

#FemkuMag



Issue 40
Autumn/Winter 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: Debbie Strange

Issue 40

Autumn/Winter 2025

Edited by Rowan Beckett Minor and Kelly Sargent

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Interior Design: Rowan Beckett Minor

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Cleveland, Ohio, USA

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EDITOR'S NOTE

As the daylight hours lessen in our small part of the earth right now, the larger world climate we are all experiencing becomes increasingly dark for reasons other than the tilt away from the sun. Poetry continues to prove itself as a powerful tool for coping, emotional healing, social justice, education, and community building — one poem, one line, one breath at a time. Poets can experience a visceral vulnerability; initially in writing and then in submitting — particularly to a pioneering journal such as *#FemkuMag*. We felt deeply humbled in bearing witness to the courage and strength exemplified by these submissions. To contributors, we thank you for entrusting us with profoundly personal threads of your truths and allowing us glimpses into your lives. To readers, we share these windows, hopeful that you may see your own reflections in one or more of them. May this Autumn/Winter issue play a small part in inspiring us to lean closer to one another in quiet, connecting moments, and encourage us with the knowledge that, despite the distance, in time, the light will once again return.

With gratitude,

Kelly Sargent, *#FemkuMag* Issue 40 Co-editor

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HAIKU

the littlest child
learns to whistle
buttercups

Meredith Ackroyd, USA

sardine clouds---
tracing the dimples
around my thighs

Genevieve S. Aguinaldo, Philippines

falling leaves
I finally learn
to set boundaries

Genevieve S. Aguinaldo, Philippines

stillborn
on a lamb's ear
summer dew
(lament for Annunciation Catholic School shooting)

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

honour killing—
in the barren land
overgrown thistles

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

ragwort wind
silence creeps
through the family garden

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

cold snap—
aunt flips through
the mammogram report

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan

Haiku

sisterhood
and yet still
thorned roses

Joanna Ashwell, UK

a squirrel peeps
into the study window
only the breeze gets in

Meg Arnot, UK

black moon
the scent of datura
luring her back

Dyana Basist, USA

writers retreat
the wolf moon's
work-in-progress

Roberta Beary, USA/Ireland

Haiku

soaking up the aromas
of the Christmas market
the homeless counts his coins

Boryana Boteva, Bulgaria

summer re-runs
he tells the same lies
over and over

Nancy Brady, USA

tea in hand
nipping out to the garden
to smell my own roses

Sarah Mahina Calvello, USA

a kite
 tangled
 in the arms of ㄣ
spring wind

Sandip Chauhan, USA

Haiku

summer rainfall
a paper boat drifting
far from its cradle

Manasa Reddy Chichili, India

prickly pear
she always
means well

C. K. Crawford, USA

muggy morning my knee brace sets off the security scanner

Daniel Shank Cruz, USA

All Soul's Day
questions come back
when I visit his grave

Beata Czeszejko, Poland

Haiku

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the lightness
of this year's peaches

Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

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only on my cheek
fading blooms

C. Jean Downer, Canada

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the downside of this
age-gap romance

C. Jean Downer, Canada

this longing to be wild flowers

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

relearning
how to say yes
spring thaw

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

zombie amaryllis
they tell me the placenta
won't detach

Adele Evershed, USA

tea plantation
the women bending lower
than the men

Adele Evershed, USA

forced bulbs
she practices walking
in kitten heels

Anne Fox, USA

Haiku

waiting for the
war to end
a field of red poppies

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

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my daughter's
first period

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

counting the syllables in his insult autumn chill

Jahnavi Gogoi, Canada

frozen Juneberries
holding on to her sweetness
through the dementia

Laurie Greer, USA

Haiku

no calls this morning
the bee still pollinating
the cut squash flower

Mariya Gusev, USA

mountain crows
disappear into fog —
a smile I can't hide

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

autumn frost
our parents'
trial separation

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

midnight
our glass slippers
buried in snow

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

November gray -
on old photographs
your warm smile

Eva Joan, Germany

fireflies...
a woman's nose pin
through soiled pallu

Arvinder Kaur, India

first frost –
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Capotă Daniela Lăcrămioara, Romania

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to share my room with a spider
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tucked on a shelf

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strangling a daylily stalk—
another ICE raid

Hannah Mahoney, USA

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their gazes

Urszula Marciniak, Poland

harvest moon-
marigold bouquet
on her grave

Martina Matijević, Croatia

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trimming
family tree

Martina Matijević, Croatia

autumn rain
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last letter

Martina Matijević, Croatia

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a ray of light

Mary McCormack, USA

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Kelly Sauvage Moyer, USA

amid wars
and assassinations
asters bloom

Nancy Orr, USA

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every night
wolf moon

Nancy Orr, USA

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Lorraine A Padden, USA

Haiku

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reaching the end
of twenties

Bhawana Rathore, India

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i think of her

Kala Ramesh, India

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the wild lantanas
wilder

Kala Ramesh, India

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he kisses her forehead
once again

Nisha Raviprasad, India

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I'm just bi...
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welcome centre —
her attempts to explain
touch of frost

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the old couple

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of tomorrow

Daniela Rodi, Finland

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splits themselves in two

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I can't hear anything
against the moon

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gone bad

Robin Smith, USA

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Skaidrite Stelzer, USA

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Jan Stretch, Canada

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C.X. Turner, UK

autumn wind
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in his story

C.X. Turner, UK

peace lilies
just another
reminder

Annie Wilson, UK

Haiku

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is this another
on-off romance

Annie Wilson, UK

summer moon
the five pillars
of belonging

Katherine E Winnick, UK

migration
each turn in the river
reshaping me

Nitu Yumnam, UAE

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mother tree
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this body and i dissolving estuary

Meredith Ackroyd, USA

worry stone
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about the moon

Meredith Ackroyd, USA

end work zone
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brick red

Melanie Alberts, USA

woollen needlepoint
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a memory

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Meg Arnot, UK

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the same issues
in my inbox

Joanna Ashwell, UK

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a dish of moonlight
for the stray

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t

r

a

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m o o n s h i n e

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as crabbypants

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Sondra J. Byrnes, USA

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Daniel Shank Cruz, USA

watching true crime
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Daniel Shank Cruz, USA

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Maya Daneva, The Netherlands

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Lisa Espenmiller, USA

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Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

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against itself

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

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Anne Fox, USA

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of a hill
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Barbara Anna Gaiardoni, Italy

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Monique Renee Harris, USA

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Kathryn P. Haydon, USA

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Ruth Holzer, USA

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Louise Hopewell, Australia

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Charlotte Hrenchuk, Canada

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Charlotte Hrenchuk, Canada

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quinces
on the fruit platter

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Lakshmi Iyer, India

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on the white crayon
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Lakshmi Iyer, India

must I do everything myself artificial insemination

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

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Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

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to be a lesser man

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her mind

Deborah Karl-Brandt, Germany

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Arvinder Kaur, India

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ice flower

Arvinder Kaur, India

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Colette Kern, USA

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Colette Kern, USA

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Colette Kern, USA

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Laurie Kuntz, USA

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Barrie Levine, USA

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Barrie Levine, USA

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Kathryn Liebowitz, USA

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Kathryn Liebowitz, USA

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open grave
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of petals

Eva Limbach, Germany

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Hannah Mahoney, USA

shore shingles
her depressive
episodes

Bipasha Majumder (De), India

smaller than
i remember
mom

Sharon Martina, USA

ocean sunrise the horizon of my possible

Sharon Martina, USA

forced kiss
his hands
become a vice

Mary McCormack, USA

three miles...
the time it takes
to share a secret

Mary McCormack, USA

last birthday
no hallmark
good enough

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

redtidecombover@blackmail.com

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

while the king shits
into a gold toilet
the trashed tents
of the unhoused

Sarah E. Metzler, USA

sewing with her sister . . .
adjusting the tension
on the old Singer

Wilda Morris, USA

doing laundry
after the squabble
steam iron

Wilda Morris, USA

old pond . . .
the sound of chaotes
paradigm-jumping

Kelly Sauvage Moyer, USA

deity worship
blessed are the misfits
summoning me

Kelly Sauvage Moyer, USA

polite company
tannic as the barrel
in which i piss

Kelly Sauvage Moyer, USA

poison ivy
covering up
the tramp stamp

Jiel Narvekar, India

between two city buildings half a rainbow

Bernadette O'Reilly, Ireland

revealing
a different face
the lies she told

Bernadette O'Reilly, Ireland

trying on
my late sister's dress —
dust on the piano keys

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

southbound bus:
a woman talks about Jesus
on the upper deck

Maeve O'Sullivan, Ireland

turning sixty kegels twice a day

Debbie Olson, USA

raindrop lullaby no baby to lull

Mary Oishi, USA

me too
an echo pushed back
into the mouth

Lorraine A Padden, USA

imaginary...
notating a bible
with alternate views

Lorraine A Padden, USA

bare footsteps
I let him know
I'd rather go slow

Basiliké Pappa, Greece

silk road
following the lines
in the baby's hand

Basiliké Pappa, Greece

reasserting my godlessness a roll of universe's dice

Vandana Parashar, India

quest or abandonment
what if Buddha
were a woman

Vandana Parashar, India

on a scale of one to chandi a woman scorned

Vandana Parashar, India

**chandi or chandika is a ferocious Hindu deity representing the
fierce aspect and embodiment of Shakti or divine feminine
power.*

coal plant ash—
her wedding bangles
slip off the wrist

Vidya Premkumar, India

childhood bedroom
dodging the creak
of old floorboards

Audrey Quinn, Denmark

beach walking . . .
my childhood spirals
into a conch shell

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

pine-covered slopes
all around
 clouds pass by

Kala Ramesh, India

casting call
no takers for the role
of old person

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

Mom's cuckoo clock
in a storage box -
ornate casket

Valentina Ranaldi-Adams, USA

evening walk
the simpler times
mother talks about

Bhawana Rathore, India

early winter
my own shadow
falling short

Bhawana Rathore, India

Sunday prayer
she holds on to his ring
in tears

Nisha Raviprasad, India

temple bells
the loud cry of a
hungry beggar

Nisha Raviprasad, India

government home
he shortens his stay
a cigarette-length

Sam Renda, South Africa

bitter almond...
deciding which of his truths
are the lies this time

Sam Renda, South Africa

gym class
my body learns new ways
to keep the score

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

in the tarot deck
The Moon forgets
a secret

Miriam Sagan, USA

jumbling keys
something always
on her mind

Minal Sarosh, India

until the stars dissolve night rain

Ann K. Schwader, USA

before
and after us
urban coyote

Ann K. Schwader, USA

7/8 of the nonvoting women iceberg

Julie Schwerin, USA

her last egg drops far side of the moon

Julie Schwerin, USA

a cigarette so much of me deviates from this world

Richa Sharma, India

forest wind soothing what I'm told in the brain

Richa Sharma, India

bleak midwinter
the tone deaf girl told to mime
at the Christmas concert

Jenny Shepherd, UK

maternity leave
the boss questions
her career plan

Neena Singh, India

moonless night
the wind cradles
an empty swing

Neha Singh Soni, India

my dead aunt
her favorite cookies
on the counter

Dena Heitfield Smith, USA

hot soup
the only warmth
in this house

Dena Heitfield Smith, USA

a
stellar
black
hole
the

s p a g h e t t i f i c a t i o n

of
our
constitution

Robin Smith, USA

returned to me
slightly altered
my opinion

Mary Stevens, USA

family gathering . . .
the fork
with the raised tine

Mary Stevens, USA

soft rain . . .
unpacking the urn
with your stardust

Ann Sullivan, USA

evening news
resisting
the whiskey

Ann Sullivan, USA

perfect for rainy ballpoint pen days new to-dos

Leah Ann Sullivan, Japan

another woman's laughter stitched inside my shadow

C.X. Turner, UK

wedding anniversary
her husband
digs deep

Tuyet Van Do, Australia

my grown daughter's call
still raising
each other

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff, USA

worry beads...
she cleanses
my aura

Katherine E Winnick, UK

frilled bikini
he eats a
bearded clam

Amber Winter, USA

from rags to riches
she switches over to
a menstrual cup

Amber Winter, USA

thinning hair--
the river pulls back
revealing stone

Nitu Yumnarn, UAE

wo(e)man

Nitu Yumnarn, UAE

TANKA

cornrows on hilltops
whistle by whistle
we call ourselves home
if this was our classroom
no shooter could find us

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

this childhood trauma
of shadows trailing
my every step
a survivor's bend
on eggshells

Joanna Ashwell, UK

the bough
hangs by its bark
after the storm ...
why do you refuse
to talk about this?

Cynthia Bale, Canada

every holiday
the lie never changes:
warm embraces
from relatives who
vote to erase me

Cynthia Bale, Canada

what I became
was neither marble
nor chisel—
just the echo
of a vanished sculptor

Sandip Chauhan, USA

the sun is taxed
even shadows pay tolls
but the moon slips
through embargo lines
with no declared goods

Sandip Chauhan, USA

escaping
into Jane Austen's world
where would I fit
her heroines
all pale and hazel-eyed

Jackie Chou, USA

harvest
experience cannot be
bottled or preserved
youth receding
as the rose hips swell

Melissa Dennison, UK

our story
kept in my room –
a swarm of butterflies
trembling on the fan
with every whisper

Ana Drobot, Romania

in my longer dreams
it's always September
red leaves
fall in the cemetery
just as I remembered

Diane Funston, USA

fields of goldenrod
wild and waving
a freedom
along rural roads
stronger than flags

Diane Funston, USA

on the summer grass
clouds drift apart
then return
I wait for you to
come back to me again

Fatma Zohra Habis, Algeria

was it a dream...
through the window
his eyes
dark with promise
or unquenched anger

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

unseasonal weather
begins an early thaw—
that smile
all the way to his eyes
melts my resolve

Marilyn Humbert, Australia

Love Canal
after all the years
their voices
still drifting through
the chain-link fence

Debbie Olson, USA

vintage record store
the young clerk hums
a '72 rock classic
that year I learned
what boys like

Debbie Olson, USA

moonless night—
on the deserted street
a mad women
beats her chest
raving about something

Padma Priya, India

a light ring
to her laughter
deepening
the sparkle
of a red leaf

Vaishnavi Ramaswamy, India

blow-drying
my bathroom mirror
smiling
as my youth melts
with the mist

D. V. Rozic, Croatia

I breathe heavily
climbing the mountain . . .
the squirrel
worthy of healing
this old world

D. V. Rozic, Croatia

KYOKA

sleeping beauty
fought till she was
blue in the face
now all she has
is this lousy tag

Helen Buckingham, UK

CHERITA

waiting

for you to say
the words

I failed to see
the many ways
you loved me

C. Jean Downer, Canada

our own street

a quiet
neighborhood

it's happening
your neighbor
kidnapped here

Kathabela Wilson, USA

carnival music

but no one
was smiling

a small leftover protest
corner of here
and there

Kathabela Wilson, USA

HAIBUN AND LINKED FORMS

Res Ipsa Loquitur

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

first year law
the student next to me
succumbs to cancer
they called it
the weed out

Pinstriped and pearled, I walk through prison gates with
guards: the law's robe freshly pressed and justice gowned in
rags.

Smelling a Rat

Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA

The numbers don't add up. Intake forms list hundreds of
people in training but field office calendars list none.

dry ice

I touch my tongue

to the truth

Home is...

Patricia Nellene Deal, USA

The pace quickens in the shifting throng; rain on our way to Broadway. Barefoot on Assateague Island. Crisp days in the company of Maples and Aspens hiking along the upper Mississippi. A five story walk-up older than the U.S. Constitution. Cliffside B&B's with endless views. Cities where English isn't the mother tongue. Gathered around my dining room table. A few minutes on a call. A few days between obligations. Wherever we are, I am home.

fledgelings
fly from my doorway
tickets booked

Dark Margin

Eavonka Ettinger, USA

& C. X. Turner, UK

chiaroscuro

*bone shard
in the turned soil
still warm*

what lies beneath

*sun shafts
penetrate the woods
her cries unheard*

the shadow

*black feathers
caught in the chains
blood trace*

Flashbulbs

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

wall graffiti
my present arrives from Berlin

columbine
florals line a first school fence

art collage
fragmented news covers 9/11

My roommate and I chatter and clatter in our dorm as we drop our books on a faded futon and debate the nature of cognition and memory. She argues total recall memory is real. I barely register my mom's repeated ringtone.

obituary page
the senior photo he gave me

Rewriting Herstory

Colleen M. Farrelly, USA

I.

This trans story ends
differently. She doesn't turn
tricks in a tattered dress under
the flickering urban twilight.
She doesn't yank off her belt
and melt powder in a blackened
spoon. She isn't found in a
ditch with clothes ripped or
misgendered in a jail. This
trans story ends differently.

II.

This trans story ends with her
blushing in a candycore dress
and kitten heels as she waits
for me to rent a purple pantsuit
and a Clydesdale dolled up as a
sparkle-horned unicorn to show
her that she's singular in her
beauty and her strength. This
trans story ends where her new
life begins.

spring zephyr	blooming into	her body
stripping	a rose bush	the scars
her mask	old memories	locked inside

Seniors' Day Out

Lakshmi Iyer, India

& Rupa Anand, India

male mannequins
in the trial rooms
we hesitate to change

discount counter
sweet sixteen again

avatar booth —
the two of us as
the Three Witches

paying up
I jumble
the password

mall mania
I spot another sale

metro home
I adjust a phantom breast
surreptitiously

Wings

Lakshmi Iyer, India

& Anju Kishore, India

first spring
grandma quiets
the girl's giggle

*courtyard peepal
a wind fanning the rustle*

winter rains
she hesitates to share
the blanket

*blood moon
the earth absorbs
every word*

the white pigeon
flies into a new home

*last light
granddaughters lift
the bamboo stretcher*

Haibun and Linked Forms

Tan-renga

Kimberly Kuchar, USA

& Eavonka Ettinger, USA

stagnant pond
a breeding ground
for mosquitoes

*the dread within
an offered drink*

Ceremonial Time

Kathryn Liebowitz, USA

It's been years. I'm an outsider, now, waiting in line with the monks to sprinkle a pinch of incense on sandalwood embers, to drop chrysanthemum petals into a clay urn, to gassho in the low slanting sun. Far below, the valley stream cuts a narrow channel through the thin ice, and the first tips of red-streaked skunk cabbage breach the mud.

I follow the others downhill to the monastery to join them sitting zazen in the Zendo, hands held loosely, thumbs lightly touching, back rounded... Later, a hospice worker speaks to those gathered in mourning about certain mementos found in my friend's things...

hoarding...

her backstory

in a rain jar

An Unsung Poem

Neena Singh, India

& Lakshmi Iyer, India

maternity leave
the potted plant
sent home

*a silent prayer
to the Goddess within*

the long wait...
granny knits booties
pink and blue

*kneading flour
the aroma of wheat
lingers on her apron*

evening shadows stretch
across the courtyard

*autumn leaves
an empty cradle
rocks the breeze*

On the Fringe

Angela Terry, USA

& Julie Schwerin, USA

choir practice –
the girl asked
to just mouth the words

*a minor character's
large gestures upstage*

a wardrobe malfunction –
or perhaps something
more sinister

*whodunit –
the murder weapon missing
from the prop table*

all the actors gathered on stage
for the final showdown

*race to the cast party –
the epilogue delivered
without a spot*

Six Impossible Things Before Breakfast

Margaret Walker, USA

Sometimes I wake up laughing.

Sometimes with a song I didn't remember I knew running through my head—*with all the lyrics*—and I wonder where it was stored in my brain and what I was dreaming to evoke it.

Sometimes I sit in 3am quiet with hot tea and don't think of anything or maybe I do. The thoughts so fleeting they almost aren't there and I wonder if this is kinda daydreaming.

Sometimes I know the words I want to write and then someone speaks before I jot them down—and they are gone.

Sometimes, just for a few minutes, I feel like “me” again

Sometimes—*actually most of the time*—I know I need another life-time because one isn't enough to do it all.

until the band calls it a night

**The title is from “Through the Looking Glass” by Lewis Carroll*

Question of the Day

Margaret Walker, USA

Here?

In this land of the free the brave cower in fear of those who
unseen and unspoken lurk in the background afraid of what
you might say or think—

Who?

equinox the blackout curtains billow

Equanimity

Valorie Broadhurst Woerdehoff, USA

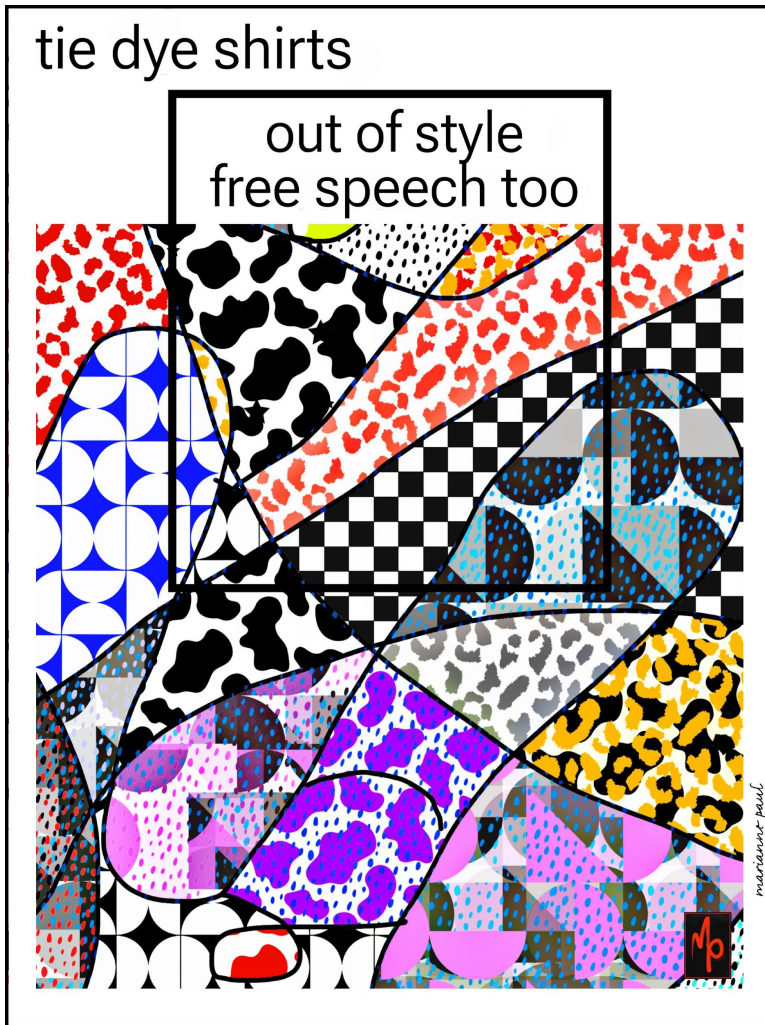
Once you commit to rolling down a big, grassy hill — laying down and giving yourself over to centrifugal force — you're in it for the ride. You don't stop moving until the hill becomes a valley.

late for work
to watch
the hummingbird

HAIGA AND VISUAL POETRY

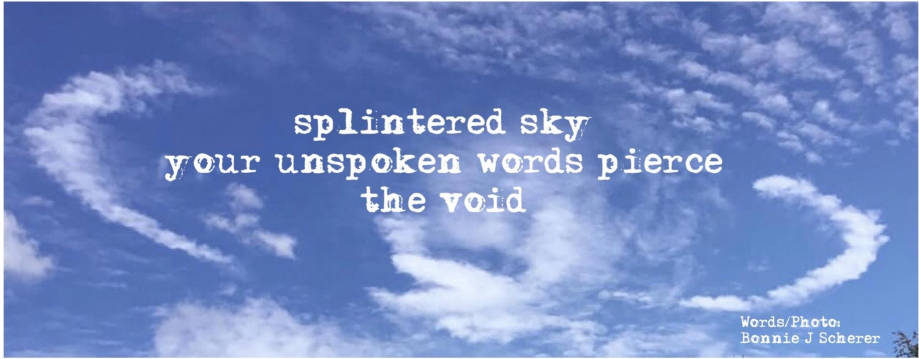


Marianne Paul, Canada



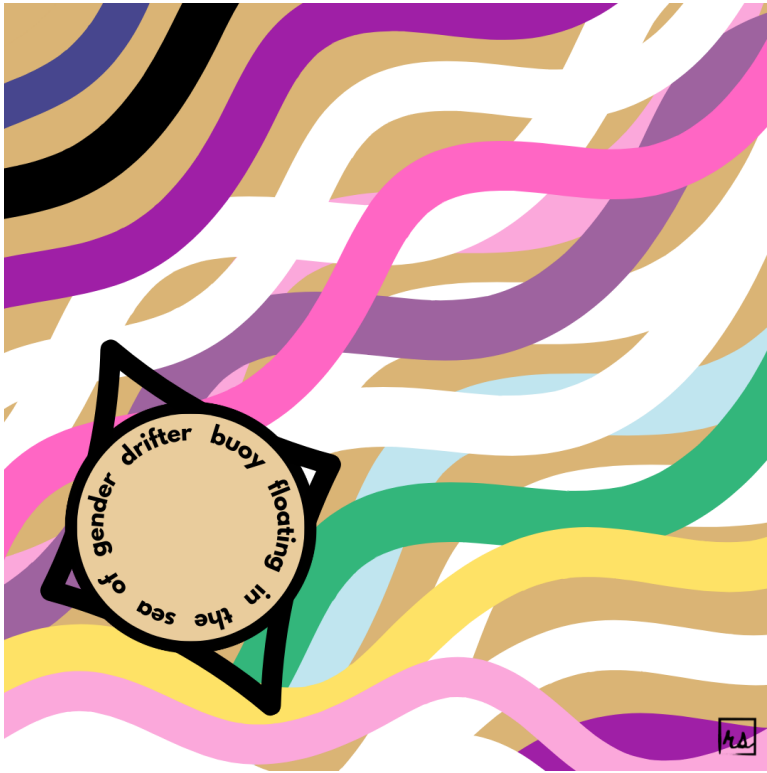
Marianne Paul, Canada

Haiga and Visual Poetry



Bonnie J Scherer, USA

Haiga and Visual Poetry



Robin Smith, USA

Haiga and Visual Poetry



Robin Smith, USA

FEMKU FEATURES

Kristen Lindquist, USA

Debbie Strange, Canada

Kristen Lindquist (she/her) writes her haiku amid the beauty of coastal Maine, where she is the Haiku Society of America's Regional Coordinator for New England and co-editor of *Autumn Moon Haiku Journal*. Her book *Island* was runner-up in the 2023 HSA Merit Book Awards.

childhood secrets
a scrap of birchbark
marked "keep out"

through the courthouse door
without handcuffs
autumn sunlight

skinny-dipping a dream ripples through the day

naked in the heat -
all night wind
rattles the window

who's to say
where our prayers go
wind in fallen leaves

forest stillness
half-expecting
some kind of magic

commendation of my soul hummingbird

Debbie Strange (she/her) is a chronically ill short-form poet and artist whose creative passions connect her more closely to the world. Strange's haiku collection, *Random Blue Sparks* (Snapshot Press, 2024), received 3rd Place in the 2025 Haiku Society of America Merit Book Awards. Further information at: debbiemstrange.blogspot.com



Femku Features

bikini wax
the scarlet-thighed dacnis
strikes a pose

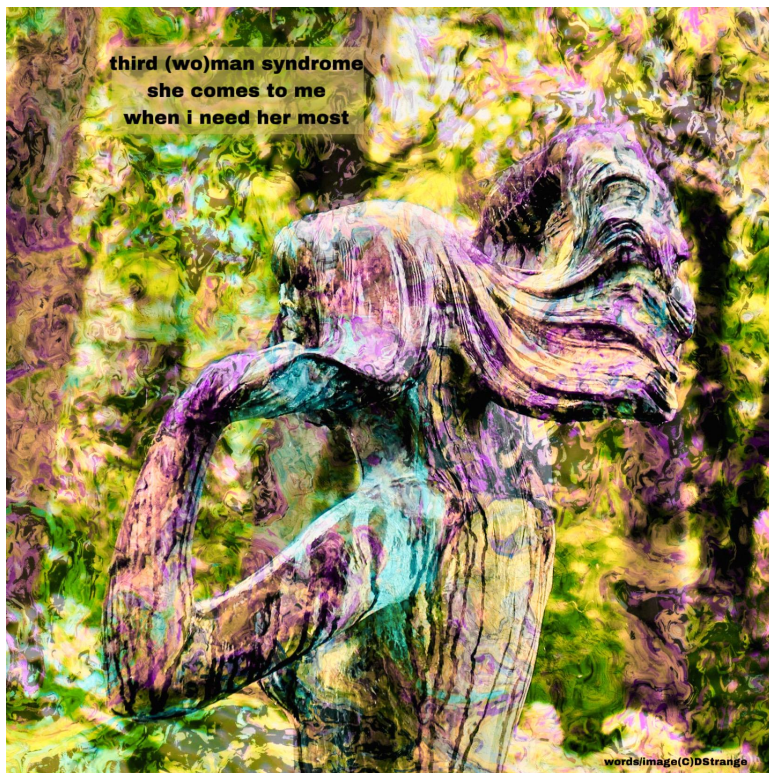
Litha bonfire
my flower crown
begins to wilt

childless
our young beans lost
to halo blight

chronic illness the multitudes i once contained

woodland owl saw-whetting the appetite for scandal

if we could
detoxify this world . . .
nettle soup



PERFECT PAIRING

keeping score my body loses against itself <i>Colleen M. Farrelly, USA</i>	gym class my body learns new ways to keep the score <i>Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA</i>
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Commentary by Rowan Beckett Minor

At first glance these two poems might seem nearly identical, but when digging deeper, the different tools used in each become more apparent.

Farrelly's poem mimics the "zoom-in" technique, although that is primarily for haiku. In line one, she introduces the broad idea of keeping score and leaves space for the reader to determine what kind of score the speaker is keeping. She then lets readers know that regardless of what kind of score is being kept, her body is losing. The shift into line three where readers realize her body is actually losing to itself becomes the "a-ha moment."

Ryan-Jauregui, however, uses the location/event technique. Readers are given a specific location, i.e. the gym, before shifting into her poignant phrase in the second two lines. The author's use of "gym class" is smart because it allows readers to connect with a familiar moment. Most people have experience with gym class, whether positive or negative. "gym class" effortlessly connects to line two, where

Perfect Pairing

readers are still unsure if the speaker's experience is productive or obstructive. In line three, Ryan-Jauregui creates more tension when we learn that the speaker's body is learning new ways to "keep the score."

Both authors use clever breaks between lines two and three, which concludes with a stark shift in tone. Farrelly's senryu is somber and sorrowful as readers learn she has already lost this battle, while Ryan-Jauregui's is hopeful that perhaps the new score-keeping might lead to an eventual win. Despite the poems' distinct variation, they certainly make the perfect pairing and show how two completely different people can be affected by similar experiences.

BOOK REVIEWS

baggage claim, by Surashree Joshi (Bangalore, India.: Yavanika Press, 2025). 42 pages; E-book. \$3 minimum from www.payhip.com/YavanikaPress

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Surashree Joshi, from Pune, India, has a Master of Arts in English from Fergusson College and works as an English trainer. Also a translator and content developer, she started her haiku writing journey during the 2020 pandemic. Since then, her work has been featured in *Wales Haiku Journal*, *Failed Haiku*, *tsuri-dōrō*, and *Pan Haiku Review*. Joshi's first chapbook, *Mithaक*, was published by Yavanika Press in 2023 and her second chapbook, *baggage claim*, was published this year.

baggage claim is a surreal and experimental e-collection of haiku and senryu. Joshi blends whimsical speech with dream-like circumstances, sometimes even playing with language:

phantom snow
I outstretch my mind's eye

It is the author's potent and compelling use of juxtaposition that taps into her subconscious. These poems are not solely innovative for the sake of being innovative, but have substantial depth and are open to interpretation.

A master of brevity, many of Joshi's poems are just seven words or less:

ere we break civil twilight

It is impressive that the author is not only able to catch readers' attention, but also sustain it with such small poems. Although these haiku and senryu are short, they can (and should) be read several times to understand her various intentions and techniques.

Feminine and self-exploratory, Joshi creates a unique, self-portrait of an artist on a path of discovery. For those who are interested in experimental haiku, *baggage claim* will be a book to read over and over. Followers of Réka Nyitrai and Robin Smith are sure to love this collection.

Trying on the Night Sky, by Mary McCormack (Self published, 2025). 162 pages; 6" x 9". Perfect softbound. ISBN 978-0998172064. 19.99 from www.amazon.com

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Mary McCormack, a writer and writing teacher, lives in the United States and enjoys music, photography, and travel. She was the winner of the 2022 Vancouver Cherry Blossom Haiku Invitational in the US category and was the third place winner for Haiku Canada's Betty Drevniok Award. McCormack has been published internationally in various journals, including *Mayfly*, *Shamrock Haiku Journal*, *Chrysanthemum*, *Blithe Spirit*, and *Wales Haiku Journal*. Her books include *Tastes of Sunlight: Haiku for the Seasons*, *All the Words Kept Inside*, *Brushstrokes*, and *Touching His Scar*. Her fifth haiku collection, *Trying on the Night Sky*, was published earlier this year.

Trying on the Night Sky is an eclectic 162 page collection that encompasses romance, life's whimsy, and the author's affinity for nature. Several haiku are incredibly engaging and strongly evoke the senses; the smell of lavender, the taste of honey, the touch of the river. McCormack brings these moments to life for reader:

scent of the meadow
lingering in my hair
wild violets

These love poems are both between the author and seasonal variation and from the speaker to her audience. This will allow readers to fall deeper into McCormack's ethos and firmly establishes the author's own poetic voice.

McCormack carefully conveys powerful and well-curated images that feel realistic and authentic. These sometimes erotic haiku and senryu are personal and aim to carefully caress the reader:

night sky...
you trace a blackberry
across my nakedness

The author's use of second person pronouns is exceedingly intimate and creates a private, first-hand experience for her audience. Even though she uses this technique frequently throughout her collection, McCormack's poems never become awkward or overbearing. She even writes love poems to herself:

red currant wine
dreaming of all the places
I've never been

These sensual poems are both introspective and relatable as the poet creates space for the reader to identify with "dreaming of all the places [they've] never been" while also being able to think up their own individual places to visit.

Although most haiku and senryu use ideal craft tools, some poems seem to be solely from a stream of consciousness and appear to be unprocessed. These attempts at haiku and senryu contain vague ideas, rather than the concrete

imagery and specific, vivid moments that are used in these forms:

seeking
each other out. . .
chance meeting

Other poems are simply three line poems and don't have the proper tools needed to be considered haiku and senryu, such as kireji or juxtaposition:

apricot
gelato
afternoon

Unfortunately a few of these underdeveloped poems completely miss the mark and the poet's intentions are likely to only be fully understood by the author herself.

Filled with unique moments and ideas, *Trying on the Night Sky* has numerous moving poems and is thriving with admirable energy. McCormack certainly has the chops to write a successful collection and her proper haiku and senryu are simple, elegant, and engaging. While there are enough brilliant haiku and senryu to sustain this large body of work, there are still ineffective poems that might pull readers out of the moment and leave them questioning the author's objective. Perhaps the book could have been more effective with a traditional publisher, who would have trimmed the fat and cooked to completion. Overall, McCormack's work is highly promising, and *Trying on the*

Night Sky is a fulfilling collection that should be enjoyed by most readers.

Main Street, by Darlene O'Dell (Bangalore, India.: Yavanika Press, 2025). 26 pages; E-book. \$3 minimum from www.payhip.com/YavanikaPress

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Darlene O'Dell, the recent featured artist in *MacQueen's Quinterly* Issue 28, is a writer and artist from western North Carolina. Her work has been featured in *Modern Haiku*, *Frogpond*, *Presence*, and *Contemporary Haibun* (Vol. 17 and 18). She is the author of a range of books, including *Sites of Southern Memory* (University of Virginia Press, 2002) and *The Story of the Philadelphia Eleven* (Church Publishing, 2024). Her second chapbook from Yavanika Press, *Main Street*, was released this year.

Main Street is a short e-collection of haibun, prose, and haiga that centers around family, grief, and small town living. This manuscript was conceived while the author evacuated her home during hurricane Helene. O'Dell breathes *Main Street* to life with every sentence, and with these familiar-feeling people, readers are sure to feel right at home. The prose is

incredibly tight and her use of language is evocative, enticing, and filled with literary devices such as personification and hyperbole.

O'Dell is no stranger to haibun; on top of her striking, vivid prose, she connects her titles and haiku with depth and attentiveness. This is especially true for haibun “Benjamin of the Family” and “Ashes to Ashes.” These poems, which truly tie the collection together, are pivotal and necessary for the reader’s understanding of *Main Street*.

For all haibun lovers, especially the fans of Terri L. French, *Main Street* tells many small, poignant stories. The ghosts of O'Dell’s memories live on through these pages and have been fully preserved for years to come.

within our somehows, by Shloka Shankar (Bangalore, India.: Yavanika Press, 2025). 68 pages; E-book. \$8 minimum from www.payhip.com/YavanikaPress

Reviewed by Rowan Beckett Minor

Shloka Shankar is a poet and self-taught visual artist from Bangalore, India. Her work can be found in over 200 online and print venues, including *Modern Haiku*, *Hedgerow*, the

Morioka and Yamadera contests (Japan), the Polish Haiku Competition, and Maya Lyubenova Contest (Bulgaria). She is the founding editor of the literary & arts journal *Sonic Boom* and its imprint Yavanika Press. Shankar is the author of the microchap *Points of Arrival* (Origami Poems, 2021), the haiku collection *The Field of Why* (Yavanika Press, 2022), and co-author of the haiga anthology, *living in the pause* (Yavanika Press, 2024). She is known for experimenting with Japanese short forms, and this is exemplified in her most recent e-collection, *within our somehows*.

within our somehows is filled with innovative and avant garde haiku and senryu, including vertical and parallel haiku, as well as several bewitching collages by the author herself. These poems tap into language poetry, which relies on the language to generate the meaning of the poem by using syntax, disjunction, caesura, and other poetic devices. Shankar effortlessly uses these techniques alongside haiku and senryu craft tools like kigo, juxtaposition, and kireji:

daisy shining. Are you sure you can help me?

Here, the daisy is the kigo and there is a clear break using the period and capitalization to begin the question. Although these are atypical for haiku and senryu, there is no “rule” against it, and Shankar has certainly left space for readers to come to their own conclusion, as it is not clear whether or not the daisy is the one being asked to help. In fact, it could

be argued that the “you” is a person separate from the daisy because of the punctuation. Regardless, this is a stunning, eccentric poem that will invite readers to get lost in its many layers.

Shankar’s work is exceedingly fresh, even when she uses common haiku themes, such as cherry blossoms:

a rhetorical question through the ages cherry blossom

This philosophical haiku, which contains kigo, pivot, and juxtaposition, might be more common in structure, but is just as open. Shankar is a master of using various philosophies in her work, including surrealism:

evening all afternoon. We render the noir of sleep

Also using punctuation as kireji, this poem is able to be read in two ways: as written, and also starting with “We render” and wrapping around to the beginning. Several poems in this collection cleverly follow this format. The ending senryu, which is perhaps the most traditional poem in the book, fully encompasses the collection in its entirety:

to be continued starlight

within our somehows is an impressive book of poetry and art, in which several poems have appeared in many reputable and

Book Reviews

selective journals, including *Wales Haiku Journal*, *Acorn*, *Modern Haiku*, and *Prune Juice*. Shankar is one of a kind and there is no one else writing like her. It is clear that her mind works in ways others could only dream of and the way she expresses her perception of the world is a gift to readers. Her work is unparalleled and sure to inspire a new generation of experimental haiku poets. *within our somehow* is a book to study for those seeking to write the haiku of tomorrow.

A special thank you to our recent donors:

Marilyn Ashbaugh

Debbie Strange

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

Submit: June 1-15

Autumn/Winter

Edited by Rowan Beckett Minor & Kelly Sargent

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

Submit: September 1-30