

# Chapter 34

Chapter 34 opens with the narrator hastily descending the stairs, deliberately avoiding the sight of the recently repaired window. Instead, their attention is diverted to the coffee table, where the vase has been placed back at its center, provoking a complex swirl of emotions. They instinctively reach for the vase and head outside to discard it in the garbage bin, feeling the rain drench them as they bury the broken vase in the bag that holds its shattered pieces from the previous night. This simple action becomes symbolic, the rain washing over them as they dispose of a reminder of the past, one that continues to haunt their thoughts. The act of throwing the vase away, while small, feels significant, representing a desire to remove remnants of the past that have become painful to carry.

As the narrator attempts to move on from the emotional weight of the vase, a crow caws loudly from the front yard, drawing their gaze upward. The tree outside is oddly full of black birds, which stirs a strange sense of nostalgia, reminding them of the first day of school when excitement had filled the air. The vivid memory of the leaves and the feelings of hope that came with the season shift to something more unsettling as the narrator approaches the tree. There, they notice Joe perched on a low branch, his talons clutching a slip of paper, and as they get closer, they read Juniper's handwriting on the note: "Dear Joe, please help us." This message sends a cold shiver down their spine, and their instinctive reaction is to back away, their eyes filling with tears. The scene is eerie, the connection between Juniper's plea and the presence of the crow leaving the narrator deeply unsettled and wondering about the unspoken communication unfolding before them.

Joe flutters down beside the narrator, who is still transfixed by Juniper's note, feeling a strange sense of urgency as the crow then hops to the ground. The narrator watches as Joe nudges something in the grass, their curiosity growing. As they lean closer to see what Joe is doing, the crow picks up a shiny object with its beak and drops it at their feet. It's their father's wedding band, an item typically kept in his wallet while he's at work. This discovery is a shocking revelation, causing the narrator to recall their father's lost wallet, a memory that resurfaces with a new understanding. The realization dawns that Juniper had not been searching the truck as initially thought; instead, she had been looking for the wallet, which she had found or perhaps even taken. The significance of this moment grows, as the connection between Juniper, Joe, and the mysterious occurrences in their lives deepens.

Holding the wedding ring in their hand, the narrator reflects on recent conversations with the ornithologist they had interviewed, learning that crows are incredibly intelligent creatures capable of understanding concepts like reciprocity and retribution. Crows are known to give gifts and hold grudges, and the narrator begins to wonder whether the crows in their yard might have some awareness of the dynamics in their household. Could Joe have found the wallet where it had been lost, or had the crow stolen it initially? This possibility raises unsettling questions about the role of these birds in their lives, and the narrator is left with a sense of wonder and unease. The enigmatic presence of Joe and the other crows lingers in the narrator's mind, suggesting that their connection to the family runs deeper than mere coincidence. As the chapter closes, the narrator is left contemplating the strange, almost mystical bond between the crows and their household, wondering what the birds might know or understand about the hidden truths of their lives.