

In a small house nestled in a small forest, all on top of a small hill, a woodcarver sat carving wood. He'd done it since he was a boy; his father had done it since he was a boy and so it was all he knew. Very few people visited the hill, much less the forest and even less the house, but he carved wood all the same. He carved well, after all, and all those who did visit were sure to come again when they wanted wood carved; there was always wood in the forest to be carved. It was enough and in this practice he was adroit, he did not complain. He carved from dawn till dusk and at each day's end he would meet his bed to sleep much like the logs resting around his shop. Sprouting up from his bed the next morning he would water his garden, sit himself, and begin carving wood all the same. Every now and then a customer would come, one he'd recognize, and he'd carve for them. The extent of their relationship was just so, and not some other way. The woodcarver simply carved wood, and the customers simply bought the wood. Then, appreciating the garden on their way out, the customers would leave satisfied and the wood would leave with them, now carved. The woodcarver did not mind; the woodcarver did not think much of it, and so he did not mind. Thus, the woodcarver carved more wood.

One day the woodcarver carved an especially fine piece of art— a pristine wooden fox with a bright orange finish. He admired his own work and placed it within a special display to show all those who came to his house. He continued carving into the next day and when he awoke he found the display empty; on the floor before it was the wooden fox now moving with life. The fox spoke of its purpose, that it was given life to give the woodcarver company for he was lonely. The woodcarver was taken aback by this and he never considered himself in need of companionship. Still, he did not mind; he did not think much of it, and so he did not mind. The fox made a great companion and the customers adored it. The man came to care for the fox as well and he felt that the fox had accomplished its purpose. Out of gratitude for the fox, the man told the fox to be free and run about the forest with the foxes made of flesh and bone. But the fox would not go, for it told the carver that he still was not truly happy and the fox knew this. The carver could not understand this and asked the fox what more he needed, then, to appease himself. The fox told the woodcarver that he must find something which he enjoys doing, as the fox could sense a lack of fulfillment in the woodcarver's life. The fox offered to carve in the woodcarver's stead; it had watched the woodcarver for a long while and itself had become adept in the art. The carver would then be allowed to go out and tend to the things one might enjoy outside the busy-ness of work. If the woodcarver still felt the urge to carve after this, however, then they would know that it truly is carving wood he enjoys and the fox would cede the craft to the carver. The woodcarver agreed and so he was no longer a carver of wood but simply a man. He went out into the forest among the critters and flora and breathed the clean air of the outdoors. He went down from the forest and down from the hill and into the town below to greet the dwellers there, whom many were unknown to him as he was to them. Still, they welcomed him and celebrated him, as many in the town were familiar with the legend of the woodcarver. All this to say he was surprisingly well received and so he felt happy.

The fox, worried for the safety of the carver, poured its skill into its craft and carved out an exceptional piece of art— a small wooden crow with a black and oily finish. The fox sent the crow out to watch over the man and protect him; the crow went about trailing the man wherever

he went. The following days went as smoothly as ever, only now the fox carved the wood. The man still tended to his garden and took care to gather more wood to be carved. Familiar now with the forest, he made sure to plant as many trees as he fell. One day the crow happened to overhear a few of the man's customers talking amongst themselves. They spoke of gossip and the type words one would share in private; that the woodcarver could no longer carve wood; that the wooden fox had tricked the carver out of the ownership of his house; that the fox carved wood better than the woodcarver ever could. The crow, worried for the man's safety, went and relayed these things to the man, who at first did not think much of them. For one, he was confident in his craftsmanship, although he did feel a tad out of practice. Secondly, he felt only camaraderie for the fox and never thought less of it. He began to admire the craftsmanship behind the crow and could even see some of his own technique within the piece. He felt proud of the fox and happy that he was well watched after. Then the man felt a burning sensation in the pit of his stomach and wondered what it could be. Returning to the fox, as he knew it was well versed on the implications of these things, he asked for its opinion. The fox believed that this was the man's passion being relit, his passion for carving wood that is, and acknowledged that the man must truly love woodcarving after all. The man found this agreeable and decided to take up carving once again, although he wished for the fox to continue carving as well since this brought him joy. The fox saw the woodcarver as its master and so it agreed to this, but the woodcarver insisted that they stood as equals in the realm of art. To this end the woodcarver wanted the fox to have its own shop, where it could carve freely and blossom into something even greater. The fox was apprehensive but it agreed and so they became carvers of equal stature, each with their own customers and styles. The woodcarver was happy.

The woodcarver would still go out into the town every now and then, and once again while following him the crow overheard unsavory conversations. Some people said that perhaps the fox was possessed by a demon and aimed to steal the woodcarver's business. Others talked of the decline in quality of the woodcarver's product. Some reasonable voices came forward and said that the woodcarver loved the fox as if it were his son. They said that the woodcarver must have taught the fox all his skills and was passing them on before retiring for good. The crow came to the woodcarver and told him of these things, which the woodcarver rebuked. The woodcarver admitted to feeling a fatherly bond with the fox and felt comfort in knowing that the fox's skill was outgrowing his own. He hadn't thought about retiring but perhaps that time was coming soon. The woodcarver once again felt the sensation of burning in his stomach's pit and thought against throwing in the towel just yet. He went to see the fox to consult it on this matter and after meeting it, he felt appeased. Some time passed after this and one day the woodcarver awoke to an awful banging on his door. One of his customers had come to tell him that the fox had been found hacked to pieces on the floor of its shop, returned to the lifeless wood it was carved from. He came to see for himself and before his destroyed creation he crumbled in grief. Some of the other townspeople were there and explained that they thought those who thought ill of the fox came to destroy it, but the woodcarver did not care. He simply wanted everyone to leave; he wanted to give the fox a proper burial. Some left but his customers remained to console the carver and help with the funeral. They burned the fox's remains and buried the charred pieces beneath the stump from which its wood originated. All this while did the crow look on silently, watching the carver closely. As the last bit of dirt was

shoveled into the ground, the carver looked towards the sky and asked why he was granted this gift if it was to be mercilessly taken away. The sky did not know why, no, but the crow knew indeed what had happened. It was the carver who had destroyed the fox, who lacerated it into chunks of orange wood. Later, when they arrived back at the carver's home, the crow asked why the carver had done this. The carver told the crow that now he was truly happy, and so he shooed the crow out of his house and told him never to return, and so the crow never did.

The woodcarver would continue to carve wood and after some time he would grow lonely once again. Eventually he got married and had a child, with whom he shared whatever bit of his life he had left. After his death they would hold a grand funeral for him with an ornate wood casket furnished with gold and silver. The people of the town constructed a statue in the honor of his legend, the legend of the woodcarver so skilled he could carve a felled tree back to life. The son did his best to live up to the image of his father, but his father taught him naught of woodcarving. The son even came to dislike the trade, but felt honored when he thought himself following in his fathers footsteps. The crow continued to fly further and further away, its shiny black finish worn away from the constant bombardment of rain and wind. One night, while resting in a tree, it noticed a nest on the tree directly across from it. In the nest was another crow, made of flesh and bone, watching over three of its eggs. The nest was an intricate thing, made deftly from an assortment of twigs and leaves and other things from the forest floor. The crow marveled at the craftsmanship and felt proud and happy for the fellow crow. Later that night, the wooden crow went and took apart the nest, gradually stealing every bit of structure until it collapsed in on itself and the eggs fell to the base of the tree. It took the pieces and constructed its own nest, a very shoddy creation. It was enough to rest in, though, and so the crow felt truly happy.