



# HAIKU

Claire Pratt



**HAIKU by Claire Pratt**

Reprinted from the original 1965 edition  
by the Haiku Society of Canada

Wood engraving by CLAIRE PRATT

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ISBN 0-920752-02-0

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TO THE MEMORY OF MY FATHER

## INVOCATION

Green is the wet night,  
and fingers at my casement  
linger crookedly.

Bright light, convulsive  
from the centre, blinds me quite.  
Cut clean, white chisel.

Pale winter heaven,  
Diana, cold white and small:  
cup the shrivelled gourd.

Night, flea-bitten thief,  
cast your black self to the moon  
and return my sleep.

How is your defence,  
silly quills? Oncoming car.  
Quick into the thicket!

At the water's edge,  
summon the rising wind to  
keep the tears at bay.

Land from sea to sea,  
unknowing, sleeping, trying:  
waken, weep and bleed.

Rage, roar, pound, O surf,  
upon my bleeding beaches;  
wash my body home.

Hurt world, by anguish  
quickened, from the dark centre  
rise, small seeds of joy.



## THE PAIN

From the concave throb  
of dark, the issue pours in  
one tremendous sob.

Wet and leaden day;  
heaviness descends in shrouds  
through every crevice.

The young lion's pride—  
strength—crumbles to impotence,  
flows the aching tide.

Do they bleed: the sons  
and daughters of Arcturus?  
Do they die in pain?

They called and you went,  
dark face. A mistake, they said.  
The deep chill deepens.

Canada, our land,  
country of lonely islands  
and deep blue water.

Screaming, screeching bird,  
what black powers of night have  
robbed you of your rest?

Long miles of desert  
finished. In the green distance . . .  
Bleak wastes eternal.

Squirrel, bushy-tailed,  
bright-eyed, nut across the street . . .  
Crawl on, hurt blackness.

Is the yoke too great?  
O body broken, broken . . .  
Has it felled you yet?

"EACH MAN'S DEATH . . ."

Blood streaming through the  
pain-wracked earth. Crack, Antares!  
Break, Aldebaran!

Earth shakes; the temple  
splits everlastingly; and  
salt flows without end.

How much of the strength-  
giving wind can that pine tree  
stand? When is too much?

## THE PASSION

Wind, blow hot, blow pain,  
blow evil, move the still air.  
Crack the still white north.

Winds of the mute air,  
strong tides of the secret sea:  
mover in silence.

A clean, honest hate . . .  
born of you and the dinner  
of nettles I ate.

Leap, bright dolphins, break  
with showers of joy into the  
shrine. Holy art thou.

My disordered soul . . .  
from the streaming zenith can  
the light yet reach you?

Wind, whip the waters  
to wild, white rage. Boil over,  
sub-aqueous pot.

Tree forever gone . . .  
sun-quick swords, pain-blasted eyes.  
Drowse, O cherubim!

As dew in the sun,  
melt body, a quick burning  
and a hot white flame.

A flash of summer  
lightning . . . and healthy apples  
glowing in the night.



## THE GLORY

Singing "Gloria,"  
Altair and the bleeding earth.  
From whose pain glory?

Soul, ego-yielding,  
intergalactic, one in  
the great possible.

Sounds of traffic screech  
on the cluttered highway. But  
look! The North awaits.

Huge northern whiteness  
in whose polar chrysalis  
thought, suspended, waits.

Blue delphinium,  
white comet flower: diamond  
streaks the firmament.

The cusp of autumn,  
where I stand, is sharp and crisp.  
Brightly fall the leaves.

OAK LAKE

From the air are spun  
rings of oak and cedar; bright  
circlets from the sun.

Kitchen all aglow:  
not yet, not yet—frosty stars,  
angels in the snow.

Crack the ice-locked land.  
From hyperborean nights  
a fugue eternal.

## THE MYSTERY

Dim and low and far . . .  
only a lisping whisper  
on the windswept shore.

Wind, carve a tunnel  
through the earth, and at the heart  
pause in ecstasy.

Gigantic, the sea  
feeds them. They in mortal fear  
turn and try to flee.

Soft, soft, cello-soft,  
anointed night, seductive,  
dark on deeper dark.

Things undone, not said:  
the huge north does not permit  
this self-indulgence.

Night soft and dreamlit:  
through the stars from the far shore  
a longing whistle.

Over city sounds  
blue sun of summer. Breezes  
soughing in the elms.

Strange and glowing light:  
absorbed, I stretch to see—my  
bamboo window shade!

The fog has settled  
around us. A faint redness  
where the maple was.

Forest and the cool  
shimmering night. Fallen stars  
shattered in the pool.

Water on water,  
wet on wet in the cool pool.  
Let the darkness in.

The shape of an O  
is our world: all and empty.  
How jolly the crow!



## THE NIGHT

Eyes closed by the night,  
Chimborazo Cottapax'  
in the amber light.

Bleak and weary night,  
arms bent against foul monsters . . .  
a faint chirp, dawn's light.

Moon, Bobcaygeon night,  
the great elm pool-encircled,  
remnant of the storm.

The dark wet forest,  
little night bird twittering  
in the gentle rain.

Pestilent, dog-eared,  
scratching night: a thousand oaths  
cannot remove you!

Forever flittering,  
will-o'-the-wisp in the swamp:  
black night skittering.

TRIPTYCH

Night sky and ocean  
in the many-coloured dark  
meet the rippling stars.

Night sky shimmering,  
mist above my jewelled town:  
prism of the Pleiads.

Night sky and black fog,  
alone upon the rock cliffs;  
gone is the North Star.

## THE SONG

Brindled bees float through  
with ease, in my dark garden.  
Nightingales sing too.

Opals in a sea  
of pain . . . Philomel . . . your face  
palely glimmering.

Serene and limpid,  
carved from sheer Laurentian light:  
agelong summer day.

From the deep, a rush  
of fingers, touching, grasping  
at the beachy shore.

The lake dawn-polished,  
through the shimmering air, long  
throb of violin.

SONATA FOR VIOLA AND BASS

Fly and bumble bee,  
tumbling mumbling in concord  
in the listening air.

Courageous robin  
in the pre-dawn weirdly grey,  
lead the world awake.

TO MY MOTHER

Out of the blackness,  
fire-drakes and the reedy swamp,  
composed and lovely.

Enter, breeze of night,  
and through the dark green spaces,  
health, contentment, sleep.

## THE LAMENT

Dearly gathered dust,  
*Kyrie eleison*,  
dearly sold. *Kyrie!*

Out of the depths, grief  
rises to my soul's lament:  
"Come, ye daughters . . ."

Flora deep in tears:  
breasts, hips, curves—all sliced away  
by the pruning shears.

Morpheus is dead.  
A taut but unstrung wire  
weaves around my head.



Weep for the lost sheep,  
eyes dimmed, asleep; a candle  
guttering in the deep.

TO MY FATHER

Son of Helios,  
mover among the great spheres . . .  
a long slow melting.

"The toll of the bells."  
my father . . . with salt-tipped wings,  
seagulls wheeling scream.

FOR C. H.

Good cheer and life-long  
fellowship, green-growing tree:  
where in that pale world . . .

FOR M. J.

Death, jealous, took you.  
From your giving hands he claimed  
your gifts. Shrink, O earth!

Do not grieve, my soul;  
their bed is generous and  
will accept you soon.

Black are the stars' beams,  
blacker yet the moon and sun.  
while cold earth stiffens.

Country of the north,  
sick, sick nation, let the wild  
white sky enfold you.

TO A DYING FRIENDSHIP

From the orient pearl  
the radiance has faded:  
Vale of Acheron.

ST. MATTHEW PASSION

Mists shroud the college  
buildings. Swelling threnody  
to embrace the earth.

## THE HOSPITAL

Breath on the broad heath?  
That sound out there . . . a-ah windmills  
clatter brokenly.

TO A NAMELESS ROOMMATE

Olive morning . . . uproar  
and stench are ended. Listen!  
Stillness . . . stiller yet.

Gleams the darkling pool.  
Into sullen depths a bird  
has dipped its wing.

The petals are gone  
from the cosmos . . . one remains  
to face the lone wind.

Springing coil, swift flight  
through deep heaven . . . violent  
is the shattering.

Dolphins on bright wheatfields,  
giraffes leaping the dark waves:  
strange worlds to wander in.

A ferris wheel? The rack?  
Beyond this bloody cough . . . the free  
and undulating hips.

Five walls, darkling street,  
phlegm-drenched heath: riding the flood  
the fluid dream.

Come not the sons of  
Aurora to the dun swamp;  
rest, weary flotsam.

Sullen is the earth . . .  
blood, foul sputum, excrement.  
Laughter from the moon.

Lying on this shoal  
in helpless mucus, lying  
in the absurd: I.

Day-night watch and grief  
dark upon the battlements . . .  
the Raven spreads his wings.

Dewdrops quivering  
on the thorn are ransomed by  
a heliacal ray.

From depths of chaos  
emerged the glimmering circle.  
Be blessed, green centre.



## THE INFINITE MOMENT

At Bobcaygeon's gate,  
moon-quiet on my father's back,  
I grasped a memory.

Murmuring on my  
windowsill . . . a pile of shells  
from last night's oysters.

Languid afternoon,  
Bobcaygeon hours motionless:  
Far away a crow.

Through my side-vision  
people moving to and fro:  
leaves blow in the wind.

Open on the sky,  
square window-patch. How many  
ways a bird can fly!

A moment of dream  
passed by, Bobcaygeon, sweet  
kingdom of the mind.

Light floats through me and  
around in little pieces:  
chips held in the hand.

## THE MAD MAD WORLD

Evening. Blood-red rays  
upon the ruined temple.  
Ye host of heaven!

Screeching power trucks,  
insistent and unwelcome sperms,  
pierce the endless nights.

Life-giving needles  
from a nimbus anodyne,  
pierce the grateful earth.

"New patterns for old!  
"Come, come buy!" Ancient vendor,  
your tale has been told.

High on my dungheap,  
phosphorescing, flittering,  
asses arch below.

ALL HALLOWS' EVE

Fragrance wreathes around  
the hunters' moon, and pumpkins  
grin in fields below.

Broken branch, hanging  
untended since last year's storm:  
distorted beauty.

Crescents on a frieze:  
a whirl of ether, music  
metal-thin, ink seas.

Blood, silvered by the  
stars, guts by the afterglow:  
poles of the round earth.

## NUNC DIMITTIS

The grade steepens, swift  
and swifter flows the river;  
pitiful the dams.

In the dark green night  
raindrops fall and disappear,  
lost to mortal sight.

Blackness at noonday:  
ah, ah, ga, ga, ga, GA, GAHH—

— — — — —  
Puzzled and weary,  
celebrant at Bethel's font:  
borderland of tears.

Still raw, bleeding earth?  
Dark blood on your freezing soil?  
Snow will cover all.

Inside the cold and  
lattice cage, too old for dreams:  
sweet airs come drifting.

Shorn lamb shivering  
on the heath . . . dawn's grey spaces.  
Yonder is the fold.

Cosmos in my room,  
frail petals breathing freshness:  
widening purple sky.

River of heaven,  
flow on quiet through the night,  
silvering our sleep.





