

CURTAINS & HOT ICE

TRAFFIC was light. Quick bursts of olive green and lemon yellow interspersed with the magenta of a stray delivery bike. From his vantage point on the fifth floor he had a clear view of the intersection—the bake shop, the testing site, the corner store, the bus stop. Eunice was coming. There had been mention of 'sting jet' winds on the radio, and people were mostly staying indoors. As he scanned the sky for signs of the oncoming storm, he spotted a feral pigeon perched on the drainpipe. It eyed him beadily, its gray plumage fluffed out like a ruff collar. Apparently pigeons were descendants of the wild rock dove, which nested on sea-cliffs and mountain tops. Here in the city, they made do with window ledges, train bridges, church towers and abandoned buildings. We're probably a lot higher than a sea-cliff, he thought.

He peeled out onto the street. There were no more cars, no traffic, no people. His feet slapped the pavement as he propelled himself into the middle of the intersection. Here he stopped and took a moment to look around. The normally bustling burger joint was empty, discarded fries and napkins still littered the pavement. He caught sight of another pigeon peering up at him from beneath an orange bin adjacent to the U-Bahn entry. The same one?

Its fluffed collar seemed uniform. Construction netting flapped violently against the scaffolding of a nearby building and suddenly stopped. Then it was quiet, entirely too quiet. He blinked, breaking eye contact with the bird, and glanced down at his watch. Five minutes was all the lead he needed.

Two streets over he careened into the park. The light had taken on a cinematic air, plunging his surroundings into an ultramarine blue. The wind had picked up again, and erratic shadows danced at the corner of his vision. His body jackknifed as he jumped the oversized cement steps, which were usually full of people, even at this time of year. He made a beeline for the pit. His momentum increased, as he veered downhill into the crater-shaped hollow. By the time he reached the bottom, he was winded enough to sink breathlessly to the ground. He lay there, arms outstretched, pulse racing. The silhouette of a single pigeon twirled and dove against the darkening sky. If it had a pattern to its flight, he couldn't see it. He was now certain it was the same bird.

- Anne Fellner

