

A COURT OF WINGS AND RUIN



Young Adult

By Sarah J. Maas

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CONTENT WARNING

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Summary of Concerns:

This book contains sexual nudity; obscene sexual activities; mild profanity; and violence.

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Not For Minors
BookLooks Review Rating

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129	<p>Neither did Rhys as he murmured, “My love,” and kissed me. I’d no sooner slid my hands into his hair than he scooped me into his arms and stood in one smooth movement. I pulled my mouth from his, glancing toward a pallid Lucien, but Rhysand said to our companions without so much as looking at them, “Go find somewhere else to be for a while.”</p> <p>He didn’t wait to see if they obeyed.</p>
131	<p>I braced my hands on his hips, fully ready to slide beneath his jacket, needing to touch bare skin, but Rhys straightened, pulling back. Still close enough that one of his hands remained on my waist, but the other—</p>
134	<p>His mind curled around mine, as surely as his body now held me.</p> <p>“I missed you every moment,” Rhys said, leaning down to kiss the corner of my mouth. “Your smile.” His lips grazed over the shell of my ear and my back arched slightly. “Your laugh.” He pressed a kiss to my neck, right beneath my ear, and I tilted my head to give him access, biting down the urge to beg him to take more, to take faster as he murmured, “Your scent.”</p> <p>My eyes fluttered closed, and his hands coasted around my hips to cup my rear, squeezing as he bent to kiss the center of my throat. “The sounds you make when I’m inside you.” His tongue flicked over the spot where he’d kissed, and one of those sounds indeed escaped me. Rhys kissed the hollow of my collarbone, and my core went utterly molten. “My brave, bold, brilliant mate.”</p> <p>He lifted his head, and it was an effort to open my eyes. To meet his stare as his hands roved in lazy lines down my back, over my rear, then up again. “I love you,” he said. And if I hadn’t already believed him, felt it in my very bones, the light in his face as he said the words ...</p> <p>Tears burned my eyes again, slipping free before I could control myself. Rhys leaned in to lick them away. One after another. As he’d once done Under the Mountain.</p> <p>“You have a choice,” he murmured against my cheekbone. “Either I lick every inch of you clean ...” His hand grazed the tip of my breast, circling lazily. As if we had days and days to do this. “Or you can get into the bath that should be ready by now.”</p> <p>I pulled away, lifting a brow. “Are you suggesting that I smell?”</p> <p>Rhys smirked, and I could have sworn my core pounded in answer. “Never. But ...” His eyes darkened, the desire and amusement fading as he took in my clothes. “There is blood on you. Yours, and others’. I thought I’d be a good mate and offer you a bath before I ravish you wholly.”</p> <p>I huffed a laugh and brushed back his hair, savoring the silken, sable strands between my fingers. “So considerate. Though I can’t believe you kicked everyone out of the house so you could take me to bed.”</p> <p>...“As much as I’d like to see you attempt to lick off a week’s worth of dirt, sweat, and blood ...” His eyes gleamed with the challenge, and I laughed again. “Normal bath, please.”</p> <p>...And I smiled to myself, arching my back a bit more than necessary as I removed my shirt and tossed it to the marble floor. Sunlight streamed in through the steam rising from the tub, casting the space between us in gold and white. Rhys made a low noise that sounded vaguely like a whimper as he took in my bare torso. As he took in my breasts, now heavy and aching, badly enough that I had to swallow my plea to forget this bath entirely.</p>

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	<p>But I pretended not to notice as I unbuttoned my pants and let them fall to the floor. Along with my undergarments. Rhys's eyes simmered. I smirked, daring a look at his own pants. At the evidence of what, exactly, this was doing to him, pressing against the black material with impressive demand. I simply crooned, "Too bad there isn't room in the tub for two." "A design flaw, and one I shall remedy tomorrow." His voice was rough, quiet—and it slid invisible hands down my breasts, between my legs. Mother save me. I somehow managed to walk, to climb into the tub. Somehow managed to remember how to bathe myself. Rhys remained leaning against the doorway the entire time, silently watching with that unrelenting focus. I might have taken longer washing certain areas. And might have made sure he saw it. He only gripped the threshold hard enough that the wood groaned beneath his hand. But Rhys made no move to pounce, even when I toweled off and brushed out my tangled hair. As if the restraint ... it was part of the game, too. My bare toes curled on the marble floor as I set down my brush on the sink vanity, every inch of my body aware of where he stood in the doorway, aware of his eyes upon me in the mirror's reflection. "All clean," I declared, my voice hoarse as I met his stare in the mirror. I could have sworn only darkness and stars swirled beyond his shoulders. A blink, and they were gone. But the predatory hunger on his face ... I turned, my fingers trembling slightly as I clutched my towel around me. Rhys only extended a hand, his own fingers shaking. Even the towel was abrasive against my too-sensitive skin as I laid my hand on his, his calluses scraping as they closed over my fingers. I wanted them scraping all over me. But he simply led me into the bedroom, step after step, the muscles of his broad back shifting beneath his jacket. And lower, the sleek, powerful cut of thighs, his ass—I was going to devour him. From head to toe. I was going to devour him— But Rhys paused before the bed, releasing my hand and facing me from the safety of a step away. And it was the expression on his face as he traced a still-tender spot on my cheekbone that checked the heat threatening to raze my senses.</p>
138	<p>I let my towel drop to the carpet. Let him look me over as I put a hand on his chest, his heart raging beneath my palm. "Ready for ravishing." My words didn't come out with the swagger I'd intended. Not when Rhys's answering smile was a dark, cruel thing. "I hardly know where to begin. So many possibilities." He lifted a finger, and my breath came hard and fast as he idly circled one of my breasts, then the other. In ever-tightening rings. "I could start here," he murmured. I clenched my thighs together. He noted the movement, that dark smile growing. And just before his finger reached the tip of my breast, just before he gave me what I was about to beg for, his finger slid upward—to my chest, my neck, my chin. Right to my mouth. He traced the shape of my lips, a whisper of touch. "Or I could start here," he breathed, slipping the tip of his finger into my mouth. I couldn't help myself from closing my lips around him, from flicking my tongue against the pad of his finger. But Rhys withdrew his finger with a soft groan, making a downward path. Along my neck.</p>

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	<p>Chest. Straight over a nipple. He paused there, flicking it once, then smoothed his thumb over the small hurt.</p> <p>I was shaking now, barely able to keep standing as his finger continued past my breast. He drew patterns on my stomach, scanning my face as he purred, “Or ...”</p> <p>I couldn’t think beyond that single finger, that one point of contact as it drifted lower and lower, to where I wanted him. “Or?” I managed to breathe.</p> <p>His head dipped, hair sliding over his brow as he watched—we both watched—his broad finger venture down. “Or I could start here,” he said, the words guttural and raw.</p> <p>I didn’t care—not as he dragged that finger down the center of me. Not as he circled that spot, light and taunting. “Here would be nice,” he observed, his breathing uneven. “Or maybe even here,” he finished, and plunged that finger inside me.</p> <p>I groaned, gripping his arm, nails digging into the muscles beneath—muscles that shifted as he pumped his finger once, twice. Then slid it out and drawled, brows rising. “Well? Where shall I begin, Feyre darling?”</p> <p>I could barely form words, thoughts. But—I’d had enough of playing.</p> <p>So I took that infernal hand of his, guiding it to my heart, and placed it there, half over the curve of my breast. I met his hooded gaze as I spoke the words that I knew would be his undoing in this little game, the words that were rising up in me with every breath. “You’re mine.”</p> <p>It snapped the tether he’d kept on himself.</p> <p>His clothes vanished—all of them—and his mouth angled over my own.</p> <p>It wasn’t a gentle kiss. Wasn’t soft or searching.</p> <p>It was a claiming, wild and unchecked—it was an unleashing. And the taste of him ... the heat of him, the demanding stroke of his tongue against my own ... Home. I was home.</p> <p>My hands shot into his hair, pulling him closer as I answered each of his searing kisses with my own, unable to get enough, unable to touch and feel enough of him.</p> <p>Skin to skin, Rhys nudged me toward the bed, his hands kneading my rear as I ran my own over the velvet softness of him, over every hard plane and ripple. His beautiful, mighty wings tore from his back, splaying wide before neatly tucking in.</p> <p>My thighs hit the bed behind us, and Rhys paused, trembling. Giving me time to reconsider, even now. My heart strained, but I pulled my mouth from his. Held his gaze as I lowered myself onto the white sheets and inched back.</p> <p>Further and further onto the bed, until I was bare before him. Until I took in the considerable, proud length of him and my core tightened in answer. “Rhys,” I breathed, his name a plea on my tongue.</p> <p>His wings flared, chest heaving as stars sparked in his eyes. And it was the longing there—beneath the desire, beneath the need—it was the longing in those beautiful eyes that made me glance to the mountains tattooed on his knees.</p> <p>...No playing, no delaying—I wanted him on me, in me. I needed to feel him, hold him, share breath with him. He heard the edge of desperation, felt it through the mating bond flowing between us.</p> <p>His eyes did not leave mine as he prowled over me, every movement graceful as a stalking plains-cat. Interlacing our fingers, his breathing uneven, Rhys used a knee to nudge my legs apart and settle between them.</p> <p>Carefully, lovingly, he laid our joined hands beside my head as he guided himself into me and whispered in my ear, “You’re mine, too.”</p> <p>At the first nudge of him, I surged forward to claim his mouth.</p>

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	<p>I dragged my tongue over his teeth, swallowing his groan of pleasure as his hips rolled in gentle thrusts and he pushed in, and in, and in. Home. This was home. And when Rhys was seated to the hilt, when he paused to let me adjust to the fullness of him, I thought I might explode into moonlight and flame, thought I might die from the sheer force of what swept through me. My pants were edged with sobs as I dug my fingers into his back, and Rhys withdrew slightly to study my face. To read what was there. “Never again,” he promised as he pulled out, then thrust back in with excruciating slowness. He kissed my brow, my temple. “My darling Feyre.” Beyond words, I moved my hips, urging him deeper, harder. Rhys obliged me. With every movement, every shared breath, every whispered endearment and moan, that mating bond I’d hidden so far inside myself grew brighter. Clearer. And when it again shone as brilliantly as adamant, my release cascaded through me, leaving my skin glowing like a newborn star in its wake. At the sight of it, right as I dragged a finger down the sensitive inside of his wing, Rhys shouted my name and found his pleasure. I held him through every heaving breath, held him as he at last stilled, lingering inside me, and relished the feel of his skin on mine. For long minutes, we remained there, tangled together, listening to our breathing even out, the sound of it finer than any music. ...His throat bobbed. “I missed you. Every second, every breath. Not just this,” he said, shifting his hips for emphasis and dragging a groan from deep in my throat, “but ... talking to you. Laughing with you. I missed having you in my bed, but missed having you as my friend even more.” My eyes burned. “I know,” I managed to say, stroking a hand down his wings, his back. “I know.” I kissed his bare shoulder, right over a whorl of Illyrian tattoo.</p>
144	<p>He’d laughed and said that if I truly felt it was necessary to settle the score between us, perhaps I could find some other creature for him to battle—one that wouldn’t delight in removing my favorite part from his body. I’d only kissed him, murmuring about someone thinking rather highly of themselves, and had placed the ring he’d selected for himself, bought here in Velaris while I’d been away, onto his finger.</p>
191	<p>His mouth grazed my neck. ...Rhys leaned in to kiss my neck again.</p>
198	<p>I rolled my eyes, even as I tried to shut out the image of Rhys and laying me on my stomach, then kissing his way down my spine. Lower. Tried to shut out the feeling of his strong hands gripping my hips and lifting them up, up, until he lay beneath them and feasted on me, until I was quietly begging him and he rose behind me and I had to bite my pillow to keep from waking the whole house with my moaning.</p>
199	<p>“Two Illyrian males making me sweat in one morning. What’s a female to do?”</p>
218	<p>Rhys’s answering smile was lovely—and just a bit wicked. “I believe my little lessons helped.” “Yes, ‘Rhys is the greatest lover a female can hope for’ is undoubtedly how I learned to read.” “I was only trying to tell you what you now know.” My blood heated a bit. “Hmmm,” was all I said, pulling a book toward me.</p>

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	<p>“I’ll take that hmmm as a challenge.” His hand slid down my thigh, then cupped my knee, his thumb brushing along its side. Even through my leathers, the heat of him seeped to my very bones. “Maybe I’ll haul you between the stacks and see how quiet you can be.”</p> <p>“Hmmm.” I flipped through the pages, not seeing any of the text.</p> <p>His hand began a lethal, taunting exploration up my thigh, his fingers grazing along the sensitive inside. Higher, higher. He leaned in to drag a book toward himself, but whispered in my ear, “Or maybe I’ll spread you out on this desk and lick you until you scream loud enough to wake whatever is at the bottom of the library.”</p> <p>I whipped my head toward him. His eyes were glazed—almost sleepy.</p> <p>“I was fully committed to that plan,” I said, even as his hand stopped very, very close to the apex of my thighs, “until you brought in that thing down below.”</p> <p>A feline smile. He held my stare as his tongue brushed his bottom lip.</p> <p>My breasts tightened beneath my shirt, and his gaze dropped—watching. “I would have thought,” he mused, “that our bout this morning would be enough to tide you over until tonight.” His hand slid between my legs, brazenly cupping me, his thumb pushing down on an aching spot. A low groan slipped from me, and my cheeks heated in its wake.</p> <p>“Apparently, I didn’t do a good enough job sating you, if you’re so easily riled after a few hours.”</p> <p>“Prick,” I breathed, but the word was ragged. His thumb pressed down harder, circling roughly.</p> <p>Rhys leaned in again, kissing my neck—that place right under my ear—and said against my skin, “Let’s see what names you call me when my head is between your legs, Feyre darling.”</p>
220	<p>Two hours of work, he promised me, turning back to the table and flaring his wings—a veritable screen to block my view of him. And his view of me. Then we can play.</p> <p>I gave him a vulgar gesture.</p> <p>I saw that.</p> <p>I did it again, and his laugh floated to me as I faced the books stacked before me and began to read.</p>
231	<p>Rhys silently pushed off the banister and kissed me. Once. Twice.</p> <p>Cassian stalked through the front door a heartbeat later and groaned that it was too early to stomach the sight of us kissing. My mate only snarled at him before he took us both by the hand and winnowed us to the Prison.</p> <p>Rhys gripped my fingers tighter than usual as the wind ripped around us, Cassian now wisely keeping silent. And as we emerged from that black, tumbling wind, Rhys leaned over to kiss me a third time, sweet and soft, before the gray light and roaring wind greeted us.</p>
261	<p>“Ready to be wicked?” he purred in my ear. My toes curled at the caress in that voice—at the memory of the last time we’d gone to the Court of Nightmares. How I’d sat in his lap—where his fingers had drifted.</p> <p>I rose from the bench, facing him fully. His hands skimmed the bare skin along my ribs. Between my breasts. Down the outside of my thighs. Oh, he remembered, too.</p> <p>“This time,” I breathed, kissing the tendril of tattoo that peeked just above the collar of Rhys’s black jacket, “I get to make Keir beg.”</p>
276	<p>“But when you fucked that other bastard—”</p>

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279	<p>“If Amarantha offered us a slim shot at survival,” Rhys said, his gaze unflinching, “then I would not give a shit that she made me fuck her for all those years.”</p>
310	<p>My clothes vanished, presumably to the laundry downstairs, and Rhys swept me into his arms, lowering my naked body into the water. With the wings, the fit was tight, and—I groaned from deep in my throat at the glorious heat and didn’t bother to do anything other than lean my head against the back of the tub.</p> <p>“I’ll be right back,” he said, and left the bathroom, then the bedroom itself.</p> <p>By the time he returned, I only knew I’d fallen asleep thanks to the hand he put on my shoulder. “Out,” he said, but lifted me himself, toweled me off, and led me to the bed. He lay me down belly-first, and I noted the oils and balms he’d set there, the faint odor of rosemary and—something I was too tired to notice but smelled lovely floating to me. His hands gleamed as he applied generous amounts to his palms, and then his hands were on me.</p> <p>My groan was about as undignified as they came as he kneaded the aching muscles of my back. The sorer areas drew out rather pathetic-sounding whimpers, but he rubbed them gently, until the tension was a dull ache rather than sharp, blinding pain.</p> <p>And then he started on my wings.</p> <p>Relief and ecstasy, as muscles eased and those sensitive areas were lovingly, tauntingly grazed over.</p> <p>My toes curled, and just as he reached the sensitive spot that had my stomach clenching, his hands slid to my calves. He began a slow progression, higher and higher, up my thighs, teasing strokes between them that left me panting through my nose. Rising up until he got to my backside, where his massaging was equally professional and sinful. And then up—up my lower back, to my wings.</p> <p>His touch turned different. Exploring. Broad strokes and feather-light ones, arches and swirls and direct, searing lines.</p> <p>My core heated, turning molten, and I bit down on my lip as he lightly scraped a fingernail so, so close to that inner, sensitive spot. “Too bad you’re so sore from training,” Rhys mused, making idle, lazy circles.</p> <p>I could only manage a garbled strand of words that were both plea and insult.</p> <p>He leaned in, his breath warming the space of skin between my wings. “Did I ever tell you that you have the dirtiest mouth I’ve ever heard?”</p> <p>I muttered words that only offered more proof of that claim.</p> <p>He chuckled and skimmed the edge of that sensitive spot, right as his other hand slid between my legs.</p> <p>Brazenly, I lifted my hips in silent demand. But he just circled with a finger, as lazy as the strokes along my wing. He kissed my spine. “How shall I make love to you tonight, Feyre darling?”</p> <p>I writhed, rubbing against the folds of the blankets beneath me, desperate for any sort of friction as he dangled me over that edge.</p> <p>“So impatient,” he purred, and that finger glided into me. I moaned, the sensation too much, too consuming, with his hand between my legs and the other stroking closer and closer to that spot on my wing, a predator circling prey.</p> <p>“Will it ever stop?” he mused, more to himself than me as another finger joined the one sliding in and out of me with taunting, indolent strokes. “Wanting you—every hour, every breath. I don’t think I can stand a thousand years of this.” My hips moved with him, driving him deeper. “Think of how my productivity will plummet.”</p>

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	<p>I growled something at him that was likely not very romantic, and he chuckled, slipping out both fingers. I made a little whining noise of protest.</p> <p>Until his mouth replaced where his fingers had been, his hands gripping my hips to raise me up, to lend him better access as he feasted on me. I groaned, the sound muffled by the pillow, and he only delved deeper, taunting and teasing with every stroke.</p> <p>A low moan broke from me, my hips rolling. Rhys's grip on them tightened, holding me still for his ministrations. "I never got to take you in the library," he said, dragging his tongue right up my center. "We'll have to remedy that."</p> <p>"Rhys." His name was a plea on my lips.</p> <p>"Hmmm," was all he said, a rumble of the sound against me ... I panted, hands fisting in the sheets.</p> <p>His hands drifted from my hips at last, and I again breathed his name, in thanks and relief and anticipation of him at last giving me what I wanted—</p> <p>But his mouth closed around the bundle of nerves at the apex of my thighs while his hand ... He went right to that damned spot at the inner edge of my left wing and stroked lightly. My climax tore through me with a hoarse cry, sending me soaring out of my body. And when the shuddering ripples and starlight faded ...</p> <p>A bone-weary exhaustion settled over me, permanent and unending as the mating bond between us. Rhys curled into bed behind me, tucking my wings in so he could fold me against him. "That was a fun experiment," he murmured into my ear.</p> <p>I could feel him against my backside, hard and ready, but when I made to reach for him, Rhys's arms only tightened around me. "Sleep, Feyre," he told me.</p>
342	<p>I laughed in earnest, and squeezed his face as I pressed a swift kiss to his mouth. "Shameless flirt."</p>
378	<p>But I leaned over and kissed him lightly. "We'll deal with it," I said onto his mouth.</p>
379	<p>It was the way his voice went hoarse, the way his eyes guttered, that made me press a kiss to his mouth as I laid a hand upon his chest and pushed him down upon the furs. His brows rose, but a half smile appeared on his lips. "There's little privacy in a war-camp," he warned, some of the light coming back to his eyes.</p> <p>I only straddled him, unfastening the button at the top of his dark jacket. The one below it. "Then I suppose you'll have to be quiet," I said, working my way down the front of the jacket until it gaped open to reveal the shirt beneath. I traced a finger of the whorl of tattoo peeking out near his neck. "When I saw you facing the king today ..."</p> <p>He brushed his fingers against my thighs. "I know. I felt you."</p> <p>I tugged on the hem of his shirt, and he rose onto his elbows, helping me remove his jacket, then the shirt beneath. A bruise marred his ribs, an angry splotch—</p> <p>...But I leaned down and brushed a kiss over the bruise.</p> <p>Rhys loosed a long breath, his body seeming to settle. Calm.</p> <p>So I kissed the bruise again. Moved lower. He drew idle circles on my shoulder, my back. I felt his shield settle around our tent as I unbuttoned his pants. As I kissed my way across the muscled pane of his stomach.</p> <p>Lower. Rhys's hands slid into my hair as the rest of his clothes vanished.</p> <p>I stroked my hand over him once, twice—luxuriating in the feel of him, in knowing he was here, we were both here. Safe.</p> <p>Then I echoed the movement with my mouth.</p> <p>His growls of pleasure filled the tent, drowning out the distant cries of the injured and</p>

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	<p>dying. Life and death—hovering so close, whispering in our ears. But I tasted Rhys, worshipped him with my hands and mouth and then my body—and hoped that this shard of life we offered up, this undimming light between us, would drive death a bit further away.</p>
387	<p>I tugged Rhys into the hall before they'd finished saying good-bye, the kitchen door swinging shut behind us. I put a hand on my chest, leaning against the wood panels of the stair wall. Rhys's hand covered my own a heartbeat later. "That was what I felt," he said, "when I saw you smile that night we dined along the Sidra." I leaned forward, resting my brow against his chest, right over his heart. "She still has a long way to go." "We all do." He stroked a hand over my back. I leaned into the touch, savoring his warmth and strength. For long minutes, we stood there. Until I said, "Let's go find somewhere to eat—outside." "Hmmm." He showed no sign of letting go. I looked up at last. Found his eyes shining with that familiar, wicked light. "I think I'm hungry for something else," he purred. My toes curled in my boots, but I lifted my brows and said coolly, "Oh?" Rhys nipped at my earlobe, then whispered in my ear as he winnowed us up to our bedroom, where two plates of food now waited on the desk. "I owe you for last night, mate." He gave me the courtesy, at least, of letting me pick what he consumed first: me or the food. I picked wisely.</p>
411	<p>She'd kissed him before he could speak a word.</p>
418	<p>Tamlin only angled his head at Rhys. "When you fuck her, have you ever noticed that little noise she makes right before she climaxes?"</p>
421	<p>"Who knew," Beron mused, "that a cock could be so persuasive?"</p>
422	<p>"Yet you witnessed all that he did Under the Mountain, and still spread your legs for him. Fitting, I suppose. He whored for Amarantha for decades. Why shouldn't you be his whore in return?"</p>
425	<p>Tamlin growled, "The moment you let him fuck you like an—"</p>
450	<p>Mor lolled her head to the side. "I don't like to share, unfortunately." "You never know until you try," Helion purred. The three of them in bed ... with him? I must have been blinking like a fool because Rhys said to me, Helion favors both males and females. Usually together in his bed. And has been hounding after that trio for centuries. I considered—Helion's beauty and the others ... Why the hell haven't they said yes? Rhys barked a laugh that had all of them looking at him with raised brows. My mate just came up behind me and slid his arms around my waist, pressing a kiss to my neck. Would you like someone to join us in bed, Feyre darling? ...I think you'd like two males worshipping you. My toes curled.</p>

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	...Rhys laughed again, kissing my neck once more before saying, "Apologies for offending your delicate sensibilities, cousin."
462	The past tangled and snarled, and I whispered, "I don't think—I don't think I can have sex here. With him so close."
515	<p>Definitely not Keir, but ... I was still chewing it over when I at last slipped between the warm sheets of my bed and curled my body into Rhys's.</p> <p>His arm instantly slid over my waist, tugging me in closer.</p> <p>...He stroked a hand over my waist, down to my hip. "You must be exhausted."</p> <p>"And you should be sleeping," I chided, shifting closer, letting his warmth and scent wrap around me.</p> <p>"Can't," he admitted, his lips brushing over my temple.</p> <p>"Why?"</p> <p>His hand drifted to my back, and I arched into the long, trailing strokes along my spine. "It takes a while—to settle myself after battle." It had been hours and hours since the fighting had ceased. Rhys's lips began a journey from my temple down my jaw.</p> <p>And even with the weight of exhaustion pressing on me, as his mouth grazed over my chin, as he nipped at my bottom lip ... I knew what he was asking.</p> <p>Rhys sucked in a breath as I traced the contours of his muscled stomach, as I marveled at the softness of his skin, the strength of the body beneath it.</p> <p>He pressed a featherlight kiss to my lips. "If you're too tired," he began, even as he went wholly still while my fingers continued their journey, past the sculpted muscles of his abdomen.</p> <p>I answered him with a kiss of my own. Another. Until his tongue slid over the seam of my lips and I opened for him.</p> <p>Our joining was fast, and hard, and I was clawing at his back before the end shattered through both of us, dragging my hands over his wings.</p> <p>For long minutes afterward, we remained there, my legs thrown over his shoulders, the rise and fall of his chest pushing into mine in a lingering echo of our bodies' movements. Then he withdrew, gently lowering my legs from his shoulders. He kissed the inside of each of my knees as he did so, setting them on either side of him as he rose up to kneel before me.</p> <p>The tattoos on his knees were nearly obscured by the rumpled sheets, the design stretched with the position. But I traced my fingers over the tops of those mountains, the three stars inked atop them, as he remained kneeling between my legs, gazing down at me.</p> <p>"I thought about you every moment I was on that battlefield," he said softly. "It focused me, centered me—let me get through it."</p> <p>I stroked those tattoos on his knees again. "I'm glad. I think ... I think some part of me was down there on that battlefield with you, too." I glanced to his suit of armor, cleaned and displayed on a dummy near the small dressing area. His winged helmet shone like a dark star in the dimness. "Seeing that battle today ... It felt different from the one in Adriata."</p> <p>Rhys only listened, those star-flecked eyes patient. "In Adriata, I didn't ..." I struggled for the words. "The chaos of the battle in Adriata was easier, somehow. Not easy, I mean—"</p> <p>"I know what you meant."</p> <p>I sighed, sitting up so that we were knee-to-knee and face-to-face. "What I'm trying and failing miserably to explain is that attacks like the one in Adriata, in Velaris ... I can fight in</p>

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	<p>those. There are people to defend, and the disorder of it ... I can—I'll gladly fight in those battles. But what I saw today, that sort of warfare ..." I swallowed. "Will you be ashamed of me if I admit that I'm not sure if I'm ready for that sort of battling?" Line against line, swinging and stabbing until I didn't know up from down, until mud and gore blurred the line between enemy and foe, relying as much upon the warriors beside me as my own skill set. And the closeness of it, the sounds and sheer scale of the bloodbath ...</p> <p>He took my face in his hands, kissing me once. "Never. I can never be ashamed of you. Certainly not over this." He kept his mouth close to mine, sharing breath. "Today's battle was different from Adriata, and Velaris. If we had more time to train you with a unit, you could easily fight amongst the lines and hold your own. But only if you wanted to. And for now, these initial battles ... Being down in that slaughterhouse is not something I'd wish upon you." He kissed me again. "We are a pair," he said against my lips. "If you ever wish to fight by my side, it will be my honor."</p> <p>I pulled my head back, frowning at him. "I feel like a coward now."</p> <p>He stroked a thumb over my cheek. "No one would ever think that of you—not with all you have done, Feyre." A pause. "War is ugly, and messy, and unforgiving. The soldiers doing the fighting are only a fraction of it. Don't underestimate how far it goes for them to see you here—to see you tending to the wounded and participating in these meetings and councils."</p> <p>I considered, letting my fingers drift across the Illyrian tattoos over his chest and shoulders.</p> <p>And perhaps it was the afterglow of our joining, perhaps it was the battle today, but ... I believed him.</p>
556	<p>And none of us dared to speak as Varian dropped to his knees before Amren's chair, took her shocked face in his broad hands, and kissed her soundly.</p>
557	<p>And none of us dared to speak as Varian dropped to his knees before Amren's chair, took her shocked face in his broad hands, and kissed her soundly.</p>
558	<p>Rhys's naked body was wrapped around mine, his face softened with sleep.</p>
588	<p>"I can't love him like that." "Why?" "Because I prefer females." For a heartbeat, only silence rippled through me. "But—you sleep with males. You slept with Helion ..." And had looked terrible the next day. Tortured and not at all sated. ... "I do find pleasure in them. In both." ... "But I've known, since I was little more than a child, that I prefer females. That I'm ... attracted to them more over males. That I connect with them, care for them more on that soul-deep level. But at the Hewn City ... All they care about is breeding their bloodlines, making alliances through marriage. Someone like me ... If I were to marry where my heart desired, there would be no offspring. My father's bloodline would have ended with me. I knew it—knew that I could never tell them. Ever. People like me ... we're reviled by them. Considered selfish, for not being able to pass on the bloodline. So I never breathed a word of it. And then ... then my father betrothed me to Eris, and ... And it wasn't just the prospect of marriage to him that scared me. No, I knew I could survive his brutality, his cruelty and coldness. I was—I am stronger than him. It was ... It was the idea of being bred like a prize mare, of being forced to give up that one part of me ..."</p>

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589	<p>"I slept with Cassian because I knew it would mean little to him, too. Because I knew doing it would buy me a shot at freedom. If I had told my parents that I preferred females ... You've met my father. He and Beron would have tied me to that marriage bed for Eris. Literally. But sullied ... I knew my shot at freedom lay there. And I saw how Azriel looked at me ... knew how he felt. And if I'd chosen him ..."</p> <p>..."It wouldn't have been fair to him. So I slept with Cassian, and Azriel thought I deemed him unsuitable, and then everything happened and ..."</p>
590	<p>"I sleep with males in part because I enjoy it, but ... also to keep people from looking too closely."</p>
639	<p>And when he returned, my mate only pressed a kiss to my mouth before he took to the skies, spearing for the heart of the battle—the heaviest fighting.</p>
652	<p>She didn't stop him as he leaned up and kissed her—lightly. As much as he could manage.</p>
696	<p>I slid into his lap and let him wrap his arms around me.</p> <p>We sat in silence for a long time. We'd barely had a moment alone in the aftermath of the battle, and had been too tired to do anything but sleep. But tonight ... His hand ran down my thigh, bared with the way my nightgown had hitched.</p> <p>He startled when he actually looked at me, then huffed a laugh against my shoulder.</p> <p>..."The shop ladies gave it to me for free. As thanks for saving them from Hybern. Maybe I should do it more often, if it gets me free lingerie."</p> <p>For I indeed wore that pair of red, lacy underthings—beneath a matching red nightgown that was so scandalously sheer it showed them off.</p>
697	<p>Rhys traced idle circles on my bare skin, along my knee and lower thigh.</p> <p>...I laughed again, savoring the feel of his hand on my skin, the warmth of his body around me.</p> <p>...I began to tense at the lingering terror that had driven me from sleep these past few nights—the terror I doubted I'd soon recover from. "Those minutes," I said once he began making long, soothing strokes down my thigh.</p> <p>...But he wrapped his arm around my waist and squeezed, breathing me in.</p>
698	<p>"It's a bargain," he said, and kissed me gently. I murmured back onto his lips, "Yes, it is."</p> <p>...Rhys leaned forward and kissed me.</p> <p>...His wings rustled as he shifted us in the chair and deepened the kiss until I was breathless.</p> <p>And then I was flying.</p>

Profanity	Count
Ass	27
Bitch	3
Cock	1
Fuck	13
Piss	11
Prick	12
Shit	36