to walk in their house; if they frown at the grocery store, thinking only of it as a chore, not a gift! Do they notice how long they stand, talking to friends?

Would I be sailing and biking again, had I stayed well, I wonder. Would Joplin or Liszt resurrect through my fingers at the piano? Would good friends return to my life instead of fleeing the sick woman I became?

chairs are a tool
my mantra when people
look right through me

Pris Campbell

Rolling Stone

He could have been a Sad Sack or a James Dean, bottom lip thrust out, but this vet who had been stabbed in the neck with a hypodermic needle, paralyzing him, smiles when I walk to his bed to meet him.

dark corners
disheveled men lurk
to steal lives

My boss had asked if I could go to the spinal cord unit to try and help. He had feeling in his right finger, nowhere else. That arm was crushed to his chest as if protecting a screaming baby from falling. Using a toggle chair would be unsafe, even with the arm tied down. Staff had massaged it in a hot tub, tied it to the bed at night. Nothing! My boss felt there was an anxiety component so sent me.

relaxation therapy
steps off the beaten path
oblivious muscles

Tied upright in his chair, we pick an outdoor isolated place he would enjoy and discuss it in detail. Eyes closed, I take him with my words to his chosen spot by the lake, a warm breeze blowing, birds singing in the trees above, reminding him off and on to 'breathe...breathe '

Suddenly his arm drops. Shocked, his eyes pop open and up it goes again.

exceptions ..
unexpected changes
sometime bode

We practice at lunchtime all week then he practices on his own with occasional visits from me. The ward staff is in awe of his progress. Mouths fall open. They ask for a demonstration of us working together. What magic do I weave? Do I practice witchcraft?! *Ahhhs*, when the arm releases again. Just from pretending to be at an imaginary lake.

Next trip down the hall past his unit I hear a laugh, a beep, and a chair speeds past, 'student driver' stuck to its back.

time is on my side
I can count the stars
in his eyes

Pris Campbell

Alan says, *this is important, when we have angels in our midst:*

This really happened but doesn't need to be mentioned. It just meant a lot to me.

At Large,

an envelope with a snapshot taped to the outside, a coiled rattlesnake. *"Here, open it and grab an egg."* *"No, never again."* Days ago when I dared open the container a loud rattle from popcorn kernels and a paper clip-twisted rubber band stunned me. When I say, *Never*, my dream from last night wakes in black and white, my foot on an oak limb that drapes on ground. Up the trunk I climb into a wooden shed. There, a conveyor belt. As the eggs fly by I divine which ones hold goodness. And which would tip the scales toward darkness like the oft signs of soot these days. Down the tree, I chain myself to it. Someone decided ten thousand acres of wilderness is for harvest. Still dreaming?

wakeup call
the copperhead hourglass
slips away

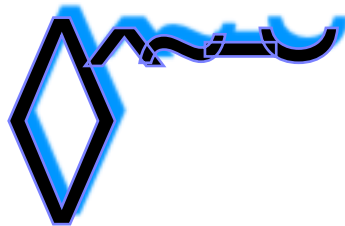
Laurie Wilcox-Meyer

Unleashed

or leashed, J's Sunshine sings a more-than-human tune when hearing Prokofiev or rolling in green grass. Yet I can't take my eyes off our plastics and pollution. The message is out of the bottle: *I came before your white sails and white houses. Much love, Mother Earth.*

near the dump
sedge grows bitter
to blossom?

Laurie Wilcox-Meyer



The **Brief** case **Encounter**

station platform
the libretto whispers
in frost, *and carols*

The Good Mirror is a cellphone screen, tablet screen, whenever it reflects my image,
whenever it's on hold, switched off, sleep mode, sleeping sleeping sleeping **zzz**

One for sorrow,

the tank applies
its winter camouflage
glinting cellphones

What do the Bars on Your Phone Really Mean?

[double meaning of phone / prison bars]

The phrase "The best mirror in the world is an old friend" is an idiom which means that our most trusted friends always tell us the truth even if harsh. They are the ones who actually care, and put us on the correct tracks even if it is difficult to walk.

military strike
the father's warm hand
for a child dissipates

ut terrebis

ut terrebis

ut terrebis

*It's like a Vietnam War gameshow segue segue segue Persian Gulf Middle East Ukraine
Damascus Other Holy Places*

etc... slasher some newsmidia journalists smiling too much

Our List of wars: 1945–1989

Our List of wars: 1990–2002

Our List of wars: 2003–Christmas present Christmas Past Christmas Future

Forever Last War...

another night calls
gleam-steady through dusk
train lights braking

night
the
snow
 railroad
 switch
quickly

the strip of blue people delivering home gray skies

no rules
the child draws
another box

the snow piling up another *détente*

train journey
that last chunk of fruit cake
dipped into coffee

Two for joy,
Three for a girl,
Four for a boy,

day moon
the kettle's click
all by itself

We are all just a phone call away . . .

echo
of the next speaker's
briefcase catches

Alan Summers

NOTES

Quote by George Herbert: *"The best mirror is an old friend."*

ut terrebis

Latin: *"that you will be afraid"*

echo
of the next speaker's
briefcase catches

Presence journal issue 13 ed. Martin Lucas (2001)

Thumbscrew

Julie's mama told her not to play with that pikey boy by the pond, yet sure enough there he is again after school, covered in dirt and irresistible. The schoolgirl knew she would find him at that selfsame spot, this time had the forethought to save half her ham sandwich in her lunchbox and offers it to him magnanimously. The little rascal glares at Julie resentfully with his beady eyes, puffs out his chest and blusters a bit, but accepts the tribute all the same. He says he's gorged on a big home-cooked lunch back at the caravan, but after doing a thousand jumping jacks has worked up such a mighty appetite, that if she *really* does not want the morsel, well... The traveler gobbles it down without much chewing at all, indeed as though he hasn't eaten all week, and his more privileged playmate suspects that must be closer to the truth. She'd found him skipping rocks, and after gourmandizing the youth invites her to join in on the fun. Julie is actually an expert at this sport, but feigns incompetence so that he might instruct her upon the finer points, guide her hands-on with improving a shoddy technique, bait snatched up and ran with in great enthusiasm. When the gypsy boy leans in from behind, takes her soft, creamy hand in his rough calloused one her face blushes and her heart all but skips a beat before resuming a furious *vivacissimo* beneath her dress, which the girl cringes in realizing—afraid he might sense it through the pulse about her wrist. But if the lad discerns her girlish butterflies he is polite enough not to call attention to the mortifying development, carries on just as he always does without making any fuss or awkward to-do. When they tire of this game, have expended their supply of flat stones on hand, they climb the several tallest nearby trees, play tic-tac toe with sticks in the sand, terrorize every chipmunk and goose in proximity. Dusk arrives far too quickly, as it always does for young people enjoying themselves, and they are forced to part ways morosely for their respective homes, after bidding one another fond adieus. The boy offers a businesslike handshake, Julie electing rather to peck him on the cheek. When she undresses for bed the girl notices her bracelet missing. She hopes that does not mean he will be absent tomorrow, resolves to purloin her companion a pear from their pantry in the morning before heading off. Maybe if she wears a ring she'd been given for her birthday the gypsy might even be persuaded to hold her hand, she thinks to herself wickedly...

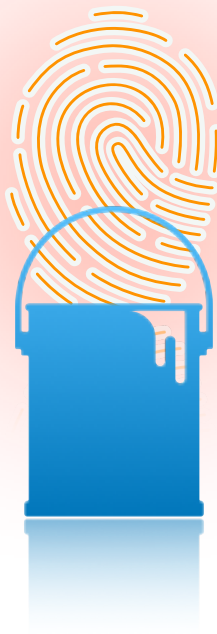
dead
bare tree
center broad
lush plain
summer?

Paint Sample

My uncle is texting me photographs of his bowel movements, a part of his fine art he clarifies, and I concede I can understand the impulse.

white picket (federal of)fence

Jerome Berglund



It was the owl that shrieked

She could barely see beyond the crust of corrosion distorting her peripheral vision. Lost in thought, she always said there were nuances between tarnish and patina, and hardly worth discussing. She could shine whenever she chose to.

*setting the tone
drawing every line
crossing her path*

Someone will polish her silver soul, a warrior with well-oiled armor in summer glory: No rust would mar the skin. A sun bears down on her parasol as she watches the horizon, and then another autumn arrives, bringing dust in its amber wake.

*one cloud
scent of petrichor
in the clarion sky*

The irony of oxidation is that it protects what it hides. Rainbow hues mask her frayed edges. There's simply too much oxygen. No fault of her own.

With her black spade, she digs a hole by the path that waits for the coming Spring, giving no thought to who might toss dirt on her heirloom grave.

*Macbeth in her words
Shakespeare is a hard act
to follow*

Leon Tefft

Juice Just as Sweet

From my earliest memories, I rarely knew my mother to be anywhere except by the television watching soap operas, Merv Griffin, and Walter Cronkite. It was a habit I picked up from her, though I've been learning new things lately. Since she had them take the TV out of her room, I always find her waiting for me in the garden area wearing the most charming smile. I wheel her casually around as she marvels at everything from the changing maples, to fresh air and fragrant breezes. I never knew that was the alyssum I smelled until she mentioned it one afternoon. God willing, I hope to take her to see the holiday decorations tomorrow. There's a chance of rain, and she already has her umbrella waiting.

*sunset lingers...
once more
around the park*

Leon Tefft

Dreamer's Emporium

It whispers softly where to find abandoned toys. The display of the museum presents them in a different light. The children's toys of the past, not forgotten or mislaid, just regifted to highlight how time marched on without them.

The nostalgia hits as you walk into the room. Vintage teddy bears stare at you, behind glass their beaded eyes plead to be held again. How things were, the wooden blocks, the dollhouse, the corgi cars, the SMASH robot, the miniature TARDIS, Paddington with suitcase in hand, ready to step back at any moment into your life.

Bagpuss waiting to wake in another world. The comics of *The Beano*, *The Dandy*, *Bunty*, *Mandy*. Let alone the old magazines – Smash Hits, Look-in – poster of the week – look it's Knight Rider with the talking car. Sindy with her horse, Pippa dolls waiting for their hair to be brushed once more. Tiny Tears laid on her changing mat.

Colouring books, thick crayons, and larger than life pencils. An Etch-a-Sketch, a Rubik's Cube, a Slinky, that plastic snake that floats in circles through the air. A skipping rope, Mr Potato Head, Operation Game, The Bionic Woman Doll facing Action Man with a defiant stare. Snakes and Ladders, counters spilling across the board. Toy money stacked ready for Monopoly. The kaleidoscope that you shook to see patterns dance in front of your eyes.

swifts leaving
at twilight
the forgotten hour

Joanna Ashwell

Land of Kettles

It's the nexus where all seem to gravitate. Whichever part of the building you work in, all eventually find themselves there. I've been alone, clicking the switch, when out of nowhere random souls appear, searching for the wisp of smoke and the balm of tea.

occupancy whistle
the hiss and boil
of office brew

Joanna Ashwell

Loose switch

18:45

I'm aware of the pressure on my eardrums, a sensation that persists. Following a brief moment and an expansive yawn, I recognize the source as my Spotify playlist. Apparently, I have awakened from my brief slumber.

high-high notes
of a rickshaw puller
an evening alley

19:00

I keep checking on the washroom door, for my wife's emergence, as she often requires assistance with retrieving sanitary products or a towel due to her preference against carrying items into the lavatory, reflecting her high standards of hygiene.

a blackout
in the apartment complex
flashing mouth

21:00

Watching the news headlines at prime time, I see protesting students seeking railway recruitment reform remain unjustified. Their voices raised against the system express hope for transformation, but personally, I see an immutable cycle repeating itself.

city square
the drunk repeats
his monologue

23:00

Richard Dawkins' 'The God Delusion' has me stuck in a literary dilemma. To finish or not to finish tonight, that's the question. The pin-drop shush of winter nights and having her nearby clouds my judgment. As someone who keeps to themselves, I'm pretty sure I'm missing something. Perhaps, it's time to speak up and shatter the peace?

3 A.M.
someone flushes
twice

Daipayan Nair

Follow-up prescription

*a sparrow song
now and then
electric drill*

It's evening, and her burger cravings are in full swing. I'm supposed to be on a diet, but Uveitis derailed that plan. Now, I'm stuck scrolling through food delivery apps, feeling weak—and not just because of steroids. My wife's puppy eyes are kryptonite I exclaim. She looks at me...

*all this time
on a rose petal
the fire ant*

Daipayan Nair

Apple Pie

He glances again at the speedometer, taking care to stay under the posted limit. Stopping at a red light a few blocks further, he takes the last bite of a protein bar, chasing it with a gulp of travel-mug coffee. Several minutes later, he flicks the turn signal as he approaches a familiar entrance drive, then turns in.

Rather than heading into the employee lot as usual, he continues along the curving drive to the visitors' parking by the main door. He carefully backs into a space, irritated that visitors are given such preference over the employees, who have a long walk from their lot. But that's fine—today, *he's* the visitor. As he pushes open the car door, he notes what a bright, nearly cloudless morning it is.

Such a clear day, he thinks, standing. *Yes, a day of great clarity.*

Reaching back into the car, he grabs his backpack and slings it over one shoulder. He lingers for a moment until someone walking in from the lot nears the door, then casually falls in just a few steps behind. The door responds to a key card—like the one he no longer has—and opens. He steps inside.

that smug voice
telling me I'm fired
the first bullet's yours

David Josephsohn

Permafrost

I see him there on the concrete median, by the “No Standing or Sitting” sign. Walking down the line of vehicles captive to a stoplight, he waves and smiles directly at each driver, including me. Safely behind my windshield glass, I gaze at the other cars, the Wendy’s across the street, that sign in the median—anything but him. And I question if he’s truly homeless as his cardboard placard proclaims. Guiltily glancing down at imaginary lint on the car seat, I choose to believe he’s not.

tax audit...
the search for
charity receipts

When did I become this hard, this cold? Did it happen so gradually that I remained unaware as the frost settled in? Did I ever resist, or did I welcome it, grateful for respite from the burden of caring?

deep woods
far beyond the last
trail marker

David Josephsohn

Amongst the trees

He was my age now when he died. I entered the hospital room and dad laid underneath the sterile white bedding, oxygen prongs in his nostrils beneath wire-framed tear-drop glasses. Unshaven, his head rolling back and forth on the pillow, he asks to be taken out of his misery. The window was open, on this first day of winter, which he hated. I felt his chi escape to the forest outside, as he took a last breath, when my husband promised him he'd take care of me forever. That was dad's death wish. Life is not the same without him, but he visits me as a mourning dove bestowing peace.

where in the sky
can he hear
when I speak now

Diana Raab

Shared

She sweeps into the room with cat eyes. He follows, hands in pockets and the hint of a waddle flowing from his middle-aged waist.

Silvia sits on one of the high stools at the bar. Her short black hair is sculpted framing a strong jaw and deep dark eyes. The tux-shirted, black-tied woman tending the bar moves quickly to take her order. Silvia leans toward her and speaks in low tones gesturing toward the long-stemmed glassware neatly lined in front of an assortment of colored bottles along the back wall. The bartender harvests small vials and turns away to perform alchemy.

Silvia turns back to scan the room. Her short tunic and skinny pants accentuate an athletic form. She's a Ninja sitting at the edge of exploit. Effortlessly, she draws her legs upward until she is perched atop the stool, balanced in the lotus position. She's wearing slippers, not *ballet pointe* shoes, light and soft and swift.

Bill stands at her side. He wears a white shirt with a loose-knotted, red and gray striped tie. She calls him "William," the fabric stretches open between the buttons just above his belt. His glasses slip down his nose, and his eyes peer over them. They focus on her, on everything about her.

She is now attending an embellished martini glass drizzled with chocolate which magically does not mix with the glittering diamond liquid within. She takes a tentative sip as the mixologist looks on. There is a nod, not a smile, and the server is reassured.

The band returns from a break; the music begins. William extends a hand; she accepts, setting down the glass. She pads her way to the center of the room, and twirls into his embrace. The music is fast, they keep pace. The little man is light on his feet, and Silvia, looking aside with eyes closed, is spinning, spinning until the other patrons turn away feeling that they are watching something too private.

Each week they come to the club. Each week they dance, and the voyeurs hold their seats rather than flood the dance floor. Then, one week, they are not there. The week becomes a month and the newest regulars pay no attention when a middle aged man in a too-tight white shirt leads a diminutive woman into the bar. They sit at a small table in the back.

Her face is drawn with sadness that hovers between despair and blank oblivion. The music starts; Bill takes her hand and pulls her toward the floor. Then they are spinning, spinning and a flicker of something flashes beneath closed eyelids. His eyes focus on her, everything about her.

Tonight she is back. He walks behind. She has come to dance and her confident stride establishes a new rhythm for the room. She waits until he withdraws her chair at the table and nods her appreciation as she slips silently into place. His glasses have already slipped down his nose, his eyes peer over them. They are focused on her, on everything about her.

dancing
for better or for worse
still dancing

Rob Smith

The Small Print

When my father retired to Georgia, he had a sixty-eight foot well drilled at the base of the mountain that was his backyard. One dry summer, the well nearly went dry, but there was a spring higher up the slope. Cutting through rhododendron, he laid PVC plastic pipe and brought water to the house. Eventually, he drilled a deeper second well. Now he had wells for drinking, and a supply that could be redirected to flush the toilets.

My father was not a literary type. He could read schematic circuit diagrams, but I don't remember ever seeing him reading a book. He did read the Cleveland Plain Dealer. As for books—he owned a few—but I never saw him read one. In his later years, however, he started writing vignettes of his boyhood in Youngstown, Ohio. My older sister helped him put them on a computer, and with an inkjet printer and a spiral binder, he made a book that he gave away to his neighbors.

It's a fact that my father could jury-rig just about anything. He could lay a block foundation, screed a cement pad, build a stud wall, and install a furnace. In my early years, I was his apprentice. So, I knew about plumbing, electrical flow along a conductor, and that studs are 16" on center. When I first saw the gate valves and filters in his basement I told him that what he really needed to write was an owner's manual for his house' plumbing. What he had created down there looked like the dive controls of a World War II submarine.

On one visit, I knew he was not himself. He'd stopped using one bathroom because the toilet leaked, and he couldn't fix it. I replaced the fill valve, and assured him that it was working okay.

He never did write an owner's manual, and in the very end, my brother and I had to sort out all the pipes and valves and memories.

deep waters
rising from pipes
into memory

Rob Smith

Reservations Around A Conference

Does your *wife* know she's coming?

No, but she knows *you* are.

performance review

I read between the lines

The Beaten Path

I am surprised you haven't heard of it. It's literally all the other parents are talking about. It's called "giving the gift of time." Ahh, doesn't that sound wonderful? It's just another way we show our love to our precious little jewels. Just imagine...when little Grayson is in middle school, he can walk confidently into the locker room showers and know that he has developed a full year more than all of his classmates. When Iverson tries out for football, he'll be a full year bigger and more muscular than all of his peers. When the twins Anderson and Jefferson start dating, they'll get enbyfriends before anyone else in their grade because they'll be taller and more self-assured. When all of Addison's classmates are struggling with reading and algebra, she'll be a whole year ahead of them. Just imagine the confidence boost. Bigger, smarter, and better-looking than their peers. They will graduate a year later, nevertheless they won't get bullied for being smaller or less advanced academically—and they will carry that sense of specialness for their entire lives. Just by holding them back in preschool for another year—you can give them literally everything. Everything that matters, anyway. Life on easy mode—what better present could a parent give a child? I am surprised you're not considering it. Literally every influencer on Instagram is doing it and every other parent we know is doing it, however I suppose each parent loves their children in their own *special* way.

the ones who stay
enjoy the wide open fields
lemmings

Joshua St. Claire

The Reckoning

I head home with a friend.
We arrive just as a Bombay cat
jumps in the window.

My father yells, *I've been hung.*
We find him strung up, neck bloody.
Get a knife and cut me down!

I hesitate, make
no move for a blade.
Who did this to you?

Your mother,
he chokes—a curse
laced with poison.

AND THERE SHE STORMS
DOWN A DARK CORRIDOR
KALI MAA
BENT ON HER DANCE
OF DESTRUCTION

Cynthia Anderson

My ears prick up

I can't place the sound at first. Then, from a second-story window, I see Cupid's coffin creak down the street, borne by naked cherubs, heads draped in black.

Townfolk line the path to take in the spectacle, nary a tear in sight. The poets are tongue-tied, the women wistful. I reach out my hand as if to touch the god being carted away.

Nearing the temple of Diana, the cherubs prance. Will they bury his alabaster body? Or will Venus, in her golden chariot, swoop from the heavens to seize her son?

wingless
the wounded hearts
he leaves around

Cynthia Anderson

Based on an ekphrastic treatment to the painting The Funeral Procession of Love, Henri Lerambert, France, 1580

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/>

[File:Henri_lerambert_\(attr.\),_i_funerali_di_amore,_1580_ca..JPG](#)

Why hast thou forsaken me?

In the back of a dimly lit storage room, the man in his cassock stands behind a half-naked boy, bent over.

Good Friday service
this white-haired man last to come
always first to leave

Chen-ou Liu

Sehnsucht

I don't know how she managed to keep her skin so clear. Not a spot, a freckle, or a wrinkle to mar the smooth whiteness of her face. A very light coating of golden hair, barely visible to the human eye, covers the area under her sharp chin and the sides next to her delicate pink ears.

The sun beats down without pause. The blue sea and sky grazes against each other. The sand beneath my sole is grainy, tending to get stuck between my nails. We both walk the same strip of narrow sandy crescent beside the busy sea every morning and evening. Miraculously her skin progressively lightens while I brown, and then burn.

yearning for sleep
I watch
another reel

Vidya Hariharan

Hiatus

I enter the square classroom with a sheaf of papers. There is not much space between my table and the first bench. I sit down and open the brown paper envelope in which the question papers are sealed. The students, around forty of them, settle down when they see me open it; many with folded hands, while others fidget. I look out the door waiting for the bell to ring, signalling the start of the test.

poised to enter
the marks . . .
smile or frown

Vidya Hariharan

Space being

Following the Big Bang around 13.8 billion years ago, our newborn baby:
A skipping string of designs, stars, galaxies, and galactic clouds in a backyard.

She recycles remnants into baskets of black holes.

I recall writing,

*"At times I wonder perhaps we are the living relatives of cosmic rays
at an imaginative focal length: when the lens is focused at infinity."*

late midnight
the bookmark I place
in quantum physics

Pravat Kumar Padhy

Dwindling

Insect populations continue to plummet. More and more crops are failing. There have been over 100 local reports of birds falling from the sky... I turn off the radio, and we head outside.

It's dusk, and there's a slight summer breeze. We sit on the stairs on the back porch and share a can of peaches for dinner.

blinking out:
the fireflies
fade to black

Kimberly Kuchar

Scars

I remember this part clearly. I'm five years old at my aunt's house. "*We can both be puppies.*" My older cousin and I get down on all fours on the dark-stained wooden floor. I do my best attempt at barking.

I decide I want the mutt, Duke, to be my mommy dog. (Everyone loves Duke, and Duke loves everyone.) My cousin decides that Duke is her mommy. She says their older dog, Midnight, can be my mommy. We argue for a moment, but I'm just happy to be playing with my cousin, so I give up. I crawl across the floor right up to Midnight and say, "*Hi, Mommy,*" in her face. I don't really notice that she's eating from her food bowl. Then I see teeth.

lightning flash—
darkness eats away
the sky

Mom tells me that the doctor gave me stitches on the side of my nose. I have no memory of that... or of actually being bitten. I just recall crying. But I still love dogs, like I always have.

my old pup
licks away my tears . . .
first breakup

Kimberly Kuchar

Freehold

As I unlock the main gate in the morning, I see a black dog, he wags his tail and tries to enter. I shut the gate and come outside. He looks at me and sits outside the gate again. There are five stray dogs in the lane who come for their daily treats—this is a new visitor. He doesn't look like a stray, most probably an abandoned labrador looking for a home.

missing my pet
I feed her treats
to street dogs

I offer him a biscuit. Soon three strays arrive barking, and attack the newcomer. The dog bares his wolf incisors and leaps. They back off, I also try to distract them with biscuits.

Leaving home for my morning walk, I look back, Blackie is ensconced at the gate, his tail spread out like a fern.

No Trespassing across the barbed wire I fall among wildflowers

Neena Singh

Not Quite Renunciation

Four-year-old Duke lingers by our gate, his gait slow. His mistress passed away last month, and their house at the end of our lane—once full of life—now stands locked up. The caretaker, living in the annex, takes care of him. The children live far away and send money for his upkeep.

The old caretaker tells how Duke's mistress loved him like a mother. I kneel feeling the weight of grief. His tail wags, though when I offer a biscuit, his head turns away.

yellow swallowtail
so suddenly it flies
from a leaf

Neena Singh

the changing room

my life
almost
doors not open
not shut
nothing decided
walking the borders
approaching death
looking for
not finding
the exit door

running down corridors
knocking, knocking
a labyrinth of passages
passing, passing

pot liquor
the color of brewed
iced tea
instead from beet
collard and mustard greens

9 months late
i've finally arrived
putting down
a water wash
as my fingers move
my tears around
until
even my forehead is wet
ready to put on a new face

black chocolate pudding
i've never had it so good
2 and 3/4 cups of milk
1/2 cup white sugar
1/4 cup dutch processed cocoa
3 tbsp cornstarch
3 tbsp butter
1 tsp singing dog vanilla
a pinch of salt
it's magic, the way
the milk, cocoa, sugar and cornstarch

go glossy as it thickens on the heat
and the mouthfeel of rich chocolate
scooped from ramekins morning
noon or night still one in the fridge
a half ramekin looked forward to
tomorrow

no longer we
he's gone for good
but not
everywhere i eye
his lingering
on his couch side table
a half-filled glass
leftover from his last visit
and the ramekin used
for holding his pills to be taken
and there! his pills in it
in the bathroom
2 drawers of his unused
pills, while I'm still
stuffed in the bottom drawer
the bedroom with his unused
CPAP gear and a closet
holding bags and boxes
full of stuff *to be sorted*
when i have time
which he never does so
it just follows him around

at least
the bedroom no longer reeks
of his sex-toy lubricant

my CPAP mask glub-glubs
I pull the straps tighter
abbey schnauzer hugs me
in my bed where she belongs
i think about a littermate pile
i celebrate our sleeping as one

he never liked abbey snuggling
he'd move her away from him
heck he never liked snuggling

and i?

i'm where i'm supposed to be
doing what i'm supposed to do
in the middle of it all clinging to
shredded sanity

he's doing this for me he says
living like he's always wanted
a jaybird in nature living with
a woman who has money
so she can keep him
so that i can live my life
the way my doctors want
independent calm peaceful
none of his temper tantrums
to disturb my solitude eating
my foodie ways and thriving finally
and likewise abbey schnauzer
thrives although she approaches
seventeen years

my shadow –
rolled up jeans and t-shirt
silvered pony-tail
a tom sawyer
at seventy five

that was last year
this year i'm naked
(Do *they* know ?)
wearing nothing but
cotton yoga capris and
cotton shirts cropped
at the waist comfortable
for the first time ever
hair naturally in ringlets
(OMG i *do* resemble
shirley temple) held in place
by authentic African prints
no longer a tom sawyer
my hourglass figure returns
my boho style turns heads
including his

my partial grocery list for a month

6 cartons of 18 count
extra large brown organic eggs
6 lbs european butter that has
the most beautifully developed
foam of milk fats
4-5 half gallons whole milk
8 bricks extra sharp white cheddar
4 large bags of greens

no longer
buying groceries
never eaten
no longer
eating
fast food
every meal

slowly
drink it
the way you made it
scalding milk
3 cups
adding the chai tea
(from india itself)
and the scald of milk
turns almond color
and black tea leaves
and spices
continue a total
of almost five minutes
and my beautiful porcelain
mug with its infuser
receiving ladled scalded
tea milk and strains it
until there's 20 ounces
filling my tea mug
i lift out the infuser
holding the dregs
from careful start to
more careful finish
less than thirty minutes
sugar to taste
and i study the color
of milk tea against
white porcelain

i sit down holding it
as carefully as it was made
the first sip savored
i renew my promise
to drink it slowly
and less than 5 minutes
nothing but an empty mug
no refills
nothing to be done but
to start again

independent,
independent,
independent
warrior,
warrior,
warrior

my doctors first hernandez
then kaplan and now steph
have given me my marching orders
to move
move my body
i want to dance

now i can dance
in the open spaces
now i can be a bird
singing
flying
landing on light feet

moving
I crave moving
through space

his text
asks if i'm doing better
without him here
i need for you to be

for a moment
I want you here
but you'd cramp my style

so I go it alone while you
carve another notch

breakfast
chopped onions, baby
bella whole mushrooms,
greens and garlic covered and
sautéed in 4 tbsp butter
tempered with the least
olive oil to keep it from browning
2 eggs whose yolks are the most
beautiful deep yellow beaten with
ground peppercorns and himalayan salt
added the heat lowered to steam
the spanish tortilla an open-faced
omelette the thickness of a pancake
the fire turned off 17 passes on a box
grater with extra sharp white cheddar
sprinkled over the top and the lid put
back on to melt it lifted onto the plate
a rich satisfying breakfast followed
by a quick walk

I wish us both well

ingredients list for stirred egg custard
2 cups whole milk
1/2 vanilla bean, sliced and scraped
(not hanging out in *my* pantry!)
3 egg yolks (a dinner knife rapped on
the shell makes a cleaner edge
on which to separate rather
than using the edge of the bowl)
1/4C + 2 tablespoons granulated sugar
1 tablespoon cornstarch (optional)
1/4 teaspoon pure vanilla extract
Pinch of salt
Homemade whipped cream, for garnish
Freshly ground nutmeg, for garnish
(even whole nutmeg ground on a rasp
is too dry and loses its flavors as it falls
anyone want ground paper atop?)
we start with scalded milk
a cup of which tempers those egg yolks
that now have sugar, salt, and cornstarch

added to them and whipped wickedly
before returning to the milk in the pan
(beatbeatbeat don't let those once-beautiful
yolks scramble) thickened by now
off the heat vanilla extract alters the color

but
on her own at the end
she's just another pale blonde dish
in spite of the promise
of those yolks

loose leaves infused
ground coffee beans
pressed or poured over
a stick blender frothing
no longer burning milk nor
curdling egg yolks nor
seizing the chocolate
it's the small things
that matter most
no big elaborate offering
but some small exquisite
single serving because
that's what i am now
small
exquisite
single

Lorraine Pester

The haibun incognito

...what really happened was this...Deb and I are in Otaki to get some reclaimed timber for me to shape and paint because I'm inspired by taniwha or Māori water spirits. Koromiko blossom is everywhere...swaying branches of white flowers. Outside the yard we pull in because I could feel a kingfisher...which sounds silly...but sometimes I can feel if there's a kingfisher close by. ..watching. It took some looking for but there it was by the stream on the power lines, head cocked. Behind it snow ridges of the Taruras and a big blue sky—and with that its gone in a gust and this poem arrives with the wind ...it is so simple

koromiko drifts how many blues in kingfisher

ka paheke e koromiko e hia nga puru o te kōtare

We sat there quietly and we just knew... it's all about healing...

Tim Roberts

Flow of Time

Painted exactly one hundred years before I was born. A solitary snow-covered landscape with a black-feathered bird perched on a wobbly gate. Light and shadows in a dynamic play with winter sunshine breaking the monochromatic colour scheme. One by one the intricate details of the painting start looming in front of me so I sit on a bench. As visitors pass by, stopping only briefly, it feels like the painting was hung there especially for me.

a sneeze

instead of the

MagpiE

the focus shifts on

Iliyana Stoyanova

Ruapeho's face

Not a word since Wellington...too many hours...the desert road already...bleak...a wilderness. Frost clings to the shadows. This is where snipers train. Too bumpy back here for me to sleep. She clears her voice...nothing said. She drives on her breath...holding it for corners, gasping at overtakes, sucking it in loudly if I ask a question...and that sigh...so empty and so full...no space...

car cramp
trapped
between the spare
and her
resentment

I knew we were here by her long exhale. Mount Ruapeho, simply The Mountain—is a snow volcano dominating North Island in never—been—seen—whites. My eyes burning from the Mountain's blaze ...I tried to stare back...I turned away. She saw. We stretched our legs

walking together only monologues touch

It's said that something is alive in the flaming magma....and if you are sincere and quiet...the something might speak. We never believed that...but now that that we don't believe our selves anymore we listened like never before. A slow wind came through and inside the wind the pain and whispers of ancestors...

Find the fire spirit deep in your guts
you must wake it
with the trust of kindling
give all you have been away
let the flames of your sorrow
wake the lava that sleeps in your veins
you must set your life alight again
once more a molten river
brimming with fiery possibility
and thundering through the dark—
or, will you turn and walk away, again
and settle for the cold ashes
of a life you could have been.

"Ready?" she asked...

Tim Roberts

Andamooka Lapidary Club, Mash sells a Rainbow Matrix Opal to an alien

Andamooka September. Blinding white Mullock heaps in every direction.

Rusted carcasses of seventies Holden Toranas, Toyota Corollas, and then other Holdens strewn across the properties of opal miners.

Alien tourists in town.

Sitting on a concrete step eating drumstick ice-creams. Blinded by the retro orange bougainvillea sprawling over the wire fence. We are alien sheep heading to the local opal noodling Mullock heaps.

You dig, I turn over, inspect and spray. Your jeans stay clean, mine are covered in white dust and water. I split rocks with my hammer.

I think of all the Mullock heaps created all over Earth, all the minerals we have stolen in lust for the material. I smash open rocks a little harder. I empathise with trapped rainbows.

On the other side of Earth bodies are being pulled from Concrete heaps, whilst we search for Rainbow Matrix opal in Andamooka. I smash the rocks harder and harder.

Mash hangs an opal
around an alien's neck
making no sense of Earth
we speed off
in a rusted-out Holden

Robyn Cairns

Andamooka is a town approximately 600 km north of Adelaide in the Far North of South Australia on the lands of the Kokatha people.

https://justapedia.org/wiki/Andamooka,_South_Australia

Mullock refers to waste tailings from metal ore mining.

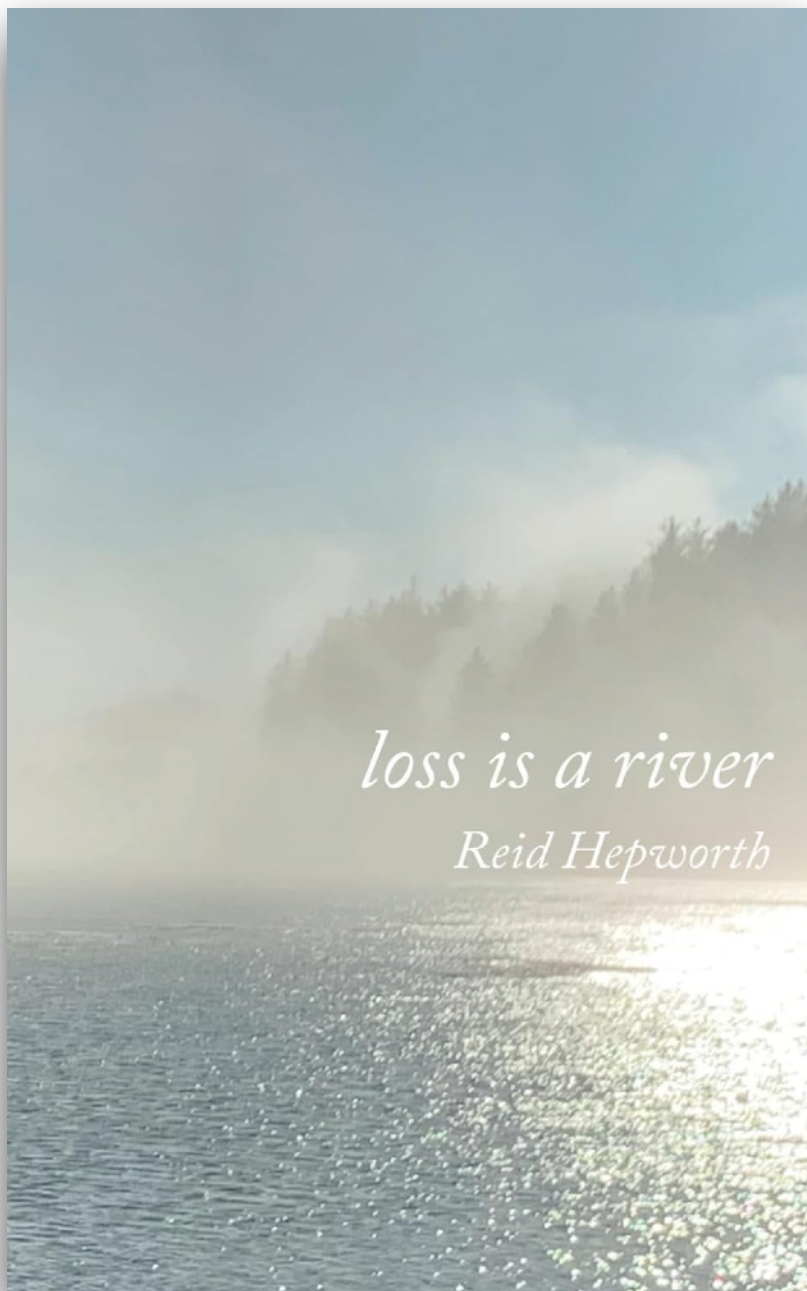
The 1970s Holden legendary cars:

<https://www.holden.com.au/discover-holden/heritage#:~:text=1970s-,1970s,%2Dbuilt%2C%20Trimatic%20automatic%20transmission>

loss is a river

by Reid Hepworth

Reviewer: Kelly Sargent



loss is a river

Reviewed by Kelly Sargent

Author: Reid Hepworth

Cover Photograph: Elizabeth Kulczycki

Publisher: Adisakrit Publishing

Date: October 2024

92 pages, perfect softbound, 5 x 8 inches

ISBN 979-8341090729

Price: \$9.54 US

Amazon link:

[loss is a river](#)

When I held Reid Hepworth's debut collection of tanka, haibun, and haiku in my hands, I prepared myself to be moved. With the opening poem, Reid begins her collection with four words: *loss is a river...* She ends the journey with the same four words: *...loss is a river*

Between the bookends of this definitive phrase, we travel from one understanding — our own — to Reid's. Through the voyage, we discover how much we, as humans, share. Though her collection is a tribute to her parents and how the loss of them has affected her, readers will certainly relate to their own experiences with grief.

As a former associate editor at Triveni Haikai India's The Haibun Gallery, Reid is a poet who clearly knows her craft. With the first haibun, titled "The Hole," Reid hints at the guiding philosophy of the travels ahead: "As always, the destination doesn't matter, it's the journey." Masterfully blending prose with haiku, she creates the effective link and shift from title to prose to haiku, ending with:

diagnosis
the doctor avoids
eye contact

Though fewer images in haikai are more traditional than the moon, Reid makes use of the symbol in a unique manner. Guiding us with a combination of 27 tanka, five haibun, and a handful of haiku, she leads us through five phases of grief. At each one's end, a moon gives us pause. Just as the moon owes its light to the sun, the one-line poems reflect the brilliance within the poet.

I found reading the fourth haibun in the collection, "Holding," to be a powerful experience. Alternating three stanzas of prose with three haiku allowed me to breathe, in and out, while taking in the imminence of a matriarch's passing. Moving between holding on and letting go, like the breaths we take, the haibun's final poem reads:

*clinging
to the last of the sun
cherry blossoms*

Reid makes stunning use of sensory details and juxtaposition in tanka with a half-dozen varieties of birds, including the steller's jay, swooping kestrel, and varied thrush. A seagull, heron, and whippoorwill also make appearances. Birds, in fact, express grief and engage in mourning rituals, showing that sadness is not unique to humans. When we feel most alone, it may be of comfort to feel a kinship with the natural world.

*unaware
that you have gone
the varied thrush
trills joyfully
at first light*

Reid moves us further into the mourning process, "rudderless" and adrift "in a fog." We catch glimpses "of a girl I never knew" through photos and a "searching for what you left behind." Feelings of loneliness and the gravity involving facing one's own mortality become part of the current. Grief, like water, changes shape, but remains a part of us, flowing like a river.

At its end, a river's water fans out into another, often larger, body of water. The river's flow is no longer confined to its channel, and is able to expand in width. Reid's collection is a gift, reminding us that we are not alone. Helen Keller said of the bereaved, "We belong to the largest company in all the world — the company of those who have known suffering."

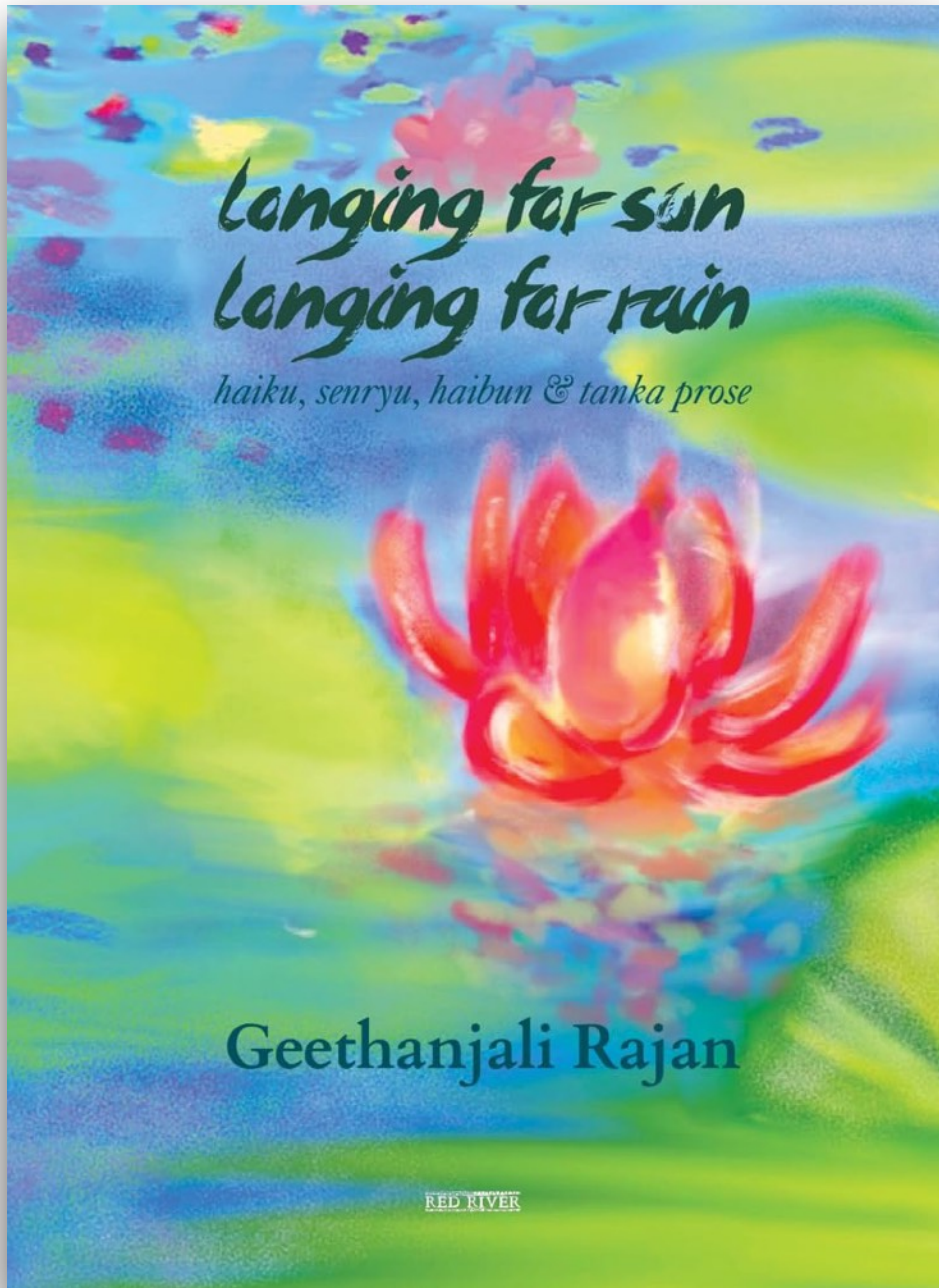
*some wounds
leave a mark
birch grove*

Finally, Victoria Alexander said, "There are three needs of the griever: To find the words for the loss, to say the words aloud, and to know that the words have been heard." We hear you, Reid, as clear in cadence and rhythm as the lunarphilic whippoorwill under the dying grass moon.

*poised
on the tip of a flowering
crape myrtle
the whippoorwill's lament
distills the night*

Bio:

Kelly Sargent is a writer, artist, and editor whose short form poetry appears regularly in leading journals and anthologies. She is the author of a haiku and senryu collection entitled *Bookmarks* (Red Moon Press, 2023).



longing for sun longing for rain
by Geethanjali Rajan

Click : [link to the book on Amazon](#)

Book review by Sangita Kalarickal

Any time I read a book to review, I tag interesting poems with a post-it note. But by the time I reached the fourth section of 'longing for sun longing for rain' by Geethanjali Rajan, the pages looked like the skirts of a flamenco dancer, laced with ruffles at the edge. So many gems to return back to, and so many verses that stayed with me long, as I ponder the ache they left behind, like the senryu

slipping through
the gaps of my fingers
his last breath

The book is a romp through places, scenes, festivities, and times. Geethanjali's writing shows a sensitivity, not only to places but also to the people and culture. Such as when she describes seeing a maiko in a lane of Gion. "It's face-saving that I don't click a picture" This kind of social finesse pervades the entire work, making her prose as well as the haiku shine. I find her senryu are packed with action moments. For example,

pony ride —
pink-ribboned pigtailed
follow her squeals

makes me see the entire scene as though in slow motion. Extremely effective. But overall, Geethanjali's strength lies in narrative poems of loss. The section 'in the heave of the sea' for example, has the power to reach into you and grip your heart tight. Geethanjali's inimitably gentle style carries you through different aspects and turns in life, and along the way you'll find some superlative senryu paired with some heart wrenching haibun. The original artwork by Dhatri Vengunad in the book is absolutely charming. A glimpse of a biography of sorts, I wait for the next book from her. Finally, I leave you with an absolutely brilliant haibun that has stayed with me much after I closed my post-it frilled copy of the book:

Kampai!

I am not a fan of tourist-like behaviour or gawking, but succumb to both at the narrow lanes of Gion, where a maikosan takes her hurried petite steps past me. It's face-saving that I don't click a picture.

I try not to drool while waiting for a matcha soft serve ice-cream cone with the customary cinnamon biscuit — yatsushashi, at the lane leading away from Kiyomizudera, the grand temple where I had just seen the three streams of pure water leading to good health, success and long life, but hadn't had the chance of drinking any of it.

I abhor cliches, but later, admit to 'leaving behind a piece of my heart', along with my dreams of samurai at the miyako. I leave out the part about my stray tears that may have

stained the pristine, pure-white pillow case back in the room in Kyoto. Then, boarding the shinkansen back to Kanto, I fly out of the beautiful island country with whom I will achingly continue my long-distance relationship of the past twenty years.

in the western sky
before the moon
hazes over, quick!
so much to love
so much sake to drain

Glossary:

- * Maiko is apprentice geisha
- * miyako means capital city, especially Kyoto, Japan's former capital
- * shinkansen is the bullet train
- * sake is the Japanese alcoholic beverage made from fermented rice



Reviewer: Sangita Kalarickal



FAIRYLORE

tim roberts

writer/artist-in-residence



the darkest
fairy
tales
prey on
our fear and
sometimes
they attack

boney fingers
pick the lock
the deaf dog barks
and ghouls
hesitate

rag moon in
a heedless
sky we head
for the fight thorns
scrape vines
snag with
yesterweek's cheese
and sour tea
we push on

ONCE upon a time

skirmish at
tangle
tree hill
darkness
gaining ground

help arrives from the east

warrior sprites in melodious tones fire arrows into the sky
darkness swollen into thunderheads rakes and claws the clay
glowing cavalry pound the ground—saddle bells ring inside the storm
pixie dragon legions ignite their chanting breath
choral units of ragamuffins spoon-tap-drum at frenzied speed
dawn arrives blackbirds crows and shrike sing with the sprites

finally shadows break and flee

street urchins trumpet the victory and fairies of hope serve crumpets and tea



The Blōō Report: PHR4 haibun (and tanka-bun) special 2024/2025 theme(s)

A Door Ajar special Babylon Sidedoor edition

The mention of tension:

Kansō

“Poetry is that art of the marvellous, of a simultaneous compression of language and an endless expansion of meaning.” —Fred D’Aguiar ((born 1960)

“What makes poetry reach beyond prose is its joyful recognition that there is more to words than meaning alone.” —Francis R. Jones (born 1955)

Who coined the word tension for poetry? —Allen Tate (1899 – 1979)

This sense of tension was derived by Tate from two terms used in logic—extension (literal meaning) and intension (metaphorical meaning)—from which he dropped the prefixes, and it refers to a mutually dependent relationship between these different forms of meaning. <https://www.britannica.com/art/tension-art>

Allen Tate said all works needed some kind of tension to be complete. He defined tension as a mutually beneficial relationship between extension (the literal meaning of a work) and intension (the metaphorical meaning of a work). In 1928, Tate published his first collection of poems *Allen Tate: Poems, History & Books, Biography*

Gonzo journalism: characterized by its punchy style, rough language, and ostensible disregard for conventional journalistic writing forms and customs.

See *Life without Mars* (PHR3) as a hybrid approach of haibun and gonzo journalism.

Ways To Swing a Prose piece:

1. Avoid clichés.
2. Be accurate.
3. Don't trust your reader.
4. Cull your adjectives.
5. Mix your rhythms.
6. Ditch the modifiers, others do the work.
7. Use unexpected words to shock readers into understanding or misunderstanding.
8. Repeat

Subverted Tips For Writing Perfect Prose — Jericho Writers

Carrying on from the mention of tension again:

Roald Dahl (WWII fighter pilot and storyteller) creates tension within ... within his reader. Famous for many genres from political satire to the British television series, *Tales of the Unexpected*, to *James Bond*, and *Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory*, the list goes on!

A strong contender for one of Dahl's darkest stories is "*Lamb to the Slaughter*." A devoted housewife murders her husband with a frozen leg of lamb and then avoids arrest by cooking the murder weapon then serving it to the detectives.

Think of haibun or tanka-bun (tanka instead of haiku) as a frozen piece of food handy as a weapon, and imminently suitable for investigators to unexpectedly devour the evidence!

The Index Test

Titles:

Please don't forget to consider the **Index Test!** What title might look intriguing enough in an index to tempt the reader to go there first.

REALLY IMPORTANT: TITLES
REALLY IMPORTANT: TITLES

How Does Roald Dahl Create Tension and Suspense

in His Short Stories for Adults Through the Characters

He creates tension and suspense in his short stories through various techniques such as:

Misleading or suggestive titles to pique readers' curiosity without giving away crucial details.

Settings are also used to build an unsettling atmosphere, such as describing a town at night.

Finally, Dahl develops complex, ambiguous characters whose motivations and behaviors keep readers guessing as to what might happen next.

AJAR:

The adjective ajar describes something that's slightly open, easily pushed open by the wind or kept open a little by a nosy person.

People in a hurry leave drawers and cabinet doors ajar, or hanging open for us to glimpse into as readers (or writers)!

Why do we say leave the door ajar?

The original meaning of ajar refers to leaving something slightly open in a literal sense, such as in this passage from Nathaniel Hawthorne's "From Twice Told Tales":

"In the obscurest corner of the room stood a tall and narrow oaken closet, with its door ajar, within which doubtfully appeared a skeleton."

WORD ORIGIN

Etymology: from around 1718; an alteration of Scottish dialect "a char", a contraction of the earlier (1500s) "on char" meaning slightly open. (The Barnhart Concise Dictionary of Etymology)

PARA-SYNONYMS

not just blunt-force over-used words such as old, ancient, silent, silence etc...

Make them open-resistant, undisclosed, never-shut-or-unshut, unlatched, awry, and glimpsebait!

Just some of Alan's alternatives!

The Door Ajar: An experimental documentary (dir. Patrick Jolley with Marcus Lamb) about French poet and theatre director Antonin Artaud (1896 – 1948) best known for his writings, and work in the theatre and cinema. Widely recognized as a major figure of the European avant-garde, he had a particularly strong influence on 20th century theatre through his conceptualization for raw, surreal and transgressive work, with texts exploring themes from the cosmologies of ancient cultures, philosophy, mysticism and indigenous practices.

His productions were "suggestive of extreme atmospheric turbulence..." —Wikipedia

Dare we even seldom leave a door ajar?

Haibun is alchemy, just that.

It's the art of combining aspects and angles of prose with haiku poems (or tanka etc...) to create a different genre of writing.

It's equally at home in poetry; creative short fiction/flash fiction; and creative non-fiction publications; as well as journal writing; nature writing; diary writing; and many other forms of art.

Answer the call of the page, the call of the wild haibun! It's all about *rewriting/rewiring the world*. —Alan Summers

There should be an accessible level, and a less obvious ambiguity that rewards close readers, & a third level of meaning that only reveals itself to the person who re-reads months/years later." —Martin Conneely, Ireland

"You have to be passionate about your subject...to write a quality haibun...pieces that kept [you] awake at night... I want to be startled by all the elements of a haibun (title, prose, haiku, tanka). I want haibun that compel me to read them again and again as I strive to learn something new about what it is like to be a human being."

Paraphrasing Glenn G. Coats, Some Thoughts about Haibun
Contemporary Haibun Online (January 2017, vol 12 no. 4)

We are poets always in interesting times, and the haibun mix of prose or even prose poetry combined with the short verses of haiku that are "pockets of now", and cemented into the actual present that comes and goes, feels vitally appropriate, and in keeping with our evolving and changing societies. - Alan Summers

"Create dangerously, for people who read dangerously. ... [Write] knowing in part that no matter how trivial your words may seem, someday, somewhere, someone may risk his or her life to read them." —Edwidge Danticat

"And by the way, everything in life is writable about if you have the outgoing guts to do it, and the imagination to improvise. The worst enemy to creativity is self-doubt."
—Sylvia Plath

As we have entered and gone beyond the second decade of the 21st Century, perhaps it's time to look back, look forward, and never moreso than looking uncritically at everything happening from family to work to social history. —Alan Summers

"There is no greater agony than bearing an untold story inside you." —Maya Angelou

Do you realize that all great literature is all about what a bummer it is to be a human being? Isn't it such a relief to have somebody say that? —Kurt Vonnegut

"Perhaps I write for no one. Perhaps for the same person children are writing for when they scrawl their names in the snow." —Margaret Atwood

"Writing saved me from the sin and inconvenience of violence." —Alice Walker

"I do what I do, and write what I write, without calculating what is worth what and so on. Fortunately, I am not a banker or an accountant. I feel that there is a time when a political statement needs to be made and I make it."
—Arundhati Roy

Don't bend; don't water it down; don't try to make it logical; don't edit your own soul according to the fashion. Rather, follow your most intense obsessions mercilessly.
-Franz Kafka

"Know what you write more than write what you know." Paraphrased from Annie Proulx

Carolyn See said:

"Every word a woman writes changes the story of the world, revises the official version."

[Emma Cueto](#) adds:

Because let's face it, the "official version" of the world could do with some revising.

"A word after a word after a word is power." — Margaret Atwood

Do you have *the call of the page* in your blood, and a passion for the line?
Join us...haibun needs you, even if you don't know it yet. — Alan Summers

The babylon sidedoor The babylon sidedoor

It seems that we are entering an interesting era for writers, and a poet stepped forward.
Do we follow?

"Somehow we've weathered and witnessed / A nation that isn't broken / But simply unfinished..."

"The Hill We Climb" by Amanda Gorman.

I too see that in our haiku, and can be inspired by the incredible bravery of a Japanese group of writers who took haiku by the hand, and were tortured for believing in it. Do we at least nod back to the distant past, and the recent past too, and look a little beyond today or tomorrow?

Why Babylon?

The appearance of Babylon was largely a mystery, and typically envisioned by artists as a hybrid between ancient cultures and contemporary developments.

The word "Babylon" in various languages has acquired a generic meaning of a large, bustling diverse city.

Paraphrasing from Wikipedia

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Babylon#Cultural_importance

Why sidedoor?

"...the large side doors were thrown open towards the sun to admit a bountiful light..."

— Thomas Hardy, *Far from the Madding Crowd*

The Babylon Sidedoor©Alan Summers, 23rd January 2021

Do get ready for the second all haibun
(and tanka-bun) edition Part Two, (PHR5)
the Summer of 2025!

Dates to send for PHR5:

May 3rd to May 11th 2025

9 days, **two** weekends!

Keep checking *Call of the Page*:

Home page:

www.callofthepage.org

PHR page:

www.callofthepage.org/the-pan-haiku-review/

maximum one piece

Which can be up to 1,500 words
submitted within the body of the email itself.

*Pan Haiku Review does not accept simultaneous submissions.
Previously unpublished work only.*

Please please please proofread

I want to read haibun and tanka-bun that excites, and intrigues.
That works with tension: Tension can be included via storytelling twists.

It should leave the reader elated, unsettled, or simply gasping!

Please think about titles:

What title might look intriguing enough in the contents section,
or index, to tempt the reader to pay a visit to your piece first

Alan Summers, PHR editor-in-chief
and *babylon sidedoor* editor panhaikureview@gmail.com

