

THE CHRONICLES OF AVANTIA

I braced my hind legs and lunged into the air, my wings beating hard, disturbing the river in a howl-press of air. She grasped my fur tightly. I flew high to show her my speed, and as we raced above a flock of geese, I dropped and opened my jaws —

“No!” Gwen shouted.

I pulled back and the geese scattered, honking. They smelled like dirty feathers and meat. I flew higher.

“You were going to kill that bird for sport,” she said. “I won’t let you do that; do you understand?”

I growled. Geese were senseless animals: prey. Couldn’t she smell them? But if that was what she asked, I would obey. Even here, in the wet clouds, she wasn’t frightened. Her heartbeat sounded so steady; it was as if she had been expecting me.

The clouds broke, and her pulse quickened.

“Oh, it’s wonderful,” Gwen murmured. “Look at the ground, so far below us — I’ve never seen it like this. I can see the whole curl of the river, and the sunlight is so orange and red along the edge of those hills.”

I looked: The river was a black line; the hills were hazy and gray, cut with splits of white sunlight. I could smell the

CHASING EVIL

earth, and hear the grass rippling, the water rushing, but I couldn't see it as she did. I was glad to have her with me.

We followed the Deep River to fresh mountain springs. I felt her shift on my back as she gazed around us.

We acted as one, with me as her guide and protector. My Chosen Rider, my Gwen.