

DESTROY
THE
DAY

BRIGID
KEMMERER

BLOOMSBURY

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

THE POLITICAL LEADERS OF KANDALA

NAME	ROLE	SECTOR
King Harristan	King	Royal
Prince Corrick	King's Justice	Royal
Barnard Montague (Deceased)	Consul	Trader's Landing*
Allisander Sallister	Consul	Moonlight Plains
Leander Craft (Deceased)	Consul	Steel City
Jonas Beeching	Consul	Artis
Lissa Marpetta	Consul	Emberridge
Roydan Pelham	Consul	The Sorrowlands
Arella Cherry	Consul	Sunkeep
Jasper Gold	Consul	Mosswell

*Sometimes called "Traitor's Landing" after the former king and queen were assassinated by Consul Montague, leaving Harristan and his younger brother, Corrick, in power.

THE REBELS

NAME	ROLE
Tessa	Apothecary*
Karri	Apothecary
Lochlan	Metalworker

*Now working in service to the king

WANTED FOR TREASON

NAME	ROLE
King Harristan	King
Quint Rifield	Palace Master
Adam Saeth	Royal Guard
Benjamin Thorin	Royal Guard

THE CURE

In Kandala, the only known cure for the fever sickness is an elixir created from dried Moonflower petals, a plant native only to two sectors: Moonlight Plains and Emberridge. King Harristan and Prince Corrick tightly control the supply to ensure fair market dealings and distributions, and to prevent smuggling and thievery.

CHAPTER TWO

Tessa

In any other situation, an isolated house on the beach might be paradise.

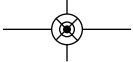
As it is, I can't wait to leave. Unfortunately, I have nowhere to go.

Worse, I have no *way* to go.

At first, Rian tried to convince me to stay in his palace. He made a lot of promises about how it would be safer, how he could ensure my comfort, how I would be given space to grieve my losses.

I told him I would find a way to slit his throat in his sleep if he didn't find us somewhere else. I've heard enough empty promises, and I've been betrayed by too many men. I've seen enough death and destruction to last a dozen lifetimes.

So now Rocco and I share a large house on the east side of the island. No, *Erik* and I. I still haven't gotten used to calling him by his first name—though he hasn't really stopped calling me *Miss Tessa* either. We're both a little raw, a little empty. Every time I look



at him, I think of Corrick being blown off the deck of the ship, and my throat swells. I think of Kilbourne being killed in the hallway, or Lochlan being lost at sea.

Honestly, once the *Dawn Chaser* docked, Rian could have spared himself the trouble. I didn't need a house at all. There was a part of me that wanted to walk straight into the ocean and never look back.

But I can't. I need to figure out a way to return to Kandala.

I need to tell the king what happened to his brother.

I need to tell Karri what happened to Lochlan.

And I can't leave Erik either. He still has a healing knife wound in his side. I've been treating it every day with turmeric and tallow root, but it still looks a bit infected.

So I wake every morning, and I force myself out of bed, even though every fiber of my being wants me to hide in the darkness forever.

But at least Rian leaves us alone.

The house is far larger than we need, with four wide bedrooms, a sprawling sitting room, and even a well-outfitted kitchen with two ovens. A house built for a big family, clearly. One of the bedrooms even has two sets of bunkbeds, with whimsical creatures painted on the walls, and a few forgotten toys left under a bed. A children's room. It makes me wonder what happened to them, because the house was dusty and locked up when Rian first showed us to the door. I've heard there's electricity on some of the islands, but not in this part of Fairde. I don't mind, though. Electricity is a luxury I never grew accustomed to, even when I was living in the palace in Kandala's Royal Sector.

The house has a small stable, a paddock, a chicken coop, and a rabbit hutch—though they're all empty. No livestock. Rian offered

to have horses and chickens brought, which I declined—though Erik later told me I should have accepted, because we don't know how large the island is, and we don't know when we might have a need or opportunity to travel. We don't know how easy food will be to come by.

I scowled at that, because it's smart. I can't let my grief-stricken anger make me stupid.

We're near the water, too, with a long stretch of beach behind the house, and a small dock that has two aged rowboats tied up. On the second day, Rian arrived with men to outfit the house with furniture and clothes and as much food as they could carry, and this time I held my tongue. He also brought any of our trunks from the *Dawn Chaser* that survived the journey. I sat outside in the sand and watched the waves roll up the beach while they unloaded the goods. The whole time, I imagined holding Rian under the water until he drowned.

I sat, tense, waiting for him to come find me anyway, but he didn't. Later, Erik told me that Rian said he would give me space until I was ready to talk about whatever else I might need.

He can't give me what I need.

I *need* to reverse time. I *need* Corrick back. Sometimes I remember his voice so clearly it's like he's beside me, and the memory is so painful that I think my chest is caving in.

Please, my love.

In the cavernous house, I don't sleep well. Every time I close my eyes, I'm haunted by dreams of Corrick being blown off the ship, his body torn apart by a cannonball. Worse are the dreams where I see him treading water in the dark, waiting for the ship to turn back—but of course we don't. In those dreams he screams my name until he slips under the water and drowns.

In the mornings, I sit on the beach. Fog usually hovers over the water at dawn, but once it clears, two other islands of Ostriary appear in the distance, along with the faint outlines of the bridges that Rian needs Kandala's steel to rebuild.

I spend a lot of time staring at the water, waiting.

I'm not sure what I'm waiting for. It's not like Corrick is coming back from the dead.

I can't help staring out at the waves, though, as if he'll do exactly that. Like I could sit here long enough and he'll come strolling up the sand one day, an apparition appearing out of the fog. *Lord, Tessa. Mind your mettle.*

Sometimes my waking thoughts are worse than my nightmares. I can't breathe through the pain when I think like this.

By the time I wake on the ninth day, we haven't seen a soul in at least a week, and it seems that Rian really is going to give me the space he promised. That's good, because I don't know how I'm ever going to face him again. At the same time, I know I'm eventually going to need him to get us back to Kandala.

I don't want to see him. I'm not ready.

But Erik must be done with living like a ghost, because he finds me trailing my fingers in the cool sand at sunrise, and when I look up, I see he's got fishing nets over one broad shoulder.

"Come on." His voice is rough and quiet from disuse, because we don't say much to each other. He's just as trapped by grief and loss and uncertainty as I am. "Let's see how much life the rowboats have in them."

I peer up at him in the sunlight. "I don't think you should be rowing yet."

"Well." He squints out at the pier. "Maybe I'll just see what kind

of shape they're in then." He gives me a nod, hoists the nets higher on his shoulder, then strides off.

Something in his voice tells me he's going out on a rowboat whether I like it or not. I imagine him getting fatigued out in the middle of the ocean while the oars slip into the water. Then I'd really be alone.

I shove myself to my bare feet, brushing sand off my trousers. "At least let me take a look at your wound first."

He looks at me over his shoulder. "It looks better this morning. Hardly aches at all."

"Hmm." I don't believe that for a *minute*.

"I need to move, Miss Tessa."

That makes me frown.

He looks back again. His brown eyes skip over my face and down my form. "You need to move, too."

I don't know how to say that I don't want to leave the sand in case Corrick comes looking for me. It feels pathetic to even *think* it. Corrick is never coming back.

I swallow the lump in my throat and follow him out onto the dock.

Both rowboats are covered with broadcloth tarps, though one is worn and threadbare. The second is larger, and the tarp is sun-bleached, the ropes tethering it to the dock looking like they might fall apart if we dare to touch them. Erik wordlessly starts untying the threadbare one, so I move to the other.

The knots are dry-rotted, so they don't untie at all. They literally fall apart in my fingers.

I grimace and look at Erik. "Sorry."

"Don't be. These have been tethered here forever. It's a lucky

thing they're still floating. We'll have to ask Rian for more broadcloth."

"*You* can ask him."

He nods. "I will." Then he jerks back the threadbare tarp, and enough dust flies up that we both cough.

Erik winces and grabs his side after he does.

He sees me looking and drops his hand, but there's still a pained look in his expression. *Hardly aches at all*, my foot.

But he looks between the boats and says, "This one looks solid. Just old. But no oars. How's yours?"

That spurs me into motion, and I jerk the sun-bleached tarp free. Less dust, but a dozen spiders scatter in the sudden sunlight, and I shriek and drop the tarp in the water, scrambling back on the dock.

Erik smiles, but just a little—then he stares down into the boat and does a double take. "Oh! A sailboat. Look. Yours has a mast."

I look, and he's right. There are four small benches across the boat, but in the very center is a hole set into a plank at the bottom, and laid along the benches sits a beam that must be designed to set upright as a mast, plus a shorter one that must serve as a boom.

"No sail, though," I say.

"I'll check in the shed where I found the nets, but if there isn't one, I'll ask Rian for one of those, too," he says.

I'll ask Rian. I clench my jaw.

Erik looks at me. "Let's move the beam onto the dock. We can row for now. I think I see some oars."

The wood is heavier than I expect, but we manage. I force myself to ignore the bloom of sweat on Erik's forehead once we're done. He tosses the nets into the hull, then steps down into the boat himself.

He looks a bit pale, so I don't follow him. "You *really* shouldn't be rowing," I say.

"I won't," he says. "I'll get us out from the dock, and then you can row."

"I—" I let out a breath. That isn't what I meant. But again, I think of him passing out a mile away from shore, leaving me with no way to rescue him. "I don't really know how to row."

"I'll show you."

I chew at my lip doubtfully, and I glance out at the water.

"You asked me to teach you how to fight, Miss Tessa." His voice is gentle, but firm. "I can't teach you how to fight if you can barely pick yourself up off the beach."

My face threatens to crumple. I asked him that when I was racked with grief, when Corrick had first disappeared into the darkening waves, when I thought nothing could ever cause me more pain, and I wanted to know the best way to lash out against it.

Just now, I want to go back to the beach and curl up in the sand.

I have to put a hand against my face. The tears swell before I can stop them, and I try to sniff them back. I'm barely successful.

Erik puts out a hand. "Come on. Maybe we can catch something good and have a better dinner than salted beef and cheese."

I swipe at my cheeks. "I'm an apothecary, not a cook. I don't know how to gut fish."

"So we'll learn how to row *and* gut fish."

It should make me smile, but it doesn't.

Then Erik says, "It's been over a week now. If I leave you here, Rian might show up to check on us, and you'd have to talk to him on your own."

Well, that does the trick. I practically *leap* into the boat. It rocks a bit from the force of my movement, and Erik smiles. He points to

the rope tethering the boat to the dock. “Unwind that from the cleat, and I’ll push us off.”

When I do, he uses an oar to shove us away from the dock, then drops to sit on a bench across from me. The oars settle into two gaps along the rail of the boat, and I see that they have tiny notches cut into the wood to prevent them from slipping into the water. Maybe I didn’t need to worry after all.

I reach for the oars, but Erik shakes his head. “I’ll get us out. Watch.”

He dips the oars in the water and pulls rhythmically, lifting and folding with each stroke as if he’s been rowing boats all his life. He explains each movement as he does it, showing me how to keep my body upright, to use the current. He’s not moving fast, but each pull is strong, and the small boat cuts through the water with ease, and within a minute, we’re far from the dock. A breeze cools my cheeks, drying the tears, and I take a deep breath.

“Do you want me to take over?” I say.

“Not yet.”

I think of what he said before. *I need to move.*

“Don’t be *too* stubborn,” I say.

He smiles. “Yes, Miss Tessa.”

“How do you know about boats and fishing?” I say.

“I grew up in Sunkeep,” he says as he rows. “Most of my family are sailors. My brother and his wife sail the trade route between Sunkeep and Steel City, and I often join them whenever I have a long enough leave. That’s partly why—” He breaks off sharply, studying me.

I can’t read his expression. “Why what?” I finally say.

“I’m not sure how much to say.” He sighs, aggrieved, and looks out at the water himself. “Maybe it doesn’t make any difference.”

I turn that around in my head, because I can't figure it out. Maybe I've been sitting on the beach for too long. "How much to say about what?"

He gives me a look. "The king's business."

"Oh."

Erik nods. "*Oh.*"

He rows on in silence for a little while, and I realize for the first time that Erik must have a *lot* of secrets. He was part of King Harristan's personal guard. He was by the king's side all the time, over-hearing all manner of conversations.

That's a little intriguing, and I tilt my head and look at him. "What's the worst secret you've ever had to keep?"

He smiles furtively. "I don't recall."

"Liar. Did you ever have to keep secrets from Corrick?"

As soon as I ask the question, I think it's foolish. Corrick was the King's Justice. Anything having to do with Kandala was his business. I can't imagine Harristan using his guards to keep secrets from his brother.

But Erik nods. "Sometimes," he says.

"*Really.*"

He grunts. "Well, the prince kept some secrets himself, I think." He gives me a more pointed look this time.

I suppose that's true. Corrick hid his identity so well as Weston Lark that I had a hard time believing it when the prince tried to reveal the truth.

But at least this line of conversation has given me a bit of distraction. "Can you tell me *anything* interesting?"

He looks out at the water, considering, then sighs. "Most everything I know is boring, Miss Tessa. Truly. The consuls never wanted to speak with His Majesty on anything very exciting. Most

of them just liked to hear themselves talk. You were *there* for the exciting parts.”

I frown. The sad thing is that’s probably true.

“Here, I’ll give you this much,” he says, and he drops his voice just a little, as if we’re not a good distance from the shore, with no audience except the sea and sky. “Captain Blakemore—well, *Rian*—refused to have sailors aboard the *Dawn Chaser*. Do you remember?”

I nod. “He said he didn’t want to lead navigators to Ostriary. He didn’t want to teach anyone how to get through Chaos Isle, because he was worried about leading a military force here.”

“Yes. But the king wanted Prince Corrick to have someone competent on board, someone who could sail the ship just in case . . . in case it was necessary. I have experience at sea, so I volunteered. Kilbourne did too. That’s why I chose him. He’d done summer work on the docks in Artis as a boy.”

Someone who could sail the ship just in case.

As I consider the words, I remember Rian preparing to kill Erik, the morning everything fell apart on his ship. *He’s a sailor*, he said. *Proof that Prince Corrick didn’t honor our agreement*. I didn’t really think about what that meant then, but I do now, and it chases away some of the intrigue.

I swallow thickly, remembering how I practically begged Corrick to get on that ship. I listened to Rian’s stories of having acres of Moonflower, of the way he wanted to help his people, and I fell for every lie.

But apparently no one else did.

“So you never trusted Rian,” I say quietly.

“No.”

He says it so simply, while a bonfire of rage burns in my chest every time I think of Rian.

Maybe that's why Erik can ask for things like tarps and sails, while I'm content to envision holding the captain under the waves while he slowly drowns.

Erik keeps rowing, and I stare out at the water. Sunlight glitters on the surface, and it really is peaceful. Off to our left, the shore is an empty stretch of sand, as if our house is the only one on the whole island. When the *Dawn Chaser* was arriving to Fairde, I could see Rian's palace from the water, but it must be on the other side, because it's out of sight from here.

Good.

I listen to Erik's breathing, waiting to hear any sign of strain, but he's been talking like we're still standing on the dock. He's nearly twice my size, with muscles to spare, so I shouldn't be surprised, but I don't want him to regret this later.

I keep my eyes on the water and say, "Poor Kilbourne's wife won't even know what happened to him." My throat threatens to tighten again, and I swallow. The guardsman was so excited to have a baby. He wanted to buy his wife a house. "Sara, right?"

He nods. "We'll find a way back. I'll tell her."

I realize that Erik might have someone missing him just as much, and I've been so wrapped up in my own grief that I haven't even asked him. "What about you? Do you have a sweetheart waiting for you at home?"

He startles at that, then smiles just a little. "No. The pay is good in the palace guard, but the hours can be long. Duties are unpredictable, especially in service to the king. Secrets to be kept, lies to be told. The risk is high, especially in the last year. I've seen just as

many marriages end as I've seen start. Not the best way to begin a life with someone."

I start to say that Kilbourne made it work—but maybe this is exactly the risk that Erik is talking about.

Erik shrugs. "Someone else is always a priority. I feel like that would just be a disappointment to a wife."

"Well, that sounds lonely."

His smile turns a bit wolfish. "I never said I was *lonely*."

I gasp in surprise, then scoop up a handful of water and splash it at him. "*Erik*."

He laughs—which makes me laugh.

But as soon as I hear the sound of my laughter, I choke it off, folding my hands against my belly.

Laughing feels like a betrayal. I don't know why, but it does.

I don't realize I'm holding my breath until I begin to see stars.

Wood brushes my fingertips. "Your turn."

I let out my breath in a rush, and it almost comes out like a sob. "What?"

Erik's face fills my vision, and he's pressing the oar handles against my knuckles. "Now, Miss Tessa. Let's trade. You row."

"Oh. Oh—all right." I grab hold, and we switch seats. Tears might be rolling down my cheeks, but I struggle to lift the oars out of the water the way he showed me. I'm clumsy and we slow dramatically, but the boat moves a *little*.

"I won't be as fast as you were," I say.

"It doesn't matter."

"Are you in pain?"

He glances away from the water to say, "No. But you were."

Well, that does it. I let go of the oars and press my hands to my

face, because the tears are relentless. The sorrow and grief swell in me until I can't contain them any longer.

The boat rocks as Erik shifts to sit beside me on the little bench. After a moment he puts an arm around my shoulders. It's very kind, and very brotherly—but also a little awkward and stiff, especially when he actually pats me on the arm.

It's so unexpected that it chases some of the emotion away. I swipe at my face and look at him. "Sorry."

Erik pats me on the shoulder again, then sheepishly says, "No, *I'm* sorry. I never know what to do with tears."

I giggle and swipe at my face again. "I'm surprised you didn't say *there, there*."

He smiles and shifts back to his own bench, then nods down at the oars, hanging from the notches that kept them hooked to the boat. "Row. You'll feel better. Like I said, you need to move."

I nod and take hold. My throat is threatening to close up again, so I force myself to talk. My voice is a little breathy, but I try to tease. "You never had to comfort all those girls who made sure you weren't *lonely*?"

A light sparks in his eye, and he teases right back. "Maybe I never gave any of them a reason to cry."

He would *never* be this forward in the palace. I feel like it's revealing a whole side to the guardsman I never knew. "How old are you?" I say.

"Twenty-eight. How old are you?"

"Eighteen."

He whistles through his teeth, then leans out to look over the side at the water. "I knew you were young, but not that young. Let's go out a little farther and I'll see if we can drag the nets a bit."

“Well, Corrick was only nineteen.” My voice threatens to break, so I lean into the oars and pull harder. Erik was right. I *did* need to move.

“I know.” He shakes his head and frowns. “Some days I’d forget, but he *was* young. So is the king, honestly. Their family legacy seems destined to be nothing but tragedy.”

The good humor has slipped out of his voice, too, but his tone burns with an ember of fury.

“You’re angry,” I say in surprise.

He nods, then tosses the nets over the side with enough force that it seems to emphasize his anger—and then he winces and presses a hand to his side, breathing through his teeth. “When we return to Kandala,” he says, “I will have to report to His Majesty that our suspicions were correct, that Captain Blakemore was not to be trusted, and that I failed to keep Prince Corrick safe. It shouldn’t have happened that way, Miss Tessa. He didn’t deserve to lose his brother, too.”

I imagine Harristan learning of Corrick’s death, and tears threaten to swell again. Erik looks at me sharply. “This is why I’m no good with tears,” he says. “I’d rather get angry.”

I remember how he was on the deck of the ship, chasing Rian away from me after Corrick and Lochlan had slipped beneath the waves, gone. I was sitting on the planks crying, but Erik was ready to throw Rian overboard if he came near me.

That was the night I asked him to teach me to fight.

I can’t teach you how to fight if you can barely pick yourself up off the beach.

I dig deep for that same anger, biting my tongue until I taste blood, leaning into the oars, breathing hard.

“Good girl,” says Erik.

“You said *when*,” I say between strokes. “You think we’ll be able to get back?”

“I don’t know.” He hesitates, studying me for a moment before leaning over again to check the nets. “But I do think you’ll need to be the one to figure out a way to talk to Rian.”

I almost drop the oars. “What?” I demand. “Why?”

“Because I don’t think he lied about everything. Ostriary truly does need steel. He wasn’t trying to kidnap Prince Corrick. I believe he was trying to do the right thing for his people, just like you were trying to do the right thing for Kandala. So I think his regret is genuine. That’s why he’s trying so hard to make amends with *you*.” He tugs at the netting. “Eventually, that regret is going to wear thin—if it hasn’t already. He’ll have to admit that he failed, or those pirates will come after him again, or his people are going to figure out that he couldn’t keep his promises—*something*. Once any of that happens, you will have absolutely no leverage over him.”

I keep pulling at the oars, considering this.

I hate Rian. I *hate* him. I don’t want to talk to him.

But if he’s the king of Ostriary, he might be our best—our *only*—way out of here.

I look at Erik and remember what the king used to say when he needed his guards to help formulate a plan. “Advise.” I hesitate. “Please.”

“Well, Rian came to Kandala to negotiate with the king. He couldn’t have been sure who he was going to bring back—if anyone at all.” He shrugs a little. “He still needs steel. If I know anything of royalty, right now he’s scrambling, stalling, *hiding*.”

“Lying.”

“Absolutely. Maybe you could lie a little yourself. Convince him

that you knew secrets from Prince Corrick that could be advantageous to Ostriary. Bargain for passage back to Kandala.”

That makes me falter. “He wouldn’t believe it. I’m not a good liar.”

Erik considers that, pulling at the nets, dragging them back over the side while he thinks. “Look! We’ll have more than enough. I’ll have to throw half of this back.” He dumps two dozen fish in the hull of our little boat, and they all start flopping everywhere. He immediately starts tossing some back over the side, but his breathing has gone a bit ragged.

I let go of the oars and help. “You should rest.”

“I’m fine. Let’s keep six. Give me the oars. I’ll turn us around.” As he does, I look off to the island. We’re a good distance from shore, and the beach has been mostly deserted, but for the first time, I spot another dock. A woman stands near the end, watching us. A small child is by her side.

I raise my hand to wave, but she doesn’t wave back. We’re too far to make out her expression.

Erik is rowing again, heading us back the way we came. “She’s probably wary,” he says. “Rian said these shores used to be attacked by Oren Crane’s people.”

“Oh,” I say quietly. I hadn’t thought about that.

“I’m sure that’s why our house was empty.”

I hadn’t thought about that either. In all my anger at Rian, I forgot that Ostriary faced its own tragedies.

Erik is right. I’m sure Rian’s regret is genuine.

But he was still a liar. He did a lot of terrible things to get what he wanted. Corrick is dead, and he has to know Harristan won’t forgive him for that. If he needs steel for Ostriary, he might do something even worse to get it.



That gives me an idea. “Maybe I don’t have to lie at all.”

Erik looks back at me, pulling hard on the oars so we cut smoothly through the water. “Oh?”

“He still needs steel. He let Corrick die, so he must be worried that Harristan is going to set Ostriary on fire when he finds out.”

“I’ll help light the match.”

“Me too. But neither country can sustain a war. Rian knows Harristan listened to me about the Moonflower. I think he’d believe that Harristan would listen to me again. Like you said, no one knew who Rian was bringing back, because he didn’t know himself.” Rage is burning in my gut. Erik is right. Anger is so much more powerful. “I don’t need to lie about anything at all. Maybe I just need to convince him that I’m the only one who can help him get what he wants.”

