

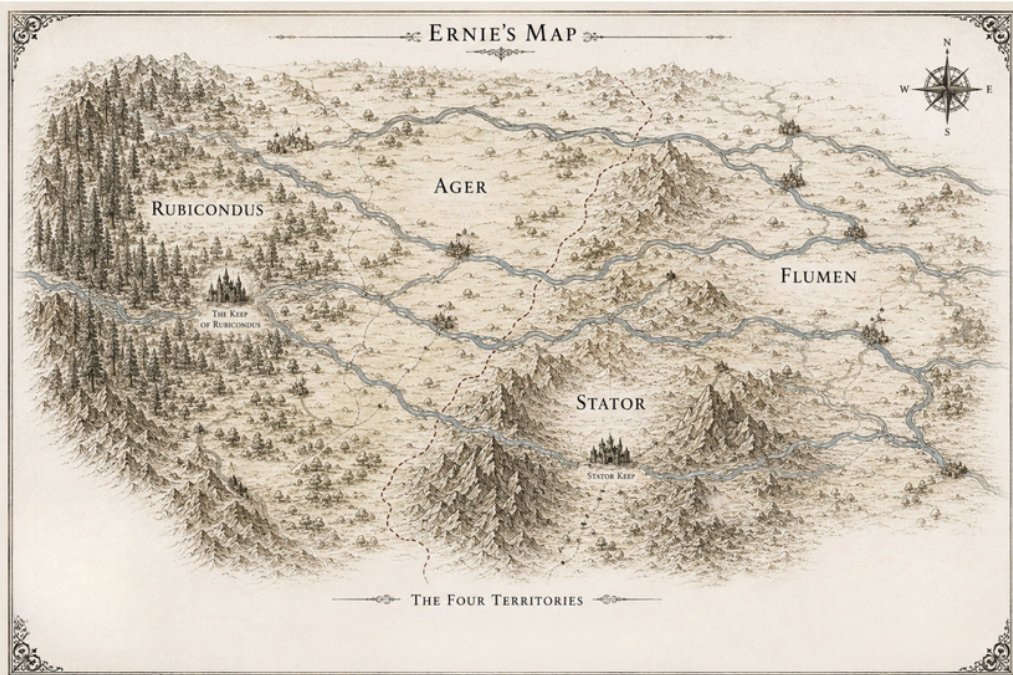
BLOOD & COVENANT
INHERITANCE

BOOK 5

It Standing



Blood & Covenant



Book Three: Inheritance

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Author's Note

This book began while I was in Ukraine, serving during a time of active bombardment.

There were long stretches all that could be done was wait through the noise, uncertainty, and moments that stretched longer than they should. In those hours, this story took shape, becoming something to hold onto, steady yet so distant from where I stood. The ideas in these pages were carried through those nights like a small, constant flame.

L.T. Standing

Dedication

Dedicated to Tom Cruise, who
teaches us that storytelling is an
inheritance, entrusted to each
generation for preservation.

Book Three
Chapter One

As she twirled in her new dress, Anita held the bag open for her father, Nollen, to see.

“It is for mama.” She showed the necklace she had spent nearly an hour picking out. His face lit up in surprise.

“How did you manage to find your mother such a nice gift for so few schillings? This is a shickle at least.”

“I showed my shillings to the shop owner. A real princess in the store insisted I pick the best necklace for ma.”

“A real princess to your rescue!” Her father was impressed.

“Covenant Princess Trist of Rubicondus is very nice, let me pick any necklace in the shop I wanted, and when I didn’t find what I wanted, she took me to a much nicer shop pa.”

“That indeed was kind of her,” he set her gently on the cart as she held the bag closely to her heart. “If we don’t leave now, we will miss your brother and have to stay one more night.”

“I want Ager,” laying down in the cart and curling her legs beneath her. It had been a lovely time.

The Red Moon ceremony was over a month ago. Anita remembered the red moon as large as the Rubicondus trees. She liked little trees, the kind that grew in Ager near her home.

Better to climb, “I wonder what the Ghost Humans will bring this year for Fast as Fox Day? I still haven’t caught sight of one of them yet. Last year was my favorite year. I got, Lily.”

“I remember.” Nollen knew she carried the small horse with her every day, nor was he surprised to glance back and see her begin to play with it, Lily had become part of the family.

Nollen handed the guard his travel papers. “The little one is mine.”

“Do you know this man, and do you need assistance to get away from him safely?” the guard asked her.

“He is my pa,” Anita growled deeply towards them.

He stamped their papers and waved them through.

“What a strange thing to ask someone who is so little, especially since I am traveling with someone so big.”

“Ah, but it is wise for them to ask. Many Stators are here; they travel buying or selling things.”

“Children?” Anita was confident her mother would not want her to know that. She was only ten years old, but she understood what buying and selling were. Ager was a crop, not a children's kingdom.

“Yes,” her father spoke quietly as he saw her offense. Nollen pulled the small cart with their things and Anita along the road.

Not long after, Nollen ran into his eldest son, Hegset and his new wife, Nula, with their smaller cart.

“How is the guard tower duty going, son?”

“Never been busier. Rubicondus and Stator Blood send troops to guard the borders. Now, under this new Blood Prince, Tane, he marks his men. They have ways that are their own, and you can learn to count on them.”

Hegset and his father slowed for his wife, who was refusing to sit in the cart despite being six moons along with his child.

Both men knew fighting a shewolf would bring no peace to the pace of their journey. Anita raised her eyebrows and then looked to the cart Hegset was pulling, expectantly.

“A mark?” Nollen had not heard of this before.

“The Path of Tane, a red star shape. It gives them the ability to run the Blood Roads, all three of them: Ager, Stator, and Rubicondus. Never Flumen. Offense has been taken. Stator locked all Flumen borders by order of the Blood King Fides. If that doesn’t mean war.”

“Mama doesn’t like that talk.”

“Mama’s not here,” Hegset told his little sister and widened his eyes as though he was threatening to tickle her again, which he did often while holding her upside down.

“She’ll hear about it,” Anita sang softly of her loyalty, and both men chuckled, knowing that was true.

“We received orders that the new Blood King will be coming through. We do not know when, apparently, he is running the entirety of Ager, every valley and farm.”

“Why?”

“Honestly father I do not know. We are so few he could very well meet everyone in Ager, personally.”

“Good legend to boast before commanding.”

“As long as I don’t get transferred to the South. I don’t want to be near any of those cultish Flumen. What are they thinking?”

“Have you seen the bones in their hair, Lycans with bones?”

“Or the paint,” Nula added of the blue and white markings they wore. “They are not Ghost Humans, they do not stand tall or walk in silence and trusted pose. They are strange even for wolves and not welcome in the North.”

“I have heard,” Nollen recalled the reports. “Have the Ghost Humans spoken about this yet as they travel past them?”

“Not much, they are concerned. They do not want people to think they support this action. They also showed us the Fast as Fox Day toys, carvings and all, to show they were not carrying any bones. We felt that it was unnecessary; we grew up with them.”

Nula finally relented and sat down on the cart as her husband and father-in-law both picked up the pace. It was several miles later that they stopped near a pond, as a band of Stator came by.

“Wares, whores, and more, come and get it before it’s gone,” the Stator shouted from a largely overflowing cart filled with people. He stared at Anita. “Dolls and bracelets available two for one.”

“Stolen most likely,” Hegset glared at them as they rolled by, Stators tipping their hats to their family as though a show of support for their performance.

“Off to the Blood Roads with you, there are children in these parts.”

“Get’er arses to going.”

“We don’t want your whores here!”

“Filthy Stator sukaza.”

“Pa, what’s a whore?”