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Death of the Crane

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Death of the Crane

MELANIE LEARY

She always began her mornings like this: sitting on the back porch with a cup of black coffee, breath steaming the air, hair a wild gray-brown cloud around her face, eyes downcast. Some days, when she didn't have to work, she would bring a book outside with her, glossy cover hardly creased, and half-heartedly flip through its pages.

In the summer, the early-rising sun would gleam off the gold ring on her finger. On occasion, she would disappear inside before emerging in a modest black dress, hair combed and styled. Then she would leave for two hours, prayer book tucked under her arm and her late husband's watch clutched tightly in her hand. She would always return with slightly-smeared makeup and red eyes.

She never had any visitors, her only family being an elderly grandmother who lived across the state. Once in awhile she would receive a letter in the mail, her name spelled wrong and the scent of nursing home clinging to the pages.

After her husband's death, she started working part time as a bank teller, even though she had received a degree in Writing many years ago from the prestigious private school in the

city. She was an author of many books—essays, novels, short stories. But my favorite of her works was a small collection of poetry called *The Death of the Crane*. It was the last writing she had published before she stopped writing altogether.

I saw her slowly lose herself, voice growing ever fainter, eyes becoming dull and vacant. I thought that this had to be the biggest tragedy of the decade. From my bedroom window, I watched the gentle blue glow of the TV screen coming from her house. I glanced at the copies of her books lining my shelves, dog-eared and worn, and I felt the overwhelming need to give her peace.

Pulled by an invisible force of compulsion, I snuck into the yard and through her bedroom window to watch her sleep. She looked different there, in the sanctity of her home. The slight hint of wrinkles framing her eyes had smoothed out, and her breath came in slow, even puffs.

My pocket knife glinted through the dark, and I smiled.