

SPARE MULE



Missouri State Poetry Society
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From the President

Season's Greetings to all Missouri Poets!

As we end one year and enter another, I am reminded that one of poetry's joys is that it stops time by encouraging us to "savor the moment"--a good poem casts both light and shadow and invites readers into the small space that it creates. As your MSPS president, I invite you to join our online community on the **Missouri State Poetry Society Facebook Page (@mostatepoetry)** and to participate in all of the contests, challenges, and events that MSPS has to offer.

Today, with the falling snow outside my window, I challenged myself with writing a pantoum. With its dream-like repetitions of lines and rhyme, the pantoum form is a perfect way to slow time and unwrap memories. A cousin to

the villanelle, the pantoum uses any number of four-line stanzas (quatrains) with an *abab* rhyme scheme. In this form, the second and fourth lines of each quatrain become the first and third lines of the next; the last line of a poem is the same as the first, and the unrepeated third line in the first stanza appears again as the second line of the last stanza. Thus, the pattern of a four-stanza pantoum with interwoven quatrains is as follows, with *1234* representing the first four lines of the poem: *1234 2546 5768 7381*.

In each issue of *Spare Mule*, I plan to offer you a writing challenge. This time, I invite you to read my pantoum below and challenge you to write your own for inclusion in the next edition of *Spare Mule*. Please send your pantoums to sparemulenewsletter@gmail.com, and may your new year be filled with poetry!

Blessings,

Carla Kirchner
MSPS President

Chapter Reports

ON THE EDGE

On the Edge is still hanging in there. We meet once a month at Barnhart if anyone is interested and wants to join us, our next meeting is January 12, 2018. Come on down to the library between 10-12. Bring something to share. Bring cookies if you have them.

The December's meeting was at Bob Evans. I wasn't able to attend. I believe those that did had a pleasant repast and a little merriment. Hope everyone had a amiable holiday. But now that the new year is here, it is time to write and get those entries into the Winter Contest. Fill the inboxes of the judges with volumes of poems. Set a record for entries.

SECOND TUESDAY

The Second Tuesday chapter has been suffering in attendance for the past few months. With Mark Tappmeyer retiring from SBU and moving out of state, we have been floundering without direction or a dependable place to meet. We now have a meeting place suitable for us. We are in the conference room in the back of the University library. We invite all past and lapst members to give us another try.

Meeting time is the same, the second Tuesday of every month. Usually we meet at 7:00 p.m. [For January only we will start at 6:00 p.m., due to early closing of the library during Jan Term.]

As for the people in the **On the Edge** group, well, they are busy being busy. Some writing, some welding, some just enjoying the pleasures of life. We are all doing our thing, whatever that is.

Oh, by the way, in Webster Groves there is a new (old) open mic at the Webster Garden Café on Lockwood. Thursday night from 7-9. Grab a bit to eat, sip a little coffee, maybe read, listen to the music. Come on down and join the fun.

--Terrie Jacks

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Author Unknown continues to progress and send poems out for rejection/acceptance.

Aaron Belz dropped by our Friday group in September and shared deep insights. A few weeks later, he blessed us with blister fried peanuts. WHAT?!?

Author Unknown continues to meet Fridays at 10:00 a.m. in room 230 of the Jester building (same building as the Library). Perhaps this semester the missing donuts will be replaced by a Girl Scout type rotation for goodies.

--Todd Sukany

A REMINDER: Dues for 2018 are due.

To be included in the NFSPS membership roster, they need to be in soon. State dues are \$7.00 for members of a local chapter, or \$14.00 if you wish to be a Member-At-Large.

--Bill Lower

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**Don't forget the WINTER CONTEST ([more](#))**

**Don't forget the YOUTH CONTEST ([more](#))**

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KUDOS

Hi Poets,

Am I allowed to mention I have a new book out?

It's title is Not Quite Leaping Puddles

My website has the information: www.barbara-blanks.com

Kudos:

Weekly column "A Tale Or Two" in the Buffalo Reflex newspaper

"An Army Brat" in the Rock Springs Review anthology-2017

"Too Good To Be True, Or Was It?" in Mysteries of the Ozarks Volume V anthology

"WWII Veterans Marched in Protest in 1946," in the Proud To Be: Writing by American Warriors, Vol. 5

"The Day I Ran Away" in the Oct.-Nov. 2017 issue of Mary Jane's Farm magazine

Interview about my Highway 65 book on Ozarks Watch Video Magazine, on KOZK

--Marilyn Smith

Kudos,

* Poetry Day in Arkansas, an Honorable Mention in poetry, October

* Mid South Poetry Day, Memphis, 2nd in poetry, and an honorable mention in poetry

*Ozark Writers' League, 3rd in Haiku, Branson, November 18

I have made three readings from my late summer book "FEMALE VOICES FROM THE BIBLE" and will make two more in January. The book is listed at Amazon and Barnes and Noble online.

--John Crawford

Ekphrastic Challenge



The October 2017 issue of [Spare Mule](#) posted an article from NFSPS President Jim Barton. The Author Unknown group presented a reading at the State Convention in September on the same topic. The group also offered a challenge to the attendees to create an ekphrastic from a painting (to be selected later). Please enjoy these ekphrastic poems from our members.

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## **A Dismal Conference**

(Ekphrastic poem)

The room feels murky  
like a foggy November evening.  
A middle-aged couple sits across the table,  
having a conversation that goes nowhere.  
The woman leans forward, about to drink coffee  
and resume her tirade.  
Half hidden behind the table,  
the man puts his right hand on his gray head.  
He looks in agony.  
She accuses him of some moral lapse.  
She faults him for being incompetent.  
She scolds him for being insensitive.  
He tried to explain himself in vain.  
His mind now wanders off to the green pastures  
of his childhood, the days of pure happiness  
which will never return until he rests underground.  
Meanwhile, her diatribe rings like hums  
of wasps and hornets in Dante's Inferno.

--John J. Han, On the Edge

## **Home Improvement**

You, my husband  
deep in study  
making ends meet.

I read leaves  
at the bottom  
of bone china.

## **HOME SWEET HOMEOPATHY**

Allopathy has failed you--  
try my blended, tailored stew.

Kneaded and aged in the two-rimmed,  
unfired, beet infused bowl.  
Freshened with the dried herbs  
held on the west windowsill,  
waiting for my mother's  
earthen mortar and pestle.

It smells so bad,  
that it must be just right.  
An overnight poultice  
spread and packed on the  
right frontal lobe,  
covering your pain,  
will make you right again.

--Bill Lower

## **Dust Bowl Song**

At the heart of the snowflake: a fleck of dust.

At dust's dry heart: volcanic eruptions, soil, ox hair,  
star stuff, pieces of me and you.

At the heart pine table: the empty bowl in my chest, both of us  
weathered to dust.

--Carla Kirchner

Many good things  
come in threes:  
reds, bowls, cups--

the rim of-the-present  
the close-to-our sides  
and the depths

in our future.  
Will tea leaves  
herald the hope

hidden from you  
a rising sun  
growing in me?

--Todd Sukany

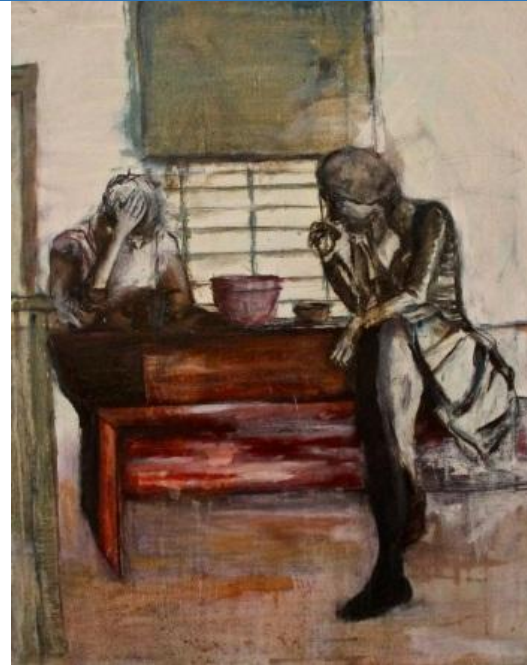
## **"Japanese Couple"**

Oil, acrylic, and charcoal on canvas.

30" x 24"

--L. K. Sukany 2011

(Click on the picture for a larger image)



**Poems from Members**





### **a spirit in the woods**

a mamma spirit  
with babies tucked under her arms  
hiding along a path  
keeps them safe from harm  
hides in plain sight  
for everyone to see  
but very few notice  
sometimes not even me.

--Terrie Jacks

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### **Growing Up**

*One stops being a child when one realizes  
that telling one's trouble does not make it better.*  
— Cesare Pavese, 1937

At confession, I got what I expected, no more  
than to repeat by rote some phrases  
trivialized by being dredged up from ancient lore  
laced with intermittent praises

addressed to a father I wasn't akin to  
and who, so far as I could tell,  
needed only adoration before he would begin to  
shield me from the gates of Hell.

Hell, at that age what did I know about sin?  
— and couldn't have committed one  
had it given me a written invitation  
asking me to join in on all the fun.

Not that I didn't have troubles  
like any other kid, and I would share  
them with my friends hoping that, like bubbles,  
they would simply burst in air

which they would have done in any case.  
The fish that doesn't get caught by keeping  
its mouth shut, starves. So I would erase  
my problems, not by sleeping

on them but by telling them. Troubles arise  
when making choices — the list's not long:  
the right one and the selfish one are no surprise  
because who would knowingly choose the wrong?

I've since learned to keep my problems close to me,  
whether they be sins or upsets or things that I regret  
because telling about them only makes reality  
of those things that otherwise I might easily forget.

## LUNA MOTH

Broad-winged, long-tailed  
light-green moth,  
her dark outlined spots--  
her cloak and camouflage.

Now listen for her voice--  
silence liltng in her  
chambers dim.

Look now, and see  
the pale moon rise--  
light shed on her leafy bed.

-- Carol Louise Moon  
Crawford Co. Bombadils

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## LIFE'S NO BED OF ROSES

Any day may present  
chores and tasks to resent.  
A few embrace the vat.  
For sure, we all know that  
life's no bed of roses.  
Life's no bed of roses

--Lawrence W. Thomas

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## ELECTRONIC SQUIGGLES

Where do they go?  
Do they disappear, vaporize,  
disintegrate, become no more?  
Were they ever really there?  
Or did they just seem to be?  
Were they mirage, imagination,  
a projection of the mind or the cathode?  
An LCD fantasy, a wisp of plasma?  
An arrangement of dark upon white  
that truly *went dark*?  
All those little obedient electrons,  
making my electronic mail.  
They surely seemed to be there,  
but from where and to where?  
Pop! They are there!  
Delete. No there, no more.

--*Bill Lower*  
1-12-15

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## Time for a New Calendar

When I take down the Christmas tree,  
I'm always in a somber mood.  
Big storage boxes wait to hold  
bright decorations I so love.

I'm always in a somber mood

and would we, if it were  
after hard thought, concur  
that only a fool mourns.  
In truth, we'd miss the thorns.

### **FROM SHAKESPEARE AND DONNE TO**

Millay, Frost or O. Wilde  
(though survived yet reviled)--  
mouths now clogged with dumb song.  
With time that list's grown long,  
of our dead poets throng.  
Of our dead poets throng,  
how many might deplore  
these slick times and abhor,  
despise (along with me)  
this rum non-rhyming spree?

--Jean Marie Purcell

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### **THE GLANCE**

You almost touched my shoulder  
I almost brushed your sleeve  
me going down the stairs  
you going up

We paused at the landing,  
looked fully at each other,  
exchanged slight smiles,  
shared an unguarded glimpse  
of inner worlds.

How can we ever forget each other now,

when Christmas draws its last sweet breath,  
but soon my spirit soars with joy  
as January First draws near.

Big storage boxes wait to hold  
the candles, wreaths, and greeting cards,  
all fodder for my memories;  
the new year will bring many more.

Bright decorations I so love;  
they shine like blessings yet to come.  
Post-Christmas doldrums always fade  
when I embrace a brand-new year.

--Janice Canerdy

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### **It's Snowing**

But inside,  
in the kitchen's  
south window  
stands a bouquet  
of early jonquils,  
japonica's  
tight pink buds,  
and stems  
holding white  
flecks of spirea --  
all portents  
of springtime

we, who, for a moment, were so intimate?

---Dewell H. Byrd

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### **Short History of Bodily Anomalies**

King Achoo of Sneezedale sent his germ troops  
with so much force they practically flew.

Belch Knights of Burpingsburge ignored their simple orders  
and King Achoo's forces met theirs on the battle's edge.

Lord Allergy of Ildale usurped the nose throne  
conquering all of Sneezedale and Throat's Glen.

Sniffle serfs of Boogerburge began a quiet resistance  
to help Lord and Lady Sinus protect their mighty castle.

King Achoo of Sneezedale bowed to Lord Allergy's reign  
every innocent citizen suffered irritation as this new dictator blew  
them all away.

### **The Unexplained Bruises**

Abusers:

To a faultless digit, my door;  
To an innocent head, my bunk;  
To a virtuous knee, my desk;  
As I consider the pains in the world,  
They give no consideration of me.

### **Rain Dance for the Printer**

One must have faith for the ink drops to fall.  
Paper offerings are an act of faith.  
Connection to the power brings life and green light.  
The rain will surely come when preemptive thunder rolls.

waiting in the wings.

--Pat Laster

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### **At Work: Senryu**

leaving home hastily  
at work I find my socks  
mismatched

hole punch copier  
I learn the punch function  
near my retirement

high-fat chocolate  
someone gave it to my colleague,  
who gives it to me

three students in the hall  
each checking her  
smartphone

a bald head—  
the price for gaining  
wisdom

group photo session  
losing stomach fat  
via deep breathing

one more has retired  
the faculty list still shows  
she's not the oldest

donation receipt

Some soft pitters some more dramatic patters.  
It thunders again and begins to pour.

--Sarah Wruck

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### **I'm waiting for you**

She sends me words in a brown envelope,  
handwritten, smooth cursive strokes that lean  
*left to right*

They whisper to me from my nightstand  
begging to be read and reread  
insistent and tireless.

A song stuck in my head,  
splinter in my open palm.

I wait on the shore for your boat,  
Without your arms 'round me, I can scarcely breathe  
Come, come carry me away,  
else I will fade into the sand.  
A relic, an empty shell.

What answer would you have,  
if you could answer at all?

--t. wagner

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and an invitation  
to donate more

dining hall  
eaters look different,  
chew the same way

health checkup over  
time to gorge  
cheesy crust pizza

computer crash  
inbox free of e-mails  
I hated

squeaky clean lady  
shedding tears over  
her pigs

a small bunch of hair  
combing it carefully  
oh so carefully

--John J. Han, On the Edge

### **Learning from Animals**

When their time runs out,  
animals seclude themselves.  
Lions hide among the bushes,  
dogs seek the basement,  
cats lie under the porch.

And wait for their last moments.  
They do not struggle for life,  
do not presume they have the right to live forever.

Mark Twain admired animals for their moral superiority  
but forgot to mention that they model a dignified death, too.

## Frozen Is For Ice Cream

When winter blasts the leaves from sycamores,  
and hibernating bears are snug in dens;  
when birds are huddled—silent troubadours,  
and deer must paw for grass in snowy glens—  
I crave the swoosh of waves on beaches tucked  
in sheltered coves, the sight of swaying palms  
caressed by zephyrs, tasting lobster plucked  
from traps an hour before. I have no qualms  
about escaping—let me disappear  
to Maui's surf and sand. I grab the phone  
and make a reservation—mutineer  
against the snow. It's *not* my comfort zone.  
    I won't be stoic! Cover me in oil  
    and bake me toasty ... set the heat to broil.

--Barbara Blanks

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## Looking Back

When winter blasts throughout the forest floor,  
I sit to woo the mind, recall days done,  
Remember when I opened love's first door,  
Go back to heights where love was first begun.

I go back to the stone mass dipped in dew  
And pore upon the landscape all around.  
I cannot find the one whom I first knew.  
I sigh as I hold firmly to the ground.

Instead of love, I see men marching on,  
With flashing bayonets and firing guns,  
In time, senseless, with order all but gone,  
With cannon loud and fast escaping runs.

When my time comes, I shall speak silence.  
I will have spoken enough.

On his deathbed, Cather's archbishop dreams  
of his native green mountains in France.  
Likewise, on my deathbed, my soul shall return  
to my native paddies, where spring haze rises  
above a million wild flowers.

--John J. Han, On the Edge

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## LOST KEYS *\*Couplet poetry form*

A recent day began this way,  
I grabbed my stuff to rush away.

For I was late, a job you know,  
I take my lunch, had it in tow.

My extra shoes were in my bag.  
I had to rush, I could not lag,

My blue cell phone, yes it was there,  
Let's see, I guess, I combed my hair.

The book I read on my lunch break,  
must not forget, for goodness sake.

And so perhaps I have my vision blurred,  
For looking back is sign enough I erred.  
(English Sonnet)

-- John W. Crawford, Hot Springs, AR

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### **More from the Waiting Room**

*(for Jeremiah Christopher)*

What can be expected to happen between  
*The Bucket List*  
and *Ernest Saves Christmas*?

A text delivered from Recovery  
and then  
Kangaroo Care for an eternity?

Three cans of blood-orange drink  
cannot quench  
a desire to feel newborn.

--Todd Sukany

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### **Godchild**

I double checked, no lights left on,  
it's getting late, I must be gone.

My own left arm was bulging full,  
I grabbed my purse, gave it a pull,

then searched and searched, where were my keys,  
I looked up high, then on my knees.

With pockets of my purse now searched,  
upon my table, had they perched?

To my dismay, I found them in  
my own left hand, where they had been.

### **A WINTER STORM** \**Tartoum poetry form*

Put the electric blanket on  
a cold front is heading our way  
with snow in the forecast.

A cold front is heading our way,  
batten down the hatches,  
get out the shovel.

Batten down the hatches,  
bring in another armload of wood,  
stock up on groceries.

Bring in another armload of wood,  
pull your muffler a little tighter,  
grab your sweater.

Pull your muffler a little tighter,  
the north wind is blowing,

She was born a November child,  
and November trees stand tall  
with sunlight going to branches  
otherwise forgotten. That night  
the moon seemed bolder  
and winked at stars.

She was ready and would  
take no other answer.  
Birth is not an easy task with pain  
nearby waiting to be heard.

Time crystallized at that moment,  
the family had increased by a heart beat.

At home, she was passed around the room  
to hands eager to touch a future,  
her bed was a shoulder  
with wristwatch nearby ticking time.

Future sons have the family name,  
but girls move in gentle rhythm  
as the heart and soul of the family.

## **Exile**

it's cold for him to pray without ceasing  
in this chilled air and sheltered place,

poplars bend in a yellow wind  
and with bristled leaves, bruise the ground

a birch arrow goes and  
finds no target for his searching gaze

and I have made my own village

and don't forget your mittens.

The north wind is blowing,  
with snow in the forecast,  
get out the shovel,  
stock up on groceries,  
grab your sweater,  
and don't forget your mittens.

## **A CHRISTMAS GIFT**

Christmas was special at our house;  
our dad, he loved it so.  
He cut the tree, and brought it home,  
put lights all in a row.

On Christmas Eve, we fixed a plate,  
of cookies and much more,  
and cocoa in the thermos jug,  
with marshmallows galore.

We wanted to make sure he had,  
Ol' Santa, we do mean,  
a snack to keep him happy when  
he showed up on the scene.

It always tickled Sis and me,  
when crumbs were left behind,  
and in the thermos lid we saw,  
it brown and cocoa lined.

One Christmas when we came downstairs,  
to check beneath the tree,  
then "Oh my gosh," our daddy said,  
"look here, what could it be?"



safe from love...  
like an elegant crystal  
over a chasm  
swaying just beyond reach.

--Marie Asner  
Crawford County Bombadils

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## **PASTIMES**

Poetry's like  
quilting and chess,  
small pieces placed  
selectively,  
in solitude.

Some passersby  
will stop awhile,  
the curious,  
in the still rooms.  
We may know them

By their passions  
for worn remnants,  
courtly manners,  
old syllables,  
new similes.

In my quaint lines  
a tapestry  
is Penrose tiles,  
a bold checkmate  
anthologized.

For there in all the ashes laid,  
a present wrapped in red,  
all sooty and the paper torn,  
"For Shane," the gift card said.

"Do you suppose, while in his haste,  
Ol' Santa dropped this one?  
I'll bet it's meant for his next stop,  
oh dear, what has he done!"

"A kid I know, that's in my class,  
his name is Shane Verdew,  
he lives, I think, right down the street,  
a house or maybe two."

My sister said, "Oh can we please  
deliver this to him,  
just think how sad we girls would be  
if all our gifts were slim?"

"We'll open ours, then we'll walk down  
and take this gift to Shane,  
along with apples and an orange,  
and yes, a candy cane.

"We'll have to tell him what we think  
Ol' Santa did last night,  
while in his haste, he dropped this one,  
then vanished out of sight."

The look of pleasure on Shane's face,  
as paper flew each way,  
to find inside a mitt and ball,  
and thanks we heard him say.

I was a kid, how could I know,  
that this was Daddy's way,

--Hank Spottswood

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### **Geese Filled Sky**

Like leaves falling upward,  
startled geese jump disorderly  
into the air

So many V's, forming,  
changing in winds path  
across the intensely blue sky

They seem as ripples  
or waves, as though  
I were looking into water

--Thomas Wheeler  
Springfield Poets

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### **Christmas Dinner**

The cave swallows light and leaves and bats.  
Its rocky mouth is swallowed by the snow.  
Clouds devour the sky and fall in fat  
flakes that sift in silence to the earth below.

The cragged world is swallowed by the snow,  
whose silence eats the traffic and bird songs  
that sift in silence to the ground below.

of making sure Shane had a gift,  
on this one special day.

Dad was aware, Shane's folks were poor,  
and if we did not share,  
beneath Shane's tree, my daddy knew,  
it surely would be bare.

From that year on, we managed to,  
find presents here and there,  
for kids we knew had nothing, so...  
we were the ones to care.

And now that Sis and I have kids,  
gifts magically appear,  
for us to share with others ... 'cause ...  
Dad's mem'ry we hold dear.

--Marilyn Smith

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Night dines on day and grows quite cold and long.

Silence eats the carols and wren's song.  
We've carved the bird, etched one more year in stone.  
We've dined all day on hope, on right and wrong  
and placed them in a cage of flesh and bone.

We've carved another year into our stones.  
Clouds fall down to earth, all mute and fat.  
I've made a cage for hope of flesh and bone  
and swallowed light and caves and This and That.

--Carla Kirchner

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Reminders: Youth Contest, Winter contest, MSPS Dues, and Pantoum Challenge.

Until next month, keep writing!

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Todd Sukany--Acting Editor