

The Crow.

If the sheep had still been around to graze the pastures, the toppling water tower would have startled them enough to lose their wool there and then. Instead, the rusty shell of the tank cracks unceremoniously over the grass and weeds that have begun to consume it, and its contents spray far and wide in a few seconds of elated freedom, before settling and trickling down the blades of green. The nearby farmhouse has relied on the water tower as a source for years, but it too has fallen. Since the man left.

The woman sits in a worn chair on the wraparound verandah that once supported so many purposeful gaits, but now droops with age, almost caressing the ground. She holds a hot drink in trembling hands, oblivious to the flies that have claimed the sandwich which teeters on a lopsided table beside her. The crow eyes her suspiciously. It's perched nearby, on the edge of a rusted barrel. Watching patiently. In the far field, a mouse scurries from a shed into the overgrown grass, and then the crow is off. Hunting.

The crow returns hours later to thick black smoke, twisting into the sky as if to strangle it. The woman stands before a pile of belongings that are being eaten feverishly by greedy flames. She looks down at a picture frame for a long moment, before pitching it into the destruction. Next come ties and shirts and books and CDs, one after one disappearing into the orange and yellow and quickly reduced to ash. She screams suddenly. Inhumanely. Startled, the crow is off again, chasing the smoke into the dusk.

The next day the crow returns just as an unfamiliar vehicle comes to a stop out the front of the farmhouse. A stranger walks back and forth in front of the house, before finally knocking on the door and entering. The crow leaves to search for and snatch up a snail, returning hours later to find the woman alone, entering the stranger's car and maneuvering it slowly to the nearby pond. She exits just before its wheels kiss the murky eddies and it continues without her, travelling down into the choking weeds and uncharted depths.

For the rest of the day the woman chops wood with a large iron axe. Aggressive and erratic. The crow watches from a nearby stump until the instrument is flung its way with an unmatched fury. It spreads its obsidian wings and escapes to safety. Chased by howls. When it returns, the woman clings once more to her axe as she marches towards her car. A mouse scurries under her bonnet. The woman pulls out of her property. The crow follows her down the road.

An absent sun pales the sky to a murky blue-grey as the woman parks her car before a modest suburban house. She stands at the entrance and screams at the brick structure until she chokes on her tears. Finally, a man exits the house. The crows' attention is on the mouse, which has decided to stick its head out from under the woman's car. It walks forward. Tentatively. Unaware of the stalking crow. Without warning, the woman raises the axe from behind her back and brings it down on the man as the crow dives for its prey. The mouse doesn't stand a chance.

A distraught woman and her child run from the side of the house, onto the street. The axe is lifted again. The woman strides towards them. From the end of the street, a song plays in time to flashing red and blue. In a nearby tree, the crow spots a nest of eggs and soars towards them. The woman raises the axe on the child, as another bird intercepts the crow with ferocity, sending it spiraling. From the flashing lights sounds a terrible *bang*. The crow falls.