

REVELATION

The Sword and the Cross Chronicles

By Olivia Rae

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Chapter One

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to
send peace, but a sword.
Matthew 10:34

Tyre, Outremer, August, 1191

"Julian, the Master wishes to see you."

Lying prostrate in the position of his crucified Lord, Julian de Maury pressed his cheek firmly against the cool marble floor to block out the intrusive voice interrupting his prayers.

"Brother Julian, the master said 'twas urgent. I am to escort you to his quarters immediately."

Julian ceased his chant and opened his eyes. He waited for his sight to adjust to the dusty beam of light which filtered downward onto the makeshift altar. "I am conversing with God,

Andrew."

"We have visitors who cannot be detained."

He flattened his fingertips against the stone floor, then submerged himself into a final prayer. Upon completion of his petition, Julian slid his hands across the smooth surface until his thumbs touched the sides of his chest. He waited for the blood to rush through his numb forearms, then pushed himself onto all fours.

The muscles in the back of his neck and shoulders ached as he raised his head until his gaze fixed on the golden crucifix above the altar. The emerald in the center of the cross glittered boldly in the streaming sunlight. Julian never tired of staring at the blessed stone that had come from Solomon's crown.

His heart ached. The cross belonged in Jerusalem above the granite altar where King Solomon's temple once stood. Not above a shabby wooden structure in a home once owned by a wealthy Muslim merchant.

"Please Julian, these are *important* visitors," Andrew urged.

Rising to one knee and with precise movements, he signed the cross on his chest. "Are they more important than God?" Julian asked before rising to his feet.

Andrew rushed over to help brush out the creases pressed into Julian's white tunic during hours of meditation. "God is patient, but *Richard Coeur de Lion* is not."

Julian's hand stopped on the large red cross that covered the front of his tunic. "The king is here?"

"Aye, and he seeks the help of the Order of the Templar."

Julian's heart began to race. Why would Richard come north when he prepared to march his troops south from Acre? It could only mean one thing. The Templars were needed. *He was needed.*

With each rapid breath his chest expanded. He slapped the smaller knight between the shoulder blades. "I cannot believe God has answered my prayer so quickly. Lead on, Brother."

The warm summer air swept through the large arched windows as they strode down the aged corridor toward the master's chamber.

Andrew looked about without breaking his stride. "I am glad God has given a swift answer to your prayers, but be careful how you greet Master de Sablé, lest he mistake your joyous mood as a result of an unclean thought."

"Nay, Brother, my mood is caused by a righteous request. Many times I have wondered why I was not at Hattin when our Templar brothers perished at Saladin's hand and why the fight was taken from me in Jerusalem and again at Acre. God denied me the chance to fight thrice for one purpose only. He wishes me to march at King Richard's side to the gates of the Holy City and crush Saladin, sending him to the fiend once and for all."

"I often wished God allowed us to slay Saladin while we still controlled Jerusalem," Andrew said.

Julian's chest tightened. The battle at Hattin had marked

the end of the Christian reign in Palestine. Almost all his Templar brothers had fallen beneath infidel swords. Even the True Cross had been lost. Twelve weeks later, Saladin and his army stood at the gates of Jerusalem demanding surrender. Julian would have fought to his death before turning the city over to the vile infidels, but the perfidious master, de Ridefort, ordered the Templars to lay down their swords and give up the city. Julian's ears still rang with the curses and jeers that accompanied their retreat from the Holy City.

A mild breeze swept through the hallway, ruffling Julian's hair. He took a deep breath and confessed, "At least you were in Acre when the city fell back into God's hands."

"Why punish yourself? The siege of Acre was long. The capture and subsequent death of Master de Ridefort had brought chaos to the army. To leave and travel through enemy country alone, to bring back food and reinforcements was courageous."

Julian's throat dried. Only Andrew would turn shame into courage. "Nay, not courageous, but impatient. Had I waited another week, King Richard and Master de Sablé would have arrived with both."

Andrew stopped and placed his hand on Julian's shoulder. "We lay siege to the city for ninety-eight weeks. None knew the king would come."

"Perhaps, but now the time has come to prove my worthiness and loyalty. To heed Saint Paul's words and put on the full armor of God. Come, we have tarried long enough."

True enough, Saint Paul spoke of a spiritual battle and not a physical one, but Julian believed at times they were both the same. For how else could the Lord work in men's hearts if they were being persecuted by others? But if the threat is removed then surely the Word would flourish.

With strong purposeful steps, Julian made his way down the hall to the master's chamber. When he reached the door he placed his hand on his belt. *He had left his sword in the dormitory.* A fleeting panic reverberated through his chest. Julian took a deep breath. He was not a vain man who needed a steel object to bolster his courage before a mere king. He knocked briskly on the door before folding his trembling hands.

"Enter," bellowed an unfamiliar voice.

Julian opened the door and crossed the threshold. A bright light streamed through the diagonal windowpanes, momentarily blinding him.

A tall man with red-gold hair and piercing eyes stood near the window. The cross of his arms and the width of his stance personified strength and power. Julian swallowed hard and bowed low before King Richard the Lionheart.

"Arise, man," the king ordered. "So you are Breanna's brother, Julian de Maury. I have heard much about you. Master de Sablé, is it true the Saracen curse the name of this man?"

The elderly master moved to the king's side. "Aye, Your Majesty."

Richard grunted and looked Julian over. "I see your sister

in your eyes. But her jaw is set with a softer line. She is indeed a comely wench, and from what Royce tells me she is even more beautiful now that she is a mother."

The king's frankness and comparison irritated Julian. After all, she was a woman and he was a knight in God's army.

Richard brushed a hand over his short beard. "It has been a long time since I have seen them. I shall have to make a point to visit when I return to England. They have proven to be very loyal servants to the crown."

Julian nodded. Royce had been wise not to protest when Richard seized the throne from his father, Henry II. But then, Royce did have a good head on his shoulders. Julian knew such when he sent his friend to help Breanna after she had become a widow. Their marriage was a surprise, but Julian could not have been more pleased.

"But that is not what I came here for." Richard narrowed his eyes and again took in Julian's full measure. "Are you truly God's Avenging Angel as every Christian knight claims?"

Julian's skin grew warm under the king's scrutiny. "Your Majesty, you honor this humble knight. I am merely a servant of our Lord."

"What say you, Baldwin? Does he gain your approval?" the king asked.

A thin sour-faced man moved from the shadows. "Good God, he won't do, Sire!"

Julian straightened his shoulders and raised his chin. He

dug his fingernails into his calloused palms. Who was this man who judged him so hastily? "You are fortunate, sir, I do not have my sword in hand or your tongue would be lying at your feet. God's name is holy. 'Tis blasphemy to use His name carelessly."

The man cringed. Richard exploded with laughter, then waved toward the colorless man. "This is my most trusted counselor, Sir Edward Baldwin."

Baldwin nodded. Julian ignored the feeble greeting by directing his attention back to the king.

"Recant your words, Edward. You have offended a knight of the Templar," Richard ordered.

"He has offended God, Your Majesty. Not me." The muscles in Julian's body tensed, his fingers itched. 'Twas a good thing his sword lay upon his bed. "He should do penance for his sin against our Creator."

Richard tipped back his russet head and guffawed again. "So he shall, noble knight. So he shall."

Julian let his last breath out slowly. He took no pleasure in instructing the king that 'twas God who should receive the glory. "Nay, Your Majesty, not noble; I am but a humble servant of our Lord."

Julian knew to disagree with the king could mean death. The room became instantly quiet; even the few insects that buzzed near the closed window took refuge against the pane, as if the serious mood that had descended upon the room's occupants had

also fallen upon their wings.

Richard sat in Master de Sablé's chair. He leaned forward, his eyes hooded behind thick bushy lashes, his face unreadable under the wiry beard. "Is it true, Brother Julian, you have never broken a single article of The Rule?"

Julian lowered his chin and quietly answered, "With God's help."

"Impossible! There are over six hundred of them," Baldwin blurted out.

Gritting his teeth, Julian responded to the black soul who rested his hand casually on the back of the Master's chair. "Keeping The Rule is easy if one meditates before one commits a rash act or utters witless words."

Julian raised a brow and hid a frown when a low rumble escaped Richard's throat for the third time. How could he find humor where there was none? 'Twas a Templars duty to correct the faithless.

Richard slapped his knees then stood. "I think he is perfect. I know the family and if Master de Sablé trusts him completely, then so do I."

"Well, I do not," Baldwin said, with a wave of his hand. "He is much too fair of face. We must consider his attitude toward women. When was the last time he had a dalliance? Julian de Maury, how long have you been a member of this order?"

Julian could smell the acid of this demon's blood. How dare Baldwin question his purity? He purged his lungs with a

cleansing breath, seeking the restraint his faith always insured. Sure as he stood in God's grace, someday the king would realize he harbored a serpent in his midst.

"I have been in this order for almost ten years," Julian answered.

"Ten years without a woman! Good God, he will ravish her before they reach Antioch."

Every muscle in Julian's body ached to lash out at this blasphemer. He took another calming breath. "Never in my entire life have I defiled myself with a woman."

Again the room became deathly still; Richard moved close until he stood toe-to-toe with Julian. "Are you saying you have never lain with a woman?"

Julian nodded, refusing to release the rage Baldwin had planted.

Master de Sablé stepped to the king's side. "Your Majesty, Julian never speaks other than the truth."

As if he sensed the volcano bubbling beneath Julian's calm exterior, Richard backed away until at least four hands separated him from Julian. "Yes, of course."

Julian raised his eyes heavenward in prayer, pleading for control, then looked upon Richard. "Your Majesty, let me burn in the fires of hell if I should ever love another soul more than my Lord."

"Aye, burn you shall," Baldwin taunted. "Not in hell's fire, but in a blaze just as consuming, just as condemning!"

"Quiet, Edward. No one is judging Julian's loyalty to our God," Richard reprimanded. "In fact, I am more than satisfied with him."

Julian lowered his head, trying to contain his exuberance and find his humility. He locked his knees and pressed his feet against the floor for fear he would forget his place and jump for joy. Richard had selected him. He would be sent on a glorious mission and escape the mundane tasks of polishing the marble floors. He would ride beside the king into blessed battle.

His Majesty walked to the window and squashed a still beetle against the pane with his thumb. "Many years ago," Richard continued, "relatives through marriage of my dear deceased brother Geoffrey came to the Holy Land on a pilgrimage. Muslims set upon them before they reached Jerusalem. We believed the whole family perished. Then came reports that a girl resembling Geoffrey's niece lived among the Muslims near Acre."

Richard coughed, clearing his throat. Julian waited respectfully for the king to finish his tale and speak of the great holy battle before them.

"When the city fell to the armies of God, we found Lady Ariane. She had been living with the infidels these past ten years. Now listen carefully, Julian, for this concerns your mission."

Julian straightened his shoulders. Whatever the test, God would find him true.

"When we found her, one of King Philip's cousins was with us. Jacques de Craon became smitten by the girl. Since I refused to marry Philip's sister, Alice, the bond between France and England has been unstable. I proclaimed, de Craon could only have the girl through holy matrimony. Fortunately, in his lust, he has agreed to my terms. A marriage between de Craon and the Lady Ariane would heal many wounds. Unfortunately, the girl lived as a concubine in the house of a man named Abi Bin and has accepted heathen ways."

The king droned on. Julian swayed slightly. Visions of conquering the Muslims thundered through his mind – the clang of armor, the screams of the infidels as they tasted the steel of his sword. Finally, the fight would be his. This time he would march into Jerusalem and smite the wicked.

Richard's voice boomed above the battle cries. "What say you, Julian, are you up to the task?"

Julian widened his stance, pulled back his shoulders and laid his palms flat against the sides of his white tunic. His glorious mission was at hand. "Aye, Your Majesty."

"Good. I need a trustworthy knight to convey the Lady Ariane to England and train her in the ways of a good Christian."

What is this? Before Julian could give voice to his question the king spoke again.

"Also, while you are there, keep a sharp eye on my brother, John. I have received reports he is misusing his power and has

designs on the throne."

England? The banners of battle Julian had created in his mind crashed to the ground. Surely there must be some mistake. Richard wanted him to return to England while playing nursemaid to some girl?

"Your Majesty, the Rule is very clear about dealing with children. No knight of the Templar is allowed even to be a godparent for fear of wanting a family of his own. Is there not someone of a lesser order who might school the child?"

"Child?" Richard crossed his arms in front of him. "Haven't you heard a word I said? The girl has seen at least seventeen summers. She is a woman."

Julian stared at the king. This was not a test worthy of a Knight Templar. He glanced at the master and noticed the severe frown creasing his face. Did the master truly expect him to carry out so trivial a task?

"Bring the girl in," Richard roared.

Across the room a door that led to the master's sleeping compartment burst open. Flanked by two knights stood a slender girl draped in a drab hooded cloak. When one of the king's knights tried to usher her forward, she retaliated with a swift kick to his shin. Her hood fell away, revealing a girl, nay, a woman with flawless skin, perfectly sculptured cheekbones, and bright green eyes that sparked pure hate.

But it was her hair which caused Julian to fight the urge to cross himself. For before him stood a siren whose rich wavy

tresses matched the consuming fires of hell. Edward's earlier words cried out in his mind: *Burn you shall. Not in hell's fire, but in a blaze just as consuming, just as condemning.*

Ariane took great pleasure in the insolent knight's howl even as pain shot up the foot she had slammed into his grimy shin. The weeks of trying to escape these Christian monsters had left her bone-tired and bruised, but no less determined.

The knight reached for her again. When she jumped away from him, her slipper caught in a large crack in the stone floor. She stumbled and raised her hand to brace herself for the inevitable fall. Swift feet crossed the room. Her hands landed against a solid chest adorned with a blood red cross. Ice swept through her veins when she noticed the white background of the tunic.

The red cross turned thick and sticky underneath her fingers. Blood covered the hilt of a glittering silver sword. High shrills pierced the air.

"My lady, are you hurt?"

The harsh, strong voice broke through her nightmare. The tight grip on her sides reminded her where she was – in the arms of a Templar. A murderer of the children of Allah.

With a shudder, Ariane spun away. She brushed her riotous hair from her face and spit a few strands from her mouth. She raised her gaze three hands. The tall knight's strength, his broad powerful chest, seemed to make the room shrink. Ariane pulled back her shoulders, meaning to hurl a string of Arab

curses at the arrogant Templar. But the curses died on her lips as she saw the savage storm ready to break in his fair colored eyes. Even the firm set of his cleanly shaven jaw indicated the tempest brewing beneath the controlled exterior.

Queasiness engulfed Ariane. His face seemed familiar and then again not. She fought the fear brewing in her belly. Surely he was just one more of the countless filthy Christians who shoved her about in her captivity. And yet, this man would never be only one of many. His beautiful, hard, stern face was like none other.

"Lady Ariane has forgotten her English tongue so we will address her in Arabic." The choppy Arab words of the dog, Richard, drew her attention from the imposing knight. To the left of the Anglo ruler stood the cobra, Edward Baldwin and two other Templars, one of strong build and elderly, the other of slight frame and young. The older knight had a face of a weasel, sly, with thin eyebrows. The other resembled a dog's whelp, scrawny, with mud-brown hair.

What was the dog king up to now?

Ariane squelched the smile, which begged to cross her lips. Little did the dolt know she understood every syllable he uttered. She had been wise not to reveal her knowledge of the English language.

"Lady Ariane," Richard said in Arabic, waving to the older knight. "May I present the Master of the Temple in Jerusalem, Robert de Sablé." The seasoned monk bowed slightly. Richard

ignored the younger knight and waved to the golden Templar with the puzzling face. "Before you stands Julian de Maury."

She had heard many tales about the Christian's Avenging Angel, who killed those who followed Mohammed and served Allah. Julian de Maury looked like an angel, but she knew the truth of it. He was a demon. A butcher who murdered harmless eunuchs such as faithful Isam. Is that why his face made her wary?

Screams mixed with the thunder from horses' hooves. A silver sword slashed.

Ariane shook the thought away. She matched the Templar's even glare. He offered no greeting, but wiped his hands on the side of his white tunic as if he had touched a leper. She longed to tell him what she thought of him in a language he understood, but she clenched her jaw to keep from shouting at him in English and giving herself away.

Abruptly the man turned to face the king. "Your Majesty," he said in English. "Forgive me, but 'twould be unwise for me to leave the Holy Land. Soon God's army will recapture Jerusalem. Surely you will need my sword in the fight."

Color crept up the king's neck. He crossed his arms and planted his feet firmly. His face took on a fierce, wild look. The weasel's and whelp's eyes widened. Yet the butcher seemed unaffected. He stood before his king like a cold and unyielding castle tower.

"Take her to England," Richard grated out in Arabic. "Stay there until the lady is safely wed to de Craon."

The mention of the beady-eyed Frank who ransacked her home freed Ariane's tongue. "I will not wed that worm!"

The cobra Baldwin hissed in English, "I know not what the lady said, but she sounds distressed. Perhaps she would be more at ease if I escorted her home."

Home. Baldwin had destroyed her home. Ariane chewed on the inside of her cheek, to keep understanding from showing on her face. If only she had a dagger, she would slit the belly of this snake that murdered her faithful Isam.

"Enough," Richard roared. "All leave except Julian and the lady."

The weasel, the whelp, and Richard's two mongrel knights scurried to the door like a pack of animals fighting for table scraps thrown on the ground. Baldwin slithered behind, then turned and bowed to his king. Richard waved him off. Baldwin straightened slowly, his gaze slid to her and crawled up her body. She wished she stood close enough to spit in his face. Instead she spat on the ground.

"Leave us." At the force of Richard's command, Baldwin jumped. He spun about and hurried out the door.

The room grew cold with silence. Ariane glanced at the king whose face bore deep crooked lines of disapproval. His eyes fixed on the closed door while his chest rose and fell with exaggerated breaths.

Ariane had seen Richard this way many times before, his anger boiling beneath a fragile calm. She meant to look at the

floor until the king's rage ebbed, but a strange force pulled her gaze in another direction, into cool ice-blue eyes. A chill pricked her spine.

An ice-blue jewel sparkled in the hilt of a broadsword, floating downward.

"Brother Julian," Richard said in Arabic. "The marriage between Lady Ariane and de Craon is extremely important to the Crusade. Sir Baldwin does not speak the infidel language, and in truth, I do not trust him in this matter. When he looks upon Lady Ariane the flames of desire burn hard and fast in his eyes. I promised de Craon she would remain untouched from the day he set eyes on her and by God, he shall have it. It is the least I can do since he has agreed to marry the soiled lamb. But be careful. She is a crafty one. Already she has tried to seduce two of my knights into helping her escape. Luckily we got wind of the plan before it could be brought to fruition. I trust this will not happen with you, de Maury?"

The Templar nodded, but looked like he had just eaten a spoiled date.

Ariane balled her fists at her side and stamped her foot. "I refuse. I will not wed that slimy worm nor will I go anywhere with this...butcher."

Richard walked over to stand in front of her. He placed his hands on his hips, his gaze traveled her body as if she were a mare to be auctioned. She well expected him to examine her teeth or slap her thighs to check her strength. He switched to his

English speech. "Julian, you will take the girl."

Ariane lowered her head, certain comprehension of his words could be seen in her eyes. Waves of anxiety rushed through her, she would need all her wits in order to escape this knight.

The Templar cleared his throat and spoke in English. "Your Majesty, she may not be Lady Ariane. Many young Christian children have been abducted by the Muslims."

Richard motioned the Templar knight to his side. "She wears a necklace given to her by my brother Geoffrey at her baptism. The front carries our family crest; her name is engraved on the back with a tiny cross above the script."

Richard backed away allowing the Templar to move forward. Her skin crawled when his fingers grazed her neck. She slapped his hand away and stepped back.

"Keep your filthy hands off me, Templar butcher," she spat in Arabic.

He inched forward. "I won't hurt you," he said fluidly in the same tongue.

She took another step back. "Nay, you will. I feel it...I know it."

Ariane heard the grind of his teeth through his insolent smile. Surely he wished to wring her neck. "Never have I raised my sword against a lady."

A strong hand gripped the hilt of the sword. The blue stone flashed in the late afternoon sun. Falling downward, downward .

. . .

She gulped hard. He had no sword on his hip, yet she felt—
“Yea, you have, I know it. I know it!” Her back came up against
the cool chamber wall. He advanced slowly until his shoes
touched the tips of her slippers. Her heart thudded wildly.
There was nowhere to run. No chance of escape.

He touched her again, then hesitated, holding his trembling
fingers before her. He flexed his hand then gently slid his
fingers down her neck. They were not cold as she suspected, but
radiated warmth. She stood paralyzed on the spot when he raised
the chain that hung about her neck. She could do naught but
watch the small heart glint in his large palm.

The king’s face loomed near the Templar’s shoulder. Quietly
he said in English, “When we sacked the house of Abi Bin, a
eunuch died protecting her. With his last breath, he begged us
to spare her life. He claimed she was of noble English blood. I
believe he spoke the truth for every time someone tries to take
the necklace from her she fights like a wild animal. How many
infidels would cherish a necklace inscribed with the cross of
Christ? I believe that deep in her soul she begs to be saved.
’Twas God’s will we were sent to the house of Abi Bin.”

The Templar butcher took his time examining the heart. Then
he raised his gaze to meet hers. “Perhaps you are right, Your
Majesty.” His warm English words washed over her throat chasing
away the chill. “But she may have stolen the charm from the true
Lady Ariane. By chance she could be a skillful thief.”

Ariane grabbed the necklace from his hand and placed it

beneath her cloak. Thief indeed. 'Twas Christians who stole the Muslims' homes and lands.

Like a savage lion bored with his prey, Richard shoved the Templar aside and shouted, "Enough of this! Saladin awaits me on the road to Jerusalem. I'll not waste more time on this matter. Her eyes, her hair, even her small stature are similar to Geoffrey's wife. She is his niece!" He drew a deep breath. "I need this alliance with Philip. The French grow weary of the Crusade. If they leave, Jerusalem will be like the Star of Bethlehem, beautiful to behold, but unable to be reached. I have not come this far for naught. Take whomever and whatever you wish. But you accompany her to England. Is that clear?"

"Aye, Your Majesty. I will do what you and God command," the butcher answered, his voice edged with defeat.

Ariane peered over Richard's shoulder to look directly into the fair, fierce countenance of the Templar.

God command.

God commands me.

The memory flooded her mind. She was but twelve summers when Abi Bin had taken his household to visit relatives in Damascus. On their travels they encountered a group of pilgrims, escorted by Templars. Never had Ariane seen such magnificent men, garbed in white with bright red crosses on their chests and large shiny swords on their hips.

First there were words between the two parties, then shouts and curses. Swords began to clang, both Muslims and pilgrims

began to run, while others chose to fight. Frightened, she crawled under a wooden cart and watched the fray.

She saw him. His ice-blue eyes chilled with hate. He wore no helm, his hair hung like a golden veil about his face. He raised a blue-stoned sword high. It glittered and sparkled in the afternoon sun. The sword glided downward, downward until the blade crashed against the skull of Raya, her teacher. The only woman who bothered to comfort a lonely child in a strange land. Blood flowed freely. His words of vengeance rang loud in her ears.

"As God commands me, I will purge this land with infidel blood."

Allah have mercy! She remembered this face. The golden knight, the Christian's Avenging Angel. Ariane bit her lower lip to keep from calling him a liar. He did kill ladies. He would butcher her like he did Raya. If she could not flee, she would fight.

Ariane pushed Richard, he stumbled backward. She flew at the butcher and drummed her fists on his chest. His hands caught her wrists, subduing her. She struggled to free herself.

The Arabic words rushed from her lips, "Let go! I'll not go! Kill me now, Templar butcher. For I swear, at first chance, I will cut your heart out."

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