

Junior Division, Prose

Sadie Butt, St. John's

Crows and Crowds (an excerpt)

When I was younger, I often watched my aunt calling for her birds. She would stand on the rotting boards of her deck, the old slide hanging off the side, and call out to them. They knew her voice. Her dog always sidled up beside her, black fur streaking his back and long nails scraping against the planks — a dog made to run unhindered in the forest. The birds always came but waited for a moment a few trees down from us because they saw a face they did not recognize. I stared at them, my eyes wide in childlike anticipation, before my aunt told me to watch from inside, because they only recognized her.

They only felt safe with her face, feeding from her hand, landing on her railing. They knew her.

Beady black eyes take in the girl raking in the yard below — dark feathers grazing the low hanging clouds. The bird surveys the ordered, clean backyards, the trees laid bare and vulnerable, darkness quickly advancing. It observes a brown dog sniffing the ground — a leaf falling slowly, pushed by wind. It observes the girl, doing the meaningless work of cleaning up those fallen leaves, even though more and more will come down. Even though if they are left, they will simply decay and feed the ground.

The bright eyes land on a dark lump on the ground, its feathers fluttering in the breeze. The crow descends, sticking out its scaled claws to gracefully grasp a bare tree branch.

One recognizes one, in death.

The crow scolds, alarming its kin to this loss of life. One crow, then two, then four more, all calling out to the sky, circling the corpse. Their minds whirr, for even while they feel this grief, they still wonder if they may die the same way. Their fear — their instincts.

The girl watches, her eyes bouncing from the trees to the sky, staring at this murder.