

THE CARNIVOROUS CORVUS

by Josephine Renee

Black nails click against the phone as she swipes up to another viral video of a crow. It holds amethyst in its beak, which it adorns its human companion with. Swirling the remains of an iced chai latte, she watches the melting ice mix with the spices. Her legs are crossed. She wears no undergarments, only black lace over chiffon and organza. The oat dregs in the bottom of her glass form the distinct image of a raven, *Corvus*.

She leaves The Soul Cauldron's parking lot in her 1967 Candyapple Red Ford Mustang, the passenger seat full of tarot cards to review for her followers. A pair of ravens fly side by side, mated for life, tangled in a vortex of their own design. Dropping nuts onto the road, one swoops down.

Her pedal hits the steel husk of the Mustang. The bird becomes paste against the asphalt. She slows. A beak crashes against the rear window, devastated at the state of his mate. She stops. His body slumps to the ground, lain bare among the granite rocks.

Her car door shuts with the delicate creature inside, cradled in her arms. Ruffled feathers splay across her skin. She whispers spells against his wings. Kisses his forehead and wraps him tenderly in a coat on her lap.

At home, she places seeds and a bowl of water beside a perch and an amethyst between the sheets of a heated bed. She feeds him unshelled peanuts and strokes matted feathers down with the back of her finger.

Once the food is delivered, they sit on the black silk sheets of her bed and watch *Sabrina the Teenage Witch*, *Corvus* in the warm crook of her neck. He's in her videos now. She's reaching viewcounts beyond her wildest dreams.

'I love you. Goodnight,' she whispers before they fall to sleep.

Corvus glides alongside the car, then attaches himself like a cape to her shoulder as she steps out. The chilly air ruffles their black coats. Her heels

click along the pavement. The slit in her skirt lets in cold air, filtered only by her criss-cross tights. As they step toward The Soul Cauldron, she looks at a new pack of tarot cards in the window, the skeleton facing hers.

Talons scrape her shoulder as his weight shifts into the air.

Grass seeds stick to her hair and clothes as she runs to catch up. Her stockings ladder like stretch marks on a demonic beast. Thin lace sticks to her as a second skin. The coat drops from her shoulders. Jewellery slithers from her neck. Crystal droplets drip from her wrists. Purple gems shine in her footprints.

As her heel hits the road, it snaps. She stops—*is* stopped.

Rocks glisten in every pore, skin is unpicked from the seams, lain to rest on a bed of asphalt and glass. Gravel grates raw flesh away from bones. Corvus contorts. His tail rises like a flag to signal fresh meat. His beak breaks open, he arcs his head back and caws, calling more crows to help cut the stringy flesh of the corpse. Headlights carve the remains into sections for them to mark. The driver tries but fails to shoo the flock away.

Away from my cracked-open rib cage. Their beaks pull apart my aorta and drink straight from the chambers of my heart. They burrow their faces through my bones and bite, my closed casket assured as my limbs are broken into parts. Claws cut into my corneas and fledglings eat the vitreous fluid that falls. Wide is my mouth for Corvus to crawl in and bite at my tongue, getting feathers stuck between my teeth. Black nails broken, dress cut open, asphalt-stained lips.

Bones bare beside my murderer's beloved.

