

THE BRIDGE KINGDOM BOOK 2



THE
TRAITOR
QUEEN

DANIELLE L.

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR OF *A FATE INKED IN BLOOD*

JENSEN

PRAISE FOR THE BRIDGE KINGDOM SERIES

“Heart-pounding romance and intense action wrapped in a spellbinding world. I was hooked from the first page.”

—Elise Kova, *USA Today* bestselling author of *A Deal with the Elf King*, on *The Bridge Kingdom*

“Exquisite, phenomenal, and sexy, *The Bridge Kingdom* is the epitome of fantasy romance perfection. I adored Jensen’s world and characters. Aren and Lara were magnificent individually and together, a couple you’ll root for from beginning to end.”

—Olivia Wildenstein, *USA Today* bestselling author of *House of Beating Wings*

“An epic, action-packed tale of love, revenge, and betrayal.”

—Jennifer Estep, *New York Times* bestselling author of *Kill the Queen*, on *The Traitor Queen*

“The next installment in the Bridge Kingdom series is not to be missed. Do not walk to pick up this book. Run.”

—Jennifer L. Armentrout, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *From Blood and Ash*, on *The Inadequate Heir*

BY THE AUTHOR

THE MALEDICTION TRILOGY

Stolen Songbird

Hidden Huntress

Warrior Witch

The Broken Ones (Prequel)

THE DARK SHORES SERIES

Dark Shores

Dark Skies

Gilded Serpent

Tarnished Empire (Prequel)

THE BRIDGE KINGDOM SERIES

The Bridge Kingdom

The Traitor Queen

The Inadequate Heir

The Endless War

SAGA OF THE UNFATED

A Fate Inked in Blood

THE
TRAITOR
QUEEN



DANIELLE L.
JENSEN



NEW YORK

Copyright © 2020 by Danielle L. Jensen

Bonus chapter copyright © 2024 by Danielle L. Jensen

Penguin Random House values and supports copyright. Copyright fuels creativity, encourages diverse voices, promotes free speech, and creates a vibrant culture. Thank you for buying an authorized edition of this book and for complying with copyright laws by not reproducing, scanning, or distributing any part of it in any form without permission. You are supporting writers and allowing Penguin Random House to continue to publish books for every reader. Please note that no part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner for the purpose of training artificial intelligence technologies or systems.

All rights reserved.

Published in the United States by Del Rey, an imprint of Random House, a division of Penguin Random House LLC, New York.

DEL REY and the CIRCLE colophon are registered trademarks of Penguin Random House LLC.

Originally published in slightly different form as an audio original by Audible in 2020 and subsequently self-published in print and digital formats by Danielle L. Jensen in 2020.

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOGING-IN-PUBLICATION DATA

Names: Jensen, Danielle L., author.

Title: The traitor queen / Danielle L. Jensen.

Description: New York: Del Rey, 2024. | Series: The Bridge Kingdom series; 2

Identifiers: LCCN 2024038001 (print) | LCCN 2024038002 (ebook) | ISBN 9780593975213 (trade paperback; acid-free paper) | ISBN 9781733090339 (ebook)

Subjects: LCGFT: Fantasy fiction. | Romance fiction. | Novels.

Classification: LCC PR9199.4.J455 T73 2024 (print) | LCC PR9199.4.J455 (ebook) |

DDC 813/.6—dc23/eng/20240816

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024038001>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024038002>

Ebook ISBN 9781733090339

[randomhousebooks.com](https://www.randomhousebooks.com)

Title page art by Adhi, aksol © Adobe Stock Photos

Book design by Sara Bereta, adapted for ebook

Map: Damien Mammoliti

Cover design: Regina Flath

Cover illustration: Eevien Tan

ep_prh_7.0a_148659011_c0_r0

CONTENTS

Dedication

Chapter 1: Aren

Chapter 2: Lara

Chapter 3: Aren

Chapter 4: Lara

Chapter 5: Aren

Chapter 6: Lara

Chapter 7: Aren

Chapter 8: Lara

Chapter 9: Lara

Chapter 10: Lara

Chapter 11: Aren

Chapter 12: Lara

Chapter 13: Aren

Chapter 14: Lara

Chapter 15: Lara

Chapter 16: Aren

Chapter 17: Aren

Chapter 18: Lara

Chapter 19: Aren

Chapter 20: Lara

Chapter 21: Aren

Chapter 22: Lara

Chapter 23: Aren

Chapter 24: Lara

Chapter 25: Aren

Chapter 26: Lara

Chapter 27: Aren

Chapter 28: Lara

Chapter 29: Aren

Chapter 30: Lara

Chapter 31: Lara

Chapter 32: Aren

Chapter 33: Lara

Chapter 34: Aren

Chapter 35: Lara

Chapter 36: Aren

Chapter 37: Lara

Chapter 38: Aren

Chapter 39: Lara

Chapter 40: Aren

Chapter 41: Lara

Chapter 42: Aren

Chapter 43: Lara

Chapter 44: Aren

Chapter 45: Aren

Chapter 46: Lara

Chapter 47: Aren

Chapter 48: Lara

[Chapter 49: Aren](#)

[Chapter 50: Lara](#)

[Chapter 51: Aren](#)

[Chapter 52: Lara](#)

[Chapter 53: Aren](#)

[Chapter 54: Lara](#)

[Chapter 55: Aren](#)

[Chapter 56: Lara](#)

[Chapter 57: Aren](#)

[Chapter 58: Lara](#)

[Chapter 59: Aren](#)

[Chapter 60: Lara](#)

[Chapter 61: Lara](#)

[Chapter 62: Aren](#)

[Chapter 63: Lara](#)

[Chapter 64: Aren](#)

[Chapter 65: Lara](#)

[Chapter 66: Lara](#)

[Sarhina](#)

[About the Author](#)

For my dearest friend and confidante, Elisa Kova

1

AREN

HE'D BEEN BLINDFOLDED FOR THIRTEEN days.

Shackled, too, and occasionally gagged, but despite the persistent burn of the ropes sloughing the skin of his wrists and the foul taste of the fabric shoved in his mouth, it was the endless shadow of the blindfold that was driving Aren, the former king of Ithicana, to the brink of madness.

For while pain was an old friend, and discomfort almost a way of life, to be confined to what sights his own mind could conjure was the worst sort of torture. Because despite his most fervent wish it were otherwise, all his mind wanted to show him were visions of *her*.

Lara.

His wife.

The Traitor Queen of Ithicana.

Aren had more pressing matters to consider, the foremost how the *bloody hell* he was going to escape the Maridrinians. Yet the practicalities of that need faded as he examined every moment with *her*, trying and failing to decipher truth from lie, reality from the act—though to what end he could not say. What did knowing if any of it had been real *matter* when the bridge was lost, his people were dead and dying, his kingdom was on the brink of defeat, and all of it the result of him trusting in—*loving*—his enemy.

I love you. Her voice and face filled his thoughts, honey hair tangled, her azure eyes bright with tears that carved their way through the mud smearing her cheeks.

Truth or lie?

Aren wasn't sure which answer would be a balm to the wound and which would tear it wide open again. A wise man would leave it alone, but God knew he had no claim to that particular attribute, so around he circled, her face, her voice, her touch consuming him as the Maridrinians dragged him, kicking and fighting, from his fallen kingdom. Only once he was off the seas and beneath the heat of the Maridrinian skies did he get his wish: the blindfold removed.

Wishes were the dreams of fools.

2

LARA

LARA HADN'T KNOWN ERANAHL HAD a dungeon.

But there was no other word for the dark cell built into caverns beneath the island city, the stone walls slick with mildew and the air stagnant. The steel bars were devoid of even a hint of rust, because this was Ithicana, and even the things that were barely used were well maintained.

Lara lay on her back on the narrow cot, the thin blanket she'd been given doing little to ward off the damp chill, her stomach tight with hunger because she was subjected to the same rations as everyone else on the island.

This wasn't how she'd hoped things would go.

Rather than convincing Ahnna of her plan to rescue Aren from her father's clutches, all her display of martial skill in the council chamber had done was see her slapped in irons, dragged through the city streets, and tossed in this cell. Those who brought her food and fresh water refused to speak to her, ignoring her pleas to see Ahnna.

And every day that passed was another day that Aren remained a prisoner in Maridrina, subjected to God knew what sort of treatment.

If he was even still alive.

The thought made her want to curl in on herself. Made her want to scream with frustration. Made her want to break free of this place and try to free Aren herself.

Except she knew that would be folly.

She *needed* Ithicana.

If only she could make them realize that they needed her, too.

3

AREN

“GOOD MORNING, YOUR MAJESTY,” A voice said as the blindfold was removed from Aren’s face.

Aren blinked rapidly, tears streaming down his cheeks as the sun seared into his eyes, blinding him as surely as the sweat-stained fabric ever had. Gradually, the burning white receded to reveal a manicured rose garden. A table. And a man with silvered hair, sun-darkened skin, and eyes the color of the Tempest Seas.

The king of Maridrina.

Lara’s father.

His enemy.

Aren lunged across the table, not caring that he was unarmed or that his wrists were bound. Knowing only that he needed to hurt this man who had destroyed everything he held dear.

His fingers inches from their mark, Aren found himself snapped back against his chair, a chain belted to his waist holding him in place like a dog to a post.

“Now, now. Let’s not be uncivilized.”

“Fuck. You.”

The Maridrinian king’s upper lip curled with disdain, as though Aren had barked rather than spoken. “You are as your kingdom was, Your Majesty. Feral.”

Was.

The sneer turned into a smile. “Yes, Your Majesty. *Was.* For I’m afraid Ithicana is no longer, and your title now a courtesy you will have to do without.” He leaned back in his chair. “What shall we call you? Master Kertell? Or perhaps, given we are family of sorts, a certain amount of familiarity is appropriate, *Aren.*”

“I don’t give a shit what you call me, *Silas.* As to your other point, the bridge is not Ithicana. *I* am not Ithicana. My—”

“—people are Ithicana,” Silas finished, his gaze gleaming with amusement. “Pretty words, boy. And perhaps there is truth to them. Ithicana stands...for as long as Eranahl does.”

Aren’s stomach twisted, the name of his city on his enemy’s lips both unfamiliar and unwelcome.

“Such a secret to keep.” King Silas Veliant shook his head. “Yet a secret no longer.”

“If you mean to use me to negotiate Eranahl’s surrender, you’re wasting your time.”

“I don’t waste my time. And I don’t negotiate.” Silas rubbed his chin. “Nearly all your people gathered on one island, cut off from supplies, and with no hope of salvation. How long will they last? How long until Eranahl is not a fortress, but a tomb? No, Aren, I don’t need *you* to see the destruction of Ithicana through to completion.”

It wouldn’t come to that. Whoever was in command of Eranahl would begin smuggling civilians out of Ithicana under the cover of the storms. North and south. Scattered to the winds.

But alive.

And as long as they were alive...“If I’m so useless, why am I here?”

Silas steepled his fingers together, silent. Aren’s heart sped, thundering against his chest, each beat more violent than the last.

“Where is Lara?”

An unexpected question, given that Aren had expected her to be *here.* Back in Maridrina. Back at her father’s side. That she wasn’t...That her father didn’t know where she was...

I love you.

Aren shook his head sharply, a bead of sweat running down his cheek. She'd stabbed him in the back, lied to him from the beginning. *Nothing* she'd said mattered now. "I have no idea."

"Is she alive?"

Unease prickled across his skin, Lara's voice echoing through his thoughts: *I thought I'd destroyed all the copies. This is...this is a mistake.* The tears in her eyes had glinted like jewels. "Your guess is as good as mine."

"Did you let her go? Or did she escape?"

Please don't do this. I can fight. I can help you. I can—

"Allowing a traitor to go free seems an ill-advised choice." Yet it had been the one he'd made. Why? Why hadn't he killed her when he'd had the chance?

The other man's head cocked. Then he reached into the pocket of his gleaming white coat and extracted a ragged and stained piece of paper, the gilt long worn off its edges. "This was found on your person when you were searched. Such an interesting document."

Silas laid it flat on the table. Aren's writing was barely visible through the watermarks and bloodstains. "On one side, she betrays me. On the other"—he flipped it over—"she betrays you. A puzzle. I must say, we were uncertain what to make of it, especially in conjunction with your visit to my fair city. Tell me, where do you believe Lara's loyalties lie?"

Aren's shirt glued itself to his back, the stink of sweat filling his nose. "Given our present circumstances, I'd say the answer is obvious."

"On the surface, perhaps." The Maridrinian king's fingers grazed over the damning piece of paper. "If I might ask, who killed Marylyn?"

"I did." The lie slipped out before Aren could question why he felt the deception necessary.

"No," Silas mused. "No, I don't think you did."

"Believe what you want. It makes no difference."

Folding the paper, Lara's father leaned over to tuck it into the neck of Aren's shirt. "Let me tell you a story. A story about a girl raised in the

desert with her beloved sisters. A girl who, upon hearing that her own father intended to kill her and ten of her sisters, chose not to save herself but to *risk* herself to save their lives. Chose not to flee into a certain future but to condemn herself to a dark fate. All to save those precious lives.”

“I’ve heard this story.” Pieces of it. From Lara. And from the sister she’d murdered.

“Heard it, perhaps. But did you understand it? For within every good story, there is something to be learned.”

“By all means, enlighten me.” Aren lifted his bound wrists. “I’m a captive audience.”

Silas chuckled, then asked, “Why, given the girl was so damned and determined to protect her sisters’ lives, would she take one of them herself?”

“Marylyn threatened the others.”

“The others were not there. She had time. Yet instead of using it, she snapped her sister’s neck. Which leads me, Aren, to believe that something she valued greatly was in more immediate jeopardy.”

Images flashed across Aren’s vision. Lara’s face when her eyes had landed upon him on his knees, her sister’s knife at his throat. The way she’d searched the room, not for a means of escape, but for a way through an impossible situation. There had only been one choice: his life or Marylyn’s.

Silas Veliant leaned across the table, not seeming to care that he was well within reach of Aren’s hands. “I made my daughter a promise, *Your Majesty*.” His voice was full of mockery. “I promised that if she ever betrayed me, I’d have her killed in the worst of ways. And I always keep my promises.”

Maridrinian bastard blue. That was the color of this man’s eyes. And Lara’s. But whereas hers had been full of depth and life, staring into her father’s eyes was like meeting the gaze of a snake. Cold. Dispassionate. Cruel. “She didn’t betray you. You have what you wanted.”

A slow smile revealed teeth that had seen too much tobacco. “Even now, after all she’s cost Ithicana, you lie for her. You love her.”

That was a lie. Lara had cost Ithicana its bridge. Its people their lives. Aren his throne. He *hated* her. “I care nothing for her.”

Silas chuckled, then murmured, “We shall see. For of a surety, she knows I have you here. And with even greater surety, she will come for you. And when she does, I will cut her down.”

“I’ll hand you the sword.”

His chuckle turned to a wild, jarring laugh. “We’ll see if you’re singing the same tune when your wife is on her knees begging for your life. Or when she starts to scream for her own.”

Without another word, the king of Maridrina rose, leaving Aren alone and chained in the garden. And though for days all Aren had wanted was *sight* to wipe away the vision of her face, now he closed his eyes to see it. *Run, Lara. And don’t ever look back.*