THE CLAIMING

A raven flies into the frame from upper right and lands on fence lower left

NARRATOR
A sharp scream shattered the early morning quiet. The raven ruffled its feathers and cocked its head. It peered at the large farmhouse through obsidian eyes.

Door of house opens

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
Moments later, the porch door cracked against the side of the house and a small child stumbled into the open.

Child stumbles out

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
The raven shifted from side to side and bobbed its head. Wind whipped the child's nightgown around her legs as she raced down the steps, tripping her at the bottom. She went down hard.

She looked over her shoulder and a dry sob wracked her little frame as she shoved herself up to her hands and knees. Long tendrils of light brown hair tangled around her face and arms.

Man follows with red splatters on hands and shirt

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
A man, tall, covered in red splatters, burst through the open doorway and the little girl scrambled to her feet with a cry of terror. She took off at a run into the large field behind the house, the man fast on her heels.

The raven cawed and flapped its wings, the glossy black feathers shining in the breaking dawn.

(MORE)
The child screamed again as her pursuer caught her hair, wrapping it in his beefy fist and yanking her back. Her arms flailed and she struggled to free herself.

Raven flaps wings; man yanks child to him

NARRATOR (CONT’D)

Again, the raven cawed. It stretched and flapped, its talons digging into the soft wood of the fence as though to keep itself rooted to the spot despite the powerful beat of its wings.

The little girl kicked and screeched. Small fingers clawed and the man howled in pain as she sunk her teeth into the hand he'd tried to silence her with. He cursed and threw her small body away from him.

Man tosses girl away

NARRATOR (CONT’D)

Like a ragdoll, she flew through the air and landed hard against the ground. Air left her lungs on a whoosh and blood pooled from the back of her head. She did not move.

Man steps toward girl; raven swoops in

NARRATOR (CONT’D)

The man stepped toward her limp body and the raven screeched as it took flight. It swooped at the man, pecking at his arm, his shoulder. His head.

Man backhands raven; it falls to the ground

NARRATOR (CONT’D)

The man backhanded the bird and it fell to the ground near the child with a dull thud, its neck twisted at a wrong angle. Blood flowed from the raven to mingle with the child's before both seeped into the dry, hungry earth like some kind of pagan offering.
Man moves toward girl; other ravens swoop in

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
The man moved again, but another raven swooped from the sky. He batted at it and another dove at him. And another, and another, and another. They landed on and around the small girl, cawing and flapping their sleek black wings. Still more, came at him with claws and beaks until her attacker stumbled away, gashes peppering his face and arms.

Man runs away; ravens converge on girl

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
Through day and night for two days the ravens stayed, keeping vigil over their small charge.

Woman arrives; knocks on door

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
Late the second day, a car pulled up the drive. An older woman got out and started up the walkway. She gave an uneasy glance toward the ravens before scurrying up the steps and knocking on the partially open screen door.

Police cars arrive

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
The birds flapped and cawed and the woman knocked harder before entering the house. Her scream sent the large black birds into a flurry before they settled around their charge once more. Soon other cars arrived, lights flashing in the waning daylight.

Police dog heads toward birds

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
A police dog bounded from one vehicle, racing toward the ravens, sending them high into the sky yet again.

(MORE)
NARRATOR (CONT’D)
One of the officers yelled for help and ran to the still body lying in the field, sleek black hair—as dark as a raven's wing—wrapped around her slender shoulders.

The officer pressed two trembling fingers at the base of the child's throat and gave a prayer of thanks when her tiny frame shuddered and she drew in a deep breath, her pulse beat strong and steady beneath his touch.

Officer brings child to ambulance

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
He gathered the child into his arms and rushed her to the awaiting ambulance where paramedics tended to wounds that turned out to be dried blood and nothing more. Not one scratch or scrape adorned her porcelain skin.

Paramedics wheel gurney with body bag past child in ambulance

Her mother hadn't been so lucky. The little girl was shielded from seeing the body bag being wheeled away on a gurney.

Girl alone in crowded playground

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
Officers whispered about the horrors that must have gone on within the large farmhouse, the terror that child must have faced.

The older woman had worked with the girl's mother. She offered to take the child for a few days until family could be located.

Days turned into weeks. The child had no family so she became a ward of the courts and the fostering began. But no family lasted long. Not for the quiet, odd little raven haired child who'd witnessed her own mother’s murder.

Hundreds of ravens in trees and on ground near girl
NARRATOR (CONT’D)

It was the birds though, that made it impossible for the child to ever be considered normal. Their ever vigilant presence frightened people. Made them whisper.

Flash sketched pictures of smiling young girl in picture frames

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
They spoke of the pictures that had been found in her home that dreadful day she’d been rescued. The pictures of a smiling child with light brown hair and twinkling light brown eyes.

The pictures that only resembled the little girl the officers had found unconscious in the field next to her home. At first, they'd thought her hair had been dyed that unnatural black and that her obsidian eyes were contacts of some sort.

Single shot of girl with raven black hair and dark obsidian eyes

NARRATOR (CONT’D)
It didn't take long to realize something more--something unexplainable--had happened to the little Crawford girl.

End Scene