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A COURT OF WINGS AND RUIN by Sarni J. Mass, Copyright © 2022. Physand Two Years Before the Wall The buzzing files and accessing lives and accessing study of a person of the contract of the person of
                                                  the bedroom door behind me. Lucien remained leaning against the door ac ross from mine. His room. I didn't doubt he'd ens ured I now stayed across from
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          him. Didn't doubt that the metal eye he possesse d was always t urne
                                                             're so calm, given your promises in Hybern," Lucien said by way of greeting. The promise I'd made to kill the human queens, the King of Hybern, Jurian, and lanthe for what they'd done to my sister s. To my friends. hear her out ." I had not told Lucien of what I knew regarding her true nature. It would mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home, that Rhys had done it to defend himse If and the mean explaining that Rhys had thrown her out of his own home.
                                                  you
r reasons. Furious as I might b
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     mbers of his court, and it would
                                                                                        carefully crafted lies that had kept him and his court -my court-safe. Thoug h I wondered if, after
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          r Velaris, it was even necessa ry. Our enemies knew of the city, knew it was a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    d and peace. And had tried to de
aise too many questions, under
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   ce of goo
                                                                                         the attack on Velaris after Rhys had revealed it to the ose human queens would have the attack on Velaris after Rhys had revealed it to the ose human queens would have the attack on Velaris after Rhys had revealed it to the ose human queens would have the attack on Velaris after Rhys had revealed it to the ose human queens would have the attack on Velaris after Rhys had revealed it to the ose human queens would have the rest of our immortal live.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   Lucien warned. I shrugged, headir
                                                                                            e for myself. Though it sounds li ke you've alrea dy chosen not to believ e her." He fell into step beside me. "She dragge d two innocent women into this." "She was
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                working to ensure Hybern's alliance held stro
                                                                                               elbow. I all lowed it because not allowing it, win nowing the way I'd don e in the woods tho se months ago, or using an ped around my elbow. Then I met one eye of reusset and one of whirring gold. Lucien breathed, "Where is he keeping
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    Illyrian defensive maneuver to k nock him
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                on his ass, would ruin my ruse. "You're smarter
than that." I studied the broad, tan hand wrap
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    her?" I knew who he meant. I
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               y head. "I don't know. Rhysand has a hundred p
                                                                                                    any of them to hide Elain, kn owing that I'm aware of them." "Tell me anyway. List all of them." "You'll die the mo ment you set
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                śurvived well enough whén I found you." "You c
                                                                                                      take me back." Lie, lie, lie, lie. B ut the hurt and quilt I expected weren't there. Lucien slowly released his grip. "I nee d to find her.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                Elain. The mating bond is just a physical reactio
                                                                                                      it di d to you and Rhys?" A qui et, dangerous question. But I made fe ar enter my eyes, let myself drag up memorie s of the Wea
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               ngard Wyrm so that old terror drenched my sc
n overriding your good sense. "
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        thanks to the Mother and launched in to a quick walk. "We'll be lat
                                                                                                                                                      clock chimed on the main level. I sent a silent prayer of
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                en only nodded. But I felt his gaze
on my back, fixed right on my spine, as I
                                                                                                                          stairs. To see lant he. And at last decide how I was going to shred her int o pieces. The High Pries tess looked
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  exactly as I remembered, bot
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    h in t hose memories Rhys had shown me a
                                                                                                                           neath my nails to carve out her eyes, then her tongue, then open up her th
nd in my own daydreamings of using the tal
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        roat. My rage had beco me a living
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   oing heartbeat that soothed me to sleep and s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     Like a S iphon—the jewel in its center remin
tirred me to waking. I quieted it as I stared a
                                                                                                        lanth e acros s the formal dining table, Tamlin and Lucien flanking me. She still wor e the pale hood and silv er circlet s
                                                                                                                                dered if, like the Illyrian warriors', the jewel somehow
                                                                                                                                                                                                               helped shape a n unwieldy gift of magi c into som
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  dlier. S he had never removed it-but then a
gain, I had never seen lanthe summo
                                                                                                                                                                                                               The High Priest ess lowered her teal ey es to the d ark wood table, t he ho
                                                                                                               n any great er power than ign iting a ball of faelight in a room.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            od casting shadows on her perfect face
. "I wish to begin by saying how truly s
                                                                                                              orry I am. I ac ted out of a desi re to ... to grant what I believed
                                                                                                                                                                                                               you perhaps y
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       earned for but did not
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          dare voice, while also keep
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           allies in Hybern satisfied with our allegia
nce." Pretty, poisoned lies. But finding h
                                                                                                                                     ... I'd been waiti
                                                                                                                                                              ng these weeks for this meetin
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       m the horrors I'd survived at Rhysand's ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ese weeks pretending
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         to convalesce, pretending to heal fro
nds. "Why would I ever wish for my sisters
                                                                                                                                                                 me out trem bling, cold. lanthe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 lifted her head, scanning my unsure
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        , if not a bit aloof, face. "So
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      be with them forever. And if Lucien had dis
                                                                                                                                       ?" My voice ca
covered that Elain was his mate beforehand, i
                                                                                                                t would have be en ... devastati
                                                                                                                                                                                    ze he'd only have
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 a few decades." The sound of Elain's name on her lips sent a s
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                g up my throat. But I leashed it, falling into that
                                                                                                                                                                  ng to reali
mask of pained quiet, the newest in m y arsenal.
                                                                                                                 Lucien answered , "If you expec
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 aiting a while, lanthe." Tamlin shot him a warning look—both a the words a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             nd the tone. Perhaps Lucien would kill lanthe befo
                                                                                                                                                                    t our grati
                                                                                                                                                                                     tude, vou'll be w
re I had the chance, just for the horror
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          tude in the least. Or forgiveness. But un
                                                                                                                 e'd put his mate the rough that day
                                                                                                                                                                                      nthe breathed, e
                                                                                                                                                                                                                            wide, the perfect picture of remorse and guilt. "No, I don't expect gr
derstanding ... This is my home, too." S
                                                                                                                                                                       ilver ring
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                to encompass the room, the manor. "We have all he ad to make alli
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ances we didn't believe we'd ever forge-
                                                                                                                  he lifted a slender
                                                                                                                                                hand clad in s
                                                                                                                                                                                       s and bracelets
perhaps unsavory ones, yes, but ... Hybe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  ed like any other storm." A glance toward Tamli n. "We have w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       orked so hard to prepare ourselves for Hyb
                                                                                                                   rn's force is too gr
                                                                                                                                               eat to stop. It now can
                                                                                                                                                                                        only be weath
ern's inevitable arrival—all these months. I
                                                                                                                      made a grave mist ake, and I wil I always
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    used, but let us continue this good work together. Let us find
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      a way to ensure our lands and people survi
                                                                                                                                                                                          regret any p
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ain I ca
                                                                                                                       ucien demanded. A gain, that wa rning lo
ve." "At the cost of how many others?"
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       Lucien ignored him. "What I saw in Hybern," Lucien said,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ipping the arms of his chair hard enoug
                                                                                                                                                                                          ok from Ta
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    mlin. But
h that the carved wood groaned. "Any pro
                                                                                                                         mises he made of p
                                                                                                                                                       eace and im munity
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   Ited, as if re
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              membering that lanthe might very well feed this bac
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       k to the king. He loosened his grip on the c
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                lin promised. "But we've alread y agreed to ce
hair, his long fingers flexing before settling o
                                                                                                                            n the arms again. "We have to be careful
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 rtain conditions. Sacrifices. If we break apart n
                                                                                                                                                                                                                   will be," Tam
ow ... even with Hybern as our
                                                                                                                                                                                              Toget
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 rusted her. Still thought that I anthe had m
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    erely made a bad call. Had no ide
                                                                                                                                  ally, we have to present a soli d front.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 her." He still t
a what lurked beneath the beauty, t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            But then ag
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 e blindness kept him from realizing
                                                                                                                                                                                             suoid
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ncantations.
what prowled beneath my skin as wel
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            n. "I will endeavor to be worthy of my f
                                                                                                                                                                                              nthe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 bowed her he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             ad agai
                                                                                                        ver
                                                                                                                                                                                                rd n
                                                                                                                                                                                                                 ot to roll his
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        s. But Tamlin said, "We'll all try." That wa
                                                                                                        ed, making sur
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     d nodded slowly, keeping my eyes on lanthe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                    heard it, a
 "Don't ever do anything like that again."
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      he'd expected me to make, from the quickn
                                                                                                             fool's comm
                                                                                                                                                                                                                     and—one s
ess with which she nodded. Lucien leane
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        g to say anything else. "Lucien is right, th
ough," I blurted, the portrait of concern.
                                                                                                                              What of the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          this conflict?" I frowned at Tamlin. "They
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       rt dur
                                                                                                                                   well they will en
were brutalized by Amarantha—I'm not
                                                                                                                                                                                                         dure living beside H
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   vbern. They ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         d enough." Tamlin's jaw tightened. "Hybe
                                                                                                                                                                                               bed." Our people. I nearly scowle
rn has promised that our people shall r
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         understanding. "It was a part of our ... ba
rgain." When he'd sold out all of Pryth
                                                                                                                                              everything decent and good in himself, to retrieve me. "Our people will be
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           I've sent out word that families should
... relocate to the eastern p
                                                                                                                                                     time being." Good. At least he'd considered those potential casualties—at least he c ared that much abou
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       people, under stood what sorts of sick games Hyber
n liked to play and that he mig
                                                                                                                                                                      nean another. If he was already moving those most at risk during this conflict out of the way
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       ... It m
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                ade my work here all the easier. And east-a bit
of information I tucked away. If eas
                                                                                                                                                                         the west ... Hybern would indeed be coming from that direction. Arriving there. Tam
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      blew out
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               a breath. "That brings me to the other reason be
hind this meeting." I braced myself, scho
                                                                                                                                                                                                     curiosity, as he declared, "Th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              Hybern arrives tomorrow." Lucien's golden skin paled. Tamlin added,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              n commander since that
Jurian will be here by noon." CHAPTER 2 I'd ba
                                                                                                                                                                                                    whisper of Jurian these past w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   eeks—hadn't seen the resurrected huma
night in Hybern. Jurian had been reborn through the
                                                                                                                                                                                                    on using the hideous remnan
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              hoarded as trophies for fi
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ts of him that Amarantha had
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          had gone mad long before the King of Hybern had re
now. Had to have seen that gleam in Jurian's eyes. But
ble of cleaving this world apart. Starting with the wall. The o
ve hundred years, his soul trapped and aware wit hin his ow
                                                                                                                                                                                                    ically preserved eye. He was
surrected him to lead the human queens down a path of ig
                                                                                                                                                                                                    bmission. Tamlin and Lucie
                                                                                                                                                                                                    ssessed the Cauldron-tha
 .. they also did not seem to entirely mind that the King of
nly thing standing between the gathering, let hal Fae armi es and t
                                                                                                                                                                                                     erable human lands below
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             certainly di dn't seem to keep Lucien or Tamlin awake at n
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             o be in cluded in the plannin g, in every meeting. And he was true to his we
esent for it. The y indeed wished to survey the wall, to test for the perfect spot to
it. My smugness a t the fact was short-lived. My first task: learn where they planned
ight. Or from inviting these monsters into their home. Tamlin ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                       upon my return that I w
ord when he explained that Jurian would arrive with two other co mmander's from
                                                                                                                                                                                                       Hybern, and I would be
                                             n had recovered its strength. Turning my sisters
                                                                                                                                                                                                        Fae, apparently, had dr
to strike, and how long the Ca
                                                                                                                                                                                                        uggle that information
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               d and the others. I took extra care dressing the next day, after sleeping fitfully thanks to a di
il the Hybern commanders were settled before making her appearance. She'd cooed about w
                                                              uldron required to return to its full capacity. An
                                                                                                                                                              en sm
nner with a guilt-ridden lanthe, who went t
                                                                                                                                                                                                            priestess apparently
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          ed to
anting to ensure they had the chance to get to know u
                                                                                           s before she intruded, bu
                                                                                                                                                                                                         old me that he and I, fo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               d likely planned some sort of grand entrance. It made little difference to me—to my plans. Pl
                                                                                                                                    t on
                                                                                                                                               e look a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         ron c
ans that I sent down the mating bond the next morning, words and images tumbling along a night-filled corr idor.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       I had communicated with Rhysand only once since I'd arrived. Just once, in the hours after I'd walked into m
                                                                                                                                                                                                          dare risk using the bo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           nd too o
old bedroom and spied the thorns that had conquered it. It had been like shoutin
                                                                                                                                     g across a great dista nce, like s
                                                                                                                                                                                                         peaking underwater. I a
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            m safe an d well, I'd fired down the bond. I'll tell you what I know soon. I'd waited, letting the words travel into the dark. Then I'd
asked, Are they alive? Hurt? I didn't remember the bond between us being so hard to he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             t to see if I was still breathing, to make sure my despair hadn't swallowed me whole. But Rhysand's response had come a minut
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               , and enveloped the entire place in a wall of hard air to keep any scent from my sil
p in a corner óf the bathing room. I had once sat in such a position, watching the stars during the long, bleak hours of t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            blue sky beyond the open window, listened to
                                                                                                                                                                                                       he night. Now I took in the cloudless
anted to roar. I had not dared to ask for more details about Cassian and Azriel—or my sisters. In terror of knowing just how bad i 🕇 ha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             grim. What I
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      'd bring down upon these people. Healing, Alive and healing, I reminded my
elf of that every day. Even when I still heard their screams, smelled their blood. But I did not ask for more. Did not risk touching the bond beyond that first time. I didn't k
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              now if someone could monitor such things—the silent messages between mates. Not when the mating bond could l
e scented, and I was playing such a dangerous game with it. Everyone believed it had been severed, that Rhys's lingering sc
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            had planted that scent in me. They believed that with time, with distance, his scent would fade. Weeks or months, likely. And who
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               communicating down the bond kept its scent strong ... I had to minimize how much I used it. Even if not talking to
                                                                                                                          ng ... I would hear those things again, I p
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   d I was again thinking of how pained that face had been the last time I'd seen it, thinking of Rhys, cov
                                                                                                                                                                                                romised myself over and over. See that wry smile. An
                                                                       ood, as Jurian and the two Hybern commanders winnowed into the g
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      mor, his brown hair whipping across his face in the blustery spring breeze. He spied us
standing on the white marble steps into the house and his mouth curled in that crooked, smug smile. I willed ice
                                                                                                                                                                           into my veins, the coldness from a court I had neve rs
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           s gift on myself, turning burning rage into frozen calm as Jurian swaggered toward i
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           eir skin the same ruddy hue and hair the identical inky bl ack as their king. But it was their vacant, unfeeling faces tha
s, a hand on the hilt of his sword. But it was the two commanders—one male, one female—that had a sliv
                                                                                                                                                                 er of true fear sliding into my heart. High Fae in appearanc
 snagged the eye. A lack of emotion honed from millennia of cruelty. Tamlin and Lucien had gone
                                                                                                                                                       rigid by the time Jurian halted at the foot of the sweeping front st
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  he human commander smirked. "You're looking bet
                                                                                                                                           "May I present Their Highnes ses, Prince Dagda n and Princess Brannagh, n
eyes to his. And said nothing. Jurian snorted and gestured the two commanders forward.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          nd niece to the King of Hybern." Twins—perhaps linked in p
 amlin seemed to remember that these were now his allies and marched down the s tairs. Lucien followed. He'd sold us out. Sold out Pryt hian—for me. To g 'Welcome to my home. We have rooms prepared for all of you." "My brother and I shall reside in one together," the princess said. Her voice was deceptively simmering in Lucien. But I stepped down the stairs and said, ever the lady of the house that these people, that Tamli h, had once expected me to gladly embrace,
                                                                                                                                 tairs. Lucien followed. He'd sold us out. Sold out Pryt hian—for me. To ge t me back.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  rled in my mouth. I willed frost to fill it again. Tamlin inclined his he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          utter lack of feeling, the utter authority was anything but. I could practically feel the snide remains
 "Welcome to my home. We have rooms prepared for all of you." "My brother
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  s." Lucien's metal eye whirred and narrowed on me, but I kept my face impassive as I curt
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         n it—on how Cassian had screamed as his wings had been shredded. Princess Brant
sied to them. To my enemy. Which of my friends would face them on the battlefield? Would Cassian and Azriel have even healed enough to fight, let alone lift a swo rd?
agh surveyed me: the rose-colored dress, the hair that Alis had curled and braided over the top of my head in a coronet, the pale pi nk pearls at my ears. A harmless,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  o mount whenever he wished. Brannagh's lip curled as she glanced at her brot
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     love
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 tween us." Jurian let o ut a low chuckle and strode up the stairs without being given leave to do so.
                                                                              by his answering sneer. Tamlin snarled softly in war ning. "If you're done's taring at her, perhaps we can move on t
her. The prince deemed the same thing, judging
They're curious." Lucien stiffened at the impudence of the gesture, the words. "It's not every century that the bered going to war over Miryam, she wouldn't have left you for Prince Drakon." A ripple seem ed to go through Jurian.

She wouldn't have left you for Prince Drakon." A ripple seem ed to go through Jurian.
                                                                    impudence of the gesture, the words. "It's not every cen tury that the contested possession of a female launches a wa r. Es
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    th such ... talents." I only turned on a heel and stalked up the steps after him. "Perhaps if you'd bot
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           exchange and escorting the two Hybern royals into the house. Upon my own explanation that
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       ween monitoring our
zriel and his network of spies were well trained, we'd cleared any unnecessary servants, wary of spying ears an deyes. Only the most trusted among them remain ed. Of he cost of their lives. Or that it served my own purposes to have fewer people watching me. Juri an halted at the to p of the stairs, h is face a mask of cruel death as I to ok the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              course, I'd forgotten t
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       , breezing past. "Or what? You'll throw me in the C
auldron?" I strode between the front doors, edging around the table in the heart of the entry hall, its towering va se of flo wers arch ing to meet the crystal chandelier. Ri e in the center of the foyer, Mor had picked me up and carried me out of this house and in to freedom. "Here's the first rule of this visit," I said to Jurian over my should
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               e—just a few feet away, I had crumpled into a ball of terro
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              ght ther
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                r and despair all those months ago. Right ther
                                                                                                                                                                                                        visit," I said to Jurian over my shoulde r as I he
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  aded for the dining room,
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           where lunch awaited. "Don't threate
knew a moment later, had worked. Not on Jurian, who glowered as he claimed a seat at the table. But on Tamlin
                                                                                                                                                                   , who bru shed a knu ckle over my cheek as he passed by, una ware of h
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ow carefully I had chosen the words, how I had baited Jurian to se
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ery wish and order. As if he were the bla de she wielded to slice through
 That was my first step: make Tamlin believe, truly believe, that I loved him and this place, and everyone in it. So that he would not so uspect when I turned them on each other.
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      Prince Da gdan yielded to his twin's ev
he world. He poured her drinks, sniffing them first. He selected the finest cuts of meat from the platters and
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           ch as looked at her with doubt
                                                                                                                                                             neatly arra nged them on her plate. He always let he r answer, and ne ver so mu
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             in his eyes. One soul in two bodies. And from the way they glanced to e
ach other in wordless exchanges, I wondered if they were perhaps ... perhaps like me. Daemati. My menta I shields ha d been a wall of black adamant since arriving. But as we din ed, beats o f silence going on longer than c onversation, I found myself checking them over and over. "We will set out for the wall tomorrow," Brannagh was saying to Tamlin. More of an order than a request. "Juri an will acco mpany us. We require the use of sentries who know where the holes in it ar e located." The thought of them s o close to the human lands ... But my sisters were not there. No,
my sisters were somewhere in the vast territory of my own court, prot ected by my friends. Even if my father wou ld return hom e from his business dealings on the continent in a matter of a month or two. I still had not figured ou thou l'd tell him. "Lucien and I can escort you," I offered. Ta month or two. I still had not figured ou thou l'd tell him. "Lucien and I can escort you," I offered. Ta missary knows the wall as well as an y sentry." You are letting them do this; you are rationally
                                                                                                                                                              ed lea rned his lesso n, was indeed willing to try, as he merely gestured to L ucien. "My e missary knows the wall as well as an y sentry." You are letting them do this; you are rationally a d hi ssed in my mou th. But I made myself give Tamlin a slow, if not slightly d ispleased, no d. He knew I'd never be happy about it —the girl he believed had been returned to him would a ul dn't feast on the humans once that wall came down. That we'd merely abs orb them into our territory. "We'll leave after breakfast," I told the princess. And I added to Tamlin, "With a factor of the princess o
llowing them to bring down that wall and prey upon the humans on the other side. The words tangled and hi ssed in my mou
lways seek to protect her mortal homeland. Yet he thought I'd stomach it for him, for us. The at Hybern wouldn't feast on the
made that eye after she carved it out." We did n
hove those fears and pain down deep. For a heartb eat, I weighed who I had been with who I was now s upposed to be. SI owly healing—emerging back into the girl Tamlin had fed and sheltered and loved before Amarantha had snapped my neck after t hree months of torture. So I shifted in my
seat. Studied the table. Lucien merely leveled a hard look at Jurian as the two Hybern royals watched w an. "Does your little mate have a rival?" "My mate is none of your concern." Jurian shrugged. "She sh ouldn't be any of yo urs, either, considering she's probably been fucked by half the Dawn Court. She's skilled at tinkering—blending magic and machinery. Tamlin got her to craft it for me a t great rist." A hateful smile for me leaping over the table to rip out Jurian's throat. But it was Ta mlin's snarl that rattled the glasses. "You will behave as a proper guest, Jurian, or you will sleep in the stables like the other beasts." Jurian merely sipped from his win." "We kept the winson of fighting against them." "We kept the winson of their generals and lords as trophies," Dagdan said with a small smile. It took every bit of concentrating the truth? Neither of you were in the War, when of fighting against them." "We kept the winson of their generals and lords as trophies," Dagdan said with a small smile. It took every bit of concentrating the truth? Neither of you were in the War, when of fighting against them." "We kept the winson of their generals and lords as trophies," Dagdan said with a small smile. It took every bit of concentrating the truth? Neither of you were in the War, when of your were the tables like the other beasts." Jurian merely sipped from his win. "But he delight of fighting against them." "We kept the winson of their generals and lords as trophies, "Dagdan said with a small smile. It took every bit of concentration to to gene tunting of their generals and lords as trophies, "Dagdan said with a small smile." It took every bit of concentration to what the Hybern prince had said. But I hadn't spotled any trace when I
nielded. But Lucien's—Tamlin's—Í reached out with my night-kissed power, casting it like a net. And found two oily tendrils spearing for Lucien's and Tamlin's minds, as if they were indeed javelins thrown across the table. I stru ck. Dagdan and Brannagh jolted back in their seats as if I'd landed
a physical blow, while their powers slammed into a barrier of black adamant around Lucien' s and Tamlin's minds. They shot their gazes. "What's wrong?" Tamlin as ked, and I realized how quiet it had become. I made a good show of furrowing my brow in confusion. "Nothing." I offered a sweet smile to the two royals. "Their Highnesses must be tired after such a long journey." And for good measure, I I unged for their own minds, finding a wall of white bone. They flinched as I dragge do black talons down their mental shields, gouging deep. The wa
rning blow cost me, a low, pulsing headache forming around my temples. But I merely du g back into my food, ignoring Jurian's wink. No one spoke for the rest of the meal. CHA PTER 3 The spring woods fell sile nt as we rode between the budding trees, birds and small furred beasts having darted for
cover long before we passed. Not from me, or Lucien, or the three sentries trailing a res pectful distance behind. But from Juri
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   e two Hybern commanders who ro de in the center of our party. As if they were as awful as the Bogge, as the naga. We rea
ched the wall without incident or Jurian trying to bait us into distraction. I'd been awak e most of the night, casting my
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 that Dagdan and Brannag h were working their daemati influence on anyone else. Mercifully, the curse-breaking
ability I'd inherited from Helion Spell-Cleaver, High Lord of the Day Court, had detect ed no tangles, no spells, save
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   wing in or out. Tamlin had been tense at breakfast, but had not asked me to remain behind. I'd even gone so fa
                                                                                                                                                                             for the wards around the house itself, preventing anyone from winno
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     laughed at the words. But laughter was now far from my lips as the wall pulsed and throbbed, a heavy, hideo
r as to test him by asking what was wrong—to which he'd only replied that he had a 🔝 headache. Lucien had just patte
                                                                                                                                                                                d him on the shoulder and promised to look after me. I'd nearly
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                y earth as we tied them to the lo    w-hanging branches of blooming dogwoods. "The gap in the wall is right up here
   presence that loomed from half a mile away. Up close, though ... Even our hors es were skittish, tossing their heads
                                                                                                                                                                                                      and stomping their hooves on the moss
   ucien was saying, sounding about as thrilled as me to be in such company. S tomping over the fallen pink blossoms
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               n and Brannagh slid into step bes ide him, Jurian slithering off to survey the terrain, the sentries remaining with o
ur mounts. I followed Lucien and the royals, keeping a casual distance behind.   I knew my elegant, fine clothes weren
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                g the prince and princess into for getting that a fellow daemati now walked at their backs. But I'd still carefully se
lected the embroidered sapphire jacket and brown pants—adorned only with 👚 the jeweled knife and belt that Lucien h
ot see—no, the wall itself was utterly invisible—but rather felt, as if the air h 👚 ad been sucked from one spot. "We do
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            Lucien replied, the dappled sunlight glinting along the gold thread adorning his fawn-brown jacket as he
crossed his arms. "Some of the holes just appeared over the centuries. T \,\,\, his one is barely wide enough for one pe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      get through." An exchanged gla unce between the twins. I came up behind them, studying the gap, the wall
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      rson
round it that made every instinct recoil at its ... wrongness. "This is wher 👚 e I came through—that first time." Lucien
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ded, and the other two lifted their b rows. But I took a step closer to Lucien, my arm nearly brushing his, lett
ng him be a barrier between us. They'd been more careful at breakfast t \, his morning about pushing against my me
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       hields. Yet now, letting them think I was physically cowed by them ... Brannagh studied how closely I stood
o Lucien; how he shifted slightly to shield me, too. A little, cold smile curled her lips. "How many holes are in th
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             "We've counted three along our entire border," Lucien said tightly. "Plus one off the coast—about a mile
away." I didn't let my cool mask falter as he offered up the informati  on. But Brannagh shook her head, dark hair
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        vouring the sunlight. "The sea entrances are of no use. We need to break it on the land." "The continent surel
 has spots, too." "Their queens have an even weaker grasp on the ir people than you do," Dagdan said. I plucke
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         that gem of information, studied it. "We'll leave you to explore it, then," I said, waving toward the hole. "Whe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       d up
n you're done, we'll ride to the next." "It's two days from here," L ucien countered. "Then we'll plan a trip for tha
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ursion," I said simply. Before Lucien could object, I asked, "And the third hole?" Lucien tapped a foot agains
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      t exc
the mossy ground, but said, "Two days past that." I turned to th e royals, arching a brow. "Can both of you winn
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          Brannagh flushed, straightening. But it was Dagdan who admitted, "I can." He must have carried both Bra
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      ow?
nnagh and Jurian when they arrived. He added, "Only a few mi 🔝 les if Í bear others." I merely nodded and headed
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        ward a tangle of stooping dogwoods, Lucie  n following close behind. When there was nothing but ruffling p
    blossoms and trickling sunlight through the thatch of bra \, nches, when the royals had busied themselves with
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        the wall, out of sight and sound, I took up a perch on a smooth, bald rock. Lucien sat against a nearby tree
folding one booted ankle over another. "Whatever you're p lanning, it'll land us knee-deep in shit." "I'm not plan
Ien eye narrowed, clicking softly. "What do you even see with that thing?" He didn't answer. I chucked the bloss
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       ning anything." I plucked up a fallen pink bloss om and twirled it between my thumb and forefinger. That gol
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      om onto the soft moss between us. "Don't trust me? After all we've been through?" He frowned at the discar
ded blossom, but still said nothing. I busied myself by sometring through my pack until I found the canteen of water.

It for the humans?" "I would have been a part of the human-Fae alliance." "Even if your father wasn't?" "Especially ose months ago. "And yet here you are, ready to march with Hybern." "I did it for you, too, you know." Cold, hard wor
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      "If you'd been alive for the War," I asked him, taki ng a swig, "would you have fought on their side? Or fough if my father wasn't." But Beron had been part of that alliance, if I correctly recalled my lessons with Rhys all the
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    ds. "I went with him to get you back." "I never realized what a powerful motivator guilt can be." "That day you—≀
 nt away," he said, struggling to avoid that other word—left. "I beat Tamlin back to the manor—received the message w
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 hen we were out on the border and raced here. But the only trace of you was that ring, melted between the stones nted not toward abduction. "They melted it off my finger," I lied. His throat bobbed, but he just shook his head, the
of the parlor. I got rid of it a moment before Tam arrived home to see it." A probing, careful statement. Of the facts that po
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              the rustling and murmuring, the royals were finishing up, and I braced myself, calculating the words I'd need to wiel jaw tight. "It was a trap. What I thought we were to do there ... it did not turn out that way." It was an effort not to bar
sunlight leaking through the forest canopy setting the ember-red of his hair flickering. We sat in silence for minutes. From
d without seeming suspicious. I said quietly, "Thank you. For coming to Hybern to get me." He pulled at the moss beside him
e my teeth. But I walked to him, taking up a place at his side against the wide trunk of the tree. "This situation is terrible," I said
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          and it was the truth. A low snort. I knocked my knee against his. "Don't let Jurian bait you. He's doing it to feel out any
weaknesses between us." "I know." I turned my face to him, resting my knee against his in silent demand. "Why?" I asked. "Wh
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         y does Hybern want to do this beyond some horrible desire for conquest? What drives him—his people? Hatred? Arroga
nce?" Lucien finally looked at me, the intricate pieces and carvings on the metal eye much more dazzling up close. "Do you—
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          Brannagh and Dagdan shoved through the bushes, frowning to find us sitting there. But it was Jurian—right on their he
els, as if he'd been divulging the details of his surveying—who smiled at the sight of us, knee to knee and nearly nose to nose
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     ' the warrior sneered. "You see what happens to males who touch the High Lord's belongings." Lucien snarled
but I shot him a warning glare. Point proven, I said silently. And despite Jurian, despite the sneering royals, a corner of Lucien'
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         e was waiting at the stables when we returned. She'd made her grand arrival at the end of breakfast hours before, breez
ng into the dining room when the sun was shining in shafts of pure gold through the windows. I had no doubt she'd planned th e timing, just as she had uld have titled the painting Model Piety. After she'd been briefly introduced by Tamlin, she'd mostly cooed over Jurian—who had only scowled at her like som
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          the middle of one of those sunbeams, angled so her hair glowed and the jewel atop her head burned with blue fire. I wo
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       e insect buzzing in his ear. Dagdan and Brannagh had listened to her fawning with enough boredom that I was starting to wonder if the two of the
em perhaps preferred no one's company but each other's. In whatever unholý capacity. Not a blink of interest toward the beauty who often made males and fe
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      males stop to gape. Perhaps any sort of physical passion had long ago been drained away, alongside their souls. So the Hybern royals and Jur
an had tolerated lanthe for about a minute before they'd found their food more interesting. A slight that no doubt explained why she had decided to meet us he re, awaiting our return as we rode in. It was my first time on a horse in months, and I was stiff enough that I could barely move as the party dismo
unted. I gave Lucien a subtle, pleading look, and he barely hid his smirk as he sauntered over to me. Our dispersing party watched as he braced my waist in his broad hands and easily hefted me off the horse, none more closely than lanthe. I only patted Lucien on the shoulder in thanks. Ever the courtier, he bowed back. It was hard, sometimes, to remember to hate him. To remember the game I was already playing. lanthe trilled, "A successful journey, I hope?" I jerked my chin toward the royals. "They seemed pleased." Indeed, whatever they'd been looking for, they'd found agreeable. I hadn't dared ask too many prying questions. Not yet, lanthe bowed her head. "Thank the Cauldron for that." "What do you want," Lucien said a shade too flatly. She frowned but lifted her chin, folding her hands before her as she said, "We're to have a party in honor of our guests—and to coincide with the Summer Solstice in a
ew ɗays. I wished to speak to Feyre about it." A two-faced smile. "Unless you have an objection to that." "He doesn't," I answered before Lucien could say something he'd regret. "Give me an hour to eat and change, and I'll meet you in the study." Perhaps a tinge more assertive than I'd once been, but she
nodded all the same. I linked my elbow with Lucien's and steered him away. "See you soon," I told her, and felt her gaze on us as we walked from the dim stables and into the bright midday light. His body was taut, near-trembling. "What happened between you?" I hissed when we were lost among the hedg es and gravel paths of the garden. "It's not worth repeating." "When I—was taken," I ventured, almost stumbling on the word, almost saying left. "Did she and Tamlin ..." I was not faking the twisting low in my gut. "No," he said hoarsely. "No. When Calanmai came along, he refused. He flat-out refused to participate. I replaced him in the Rite, but ..." I'd forgotten. Forgotten about Calanmai and the Rite. I did a mental tally of the days. No wonder I'd forgotten. "You took lanthe into the
cave on Calanmai?" He wouldn't meet my gaze. "She insisted. Tamlin was ... Things were bad, Feyre. I went of my own free will. And we completed the Rite." No wonder she'd backed off him. She'd gotten what she wanted. "Please don't tell Elain," he said.
  When we—when we find her again," he amended. He might have completed the Great Rite with lanthe of his own free will, but he certainly hadn't enjoyed it. Some line had been blurred—badly. And my heart shifted a bit in my chest as I said to him with no guile whatsoever, "I won't tell anyone unless you
ay so." The weight of that jeweled knife and belt seemed to grow. "I wish I had been there to stop it." I meant every word. Lucien squeezed our linked arms as we rounded a hedge, the house rising up before us. "You are a better friend to me, Feyre," he said quietly, "than I ever was to you." Alis frowned at the two dresses hanging from the armoire door, her long brown fingers smoothing over the chiffon and silk. "I don't know if the waist can be taken out," she said without peering back at where I sat on the edge of the bed. "We took so much of it in that there's not much fabri
c left to play with ... You might very well need to order new ones." She faced me then, running an eye over my robed body. I knew what she saw—what lies and poisoned smiles couldn't hide: I had become wraith-thin while living here after Amarantha. Yet for all Rhys had done to harm me, I'd gained back th
 weight I'd lost, put on muscle, and discarded the sickly pallor in favor of sun-kissed skin. For a woman who had been tortured and tormented for months. I looked remarkably well, Our eyes held across the room, the silence hewn only by the humming of the few remaining servants in the hallway, busy wit
h preparations for the solstice tomorrow morning. I'd spent the past two days playing the pretty pet, allowed into meetings with the Hybern royals mostly because I remained quiet. They were as cautious as we were, hedging Tamlin and Lucien's questions about the movements of their armies, their foreign
allies—and other allies within Prythian. The meetings went nowhere, as all they wanted to know was information about our own forces. And about the Night Court. I fed Dagdan and Brannagh details both true and false, mixing them together seamlessly. I laid out the Illyrian host amongst the mountains and
steppes, but selected the strongest clan as their weakest; I mentioned the efficiency of those blue stones from Hybern against Cassian's and Azriel's power but failed to mention how easily they'd worked around them. Any questions I couldn't evade, I feigned memory loss or trauma too great to bear recall
steppes, but selected the strongest clain as their weakest; I mentioned the efficiency of those blue stones from Hybern against Cassian's and Azrie's power but railed to mention note daily they did worked around them. Any questions I couldn't her evade, I regard to pear fecalify many careful expressions, Alis seemed the only information. And for all my careful expressions, Alis seemed the only tells that even I couldn't control. "Do you things," Alis said, folding her tongue. "Am I not allowed to change my mind?" Hot allowed to change my mind? "You could wear this." She held up an outfit. A set of turquoise Night Court clothes, cut so similarly to Amren's preferred fashion, dangled from her spindly fingers. My heart lurched. "That—why—" Words stumbled out of me, bulky and slippery, and I silenced myself with a sharp ya nk on my inner leash. I straightened. "I have never known you to be cruel, Alis." A snort. She chucked the clothes back into the armoire. "Tamlin shredded the two other sets—missed this one because it was in the wrong drawer." I wove a mental thread into the hallway to ensure no one was listening. "He was upset. I wish he'd destroyed that pair, too." "I was there that day, you know," Alis said, folding her spindly arms across her chest. "I saw the Morrigan arrive. Saw her reach into that cocoon of power and pick you up like a child. I begged her to take you out." My swallow wasn't feigned. "I never told him that cocoon of power and pick you up like a child. I begged her to take you out." My swallow wasn't feigned. "I never told him that cocoon of power and pick you up like a child. I begged her to take you out." My swallow wasn't feigned. "I never heard of or saw the hall be a child. I have the my lines—there were lines—there were lines here. "He had been abducted being them."
aw Knysand laying a hand on a servant. Guards, Amarantna's croines, the people ne was ordered to Kill, yes. But never the meek. Never the never 
ns. But what had not existed here a year ago was lanthe. The celebrating would be sacrilege, she intoned, if we did not give thanks first. So we all were up two hours before the dawn, bleary-eyed and none of us too keen to endure her ceremony as the sun crested the horizon on the longest day of the year.
wondered if Tarquin had to weather such tedious rituals in his shining palace by the sea. Wondered what sort of celebrations would occur in Adriata today, with the High Lord of Summer who had come so very close to being a friend. As far as I knew, despite the murmurings between servants, Tarquin still
had never sent word to Tamlin about the visit Rhys, Amren, and I had made. What did the Summer lord now think of my changed circumstances? I had little doubt Tarquin had heard. And I prayed he stayed out of it until my work here was finished. Alis had found me a luxurious white velvet cloak for the bris
k ride into the hills, and Tamlin had lifted me onto a moon-pale mare with wildflowers woven into her silver mane. If I had wanted to paint a picture of serene purity, it would have been the image I cast that morning, my hair braided above my head, a crown of white hawthorn blossoms upon it. I'd dabbed rou
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