

The Unkindness of the Raven

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Nevar Windsor approached the coffee shop, stopping just in front of the glass doors. He pulled out his phone and opened an email thread. After double checking that the address from the email was indeed the place he was standing in front of, he made his way inside.

His company, Windsor Enterprises, had seemingly taken off overnight. What started as a new Artificial Intelligence system created in Windsor's freetime to help him with everyday mundane tasks, quickly caught the eye of the entire world. Within a month it was improved until the system was able to talk and act like a real person. Companies like Apple and Microsoft raced to jump on board to work with Windsor Enterprises. But the workload had become too much, so he decided to take on an assistant. This would be the first of many interviews that would take place in this coffee shop for this position.

The aroma of coffee was strong, and he felt as if he was breathing in the caffeine. Each inhale slightly increased the buzz.

"Black coffee. The freshest you have, please." The barista gave him a smile and a nod as he placed the five-dollar bill on the counter.

As she made the coffee he surveyed the place, looking for a table. Spotting a small table for two he grabbed the coffee and walked over, and sat facing towards the window. As he sat down he caught a glimpse of a man, easily recognizable from a picture he found online. The man had a face as if he was only twelve years old, yet he had a receding hairline and a slight beer belly. He had a polo shirt that was slightly too big for him, the armpits lined with fresh sweat stains. His khaki pant legs dragged on the ground behind him.

Nevar waved over to him and made eye contact. He smiled back and walked over, sitting down in the chair opposite. "You want a coffee? On me," Nevar told him.

"Nope. I don't believe in that coffee shit. It's either beer or water for me," he chuckled, showing Nevar the water bottle he had with him. Nevar grimaced a bit, as it struck him as unprofessional.

Nevar started the interview with polite small talk, but then quickly moved to business.

"Start by telling me about yourself. Where you grew up, what

drives you, previous jobs..." Nevar immediately regretted this, as this man was apparently a nervous chatterer. He began from where he was born, moving slowly throughout his years. He seemed to talk himself out of breath, having to stop and gasp for air every few minutes.

There was the clicking of a keyboard behind Nevar. That was usually normal for a coffee shop, but something about the tapping was distracting. He listened more intently, completely tuning out the interviewee, who was now droning on about his middle school years.

The man stopped to take a drink from his water bottle and the clicking stopped. After a big gulp he screwed the cap back on and continued talking. Then the keyboard clicking continued.

"One second," he said, cutting him off in the middle of his sentence. He pulled out his phone as if he was receiving a call, but he was truly listening to hear if the typing had stopped in the silence of the conversation. He heard nothing.

He tried this two more times to see if, in fact, it was just a coincidence. But every time the tapping seemed to link up with the conversation.

"I apologize, but can we pick this up another time? Something important just came up."

"No problem, boss. Let me know when and where." The man stood up looking disappointed, knowing he did not get the position. Nevar pretended to take a call while he watched him stroll out of the coffee shop.

Nevar removed the phone from his ear. "Do you want my email so you can send me that transcript of our conversation?" he asked as he turned around in his chair. Sitting with her laptop was a woman with long dark hair. Her face was round, but her cheekbones were well-defined. She wore a jean jacket over an old black AC/DC shirt. He could tell she was tall even though she was sitting down.

Her face lit up with different shades of red. "Do I know you?" she murmured in a nervous voice.

"I don't know, do you? You seem pretty interested in my conversations." He switched from an aggressive tone to being slightly teasing.

She laughed, showing off her straight white teeth, contrasted against her tanned skin. "I can explain that."

"Please do!" Nevar turned his chair completely so that they were sitting at the same table.

"I'm working on a book, but I'm stuck on one of my characters. So, I decided to come here and study a stranger, and maybe base my character off of them."

"Why'd you pick our conversation?" he asked, genuinely intrigued.

"Okay, well you walked in and you instantly gave off these con-

fidant and powerful vibes. I could tell you were waiting for someone, so I sat down nearby and decided to see what happens, expecting you to be waiting for a date. You just seemed to be someone important.” She looked at him, and he felt as if she was still trying to analyze him. She was trying to read his whole life through his eyes. He broke the eye contact, afraid of what she might find.

He gazed out the window. “Well I’d love to make some notes about your observations of me, but I’ve got to be across town in twenty minutes. How about dinner Thursday night?”

She laughed as if he had made a joke. “You don’t even know my name and you want to take me out to dinner?”

“You’re right. Hi, I’m Nevar. The ‘confident’ and ‘powerful’ guy from the coffee shop,” he mocked, putting air quotes over the descriptions.

She smiled. “Okay, Nevar. I’m Traeh. The stalker writer from the coffeeshop.” She scribbled her phone number on a napkin and handed it over to him. He glanced at it, then shoved it in his shirt pocket.

“Thursday night!” he shouted, as he stood up and walked to the door. He could still feel her eyes as he left the coffee shop, analyzing everything about him.

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The view from Nevar’s 32nd floor apartment was truly gorgeous. It overlooked Central Park, making the people that bustled through it seem miniscule. Trees appeared as small orange and red bushes, as the leaves were changing with the autumn. The rooftops of the buildings he overlooked stretched far below him. Rain spattered, streaking down the window as if the glass was crying. He could see a raven perched on the balcony of a building close by, cocking his head as if trying to understand what the rain was.

He leaned against the window, blinking hard as if it would push away the thoughts in his head. Behind him, the apartment was chaotic. Tables and chairs were overturned, shattered glass sprinkled throughout the hardwood floor, and a broken picture frame displaying Nevar and Traeh laid fragmented on the floor.

Her words rang in his head repeatedly. “Nothing will ever be enough for you.” “You’re an emotionless asshole.” “All you care about is your damn company. What about me, Nevar?”

He hadn’t cried. He can’t remember the last time a tear rolled down his face. Traeh’s face was red, her eyes swollen with tears, sniffing the snot running from her nose between her screams. But Nevar stood there and only watched.

He knew she wasn’t wrong. Windsor Enterprises had become the

fastest growing company America has ever witnessed. He kept working harder and harder, hoping to satisfy something in himself. But with every hour of strenuous work he added to his schedule, he slowly began to realize something that he had been trying to prove untrue to himself from the beginning: he could never feel satisfied.

It had been three years since that day at the coffee shop, and he had loved her ever since then. But he pushed her out intentionally. He wanted to take back everything during their fight. To explain that he was afraid of himself, that he was broken inside. But something stopped him. Something told him this was the easiest way for everyone. So instead, he just watched her, and she stormed out of the apartment.

A nervous voice from behind him spoke feebly, “Mr. Windsor?”

Nevar whipped around to see Ashley, the assistant he had finally chosen after his hundreds of hours worth of interviews years ago. She was looking at the mess of his apartment. He glanced at the watch on his wrist. The hands read 10:00 a.m. His fight with Traeh had happened at midnight the night before. He had been at the window ever since.

When he hadn’t answered, Ashley continued. “Would you like me to call the maid to clean this up?”

“That would be great. And how’s the work going with finding my successor?”

“I have someone set to meet with you today in the afternoon. Should I reschedule...”

“No, no. Today works great. Thank you, Ashley.” She retreated from the apartment.

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The walls of Nevar’s office were blank, painted a light grey. His desk was made of dark mahogany wood, the top littered with papers and folders. Two wooden chairs sat on the opposite side of the room. He sat behind his desk, staring at the wall, examining it as a critique would analyze a work of art.

A knock at the door snapped him out of his trance.

Ashley poked her head in his office. “It’s time for the interview. For your successor position.”

“You can send him in.” Nevar quickly shuffled some of the papers on his desk to the side. The door swung open and a man walked in, wearing a bright blue suit. The tight fit showed he was slightly muscular. He had a closely shaven haircut that seemed to continue throughout his face in the form of a five o’clock shadow.

Without speaking a word he grabbed one of the wooden chairs, dragged it so that it was only a couple of feet from the desk, and sat down.

It was silent. Neither one of them spoke. They both just stared at each other, analyzing one another. Nevar recognized this as a power move, but he decided to break the silence anyways.

“What’s your name?”

The man gave a grin, realizing he succeeded in his power move. “Evod, but everyone just calls me Ev.”

“Fair enough, Ev. Do you have a resumé?”

Ev laid a piece of paper on the desk. Nevar grabbed it and proceeded to look it over. Nevar had a confused expression while reading. There were only two previous jobs listed, and both seemed to be internships. Another thing caught his eye: he had only graduated from college a year prior to this.

“You don’t have much experience. Why are you here?” Nevar asked.

Ev let out a laugh. “Well I was doing some job searching and came across this place. I sent your assistant, Ashley I think it was, an email with my resumé. She told me I was underqualified, but you know what I always say? Persistence is key! So I sent another email and she graciously set me up with an interview. So here I am!” He was chuckling.

Nevar smiled back. “Ashley is stubborn. What did you say that made her change her mind?”

“I told her that when I set my mind on something, I’ll do whatever it takes to achieve it. And I was damned set on getting that interview!”

From anyone else, this would have come off as threatening. But from Ev, it came off as charming, and Nevar believed him. It was something about his smile and the way he presented himself. He seemed intelligent and genuine. It reminded Nevar of himself, only happier and more driven. Nevar believed that if Ashley kept denying him the interview, he probably would have still showed up to the office.

Nevar and Ev sat in the office for over an hour. Nevar talked about the future of the company, struggles they were facing currently, and competitors. Ev not only listened, but he gave input and suggestions on what he would do. Some of which Nevar never thought of, even after day’s worth of brainstorming with teams of experts.

When they were done talking the office had started to close. They shook hands, exchanged information, and Ev left with the crowd of workers streaming out the door for the night.

Ashley peeked her head into Nevar’s office, as if she had been waiting outside for the meeting to be over. “The next person comes in tomorrow at the same time.”

“Cancel it. He was the one.”

She grinned. “Great, I’ll contact him tomorrow and get the paperwork set up.”

Nevar left the office late that night. He felt a feeling of relief, and for a brief amount of time, it seemed to lift some weight off of him.

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The next week, everyone knew of Evod. Biographies were in every newspaper and on every news channel. But this also raised the question as to why Nevar was in search of a successor. He was bombarded by news interviews and paparazzi.

Rumors that he had a terminal illness or that he could no longer handle his position soon filled the same newspapers and news channels. Ashley did her best to deny the rumors, but within a couple of weeks it seemed that everyone had forgotten anyways.

It had been a month since the fight with Traeh. Nevar’s apartment now looked as if the fight with Traeh had never happened. The glass had been swept, the tables and chairs back upright where they belong, and the picture of him and Traeh in a new frame. He tried several times to get rid of the photo, but he could not bring himself to do it. He thought of her every minute anyways, so what was one more reminder.

Nevar looked out his window with content this time. It was a clear night, but the city was still glowing. Central Park looked to be empty. The trees that had once looked like bushes were no longer visible, as the leaves had fully fallen off. A black streak caught his eye as he saw a Raven fly downwards. Nevar wondered to himself if it was possible that it was the same bird as before.

He opened the window and took a deep breath. He held the cold, wintery air in his lungs before exhaling through his mouth. The sounds of the city rang even louder now. Police sirens, cars honking, glass bottles breaking.

Leaving the window open, he sat on a couch behind him. On a glass table to his right was an old revolver. He lifted it up, holding it in his hand as if it was as light as a feather. He took one more deep breath of the city air and pulled the hammer back on the revolver. For the first time that he could remember, Nevar felt satisfied.

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A tall woman stood at the front of an audience. Her long and dark hair brushed against her sharp cheekbones, as her face tilted down towards a heavy book in her hands.

With a shaky voice, Traeh read from the end of the book, “Loving Nevar was so easy for everyone but himself. I spent so long thinking that I was never enough. It gnawed away at me, tearing at my insides until I

couldn't take it. It wasn't until after he died that I realized the problem wasn't me. He wasn't good enough for himself. I believe he was trying to prove to himself that he could be good enough, whether it was through money or by owning one of the most successful companies in the country. But in his head, he ended up proving that he would never be happy. I only wish I would have stayed with him to tell him that he was enough for me.”

Her eyes glistened as she closed the book. The audience clapped quietly as she held back her tears. After a couple minutes the audience began to shuffle and talk amongst themselves. A few people walked up to either thank her for a well-written book or to give their sympathies for her loss.

An elderly lady came up to Traeh with a copy of her book. “Would you mind signing this for me?” she asked nervously. “I loved being able to see into the mind of such a genius like Mr. Windsor, and it's so upsetting for him to leave the way he did.”

“Of course, thank you so much for your support,” Traeh said. But while she reached for the book, she caught a glimpse of someone in the audience. It was a man in a bright blue suit, tight enough to see his muscles. However, his undershirt was slightly untucked, and his beard, once neatly trimmed, was now scraggly and unkempt. Traeh could see a guilt inside him. It was the guilt of a man who craved power and success, but who achieved it through someone else's pain and suffering.

Evod, the new owner of Windsor Enterprises, met Traeh's eyes for a second, giving a sympathetic smile. He then lowered his head and shuffled to the exit.