

# 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 ...*

10

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

11

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

12

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

13

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

14

Picture her saying:

*A live runaway could do  
great harm by going back  
but a dead runaway  
could tell no secrets ...*

15

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

16

Picture John Brown  
shaking her hands three times saying:  
General Tubman. General Tubman. General Tubman.

17

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)