

## Chapter 18

### Crossroads

Rebecca looked back miserably towards the trees. Wolf had warned her to be careful with that backpack, and now all of her food was gone. So many things in the past few weeks served as a reminder to her frailty. She looked back to the thin scar on her arm. Doll or human, the world seemed to hold many dangers.

Silver Sky walked slowly beside her. He felt a sense of guilt in the loss of the backpack. He had been the one to call the nasty birds over. He had been tricked by them. And while he could still eat the grasses and plants they wandered past, Rebecca could not. Well, maybe some of them, but neither he nor Rebecca knew which ones.

They continued on walking in silence for the rest of the day, stopping only when they were too tired to continue. They settled down at the base of a hill a few hundred yards away from the river for a restless nights sleep.

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Rebecca awoke the next morning with a grumbly tummy; an entirely new experience for her. It was not something she seemed to enjoy. She felt oddly empty, and more then a bit cranky. She wandered over to the river, hoping the clear water would help. It did, a bit, but wasn't entirely satisfying.

She glanced over at Silver Sky, who between early morning yawns, munched on the grasses and moss. With a tinge of jealousy, she wandered back over so they could start their day.

Silver Sky looked on sullenly as she approached. "We'll find something," he said, though he was not all that sure.

Rebecca smiled back at the grey horse. "Hopefully, we'll find where we can cross the river today. We should be getting closer to the ocean," she said, quickly changing the subject. The last thing she wanted to think about right now was food.

Together they started off, slowly, but surely, heading Southeast as Wolf had instructed. The village that Joe lived in was on the other side of the river where it emptied in to the ocean. They were not making the time Wolf had suggested, but if all things worked out, they should be there within a day or so.

Despite the gnawing feeling in her stomach, they seemed to be making good time. Not wanting to stop, which would make her concentrate on her hunger, she just kept pushing on. Instead she tried to focus on the animals around them. She could not understand them anymore, which disappointed her. But there was a beauty in the babble that she now heard. Bird song, in spite of yesterday's encounter, fascinated her.

"They're all different," she noted, surprising Silver Sky who had become accustomed to the quietness of their walk.

"What's that, dearest?" he asked.

"The bird song," replied Rebecca. She pointed to a little bird with a black head and grey body. It flitted from tree to tree. It would puff up its feathers and let loose with a string of notes. From somewhere far off, another would answer.

A raven, perched high up in a tree made much more guttural sounds, like they came from deep within its chest.

"I wonder if that's how they sounded when they were talking to us?" she asked.

Silver Sky looked at her. "It's all just words to me," he answered. "That one is looking for a girl friend," he said with a giggle, motioning towards the little puffed up bird with the black cap. "And the raven is telling us to stay away from his tree. Not that I want his silly tree, anyway," he explained.

"Humph, I liked our ravens better," snipped Rebecca and she continued walking along the river.

Silver Sky quickly moved on, as well. Cranky ravens did not sit well with him. Birds, in general, were currently on his bad list, anyway. Besides, like Rebecca, he wanted to find a way across the river.

They continued to walk as the sun continued to rise, warming up the air around them. It was nearing noon, and Rebecca was feeling the pangs of hunger more than ever. She knew Silver Sky would also be hungry, and while she may not have anything to eat, it would not be fair to him to keep going.

As they came to a large curve in the river, she decided they should probably stop for a rest. On the inside of the oxbow was a large bank of dry sand. If she had been in a better mood, it would have made a perfect spot to stop and play. Instead, while Silver Sky browsed the grass on shore, she sat with her feet in the water.

The cool water slowly flowed past her toes. It was a nice feeling. It seemed that for every limitation of being human, there was some simple pleasure to counter it. She looked around at all that surrounded her - a glorious, warm sun, cool flowing water, brilliant green grasses and trees and flowers with wonderful scents.

She looked at her reflection in the water. A bit dirty, a bath would be nice. Of course, she was not even sure how *that* worked. But as she looked into the water, another realization dawned on her.

"Silver Sky, check this out," she called out.

Silver Sky approached and the two looked towards the river.

"How far across do you think that is?" she asked.

Silver Sky pondered for a moment. "Not far," was his simple answer. Less than fifty yards, likely less, he thought.

"It doesn't look too deep, and it's not that fast," Rebecca noted putting her foot back into the water. How could she be sure, though, she thought. The water had tricked them both in the past.

Silver Sky knelt down. "Get on," he instructed.

Rebecca clambered on, clinging tightly to Silver Sky's mane. He took a few tentative steps into the water. It felt cool on his hooves, and not very fast, so he boldly continued onwards. Slowly the water got deeper; up to his knees and then touching his tummy. Still, the water didn't seem to be all that fast, and they were making good time crossing the river. He looked back and they were about halfway across.

Silver Sky looked at the opposite bank. It looked pretty well cut by the moving water, but there was a good spot to step out. He shifted his direction to head towards it, but as he inched forward it seemed the water was becoming deeper and faster. He was still making good time, though, so he lunged forward into the river. It was then that he lost his footing all together. Silver Sky felt his legs give way beneath him as he plunged into the river.

Rebecca gripped Silver Sky's mane even tighter as she felt the water go over her head. She could feel the strong muscles of the horse beneath her as he struggled for footing. Getting his grip once more, he pushed upwards, breaking the water. Each took a deep breath, but the current pushed back against them, and they fell beneath the water again.

Rebecca slipped, losing her grip on the dark grey mane. She felt herself pulled away from her friend and grabbed madly for a hand hold. What she found was his tail, which she pulled with all her might to prevent being swept away by the water. She looked up and could see the sun through the rippling water. She wanted to shout, but instinctively knew that would be a bad idea. She closed her eyes tightly.

Silver Sky found footing once more on the river bottom and pushed up with all of his might.

Again, he broke the surface of the suddenly very chilly water. He looked around for Rebecca while trying to figure out how close to the bank they were. Not far, but where was Rebecca? He took another deep breath and felt himself being pulled back under the water.

Rebecca's ears were ringing. It felt as though she had been under water for hours. Her lungs hurt and her heart pounded in her little chest. What happens next, she wondered? Again, she felt Silver Sky lunge forward, forcing her to cling to his tail even tighter.

Once more, fresh air poured in to her lungs. Slowly, she opened her eyes. Grass and dirt, not water, surrounded her. She let go of Silver Sky's tail and fell to the ground exhausted. Together, they lay in the grass, shivering, but across the river.