

Chapter Thirty-One

The chapter opens with Nesryn expressing skepticism about the existence of stygian spiders and their rare spidersilk, dismissing them as myths. However, Falkan surprises her by producing a small piece of the glittering fabric, proving its reality. He reveals that he acquired a substantial amount of spidersilk three years prior through a barter with the spiders' northern kin. The conversation takes a darker turn when Falkan discloses the steep price he paid: twenty years of his life, taken from his prime, leaving him physically aged beyond his years. This revelation sets the stage for the chapter's central mystery and tension.

Falkan explains his presence at the aerie, seeking answers about the spiders to reclaim his lost youth. Houlun, the hearth-mother, connects his arrival to recent disturbances caused by the kharankui, a destructive breed of spiders in the southern mountains. These creatures have been stealing ruk eggs and spreading their deadly webs, choking the landscape. Houlun suspects Falkan's quest is linked to the spiders' resurgence, though he denies provoking them. The group debates the spiders' motives and the potential danger they pose, with Falkan admitting he hopes to find a way to reverse his aging by confronting them.

The discussion shifts to a plan of action, with Houlun urging Sartaq and Nesryn to investigate the spiders' activities and protect the ruk nests. She emphasizes the need for secrecy to avoid panic among the riders. Falkan is included in the mission, as Houlun believes his knowledge could be valuable. The chapter highlights the tension between caution and the urgency to act, as the group weighs the risks of confronting the kharankui without clear proof of their involvement in the egg thefts. Sartaq and Nesryn's skepticism toward Falkan's motives adds another layer of conflict.

The chapter concludes with a ominous note as Houlun murmurs about the awakening of "The One Who Sleeps," implied to be Erawan. This reference suggests a larger,

looming threat beyond the immediate danger of the spiders. The firelight casts a eerie glow on the scene, underscoring the gravity of the situation. The chapter ends abruptly, leaving readers with a sense of foreboding and anticipation for the challenges ahead, as the characters prepare to face both the kharankui and the darker forces stirring in their world.

