

Broken Mirrors

You clean the bathroom mirror. Buff your reflection. Spots blur, vanish. Eyes meet eyes.
 Move on to the window. Cloth streaks glass. A gray squirrel dangles from the bird feeder, then steadies. Peers your way, fingers fret.
 Drag the trash bins down the long drive. Your terrier swaggers ahead. Neighbor moans about bears and dog poop. "Morning Wes, how's Agnes feeling?" you ask. He drops the trash to chat.

Drive to the barn for chores. Wheelbarrow of hay lurches on rutted ground. Wrestle, tug, and push. Red fox limps from brambled brush, turns to face. Gaze glued.

The school principal phones for an urgent meeting. Juggle obligations, carve time. She glooms, "Your curious 10 year old searched 'bombs' on his school Chromebook." You search her face for anything soft.

Barn owner calls. Your old horse is down, colic. Speed to his side. Collapse in wet grass. Eyes meet eyes. Gone.

--Amy Schneiderbeck



Anique Taylor Workshop

Senryu

The caveman's first fire was not that miraculous
 His second fire was.

--Jesse Hilson



Writers in the Mountains

Imagination Unbound

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Writers in the Mountains (WIM) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to provide a nurturing environment for the practice, appreciation and sharing of creative writing.

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Ancestors in Stone

Silence.....
 Stones huge and small,
 I feel their past glories,
 In life we shared the same hopeful
 Stories.

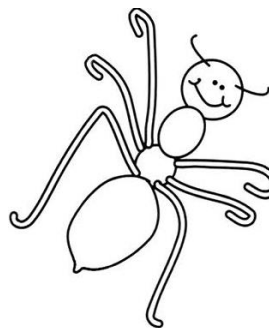
--Marge Pietrowski
Cinquain, syllabic form



A Tiny Love Story

When my father passed, I wanted someone to keep me company. My family lived far away, and I lived alone in a loft on the Lower East Side. I asked the woman I'd been dating if she would come over and stay the night, but she said no. I don't remember if she gave a reason, but, if she did, she didn't sound sincere. So I sat at my homemade table in the large, empty space until it was time to go to bed. I missed the woman for sure, but I missed my father more.

--Thaddeus Rutkowski
Short piece started in the "Modern Love" workshop at the retreat.



Walking in Cold Darkness

Walk in cold darkness as the fire flies.
 Each white star a story yet to be told.
 Step on packed earth till the demon's fire dies.

Dilute your demons and protest their lies.
 Do not waste time, the sun too grows cold.
 Trod on damp earth as demon's fire cries.

Life's cool brisk wind weeps through
 tear-reddened eyes.
 Virulent cruel beasts, their crimson sails unfold.
 Walk in the dark as the demon's fire flies.

Relentless heat tightens the lie that ties.
 White stars lay quiet, beckon truths in gold.
 Trod on damp earth as the demon's fire cries.

To see in the dark with starry white eyes.
 Listening hidden while tall tales are told.
 Step on packed earth til the demon's fire dies.

Question the devils, are demons so wise?
 Then we starry eyed, with spirits unsold.
 Walk in cold darkness as the fire flies.
 Trod on damp earth as demon's fire dies.

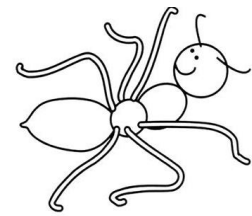
--Jason Frome

The Old Desk in the Attic

That old desk, the one with the stains, scratches, and carvings, sits proudly in the attic corner. Built strong and straight, she hasn't lost her vigor. Many generations of school children sat - bored, anxious, inspired, in love, angry - secretly writing notes and making marks on her surface.

She loved every one of them. She knew their hearts as they graduated to the next level, and felt their weight as they moved closer to adulthood at her helm.

-- Sharon Suess
Workshop prompt: Write from a different point of view.



Don't You be Worrying

The Indian manager at my Brew-n-Burger job didn't like that I wouldn't wear the mandatory white kerchief and chiffon scarf with my red waitress uniform. I was the only woman working the weekday lunchtime shift. Occasionally, they brought in a Chinese waitress, a floater, to help the crew of waiters and me. She was having an affair with a manager and sang along when the jukebox played "Copacabana," holding the plates high above her head, she sashayed and danced down the restaurant's main aisle. "Her name was Lola; she was a showgirl."

During the staff meeting the big supervisor, Mr. Menu, pointed at me. "If this one isn't wearing her kerchief or scarf tomorrow, don't give her the paycheck."

I was really annoyed and scared. All night long and the next morning it ruined my high, obsessing that I might not get my money. I hated that white nylon chiffon scarf with a passion; we were supposed to tie it to the side of our necks in a bow like it was the 1950's. I think I threw them both away.

The following day, on my way to work, in front of the bank across the street from Brew-n-Burger was a raggedy older woman, a filthy witch in torn, dark clothes. A bag lady, a bum.

She pointed at me. "You! Don't you be worrying about what you're going to be getting."

"Another New York City crazy," I thought.

I ignored her, hurrying along, so she spoke louder, "Hey you! Don't you be worrying about what you're going to be getting."

"Yeah, yeah, okay, whatever you say, lady," I mumbled.

As soon as I walked through Brew-n-Burger's revolving doors, the boss handed my paycheck envelope to me.

--Yarrow Regan



Tsuga

They were born in the shadows of the elders. Ever-patient, the saplings waited, for even the elders had a maker to meet. Time and disease are not kind to trees, and so the elders fell, one by one, their bones providing nourishment, their absence allowing the sun to fall on the narrow, dark-green needles of the saplings.

The hemlocks' time had come. Those trees are now the eldest in a patchwork landscape. Aspens spring up to colonize forgotten farm fields. Maples grow thick while beech die and send up root sprouts in a never-ending cycle of futility. Ash buckle under the weight of a beetle invasion. Scotch and red pine deny each other sunlight in once-neat rows planted by the Civilian Conservation Corps. And the oldest white pines, ecological brethren to the hemlock, tower above the rest at heights their offspring won't live to achieve.

But the hemlocks - those that survived the age of the tanneries - continue as they always have, sheltering and shading the steepest slopes, rock outcroppings, streambanks, and narrow hollows. Beneath the dense canopy, the never-plowed ground rises and falls in mounds and troughs: the only remaining evidence of the long-gone elders.

It is cooler in the hemlock grove, darker, quieter: a cathedral. These groves are the pockets into which Nature slips her most precious things: brook trout in cool streams, flitting warbler wings, delicate flowers shying from the sun. The hemlocks remember a time when elk and wolves and cougars moved among them. They've stood as moccasined feet gave way to heavy boots, as favored darlings like oak and maple grew old and craggy and decrepit in the swirl and rush of generations.

But the forest cathedrals now face desecration. The tiny woolly adelgid has come for the hemlocks, and only the hemlocks. Woolly - it seems too innocuous a word for an insect that may well be the downfall of a species. Yet the onslaught proceeds, ignoring the hemlocks' place here: the ravines, the headwaters, a witness to our history. Perhaps some will remain to stand sentinel when we are gone.

--Kristin Janke Schneider

Modern Love

Jeanne decided to quit her job to stay home with her 6 year old son Walt. She sat him down to tell him about the upcoming change.

Walt squinted wondering about his beloved nanny, Yvette. "But what about 'Vetty?'"

Jeanne answered, "Walt, you're not a baby anymore. So Yvette will be going to another family to help take care of their baby. Like she took care of you. She won't be far away so you can see her anytime."

"When is this going to happen?" Walt started to sniff.

"In three weeks," she replied.

Walt's eyes started to redden and fill. 'Here we go' Jeanne said to herself.

Then Walt looked up at his mother and asked, "But why do I have to wait that long?"

--Richard Vogt

Spring

And trees will bloom in Spring for us and then the winter freeze lets go its fingers frost. The stones they laid will shift, grow moss again,

and sky gets dark at 8 or 9 or 10. The hope we had grows loud with fingers crossed, and trees will bloom in Spring for us. And then

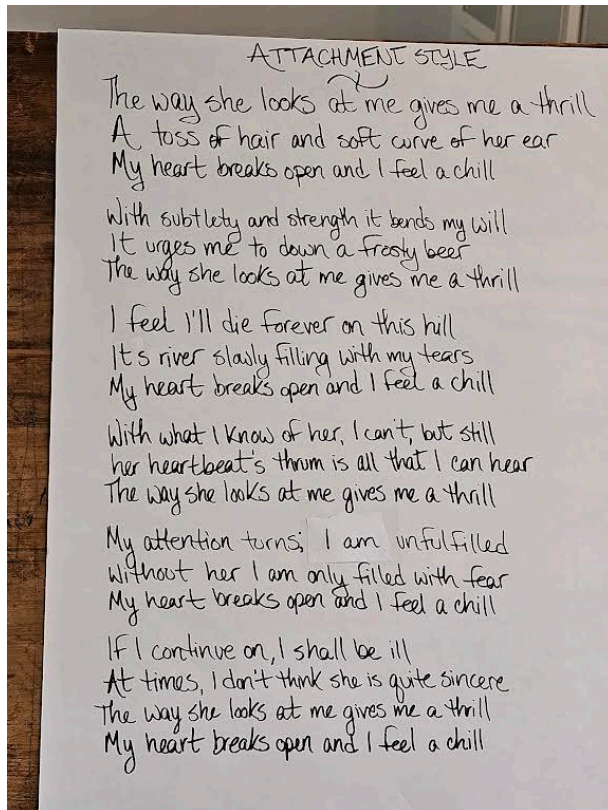
the stream will flow and curve and wind, but when? Our pulsing hearts fulfilled with beauty glossed, the stones they laid will shift, grow moss again

The grace it is much too much to comprehend. A fresh new light that years cannot exhaust And trees will bloom in Spring for us and then

twin fawns hide deep within the field and glen. Farewell to winter my old friend now lost the stones they laid will shift, grow moss again.

Verdant sprouts veil gray mouse and singing wren savor the day, it waxes at no cost. And trees will bloom in Spring for us and then the stones they laid will shift, grow moss again.

--Group Villanelle transcribed by Amy Schneiderbeck



Other group's Villanelle transcribed by Angela Somma

City Folk on Dark, Winding Roads

Coming north to Writer's in the Mountains, the awful traffic on the Henry Hudson Parkway was expected. We had experienced it often in our decades of driving in New York.

However, once we were off the main highway, the towns became sparser and further apart. We were familiar with the drive to Woodstock, but as we drove further, the roads became darker and more winding. Just trees on either side of us in the dark, and very few other cars. There were signs warning to be careful of deer, but we didn't see any other living creatures.

Using my cell phone map app to navigate, the cell phone coverage became spottier and spottier until it was non-existent. I attempted to contact our host to let him know we would be late, but the calls and texts did not go through.

Finally we hit the Hamlet of Andes. After driving back and forth on the main road a few times, we realized we could make out the addresses by looking at the mailboxes. This hadn't occurred to us.

--Randi Hoffman

Attention, Please

Eyes open with a start, look around, try to focus. It's early, the quiet almost eerie, the dark a blanket that covers everything. Not even a sliver of moonlight visible through the blinds. Warm in my bed, I savor the silence, stay still. Prolong the peace, remain in this space. Wakefulness creeps in, an unwanted visitor who changes the mood.

Reach for my phone, check the news. Back to reality with a smack: War, More War, Invasion, Humanitarian Crisis, Intensified Strikes, Kill and be Killed, Double Standards, Demonstrations Pro this, Anti that. Intractable. Chaos in Congress. Have a good day. Skip the local news. And the weather. Close my eyes, catch my breath, burrow into the cocoon that is my bed, no longer as comforting. Migrants, refugees, the homeless, guilt for my comfort. Get up and get going. The weight of world's suffering consumes me, steals my strength, slows me down. Like the dream where you can't move fast enough or move at all to save the day. Or yourself.

Tune out. Agitated and aimless. Grab a sweatshirt, flashlight, and head outdoors in this still dark morning. The air snaps me to attention; cool yet mild, inviting. Birdsong an unexpected delight. Step a little lighter, move a little faster.

Approach the wooded area that invites me in, offers respite in every season. Daylight dawns muted; dreary, gray. The earthen path now a soft carpet of fallen leaves; red, orange, brown, and a bit of yellow. Soft, damp, only a little crunch underfoot. Sunlight breaks through the haze and clouds. Yellows and oranges brighten, almost turn to gold. Nature bragging about the beauty of the season, interrupted only by the graffiti now visible through the half-naked trees. Mostly nonsense letters, odd drawings and then a large and clear "SOS."

In the distance, a dark, witchlike figure stands erect, arms raised toward the sky. She draws me closer. Not a witch, a large tree trunk as tall as a person; violently sheared off save the three jutting pieces of bark that from a distance pose as a hood and two outstretched arms. Terribly wounded and still standing. Ahead, the remains of that once tall oak tree are on the ground, branches splayed, reaching, immobile. The deceptive sunlight vanishes, then reappears, turning up the volume. Teasing me with color and light. Loud cawing, cackling, rattling overhead -- an urgent call, a warning. A cacophony of countless crows demanding attention. Their shadows dance on the forest floor. And then they're gone, their message a mystery, their destination secret. A ginkgo tree holds all her shimmering yellow leaves, oblivious to the calendar and the season. Just ahead is a tree with only bare branches.

Feeling more centered, more in balance though nothing has really changed. Except that I may have gained some perspective and reclaimed some space.

--Rosemarie Konrath

written two weeks prior to the retreat for Jane Seidel's class

