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Acknowledgements

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Scary Statue
Photograph
By Michelle Jericho Poppler
Water Glasses
Charcoal on paper
By Elena Nakashima
Morning Dream
By Kristine Alice Burch

A blue morning:
Dark, early, empty.
Gentle snow falling silently about the earth
Full of promise, beauty, and life.
Surrender with a breath
And begin to dream deeply,
Through time, vanishing from here
Forever.
If a Woman Were President...
By Ronda Shizuko Hayashi

If a woman were president…
War wouldn’t be an industry.
The lives of 18-year-old baby
Faces in camouflage suits
Would not be jeopardized.
And the Taliban would not
Be a threat to the U.S.A. right now,
Because a woman president of the
World’s most powerful country would’ve
Stopped their female genitalia mutilating
Asses from taking any sort of power
In the first place.
If a woman were president,
She would not be caught on global
Television crying like a bitch
To the delight of the enemy—twice.
Know why? Because a woman
President would think of the
Safety of her American children
Before she would ever let ego
Underestimate her opponents.
If a woman were president,
Rape would not be used as
A war tactic—unless it were
Man on man anal penetration.
Yes, if a woman were president
She’d feed the fleeing Afghanis
As well as starving, homeless
American children.
If a woman were president,
Hussein could keep his shrewd oil.
There’d be no dredging
In the goodness of Alaskan earth,
And all cars would be fueled off
Of American corn.
If a woman were president, a war
On terrorism would not be about greed,
Aggrandizement, religious rhetoric or
Making money off weapons sold to
the enemy.—If a woman
were president in a time of war,
a woman would fight a real
fight damnnit!
A woman wouldn’t fight politically
Correct; a woman wouldn’t fight fair.
A woman would be conniving, devious,
Wig out, and throw down for the
Safety of her American Children’s lives.
There would be peace in the
Middle East, and justice for
The deceased—if a woman were
President.
Underneath the Veil

By Ronda Shizuko Hayashi

Underneath the veil resides a human being
Who is self defined as a woman
Not a nationality, or ethnicity.
I am simply a woman,
Beneath the veil.

Underneath the veil,
I don’t see the evils of foreign
Policy and politics.
Instead I have been burdened with
The weight of truth,
Grounding itself in air planes &
Air missiles, navigated toward the
Death of my country’s youth.

Underneath the veil
I bow in reverence
5 times a day as do all my
brothers & sisters.
Opening our hearts to the Kabalah in
The east.
Asalamalaikam Rawahamatula
Wishing all the testosterone
Driven power mongers of the
World
Could chill
In my moment of peace
Underneath the veil.
San Gimignano
By David Caldicro

Rolling hills in the distance
Shades of brown and green—

Quilting the land
Scent of olives

The purple haze sunset
On the table—

A wedge of cheese—
The wine, cork out

The semolina bread
One red poppy

The candle light—
Now illuminates
Sisters keep your head up  
By Ronda Shizuko Hayashi

(poem)
I am a woman and like the lioness, I am the hunter
Ain't no other woman gonna put my love to rest
For it is my duty to protect my man and family in conflict
If needs be, I would dig through the crust of the earth
Should life test my womanhood's worth
I stand my ground and guard my territory
I refuse to let myself come out of a situation secondary
For I am a woman. I can't change that. I am what I am.
Not driven by testosterone, yet not all glitz and glam.
Both leather and lace compliment my face
Ain't no ordinary mister gonna trace my design for it is mine
Yet all are driven to find the source of my eternal shine
But this I keep confined for I am a woman and it is mine.

(chorus)
Sisters keep your head up. Keep fighting. Never let up.
We owe it to our children to evolve and develop.
Keep your head up. Yeah, keep your head up.

(rap)
Arise at dawn my sisters. Paint your face like a tribal warrior.
We bear the seeds that give all life. We are the Amazon destroyers.
I am every woman and every woman is in me.
His story makes me feel that we only know defeat
But in reality, we're the backbone that keeps this country on two feet.
I need not he for me to grow and be complete
Yet he needs me for him to sufficiently compete.
I do not know the meaning of ego
It seems to follow him where he go
I allow him to keep me below because inside I know
That he would not stay afloat without me
A woman simplistically

(chorus)

My feminine hell raisin’ qualities, sometimes repress hostilities,
Take second seat, endure humilities,
But make impossibilities become realities—all 4 the sake of
Me family. Sistahs don’t be so blind, open your eyes you need
would let go of ego to do all that
You done do.

Mother’s Pans
By Miyuki Kajiyama

Mother, don’t you think these pans need to be thrown away?

Look mother, some are rusty,
And need to be scoured before you cook.
Some have already lost their handles,
And have only bolts left in their place.
Some are made of aluminum,
And are thin and bumpy.
Some already have holes,
And cannot hold water any more.

Stop mother, don’t hide your pans while I am talking to you,
And don’t ask dad to repair them any more.

I know that these are older than I am,
And show your marriage history.

But mother, it is time to give up these pans,
So you won’t burn your fingers any more.
Drinking with Edna St. Vincent Millay
By Matthew McCrae Martin

She moves her shoulders like a piston engine
To the downbeat provided by
The jazz five-piece working the stage.
The tumbler situated directly before her
Immaculately kept white hands
Contains two half-melted ice cubes and
A collection of extinguished, lip gloss-stained cigarette butts;
Their last breaths wreathe her hair
In opalescent, spidery halos as she
Details for me the late night cab ride through
Paris avenues when someone touched the space
Between her shoulders for the first time.
Suddenly, we have nothing to say to one another.
We spend the rest of our time together eyeballing
The men and women slouching down the evening streets
Past the window where we sit avoiding each other’s eyes,
Wondering who will be picking up the tab.
Things and More Things
By Jared Lau

I grab and grab, and the more
I grab, the more I find.

Shoes, socks, underwear, a pony
Just to name a few.

Baseball hat, baseball bat,
Cell phone, Rolex watch,

POGS, bong,
Toy guns, and a scarf.

An Elvis impersonator, a really cool wig,
A sweaty T-shirt, and one not too sweaty.

The list goes on
The more I grab, the more I find.
In Memory of My Last Date

By Loga Narayanasamy

Gazing far away into the sunset
I watch in despair the shadow of its rays cast upon the Pacific
Upon a bench I sit in solitude feeling the world tilt beneath me
Along with the solemn arrival of dusk my life turns to void
Far away I go in time and go as far as I can
To remember you

Gazing far away into the sunset
I feel the warmth of tears caressing my face
Traveling back in time I search with zest
For something I had left behind you
For something I can neither remember nor forget

Gazing far away into the sunset
I witness the sight of the fading eye of God
Clutching to the letter you wrote I pray
For your spirit to reside in another world
For the moon to rise and illuminate your soul

Gazing far away into the sunset
I hear the thunderous sound of the waves
Crushing into the silent rocks only to pierce my heart
My heart trembles in agony of your absence
Far away it travels to find you

Gazing far away into the sunset
My body shivers in the cool breeze
In the midst of endless space
I float as a withered leaf
Space aggravates my vanity

Gazing far away into the sunset
My motionless hands are embracing your letter
A million years may deprive my happiness
A million words may fail to describe
How I adore those words you wrote
The words which will never cease to lighten my lonely nights.

Nature Haiku
By Allison Liddle

I can feel myself
Relaxing...as the water
Rushes past my feet

Birds voice their beauty
As they are gliding over
Touching the tree tops

As I look into
The river water’s mirror
I can see clearly

At night in the plains
The crickets practice their songs
Mating melodies

The stars shine so bright
Heaven can’t be miles away
For it is right here
An Imitation of William Carlos Williams
By Tracy Nomura

As the frog
Swam through
The clear, calm

Water
First the front
Two legs

Then the back
Two legs
Onto the ledge

Sprang off
The lip
Of the
Drinking glass.
This is just to say

I have thrown out
Your pants
And shirts
That you left
At my house

And which
You were probably
Picking
Up
Later

Forgive me
It felt good
To get you out
Mango
By Emma Neff

Peel away the skin
Slit it with a
Knife

Tear off the smooth scales
Grab them at the corners and listen
To the soft screams you utter
As armor deserts flesh

Yellow and dunes stare up at me
Eyes that are rough on the edges
Torn from sweeter visions now

Peel away my skin
Know the raw flesh staring up at you
And among my own remains
I find your body.
In My World
(Self Portrait)
Digital Composition
By Lisa Mizguire
Fake
(Reproduction of Vincent Van Gogh’s Starry Night)
3d Still Image
By Dae Sung Han
Wheat Fields at Auvers Sur Oise, France
Acrylic on Canvas Paper
By Suzy Keeler
She Came Back Stronger
Digital Painting
By Michelle Jericho Poppler
Phenomenon of cool
By Lisa Perry

Reflect
Imagine
Who are you?
Are you antithesis of cool?
Attempting to capture cool is a trap.
Don’t let its jaws drag you
All over town.
Your time is…now.
Take a leap…of faith.
Throw the world off your shoulders and
Live a little.
Discover yourself:
Go back to the beginning,
Follow the flame to the limitless pool of possibilities.
Challenge yourself:
Leave yesterday
Behind
Run a million K marathon towards the bright lights and passionate sound of
Tomorrow
Go…
Over the river and through and across the rocks and down the canyon
And into the gorge and up the mountain and under the cliff and between the
Boulders and past the switchbacks and into the stream and beyond the ridges…
Explore
Until you find a tree with fruit
Good enough to eat.
Be whoever you want to be.
Glow with gold.
Shimmer with you.
Saucy Conversation
By Kaleo

A loco moco
It means
“how do you do sexy—“

you first get ingredients:

some of your attention
sweet glances and
musical smiles

a patty
it
has to be over rice
and an egg, that’s

fried my brain
Yours truly,
Your gravy, all over it

that’s what I think, gravy.

All over some eggs.

scramble them, my saved plastic
shopping bags hold canned goods

bundles of paper
of images remind me of
“I once used to be”

Turn plates
Of fleeting memories
I cannot accept
And tote around
Cans of soup that
Nurture regret

And chairs that speak of whose ass
Sat in them—

Lonely tables hold trash
Seats bear ass
And which the warmer?

Heat
By Kaleo

My skin smells like campfire
on the beach
where salt and smoke soothes me
Mouth corners
curl upward
And my nose
brushes her shoulder again
Longer
Lovers teased,
breathe one another’s smoky breath
I saw her sun touched lips
Swollen
Parted
Wet from licking
I tasted summer at the beach
Not from the grill
But of her sun ripened sweets.
Lucas’ Spiritual
By Matthew McCrae Martin

Come a Sunday morning and Mama and Papa will be just a thunderin’ up and down the house tryin’ to raise up the girls for church and generally disturbin’ my rest. Then Mama will be bent over me with a wet wash cloth mashin’ the sleep out from my eyes, tellin’ me how I got to be keepin’ an eye on Lucas—‘cause Lord knows some times he acts like he ain’t got no sense—and to make sure he don’t get to cuttin’ up too bad in Miss Rogers’ bible school class.

Mama worries ‘cause Lucas is still little, and little children in general tend to cut the fool when they get out from underfoot of they’s parents. Mama says she wants her children to be the best-behaved children ever, ‘cause when we’re good it’s like a light shinin’ right out from Kingdom Come on her and Papa. I think it’s cause she don’t want nobody to get too mouthy behind our backs and start lyin’ on us and spreadin’ rumors and such. People who go to church regularly will generally do things like that.

But she ought not to be getting’ herself worked up none over Lucas. I do my best to keep an eye on him, though that’s a might bit hard to do what with all the testifyin’ and gloryin’ for the Lord we do in Bible class. But Lucas is generally a quiet little fella. He don’t bother nobody, just likes to look out the window and draw Jesus fish all over a piece of construction paper.

Now it is true that Miss Rogers thinks he’s all the time sassin’ her when she calls on him. But he ain’t tryin’ to sass nobody, he’s just tellin’ her what he thinks. And Miss Rogers can get real irked by him. Which ain’t good for a lady big as she is let me tell you. ‘Cause her face gets to turnin’ purple and she gets to talkin’ so that she can’t hardly breathe. Then she’ll get right down to stare Lucas in the eye, just a gruntin’ from the effort, and start to bark at the little fella for somethin’ he done said.
“Now why do you think it isn’t important to go to church, Lucas?” she’ll say.

And the little fella’ll answer her back, “I just reckon it ain’t so important if’n you worship Him and keep His day holy”

And then Miss Rogers’ll say, “But you need to be in church so that you might hear the Word.”

And then he’ll say, “I hear the Word all the time outside of church.”

And then Miss Rogers’ll put her hands up on her hips so she looks like the world owes her a favor and she’ll say, “Really, and where might you hear it?”

And then he’ll say, “Ever’ time I sit under a tree and listen to the wind blow, I says, ‘Yes sir that’s the Lord doing His work.’”

Now that’ll just near tear it for Miss Rogers, and she sets to breathin’ right fast out her nose so that it sounds like a big ol’ Bible thumpin’ hog done got in the room somehows, and then she’ll say, “That’s not the same thing Lucas. This is the Lord’s house, this is where you come to hear the word of God. If you think you can get that from listening to the wind in the trees then you’re no better than some old savage.”

And then Lucas, that little fella, will just get real, real peaceable and he’ll say, “I reckon that if the Lord made everythin’ then a little bit of him must still be in everythin’. I think the Lord lives all over and you don’t need to be cooped up inside to know that.”

And if there’s anything left to tear it’s done gone, and Miss Rogers will just close her eyes and roll her head ‘round and ‘round on her shoulders and in her real quiet voice she’ll say, “Mr. Martin”—people like Miss Rogers like to use your last name when they’s mad at you for somethin’. I can only figure that it’s s’posed to be a threat, but
shoot, anyone sets it in they mind to call me Mr. Anythin’ they can go on ahead, makes me feel right important—‘I am in no mood to argue with you today. But I will remind you of this: the Lord resides in the Kingdom of Heaven, and this is His house you’re sitting in right now, and all of us in this room are his lambs. By talking in such a manner as you are you make light of Him and are in turn are being disrespectful of your classmates and myself. I think you had better go outside and sit down before your brand of thinking spills over on to everybody else and starts to worrying them. And don’t you come back in until you can act right.”

By the time we set down for the sermon, ‘bout near everybody in the congregation knows Lucas done made Miss Rogers upset again. Almost every time those two have a go at one another she’ll wind up standin’ over by the piano, fannin’ herself to beat the band even though the church has air-conditioning.

“Look at her,” I tell Papa. “She’s fannin’ like she done walked through blazes to be here.” But Papa tells me this is for effect. Which means she’s just playin’ at needing that fan ‘cause she wants attention. This ain’t a very honest thing to be doin’ in a church I think, but it seems to work for Miss Rogers, and I s’pose it might be somethin’ I might like to try myself some time—if’n I ever get in a spot I can’t get out of. So, I says to myself, I s’pose I can’t fault her too terribly much.

But just when I am ready to forgive her for her acting—which is the right thing to do, especially if’n you’re in a church let me tell you—she starts to talking at the right tip-top of her voice, goin’ on and on ‘bout how tryin’ it is to teach the gospel to those who just don’t want to hear it. And how none are so blind as those who will not see. And that it ain’t her place to judge, that bein’ the Lord’s work and this bein’ His day and all, or expect too much from certain children considerin’ how they been raised. I wonder if she thinks we don’t know she’s talkin’ ‘bout us.

Now I know that some people ‘round here think that ‘cause my Mama went to college and has herself a job that we children are
just runnin’ wild. But Lord, it ain’t as if we’re living like a bunch of slop-hogs or nothin’. Mama catches it right and left from everybody. People like to say that ‘cause she went to school and got all them big ideas that’s why her children turned out so badly behaved an sassy, especially Lucas. Mama will look you right in the eye and tell you that it don’t bother her, but it does, Lord, Lord it does. ‘Cause generally after Miss Rogers performance Mama’ll get real quiet and she don’t say a word to us for the rest of the service. Then when we’re all walking home and gotten used to it bein’ so quiet and all, Mama’ll just all of a sudden bust out yellin’ and like to scare us all to death.

And Mama will say, “I do and I do for y’all and when I ask you to do one thing, just one danged thing, for me not a one of you can or will. Now Lucas looka here at me right now boy. Son you got to stop this here nonsense. I know I’ve always told you to speak your mind no matter what anyone else might think about it, but some times people only want to hear what they think is right. Now I’m sorry for it, but it’s just a fact of life. Next time that Miss Rogers calls on you, I want you to stop and think about what you’re going to say. If you think it might upset her or make her mad then I don’t want you to say it. You just tell her ‘I don’t know’ all right honey?”

And Lucas, poor little fella, all he can do is hang his head and say, “Yes, Ma’am.”

But ‘cause he’s little, he can’t remember all that and next thing you know he’s in it again.

Now there’s some folks talkin’—which is what folks with lots of time like to do—and they’re sayin’ that maybe Lucas don’t believe, that he don’t want to hear the Word. But Lucas, he knows about God. He knows more than those people talkin’ give him credit for.

Once, I’d chased him down to the thrush of cattails growin’ out back of our house. We was just lazin’ about and then we got to talkin’. I asked him why he has to go and make Miss Rogers mad all the danged time, and he just told me he wasn’t trying to.
And I said, “Then why you always answering her like you ain’t right? You can’t just do like Mama says and tell her I don’t know? You just makin’ it hard for Mama and the rest of us.”

And Lucas just looked at me like I’m the one that ain’t got no sense in my head and he said, “I know that I should behave. But I reckon that Miss Rogers ain’t right all the time. I know that the Lord is s’posed to be livin’ up in the Kingdom of Heaven, but times when I’m out by myself, down by the woods just listenin’ to the wind, I figure, shoot, He’s there too. And what difference does it make if I get myself right with the Lord in a church or out here lyin’ in the grass, I reckon it’s all the same to Him. Only folks like Miss Rogers think you got to be in a church to hear His teachings, but what comes after church? Ever’ time I’m out here I hear the Word, and that’s an ever’ day thing.

“I know that people are talkin’ ‘bout me, and I don’t want to make Mama sad, but this is just what I think is right. Sometimes… sometimes I mash my eyes shut and just for a little while I wonder what it’s like to be water, then I think about the Lord and how he made it so I could imagine about these things, and when I open my eyes I look for the hand that done put everythin’ where it is and I can see His touch in all things. I don’t know if the Lord’ll be angry with me for what I say or not, but I just tell people what’s down inside and so I don’t think he’ll mind that too much.

“If folks are worried that I ain’t right with the Lord, then they can just quit it. I know I am.”

And they ain’t much a body can say back to that.

For myself, it don’t bother me none if’n Lucas speaks his mind to Miss Rogers. I know what he says is true. Sometimes when I’m out runnin’ through the tall, tall grass growin’ up ‘round our yard, I stop for a minute and try to picture in my mind what it’s like to be all the things He has created. I listen to the wind just a moving through that long grass and I know that this is right.
My husband stands outside the doorway stomping the excess dirt off his work shoes. Reaching in his pocket he shows me a familiar piece of paper.

His shirt and shorts are smeared with random marks of materials used in tiling pools. They look like a Picasso.

His backpack is filled with his goggles and knee pads; his empty lunch thermos he sets down next to my book filled school bag.

He fidgets with his windblown hair and he removes his muscle tank top that has been outlined on his skin by the sun.

As he gets closer, he hands the familiar piece of paper to me and I look at the check and thank God. As the weekend is upon us and we spend time together, I feel like a millionaire.
Where would you be this evening Allen Ginsberg? Wrapped in your birds nest beard? Baying at the moon (or perhaps not) from inside your rose-filled closet? Would you come out long enough to walk with me along the crepuscular avenue?

We might grub for dimes alongside the salty, fermented old cranks and beggars. We could sell them your strophes and tell them that it’s almost as good as a belt of whatever they’re drinking. I’ve never cheated anyone out of a drunk, but I hear it’s a good business with low overhead. Leading head down against the street lamp halos, your beard, moral windsock that it is, fanned against your chest, we would surreptitiously eyeball the other flimflam artists and hokum paddlers shucking and jiving against the night, while plotting a jaunt to Tangiers. And you, filling my brain with items straight from the hooka would then flap away into the steaming cold like pages closing in a book, leaving me stranded to hustle my own way home.
Family
By Kayo Nomaki

My father is taking a nap on the couch with his mouth wide open. His white hair is hanging down on his deeply wrinkled forehead. On the table, a white haiku notebook is opened, holding a black ballpoint pen. A gentle wind sometimes blows and flaps the pages.

My mother is sweeping the backyard with a broom made from dried bamboo. She holds a rust-eaten aluminum dustpan. A brown striped cat is clinging to her leg and gets in her way.

My older brother is playing a red guitar along with heavy metal music, turned up to maximum volume. His rounded back rocks and his head shakes like a punching dummy. The keening sound of his guitar sometimes shakes the house.

My younger brother is playing with a volleyball in front of the house. He throws the ball in the air. He sometimes spins the ball on the tip of his forefinger; the ball is soiled from his daily practice.

My grandma is mending something with a black thimble on her index finger. Her hunched back bends in the same way her pinkie does. She squints and tells me, “Take good care of your mother and father, please…”

My mother begins cooking dinner in her blue striped apron. While my mother is cooking, we gather in the living room and watch television. Knowing or without knowing that the day is coming.
This is a story of a boy named Keola from Ewa, O‘ahu. One day as Keola walked along the beautiful shores of One‘ula Beach, he found what happened to be a fishhook. Keola was so proud that he discovered the fishhook, he ran home to tell his parents. Upon his arrival at home, he bragged to his parents about the fishhook. “Good Keola,” said his mother.

That night when Keola went to bed, he had an amazing dream. Keola dreamt that he was fishing and caught a lot of fish. The next morning when Keola woke up, he decided to go fishing. Keola had the most wonderful time fishing because his catch was just like in his dream. He caught so much fish he was able to supply the entire village with dinner for the evening. The people in his village were so happy with Keola’s catch. That night when Keola went to bed, he dreamt once again. In his dream he was spoken to by the God of the Sea, Kanaloa. “E Keola, you’re lucky to have found my fishhook. This fishhook can bring you riches, because it has magical powers,” said Kanaloa.

The next morning when Keola awoke, he prayed to Kanaloa thanking him for the blessing of the fishhook. Keola kept this a secret and told no one about the powers of the fishhook and lived his entire life as a wonderful fisherman.
The guy I fell in love with lives near Plumeria Road, right outside of Waikiki. I live near the Ala Wai Canal. I can remember the night when we finally confided in each other. It was the most passionate night I’ve ever shared with a man. This romantic love story took place sometime after my birthday, in the month of August. One night, after a long month of fighting with our emotions, we gazed in each other’s eyes and couldn’t find the strength to fight it any longer.

I was over at his house. It was around midnight. We were giving each other foot rubs, just as normal friends would. I was talking about how I will one day become an elementary school teacher. We would always talk about innocent things like that. The conversation gradually got quiet. The massages were becoming less innocent and more intimate. I was blushing just as hard as he was. We were both pink in the face. I looked like a strawberry. The feeling in our hearts was getting so deep that we had to take a break.

We regrouped for a minute or two. I asked him for a hug and instead he stretched out behind me on the couch. He put his arms around my waist and we snuggled for a while. Soon it got to the point where we were caressing each other’s faces. The moment was even more heated than before. I was weak in the knees. I couldn’t think straight. It was time to regroup again.

It was not long until he had me back in his arms. This time our lips just couldn’t resist; the first time he kissed me was half on my lips and half on my cheek. It was such an incredible feeling. We craved more.

Our next kiss was slow, tender, ongoing, a fulfilling kiss. It was passionate. There was meaning in it. My heart was racing and I could feel that his was too. Our kisses lasted until the next day.
My mother, aunts, grandmothers, and all the female adults slave in the kitchen all day. The aromas of many dishes fill the house, waiting to be served.

My mother is wearing her floral-print dress with a tomato stained apron and black pointed shoes. Her hair is pinned back neatly in a ponytail.

My mother threatens the men and children to stay away from the kitchen. “We are not worthy,” my father says and bows his head. With a wooden spoon she swipes the air and turns toward the sacred domain of the cooks.

Because my mother is upset by my father’s remarks, the banging of pots and pans grows louder as we wait patiently for the masterpiece. When I look at my watch I wonder if the banging in the kitchen is a means of making the preparation seem harder than it is. Maybe my mother threw the food away and is now washing the pots and pans.
Jazz Dancers
Ink on paper
By Leandra Kay
It was a clear, bright morning, the beginning of a glorious spring day in the countryside of central Italy. I floated lazily in the blue sky on the warm breeze coming in off of the Mediterranean Sea in the distance, absorbing the warm rays of the sun into the glossy, black feathers of my outstretched wings. Below me a tired column of soldiers trudged ahead into the distance. They appeared tiny from this height. I had witnessed many impressive feats from this worn and muddy group in its recent conquest of the Goths. Indeed, they had provided me with quite a carrion of human flesh these last few months. I knew to follow them and feast in their wake. Presently a great man-city came into view. At first sight I was merely awed by the size, yet as I drew closer, familiar feelings began to fill me. I realized that it was here, outside the very ancient city, that I had hatched from an egg and cried for food in the nest. So begins my tale, a remembrance from whence these bittersweet memories now spring.

My name is Lucius, and, as you have perhaps concluded by now, I am a crow. And being such, I am ruled by none save my hunger and will to live. Yet a few days after arriving in my homeland, I encountered a situation that caused me to struggle against my own nature and turn down a precious meal. My brother Trinius and I had been flying above the forests outside of the city on lookout for anything to eat when we heard the sounds of human voices. We alighted on some branches high in the forest canopy; we cocked our heads and listened. The voices sounded strained and heavy with malice. We could make out three figures. One we identified as Queen Tamora, a Goth; she was being teased by the others. We could tell by the other’s voices that this encounter held the possibility of violence. We began to work our way down the branches… out of the heat of the beating sun and into the deeper cool of the shady forest floor. As the light lessened, the day itself seemed to darken in mood. Sounds were magnified in this more enclosed space.
Suddenly the sounds of branches breaking nearby caused us both to let out startled caws. Two more humans entered the small clearing. They seemed highly agitated and the intensity of the conversation doubled. We flapped our wings in growing excitement, knowing that this was what we had been waiting for. Our suspicions were confirmed when the Queen left and the two new men drew knives. They quickly struck down the male of the other two. However, instead of dispatching the remaining female, they began to rape her. Having been around the battlefield for most of our lives, we viewed this scene as nothing new. We simply waited out turn to begin eating. Yet something caused me to look down, and I caught the gaze of the female as she languished beneath her assailant. Her face struck me with its beauty and innocence even in her moment of defilement. There was also something more, though I could not put my ‘finger’ on it as of yet.

They finished presently and began to mutilate their prisoner. This I had also seen many times and was not surprised. When they threw the girl’s hands and tongue out into the brush, we marked their locations carefully. However, we were greatly disappointed when the murderers dumped the body of the man they had killed into a deep hole, well out of our reach. We retraced our path to the girl’s parts. As we alighted in the grass next to one of her hands, it dawned on me why her face had puzzled me so. I had seen her before.

"Trinius," I said, "I remember this girl!"

"So?" he replied, "I am tired of you remembering useless things about our past lives around here. I’m hungry, this is good meat, and I’m eating it. Crows don’t turn down meals! We don’t have that luxury."

"True, my brother, too true. But remember the name Lavinia?"

At this my brother cocked his head, and his shiny black eyes seemed to fill with the light of recognition. The memories came sweeping back, I’m sure, as they had with me. Memories of two
young crow chicks captured by a tree cutter and then saved by a young girl. A young, sweet girl, gentler than any mother bird could have been. Caressing, feeding, and cleaning with these same soft hands! Singing soothing melodies to still our wild hearts with this same delicate tongue! My brother made a few half-hearted pecks at the dainty hand.

“This meat is too sweet for me!” he said gruffly and took to the air. I waited, reflecting for a moment, and then followed. The only consolation we could take from this was the great feast we had when Queen Tamora’s body was thrown out into the field, expressly for us beasts to devour.
Brandon
Ink wash on paper
By Elena Nakashima