Father and Son

A Haiku Experience

Introduction

Just like an elephant or a political revolution, the poetic form called haiku didn't just appear out of thin air. For more than a thousand years, poets in Japan had been exploring a variety of closely related poetics including the katauta, the tanka, and the collaborative linked poem called the renga. In the late 17th century, the first stanza of the renga began to be composed independently and, largely through the work of Matsuo Basho, came into being as what we now call the haiku.

Then as now, the Japanese haiku is written in 17 morae, which are time-sensitive units of sound, different than syllables in that they make a distinction between short sounds like *to* (1 syllable and 1 mora) and long sounds like *rests* (1 syllable but 2 morae). When translated into English, haiku usually contain about 10 - 12 syllables, however, most non-Japanese haiku writers generally utilize a loose brevity to delve into its more essential aspects.

Like all poetry, the aim of haiku is to use words to transcend words, essentially becoming a mirror of experience itself. It wants to lead us into both the external world with its seasonality and the internal world with its deep feeling and subtle sensation. At its finest, haiku reveals the inherent connection of momentary perceptions and bigger picture narratives, similar to that of space and time. In other words, haiku is interested in only one thing: the human experience.

David Sudar,
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Day 1

                    Redwood forest
               Some places don't need
                    Entrance signs

Unpacking our bags
Unpacking our
Selves

                                        First hike
                                   I ask what it's like
                                      To be nineteen

          The forest
     Between two rivers
          Flowing

                              One fire
                    One father   one son
                         One soup bowl

At dusk the critters that wake
          creaking
          croaking
          cricketing

                                   Sharing a tent
                                   Only one year ago
                                   Sharing a home

Day 2

Filled with dew
  The summer dawn
Fills our lungs

                              No running shoes
                                 He says
                              No excuse not to run
                                 I say

           Gathering nuts
     A big one and a little one
           Chipmunks

                              He says Redwood
                              I say sequoia
                              . . . The woman we both love

                                        Teaching my son
                                     What it means to tie knots
                                        That can't be undone

           Tall Trees Grove
     Even the ferns could be hiding
              A dinosaur

                       On our tent
                    The song and dance
                       Of rain drops

Day 3

Drizzly morning
Pooping is my reason
To leave the tent

Rotting raccoon
Why our ancestors
Buried us

Winding trail
After me my son steps
In the puddle

The eagle
Encouraging his young to fly
With soft nudges

My son questions
This relentless quest
For dry wood

A soft glow
Brought to our mouths
By moonlit beans

Crackling fire. . .
Telling my son the tales
My father told me

Day 4

Morning tea
Seated on stumps we discuss
Past times

Tossing pinecones
Back and forth
The breezy trees

Biting his nails
My stern glare lingers
From his youth

Tying his boots
His pouty face lingers
Into the jog

His unfortunate fall
A chance to show
Fortitude

On our bellies
Watching the smaller ants
Rebelling

Pushed too hard
All his life he says
. . . the smoldering fire

Day 5

Not a word
For hours we hike until
Hummingbirds

Dammed river
The thousand miles current
Surging forward

Sipping tea without labels we share our feelings

Ten hugs
Not quite enough
Redwoods

Bursting free
From smooshed berries
An August scent

Campfire
Our words ignite
Laughter

Starry night
Framing the memory
With constellations

Day 6

                        the
        year   giant
            another
                                sequoia
            still
                growing

                                        Six days together
                                        Only now he mentions
                                            A girlfriend

                Trail after trail
                The novelty goes
                Wherever we point

                                        Nineteen years together
                                            Only now I mention
                                        The woman before his mother

    Biting his nails
        In silence
    I bite my tongue

                    Into darkness
                    Not just our steps
                    Softening

                                    The conversation stops
                                        Eternity or infinity
                                    And we listen to the fire

Day 7

Through the forest
Landing our footsteps
On the chorus

As the heron
Scoops salmon we scoop
Sardines

On the path   off the path
Just another hike
With my son

Against a big tree
A pair of animals
Napping

Clouds so busy
Socializing   the sunset
Unseen

Sleeping bags touching
Our I love you's
Mirrored

Son becomes father becomes memory becomes. . .