

Two Hawks Kindles a Morning Fire Natchitoches Confederacy, ca. 1810

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Aren't you up early, little tat'iti?
Come sit while I start my fire for tea.
What do I do? I wrap my hand in doeskin,
Holding my steel so—this foreign flint has
Cut my fingers too many times, but this kindling wool and
Flint is not the moss your mother arranges, and you note my steel,
The ends curled? Long seasons past I was given this tool
By an old man from another people far north of here....But
This is a story for another day. Yes, the dried tree moss they
Use works well, but from where did it come? Ah, the sparks
I struck have brought life to my little kindle here. Hand me
Those small sticks behind you....The moss that hangs all
About us here—when first our people came to this place,
There and water, swamp, everywhere as it is now, but the
Trees growing out of the mud were bare, and our people of
The Caddo grew and planted our corn and squash and peppers,
Wove and bundled our lodges as we do today, and took deer
And bear as we pleased.

One day a man and his son came in a dugout shaped as we had
Never seen—Caloosa, they said, on a journey of the spirit, and
Showed us beautiful shells and a stick-thrown spear that was
Fast and true—they were a wondrous pair—and as they spoke,
The son, called Osceokla, looked deeply into the spirit of Dark
Moon, a tinuti maiden just blooded, her black shining hair falling
On either side, through her deep black eyes, his spirit reached,
And sat by her fire until they could not be apart. No, sihnuti,
He was not a skin-walker, as your mother warns you of, but
Only a youth feeling the love of a woman for the first time, as
She, lost in each other's hearts....You will not understand for
A long time, but listen—Locksawee, the elder Caloosa, saw
His son slipping from his grasp, and Dark Moon's father saw,
Too, the two Caloosa with their journey not complete; Tichtow
Forbade his daughter to sit in the lodge when Osceokla sat with
His father; Locksawee, saw, too, the journey might end here,
Before the destined time, the two elders agreeing. And the two

Caloosa poled away on the morning of the next day, soon lost
In the mist that hung like the smoke of a memory over the track
Between the cypress trees, the hard light of day soon burning
Away any trace of where the men had gone, in all but the eyes
Of Dark Moon, whose thick lashes were stroked together into
Points by the slow tears of grief, not with sound of wailing or
Sigh but with the slow squeeze of deepening loss.
And day spun into day and into night, Dark Moon's bowl of corn
Meal and bright peppers untouched, joints of venison or even soft
Catfish unbroken in her lap, her long blue-black hair hanging down
Her cheeks unbraided and unbrushed.

Until one summer day, Dark Moon, her strength failing, her heart
Knowing Osceokla would never return, wound her way through
Thicket and brush, past blackberry and clutching thorn, deeper into
The swamp, wading through sloughs and past chuckling creeks,
Deeper into the cypress stands than ever she had known her people
To tread before. And there she saw a cypress tree taller than all
The others, on a mound of mossed soil, the knees of the old tree
Rising up all around like the thick fingers of the yearning dead.
She propped a fallen trunk onto the bole and pulled herself onto
The lowest branch and began to reach up and climb, step and pull,
Until the surrounding trees fell away and the clean untouched breeze
Swept her face and lifted her tangled hair.

And there she took three long sinews from her brightly beaded
Pouch adorned with a glossy pink bit of shell Osceokla had given
Her. Twisting the sinews together she tied the cord around the one
Thick branch remaining, the other around her smooth throat, and
Spreading wide her empty fingers stepped off into the keening air.
And all that season Dark Moon's body swayed in the moving wind
And slowly dried, untouched by bird or furry hand, her black doeskin
Shift hardened in the broken sun, her long blue-black hair caught
And lifted, turned as the season passed, lost its gloss and grew from
Blue to dull black and then to moldy grey, the wind lifting her
Heavy tresses, until a long storm swept in out of the south, turning
Slowly as the water turns in my tea here. And the powerful winds
Pulled at Dark Moon's corn-husk form from side to side until her
Hair was drawn from the leathered skull, was pulled and caught,
Caught and drawn from tree to tree, from where the sun comes up
To where it goes down--her hair grey and swollen with grief drapes
Still from our branches. Such moss cannot kindle my fire, though
Many use it to. Yes, children, that is why the moss in the trees
Sometimes makes you sad.

Here, now, that happened long ago. Taste these berries I dried
Into sweetened spots for my tea.

First appeared in the *Langdon Review of the Arts in Texas* 6 (2009-2010).

A Karankawa
Near Garcitas Creek, Matagorda Bay
October, 1684

Have some tea, Monsieur LeBon, is that how
You say it? Boiled from that Yaupon holly at
The edge of the sand, the tea will make you strong
Again; use this bowl with the handle I found near
Your staying place. Here, I will hold it for you,
Your hands are of course bound very tight with
The Yucca fiber, not as smooth as your boat's
Rope but good enough for us poor Karankawa.
Oh, don't lift your eyes to the sky, the tears, like
A welcoming Caddo there, but the pain will pass,
And we have much to share, you and I, and I
Grow hungry—yes, LeBon, if eyes could pierce,
I would be full of holes and I would now die,
But I will not, nor will you. That last slice I took,
From your lower back, just a hand's length piece,
The width and depth of the middle finger I lost
To the snapping jaws of that wild pig four seasons
Past, you faced it like a man, until you saw it spit
And crackle over the fire, until my first slow bite,
Sprinkled with a pinch of salt from the drying stone,
Though a man's flesh does not need much added salt,
So well greased and spiced we already are...and now
You understand I will consume your spirit piece
By piece until you exist only in me. Come, sit up,
The sun is very tall, all those coverings you wear
Make you sweat so, and your skin so bright, no
Tattoos to show who you are, but I will change all
That today, eh? But let me pull off one of those
Long leather cases you have on your feet—pah!—
How they stink, but the big toe, LeBon, that big,
Soft fat toe, how it will pop and sizzle—I see I
Must wrap the legs together, so, along this trunk

Of driftwood before you will let me have it, and
This knife you brought us, so bright and shiny,
Remember? But perhaps an arm is better, up near
The last joint, where you can see the swiftness of
My knife, and I don't wish you to faint away into
A world of ignorance—a man should be aware of
Himself and where he is going...See? You felt
Just a chill, like brushing against a frosty branch,
And then the sting as the edge made its way through
The skin, and so sharp, just a handful of bright red
Beads of blood, the flap still held closed, and, here,
LeBon, look into my eyes, and—see? You did not
Guess the second cut so soon—Stay with me a short
Span of day longer, breaking man, so that I might hold
Your essence like an opened oyster and slide it down
My upturned throat...Uh, he is gone for now, into
That forced sleep of fear.

LeBon and I have time until he wakes again, and here
Growing along this stream are fine straight canes for
Arrow shafts to replace those I lost in that beautiful
Snook that swam off a day ago near the sandspit's tip,
Oh, what food that fish would have been for all my
Family. But I look at this piece of bleeding man and
Have to wonder what drove him here, and will I feel
That pull, and how many more will we share into our
Bodies until our spirits become theirs?

First appeared in the *Wilderness House Literary Review* 6:3 (Fall 2011).