

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Nesryn and Prince Sartaq are caught in a violent storm while traversing the northern Asimil Mountains. Sheltering beneath a rocky overhang, they endure freezing rain and howling winds, with Sartaq's ruk, Kadara, acting as a protective barrier. Despite her thick ruk leathers and wool blanket, Nesryn suffers from the cold, her teeth chattering uncontrollably. The storm's intensity forces them to huddle together, highlighting the harsh conditions of their journey and the resilience required to survive in such an unforgiving environment.

As the storm rages, Nesryn reflects on her aversion to magic, even before its disappearance from the world. She has always relied on physical skills like archery and swordsmanship, believing steel more dependable than magic. However, the extreme cold makes her yearn for warmth, even fantasizing about Aelin Galathynius, the Fire-Bringer, arriving to aid them. Nesryn speculates about Aelin's whereabouts, wondering if her disappearance is due to Morath's schemes or her own strategic planning. She admires Aelin's ability to conceal her long-term plans, a trait she finds both impressive and reassuring.

After hours of enduring the storm, they finally resume their journey, though the damp saddle makes for an uncomfortable ride. Forced to camp overnight in a copse of trees, Nesryn grapples with lingering cold and discomfort, realizing how little she knows about Sartaq despite their shared mission. The prince's kindness, offering his blankets and clothes, contrasts with her growing unease about their unfamiliarity. Nesryn questions her decision to accompany him, even as she acknowledges the importance of their alliance against the looming threat of Morath.

The next day, they continue their flight toward the Tavan Mountains, with Sartaq pointing out the historical connection between the rukhin and the Darghan horse-lords. He explains how their shared past influences their military strategies, blending aerial

and ground forces. Nesryn probes about Sartaq's wartime experiences, to which he responds with a grim reminder of his father's ruthless rule. The conversation leaves her unsettled, underscoring the high stakes of their mission and the brutal realities of the empire they seek to unite against a common enemy.

