

Nevermore

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Alan felt confined. The four walls of the study seemed to loom over him like giant representations of his editor, agent, fans and himself pressing him to finish the book. Clamping his hands over his eyes and rubbing them, he tried to wipe away the thoughts of normality. The review of his last book had been so critical he felt like giving up. 'Too cookie cutter... too in the norm... written only for the money...' Now he had his own pressure, as well as everyone else's pushing on him to do better.

Opening his eyes again, he was met by the blank document page on the computer screen. The cursor blinked at him and he could almost imagine a fingernail tapping on the wooden desk with each blink. "Great now even the computer is expecting something from me..."

The long, cold of winter was setting in outside. The window he had opened slightly in the earlier part of the evening started to allow a chilling breeze through. Most people would close the window, not Alan. He welcomed the cold as it was a reminder that he was still alive.

A shiver crept up his spine as he sat forward in the creaky writing chair. The same one he had used for years. He leaned back again and listened to the groaning creaks

of the seat. Rubbing his hands together to shake away the cold feeling in his fingers, he spun the chair around to stare up at the bookcase behind him.

It wasn't apart of the house when he bought it, but when he saw this room, he knew it was going to be his study. The local hardware had a decent price on wood one weekend and he had an idea for the study. By the end of the weekend, it was nearly finished. Now it stood, completed, taking up the whole wall.

Midway up the shelves, stood two pewter raven bookends his mother had bought him after his first book sold. Even though he thought the ravens looked like they belonged in a classic black and white horror movie, he took them and set them on his shelf. Between the shining birds was a small collection of his books. It was the only place he allowed them to be.

He almost had packed them away into the basement after the first couple days of having them. First night he came into the room, he nearly broke a toe on a raven that had somehow fallen onto the floor right behind his desk. Another time he pushed back his chair a little too hard, hit the bookcase and one fell down nearly onto his head.

Now, though, they sat perfectly center of the shelf. They couldn't fall or even be moved. He made sure of it.

“Any suggestions, boys?” He said craning his neck slightly.

The birds looked down at him, piercing his soul with their open pewter eyes. He stared back at them and slowly turned back around to the computer.

“Okay, why not just write some crap for a while and see where we go?” The statement almost sounded like a response to someone.

He set to work, much as he did before. His first book was a thrown together piece. The first part started out a short story, and then continued into a second part and so on. It was one of his best works, at least most everyone who read it thought so.

After a couple of hours of straight typing, Alan stopped. He cracked his knuckles and rubbed his hands together again. The temperature was starting to fall off quicker and deeper than he had thought. He leaned forward and read a small bit of the writing he had done.

“Well its crap alright.” He shook his head, placed his glasses next to the computer and sighed.

The noise echoed through the room, Alan put his glasses back on and scanned the entire area. It sounded like a bird, like a crow... a raven’s caw. The small lamp on his desk only cast shadows and hardly any light into the room.

He slid the chair back slowly trying not to make too much noise on the hardwood floor. As he started around the desk to turn on the ceiling light, the caw came again. Louder this time. He stopped in his tracks, it had to be in the room.

“Knew I should of closed the window.” He said, cursing himself in his mind.

A loud scratching noise came from the window. He refocused his eyes and squinted trying to see. There was movement and another loud caw. Something shone in the moonlight and small light from his desk lamp. It looked silver.

“Damn, it’s got my letter opener.” He moved past his desk to get the bird out and shut the window.

As he passed his desk, another glint of silver caught his eye. He glanced quickly and nearly tripped over his own feet. The letter opener sat perfectly next to the lamp. He turned back to the window, and could see clearer now.

The bird cawed at him again and hopped off the windowsill onto the ground. Alan blinked his eyes again then rubbed them with his hands. The raven was silver. There's no such thing as a silver raven.

For some reason, instead of rushing to close the window and go to bed since he was imaging silver birds, he looked up to the bookcase. One shelf, midway up, the pewter raven stood next to his novels. Its partner on the other end was...

“GONE?!”

He ran behind the desk, looking below the chair and next to the bookcase. No bird. He looked back up to the shelf. The base was still sitting there, holding the books upright. The raven was gone.

“This is insane.” He shook his head, turning to go to the window he stopped and looked back up to the other raven, “Don't you get any ideas.”

Alan sighed, now he was talking to inanimate objects. The cool air blew into the window as he stuck his head out slowly. The caw made him duck back inside, before jutting his head out again.

The raven still stood under the window, looking up to him as if it to say *well come along*. It hopped slightly away from the house towards the wooded area behind it. Now Alan couldn't believe he was still awake. He tucked himself through the window and soon found himself following a pewter raven into the dark wood behind his house.

The bird would caw occasionally and look back to make sure he was still there. He wrapped his arms around himself, trying to shield his body from the cold. As they reached the trees, the raven stopped.

Grab it, grab it and run to the house, he thought to himself. The bird seemed to hear him as it leapt up into the air. The silver wings creaked open and with a sound of a metallic grind, started to flap. The raven caught a breeze and soon was floating over Alan, cawing its throat dry.

“Get down here for crying out loud.” He shouted up to the bird as it swooped and then entered the woods, “Ah, hell.”

Before his mind could stop his body, he was walking deep into the darkened woods. The bird was easy to track, just follow the metallic grind of its wings and its constant caws.

Soon it was all he heard. The nightmarish caw of the raven followed with the metallic grind. He tried to shut it out, even putting his hands over his ears, but it kept coming. Caw, grind, caw, grind, caw, grind. The bird was completely out of sight now.

By the time he had enough of the bird and was about to turn around, he realized he was lost. The bird led him into the woods and now he couldn't find the way out. Suddenly, the metallic grinding and cawing stopped. Now Alan was alone in silence.

“This is not good.” He started to walk back the way he had been coming from, but without tracks or even a light to see, he knew for sure he was lost. The light from the back of his house wasn't even visible.

Cracks, creaks and other noises started to surround him. The natural sounds of the woods at night. Alan rubbed his hands together to get the chill out of them. The

night was turning bitterly cold. After a few minutes, his breath started to appear in a mist before him as he walked.

A slight rustle in the trees above finally made him look up. The moonlight broke through the trees and glinted off the silver ravens' body. The eyes seemed to glow as they looked down on him.

“Well, I hope you're happy, I'm lost now because of you.” Alan flipped the bird off and kept walking, laughing slightly and the irony of what he just did.

The metallic grinding started up again and the raven cawed loudly over and over. It seemed to be chasing him now. He held his hands over his head tightly, trying to block out the noise but to no avail.

Finally, he stopped, turned around and screamed into the darkness towards the oncoming bird. The raven swooped low towards his head and Alan quickly fell to the ground to avoid it. It landed on a tree branch nearby and watched as Alan climbed back up to his feet.

Before he could speak, he felt it. The bird launched off the branch, targeted his chest and rammed into it at full speed. It felt like a boulder had been thrown onto his ribcage.

The wind was knocked out of his lungs as he fell backwards onto the ground. He shook his head and coughed. Something wet fell against his lips and chin. He wiped it with the back of his hand and as the moonlight shone down, realized he was coughing blood.

He groaned and tried to shift his weight and could feel the cracking and grinding of his ribs. The bird laid on his chest, no longer seemingly able to move or caw. It was a pewter raven.

Alan let his head fall back onto the ground and slowly looked around. Still no sign of his house. Again he tried to move himself and the shooting pain in his chest returned. But he saw something. Grimacing against the pain he looked up over the bird towards his feet. The light of his porch was shining into the trees.

He fell onto his back again and tried to catch his breath from the pain, only to end up in a coughing fit. More of the wet stuff landed on his chin and cheek as he coughed. He grabbed the bird and flung it as hard as he could towards the light. Without the heavy metal on his chest, he was able to breathe slightly better.

After a few minutes, he tried to crawl or drag himself closer to his house. He had to stop after a couple movements to cough and try to breathe. Slowly he made his way out of the woods.

The light on his porch called to him, he focused on that until finally he was at the base of the stairs. It was a battle to try and use the railing to stand and stagger to the door. The phone was on the wall just opposite the door, if he got in he could sit down, call 911 and wait.

He reached out and grabbed the doorknob, locked. He shook the door and tried to force it open, but couldn't. A cry escaped his throat, but was cut short by another coughing fit, leaving the window of the door splattered with blood.

He was getting dizzy, the chair on the porch called to him. Slowly he moved to it and fell into the seat. *Wait a few minutes then go for the window, crawl back in.* He told himself.

His eyelids felt heavy, he couldn't keep them open. The world got darker as he decided to just close his eyes and rest for a few minutes. As he leaned his head back, a caw echoed from the woods.

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