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Crows Remember Faces, Too

There is nothing special about the town of Elbow, but every summer I still chose to return.

There were largely two reasons for this. The first being that I was born in the woods of Elbow and have always been nostalgic in temperament. The second reason was Queenie.

I have never known Queenie's name, the same way that she doesn't know mine. But in the early dawn of every summer when I fly over Queenie's woods, I see her pink little house with its grey-white shingles and drooping eaves and I find myself stopping.

Queenie has a stone bath in her yard. The bath sits in the grass closest to her sitting room window. The routine is always this when I return: a rinse and a drink from Queenie's fresh bath, then I hop over to the sill of her window and tap on the glass to let her know I've returned.

This past visit, Queenie was stringing green beans when I arrived. I had taken my time in the bath; the water was always cold and fresh, like she knew the exact day I'd be back and set it out ahead of time. With the summers growing hotter and more unforgiving, that cool water was my personal oasis after a long trip. I took pleasure in dipping my beak into the water and running it through my feathers, picking out the dirt I'd accumulated from traveling. Then I took my time preening and straightening out my feathers. I knew Queenie liked it when I showed up looking presentable. I drank a refreshing beakful of water and let myself cool off for another moment before hopping over to Queenie's window, where I saw her shuffling around inside. Queenie had gotten older in the last year, as humans tended to. Her hands bore more lines and trembled a bit as she snapped the end off each green bean, peeling out the string and-- to my pleasure-- setting it aside in a little porcelain bowl. This was a little treat for me, I knew.

Queenie never let me in her house, though I had never tried. Crows feel most comfortable in open areas. And though Queenie's eclectic house with all her collected teapots and handicrafts charmed me, I was none too tempted to be trapped by her well-decorated walls. When I tapped the window with my beak, it made a pleasant *plink plink plink* sound, telling Queenie I was home.

She turned, at the sound of my knocking, and smiled a great big smile at me before opening the window. Queenie's smile was something marvelous about her, always full and sweet and sometimes stained with just a bit of her coral-red lipstick. Queenie's smile made me wish I had the teeth to smile back.

"Agnes, there you are!" She said, as she almost always did— as if she had just misplaced me in the time I'd been gone. "Don't you look neat."

I preened a little at that, glad my efforts had not gone unnoticed. Agnes was the name Queenie had chosen for me, just like Queenie was the name I'd picked for her. She told me that she'd heard the name Agnes in church one day and decided it fit me. I was pleased to have a name, when she gave me one. I was born in an empty nest, my mother and the other hatchlings already gone. In my adulthood, I've grown to assume that my nestmates were eaten by a hawk or another raptor, a common fate for unhatched eggs, I've learned. What turn of fate caused my life to be spared— I can only guess.

"It's been a long winter without you," Queenie said as I began plucking up the snack she'd saved for me. "Ooh a long winter, indeed." Queenie pulled her shawl tighter and watched me eat for a moment, then sat up remembering.

"I'd almost forgotten," she mumbled to herself, shuffling off. When she returned, I had finished my bean strings and she had two teacups in hand. "Your tea, darling girl." She set both

down on the windowsill. I hopped up on the brim of my teacup, noticing that she had taken out her fine china for this occasion. I *tinked* the cup with my beak and Queenie gave a pleased hum.

“You noticed!” She took a sip of her tea. “I’ve decided I should start using it whenever I have company, otherwise I’ll die with them dusty.”

Queenie had put ice cubes in my tea, knowing that the water would otherwise be too hot for my sensitive beak. I took a little sip, savoring the delicately fragrant taste of Juneberry, perfect in this season, Queenie always said. We sat together for a good moment and sipped our tea, the silence broken only by Queenie’s satisfied sighs of contentment after every other sip or so.

After a moment, she extended her index finger, painted a nice shade of pink but chipping a bit at the edges. The older she got, the softer her hands became. In the early days of our relationship, when she found me on the ground twenty-seven feet below my nest, this would’ve been unthinkable. When she scooped me up, I had screeched and jabbed at her with my still-hardening beak, a memory that pains me to think about. I was hurting back then, physically from my broken wings and perhaps emotionally in the place where my mother should’ve been. But then there was Queenie, with the tiniest splint and a warm shoebox of cotton balls for me to heal up in. Now in the days of my second-to-last visit, Queenie’s touch was welcoming and familiar.

Queenie is not my mother, I feel compelled to make clear, which may seem obvious but I should clarify that not only is she not biologically related to me, I do not see her as any form of surrogate. This point I had to make clear to many of the other crows of Elbow. Many of them didn’t understand our relationship, nor did I blame them. Crows are a social species, brooding in murders and keeping mostly to ourselves. With raptors flying ahead, many crows watch out for

one another's nests, ensuring the future of our species by communally watching over the eggs. Perhaps if my real mother had built her nest in the woods with the other crows and not so close to Queenie's house, I would've been a more social bird.

After we had finished our tea, I felt the weariness of the day's travels heavy on my wings. Queenie sensed this and suggested we turn in for an afternoon nap. Queenie has always been good in this way, reading the cues of our interactions with perfect politeness. It more than made up for our otherwise one-sided communication.

I waited for her on the window sill as she came around outside through the backdoor in her kitchen. Though I was obviously more than capable of getting around on my own— at Queenie's house I was babied, and enjoyed perching on her hand as she carried me from place to place. I am ashamed to say, but this time around I was impatient as I stood there waiting for her. She had taken longer than usual to slip on the worn-leather clogs that sat by her door. Then looking through the window, I saw her wobbling against the table to keep her balance and knew that I was a very bad bird for thinking these things.

Queenie carried me over to a smallish pine that grew at the corner of her yard. Nestled into it was a small house, perfectly sized for me. Queenie had placed it there quite a time ago, back when the tree was just a sapling, and in the many years since, the trunk had grown over the tiny house until only the entrance was left bare. It had created the perfect little place for me to curl up during my summertime visits. Queenie held me up to the perch at the entrance and I hopped down. She gave a little *mwah mwah* on either side of my cheeks, which I reciprocated. Then after I'd watched her tremble back to her house, I ducked into mine.

When my little house was first built, Jack, Queenie's son, had tried lending a hand in decorations. Jack was a strange boy back then and had a peculiar taste in decor. When I first saw the fate of my house, I was horrified by his choices. Jack had decorated the walls of my little house with 'treasures' he had collected in his time as a strange boy. The carapaces of beetles, the wings of moths, the tiny teeth of different mice. In truth, the first time I saw these things, I was untroubled—I was surrounded by these things in nature and admittedly I was still lacking in taste or decorum. Thankfully, once Queenie had seen the mess that Jack had made, she had rightfully blown up. She scolded him for his handiwork, which was *not appropriate decor for a polite young bird*, as she had said before sending him to bed without dinner. Before dawn the next morning, Queenie had erased his efforts with charming swatches of wallpaper and a lace doily for my rug.

When I entered my little house, I found that the entrance was a little snug. I nonetheless managed to wriggle my way in and bask in the familiar comforts of my fledgling home. A little bundle of shredded newspaper and cotton balls sat in the corner, my Queenie-made nest. On the walls hung bottle caps with tiny paintings and strung up all around were little shiny things that Queenie knew I enjoyed. Content to be at home for the summer, I tucked into my nest and fell into a deep sleep.

That was the last good summer at Queenie's house. We spent our days sipping tea and chit-chatting in the way we usually did. Queenie took care of me, and I was happy to let her. Once the leaves began to turn brittle, I knew it was time to leave. The winters in Elbow are even harsher than the summers, and though I knew Queenie could offer me many comforts to keep me warm, it was my natural way to fly south for the winter. That aside, winter was Jack's time to visit, and I felt the need to be gone when he was there, mostly out of respect for his time with

Queenie. Still, despite feeling the encroaching chill of winter and Jack's arrival, I always stayed as long as I could. Waiting until the breeze was biting enough to ruffle my feathers, I clung to those final days with Queenie.



Did you know? Crows live for much longer than people realize, decades even. Most people just aren't paying enough attention to notice it.

The next summer, I knew something was wrong the moment I landed in Queenie's birdbath. The water was tepid and dirty, clearly the rainwater that had naturally collected. Still, I wasn't a spoiled bird, and I took a moment to clean up despite not feeling nearly as refreshed. When I hopped over to Queenie's window, she was already in her sitting room, which wasn't strange, but for once she was unoccupied. It was strange to see her hands empty, and when I tapped the glass, her head turned slowly. She stared at me for a long moment, seeing only a crow standing at her window. I watched as clarity dawned in her eyes and relief flooded through me as recognition did for her.

"Agnes, there you are!" she said, as she almost always did. I crooned and hopped about—I had never thought about what would happen if Queenie didn't recognize me one day. Was that something that could happen to humans?

Queenie looked over at the bird bath and gasped in horror. "Oh Agnes, darling girl, your bath. I've completely forgotten."

With great effort, she staggered out from her house and to the bath. I watched as she used a little cup to scoop out the old water. Then she fished a bottle of mineral water from her sleeve

and refilled the bath. I stood at the rim of the bath, watching the process. By the time she was done, Queenie trembled with exhaustion. She was waiting expectantly for me, so I splashed around in the water with at least some heartedness. I wasn't upset by any means, and I'm truly a terrible birdie for saying so, but seeing Queenie struggle to fill my bath somehow ruined my enjoyment of this small pleasure. Still, I tried my best to straighten up for her.

After my bath, if you could call it that, I found myself back at Queenie's windowsill. We sipped our tea— Queenie dunked biscuits in as I nibbled at the crumbs she'd crushed up for me. Somewhat unexpectedly, Queenie sighed with dissatisfaction and I paused in my tea.

"I'm sorry, Agnes darling, that things aren't as they should be. I've been unwell lately and I took a bit of a tumble this past March." Queenie sighed again, looking out at the woods behind me. "And on top of that...there's something I need to tell you."

I shuffled awkwardly on my windowsill. Though Queenie often chatted with me, it had been awhile since I had been her confidant. Back in Jack's days of being a strange boy, I had been Queenie's closest ear and secret-keeper. Once Jack was put to bed, she and I would rendezvous at the windowsill where she would lean close and whisper to me the things that pained her to say. She told me how he was doing poorly in school, how he had released her cat into the woods, how he had hurt a little girl in his class by lighting her hair on fire with a match he'd stolen from her purse. She told me that it was all because Jack's father had turned tail and ran the day before Jack's ninth birthday party. Without him, Queenie couldn't raise Jack to be a man the right way.

In those times, I carried her secrets with me and they weighed my feathers down like oil. I was unable to do anything to help, but nonetheless I listened as good birds should. I never told her how much her confidence affected me, how could I?

Today Queenie hesitated and I waited impatiently. She took a deep breath.

“Jack is coming home tomorrow.” I was stunned, for a moment. Then a terrible heat prickled through me, rustling through my down feathers as I puffed up angrily.

“Oh Agnes, please don’t be upset. I was so worried about what you might think,” Queenie pleaded. She stroked some of my feathers back into place. “I don’t know if you’ve noticed but I’ve not been myself lately. I took a tumble pretty hard last fall.” She brushed faintly at her wispy bangs, and I noticed a scar above her eyebrow. I felt guilty for not noticing that before. I ran my beak along her hand as she continued to pet me.

“I’ve been spacey lately, forgetting things.” She wobbled her hand in the air, “And the bank had to let me go...which means I can’t pay the fee at Jack’s halfway house.” Her pats were getting heavy, almost forceful as she seemed to grow distant. This was how it had been before—Queenie’s problems falling hard into the air and onto me.

But that wasn’t Queenie’s fault. Queenie likely didn’t know the extent that I understood her, much less would she expect me to feel obligated towards her distress. I would never blame Queenie for that. But nonetheless, on this last summer of ours as she told me about her problems, I couldn’t help but feel the pressure of her eyes boring down on me. This time, though, I would finally be able to help.

I thought back to the shiny odds and ends in my little house. I’d seen money before. Sometimes during the winter, when I was in the city, I would perch on the rooflines and transoms, watching people exchange bits of paper and metal for food, clothes, yarn. So I knew money. Hopping back into my house, I pulled a heavy coin from the wall where it was mounted on two tacks. The coin was a little too flat and wide to comfortably carry in my talons, but it was

a short flap back over to Queenie's windowsill. She watched as I lugged it over. When I deposited it in her hand, she scrutinized it for a moment, then looked at me.

"What am I meant to do with this?" she said.

I was speechless for a moment. Never before had I heard such a tone from Queenie, at least not towards me. We were both frozen for a moment, then she smiled her warm smile and I felt myself melt into relief again.

"Thank you, Agnes," she said. Queenie took the coin and tucked it into her pocket. She looked at me hazily. "Jack's been gone for a long time," she whispered.

She shuffled away after that and I realized it was time for bed.

I waited at the windowsill for her to ferry me over to my little house. A long minute passed, but I remembered my shameful thoughts from last summer and forced myself to be patient. Still, Queenie never came. Eventually, I resigned to fly myself to the house and get tucked in without Queenie's hand to guide me over.

When I saw Jack pull up in his little grey car the next day, I felt that anger prickling at my feathers again. I was sitting on my perch when he arrived, and though it had been several decades since we'd seen each other, I knew it was him instantly. It was strange seeing Jack like this. I had seen both men and boys before, but they existed as separate entities living entirely independent from one another. Watching Jack climb out of his car as a fully grown man, I saw him as a continuous shape from the boy I had once known to this man I saw now.

Queenie was at her window in the sitting room when Jack arrived, and though I saw her head turn at the sound of his car, she didn't get up from her chair. Then Jack appeared behind his mother in the window. He held his arms open for a hug and waited until she finally acquiesced. I

had never hugged Queenie, with my wings being considerably shorter than hers. Watching them share this moment, I felt awkward for the second time of this trip and decided to give them their privacy. I ducked back into my little house and surveyed my surroundings. My little doily rug, my little bottlecap paintings. On one wall hung a small reflective shard, broken off from the mirror of Queenie's favorite compact. I surveyed myself in the little mirror.

Jack had grown up, yes, but he was inarguably the same boy that had been shipped off years prior. And though the years had given him more height and broader shoulders, they had let him keep the same cold eyes and permanent sneer. He was a Jack but bigger. I thought back to my own childhood. As a fledgling, I was round and soft, with light grey feathers and a petite little beak. I strained in the mirror to find any of those features, but they were indistinguishable. Somewhere along the way, I had lost all that. Now my feathers were dark and sleek, my beak hardened for working, my talons sharp, and a small patch above my left breast where feathers no longer grew. Where Jack was continuous, I was discrete. There was no smaller me, we were separate entities entirely.



He took no time making himself comfortable in Queenie's home. He spent his days out in the town, looking for jobs, according to Queenie. In the evenings he sat in an armchair in the parlor room that he had suddenly claimed as his. At night, I watched the glowing ember of his cigarette die down as he sat in darkness, watching me back.

"Jack is here to take care of me, just while I'm getting things settled," Queenie said over tea the next morning. I had waited til Jack had left for town before flying over, not wanting to interrupt his time with Queenie. I had no issue taking turns with him, dividing Queenie's time.

“He’s at the bank right now sorting things out with my severance package.” Queenie stared down at her teacup guiltily.

“I saw him every Christmas, did you know?” Queenie said. “I visited him there, once a year.” I ran my beak along the grain of the wood, cringing as it splintered. Though it had been a long time since I’d seen Jack, Queenie had seen him every winter. I wondered if she too saw the similarities to his younger self.

“Jack is much better now,” Queenie interrupted my thoughts. She was very good about that, sensing what I was thinking. “I think things will be different from last time,” she said. I felt uneasy about that but I could think of no way to communicate that to Queenie, so instead I drank my tea.

That night, I flew over to the window of Jack’s bedroom. Just like when he was a boy, he left it propped open when he slept. I squeezed myself in through the gap that was left open. I was uncomfortable with how much I had to finagle my way inside. If I needed to escape quickly, it wouldn’t be easy to slip out. Still, this was a necessary mission. Once in Jack’s room, I paused for a long moment to ensure that he was sleeping. Watching the rise and fall of his chest under Queenie’s quilt, I gave myself permission to move. I hopped down to the nightstand by his bed. A glass of milk was on the nightstand. Jack drank it first thing every morning. I fluttered up and, with my best aim, opened my claws right above the glass. The little seed fell from my grasp and *plunked* down into the glass cleanly.

Oakloss is a fascinating plant. A type of vine that sprouts from its seed in nearly any condition but favoring humid weather, the vines could sprout and grow to full length within less than a day. When I returned home and slept that night, I pictured Oakloss vines sprouting from

inside Jack's stomach, growing out through his intestines and throat until it choked out all breath from within.

The next morning, I watched Jack closely from a faraway spot in the trees. Though he seemed somewhat groggy, throughout the day he never exploded in vines. Instead, he spent the day pacing around the house yelling on the phone. Queenie's illness had flared up and she stayed in bed all day with an aching migraine. I was somewhat disappointed with my failure, but not discouraged. A few days later, once she was finally back on her feet, Queenie had gone out to the garden to pick flowers for her table, which inspired me. I perched on her shoulder as she worked, sometimes hopping down to poke at the dirt and help her dig. When she wasn't looking, I snatched a thatch of pokeweed from the edge of the garden. I hid in the eaves of the roof then went back to helping Queenie garden.

That night, I was back in Jack's room. Worried he would grow suspicious of the milk, I instead aimed for his pipe. As I scoured the room, I realized the pipe was nowhere to be found. I knew Queenie had always disapproved of smoking, so it was likely that Jack had hidden the pipe when he wasn't using it. I paused to think back to the boy Jack I had once known. Back in those days, he had hidden most of his treasures in a small lunchbox tucked under the bed. I crept across the floor, trying my best to silence the scrape of my claws against the wooden floor boards. Above me, Jack snuffled in his sleep and turned onto his side, facing away from me. With no better chance than this one, I slunk under the bed and found the same metal lunchbox hidden behind sweaty clothes and dirty gardening gloves. Blessedly, I realized it had been left open.

In the lunchbox, sure enough, was the pipe. Pokeweed was deeply poisonous to crows, so although it would've been easier to use my beak, I carefully shredded the weed with my claws and stuffed it into the pipe. This took quite a bit of time and I knew the longer I stayed here, the

greater chance there was of being caught. Finally, once I had sufficiently packed the pipe, I made to leave. As I placed the pipe back where I had found it however, something caught my eye. In his little box of treasures, alongside a few pictures of nude women and a dusty mouse skeleton—a long, sleek black feather.

I stuffed everything back, perhaps too recklessly. I scuttled back to the window and paused to catch my breath before stuffing myself back through the gap. I glanced over my shoulder to look at Jack one more time. Laying perfectly still and illuminated by the pale blue moonlight, Jack stared back at me.



I lied before, when I said that I had never tried to enter Queenie's house. Crows are natural-born liars and I apologize for that. Another lie: Jack was my friend first. Perhaps not a lie, but something I had kept to myself. It wasn't something we liked to think about.

Jack was a strange boy. He didn't want to be with the other kids at school, and when they all ate together at lunch, he would find me at the edge of the woods where I waited for his company. After Queenie had plucked me off the ground, she nursed me back in the comfort of her home while Jack and I became fast friends.

Though I wasn't allowed in the classroom with him, there was hardly a time otherwise that I couldn't be found on Jack's small little shoulders or flying beside him. Jack liked playing. The two of us would romp through the woods, pretending to be Napoleon and Marshal Ney—him leading a war against the woods and I his trusty second. He lost his first tooth as I molted for

the first time, growing in my new dark feathers. Queenie put a nickel on his pillow and a shiny marble under mine. At night, I would sneak in through his window and he would read to me from his books. I learned Jules Verne and Mad Magazine all the same from Jack.

Jack began losing trust in me when Queenie took me on as her confidant. Perhaps the knowledge Queenie bestowed had changed my behavior, as his friend. I was torn between the two Jacks, the boy I knew and the one Queenie revealed to me every night. At night I would learn new things about Jack and in the mornings, he'd wake and find less and less of a friend in me.

"Jack has been out in the woods lately," Queenie had confided in me one night, many years ago. "He goes out and kills little creatures. He guts them, I think." She said

I had already known this, of course. I had seen Jack's little victims in the woods, entrails spilling out as the forest consumed their bleeding remains. Though I never took part in Jack's killings, I presided over them without issue. A child of nature, I hadn't been immediately disturbed seeing Jack doing these things. That night, however, seeing Queenie's distress, I knew that this was not how little human boys should behave. I sometimes wished that Queenie had not told me this. I've had a distaste for flesh ever since. Moreover, it made me ache a bit to see Queenie so upset with no way for me to remedy it.

This all ended the night that Jack had a fever. He was especially unbearable when he was sick, Queenie had told me. He'd finally gone to sleep after hours of tossing and Queenie could finally breathe. She was sitting in her armchair by the fireplace, me in her lap as she stroked my feathers. She went about business as usual, airing her grievances about the ladies at church who gossiped too much, about the child support checks which always came late, about Jack. Queenie realized it too late, but Jack had woken up in the middle of our confessional.

“I just can’t handle him anymore. It makes me wish you were a real girl,” Queenie was saying when he appeared in the doorway.

I remember how he looked, face ablaze from the light of the fire. He was angry, I’d learned to recognize that early on. I remember feeling scared for Queenie, afraid of what he would do. Too late, I realized that my fear was misplaced. It was havoc as Jack lunged for me. It was a squabble of screams and feathers, I remember the feeling of his skin breaking under my claws, of his hands clamped tight around me. We ended up in the kitchen somehow. Queenie had collapsed in the doorway, screaming for us to stop. Instead, a knife had found its way into Jack’s hand just as I at last escaped his grasp. A second later would’ve been too late— the knife sliced at me, right above my left breast. It split my flesh, though shallowly, I had never been made open like that before. I remember screeching and crying as I tumbled out the kitchen window and into the black night.

It was a few years before I returned. A storm had blown me towards Elbow by chance, but homesickness had caused me to perch at the edge of Queenie’s property that day. She found me there with a newfound caution and a healing scar where Jack had gotten me. Jack was already gone by the time I came back, sent to juvenile detention for biting a girl’s finger off in school. Not for what he had done to me. Nobody cared if a crow got stabbed, nobody but Queenie.



I sat in the woods, watching Queenie’s house from a distance. I wanted to see if my pokeweed had worked, but I didn’t dare get any closer. Even that wasn’t enough, as Jack moved through the house, I caught him staring out the window, looking right at me. A confused part of me almost felt pleased that, even after so much time, Jack could still pick me apart from any

other crow in the woods. The rest of me was sensible and forced me to fly deeper into the woods, just for a bit.

The other crows were shocked to see me, as I was a rare visitor to their neck of the woods.

Did your humans kick you out? One had jeered at me. The others gurgled in laughter.

No, I said, trying not to sound defensive, *I came here of my own volition*.

What is 'volition'? They chirped in a choir. I didn't bother answering.

I've seen your human. The first one said, *It's a man now*.

You've seen Jack? I said, feeling very cold. Had he come here looking for me? *What was he doing?* I asked.

Digging, replied the chorus. *Digging over there*, they flapped over by a bare patch of grass at the bottom of one tall pine. I hopped down to the patch and picked through it with my beak.

Careful, one of them said, *careful, careful, careful*. I looked up, they dotted the branches of the trees around me, all watching. *It's nightshade*, they cried. *Poison, poison, poison*.



Queenie was at the edge of the woods when I made it back, like she was waiting for me.

"Agnes!" She cried, "There you are!" I was near wailing as I reached her. Never had I wished to speak so badly as I did now.

Queenie hobbled over closer to greet me. I noticed more than ever how weakened she seemed, unnaturally so. *Oh Queenie*, I sobbed to her, but of course she didn't know this.

"Jack has been throwing up all day." Despite myself, I was somewhat pleased to hear this. "He's been cooking supper these past few months, but I figured the boy could use some rest."

With me on her shoulder, she began shuffling back towards her garden. "I'll dig up some vegetables to use." As she spoke about Jack's cooking, I thought back to those dirty gardening gloves under his bed, feeling overwhelmed with grief. I could've pieced it together sooner, I could've done something. Still, with Jack temporarily incapacitated, I had an opportunity to find his stash while Queenie cooked.

We arrived back at the house and when Queenie stepped through the threshold of the door, I stayed on her shoulder.

"You'll help me cook, dear?" She cooed to me.

"Who are you talking to Mother?" Jack said from where he stood in the kitchen doorway. In his hands, a neat tray of afternoon tea was steaming. I nearly dropped from Queenie's shoulder in fright. Jack zeroed in on me, perched on his mother's shoulder.

"Oh, Agnes," he said. It was casual, as if it'd been only days we were apart and not decades. My talons instinctively tightened around Queenie's shoulder and she winced.

"Jack, don't strain yourself," Queenie said, her voice trembling.

"I'm feeling much better, mother." Jack kept his eyes on me as he responded. "Have a rest, I made tea for you and Agnes." He gestured to the chair beside him.

Sensing my tension, Queenie compromised, sitting at the kitchen table. "I can have my tea for a bit and then I'll start on supper?"

Jack paused, then smiled. I had never seen man Jack smile, and it unnerved me to see his adult teeth all in place. “That’s wonderful, mother.”

He placed the tray in front of her. I hovered over the teacup, the rising steam bloomed in my face and made me dizzy. I stumbled back, Queenie thankfully grabbed a tea cookie first, nibbling at it timidly.

I tried getting closer to watch Jack, but as I fluttered over to rest on the counter, he fluidly pulled a knife from the block and set it down on the chopping board, right beside me. In a flash, I was back with Queenie, forced to watch from a distance.

“So you remember Agnes, Jack?” Queenie said, to my horror. Queenie had never committed such a faux pas like this before. Jack turned and smiled at me with his man teeth.

“The little bird I used to play with as a boy?” He asked. “I didn’t realize crows lived that long,” he added. I scowled at him. They do if no one guts them first.

“We’re very lucky to have our Agnes around,” Queenie sighed, stroking my feathers. Out of the corner of his eye, Jack watched his mother pet me affectionately.

Finished with her cookie, Jack and I both watched as Queenie reached for her teacup. Immediately I fell into a panic, shrieking and scrabbling at the table. My fear was an invisible barrier, keeping me from getting any closer to Jack, but I wailed against it in terror. Queenie gasped and dropped her teacup as Jack grabbed the knife. We were a mirror of younger selves. I felt something bubbling up in my throat, like bile rising and foaming at my mouth. I squawked and choked on it as it boiled over from my chest.

“*Poison*,” I croaked out. My voice was deep and alien to the air around us.

Queenie and Jack froze. Queenie and Jack met eyes over the shattered teacup. A hand flew to her coral-red mouth as Jack flew into a rage. He lunged at me, swinging the knife

ravenously. I tumbled from the air, just missing Jack's swipe. I dove at him, my claws outstretched. They dug into the soft flesh of his eyeball before he could stop me. Then I was rearing back, ripping the sinew of his eyeball in two as I tore away from his face.

Jack yelled, a low and horrible screech of pain, dropping the knife. I flung myself at him again, driving my beak into the hole where his eye was, ripping out gore and flesh from the socket as I had seen him do countless in our childhood. He reared back and threw a closed, heavy fist at me. Before it could collide, Queenie leapt in front of me as Jack swung down, bashing her down to the floor. Queenie collapsed in a heap and we both froze. I landed at Queenie's feet. Her face was flat against the cold tile of the kitchen floor. Jack was still paralyzed above us, watching to see what would happen.

With my beak, I pushed the hair away from her face. She stirred, eyes fluttering open to see me standing before her. Queenie's dull eyes stared back at me, cold and unrecognizing.

"Jack?" she croaked groggily. He watched. "There's a bird in the kitchen, Jack."

Jack barked a sharp yelp of victory. I felt out of place, suddenly. The ceiling was too low and the tile too cold.

Jack was hollering with laughter as grabbed me. I was too exhausted to fight it as he squeezed me tightly in his hand. It was over quickly, then. Jack slammed me hard against the kitchen counter and I was dead before my head fully splattered across the tile.

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I awoke in a warm shell, surrounded by a wet and comforting fluid. I chipped at the shell with my soft little beak. Once the cracks formed, I was able to worm my way out and tumble into a nest. A real one, made of twigs and leaves, not penny-saver pages. Not that I had ever known any other nest besides this one.

In this body, I did not know anything about penny-savers or Juneberry tea or little pink houses. This body did not know it would someday be sleek and dark and tired. This body was round and soft, with light grey feathers and a petite little beak, and it had never been touched by human hands.