



presents this piece for your enjoyment

## Tanka

Jan Dean

(i)  
just after sunset  
this winter sky turns violet  
our Antarctic gift —  
why are things at their best  
shortly before we lose them?

(ii)  
out the front  
eastern rosellas  
out the back  
rainbow lorikeets ...  
segregated chirps!

(iii)  
one startled breath  
turns the tree-snake on my stairs  
from toy to life  
coiled round a broom handle  
it became Asclepius' staff\*

(iv)  
how lightly  
the layer of garlic skin  
floats to the floor  
like a dragonfly  
with punctured wings

(v)  
groomed shrubs ripple  
in the Japanese garden  
plead for touch  
reward with prickles —  
too many smiles float away

(vi)  
on my first visit  
I missed the raked garden —  
today the stones  
shift my mind further  
than the carps' fluidity

(vii)  
my Fukushima...  
places and faces gone  
from poisoned land  
and grave fears, growing  
there is no right of return

(viii)  
in Tokyo  
a baby's mother  
hoards bottled water  
how long before survivors  
question their escape?

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Like haiku, tanka originated in Japan. Tanka have five lines and, like other Japanese poetry, do not rhyme. A tanka usually breaks into two units, the first three lines forming one unit and the last two lines forming another. The middle line often acts like a pivot.

\*The snake-entwined staff of Asclepius, the ancient god of medical arts, remains the symbol of medicine.