

THE BALTIMORE RAVEN

By Robert Bowie Johnson, Jr.

Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered
weak and weary,
Over the departure of the Colts from
Baltimore,
While I nodded, nearly napping, suddenly
there came a tapping,
As of someone gently rapping, rapping at my
clubroom door.
“Some football fool,” I muttered, “tapping at my
clubroom door—
Only this and nothing more.”

Ah, distinctly I remember, it was playoff time
in December;
And no team could raise my spirits as the Colts
had done before.
Eagerly I wished the morrow—vainly I had
sought to borrow
From memorabilia surcease of sorrow
for the lost Colts of Baltimore,
For the proud and valiant team that thrilled
me with each score—
Absent here for evermore.

And the thought of cheering on the Redskins
chilled me,
Killed me—filled me with revulsions
never felt before;
So that now, to still the beating of my heart,
I stood repeating
“Is it a Colt Corralster tapping sadly at my
clubroom door—
Another baffled fan—angry, sorry,
and pigskin poor?”
Or could this be what we’ve been praying for?

Presently my soul grew stronger; hesitating then
no longer,
“Sir,” said I, “or Madam, truly your forgiveness
I implore;
But the fact is I was napping, and so gently
you came rapping,
And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my
clubroom door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you”—here I
opened wide the door—
Darkness there and nothing more.

Deep into that darkness peering, long I stood
there wondering, dreaming—

Oh, those times Big Daddy just wouldn’t let
the other team score!
But the silence was unbroken, and the still-
ness gave no token,
And the only words there spoken: “The Colts
are gone from Baltimore.”
This I whispered, and an echo murmured back,
“The Colts are gone from Baltimore.”
Merely this and nothing more.

Back into my clubroom turning, memories of
Gino and Artie a-churning,
Soon again I heard a tapping somewhat louder
than before.
“Surely,” said I, “surely that is something in
my window well;
Let me see, then, what thereat is, and this
mystery explore—
Tis the wind and nothing more!”

Open here I flung the shutter, when, with many
a flirt and flutter
In there stepped a stately Raven of the saintly
days of yore,
Not the least obeisance made he; not a moment
stopped nor stayed he;
But perched upon my bust of Johnny, just above
my clubroom door—
Perched and sat, and nothing more.

Then this ebony bird beguiling my sad fancy
into smiling,
By the powerful and stern determination of the
countenance it wore,
“Though thy crest be sleek and shaven, thou,”
I said, “are sure not craven,
You wise and agile ancient Raven feasting
on this Chesapeake shore—
Reveal thy message, make it quick, my heart is sore.”
Then the bird said,
“The Ravens win in Baltimore.”

Much I marveled this majestic fowl to hear
discourse so plainly,
Though its answer little meaning—little rel-
evancy bore;
For we cannot help agreeing that no living
human being
Ever yet was blessed with seeing bird above his
clubroom door—
Bird or beast upon Johnny’s sculptured bust above
his clubroom door, saying
“The Ravens win in Baltimore.”

But the Raven, sitting nobly on Johnny's bust
spoke only
Those five words, as if his soul in those five words
he did outpour.
Nothing farther then he uttered—not a feather
then he fluttered—
Till I scarcely more than muttered, "Other
teams have flown before—
On the morrow you will leave me, as our team
left town before."
Quoth the Raven: "Nevermore."

Startled at the stillness broken by reply so aptly
spoken,
"Doubtless," said I, "what it utters is its only
stock and store.
Brought from some unhappy master for whom
stadium disaster
Followed fast and followed faster till his songs
one burden bore—
On the sunlit shores of Erie, they shall play
never—nevermore."

But the Raven still beguiling my curiosity into
smiling,
Straight I pushed my black recliner in front
of bird, and bust and door;
Then, upon the leather sinking, I betook myself
to linking
Fancy unto fancy, thinking what this triumphant
bird of yore—
What this trim, poised, unbridled bird of yore
meant in croaking
"The Ravens win in Baltimore."

Thus I sat engaged in guessing, but no syllable
expressing
To the fowl whose fiery eyes now burned into
my bosom's core;
This and more I sat divining, with my heart
a-thump and pining
For Chuck's smooth voice so rich and deep,
so proud and sure:
"Unitas drops back, he looks deep,
there's Lenny Moore!"

Then, methought, the air grew denser, per-
fumed by a magic censer
Swung by gridiron angels whose foot-falls tinkled
on my red tiled floor.
"Trickster," I cried, "why do you tease me about
the lost Colts from Baltimore?
Tell me, oh, tell me, how shall we ever
those glory days restore?"

Then the bird said,
"The Ravens win in Baltimore."

"Prophet!" said I, "thing of wonder! prophet still,
if bird or phantom!—
Whether tempter sent, or whether tempest
tossed thee here ashore,
Desolate yet all undaunted, in this town by
Irsay haunted,
Tell me truly, I implore, is football back on
the Chesapeake shore?"
Quoth the Raven,
"The Ravens win in Baltimore."

"Prophet!" said I, "fowl of fortune—prophet
still of mirth and more!
By that heaven that bends above us—by that
God we both adore—
Tell this fan with expectation growing, if, what
you speak you're knowing,
Our Sundays loud again with the champion-
ship roar,
Alive with great defense and the last
second score."
Then the bird said,
"The Ravens win for Baltimore."

"Be those words the sign of blessing, bird of
greatness! the future confessing—
Linebackers as tough as Pellington, receivers
as shrewd as Berry and Orr!
I take a black plume as a token of that truth
thy soul hath spoken!
Leave my happiness unbroken! Adorn the bust
above my door!
Lay thy beak across my heart—let's hear it again:
'Touchdown Baltimore!'"

And the Raven, never flitting, still is sitting,
still is sitting
On that treasured bust of Johnny just above my
clubroom door,
And his eyes are the picture of a victor—
contenders creaming,
And the lamp-light o'er him streaming
throws his shadow on the floor,
And my joy from out that shadow leaps
for what's in store:
The Ravens win it all for Baltimore!