

PEREGRINE the PEREGRINE

A short story by John Morey



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Foreword

The following tale is a departure from the author's normal genre – romantic novel writing.

Inspired by actual happenings on one of his many country walks, the tale is a work of fiction, albeit rooted to a degree in reality.

That said, it should be understood that the author does not set himself up as an expert ornithologist. With that in mind, any departures from the exact nature and behaviour of the main characters – birds – will, hopefully be forgiven.

Younger readers in particular should consult friends and family who do have knowledge of bird behaviour. If that fails, the RSPB welcomes aspiring birdwatchers and naturalists – or they can always visit the Bowling Green Marsh .

Peregrine the Peregrine

Peregrine was tucking into his prey. It was a shoveler duck. There were quite a few of them by the waterside that day – on the nature reserve near Topsham, Bowling Green Marsh.

His stoop had been impressive – descending at close on 200 mph to snatch the unfortunate bird from his friends on the lake. He was proud of his dive. What's more, he always liked to put on a show for the birdwatchers in the hide just across the water – especially as it was a Saturday. It was usually a 'full house' most weekends.

Of course, the redshank never help – coming out with their 'skee, skee' alarm call if they happened to catch sight of him out hunting. *This time you were just a little bit too late*, he mused to himself. He set about de-voiding the bird of its plumage. He was well away.

“allo,” came a voice, startling him for a second, he was so engrossed in his meal. He always got carried away at the plucking stage. For him it was almost like a meditation – a Zen experience.

“Caw! What have you got there?” It was that voice again.

The peregrine recognised it at once, which is why he was trying to ignore it. But in vain. The owner of the voice would *not* go away, so eventually he gave in.

“allo yerself, Jim Crow,” he replied.

“Nice looking bird,” said Jim.

“Thanks. You're not so bad yourself.” The peregrine had to force himself to answer, so he thought he might as well be pleasant. It was his idea of a joke but, obviously, crows were not as bright as falcons. Or were they?

Finally, his curiosity got the better of him. “What d'ya want, Jimbo?”

“A bit of civility would be nice,” answered the crow. “How do you know who I am, anyway?”

“*Everybody* knows who *you* are,” replied Peregrine. “Are you still with the same bird?”

“Jan, you mean?”

“That's the one.” The peregrine ceased de-feathering the shoveller for a moment, turning to make sure it was who he thought it was. “Not that I'd recognise her.”

“Why's that?” asked Jim.

“You all look the same to me.”

“Charming! I could say that about you. You've all got the same markings,” the crow replied, a little testily this time. “Anyway, there's no need to be racist!”

The peregrine paused for a while, exasperated. He was only half way through preparing his feast and had yet to get to some meat. All he had so far were feathers. “Yes?” he asked, locking the crow in his stare, pressing for a reason why he had been disturbed from his very important task. In any case he was hungry, not having eaten for hours.

Jim Crow was getting to the point, eventually. “What's your name, anyway?” he asked. “You never *did* say.”

“Peregrine.”

“No!” Jim was getting flustered again. “What's your *name*. *Who* are you, not *what* are you. I know you're a peregrine.”

“I just said – Peregrine.”

“Peregrine the peregrine?”

“That's what I said.” The falcon continued plucking.

“Well, I'm glad that's settled,” said the crow.

There was a long pause while peregrine continued to prepare his meal, leaving Jim Crow time to think of something else to say. Or do. He decided to 'do' – creeping forward to get a whiff, or even a sight, of the deceased shoveller.

“Careful, Sunshine,” hissed peregrine, without looking up or interrupting his rhythm. “You don't want to be next on my list, do you?”

Jim Crow stopped in his tracks. He stepped back. Ready to make his escape, in case... Peregrine had reached the meaty bits. It made him even more wary and aggressive. After a while Jim Crow mustered enough courage to pose his next question. He began tentatively, almost whispering.

“I don't suppose....,” he paused, “... you could spare...”

“No!” snapped the falcon. “Get your own!” With that he lunged at the crow. He hadn't noticed Jan Crow creeping up on the other side, ready to snatch a morsel or two of prime shoveller – but he turned back to what he had been doing, just in time to catch her out. “Off!” he screamed, feigning a 'yarak'.

The falcon had extended his talons, capable of ripping off the tail feathers of the crow – or worse – but he just wanted to scare her this time.

“Caw! You're in a mood, ain't ya?” Jan said, moving back to a safer distance. *Women!* Muttered Jim, witnessing the failure.

“Some of us work for a living,” was the falcon's reply to Jan.

“How about swapsies?” asked Jim.

“Depends. What have ya got?”

“That's a very nice Al Pacino impression, Perry old boy,” said Jim, rather cheekily this time. Then he replied. “I do a nice line in sheep's eyeballs...”

“No thank you.” Peregrine was quite adamant. The last thing he, or any bird of prey for that matter, wanted, was the local farmer accusing him of raiding his sheep and cattle. The falcon carried on with his meal.

“How's the missus?” asked Jim, trying to open up another line of conversation.

“Not seen her,” answered Peregrine, his mouth full of shoveller.

“Caw! You don't half 'shovel it in',” said Jim Crow in the way of a joke. Then, “Geddit?” he added, chuckling.

“So where *is* the missus?” Jim persisted.

“Dunno,” replied Peregrine. “It's not mating season yet.”

“I thought you were like us, and mated for life. The same wife.”

“We do. But I like my own space as well.” Peregrine was starting to 'open up' – Jim Crow was trying to get his trust.

“I get that, I *really* do,” said the crow. “I'm a bit like that myself. I do go off on my own, sometimes, but me and Jan would miss each other if we weren't together.”

Fool!, said Peregrine, to himself.

It was Jan who came right out with it, “Are you going to eat *all* that?” she asked, pointing at the remains of Peregrine's lunch.

“Listen, Mrs.,” he said, walking towards the female crow, threateningly. In so doing, he inadvertently – without realising – left his lunch unguarded. Jim was in like a flash, grabbing a wing which, unfortunately, was still attached to the rest of the shoveller. It was heavier than he imagined. As soon as he tried to launch – or should we say 'lunch!' - into flight, the weight of the waterfowl dragged him down again. He dropped it.

“Curses!” yelled Jim. With that, Peregrine was onto both of them, chasing both Jim and Jan across the meadow.

“Bingo!” It was Barrie the Buzzard. He had been watching the game from afar – on the tall hedgerow at the far end of the meadow. He made his move, swooping low and silently no more than six feet above ground, camouflaged and undetected by the hedge in the background.

“Hey, you!” cried Peregrine, catching the sight of Barrie out of the corner of his eye after he finally chased off Jim and Jan.

“Yeh, you!” joined in Jim and Jan together, even more upset at seeing their hoped-for chances of a free meal disappear, “that's ours.”

“Was,” replied Barrie through his beak. “It's mine, now.” Being a much bigger bird, Barrie was a lot stronger than either the crows or, indeed, the falcon. Peregrine gave chase,

but it was only a token challenge – a mere gesture. He had eaten enough wildfowl for one day anyway, so he let the buzzard run off with his prize. “There was only gristle left,” he muttered sulkily, as he returned to his pile of feathers.

Jim and Jan were less forgiving. “That was *so* unfair,” said Jim. “Totally out of order. We could have had him, Peregrine, if we'd joined forces.”

“That's never going to happen,” said Peregrine.

“Why?”

Peregrine had his answer ready. “You know what they say?”

“What?”

“Bird's of a feather, stick together.”

The words were plain enough for the crows. “Come on, Jan,” said Jim, taking flight back to the woods. “We know when we're not wanted.”

“At last,” sighed Peregrine. “Jimbo gets the message. Now I wonder where *is* my Missus?”

With that, he was gone. Life on Bowling Green Marsh returned to normal for the summer visitors.

At least for now...

~ THE END ~

Afterword

For more writing by John Morey, visit his [website](#), or look for his books in e-book and paperback format on [Amazon](#).