

## PROLOGUE

# BEAST IN THE WATER

She doesn't look powerful." The woman with wild red hair glared as she spoke, and the fire in her eyes made Quinn tremble.

Fire.

It burned. Bit her skin. Nothing soothed her blistered arms. Quinn huddled at the base of the tall tree they'd tied her to. Dull, diseased wood scratched her exposed and burning skin. This forest was so different from the warm, sunny place they'd taken her from. Everything here was gray and overgrown with brambles. Prickly ropes bound her hands. Her wrists itched. Thinking about the itching took away from the pain.

A smug smile lit the red-haired woman's face. "Ready to be compliant now, are you?"

Quinn trembled. Why did they hurt her? What had she done? She wasn't powerful, whatever they thought. But when she denied it, they burned her. Bound her hands. Picked her up with wind they controlled and slammed her back against the trees.

The trees mourned with her. They didn't want to hurt her, but they were powerless.

She glanced at Enya, her only friend. The huge colorful bird wasn't okay. The netting they'd thrown around her had bent her wings. Sunset-red, deep-purple, and fiery-orange broken feathers poked out between the tight ropes of the netting. They floated like wisps on the wind. Once vibrant and shimmering, they fell like shattered hopes. Soon they'd turn gray—everything here dulled to gray. Enya looked

like a crooked mess, lying in a heap on the cracked earth. Her thoughts didn't reach Quinn anymore.

Tears slid down Quinn's cheeks.

"Sabine," The red-haired woman spoke to the woman with yellow hair. "It's time to tell the Mistress we have the girl."

Sabine dipped her fingers into her jerkin and pulled out a cloth. She crouched in front of Quinn and unfolded it. A stone rested in the center, small and shiny.

Sabine held it out between her two fingers. "Do you know what this is, girl?"

Quinn shook her head, and her tangled brown hair caught Sabine's hand. The stone flew from her grip.

"Stupid child." Sabine smacked Quinn's already stinging face.

Quinn crawled backward as best she could in her cumbersome bindings.

Sabine laughed. "I can still reach you."

A gust of wind cradled Quinn. It held her in the air for a moment then forced her hard against a tree. Bark scraped her back and her head bashed against the trunk. The wind released her and she fell to the ground, huddled low with her head hidden. If this was what people were like, she hated them.

Sabine yanked Quinn's hair and forced her head up. "Get me the stone."

On her knees, Quinn crawled toward the stone and picked it up with her bound hands. It warmed to her touch. The shiny black exterior changed, turning red along the edges, and a picture flooded the center. Quinn stared, captivated.

The woman who looked back at her from the stone was beautiful, with silver-blue eyes and long hair so dark it resembled a moonless night. "*So you're the girl. You're only a child.*" Her voice was like a sharp hiss.

What girl? Before Quinn could ask, the picture changed. Nothing but blackness and two amber eyes. Frightening eyes. Not quite human. Whoever was behind the eyes spoke to her. "*Don't worry. I'll get you safe.*"

Quinn gasped. His voice seemed kind, but who had eyes like that?  
*What* had eyes like that?

The eyes softened.

Strange eyes. Strange but kind.

She wanted to call out to whoever was behind them. *Please. Help me.*

Sabine snatched the stone from her. “The Mistress spoke to you, didn’t she?”

Quinn nodded slowly.

“What did she say?”

Quinn sat numb.

“Janice.” Sabine motioned to the red-haired woman.

Janice snapped her fingers, and a flame grew in the center of her left palm. Quinn shook. Not the fire again. Tears raced down her cheeks as Janice stepped closer. The flame in her hand shot up higher.

“She asked if I was the girl.”

The fire in Janice’s hand died.

Quinn huddled closer to the tree as Sabine’s narrowed eyes searched her face. She walked over to Janice and leaned close. “The Mistress says someone infiltrated the stone.”

“Who?” Janice asked. The fire sparked up again.

Quinn’s body shook. “Please, don’t. I didn’t see anyone else!”

Sabine’s eyes narrowed. “We’ll find out. First, we are to shackle this girl to the black island of Castlerock.”

The woman with red hair straightened her back, and her eyes grew wide. “Surely the Mistress doesn’t mean to send her there.”

“Don’t worry. She’ll protect us from the beast.”

“How?”

“Do you doubt her powers?”

“She has been trapped for a long time.”

“I’ll go alone. Then I’ll collect your share of the power when she is released.”

“No one takes my fire. I’ll come.” She pointed to Enya. “What about her bird?”

“Kill it.” Sabine’s lips curled into a devilish smile, and Quinn’s stomach squeezed.

Enya’s half-closed eyes looked at Quinn, and her small, quiet

voice leaked into Quinn's thoughts once again. "*Be brave, little chick. Remember: a burned heart can rise from the ashes.*"

"*What does that mean?*" Quinn asked.

A ball of flame lit Janice's palm and pulsed. It grew. She looked at the red bird in the net and threw the ball of fire. It exploded and consumed Enya.

The bird's thoughts winked out from Quinn's mind, leaving a hole, hollow and empty. A sob clawed out of her throat. Gone. Nothing but a pile of ash. Enya was wrong. Quinn didn't want to be with other humans. Not if they were this cruel.

Janice untied the rope from the tree and jerked Quinn's bindings. She fell forward. Rocks scraped her bare arms and bit through her clothes. She scurried to stand before they dragged her.

Janice laughed. "We're going to take you to your new home."



They took a rowboat across the inky waters up to the island where lush vegetation covered hundreds of boulders at the base of a mountain. The breeze smelled sick here. Not clean. Not alive with the freshness that comes from living, beating trees.

Then they shackled Quinn to the base of the mountain with cold, metal chains, and they tossed her the rest of their rations. Birds had always fed her before. Would they come in the presence of these women? With Enya gone, would anyone come?

Sabine knelt next to her. "The Mistress thinks you're special. You're nothing but a scared child."

Thunder rumbled below the surface of the black water. The ground quaked. A long, serpentine neck shot straight up into the air and towered over them like an ancient oak. Liquid slid over its green and yellow scales like tiny black rivers. Dark, moving veins. It snaked its head closer. Horns encircled the creature's crown, curved and spiky. A single black eye sat in the center of its head and jagged, white teeth outlined its massive jaw. Smoke poured out of its nostrils.

Quinn wanted to scream.

"The beast," Janice whispered. "Tell the Mistress to call it off." She held a ball of flame in her hand and shot it at the beast.

It opened its mouth and a stream of fire ate her tiny flame. Its head dove down fast, and huge jaws snapped around the woman with red hair. Swallowed her whole.

Quinn screamed.

Shaking, Sabine took out the stone from her pocket. “Call off the monster!” she said into the rock. “Call off—”

The beast closed its jaws around her, and the stone clattered against the rocks and landed near Quinn, but too far away for her to reach.

Then the beast snaked its head closer. Quinn sat still and silent as a newborn fawn, but her heart thrummed. Its black eye blinked. She saw her face in the depths of its pupil. Frightened. Dirty. Alone. A shiver pulsed through her, but she dare not so much as blink. Slowly the monster retreated and sank beneath the quiet, black water.

Quinn shuddered, staring into the stone. *Please, someone help me.*

## CHAPTER 1

# THE ENEMY'S SHADOW

Logan stood on the top of a wooded hill facing the direction of the palace, the wolves with him. He'd come here again because of the pull in his chest, like a string attached to something but always out of reach, or a dream he was supposed to remember hours after waking. It had to be telling him where to find the remaining three Deliverers. Specifically his son.

The unreachable tug urged him to stay near the palace. For two days he had. But it made him jumpy. Danger still lurked there. He felt it in the air. Smelled it in the wind. Sword oil and chainmail filtered through the scent of spruce and moss. And the smell of horse grew stronger tonight.

Jayden may have killed Idla, but a bigger threat seemed to pulse below the surface.

Westwind nosed the air as a breeze filtered through the pines.

*"What do you smell, friend?"* Logan asked.

*"Horse and rider mixes with deer and rabbit. And the scent of fear stains the soil here. Something isn't right."*

*"Perhaps they're looking for my son."* Logan's heart jolted at the thought of it.

Westwind didn't say anything in return, but Aurora's voice entered his thoughts. *"If your son is still in these woods, he's nowhere near here."* She sounded sad and comforting. So similar to Rebekah. The wolf retained Rebekah's normal speech inflections even though the two of them were no longer bonded. It was both a comfort and a

curse—hearing his wife’s voice daily, having a piece of what used to be her heart now bonded to him.

The memories stung more since he’d seen Rebekah at the palace. She hadn’t sounded like the Rebekah he’d known and loved. Her eyes held none of the warmth they used to.

She’d become a cold and heartless killer. A pawn of the palace. And he still loved her.

He closed his eyes and breathed in, banishing thoughts of her—feelings toward her—to the deepest corner of his heart. He would find a way to get his son from her grasp. But how much would being raised by Rebekah have poisoned his son’s heart toward the Feravolk?

Westwind turned to him, his eyes gleaming as traces of the approaching dawn reflected off of them. *“I understand your desire to stay, but I think it’s time we fled. Unless you want to risk meeting this danger head on.”*

*“It’s my duty to protect the Deliverers. That includes my son.”*

“Yes.” Westwind cocked his head. *“It also includes Jayden. Keeping her close to the palace is like planting her in a black lion’s lair. Come back for your son when you are ready with an army. Don’t risk the Deliverer you have.”*

*“You think I should abandon him and find the other two?”*

A hint of sorrow filtered across the bond along with Westwind’s quiet pause. *“I don’t think abandon is the right word. But you typically make decisions with your instinct. I think your heart has been taking over.”*

Sunlight pierced the darkness, making it easier for anyone who could be tracking them to see, despite the camouflaged cloaks they wore. Logan bowed his head. The wolves were right. He should leave.

*“Aurora and I are going to check the perimeter again, then we’ll look in on Jayden. Perhaps you’ll let Gavin talk some sense into you.”* Westwind’s eyes gleamed greenish gold in the moonlight as he turned to leave.

Logan glanced right as someone approached him with soft footfalls. It was only his friend Gavin.

His boots padded against the soil as he drew closer to Logan. “Melanie says Callie found the scent of one set of tracks on top of our trail. Someone is following us.”

Melanie’s mountain lion would know. As much as he wanted it to be his son, Logan couldn’t rule out the possibility that they had been found. “A scout? This area carries the faint scent of horses and chainmail.”

Gavin didn't speak right away, but when he did, his voice remained quiet. "This evening, Glider saw a group of horses and riders to the east. I had him follow them, and they've bedded down for the night. If they're working with a scout, it's not the same one on our trail."

"Thankfully, Gavin's eagle would tell them if those riders found their trail. So we're still in the clear for now."

"For now." Gavin leaned his shoulder against a tree and glanced at Logan.

Logan bowed his head under the weight of that look. "I've kept us here too long."

Gavin grasped Logan's shoulder. "We'll find your kid. We'll find all the Deliverers and help them save Soleden. Our people. Your burden is mine, friend."

Save Soleden. Hadn't they done that when Jayden defeated Idla? Deep in his heart, Logan knew of the danger Gavin referred to. "Do you think the Mistress is escaping?"

Gavin took his time breathing in. "All the signs point to it. Evil creatures, like those black lions you met, are her creations, banished into the prison with her. If they've found a way out, she won't be far behind. In the end, Queen Idla was just a pawn of the Mistress of Shadows." He tipped his chin up to the full moon. "Besides, isn't it starting to look red to you?"

A slight hint of red, like blood, spread over the moon's glowing surface. "I was hoping it was my imagination."

"But you knew it wasn't. Otherwise you wouldn't be out here trying to herd the Deliverers."

Logan closed his eyes. Gavin was right. It was time to leave before it was too late.

*"Logan." Westwind's thoughts punctured his mind. "Someone has spotted you. The intruder is fleeing. Aurora and I are on her tail, but Jayden and Ryan are following us."*

Logan's stomach tightened and so did his fists. "*Which direction is the intruder headed?*"

*"East."*

The direction of the palace.



# AMBER EYES

CHILDREN OF THE BLOOD MOON

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BOOK TWO

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