



BLOODWING ACADEMY BOOK 1

ON WINGS OF BLOOD

USA TODAY BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRIAR BOLEYN

A decorative rectangular border with ornate, symmetrical floral and scrollwork designs at each corner and mid-point.

BRIAR BOLEYN

ON
WINGS
OF
BLOOD

//MIRA

Dedication

To my Street Team, the Rose Court. You will never know how much I appreciate you all.

And to my little sister, for being the first reader of this book. You always give me the best book recommendations!

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Announcement

Also by Briar Boleyn

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About the Publisher

A Note About Trigger Warnings

Bloodwing Academy is a dark fantasy romance series with bully vibes. The series deals with topics that some readers may understandably find triggering.

A trigger and content warnings list may be found on the next page.

Please keep in mind that reading the trigger warnings list will spoil certain plot elements.

Avoid reading the trigger warnings list if you do not have any triggers and do not wish to know specific details about the plot in advance.

Trigger Warnings

Abduction

Assault

Blood and Gore

Blood Play

Bullying

Child Abuse

Death

Dubious Consent

Emotional Manipulation

Graphic Violence

Injury/Threat to Animals

Mental Health Issues

Murder

Non-Consensual Blood Feeding

Non-Consensual Mind Control

Physical Abuse

Power Imbalance

Psychological Abuse

Sexual Assault (Threat of)

Strong Sexual Tension

Substance Abuse

Suicidal Ideation

Torture

Map



Book 1

Prelude

“My blood speaks to you in your veins.”

—*The Merchant of Venice* (Act 3, Scene 2)

“Who meets their death devoid of love shall surely face their end.
But one who gives their soul away, eternity extends.”

—The Last Words of Queen Orcades Le Fay

Prologue

I think I was drunk. Drunk on power, drunk on her blood.

I believed she'd forgive me. She'd forgive me because she had to. We were bound, her and I.

What was spoken would be forever unbroken. Wasn't that what the old man had said? *What was bound could not be unbound.*

I hadn't done anything wrong, I told myself. I'd just taken things to their logical conclusion. I wasn't going to take pleasure from this. I was hungry. I *needed* her.

All right, maybe there would be a little pleasure. But it would be for both of us. Not me alone.

I stepped towards her, looked into her eyes, and for a moment, I hesitated. I could feel the emptiness gnawing at me. The blood lust was always there, lurking beneath the surface. When it came to her, I'd somehow managed to keep it at bay.

She didn't look at me like a thrall would have. Like I was something to be feared—or worshiped. She never had. No, what was in her eyes right now was something else entirely.

Pure hate.

She'd trusted me. Even if she wouldn't admit it.

Now I'd destroyed that.

She was looking back at me like she had that first day. As if I weren't a man, but merely a monster.

Still, the pull was too strong. I couldn't let her simply walk away from it. From me.

The first taste of her blood hit me like a drug. Sweet and rich and powerful. She was everything I'd been craving. More. I drank more deeply. Her blood was like nothing I'd ever tasted. She was perfect. Instead of being sated, my hunger roared to life with a vengeance. I felt her body tense, felt the slight tremble as she tried to pull away, but I ignored it. In time she'd grow used to this. She had to. This was our way.

Then my fangs were ripped from her neck without warning.

The ground around us erupted.

Minutes later, as the dust settled and she turned towards me slowly, my bite marks still fresh upon her neck, I knew the truth.

She was in more danger now than ever before.

And she'd never forgive me for what I had done.

Chapter 1

Medra

Autumntide
Ten Months Earlier

The leaves were turning color when he found me. The last vestiges of summer were fleeing as my imprisonment began. I had died destroying a corrupt god in my own world. I had sacrificed to save the ones I loved. I had gone willingly to my end. I had gone with no regrets. And I had expected the end to stay the end.

Fate was cruel.

I took my first gasping breath, feeling my soul fluttering violently about within my body, as if uncertain it had a true place there, before finally settling uncomfortably, as if unwillingly accepting we were stuck here together. But where was here? This was not my world. This was not Aercanum. I could sense that from the very air. It reeked with the tinge of iron and ash. Blood and death.

With a groan, I shifted my weight, the movement sending ripples of pain down my back. Something was pinning my legs down. I stirred again and, this time, glanced downwards. A chill ran through me.

Not *something*. *Someone*.

Someone dead lay atop me, weighing me down. I took a deep breath to steady myself. But that only made it worse as the scent of decay filled my nostrils more strongly. I gagged. My ears pricked at a faint sound. Then

came another. I strained to decipher the muffled murmurs. Footsteps marched against hard ground. People were coming.

I sat up and pushed at the heavy body that had fallen over my legs, struggling to free myself. Should I call for help? Or hope they'd pass by without seeing me? The voices were growing closer.

Abruptly, a figure appeared on the edge of my vision, bouncing up the mounds of bodies like a large weasel. It was a man. Small and wiry. He had a smirk upon his lips, revealing a row of ratlike yellowed teeth.

I lay still, hoping he would think me just another dead body on the heap.

But it was too late. He must have caught my movement before I'd seen him. With a quick rattish leap, he was on top of me, pinning me down.

I could smell the stink of his rancid breath as he lowered his face to mine and sniffed long and deep.

"Barnabas!" The voice cracked the air like a whip. Loud. Deep. Commanding.

The man sitting astride me froze, his face torn in indecision. "Yes, master?" His voice became like the slithering of serpents. Odious and simpering.

"What have you found?"

An intake of breath. The man's face was very close to my ear. He inhaled again, drawing in my scent as if it held the fragrance of a rare wine. And then, to my horror, his tongue snaked out. Red and foul-smelling, the twisting flesh approached my neck.

"Barnabas." The voice was sharper. "I asked you a question and I expect a swift response."

The tongue slid back into the rat man's mouth. I saw the look of disappointment in his eyes as he begrudgingly responded, "This one's alive."

A pause. "Impossible. All the others were dead. The place has been on fire for days."

There was a glint in the man named Barnabas's eyes I didn't like. I held my breath as we looked back at one another. Then he smiled.

"Even so, she's alive, my lord. And she smells—" he sniffed the air again like a hungry mongrel, and I flinched "*—exquisite.*" He lowered his mouth to my neck again, and I shouted, raising my hands to push him away as I saw the glint of sharp teeth.

"Get off her," the other man—the lord—growled. His voice was predatory, threatening. I struggled to get a sense of how old he was. Younger than Barnabas, I thought. "Not a taste. Not another sniff. That's an order. Bring her to me. Now."

Barnabas whined so quietly only I could hear, like a dog fighting against its master's chain. "Just a small taste. Just a little taste, pretty one," he whispered. "You smell so good. Better than anything I've ever had. When he has you, he won't let you go. I'll never get another chance at you again." His lips parted and two sharp canine teeth appeared, sharp and elongated. Larger than I had ever seen on a man—or a woman, for that matter. He bared them like a wolf might do with fangs and began to lower his face to my neck.

Panic surged. I flailed, lifting my arms up to hit him. He shocked me with his speed and strength, forcing my arms back down almost instantly. I was weaker than I'd been. From my arrival or the ordeal that preceded it, I wasn't sure which. I kept struggling against him and felt his frustration as he tried to keep me pinned. His face loomed over my neck. His teeth were so close. I shut my eyes, my entire body tensing for the inevitable attack.

Instead, there was a soft crunching sound. I felt a wetness on my face and opened my eyes. Barnabas's body was still on top of me. But his head was gone.

Letting out a gasp of horror, I sat up and shoved his corpse off me, glancing to the side to see his decapitated head rolling down the mound of bodies, a bolt embedded in his skull.

I wiped my arm across my face, trying to clean off the vermin's blood. Which was when I realized I was very inconveniently naked.

"Get up. Come down here."

I gritted my teeth. It seemed I was about to exchange one captor for another. And this one didn't sound the sniveling sort.

"I'd much rather prefer to stay here," I called. "Be on your way. I require no aid."

There was silence for a moment. Then I heard a burst of voices. The man was not alone. My words had evidently shocked the group of people who surrounded him.

"Silence." The voices below fell silent. "It was not a request," the voice came again. "But if you decline to do my bidding for a second time, I'll gladly have one of my men carry you down."

I rose slowly to my feet and heard gasps from below, whether at the sight of Barnabas's blood dripping down me or the shock of a woman's naked flesh—who can say. They were mostly men, so likely the latter. I lifted my hand to shield my eyes from the hazy sun which had half peeked out from behind the clouds. Focusing my eyes, I saw a line of soldiers—some standing, others on horseback. All wore a distinctive style of red and black armor.

A man sat at the front on a black steed. He held a crossbow in his hands. I eyed the weapon with interest. It must have been a powerful bow indeed to decapitate with a single shot. Then I looked up at the man's face and all thoughts of the bow left my mind. He was striking. All sharp angles and pale skin. Lethal and alluring. He was also much younger than I'd expected. Closer to my own age.

This man had saved my life. Killed one of his own men to protect me.

But as I saw the arrogant expression painting his handsome features, the cruel twist of his thin lips, I felt no gratitude. Golden-blond hair framed a sharp jawline. He had a lean, elegant build, all muscular grace. Nevertheless, there was something about him that made me think he had been a frail and skinny boy once. One of his features stood out from the others. His aquiline, hawkish nose. It was out of place. Too pointed, too large. Too less-than-perfect. But if anything, it made him look even more aristocratic, enhancing his haughty expression. It complemented the fine angles of his cheekbones and jaw and added to his wolfish air. Some might even have called him unattractive.

He certainly wasn't my type. I preferred a bulkier build. Darker hair. Still, I couldn't deny there was something about him. A sense of barely coiled power and dangerous cunning that simmered beneath the surface of his facade of tight control.

As I stumbled down the mountain of rotting corpses, he slid off his horse. Holding the crossbow in his left hand, he strode towards me. He carried himself like someone unused to having his authority questioned. Piercing gray eyes glinted and I felt myself being assessed from head to toe. His eyes lingered slowly on every inch of my flesh, stripping away all of my modesty. He took a step closer towards me, sniffing the air in a way that reminded me unbearably of Barnabas. I caught the scent of green apples wafting off him, just before I snapped and backed away from him. Later, I would wonder about that. He smelled fresh. Nothing like Barnabas or the rancid corpses.

Still, I couldn't bear that gaze raking over me any longer. "Take a good, long look, why don't you?" I tossed my long hair over one shoulder and was disconcerted to feel it fall on bare skin. "I assure you, it's the last one you'll ever get."

One brave soldier hooted with laughter somewhere down the line. I grinned towards the soldiers, daring them to laugh again.

A glare from their young commander silenced them all in an instant. The young man sneered. "I was trying to understand Barnabas's strange fascination. You smell absolutely revolting. But then, I suppose lying on a pile of corpses tends to do that to one." He turned to one of the soldiers. "Get

her some clothes.” He snapped his fingers. “No, on second thought, give her your cloak. Take it off. Now.”

I saw the soldier’s eyes widen. “But, my lord, my prince,” the man whispered, glancing at me surreptitiously. “You saw what she is. Her hair . . . She bears the mark . . .”

A prince, was he? He was certainly haughty-looking enough to be one.

“I know what she is,” the commander responded. “Better than you do, I have no doubt. Now give her your fucking cloak. We’re taking her back with us.”

Hurriedly, the soldier unfastened his cloak and tossed it over to me. I caught it gratefully, trying to ignore the look in his eyes. Fear or revulsion, I couldn’t quite tell.

“Prince or not, you’re quite mistaken if you think I’m going anywhere with you,” I declared as I accepted the cloak and wrapped it around me. “Thank you for the cloak, but I’ll find my own way home from this place.”

Part of that was true, at least. This wasn’t home. I doubted I’d ever get back there again. But I could leave this hellhole into which I’d fallen. A moment later I found myself wishing I hadn’t spoken.

The young commander had mounted his horse. Now he turned to look down at me disdainfully. His nose, I noticed, was not only hawklike but crooked, as if it had been broken before, perhaps more than once. There was something about him that made me unable to look away. His eyes locked with mine in a silent challenge.

“If only the decision were yours to make. It isn’t. But if you plan to make this difficult . . .” He gestured to another soldier. “Find her proper clothes. Then bind her.”

And they did.

* * *

We rode towards a city, a strange procession of soldiers, horses, and me, staggering in front of the commander’s horse, my wrists chained together as I trod over uneven ground. I could feel the prince’s eyes on me, sense his cold amusement each time I tripped and stumbled. I’d already developed a seething hatred for my new captor, but I managed not to turn my head and look up. Not once. Eventually, though, he spoke.

“Where do you come from?”

I ignored him.

“I asked you a question. Clearly you didn’t belong in that place. So where do you come from? What were you doing there?”