

# The Crow's Quill



**AUGUST 2021** WELCOME TO OUR FIRST ISSUE!

## CASSANDRA L. THOMPSON

Thoughts from the mastermind behind Quill & Crow Publishing House, the press determined to bring poetry back & Gothic fiction into the mainstream.

## TALES OF GOTHIC DELIGHT

Six short stories that encompass the feel of the House: dark, intriguing, & dreadfully macabre.

## POET SPOTLIGHT

Exclusive Marie Casey Q&A and poetry by two honored members of The Dark Poet Society.

QUILL & CROW PUBLISHING HOUSE



THE CROW'S QUILL

# CONTENTS

EXCLUSIVE!

WHAT IS  
QUILL & CROW  
PUBLISHING HOUSE?

18

INDEPENDENT. REBELLIOUS. DREADFUL.

## 06 INHERENT DARKNESS

A bone chilling story about a haunted little girl and her adored father. Written by **Lucas Mann.**

## 11 LITTLE BLACK DEATH

Heart-chilling tale of a loving mother and her struggles to please her mysterious and secretive husband. Written by **Rebecca Jones-Howe.**

## 16 BLINDFOLD

An interview and original poem by the lovely **Sheena Shah.**

## 22 DARKLY YOURS

A man battles confusion and odd happenings as he searches for a way out... Written by **Spyder Collins.**

16

### BLINDFOLD

*"Your murky past  
warns me at night  
but in the light  
I'm happy being  
blind"*

22

### DARKLY YOURS

*"I was in a deep  
and pleasant sleep,  
horrible dreams  
and all."*



THE CROW'S QUILL

# CONTENTS

INDEPENDENT. REBELLIOUS. DREADFUL.

## 26 THE RAVEN TATTOO

A exploration of intrigue and curiosity! How much would you sacrifice for just a taste? Written by **Kristin Cleaveland.**

## 32 THE BEAST WITHIN

An interview and original poem by the wonderful **K.R. Wieland.**

## 34 THE QUILL

A man is tormented by a voice, and his only escape is a magic quill that seemingly grants wishes... Written by **David Andrews.**

## 40 THE MOTHER OF CROWS

A woman embraces a new connection with her crows, that runs deeper than blood, after a devastating trauma. Written by **William Bartlett.**



### THE BEAST WITHIN

*Nothing makes sense  
But there is an ache  
Inside my joints  
They no longer fit  
Within the confines  
Of my body.*



### THE QUILL

*A man is tormented by a  
voice, and his only escape  
is a magic quill that  
seemingly grants  
wishes...*





# THE CROW

*Independent  
Rebellious  
Dreadful*

Ask anyone who knows me: I notoriously work on 900 projects at a time. I have no chill. One of these projects happens to be our podcast, which is set to come out later this month. During the recording of the first episode, our host Luke asked me, “So, why crows?”

A clear cut question with a simple answer, and yet, my words caught in my throat. I couldn’t respond. Why couldn’t I explain why I love crows? Then I realized, it’s because the answer to that question is much deeper than it seems.

In my twenties, I hit a rough patch. I was consumed with trying to be what other people wanted me to be. I strived to project this perfect person holding everything together. Inside, I was screaming.

I’d always loved the color black, and things dark and macabre, so crows were always aesthetically beautiful to me. I’m absolutely in love with their calls. Something about hearing them talk to each other in their own language has always brought me a sense of peace. But I noticed, during my rough patch, I started to see crows more and more, started to hear them echoing in the distance.

Eventually my house of cards crumbled, leaving me desperate to find a solution for my misery. I’d always been a spiritual seeker, but I threw myself headfirst into things like yoga, meditation, reiki, shamanism. During my meditative trances, I saw crows. A flock moved into my backyard woods. They even found their way into my dreams.

And then one day, I found her.





# THE CROW

While writing *The Ancient Ones*, I did a lot of mythology research, and I stumbled upon an old Celtic war goddess named The Morrigan. Goddess of Death. Phantom Queen. Mother of Crows. She was black haired, blue eyed, fierce, and indomitable. She was everything I had ever wanted to be and more.

I was floored.

I couldn't believe I'd found a deity that spoke to me. Well, she found me.

Long story short, I slowly shed my outer walls and evolved into the person you see today. I put Morrigan in *The Ancient Ones* and she fit perfectly. I began feeding "my" backyard crows, and I currently have three flocks that stop by on a rotation. I chopped off all my hair, I dress however I like, and I started a gothic publishing house. I put crows in the name because, of course I did.

I never could have imagined what would follow.

Not only am I shocked and humbled daily by how many people read *The Ancient Ones*, but I never could have predicted that I would start writing poetry again. Let alone that others would join me. Or that I'd publish them and we'd create a family that transcends simple friendships.

That I would be writing for a magazine about a podcast while preparing to launch my second book.

It isn't just a coincidence that the magazine is debuting in August, the month when Q&C was founded. This entire experience has been utterly serendipitous. This time last year, I was rejected for the 100th time, this time on a full manuscript request. I wasn't even upset. At that point, I was thoroughly disgusted by what I'd learned about the publishing industry. I'd befriended a whole host of people just like me, who wanted to read fun and interesting books. We're sick of boring tropes and unimaginative prose. I knew it was my job to get my book in the hands of those people. And if I ended up being any good at it, then I was gonna take others with me.

And so, Quill & Crow was born. It's only been one year, but I'm even more driven than I was before. The relationships I have forged are irreplaceable. We work together to bring these words to life, to do our part to make this world a little better... a little darker.

We call each other Crows.

CASSANDRA L. THOMPSON  
EDITOR IN CHIEF  
PUBLISHER  
FOUNDER  
THE CROW





# THE QUILLS

Quill & Crow Publishing House is a quaint and curious press dedicated to promoting the integrity of independent literature. Specializing in all things gothic and macabre, we strive to preserve the upmarket prose while lifting up voices often unheard. Quill & Crow is not your typical publishing house. Not only because we love bleeding heart poetry and all things odd & macabre, but because we are family. Each one of us brings something amazing & unique to the table.

Whether you are joining us as an author, poet, or just want to hang out as a Friend of the Crows, you are welcomed and appreciated.

...and we will probably feed you.



A.L. GARCIA

Marketing/Social Media Manager

Weeping Poetess, demon weed. Author of Broken Things & Broken Heart Mosaics.



LUCAS MANN

Public Relations

Host of CrowCast, dark fantasy/horror writer, friendly neighborhood ax murderer.



MARIE CASEY

Head of Poetry

Designer, poetess, mouse, author of Bloodhound: A Poetry Collection.

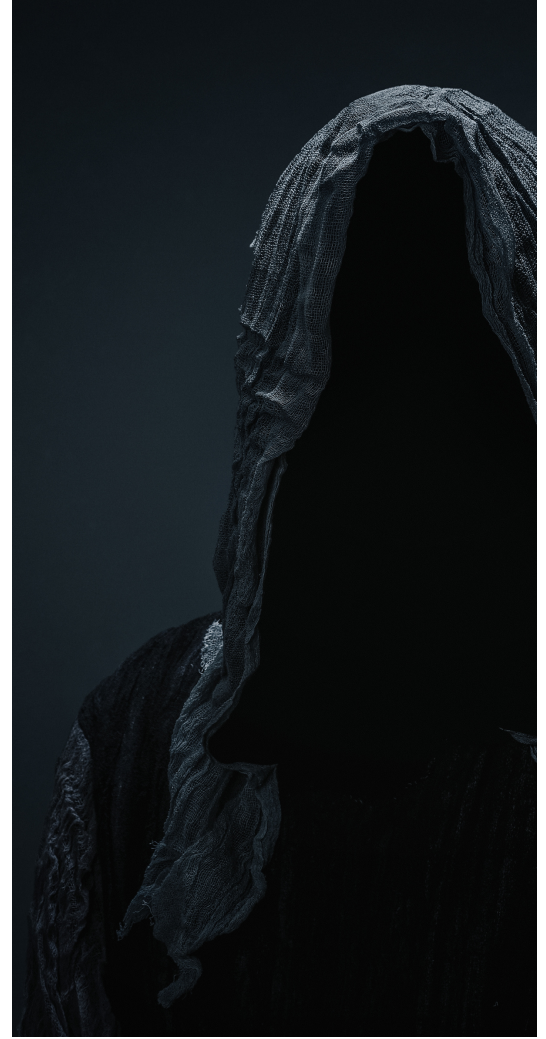


WILLIAM BARTLETT

Assistant Editor

Assistant Editor, dark poet, fantasy author, dragon of darkness in human form.

# Inherent Darkness



**Written by Lucas Mann**

**“Daddy!”**

Lucia pulled the blanket over her head. He was watching her again. Standing at the foot of her bed. No more than a dark shadow with glowing scarlet eyes. She could feel the heat from her breath against her face.

Shaking, she drew the blanket down, hoping he was gone. Keeping her eyes closed as she did, she was startled by the flash of light. She opened them to see her father standing in the same spot the demon had just been.

**“What is it, honey?”**

**“I saw him again.”**

He took a deep breath and exhaled. “I told you there’s nothing to worry about.” He walked around the bed and knelt next to her, placing his hand on her head. “You are completely safe in this house. I’ll never let anything harm you.” The warmth of his hand calmed her.

**“Taking the shape of a human skull, they came directly for her. She whispered to it in her paracosmic language.”**



"I know I saw him this time, Daddy. He was standing right there!" She pointed to the foot of her bed.

"Would you like me to light a candle?" he asked. She nodded fervently, shaking the bed. "Okay, okay."

He leaned down and kissed her forehead, sending another surge of warmth through her.

"I love you, Daddy."

"I love you too, sweetheart."

He lit the candle on her dresser and shut the overhead light off, basking the room in a soft glow. Smiling, he left, leaving the door open just a crack. Silence engulfed her. The kind when all you can hear are your thoughts running rampant through your mind.

She watched the shadows dance on the wall behind the candle. They waxed and waned, mimicking the movement of the flame. Raising her hands, she moved her fingers in the same motion, watching their tendrils grow and climb the wall. They reached the ceiling and slithered across, consuming the room. Taking the shape of a human skull, they came directly for her. She whispered to it in her paracosmic language.

The monster emitted a screeching sound, as if it were responding in its own tongue.

"What are you doing?" Her father flipped on the overhead light, extinguishing the shadow.

"Pretending." She smiled at him. "There was a shadow monster crawling across the ceiling."

He sat down next to her. "Baby girl. I don't know where your mind creates these things." He looked over at the dresser. "The shadow was from your doll behind the candle."

"No. It was what I wanted it to be." She raised her eyebrows. "I made it move and it talked to me."

"Talked to you?"

"Yes. More of a scream, but it answered me." He furrowed his brow and listened.

Lucia opened her mouth to speak, but he silenced her by raising his finger to his lips. He pointed at the window as they heard the screeching sound she had heard before.

"Is that the screaming?"

"Yes, Daddy."

"My love. That is the tree outside scratching on your window. I've been meaning to trim that."

"Oh. It's too dark outside. I can't see out the window."

"Darkness is relative. Before I lit the candle, it was darker in here and you would have been able to see out the window." He smiled again. "Many people, not just children, are afraid of the dark. But it can be your friend. It will conceal you when you most need it. Cloak yourself in darkness and no harm will ever come to you."

"Daddy?"

"Yes, love."

"Will you blow the candle out? I want darkness to be my friend."

“Time to sleep.” He stood and walked over to the dresser, blowing out the candle. He paused at the door, before turning off the light. “Find strength in the darkness. With it, nothing can find you.”

Once again, the room was black. She peered out the window, and could now see the tree, its stygian silhouette against the night sky. The last leaves had fallen as it prepared for the dormancy of winter. It was not void of life, however. A single crow was roosting close to the trunk. It appeared to be sleeping until its head turned, looking at the window with its closest eye. It stood and hopped sideways along the branch. Leaning forward, it peered through the window before cawing multiple times, the sound barely audible through the glass.

This did not frighten Lucia. She often fed the crows through her window causing them to behave this way. She wondered if this was the same crow that followed her around during the day, knowing she always had a handful of grain in her pocket.

Her eyes grew heavy as she watched the crow retreat back to its perch. It nuzzled its face in the feathers, tucking its beak under its wing. She let her eyes close, the weight of her eyelids too much to bear. A moment later she opened them, looking back out the window for the crow that was no longer there. Disappointed, she turned her gaze inside to find it perched on the footboard of her bed.

“Hello,” Lucia said. “I’m glad you came in from the cold.”

The crow cawed in response, but she could understand its language. “Thank you for inviting me.”

“You’re welcome. My name is Lucia.”

“Yes. Mine is Dealla.”

“Why are you alone?”

“Only the innocence of a child can ask such questions.” Dealla hopped onto the bed. “I am not alone. I am with you. I have been for some time.”

“I know that. I mean, where are the other crows?”

“Succumbed to the great disease. I am the last. My family fell ill two winters past.”

“Oh. I’m sorry. Is that why you’ve been following me?”

“No, Lucia. I worry about you. There is danger lurking. Closer than you know. Darkness surrounds you.”

“It was here tonight. I saw it.”

“As did I. That was why I was scratching at your window.”

“That was you? Daddy said it was the tree moving in the wind.”

“Trees are not moved by still air.”

“Why was it coming for me?”

“I do not know. I am not able to comprehend the why of things. Only that there is danger.”

“Is there danger here now?”

“Not in this room.”



“Then where?”

“Can I show you?”

Lucia nodded and Dealla touched her wing to Lucia’s fingers. Suddenly they were outside, perched on a branch. Not in the same tree, one farther away with a full view of the house. A dark cloud had descended, consuming everything except her bedroom.

“What is that?” Lucia asked.

“Desire,” Dealla said. “I do not know exactly what it is. But it wants you.”

“What does it want from me?”

“Again, I cannot discern that. But you have an allure that is plain to see. Everything bends toward you. Craves you. Humans, beasts, plants. Even inanimate objects gravitate toward you.”

Lucia scrunched up her face. “What do you mean?”

“Here, watch.” Dealla reached into her nest and pulled out a small silver object. “Hold out your hand.”

Lucia opened her palm and Dealla dropped the trinket. It fell, then turned and landed in Lucia’s hand.

“How did that happen?” Lucia was too stunned to move.

“I told you. Things are drawn to you.”

“If things are drawn to me so much, why isn’t the cloud around my room?”

“You search for meaning I cannot give.”

Lucia was silent for a while, lost in thought. “This doesn’t seem real.”

“Why do you say that?”

“It feels like a dream.”

“Just because it’s a dream doesn’t make it any less real. The gifted are not limited by sleep. You transcend consciousness.” Dealla stood, letting out a trilling sound that drew Lucia’s attention back to the house. The cloud had obscured half of her bedroom. “You should return to your body, or else you will be stuck in the dream world forever.”

Lucia held out the trinket to Dealla.

“That belongs to you now,” Dealla said. “It is my gift for sharing your dream with me.”

“Thank you.” Lucia paused, confused. “How do I wake up?”

“Merely close your eyes and open them again.”

Lucia closed her eyes tight, her face scrunched as if bracing against a cold wind. When she opened them, she was back in her bed, warm and cozy under her blanket. She was struck by the whoosh of a swirling wind at the foot of her bed. Not cold—the air had a familiar warmth to it. The room was so dark she couldn’t see anything, not even the light from the doorway or the window. A red light flashed, illuminating enough to reveal the cloud had infiltrated the room, the grains of its stygian mist approaching.

Another flash and she saw the outline of a hooded figure. The same figure she had seen earlier at the foot of her bed. She realized the light came from its glowing red eyes.

Terror overwhelmed her.

“What do you want from me?” she screamed.

Everything stopped. The wind stopped swirling, the temperature returned to normal, and the dark mist evaporated from the room. Yet the figure did not move. Without the cloud, enough light filtered in for her to see him. He slowly removed his hood to reveal a full head of black hair. When he looked up, he opened his eyes to show they were not red anymore. They were the green eyes of her father.

“My baby girl. I was worried you were not going to wake. You did not seem...present.” He scowled at her suspiciously.

“It’s been you,” Lucia said softly, more to herself than him.

Her father nodded. “Yes. I’m truly sorry to have kept it from you. I wasn’t sure you were ready. I’m still not.”

“So you lied to me?” Anger washed over Lucia as she balled her hands into fists.

“It was necessary. Let me tell you who I am.” He sighed and leaned onto her bed. “I keep order in this world. Temptation, betrayal, and power are viewed as evils, but they are necessary to bring joy and happiness. They provide the counter the world needs to keep things balanced. It is my dream for you to join me. Help me mold this world the way we want it to be.” He held out his hand, offering her a place at his side.

She raised her own, then hesitated. “You’ve lied to me my entire life. How do you expect me to trust you?”

“As I said, it was necessary. I am your father and love you dearly.” He reached closer to her.

She stared at him for a long time, then nodded slowly. “That sounds like something an expert in temptation would say.”

“Other than this one thing, what have I ever kept from you?”

She raised her hand again, their outstretched fingers inches apart. With a flick of her wrist, Dealla’s trinket flew at her father, piercing his chest. It fell to the ground, leaving a hole that continued to grow. Lucia left her hand in the air, turning it palm up. Her father’s heart emerged from the hole in his chest, floating across the room to her. He fell to the floor, his eyes draining of green to a lifeless grey.

“Things are drawn to me.” She giggled while inspecting her new prize. “No, Daddy. You have shown me that I cannot trust you. I will not join you. Instead I will become you. I will keep order in this world, but not the way you want it. I will burn it to the ground if I have to and rebuild it as it suits me.” She stepped over his body and walked out of the room, humming a nursery rhyme to herself.

From outside, Dealla looked up to the sky at an opening that appeared in the clouds.

“She is ready.”



# Little Black Death



**Written by Rebecca Jones-Howe**

The newest expansion of the Hargrove Mill opened the night Daniela was born. Gray smoke bloomed and blended into the sky as I labored. Daniela had my red hair, which I buried beneath the blanket when William entered my chambers to see his firstborn child.

He took her and gazed at her sleeping face. He touched her cheek before facing the village below.

"I'm sorry," I said.

At this, he revealed to Daniela the cold depths of his black stare. It had seized me the day he brought his carriage to the village and proposed that I become his wife. His irises were dark as his pupils, glistening with only the slightest touch of desperation as he waited for my response. My body chilled, so fearful to answer. His lumber had built every structure in the village. He lived alone in his stone home, perched on the mountainside, each arched window accented with draperies of red. When he kissed me on our wedding day, his mouth tasted of blood.

**"When he kissed  
me on our  
wedding day, his  
mouth tasted of  
blood."**

"What are you sorry for?" he asked, raising his gaze to my face full of tears.

"I-I know you only married me for an heir."

He placed Daniela back into my arms. His knee shifted the mattress as he leaned in close and wiped the hot tears from my eyes. "Don't cry, darling. I married for love as well, and you've given me a daughter to spoil."

More tears came, clouding my eyes, turning the room into a swirl of red as he embraced us both. I tried to find comfort, but only felt his chill. I smelled salt and iron, and the baby must have too, because she opened her mouth and screamed like a siren of warning.



The newspapers often wrote articles of the ghastly conditions at the mill. Villagers wrote open letters, telling William of their woes, their broken bones and broken families. Yet, after Daniela's birth, the newspapers only wrote of me. Columns described the expanse of the nursery, the wet nurses and the myriad of servants I had at my disposal.

I made the mistake of reading the letters sent from other mothers. They complained of their hardship and their toil and their lost husbands. Their stories sent me glancing out the window at the factory. Weary workers descended into the village, only to be replaced by another set of faceless men, all of them like pieces in a machine of intricate cogs.

A siren rang, beginning the night shift. The smokestacks clouded the sky with gray haze. One of the maids came to shut the window. "That air's doing you no good, my lady."

"I used to breathe that air," I said.

"You forget about that air once you've breathed," she said, scoffing at the village which sat in the valley, brewing, simmering, angry. I was once angry. I once wrote letters of my own father's untimely death, but now my red hair blended with everything inside my husband's home, its fury lost behind the opulent curtains that the maid pulled closed.



I demanded to have Daniela christened at the village chapel. People watched us descend from William's carriage, for the first time being seen not as a villager, but as his wife. I glanced at the people I once knew, their faces now were tenebrous and blurred. They gawked at my finery, at the bold brocade of my dress and the gold of my jewels. Mutters sounded, until one of the men stepped forward.

"You come to gloat about your child, Mr. Hargrove, but what of mine?"

Other voices shouted from the crowd.

"The conditions at the factory are vile, Mr. Hargrove!"

My husband's stare hardened. His hand firmed at my back.

"You use our church at your whims," another voice said. "You take one of our women and spoil her with the fruits of our labor! What will we ever get in return?"

William turned. "I pay you all an adequate wage. Before I married my wife, I gave you all a raise."



Voices raised. Fingers pointed. "Soon enough you'll pay in blood!"

At this, the village roared. Daniela cried in my arms, pulling the crowd's attention back to my finery. William pulled my cloak over my head and pushed us through the carriage door. The mob followed until the dirt roads of the village turned into the cobblestone path that led to his massive home. Servants locked the iron gate behind us, yet my fear didn't settle. Daniela's screams punctured in my ears.

William handed her to the wet nurse. "They're ungrateful peasants," he seethed, his breath hot. "They might hate me, but they'll never hurt me or anyone that I love." He clung to me like a possession, their fury we'd escaped only driving him into desire.

Later, in his chambers, he tucked my hair behind my ear. "Are you grateful, darling?" I did not answer.



Protests rose in the village on the night Victoria was born. Torchlight flickered about the streets as I labored. Victoria had my red hair, which matched the crimson plumes that rose from between the tightly-packed houses in the clouded village below.

This time, when William entered to see his second-born child, I did not apologize.

He took Victoria in his arms and moved to the open window, slamming the panes over the cries of those outside. He pulled the red drapes over the darkness. The baby whimpered, but he rocked her gently and whispered in her ear. "Your mother thinks she has something in common with the workers. Perhaps, had she been more grateful of my love and devotion, you could have been a son."

"You could improve the factory conditions," I said firmly, remembering the fury I used to write my letters with after my father's death.

William lifted his gaze, his expression hardening. "Their fires will always burn for me, darling, no matter what I do. I married you and I provided for you, and yet you still hate me as you did before."

Victoria cried, her fists tightening. William pressed a fingertip to her lips but then gasped, nearly losing his hold when her mouth parted, revealing teeth.

"You're a horrible, rapacious man," I said. "You're covered in blood. The entire house smells of it."

At this, he opened the chamber door and passed the baby to the wet nurse waiting outside. Then he came and wiped a rag against my sweat-soaked forehead. "You are red, my dear, but not with passion or desire or love, as you should be."

I turned, but he cupped my chin and forced me to drown within the black pit of his glare. "I understand you care for the villagers, darling, but you don't live there anymore. You made a choice. All that you have now is me."

He held me until his fingers trembled. Blood dripped down his hand from Victoria's bite, trickling against my neck. He tried to kiss me, but I denied him my love.

---

The newspapers wrote of the girls. Victoria bit like a snake. Daniela was shrill as a banshee. The articles described my fury, my temper. Columns detailed the fine silk and brocade of my gowns. William had the papers brought to us at dinner. He read every article aloud.

"She is said to be of fiery temper, snapping at even the slightest of inconsistencies. She is vapid. She is vile. She is vain."

He sipped from our finest wine and continued until my face heated and my tears flowed hot. Then he set his glass down and rose from the table. He shook my shoulders in his cold grasp and smiled.

"You, my dear, are just as rapacious as I."

---

Riots started the night that Adelaide was born. Hollers of tired men and weary women sounded through the valley while I labored. Like her sisters, Adelaide bore red hair, which matched the bonfires that burned in the village square. They built pyres and burned effigies in William's likeness, in my likeness, as well as little ones of the children.

A little girl with a gaping maw.

A toddler with sharpened teeth.

A baby, drenched in blood.

William entered the room and took Adelaide into his arms. She flailed, her brittle nails catching against his silk waistcoat. This time, he took her straight to the waiting nurse. He slammed the door and locked it. I made fists as the sirens rang, announcing another shift change at the mill. The roars from the village built into a crescendo.

William glared at me, his gaze making me shiver. "I did what you wanted," he said. "I promised I would invest in new machinery, yet they told me it was too little, too late."

I turned to the window, where the torches and pitchforks came snaking up the path. "They'll never make it past the gate," he scoffed. "Even if they did, there's a tunnel in the wine cellar that leads down to the docks."

"What then?" I asked, my voice shaking.

"We'll have each other." He kissed me but I sat silent.

Moments later, the wet nurse banged on the door in tears. Adelaide refused to latch and had clawed her chest deep enough to draw blood.

"She's just like her mother," William said, leaving me alone with another little fire that burned at my breast.

---

Servants lingered in every corner, which only further perpetuated gossip.

I nursed Adelaide by the window, her scratches always drawing me to tears. I distracted myself, surveying the factory and the village. It was from where I came, and yet these people knew nothing of my toil. I'd come from their bearings. I'd suffered their loss. I'd lost my father. I leaned my head out the window and screamed, but there was nobody within range to hear.

My throat burned. My body ached. I put the baby in her cradle and hurried to William's bed. He kissed my tears and at the scratched and scabbed surface that Adelaide had made of my chest. He licked at my flesh, at the salt, the rust.

"You taste like me, darling," he said, his touch easing the swell.



One of the remaining maids closed the window while I read in bed, sickened by the early stages of another pregnancy.

"You should stop reading those, my lady. They'll be the death of you. For a while, they were the death of him."

"What do you mean?"

The maid smoothed the covers and smiled. "You'd written a letter about your father's death once. Mr. Hargrove raised wages, just as you'd demanded, yet the people still hated him. Then he asked you to marry him. He said he admired your hair."

I hesitated.

"He stopped reading the papers after that," the maid said, prying the sheets from my hands.



The factory burned the night Oliver was born. Villagers strode up the path to our mansion, their torches bright and their pitchforks raised. They wrestled with the wrought iron gate while I labored. Unlike his sisters, Oliver had the dark hair of his father, as well as the black pool eyes that drowned the worst of my misery. William entered. He hurried to my bedside and pried the baby from my arms, his breath caught with emotion.

Outside, the villagers charged at the gate, finally breaking the metal.

The remaining servants brought the girls to us, flailing and screaming, their mouths wide and shrill, teeth gnashing, claws bared. I turned, but William was gone. Oliver's scream echoed through the halls, down the stairs and into the depths of the wine cellar. William slipped through the secret door and closed it behind him, spilling red all over the stone floor.

I pounded the door, but he locked it from the other side. "William! William, please! You're all I have!"

He did not respond.

He did not love me.

He was long gone by the time the villagers arrived, their cold pitchforks hungry for blood.



A CROW'S  
POEM

---

BLINDFOLD

White colored roses  
cough black blood  
when I pin them in your  
intricate braid,  
thick, rattling like  
a snake in my misty  
eyes;  
hissing, hiding  
two-three wicked deeds  
I'm afraid to push  
my hand inside  
your nest,  
terrified  
of what I could  
find.

Your murky past  
warns me at night  
but in the light  
I'm happy being blind.

Wading, throat level deep water,  
in your ice-cold love  
if only for a while  
I'm happy being  
blind.

WRITTEN BY SHEENA SHAH



# POET SPOTLIGHT

**SHEENA SHAH**

Questions by Marie Casey

**1. As a crow, please explain how you extract worms from a corpse.**

Worms, maggots and larvae of flies are my favorite. These delightful little wiggly things love to infest corpses of the sinners, putting their existence into oblivion. My head twitches whenever I see fumes of their work on a dead body, the walls of my belly twists in anticipation of their divine flavor and my wings flap on their own, taking me to the place of their witchcraft. My eyes narrow on the holes made by their entry. In a precise motion, my beak peels away the skin hiding these naughty monsters, dancing in ecstasy on the layers of the inner flesh. I collect them up, slowly in my mouth, watching a few of them begging for mercy. A deep gulp and I cry in pleasure, devouring their slick bodies. Only the ones that announce me as their lord are granted a second chance at life. I am kind to those who are willing to bow.

**2. As a crow, would you prefer rotting or fresh meat?**

I would prefer rotten meat. My hollow bones are wicked, its essence relying on the flesh of the dead. My beak turns upwards in disgust at the sight of a living, innocent creature crawling with glee. My gut demands uncompounded, syrupy soups that could be obtained only after the blood is leached out of the tiny pores of my feast.

**3. What would be etched in your tombstone and why?**

My tombstone would be engraved with just one word-  
Frankenstein. No blessings, no love. I'm a catastrophe (for reasons I can't state here).

I believe I will be another curious Victor, always thirsty, always seeking. But I'm not afraid. My blood reeks of tragedy and I have learned to own it. My fingers are bent. My nails are filled with ashes and scrapings of the dead. I know I'll create something that will eat me. My monster will be known by my name while mine will gather dust.

EXCLUSIVE!

# WHAT IS QUILL & CROW PUBLISHING HOUSE?

BY CASSANDRA L. THOMPSON  
AND  
WILLIAM BARTLETT

Quill & Crow Publishing House is a quaint and curious press dedicated to promoting the integrity of independent literature. Specializing in all things gothic and macabre, we strive to preserve the upmarket prose while lifting up voices often unheard. We bid you welcome.

Before you can truly understand the nature of this Publishing House, you need to understand what gothic horror is. So what exactly is gothic fiction/horror? Most often, the term brings to mind the works of Edgar Allen Poe, Mary Shelley, or even Ann Radcliffe. But there are quite a few literary works that fit this motif, including modern examples. So what makes a story gothic?

There are plenty of resources out there, including solid academic research, but for simplicity purposes, the general consensus is that it contains several themes. Most, if not all, of the following themes are included in historic and modern day gothic literature.





# WHAT IS GOTHIC HORROR?

---

## Gothic Theme #1

### Atmosphere



A setting that is dreary/spooky; haunted castles, manors, cemeteries, mansions, etc. The atmosphere not only sets the mood, but can become a part of the story.

## Gothic Theme #2

### Omens & Curses,



Foreshadowing that something terrible is about to occur; this can happen with symbolism (a black cat crossing the character's path, for example), an event, or even a character's vocalization of what may come.

## Gothic Theme #3

### Supernatural/ Paranormal



These elements are either explicitly stated or alluded to; includes but not limited to ghosts, vampires, witches, demons, etc.

## Gothic Theme #4

### Emotional Distress



Strong, even overwrought emotion; quite often these high emotions manifest into nightmares or cause the main character to descend into madness.

# WHAT IS GOTHIC HORROR?

---

## Gothic Theme #5

### The Villain



Gothic villains are generally autocratic, authoritative men in power positions such as a father, a marquis, or a king; their villainy includes trying to bring harm to a damsel in distress.

## Gothic Theme #6

### Damsel in Distress



A young woman who suffers at the expense of a villain and is characterized as sad, oppressed, and lonely. She is often held captive and terrorized, and her purpose is to appeal to the readers' pathos.

## Gothic Theme #7

### Romance



Often there is an element of romance in the story, mainly between the damsel and the protagonist (sometimes even the villain); it is thought that the romantic elements present in Gothic literature were influenced by the literary Romanticism that preceded it.

With these themes in mind, you can see how they can be applied to romance and fantasy. Here at Quill & Crow Publishing House, we exalt gothic themes in different genres. The best way to get a feel of this is by reading Cassandra's debut novel, and Quill & Crow's original publication, *The Ancient Ones*. We live by a creed, to find talented writers out there who haven't been given a fair chance in the subjective industry, and bring more stories like *The Ancient Ones* to the world. Gothic is who we are. Different. Rebellious. And just dreadful to the traditional world. We invite you to submit to us when we have our open calls, so we can bring you under our obsidian wing.

# WHAT IS GOTHIC HORROR?

---

Here's a little poem to explain what the community is like here at  
Quill & Crow Publishing House:

## THE MURDER

We write for the laughter  
We write from our fears  
We write through all the blood, sweat, and tears

Our emotions are like a vineyard  
We wait as they grow  
When they're ready, they'll ripen, ferment, and flow

We rip our hearts open,  
And we paint with the blood.  
Our emotions are the well that flows like a flood.

Adversity and hardship; the kindling to our flame.  
Our talent born of matters draconian.  
Our scribblings; everlasting, immortal, and aeonian.

We are mariners of the darkest depths.  
We are dreadful, rebellious, and it shows.  
We are poets, artists, and crows.

WRITTEN BY WILLIAM BARTLETT



# Darkly Yours



## Written by Spyder Collins

I wake from a pleasant slumber by the rattle of thunder and the spark of lightning that illuminates my room. I lay for a moment, enjoying the cold of the sheets even after a long night's sleep. I wait for the return of thunder. How can I begin to tell you my love of a good thunderstorm? Though, truth be told, a good sleep is also well received in my world. I was in a deep and pleasant sleep, horrible dreams and all.

Nothing comes after the initial onslaught, and I grow impatient by Mother Nature's alarm clock. If she were going to wake me, she could at least continue the show, I think. Leaving my bed, I stretch my bones to expel the last bit of sleep. Still, the happiness that the sound of thunder brings me, even as a child, keeps my interests heightened. You see, where other children feared the thunder and the long creeping shadows that lighting drew across floors and walls, I embraced them. Even during the worst of storms, I savored sitting outdoors on the covered patio of my home. The smell that came with the thunder, rain or not, was glorious.

At night, I would sit up in bed, next to my window, and invite the crackling of the thunder and the flash of lightning. Often, I would set my toys by the window and as the lightning struck, I would watch the shadows that crowded my walls in a frenzy.

Here, my cabin only has one window. However, like most things, I have learned not to pose too many questions, as answers are always lacking.

**"The rolling  
thunder continues  
to court me,  
though my  
trepidation lingers."**

Opening the curtain, I lean into the window to have a look at the sky. Brooding clouds billow, sprawling across the horizon. Sadly, there is no rain in these clouds. Another rolling boom of thunder rocks the cabin before white-hot lightning shatters the gray sky.

Something is different. Though I can feel the excitement the storm brings, there is also an odd sense of apprehension. It is morning, but the gray skies obscure its light, keeping gloom over the landscape. I choose to forget the nagging dread that settled itself in my subconscious, for these mornings are still comforting to me.

To the east, where the front of the cabin faces, I peer out at the apple grove. Like everything else here, it is dead. Black soil rolls and turns like a gravesite. Crooked trunks from long axed trees are simple headstones. Barren of foliage and fruit, they stand in the grove like scarecrows watching over the dead. They always seem to leer back at me, these scarecrows. Ominous, the knots in their eroded trunks like the forlorn eyes of the dead.

I back away from the window. The rolling thunder continues to court me, though my trepidation lingers.

I find myself sitting at my desk. It is a humble desk, a table really, but here is where I write letters to my beloved. Her picture sits in a soiled frame, and blood drips insistently down the pewter fashioned as lattice and vine. I know not where the blood comes from, but there is no mistake it is blood. It pools on the surface of the small wooden desk then vanishes. I dedicate days trying to follow the flow of the blood, but no matter where on the desk I set the frame, the blood simply absorbs into the wood, leaving not a trace. I even look beneath the desk, but find nothing. If I hold the frame, the blood lingers at the bottom, then runs up the backside. Never did it stain my hands. After several days of investigation, I give up. As I said, there are many questions that remain unanswered. Perhaps it is better this way.

On the desk is a black feathered quill and parchment paper. I love the smell of the paper and the feel of the quill as it glides across the page. It calls to me each morning, the quill and parchment, to write to my Beloved. And I listen.

*My Dearest,*

*It has been a fortnight since I last sent a letter and, in that time, I have not heard back from you. I worry that our time apart has diminished your fondness of me, as you are a fetching woman, and I know many gentlemen about town would love to come calling.*

*I implore you to refrain and stay true. I will return in due time. I need to understand this place where I am unusually imprisoned. My punishment for what, I cannot determine. However, it will not hold me from you, my dear Elenore.*

*This letter I must keep short. The Raven paces the windowsill, eager to take flight and deliver my love to you.*

*Best,  
Silas*

It is true, this Raven - he or she perhaps - paces impatiently upon my sill. Carefully, I fold the letter into proper thirds, place it in an envelope, and seal it with red candle wax – my initials S.D.A. in eloquent cursive. Then to the window with haste I go. I open the window, repelled by the heat of the day, and quickly offer the letter to Raven.

She grabs it with her greedy beak and takes flight. Unsightly ash trails behind her, and some enters through the window. I shut it with some urgency to keep the heat from outside at bay. The ash floats about my small cabin like lost gnats searching for a place to be.

I try the door, as I have each day, with failure. Then I take my unused letter opener to the wall furthest from my bed and etch a tick into the withered oak. The logs stack from ceiling to floor and soon, I will wrap around the wall opposite the very door I cannot open.

The windows, you fool, you may be thinking at this moment. If you think I have not tried to break them out or climb out when I open them for Raven, you are sorely mistaken. For I have, and each time, I strike the ground as if I have fallen from Heaven. The impact shocks my bones, rattles my teeth. This is all before the heat melts my clothing to my skin. I wail like a trapped bear, scratching the scorched loam before finding myself back in my bed, just as I was the morning I attempted to flee.

My movement around the cabin is accompanied by the labors of the old floorboards. Dust covered, natural wood spits its disapproval with an eerie cry. Ash from Raven's wings lift as well, accompanying each step with a plume of gray powder. Each board looks like it was scratched by someone trying to escape or worse, being dragged to a darker place. I chuckle to think what could be worse than this box.

I sit once again. I pull the quill from the well and a piece of parchment from the stack that never seems to diminish. I jot on these papers two, three times a day.

*My Dearest,*

*I am in despair. Why can you not return my affections through just one letter? One note telling me you miss me and how you love me. I yearn for your love. Your gentle fingers on my face. To look into your violet eyes, my love, hear me. I –*

The quill runs dry and the well is empty.

*What is this?*

Frantically, I open drawers, ridiculously look beneath paper and other places where ink surely would not be. About the cabin, I search - nightstand, empty, kitchen cabinets and drawers, empty. There is no food here either.

*Why am I never hungry? Why do I not eat?*

These thoughts race through my mind. I only sleep never-ending nights, pace about, and write during the lonely daylight.

*What is this prison?*



*Where am I?*

My anger rises straight up my spine. A tingle behind my right eye indicates my blood pressure is on the rise.

Raven returns, pacing the sill. Its beak is empty, no letter from my Beloved.

*Why is she back so soon?*

To the window I go. I open it, but the heat doesn't greet me. Curiously, the air seems pleasant. Raven stares at me with her empty beak. My rage takes me. In one hand, I grab Raven and in the other, I clench my inkless pen.

I return to the desk, Raven in hand. She does not resist, in fact, she cooperates. An urge grips me as I watch Raven's chest swell then drop. I hear her beating heart. It invites me, my quill. Perhaps the blood of this worthless bird will provide me with the ink I need to finish the letter to my Beloved. *But who will take it to her?*

I place the tip to her beating heart. But there is a rustle at the door. As I approach, the floorboards groan their denial. My attention is drawn away from Raven, and my grip loosens. The quill drops to the floor and Raven takes flight.

Startled, I watch her retreat. The door bursts open and a swell of heat embraces me, the rancid smell of sulfur burns my nostrils.

This is where my story ends, as you can imagine.

Also, I suppose you have already guessed that I am in Hell. I had no idea love was a crime. That being in the throes of a lovely woman, a sin. The demon grabs my ankle, its searing melting my flesh away to the bone. Frantic, my nails dig into the floorboards as it drags me away. My screams drown out the sound as my nails tear from my fingers.

Then I see her.

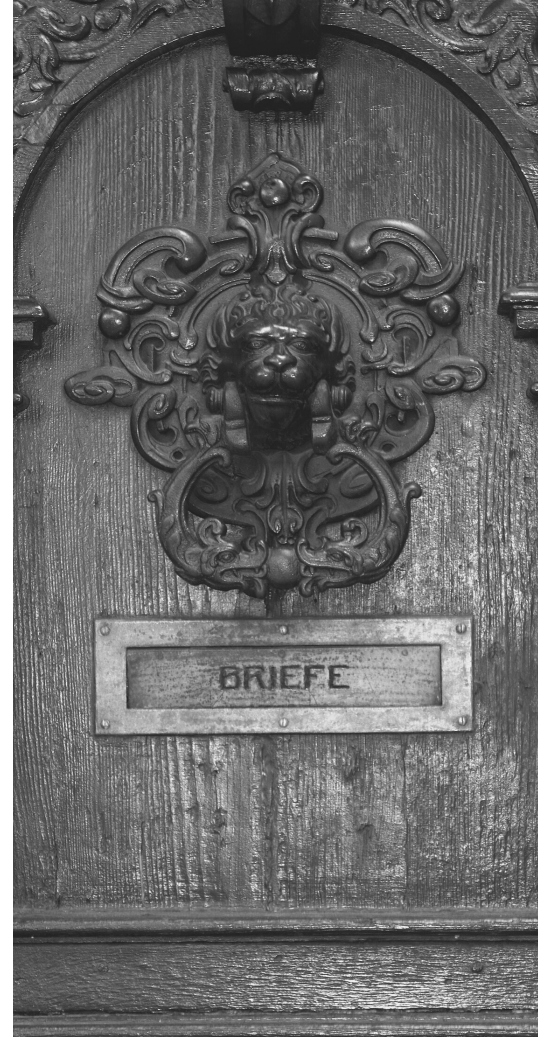
My Beloved, laying in the dirt with a hatchet lodged in the crease of her neck.

Raven sits atop her head, pecking at her violet eyes.

*Was she with me all this time?*



# The Raven Tattoo



## Written by Kristin Cleaveland

The cobblestone streets were slick with rain as Robert Jacobs darted through the fog, clutching his overcoat close around him. Avoiding the hazy glow of the streetlamps, he stayed out of the crowd, keeping himself cloaked in shadow. After making sure he had not been followed, Robert ducked down an alley that led behind the dilapidated building on the corner. He leaned against the wall for a moment to collect himself, glad he had worn his second-best overcoat.

Retrieving a crumpled slip of paper from his pocket, he read it over for the hundredth time. Knock three times, it read. Ask for Edgar. Scribbled at the bottom of the page, in a small hand Robert could barely make out, was the word *corvidae*.

Robert's heart beat faster— whether in trepidation, anticipation, or both, he wasn't sure. After gathering his courage, he quickly rapped three times on the door. Despite his attempt to be discreet, it seemed like the sound echoed through the alleyway.

He waited with bated breath.

The door opened a sliver. "State your business."

Robert cleared his throat, trying to keep his nerves out of his voice. "I'm here to see Edgar."

The voice behind the door was silent for a moment. "What's the password?"

Robert felt a rush of panic. Then he looked down again at the slip of paper clutched in his hand.

**"Robert. Isn't this what you wanted, and paid so dearly for? Something few have ever seen, and fewer yet have loved. Open your eyes."**

Pronouncing the unfamiliar word slowly, he responded, “Corvidae?”

The door slammed shut. Robert heard the rough sound of a chain dragged across metal. “Come on, then,” the voice said from inside, opening the door just wide enough for him to enter.

Robert stepped into the dimly lit vestibule.

“You can hang your coat here.” The man who had admitted him was tall and thin, with a sallow complexion. Even in the dim light, his eyes had an uncanny sheen. Robert assumed this must be Edgar. “But don’t leave any valuables behind. I’m sure you understand that things around here tend to... disappear.”

A varied selection of gentlemen’s coats, ladies’ cloaks, and capes hung in the hallway, ranging from ragged and shabby to astonishingly opulent. Robert hung up his coat and hat, then followed the pale man down the corridor.

“What’s your name?” Edgar asked him, stopping for a moment.

“It’s Jacobs. Robert Jacobs,” he replied.

Even in the darkness, Robert could sense the man looking at him with a withering expression. “Not your real name,” he said.

Robert flushed with embarrassment. “I take it your name’s not actually Edgar,” he replied. “No.”

Robert thought for a moment, then latched onto something he felt might be appropriate. “Call me Dorian, then,” he said.

Edgar laughed. “Ah, we have another Dorian. How original.” He turned around and headed down the corridor. Robert trailed behind, feeling foolish. In the distance, he could hear the clinking of glasses and the faint hum of murmured, clandestine conversations. At the end of the hall was a long, dark staircase. “Are you sure about this?” Edgar asked his new companion.

Robert hesitated, thinking back to what his friend William had told him in hushed tones. “You will not believe it,” he had said, his voice still tinged with awe.

He gathered his nerve. “Yes.”

The men entered a large, dimly lit room. The air was thick with smoke; beneath the overwhelming aroma of cigars, Robert caught a hint of what he thought might be incense. There were many people in attendance, but no one looked up to mark their arrival. Clustered into tightly knit groups, the revelers spoke in hushed tones. Some sat alone, lolling on sofas or chaises. Robert watched one heavy-lidded woman inhale from a long, thin pipe, then recline with a sigh.

“Opium,” he realized.

“Would you like some?”

Robert shook his head quickly.

“A drink, then.”



The men approached a bar at the far end of the room. A tall, pale man stood behind it. His skin was sallow, but his eyes, though ringed underneath with circles, were very bright. Robert noted their deep, uncanny quality. “What will you have?” the bartender asked. As he spoke, he set a small slotted spoon atop a glass. After placing a lump of sugar on the spoon, he poured a small quantity of green liquid over the sugar and into the vessel. He pushed the glass toward Edgar. “Your usual.”

Edgar raised an eyebrow at Robert. “Absinthe?”

Robert’s nerve could only take him so far. “No thank you. Whiskey and water, please.” It was his father’s usual drink order. Robert was unaccustomed to alcohol, but didn’t want to appear even more naive in front of his companion.

They sat down at the bar and Robert sipped his whiskey, which he found very strong but not unpleasant. Beneath the burn, it carried a taste of something unfamiliar. The drink sent a warm feeling through his body. He felt himself relax slightly.

“So, Dorian, what has your friend told you about this place?” Edgar asked. “He must have spoken highly, if you were willing to pay so much for a membership.”

Robert felt slightly ill at the reminder of how much money he had exchanged for the crumpled slip of paper. It was several months’ salary, and Robert, who had always been frugal, still couldn’t believe he’d managed to part with it. “He said...he said Miss Lenore was very beautiful.”

Edgar chuckled wryly. “There are many beautiful women in London,” he said. “She is something else entirely.”

Robert gestured to the bartender for another whiskey. The man poured him a double. “So, when do I meet her?”

“Oh, not yet, certainly. You must prove you are worthy of her first.”

Robert felt a sinking disappointment, then a rush of anger. “I was promised the chance to meet her! To...” He caught himself in embarrassment. “You swindled me!”

“Now, now,” Edgar said softly. He tilted his head in the direction of a woman who stood at the side of the room, watching. She walked towards the men and sidled up to Robert.

“Annabel, my dear,” said Edgar. “This is my friend, Dorian.”

Robert’s breath caught in his throat. He had very little experience with women, and had certainly never met a woman like this. She wore a low-cut dress of crushed burgundy velvet, clearly expensive, but darned and stained in places. The woman was so pale that Robert could see the blue veins running underneath the skin of her neck. Her eyes were glassy bright, like the bartender’s, which— coupled with her heavily rouged cheeks— gave her a feverish countenance. Dark hair tumbled in loose ringlets to her waist. She smelled of lemon oil, bergamot, and something warm and musky underneath.

“Nice to make your acquaintance, Dorian,” she said. Her voice was languorous, like a slow drip of honey. She slid her arm around Robert’s neck. It made him rather dizzy.

“Annabel here has a fine hand with a quill,” Edgar said.

“Oh?” Robert replied, trying to maintain his composure. The whiskey had gone straight to his head. “A writer?”

“Not exactly,” Edgar replied.

Annabel’s lips, dark and wine-stained, curled into a slow smile. She reached into her skirts and drew out a long, black feather, and a carved glass bottle that sparkled even in the dim light.

“Lenore wants to make sure her followers are...committed,” she murmured in that liquid voice.

Robert’s vision blurred, and he leaned on the bar to steady himself. “Am I meant to sign something?” he asked.

“Quite the opposite,” Edgar said. “It is Lenore who does the marking. All of us bear her sigil.” He unbuttoned the cuff of his sleeve, which Robert noticed was frayed and smudged. Rolling his shirt to his elbow, he gestured to his forearm. A small, yet clearly defined raven was tattooed just below his wrist.

Realizing what Edgar was implying, Robert stumbled to his feet. “If you believe I will allow myself to be tattooed like some drunken sailor, you are mistaken.” His stomach lurched and he leaned on the bar. “Return my payment to me, and we’ll speak no more of it.” Edgar laughed. “Lenore has already accepted your tribute. There are no refunds here.”

Annabel gently pushed Robert back onto his barstool. She leaned down and put her lips to his ear. “She’s worth it,” she whispered, and the hair on Robert’s neck and arms prickled with electricity. She drew her lips close to Robert’s mouth, murmuring, “She’s worth anything.” Then she put her mouth to his. He tasted wine, and honey, and something dark, like iron and rust and earth.

As Annabel kissed him, Edgar took Robert’s arm and unbuttoned his shirt cuff. Robert started to pull away, but Annabel bit his lower lip and pressed her tongue between his teeth. He opened his mouth wider, while Edgar rolled his shirt sleeve up to the elbow.

Annabel broke the kiss, but Robert’s head was still reeling. “That’s nothing compared to what she can do,” she said, her lips wet and shining. A drop of Robert’s blood glistened on her teeth. The bartender poured a glass of red wine and set it in front of her. She took a long swallow, and Robert watched the muscles of her pale throat contract. He thought he could see the blood coursing through the blue veins of her neck and shoulders.

“Are we agreed, then?” Edgar asked, holding Robert’s arm to the table. “Do you vow to serve Lenore— to give her whatever she asks— in exchange for her favor, and her love, and the opportunity to worship her and her alone?”

“Yes,” Robert gasped. He had an uneasy awareness that he was about to make a terrible mistake, but turning his back on everything he’d seen and returning to his ordinary, pedestrian life was unthinkable.

Annabel removed the stopper from the bottle.

To Robert's bleary eyes, the liquid inside seemed to move with a life of its own, black but shimmering with glimpses of indescribable color. Annabel picked up the long, dark feather, which Robert realized had been sharpened to a cruel-looking point. She dipped the quill into the ink.

"Are you certain?" Edgar hissed. "There is no going back."

"Yes!" Robert cried, before he could change his mind. And then all at once, Edgar was holding his arm down and Annabel was scratching with the quill, and his own screams echoed off the walls until the bartender stuffed a towel in his mouth and his mind went blank.



Robert opened his eyes into a deep blackness, with stars shimmering all around him. As his eyes slowly focused, he realized he was in a silken bed in a room lit only by candlelight. Every surface was covered with objects that sparkled brilliantly in the candle flames: jewels, silver candlesticks, and gilt-plated mirrors. Robert looked at his arm. By the dim light, he saw the small, but detailed outline of a raven. Much to his surprise, the skin around the tattoo had completely healed. There was no pain. Robert ran his fingers over the skin, finding that it wasn't raised at all. The ink was part of him, as if it had always been there.

"It's beautiful, isn't it?" A woman's voice, soft and low, came from beside him on the bed.

Robert tried to scramble into a sitting position, but the silk sheets he was wrapped in made it difficult. He was chilled to his core. Even after the night's startling events, this was the most terrified he had ever been—it was a primal fear, more awe than horror, an urge to hide coupled with the most desperate longing. He closed his eyes, too afraid even to breathe.

The voice continued. "Dorian, my dear. Robert. I am Lenore. Are you afraid of me?"

Robert knew he could not pretend. "Yes," he said, without opening his eyes.

"Wise men fear me. Foolish men do not live long enough to be afraid." Robert felt something drawn across his face, soft, but sharp on the edges. The air felt close and stagnant. Robert took a deep, shuddering breath. Crystal vases full of flowers glittered around the room -- but mixed with their heady fragrance was a sharper, acrid smell.

"Robert. Isn't this what you wanted, and paid so dearly for? Something few have ever seen, and fewer yet have loved. Open your eyes."

Robert felt that fear would stop his heart if he saw what was next to him in the bed, but he was too afraid to defy Lenore. Tears leaked from his eyelids as he opened them. Through blurred vision, he saw a woman illuminated by candlelight, her skin like white marble with blue veins shot through. Almost to her feet cascaded a mane of raven curls, blue-black and lustrous. Through the tangle of hair, Robert could see glimpses of alabaster flesh—a shoulder, a thigh—and he realized she was nude beside him. Her face was as white as her flesh, her lips dark as her hair, with sharp teeth that gleamed like pearls. Lenore's eyes were black. The candlelight shone in their depths.



Robert could not stop the tears that slipped down his cheeks. He knew that the price he had paid was worth it. Lenore reached out to him, cupped his chin in long fingers with nails filed to sharp points. She raised herself up on the bed, leaning over to kiss him. “Do you want me?”

“Yes,” he said desperately, with a terror coursing through his body that was both holy and obscene. She climbed on top of him, and he wrapped his arms around her. She raked her fingernails down his back, then unfolded her massive black wings, and they were hovering together above the black silk bed, as the diamonds, and gilt, and silver, flashed all around them in a delirious glimmer. Robert cried worshipful tears into her jet-black feathers.



Months later, wearing a tattered overcoat and ragged shoes, Robert rapped three times at the alley door and asked for Edgar. When refused, he begged, pleaded, and broke down in tears, only to be told that Lenore was dissatisfied— she needed more tribute than the miserly trinkets Robert had offered her. He would have only one more chance.

By the time a few more weeks had passed, Robert had not a single friend or associate to whom he was not indebted. The sight of his pale and haggard face pained his mother so deeply that his father forbade him to come home again until he was presentable. His employer told him he was unreliable and his services were no longer needed. Still, Robert haunted the alley, and called for Edgar, but was never admitted again.

One morning, Robert’s mother opened the door to a policeman, who asked if her missing son’s description matched that of the man whose body had just been found in the river. Through tears, she stammered that no, that wasn’t her boy, her Robert. It couldn’t be— her son never had a raven tattoo.



## THE BEAST WITHIN

The howling grows  
Into a crescendo  
And I can't help  
But wonder  
What it is  
They're looking for.  
I hope they can find it  
For their calls  
Are in such earnest,  
Agonizing,  
As if a part of them  
Is missing.

Maybe a part of me  
Is missing,  
Something long forgotten  
And I struggle  
With not knowing.  
Nothing makes sense  
But there is an ache  
Inside my joints  
They no longer fit  
Within the confines  
Of my body.

Joints pop and bulge  
Bones shift and stretch  
Muscles tear and repair  
Skin rips and shreds  
A scream builds  
In my throat  
And I release it  
Unable to hold  
The pain writhing within.  
I claw at my scalp  
Before digging into the earth  
And I collapse.

The moon is bright and full  
I lift my head  
To see what I've become,  
A beast.  
The scent of blood  
Fills my nose  
The howling begins anew.  
I understand now,  
Know what they search for,  
Know what I've been missing,  
They call to me  
And I answer.

WRITTEN BY K.R. WIELAND

---



# Poet Spotlight

**K. R. WIELAND**

Questions by Marie Casey



**1. As a crow, please explain how you extract worms from a corpse.**

It is a simple matter of picking carefully through the meat to find the worms, then gleefully grasping them within my beak, tossing them into the air and catching them.

**2. Do you believe it's possible to shed your skin and transform with a howl to the moon?**

Of course. If not, I have questions for what happens to me each month when the moon is full and bright.

**3. What would be etched in your tombstone and why?**

Beloved wife and mother, died while still searching for the perfect gif in response to your tweet. - Because seriously, I get lost in gif world sometimes, I just know the right one's out there and I'm going to find it!



# The Quill



## Written by David Andrews

It was twilight.

Eager to get home, Thomas hurried down the damp streets. The lamplighters had just finished setting the last few street lights afire. As he approached his home, he noticed a crow perched on the cornice just above the door frame. He paused to examine the bird. It peered down at him for a moment before letting out a series of demanding caws. He listened to the bird cackling. Its distinctive call repeated, turning into what Thomas thought were a series of “Naws.” Finally, after a short pause, the determined corvid let out a final declaration, so pronounced that Thomas was sure the creature yelled, “No.”

He smiled as he walked through the door. “Naw, naw, no. Silly bird.”

The evening air hung thick. It was mid-summer, and sweat dripped from Thomas’s brow. He sat next to an open window, hoping a whiff of wind might blow though, but there was none. Only lingering heat resided in the space. Even the stone surrounding the empty fireplace cried out for relief. Its normally cool façade dripped beads of miserable condensation.

His evenings were always the same. He cooked a small meal then retired to his chair next to the window, listening to the sounds of the city streets, from the occasional horse and carriage, to the steps of a few people, then to silence – complete stillness. It was there that he would think of her.

**“It had no eyes, no nose, and no mouth sewn onto its head, just a blank, round sack of hay where a face should be. Its straw hands were holding a book, and next to it lay a quill and an inkwell.”**

Thomas had just finished college. He came from a wealthy family and was going to be married next spring. She was a lovely girl that he had known since his childhood. Her name was Mary. The thought of her carried Thomas through many lonely nights and helped to fill the empty spaces in his mind. He would sit as he was now, packing the blank spots of the newly purchased townhouse with visions of Mary and the many children they would have.

He settled into his favorite chair. As he drifted into thoughts of her, he looked out the window onto the dimly lit street. It was growing late, and not one carriage or person strode the cobblestone. He loved the sound of horse hooves as they clipped and clapped against the stone, each step echoing through the tight row of homes.

Thomas admired his reflection in the glass. His blonde hair was disheveled from constant sweating but his high cheekbones made him proud, and he smiled at the sight of them. He was a handsome man, and Mary always made sure he knew it.

She constantly lauded his features: "Oh Thomas, the beauty of your smile lights up my heart. My wonderful Thomas, how I would love to swim in the depths of your blue eyes. Dearest Thomas, you are the most attractive man I have ever seen."

He thought himself a confident man, but he required constant affirmation from his lover. She accommodated his demands, praising not only his looks, but his mind as well.

"I love how you see the world," she would say. "Your intelligence is unparalleled— when you talk, everyone in the room takes notice. It's as though they have never seen a man so attractive, so perceptive, so witty. I must be the luckiest woman in the world."

As he basked in thoughts of his lover's adoration, he grew tired. Thomas looked at his bedroom door, thinking it was time he found his way to bed. He had just started his job a few weeks ago and feared being late. He turned a final time to look out the window and was startled by what he saw – a featureless face staring back at him. The high cheekbones were gone. No locks of golden hair, only the round, pale blank stare of an apparition looming in the glass. He turned his head away, rubbed his eyes, and looked back to the window. It was gone. Again, he saw himself.

He stood up, thinking he must have drifted off to a shallow dream, so he started to walk to his bedroom, but he was interrupted by a whisper, "*Go to the attic.*"

He stopped in his tracks. Fighting reason, he dared not take another step. He wanted to focus on the quiet. He wanted to disprove the words that he thought he had just heard, but again, through the air came the words, "*The attic.*" This time it was louder, clearer. He could not deny what he heard, and being a man of great curiosity, he wanted to indulge it.

He changed direction and headed for the staircase. He opened the door, ascending to the dusty, forgotten space of his dwelling. Once in the attic, he heard the scurried feet of rats running to hide. His presence, and the small candle he carried, were enough to send them back into the walls.

He looked around, chastising himself for listening to a voice he heard in his dreams.

But there was something in the corner. It looked like a body sleeping, or even worse, a dead man. He walked closer to the form. The slight flame of the candle flickered with each step, causing the pitch black space to dance with eerie shadows. He was close enough now to see that it was a scarecrow.

He thought, *what a strange item to find in the city.* There weren't any farms for miles, yet here it sat, in the corner of his attic in his home far from the rural life where it would be needed.

He inspected the scarecrow. It had no eyes, no nose, and no mouth sewn onto its head, just a blank, round sack of hay where a face should be. Its straw hands were holding a book, and next to it lay a quill and an inkwell.

Thomas grabbed the book, opened it, and started reading:

*I had to leave. My mere existence has brought nothing but plague to my family. Since I can remember, my family has struggled. There were stories of thriving land and great harvests, but those times were long before my memory. Each season brought new difficulties. Father is now sick, coughing up blood. Mother won't even look at my face anymore. The previous years brought drought and great waves of insects, and this year, a thousand crows descended on our farm. Then a great fire burned our barn and remaining crops. I left in the night, while the fire still burned. I pray that Mother and Father will find better fortune, now that I am gone.*

Thomas shivered. He closed the book, descended the stairs, and went to sleep.

The next evening, Thomas walked home. It was early enough that he witnessed the lamplighters scurrying to bring light to the night streets. As Thomas neared his home he noticed there were two crows now perched over the doorway. Both of the birds were gawking and chanting, "Naw, naw, no. Naw, naw, no."

With a scowl on his face, he looked up to the birds and hissed, "Go from here, you unfortunate pests."

However, the crows were not interested in his acrimony. They shook their proud heads back and forth, adding emphasis to their ominous message.

In an attempt to scare off the birds, Thomas waved his hands in the air, but they did not budge.

He again shook his head, and thought, "Why am I engaging in the folly of these simple minded vermin."

He then corrected his countenance back to a smug grin and entered his home.

Again he sat looking out the window, but was bothered by how irritated his skin had become over the last day. With confusion on his face, he looked at his arms and wondered why they itched so badly, why his skin felt so dry, so coarse. He examined his arm, running his fingers over the hairs. He then pulled at a few strands. As he did, his flesh perforated slightly. The more he unraveled, the thicker the hair seemed to be. He continued reeling at the hair, and wondered where it would end.



After several seconds of this disgusting endeavor, he pulled his shirt sleeve down, covering his arms. Negotiating with himself, he thought perhaps the humidity and profuse sweating had taken its toll on his youthful flesh. He couldn't tolerate another moment thinking that his skin was anything other than perfect, so he went back to her in his mind, recounting all the loving expressions she had given him. He again became lost in the thought of his sweet Mary.

However, through his thoughts he noticed the grim outline of the same pale ghostly reflection that visited him the evening before. It was the same listless face. Now, however, it had eyes - blue and piercing with no eyelids. Because of this a large portion of sclera in each eye was exposed, bringing him a wave of dread. He closed his eyes tight, shook his head, and feared opening them again. As he sat silent and still, he heard the mysterious whisper through the night air.

This time it said, "Go to the attic. Use the quill."

And he did. He found the scarecrow sitting where he left it, slumped over in the corner with the book laying next to him. Its fingerless hands hung at its sides.

Thomas grabbed the journal, opened it, and started reading:

*I must say that my luck hasn't changed. Since I have come to the city, sickness and strife has come to all I encounter. I did find a bit of luck. When I first came to the city, I met a gentleman who took me in, an older man of some means. I told him of my miseries and he allowed me to reside in his attic until I found my way. Yet, misfortune did strike the old man. He was walking the street late one evening, and a horse loose from its harness ran him down. He lies now in bed, an invalid.*

*If I am to be honest, I must write that it is not a matter of unknown luck. I have determined the ghastly cause. It is this quill with which I write that carries a great power. When I was young, I found it in an abandoned cottage in the woods. At first, I wrote my wishes and they were granted. I was young and foolish and wrote of blackberry pie, finding friends, and new toys. For a while these wishes came true. A family moved to the nearest farm. They had seven children. My mother came across a great blackberry bush. She baked many pies.*

*However, after time, my dreams turned to nightmares. I would write of the sun and it would rain for days. When I wrote of pie again, the berries would be eaten by the birds, or my mother would burn it to coal. The worst part was what it did to the people around me. I wrote of happiness for my mother and she grew melancholy. The more I wrote for happiness, the darker her moods grew. This continued with everyone around me. I would write of fortune and they would receive misery. Yet through it all, I did not stop. It seems to have become my great obsession; the quill and these pages.*

Thomas took his eyes from the page and looked over to the quill next to the scarecrow. Its barbs were deep black, its shaft stained with splashes of foreboding.

And yet, he was drawn to it. Almost unwillingly, he moved towards the quill. He stood over it, gazing and longing for its touch. An excitement even the thought of his love couldn't give him coursed through his heart. He could no longer resist its call and picked up the quill. No sooner than the feathers brushed his fingers, he dipped it in the inkwell and began to write:

*For my love, I wish for her good health and happiness. I long to see her smile. Bring my love to me, so that we might talk through the night and I can hear her cherished voice again – even if for just one day.*

Thomas set the quill down and exhaled. He felt relieved, as if he had just carried a heavy load for miles and was able to set it down at last.

That night, Thomas fell into a deep slumber. He awoke fresh and eager for the day, excited to see what fortunes the quill would bestow upon him and his love. He had read the warnings in the journal, but disregarded them because he knew he would never inflict harm upon his dear Mary. Not only this, but he knew he was a smarter, more refined man than the one who wrote those awful things. That person was weak, and did not have a strong heart and mind like himself.

A few days had passed, and Thomas went about his life, not seeing the face in the window, and not having a thought about what was in the attic. All was normal, except for his irritated skin, and hair that grew thicker and harder each day. Still, he blamed the weather. The heat persisted. It was summer after all.

While at work one day, he received correspondence by carrier. He opened it on his journey home. The lamplighters had yet to set out on their evening rounds, and the sun was high enough in the sky that it would provide ample light to read.

He took his index finger and ripped the seal. Then he pulled out the folded paper and started reading:

*Dearest Thomas,*

*It is with a sad heart that I must write this letter. Our dearest Mary set out to surprise you with a visit. Her spirits were high and knew that you would be delighted by her company. Just a day ago, we hired a coach to carry her to you. While in route, the horses were startled and the carriage flipped killing your beloved. We did not want this news to come from anyone but us, her loving parents. Please pray for us and take our sincerest condolences for we know you loved her with all of your heart.*

*Yours very sincerely,  
Mr. and Mrs. Arnold Fernsby*

Thomas erupted into tears. He felt as though a thousand dreams fell from his heart. His legs grew shaky, and sickness gnawed at his stomach. Just before he reached the front door of his home he collapsed onto the cobblestone. His agony was disrupted by commotion over his head.

He looked up to the glowing streets, the setting sun brushing each stone with flushing crimson. The lamplighters had begun their work, but his attention was quickly drawn to a cloud of midnight plumage descending upon his home. Crows covered his house, perching wherever their small claws would hold. The roof, the windowsills, and even the ground was covered with them. The agitated messengers offered chants of caws that resonated with Thomas – “Naw, naw, no.” It was clear to him what they meant. No, this feather, this quill must never scribe a word again.

Thomas ran to a lantern just outside his front door and set the letter aflame. He ran into the house, straight into the attic, and set the scarecrow ablaze. Its straw was old and dry, and within seconds it erupted into flames. The floor and the walls followed. In mere moments, Thomas was standing on the street watching his hopes burn to ash.

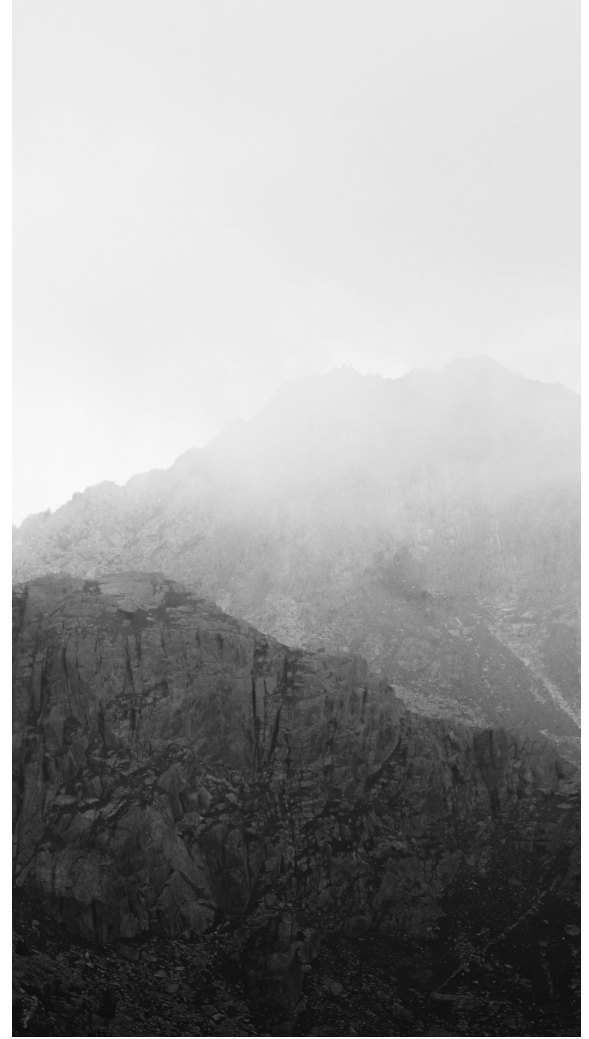
His love was gone, but now the quill was too. The crows had departed. The streets were now crowded with onlookers. Thomas didn’t reply as they offered their sympathies and questioned how the fire had started. All he did was stare into the flames, where he saw the face smiling, still pale but now full of features resembling his own. He heard a whisper, “Your feet.”

With straw fingers, he picked up the old cursed quill, put it in his pocket, and disappeared into the shadows of the night.





# The Mother of Crows



written by william bartlett

The clanking of sharpened steel ebbed as the battle exhausted. Screams simmered to moans and horses trotted off with the survivors. Vultures spread their greasy black wings, ready to claim the feast wrought upon the glade. The feast, a bloody wasteland of potential, was the unfortunate result of ideals that failed to persuade strangers of differing cultures.

Isabella unfastened the bone shards that held the hide cover securely over the caravan. The storm clouds above her darkened and fattened with gray gloom. Negative energy in the cool breeze saturated the grassy glade. The vultures floated down to the bloody mud and pecked at the chain mail and leather that guarded their meal.

Isabella tossed up the hide cover and the brisk breeze did the rest of the unveiling. Twenty wooden cages, lashed together by her own sore hands, held thirteen adult crows each. They all kept their peeled black eyes on Isabella. Watching. Waiting.

She removed the cord that held the little doors closed one at a time. She could feel their love. Their attention.

The caravan rocked as Robhur dismounted the carriage seat, upsetting the crows. The horses snorted and whinnied as the heavy-set man stretched and yawned unnecessarily loud.

Isabella rolled her eyes.

**“Blood was evident. A sharp beak made this wound. A beak larger than a crow’s. Rage stirred inside her. Sorrow twisted into a rush of fury. She let out a battle cry.”**

He rounded the caravan, and the birds released squawks and caws.  
“Shut up, you dumb black chickens.” He kicked the side of the caravan.

Isabella bit down on her lip and sucked in her emotions.

The crows squawked louder.

“Relax, dammit,” he cursed. “You’ll get your meal. Hurry up, Bella. Why are you taking so long? Just cut the damned lashings so that they’ll shut up already.”

Impatient, he pulled out a knife and cut them for her.

“They don’t like you, Rob.”

“Why the hell not? I’m about to give them the feast of a lifetime.”

He set the knife down in front of the cages and walked around to the side of the caravan. He rocked it vigorously until the stick-cages opened. The crows cawed and flapped their obsidian wings, but did not fly out.

“Crows are smart,” Isabella explained. “They know that you starve them in anticipation of these feasts. They are aware you are not doing any of this for them. That you get paid to clean these battlefields. They know their feasting makes your work easier.”

“You cannot be serious.”

“I could not be any more sincere.” Isabella’s tone was soft, but firm.

Robhur pressed his lips tightly together, his face flushed. He approached her with contemptuous eyes.

The crows quieted, turning their attention to him.

“Crows are emotional creatures,” Isabella continued. “They sense things in each other and even other animals. Crows have empathy unlike any other species. Almost tangible. Their memories are everlasting. They know what’s going on without understanding it the way we do.”

Robhur let out a sound of frustration. “Enough with the lesson!”

He slapped the cages several times, but the crows refused to budge. “Go! Dumbass rats with wings! Go eat! I thought you were starving.” His frustration grew noticeably thick. He shot a threatening glare at Isabella. “I thought you said they were smart? They seem quite slow to me! Are you doing this? Are you making them stay?”

“Who sounds crazy now?” she remarked.

“What did you just say?” He marched up to her, his anger returned.

“I never said you were crazy,” he said inches away from her face. “I just asked if you were kidding. What is your goddamn problem with me?”

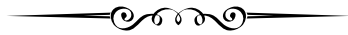
She parted her lips to smooth over the conversation, but it was too late. His anger was flaring.

“You should humble yourself.” Spittle from his mouth flew in her face. “Show some appreciation. I do everything for you - you and your stupid birds!”

A crow let out a low sound, the one they use when threatened.

Robhur paid them no mind. “You’d still be a damn beggar servant or a tavern wench by now if it weren’t for your father convincing me to take you in under my wing. Give you a home and hearth. Food to eat and cook with.”

Isabella didn't have the energy to keep arguing. She turned her back to him and walked towards the field. Then she let out a shrill whistle. The crows launched into the air all at once like a tornado of black fury, abandoning the caravan behind them and nearly knocking Robhur over to the ground.



Pearl took the lead, the other crows, following closely behind. The open air brushed Pearl's wings. She used it to pull herself into a playful barrel roll. Some of the others mimicked her actions, but most simply enjoyed the storm's wind. Overcast skies riddled with cool breeze was Pearl's favorite time to fly.

She heard the fat man's screams as she twirled through the air and struggled to enjoy the flight. The thought of Isabella, the woman who'd given her her name, in distress upset her, but hunger proved her dominant drive. She observed a yearling break off from the flock and fly down to one of the human carcasses. The crows fluttered around each other, circling the glade. The hovering vultures were highly outnumbered, and their presence was not much of a threat.

Pearl once led an attack that drove them off, but they were persistent in returning for scraps. She had no issue with them staying. They could share the feast, provided they kept their boundaries.

The crows swooped down and scattered about the carcasses. Pearl came down last, sneaking a final glance at Isabella before she descended. The fat man seemed to have calmed and their argument shifted back to regular conversation. Pearl landed on the bloody mud next to a dead soldier alongside a couple of her siblings. They tore off pieces of leg flesh and calf muscle easily.

Pearl monitored the vultures above. She spotted only four of them. She couldn't see all members her murder either, but she depended on their empathetic connection to scan for danger. She stretched out her legs one at a time before she settled down to eat.

She plucked out the carcass's eyeball, her favorite piece of human. She dropped it and tore it into chunks. She swallowed the first delicious morsel as she held it down with her claw. She savored the delicious flavor as she scratched an itch with her beak.

A rush of panic flooded her suddenly as the murder morale plummeted. There was pain. Suffering. Struggle. Fear. Then there was a void. An empty illness filled Pearl's gut. She let out a guttural caw, jumped into the air, and flapped her sheeny wings until she was high enough to spot the first yearling that had broken off from the murder. She shot down towards the unmoving crow and landed right next to it.

She nudged it with her beak. It refused to twitch. She already knew it was dead, but she wanted to flirt with hope. She allowed grief to flow into her feathery chest and she belted out a mournful caw.

The flock chimed in, filling the stormy air as they circled around the yearling. Thunder crackled in the distant clouds. The crows cawed like howling wolves.



The sadness was thick and tangible. Sorrow blanketed the murder.

Pearl fluffed her feathers as she gazed upon the corpse. Blood was evident. A sharp beak made this wound. A beak larger than a crow's. Rage stirred inside her. The sorrow twisted into a rush of fury. She let out a battle cry. The others unanimously puffed up their feathers and spread their wings out as they all stalked toward the vulture. The voluntary-carrion-devourer recognized the threat and squawked as it backed up slowly and struggled to maintain its dignity. Pearl almost felt pity for the filthy beast, for it had no idea the punishment that was about to come.

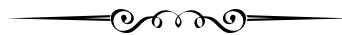
Thunder cracked closer and louder as the storm clouds moved in tighter. Pearl launched herself into the air and the rest of the crow family followed. The vulture squawked for its companions and quickly realized they had left the glade. It was on its own. In a panic, it launched off the ground and flew in retreat as fast as it could. But there was no escape for the beast.

Pearl let out a caw that echoed through the glade like the thunder itself. She swooped down viscously at the vulture and pecked out its eyeball in a single attempt. The others swooped down, one after another, swiping and slashing. The vulture's escape was halted by the thunderous flapping of wings and terrifying caws. Sharp claws shredded the rot-eater faster than it could react to.

Pearl rose into the air and prepared for another attack, but felt a terrible panic rip through her - just like before when the yearling was killed.

She scanned her surroundings for another casualty, but found nothing but a dying vulture. A bolt of lightning ripped through the dark sky. Just under the flash, Pearl saw Isabella grasping her face in shock. Then the fat man struck the other side of her face.

Emotion like she had never felt before boiled inside her. Pearl released a caw that would terrify even a scarecrow. The crow family already knew what had happened. The thunder from the bolt roared over the glade. The murder grouped together in the sky, and they abandoned the dying vulture.



Isabella's cheek stung where Robhur had struck her, fueling her anger. "I have let you treat me like a rat ever since my father gave me away to you, but no more! I will no longer take your abuse."

"You are going to regret those words, Bella!"

Isabella heard the crows swoop in, and she prayed they wouldn't try to help her. She knew Robhur would drown them if they did.

Robhur removed his belt and struck her again.

She reached for his arms to stop him.

He pounded her with it again and again as she clawed his face with her fingernails.

In between lashes, she noticed the knife that Robhur had set down next to the cages on the caravan.

She grabbed it, slashing wildly at her husband. Each attempt missed and infuriated him worse.

He finally caught her hand and they fought for control of the weapon. The crow calls sounded dangerously nearby.

Robhur nearly broke her wrist as he wrestled the blade free. They separated for a moment and stared at each other in silence. Robhur's eyes shifted into decision. Lighting tore through the sky behind him as he lunged for her.

Pearl shot down out of nowhere and slashed the man across the face with her talons. His scream disappeared behind a terrifying crack of thunder and the mob of attacks that slashed the fat man to pieces. The crows attacked in a savage flurry of slashing and pecking. The man could only gargle the blood that filled his lungs amidst the avian tornado of death.

Isabella's heart raced and her breathing vibrated wildly as she approached her husband with the dirty knife in hand. The crows gathered around her in a circle. She let out a scream, the first of her life, and slammed the knife into the bloody mess of her husband's chest.

He took a final horrible breath, then the detestable man was no more.

She cried as she knelt over the corpse. Her crow family surrounded her, offering their affections. Isabella looked at her beloved Pearl, and realized she shared her emotion. Love filled her heart for the first time since her mother's nurturing embrace. She was helpless against the tear that squeezed out of her eyes as Pearl and her family cooed.



# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We are so grateful for the stories written by our talented authors and the powerful poetry submitted by the Dark Poet Society for this month's spotlight. We are continuously grateful to the entire Crow Family for their support and enthusiasm.

This issue was a ton of fun to put together and we are excited for the next issue! If you are interested in seeing your own short story in The Crow's Quill, please submit on our website:

<https://www.quillandcrowpublishinghouse.com/cqmagazine>

I'd love to take a look.

Are you poet? Whether you know it or not, but want to show it, please participate in our daily #CrowCalls on Twitter and Instagram. Feel free to tag me @wbartlett1984 in your post, and you just might get hand picked for a guest spot on our Poetry Blog! Sign up for our mailing list to stay up-to-date on all the fun things we have planned.

A special thank you to everyone who helped make this magazine possible!

Sincerely,  
William Bartlett, Assistant Editor

