

## *Beneath the Weight of Birds*

*Cindy Lamothe*

In a meadow, by the airfield, a girl lies waiting for the world to end before slipping on her sandals again. She stares at the sky, inviting the plane's wings to root toward the white linings. Clouds dip below the sun, as she takes the dark earth between her hands and spreads the mulch over her face to match her hair. The skin on the backs of her legs is blistered from dead branches that rubbed up and down her spine only minutes ago. She counted pine needles when the earth began to move.

*One hundred, two hundred, three hundred ... four ...*

The quaking began before six, when the birds scattered to their nests in preparation for night. Mama told her not to go too far, to stay close. But she followed the shadows and strange figures that appeared just beyond the trees. Followed the white crows with studded feathers who appeared just as the sky turned a halo of pink.

She was told to stay far from the crows with black beady eyes—that they would try to perch and caress. She was told that their beaks would turn into coiled snakes.

When the earth shook, she remembered to lie very still—to breathe only in gasps, and to stare at the minuscule planes the size of mosquitoes. She listened to the loud shrill of cicadas and the rhythmic crunching of dried leaves. Hot electric wires shot out from the base of her body, and hot coals seized the roof of her mouth so that no sound came out.

*This is how the world ends*, she thought, in quiet heaves and violent movements,  
beneath the weight of birds.