

Dan

The Crow

Part 1

The Crow

The crow flew to the highest branch of the gum tree at the top of the hill and inspected the territory he and his family had called home for generations. Every March he and his partner flew to this neighbourhood and built a nest for the one or two offspring they would produce. The nest had been complete for a couple of weeks, and soon the crow and his partner would do little more than protect the young and shuttle food from dawn til dusk.

Over the past four seasons the crow had witnessed this area go from farmland to acreage blocks. They had seen the influx of humans, and their stupid pets. A double edged sword really; now there were less trees and more potential predators, but more food and it was easy to collect.

From his roost almost 25 meters above the ground the soon to be setting sun revealed for anyone looking closely enough that his feathers were not strictly black, but a beautiful array of deep metallic blues and greens. The day had been hot, and humid. The crow knew that a storm was coming. And right now he thought the growing sense of danger was just another approaching storm. The crow let out a warning caw to the rest of his murder.

The sun had set half an hour ago. The crow saw very little to worry him in his domain; two cats trying to hunt smaller animals, a few juvenile humans sneak into the shell of an uncompleted house to smoke their funny cigarettes and to grope each other clumsily. And just a few minutes ago a fox had scurried across the entire width of the crow's kingdom. And although the storm was edging closer, and from his vantage point high above the ground the crow could discern distant flashes, the sense of danger was now drowning out all his other instincts. He let out a louder warning caw.

A few minutes went by and then just on the edge of his territory the crow spied a human shape carefully keeping to the shadows and dark places; his awareness of danger spiked. Another loud caw shattered the stillness that had fallen over the estate. The crow left his perch and almost glided to a tree near the human shape. Although it was dark the crow knew he was not familiar with this particular human. This human was not part of the kingdom.

Part 2

The Voyeur

The voyeur had a sense of building anticipation. Not that his scotophilic desires had begun to be sated; this was his first night scoping out a new estate in the largish town

where he currently resided. He had already driven through this estate at various times of the day for a week or more scoping for “talent”. He had one house that he simply must try and find a watching post for; and a few others that might prove interesting.

This was almost a perfect night for him; dark, the moon not due to rise for hours yet. If the storm held off he could get in hours of potential watching. With the heat and humidity many places would have the windows and even doors open. Blinds would almost certainly be up, and curtains open trying to catch any hint of breeze.

Normally he worked the other side of the town, but the pickings were getting a little stale now, and he was sure that his favourite target, the tall leggy blonde cop had twigged to his presence. He had noticed a change in the patterns at her house, and a subtle increase in police patrols for that side of the town. A shame really; her exploits were the things of legend. Just thinking of her caused a familiar tingle. He patted the small camcorder in his pocket. If things got boring on tonight’s walk he’d review some of her finer moments.

As he entered the acreage estate he could just make out the occasional cawing of a crow somewhere on the hill. Keeping to the shadows he passed a handful of houses that quickly proved to hold no interest. Air con, too old, too fat, too ugly for his tastes.

Keeping to the shadows he watched the widows of the fourth house, a middle aged woman, and two kids – probably mid teens. He’d missed seeing anyone here on his previous drive by. Damn, both were boys. No joy there.

The mother didn’t look like a real MILF, but he thought he wouldn’t pass up an opportunity to get to know her better. The voyeur settled deeper into the bushes and watched as the woman prepared the evening meal, blissfully unaware of the caller outside in the shadows. In a tree somewhere close he heard a loud caw.

He was just thinking of leaving when the woman ducked into the hallway. Curiosity got the better of him and he turned the corner of her house, found an even better vantage point close to an open window and peered inside. Pay dirt! He had just found his spot in time to see her step into the ensuite shower recess. He loved the modern trend for clear shower glass. He decided he would upgrade his ranking on this woman. Sans a rather dowdy housedress, she had a figure that he would certainly spend some moments contemplating at home.

He pulled out the camcorder and pressed record. If he was asked he would say it was the little things he found attractive about her. Her long wavy brown hair, the way the water and shampoo suds ran across her marvellous curves. The way the cold water made her nipples engorge. The hidden tattoo on her left shoulder. There was something about the tattoo that reminded him of the blonde cop. He also liked the fact that she groomed her pubic hair. Not like a modern porn star, but certainly not like those of the classic 70’s porn he grew up on.

With enough video recorded, the voyeur set about gratifying his particular sexual appetite. His vision was completely focused on the mother in the shower, his mind swimming in a mixture of visual stimulation and fantasy. He reached his “happy ending” just as his quarry pulled on an extra long T shirt over some khaki shorts. At the precise moment of his release the crow let out a piercing caw. Had the peeper been an expert in

crow calls he might have recognised this as a distress call. The noise split the night just as a flash of lightning lit up the neighbourhood.

In the bathroom the woman thought she saw a man's silhouette outside her bedroom. Old fear chilled her to her core, and anger burned in her chest. The steely resolve to never again be a man's victim burned in her gut. She reached into a draw next to the hand-basin and pulled out a long knife and quickly finished dressing.

The peeper wondered if she had seen him in the mirror. Was there a momentary freeze in her actions? Other crows from the local murder landed in the tree. He decided that now would be a good time to move on.

After a few fruitless blocks he decided it might be time to visit the night's prime target. As he entered the side street that would take him down to the secluded house on the end of the cul-de-sac he noticed that the storm was only a little closer and apart from that one anomalous flash at the wrong time the flashes were still distant. As he thought about that flash he recalled there was no clap of thunder, just a low rumble far in the distance.

He also couldn't shake the feeling that he was not alone on the dark streets. Once or twice he thought he caught a fleeting movement behind him, but even when he hid himself away to watch the mundane lives of his subjects (for that is how he thought of them), nothing or no one came into view from behind. But he was convinced that this area was plagued by crows. Everywhere he stopped he could hear their low cawing in the trees. Every now and then there was a loud caw, had he been a little more paranoid he might have noticed it was just as he decided to move on from one house to the next.

Had his senses been more finely honed he would have known that he was indeed being followed. Followed by at least a dozen crows who all felt the impending danger, and by at least one woman now determined to end her torment.

The voyeur settled into a new position, looking into the lowset timber house tucked away at the bottom of the hill. He'd been here a few days ago delivering gas bottles and figured it was the original farmhouse from a generation or two back. It was during that visit he decided he had to investigate. The lady of the house was gorgeous, but it was the daughter that really got his attention. She was in her late teens he guessed and had answered the door in a bikini barely covered by a loose shirt. He planned to make this house a regular stop on his nights out if it proved as fruitful as he hoped.

As he peered into the lounge room window from the shadows he was disappointed not to see the ladies of the house. Instead he saw what he figured must be the man of the house and two other men. On the low table in the middle of the room were bags of what looked like small tablets. He assumed these to be drugs. There was also an old sports bag with what looked like wads of cash, and what was definitely a very large hunting knife.

It was at that moment that he heard the crows all give out an explosive caw – and a light flashed so bright his eyes were momentarily dazzled. From inside the room he heard a loud curse. He knew he was sprung and quickly made his way to the darkest

spot he could find behind a nearby shed. He had to get away. The crows wouldn't shut up.

Was the lightning storm suddenly closer? Now the flashes turned the horse paddocks as bright as day every few moments. He could feel the first heavy splatters of rain and the thunder boomed and echoed in the valley. He had just entered a darker area behind the neighbour's horse shed when he felt something plunge into his abdomen, now stabbing at his eyes, invading his flesh. Again and again he felt his body being violated by something that burned. He was aware of flapping, and of cawing; he heard a strangled shriek. As the rain filled his eyes, he saw a shape hovering over his now powerless body. His eyes grew dark.

Part 3

The Cop

She unfolded her long legs from the confines of the patrol car. Her blonde hair was pulled tight into a bun, her uniform was crisp and clean. She unclipped the army knife she had sheathed on her belt and put it in the car's glove box. Looking at her watch, she noted the time - 05:42.

Finishing her coffee she stepped around puddles as best she could and approached the body lying in the shade behind the horse shed. She cursed under her breath.

The crows had already found the body and she wondered which of the other cops she'd give the job of keeping the keep crows off a body while they waited for the forensic team. No contest; it would be that slow witted idiot again.

The body was a mess. So many wounds. So much blood and gore. So many feathers. So much bird shit. Just what wounds were from the attack, and what had been from the crows gathering fresh meat for their young, only an expert would possibly be able to tell. The mud should have made it easy to collect some shoe prints, but this area was well trodden by animals and humans. They'd do what they could, but she figured there might not be much help here in revealing what had transpired the previous evening.

One of the crows tried to take off with something in its beak. Whatever it was dropped only a few meters from the cop. She saw it was a pocket camcorder. Noting its location, she snapped a photo on her iPhone and picked up the device. Mercifully it had survived the torrential rain. It probably had been covered by the body. As she went through the files she saw herself – over and over again. A wry smile threatened to show itself.

As the rest of the local police team arrived she quickly turned off the camera and slipped it into her thigh pocket. High up in the tree the crow cawed.