



THE BOY

The Beginning The story begins on a Friday afternoon, some time in summer roughly 40 years ago. The boy's father is given a farm 700 kilometres away in the south of the country, near the unstable border. There, he will start a new life as a farmer living off the earth and selling crops and cattle to the nearby military base. This is not unusual, single males are paid handsomely

by the state to move to here, marry local women and have kids, gradually swedifying the gene pool. He does exactly that: falls in love with a local girl, marries her and start having kids. Their first child is a girl, born in 1965, and their second child, our boy, is born three years later.

The farm is not far away from civilisation,

but for our boy, the distance is enormous. He dreams about the city that he has never seen. Not many other people live close by, and the only ones we will be focusing on now are Father, Mother, Grandma, and the old couple. On our boy's fifth birthday, the war starts. Even though the front is only one hour away by car, they are seldom reminded of it. Sometimes, a stray aircraft will pass over the farm. Then all work stops and everyone is looking at the sky wondering whether it is friendly or not. But they are not afraid. No one is going to bomb a small farm in the middle of nowhere and our boy waves to the aircrafts, friendly or not. Sometimes, they hear the sound of the cannons like a far away thunder. Once, soldiers stopped to fix a broken tire on their jeep. Every other week, a deserter stops to beg for a hot meal before running off deep into the woods never to be seen again.

When our boy turns six, the war is still raging. In fact, it will rage for his entire life. The front hasn't budged an inch. It is summer, and his father is harvesting the first crops and the fields are full of crows eating leftovers in the wake of the harvester. Our boy is sitting in the kitchen window with his Grandmother, who is pointing out to him the patterns in which

the birds fly. "Something really bad is going to happen", she tells him, over and over, pointing at the patterns in the sky made by the birds. Her family has been living here for God know how long, and living here means getting to know the birds. His Mother assures him that nothing is going to happen, and sends him off to play with his birthday present, a paper kite.

The boy is running over the fields with the kite behind him on a string. He doesn't look where he is going, he just runs and runs and runs until he cannot see the farm anymore. All around him, birds are flying, black crows it seems. They are forming the same pattern as before, but he is unable to understand them. And after all, his mother told him not to worry. So he runs. And just when the farm vanishes out of sight, it happens. Something grabs his kite and drags it to the ground. The string cuts into his hand and it starts to bleed. He looks at the blood pouring from his hand and does not notice The Old Woman under the trees. A string leads from the thing that captured his kite and up to a nail just above her head where a tiny bell is attached to it. She quickly loosens the kite and follow its string until she finds the boy. Without a word, she grabs his hand and pulls it towards her face and start licking the

blood. Her tongue feels old and dry against his skin. She ties the string around his hands and leads him off into the woods. Whenever she feels he is lagging behind, she pulls hard on the string and it hurts. He sobs and his legs tremble. The woman carries a wooden basket full of dead crows. She is a bird catcher, and Father says they don't exist anymore.

The Old Man is waiting outside the cottage. He touches our boy's hair and face with his old hands. He smiles. Then they force him inside. It smells of crows' corpses in there. They tie him to a chair and start going through the basket. They sort the dead crows into two heaps. Two crows in the left and ten or fifteen in the right. The Old Man is disappointed. He shovels all crows in the right heap into the burning fire. The smell is awful. They start plucking the remaining two birds and put the feathers in a drawer that's already full of them. They then turn their attention to the boy.

Our boy is so sweet and innocent, and his skin is so soft. They are old and their skin is chapped and leathery. They undress him, careful not to damage him or his clothes. They carry him to the bed and run their hands all over his body. They are panting, and looking at each other and

not at our boy. They are careful never to touch each other, only his skin. The Old Man licks his wound, just as the woman did, even though the blood has long since stopped running. The boy can feel his erection through his rags, hard against his naked leg. The old couple take it real slow and the boy loses track of time. He loses consciousness and wakes up with a bad feeling. He vomits on the bed spread.

Afterwards, they bathe him carefully in a large pot with herbs and a smelly soap. His small penis shrinks in the cold water. For a second, he thinks they are going to cook a meal of him, and when he asks, his first words to them, they break into laughter. They take him out of the water and dry him, long and hard, with a rough towel and help him put his clothes back on as his arms still wont move. Then they thank him. They fixate him with their tiny eyes that seem sunken too far into the head and it is like being hypnotised by a snake. "It was long since we met anyone like you", they repeat over and over. "We have not made love for ages." "You have no idea what joy you brought us, little one". They lead him through the woods back to the fields and hand him the kite. It isn't broken. "Do come again." There are no birds around their house, and the crows on the field go mad

when the old couple emerge from the woods. They vanish without a trace and our boy begins to cry as never before.

A crow lands besides him, flops its head over on the side. The boy stops crying. He sees the crows making their patterns, flying high up and diving straight down towards the ground. It looks dangerous. He walks towards the crows and they move away a couple of meters every time he gets too close. He follows them a bit and look, there is the farm, just behind the fields and the hedges. The harvester is not moving. It is like looking at a painting.

When our boy comes home, he finds his mother in tears. Grandma is dead. She died looking at the birds. Her heart just stopped beating. "She was right after all", Father says. But he means not what happened to our boy, and not matter how hard he wants to tell them, he seems unable to find the right words. Instead, he starts crying and Mother takes him in her arms. He can feel her breasts press against his body, but unlike before, it is not comforting anymore. He feels a burning sensation through his body, and a slight queasiness comes over him. He breaks lose from her hug and runs out of the house and into the fields. This time, he does not go too far.

Mother and Father plait a coffin for Grandma out of trees' branches and they bury her in the treetop of the tall oak in the middle of the wheat field. There, she will be eaten by the crows that in return will carry her soul to the sun. They boy spends days looking at the tree. A big swarm of black birds are screaming and circling over the coffin. He sees their tiny movements as they eat at the body. The head dashes out, pries the beak into the flesh and rips out a small scrap of meat.

In his anger, he throws rocks at them. One crow is flying straight at him, and he hits it on the wing bringing it to the ground. He runs up to it but once he is right next to it, he doesn't know what to do. The bird looks at him with eyes that look familiar, almost human. It croaks at him, a sad sound with a familiar ring to it, but does not run away when he comes closer. It's wing is badly hurt and it seems unable to fly any longer stretches. When talking to the crow, the words never seem so hard to find as they are with everyone else. Whenever the boy looks over his shoulder, the crow will be there. Looking at him. Our boys knows who it is. But who would believe him if he told them?