haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



Milind Malick

Issue 28, February 2024

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haikuKATHA is the official monthly publication brought out by Triveni Haikai India. Its primary function is to publish the best in contemporary English-language haiku, senryu, tanka, haibun, tanka-prose, tanka-art, and haiga.

Each month's issue is put together by a team of editors who select poems from the previous month's prompts posted on the Triveni Haikai India website. The magazine is copyrighted by Triveni Haikai India.

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Issue 28
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haiku, tanka, haibun, gembun, gembun with tanka,
tanka-prose, haiga and tanka-art

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CONTENTS

Haiga by Milind Rajkumar
Editor's Choice Commentary by Teji Sethi 1 - 4

haiku

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt 5
Barrie Levine
Govind Joshi
John Pappas

K. Ramesh 6
Keiko Izawa
Keith Evetts

Keith Evetts 7
Lev Hart

Lorraine Haig 8
Marilyn Ashbaugh
Nalini Shetty
Nancy Brady

Padma Rajeswari 9
Priti Aisola
Richard L. Matta

Robert Kingston 10
Srini
Susan Burch

Susan Yavaniski 11

CONTENTS

one-line haiku

Nicholas Klacsanzky 12
Robert Kingston
Srini
Susan Beth Furst

four-line haiku

Bonnie J Scherer 13

concrete haiku

Barrie Levine 14
Hassane Zemmouri 15
Jan Stretch 16
Kanjini Devi 17

tanka

Alfred Booth 18
Barbara Olmtak

Billie Dee 19
Bonnie J Scherer

C.X. Turner 20
Joanna Ashwell
Kanjini Devi

CONTENTS

Kanjini Devi 21
Kirsten Cliff Elliot

Lakshmi Iyer 22
Linda Papanicolaou

Linda Papanicolaou 23
Lorraine Haig

Lorraine Haig 24
Marilyn Humbert
Nalini Shetty

Padma Priya 25
Priti Aisola

Priti Aisola 26
Reid Hepworth
Sanjuktaa Asopa

Shawn Blair 27
Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

Susan Burch 28
Susan Yavaniski

haibun

Anniversary by Adelaide B. Shaw 29
Magic Hour by Alfred Booth 30
Yin Yangs Made of Flesh by Andrew Riutta 31
Polydactyly by Billie Dee 32
Fight or Flight by C.X. Turner 33

CONTENTS

If I Could Turn Back Time by Eavonka Ettinger 34
Query by Kalyanee Arandhara 35
Girls' Rules by Linda Papanicolaou 36
Dostadning by Linda Papanicolaou
37
The Land of Myth by Lorraine Haig 38
My Mother's Heart by Lorraine Haig 39
The Way it's Always Been by Lorraine Haig 40
The Relic by Mona Bedi 41
Twisted by Mona Bedi 42
Broken Fence by Sandip Chauhan 43
Untouched Tomorrows by Sandip Chauhan 44
~~*In a New Nest*~~ by Sandip Chauhan 45
Clotheshorse stable by Susan Burch 46
It's Barely a Moment by Susan Yavanisky 47
Different Truths by Teji Sethi 48
b*lessed* by Vidya Shankar 49

gembun

Sankara Jayanth 50
Susan Burch 51

gembun with tanka

Kala Ramesh 52

tanka-prose

Fading Grass by C.X. Turner 53
Stopwatch by Susan Burch 54

CONTENTS

haiga

Adelaide B Shaw 55
Marion Clarke 56
Milan Rajkumar 57
Milan Rajkumar 58
Sankara Jayanth 59
Sankara Jayanth 60
Teji Sethi 61

tanka-art

Teji Sethi 62
Teji Sethi 63

haiku, tanka, haibun, tanka-prose, haiga and tanka-art

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and Aparna Pathak,

for providing the weekly challenges
for the month of January 2024,

Milind Mullick
for his watercolour painting,

our contributors
for sharing their poems.

Editors' Choice Commentary: Teji Sethi
Two Haiga by Milan Rajkumar



From what I know of haiga — the more visual cousin of haiku, is that haiga beautifully employs a link and shift technique between the haiku and the artwork which transforms it into a visual-verbal interplay. Since haiku and artwork share the same space, there ought to be an artistic attachment and detachment at the same time with neither of them explaining or overpowering the other. The contemporary haiga sometimes lacks this element and repeats the images in words and visuals which might speak of the inadequacy of either or both elements. The artwork or picture should therefore complement the haiku and elevate its essence.

The moment I saw Milan's haiga 'an autumn leaf, the delicacy and depth of the verse reminded me of a Nirgun Bhajan of Kabir, 'jaise paat gire taruvar se, milna bahut duhela, na jaane kidhar girega, lageya pavan ka rela' which means, we are much like a leaf, when severed from the universal spirit, we are liable to be blown away. In such a state, it is difficult to predict our journey. Our fate lies in/with the wind's direction.

In another reading, I visualise a sage, free from all worldly desires, who wanders from place to place gathering life's learnings. This could be the poet himself reflecting on his own journey. Pairing it with a faded pencil sketch, Milan nurtures the fragility of the moment. The back and grey tonalities add earthiness and visual depth to the haiga. The haiku takes an unexplained but intuitive leap from the sketch of a bamboo shrub and a bird perched on one of its twigs. The Japanese term for this is fusoko-furi. This haiga of his, speaks to me, at once of the many emotions embedded in a single image; of solitude, melancholy, uncertainty and freedom.



In this photo haiku or shahai, Milan creates a poignant story putting the reader into his shoes. When he opens the poem using 'ancestral home' as a backdrop, the reader anticipates something emotional like a fragment of memory to follow in the coming phrase. Rather, one gets a jolt on reading ‘a location no more on google maps’. Milan supplements this image with a picture showing a google map with a bird's eye view of a mountain range highlighted in white. Knowing that Milan comes from the North-Eastern part of India, this leaves us with many questions.

Is he pointing towards the recent outbursts of violence where a whole village was turned to dirt or is he talking of a natural calamity that engulfed his home? Or may be nothing of the two.

He just wants to draw attention to the changing topography of the place. Whatever it is, the sense of loss is palpable in this shahai. The use of a technical term ' Google maps' is an intelligent play of words. The versatility of technique lies in applying the use of zoom in from the bigger picture into a small one of his home, that finally fades out and you are left with nothing but a vacuum.

I congratulate Milan on creating these visual delights.

spring breeze ...
a Marilyn moment
in front of my crush

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

in the grip
of clothespins ...
billowing clouds

Barrie Levine

harvest basket
the earthy aroma
of just pulled carrots

Govind Joshi

pulling the lake
into the sky
grey heron

John Pappas

dewdrop on a leaf
the earth
holding oceans

K. Ramesh

looking up
to where a bird chirps
swollen plum buds

Keiko Izawa

discussing
family issues with friends
crosswinds

Keiko Izawa

rising moon
the spread of wind
in ripened grasses

Keith Evetts

anchored to a rock
a kite
at lunchtime

Keith Evetts

brushing off earth
with a song
skylark

Keith Evetts

feelings i can't name
a red leaf scuttles across
the sidewalk

Lev Hart

shimmering heat
the pig farm wafts through
our window

Lev Hart

breakwater
a trawler trailing
seagulls

Lorraine Haig

strong winds
everything moving
but the heron's stare

Marilyn Ashbaugh

deflated balloon -
the hush within
my womb

Nalini Shetty

first snowfall ...
tulip bulbs tucked
into beds

Nancy Brady

as if in a dream
she pats the soil
on the fresh grave

Padma Rajeswari

fissured earth
the sky's blue
hurts

Priti Aisola

dusk
my jagged thoughts
softened by prayer

Priti Aisola

pottery wheel
five pounds of clay
puts me in my place

Richard L. Matta

daffodils
a trio of magpies joined
by another

Robert Kingston

pit song ...
whistling down
the canary's voice

Robert Kingston

windy dusk
a stampede
of leaves

Srini

how you think
you walk on water
Jesus bug

Susan Burch

nor'easter
the tethered bull
grows restless

Susan Yavaniski

one-line haiku

multiple universes chatter of a magpie

Nicholas Klacsanzky

fifty spades deep the thud in dried clay

Robert Kingston

knowing everyone's names small town wind

Srini

early morning snow drifting back to sleep

Susan Beth Furst

the shift
of tectonic plates —
my dry knuckles
        buckling

Bonnie J Scherer

running to the bus ...
her windblown scarf
hanging on

Barrie Levine

concrete haiku

bro ken wind ow

Hassane Zemmouri

concrete haiku

soft snow
*
*
*
sounds of sibilants

Jan Stretch

thud
thud
thud ...
an empty skateboard
down the driveway

Kanjini Devi

tanka

morning birdsong
    sometimes a touch of rain
    sometimes a sunny sky
there are so many paths
to a musical phrase

Alfred Booth

when we fell askew
i found a homeless kitten
nurturing him
helped me believe
i could love you once again

Alfred Booth

eavesdropping
on conversations
my grandkids
so much wiser
than many adults

Barbara Olmtak

tanka

old pin oak
the last of the fledglings
takes wing
I wonder how many springs
are left for me

Billie Dee

a hummingbird
whirs among the aloes
remembering
your turquoise eyes
but not your name

Billie Dee

hornets nesting
under garage eaves
the sting
of a mortgage
hanging over me

Bonnie J Scherer

inside
a chrysalis
forming wings ...
I learn to love
silent spaces

C.X. Turner

my heart lifts
as you return
morning birdsong
finding a way
to be around you

Joanna Ashwell

the paddock now free
from blackberry brambles
rescue goats
the permanent tracks
they leave in my heart

Kanjini Devi

tanka

farmers wading
in flooded pastures
this winter
I reminisce about
rice fields of Bali

Kanjini Devi

added to each
layer of mulch
green manure
these parts of me
you don't embrace

Kanjini Devi

cracking open
this new journal ...
waning moon
will my salvation be
within these pages?

Kirsten Cliff Elliot

tanka

i don't know
why i shouted
at my mother
the sleepless night thundered
with heavy rain and tears

Lakshmi Iyer

blizzard of snow geese
across a tidal tule marsh —
suddenly
alone in the parking lot
I inhale first signs of spring

Linda Papanicolaou

the felt-tipped pen
poised above a blank page
in my sketchbook —
a dot becomes a line, then
turning on itself, a shape

Linda Papanicolaou

first day of school
through the morning traffic
anise swallowtail —
my resolution this year
to notice little things

Linda Papanicalaou

the silent pools
and deep ravines
of a river
your long absence
shaping my days

Lorraine Haig

her wish
to live past one hundred
in good health
the grace and beauty
of an old Huon pine

Lorraine Haig

all afternoon
I gaze at a blank page
by the river
a blackbird scratches
at shadows

Lorraine Haig

assaulted by
briny-ozone aroma
mixed with
rotten seaweed
... memories of home

Marilyn Humbert

amid daily chores
my muse toils
to take form
on a starved canvas
an evening sun

Nalini Shetty

tanka

still water
in the pond
scissored by the duck
turns still again ...
healing moments

Padma Priya

broke
my sand clock into two
only a sage knows
how to arrest the flow
of moments

Priti Aisola

morning walk
she sits on a bench
for a while
her hand rests lightly
on a statue's

Priti Aisola

tanka

wind-stirred
dry champa leaves ...
just one word
raking memories
of a loss i cannot face

Priti Aisola

tenderly
the gardener grafts together
tangy and sweet
how hard it is to accept
the different parts of me

Reid Hepworth

folding the day
into poems and poems
into paper cranes ...
now I wait for the wind
beneath their wings

Sanjuktaa Asopa

3 a.m.
a deer's silhouette
in the yard
did we even touch
each other yesterday

Shawn Blair

there is little
to see in the drab grey
this winter
how i dread the glimmer
of my deep blue sadness

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

hitting
the return key
then backspace ...
I erase the fantasy
of becoming a poet

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

why did you
leave it loaded?
your shiny gun
perfect
for cops and robbers

Susan Burch

alone at the Taj
I laughed to think I'd ever want
a monument to love ...
now a craftsman carves
one stone for our shared plot

Susan Yavaniski

for me
you labored a lifetime
in this field
now wild with flowers
I gather for your grave

Susan Yavaniski

Adelaide B. Shaw

Anniversary

pain and loss pain of loss loss of pain when does that happen some pain never goes it abates resurfaces reasserts itself attaches itself to nerve endings to the psyche one at a time or both all at once inclusive enveloping show stopping pain nagging persistent triggered by nothing by a look at a photo or a turn of my head by a date on the calendar

heavy winter rain
even my bones
know the date

Alfred Booth

Magic Hours

Yes, I know, I sneezed three times in a row in the wee hours. You always jumped down from your basket on top of the wardrobe next to the bed. Worried? Probably. You would cuddle for a while afterwards. Until I fell asleep again.

I felt the bed receive your now-invisible paws, tracing their path to where I lay awake. I said "Hello, Sweet Pea. Don't worry, papa is OK."

I don't remember how that nickname evolved from the beautiful Gao I've always known. It was the name given to you by the lady angel who nursed you when your mama couldn't be there for you and your kitty siblings. There were other nicknames.

I told you "It's alright, you can go back to sleep, wherever you are now." The rest of our long conversation will remain our secret.

full moonbeams ...
did you always watch them
without me?

Andrew Riutta

Yin Yangs Made of Flesh

I don't believe I've ever seen anyone look so soft, the way she's caught right now in this Christmas Eve candlelight and its dancing midnight flickers, her face and neck so delicately aglow.

She told me once when we were both drunk, and I was being a real jerk, that she wished a herd of elk would trample me and my poverty into a few dozen pounds of fresh steak.

shut-off notice —
she plays Nina Simone
for her pregnant belly

Billie Dee

Polydactyly

The boy I sat next to in tenth grade had six fingers on each hand, each one fully articulated with milky half-moons on each perfect nail. It came as no surprise when he won the Statewide Wrestling Match.

trimming
the Maine coon's front claws —
all 12 of them

C.X. Turner

Fight or Flight

Patterns of light flicker across the pavement stretching in front of me. I try to focus on stopping the tremble in my legs and remember to breathe when the cool air hits the back of my throat.

open sky

It is often easy to notice a swallow in flight because they will execute tight turns and dives while searching for insects, which they catch midair.

revealing its secrets

I never expected to walk away from you quite as swiftly as I did when you appeared unexpectedly in the street that bright autumn Tuesday. I hope you didn't see me, but remember that it doesn't matter.

one by one

Eavonka Ettinger

If I Could Turn Back Time

We are both wearing cowboy boots. I don't know why I even brought them with me to be a live-in nanny in Long Island, but she says it's a hot trend right now. Rachel isn't even legal yet, but her parents allowed her to come since I'm twenty-two and can look out for her. She's got a good fake ID. We paid for a cab to get all the way over here.

falling

I've only been here less than a month. It's such a culture shock living with the super wealthy in Sands Point, and I'm unfamiliar with everything. When she invited me to go to a club on the other side of the island and then spend the night at her place, I was thrilled. The family I work for has relatives visiting, and they're going to sleep early. It's such a relief to finally have a night away.

into a snakepit

We've been here maybe 15 minutes when a guy she likes shows up. Turns out this was all a ruse to get alone time with her older boyfriend. She takes off in his car promising she'll be back.

so many rattles

But she isn't. I wait at the door watching every single person coming or going and every car that pulls up for two hours until closing time comes and goes. It seems impossible. Were they in a crash? I don't even know what town I'm in. I have no one I can call. I'm terrified to wake up my employers at 2:30 in the morning. I don't know her parent's number. I have no clue how to get there. The staff is cleaning up, and there are only men left.

Kalyanee Arandhara

Query

How I restrained my urge to hug that stranger - a fruit vendor wearing a pendant of letters of my native language, when my husband and I were two lost souls in a non-English speaking country, late at night scouting for the Colosseum. Abdul, the fruit seller was indeed a life-saver as he directed us to that historical site.

Then again, those restauranteurs who gave us complementary plates of green salad in Indian restaurants in Central London.

from one milepost
to another
— a journey within

After eons, stories of conflict emerging from border issues still fall on my ears like crackers bursting on Diwali. These years of so-called progress, spread of education, development etc., etc., haven't been able to kindle that simple awareness of who we actually are. What are those barbed wires, fences, the hostility, disparity, the bloodshed for, if we still sing songs in our praise?

my kite flies alone
soon to be joined by ten more
— infinite sky

Linda Papanicolaou

Girls' Rules

The high school gym suit is a coarse green cotton design that probably hasn't changed since my mother's day. You take it home on Friday, wash, iron, and wear it in class again on Monday if you don't want an X in the roll book. Not that it ever needs washing, what with ten on a side and only two dribbles before passing. Women's basketball adheres to the principle that ladies don't sweat — they glow.

choosing up teams —
the consolation of being
picked *next* to last

Linda Papanicolaou

Dostadning

Yesterday a meme on my Facebook news feed asked if there were anyone (alive or dead) whom I'd want to talk to for one hour, who would it be? I suppose we're expected to answer Jesus Christ or Gandhi or somebody famous, but I knew immediately who I'd choose: my father. There are so many questions I didn't think to ask. An hour wouldn't be enough.

Today it seems my wish has been granted. I'm on a clean-out, weeding through boxes and boxes of his old 35 mm slides ...

long-gone summers
in faded Kodachrome —
my childhood through his eyes

Lorraine Haig

The Land of Myth

We arrive at a landscape where escarpments have heaved their great shoulders out of the earth.

Red granite boulders are scattered over the valley like a giant's marbles. Some are precariously balanced. As we wander among them, it feels as if we have entered the time of creation. Perhaps if we wait, we might see the bony-scaled monster roar from the curve of the land, feel the earth shudder as it swings its huge tail shattering everything in its path. A curved bower of rock might once have been a nest of sticks and straw where a flightless bird would gently roll a huge egg under her enormous body. The land is holding its breath. As we stand in the deep silence, a startled Sure-footed wallaby bounds away.

campfire
a pack of dingoes haunt
the shadows

Lorraine Haig

A Mother's Heart

Sometimes I'm filled with a longing for those years living on a small island. For the community hall where families would gather to dance. Its cypress floor powered smooth and slippery as dusted skin. For the abandoned farm where children would carry home avocados and mangos. For the crumbling hideaway with a wall of colored bottles. For a kerosene fridge and gas lamps because there was no power. For a track winding among the smooth, ochre trunks of Angophoras, their leaves rinsed in sunlight. For the Bush Stone-Curlew, summoning with its mournful cry, all the loneliness of the island.

butterfly
the tale of a child
who stayed

Lorraine Haig

The Way it's Always Been

They don't like newcomers in this small outback town. They don't like city people who buy a house and paint it yellow or blue. They don't like the new fence or the small orchard that's been planted. In their four-wheel drives, working dogs in the back, they slow down to stare from under their akubras. They never smile or wave.

Cauliflowers and zucchinis grow well in the rich soil and some locals come to buy. The oranges are ready for the market and will be picked the next day.

Through the night they come and strip every piece of fruit off the trees.

long grass
a black snake
slithers away

Mona Bedi

The Relic

It's a sunny day today and I decide to visit my birthplace. Born and brought up in Delhi, the hospital I was born in is just an hour away from the place where I live. As I enter the gates of the hospital a familiar breeze greets me. The old building I was born in is now a swanky maternity unit. The open grounds have been replaced by play areas for kids. All has changed except for a small temple under an old peepal tree with the same stone God idol.

peeling paint
the walls too have
a story to tell

Mona Bedi

Twisted

She was inside the room with her uncle for a good 40 minutes. When she came out her hands were full of chocolates. Her lips were a bit bruised but the goodies had all her attention.

the flutter of her school dress spring breeze

Sandip Chauhan

Broken Fences

rustic rooftops
Goddess Lakshmi aglow
in golden lights

A man draped in a saffron robe, holding a trident, and wearing vermillion on his forehead, marches through a bustling crowd. He approaches a shop owner, ringing his bells and chanting mantras, seeking donations for a deity. The merchant lowers his head and promptly drops polished coins into his aluminium begging bowl. Right there, a slumdog boy, barefoot and in tattered clothes, extends his empty palms with pleading eyes. The shopkeeper dismisses him with a shooing gesture.

shadows deepen
parijat bending
to the wind

Sandip Chauhan

Untouched Tomorrows

My nephew stands ready, eyes fixed on the sky, poised to pursue his dreams. The air is alive with the heady fragrance of petrichor, blending with the tears of his widowed mother. Against a sky adorned with drifting dandelion seeds, he bids his mother farewell, promising a reunion in two years. She whispers, "Upon your return, my son, I'll find you a suitable bride."

ocean waves
a rainbow hovers
on a far horizon

In the quiet hospice room, now he lies in the twilight of his existence. I feel the weight of unspoken words in the pauses between his shallow breaths. Gently holding his hand, I sense his last breath ebbing away within the shelter of my cupped palms.

gray heavens
the wilting marigolds
on a half-strung garland

Sandip Chauhan

In a New Nest

wedding album
the scent of jasmine
in my hair

In the kitchen, I am preparing a feast for the entire family, the pungent smell of spices clinging to my clothes. Sweating profusely in front of the high flames of the stove, I try to mask the potent scent while wiping my sweat with the corner of my dupatta.

Outside, on the verandah, I hear my mother-in-law chatting with her friend under the spin of a ceiling fan. The cool breeze offers them a respite, turning their talks into laughter. Their laughter rings louder than the clatter of pots and pans in the kitchen. I start stirring the lentil pot vigorously, trying to drown out their merriment.

cayenne peppers
cacophony of crows
stifling air

Susan Burch

~~Clotheshorse~~ Stable

From a young age, my mom used to have me save my best clothes for later. So I always wore my least favorite things and outgrew my favorites. And even though I'm older now, I still hear her voice in my head and it's all I can do not to take off the shirt I'm wearing now, even though it's just a cute T-shirt, and save it for later.

estate sale knickknacks
the price-tags
still on them

Susan Yavanisky

It's barely a moment

between the two events: the first, my realization that this roar is not some distant highway, but the waterfall hidden in the forest; and the subsequent instant, my feeling of dismay changing, as if seamlessly, to one of delight. Is this that merest fraction of time Tibetan Buddhism calls a kechig?

a foreign land
the elephant meanders
ahead of me

Teji Sethi

Different Truths

After chemotherapy,
cardamom and ginger no more work.
Tea tastes like bitter, half-spoken words,
gurgling down my throat.
I switch over to chamomile
and tender coconut water.
I have always loved matt.
Matt this time is the texture of my tongue.
Crunch is the sound my ears envy.
My eyes lust for raw, when
someone chews on lettuce.
All my life a nutritionist, I now sit
on the other side of the fence.
My family has deleted food apps.
My 78-year-old mother rolls out
a fresh chapati for me every night,
putting her neuropathy to sleep.
My husband tries new versions
of Spanish omelettes and smoothies.
My kid brother has given up
finger-licking-good KFC and
boils chicken broth.
From her boarding school, my daughter
sends me old ghazals to flavour
my appetite.
They all now munch on roasted
puffed rice, learn to savour
bland upma on their Punjabi palates
And when I ask them why, they say,
“let’s taste these times together”

varicose veins the entangled roots I belong to

Vidya Shankar

blessed

Halfway through my lunch, I rush to position the kidney dish under my husband's mouth to receive the vomit. He can barely keep his eyes open. It's been three days now since his fifth chemotherapy session. There is one more to go.

I have hardly emptied the contents of the kidney dish into the toilet bowl and cleaned it before he begins to throw up again. I rub his back hoping it will ease his retching.

Do you really want to go through the trauma of this treatment however good the prognosis? You and your husband might as well spend your time, energy and money on a dream trip, making memories that you can fall back upon.

Ten minutes later, when there's nothing more to come out, and I have cleaned up all traces of vomit, I help him lie down. Moaning from exhaustion, he takes my right hand into his and holds it to his chest, close to his throbbing heart. I stand beside him without moving, watching his strained face as he drifts back to sleep. His condition does not despair me. Just as my unfinished meal does not.

coldest winter —
our mango tree bursts with
yellowish pink flowers

Makar Sankranti —
colourful kites rise
with the first sun

(*blessed* is the title of Andrew Riutta's book of haibun "on almost every despair" yet laced with hope.)

Sankara Jayanth

The dancer's grace melds into the poet's lilt.

the whole world
on a precipice
ma

Susan Burch

When you left me, I was a mess.

a hummingblur holding up the sky

Kala Ramesh

memories do pull me back

after his eye operation
father's world
is born anew
each swollen bud
talks to him of tomorrow

C.X. Turner

Fading Grass

Sometimes only a robin sees me work, yet I hear the clang of raw metal, builders' shouts and the laying down of red bricks in what used to be a meadow.

empty feeder ...
I miss the notes
of summer
foraging
the last elderberry

Susan Burch

Stopwatch

in case I die
I need
a good death poem
right now —
and begin ...

Nothing. Maybe I'm already dead and don't know it yet.


mid-winter blues
the day warms up
with a hearty soup
A. B. Shaw



Marion Clarke


ancestral
home
a location
no more
on
Google maps
milan rajkumar

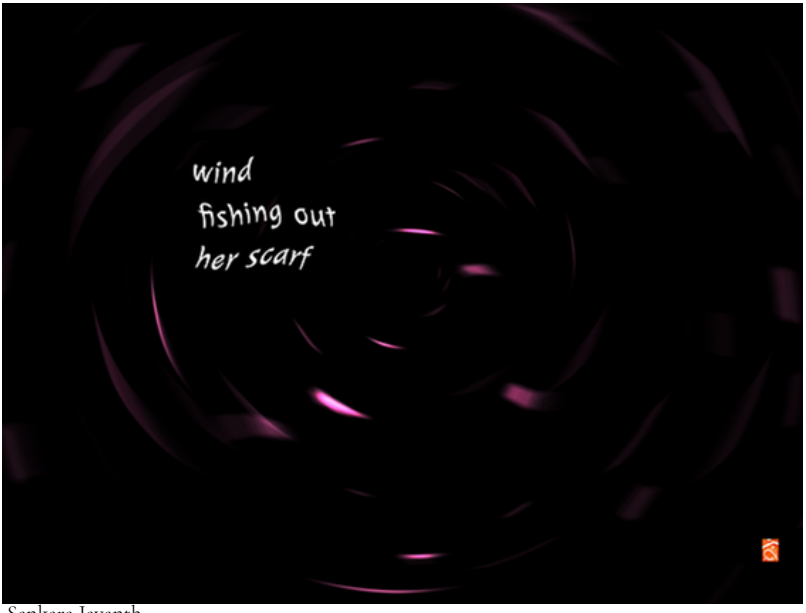

an autumn leaf
wherever the wind blows ...
this wandering life
milan rajkumar

little egrets
acting all busy
grassland wind



Sankara Jayanth

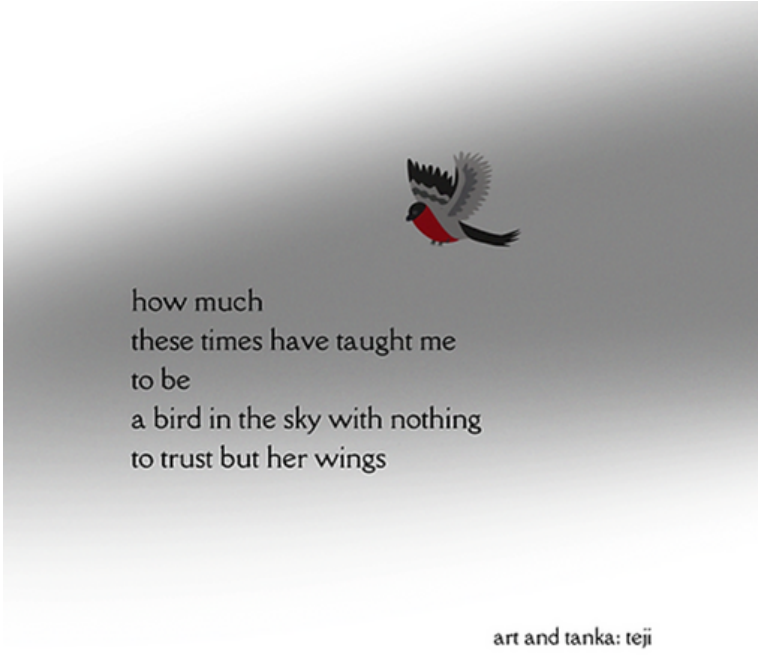
haiga

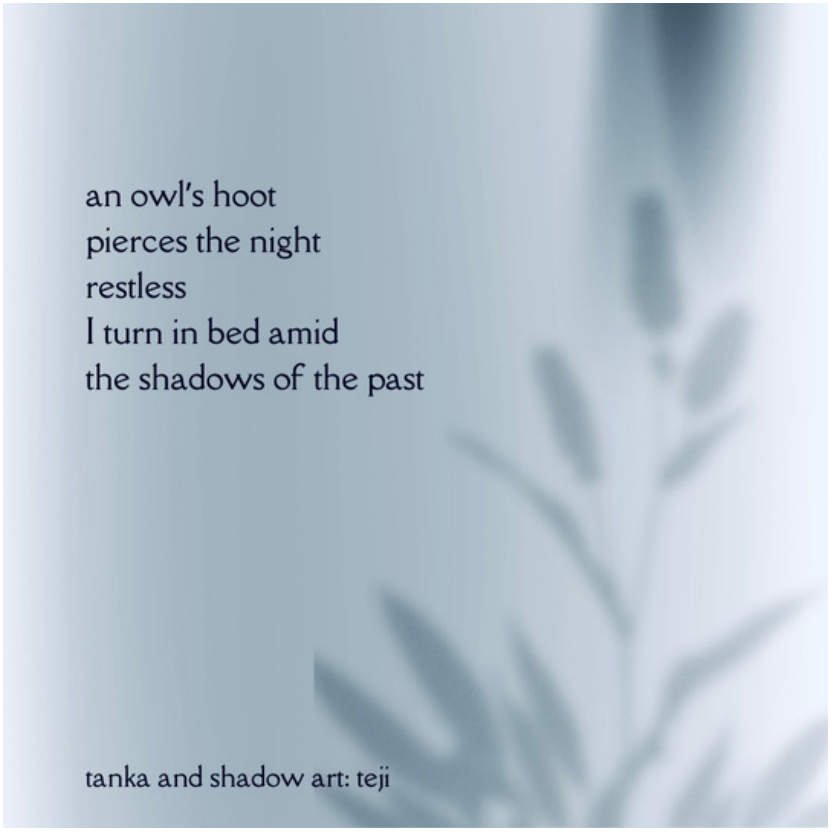


Sankara Jayanth

haiga


no man's land
roots find their way
to the other side
art & haiku : teji


how much
these times have taught me
to be
a bird in the sky with nothing
to trust but her wings
art and tanka: teji


an owl's hoot
pierces the night
restless
I turn in bed amid
the shadows of the past
tanka and shadow art: teji

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with many more fine poems
from our contributors.

Team: *haikuKATHA*