

PROLOGUE

The tops of the trees whipped through the air, battering one another. Needles from the old evergreens separated from their branches. Caught in the gusts of wind, they swirled through the air, raining down on the crow's nest below. The black of the night seemed to have fallen upon them as quickly as the storm.

“Marvin!” Maeve shouted into the darkness. “Marvin, are you out there? Marvin, I’m scared!”

Alone in her nest, Maeve tried desperately to shelter her first clutch of eggs from the rain. She spread her wings and lay her body on top of them. Each time the tree jerked, she hugged them tighter, trying to keep them from rolling and cracking against each other.

A flash of light crashed through the trees. Maeve caught a glimpse of a silhouette flying toward her. It was too big and too fast to be Marvin. She closed her eyes tight and braced herself for the terror coming for her and her babies.

A clap of thunder shook the trees. Maeve felt the feathers of the great hawk graze over her back as it was slammed



into the trunk and was shoved away from the nest. The lightning struck again. For a split second, Maeve saw Marvin's single white feather through the blackness.

Standing over her to protect her, Marvin let out a screeching caw of alarm. He was signaling to the crow guard that their nemesis, Zenith the one-eyed hawk, was stalking that night.

Zenith came crashing back through the branches. When the sky lit up again, Marvin was gone.

“Marvin!” Maeve screamed. Through the wind and the thunder, Maeve wasn’t sure if Marvin called back to her. She tucked her head under her wing and silently waited, hoping she would hear him soon.

In the distance, she heard Marvin’s older brother, Podarkes, cawing wildly. The other crow sentinels had arrived. Marvin was no longer fighting this battle alone.

The rumbles in the sky began to fade, and the wind slowed. The rain became a drizzle. Far in the distance, Maeve heard Zenith screech again. She knew the sentries were chasing him off.

A wisp of air blew across her as a flutter of feathers landed beside her. Her heart raced as she lifted her head to see who it was. Looking back at her was Marvin. His eyes glistened with love and worry.

“Are you okay, Maeve?” he asked. “Are our eggs okay?”

Maeve stood up. She rolled each egg gently around with her beak, carefully checking every one. Then she nestled them under her belly and sighed. “They are fine. Thankfully. He came out of nowhere, Marvin. And he came at nightfall.”

“I know, Maeve. There is no rhyme or reason to his attacks. Zenith seems to hunt for sport. I’m so thankful you and the babies aren’t hurt.”

Maeve shivered. “I was scared, Marvin. I didn’t know what to do. If you hadn’t come home when you did . . . I don’t even want to think about it.”

Marvin nuzzled closer to his mate. “I know. I was scared, too.”

“Should we leave? Do we need to move our nest?” Maeve asked. “Or do you think he’s gone? For good?”

“If Podarkes has anything to do with it, he will be.” Marvin’s eyes grew big. “Po is still out there patrolling. I don’t think he will let this attack go. Not this time. I’m going to stay closer to the nest from now on, though.”

“I would like that, Marvin. I would like that very much.” Maeve rested her head on Marvin’s shoulder. “We are about to be new parents. We are going to have our talons full if all four of our eggs hatch.”

“They will, Maeve. They will,” Marvin reassured her. “We are going to have many hatchlings. And we will raise them right here in the cedars, like we were raised. I promise you.”

