

DOOMED TO REPEAT
By Deborah J. Hunter

*About the 1921 Tulsa, Oklahoma Race Riot:
It is not our failure to remember the past that dooms us to repeat it.
It is our failure to believe we are capable of the same acts.*

Your disbelief blooms in slow motion,
like smoke smothering the sky,
like a death wound under white linen.

This telling of history from your too-late
perspective creates a bubble in my mind
that I cannot identify until it bursts
in my mouth into incredulous laughter.
You say you are shocked by the cruelty, but
this is how it has always been for us.
Your Tulsa is not my Tulsa.

Do you think we have always walked with
downcast eyes, heads drooping on our shoulders
and rounded back bones like wilted tulips,
speaking in hushed, inoffensive tones
so as not to be judged ripe for the noose?
This was the lesson our grandmothers taught us,
the lesson they learned from you grandfathers.

So, now, when you have accepted the Truth
of the massacre called riot, you wonder
why I am unimpressed by your outrage
at men who were the children of Indian murderers
and slave rapists, born in a country that debates
the worth of a black skin against the worth

of a brown skin against the worth
of a red skin against the worth
of a yellow skin while the scales are
weighted in favor of the white skin,
and how you cannot believe your own grandfather
committed this small act of terrorism when
it was his great-grandfather who auctioned black flesh,
his grandfather who engineered the Trail of Tears,
his father who rushed to claim stolen promised land.

It was you grandfather standing in the back
of a pickup truck, holding a molotov cocktail.
It was my grandmother hiding in her own house who,
a millisecond before she fled the flames of Greenwood,
saw the gleeful malice dancing in his eyes as the match flared.

From *The Red Shoes and other poems from the edge*
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