

## Song and Wind

Marjorie Lotfi

### i. Prelude

*I am a crow disguised  
as a nightingale. I sing  
the warbling notes  
that lead my people  
to easy sleep, content  
that all is well beyond  
their window. Listen  
and I will tell you*

*all you wish to hear:  
that I am warm enough  
beneath these feathers,  
that I don't miss those birds  
that flew away in the storm,  
that this pencil-thin branch  
is all the home I need.*

*My heart, of course,  
is all crow - oiled  
black feathers, the repetitive  
squawk of a muscle  
that knows better. It beats  
against my chest – peck,  
peck – asking only what  
it needs to survive.*

ii. Before

On leaving Tehran my mother —  
usually a nightingale — disguises  
herself in swathes of black, hides

between her husband and son  
on the way to the airport, her words  
(if any) lost to the roar beyond

the windscreen. I turn away from  
the noise to see a bird crouched  
between my father and brother.

The only black crow I've known  
all my childhood, my grandmother  
Maman Bozorg, is left behind.

iii. Transition

Why is a bird born with wings

if not to stretch its feathers

and fly? Its song never alters

as it moves across hemispheres,

continents. Settling on new land,

it doesn't forget a cliff, the shape

of a body of water, its own nest

in the crag of some far-flung stone.

What is a haven but song and wind?

iv. Official

After twenty-five years, I have *now been made official*. I pass an official test, then make the application and wait.

A letter says my case is *exceptionally complicated*, but little else. I take out my Iranian passport, its leather cover

opens like the black wings of a bird. My pigtailed-girl-self stares back at me, eyes still dark, with hands smelling

of Shomal roses and the pine trees at the shore that filtered the summer light. Now I can hear Maman Bozorg's

voice, gone a decade. Some nights I fly across the frail border to visit. But my papers arrive, the swearing in,

the taking of their solemn oath. I am a citizen of another – my third – country. I'm told I'm British.

v. Memory

This shore could be the Caspian,  
the sand a particular shade of oat  
or straw, shallow waves along

a lip of clear water. How can I  
have spoken out loud for forty  
years without a mother tongue?

What is speech but a conversion,  
the flip of thought, an attempt  
to be understood; words form one

from another as waves approach  
a shore and are let go. How do you  
lose a language? Will it ever be

as simple as the spent swell drawn  
back into a waiting sea, that bird  
tapping against your window,

one ripe pomegranate picked from  
the bottom of your garden, a knife  
laid ready across the empty plate?

vi. Present

Here at home in southwest Scotland  
one thousand crows roost in pines  
at the shore. When they raise into sky

the dark cloud blots out the light,  
their wings silenced by shrill cawing.  
They shift from tree to tree and never

leave. In this part of the world, there  
are no nightingales. Someone tells me  
I am not Iranian enough, then asks me

to write *what little I must remember*.  
Who doesn't recall childhood? Who  
could forget the stand of pines behind

our shore finally bending to the autumn  
wind? Who doesn't hear her grandmother's  
voice in prayer, just before the day ends?

### **Marjorie Lotfi**

Marjorie Lotfi is the author of *The Wrong Person to Ask* (Bloodaxe Books, 2023), which won the 2024 Forward Prize for Best First Collection. It was also shortlisted for the Saltire Prize for Best Book of Poetry and was one of the winners of the inaugural James Berry Prize and a Poetry Book Society Special Commendation.

Marjorie's poetry has been published widely, most recently on London's Poems on the Underground. She is one of the UNESCO Cities of Literature's ILX 10 'Rising Stars of UK Writing' and a member of WritersMosaic.

A recording of this poem can be found at [writersmosaic.org.uk](http://writersmosaic.org.uk)

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