

Bristle tapped her beak against the rippled window pane. A white paw brushed the latches aside, and the raven stepped in through the window, shaking her blackest feathers free from the coat of rain. The cat who let her in snarled at the flung drops of water that hit him. He shut the window and hopped off the ledge, returning to the shabby, fraying basket and cushion in the corner.

The raven clacked at him with her beak. “Some welcome. I was out there for hours! Where’s the life-giver, Mr. Brilliantwumps?”

The calico flicked his tail in her direction and turned his back to her. “We’ve been over this, vulture. My name is Dreadstare.”

“That’s not what *he* calls you,” the raven replied, already hopping to the food dishes, only to find them empty. Even the cat bowls on the floor appeared licked clean. This required further investigation.