

Musica

by Roberta

I find her in the forest. Late evening. I have been walking in blind circles. I can barely remember where I have come from, still less where I am going. My hair is matted — mud, tears, blood — I have lost track. And there she is, taciturn before the fire. She motions. I sit down down next to her. Wet leaves scatter over my lap. "Weary, child?" She asks me. I mean to tell her that I am not a child. Instead I lay my head in her lap. She ladles out deer stew for me. "You can cry if you wish, child." Her voice is calm and clear, like a breeze on a hot night. The tears pour from me: my own exhaustion. Rape. My child, dead before it left my body. Gently she runs her fingers through the matts of my hair. "You are not tired, child," she tells me. "You are furious." Something releases and I howl. From deep in my gut, I howl. The fire swells in front of us. The voice of the forest howls back. Finally, a hush falls. "Time to lay yourself down, child," she murmurs. "But first, you must remember who you are."

I stare into the eye of the fire. Heat pulses through me, memory after memory washing over me. I stagger, I jerk. "Remember," she whispers. "Remember." Sweat. Tears, urine, excrement, vomit, blood. A child's cries, a child's screams, a child's laughter. A mother's voice. A woman's scream. The gasp of an orgasm. Release, release. A long, torn moan of anguish. A tug of war inside me. I tremble, I jolt, I crash to the floor. — I am still. Leaves sprout from me, tree branches. Roots shoot from my body and deep into the earth. "It is time," she sings. "It is time." I close my eyes and feel the fire take me. A sizzling as skin and sinew melt, fall away. "Scream if you need to scream, child." And I scream, and her song gains strength. The warmth of her around me. It is time.

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A pile of parched bones. Day is breaking. She breathes in and

inhales the world. She breathes out and gives life to the bones. The thud of a heart beating. "It is time," she cries out. "It is time." Morning birdsong peals around me. The pure yellow-white sunshine. I open my eyes and I glance behind me. I turn my head and fix my fierce gaze on the horizon. My clean black hair. My strong brown body. I rise and I am ready. "Time to live," whispers the earth and sky.

