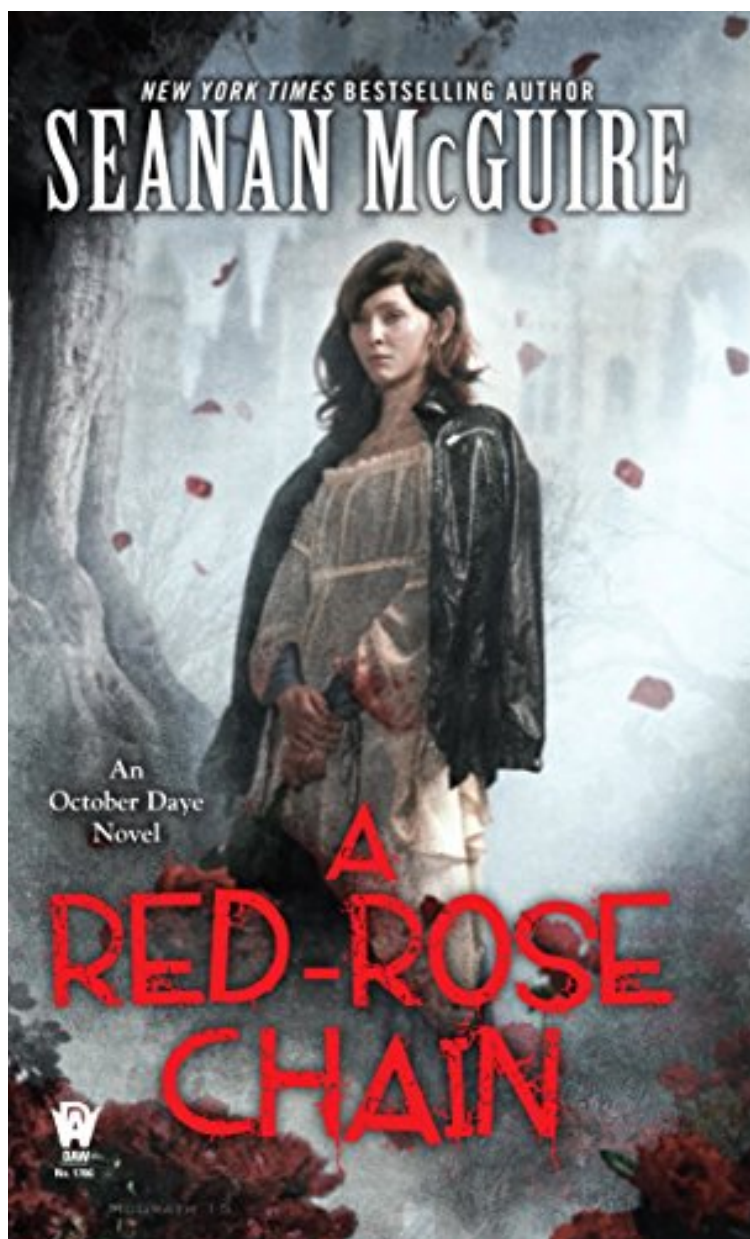


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## A Red-Rose Chain



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### Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurA Red Rose Chain is the ninth installment in Seanan McGuire's urban fantasy October 'Toby' Daye series.ExtraitPraise for the October Daye NovelsRosemary and Rue will surely appeal to readers who enjoy my books, or those of Patricia Briggs.Charlaine Harris, #1 New York Times bestselling authorMcGuire has never lacked for courage in her writing, and this eighth entry in the phenomenally inventive October Daye series showcases her narrative daring and ingenuity beautifully. By forcing Toby to question her own identity and loyalties, McGuire highlights what a truly strong character Toby has always

been, and what a remarkable heroine she has become. RT Book sThe plot is strong, the characterization is terrific, the tragedies hurt... and McGuire's usual beautiful writing and dark humor are present and accounted for. This has become one of my favorite urban fantasy series, and I can't wait to find out what happens next. FantasyLiterature.com An urban fantasy detective series featuring a resourceful female detective... [October Daye] should appeal to fans of Jim Butcher's Dresden Files as well as the novels of Charlaine Harris, Patricia Briggs, and similar authors. Library Journal Its fun watching [Toby] stick doggedly to the case as the killer picks off more victims and the tension mounts. LOCUS With Ashes of Honor, McGuire has crafted a deeply personal and intense story that will keep you on the edge, hoping to be pushed over. In my opinion, it is, hands down, the best Toby to date. The Ranting Dragon These books are like watching half a season of your favorite television series all at once.... More than anything else, it's the fun of it all that kept me returning to McGuire's books, and to this series, long after I've stopped reading other mainstream titles. SF Signal I love that Toby is a strong, independent yet still vulnerable heroine. I love that this is a world where people die, where consequences matter. I love the complex world-building and mythology. I love the almost film noir tone of the series. I love that each book leaves me wanting more. If you dig urban fantasy, this is one of the best out there. CC2K DAW Books presents the finest in urban fantasy from Seanan McGuire: InCryptid Novels: DISCOUNT ARMAGEDDON MIDNIGHT BLUE-LIGHT SPECIAL HALF-OFF RAGNAROK POCKET APOCALYPSE CHAOS CHOREOGRAPHY \* SPARROW HILL ROAD October Daye Novels: ROSEMARY AND RUEA LOCAL HABITATION AN ARTIFICIAL NIGHTLATE ECLIPSE ONE SALT SEA ASHES OF HONOR CHIMES AT MIDNIGHT THE WINTER LONGA RED-ROSE CHAIN \* Coming soon from DAW Books. Copyright 2015 by Seanan McGuire. All Rights Reserved. Cover art by Chris McGrath. Cover design by G-Force Design. Interior dingbat created by Tara O'Shea. DAW Book Collectors No. 1706. Published by DAW Books, Inc. 375 Hudson Street, New York, NY 10014 All characters and events in this book are fictitious. Any resemblance to persons living or dead is strictly coincidental. The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or via any other means without the permission of the publisher is illegal, and punishable by law. Please purchase only authorized electronic editions, and do not participate in or encourage the electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Your support of the authors rights is appreciated. Nearly all the designs and trade names in this book are registered trademarks. All that are still in commercial use are protected by United States and international trademark law. ISBN 978-1-101-60178-5 DAW TRADEMARK REGISTERED U.S. PAT. AND TM. OFF. AND FOREIGN COUNTRIES MARCA REGISTRADA HECHO EN U.S.A. For Brooke. I am so lucky to have you in my life. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS: Every new Toby book is an adventure for me as a writer just as much as it (hopefully) is for you as a reader. A Red-Rose Chain was a surprise from start to finish, and that's the best kind of book for me, as a writer. I learned things that excited me, and I'm so glad that you're still here. As always, there are people who need to be thanked. Thanks to the Machete Squad, for tireless support and editorial assistance, and to the entire team at DAW, without whose faith in me this book would not exist. Thanks to Talis, Teddy, and Amal, for hosting me at various spots around the United Kingdom while I finished this book, and to my entire Parisian crew, for not drowning me in the hot tub located in the basement of our Murder Palace. Thank you Vixy, for continuing to put up with me; Amy, for continuing to love me; and Shawn, for clicking on all those axolotl pictures I send you. Thanks to Patty, for understanding that sometimes I am just going to become God's problem, and to Robert and Rachel for emergency staffing duties. Sheila Gilbert remains the best of all possible editors, Diana Fox remains the best of all possible agents, and Chris McGrath remains the best of all possible cover artists. While we're on this track, my cats are the best of all possible cats. So are yours, if you have them. All hail the pit crew: Christopher Mangum, Tara O'Shea, and Kate Secor. My soundtrack while writing A Red-Rose Chain consisted mostly of Songs About Teeth, by Cake Bake Betty, Caffeine Big Dreams, by Kira Isabella, the soundtrack of Ghost Brothers of Darkland County, endless live concert recordings of the Counting Crows, and a really awesome playlist made for me by Amal. Any errors in this book are entirely my own. The errors that aren't here are the ones that all these people helped me fix. Welcome back. OCTOBER DAYE PRONUNCIATION GUIDE THROUGH A RED-ROSE CHAIN All pronunciations are given strictly phonetically. This only covers races explicitly named in the first nine books, omitting Undersea races not appearing or mentioned in book nine. Afanc: ah-fank. Plural is Afanc. Annwn: ah-noon. No plural exists. Bannick: ban-nick. Plural is Bannicks. Barghest: bar-guy-st. Plural is Barghests. Blodyn bryd: blow-din-brid. Plural is Blodyn bryds. Cait Sidhe: kay-th shee. Plural is Cait Sidhe. Candela: can-dee-la. Plural is Candela. Coblynau: cob-lee-now. Plural is Coblynau. Cu Sidhe: coo shee. Plural is Cu Sidhe. Daoine Sidhe:

doon-ya shee. Plural is Daoine Sidhe, diminutive is Daoine. Djinn: jin. Plural is Djinn. Dchas Sidhe: doe-sh-as shee. Plural is Dchas Sidhe. Ellyllon: el-lee-lawn. Plural is Ellyllons. Gean-Cannah: gee-ann can-na. Plural is Gean-Cannah. Glastig: glass-tig. Plural is Glastigs. Gwragen: guh-war-a-gen. Plural is Gwragen. Hamadryad: ha-ma-dry-add. Plural is Hamadryads. Hippocampus: hip-po-cam-pus. Plural is Hippocampi. Kelpie: kel-pee. Plural is Kelpies. Kitsune: kit-soo-nay. Plural is Kitsune. Lamia: lay-me-a. Plural is Lamia. The Luidaeg: the lou-sha-k. No plural exists. Manticore: man-tee-core. Plural is Manticores. Mauthe Doog: mwa-th doo-g. Plural is Mauthe Doog. Naiad: nigh-add. Plural is Naiads. Nixie: nix-ee. Plural is Nixen. Peri: pear-ee. Plural is Peri. Piskie: piss-key. Plural is Piskies. Puca: puh-ca. Plural is Pucas. Roane: row-n. Plural is Roane. Satyr: say-tur. Plural is Satyrs. Selkie: sell-key. Plural is Selkies. Shyi Shuai: shh-yee shh-why. Plural is Shyi Shuai. Silene: sigh-lean. Plural is Silene. Tuatha de Dannan: tootha day danan. Plural is Tuatha de Dannan, diminutive is Tuatha. Tylwyth Teg: till-with teeg. Plural is Tylwyth Teg, diminutive is Tylwyth. Urisk: you-risk. Plural is Urisk.

ONEMarch 11th, 2013 Thus he that overruled I overstayd, Leading him prisoner in a red-rose chain: Strong-tempered steel his stronger strength obeyd, Yet was he servile to my coy disdain. William Shakespeare, Venus and Adonis. SO HOW LONG ARE you and the kitty-cat plannin on doing this whole engagement thing? Danny punctuated his words with a sweep of one heavy hand. The motion neatly swatted the enormous black dog that had been leaping for my head out of the air, sending it crashing to the ground. It yelped. Danny pointed at it, saying sternly, Stay down, ya big mutt! Could we focus on the Mauthe Doog for right now, and talk about my engagement later? I asked, as I swung my sword at another of the shaggy canines. It dodged easily. They all had. I wasnt as good with a blade as Danny was with his hands, and in the end, I was just too slow. I dont want to be torn to shreds because youre planning floral arrangements! I would normally have felt bad about attacking dogs with swords. I like dogs. Most dogs arent feral teleporters the size of small ponies. Human animal rights groups have very different problems than fae ones. For one thing, most human animal rights groups dont have to worry as much about being eaten. Im just sayin, maybe you need to start talking about dates. Danny grabbed another dog by the tail, scolding, No. Bad. We dont eat people. The dog snarled and snapped at him, not quite managing to twist around enough to sink its teeth into his arm. That was a pity. Dannys a Bridge Troll, with the solid, concrete-like skin to prove it. If the dog had tried to take a bite out of him, it would have probably broken several teeth, and made itself a lot less dangerous to me. With most people, its unfair for me to expect them to play shield. I heal faster than anyone else Ive ever met, to the point where if I watch closely I can actually see my skin knitting back together and trust me, thats even more unnerving than it sounds. Danny is one of the few exceptions to this rule. Hes huge, imposing, and virtually indestructible. He heals slower than I do, but that doesnt matter, because theres almost nothing that can actually injure him. All of this makes him uniquely well-suited to being my partner when I have to do something ridiculously dangerous like, say, clearing out a pack of Mauthe Doog that should never have been roving the salt flats of Marin. Not that we were out there alone. My squire, Quentin Sollys, and my boyfriend-slash-fianc, Tybalt, were about fifty yards away, dealing with their own contingent of black dogs. Quentin had his sword, and was handling his share of the problem with a grace and finesse that I will probably never possess, even if I live to be a thousand although he hadnt managed to land a hit, either. The dogs were just too fast for something as clumsy as a sword. Tybalt was having better luck. He had shifted far enough into his feline mien that his hands had become heavy with claws and his mouth bristled with teeth, and he was taking out his share of the Mauthe Doog in the classic cat-meets-dog fashion. I could hear his feral snarls, and the dogs pained yelps, all the way down the beach. Mauthe Doog are native to a few small islands in Avalon, one of the deeper realms of Faerie. All the deeper realms were sealed by Oberon centuries ago, as part of the process of locking up the house and hiding the valuables before he went on an extended vacation, leaving his descendants to fend for ourselves. Most of the really dangerous monsters fell under the valuables category, and were shut off from the rest of us, leaving our asses unchewed and our pets uneaten. Unfortunately, there had been an incident about nine months ago involving an uncontrolled, overpowered teleporter named Chelsea Ames. Chelsea was strong enough to rip holes in those closed walls between the realms, leading to leakage from all the deep, dark places into the Summerlands, the last accessible Faerie country. Which also happened to be the one closest to the mortal world. Which meant that once something was there, it could easily wind up here. We managed to stop Chelsea before she could completely destabilize Faerie, leading to the loss of the Summerlands, or worse. That didnt do anything to stuff whatever had already managed to come through back into the places where it belonged. Sylvester, my currently semi-estranged liege lord, wound up adopting an Afanc, a docile lake creature big enough to squash cars. The local pixie tribes swelled

by a factor of five, and promptly began battling each other for territory, shrieking in hypersonic voices and stabbing each other with tiny poisoned spears. And those of us unlucky enough to be on-call as knights errant or heroes of the realm got to spend a lot of time playing mediator between the warring swarms. Guess what I do for a living. Lucky me. Toby, watch your back! Danny's shout caused me to whip around, sword raised defensively. The leaping Mauthe Doog rebounded off the blade with a yelp, leaving a smear of red-black blood behind. The fae dog retreated a few steps, alternately whining and growling. I stared in surprise at the blood on the blade. It smelled like hot copper and distant fens, a rich, boggy smell that was as familiar as it was foreign. They had been moving too fast before for me to draw blood. Danny had been doing a lot of damage, but it had all been blunt force trauma. Not much blood in that sort of fight. Danny, cover me, I said, and brought the sword to my mouth. You're not gonna aw, shit, you are. That's gross, grumbled the Bridge Troll, and moved to shield me from the remaining dogs as I licked the blood from the side of my sword. Faerie is a funny place. There are hundreds of different types of fae, all descended from the First Three: Oberon, Maeve, and Titania. We can look different enough from one another that it's impossible to believe we could be related, much less share the same origin, but it's true. And all of us have our own special talents to help us survive. Some are shapeshifters, like Tybalt. Others are built to last, like Danny. The rest of us have to depend on subtler magic. Like blood. My kind of fae, the Dchas Sidhe, are the best blood-workers of all. The fact that I'm a changeling part human, part fae, although the fae part of me is getting stronger all the time, at the inevitable expense of my humanity has never been enough to keep me from accessing the magic my lineage is heir to, even when I would have been better off leaving that magic alone. The fact that I hate the sight of blood is neither here nor there. If anything, it's proof that the universe has a sense of humor. The Mauthe Doogs blood was tart and faintly bitter, like it had been tainted by some unknown substance. I closed my eyes as I swallowed, trying to find something anything that would tell me what the dogs wanted, or how to make them stop attacking joggers and eating people's housecats. Instead, I found my own face, distorted by the Mauthe Doogs fear until it became the visage of a monster. Danny loomed behind me in the red blood haze of memory, a walking mountain that dealt out death with every blow. They're terrified, I said distantly, only barely aware that my lips were moving. I swallowed hard, trying to chase away the shreds of blood memory. A faint headache was growing in my temples, warning me that I was pushing the limits of my powers again. Blood magic is hard on a body harder, it seems, than regenerating most of my skin, or repeatedly healing broken bones. Louder, I repeated, They're terrified! What? The low rumble of Danny's voice pulled me all the way back into the present. I opened my eyes and dropped my sword in the same motion. The sound of the blade hitting the ground seemed louder than it was. Even Tybalt stopped his snarling, head whipping around as he stared in my direction. His ears were better than mine under the best of circumstances, and in his partially-transformed state, his hearing would be especially sharp. That was a good thing. I didn't want to yell. They're scared, I said, lowering myself to a crouch. The three Mauthe Doog who were in any shape to fight watched me warily, but didn't attack. I think they were just relieved that I wasn't holding a sword anymore. We've been acting like they were animals because they're not shapeshifters, and that was sort of right: they are animals. They're monsters. The Law doesn't protect them, because they can't claim its protection. But they're not dumb animals, and they're not attacking people out of malice. They're doing it because they're scared out of their minds. What do you mean? rumbled Danny. Imagine going from one of the deep realms a place where there's never been an Industrial Revolution, no people, no pollution, no cars to modern-day Marin in the blink of an eye, just because you were standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. I extended my hand toward the nearest Mauthe Doog, fighting not to let my nervousness show. I could probably grow back any fingers the big dog decided to bite off. Probably. I'd never actually experimented with regenerating limbs before, and this would be a lousy way to find out where the limits of my healing powers were. So you're sayin that these are somebody's pets? Danny actually sounded halfway excited now. He had a big heart to go with his big body and given that he was almost eight feet tall, that meant he had a lot of heart. He also ran the only Barghest Rescue Society in existence. He was supposedly trying to find homes for all his semi-canine, scorpion-tailed monstrosities, but since most Bridge Trolls didn't live in houses with backyards and everyone who isn't a Bridge Troll has issues with venomous pets, he hadn't managed to adopt one out in the whole time that he'd been keeping them. I wasn't sure he really wanted to anymore. I'm saying they used to be, a long time ago, before we went away and left them all alone. Sometimes I questioned Oberon's wisdom in sealing the deeper realms. Yeah, he kept the kids away from the guns and liquor, proverbially speaking, but he'd also kept them away from their quiet spaces and favorite toys. More, he'd locked them out while locking their companion animals in. Even fae creatures can live

forever, under the right circumstances. How long could an abandoned fae dog wait for its master before it decided to turn loneliness into rage? I turned my attention to the injured Mauthe Doog. Hi, I said, as gently as I could. Im sorry we hurt you. You scared us. Danny snorted. They did moren scare us. Danny, hush, I hissed but he was right. Queen Arden Windermere in the Mists had asked me to gather my friends and take care of the Mauthe Doog problem in Marin after the third mortal jogger had come staggering back to his car raving about disappearing dogs with teeth like daggers. The fact that hed been lucky to encounter the Mauthe Doog instead of something nastier theyre not the only breed of fae dog, and some of their cousins are venomous probably didnt occur to him. Hed been so focused on convincing people that he wasnt crazy that hed actually managed to stammer his story to a local newscaster before he was whisked off to a hospital. Arden had called me immediately. I was a hero of the realm, after all, which made this my problem, whether I wanted it to be or not. I had turned around and called for backup. Which is maybe not a very heroic thing to do, but is definitely the sensible thing to do, and if theres one thing my friends and allies have been pounding into my head for the last four years, its the need for support when Im going into a dangerous situation. Some people call it personal growth. I call it the slowly dawning understanding that I enjoy being alive, and that its easier to stay that way when I have people to help me. The Mauthe Doog was still watching me warily, its ears pressed down flat against its head. All of them were about the size of healthy Rottweilers, but with thick, shaggy black coats that would have looked more at home on a Muppet. The other two had fallen back farther, whining in confusion. At least they werent attacking us anymore. Tybalt, I know you can hear me, since youre all kitty-kitty right now, I said, raising my voice only slightly. I didnt want to scare the Mauthe Doog again if I could help it. I want you to start falling back toward me. Bring Quentin along. Defend yourselves if you have to, but stop attacking. Dont make any aggressive moves. I paused before adding, Trust me. It was probably a good thing I couldnt hear whatever Tybalt said in response to my instructions, since it was almost certainly profane and laced with comments about my intelligence, or lack thereof. Tybalt has been just about everything I could ask for in a lover, which is why I agreed to marry him when he asked, but he doesnt like my habit of charging headlong into danger when there are people he likes less who could be doing it in my place. Its hard to argue with that sort of logic. The Mauthe Doog slunk closer to my outstretched hand, its head hanging low and its ears slanted forward. I didnt know enough about dogs to know whether that was a good sign. Dogs. That was it. Tybalt was a King of Cats, which was all well and good, but wasnt going to help calm a bunch of fae dogs. Luckily, Tybalt wasnt our only option. Do you remember the Cu Sidhe? I asked the Mauthe Doog. Its ears seemed to prick up a bit. I decided to take that as a good sign, and kept talking. Theyre here, with us. Youre on Earth now, on the other side of the Summerlands. Thats why things are so strange here. But we can help you get back to the Summerlands, to the Cu Sidhe. You dont have to be alone anymore. What we couldnt do was help them get back to Avalon. Those doors were sealed, and had been since we stopped Chelsea from her panicked flight through Faerie. She couldnt teleport at all right now, thanks to an alchemical potion that had blocked her powers, and was going to keep blocking them until a year had passed. When it wore off and it would wear off soon; she only had about three months to go she would have a normal Tuatha de Dannans limitations. No more shredding the fabric of Faerie for Chelsea, and no way home for the Mauthe Doog. The Mauthe Doog closest to me whined. I heard footsteps approaching from behind me. Experience told me that they belonged to Quentin, not Tybalt. My squire might have the grace and elegance of a pureblooded Daoine Sidhe, but Cait Sidhe are in a league of their own when it comes to sneaking up on people. The day Tybalt did something as common as stomp would be the day he turned in his proverbial whiskers. These are my friends, I said, gesturing toward the sound of footsteps and hoping that the gesture would encompass all three of the guys. Were all sorry we fought with you. We didnt know. Im not sorry, said Quentin. One of them tried to take my throat away from me. With its teeth. Im not you. I need my throat. Whine about missing body parts later, talk nicely to the poor confused doggies now, I said, keeping my eyes on the Mauthe Doog. This is one of those moments when I could really use Etiennes powers back in working order. Danny, call Muir Woods. Tell Arden we need a door from here to there, and tell her that Madden needs to be waiting on the other side. I think attacking the Queen with a bunch of monster dogs is treason, Toby, said Quentin, starting to sound concerned. Good for me, I havent committed treason against this monarch yet. Im trying to complete the set. Danny? On it, rumbled the Bridge Troll, and moved away, his steps thudding against the ground like tiny boulders falling. I stayed where I was, keeping my hand stretched out toward the dogs and making quiet, soothing noises. More Mauthe Doog slunk around us to join the three Id started with, forming a pack of wary canines. There were seven of them, all told; I didnt know how many wed killed, or how many of them had teleported away and

were now making their way back to check on their pack mates. I've never really been much of a dog person. The smell of blackberry flowers and redwood bark drifted over me, out of place this close to the water. I twisted to look over my shoulder. Arden was standing behind me and not behind me at the same time, since there was no rational way of folding geography that put Muir Woods behind the Marin salt flats.

A glimmering circle in the air marked the division between her location and ours. What in the world she began. I cut her off. Is Madden there? Its good to be on speaking terms with the Queen: it makes rudeness a little easier to forgive. But only a little. I had to be careful not to push it. Arden frowned, apparently not used to people interrupting her anymore. I was definitely pushing it. All she said was, Yes, hes here.

Madden? Coming! The voice was followed by a large, shaggy man in jeans and a black T-shirt with the Borderlands Caf logo on the front appearing in the frame of Ardens portal. He would have looked completely out of place next to Arden, with her perfectly groomed hair and the dress that could have been lifted straight from the Italian Renaissance, if not for the red streaks in his otherwise snow-white hair and the wolfish gold of his eyes. Madden looked mostly human, but the parts of him that werent human were pure canine. Hi, Toby! Hi, Tobys friends! Hi, Madden, I said. Can you step through for a second? I have some folks here who really want to meet you. All right, said Madden amiably, and bounced through the portal.

Then he stopped, staring at the Mauthe Doog with open-faced delight. Hey! Cousins! The Mauthe Doog perked up instantly, their ears going straight and their shaggy black tails beginning to wag. I straightened up and stepped back as Madden stepped forward. That seemed to be their cue: the Mauthe Doog who werent too injured to jump began jumping all over him, dancing up onto their hind legs to make it easier. Those who were too injured pressed themselves against his calves and ankles, sighing heavily, the tension going out of their bodies. I turned to the portal. Theyre not monsters, Your Highness; they were attacking people because they were scared and confused. But they come from the same realm as the Cu Sidhe, so once I realized they werent actually hostile, I figured Madden was the answer. You didnt tell me they were Mauthe Doog, Arden,

said Madden, sounding hurt. I glanced back to find him standing behind me, one of the injured canines cradled in his arms. It had its neck bent at an improbable angle, and was calmly licking the underside of his chin. I wouldve said they were good dogs, if youd told me. I didnt know, said Arden. All the reports we had said shaggy black canines, but they werent specific enough to let us figure out what kind of fae dog we were dealing with. Theyre good dogs, said Madden. He turned to me. Theyll come with me now. If thats okay with you. I can call my brothers and sisters, and theyll come to Muir Woods to get the Mauthe Doog that were

here and take them back to the house before we come back and start looking for the rest. Any that are missing, well find, once the pack trusts us. Cu Sidhe like to live in large family groups, almost like packs, but without the social posturing and structure that humans have tried to assign to the word. They just want to be with other dogs. I could understand that. Its nice to be around people who understand you. Sure, Madden, I said. Do you need us to help you carry them? Theres only two who dont feel like they can walk so good, and I can get them, he said. Arden, can you hold the door? For you, the world, she said, with a faint smile. Arden and Madden had been friends since long before she had come back to Faerie and allowed herself to become a Queen. Their relationship wasnt romantic, and that was probably a good thing; she needed a friend more than she needed a lover. I knew what that was like. Sir Daye, Im going to need you and your people to come by the knowe to give me a full report. Shall I see you tonight? As soon as we finish cleaning up here, I said.

None of us had physical magic, but we could kick away the footprints in the sand and bury the blood, making it look like the salt flats had been invaded by a bunch of kids playing soccer or something, not a group of heavily armed fae having a pitched battle with supernatural dogs. That, too, was part of my job. The

human world and Faerie were separate for a reason, and I had to help hold that line. Can I come visit the doggies? asked Danny, looking at Madden. Madden smiled. We will welcome you, he said. He stooped to lift the second badly injured Mauthe Doog onto his shoulder, and then he stepped through the portal. The rest of the black dogs flowed through at his feet, vanishing from the salt flats and reappearing in the shadows of Muir Woods. Arden looked briefly nonplussed. Then the last dog was through, and she lowered her hand, closing the portal. Danny, Quentin, Tybalt, and I stood alone on the sand in silence for a few moments. Two

dead Mauthe Doog lay further down the beach, their necks broken, the blood running from their open mouths tinting the ground where they had fallen. The night-haunts would come for their bodies soon enough; we just needed to take care of the tracks. Quentin spoke first. So this was fun. Yeah, I said. We should do this every week, he said. I will drown you in the ocean and send your parents a very nice card to tell them how sorry I am, I said. Be sure you include a gift card for Tim Hortons, he said. Thats how we say sorry for killing your firstborn son in Canada. I laughed. So did Quentin. Tybalt just snorted, while Danny looked

confused. All in all, it was a pretty normal night for us, and the fact that we had to clean up our own mess just continued the theme. All right, boys, lets kick some sand around before we go to visit the Queen, I said, and sheathed my sword. A heros work was never done. TWOFAE TEND TO BE nocturnal by nature. Thats probably the only thing thats really protecting us from being discovered or rather, rediscovered by humanity.

We used to show ourselves a lot more, which explains all those fairy tales and folk stories and popular ballads about the merry, merry greenwood ho. We also used to steal livestock and borrow human women to raise our children. And we used to find ourselves burnt and stabbed and killed with iron on a regular basis, because while our worlds may have been meant to coexist, they were never intended to do it peacefully. So yes, not being chased by angry mobs is a benefit of the nocturnal lifestyle. The other nice thing about it is the people, or rather, the lack thereof. We didnt bother spinning human disguises for ourselves before we got in the car: there was no one around to see us. The normally ninety-minute drive from Marin to Muir Woods only took about an hour. Quentin spent the whole time complaining about the fact that I wouldnt let him change the radio, while Tybalt spent it staring through the windshield, fingers clenched white-knuckled against the dash. It should probably have been reassuring that there was something that scared him, apart from my tendency to rush headlong into certain doom. Instead, Tybalts reaction to cars just reminded me of how much older he was than me, and left me feeling uneasy and off-balance. Danny had left us in the parking lot in Marin where Id stowed my car and hed stowed his cab. Its not that I dont like the new Queen an all, but every time I go with you to visit royalty, somebody winds up dead or exiled or whatever, hed said, with disturbingly accurate logic. I figure if I just go on home, you wont have to worry about it. Ill call you later, Id promised, and endured his clumsily patting me on the shoulder before he turned and lumbered back to his cab. Bridge Trolls cant be physically demonstrative with most denizens of Faerie. Theres too much of a chance that theyll accidentally break us. There were no cars visible in the parking lot at Muir Woods when we arrived. There could have been anything from junkers to horse-drawn carriages hidden under illusions and complicated dont-look-here spells, but since most of those also come with mild aversions and please dont park on top of me suggestions, I didnt worry overly much as I steered my car into a parking space and killed the engine. All right, everybody out, I said. Tybalt didnt have to be told twice. He practically kicked his door open, retreating to the edge of the parking lot while he waited for me and Quentin to follow him.

Quentin snickered, but there was no malice in the sound. He was just amused, and he knew he was safe enough that he could get away with expressing it. It felt good to know he was that relaxed. Not many Crown Princes get to grow up feeling like theyre allowed to be happy. Not in Faerie, anyway. The thought reminded me of something. I glanced at Quentin as we got out of the car and walked toward Tybalt. Hey, I said. Dont you have a birthday coming up? Ill be eighteen on Lughnasa, he said. Is there anything you wanted to do for your birthday this year? Eighteens a pretty big deal. We could have a party. May loves parties. Eighteens a big deal for humans, maybe, said Quentin. He grinned, the light from the lamps around the parking lot throwing gold highlights off his dark bronze hair. Hed looked like a dandelion when we first met, all pale yellow fluff with no real substance. Now he was taller than I was, and finally starting to fill out. It was unnerving. My squire wasnt supposed to grow up. Ask me again when I come of age. So we hold off on the grand bacchanal until you turn thirty. Got it. I looked back to Tybalt, allowing my face to relax into a wide, only slightly mocking smile. You know, youre going to have to get used to riding in cars eventually. Im never going to learn how to teleport, and that means Im going to keep driving everywhere. Must you taunt me so cruelly? Tybalt asked. Yes, I must, I said, and offered him my hand. He took it, tucking it gently into the crook of his arm. It was an old-fashioned way to walk, but it made him happy, and I was all in favor of things that made Tybalt happy. He shook his head, still feigning offense at my comments about the car, and started walking toward the woods. Quentin followed close behind us, for once not ranging wildly ahead. Fighting a bunch of disoriented fae dogs and cleaning up the signs of the struggle had tired him out, at least for the moment. Knowing Quentin, he would bounce back soon. In the meantime, I got to keep everyone where I could see them. The trees loomed around us like sentinels, filled with dancing lights as pixies soared from tree to tree and Will o Wisps danced above the water. I wondered idly what the human rangers who ostensibly controlled the park thought of the changes that had occurred over the course of the past seven months. Knowes better known as hollow hills in the human world, which has had a long time to forget the proper names for fae things have a tendency to weaken the walls between the Summerlands and the mortal worlds when they stand open. Not to the point where monsters can slip easily through, but in more of a pixies in the backyard, strange whispers in the water, Dryads in the trees sort of way. Fae communities grow up around them, because we know were safe there. We can always run for the Summerlands if things turn

sour. Up until seven months ago, no one knew that there was still a knowe in Muir Woods. I'd known that there had been a knowe there, once upon a time, but I had assumed it was one of the lost ones, so old and so weakened that it had become nothing more than a shallow scrape in the space between worlds. It turned out the knowe was perfectly healthy and structurally sound. It was just waiting for its actual owner to come back and give it permission to open. Enter Arden Windermere, daughter of Gilad Windermere, rightful Queen in the Mists. She had been in hiding since before I was born, choosing safety and obscurity over the dangers inherent in taking the throne. We would never have found her if the woman who'd been holding the throne of the Mists hadn't been a psycho bitch who decided to banish me from the Kingdom for the crime of asking her to stop selling drugs that killed changelings. That didn't sit well with me, or with my allies, and we'd ended up asking some pointed questions about how a woman with no Tuatha blood could be the rightful heir of a Tuatha de Dannan king. One thing led to another, and we'd managed to find Arden, talked her into retaking her Kingdom, and brought her back to the knowe that had been patiently waiting for more than a century for her to come home. We walked down the carefully-maintained paths through the flat part of the park, across streams and over tiny ponds that still made my skin crawl if I looked at them too closely. I don't like water much, and I don't like pools of standing water at all, and I began to climb the hiking trail that wound its slow way up the side of the hill. Tybalt let go of my arm as the path narrowed, taking up a position directly behind me. He'd learned the hard way that if he let me out of his sight when we were checking in with the nobility, I'd probably find a way to dump myself in a mud puddle, cover myself in blood, or otherwise render myself completely unpresentable. To be fair, I never did it on purpose. It was just a talent of mine. The path leveled off, and we stepped into the small clearing that preceded the entry to Arden's knowe. The doors in the big redwood that served as the knowe's tie to the mortal world stood open, like they were welcoming us home. Many knowes require complicated rituals or motions to get in. Not this one. This was the royal seat of the Mists, and its doors were never closed to the people of the Kingdom. The pixies clustered in the trees here so thickly that they illuminated the area like so many pastel Christmas lights. Guards in Arden's livery stood to either side of the doors. I waved. One of them, a diminutive Glastig with hair the color of walnut shell, waved back. Evening, October. Quentin. Your Highness. She bobbed her head to Tybalt, which was as close as any member of the Divided Courts would come to bowing to a Cait Sidhe. The fact that she called him by his title at all said a great deal about relations between Arden's Court and the Court of Cats. The Queen's expecting you, and said that we were to send you right on in when you arrived. Evening, Lowri, I said, with a quick smile. It was safe for Arden's guards to stand outside like this: given the strength of the illusions hiding the knowe, they were probably rendered invisible to searching eyes just through proximity. Where did Madden go with the Mauthe Doog? You mean the big black dogs that pop in and out of view like bad special effects? asked Lowri, her faint Welsh accent making the question sound even more surreal than it probably should have. The other guard, Coblynau, I didn't know by name, put a hand over his mouth, concealing a smile. Those are the ones, I confirmed. He took them home to meet his siblings, said Lowri. Said some of them need proper medical care that's based on dogs, not on people. He looked awfully sad about it, too, and said that if you asked, we were to tell you he didn't blame you, since you didn't know any better. I winced. There was something especially unsettling about being chastised, even secondhand, by someone who was essentially a dog. The Cu Sidhe liked to cultivate a simpler way of life, eschewing the complexities of fae politics and human manners. That doesn't mean they're rude or stupid: Madden couldn't have been Arden's seneschal if he wasn't a smart guy. It just means they don't hold grudges or go on vendettas, or host dinner parties that require knowing when to use multiple forks. We shall make it up to him later, said Tybalt. Yes, we will, I said. Is Arden inside? Lowri wrinkled her nose at the informality, which was funny, considering that when we'd met, Lowri had been working in the private guard of the false Queen, who had called Arden things that were far worse than her actual name. As she said to send you in, I believe that is a fair guess, yes. Cool. See you in a bit. I waved to the other guard and walked inside, with Quentin and Tybalt following. Arden's knowe was a redwood wonderland, perfectly suited to the woods outside. The floor and walls in the entry hall were all paneled in the stuff, and the smell of it suffused the air. Elaborate carved panels on the walls sketched out the history of the Kingdom of the Mists all the way up to the present day, and while new panels seemed to have been added every time we came to visit, none of the old panels seemed to have disappeared. I made a mental note to ask Arden whether the hall was getting longer, or whether it just somehow knew which panels it was safe to hide when I was looking. Either option seemed reasonable. The knowes are alive, and while they may not think like people do, they have opinions about things, and will generally do what they feel best. The hallway led out on the throne room, where Arden was sitting on her

throne, wearing the same purple-and-silver velvet gown that Id seen through her teleport window, playing with her mobile phone. She looked up at the sound of our footsteps. Then she smiled and unfolded herself from her seat, standing. Hey. Did you have any trouble getting here?None, I reported.Cool, she said, and tossed her phone onto the cushion on her throne.Arden Windermere might not sound much like a queen, but she certainly looked the part, especially these days, now that she had a proper staff of handmaids and clothiers to help her present the appropriate image to her people. She was tall, slim, and elegant in her carriage, standing a few inches taller than Tybalt, who was in turn a few inches taller than me. Her purple-black hair was pulled into a high chignon, secured with loops of amethyst, and her jewelry was all silver, accenting the vibrant colors of her mismatched eyes: one vivid blue, the other liquid mercury. She could easily have walked among the kings and queens of our past, as long as she kept her mouth closed. Not that Im one to criticize the speech of others, but when Arden talked, it was more Haight Street than High Court.Maybe that was a good thing. A lot of the problems faced by the fae nobility come from the collisions between our world and the human world. Arden had spent most of her life in the human world. While she wasnt going to broker a lasting peace or anything, she at least understood what I and her other changeling vassals were talking about when we brought human problems to her attention.Now that she was standing, it was time to observe the niceties. I curtsied, dipping as low as practice and training allowed. Quentin bowed with equal depth and solemnity. Tybalt inclined his head, but otherwise stayed upright. That wasnt as disrespectful as it looked. As a King of Cats, he was technically Ardens equal, and it would have been inappropriate for him to bow to her. He was already showing her a great honor by following the rules of her knowe, and not insisting that she treat him as visiting royalty.Quentin was also visiting royalty, being the Crown Prince of the Westlands and all, but that wasnt something we talked about much. Arden knewHigh King Aethlin and High Queen Maida had been the ones who came and validated her claim to the throne of the Mistsbut as Quentin was technically untitled while he was in fosterage, she didnt let it affect her reactions to him. Quentins rank was secret from most of Faerie, and it needed to stay that way if he was going to stay safe.You may rise, said Arden, sounding faintly bemused, like she still didnt understand the point of all this bowing. At least she wasnt trying to make us stop anymore. Centuries of training dont die out that quickly.Lowri told us Madden took the Mauthe Doog home, I said, as I straightened. Will he be back tonight? Id like to apologize for not realizing what was going on quicker.He should be, said Arden. You did well tonight. The Mists appreciate your service.There are some pretty strong taboos in Faerie against saying the words thank you, which has made us all incredibly good at talking our way around our gratitude. It was sort of fun, in a big angry black dogs trying to kill us kind of way. Im just sorry we didnt figure out that they werent hostile sooner. We could have saved the rest of them. As it stands, I dont know whether any managed to teleport away.Madden will look for them, said Arden. How many died?Two, said Quentin. It might be a good idea to tell Madden to go back over there before tomorrow night, to make sure none of them were wounded and went to ground. But I dont think any of them were. They were all pretty dedicated to attacking us.I listened for the sound of pups hidden in the high grass, added Tybalt. No such sounds came to me. I believe we found them all.Thats good, said Arden. They were becoming a nuisance.They just needed someone to tell them they werent alone, I said. That wasnt an uncommon situation, in Faerie. For every Court like Ardens, which welcomed changelings and shapeshifters as well as the more courtly members of the fae, there were three Courts like the former Queens. She had run a very formal house. No changelings unless they were servants; no shapeshifters, because she didnt allow animals around her nice things. The Mists had been losing good people since that woman took the throne, driven away by her insistence on a form of courtliness that had no bearing on the modern world. Arden was starting to get some of those people back, but it was going to take a long time before the Kingdom had fully recovered.Theyre not alone now, Arden said. Madden and his family will take good care of them until we can figure out a permanent placeand Mauthe Doog used to be popular companions among the Tuatha de Dannan. I may be able to settle them here at my Court, depending on how well they remember their time with my people.That would be excellent, I said. Tybalt made a face. I laughed and elbowed him lightly in the side. Dont worry, Im not going to get a puppy.I should certainly hope not, he said stiffly.Actually, while youre both here, there was something I was hoping to talk to you about.Ardens words were casual, but if there was one thing Id learned in my years of dealing with the nobility, it was that nothing that included the phrase I was hoping to talk to you was ever as casual as it seemed. Tybalt and I exchanged a look. Quentin winced, looking wary.She was my Queen. Tybalt belonged to a different political structure and Quentin was going to outrank her someday. Swallowing my sigh, I turned to face her, and said, Yes, Your Highness?To

my surprise, Arden groaned. You know, sometimes being the Queen isnt all its cracked up to be. I dont want to give you an order or send you on a quest or make your lives harder, I swear. I just want to ask you a favor, and have you really think about it before you answer either way. I dont want you to say yes and hate me, and I dont want you to say no before youve heard me out. All right? All right, I said, more slowly. Whats up? I would like you to consider choosing Muir Woods as the site of your wedding, said Arden. I stared at her. Tybalt stared at her. Arden reddened. I know, I know, we need a better name for this place, but I feel silly saying the Court of Windermere, which is what my father called it, and I cant go the easy route and call it Mists, because this whole Kingdom is the Mists and right, sorry. Babbling. I dont do it often, but when I do, I can win valuable prizes. Arden shook her head. Look. October, youre a hero of the realm. You mean something to people around here. Yeah, I mean theyre about to get in trouble, I said. Arden ignored me. That was probably a good choice on her part. And Tybalt, youre a King of Cats. Do you know how long its been since a titled member of the Divided Courts has married into the Court of Cats? Its incredibly unifying, and that makes it incredibly important. I know you were probably considering Shadowed Hills for the ceremony, but Id like you to please give some serious thought to doing it here. Apparently taking our stunned silence for criticism, she put her hands up in what was probably meant to be a reassuring stance. I promise you, we have the space you havent seen the entire knowe. I havent seen the entire knowe. The more we clean it out, the more rooms we find. The staff here is superb, and theyre itching for more opportunities to prove themselves. The Yule Ball went off without a hitch, in part because my staff was so eager to show off how amazing they can be. Yes, but that was a ball, I said, choosing my words carefully. We sort of have road maps for those things. Like, we know where to put the refreshment table, what kind of band to hire, and how many guests were expected to invite. Our wedding is a whole different can of worms. And complicated as hell, for many of the reasons Arden had already mentioned. Tybalt being royalty meant we were at risk of having it turn into a state wedding, which could result in six hundred guests, a cake the size of a small car, and me spending what should have been the happiest day of my life hyperventilating in a closet. I dont like big parties. The idea of being the center of one... thanks, but no thanks. I know, said Arden. I just want you to think about it, all right? Like I said, I know Shadowed Hills is your first choice, but I think you could be really happy here. We will consider your most generous offer, said Tybalt, before I could say anything I was going to regret. I shot him a grateful look. He inclined his chin, very slightly, and said nothing. Shadowed Hills is the Duchy Im sworn to serve, and my oaths are held by Duke Sylvester Torquill, who has been a part of my life for as long as I can remember. He was the one who gave me the Changelings Choice, back when I was seven years old and still standing balanced on the knives edge between the fae and mortal worlds. He was the first pureblood to take a chance on me, allowing me into his court and even making sure I got knighted when I earned it. For years, he was the closest thing I had to a father. I still loved him like one. I couldnt stop. Not even when it turned out hed been lying to me the whole time, and that hed been taking care of me in part because his brother had been married to my mother since before I was born, which technically made Simon my stepfather. Simon Torquill was also the man whod kidnapped Sylvesters wife and daughter, and turned me into a fish for fourteen years, effectively destroying my relationship with my own daughter. Why hadnt Sylvester told me any of this? Because he had promised my mother that he wouldnt. He had put his promise to a woman who had all but abandoned me ahead of his relationship with me, and he wouldnt or couldnt give me a good reason why. I hadnt spoken to Sylvester in three months. As far as I was aware, he still didnt know Tybalt and I were engaged, and I was happy to keep it that way. I dont trust easily. Abuse that trust, and I dont see why I should keep giving it to you. Sylvester had more credit with me than most people had been building it for decades and I loved him very much. Probably always would. I just needed some time before Id be able to deal with him again. Arden smiled, looking relieved that she hadnt just been shot down cold. Excellent. Is there anything else I can do for you tonight? The kitchens still open, if youre hungry after all your hard work. I could eat, said Quentin. October would greatly appreciate a sandwich, said Tybalt. Or perhaps a banquet that you happen to have lying around going uneaten. I shot him a mock-glare. Stop trying to feed me. Stop trying to starve yourself to death for no apparent reason, and I will consider it, he replied. Arden laughed. Well, since you put it that way she began. A commotion from the entryway cut her off. Arden turned, amusement giving way to confusion and then alarm. The rest of us turned to follow the direction of her gaze. Lowri and the other guard from the entryway staggered into view, bent under the weight of the big red-and-whitehaired figure they held between them. Madden was limp, his feet dragging behind him like a dead mans. Madden! cried Arden, shoving me out of the way as she flung herself across the throne room to reach her seneschal. She grabbed his head, lifting it so that she could stare into his face. His

eyes were closed, and if he felt her hands against his skin, he didnt react to them. He didnt react at all.

Madden? Wake up!He was dropped through a portal into the clearing, Highness, said Lowri. Her voice shook as she spoke, her accent growing stronger in her dismay. Whoever left him for us, their magic came and went too quickly. We didnt have time to recognize it.Why wont he wake up? moaned Arden. She didnt look like a Queen in that moment: she looked like an ordinary woman, on the verge of a breakdown over the thought that her best and oldest friend had been hurt. Madden, please. Please wake up, Madden, please.He wont, said Tybalt. He strode over to Arden, pushing her aside as he bent to pull Maddens jacket open.

Quentin and I followed him, although we didnt touch Arden. He could get away with a certain amount of manhandling the Queen, since she had no authority over him. Quentin and I werent so lucky. Arden was our friend and all, but that wouldnt stop her from getting pissed if we touched her while she was already distraught.Tybalt felt around inside Maddens jacket, Arden looking on in wide-eyed dismay, until he hissed with displeasure and pulled out a short, almost stubby-looking arrow. The tip was damp with blood, but only the tip; the arrow had done little more than scratch Maddens skin, based on how much blood was there. The

smell of it hit me as I was walking toward him. I gasped, clapping a hand over my mouth.Blood knows everything. Blood is where memory is stored, and where magic lives... and when someone is poisoned or enchanted, the blood knows that, too.As I suspected, said Tybalt sadly. He turned the arrow in his hand, careful to avoid the point. The shaft was fletched in deep pine green and silverthe same shade of silver that appeared on the arms of the Kingdom of the Mists, in fact. That was odd. There are only so many colors in the world. Some duplication is unavoidable, but people mostly try to avoid using the colors that have been claimed by neighboring Kingdoms when they can possibly help it. Theres just too much chance of winding up with an angry monarch on your tail, questioning your fashion choices.Elf-shot, I said, voice muffled by my fingers.Ardens face, which had been teetering on the edge of despair, crumbled. It was like watching a bottomless pit open in what had been a perfectly happy woman. What? she asked, eyes flicking to me. No. It cant be elf-shot. No. Im... I am the queen. I became queen so that my people would be safe. Madden is my people. Hes my best people. I mean, hes my best friend. He cant be elf-shot. I wont allow it. Her voice broke

on the last word, and my heart felt like it broke a little too, in sympathy.Elf-shot is either one of Faeries crueller weapons or one of Faeries kinder weapons, depending on how you look at it, and how you feel about hundred-year naps. It allows the purebloods to wage war without killing each other, since killing a pureblood is a violation of Oberons Law. Killing changelings doesnt violate the Law, naturally, and just as naturally,

elf-shot is fatal to us, because who cares if some mongrel foot soldier dies on the battlefield?I care. And everyone I know whos effectively lost a friend or loved one to elf-shot cares. A century is a long time, even for a pureblood.Maybe my reasons for hating the stuff are more personal than I like to admit. Elf-shot killed Connor, who was my lover and my friend and an important part of my life. Elf-shot forced my mother to shift my blood away from human and toward fae, disrupting the fragile balance I had managed to build for myself and sending me into what has sometimes seemed like an inevitable spiral toward the pureblood side of my heritage. And it was elf-shot that forced me to turn my little girl human, taking her away from me forever. So yeah, I hate it. I figure Im allowed.Arden was shaking her head, eyes still fixed on my face.

Youre wrong, she said. Why would someone use elf-shot on Madden? Hes... hes the best. Hes the sweetest person in the world. No one wants to hurt him.Unless, through hurting him, they might hurt you, said Tybalt gently. Arden whipped around to stare at him. You know as well as I do that the throne carries a heavier cost

than we would choose, if it were up to us. So often, that cost is borne by the ones we care for.Green and silver are the colors of the Kingdom of Silences, said Quentin.We all turned to stare at himeven Arden, who had started to cry. Quentin was undaunted.Silences is the Kingdom to the north of us, right? Their colors used to be green and red, to symbolize the evergreen forests and the roses they grow there, but when they lost the War of Silences, the Queen of the MistsI mean the one who wasnt really Queen, Your Highness, its just that we never got a real name for her, so I dont have anything else to call hertook the red away from them. She said they no longer had the right to claim the blood of those who had died in the name of their false cause, and that they should always know who the superior Kingdom was. Thats why she made them

match the silver in the arms of the Mists. Quentin bit his lip before continuing, I mean, Im just saying. Those are their colors.Revue de pressePraise for the Toby Daye series:"McGuire has never lacked for courage in her writing.... The phenomenally inventive October Daye series showcases her narrative daring and ingenuity beautifully." --RT s"Prepare to be dazzled.... Like the best of urban fantasy, with each reveal and mystery solved, Toby's world grows ever more enticing. As seductive as faerie itself, this is one series I could never give up." --All Things Urban Fantasy"These books are like watching half a season of your

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