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MAAS

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OF
MIDNIGHT

A THRONE OF GLASS NOVEL

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best friends until we're nothing but dust.
(And then some.)*

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MIDNIGHT

A THRONE OF GLASS NOVEL

SARAH J. MAAS

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PART ONE

The King's Champion

1

The shutters swinging in the storm winds were the only sign of her entry. No one had noticed her scaling the garden wall of the darkened manor house, and with the thunder and the gusting wind off the nearby sea, no one heard her as she shimmied up the drainpipe, swung onto the windowsill, and slithered into the second-floor hallway.

The King's Champion pressed herself into an alcove at the thud of approaching steps. Concealed beneath a black mask and hood, she willed herself to melt into the shadows, to become nothing more than a slip of darkness. A servant girl trudged past to the open window, grumbling as she latched it shut. Seconds later, she disappeared down the stairwell at the other end of the hall. The girl hadn't noticed the wet footprints on the floorboards.

Lightning flashed, illuminating the hallway. The assassin took a long breath, going over the plans she'd painstakingly memorized in the three days she'd been watching the manor house on the outskirts of Bellhaven. Five doors on each side. Lord Nirall's bedroom was the third on the left.

She listened for the approach of any other servants, but the house remained hushed as the storm raged around them.

Silent and smooth as a wraith, she moved down the hall. Lord Nirall's bedroom door swung open with a slight groan. She waited until the next

rumble of thunder before easing the door shut behind her.

Another flash of lightning illuminated two figures sleeping in the four-poster bed. Lord Nirall was no older than thirty-five, and his wife, dark haired and beautiful, slept soundly in his arms. What had they done to offend the king so gravely that he wanted them dead?

She crept to the edge of the bed. It wasn't her place to ask questions. Her job was to obey. Her freedom depended on it. With each step toward Lord Nirall, she ran through the plan again.

Her sword slid out of its sheath with barely a whine. She took a shuddering breath, bracing herself for what would come next.

Lord Nirall's eyes flew open just as the King's Champion raised her sword over his head.

2

Celaena Sardothien stalked down the halls of the glass castle of Rifthold. The heavy sack clenched in her hand swung with each step, banging every so often into her knees. Despite the hooded black cloak that concealed much of her face, the guards didn't stop her as she strode toward the King of Adarlan's council chamber. They knew very well who she was—and what she did for the king. As the King's Champion, she outranked them. Actually, there were few in the castle she didn't outrank now. And fewer still who didn't fear her.

She approached the open glass doors, her cloak sweeping behind her. The guards posted on either side straightened as she gave them a nod before entering the council chamber. Her black boots were nearly silent against the red marble floor.

On the glass throne in the center of the room sat the King of Adarlan, his dark gaze locked on the sack dangling from her fingers. Just as she had the last three times, Celaena dropped to one knee before his throne and bowed her head.

Dorian Havilliard stood beside his father's throne—and she could feel his sapphire eyes fixed on her. At the foot of the dais, always between her and the royal family, stood Chaol Westfall, Captain of the Guard. She looked up at him from the shadows of her hood, taking in the lines of his face. For all

the expression he showed, she might as well have been a stranger. But that was expected, and it was just part of the game they'd become so skilled at playing these past few months. Chaol might be her friend, might be someone she'd somehow come to trust, but he was still captain—still responsible for the royal lives in this room above all others. The king spoke.

“Rise.”

Celaena kept her chin high as she stood and pulled off her hood.

The king waved a hand at her, the obsidian ring on his finger gleaming in the afternoon light. “Is it done?”

Celaena reached a gloved hand into the sack and tossed the severed head toward him. No one spoke as it bounced, a vulgar thudding of stiff and rotting flesh on marble. It rolled to a stop at the foot of the dais, milky eyes turned toward the ornate glass chandelier overhead.

Dorian straightened, glancing away from the head. Chaol just stared at her.

“He put up a fight,” Celaena said.

The king leaned forward, examining the mauled face and the jagged cuts in the neck. “I can barely recognize him.”

Celaena gave him a crooked smile, though her throat tightened. “I’m afraid severed heads don’t travel well.” She fished in her sack again, pulling out a hand. “Here’s his seal ring.” She tried not to focus too much on the decaying flesh she held, the reek that had worsened with each passing day. She extended the hand to Chaol, whose bronze eyes were distant as he took it from her and offered it to the king. The king’s lip curled, but he pried the ring off the stiff finger. He tossed the hand at her feet as he examined the ring.

Beside his father, Dorian shifted. When she’d been dueling in the competition, he hadn’t seemed to mind her history. What did he *expect* would happen when she became the King’s Champion? Though she supposed severed limbs and heads would turn the stomachs of most people—even after living for a decade under Adarlan’s rule. And Dorian, who had never seen battle, never witnessed the chained lines shuffling their way to

the butchering blocks ... Perhaps she should be impressed he hadn't vomited yet.

"What of his wife?" the king demanded, turning the ring over in his fingers again and again.

"Chained to what's left of her husband at the bottom of the sea," Celaena replied with a wicked grin, and removed the slender, pale hand from her sack. It bore a golden wedding band, engraved with the date of the marriage. She offered it to the king, but he shook his head. She didn't dare look at Dorian or Chaol as she put the woman's hand back in the thick canvas sack.

"Very well, then," the king murmured. She remained still as his eyes roved over her, the sack, the head. After a too-long moment, he spoke again. "There is a growing rebel movement here in Rifthold, a group of individuals who are willing to do anything to get me off the throne—and who are attempting to interfere with my plans. Your next assignment is to root out and dispatch them all before they become a true threat to my empire."

Celaena clenched the sack so tightly her fingers ached. Chaol and Dorian were staring at the king now, as if this were the first they were hearing of this, too.

She'd heard whispers of rebel forces before she'd gone to Endovier—she'd *met* fallen rebels in the salt mines. But to have an actual movement growing in the heart of the capital; to have *her* be the one to dispatch them one by one ... And plans—what plans? What did the rebels know of the king's maneuverings? She shoved the questions down, down, down, until there was no possibility of his reading them on her face.

The king drummed his fingers on the arm of the throne, still playing with Nirall's ring in his other hand. "There are several people on my list of suspected traitors, but I will only give you one name at a time. This castle is crawling with spies."

Chaol stiffened at that, but the king waved his hand and the captain approached her, his face still blank as he extended a piece of paper to Celaena.

She avoided the urge to stare at Chaol's face as he gave her the letter, though his gloved fingers grazed hers before he let go. Keeping her features neutral, she looked at the paper. On it was a single name: *Archer Finn*.

It took every ounce of will and sense of self-preservation to keep her shock from showing. She knew Archer—had known him since she was thirteen and he'd come for lessons at the Assassins' Keep. He'd been several years older, already a highly sought-after courtesan ... who was in need of some training on how to protect himself from his rather jealous clients. And their husbands.

He'd never minded her ridiculous girlhood crush on him. In fact, he'd let her test out flirting with him, and had usually turned her into a complete giggling mess. Of course, she hadn't seen him for several years—since before she went to Endovier—but she'd never thought him capable of something like this. He'd been handsome and kind and jovial, not a traitor to the crown so dangerous that the king would want him dead.

It was absurd. Whoever was giving the king his information was a damned idiot.

“Just him, or all his clients, too?” Celaena blurted.

The king gave her a slow smile. “You know Archer? I'm not surprised.” A taunt—a challenge.

She just stared ahead, willing herself to calm, to breathe. “I used to. He's an extraordinarily well-guarded man. I'll need time to get past his defenses.” So carefully said, so casually phrased. What she really needed time for was to figure out how Archer had gotten tangled up in this mess—and whether the king was telling the truth. If Archer truly were a traitor and a rebel ... well, she'd figure that out later.

“Then you have one month,” the king said. “And if he's not buried by then, perhaps I shall reconsider your position, girl.”

She nodded, submissive, yielding, gracious. “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

“When you have dispatched Archer, I will give you the next name on the list.”

She had avoided the politics of the kingdoms—especially their rebel forces—for so many years, and now she was in the thick of it. Wonderful.

“Be quick,” the king warned. “Be discreet. Your payment for Nirall is already in your chambers.”

Celaena nodded again and shoved the piece of paper into her pocket.

The king was staring at her. Celaena looked away but forced a corner of her mouth to twitch upward, to make her eyes glitter with the thrill of the hunt. At last, the king lifted his gaze to the ceiling. “Take that head and be gone.” He pocketed Nirall’s seal ring, and Celaena swallowed her twinge of disgust. A trophy.

She scooped up the head by its dark hair and grabbed the severed hand, stuffing them into the sack. With only a glance at Dorian, whose face had gone pale, she turned on her heel and left.



Dorian Havilliard stood in silence as the servants rearranged the chamber, dragging the giant oak table and ornate chairs into the center of the room. They had a council meeting in three minutes. He hardly heard as Chaol took his leave, saying he’d like to debrief Celaena further. His father grunted his approval.

Celaena had killed a man and his wife. And his father had ordered it. Dorian had barely been able to look at either of them. He thought he’d been able to convince his father to reevaluate his brutal policies after the massacre of those rebels in Eyllwe before Yulemas, but it seemed like it hadn’t made any difference. And Celaena ...

As soon as the servants finished arranging the table, Dorian slid into his usual seat at his father’s right. The councilmen began trickling in, along with Duke Perrington, who went straight to the king and began murmuring to him, too soft for Dorian to hear.

Dorian didn’t bother saying anything to anyone and just stared at the glass pitcher of water before him. Celaena hadn’t seemed like herself just