

The Five-Headed Lizard  
(Zenku from Nothing)  
Steve Brooks

Famous poet, with his knapsack,  
drunk. Now where did I put  
my knapsack?

The art of being empty,  
full of sand, soil, water,  
wind and words.

Old age, my destination,  
but my car has clean  
windows, front and back.

This poem is not  
about New York City,  
O, maybe a little.

Wise to my ways, she can tell  
when I have been drinking  
in the moonlight.

Each thought pretends  
to be new, wearing its  
great-grandmother's dress.

A brisk wind cleans the air  
around my head, so full  
of its own folly.

The morning glory survives  
the first frost, old age,  
the first thought of death.

The ancient poet, in modern  
words, sounds chatty, and then,  
, the heart.

Booming !!! in the  
packed café, sudden thunder,  
birds stop singing.

Ancient cathedral, old  
easy chair, made of sand,  
buried in the sand.

Some part of the concert  
on the grass is performed  
by the mosquitos.

The breeze on my cheek,  
so slight in its might, I look  
to see its origin.

Turning pages in this  
old book, turning handfuls  
of sand in the sand.

Parrot, on its perch,  
ready to shock the world,  
with its same old story.

Death's a snake, swallowing  
itself, to its own wonder  
and dismay.

Large room, empty tables,  
lone reader looks up,  
and the room is full.

It comes unbidden, my heart  
broken, until each piece  
recalls the whole.

This old hand, old worker, old  
lover, now a five-headed lizard  
on the sofa's arm.

The mirror, old friend, has,  
upon reflection, seemed  
unfriendly, lately.



Wise and foolish man, here,  
under one roof, nature's  
cruel compassion.

O, not another poem,  
in this hurtful world,  
of beauty born.

Mountains rise, seas  
surge, says the wily aphid  
to the young apple leaf.

The deep, dark night  
is a symphony, until  
I hear its soloist.

Tired as mud on boots,  
caked and drying, so close  
to the river road.

Sleep pulls me to  
its bed, to an intimacy,  
enticing as love.

All of life reduces to  
a body, this crumpled  
old universe.

Thick wet fog, a silver bridge  
floats in air, a black barge  
slips silent by.

Fisher, without a pole,  
no line, no bait, a timeless  
wait, contentment.

No screen, no projector,  
no film, perhaps an epic,  
or a cartoon.

We, at tables talk, as fall  
walks up and stands, its  
leaves, still on the trees.

In the roar, a singer  
sings, sly whispers,  
in the raging water-fall.

Chess players in the park,  
watch the ongoing war,  
on the battered board.

A small man, a tall woman,  
dance in step, a level  
gaze in their eyes.

Leaders of the faith  
preach surrender, beneath  
the ancient sign,

Dewdrops on a translucent  
leaf, clear spheres,  
a sumptuous assumption.

The clock ticks on its  
own, time wanders, with  
nothing on its empty mind.

Old couple, matching gaudy  
with gauche, their love,  
the hope of the world.

In the valleys, on the mountains,  
The pines whisper to each  
other, Shhhhhh...

Unthought silence, stillness,  
solitude, turn to words,  
spoken to others.

Awake, at night, one side  
trades with the other,  
bargaining for better.

Wind lifts the roof, blows down  
the walls, eager to move in,  
without baggage.

All this talk of time and  
timelessness, dew drops  
linger in the sunrise.

Palm trees encourage  
the wind, going with it,  
as far as possible.

Rain forest, sun, old  
uncle, pokes his face in,  
the kids begin to play.

Shacks, beside the mogul's  
castle, the presence of  
wealth, among the poor.

Without the dignity of  
their elders, young trees  
calm the harried heart.

A swell lifts the water  
bug, just above the  
roiling world below.

Our words translate, our thoughts  
transcend, until, wordless, we are  
thus transformed.

Someone said,  
    There was a book,  
torn from the heart of a tree.

No one in my chair, yet  
I cry out, no one here,  
yet my voice is strong,

No orchard, no tree,  
no fruit, no seed, as far  
as the eye can see.

Twenty-two years, one time  
drunk, so many glasses,  
so many swallows.

Written words, scarce  
imagined, for those who  
read with imagination.

No water bowl, no sea,  
no lake, no pond, no pool,  
we swim in wet clay.

Not one with the Morning Glory,  
this glorious morning,  
now I am.

The pond welcomes all  
that thrives within it, all  
that falls within it, too.

Basho's frog, the splashy birth  
of true Haiku, welcome, and  
good riddance.

Slowly, swiftly, the world,  
swiftly, slowly, the world,  
this in that. .

From its prison cell, one breath  
escapes, returns, escapes,  
returns, escapes.

The thief knows he's been stolen,  
it's worse than that, he can't  
remember when.

Monks at the foot of the mountain,  
Point to the peak, where some  
few have gone.

The painter paints  
flowers, Raybans by  
his side, paradise in his eyes.

With a brush stroke, the artist  
transforms the world, then  
signs its canvas.

The bird-painter's eyes fly  
across his belly to their  
flight in the skies.

Berry nectar, pots of paint,  
swirls of oil, raised brush,  
a fresh beginning.

I put my feet up, in public,  
the river runs below,  
within reach.

Jack rabbit, leaps, stops,  
leaps again, squirrel hops,  
stops, looks, runs away.

The cat comes home, bloody  
from a raccoon fight. Near  
death, the cat comes home.

Mother calls to her brood,  
"Come here and bring your  
here, over here, right now."

How can I look at cake,  
without eating it all?  
I am also cake.

In the same attention  
to fear, life appears  
as war-time in slow-time.

Gazing up, my lazy cat eyes  
fall back in their beds,  
looking for sleep.

A gun in my pocket,  
I'm ready for anything,  
but peace.

Metal boxes flying by,  
blue sky, soft face  
of clouds, eternity.

Words, their swaddling fills  
the crib, baby, in the folds,  
singing its birth song.

Young dog, big as a colt, bolts  
from home, smells the ground  
on the slow walk back.

The closer to home, the more  
tired, the closer to home,  
the less weary.

Old bear, walking around  
town, seeking refuge  
in a fading forest.

This time of life, this life  
in time, a timely time-out  
from timelessness.

Flip-flops flap on the marble  
ashram path, past peacocks  
preening themselves.

The chickadee, small and shy,  
surrounded by chickadees,  
small and shy.

Singer singing the same song  
of joy from deep within  
the same sad heart.

I reach in privet, that writes  
its name on my bare arms,  
cheers from the bees.

I'm foreign, in the land  
of others, until I see  
my eyes in theirs.

In this letting go of past  
and future, life becomes  
unhinged from time.

Beside the road, flaking  
bark slips into the open  
sea of the air.

Worker, shoveling cement,  
his boots, thick-coated  
cartoons of themselves.

I cloud the air with words,  
when inside the poetry  
of words, no words.

Ahead, you lead the way,  
if you follow, I can hear  
what you say.

In this dream, I am old, the  
dreamer, ageless, the dream,  
wrinkled and paunchy.

The air, sliced by speeding  
cars, fueling station, in  
prosperous repose.

The breeze in the trees  
can't spell Charlotte Street,  
yet it goes where it pleases.

A worker dusts the Sistine  
Chapel ceiling, the Buddha's  
smiling face.

The artist makes faces,  
on paper, in fire, for  
those behind his back.

Humans, on earth,  
the first, celebratory,  
the last, laudatory.

Poems appear in the  
dark, aware of other  
predators, nearby.

Old bull, his hide,  
thickened, over time,  
into its longevity, snorts.

Old man steps, one foot  
in front of the other,  
the same uncertain joy.

I am drowsy in the safety,  
of this lazy, lovely, caged  
comfort.

Down the volcano's  
side, children delight, in a  
country not my own.

She paints blue at the top  
for a sky, broad sand, where  
we walked, this morning,

I love her completely,  
I only make it seem so,  
by saying so.

She paints the humble  
corners of things, even  
decay is her beauty.

Mother's hand, holding baby's  
head, he sees the world,  
and grips her sleeve.

The cold wind blows in the old  
wood barn, the old dog barks,  
the cold wind blows.

The good and bad, rumble,  
rush, and roar, no time  
for hello or goodbye.

In language, I wear a king's  
wardrobe I cannot see  
in the mirror.

A coiling vine, words in the  
brain, calling themselves  
to their private dance.

First, all of life appears,  
and then the heart appears,  
and then, all of life.

Sun looks not for light, wind  
takes no notice of things  
that blow in the wind.

The painter does not paint  
the subject or herself,  
she paints the painting.

This flowering self  
changes its water, from  
time to time, to timeless.

Loud refrigerator, water  
on the floor, tattered  
shirt's second life.

Seeking my place in  
the whirlwind, I find  
I am mostly oxygen.

Fang, old dog, in a  
photograph still old,  
young again, in memory.

Did you see that plumed  
bird, with its mate, fly by,  
a thousand years ago?

In my turn, I taste  
and spit the absence  
of joy, in the midst of it.

Heartbroken, in the unbroken  
heart, unbroken, in the  
broken heart.

I go out from inside,  
to find how far I have  
come, to be just here.

When I do not think of her,  
I turn to see her, there,  
here in my heart.

Nothing remarkable  
occurs, except occur  
and remarkable.

Joy comes into this  
paraffin heart, swinging  
its scythe of fire.

The unfounded joy in my  
heart - unwound bundles  
of inspired breath,

To have a mind that won't quit,  
One learns to quit the mind,  
"Be still . . . Good dog."

To be in stillness,  
then to be with others,  
another homecoming.

What provides life  
to this peacock self,  
nasty bird, is my feeding it.

In their death poems, Zen monks  
teach, or they pull their words  
in after them.

Jumping in the volcano  
leaves little past behind,  
maybe the shoes.

I live here, in this sweet  
air, where she, too, may  
appear and disappear.

I fail to paint a true  
portrait of the one I've  
always known to be.

Grief, without a ground  
beneath its grievance,  
is hard to imagine gone.

When I say I, in cafés and  
Congress, no one calls me  
on my lie.

All this talk is entertaining,  
even the word "nothing."  
What a show!

It takes only a little fear  
to stay away from  
this being here.

, " are  
the only words of love  
that don't lie, just a little.

I look for you, inside yourself,  
where you forgot to say  
you'd meet me.

Flowers live  
their impartial divinity,  
uncaring who loves them.

To let go a love takes  
more time than exists,  
or we let having go.

I put on a wise man's hat,  
to see if it might fit  
this unwise head.

I wear shoes, belonging  
half to my feet, the other  
half, to the earth.

My character is of  
deepest design, drawn  
on water, by the wind.

In a moment's fraction,  
wonder thrives, or it  
wanders into time.

Peace; the presence of  
acceptance, in the midst of  
too much, for too long.

Departure to arrival,  
on this train, some  
whisper the universe.

Silence, in the house, stillness,  
everywhere, here to stay,  
my finest friend.

Time takes time off  
for itself, all at once,  
in moving, I am still.

Men, besting each other,  
language strangled, begging  
for water and air.

Winter comes into  
the room, wearing fall's  
clothing, summer's faded smile.

Leaves, blown by the wind,  
stop and stay, ot far from  
home, all ambition gone.

Lovers stand close, closer  
than love requires. Still closer,"  
desire cries.

Old pond, not-as-old frog  
Koosh! timeless water, frog,  
in time, leap, splash, kiss.

Each poem, a burst  
of freedom, here, inside  
this endless forever.

Walking, without doubt,  
now gone from the trail,  
back to its prior life.

Without desire, the urge  
comes, to make things  
of beauty from beauty.

Stripping their reality  
naked, lovers still love  
illusion's leaf.

A bell's ring breaks up  
the day into parts of  
itself, a wall, the earth.

The insect I kill may not  
care, nor may I, nor may  
life, but caring cares.

I take a tree in the  
forest, for a table,  
in the warm café.

Words of love, a distant  
clime, reassure my  
homesick rhyme.

These little telegrams  
to the universe,  
Marigold volcanoes.

Hands free, I clutch at  
life, love breaks my heart,  
until I love once more.

As more great athletes  
appear, no one stops playing  
sports, I write poems.

My father handed me  
a big gun, told me to  
shoot the sky, I missed.

Trees, beside the road,  
simply will not declare  
themselves political.

A broom of yellow  
bristles sweeps the sun  
from the floor into my eyes.

No patron in sight, counter  
still bright, the café light  
stays on all night..

A random blow struck  
my head, I fell, watching  
myself, staying alive.

Mother, I can't miss you,  
when what I am is what  
I might miss of you.

Others may say sound  
of water, until Basho  
says water of sound.

Shine a bright light in  
the ebony night, it goes  
all the way to dark.

The poet chased  
her on a vase, into  
immortality, and died.

I only seek to secure  
my amateur standing  
in life itself.

In the waning hours, the light  
fades, grows pale, graying  
at the temples.

Under the dark, I see light,  
peeking out from its bed,  
with shining eyes.

He places his bag,  
they kiss, dance a bit  
in the kitchen, Daddy's home.

Hidden in the jungle din,  
stillness, yellow eyes  
in the green leaves.

I asked if wonder would  
marry me, "Not twice," she  
said, and laughed out loud.

Uncaring cat, fallen priest  
of peace, mad for love,  
flies into the night.

Upset stomach, tired,  
my eyes ignore me  
for their own nirvana.

Rain falls hard, the sky is  
flooded, the sun is washed  
away, dry is drowned.

All are welcome,  
until one among us,  
is said to be a danger.

Two white-tail blue jays  
crash the air, dive hydrangea,  
disappear to a stop.

The brilliant sun shines,  
not looking for darkness,  
finds it, nevertheless.

Viewing the cool moon,  
my eyes turn inward,  
staring at the distant light.

Stepping in some  
dung, I go on my way,  
its faithful emissary.

Drunk, drugged by  
discovery, the young inhabit  
the land of the young.

The muse, mostly female,  
mostly male, imagination,  
mostly on its own.

Bobbing in the waves  
of images of myself,  
I seek the shore.

Quiet, a crowded branch  
full of crows, ears full of  
caws, claws full of branch.

Awakened by wakefulness,  
that refuses to let go  
its stolen life.

Even those words, made from  
thinking, resemble those that  
front the dancing heart.

My good neighbor stretches  
in the sun, sleeps in the yard,  
dreams in his sleep.

In this world, old house,  
cockroach doesn't bother  
to claim its property.

Root vegetables, born  
underground, come alive  
with color, in the sink.

Gazing infant, on its  
back, its core bubbling,  
eternity drooling.

Dead leaves, crushed  
to the ground, brocade  
carpet, mosaic, loosely woven.

Deer on the stony road,  
quickly, into the trees,  
empty path ahead.

Lost in music, absorbing the  
sound, the way the beer  
absorbs the drunk.

Young man grows up an  
old man, in line for coffee,  
still a young man.

Cat sits, before crossing  
the road. Mr. O'meara,  
reading a book.

Old Greek and Roman  
gods, homeless, penniless,  
living in New Jersey.

Why can't you see me?  
I'm here, just as you are,  
not broken from each other.

Memory, like a warm  
bath without suds, then  
a sudden taste of soap.

A finger on my missing  
tooth, the old fox licks  
his forgotten wounds.

Lightning at night, pond,  
flashing bright, an old stump  
seems to twitch in the light.

wants mind for  
its own, has had it, since  
mind first thought of itself.

On a good day, I love  
her old sweater, a  
bad day, I like it fine.

Light comes and goes, not  
the sun, that old good god  
on its encircled throne.

I went to see the show,  
the place was empty,  
no one came, and stayed.

What one might think  
about art is like what  
one might do about nothing.

I slip out of thought, to  
slip into sleep, conscious,  
in the unthought deep.

Bright sun drains the colors  
to white, as if the light  
were its own shadow.

Butterfly goes with me  
on the road, knowing  
no road, goes on its way..

I can't take one step  
outside myself, yet I  
dance on top of this life.

I fall down drunk,  
in my room, across  
the available universe.

Romantic, the sight, the sound,  
the touch, the smell, of my  
neglected heart.

Red cherries, hanging  
on the branch, do nothing  
to block these thieving hands.

Wisdom for the poor, gold  
for the rich, who seem to  
need its comfort more.

In their veiny core, trees  
hear one of their own  
fall to the forest floor.

When I see the moon,  
anew, in the night sky,  
I feel at home, again.

The old road that runs  
by the door, runs in place,  
to the ends of the earth.

There's no foreign language,  
except those that sound  
in my untraveled ear.

Even here, on this rock,  
far from home, the sunlight  
warms my upturned face.

Shakespeare returns  
as Basho, many words,  
reborn as few, light as light.

Looking through the windows  
of someone else's eyes,  
seeing what one sees.

Melancholy, with no  
sadness, a day that  
incorporates the night.

A cool draft climbs my  
pant leg, clings to the cloth,  
snapping like a small dog,

Putting his teeth in,  
he bites into the meat  
of his new life, and grins.

When poetry stops knocking  
at my door, I listen for its  
soft steps.

I met a notorious  
man on the path,  
"Beautiful day," we said.

Everywhere I look,  
leaves of grass, temples  
of no denomination.

Voyager, in his chair,  
pilot, in her sky, wonder,  
homeless, and free..

He names his boat, so it won't  
get lost, on the open sea,  
this dark night.

Table in the sun, I move  
my chair, to garner  
the sun's attention.

Pigeon coolly places its bet  
on the ice, foolish dog,  
same wager.

Sickness, takes up  
residence, the house,  
crowds into every corner.

The sun appears suddenly  
from behind a slowly  
fading sorrow.

Bring me what's  
been in the head of  
Federico Garcia Lorca.

I do best, exhausted, mind  
falters, then soars, beyond  
these conscious dreams.

This once heart, deserting  
of past, emptied of future,  
knows the way clear.

Old woman strips  
naked by the river, boldly  
startling the jaybird.

Storm crosses the prairie,  
toward trees, toward the eyes  
and ears of nesting birds.

Always full, in the sun's light,  
the moon says, "Tonight's  
the night, watch me shine."

Times of being poor,  
close as catastrophe,  
as far off as Mars.

To love this much overwhelms,  
Love reneges, seems to hide,  
to not be love.

Sleep arouses, in this  
life, the realization  
of emptiness.

Singing, chomping his  
toothless mouth, dancing,  
with a twisted leg, he grins.

Love itself, the measure  
of the distance between us,  
knows no distance.

No, no, you cannot  
have these poems, they  
already belong to you.

My heart, broken open,  
when love comes running  
to me, called grandchild.

A storm across the face  
of an infant, rain, wind,  
dark, sun, beaming.

A cool, wet wall, breathing,  
in the hot, dry world,  
dark inside the sun.

I share a familiar chair,  
many have shared before,  
this old body.

Each of us, a poet,  
walking on the narrow  
road to the deep north.

The moment does not pass,  
but this bustle makes it  
seem a passing thing.

In the city, without beasts,  
people assume the shapes  
of fear and fur.

A written-down poem,  
saddle on a horse, the  
wind, going my way.

I walk the path of  
others' words, stepping  
in the air of their footsteps.

Sadness for my brother's  
death, depends on an  
impossibility.

The shame of not  
knowing poetry, falls on  
those who know poetry.

In tired eyes, resting,  
the surface glistens,  
on the lake, in the sun.

Old goat wobbles  
as he walks, recalling  
a mountain in his legs.

A thousand lovers  
sing of a certain love,  
out baking in the sun.

What to do, when no poem  
comes? No poem, I listen  
to you, as well.

I drink from the hose,  
biting chunks of cold water  
from the summer heat.

Battered hand, old friend,  
I say you work for me,  
I lie, here's my voucher.

Old poet, outside  
the window, once on  
fire, looking for a light.

Wanderer, hard to follow,  
strikes out on his own,  
leading the others.

Two men in chairs, speaking,  
laughing, their dress and  
language foreign, not they.

Animals, and all else,  
given names not their  
own, asparagus grins.

Other's wisdom, burdensome,  
sought or not, like my own,  
still, I seek it .

Silhouettes, passing  
in the sun, on the water's  
edge, in blinding light.

Worker tries philosophy,  
His worn body, for and  
against it.

In this narrow café,  
the doorway welcomes  
the world in, unbroken.

This moment forgets  
but the certain peace,  
the ease, of its emptiness.

I ease to disappear,  
I appear here, I fly,  
and flying, I'm flown.

Music fills the mind  
of the man walking his  
heart across the room.

You forget your teacher, now  
what do you call yourself?  
Unschooler? Wise?

Mourning my someday  
death, I am held tight by  
that which will some day die.

Sparrow is loved by  
love, sparrow is known  
by knowledge, away it flies.

Energy, living now, nothing  
to say, speaks, and thus,  
this light, this dust.

All these ways of being  
human, such invention,  
a spoon in a cup.

In the mirror, over  
time, this changing face,  
in endless space, the moon.

My ship has been  
coming in, for decades,  
here it is now, coming near.

Poetry, easy entry  
profession, come on  
in, the water's fire.

Winter says spring will come,  
winter lies, spring will come,  
winter lies, spring comes.

The words of the story  
bear no resemblance, a rock,  
tossed on the sand.

We trade the worn  
stories of our lives, until  
we are worn together.

Small-minded illness, loud  
singing guest, out of tune,  
but now, he lives here.

I grip the day ahead,  
in my knee, then, my  
legs begin on their own.

The old days have died,  
I visit their graves, each  
stone, so finely carved.

This Buddha belly contains no  
Buddha, breathe in, breathe out,  
Buddha air, everywhere.

In abundance, I search  
for abundance, and  
find it, abundantly.

Men, boys, in five, the leader,  
the counsel, the muscle,  
the clown, the wise.

This sad, old, fading  
appendage, tired and  
tender tongue of fire.

In this room, there hides  
no room, in plain sight,  
unseen, the unhidden hides.

Do I breathe the air  
I praise, or has heaven  
become so prosaic?

In the glass, I see the look  
on my face, then the face,  
then the mirror.