

## In Those Years

Adrienne Rich

In those years, people will say, we lost track  
of the meaning of *we*, of *you*  
we found ourselves  
reduced to *I*  
and the whole thing became  
silly, ironic, terrible:  
we were trying to live a personal life  
and yes, that was the only life  
we could bear witness to

But the great dark birds of history screamed and plunged  
into our personal weather  
They were headed somewhere else but their beaks and pinions drove  
along the shore, through the rags of fog  
where we stood, saying *I*

## Testimony: 1968

Who comforts you now that the wheel has broken?  
No more princes for the poor. Loss whittling you thin.  
Grief is the constant now, hope the last word spoken.

In a dance of two elegies, which circles the drain? A token  
year with its daisies and carbines is where we begin.  
Who comforts you now? That the wheel has broken

is Mechanics 101; to keep dreaming when the joke's on  
you? Well, crazier legends have been written.  
Grief is the constant now; hope, the last word spoken

on a motel balcony, shouted in a hotel kitchen. No kin  
can make this journey for you. The route's locked in.  
Who comforts you now that the wheel has broken

the bodies of its makers? Beyond the smoke and  
ashes, what you hear rising is nothing but the wind.  
Who comforts you? Now that the wheel has broken,

grief is the constant. Hope: the last word spoken.

### Credit

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### About this Poem

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“Two years ago, the composer Richard Danielpour and I were commissioned by Copland House in New York to begin work on a song cycle that would span the past half-century of American history: a baker’s dozen worth of testimonials, lyric vignettes arranged for a single soaring mezzo-soprano. ‘Testimony: 1968’ sets the trajectory in motion by chronicling the turbulences of 1968: the Vietnam War, the ongoing struggle for civil rights, and of course, the assassinations. I chose the villanelle form, with its relentless double-refrain, to evoke the turmoil of that year—the spiraling outrage and eddying despair—but also the swirls of hope that have risen and fallen through the years since. The entire song cycle, called *A Standing Witness*, was scheduled to premiere this summer at the Tanglewood Music Festival in Massachusetts but, because of the pandemic, might have to be moved to a later date.”

—*Rita Dove*

## INDOORS

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I lose perspective in national museums  
wandering through the nest of rooms.  
I forget that history is a long scroll  
floating over a smoky battlefield.  
When I bend over a glass case to inspect  
the detail on an engraved shield,  
I stop at a curlicue as if it were everything.  
Then in the rare books room I am mesmerized  
by little illustrations in the margins  
of dictionaries, ink pictures of a lizard, a kayak.  
Lost down a corridor of suits of armor,  
I cannot find the daylight of an exit  
or even an airy room of outdoor paintings,  
no blue sky and white clouds in a gold frame.  
Maybe it is time to return to the beginning  
of knowledge, to relearn everything quietly,  
to open an alphabet book and say to myself,  
lips moving silently, A is for Apple.