

*Hazel Simmons-McDonald*



## Silk Cotton Tree

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Some say  
They hold secrets of centuries  
Within their gnarled trunks

They are the silent see-ers  
Of ancestors, backs bent  
In blazing sun  
Seeding earth to birth young trees  
The backbone of a nation.

And when, in the noonday heat  
Some girl, shunning the overseer's  
Pulsing whip would hide  
In foliage at their feet

Their branches bent  
To mark the place where she,  
Holding within her breast the memory  
Of one who gave himself to shield her  
From the hurt of that same whip,  
Fell to the whim of the master's will

She gave birth to one stillborn  
And buried it there in the dark earth  
Between the roots.

And the ghosts of all those loves  
Whose hearts were given, taken, broken  
In that place  
Sigh the wind's silken breath  
Through the leaves of this stand  
Of silk cotton trees.

