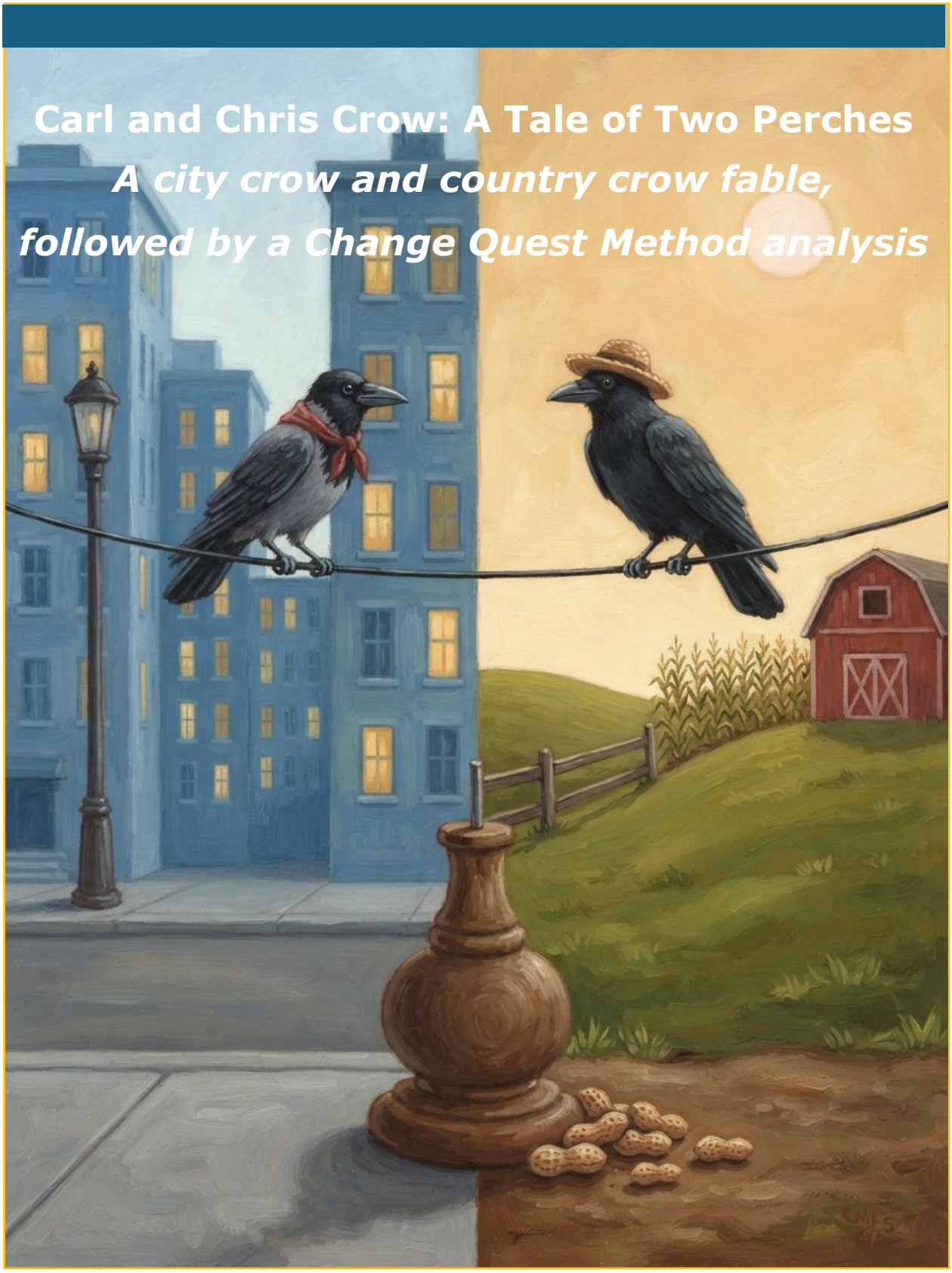
Carl and Chris Crow: A Tale of Two Perches

A city crow and country crow fable, followed by a Change Quest Method analysis



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1. The Two Cousins



Once upon a time there were two crows who were cousins.

Carl Crow lived in the city, on the third lamppost outside a busy food court. All day long the buses hissed, the people hurried by, and something new turned up on the sidewalk.

Chris Crow lived in the country, on a fence post at the edge of a cornfield. All day long the corn grew, the wind blew, and nothing much happened at all.

The cousins didn't agree about many things. But they did agree that the finest food in the whole world was a peanut in the shell. And each of them was quite sure that the other one had it easy.

2. Chris Visits the City



One spring, Carl invited Chris to the city.

"You'll love it," said Carl. "There's food everywhere. You'll never want to go home."

So Chris flew in, and Carl took him straight to the best spot in town, behind the burger place. There was a lovely pile of peanuts. And beside the peanuts sat a paper takeout box.

Chris stopped on the curb and stared at it. He had never seen such a thing. He walked around it once. Then twice. Then four times.

Carl hopped up on top of the box and cracked a peanut. "It's a *box*, Chris. It's always here."

At last Chris crept forward to take a peanut. But just then a man with a briefcase walked by, and Chris shot straight up to the rooftop.

A lady with a stroller went past. Up to the roof.

A boy eating a pretzel. Roof.

"You can't fly away from every person here," called Carl from the sidewalk. "Watch their eyes. That man is looking at his phone. That lady is looking at the bus. They don't care about us. You only go when one of them looks right at *you*."

"Where I come from," said Chris from the rooftop, "a person is a person. You don't stop to look. You just go."

By the end of the day Chris had spent more time on rooftops than on the ground, and he hadn't eaten a single peanut. That night he flew home to his quiet fence post, tired and hungry.

"The city is a fine place for Carl," he said to himself. "But I'd rather have my cornfield and a full stomach."

3. Carl Visits the Country



That summer, Chris invited Carl to the farm.

"It's peaceful," said Chris. "Nobody rushes. You'll sleep like a stone."

So Carl flew out, and Chris took him to his favourite spot by the barn. There was a lovely pile of peanuts. And beside the peanuts lay an ear of corn.

Carl froze on the fence rail.

"Chris," he whispered. "What is *that*?"

"It's corn."

"It's yellow. It has rows. Why does it have rows?"

Chris laughed so hard he nearly fell off his post. "You're the big-city crow, and you're scared of corn?"

Carl was surprised at himself too. In the city, he wasn't afraid of anything. But in the city, new things showed up every day. Most of them were good to eat. Some of them were traps. And a city crow learns not to trust anything until he has had a proper look at it.

So Carl did what crows do. He didn't charge in, and he didn't fly away. He flew up to a high branch and watched.

He watched Chris eat. He watched the corn just lie there being corn. He watched the farmer walk past without once looking up.

On his third try, Carl landed. On his fourth, he took a peanut. By sunset he was pecking at the corn himself and telling Chris it was "honestly underrated."

But that night, the farm was so quiet that Carl couldn't sleep a wink. In the morning he flew home to his noisy lamppost.

"The country is a fine place for Chris," he said to himself. "But give me my buses and my food court."

4. The Strange Wooden Thing



The seasons turned, and life went on just as before. Carl had his lamppost and his peanuts. Chris had his fence post and his peanuts.

Until one Monday morning.

Carl swooped down for breakfast and stopped in mid-air. Beside his peanuts sat something he had never seen before. It was heavy and made of carved wood, round at the bottom and skinny at the top. It didn't move. It didn't smell like food. It just sat there, being strange.

At that very same moment, five miles away, Chris landed on his fence post, looked down, and saw the very same thing beside *his* peanuts.

This time there was no cousin to laugh at the other one. Carl had never seen such a thing in the city. Chris had never seen such a thing in the country. It was new to them both.

Neither of them ate breakfast that day.

5. The Crows of Town and Country



By noon, every crow for miles had heard about the wooden thing.

In the city, some of the young crows said it was a curse and the whole flock should move to the parking garage forever. Others shrugged and said they didn't care, because they were tired. That month they'd already had a new lid on the dumpster, spikes on their favourite ledge, and a man with a leaf blower who came every Thursday. One more new thing was one too many.

In the country, some of the young crows wanted to dive at the wooden thing and peck it into toothpicks. And the eldest crow of all, Old Corvina, sat on the highest branch of the oak tree and said only one thing: "When in doubt, fly."

That evening, crows from the town and the country gathered on the old water tower that stood halfway between, as crows have always done when there was news to share. There was a great deal of squawking.

When it finally quieted down, Chris said, "All any of us wants is our breakfast back."

Everyone agreed that was true.

The next morning, nobody went near the wooden thing. Instead, the crows did what crows have always done with something strange. They found high

places, on the lampposts and the rooftops, the fence rails and the oak branches, and they **watched**.

They watched all day. The wooden thing did nothing at all.

Carl flew out to the farm to sit with the country crows. "Don't watch the people," he told them. "Watch where the people are *looking*. That farmer is looking at his tractor. That mail carrier is looking at her bag. They aren't looking at us." Most of the country crows thought this was very strange. Old Corvina didn't listen at all.

So Chris went and sat beside her on the oak branch. He didn't argue with her. Instead he asked, "Tell me about the times your rule saved you."

Corvina was quiet for a long while. Then she told him about the farmer with the loud stick, and the winter the barn crows didn't come back. Out here, she said, people who notice crows don't usually mean them well.

"That makes sense," said Chris. "Would you watch with me for a few days? From right here?"

"From right here," said Corvina. "Not one feather closer."

Meanwhile, a few of the country crows flew into the city and sat with the city crows, who were quick to decide everything, one way or the other. "Just wait," the country crows told them. "Longer than feels comfortable." It was much harder than it sounded.

On the second day, the smallest crow in Carl's flock, a curious young thing named Pip, hopped down and landed a wing's length from the wooden thing. Every crow on every rooftop held its breath. Nothing happened. Pip flew back up, looking very pleased with himself.

On the third day, Pip walked right up and took a peanut from beside it. In the country, a young crow did the same. That evening on the water tower, the city crows told the country crows, and the country crows told the city crows, and there was a great deal of happy squawking.

But the next morning, three young country crows decided they had waited long enough. They all rushed in at once, bumped into the wooden thing, and it rocked with a great hollow **THUNK**. Every crow for five miles was in the air in an instant, and Old Corvina said, "Hmph."

After that, the crows went down one at a time, and never in a crowd.

On the fifth day, Old Corvina had watched long enough. She had watched the young ones eat. She had watched the mail carrier walk past without

looking up. She had watched the THUNK, and the calm, careful mornings after it.

Then, without a word, she dropped off her branch, landed beside the wooden thing, and took a peanut.

Within minutes, half the farm flock was down there beside her.

By the end of the week, the crows of town and country were eating breakfast next to the wooden thing as if it had always been there.

6. Breakfast Again



The wooden thing, it turned out, was only the base of an old lamp. Two different people in two different places had cleaned out their attics on the same weekend. That was all it ever was.

"Most new things are just lamp bases," said Chris, cracking a peanut on the water tower.

"Maybe," said Carl. "But you don't know which ones until you've looked."

A week later, Pip spotted a shiny wire box in an alley with a single peanut inside. "Probably another lamp base!" he chirped, and went straight for it.

But Old Corvina was visiting the city for the very first time. She dropped down in front of Pip and stopped him with one wing.

"When in doubt," she said, "have a look first."

So Pip flew up to a ledge and looked. He saw the little spring door at the front of the box, and the peanut set just far enough inside to pull a crow all the way in. It was a trap. Pip found his breakfast somewhere else that day.

And so life went on. Carl was still a city crow, loud and quick, and Chris was still a country crow, slow and steady. Old Corvina still flew away whenever a farmer looked her way, and she was right to. But each of them was a little better at living in a world that keeps on changing.

Which was just as well. Because the next Monday, something new turned up. It always does.

The Change Quest Method in Brief



A journey or a quest?

Sir Ken Robinson drew a useful line between the two. On an ordinary journey, he said, you know where you're heading, where it is, and when you'll get there. A quest is different. It carries exploration and risk, and there's no certainty you'll find what you're looking for, so you travel mindfully (*Finding Your Element*, 2013).

Carl's and Chris's visits to each other were journeys. Each cousin knew exactly where he was flying and when he'd arrive. The wooden thing started a quest. Nobody knew what it was or how it would end, so the crows had to find their way as they went. Much of the change people live through at work and in life is the second kind. That's why the method is built as a quest, not a project plan.

The eight steps

The Change Quest Method treats change as a quest that people take together, in eight steps:

1. **Understand the Mission.** Define what is changing and what is not, who is affected, why, and what success looks like.
2. **Assess the Terrain.** Size up the change, how ready people are, and where resistance is likely, so you know where the ground is firm and where it is shaky.
3. **Map Your Quest Roles.** List everyone with a stake in the change and give them roles, such as Sponsors, Navigators and Champions.
4. **Understand the Quest Landscape.** Look at each stakeholder's influence, interest and contribution, and how the change affects them, then plan how to engage each one.
5. **Design the Quest-Flow.** Plan two-way communication that speaks to each group's benefits and fears, with feedback loops built in.
6. **Skill-Up the Quest Team.** Design training that fits each group, delivered through several channels, as level-up checkpoints along the way.
7. **Launch the Quest Campaign.** Roll the change out in phased waves, each with its own communication, training and support.
8. **Reinforce the Quest.** Sustain the change until the new ways of working become habits and the benefits are realized.

The Quest Compass, described later in this book, measures how the people living through the change experience each of these steps.

For the full method, see Alan Viau, *The Change Quest Method* (e-book, 2026), and the overview on his blog, *The Change Quest: A Shared Journey Through Change* (Life Horizons, September 2, 2026).

Analysis: The Story as a Change Quest

The story has two halves. Chapters 1 to 3 are the old town-and-country tale: each cousin is brave at home and foolish away, and each goes home sure his own way is best. Chapters 4 to 6 bring a change that is new to everyone, with an outcome nobody can know. A map is no use for that kind of change. The crows need a compass, and without anyone naming it, they move through all eight quests.

What the crows did in Chapter 5

Nobody in the story makes a plan. But the crows of town and country follow one anyway, because it is simply how crows behave:

1. **Perch first.** Nobody goes near the wooden thing. Everyone finds a safe, high spot and watches.
2. **Watch for real signals, not every shadow.** Carl teaches the country crows to notice where people are looking, and the country crows teach the city crows to wait.
3. **One crow at a time.** Pip goes in close and comes back. After the THUNK, nobody goes down in a crowd again.
4. **Share what you learn.** Every evening on the water tower, the town crows and the country crows trade news, and the next day goes a little better.

The eight quests in the story

Quest	Where it happens	The lesson	Compass Check
1. Understand the Mission	Ch. 5: on the water tower, Chris says all anyone wants is breakfast back	The real goal is usually simpler than the noise around it	Can everyone say in one sentence what we're trying to do and why?
2. Assess the Terrain	Ch. 2 and 3: the takeout box scares Chris, the corn scares Carl	What scares people depends on where they've been. When a change is new to everyone, nobody is the expert	For whom is this change the "corn"?
3. Map Your Quest Roles	Ch. 5: the young crows who want to flee or fight, the tired ones, Pip, Old Corvina, and the cousins carrying news between flocks	Resisters and rushers both care. They're scared in opposite directions	Does everyone know their part, including the ones who are afraid?
4. Understand the Quest Landscape	Ch. 5: Corvina's rule, and the city flock worn out by a month of changes	Old rules have reasons, so ask about them first. Chris has no authority over Corvina, only her respect	Whose resistance has a good reason, and have we asked them about it?
5. Design the Quest-Flow	Ch. 5: the four moves above, with the water tower as the daily check-in	When the outcome is unknown, keep each step small and the feedback loop short	Could a nervous person follow the next step tomorrow?
6. Skill-Up the Quest Team	Ch. 3 and 5: Carl learns to watch the corn; the flocks teach each other eye-reading and waiting	Peers who already live with the change make the best teachers	Has everyone practised the new skill somewhere low-risk?
7. Launch the Quest	Ch. 5: Pip goes first, the THUNK, then Corvina	Volunteers show it can be done. The respected	When something goes wrong, do we

Quest	Where it happens	The lesson	Compass Check
Campaign	lands	doubter who joins in is the one everybody follows	adjust right away?
8. Reinforce the Quest	Ch. 6: Pip nearly walks into a trap	Reinforce how people got through the change, not just how it turned out	What will we do the same way next time, and what won't we assume?

The Quest Compass: Grading the Flocks

By the end of the week, both flocks had gone from a failing grade to 30 out of 40. Each quest is scored from 0 to 5, and a score of 0 to 2 means that quest needs attention. The scores are illustrative, taken on Monday (the start) and Sunday (the end of the week).

Quest	*City flock, Mon → Sun*	*Country flock, Mon → Sun*	*What held it back, and what moved it*
1. Understand the Mission	1 → 4	1 → 4	One group wanted to flee, the other to fight. It moved when Chris named the goal on the water tower: breakfast back
2. Assess the Terrain	1 → 4	2 → 4	The city crows were jumpy and tired after a month of changes. A day of watching from high places helped
3. Map Your Quest Roles	2 → 4	1 → 4	Nobody knew who would go first or who the others would follow, until Pip and Corvina found their parts
4. Understand the Quest Landscape	1 → 4	1 → 4	Corvina's rule, *when in doubt, fly*, held the farm back; change fatigue held the city back. It moved when Chris asked about the rule's history instead of arguing
5. Design the Quest-Flow	2 → 4	1 → 4	No agreed way to approach the wooden thing, so three crows rushed in together. After the THUNK: one crow at a time
6. Skill-Up the Quest Team	1 → 4	1 → 3	City crows couldn't wait; country crows couldn't read where people were looking. The flocks taught each other. Corvina never learned, so the farm stays at 3
7. Launch the Quest Campaign	0 → 4	0 → 5	Not started on Monday. The farm scores 5 because Corvina's landing brought the flock

Quest	*City flock, Mon → Sun*	*Country flock, Mon → Sun*	*What held it back, and what moved it*
			with her
8. Reinforce the Quest	0 → 2	0 → 2	Still low at week's end: the crows remembered the answer ("it's only a lamp base"), not the habit of looking first. Pip nearly walks into a trap in Chapter 6, and Corvina's new rule, *have a look first*, is the fix
Total (/40)	**8 → 30**	**7 → 30**	

The Sunday grade looks good, but Quest 8 is still 2 out of 5. A good total can hide one short spoke, and here the short spoke is the one that protects the next change.

Two readings. Each score has a lived-experience reading from the crows themselves and an evidence reading from an observer. On day three, an observer counting crows eating at the farm might have scored Launch at 3. Ask Old Corvina how it felt and she'd have said 1. A gap of 2 or more is a finding to look into, not a verdict on anyone. This one showed exactly who the change hadn't reached yet.

The Compass didn't tell the crows the wooden thing was harmless. It told them where to look next.

What Real Crows Tell Us

The story is based on a study in *Behavioral Ecology* by biologist Dave J. Colucci and Associate Professor Emerita Anne Clark of Binghamton University, reported by Newswise on November 16, 2026. The researchers fed peanuts to 10 urban crow families in Ithaca, N.Y., and 10 rural families in nearby Dryden. Then they set out a rock, an ear of corn, a takeout box and a wooden lamp base beside the food, and watched how each group reacted to approaching people.

- **Every animal hesitates at new things.** The name for it is *neophobia*, and clever, curious crows have plenty of it (Chapter 4).
- **Experience decides what feels new.** Country crows hesitated at the takeout box and city crows at the corn. Both hesitated at the lamp base (Chapters 2 to 4).

- **City crows were the more cautious.** That surprised the researchers. One explanation is that a place with many new opportunities also has many new threats (Chapter 3).
- **Country crows flee people early, whichever way the person is looking.** It's a blunt, take-no-chances strategy, likely because crows are more often shot in rural areas (Chapter 2, and Corvina's rule in Chapter 5).
- **City crows read the human gaze.** They're less likely to fly off when a person isn't looking at them (Chapters 2 and 5).
- **Crows watch before they act.** Being able to fly lets them observe from a safe spot first, which may help explain their problem-solving skills (Chapters 3 and 5).
- **Crows adapt without changing who they are.** They adjust to city life while keeping their basic nature and survival strategies (Chapter 6).

Carl, Chris, Pip, Old Corvina and the water tower are, of course, invented.