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Brother Crow

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Kann: Brother Crow

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 thereor worthy of the laughter, if that's what it came to. He stared and seemed to wait. What could I do but salute him?

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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,

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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. ©