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# THRONE OF THE FALLEN

KERRI  
MANISCALCO



HODDERSCAPE

PROLOGUE  
*House Envy*

SEVERAL DECADES BEFORE

*G*ODS-DAMNED FAE BASTARD.”

The Prince of Envy stared at the emerald feather that had just fallen from the unfolded parchment in his hand, heart thundering from the taunt. The area between his shoulders suddenly burned, the need to summon his wings almost painful.

That prick certainly knew where to hit Envy the hardest.

The spell tattooed across the feather glowed in invitation.

*Be ready.*

—*L.*

He took a steadying breath and glanced up, searching his reflection in the gilded mirror across the room, studying himself with the eye of someone who appreciated art, including the fine art of deception.

Outwardly his expression was calm, bored even. The portrait of royal indolence. His nearly black hair was combed perfectly, his cool, arrogant features set into that troublesome half smirk that easily won lovers to his bedchamber.

It was just another pretty deception.

Inside he raged, that emotion blazing so wildly that his brother Wrath,

the king of demons, would sense the disturbance from his circle and eventually come sniffing around.

Envy had gotten good at pretending over the years; a necessity to save his court.

He knew what others saw when they looked at him, the mask he'd crafted of a handsome, devil-may-care prince who liked games and riddles. He understood that the well-dressed exterior and disarming dimples he rarely flashed were simply two more weapons in his arsenal. Clever ways to hide the dangerous demon lurking beneath his chiseled façade, the ruthless prince who'd long since lost any sense of morality when it came to accomplishing his goals.

Envy picked up the feather, his thumb brushing the emerald plumage almost in reverence, until that feeling gave way to something darker.

The feather was a reminder of the time his own edges had been more soft than hard, and the note itself was a warning that a new game was beginning.

*Be ready.* That at least was a challenge Envy intended to win. He'd been waiting for this game to start for more than half a century now, watching his court slide closer toward ruin every year. In being soft, in making that one mistake, Envy had damned them all.

*That* was a secret that wouldn't remain hidden from his brothers for long, especially if things continued as they were.

Already the signs were clear enough, should anyone look closely. It was apparent in the way Envy's courtiers grew foggy, or that constant half-second delay amid conversation. As if they couldn't recall where they were or who they were speaking with.

Thus far it only lasted for a heartbeat, but it would worsen. Time would see to that.

And Envy knew that the Fae bastard would draw the game out, wait as long as possible to start, just to weaken Envy as much as he could. Envy, like all his brothers, drew his power from provoking his sin. And a court in peril was the envy of no one.



His court's falling would toss their realm into chaos, leave an opening for others—like this devious game master—to try to infiltrate.

If Envy's brothers knew how dire the situation was... well, he'd make sure they'd never find out. Let them think he was playing one more frivolous game, with nothing driving him other than his need to win to inspire envy, to stoke his sin.

They'd expect nothing less after all his careful maneuvering.

Envy stared at his face in the mirror one last time, ensuring that there were no cracks showing, no hint of his true feelings bleeding through his favorite mask, then tucked the feather into his waistcoat and crumpled the note in his fist.

When the time came, Envy would play the game. He'd reclaim what was his, restore his court, and he'd never endanger his circle by becoming intrigued by a mortal again.

Envy tossed the parchment into the fireplace, watching the flames destroy the letter from that cursed prick, vowing to one day see the game master reduced to ash too.

And just like the fire contained within his private study, inside Envy burned.



## SEVERAL DECADES LATER

“Oi! Wanna ride the famed one-eyed monster that’s painted on my ceiling, darling?”

As Lord Nilar Rhanes stumbled up the dais to the throne, mocking the Prince of Envy’s legendary bedchamber art, he became dimly aware that something—aside from the obvious treason he was committing—was very wrong with him.

And yet, try as he might, he didn’t exactly care enough to stop his unseemly antics.



“Who wants to see if life truly imitates art?”

Rhanes pointed to the buxom brunette standing nearest.

For the life of him he couldn't recall her name, which also struck him as rather odd. Deep down he felt as if he'd known her for ages and had never leered at her like some degenerate from House Lust, one of their rival courts.

Any peculiarity he felt swiftly vanished.

“You, there!” he shouted, voice booming.

Knees high, he pranced before the glittering throne like a proper fool, his legs seeming to move of their own accord.

“Come sit on my lap, love. I've got a mighty gift for you.”

Rhanes grabbed his limp cock, sending the ladies into titters.

“You're a dead man if His Highness finds you up there!” Lord... whoever... called out to him.

Rhanes shook his head, attempting to clear it. He must have had much more demonberry wine than he recalled. Even in his younger years he'd never gotten so pissed that he'd forgotten the names of his friends.

*They are his friends, aren't they?*

He glanced at the semifamiliar faces of the lords and ladies gathered—a drunken group of twelve, thirteen including himself. Aside from Rhanes, who wore red, they were all dressed in a deep hunter green. The colors and numbers both felt significant somehow and a bit foreboding as he noticed that the hour was nearing twelve.

Midnight.

Flashes from earlier that evening crossed his mind. He was almost certain he hadn't started the night wearing the red suit—it wasn't one of Envy's House colors.

His pulse pounded as words emerged in his fog.

“Same lie Lilac.” The phrase was bizarre. He couldn't recall whether he'd heard it before; he must have, though.

Everything in his head was jumbled and wrong. Except...

Something was happening in their court. Something spoken only in



whispers, in shadows, then forgotten...but something was missing. Something vital.

Rhanes disregarded his worry almost as quickly as it had appeared, compelled to keep up his mockery as if he were a puppet whose strings were controlled by some unseen force.

“Come here, you little minx.” Rhanes thrust his hips, pretending he’d bent the giggling brunette over. “Forget the bedchamber, let’s make everyone jealous as you suck me off right here!”

“She can’t suck what she can’t find, now can she?” someone else heckled.

Rhanes squinted, unsure whether this foggy haze was real or only his imagination. A tall blond male with a razor-sharp smile cut through the crowd.

Recognition slowly filtered in. Alexei. The prince’s second-in-command.

If the vampire was here, His Highness was likely nearby...

A flutter of panic stirred in Rhanes’s belly before his attention was yanked to the sudden tolling of the clock tower’s bells. The witching hour was upon them.

Voices, hundreds of them, began whispering as each stroke of the second hand brought the top of the hour ever closer.

*Are those memories? Are they purging at last?*

Why had he thought such a ridiculous thing? He struggled to recall the last time he’d drunk from the chalice. Perhaps that would make this end. Whatever *this* was.

Rhanes covered his ears and squeezed his eyes shut as the cacophony grew.

The voices unified and that same odd phrase broke free, loud and clear. *Same lie Lilac. Same lie Lilac. Same lie Lilac. Same lie Lilac.*

“Shut up!” he yelled, earning a few more jeers.

Rhanes cracked an eye. Bloody hell. He was drunk as sin. No one else was speaking now.

He staggered up toward the throne, willing to take his chances with



angering his prince in favor of stopping the room from spinning. He just needed one moment of stillness, one beat to breathe, to think. If he could only remember . . .

Everything screeched to a halt the moment he sat.

Each lord and lady crumpled to an unmoving heap on the checkered floor, like chess pieces knocked astray.

A game. That had to be what was happening. The prince would know for certain. And Alexei would find the prince.

Rhanes stiffened, searching for the vampire, but Alexei was nowhere to be seen.

“What the—”

The bells stopped ringing. Midnight had finally come.

Dark smoke suddenly twisted up and around the throne, forcing Rhanes to hold his sleeve to his nose, eyes stinging. He searched out the source and caught sight of himself in a mirror across the chamber, his mouth falling open in horror.

Half the throne was untouched and the other half, the part where he sat, now chained by magic, was engulfed in flames.

*He was burning.*

Whatever fog had been hovering vanished and reality hit Rhanes hard and fast. He screamed as the very real flames whipped him like a sadistic lover, melting his flesh.

He wanted to save himself, run far from the deadly flames, but for some reason, all he could scream was “SAME LIE LILAC!”

As the blessed darkness of unconsciousness slowly descended, Rhanes could have sworn the prince finally emerged from the shadows, emerald eyes glittering.

A tiny spark of hope lit within him. The prince was stronger, he’d resist the madness before they were all damned. He had to.

“Same lie. Lilac,” Rhanes whimpered.

*Same lie Lilac. Same lie Lilac. Same lie. Lilac.*

The prince stood over him, merely surveying the scene, as if committing it to memory.



With Death hovering seconds away, Rhanes finally gathered the last of his will. “What...does...it...mean?”

“It means the game has finally begun.”

Anger flickered in the prince’s face before he strode from the chamber.

Soon Rhanes was alone. Or maybe he wasn’t...

He closed his eyes, his mind growing dark. Still.

Maybe Prince Envy had never truly been there and maybe he wasn’t burning on the Hexed Throne at all.



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PART I

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*The Game  
Begins*





## Rules of Conduct

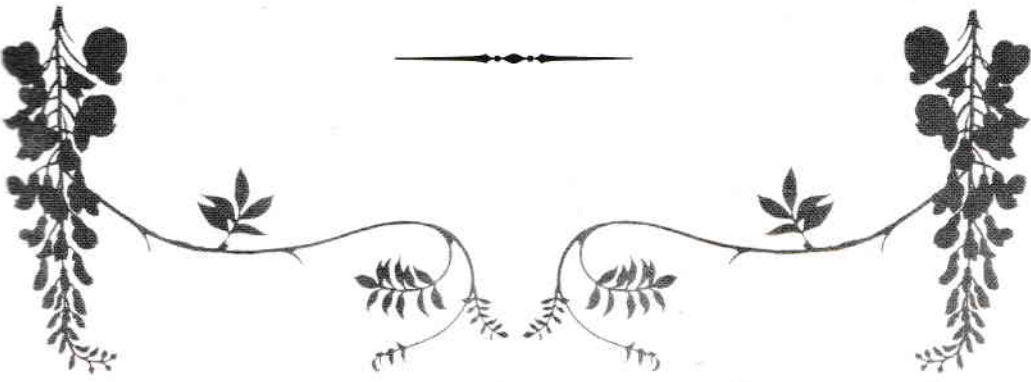
1. No magical persuasion will be used to influence nonplayers who directly relate to your clues.
2. Each player will have three chances to move to the next clue. Failure after the third means disqualification.
3. The punishment for disqualification will be determined by the game master, including but not limited to death.
4. The prize will be tailored to the individual winner. Everyone has something at stake.
5. Players have been personally selected by the game master.

*By agreeing to participate in the Game, you hereby bind yourself to its will until a winner is chosen.*

*Mark the below line with a drop of blood to activate the bonding spell.*

*Once activated, the Game will keep track of your progress, reporting directly to the King of Chaos.*

*Good luck.*





# ONE

MISS CAMILLA ANTONIUS had very little patience for fools, even handsome ones.

And Lord Philip Atticus Vexley—with his golden hair, tanned skin, and roguish grin—was among the finer specimens in both areas. Especially if he thought she'd create *another* forgery for him.

Which, as he swept into the art gallery just as the sun was setting—in his buffed riding boots, burgundy swallowtail jacket, and close-fitting camel breeches—Camilla knew was precisely the reason he'd come.

It was almost closing time, and the secretive glint in Vexley's eyes was most unwelcome; they were not friends or confidants. Nor were they lovers. In fact, if Camilla never saw him again, she'd host a soirée fit for the crown to celebrate her good fortune.

“Working on anything intriguing, Miss Antonius?”

“Just a landscape, Lord Vexley.”

It was not the truth, but Vexley didn't deserve to know that. Camilla's art was deeply personal to her, drawn from her mother's warnings, her father's stories, and her own loneliness, which helped her see the world as it truly was.

Her art was often her soul laid bare, a part of her she hesitated to share with just anyone.

Thankfully the easel faced away from the door and Vexley would need to walk around to view it. He rarely put such great effort into anything but his own scandalous reputation.

Camilla pushed the stool back from her easel and quickly abandoned her painting as she moved to the old oak desk that acted as the register *and* a wonderful partition to keep the irksome lord at bay.

“Was there anything I could assist you with, or are you simply admiring the art this evening?”

His attention dipped to her paint-splattered smock. She hadn’t removed it upon his arrival, and the slight pressing of his lips indicated that he wished she would.

“Don’t play coy, darling. You know why I’ve come.”

“As we’ve previously discussed, my lord, the debt has been paid. I’ve even secured a memory stone for you. All you have to do is feed that particular memory to it.”

Or so Camilla had been told by the dark-market dealer she’d purchased the alleged magical stone from. She hadn’t felt any buzz of magic, though that wasn’t exactly a surprise, all things considered. Still, Vexley refused to accept the stone.

He gave Camilla a bemused look as if her denying him something he wanted were more outrageous than a magical stone that could withdraw any memory he chose to give it.

Lord Vexley wasn’t quite a dandy, but he certainly spent money like one. He was the firstborn son of a viscount and as such had indulged in only the finest things for the whole of his spoiled thirty years.

Four years prior, after a rather scandalous theater incident that involved not one but two stage actresses and a very public display of drunken affection during what was now called “the intermission of infamy,” his father had cut him off from his inheritance and named his brother the heir instead, a bold move that should have shocked all of Waverly Green’s elite.

But much to his family’s surprise, Vexley’s antics hadn’t disgraced him in the slightest. If anything, he’d become something of a rascalion legend around the Green.

Society praised incorruptible morals above all, especially for women. But virtues never held the same appeal as sin. They weren’t as thrilling



to gossip about over tea, and no matter how prim and proper high society claimed to be, they all loved a good scandal, the more salacious, the better. Nothing in Waverly Green was ever as entertaining as watching someone's fall from grace.

Satire-sheet columnists often followed close on Vexley's heels now, desperate to be the first to report on his next potential scandal. Everyone knew he'd been disinherited, so the source of his income was a growing mystery most of the city wished to solve.

Vexley laughed it off, claiming he was a smart gambler and made wise investments, but people still whispered more nefarious stories about his growing fortune.

Some rumors claimed he'd made a deal with the devil, while others whispered about a bargain he'd struck with the Fae. Camilla alone knew the full truth.

Due to what she called the Great Mistake, *she* now unwittingly funded his extravagant lifestyle and placed herself in danger of being caught by the press.

The last painting Camilla had created and sold for him had almost been discovered as the fraud it was, and if the collector hadn't imbibed too many glasses of claret, then promptly relieved himself on a priceless sculpture, in front of the entire party of lords, ladies, and even a duke, thus causing *quite* the stir as the duchess fainted right onto the foul mess, Camilla's reputation would have been ruined.

A scandal of that magnitude would destroy her hard-won standing as Waverly Green's most sought-after art dealer. And the selfish scoundrel standing before her—with his damnably charming smile and freshly pressed suit—knew it and clearly couldn't care less.

"Honestly, Camilla darling—"

"Miss Antonius," she corrected primly.

Camilla's smile was nearly as tight as the grip on her paintbrush.

Vexley, or Vex the Hex, as she'd taken to calling him in her head, had been blackmailing her for that one horrid mistake she'd made eons ago, and—after they'd struck a bargain for his silence—he was *supposed* to

