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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.