

# WAKING

DAVID SWARBRICK



THE  
CEYLON  
PRESS

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Written in a moment between 6.30 and  
7.30 am in bed on 5th January 2026.

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FOR JEROME

HAIKU KING

1

Waking, I dream of  
the tattered ends of magic:  
flame trees, a white house.

2

How could others count?  
On the biggest rock of all  
I hook my leash.

3

I read the torn photo,  
the boy, entering a car,  
beneath frangipani trees.

4

Ice blocks melt on lawns,  
the dinner party long over.  
Now the dawn crows caw.

5

I made my garden  
with the mali, plunging twigs  
into watered earth.

6

Deposed now, the queen  
sits above the Adyar  
with her transistor.

7

Nothing is missing,  
the supermarket stocks all.  
And, plastic Buddhas.

8

Only fireworks -  
no gunshot, bombs, villages  
circled by spiked heads.

9

Always she is there -  
airports, stations, quay, car parks,  
angel without wings.

10

This, my bomb helmet,  
my dog that sleeps skull-to-skull.  
What else would I need?

11

A millennia ago  
armies crept through these hills,  
razed the grand kingdom.

12

An easy trick to play -  
that nothing matters at all  
but what matters most.

13

Dawn. The babbler calls,  
and the small niggardly things  
fade into the night.

14

Pub, party, shopping -  
all entrapment, is it not,  
forgetting what's next?

15

Licking each other,  
all day my dogs show their care.  
Ah, if we could too.

16

Jungle hills confuse  
which way is north, which path leads  
to the shallow sea.

17

The tea Wiji brought  
Cools fast. I have spent too long  
dreaming in my bed.

18

It will not complete –  
the four-sided perfect square  
that doesn't quite meet.

19

This is my tally -  
the long day burdened with scent  
of sapu flowers.

20

They had no daughters,  
just sons who learnt not to speak,  
but come, go and go.

21

Tiny waves recall  
last movements of a great storm  
far out in the sea.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

David Swarbrick is a publisher, planter, hotelier, hermit, and writer. He was born in Colombo and, with few concessions to modernity, raised in India, Singapore, and the Middle East. Cornish gained his degrees on the Celtic fringe: at the Universities of Wales and Stirling, prolonging an introduction to accepted working hours for as long as possible.

Having worked at as a board member at News Corp's HarperCollins UK and HarperCollins India, he then ran Hachette's consumer learning division. Prior to this, he launched Oxford University Press's first commercial online business, Oxford Reference Online.

When the doubtful charms of boardroom bawls diminished, he returned to Sri Lanka, the land of his birth hundreds of years earlier, to rescue a spice plantation and a set of art deco buildings that had gone feral in the jungle.

Today, as The Flame Tree Estate & Hotel, it has become one of the country's top ten boutique hotels, run by the kindest of teams, and overseen by several small schnauzers.

It also helps fund The Ceylon Press, set up to make Sri Lanka's story more accessible. The Press' books, companions, podcasts, blogs, and guides are freely available at [theceylonpress.com](http://theceylonpress.com).