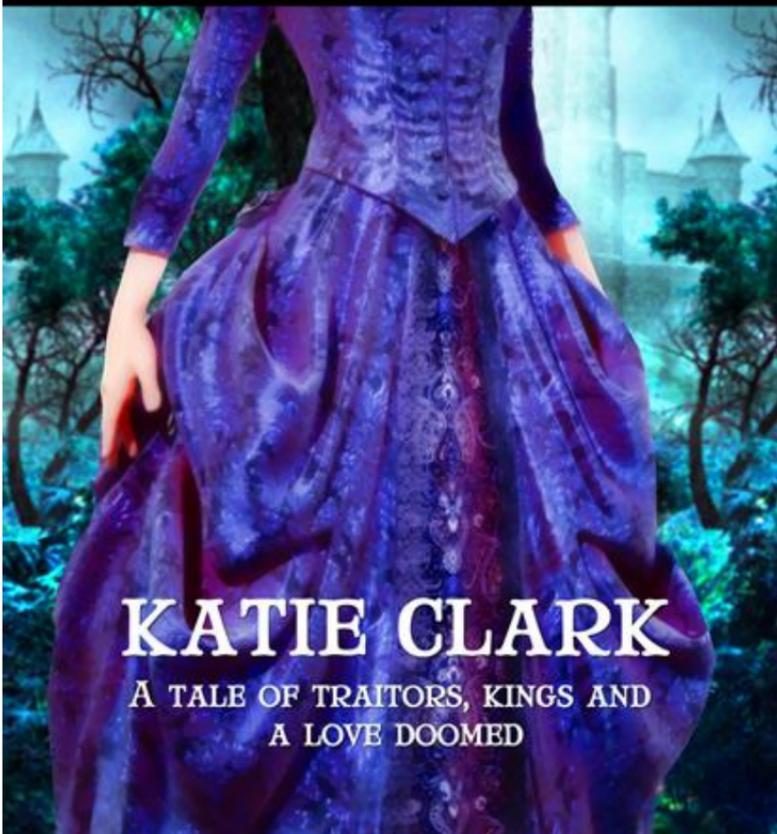


THE
Rebel
PRINCESS



KATIE CLARK

A TALE OF TRAITORS, KINGS AND
A LOVE DOOMED

The Rebel Princess

Katie Clark

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The Rebel Princess
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Dedication

To my loves, always.

Also by Katie Clark

The Rejected Princess

Enslaved Series

Vanquished
Redeemer
Deliverance

Beguiled Series

Shadowed Eden
Whispering Tower

What People are Saying

The Beguiled Series ~

"*Shadowed Eden* is a unique and intriguing tale that will keep the reader guessing and turning pages to find out the secrets of this mysterious story, and the suspense doesn't stop until its surprising end! I highly recommend it." ~ Melanie Dickerson

"A truly original premise, *Shadowed Eden*, is an exciting supernatural adventure filled with danger, redemption, and a cast of teenage characters that I grew to love. I enjoyed Clark's story and look forward to seeing what she comes up with next." ~ Jill Williamson

The Enslaved Series ~

"An emotional and unique take on a world of haves vs. have-nots that will pull you in from the author of *Touch of Death*

"Hana's journey continues in the page-turning sequel to *Vanquished*. Greater City is not what Hana hoped or expected and now she must choose between a privileged life of silence and lies or the dangerous road to truth and deliverance."

~ Donna Marie West

Kingdoms

Chester's Wake, the northern kingdom, ruled by the Hamiltons

Dawson's Edge, the southern kingdom, ruled by the Dawsons

Lox, the western kingdom, ruled by the Bellevues

Jakbar, a kingdom from across the ocean

Characters

Prince Benjamin of Lox, engaged to Princess Roanna of Dawson's Edge (formerly the princess of Chester's Wake)

Prince Gregory of Chester's Wake

Prince Stefan of Dawson's Edge, married to Princess Isabella de St. Paul of Jakbar

Ambassador Roland Dawson, fifth brother of the King of Dawson's Edge

Merry Stern, former Dawson's Edge nobility, whose family was outcast after being exposed in the national rebellion

Wesley and Gideon, royal guardsmen in Chester's Wake, and friends to Prince Gregory

Royal Histories

Four hundred years after the Great Wars, the kingdoms of Chester's Wake, Dawson's Edge, and Lox find themselves on the brink of peace at last. Aided by advancements in chemistry and alchemy, their use of steam-powered air ships, genetic testing, and robotic technologies are helping to foster good relations between them and bring them to their long-awaited goals.

However, not all want peace. Dawson's Edge has long refrained from using the baser technology of Termination, which the other kingdoms see as an advancement. The rebels within Dawson's Edge wish to embrace Termination in order to stomp out the anomalies which give their rulers unknowable powers.

Can this world of fairy tales and steam-powered engines ever be truly whole?

1

A thick, red blood droplet hit Roanna's hand. Then another. And another. A moment later, a warm trickle reached her upper lip. She blew out a frustrated breath and reached for a handkerchief. "I can't do anymore today." She turned to Roland Dawson, her uncle and the brother of the king of Dawson's Edge. She moved the conversation to her mind. *It's too much. I'm not strong enough yet.* She wiped the blood from her face, thankful she had pinned back her dark locks that now reached well past her shoulders. She wore simple clothes when training with Roland in the palace gardens—a full, knee-length, cotton skirt with a blouse and a vest. She had learned that, at times, she wasn't quick enough to stop the nose bleeds, and she had ruined more than one gown. Today, Roland was trying to teach her to search out others with her mind and identify those with whom she could speak—namely, those who also had the power to communicate via thought.

While she had adjusted to the idea of having powers, or anomalies as they were called back home in Chester's Wake, she had not yet mastered her skills.

Roland sighed. "The ability is there. You simply haven't unlocked it yet."

Easy for him to say. His ability was small, at least compared to hers. He didn't understand the pressure that built in her head when she concentrated so hard, when so much power rushed through her.

Not that the Dawsons were aware of the full extent of her powers. She didn't trust them enough to show them. At least, not yet. Perhaps when she had known them longer. Been through more with them. Maybe when she could stake not only her own life but also the lives of everyone she loved on their actions.

When she didn't answer, Roland sighed again. He reached for his top hat then slipped into his waistcoat. "Very well. We can resume training later this week." He paused as if he didn't want to say what he would reveal next. "I am leaving for Santa Rio for a few days to return by the end of the week. Has my brother mentioned that Prince Benjamin is arriving any day?"

Roanna pressed the handkerchief against her nose. She stretched her eyebrows upward, and her heart sped up. "Ben is coming?" She had barely seen him since revealing she was a Dawson nearly a month ago. He had accepted her new reality with all the grace and love she had hoped but had not expected. Her family hadn't reacted so mildly.

Mother and Father, the king and queen of Chester's Wake, had flown into a rage when she told them she was the presumed-dead princess from Dawson's Edge. She explained how she and Ben had uncovered clues that led to the proof of her claims. Father had nearly attacked King Dawson—Roanna's real father. It had taken hours of talking, explaining, and showing her parents the genetic test results to calm them enough to even consider the possibility. Then, Father had insisted on his own genetic tests. The

independent testing yielded the same results—Roanna was, indeed, the lost princess of Dawson’s Edge. Her olive-toned skin matched that of the Dawson family, and she was even of similar height and build, slightly taller than most women, and thin. How had she never noticed the lack of similarities with the Hamiltons before now?

The Dawsons had praised the advancements of the alchemists and scientists that had developed such advanced genetic testing. Her family from Chester’s Wake had bemoaned them.

Now Roanna split her time between Dawson’s Edge and Chester’s Wake, with the majority of her time being spent at the Dawsonian palace. Chester’s Wake was in turmoil. She had expected her parents’ shock and dismay but hadn’t considered how the people of her kingdom would feel. They had spent decades terminating anomalies—yet the princess had been allowed to live. Some saw her as an injustice while others saw her as a threat.

Her parents had not changed their stance on termination, yet they loved her. Their personal struggle was seen as weakness and hypocrisy by many within their country.

Roanna did not enjoy the moments her mind drifted to these thoughts. Her own people no longer loved her family. Perhaps they would have their own rebellion, one to rival Dawson’s Edge.

“Roanna?” Roland’s voice brought her back to the present conversation.

“Is he coming to interrogate the Sterns again?”

Ben had visited twice in the last four weeks, both for short jaunts to question the Sterns, the leaders of the rebel band who wished to rid the Dawsonian

kingdom of the royal family.

Roland frowned, still seeming to hold back. "No, I don't think that's the plan."

Roanna's pulse quickened even more. "Why is he coming?"

"Perhaps you can speak to Queen Katherine about it." His gaze danced away, and his frown deepened.

Uncomfortable, perhaps? He still didn't like Ben. It didn't matter that Ben had never stolen her from Roland—she was his niece, and they would not have married regardless of Roanna's relationship with the Prince of Lox.

Nor did it matter that Ben had played a vital role in bringing the Dawsonian rebels to justice. Roland, and King Dawson for that matter, distrusted her betrothed.

Roanna didn't care what they thought of him. She couldn't wipe the smile from her lips. "Thank you, Roland. You leave tomorrow?"

He nodded.

"Have a safe trip." She bolted from the garden and hurried toward Katherine's offices. Katherine would explain what was happening. She often indulged her long-lost daughter, much to King Dawson's dismay.

Roanna went to the queen's personal rooms. Soft voices came from inside, so Roanna knocked. A moment later the door swung open. Julietta, Katherine's maid, stood in the doorway. Her long blonde hair was twisted into a thick bun at the base of her neck, and she wore a lacey white cap on her head.

"Miss?"

"Hello, Julietta. I'm looking for Queen Katherine."

Julietta curtsied. "One moment, my lady." She disappeared into the room. A moment later, she

returned, beckoning Roanna to enter.

Katherine sat at a small desk in her relaxation area. She was bent over a paper, pen in her hand. She smiled when Roanna entered. "Hello, darling. How did your training go?"

"As well as could be expected. Things are coming along." Her parents knew that Roland was helping her develop her powers—the anomalies she had been born with. The anomalies that might have gotten her killed if she had truly been born in Chester's Wake. While Dawson's Edge did not practice termination, not everyone in the kingdom felt entirely comfortable with the royal family's powers. "Roland mentioned that Ben is coming. What are his plans?"

Katherine smiled. "He is coming to speak with the king regarding the marriage agreement."

Another grin erupted across Roanna's face. What was wrong with her today? She wasn't some silly, love struck child. Ben was her best friend, and better yet, now he was her betrothed. While the rest of her new life often felt like a nightmare, Ben's role felt like a dream come true.

Katherine patted her hands. "Don't get your hopes up just yet. Now that we have Lox's alliance without the marriage treaty, your father is much less willing to let you go so quickly."

But he wouldn't stop the marriage, not if Lox was still willing. Would he? A month ago, King Dawson couldn't get the marriage underway soon enough. But since Dawson's Edge had cooperated fully in catching and prosecuting Lox's attackers, the two kingdoms had become better allies than ever. And then there was the alliance with Chester's Wake. It was both stronger and more unstable all at once, but they would certainly

come to Dawson's aid when needed. Perhaps Dawson's Edge no longer required the marriage, after all.

"You look so gloomy. You needn't." She turned back to the paper and continued writing. "We are throwing an engagement ball for you. I'm finishing some of the details now. Prince Benjamin will be staying for two weeks at the least, and we expect to throw the party just before he returns home."

An engagement ball? Roanna forced herself to remain poised this time around. "Thank you, Katherine." Her birth mother must have had something to do with the whole arrangement since Ben irritated the king so incessantly.

Katherine's face lit with a quiet joy. "You're quite welcome. Now, go get rested for supper tonight. Many nobles will be joining us."

Roanna nodded her consent. Ben's arrival was a bright spot in her dim world. She tried to stay positive, but in her truthful moments she missed being home in Chester's Wake. And then, when she was home, she felt like an outsider. Her parents treated her differently now. Were they disgusted because they knew the truth? They'd spent their rule terminating children with physical or powerful anomalies. Have cancer in vitro? Terminated. Have the ability to read minds? Terminated. Only to learn after eighteen years that the daughter they had raised had an anomaly herself—and wasn't their true daughter.

Besides, now they were dedicating their resources to learning what had become of their real daughter, the true princess of Chester's Wake. Lox was graciously aiding in this effort. The Loxian rulers hadn't reached out to Roanna at all since Ben had explained to them

the truth. The thought brought pain.

Pushing gloomy feelings away, Roanna focused on Ben's arrival. And he'd be around for weeks! The idea was like a soothing balm. She would relish it.

"I can't wait to hear every detail." She hugged Katherine one last time then turned to leave the room.

A knock sounded at the door. Julietta moved to answer the knock, and this time, she returned with a frown. She curtsied to Katherine. "My Lady, a guard at the door."

Katherine rose and hurried to the door, and Roanna followed directly behind her. The guard stood ramrod straight, and stern, in the hall. He nodded to Katherine. "Your Highness, the king has sent for you." His gaze flickered toward Roanna then back to the queen. "Both of you." His tone bespoke urgency.

Katherine took Roanna's hand. "Come along, then."

They walked hand in hand toward King Dawson's office, Roanna matching Katherine's long strides. The dark hallways seemed to close in on her, and not for the first time she wished she was back home in Chester's Wake.

The king's offices bustled as usual. Inside, Roland stood beside the king at a desk, both bent toward a letter.

The king glanced up. His gaze locked onto Roanna, and his shoulders relaxed some. He waved the letter. His nostrils flared and he looked to Katherine. "Another one." His ominous words sparked fear in Roanna.

Katherine frowned and stepped forward, her eyes wide and wary. "What is it, Bartholomew?"

The king looked back to Roanna. His own face