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Popular Free Online Home Books .gt; Books of Kings Rising (Captive Prince #3) - The risk of laming was high and they made slow progress along the bed stream because they had to protect the carriages. Riders went forward to ensure the flow did not deepen or quickly in the current, and that the creek remained a gentle slate with enough purchase for the wheels. Damen called for a halt. They drove up to the shore, where the rock's outcrop could mask a small fire. Here, too, were granite ruins, which also provide coverage. Damen learned the shapes after seeing them in Acquitart and most recently in Marlas, although here the ruins were only remnants of the wall, stones worn and covered with undergrowth. Pallas and Aktis put their skills to work and spear the fish they ate baked and puff wrapped in leaves, drinking fortified wine. It was a sweet tasting addition to their usual road fare of bread and hard cheese. Horses tied to the night, graze a little, gently whistling on the ground. Jord and Lydos took the first hours, while others came to sit in a semicircle around their small fire. When Damen came to sit too, everyone suddenly scrambled up and got up, awkwardly. Earlier Laurent threw Damen his bedroll and said: Unpack it, and Pallas almost challenged him to a duel for insult. Sitting and eating cheese by accident with their king was not something they knew how to do it. Damen poured a shallow cup of wine and handed it to the soldier next to him (Pallas), and there was a long silence in which Pallas stood, obviously gathering every piece of courage that he had to reach out and take it. Laurent stalled, rushed to the log next to Damen, and in an inexpressive voice launched into the story of a brothel adventure that brought him a blue dress that was so unabashedly dirty he made Lazar blush, and so funny was Pallas wiping his eyes. The Veretians asked frank questions about Laurent's escape from the brothel. This led to frank answers and more wiping eyes, as everyone had opinions about brothels that were translated and mistranslated fun. The wine was passed around. To keep up, the Akielions told Laurent about his escape from Castor's soldiers, squats in a stream, race in slow carriages, hiding behind wood led. Pallas made a decent impression of the Easter ride. Lazarus watched Pallas with lazy admiration. It was not an impression that he admired. Damen a little in apricot. When Damen rose some time later, everyone remembered once again that he was king, but the rigid formality was banished, and he went rather pleased with the bedroll that he dutifully unpacked, and lay down on him, listening to the sounds of the camp getting ready to sleep. It was with little shock that he heard footsteps, and the faint sound of the bed hitting the ground beside him. Laurent stretched out, and they lay beside each other under the stars. You smell horse,' said Damen. This is how I got past the dog. He felt a throbbing of happiness, and said nothing, just lay on his back and looked at the stars. It's like the old days,' said Damen, though the truth is that he's never had times like this. My first trip to Akielos, said Laurent. Do you like it? It's like Vere, with fewer places to take a bath. Said Laurent. As he looked to the side, Laurent lay on his side, looking back at him; their poses echoed with each other. The flow is right there. Do you want me to wander through the Akielon countryside naked at night? And then: You smell just as much of a horse as I do. He was smiling, Laurent was pale in shape in the moonlight. Behind it was a sleeping camp, and ruins in granite that would crumble over time and fall forever into the water. They're artestesians. Don't you? From the old empire, Artes. They say it used to cover both our countries. Like the ruins in Acquitart, said Laurent. He didn't say, and in Marlas. My brother and I played there like boys. Kill all the Aquilions and rebuild the old empire. My father had the same idea. And look what happened to him. Laurent didn't say that either. Laurent's breath was easy, as if he were relaxed and sleepy, lying next to Damen. Damen heard him say that. There is a summer palace in Jos outside the capital. My mother designed gardens there. They say it's built on Artetian foundations. He thought of the winding walks, the gentle, blooming southern orchids, the splashes of an orange flower. It's great summer, and there are fountains and tracks for riding. His pulse beat with uncharacteristic nerves, so he felt almost shy. When it was all over... we could take the horses and stay for a week at the palace. After their night together in Kartas, he did not dare to talk about the future. He felt Laurent holding himself cautiously, and there was a strange pause. After a while, Laurent said quietly, I'd like this. Damen rolled on his back again, and felt the words as happy as he allowed himself to look again at the wide sweep of the stars. HOME FIFTEEN IT WAS TYPICAL of their luck that the wagon, which was held together for five days in a creek bed, broke down as soon as they got back on the road. He sat like a truculent child in the middle of the mud, the second carriage crowded awkwardly behind him. Lazarus, leaving from under the wagon with a stain on his cheek, declared her a broken axel. Damen, who as the prince of blood did not succeed in wagon repair, nodded to the knowledgeable, and ordered his men to fix it. All mounted and got to work propping up the wagon, cutting down a young tree for a tree. It was then that a squadron of Akielon soldiers appeared on the horizon. Damen blew his hand for silence-complete silence. The hammer stopped. Everything stopped. There was a clear view across the plain all the way up to the trotting squadron in a dense formation: fifty soldiers, northwest. If they come here, said Nicandros in a low voice. Hey! Laurent shouted. He pulled from the front wheel to the top of the carriage. He had a strip of yellow silk in his hand, and he was standing on a wagon, brandishing it colorfully in the squadron. Hey you! Akielions! Damen's stomach squeezed, and he made a powerless step forward. Stop him! Nicandros said, making a similar move forward- too late. On the horizon, the squadron roams like a flock of odies. It was too late to stop him. It's too late to grab Laurent's ankle. The squadron saw them. Laurent's brief visions of suffocation did not help. Damen looked at Nicandros. There were more of them, and there was nowhere to hide on this wide, flat plain. Two of them are subtly squared to the approaching squadron. Damen judged the distance between himself and the nearest of approaching soldiers, his chances of killing them, killing enough of them to even the chances for others. Laurent clambered down from the top of the carriage, still squeezing the silk. He greeted the squadron with a relieved voice and an exaggerated version of his rope accent. But thank you, officer. What would we have done if you hadn't stopped? We have eighteen bolts of fabric to deliver Milo Argos, and as you can see Christoffe sold us a defective wagon. The officer in question was identified by his excellent horse. He had short dark hair under his helmet, and the kind of unwavering expression that only came with extensive training. He looked back at the akilon and found Damen. Damen tried to keep his own expression soft and not look at the carriages. The first was full of fabric, but the second was full of Jokaste, with Guion and his wife also crammed there. The moment the doors are opened, they will be opened. There was no blue dress to save them. Are you merchants? We are. What's the name? The officer said. Charles, said Damen, who was the only merchant he knew. Are you a Charls famous dealer of veetian fabric? Said the officer was skeptical as if it were a name well known to him. No, Laurent said, as if it were the stupidest thing in the world. I'm Charles, a famous dealer of Verdian cloth. That's my assistant. Lamen. In silence, the officer tracked his gaze at Laurent and then over Damen. Then he looked at the wagon, taking in every dent, every dust spot, every sign of long-distance travel, in minute detail. Well, Charles, he said, after all. Looks like you've got a broken axel. I don't think your people could help us with our repairs? Laurent said. Damen stared at him. They were surrounded by 50 established Akielon soldiers. Jocaste was inside the carriage. The officer said: We are patrolling Damianos Akielos. Who is Damianos Akulos? Laurent said. His face was perfectly open, his blue eyes unblinking, inverted to the officer on the horse. He is the son of the king, Damen heard himself saying: Brother Castor. be funny. Lamen. Prince Damianos is dead, Laurent said. He's hardly the man this officer means. Then, to the officer: I apologize for my assistant. He's out of step with the Akielon affair. On the contrary, it is believed that Damianos Akielos is alive, and that he crossed this province with his people six days ago. The officer gestured to his squadron, waving them forward. Damianos in Akielos. To Damen's disbelief, he waved them forward to sweep the wagon. One of the soldiers asked Nikandros for a wooden block to brace the wheel. Nikandros passed it on to him without words. Nikandros had a slightly stunned look, which Damen memorized from several of his adventures with Laurent. When your car is repaired, we can drive with you to the hotel, the officer said. You'll be safe. The rest of the garrison is there. He used the same tone that Laurent used when he said: Who is Damianos? Suddenly it became obvious that they were not free from suspicion. Provincial officer may not feel comfortable in front of a famous traffic dealer on the road and search his wagons. But in a hotel, he could set his men to investigate wagons at his leisure. And why risk a fight with a dozen guards on the road when you can just escort them back to your garrison's weapons? Thank you, officer, said Laurent, without hesitation. We're going to call the officer Stavos, and when the wagon was installed, he was driving next to Laurent, all trotting vertically in the saddles to the hotel. The air of trust of Stavos became stronger when they drove, which brought all the feeling Damen was a danger to life. However, any reluctance was a sure sign of guilt. He could only drive forward. The hotel was one of the large hostels in Mellos equipped for powerful guests, and its entrance was a set of large gates through which carriages and carriages could pass into the central courtyard, which contained enough yards for plodding beasts, and stalls for good horses. The sense of danger Damen grew as they passed through the gate and into the bumpy courtyard. There was a significant barracks, the hotel was obviously used as a point of path for the military in the region. It was a fairly common agreement in the provinces: merchants and travelers of good birth valued and even subsidized the military presence that elevated the establishment over ordinary public houses, where even a slave, if they possessed a shred of respectability, would risk eating. He counted a hundred soldiers. Thank you, Stavos. We can get him out of here. Not at all. Let me escort you inside. Very good.' Laurent showed no signs of hesitation what it was. Come, Lamen. Damen followed him, acutely aware that he was separated from his men. Laurent just walked into the hotel. The hotel had a high ceiling in the style of Akielon, and a giant spitfire in the hearth, the spit briefly suppressing the room with the smell of its roasting beef. There was only one a group of guests, half visible through an open turn-based, sitting at a table, in a lively discussion. On the left was a stone staircase leading to the bedrooms on the second floor. Two soldiers of the Akielon took a position at the entrance, two more were placed in the far entrance, and Stamos himself brought with him a small escort of four soldiers. Damen thought absurdly that unrailed stairs could be the height of the fight, as if they could take over the entire garrison, only two of them. Perhaps he could have suppressed Stavos. He could agree on some kind of exchange, the life of Stavos for their freedom. Stamos introduces Laurent to the owner of the hotel. This is Charles, a well-known merchant of Veretian fabric. This is not Charles, a famous merchant of Vethian cloth. The hotel owner looked at Laurent. I can assure you that I. I can assure you that I. I can assure you, Charles is a famous merchant here. There was a pause. Damen appeared to be looking at Laurent as a man, striding to the mark in a spear-throwing competition after the last competitor threw a perfect bulls-eye. It's impossible. Call him here. Yes, call him here, Stavos said, and everyone waited for the attendant to retreat to the guests' party in the next room. A moment later, Damen heard a familiar voice. Who is this impostor claiming to be m, they come face to face with Charles Verestian cloth dealer. Charls changed very little in the months since they had seen each other, his expression merchant-seriously, like his clothes, heavy, expensive-looking brocade. He was a man in his late thirties, with a greedy character softened by the kind of presence that evolved over the years of trade. Charles once glanced at the unmistakable blue eyes and blond hair of his prince, whom he last saw on Dayman's lap in a pet suit at a tavern in Neson. His eyes widened. Then, with a truly heroic effort: Charles! Charles said. If he's Charles, who are you? Officer Charles said. I. Charles said. He's Charles, I've known him for eight years, the hotel owner said. That's the truth. He's Charles. I'm Charles. We're cousins,' said Charles, gamely, named after our grandfather. Charles. Thank you, Charles, this man thinks I'm King of Aquielos, Laurent said. I just meant that you could be the king's agent, said Stavos exasperatedly. Agent King, when he raised taxes and threatened to bankrupt the entire fabric industry? Laurent said. Damen put his eyes somewhere where they would not meet Laurent, while everyone else looked at him-on his bright face, with his pale, arched eyebrows, handing out his hands, a verethian gesture to go with his verethic accent. I think we can all agree that he is not the King of Aquielosa, said the hotelier. If Charles vouchs for his cousin, that should satisfy the garrison. I certainly vouch for him, Charles said. A moment later Stamos made a hard bow. My apologies, Charles. We brag every On the roads. There's no need to apologize, Stavos. Your vigilance gives you credit. Laurent gave a hard little bow of his own. Then he took off his cloak and handed it to damen to carry. In disguise again! Charles said sotto's voice as he drew Laurent to his table by the fire. What is it this time? The mission of the crown? A secret date? No fear, Your Highness, it is my honor to keep my roads. Charles introduced Laurent to six men at the table, and each of them expressed his surprise and delight at meeting Char's young cousin in Akielos. This is my assistant Gilliam. This is my assistant Lamen, Laurent said. So Damen found himself at a table full of venet merchants, in a hotel in Akielos, discussing the fabric. In total, there were six people in Char's party, all merchants. Laurent found a place next to Charl and silk merchant Matelin. The flame was relegated to a small three-legged chair at the end of the table. Servants brought tortillas, soaked in oil, olives and meat shaved from the spit. Red wine was decanted into mixing bowls and drunk with small cups. It was decent wine and there were no flutists or dancing boys which was the best one could hope for in a public hotel, thought Damen. Gilliam came to talk to him, since they were of the same rank. Lamen. It's an unusual name. It's Patran, Damen said. You speak very well Akielo, he said, loudly and slowly. Thank you, said Damen. Nihandros had to stand awkwardly towards the end of the table when he arrived. He frowned when he realized he had to give his report to Laurent. The wagons are unpacked. Charles. Thank you soldier, said Laurent, adding expatsively to the group: We usually work at Delfeur, but I had to come south. Nikandros is as useless as Kiros, Laurent said, loud enough for Nicandros to hear him. He doesn't know the first thing about the fabric. That's so true, matelyn agreed. Charles said: He forbade the trade of Mentian silk, and when I tried to sell silk from Varenna he taxed him on five bolt sols! This was met with exclamations of disapproval that he deserved, and the conversation turned to the difficulties of border trade and the unrest plaguing the supply of trains. If it's true that Damianos is back north, Charles expected this to be his last batch before the road closures. The war was going on and they could expect lean times. Speculation was on the price of grain in wartime, and the impact on producers and producers. No one knew much about Damianos, or why their own prince was allied with him. Charles met With Prince Verema once, said Gilliam Damen, lowering his voice to the conspirator, in a tavern in Neson, disguised as, 'dropping him on', the prostitute. Damen looked at Laurent, who was deep in conversation, allowing his eyes to pass slowly over each familiar feature, a cool expression tipped with gold on fire. He said: Did he? Charles Think of the most expensive pet you've ever seen and then double it. Really? Said Damen. Of course, Charles knew who he was at once, because he could not hide his princely style, and nobility of spirit. Of course, Damen said. At the table, Laurent was asked questions about cultural differences in trade. The Veretians loved ornate fabrics and dyes, weaving and embellishments. Charles said, but the Aklions were sharper to focus on quality, and their textiles were actually more sophisticated, every aspect of weaving showed their deceptively simple styles. In some ways, it was harder to trade here. Maybe you could encourage Akielon to wear sleeves. You'd sell more fabric,' said Laurent. Everyone politely laughed at the joke, and then speculative glances crossed one or two faces, as if this young cousin of Charles might have accidentally stumbled upon a good idea. Idea.

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