

Still Life with a Crow

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It was snowing as she sat on her garden bench; white flakes fell and blended into her hair. In her hand, a shock of yellow. A crow on the bench beside her was iridescent, blue-black on white. It felt like a long, beautiful moment to take her last breath.

This is how she knew her end. She had always dreamed exactly what would be: late but easy births, serendipitous encounters, objects found, and lives lost. Even her daydreams inserted themselves into the softest moments of an ordinary day. They were sharp with the crystalline quality of prophecy.

But it was March, that month when leaves greened the world overnight, when light turned from soft pink to rich gold, when the earth gave off its own warmth for an optimist's seeds. She had time before the winter of her dream, three whole seasons of hope.

Gardeners, by definition, were hopeful people. Nobody planted a seed, tucked tender roots into the soil, or even removed a weed from its unfortunate hold without hope for an intended result, something beautiful or fruitful. For decades she hoped through her aching backs, dirt-split fingernails, and inevitable sun damage. Her hope had coaxed tender Ranunculus and Gloxinia into dividable masses and tamed annual invasions of Himalayan blackberry and Rugosa rose brambles. Her efforts were welcomed by returning February jonquils and appreciated by autumn Crocus.

Ignoring the pancreatic pain, she began to dig up dandelions in the farthest corner of her lawn. She tired after only a handful, surprised by the thought that somehow, by destroying these yellow demons, she was also destroying her brightest angels.

She rested on the bench from her dream and listened to the offkey notes of songbirds. Eyes closed, she sensed the stampede of clouds overhead, the shadow preceded the gust that freed the petals from the flowering pear overhead. They fell like white feathers. She opened her eyes, squeezed the dandelions in her fingers and greeted the crow like her oldest friend.