

I'm a Clown in His Circus

by Lee-Ann Khoh

He called me Jay. I called him Dr Corvid. Until the very end, we lived alone. We had no use for any other companionship. I was Dr Corvid's finest achievement until he perfected his Disintegration Ray. I was the first working prototype of Project Novus.

Dr Corvid created me in man's image without the flaws. Emotion... Fatigue... Poor health... These do not trouble me as they do Them. I served Dr Corvid, protecting him from Them and their world, protecting his work, stealing supplies from towns as required.

The Disintegration Ray consumed the last three years of his life. He worked 18 hours a day on it, and I guarded it with my life.

Until my wayward sister intervened.

Following his success with me, Dr Corvid made the fateful decision to create another, bearing female features. But Raven was unable to carry out her purpose, fleeing in search of a phenomenon she called "human touch". By this time, Dr Corvid had put Project Novus on hold and thrown all his focus into developing the Disintegration Ray. New fuel sources... Pest control... Behavioural programming. The possibilities were endless.

"You're evil," said Raven, during her last night with us. Dr Corvid glanced over at me and shook his head sadly. Raven had been spending far too much time in the towns with Them, reading their books and watching their films instead of working for Dr Corvid.

"And you know what's even worse?" Raven turned her attention to me. "You don't even know it! You're just a clown in his circus."

In hindsight, Dr Corvid should have eliminated her there and then —

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I, too, was prepared to be shut down permanently if required — but the truth was, he'd grown attached to us as more-than-experiments. So he — we — let her go. I never expected to see her again.

The night Dr Corvid died, I was on guard outside the lab, which is annexed to the main house. In the dim light, I skimmed passages from Dr Corvid's slightly scuffed copy of the Book of Genesis to pass time. Suddenly I heard a twig snap. I bounced to my feet, my rifle ready in a fluid motion.

“Who's there?” I demanded.

There was a pause, followed by the crunching of leaves that got louder as the footsteps got nearer. “Hello, Jay.”

“Raven.”

She stepped into view. “How have you been?”

“Loyal,” I replied.

Her eyes flickered over to my gun. “You know why I'm here,” she said softly.

“The Disintegration Ray.” I raised my weapon and aimed it at her head.

Our eyes locked. She cautiously inched towards me. “You can't hurt me, Jay. I'm your sister.”

“Dr Corvid is your father, then.”

“Jay, I'm doing this so no one gets hurt. Please.” She closed the remaining distance between us and, with an unreadable expression in her eyes, kissed my mouth long and hard.

Unsure of how to react, I did nothing. A heartbeat later, my gun had been loosened from my grip and was firmly clamped in Raven's hands.

I cursed at her.

She blasted the door of the lab, setting off a deafening alarm. "I'm sorry, Jay!" I felt a shot penetrate my leg, disabling my left stabiliser. I lunged at her and predictably fell face down. She stepped over me and into the lab.

I scrambled to my feet and half limped, half hopped after Raven. It was a losing battle. By the time I made it to the case housing the Disintegration Ray, it was empty. I cursed again.

"You've picked up some foul language from Them."

Raven's silhouette emerged once more from the shadows, a wry smile twisting at the corner of her mouth.

"You won't get away with this," I told her.

She looked up, and I heard the frantic *whop-whop-whop* of helicopter blades approaching. "Maybe I won't," she replied, opening the back door and exposing the lab to the chopper's bright lights, as well as the mini-cyclone of leaves and grass it caused.

Raven started towards the helicopter, before turning back to me. I noticed Dr Corvid off to the side, gaping forlornly at her. Raven acknowledged us both with a slight nod. She tossed the rifle back in our direction with a Hail Mary-like pass. It landed on the grass near Dr Corvid's feet.

Raven sprinted into the helicopter and took off as I stumbled

towards my weapon.

I lifted the gun and pumped bullets into the air but my shots barely grazed the helicopter each time. It was obvious Raven was behind the controls now. She knew me too well, and seemed to anticipate what I would do a few seconds before I could do it.

When the chopper was an invisible speck, I put my weapon down and limped towards a cowering Dr Corvid. Brilliant as he was, he could not escape the affliction of human emotions and I could not guard him against them.

"Raven is a fool," Dr Corvid whimpered. "Does she honestly believe her human lackey can be trusted? They're all the same." He held up the Book of Genesis that I'd dropped at the front of the lab and threw it into the ground with disgust. "Always fighting over money or fighting over faith. They'll use my work to destroy us."

"Dr Corvid..."

He looked up, his eyes like murky little pools, before gesturing at my left leg. "She damaged your stabiliser."

"I can fix it," I replied. "What will you do?"

"I don't know," he admitted. "My heart can't take this."

"That's what I thought," I murmured. "I am sorry I failed you."

I squeezed the gun to his head. This time I fired a single shot and I didn't miss.

Then I sat down and began to repair my leg. I would need to be fully operational in order to find Raven and avenge Dr Corvid.

