

Chapter Twenty-Three

Chaol and Yrene grapple with a troubling revelation about the potential existence of three Valg kings, not just one, which threatens their world. Chaol's distress is palpable as he struggles to recall the fate of the other two kings, his fear and anger simmering beneath the surface. Yrene attempts to calm him, recognizing his emotional state is unfit for their healing session. Their dialogue reveals the weight of their mission and the dire consequences of failure, as Chaol confesses the Valg's destructive power over everything they encounter.

The tension between them escalates as Yrene probes Chaol about his scars, hoping to distract him from his rage. His evasive answers hint at a painful past, particularly when he reveals his father gave him the scar on his temple. This admission momentarily centers him, shifting his anger into something colder and more controlled. Yrene, sensing his vulnerability, refrains from pushing further and instead focuses on their immediate task: healing his wound and confronting the darkness within it.

As they prepare for the healing session, Yrene warns Chaol she may need to adapt her approach if the darkness resists her. Despite her fear, she maintains a reassuring demeanor, though Chaol notices her unease. Their brief, intimate moment—when his lips brush her fingers as she places the bit in his mouth—underscores their growing connection. Yet, Yrene withdraws, steeling herself for the daunting task ahead as she lays her hand on his scarred back.

The chapter shifts to a flashback of Chaol's traumatic past, revealing the origin of his temple scar. His father violently expelled him from their home in Anielle after he announced his decision to join the Rifthold guard. The memory is fraught with pain—physical and emotional—as Chaol recalls his mother's desperate pleas and his younger brother Terrin's terror. The scene highlights Chaol's resilience and the sacrifices he made to forge his own path, leaving behind a life of duty and family for an

uncertain future.

