

BURIAL GROUND

I awoke to the sound of a bird's shriek. It was a high, piercing sound that left my ears ringing, a shriek loud enough to wake the dead.

As I could have guessed by the loudness of the scream (for it did seem more of a scream than a bird's call), the bird was right outside the door of my hut, on a low tree limb. How strange, I thought, for the bird was a raven – a large, dark, ominous raven with a noticeably sharp beak and jet-black eyes. We held eye contact for a moment and then he flapped away, leaving me with an unwanted feeling of dread.

As I looked at the jungle around us, things seemed too quiet. I approached the hut of one of my colleagues and I heard another strange sound, like of a man dying. It was a moaning, first very low and then rising in pitch until it was almost a scream, then subsiding for a minute. I looked in Dr. Moore's window and saw he asleep, in the clutches of a nightmare. He had thrown off his blankets and his white shirt was dark with sweat. His was also soaked, like he had just taken a bath.

I didn't want to have anything to do with his dream, so I decided to let him work it out for himself. As I was leaving, I noticed a new beautifully worked curtain he had covering his doorway. It was dark red, dark as blood issuing from a fresh cut. I realized he must have found it yesterday when the rest of the group went to study an abandoned native village.

Several tribes in this area disappeared around twenty years ago. No one knows much about these tribes, and we've been looking for clues about their lives, and about their disappearance. One thing I'd recently discovered is that their village also doubled as their sacred burial grounds. As the others had left yesterday, I stayed behind to do some more research and I jokingly warned them about a curse on the burial grounds.

Walking away from Dr. Moore's hut, I heard a sound behind me, and ducked just in time as the raven swooped down low over my head, heading straight toward that red curtain. The bird hovered in the air as its claws tore at the curtain. When the raven flew off, I could see the once-beautiful, almost majestic, red curtain was torn into shreds, barely hanging on, like the ripped clothes of some of the poor natives.

With a shudder, I went on to the next hut, but the fine doctor was still sleeping. In his abode I noticed something he must have found yesterday – a large, shining, gold statue of a bird, with black pearls for eyes that seemed to absorb light. The fools, I thought. They all must have taken valuable objects from the burial ground!

I tried to put all of this nonsense out of my mind, and I went to the stream to wash up. Even this early in the morning, the jungle was alive with animals. Birds of every color in the rainbow were singing in the lush vegetation. The bright yellow and red flowers were in full bloom, spreading their petals out. The stream was a clear blue, reflecting the brilliant sun.

Upon reaching the stream, I took my shirt off and got ready to wash up. While I was looking at my reflection, the stream suddenly rippled, destroying the otherwise peaceful and calm water. Staring back at me now was a gaunt skeleton of a man! Reaching out, I banished the strange illusion. Scared half to death, I ran all the way back to camp, receiving numerous cuts from the branches on my bare torso.

Bleeding in several places, I arrived at the camp to find that no one was yet up. Things still seemed to quiet to me. I began to go into each hut in turn, and what I saw brought me close to vomiting. The only hut remaining was Dr. Moore's.

As I entered, that jet-black head turned toward me, and with his claws deep in Moore's chest, the raven seemed to smile at me.

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