

“Small Wings and Great Things”

Small wings can do great things, his father once told him. Now, as Jimmy looked out over the sleeping city from his tree branch at the top of the hill, he took the last of his mother’s breakfast and readied himself for flight. It was the coldest day he had known; the kind of cold where roosters slept in and the townspeople stayed inside. Jimmy alone had seen the sleigh above. The midnight drops were quiet but still Jimmy saw and he had contented himself to wait until the children rose to see in their windows what had come but then Jimmy saw the bandits, too. From the east, from the south, lurked ten packs of figures with empty bags that soon would be full if Jimmy didn’t warn them. Through the grey light Jimmy watched the evil flocks separate toward chimneys and doors. His parents would forbid his mission so he told them he was cold and was going to get more filling for the nest. They would open presents when he returned.

Off Jimmy went. Out of the tree, down the hill, swooping over homes and roads, fast as a stealth, quiet as a seed. He went straight to the bell tower and pecked it with his beak. It didn’t ring. He went to the flagpole near the school and tried unfurling the limp material but it was too heavy. He ventured into a doghouse but the animal was too cold to be aroused. In the center of town, Jimmy went to a grand Christmas tree and batted the star off with his tail feathers. No one heard the crash. There was a scratching at many locks and a shuffling over many roofs. Jimmy chirped. The town slept. The robbers were almost in.

The little bird flew between houses, over fences, and under bridges looking for a solution. Breathless, he stopped near a trashcan and sobbed. He began to shiver with cold and regret, then the sound of claws against metal breached his small ears and Jimmy looked up to see a crow. The crow regarded him without interest and continued searching for his breakfast. Up went Jimmy’s head, as if shocked by inspiration. It was never too cold for crows. It was never too cold for pigeons. But Jimmy also knew that a crow could eat him.

With a last look at the larcenies in action, Jimmy gulped what could be his last breath and approached the crow.

Christmas trash was the best kind of trash, for as Jimmy spoke, the crow’s head popped up with a large biscuit in its mouth. Quickly, Jimmy pleaded with the larger bird and as the biscuit disappeared, Jimmy braced himself for attack. Instead, the bird flew off. A moment later, twelve crows were knocking the bell in its tower, eleven pigeons were raising eleven dogs, ten crossbills had noisily wrangled ten cats out of their own cans. Owls raised roofs, seagulls pecked doors, finches banged windows. Wings went down, beaks went in, tailfeathers swept and sounded and a great cawing louder than ten thousand roosters finally drew heads from beds. The lurkers stopped lurking and the creepers stopped creeping. The town, now wildly awake with birdsong and Christmas cheer, was saved.

Eventually, the birds retreated and Jimmy found the crow that had helped him. There was no biscuit in the bird’s mouth this time, but he soon had his Christmas meal.