

FULL OF CROW

Two Men | Robert John Miller | Winter 2011 Issue

"All I usually do," Greg said, "is invite over any friends or family, anyone in the area, and just make a time of it. Keep it simple."

"Aye. A fine ritual."

"A person is lost without rituals."

"Certainly lost," Peter said.

"I used to skip eating meat on Fridays, sometimes, during part of the year."

"Much of the world has died for lack of meat to skip," Peter said.

"Probably true. Certainly true." And he paused and said, "What do you think?"

"Hm?"

"The way things are."

"Ah," Peter said. "Well." And Peter was slipping now, he knew he was slipping, he could feel the slippage, but he continued because he had to speak. "Well," he said. "The family is broken, but the family has been broken. Our religions are nonsense, but religion has been nonsense. Our work is unfulfilling, but our work has been unfulfilling." Peter did not know where he was going but he could not stop so he continued. He continued, "Our friends mean less, but we have more of them; we savor food less but we eat more of it; we see a lot less but we travel more often. And I, for one, have many addictions. But what about it?"

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Greg and Peter had started drinking early, sometime in the afternoon, polishing off one bottle and starting another, working toward a fuzziness on the shyer side of sloppy. They were awaiting the arrival of a pizza, surely the driver's last stop of the night, maybe even on her way

home if she had closed shop and kept the order off the record. As background noise they played generic cable television, something about someone somewhere who had won something, or something, they weren't sure what exactly despite watching the show presently and being relatively certain that they had, collectively, seen the show previously.

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But what about it? Peter's left eyebrow raised and his forehead tightened, his breathing slowed, he tried not to move. He knew things were fragile because Greg had asked a searching question, not a casual question, and the truth itself is always fragile and Peter believed what he was saying was true but the truth was also that he wasn't all that concerned, and how does he explain? How does he explain his unconcern? *Because after all maybe I should be more concerned.* He had meant to say something easy and soothing, something light without being dismissive, something quelling, something to reassure. Tomorrow was Greg's birthday. Greg was turning 37.

This question now between them was a question Peter knew would not be asked again but would not go away; it was a birthday question, a big question, and yet Peter could not feel its urgency how Greg felt its urgency. The television began airing an infotisement promising heftier bowel movements. Peter turned the television off and gained a few moments to think by fumbling with the remote.

Then, *relief!* With Greg's eyelids drooping, Peter could stop answering. But he must remember in the morning, *I will remember in the morning, I must remember in the morning that the question is between us*, but for now he is freed from words, he can answer in other ways, he will answer by singing in the morning, and he can relax. They can relax.

And Greg and Peter continued in warm silence until they fell asleep.

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