

The Crow Calls

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I open my eyes. Standing at the top of a hill, all around me I can see countless fields, dotted with dark green trees and the occasional red-brick cottage. Thin, ribbon-like roads meander through the landscape, over hills and through valleys before finally becoming too thin to see. In the distance, the peaks form a dark blue line where the sky meets the land. All around me, there is not a single person to be seen – a spectacular view.



A sudden bang yanks me out of my reverie; the sound startles a group of birds and they fly away, cawing. I turn around in surprise, trying to locate the sound. A strong gust of wind makes my jacket flap; the air is icy cold. Slowly, I make my way back down the hill to the road, and stop in my tracks, confused. On the road stands a car; it is old and silver and the exhaust is smoking slightly, filling my nostrils with the harsh smell of fuel. One of the doors is open and I peer inside in curiosity, but the driver is nowhere to be seen. I step back but realise there is something trapped underneath my foot – a torn, crumpled piece of a newspaper. I lift my foot to release it and catch the headline ‘MISSING PERSON IN THE PEAK DISTRICT’ before it flies away in the wind, flapping gently. I decide to carry on with my walk.

As I trudge up the path, something cold and wet lands on the back of my neck and I glance back up at the sky which has now darkened to an overcast, sombre grey. The wind howls and howls, sounding like the wails of a child and I hear the cry of a bird – a crow. I watch the bird circle my head in a smooth arc before it flies away gracefully. As the hill gets steeper, the air gets colder and icier; I pull my jacket more tightly around myself. The landscape has changed now, no longer open fields and trees, but instead rocky hills and cliffs. The path has become more treacherous and I stumble every so often on loose rocks and stones. On either side, the land below is getting further and further away; my foot catches on a jagged piece of rock and I accidentally send it over the edge of the path. I watch as it falls through the air then hits the ground with a remote thud. In the distance, again I hear the screeching of a crow.

Up the hillside I continue, unconsciously putting one foot in front of the other. I do not notice that as I walk I am being surrounded by crows, by their charcoal black bodies and their unceasing squawking. Only when I become aware that I am no longer walking on concrete do I see that the path has gradually dwindled and now has finally turned non-existent. I realise I am standing near the edge of a cliff; the wind is blowing harder up here and all I can hear is the cawing of the crows. The crows – they are everywhere, some perched at the edge of the cliff whilst others have flown over to the ground below. Slowly, I step closer to the edge; somewhere inside me I know there is something wrong about this place, something unnatural, something not meant to be, but still I step closer.

I reach the edge of the precipice – the birds at my feet do not move or register my presence. As if in slow motion, I look down at the ground below, in my mind already knowing what I am going to see.

There sprawled on the rocks is the body of a man, his head and the grey stones around him smeared in blood. His corpse is surrounded by the crows pecking at his flesh, their shiny, black bodies covering his in a deadly embrace. What little is left of the man's face is peppered with red holes and his clothes are ripped and torn from the crows' greedy beaks. Through my horror, my eyes land on his jacket; it is a dark blue one with a thin hood and a logo on the left hand side, but the logo is now stained red with blood. Something about the jacket is strangely familiar... And then I realise why.

Numbly, I look down at myself to the left pocket of my jacket and see the logo – once white, but now dark with blood. With shaking hands, I reach up and touch the back of my head and feel the wet blood, slick between my fingers.

What is happening to me?

Is that my body, lying there on the ground?

What am I?

Without thinking, I throw myself off the edge of the cliff with a helpless howl and I feel myself falling, down and down. I close my eyes, waiting for something, waiting for anything...

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