

The Raven's Nest: An Icelandic Journey Through Light and Darkness

Sarah Thomas

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Visual anthropologist and filmmaker Sarah Thomas's eloquent memoir-in-essays *The Raven's Nest* covers her time in Iceland, where her views about people's relationships to land and to each other sharpened.

The book draws contrasts between Thomas's insulated expatriate childhood in Kenya, life in London, and trips to Iceland. In the latter space, the seasonal pace of her hosts' lives inspired her to reflect on the practical rhythms of work and the nature of kinship amid an ever-changing volcanic landscape. She also met and was enchanted by Bjarni, her eventual husband, there.

Thomas's recorded exchanges with Bjarni's parents and other Icelanders are marked by admiration; Iceland's gift economy and local habits charmed her. Through her own linguistic and cultural adjustments, she developed a wider sense of their community. The end of her marriage is traced with delicate, even poetic restraint, as when earthquakes are juxtaposed to the couple's separation.

Thomas's memories place lore, local fauna including seals and ravens, and shared solitude on equal footing with larger reflections on belonging. The interwoven vignettes cover topics including a Björk concert, eating new foods on the fjords, helping to slaughter sheep, the quiet pleasures of homekeeping, and translating for tourists. Together, they rejoice in truly getting to know a place beyond its idyllic images—work that entails forming meaningful relationships with locals and getting to know generational traditions, the loss of which affects everyone. Indeed, moving, subtle parallels are drawn between such cultural losses and the earth's environmental shifting.

A poignant memoir about marital rifts set against Iceland's resplendent wilderness, *The Raven's Nest* is a work of piercing clarity that celebrates love and issues an elegy to its erosion.

KAREN RIGBY (November / December 2024)

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