

The Raven

A fairy tale in the spirit of H.C. Andersen by Henrik Frederiksen, ©ElephantTribe.org

High up, above the smoke and noise of the town, up in the highest church tower, lived a raven. He was as black as the darkest night, and when the sun caught his plumage, it shone with an elegant gleam of violet and glossy green. But none of the people down on the earth noticed that. They only heard his hoarse "Croak! Croak!" when he flew over the red tiles, and so they said: "What a bird of ill omen! He brings nothing but bad tidings."

But the raven was no bird of ill omen at all. On the contrary, he was a very thoughtful and poetic gentleman who had seen more of the world than most. He knew every chimney, every twig, and every crack in the old walls.

At the very top of the church spire, right above the raven's nest, sat the Weathercock. It was made of the purest gold, or at least beautifully gilded, and it turned proudly in the wind. The raven was deeply fascinated by this shining bird.

"He is of an exceedingly fine family," thought the raven, for he naturally believed that the Weathercock was a living, albeit very high-ranking, bird. *"He does not speak much, the fine gentleman. In fact, he says nothing at all, but he always knows which way the wind is blowing. That is true refinement!"*

The raven wanted so much to be friends with the golden rooster. Every morning he flew up and perched respectfully on the spire.

"Good day, Your Highness!" said the raven. "The weather is mild today, and the swallows are talking of traveling south."

But the Weathercock did not answer. It merely creaked a little bit in its metal when the wind suddenly shifted, and proudly turned its beak to the west.

"What an elegant silence," thought the raven admiringly. "He is thinking deep thoughts."

To win the friendship of the distinguished bird, the raven began to bring him gifts. He flew far and wide across the land and gathered the finest treasures, which he laid on the lead roof just below the spire. First, he brought a shining mother-of-pearl button, then a piece of pink silk ribbon, and one day he found a shiny silver coin down in the market square.

"Look," said the raven. "This is for you. It shines almost as beautifully as your own plumage."

The Weathercock paid no attention to the gifts. The silver coin just lay there glinting coldly in the sun, until a gust of wind one day blew the silk ribbon away. But the raven did

not lose heart. He figured that great personalities were simply slow to form friendships.

Then winter came. It arrived with a severe cold that bit into beak and claws. The snow fell thickly and laid a white blanket over the whole town. People shut their doors tightly and lit their stoves. The swallows had long since flown away, and even the sparrows hid deep beneath the eaves.

Up on the tower, it was freezing cold. The wind howled, and the snow whipped against the church spire. The raven shivered from the cold, but when he looked up at the Weathercock, he saw that the fine golden bird was covered in hoarfrost.

"He must be terribly cold," thought the good raven. "He is so fine and distinguished, he doesn't have the thick downy coat that the rest of us ordinary birds have at all."

With his last remaining strength, the raven flew up and perched close, very close to the Weathercock. He spread

his large, black wing over the ice-cold gold to warm the distinguished gentleman while the winter storm raged. "We will stay warm now," he whispered, "as long as we stick together."

The next morning, the sky was clear and blue, but the frost was hard as glass. Down in the churchyard, right below the tower, the old gravedigger was out clearing snow. There, in the middle of a snowdrift, he found the raven. It lay stiff and frozen to death, and right beside its beak lay the shiny silver coin, which the night wind had blown down from the roof.

"Look here," said the gravedigger to the priest, who came walking by. "The ugly bird of ill omen has fallen down. It tried to steal a silver coin! Yes, that's what happens when you have a black and greedy heart."

They swept the raven away along with the snow.

But high up on the tower sat the Weathercock, glittering coldly in the morning sun. It turned to the north, and it

turned to the south, with a stiff and creaking sound. It shed no tears and felt no sorrow, for it was only made of metal. It had no heart that could beat for another. There was only one on the entire church tower who had possessed that – and he now lay beneath the snow, in his modest, black plumage.