

Mimencholy

about 2300 words

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Broken Crying Crow

Wind whistled through the roughly carved hole in the center of a standing charm; and a fieldhand heard, with his back turned, as he watched a mangy crow start flying off into the distance. His clothes stuck to him from sweat, he leaned on his stick as he spoke, eyes fixed on that bird as it fled, "Good that you leave. With your wings out, flying off to some other field to rob, someone else... and you can just do that... while I wait. I wait and want. I wait and want watching someone else's wheat and waste my time away. I'd rather be you. I would. I'd rather swoop all morning from where the sun shines... it's better to fly free—" he cut himself short.

He wanted to be sure he was seeing things right. And he was, that bird had turned round again.

Flying too slow, the crow circled back to try and try and try to taste the field again. It wanted only to taste the field. It wanted not for the faint flavor of freedom that it may have been afforded, but for what really makes beasts and men alike salivate, perspire, and pray: It wanted to survive. To live is like a feast for the dying. And the wheat was a feast. And another day drives the dying. So, the crow flew to the edge of the stalks of wheat and it wanted nothing more than to eat. But as the glimmers of gold swayed in the wind as it rushed over the field, as it pushed the weak bird any way it went, as the sun begin to slowly set; the crow bided its time. It circled. Around and around the field. And the fieldhand watching, waiting, ready wailed, "Get on with it, you bastard!"

He was loud and just. On a normal day it would have cut the crow in two. But the crow could not falter.

Today it responded; *Caw. Caw. Caw.* Crying out loud the only language it knew towards any direction that might listen. Begging the other crows to come back. Yearning for the chance he lost in the morning to reappear. But they would not come back for him, that much was obvious as time went on, and so more tired than he was before, not quite healing wings sorer, and skin itching all over (Itching and scratching sores bred from itching and scratching infection made by hungry mites mindlessly living); Nearly starved, the Crow tried couldn't wait any longer. It began the race to the other end of the field. It flew as the man ran. But the man made it first, as he had so many times now. Over and over. And the crow could only— *Caw. Caw. Caw.* He could only watch as the man leaned onto his stick, huffing and puffing. The crow could not reap where the man was not sown. The crow knew it would die. But still, it called out again as it turned round to try the other end of the field.

The fieldhand parted a path through the crow's feast. He smacked heads of grain to either side, stomping carelessly through the crops, grinding his teeth, "You've got to be kidding me..." And again, and again, and again. The crow was too slow. It went on this way until the sun shone its last rays down upon the tattered body of the bird. And the man saw a diminutive, frail, dying thing. In the waning light, its elderly eyes looked strained, almost sad, as it flew. In that light, the man's eyes darkened. A shame was growing. He didn't care about the

crops. He didn't care to hurt the bird. But he had to. He ground his teeth, but his wife had told him not to. So, he tapped his foot, but he got nervous about the crops again. There was already so much to clean up, after all, so he scratched at the side of his face. Watching that familiar face, grow tired, with familiar eyes caked in mucus and dirt. He wanted it to drop dead there and then... or go home. He wanted to go home. It was late after all... and he was free to leave, "Ain't that everything?"

Abandoned. Awaiting certain death. That was the envied everything to the crow. That was freedom. But freedom did not feed the crow or cure its wing. Freedom did not let it live. So, for wanting to live, the crow cried out to the waning sun for respite. Caw. But was no response, so again, this time to the rising moon. Caw. Then, once more, before the animal laid down and died, caw. And it was quiet. And it went past the sun and sky and stars. And it went on and on until it wormed its way into the mind of a distant divine thing, and it did more than listen. It promised an answer. It told the crow that tonight there would be a meal. Be it bread or wheat or blood or meat.

But as the crow flew, a rock flew too from the fieldhand's hand. There was this fear that drove him and a sort of anger too. It could have been the shadows dancing under and over the stalks of wheat reminding him of a time when he too young to be alone, yet left behind for hours until his father found him again. Maybe it was the setting sun that reminded him of how what little time he had to spend was slipping away so quickly. How before the sun was up, he'd be back here

to work off his debt again tomorrow; how he'd look down at his wife kissing her sweet sleeping face goodbye, walking out the door before his children were awake enough to remember the words in how dearly their father loved them. How the same crow would be on the field with him. How without those little moments he would just be a fieldhand and never a father. It could have been that uncanny cadence born in the air, that soundless noise whispering in his ear, that pushed his nerves over the edge. He didn't quite want to. He really didn't want to. But all the same...

There was the crow crashing down.

The man's heart beat and burned— he sweat and sweat and over and over he swallowed knots, but it was not enough. He couldn't breathe. He couldn't help but begin to shift his feet to turn around and check something vitally important, and his teeth ground together as he did, his hand scraped at the side of his face; All because he heard the inklings of something nestling deep into his mind, echoing through his ear canal as it writhed in and in and in to speak in a language without a voice. And the man's worst fears were all but confirmed. As he listened to something he couldn't understand, except for its danger.

Weeks ago, that landowner spoke to him, "Can you read this? No... well, it says that you are indebted to me. It is a writ. Under no circumstance may you abandon your duties at the field. You will tend it from sunrise to sunset every day, without exception (unless, of course, its holiday or you've come to me and let me know); Do you

understand?" then in a kinder voice he said, "... but whatever this writ says, I want you safe. There is a warding charm. If it stands you are safe. If it doesn't... it's death to be alone. Be safe."

Foreboding as those words rung, as the man laid eyes of the charm, his body relaxed. Tension dissipated. There was no missing charm, none of the stones had been toppled, nor markings smudged or ruined. He should have been safe from all sorts of unpredictable things: magical things, divine things, evil things that live in whispers. But... as he watched the charm, it began to unravel, flaking at the edges of the half a dozen or so stacked flat stones, bleeding gravel and making an ungodly crack after piercing crack.

All that could be done to save him now was nothing. All that could have been done was crumbling before some unknown power. All that he could do had already been tried by the more capable, the cleverer, and with more time to grasp how close they were to death.

But this time, he had not one final breath through his healthy lungs, before he was no longer in the body that he had been where he had been, now strewn out in the field dirt. He was not looking through the same eyes at the same sight as his mind argued he should have been: no ruins of stone. Instead, all he saw was himself from far away, looking through a pinhole from a cramped space made for a smaller soul. The edges of his mind were dulled and crimped as they were pressed in between six fleshy walls barely large enough to fit a river stone. For a second, he couldn't process what had happen. The next, he only understood that he was afraid, and he ought to run

because the protection spell was cracked and crumbled; but his new body didn't even flail... the essence of words crept into the new crow's heart, this time in a way that that his new mind understood, "*Enviably freedom.*" He couldn't disagree more, yet, he could only croak in response. A newborn wail. Mixed with the wet sound of coughing up diseased lung. Raw. Tearing up his new throat in ways that only a human could manage. But struggle as he might the new crow had no chance to say what he thought. Weak in body. Dying. Bleeding out. Yet his mind was pristine, but quickly eroding, tearing away in chunks trying to understand his new prison. Writhing in place as the ants begin to feast on him, he panicked, and he tried to think, but he only felt what a human feels. He only thought what a human thought. Stewing in a pool of crow's blood, unable to understand what comes naturally to any sort of animal. Crawl, climb, walk, run; No longer. For a moment, there was a fear, a horrible selfish fear. I'm sure that he would have screamed it out. Begged, Pleaded. Prayed. But there were worse feelings. The love of his children. The longing of his wife. The warmth and the kindness and the curiosity they shared. Regret. For having lived at all. For sharing a face with himself. Because they would suffer too. And much worse than him. They would suffer. He watched, clicking his broken beak together trying to bargain, the new man's body once again turning around, dragging itself past the broken bird to leave the field behind. It didn't know it yet, but it was a fieldhand. And the dying crow envied it. It didn't understand that it was dragging itself back towards town, to the ones he loved. And how they would feel, what a fury. Somehow, a worse kind of loss. When that

newborn man crawled into town... they.. they would not realize he is a lie. They would love him still. They would nurse him back to health. Kindly, lovingly, thoughtfully. Teach him to walk, to talk, to run, to play. And they might never know. And they might love him still. And she will sleep in a bed in the dark all alone with him. And the little ones will play and scream and be raised by him. And it hurts, in a very human way, to think of these things.

A dying crow with mind of a man tried to forget his human thoughts. Trying to replace them in the short time before it up and died. It tries its best to stand on its own, but it struggles. The blood beneath was slick and mocking. It tries to close its eyes to die with dignity. And it might have worked if man and crow did not have a different idea of dignity. He would have given up then, wishing his heart to stop. Trying and trying again to make it stop. But beat after beat, every heartache resembled living still. Except that living was so far separated from humanity now. No matter what, the chance to die... decently... with the right type of soul was gone. But he still wanted it. He wanted to be a man again before he passed. But it would not be.

He tried only one more thing, after lying there for a while in the chilling blood with the compassionate moonlight comforting him. Clumsily he angled his neck, straining all the wrong ways, until he lapped and bit and chewed up his first, his last, his only feast in the form that he would be for the rest of all time; Blood and wheat. It tasted as bad as it smelt and reminded him of childhood jokes that ended in chewing spoiled straw. He spit it up. It... it wasn't the



taste, the smell, nor the sight that repulsed him. It was his thoughts of warmth, of hearth and home, which made him give up on the food. He hated it, in part, because he wanted to take another bite. Because some small part of him knew that he would not be living any more life besides this. He would not be free in the sky. He would not fly to this village as some saving omen and warn them. He would not watch his children grow old from a bird's eye view. He would only live this: Dying, soaked in blood that was at once his own and another's; Cold, drifting in and out, mindlessly last moments; And it would feel like forever, in the same way that your life flashes before your eyes, so too does this, except there is not much life to live. Only a condescended suffering, and he ought to enjoy it.