

You Went Searching for the Crows

Your problem was simple: you were curious. You didn't know the land where you were born or the reason you were forced to leave. Your past was a mystery, a void that consumed your thoughts by day and your dreams by night.

You asked everyone. Once. Twice. Thrice. No one would tell you. First, people turned their faces away, furrowed their brows, shuddered, said *What business does a young, happy girl like yourself have asking these questions?* or *Be grateful you don't know.* The second time, people became angry, the pained expressions on their faces more pronounced. *Get out, stupid girl, and don't come back!* But you were stubborn. You kept asking.

The third time you visited the herbalist's makeshift tent, she turned you away, spitting after you in her old, weak voice, "The only answers you'll find are with the salt crows!"

You didn't know the word *crow*. It felt foreign and evil as you turned it around and around on your tongue. It was a bitter word. But you knew the smell of salt.

So with the phrase *salt crow* echoing through your head, you left the place where you lived in search of your past, with the wind as your map. You journeyed for days, following the great gusts that blew your braids out of your face and brought the faint smell of the northeastern salt flats to your nostrils.

You arrived half dead in the place where you were born, stumbling over the sand dunes and the salt flats of your homeland. You came upon the ruins of the bustling city which once thrived there, now almost completely buried in sand. And it was then, standing alone in the sand at the outskirts of the city where you once lived, with only the wind to keep you company, that you remembered the smell of flesh.

Suddenly, like a flood, it came back to you: the way the skies turned black that fateful day, how the birds descended upon your city, flew into your buildings, destroyed your crops, then began to eat your people. The sounds of beaks pecking at flesh. You remembered the way you left in the middle of the night, strapped tightly to someone's back. You remembered the *crows*.

Now you sink to your knees in front of your city's ruined gates. You close your eyes, feeling utterly alone.

What you do not know is that a pair of great black eyes saw you arrive here half dead. What you do not yet know is that those same black eyes are observing you from their perch far above where you sit weeping in the sand. What you do not yet know is that I am hungry, *so* hungry. I haven't eaten in thirteen years. In a moment, I will swoop down from my perch above you. I will devour your flesh with my beak. You have succeeded, but this, my curious traveler, is where your story ends.