

The Raven Steals the Light

Native American (Haida)

A LONG TIME AGO, an old man lived in a house on the bank of a river with his only child, a daughter. At that time the whole world was dark. Inky, pitchy dark, blacker than a thousand stormy winter midnights, blacker than anything anywhere has been since. The reason for all this darkness had to do with the old man in the house by the river, who had a box which contained many other boxes, each nested in a box slightly larger than itself until finally there was a box so small it contained all the light in the universe.

There was a raven who didn't like the darkness so much, since it led to an awful lot of blundering around and bumping into things, and slowed him down a good deal in his pursuit of food and troublemaking.

Eventually, he found his way to the home of the old man. As he walked by, he heard a little sing-song voice coming from it. When he followed the voice, he found himself at the wall of the house, and there, placing his ear against the it, he could just make out the words, "I have a box and inside the box is another box and inside it are many more boxes, and in the smallest box of all is all the light in the world, and it is all mine and I'll never give any of it to anyone, not even to my daughter." It took only an instant for the raven to decide to steal the light for himself.

The raven thought and thought about how he could enter the house. Finally, he found the solution to his problem. He waited until the young woman, whose footsteps he could now tell from those of her father, went to the river to gather water. Then he changed himself into a single hemlock needle, dropped himself into the river and floated down just in time to be caught in the basket that the girl was dipping in the river.

Even as a hemlock needle, the raven was able to make at least a little magic – enough to make the girl so thirsty she took a big drink from the basket, and in doing so,

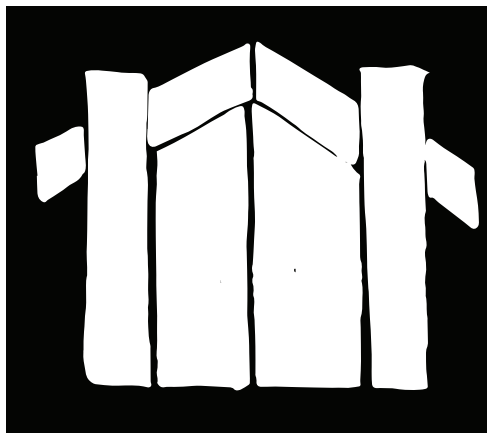
swallowed the needle. The Raven slithered down deep into her warm insides and found a soft, comfortable spot, where he transformed himself into a very small human being, and he went to sleep for a long while. As he slept, he grew.

The girl didn't know what was happening to her, and her father didn't notice anything unusual because it was so dark. Weeks later, he suddenly noticed another person in the house: the raven had turned himself into a human boy. He was – or would have been, if anyone could have seen him – a strange-looking boy, with a long beaklike nose and a few feathers here and there. In addition, he had the shining eyes of a raven, which would have given his face a bright, inquisitive appearance – if anyone could have seen it. And he was noisy! He had a cry that contained all the noises of a spoiled child and an angry raven – yet he could sometimes speak as softly as the wind in the hemlock boughs.

As time went on, the old man grew to love this strange new member of his household and spent many hours playing with him, making him toys and inventing games for him. As the old man began to trust him, the raven continued his search for the box of light. After much looking, he was convinced it was kept in the big box which stood in the corner of the house. One day he cautiously lifted the lid, but of course could see nothing – all he could feel was another box.

He went to his new grandfather and begged him to let him have the biggest box. That box, the raven said, was the one thing he needed to make him truly happy. As most grandparents do, the old man gave in and gave his grandchild the outermost box. This pleased the boy for a short time – but as most grandchildren do, the raven soon demanded the next box.

It took many days, with many well-planned tantrums, but one by one the boxes were removed. When only a few were left, a strange radiance, never before seen, began to infuse the darkness of the house, revealing dim shapes and their shadows. The raven then begged in his most pitiful voice to be allowed to hold the light for just a moment. His grandfather first would not let him, but soon gave in. The old man lifted the light, in the form of



a beautiful bright ball, from the box and tossed it to his grandson.

He had only a glimpse of the child, for even as the light was traveling toward him, the child changed from his human form to a huge black shadow, wings spread and beak open, waiting. The Raven snapped up the light in his jaws, thrust his great wings downward and shot through the smokehole of the house into the darkness.

The world was at once transformed. Mountains and valleys were starkly silhouetted, the river sparkled with broken reflections, and everywhere life began to stir. The raven flew on, proud of his new possession, admiring the effect it had on the world below. He was having such a good time that he didn't see the eagle that was coming toward him until it was almost too late. In a panic he swerved to escape it, and in doing so he dropped a good half of the light he was carrying. It fell to the rocky ground below and there broke into pieces – one large piece and too many small ones to count. They bounced back into the sky and remain there even today as the moon and the stars that glorify the night.

The eagle chased the raven beyond the edge of the world, and there, tired from the long chase, the raven finally let go of his last piece of light. It floated gently on the clouds and started up over the mountains lying to the east and still travels across the sky as the sun.

How was the raven able to enter the house?

Describe the steps he took below.

1.

2.

3.

Why did the raven want the light for himself? Choose a sentence from the story that says why and write it below.

