

Nightingale and Crow

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Lively, and with a swing feel: divide the quarter notes in each half of the measure about 60:40 instead of the notated 50:50

(mostly)

Now, I got it from Ma-ry-lyn, and she got it from Vince.

Lu - sci - ni - a me - ga - rbyn - chos

He got it from Aa - rene, who does not know what's hap-pened since.

Cor - vus cor - one cor - one

Aa - rene got it from E-ric, who per - haps did not fore - see

That it might spread through E-mail, so it's not an S T D,

But it's e-equal-ly con - ta-gious. Now you're get-ting it from me.

Lus - ci-ni-a me-ga - rbyn-chos Cor-vus co-rone co-rone



Now, I got it from Marylyn, and she got it from Vince.

*Luscinia megarhynchos*¹

He got it from Aarene, who does not know what's happened since.

*Corvus corone corone*²

Aarene got it from Eric, who perhaps did not foresee
That it might spread through E-mail, so it's not an STD,
But it's equally contagious. Now you're getting it from me.

Luscinia megarhynchos Corvus corone corone

Once Nightingale³ sat singing on a tree branch in the sun.
And as each song was finished, he'd begin another one.
With confidence in melody, he'd sing each one with pride.
He'd just completed seven when a bird flew to his side,
And he said, "Your singing's awful. You should shut your beak and hide."

Astonished at this comment, he said, "Who are you to know?"
To which the other answered, "I'm a singer! I am Crow!"
He flapped his wings and shouted, but his voice was hoarse and raw.
Just half notes⁵ of E natural, and Nightingale⁴ saw
That the branch was shaking roughly, but the only sound was "caw".

"Let's have a singing contest," Crow proposed when he was done.
"Who'll judge it?" replied Nightingale³, "Who'll tell us who has won?"
"We'll each perform before the next three creatures that we meet,
Ask each who can sing better," Crow replied, "who is more sweet,
And whoever does not get two votes must go down in defeat."

"I do not have a trophy," Crow continued, "so instead,
The winner gets to peck the loser three times on the head.
Do you accept my challenge, Nightingale³?" The smaller bird
Considered this peculiar, but agreed. Each gave his word
To accept three pecks if in defeat, not flee before the third.

They came upon a woman taking berries into town.
They said they'd entertain her if she'd set her baskets down,
But she must judge their singing contest. Nightingale³ went first
He ended his cadenza with a fine, staccato burst.
When she heard Crow's "Caw! Caw! Caw!", she said he surely was the worst.

... continued overleaf

Said Nightingale⁴, “See! I won!” but Crow said, “Not so fast.
For she was but the first judge, and we must await the last.”
They flew a little further, and they heard a raucous grunt
From out behind an oak tree, so they waited at the front,
And they saw a pig come at them. “Move aside!” The pig was blunt.

“You might say, ‘Please’,” said Nightingale⁴, as they did not budge.
“We value your opinion as a singing contest judge.”
“Will this take long?” replied the pig. “I’m heading home to rest.”
“Not long,” said Crow, then “Caw! Caw! Caw!”, his prize song quite compressed.
After Nightingale’s⁴ long, clear tune, the pig said, “Crow’s the best”.

“You see,” said Crow, “I am the best. None sings as well as I.”
“We must ask one more creature still,” was Nightingale’s³ reply.
The next judge they encountered was just hanging by his tail,
Admiring his striped⁶ back, and proud of every scale.
So he listened, laughed, hissed “Crow’s the best”, then slithered down the trail.

“I won the contest, two of three!” squawked Crow, “so just hold still,
While I peck you three times.” Crow did, then flew around a hill.
Crow cawed his triumph as he flew. “I won! I won!” he said,
And, warned of his approach, along his path the songbirds fled.
To his nesting tree flew Nightingale³, where welcome branches spread.

His back against the tree to rest, a young woodcutter sat,
Where cool, green shade allowed him to remove his sweaty hat.
Upon his unprotected brow, he thought he felt some rain
Although the sky was cloudless, so he looked around again,
And he saw the crying Nightingale⁴. “Please, dear bird, explain!”

“I sing my songs each morning, to the flowers, to the sky,
To all who care to listen, but this morning Crow came by.”
Then he retold the story of the challenge, of the prize,
The woman, pig and snake, sad words among his mournful cries,
Of the pecking and departure, as the tears fell from his eyes.

“You cry because your head hurts! Oh, you poor, dear, injured bird!”
“Oh, no! You do not understand this story you have heard.”
“I am not crying for my head – it does not bleed or ache –
But now I shall remember, every morning when I wake,
That I let myself be judged by first a pig and then a snake.”

¹ The nightingale, native to Europe

² The carrion crow, found in Europe

³ Nightingale as three syllables, night-in-gale

⁴ Nightingale as four syllables, night-in-ga-le

⁵ Minims, for those who prefer the British notation system

⁶ Ad-mi-r-ing his stri-ped

Author’s notes:

I really did get the story from Marylyn Peringer, who got it from Vince Wall, who got it from Aarene Storms, who got it from Eric Kimmel. I heard it in the late winter of 2003, asked Marylyn about it a few months later, and was referred to Vince, who forwarded a copy of the E-mail in which he’d first received it from Aarene. My version is based on my memory of Marylyn’s telling, on that E-mailed text, and on Vince’s handwritten comments about how his version differs from his source version.

If you’re not me, you might want to simply drop the first verse or else modify it as required, for example:

Now, I got it from Howard, he from Marylyn, she from Vince...

On the other hand, if you are Marylyn, you might prefer this:

Now, I gave it to Howard after I got it from Vince ...

The image of *Luscinia megarynchos* is from a web site for Freie Universität Berlin, Institut für Biologie, <http://www.verhaltensbiologie.fu-berlin.de>.

The image of *Corvus corone corone* is from Morris’s British Birds 1891, as reproduced on <http://www.birdcheck.co.uk>.

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