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## Hitchcock and the Birds

by Sue Hitchcock

No! Not that Hitchcock! - Me!

My husband's ancestors came from the other side of the river.

But the birds? – well I'm not sure.

When we moved to Eastbourne four years ago, I loved our neighbours, a pair of jackdaws nesting amongst the chimneys on the house backing ours. They're still there. Don't they mate for life?

Things have changed this year. It was only a couple of days after the first lockdown started during the pandemic. My husband had run a fever and in the morning he was still in bed. I had taken him a cup of tea and was eating my breakfast in front of the t.v. for company. We've blocked the ornamental fireplace with a bookcase to stop the draught, as we don't burn fossil fuels any more. The wind rattles around in the chimney, which is still open. That morning the noise was different – more insistent, frantic even. It had to be a bird, a jackdaw and I couldn't imagine how I could grab it to get it out, with its sharp beak and claws. I phoned the Council, the R.S.P.C.A., anyone I could think of, but we were isolating.

How could they physically help? I left a message on the answerphone of someone in our street, who had left a leaflet offering help. The internet had better suggestions, but I would still need help, so I knew I would have to bother my husband. How could I have had so little faith in him? He dressed and knew exactly what to do.

We closed the lounge door, opened the window as wide as it would go and then edged the bookcase away from the fireplace. Sensible bird! It flew straight out of the window, but surprise! A second bird followed, less accurately bumping the window frame on the way out. Strangely, my husband felt much better, cured of whatever ailed him.

This Covid year has dragged on and we've been alone together all the time. There have been events like another problem, when he tripped and cut open his forehead. We've argued with the Gas Board, who no longer provide us fuel for heating. We've learned to shop with deliveries, but the daily walk for exercise has been the most important.

For me watching birds has been surprising. At first I was delighted at the daily spiralling assembly of all our local jackdaws. The one windy day in the early autumn our neighbouring pair were watching, one to east, one to west, vigilant on their chimney pot. Then came the starlings from Europe, whistling, screaming, bunches of seven or more on each television aerial, their small claws not suited to chimneys.

Now I see flocks of jackdaws competing with clouds of starlings, even rooks and once a flock of tiny birds, gone too soon to identify. Are they filling the space we have left, now we are housebound?

Or might they attack?