

Marvin Bell

THE DEAD HAVE NOTHING TO LOSE BY TELLING THE TRUTH

*On the Fiftieth Anniversary of the Adoption
of The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*

He sees the leaves fly free.
She sees the wild horse and the sparrow.
Free to labor, to consort with their kind, to choose or be chosen.
He sees them fed and feeding, mindful of the season.
She hears the continents shifting, he smells the air of change.
He tastes the wind-borne soot of rebirth.
She feels the human cry in her bones.

What can they do to gain our attention?
Shall he dance, shall he spin in the air, shall he vote with his feet, with his
voice, with the shells of his burning ears?
Shall she tell the world to hear the world's crying?
Shall she number the bodies, the prisons, the pyres, shall he mark the
graves, display the bloody shackles?
How many pairs of disembodied heads will it take?
How many detached hands and feet?
How many hollow cheeks, empty stomachs, vacant eyes?
How many skulls without memory?
He has been there, she has seen it, they have lived and died a long time.
He has something to say about who did what.
She has something to say about the living.
Let history honor the murmurs of conscience that are heard above ground.
Let praise flow to those who unclenched a fist.
Who granted men and women the freedom of the sparrow.
Who taught us to think twice.
Who showed us that famine is not a fast.
That exile is the last step.
That the rights of the few must be written down by the many.

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