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By

Arlene Johnston

First edition

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West Guilford, ON*

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Pine Lake Books has allowed this work to remain as the author intended.

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*For Tennille and Daryl
My cherished and much loved brood--Mom*

Book One

DEMPSTER

Dempster is more determined than ever to live alone on the Magassus Mountain now that his family has deserted him. Anger and bitterness are his driving force as he rebels against the 'Law of Nature'.

Chapter 1: Beth

ARMAND COULD NOT believe his good fortune of finding a mate and a home in the same week. *Crows are not usually this lucky* he thought smugly circling back toward the mountain cliff for one last gander. *My adversaries will be so envious it may cause a riot*, he chuckled, flying back to collect his mate.

Armand had always enjoyed the challenge. He was headstrong and fearless. This coupled with his superior intelligence and size made him triumphantly a leader of the pack.

As he flew back into the valley, the field behind Metcalf's barn was alive with crows pecking the ground for buried grains in the abandoned cornfield. Perching on the rusty weather vane located in the center of the roof on the old faded grey barn he had a bird's eye view of all the activities below. His eyes scanned the snow dotted field. They seemed to know exactly where to look in a field occupied by close to 100 crows. *There she is* he thought, breathing deeply, expanding his chest in self-assured pride.

Beth was the most beautiful crow Armand had ever laid his coal black eyes on. He remembered their courtship dance, passed on from generation to generation and the competition with other males also in pursuit of his chosen. Beth's reluctance as she pretended to be completely unaware of her suitors. How she would not look directly at Armand and turned her head away. He loved the challenge for he knew it was just a matter of time before he would win her over. He chuckled to himself as he thought about the final scenario. Beth had flown a short distance with Armand and the last rival still in pursuit.

When two males court the same female and she shows no definite preference, a contest begins. Armand and his rival

flew straight up clashing in mid-air, each trying to rise above the other, battering with wings and bills. So intense was the fighting that they fell to the ground rolling about; the weaker crow finally submitted and flew away. *Yes, I won the fight*, Armand thought, perched above eyeing his future in the late morning sun.

He flew down to Beth and proceeded to tell her about their new home on Magassus Mountain.

“On a mountain? I like it here near this field with the others close by,” Beth said hesitantly.

Crows usually favour woodlands and farmlands but have been known to break protocol and nest on mountains.

“The mountain is only a few days journey away.” Armand looked toward the trees surrounding the cornfield. “All the trees in this area are filling up quickly. I believe we should have our own distinct territory to establish ourselves and raise our family,” Armand coaxed.

It didn’t take much more persuading to sway Beth, for Armand was her mate and she was very proud of him. She had fallen head over claws for him. She was sure Armand knew what he was doing removing them from the flock. With a wink and a nudge from Armand, the pair flew off.

Magassus Mountain stood alone rising up to meet the clear spring day. Waves of green drawn up the sides indicated its plush vegetation, more than ample in which to build a new home. Their flight went without incident. Beth’s reluctance soon dissolved into joy as she strutted around the foreign territory she would now call home. The area of mountain Armand had chosen was on the leeward side, not too far up from the valley below, where several streams flowed into a small lake. When days grew longer in spring or shorter in the fall, migrating crows will pass through the valley enabling Armand, Beth, and their offspring to join the migrating flocks.

They constructed their nest under a large grassy overhang that would provide ample protection from the elements, while seconding as a lookout post for predators. Though the area was quite rocky, tufts of grass sprouted throughout and moss grew plentiful. There was a small pond for bathing and drinking. Cherry trees swayed back and forth at the side of the ledge, while forests of pine, oak, cedar, spruce, and maple trees surrounded their area. For the next 12 days, Armand gathered twigs, leaves, moss, dried grass, and bits of molted rabbit and deer fur. Beth would arrange the twigs and leaves to suit her needs. Standing in the nest she would weave together the soft strips of bark Armand had torn from trees, finally lining the cup of the nest with moss and animal fur. On the outside the nest looked like an untidy pile of twigs. The inside cup where the eggs would be laid was a beautifully finished piece of work. Armand and Beth would work all morning and spend the afternoons eating, mating, and resting.

“Our nest is complete, Beth,” Armand said sitting side by side in a large oak tree. Beth continued to rub his neck with her beak. “Now all that is missing is the remainder of the clan,” he said, pecking her beak.