

Dead Crows

by Debbie Ann Ice

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(October, 2007)

The night my husband became a transvestite, crows started dying. They fell from the sky like black umbrellas, hitting the ground with a thud. A rainstorm of birds. I figured it was a virulent strain of bird flu that drifted into the clouds and killed them all just like that. There they were, flying around in circles, and bam! Sick. Dead. A virus that behaved like shot gun pellet.

I told Earl, who was dressed like Queen Elizabeth for a Halloween party, not to touch the birds. He wobbled outside in his comfortable pumps and leaned way over to study their limp bodies, poking a few with a stick. There were at least four dozen birds in our yard. A few more plopped by him before he finally decided to hurry back inside.

I was not Prince Phillip. I was Woody Allen, because I kind of look like him, and only Woody Allen would show up at a party with a husband dressed like Queen Elizabeth. My husband had planned everything out that night. Dressed up like the Queen, he would talk to me about his quirky coming out. But then the crows started dying, so Earl decided, rightly so, to deal with the crows first.

After the thudding stopped, we got garbage bags and started the clean up. When crows fall all over your yard, you don't stand around asking questions, you clean them up.

There would inevitably be media coverage, panic, flu shot mania, our confused President on TV. But at that moment our only concern was removal of dead birds.

It took about a dozen garbage bags for our front yard. Larson Henley, our neighbor, had to borrow a few bags to get all of his. The

dead crows were so bad in his yard, you could not see a bit of grass.

After all the bags were piled as high, we grabbed some beers and rested on the patio before heading out to the party. I said, "Earl, do you suppose something else besides the flu killed all these birds?" Across the street, Mary Lou Eagan's yard looked like a soft black blanket. She was off visiting relatives in Texas. By the time she came back, her yard would smell like a civil war battlefield unless we all chipped in and helped clean it up.

Earl said he didn't know, and chances were no one would know. It was like the time all the dead fish floated up from the bottom of the ocean. Or when the trees fell down in the California Redwood forest. Or when all the bears woke up mid-winter and starved to death.

"It's just one of the many things we have to accept in the twenty-first century," he said. He let that sit a while, then turned to me, all pensive and sincere. "It's best, during these trying times, to be honest with each other. You never know what will be next. It could be people. All of us standing around, talking or something, then, whammo, on the ground, just like those birds." I nodded. "Lindsey, what I am saying, I guess, is that things are just going to hell all over the place, and the only thing we can do is hold on to the truth."

"Amen."

"That is the only thing that cannot die. Truth."

"You said it, Earl."

Another thud off in the distance, over by our mailbox.

"I will tell you something now," I continued. "I never cared that Woody Allen had sex with, then married, his daughter. I pretended to be outraged. But, you know, I still like his movies, and I am glad I look like him. There. It's out."

"There you go, Linz. There you go with the truth. Good for you."

"I feel better."

Another thud, this time closer. I looked over by our garage and spotted the lifeless crow.

"So, OK. You're brave, Lindsey, and that motivates me. So, here I go. I think I want breasts."

"Well, I got a few here. You can have them anytime." Earl did not laugh.

"No. Not like that. I mean I want my own. I want to *have* breasts. There, I said it."

The silence became a rustle of leaves, our neighbor's loud "Goddamn", and another thud, over by our Japanese maple.

"And I like skirts," Earl said. "I think I look good in them."

"And so," I said. "You're going to get breasts? And sex between us becomes what?"

"I'm still turned on by you. I just want to wear different clothes." Earl took a long suck on his beer. "Maybe you get on top more. Maybe that."

I decided not to say anything, instead grabbed a garbage bag and started to pick up the few crows that had fallen during our truth talk.

I held them up by their little talons, taking in their empty eyes and stiff wings before dropping them into my bag. I tried to imagine how they must have felt up there, flying around with headaches, then falling until they hit this tangled yard where they took their final breath, here with Queen Elizabeth and Woody Allen.

