

RAVEN TIME



Barbara Romney

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a little longer

Raven Time

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As a plant produces its flower,
so the psyche creates its symbols.

- Carl Jung

I. REFLECTIONS OF AMBIGUITY

RAVENS' PLAY

She called and
my body knew
by the timber of her voice
 who it was
and gladness filled me

Then
the river beckoned
Its surface calm
 glossy
Rocks voluptuous huge
as in O'Keeffe's painting
 foliage
 spring green

Two flocks of ravens - iridescent - intersect
circle the cloudless desert sky
 playing
 hide 'n seek

My heart, circumspect, equivocates
murmuring only
 maybe . . .
 maybe . . .

So
I send my faint-hearted
 heart
with her murmurings of *maybe*
I send her to visit
with the ravens
 as they play



JACK DANIELS

Judgment
willpower
out the door!

As though I'd had
maybe four or three
glasses of wine or
as in the old days
of Jack Daniels
a double shot

How else explain
during that sensuous movie
my uninvited hand
on your thigh?

Or
under a street lamp
a sudden (prolonged?)
leave-taking hug

But you don't drink
We don't drink together

So
how explain
whenever
whatever we do
or don't do
how explain
my getting high?

TIGHT JEANS
- cool weather fantasies

In the spring we met You
wore long-sleeved shirts
tucked in
jeans, belt buckled

Oh, I wanted you then
but submerged my longings
when you demurred

And so I thought
being
just friends
was nice

It was nice
that through summer
you wore loose
short sleeved shirts
non-descriptive pants

For the warm months
my denial was complete
We had fun
we talked of now
and of our histories

We became
more than “just friends”
but what we were or are
who knows

Cool weather came
We watched a movie
and I was cold
The movie was sad
Under the blanket
we held hands
You cried

Cool weather
and again you wear
those long-sleeved shirts
buttoned at the wrist
and neck
tucked in
tight jeans

Sitting across from you
our knees almost touching
again the fantasies
desires emerge

My imaginary hand
runs up your thigh
then
undoes a button . . .

Cool weather
fantasies . . .

HOLDING ME AWAY

If you were a child
who'd scraped her knee
I'd hold you close and croon

It's ok

It's ok to cry

I know it hurts

If you were a child
I'd kiss it better

But you are not a child
and that scraped knee
has been bloodied uncounted times
Oh, not the knee per se
but hurts deeper, more intimate

You are not a child yet
each time you feel invisible
each time you hurt

I stand helpless
wanting to hold you close
to rock you in my arms

Wanting to say
It's ok to feel that way

But all the while
you're holding me away

I cannot rock you in my arms
or even say
It's ok to feel that way

IRREVOCABLY, PERHAPS

Never having had
a relationship of depth
intimacy
Having never had such
with either man or woman
without sex
Leaves me in a quandary
as to what it is we have
or have not

Irrevocably, perhaps
I could give up the notion
of sex

But still hope to hear
echoes of love
crave a tender touch

Still miss
perchance
the sex

HER WALL

She built it over many years
starting as a small child
sitting on the sidewalk
outside the bar
 waiting
 for auntie and mother

She's worked on it
 ever since
The wall is solid
perhaps cinder block
 too thick to crack
 too tall to jump
 too high
 for anyone
 to ever touch
 the top

Sometimes
she moves a single block
opening
a kind of window

We share stories
 even dreams
But next time
 there's no window

Perhaps
she will appear again but with
 no remembrance

The wall
 is permanent but
 as did that child
 those many years ago

I wait
 for a window
 or door
 to open
knowing the while
 the wall is sealed

AN ABSENCE OF RAVENS

Her heart's
a desert

Sometimes cottonwoods bless
the edges of a creek

Sometimes water holes
teem with life
if only momentarily

Sometimes a hanging garden
with ferns and tiny blossoms
is nourished by a seep

Sometimes
not now
none of these
No ravens here

Her heart's a desert
dry

INTERLUDE ONE: BEYOND MEMORY, PERHAPS

WONDER BREAD

Mr. Soward's Grocery Store was just across the street
- a little corner market where, even though everyone was poor,
neighbors could "charge" basics such as flour, sugar, and yeast.

The town was so small that as a four year old

I could cross the street alone
if my mother, who was often ill, sent me on an errand.

The one thing I couldn't buy was Wonder Bread.
Conserving money, my mother always made our bread,
as well as everything else, from scratch.

I loved bread just out of the oven - warm and crusty.
But it was not Wonder Bread which I had seen but never tasted.

Wonder Bread seemed like a fairy food
- to be dreamed of
only.

My mother took me to visit a friend of hers
whose daughter Mary was a couple of years older than I,
older and so much more crafty.

I felt babyish, timid, and a little chubby whenever she was around.

We were outside on the porch playing paper dolls
when her mother brought out a plate with two slices of Wonder Bread
lightly coated with butter and quartered.

Eight beautiful, small squares of the most desired,
of Wonder Bread!
Oh my!

I reached for a piece but Mary stopped me with
Oh you can't eat that. It's poison to anyone not in my family.

You'll die if you even eat a bite!

My hands clasped behind my back, tears in my eyes,

I watched her eat all eight pieces.

I never told my mother even when she asked how the sandwiches were.
I don't know why.

A few years later my first job with a distant cousin -
dusting all the knick-knacks in her china cabinet.
There were lots. I was happy.
Ten cents an hour and told if I got hungry
to help myself to whatever was in the kitchen.
On the counter, Wonder Bread and soft butter,
items never seen in my own house.
Oh my!

By now the war was on and we didn't have butter.
We used margarine - a foul white substance
that came in a plastic bag with a capsule of orange coloring.
My brother and I took turns squashing the capsule
and then tried to squish the color all around throughout the white substance,
everything hopefully still sealed inside. This was actually quite a bit of fun
but the stuff still tasted awful.
So even then, a slice of Wonder Bread spread with real butter
was an unbelievable treat. I loved my Saturdays -
but never told my mother why.

By college, I was no longer timid nor chubby
and didn't cry when I couldn't have something I wanted.
Moreover, I had grown to realize my mother's homemade bread
was something beyond wonderful although I never told her so.
Mary's father was a professor of English,
a Rhodes Scholar, and highly renowned locally.
In class, I challenged him on some bit of medieval poetry
and for my trouble was awarded my only "B" in English.
I didn't take another class from him and vehemently hoped
his wife still served him Wonder Bread.
Oh my!

MY FATHER'S THUMB

We lived in the small red brick bungalow
a couple of years before we lived across from Mr. Soward's Grocery Store.
A toddler I must have been although I do not remember being a toddler.
I do remember seeming very small, especially when around my father.
And the house was a dark house inside.
A cousin, a baby only, small as my little rubber baby doll,
almost died there.

Perhaps the house was dark because he was so sick.
My father, the baby's father, and some other man,
most probably the bishop, gathered 'round.
My mother fetched the sacred oil and handed it to my father.
Oil on the baby's forehead and their hands on his head, as well,
while one of them murmured the healing blessing.
I have a cluster of memories echoing this one.
Sometimes the baby lived.
Sometimes the baby died.
You never could tell what would happen.
The women always stood silent holding the older living children close.
No one cried. That's how I remember it
but then I could be wrong
as I was only a toddler.

Behind the house was bright and seemed always sunny.
There was a large plot for a garden - but we didn't have a garden.
What we did have was a cow. And an irrigation ditch.
The ditch ran all along the edge of the space for the garden.
It always had a lot of water flowing.
Every evening my father took me with him to milk the cow.
His hand was much too large for me to hold so I grasped his thumb,
my fingers barely able to encircle it, and we walked along the path
between the ditch and the space for a garden,
which we didn't have.

The cow shed was at the back of the yard and it seemed a long way from the house. I would have walked any distance as long as I could hold my dad's thumb. He always matched his pace to mine. We walked together. My dad settled himself on the stool but set the bucket aside for a moment. First he squirted my little tin cup to the brim with the foamy warm milk. All the neighborhood cats gathered around meowing and he squirted a bowl of milk for them as well. It was only then he settled into the milking of the cow.

Then one evening my dad took me out to the front porch. The house faced east. The sun was still shining on the tops of the mountains. The dark house was behind us. I was holding my dad's thumb.

Look, look up over those phone lines to the mountains.

I have to go away, up over the mountains, to the other side.

But I will come back as soon as I can.

I understood later that he was gone to be a travelling salesman, desperate to earn money.

We were now in the heart of the depression.

Oh, I wanted to go with him to fly, as I imagined, up over the wires to the mountain where it was still sunny.

But no.

The dark house waited behind me.

My daddy was gone.

I didn't cry.

MY BROTHER, THE PRINCE

So my daddy was gone as was the cow and the evening ritual
with me, my tin cup, the cow, and the cats.
But the weedy garden plat was still there as was the irrigation ditch.
I was not allowed to go near it as two year olds are liable to drown
if they fall in - so my mother said.

This may be a true story or it may not be. I don't know.
These many years later no family members will corroborate it
so it may be something that exists only in my little toddler brain.

The weeds and grasses grew dense by the edges of the ditch, almost reaching my head.

The bank was steep and muddy.
One day my brother, five years older, was supposed to be watching.
I struggled through the weeds and sat on the bank
to put my bare feet in the water, slipped and went right in the ditch.

I cried and my brother came.
I could never have climbed out since
the banks were so slippery
and the water so cold.

My brother, just as the prince in the fairy tale, rescued me.
He pulled me out and washed me off as best he could
and we sat in the sun while he told me magic stories and I dried off.

We never told my mother.
Perhaps this story's somewhat true
or my little toddler heart made the story up
because I love my brother so
and my daddy,
he was gone.

II. REFRACTIONS OF UNDERSTANDING

POLITICS

*Because you are articulate and
so picaresque
we want you*

That's what I heard

Thinking of it later
the word she'd used
escaped me

I knew *articulate* and
that the other started with *pic*
but what was the word
she used?

Later
by the river
the word came back -
picaresque

That's what it sounded like

True
I've tilted many a windmill
in my time
but is that
the word she really
meant?

How could she know?

And if it was they
saw me as picaresque
did that bode well for me or for
the project?

Back from the river
dictionary in hand
exploring
similar sounds I found
picturesque

Articulate and picturesque

Perhaps
that's what she said

Still strange
and hardly how
I'd describe myself
But at least I'm not
fighting windmills

I suppose
it's just a matter of
adjusting
my self image to
*articulate and so
picturesque*

If indeed I can

I SMILE AS BEST I CAN

All over town
consensus is

Oh, isn't she wonderful!
at the pool
the health food store
the Farmers' Market
the PO

Yes, everywhere I go
I hear

She's my favorite person!

I smile as best I can

In myself

there must be some grave fault
a defect unseen by me

But sufficient

to bring forth from her
(I smile as best I can)
behavior warranted by me
alone:

A pickiness

Avoidance of saying

whatever should
be said

Leaving it to me

to figure meanings out
to my discomfort & chagrin

If I ask others

what my fault may be

They smile as best they can

and say

She's my good friend

I smile as best I can

OLD GUYS IN COWBOY HATS

Why is it

old guys
I don't even know
in cowboy hats
always smile
touch the brim
and nod

Why is it

such smiles
even when the guys are
somewhat scruffy
with dusty boots
but with polished silver bolos and
silver buckles on their belts

Why is it

even though
generally speaking
as you well know
I'm not at all
into men

Why is it then

I pause
flutter my eyes
and return
the smiles

Why?

THE WRONG NAME

She wanted me to meet her friends Why
I don't know

I knew
whatever had been hoped for
our relationship remained
casual

But that afternoon we were together
Me

the hoped for one
and her two friends
The vistas were magnificent

One friend and I
recovering Mormons
had much in common
as Mormons have much to
recover from
especially
if we are gay

As always in this desert land
the sun burned all negativity away
Bare bones clean and bright

Until
she called me
by the wrong name

Her friend the driver
turned
almost chastising

Where did that come from
she queried
although she knew
and I knew
and he knew
as well

I'd known all along
but not until she said the name
did I know my heart
still hurt
and I question again why
she invited me
instead of the one
she named

PRETEND FRIEND

A raven overhead
squawks
as the woman asks

Is she your friend?

Yes, yes
she's my friend
at least she's my
pretend friend

*What do you mean
pretend?*

Well, she should be
my friend
but something happened
we never talked about

And so
we act like friends
everyone thinks
we're friends
and she perhaps
as well
but it's only
pretend

Because
we never mention it
we never really
talk



THE GLASS MAZE

Yes
You told me about your wall
You built it
You know it's there

But
what you didn't
 tell me
was about the maze

You
entice me
over your wall and

I find
 a glass maze
Through refracting angles
 I see you
 crouching

The glass walls
taunt me

The maze
is more
defiant
more protective of
whatever it is
than your wall
could
ever be

I'm lost herein

BIG BEACH PARTY
- a guidance dream

Big beach party on
Fire Island or someplace like that

Me
off in a side room
with Dan Rather

He
getting inside my bra

Me
wondering how we'd
get out of this one
without everyone
knowing

He
playing with my breasts

Me
listening to voices
from other rooms

He
getting a good obligatory
hard-on
little else

Me thinking maybe
to make it worth the effort
we should try
spanking or something

Then
someone at the door
bringing drinks

And it hits me -
No one gives a hoot
what we're up to

He's on his cell phone
interviewing a diplomat

No one gives a hoot
nor does he
nor I

So it begs the question -
What
am I doing here?

INTERLUDE TWO: THE BROKEN ZITHER

WHAT WAS BROKEN

What I didn't remember

was

he broke

my zither

She was still small

my daughter

too young to

comprehend

Though angry

uncontrollable

it was not me

he attacked

but

my zither

My sad songs

silenced

hangman hangman

slacken your rope

and

go dig me a hole

in the meadow

dig me a hole

in the ground

The zither gone

my daughter's tiny fingers

traced a scar on the table

as she murmured

broken

broken

Nearly fifty years later

I wonder

what

was broken

what was broken

when

It was not 'til

two or more years after

I gathered my daughter

my dog

my bank book

I gathered them and

terrified

I fled

III. WINTER

HUMILIATION

- a dream

Susan and me
at a meeting
as was Kathy all
on the front row

But Susan
was a man flirting
unabashedly
with Kathy

He pressed his beefy
arm between
her legs

Desperate
I tried to
pull it out

I was angry
as I never could be
with Susan
for flirting
and getting
between Kathy's legs

and for the
deliberate
ignoring of me

when everyone
we knew
was watching

PERSEVERATING

That
too fast
high pitched
voice in my head
I don't care
don't care
I don't care

While my heart echoes weakly
I care
care
care

My head
louder
faster
higher
Drowns out the care with
I don't
I don't care
don't care

My heart whispers softly
care
care
I care

DREAD

Fear is flimsy
 individual
 as mine
 or yours
 or hers

On the other hand

Dread
 ubiquitous
 unfathomable
 lives breathes
 deep in our
 unconscious
 never to be
 remedied



WINTER COMES ON

Overnight
the season changes
from late summer
golden
to windy
white

Winter comes on

Overnight
I'm cold and shrink
toward invisible as

Winter comes on

I'll stay in my bed
 and not rise 'til
 spring

A RAVEN

A raven flies by
 high overhead

too high for me to see but
 his shadow
 envelops me

INTERLUDE THREE: TAKING TIME

A POEM IN FIVE PARTS

I.

Auden's *Age of Anxiety*
strangers
in a New York bar
seeking intimacy
 probing beyond

Auden ushered me into
 adulthood

Oh, we had plenty to be anxious about
 The war barely over
 Europe in shambles
 and soon McCarthy here
And a decade thereafter still
 no husband

Truth to tell
 I was happy felt
 prodigious
 fulfilled
except for that vast vacancy at my side
 vacancy proclaiming

 my lack
 my incompleteness
 as a woman

The cure awkward
 and temporary only

II.

Fifty years later -
The Age of Distraction
so ubiquitous
we can't name an author
 but know what's being
 diagnosed

Inundated
 with 24 hours of everything
 and if it is not being
 broadcast
 we google it
 and find out more
 than we ever dreamed
 or desired to know

We multi-task
 'til no focus
 can be found

OK

No FaceBook or Twitter but
I'm distracted
 by email
 by google
 by the movie last night or even
 by an innocuous book

I need time

 I need time to think and
 to not-think
 I need time to listen and
 to be listened to

III.

Jefferson via Lucretius
via the Epicureans
designated
pursuit of happiness
as an inalienable right

Pursuit of happiness!
What do you think of that?
and for a Christian nation, yet

I told Bonny Blue-Eyes
Our bodies are all we have
Let's care for them
even as we care for
each other
Bodies are the only
doorway to the soul

Blue-Eyes and I
took time
for pleasure and
nurtured happiness
thus finding the true path
of love

from which
distracted
we still stray



IV.

Distractions usher us into
or out of
what?
With distractions
I may be gone
my body gone
The molecules composing me
disbursed
and then
the sadness is
the unopened door

V.

I take time to think and
to not-think

I make the time
to track the melting
of the river ice
to smell the spring rain
to share laughter or tears
with a friend
and hold her hand
to be cleansed by
the desert sun
to go walking
with the ravens
in the first snow

I take the time
to breathe

IV. AND BEYOND ALL THAT

*The most beautiful thing we can experience
is the mysterious.
It is the source of all art and science.
- Einstein*

TWO DREAMS

DREAM ONE

In bed we're
awkward
not touching
You drift far away
in sleep

I want only
to be held
no sex
 just touch

Rousing
you pull me toward you
hold me close

We curl together
so comforting
so loving

And in my dream
almost instantly
I am
asleep

DREAM TWO

A fragment
 a figment
She turns her face to mine
 lips apart
 and oh
 I so want to kiss her
but surrounded by strangers
 we clasp hands
 and together
 walk away

In another place
still crowds of people -
 we walk on
 holding hands

Then turn toward
 each other
 lips almost touching and
I know the dream
 is ending
 before I ever kiss her
 before I even learn
 her name



OUR WINGS

Sometimes a poem
almost breaks through
our everydayness

as when
after my swim
you set a glass of water
near at hand

you stand on your back step
to greet me and
we are eye to eye
as I approach

you catch the beauty
at the moment
I'm also catching it
the desert sky
a cloud
the river flowing
ravens
overhead

I hold these times
in my heart then
from the cocoon
of everydayness
we burst forth
into another realm

flying
as our highest
lightest
ephemeral selves

selves composed only
of light and color
and
while they last
our wings are beautiful

A HOLE IN MY HEART

The technician's room was cold
I lay on the gurney
half-clothed

They were looking for a hole
in my heart
and I was chilled

You felt
my body's tremors
and brought a warmed
blanket

They were looking
for a hole
I was cold

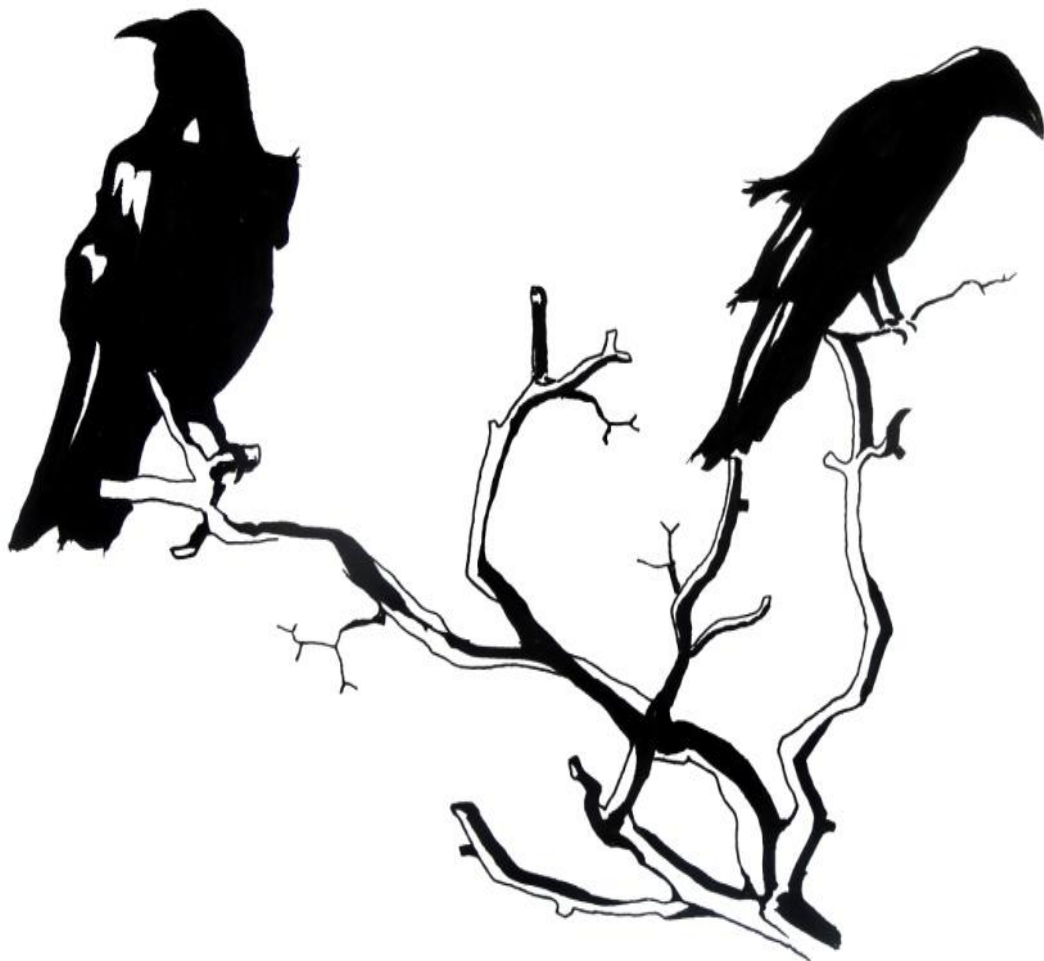
You brought another blanket
tucked it over my knees
around my feet
and trembling body

Then you stayed
caressing my legs
warming me

What they did not know
was
had there been
a hole in my heart

It was already mended
by your tenderness

TWO SENTINELS



STAR STORIES

- the gift

We drive over the loop road
picnic at a lake
then take the long way home
passing through
wild
fire
ravaged scrub oak
Bare black branches

But for us
the earth erupts
into a carpet of flowers
wild as fire
tiny red penstemon
mustards
thistles
asters

As our senses invoke our spirits
we're overwhelmed with awe

(You held my hand and said
This is the endgame)

We lie in the grass
of Old City Park
Faylene tells star stories
and myths and
where the next constellation
will appear
as the sky darkens

Soon it's deep dark and
each star outshines the other as
myriad points of life
spill over us

Our spirits
are overwhelmed
with awe

(You said *This is the endgame*)

Now your body's ravaged
tethered with oxygen tubes
and drugs

From your window we see
those two old ravens
sentinels
still watching

They know
we strayed from
our path
ages ago

But oh what a gift
beyond imagining
walking that path together was
however brief

Now I hold your hand
This is
the endgame

THE THIRD DREAM

We were very young
teen-aged
almost children

a boy and a girl
androgynous
slim, beautiful, brown
perhaps Mexican or
Hopi

I was both the girl
and the boy
or at different places
in the dream
I was one
and then the other
as were you

The car was an old model
so old the front seat was
a single seat
no buckets

We had parked
in an old part
of the city dark
with empty lots

I needed to be held
That's why we stopped

Which of us was which
I don't know
but we held each other
quietly

Until a middle aged man
beer-bellied
authoritatively
tapped on the window
signaled us to move on
making an obscene gesture
laughing

Suddenly
we are out of the city
in a place of ravens
and cottonwoods
 golden and grassy

We lie on the ground
under a tree
holding each other
as gold leaves
drift down

We are beyond gender
beyond sex
beyond age
in the grass
under the golden
cottonwood tree



RAVEN REVERIE

Fledged too soon
a small raven
spreads her wings for balance
wobbles by the icy river's edge

Unafraid
she looks at me
as birds do
with one eye
cocking her head

She settles on my lap
as though to sleep

With a cloth
drenched it in river mud
I swaddle her

It gentles her wings into place
covering her closed eyes

Not knowing if she's dead
or living
I hold her

The desert sun shines down
warming us
drying the mud

We sit very still
for a long while

I listen
hear the first peck
her eye peers out
She pecks more then

Bursts forth
flying towards the sun
soundless

My hands and lap are filled with dried
river mud

My heart
in longing
flies with her
'til
far beyond my sight
she's gone

Then,
are symbols
the flowers of our souls?

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Barbara Romney
Moab Utah



RAVENS BY TYLER QUINTANO