

# The King: A Novel of the Black Dagger Brotherhood

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J.R. Ward's # 1 New York Times bestselling Black Dagger Brotherhood continues as a royal bloodline is compromised by a grave threat to the throne.

Long live the King...

After turning his back on the throne for centuries, Wrath, son of Wrath, finally assumed his father's mantle--with the help of his beloved mate. But the crown sets heavily on his head. As the war with the Lessening Society rages on, and the threat from the Band of Bastards truly hits home, he is forced to make choices that put everything--and everyone--at risk.

Beth Randall thought she knew what she was getting into when she mated the last pure blooded vampire on the planet: An easy ride was not it. But when she decides she wants a child, she's unprepared for Wrath's response--or the distance it creates between them.

The question is, will true love win out... or tortured legacy take over?

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"Give me your mouth," Wrath demanded.

Beth tilted her head back and leaned into her mate's arms. "You want it? So take it."

The growl that came out of that massive chest was a reminder that her man was not, in fact, a man. He was the last purebred vampire left on the planet-- and when it came to her and sex, he was fully capable of going wrecking-- ball to get at her.

And not in the stupid-- ass Miley Cyrus poser-- sex way-- and provided Beth was willing, of course. Although really, when a woman had the opportunity to get with six feet, nine inches of hard-- ass dressed in black leather, who just happened to have pale green eyes that glowed like the moon, and black hair down to the aforementioned concrete posteri-or?

No was not just out of her vocabulary; it was a foreign concept.

The kiss that came at her was brutal and she wanted it that way, Wrath's tongue thrusting into her as he shoved her backward through the open doorway of their secret hideaway.

Slam!

Best sound in the world. Well, okay, second-- best-- number one being what her man made when he came inside of her.

At the mere thought of it, her core opened even further.

"Oh, fuck," he said into her mouth as one of his hands slipped in between her thighs. "I want this--yeah . . . are you wet for me, leelan."

Not a question. Because he knew the answer, didn't he.

"I can smell you," he groaned against her ear as he ran his fangs up her throat. "The most beautiful thing in the world— except for your taste."

That gravel in his voice, the straining in his hips, that hard length pressing into her— she orgasmed right then and there.

"Fuck me, we need to do this more," he gritted as she ground herself against his hand, working her hips. "Why the fuck haven't we come down here every night?"

The thought of the mess that waited for them back in Caldwell drained some of the heat out of her. But then he started massaging her with his fingers, working the seam of her jeans against her most sensitive place while his tongue probed her mouth the way he did when he was . . . um, yeah.

Gee whiz, what do you know, surprise, surprise— everything about his being King and the assassination attempt and the Band of Bastards just floated away.

He was right. Why the hell didn't they make time for this slice of heaven on a regular basis?

Giving herself up to the sex, her hands tangled in his waist— length hair, its softness at odds with the harshness of his face, the strength in his incredible body, that iron core of his will. She'd never been one of those silly chippies who dreamed about a Prince Charming or a fairy— tale wedding or any of that Disney musical bullcrap. But even for someone who had had no illusions and no intention of ever signing a marriage certificate, there was no way she would have pictured herself with Wrath, son of Wrath, King of a race that as far as she had known back then was nothing more than a Halloween myth.

Yet here she was, head over heels with a straight— up killer who had a trucker's vocabulary, a royal bloodline as long as his arm, and enough attitude to make Kanye West look like a self— esteem reject.

Okay, he wasn't quite that egocentric— although, yup, he probably would cut Taylor Swift off in a heartbeat, but that was because rap and hip— hop were his music of choice and not 'cuz he was being a hater.

Bottom line, her hellren was a his— way— or— no— way kind of guy, and the throne he sat on meant that personality defect was embraced on bended knee as the law of the land.

Talk about a perfect storm. The good news? She was the sole exception, the only person who could talk sense into him when he really got his hackles up. It was like that with all of the Brothers and their mates: Members of the Black Dagger Brotherhood, the race's elite group of fighters and meatheads, were not known for being easygoing. Then again, you didn't want pussies on the front line of any war, especially when the bad guys were of the

ilk of the Lessening Society.

And those goddamned Bastards.

"I'm not going to make it to the bed," Wrath moaned. "I gotta be in you now."

"So take me on the floor." She sucked on his lower lip. "You know how to do that, don't you?"

More growling, and a big shift in the planet's orientation as she was popped off the ground and laid out on all that polished wood. The loft that Wrath had once used as a bachelor pad was right out of central casting: It had a cathedral ceiling, an empty warehouse's decor, and the matte black paint job of an Uzi. It was nothing like the Brotherhood mansion where they lived, and that was the point.

As beautiful as that place was, all the gold leaf and crystal chandeliers and antique furniture could get a little stifling-

Riiiiiiiiiiiiiiiiip.

With that happy noise, she lost another outfit in her wardrobe- and wasn't Wrath proud of himself: Flashing fangs long as daggers and white as the driven snow, he proceeded to turn her silk button- down into a Swiffer, shredding the thing off her naked breasts, buttons flying everywhere.

"Now, that's what I'm talkin' about." Wrath tore off his wraparounds and smiled, exposing his dental hardware. "Nothing in the way . . ."

Looming over her, he latched onto her nipple while his hands went to the waistband of her black jeans. All things considered, he was pretty polite as he unhooked the catch and unzipped, but she knew what was coming. . . .

With a violent jerk, he laid waste to what had been a two- week- old pair of Levi's.

She didn't care. Neither did he.

Oh, God, she needed this.

"You're right, it's been way too long," she hissed as he went after his own fly, popping the buttons free, unleashing an erection that still man-aged to take her breath away.

"I'm sorry," he bit out as he grabbed her behind the neck and mount-ed her.

As she opened her thighs wide for him, she knew exactly why he was apologizing. "Don't be- Jesus!"

The blazing possession was exactly what she wanted- and so was the rough ride he gave her, his heavy weight crushing her, her bare ass squeaking against the floor as he pounded into her, her legs straining to link around so he could go even deeper. It was total domination, his great body pistoning in an erotic pump that got ever faster and more intense.

But as good as it was, she knew how to take things to the next level. "Aren't you thirsty yet?" she drawled.

Total. Molecular. Stoppage.

Like he'd been hit with an ice ray. Or maybe a truck.

As he lifted his head, his eyes lit up so brightly, she knew if she looked on the floor next to her, she'd see her own shadow.

Digging into his shoulders with her nails, she arched up to him and cocked her head to the side. "How about something to drink?"

His lips curled off his fangs and he let out a cobra's hiss.

The bite was like being stabbed, but the pain faded into a sweet delirium that carried her to another dimension. Floating and grounded at the same time, she moaned and pushed her fingers into his hair, yanking him even closer as he sucked at her throat and thrust into her sex.

She orgasmed- and so did he.

Duh.

God, after a dry spell of how long? At least a month- which was unheard of for them- she realized how much they both had to have this. Too much static from all the demands around them. Too much stress polluting the hours. Too much toxic crap they didn't have time to process with each other.

Like, after he'd been shot in the neck, had they really talked about it? Sure, there had been the OMG, you're alive, you made it stuff . . . but she was still flinching every time a doggen opened a bottle of wine in the dining room or the Brothers played pool after hours.

Who knew that a cue ball smacking into a rack sounded exactly like a gun going off?

She hadn't. Not until Xcor had decided to put a bullet into Wrath's jugular.

Hardly the kind of education she'd been looking for-

For no good reason, tears flooded her eyes and broke free, tangling in her lashes and

seeping down her cheeks even as another round of pleasure flooded her body.

And then the image of Wrath's gunshot wound billboarded her vision.

Red blood on the bulletproof vest he'd worn. Red blood on his muscle shirt. Red blood on his skin.

The dangerous times come home, the ugliness of reality no longer a hypothetical bogeyman in her mental closet, but a scream in her soul.

Red was the color of death to her.

Wrath froze for a second time and jerked his head up. "Leelan?"

Opening her eyes, she had a sudden panic that she couldn't see him right, that that face she looked for in every room no matter the hour was gone, that that visual confirmation of his life wasn't going to be there for the taking anymore.

Except all she had to do was blink. Blink, blink, blink . . . and he was back with her, clear as day.

And that made her cry more. Because her strong, beloved man was blind- and though that didn't make him handicapped in her opinion, it did cheat him out of some fundamentals, and that just wasn't fair.

"Oh, fuck, I hurt you-

"No, no . . ." She took his face in her hands. "Don't stop."

"I should have gone over to the bed-

The sure way to get him refocused was to arch under him, and she did, undulating and rolling her hips so that her core stroked him. And Hello, big boy, the friction registered, rendering him tongue- tied and torn.

"Don't stop," she reiterated, trying to draw him back down to her vein. "Ever . . ."

But Wrath held off, stroking a piece of hair away from her face. "Don't think like that."

"I'm not."

"You are."

There was no reason to define what "like that" meant: Treasonous plots. Wrath at that ornate desk, strangled by his position. The future unknown and not in a good way.

"I'm goin' nowhere, leelan. You don't worry about a goddamn thing. Understand me?"

Beth wanted to believe him. Needed to. But she feared it was a promise far harder to keep than speak.

"Beth?"

"Make love to me." It was the only truth she could put out there that wouldn't burst the bubble. "Please."

He kissed her once. Twice. And then started to move again. "Always, leelan. Always."

Best. Night. Ever.

As Wrath pushed himself off of his shellan an hour later, he couldn't breathe, he was bleeding at the throat, and his Man of Steel cock had finally gone wet-? noodle.

Although knowing the damn thing's stamina? He had five, maybe ten minutes before Mr. Happy got to grinnin' again.

The big bed in the center of the loft's vast space had been upgraded since his Beth had mated him, and as he stretched out on his back, he had to admit that having sex on the thing was so much better than doing it on the floor. That said, as he recovered, its sheets were unnecessary as he could have fried an egg on his chest from the exertion. Blankets were an absolute hell-? no. Pillows had been lost quickly because there was no headboard, but the advantage was leverage from any compass point.

Sometimes he liked to put a foot down and really dig in.

Beth let out a sigh that was longer and more satisfying than a Shakespearian sonnet-? and talk about a hell-? yeah? Wrath's chest inflated like a hot-? air balloon.

"I do you okay?" he drawled.

"God. Yes."

More with the smiling. It was The Mask all over again, nothing but Jim Carrey, Pepsodent white over here. And she was right: The sex had been beyond fantastic. He'd fucked her across the floor until they were in range of the mattress. Then, like the gentlemale he was, he'd put her on the bed . . . and had her another three times. Four?

He could do this all night-

Sure as an eclipse could wipe out the moon, his cosmic relaxation disappeared and took all warmth with it.

There was no all night for him anymore. Not when it came to kickin' it with his female.

"Wrath?"

"I'm right here, leelan," he murmured.

As she rolled onto her side, he could feel her staring at him, and even though his vision had finally given up the ghost and conked out on him entirely, he could picture her long, thick black hair and her blue eyes and her beautiful face.

"You're not."

"I'm fine."

Shit, what time was it? Had it been longer than the hour it had felt like? Probably. When it came to the grind with Beth, he could lose moth-erfucking days.

"It's after one," she said softly.

"Fuck me."

"Would it help to talk? Wrath . . . can you tell me where you're at?"

Ah, hell, she was right. He had been checking out a lot lately, retreat-ing to a place in his mind where the chaos couldn't get to him- not a bad thing, but it was a solo trip.

"Just not ready to go back to work."

"I don't blame you." She found his mouth and brushed her lips against his. "Can we stay a little longer?"

"Yeah." But not long enough . . .

A subtle alarm sounded on his wrist.

"Goddamn it." Putting his forearm across his face, he shook his head. "Time flies, huh."

And responsibilities waited for him. He had petitions to review. Proc-lamations to draft. And e- mails in his inbox, those fucking e- mails that the glymera pulled out of their asses on a nightly basis . . . although those had been drying up lately- probably a sign that that bunch of fruit loops were talking among themselves. Not good news.

Wrath cursed again. "I don't know how my father did this. Night after night. Year after year."

Only to be killed brutally too young.



At least when the elder Wrath had been on his throne, things had been stable: His citizenry had loved him and he had loved them. No treasonous plots cooking in back rooms. The enemy had been from without, not within.

"I'm so sorry," Beth said. "Are you sure there aren't some things you can put off?"

Wrath sat up, brushing his long hair back. As he stared off ahead, seeing nothing, he wanted to be out fighting.

Not an option. In fact, the only thing on his dance card was going back to Caldie and rechaining himself to that desk. His fate had been sealed many, many years ago, when his mother had gone into her needling, and his father had done what a hellren should . . . and against all odds, the heir had been conceived, and birthed, and then nurtured long enough so he could see both of them killed by lessers right in front of his still- functional, pretrans eyes.

Crystal clear, the memories were.

It hadn't been until after his change when the ocular defect had begun to manifest itself. But that weakness was, like the throne, part of his hereditary due. The Scribe Virgin had had a prescribed breeding plan, one that had amplified the most desirable traits in males and females and created a caste- like system of social hierarchy. Good plan, up to a point. As usual with shit like Mother Nature, the law of unintended consequences had decided to slap a bitch- and that was how this King with his "perfect" lineage had ended up blind.

Frustrated, he jacked out of bed- and naturally hit one of those pil-lows instead of the floor. As his foot flipped out from underneath him and his balance went carnival fu...

#### Other Books

Darius, #1 New York Times bestseller J.R. Ward shares the powerful star-crossed love story of reader favorite, and original member of the Black Dagger Brotherhood, Darius. Darius, son of Marklon, isn't looking for love the night destiny comes to claim him. He's also not interested in crashing his new car. But when a human woman runs out into the road and he must swerve to avoid killing her...everything goes off course. Disillusioned by his King's lack of leadership and the losses in the war against the Lessening Society, Darius finds purpose in protecting a woman he cannot make his own. Love finds a way, however—until the truth of what he is comes out and she leaves him in horror. Unbeknownst to them both, Anne is carrying his young, a female who is destined to be Queen—and after a tragic reunion, he vows to protect their daughter. Resigned to perpetual sadness, he is determined to serve the memory of his beloved no matter the cost...unless by some miracle, fate sees fit to once again bring them together.

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