

Chapter Twenty-Four

Nesryn reflects on her complicated relationship with Chaol, recognizing his recent attention stems from guilt rather than genuine interest. Though she tells herself she's fine being a placeholder for the other women in his life, her weariness is evident as she returns to the palace after a fruitless search for Valg activity. Seeking solitude, she climbs to the aerie where Kadara, Sartaq's ruk, is feasting. The prince surprises her, revealing his network of spies and inquiring about her well-being. Their conversation hints at a growing connection, as Nesryn admits she enjoys his company despite her usual reserve.

Sartaq shares his own struggles with familial expectations, contrasting his deep bond with Kadara and the rukhin against the distrust among his royal siblings. Nesryn relates to the tension between duty and personal ties, having spent a draining day with her demanding family. The prince's candidness about his isolation within the royal family surprises her, revealing a vulnerability that resonates with her own feelings of displacement. Their mutual understanding fosters a rare moment of openness between them.

The tone shifts as Sartaq reveals his imminent departure for the rukhin mountains to investigate the threats they previously discussed. He extends a hesitant invitation for Nesryn to join him, acknowledging the risks but emphasizing the brevity of the journey. Though eager to accept, she insists on consulting Chaol first, maintaining their partnership despite her personal turmoil. The arrival of servants with supplies confirms the urgency of his departure, leaving Nesryn startled by his near-disappearance without farewell.

Their final exchange crackles with unspoken tension as Sartaq admits he assumed she'd be preoccupied with Chaol after the previous night's events. His teasing remark about taking "all day" flusters Nesryn, though the moment is interrupted by the

bustling preparations for his journey. The chapter closes with their dynamic poised between professional alliance and budding intimacy, as Nesryn faces a pivotal choice between duty and the allure of adventure with the prince.

