

Harvest Ball

**7 October 2010/10 Moonshare 1278
Hawthorn House**

In honor of the anniversary of the Rebel's Rout and of the Festival of Dawn's Early Light, Nathaniel Carter, Lord Hawthorn, has invited all of Dreven to attend a masked ball. Ribbons of many harvest colors flutter in the breeze as groomsmen take horses, help guests down from their carriages and guide the guests on their way into the wide courtyard. In the center of the courtyard, a fountain merrily splashes water from six fountain heads. The Half-lo jugglers, with their variety of skin tones, greet visitors in the courtyard around the fountain. Exits from the courtyard lead north to the street, west to a vast manicured garden over which the sun set 'marks ago and east toward the sun's rising greets the visitors. During the night the jugglers cavort round and about the guests into the ballroom and throughout the first floor of Hawthorn House. South are the heavy double doors to the Grand Hall and Ball Room open to greet the guests as they arrive.

In the Ballroom, Shadokhan pipes and strings will keep the masked dancers feet moving! The musicians from Balthazor play in the dining hall – contemplative tunes to soothe the diners stomachs; the Arborian musicians are set up in a corner of the Library melodic and pleasant music for the dancers to relax to, catch their collective breaths and have a drink from one of the many fine vintages provided by wineries throughout the region.

Thermish dancers will also swirl from room to room, collecting guests who've been still too long – this is a party, a revel, a celebration! Enjoy!

Lrd Hawthorn

::Pennants of Hawthorn House flapped in the breeze, snapping and cracking. Torches shed merry light on the cobbles and the sparkling fountain in the courtyard. Jugglers tossed pins back and forth in high arching arcs and music flowed out of the open double doors onto the courtyard::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Strings and pipes wove together. Already guests were dancing and moving among them were servants wearing masks and bearing trays with finger foods arranged on them::

loloasSanGiam

::In his overalls held with dirty red leather suspenders and his loose fitting off white shirt, he looked to his bare feet and wiggled his toes. He pushed his straw hat onto his head tigher and held his arm out for Nadiya::

Beliana Houlruin

::she placed her hand in the footman's when it was offered and stepped from her carriage::

Lrd Hawthorn

::The masks were all the faces of animals... a stallion here, a cat there, bear and deer across the marble tiles::

Nadiya Galyn

::The Lady Galyn looked not at all like a lady, but rather someone who might be paid to stomp on grapes. She wore a peasant dress, and her dark hair was tied back with a matching scrap of fabric. She, too, had bare feet. With a quick grin, she hooked her arm through loloas'::

Beliana Houlruin

::light brown eyes, sometimes referred to as golden they were so light in brown color, were opened wide behind the black silk mask that hid most of the rest of her face except her mouth and chin. The mask matched the black silk of the gown that encased the young woman's body and the long strands of hair arranged in piles of curls atop her head::

Nadiya Galyn

::Had the two of them *walked* to the Manor? It appeared so. No horse or carriage in sight.::

IoloasSanGiam

Oh, here's what you need. ::He reached down to the ground and took a piece of grass and smudged a bit over Nadiya's nose.::

Beliana Houlruin

::her pale skin was accentuated even more against the black of the silk. The low cut of the gown gave a peak at the possible delights that could be had.::

Nadiya Galyn

Does it suit me? ::She wrinkled her nose and struck a pose.::

IoloasSanGiam

Ah! ::he leaned back and smiled.:: From dirt you were made.

Beliana Houlruin

::nervously she adjusted her skirts and began to walk toward the doors she assumed led inside, all the while thinking about the slurs she'd heard yet again in the marketplace - new money.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Not far from the doors, the tall figure of a dark-haired man wore the half mask of a silver fox. A short cape of ruby red hung from his shoulders over a silver doublet, black shirt and black trousers in high riding boots. He spoke to those nearest to him, but his fox eyes always returned to those who entered.::

Nadiya Galyn

To dirt I will return. ::she nodded.::

Beliana Houlruin

::she approached the doors while nibbling nervously on her plump, pink lower lip. Her lips seemed almost a little too large for her face.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::He directed some to the library where many were already moving to begin with a libation. He carried none himself.::

IoloasSanGiam

So, do you know this Lord? ::He turned to the manor keeping Nadiya's arm hooked in his. Then he stopped to allow the woman in black to pass them by.::

Beliana Houlruin

::new money, yes she was new money, yet in her hand she held an invitation to the ball. She had to wonder why? Was it a cruel joke of some sort? Only time would tell.::

Vellys Marsh

::Next to the Silver Fox stood a slight woman gowned in red silk with gold filigree and a scooped neckline. Long dark hair spilled down her back. Her identity hidden by a simple domino mask tied with red ribbon.::

Beliana Houlruin

::She spotted the man and woman next to the door and assuming they were her hosts for the evening, she gave a low curtsy while bowing her head in respect.::

Nadiya Galyn

Not well. ::she shook her head.:: I think I was invited because of my position on council.

IoloasSanGiam

You know, ::He looked around to the others.:: When they said masked they meant masked. We didn't cover our faces. ::And as if the grass might help he smudged a bit more onto Nadiya's chin.::

Lrd Hawthorn

Welcome, welcome, to Hawthorn House.::the Fox said to the lady in black.::

Nadiya Galyn

::She made a grab for the grass and tried to dab some on his cheek.:: Maybe they'll think we're the hired help.

Beliana Houlruin

::she smiled nervously as she straightened.:: Th...thank you. May I...may I go in? ::she held the

invitation in a shaking hand expecting she would be asked to present it in proof that she was invited::

Lrd Hawthorn

::the hired help wore masks too, tonight!::

Vellys Marsh

::She executed a perfect curtsey in return.::

IoloasSanGiam: The way I serve that won;t fool them long.

XiphSnowmoon

::Strolling slowly through from room to room as he strummed his lute, the elven bard was garbed in the astounding and brilliant costume of a peacock. A feathered mask with a gleaming gold beak covered the top half of his face, and he looked fantastic, of course.::

Vellys Marsh

::A mere glance at the invitation.:: Of course you may. Enjoy yourself. ::She smiled, dazzling, really. ::

Nadiya Galyn

I can stomp the Abyss out of grapes, if they ask.

Beliana Houlruin

::Her smile was a bit less nervous and she shoved the invitation into the silk handbag dangling from her wrist. Of course it matched!::

IoloasSanGiam

::chuckled:: From your feet to my lips

Lrd Hawthorn

::He took the lady's hand in both of his:: So glad you could come! ::then let her go to enjoy the beat of the dance::

Beliana Houlruin

::she slowly made her way inside, her eyes glancing this way and that as she tried to take in everything. The house was much grander than the City home her family occupied in Dreven- possibly even more so than their home in Luminii:

Vellys Marsh

::she looked from the lady to the host and back.::

IoloasSanGiam: ::So it was his turn to stand before the Fox the Red Dress. He bowed and then smiled::

XiphSnowmoon

::He was quick and clever enough with his music to blend his song into whatever was being played in whichever room he happened to enter. He smiled here, nodded there, and added his voice to the music, singing in non-words that fit perfectly with the rest of the music.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::He laughed at the straw hat and bowed in return:: Please, be welcome!

Nadiya Galyn

::Nadiya dropped a quick curtsey, not quite as formal as she usually did.:: Evenin', m'lord and lady!

Vellys Marsh

What fine costumes! ::smiling, curtseying, appraising::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Full of the mood of the ball, he danced a step around Nadiya:: I hope you'll enjoy some of the wines in the library tonight.

Vellys Marsh

No one will recognize you. ::a wink at Iolas, because, of course, she recognized him.::

Beliana Houlruin

::she paused in what she could only assume to be the parlor based on the furnishings as a juggler began to attempt to entertain her; She smiled brightly with her delight at his antics::

IoloasSanGiam

::He laughed:: It was this or a white sheet.

Nadiya Galyn

Costumes? Oh, these be my best clothes, m'lady... ::a quick wink to Vellys, and then she smiled at Lord Hawthorn.:: I'd like that very much.

Vellys Marsh

It is so much fun playing dress up. ::smiling, but her dark eyes flashed from behind the mask::

IoloasSanGiam

It is? ::His eyes questioned her even though he smiled:: If you say so.

XiphSnowmoon

::A couple nearly danced right into him, but he evaded them neatly, turning a graceful pirouette away from danger that had them laughing.::

Beliana Houluin

::she was finally able to manuever around the juggler and out the door on the opposite side of the room. Her feet were carrying her toward the sound of music.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::He gave her a wink behind the almond openings for eyes in his Fox mask:: Just behind that wall... ::he said, pointing to the large fireplace, over which was the shield of the house, a red, heavy wooden thing with a black steel boss in the center and a golden hawthorn painted upon it:: you'll find our best vintages.

Vellys Marsh

I believe it is.

Nadiya Galyn

Aye? Will you give me a tour sometime this evening? ::slipping in and out of her rural accent::

Vellys Marsh

To pretend to be someone else? Walk a league in their shoes... ::smiling then glancing down:: Or perhaps in no shoes at all.

Beliana Houluin

::She peered into the Ballroom, then stepped a few feet inside and to her right to watch the dancers swirling around the dance floor.::

IoloasSanGiam

Humm ::He put his hand on his chin:: I can see that. ::He wiggled his toes:: A sort of freedom.

Lrd Hawthorn

::he smiled and let slip some of his carefree veneer:: I'd be honored.

Blakk Maskk

::The man that made his way toward the doors wore a three-quarters black iron mask with brass horns. Red ribbons hung from the edges all around but for over his mouth. Red decorated the shoulders of his black leather armor, and he wore at his side long read feather in place of a sword.::

Beliana Houluin

::once again she pressed pale hands to black silk to rub away nervous moisture that had gathered on the palms before reaching one hand up to adjust the matching black silk mask. She once again bit nervously at the pink flesh of her overripe lower lip, one of two that nearly dominated her alabaster face.::

Vellys Marsh

Indeed. Although I suppose it is easier for some than others.

KingTheNew

::From the plain carriage he stepped out and stood tall. His gold painted crown sat on his shoulders, covered his neck and his entire head. Seven pointed tips surround the top with a gem and symbols, very simply drawn, on each point: a sun, a leaf, a wave, an ear of corn, a feather, a bone, and a star. There were two small holes for his eyes, letting the bright green slip through, and a large hole that exposed his chin, all around his mouth and just to the tip of his nose. ::

Nadiya Galyn

You have a lovely home, Lord Hawthorn. ::she said quietly, in a proper voice.::

Vellys Marsh

I hope you enjoy the food. Delicacies from across the former Empire.

IoloasSanGiam

::He looked at the eyes of the woman in the Red Dress:: It always is. Oh, there is food?

Beliana Houlruin

::eyes so pale a brown as to be sometimes called golden peeked from behind a black silk mask at the dancers then stopped to stare wide at a person dressed as a peacock::

Lrd Hawthorn

Thank you, m'lady. ::His eyes glittered and he did not use her name, nor give away that he might know it:: Tonight, it is your home as well.

Vellys Marsh

::Her eyes so black they were almost blue:: Of course. What sort of party would it be without food?

KingTheNew

::He wore a deep purple cape draped around his shoulder and hung to his knees and the top of his black boots. Light orange pants were tucked into the boots and his shirt of the same color was tucked into his pants. He carried a twisted wooden stick as a scepter. ::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Trestle tables in the dining hall were loaded down with food for the evening, servants attending to keeping things full and warm as need be. Aromas drifted through the house with the music::

Nadiya Galyn

Aye, then, want to find a bite to eat? ::to Ioloas, back in her rural accent::

Stan Hewnan

::All in white and on a white horse he rode up to the manor. A groomsman took the beast as he slid off and slipped in through the western door::

IoloasSanGiam

And a bottle of wine ::He held out his arm to Nadiya again::

XiphSnowmoon

::Catching sight of the lady in the black gown and dress, he made his way toward her. The lute produced what sounded very much like a whistle of appreciation.::

Stan Hewnan

::his mask was simple white feathers... a swan's feathers::

Beliana Houlruin

::she blushed, which was extremely obvious given the paleness of skin, and ducked her head slightly to watch the peacock from beneath lowered lashes::

Nadiya Galyn

That too. ::she took Ioloas' arm::

XiphSnowmoon

::It might have been his mask, or he might just have been playing, but his voice was low and sultry::

Good evening, my lovely...

LimelenathS has joined this chat.

KingTheNew

::He walked slowly to the door, His movement stiff and paced::

Beliana Houlruin

::She giggled nervously and smiled at him:: Good evening, sir.

IoloasSanGiam

Oh, the floor is cold ::He looked to his feet and praced, lifting them up high::

Stan Hewnan

::He strolled through the long hall by the dining area, breathing in the roasted meat, the savories and such; and experimentally sat on a blue divan in a striking pose::

Nadiya Galyn

I hadn't thought of that. ::she leaned in close and whispered:: Maybe we can borrow some shoes.

KingTheNew

::He stopped by the door watching.::

IoloasSanGiam

No, no, ::He put his arm around her in a dancing sort of way:: We just have to move. Dance.

Vellys Marsh

::Her gaze went from swan feathers to crown. A very big crown. Her brows shot up over the mask as she laughed with delight.::

Nadiya Galyn

Should we dance over to the food?

XiphSnowmoon

You are looking lost. Would you like a drink? ::The playing stopped for just an instant as he reached out to snag a goblet of something from a passing servant and offer it to Beliana.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::The host of the house bowed low to the shoulders that wore the crown, the head so heavy it collapsed beneath the weight!::

IoloasSanGiam

First the wine, then the food dance.

Beliana Houlruin

::She smiled warmly:: Yes, thank you. ::she took the goblet from his hand and sniffed at it:: It smells good...

Nadiya Galyn

The wine might warm us up as well. ::she took a good look around the room, at the people there.::

Vellys Marsh

::a pretty curtsey to the crown:: Please come in and be welcome!

KingTheNew

::From under the huge crown his lips smiled at Vellys reaction:: You may welcome the New King ::He hit his specture on he floor.::

Blakk Maskk

::Coming up behind the crown with feet, he stopped to look it over. The mask did not hide his sneer of amusement.::

Beliana Houlruin

::she stood off to the side of the ballroom dance floor, eyeing the peacock in front of her as she sipped the wine in the goblet he had offered her:: I like your clothes. Very festive.

XiphSnowmoon

You should taste it and see if the scent lies ::he intoned. Deeply.::

Beliana Houlruin

Oh, it does not lie. ::She giggled and smiled:: It is good. ::she took another sip to prove the truth in her words::

Vellys Marsh

You honor us, your majesty. :: She smiled while noting the sneer of the gentleman behind the King.::

Nadiya Galyn

See anyone you recognize yet?

XiphSnowmoon

::He posed this way and then the other, revealing the fine train that trailed behind him. Feathers, of course.:: I saw it and I could not resist.

KingTheNew

::His lips smiled again and his eyes showed his enjoyment:: I do. And I know all my subject will love me.

IoloasSanGiam

Ah.....:He looked around and laughed:: How would I know?

Beliana Houlruin

It is a wonderful pick! Much more festive than mine. ::she motioned toward the black silk:: My

mother said it would be "more dramatic". ::her voice sneering as she repeated her mother's words::

Lrd Hawthorn

::A signal from a passing servant caught the Silver Fox's attention:: Indeed, every king needs a ball. Or two, even, to rule his subjects well. ::he said to the costumed king::

Vellys Marsh

How could they not? If you are in need of refreshment you need but ask one of our staff. You are welcome anywhere on the ground floor but the kitchens tonight. I fear the cooks do not look kindly even on Kings in their domain!

Blakk Maskk

And what will your subjects call you, oh mighty king? ::he inquired, interrupting the conversation::

Vellys Marsh

::turning her dazzling smiling on the Black Mask::

XiphSnowmoon

It is certai-- ::He cleared his throat and started again in the Deep and Sultry voice:: It is certainly dramatic, m'lady, and quite complimentary.

KingTheNew

The New One, of course ::He turned only slightly toward the black thing:: And I will read their minds and tell them to love me.

Beliana Houlruin

::She blushed again, but smiled brightly without ducking her head at Xiph:: Thank you. Do you dance as well as you play, sir? ::nodding toward the dance floor of the ballroom::

Nadiya Galyn

Good point. ::she signalled one of the servants:: Red wine? White? ::asking loloas::

Lrd Hawthorn

You'll read their minds? ::he laughed softly::

Vellys Marsh

::She touched a scarlet gloved hand to her mouth in mock horror::

loloasSanGiam

::He found a tray with wine glasses and danced right over, with Nadiya, to it::

KingTheNew

I am all powerful. ::Then softer he added:: I use magic.

Stan Hewnan

::He simply had to draw nearer, but he took the round about way, though the parlor, and the open doors into the library where he gathered up a bit of something pale and bright::

XiphSnowmoon

Absolutely. Do you dance as sweetly as you smile?

Blakk Maskk

Oh, another mage. How original. ::drily::

loloasSanGiam

Here ::He handed a wine glass to Nadiya:: You are the more important one. Who do you know?

Beliana Houlruin

::her cheeks turned crimson and she ducked her head again:: I don't know...

KingTheNew

Yes, as original as black.

Vellys Marsh

Then we must love you. ::another curtsey for the king, and then one to the Black Mask:: Welcome, friend.

Lrd Hawthorn

Do you use your magic to dance, o king? ::He spread a hand out to indicate the dance floor:: I see a lady or two out there you might make into your queen. The pretty blue bird, perhaps ..or the sunflower stemmed all in green. ::He laughed::

Beliana Houlruin

::She downed the wine in the glass in her hand, just in case he did actually want to dance with her, then set the empty on the tray of a passing servant::

Nadiya Galyn

Thank you. ::she immediately took a drink of wine from the glass:: Other than Lord Hawthorn...and his companion...no. No familiar faces.

KingTheNew

They will think I swept them off their feet even if it is not true::He stepped away and toward the dance floor::

Blakk Maskk

::The smile beneath the rim of his mask was chilly, and he looked past their hosts to the crowd beyond:: Oh, look. I blend right in with the rest of the crowd. How terrible.

Lrd Hawthorn

You know how it is, ::he offered condolences:: black goes with everything.

Vellys Marsh

Best with red.

Lrd Hawthorn

::and looked Black Mask over::

Nadiya Galyn

::Her brows went up when she saw the man in the costume with the huge crown::

Blakk Maskk

Doesn't it just? ::Triumph in the pale eyes behind the mask::

Lrd Hawthorn

Hmm hm... black and red you say. Those two colors did have a ... quality to them.

XiphSnowmoon

::He held one hand out to Beliana, the lute in the other:: Would you care to dance?

Beliana Houlruin

::Grinning, she placed a pale hand in the one he held out to her:: I'd love to!

KingTheNew

::He found a drink and watched the merriment::

Vellys Marsh

::She smiled and smoothed out the red silk with gold she wore. Perhaps a bit self-consciously::

Stan Hewnan

::He stole like a cloud, so light on his feet, a bird on the wing, nibbling a treat. A goblet in hand, he stopped by his hosts::

IoloasSanGiam

::He laughed:: Now there is a mask. ::He nodded to the big crown::

Vellys Marsh

::She looked up from her gown to find a Swan. Her eyes shone::

Lrd Hawthorn

I'll not say that a great deal has gone wrong over the last several years, ::The Silver Fox murmured::

Vellys Marsh

Good evening, sir. Welcome to Hawthorn House.

IoloasSanGiam

Do you think it is to show approval or to accent descent? ::whispered to Nadiya::

Blakk Maskk

Mm ::he agreed with the fox:: I have a question. How will we tell that big head from those who go before?

Nadiya Galyn

I don't know for certain, but I'd guess the latter. ::whispered back::

Stan Hewnan

::Gracefully he moved to greet the lady, bowing to her and to the host:: A fine bit of fluff this is tonight, eh?

Lrd Hawthorn

Sheer size, ::came the answer::

XiphSnowmoon

::He smiled winningly at Beliana and guided her toward the ballroom, stopping to stash his lute in the corner behind the door where it would be safe.:: Do you happen to play?

Blakk Maskk

::He laughed softly.:: Even bigger? Or is just large enough?

LimelenathS

::Her hair was dressed in formal braids that hid her pointed ears. Her gown was dark green satin trimmed with gold. A gold ribbon with a cameo at her throat served as her only jewelry. ::

Vellys Marsh

::a curtsey like she was born to it.:: I hope you are enjoying yourself.

LimelenathS

::A simple green mask hid the upper part of her face as she came into the ballroom and, for the most part, faded into the crowd.::

loloasSanGiam

We could always go ask?

Beliana Houlruin

I have minimal skill at the dulcimer, sir. ::she smiled and cursed slightly before placing on hand in his and the other upon his shoulder.::

Nadiya Galyn

::She gave it about a second's thought.:: Yes. Let's do that.

XiphSnowmoon

I do like the dulcimer. It is very shapely. ::Smiling wickedly, he led her into the dance. He was as good as his word, light on his feet and more than able to avoid the peacock train trailing behind him. Luckily, it wasn't extraordinarily long.::

Lrd Hawthorn

It is hard to say, don't you think? I know my head is not fitted for that crown. ::he regarded the black masked man.::

Beliana Houlruin

It was just then she noticed the giant crown sitting atop a pumpkin or at least, the orange clothing seemed to be indicating that, and she stumbled slightly.::

Stan Hewnan

Oh, I am, dear lady. ::his smile was charming beneath the feathers.:: Are you in need of anything?

loloasSanGiam

::He danced Nadiya right over the to big crown guy. Oh trying to make it all look as if they just happened to stop there.:: Well now. ::He slows the dance and looks to the crown, and then to Nadiya.::

Beliana Houlruin

Did you see that? ::she recovered in time to keep from tripping Xiph and toppling them both to the ground, but she kept glancing over her shoulder at the "crown" mask.::

Blakk Maskk

::He leaned toward Hawthorn just a little.:: It is a mockery ::he murmured, though he didn't say which he meant, the walking crown or the previous large heads.::

Nadiya Galyn

::She dropped a curtsey to The Crown.::

Vellys Marsh

You are kind to ask, but no thank you. ::She was working after all.:: May I get you anything?

April Brell

::She wore a gown the colour of sunripened peach offset in copper with a mask of similar hues in rust. The gown flowed off the shoulders of her lovely form, following slender curves.::

XiphSnowmoon

How could anyone not? ::he whispered, his hand on her waist steadying her. He, too, took the opportunity to look at the Crown as they danced.::

KingTheNew

::His eyes went to the farmer dancers. Then he smiled to the curtsy:: You are noted loyal one.

Lrd Hawthorn

So you say. ::The Fox replied, agreeing or disagreeing was not obvious. And then:: Of many things.

Blakk Maskk

Oh, do I.

Beliana Houlruin

How does he keep it atop his head. I think that would hurt after a while, don't you? ::she kept good pace with Xiph even if her dance wasn't quite as expertly skilled as his:: I mean, if he's even a he...is he?

Nadiya Galyn

Well, thanks to you, your...Highness. By gods, that's a big crown, aye?

Lrd Hawthorn

Mockeries come in all sizes. ::a servant came by and he took a goblet from the tray::

loloasSanGiam

It is a heavy weight those who rule must carry.

Stan Hewnan

So many things, my lady, ::he told her quietly and then smiled:: Later, perhaps we can dance?

XiphSnowmoon

I think -- ::It was good they could take turns staring:: it's on his shoulders, but still it seems so -- large.

KingTheNew

::He smiled to loloas::

Vellys Marsh

::She set a gentle hand on the Swan's arm. Her cheeks pinked just a little.:: I look forward to it.

Lrd Hawthorn

But kings should represent all their subjects. Don't you agree?

loloasSanGiam

But, :He wiggled his toes:: Those who do might enjoy the freedom.

Vellys Marsh

::then the dazzling smile was turned on the arriving and lovely April:: Good evening, my lady!

Welcome to Hawthorn House!

Blakk Maskk

I do. Firmly ::and his voice was hard.::

Beliana Houlruin

Yes... ::she then wrinkled her nose at the two people speaking to the "Crown": (q) I think someone forgot to tell them this was a ball...with masks.

KingTheNew

This is pretend after all.

Nadiya Galyn

Aye, freedom has its advantages.

Stan Hewnan

::he danced away and found a partner on the floor for several turns of the tune::

KingTheNew

And its price.

Nadiya Galyn

What did you figure would be the reaction to this bit of pretend?

LimelenathS

::She had a glass of wine in hand as she admired the costumes and listened to the music. Her lip twitched as she watched the goings on with the Crown::

April Brell

::Long, dark tresses were waves of curls atop her head with a couple strands falling in wisps as she approached the door. She smiled at the welcoming voice.:: Good evening and thank you. ::she curtsied to the host and hostess::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Quietly he said:: Do you think that's the current case?

IoloasSanGiam

Oh, I hope some will just think. But then, that might be asking for more than is possible.

XiphSnowmoon

There are all sorts of masks, and all sorts of imaginations. ::Leaving off gawking at the Crown, he applied his attentions to the lady.:: I imagine, for instance, that you are a princess.

Beliana Houlruin

::she barked out a loud laugh:: Hardly, sir...well, except to my father.

Vellys Marsh

Please help yourself to the food and drink and dancing. ::she encouraged April::

Lrd Hawthorn

Please do, ::The Silver Fox masked man added to Vellys welcome::

Beliana Houlruin

And that would make me a Dreven wouldn't it? Should I go challenge the crown for my rightful place upon the throne? ::She winked behind her black silk mask at Xiph then giggled::

KingTheNew

What do you think the reaction is? I see little reaction. Of course that might be because I can hardly see.

Blakk Maskk

That he should? Definitely. ::He stepped aside, out of the way of the pretty little peach.:: Does he? No, he does not.

Nadiya Galyn

::She laughed.:: A little reaction, from what I can see. They are watching, wondering what you are up to.

LimelenathS

::She slipped back out before she was discovered missing from home::

LimelenathS has left this chat.

Lrd Hawthorn

The goal being the good of the people, how can we ..help him to do what he needs to do?

Beliana Houlruin

::she heard the chime of a clock somewhere within the Manor House as it began to ring out the time and gasped::

XiphSnowmoon

There are no doubt other men who would happily call you princess. Doves of them. And you *might* be a Dreven, if you like ::he said dubiously, remembering to keep his voice deep and seductive.:: Or you could be a princess from some exotic, far off land.

Lrd Hawthorn

::he sipped from his goblet, also taking a few steps to the side::

Vellys Marsh

::leaving her alone and a little chilly::

April Brell

It is all very beautiful. Thank you again. ::She smiled and entered.::

Vellys Marsh

You are very gracious. Enjoy. ::curtsey to April::

Beliana Houlruin

::nearly too wide pale, pink lips pressed a kiss to Xiph's cheek without thinking:: I must go. Thank you for the dance! ::and she ran off leaving him in mid-step on the dance floor::

Blakk Maskk

What does a foreigner in our fine country need to do? ::Behind the iron mask, the pale eyes were shrewd.::

KingTheNew

My crown is big to fit my head.

Vellys Marsh

::then she looked about and thought it was time to mingle::

KingTheNew

My head is big because too many tell me how wonderful I am.

Beliana Houlruin

::She wound her way quickly through the press of dancers and out the doors, then another set of doors and another set before picking up her skirts to reveal pale long legs that carried her in a run to her carriage::

loloasSanGiam

There must be those who tell you otherwise ::He looks in at the eyes again::

Lrd Hawthorn

Remember his origins. ::a servant came by again and whispered to Hawthorn:: Excuse me, please. Enjoy the ball! ::he told the man in the iron mask::

Beliana Houlruin

::and she didn't even lose one black silken slipper for Xiph to find::

Nadiya Galyn

Would it help if I insulted ya, your Highness?

XiphSnowmoon

Whatever is -- ::But she was gone. Being the consummate performer that he was, he danced several more steps with empty arms. Oh, look. There was a young lady willing to fill them, and the elf smiled at his new dance partner.:: Such good timing you have.

Vellys Marsh

::a moment to gape at Beliana's hasty exit::

KingTheNew

::He smiled:: If you knock the crown off you have to wear it.

April Brell

::She made her way to the dining hall, sampling a bit of this and a tidbit of that::

Beliana Houlruin has left this chat.

Lrd Hawthorn

::He whispered to Vellys:: I'll be right back.

Blakk Maskk

Oh, I think I will. ::He gave a small bow, then took himself inside.::

KingTheNew

Just defeating someone in power is not so hard. Building things back is much harder.

Stan Hewnan

::Seeing her essentially alone, he relinquished his hold on his dance partner and made his way back to Vellys side::

Vellys Marsh

Oh, yes. All right. ::smiling and nodding at Lord Hawthorn.::

loloasSanGiam

Ah ::He looked to Nadiya:: And pretending to know all about is easier yet.

Nadiya Galyn

::Her face grew serious.::

Stan Hewnan

::in a low tone, he said,;: Are you permitted to dance? To waste such a dress is practically criminal.

Vellys Marsh

::and then she wasn't alone. The Swan had returned. Her smile breathless.:: I think I can spare a dance.

April Brell

::Eventually she meandered into the ballroom, watching the dancers twirl gracefully about the room.::

Blakk Maskk

::He stopped one of the servants and took a helping of the odd looking, tiny little bits of food. And a drink.::

Nadiya Galyn

You can only pretend for so long.

KingTheNew

How long?

Lrd Hawthorn

::On the trestle tables over in the dining hall were plates heaped full with sliced red cow and roasted chickens, potatoes and squash and greens and sweets of all sorts.::

KingTheNew

See, them dancing? The man in feathers holds the woman in black and tells her what she wants to hear. Who is pretending? In this moment they might not be at all. But then, who can help it.

Nadiya Galyn

::The "peasant" tipped up her wine goblet and drank down a good swallow.:: You know what might help?

Blakk Maskk

::It didn't take long to polish off the finger foods. He washed them down with a gulp of wine, passed the empties off, and headed toward the Crown and the undisguised peasants.::

loloasSanGiam

::He looked at Nadiya.::

KingTheNew

No, what would help?

Nadiya Galyn

::She held out her goblet to the King.:: Some of this. ::a little glitter i her eyes.::

April Brell

::Behind the mask, her dark brown eyes fixed on the dancers almost trancelike in fascination.::

XiphSnowmoon

::When the dance finished, he bowed to his dance partner and kissed her hand. Excusing himself, he went to collect his lute.::

loloasSanGiam

::He laughed and nodded.:: Now you know why I came with her.

KingTheNew

::He looked at the both of them and smiled.:: You must be grape growers.

Nadiya Galyn

My mistress does that. I just stomp on 'em. ::she stomped her feet.::

loloasSanGiam

I'll get another round. ::He moved from the two of them went to a nearby table to find more wine.::

Vellys Marsh

::She turned to face the Swan.::

Blakk Maskk

::Where were the wine-bearing servants when you needed one? He had to detour to swipe a glass from one of them, then circled back to the Crown and his subjects.:: Lady ::he murmured, holding out the fresh glass to Nadiya.::

Nadiya Galyn

Very obligin' m'lord. ::accepting the goblet from the black masked man.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Dancers wove in and out, around and around. Jugglers moved onto the dance floor and small beaded sacks flew in graceful patterns over the heads of the dancers.::

KingTheNew

Black returns.

Stan Hewnan

::He leaned closed and whispered something secret to the lovely lady in red::

Vellys Marsh

::She leaned in to listen::

Blakk Maskk

Your majesty ::he murmured, and bowed slightly:: Do you mind if I steal this pretty girl for a dance?

Kirin Fand has joined this chat.

KingTheNew

She is not mine to steal. But I would think you would gain more from asking her.

loloasSanGiam

::He found three glasses of wine, but had to swirl past dancing things that tossed stuff::

Stan Hewnan

::Laughter followed, soft and sweet::

Blakk Maskk

There are conventions, or so I hear. ::He turned to Nadiya:: May I have the honor of a dance?

Nadiya Galyn

::She looked from the King to the Black Mask:: Aye, I wouldn't mind that. Here, hold this for me, your majesty, will ya? ::offering up the goblet Black Mask had brought her::

Vellys Marsh

::She flinched and her cheeks flushed. Her eyes glittered as she stepped back:: Perhaps that should be tested.

Lrd Hawthorn

::More animal masked servants flowed around the edges of the ballroom from the direction of the kitchens, burdened with goblets and bottles and heavy laden with foodstuffs::

Stan Hewnan

Do you think so?

XiphSnowmoon

::Drifting here and there through the crowds, he resumed the blending in of the music he played, though his beautiful peacock attire stood out, even in this crowd::

Vellys Marsh

I find myself wanting to.

Stan Hewnan

Well then, ::he bowed and offered his hand to her::

loloasSanGiam

::He looked at Nadiya::

Blakk Maskk

There is apparently plenty more where that came from. ::A hand under Nadiya's elbow urged her toward the dance floor:: You will not stomp on my toes, will you?

Vellys Marsh

::She curtseyed and took the offered hand::

Nadiya Galyn

If you swear not to stomp on mine. ::She cast a look back at loloas, and smiled. Back in a moment, she mouthed::

Kerbouchard Ren has joined this chat.

loloasSanGiam

::He nodded and held the glasses of wine. He stood beside the crown, trying to hand him another one::

Stan Hewnan

::Smoothly, he strolled with her out to the floor, white and red:: We are two sides of a chess match, my lady, ::he told her::

April Brell

::She continued to watch the dancers and at times the appearance of someone who stood out; A

spectacular peacock, a man in White with the lady in Red.::

Blakk Maskk

I'm afraid I can't promise to leave your toes alone. I hope you are nimble. ::He was careful that the brass horns of his mask didn't stab her or anyone else.::

Vellys Marsh

What pieces do we represent? ::she glided along with him, poised and straight-backed.::

Nadiya Galyn

Nimble and quick. What shall I call you, m'lord? ::Nimble she was. A good dancer.::

Kirin Fand

::She gathered up the hem of her black velvet skirt, walked to the door of ballroom and paused a moment to take in the festivities.::

Stan Hewnan

The king and the queen of course... only... I've won the game and taken the other king's queen, you see.

IoloasSanGiam

::He finally found one of the traveling servants with a tray of lots of small stuff and he took the tray.::

KingTheNew

::He held two glases of wine. How did he get two?::

IoloasSanGiam

::He found a few grapes on the tray and started tossing them across the room toward Nadiya.::

Opps...::He hit some other dancer.::

Blakk Maskk

Enchanted. ::One hand on her waist, he danced carefully. It was clear it was not something he was accustomed to doing.::

Nadiya Galyn

Pardon the grape thrower. Peasants, you know how they can be. ::It was not said without affection. She smiled.::

Nadiya Galyn

Any other hints on who is behind the mask? ::she asked.::

KingTheNew

Could he take her from you? ::He drinks from one glass and then the other.::

IoloasSanGiam

::Brows up as he looked to the crown.::

Blakk Maskk

What fun would that be? ::Lucky for Nadiya the dance was not too fast.:: Are you a friend of the Crown?

Vellys Marsh

Have you won? Perhaps it is I who have won the game by taking the White King.

Nadiya Galyn

Important folk like him aren't friends with folk like me. ::playing the peasant role again.::

Stan Hewnan

::He danced with her all around the floor, holding her closer than he needed to and smiling as they talked of victory.:: Perhaps you have. Then again, I may not be a king at all.

IoloasSanGiam

::And since he couldn't answer he tossed another grape.::

April Brell

::seeing something whoosh past her-- was that a grape?::

Blakk Maskk

::He lifted his hand from Nadiya's waist to smack the grape aside.:: I would imagine not.

Stan Hewnan

::The grape hit the white feathered man in the back of the head, bounced off and someone else stepped on it, the slick 'ssquish' of the tiny fruit causing them to slip and fall with a cry and a thud.::

Kirin Fand

::A mask adorned with owl feathers hid her facial features with the exception of eyes the color of brilliant sapphires. She moved gracefully from the doorway into the ballroom.::

IoloasSanGiam

Do I know you? ::He wasn't looking at the crown, but it was clear he was asking him. He was still throwing small bits of food from the tray he held toward Nadiya.::

Vellys Marsh

You are hardly a Knight despite your white attire. ::Her smile was sly. She did not seem to mind how close he held her.::

Kirin Fand

::She stifled a laugh as she saw fruit flying about.::

Nadiya Galyn has left this chat.

Stan Hewnan

And under fire of fruit, it would seem. ::a dangerous looking scowl crossed his features.::

KingTheNew

Everyone knows the King, one way or the other.

Vellys Marsh

Do not frown. Look at the chaos.

April Brell

::Shaking her head. Nahh, couldn't have been. Seeing the falling dancer; brown eyes widening under the coppery mask.::

Vellys Marsh

::she probably should help the couple up, but...::

XiphSnowmoon

Oh, dear... ::Tucking his lute carefully beneath one arm, he went to help the downed dancer, all full of solicitousness and helpfulness.::

Stan Hewnan

The difference between chaos and order is perception? ::but his frown went away.::

IoloasSanGiam

Opps ::He quickly put the tray down on a near by table.::

Vellys Marsh

Idle hands are the property of the Abyss. ::She laughed quietly.::

Stan Hewnan

::His hands were certainly not idle.:: I do see your point.

Kirin Fand

::She tipped her head as she saw the man on the floor, but people had already come to assist him.::

Stan Hewnan

Tell me, my lady, ::he whispered.:: When comes the unmasking?

Vellys Marsh

When midnight arrives.

IoloasSanGiam

::Then he looked over the room for Nadiya, oh there she was. Too bad he had put the tray down and couldn't toss something at her.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Servants took care of quickly and unobtrusively cleaning up any stray bits of food.::

April Brell

::She helped herself to a goblet of wine from a passing servant's tray.::

IoloasSanGiam

Well, that's enough. ::His tray gone and his conversation with the crown dead he stomped right out onto the dance floor to Nadiya and the Black Mask guy.:: Nadiya.

Kerbouchard Ren

::A dashing dark-eyed fellow moved through the house with the Thermish dancers. He helped

gather up stray guests, idle too long, and danced them back into the ballroom. He wore traditional Thermish dress and danced as easily as any of the 'official' entertainers::

Blakk Maskk

I think your suitor has come to reclaim you.

IoloasSanGiam

I'm sorry, but it is time I take ya home to your paw. ;said in a very unconvincing farmer twang:: You go play with the crown guy ::He said to the black face::

April Brell

::She was observing the guests with a thoughtful eye when a familiar floral scent caught her attention::

Kerbouchard Ren

::His mask was the long strip of cloth flowing from his headdress across his nose and mouth::

April Brell

::She nodded to the figure wearing an owl mask and smiled:: Evening my Lady.

Blakk Maskk

I'm sorry, my lady. Good luck.

Kirin Fand

::She offered polite nods to those she moved past. A familiar voice caught her attention; she greeted the lady in the peach gown and rust mask:: Good evening. ::the tone was warm::

Stan Hewnan

Then I had best make this dance count. ::and with an ear for the ringing of bells, he held her tight and went around the marble floor once more::

KingTheNew

::He looked about and then walked slowly toward the door. His neck was getting stiff:: Play, play, play, you servents of the heavy crown. Pretend, dance and pretend. That is how we keep you all in your place. ::He waved one hand and kept walking:: Rich enough to not really care.

Lrd Hawthorn

::Meanwhile, a table was carried out to be set up at one end of the room and upon it were pouches and a fancy knife::

Vellys Marsh

::She laughed as he spun her around the room::

Sherakai has joined this chat.

Kirin Fand

::She glanced over as she heard the "King": That's what he thinks. ::she murmured::

April Brell

::The dark-eyed fellow in traditional Thermish dress caught her eye and she gasped softly::

Blakk Maskk

::Another glass of wine in hand, he watched the Crown, shaking his head::

Kerbouchard Ren

::he made his way toward peach and black velvet::

April Brell

::The empty wine glass was set upon the tray of a passing servant as she moved toward the striking figure::

Kirin Fand

::She looked on as the lady in peach headed off in what appeared to be an eager manner::

KingTheNew

::He looked for the Lord of the house, to thank him, but he could not move his head around all that well and was not sure where he was::

Sherakai

::The man who appeared in the doorway was dressed in dark blue trimmed with copper. The copper domino he adjusted did not do a great deal to disguise his black-bearded features. The Warden at his elbow completely gave him away::

Lrd Hawthorn

::The lord of the manor returned to the ball room, waved a hand and the musicians ceased their playing:: Honored guests, I hope you are enjoying the revels. Please do not take this as an end to the ball but rather it's first birthing day! Many more hours the night holds in her arms and I hope you will stay until the night is well on the way to morning.

Vellys Marsh

::She tried to break away. She was hostess and it was time to unmask.::

KingTheNew

::The big crown that covered his whole head swayed a bit as he made his way to the door.::

Lrd Hawthorn

However! We have rewards for those that showed cleverness and inventiveness tonight.

XiphSnowmoon

::Slipping into the library, he quieted the musicians there, as well, so that those enjoying the comfort of rich surroundings and fine wine could hear the lord and master of the house.::

Stan Hewnan

::The swan-feathered man melted into the crowd.::

Blakk Maskk

::Behind the black iron, pale eyes glanced over the crowd, then he stiffened.::

KingTheNew

Cleverness ::He chuckled as he past through the doorway.::

Vellys Marsh

::She hurried to join Lord Hawthorn, adjusting her mask as she went, and spying the Steward.::

Lrd Hawthorn

First, so you need not be shy... ::and he held his hand out to Vellys:: My hostess for this evening, resplendent in red, will unmask with me.

Sherakai

::A murmured word to the Warden had the fellow moving off to speak with one of the servants, though the look on his face was anything but happy.::

Vellys Marsh

::She took the Lord's hand with a smile.::

XiphSnowmoon

Hush, hush! ::he whispered, looking out one of the library doors.:: It is time for the unmasking!

KingTheNew

::Through the small eye holes he noiced the Steward right there by the door.::

Kerbouchard Ren

::His dark eyes smiled as the peach came toward him.::

Sherakai

::There were smiles and greetings, the shaking of hands for those who moved to greet him.::

KingTheNew

I think I like the pretend part better. Time for me to go. ::He was outside as quickly as moving around in a huge crown would allow.::

Lrd Hawthorn

Where is the Orange King?

April Brell

::Standing before him now and looking up into his dark eyes.::

Vellys Marsh

There he goes! ::pointing to the fleeing Crown.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::He held up a small sack that clearly contained coins and jingled it with one hand while removing his Silver Fox mask with the other.:: Sir, don't you wish to claim your reward? A clever costume that caught the eyes of all...

Kirin Fand

::She stayed quiet for the moment. Something was afoot::

KingTheNew

Like all power it flees just when you need it ::He yelled as he left::

Vellys Marsh

::She reached back to untie the ribbon that held her mask in place::

Blakk Maskk

::Setting his goblet aside, he rubbed his arm. Silver flashed there, and he slid quietly along the edge of the crowd::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Lord Hawthorn's jaw was scruffed with beard, his dark hair wavy and thick::

Stan Hewnan has left this chat.

IoloasSanGiam has left this chat.

XiphSnowmoon

The real power's only just arrived! ::someone shouted from the back of the room, and a ripple of laughter followed::

Lrd Hawthorn

Perhaps the footmen and the groomsman will stop him. ::he laughed softly:: I've never seen a king who didn't want his taxes!

Vellys Marsh

::The ruby mask revealing Vellys! Wearing red, showing some skin, with her hair down...all pretty like::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Vellys was absolutely lovely!::

Lrd Hawthorn

::The first pouch of coin was handed off to a servant::

Sherakai

Late. So sorry ::Kai laughed:: Can I claim business for the welfare of Shadokhan?

Kirin Fand

That's always your excuse! ::she laughed and called from across the way::

KingTheNew has left this chat.

April Brell

::Dark brown eyes behind the mask regarded Vellys with surprise ... and admiration::

Sherakai

::He held his hands out to either side helplessly::

Mik Gideonn has joined this chat.

Kirin Fand

::She smiled as she got a look at Vellys unmasked, she looked lovely!::

Vellys Marsh

::her smile did not falter, but she kept an eye on the Steward::

April Brell

::laughing at Kai and the lady behind the owl mask's banter::

XiphSnowmoon

It is the steward! ::the elven bard exclaimed, and the people behind him pushed forward to see for themselves:: Auck! Be gentle! My feathers!!

Lrd Hawthorn

You are most welcome to the ball, your Grace, ::Nate called to the Steward:: Late or no! Where is the man in the iron mask? ::he held up another jingling bag::

Sherakai

You are most gracious, Lord Hawthorn. ::He bowed to their host::

Vellys Marsh

::Not everyone bunched up to gawk at the steward. There were some who held their ground and paid more attention to the host than the late arrival::

Blakk Maskk

::He froze, and far too many eyes turned his way::

April Brell

::Her eyes fell upon the man in question::

Kirin Fand

::She curled her left hand around the stem of her wine glass. Her attention turned from teasing Kai to seeking out the fellow in the iron mask::

Lrd Hawthorn

He had me on the horns of a dilemma! ::the Silver Fox mask wound up on the table and a servant cleared it away:: Come, sir, unmask and claim your reward, for I have no idea who you might be.

XiphSnowmoon

::Against his will, the little knot of people in the library behind him pushed the elf right out the door. He held his lute against his chest to keep it safe::

Vellys Marsh

Please. Come share your cleverness with us all. ::calling out to the Black Mask::

Blakk Maskk

::Gathering himself, he moved slowly forward a few paces:: Who am I? ::he asked:: A poor man. A soldier. A man of the people. Do you give your gold to help the people, your lordship?

Mik Gideonn

::A multi-colored jester with a jingling jester's mask moved slowly through the dancers, even as the man in the iron mask moved::

Lrd Hawthorn

Indeed I do, sir. Come, let's see you. ::Nate smiled without guile::

XiphSnowmoon

::He had to mind his footwork or he'd find himself face down on the floor or worse, pushed into the grand fireplace, and he was not yet ready to be roasted fowl. A slap here and a jab there cleared a little space about him and smoothed his lovely feathers::

Kerbouchard Ren

::He slipped up beside April, letting the white linen fall away from his face:: Having a good time? ::he whispered::

Kirin Fand

::The jingling noise caught her attention and she looked that way to see the jester on the move::

April Brell

It's all very grand. ::She smiled,:: And even better now.

Sherakai

::He tipped his head, watching curiously. A glance around didn't reveal any in the crowd who wanted to claim immediate acquaintance with the man in the horned mask, but there was something about him that tickled Kai's senses::

Lrd Hawthorn

And the dancing, playing peacock wins the first prize of the night for sheer extravagance! Come retrieve your winnings master peacock! Perhaps you'll get yours before the iron mask secures his! ::he jingled another bag and dropped it next to the be-ribboned knife in a fancy-fine sheath::

Vellys Marsh

::she clapped her hands::

April Brell

::Adding her applause to Vellys::

XiphSnowmoon

Oh, I am having a prize? Is that being fair? ::And with that he left the pushy group and skipped forward, grinning happily::

Kirin Fand

::She, too, clapped. She grinned. She knew the voice that came from the peacock::

April Brell

::The familiar voice evoked a long soft laugh.::

Lrd Hawthorn

It is only fair if you reveal yourself, master lutist. ::And Nathan laughed::

XiphSnowmoon

I mean -- ::And he slipped back into the Suave, Sophisticated voice without the crazy accent.:: Oh, my lord, you are too kind by far!

Kirin Fand

::It was too late, the bard had been found out! She stifled laughter.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::A bow to the peacock and then he was presenting the lovely blade with its handle of silver inlaid with pearl and onyx and a small purse to go with it::

Sherakai

::Kai laughed at the bard and clapped.:: You're beautiful, Master Snowmoon!

Mik Gideonn

::Applause came from all around the hall and more jingling as the jester passed a familiar looking servant::

XiphSnowmoon

Oh ::he gasped.:: Oh, that is being far too fine! ::Even so, he bowed gracefully and perfectly. As he came up, he pushed his extravagant mask off, revealing familiar sharp features and sapphire blue braids.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::More applause greeted the winner:: Well done!

Vellys Marsh

::stepping back so Xiph could have the spot of honor.::

April Brell

Marvelous! ::Applauding some more::

Lrd Hawthorn

Where is our iron masked fellow? ::Hawthorn hefted the purse:: Come forward sir! ::He searched :: Claim your gold for the people - and I will throw in another pouch. It will be worth it to see your face!

April Brell

::Still watching to see the iron masked man...unmasked.::

Vellys Marsh

Oh do please reveal yourself!

Blakk Maskk

::With the attention still on the gaudy elf, he turned smoothly and launched the small blade he'd hidden in his hand. It flew straight and fast at the steward's throat.::

April Brell

::hearing a bit of jingling, then gasping at the sudden motion of the blade.::

XiphSnowmoon

This is very beautiful, my lord ::He bowed again, all unsuspecting.::

Kirin Fand

Kai! Duck!

Mik Gideonn

::The jester's eyes had never left the iron-masked man and it was speed of thought that acted rather than speed of form, though form moved as well.::

Sherakai

::Stars, he was fast! Kai's arm came up and his head jerked to one side, then he was fast-stepping backwards into the arms of those behind him.::

April Brell

::taking a step toward Mathurin, eyes riveted on the scene:

Ricoh Gideonn

::At the same time, one of the masked servants tackled the Black Mask.::

Kirin Fand

::Anger filled her and, for a moment, she found herself wondering if she was the only healer in the place.::

Blakk Maskk

::His opposite hand came up and darkness enveloped it, spreading quickly into a tall ellipse.:: Lick the steward's boots, will you? Now you can lick the steward's blood! ::Knocked from behind, he fell into the shadow.::

Ricoh Gideonn

::the servant what did the tackling tumbled into the shadow with the Black Mask.::

Mik Gideonn

::The jester was there in a flash as well even as the shadow formed, reaching for the servant's foot as shadow claimed the two before him.::

Blakk Maskk

::The portal hissed and snapped -- and where there had been two men there was nothing but turmoil.::

Kirin Fand

::She swore: May you drown in your own when you die for this. ::She dropped the glass on the nearest table. The owl feathered mask fell to the floor and Kirin headed toward Kai and the Wardens.::

Sherakai

::Hands supported him, keeping Kai on his feet. His hand clutched his shoulder, the hilt of the knife protruding between his blood-stained fingers.::

Mik Gideonn

::His hand closed on nothing and he roared in anger, whipping off the mask and pushing - yes, pushing - through the crowd toward Sherakai.::

XiphSnowmoon

::He was just as surprised as the rest of the gathering. Mossy eyes wide, he leaped up onto the table, looking swiftly over the crowd in search of the would-be assassin's cohorts.::

April Brell

::Darting after Kirin, then slowing to stop next to her.::

Lrd Hawthorn

Close the doors! :: Hawthorn shouted: No one leaves!

Kerbouchard Ren

::Mathurin, for his part, would not stand idly by. He too moved to be sure that the doors were shut. The Thermish dancers were swift to alert the others as events unfolded.::

Sherakai

::Swearing volubly, the Warden dropped the glass of water he'd been sent to retrieve and headed straight for the doors. The Chief would take care of the steward, and there were another half-dozen Wardens outside to set to work.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::The half-lo's too, moved through the house, many hands to assist the Lord's men. Their pins potential weapons if things got more unruly.::

Vellys Marsh

::regreting now the dress she wore. So much easier to blend in if she wasn't wearing red.:: Is there a healer?

Kirin Fand

Kai, we've got to stop meeting like this. ::She kept her wits and sense of humor about her. She looked to Mik and inclined her head toward Kai's shoulder.:: You need my help or have you got this in hand?

Kirin Fand

Right here! ::She raised a hand for Vellys.::

Mik Gideonn

Help is always welcome. ::Mik said, his voice hard, his hand going immediately to the wound, a handkerchief in it to staunch the blood, blue glimmering on his fingertips, working its way around the metal and down and in::

Vellys Marsh

::She might have known the Chief could heal. ::

Sherakai

I'm all right ::he grimaced:: Does anyone know who that was?

Kirin Fand

::She murmured:: Any sign of poison, Mik?

Mik Gideonn

::Mikkaill said something unkind and unhelpful about the man in the iron mask and then he fell silent. There was no arguing the point. He was looking for precisely such things - he remembered Marrford!::

Kirin Fand

April? ::She glanced over to her:: Is there a chair nearby you can grab?

April Brell

Sure::She moved to retrieve the needed chair for Kirin and brought it to her::

Sherakai

::Teeth clenched, he closed his eyes and tried to focus his Gift:: Ricoh? ::he asked Mik::

Kirin Fand

My sentiments as well. ::To Mik. She then smiled to April:: Thank you. ::She slid the chair behind Kai::

Vadoma Nuri has left this chat.

Mik Gideonn

::tightly he said:: No poison. ::which was a relief:: I want to get this knife out of here once you're sitting...

Sherakai

Just get it out, already. ::He'd certainly suffered worse, and -- well, then he was sitting, helpful hands pushing him down whether he wanted to go or not::

Kirin Fand

If you draw out the knife, Mik, I can help seal the wound as you go. ::She glanced to Mik::

Sherakai

If it's not poisoned, I'm not going to die ::he pointed out, moving his hand away from the knife:: Somebody get this mask off, please?

Kirin Fand

::She reached to remove the mask as Kai asked::

Vellys Marsh

::So Vellys did what a good hostess does when no one is allowed to leave...she got the kitchen folks working and spent the time making sure the vips were comfy::

Mik Gideonn

Ricoh... is uninjured at the moment, ::Mik said to Kai and while he was focused on Kirin removing the mask he pulled the blade out, putting pressure on the wound and wreathing it in blue magic to hold the precious, precious blood in::

Kirin Fand

::Holding the mask in one hand, she reached take Kai's hand, the one opposite from his injured shoulder:: So, how are the children? ::More distraction::

April Brell

::April reached her hand out to Kirin, offering to relieve her of the mask so she'd have both hands to work with should she need them...::

Kirin Fand

::She smiled gratefully to April as she handed off the mask::

Sherakai

::She was going to be wearing his blood, for he'd clutched his shoulder with that hand!:: Fine.

They're -- ::Wait, were they? He tipped his head, silver eyes gleaming brightly.:: Fine.

Lrd Hawthorn

::Hawthorn too was busy, sorting out who was who and removing masks to make sure there were no more surprises. Accountings were made of everyone who was in attendance - which of course did nothing more than keep the guests busy until it could be ascertained - along with the Steward's Wardens - that no one else had left abruptly who hadn't left *before* the unmasking. Several individuals had, of course::

Kirin Fand

::Kirin was the wife of soldier, it wouldn't be the first time she'd gotten blood on herself from tending wounds:: Good. ::she smiled:: How does Shahdi like being home again?

Lrd Hawthorn

::The wine peasants and the white masked man for instance::

Vellys Marsh has left this chat.

Ricoh Gideonn has left this chat.

Mik Gideonn

April, ::Mikkaill said::

Sherakai

Kirin. You're a sweetheart, but chitchat about the children can wait. Do *you* know that man or anything about him?

Mik Gideonn

Take that mask from Kirin, please.

April Brell

::She stepped to Mik, holding the mask up that Kirin had passed to her earlier:: Got it. ::She was holding both Kai's mask that Kirin had handed off to her and the mask 'she' had been wearing earlier::

Kirin Fand

No, but if I hear his voice again, I'd remember it. ::She shook her head:: But the priority right now is to keep you from bleeding all over Lord Hawthorn's floor.

XiphSnowmoon

::Slipping off the table, which hadn't rewarded him with the sight of any suspicious felons attempting to flee, Xiph went to gather up the musicians and set them to playing.:: The steward is being lively and his Wardens are searching the grounds.:: He was making things up as he went along.:: And Lord Hawthorn has lots and lots of good things for drinking and eating!

Sherakai

I think I'm in good hands. ::He peered through those gathered around him, as if he might spy something or someone useful.::

Kirin Fand

If he came on horseback, though, and anything was left behind ... ::she shrugged. This was not the time to mention talking to animals. Kai would know, no one else needed to::

Sherakai

Good idea. We'll check with the stable hands::He couldn't see anything but curious gawkers.::

April Brell

::She found herself staring at the spot where the men had disappeared, her brows drawn together darkly. Then she shook herself out of it and lifted her gaze to Mik, concern in her eyes.::

Kirin Fand

So, who gets to look? ::She smiled wryly::

Sherakai

At the stable hands?

Mik Gideonn

::*pain was siphoned away... blood more than simply staunched - he wasn't about to let it go to waste*::

XiphSnowmoon

::As the music filled the air again, a little of the tension eased, though there was plenty of gossip

going on, knots of people here and there with their heads together and speculation abounding.::

Kirin Fand

Oh, never mind. ::she sounded resigned:: Shall I get you drink or something?

Sherakai

::His hand fisting where it laid against his leg, he looked up at Mikkaill.:: I'm all right, ::he repeated softly.::

Mik Gideonn

I'd very much like to get you out of here, ::Mikkaill grumbled softly as he worked to close the wound. Perhaps his own anger was struggling with his focus:: Kirin, lend me a hand with this... ?

Sherakai

The stable hands will be questioned, Kirin. After that, we -- ::He clenched his teeth again and turned his head aside.:: Bloody Abyss.

Kirin Fand

::She nodded to Mik and moved her hands just above Kai's shoulder. She was angry as well, but she'd had years of practice to not allow it to interfere when she was plying the healing arts.::

Mik Gideonn

::such a small thing, relatively, but he was jagged around the edges and tugged by Ricoh dropping into a dangerous situation ..he hissed and whispered softly:: I'm so sorry, *surei*.

April Brell

::She watched helplessly as Mik and Kirin labored over Kai, wishing she could be of more assistance. She scanned the room quickly searching for Mathurin, before returning her gaze to Kai.::

Mik Gideonn

Oh, yes, that's it. That helps *immensely*, Kirin, thank you. ::Just that nudge... just that ounce of focus.::

Sherakai

::He gave April a taut smile.:: Sorry to ruin your fun. Was it a good party before I arrived?

Kirin Fand

::She offered Mik a smile and glanced up to him they tended Kai.:: We know one thing. ::she murmured.::

April Brell

::She offered him a radiant smile.:: It was marvelous. I was watching the dancers. So beautiful. ::considering.:: Almost as nice as our dinner with Kirin. ::she winked.:: *You* didn't ruin it anyway. ::she added.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Since most of the excitement was over, guests followed Xiph's advice and moved to the dining hall to partake of the vast amounts of food available. Gawking was only good for so long when important people weren't actually *dying*.::

Mik Gideonn

What's that? ::Mik asked Kirin, his eyes on her for a moment.::

Blakk Maskk

::Worse for the guests' entertainment, the skewered steward was sitting up and talking.::

Kirin Fand

::She murmured.:: Are there any necromancers in particular with an axe to grind against Kai? ::She shook her head.:: That I know of, that's the only magic that commands shadows.

Mik Gideonn

:warmth and ribbons of relief wrapped around the wound as it closed under their efforts at last.::

April Brell

Can I get anyone something to drink? Water, wine ... serky? ::smiling sweetly.::

Sherakai

That's debatable, ::he said to April.:: Do you think you could find something I could use as a sling? As much work as these two are going to, I don't want to ruin it right away.

Kirin Fand

Pillowcase would do the trick, April. Maybe one of the servants can get one out.

Kerbouchard Ren

::Mat returned at last, the Thermish Dancers having moved on to help Xiph and the jugglers and the Wardens. What a bunch they made! The Balt musicians were all being questioned and sequestered - to their complaints...::

April Brell

Absolutely. I'll be right back. ::She turned and went to head off one of the servants with the request::

Kerbouchard Ren

::The long linen bit of his head dress dangled from his shoulder as he walked toward them just as April hurried off::

XiphSnowmoon

::Hovering into view, the elf peered over the shoulders of one or two of the onlookers. Seeing that the steward was indeed alive and well, he coaxed the last of them away.:: Come, there is music and wine! Let the dear steward have some room. And some drink of his own!

April Brell

::She paused, looking at Mat, then grabbed his hand.:: Umm...could we use this ...she reached for the linen wrap with her other hand::

Mik Gideonn

I think that's got it for now, ::Mik said flexing his fingers and straightening::

April Brell

Kai needs a sling and that might just work. ::she added to Mat::

Sherakai

Chief ::he said quietly.:: Go tend to the Wardens, if you please. Kirin, I think, can bandage me up nicely. I'll make my apologies to Lord Hawthorn.

Kirin Fand

I'll fasten you up once April gets... ::She chuckled.:: Mindreader!

Kerbouchard Ren

::Mat unwound the cloth which was longer than it looked.:: At your service, ::he said, handing it over to April::

Sherakai

I don't read minds ::he said, a frown tugging at his brows. There were still people lingering close by, and he didn't need a new spate of rumors starting. Getting a knife flung at him was more than enough fodder for the gossips.::

April Brell

Thank you kind sir. ::April flashed a brief smile and curtseyed to Mathurin. then she took the linen cloth to Kirin.:: Think this will work?

Mik Gideonn

::Mik nodded and inclined his head.:: Aye. ::He moved off to do as he was bid, a quiet 'thank you' to April and Mat as he did so::

Kirin Fand

Yes, I think that will do nicely, April. Thank you. ::She took the cloth and started winding it around Kai's arm after tearing two long strips from it.:: Kai, that's a jest, you know.

Sherakai

::His gaze followed Mikkaill.:: I know ::he said somewhat shortly.:: Other people don't.

Kirin Fand

Mmm... ::She went about the business of tying a long strip of cloth around Kai's wrist::

Sherakai

Thank you, ladies.

Kirin Fand

::She draped the end on his shoulder while she tied the other long cloth in place near his elbow.:: This will do nicely for the time being. ::She tied the strips together behind Kai's neck::

Sherakai

Very nicely. ::He managed a smile.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Hawthorn himself returned to the ball room:: My lord, ::he said as he approached Kai and the knot of folk around him:: You'll be all right?

April Brell

::She stepped back to give Lord Hawthorn some room.::

Kirin Fand

::She offered a polite smile to Lord Hawthorn as she finished up with the sling.::

Sherakai

::His silver gaze lifted to capture and hold the man's eyes, and he studied him for a long moment.:: Yes, quite all right.

Lrd Hawthorn

I'm relieved to hear it. Can I provide you with anything? Food, drink, lodging for the night? ::Hawthorn house was, afer all, a place for visitors.::

Sherakai

Your full cooperation will be sufficient. Is it true that you do not know my attacker?

Lrd Hawthorn

I didn't recognize his voice and we talked some when he first arrived. ::He'd removed the red cape and now wore just the black.::

Mik Gideonn

::Wardens met and tended to, he moved on to interviewing the Balt musicians who = it turns out - weren't from Balthazor at all but were actually impersonators who, while they knew the tunes had never spent a day in the overcast north.::

Sherakai

::He studied him further, looking for lies, then he nodded.:: I am sorry that my arrival sparked violence in your guest. If you learn anything, I would like to hear it.

Kirin Fand

::She looked to Kai:: Who is to say that the mystery man didn't come tonight hoping you'd show up? ::She shook her head.:: I wouldn't be surprised if he was in cahoots with that melon head in a crown. He never unmasked either.

Sherakai

If he is found, he will be questioned, I assure you. ::There would be a lot of questioning going on -- a tedious way to ruin a party, to his way of thinking.::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Hawthorn nodded his agreement and bowed.::

Sherakai

Perhaps we can talk again on the morrow, sir?

Kerbouchard Ren

::Matt looped an arm around April's shoulders:: Come on, ::he said softly:: Let's go get something to eat. ::while they could.::

Kirin Fand

Questioning. ::she murmured.:: Sometimes, it's frustrating to be on the *right* side of the law.

Lrd Hawthorn

I am at your service, my lord.

Mik Gideonn

::The spot where his brother and the masked man had vanished got a lot of his attention. He stood there for several long minutes, eyes closed.::

April Brell

::She nodded and followed his lead, the whirling of adreneline settling into something suspiciously like weariness.::

Sherakai

Thank you. ::Getting to his feet, he inclined his head gracefully to Hawthorn.:: I hope you will forgive me if I do not linger.

Kirin Fand

::She took a slow deep breath::

April Brell

::She turned back to look at the steward:: Be well Kai, Mik.

Lrd Hawthorn

Please, ::he gestured to indicate the Steward's freedom::

Sherakai

Are you well, Kirin?

Mik Gideonn

::Mikkaill, with perfect timing, returned to Sherakai's side::

Kirin Fand

And what about the rest of us, m'lord. ::She looked at Lord Hawthorn:: Are we free to leave as well? ::She looked to Kai:: Other than finding myself in need of fresh air, I'm fine. ::She gave Kai a warm smile::

Mik Gideonn

You certainly are, Kirin, ::Mikkaill said, daring Hawthorn to second guess him::

Lrd Hawthorn

Anyone my lord Gideonn and the Steward says may go, may go.

Kirin Fand

In the fuss, I have forgotten my manners. ::She offered her hand to Hawthorn:: I am Kirin Lexington.

April Brell

::She slipped one arm around Mat, looking between Kirin, Mik and Lord Hawthorn::

Lrd Hawthorn

::He took it and bowed over it:: A pleasure. I've heard so much about you.

Kirin Fand

Rumors, most likely. ::She chuckled::

Lrd Hawthorn

Not all, surely? ::he grinned at her good humor::

Mik Gideonn

I'll give you a list of those you can release if you call for quill and parchment.

Kirin Fand

Depends on who you hear things from. ::She winked:: And the pleasure is mine. ::She smiled warmly then looked to Mik:: You mind vouching for April and Mat, please?

Sherakai

::He looked around the room, mouth slightly pursed, then turned to Mikkaill::

April Brell

::She stepped forward shyly:: I'm April Brell. I just work for Kirin so you wouldn't have heard of me.

Mik Gideonn

My pleasure.

April Brell

::Then realized Kirin had it all in hand and stepped back to Mat::

Lrd Hawthorn

::Nathan took April's hand and bowed a greeting:: I'm sorry we've met under such difficulties.

Kirin Fand

::Kirin glanced to April then looked to Kai:: I can picture the conversation at home already...

April Brell

::She took his hand, inclining her head deeply:: As am I.

Sherakai

The Wardens will finish their jobs here, Hawthorn, and then get out from underfoot. Until tomorrow. ::He bowed slightly to the man:: Ladies... I hope you enjoy the rest of your evening.

April Brell

::Arching a dark brow at Kirin::

Mik Gideonn

::Mik called a warden to him and the process of name-taking was underway:: Lord Hawthorn, ah, here's the fellow... ::a servant with the necessary stuff came, Mikkaill passed it to his man with the instructions to hold those who made an effort to leave when the iron masked man had attacked and to release the others after thorough questioning:: Take names, ::he said:: Of everyone.

Kirin Fand

With Will. ::she clarified for April::

Sherakai

He'll be so disappointed to have missed the excitement. And the costumes.

Lrd Hawthorn

My lords, ladies... I will tend to this with your man's help. I bid you a better night than the evening has been and I apologize for all that's happened.

Kerbouchard Ren

::Mat stuck close by April's side::

April Brell

Does he like costumes? ::canting her head to Kirin in curiosity::

Kirin Fand

::She nodded to Hawthorn:: You need not apologize. This wasn't your doing. ::She looked to Kai and laughed:: Last time he was at one of these, you dressed him like a barbarian and that crazy elf showed up!

April Brell

Kai dressed him up as a barbarian?? ::she forced her jaw to close and shook her head slowly from side to side:: You're going to have to tell me all about that sometime Kirin.

Kirin Fand

Will doesn't really care for large parties, April, but duty sometimes demands him to be at such functions. That and indulging me once in a while. ::She smiled thoughtfully::

Sherakai

He made a very good barbarian.

Kirin Fand

More than one lady was eyeing him up. ::She grinned:: The costume was borrowed, April. Kai chose it.

April Brell

I see.

Sherakai

Thank you for your help. Good night. ::He made another small bow from the waist, then turned to head for the door. There were another score of people to reassure and say good night to, and then he'd be free::

April Brell

Good night, Kai.

Mik Gideonn

Ladies, gentlemen, ::Mik said, moving him past those others who would goodnight him to death:: I am taking Sherakai to the Keep so Iss'ende can tend him. Stay as long as you like. ::As soon as he got him outside he wasn't even going to wait for the carriage - since all the guests were inside, it would work out quite nicely::

Kirin Fand

I better be heading home. Once this news starts traveling, there will be more work for the soldiers including my husband.. ::She went to pick her mask up from the floor::

April Brell

And it will be an early morning for us all. ::she realized she still held both her own and Kai's mask, looking at both in bemusement::

Kerbouchard Ren

::Mat urged her toward the exit. They could get something to eat somewhere else!::

Kirin Fand

::She held her hand out to April for Kai's mask:: I'll see about getting that returned.

April Brell

::she handed the mask off to Kirin again and followed Mat out:: Thank you

Kirin Fand

::She slipped out the door. It was going to be an interesting night::