

Crow and Firefly

by chivalric

With the life of his sister and newborn nephew at stake, shapeshifter Ari is trapped in a castle and compelled to accept a situation he'd dreaded: he is forced to marry Lord Dagur, a man he's never met.

One-shot

Chapter 1 of 1

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A/N: As I always post my (longer) original stories here (well, partly), I thought I'd do the same with this one. Everyone who leaves a review has a chance of winning a complete copy of the novella. Enjoy!

The storm was much worse than the usual winter storm. Clouds were thick in the sky, heavy with rain. Flashes of lightning cut through the air. The thunder was deafening, rattling the castle that was barely visible, freezing its walls, cracking its windows, and scaring its inhabitants.

It was not a time to be outside. Yet one was: a crow, fighting its way through icy hail and deathly winds. Although it wasn't night yet, it was dark outside. The storm would rip the crow to pieces in a little while. Fighting against wind and hail was a lost cause, but the crow refused to give up. It was a fairly young bird, at the height of its strength and with long, straight wings. Too thin, though, too small to survive for much longer.

The crow desperately tried to get away from the castle. It would fail, eventually.

It was stubborn, that crow. Fighting against the storm, no matter it had no chance to survive whatsoever. By morning, the crow would be dead, a heap of bones and feathers buried beneath an icy blanket.

Whenever the wind threw it back toward the stone walls barely visible in the weather's chaos, the crow fought to gain another foot, another inch, if only to avoid the high, narrow windows rimmed with lead, the slender battlements, and mainly, the north tower. It was, for a castle, not unpleasant to look at, yet the crow seemed determined to die rather than seek shelter under one of its roofs.

The crow might have made it, despite all odds, had it fed properly recently, but as it was, there wasn't much flesh underneath the feathers, and the muscles sustaining the rain-heavy wings grew more and more tired with each passing heartbeat. When the wind threatened to crush the crow in its cruel grip, the bird finally accepted it had lost the fight. Going limp, it was helpless, unable to control where it was going any longer, unable to tell where was up and where was down, and definitely unable to say in which direction the castle was.

When the storm threw the crow against one of the windows, it came as a bigger shock than the bird would have believed possible. It hurt, and the impact on the glass, although it didn't shatter, dislocated one of its wings.

The crow fell, half-unconscious. As it tumbled, the wind caught it again, lifted it up, whirling it around in endless circles.

Right before the wind could drop the bird to its death a hundred feet below, the window it had crashed against opened, and hands—slender, long-fingered hands—caught the crow and pulled it inside into the warmth of a cozy, fire-lit room. “You stupid idiot,” a woman’s voice hissed. “Didn’t you have anything better to do than to run away, although Lord Dagur is awaiting you in your wedding bed?”