

Senior Division, Short Fiction

Beth Ryan, St. John's

Rose Garden (an excerpt)

When she opens her front door, Angela sees a flash of black moving in the muddy grass across the street. Two large crows have a smaller bird pinned down, their heads looming over its little body. It looks like a starling or a finch - Tom would know the difference. They are picking at it viciously with their shiny black beaks, jabs and thrusts that seem impossible for the little one to resist. But it flaps its tiny wings frantically as it struggles to escape. Angela runs towards them and stomps her feet once she is just inches away. The crows are momentarily startled by her presence and fly up in a windstorm of black feathers. The bird is barely moving now. But the crows are relentless and descend again. After a frenzied few seconds, they pause and observe their prey - the little bird is lying still, its feathers mottled with blood. Angela does not stay to watch them pick apart the carcass. She goes back to the house and cries, frustrated by her helplessness and annoyed by her own sentimentality.

Tom would be dismissive at this moment.

“It’s the natural order, for God’s sakes! What did you expect? A crow’s got to eat and that little bird looks like supper.”

He was big on telling hard truths, lecturing her about climate change, informing her that her fastidious washing of the empty pop tins and milk cartons for the recycling bag was pointless.

“Big business has sold people a bill of goods,” he would say. “Climate change is on their heads - not ours. But they try to make us feel responsible. As if we could change what they have wrought.”

“I know,” she’d say. “But at least I feel like I’m doing something. I can’t just sit back and do nothing.”

“Do what you need to do,” he’d say with an indifferent wave of his hand. “The planet is burning anyway.”