

Chapter 65

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 65

This was some new hell. Some new level of nightmare. I even went so far as to try to wake myself up.

But there they were—in their nightgowns, the silk and lace dirty, torn. Elain was quietly sobbing, the gag soaked with her tears. Nesta, hair disheveled as if she'd fought like a wildcat, was panting as she took us in. Took in the Cauldron.

"You made a very big mistake," the king said to Rhysand, my mate's arms banded around me, "the day you went after the Book. I had no need of it. I was content to let it lie hidden. But the moment your forces started sniffing around ... I decided who better than to be my liaison to the human realm than my newly reborn friend, Jurian? He'd just finished all those months of recovering from the process, and longed to see what his former home had become, so he was more than happy to visit the continent for an extended visit."

Indeed the queens smiled at him—bowed their heads. Rhys's arms tightened in silent warning.

"The brave, cunning Jurian, who suffered so badly at the end of the War—now my ally. Here to help me convince these queens to aid in my cause. For a price of his own, of course, but it has no bearing here. And wiser to work with me, my men, than to allow you monsters in the Night Court to rule and attack. Jurian was right to warn their Majesties that you'd try to take the Book—that you would feed them lies of love and goodness, when he had seen what the High Lord of the Night Court was capable of. The hero of the human forces, reborn as a gesture to the human world of my good faith. I do not wish to invade the continent—but to work with them. My powers ensconced their court from prying eyes, just to show them the benefits." A smirk at Azriel, who could hardly lift his head to snarl back. "Such impressive attempts to infiltrate their sacred palace, Shadowsinger—and utter proof to their Majesties, of course, that your court is not as benevolent as you seem."

"Liar," I hissed, and whirled on the queens, daring only a step away from Rhys. "They are liars, and if you do not let my sisters go, I will slaughter —"

"Do you hear the threats, the language they use in the Night Court?" the king said to the mortal queens, their guards now around us in a half circle.

"Slaughter, ultimatums ... They wish to end life. I desire to give it."

The eldest queen said to him, refusing to acknowledge me, my words,

"Then show us—prove this gift you mentioned."

Rhysand tugged me back against him. He said quietly to the queen,

“You’re a fool.”

The king cut in, “Is she? Why submit to old age and ailments when what I offer is so much better?” He waved a hand toward me. “Eternal youth. Do you deny the benefits? A mortal queen becomes one who might reign forever. Of course, there are risks—the transition can be ... difficult. But a strong-willed individual could survive.”

The youngest queen, the dark-haired one, smiled slightly. Arrogant youth—and bitter old age. Only the two others, the ones who wore white and black, seemed to hesitate, stepping closer to each other—and their towering guards.

The ancient queen lifted her chin, “Show us. Demonstrate it can be done, that it is safe.” She had spoken of eternal youth that day, had spat in my face about it. Two-faced bitch.

The king nodded. “Why did you think I asked my dear friend Ianthe to see who Feyre Archeron would appreciate having with her for eternity?” Even as horror filled my ears with roaring silence, I glanced at the queens, the question no doubt written on my face. The king explained, “Oh, I asked them first. They deemed it too ... uncouth to betray two young, misguided women. Ianthe had no such qualms. Consider it my wedding present for you both,” he added to Tamlin.

But Tamlin’s face tightened. “What?”

The king cocked his head, savoring every word. “I think the High Priestess was waiting until your return to tell you, but didn’t you ever ask why she believed I might be able to break the bargain? Why she had so many musings on the idea? So many millennia have the High Priestesses been forced to their knees for the High Lords. And during those years she dwelled in that foreign court ... such an open mind, she has. Once we met, once I painted for her a portrait of a Prythian free of High Lords, where the High Priestesses might rule with grace and wisdom ... She didn’t take much convincing.”

I was going to vomit. Tamlin, to his credit, looked like he might, too.

Lucien’s face had slackened. “She sold out—she sold out Feyre’s family. To you.”

I had told Ianthe everything about my sisters. She had asked. Asked who they were, where they lived. And I had been so stupid, so broken ... I had fed her every detail.

“Sold out?” The king snorted. “Or saved from the shackles of mortal death? Ianthe suggested they were both strong-willed women, like their sister. No doubt they’ll survive. And prove to our queens it can be done. If one has the strength.”

My heart stopped. “Don’t you—

The king cut me off, “I would suggest bracing yourselves.”

And then hell exploded in the hall.

Power, white and unending and hideous, barreled into us.

All I knew was Rhysand’s body covering mine as we were all thrown to the floor, the shout of pain as he took the brunt of the king’s power.

Cassian twisted, wings flaring wide as he shielded Azriel.

His wings—his wings—

Cassian’s scream as his wings shredded under talons of pure magic was the most horrific sound I’d ever heard. Mor surged for him, but too late.

Rhys was moving in an instant, as if he’d lunge for the king, but power hit us again, and again. Rhys slammed to his knees.

My sisters were shrieking over their gags. But Elain’s cry—a warning. A

warning to—

To my right, now exposed, Tamlin ran for me. To grab me at last.

I hurled a knife at him—as hard as I could.

He had to dive to miss it. And he backed away at the second one I had ready, gaping at me, at Rhys, as if he could indeed see the mating bond between us.

But I whirled as soldiers pressed in, cutting us off. Whirled, and saw Cassian and Azriel on the ground, Jurian laughing softly at the blood gushing from Cassian's ravaged wings—

Shreds of them remained.

I scrambled for him. My blood. It might be enough, be—

Mor, on her knees beside Cassian, hurtled for the king with a cry of pure wrath.

He sent a punch of power to her. She dodged, a knife angled in her hand, and—

Azriel cried out in pain.

She froze. Stopped a foot from the throne. Her knife clattered to the floor.

The king rose. "What a mighty queen you are," he breathed.

And Mor backed away. Step by step.

"What a prize," the king said, that black gaze devouring her.

Azriel's head lifted from where he was sprawled in his own blood, eyes full of rage and pain as he snarled at the king, "Don't you touch her."

Mor looked at Azriel—and there was real fear there. Fear—and something else. She didn't stop moving until she again kneeled beside him and pressed a hand to his wound. Azriel hissed—but covered her bloody fingers with his own.

Rhys positioned himself between me and the king as I dropped to my knees before Cassian. I ripped at the leather covering my forearm—

"Put the prettier one in first," the king said, Mor already forgotten.

I twisted—only to have the king's guards grab me from behind. Rhys was instantly there, but Azriel shouted, back arching as the king's poison worked its way in.

"Please refrain," the king said, "from getting any stupid ideas, Rhysand."

He smiled at me. "If any of you interfere, the shadowsinger dies. Pity about the other brute's wings." He gave my sisters a mockery of a bow. "Ladies, eternity awaits. Prove to their Majesties the Cauldron is safe for ... strong-willed individuals."

I shook my head, unable to breathe, to think a way out of it—

Elain was shaking, sobbing, as she was hauled forward. Toward the Cauldron.

Nesta began thrashing against the men that held her.

Tamlin said, "Stop."

The king did no such thing.

Lucien, beside Tamlin, again put a hand on his sword. "Stop this."

Nesta was bellowing at the guards, at the king, as Elain yielded step after step toward that Cauldron. As the king waved his hand, and liquid filled it to the brim. No, no—

The queens only watched, stone-faced. And Rhys and Mor, separated from me by those guards, did not dare to even shift a muscle.

Tamlin spat at the king, "This is not part of our deal. Stop this now."

"I don't care," the king said simply.

Tamlin launched himself at the throne, as if he'd rip him to shreds.

That white-hot magic slammed into him, shoving him to the ground.

Leashing him.

Tamlin strained against the collar of light on his neck, around his wrists. His golden power flared—to no avail. I tore at the fist still gripping my own, sliced at it, over and over—

Lucien staggered a step forward as Elain was gripped between two guards and hoisted up. She began kicking then, weeping while her feet slammed into the sides of the Cauldron as if she'd push off it, as if she'd knock it down—

“That is enough.” Lucien surged for Elain, for the Cauldron.

And the king's power leashed him, too. On the ground beside Tamlin, his single eye wide, Lucien had the good sense to look horrified as he glanced between Elain and the High Lord.

“Please,” I begged the king, who motioned Elain to be shoved into the water. “Please, I will do anything, I will give you anything.” I shot to my feet, stepping away from where Cassian lay prostrate, and looked to the queens. “Please—you do not need proof, I am proof that it works. Jurian is proof it is safe.”

The ancient queen said, “You are a thief, and a liar. You conspired with our sister. Your punishment should be the same as hers. Consider this a gift instead.”

Elain's foot hit the water, and she screamed—screamed in terror that hit me so deep I began sobbing. “Please,” I said to none of them.

Nesta was still fighting, still roaring through her gag.

Elain, who Nesta would have killed and whored and stolen for. Elain, who had been gentle and sweet. Elain, who was to marry a lord's son who hated faeries ...

The guards shoved my sister into the Cauldron in a single movement.

My cry hadn't finished sounding before Elain's head went under.

She did not come up.

Nesta's screaming was the only sound. Cassian blindly lurched toward it—toward her, moaning in pain.

The King of Hybern bowed slightly to the queens. “Behold.”

Rhys, a wall of guards still cleaving us, curled his fingers into a fist. But he did not move, as Mor and I did not dare move, not with Azriel's life dangling in the king's grasp.

And as if it had been tipped by invisible hands, the Cauldron turned on its side.

More water than seemed possible dumped out in a cascade. Black, smoke-coated water.

And Elain, as if she'd been thrown by a wave, washed onto the stones facedown.

Her legs were so pale—so delicate. I couldn't remember the last time I'd seen them bare.

The queens pushed forward. Alive, she had to be alive, had to have wanted to live—

Elain sucked in a breath, her fine-boned back rising, her wet nightgown nearly sheer.

And as she rose from the ground onto her elbows, the gag in place, as she twisted to look at me—

Nesta began roaring again.

Pale skin started to glow. Her face had somehow become more beautiful—infinately beautiful, and her ears ... Elain's ears were now pointed beneath her sodden hair.

The queens gasped. And for a moment, all I could think of was my father. What he would do, what he would say, when his most beloved daughter looked at him with a Fae face.

“So we can survive,” the dark-haired youngest breathed, eyes bright. I fell to my knees, the guards not bothering to grab me as I sobbed. What he’d done, what he’d done—

“The hellcat now, if you’ll be so kind,” the King of Hybern said. I whipped my head to Nesta as she went silent. The Cauldron righted itself.

Cassian again stirred, slumping on the floor—but his hand twitched. Toward Nesta.

Elain was still shivering on the wet stones, her nightgown shoved up to her thighs, her small breasts fully visible beneath the soaked fabric. Guards snickered.

Lucien snarled at the king over the bite of the magic at his throat, “Don’t just leave her on the damned floor—”

There was a flare of light, and a scrape, and then Lucien was stalking toward Elain, freed of his restraints. Tamlin remained leashed on the ground, a gag of white, iridescent magic in his mouth now. But his eyes were on Lucien as—

As Lucien took off his jacket, kneeling before Elain. She cringed away from the coat, from him—

The guards hauled Nesta toward the Cauldron.

There were different kinds of torture, I realized.

There was the torture that I had endured, that Rhys had endured.

And then there was this.

The torture that Rhys had worked so hard those fifty years to avoid; the nightmares that haunted him. To be unable to move, to fight ... while our loved ones were broken. My eyes met with those of my mate. Agony rippled in that violet stare—rage and guilt and utter agony. The mirror to my own.

Nesta fought every step of the way.

She did not make it easy for them. She clawed and kicked and bucked.

And it was not enough.

And we were not enough to save her.

I watched as she was hoisted up. Elain remained shuddering on the ground, Lucien’s coat draped around her. She did not look at the Cauldron behind her, not as Nesta’s thrashing feet slammed into the water.

Cassian stirred again, his shredded wings twitching and spraying blood, his muscles quivering. At Nesta’s shouts, her raging, his eyes fluttered open, glazed and unseeing, an answer to some call in his blood, a promise he’d made her. But pain knocked him under again.

Nesta was shoved into the water up to her shoulders. She bucked even as the water sprayed. She clawed and screamed her rage, her defiance.

“Put her under,” the king hissed.

The guards, straining, shoved her slender shoulders. Her brown-gold head.

And as they pushed her head down, she thrashed one last time, freeing her long, pale arm.

Teeth bared, Nesta pointed one finger at the King of Hybern.

One finger, a curse and a damning.

A promise.

And as Nesta’s head was forced under the water, as that hand was

violently shoved down, the King of Hybern had the good sense to look somewhat unnerved.

Dark water lapped for a moment. The surface went flat.

I vomited on the floor.

The guards at last let Rhysand kneel beside me in the growing pool of Cassian's blood—let him tuck me into him as the Cauldron again tilted.

Water poured forth, Lucien hoisting Elain in his arms and out of the way.

The bonds on Tamlin vanished, along with the gag. He was instantly on his feet, snarling at the king. Even the fist on my mind lightened to a mere caress. As if he knew he'd won.

I didn't care. Not as Nesta was sprawled upon the stones.

I knew that she was different.

From however Elain had been Made ... Nesta was different.

Even before she took her first breath, I felt it.

As if the Cauldron in making her ... had been forced to give more than it wanted. As if Nesta had fought even after she went under, and had decided that if she was to be dragged into hell, she was taking that Cauldron with her.

As if that finger she'd pointed was now a death-promise to the King of Hybern.