



THE
DARKENING
TIDE

Liam Wilkinson

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A Collection of Tanka
by Liam Wilkinson

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FOREWORD

In 2005 I moved to the beautiful, historic city of York, England to begin my new post at the city's central library. The move came after living, for five years, beside the sea.

For three of those salty years, I lived in a series of tatty flats in the Victorian seaside resort of Scarborough on the North Yorkshire coast. It was in Scarborough that I was to gain four very important things: my education, my future wife, my love for the traditional Japanese literary forms of haiku and tanka, and my infatuation with the sea and its coast.

For the remaining two years, my fiancée and I lived in a house that stood a few steps away from the beach at Rossall on Lancashire's Fylde coast. Having that blustery stretch of coast, effectively to ourselves, was a luxury I miss, deeply.

Whilst the spires and cobbles of this inland city are an inspiration in their own right, a part of me remains beside the sea. This collection is a product of that part of me.

Liam Wilkinson
York, May 2007

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And finally, heartfelt thanks to Diane Sturch for the memories that we've made and continue to make - no superlative would suffice.

Every word in this book is dedicated to Diane
who has taught me that the true science of the sea
lies within its mystery.

as long as I have
this memory of it
you and I shall inhabit
that small, cold flat
by the sea

out of date posters
for out of date shows
flutter in the sea wind –
our memories
litter the promenade

the tide withdraws
leaving cowries
and our minds
filled
to overflowing

ignited,
the magnesium strip
burns across the sea —
students of the moon
gasp

between two hotels
at the avenue's end,
the reliable blast
of sea wind –
I let my troubles go

through the amber
of Winter dawn
we walk, listening
for the crash
of today's first waves

St. Andrews Church
shines in a silk of salt
and early morning sun –
Scarborough and I,
washed and dressed

white peeled paint
and tawny rust –
we tease ourselves
with grandeur
we could never afford

rounding Oliver's Mount
we circumnavigate
the brooding crag
of our impossible future –
how to climb it...

the pillows of town
hold their heads –
as dawn lifts,
the lighthouse and I
blink

scars of erosion
down the cliff, craters
left by landslides –
 all are parts
 of the beauty now

we think of the jetty
as an old whale,
beached and broken –
you run your fingers
over its barnacles

ULVA LACTUCA

in the brackish
waters of our love
we dance

back on the beach
you name the seaweed

GRAND HOTEL SUITE

the hotel bed
creaks and squeaks –
the thrill of trying
to be silent
in the middle of the night

in the middle
of all these nights
we join the creaks
of this old hotel
with lines of laughter

first blast of sun
on the hotel window
the peeling-painted chair
creaks, cracks –
waking

mid-morning sun
rides a humpback swell
in the bay,
I sit transfixed –
I should be somewhere else

magic of Burbank –
at the lip
of the stage
we make our ice-creams
disappear

at the sea-view restaurant
the food is terrible,
the drink is watered down;
 so you eat the cliffs
 and I sip the swash

WEAPONNESS

waking
to gunfire
bounding towards us
from the sea
of eighty years ago

the glare
of glass in milk
slopes into the road –
today
the coast is bleeding

GRIMSHAW

I make a square
of fingers and thumbs –
nothing in this frame
has changed
since you were here

by the Grand Hotel
a silhouette
against a sliver
of moon on sea –
the shadow of me

your moons still glow
inside the gallery –
in the middle of these days
at least I have
your nights

climbing Oliver's Mount,
the town fades

diminishing –
the soundtrack
of our first life

on the soles of our shoes
the sands of time –
we kick the walls,
ready again
for the beach

under the pier
she kisses me quick,
squeezes me slow –
danger signs
rattle in the wind

in the gift shop window
severed heads
stare from their row,
the incoming tide
reflected in each eye

after the tide
the pier wears
a seagrass skirt –
ukuleles strummed
along the prom

arguing
on the seafront –
a ball of candy-floss
tumbleweeds
through our silence

waves
in a puddle
under the big dipper –
shock
of wrong-flavoured milkshake

the child throws up
sundaes and sausages
by the merry-go-round –
the laughing clown
splits his sides

neon
darkness
neon
darkness
neon

evening thunder –
Blackpool dims

in our B&B
we turn the room on
with a fifty pence piece

onset of dusk
along the cliffs –
glad
to be cut off
by the darkening tide

Rossall spires rise
as the sun falls
into the Irish sea
with a pink and amber
splash

dark blue dusk
in gift shop windows –

the tide goes out
leaving the lights on

wet sand

the Ferris wheel
stops spinning –
a full moon
caught
in its cogs

with no line to cast
I stand at the swash
and launch my mind
into froth –
another poem caught

waking here
for the last time –
how to stuff
the gulls' song
into a case...

morning lights
the horizon line –

this day
and these waves
will go on without us

one last pleasure cruise -
I map the moments
of our love
along that coast
from this sea

end of the pier
wind
in the deckchairs
music swirls
for no one

packing the car
with pieces of this place
I take off my coat
to feel the sea breeze
on my arms

descending Oliver's Mount
into a life we knew,
to the decipherable
unfamiliarity
of it all

the troubles
that went bounding
along the esplanade –
I return to find them
swept away

THE WRECKING SEASON

*In Memory of Nick Darke
(Playwright & Beachcomber, 1948 - 2005)*

glugging
from a bottle
come to rest
on the sand –
a torrent of words

reclaiming
words
to use again –
 life
brought in on a tide

I too exist
within these moments
before dawn
when the tide offers itself
in small pieces

solace
in the thought
that the sea
is close enough
to take me

going the way we came,
we pass
those just arriving –
new grains of sand
brought by the tide

leaving
to a standing ovation
of spires,
 turrets
 and waves

Liam Wilkinson is the curator of the 3LIGHTS Online Gallery of Haiku & Tanka. He was born in Yorkshire, England in 1981. His poems have appeared in such publications as *Aesthetica*, *Simply Haiku*, *Presence*, *Bottle Rockets* and *Paper Wasp*. He currently lives in York, England.

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