

The Lost Crow

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DEDICATION

To my children. Be yourselves.

Once upon a time, a little crow fell out of her nest before she was grown. She landed in a bush where her parents could not see her. She survived on the ground, eating beetles until she was old enough to fly and her thick black feathers had grown smooth and shiny.

She returned to her nest, but her parents had long since flown away. Unsure what type of bird she was, she set out to find her place in the world. She flew over the countryside, looking for a group of birds she might join.

She flew first over a group of chickens. She saw them going in and out of their coop and being fed corn by the farmer. "Ah, that must be the life," she thought to herself, "shelter and food whenever I want it!"



So, she flew to an old firepit and rolled herself in the soot until her feathers were a mottled white, just like a chicken's. Then she flew back to the farm.

She landed and said, "Hello, I am a lost chicken. Can I join you here?"

The chickens were skeptical. They went off to find their leader, the old rooster. He soon strutted up leading the chickens.

"Hmm... you have mottled white feathers like a chicken. Can you peck at the ground for food like a chicken?"

The crow mimicked what she had seen the chickens do, waddling up and down the yard, pecking at the dirt.



“You look like a chicken and you act like a chicken,” the rooster assessed. “You may stay with us tonight. Tomorrow morning, we will see if you can lay eggs like a chicken.”

The crow slept in the coop that night, fitfully dreaming of eggs. When morning came, she was disappointed to see that she had not laid any eggs.

The rooster was disappointed too. Before the whole yard he said, “You may look like a chicken and peck like a chicken, but you cannot lay eggs like a chicken. You are not a chicken. You must leave this place.”

Seeing how sad the young crow was, the rooster added, “Do not worry, life as a chicken is not as good as you imagine. We live in constant fear of the fox, who sneaks into our coop at night to eat us, and of the farmer, who comes into the yard in the evening to take one of us for his dinner.”

Still saddened, the crow flew away. She washed herself in a pond and slept alone in a tree that night.



The next day, she flew on. In the distance, she saw a group of sparrows flitting about between the trees.

“Ah, how nice that must be,” she thought to herself, “to spend the day playing and flitting from tree to tree.”

So, she found a nice patch of dry dirt and rolled around in it until her feathers were a striped brown, just like the sparrows’. Then, she flew to meet the sparrows.

“Hello,” she said, landing on a tree branch, “I am a lost sparrow. Can I join you?”



A matronly old sparrow came over. “You are large for a sparrow, but you do have striped brown feathers. Can you flit from tree to tree like a sparrow?”

The crow could flit indeed. She flew back and forth happily, going from branch to branch and turning quickly in the air.

The sparrow matron nodded. “Yes, you look like a sparrow and can fly like a sparrow. You can roost with us tonight. Tomorrow morning, we will sing as we find breakfast and you can show us your song.”

That night, the crow roosted on a branch with the other sparrows, but she did not sleep well. She was nervous about singing as she had never done it before.

The next morning, as the sun just started to filter through the forest, the sparrows began to chirp and sing. The old sparrow came and perched next to the crow. “Go on, it’s your turn,” she nudged.



The crow tried to sing, but all that came out were raucous caws. The whole flock of sparrows stopped singing in surprise.

“Well,” the sparrow matron sighed, “you may look like a sparrow and flit from branch to branch like a sparrow, but you cannot sing like a sparrow. You are not a sparrow; you will have to find somewhere else to roost.”

The crow was very embarrassed by her poor singing. Seeing her embarrassment, the old sparrow took some pity, “Do not worry. The life of the sparrow is not as good as you imagine. We live in constant fear of the owl, who snatches us from our roosts at night, and of the hawk, who snatches us from the air during the day.”

At the word “hawk,” the whole flock became very upset. The word rippled up and down and a panic set in. Quickly, the whole flock flew away, like a single cloud blown across the sky on a windy day. The crow was left by herself on the branch. Dejected, she stayed on the branch sulking until nightfall.



The next morning, she flew to the pond to wash the brown dirt off her feathers. As she approached, however, she saw a group of ducks. They were stripy brown too! They preened themselves on the bank and nestled among the reeds.

“Ah,” she thought to herself, “that would be a fine life, preening and nestling comfortably by the water.”

So, she flew down to join the ducks. “Hello,” she said, “I am a lost duck, may I join you?”

The ducks whispered among themselves and disappeared into the reeds. They came back with a fantastic drake. His head was a brilliant, shiny green, his wings had a streak of bright blue, and his bill was as yellow as the sun. The crow thought he must be the most impressive creature she had met yet.



The drake walked around her curiously. “Well,” he said, “you look like a duck.
Can you quack like a duck?”

The crow gave it her best shot. Try as she might, she could only caw.

The drake didn't seem to mind, however. “Close enough. You must be from
somewhere else. You'll learn in time. You look like a duck and sound like a duck,
so you can nest with us tonight in the reeds. Tomorrow at breakfast we will dive
for fish.”

That night, the crow slept nestled in the reeds with the ducks, but all through the
night, nervous dreams of swimming and diving flitted through her mind.



The next morning, the ducks lined up on the bank of the pond and splashed in. When the crow's turn came, she jumped in, but quickly faltered. She could not swim and she splashed and jumped and hopped back to the shore.

The dirt had been washed off of her feathers. As she stood, shaking off the water, the drake walked up. "You may have fooled me with your brown feathers and your cawing quack, but you are not a duck. You are a crow. You cannot stay in the reeds with us."

The drake saw the crow was quite upset and tried to soothe her, "Do not worry, the life of the duck is not as good as you imagine. We live in fear of the pike, who attacks us from the water, and of the snake, who ambushes us in the reeds, and of the hunter, who shoots us from the air."

The crow certainly did not want to be eaten, but did not want to live alone either. She flew back to the woods for the night.



The next morning, she awoke to hear cawing in the distance. The noise sounded just like the crow did when she had tried to quack. She fluttered into the air in a start and flew toward the noise.

In the distance, on a telephone wire, she saw the crows. There must have been a hundred of them. She flew up and landed on the wire.

“Hello, I am a lost crow. May I join you?” The crows took one look at her and recognized her instantly as one of their own.

“Of course,” they cawed happily. “How did you come to be lost?”

The crow told them her story of being lost as a fledgling and of her adventures with the other birds. The flock was quite amused.



“Well, there’s no doubt about this one. You are a crow! You look like a crow, sound like a crow, and you are smart like a crow. You almost had those other dumb birds fooled,” the other crows laughed.

The young crow was very happy to have found her place, but she had just one more question. “All the other birds lived in fear of their predators. What are we afraid of?”

“Very little,” her new flockmates told her, “we are large and smart. As long as you stick with the flock, we will watch for foxes when we eat on the ground and we will chase away hawks in the sky. We are not fed by a farmer and we do not play between the trees or sit by the water, but you will like being a crow.”

And, so she did. She lived contentedly ever after with the flock, quite happy to be a crow.

THE END





ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Nelson lives in New York with his wife and growing family. He works in advertising during the day and writes little fairy tales for his children at night.