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Umoja: Each One of Us Counts

Rita Dove

One went the way of water, one crumpled under stone; one climbed the air but plunged through fire, one fought the fear along.

Remember us, though we are gone.

A star flares on an epaulet, a ball rolls in harm's way; the glowing line onscreen goes flat, an anonymous bullet strays—

Remember us! Do not forget!

One lay slathered in garlands, one left only a smear; one cracked a joke, smiled, then shrugged to show he didn't care.

Do not forget that we were here.

Do those who failed still miss the wind, that sweet breath from the sky? Do they still covet rock and moss or the swift, hard blink of the lizard's eye?

We walk on water, we are written on air.

Let us honor the lost, the snatched, the relinquished,
those vanquished by glory, muted by shame.
Stand up in the silence they've left and listen:
those absent ones, unknown and unnamed—

remember!

their whispers fill the arena.

 $\hbox{\o}$ 1996, 2003 by Rita Dove. Reprinted with permission; contribution to Poets Against the War.

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