



Andrew Grimes Griffin



Happy
Birthday,
Hanafuda.

やがて死ぬけしきは見えず蟬の声

– 松尾 芭蕉

Death is very near
Unseen even when we hear
The cicada's song
– Matsuo Bashō
(tr. AGG)

According to *Japanese Death Poems* by Yoel Hoffman, Narushima Chuha-chiro began writing death poems in his fifties just in case the reaper took him by surprise. He lived into his eighties. Nonetheless, I certainly relate to his approach, so much so that, for fear I might miss my own funeral, last year for my birthday I invited my friends to imagine the many ways I might die and produce works to illustrate these deaths. The response was overwhelming, but so far none of the imagined demises has actually occurred.

This year's birthday activity is based on Hanafuda 花札, Japanese Flower Cards. I invited my friends to find the suit associated with their birth month, look at the four cards for that month and see what it inspired them to make: a poem, a song, a baked good, a piece of clothing, anything really. In case they were not completely inspired by the Hanafuda, I also randomly selected and assigned each of them a Tarot card from the 22 Major Arcana.

Last year, as I was dead by mutual conceit, I did not contribute to the proceedings. This year I have decided to write a tanka for each person. It was a joy to look at the cards, delve into their symbolism, explore classical Japanese poetry, and think about the people in my life.

In his eighties Narushima Chuhachiro wrote two lines that perfectly set the mood for what follows – with a tranquil heart/between the flowers and the moon.

松



In the fallen snow
Tiny birds wait in the pines
Whispering secrets
The stars as sharp as needles
Pierce the cold dark winter sky
(for Sonia)



Battled demons – won
The true heart of the empress
Now the snow settles
Soft on the pines – each morning
Smell of coffee – fresh biscuits
(for Griff)



梅



Unseen yet fragrant
Late winter can't block
Irrepressible blossoms
The plum trees full of warblers
All of nature talks to you
(for June)



藤



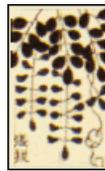
Purple-on-purple
The waves of wisteria
Bred from earth and sky
Each blossom reminding us
These gardens are woman-made
(For Eileen)



Drawing earth and sky
Together through sheets of rain
The wisteria
Climbs by force of will – unfurls
Purple laughter on the wind
(for Grace)



And where you were born
What purple flowers bloom there?
What songs do birds sing?
Mbote bolingo na nga
Nalingaka yo mingi
(for *Cutty*)



The field of the past
All awash in purple waves
Lupins in the rain
Even the crows can't call us
Away from its pale presence
(for Robb)

菖蒲



What separates us?
Eight bridges – high white mountains
Strip malls – gas stations
Still in springtime irises
Bloom – first there – then over here
(for Sue)



Irises blue bloom
Among the bones of old dreams
Every springtime
Beauty breeding its false hopes –
Again – pretty – so pretty
(for Christine)



牡丹



萩



The dew falls away
From the leaves of fresh clover
As you pass through it
Your feet feel sand – broken shells
Finally – you touch the waves
(for Eva)



You swam in moonlight
Harbour waters warm and dark
Emerging – shining
Climbing over rocks to reach
Clover fresh with the night's dew
(for Lynn)



世



First – there were shadows
Stretching through the long night – next
The beating of wings
Then a silence of moonlight
Revealed your beauty – the world
(for Katy)



Last seen – a blue moon
Earth – inhaling – exhaling
Silver grass swaying
Geese cutting the sky – their cries
A rain of dust in our eyes
(for Pippa)



菊



Let's sit by the stream
Put soft petals in the wine
Unmediated
We'll socialize face-to-face—
Laughter rich as chocolate
(for Ken)



Your heart yellow—red
Chrysanthemum electric
Sprouts petals of light
That fade instantly to be
Replaced as fast as they fall
(for Reuel)



Delicate balance
Poised between the two seasons
The better angels
Share warm rice wine and mooncakes
Laugh—fall silent—laugh again
(for Melanie)



紅葉



In another world
Cabaret singer – perhaps
A showgirl – maybe
Dancing as the leaves fall – fall
Laughing as the wheel spins – spins
(for Miche)



月見



Ten thousand falling
Leaves red and gold--these your words
Flowing through this world
Beware the seductive sight
The moonlight on the water
(for John)



龍鳳



Each year the same flame
Sets the trees ablaze – red – gold
A shower of sparks
Grace notes to the fall wind's song
And there you are – floating free
(for Emma)



柳



In joining power
To grace with a willow's arc
With hand poised-ready
Your swooping swallow brush strokes
Paint flowers that will not age
(for Eliza)



Buckets of blood – fake
You wouldn't harm a fly – but
Darkness fascinates
Waiting to see what's revealed
By violent lightning flashes
(for Dave)





A lifetime later
Willow-waisted wedding dress
Eyes blue as the sky
After the rainstorms have cleared
This beauty – your laugh – endure
(for Florence)

桐



Nude and deluded
The emperor was startled
Mischievous laughter
Luckily for him you could
Sew the leaves back on a tree
(for Anne)



Midnight stars mirrored
In dark waters – a heron
The tide holds its breath
The tiny creatures stand still
One leaf falls – her wings unfold
(for Nicola)



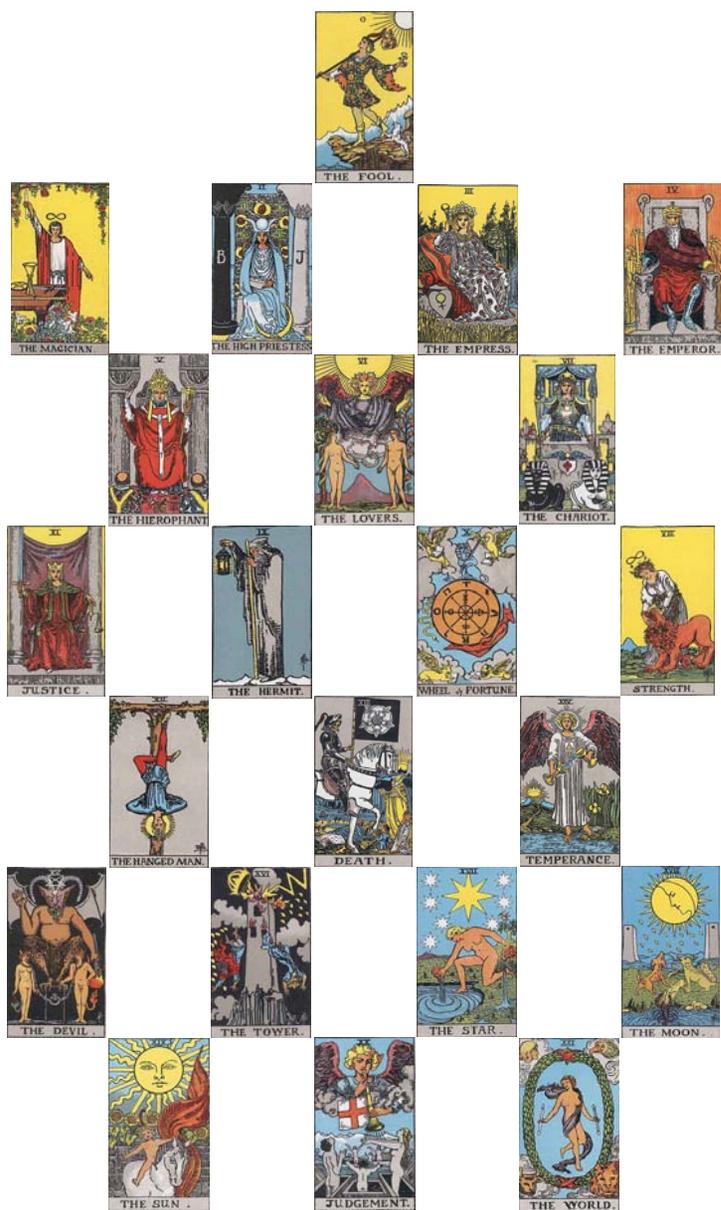
Strange to think we walked
Where the phoenix came to rest
Under wutong trees
Now thick smog conceals the sun
Does the river still run there?
(for Eavan)



花見



Everyone has gone
A single note reverberates
A final leaf falls
Yet still you sit there smiling
Beneath the bare phoenix tree
You already see
New buds time's certain to bring
Hear songs she will sing
(for Michael)



Shauna 桜 Eliza 柳	Sonia 松 Cutty 藤 Reuel 菊 Dave 柳	Griff 松 Ken 菊 Eavan 桐 Eileen 藤 Melanie 菊	Anne 桐 Grace 藤
Robb 藤 Florence 柳	Sue 菖蒲 Eva 萩 Michael 桐花見	Christine 菖蒲 Lynn 萩 Katy 芒	
	Pippa 芒	Andrew 桜 Barb 桜	John 紅葉月見
Clank	Emma 紅葉龍鳳 Nicola 桐	June 梅	
Vivian		Miche 紅葉	

松 (まつ) Pine
梅 (うめ) Plum
桜 (さくら) Cherry
藤 (ふじ) Wisteria
菖蒲 (あやめ) Iris
牡丹 (ぼたん) Peony
萩 (はぎ) Bush Clover
芒 (すすき) Silver Grass
菊 (きく) Chrysanthemum
紅葉 (もみじ) Maple Leaves
柳 (やなぎ) Willow
桐 (きり) Paulownia

花見 Flower Viewing
月見 Moon Viewing
龍鳳 Dragon and Phoenix

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