

Sentry¹

By Kate Dahlstedt

For Veterans Everywhere

I look into your soft eyes as you hold up your tattered shield –
to keep me from seeing...

The Beast
fangs dripping...
and you with nowhere to run.

But I am a grown woman.
I can only feel your story
like a distant mist,
a dream I can only glimpse in pieces.

But don't think I can't hear
the desperate howl behind your silence,
the crashing of your heart on the jungle floor.

It is you I really want to see,
even when it hurts.

I know there is safety in the Inside Place,
when there is no more *olle olle oxinfree*,
and the wound and the growl are deeper than Earth.

I ache to hold your broken heart,
and sing and rock and rest.
But I know the power of that Inside Place
to hide you away forever.

¹ The poem was previously published in the book *Lessons From The Garden: Selected Poems and Essays* by Kate Dahlstedt, Mandorla Books 2020.

So, I keep vigil outside your door,
three feathers in my hair,
beating my woman round drum,
humming the ancient Warrior Song...
all night long.