Haiku and Tanka for Harriet Tubman

By Sonia Sanchez

1

Picture a woman
riding thunder on
the legs of slavery ...

2

Picture her kissing
our spines saying no to
the eyes of slavery ...

3

Picture her rotating
the earth into a shape
of lives becoming ...

4

Picture her leaning
into the eyes of our
birth clouds ...

5

Picture this woman
saying no to the constant
yes of slavery ...

6

Picture a woman
jumping rivers her
legs inhaling moons ...

7

Picture her ripe
with seasons of
legs ... running ...

8

Picture her tasting
the secret corners
of woods ...

9
Picture her saying:
   You have within you the strength,
   the patience, and the passion
to reach for the stars,
to change the world ...  

Imagine her words:
   Every great dream begins
   with a dreamer ...  

Imagine her saying:
   I freed a thousand slaves,
could have freed
   a thousand more if they
   only knew they were slaves ...  

Imagine her humming:
   How many days we got
   fore we taste freedom ...  

Imagine a woman
   asking: How many workers
   for this freedom quilt ...  

Picture her saying:
   A live runaway could do
great harm by going back
   but a dead runaway
   could tell no secrets ...  

Picture the daylight
   bringing her to woods
   full of birth moons ...  

Picture John Brown
   shaking her hands three times saying:

Picture her words:
   There's two things I got a
right to: death or liberty ...

18

Picture her saying *no*

to a play called *Uncle Tom’s Cabin:*

*I am the real thing* ...

19

Picture a Black woman:

could not read or write

trailing freedom refrains ...

20

Picture her face

turning southward walking
down a Southern road ...

21

Picture this woman

freedom bound ... tasting a

people’s preserved breath ...

22

Picture this woman

of royalty ... wearing a crown

of morning air ...

23

Picture her walking,  
running, reviving

a country’s breath ...

24

Picture black voices

leaving behind

lost tongues ...

Source: *Poetry* (April 2018)