

STONE THE CROWS

Elizabeth Creith

Flash
Fiction Online

I'D JUST TURNED THE KEY IN THE IGNITION when I saw the birds.

They'd swooped past my car into the alley in front of the bank parking lot. When I looked up, I could see the pigeon on the ground, at the base of a brick building. It was in trouble, trying to get up onto a windowsill; flap as it would, it couldn't get enough lift. One wing was hardly moving.

The raven came wheeling in and hit the pigeon, feet outstretched. The two bounced together for a few feet; when they came to rest, the pigeon was on its back, the raven standing on top. Almost before they stopped moving, the raven was tearing at the pigeon, plucking wads of feathers from the tail, the breast, one pinned wing. Grey down caught in the bristles around the raven's beak, rolled along the ground, drifted gently in the air. I'd never seen a raven hunting before, and I watched, fascinated. The pigeon was still living; I saw small movements of the wings and legs.

The stone that made the raven jump startled me as well. It arced over both birds, falling past its target. I jerked my eyes left and saw a man, middle-aged, well-groomed, in a long, dark topcoat and leather gloves. The second rock in his hand was the size of an orange, and he shouted as he pitched it awkwardly at the raven.

He hadn't a chance of hitting it, of course. He didn't want to risk hurting the pigeon. The raven flipped its wings lightly and glided easily out of reach, flying further up the alley and out of my sight. The pigeon turned over, ragged breast on the ground. It tried to get both legs under it, but the right kept slipping. In the few seconds it took the man to reach the pigeon, the bird tried vainly to stand half a dozen times, lurching up and down on that leg.

The pigeon fluttered in panic, hitting the brick wall, as the man bent, reaching. I got out of my car just as he trapped the bird between his hands.

"That damn crow!" he said to me, "did you see that?"

"I did," I said. I looked down at the bird in his hands. Its neck feathers were iridescent, pink and green and blue. Its half-plucked breast was speckled with blood, and I could see



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an end of bone protruding from the right leg. The eyes were black, bright and unreadable.

“What can we do? Could we take it to the humane society?”

“You could try that,” I said, “I don’t know if they take wild birds.” This bird is dead, I thought. It just hasn’t stopped breathing yet.

“Look,” he said, thrusting the bird at me, “you look like a nice lady. Could you take it there? I’d do it myself but I have an important meeting.”

Down the alley the raven landed. The man’s head snapped around at the movement.

For just a second, the tilt of their heads as they regarded each other was comically similar. The man shouted, “Get out of here! Damn bird!”

“The city should do something about them,” he grumbled, then held the bird out to me again.

I looked at the raven, at the dying pigeon, at the man with the meeting. Carefully, trying not to cause any more pain, I took the pigeon into my hands.

I waited in the alley until the man was gone. The raven waited, too, neither retreating nor coming closer.

I’d never learned to wring a bird’s neck. It seemed best just to use the rock. One good blow did it. I dusted gravel off my knees and turned to go back to my car.

The man was there, carrying a briefcase. He must have left it in his car, gone to get it for his important meeting. His shocked look said everything.

I pushed past him, got into my car, and drove back to work. 🚫

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Elizabeth Creith has written flash fiction for the last four years. Her 55-word flash “Companion Animal” placed twelfth in the 2008 Writers’ Union of Canada Post-card Fiction Contest. It also served as the seed of a novel currently in progress.

For ten years she wrote humor for CBC radio, both regional and national. She is passionate about art, good writing, country life, and animals, and currently pays the bills by working part-time at the pet store she and her husband own in Sault Ste Marie, Ontario.

Elizabeth lives, writes, and commits art in Wharncliffe, Northern Ontario.

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