

A Black Woman Speaks

It is right that I a woman
black,
should speak of white womanhood.
My fathers,
my brothers,
my husbands,
my sons
die for it — because of it
Their blood
chilled in electric chairs,
stopped by hangman's noose,
cooked by lynch mob's fire,
spilled by white supremacist's mad desire
to kill for profit,
gives me that right.

I would that I could speak of white womanhood
as it will and should be
when it stands tall in full equality.
But then, womanhood will be womanhood,
void of colour and of class,
and all necessity for my speaking this will be past.
Gladly past,
But now, since 'tis deemed a thing apart
supreme,
I must in searching honesty report
how it seems to me.

"White Womanhood" stands in bloodied skirt
and in slavery
reaching out adulterous hand
killing mine and crushing me.
What then is this superior thing
that in order to be sustained must needs
feed upon my flesh?
How came this horror to be?
Let's look at history.

They said, the white supremacist said
you were better than me,
that your fair brow should never know
the sweat of slavery.
They lied.
"White Womanhood" too is enslaved
the difference is degree.
They brought me here in chains.
They brought you here unwitting slaves to man.
You, shiploads of woman each filled with hope
that she might win, with ruby lips and saucy curl
and bright and flashing eye,
him to wife who had the largest tender.
Remember?
And they sold you here even as they sold me.
my sister, there is no room for mockery.
If they counted my teeth
they did appraise your thigh,
sold you to the highest bidder
the same as I.
And you did not fight for your right to choose
whom you would wed
but for whatever bartered price
that was the legal tender
you were sold to a stranger's bed
in a stranger land —
Remember?
And you did not fight.
Mind you, I speak not mockingly
but I fought for freedom,
I'm fighting now for our unity.
We are women all,
and what wrongs you murders me,
eventually marks your grave
so we share a mutual death at the hand of tyranny.

They trapped me with chain and gun.
They trapped you with lying tongue.
For, 'less you see that fault —
that villainy
that robbed you of name, voice and authority,
that murderous greed that wasted you and me,
he, the white supremacist, fixed your minds with
poisonous thought:
"white skin is supreme,"
and therewith bought that monstrous change
exiting you to things.
Changed all nature had in you wrought
of gentle usefulness,
abolishing your spring,
Tore out your heart,
set your good apart from all that you could say,
think, feel, know to be right.
And you did not fight,
but set your minds fast on my slavery
the better to endure your own.



Excalibur — Pat Bourque

'Tis true,
my pearls were beads of sweat
wrung from weary bodies' pain.
Instead of rings upon my hands
I wore swollen, bursting veins.
My ornaments were the whip-lash's scar,
my diamond, perhaps, a tear.

Instead of paint and powder on my face
I wore a solid mask of fear
to see my blood so spilled
And you, women seeing
spoke no protest
but cuddled down in your pink slavery
and thought somehow my wasted blood
confirmed your superiority.

Because your necklace was of gold
you did not notice that it throttled speech.
Because diamond rings bedecked your hands
you did not regret their dictated idleness.
Nor could you see that platinum bracelets
which graced your wrists were chains
binding you fast to economic slavery,
and though you claimed your husband's name
still could not command his fidelity.

You bore him sons.
I bore him sons.
No, not willingly.
He purchased you.
He raped me, I fought!
But you fought neither for yourselves nor me.
Sat trapped in your superiority
and spoke no reproach.
Consoled your outrage with an added broach.

Oh, God how great is a woman's fear
who for a stone, a cold, cold stone
would not defend honor, love or dignity!

You bore the shaming mockery of your marriage
and heaped your hate on me
You felt avenged.
Understand:
I was not your enemy in this,
I was not the source of your distress.
I was your friend, I fought.
But you would not help me fight
thinking you helped only me.
Your deceived eyes seeing only my slavery
aided your own decay.

Yes, they condemned me to death
and condemned you to decay.
Your heart, whisked away,
consumed in hate,
used up in idleness.
Playing yet the lady's part
estranged to vanity.
It is justice to you to say
Your fear equalled their tyranny.

You were afraid to nurse your young
lest fallen breasts offend your master's sight
and he should flee to firmer loveliness.
So you passed them, your children, on to me.
Flesh that was your flesh, blood that was your blood
drank the sustenance of life from me.
As I gave suck I knew I nursed my own child's enemy.
I could have lied,
told you your child was fed
'till it was dead of hunger.

But I could not find the heart to kill
orphaned innocence
For as it fed, it smiled, burped and gurgled with content,
and as for color knew no difference.
Yes, in that first while
I kept your sons and daughters alive.

But when they grew strong in blood and bone
that was of my milk
you taught them to hate me.
You gave them the words
mammy,
nigger,
so that strength that was of myself
turned and spat upon me,
despoiled my daughters
and killed my sons.
You know I speak true.
Though this is not true for all of you.

When I bestirred myself for freedom
and brave Harriet led the way,
some of you found heart, played a part
in aiding my escape.
When I made my big push for freedom
your sons fought at my sons' side
Your husbands and brothers fell in that battle
When Crispus Attucks died.

It is unfortunate that you acted not in the way of
equal justice
but to preserve the Union
and, of course, for dear sweet pity's sake;
else how come it came to be as it is with me to-day!
You abhorred slavery
yet hated equality.

I would that the poor among you could have seen
through the scheme
and joined hands with me.
Then, we, being the majority,
could long ago have rescued our wasted lives.
But no!
The rich, becoming richer, could be content
while yet the poor had only the pretense,
and sought through murderous brutality
to convince themselves that what was false was true.

So with KKK and fiery cross
and bloodied appetites
set about to prove that "white is right",
forgetting their poverty.
Thus the white supremacists used your skins
to perpetuate your slavery . . .
And woe to me.
Woe to the boy Emmett Till.
And woe to you!

It was no mistake that your naked body on a calendar
announced that fatal date.
This is your fate:
if you do not wake to fight
they will use your naked bodies to sell their wares
though it be hate,
soft drinks,
or rape!
This is what white supremacy has done to you,
This is the depravity it would reduce you to
death for me . . .
and worse than death for you.

What will you do?
Will you fight with me?
White supremacy is your enemy and mine.
So be careful when you talk with me.
Remind me not of my slavery, I know it well,
But rather tell me of your own.
Remember, you have never known me.
You've been seeing me
as white supremacy would have me be.
But I will be myself. . .
FREE!
Justice, peace and plenty for every man, woman
and child
who walks the earth,
this is my fight.
If you will fight with me then take my hand
that our native land may come at last to be
a place of peace and human equality!

— Beulah Richardson