

VERSION

Lanky yet brawny for fourteen, Kya stood on an afternoon beach, flinging crumbs to gulls. Still couldn't count them; still couldn't read. No longer did she daydream of winging with eagles; perhaps when you have to paw your supper from mud, imagination flattens to that of adulthood. Ma's sundress fit snugly across her breasts and fell just below her knees; she reckoned she had caught up, and then some. She walked back to the shack, got a pole and line, and went straight to fishing from a thicket on the far side of her lagoon.

Just as she cast, a stick snapped behind her. She jerked her head around, searching. A footfall in brush. Not a bear, whose large paws squished in debris, but a solid clunk in the brambles. Then the crows cawed. Crows can't keep secrets any better than mud; once they see something curious in the forest they have to tell everybody. Those who listen are rewarded: either warned of predators or alerted to food. Kya knew something was up.

She pulled in the line, wrapped it around the pole even as she pushed silently through the brush with her shoulders. Stopped again, listened. A dark clearing—one of her favorite places—spread cavernlike under five oaks so dense only hazy streams of sunlight filtered through the canopy, striking lush patches of trillium and white violets. Her eyes scanned the clearing but saw no one.

Then a shape slunk through a thicket beyond, and her eyes swung there.

Delia Owens, *Where the Crawdads Sing*, Corsair, 2019, p. 86-87