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Tanka : Poems in Exile

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TANKA

Poems in Exile

Jun Fujita ✓



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J. F.

To
Mrs. Edward H. Taylor

Winter

Under the scowling sky
The frozen sand plain stretches.
Curled and crisp, two leaves
Scud away.

Falling slowing, whirling swiftly—
The horizon, lost in the snow.
On a gaunt skeleton
A crow with wings drooping
Peers.

Among the brittled grasses,
Frosting in the moon glare,
Tombstones are
Whiter tonight.

The glamorous night is fading
Over the rolling hills, hoary bare.
On the paled sky, the moon
Has forgotten to vanish.

From the clear depth, inlaid with stars,
An echo of the glittering snow.
A fleeting song and bell, over the icy horizon,
Have left a vibrant void.

The death-like expanse of snow,
The low leaden sky—
From the drift, now and then,
Thin fangs dart.

*The rocking horse,
A half built block house—
Stillness echoes
Lost laughter.*

Spring

Milky night;
Through slender trees in drowse
A petal—
Falling.

The air is still
And grasses are wet;
Thread-like rain
Screens the dunes.

On the pond rain-drops are bubbling;
From the hem of heaven
Dyed in black
The frog echoes.

The sloping sand plain
Fades into pale night air;
A black tree skeleton
Casts no shadow.

Above the settling mist,
Above the phantom isles upon the settling mist,
In the opalized moonlight,
The whinny of a horse careers by.

Down the slope, white with flowers,
Toward the hills, hazy blue,
A butterfly
Floats away.

*While you pant deliriously, I awake
To the bold moon,
The somber hills,
And myself.*

Summer

Against the gulls that play in the gale
The black waves dart
White fangs
In vain.

Midnight;
Over the lifeless sand plain,
The moon and I
Are alone.

The night is bare and pale
Over the charred down trees.
Daring the empty space and drifting mist
A gaunt skeleton stands.

Over the undulating expanse, grey glare,
A last glint of day is fading;
On the shore the same tired waves
Splash.

There is no time here.
From giant trunks hoary moss
Hangs through the air of shadowy green.
And cool dew drips.

By the sunflowers
A cat sniffs the grass—
Her tail curls in the air.

*A strange muteness—
The grey door of your boat-house alone
Listens to ripples,
Tonight.*

Autumn

The brook has gone.
Over the leaves that lie so still
A bird,
Startled.

A sudden caw, lost in the air,
Leaves the hillside to the autumn sun;
Save a leaf or two curling
Not a sound is here.

On a country road
An old woman walks;
The autumn sun casts her shadow
Long and thin.

Against the cold sky
Where the day fades swiftly
A scarecrow stands
With its torn sleeve swaying.

The November sky without a star
Droops low over the midnight street;
On the pale pavement, cautiously
A leaf moves.

Across the frozen marsh
The last bird has flown;
Save a few reeds
Nothing moves.

On a pale sand-hill
A bare tree stands;
The death-wind has snatched
The last few leaves.

Graves are frozen.
A few leaves
Stood, whirled,
And have gone.

*I know it is not she,
Yet, I listen
To distant laughter,
Fleeting away.*

Others

Gypsy Taylor

"G-y-p, oh, G-y-y-p!"

In mute blackness where my call vanishes

Your voiceless laughter

Flickers.

To Elizabeth

Against the door dead leaves are falling;
On your window the cobwebs are black.
Today, I linger alone.

The foot-step?
A passer-by.

Miriam

A sigh among the trees;
A sudden shower of large rain-drops—
I hear no voice, today.

On the wet grass
Paper, crumpled, flaps.

Ecstasy

The night is still,
So, you,
Panting secretly, relaxed on the grass,
With languorous eyes half closed.
You smile
As the cool breeze flows—
Flows over your dishevelled hair.

Summer Moon

The rain, crazed like horses
In the flare of lightning, has gone.

Against the clear washed sky
Rain-drops on the twigs
Reflect the moon.



A Moon

Why so weird, Moon?
Grey-haired, wind-combed,
Hastening through the torn clouds
With pale stare fixed beyond the horizon,
What are you searching for?
Dried and crazed, the sands are rising
Against a broken face in laughter.



A Picture

The roads are frozen; no moving thing is there.
Upon the red opening across the black sky
A headless, giant form,
Hanging by its arms stretched,
Glides on.
Dead and pale, the roads are far.

Diminuendo

Into the evening haze
Out of giant stacks, the smoke
Winds and fades.

Din and whistles have dwindled away
And stillness chants an empty echo.

Michigan Boulevard

A row of black tombs—tall and jagged,
The buildings stand in the drizzly night.
With vacant stare the boulevard lamps in rain
Amuse the green gleams they cast.
Beyond the lamps, among the tombs,
Drip, and drip,
The hollow sound rises.

Chicago River

Slowly, by the slimy wooden wharves,
Through the stillness of rain
The Chicago River glides into night.
From the silhouette of a black iron bridge,
The watchman's light is dripping—
Dripping like melting tallow.
Out of darkness
Comes a woman,
Hellos to me; her wet face glares;
Casually she turns and goes
Into the darkness.

Through the stillness of rain
The Chicago River glides on.

My Sister

Across the meadow
The breeze is fragrant;
In a tree a bird
Disturbs the petals
Over these tombstones, still and content.

A melodious afternoon, years ago;
My sister
With pig-tail flying
Chased a dragon-fly
And laughed over nothing.

The clear vision stands today—
When I pledged
Tidings and gifts
Her strained lips quivered in vain—
Before me, the tombstone, still and content.

The chirp of a bird among the trees—
It too has died away.

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