

## Precious Pair

*by Eydie McDaniel*

Mud oozed beneath my feet and slid me backwards. I managed to grab a small tree trunk just in time. Finally at the top of the hill next to the huge boulder I heard the sound of her car. Even wet with mud, the forest felt great. But always her return made my favorite moment of the day.

Shadows lay long on the scrub brush. I took the shortest path, careful to step smoothly and ran through the meadow grass to our home. But alas, where had her car gone? I stood atop the picnic table to look around. I wanted to cry out for her. The day had been so long already. Was it really her car I heard? Had she been here and sped away again without speaking, to see someone else?

I entered the door. Could she have lent her car to a neighbor who dropped her off? No, every room was empty, even her back porch. I sighed and wandered out to sit and listen in the last of the sunshine. "Oh you dumb crow! How was I to hear over your dreadful squawk?"

A whiff of barbeque wandered across my nostrils. Salivation started but I soon reminded myself it was not for me. Eating without her was no fun anyway. I went back inside and sat in her favorite chair. Surely she would bring us something delightful to eat. Or maybe, just maybe... I stood up and spun around. But no, no crock pot sat on the counter top. No little red light glowed to encourage anticipation of good hot food. I returned to her chair. Maybe if I were patient enough, she would be home before the darkness.

I dreamed there. So real it seemed. My foot knocked the little table and our picture off. I startled awake. My confusion alarmed me. But with a few deep breaths I realized the same reality of the same lonely cabin, too quiet, too dark, and too still without her. I got up to look at the driveway. I had to know for sure I only dreamed her return with laughter and hamburgers. Only a bit of paper moved there. It floated in a breeze and snagged on a pine tree's twig. I sighed, again, got a big drink of water, and sat again in her chair, still more cold than cozy. The room faded dimmer. I moved to the couch to cover my feet and shoulders with the fluffy throw. That warmth felt good. There I dreamed again. Then I woke up to a thrilling dream come true. I gulped my hamburger down. She slowly savored hers and hugged me close. No one can rub my ears and scratch under my collar like she can.