

## *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*

### Author

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## Rita Dove

The author of numerous collections of poetry, Rita Dove served as the US Poet Laureate from 1993 to 1995 and as a Chancellor of the Academy of American Poets from 2005 to 2011.



Date Published: 2020-04-21

Source URL: <https://poets.org/poem/testimony-1968>