

## Tell them

Tell them we were eternally young, believed  
in the old lie, how sweet and honorable  
to die for the mother country.

Tell them we marched on foreign soil against tyranny,  
even when we were called boys, sambos and darkies  
but we were men proud to heed Kitchener's call.

Tell them that gas shells didn't discriminate,  
gas we carried in lungs, luggage that we brought  
all the way home long after the war, a lugubrious death.

Tell them that bombs didn't demarcate where they landed  
between the dark and the light skin, bullets didn't curve  
in mid-air making distinctions of the lesser race.

Tell them in quiet moments, we heard our mother's voices,  
desired the kiss of lovers and watched God  
in the still of the morning before the rising of hell.

Tell them of guns, howitzers and Canadian 60-pounders  
the barrage of sounds both day and night, the incessant din  
bursting through tin hats, into sleeps, into dreams, decades later.

Tell them of the silent bullet whispering in the dead of the night  
tell them our feet rotted in unforgiving mud  
of the *eternal misery of body lice to be found everywhere*.

Tell them we were Scots with kilts, Sikhs with turbans  
an Indian cavalry, a British West Indian regiment  
and Cockneys, Cockneys, everywhere at the Somme

Tell them that our blood mingled and bled together  
in the frontline, on the battlefields, limbs mangled  
on barbed wires, bodies lost in no man's land.

Tell them we died in the colour of our skins,  
our mouths filled with patois and our blood  
still warm with the memory of slavery.

Tell them of the Sons of Africa who came to die;  
their bodies filled with war cries on the SS Mendi  
sinking as brothers danced the death drill side by side.

Tell them of the decision to white wash black troops  
from victory celebrations and the Peace March in London  
of the names that were not included on the walls of memory.

Tell them of Lionel Turpin the father of Randolph Turpin  
Tell them of Walter Tull the Forgotten Hero  
Tell them of Norman Manley a Jamaican National Hero

Tell them of Alhaji Grunshi who fired the first shot for Britain  
Tell them of Albert and Ethel James, of Private Harold Brown  
Of Marcus Bailey, of Herbert Morris, a 17-year-old, shot at dawn  
*for fleeing the trenches after his nerves had given way.*

Tell them after all of this, after the war had finished  
we still had to fight in the race riots of 1919.  
Tell them of seaman Charles Wotton who was thrown  
into the River Mersey and left to drown.

Tell them of the Black Tommy of the Somme  
no name, but a picture found amongst hundreds  
a reminder that we were there, a reminder to tell them all.

Tell our children and our children's children, tell them all.

**Roy Mcfarlane**