

Chapter Seventeen

Nesryn Faliq visits her aunt and uncle's home in Antica's Runni Quarter, a serene and beautifully designed residence typical of Balruhni architecture. The house is built to withstand desert climates, with strategic placements of windows, wind-catching towers, and shaded courtyards. Upon arrival, she is greeted warmly by her aunt, who immediately inquires if she has eaten—a customary Halha greeting. The lively banter between her aunt and uncle reveals a close-knit family dynamic, with her uncle teasing from his study above the courtyard. The home's tranquil atmosphere, adorned with bougainvillea and a burbling fountain, contrasts with the chaos of Nesryn's past in Rifthold.

The chapter delves into the cultural richness of Nesryn's family, highlighting their Balruhni heritage through the home's decor, including statues of their goddess, Inna. Her aunt leads her to a private family courtyard, where Nesryn is seated in a place of honor. The warmth and familiarity of the setting evoke a mix of comfort and melancholy in Nesryn, as she reflects on her displaced family in Rifthold. Her uncle's arrival and his resemblance to her father stir emotions, reminding her of the traits she shares with her father, despite their differing temperaments. The scene underscores the importance of family and heritage in Nesryn's identity.

Conversation shifts to Nesryn's role as Captain of the Royal Guard, with her uncle expressing surprise at her frequent visits. Her aunt, however, cherishes these moments, emphasizing the family's pride in Nesryn's accomplishments. The discussion touches on the khaganate's progressive policies, such as free education for all children, which contrasts sharply with Adarlan's disparities. Nesryn's uncle humorously mentions the children's attempts to mimic her singing, revealing a lesser-known talent she reserves for family. This lighthearted moment adds depth to Nesryn's character, showcasing her private joys amidst her public responsibilities.

The chapter closes with Nesryn's internal conflict, as the safety of her Antica family contrasts with her concerns for her parents and sister, who fled Rifthold but now face an uncertain future. Her uncle's observation about her pensive expression mirrors her father's demeanor, reinforcing their bond. The visit serves as a respite from her duties, yet it also reminds her of the unresolved tensions and dangers her loved ones face. The blend of familial warmth, cultural pride, and underlying anxiety creates a poignant narrative thread, setting the stage for Nesryn's personal and political challenges ahead.

