

Portrait of Old Ma

by

Suzanne Sunshower

Rarest portrait of all:
tintype of a Black woman
forebearer (original
mountain)
– deepest shadow
of country's darkest hour.

Thumbing the smoky image
in awe
a visiting neighbor-lady says softly
Wasn't it a sin
what those slave masters did
to the women?

My child's mind processes
the reverent whisper
and knows just knows
what is meant.

Old Ma's portrait tells all

before film almost
before photograph –

rugged great-great face worn
eyes deep-creased / battered
crack of mouth

forming bitter line:

Ain't I A Woman?

in thick mississippi drawl / voice
like muddy river pounding rock...

They used to say

being "sold down the river"

to mississippi

was the cruelest fate –

the sun blazing always blazing.