3.3 A Crow in the House

The young crow had fallen from its nest and was fluttering about on the road, in danger of being crushed by a cart or a tonga, or seized by a cat, when I picked it up and brought it home. It was in a sorry condition, beak gaping and head dropping, and we did not expect it to live. But Grandfather and I did our best to bring it round. We fed it by prizing its beak gently open with a pencil, pushing in a little bread and milk, and then removing the pencil to allow it to swallow. We varied this diet with occasional doses of Grandmother's home-made plum wine, and as a result, the young crow was soon on the road to recovery.

He was offered his freedom but he did not take it. Instead he made himself at home in the house. Grandmother, Aunt Mabel, and even some of Grandfather's pets objected; but there was no way of getting rid of the bird. He took over the administration of the house.

We were not sure that he was male, but we called him Caesar.

Before long, Caesar was joining us at meal times, besides finding his own grubs or beetles in the garden. He danced about on the dining table and gave us no peace until he had been given his small bowl of meat and soup and vegetables. He was always restless, fidgeting about, investigating things. He would hop across a table to empty a match-box of its content, or rip the daily paper to shreds, or overturn a vase of flowers, or tug at the tail of one of the dogs.



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- What dangers were likely to befall the young crow?
- Who were the other members of the author's family living in the same house?
- Did the author's Grandfather like animals? How do we know that? Give two examples from this page to support your answer.
- What is implied in 'He took over the administration of the house?

‘That crow will be the ruin of us!’ grumbled Grandmother, picking marigolds off the carpet. ‘Can’t you keep him in a cage?’

We did try keeping Caesar in cage, but he was so angry, and objected with such fierce cawing and flapping, that it was better for our nerves and peace of mind to give him the run of the house. He did not show any inclination to join the other crows in the banyan tree. Grandfather said this was because he was really a jungle crow – a raven of sorts – and probably felt a little contemptuous of very ordinary carrion crows. But it seemed to me that Caesar, having grown used to living with humans on equal terms, had become snobbish and did not wish to mix with his own kind. He would even squabble with Harold the Hornbill. Perching on top of Harold’s cage, he would peck at the big bird’s feet, whereupon Harold would swear and scold and try to catch Caesar through the bars.

In time, Caesar learnt to talk a little - as ravens sometimes do - in a cracked, throaty voice. He would sit for hours outside the window, banging on the glass with his beak and calling, ‘Hello, hello’. He seemed to recognise the click of the gate when I came home from school, and would come to the door with a hop, skip and jump, saying, ‘Hello, hello!’ I had also taught him to sit on my arm and say ‘Kiss, kiss’, while he placed his head gently against my mouth.

On one of Aunt Mabel’s visits, Caesar alighted on her arm and cackled, “Kiss, Kiss!” Aunt Mable was delighted – and possibly flattered – and leant forward for a kiss. But Caesar’s attention shifted to my aunt’s gleaming spectacles, and thrusting at them with his beak, he knocked them off. Aunt Mabel never was a success with the pets.

Pet or pest? Grandmother insisted that Caesar was a pest, in spite of his engaging habits. If he

- carrion crows : crows feeding on dead or decaying flesh (and other garbage)

⌘ Guess how Caesar learnt to say ‘Hello, hello’.

⌘ What is meant by ‘Aunt Mabel never was a success with the pets’? Can you think of the reasons why it was so?

- engaging : Here, it means charming or attractive

had restricted his activities to our own house, it would not have been so bad; but he took to visiting neighbouring houses and stealing pens and pencils, hair-ribbons, combs, keys, shuttlecocks, tooth-brushes and false teeth. He was especially fond of toothbrushes, and made a collection of them on top of the cupboard in my room. Most of the neighbours were represented in our house by a toothbrush. Toothbrush sales went up that year. So did Grandmother's blood-pressure.



- took to visiting : visited regularly as a matter of habit.

Caesar spied on children going into the bania's shop, and often managed to snatch sweets from them as they came out. Clothes pegs fascinated him. Neighbours would return from the bazar to find their washing lying in the mud, and no sign of the pegs. These, too, found their way to the top of my cupboard.

- ⌘ What is implied in the following sentence :
- Most of the neighbours were represented in our house by a toothbrush.

It was Caesar's gardening activities that finally led to disaster. He was helping himself to our neighbour's beans when a stick was flung at him, breaking his leg. I carried the unfortunate bird home, and Grandfather and I washed and bandaged his leg as best we could. But it would not mend. Caesar hung his head and no longer talked. He grew weaker day by day, refusing to eat. An occasional sip of Grandmother's homemade wine was all that kept him going.

One morning I found him dead on the sofa, his legs stiff in the air. Poor Caesar! His anti-social habits had led to his early end.

I dug a shallow grave in the garden, and buried him there, along with all the toothbrushes and clothes pegs he had taken so much trouble to collect.

– *Ruskin Bond*

(*From 'Grandfather's Private Zoo'*)

- ⌘ What actions of the author show that he loved Caesar?

ENGLISH WORKSHOP

1. (A) **Find antonyms** for the following from the story.

   - motionless x ..... • captivity x ..... • frequent x .....
   - dull x ..... • gentle x ..... • co-operated x .....
   - deep x ..... • humble x .....

   (B) Now try to **find out synonyms** (words that mean the same) for the following : (You may use a dictionary / theasures)

   - disapproved : ..... • bits/pieces : ..... • achievement : .....
   - attracted : ..... • nuisance : ..... • mishap : .....
   - controlled : ..... • rebuke : .....

2. Using your imagination, write how the other pets in the house could have objected to Caesar living in their house.
3. **Prepare a table** to show 'Caesar's Pranks' at home and outside.
4. Relate the life-story of Caesar, rearranging the facts in a proper sequence in the form of a **flow chart** :

   - Caesar begins to upset things at home
   - Young crow is saved by the narrator
   - The crow is named Caesar
   - Caesar objects to being caged.
   - Neighbour flings a stick at Caesar
   - Caesar begins to trouble neighbours
   - Caesar passes away

5. Rewrite in your own words (a) One event from the story (b) One of the Caesar's traits that makes you laugh.
6. **Hold a debate on –** 'Pets or Pests?'
7. Do you have pet animals? Write an interesting story about your own or your friends' pet.
8. Language Study : **Complement :** There are two types of complement : subject complement and object complement. **Subject complement** is a word or a phrase used after a verb that describes the subject. The underlined words and phrases in the following sentences are subject complements.

   1. I am <u>hungry</u>. 2. My sister became a <u>teacher</u>.

   The word 'hungry' and the phrase 'a teacher' describe the subjects of the verbs. Therefore, they are subject complements.

   An **object complement** comes after the object of a verb and gives us information about the object. The underlined words and phrases in the following sentences are object complements.

   3. The class made her <u>the monitor</u>. 4. The teacher found my answer <u>correct</u>.

   The phrase 'the monitor' gives us information about the object 'her'. The word 'correct' gives us information about the object 'my answer'.