failed ~~haiku~~ invitation-only

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Welcome to our haibun-centered issue of *Failed Haiku - Invitation Only* Edition! In this issue, I asked a few select haibun poets to provide me with a haibun or two of their own, either traditional or experimental, for publication. They responded with an eclectic group of poems and prose that offer individual glimpses into the styles, formats, and techniques designed to inspire others to read, write, and enjoy haibun. I want to be clear, we need to have readers even if they do not write haibun theselves. Through the examples and teaching of the folks featured herein, haibun is growing in popularity and entering publications that have not traditionally carried haiku/senryu poems or prose poems.

The goal here is to interest people in haibun and encourage those already writing and reading them to open up their vision to what haibun is and can be in the world of poetry.

Mike Rehling

Cast List

In order of appearance

(all work copyrighted by the authors)

Andrew Riutta

Glenn G. Coats

Shloka Shankar

Lew Watts

Alexis Rotella

Jennifer Hambrick and Richard Gilbert

Jennifer Hambrick

Roberta Beary

Kala Ramesh

Johannes S. H. Bjerg

Terri L. French

Jack and Linda

Each morning my folks have a simple breakfast of coffee and toast---while my mother, at the same time, plays videos they both watch on her phone. Of countless varied things. Mostly funny or cute. Maine Coon cats lying peacefully next to backyard crows. Babies caught on camera---scaling out of their cribs at 1 a.m.---in search of the television's sheer glowing life. Colorful elderly men and women, despite their canes and leg braces, polka dancing the nights away---walking on water like Jesus. With Jesus. I think my parents are old enough now that they're simply trying to take in what they can of it all . . . The good stuff. The true "salt" that, in the end, seasons the days. Keeps hearts from spoiling.

autumn evening---
rotten bird seed tossed
into the wildflowers

Andrew Riutta

Editor Comment: I have been reading Andrew's poetry for decades. He is a favorite of mine, and I have met his parents. This has added value to me since I am in my late seventies, and the activities he describes in this well-crafted haibun are familiar to me personally. And yet the importance of the capping poem blends with the prose so well. Spoiled bird seed is such a wonderful contrast to the 'sheer glowing light' of the

TV. The rich prose tells a loving story without a hint of criticism and chronicles the bird's story as they deserve a dash of 'salt' to keep them going.

The Heartbeat Of A Hummingbird

I did not tell
Mr. Sulovski
who stood
like a soldier
outside
his classroom
and monitored
students
between classes,
he never knew
what
happened.

I did not tell
the music teacher
who lined
the saxophones
up
to play “Moon River,”
who never
saw me wince
as I lugged
my instrument
down
the hallway.

I did not tell
my parents
as I studied
my shoulders
in the bathroom
mirror:
fresh red blotches,
others were
bluish-purple,
some black,
then pulled
a towel
around my neck
and dashed
to the solitude
of my room.

I did not tell
my sister—
not after she
confided to me
that Roland
was meeting her
on Friday night—
not after she said
that mom and dad
must never know—
I told her then

I knew how
to keep a secret.

the flinch before a first kiss summer dance

Glenn G. Coats

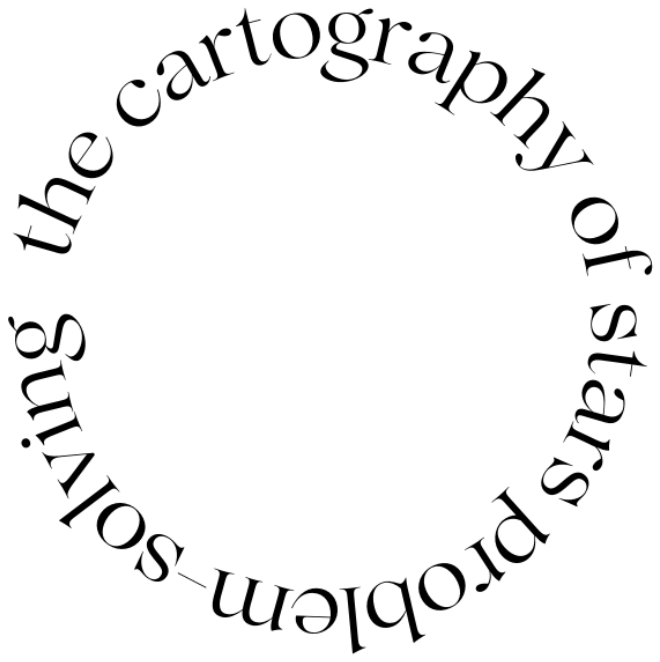
Editors Comments: Glenn is one of the folks who guided me into haibun, so I am in awe of his work. As an editor at HaibunToday, he mentored many of us as well. He almost exclusively writes haibun now and is a champion of the form.

In this haibun, Glenn takes the reader on an emotionally charged ride through two delicately described instances of abuse. The ragged construction of the prose moving down the page mirrors the child's whispered confession of a 'secret event' that is being chronicled but is without specifics. The reader is free to 'fill in the blanks' as to the actual reason for not telling anyone. The fact that in this house 'secrets' are not exclusive to a single sibling either sets the stage for wider intrigue. Let us not forget the importance of a title in haibun either. **The Heartbeat Of A Hummingbird** seems odd as we begin to read through the prose, but when we get to capping poem it becomes the thread that ties it all together. Can you see a child as small, with intense feelings and staggered thoughts that are brought home to the reader through the short lines of the prose? The capping poem takes what

could be an innocent moment into one that drives home to the quiet nature of abuse.

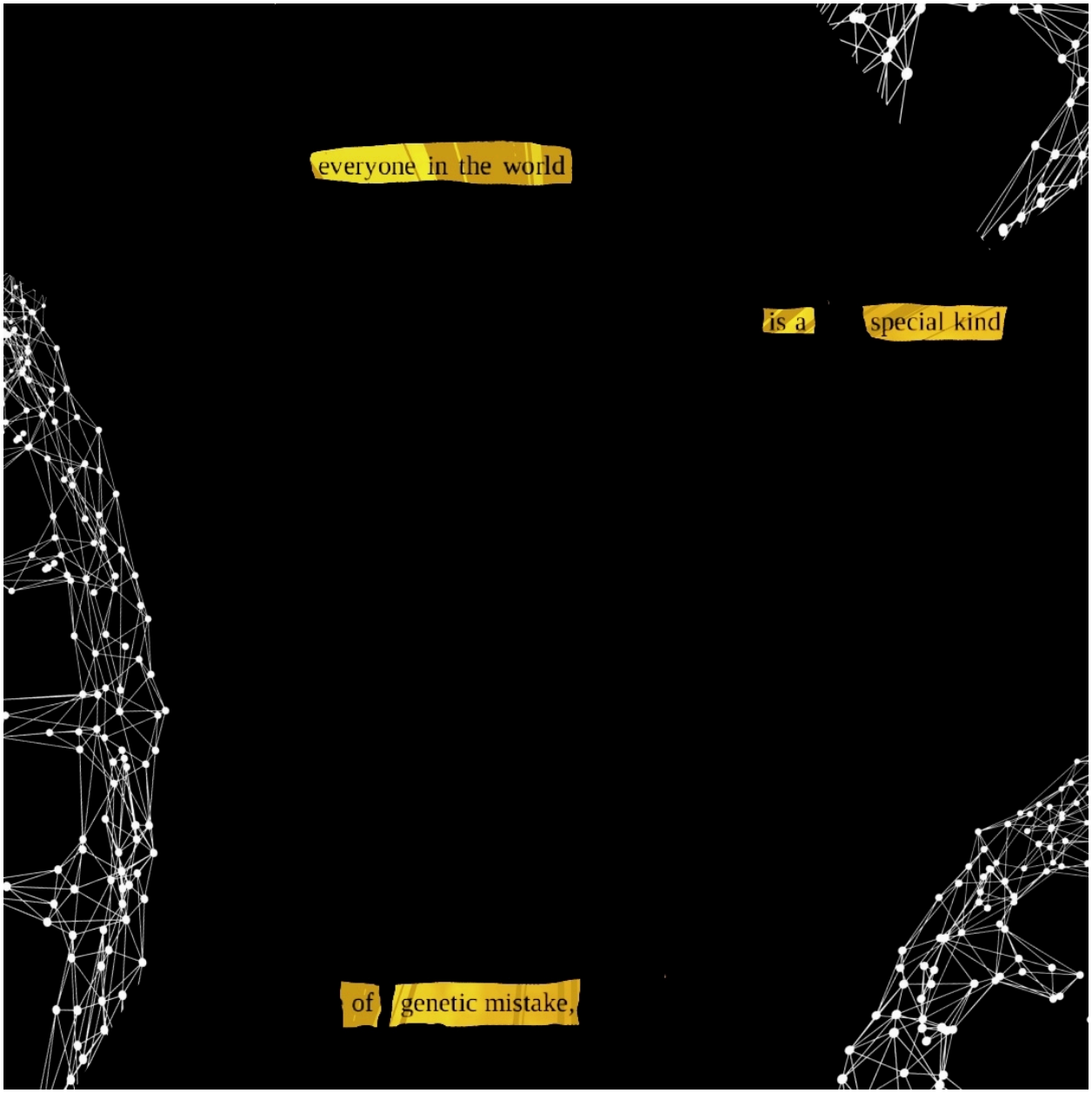
This haibun is a BRAVO!

Singularity
an erasure series



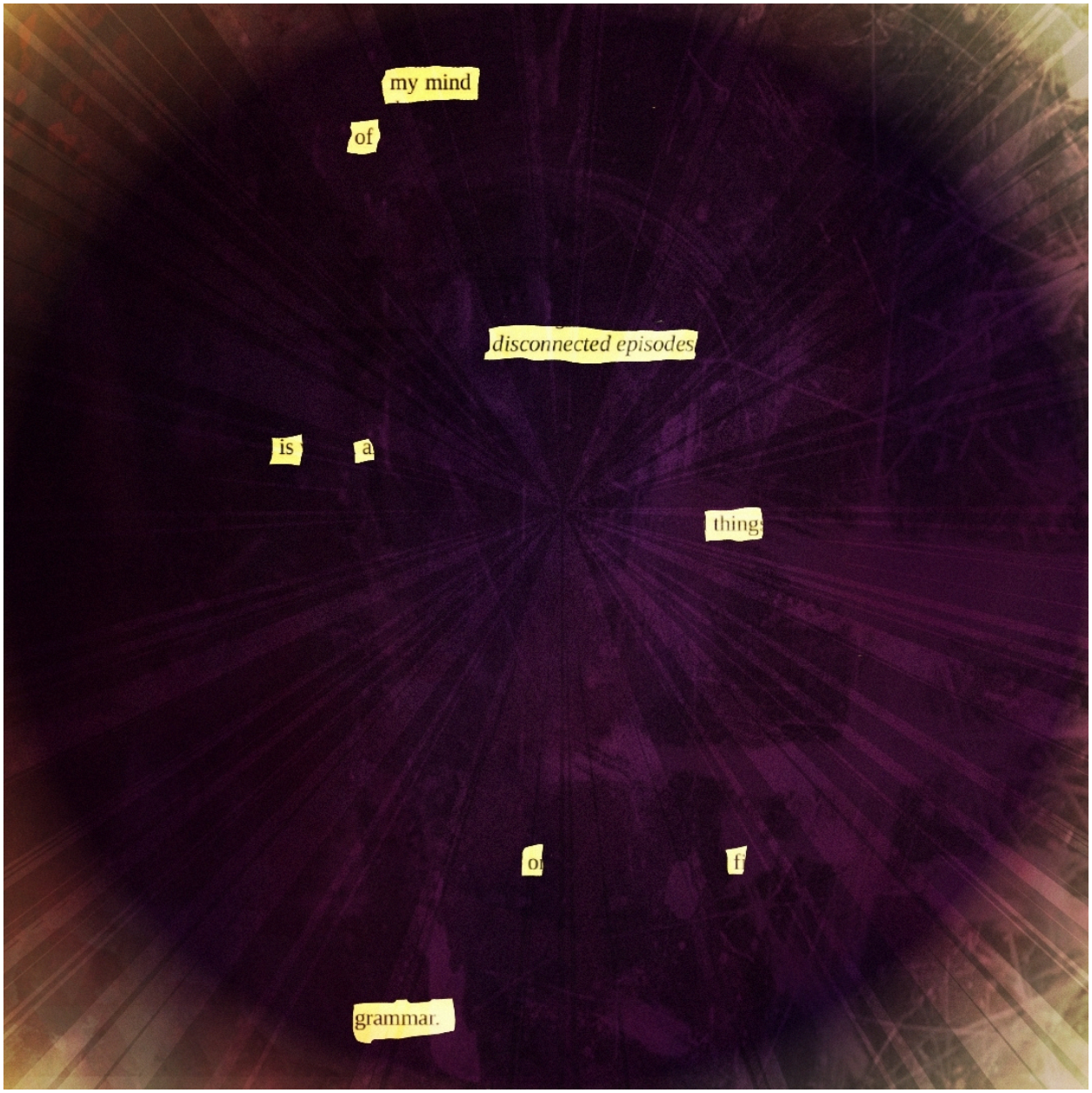
the cartography of stars problem-solving

everyone / in the world / is a special kind / of genetic mistake



II

my mind / of disconnected episodes / is a thing / of grammar



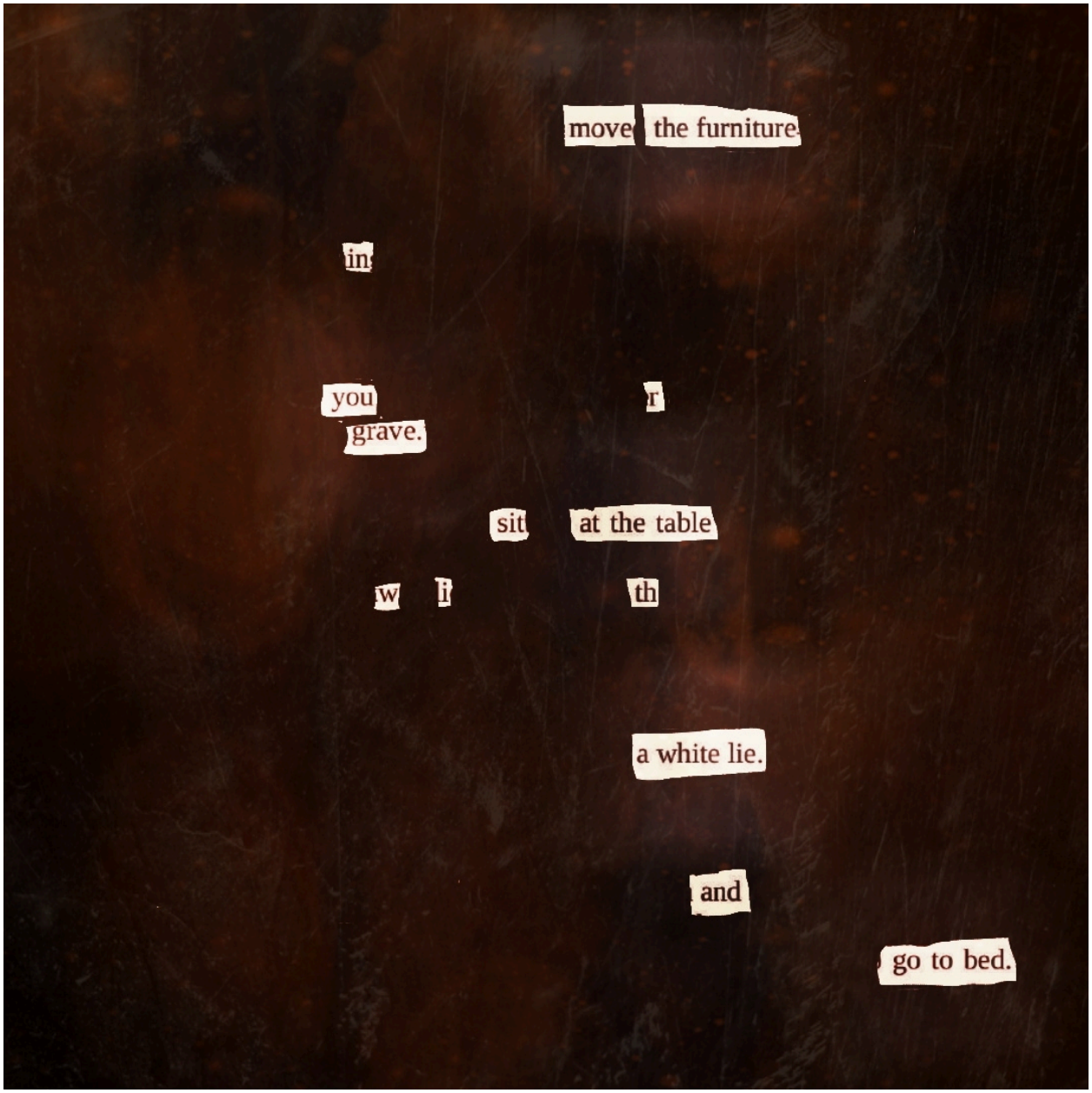
III

underneath reason / a letter full / of shapes / & colour

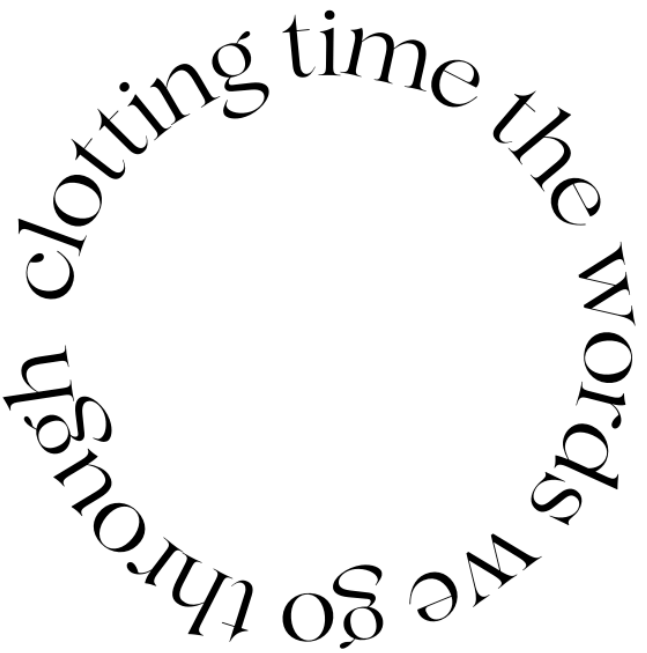


IV

move the furniture / in your grave / sit at the table / with a white lie / and go to bed



clotting time the words we go through



Source: The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time by Mark Haddon.

Shloka Shankar

Editor Comments: Shloka has been a friend and inspiration for some time now. Her willingness to walk the plank, and dive into the ocean without a push is something many who have read her work are used to. This one manages to use many techniques in a single haibun. She received her initial inspiration to write this using 'found haiku' from a story by Mark Haddon and then incorporated them into a series of haiga. Now I confess that I had never even thought of this approach, but Shloka has shown me something I am intrigued enough by to give a go myself someday.

I read each of these and could have made a haibun out of any one of the images. But she has given us the words, the texture of the images, and a capping poem that knocks the reader off their chair. The illness of a loved one is tough for anyone to handle, but in this case, the 'white lies' and the concerns voiced through this haibun each contain delicately selected words and phrases that hammer home the hope and the fears of the family surrounding the patient. Sometimes haibun that takes the leaps contained in this piece are called 'experimental' and that would be very inaccurate in this case. It would only be an experiment if it failed, but that is not the case here. Take a minute or more and read it slowly, look at the images contained within it, and feel the emotion of the moments she is sharing. Well worth it. You will agree with me that this experiment has succeeded fully.

The Needle's Eye

stroking a leaf
of lamb's ear . . .
cub scout forage

There's a crack in the ceiling. Someone has tried to seal it during the last week. But there's still a gap—I can feel the air being sucked out of the room. Maybe, if I can make myself that small . . .

"So again, in your own time, what else do you remember of that day?"

deep in the gorge—
specks of lint
on his stubble

Lew Watts

Editor Comments: Childhood is a time of simple and sometimes magical moments. But it can be colored by nature and the small gentle hairlike fur on the lamb's ear leaf is a potent memory. Then that memory is clouded by an event that evening where the child is looking up from his bed at the ceiling. Children 'make themselves small' as a way of hiding from the truth of some moments in their lives. The title of this haibun has a deeper meaning than just a statement in my opinion.

The title develops those meanings as we read the prose. Making yourself small so you can escape through a crack in the ceiling is just a way to make darker images recede. The capping poem tells us a memory that is not anything like the image in the first poem of this haibun. It hints darkly of an adult who has measured a vulnerability and exploited it. As powerful as this one is there is a subtlety in Lew's approach that shows he is a haibun master.

EMPTY SOULS

Tibetan prayer flags
flap in the wind
no one to talk to

Why Tower Air? I ask as my husband packs a suitcase to get ready to attend his mother's funeral.

Because it's a bargain, he says.

Wouldn't you rather fly a major carrier?

I pull a card from my Tarot deck. Out of the 78 possibilities, it's the Tower that shows up. Flames shoot from the top of a crumbling brick tower while a couple with shock imprinted on their faces falls through the air, crowns flying. There's no soft landing in sight.

I plead with my husband to book with another airline, but he says he'll be fine. I shouldn't put such faith in divination.

As I entertain a couple of acquaintances, the phone rings. My husband's voice sounds far away.

dusk signals the jasmine to release its scent

I'm at Kennedy. We had to make an emergency landing. While flames shot from the engine, the pilot told us to put our heads in our laps and

brace for impact. The silence was so thick, no one could make a sound. I took my wallet from my jacket, placed it in the seat pocket facing me, just in case my body couldn't be identified. And then I saw a newspaper headline which seemed so vivid and real—son dies in plane crash after attending mother's funeral. It was the most bizarre experience. I thought my life was over, that I'd never see you again. When we got off the plane, some people actually kissed the ground. Everyone is shaken including the pilot's wife. It was her husband's last flight before retirement.

While my guests stuff themselves on tacos and guacamole, I try to regain composure. Don't sweat the small stuff, they tell me. Get over it. Move on. Come eat.

I want to throw them both out but instead I bite my tongue until it aches. I count the minutes until they're out of my space.

the cat brings home a screech owl

I sense disappointment in my brother-in-law's voice. Had there been a fatal accident, he'd inherit all of the mother's estate. I so need to vent, but my next-door neighbor, who caught a blip about it on the news, is nonchalant.

During break in qi gong class, my husband tries to tell a classmate about the incident, but the instructor glares at him as if to say, keep your sad stories to yourself.

The taste
of loneliness
evening meal

Alexis Rotella: “My husband and I were living in Los Gatos, California, a few months when he flew a low-budget airline back east to attend his mother’s funeral. The reaction of dinner guests, a neighbor, my brother-in-law and qi gong teacher taught us how a near tragedy can bring unexpected reactions from others as well as an education in human nature.” (web)

Alexis Rotella

Editor Comments: Ahh… Alexis is a friend, a healer of bodies in real life, and someone unafraid of chronicling her fears. She turns those fears into poetry and prose with such a deft hand that she becomes a character in her play. That first senryu will stick with me for some time. Often the only thing we can do is silently pray not to god but to ourselves. The Tibetan prayer flags carry the message for us into the universe where silence reigns supreme and matches our mood. As someone whose 'day job' took me into three million air miles, I know the story she tells of her husband's 'cheap flight' is too true. But the second poem has the poet letting the scent of jasmine briefly distract her and her guests. But then the call comes from her husband and her fears are suddenly not those of a worried wife and an all too real story of fears coming way too close to coming true.

We move through this story when we find the cat participating in his own 'winged tragedy' with the screech owl. Even the most natural of

flyers can find themselves crashing and burning it seems. The reactions of her dinner guests are priceless, and I share her feeling that tossing them to the curb outside must have seemed very tempting. The poet has stifled her urges and gets through the dinner and the guests with their misshapen comments on the events of the evening. The capping poem is stunning. When you have a marriage of substance even the 'taste' of 'loneliness' is too much of a reminder of what could have been.

Drift

eternity of tide into our grotto we are born
of sunlight piercing sea
currents rubbing rocks to seabed
open to you soft inside
a broken shell your hand disappears from mine
you turn to stone

breakwater
a seagull scoops a starfish
toward neap tide

I am an ancient eyeless creature in your ocean's vast
unsettled time
come find me you will know me by my
cold I will take
your darkness into me

now the waves
come closer, listen

wheeling stars

By Jennifer Hambrick and Richard Gilbert

Editor Comments: A wonderful example of what can happen when two experienced poets in haibun get together to create collaboratively. This one starts with a title that is integral to the entire piece. 'Drift' sets the tone for the reader. Living as I do right near Lake Huron, and having spent too much time maybe in Big Sur I see the shape of the prose. When the 'eternity of tide' introduces the inspiration for the scattered prose I immediately bought into it. Each wave is unique and carries with it a bit of the water and often seaweed and human junk are cast off to the shore. There is an inconsistent rhythm to this scene that can resonate with each reader. That said what do I think this represents to me? Well, it could be that the reader is seeing a representation of the collaboration between two poets flowing out of them as they work on the haibun. The creative 'beats' of the poets match the random and ever-changing rhythm of the waves. The capping poem is wonderfully imagistic and the thought of 'stars' 'wheeling and dealing' as they rush together to the shore is something at turned my head. Is this haibun a genuinely crafter love poem? I think so the merging of the waves is a metaphor for two merging souls finding a moment of connection in the act of creation. Yes, read this one a few times and learn what the poets learned together.

NOTE: There is a video on our site on YouTube of Jennifer and Richard discussing their process of collaboration. Be sure to check it out!

Pool Slide Apocalypse

parasitical tadpole
teeth trapped in tiny chain
link / & biting through skim
of milky way
you drop from the top
of this giant black
hole / slosh left & right
in a torrent of chlorine
dragging your comet tail
down polymer umbilical cord
through plastic birth canal
past cervix
past charybdis / water
breaking / spitting
you into alkaline
wasteland / washing
over your head
over your other
head
as you bob
in amniotic
cocktail
& they say
there is
no life
on

this
planet

the end of the world
as we know it
last day of summer

Jennifer Hambrick

Editor Comments: The image of destruction implicit in a pool slide ride and landing in the pool is only enhanced by the structure Jennifer developed for this haibun. The words and the structure take me down the slide right after her. I have to confess her poetic deep dive down the slide to the pool but an exclamation mark on the capping poem. Briefly, she was sliding down and twisting through a plastic 'birth canal' and into a huge splash of pool water. That landing was at the end of the day the last day of summer and created a memory of that summer's end. Yes, it is a bit of apocalypse that final landing and it slid her into autumn with a splash to remember. I love that the poet has noted each emotional image that flashed before her as she experience that moment. There is an overriding sensualness in this one that denotes an event that transcends the actual ride down the plastic tube and I would not dare to tell the poet 'there is no life on earth' after that orgasmic slide down to a huge splash at the end of summer.

13 years

since the phone rang daily at 5pm *since* the card arrived on my birthday *since* the azaleas needed looking after *since* the stop at the library for large-print books mysteries mostly *since* the long cry after inspector morse had his fatal heart attack and we talked about it for days before watching the entire series again from start to finish *since* i left without looking back and then i did and she gave a little wave from the balcony and ever *since* i always look because hope is the thing with feathers

mother gone
an egret shapes
the river mist

Roberta Beary

Editor Comment: Roberta Beary is a friend and a constant inspiration to me. When I see her work I know she has 'crafted' it out of whole feelings and she holds back nothing. The title of this one cements everything together for the reader. They know immediately that this a hard and fast memory with a day, a time, and emotions still intact for the poet. The repetition of '*since*' tells us the 13 years have not dulled the moment one bit for the poet. We often overlook the memories we have share with others, the profound and silly moments seem to melt away when they leave us to this shadowy existence. But not Roberta,

she has the mundane moments she cherishes and that last wave to her mother has changed her forever. She 'looks back' now not wishing to miss the last wave of anyone she cares for. And that capping poem says it all so succinctly. Her mother has left but the gentle flight of an egret adds turbulence to the mist on the river as the soulful departure of her mother's consciousness blends back into the universe. This is touching but in no way morbid or sad. Just a last moment shared with a child and their parent. I am going to take a piece of this one with me when I leave this body because 'hope is the thing with feathers'.

Folded Fragrances

As she watches the August rain from the bedroom window, she hears the darkness of the night hemming her in from all sides. A strong breeze pleats the rain into liquid sheets. A sudden chill, and she wraps her sari pallu tightly around her shoulders. She can feel her heartbeat.

hammers and nails
elephants go a-thumping
on a tin roof

She has always liked this room, the smallest room in the house. Walls have stories to tell, and they repeat them often, but, today, the walls seem to vanish, and there she is, out in the open … drenched in the spaciousness of one breath.

what's in
    what's out
the seamless horizon

Kala Ramesh

Editor Comment: Well Kala has a sweet patch of images for me cruise through in this one. First off that title is just stunning in itself, and almost a poem. The rain is being blown into the home and the poem tells us that it is like 'elephants' on the tin roof. I have been to India and

when it rains it can be both frightening and exciting simultaneously. Then the haibun gives a glimpse into this unnamed woman/girl who has chosen the smallest room in the house as her bedroom. But then something happens and the sound of the storm instead of making her hide opens up the walls and demonstrates the wholeness of the sky to her and she is suddenly unburdened and unconfined in the vastness of the storm. And then there is the line 'drenched in the spaciousness of one breath'. That reminds me of the last breath we notice when your meditation time moves from effort to effortlessness. And the capping poem paints a picture of a 'seamless horizon'. Now that got me since I have never seen a 'seam' in a skyline, but this is just an indication that the entire world has opened up for her. The fragrance of the 'after the storm' sky smells sweet and all fear or concern are gone for good.

Alpenglow

My siblings and I have been named dawn-lit mountains. We stand on the land of this remote region, rarely visited and unknown to many. I am located at the far eastern tip of this land that I call home, the first to be illuminated by the rising sun. The sprawling earth and rivers behind me require more time to shake off the shackles of darkness.

At my dazzling best I want to shout, “Hey, look at, look at me!” but there isn’t anyone around.

Oh, Sun God Aditya, would you tell the people at Kanyakumari, who gather in thousands to see you dip into the ocean, that there are mountains up here also worth seeing? And don’t forget to tell them that when they arrive, you will be here to greet them with a warm "Good Morning."

gold-tipped wings
of a Himalayan eagle …
cloudless sky

Note:
This piece is inspired by Meghadūta (Samskrit: मेघदूत Cloud Messenger) a lyric poem written by Kalidasa (c. 4th–5th century CE), who is considered to be one of the greatest Samskrit poets. It describes how a yaksha (or nature spirit), who had been banished by his master to a remote region for a year, asked a cloud to take his wife a message of love.

Kala Ramesh

Editor Comment: Sunlight on the mountains is something to capture your eyes but it also touches something deeper. A glow has indeed covered the mountain but it has penetrated the soul as well. The poet and her siblings are 'dawn-lit mountains' themselves you see. So we have the glow resting on them as well. It generates an energetic response but no audience. The poet then wants to share what she has discovered and invokes the Sun God to invite the people in the village below. There seems to be an immediate answer in the form of an eagle presumably heading off to the nearby villagers to invite them into the scene and receive their greeting when they get there.

The Hole

- What are you doing in that hole?
- I fell in.
- Did you hurt yourself?
- Not sure. I'm too cold to feel much else than the cold.
- How did it happen?
- I didn't see it so I just fell in.
- What were you doing out here?
- Digging a hole.
- That one? (points)
- This one (shows)
- Why?
- I thought I might hide a while.
- You succeeded. If you hadn't coughed I probably would have walked right past you.
- Yea, I accidentally inhaled some of the fumes from when I stroke a match.
- Ah, so you have got your smokes with you? Good.
- Yes. I also wanted to see how deep the hole had gotten, so I used most of my matches for that. It's deep.
- It sure is. Can be quite tricky to see the whole hole in this darkness.
- Yes, new moon, you know.
- Yes, indeed.
- Is the shovel still up there.
- (Looks around by the feeble flame of a lighter) Yes, it's here.
- Would you pass it to me?
- Do you want to dig more?

- Yes, I want to see how deep the hole is but the soil is in the way.
- Ah. Here. (Hands the shovel)

anchored the ships in her head the black ships
...

Johannes S. H. Bjerg

Editor Comment: Johannes has a 'flavor' all his own, it is always deliciously sweet to me though. Has he given us a screenplay or a haibun? I think both. As the narrator of this story, he tells a familiar story to us about wanting to 'hide' in a hole to get away from it all or to find it all. In this case, the digger of the hole wants to find the absolute 'bottom' of the hole, but the 'soil' keeps getting in the way. How many times have any of us felt that we just wanted to hide from our life, the worlds worries, or everyone? It seems like it would work but as has been said the 'soil is in the way', yet she keeps digging. At the bottom of this haibun 'hole,' we find the digger 'anchored' and 'in her head the black ships'. You see hiding in a hole leaves you nothing but the smell of the soil and and the blackness of that stubborn soil. I think I will stay on the surface to monitor the futility rather than jump in and dig.

Ca Dao Mẹ*

It was 1971 and I was 11-years-old. Many of the kids at Madison Junior High wore army jackets and POW bracelets. It looked cool and we all wanted to look cool. But the stainless steel band I wore around my wrist was more than a status symbol. I prayed for the person inscribed on it every night--Sgt. Gary LaBohn. MIA .11/30/68.

death star—
if I should die
before I wake

Sgt. LaBohn and seven other men boarded a helicopter that day. Their team was being transported to their reconnaissance mission area in Laos. It was a classified mission, not one they could talk about with their families. At 4,000 feet, the helicopter was struck by anti-aircraft fire, went into a spin, crashed in a mass of flames ten miles outside of their destination, and exploded. No ground search was initiated as it was a denied area. An air search indicated there were no survivors. Still the men were listed as “Missing in Action” and their families held on to hope for the next twenty-one years.

deep in the jungle
where no eyes see—
bamboo orchid

In March 1989, the area was excavated. Human remains of 17 teeth and 145 bone fragments were found. The remains are buried in a mass grave in Arlington National Cemetery.

here and there
two grandmothers
point to Orion

*Mother's Lullaby
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X2ka5Jc0oug

Terri L. French

Editor Comment: Terri is an empath with a penchant for 'caring'. I have availed myself of her concern from time to time and she always comes through. In this haibun, she has confirmed her strong feelings for the 'others' she has crossed paths with, however tenuously, in this life. That POW bracelet was not just 'kool' jewelry to her it was, as it was intended, a connection to another. That connection remains to this day it seems and so is her connection to that soldier's mother whom she has not met but still feels connected to through that bracelet. In war, a 'death star' can be jet plane or a bomber, either way in a split second lives are ended without a moment to care from anyone. But Terri is still caring it seems, and likely will continue. Not just for the sake of the soldier now but for his mother. And then the capping poem takes us to that moment when the family was told their son was 'missing'. Two

grandmothers go out to look at the stars or are they looking for a lost grandson? Having been alive through that war I lost many friends to it. I am glad we have a poet who does not forget to remember.

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