



ANGELA HUNT

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

KING'S
SHADOW

THE SILENT YEARS // A NOVEL OF KING HEROD'S COURT

THE SILENT YEARS

KING'S SHADOW

A NOVEL OF KING HEROD'S COURT

ANGELA HUNT



BETHANYHOUSE

a division of Baker Publishing Group
Minneapolis, Minnesota

© 2019 by Angela Hunt Communications, Inc.

Published by Bethany House Publishers
11400 Hampshire Avenue South
Bloomington, Minnesota 55438
www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House Publishers is a division of
Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, Michigan

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy, recording—without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotations in printed reviews.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hunt, Angela Elwell, author.

Title: King's shadow : a novel of King Herod's court / Angela Hunt.

Description: Bloomington, Minnesota : Bethany House Publishers, 2019. | Series:

The silent years

Identifiers: LCCN 2018058911 | ISBN 9780764233364 (trade paper) | ISBN
9780764234156 (hardcover) | ISBN 9781493418596 (e-book)

Subjects: LCSH: Courts and courtiers—Fiction. | Herod I, King of Judea, 73 B.C.—4
B.C.—Fiction. | GSAFD: Christian fiction. | Historical fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3558.U46747 K56 2019 | DDC 813/.54—dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018058911>

Scripture quotations are from the Tree of Life Version. © 2015 by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society. Used by permission of the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society. “TLV” and “Tree of Life Version” and “Tree of Life Holy Scriptures” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by the Messianic Jewish Family Bible Society.

This is a work of historical reconstruction; the appearances of certain historical figures are therefore inevitable. All other characters, however, are products of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is coincidental.

Cover design by LOOK Design Studio

Cover photography by Aimee Christenson

Author is represented by Browne & Miller Literary Associates.

19 20 21 22 23 24 25 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

In the Christian Bible, one turns the page after Malachi and finds Matthew as if only a few days fell between the activities of the prophet and the arrival of Jesus Christ. In reality, however, four hundred “silent years” lie between the Old Testament and New, a time when God did not speak to Israel through His prophets. Yet despite the prophets’ silence, God continued to work in His people, other nations, and the supernatural realm.

He led Israel through a time of testing that developed a sense of hope and a yearning for the promised Messiah.

He brought the four nations prophesied in Daniel’s vision to international prominence: the Babylonians, the Persians, the Greeks, and the Romans. These powerful kingdoms spread their cultures throughout civilization and united the world by means of paved highways and international sailing routes.

God also prepared to fulfill His promise to the serpent in Eden: “I will put animosity between you and the woman, and between your descendant and her descendant; he will bruise your head, and you will bruise his heel” (Genesis 3:15).

King’s Shadow closes the gap between the time of the prophets and the coming of the promised Messiah.



PART ONE

37 Years Before the Common Era

CHAPTER ONE

Salome

If my brother had been marrying anyone else, I might have been happy for him. But the seventeen-year-old girl at his side was Mariamne of the Hasmoneans, and nothing would please me more than never having to see her again. But now the war was concluding, so Herod was free to take his promised throne and marry his betrothed. In a few moments, Mariamne and I would be joined as sisters-in-law for a lifetime.

The thought made my stomach churn.

Mariamne, the esteemed bride, was the daughter of Alexandra and Alexander, the closest thing to a royal family the Jews possessed. Alexandra, the bride's mother, was the daughter of Hyrcanus II, the eldest son of King Alexander Jannaeus and Queen Salome Alexandra. Alexander, the bride's father, had been sired by Aristobulus, the second son of Jannaeus and his queen. Though most people would find it difficult to keep track of that family's intertwined lineage, they were more than royal names to me. My father and grandfather had served those kings, so my brothers and I had visited the royal palace many times.

I had long since grown weary of them all.

I thought Herod would be weary of them as well, but Mariamne had blossomed into an exquisite beauty, and my brother was thoroughly besotted.

A murmur of approval rippled through the crowd, followed by fervent whispers.

“This will silence the wagging tongues who say our king is not of royal blood.”

“The Jews cannot criticize our king now—not with a Hasmonean queen on the throne.”

“I hear he is truly smitten with the girl. Some say she might already be with child.”

“About time! Their betrothal has lasted how long? Six years?”

Five, I wanted to shout. I had endured five long years of living with the girl at Masada, five years of hearing her complain about the food, the clothing my brother provided, and the furnishings in her chamber. Never mind that Herod had emptied his personal treasury to provide her with the best of everything. Never mind that Mother had urged me and my other brother to be on our best behavior in her arrogant presence.

Never mind that I had been placed in charge of arranging this tiresome royal wedding. I would do almost anything to make my brother happy, but I would have preferred to endure a full day of torture rather than spend a full week arranging the marriage between Herod and that spoiled hellcat.

I forced a smile as the priest—an ordinary Levite, the best I could find, as Herod had not yet appointed a new *cohen gadol*—lifted his hand and offered a quiet benediction.

When the priest had finished, my brother turned to face the assembly, a wide smile overtaking his tanned face. “May I present to you,” he said, a note of childlike wonder in his voice, “my bride and your queen, Mariamne.”

The bride, who fairly dripped in jewels and gold chains,

inclined her head in a regal nod and allowed Herod to lead her off the elevated platform. Then she paused beside a servant carrying a pillow and turned to her new husband.

Beaming like a grateful boy, my brother lifted a golden diadem from the pillow and placed it on Mariamne's head.

Beside me, eight-year-old Antipater snorted. I elbowed him, then nodded toward the king. "Mind your manners, nephew. Your father will not be pleased if he sees you smirking at his bride."

"If given a chance, I could make real trouble," the lad replied, his dark brows rushing together. "Should I step forward and ask Father how my mother feels about this? He has cast her off like a worthless old shoe, and yet—"

"Does she not still live?" I frowned and lowered my voice. "You are here, and you are the king's firstborn, a position no one can take away. So mind your tongue and watch your step. You must tread carefully if you wish to remain in your father's favor."

"In the king's favor." Antipater arched a dark brow, revealing a wisdom beyond his years. "A precarious place to be."

"Would you rather be ignored?" I nodded toward the departing newlyweds. "Herod would never forgive me if I allowed you to make a scene at his wedding. So go to the feast and adopt a pleasant expression. Behave yourself. If anyone asks for your opinion of the bride, say you admire her and look forward to getting to know her better. Because you do *not* want to be overheard complaining about your mother's situation."

Antipater scowled, but he was smart enough to know I would not give him bad advice. As the crowd surged toward the reception tent, I waited for my other brother. Pheroras stood at the rear of the expansive chamber, looking pleased. He had supported Herod's plan to marry the Hasmonean girl and did not seem to view her as I did.

Perhaps it took a woman to fully understand another woman. What did men know of our ability to intuit the secret desires hidden behind painted lips and polished faces? To read another female heart through sly glances and tight-lipped smiles? Why could neither Pheroras nor Herod see Mariamne and her mother as I saw them?

Ten minutes after I met Alexandra, I knew she had agreed to this marriage for only one reason: to keep her grip on power in Judea. The Hasmoneans had been pushed off the throne because they could not share power among themselves. Rome stepped in to maintain the peace, and the Senate's edict established Herod as king of Judea. But due to this marriage, Alexandra's grandchildren would be royal heirs, and within a generation Judea would again have a Hasmonean king . . . if Herod allowed Mariamne's children to replace Antipater, his firstborn.

Alexandra's ambition was as obvious as the stars on a cloudless night, yet Herod was so addled by the daughter's beauty he honestly believed she loved him.



In the great pavilion Herod had erected outside the city of Samaria, dozens of dignitaries lounged on couches, drank wine, and shouted congratulations to the king. I walked in with Joseph, my uncle and husband, and scrutinized visiting Roman senators, wealthy merchants, and Malichus, the Nabataean king with his entourage. Were they pleased with the wine? Had we provided enough food? Some guests had come from miles away, and Herod would not be happy if anyone left hungry.

Once I was certain everything was in order, I relaxed and tried not to be too obvious as I drank in the details of dress and jewelry on the Arab women. After being safeguarded for so long at Masada, I felt a keen interest in current fashions and hairstyles. My handmaid, Nada, was set in her ways and

for years had been arranging my hair in the same boring style. Now that we had been freed, perhaps Mother and I could finally look like royal women . . .

A bright, eye-catching crimson blazed among the chitons and flowing himations. What did they call that shade, and how did the dyers achieve such brilliance? And silver must have gone out of favor, for I had never seen so much gold jewelry encircling male and female necks. Herod would want Mother and me to look like these women, to show that we were not common but as regal as any noble lady.

“So many important guests have come to honor my nephew.” Joseph spoke to me but smiled fondly at Herod. “I never thought I would see such a day.”

“Neither did I,” I remarked, though my reasons for doubting the marriage likely differed from my husband’s.

I nodded toward the wide couch reserved for us, and Joseph led me through the crowd while acknowledging those who respectfully inclined their heads in our direction. Though I was not the focus of attention—the central elevated couch had been reserved for Herod and his new bride—everyone knew I was the king’s only sister and my husband the king’s uncle. No one wanted to slight us, for my brothers and I were as close as a tree and its bark. Our father taught us to be dependent on each other and to support, protect, and elevate one another whenever possible. To insult one of us was to insult *all* of us, and no one wanted to face our combined wrath.

I should have been overjoyed on this day, yet when I looked at the bride, whom everyone called “the Hasmonean princess,” my gut clenched. Mariamne was beautiful, even I could admit that, but she seemed to believe herself superior to everyone around her. Alexandra, her mother, had to be the source of the girl’s imperiousness, for even I had heard the woman boast that Mariamne had been born into a chosen race and a chosen family.

I caught my husband's arm. "What do you think?" I jerked my chin toward the bride's mother. "Friend or foe?"

Joseph released a dark little laugh. "Clearly a foe." He grinned at me. "But the sort you keep close so that you may keep a sharp eye on them."

"She's always talking about the heroic Maccabees," I muttered, walking close to him as we threaded our way through the gathering. "Constantly reminding me of the ragtag army that saved Israel from the Seleucids."

Joseph snorted. "Judah Maccabee might have been a hero, but if she mentions her ancestors again, ask her about Alexander Jannaeus, who crucified hundreds of Pharisees on a single night. Or Aristobulus, who murdered his own mother in order to seize the throne. For that matter, ask her about John Hyrcanus, who invaded Idumea and forced us to become Jews."

My husband spoke in a soft voice, but I heard the resentment in it. If Alexandra had been close enough to hear, she would have been alarmed.

The woman despised me; I knew it as certainly as I knew the sun would rise on the morrow. Both Alexandra and her daughter displayed a palpable revulsion when presented with anything—food, garment, or servant—from Idumea, which caused me to wonder how Alexandra had reconciled her disdain for Idumaeans with her desire to see her daughter well married. Throughout the years of our forced togetherness, I had been able to formulate only one reason: she wanted her offspring to reclaim the throne of Judea. If that meant Mariamne would have to marry an Edomite, then so be it. Alexandra, I had come to believe, would marry her daughter to a toad if it meant her grandchildren would be kings and queens.

Both women were always clever enough to veil their innermost thoughts and opinions when seated with Herod or any

of his counselors. When we women gathered for a meal or an afternoon's entertainment, however, the veils came off.

"I know why Alexandra wanted Mariamne to wed the king," I whispered as Joseph and I approached our couch. "What I can't understand is why Herod wants to marry that arrogant girl."

"That, my dear—" Joseph tossed a grin over his shoulder—"is because you are not a man."

As the musicians I had chosen played in the corner of the decorated tent, I pressed my lips together and reclined on our couch, positioning my head near my husband's. Joseph had never been the love of my life, but I was reasonably certain Herod arranged our marriage because he thought I needed a mature advisor.

Though Joseph did not love me, I knew he had developed a certain fondness toward me. At twenty-eight, twenty years his junior, I could rarely hold his attention for more than a few moments because he claimed our conversations exhausted him. His concubines attended to his physical pleasures, so he did not need me for physical or emotional satisfaction. But with our marriage he won a role he had greatly desired, that of advisor to the king. Now when Herod sent for me and Pheroras, he included Joseph, which pleased my husband immensely.

I smiled as a sudden thought struck. Perhaps my brother married me to our uncle in order to control me indirectly. If so, his ploy had worked—to a point. But I still could not figure out what he saw in Mariamne. She was lovely, yes, but he could fill a harem with beautiful concubines. She was not particularly bright or clever, and she came with a mother who would vex the patience of a stone.

Yet only Mariamne could give him legitimacy. Rome might have given Herod the throne, but only a Hasmonean would satisfy the Jews of Jerusalem. Still . . . would her so-called legitimacy be enough to make the marriage work? The Jews would not be happy if he married this girl and later set her aside . . .

I pressed my hand to my husband's arm and nodded toward the bride. "What do you think? Will she make Herod happy?"

Joseph followed my gaze. "She has already made him delirious with joy. She is everything he ever wanted—beautiful, intelligent, Jewish by birth, and Hasmonean. If she proves fertile, he will never find fault in her."

"I would not be surprised if she is already with child," I murmured, tilting my head to study the bride's belly. "Five years is a long time for a betrothal. Surely Herod has visited her chamber—"

"Not likely, with her mother hovering about." Joseph smiled. "Alexandra guarded her daughter's purity as if it were more valuable than jewels. No, the girl cannot be with child. But after tonight . . . we shall see."

I looked to the edge of the tent, where young Antipater sat on a bench, his face marked by resentment. "Antipater cannot be pleased by this union."

Narrow-faced Antipater who, along with his mother, had been unceremoniously set aside, did not appear to be enjoying the wedding, but Herod wanted him to witness the new marriage. Herod had banished Doris and would soon send Antipater to his mother. The next time Doris saw her son, she would undoubtedly pepper him with questions about the event.

Herod would approve if the boy told his mother everything.

"What will become of the lad?" I wondered, studying the young prince. The boy looked nothing like my brother. He had inherited his mother's thin face, frail frame, and sparse brown hair. His voice was yet high and reedy, far more suited to a girl than a boy. But since he was Herod's firstborn, he had been indulged from birth until the day Herod decided to marry Mariamne.

"Next week he will leave us," Joseph said. "He and Doris will be well cared for, but Antipater will not be regarded as the heir

apparent. Today Herod begins a new chapter in his reign. He has his Jewish queen, and soon he will have Jerusalem. Already our men have surrounded the city, and the Romans are on their way to support us.”

“I hope nothing happens to Herod,” I whispered, hardly daring to speak such ominous words at a wedding. I should not even hint of such a dark possibility, but I had watched my brother ride away too many times and take too many risks. One day, surely, the tide would turn and he would not be victorious . . . or so lucky.

I had already lost two of my brothers. I did not want to lose another.

“Nothing will happen to Herod,” Joseph answered, his voice brimming with confidence. “He has a gift for being in the right place at the right moment.”

“But so did Phasaël. And Joseph.”

My husband shrugged. “Then, considering the world we inhabit, our new queen should produce a son as soon as possible.”

I brushed the troubling thought of Herod’s death aside and peered across the crowd to where our mother sat on an elevated chair. She held her chin high, a silent rebuke to all those who thought our family unworthy of marriage to a Hasmonean, and then her gaze crossed mine.

Yes. Her eyes sent a silent message. *Your brother will be pleased with your efforts here.*

I sighed and felt the tension leave my shoulders for the first time in a week.