

## The Stupid Raven

Once upon a time, there was a stupid, conceited raven, who flew far, far out over the sea. It flew and it flew, further and further, and when it grew tired it began to look out for land. But there was no land. Eventually it got so tired that it could but hover above the surface of the water. Suddenly a big whale appeared in front of it, and the raven was so confused that it flew right into the whale's mouth.

For a moment everything was dark around it; it splashed and whirred, and just when it thought it was going to die, it tumbled into a beautiful house, full of light and warmth. On the bunk sat a young woman, busy with a burning lamp. She got up and received the raven with a friendly smile, saying.

"You are welcome to be my guest, but promise me, never to touch my lamp."

Happy that it was saved, the raven hastened to assure her that it would never touch the lamp, and then it sat down on the bunk and wondered at the tidiness and cleanliness of the house. It was made out of whale bone, built like men's houses. But the young woman was restless, she never sat down quietly for long, and at brief intervals she got up from the bunk and slipped out of the door. She was never away for more than a moment, then she was back in, but soon disappeared once more.

"What makes you so restless?" the raven asked.

"Life" the girl said, "Life and my breath"

But the raven did not understand the answer.

The raven, now settled and calm, began to grow curious.

Why must I not touch the lamp, he thought. Every time the girl slipped out and he was alone, he felt more like breaking the promise and fiddling with the lamp, just a little bit. Finally he couldn't restrain his curiosity, and when the girl slipped out of the door, he ran to the lamp and fiddled with its wick.

At that moment the girl tumbled in through the door, dropped to the floor and lay there while the lamp extinguished.

Too late the raven regretted its deed and raged in the darkness; the beautiful, lighted house was gone. He was about to suffocate. He fluttered about amongst blubber and blood, and it grew so hot that he lost his feathers. Stifled, he tumbled about in the belly of the whale, and only then he realized what had happened.

The young girl was the soul of the she-whale, and she slipped out of the door into the open every time the whale breathed, and the lamp with its great, calm flame was her heart.

From sheer curiosity the raven had tampered with the young girls heart, and therefore she had died. He did not know that the delicate and beautiful were so frail and easy to destroy. He himself was stupid and tough, and now he fought for his life in the darkness and blood. All that previously was beautiful and clean was now hideous and stinking.

Finally he managed to get out the way he came in, and there he was, half naked, greasy and dirty on the back of a dead whale.

He stayed there and lived on the carcass, while the wind and the waves washed over him. His wings were ruined by heat and blood, so that he could no longer fly.

At last the storm drove him towards land, and the people saw the whale carcass and rowed out in their boats to get blubber and meat. Seeing this, the raven immediately transformed himself into an ugly, sooty, shaggy man standing on the whale. He never breathed a word about having killed something beautiful out of sheer curiosity, but crackled boastfully." I killed the whale, I killed the whale!"

And he was a great man among the people.

*Told by Panik from the Utokok river.*