



PROLOGUE

Brann could remember the last time she let herself feel fear.

She was six years old, sitting on her new bed with her arms tucked round her knees, unable to sleep. The bed was too big, with a scratchy blanket and a hard pillow. Brann didn't like it. She wanted to be back in the Nest with the other small children, and the nice Aunts and Uncles looking after everyone. Brann liked helping to feed the babies, playing silly games with them. It was messy. It was fun.

But she was six now, and the Aunts and Uncles said she was too big to stay in the Nest. It was time to stretch her wings. One day, she would be a crew member, and it started with this. So she and four of the other children had been moved to this room, with its too-big beds and scratchy blankets. They would spend tonight here, to get

used to not being in the Nest. Tomorrow, they would join the big children in the dormitory.

Brann didn't like the big children. They were sharp and dangerous, and treated the smaller ones like bugs. And she didn't like this room, with its single dim night light that threw strange shadows across the walls. The room swayed and shifted as the storm howled outside. Brann didn't mind *that*, of course – she'd been born aboard Raven, and its creaking was like the beat of her heart – but each time it shifted, the shadows moved like wolves in the night.

“Brann,” whimpered Deryn from the next bed. “I'm scared...”

Brann didn't want to move. But she clenched her fists, glared at the dark, and crept over to him.

“It's all right,” she whispered, holding his hand “It's just shadows.”

Deryn nodded. But then he gave a sudden hiccup and wailed, “Brann, I'm *scared!*”

“Shh,” said Brann gently. “It's OK.” She cooed and stroked his head, but he kept crying. The others were awake now, peering nervously at them. Brann ignored them. “It's OK...”

“Wolf is coming!” he sobbed. “Wolf is coming!”

The door swung open, and a man entered.

He was the tallest person Brann had ever seen. He had to duck his head at the doorway. He wore a leather jerkin and a jacket of black feathers. His hair was black with streaks of silver, and spiked, and there was a thick black stripe across his face, so that his eyes seemed white and staring.

“What's this noise?” he asked. His voice was hard – not angry, but as cold as bones with no mercy. He glared at Deryn. “Why are you cawing like that?”

Deryn tried to answer but collapsed into tears again. The man scowled.

“He's scared!” snapped Brann. “Leave him alone!” The man glanced at her. Brann swallowed, but didn't look away.

“I see,” he said, frowning. “And you? Are *you* scared?”

She was, but she shook her head. “No.”

“Hmm.” He leaned towards her. “You are Brann, yes?”

Brann nodded.

“Do you know who I am?”

“Claw,” she whispered.

“Yes. I am the Claw, and you are my crew. Raven crew are strong. Raven crew are not *scared*. Do you understand?” He looked around. “All of you! Is Brann the only one who can speak?”

The others just stared.

Claw turned back to Brann. “Stand up, little chick.”

She stood, trembling.

“Follow me.” He strode away, and Brann followed, feeling the other children staring at her back.

They walked through the dark corridors of the Construct, and the grown-ups nodded to Claw and stood aside as they passed. They reached a set of steps. Claw made Brann go up ahead of him. The steps were huge, but she scrambled to the top and walked out on to the deck of Raven.

It was freezing. A storm raged around them and the wind lashed her face. Revna was there, Claw’s second in command. She looked surprised to see Brann, but then noticed Claw and saluted. She removed her cloak and wrapped it round Brann.

“Stay warm,” she said softly. She clipped a harness round Brann’s middle and fastened it tight. “Stay safe.”

“This way,” ordered Claw. He led her forward, up more steps, past more crew. The wind tried to knock her down, and the deck shifted beneath her feet. Her harness tether trailed behind her. Brann had been on deck before, but always in the daylight with the Aunts and Uncles. Never like this.

“Here,” said Claw. He reached down, lifted her up, and stood her on a raised block. “Look!”

Raven was flying.

Her vast wings beat in huge strokes, carrying them through the air. Each wing was formed of thousands of overlapping feathers, plastic and metal, shimmering black, glinting in the night as they moved. She could hear them: *whum, whum, whum*. Ahead, Raven’s black head stared into the storm. Her cruel beak was larger than a grown-up, each eye as big as Brann herself, liquid black.

“You spoke when the others were quiet,” said Claw. “They felt fear. But you did not, eh?”

Brann’s heart raced. The wind scolded her, the rain spat at her, lightning flashed. Behind her, the crew ran back and forth, fastening cables and moving containers. The wings beat up and down. The storm howled. Claw’s hand gripped her harness.

“What do you feel now?” he demanded. He pushed her forward so her toes were on the rail. Below her was empty sky, and far away – so far away! – the ground like a pale blanket. “NOW?” he shouted.

Fear froze Brann’s heart. The edges of the world turned grey, as if she was looking down a tunnel at emptiness.

“Listen!” Claw roared. “Feel with your feet!”

Brann didn’t know what he meant, but for a moment she *did* sense something: like a whisper, or a pulse, or a song. A song...

She heard Raven's Call. It was like a dream she was sharing with every other member of the crew – an idea of what it meant to be part of Raven, a song of carbon wings and steel claws, of the joy of flying, of air currents lifting them up, all of them together...

Claw heaved her back and turned her to face him.

"You felt it?" he said. Somehow, despite her terror, she nodded, and he grinned. "Listen to me, little chick. We are Raven, and Raven is *strong*. You are not afraid. Fear is *weakness*. Raven has no fear, understand? Take your fear and throw it overboard. Do it!"

Brann stared at him. He was Claw, their leader. This was an order. She tried to imagine throwing her fear away, into the storm. But the fear clung to her and wouldn't leave her body. So instead, she imagined it was a liquid, and she could catch it, gather it up into a jar.

Raven has no fear, she thought. She closed the jar and buried it deep down inside her. She pushed it down.

"No fear," she whispered.

Claw gave a booming laugh of approval. "Yes! Fear is weakness. Raven is *strong*."

Fear is weakness. Raven is strong. Brann nodded.

"Well done, little chick," said Claw. "Well done."

Despite the cold air and freezing rain, Brann felt a glow of warmth. She was Raven. Claw approved of her. She

smiled, and Claw smiled back.

He lifted her down and took her back to her room. The others were still awake, and they fell silent when they saw Claw again.

Claw pointed at Brann. "*This* one is Raven," he announced. "Be like her."

He left.

Deryn stared at Brann in awe. The others watched her silently, as if there was something different about her now. Brann thought there was.

Fear is weakness, she told herself.

Deryn was still whimpering slightly, but Brann ignored him and climbed back into her own bed. She thought she could feel the little jar of fear inside her heart. She imagined it strapped up with cables, closed tight, pushed down.

I am Raven, she thought. *Raven has no fear*.

She slept.