

31. Daughter of Traitors

The chapter follows Venli, a Regal serving under the Fused Raboniel, as she accompanies a strike team through treacherous mountain passes toward the hidden human fortress of Urithiru. The group includes the enigmatic *makay-im*, or Deepest Ones, a brand of Fused with unique abilities to meld with stone. Venli is fascinated by their smooth, patterned bodies and their Surge of liquefying stone, observing their aloof demeanor and unnatural movement. Raboniel, a formidable and ancient Fused, pushes the group at a relentless pace, eager to reach their destination undetected by Windrunner patrols.

Venli's role as Raboniel's Voice is complicated by her status as the "daughter of traitors," a label she carries despite Leshwi's trust in her. The harsh, storm-scarred landscape of the highland valley reflects the peril of their mission, with barren rock and resilient flora offering little shelter. Venli's curiosity about the Deepest Ones draws Raboniel's attention, raising her anxiety as she fears her bond and true loyalties might be discovered. Raboniel, however, seems intrigued rather than suspicious, praising Venli's curiosity as a worthy Passion.

Raboniel's cryptic remarks suggest she suspects Venli's role as a spy for Leshwi, though the extent of her knowledge remains unclear. She probes Venli about her interest in the Deepest Ones, hinting at a deeper understanding of the Surges and the nine brands of Fused. Venli treads carefully, avoiding outright lies while concealing her true intentions. The tension between them grows as Raboniel's satisfaction with Venli's "irregular" nature hints at a dangerous game of deception and trust.

The chapter culminates in a quiet but charged exchange, with Raboniel acknowledging Leshwi's cunning and Venli's precarious position. Venli's internal struggle with Anxiety and Agony underscores the stakes of her mission, as she balances her loyalty to Leshwi with the need to survive Raboniel's scrutiny. The looming threat of exposure

and the unknown dangers of Urithiru cast a shadow over the group's progress, setting the stage for a high-stakes confrontation.

