

Chapter 20: NASSUN AND ESSUN, ON THE DARK SIDE OF THE WORLD

The chapter alternates between the perspectives of Nassun and Essun, both poised to enact world-altering decisions. Nassun, at sunset, resolves to collide the Moon with Earth, driven by a twisted love and despair. She cares for Schaffa, her guardian, ensuring his comfort before her departure, acknowledging the inevitability of destruction. The narrative reflects on her capacity for love despite her traumatic experiences, framing her catastrophic choice as a tragic response to a broken world. Meanwhile, Essun awakens at dawn, preparing for her own transformative mission, surrounded by companions who have gathered to bid her farewell.

Essun's journey is marked by reluctant camaraderie and unresolved emotions. Her companions—Lerna, Tonkee, Hjarka, Ykka, and others—assemble in a makeshift camp, their presence a mix of support and unintended burden. Essun grapples with their admiration, feeling unworthy yet determined to prove herself. The group's dynamic is bittersweet, blending humor and melancholy as they prepare for an uncertain future. Ykka's reappearance, especially, stirs mixed feelings, as she balances her leadership duties with a grudging affection for Essun.

The chapter underscores themes of inevitability and cyclical tragedy. Nassun's belief that some things are "too broken to be fixed" mirrors Essun's own resignation to a doomed world. Both characters act from a place of love and despair, their choices framed as the only responses to systemic suffering. Nassun's reference to a "commandment set in stone" hints at the inescapable patterns of history, while Essun's companions embody the fragile hope of breaking those cycles. The narrative juxtaposes their parallel journeys, emphasizing the weight of their decisions.

Ultimately, the chapter captures a moment of transition, where characters confront the limits of their agency. Nassun's cold determination contrasts with Essun's reluctant leadership, yet both are united by their desire to end suffering. The gathering of Essun's friends—some joining, some staying—adds a layer of poignancy, highlighting the human connections that persist even in the face of annihilation. The chapter closes with a hint of dark humor, as Essun laughs at the absurdity of their "quest," underscoring the surreal tension between hope and inevitability.

