

Issa's Spider

Heather Ann Schmidt

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Don't worry, spiders,
I keep house
casually. ~ Issa

A poet sits in the corner of his home at a low table and watches a spider crawl across the sheet of rice paper in front of him. He picks up the paper and smiles, watching the spider stop. Resting the paper on the table, he lets the spider finish its trek. Once the terrain is cleared, the poet fills his brush with ink.

The Five Bats

Once there were five bats that gathered after midnight in a grove of cherry trees. It was Spring and the pale blossoms released their delicate scent onto the night breeze. Four of the bats were paired off as lovers and the male bats would each sing a special song to their beloved. The fifth bat sang out his song, but there was nothing but silence in return. As the bat flew around, feeling very sad and lonely, he perched himself upside down on one of the cherry tree branches. It wasn't long before he noticed he was not alone on the branch. There was an owl there as well. The owl hooted at the bat and they shared the branch for the rest of the evening until dawn approached and the sunrise bid them goodnight.

Red and Gold Sparks

Late one evening during Chinese New Year, a child rests on his father's shoulders so he can see the fireworks display along the Yangtze River. Just as each new firework fades, a dragon appears trying to hold each pattern created. The child watches the dragon chase the red and gold sparking against the black. As it somersaults, the dragon creates figure eights that frame each fire picture.

" Look, Father!," the child exclaims, " Did you see that?"

The Water Dragon and the Rainbow

A young girl found them swimming around her ankles. She lifted her brocaded silk gown, walking in the river. She had once heard a story that said koi were magic and could turn into water dragons. Setting her sights on one that was silvery white, she began to follow it upstream. Even though her gown began to get soaked, she waded farther. Soon, the mist of a waterfall surrounded her. At the end end of the river, she watched as the koi dove into the waterfall's rush and flew out a water dragon. She, then, ran under the waterfall as well and, then, found her limbs becoming iridescent rainbows. Dancing, the water dragon and the rainbow girl wove around one another into flooded walls of color against the mist. To this day, it is said that those who visit a waterfall can see their prismatic union if they truly believe.

The Two Carp

The child and his grandfather took their poles and sat at the edge of the Yellow River. As they took out their nets and unfolded them, the child noticed two brightly colored carp swimming downstream. Immediately, he said, "Look Grandfather! I am going to follow those carp and catch them!" With that, the child waded behind the fish, admiring how the sunlight shimmered against the yellow one and how the rushing water seemed to make the orange and black markings on the other, dance. As the boy followed them, he did not look up to notice that the river has two tributaries diverging in separate paths. Once he reached them, the yellow carp went down one and the orange and black one went down the other. The child stood in the river, not sure which path to follow. Finally, he decided to walk down the middle of the sandbar that divided them. But, when he tried to catch up, both carp had gone too far...

The White Mulberry Trees

The girl had heard that the white mulberry trees gathered outside of the Emperor's palace were magic and that the silk worms that ate from this tree created silk brocades that had imaginary worlds woven into them. The girl wondered if the Emperor visited those lands at night when he wore his beautiful brocade to sleep. Did he close his eyes and suddenly fall into a meadow or did a red dragon usher him in? As the girl ran her fingers over her own brocade dress, she closed her eyes and suddenly she was surrounded by white cherry blossom snow covering her hair, her arms, her feet and when she looked up all she saw were the blushing pink buds falling around her. It was as if she had been put in a shaken water globe. Suddenly, the girl heard her mother call to come inside for supper.

The Fan Dance

It was a rainy evening in Edo. The streets glistened from the raindrops and the red bridge glistened with moonlight under the little girl's feet as she made her way to the tea house to bring the shamisen that one of the geishas had forgotten. The word geisha means artist and the girl dreamed of becoming an artist too someday. When she arrived, she knocked and the rice paper door opened and the hostess took the shamisen. After their exchange, the little girl snuck around the corner and followed the sound of music until she found an opening in one of the doors and peeked inside. There was a geisha in a long plum silk kimono with navy blue flowers on it and she was dancing with two fans in her hands, creating shapes with their movement. It was as if the fans had become a part of her being as she manipulated them. The fans' shapes intertwined and released like lovers who disagree and reunite. The navy blue and silver brocade on the fans blurred into streamers against the candlelight. All of a sudden lightening crashed behind the girl and, startled, she ran away.

Ten Thousand Hollows

Bone-chilling snow on a thousand peaks
wild raging wind from ten thousand hollows
when I first awake deep beneath my blanket
I forget my body is in a silent void.

- Han Shan Te'-Ch'ing, 1600

After a long winter's nap a poet awakens because the wind stirs his window open. He rises from under his blanket to shut the window. As he reaches for the panes, he looks out at the Tientei Mountains and sees their peaks rise up to meet him. Suddenly, he is as cold, as transparent as the wind that carries his idea in that moment.

The Lake

A little boy sat on the shore of the lake. His uncle had told him that he could find happiness if he saw a koi leap from the lake, higher than any crane could fly. The boy sat for a long time and he only saw a few cranes walking along the shoreline. He watched as they chased one another in patterns on the sand, leaving tiny prints that followed them and then disappeared. When the boy watched them fly away, he realized he had forgotten to look for the koi and he smiled.

Ten Winter Wrens and the Ume Tree

Late Winter had shed its white coat and the flowering plum trees began to release their buds. There was one particular tree in a faraway field whose flowers were deep scarlet red that had become a favorite for a young woman to visit and play her sage-koto. Everyday she would come and play her music and everyday ten winter wren would gather on the branches and sing their melodies as she played. Not long after the flowers had fallen away, the young woman stopped coming to visit the tree. Even in her absence the ten winter wren still gathered and made music for the trees to hear. In early June, the tree produced sweet plums for the children to pick as they listened to the music the young woman left behind.

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Biography

Heather Ann Schmidt teaches writing at Oakland Community College. Her poems and flash fiction have appeared in journals in America and Canada. Her books are *Njaa* (Recycled Karma Press, 2009), *Channeling Isadora Duncan* (Gold Wake Press, 2009), *The Owl & the Muse: Collected Tanka* (Recycled Karma Press, 2009), and *The Bat's Lovesong: American Haiku* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2009). Forthcoming are *Recalling Life Through the Eye of the Needle* (Village Green Books, 2010), *Transient Angels* (Crisis Chronicles, 2010) and *Red Hibiscus* (Crisis Chronicles Press, 2011).