

Gross

The first attack was the mildest, this last one, the most violent.

A beautiful spring morning with an untroubled sky. The omens weren't good. David watched as a murder of crows flew overhead, cawing, circling, before each took a stunted tip of the pollarded trees. Standing on either side of the road, these two aged plane trees, whose branches, if they had not been hacked at to keep nature's darkness at bay, would have created a triumphal arch. This avian resting point - from where this dark muster could survey the joggers, the dog-walkers, the scuttlers, the schoolchildren, the depressed trudge of the junk mail deliverers with their defeated trolleys and, him - was their court. Judgement would be reached, leading to the sharp clamour of their disbanding, flight, then execution. He saw a woman, yanking at the leads of three small dogs, exit the park and head in his direction. She lifted her face to look at the crows. The day's unexpected warmth, the clear blue sky and his loneliness, drove him to say something as the woman passed.

It's like Hitchcock's The Birds

The woman glanced at him, up to the treetop, turned and carried on with her walk. David blushed, craned his neck upwards to look at this nasty black cabal, hoping the heat would drain from his face. The sun had driven him out of the house and now he was starting to regret it. A walk in the

park, a sit on a bench to get some Vitamin D – Penny keeps telling him how pale he looks - then home. It would do him good. Maybe she thought he was a psychopath, the neighbourhood Norman Bates – the woman, not Penny. He wanted to shout after her disappearing figure, *I'm a police officer, signed off sick. Still part of the force though. Make sure you pick up your dog shit*

Once he entered the park, he felt himself relax. This place had kept him going. He identified with it and it brought him relief. The solidity and grandeur of the Palladian house; the wild unruly bushes, ungovernable trees, and muddy tracks contained by the Italianate garden, the symmetrically placed stone sculptures, the carefully trimmed hedges and the rectangles of grass, mathematically locked in by straight gravel paths. The English landscape garden, nature's febrile drive held delicately in check by order. He liked to vary his walks, sometimes sticking to the well-worn paths, passing people and saying hello, sometimes darting through a gap and seeing where that would take him. He'd been coming here for years yet there was still so much discover; away from it all, from work, from worry, from the machinations of the modern world. Trains had been his undoing, the charge of gross misconduct and the Thursday mêlée. Nature, the natural order would save him.