

FICTION

ONIONS

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Parallel worlds are never normal. Even when they look like they're supposed to, their detailed nature is sometimes beyond strange. The Pandemonium was no exception.

Harnik walked alone in the parallel abnormal, shrouded in the grey mist that was both calming and uncertain. A black wide-brimmed hat sat upon his head, his hair dangling out from below. His stomach growled. Harnik clutched his clunky chrome lantern that parted the way ahead and continued across the field of pale green knives.

His house had to be somewhere in the humid place. His boots had long since been cut. Harnik winced with every step in the field, even if his skin had adapted thick layers beneath his stride. The grass remained relatively still as a breath of onion had begun to blow past. Rain continued to spit down from the mealy sky. Another average day.

A single tree slowly appeared before him; limbs of chubby child hands oozed at the pores. A shiny crow flew down to stand upon a lower branch, panting like a dog. Harnik approached the bird, who seemed to be ushering him to come closer.

"Yes, welcome friend!" the animal hissed.

The grip on Harnik's sweaty lantern tightened. The occasional talking animal was to be expected, yet Harnik's breathing was still laboured. "Where is the house?" Harnik asked. "I strayed from the path and now wish to make it home for dinner."

"Dinner? Nay," taunted the animal. "Dinner is soon missed. Harnik is out of luck."

A rumbling plea erupted from Harnik's organ. "Please help me. I don't wish to be out here beyond nightfall."

“But the pan-demons like to play,” the crow replied. “Yes, they play very nicely with humans.”

Harnik’s neck began to pour. He started to walk past the tree. “I don’t have time for your riddles, crow.”

The tree’s hands came down before the desired path. Boils upon its bark burst and dripped from the sudden motion. The tree groaned in pain.

“Stay a while, hmm?” asked the crow. “Drink some gin, have a laugh?”

Harnik ignored both beings, sidestepping them into taller, sharper knives with a soft crunch. He traipsed around the tree, now beyond its reach. The crow flew down onto Harnik’s shoulder and whispered hot words into his brain.

“You’re going the wrong way, mate,” he chuckled. “I can guide you, for a price of course.”

Harnik batted the crow, who squawked at the touch of his hand. “I’m not interested in your deviousity. A tip would do just fine.”

“We share dinner then, yes?”

Harnik said nothing. He thought back to the empty rabbit traps he’d just visited. He tightened his dry, cracking lips in defeat.

The crow sighed at Harnik’s lack of response. It flew up into the air, flapping down the smell of ripe onions amidst the spitting rain. Harnik paused. Grass licked blood off his feet. The humid air pushed deeper into Harnik’s ears as he waited. The crow returned a short moment after, perching back upon Harnik’s shoulder.

“It breathes in the same direction,” the crow stated. “Very loud it breathes.”

“Do you mean the wind? Or is there a pan-demon near us?”

“Nay to the monster; not until dark,” the crow said. “Follow the onions, for they are smarter than us.”

Harnik took in a reluctant breath of displeasure. The air curdled the mucus in his chest, but it was stronger in one direction. He couldn’t wait to inhale the pure air of his house, enhanced by lush plants rich in fresh air.

“To the left?” Harnik asked.

The crow coughed up a lung, either on purpose or at the smell. Harnik took that as a yes, beginning down the hill as the tree faded from behind. Nothing else could be seen in the mist for several minutes. Soon, a tall, wooden house faded into view. It canted to the right, and the stone chimney gradually fell to the left. Lush greenery sat pressed against the windows, fully riddled in moisture.

Harnik’s stomach groaned again. He fetched a bone key from within his coat, unlocked the house, and released a fresh wall of air. The grass around the entrance perked up, taking on a bright green with its resurrection. Harnik took a deep breath.

The crow cawed with excitement and flapped its wings on Harnik’s shoulder. “Dinner, yes?” asked the crow. “In this life box with Harnik?”

“I would love to have you,” Harnik said. He grabbed the crow off his shoulder, cracked its head against the chrome lantern, and entered his house. The door closed and the nearby grass wilted as the smell of onions took over once again.