

Birds of a Feather

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No one saw the raven and the hummingbird fall in love. One day, things were normal, and by the next day they were together.

They were together by the ranger's station, where the hummingbird drank nectar from a feeder while the raven watched from the roof. They were together on the beach, where the raven gulped down rotten fish while the hummingbird avoided sprays of seawater. They were together in flight, where the hummingbird circled the raven like an iridescent moon orbiting a black sun.

The starlings knew first, and were quick to tell everyone else. "Did you know," they asked, "that the raven was sharing her hollow with the hummingbird? Did you know," they asked, "that the hummingbird perched with the raven, sitting right on her talons?"

It was a ridiculous embarrassment to everyone in the park.

"It won't work," the robins said, "turning over fallen leaves in search of worms. How would they preen each other?"

"It won't work," the turtles said, "sunning themselves in the last rays of fall. How would they court each other?"

"It won't work," the squirrels said, "burying acorns in the soil. How would they have children?"

The couple lingered on the tongues of others as a balm for their pains. Things were bad, but at least things weren't like that.

They gossiped, judged, and moved on.

Meanwhile, the hummingbird watched the grey sky from an oak branch. She wondered if it was cold enough to start snowing.

She heard her mate's wings above the wind's bluster, and the hummingbird's blazing heartbeat sped even faster.

The raven perched beside the hummingbird, her feathery beard fluffed up against the chill. The hummingbird hopped onto her mate's foot, pressing up against her warm, black feathers. "You're done saying goodbye? You were hardly gone an hour!"

The raven's deep croak rumbled through the hummingbird's hollow bones. "I only told my mother. I don't think anybody else wanted to see me."

Then she spoke softer, in the secret warble that corvids used for their closest bonds. "And besides, I'm looking forward to seeing those orchids you keep telling me about."

The hummingbird took off, hovering near the raven's eyes. "I know you'll love them. Come on."

They left, following the hummingbird's migration route due south to brighter weather and free-flowing nectar. After the season passed, they would not be returning to the park.

Maybe they wouldn't last. Maybe the world would tear them apart, like others were so sure of. But for the moment, they were together, buoyed by love and the hope for a warmer world, and it was enough.