The Raven

Edgar Allan Poe

Retold by Marek Vít

It was in a cold December, on the last night of the year. It was midnight and everything was dark. I was sitting in my room, almost falling asleep. There were books everywhere, ancient books of forgotten wisdom. I had been looking for something that could ease my pain, my sorrow for the girl I had lost, for the beautiful Lenore I had loved so much.

Suddenly there came a soft tapping sound, as if someone was gently knocking on the door. "It's just a visitor," I said to myself. But every little sound that night filled me with terror and my heart was beating fast. "It's just a visitor," I repeated to myself and stood up from my chair. "Just a late visitor, and nothing more."

My heart calmed down a little and I said, as if to apologize: "I'm so sorry I have kept you waiting, sir or madam. I was sleeping, you see, and you knocked so gently, so silently that I
almost didn't hear it." I opened the door, but there was nobody there, only darkness, nothing more.

I peered into the darkness, all kinds of terrible thoughts and ideas coming to my mind. Finally, I whispered into the night: "Lenore?" And an echo whispered back: "Lenore." Nothing more.

I turned to return to my room, to my sorrow and misery. Then I heard the tapping sound again, louder than before, but this time it was coming from the window. "Oh, it's just the wind, nothing more!"

I thought but I felt that I had to explore the mystery, so that my heart could finally stop worrying.

I opened the window. A large black raven stepped in. Without stopping, without hesitating it flew and sat on the statue above my door, on the white bust of Pallas, the goddess of wisdom. It just sat there, and nothing more.

Overcoming my shock, I started smiling and said: "Tell me, what is your name?" I did not really expect an answer, but the raven said: "Nevermore". I could not believe what I had just heard, the bird had pronounced the word so well, so clearly. I was sure that it had no meaning. After all, who had ever heard of a bird or an animal with such a strange name as 'Nevermore.'

But the word was the only thing that the bird had said. It did not move, it did not make a sound, it was just sitting there. I said quietly: "All my friends have left me, my hopes are all gone. Surely you will leave me in the morning, too, and I will be alone again." And the bird, as if it understood what I had just said, croaked: "Nevermore."

His answer frightened me but then it came to me that it was probably the only word the bird knew, the only word that it had been taught by an unhappy, miserable master before he died. Terrified but fascinated at the same time, I smiled again and pushed my chair in front of the door, in front of the bird, and sat down. I looked into the bird's terrible eyes. There was fire in them, and the fire was burning into me. What could the bird have meant by croaking "Nevermore?"

Sitting there, painful memories came back to me. This was the very chair where Lenore had sat so often, Lenore, who would never return to me, who would never sit in the soft chair again. "You have to forget her!" I realized, "Forget the lost Lenore!" But the raven said: "Nevermore."

I looked at the bird: "Prophet!" I cried. "Whoever you are, whether a bird or a devil, whether the storm has sent you or it has thrown you into my life, tell me: Will my broken heart ever be healed? Tell me, I need to know!" The bird said: "Nevermore."
I cried again: "Prophet! Bird or devil, tell me, by God who is above us, tell me: Is Lenore with the angels in the garden of paradise?" But the raven just said: "Nevermore."

"Let this be our goodbye, then!" I shouted at the bird. "Get out, back where you came from, back into the storm. Leave nothing here, nothing that could remind me of all the lies you have told. Leave me to my loneliness, to my sorrow, leave the bust above my door! Take your ugly beak out of my heart and get out of my sight!" But the raven said: "Nevermore."

And the raven still is sitting, still is sitting above my door. Its eyes are the eyes of a demon who is dreaming. The light of my lamp throws his large black shadow on the floor. And my soul will never be lifted from that shadow, never, nevermore.

Questions:

1. Why is the man sitting alone and sad in his room?
2. What interrupts the silence?
3. What does he think when he opens the door and there is only darkness?
4. How does he feel about the raven in the beginning?
5. What does their communication look like?
6. What does he learn from their "conversation"?
7. How does he feel about the raven at the end? What changes his opinion?
8. How does the story end?

Things to consider:

- What does the raven symbolize?
- The raven sits on the statue of Pallas. Is that symbolic, too?
- Why does the man keep on asking the raven questions?
- Is the story romantic? Explain why or why not.
- How can you translate the word "nevermore"?