

FIREBIRD SERIES - BOOK TWO

THE GIRL WITH
FIRE
IN HER VEINS

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*To my husband and family. You are the stars in my night's sky. I love
you more.*

ANA

Sea C

TRELLER TERRITORY

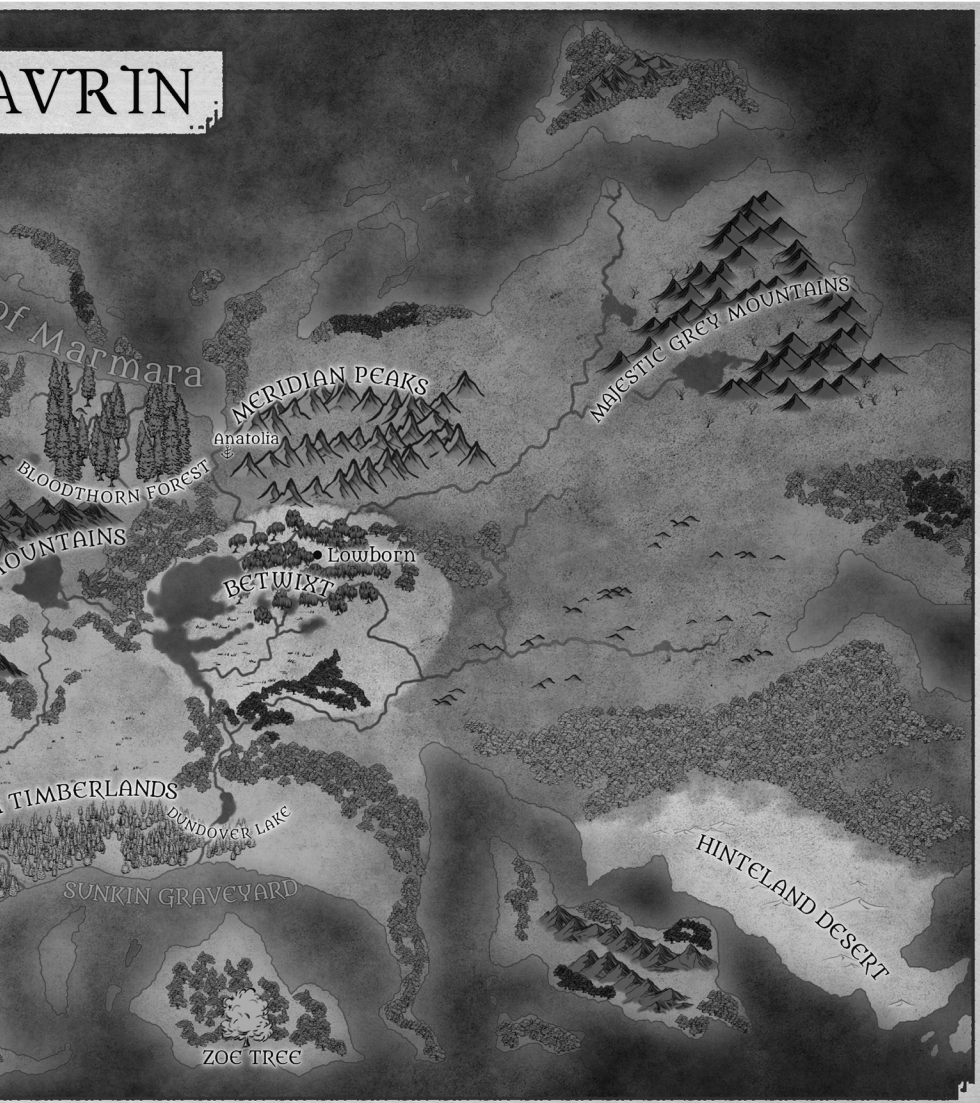
KINSTONE M

DURHAM

GOLDEN BEACH



AVRIN



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As a writer, I must thank God first and foremost for gifting me with this story and then trusting me to play it all out. It was He who placed the characters and their story in my heart. I was immersed into this fairytale land from the beginning and each time after as I worked with Tambrynn to bring her story to life.

For my readers, it has been a wild ride with many ups and downs. For those of you who sent me comments about how much you enjoyed *The Girl With Stars*, you lift me up higher than I thought possible. You make my journey worthwhile. I am humbled by your words of encouragement. I hope *The Girl With Fire In Her Veins*, takes you on a deeper journey with Tambrynn and Lucas, along with Bennett, Audhild, and Rekspire. I pray it's worth the time you spend with them. As always, if I have managed to pull you in for the ride, my job as an author is successful.

For Jennifer Rupprecht, thank you for taking the rough diamond and making it shine. You rock!

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PART ONE



1



A bright midday sun breaks through Anavrin's overcast sky, revealing a rain-washed landscape. Wind ruffles through my damp feathers, cooling my inner fire.

"Tambrynn. Don't fly so fast and far ahead. You never know what dangers are lurking." Trepidation fills Lucas's voice as he 'mindspeaks' to me, a term my grandfather has given to our mind communication.

Shadows race across the lush pasture chasing Lucas and me as we fly. It had been two, long storm-drenching days with the three of us cooped up in a mountain cave staying dry.

"I can't help it. This feels glorious!" I reply and stretch my long wings. I'm overjoyed to get out and move around. With a taste of freedom in this new kingdom, despite all the perils we've been through, I'm itchy to explore more. And to find our lost belongings.

"It does feel wonderful." Lucas's magpie form sails in and out of the wind currents like a dance. There's a sense of watchfulness and disquiet in him.

I twist my head his way, wishing I could navigate the

breezes so easily. Though I'm bigger and stronger than he, Lucas is far more adept in his bird form.

Normally he's the one pushing to go further. However, our harrowing trek and my father Thoron's evil hexes have taken a toll on my beloved. My heart pinches at his abnormally hesitant attitude. *"Are you worried about something?"*

"Do you recall the snowstorm on Tenebris?" he asks.

"Vividly." I could still feel the lashing snow, blinding in intensity in my mind.

"That's what this is like. I don't recall Anavrin being this rainy. Something ominous is coming. I can feel it in my bones." He dips down and bobs back up on a cold gust, his inky black wings spread wide.

"But we know Thoron is already here. What could it be?" I reexamine the biting sensations I've been having. At first, I thought I was simply acclimating to this new kingdom and my firebird abilities.

"I'm unsure. Just—just don't stray too far from my sight." He darts left. *"And keep an eye out for anything shiny."*

My silver ring, the key to the Zoe Tree which connects my old kingdom to this one, is missing. My stomach sours again at the thought of Stiltworth, the froggen, finding it. *"I noticed it was gone after we found Grandfather, but truly it could be anywhere between where I happened upon the nomad women and where I jumped off the cliff from the eldrin's sanctuary."*

I picture it in my mind. A large ring with a sprawling tree carved into the metal band. It only takes one to open the hidden doorway in the Zoe tree, and even though Lucas still has his, it's alarming that mine is gone.

Puddles the size of ponds dot the land below us. The rain had been significant. Floods surrounded the pastures that days before had been lush and overgrown with flowers and grasses.

Now only the tips of weeds and tops of brush can be seen above the glistening surface.

I drop down and teeter against a gust as the realization hits me. *"We'll never find it."* My thoughts turn to the smallish people whom we'd met only a few days ago. *"Do you think the nomads are safe?"*

Lucas flits gracefully past me and down toward the curving ribbon of rushing water. *"Nomads are very resourceful. I'm sure they're safe in their kinstone mountain."*

We fly above the pasture not far from that same mountain. The stream where I'd found the women is now burgeoning, the ground around it saturated. Water and drowning grassland are all I see.

No, that's not all I spot. My pulse quickens.

I swoop around in a circle. Reflective eyes gaze upward while darker bodies slither around each other below the surface of the river. I catch a murmur from the water, like muted voices that make no sense, much like the bubbles in the stream around the froggen's castle.

Could it be them?

I sail higher, far out of reach in case any of them have plans to snare me again. *"Do you see them?"*

"I do."

His concern and fear creep along my nerves and join my unease. *"We're not safe here."*

"No. Let's head to the nomad's mountain. I hope you lost it there while battling your father. It would be easier to find among the rocks." He tilts his body northward.

I follow closely behind him, heartened that he remembers this area enough to lead. We'd traveled there by foot. It's not as far by air. But strangely, it's deserted. There's not a small, plump, or bearded nomad in sight. The bushes along the perimeter are no more. Only a smashed and soggy waste

remain. It's a chilling reminder of Thoron and the eldrin who'd been turned into a beast in front of my eyes.

Images of Garrett changing to a beast while I looked on helplessly play in my mind. I don't want to relive it. I wish I didn't remember it at all. I swallow and push the horrid memory away.

"If only I remembered more about that day." Regret laces Lucas's words. He lands close to the stony perimeter of the kinstone.

"I'm glad you don't." I lightly land beside him, my wings caressing his sleek head as I return to my girl form mid-drop. Though Lucas is graceful, I settle on the tips of my toes. Luckily, he is there to stop me from tumbling to my knees. "Thank you," I tell him. "I may never get the hang of this."

Lucas's grin sets my heart racing, distracting me from my unease. He grabs my hand in his warm one, kisses it, and places it on his chest. "You're doing a wonderful job, my lady. You've only been a bird for a short time. And your firebird form is much larger. It took me weeks, maybe months, to successfully descend."

I brush back a dark lock that's fallen across his forehead. "If you say so." I wasn't so sure. I rub my palms down my slick eldrin clothes to ease my nervous energy. I anticipate Nobbert or another of the nomads storming out of the new crevice opening to greet me in their blustering, oh-so-welcoming way.

There's nothing but silence.

We turn and step across the bush border and onto the nomad's rocky soil. Washed clean, the gray stones are marbled with kinstone, a metal that suppresses magical abilities. The non-magical nomads form it into shackles, enabling them to stop magical beings from using magic against them. It's what has kept the nomads safe, at least until I came.

The crevice opening, which had been blown apart by one of

Thoron's spells, is now neatly reshaped so only the smallest of bodies could squeeze by to get inside the mountain. "Do you think if it were here, the nomads would've found it by now?" I search the outer base.

"Maybe. I'm sure Arrin would tell you. The others, I'm not so sure about. I wonder where they are." Lucas's footsteps scrunched against the ground. "They found all the maps and papers in the bushes, correct? Do you know if they gave them all back to you?"

"From what Nobbert said, yes. Since he can't read, I don't expect him to have lied about it." I explore wider, around the scraggly-looking foliage. Had it been this bare and dead-looking before? Most of that night is a confusing blur. Only a few things are clear, and those are the details I wish weren't burned into my memory.

We both explore the rocky expanse for several minutes and find nothing. The nomads may not be magical, but they are tidy. "I don't think we're going to find it here. Maybe it will be by the sack Arrin gave me."

We fly for several hours in the direction I'd flown when I left the nomads across an endless damp landscape. It's so different from Tenebris where small villages and farms are a simple carriage ride away from each other. My wings tremble when I hear the howls of my father's beasts splashing around in the forests. They're on the search for me, no doubt.

"*Why are there no villages here or by the mountains?*" I duck beneath the branches of a tall oak tree. The shade's coolness is a welcome change from the sun's heat.

Lucas is quiet for a few moments before he answers. "*The eldrin's law forbade living freely between areas, and so you normally find only travelers where there are no townships or villages. So, the voyants dwell in the east Meridian Peaks and the Majestic Grey Mountains. The djinn live in the towns along the streams and lakes,*

co-existing among the many different kinds of people. There are forest dwellers called trellers who live among the Great Northern Timberlands. Their job is to fell the trees for the wood used to build houses and businesses. And, of course, there are all of the fishkin, finfolk, and merpeople who live in the water. You know about the eldrin who live in the Sanctuary's holy mountain. I recall tales of other races that dwell in the deserts and the marshes, but I never knew if they were true or not."

I'm amazed at all the different kinds of people who live in this kingdom. On Tenebris there were only the nomad non-magical people. *"If dragons exist, I'm sure the tales you heard are at least in part true."*

"After having seen Audhild, I have to agree with you."

Below us, the landscape grows familiar. Another stream burgeoning at its banks meanders through a meadow dotted with trees. A low hum, almost singing, whispers among the sound of the rushing water. We follow it down to a crooked bend that I stopped near before I took my ride to the froggen's castle.

I spy no dark, slithering bodies or reflective eyes glancing my way. Some of the tension I've had since the meadow eases from my shoulders.

"Tambrynn, you explore left. I'll take the right." Lucas's words flow easily into my mind. Possibly he's feeling the same relief as I am.

Unfortunately, the bag the nomad woman, Arrin, had given me was made of dark fabric. It would be hard to pick out in this landscape even now due to it being soaked.

Desperate, I ask Lucas, *"Did you see a water creature take it?"*

He dips down. *"My memory is foggy, though I recall panicking when you disappeared into the water."*

We search but find nothing again. Thanks to the storm,

there is no trace of where we'd been. "*It's too hard to see up here. I'm going down.*"

"*I'm going to make one more swing over the water,*" Lucas replies. "*Be careful.*"

"*You, too.*" I pick a spot by a tree on an incline, close but not too close, to the gushing stream. As predicted, I tip forward and have to brace myself against the trunk so I don't fall over. I lean gratefully against the bark to rest my weary arms. A lilting song carried by the wind shifts into the hiss of near-boiling water. Yet even with the sun so hot, it is an impossibility. I brush the thought off as nothing more than irrational fear.

After a moment of rest, I push off the tree and begin my hunt. The sun is bright and I have to squint against it to get a good look around me. I turn away from the water so I can see better. My necklace warms against my skin.

Suddenly, there's a cold hand on my shoulder, bringing pinpricks of ice across my arm. "Silver mage?" a strange voice croaks out.