

## English Haiku Contest 2021: Selections by Susan Antolin

### First Place

Midnight city    starry sky is fallen    on the ground  
—Honomi Morimoto, 1<sup>st</sup> year, Medicine

One of the things great haiku often do is to make the reader look at a familiar scene in a new way. A city at midnight is familiar to most of us, as is the starry sky. And yet, this haiku makes us see both in a slightly new way, with the lights of the city suddenly appearing as though they were stars fallen from the sky. Also, when the lights of a city are especially bright, the stars are obscured from view by the ambient light. The stars missing from the sky have perhaps fallen to the ground? A playful new way to look at the midnight city!

### Second Place

my mother's childcare diary    faded maple leaf bookmark  
—Kaya Miyata, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Clinical Psychology

The image of a mother saving her place in her childcare diary with a maple leaf bookmark is evocative. This mother pays attention to the outside world, and specifically to nature. Does the leaf perhaps convey more than written words could? The leaf might have been brightly colored when it was first brought inside, but now, after the passage of years, it is faded. The memories of that long ago time may also be faded, but the simple fact that the mother marked her page in the diary with a maple leaf tells us something about the mother in a slightly more nuanced way perhaps than the ink on the pages of the diary.

### Third Place

Autumn is over    Cat enters    In the kotatsu  
—Taishin Tanaka, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Economics

While the English is ever so slightly awkward in this haiku (the word “in” is not necessary in line 3), the overall image of the poem is wonderful. There are so many varied events that mark the changing of the seasons, and here, the cat seeking the warmth of the kotatsu is one that could be easily overlooked. This perceptive poet has drawn our attention to a small detail of everyday life that signals the start of winter. A delightful image!

## Honorable Mentions: Selections by Susan Antolin and Ian Willey

the leaves turning red, yellow leave my heart behind  
—Kana Hirata, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Clinical Psychology

In autumn the turning of the leaves to red and yellow reminds us that time is passing. The third line of this haiku is a surprise. Why does the speaker of the poem feel that his or her heart is left behind? Or, is “leave my heart behind” a command? Does the speaker prefer her heart to remain in summer? I like to read this one as a lament over time’s passing. The metaphorical summertime of love does not last long enough, and so the turning of the leaves makes us long to slow time down.

In the autumn rain The flowers have fallen Umbrella blooms  
—Midori Saito, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Engineering & Design

Although the autumn rain takes away the last of the summer flowers, the scene is not gloomy. Umbrellas (presumably colorful ones!) replace the blossoms, giving us a momentary feeling of brightness, as if the umbrellas are flowers. This haiku is another beautiful example of making an ordinary scene (umbrellas in autumn rain) feel extraordinary.

The tree leaves changing from green clothes to red  
—Ryusei Sasaki, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Economics

Trees do not wear clothes, of course, and yet this playful poem invites us to imagine that they do. In personifying the trees, we can also imagine the trees have some degree of agency in the passing of the seasons, as if they have decided to change out of their green clothes and into their red ones, thus transforming the world into autumn.

In the air, with the smell of sweet Osmanthus, that’s my hometown  
—Chen Qiuchi, 1<sup>st</sup> year Masters student, Economics

Haiku rely on sensory images to evoke an emotional response in the reader, and the sense of smell is one that is often overlooked. Here, the scent of a particular tree or shrub is linked in the poet’s mind to his or her hometown. It might be that the speaker of the poem hadn’t realized before how closely that scent is associated with their hometown, but upon arriving home after some time away, that scent greets the speaker and accentuates the feeling of being home again. A lovely and perceptive haiku!

winter sky very cold and dry like your heart  
—Ai Tada, 2<sup>nd</sup> year, Nursing

This haiku does a couple of things that haiku are not supposed to do: it has a rhyme, and it uses a metaphor (“like your heart”). And yet I find it works. The clarity of the writer’s voice and the power of her emotion resonates in my own heart after reading this haiku. So many haiku are written by older people occupied with older people’s concerns, and it is refreshing to experience the feelings of someone much younger. Young people who read this haiku will know exactly how the writer feels, and older readers will be taken back to a time when they too were experiencing the ups and downs of youthful love, and remember the pain that they felt, or caused others to feel. This haiku shows that pinning down what exactly makes a good haiku is hard to do; what matters most may be the author’s voice, and the power of her words.

We would like to thank everyone who submitted their English haiku to this contest! Writing haiku in one’s own language is a challenge, and doing so in a foreign language is doubly so. It was a great pleasure to read every haiku submitted, and please be assured that choosing the “best” ones was no easy task. We encourage you all to keep looking for haiku in your daily lives and hope to see more of your work next year!