

As The Crow Flies

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No coverage, not even one bar, the battery was dead anyway. It was still daytime, but there was an overcast and the sky had a perfectly even dullness, so there was no way to tell what time of day it was, much less which direction was north or south or anything else for that matter. A two-lane blacktop road snaked up into the distance and disappeared into some trees, or a forest if you wanted to get technical about it. It also snaked down toward some lumpy hills and disappeared there as well. What sounded like a two-stroke chainsaw could be heard in the distance, but it was impossible to tell whether it was up in the forest or down in the lumpy hills. This had been happening more often lately. Two different ways to go, with a dead battery and no bars, and nobody left to blame.

Ellen wouldn't be in this predicament if she hadn't gotten mad at her husband and took off driving like a maniac, burning rubber, spinning tires, and not caring who she ran into and where she was going. All she wanted to do was get out of there no matter where the road led her and her vintage El Dorado.

She realized she was being unreasonable in the eyes of those who didn't have to live with him. Her question to each of them who gave her a questioning look was 'what would you do if you loved one of ten years told you he was getting a little bit on the side from your best friend?' He added a strange laugh after he uttered that revelation which made her wonder if he was telling the truth or just yanking her chain.

Ellen knew she had to calm down but that was easier said than done. She kept driving but just a bit closer to the speed limit. She had no destination in mind. The act of driving was having a calming effect on her which was what she really needed.

On and on she drove not realizing she was leaving civilization and entering into a world unknown to her that was the Stillwell National Forest that was located about ten miles outside of the Town of Stillwell. It was as if she had entered a foreign country.

Her mind was rambling on with trying to find a solution to her husband and her best friend problem. She was not paying attention to the fact that the sun was rapidly disappearing by dropping down behind the canopy of trees.

A person was walking on the side of the road. It didn't look like one of Appalachian Trail hikers so she slowed down to get a good look. She nearly ran off the side of the road when she recognized the person who was doing the walking.

"It's Bethany and I need to talk with her," Ellen mumbled as she raced ahead of Bethany and pulled her El Dorado onto the berm. She climbed out of her car and placed each hand on each hip in a sign of contempt and defiance.

Bethany recognized the challenge and scrambled to the other side of the road to avoid the inevitable confrontation. From the stance that Ellen had assumed, Bethany knew she was in for a vicious tongue lashing, maybe even a body thrashing.

Ellen crossed the road. She was going to force the confrontation. She had to have an answer as to why her best friend would do something so cruel. Never in all of the years she had known Bethany would she have expected something like this to cause the inevitable rift.

“Bethany, just tell me why you would stab me in the back like this. I thought we would be friends for ever and ever but you seem to have a totally different idea. I really want to know why you let this happen.”

“Just calm down, Ellen. It’s not what you think. I am not trying to take your husband. I promise you that. This has all been a big mistake. If you must know, I don’t want anything to do with Arnie.”

“Then why did he tell me he was getting a little bit on the side from you? You, of all people in my world. Who should I believe, you or him? This is kind of ridiculous, don’t you think?” said Ellen.

Ellen started stepping closer and closer to Bethany which was not a good thing as far as Bethany was concerned. Bethany backed up an inch at a time trying to maintain more than an arm’s length distance away from Ellen’s reach.

A vehicle drove towards both of them so they each moved off of the pavement and out of harm’s way. But, it kept coming at them even though they had moved as close to the edge of the road as possible.

“Hey, you idiot, stop it! Back off! What is your problem?” shouted Ellen as, once again, her anger was rising to the top. She moved back but she couldn’t go much further without falling down the side of the steep mountain.

“Ellen, are you all right?” screamed Bethany as she, too, was running for cover that couldn’t be found. “What is happening? Why is that stupid fool trying to kill us and that is exactly what he is trying to do?”

“Climb over the guard rail. If he wants to hit us, he will have to ram the rail really hard. That would cause some damage to his vehicle, too much damage I think, or maybe I should say, I hope,” said Ellen. “He might even go over the edge and down the mountain.”

Ellen was scrambling over the rail but hanging on as tight as she could to keep from falling down the mountain; but, the vehicle kept coming at her as she strained her eyes trying to see who was driving so dangerously.

“Can you see the person driving?” Ellen screamed at Bethany who was also hanging on to the guard rail for dear life. “The windows are tinted so dark that I can’t tell if it is a man or a woman.”

The vehicle came to a dead stop before actually colliding with the guard rail. It backed up, turned its wheels, and drove away to the astonishment of both ladies. The vehicle’s bumper was only inches away from damage to both vehicle and ladies.

“What just happened? Why did the vehicle go on without finishing us off and why were they trying to hurt us? What did we do to deserve this kind of treatment?” asked Bethany as she pulled herself up and over the guard rail.

“To my knowledge, I haven’t done anything bad except get mad at my husband because of you. I didn’t know that was a crime punishable by death. Have you done anything that would require this type of deadly punishment?” asked Ellen.

“Of course not and that thing with Arnie is not what you think. If you will stay calm, I will tell you what happened. You’re not going to like what I have to say, but I do have to tell you,” said Bethany.

“Well, go ahead, let me hear what you have to say. I don’t have to believe a word of it but I’ll give you a chance to try to convince me that what you are telling me is the truth before God and me,” said Ellen.

“I have never had intimate relations with your husband nor do I ever want to do so. As a matter of fact, he isn’t my friend but you are, I hope. I saw him one day when he was being harassed by a couple of thugs. He was standing outside a restaurant on Main Street as I was walking by and he threw his arm around me and said I was his lover.”

“Why would he do that? Why did you let him do that? Who were the thugs? Why were they harassing him? I have a ton of questions that need to be answered so you need to start answering them one at a time,” demanded Ellen.

“Okay, I’ll start with why he did that. It was because he didn’t want anyone to bother you. He loves you that much and he was trying to throw the danger off of you and onto me and himself,” said Bethany as she stared directly into Ellen’s eyes.

“Okay, now tell me why you would allow him to place you into danger if you have no love connection with Arnie. I certainly wouldn’t want him to do that to me and I am married to him,” said Ellen.

“Let me go on with answering your first set of questions. You wanted to know who they were. As far as I could figure, Arnie is a gambler and he lost quite a bit of money to those guys somewhere along the line. Did you know he gambled?” asked Bethany.

“I knew he took care of the sports pools at his place of employment but that is the only gambling that I know he does. Where is he placing bets that can cause so much trouble for the two of us?” asked Ellen.

“You wanted to know why I would allow him to do this to me. I will tell you that all I wanted to do was to protect you, just like he did. I had no idea it would be dangerous to either one of us. We didn’t want you put in harm’s way,” explained Bethany.

“Look, that vehicle is coming back. Let’s go jump into my car and see if we can get away from this menace. I think he or she is planning to finish the job which means one or both of us will be eliminated,” said Ellen.

Bethany and Ellen scrambled for cover within the big, heavy Cadillac El Dorado. It would take a fast moving vehicle to shove them over the hill. Ellen was hoping that wouldn’t be possible because they would be taking a chance on going over with them.

“Oh my God. Here they come!” screamed Bethany as she jumped inside the car scooting over the bench seat to the passenger side as Ellen followed her. Ellen pressed the button on the door to lock it as the door slammed. “Start the car. Let’s get out of here. They are getting closer and taking aim at us.”

Ellen turned the key and nothing happened. She offered up a silent prayer and, again, she tried to start the car. Nothing happened. “The battery must be dead,” she mumbled as she grabbed her cell phone to call for help.

“No bars, do you have a cell phone, Bethany? Call 9-1-1 if you can,” she said as she glanced up to see a big, black crow cruising near the windshield. “Aren’t crows supposed to be bad luck?” she asked Bethany.

“Yeah, but I think I read somewhere that the sighting of one crow means bad luck for some strange reason. I just hope we see more of them forming a group because the luck changes to good according to the superstition and the number of crows.”

“I’m not going to worry about the crows. We have trouble driving right at us,” said Ellen as they were jarred into a frightening reality when the vehicle rammed their car from the rear. “I guess they wanted to kill us but not go over the hill themselves.”

“He is backing up so he can do it again,” screamed Bethany as she crouched down under the dashboard so she could avoid any flying glass or maybe bullets headed her way. She drew her body up into a fetal position so she would be as small as possible.

The ramming stopped and they both popped up their heads to see what was going to happen next. They saw headlights coming toward them from the opposite direction and their assassin had driven away. They didn’t move from their positions under the dashboard for what seemed like forever. They were afraid to reveal themselves completely.

“There is someone else headed this way but the crazy SUV is gone, I think,” stammered Ellen. “Can you see who is driving the newly arrived vehicle? Maybe it is a forest ranger. We could really use his help to get out of here.”

The vehicle was an SUV driven by a forest ranger and it stopped directly in the center of the narrow, paved road blocking all traffic; and there suddenly was traffic coming out of nowhere. People were exiting the now parked cars surrounding the Ed Dorado.

“Step back, folks. I need to speak with these young ladies,” shouted the ranger as he forced the growing sight-seeing crowd to back away from my badly beaten El Dorado. He walked over to my driver side and motioned for Ellen to get out of the car.

“What happened here? We have arrested a couple of men in a large SUV, a black one that had quite a bit of front end damage. Are you the reason for that damage? Were they trying to cause your vehicle and you to tumble down the mountain?”

Ellen crawled from her hiding space and gratefully placed her feet firmly on the ground. Bethany followed her across the front seat and they both stood leaning against the car for support because they were weak from fright and the loss of the adrenaline rush.

“I think they were trying to kill us because they were going to use our deaths as a warning to my husband who has reneged on his gambling debts. At least, that’s what I’ve been told by her, Bethany, my best friend,” Ellen said as she pointed to Bethany.

“You ladies need to go to the sheriff’s office and give a statement about what has taken place today. Do you think you will be able to start your car and drive it or should I call you a tow truck?” asked the Ranger.

“Just give me a jump start. My battery is dead. Once we get the car started we can go far enough so I can call my husband and tell him to meet us at the sheriff’s office. I’m sure they will want to talk with him,” Ellen said. She wanted to plug in her cell phone as soon as the engine would turnover.

They made their way through the crowd, and back to the El Dorado. And as they approached it, a crow flew directly over their heads and landed on the hood and then looked at them. They stood some distance away and watched the crow watching them. Another crow flew directly overhead and landed beside it. The first crow squawked and then both flew away. They watched the crows disappear, looked at each other, and then got in the El Dorado. Only one way to go this time, with five bars and full battery.