

BROTHER CROW

By David Kann

Walking in the woods
through autumn's smoky afternoon
smell of dry leaves, dust and drowse,
I found a clearing
with spiky yellow grass
and wheat run to seed seasons ago.
Across the way
a sentinel crow hunched
on a tree branch so long dead
its bark had fallen away
its cambium weathered feather-grey.
The crow shrugged,
shuffled his wings,
slanted his head at me,
and cried, "Haw!"
then: "Haw-haw!"
I wasn't worth the warning—
his friends were far from there—
or worthy of the laughter,
if that's what it came to.
He stared and seemed to wait.
What could I do but salute him?

I raised a finger to my brow and nodded.
He nodded back.
His bright eye said,
“The cold time is coming.
Coyote dozes,
curled in his den
on the rocky hillside
beside the rank bones of his meals.
and the tatty bush of his tail
warms his black nose.
She-bear who adores the sun
warming her belly
and shining on tossing streams
sleeps unmoving by her cub.

Snakes in their burrow
curl and knot slow and slower,
will sleep medusa-wise,
clouded eyes staring.
Frost’s razor will scribe clear pond ice
when cold’s first hammer-slam
slows night’s wheel
and eats the day.
The wind will tear,
but branches will never be bare.
Few leaves and fewer
will cling, shriveled tongues on bony lips.
Some will stay to wag winter’s windy promise.
Man, man, there will be a time
of grating fever and slicing chill,
of blood that thickens and trickles
of breath that catches and staggers,
of a heart that slows and stumbles
over December dark’s vacant covenant.”
He nodded once,
then squatted and thrust
himself away from the branch.
He spread his wings,

feathers finger-flexed
carding the twilight.
He circled the clearing,
lifted above the tree-tangle
and rowed the night
rising from its cinnamon pool,
laughing all the way.☺