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opening extract from

The Raven Mysteries: Ghosts and Gadgets

written by

Marcus Sedgwick

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GHOSTS AND GADGETS

The Raven Mysteries

Book 2

MARCUS SEDGWICK

Illustrated by Pete Williamson

Orion
Children's Books



One

Castle Otherhand
is home to
all sorts of
oddballs, lunatics
and fruitcakes.
It's just as well
for all of them
that they have
a secret weapon:
he's called Edgar.

Is my beak wonky?



This is a question which vexes me more and more these days, though I think it was almost ten years ago when I first caught myself going cross-eyed at two thousand feet trying to look down the length of my foremost extremity.

Now, vain bird that I am, I find myself squinting into the ornate looking glass above the mantel in the dining room a little too often, trying to establish for once and all whether my beak is curved. It never used to be, not when I was a fledgling. You could have drawn technical diagrams with the thing! It was like a ruler! But now, ah now, I'm not so sure.

It was on just such a pondering that I embarked one fateful night that was to become the start of a most dreadful and frightsome episode in Otherhand history. An adventure so quiverful that I scare myself now to speak of it, and yet, as guardian and custodian of all things Otherhand, relate it I must!

I pecked the mirror one last time, just to give the old bird in the glass a warning:





Keep your marbles, Edgar, and forget about your beak for five minutes.

'Is the crow losing it?'

I turned to see Minty pointing a fork at me. Something dropped from the fork on to the carpet and Fellah was on it like a flash.



'Cudweed! Control your monkey,' Solstice said, sighing.

'Anything that hits the floor is his,' Cudweed protested. 'We agreed!'

'*You* agreed,' Solstice said, tutting.

It was Sunday evening, and the whole odd lot of them were gathered at dinner.

Lord Valevine was at the head of the enormous dining table. About a delicate stone's throw away sat Minty, at the other end. Between them, on a table that could have seated forty with plenty of elbow room, were the other five members

of the Otherhand family: Solstice and Cudweed, on opposite sides of the table, Fizz and Buzz, clamped into high chairs and not crawling over every conceivable surface, and Grandma Slivinkov, somewhere in the middle, sitting bolt upright, partly because that was how she'd been brought up, but mostly because she was tied to the back of her chair so she didn't fall asleep in her soup. Something had to be done about it after the fourth time.

Now while this seating arrangement was not entirely convenient, it did at least mean that the various egos of the family were separated by some good safe distances. And there are always plenty of maids to run around with plates and dishes and whatnot.





On some evenings, the distance between the diners gave us lots of fun, and sometimes there'd be much laughter as Lord Otherhand would have me fly the salt cellar down to Lady Otherhand; the weighty condiment clutched in my claws, and then return with a celery fork held in my powerful beak.



Everyone would applaud these little feats of my skill, and now and then for good measure, I'd throw in an extra trick or two, like pretending to drop the finest crystal glass, only to catch it again before injury occurred to either bird or beaker.



It has to be said that those days are less frequent.

For one thing, there's the monkey. Since he arrived, my parlour games have been curtailed. That mentally-challenged baboon goes 'ape', if I may mix my primates so wilfully, if I get so much as a whisper of appreciation, and the thought of the fights we've had around the silverware makes me shudder.



For another thing . . .

Well, it can only be said that strange things are afoot in Castle Otherhand. That evening, the family were a discontented, tetchy and downright irritable crew. Each and every one seemed wrapped up in their own thoughts: Minty with her latest fad, which involved needles and thread, Cudweed with his awful orang-utan, Lord Valevine with gloomy thoughts that had



something to do with money and the lack of it, Solstice with . . . well, I don't know what.

Outside, the sky had grown black, and I could sense, from a tingle in my beak, that a storm was brewing. A big storm.

Minty stabbed mercilessly at something else on her plate, and began waving her fork at me again. Fellah sat drooling on the carpet, and Solstice glowered at Cudweed, who stuck his tongue out at his sister. Nonetheless, he slipped a lead round Fellah's foot, before he could make a lunge for anyone's dinner.

'I said, is the crow losing it?'

'What's that?' Valevine spluttered, lifting his gaze from the tablecloth. 'The crow?'

Suddenly everyone was staring at me.

Fighting a desperate urge to hunt for fleas, I flapped across the room and landed on the handle of a vast and silvery ornamental punch bowl, where I tried to strike a pose that said: I am aloof.

'What's the difference between a crow and a raven?' Cudweed asked no one in particular.

'Oh, not one of your jokes, puh-lease,' groaned Solstice. She flumped forward rather sulkily, her elbows on the table.

Grandma Slivinkov opened an eye.

'I like jokes,' she said, and opened her other eye in readiness.

Everyone looked at her, if only because it was the first time she'd spoken in three weeks.

But if they expected more, they were disappointed. Eyes turned back on Cudweed.

'No, I just mean, what's the difference between a crow and a raven?'

'If you have to tell jokes, please get it over with quickly,' Solstice said, flicking a pea which hit Fellah. Deliberately, I hoped.

'Hey!' cried Cudweed. 'Don't abuse my monkey!'



'Don't shout at the dinner table.' Minty waved a finger at Cudweed.

Valevine coughed, and leaned forward, then in a loud voice, declared:



'All ravens are crows, but not all crows are ravens.'

There was more than a moment's silence, then Grandma S began to chuckle.

'Heh heh heh,' she went. I promise you, it was just like that, 'heh heh heh'.

Cudweed and Solstice exchanged glances.

'I don't get it,' Solstice said.

'That's probably because it's rude, dear,' said Minty, glaring at her husband.

'It's because it's not a joke!' said Cudweed.

'You can say that again,' said Solstice.

'Heh heh heh. Heh heh heh,' went old lady Slivinkov.

'Noo-oo-oo,' moaned Cudweed, making at least three syllables out of the word, but before

he could open his mouth again he was shushed by Minty.

Valevine addressed the table again.

'All ravens are crows, but not all crows are ravens. Isn't that right, Edgar?'

And I was just about to open my beak and give a loud 'caw' of agreement, when the storm broke over the castle.

A flash of lightning right outside the window lit the dim dining room like a summer's day, and then was gone, but before we'd even finished blinking, the thunder arrived.



Not one of those low stomach rumblings that you sometimes hear from the other side of the mountain, but a painfully loud

clap, right above our heads.



'Futhork!' I said, swearing badly in the old raven tongue. Fortunately none of the family knows what it means, or I might have been sent to my cage without supper.

Pandemonium broke out with that thunder and lightning, followed by the most gargantuan storm I've witnessed in many a long year. In an instant, the whole room was in chaos and . . .

. . . And, well, actually.

This is, er, difficult to admit. It pains me rather, and I might be exaggerating somewhat, because actually most of the room was calm. Valevine, Minty, the children, even the terrible toddlers were all quite happy in the face of the

electrical storm. Grandma Slivinkov had actually gone to sleep again, though I think she might have muttered 'Heh heh heh' once or twice.

So when I say the whole room was reduced to panic and mayhem, I am in fact referring to only two creatures: myself, and that damn monkey.

I wouldn't want you to get the wrong idea, because it's been well-proven that I am a fearless and proud raven, but I seem to have developed a dread and mortal fear of thunder and lightning. Even the merest hint of it and I become demented.

I jumped onto the table cloth and began to peck my reflection in the punch bowl repeatedly, and with a demonic desperation.





'He *has* gone loopy,' Minty said, but that was the last thing I heard anyone say clearly. Fellah, and this is the part that really shames me, that we might be in any way similar, had by now also scrambled his eggs, and was leaping and shrieking as if his tail was on fire.

In a moment he'd pulled out of Cudweed's slippery grip, and was off around the dining room on a tour of destruction, gibbering and swiping at anything and everyone.



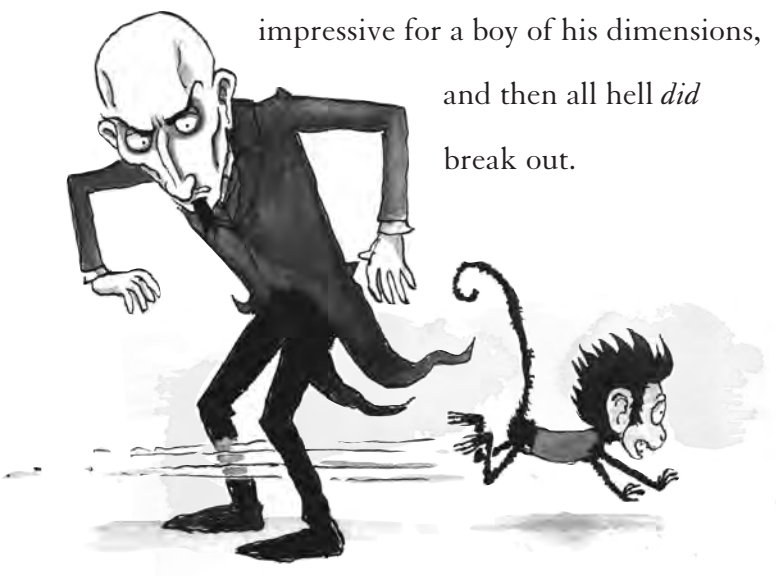
Meanwhile, I think I'd given up on the punch bowl and was banging the side of my head against the tabletop. Please don't ask me why. I think it might have been to occupy

the fear sensors in my brain with something other than the storm. Either that or I had indeed gone screwy, as Minty suggested.

In another second, Fellah had bolted for the door.

Flinch, that most unresponsive of butlers, made a half-hearted effort to stoop, but the ape was through his legs like a rat on roller skates, and away.

Cudweed was after him in a flash, quite impressive for a boy of his dimensions, and then all hell *did* break out.



'Cudweed!' screamed Minty at the top of her voice. 'You must ask to be excused! Uh! Get me that boy!'

She stormed off, rounding up a search party of maids, headed by Cook, to bring the boy to heel.

Outside, the storm raged and rioted. I decided to hit my head on the table a little harder to see if that would help.

It didn't.

The last thing I heard was Solstice appealing to her father.

'Father,' she said, 'what *is* the difference between a crow and a raven?'



