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Flurries

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In a flurry of red and green and blue, the crow swoops out of the shade of his tree nest and into the soft gentle light of the new morning. Gliding gracefully over the fields on the edge of the forest he sings his song, acutely aware that as he goes various little creatures stop their morning activity to catch a glimpse of the splendor of the Rainbow Crow. His voice is clean and sharp and powerful. His melody is as graceful as the trickling of a brook but as strong as the ocean’s current. No other bird can hope to match his song nor the beauty of his feathers, reflecting the colors of the rainbow. He has layers of yellow on orange on red on blue. Truly, he is the most gifted of all the creatures of all the lands and he knows that.

From behind a bush, Old Man Coyote catches a glance of the great bird’s morning flight and quickly turns back to the matter at hand. He licks the warm, sticky blood from his muzzle and takes a final glance at the rabbit who was unfortunate enough to become the coyote’s breakfast. There is more than enough berries and such to keep the coyote from going hungry, but Old Man Coyote prefers the hunt and taste of the blood, that hot juice of life. The look in the eye of his prey as the last traces of life surrender to his appetite is a fulfillment that he could never find eating the nuts and berries that seem to satisfy even Bear. “How I wish that this were the Rainbow Crow,” he thinks. “The taste of his worthy flesh must be just as delightful as his other splendors. Soon...”

Past the fields lays a pond of sparkling, clean water so still and tranquil that the clouds reflected on the surface appear to be a second sky embedded in the ground. In this pond lives Swan. She is a very beautiful bird of pure white feathers. She is the most graceful of any other bird the Rainbow Crow has ever seen with her elegant curved neck and delicate down feathers as she slowly drifts around her pond with her wings by her side like a queen surveying her realm. “Surely if there is any other worthy of being my mate it is Swan,” Rainbow Crow thinks to himself. “I’m sure she will appreciate my song that I will sing just for her.” He flies over the pond but not to close to Swan as to appear as she is the reason he flies here every morning. He begins a song very slowly at first, almost tentative but as he sees her begin to listen he slowly picks up the tempo and adds in smaller crescendos and sailing
scales. Swan listens for a while but then softly sails away. Crow tries to stay over her but she only slips off into another direction. Realizing, today's opportunity has slipped by him again he fades out his song as he turns back for the forest.

Mouse tries to escape, she dodges left then right. She tries to find a small enough hole to squeeze through but Old Man Coyote seems to head her off from any possible escape route. She can feel his stale breath on her tail and she knows he is very close without having to look behind her. His breathing is still even on her back while her own heart is pounding so fast it seems like it will just jump out of her chest and run away from Coyote by itself. After a few more abrupt turns she can finally see her little home up ahead but it is so far away. The sound of Coyote’s paws thumping on the ground behind her is maddening. She is almost home. She is so close now, just a few more feet. But suddenly she feels Coyote’s paw come crushing down on her and the chase is ended. The pair comes to a grinding halt and he rolls her around with his paws until they are face to face. She doesn’t want to look at him but she is too enthralled to turn away. She cannot stop staring at a little bit of fur between two crimson stained teeth. They pause as they look at each other, one full of fear, the other full of exhilaration. Out of the corner of his eye Old Man Coyote spots a blur of color. As he looks over to spot the Rainbow Crow on his return trip his grip relaxes just a tiny bit. But it is just enough for Mouse to slip out of his hold and back into her safe, warm, little hole. Coyote follows her in with his eyes without much despair, he is no longer hungry anyway.

Old Man Coyote is a very strange person. He is a lot more knowledgeable than all the other animals. He is a nomad and a trickster. He travels around most of the year and learns things from many other animals that most of these forest creatures could not even imagine. He has even gone to talk to the Great Spirit In The Sky several times. The things that Spirit had to offer were very great. But Old Man Coyote does not like the other creatures. He does not want to be friends with them and live in harmony and eat berries. He wants to travel around and do exciting things. Sometimes he lets his friend Fox come along but generally he likes to be by himself. “I don’t want to be a part of their world. I want to ruin their world. I like to play tricks on them because they are so dumb and innocent. The Great Spirit In The Sky has told me that soon another animal will come and he will be master of all these simple creatures. He will walk on two legs. This new animal won’t eat just berries but he’ll eat the meat of other animals like I do. Then that conceited Rainbow Crow will suffer just like the others will,” thought Old Man Coyote.

But while Old Man Coyote was busy thinking about the future, Rainbow Crow was busy thinking of himself. “Why am I not happy? Everyone loves me. I am beautiful, I sing better than any other. I can fly anywhere and always be the most beautiful. I am everything that they all want. I can do anything. So why is it that I am not content?” But Rainbow Crow knew perfectly well why—because Swan did not love him. But how could Swan not
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love him? He was better than all the others, he knew that, they knew that, surely she must realize that, too. "What good is all of this if I cannot make Swan fall in love with me. It is not like I can just stop being me. I cannot help being loved by everyone. Maybe she just feels that she isn’t worthy of my love. Yes, that must be it. I must go and tell her that she is worthy. Yes, that is what I must do."

But just as Rainbow Crow was about to fly back to Swan’s pond the oddest thing happens. He feels a tiny cold spot on his wing. When he looks at it he sees a little drop of water. “Strange,” thinks Rainbow Crow, “I wonder where that came from. It couldn’t be rain. Rain is warm. Everything is warm. I don’t think I’ve ever felt anything so not warm.” But as he looks above him for some clue he sees another peculiar thing: a teeny white speck falling from the sky. Rainbow crow is of course curious and flies up to see it better. When he touches it, it turns right to water! Then he sees a few more specks lazily drifting down from the sky. I should go and talk to Owl. He is very old and wise and will know what is going on.

By the time Crow gets to Owl’s home there are a lot of others who have seen the same stuff and have come to ask Owl what it is. There are so many there that Owl has to struggle to be heard. “Please, please, be quiet and I will tell you all what is happening. Sssshhh. Those flakes you see are called snow. It is snowing! The snow is very cold as you can tell.” Already the snow is falling steadily and all present can feel it. “There is no danger. It will not hurt you. But please go and tell the other animals what it is so that they will not be scared like you were.” But before Owl could finish telling everyone to leave his home and go to their own Deer speaks up.

“But this snow is cold. It makes my bones hurt. I want it to be warm, like it was before snow. It was always warm,” says Deer.

“I think the snow is pretty,” answers Hare. “I like it. It’s fun to play with and it makes it easy for me to hide from Old Man Coyote with my white fur.”

“But it is cold,” repeats Deer. But before an argument could start up, Owl interrupted them.

“It is true that the snow is very cold and uncomfortable. But it is also true that the snow is not really hurting anyone. So I believe that we should just go home and see what happens.” And with that the little impromptu meeting ends.

Just outside the little circle of worried forest creatures around Owl’s tree, crouching behind a bush sat Old Man Coyote. “Owl is very wise. I did not think that he would know what snow was. He is older than I had remembered. But how happy I am too see all these fools shiver and quake in their skins. All so uncomfortable and unhappy in their first snow.” A ghoulish smile came to the coyote’s lips. “Owl is right. We shall see what happens.” In mid thought he spots Rainbow Crow headed out across the field and decides to see what the colorful crow is up to.

“Do not worry, Swan. This is just snow. It is very cold and uncomfor-
able but it is also very pretty. See?” he calls out gesturing to the thin layer of
white blanketing the tops of the trees in the nearby forest.

“Yes, I can see that. Thank you for coming to tell me, Rainbow Crow,”
replies Swan in an even tone. After waiting a few moments and upon seeing
that Crow is still circling she adds completely innocently, “Is there something
else you wanted?”

“Well, yes,” he answers. “I wanted you to know that of all the creatures
on this land, I have picked you to be my mate.”

“Thank you, once again, Rainbow Crow. I am very flattered,” she
replies with what may be less than genuine affection. “But you see, I am not
in love with you.”

“But of course you are, Swan. Everyone else is. You just don’t want to
admit because you don’t think you deserve my love. But it is okay. I do love
you.”

“Well I am sorry, Crow, but I am not everyone else and I most certainly
do not love you,” she replies in a tone as frosty as the newfound snow.
Although Rainbow Crow could not understand why Swan was getting mad
when she should be overcome with joy, he realized that it might be better if
he left her alone for a little while.

“So, Swan does not love Rainbow Crow, huh?” calls out Old Man
Coyote just as the beautiful bird flies over his head. Crow tries to ignore him
and just flies on his way but Coyote runs on the ground underneath. “Do you
know why?” asks the trickster. This captures Crow’s attention and he perches
on a branch high over the coyote’s head.

“I suppose you know, don’t you, Old Man Coyote?” asks Crow almost
accusingly.

“You love yourself more than others so much there is no room left to
love anyone else,” replies Coyote as if it were the most obvious thing.

“But everyone else loves me more than themselves so why should I
not?” retorts the crow.

“Do not be deceived, arrogant one. The others admire your beauty and
your song, but not yourself. You think too highly of yourself and too lowly
of others. Have you ever wondered why you have no friends?”

“An easy question. I do not want any friends,” replies Crow throwing
his head back in triumph.

“But you want Swan. Yet, she does not want you,” answers Coyote
without missing a beat.

There is a pause while Rainbow Crow tries to come up with an answer
but it is no use, Old Man Coyote is right. Swan does not want him. “So, how
do I make Swan love me?” Crow finally asks.

“You must show her that you care more for others than yourself.”

“But I don’t.”

“No one really does. But you have to pretend that you do. With love it’s
all a game. You must find out what the other person wants and pretend that
you can give it to them.” Again Crow is confused. Old Man Coyote can see that it would be pointless to continue with a mind as narrow as the crow’s so he takes off with a cryptic, “Soon you will have your chance.” But he adds under his breath, “Soon we both will.”

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The snow continues falling without end and soon the ground is completely covered. For days there has only been snow. The warm sunlight tries its best to melt away as much as it can but the snow simply falls too fast. It has become so deep already that Mouse has been swallowed up. Hare hops as high as he can to keep above it. Deer trudges through the deep banks to offer his back to the weary Hare. Everyone is downcast and sad. They are as weighed down by their fears as the branches of the trees that droop pathetically with the heavy load of snow on them. Squirrel loses his grip on the icy tree trunk he was clinging to and plummets down into the snowy depths. Deer rushes over with Hare to try and find him but the accumulation is so great that they only end up rearranging the piles without a trace of Squirrel. Just as they abandon their search Blue Jay flies overhead calling out as loud as he possibly can, “Owl has called a meeting. Everyone must come. We must hurry before more of us are swallowed up by this snow!” Deer gazes over to Owl’s tree, then at the mountains of snow separating the short distance. Hare clings to her back shaking violently with teeth chattering uncontrollably. A nearby branch cracks under the stress of the snow’s weight and comes crashing to the ground noisily breaking through the frozen limbs underneath. Deer turns her head and closes her eyes as the giant cloud of white dust blows past her. With a hollow sigh which is visible through the steam of her breath, she turns and heads for the meeting.

The animals stagger in from all directions. Even Bear looks helpless in the oppressive cold. Most of the larger animals are carrying smaller animals so that they will not be lost to the snow. Only a few of the birds could make it through the huge drafts of snow with the icy winds stinging right to the bone. Owl creeps out from his hole. “Something must be done! If the snow does not stop then we will all be swallowed up.” There is silence. They all know that. Everyone used up what little hope was left to get here on the slightest of chances that Owl would know how to stop it. Rainbow Crow arrives late and lands on a branch on the outside of the circle around the tree. Looking up, Old Man Coyote sees the late comer and circles in furtively to a bush just behind the crow. “One of us,” continues Owl, “must go to the Spirit In The Sky and ask him for help. He created the snow so he will know how to end it. No one can tell another what to do, so we will have to wait for someone to volunteer. I would go myself only I am too old now and would not be able to fly so high.”

“Rainbow Crow,” whispers Old Man Coyote from his bush. “Rainbow
Crow, if you go to the Great Spirit In The Sky to save everyone then Swan will fall in love with you because she will see that you are not so selfish.” Rainbow Crow hearing this thinks to himself about the matter. If he goes Swan will fall in love with him. If no one goes, they will all be covered. “But if someone else goes instead of you, Swan will fall in love with him!” Coyote finishes his thought for him. Rainbow Crow is completely taken by Old Man Coyote now, so Coyote begins to set him up, “Listen carefully . . .”

Everyone is still looking at each other waiting for someone to offer themselves for the job but no one feels that they can do it. But suddenly like the striking of a match, a quick flash of color streaks across the sky. Rainbow Crow jets out into the center of the circle in front of Owl and proclaims loudly, “I shall go to the Great Spirit In The Sky. I am young and strong and I am not afraid. I will go and ask for . . .”

“Fire!” whispers Old Man Coyote as loudly as possible. “Fire. With the fire I can melt the snow and bring warmth back to the land for the fire is very warm and bright. Then we shall all be happy once again.” The vibrant colors of Rainbow Crow’s feathers show even brighter against the solid white background. All the other animals look up at him with as much gratitude that he is willing to save them as shame that they were too cowardly to do it themselves. As Rainbow Crow looks down at the sorry lot of cold, wet creatures he sees something in their eyes that he has not seen before. It is not the usual look of passive appreciation or amusement. It is like the look they have when the talk of how wise Owl is and how much he helps them. It was a look of respect or maybe love, but Rainbow Crow could never have known what those looked like so he became confused.

He ponders this new reaction for a moment and then takes off for the sky. “Swan will surely love me now,” thinks Crow. “When I return she will love me.”

Rainbow Crow flies for many hours before he spots the Great Spirit In The Sky. The Spirit is like a giant rainbow but instead of touching the ground it just goes around in a circle. Even after spotting him it takes several more hours until he is close enough. He flies as near as he dares to the incredible rainbow colored hoop and begins his song. He sings the most beautiful song he can and then pleads to the Great Spirit, “You have made snow and we are grateful to see how beautiful it is, but it is very cold and it makes us sad because our friends disappear and we cannot find them. So may I please have fire that I may melt the snow and bring warmth back to our land?”

The Great Spirit In The Sky waits and watches Rainbow Crow fly around. The crow is becoming tired, but he still tries his best to stay in the air. Finally the Great Spirit answers, “Tell me Rainbow Crow, where did you hear of fire?”
"From Old Man Coyote."

"Why do you think Old Man Coyote told you to ask for fire?"

"So that I may win the love of Swan."

"Is that why you came, Rainbow Crow. Not for the others that are buried, but for yourself?"

"Yes, I came so that Swan would fall in love with me," Crow admits. One cannot lie to the Great Spirit In The Sky, it is best to tell him the truth.

"Then I shall give you fire, little one." With that the Great Spirit In The Sky gives Rainbow Crow a stick with a glowing flickering dance of light on the end. The fire is as beautiful as Rainbow Crow himself. Crow grabs the torch with his beak and with a quick but sincere thank you he darts down back to the Earth.

From the top of the fire is thick billowing smoke like mud in the water. As Rainbow Crow descends the smoke encompasses him with all the soot and ash of the consumed torch. The heat from the fire itself is unbearable. Crow can feel the heat scorching his throat and his voice begins to crack. He flies faster and faster as fast as he can but soon he is falling more than flying. He can feel the smoke engulfing him and coating him with its filthy ash but he knows he must fly on, and so he does.

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Eagle is the first to spot Rainbow Crow or what is left of him. All that can be seen is a huge fireball full of brilliant colors trailing an ugly black smoke. "This must be Rainbow Crow," announces Owl, "with his fire." All watch as it comes closer. Deer is almost covered by the snow by now and can only move her neck to look as Hare, now sitting on her head, stares with her. Like a falling star The tumultuous ball of fire and smoke streaks out of the sky towards the snow. Those nearby can feel the amazing heat of the flame as it sizzles by. The snow melts easily and soon Mouse and Squirrel and Beaver and all the others are uncovered. As everyone runs around to see that all their little friends are okay, Coyote follows the fireball with absolute glee in his heart, knowing what is coming next.

Finally all the snow is melted and everyone uncovered and Rainbow Crow drops the fire and perches on a branch to rest. After the smoke clears Crow looks around to see that everyone has gathered around to thank him and praise him. But no sooner does he become visible than the happiness and joy of the welcoming party drops to shock. "What, what is the matter with all of you?" No sooner than he asks the question does he realize exactly what happened. He can hear it in his voice, his hoarse, crackling voice. Silently he takes off for the one place he wants to be now, the pond.

In the clear reflection of the pond he sees his own reflection. His feathers are no longer bright and beautiful but are now black like the night. The soot has tarnished his colorful feathers and left only one awful, ugly color. He tries
to sing out to Swan to call her attention but his voice has been cracked. “Caw, caw,” trickles out from his ravaged throat. Hearing the disgusting noise she turns around and comes face to face with the crow. His own shame forces him to leave before she can say anything. He flies off alone. Flying home he sees a look of sympathy in the eyes he passes and respect. Old Man Coyote watches, enjoying seeing the Rainbow Crow reduced to an ugly black monster. Getting up from his crouch the coyote bounds from his bush with contentment to find some other mischief to get into.
Faust is basically the story of an overachiever. Faust has a certain degree of wealth or power. He is at a certain station where most others would be content, but for some reason or another he is not content. He takes what he has for granted and therefore is greedy for more. In the case of Goethe and Gounod, that something more is a woman. Faust is tired of theory and wants to experience things, to experience love. Marlowe paints Faust as more of a prankster who just needs a study break more than anything else. Mann’s Faust (or Leverkuhn) wanted to create or re-create music as the contemporary system he felt was used up. Bulgakov used Margarita as the Faust figure to help others, an odd twist in the legend. Szabo’s Faust wanted to be the greatest actor, he wanted to be German theater. Although all were respected for their positions, they all wanted to go one step further. In this story, the Faust character is the most beautiful creature but wants the love of someone who does not respect him.

The next step in the Faust legend is to enter into something that they would not normally do to gain what it is that they seek. After seeking long enough by himself Faust must turn to another for help. The most convenient person willing to fulfill Faust’s desires is the devil. Mephisto tries to trick Faust by getting him to do something that compromises his morals or causes unforeseen complications that lead to his ruin. Here, the tempter’s motives must be taken into account. The tempter, or Mephisto character, usually wants Faust’s soul. In some cases depending on the background of the author Faust’s destruction is good enough. Szabo’s Mephisto, the Nazi party, obviously didn’t believe in souls but they wanted to keep the Faust character in line and destroy any original idea in his head. Old Man Coyote, a character from Cheyenne mythology, is a trickster and not always a bad character but very mischievous, much like Felix the Cat. For this story however he is painted a little darker and instead of causing mischief he seeks Crow’s destruction. Coyote is much like Bulgakov’s Mephisto in that he doesn’t really let on his true identity at first, but as the reader continues he realizes what he is.

Another shared theme with Mephisto and The Master and Margarita is oppression. For Szabo it was the Nazi empire, for Bulgakov it was the Communist party, and for these forest animals it is the snow. In Szabo’s film however the oppressor is also the Mephisto character. In the other two, the oppression creates the impetus for the pact between Mephisto and Faust. The circumstances of the agreement are dictated by the oppressor standing in the way of what Faust wants. People are also swallowed up or disappear because of the particular monster in each story.

Faust ends in a variety of ways. Margarita becomes a witch to do others good and is therefore saved. Goethe’s Faust is saved as he turns soft in his old age, Marlowe’s is damned for entering the pact in the first place, Szabo doesn’t even really have an ending. The ending here is rather anticlimactic. The reader is left to decide on his/her own terms what damnation is. Is enlightenment salvation? Is loss damnation? Szabo’s movie is similar in that
whether he lives or dies is not revealed but we are left with the feeling that he is worse off. Crow kind of slinks off but may realize he is a better person for what he has done. For Faustian legends, the end isn't near so as important as the road to it. The end is basically just for the author to put his/her own personal moral into the story. In this case, I guess the reader should think about it him- or herself to decide if it was worth it.