

Blackbird, by Isobel Staniland.

There's a great big sycamore tree in the middle of the orchard and there's a loud noise coming from it, like *chadadada*. It makes my heart beat harder, like it's an announcement of my arrival, or a warning. I think it's a rook, or a crow or something, and I wish it would shut up because up ahead I can see Katie Ireland and Jane Bowker and if they see me I'm done for. And now my heart is really pounding and I say, under my breath, *shit shit shit*, and it's a bit calming even though I know I shouldn't say words like that.

I turn around and go back towards the wooden path that goes past the pond. I don't want to look over my shoulder to see if they've noticed me, so my head is down and I'm looking at the ground. And then I see the bird. Even though it's brown and quite big, I know that it's a baby blackbird because Dad pointed one out to me. He said that sometimes they have speckles and spots on their feathers, but it's hard to tell because this one is shivering and panicking, even more than me. It looks like it's been in a fight because one of its wings is stuck out, like a matador holding a ragged cape.

I'm feeling really sorry for it so I crouch down, wondering if I could catch it and take it home, and me and Dad could make it a nest with an old jumper and feed it worms or something. But then there's another blackbird, leaping and calling out like it's swearing at me, angry as it shouts and jumps from one fence post to another. I want to tell it that I'm not going to hurt its baby but I don't know how to so I just slowly back off, but out of the corner of my eye is a swaying shadowy shape, low to the ground, half hidden in the long grass. And I can hear that's it's growling, like an evil meditation coming from its throat. A grey cat.

Before I can think, the cat shoots out, shoots forward, and it's like the bird on the ground has exploded, feathers are everywhere. The noise is awful, loud and vicious and terrible and I know that I'm screaming but I don't mean to.

"Get AWAY," I yell, falling onto my knees and the cat runs off, as fast as it came.

But it's too late.

The fields are silent and the bird is ruined.