

Bury Me in a Free Land

Make me a grave where'er you will,
 In a lowly plain, or a lofty hill,
 Make it among earth's humblest graves,
 But not in a land where men are slaves.

I could not rest if around my grave 5
 I heard the steps of a trembling slave:
 His shadow above my silent tomb
 Would make it a place of fearful gloom.

I could not rest if I heard the tread 10
 Of a coffle gang to the shambles led,
 And the mother's shriek of wild despair
 Rise like a curse on the trembling air.

I could not sleep if I saw the lash 15
 Drinking her blood at each fearful gash,
 And I saw her babes torn from her breast,
 Like trembling doves from their parent nest.

I'd shudder and start if I heard the bay 20
 Of blood-hounds seizing their human prey,
 And I heard the captive plead in vain
 As they bound afresh his galling chain.

If I saw young girls from their mother's arms
 Bartered and sold for their youthful charms,
 My eye would flash with a mournful flame,
 My death-paled cheek grow red with shame.

I would sleep, dear friends, where bloated might 25
 Can rob no man of his dearest right;
 My rest shall be calm in any grave
 Where none can call his brother a slave.

I ask no monument, proud and high,
 To arrest the gaze of the passers by;
 All that my yearning spirit craves,
 Is bury me not in a land of slaves.
 (1858; 1864; 1871)

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 R. Sherman (Urbana: U of
 Illinois Press, 1992)