

Kingdom of War
Kingdom Journals Volume 4 – Hunter’s Story
by Tricia Copeland

Copyright © 2019 True Bird Publishing LLC
All rights reserved

License Notes:

This book is licensed for your personal enjoyment only. It may not be copied or re-distributed in any way.

Author holds all copyright.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author’s imagination or are used fictitiously.

Edited by Tia Silverthorne Bach

Proofread by Jennifer Oberth

Interior Formatting by Jo Michaels

all of Indie Books Gone Wild

Cover by Daryl A. McCool of d.a.m. Cool Graphics

Published by True Bird Publishing LLC, Superior, CO



The unauthorized reproduction or distribution of a copyrighted work is illegal. Criminal copyright infringement, including infringement without monetary gain, is investigated by the FBI and is punishable by fines and federal imprisonment.

Chapter 1

The prophecy states three Children of Light, each born on a high holiday of light—the Spring Equinox, Summer Solstice, or Fall Equinox—may come together to break the curse on the witch lines, prohibiting them from keeping permanent residences and condemning their souls to purgatory. The three must find the Lance of Longinus and restore it. I am Hunter and, along with Alena and Camille, am believed to be one of the trinity of beings destined to save the witches from this damnation.

This is my story.

March 2018 – Athens, Greece

I ran through the structure to every exit, testing each one with no luck. Six of us, Alena, Camille, Jude, Chalondra, Orm, and myself, were spelled inside a building of eight rooms crammed with books.

Alena grabbed my shirt. “What has Jude gotten us into? We’re hostages.”

“You wanted answers. We have all of them.” Jude’s voice echoed off the high ceilings.

“Please tell me all this is digital somewhere.” Alena’s breathing rate increased as she paced between the stacks of texts.

I hated that she struggled with her half-vampire nature. Being trapped fueled her fight-or-flight reaction, and I coaxed her to inhale and exhale with me.

“You’re going to be okay. With all of us here, we’ll work around the clock. There has to be a spell to help us find the location of the lance without going through *all* the books.”

Alena’s phone rang, and she answered the call. Dimitri’s voice sounded through the microphone. “Alena, Princess, are you there?”

“Yes, what are you talking about? You’re standing right outside the door ten feet from me, Dimitri. I’m looking at you right now.” Placing a hand on one hip, she glared at her vampire guard. “What? You can’t see us or the building? How can this be happening?”

“It doesn’t matter, Princess. It is what it is. What do you want me to tell Anne? She’s not going to be happy about this.”

Alena covered the phone and whispered to me. “What do we tell my mother?”

“The truth. Even as Vampire Chancellor there’s nothing she can do about a magic barrier.”

“How can this be happening?” Alena tapped the phone to her thigh.

“Alena,” Dimitri inquired.

“Tell Mother we’re still searching for clues.” She slipped her phone in her pocket.

Gathering her hair she twisted it into a bun.

I fought touching her, knowing it would send her over the edge. “Everything’s going to be okay. More than okay. It’s perfect. Sonia and Thanatos won’t be able to find us. We’re safe. All of this is untouchable.”



Even with my show of positivity, the days wore on as we searched the texts for clues of how to break the curse. *I wanted this. To know who I was, why Alena, Camille, and I had this connection, to embrace my heritage, free my people from centuries of living like gypsies and eternity in purgatory. This was my destiny, right?*

Since the moment I’d seen Alena, some seven months ago, I knew my life would never be the same. Sometimes, I still couldn’t wrap my head around it. I’d been a regular guy, had normal friends, played varsity basketball, and made decent grades. My parents never married, and my dad always creeped me out. My radar on him proved to be spot on. My father, Thanatos, held the position of High Priest of the witch lines. He found a lance prophesied to bring peace to the witch lines. Corrupted by lust for power and desire to control, he and my brother, Theron, tried to end Alena, Camille, and *me*, to prevent us from breaking the curse. What kind of father would kill his own son?

Theron used the sword to make my grandmother, Sonia, former High Priestess of the Witches, immortal. Since then they held the sword in a compound guarded by their coven members in Italy. But, even if the sword could be taken, we weren’t sure how to break the curse. Those answers lay within the structure we were sealed inside.

Over the past few days, every spell we tried failed, and we started scanning pages. I hated not having a plan, so as I read, I theorized options for stealing the sword from Theron. It would be well guarded, but if we used Anne’s vampire army, we might stand a chance against my family and their coven.

“Hunter. Hunter.” Alena slapped my arm.

I glanced over the top of the page. “What?”

“Are you even paying attention? You’re just flipping through the pages.”

“Yeah, skimming for keywords like we decided.”

She slammed her hand down on the stack beside me, causing a cloud of dust to rise into the air. “I

seriously cannot stand one more day of this. We've been here three days, and we're not even halfway through the texts. Plus, we're supposed to be doing this together. Everyone just has their head stuck in a book."

"We don't have a seer. All the spells didn't work. Divide and conquer, it's the best strategy."

"How do we even know what we can and can't do? We haven't tried to do a spell as a unit. Maybe together our powers are limitless."

She grabbed my hand and pulled me out of the cove of books.

"Hey, remember, human strength here."

She released my arm. "Sorry."

Most of the time I forgot or ignored—if I was being honest, more like blocked out—that Alena was half vampire. I should've been more grateful. Her blood saved me when Theron tried to kill me. But if stressed or threatened, she could be intense.

"Where are we going?"

"To wake up Camille."

We climbed the stairs to her room. I knew it wasn't a good idea to bother Camille. First, my watch read just after two a.m., and second, being seventeen, with little oversight from the aging Chalondra and Orm, Camille and Jude, like Alena and me, had taken liberties with sleeping arrangements.

I caught her hand a second before it grabbed the knob. "I think we should knock."

"Oh, right." She rapped on the door.

Within half a minute, Jude cracked it open. "What is it? Did you find something?"

Alena shook her head. "Wake Camille up. Our strategy isn't working. We've got to try something different. Meet us downstairs."

"Fine." Jude shut the door.

"Should we wake Chalondra and Orm?" I asked as we descended the stairs.

"No. This is about the trinity. I want to explore just how powerful we are."

"Do you think that's the best idea? I mean what if our magic gets out of control?" I twisted her around, forcing her to face me.

Alena always knew she was a vampire-witch hybrid. Orm trained her in the use of magic since she could talk. Camille and I discovered our heritage within the last six months. I'd been training every day, growing my powers, but the possibility of us combining our abilities had me nervous. We were all powerful alone. What if the spell got out of hand and the building exploded or one of us got hurt?

"I think we should at least wake Chalondra," I insisted.

"Why? She doesn't know anything. She never found the other witches of her trinity. Do you want to look through every book in this house?"

Camille and Jude descended the stairs to us. Camille, like Alena, thought we should try a different approach. Jude preferred my route, but Alena and Camille didn't count his opinion and decided the vote to be two for and one against. We locked hands, and I focused on an image of a dagger. The familiar hum of magic, like a low buzz running through my nerves, filled my head. At first, I saw images of pages, books, a dagger, Alena's face, Camille, Jude, Tyler, and then a boy, a teen I didn't recognize.

Dropping their hands, I stepped back. "Did you guys see that?"

"The guy? Dark skin and hair?" Alena asked.

I nodded.

"I saw him too." Camille confirmed. "Maybe another herald?"

"That would make sense." Alena pointed out. "We each should have a herald."

"I've never seen that person in my life." I looked between Alena and Camille.

"I'd never met Jude before." Camille's eyes cut to Jude, her herald.

"Let's keep going." Alena grabbed our hands.

As we locked hands, an image of the sword, the one Theron and Thanatos had, appeared. A man wearing a tunic lifted his hand above the blade and seemed to be performing a spell. The sword started to glow red and floated up. A gust hit my face, and I squeezed Alena's hand. With wind swirling around us, I started to wonder if the house was some type of portal and if we'd be swept into another dimension. I opened one eye and the wind died.

"Focus." Alena jostled my hand.

I shut my lids, and the breeze picked up again. Blinding lights flashed through my brain, and three crosses stood on a hill. Affixed to the wooden crosses were men, bleeding from their hands and feet where they'd been nailed to the wooden structures. The man in the center wore a crown fashioned of thorns, and I realized who he was—Jesus. People milled around the base of the cross, some cheering, some in tears.

In the vision, the sun traced across the sky as if I were watching a movie in fast forward. The crowds trickled away until just a few people were left at Jesus' cross. A soldier pulled a dagger from his belt, reached up, and stabbed Jesus in the ribs. Water and then blood gushed from the wound. *Longinus*, I thought. *Longinus pierced the side of Jesus*.

But his dagger wasn't the same as the one Theron and Thanatos had. Alena and Camille dropped my hands.

Alena's eyes met mine and then cut to Camille. "The dagger... It's not the right one. Theron and Thanatos don't have the Lance of Longinus."

"The one they have looks like the one spelled by the guy in the first scene. Did you see him? The guy in the monk's tunic?" I offered my palms to Alena and Camille.

Camille placed her hand on top of mine. "St. Maurice. How did I know that? He seemed more like a

warlock than a witch. We should keep going.”

I laced my fingers in Alena’s. “We have to find out where the correct sword is.”

The scene morphed into images of Longinus dropping to his knees, the lance falling from his hands, of soldiers trekking across plains and mountains. The sun set and rose, and we were plunged into darkness. Three pieces of the lance floated through the air, and fingers wrote upon parchment. The wind howled, and the building shook around us. I gripped Alena’s and Camille’s hands, praying the roof didn’t fall on us. A vacuum formed in front of me, all the air drawn to the space between us. Books shot into the circle and swooshed out the top, landing with thuds behind me. Then, one hovered before me, its pages blowing open. It dropped to the floor. I wondered if this was the one, the information we needed, but texts continued to swirl around us. Books flew past and out of my view.

After hundreds, perhaps thousands, more texts passed me, and just when I started to wonder how long I could hold our magical connection, another book fell before my feet. As the chapters swirled around us, I clenched my eyes shut, focusing my energy. A large bang brought me out of my trance, and the room fell silent.

I opened my eyes, expecting to see books ripped to shreds around us, but the stacks appeared the same as they did before. In front of me, three texts lay open in the center of the circle.

“I think it worked.” I opened my palms.

“I told you.” Alena dropped to her knees, inspecting the pages of the book in front of her.

Squatting down, I slid the book beside me closer. I breathed a sigh of relief when I saw it to be in English. The pages were worn and soft, and the words archaic but legible. We skimmed the texts. They seemed to be written in journal form, and we decided to each take one and summarize for the others. Since Alena and Jude had photographic memories, they’d read each of them.

My book started with the story of Longinus, how he came to believe in the Messiah when water poured from the laceration in Jesus’ chest and how the lance came to be revered as holy. Over the next hours, we each read one of the texts and charted the story of the lance. I worked through the pages, trying to memorize any information that might be needed later. Louis IX of France gathered many Christian relics on his crusade to the holy lands, and I learned he gained the point of the lance and enshrined it in the crown of thorns in Sainte Chapelle outside Paris. It was reported to have been moved to the Bibliotheque Nationale in Paris.

“The point of the sword is at the Louvre,” I told them as I skimmed the last of the entries. “Or it was as of 1793. That’s where this ends.”

“You finished reading that whole book?” Alena’s hands rested on her hips.

“We only need the punch line.”

“Good thing two of us have photographic memories.” Jude pulled the book to him.

“It seems like the handle was enshrined in a pillar in St. Peter’s Basilica in Vatican City.” Alena held up her book.

“I have information on a third piece. That must be why we saw three parts of the lance. The mid-portion should be here.” Camille pointed at a page. “St. Peter’s Cathedral is in Antioch, Turkey.”

“Wow, we have our work cut out for us.” I reclined against the stack of books behind me.

“Do either of those books say what St. Maurice’s sword does?” Alena strummed her fingers on the page.

“We know it made Sonia immortal.” Camille paced. “It seemed like the souls of fallen witches held in purgatory combined or bonded with hers.”

“If we find the pieces, reunite the Lance of Longinus, and break the curse, then there will be no more witch souls in Sheol for her to take power from. They’ll all be allowed to pass to Heaven, right?” I hoped this theory would hold.

“Theoretically, I guess, except for the evil ones that should go to Hell?” Alena shrugged.

“We only have our eighteenth year to get all the pieces and figure this out. Do the texts say anything about how to break the curse?”

“Mine ends with the last known resting place of the one piece.” Alena slammed her book shut.

“So, we still don’t know what we’re supposed to do with the lance.” I stood and paced away.

“Maybe once we get the pieces together, we’ll find the spell to break the curse.” Camille looked wide-eyed between us.

“The poem. Recite the poem again, Jude.” I pointed at him.

“In a land ringed by gods, an ancient city sleeps.
The Alonso crest adorns a door, holding the Earth’s ancient lore.
Their beauty surpassing all, a soulless people roam the earth.
They know not love of God or man, but a forbidden creature holds fate.
Younger still, an angelic breed, hold the balance of the creed.
In their midst, children with three shining souls prepare a lance.”

I swiveled to face the others. “So, we find the pieces and put them together. Keep going.”

“Once laid out then nevermore, only he may open the door.
Within the Book that lays the tale, the blade’s true master shall be restored.”

“So, there is another person after we find the lance? Longinus, right? We thought the door was the door to this house, but what if it’s another door? And the poem only mentions one book, not three.” I circled behind them.

“But maybe it’s not literal. Jude and I need to read each of the books cover to cover.” Alena took my book from Jude.

Jude started on the text Camille read. After daybreak, when Chalondra and Orm woke, Camille and I briefed the old witches on our findings. With little to do but wait, I made breakfast and gathered my belongings in hopes that we’d attained the knowledge needed to start the next leg of our quest. I stacked our bags near the front door. Just as I’d finished, Alena shut the text she’d been reading.

“We’re done. It’s all up here.” She pointed to her temple.

The front doors flew open, and the rising sun blinded me. Alena grabbed my hand and pulled me to the entrance. I inched my arm over the threshold, testing the barrier.

“That’s it! We’re free!” Alena jumped outside.

“Princess.” Dimitri zipped from his position at the bottom of the stairs.

Tyler ascended behind Dimitri, eyes locked on Alena. My brain twitched with jealousy for Alena’s herald. *She’s still with you. Just because Camille and Jude are together doesn’t mean Alena will abandon you and choose Tyler.*

“Are you guys done? Did you get what you needed?” Tyler’s brows shot up.

“Apparently.” Camille skipped down the steps to her brother. “Call Dad. We need a ride stat.”



We washed up in the hotel where Dimitri and Aaron, our vampire guards, along with Tyler and his father Grady had set up base. Alena’s mother, Anne, arranged a jet to take us back to headquarters, and we headed to the airport.

Seeing Alena staring off into space, I took the seat beside her on the plane. “I know why I’m not happy, but I thought you would be thrilled to be out of that house. What’s wrong?”

“Why aren’t you happy?”

“There always seems to be more questions than answers.”

“Well, I’m beyond happy to be out of that place.”

“But?” I leaned into her.

“I thought I might find out something more about my father, and Uriel, and why Alfred said I favored him.”

“Uriel, the angel in the painting, the arch angel that sired your line?”

“Didn’t you think it was strange that Alfred said I looked like him? What if he is my father?”

“Yes, but Alfred said many strange things. You should just ask your mother, demand to know.” I squeezed her hand.

She smiled and kissed my lips. “I love that you’re so direct. But you haven’t known my mother for

long. She's not going to tell me until she thinks I should know."

"She's protecting you, right?"

"Shouldn't I get to decide if I need protecting?"

"How old is your mother?"

"Four hundred forty-three."

I tapped her nose. "Then I think she might get my vote on this one. But"—I kissed her before she could get angry with me—"ask again. Maybe she'll tell you now, especially with Alfred's comments and the fact that Uriel seems to be the one that's saved us twice."

Even though I knew I should rest, sleep eluded me. Visions of the sword, Jesus, the warlock, and my father drifted through my mind. I gave up and started to devise a plan for finding the three pieces of the sword. We'd need Anne's intelligence on each location and soldiers for backup. I wondered if Sonia, Thanatos, and Theron knew they had the wrong sword. What if they'd known all along and had other plans for St. Maurice's blade? Our focus had to be on the Lance of Longinus. Our purpose was to release the witches from an afterlife in purgatory, help their souls find peace. I intended to focus on that goal.

As Alena stirred beside me, I thought about what effect lifting the curse would have on the vampires. Orm believed that even with Alena's half-vampire nature, she'd become a full witch at eighteen. Jude became a full witch even though he was quarter vampire. Theron—my half-vampire, half-brother—believed he became a full witch with a soul, and after hearing from Camille he wielded St. Maurice's sword to make Sonia immortal, I guessed it to be true. Were the vampires really soulless? Would they be granted souls when we lifted the curse?



Landing without the benefit of seeing the ground seemed to be something I would never get used to. For as much as I wanted out of that house in Greece, it didn't feel welcoming to exit into a windowless hangar and load into closed vehicles. After half an hour, the SUV slowed, and we descended into what I knew to be an underground structure, although I had no idea where we were. The technology that kept us safe, hidden from my family's coven, hadn't been shared with me. Perhaps Camille's and Jude's lodestones, or something similar, hid us from magic being able to find our location. It frustrated me that Anne didn't trust us with the information, but even though I'd suggested that Alena push her mother to have answers, I was a little scared of Anne. *You've got to get over that*, I thought.

Anne, tapping the toes of her heeled shoes to the floor, greeted us just inside. "You found where the sword is?"

"Yes. It's in—" Air caught in my lungs, and I gasped for breath.

Alena wrapped her arms around my shoulders. "Hunter, what's wrong?"

"I can't," I squeaked out.

"It's in—" Camille doubled over in a coughing fit.

"Alena, what's going on?" Anne focused on her daughter.

"I'm not sure. We learned where the—" Alena's eyes grew wide. "I don't think we can tell you."

"Of course. Isn't that clever?" Anne folded her arms over her chest. "Witches and their spells."

Standing upright, I started to catalog the things we'd need for our missions. It would be impossible to retrieve the three pieces without Anne's resources.

I approached Anne. "Do you trust us? Are you willing to let us use your people? Planes? Weapons?"

Anne looked between me, her daughter, and Camille. "You're not even eighteen years old. Are you kidding? You have no experience coordinating staff and vehicles. Weapons? Definitely not! Do you think money grows on trees? I have people to answer to. I can't just hand you unlimited resources on a hunch that perhaps, maybe, finding the sword and breaking this curse will finally put an end to the war between the witches and vampires."

Alena grabbed her mother's hands. "But you must believe that it will, or you wouldn't have helped us this far."

"That was when I could account for my resources, knew where they were being used, and how much risk was involved." Anne shook her head.

Even though dead tired, and in much need of sleep, I motioned down the hall. "Perhaps we could move to the conference room. Figure out how much we can tell you."

As soon as we're seated, I started again. "There are th—" My air was cut off, and I swallowed to moisten my throat. "It's in pieces. We have to retrieve the parts, and that's all we know for now."

"And you know where the parts are?" Anne paced behind us.

"Yes. That's it." I jumped from my seat. "Chalondra and Orm have been entrusted with the information. You at least trust Orm to use things wisely, right?"

"I do." Anne stopped and faced us. "You've had a long journey. You should rest, and we'll talk tomorrow."



I sensed someone in my room and bolted upright.

"Finally, you're awake!" Alena glared at me. "I need to talk to you."

"What time is it?" Pulling my sheet up to my waist, I sat up.

"Seven."

"That's only four hours of sleep. You remember I'm human, right?"

"I know. I'm sorry." Alena's bottom lip puffed out. "But I really need to talk with you. My mom and

I finally had our talk, you know the one about my dad. There's so much information crowding my brain, I have to get it out."

I stood, pulled a shirt over my head, and then sat beside her. She began by telling me about Anne's parents and how they were burned alive by witches outside Paris in 1557. Elizabeth and Anne fled to London, where they lived among humans. A rival vampire tribe staked Anne's fiancé, and she began a quest to foster peace among the vampires, a quest which resulted in treaties among the vampires and with the witches. I listened to each fact, how her mother visited every vampire tribe, brought the tribes together, and learned how to live among the humans, trying to wrap my brain around living for centuries.

"You should know Sonia massacred all the ambassadors of the first vampire tribunal my mother held." Alena wiggled her fingers from my grip and crossed the room.

"Sonia? Like my grandmother Sonia?" I asked in disbelief.

"Yes, and your father was there when my mother's family was burned. Your father and Sonia have been hunting my mother and her friends for hundreds of years, trying to erase vampires from existence. They believe vampires are the evil that should be purged from the world."

I ran my hand through my hair. "So, what about your dad?"

"I had a brother, like a living breathing human brother."

"Your mother had another child?"

"No, she adopted a boy when she married a human in the 1600s."

"But your father had to be a witch, so that man wasn't your father?"

"A witch or a witch-like being." She bit her lip.

"What does that mean?" Unable to contain my energy, I bounced on my toes.

"It's complicated. But my father's name is Lucas, or that's the only name he told my mother. She said his exact words were, 'You may call me Lucas.'"

"Did you ask her about Uriel?"

"I don't think she knows anything for sure, only that Lucas is eternal, he can't die, and Orm knows everything, but I guess he's never told my mother anything because it's too dangerous to know."

"Dangerous why?"

"Who knows." She slouched onto my bed. "The worst part is that he was cursed and given only one year in every hundred to be of human form. That's why I can't see him. He can't be with us until 2099."

"What if we break the curse?"

"We have no clue if they are even the same curse."

"Who cursed him?"

"God."

I spun to face her. "Just as God cursed the witch souls to lie in Sheol for eternity? What kind of God

is this?"

"I had the same question. Mother explained it to me like you were helping your child by making sure they followed the rules. Like when we get put on restriction for getting home too late. God punished him for something." Catching my arm, she pulled me to her side. "There's something else. Sonia was sentenced in 1945 to lie in a coma, entombed in the House of Uriel until she died for siring a vampire-witch hybrid who become known as Adolf Hitler."

Chapter 2

Long red locks swished from side to side as she shook her head. “This is all so much to take in. I can’t believe I had a brother who died before I even met him. Can you picture my mother raising a human child?”

Bloody tears formed in her eyelids. I grabbed a tissue to cover my frustration. How could she be upset about a boy she never knew, and had no relation to, who died two hundred years ago, when she just told me that Adolf Hitler is my uncle? I forced myself to focus on Alena, wondering if she was upset about her brother because he was something concrete. The thing about being related to Hitler had my mind spinning, and I decided thinking of anything else would be a welcome distraction.

“Did your mother have a picture of your father? Do you know if he looks like the being you saw on the water in Italy?”

“She said he is blond and blue-eyed. It fits the description of the glowing form I saw in Italy, as well as Archangel Uriel in the painting in Greece. But many angels are depicted as fair and blue-eyed. It’s just too much to process.” She covered her face with her hands.

I wrapped an arm around her shoulders and kissed her head. “We’ll figure it out.”

“Okay, I’m done feeling sorry for myself.” Sliding out of my arm, she jumped up. “My mom wants to brief everyone on Sonia’s history so we’re all up to speed. It will be good information for future run-ins with her.”

Following Alena to the cafeteria, I wondered how she could skip from thinking about her father to prepping for a battle with Sonia so quickly. My family’s transgressions weighed heavily on my mind. I wondered whether Anne held them against me. She’d never seemed wary or angry around me. Was everyone in my family evil deranged beings? Sonia, Thanatos, Theron, and Hitler were all murderers. My father killed Anne’s family and Elizabeth. My grandmother, Sonia, killed countless vampires. Hitler—my uncle, I guess—killed six million Jews. My half-brother, Theron, killed Alena’s high school friend, Ganby, and God only knew who else. How did I turn out normal? I thought of my mom and that I should call her to let her know we’d returned from Greece.

Hearing heels clicking on the floor in front of us, I forced my thoughts to the present. I wondered if I would have to kill. Could I? Alena grabbed my hand and pulled me into the conference room. Taking in her face, I knew that I’d do anything to protect her.

Anne wound around to the head of the table and sat down. Alena, Camille, Chalondra, Jude, Tyler, and I picked muffins from a platter and took seats. Anne started her tale with the story of her parents' deaths and described each episode of engagement with Sonia and my father, how they slaughtered hundreds of vampires and terrorized Anne for four centuries. My eyes glazed with the enormity of information. What would my story be in five, ten, a hundred years, if I made it through the next one?

Standing, Anne paced behind her chair. "Reports of missing vampires have trickled in over the past two weeks, nineteen so far. They aren't localized to one region and don't seem to have any connection to each other. It may be nothing, but we'd be stupid to ignore any strange activity. I've sent teams to investigate. We should know more in the next few days." Anne closed her laptop.

"Did any of them have blood bonds?" Alena asked.

"Most of them did. Their loved ones report feeling no draw to them. They didn't sense their deaths but have no pull whatsoever. It's like they just ceased to exist."

I raised my palm. "Maybe our witch council friend would have some information. Did you ask Marcus about it?"

"It's premature at this point. If our investigators find nothing, we may take that step. I'll let you know if there are any new developments." She strode from the room.

"So, what do you think? You ready to take on Sonia?" Jude slapped my back as we stood.

"I think I'm ready to focus on my transformation to a full witch and finding the parts of the sword."

"Is Orm going to let you complete the transition before your birthday?"

"I hope so. This can't wait." I stretched my arms.

Just then, a hand landed on my back. "Your wish is my command."

"You agree with me Orm?"

"I agree we need more power. Tyler will be put to the test soon too."

"What about Alena?" Standing, I replaced my chair under the table.

"I can't risk it with her. Her vampire nature will protect her. Everyone needs to be one hundred percent for what is to come."

"Is Tyler ready?"

"His father says he will be. We'll start the trials in four days. That will give you a day to work on each area." Orm shuffled to the exit.

"So, what happens if he's not ready, doesn't pass?" I followed him.

"You're not worried about yourself?"

"I've been training for almost six months. Tyler has only been training for one. But I guess he just has to try again, right?"

"Most witches have eighteen years to prepare, but no, if you don't pass, you lose your magic. There

is only one shot. That is why we will wait for Alena. At eighteen her body will stop growing, her emotions will level out, she'll be more stable. Come with me, we will begin."

I was more than happy to be away from the rest of the group. Truth be told, all I wanted was to be alone. I trudged behind Orm, thinking hitting something would feel great.

"So, how are you feeling about everything you learned today?" Orm asked as he closed the gym door behind us.

"It's not polite to use foul language in the presence of elders."

"Your mother raised you right."

"Thank God."

Orm placed his hands on my shoulders. "You are not your father, your grandmother, your uncle, or your brother. You have a good heart, and you're not responsible for them."

"But I have a duty to stop them."

"Perhaps." Orm's eyebrows rose. "But you don't carry that burden alone."

"I just want this over, to get the lance, break the curse, and go back to my life."

"Do you really think that's something you can do?"

"Do I think I could, should, or that it's even possible? Probably not, but one can dream."

"You realize your place if Sonia, your father, and Theron are eliminated? You would be next in line to succeed them."

"That's not something I want to think about right now." I walked to the far wall and chose a weapon. I had to do something else, anything to change the course of my thoughts. It seemed so archaic. *Shouldn't they have an election?* "So, what are we practicing today?"

"First, you're getting all this negative energy out. Drop the weapon and close your eyes."

Orm lumbered to me and placed two fingers on each of my temples. A memory from my childhood popped into my vision. *Four-year-old me chases two girls—one of red hair and one of blond—down a hallway. The next second, I'm in my closet with Alena. Sitting knee to knee, she creates a whirlwind using magic. Then, she teaches me to levitate a ball.*

I popped my eyes open. "How do you do that? Can you teach me?"

"As Alena is of Archangel Uriel's line, Camille is of Raphael's, and you are of Michael's line, I am of Archangel Gabriel's line. Do you remember what his line is known for?"

"Messengers, like Chalondra, Jude, and his father."

"I trained myself to pull happy thoughts from one's memories."

"That is cool. So, I'm guessing it's more of an advanced skill?"

"Very. What would you like to start with?" Orm rotated in a circle, pointing out the different areas of the training space.

Each represented skills from the four archangel lines: Gabriel's, the messengers and keepers of knowledge; Raphael's, the healers, like Camille and Tyler, and their father Grady; Uriel's, representing one with superior wisdom like Alena; and finally, my line, Michael's, the leaders. I strode to the far end of the room, thinking I might as well start with my strong suit since my mood still needed adjustment.

Leadership involved many skills, physical strength, mental acuity, tuning into others' feelings and motivations. Picking up a javelin, I threw it to the target at the other end of the room.

"You might want to use magic for that. But I'll leave you to let some steam off." Orm hobbled to the exit.

After fifteen minutes of working my physical muscles, I switched to stretching my magical powers. Jude came in, and we sparred for the rest of the morning. After lunch, I walked the halls with Orm, testing my ability to sense moods, and pushed myself to conjure more concrete thoughts of those around me. Next, he had me practice the skill I hated least, persuasion. We started with mice, moved to cats and then dogs, and then found Alena who always volunteered to be my guinea pig. Her mind resisted compulsion like no other, so it gave me a good workout.

In the following days, I trained with Chalondra on messenger skills, transporting objects, and moving air, earth, and information to others telepathically. Then, I worked on healing skills with Grady and studied witch history with Alena.

"You're ready," Orm announced at the end of the fourth day. "The Spring Equinox is tomorrow and we will begin at sunup."

My stomach tightened with apprehension as I left the gym. I could feel power pulsing through every cell. I was ready. Orm wouldn't let me take the trial unless he thought so. There was too much at risk. But I worried for Tyler. We needed him. Grady wouldn't let his son go through the test if he weren't ready, right? Why did I even question it? The thought popped into my head, and it wouldn't go away.

Grady never wanted his children to be witches. He kept their heritage a secret and never intended to tell Camille or Tyler. It was only because Alena, Chalondra, Orm, and I reached out to Camille that her powers were awakened. What if Grady meant to sabotage Tyler's ability to become a full witch?

"I'll be glad when this is all over. I've barely seen you all week." Alena kissed my cheek as she reached me. "I miss you."

"I miss you too." I squeezed her hand.

"Are you nervous?"

"A little. Worried for Tyler too," I admitted as we walked to the cafeteria for dinner.

"You'll be together. You can help each other."

"I thought that was forbidden."

"You can't help him with your powers, but you can talk to him, help him through a situation. Camille

said she and Jude did.”

“That makes me feel better.”

“Why are you worried about Tyler? Grady has been training him non-stop.”

“I don’t know, just a feeling.” I squeezed her hand as we approached the food line, knowing I couldn’t ignore the feeling in my gut. I needed to talk to Grady.

Training drained me, and I piled a big chicken breast on my plate. The chatter around me became background noise as my thoughts churned. Glancing at Tyler, I saw it in his face too, the focus. Nothing else mattered right then but the trial.

“Hey, how are you?” I asked Tyler as we filed out of the cafeteria.

“Good, you know, just tired and ready to get this over with.”

“You worried?”

“No, just anxious.”

“We’ll be together. All for one, one for all. We’ve got to finish this.” I held out my hand.

“That’s right.” He clenched my hand and bumped his arm to mine.

I told Alena I was turning in and wound around to Grady’s quarters. He opened the door after my second knock.

“Hi, what’s up?”

“I wanted to talk to you. Can I come in?”

He motioned me inside. “What’s on your mind?”

“This sounds bad.” Nervous, I rubbed my hands down my pants. “But I have to say it. Tyler is ready, right? Tomorrow is going to go well?”

“Why would you ask? Jude did fine after only a couple of months training.”

“Yeah, but Jude is also half vampire and has a photographic memory.” I reached out with my magic, trying to read him.

“Obviously, I can’t know for certain he will pass. The trials are meant to be challenging. Why are you asking? Don’t you want Tyler to be the strongest he can be?”

I still couldn’t get a sense of whether he wanted Tyler to be a witch. “I do. Sorry for even mentioning this, but do you want this for Tyler?”

“No, I don’t. I never have, for either of them.” He wiped his brow. “But Camille made her choice, and it’s what Tyler wants too.”

“So, he’s ready. He’ll pass the trial?”

“Well.” He chuckled. “I’m not a seer, but I believe he will. I wouldn’t put my son in a position to fail when he seems to want this so much.”

I held Grady’s stare for a full moment. He wasn’t lying. He wanted his son to be happy. “Okay,

good.”

I offered my hand and Grady squeezed my palm.



My alarm woke me at five the next morning, and I met Tyler in the cafeteria. Orm and Chalondra escorted us to the vehicle bay.

“Why are we traveling?”

Orm lifted a bag to his shoulder. “We can’t simulate the trial here without some major repercussions.”

Tyler shook his head. “Camille and Jude had their tests in Michael’s compound in Italy.”

“You want to injure someone or something just so we can see if you know how to fix them?”

Chalondra raised her eyebrows.

“I guess not.” Tyler climbed inside the waiting SUV.

“Wait, this is risky. What if we’re discovered?”

“We wouldn’t put you at risk.” Orm motioned to the vehicle.

I took a seat beside Tyler in one of Anne’s windowless SUVs, and we drove to an airport. When the doors opened, we were inside a hangar with a small jet.

Boarding the plane, I tried to lift the shade to my window, but it wouldn’t budge. Dazed from being up so early, I napped and then ate breakfast. The meal energized me, and I paced the aisle, stretching my muscles.

As the plane descended for landing, the shade beside me clicked. I lifted it to see a large sprawling city.

“Mexico City?” Tyler asked.

“It’s the last place Michael’s coven will look for you.” Orm tightened his seatbelt.

I shook my head. “We’re going to walk around the city without the lodestone bracelets?”

“Not the whole time. But you can’t use magic with them on.” Orm reclined his head on the seat.

“Isn’t this a decision we should make? It’s a huge risk.”

“It’s one day, and there are nearly nine million people in the city.” Chalondra shrugged. “Michael’s coven hates squalor.”

It wouldn’t have been my first choice or even my last choice for how this day would have gone, but we were landing. The decision had been made for us. Orm seemed to be a level-headed guy. He wanted the curse lifted and would spare nothing to protect Alena and Anne. *They trust him*, I reminded myself.

The plane touched down, and we exited into the terminal. Nervous, I wound my lodestone bracelet around my wrist. Outside, cool moist air greeted us, and the temperate climate surprised me.

"I thought it was always hot in Mexico," I said to Tyler.

"We're at about twenty-two-hundred feet. It's actually mild in this region."

"Lucky us. What now?" I motioned to Orm.

"We walk."

My anxiety grew as we left the airport. Buildings rose around us, and the streets teemed with activity.

"Okay, bracelets off." Orm held out his palm.

"So, what, we find situations where we're needed?" I inquired.

"That's pretty much the sum of it."

"We're superheroes for a day?" Tyler asked.

Something slammed into my back, and a guy blew past me. Looking back, I saw a shop owner raise his fist into the air, his head swiveling left then right. Looking back to the guy who'd hit me, I noted a bag under his arm. I homed in on his form and froze the air around him. He slammed into an invisible wall.

"Using the elements. Nice." Orm nodded.

As we reached the guy, I realized he couldn't be much older than fifteen. With a slight build, it didn't take much effort for Tyler and me to summon the air and guide the guy into an alley.

"What do you have in the bag?" I asked him. "That shopkeeper seemed upset." I warmed the air around him a couple of degrees.

He sized up Tyler and me. "What? You some kind of Americano hero or something? I got people to feed. My mom's sick, and my brothers and sisters need food. See, man." He opened the bag to show us a loaf of bread.

Reaching out with my mind, I read his thoughts. His brainwaves bounced about. I sensed fear, but no tinge of deceit. "Here." I held out several pesos from the stash Orm supplied us with. "Take the shop owner this."

He shook his head. "*Policia*, no good."

I slid ten pesos from my pocket. "I'll make you a deal. You go back and pay the shop owner, and you can have this to buy whatever food you want. We'll go with you to make sure the shopkeeper doesn't call the police."

His eyes cut from me to Tyler. "Ten pesos. No trick?"

"No trick." I raised my palms.

We walked in a pack back to the grocery store. As we entered, the shop owner started yelling and picked up the phone.

"Please." I lifted my hand, sending calming vibes his way. "He wants to pay you and buy more groceries."

I gave the boy the pesos. He approached the shopkeeper and held out the money.

“*Gracias.*” The shopkeeper’s eyes landed on me.

The boy cut up one aisle and down the next, picking up another loaf of bread, cheese, milk, and fruits, a grin plastered on his face.

“You come with me, meet my family.” He pointed up the street as we exited the market.

Tyler nodded. “Sure. You lead.”

We weaved through the crowds on the streets about five blocks, and I wondered if Orm and Chalondra would make it walking around the city all day. They didn’t show any signs of wear, so I refocused on our surroundings. We entered a high rise and climbed to the fifth floor. Children lined the halls, tossing balls and chasing each other. Ducking around them, the boy led us to his apartment.

Inside, a woman lay on a mattress with a small girl beside her. The boy pointed at them. “This is my mother and sister.”

The woman tried to push up on one arm but cried out in pain.

“Mama, rest. I have food.”

The little girl grabbed the bag, and as she produced an apple, her eyes grew large. I squatted down beside the woman and asked how she got hurt. From the Spanish I could interpret, she’d lifted something too heavy and hurt her back. She couldn’t sit up or stand, much less walk to work.

“Probably just a strained or pulled muscle.” Tyler knelt beside me.

He held out his hands. I gripped his arm. “Maybe you shouldn’t do anything before we know what’s really wrong. You might make something worse.”

“How do we know what the problem is? We aren’t doctors and don’t have diagnostic equipment.”

“We can’t fix everything.” I glanced at Orm, whose expression had remained stoic throughout the whole experience with the boy and his family. Leaning over, I whispered to Tyler, “If we only had vampire blood.”

“What if we boost her own healing capabilities?” Tyler spoke into my ear.

“Sounds like a plan.”

As the girl and boy enjoyed their meat and cheese, we focused on sending healing powers into the woman’s body. By the time the children had finished their sandwiches, their mother’s color improved to a healthy rose tone.

“I might take a sandwich now.” She reached out to her son.

“We should go.” I stood and took a step back.

Before I knew it, the boy wrapped his arms around my middle, hugging me tight. “*Gracias muchachas, gracias.*”

He hugged Tyler, Chalondra, and Orm. “*Gracias.*”

Saying goodbye and wishing them well, we walked out the door and down the stairs to the street.

“That felt good. I feel like a superhero,” Tyler commented.

“I thought we weren’t supposed to use our magic because people might find out that witches are real.”

Orm nodded. “But you found a way to help them with some magic and common sense. They’ll never know you were witches. Good work and good team work. It was smart to let the boy make a choice to do the right thing.”

“So, we’re done? We passed?” Tyler rubbed his hands together.

“Hardly, our day has just begun.” Chalondra hobbled away.

We weaved through the streets finding wrongs to right, disabling a man’s gun so he couldn’t shoot a policeman, coaxing a cat from an awning, and blowing a tire on a moped to avoid hitting a pedestrian. Our reward at the end consisted of a huge plate of tortillas and meat.

“So, superhero stuff, that’s what we’re supposed to do all the time once we finish this breaking-the-curse thing?” Tyler stuffed a bite in his mouth.

Orm set his fork on his plate. “Yes and no. You can choose how you live your life. With power comes responsibility, but it doesn’t mean you need to be a servant to the masses. Most witches live as normal people. They have interests, hobbies, jobs, families.”

“Unlike our messed-up parents.” I pointed between Tyler and me.

“Grady did the best he could for his children. Some have extraordinary gifts that can’t be ignored. Some are called to lead.” His stare pierced my skull. “Some are called to pave the way.” He swiveled towards Tyler. “Some are not called at all.”

“I’m not sure whether we got the short end or the long end of the stick.” Tyler laid his fork on the plate.

“You’re quiet, Hunter.” Chalondra offered me another tortilla.

“Just listening and observing.” Truth be told, I hated thinking about my future. Not that I’d had everything figured out before, but at least I had a path, college, some type of engineering thing in my head. After learning about my heritage and position as a Child of Light, it just seemed like one big blur of questions and potential chaos, battles, destruction, and death. Still, every cell of my body spurred me towards finding the lance, figuring out the riddle to the curse, seeing the mission through.

“It’s getting late. We should head back.” Orm waved the waiter over.

We meandered through the streets to the airport. As we passed through a festival area, a man bumped my shoulder, and it felt like a bolt of lightning shot through my arm. I grabbed my bicep and sized him up. The next second, another bolt shot through my back. I locked eyes on the guy beside me. His eyes narrowed, and I reached into his mind, gauging his intent.

“You look familiar. Do I know you?” he asked in a thick Spanish accent.

Child of Light was all I registered from his thoughts before I blasted his brain with a bolt of electricity that would have brought down a horse.

To read the rest click the right link for you below!

US: <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B07RB3VFW7>

CA: <https://www.amazon.ca/dp/B07RB3VFW7>

UK: <https://www.amazon.co.uk/dp/B07RB3VFW7>

AU: <https://www.amazon.com.au/dp/B07RB3VFW7>

Add to Goodreads: <https://www.goodreads.com/book/show/45415399-kingdom-of-war>

Find the whole series here:

Kingdom of the Damned (Kingdom Journals Prequel) – Anne’s Story

Kingdom of Embers (Kingdom Journals #1) – Alena’s story - \$0.99 in ebook (all platforms)

Kingdom of Darkness (Kingdom Journals #2) – Camille’s story (all platforms)

Kingdom of Honor (Kingdom Journals #3) – Jude’s story (all platforms)

Kingdom of War (Kingdom Journals #4) – Hunter’s story

Amazon US: <http://amzn.to/2fe2Jrw>

Amazon CA: <http://amzn.to/2y9i7t1>

Amazon UK: <http://amzn.to/2woT2h2>

Amazon AU: <http://amzn.to/2xbRdRK>

Learn more at www.kingdomjournals.com

<https://www.triciacopeland.com/index.html>

<https://www.facebook.com/TriciaCopelandAuthor/>

<https://www.instagram.com/authortriciacopeland/>

<https://twitter.com/tcbrzostowicz>

<https://www.pinterest.com/triciacopeland/>

<https://plus.google.com/u/0/collection/8wque>

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBHpvjj9L3od2SLTS4zJTjA>

https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/14055439.Tricia_Copeland

<https://www.bookbub.com/authors/tricia-copeland>

<https://www.smashwords.com/profile/view/triciabrz>