

blue irises	early morning
mother's laughter	the silence
in the sun	of good companions

The essence of the poet touches me, as I believe it will touch you.

*Magic Carpet*, by Frank Hooven (Winchester, Va.: Red Moon Press, 2025). 122 pages; 4¼" × 6½". Glossy four-color card covers; perfectbound. ISBN 978-1-958408-58-. Price: \$20.0 from [www.red-moonpress.com](http://www.red-moonpress.com)

*Reviewed by Barbara Ungar*

This debut book by Frank Hooven is a delight. There is not a weak poem here: each haiku resonates. The style is simple yet profound. No cleverness or wordplay, no experiments with language or spacing: Hooven demonstrates that traditional haiku can still be full of surprise and satisfaction.

The haiku are arranged by season, beginning with summer and ending with spring. Most are unpunctuated, usually in three lines (rarely one or two lines), some as short as five words. Yet every one contains a turn that conveys powerful emotion. From the opening poem, we know we are in good hands:

roughhousing  
at the pool's edge  
a gang of sparrows

The opening verb "roughhousing" conjures up most likely a group of boys "at the pool's edge," which seems to go along with the noun "gang" in the third line: the turn comes in the very last word, "sparrows." The image is sharpened by our expectation being overturned, and contains within it an inherent parallel between human and animal behavior. There is both humor and delight here, in the scene precisely observed, the

implied comparison, and the playfulness of the rowdy sparrows.

Another favorite from this first section:

southbound  
along the train tracks  
butterflies

Again the turn comes in the last word. Until then, the first two lines evoke human travel, engineered in straight lines, so there is a happy shock in the last line to see the lightest of creatures dancing erratically above the railroad. The heaviness and noise of the expected train contrast with the silently wandering butterflies, making the final line lift off in a moment of liberation. Again, the contrast between expectation and ending both sharpens the image and brings joy.

Some poems use synesthesia, such as: “waking / on summer grass ... / the hum of clouds.” Here the surprise is the “hum” of the clouds, which we generally think of as silent. That hum emphasizes the dazedness of the speaker, who has fallen asleep outside, and the blurred feeling of awakening. The poem is tactile and auditory rather than visual; we feel we are waking up, too, along with the speaker. Another wonderful poem that uses sound in a surprising way:

approaching storm  
a secret  
passed tree to tree

This haiku captures something that we have all noticed, in a way that is both fresh and familiar at once. We can see and hear the trees bending as if whispering to one another, and wonder why we never thought to write it just like this. Another poem that brings fresh perspective to a common sight:

bag in a tree  
we have all come  
from somewhere else

The shock of recognition here is in the implied comparison between human migration and the plastic bag caught on a branch. It comments on our current immigration insanity: it is a truism that we are all blown about by the winds of this world, ending up in random places. The image is humble, not pretty, but the meaning drawn from it is profound.

There are several through-lines in the collection: compassion for animals; the death of a father; and an implied relationship. These make the collection feel cohesive, without establishing an actual narrative. For example:

stray dog  
the long day  
follows me home

The language almost completely monosyllabic, but the surprise is in the switch of subjects: it is “the long day,” rather than the “stray dog,” with their internal rhyme, that follows the speaker home. The homeless dog makes us feel the difficulty of the day; the final word, “home,” underscores the dog’s lack of a home. Pathos is evoked in an understated way. Another powerful dog poem:

worn sofa  
the tight curl  
of a rescue dog

The adjectives “worn,” “tight,” and “rescue” convey the situation, as if the stray from the earlier haiku had followed the speaker in. The “tight curl” implies that the dog has been traumatized, yet now has found shelter; the worn-ness of the sofa makes it even cozier. Not a fancy house, but a warm home.

A bird poem impresses with how much it can do in five words: “winter dusk / only feathers / remain.” The first sets the larger scene; the second zooms in on a close-up image, and the third reveals its meaning. We have all seen and felt this, but not managed to express it so clearly in so few words.

The inevitability of death, and the sadness of time's passing, is conveyed in this two-line haiku: "folding dad's old shirts — / sunlight through yellow leaves." Other evocative haiku make clear that the father is gone:

dad's ashes  
the fish  
take notice

The dead father still remains important: "the fish / take notice." He does not disappear, but remains implicated with and in the world, commemorated by this poem, making us feel the pain of the speaker. Another haiku about death more generally:

news of a passing  
the old furnace  
rumbles on

The furnace is old and noisy, implying the inevitable wear and tear on us all, and that one day we will be the ones in the "news," but for now, we keep ourselves warm, albeit with some effort. "Rumbles" is a wonderful verb here, conveying the sound but also the difficulty of life's continuing necessities.

Finally, a good relationship is implied in subtly erotic haiku scattered throughout, like this one in from the spring section:

shower song  
last night's  
first kisses

By the end, one feels they have made a new friend, openhearted and genial. The book ends as sweetly as it began, with a haiku that recalls Williams' famous red wheelbarrow:

clearing skies  
wind ruffles the water  
in the little red wagon

The book is attractive and small enough to slip into a pocket: as usual, Red Moon Press has done a fine job. Hooven is highly accomplished, with an impressive list of publications and contests. I look forward to reading more of his prize-winning work, and highly recommend this collection to everyone.