

water on the moon



Helen Buckingham







**water on the moon**

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**original plus**

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**For Mum, Dad  
...and Alice**

With special thanks to Sam Smith and Alan Summers for the tremendous support they have shown me, not only in the making of this book but in the years leading up to its inception.

## Introduction:

There is so much haiku written that sometimes we can lose our own 'voice' as a reader. Helen Buckingham is one of those writers who allows us to regain it. Good haiku is a little like alchemy, not so much as to turn lead into gold, but to highlight how mundane everyday objects, accidents and incidents enrich our lives without us even realising it. Sometimes we just need a small kick to remind us, and a haiku poem seems ideally suited to do this, to show how those small moments are pure gold. The trick is not to think that lead needs to be turned into gold, it's the art of the deft touch, the fingernail to scrape off the slight oxidation, when we neglect the quiet moments in our busy lives for the big brash times that so quickly fade away.

Join Helen and her book as she carries off an overall tone and mood, albeit made of many voices. This isn't easy without setting off a cacophony, a clamour of alarms as if a great number of emergency vehicles were trapped in a traffic jam. There are subtle tonal changes in this book moving from the daily process of living with illness; the beautifully observed relationship with her parents; the appreciation of a child's wonder at a world still very new. The bittersweet humour contained in both haiku and senryu; the stars and sky at night; allusion and surreal images; and the seasons. How is all this possible?

third night grounded...  
tracing ursa minor  
in the woodchip

Mood is balanced with technique, getting the experience either directly or elliptically caught in amber:



amber light  
wrapped flowers  
on the verge

Accidents come in all shapes and sizes, and however painful,  
they need to be addressed.

nil by mouth--  
peeling and dicing  
the moon

On reading Helen's collection I absorb a sustained collective  
of poems, moving from bluntly honest poems about illness  
to the quirky side-steps in life, from the one liner:

blood room counting the odd tiles

...to the nod towards Alice in Wonderland...

taxi stand  
the man in the rabbit suit  
fumbles for his watch

Honesty is a potent instrument and we have plenty of that:  
a life is brought to the microscope, with humour never far  
away, never a stranger to pain. We all like to think we have  
a keen sense of humour, and a strong streak of honesty; and  
Helen's collection is like a litmus test to our own pH. What  
I appreciate within the collection is the musicality within the  
brevity of words and the starkness of imagery, with the gentle  
touches of technique: alliteration, dissonance, assonance  
and consonance, and always light and shade. Alongside the  
usual methods of juxtaposition; zooming in and out of things  
observed, poems are possible hinted at metaphors like the  
"man" in a rabbit suit fumbling for a pocket watch; do we

spend our life like that?

I've mentioned humour in haiku and humour in senryu, here we have two quite different takes:

after sex  
he googles  
himself

and the off-centre poignancy of:

flagging mistletoe  
a fine amontillado  
stain on the carpet

Haiku poems need to have a fulcrum to keep merely from becoming a deflated gag with a superficial punchline that never goes beyond a cheap laugh. The humour in Helen's haiku (and senryu) is definitely expensive, or rather, at the expense of the writer, never the reader or other intended target.

How is a series of concentrated poems that are haiku, sustained within a framework of craft, integrity, light and shade, given a content as deep as a longer poem? How to do that with the perhaps unbearable brevity that would cause pain for most poets, kept throughout, how is that light'n'tight magic that haiku is famous for, brought alive?

Well, if you can fight off the foxes...

foxes  
fight over  
the last of my dream

and join Helen early in the day...

breakfast shift  
...sharing the last  
of the stars

...perhaps you too will share the last of the stars.

**Alan Summers:** Director/Writer of With Words (promoters  
of the love of words)  
Embassy of Japan's roving Japan-UK 150 haiku & renga  
haiku poet-in-residence

Each of these poems has appeared in one or more of the following places:

#### Journals:

3Lights Gallery (Eng); Acorn (US); Ambrosia (US); Asahi Haikuist Network (Japan); Bear Creek Haiku (US); Birmingham Words (UK); Blithe Spirit (UK); Bottle Rockets (US); Chrysanthemum (Austria); Concise Delight (US); Famous Reporter (Tasmania); FreeXpresSion (Australia); Frogpond (US); Notes from the Gean (Scot); Haiku Canada Newsletter (Can); Haiku Ireland Newsletter (Ire); Haiku Page (International); Haiku Scotland (Scot); Ink, Sweat & Tears (Eng); Kohinoor (India); Kokako (NZ); Lynx (US); The Mainichi Daily News (Japan); Mayfly (US); Modern Haiku (US) Moonset (US); Nomad (Scot); Obsessed with Pipework (Eng); Paper Wasp (Australia); Pen Himalaya (India); Poetry Monthly (Eng); Presence (Eng); Prune Juice (US); Pulsar (UK); Riverbed (US); Roadrunner (US); Shamrock (Ire); Simply Haiku (US); Snapshots (Eng); Stylus (Australia); The Brogdignagian Times (Ire); The Heron's Nest (US); The Journal (Eng); The Pedestal Magazine (US); Various Artists (Eng); Vigil (Eng); Wisteria (US); World Haiku Review (US)

#### Anthologies:

On Hundred Droplets: Series 1, Spring/Summer (Magnapoets:US, 2009); While the Light Holds: Series 2, Autumn/Winter (Magnapoets:US, 2009); A New Resonance 5: Emerging Voices in English-Language Haiku (Red Moon Press: US, 2007); dust of summers: the Red Moon Anthology of English-Language Haiku (US, 2007); Taboo Haiku: An International Selection (Avisson Press: US, 2005); Food Memory Marriage Alienation and Loss (Othername Press Poets vol 2: Scot, 2005)

## Solo Online Exhibition:

3Lights Gallery: “Waking Again With the Dog” (Eng, Winter-Spring 2009)

## Awards:

“lunch in the courtyard” (Runner-up) 57th Basho Festival Association Award, Japan, 2003; “remembrance” (Runner-Up) BHS James W. Hackett, Eng: 2005; “beating the rain” (Runner-up) James W. Hackett 2008; “rainbow’s end” (2nd Place) Dreaming Australia, 2009; “ocean breeze” (Runner-up) Dreaming Australia, 2009; “old bridge” (2nd Place) Genkissu! Spirits Up!, Japan, 2008; “garden swing” (3rd Place) Genkissu! 2009; “back outside” (Runner-up) Haiku International Award, Japan 2003; “journey’s end” (Runner-up) Iga Town Basho Memorial, Japan, 2003; “spring planting” (Runner-up) Iga Town 2007; “falling blossom” Ito En Oh-I-Ocha (2nd Place) Japan, 2009; “anniversary” (Finalist) Jack Stamm Paper Wasp, Australia, 2004; “en route to the solstice” (Finalist) Jack Stamm, 2005; “throbbing basement” (Finalist) Jack Stamm, 2006; “harvest moon sweeping” (3rd Place) Kusamakura, Japan, 2008; “Mother’s Day morning” (2nd Place) Mainichi, Japan, 2006, “ferry home” (Runner-up) Mainichi, 2008; “steam-filled market” (Finalist) National League of American Pen Women, 2005; “breakfast shift” (Runner-Up) Snapshot Press Calendar, Eng, 2004; “Lent lunch” (Runner-up) Snapshot Press Calendar, 2005; “steam-filled market” (Runner-up) Snapshot Press Calendar, 2005; “All Souls’ (1st Place) Snapshots Calendar, 2007; “Leonids night (Runner-Up) Snapshots Calendar, 2008; “China-bound” (Runner-up) ‘still’ Spring Haiku, Eng, 1999



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waiting for the kettledrum

spring morning--  
expected  
to be up

breakfast shift  
...sharing the last  
of the stars

day moon  
the child adjusts  
her tiara

early bus--  
catching my reflection  
in the police van window

old school  
the coldness  
of the triangle

starless night  
tucked in  
under a cloud

paranoid morning  
next door's leylandii  
that bit closer

third night grounded...  
tracing ursa minor  
in the woodchip

wildlife on the radio...a wasp slips under the wire

spring dig--  
a worm recoils  
from itself

weeding the borders...  
I strain to remember  
my new neighbour's name

birthday girl--  
rubbing Dad's feet  
with Mum's hands

early spring  
the butcher  
wears a daffodil

St. David's Day--  
the daffodil man  
makes light of the rain

Mother's Day morning...  
blossom fresh from the garden  
mirrored in her spoon



spring equinox  
a father and his daughter  
digging against the clock

day moon--  
nursing  
a stolen cutting

spring planting  
the smell of the earth  
in our hands

deserted car park  
a woman with a pushchair  
chases a pigeon

spring afternoon  
pigeons jostle for position  
on the college roof

full moon the quadrangle empty

first night  
the life model  
still in her robe

tea-break  
the life model  
requests a plate

long night--  
the life model

drops another stitch

dandelion clock...  
remembering how not  
to tell the time

shadow on the lawn...  
the bridesmaid shows off  
her daisy bracelet

wedding ring  
once removed  
a dead white rib

Eastertide...  
passing fields  
of numbered lambs

Shrove Tuesday...  
shopping for lemons  
in the snow

Lent lunch  
...toying  
with the monkfish

day one of the fast--  
the image of Ganesha  
stuck to my fridge

fast night  
sucking the blood  
from my thumb

Good Friday--  
wind-torn  
daffodls

Easter morning:  
brushing the snow  
from his bonnet

rush hour by the cycle lane a slowworm

family lunch:  
tucking into  
the marrow



Easter sky--  
plane trails  
cross

after hail  
the stealth  
of the rain

child sits transfixed...  
waiting for the kettledrum  
to boil

blossom on the sill--  
she paints her nails  
black

lunch in the courtyard--  
cherry blossom obscuring  
the hands of the clock

falling blossom  
parents hover  
by the school gates

cottage hospital  
another window  
broken

last summer  
dried  
in vases

new father  
nurses  
a coffee

hospital bench...  
patterning a smile  
out of cherry petals

elderly jogger pauses  
to brush off  
the blossom

night's end a muffled chirrup

start of the season:  
the myna bird rehearses  
its builder's whistle

me, him and the waterwheel

summer vacation--  
paintwork  
dripping paint

first flame  
in my dream  
still blonde

summer of love  
stroking the curves  
of our black and white car

restless summer solstice  
B movie  
moths

en route to the solstice  
the sun  
on our windscreen

summer rain...  
sheltering in the shadow  
of a living statue



midsummer  
...finally  
the point of the tent

summer  
by the flower stall...  
free perfume samples

strawberry moon we lick the bowl clean

Family Reunion...  
foxgloves stirring  
in the afternoon breeze

kissing gate:  
arguing over  
the mechanics

pub garden:  
me, him  
and the waterwheel

pub garden--  
the old dog sighs  
into his ashtray of water

Royal Park  
a tourist hugs  
the hollow tree

designer garden...  
even the butterflies  
are white

return vacation--  
treading on another child's  
daisy chain

bay view  
the clown's  
neon smile

man on stilts  
taller  
than the pier

child smiles  
wider than the  
donkey

kids on the beach--  
not waving  
but phoning

listening to shells...  
the younger child  
takes a call

cliff-top guest house...  
an assortment of rocks  
on the sill

ocean breeze...  
abalone shells tremble  
beneath the bedroom nets

after sex  
he googles  
himself

waking to a stain  
on an organza bedspread  
nothing to speak of

southbound on a contrail the codeine kicks in

rainbow's end--  
the crabbing child  
empties her pot

old bridge--  
a father and son  
fish as one

Punch & Judy--  
his grip  
tightens

blue skies  
the kitten probes a paw  
into the buddleia



anniversary  
of Apollo 11--  
losing the remote

birdshit  
on my window  
welcoming summer rain

flash flood  
the tough core  
of the pineapple

tv monsoon...  
we cling  
to our cushions

village weathervane--  
watching them count  
the cost

beating the rain...  
Dad lingers  
to smell the pinks

warm night...  
fanning myself  
with a reminder

city drought...  
kids retrieving pennies  
from the fountain

charity shop  
exchanging nods  
with my ex-

results morning:  
the mulberry tree  
a deeper green

garden swing--  
with every swing  
a fresh patch of sky

VJ Day--  
an old man with a balloon  
tied to his chair

throbbing basement sunflowers nod

sunny day...  
losing all sense  
of my stone pillow

siesta  
the sun  
sketches me a moon

dozing  
by the radio...  
another Hottest Day

rainbow's end an empty negative

full moon...  
the last  
of the codeine

Norfolk holiday...  
re-reading Wyndham  
amid the hollyhocks

summer  
a cartwheel  
I could never do

journey's end  
a sudden gust  
lavender fields

slow news day--  
the French wasp  
invades

early evening  
the cobbles already  
less than even

hungover bath  
...locating  
that wasp



distorted rose  
his camera held  
too close

into his camera  
another sunset

summer's end--  
returning home  
to shadows

ferry home  
the painted bucket  
loses its glow

summer's end...  
jazz on board  
the ferry

returning home...  
towering sunflowers  
hunched into their leaves

indian summer  
seeping through  
the change of drapes

at home reading  
Homes & Gardens  
--summer's end

late summer flowers...  
the joy  
of a good sneeze

indian summer  
another half-cup  
left in the flask

late sunflower a black hole

St. Martin's Summer  
the dead-head pruner  
returns to her easel

tracing the contours  
of my brain scan...  
recalling past mountains

water on the moon

autumn cancelled--  
blossom on the line

still life:  
the pear's  
pitted skin

dawn the light before I open my eyes

sunrise last of the cathedral honey

well morning  
stirring the window  
into my coffee

out of hours  
the doctor's  
fixed smile



over her shoulder  
a rambling rose--  
Test Positive

nil by mouth--  
peeling and dicing  
the moon

low tide  
the makings  
of a raft

left by the tide  
an empty crisp packet--  
low in salt

fossil  
older  
by the second

harvest moon...  
waltzing puddle  
to puddle

autumn stroll  
...dead leaves  
on the carousel

leaf fall  
the gardener's  
pursed lips

glitterball moon...  
the rain  
still dancing

train home--  
the sea  
a ringtone

every shade of crackle distant woodsmoke

full moon  
learning again  
how to knit

autumn  
uprooting  
an old friend

open season  
another tree  
down

moon still tranquil after all these years

autumn  
the yellow  
of the hard hat

a blood orange cloud the monks march on

harvest moon  
the tortoise's mouth  
painted red

harvest festival:  
bringing in  
the tinned potatoes

harvest moon sweeping up the last of the grain

Halloween  
milk teeth buried  
in a toffee apple

Waiting Room:  
head buried in a pile  
of perfect smiles

full moon falling on the herb rack

All Souls'  
a wasp returns  
to the lintel



low-flying cloud...  
the retired airman clips  
his topiary swan

old atlas  
her grandfather finds  
the flag he wants

Guy Fawkes Night  
beyond the furore  
a still grey moon

buried  
in the sports pages...  
yesterday's daddy-long-legs

downtown shoot--  
watching them mask the legend  
over the library door

museum dusk  
mannequin soldiers  
hold their ground

remembrance...

two seagulls arc together  
wheel apart

late-night radio...

dust rising  
from the convector heater

night spiders armed with red pens

tv lounge--  
turning to face  
the fish tank

graffiti  
sharper  
by moonlight

Leonids night...  
picking a pomegranate  
clean

night in pain--  
staring at a starless  
ceiling

surrounded by cobwebs I dream of trampolines

through driving rain  
the ghost  
of a sunrise

wild-eyed child  
figuring out  
the roadkill

museum lunch:  
exchanging blank stares  
in the stuffed animal section

window  
in the mirror  
...clouds

lodestar  
the pain returning  
its pull

storm brewing  
...words whipped sideways  
on the breeze

thunder outside  
inside  
missing him

morning  
after the storm:  
an upturned bin

China-bound  
her fingers trace  
the willow pattern

house clearance:  
an empty  
babushka



skirting  
the post box:  
autumn leaves

free paper flyer a dead leaf

autumn sunset  
half a glass  
is quite enough

water on the moon...  
we're ready  
with harpoons



snow on mars

first snow  
not having  
the words

stroke clinic the doctor's spirit level smile

first snow  
making an angel  
in my head

blood room counting the odd tiles

oxygen mask  
wax flowers  
on the sill

dusk again...  
the shutters  
remain shut

steam-filled market...  
mistletoe tethered  
to a meat-hook

barfly...  
the playing  
of the rain

long night  
another cornice  
comes to life

winter solstice  
steam rising  
from the gutter

Christmas  
City...  
a fairy-lit crane

on tiptoe  
once again  
winter moon



first Nativity  
swopping his grey uniform  
for a set of wings

angels in concert  
trailing spittle  
from their recorders

a light flurry...  
carol singers  
on fast forward

log fire  
the landlord's  
reindeer nose

Christmas lunch--  
passing round  
the festive chestnuts

Boxing Day  
a fork-lift truck  
laden with mist

New Year's fireworks--  
waking again  
with the dog

foxes  
fight over  
the last of my dream

ghee stain  
on the mattress--  
an indelible moon

starry night...  
his turn  
for the nit comb

chewing ice I watch him crossing continents

long night  
the duvet creeping  
his way

repeat alarm  
his : mine

sunrise  
the snowman's  
lopsided smile

skater's lake...  
a shooting star  
melts away

flagging mistletoe  
a fine amontillado  
stain on the carpet

taxi stand  
the man in a rabbit suit  
fumbles for his watch

New Year's Day  
the first-footer  
carries a plunger

New Date--  
ditching  
the dead mistletoe

New Year's Day--  
lifting the lid  
on another jigsaw

frost on our window...  
the rat-at-tat-tat  
of the jackhammer

dusting the fir trees  
quiet as the calendar  
January snow

moving day...  
bruises  
in the snow

snow-stacked window--  
he plunges himself  
into the ironing



cold morning  
his words still shaping  
the steam on the mirror

bathroom vacant  
bottles evenly spaced  
one proud toothbrush

the taps fall silent  
through our wall, his baritone  
lowering me in

solo viola  
sprinkling red wine  
on my fries

Twelfth Night  
used needles  
amid the slush

amber light  
wrapped flowers  
on the verge

old road  
the sky as full  
of potholes

scene of the accident  
everywhere  
arms folded

graffiti  
by the roadside--  
winter fuchsias

hunger moon  
the model returns  
to her circle of chalk

St. Agnes' Eve...  
woken amidships  
by Johnny Depp

Chinese New Year--  
daring to call my sister  
a monkey

dark night  
the astrologer  
counts her trines

snow on mars tonight earth's flaming arrow

small hours  
sudoku  
then the stars

clear night  
the space  
between us

through the gallery  
window  
a perfect tree

holding her face  
the finest  
walnut mirror

back outside  
the gallery...  
an endless sky







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<http://thesamsmith.webs.com/>

"Like the best wordsmiths, Helen Buckingham possesses what seems to be a wholly natural talent for translating the modern world and contemporary living, often in their minutest detail into exquisite poetry. It is a faculty that is, perhaps, more of an asset to a writer of haiku and its related forms than any other poet or artist - the finest haiku relies on its ability to appear as simple as steam rising from a cup of coffee. What's most striking about Helen Buckingham's poetry is its immediacy and proximity - each breath of poetry seems to exist within the moment of its making. Given this it's not surprising to find buses, police vans, pushchairs, pubs and ashtrays in Helen's haiku - features of modernity that are encased in fine examples of an ancient, though ever-evolving form of poetry." - **Liam Wilkinson**

"Helen Buckingham is one of those great haiku/senryu writers whose work invites us to revisit it again and again. I highly recommend *Water on the Moon*; it should be in every poet's library." - **Pamela A. Babusci**

"Much of Helen's work is tied to the seasons and their change in a classical way; her subject materials can be quite modern, individualistic. I have long been a fan and am rarely not interested in what she has to share. The haiku and senryu experiences in this collection run the gamut from soft and beautiful to humorous, some with an acerbic wit. At more than eighty pages, three per page, this is an ample serving of enjoyable poems by a strong, original writer." - **Paul MacNeil**

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