

Badgerblood: Awakening

S. C. Monson

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*In the fantasy novel **Badgerblood: Awakening**, a romance blossoms amid instances of magic and political intrigue.*

In S. C. Monson's fantasy novel *Badgerblood: Awakening*, a young man discovers his family story as he faces punishment from a sinister monarch.

A vast and dangerous forest of gargantuan trees divides the civilized lands. Few venture into its darkness. Kor, who can shift into a badger form, was raised in this forest with a trusted badger companion, Spart. He knows little about his family or his past.

Then a headstrong girl who can influence others, Len, charges into the forest in search of a rare flower. She encounters a borlan, a massive and dangerous beast. Kor witnesses the incident and rushes to assist, but by interceding, he ties their fates together. He drags Len into his eventual troubles with the royals, and the novel becomes tense as he seeks retribution for wrongs committed against him. It is alleged that he committed crimes against the king; he is assigned to duties in a work camp.

Kor is an intriguing hero. Though he's oblivious to his past, he's haunted by dreams of the forest, and a mysterious voice compels him to "rise to his blood," promising that "charm will bring victory." Kor feels the dreams are prophetic, but deciphering them falls second to surviving his imprisonment. He grows up as he endures his traumas and discovers the truth about his past. And Len's arc mirrors Kor's: she's also unaware of what her bloodline is capable of at first. Beside them, Spart is a comedic presence who expresses himself through pantomime and snorts, lightening up the darker sections of the story.

The plot is moved along by revelations and developments whose deliveries are paced out for maximum drama. Though Kor and Len begin the story at odds with each other, sniping comments in each other's direction instead of conversing, they develop an endearing romance, becoming increasingly genuine and concerned with each other's well-being. Their shared struggles to survive the forest, and their later discoveries, also contribute to this connection. And these romantic elements are balanced with tense adventure scenes, close escapes, and dynamic sensory details, as of a dangerous creature's foreboding odor and the sensation of claws upon skin. Subtle foreshadowing is also used to push the story toward its rewarding conclusion, which includes a mutual resolution and the promise of a hopeful future.

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JOHN M. MURRAY (July 12, 2021)

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