

Forevermore

By Priya Shipler

"Quath the raven, 'Nevermore!'"
-The Raven, by Edgar Alan Poe

I sit on the trolley, waiting for my stop. I was just a minute late today. I missed the work shuttle. It means I will be very late. Mentally preparing myself for what is to come, I watch the trees meander past.

I sigh. Of all the trolleys, I had to catch the decrepit one. The same one that broke down last week. I'm surprised it's still rattling along.

My work dress itches my arms. It is stiff. No proper lady should actually work in such attire. Not that I am a proper lady.

I sigh again. I do that a lot.

The work dresses have sleeves ending just below the elbow, so you can imagine how suffocating it is to wear such a garb for 364 days straight.

I am still watching the trees. Most of them are dead even though it is summer. Buildings pass by, all grey and concrete. Some of them have smokestacks. The occasional one has windows on several stories. Most of them just have windows all the way at the top.

The trolley creaks to a stop in front of a complex. It has four buildings surrounding the quad. The one on the far right is where I work.

The first time I arrived a lady showed me how to work a needle. Of course I already knew, but I said nothing.

"It's all in the wrist." She'd said.

"That's a cliché."

"Well," she pursed her lips, "it's true."

It was a cliché and it still is.

"You're late." A heavyset man who has never told me his name growls at me. "I must take you to Mr. Rechingbowler's office."

"But I have a project." I reply smoothly. "It was specially assigned, and I need to finish it today."

"You told me that last time." He eyes me suspiciously.

I sigh at my own incompetence. "Well, I've been assigned a new project."

"You won't fool me this time."

He grabs me roughly by the arm and drags me up a few flights of stairs. When we finally make it to the third floor, he pushes me to the ground and knocks on the heavy metal door.

"Yes?" came a chirpy voice. The door opens and out comes a plump little man wearing a plum colored suit. His hair is thinning and his mustache thickening, as well as his middle.

"Who are you?" I say.

"I am your new boss, Mr. Leaches. Didn't you know?" he says.

"No," I say.

"Well, well." He looks both of us up and down. "You are dismissed."

I stand and straighten my skirt preparing to leave.

"No, not you. I would like to have a word with, well, you." He looks at me and smiles. The guard turns and stomps down the stairs.

I enter Mr. Leaches' office, the one I have always dreaded, and sit down in the dark leather armchair across from him. Seconds melt away as the clock behind Mr. Leaches' desk ticks.

"Excuse me sir, may I ask why I am here?"

"Yes, yes." He smirks at her, dusting off his suit. "You will marry my son."

I know the shock on my face is presented clearly, for my mouth has dropped open and is still hanging there. This news is sharper than any whip I have encountered.

"Now off to work you go."

No choice. No warning. No reason. No nothing.

I walk to my station and begin my assignment. The one that is not special.

I have decided not to take the trolley home and to instead walk through what people call Our Park. There are a few dead trees and the occasional raven but not much more.

I sigh. There is too little in this town I am confined to, but so much out in the world. If only I could see the world.

I hear a caw. A raven is fluttering by. It lands lightly in the dead tree a few steps ahead. I keep walking until I reach the tree. It is bare and dull just like the rest of this place.

The raven twists its head toward me. A deep black eye looks down. I smile at it.

"Dear raven, why here? Why this of all places?"

Its answer is to look away.

"Dear raven, can you not leave?"

I think its head has lowered slightly.

"I can't either. All I can do is live this monotony."

It is looking at me once more.

"Dear raven, all I do is wake up, go to work, go home, and be a servant to my father."

It caws.

"Dear raven. Now I am being sent to marry a man I have never met. To love without consent. That is not real love dear raven."

Now I think there is pity gleaming in that beady black eye.

"Dear raven, what can I do?"

It opens its wings and closes them again.

"You're right."

It blinks. I've never seen a raven blink. Nor have I ever spoken to one before this moment. Or spoken words like these before. It feels so wrong, and yet so right.

"Yes, dear raven. You are right." I laugh, though it sounds weak and melancholy. "I can do anything."

The moment I say those words, the raven turns its body, showing me a mauled wing. For some strange reason, I am not surprised or scared.

The bird turns its graceful head, giving me one last stare. It makes its way through the maze of branches finally launching itself into the air. It leaves me and these dull trees behind.

I watch it go. And I go too. Down the path. Through the drab trees. Then to the left and onwards until I reach a stone wall.

I step forward. One more step forward. Another and another and another. And I continue on with life.

Forevermore I remember that raven.