

# Long Paddock

**PETER BOYLE**

*Crows*  
*in memory of Val Plumwood*

The sound of crows is known to us for its mournfulness, its insistent black edge to a bright world. There was a day when she stepped into a clearing and surprised crows at their other speech, the cheerful joyous rapture they know from time to time when no one is about, when they are completely free of all other creatures' expectations. It did not last long, less than a minute before the crows perceived her startled presence. In that minute how taken home she felt to the world's deep joy.

Coda:

Or perhaps as a girl what had happened was this: for one moment she became a crow and heard crows the way crows hear themselves. Nothing has changed in the singing of the crows, the same pitches and frequencies spliced against a clearing in sunlight. Only for this one time her ears, her entire being perceived these sounds according to the delicate inner coding of a crow. Just like the small brown and grey birds, so drab to our eyes, that to each other are splashes of the brightest iridescent colour, so, through a strange grace, she had perceived that day for those few moments as a crow does, had grasped their smooth eloquent harmonies gliding between the interrupted stuttering of the trees.

*Conversation While Waiting*

Who has gone furthest away from me?

Is the sky to be trusted  
and, when I die,  
will my feet point left or right?

It is night now  
and the trucks delivering forgiveness  
and frozen fiestas  
have still not arrived.

Can the hidden alphabet  
be made plain?

A few steps beyond the deserted esplanade  
light and the reassuring hum  
of distant planets vanish.  
Far from me  
the waves have gathered  
to confer in their unknown language  
and I'm waiting.