



The Angels' Share (The Bourbon Kings)

By J.R. Ward

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#1 New York Times bestselling author J. R. Ward delivers the second novel in her Bourbon Kings series—a sweeping saga of a Southern dynasty struggling to maintain a façade of privilege and prosperity, while secrets and indiscretions threaten its very foundation...

In Charlemont, Kentucky, the Bradford family is the crème de la crème of high society—just like their exclusive brand of bourbon. And their complicated lives and vast estate are run by a discrete staff who inevitably become embroiled in their affairs. This is especially true now, when the apparent suicide of the family patriarch is starting to look more and more like murder...

No one is above suspicion—especially the eldest Bradford son, Edward. The bad blood between him and his father is known far and wide, and he is aware that he could be named a suspect. As the investigation into the death intensifies, he keeps himself busy at the bottom of a bottle—as well as with his former horse trainer's daughter. Meanwhile, the family's financial future lies in the perfectly manicured hands of a business rival, a woman who wants Edward all to herself.

Everything has consequences; everybody has secrets. And few can be trusted. Then, at the very brink of the family's demise, someone thought lost to them forever returns to the fold. Maxwell Bradford has come home. But is he a savior...or the worst of all the sinners?

From the Hardcover edition.

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Editorial Review

Review

Praise for *The Angels' Share*

“The lush descriptions make Kentucky and the rarefied bourbon aristocracy spring to life . . . an utterly mesmerizing glimpse at the lifestyles of the flawed rich and the famous.”—Fresh Fiction

“Well-drawn characters, razor-sharp dialogue and truly stunning twists and turns kept me turning pages faster than I really wanted to, wishing to savor every nuance of this engrossing novel.”—The Book Review

“There is a little something for everyone: a glimpse into the lifestyles of the Southern aristocracy, murder, mystery, sex, and intrigue.”—Lit Buzz

Praise for *The Bourbon Kings*

“Fantastically and compulsively engrossing, as readers will undoubtedly fall through an irresistible rabbit hole that leads to murder, adultery, kidnapping, embezzlement, sins, lies, and love.”—USAToday.com

“A sweeping saga where family roots run deep and passion sizzles hotter than a Kentucky summer.”—*New York Times* bestselling author Gena Showalter

“The drama never stops in this tale of family secrets, lost love found, rivalries, delightfully nasty villains, and deliciously appealing heroes.”—*New York Times* bestselling author Susan Wiggs

“Breathless fun!!”—*New York Times* bestselling author Lisa Gardner

About the Author

J. R. Ward is the author of more than twenty previous novels, including those in her #1 *New York Times* bestselling series, the Black Dagger Brotherhood. She is also the author of the Black Dagger Legacy series and *The Bourbon Kings*. There are more than fifteen million copies of Ward's novels in print worldwide, and they have been published in twenty-six different countries around the world.

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ONE

Big Five Bridge, Charlemont, Kentucky

Jonathan Tulane Baldwine leaned out over the rail of the new bridge that connected Charlemont, Kentucky, with its closest Indiana neighbor, New Jefferson. The Ohio River was fifty feet below, the muddy, swollen waters reflecting the multicolored lights that graced each of the span's five arches. As he rose up onto the tips of his loafers, he felt as though he were falling, but that was merely an illusion.

He imagined his father jumping off this very ledge to his death.

William Baldwine's body had been found at the base of the Falls of the Ohio two days ago. And for all of the man's accomplishments in life, for all of his lofty pursuits, he had ended his mortal coil tangled and mangled

in a boat slip. Next to an old fishing trawler. That had a resale value of two hundred bucks. Three hundred, tops.

Oh, the ignominy.

What had it been like to fall? There must have been a rushing breeze in the face as William had been fisted by gravity and pulled down to the water. Clothes must have flapped as flags, slapping against body and leg. Eyes must have watered, from gust or perhaps even emotion?

No, it would have been the former.

The impact had to have hurt. And then what? A shocked inhale that had sucked the river's foul waves in? A choking sense of suffocation? Or did a knockout render him blissfully unaware? Or . . . perhaps it had all ended with a heart attack from the adrenaline overload of the descent, a stinging pain in the center of the chest radiating down the left arm, preventing a lifesaving swim stroke. Had he still been conscious when the coal barge hit him, when that propeller had chewed him up? Certainly, by the time he went over the falls, he was dead.

Lane wished he knew for sure that the man had suffered.

To know that there had been pain, tremendous, agonizing pain, and also fear, a ringing, overwhelming fear, would have been a powerful relief, a balm to the swirl of emotions that his father's watery death caused him to drown in even while he stood on dry land.

"Over sixty-eight million dollars you stole," Lane said into the uncaring wind, the disinterested drop, the bored current down below. "And the company's in even more debt. What the hell did you do with it? Where did the money go?"

There was no answer coming up at him, of course. And that would have been the same if the man were still alive and Lane were confronting him in person.

"And my wife," he barked. "You fucked my wife. Under the roof you shared with my mother-and got Chantal pregnant."

Not that Lane's marriage to the former Chantal Blair Stowe had been anything other than a certificate he'd been coerced into putting his name to. But at least he was owning that mistake and taking care of it.

"No wonder Mother is a drug addict. No wonder she hides. She must have known about the other women, must have known who and what you were, you bastard."

As Lane closed his eyes, he saw a dead body-but not his father's swollen, mottled mess of a corpse on that slab from when Lane had gone to the morgue to ID the remains. No, he saw a woman sitting upright in her office at the family's mansion, her sensible, modest skirt and button-down blouse arranged perfectly, her bobbed hair only a little mussed, grass-stained running shoes on her feet instead of the flats she had always worn.

There had been a horrible grimace on her face. The Joker's mad grin.

From the hemlock she had taken.

He'd found that body two days before his father had jumped.

"Rosalinda is dead because of you, you sonofabitch. She worked for you in our house for thirty years, and you might as well have killed her yourself."

She was the reason Lane had found out about the missing money. The former controller for the family's household accounts had left a kind of suicide note behind, a USB drive with Excel spreadsheets showing the alarming withdrawals, the transfers to WWB Holdings.

William Wyatt Baldwine Holdings.

There were a good sixty-eight million reasons she had poisoned herself. All because Lane's father had forced her to do unethical things until her sense of decency had snapped her in half.

"And I know what you did to Edward. I know that was your fault, too. You set your own son up in South America. They kidnapped him because of you, and you refused to pay the ransom so they'd kill him. Business rival gone while you get to look like the grieving father. Or did you do it because he, too, suspected that you were stealing?"

Edward had survived, except Lane's older brother was now nothing but a ruined shell with an irregular heartbeat, no longer the heir apparent to the business, the throne, the crown.

William Baldwine had done so much evil.

And these things were only what Lane knew about. What else was out there?

Equally important was what to do about it all. What could he do?

He felt like he was at the helm of a great ship that had been turned to a rocky shore-right before its rudder snapped off.

With a quick surge of strength, he swung his legs up and over the heavy steel railing, his loafers slapping on the six-inch lip on the far side. Heart pumping, hands and feet going numb, mouth drying out until he could not swallow, he held on behind his hips with an under-grip and leaned even farther into the abyss.

What had it felt like?

He could jump-or just step off . . . and fall, fall, fall until he knew for certain what his father had been through. Would he end up in the same boathouse slip? Would his body also find the propeller of a barge and be great white'd in the filthy fresh waters of the Ohio?

In his mind, clear as day, he heard his momma say in her deep Southern drawl, God does not give us more than we can handle.

Miss Aurora's faith had certainly seen her through more things than most mere mortals could bear. As an African-American growing up in the South in the fifties, she had faced discrimination and injustices he couldn't even imagine, and yet Miss Aurora had more than endured, triumphing in culinary school, running the gourmet kitchen at Easterly not just like a French chef, but better-while also mothering him and his brothers and sister as no one else had, becoming the soul of Easterly, the touchstone for so many.

The beacon that, until he had met his Lizzie, had been the only light on the horizon for him.

Lane wished he believed as his momma did. And oh, God, Miss Aurora even had faith in him, faith that he would turn this all around, save the family, be the man she knew he could be.

Be the man his father was not and never had been, no matter the trappings of his wealth and success.

Jump, he could just jump. And it was over.

Was that what his father had thought? With the lies and the embezzlement being exposed, with Rosalinda's death a harbinger for the dirge of discovery, had William come here because he alone knew the true extent of what he had done and the depth of the hole that had to be dug out? Had he recognized that the game was up, his time was coming, and even with all his financial acumen, he wasn't going to be able to solve the problem he'd created?

Or had he decided to fake his own death-and failed by succeeding?

Was somewhere, out there, perhaps in an offshore account or in a bank vault in Switzerland, under his name or another's, everything that had been siphoned off?

So many questions. And the lack of answers, coupled with the stress of having to fix it all, was the kind of thing that could drive you insane.

Lane refocused on the waters. He could barely see them from this height. In fact . . . he could see nothing but blackness with the merest hint of a shimmer.

There was, he realized, a certain siren call to the coward's way out, a pull, like gravity, to an end that he could control: One hard impact and it was all over and done with, the deaths, the deceit, the debt. Everything wiped clean, the festering infection that was going to hold no longer and was about to be unleashed publicly nothing to worry about anymore.

Had there been sleepless nights for his father? Regrets? When William had stood here, had there been a to-and-fro about should he/shouldn't he fly for a few moments and be done with the terrible mess he had created? Had the man even once considered the ramifications of his actions, an over two-hundred-year-old fortune wiped out not even in a generation, but in a matter of a year or two?

Wind whistled in Lane's ears, that siren call.

Edward, his older, formerly perfect brother, was not going to clean all this up. Gin, his only sister, was incapable of thinking about anything other than herself. Maxwell, his other brother, had been MIA for three years now.

His mother was bedbound and drug-addled.

So everything was in the hands of a poker-playing, former manwhore with no financial, managerial, or relevant practical experience.

All he had, at long last, was the love of a good woman.

But in this horrible reality . . . even that wasn't going to help him.

Toyota trucks were not supposed to go seventy-five miles an hour. Especially when they were ten years old.

At least the driver was wide awake, even though it was four a.m.

Lizzie King had a death grip on the steering wheel, and her foot on the accelerator was actually catching floor as she headed for a rise in the highway.

She had woken up in her bed at her farmhouse alone. Ordinarily, that would have been the status quo, but not anymore, not now that Lane was back in her life. The wealthy playboy and the estate's gardener had finally gotten their act together, love bonding two unlikelies closer and stronger than the molecules of a diamond.

And she was going to stand by him, no matter what the future held.

After all, it was so much easier to give up extraordinary wealth when you had never known it, never aspired to it-and especially when you had seen behind its glittering curtain to the sad, desolate desert on the far side of the glamour and prestige.

God, the stress Lane was under.

And so out of bed she had gotten. Down the creaking stairs she had gone. And all around her little house's first floor she had wandered.

When Lizzie had looked outside, she'd discovered his car was missing, the Porsche he drove and parked beside the maple by her front porch nowhere to be seen. And as she had wondered why he had left without telling her, she had begun to worry.

Just a matter of nights since his father had killed himself, only a matter of days since William Baldwin's body had been found on the far side of the Falls of the Ohio. And ever since then Lane's face had had a faraway look, his mind churning always with the missing money, the divorce papers he had served on the rapacious Chantal, the status of the household bills, the precarious situation at the Bradford Bourbon Company, his brother Edward's terrible physical condition, Miss Aurora's illness.

But he hadn't said a thing about any of it. His insomnia had been the only sign of the pressure, and that was what scared her. Lane always made an effort to be composed around her, asking her about her work in Easterly's gardens, rubbing her bad shoulder, making her dinner, usually badly, but who cared. Ever since they had gotten the air cleared between them and had fully recommitted to their relationship, he had all but moved into her farmhouse-and as much as she loved having him with her, she had been waiting for the implosion to occur.

It would almost have been easier if he had been ranting and raving.

And now she feared that time had come-and some sixth sense made her terrified about where he had gone. Easterly, the Bradford Family Estate, was the first place she thought of. Or maybe the Old Site, where his family's bourbon was still made and stored. Or perhaps Miss Aurora's Baptist church?

Yes, Lizzie had tried him on his phone. And when the thing had rung on the table on his side of the bed, she hadn't waited any longer after that. Clothes on. Keys in hand. Out to the truck.

No one else was on I-64 as she headed for the bridge to get across the river, and she kept the gas on even as she crested the hill and hit the decline to the river's edge on the Indiana side. In response, her old truck picked up even more speed along with a death rattle that shook the wheel and the seat, but the damn Toyota was going to hold it together because she needed it to.

"Lane . . . where are you?"

God, all the times she had asked him how he was and he'd said, "Fine." All those opportunities to talk that he hadn't taken her up on. All the glances she'd shot him when he hadn't been looking her way, all the time her monitoring for signs of cracking or strain. And yet there had been little to no emotion after that one moment they'd had together in the garden, that private, sacred moment when she had sought him out under the blooms of the fruit trees and told him that she'd gotten it wrong about him, that she had misjudged him, that she was prepared to make a pledge to him with the only thing she had: the deed to her farmhouse-which was exactly the kind of asset that could be sold to help pay for the lawyers' fees as he fought to save his family.

Lane had held her, and told her he loved her-and refused her gift, explaining he was going to fix everything himself, that he was going to somehow find the stolen money, pay back the enormous debt, right the company, resurrect his family's fortunes.

And she had believed him.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Roxanne Pineda:

In this 21st century, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive today, people have to do something to make them survive, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice by means of surrounding. One thing that sometimes many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. Yes, by reading a reserve your ability to survive raise then having chance to stay than other is high. For yourself who want to start reading a book, we give you this kind of The Angels' Share (The Bourbon Kings) book as basic and daily reading guide. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

Carmen Flood:

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Diane Russel:

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Kings) has many kinds or variety. Start from kids until adolescents. For example Naruto or Investigator Conan you can read and believe that you are the character on there. Therefore not at all of book usually are make you bored, any it offers you feel happy, fun and rest. Try to choose the best book to suit your needs and try to like reading this.

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