

SEVENTEEN
GRAINS
OF
SAND

one hundred one

american

Haiku

and other poems

by

Sol Markoff

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for the book
SM*

\$2.95

SEVENTEEN GRAINS OF SAND

by
Sol Markoff

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To Maxine

A bird's flight, a cloud,
A veined leaf, some grains of sand
All say what I am.

By the Author:

The Changing Years

Colorado Tale

Sweatshops Under Blue Skies

Editor-in-Chief:

The American Child

The City Almanac

Preface

It is a source of pleasure that one of America's *haiku* poets, Sol Markoff, is a fellow artist and a painting student of mine. Using American themes Markoff has integrated them into a poetic form which first flourished on a distant soil. In so doing, he has demonstrated that art is universal and knows no national boundaries.

Markoff's American *haiku* are beautiful poems and I commend them to the American public.

MINORU KAWABATA
Artist

New York, N. Y.
March 3, 1975

It is a matter of fact that one of America's leading poets
has written a history which is a history of the world.
The history of the world is a history of the world.
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Foreword

Gratitude must be expressed to the people of Japan for developing, and for giving the world *haiku*—that singular form of poetic expression which, for centuries, has sought to record the deepest relationship of humankind to Nature at a moment in time when that union was most keenly perceived.

All the poems in this volume follow the classical Japanese structural pattern of 17 syllables, in three lines of 5, 7, and 5 respectively. It should be noted, however, that while all the verses follow this form, some are simply 3 line poems, *haiku* in structure, but not necessarily in content. The author deems it desirable to state this at the very outset to avoid needless debate over nomenclature.

Haiku are verses which express with maximum compression a poet's immediate response to an event he is then seeing, hearing, or otherwise experiencing, in unembroidered language without reliance on the conventional tools of other poets. *Haiku* poems seldom employ rhyme, simile, metaphor, alliteration or assonance. They are not reflective; they do not beseech, declaim or philosophize; they engage in neither polemics nor prophecy; they shun generalizations and focus on the particular. What happened yesterday, what may happen tomorrow, are matters of little concern. In the words of Basho, one of the greatest Japanese poets: "Haiku is simply what is happening in this place, at this moment". The poet seeks to record that event without wasting words to explain it, and in so doing tries to employ what has been called "the principle of internal comparison"—finding an unexpected unity among disparate and even contradictory elements. Discerning readers will quickly discover for themselves which poems are *haiku* and which belong to some other category. In any event, classifications never made poetry.

Harold G. Henderson, one of the greatest authorities on *haiku* had emphasized that, "for Americans, complete adherence to Japanese standards is impossible", and that the "same basic objective of poets who write *haiku* in English is the same as that of the poets who write in Japanese. They wish to let the readers experience for themselves, the same living emotions that they themselves experienced. It cannot be done quite in the Japanese way; therefore it has to be done our way. . . what kind of poems. . . eventually turn out will depend primarily on the poets who write them.*

In publishing this collection, special thanks are due to Prof. Jacob Kaplan of Brooklyn Polytechnic Institute for his enthusiasm and encouragement; to Mr. Jack Meyer, a fellow *haiku* poet with whom the author has spent many pleasant hours discussing the history and nature of this poetic form; and to Ms. Gloria Bromberg, publisher of "Contemporary Poets" in whose pages some of these poems first appeared, and who was quick to recognize the possibilities of extending an ancient poetic form to current themes in urban settings.

Sol Markoff
New York, N.Y.
Nov. 1975

*"Haiku in English", by Harold G. Henderson, Japan Society

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Page 1

The first part of the paper is devoted to a discussion of the general principles of the theory of the structure of the atom. It is shown that the structure of the atom is determined by the laws of quantum mechanics, and that the structure of the atom is determined by the laws of quantum mechanics.

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Dawn

Dew on violets,
Wet lilacs and moist roses,
Did it rain pink wine?

Noon (I)

To silent music
White butter flies dance, then die . . .
Far off, snowstars fall.

Noon (II)

To silent music
Gold butterflies dance, then die . . .
And butter cups bloom!

Dusk

A lost gull cries, flies
Empty skies seeking its flock
In tea-touched twilight.

Night

This sky was hammered
To heaven with silver nails
By a Carpenter.

As Leaves Fall

Whispers in the wind:
Weaving, waving grasses sigh,
"Bye, see you next Spring".

Garden

Where we planted beets,
One red tulip is blooming,
Imposter, yes! Yet . . .

Courtship

A frozen pond thaws,
Feathered choirs sing old songs,
Two robins meet, mate.

Steel Tree

On this treeless Street
Atop a roof antenna
A bird builds a nest.

Perspectives

Surprised, the child saw
Fish fly through clouds, bluebirds swim
In the clear blue lake.

To its End

Rain — and at the curb
A river of rainbows flows
Into a sewer.

Oops!

Two gray sparrows perch
On sign, "PLEASE KEEP OFF THE GRASS",
They hop down, hop back.

A Summer Wind

It has flown away,
Golden leaf or butterfly,
... Whatever it was.

Summer Storm

Lightning tears the sky
And from a broken heaven
The rains fall on rain.

Renaissance

My broken pear tree,
Felled right here last winter,
Still blossoms this Spring

Feathered Song

The soft sighs of flutes,
Fluttering reeds and sweet strings,
Stored in one bird's beak?

Painful Flower

Powerful poppy!
Breaking through the stoned sidewalk
To bloom in the cracks.

Not for Touching

A rouged rose beckons,
How lovely its sweet fragrance,
Oh, those cruel thorns!

Where?

Looking in the lake
As a child threw some pebbles in,
My face ran away.

See and Sky

Waves leap over waves,
White clouds fall into the sea
To play in the surf.

Replacement

Clouds cover the sun,
Then a small boy holds aloft
His orange balloon.

Highway Songs — Old and New

The cars hum along:
A feather flies with the wind
Above a dead bird

Guide

Through the storm, a gull
Led restless waves to the beach,
Then soared back for more.

Remembered Song

(for Dr. Herbert Freudenberger)

Just naked boughs now,
But still, from one empty nest,
Songs echo . . . echo . . .

Double Feature

In the movie house
Lovers embrace each other
On the screen; and off.

Cloudburst

When the rain slanted,
He tilted their umbrella
To show her his love.

Homes

As I paint a tree,
Birds build nests on the canvas
With my wet brushes.

The Colors of Love

(to the artist Minoru Kawabata, my teacher)

In those magic eyes,
The whole world is a canvas
Ribbioned with rainbows.

Last September

Among graven stones
I walk and call my mother,
The stones call her, too.

Autumn Winds

At a windy blast,
A frightened flock of Fall leaves
Scurry to take flight.

Winter Sun

When it becomes cold
I keep warm, watching my child
Skip across a room.

A Shot?

The wind breaks a branch,
Frightened rabbits leave behind
Pink footprints in snow.

Cold Fire

How cold these evenings!
Yet, throughout the blackest night
The stars burn brightest.

Patience

(to Bruce Dorfman—Artist, Poet, Teacher)

Soft snow falls on snow.
A tree bows. Still . . . very still
The bare boughs bear blooms.

Shelter

What a wind! Even
A torn Barbey doll has hid
In a garbage can.

Quiet Melody

The snow falls gently.
How still is a whitened world,
Still . . . silence is song.

Winter Sport

A hole in the snow,
Its edges turning orange:
A boy is pissing.

In A Park

On a snowbent branch,
A hunched sparrow shivers, waits
For Spring . . . dreams of seed.

Street Scene

On Macdougall St.
One last ray of sunset hides
In an empty can.

Bird Seeds

On a fire escape
A sparrow pecks at peeled paint,
Still hungry, flies off.

Overnight Frost

A forest was painted
On this window. An artist
Whose paints were ice, lace?

To Be

Caged in solid stone
The lark awaits the sculptor
To chisel it free.

An East Village Tenement

Through an open door
And up the wooden stairs, crawls
A dying sunbeam.

Midnight at Art Gallery

Viewers long since gone,
Now only the framed faces
Stare. No one stares back.

Demolition at Women's Detention House

Among the scrapped junk,
Asleep in her unmade bed,
Lies an armless doll.

Fragments

In a dark basement,
A sled, toy planes rot with rust.
A child has grown . . . gone.

Demonstration at Washington Sq.

Children play gaily
As gay men and gay women
Parade and chant songs.

On a Bicycle

Up Sixth Avenue
A robed nun pedals to work
Counting her black beads.

A Gala Night

He danced with angels,
Swam with mermaids in the sea,
Then that rooster crowed.

At the Pier

A small, red tug boat
Pulls a stubborn ship to sea
Ignoring its screams.

West 13th St.

On this Village street
Even bright butterflies don
Faded denim wings.

Who?

In an open booth,
A phone dangles and whispers,
"Hello, hello there".

Together Again

Old friends meet once more,
A slowly, dripping faucet
And worn-out washer.

Shopping on 8th St.

In a glass window
A bird saw itself. Frightened
Both flew to join flock.

Re-Birth

Did that rainbow go?
It will come again, again,
Like yesteryear's dreams.

Death of a Doe

Its face was all eyes.
When the shot came, it fell,
A face with no eyes.

Unseen Handles

A gull glides through space
With a dancer's grace, then stops . . .
Its talons grip air.

Feminist

When that old rooster
Was too weak to crow, the hen
Awakened the sun.

Evening Stars and Other Fires

A jewelled sky fades,
A lighted lamp flickers, fails,
A moth folds wings . . . waits.

Chrysanthemum

That golden blossom!
Its hundred healing fingers
Touch a hundred hearts.

Things

Afraid of the dark,
Little one? Close both your eyes,
You will see nothing.

Heavy

Foolish little boy,
Trying to show a giant's strength
Lifting your shadow.

The Tree

Reach up, sycamore.
Fingered branches may touch stars,
Roots must rest in earth.

At St. Vincents Hospital

A woman cries out.
Suddenly, echoing her,
A new child cries out.

The Food of Love

The captive monkey
Spurned the fruits a girl offered,
But licked her fingers.

Horse Race

Round the track they run,
Faster, faster toward the end.
Not tired, carousel?

Fruits

While sleeping soundly,
That lemon ball in the sky
Became an orange.

Reconnaissance

Frightened by a sound,
I stopped and sent my shadow
To meet the echo.

Flood

An ant was busy
Building a fine home, but drowned
In falling dewdrops.

20/20

This brook is so clear!
All the fish can plainly see
The junk to avoid.

Remembrance

These pebbles, this sand
Were mountains once . . . now only
Shrunk memories.

Companions

Now wake up, shadow.
A lonely way lies ahead,
A friend is needed.

Park Avenue

Such crystal towers!
Structures built with so much glass
Must be built with hope.

To Moses Soyer — Artist

Shrouded eyes will seek
Black rainbows in a black night.
He'll paint them with love.

Wounded

Land, sky, sea are one.
A fog-wrapped ship screams hoarsely,
Trapped, lost and alone.

Communication

In a noisy world,
Touch is far better than talk;
Stranger, hold my hand.

Speech

Smiles are silent sounds
In lands peopled by lovers;
Laughter is language.

Feelings

Walking in the park
I picked some flowers; felt them
Dying in my hands.

A Parting

In purpling twilight
Tide waters, slowly ebbing,
Leave the shore, sighing.

Gift

The Spring rain tonight
Has stopped, leaving behind it
A gutter of moons,

Passing Scene

We did it once more,
Then saying some nothing words
Dressed and went our ways.

Fashions

At the beauty shop
One wants her hair straight, just like
The one who wants curls.

Anxious

Car radio speaks:
"Rains due this P.M." Nervously,
Windshield wipers start.

?

Among yellowed leaves
A crushed rose, still rouged, survives
Some forgotten love.

Zen

The blind man can see
The sound of one hand clapping
With his middle eye.

Courage

Silly little cat,
How bravely you stalk and pounce
On tigers . . . your tail!

Memory and Desire

Lime/lemon eyes gone,
Gone too, all your own sunbeams,
Only shadows now.

Which?

Lonely in the night,
Is it that cat which cried out?
Or its bereaved one?

Right of Way

While brakes screeched, horns blared,
A black cat, kitten in mouth,
Walked across 8th St.

Store Special

Supermart window:
Under ad – “GRAND OPENING” –
Uncurling cat yawns.

Store Super-Special

Supermart window:
Under ad — “WHOLESALE PRICES” —
Three kittens asleep.

The Wise

All questions are asked
By a cat's eyes. All answers
Are found in its tail.

Cat and Bird

Caught in a cruel trap
Of nothing . . . just lemon eyes.
Swift wings turn to lead.

Winter Landscape

Snow, snow everywhere,
I hear their cries, but all cats
Have also turned white.

A Time for All Things

Fall has its own speech.
Does a leaf need to be told
To leave its old home?

Time

A moment ago
This shining mirror was so new.
Why is it so scratched?

Then, Now, At A Senior Center

At last her children
All have such lovely toys now. . .
. . . for their own children.

Unbent

So heavy this load,
I must drop it and rest. Ah!
That sun . . . always there?

Bonds

Both bald, with no teeth,
The old man and infant see
In each the other.

The Whole of It

To live to the end
Eating every joy like bread,
Sipping bliss like wine . . .

There is a great deal of
the world in it
and it is a great deal
of the world in it
and it is a great deal
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