

#40



15

Handwritten Japanese calligraphy in black ink, consisting of several lines of characters.

159

STRETCH
Added stretch for extra comfort and flexibility



prune juice

Issue #40

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Founded by Alexis Rotella in 2009, *Prune Juice Journal* is recognized as the longest-running international literary journal dedicated solely to exploring new directions in English Senryu and related forms, including Kyoka, Haibun, Haiga, and Rengay.

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Contents

Best of Issue p. 3

Senryu p. 4

Haiga p. 20

Haibun & Gembun p. 23

Linked Verse p. 40

Best of Issue

Each new issue of Prune Juice features a best-of-issue senryu chosen by one of the co-editors.

school bus
blowing an extra kiss
just in case

Helen Ogden, USA

Our selection for issue 40's "Best of Issue" award was a unanimous one. Helen Ogden's "school bus" deftly weaves a narrative that continues on long after we finish reading the poem. The opening lines draw us in with their innocence, depicting an almost mundane scene of a parent or guardian parting ways with a child for the day. Perhaps this is a young child who still clings to the safety of home and only reluctantly gets on that school bus. Or maybe they are on the cusp of the age at which they no longer desire the company of grownups, and these intimate moments are becoming precious few. Whatever the context of this interaction, our attention is caught by the at once enigmatic, chilling, and haunting third line. We are transported out of this space of innocence and into a space of fear. Fear that the content within the hours between this child leaving us and coming back home is beyond our visibility and control. There is a harrowing futility to the act of blowing that extra kiss—is it merely a salve for our own conscience? The ultimate power of this poem is that the motivation for this fear is unnamed; and it doesn't need to be. It is, in fact, a stronger poem for this reason, as it allows for a universality in the experience. The hallmark of a brilliant poem is its invitation to multiple meanings upon reading and re-reading. Helen's poem masterfully achieves this through the use of simple, everyday language, and is, therefore, a worthy recipient of this issue's award.

Antoinette Cheung, Co-Editor
August, 2023

Senryu

this struggle
for novelty—
flat moon

A.J. Anwar, Indonesia

mapleafallsosoon

Caroline Giles Banks, USA

stars on stars ever growing my boyhood

Rowan Beckett, USA

home
is where
puppy mills

Jerome Berglund, USA

the living
go to purgatory
probate

Alanna C. Burke, USA

the squeak
of a marker running dry—
another protest

petro c. k., USA

thunderclap—
the soldier's gaze
on a toothpick flag

our vapor trail . . .
the party clown
takes off his tie

Aidan Castle, USA

driftwood . . .
after
all the sales

Ram Chandran, India

self-checkout
I almost say
you're welcome

Mary Ann Conley, USA

A. 01001001 00100000 01100001 01101101

Shane Coppage, USA

(translate the binary code [here](#))

interment I delete his number

daughter-in-law
casting nasturtiums
on the salad

Sue Courtney, New Zealand

cardiac consult—
on the office palm
a dead spider

black iris
the eulogy omits
my other life

Dan Curtis, Canada

AI
waxing
eschatological

Pat Davis, USA

not enough words
for the modern world
grandpa's patois

Marie Derley, Belgium

pillow talk—
my translation
of Genji's Tale

Edward Dewar, Canada

erectile
dysfunction
such
hard
words

Keith Evetts, UK

between paragraphs
about migrant camps
sweat pants ad

Bruce H. Feingold, USA

campfire songs
the dirty verses
uncorked

Mark Forrester, USA

twenty five years dead my mother sighs

Jenny Fraser, New Zealand

6th anniversary
more a tickle
than an itch

Terri L. French, USA

teen breakup
the rapid staccato
of thumbs

Jay Friedenberg, USA

chalk dust
blown from my hand—
first crush

Lisa Gerlits, USA

catch and release
my son's grasp
of female anatomy

Lisa Gerlits, USA

war poem:
too long
too many adverbs

Mark Gilbert, UK

the stains
of my father's love
beetroot salad

Abhisha Gulati, India

rubber chicken
but no one dares complain
charity dinner

Charles Harmon, USA

safety her new
 scissors brand bangs

Kerry J. Heckman, USA

buzz bombs by another name plum blossoms

Ruth Holzer, USA

memory care
the ice cream truck
sounds—

Kimberly A. Horning, USA

summer love chef tests the tempura oil

lost between happiness & senior rates

Keiko Izawa, Japan

lurking
in the shadows
senryu

Roberta Beach Jacobson, USA

county fair
nearly enough beer
to enjoy the band

Richard Jordan, USA

hazy morning
the next generation's
unisex names

Govind Joshi, India

mass
a psalm recited
in *valley girl*

Nicholas Klacsanzky, USA

popcorn quilt
a doctor tries to outsmart
the cancer

Deborah P Kolodji, USA

cloud animals
reshaping the sky
for my son

Kimberly Kuchar, USA

far from home . . .
the whys
and the 'causes

Natalia Kuznetsova, Russia

untold stories
the click of her needles
casting off

Kathryn Liebowitz, USA

he mows the lawn
on the shortest setting
divorce papers

walking my anger
to the breakwater's end—
blast grooves in granite

Kristen Lindquist, USA

last call
the umbrella I take
not the one I brought

Bob Lucky, Portugal

street healer says
his spell is approved
by the FDA

Roman Lyakhovetsky, Israel

being always the present continuous

Ruchita Madhok, India

wardrobe malfunction the pop eyes of toads

registry office
the only pen
spatters ink

Marietta McGregor, Australia

strawberry moon . . .
attacking the wildfire
with a garden hose

Rob McKinnon, Australia

fomo my sulky phone

Kati Mohr, Germany

nursery wing
so many named
not-a-boy

Anne Morigan, Canada

old age
ad

no longer prematurely gray

Laurie D. Morrissey, USA

middle age
judging a book
by its font size

Debbie Olson, USA

waiting room
nobody winning
at tic-tac-toe

John Pappas, USA

never learning
the custodian's name
false holly

John Pappas, USA

school library
the book on freedom
suddenly cool

Ganesh R., India

daughter's laundry
pieces of I love you
in the lint trap

Bryan Rickert, USA

road trip
all the places
I pee

Jenn Ryan-Jauregui, USA

an adopted child
at twenty one
an adopted child

Ann Schechter, USA

shucking corn—
her silk robe
drops to the floor

Bonnie J. Scherer, USA

sex talk
my kids ask
Siri

Rich Schilling, USA

express lane the cashier
finishes
his
story

Greg Schwartz, USA

open carry
she begins
to show

Julie Schwerin, USA

Halloween—
the same demons
as last year

Rob Scott, Australia

yellow mangoes
again I play
the psychiatrist

Richa Sharma, India

Semper Augustus
my nephews discuss
altcoins

Joshua St. Claire, USA

same linear rainbands that knocked on Woodrow Wilson's neutrality

Patrick Sweeney, Japan

pink cliffs
our conversation edges
into gender roles

Carly Siegel Thorp, USA

waitress as pronoun

chairs onto tables every night the same song

Joan Torres, USA

dandelions—
for the first time
she calls me dad

Kevin Valentine, USA

thrift store bridal gown for sale as is

Christine Wenk-Harrison, USA

drag queen ban from monarch to larval stage

Mike White, USA

fresh paint
the smell
of another cover-up

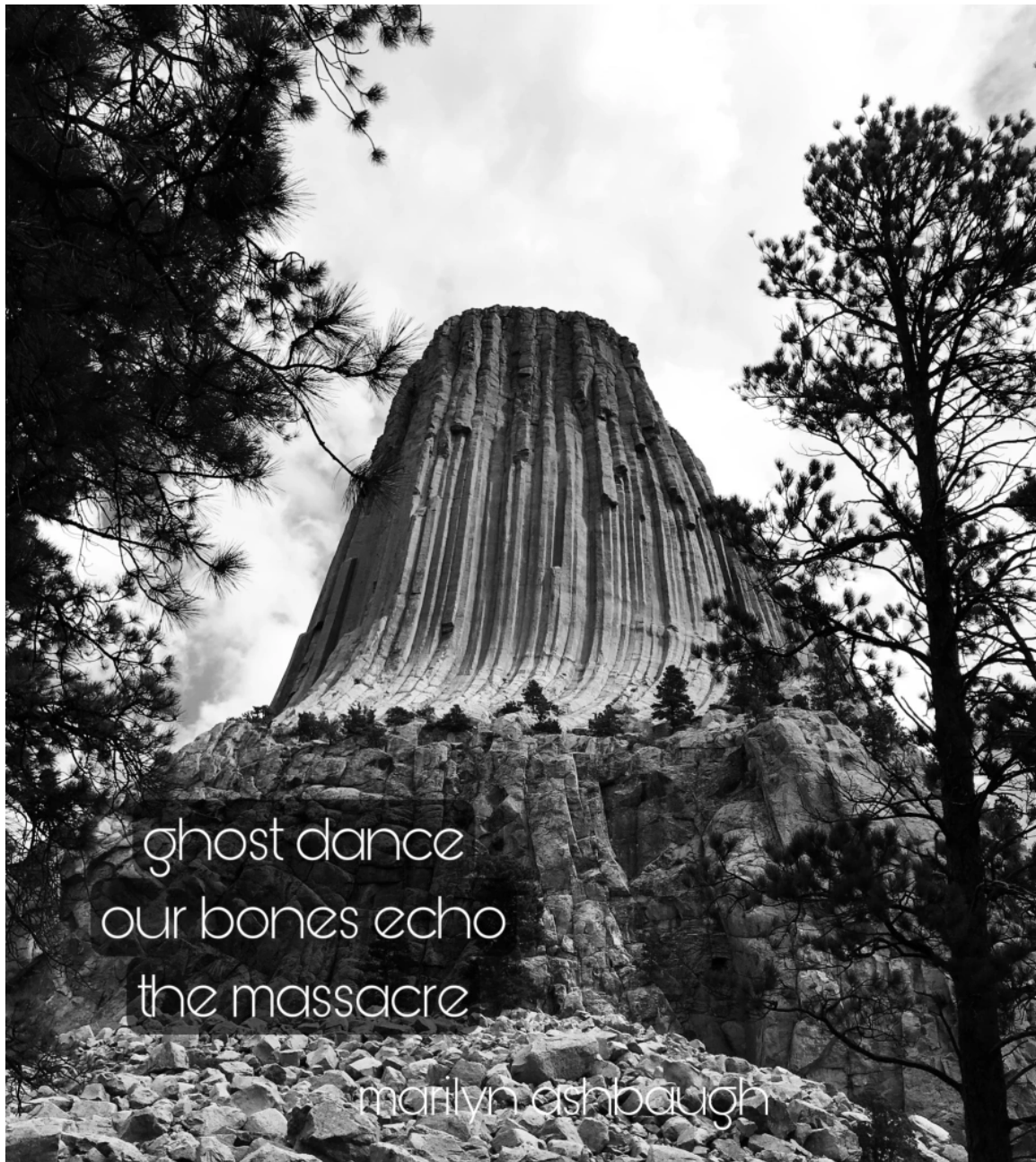
Tony Williams, UK

just like that time
we didn't need
the moon

his hands
a little rougher
testosterone shot

Genevieve Wynand, Canada

Haiga



Marilyn Ashbaugh, USA



pareidolia the screams of my existential angst

marianne paul

Marianne Paul, Canada

migration
a game of *panjagh*
near the border



Ganesh R.

Ganesh R., India

Haibun

Wishing Well

A woman I know leaves her husband of over 50 years, a man who's needed leaving for at least that long. I offer congratulations and support, tell her I always thought we might have been friends, if not for him. It's as though she's woken from a long enchantment. For the first time, I feel her unique presence, one not defined by deflecting his outbursts and cleaning up his messes.

This is my dream for her, made manifest in the wishing well of night.

She'll never wake up.

nonstick skillet
scraping by
with chemistry

Cynthia Anderson, USA

“malice aforethought” it was titled

Thinking back to that screenplay my father laboriously drafted after he divorced my mom, based on a newspaper article he'd clipped and carefully preserved, about an attorney whose marriage sours so he proceeds to hire a hitman who kills his wife . . . Never read too much into that before, but in light of current events and new developments, I now have to wonder about the *wunscherfüllung* one ascribes to dreams. He rewrote draft after draft, even hired a script doctor at some expense, but never could manage to get the ending quite right, luckily, and ultimately abandoned the project.

buried gas line
semi's persistent
turn signal

Jerome Berglund, USA

Ignominy

Summer holiday, hooking grass on the hospital grounds and rounding up peacocks when they decide to roost on matron's stoop. It's hard work but working the wards are trainee nurses, visiting from Sweden. What more could a young guy want?

Bent low, I chop my sickle through a clump of grass and an angry mouse sinks its teeth into my wrist. Better get a tetanus shot. Arriving in ER, I'm confronted by a formidable Irish nursing Sister who may well have served in the casualty tents of WWII.

"What's wrong with you?"

"Got bitten by a mouse!"

"Well, that's a first! I'll give you a shot."

By now a few of my Swedish girlfriends have gathered for the fun.

"Okay, I'll roll up my sleeve."

"Oh no you won't," says Sister. "Drop 'em!"

Red-faced, I oblige, trying my best at a manual fig-leaf. Much giggling from the gallery.

Sister steps back and hurls that needle in like a pub darts champion. I grimace in pain to squeals of laughter.

"Well now, m'lad, you'd best hitch 'em up and get back to work."

My summer love life hasn't quite been the same after that, what with quips like, "No thanks, I've seen what you've got to offer!" Perhaps that's what Sister had in mind all along.

beneath her habit
a rosary
and a wicked way

Bryan D. Cook, Canada

Sentient Beings

A stink bug crawls slowly up my small, bronze figure of Guanyin, over her knee, pauses a while on the water vase, crosses the willow branch in her left hand and, finally, rests on the crown of her head.

I haven't the heart to kill it.

alternate nostril breathing
a gnat clears
my 7th chakra

Terri L. French, USA

Sheer Nonsense

Do women even wear them anymore? My mother's pantyhose came out of the package with the perfect Betty Grable shaped legs. As they were prone to snags and runs, clear finger-nail polish was a staple in every woman's pocketbook. Nail polish and pantyhose manufacturers must have been in cahoots.

As a teenager I couldn't wait to shave my legs and wear pantyhose. Unfortunately, my mother saw fit to allow me to do the latter first, which was a bit unsightly and not at all the look I was going for. My first pair of pantyhose came in an egg purchased at the drug store, because everyone knows, like chicken, pantyhose are hatched. I wore size A, which supposedly fit women from 4'10" to 5'7" and from 85 to 150 lbs (give or take a couple inches and pounds). They came in six shades—suntan (perfect for summer), nude (for winter or particularly pasty women), taupe (a pink/brown color not seen on any human being other than nurses), coffee (for women of color or those prone to spilling their morning brew), navy (I have no explanation for that one) and off-black (reserved for cocktail parties and funerals).

Mothers taught their daughters the delicate art of putting on pantyhose. First, make sure you lotion your hands. Rough hands and pantyhose are not friends. Then, delicately gather one leg up and place your foot (which has also been lotioned—why is this bringing to mind a scene from *Silence of the Lambs*? I digress—into the reinforced toe of the stocking, gently shimmying it up the leg; repeat with the other leg. Now, re-lotion the hands and smoothly run your palms up each leg, tugging ever so slightly at the top of the thigh to ensure there's no loathsome crotch sag. And the waistband? Forget about it. You suffered with it. Additionally, the seam from waist to what mother called "your privates," left behind a squiggly line resembling a surgical scar. But hey, I suppose even the restricting "control top" pantyhose were better than wearing a girdle.

So, again I ask, does any woman wear these things anymore, and if so why? Burn those pantyhose and the eggs they rolled in on . . . in . . . (whatever!) We've come a long way, baby.

1974

Joe Namath
cross-dresses

Terri L. French, USA

**Joe Namath Hanes "Beautymist" pantyhose ad.*
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T-H54s6Sbos>

Not Another Fish Story

One day last summer, after hearing that schools of bluefish were running close to shore, I decided to take my saltwater fly fishing outfit down to the beach. Over the years, I've done pretty well fishing from shore with my spinning rod, but fly fishing is still a bit of a mystery to me. As I was, yet again, untangling another wind knot from my leader, I noticed off in the distance a pair of large birds circling over the shoreline. At first glance, they looked like black-backed gulls, but as they moved closer, I could clearly discern the ruffled wing tips and wedged tails of raptors. When they were almost directly overhead, one of the birds suddenly dropped from the sky and splashed down about ten feet from where I was standing. A few seconds later, he emerged from the roiling water gripping a bluefish in his talons. The other bird, his mate, I presumed, greeted him with a piercing cry, and the pair flew off into the tree line at the top of the dunes.

Shortly after witnessing this incredible scene, I packed up my gear and headed home. My heartbeat was still racing when I walked in the door. My wife was puttering around the kitchen as I excitedly related my tale about being treated to an up-close view of the unbroken circle of life. When my story was done, she turned to me and said, "But did *you* catch any fish?"

searching
for the right word
summer kigo

Rick Jackofsky, USA

New World

The once rural rim of this coastal city may well tumble into the sea one day. But the slew of glass and concrete monsters that have arisen here over the last decade look set to prove the climate-change police paranoid.

All around, like so many growing tentacles, are roads teeming with shops, eateries, schools, hotels, and apartments. Wedged between them are hostels. Hundreds of them, for men and women from all over the country who oil the gargantuan wheels of this “happening” part of the city.

I slip into the grease, too, trying to find a few square feet of space.

"No single room, madam. Only three-, four-, or five-sharing."

I step out of yet more cramped quarters into the setting sunlight. Backpacking young women are everywhere, talking into their cell phones, ID cards hanging from their necks. The young men are bunched around tea stalls smoking or munching on pakoras, crowding the narrow roads with their parked bikes.

Picking my way around potholes, and past a warm shawarma blast from a corner stall, I approach the next hostel on my list.

under the tossings
of a million wavelets
pearl oyster

Anju Kishore, India

50 years since her last protest

People with badges, waving banners. Mothers with strollers, nannas, retirees, dreadlocked students, office workers. Gathering to demonstrate against banks funding a foreign conglomerate to dig giant coal mines. We move off, led by a grey-bearded guitarist and a tambourinist, singing a jaunty tune: "Leave the coal in the ground." Two blocks away, we form two ragged lines, flanking the main entrance to the "People's Bank." A lawyer with a megaphone speaks about class actions being taken by children in the United States to sue for the destruction of their future. We sing again. A passing car honks. Two sour-faced security guys pull down metal shutters. Bank's closed. Our motley crew is a threat to civilized society. Slowly, we trickle away.

a little wind
in the plane trees
just enough power

Marietta McGregor, Australia

Karma Police*

Not to mention malevolent, but haven't I done more than enough benevolent collateral damage by now? Yes, I believe it's so. Purpose and meaning of life? Hell if I know. That whole "bucket list" crap is for the birds. I've kicked over as many buckets as I've filled—zero sum game, the pluses and minuses tally close enough for me—why kvetch? So now I'm old, my gluons are slowly disengaging, bones weary, creaking, cataracts ahoy. No big deal. Anyhow, the scenery around here is a drab gray at best, of little consequence. But there must be wildfire somewhere in the canyons ahead; I can smell the acrid smoke.

magnum opus
I smush a stink bug
well, just because

Mark Meyer, USA

**title of a song by Radiohead*

REPLY LETTER (a coalesku*)

dear universe,

i wanna be small • a smile in the morning, creased and sought •
the bum of a bumblebee in apple blossom • or a talk about •
how every thing and every one deserves • *respect* • *at the*
kitchen table • *afterdinner* • i wanna be • behind the stage • and
rearrange the mise-en-scène • *so loud to marvel at taking a*
breath after • and listen, think and feel • then walk • with every
step boards may slightly • yield • or take refuge • from hunting
down the next, the next, the next • *in the shell of a walnut*
• *a squirrel lost* • *last autumn* • as if bedtime stories over time
become • fertile • i wanna be the pause and echoing • then die •
some day some small teal eggshell

in a garden

picked up

Kati Mohr, Germany

*Poet's Note: *Coalesku* is a "mixed media" haibun which blurs the (visual) separation of prose and haiku/monoku/senryu. Though these elements can be read separately, they should blend together, with the haiku portion floating into the lyrical prose.

V

The vocal ability of the Andalusian wall lizard is well known and much commented upon. Historically, the Podarcis choir of Cordoba were already well-known in the time of the Caliphate and, across the Iberian Peninsula today, most villages have either a squamate choir or folk group. A long-standing bitter factional rivalry has, however, recently turned violent, culminating in the deaths of two young ladder snakes and a horse-shoe snake; each descended from a long line of singers. All three were noted sopranos. Worryingly, new sectarian divisions are emerging.

Chanting the now familiar slogan—*Death to the legless*—vigilante groups have, in the last few weeks, begun to take matters into their own hands. Lución, a well-respected tenor with a long recording career, was recently shot and killed near the mouth of his cave. Iberian worm lizards are taking up arms, and war, it appears, is now unavoidable.

*foreign field**—
chipped wood under
rows of saplings

Alan Peat, UK

**From Rupert Brooke's poem "The Soldier" (1914)*

Escape Velocity

Like all the times before, my fourth-graders quickly and quietly sit with their backs to the cinderblock wall, waiting for an end to the all-school lockdown. Sometimes minutes. Sometimes hours. These street-tough kids look for stability and comfort in times like this, so after 30 minutes, I take a quick peek out of my second-story classroom window. Hoping to see nothing. Hoping to tell the kids that all is clear and we can all go back to work soon. But instead, a few houses down, I see a body lying in the street.

graduation day
the man in the moon
never looking back

Bryan Rickert, USA

Resilience, Guts, and Supper

It takes a special kind of woman (Grandmother) who can strain the sunny day from all the sheer ungratefulness on earth and then turn it into rich, shiny gravy over meatballs while talking softly—nearly in silence—to Jesus.

But once, while she was fetching potatoes, the open cellar door crashed back down on her head, smashing her to the cold bottom so torn, scraped, and bruised.

She only brushed it off. Brushed herself off. And then made Cornish pasties in the same warm light that her favorite son swam through—right after he'd drowned trying to save the neighbors' daughter—on his way to our heavenly home.

flea market . . .
a skeleton-key necklace
among a few agates

Andrew Riutta, USA

dead cert!

. . . yea, no I mean it is a church looks like a redfrigginbrickugly box with steel shutters over them ohmygawdywindows—and there was a service going just a few old crumblies and fifty-pence-nige’s twin bruno . . . he’s the thick one . . . and fifty-pence-nige ain’t no pub quiz contestant—bruno is there to kidnap this guide dog—he loves dogs—he reckons it’s easy money the old dear will definitely pay up—bruno thick as, had the ransom note ready, so he grabs pooch, drops the note and tries to leg it—but the old gal’s wrapped the dog lead round her ankle so she gets pulled off her bench skittles a few oldies, the dog barks and bites a chunk out of bruno, and to top it all she can’t read his ransom note because she’s friggin’ blind! . . . so he brings the dog back like he’s just found it—the old dear was well happy—anyway suddenly they’re all singing and chanting the alleluias and pretending to drink blood, well cold tea—wine and sherry get nicked here—and BOOM the church doors fly open—and in storm those two tough old bill you know the rockhardcrew, them new ones who went through shane’s windows and dragged him out by his...yeah, them no he’s still not right—they rush in, all blood splattered—not a word—they tear off their body armour and chuck it at the font—water sloshes everywhere—with a thud they drop their weapons—side handle batons bounce on concrete—barging through chairs they walk straight at the vicar who starts making cross signs and he’s tearing up...then ambulances start arriving at the thing outside . . . you know the rest

broken bricks

soothsayer crows

snowdrops rise

batons clatter . . . half life of echoes

sacred glass shutters the moonlight comes and goes

Tim Roberts, USA

On the AI-generated Beer Commercial, “Synthetic Summer”

Not even Hieronymous Bosch could have imagined a hellscape such as this. All throats frantically gulping with a Charybdis-thirst that can only be satisfied with infinite swill. The faces of mankind contorted with the agony of perpetual consumption, in which there is no division between the consumer and the consumed. In a parody of pleasure, the organs of sense are engorged and multiplied as if more fingers could take greater delight in coolness or larger lips in lusciousness. This is the world turned up to 11. An earworm cancers over all other voices to become the soundtrack of the Apocalypse. All communication is reduced to a clanging klaxon of everything-everywhere-right-now-all-at-once. As this final Bacchanal frenzies to its climax, pagan priests gather around the iron altar to light the sacred fire. A cookie cutter reveals the sound of a bland pop band, which begins chanting “*sic transit gloria mundi*” on an endless loop. The priests become clanking replicators, gathering in all creation, and, in an ecstasy of ecophagy, burn all of nature on the altar, a sacrifice of everything to annihilation.

Bud Lite can *not with a bang but a whimper**

Joshua St. Claire, USA

Source: [“Synthetic Summer”](#)

**From T. S. Eliot’s poem “The Hollow Men” (1925)*

Gembun

They say man is the only creature who knows he's alone.

icehouse moon—
the first A.I. therapist
turns suicidal

Susan Burch, USA

Linked Verse

Rengay

A Midnight Grim

mirror, mirror
multiplying into
hundreds of me

*the heated snort
of a white horse*

christening
the knight's armor
first blood

*the frog
stays a frog
after the kiss*

crows devour
a breadcrumb trail

*the shoe
on the other foot
still doesn't fit*

Kimberly Kuchar, USA
& *petro c. k.*, USA

Dark Matter

winter seclusion
the sky enunciates
each star

*putting some light years
between us*

empty house
some of the echoes
are you

*attic bedroom
all to myself
the hunger moon*

adding a pillow
to your side

*elliptical
calculating the path
of your return*

Kat Lehmann, USA
& Bryan Rickert, USA

Chicory and Lace

taking you home
I veer off
for your shoulders

*a picnic lunch
in the rest area's shady spot*

not visible
from the road
a crumb on her lips

*no need to ask
for directions . . .
this familiar journey*

down to a dirt lane
in chicory and lace

*creaking porch swing
the fireflies out
later than usual*

Dan Schwerin, USA
& Julie Schwerin, USA

Tan-Renga

in the shelter
one central light source
huddled together

*sold their house
to live in the car*

Jerome Berglund, USA
& *Christina Chin, Malaysia*

wherever we go
there we are
greenhouse gases

*frog in the old pond
slowly getting hotter*

Jerome Berglund, USA
& *petro c. k., USA*

screenshots
doubling up
my weary frame rate

chroma keying
reshapes my image

R.C. Thomas, UK
& *Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan*

meteor shower
the beliefs we hold
back

Fukitol
compounding our fate

Hifsa Ashraf, Pakistan
& *R.C. Thomas, UK*

Split Sequences

Casting of Lots

autumn rain

*cloudburst—
a sudden chill
enters the room*

their fetus still

hint of blue sky
the doctor's halitosis
lingering

under her hands

*broken life line
a sudden leap
towards destiny*

Bisshie, Switzerland
& Peter Jastermsky, USA

Jack and Jill

her glass slipper

*coming up short
what the mind
overpromises*

crushes the blue pill...

captain charming
a rabbit replaces him
in her affection

shrivelled plums

*in one's hands
the rise of
low-hanging fruit*

Bisshie, Switzerland
& Peter Jastermsky, USA

Rumor Has It

witch hunt

*quilting biddies
stitching together
a conspiracy*

angry townspeople

loaded guns
everyone
fired up

form a mob

*leading the pack
a Roman collar
and a noose*

always believing

he had it
coming
blood moon

the worst in others

*news update
how the grizzly scene
boosts ratings*

Susan Burch, USA
& Bryan Rickert, USA

Clipped Wings

what's become of me

barnacles . . .
one more week
of uncut toe nails

an elderly lady

dermo appointment . . .
asking about the rash
on my lifeline

offers her seat

new blood pressure med
the first question
below the belt

Richard L. Matta, USA



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