

Blood Swords

By : writinglover

Four young adults are transported to another world, where they find another man and some strange swords that hold immense power. They have to learn to get along, if they are to fulfill their destiny and stop evil from unleashing.



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Table of Contents

Blood Swords Chapter 1

Blood Swords Chapter 2

Blood Swords Chapter 3

Blood Swords Chapter 4

Blood Swords Chapter 5

Blood Swords Chapter 6

Blood Swords Chapter 7

Blood Swords Chapter 8

Blood Swords Chapter 9

Blood Swords Chapter 10

Blood Swords : Chapter 1

Luke Sarandon groaned and covered his head with a blanket. The sun wasn't his friend this particular morning, or any morning, for that matter. He was a night person, as proven last night, when he had stayed up half of it.

The night before he had had a few friends over, and had drank too much alcohol. He was paying for that mistake now, with a pulsing headache.

He sometimes wished he was more like his best friend, Mark, who rarely drank, and always fared better when he did. He could hold a lot of alcohol for a small guy. He was 5'9" and light, but he always seemed somewhat resilient to alcohol. Luke had always thought he would be the resilient one, since he was 6'2" and had more muscle. Luke laughed. Or, maybe I just drank too much to notice that he stopped a long time before me. That thought was a bit disturbing.

Finally stumbling out of bed, Luke glanced at his cell phone. It read 9:30. It really wasn't very early, but it meant he had an hour and a half to shower, eat breakfast, and get across town to college. Grabbing some jeans and the first shirt he could find, he took a quick shower. After running a comb through his thick, black hair, he walked down the short hall.

Just when he reached his friend's door, he remembered the hangover shakes Mark had made the night before. He had tried to talk him out of making them, but Mark had insisted they would be essential to functioning the next day. It turned out that he had been right, as usual. They would definitely be appreciated this morning. Hurrying to the kitchen, he poured two large glasses. Returning to the room, he knocked. After getting no answer, he grinned.

"Good morning, sunshine," he joked, knocking again, this time harder.

"Good morning, Luke." His friend seemed a bit irritated. "Come in," Mark sounded distracted.

When Luke opened the door, he saw that his friend was typing. He paused, then moved quietly to the other side of his friend, to the bed. He set the glasses down on the desk, careful not to distract him.

Mark had always written down his dreams, and Luke figured that was what he was doing. It was better not to disturb him now. He would lose his train of thought, and possibly forget the dream. If he did that, he would be trying to remember it all day. He only wrote down the dreams that had some possible meaning. It seemed to be important to him.

Seeing Luke set the glasses down and took a seat next to him, Mark smiled, but his eyes never left the screen. Taking a drink, he continued typing.

Luke just sat there and watched, patiently waiting. His friend was obviously in a trance. Luke found it a bit strange that his friend took so much interest in his dreams. He didn't understand it entirely, but didn't question it. It was just a strong part of Mark.

After what seemed like forever, Mark stopped and turned to Luke. He had a strange look on his face. "I had a really...", Mark seemed to space out for a moment, then continued. "...strange dream last night." He looked at Luke.

"Uh, yeah. You were drinking. I'm really not that surprised," Luke said.

Blood Swords

Luke realized that was the wrong thing to say when his friend pursed his lips and turned back to the screen. Inwardly cursing at himself, he sighed. "I'm sorry. What was your dream?"

Mark continued to stare at the desk. "You're really gonna listen to me?"

Luke smiled. "Of course. Go ahead. I have time."

Mark was quiet for a long while, then started talking. "I was carrying a sword, which was cold to the touch. It was influencing everything I did. It felt almost like it was leading me somewhere, down a path. It was weird."

Luke cocked his head. "The sword was leading you?" He thought this sounded very bizarre. "It sounds to me like you're worrying about your future too much. That's where the path most likely comes from."

Mark nodded. "Maybe. It was creepy, though. It was like I was handling something evil, but drawn to it, still. It wasn't even the dream itself that bothered me the most. There was an evil air about the whole thing. I can't explain it very well. It was like I could feel an evil presence in my dream. I felt like I was evil. I don't get it. You'd think if it was about my future, it wouldn't be so creepy. I'm gonna analyze it more later, but..." Mark was quiet for a while, then he glanced at his watch. "Hey, you had better get to class. It's 10:45."

Luke jumped up. "Oh, shit! Thanks, dude. I'll help clean up when I get home. Hey, tell me what you come up with, and don't be so worried. It's just a dream. I'll see you later." With that, Luke flew out of the room.

Mark watched him leave, then closed the document. Sometimes he wished Luke would take these dreams a little more seriously. He didn't seem to be concerned at all. Mark laughed to himself. That's probably because it's just a dream. It's nothing to worry about.

Shutting down the computer, he finished his drink and started getting ready for work. He didn't have time to sit here and analyze. There was a good chance he would be thinking about this dream all day, though. Since he worked at Wal-Mart in the electronics department, he thought he might pick up a tape recorder, or something. It might help to voice his dreams.

* * * * *

Jackie Woodard cursed lightly as her scissors grazed the side of a poodle's ear. The owner had just walked in, making the dog move his head. That had caused her to cut him. It wasn't a bad cut, but it would still need pressure to stop the bleeding. Holding the ear with her fingers and a towel, she waited about thirty seconds. This would be hard to explain to the already impatient owner.

Removing her hand from the wound, Jackie inspected it. When she looked this time, she was surprised to see a perfectly healthy ear. There wasn't even blood, where there had been before. Looking at it again, she shook her head. Had she just imagined the blood before? Well, at least she wouldn't have an angry customer.

Letting her long, dark hair out of the ponytail it was in, she braided it. After talking to the closing groomer, Jackie clocked out and walked to her car, an old Honda Civic. Getting in her car and buckling up, she called her dad. She would be moving in a few days, and needed to know if the apartment she was planning to move into was still available.

* * * * *

Jaisyn sat down, breathing heavily. He had just finished going through several fighting drills, and definitely needed a break.

Blood Swords

The man training him grinned. "Two minutes, then we start a new set."

Jaisyn groaned. It felt like his sides were splitting, and this man was relentless. He was starting to wonder if the other man ever got tired. Right now, he seriously doubted it. It felt as if they had been sparring for hours, when, in reality, it hadn't even been an hour yet.

Getting to his feet Jaisyn reached for the sword again. He could stand a few more minutes of this.

The trainer shook his head. "No weapons in this last set. Only hands," he settled back into a stance. "Give me your best attack."

Jaisyn rushed at the man, catching him by the arm and quickly flipping him on his back. He backed off, instead of helping him up. He knew all too well what would happen if he did that.

The other man flipped to his feet, rushing at Jaisyn quickly. Jaisyn moved to the side, and realize his mistake. The other man grabbed Jaisyn's arm and twisted it back. Pulling the younger man up against him, the trainer grinned. "Try getting out of this one, Jay," his breath brushed Jaisyn's ear, causing him to shiver. Jaisyn froze, thinking about his next move.

Backing closer to the man, Jaisyn moved quickly, kicking him just below the knee. The man gasped, letting him go. He hadn't hit him hard enough to cause any damage, but it would still hurt.

"Nice move," the trainer moved at him again. Jaisyn grinned and felt a tingling feeling rush through him. He started to block the blow, when he felt something shoot from his hands. It hit the other man on the shoulder, eating away at his clothing quickly. The trainer screamed in pain and horror, staring at Jaisyn. Seconds later, he blacked out.

Jaisyn backed away, numb with shock. Seconds later, he rushed to the other man, unsure of whether to touch him or not.

Guards rushed in when they heard the scream. At first they thought the training had been too rough, but the trainer was unconscious. They moved to him quickly, and Jaisyn backed up. When they found the acid, they looked at Jaisyn.

"What did you do?" One of the guards yelled, not looking up. "Get a healer in here right now!" One of the guards was already going for a healer.

Jaisyn stared at his hands. "I don't know," he whispered.

Two of the guards grabbed Jaisyn by his arms, leading him out. They took him to Bordekai, not knowing what else to do. Their lord dismissed the guards quickly, leading Jaisyn to a chair.

"Have a seat, Jaisyn," he spoke quietly.

The young man collapsed in the chair offered, and stared into space. He was prepared for a scolding, but what he got was very different.

"I should have been more careful with your training, since I always suspected that you might be one of them. There's only one way to know, but we'll save that for tomorrow. Right now you need some rest."

Blood Swords

Jaisyn nodded mutely, confused by what he was saying, but too exhausted to ask. Bordekai helped him to his feet, calling a servant.

* * * * *

Right after school, Luke rushed to work. He had brought his shirt with him so he wouldn't have to change. Mark had joked that he could just wear it to school, but Luke couldn't see himself wearing a McDonald's manager shirt to school all morning. It would not give off a good image.

Everything was going as expected until he went to the back to get some boxes. That was near the end of his shift at 7:40. Picking up a stack of Happy Meal boxes, he was carrying them to the front when they caught on fire. Panicked, Luke dropped the boxes. What the hell? he thought, his heart racing. Looking at his hands, he noticed they were not even touched. He picked up the stack of boxes. The ones on the bottom were burned halfway up. Luke ran to the front and talked to the closing manager. When she looked around, she didn't find anything that may have started the fire. She just told him not to worry about it, to just go home and relax.

Luke went to his car and sat there for a moment. That had been really strange.

* * * * *

Mark smiled at the attractive, young woman at the counter. "Hi. Did you find everything you needed alright?" He started running her items over the scanner. She half smiled, and looked down. 'I could find more if you came over to my house. Definitely.' She thought to herself.

Mark's head shot up from scanning. Blushing fiercely, he thanked the girl, and she left. That was embarrassing, he thought. Wait a minute. How did I..."His thoughts trailed off. How had he heard what she had been thinking? That wasn't possible. It must have been my own thoughts, somehow. That was even more embarrassing.

Chapter 2

As soon as Luke walked in the door, he sneezed. His roommate had obviously been cleaning, judging from the strong scent of Pine sol. That, and the house was spotless. Smiling, he called Mark.

His friend sauntered in from the kitchen, carrying an apple and his cell phone. He dropped down on the couch and looked at Luke. "How was school? Do you want something to drink?" He seemed to be a bit apprehensive.

"No, I'm fine. Thanks," Luke groaned and settled in one of the overstuffed chairs. "School sucked, as usual. The printer started smoking when I was using it. It must have been old, or something." He had decided not to mention the boxes catching on fire, since he didn't know what had happened. He wasn't sure how to explain it, even to Mark.

Mark furrowed his brow. "That's weird. Work was hell," He almost told him about hearing the girl's thoughts, but he knew his friend would think it sounded stupid. There was no way he could have heard her thoughts. He had probably just imagined it. He chose a slightly safer subject. He took a deep breath and spoke quietly. "Hey, you know how my sister was gonna move out here with friends? Well, there was a problem." Mark looked at Luke.

"Yeah, what happened?" Luke urged his friend to continue.

"Her friends decided not to come, so that means she'll have to find another roommate," Mark paused. "Remember when we talked about her moving in last year? My dad thinks it could still be a good idea, and I agree. It's just that I don't want to make the two of you uncomfortable. I mean, if it's too much..."

Luke shook his head. "I don't think so. I mean, we left on good terms. It wouldn't happen again. I think we're both past that."

Mark looked uncertain. The last time Luke had really spent much time around Jackie, it had ended up a one night stand. They hadn't meant for it to happen, but had managed to use protection. Things had been really awkward between them since then. They hadn't talked very much, and Mark had almost kicked Luke out of the house for it. It had nearly destroyed their long friendship, and had taken a long time for all of them to get over it. Jackie had felt guilty for almost ruining her brother's friendship, and had told Luke it would never happen again. They had still been friends when she had gone home, but had not had much contact.

Mark stared at his half eaten apple. "You really think you can handle that," he said it as a statement, not a question.

Luke caught Mark's eye. "Yes, I do. You can trust me."

Mark stared at him for a long moment, then nodded. "Alright, then. I'll call her and let her know."

* * * * *

Two days later, Jackie arrived. Luke had been going over what he would say to her, but nothing sounded quite right. When he saw her, he just smiled.

The awkwardness was broken by Mark, who started asking questions about work and such, as they were unloading her things. It turned out she was transferring her job, and was eager to start. The conversation

Blood Swords

remained on work and school until all her things were loaded into the living room.

Jackie turned in a slow circle, staring at the arrangement. "Damn, this place looks different from the last time I saw it. It looks nice."

Mark grinned. "Thanks." He glanced at Luke, who had gone silent as soon as they had walked in the house. "I'll show you to your room. Luke, can you run the groceries to the kitchen? I'm gonna help Jackie take this stuff to her room. It shouldn't take long."

Luke's eyes flicked to the two of them, then the groceries. "Sure. Go ahead." Smiling at Jackie, he grabbed the box of food and headed to the kitchen.

"Thanks, Luke," Mark called after him, then motioned down the hall with his head. "Come on," he said to his sister.

Once they were in Jackie's new bedroom, she turned to Mark. "Okay, that was a bit awkward. He was fine until we walked in. He's okay with this, isn't he? I thought you guys talked about this."

Mark started unloading a box. "Yeah, we did, and he's okay. He just...I think he's afraid. It's not that he doesn't want you here. He'll chill out."

Jackie sighed. "I hope so."

Mark glanced at her. "Hey, you can talk to me about anything you need to about him, and how you feel about this. Just don't try to pour your feeling out to him," he smiled. "He's not sentimental."

Jackie smiled. "I know. Hey, you trust me, though, right?" She glanced at her brother tentatively.

Mark swallowed hard. "Yeah, I trust both of you."

Jackie hugged Mark. "I'm glad I decided to still come. I've missed you." After they had pulled apart, she grinned. "Hey, does Uncle Daniel still have his horses?"

Mark thought about it for a moment, then nodded. "Yeah, he does."

"Good," Jackie said. "We should go riding tomorrow after work. It might lighten things up a little."

Mark grinned. "That does sound like a good idea. I'm gonna go find Luke. You can come if you want." Mark walked out, with Jackie following him.

They found Luke in Mark's room at his computer. When Mark saw what his friend was looking at, he cleared his throat loudly. Luke closed the document and looked at them. "Hi, guys."

A smirk tugged at the corner of Mark's mouth at his friend's reaction. "Hi. We have a plan for tomorrow."

Luke raised his eyebrows. "And what would that be?"

Jackie glanced at her brother. "We're going riding."

Luke nodded. "Okay," he smiled at her. "Sounds fun." He paused for moment, thinking. "Hey, Mark...can I talked to you for a second?"

Blood Swords

Mark glanced at Jackie, his face sober. "Okay. Jackie, could you..."

Jackie smiled. "Sure. I'm gonna go work on my room some more."

"Thanks," Mark said, sitting down. Once she left, he glanced at the computer, sitting down on his bed. The look on his face sent chills down Luke's spine. He wasn't quite sure why.

Mark was the first to speak. "I had another dream last night. It was like the other one and had that same strange, eerie feeling. I can't explain it very well."

Luke leaned forward, noticing that this was really bothering his friend. "I wouldn't worry about it too much. You're probably just under a lot of stress, this is your mind's way of dealing with that. Dreams are never reality, and that's the good thing about them."

Mark shook his head, looking confused. "I wake up in a cold sweat, with chills going down my spine. It almost feels like someone is reaching for me."

Luke could see that he wasn't getting through to his friend very well, and he wasn't really understanding him. He couldn't think about any other way to help Mark except to get his mind off these dreams. He knew what might. "Hey, we should go out to eat, instead of cooking. What sounds good?"

"Ask Jackie. Anything sounds good to me," Mark stood up, mildly irritated by the interruption. "She just got here, so she should decide."

They found Jackie and decided on Chili's.

* * * * *

The next morning, Mark made a large breakfast of scrambled eggs, hash browns and bacon, with a side of cantaloupe. It was going to be a long day, and he figured they needed at least one well balanced meal. He had always been a great cook, a trait he had inherited from his mother that Jackie had not. She hated cooking.

Once they had finished eating, Luke grinned at Jackie. "You invited Megan and Casey, right?"

"Yeah. I hope you don't mind," Jackie replied, helping him load the dishes in the dishwasher.

Luke just smiled. "No. Not at all. That's cool."

They were waiting for Mark to get back from walking Luke's dog, Sirius. The large German shepherd was going with them.

Chapter 3

They met Megan at Mark and Jackie's uncle's place. Casey had decided not to come. That bothered Jackie a little, since she didn't really get along with Megan.

Their uncle lived on the outskirts of Seattle, and had several acres, where he kept horses and sheep. He had told them they could ride his horses any time they wanted. Luke and Mark hadn't been out there since the last time Jackie had been in Seattle. That had been almost a year ago.

Daniel Wood came out to them with a big grin on his face. "Hi! If you're ready, let's go saddle up!" He gave Jackie a hug, then led them over to the horses.

Jackie went straight to a large, black bay mare, and started saddling her. "I'm glad you still have Summer. I was afraid you might have sold her, since I didn't get out here as much as I wanted to." She stroked the mare lovingly.

Her uncle smiled. "I kept her around mainly for you, sweetie. I have a few people who ride her to keep her from getting too rotten, but she's mainly yours."

Jackie smiled. "Thanks." She turned back to the mare.

Daniel watched Luke saddling his own grey gelding. He had chosen him because he was large and strong enough to support Luke's tall, muscular frame. Touching Luke on the shoulder, Daniel spoke softly. "May I speak to you for a moment? After you finish, of course."

Luke glanced back at him. "Sure."

A few minutes later, Luke turned to Daniel. "Okay, what did you need?"

Daniel smiled grimly. "Come over here," he said, leading him away from the others. He pulled out a black key with silver inscriptions on it. After staring at it for a moment, Daniel pressed it firmly into Luke's hand.

"This key will open the gate you'll come to when you ride into the woods. That should be about a half mile in," he paused. "Keep this key with you at all times. Don't lose it. You'll need it again."

Luke was confused. He found it strange that he was stressing the point of the key. "Don't worry. I'll keep it with me."

"Good. Now, I think everyone else is ready to leave. You have jackets and food, right?" Daniel walked over and smiled at them all.

"Yes, we do," Mark grinned, mounting his brown and white mare.

Jackie checked Megan's saddle, which did not seem to be very appreciated by the blonde girl. Megan wasn't the type of girl that would be seen around horses, and didn't want any help, thinking she knew more than she actually did. That was why Jackie was checking the saddle now, knowing it probably wasn't tight enough. Megan had always been rude to Jackie, and if it had been up to her, she wouldn't have come.

They started out toward the woods at a brisk trot. When they were almost there, Megan pulled her horse up. "I thought we were going on the road. We'll get lost."

Blood Swords

Mark grinned at her. "Come on, Megan. Don't tell me you're afraid of the woods. There's no reason to be."

Jackie smiled at Mark, then turned to Megan from the front. "First of all, Megan, we never said anything about riding on a road. Second, I think I know where I'm going. I've ridden here just a few times," she said with sarcasm. She was losing patience with Megan very quickly.

Jackie felt Luke's hand on her arm. She shivered at his touch. She was surprised at how much she was still affected by him. Telling herself it was just nerves, Jackie urged her horse forward.

Luke watched her go, shaking his head. He hadn't realized how difficult it would be to see her again, and he wanted to push the feelings he had for her away. If he didn't, he could lose her, along with Mark. Loosening the reins, he let his horse trot.

They rode on for a while, talking about work, and other things. Even Jackie had decided she would make an effort to get along with Megan. It was turning into a nice ride.

The leaves were just starting to turn a golden color and they were starting to scatter on the ground. The sky was overcast, holding the promise of rain in a few hours. The darkened sky and dry tree branches made the whole wood appear a bit sinister. It was a little creepy if you paid close enough to the surroundings.

Luke was starting to wonder why Daniel had recommended they go this way. He fingered the key in his pocket. Riding up alongside Mark, he spoke quietly. "Hey, you're uncle mentioned a gate about a half mile in here. Do you have any idea where it is? I was just hoping we were going in the right direction. I don't remember it being here."

Mark shook his head. "You wouldn't. It's new. It should be right about... " he glanced around. "Well, it's a little further up. It's not too far. Just out of the woods."

Luke nodded. "Okay, cool."

Mark glanced back at Megan. "Well, I'll bet she'll be happy once we're out of these woods," he glanced back at the girl, who was looking around nervously.

Luke looked at Megan. "She not used to this sort of stuff, is she?"

Mark grinned. "I guess not. If I'd known...oh, well. It won't kill her."

Luke glanced at her. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

They finally came to a clearing and rode on quietly until they reached the gate. It was large and wooden, with a metal bolted lock. Strangely, it was the same color as the key in Luke's pocket.

Luke got off his horse and put the key in the lock. Turning the key, he felt a strange tingling sensation. As soon as he removed the key, there was a flash of light, which blinded them all, knocking them all unconscious.

* * * * *

Three cloaked figures approached the gate to the Crimson Temple. The tall one who was obviously the leader spoke to the guard.

Blood Swords

"I have urgent news for Lord Bordekai," he stared at the guard. "I'm assuming I do not even need to ask you to open the gate." His manner implied that he was important enough for them to obey him without question.

The guards open the gates immediately, and stepped back.

The tall wizard glanced at the guards and walked past. They didn't need someone to degrade them by leading them like blind men. They could find their own way to Bordekai. He led the other wizards down a long hall to Bordekai's quarters.

Before he knocked, Bordekai knew he was there, telling to come in. He entered, closing the door behind him.

Bordekai was watching him the entire time, and looked at him expectantly. "Well, is it true?"

The wizard looked excited. "Yes, my lord. The gateway has been opened. It should not be long now."

Bordekai sat back in his chair, smiling. "Finally."

Chapter 4

It took several minutes for Luke to gather his thoughts when he regained consciousness. He felt disoriented, like he was in a dream. He also felt his ears ringing.

Looking around, Luke noticed his dog was acting strange, also. He was rigid, his ears alert. He only behaved that way when he was wary of something. Luke grew suddenly nervous, standing up slowly.

Once on his feet, he followed Sirius' intent gaze. What he saw diminished any drowsiness he had. A man dressed in pure black was bent over Jackie. He seemed to be checking her over. At least, that's what Luke hoped he was doing.

"Who the hell are you?" Luke asked, pulling out his hunting knife. He moved slowly toward the other man, who didn't seem to even acknowledge his presence.

When Luke got within a foot of the man, the stranger held up a hand without turning around.

Luke stopped and waited. "I believe I asked you a question."

The man stood up quietly. "Your friends should be waking up soon. I checked them over, and they're fine. The blond man has a small cut on his head, but it's nothing serious."

Luke's eyes shot to Mark, who had a bandage wrapped on his head, and his helmet had been removed. "Why didn't any of them wake up when you checked them, if they're okay?" He was getting sick of the cryptic answers.

The man looked up at him, his ice blue eyes piercing. "You entered through the gateway, most likely. That put a great deal of strain on your bodies. I am surprised you awoke as soon as you did?"

Luke rolled his eyes. More cryptic answers! Shaking his head, he looked the man in the eye. "Who are you?"

The man stared at him. "Alix. My name's Alix. I'll explain more once your friends wake up."

Luke put his knife away. "Fine, then. When should that be? They should be awake by now."

Alix glanced at the others. "Yeah, they should."

They waited a few moments, and he proved to be correct. The others started waking up. Once they were all on their feet, Alix dispelled their fears by introducing himself again, assuring them he was not harmful.

Mark touched the bandage lightly. "What happened?" His mind was still foggy. "Where are we?"

Alix glanced at all of them, glad to not be getting any other reactions like Luke's.

Everyone else seemed to be somewhat compliant.

"I heard some noise, then I saw your horses run past me," Alix helped them up. "I came to see what was going on, and found you."

Blood Swords

He looked at their strange clothes, and nodded. These had to be the young people from the prophesy. It was the right timing, and the right place. Alix was almost certain he was correct. There was only one way of knowing. They would have to go to the cabin.

Jackie smiled at him. "Thank you for looking after us," She glanced around her. The grass was green, not brown like they had seen in the woods, and the weather was warmer. "Where are we," she repeated her brother's question. "I don't recognize this place."

Alix smiled for the first time. "This is Rotieva. I think you got here through a portal. Speaking of which, I think we need to talk," he looked at all of them. "Will you follow me?"

Luke shrugged. "I guess we don't have much of a choice." He was still being cold, and Alix didn't like that. "Why can't we talk here?"

Alix shook his head. "It's not safe. Come with me." He started off into more woods.

Mark caught Luke's arm as they were starting to follow. "Chill out, will you? We obviously can't go back, and making him angry won't solve anything."

Luke nodded. "You're right. I'll try. He's just aggravating." He looked around in disbelief. "What the fuck happened? I don't even know where to begin with this..."

Mark's mouth twitched. "I don't know, but I hope he can explain." He was suddenly remembering the dreams he had been having recently. This all seemed somewhat familiar to him. He smiled at his friend. "If he turns out to be a threat, I think we can take him. At least three of us can fight. Come on."

Luke just shrugged, and started walking.

Chapter 5

Alix started leading them deep into the woods. Jackie noticed that the trees here had fresh leaves, and they were very green. The sky was clear, unlike the dreary weather they had been in before. That proved they were definitely in a different place. A thought suddenly occurred to her, and she turned to Alix. "Where are our horses? You said you saw them run past you."

Alix turned slightly, smiling at her. "I didn't stop to catch them. I was more concerned with the fact that they were without riders. I know this place, and I think I have an idea of where they are. We'll find them."

Jackie nodded. "I hope so. Those are my uncle's horses."

Alix glanced at her, then continued walking. He led them through the trees for what seemed like an eternity, then stopped. They could see a cabin ahead. When they started toward it, Alix stopped them.

"Wait," he murmured, closing his eyes. He seemed to be concentrating on something. He had to make sure there was no one coming. Once he determined it was safe, he opened his eyes.

While they waited, they noticed there was nothing extraordinary about the cabin. It looked like any old cabin, plain and brown. The only thing that stood out about it was that there was no grass for about two feet around the cabin. There was grass everywhere else. As a science fanatic, Luke knew it had been caused by some form of radiation.

He looked at Alix. "Is this cabin safe? It looks a little odd."

Alix stared at him for a moment. Luke didn't like the look on his face. "Yes, it is." He walked over to the cabin. When he tried the door, it was locked, like he expected.

"Last I checked, it was illegal to break in to places," Megan said.

Alix ignored her and turned to Luke. "You unlocked the gate, right?" When Luke nodded, he continued. "Maybe the same key will unlock the door."

"You know, Megan's right. You're not supposed to break in," Luke protested.

Alix rolled his eyes. "I just asked for a key, didn't I? If we can open it with a key, we're not breaking in, are we?"

Luke ground his teeth. He could see the point. "How did you know about the key?" He glared at Alix. When the other man just stared at him, he cursed lightly. "Fine, I'll try it."

Alix smiled grimly, and moved out of the way. "Go ahead."

Luke pulled out the key, remembering what Daniel had told him. Keep the key with you. You'll need it again. Had he known this would happen?

Sticking the key in the lock, he turned it easily. He stepped back, and Alix pushed past him. He stared around in awe. He was actually in the cabin. He was getting excited.

Blood Swords

Once in, they all explored. The cabin was quite large, but almost empty. There was not much in the main room, only a table, some chairs, and a furnace in the corner. There were three bedrooms, with no lamps and one large bed in each room. The beds had old blankets and two pillows each. They were quite basic, as if no one had intended to be living there for very long.

Megan was the first to note that there was not a restroom, quite to her dismay. Alix explained that they would not be staying there for any longer than one night, and could always go outside. She accepted that fact grudgingly.

Near the back of the cabin, Alix froze. There was a door with a strange light coming from it. He knew what that room held. It was the reason they were here. Luke tried to open it, and found it not locked, but had air resistance. He tried again, but was still unable to open it. He turned to Alix, glaring at the other man. "Okay, what's going on here? What is this place, and why are we trying to open a closet? What the hell?"

Alix stared at him, and Luke found his eyes unnerving. "I will explain in a moment."

Luke glared at him again. "You had better start soon." He was trying to ignore the strong urge he was having to pull that closet door open. He couldn't understand why he was finding it so intriguing.

Mark felt a strong sense of dread when he saw the door. He felt like he had seen something like it before, and he seemed to have a vague memory from one of his dreams. It sent chills down his spine, and he backed away from it.

Alix glanced at him, a little wary. "Are you alright?" he asked, watching at him with a strange look on his face.

Mark avoided his eyes. "Yeah, I'm fine." He moved away from the door, sitting down at the table, beginning to feel dizzy. He hoped it didn't have anything to do with the cut on his head.

Alix glanced at him again, then turned to them all. "I'll go get the horses, and some of us can go into town to get some food."

Jackie smiled at him. "We have some food in Mark's saddlebags. We can eat that for tonight. That way, we can wait to go into town."

Luke glanced at Alix. He didn't like how much Jackie was interacting with him. It was making him jealous, even though he knew it shouldn't. He had already established that there shouldn't be anything between them, anymore.

Alix considered it for a moment, then nodded. "Okay, that sounds like a good idea."

After Alix left, Mark turned to Luke. "What do you think?"

"I'm not sure we can trust this Alix guy, but we do need to figure out what's going on," Luke sat down in one of the chairs. "There's really nothing we can do on our own, since we don't know our way around."

"That's true," Mark said, still looking around. He glanced at the strange door again, shivering. He could almost hear a whisper of someone calling to him, but was not entirely sure what that was. He only got that feeling when he looked at that door.

Blood Swords

Alix returned with the horses, along with his own horse. They arranged a picket line, so the horses could eat, but not run away. He had also brought wood with him.

Alix set the wood in the corner by the fireplace. He took note of how Luke avoided the wood. He seemed to be nervous about the idea of lighting a fire. That reminded Alix of the questions he had for them.

They sat down and started eating. Alix casually brought up the subject of powers. He explained that he had recently been freezing random liquids with ice that came from his hands. Luke found it odd that he had recently acquired powers, and was wondering if that was what had happened to him. It had not seemed possible before, but now that they were in a strange place, anything could be. They all started telling about the strange things that they had been doing. Alix told them he may know what was causing the powers, and that he would explain more the next day.

Alix notice that Mark had stayed somewhat silent throughout the conversation. He mentioned the mind reading, but remained quiet about the dreams. He seemed fidgety.

After eating, they all figured out where they would sleep. It was getting late. There would be more time to talk tomorrow.

The next morning, Luke woke up to a light knock on the door. When he didn't answer, the door opened and Mark slipped in. Glancing at Luke, he kicked the bed.

"Get up. Alix wants to talk to all of us," Mark offered a small smile. "Maybe he'll finally explain things."

"This whole thing is strange, huh?" Luke got up, already dressed, since he had not had anything to change into. "It feels like we're in a dream, or something."

Mark frowned. "Yeah, it does. I had no idea things like this could happen."

Luke moved to the door. "Yeah, know," he sighed. "Well, shall we go see what our dear stranger has to tell us? Maybe he can help us get home, so your uncle doesn't get worried." He suddenly remembered the key, and Daniel's urgency when speaking about it. That, and the gate...how could he have known?

Mark just smiled, watching his friend. "Let's go. I'm sure the girls are getting anxious, and I don't really feel safe leaving that Alix guy in there with my sister."

Luke grinned. "Yeah, not kidding."

Once they had all settled in the main room, Alix stood up. "I'm sure you have all noticed the glowing door at the back of the cabin," his eyes flicked around briefly. "What's in that room is the reason I brought you all here. That key you used to open the door and unlock the gate is from the Rotievan Wizard Council. They control, or at least monitor, all magic used in Rotieva. It's been that way since the creation of the first Blood Swords."

He paused, and Jackie cut in. "What are the Blood Swords?"

Alix stared at the door for a long while, then answered. "The two original swords were created to protect the realm. One of the wielders became obsessed with the power it gave him. This caused him to kill his own brother to try and gain his power, also. No one really knows the whole story. After he was locked up, the Council took control of the swords," Alix looked at them. "That is why they are called the Blood Swords. They were created with blood, and destroyed by blood."

Blood Swords

When he paused again, Luke interrupted him. "Sorry, but what does this have to do with us getting home?"

Alix stared at him, annoyed. "It may have everything to do with you. As for going home...just let me finish.

One of the swords was stolen, so the Council created four more to add to the remaining sword. These would be used to track it. The problem is, not just anyone can wield the Blood Swords," Alix took a deep breath. "With the powers you have all been telling me about, and my own, we just might be the wielders. There is only one way to find out," he looked at Luke. "I believe, since the key was given to you, you are the one to open the door." Alix turned to all of them. "You can follow me, and see if this is true, or you may walk out the door. It's up to you." Alix continued down the hall.

Luke took out the key and looked at the others. When no one objected, he walked down the hall. The others followed him, curious.

When they reached the door, Alix smiled at Luke. "Ready?"

Luke reached for the handle, turning it. It didn't have the same resistance it had before. When he pushed it open, they saw a glass chest with five glowing swords placed carefully inside. Luke stepped back, shocked.

Alix looked at the others expectantly. He was shaking with excitement. No one spoke. They just stared at the swords, wondering. Alix stepped toward the chest, followed by the others. Mark started to follow and hesitated. He was feeling a strong sense of dread, but at the same time, eagerness. He moved to the chest, his curiosity overriding his caution.

Luke unlatched the chest and started to reach for one of the swords. Slowly lifting it out, he stared at it. He felt a slight tingle, and fire shot up the blade. The fire didn't burn, and didn't feel afraid. He felt like he had been connected to this blade for years. He also felt a strong obligation to protect the others.

Jackie stared at Luke, then took her sword out. There was the same amazing connection, but light instead of fire. She studied it, turning to the others.

Megan felt a rush of air with her sword. She had never been into weapons, but this felt like it was a part of her.

Alix glanced at Mark, who still seemed unsure. Shrugging, he pulled out his sword. It frosted over immediately, and Alix felt an instant bond with it.

Mark stepped forward last, touching the remaining sword hesitantly. As soon as he picked it up, all the shadows in the room seemed to darken. His mind seemed open to everyone around him. The power it instilled in him was incredible, and he was starting to wonder why he had ever been afraid. He started to smile, when a cold feeling replaced the light one. He suddenly felt a strong hunger for power, as if nothing could stop him from having all control. That feeling made him very uneasy, but he felt like he had never wanted anything as much as he did now. There was a tingle, and the dark feeling vanished as quickly as they had come.

No one spoke for a long time. They all seemed content to bask in their new found power. They all felt such a connection to their swords, and they didn't want to ever put them d

The chest stopped glowing, and they all snapped out of their dreamlike state. They looked down, and saw that scabbards attached to belts had appeared on each of their waists for the swords. They placed the swords inside them, and left the room.

Blood Swords

Alix looked at all of them, his seriousness replaced by a grin. "So, shall we go into town now? I'm guessing no one wants to go home just yet."

Chapter 6

Alix started showing them how to use their new weapons, since he already knew the basics on swordplay. He made sure each of the new wielders understood how to properly carry the swords, and showed them ways to wield them with as little strain on the arms as possible. They knew it would take some practice to get used to the awkwardness of using a blade, even though the swords seemed to adapt to each person's particular strength. They all found this strange, including Alix. That made the training easier, however.

Alix had been worried about Megan, since she had not liked the idea of touching a weapon. She explained it as something a woman should not do at first, but Alix ignored the comments and continued to train her. She eventually decided she like it after a few days.

They all seemed to be getting more comfortable with the swords by the end of the week. They each felt a special bond with their sword, almost like an addiction. They were having some trouble with the powers at first, but the more they handled their swords, the more the powers seemed to merge with the blades. However, every so often, Mark felt that same darkness connected to his blade. It made him nervous, but he tried to not let it bother him. He figured it was just the sentient part of the sword connecting with him.

Luke and Alix seemed to have a major personality clash, both being dominant people. Close to the end of the week, Alix had given up training Luke, since they seemed to argue about everything, including technique. That made Alix angry, because he knew he had more knowledge about swords and fighting. Luke just did not want to listen to him. Alix also seemed to have a problem with Luke assuming the lead. He saw it as him wanting to control them and the whole situation.

Luke and Jackie, on the other hand, were much more comfortable with each other than they had been before. Their friendship seemed to be returning to how it had been before. They were both very happy about it, but Luke also noticed that Mark was keeping a close eye on the two of them. It annoyed Luke, because it seemed as if Mark didn't trust them.

Alix had not planned on staying in this particular place for this long, but he had figured it was the best place to train them. He knew that was important, in case they happened to get attacked. Alix had told them all about a man named Bordekai, who wanted their swords and knew where the cabin was located.

The three men had been taking guard duty shifts every night, for safety precautions. Jackie had insisted she could take a shift, but Alix did not like the idea if a woman being out alone. When he mentioned that she could help him watch, Luke got angry, and shut Alix up with a stern look. Luke then explained that it probably would be a better idea for her and Megan to not watch.

One particular night, Luke had first watch and was very alert. He was a night owl, so he had no problem staying awake from 10:00 to 2:00. The only problem he had was that his mind started to drift. He was just thinking about home and how many ways McDonald's was going to kill him, when he caught a movement out of the corner of his eye. Tensing up, Luke pulled out his knife. He concentrated on where he had seen the first movement, and noticed the shadows shift slightly. Moving closer, he made out the form of a man of average height.

"Don't move," he ordered firmly. He was ready to pounce on the man at the first sign of trouble. "Who are you?"

The man turned slowly, cautiously glancing at Luke. "I'm not here to hurt you," his eyes fell on the sword attached to Luke's belt. He stared at the sword for a long moment without speaking.

Blood Swords

Luke stared back at the man, losing patience quickly. "Hello! I believe I asked you a question."

The man smiled, his eyes returning to Luke. He didn't even seem to mind the knife pressed to his side, and stood calmly. "I'm sorry. I had just never seen one of them before," his eyes flicked briefly back to the sword.

Luke glared at him. "What is it with people around here and evasive answers? Who are you and what do you want?"

"I'm from the Wizard Council. They would like very much to meet with all of you."

Luke frowned. "How did you know where to find us?"

The man smiled again. "The Council could feel the magic as soon as you all came through the portal. That's part of what they want to speak with you about."

Luke rolled his eyes. The way this man was talking in evasive circles was really starting to get on his nerves. "What does your Council want with us?"

The man glanced at the cabin. "May I come in? I promise I will explain everything as much as I can. I am just a messenger."

Luke sighed. "Alright, then. Give me all your weapons before you come in." He held out his hands.

The man offered a small smile. "I have no weapons. Magic is enough to protect me."

Luke was about ready to strangle the man by now. "Come in, then," he said, after he had checked him over for any obvious weapons. "If you're lying, you're a dead man."

"Of course," the man looked him in the eye. "But I am not lying."

Luke nodded and opened the door and stood back to let the other man pass first. Once they were in, Luke locked the door.

"Alright, we're inside, so spill. Who are you, and what's going on?" He motioned to a chair, remaining standing himself.

The messenger smiled at Luke and sat down. "You have no need to fear me," he glanced around, pausing at one of the corners. "I am not here to hurt you. My name is Corren, and I am from the..."

"...council," a deeper voice answered from the corner of the dark room. Luke was alarmed until he realized it was Alix. Looking over at the corner, Luke could now see the other man standing there. He was actually glad he had the other man there, for once. He could help explain why this crazy guy had come up to them.

Alix walked into the light, watching the man warily. "He is from the Rotievan Wizard Council. I can tell by the silver band on his arm," he glanced at Luke. "There is no black lining the silver, so he is not of importance in the Council."

Luke frowned, then gave Alix a small, dry smile. He was surprised to see Alix up this early, since he had not had a shift. "So he is from the Council, like he says. You said you had a message for us, so what is it?"

Blood Swords

The messenger was surprised Luke was still being so suspicious. He had figured he would have lost most of his wariness by now, and it made him edgy. "Yes, I am a messenger from the Council. I have a message I would rather tell all of you together, if I may. It would be easier that way."

Luke thought about it, then nodded. "Okay, we'll wait. Would you like anything to eat or drink?" He glanced at Alix. "I'm sure Alix can help you with that, if you do," Luke noticed with satisfaction that Alix was bothered by the implication of being delegated as a servant. He smiled at Alix again. "I need to go wake Mark up for his shift."

Alix glared at Luke, but addressed the messenger with forced politeness. "Is there anything I can get you, sir?"

Chapter 7

Mark stayed up after his shift, thanks to a strong latte he had made for himself with some of the supplied they had picked up in town. He usually woke up early anyway, so going back to bed did not seem very appealing. That would mean he would have a little time to himself before the others woke up. It also meant he would not have any more dreams. That was the main reason for staying up. Mark was tired of trying to figure out the strange dreams he had been having.

Lately, they had been getting darker, with scenes of strange people dying, and other events. The strangest part about them, however, was the voice that seemed to be calling him. It felt sinister, yet inviting. It frightened him, because he felt like he had no control over these dreams.

Mark turned away from thoughts of his creepy dreams and started looking for something to make for breakfast. He figured the others would be up soon, and he knew exactly what he wanted to fix.

Luke smiled, taking in the scent of biscuits and gravy. How his friend had managed to cook biscuits all the way through over a fire was beyond him, but he was not complaining.

He got out of bed and dressed, hoping to explain why there was a strange man in the cabin. He saw it as part of his job, as the leader. He had also been the one who found the man.

When he walked in the kitchen, Luke was irritated to see that Alix had already beaten him to telling Mark. He noticed the strange man sitting at the table, looking uncomfortable. Luke glared at Alix's back, wishing he could set his fire on him.

Mark looked up from the gravy he was stirring. "Good morning, Luke! Breakfast is ready, if you want to holler at my sister and Megan." Mark sounded very awake, but had dark circles under his eyes, and his face looked very drawn. Luke frowned, figuring it was from the dreams.

Mark cocked his head. "What's wrong? Did you have a good night?"

Luke smiled. "Yeah," he wanted to mention Mark's current state, but decided not to in front of Alix and the messenger. "Hey, I'll be back. We're probably leaving today, so be ready, please." He glanced at the messenger, then left. That man still had a lot to explain.

* * * * *

During breakfast, the council spy explained that the council had members in town waiting for them. They would lead them to the Council's headquarters, where they could educate the wielders and help them understand their powers.

"Can you leave us for a moment?" Luke asked the messenger. "We would like to discuss this privately before making a decision."

The messenger smiled at him, then glanced at the others.

Mark returned his smile. "This should only take a few minutes. Thank you."

The messenger grinned at him, then left.

Blood Swords

As soon as he was gone, Luke turned to Alix. "Okay, you have just as much explaining to do as he does. How about you begin with telling us what this Council is, how they know where we are, and why they would send a messenger after us."

Jackie glanced at Mark, behind Luke's back, and they both snickered. It was annoying, yet mildly amusing the way Luke was acting with Alix.

Alix cleared his throat, glancing briefly at Luke, then turning to the others, as well. "The Council is made up of twelve wizards that govern the magic in Rotieva. They are supported by the King, and anything that goes wrong with magic, or when a new magic user comes into use, they find out about it. They have known about our swords for a long time now, since the first ones were created. They..."

"Hold up," Luke interrupted him. "So what you're saying is, this Council wants to control anything that has to do with magic. What if someone uses magic, but decides they want to do it on their own?"

Alix nodded. "I'm not quite certain how much control they have over people like us, who are not using wizardry. I don't think the Council has seen anything else in Rotieva. I believe their main goal is to support and help magic users, not control them. I also think it is safe to go with this messenger."

Luke looked at the others. "What do you guys think of all this?"

"I think he's telling the truth, from his reaction to us, and from what Alix said," Jackie smiled at Alix, which made Luke frown.

He turned to Mark and Megan, who both agreed with Jackie.

"Okay, I guess we are all in agreement to go with this guy," Luke stood up. "The first sign that he may be lying, he's dead."

Alix looked shocked. "You would..."

Mark laid a hand on his arm, rolling his eyes. "It's just a figure of speech. Luke wouldn't kill him."

Luke smiled, glad he was able to cause Alix to worry. "I guess it's settled, then. Let's go find the messenger and get ready to leave," Luke sighed, then turned to clean up from breakfast.

* * * * *

The messenger handed a map to Alix, so he could verify they were going the correct way, then mounted his horse. Alix rode next to him with his sword in reach, just in case he turned on them.

They rode until the late afternoon, then stopped for a break.

Getting off his horse, Luke turned to Alix. "Is he still legit? How much longer is it gonna take us to get there?"

Alix studied him for a long moment, frowning. "Why don't you trust me? It would make things a lot easier," he turned away, slipping the bridle off of his horse's neck and letting the big bay eat. "Anyway, he is trustworthy. I've worked with his group before, and they have never led me wrong. If he turns out to not be who he says he is, I'll take care of him. You and your friends don't have to worry about anything. Just follow me."

Blood Swords

Luke nodded. "Okay. I'll take your word for it. How much longer until we reach this town?" He repeated the question from a few moments before.

"Well, we could keep going until dark and reach the next town tonight," Alix sighed. "I would be fine with that, as I am sure you probably would, also." He glanced at the others. "I'm not so sure about Megan or Mark, in his current state. Jackie might be okay. It's up to all of you."

Luke looked at Mark. "I think it would be a good idea to stop and get an early start."

* * * * *

That night, Mark had nightmares about being pulled away from the others by the power of his sword. He tried to resist it, but was unable to. He was led to a dark castle, where he handed his sword over. He got a sense of relief that the sword was gone, but woke up to find it still beside him on the grass.

Feeling someone watching him, he turned to see Alix. The auburn haired man was standing over by his horse, brushing the gelding. He turned away when he noticed Mark watching him.

"You should go back to sleep," Alix moved on to one of their horses. "It won't be time to leave for a few more hours."

"I usually get up this early," Mark protested.

Alix nodded. "I know, but you haven't really been sleeping lately. I'll wake you up again when I wake everyone else."

"What are you doing up?" Mark smiled at the older man. Sitting up, he studied Alix. When he didn't get an answer, he smiled, changing the subject. "So, where are you from? How long have you been using a sword?"

Alix glanced at him. "I'm from Northern Rotieva, in the mountains. I've been practicing swordsmanship since I was 11." He seemed tense when talking about that particular subject.

"I see. Do you have family around here?" Mark knew he was getting personal, but couldn't help his curiosity.

Alix turned away, his lips pursed. "Not anymore. They were taken by the Crimson Temple," he looked at Mark. "That's where the Council will send us to defeat the man who is in charge. He is our enemy, Bordekai. I'll kill him someday," he added quietly.

Mark turned around again. "Thank you." He didn't know what else to say. Closing his eyes, he tried to stay awake, but dozed off, despite his best efforts.

Two hours later, Alix woke them all up, as he had promised. The messenger, Corren, started leading them again after a light breakfast of some sort of mush Alix had fixed for them. It wasn't as good as Mark's cooking, but it was filling.

They reached Hanlewey by that afternoon Alix offered a forced smile to the messenger, Corren.

"So, where were the Council members meeting us?" He dismounted and stretched his long legs. "I need to know, in case we need rooms."

Blood Swords

Corren smiled. "They should be here soon, so you will not be needing rooms. They said they would be in a tavern called The Red Haren. Do you know of it?"

Alix frowned. "Sure, I know of it. They couldn't have picked a better one to meet in," he said, his words dripping with sarcasm.

Luke grinned, still glad to see Alix uncomfortable. "Well, shall we go to this lovely tavern?"

Alix grimaced. "Yeah, as long as they hurry and get here."

Luke laughed, glancing at his friends. Jackie smiled back at him, shaking her head at Alix.

They entered the tavern, which turned out to be as dirty and loud as Alix had implied. They found a booth that was halfway clean. After fifteen minutes of waiting and avoiding the drinks offered, they were approached by three men in long robes.

Standing up, Alix shook the hand of the man in charge. "Thank you for meeting us, sir."

The man smiled, glancing at the others. "It is my pleasure to finally meet you all. If you will step outside with me, I will take you to the Wizard Council headquarters. We can talk more about the situation there."

Alix smiled at the others. "Anything to get us out of this tavern."

The man grinned at him. "Let us leave, then."

They were led to the outskirts of the town, where a portal was standing open. One of the wizards stepped through first, followed by Luke, then Megan. Jackie looked at her brother before entering the portal.

"Are you okay? You seem a bit worried."

Mark offered her a small smile. "I'm fine. Go on through. I'll be right behind you." He took a deep breath, feeling the same foreboding sense he had when first touching his sword. Ignoring the feeling, he stepped through the portal. Alix watched him go, then followed.

Chapter 8

What they saw on the other side of the portal was breathtaking and foreboding at the same time. The ground they stood on was not grass, but stone. There were steps leading up to a large, black castle that looked like it had been pulled out of a ghost story. At the same time, it was intriguing. It had spikes at each corner, and the top was dome shaped. It looked to be very solid and impenetrable.

Mark glanced at his friends, nervous. He was not so sure about this now.

The wizards left them to stare at the castle a moment longer while they talked to the guards. Alix was watching them the entire time, ready to strike if things turned ugly.

One of the wizards noticed him, and smiled. "If you would all follow us, the Head mage would love to meet you," he led them through the gated and up the stairs. Alex was still in front of the others, ready to defend them. He glanced at his sword, assuming he was supposed to hand it over. When he tried to, one of the guards stopped him.

"Please keep them, so the Head mage can see them," the man's eyes were gleaming with excitement. "He would love to see the Blood Swords. Please, come this way."

A servant led them down a long corridor to a large, black door with a tree symbol on it. Knocking softly, he cleared his throat. "They have arrived, my lord."

There was silence, then a deep voice answered from the other side of the door. "Bring them in, please."

"Yes, my lord," the servant glanced at them, then opened the door. He bowed low when he saw the Head mage.

The Head mage dismissed the servant with a wave of his hand, not looking up. Once the servant was gone, he lifted his head and stared at the young people standing before him. It was hard for him to believe he was meeting them, yet he knew they would come someday.

"Please follow me into my study. It is much more comfortable there," he said, still watching them.

Alix shifted nervously, but Luke smiled at the Head mage. "Thank you, sir."

Mark had noticed that everyone they had met, so far, had acted in awe of them, and it was somewhat unsettling.

Once they were in the large study, Jackie smiled at the Head mage. "I couldn't help but notice that everyone around here seems know who we are," she voiced her brother's thoughts. "We just got here, not to mention, we are not from this world," she smiled at Alix. "At least, not all of us."

The Head mage addressed her observation very seriously, looking at all of them. "The Wizard Council has been waiting for someone to find the Blood Swords for over five hundred years," he ran a hand through his hair. "Forgive me, if we make you feel uncomfortable. I am certain none of it has been intentional."

Luke smiled at him. "What's so special about our swords, other than their magic?"

Blood Swords

The old wizard closed his eyes, then focused on the swords. "They hold so much potential power. Come here and have a seat. I can explain it all to you now, or we can wait until later."

Luke looked at his friends, glancing at Alix. "I think we have time."

The Head mage smiled at them. "Alright, I will tell you some of it. Have a seat, please."

Once they were all seated, the Head mage began telling them the story of how the Blood Swords came into existence and what their purpose was. They had been created several years ago, as special presents to the twin Rotieven princes. However, one of the men became obsessed with his sword, and a hunger began to grow in him for the power of his brother's sword. He killed his brother, and from that, his sword had been tainted. It was taken away from him, and the sword now had evil tendencies. It was locked up, along with the still pure one. A few years later, the tainted sword was stolen, so the Wizard Council stepped in, helping to create swords that would be able to track the stolen one. However, when they created the swords, the taint was backlashed into one of the new swords. This sword would have a stronger pull toward the dark blade, making it dangerous, yet valuable. The swords were locked up in a chest, and placed in a remote area, where only the rightful wielders would be able to sense them.

When he had finished telling them the story. Mark looked down at his sword. "Do you know which one has the taint?"

The Head mage looked at him, then the sword. "Not for sure. We would like to test all of your abilities, to see what they are, and how strong. Right now, I would imagine you are all tired and hungry."

Jackie smiled. "I am definitely hungry."

Her brother grinned at her. "So am I."

Chapter 9

The next day, the wizards began training them. The weapons master started them out with the basics of fighting, such as holding and wielding a sword. To Alix's annoyance, he was surprised by their progress. He had explained to the weapons master that he had been training them before, but the man would not listen to him. He wanted to see for himself how skilled they all were.

Alix asked the weapons master if he would spar with him also, and the man was glad to. Alix did not go easy on the man, taking out all his frustrations on him. The man had already insulted him by undermining his training skills, and he was going to try and show him up. After a few rounds of sparring, the man stepped back, bowing to Alix slightly. The young redhead was still annoyed, and did not return the bow. Alix placed his sword back in its sheath, walking over to the others.

The weapons master smiled at the young people. "Well, your skills with a sword are good, though I believe that has something to do with the swords, themselves." At this, he received another glare from Alix, but chose to ignore it. Looking at Alix pointedly, he smiled. "I think you should all just continue training, and see the wizards about your powers," he glanced at Mark, who had been training with one of the other weapons masters, who was also a wizard. The man who had trained the others had refused to train him, and Mark had a suspicion that it had something to do with his sword's power. He did not know what his power was, and would have been more than happy to hand the sword over.

Once the weapons masters left, Alix turned to them. "You all did well. He seems to be a bit pompous, though, and I am sorry, for the ones of you who had to train with him."

Jackie laughed. "He does. Is all of the Council like that?"

Alix nodded, frowning. "Most of them. They monitor anything that has to do with magic, so they can catch the evil magic users and deal with them."

"Then why don't they just arrest Bordekai, and be done with it?" Mark seemed nervous with this conversation, but he was curious.

Alix sighed. "They can't, because he has a ring that can deter their magic. It is also connected to our swords, but we supposedly have the power to overcome it and defeat him."

"I see," Mark replied quietly. "So, that's why the Council was so happy to see us. They seem to be suspicious, though."

Alix nodded. "They are, because they do not know us, or what we are capable of. They will try to control what we do with our swords, if we don't stand up to them, so be careful."

"That's just lovely," Luke mumbled.

Alix glanced at him. "Tell me about it."

The door opened, and the same young man that had found them, Corren, smiled at them. "The Head mage would like to see all of you," he glanced at Mark. "Except for you, sir. He asks that you stay. I believe he wants to speak with you separately."

Blood Swords

"Oh, okay," Mark looked confused, but went to his bed chamber, while the others followed Corren. Looking around his room, he found a book about magic and began reading it. It would help to learn about the types of magic they might be up against.

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Once they were in the Council room, the Head mage smiled at them. "You are probably wondering why we wanted to speak with you without Mark."

"Yes, I would, sir," Luke interrupted him. "No offense, but in our world, that would have been considered rude. I don't understand why he can't be here."

The Head mage held up a hand, and Luke closed his mouth. "The reason I wanted to speak with you without him, is because we would like to know more about him. He could be a danger to this mission." When Luke tried to interrupt again, he was stopped again by a hand. "You do not understand everything about that sword of his. Please, let me explain."

Chapter 10

"Please do explain, because you are still being rude. What is this all about?" Luke looked very pissed off now.

The Head mage glanced at him, then continued. "The sword Mark possesses may be very dangerous. It has not and cannot be proven, until he has had a while with the sword itself. Your young friend needs to become accustomed to his weapon as much as the rest of you do. It will become a part of you."

He paused, and Luke interrupted. "Then why are you wary of Mark? You said you needed to speak with us about him, so spill it. You are only making yourself look suspicious."

Jackie placed a hand on Luke's arm and he tensed, shaking it off gently. He did not need her shushing him, and he really wasn't sure if contact between them was wise, anyway.

Alix glanced at them momentarily, an unreadable expression on his face. "Sir, you are speaking of the backlash of magic, correct? You believe that Mark's sword has the darkness inside of it, pulled from the stolen sword." He ignored the glare he received from Luke.

The Head mage nodded. "It is beginning to appear that way. We need to observe all of the swords during training and see if there are any dark tendencies from any of them."

"So it could be any of our swords that was backlashed?" Jackie smiled at him politely. "What are we supposed to do if that has happened?"

"It could have been any of the swords, but we are almost certain that it was Mark's. He is showing signs of unease and fear, which is the beginning of madness and distrust."

Luke stood up and walked over to the Head mage. "I have had enough of your bullshit, and I haven't even known you for an entire day. You do not know Mark, or any of us, for that matter. Whatever you are afraid of with this sword is not a part of Mark. He is not going to become one with a sword, and go insane. If I could, I would go back home and forget all of this ever happened. You can find someone else to carry these swords and find this guy, Bordâ whatever. Mark will be fine, because I know who he is. I'm through with this." He glanced at the others to see if they were following him, but when they didn't, Luke swore under his breath and left the room.

The Head mage did not try to stop him, but spoke quietly after him as he was leaving. "I believe you may feel differently after a time. There was a reason you were given Larick's sword and given the title of leader."

Luke paused momentarily, then left.

The Head mage smiled at the others. "Do you all understand why I am speaking with you about this? I am looking out for the well being of everyone, including Mark. If the sword is tainted, we will deal with whatever is necessary. The sword is not what matters in this case. It is Mark and the rest of you. Stopping Bordekai is of utmost importance, but we must deal with one problem at a time."

"What would happen if Mark did show signs of being tainted? What would happen?" Jackie wished that Luke had not left so he could hear the answer.

The Head mage looked at her with a serious expression. "I am not certain that we could catch it in time. We cannot touch the swords without strong magic, and the last time the tainted sword was used, it killed someone."

Blood Swords

That is what I am afraid of. He could kill us all in a hunger for more power. In that case, we would have no choice but to stop him."

Jackie sucked in her breath sharply, unsure of what to say. Luke may have had the right idea about wanting to leave.

Blood Swords

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