

# CAW'S FIRST HOLIDAY

By

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High in the Rocky Mountains with a feeling of snow in the air, the sound of a crow could be heard floating across the meadow---caw---caw---caw. Hearing his father's familiar bird call, Jeb cupped his hands against his mouth and answered---caw---caw---caw.

At the top of a tall fir tree in a world of his own perched a large black crow. *It's that foolish boy again trying to sound like me*, he thought. *I should fly down there and let him hear what a real crow sounds like.*

"I'm over here pa," yelled Jeb, "next to the pine tree." Jeb and his father always used the call of a crow whenever they were in the meadow or the woods, so when separated they could find one another.

Having just returned his father's call, the wings of a large, beady-eyed crow brushed Jeb's head as it landed on his shoulder.

Surprised and a little frightened, Jeb slowly pulled a caramel out of his pocket and offered it to the crow. The bird tried to gobble it down but it got stuck in his mouth.

*This kid's trying to kill me*, thought the crow. *Oh! Yum! This stuff is beginning to melt and it tastes pretty good!*

Jeb gave him another caramel, then another. By the time his father arrived Jeb was more relaxed and the bird stayed perched on his shoulder.

“Where’d you find him?” his father asked, as he carefully approached Jeb.

“He found me and flew onto my shoulder when I used our crow call. He seems friendly,” said Jeb, who slowly turned his head as he and the bird stared at each other eye to eye. Then forgetting the bird for a moment, he pointed at the tree and exclaimed, “Dad, look what I found!”

“What a beautiful Christmas tree,” his dad said. “Let’s cut it down and take it home for the holidays.”

Looking up high at his nest, the crow hoped they wouldn’t be chopping down his big tree.

The crow stayed put on Jeb’s shoulder all the way back to the ranch, as Jeb fed him more caramels.

*This boy’s a gold mine, thought the crow. He could be my meal ticket for the whole winter. Whatever he’s feeding me tastes better than an old field mouse.*

As Jeb entered the house the crow flew off his shoulder onto the kitchen table, and popped a cooling, fresh baked Christmas cookie into his mouth. Jeb’s mom screamed when she entered the room and saw the big black bird on her clean tablecloth. She grabbed the broom and shooed him out the door. He flew onto the clothesline and gave her his most steely-eyed glare.

Feeling a little uneasy about asking, Jeb said, “Can I keep him Ma?”

“Well--I guess so,” she answered, “as long as he stays outside.”

“Thanks Ma,” Jeb exclaimed, as he happily bound out the door and gave his new friend another cookie.

*Caw-Caw*, said the bird. *Since this boy keeps feeding me all these treats, the least I can do is show him the correct way to caw.*

After a few more caws, Jeb kidding, asked, “Is that your name? We'll, that's what I'm going to call you--”Caw.”

As he was about to give Caw another caramel, his mother opened the kitchen window and yelled, “Jeb, don't give that poor bird anymore candy or cookies. I'm sure it isn't good for him.”

“Okay, Mom,” answered Jeb, “I'll be more careful,” and he put the caramel back in his pocket.

Caw fluttered his wings and gave Jeff's mom another steely-eyed glare!

When Jeb left, the crow flew around the barn and found an opening into the hayloft. Looking around he liked what he saw and made himself at home. It was even nicer than the nest in his big tree. *Now I'll have a winter and a summer home*, he cawed, as he preened himself.

It was Christmas vacation and Jeb had lots of time on his hands. He had heard that crows were smart and could be taught to speak. He decided to give it a try. Facing the crow Jeb slowly said, “Jeb.” There was no response from the crow. “Jeb” he said again. Jeb repeated his name over and over but the bird remained silent, looking straight ahead, as beady eyed as ever.

Caw was thinking that the boy sure talked a lot, but only seemed to know one word.

Jeb finally called it quits and said, "I'll try again tomorrow."

Christmas was nearing and Jeb was excited. He and his parents had taken the long drive into town to do their Christmas shopping, and he found the perfect gift for each of them. When they met back at the truck his parent's arms were loaded with packages. He sure hoped some of them were for him.

After decorating the Christmas tree Jeb's mom stood back, looked it over and thought it needed something. "Jeb," she said, "could you go to the woods and collect some of that holly with the red berries. I think it will give our tree a finished look."

"Sure!" answered Jeb, "I'll do it first thing in the morning."

When Jeff and Caw left the ranch early the next day, the air was cold, crisp, and dry. It had snowed heavily during the night.

Jeb was filled with the Christmas spirit as he trudged through the snow thinking about all the gifts he was going to get come Christmas morning.

Finding a bush loaded with holly, Jeb shook off the snow and filled his burlap bag to the top.

While Jeb was stuffing his bag Caw was stuffing his stomach.

Closing the bag, Jeb said, "I've got enough to cover two trees." Turning to leave he tripped over a snow covered log and rolled head over heels down a steep slope. Feeling woozy he tried to stand and fell down in pain! Carefully touching his tender ankle it felt like it was either broken or badly sprained.

Jeb knew he was in serious trouble. He couldn't get up the incline and his body was getting colder by the minute. "What am I going to do?" he wondered. Taking a long look at Caw, he said, "Caw, one

way or the other, you've got to get to my folks. Go home, now! Shoo! Shoo!" Being a smart bird, Caw sensed something was wrong, and flew off in the direction of the ranch.

Landing on the kitchen windowsill Caw pecked on the window. Jeb's mom said, "Go away!"

"Jeb must have gotten back," said his dad. "I wonder what's keeping him?"

Caw kept pecking at the window angering Jeb's mom. She opened the window to shoo him away but Caw stood his ground! Looking her straight in the eye, he said, "*Jeb!*" then he said it again, "*Jeb!*"

Jumping out of his chair, Jeb's dad said, "Something must have happened to Jeb!"

Both Jeb's dad and mom threw on their coats and ran outside, grabbing a rope and hatchet out of the barn on the way to find their son. Caw was already flying in the direction of the slope.

Running after the bird and following their son's trail in the snow, they found a shivering Jeb, but he was conscious and alert.

"Jeb!" yelled his dad, "I'll throw the end of the rope to you. Grab hold and I'll pull you up."

"Okay dad," answered a very cold Jeb.

Both parents began pulling so Jeb's dead weight wouldn't cause them to lose their footing. They didn't want all three of them to end up down the incline. Slowly but surely they pulled Jeb to the top. Wrapping his coat around Jeb, his father gently picked him up and carried him home. His mother ran ahead to call the doctor.

Examining Jeb, the “Doc” said, “Luckily he only has a bad sprain and shows no signs of a fever. He’ll be running around in no time at all.”

Turning to Caw sitting on the sill outside the window, Jeb’s mom said lovingly, “We’re going to have to give Caw a special treat this Christmas Eve for saving Jeb’s life.”

“I thought you didn’t care much for Caw,” teased Jeb.

“Well, I do now,” answered his mom, laughing.

That evening nestled in the hay, Caw could see the family sitting around the Christmas tree, now decorated with the holly that Jeb had picked. There sitting on the table was a plate of his favorite cookies that he knew just had to be for him.

As all the lights were turned off in the house, the only light left was the bright reflection of the moon on the snow.

It was so quiet it was almost eerie. Suddenly, Caw thought he heard sleigh bells. Looking towards the house, he saw a white-bearded man in a red suit carrying a large bag placing gifts under the tree.

*He’s eating one of my cookies and taking the rest!* said Caw, I’ll have to investigate this. As he flew to the house, to Caw’s surprise, the man suddenly appeared on the roof. Reaching into his bag he found just what he was looking for, a basket filled with Christmas cookies. Placing the handle on Caws beak, he stepped into his sleigh and disappeared into the night, saying, “Merry Christmas Caw, Merry Christmas---Ho-Ho-Ho.”

Life couldn’t be better than this! Caw thought, as he settled into his nest in the barn loft. These cookies are delicious. With my tummy

full and my spirits high, I want to wish everyone a Merry Christmas and a Ho-Ho-Ho—whatever that means.