

shiny pens and a stapler—
no one tells
the new hire
his desk is where
the suicide sat

luggage stowed overhead—
sitting by the airplane window
I have no thoughts
about travel
as metaphor

a book on Hiroshima—
in the group picture
of survivors
the one man
with closed eyes

neighbourhood wi-fi
down again—
the trains that pass
no longer end
with a red caboose

These poems previously appeared in the following books and journals: *Brevities*, *Fire Pearls* (Perryville, Maryland: M. Kei Publisher, 2006), *Footsteps in the Fog* (Foster City, California: Press Here, 1993), *Fresh Hot Bread*, *Gusts* (Canada), *Hummingbird*, *Mariposa*, *Pontoon*, *Presence* (England), *Red Lights*, *Ribbons*, *Tanka Splendor* ("the way you look at me" won a 2001 Tanka Spendor Award), and *The Tanka Anthology* (Winchester, Virginia: Red Moon Press, 2003). My grateful thanks to the editors of each of these publications for the all-too-solitary task of selecting my tanka and letting them out into the world.

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Solitary

Michael Dylan Welch

a bird on a nest
in a tree in fog
seen through the prison window—
the tour guide asks us to step
into solitary confinement

missing-child poster
stapled to a telephone pole—
still on
at 3:00 a.m.
my neighbour's porchlight

the way you look at me
while I rub your arms—
you are the painting
I have never painted
a thousand times

one by one
the ants take my dreams
with the crumbs
they carry
from the picnic you forgot

like a songbird released
from the bounds of a cage
I dance in the light
released from old love
and yet . . . and yet . . .

I am awake tonight
not because of a bright moon
or lovesickness,
but mere insomnia—and you,
you would not care the reason

七福神 / Shichifukujin The Seven Lucky Gods

Daikokuten: The God of Wealth

the door to the 7-Eleven
opens and closes several times
while I ponder—
will this dollar bill I've found
buy me the winning lottery ticket?

Ebisu: Fisherman

fishing flies
work best, he tells me,
when tied in winter
through its long nights,
long and slow

Benzaiten: Arts

blossoms are starting—
today, someone has tied
a love poem
to my favourite tree,
that car-damaged plum

Bishamonten: Warriors

you raise your fist,
the entrance to hell;
lower it,
the entrance to heaven—
and pass me crushed sage

Jurojin: Long Life

the rice balls
this first morning
assured me a long life
—now, in the evening,
we fret already over taxes

Fukurokuju: Long Life Also

hands tucked in his sleeves
he asks for directions,
then promises
many birthdays—
the sun setting

Hotei: Happiness

trading morning grins again
me and the office guy
in the corner cubicle—
somehow he knows
the same secrets