

## Crows...

By Stephanie Liu, grade 6

Plonk! I stared out at the dirty, murky water in front of me, watching a round stone sink before washing away. Tiny waves rippled out, before eventually diminishing back into the water.

My hand grappled for another rock to throw, but instead, I winced when a sharp point tried to insert itself into my pointer finger. I picked the stone up and cradled it in my palm, running my thumb over the crevice now stained with my blood. Once, then again.

The wind slammed unforgivingly against my figure, and I shivered into myself as the stars slowly showed themselves, one by one.

I used to hate the night. It was just... too dark. And I'd always get the unsettling feeling of someone watching me. You can tell how that'd creep a girl out, right? It didn't matter if it was still early- like today, with the days shortening with the upcoming winter following the autumn days- I'd never go out after sunset. Now? It was the only time when it was quiet enough for my mind to function properly without being overrun with noise and voices that'd always be just a *fraction* too loud- don't get me wrong, it still felt like I'm being leered at, but that's a small price to pay to actually be able to *think*.

I brought my arm back, and hurled the chunk of earth as far I could, watching it sail towards the dark, shadowy sky, before also diving under the water with a tiny *splash*.

It's ironic, I thought, that us humans are very much like that tiny piece of nature. I mean, we can travel to as many places as we possibly can, go out and meet with friends as many times as we want to, but inevitably, like the rock, we will always perish under the water.

As I tore my gaze away from the now-placid waters, blood bubbled up from under my skin. I stared at it for a moment, mesmerized as red began to drip and blot blemishes on the surface of the lake.

The smell of salty air invaded my nostrils, and the soft glow of the stars dotting the night sky ricocheted off the turbid water.

A caw that sounded above me dragged my attention upwards, and my azure eyes darted to where a crow was circling above me, its black feathers glossy in the moonlight.

Since I moved here with my parents when I was little, it's been the only other living thing brave enough to venture to these cliffs and it'd reminded me of a superstition I'd heard somewhere that stated that crows could sense someone's aura and they protected others from negative energy. If that were true, I'm glad that this one hasn't decided to peck me to pieces yet.

Placing a hand onto the jagged rocks, I pushed to my feet. Sand crunched behind me and I whirled around to spot Clover, my best friend stumbling her way down the slope that leads to the wooden dock on my right, her brown, smooth as satin hair whipping her across the face like she'd committed some really serious sin against it.

“Hey,” she breathed, as she came to a stop before me, voice barely audible through the wind. “You know how that rich ‘Earl’ guy wanted to buy the cliffs and build a hotel here or something?”

I did. It’s been plastered on every wall for the past month, and her dad, along with the majority of our town, thinks it’ll make a boatload of money, but personally I think he’s full of squat.

Without waiting for my answer, she continues, “Well, they’ve sold it to him.” I blink processing the words floating between us as her green eyes darted to my blue-grey ones, grimacing as she shot me an apologetic look.

“I strongly dislike your dad now,” I stated eventually, and her cherry red lips- that have probably been slathered with too much lip gloss- parted to huff out a laugh. “Me too.”

Being the youngest daughter of the mayor, Clover didn't get to experience what she considers ‘fun’. Just yesterday, she requested to go cliff jumping off the bajillion foot high cliffs. Obviously, that idea was shut down fast.

“Just thought you’d want to know,” she added softly, eyes flickering back to me, and I just nodded along, distracted by my thoughts. “Yeah... thanks.”

As my eyes trailed her retreating form, her words sunk their brutal claws into my flesh, and their meaning finally registered- the dock and the beach and the cliffs and the lake that I’d loved so, so much, would no longer allow me here unless I’d booked a night at Earl’s ridiculously expensive hotel-to-be.

The next day, I stood in front of my house, across the street from the cliffs. I’d watched the construction workers as they arrived one by one, each dressed in flashing

neon orange vests.

When the sun finally rose from its slumber, late in the morning when the blues mixed with the yellows and pinks is when the man himself, Earl Grey arrived in his SUV, driven by some overpaid manservant. For the next half an hour, or so, he spoke animatedly to the workers, gesturing wildly and I couldn't help but glare the entire time, hoping I would be able to somehow burn half his face off. The watch on his wrist glinted in the sunlight, and it'd caught my eye. I wondered if he'd even notice it gone. I thought not. Rich, dirty, 'perfect', businessmen like him would most definitely own way too many valuables to keep track of each and every one.

His navy, tailored suit flapped in the wind, and he noticed me behind the throng of journalists and reporters desperate for any scrap of attention like a stray dog would beg for a warm bed. He flashed me an easy, practiced smile, showing all his perfectly straight, white teeth as he waved politely. My face scrunched into a sneer unconsciously, and I turned away.

It was almost like he knew he was ruining my entire life for the rest of my existence- okay, maybe not exactly that but still- all while remaining all smug and egotistical about it. Like, how dare he come and try to turn every building in sight into his? And with a name like 'EARL GreY.' Wasn't that like, a type of tea? I knew the British loved their tea but enough to name their child after one? That's a new low so low it's probably underground beneath the depths of hell.

My eyes darted up as birds squawked loudly, diving in front of the construction vehicles like they were trying to be a massive headache on purpose but the thing that

caught my attention was that there were three of them. Weird. Where'd the other two come from? Narnia?

After giving it some thought, I still didn't have a reasonable enough answer so I gave up and shrugged it off, before turning on my heel and striding back to my house.

The construction crew left at about seven that night and returned at eight the next morning. I'd observed this pattern the following fortnight from my bedroom window, making a mental note about how with each day that passed, the birds seemed to multiply and show up just to wreak havoc for the fun of it.

I bit back a smile as I watched Mr. Rich-Guy-That's-Named-After-Tea-And-Apparently-Cake-too angrily swat at a persistent crow pecking at his wrist. Serves him right.

By now, the birds have become unbearably large in number- and I mean legit, they were on every surface the eye could see. So far, no one, not even the Rich Dude could figure out a way to permanently get rid of them. The other day, he'd assembled a crew and they'd managed to kill off around 32 birds. They gave up after the crows figured out how high they could shoot and flocked just above that line.

A week later, Earl called off the hotel. I found out about this while reading the school paper and when I rushed home that day, I'd found the beach practically deserted, with only the birds hopping about. Throwing my bag onto the ground, I sprinted onto the dock, a sorry bursting from my lips as the crows scrambled away from my thudding sneakers, and I plunged into the icy water.

It's the bird(s), the cliffs, and I again, except now, the creatures were *everywhere*. Black dotted every surface on the sandy shores, fluttering away when the waves crashed too close for comfort.

Who knew the solution to a problem that probably shouldn't have concerned me in the first place would be pesky, overbearing crows that come bearing gifts from time to time. Like the obnoxiously expensive watch that weighed down my pocket.

Hopefully, the crows could stay. It's calm when they're here. Serene, even. Well, to some level with all the incessant cawing.

As the sun dipped just below the horizon, darkness descended over me and I watched as the birds soared upwards before being consumed by the night sky.