

1. Calluses

The chapter opens with an epigraph from Navani Kholin, discussing the mechanics of attracting spren by using gemstones and familiar elements. This sets a thematic tone for the chapter, which then shifts to focus on Lirin, a surgeon calmly treating a child for scurvy amidst a refugee crisis. Lirin's training helps him remain composed as he assists the child's mother, offering a token for juice and promising to help locate her missing children. The scene highlights the dire conditions in Hearthstone, where refugees from Herdaz crowd the town, living under makeshift tarps and facing scrutiny from armed parshmen, now called "singers."

Lirin observes the overwhelmed town, noting the fog-shrouded streets and the influx of refugees, many fleeing the destruction of Herdaz after a year of conflict. The town's resources are stretched thin, with stormshelters inadequate for long-term housing. Lirin's role as a medic forces him to triage the refugees, inspecting each for health issues while navigating the political tensions under the new parshmen-led regime. The chapter underscores the cyclical nature of power and violence, as Lirin reflects on how little has changed despite the shift in leadership—ordinary people still suffer, and he remains tasked with healing their wounds.

The narrative follows Lirin as he treats a one-armed Alethi man traumatized by brigands who killed his wife. Lirin's clinical detachment is evident as he directs the man to a tent for mental health support, though he internally notes the man's hollow stare. His pragmatic approach is challenged when Abiajan, the parshwoman citylady, questions his seemingly emotionless condolences. Lirin defends his demeanor as a necessary professional boundary, revealing the emotional toll of his work. The interaction hints at their shared history, as Abiajan recalls Lirin setting her broken arm in childhood, though her current role and experiences remain enigmatic.

The chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension, as Lirin continues his work amid the chaos, anticipating the arrival of a figure responsible for much of the suffering. The juxtaposition of Lirin's stoicism and the refugees' despair paints a grim picture of a world in upheaval, where survival hinges on resilience and detachment. The epigraph's theme of attracting spren through familiarity mirrors Lirin's own reliance on routine and training to navigate the unfamiliar and brutal realities of war and displacement.

