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Pillars of Fire

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Alba Publishing

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ripples
atop pillars of fire
so many cold moons

Hideki Oh

Haibun

ERRAND

My father-in-law isn't the most sensitive of creatures. A cattle and wheat rancher, the unforgiving pragmatics of ranch life has coursed through his blood since childhood. And he can be blunt and crude with his fellows. I remember the car salesman in nearby Conrad, a recent throat cancer survivor clearly equipped with a voice box, so that his speech was guttural, echoic, and barely discernable. As he tried his best to extol the virtues of a new Plymouth, and to my mother-in-law's infinite chagrin (she'd been there before), my father-in-law asked, "Something wrong with your throat?" On another occasion, the local pastor explained why he first started moving from state to state: "It was when I was called to the ministry." "Who called you?" my father-in-law wanted to know.

...So I was surprised that July morning when he asked me, "Want to come along?" He certainly didn't need me to help him drown a litter of kittens, our first morning chore. On Montana ranches, hundreds of miles from the nearest animal shelter, such things aren't only expected, they're necessary; innumerable wild cats running around constitute a major nuisance, and many attract coyotes.

I wasn't overjoyed at the prospect, but I couldn't very well say no. I was at least thankful that my father-in-law hadn't adopted a neighbor's technique of picking up kittens one by one and

smashing them against the barn door.

In the shop, where the kittens had been born—the mother was out hunting—he handed me a burlap sack, went outside, and returned with two or three heavy rocks. I put them in first, then the kittens, trying not to hurt them. We said little on the way to the small reservoir—my father-in-law was a man of few words anyway. As the flatbed Ford rumbled and rattled down a rutted dirt road, I could hear mewing from the sack at my feet.

sound of the creek
hay meadow
second cutting

At the reservoir, he surprised me a second time. “Want to do it?” he asked. I certainly did not want to do it, but again I couldn’t say no. So I grabbed the sack, got out of the truck, walked up to the water—and hesitated. Except for one or two sparrows shot with a BB gun in childhood, I’d never killed anything. A warm wind from the south picked up as I listened to the mewing and felt the bag move slightly. Then I tossed it in the air, still hearing the kittens as it splashed dead center in the reservoir and disappeared.

Was my father-in-law testing me in some strange, minor way? Initiating me? I watched the bubbles from the sack diminish and finally cease. Then I turned.

There he was: leaning on the flatbed, his back

to me, pretending to look assiduously into the distance, toward the fields of headed-out barley down east. I'll be damned, I said to myself, as the wind blew harder and we heard faint rumbles of thunder. He didn't want to watch.

day moon
not yet grazed
young grass on the hill

Because he was lean and gaunt—one local wag likened him to Ichabod Crane—the townspeople nicknamed Carl Jensen “Hungry.” He simply appeared on Main Street one Saturday afternoon, carrying a cardboard suitcase and wearing a floppy green felt hat. Soon he moved into an abandoned line shack down by the railroad junction, and picked up odd jobs where he could.

A myth grew up around him, mainly concerning his face, which was hideously disfigured due to a wound suffered in Flanders Fields, or so he said. He rarely talked about himself, but someone claimed that his own family wouldn’t take him in after he returned from Belgium and they saw his face.

He loved kids. Once they got over their initial fright, they came to visit him and even trailed him around town, as if he were the Pied Piper. He always had a dime for them, announcing that “Candy Day” was just around the corner. Sure enough, and with permission from the parents, he gathered the little ones in Larson’s Mercantile and bought them licorice sticks, hard butterballs, and peppermints.

It was Elias Cornell, the sheriff’s deputy, who found the body. Through the cracked window of the shack, Elias said, you could see his feet dangling as he slowly twisted back and forth above the overturned chair. He’d used a hemp cord, covering his face with a burlap sack. Elias didn’t find a note, and no one knew

how to notify his family.

But the town held a funeral for “Hungry.” During the short service, the pastor, who like everyone else knew next to nothing about him, for some reason chose to portray him as “a man of the land,” holding up a clod of local earth to illustrate. When titters broke out in the first two rows of the church, he realized he’d picked up part of a dried cow pie.

The kids, of course, weren’t allowed at the funeral.

September frost
every midnight
sound of the outbound express

THE PHOTOGRAPH

Many decades old, the sepia photo seems nonetheless contemporary; this twenty-something girl's clear eyes and blonde hair—it appears blonde, though it could be light brown—are her best features.

For me, she's the essence of all young women in the past I never knew and might've loved: Greek girls of ancient Delos; Iberian girls of the Costa del Sol; Irish girls of County Galway.

And yet, and yet... There's something unique about the girl in the photo. Is it that I know what happened to her? Or that her eyes (were they green?) look just past me like a cat's gazing at something only it can see: nothingness to the rest of us.

In the end, the girl becomes yet another plangent voice in the dark winds of Purgatory, whispering to me: *Too late, too late.*

Along with many others, her photo may be seen in the small on-site museum at the Majdanek concentration camp in Lublin, Poland.

Old Town
on a crumbling wall
fresh graffiti

DETOUR

He knows he's making a mistake by impulsively leaving the freeway's northbound lane and heading inland toward the neighborhood where he grew up.

Driving past the vacant lot where his grade school used to be, he knows that, if teleported here, and without the help of street signs, he wouldn't recognize the place—trees have grown up, houses have been repainted or torn down, strangers walk the sidewalks.

He stops near his house, checking the address peeking out between winter-brown ivy vines. And there, in the front yard, is the pine tree he and his mother planted more than half a century ago. With a thick, gnarled trunk he couldn't get his arms around and long, drooping branches, it's fifty feet tall.

Gazing at it from across the street he remembers the day—an overcast Sunday—when they planted the tree. After the sapling was in the ground he put in four stakes and made a string fence meant to deter neighborhood dogs looking for somewhere to pee or to bury a bone. And he remembers that, toward the end, sailing between him and his mother wasn't always smooth. Today she's buried two hundred miles north, in a small cemetery near the coast.

He sits there for about fifteen minutes before heading back to the freeway. Then, passing a Lowe's, he's seized with a sudden, overpowering, and irrational

urge to stop in, buy a chain saw, drive back, and cut
down the pine tree.

distant waves
moss-covered crosses
late arrival

FAIRY TALE FOREST

Another dodge that doesn't work, or work very well: tippling cold Polonaise vodka (straight) in the morning. Top-shelf Polish vodka is the best in the world (trust me: better than Russian), and with time on my hands, it's way too tempting. My Fulbright lecture schedule at the Marie Curie-Sklodowska University is just once a week, and I can't wait for Thursdays to roll around.

Crossword puzzles don't make the nut either—I mean, how many can you do before depression comes creeping out yet again, like weasels from beneath the antediluvian TV (which, heaven help me, doesn't work).

I know I'm in trouble when, walking past the ebony statue of Marie and through the miniature forest toward my apartment on Skowiniego Street, I notice that the sun is significantly lower in the sky at 2 p.m. Toto, I don't think we're in California any more. So now we have the long Polish night coming on, exacerbated by coal smoke and lowering skies. . . I ask Sean Molloy, the Irish professor who's been here for six years, what his secret to getting through last winter was. He says, "Simple: I read Gibbon's *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*—all seven volumes; twice."

night wind from Ukraine
from the ancient forest
a scream

COUSINS

Although we get along quite well, Jack and I are very different people. One day he shocks me by saying,

“You’re probably lucky your dad died young—how old were you, seven?—before he had a chance to abuse you.”

By “abuse” Jack means physical, not sexual. Or, as he puts it on another occasion, “My father hit me more than he had to.” The last time Jack saw Jack Sr.—I have some dark memories of my uncle myself—they fought, the father chasing the long-haired son around a coffee table, brandishing a telephone book, yelling “Faggot!” It was then, after he recounted his story, that I insensitively told him, “All my memories of my dad are good ones—no abuse—lots of affection, right up until the day I found his body.” Jack had no reply.

For all our differences, Jack and I do have one thing in common: we’ve both been diagnosed with PTSD in connection with our fathers.

the room darkening
a slight stutter
forgetting his meds

entering a dark wood
unfamiliar birdsong
. . . what we might’ve been

DEMENTIA

exploding in silence
to whisper something to us
supernovae

“A word of warning,” my great-aunt tells her friend as they pull into the nursing home parking lot. “Today’s his day to lecture on telepathic orchids.”

“He” is my great-uncle: holder of an advanced degree in botany; round-the-world hitchhiker; lay Zen monk; haiku poet; painter; once owner of a string of nurseries; part-time mystic and full-time eccentric: now in premature old age. Later in life he becomes fascinated with flora on worlds dancing around stars discovered by super telescopes like the Hubble. Intriguing him especially are “Goldilocks” planets—not too hot, not too cold, just right to support life as we know it on earth. Watercolors he makes in the nursing home depict alien landscapes of trees and flowers, many basking in the benign light of binary suns.

In an old notebook discovered after his death my great-aunt finds these words:

Imagine a world, third from the two suns of a system 600 light-years away; like our dear earth a blue-green orb bathed in oxygen and nitrogen. Imagine two twilights: one tequila-colored, the other burnt orange, and the purple shadows of cold rocks elongating, then shrinking, elongating and shrinking yet again, all within

two hours' time...Imagine too a necklace of moons—turquoise, green, silver-gray, dark yellow—and sentient, intelligent floating flowers, based not on chlorophyll but on compassion!

This spidery entry, his last, stops there.

My great-aunt knows that the nursing home staff is at a loss to deal with her husband—he's not ornery or disagreeable like some; just...My great-uncle is, I finally conclude, the sort of holy fool Baudelaire celebrates in a prose poem: "*O Creator! Can such exist in the eyes of the One who alone knows why they exist, who alone knows how they have been made and how they could not have been made?*"

Toward the end of their visit my great-uncle commences to chant nonsense syllables, so it's time to leave. As the women walk back through the brightly-lit day room, other residents chant nonsense syllables too, perhaps picked up from him.

"They're just like children," the friend says kindly but sadly. "I do feel sorry for them."

"Why?" my great-aunt turns to her. "Do you feel sorry for children?"

double rainbow
before it goes
we go inside

BY THE POOL

summer sky
touch of autumn
someone's lost kite

Listening to the oddly comforting distant hum of a gardener's lawnmower, I discover how disconcerting it is to meet one's own ghost. There he is, my twelve-year-old self, bouncing up and down on the diving board before executing a passable jackknife. Supple as a seal, he climbs out of the pool, returns to the diving board, and this time tries a double somersault--not so successfully. I watch him from my deck chair, Sierra Nevada Pale Ale in hand, the southern California sun burning my eyelids.

...That was the summer of my first kiss, chaste of course, from a girl I still remember fifty seasons on. Six years later we arrange to meet in San Diego. And we have nothing to say to each other! Until then, this is the great love of my life, rarely leaving my thoughts through middle- and high school, on to my freshman year at Cal. A strange new hurt, not rare, I suppose, in the annals of love.

I—or rather he—dives again. Then our eyes meet. I can read his thoughts: *Who is this strange guy, balding, beer in hand, gazing at me?* And my thoughts: *How many world-lines, how many futures, have led to this moment, this wink of eternity under the California sun?*

And his, one last time: *Does he mean me
harm?*

swimming underwater
avoiding
the deep end

INITIATE

fork in the stream
parting company
two seedpods

I first meet him a few months after he leaves the monastery at Fukushima, where he'd served as a lay monk for two years. Having made the decision to marry and have a child, he crosses my path once again in Kyoto. Now long-haired, still bookish and meditative, still in search with his wife of a full-time gig tutoring English in a private school, that afternoon he's teaching their toddler Ty Ty words. Like his dad, Ty Ty very much has a mind of his own.

We sip tea across from the garden, tiny even by bonsai standards. Ty Ty wanders over to a pool a short distance from the young banyan tree, points at its reflection in the water, and says,

"Tree."

"Good, good!" my friend claps his hands. "And what's that?" he points at the tree looming over our heads.

Ty Ty is silent.

"What's that?" dad repeats.

No reply.

Then Ty Ty falls to his knees and gestures again to the tree's reflection.

"Tree."

We look at each other in silence. Dad walks

over to Ty Ty, lifts him high, and takes a few steps backward so the little guy can have a panoramic view of the banyan. Dad says,

"Tree."

Ty Ty looks at his dad, then at the banyan before pointing down at the reflection a third time.

"Tree."

"Nap time," announces the mom, bringing a fresh pot of tea. She scoops up Ty Ty and takes him inside.

Dad pours fresh tea for both of us. I say,

"So. . . If you have your druthers, what would he be when he grows up?"

"A Zen philosopher," dad replies. "What else?"

ripples

elbowing clouds aside

clouds

REQUIEM

Who was it said, “This stone in my hand—it demands glory”? Yes, yes; but what good is that if, like the rest of us, I am David and Goliath rolled into one?

a winter dream
lips I touch
never touching mine

IN CONCERT

...A famous modern composer speaks of the cruelty of music. To me, of that cruelty the most painful kind is the longing for paradise that it inspires—in listener and composer. In the Art of the Fugue, one can hear Bach's fury when he can't shatter the glass ceiling of his own music.

unseen by the audience
on the conductor's face
utter joy

SHADOWS

Today at the bar I meet Trish, a new barmaid in her mid-twenties. When I leave she's standing by the hostess stand and we exchange a "Nice to meet you." The light is behind her, she's enveloped in shadow and I can't determine from her facial expression whether she's being perfunctory, sincere, flirtatious—or downright phony.

Forty years ago, when I was her age, I would've been disappointed not to know. Now, in my early sixties, I'm relieved.

her schoolgirl complexion
bikers pull up
her sigh meant for my ears only

BREUGHEL'S *ICARUS*

Everyone said it was bound to happen—an untended toddler slipping under the dock and drowning. When it did happen late in the season, a vacationing doctor took the body from a would-be rescuer and began walking up and down the dock, patting its back, rocking it gently back and forth, as the mother's sobbing could be heard a short distance away. The doctor continued walking the dock for three hours, long after the paramedics had declared the child dead, until finally, before heading home to happy hour, an on-looker shook his head and waved his hand,

“That makes no sense.”

waiting their turn
boats
lined up at the slip

moonrise
far shore
a single light

NO ONE

The strangers sleeping within—all the mothers and fathers I'm not aware of... Do they exist in my facial expression as I'm trying to make sense of last night's bad dream of the great-grandfather who killed five people in a Kentucky family feud? Or in my walk, which someone once compared to a sailor's rolling gait?

Or in my laugh? Or—

In this, I'm as much a stranger to myself as they are to me. That will change when, years from now, something of me—something in me—shows up in the walk, talk, smile, or frown of someone yet to be born.

naming him anyway
my first brother
stillborn

MYSTERY

As a child I experienced certain lonely moments, not despair or ecstasy, ups or downs, but when life simply seemed blah and ho-hum, without savor—I won't say purposeless, because kids don't think or feel existentially. But I wonder—assuming I wasn't alone in this—is there a biological or Darwinian function of such moments for children, not when the seas of life are tumultuous, but when we drift, aimless and alone, into the horse latitudes of the soul?

hunter's moon
waiting for Russian bombers
end of the world

EPIPHANY

One morning on the Montana ranch, my wife and father-in-law walk past me as I'm weeding the garden. They don't speak to each other or to me, and their eyes are fixed on the ground. A perfectly ordinary tableau on a perfectly ordinary summer day; and yet I drop my trowel and stare at them, for at that moment I feel a sudden visceral sense of the bond, the deep love, between father and daughter—far more powerful than if they'd exchanged affectionate words, which they never do.

It's not an impression—something stronger, as though a third presence walks beside them.

the four seasons
in the tall weeds
anvil and hammer

SACRED GROUND

across the border
burning
stubble fields

“If this is God’s house,” a six-year-old once asked his Sunday school teacher in my presence, “how come He’s never home?”

...In Europe, you pop into cathedrals, including the small, anonymous ones, in the same spirit you’d enter museums: so many—no, most—are lovely, full of discoveries, as when I saw colored shadows for the first time: reflections of red, yellow, and green stained-glass windows on the cobblestone floors of St. Denis in Paris.

In Zamosc, Poland, a small town about ten miles from the Ukrainian steppes, I enter a minicathedral and sit down in the third pew, thinking I’m alone. Then I hear the sound of weeping; across the aisle a huddled figure genuflects in the shadows, head bowed and slowly shaking back and forth, as if insisting that something isn’t true. She spots me, and immediately both hands go to her face.

Discreetly I turn and, by the flickering light of green and white prayer candles, leave the church.

So: another discovery. That afternoon in eastern Poland it’s brought home to me with full force that nothing, nothing, distances man from the animals—not reason, not laughter—more than the

mysterious universal instinct to smother our tears.

ancient gravestones
also gone to seed
generations of grass

SARATOGA

Still, she loved flowers. I can see her yet, a man's calloused hands digging in the garden, planting or pruning nasturtiums, peonies, impatiens (the latter seemed appropriate, because more than once Grandma Cora was short with my brother Allan and me), white roses, begonias, etc.

The house—the “little house” where we stayed, not the main dwelling my father had built for her—was filled with cut flowers: I still remember the color and perfume, the yellow morning light settling like pollen on stems, petals, and blossoms.

It wasn't until I was in high school, a decade after my father's death, that my mother told me the story. Around 1921 or 1922, when my father was a pre-adolescent, Grandma Cora secretly killed his pet hamster, skinned it, and served it to him in a stew, telling him only after he'd cleaned his plate, just as she'd taught him.

dying
in a yellow vase
sprigs of pampas grass

MEDITATION

So, this bright desert morning, a thought: *If dreams came true we wouldn't be living in truth but in dream.* Beyond the dream-catchers of native peoples, beyond Freud, I wonder if dreams are to the soul what dark matter is to the universe, 90% of which "isn't there."

Last night I dreamed of a girl I haven't seen for nearly fifty years, and I remembered her final words to me: *The last time we made love was heaven.* Then, suddenly, there's the physicist Stephen Hawking, sitting on a throne, scepter in hand, pontificating: *Take it from me: heaven is a fairy tale--a dream, if you will.*

A poet describes the sky as *bluer than ponds of dream.* And, long ago, my dream of two yellow butterflies flittering and fluttering across Paris. One, Alphonse, says to the other, Alain,

"Last night I dreamed I was an emperor fanning himself in a tea garden flooded with sunlight. But when I woke up, I didn't know whether I was a butterfly dreaming he was an emperor or an emperor dreaming he was a butterfly."

"Monsieur, you dreamed about that ancient Chinese parable of Chuang Tzu," replies Alain. "It questions the nature of reality."

"...So I'm not dreaming now?"

"What does it matter?" Alain stretches his wings. "You're in Paris!"

And they fly on, high above the domes, spires,
gardens and fountains dreaming in the Parisian
sunlight: the only reality they will ever know.

purple shadows
intruding
a sound of thunder

FISH AND GUESTS

“I believe in UFOs,” she says, putting down her glass of merlot. “I know most people don’t, but...” Then: “...OK, best-case scenario: They’re super-intelligent—I mean, of course they’re super-intelligent—they hail from an idyllic civilization out there, and...” her voice trails off again. “When they feel the time is right, they’ll make contact and share their advanced ideas. Think of what we might learn in just a few days’ visit! No, no,” she adds, smiling, after taking a sip of wine, “I don’t think they look like E.T.”

Something bothers me.

“If their society is so idyllic,” I suggest, “why did they leave home?”

northern lights
lost in the stars
stars

AN ORDINARY AUTUMN DAY AT THE CEMETERY

Young woman bowing, head against a dark
gray stone: toddler chasing an escaped blue balloon:
groundskeeper kicking a balky lawnmower: snow
geese flying overhead in a wobbly V: between two
graves, one pale petal from a plastic daffodil: scraps of
paper playing tag: the strange desire to touch a
stranger's gravestone: gray day moon: wind-chimes
tinkling faintly in a yellow wind.

coming to an end
rows of white blossoms
digging new graves

NIGHT OF THE GRIZZLIES

velvet and blue cotton
modern medicine robe
Blackfoot shaman

“It hurts,” Julie whimpers to the priest. “Would you please hold my hand?”

Much later, Blackfoot Indians would say that a killer spirit had been let loose in the mountains. Make that two spirits; but they were right.

naatsi aakii, naatsi kiyaayo

That night—an August night in 1967—is unusually dark, even by Montana standards: Mt. Grinnell and Heaven’s Peak are vague shadows against the starless, moonless big sky of Glacier Park. During an interview a week or so afterward, a helicopter pilot describes the attempted rescue as flying through curtains of black velvet. A Vietnam vet, he admits he’d never been scared flying a chopper until this night, when two 19-year-old girls lay dying somewhere below.

The girls—Michelle is the other victim—embark separately on an overnight camping trip, each with a male friend: Julie to Trout Lake, Michelle to Granite Park Chalet (the chalet is full up, so the kids have to camp a few hundred yards away, where the first grizzly finds them.)

Tourists in the chalet clearly hear the screams;

someone waves a flashlight and yells down the hill, “Is anything wrong?” When would-be rescuers arrive, Michelle’s boyfriend—who’d been thrown out of his sleeping bag before the 500-pound sow dragged Michelle, still in her bag, into the woods—tries to follow the bear, only to be restrained. Twenty minutes later they find Michelle, scalped and barely alive.

At about the same time, near the shore of Trout Lake, a favorite grizzly hangout, Julie and her boyfriend are eating, then discarding, wild chokecherries (even though ripe, they’re too sour for inexperienced palates); then, a few minutes after retiring for the night, they hear odd snuffling sounds, like someone with a bad cold.

pak-ki-pis—tsi-o taa’ t-ts-pi

“It’s a bear,” Julie whispers, and just like that the big beast—another sow—is upon them, injuring the boyfriend, then concentrating on Julie who, like Michelle ten miles away, can’t get out of her sleeping bag. It takes two hours to find Julie, who loses too much blood.

In a documentary film made forty years later, a Blackfoot Indian named Steve—expert tracker and assistant to the Catholic priest assigned to the Browning Reservation—attempts to describe his feelings of that long-ago night. Halfway through the interview he chokes up, shakes his head, and the camera turns away. (Later the priest reveals that Steve had told him, “They’re home with their ancestors now,” before he

could've possibly known there were two girls involved).

oki niksokowa

Julie is flown to Granite Park, where Michelle has just passed away, and where, as it happens, two doctors are spending the night. The priest holds Julie's hand and tells her—the last words she would ever hear—"God is looking over you."

"I know He is, Father," she murmurs; then her grip relaxes. Only then, holding a bag of plasma, one doctor looks at the other and both shake their heads.

ai yo kah

The filmmakers also interview Michelle's parents. All these years later, the mother is too stricken to speak, and the father still looks in despair. But he says he can't blame the bears for being what they are, and that he's attempted to deal with the grief and loss by contributing to an environmental group dedicated to saving *ursus horribilis* from extinction.

*nis-kum'-iks*¹

dawn star
the chopper
heading home

¹From the Blackfoot: *naatsi aakii*, *naatsi kiaayo* (two girls, two bears); *pak-ki-pis—tsi'o taa't—ts—pi* (August, when the chokecherries are ripe); *oki niksokawa* (hello to all my

Haiku

new exo-planet found
stumbling
over the same root

nettles
faint from the garden
comforting words

day moon
afraid to look
her last journal entry

bougainvillea
under her breath
all the lost words

trapped between icicles
violet moon
a feeling of not belonging

Heaven's Peak
distant glacier
our old cat yawns

roots above ground
to earthward
dying live-oak

starry sky
I think
I think I am

fast-moving storm
the flagman's world
SLOW and STOP

ragged clouds
old man on the corner
The End is Near

summoning a haiku
dismissing a haiku
sangria

In memory of—
weathered over
the name on the stone

mass killings in Norway
on the iPod
Wouldn't it be nice

second summer
still lovely without you
the deep wood

evening wind
apart all this time
viewing the same moon

distant gravestone
sunrises
I never see

cold—
light in her hair
the horizon darkens

iPod message
below the wing
clouds darker than above

lake campfire
ripples and a voice
The gods are still around

darkening
words we read
into river-sounds

lasting all morning
last night's dream
fog trolls the lake

wine tasting
vineyards
quench the rain

one thin banyan branch
hidden
the bonsai garden

dark taro patch
glints
of hidden water

Père Lachaise Cemetery
two young Parisians
on their knees

2 friends on chemo
burying both my hands
in cold dark garden earth

old October
half in shadow
the musician's grave

Wasps

(Micro-haiku)

Author's Note to the Reader

Certainly concision is the essence of mainstream haiku, but with the micro- or three-word sub-genre, something else comes into play. All haiku thrive on suggestiveness, hints, and intimations; to be sure micro-forms follow these paths, but they add a fourth: what might be called a do-it-yourself component. Many of the poems herein “function” as pieces of a jigsaw puzzle, a strategy which takes the “hermeneutical space” approach—leaving connections between words/ideas deliberately vague or ambiguous—to the extreme of allowing words to float in space-time with no apparent anchors or ballast, save what the reader’s imagination provides.

Other poems draw on the modernist technique of splitting an adjective and a noun or vice-versa, thus achieving one or two or both (contrary) purposes: to hurry the reader from line to line, welding the meanings of two words into one; or stopping the reader in his tracks, enabling adjective and noun to “savor” their own separate meanings before being cognitively wedded. Finally, micro-haiku rely less on grammar and sentence structure than conventional haiku, adding a further dimension to ambiguity and suggestiveness.

A couple of guidelines regarding three-word or micro-haiku:

1. Please be very mindful of sound: off-rhyme, alliteration, and—above all—assonance.

2. Poems, and only poems, truly teach the audience how to read them. If you want to be a keener, more sensitive reader of haiku—read haiku.

With the reader's indulgence, in some cases I've stretched or bent the rules by counting hyphenated words—i.e., rose-perfume—as one.

Because of their extreme brevity (and paradoxically), I've elected to place two, rather than the customary three, haiku on a page. My feeling is, the shorter they are the longer the cognitive distance (dissonance?) between them ought to be.

Many different kinds of haiku inhabit this micro-life-world; still, as a greatly-admired poet once observed, "Poems cannot stand alone any more than we can stand alone." Alone or not in their own life-worlds, I hope readers will agree.

supernova
leaf-shadows
ladybug

campfire
words
embers

sweetness
empty
honey-jar

river
shadows
secrets

mountain
storm
mountain

wine
firelight
silences

clouds
 rose-perfume
 inbox

LA
 ashen
 moon

drunken
 moon
 waterfall

snowflakes
 touching
 silence

nettles
soft
moon

caterpillar
butterfly
sunset

earthquake
pinwheeling
stars

full
moon
...famishing

morning
 mourning
 doves

death-day
 white
 blossoms

phantom
limbs
kisses

star-gazing
stars
gazing

fallen
 falling
 falling

