

haikuKATHA

unfolding the story within



Prakash Thombre

Issue 52 February 2026

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unfolding the story within

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 52
February 2026

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

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Triveni Haikai India: www.trivenihaikai.in

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Our heartfelt thanks to:

HAIKUsutradhar: Lorraine Haig
Tanka Take Home: Cherie Hunter Day
thinkALONG: Andrew Shimield
The Haibun Gallery: Shloka Shanker
haikaiTALKS: Keiko Izawa,

,
for providing the weekly challenges
for the month of January 2026,

Prakash Thombre
for his brilliant ink sketch,

our contributors
for sharing their poems.

Tejasvat Award

Triveni Haikai India

Tejasvat in Samskrit means shining bright
with strength and excellence, just like the sun.

The tanka editors,
Firdaus Parvez, Kala Ramesh,
Priti Aisola and Suraja Menon Roychowdhury
are pleased to present
the

Tejasvat Award

to a poet
who has a set number of poems
which hold the essence of Japanese short-form poetry
in any one issue.

In this issue, we honour

Mona Bedi

for her wide range of short-form poetry,
covering tanka, tanka-prose, gembun and tanka-art

Tejasvat Mona Bedi

Triveni Haikai India

looking
for a fairy tale
I pick up
the dog-eared memory
of my childhood

For Posterity

As the new year dawns, I miss my parents. Dad always told the three of us, "Remember, girls, you're all part of me. Even when I'm not there, I'll always live in each of you."

barefoot on the beach
I walk among scattered
pieces of sea glass
each one holding within itself
a tiny fragment of the sun

Tejasvat Mona Bedi

Triveni Haikai India

Lost World

It is my school reunion – the Class of 1983. My husband has refused to come. Strangely, I feel free, almost liberated, though a faint nervousness trails me like a shadow.

As I enter the farmhouse where the party is underway, it feels as if I've stepped into a dream. Old Bollywood melodies drift through the air. Paper lanterns sway gently in the evening breeze. Draped in a black sari, I feel luminous – more myself than I have in years.

Strangers smile, say hello, and move on. I search the crowd for a familiar face. Suddenly, a trace of perfume reaches me – instantly recognisable. It livens my senses, bringing back memories of my youth.

I turn to look at the old bald man staring at me. "Were you looking for me?" he says with a smile. His eyes still hold the mischief I remember.

science lab
we mix chemicals
hoping to create magic ...
if only love came
with a written formula

Tejasvat Mona Bedi

Triveni Haikai India



deep winter
heads huddle together
in the refugee shelter
do they all dream
of a land without borders

Pic @ ku : Mona Bedi

Tejasvat Mona Bedi

Triveni Haikai India

gembun with tanka:

every childhood has its perfect moments

insomnia —
an old lullaby spins
on the gramophone
my mother's face appears
then fades into moonlight

Tejasvat Mona Bedi

Triveni Haikai India

late night
we sit under the sky
talking to the stars
a cicada's trill sneaks into
our conversation



Pic © ku Mona Bedi

Editors' Choice Commentary: by Vidya Shankar
Editor's Choice: *Hope, a Requiem* a haibun by Matthew Caretti

Matthew Caretti

Hope, a Requiem

I. And Wounda removed to an island.

II. And Wounda hugged Jane.

III. And Wounda begat Hope.

IV. And Jane left Wounda and Hope.

swinging low
in chimpanzee trees
rainy day documentary

In this issue featuring several stellar haibun, I chose Matthew Caretti's *Hope, a Requiem*, for two reasons: first, it gives me and haikuKATHA an opportunity to honour Jane Goodall, and second, Matthew, through this micro-haibun, reminds us that greatness does not require a drumroll.

This haibun is a requiem for Dr Jane Goodall, who passed away on October 1, 2025. Much can be written about Jane's lifelong work with chimpanzees and her many thoughtful measures to heal and revive humanity's damaged connection with the planet we live on. Matthew, instead, focuses on that iconic hug the chimp, Wounda, gives Jane. As is said in Sanskrit, 'One drop reveals the nature of the ocean.'

The structure of Matthew's haibun reminds me of Anna Akhmatova's *Requiem*, which consists of a series of numbered poems. Just as each of Anna's numbered poems serves more as a progression through stages of suffering than as a progression in narrative, so do the numbered prose lines in Matthew's haibun refer to particular episodes in the story of Jane, Wounda, and Hope (Wounda's offspring). Matthew does not romanticise but keeps the lines short, terse, and specific, achieving depth through the repetition of the conjunction 'and'.

Matthew's address of Jane as Hope (in the title) reflects the empathy and care she and her organisation provided and continue to provide towards a fractured ecology. The line, 'And Jane left Wounda and Hope.' indicates her passing, yet does not mean all hope is lost. Matthew implies this in the ku by mentioning the documentary of Wounda's release into the wild—a beautiful reminder of Jane's work and the principles she lived by.

As long as there is respect for life, curiosity to learn, and courage to act, hope remains alive.

To care is natural. To act is possible. And hope is a practice, not a feeling.

—Jane Goodall

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x8Zp3khGP7g>

<https://www.rootsnshoots.org.uk/blog/never-give-up-the-story-of-wounda>

haiga

twilight
no matter
the weather



photo & ku Dinah Power

haiku

first snow
I pick a window seat
to celebrate

Alan Summers

slanting light —
a lily drifting
into the boat's shade

Artur Zielinski

train whistle
a lover's kiss
interrupted

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

marrying my friend
all of our sunsets
together

Bryan Rickert

haiku

artist's muse
the great cormorant
holds a pose

Carol Reynolds

spring rain —
the old stone bridge
tagged with QR code

Jacek Margolak

winter moon
my dog orbiting
a rare steak

Jacek Margolak

abandoned farm
the chirp of nestlings
from the mailbox

Jacek Margolak

haiku

twilight ...
the glide of a cormorant
just above the water

K. Ramesh

dandelion puffs ...
mother's prayer
for an easy death

Kala Ramesh

fractus clouds
the fragrance
of wild ginger

Kanjini Devi

deep blue sea ...
mother's voice calling
in hatsuyume

Keiko Izawa

haiku

drifting clouds ...
ring after ring
the ducks leave behind

Keiko Izawa

moon shadow —
daffodils tilting slightly
in the tea room corner

Keiko Izawa

autumn leaves
mother slowly raises
the lamp's wick

Lakshmi Iyer

school alumni meet
the back benchers
in Mercedes

Lakshmi Iyer

haiku

morning breeze
granny's chair rocks a bit
with every snore

Leena Anandhi

spring morning
the door opens to
my wife gone

Lev Hart

early light ...
brushing her hair
until it shines

Lorraine Haig

ebbing tide
a gull's shadow
surfs the sand

Marilyn Ashbaugh

haiga



image and ku: Jacek Margolak

haiku

spring breeze
boys telling stories
longer than the tracks

Marilyn Ashbaugh

empty nester
watching the chickadees
play in the snow

Marilyn Ashbaugh

the kettle
whistles it in
New Year

Marion Clarke

summer dusk
the sway of gajra
in mother's hair

Mona Bedi

haiku

the year begins
with nothing added
snow on snow

Nalini Shetty

winter pond
the fox's tracks
ending at the reeds

Nalini Shetty

fetching firewood
she calls me
by a pet name

paul m.

spring moon —
the soft rustle of
a bride's glide

Raji Vijayaraghavan

haiku

new hearing aids ...
old pond frogs singing
heavy metal

Ron C. Moss

kite festival —
our tangled strings
refusing to part

Sandip Chauhan

childhood tree
all of the branches
have a name

Saumya Bansal

Republic Day
the street vendor offers
a flag with every sale

Srinivasa Rao Sambangi

haiku

scented breeze
strands of hair slipping
from her topknot

Sumitra Kumar

ant farm
if only my own path
were so clear

Susan Burch

one-line haiku

the world of memories within me father's letters

Lakshmi Iyer

the old man who fed squirrels here fallen leaves

Lev Hart

learning to live until i die late sunrise

Rupa Anand

railroad rhythms a childhood i leave behind

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

haiga

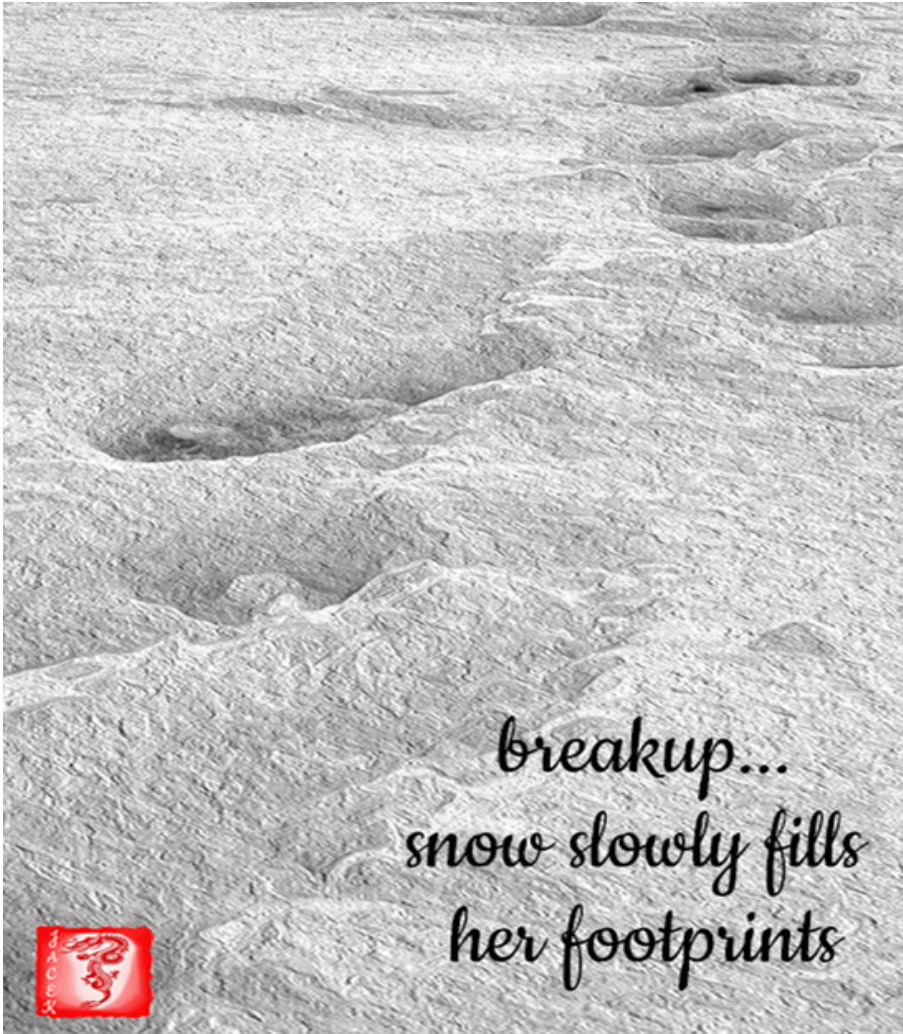


image and ku: Jacek Margolak

concrete haiku

watershed

ridge

ridge

crimson

beyond

of

leaves

Lev Hart, Canada

tanka

map in hand
I've wandered here and there
losing myself
on twisting paths
where peace seldom tarries

Alfred Booth

rain has stopped
the scent of wet stones
fleeting as life
the grass grows quietly
it will be mown again

Artur Zielinski

I linger on
after the concert,
trying not to exhale
the beauty of what I heard ...
a whistling janitor enters

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

tanka

all this endless browsing
of clothes I'll never buy,
hours gone by in minutes ...
once more an excuse
to skip the gym

Baisali Chatterjee Dutt

on our path
patches of red snow
green algae spores
life blooming
despite it all

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni

the monks and dog
moving along
in the walk for peace
a quiet prayer in each breath
will it melt the ice?

Barbara Olmtak

tanka

howler monkeys
bellowing round
past a hundred decibels
the way I speak my no today
without a trembling voice

Barbara Olmtak

blackbird's song at dawn
untouched by weather's whims
in the flow
of my tai chi
just the bird and I

Barbara Olmtak

chestnut moon
above a frozen lake
each stroke
of the white owl's wings
measuring silence

Billie Dee

tanka

my music tape
she used to record
her clinical notes
I kept that cassette for years
just to hear her voice

Cherie Hunter Day

even as
snow pixelates the woods
a woodpecker
with his bright red topknot
accentuates the oaks

Cherie Hunter Day

microplastics
and forever chemicals ...
listen carefully
to the backstory
of these coastal redwoods

Cherie Hunter Day

haiga



marilyn.ashbaugh

cruising
on borrowed bikes
our laughter

image and ku: Marilyn Ashbaugh

tanka

after all the sorries
we set them down
between us
like coats no longer needed
in a room already warm

C.X. Turner

brushing reveals
a mosaic of ancient times
laid with care
what will this time leave
for others to ponder

Dinah Power

my feet yearn to roam
ancient alleyways —
searching for the past
in a war-scarred place
where destruction binds me

Fatma Zohra Habis

tanka

my white dove returns
from Gaza
blood on its wings
the peace council convenes
to declare war

Fatma Zohra Habis

through the tracery
of trees
where rooks roost
a new day's
pink promise

Florence Heyhoe

after the fireworks
the sky still flashing
under the eyelids
again
snow

Jacek Margolak

tanka

an orchestra
of petunias are in bloom
once again
you thought
i would let it all go

Kalyanee Arandhara

day moon
how my eyes brighten
at the sight of you
like a fellow traveler
who has seen the darkest night

Kanjini Devi

since you passed ...
the asparagus spears
have turned to fronds
and the strawberry patch
now a dust bath for hens

Kanjini Devi

tanka

rivulets
of moonlight
along this riverbed
a reminder
to tread lightly

Kanjini Devi

wandering past her
the scent of lavender
wafts in the breeze
I recall my ancestors'
homemade petal water

Katherine E Winnick

the remnants
of the murderous regime
in Sudan
leaving the Nile crocodiles
to remove evidence

Katherine E Winnick

tanka

as if it matters a lot
i don't get up on time
I don't do errands,
the milk boils on time
the coffee filter works well

Lakshmi Iyer

lego block
by lego block building
a rainbow tower
toppling in the turbulence
of their whirlwind play

Marilyn Humbert

garlic vine
blooms wither away
just yesterday
she was up and about
in a mauve sari

Mohua Maulik



*spring
thaw*

*a driftwood
wherever*

*the stream
carries*

milan rajkumar

tanka

cacophony
of crows on the pipal
at dusk
we sit engrossed
in the world of others

Mohua Maulik

looking
for a fairy tale
I pick up
the dog-eared memory
of my childhood

Mona Bedi

thinking of days
you could read the subtle
shifts in my tone
deep in the cocoon
a moth stirs

Nitu Yumnam

tanka

water spill ...
her journal replete
with ink smudges,
yet her voice as she reads
her poems clear as a spring

Priti Aisola

a sunless
winter morning ...
in my mind's eye
a hillock with marigold
scampering down its sides

Priti Aisola

it's said
the sky is the limit
I try
with clipped wings
and a shaky ground

Raji Vijayaraghavan

tanka

he says the moon
is only captured
stone in orbit —
I call it the first draft
of an unwritten poem

Sandip Chauhan

train tracks
converge and diverge
side by side ...
i choose to
stay close, not cling

Sathya Venkatesh

in a world of his own
travelling around the world ...
how i miss my son
who used to say
i meant the world to him

Sathya Venkatesh

tanka

a child's crying
echoed in the mountains
she stops
and cries again to confirm
her discovery

Sumitra Kumar

freak weather ...
the harsh sun mellow
as the moon
how long will the two
pretend to be in love

Sumitra Kumar

I watched
the snail crawl, slower
than my racing thoughts
it reached there but I-
I was right where I began

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

tanka

moss grows
on the front doorsteps
the old man
alone with his television
watching the news all day

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

the fragrance
of fresh coffee
floating
a butterfly's pause
flower after flower

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

continuing
on his way -
the fox
that found me
lacking too

susan burch



long
before

words are
formed ...

eyes
that linger

milan rajkumar

tanka

pigmented imprint
of an Arrowhead Lily vine
on the house wall —
its longing
to be immortal

Tejendra Sherchan

winter morning
business is quiet
at my teashop
suddenly a sparrow hops in
and lightens my heart

Tejendra Sherchan

a blue whale's tongue
weighs over 3600 kilos
perhaps
ours should be more
to check venomous talks

Tejendra Sherchan

haibun

Adelaide B. Shaw
~

sleepless in somers

one o'clock two o'clock the minutes go slowly count sheep count frogs get up
write count syllables play solitaire count cards give up wait for slurred thought
on drowsy waves for sailing without a boat and seeing pictures with eyes closed

the bird alarm
halfway between light and dark
I'm awake

Alan Pizzarelli

Passing Through

Hunkered down
near the bank of Douglas Island
across the Gastineau Channel
that flows from medial moraines
and climate decay of the Auk glacier –
kittiwake seabirds flutter whitely
over the smooth inlet waters –

There's a bald eagle's nest
high in the tall trees
behind the house –
every day I see one of the pair
perched atop the radio tower
on the rocky shoreline
hunched down
in the cold misty rain –
saw one the other day
swoop down and talon a salmon
in a splash of sun light –

the great raptor
cries out
in a tiny voice

haibun

This morning as I set off
for the ferry to Haines
spotted one high overhead a tiny dot
gliding over the boundary ranges

on Mount Juneau
mists from the breath
of the cave bear

Alan Summers



the sky is dark

after I checked beneath the bed
the blankets become the landscape
of fairy lore and heroism

dawn brings light
of course
the sizzle of a mother's breakfast

haiga



*slipping light
I hold on to the remains
of a beautiful day*

Pic & ku: MonaBedi

Alfred Booth
~

From a Dark Nursery Rhyme

I never held you in my arms, nor saw you smile, only imagined a twinkle in your eyes, blue like mine. The touch of your hand gently drying my tears. There were many. There still are. The reasons have never changed, not really. We should have shared the same crib. Fought off the bullies. Together. Learned about love. Got lost in life's quagmire. Learned to tame emptiness.

a lone wolf
 and another full moon
 a path elsewhere

Anju Kishore
~

Thread's Breadth

The heart is a place complete with an atmosphere as well as seasons of its own. A lot of that though, depends on the people who inhabit it.

spring drizzle
still that toddler's smile
in her wedding photo

When a storm strikes, this place is so busy battling the elements that it begins to break only in the silence afterwards. Every scattered piece then slowly becomes heavier and darker with time.

leaning sky
the weight of what
clouds leave unshed

So how do we return warmth to what has frozen. Elsewhere, they simply wait for the sun that will turn up sooner or later. Here, we conjure sunlight from the winding alleys of the mind and give it names. Like hope. Or faith. So much for a snatch at life.

long night ...
only a breath
before dew
 drops

Artur Zielinski
~

Farewell

The day has come. I thought I was prepared for the inevitable. The dense morning fog presses down on me. It smells of peat, wet grass, and herbs. Rapid heartbeat, and shallow breath; nothing more. A warm, salty tear runs down my cheek. I take a deep breath and close the door; the emptiness already inside. Walking away blindly, I wonder if I would ever return. I search for the sun in vain, but it is there, always has been.

grass prints fade
in the mist
a mossy stone

Bhawana Rathore



What I am Not Yet!

I'm not sure what it is, but I've been feeling a little anxious since this morning. There's no exam, no important appointment, just a simple day ahead.

mackerel sky
the glow of sun
scatters through

The windows are open as usual; one can hear the sparrows chirping. My gaze follows a dove, now resting on the side of the bird feeder. I wonder if these birds have thoughts of their own, if they wonder what they are going to do.

career plans
one misstep before
the long fall

I tell myself I'm happy where I am, that I am in no rush. Yet what I am not, what I have not yet become, keeps returning to me. There has been so much waiting that now I feel tired of the waiting itself.

rows of aster
a butterfly circles
and circles

Billie Dee



The Weight of Gold
— for Katie, but mostly for Joyce

The earrings are 22 karat, soft as longing.
Bought in Cochin four months after Katie's body cooled,
but chosen for Joyce, who died a few months later,
just before I flew to India.

a nose-ring shop
on Gandhi Boulevard —
my own pierced memories

In Kerala, I wore them as proof of continuity.
I slept with them, touched them when I forgot
who or what I'd lost that day.

Each morning they reminded me — grief isn't cumulative,
but it multiplies in silence.

They dangle now with their tiny-faceted diamonds blinking
like conspirators in candlelight. Hard to notice,
but they know what they carry.

I don't wear them for show. I wear them for ballast.
To keep my head from floating into the empty space
where their voices used to be.

haibun

At customs, no one questions me.
No one ever does.

airport chapel —
the votive flickers
for someone else's loss

haiga



image and ku: Sandip Chauhan

Bob Lucky
~

Fantasy Check

Water drips from the chandeliers and dribbles down the walls of the castle. In dank corridors, suits of armor rattle and clank like empty chamber pots. And no matter how many times he kisses her, the princess won't wake up.

full moon
a shadow slipping
down the stairs

Caroline Giles Banks

Galileo Galilei Before the Holy Office

Painting by Joseph Nicolas Robert Fleury, 1847

You see the guard, helmeted in heavy metal, beside Galileo.
The astronomer stands resolute before the pontiff, unapologetic
for bothering the ancient worldview.

You can't hear his earth-shattering observations of the planet's
peripheral place in the cosmos, the promise of telescopes
to reveal and revise. Oil-on-canvas is mute.

You see the row of red-velveted cardinals seated at the table
behind him, lip-synching chapter and verse. You know
they sentenced science to silence. Centuries of censure.

You wonder if in their wildest dreams Galileo or the pontiff
could imagine A.I.

paradigms shift —
millennia-old megaliths
stand still

Dru Philippou

Vespers

As darkness gathers,
shadows deepen across the garden wall.

The evening is heavy with stillness ...
something unseen lingers beneath the surface.

The air grows cooler, and time itself
eases into rest.

Withered grasses bend low,
yielding to the dampness,
as if honoring the season's decline.

Moments fall softly,
not as endings,
but as part of the endless cycle.

last light ...
a blue delphinium
holds its color

Hifsa Ashraf
~

Transience

She wants me to play with the clay toys she's made from the river's mud. It's been a month since the river washed away her village. Since then, she has been living in a relief camp, trying to ease the ache of homelessness by moulding flood mud into fragile shapes.

Her life has always swayed between a clay-bricked home and a tattered tent. Now, as a teenager, she no longer speaks her feelings — there are no words left, only silence in her barren eyes. She kneads that silence into clay. Before I leave, we build a tiny clay house together. She pours imaginary tea into a cup she has moulded and hands it to me.

midsummer moon —
I revert
to my former self

Jagajit Salam

Mind Map

It's been almost a decade since we last spoke. Through mutual friends, I hear he's doing well, climbing the social ladder. Perhaps, he's simply been too busy with work and life to stay in touch.

summer house
a vase of dry flowers
in the corner

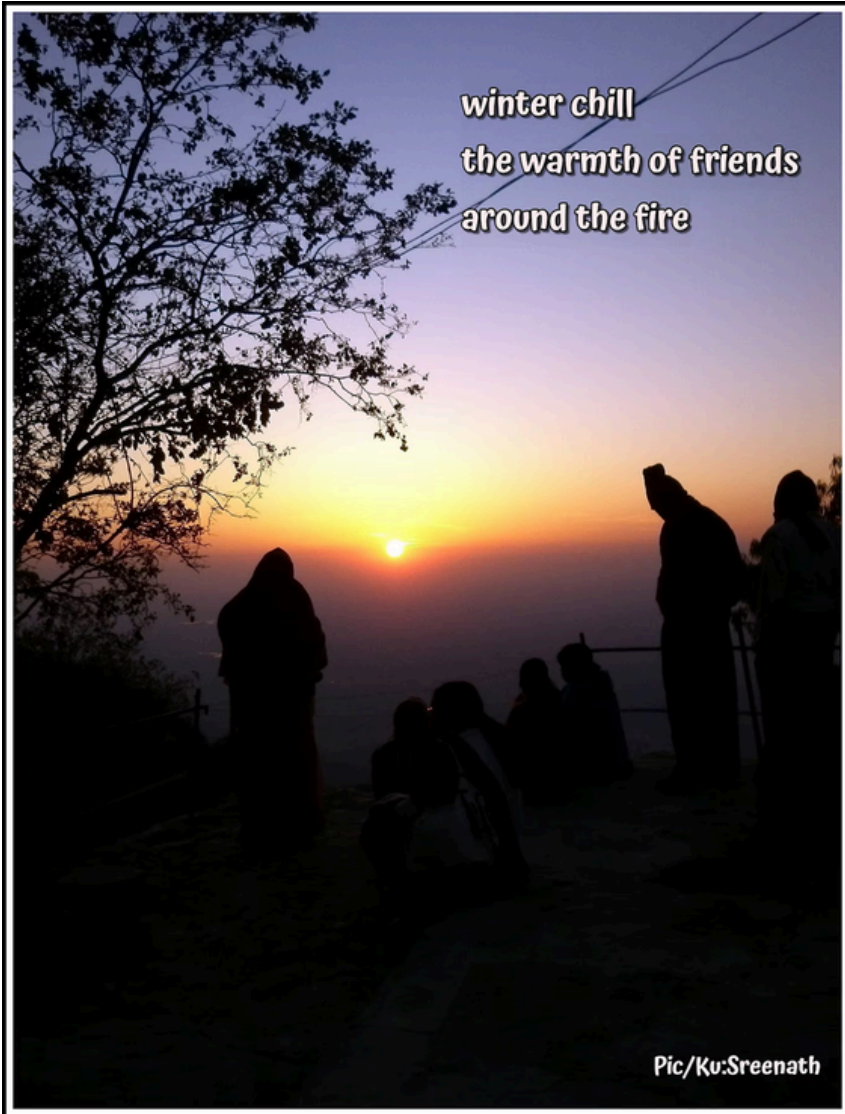
One morning at the breakfast table, while reading *The Sangai Express*, I came across a news item — with his photograph beside it. He's the new Director. What a good piece of news!

morning light
a beetle creeps
toward dawn

A week later, he hosts a party. We are all invited. When he sees me, he walks over with a wide smile. "Oldie," he laughs, "You're still the same. Haven't changed a bit."

meandering stream
an origami boat
on a long journey

haiga



winter chill
the warmth of friends
around the fire

Pic/Kv:Sreenath

John Stevenson
~

Matthew 25:40

Its shadow goes with a minnow as a name goes with a person.

what she does
to the roses
she does to me

K. Ramesh



Where the Road Ends

There is a bookshop by the sea, and the man who owns it is my friend. I go there once in a while. and He greets me with a smile. The same smile I have witnessed over the years. 'Any new book coming out?' he would ask me as we drink tea. There are times when I stand facing the racks for long. The shop is in a coastal town that attracts foreigners. When they leave, some of their books stay on the shelves in this bookshop. I meet him again with a few copies of my latest collection of poems. With a smile, he asks me, 'Oh, it is out, finally?' He takes all four copies from me and asks me to sign them. After I finish signing, it is my turn to pick up four books from the racks. One of them is the collected works of Na Muthukumar, a Tamizh poet who passed away recently. After this exchange, I walk a little, reach the shore and sit in the shade of a boat, facing the sea. After a while I pull out the Muthukumar's book of poems from my shoulder bag and start reading it. A stray dog spots me, comes wagging its tail and settles down beside me.

humming a tune
the fisherman unhooks
the last fish from the net

Kashiana Singh

Reawakening

November 23, 2025 — Raleigh, 6 a.m. The street still dark, the house holding its own cold. I knead dough the way I was taught: heel of the palm, patience shaped like silence. The kitchen gathers seasonal fragments — cardamom rising into the air, a tin meant for sweets now holding flour, a radio tuned to an old Punjabi hymn low enough to register as memory.

My mother's hands arrive before her voice ever did. Every finger knew its task. Every knuckle carried a small ache forecasting rain, age, or duty. She never named the pain. Neither did her mother.

Press, fold, turn. I recognize them in my own hands now, the crooked finger that stiffens with winter, the slow-fading bruise. Loss is not an event; it is a muscle memory. The dough resists, then yields. This was the inheritance: make something rise without announcing hunger; feed others while swallowing your own grief.

I have altered the recipe. The parantha dough my mother kept strict — one scoop of atta, a half-scoop of maida, never more than a tablespoon of oil — I open it up, let butter in, let the dough soften against expectation.

Then it is worked until the dough forgets its original shape. My daughter stands nearby, her hands already registering what the body remembers

shapeshifting
12,000 dormant years
sprouting wrath

Lakshmi Iyer

Soaring High

spring
the gondola glows
in red and green

Father receives an official letter to Japan. This may also mean good tidings of a promotion. Mother is worried. He promises to bring us goodies. I ask him to save all the coins and stamps. After a week, my mother anxiously reads my father's letter to Grandma. Her japamala count intensifies. Finally, Dad arrives. I see my hero in his kimono.

autumn breeze
the aroma of saffron
in the kheer

All our eyes are on his suitcase. Father hands my brother a box of chocolates and gives me an envelope containing two yen and a few stamps. He spreads a thick skin-coloured blanket on Grandma's bed. Mother gets a black beaded handbag with a string of oyster pearls.

soft rain
through the twilight mist
daydreaming

haibun

Father shows us the Canon camera from Japan. He asks my elder brother to stand beside a medium-sized wooden stool and gets me to climb it to reach my brother's height. He is eight and I am seven. I am scared. Father pushes me a little and whispers, "If you never try you will never know."

first winter
a baby bald eagle
flutters to fly

Lorraine Haig
~

Relocation

We've been driving for hours when we see it. A sign to the roadhouse. Planning to stop for the night, we're surprised to find we are the only ones here. Sticky with sweat, we uncoil from the vehicle. There's a smudge on the horizon where land meets sky. It's a place where road trains thunder through.

We pitch camp before going inside. Nobody's there either. We're sitting at the bar, and the publican tells us he wants to sell up and move to Tasmania. His wife is from there, and so are we. He says it should sell because it's the one in Crocodile Dundee. If it doesn't, he has a plan for that as well. He'll move the pub five kilometres up the road to the main highway.

open 24 hours
a water buffalo's horns
glow in the dark

haiga



winter twilight
the old man won't let go
of his old hut

Pic/Ku: Sreenath

image and ku: Marylyn Ashbaugh

Lynn Edge

Continuing Cycle

My son wants me to move to a city near him. We have spent the whole day looking at senior living apartments, most of them the size of closets. I look forward to a restful night at the Garden Inn, yet three bright yellow buses are in the parking lot. I expect a hotel filled with noisy teenagers, but it is quiet, and I sleep well.

This morning, a group of young people gathers in the foyer. There is no jostling or loud talking. While waiting for my son to join me, I discover they are in town for a vocational skills competition. A boy tells me his subject is automotive mechanics, and a curly-haired girl says her category is cosmetology. With boxes of supplies strapped to their luggage, the contestants roll toward the hotel door and into the future.

retirement home
shelf after shelf
of yellowing books

Marilyn Ashbaugh
~

Eye of the Beholder

I am not one of the lucky ones. My desire to read strains my eyes, making them cross. I am delighted to clearly see the letters with my new spectacles. I enter first grade as the only child wearing them. A chorus of four eyes follows me through to graduation.

savasana
the many ways
I play dead

Matthew Caretti
~

Hope, a Requiem

I. And Wounda removed to an island.

II. And Wounda hugged Jane.

III. And Wounda begat Hope.

IV. And Jane left Wounda and Hope.

swinging low
in chimpanzee trees
rainy day documentary

Mohua Maulik



Tathastu

Alternately fanning himself and wiping the sweat with his gamcha, the farmer pushes open the rickety gate. He walks across the courtyard and sinks down upon the raised mud platform under the tin roof of his hut. His daughter runs out with a glass of water.

Half a glass.

Throwing his head back, he gulps a mouthful, then pours the rest into a battered tin pot holding a wilting plant. Let it rain, Mother. Let it rain. I will bring you a garland of your favourite hibiscus.

tsunami
the paddy fields full
of silt

Nalini Shetty
~

Drizzle in the Seam

The road darkens early in August. Between showers, the rice fields hold their breath. A kestrel balances on an electric wire, watching the newly cut earth. I wait without checking my phone. Evening gathers quietly — wind in the grass, insects beginning, a light in a distant house.

even the sky
learns to hover
then empties



the brief life
of hoarfrost blooming
on glass
who will clean
my grave?

— Cherie Hunter Day

Neena Singh
~

Memorabilia

I find an old picture postcard while cleaning my bedside drawer. A mountain landscape, sent by a friend who once filled my days with long conversations and impossible dreams. The slightly faded words on the card describe her visit, but carry the warmth of an era gone by, when messages travelled slowly, yet hearts stayed connected.

Holding it now, I realise she is in a place from where no letters ever come.

winter wind —
at the street corner
a red mailbox

Priti Aisola



Watching Over Me

freshly roasted
coffee beans ...
every room a cafe

Ammamma, my grandmother-in-law, could make the most delicious food with effortless ease.

While cooking, she had this adorable habit of talking to kitchen utensils and food. If a ladle fell from her hand, she would ask, 'How did you fall? I was holding you firmly enough, wasn't I? If the milk was about to boil over, she would say, 'Wait, will you? Don't you boil over!'

I learnt all of my Andhra vegetarian dishes from Amamma, including savouries and sweets.

One day, she rests her elbows on the kitchen counter top, leans forward and keenly scrutinises the mysore pak preparation. In a heavy-bottom stainless steel pan, the mixture of sugar syrup, bengal gram flour and ghee has been cooking for a few minutes now, and every time I ladle hot ghee into it, the mixture starts hissing and bubbling. Without taking her eyes off the pan, she says, 'When I say pour, transfer it into the greased plate immediately.'

The halwa-like mixture looks viciously hot. I am about to imagine what a volcano simmering beneath the earth's surface might be like when I hear her firm voice full of urgency, 'Pour it out.'

As soon as the mysore pak sets, I cut it into diamond shapes. She says with charming pride, 'See how nice and porous it is!'

haibun

After her passing away, each time I have tried to make mysore pak, it looks like burfi ... flat ... though it tastes good. This year, I used a trick. I imagined Ammamma standing next to me, giving the final instruction in a sharp voice, 'Right now, pour it out.'

deep pink frangipani
nodding in the breeze ...
her sari on me

Ron C. Moss



book of me

thirty years plus of sitting zazen and i'm here again on my cushion. i follow my
breath and sink into the familiar stillness that soaks every cell of my body.
nothing more to search for, in fact, there never was, just to be ...

turning the page
i stub my big toe on
one hand clapping

Rupa Anand

Carrying Forward

It's a warm winter's day. White muslin cloths are spread out on chatais in the front lawn. Sunning on them are par-boiled bites of carrots, cauliflower, and turnips. The heady aroma of roasted cumin, black cardamom, and cinnamon breezes through the house.

In a small bowl, she mixes the grated jaggery and vinegar together to seep. The smell of mustard seeds at the smoking point soon saturates the kitchen. Her fingers are laced with ginger and garlic cloves. Fresh green chillies picked from the backyard add the punch she craves for.

The heady mix is then settled into clay jars lined up in a single file on the verandah waiting for their contents to mature in the sun. These will transform into the traditional Punjabi gobhi-shalgam achar, a tasty accompaniment to meals in the harsh northern Indian winter, and will be distributed.

A month later, with the extended family soaking up the change in the weather, I dare not enquire if my endeavour is as good as Mother's.

swirling dahlias
grandmother's tablecloth
french-knotted

Sandip Chauhan

Pallbearer

When I first stepped into their garden, white hydrangeas bowed softly over the walkway, each cluster spilling its four-petalled faces across the stones. They had no children, only the chatter of bulbuls in the backyard. Their home was always full of friends dropping by unannounced, the table pulled long to seat them all.

late harvest
the unpicked apples
bright in the grass

I used to see them together on the veranda, talking long after the guests had gone. Since her husband's passing, that space belongs to her alone, the second chair pushed back against the wall. On my Thursday visit, she tells me about her meeting at the funeral home — how she chose the flowers, the casket, the music. She has even made a list of friends to attend her last rites.

unsigned will
the ant trail redrawing
all the furniture

For a while, we watch the shadows settle over the garden. Then she asks if I might give her a parting voice — a poem to be recorded and played at the hour of farewell. Outside, the hydrangeas keep vigil in the wind, their weight passing from bloom to bloom.

long after midnight
someone still sweeping
the empty platform

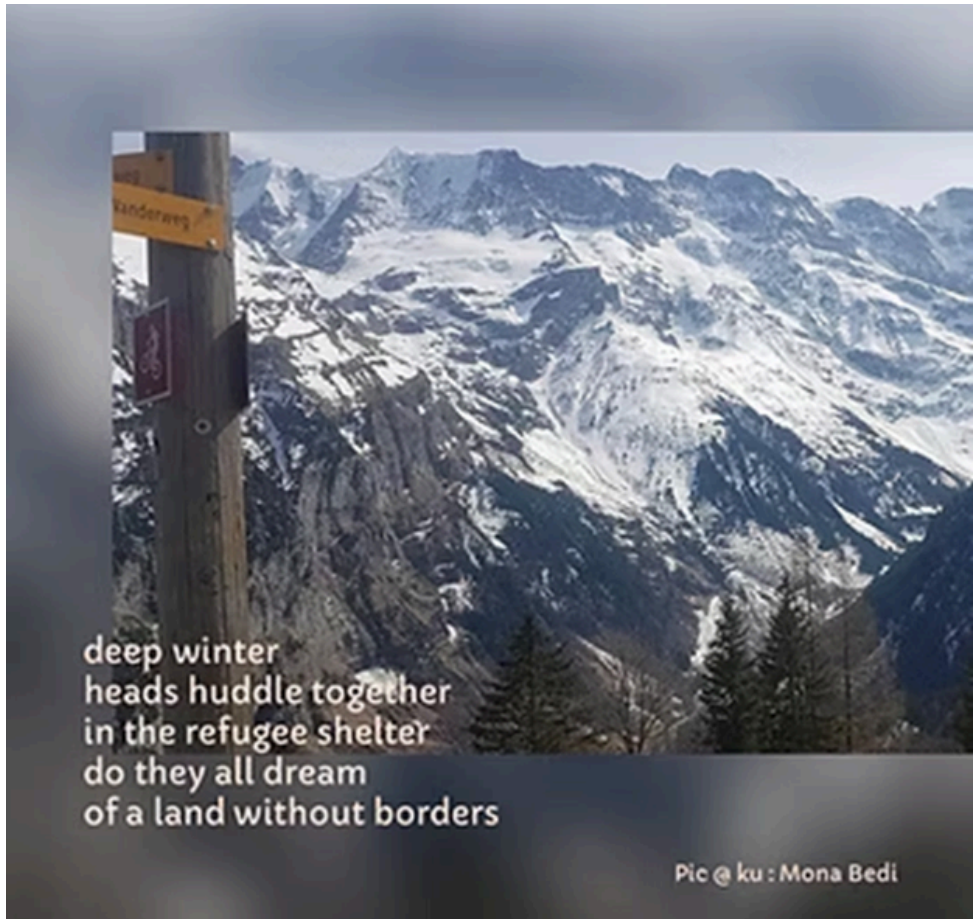


image and ku: Mona Bedi

Sangita Kalarickal



domino effects

forest fires blaze across the north american continent every summer. a mere spark razes mighty woods. flames on tall pines reach for the zenith and aeons of memories trapped within the bark releases into ether. several hundred miles away, the smoke transforms the sky into a palette of red.

war clouds
we morph
into detritus

Shalini Pattabiraman

Slow Turns

On the last day of the trip, a herd of reindeer come down from a neighbouring slope and cross over to the other side, making their way through the parking lot where I stand in absolute stillness, watching the last reindeer disappear into a cloudy mist.

Surrounded by the mountains at the ski centre, the wind's flutter squeezes my heart. This feeling inside my bones, light as a leaf, hovers over the clifftop. A warm pink glow has replaced yesterday's fury; the wind's howl, oscillating in the Cairngorms, now rests in quietude. Cold dissipates as the caged bones are tenderly lifted and brought closer to the sun.

My son calls out to me. His body curves in the sound echoing down the slope, sharing an intimacy with the wind as he skis smoothly to a halt.

Even when he explains it, his face alight with excitement and flushed from the freezing air, I know I cannot follow him wherever he wants to go.

My son, racing to grow taller than me, is already on the other side of the barrier, climbing the next slope.

eagle wings ...
rapids race
over sleeping rocks

Shiva Bhusal
~

Vilnius

A street performer begins playing the euphonium. Its warm notes drift through the air. In a corner of the Square, the boy's hands tighten around her hips. She places hers on his chest. Before their kiss, they sway in rhythm, becoming one with the song.

Rasos night —
between old town and the new
the Neris river

Subir Ningthouja

Ululations in the Haze

Clad in a white kurta pyjama, I worshipped the goddess. At my first Saraswati Puja at medical college, I tried to absorb the sights, sounds and smells to the fullest.

I drank the Panchamrit lovingly prepared by my friend, Modhu, from milk, curd, honey, ghee, sugar, tulsi and some other secret ingredients. Laughter, chants, and eating of kul (jujube) blended with the scent of incense and flowers. Lunchtime came and everyone took a break before the evening celebrations.

By twilight, the excitement was palpable. Panjada was two years senior to me and a college legend of Dhunuchi Naach. Though this dance is typically reserved for the Durga Puja festival, it was also performed at my college during Saraswati Puja too.

He began slowly to the beat of two dhak drummers. His hands delicately held a dhunuchi each. The dhunuchi is a clay incense-burner bowl, in which, on charcoal and coconut-husk embers, resin incense and camphor are sprinkled, producing fragrant white smoke. Panjada's limbs swirled faster and faster with the smoke. The drummers had a hard time keeping up. I was mesmerised.

Some months later, during the Second Professional Exams of Panjada's batch, there were shouts in the Pathology laboratory. His apron's coat tail had caught fire from one of the spirit lamps.

I still remember him fondly though I don't know where he is.

moonless night
kids' laughter echoes with
Diwali fireworks

Sumitra Kumar
~

Fenestra

She flies in and out of the bedroom window of our tiny Mumbai apartment, bringing straws. At first, it seemed a casual visit, underscoring her fearlessness. Amused by the courage, we let her be. Sparrows were a common sight in my childhood.

In about a week, squeaks emanate from the open loft directly above the window, drawing our attention. With a foot on the safety grill, we scale the wall to investigate the site when our winged guest is away on her errands.

Huddled together between two suitcases are pink nestlings. Like rosebuds, with wide funnel-like mouths and necks craning, they clamour for life-sustaining worms their mother will bring.

The windows of 2025 remain shut, thanks to rising temperatures from a rapidly diminishing green cover and the widespread installation of air-conditioners. On the brink of losing every habitat, we confine the sparrows to a virtual life of our memories.

gaping
at the forest wallpaper
my city-bred child

late night
we sit under the sky
talking to the stars
a cicada's trill sneaks into
our conversation



Pic & ku Mona Bedi

image and ku: Mona Bedi

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

Could Kubler-Ross be Right ...

Living alone has become a habit. She colors the loneliness in various shades. But lately, she's been noticing a lining to these shades. The brightness of morning reminds her there's no one to discuss the possible temperatures outside. *But it's getting warmer.* A bed of red and yellow tulips remind her she was not alone when those bulbs were planted. *They are beautiful.* The colors of dusk remind her that she's going back to an empty home. *Her home.*

despite
the frozen ground
first crocus

susan burch
~

The Evolution of Wishes

It all started with weeds. Plain old dandelions. A thorn in the side to some. A menace to others. But people kept blowing on them, kept making wishes. Dandelion fronds rode the wind. Yelled 'giddy up' like cowboys. All just going where all wishes go.

fulfillment center

But the more wishes, the more fronds, and before we knew it, there was a dandelion wind. Like a southern wind, it became part of the weather and part of our vocabulary. A phenomenon no one could explain.

still processing

Dandelion wind. Wistful wind. Wishy wind. Whatever you call it, it comes and goes without warning, leaving meteorologists baffled. It follows no known patterns because it's anything but normal.

our fairytale

Swagata Soumyanarayan

The Difference Between 8 and 10

The first time he had his head shaved was for his Upanayanam ceremony. He was only eight years old and had cried for days. He never understood how it would bring him closer to the gods, and he hated his bald head. His father took him aside quietly, saying how happy he was for him, and got him ice cream afterwards. He tried to be brave for his father and cried in his room.

Weeks later, he still wept, his itchy head a constant target for jokes and smacks at school. He tried to avoid school by inventing stomachaches and fevers, but his mother coaxed him onto the school bus, promising it would get better.

end of summer
his school uniform
already short

At 10, he understands that death means he will never see the person again. When his father is hospitalised, he fervently prays to all the gods he knows and asks them to send his father back home; he vows to shave his head as many times as necessary.

tuberoses
a touch of grief on
white blooms

This time, when he has his head shaved, he doesn't cry or ask for a cap. He just misses his father terribly.

Billie Dee
~

lacking the vocabulary of love ...

deaf tabby
fletching my wrist
without a purr

Lakshmi Iyer

resurrection

forgetting
the war within
the war outside

Lorraine Haig
~

Just one word

dry lightning
along the ridgeline
starts a fire

Mohua Maulik
~

windblown sock hanging on a cable wire

vermilion
the only colour
in her life

gembun

Ron C. Moss
~

starless

a burnt
paper wish
floats up

Sathya Venkatesh

regaining
consciousness briefly
she smiles

a rainbow

vast vistas
as i sit cross legged
on the boulder
closing my eyes
inner spaces mirror the skies

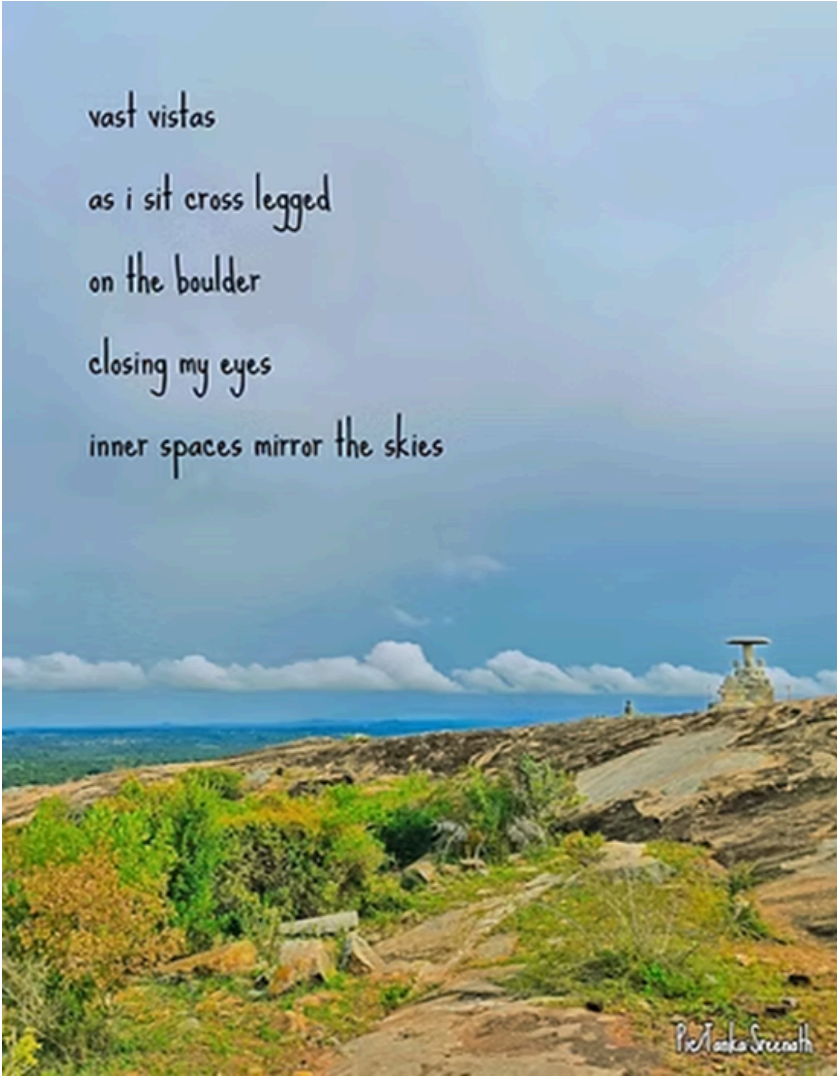


image and ku: Sreenath

Alfred Booth
~

In the Stories Told Before Death

A wizard bans all the gargoyles and grants every wish from a planet of dandelion clocks. Could those queries for peace be granted? And hope? It would be enough to set my words to music and let them flow freely from my windows, inspiring the fruit trees to blossom into baskets filled with the finest from the farmer's market. Inspiring only gentleness as each day comes and goes, a terrestrial unendingness like the waters' ebb and flow. A lullaby so the rare angels still believing in goodness would fly from the Northern Lights and tiptoe along the horizons formed by mountain tops. But I would not be remembered as a hero.

in the valleys
there is time for everything
blue elephants wait
in the unwritten pages
of a children's book

Dinah Power
~

Time

We wait for the other shoe to drop while inundated with a never-ending stream of contradictory messaging and inflammatory rhetoric.

Where are the pastoral scenes - the strolls down the boulevards - the afternoon High Teas from another era?

rain pours
unable to clean the air
the winds blow
circulating pollutants
death comes sooner

Jacek Margolak
~

What Cannot Be Clocked

The alarm goes off while it is still dark. Overtime no longer needs to be announced; it simply arrives. On the radio, a minister speaks of patience. At the crossing, a delivery truck idles, its engine growling, as if even machines are tired of waiting. Someone has tied a ribbon to the factory fence — a color out of place, already fraying. I step past it, carrying what cannot be clocked in or out.

on my way to work
I stop
at the lilacs in bloom —
forgetting briefly
about the stone in my shoe

Joanna Ashwell

Webs

Here, it takes on the form of wonder. The drops of rain glisten on the thread. I imagine the tiny legs first creating a bridge, then those tiny anchors that build the frame. Temporary spirals make way for the sticky capture of permanent spirals.

outside in
one more word
becomes a chain
the middling hours
a cradle for desire

Is this how you entrapped me? First the voyeur, then the confidant. All it took was a few swipes, and then you were gone. Like a gate breaking a web in one swing.

a bed of coal
still burning hot
my heart stilled
to blood diamond
searching for water

Joanna Ashwell



Storm Lanterns

It is the way the candle flame folds into the wall. Each shadow is layered into the coal-backed darkness. Another sideways slant of the fire, blown this way and that by the door opening. A window reflects the molten orange. In these small moments, breath can be found. The lengthening of an exhale, the long inhale back to peace.

a row of votives
side by side
with glazed acorns
one tiny finger
adjusts the beam

There is always one stair with an extra creak. Try as you might to avoid it in the depths of night, the floorboard finds a flexed toe or a raised heel. The flashlight begins to flicker, and you are alone.

wolf moon
your wildling heart
racing faster
whispering a prayer
back to yourself

tanka-prose

The forest floor is flecked with snow. You've misjudged the time, and dusk has arrived. You pin your hopes on the lone lamp swinging on the porch.

dream threads
the woven light
of stardust
how our soul
offers a psalm

Joy McCall

Tramps

The old man sat on the doorstep telling me stories from long ago.
The air around us filled with light.
Where I grew up in the northlands near the wall that Hadrian built
there were mountains.
There were wild men who wandered all their
lives, who never slept inside four walls.
They knew to come to our door when hungry -
the sign said 'tramps welcome'.

they sat on the step
my mother brought
cups of tea
and the leftovers
from the kitchen

They would not come in - their spirits would die inside a house.
They slept in the garden, rain or shine.
I dreamed of being a tramp, a wanderer, but it's no life for a
woman.

by the warm fire
now I wander
over hill and dale
I close my eyes
and sleep in sheep folds

tanka-prose

a few sheep
to keep me warm
their night breathing
the smell of damp wool
the sky full of stars

Kalyanee Arandhara
~

Seasons

the faint sound
of a flute at midnight
to its tune i hum
my favourite lullaby
mom used to sing

Before opening, he sniffs the envelope. Eyes closed, he can feel the surprised look of an eight-year-old. Oh, it's the smell of home beyond the seven seas, he answers. A letter from his father, whom he left behind in search of a greener pasture.

Little does he know that very soon, they wouldn't be posting handwritten letters. Even the busy post office would become obsolete one day.

Marion Clarke
~

Osmosis

On Saturday mornings, my father would take my younger siblings and me on a “mystery tour” to a location of interest in the local area. Once there, he might show us the inhabitants of a rockpool or pond, reveal a valley carved by a glacier during the Ice Age, or a peak formed by volcanic activity sixty million years ago. He’d show us a dam built by otters, point out edible plants and poisonous fungi, and teach us how to recognise the calls of native birds.

I must admit, at the time, I thought that these outings were to give my mother some space to wash the weekly pile of school uniforms.

final exams
most questions covered
by weekend trips
organised by my father
the geography teacher

Mohua Maulik



Eyes Wide Shut

I go from room to room, switching on the lights and drawing curtains. It's dusk, and as it gets dark, neighbours can easily peep into each other's apartments. It is indeed a concrete jungle.

Nobody believes us when we say that just a couple of decades ago, this place was a vast mustard field.

fungus cells
colonize a carpenter ant
unfettered
the bully makes plans
to envelop other lands

tanka-art

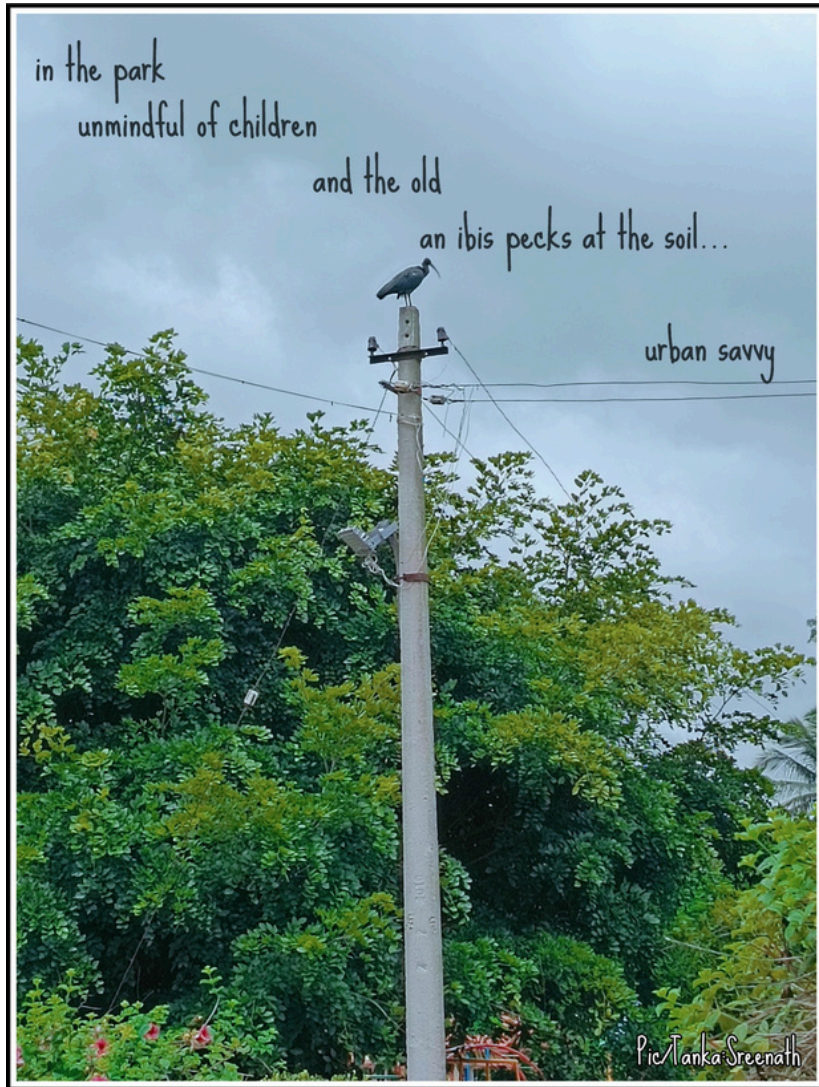


image and ku: Sreenath

Mona Bedi



Lost World

It is my school reunion — the Class of 1983. My husband has refused to come. Strangely, I feel free, almost liberated, though a faint nervousness trails me like a shadow.

As I enter the farmhouse where the party is underway, it feels as if I've stepped into a dream. Old Bollywood melodies drift through the air. Paper lanterns sway gently in the evening breeze. Draped in a black sari, I feel luminous — more myself than I have in years.

Strangers smile, say hello, and move on. I search the crowd for a familiar face. Suddenly, a trace of perfume reaches me — instantly recognisable. It livens my senses, bringing back memories of my youth.

I turn to look at the old bald man staring at me. “Were you looking for me?” he says with a smile. His eyes still hold the mischief I remember.

science lab
we mix chemicals
hoping to create magic ...
if only love came
with a written formula

Mona Bedi
~

For Posterity

As the new year dawns, I miss my parents. Dad always told the three of us, “Remember, girls, you’re all part of me. Even when I’m not there, I’ll always live in each of you.”

barefoot on the beach
I walk among scattered
pieces of sea glass
each one holding within itself
a tiny fragment of the sun

Nalini Shetty

Uttarayan

The sun reaches its mark without announcement. On the terrace, a loose thread drags once across the concrete, then stills. Someone laughs on a nearby roof; somewhere else, a line snaps. The sky neither opens nor closes.

midday heat
one kite steadies
then veers
the wrist adjusts
without thought

Later, the building absorbs the afternoon. Light withdraws from the stairwell in stages. I descend with others.

early dusk
the terrace above us
empty
voices carry upward
past the last landing

Sandip Chauhan

Gradient Theory

Everything is sorted and labeled. What appears is named: this is light, that is shadow; this is clear, that is obscure. You are tired of how every surface must testify, how each edge is forced to choose a side. Noon pins objects in place so firmly that even dusk is summoned and asked which camp it belongs to. In the stripped light of your room, the screen becomes a third eye that refuses such simple verdicts.

all this time
calling the world
two colors —
then the song splits open
into a spectrum of pulse

Sandip Chauhan

Parallel Lines

He explains the double-slit experiment to me again, as though the problem lay in memory, not in nature itself. Light as a pulse, light as a particle behaving differently when observed. He draws invisible diagrams in the space between us; his wedding ring flashes with each pass. I think about how our lives have settled into a readable text: his penciled equations, my dog-eared poems, his squared notebooks, my sagging bookshelf.

mountain runoff
two streams converge
as one course —
he tracks the pattern
I cup my hands to drink

Suraja Menon Roychowdhury

Basant Bahar

I watch the maestro tune his instrument. He takes his time, gently moving the keys as he adjusts the frets. I try to guess at the raga that he might play, based on the notes he's tuning the sitar to, but he doesn't give away any hints. Distracted, I look out of the window. So much movement in that frame ... a pair of blackbirds, a cardinal, the feathery fronds of trees, drifting clouds

what he played
between the first and fourth notes
I do not know ...
perhaps it was the song
of fluttering cherry blossoms

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

Rooted

Back from her village, jasmine still bright in her curls, Dhanam presses a small bag of fresh roots into my hand, asking me to safeguard them. The kitchen's diffused light washes her face in a greenish-yellow glow. I tuck the bag away in the pooja room and offer her coffee.

In an old cotton Chettinad saree, the bright lustre of her vermilion sharpens the austerity of her face. I marvel at the turmeric stains on her once-white blouse, yellow climbing her neck and tinting her skin.

I feel a pang of sadness as I hear her new red and green glass bangles clink cheerfully on her delicate wrists while she clears the sink.

It's been five years since her husband left her and their three children for another woman. Now the sole breadwinner, she works hard, still hopeful, believing he will return.

wild turmeric –
it dyes her faith
in a yellow thread
looped with future hopes,
secure around her neck

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy
~

Somewhere, Somehow

Nature has a micro-factory running within us, where tiny segments of life are manufactured through a series of pairing, crossing over, duplication, division, multiplication, and development from the DNA to the cellular level. The machinery is a scientific marvel where every intricate process flows with seamless intelligence.

Yet sometimes, things go different.

meiosis triggers
an extra chromosome
into a human cell ...
the blueprint of a jasmine
blooms as neroli

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy

Praana*

Through my morning chores, my eyes wander for a moment, to the crisp blue of a pleasant spring sky. Drawn to the window, I take in some sun in the quiet of the moment. A flock of parakeets screech past, diving and soaring. Slowly, an all familiar feeling of unease begins. A tightness creeps up my chest and constricts my throat, as I start to hyperventilate ...

fifteen times
breathing in and out
each minute ...
this miracle of life
we call monotony

*Praana - life-force/breath

gembun with tanka

Mona Bedi
~

every childhood has its perfect moments

insomnia —
an old lullaby spins
on the gramophone
my mother's face appears
then fades into moonlight

Results of indianKUKAI #52

hosted by Amoolya Kamalnath, Kashinath Karmakar, Neena Singh,
& Rohan Kevin Broach. Certificates design by Teji Sethi



52nd
indianKUKAI



first sunrise—
a goldfinch lifts the mist
from the reeds

SANJUKTAA ASOPA
BELGAUM, INDIA
FIRST PRIZE
THEME : first light
JANUARY 2026

HOSTS
Amoolya Kamalnath, Kashinath Karmakar, Neena Singh and Rohan Kevin Broach
organised by
TRIVENI HAIKAI INDIA



52nd
indianKUKAI



beach wall
a row of champagne bottles
filled with first light

MARION CLARKE
WARRENPOINT, N.IRELAND
SECOND PRIZE (TIE)
THEME : first light
JANUARY 2026

HOSTS
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52nd
indianKUKAI

first light --
on the barbed wire
dew drops

CRISTIAN MATEI
BUCHAREST, ROMANIA

SECOND PRIZE (TIE)

THEME : first light
JANUARY 2026

HOSTS
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52nd
indianKUKAI

first light
your empty armchair
warms up

SWAGATA
SOUMYANARAYAN
MUMBAI, INDIA

THIRD PRIZE

THEME : first light
JANUARY 2026

HOSTS
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TRIVENI HAIKAI INDIA



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thank you for being with us.

See you once again on 22 March 2026
with many more fine poems
from our contributors!

Team: *haikuKATHA*