

26. A Little Espionage

The chapter opens with a reflective moment, as the narrator expresses deep concern over the deaths of Devotion and Dominion, highlighting the fragility of power they once believed unbreakable. Meanwhile, Shallan enjoys a relatively peaceful journey on a barge, interrupted only by a distant sighting of Fused, which causes brief alarm. Her primary activity is drawing, often observed by Cryptics—spren fascinated by her art. Though she has grown fond of Pattern, her bonded Cryptic, the presence of multiple Cryptics begins to unsettle her, evoking past trauma when their appearances in her sketches once threatened her sanity.

Shallan struggles to maintain her composure as the Cryptics crowd around her, their humming and excitement amplifying her anxiety. She attempts to relax by sketching sunlight around Ua’pam, but their intense scrutiny makes her pencil strokes rigid and unnatural. When she mistakes Ua’pam’s arm in her drawing, the Cryptics misinterpret it as a lie, sparking a chaotic exchange. Their alien behavior and overlapping chatter overwhelm her, triggering memories of her past breakdown. Radiant, one of Shallan’s alternate personas, steps in to restore calm, allowing Shallan to retreat and recover by the barge’s stern.

After regaining her equilibrium, Shallan shifts focus to the mission: uncovering a spy among their group. Veil, another persona specializing in espionage, insists on coaching Shallan through the process rather than taking over. Despite Shallan’s reluctance, Veil emphasizes the need for her to learn these skills firsthand. Radiant interjects, urging them to first verify whether the communication device could have been moved without a spy’s involvement, a point Veil reluctantly concedes. This pragmatic approach delays their immediate plans but ensures thoroughness.

The chapter concludes with Shallan preparing to investigate the spy, starting by examining the tent on the barge’s deck. The tension between her personas—Shallan’s

creativity, Veil's cunning, and Radiant's discipline—reflects her internal struggle to balance her roles. The narrative underscores her growth as she navigates past trauma while embracing the complexities of her mission and her evolving identity as a Lightweaver.

