

Honorable Mention #1
If the Nest Should Fall
Chris Clemens, Toronto, Ontario

As his last sibling tumbled from the nest in a scurry of feathers, Young Crow hunched down in the mouldy straw, reluctant to join his wing-brood aloft. Danger lurked everywhere in avian life, he knew, in the treetops and along the thin black wires. In the berry bushes below skulked the terrifying predator who had days earlier caught first Elder Wing, then Mama Beak.

No, Young Crow was fine here, safe in the echo of their dying screams. Certainly he was feeling peckish, and yet—

Caw! Fly, scrawny! screeched the other fledglings, circling back across the clouds. Caw! The murderous feline comes.

Through interlaced branches Young Crow spied tawny fur, scrabbling claws, snarling teeth. She can't climb this high, he hoped dimly, desperately, but in the furious slitted eyes of the cat he saw the truth of the matter, and seized one final lesson from his recently digested parents: you might not be ready to go, but sometimes you don't get to choose.

Crow unfurled and flexed his wings before leaping into the uncaring sky, talons extended; fixated not on escape, but on revenge.

Chris Clemens lives in Toronto, surrounded by raccoons. His stories have appeared in *Invisible City Lit*, *Black Hare Press*, *The Drabblecast*, *Apex* magazine, and elsewhere.