

Book 4 in the #1 *New York Times* bestselling Three Dark Crowns series

KENDARE BLAKE



UNITE THE QUEENS. DESTROY THE CROWN.



FIVE

DARK

FATES

KENDARE BLAKE

HARPER TEEN
An imprint of HarperCollinsPublishers

CONTENTS

Cover

Title Page

Cast of Characters

Map

Sunpool

Indrid Down

Greavesdrake Manor

The Volroy

Sunpool

The Volroy

Sunpool

Indrid Down

Sunpool

The Four Queens

The Volroy

Sunpool

Indrid Down Temple

Greavesdrake Manor

Sunpool

The Volroy

Sunpool

The Volroy

Indrid Down
The Volroy
Indrid Down
The Volroy
The Parade
Indrid Down
The Volroy
Indrid Down
The Volroy
The Volroy
Sunpool
Greavesdrake Manor

The Two Prisoners

Sunpool
The Volroy
Sunpool
The Volroy
Sunpool
Bastian City
The First Temple
Sunpool
Indrid Down
Sunpool

The Queens' War

Indrid Down Temple
Sunpool
Indrid Down
Mount Horn
The Rebel Camp
Indrid Down

The Rebel Camp
The Battlefield
Indrid Down
The Battlefield
The Volroy
The Battlefield
The Volroy
The Battlefield
The Legion Queen

Epilogue

Acknowledgments
About the Author
Books by Kendare Blake
Back Ad
Copyright
About the Publisher

CAST OF CHARACTERS



THE QUEENS

Queen Mirabella, the great elemental

Queen Arsinoe, the Bear Queen

Queen Katharine the Undead, the Queen Crowned

THE CROWN

THE BLACK COUNCIL

Genevieve Arron, a poisoner

Pietyr Renard, a poisoner

Antonin Arron, a poisoner

Lucian Arron, a poisoner

Paola Vend, a poisoner

Renata Hargrove, giftless

Bree Westwood, an elemental

Rho Murtra, a priestess

Luca, the High Priestess

Elizabeth, a priestess

THE REBELLION

Jules Milone, the Legion Queen

Emilia Vatro, a warrior

Mathilde, an oracle

Billy Chatworth, a mainlander

Caragh Milone, the Midwife of the Black Cottage

Cait Milone, a naturalist

Ellis Milone, a naturalist

Luke Gillespie, a naturalist

Matthew Sandrin, giftless

Gilbert Lermont, an oracle

Camden, a cougar familiar

Braddock, a bear

MAP



SUNPOOL



Arsinoe, fugitive queen of Fennbirn Island, sits stone-faced before the desk, surrounded by crumpled balls of parchment. She has not slept but a few hours, and the light spilling in through the cut-stone window hurts her eyes; it shows the dark hollows beneath them and the gray hue of her face. Not that anyone is there to see. Her only company is a tan mountain cat with a black-tipped tail, chained to a wall. And the occasional thump from behind the closed door of the inner chamber as the tonic she gave to Jules to keep her in a stupor starts to wear off.

Arsinoe turns her head and stares through the wood. Jules Milone, the Legion Queen of Sunpool, lies behind that door. Her hands and feet are bound. The broken blood vessels in her eyes from the force of the legion curse being unleashed have begun to heal. But Arsinoe will never forget what her friend looked like when Emilia brought her home from battle. Jules with bared teeth and bloodred eyes will always be there, lurking behind Arsinoe's eyelids when she goes to sleep.

"But she will get better," she whispers, a promise to the mountain cat. Camden's only response to the promise is a deep, low growl. "She will," Arsinoe says again, and rubs her face with both hands to try to summon the last of her energy. "Not fast enough to suit you, I know. But she will."

In the meantime, there is the business of the letter. The reason she dragged the small writing desk up into the seclusion of the tower to begin with. She touches her pen to the paper and watches the ink gather. How can she tell them that their daughter was taken hostage and then murdered by

Katharine the Undead? How would she tell anyone that, let alone Cait and Ellis Milone, who are like her own grandparents?

Footsteps sound in the stairwell and Arsinoe groans. She nearly picks up her ink pot to throw before she sees that it is Billy, smart enough to lead with a tray of food and poke his head in second.

“I’ve some oat cakes and honey. A few boiled eggs. And tea.”

“Strong tea?”

“So strong it may as well be whiskey.” He comes in and wedges the tray onto the side of the desk, spilling the small pile of crumpled parchment. Then he runs his hand through her hair and kisses the soft skin of her temple. “You look terrible. Maybe I should have brought actual whiskey.”

“How do I write this letter?” she asks. “How do I tell Cait and Ellis that Madrigal is dead? How do I tell them that Jules is out of her mind?”

“Leave out the details about Jules’s condition.” He pours the tea and drips honey over the oat cakes. “That’s better done in person. But you have to write to them, and soon. They’ll want to be here for their daughter’s burning.”

When the sun rose, she had wandered to the window to look out over the beach. The flat, gray stones and rocky shore of Sunpool do not resemble the sand of Sealhead Cove, but they will have to do. “Is Emilia still grumbling about the location?” The warrior had suggested they hold the funeral in the square. Arsinoe insisted that Madrigal be burned by the water. A naturalist should be burned in the wild.

“No. She’s stubborn, but she trusts that you would know best about this. About what Jules would want, if she could tell us.”

Arsinoe snorts. “Stubborn she is. Yet what bothers her most is that it was my suggestion. An order, from a queen.”

“Only, that’s not what it was,” Billy says, a little too carefully. He, as much as Emilia, does not want to see Arsinoe step back into that role.

“No. That’s not what it was.” She places her hand on his, then sighs and reaches for her teacup. “But until Jules is well again, who else is there but me and Mira? Speaking of Mira, I should go to her. We’ll need her gift on the

beach, to calm the winds and embolden the flames.” She stands up too quickly and jostles the tray, spilling tea across unused parchment. “Damn it all!”

“Cursing like a mainlander, I see,” Billy says as he helps her mop it up.

She smiles. “You do have much better curses. We never should have come back. We should have stayed there.”

“No. Daphne and those dreams were right. You and Mira are needed here. What would be happening to Jules without you and your poisoner potions? What would the mist have done if not for Mira’s wind and storm? You’re needed. Just not forever.”

“Not forever,” she says, and takes his hand, her touch like a promise. They turn at the sound of rushed footsteps up the stairs and break apart when Emilia bursts in, her face flushed and long strands of dark hair hanging down her shoulders.

“Jules is still resting,” Arsinoe says. “And I’ve nearly finished writing these letters.”

“Forget the letters.” Emilia strides across the room and slams a flattened scrap of parchment down on the desk. “You have a far larger problem.”

Arsinoe picks up the paper and reads.

It is elegant, scrawling script, written in an unfamiliar hand.

We have spoken with the queen, and we, too, believe she is true. We have departed for Indrid Down. The decision is yours, but we will be here if you need us.

—B&E

“That was discovered in Mirabella’s room this morning.”

“B and E?” Billy asks, reading over Arsinoe’s shoulder.

Arsinoe swallows. “Bree and Elizabeth.” She looks up.

Emilia’s expression is as triumphant as it is angry, validation written over every line of her frame. The warrior curls her lip and spits the words as the note falls from Arsinoe’s fingers.

“Mirabella has defected.”

INDRID DOWN



Mirabella wakes to the thumping of the driver's fist against the carriage roof. She does not know how long she slept. Judging by the light, she thinks it seems near midday, though it is difficult to tell beneath the low, gray clouds.

"Coming up on the capital," the driver calls, and Mirabella wipes her eyes. She moves to the window and drops it open. Ahead, the twin black spires of the Volroy rise into the sky.

She has seen the Volroy before. As a girl, she saw it a hundred times in weavings and paintings, in books and in her own imagination, when she thought she would rule there one day. She saw it for herself when she arrived in Indrid Down for the Queens' Duel. But this time is different. Queen Katharine reigns there now, and though Mirabella comes under an offer of truce, it may not be true. She may arrive and find a block prepared, ready for her head. She may have to fight her way out of the capital for a second time.

In her hood, the small black-and-white tufted woodpecker trills. He is excited, sensing he is close to Elizabeth, and Mirabella strokes his head feathers. Katharine said she would be safe. Bree and Elizabeth thought that she meant it.

Back in Sunpool, they must know by now that she is gone, and it pains her to think of Arsinoe, and Billy, when they realize what she has done. They would not believe it at first. They would defend her. Maybe they would even send out a search party, or a rescue party, thinking she was taken against her will.

After that— Well, there is plenty of time to worry about what she will say the next time she has to face Arsinoe. For now, her mind is on Katharine. One sister at a time.

When the carriage last stopped to rest the horses, the driver asked Mirabella where she wanted to go. It would have been easy enough to go to Indrid Down Temple, where she might send for Luca. Or to Bree's household, where she could be sure she was safe. Instead, she asked to be taken to the Volroy gate.

"The big gate, then," the driver had said, and for the first time, looked carefully at Mirabella's face. After that, she did not speak much to her and began addressing her as "Mistress" rather than "Miss" when she did. She dared not say "Queen" so close to the castle.

In the back of the carriage, Mirabella listens to the horses' hooves clack along the road and watches the Volroy grow larger. The approaching sight of the castle has banished all thoughts of sleep, and she fidgets with the folds of her cloak and the skirt of her light blue dress. The lace edge has come loose and turned black with dirt after dragging across the ground, and she considers tearing the whole of it away. Instead she clasps her shaking hands in her lap. She must be calm. Katharine is her little sister and will not see her tremble.

Two guards stop the carriage before the main gate and approach to question the driver and peer inside. All the other passengers have been let off elsewhere. Only Mirabella and the cargo remain, trunks and crates loaded onto the roof and lashed to the back.

"What business do you have at the Volroy?"

"None of my own. I'm bringing a passenger. And I think you'll find that she has plenty." At the driver's words, both guards lean back to look in through the windows. Mirabella gazes evenly at them. It takes longer than she expects for them to realize who she is, but eventually they open the gate, and shout for more guards to attend the carriage.

"Our coming must have been kept a secret, Pepper," she whispers to the little bird, who watches with his head cocked. "But of course it would be.

Katharine would not want to lose face if I refused her offer.”

The carriage stops, and Mirabella steps out into the shadow of the fortress. The moment she is clear, Pepper darts from inside her hood, flying off to find his Elizabeth. Mirabella tries not to feel abandoned. But as the guards glare at her warily, she wishes he would have stayed.

“Will you be all right, Mistress?” the driver asks, and Mirabella turns to her with a grateful smile. “I will be fine. Thank you. It has been a pleasure.”

The woman makes a reverent gesture and clicks to the horses. Mirabella turns back to the queensguard and is greeted by the blades of their spears.

“Do not point those at me,” she says. She sends a crackle of dry lightning through the sky and the blades drop. “Take me inside. To the queen.”

GREAVESDRAKE MANOR



Katharine sits beside the bed, surrounded by whispers. Her old bed in her old room, only this time it is not she who lies upon it but Pietyr, as the three healers she has summoned from the capital and one from Prynn mutter near the open door.

They are the finest healers she could find. Poisoners all. But none of them has been able to help Pietyr. None is even able to say what is wrong with him.

Of course, perhaps they could if they knew what truly happened. But Katharine will never tell them that.

“Please wake up,” she murmurs for what feels like the thousandth time. She touches his cheek, then his chest. Both warm, and his strong heart keeps beating. The slow bleeding from his eyes and nose has finally eased, and his face and neck have been wiped clean, the pillow and bedding beneath him changed. Only the barest bit of red seeps from inside his ear.

“Let him wake,” she growls, but the dead queens do not respond. She can feel them staring at him through her eyes. Perhaps she can even feel a little remorse.

No. Regret, perhaps, but not remorse. They did what they had to do to Pietyr to keep him from sending them back into the Breccia Domain. With his bumbling, flawed, low-magic spell that caused them so much pain, he gave them no choice. And every day and night since then, they have reminded Katharine by raising their rot to mar the surface of her skin, by

humming through her blood and her mind in soothing, comforting tones. They are part of her now, and they will not be moved.

He would have harmed us. Weakened you. We would protect us. Protect you.

“Be silent,” Katharine whispers. “Be silent!”

“Our apologies, Queen Katharine,” one of the healers says, and bows his head.

“We will take our counsel into the hall so as not to disturb you,” says another, the one from Prynn, and motions to her colleagues.

“No.” Katharine stands. “Forgive me. This accident—his illness—I cannot think.” And it seems that Greavesdrake is always full of whispers. At the end of every hall. Behind every closed door. “Speak plain and tell me your thoughts. What is wrong with him? When will he recover?”

They straighten nervously, huddling and rustling like a flock of birds.

“I know there is no good news,” she says, reading their faces. “But I would have your opinions.”

The healer from Prynn steps back toward the bed. She was the one who took the most aggressive approach to Pietyr’s examination, prodding his gums, pulling on his fingers and toes. It was hard for Katharine to stand there and watch him be poked at, lying unresponsive while a stranger turned his head back and forth and peered inside his ears. When they peeked under the bandages wrapped around his hand, Katharine held her breath. It had been ugly business when she sliced into the rune, mangling it to hide it from discovery. She had made so many cuts that his palm looked like it had been torn apart. But sweet Pietyr had not been awake by then. He had not felt it.

“The wound on his hand continues to heal. Though it is still impossible to tell what caused it. And it does not seem to be the source of his illness. There are no dark lines stemming from the cuts, no foul odor—”

“Yes, yes,” says Katharine. “So you have said before.”

“We think it likely a trauma inside the skull. An unlucky vessel that burst or became clotted. It would leave no outward sign and would require no external impact. You said you found him lying on the floor. It is likely that,

when the vessel burst, he simply fell there. There was probably little pain or what there was would have been brief.”

Katharine stares at his sleeping face. He is still handsome when he sleeps. But he is not himself. What makes Pietyr Pietyr is the glint in his eye, the clever and cutting curve of his mouth. And his voice. It has been too many days since she heard his voice. Nearly weeks.

“When will he wake?”

“I do not know, Queen Katharine. That he continues to breathe is a good sign. But he is unresponsive to stimuli.”

“So much blood . . .” When Katharine returned to her senses after the failed spell and found Pietyr lying beside her on the floor, his face was a mask of red.

“There is no way to tell the extent of the damage,” the healer says. “We can only wait. He will need round-the-clock monitoring . . . care and feeding —”

“Leave us,” Katharine says, and listens to their footsteps shuffle into the hall. She takes his hand and kisses it gently. She should have banished the dead queens when he gave her the chance. If only she had not been such a coward. They know she cannot oust them now, not with her reign assailed from all sides: the mist, the Legion Queen, her sisters’ return. She used to think that the dead queens had made her strong. Now, too late, she knows the truth: the strength was theirs and theirs alone. And they would see her weak forever, to keep her as their puppet.

“I did not know,” she whispers against Pietyr’s cheek. “I did not know that this is what they would do.”

When Katharine walks out of Pietyr’s sickroom an hour later, tired and dazed, she stumbles directly into Edmund, Natalia’s old butler, carrying a tray of tea.

“I thought it might be welcome,” he says softly.

“It is,” Katharine says. “But I have had enough of sitting in that room. Perhaps in the drawing room or the solarium.” She trails off and puts her