

## The Boy Who Could Talk to Crows

In the town of Blackvale, where chimneys smoked like old men's pipes and fog clung to the cobblestones like secrets, lived a quiet boy named Finn. Finn wasn't like other children. He could talk to crows. Not in words, exactly — more like thoughts, feelings, and memories passed through the wind. The crows came to him often, bringing shiny things they found: a gold button, a broken watch, once even a silver spoon bent like a question mark. One day, an old crow with one blue eye landed on his windowsill. "A life for a life," it cawed. "You've listened long enough. Now you must choose." Before Finn could ask what that meant, the crow dropped a small, wrinkled map at his feet and vanished into the sky. That night, he followed the map through the forest, past the ruins of the iron mill, until he reached a clearing lit by moonlight. There stood a tree so wide it seemed to hold up the stars. At its base was a door. Inside, the air shimmered. Time felt... different. A voice echoed from deep within: "You may take back one thing lost. One moment. One person. But something must be left behind." Finn thought of his mother, gone two winters now. Her laugh, her lullabies, the warmth of her scarf around his neck — all gone too soon. He whispered, "I want her back." The voice was silent for a long time. Then it said, "Then leave your sorrow here." And so, Finn stepped forward — not with joy, not with magic, but with love. When he returned home, the crow was waiting. His father sat at the kitchen table. And across from him... Was his mother, smiling as if she'd never been gone. But when Finn looked down at his hands, he saw something strange. He couldn't remember how to cry.