

Chapter 63

You are being provided with a book chapter by chapter. I will request you to read the book for me after each chapter. After reading the chapter, 1. shorten the chapter to no less than 300 words and no more than 400 words. 2. Do not change the name, address, or any important nouns in the chapter. 3. Do not translate the original language. 4. Keep the same style as the original chapter, keep it consistent throughout the chapter. Your reply must comply with all four requirements, or it's invalid. I will provide the chapter now.

CHAPTER 63

I gauged the distance between my friends and Jurian, weighed my sword against the twin ones crossed over his back. Cassian took a step toward the descending warrior and snarled, "You."

Jurian snickered. "Worked your way up the ranks, did you? Congratulations."

I felt him sweep toward us. Like a ripple of night and wrath, Rhys appeared at my side. The Book was instantly gone, his movement so slick as he took it from me and tucked it into his own jacket that I barely registered it had happened.

But the moment that metal left my hands ... Mother above, what had happened? I'd failed, failed so completely, been so pathetically overwhelmed by it—

"You look good, Jurian," Rhys said, strolling to Cassian's side—casually positioning himself between me and the ancient warrior. "For a corpse." "Last time I saw you," Jurian sneered, "you were warming Amarantha's sheets."

"So you remember," Rhysand mused, even as my rage flared. "Interesting."

Jurian's eyes sliced to Mor. "Where is Miryam?"

"She's dead," Mor said flatly. The lie that had been told for five hundred years. "She and Drakon drowned in the Erythrian Sea." The impassive face of the princess of nightmares.

"Liar," Jurian crooned. "You were always such a liar, Morrigan."

Azriel growled, the sound unlike any I'd heard from him before.

Jurian ignored him, chest starting to heave. "Where did you take Miryam?"

"Away from you," Mor breathed. "I took her to Prince Drakon. They were mated and married that night you slaughtered Clythia. And she never thought of you again."

Wrath twisted his tan face. Jurian—hero of the human legions ... who along the way had turned himself into a monster as awful as those he'd fought.

Rhys reached back to grab my hand. We'd seen enough. I gripped the rim of the Cauldron again, willing it to obey, to come with us. I braced for the wind and darkness.

Only they didn't come.

Mor gripped Cassian and Azriel's hands—and stayed still.

Jurian smiled.

Rhysand drawled, hand tightening in mine, "New trick?"

Jurian shrugged. "I was sent to distract you—while he worked his spell." His smile turned lupine. "You won't leave this castle unless he allows you to. Or in pieces."

My blood ran cold. Cassian and Azriel crouched into fighting stances, but Rhys cocked his head. I felt his dark power rise and rise, as if he'd splatter Jurian then and there.

But nothing happened. Not even a brush of night-flecked wind.

"Then there's that," Jurian said. "Didn't you remember? Perhaps you forgot. It was a good thing I was there, awake for every moment, Rhysand. She stole his book of spells—to take your powers."

Inside me, like a key clicking in a lock, that molten core of power just ... halted. Whatever tether to it between my mind and soul was snipped—no, squeezed so tight by some invisible hand that nothing could flow.

I reached for Rhys's mind, for the bond—

I slammed into a hard wall. Not of adamant, but of foreign, unfeeling stone.

"He made sure," Jurian went on as I banged against that internal wall, tried to summon my own gifts to no avail, "that particular book was returned to him. She didn't know how to use half of the nastier spells. Do you know what it is like to be unable to sleep, to drink or eat or breathe or feel for five hundred years? Do you understand what it is like to be constantly awake, forced to watch everything she did?"

It had made him insane—tortured his soul until he went insane. That's what the sharp gleam was in his eyes.

"It couldn't have been so bad," Rhys said, even as I knew he was unleashing every ounce of will on that spell that contained us, bound us, "if you're now working for her master."

A flash of too-white teeth. "Your suffering will be long, and thorough."

"Sounds delightful," Rhys said, now turning us from the room. A silent shout to run.

But someone appeared atop the stairs.

I knew him—in my bones. The shoulder-length black hair, the ruddy skin, the clothes that edged more toward practicality than finery. He was of surprisingly average height, but muscled like a young man.

But his face—which looked perhaps like a human man in his forties ...

Blandly handsome. To hide the depthless, hateful black eyes that burned there.

The King of Hybern said, "The trap was so easy, I'm honestly a bit disappointed you didn't see it coming."

Faster than any of us could see, Jurian fired a hidden ash bolt through Azriel's chest.

Mor screamed.

We had no choice but to go with the king.

The ash bolt was coated in bloodbane that the King of Hybern claimed flowed where he willed it. If we fought, if we did not come with him upstairs, the poison would shoot to his heart. And with our magic locked down, without the ability to winnow ...

If I could somehow get to Azriel, give him a mouthful of my blood ...

But it'd take too long, require too many moving parts.

Cassian and Rhys hauled Azriel between them, his blood splattering on the floor behind us as we went up the twisting stairways of the king's castle.

I tried not to step in it as Mor and I followed behind, Jurian at our backs.

Mor was shaking—trying hard not to, but shaking as she stared at the