

Read the first chapter . . .



ONE

Five years later . . .

Jumping from rock to rock, water licks at my ankles. Arms outstretched, I use them to maintain my balance, so only my toes get wet. Mom follows me, mimicking my movements.

Watching Mom, she shifts, stumbles, and lurches forward. I shout, “Mom!”

Right now, I’m eleven again when I found out Mom had cancer. It also reminds me of the time Abelard, Laurence, and I fought Isetan in the Gudrul Sea in Canonsland when I had my hands around the grip of my sword, and I froze because fear had left me numb.

Pressure sinks into my chest. Even though it’s been more than five years now and Mom’s still cancer-free, I worry about her.

Laughing, Mom looks at me and says, “I’m fine, Jayden. Good god, girl, you need to relax.” When Mom’s beside me, she puts her arms around me and pulls me close.

“Mom!” I whine, freeing myself from her embrace. Looking around, I search for witnesses. If Dave or Rob were here, or Ava or Hannah, that would be fine. But other kids from my school, well, that wouldn’t be so good. Sure, I talk to my friends about Mom and Dad because my friends know them, and they think Mom and Dad are cool. But I don’t share anything with the other kids about my parents because

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I've overheard comments in town: *His truck is a piece of junk. Can't he afford new jeans? Did you see Jayden's mother's hair? I think she cuts it herself.* So, I don't want to give anyone else more ammunition to say stuff about them. But I may have made a mistake when I told some kids I liked my parents.

At my high school, on breaks between classes, there are always guys lined up in the hallway who'll chant as I walk by: *Jayden, Jayden, won't leave Mommy and Daddy. Living in Calgary, she'll be the new cat lady!*

"So, David?" Mom says with her hands on her hips. I roll my eyes at her. "He's the boy who pushed you off the swing when you were younger, right?"

Sighing, I say, "Mom, stop it." Mom and Dad have bugged me about Dave so many times. "We're just friends," I add. We're biking, hiking, and boxing buddies. I walk along the path beside the Bow River with Mom beside me.

Mom's lower lip puckers, her eyes sparkle, and she says, "I thought . . ."

"Thought what, Mom?" I ask. Sometimes, I wish I could tell her I have a boyfriend. I think my parents just want me to be a normal kid: Go to school dances, find a man, get a job in Calgary, get married, have babies.

But how can I possibly do that?

That might have been my life if it weren't for the mirror, Wyndham, Enisseny . . . Not that I blame them. Wyndham's been a second father to me, and Constance and Petronilla are the sisters I never had.

"I had a conversation with Mr. Sharp. He said you need to think about whether you're going to college or university."

Lowering my head, I bite my lip. I thought we were going for a hike because Mom had a day off. Not because she wanted to talk to me about my future.

"Mom," I say, waving my hand at her. "Do we have to talk about this today? It's your first day off in weeks."

"Honey, you really need to start thinking about it. Your education is important. You don't want to end up like

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me and your father, do you?”

“What? Hard-working? Good parents? No, of course, I wouldn’t want that!” Stepping back from Mom, I tighten my jaw.

Shaking her head, Mom folds her arms. “Flattery, my dear, will get you nowhere. Trust me.” Taking a breath in, she says, “You know what I mean. You’ve always known.”

And there it is—Mom and Dad’s guilt at not being able to afford to buy me Nike shoes or an iPad. They can’t afford to send me to ballet school. *Not that I want that.* Although, I guess if we had more money, I might hit them up for fencing lessons. Then again, I don’t need those, either. I have several tutors in sword fighting. *Thanks.*

“Jayden, do you want to struggle like your father and I have? We’re always worried about paying the gas or the hydro bill. Will we have the heat turned off again like we did when you were little?”

“Mom,” I say, “you and Dad are doing fine now. You’re working. I can even go to the dentist, and it doesn’t cost that much because we have insurance.”

“Yeah, but Jayden, if I lost my job tomorrow, we’d lose that. Your father and I, we have some money in savings but not that much. It’s taken us so long to get out of debt,” she says, her eyes narrowing at me. Taking a step closer, she touches my arm and says, “And if I got sick again—”

“No! You’re not going to—you’re not going to get sick,” I say, shaking my head and swallowing the sudden lump in my throat.

Mom looks away from me, and when she turns to me again, her eyes are cloudy.

“Do you even know what you want to do?” she whispers.

I hate making Mom upset. But if I tell her, she might laugh at me. And then how do we come back from that? Then again, if she supports me, it might kill her when she finds out I’ll have to move away because my studies will take me across multiple provinces in Canada.

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I can't tell her. Not yet.

"I don't know. Do I really need to choose right now?"

"Well . . .," she sighs, "I mean, you don't have to know for certain. You can change your mind later on if you want. Lots of people do that," she says, nodding and folding her arms across her chest. "But, if you don't have a path, I mean, somewhere you want to get to, there's a chance you won't get anywhere." Sucking in air, she says, "I don't mean to pressure you. I just want you to be happy and have the best life you can."

Maybe if I gave her a tiny morsel of information, that would help. Make her see that, *yes, Mom, I do have a plan.* "Mom, I'm looking at a couple of options. I just need to do some more research first."

A wisp of a smile forms along Mom's lips, and her eyes shine like the water beside us.

Oh no, I know what's coming next.

"Like what?" she asks, taking a step closer to me.

"Mom, I don't want to talk about it right now," I say, raising a hand to her. What's with my parents? Or all parents, for that matter. My friends and I compare notes, so I know our parents ask the same nagging questions. Although my situation is different because my answers wouldn't be the same as, say, Dave.

What are you doing now? (Sleeping, I'm exhausted. Kemena kicked my butt in training.) *Why don't you clean up your room?* (See earlier answer.) *Why aren't you eating your Brussels sprouts?* (I ate two dinners with lots of vegetables at both. Give a girl a break, Mom.)

"Why not?" Mom says.

"Mom, this one time, can you drop it?"

"Jayden . . .,"

"Mom, please . . .," I say. "I'll tell you when I'm ready, okay?"

Looking away, she stares out at a Douglas fir. I hate this. Nodding her head, I notice her eyes glisten like dew on

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the grass on an early summer's morning. Facing me, she says, "Okay."

I always try to be honest with my parents. So, if there's something I don't want to share with them, I don't. Mom's killing me, though, with her shifting, her distant smile, the way her arms are hooked together, protectively.

Eustace has been great at helping me pick up on body language. So now, I have a clue what Mom might be thinking.

This one time, I'll lie. But I'll piggyback the lie on a truth.

Shoving my hands in the front pockets of my blue jeans, I say, "I was thinking about becoming an accountant." Mom's eyes sparkle, and the lines in her face soften. "Or maybe join the Canadian Armed Forces to become a pilot—and if I can, a fighter pilot." As soon as the word *fighter pilot* drops from my lips, I swivel and make my way down the path before Mom can say anything.

"Jayden?" Mom calls after me.

I continue down the path, arms swinging at my sides. After I've put some distance between us, I wave and say, "Come on, Mom!"

"I'm not surprised," Mom says. When I look back, Mom's hands are on her hips. She hasn't moved. Squinting, she holds a hand up and looks at me through the sun and says, "I want you to be happy, Jayden."

The air in my nose burns, and I don't know why. Nausea washes over me. Isetan, the sea monster, has returned.

Mom's face scrunches at me. There's a whisper of a smile at the corners of her lips. "Is the accountant thing even true?"

"Not really," I admit. Both feet in, there's no way out now. Rubbing my forehead, I shake my head and add, "I didn't think you would like it."

"What? That my daughter wants to be a pilot?" Mom says. When I was younger, and a plane would fly over our house, Mom would lift me into the air, spin me around, and say: *Where do you want to go? BC to see Grandma and Grandpa? To*

Italy for pasta?

Fairyland! I would squeal.

“It’s cool, Jayden,” Mom says, stepping towards me. When she’s in front of me, she wraps her arms around me and squeezes me tight.

“I don’t know if it’s possible,” I say.

“We’ll look into it . . . ,” Mom’s smile shrinks away like marigolds along our walkway on a warm July day when she’s forgotten to water them. Mom’s eyes look over my shoulder, and her mouth forms a small *o*. It’s some expression that could be amazement or shock.

So, I turn around—

A tidal wave of white-water blasts from above us, but it’s not from the sky because I saw the White Winter Dragon—Enisseny is here! And he’s dumped waves of river water on us when he shot out of the Bow River. Blinking, I wipe the water away and see Edric the Knight hanging onto the dragon with one hand while a woman clothed in an emerald dress with dark flowing hair grips his other arm.

I use one hand to hold Mom while I try to steady my feet as a vortex of wind and water spins around the dragon, Edric, and the woman, dragging Mom and me closer to the river. Mom’s head leans forward, and she cries, “Oh my god!”

“Hold on, Mom!” I scream.

I grip Mom’s arm tighter and yell, “Edric!” as the dark-haired woman lifts a dagger to him.

Where did that come from?

I step forward to help Edric but stop when Mom squeezes my hand. Standing there, water and wind rush over us, and between waves, I see the woman plunge the blade into Edric’s chest. Edric struggles to push the woman away with his free hand, but then she yanks the knife out as Edric cries, “Witch!” and a stream of crimson flows from his wound. Enisseny and Edric disappear back into the Bow River. As the water recedes, the woman stands in front of Mom and me on the path, clutching a blood-soaked blade.

The brown-eyed woman has a red mark close to the

bottom right-hand corner of her mouth. Strolling toward us, she pushes her limp hair back as a trail of water follows her and says, “Hello, my dears.” Clutching the knife, she spins it around at us. I place my hand on my right side, touching my waist. And there’s nothing there.

My sword is in Canonsland.

“Oh, are you a traveler?” the woman coos.

“Get behind me!” I say to Mom, shoving her backward.

Mom’s breath is in my ear. I stand in front of her. Her hands are on my arms. I bend my knees and separate my feet. The dark-haired woman lunges forward with the knife and jabs it at us. Mom barks in my ear, “Get back, Jayden!” and throws me to the ground.

Hitting the ground, I cry, “Mom!”

Mom skips back, dodging the woman’s knife. I’m still on the ground, so when she’s closer, I lunge forward and kick the dark-haired, knife-wielding woman in the stomach, and she groans, tumbling to the earth.

Somehow, the woman still holds the knife when another wave of water washes over us. Screaming, I say, “Mom!” as I choke on water. I see a flash of gold that glimmers before her plaid shirt rises and then splashes into the river. “Mom!” I cry as the dark-haired woman is grabbed by her shoulder, and behind her is Edric’s blanched face, and then Enisseny’s wing clips the back of my head and I stumble backward. The dragon’s war-cry pierces the air and slowly fades. Getting to my feet, I look around and see Enisseny, Edric, and the woman are gone—and so is Mom.

My hair drips. Shaking, I yell, “Mom!” as I stand on the shoreline and look into the river.

“Mom!” I cry. Searching the water, I see her. She’s face down in the river before she rolls and disappears beneath it.

“Oh my god, are you okay?” a man says, running down the path clutching his cell phone.

“Call 911!” I say as I toss my coat on the ground and

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jump into the river.

The water's cold. I gulp it in and then choke on it. Gurgled words come from me. "Mom!" I scream again.

Searching the rolling waves of the rapids, I see the spot she was before I dove into the water. I watch the spiraling waves, the way it drifts, rises, and sinks, and the way it cuts and pushes things along like logs, wood, and plastic containers and cups.

I see something . . . red, plaid fabric—

"Mom," I whisper. There's no response. I push my hands into the water and kick my legs and keep my eyes on Mom. Digging into the waves of the water with my hands, I drink in the air between breaststrokes.

A few feet from her, I lose her. Frustrated, I splash the water, and then her head bobs up again. Her eyes are closed. I'm close enough that I can see blood streaming from her forehead.

Treading water, I wait for some sign of life—a word, even *honey*, *help me*. I would take anything right now.

Bravery is about doing what is difficult and sometimes what we most fear, and when at times there is no hope of success. In those moments, swallow the terror and step forward—no matter what monsters lie before you.

"Mom!" digging into the water with my hands, I kick my legs and grab her wrist. I place her head against my shoulder, keep one arm around her waist to keep her head above the water and use my legs and my free hand to move us toward the embankment. When we're close to the riverbank, two men help me drag Mom up. The blue-green water changes to a slight pink as Mom's blood seeps into the waves.

Two men in sports clothes carry Mom up and place her farther up the riverbank.

One man touches her neck and then places a hand onto her chest. He pushes down on her chest then up. Down,

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then, up, down, then, up . . .

I don't remember which man it was or what they looked like. I don't know how much time passed before I was in the police car.

Someone says, “. . . tornado. But there were no alerts in the area. Was it a tornado?” Police Officer Wilson asks me.

“I don't know,” I say, shaking my head. I'm wrapped in a blue blanket, and sit in the police cruiser beside her.

What was I supposed to say? There was a dragon that sprayed water over Mom and me when he rocketed out of the river. Oh, and by the way, there was also a knight who got stabbed by a woman dressed in green. She had a red birthmark beside her lower lip. You should be looking for them, too.

Dad's truck rumbles and then jolts to a stop. I grab the car door handle and push it open as Dad steps out of his vehicle and looks around.

“Jayden,” Officer Wilson says.

“Dad!” I yell. Waving, I take a few steps forward. Before I know it, I pick up the pace, and then I'm running and crying. When Dad turns around, I see his pale face, and when he sees me, he runs, and we meet halfway.

I want to tell him I'm sorry. I never thought something like this could happen. You see, Wýndham never told me there were other ways Enisseny could travel between worlds. I'm sorry, I didn't know. I'll fix this.

“Jayden! Jayden!” Dad says. He wraps his arms around me in one of his bear hugs. I hear the gurgling of liquid in his chest, the raspy huffing of his breath—his attempt to even it all out. Be the man he's always been, a man who's in control and able to solve almost every problem.

Embarrassingly, I'm sniffing. The wimpy version of me has returned. Blinking furiously, I tighten my lips. And with that, I'm able to shut down the wide-eyed, fearful kid in me.

She doesn't belong here. Not now.

“Are you okay?” Dad says as he pushes me back. He leaves one hand on my shoulder, though.

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I clasp my hands into fists and say, "Yeah."

"Your daughter's a hero," Officer Wilson says. "She jumped into the river and saved your wife."

Nodding, Dad stands beside me and squeezes my shoulder before letting go. Dad's eyes are red-rimmed.

Is that anger? Does he know this is my fault? No, he can't. It must be something else. Some other emotion I'm not reading right.

"My wife?" he says.

"They took her by helicopter to the Foothills Hospital. Two joggers revived her before the paramedics arrived."

Dad's face breaks apart like glass. "Thank god," he says, covering his mouth with his hand. I look away and breathe in the smell of the spruce, poplar trees mixed with the smell of Dad's sweat and stare at wild roses and bluebells along the path.

"We should go see her, Dad," I say.

"Yeah, of course," Dad says.

"Do you want me to drive?" Removing the blanket from my shoulders, I roll it up and hand it back to the police officer. "Thank you," I say.

"You've been through a lot. I can drive you home," Dad says, nodding.

"I want to see Mom," I say. I extend my hand and add, "I can drive if you want me to?"

"No, Jayden. I can do it. But listen, if you want to come . . .," Dad pauses, and this one time, I don't rush him, "we should go home and get you some dry clothes."

"I'm fine, Dad. Look, I'm already dry!" I say, patting my pants and shirt.

"Alright," he says. His eyes are searching for something. Some answer, some reason, some explanation. I can't look at him. His stare haunts me. "I'm so proud of you, Jayden. You saved your—your," running his hands across his mouth, he says, "—your mother. I can't imagine what it was like . . .,"

"It's okay, Dad. I'm alright," I whisper. Dad runs his

hands over his mouth again. Then a choking sigh comes from him as the officer asks him several more times if he's okay. Dad insists he is, and the officer gives us directions to the Hospital. Officer Wilson said cell service has been spotty out here the last couple of days, so we might not be able to use our cell phones for directions. I take a breath in, grateful the cell phones for the two runners worked when they did.

Dad's arms are folded in front of him with his finger hooked around his keychain ring as he listens to the directions. It's his habit to make sure he doesn't lose his keys. It backfires, though, when they fall to the ground. He doesn't notice. Dad listens, asks questions to clarify the best route with his brow scrunching as he takes in the information from the officer.

I wait one minute, maybe two. Then I scoop down and grab the worn metal keyring with the "R" on it with twenty different keys, some Dad knows which doors they open, and others he doesn't. "Okay," Dad says. "Thank you," he says to the officer, and she turns and leaves. "Jayden, you ready to go?" he asks.

"Yeah, I'm ready."

"Okay." Dad's face twists as he pats his pockets in his shirt and pants. "Where are my keys?" he says, shoving his hands in his pockets.

Dangling the keys in front of him like a hypnotist, I say, "They're right here, Dad."

"Oh, how did you get those?"

"You dropped them, and you didn't notice." Shaking my head, rolling my eyes, I walk toward the truck with Dad trailing me. "And that settles it—I'm driving," I say, opening the door for the driver's side.

Dad snort-grunts, and runs a hand down his face, and tugs the loose skin of his neck. I reach for the driver-side door, already open, and jump inside. Dad opens the passenger-side door, gets inside, and once he's belted in, I turn the key, and the engine rumbles to life.

"I'll come back with Uncle John tomorrow and get

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your Mom's car," Dad says, nodding, "as you don't have your full license."

I nod. But I don't admit to Dad that I forgot about Mom's car that she parked at the beginning of the trail. I guess it's a good thing there are two of us.