

The Widow's Crow

by K.B. Carle

The black marble crow waits for her friend, the widow, to visit her column perch, tucked away in the forest outlining the outskirts of the village. Unlike its inhabitants who leave requests for stolen goods on paper scraps between her claws during the day, the widow comes with bits of black berry cake in the seams of her tattered dresses. Sings to wake the crow at sundown and whispers goodbye at sunrise, when the crow becomes a sculpture once more.

But tonight, the widow doesn't wake her with a song, and the crow flies in circles overhead waiting for the cake crumbs to fall. She caws her frustrations until the widow produces a bit of paper in the palm of her trembling hand.

Steal the breath of a man.

The crow finds the request an odd one but agrees to help her friend. She finds the man gazing at a door with shattered glass windows, twisting his wedding band around his finger. He wears a fine tailored suit, murmurs the name of a woman. She lures him into her forest with gentle caws that mimic the sighs of the woman he desires and marble feathers reflecting how he envisions himself.

He reaches for the final feather at the base of her perch, not knowing she is circling overhead. She releases the stone from her claws, emits a caw that causes the leaves to shudder and mask the shattering of bones. His final breath appears as a strand of smoke wrapping around the bony wrist of the widow, shoulders trembling, eyes shrouded by her black threadbare shawl.

The crow tilts her head, sliver of a tongue swatting at questions between her parted beak. The widow kneels before the man, placing a wedding band between his parted lips.

