



George Swede *Arithmetic*



First published in Great Britain in 2020 by
Snapshot Press, Orchard House, High Lane, Ormskirk L40 7SL
at www.snapshotpress.co.uk/ebooks.htm

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Typeset in 16/20 pt and 12/15 pt Adobe Caslon Pro

Design by John Barlow

Acknowledgements

Thanks are due to the editors and publishers of the following publications in which these poems previously appeared:

Atlas Poetica, *Gusts*, *Landfall: Poetry of Place in Modern English Tanka* (Modern English Tanka Press, 2007), *Modern English Tanka*, *Ribbons*, *Simply Haiku*, *Streetlights: Poetry of Urban Life in Modern English Tanka* (Modern English Tanka Press, 2009), and *Taj Mahal Review*.

Arithmetic

all my thoughts
about the future
involve arithmetic
the dark windows of the
dead neighbour's house

three best friends dead
before they reached sixty
an ankle vein
pulses faster than my
watch's second hand

on the glass table
wiped clean last night
a new film of dust
the daily reminder
of what's to come

barber shop mirror
more wrinkle and sag
than i thought
my hair invisible
on the white apron

the growing number
of the dead who had
memories of me—
this week just one
garden waste bag

painful fingers
tie shoelaces
reminding myself
i am the sum
of a lifetime

winter twilight
the only sounds
the crunch of my boots
the rasp of my breath
the silence between

the frozen woods
as silent as the dead
then the snap of a branch
the thud of its fall
i breathe again

in the icy dawn
churchgoers pass our house—
the bedroom plants
have not heard one sermon
yet bend towards the light

during winter the evergreens
stood out in the forest, but
now one must search—
the same as for truth
among all that is said

a worm peers from
the freshly-turned earth
then wriggles back down—
i too have no answers
to the big questions

the just-washed
picture window has two
splashes of bird poop—
breaking news of a new
peace agreement

yesterday i thought
my new poem was brilliant
today it seems confused—
the morning sun in a haze
over the marsh reeds

by the farmer's field
a common dandelion—
i could never make
a poem as intricate and
charged with resonance

in a note to myself
i list the deck's split board
the rake's missing tine
the gate's broken latch . . .
and then there's me

doing neglected chores
perhaps the nest-building
robin couple
are the reason
or the teeming anthill

my dream life
has become more engaging
than the real one—
the dewdrops on the thorns
hold red roses

when i had no one
a yellow evening sky
evoked despair . . .
now fear of
impending loss

sea breeze
my body just being
while my mind
vainly searches
for meaning

outdoor café
a man as old as i
with a smile
that reveals a truce
with sadness

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