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Opening extract from

Raven Mysteries: Diamonds and Doom

Written by

Marcus Sedgwick

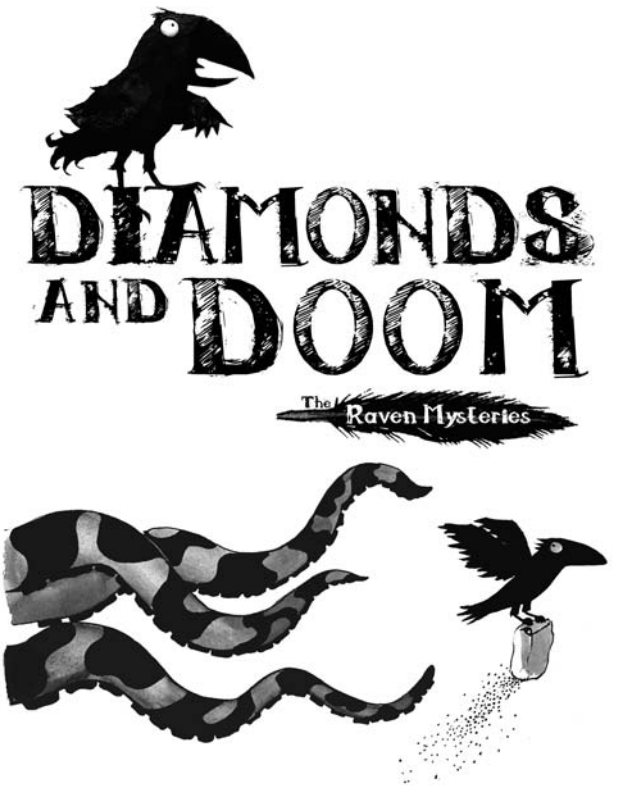
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Visit Marcus Sedgwick's website at –
www.marcussedgwick.com

and for more on the Raven Mysteries, go to -
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Book 6

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Illustrated by Pete Williamson

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For Lauren

With thanks to Alby





One

From Solstice's completely secret and totally private diary . . .



Dear Diary,

Gasp!

Edgar is missing!

No one has seen him for a whole week. He's not been the same since that business with the bunnies and the cabbages.

I was worried that maybe the whole affair had pushed him too far, and that he'd

decided to leave.

I asked Mother and Father about it, and they said that it has happened before. Every twelve years, Edgar goes missing for two weeks, and then turns up again. They call it Edgar's holiday, but oh! Edgar! You can't have a holiday just now, because we need you!

We need you more than ever!

The whole thing is just simply terrible.

I can hardly write it down, it's so awful, but it's true. It seems that we are on the verge of losing our home.

Yes!

The castle itself! I can't bear to think of it!

It began yesterday.

Cudweed and I had been down by the



lake, trying to organise the ducks into having a race, which they simply didn't want to do, and so we'd given up, and decided to come home.

We were walking up the drive to the castle, when we saw an odd thing.

There was a funny little man with a mallet in one hand and a sign in the other. He was using the mallet to bang the sign into the lawn, by the gates to the main road.

The sign said, 'FOR SALE'.

'Hey,' I said. He ignored me.

'Excuse me!' I said a little bit louder and he looked round this time. I didn't like him. I must be learning from Edgar a bit, because I took one look at him and decided I did not like him.

He had a very nasty expression on his face, which was a mixture of being grumpy and very pleased with himself all at the same time.

'What are you doing?' I asked. 'The castle is not for sale.'

'Oh yes it is, sweetie.'

He went on banging the sign into the lawn, and though I tried to get him to explain



himself, he took no notice of us.

'Come on, Cudweed!' I declared rather in a huff. 'Let's go and tell Father about him. He'll soon put a stop to it.'

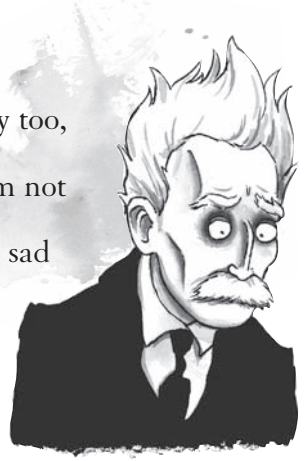
So we did. We ran all the way up to the castle, which for Cudweed is quite impressive and also quite dangerous, and when we got there, we said, well, I said, because Cudweed was panting so hard, I said, 'Father, there's a man sticking a For Sale sign up in our front garden.'

And he said …

Oh! I can hardly bear to write it down.

He said, 'I know.'

And then he looked grumpy too, but most of all, really, really sad. I'm not sure I've ever seen Father look that sad



before, and it worried me.

'But what do you mean?' I asked.

Father just shook his head.

'I mean, I know. It's true. The castle is for sale. We shall have to find somewhere else to live.'

'But why?!' I cried, desperately. I think I might have said Gasp too. Apparently I say that quite a lot. But anyway, 'Why?' I cried.

'Because,' said Father, 'we have no money left. None.'

I stamped my foot. I know it wasn't helpful but I couldn't stop myself.

'I don't believe you!' I said.

Worryingly, Father wasn't even cross with me for speaking so rudely.

'Come with me,' he said to the pair of us,

and we followed him through the castle, down some corridors I'm not sure I've ever seen before, to a very secret place.

The castle treasury. The place where all our money is kept.

Father pulled out a big key from his pocket, and used it to unlock the huge metal door to the treasury.

Inside, it was totally empty.

Not a bean.

Nothing at all in fact, except a thin mouse sitting in the corner, chewing a piece of mouldy toast.

Father sighed.

Mother appeared behind us.

The mouse looked rather fed up at being



disturbed during his dinner.

'Come on, dears,' Mother said. 'It's time to start sorting out what you'll bring with you

and what you're going to throw away.'

'Throw away!?' Cudweed and I cried at the same time. 'Why do we have to throw anything away?!'

'Because dears,' said Mother, 'wherever it is we end up, our new house, I mean, it's not going to be quite as big as this one. In fact, you should probably just pack one suitcase. Between you.'

Well, Cudweed and I were really upset then.

'But why don't you have any more money?' Cudweed asked.

'Because we spent it all,' explained Mother. 'This place costs a fortune to run. And the way we get through servants! The bill for Box and Sons last month alone was enormous.'

'But,' I said, 'But … But … Can't you do one of those things that grown-ups do? Like go to a bank and borrow money? Or something?'

Then Father gave us a very long and confusing explanation of how he had already done that. He'd actually already sold the castle to the bank, so that they gave us a big lot of money, which we have then been paying back to them in order to rent the castle from them each month and to live on and buy servants with, and how now there isn't any left. At all.

I was very confused.

'So, the bank owns the house?'

Father nodded.

'Not us?'

He shook his head.



'And now they're selling it?'

He nodded again.

'Who to?'

'To whoever wants to buy it,' Mother said. 'Now go and tidy your rooms, dears, because there are some people coming to look at it this afternoon.'

And they did.

The people I mean.

They came to look at Castle Otherhand, and I hated them, but what I hate most is that Edgar isn't here to help us. And by the time he gets back, even if it is next week, it might all be too late.

By then, Castle Otherhand might have been sold.



Oh!

Gasp!

There's something else.

Last night, as I went to sleep thinking evil thoughts about the people who want to buy our house, I thought Edgar had come back.

I heard a noise at the window, and sat up, and there was Edgar sitting on the other side of the glass.

At least I thought it was, but suddenly I realised it was too small to be Edgar.

I went over to the window, and to my very great surprise, saw a small, young raven sitting there.



I expected him to fly away, but when I opened the window, he popped straight in to my room and sat on my head.

I lifted him down and sat him on my wrist, which is a much better place for a raven to sit.

'Who are you?' I asked, and then I noticed an eeny-weeny tag tied to his ankle. ROB THE RAVEN, it said.

'Rob?' I asked.

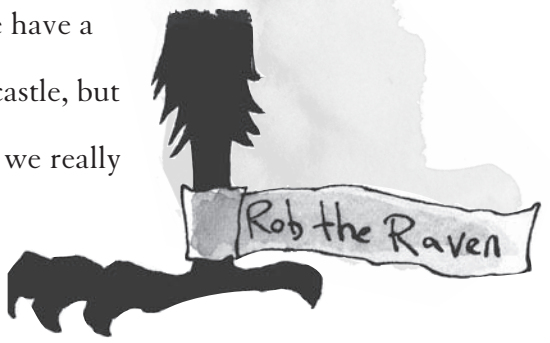
The little bird looked up at me.

'Erk!' he said.



'Well I never,' I said.

So now we have a new raven in the castle, but not the raven that we really need right now.



Edgar! Come back! Please!



Two

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.