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SARAH J.  
MAAS

HOUSE of FLAME  
and SHADOW

A CRESCENT CITY NOVEL

BLOOMSBURY



CRESCENT CITY

HOUSE  
of  
FLAME  
and  
SHADOW

*For Sloane, who lights up entire  
universes with her smile*

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CRESCENT CITY

HOUSE  
of  
FLAME  
and  
SHADOW

SARAH J. MAAS

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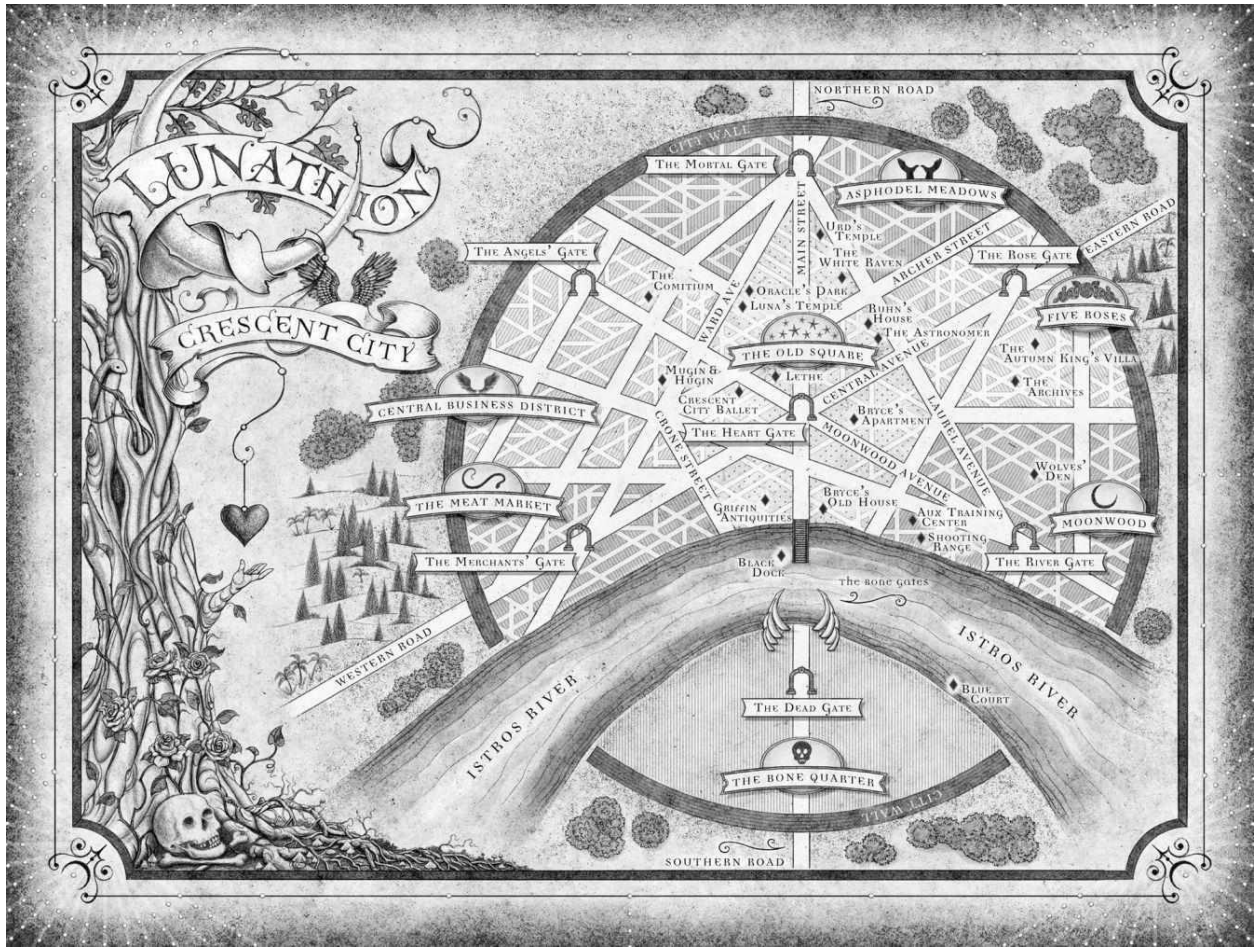


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## THE FOUR HOUSES OF MIDGARD

*As decreed in 33 V.E. by the Imperial Senate in the Eternal City*

### HOUSE OF EARTH AND BLOOD

Shifters, humans, witches, ordinary animals, and many others to whom Cthona calls, as well as some chosen by Luna

### HOUSE OF SKY AND BREATH

Malakim (angels), Fae, elementals, sprites,\* and those who are blessed by Solas, along with some favored by Luna

### HOUSE OF MANY WATERS

River-spirits, mer, water beasts, nymphs, kelpies, nøkks, and others watched over by Ogenas

### HOUSE OF FLAME AND SHADOW

Daemonaki, Reapers, wraiths, vampyrs, draki, dragons, necromancers, and many wicked and unnamed things that even Urd herself cannot see

*\*Sprites were kicked out of their House as a result of their participation in the Fall, and are now considered Lowers, though many of them refuse to accept this.*

## PROLOGUE

The Hind knelt before her undying masters and contemplated how it would feel to tear out their throats.

Around her own throat, a silver torque lay cool and heavy. It never warmed against her skin. As if the taken lives it symbolized wanted her to endure death's icy grip as well.

A silver dart on a dreadwolf uniform: the trophy for a rebel wiped off the face of Midgard. Lidia had acquired so many that her imperial grays couldn't hold them all. So many that they'd been melted down into that torque.

Did anyone in this chamber see the necklace for what it truly was?

A collar. With a golden leash leading right to the monsters before her.

And did those monsters ever suspect that their faithful pet sat at their feet and pondered the taste and texture of their blood on her tongue? On her teeth?

But here she would kneel, until given leave to rise. As this world would kneel until the six enthroned Asteri drained it dry and left its carcass to rot in the emptiness of space.

The staff of the Eternal Palace had cleaned the blood from the shining crystal floor beneath her knees. No coppery tang lingered in the sterile air, no errant drops marred the columns flanking the chamber. As if the events of two days ago had never occurred.

But Lidia Cervos could not let herself dwell on those events. Not while surrounded by her enemies. Not with Pollux kneeling beside her, one of his shining wings resting atop her calf.

From another, it might have been a gesture of comfort, of solidarity.

From Pollux, from the Hammer, it meant nothing but possession.

Lidia willed her eyes dead and cold. Willed her heart to be the same, and focused on the two Fae Kings pleading their cases.

“My late son acted of his own accord,” declared Morven, King of the Avallen Fae, his bonewhite face grave. The tall, dark-haired male wore all black, but no heavy air of mourning lay upon him. “Had I known of Cormac’s treason, I would have handed him over myself.” Lidia flicked her gaze to the panel of parasites seated on their crystal thrones.

Rigelus, veiled as usual in the body of a Fae teenage boy, propped his delicate chin on a fist. “I find it difficult to believe that you had no knowledge of your son’s activities, considering how tightly you held his reins.”

Shadows whispered over Morven’s broad shoulders, trailing off his scaled armor. “He was a defiant boy. I thought I’d beaten it out of him long ago.”

“You thought wrong,” sneered Hesperus, the Evening Star, who’d taken on the shape of a blond nymph. Her long, slim fingers tapped the glimmering arm of her throne. “We can only assume that his treachery stemmed from some decay within your royal house. One that must now be scourged.”

For the first time in the decades the Hind had known him, King Morven held his tongue. He’d had no choice but to answer the Asteri’s summons yesterday, but he clearly did not appreciate the reminder that his autonomy was a mere illusion, even on the misty isle of Avallen.

Some small part of her relished it—seeing the male who’d strutted through Summits and meetings and balls now weighing his every word. Knowing it might be his last.

Morven growled, “I had no knowledge of my son’s activities or of his craven heart. I swear it upon Luna’s golden bow.” His voice rang clear as he added with impressive fury, “I condemn all that Cormac was and stood for.

He shall not be honored with a grave nor a burial. There will be no ship to sail his body into the Summerlands. I will ensure that his name is wiped from all records of my house.”

For a heartbeat, Lidia allowed herself a shred of pity for the Ophion agent she'd known. For the Fae Prince of Avallen who'd given everything to destroy the beings before her.

As she had given everything. Would still give everything.

Polaris, the North Star—wearing the body of a white-winged, dark-skinned female angel—drawled, “There will be no ship to sail Cormac's body to the Summerlands because the boy immolated himself. And tried to take us with him.” Polaris let out a soft, hateful laugh that raked talons down Lidia's skin. “As if a paltry flame might do such a thing.”

Morven said nothing. He'd offered what he could, short of getting on his knees to plead. It might very well come to that, but for now, the Fae King of Avallen held his head high.

Legend claimed that even the Asteri could not pierce the mists that shrouded Avallen, but Lidia had never heard of it being tested. Perhaps that was also why Morven had come—to keep the Asteri from having a reason to explore whether the legend was true.

If they were somehow repelled by whatever ancient power lay around Avallen, that would be a secret worth abasing oneself to keep.

Rigelus crossed an ankle over his knee. Lidia had seen the Bright Hand order entire families executed with the same casual air. “And you, Einar? What have you to say for your son?”

“Traitorous shit,” spat Pollux from where he knelt beside Lidia. His wing still rested on her leg like he owned it. Owned her.



The Autumn King ignored the Hammer. Ignored everyone except Rigelus as he flatly replied, “Ruhn has been wild since birth. I did what I could to contain him. I have little doubt that he was lured into this business through his sister’s machinations.”

Lidia kept her fingers loose, even as they ached to curl into fists. Steadied her heart into a sluggish, ordinary beat that no Vanir ears would detect as unusual.

“So you would seek to spare one child by damning the other?” Rigelus asked, lips curling into a mild smile. “What sort of father are you, Einar?”

“Neither Bryce Quinlan nor Ruhn Danaan has the right to call themselves my children any longer.”

Rigelus angled his head, his short, dark hair shimmering in the glow of the crystal room. “I thought she had claimed the name Bryce Danaan. Have you revoked her royal status?”

A muscle ticked in the Autumn King’s cheek. “I have yet to decide a fitting punishment for her.”

Pollux’s wings rustled, but the angel kept his head down as he snarled to the Autumn King, “When I get my hands on your cunt of a daughter, you’ll be glad to have disavowed her. What she did to the Harpy, I shall do to her tenfold.”

“You’d have to find her first,” the Autumn King said coolly. Lidia supposed Einar Danaan was one of the few Fae on Midgard who could openly taunt an angel as powerful as the Malleus. The Fae King’s amber eyes, so like his daughter’s, lifted to the Asteri. “Have your mystics discovered her whereabouts yet?”

“Do you not wish to know where your son is?” asked Octartis, the Southern Star, with a coy smile.

“I know where Ruhn is,” the Autumn King countered, unmoved. “He deserves to be there.” He half turned toward where Lidia knelt, and surveyed her coldly. “I hope you wring every last answer from him.”

Lidia held his stare, her face like stone, like ice—like death.

The Autumn King’s gaze flicked over the silver torque at her throat, a faint, approving curve gracing his mouth. But he asked Rigelus, with an authority that she could only admire, “Where is Bryce?”

Rigelus sighed, bored and annoyed—a lethal combination. “She has chosen to vacate Midgard.”

“A mistake we shall soon rectify,” Polaris added.

Rigelus shot the lesser Asteri a warning look.

The Autumn King said, his voice a shade faint, “Bryce is no longer in this world?”

Morven glanced warily at the other Fae King. As far as anyone knew, there was only one place that could be accessed from Midgard—there was an entire wall circling the Northern Rift in Nena to prevent its denizens from crossing into this world. If Bryce was no longer on Midgard, she had to be in Hel.

It had never occurred to Lidia that the wall around the Rift would also keep Midgardians from getting *out*.

Well, most Midgardians.

Rigelus said tightly, “That knowledge is not to be shared with anyone.” The edge sharpening his words implied the rest: *under pain of death*.

Lidia had been present when the other Asteri had demanded to know how it had happened: how Bryce Quinlan had opened a gate to another world in their own palace and slipped through the Bright Hand’s fingers. Their

disbelief and rage had been a small comfort in the wake of all that had happened, all that was still churning through Lidia.

A silvery bell rang from behind the Asteri's thrones in a polite reminder that another meeting had been scheduled shortly.

"This discussion is not yet finished," Rigelus warned the two Fae Kings. He pointed with a skinny finger to the double doors open to the hall beyond. "Speak of what you have heard today, and you will find that there is no place on this planet where you will be safe from our wrath." The Fae Kings bowed and left without another word.

The weight of the Asteri's gazes landed upon Lidia, singeing her very soul. She withstood it, as she had withstood all the other horrors in her life.

"Rise, Lidia," Rigelus said with something that bordered on affection. Then, to Pollux, "Rise, my Hammer." Lidia shoved down the bile that burned like acid and got to her feet, Pollux with her. His white wing brushed against her cheek, the softness of his feathers at odds with the rot of his soul.

The bell tinkled again, but Rigelus lifted a hand to the attendant waiting in the shadows of the nearby pillars. The next meeting could wait another moment.

"How go the interrogations?" Rigelus slouched on his throne as if he had asked about the weather.

"We are in the opening movements," Lidia said, her mouth somehow  
distant from her body.

"Athalar and Danaan will require time to break."

"And the Helhound?" asked Hesperus, the nymph's dark eyes gleaming with malice.

“I am still assessing him.” Lidia kept her chin high and tucked her hands behind her back. “But trust that I shall get what we need from all of them, Your Graces.”

“As you always do,” Rigelus said, gaze dipping to her silver collar. “We give you leave to do your finest work, Hind.”

Lidia bowed at the waist with imperial precision. Pollux did the same, wings folding elegantly. The portrait of a perfect soldier—the one he’d been bred to become.

It wasn’t until they’d entered the long corridor beyond the throne room that the Hammer spoke. “Do you think that little bitch really went to Hel?” Pollux jerked his head behind them, toward the dull, silent crystal Gate at the opposite end of the hall.

The busts lining the walkway—all the Asteri in their various forms throughout the centuries —had been replaced. The windows that had been shattered by Athalar’s lightning had been repaired.

As in the throne room, not one hint of what had occurred remained here. And beyond the crystal walls of this palace, no whisper had surfaced in the news.

The only proof: the two Asterian Guards now flanking either side of the Gate. Their whiteand-gold regalia shone in the streaming sunlight, the tips of the spears gripped in their gloved hands like fallen stars. With their golden helmets’ visors down, she could make out nothing of the faces beneath. It didn’t matter, she supposed. There was no individuality, no life in them. The elite, highborn angels had been bred for obedience and service. Just as they’d been bred to bear those glowing white wings. As the angel beside her had.