

Chapter Sixty-One

Yrene and Chaol descend deep into the library, meticulously counting steps and scanning every corner for signs of danger. The atmosphere grows increasingly eerie as they move through dimly lit halls, past ancient scrolls and stone alcoves, until they reach a secluded underground passage. A lone candle marks the entrance to a tunnel, its open door and disturbed dirt suggesting recent activity. Despite the obvious trap, they proceed cautiously, united in their resolve to face whatever lies ahead.

The tunnel leads them into a vast, golden-lit chamber filled with the treasures of an ancient empire—golden artifacts, suits of armor, and stone sarcophagi. At the far end, they discover the Healer on High bound and gagged on a golden throne, with Duva, the khagan's daughter, standing beside her. Duva's unnatural smile reveals her true identity as Valg, a malevolent force. The scene confirms their fears: the Healer on High was merely bait to lure them into a carefully laid trap.

Chaol recognizes the danger immediately but remains determined to rescue the Healer on High. Yrene, though terrified, refuses to stay behind, insisting they face the threat together. Their silent, cautious advance through the tunnel underscores the tension, as they anticipate an ambush. The golden light in the chamber, initially deceptive, ultimately reveals a horrifying truth—Duva's possession by the Valg, a twist that heightens the stakes.

The chapter culminates in a chilling confrontation, with Duva's Valg-controlled presence signaling a deeper conspiracy. The discovery of the hidden tomb and its treasures suggests a connection to the ancient empire's secrets, while the Healer on High's captivity underscores the Valg's ruthlessness. Yrene and Chaol's unity in the face of this threat sets the stage for a perilous showdown, leaving readers anticipating the next move in their desperate struggle against the Valg's dark influence.