

#FemkuMag



Issue 39

Summer 2025

#FemkuMag

*revolutionary haiku
by women, trans, & gender expansive voices*

Rowan Beckett Minor: Founder and Editor-in-Chief

Vandana Parashar: International Women's Month Editor

Carissa Coane: Assistant Editor & Social Media Coordinator

Kelly Sargent: Assistant Editor

Cover Haiga: Marianne Paul

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Edited by Rowan Beckett Minor and Carissa Coane

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EDITORS' NOTE

From Carissa Coane and Rowan Beckett Minor

Written by Carissa Coane

Poetry is my anchor in times of crisis, a sentiment I'm sure many of you share. Although the world is heavy right now, many of the poems in Issue 39: Summer 2025 reflect our collective grief, but also our collective tenacity. Since its inception, *#FemkuMag* has embraced the revolutionary, an ethos that resonates throughout this issue.

Thank you to everyone who helped make this issue a success! If you want to be featured in the next one, be sure to get your writing ready for the September submission period.

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2025 MARLENE MOUNTAIN CONTEST

Judged by Rowan Beckett Minor and Vandana Parashar

With over 200 poems submitted to this year's Marlene Mountain Contest, selecting winners proved to be quite the challenge. The number of submissions was significantly higher than last year, and the poems ranged in themes, styles, and approaches. There were several haiku and senryu that caught our attention, but the awarded six poems surpassed all expectations for this contest. These poems are striking and inventive. Not only do they encompass the essence of Marlene Mountain's methodologies and aesthetic, they are fresh, original, and progressive. Enjoy!

First Place
Antoinette Cheung, Canada

somewhere over the [redacted]

Commentary by Rowan Beckett Minor

This senryu uses honkadori, the common practice of allusion in Japanese poetics. Although in most cases the allusion is to an older poem, this author has chosen a well-known song from a well-loved movie musical. In fact, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow” from The Wizard of Oz is considered the most recognizable musical song in history. In this poem, the word “rainbow” has been redacted. According to the Oxford dictionary, to redact means to “censor or obscure (part of a text) for legal or security purposes.” Oftentimes, the rainbow, which is the symbol for the LGBTQIA2+ community, is removed, or redacted from society. Many queer books are banned, and even some United States libraries have been told they should be careful about advertising LGBTQIA2+ material to the public. Unfortunately, this marginalized community, like many others, is under attack. What also gives this poem extra depth, is that The Wizard of Oz was released in 1939, which parallels how far we still have to go as a society to be unconditionally accepting of these oppressed groups. Although “somewhere over the rainbow” is a full phrase, the use of “[redacted]” gives the poem a clear cut. Even though a cut is not necessary in senryu, the cut does add depth to this poem by both allowing the one well known phrase to stand alone without an extra word, fragment, or phrase overwhelming the senryu, and by highlighting

ongoing human-rights issues by removing the word “rainbow.” The author has created an exceptional poem by using a fresh tactic, and its excellence deserves to be recognized.

Second Place
Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

still stuck to the bully's tongue my nickname

Commentary by Rowan Beckett Minor

One strength in this senryu is that it centers around bullying, which is a common experience, although scarcely seen in Japanese short forms. What makes this poem especially unique is that the word "still" implies that this bullying has carried on for several years, possibly from childhood into adulthood. Most haiku and senryu that do mention bullying are specifically about childhood bullying, not adults. It is important to highlight these topics in a society that is given permission to be offensive and disrespectful by certain national and political leaders. Another strength is that the author has specifically chosen the one-line form for this poem, which allows the reading of this poem to be cyclical. This senryu can be read both in the original version “still stuck / to the bully's tongue / my nickname” and a more cyclical version “my nickname / still stuck / to the bully's tongue” which almost reflects the cycle of abuse. The author's

authenticity is palpable through this striking senryu, and its effects linger for hours.

Third Place
Antoinette Cheung, Canada

s(l)urname

Commentary by Vandana Parashar

This one-word haiku held our attention from the moment we read it. Surname is an important part of one's identity and is connected to one's heritage and sense of belonging.

It's a norm in the majority of cultures to change a woman's surname after marriage. Adding "I" to it seems like the poet's way of playing with the idea of identity, individuality and conventions.

"I" in parentheses jumps out and suggests the complex emotions when one is faced with the decision of changing surname. Does it feel like adopting an altogether different identity? As a woman, how fragmented it might feel!

But, that's not all. The first impulse to view it from a woman's perspective soon subsided and on second reading, more layers opened up. I had once read somewhere that some managers reject applications after reading the surnames as

they give away the person's race or caste. That made this haiku even more powerful.

The poet's clever use of an inserted alphabet made this haiku loaded and masterful.

Honorable Mention
Kirsten Cliff Elliot, England

waiting for the overwhelm to hit full sun

Commentary by Vandana Parashar

Is it a coincidence that I'm feeling the same emotions while writing this commentary?

This haiku works for me on many levels. The way it captures a moment of anticipation and tension, I can feel the poet expecting to be swept up in a powerful emotional wave.

We all feel overwhelmed at some point and it doesn't always come with a warning. Most of the time, it just hits us. The phrase "waiting for the overwhelm" suggests a sense of impending emotional outburst or anxiety. Juxtapositioning it with "full sun" makes the moment extremely intense. I can feel my skin burning and my heart pounding. The haiku takes a deeper meaning when we factor in societal expectations, pressures and challenges. It captures the feeling of being on the verge of being overwhelmed by the demands

of family, society or cultural norms. The beauty of it is how differently it can be interpreted through the lens of personal experiences and cultural contexts.

Honorable Mention
Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

supercalifragilistic expert diagnosis

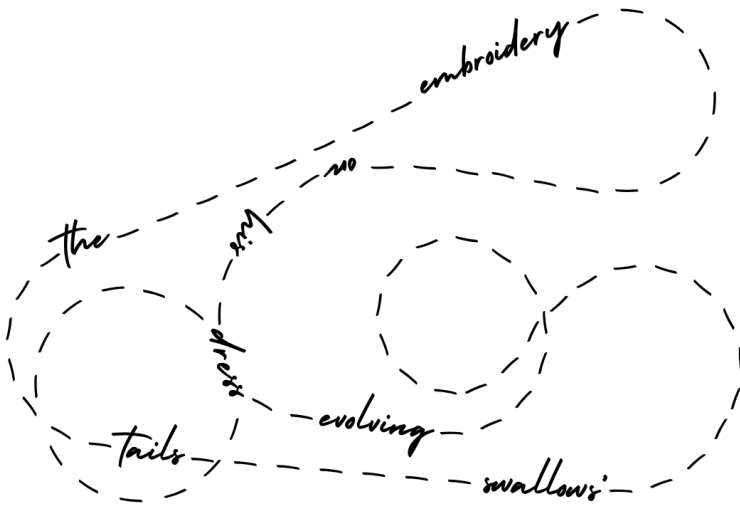
Commentary by Rowan Beckett Minor

This senryu also uses honkadori and this author has also chosen a song from a well-known movie musical. In Mary Poppins, supercalifragilisticexpialidocious is a made-up word that means "good" or "wonderful." This poem also uses word play by using "expert diagnosis," which sounds similar to the latter half of the aforementioned nonsense word. Although clever, it is not overtly so and the cleverness is used carefully and with purpose. On top of these poetic devices, this poem is profound and tackles the timely topic of medical gaslighting, making the poem not so "wonderful." Too frequently, patients, especially those with chronic symptoms, seek refuge in medical care, often to be told they are exaggerating, or making things up, much like our 34-letter made-up word. These medical "experts" often dismiss major symptoms and misdiagnose patients, leading to widespread systemic problems and abuse throughout the medical system. Although this poem is punny, the author has successfully and

effectively criticized those physicians who put ego (or ignorance) before patient care.

Honorable Mention

Robin Smith, USA



Commentary by Vandana Parashar

What a delightful image and presentation! Like the threads used for embroidery, this haiku colourfully highlights the moments of transformation or evolution, not just of the dress but also of the person wearing the dress.

The choice of “his” dress gives this haiku a whole new angle by defying traditional boundaries around fashion, identity and mode of expression. This is important to showcase in societies that reject anything outside of their “normal,” especially with the issue faced by sexual and gender minorities.

This feeling is further enhanced by the use of “swallows’ tail” which brings to mind a sense of freedom and fluidity. Swallows are known for their agility and swiftness, and the poet’s choice of using “tail” and not “wings” (which is often the word used to suggest freedom) is very strategic as it implies the wearer’s free spirit and not bothering to be defined by conventions.

The haiku when presented as a concrete poem enhances the intended effect and it is a feast for the eyes as well as the spirit.

HAIKU

waterlogged morning—
the gardener & i discuss
the storm

Rupa Anand, India

the cost of friendship butterworts

Vidhi Ashar, India

sphinx moth
those who see
but never tell

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

re fir ring a moon shadow arbor day

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

Haiku

pitting cherries
he never said
he loved her

Francine Banwarth, USA

long night moon
she falls asleep before
Rapunzel lets down her hair

Francine Banwarth, USA

a single line on the pregnancy test winter moon

Mona Bedi, India

cuckoo call
the pregnant taste
of earl grey

Bisshie, Switzerland

Haiku

cherry blossoms
all that commotion
at the flea market

Boryana Boteva, Bulgaria

1st of June
a child's picture
in the hand of a refugee

Boryana Boteva, Bulgaria

maythorn scent
of sex and death
flies around again

Helen Buckingham, UK

Mother's Day luncheon
the unraised arms
of childless women

Jackie Chou, USA

headless rose
my worry stone
worn thin

C. K. Crawford, USA

world events
hint of evil spirits
in spring

Refika Dedić, Bosnia/Herzegovina

spring sunset . . .
along the wisteria path
our first kiss

Rosa Maria Di Salvatore, Italy

ancient garden . . .
I still feel the scent
of her roses

Rosa Maria Di Salvatore, Italy

Haiku

billowing clouds...
the clown and lion tamer
share cotton candy

Janice Doppler, USA

balmy night
I trace the constellations
on her back

C. Jean Downer, Canada

stone in the lake -
a child troubles
Basho's frog

Ana Drobot, Romania

fallen plums
staining the sidewalk
another shooting

Lisa Espenmiller, USA

Haiku

mom forgets
how to answer the phone
fading light

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

cold front
the dense clouds
of my breast tissue

Adele Evershed, USA

Liberation Day
I still have the freedom
to cry

Seren Fargo, USA

out of the mist
a thousand stars
bayou fireflies

Colleen M. Farrelly

Haiku

cherry blossoms
mother flips through
her high school album

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

ghost pepper —
no longer holding
back my words

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

moving day
feeding the sparrows
one last time

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

crusts of snow...
inheriting her grandmother's
anorexia

Laurie Greer, USA

Haiku

frozen eggs . . .
last year's nest
fills with snow

Kathryn P. Haydon, USA

warm breeze –
my cat lies down
on the books to study

Nicoletta Ignatti, Italy

cherry petals rain –
a child asks
if trees cry too

Nicoletta Ignatti, Italy

late migration
butterflies untangling
out of a kiss

Lisa Anne Johnson, USA

Haiku

forsythia wind
a vulture floats
to a fresh squirrel

Lisa Anne Johnson, USA

pink columbine
in my mother's garden
a little touch of grandma

Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

a bird call
I can't name
this longing

Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

in the middle of these crazy times wisteria

Colette Kern, USA

Haiku

swallow nests
what was the reason
for my staying

Eva Limbach, Germany

early spring sunset
from the trailer park shouts
for a dog or a kid

Kristen Lindquist, USA

after skinny-dipping
the tang of forest wintergreen
on our tongues

Hannah Mahoney, USA

lingering winter . . .
jackhammers remove
BLACK LIVES MATTER

Hannah Mahoney, USA

Haiku

Holi sunset
a soldier's wife
wears white

Bipasha Majumder (De), India

first snowmelt
a letter from my past
remains unopened

Helen Ogden, USA

winterberries
the tech's warm hands
adjust my breast

Debbie Olson, USA

she is the first to bleed white trillium

Debbie Olson, USA

Haiku

an eagle winging
just above water
fog lifts

Nancy Orr, USA

tiny maple leaves returning warblers

Nancy Orr, USA

the hospital bed
finally delivered
pale lotus

Lorraine A Padden, USA

first blossoms
he finds something
to complain about

Basiliké Pappa, Greece

Haiku

spring thaw
mother's footprints
muddy my path

Shruti Patel, Switzerland

magnolia buds unfurling a newborn's fist

Shruti Patel, Switzerland

i don't reach
places so far -
solstice of June

Maria Cristina Pulvirenti, Italy

the rising
clouds of dust ...
cows return home

Kala Ramesh, India

Haiku

it all begins
with him coughing up blood
autumn deepens

Kala Ramesh, India

dawn
birdsong swelling
with the river

j rap, USA

late summer blues...
outside and within me
growing shadows

Daniela Rodi, Finland

black magic hollyhocks
not believing
everything he tells me

Kelly Sargent, USA

Haiku

between me and the bluebird counting capsules

Kelly Sargent, USA

black hellebores
adding drama
to the family soil

Kelly Sargent, USA

the fog lifts
in a plume of hope
a scent of pine

Bonnie J Scherer, USA

crickets all night small regrets

Ann K Schwader, USA

Haiku

thornless rose
the hybridization
of trad wives

Julie Schwerin, USA

the loon's dive under my past tense mother

Julie Schwerin, USA

springtime mind my only friend

Richa Sharma, India

a cricket in your shadow teaching modesty

Richa Sharma, India

Haiku

winter funeral –
a cousin picks through
the petal basket

Sandra Simpson, New Zealand

row of sunflowers—
we walk the long way
to say goodbye

Neena Singh, India

our initials
washed away by the tide—
summer fling

Debbie Sterling, USA

rainbows
the magic of childhood
dimmed by mankind

Debbie Sterling, USA

Haiku

fogged in
a friend jumps off the bridge
to nowhere

Debbie Strange, Canada

misty hills
the noodle shop
shuttered down

Neha Talreja, India

melting snow call me what you will

Shrehya Taneja, India

Sunday morning
the call and response
of birdsong

Allyson Whipple, USA

Haiku

grilled cheese and tomato soup
post-election newspaper
left unread

Allyson Whipple, USA

protests downtown
a bluebird listens

Laurie Wilcox-Meyer, USA

blossom viewing
we remember
how to flirt

Annie Wilson, UK

moonlight spills
from the white peony
sleepless night

Annie Wilson, UK

Haiku

not all at once
the leaves turn gold—
father's hands

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

anxiety—
the moth in the lampshade
keeps circling

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

SENRYU

the tide goes out
and the tide comes in
slow dance

Meredith Ackroyd, USA

looking for God
in all the wrong places
dive bar

Rupa Anand, India

sea anchor
expectations from
the elder daughter

Vidhi Ashar, India

trafficked
a mined mountain
vanishes

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

overgrown reeds—
she relinquishes her right
to inheritance

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

fault line—
the pronoun he uses
to define me

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

as far back as memories go the way of the wind

Francine Banwarth, USA

island of one mother's lasting depression

Mona Bedi, India

the relationship's
bloody termination
mother's moon

Bisshie, Switzerland

convent school prom
half a dozen skirts
don't make the cut

Bisshie, Switzerland

where is that
young girl now?
bruised flowers

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

dark sky
if i could change
i would

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

meet me where i'm at broken clouds

Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

Medicaid cuts
the diabetic 's
other foot

Terran Campbell, USA

Enola Gay bomber not drag queen

Terran Campbell, USA

night stalker
in the shadows
a slinking cat

Wendy Cobourne, USA

black-out curtains
shut inside the darkness
her suicidal mind

Wendy Cobourne, USA

 skipping
forgiveness
 stones

C. K. Crawford, USA

dry mouth...
discussing the mastectomy
of my teenage daughter

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

cigarette after cigarette another ex-husband

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

juicing blood oranges abortion law changes

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

wrapped in freshness

her shadow runs

barefoot

Refika Dedić, Bosnia/Herzegovina

touching space

half a billion women and girls

can't read this poem

Melissa Dennison, UK

moonless night
love reflects
in the cat's eyes

Melissa Dennison, UK

mum's hands
while combing my hair . . .
light feathers

Rosa Maria Di Salvatore, Italy

cancer head wrap
looking away
as she passes

Janice Doppler, USA

fireflies...
in the park
another man flashing

Adele Evershed, USA

garden of my life
how it all tastes
at season's end

Seren Fargo, USA

sine waves
the ups and downs
of bipolar

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

widespread precarity a war between the poor

Barbara Anna Gaiardoni, Italy

witch hazel --
wrapping him around
her middle finger

Laurie Greer, USA

somewhere
over the ocean
no more sad news

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

gnarled branches of a hilltop graveyard family tree

Kathryn P. Haydon, USA

deflowered I buy myself a bunch of red roses

Ruth Holzer, USA

closing her mother's eyes the accidental child

Ruth Holzer, USA

wedding day
their first kiss
turns to dust

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

sleepless again -
in my window
the universe

Eva Joan, Germany

maybe footprints
the way that he left
windy dune

Lisa Anne Johnson, USA

nutritionist consult—
another diet to give me
headaches

Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

old phonograph—
the record skips over
the assault

Julie Bloss Kelsey, USA

night explosion
the after effects
of a stool softener

Deborah P Kolodji, USA

reclaiming
their marriage
the teabag's second life

Barrie Levine, USA

the ex-boyfriend
coming on to her
oleander bouquet

Barrie Levine, USA

pleated satin
grandma's open casket
gathering light

Barrie Levine, USA

so many people
taking sides about which side
my sweater buttons

Curt Linderman, USA

between rest stops
the damn radio playing
all my heartaches

Kristen Lindquist, USA

closing time
one last shot
one last lie

Kristen Lindquist, USA

she asks me
to give her eulogy
sunlight on the old pine pews

Hannah Mahoney, USA

til death do us parting with the fine china

Sharon Martina, USA

customer service
her sweet apology
artificially generated

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

president's day
the weird mole
changes shape

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

the convict takes office year of the snake

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

between the lines a green herring opens a window

Kati Mohr, Germany

waxing and waning
my arguments
under the red moon

Jiel Narvekar, India

mom jeans
cradling my
angel baby

Jiel Narvekar, India

mid-morning coffee...
a toddler greets her father
on a phone screen

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

the fizz of Prosecco
in the century-old cinema —
Friday downpour

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

late night jazz
the sax player
talks about sex

Helen Ogden, USA

the baby
who wasn't
blood moon

Nancy Orr, USA

rohypnol season
the forget-me-please
in full flower

Lorraine A Padden, USA

median stripped
the clatter
of loose change

Lorraine A Padden, USA

south-facing
we write letters
to our past selves

Audrey Quinn, Denmark

rushing through the soul left behind :: the song

Kala Ramesh, India

an exotic flower
between the pages
father's immigrant story

Daniela Rodi, Finland

all the ways
I would have nurtured them
ash grove

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

paper moon
I fold your dreams
into mine

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

#notallmen
wind bends
the pines

Vandana Parashar, India

placing the needle on the record immigrants browning America

Vandana Parashar, India

jazz fest
on the bass player's cheek
a trickle of sweat

j rap, USA

meteor shower
mother teaches her
to draw the lines

Minal Sarosh, India

hospital bed
such intense
sunsets

Ann K Schwader, USA

waves into light the turbulence of my unsought body

Richa Sharma, India

floating wishes
I grab a handful . . .
just in case

Debbie Sterling, USA

bully culture
six coyotes surround
a mule deer

Debbie Strange, Canada

if we had one
to call our own . . .
star nursery

Debbie Strange, Canada

morning quiet
clank of bangles
on the office keyboard

Neha Talreja, India

midnight walk...
all my belongings
packed in boxes

Shrehya Taneja, India

creaking wood the kinks in god's plans

Shrehya Taneja, India

moth wings stitched outside my bra

C.X. Turner, UK

moving houses
among the boxed items
brother's business magnet

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

pothole streets
the moon's craters
visible tonight

Allyson Whipple, USA

twilight walk
dark shadows
follow me home

Annie Wilson, UK

TANKA

election day
refreshing the news site
to find out
how many of my neighbours
believe I am human

Cynthia Bale, Canada

my gender
knows no bank
only the river
adjacent to both
part of neither

Cynthia Bale, Canada

I savor
a first sip of the coffee
he has brought me
his way to love
day after day

Peggy Hale Bilbro, USA

children
wielding paper dragons
at a festival...
this heritage
I carry with me

Jackie Chou, USA

an ant struggles
with a crumb
this everyday life
at the first down light
I hear father's steps

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

autumn
slips in quietly
my vision is poor
when I look at you
stars bloom in my eyes

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

lying awake
all through the night
waiting
for you to come home again
wrapped in a stranger's perfume

Ruth Holzer, USA

another day
of not being seen—
on the lawn
such few crumbs
for a thin sparrow

Jenny Polstra, Aotearoa/New Zealand

his walking stick
leans on the bed
one last time
outside a stray dog's bark
disappears into the night

Neena Singh, India

i return home
with the blood report
folded in my palm
a heron stands still
mid-flood

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

HAIBUN AND LINKED FORMS

In Junior High We Want to be Like Sandy

Roberta Beary, Ireland/USA

new romance
i
skip ahead
to
the end

She's a year older, irons her long brown hair and uses tampons. Usually she ignores us. But on the last day of class Sandy says she'll show us how to make a boy happy. In 3 easy steps. She buys a creamsicle from the ice cream truck. Says licking a creamsicle is step 1. Squeezing bananas, which we can do at home, is step 2. We lick creamsicles all summer at the pool in our Speedos. Squeeze bananas so much they leak all over our mothers' pink fruit bowls. We are at each other's houses practicing so much we start doing sleepovers. Our tongues on creamsicles, our fingers on bananas. One thing leads to another and before we know it, it's Labor Day. We run into Sandy at the mall. She says she'll show us step 3 tomorrow right after homeroom. We say, that's okay Sandy, we've already learned how to make a girl happy. But we forget to say thanks~.

(cont.)

Haibun and Linked Forms

in love
 again
undressing them
 by
moonlight

Longing

Peggy Hale Bilbro, USA

My younger self wrote long, agonizing poems in response to the tumultuous emotional life of my early years. Most of them spoke of entrapment, missed visions, internal struggles. I often compared putting a poem on paper to ripping my chest open to expose my beating heart. It is a relief to have finally passed through those years of emotional hurricanes to the soft tides of evening. Now I accept with wonder the miracles of this life, and anticipate what is still to come when I ride the tide out to the vast ocean.

born and bred
a mountain girl
why is it
that I long
for the open sea

Life Lines

Peggy Hale Bilbro, USA

Half way around the world we - who live in the same city -
are thrilled to meet for a glass of wine on a Paris bistro
terrasse. My mind sees all those google map lines that we
each followed to arrive here simultaneously for the giddy
pleasure of reconnecting in the unfamiliar environment of
another land. It is exhilaratingly serendipitous to find
ourselves in the same place at the same time on this huge
diverse globe!

lines cross and diverge
at every intersection
we tie knots

From Them to Us

Janice Doppler, USA

Two women, decades younger than me, sweep by. They spread a blanket on my favorite spot, remove their clothes ... every ... single ... stitch. I settle a respectable distance from them yet near the lake. The pair wades into thigh-deep water where they chat for several minutes before diving in. I focus on wildflowers by my chair instead of my usual scanning for ducks and herons with binoculars.

lakeside meadow
wild strawberries
tart on the tongue

Hikers complete the loop-trail that draws most users to this park. Two middle-aged women approach the pair and casually ask if swimming is legal here. A mother focuses the attention of her preteen boys on mountain laurel blooms, turtles on a log, water rushing over the spillway ... anything she can find.

a damselfly—
the tree swallow
changes course

A trio of twenty-something males spots the naked females. Their raucous banter ceases. They slow their pace. The men stare and I glare back. My heart races. They do not approach us. The couple is too engrossed in each other to notice any of this.

(cont.)

Haibun and Linked Forms

behind the barn
raindrops on bare skin —
rolling thunder

**'behind the barn' previously published in Frogpond 46.1*

Thirst

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

& Annie Holdren, USA

anti-bodies

*aphids
in the old orchard
tended by ants*

forced to use

*not milk
and not milking
the nectar*

formula

*wildflowers
drop next season's seeds
on a dry afternoon*

Filled with Wonder

Julie Schwerin, Wisconsin

& Angela Terry, Washington

celebrating
by the mailbox
the balloons

*a bouquet of clouds
whispers your name*

lily
unwrapping the gift
of today

*filled with both wonder
and light
a dream of rainbows*

wishes secured
in butter cream frosting

*sweetheart roses
and pink champagne –
tasting winter stars*

Hooked

Vandana Parashar, India

every time he touches me scars on the moon

I know he is fast asleep, he usually is after lovemaking.

all the things he does stink bug

I pick up his phone and read the last message he had sent her
just before we got in bed.

“wish you were here...”

buckling under
its own weight
loose shingle on the roof

Brokeback Mountain

Jenny Shepherd, UK

I open the letter addressed to me: a Penalty Charge Notice, complete with photographic evidence. Although I never drive, the ticket has been sent to me, as I am the registered owner of our car.

It's for a Failure to Pay for a four-hour stay in the Harlow Mills Premier Inn carpark, on a Sunday, ten days ago, when I was meeting a friend in town.

He'd told me he'd gone fishing, and I suddenly remember that he hadn't sent me his usual photos of his best catch.

on the phone
we joke about his affair
splinter of ice

where the edges loosen

C.X. Turner, UK

It started shallow. Sun on our shoulders, the burn of chlorine and joy. She dared me to follow, to race where the blue darkens. I did. And then the whirl—beneath us, around us—pulling faster than either of us had words for. I grabbed her wrist. Not tightly enough, maybe too tightly. Her face turning toward me, not angry, just startled. Just small. It was the first time I saw her afraid. Or maybe the first time I noticed.

We surfaced laughing, but I kept her breath in my throat for days.

under the hedge
a feather she swore
was an omen

We're Not Gonna Cry

Margaret Walker, USA

I saw her today for the first time in years. Since shortly after Mama died. When she came and spent the day with me. Just visiting and laughing. The memories of her years at our house.

One day a few years ago I called and she told me a story. A story I had never heard.

She and her sister-in-law were cleaning the big plate glass windows in the downstairs restaurant. One shattered. The shards cut her badly.

“Your mama, she put me right in her car, right there in the front seat and drove me all those 15 miles to the hospital. She didn’t make me wait to ride that rickety, hot old school bus, the one for the help, like most would’ve. It woulda taken over an hour to get there. All those stops. She waited with me at the hospital. She saw they took good care of me. Like I was somebody.”

I was stunned. Of course Mama did that. Anybody would have. She had been there for us when Daddy died. A guest at Mama’s 80 th birthday party. Mama’s friend. “No, they wouldn’t. Mr. Sam and Miz Tunie, they were different. They cared. I’ve never forgotten that.”

But that was 14 years ago and now she’s 100. Yes, her 100th birthday was in March.

(cont.)

Haibun and Linked Forms

I missed the birthday. The big one. Halfway across the country. I called. The sounds in the background were the voices of home.

I missed the Mayor's Proclamation. They sent me a photo and a clipping from the newspaper about the life of this strong and beautiful woman.

So today, for Mother's Day, I was there.

seeing her a child again

No Answer

Mary White, Ireland

last bus stop
German shepherd's low howl
at the opening gate

Mama pulls me gently from the bed, careful not to wake my sister, who is six — a year younger than me. She threads the stairs slowly, one step at a time, gripping the bannister. In the hall, she hands me a phone number and asks me to call the local hospital.

She has perfect speech — she was twenty-one when she lost all her hearing. She dials the number and hands me the receiver.

“Hello... may I speak to the Sister in the Emergency Department, please? My mother is stone deaf and can't talk to you. My father has epilepsy and might be in the hospital.”

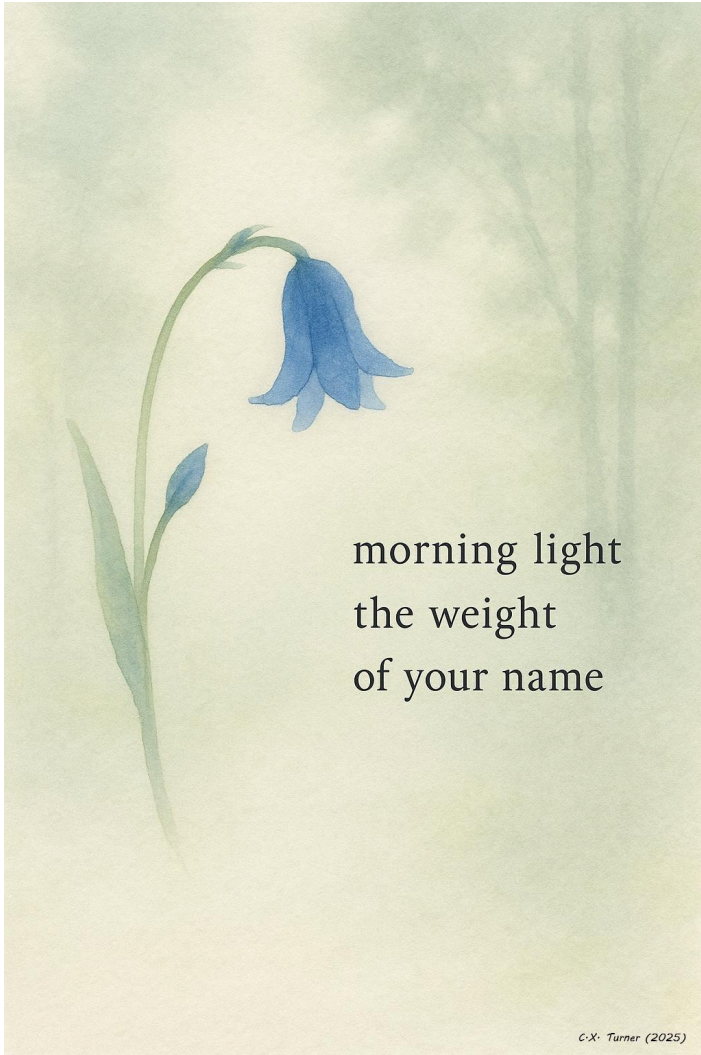
I ring four hospitals that night. He hasn't been brought to any of them. Mama shoos me back to bed, saying he'll show up.

damp pillow
her father's overcoat
keeps out the chill

HAIGA AND VISUAL POETRY



Marianne Paul, Canada



C.X. Turner, UK

FEMKU FEATURE

Daniel Shank Cruz, USA

Daniel Shank Cruz (they/multitudes) is the author of *a good possible year for an apocalypse* (Red Moon Press, 2025) and co-author with James Knippen of *It Breaks Your Heart: Haiku and Senryu on the 2023 New York Mets* (Redheaded Press, 2024). They are a haiku/senryu co-editor for *Frogpond*. Visit them at danielshankcruz.com.

home altar
the ink on the back of his photo
faded to sky blue

reading my cards the sirens down the block

the full moon lasts and lasts border dispute

Femku Feature

scent of coffee in the elevator his Mondrian-print coat

baseball on the TV fades his soft lips

packing for the wedding my childlessness

After the Election

Daniel Shank Cruz, USA

Walking around Manhattan at lunchtime, watching others doing the same, watching them carry their lunch packages as I am carrying mine—a chicken shawarma and Coke in a brown paper bag—hunched against the strong wind off the Hudson which makes it feel like fall, which it is even though it's in the mid-fifties, walking quickly so my shawarma will still be warm when I get back to the office, not seeing as much on the walk back as I did going because of this hurry but I make brief eye contact with a slight person, maybe nonbinary like me, who passes by carrying a white pizza box, everything is cement and asphalt and marble punctuated by bits of orange construction detritus, all of the buildings silent about what goes on in them, how does the rent get paid, can people afford their lunches or are they hasty splurges in response to our terrible times, I don't know, I get back to my building and get an elevator to myself and push the CLOSE DOOR button to keep it that way until I get to my desk

scent of onions in my cubicle fading sunlight

BOOK REVIEWS

Crazy Bitches, by Roberta Beary (Winston-Salem, NC.: MacQ, 2025). 130 pages; 6"x9". Perfect softbound. ISBN 979-8330566068. \$25.00 from www.bookshop.org

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Roberta Beary is a gender fluid poet, spoken-word artist, and writer of fiction and creative non-fiction. Longtime haibun editor at *Modern Haiku*, Beary divides their time between the USA and Ireland. They are the winner of numerous awards, including The Haiku Foundation's Touchstone Award and the Bridport Prize for Poetry. Their work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *Rattle*, *MacQueen's Quinterly*, *Atticus Review*, and many other journals, venues, and anthologies, including *Haiku in English: The First Hundred Years* (W. W. Norton, 2016). *The Unworn Necklace* (2007), Beary's debut collection of short poetry, won the Snapshot Press Book Award in 2005 and their most recent haiku collection, *Carousel* (2024), won the Snapshot Press Book Award in 2019. Their new book is *Crazy Bitches* (2025), published by MacQ.

Crazy Bitches is a collection of selected haibun from a span of twenty years (2004-2024). Separated into three parts, these

Book Reviews

poems are accompanied with art from Kevin Beary, as well as photos from throughout the author's life. Most haibun in *Crazy Bitches* are clearly derived from Beary's own experiences, both first and secondhand. They are an advocate for themselves as well as larger communities such as LGBTQIA2+ peoples, immigrants, and survivors of domestic violence. While Beary amplifies these delicate themes, they don't speak for these individuals, but instead reinterprets their own, personal encounters and observations. Their ability to simultaneously create and take up space is unmatched.

While some haibun are retellings of Beary's personal history and others are fantasy derived from their imagination, it is clear that all poems are rooted in their authentic truth. While the author is obviously comfortable and able to thrive in both fiction and nonfiction, it is their fantasy poems in which you see Beary's creativity taken to the next level. "And So Between Them Both, You See" is a reimagining of a classic nursery rhyme and "3 AM" is a fun, short piece where the speaker plays a game of cards with the grim reaper. Beary also has their own distinct style of haibun writing where specific key words or phrases are repeated in the prose for emphasis, or punctuation is pronounced or dropped altogether, such as in opening poem "13 years," a stunning memorial, and "The Graduating Class Is," which is a tribute to those lost in a mass shooting. These poems are key to understanding Beary's vision as a writer and innovator.

Beary's work covers a range of topics and social issues that they have endured or witnessed, such as bullying, sexual abuse, terminal illness, and abortions. While these topics are potentially triggering and might seem taboo in modern Japanese short forms, the author always handles them carefully and with purpose. Beary is truly a confessionalist and pioneer as they effortlessly and bravely lay bare some of life's most intricate moments.

Inventive and inspiring, Beary is a master of contemporary haibun. They are an author to study for ages to come, and *Crazy Bitches* is an extraordinary and impressive body of genuine work that will help readers find their place in the world. No matter where you started or where you're heading, Beary is along for the ride. Anyone looking to read or write haibun would be amiss to skip out on this collection. To say that *Crazy Bitches* is an instant classic is an understatement; this is the type of poetry that will help the world to be more kind, find more faith, and learn to stick together during difficult times.

a good possible year for an apocalypse, by Daniel Shank Cruz (Winchester, VA.: Red Moon Press, 2025). 102 pages; 4.25"x6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-70-4. US \$20.00 from www.redmoonpress.com

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Daniel Shank Cruz is a genderqueer poet from the Bronx, New York who currently resides in Jersey City, New Jersey. They are a haiku/senryu co-editor for *Frogpond* and are co-author with James Knippen of *It Breaks Your Heart: Haiku and Senryu on the 2023 New York Mets* (Redheaded Press, 2024). Cruz has been published in *Acorn*, *Blithe Spirit*, *Kingfisher*, and *Modern Haiku*, among other venues. They were also one of seven poets selected as fellows for the inaugural year of confluence haiku journal. Their first solo collection of haiku and senryu, *a good possible year for an apocalypse*, has just been released from Red Moon Press.

a good possible year for an apocalypse is a dynamic collection that encompasses the monotony, fear, and heartbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the transformations in both society and the author's life post-pandemic. These poems document sporting events, politics, and urban life, alongside self-identity and personal relationships. Cruz uses a repetition of images, which pulls the collection tightly together while allowing readers to experience the diverse moments inspired by the same seasonal variations, such as the magnolias or daffodils. The repetition also reflects the mundane reoccurrences the author experienced during the pandemic:

pandemic
I risk
two tattoos

pandemic
she's braless
all the time

These senryu include classic techniques, such as brevity and humor, and give readers two very different poems surrounding the same theme. It is clear from the author's introduction to *a good possible year for an apocalypse* that writing haiku and senryu became a therapeutic experience during the pandemic. This is strongly reflected in their work, especially as they use humor to cope with such a critical time.

To say Cruz's haiku and senryu are fresh and original is an understatement; the author's poetic voice is a necessary perspective that fills gaps in contemporary English haiku:

outside my window
pigeons and
the new Beyoncé album

Due to the author's young and progressive interpretation of their surroundings, they are able to use modern slang, references, images, and moments, which are unorthodox to most contemporary haiku. These poems are both present and forward-moving.

Cruz's poetry might speak specifically to a younger generation, but their technique is traditional enough to resonate with seasoned haiku poets as well:

muggy morning
watching an ant

carry a dead ant

The author's raw understanding of the world guides their poems toward honest, authentic, and sometimes cynical expression. However, hope remains anticipated consciously and consistently. This provides readers with a glimpse into Cruz's passions and philosophies.

a good possible year for an apocalypse is a sensual and evocative collection that extends beyond the senses. This book is essential for not only Millennials and Gen Z, but for anyone looking to delve deeper into and find solace in an ever-changing world. These poems are revolutionary and expand what haiku are capable of being. It is work like Cruz's that will bring a new generation to haiku.

the forest i know, by Kala Ramesh (Uttar Pradesh, India.: HarperCollins Publishers, 2021). 166 pages. Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-9354227585. \$17.72 USD and ₹225 from www.amazon.com

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Kala Ramesh, founder and director of Triveni Haikai India and *haikuKATHA Journal*, was born in and resides in India. She has organized eight haiku conferences in India and has taught a 60-hour haikai course to undergraduates at Symbiosis International University (2012-2021), the first

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course of its kind in her country. Ramesh has given numerous workshops and presentations, including for the Kala Ghoda Arts Festival and the Haiku North America conference. She has co-edited several anthologies, including *Wishbone Moon* (Jacar Press, 2018) and *Amber I Pause* (Hawakal 2023). Ramesh is the author of *Haikul*, an illustrated children's book (Katha, 2010; reprinted in 2017) which received honourable mention for Best Book for Children by the Haiku Society of America, and her book *Beyond the Horizon Beyond* (Vishwakarma, 2017) was shortlisted for the Rabindranath Tagore Literary Prize in 2019. Her most recent solo collection, *the forest i know* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2021), is her first book of tanka, tanka prose, and tanka sutra, or short sequences.

Separated into six sections, the poems in *the forest i know* are exceedingly emotional, lyrical, and at times almost surreal. While most of these tanka are classical in craft, others utilize contemporary techniques, making some poems seem like you are reading an ancient or sacred text:

I confess
to losing sight of God ...
my talisman
a spider's silver thread
connecting heaven to earth

Ramesh invites readers to contemplate real existential, religious, and philosophical moments through the lens of nature. She frequently uses metaphor and symbolism throughout this collection to convey these thoughts, feelings, and emotions:

fireflies
twinkling like stars
I return
to explore my mind ...
so many thoughts unvoiced

Readers journey the author's own metaphorical forest and ponder life's most intricate questions, making this an incredibly intimate read between Ramesh and her audience. Although these poems are highly introspective, they also give readers the author's perception of and connection to the world around her.

Ramesh also utilizes punctuation to slow the reader down, forcing them to pause and fully take in the author's words. In some poems, it almost feels as if the pause indicates a passing of time:

waxing
and waning, the moon
ever-reaching ...
each moment a new phase
in her journey

The poems in this collection are immensely cultural, which will resonate with readers who have relatable backgrounds. Similarly, this will also enlighten others who might not be familiar with these words, phrases, and practices, which might encourage uninformed readers to educate themselves on these topics:

sunset orange
bathing the still pond —
a mahout
guides his temple elephant
to the water's edge

These poems are simple, elegant, and ethereal, which will be great for readers who prefer tanka that are more traditional in tone. Of course, this might make a slow read for those who like a striking punchiness to their poetry.

the forest i know is a collection of soothing and tranquil poetry that will urge readers to be more fully connected with the world around them. Followers of Ramesh's work will certainly not be disappointed. Furthermore, this is a great introduction to tanks for those who are unfamiliar with the form.

Mapping the Borderlands, by Barbara Sabol (Russell, KY.: Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2025). 46 pages; 6.5"x6.5". Perfect softbound. ISBN 9781962405157. \$14.00 from www.sheilanagigblog.com

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Barbara Sabol, from Akron Ohio, was named Ohio co-Poet of the Year for her sixth book, *WATERMARK: Poems of the Great Johnstown Flood of 1889* (Alternating Current Press,

2023). Her book, *Imagine a Town*, won the 2019 Sheila-Na-Gig Editions Poetry Prize and other honors include an Individual Excellence Award from the Ohio Arts Council, the Arts Alive Outstanding Literary Artist of 2024 award, and a 2025 Rachel Sutcliffe Haiku-Arts Prize. Her most recent book, *Mapping the Borderlands*, is a chapbook of haibun and tanka prose.

Mapping the Borderlands is a serene collection of 26 haibun and tanka prose that explores flora, fauna, bodies of water, valleys, woodlands, and celestial bodies. Not only are the poems in this collection saturated with nature, but Sabol dissects the interconnections between human and animal life, and the imprint humans leave on nature. In several haibun and tanka prose, the author utilizes the prose for the human experience and the haiku, senryu, or tanka to dive into the connection to nature, or vice versa. Examples of this can be found in poems “In Wait” and “Why Our Mothers Warned Us About Playing in the Creek.” Sabol also explores many different forms of haibun, many times using free verse for the prose, such as in “Endangered.” These tools make her poems unique to her specific poetic voice and style. In the closing essay, Sabol recounts how her experiences have conditioned her own inevitable bond with animal life.

Mapping the Borderlands is a simple, yet sincere collection that intentionally slows readers down and will help them reflect on their own impact and relationship with nature. These poems are certainly for anyone who is environmentally conscious, and for those who find themselves seeking sanctuary during restless times. Anyone affected by Sabol’s

work will want to share it with their neighbor, and more deeply connect with those within their own borderlands.

Random Blue Sparks, by Debbie Strange (Ormskirk, UK.: Sheila-Na-Gig Editions, 2025). 96 pages; 7"x5". Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-1-903543-59-7. US \$28.00 or £15.00 from www.snapshotpress.co.uk

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Debbie Strange is a Canadian poet who has placed first in many contests including the Harold G. Henderson Award (2015), Vancouver Cherry Blossom Festival Haiku Invitational (2017), and Bloodroot Haiku Award (2022). Her book, *The Language of Loss: Haiku & Tanka Conversations*, won the Sable Books 2019 International Women's Haiku Contest received Haiku Canada's 2022 Marianne Bluger Chapbook Award as well as an Honourable Mention in the Haiku Society of America's 2021 Merit Book Awards. Strange's newest book and first full-length collection of haiku is *Random Blue Sparks* from Snapshot Press.

Random Blue Sparks is a collection of 85 haiku and senryu on the themes of creation, introspection, and transformation. These poems zoom in on very specific micro moments within various seasons, and expand beyond the average connection and experience with nature. In these moments of clarity, Strange is not simply reflective, but experiences

self-actualization as she immerses herself in an active, living world:

evening fog
antlers ghosting through
the coulee

wetland silence
a peeper's vocal sac
expands

The author is entranced by the ordinary, such as a deer in the fog and the breath of a spring peeper. These amplified experiences help readers connect with these split instances in ways they might not expect, or have ever experienced themselves.

Strange has an impressive way of intimately connecting with her readers, not just allowing them to not just see nature through her eyes, but to be present alongside her in the projected moment. This collection is for anyone who identifies with feeling small in a big world, or for those who are lost and looking to be found. *Random Blue Sparks* is sure to help readers feel less alone and connect with one another, as they navigate "this winter darkness."

Publication Schedule:

Spring Issue (International Women's Month)

Edited by Vandana Parashar

Open to women-identifying poets only

Submit: January 1-31

Summer Issue

Edited by Rowan Beckett Minor & Carissa Coane

Open to women, non-binary, & trans-identifying poets only

Submit: May 1-31

2025 Marlene Mountain Memorial Contest

Judged by Vandana Parashar & Rowan Beckett Minor

Open June 1-15, 2025

Autumn/Winter 2025

Edited by Rowan Beckett Minor & Kelly Sargent

Open to women, non-binary, & trans-identifying poets only

Submit: September 1-30