

Grief Is the Thing with Feathers, by Max Porter

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In Review



Grief Is the Thing with Feathers

By Max Porter
Graywolf

Max Porter's debut novel, which hovers between poetry and prose, illustrates the ways in which grief can be simultaneously violent and gentle. A London father and his two young sons reel from the accidental death of the family's mother, staggering

through the subsequent years with vulnerability and grace. Alongside them is Crow, an unwelcome, oppressive, feathered guest who claims he has come to help the family grieve. Meanwhile, the father's academic work focuses on the fictional Crow of Ted Hughes's poetry after the death of his wife, Sylvia Plath. The Crow who animates these pages is both crude and eloquent—he functions as torturer, therapist, and healer. “In other versions,” he caws, “I am a doctor or a ghost.” Whoever he is, Crow embodies accompaniment—and points toward redemption.