The Priory of the Orange Tree

A world divided. A queendom without an heir. An ancient enemy awakens.

The House of Berethnet has ruled Inys for a thousand years. Still unwed, Queen Sabran the Ninth must conceive a daughter to protect her realm from destruction—but assassins are getting closer to her door.

Ead Duryan is an outsider at court. Though she has risen to the position of lady-in-waiting, she is loyal to a hidden society of mages. Ead keeps a watchful eye on Sabran, secretly protecting her with forbidden magic.

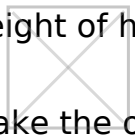
Across the dark sea, Tané has trained all her life to be a dragonrider, but is forced to make a choice that could see her life unravel.

Meanwhile, the divided East and West refuse to make peace—and forces of chaos are rising from their slumber.

One

A mysterious stranger emerges from the sea onto the shores of Seiiki, described as a "water ghost" in local folklore. Tané, a young woman on the eve of her Choosing Day—a pivotal moment in her life—confronts the outsider with a dagger, torn between fear and curiosity. The moonlight reveals him as a sunburned foreigner, likely abandoned by smugglers, who pleads for help to see the Warlord. Tané realizes her predicament: aiding him would expose her violation of seclusion, a sacred pre-Choosing Day ritual, while abandoning him could spread the feared "red sickness" across the island. Her life’s fortune now feels like a cruel punishment.

Tané’s dilemma intensifies as she weighs her options. Reporting the outsider would reveal her broken seclusion, jeopardizing her chance to become a rider and dishonoring her family. Yet, letting him roam unchecked risks an epidemic. With no good choices, she improvises, covering his face with cloth to prevent contagion and escorting him through Cape Hisan’s bustling night markets. Her blade pressed to his back, she navigates the lantern-lit streets, determined to isolate him without drawing attention. The weight of her decision hangs heavily, each step fraught with peril.



She resolves to take the outsider to Orisima, an artificial island housing foreign traders. Barred from entering herself, Tané recalls a contact—a woman who can smuggle him in. Meanwhile, the narrative shifts to Niclays Roos, a reclusive Mentish scholar rationing wine in his Orisima quarters. Annoyed by a knock, he opens the door to find Tané, drenched and urgent, with the outsider in tow. She reveals the man is Niclays’ countryman, delivered by smugglers, and insists he shelter the stranger until she can present him to the Governor. Niclays, skeptical and irritable, faces an unwelcome disruption to his solitary life.

The chapter culminates in a tense exchange between Tané and Niclays, underscoring the clash of cultures and personal stakes. Tané’s desperation to conceal her transgression and protect her future contrasts with Niclays’ reluctance to□□□□ . The outsider’s presence becomes a catalyst for both characters, exposing their vulnerabilities and the fragile balance of Seiiki’s isolationist society. The stage is set for a collision of fates, with the outsider’s identity and the red sickness looming as unresolved threats.

Two

The chapter opens with a masked intruder stealthily entering the Queen Tower, intent on assassinating Queen Sabran of Inys as she sleeps. Unbeknownst to him, Ead Duryan, hidden in the rafters, observes his every move. The assassin uses a stolen key to access the Great Bedchamber, where Sabran and her companion, Roslain Crest, remain unaware of the danger. The scene is tense as the intruder unsheathes his dagger, only for Ead to intervene at the last moment, killing him swiftly and silently to protect the queen.

After disposing of the assassin, Ead reflects on her daily routine, which includes checking for letters, observing the city of Ascalon, and breakfasting with her friend Margret. Her predictable habits mask her true role as a protector of the queen. Later, she confronts the Royal Laundress, who has neglected her duties, and manipulates her into greater diligence by invoking religious fear. The laundress's mention of a wyverling—a Draconic creature—stealing livestock hints at growing threats to the kingdom, foreshadowing larger dangers ahead.

The narrative shifts to describe Ascalon Palace, a grand and ancient structure that has been restored since the Grief of Ages, a war against the Draconic Army. The palace's beauty contrasts with the underlying tension of Loth's mysterious disappearance, which weighs heavily on both Sabran and Ead. Ead's quiet grief over Loth's absence reveals her personal stakes in the court's intrigues, adding depth to her character beyond her role as a protector.

The chapter concludes with Ead's unease about the increasing boldness of Draconic creatures, suggesting a looming threat to the queendom. Her observations and actions underscore her dual role as both a subtle manipulator and a vigilant guardian. The blend of political intrigue, personal loyalty, and supernatural danger sets the stage for future conflicts, leaving the reader anticipating the next developments in the story.

Three

The chapter opens with Tané, a young apprentice in Seiiki, awakening on Choosing Day—the pivotal moment that will determine her future in the High Sea Guard. Restless and anxious, she reflects on her reckless decision to hide an outsider in Orisima, a act that could jeopardize her and her friend Susa’s lives. As she prepares for the ceremony, the weight of her choices and the day’s significance weigh heavily on her. The vivid descriptions of the South House and its surroundings underscore the gravity of leaving behind the only home she’s known since childhood.

Tané and her fellow apprentices embark on a procession through Cape Hisan, greeted by townspeople who honor their potential to become "god-chosen." Her thoughts, however, remain consumed by the outsider she and Susa smuggled into Orisima, fearing the consequences if their actions are discovered. The plan to report the trespasser anonymously after the ceremony reveals Tané’s internal conflict between self-preservation and guilt. The threat of the red sickness and its repercussions loom large, adding tension to her already fraught state of mind.

Upon arriving at the Grand Temple of the Cape, Tané confronts her rival, Turosa, whose taunts highlight the competitive nature of their training. The temple’s grandeur, with its dragon statues and blue-glass lanterns, symbolizes the sacredness of the Choosing Day ritual. Tané’s interactions with Ishari, her longtime roommate, reveal a bittersweet awareness that their paths may diverge forever after the ceremony. The ritual ablutions at the fountain of Kwiriki, the first dragon rider, emphasize the spiritual and cultural significance of the event.

The chapter closes with Tané’s lingering unease, compounded by Ishari’s questioning about noises in their room the previous night—a subtle hint that Tané’s secret actions may not remain hidden. The tension between her aspirations, loyalty to Susa, and fear of exposure creates a compelling emotional undercurrent. The stage is set for the

ceremony, where Tané’s fate—and the consequences of her choices—will be decided.



Four

The chapter opens in Ascalon Palace, where Queen Sabran the Ninth of Inys receives a delegation from Mentendon in the sweltering Presence Chamber. The scene is richly detailed, with the heat and opulence of the court setting the stage. Ead, a Lady of the Privy Chamber, observes the proceedings with a critical eye, noting the Westerners' impractical attire and the queen's regal demeanor. Sabran, embodying the wealth and tradition of her queendom, sits atop her marble throne, her presence both commanding and detached. The arrival of the Mentish party, led by Lord Oscarde, Duke of Zeedeur, signals the beginning of a significant diplomatic encounter.

The dialogue between Sabran and Lord Oscarde reveals the purpose of the visit: a marriage proposal from the High Prince of Mentendon. The duke recounts a perilous journey marked by a wyvern attack, heightening the tension in the chamber. Sabran responds with measured concern, offering protection for their return. The interaction underscores the political stakes, as the queen’s marriage is not merely a personal matter but a crucial alliance for the stability of Inys. The chapter highlights the weight of tradition, as Sabran’s lineage is believed to protect the world from the awakening of the Nameless One, a mythical threat tied to her bloodline.

Amid the formalities, the reunion between Lord Oscarde and his daughter, Truyde, provides a moment of warmth. Truyde’s witty humility endears her to the court, while Sabran’s praise hints at her strategic role in future alliances. The queen’s sharp humor surfaces when she jests about the duke’s marital status, lightening the mood before the serious proposal is unveiled. The chapter masterfully balances personal interactions with the broader political narrative, illustrating the intricate dance of power and diplomacy in the royal court.

The chapter culminates with the revelation of the marriage proposal, a moment that sends ripples through the court. Sabran’s reaction remains enigmatic, her face

betraying no emotion as she considers the offer. The proposal is laden with implications, as her refusal to marry thus far has left her queendom in a fragile state. The narrative underscores the tension between personal autonomy and royal duty, as Sabran’s decision will shape not only her future but the fate of her realm. The chapter leaves readers anticipating her response, set against the backdrop of a world where myth and politics are inextricably linked.



Five

The chapter opens with Tané, a newly chosen soldier of the High Sea Guard, preparing to leave Cape Hisan, her lifelong home. As the city buzzes with celebrations for Choosing Day, she reflects on her separation from Ishari, a close friend who failed to become a dragon rider due to inadequate training. Tané navigates the vibrant streets, absorbing the sights and sounds one last time, aware of the city's temptations and dangers, including brothels and piracy recruiters. Her thoughts shift to Susa, another dear friend, whom she seeks out at an inn to discuss a pressing matter.

Tané's past is revealed through her memories of Ampiki, her impoverished village destroyed by fire, and her miraculous survival, which led to her training as a dragon rider. Her humble origins contrast with her current status, as evidenced by the reverence shown to her by a child at the inn. Susa arrives, and their conversation turns to a mysterious outsider who has disappeared from Orisima, a trading post. The two women grapple with whether to report him to the authorities, fearing the consequences of their earlier involvement but also reluctant to condemn him to death.

Susa and Tané debate the risks of the outsider's escape, questioning if he could evade capture and return to his homeland. Tané rationalizes that his isolation in Orisima limits the threat of disease and that further association with him is too dangerous. Their dialogue reveals their compassion and moral conflict, as well as their pragmatic understanding of the political realities they face. The tension between duty and mercy underscores their friendship and shared history of defiance.

The chapter concludes with Susa encouraging Tané to pursue her dream of becoming a dragon rider, despite her fears and the challenges ahead. Their bond is reaffirmed as they exchange heartfelt promises of enduring friendship. The interruption by the inn's young servant signals the end of their clandestine meeting, leaving Tané to face her uncertain future with determination and the support of those who believe in her.

Six

The chapter opens with Queen Sabran of Inys hosting an intimate supper in her Privy Chamber, attended by her ladies-in-waiting, including Ead Duryan and Linora. Ead, an outsider with hidden allegiances to the Priory, feels uneasy, as if her secrets are palpable to the court. The conversation centers on a miniature portrait of Prince Aubrecht Lievelyn, a potential suitor for Sabran. The queen and her ladies critique his appearance, with Roslain Crest, the Chief Gentlewoman, advocating for giving the prince a chance despite her grandmother’s reservations about his political and economic ties.

Ead is unexpectedly drawn into the discussion when Sabran asks for her opinion on the prince’s looks. Her measured response—calling him "comely enough"—stands in contrast to the flattery of the other ladies. This leads to a tense exchange where Sabran probes Ead’s background and faith, subtly challenging her loyalty. Ead navigates the conversation carefully, concealing her true beliefs while outwardly praising the Six Virtues and Sabran’s lineage. The queen’s pointed questions hint at her suspicion of Ead’s origins and motives.

The tension escalates when Roslain pressures Ead to recount the Inysh tale of the Saint and the Damsel from her Southern perspective. Ead recognizes this as a test, knowing the Inysh are protective of their sacred narratives. Sabran insists, framing the request as a comfort amid rising threats from wyrms. Ead reluctantly agrees, taking the storyteller’s seat by the hearth, poised to navigate the delicate task of retelling a foundational myth without revealing her true faith or offending the court.

The chapter underscores the political and personal undercurrents of the Inysh court, where alliances and loyalties are constantly scrutinized. Ead’s internal conflict—balancing her secret mission with the need to survive in a hostile environment—adds depth to the narrative. Sabran’s probing demeanor and Roslain’s

calculated challenges highlight the precariousness of Ead’s position, setting the stage for further intrigue as the story of the Nameless One looms.



Seven

The chapter opens with Ead Duryan entering the grand Council Chamber in Ascalon Palace, dressed formally for an audience with the Virtues Council. The chamber is adorned with a portrait of Sir Galian Berethnet, the revered ancestor of Queen Sabran, though Ead privately dismisses him as a "dolt." The council is composed of three hierarchical groups: the powerful Dukes Spiritual, the Earls Provincial, and the commoner-born Knights Bachelor. Only four members are present today, including the formidable Lord Seyton Combe, the Principal Secretary known for his ruthless efficiency in rooting out conspiracies against the queen.

Ead is introduced as an Ordinary Servant of the Privy Chamber, and the queen, Sabran, greets her with a scrutinizing gaze. The tension is palpable as Combe questions Ead about her health, hinting at his suspicion. The conversation quickly shifts to the recent murder of a would-be assassin found outside the queen’s bedchamber, holding an Yscali dagger. Lady Nelda Stillwater reveals that this is the ninth such attempt in the past year, with five assassins mysteriously killed before they could strike. The council is determined to uncover the identity of the unseen protector who has been eliminating these threats.

Lady Igrain Crest, the Duchess of Justice, argues that the protector’s actions, while seemingly noble, are still unlawful and must be investigated. She emphasizes the need for transparency, fearing the unknown intentions of this shadowy figure. Combe presses Ead for information, warning that silence equates to treason. Ead maintains her composure, denying any knowledge of the assassin or sympathizers to the Draconic Kingdom of Yscalin. Throughout the interrogation, Queen Sabran watches Ead intently, adding to the atmosphere of unease.

The chapter highlights the political intrigue and danger surrounding Queen Sabran’s court, with Ead caught in the middle. The council’s suspicion of her, coupled with the

queen’s enigmatic gaze, suggests deeper layers of mystery and potential conflict. Ead’s calm demeanor under pressure hints at her hidden resilience, while the unresolved question of the protector’s identity leaves the reader anticipating further revelations. The scene sets the stage for future tensions between loyalty, secrecy, and the pursuit of justice in the royal court.



Eight

The chapter opens with Niclays Roos enduring a stormy night alongside his unwelcome guest, Sulyard, who remains oblivious to the tempest. Despite his dislike for Sulyard, Niclays feels obligated to protect him for the sake of Truyde and his late lover, Jannart. As the storm rages outside, Niclays is consumed by memories of his past with Jannart, recalling their first meeting in a rose garden and the deep connection they shared. These bittersweet reflections highlight Niclays' lingering grief and loneliness in his exile.

Niclays reminisces about Jannart's striking appearance and their shared passion for art and history, which forged an unbreakable bond between them. He recalls how Jannart, a nobleman, saw and valued him despite his humble origins, making their relationship all the more poignant. The memories are vivid and tender, contrasting sharply with Niclays' present isolation. His longing for the past is palpable as he whispers Jannart's name, questioning how time has aged them both.

The narrative shifts abruptly when Niclays is violently apprehended by sentinels in the dead of night. Despite his attempts to defend himself, he is brutally beaten and dragged from his home. His precious work equipment is destroyed, and his pleas for mercy go unheard. The scene is chaotic and brutal, emphasizing Niclays' vulnerability and the harsh reality of his exile. The arrival of Panaya, who bravely confronts the sentinels, offers a glimmer of hope amid the violence.

Panaya's defiance against the Chief Officer underscores the tension between authority and justice in Niclays' world. Her intervention momentarily stalls the sentinels, but the chapter ends on an unresolved note, leaving Niclays' fate uncertain. The juxtaposition of his tender memories with the brutality of his arrest highlights the stark contrast between his past happiness and his current suffering, reinforcing the themes of loss and resilience.

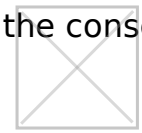
Nine

The chapter opens with Ead and Queen Sabran strolling through the Privy Garden, a space typically reserved for the queen’s inner circle. Their conversation reveals cultural differences, as Sabran inquires about life in the Ersyr, where Ead claims to have lived. Ead describes the Ersyr’s climate and customs, though she secretly admits to fabricating parts of her backstory. The queen’s limited understanding of the world beyond Inys becomes apparent, as her knowledge is confined to courtly education and diplomatic correspondence. Meanwhile, court intrigue simmers as Lady Arbella Glenn’s illness sparks competition among the Ladies of the Privy Chamber for her position.

Sabran’s curiosity about the South contrasts with her adherence to Inysh orthodoxy, particularly the Six Virtues. Ead, who secretly follows the Priory’s creed, reflects on her performative conversion to the Inysh faith upon arriving at court. The queen’s ignorance of Lasia’s role in Inysh founding mythology highlights the hypocrisy of Inysh attitudes toward foreign cultures. Their conversation turns personal when Sabran asks about Ead’s mother, Zāla, revealing a shared experience of maternal loss. The moment fosters a fleeting connection between them, though their worldviews remain fundamentally at odds.

The chapter delves into the political and religious tensions of the Inysh court. Sabran shows Ead a lovejay, a bird symbolizing fidelity in Inysh culture, though Ead knows it by a different name in the South. The queen’s discomfort with discussions of the East underscores her insular perspective. Later, Sabran mentions the execution of doomsingers—heretics who prophesy the return of the Nameless One—justifying their burning as a defense of the faith. Ead subtly challenges this brutality, questioning the inconsistency of Inysh policies, such as accepting gifts from Mentendon, which trades with the East.

The chapter concludes with a tense exchange as Ead’s pointed remarks about Mentendon’s heresy provoke Sabran’s ire. The queen dismisses Ead’s questioning, asserting her authority and reinforcing the rigid orthodoxy of the court. This confrontation underscores the growing tension between Ead’s hidden beliefs and the oppressive religious dogma of Inys. The chapter paints a vivid picture of court life, blending personal dynamics with broader themes of cultural clash, religious intolerance, and the consequences of insular worldviews.



Ten

The chapter follows Tané as she arrives in Ginura, the capital city she had long dreamed of visiting. The city exceeds her childhood fantasies with its grand shrines, bustling streets, and vibrant canals, though the noise and crowds overwhelm her. As she travels deeper into the city in a palanquin, she marvels at the vivid season trees, street performers, and the imposing Ginura Castle, designed to resemble the legendary Palace of Many Pearls. The castle serves as a bridge between the sea and the celestial plane, a reminder of the dragons' former glory.

Tané’s journey culminates at the Ginura School of War, where she and other apprentices will undergo trials to prove their worthiness to join Clan Miduchi, the elite dragonriders. Despite her exhaustion, she is determined to showcase the skills she has honed since childhood. The school’s grandeur, with its silver-leaf gateways and carvings of historical warriors, fills her with awe. A stern woman greets them, outlining the rigorous schedule ahead, including water trials observed by the Sea General and potential future kin.

As Tané settles into her quarters, she reflects on her past, particularly her friendship with Susa, an orphan she rescued as a child. Memories of their bond and shared laughter contrast with her current hardened demeanor, shaped by her ambition to become a dragonrider. She recalls how she once risked her reputation to help Susa, a act she might not repeat now. The chapter highlights Tané’s internal conflict between her disciplined present and the compassion of her youth.

The chapter closes with Tané preparing for the challenges ahead. She bathes, dresses, and rests, determined to prove herself in the trials. Her thoughts linger on Susa and the man she hid from the beach, hinting at unresolved tensions. The narrative underscores Tané’s transformation and the sacrifices she has made for her dreams, leaving the reader curious about her future in the Ginura School of War and her

potential reunion with her past.



Eleven

The chapter opens with the characters aboard the *Rose Eternal*, approaching the draconic-infested land of Yscalin. Estina Melaugo and Kit exchange grim remarks about their impending danger, while Loth observes the distant lights of Perunta through a spyglass, his hands still unsteady from encountering Fýredel, a High Western dragon. The narrative reveals the significance of these dragons as commanders of the Draconic Army, whose awakening signals a resurgence of their destructive power. Though the Nameless One remains imprisoned, his servants pose a grave threat, recalling the devastation of the Grief of Ages. The group’s tension is palpable as they confront the reality of their mission.

Loth’s thoughts delve into the history of the Draconic plague, a deadly disease originating from the Nameless One and spread by High Westerns and their wyverns. The plague’s symptoms—reddened hands, scaly rashes, fever, and visions—are described in horrifying detail, culminating in the fatal bloodblaze phase. With no known cure or protection, the disease looms as a silent killer. Melaugo attempts to reassure Loth, suggesting the palace may be safe, but her detached tone underscores the peril they face. The scene shifts as Captain Harlowe and Plume approach, signaling the end of the characters’ time aboard the ship.

Kit, desperate to avoid their fate, attempts to bargain with Harlowe, offering land and claiming sailing experience to join the crew. Loth, however, remains resolute, emphasizing their duty to uncover the truth behind Prince Wilstan’s disappearance. Kit’s frustration peaks as he privately confronts Loth, accusing Combe of sending them to their deaths. Despite Kit’s pleas, Loth refuses to abandon his mission, driven by a sense of justice. Harlowe, unimpressed by their indecision, ultimately orders them off the ship, leaving the pair to face Yscalin’s dangers alone.

As they prepare to disembark, Kit chooses to stand by Loth, citing loyalty and fellowship. The two descend via a rope ladder into a rowing boat, accompanied by Melaugo, who bids a playful farewell to the crew. The pirates’ mocking laughter echoes as they row away, underscoring the isolation and uncertainty of their journey. The chapter closes with a mix of camaraderie and foreboding, as Loth and Kit brace themselves for the challenges ahead in the plague-ridden land of Yscalin.



Twelve

The chapter opens with the sea guardians of Seiiki enduring rigorous water trials during a fierce storm. The Sea General motivates the apprentices, emphasizing resilience by declaring, "Rain is water, and so are we." Tané, one of the apprentices, remains composed despite the harsh conditions. The trials include archery, firearms, and mounted archery, where Tané excels but is narrowly outperformed by Turosa due to her horse stumbling. Turosa mocks her humble origins, hinting at the societal divide between descendants of dragonriders and commoners like Tané.

Tané’s interactions with fellow apprentices reveal underlying tensions and camaraderie. Dumusa, a skilled archer from a privileged background, offers her support, while Onren struggles with mounted archery and vents her frustration. The group dynamic shifts as Dumusa suggests visiting a tavern to bond, though Tané declines, prioritizing practice. Onren’s jest about needing a drink highlights the pressure they face, while Tané’s refusal underscores her disciplined and solitary nature.

The chapter delves into Tané’s internal conflict as she questions whether Turosa sabotaged her horse. Her suspicion reflects the competitive and sometimes hostile environment among the apprentices. Despite reassurances from the farrier, Tané’s doubt lingers, revealing her vulnerability beneath her stoic exterior. Her dedication to training contrasts with the others’ desire for respite, emphasizing her determination to prove herself despite her lower status.

The chapter closes with Tané retreating to her room to practice alone, haunted by uncertainty and the weight of expectations. Her isolation and relentless focus highlight the sacrifices required to become a sea guardian. The narrative underscores themes of perseverance, rivalry, and the struggle to overcome societal barriers, setting the stage for Tané’s continued journey toward proving her worth in a world that often judges her

by her lineage.



Thirteen

The chapter opens with Tané undergoing a rigorous trial involving knife-throwing, observed by the Sea General and members of Clan Miduchi. Despite her nervousness, she performs well, though not as flawlessly as Turosa, a skilled apprentice from the North House. Onren, another competitor, arrives late but impresses everyone by achieving a perfect score. The trial highlights the intense competition among the apprentices and the high expectations placed on them to prove their worthiness to join the elite High Sea Guard.

Later that night, the apprentices are abruptly awakened and taken to a forest lake for another challenge: retrieving eight dancing pearls hidden in the water. The Sea General explains that this test mirrors the unpredictability of real missions. Tané, though anxious, strategizes and eventually finds a pearl. Onren excels again, while Turosa mocks Tané’s humble origins, foreshadowing a potential confrontation in the final trial. The scene underscores the tension between the apprentices and the pressure Tané feels to prove herself.

Meanwhile, the narrative shifts to Niclays, a restless guest at the Governor’s mansion, who is tormented by memories of his past. He reflects on his relationship with Jannart, a nobleman whose marriage to Aleidine was arranged, leaving Niclays heartbroken. Haunted by guilt over his treatment of a musician and Jannart’s lies, Niclays struggles with insomnia and the humid heat. His introspection reveals his deep regrets and the emotional scars he carries, adding a layer of personal conflict to the story.

By morning, Niclays is granted permission to visit Triam Sulyard, a prisoner, to extract information. The storm continues, mirroring his inner turmoil. As he prepares for the meeting, the chapter juxtaposes his emotional struggles with Tané’s physical and social challenges, weaving together two distinct yet thematically linked narratives of perseverance and redemption. The chapter ends with a sense of impending

confrontation for both characters.



Fourteen

The chapter opens with a flurry of preparations in Ascalon Palace as Queen Sabran prepares to welcome Aubrecht Lievelyn and his retinue, signaling her serious consideration of his marriage proposal. The palace buzzes with activity, from food deliveries to new gowns being crafted, while Ead, still recovering from illness, struggles to keep up with her duties. Amid the excitement, she remains vigilant for the arrival of her mentor, Chassar uq-Ispad, and notes the absence of further rumors about sorcery involving Truyde utt Zeedeur.

Ead observes the influx of courtiers, including Earls Provincial and their families, and overhears a revealing conversation between Lord Ranulf Heath and Lady Igrain Crest. Their discussion centers on the political implications of Sabran's betrothal and the urgency of producing an heir. Crest expresses concern over Sabran's independence, hinting at her diminishing influence over the queen. The exchange underscores the court's preoccupation with securing the Berethnet lineage, with little regard for the personal dynamics between Sabran and Lievelyn.

As Ead reflects on the conversation, her suspicions about the court's spymaster, Seyton Combe, deepen. She theorizes that the recent failed assassination attempts on Sabran may have been orchestrated by Combe himself—not to kill her, but to manipulate her into accepting the marriage. The staged nature of the attacks and Combe's control over the court's secrets align with his calculated methods. Ead realizes her interventions may have disrupted his plans, explaining his efforts to uncover her identity.

The chapter concludes with Ead resolving to gather evidence against Combe, confident in her intuition but aware of the risks. She recognizes the need for caution, as Combe's influence looms large over the throne. Her determination to protect Sabran and expose the spymaster's machinations sets the stage for a covert battle of wits, with the

stability of the queendom hanging in the balance.



Fifteen

The chapter opens with Loth arriving at Cárscaro, the mountainous capital of Yscalin, a kingdom that once belonged to Virtudom but has since pledged allegiance to the Nameless One. As his coach approaches the city, Loth reflects on Yscalin's storied past, once known for its beauty and culture, now reduced to a charred wasteland. The landscape is desolate, a stark contrast to the lavender fields that once perfumed the air. Loth's unease grows as he prepares to enter the city, sensing the weight of its dark transformation and the mysteries he hopes to uncover about Yscalin's fall from grace.

Upon entering Cárscaro, Loth is immediately confronted with the kingdom's brutal reality. He spots a cockatrice in the sky, a draconic creature that preys on the living, and learns from Lady Priessa that the city feeds these beasts with criminals and traitors chained to the Gate of Niunda. The horrific sight of bloodied prisoners shocks Loth, revealing the depths of Yscalin's cruelty. The city itself is a nightmarish vision, with wyverns guarding the gates and a river of lava flowing through its streets, symbolizing the kingdom's fiery descent into darkness under its new rulers.

The Palace of Salvation, a towering structure of volcanic rock and glass, serves as the heart of Yscalin's draconic rule. Loth and his companion Kit are led through eerie, deserted corridors, their journey marked by unsettling artwork and hidden passages. The palace's oppressive atmosphere, combined with the red-flamed chandeliers and growling jaculi, heightens the sense of dread. Loth's attempts to maintain composure are tested as he grapples with the reality of his surroundings, realizing he is now at the mercy of a kingdom that has embraced monstrous forces.

As the chapter concludes, Loth and Kit are left in the ambassadorial gallery, awaiting an audience with the enigmatic "Her Radiance." The tension is palpable, with both men aware of the danger they face in this hostile environment. Loth's initial curiosity about Yscalin has turned to horror, and the chapter ends on a foreboding note, setting the

stage for the challenges and revelations that lie ahead in this draconic stronghold.



Sixteen

The chapter opens with Tané preparing for her final water trial, a sword duel that will determine her future as a dragon rider. Exhausted and anxious, she obsessively sharpens her blade, her reflection in it revealing her bloodshot eyes. A chance encounter with her peers, Onren and Kanperu, highlights their ease and camaraderie, contrasting with Tané's solitary intensity. Dumusa, a senior rider, offers wisdom, cautioning Tané against letting her skill consume her entirely, urging her to find balance and trust in her abilities.

On the day of the trial, Tané is paired against Turosa, her rival from the North House, in a high-stakes duel where first blood decides the winner. Turosa's disdain for Tané's humble origins is evident as he taunts her, attempting to provoke her with insults about her village. Despite her fatigue, Tané engages fiercely, but Turosa gains the upper hand with a brutal kick that sends her sprawling. The Sea General watches impassively as Turosa gloats, reinforcing his belief that she is unworthy of becoming a rider.

In a moment of defiance, Tané rallies, using her agility to regain her footing and surprise Turosa with a swift counterattack. The duel becomes a whirlwind of rain and steel, with Tané channeling her frustration and determination into every strike. Though Turosa initially underestimates her, Tané's resilience and skill begin to unsettle him, revealing cracks in his confidence. The chapter builds toward a climactic clash, leaving the outcome of their confrontation unresolved but hinting at Tané's potential to overcome adversity.

The chapter explores themes of perseverance, identity, and the pressure to prove oneself. Tané's struggle with self-doubt and her rivalry with Turosa underscore the societal tensions within the rider community. Dumusa's advice serves as a poignant reminder that mastery requires both discipline and self-compassion. The rain-soaked

duel symbolizes Tané’s internal battle, as she fights not just for her future but for her sense of belonging in a world that often judges her by her past.



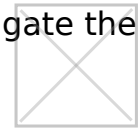
Seventeen

After days of quarantine, Loth and Kit are finally granted an audience with the Donmata Marosa, crown princess of Yscalin. The throne room is filled with courtiers, but Prince Wilstan is conspicuously absent. The Donmata sits beneath a canopy bearing the broken sword of Ascalon, a symbol of Virtudom, while wearing an iron mask shaped like a dragon’s head. The tension is palpable as the two Inysh ambassadors are announced, and the court reacts with hostility, hissing at their presence. Loth maintains composure, bowing respectfully, while the Donmata offers a formal but thinly veiled welcome.

The Donmata’s dialogue quickly turns provocative as she mentions Queen Sabran’s impending marriage to Aubrecht Lievelyn, her former betrothed. Her tone is mocking, and she openly questions Sabran’s ability to secure the Berethnet bloodline, a direct challenge to Inysh beliefs. Loth struggles to contain his anger, defending Sabran’s privacy and the sacredness of her role. The Donmata’s laughter and the guards’ drawn swords heighten the tension, underscoring the ideological rift between Yscalin’s draconic allegiance and Inys’s devotion to Virtudom. The exchange reveals the deep-seated animosity and political maneuvering beneath the surface of diplomatic niceties.

The confrontation escalates as the Donmata taunts Loth about his rumored past with Sabran, implying his inadequacy as a potential consort. She then commands him to dance with Lady Priessa, turning the tense atmosphere into a performative spectacle. The dance of thirty turns, once banned in Inys for its perceived indecency, becomes a test of Loth’s endurance and composure. Despite his discomfort, he participates gracefully, lifting Lady Priessa repeatedly as the music swells. The physical exertion mirrors the emotional strain of the encounter, with both characters locked in a silent struggle of wills.

The chapter culminates in a blend of courtly ritual and underlying hostility, highlighting the cultural and religious divides between Yscalin and Inys. Loth’s resilience in the face of provocation demonstrates his loyalty to Sabran and Virtudom, while the Donmata’s masked authority and mocking tone reinforce Yscalin’s defiance. The dance serves as a metaphor for the precarious balance of power, with every step and gesture laden with political significance. The scene leaves the reader anticipating further clashes as Loth and Kit navigate the treacherous waters of Yscalin’s court.



Eighteen

Niclays endures a grueling journey to Ginura, confined to a stifling palanquin with little comfort. The trade road winds through the foothills of the Bear’s Jaw mountain range, a path he once dreamed of traveling during his exile in Seiiki. His initial excitement is tempered by memories of his forced expulsion from Virtudom, a punishment he naively believed would be brief. As the years passed, he resigned himself to a life of isolation, but now, glimpses of the landscape rekindle his curiosity and a fleeting sense of freedom.

The journey is fraught with discomfort and hostility. After a brief respite at an inn, where Niclays bathes in a hot spring and gazes at distant lights, the chair-carriers grow resentful, mocking him with songs and making the trip increasingly unbearable. Niclays retaliates with sharp words, but their laughter only deepens his frustration. Mechanical failures and delays further sour the experience, leaving him exhausted and irritable. A haunting lullaby from the chair-carriers stirs memories of his troubled childhood, marked by his father’s violence and his mother’s misplaced hopes for his redemption.

Niclays reflects on his strained relationship with his mother, Helchen Roos, who despised his scientific pursuits and hedonistic lifestyle. Despite her disapproval, she eagerly sought to benefit from his connections to nobility, a hypocrisy he and his friend Jannart mocked. These memories briefly amuse him, offering a rare moment of levity before the journey’s hardships resume. The relentless heat and confinement push him to his limits, and when the palanquin finally stops, he is unceremoniously dumped into a puddle, left to navigate Ginura alone.

Entering the ancient capital, Niclays is struck by Ginura’s opulence. The city’s vibrant markets and fashionable citizens, adorned in sea-inspired attire, contrast sharply with his disheveled state. Ginura Castle looms imposingly, its grandeur a testament to the

city’s wealth and culture. As Niclays trudges through Seabed Town, the dazzling displays of wealth and artistry remind him of the stark divide between his exile and the world he now re-enters, a world that both fascinates and alienates him.



Nineteen

Loth follows the Donmata Marosa through a labyrinth of torchlit tunnels beneath the palace, their walls slick with condensation. She leads him to a hidden chamber where they encounter a chained, emaciated figure—King Sigoso III of Yscalin, now a hollow shell of his former self. The Donmata reveals that her father is afflicted with a rare form of the Draconic plague, allowing the wyrm Fýredel to commune through him. Loth is stunned by the king's grotesque transformation and the revelation that Sigoso was the mastermind behind Queen Rosarian's murder.

The Donmata explains that Sigoso's condition has lasted two years, coinciding with Yscalin's betrayal of Virtudom. She administers a sedative to temporarily sever Fýredel's control, enabling Sigoso to speak. Loth learns that the king poisoned Rosarian out of spite after she rejected his marriage proposal. Sigoso recounts how he commissioned a venom-laced gown, which was smuggled into the queen's wardrobe by an accomplice in the palace. The Donmata acts as an intermediary, translating Loth's questions to her father, who responds with venomous glee.

Sigoso's hatred for Rosarian is palpable as he describes her as a "venereal slut" who preferred pirates and minor nobles over a union with his royal bloodline. He takes perverse pride in the brutality of her death, claiming the basilisk venom dissolved even her bones. Loth, horrified, demands to know the identity of the accomplice who planted the gown. Sigoso cryptically names "the cupbearer," a defunct position, leaving Loth baffled and suspicious of deeper treachery within the palace.

The chapter culminates in Loth drawing his baselard, his shock giving way to rage. The Donmata remains eerily composed, her loyalty to her father ambiguous. The encounter exposes the depths of Sigoso's depravity and the wyrm Fýredel's insidious influence over Yscalin. Loth is left grappling with the implications of the conspiracy, realizing the queen's murder was not just a political act but a personal vendetta orchestrated by a

mad king. The chapter ends with tension unresolved, setting the stage for further revelations.



Twenty

The chapter opens with Tané recovering from her exhausting fight with Turosa during the sea guardians' trials. Isolated in her quarters, she nurses a painful shoulder wound while anxiously awaiting the next day's announcement about who will become dragon riders. To distract herself, she revisits *Recollections of the Great Sorrow*, a book filled with haunting illustrations of past battles and the red sickness that once plagued Seiiki. The vivid imagery of dragons and demons stirs her memories and fears, setting a contemplative tone for the chapter.

Onren, Tané's fellow trainee, arrives with food and wine, offering comfort and companionship. Their conversation begins cordially, with Onren expressing concern for Tané's well-being and praising her performance against Turosa. However, tensions simmer beneath the surface as Onren voices her frustrations about the perceived favoritism toward high-born candidates like Turosa, who has a history of cruelty yet faces no consequences. Tané defends their teachers' fairness, but Onren remains skeptical, hinting at the systemic biases that may influence the selection process.

The dialogue takes a sharp turn when Tané, overwhelmed by exhaustion and pent-up emotions, accuses Onren of disrespect and laziness. She criticizes Onren for frequenting taverns instead of training, implying that her lack of dedication—not her social status—may cost her the rider position. Onren retaliates by pointing out Tané's resentment and obsessive work ethic, arguing that balance, not just relentless practice, is key to success. The exchange exposes their contrasting philosophies and deepens the rift between them.

As Onren prepares to leave, the chapter closes with Tané regretting her outburst, the anger dissipating as quickly as it flared. The unresolved tension between the two trainees mirrors the broader uncertainties surrounding the riders' selection, highlighting themes of meritocracy, privilege, and personal sacrifice. The emotional

confrontation leaves both characters—and readers—pondering the true meaning of worthiness and the sacrifices demanded by their ambitions.



Twenty-One

Loth prepares to leave the Palace of Salvation under the cover of night, aware that he is infected with the Draconic plague after touching the Flesh King. Carrying supplies and weapons, he is accompanied by his friend Kit, who reluctantly joins him despite the dangers. They descend into the hidden depths of Cárscaro, following directions from the Donmata Marosa, who awaits them at the base of a secret stair. She reveals a forgotten escape route through the mountains, warning them of the Draconic creatures lurking outside, and equips them with ice staves for their treacherous journey.

The Donmata entrusts Loth with an iron box, urging him to complete his mission for the sake of Virtudom. Loth promises to send help back to Cárscaro and assures her she won’t be left to die alone. After a poignant farewell, Loth and Kit step into the dark passageway, surrounded by volcanic glass and pumice. The eerie environment reminds Loth of childhood tales about the Nameless One, heightening the tension as they navigate the uncertain path. Kit attempts to lighten the mood with humor, but the gravity of their situation weighs heavily on both.

As they press forward, the ground suddenly rumbles, signaling an earthquake. Panicked, Loth shouts for Kit to run, but the chaos separates them. The tunnel collapses around them, trapping Loth in darkness as debris rains down. Fear overtakes him, and he braces for death, coughing on dust and shattered glass. The violent tremors eventually cease, leaving him disoriented and alone, uncertain of Kit’s fate or whether the passage ahead remains intact.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Loth surviving the quake but facing an uncertain path forward. The emotional stakes are high, as his promise to the Donmata and his loyalty to Kit hang in the balance. The physical and psychological toll of the journey is palpable, emphasizing the dire circumstances of their mission. The narrative

leaves readers questioning whether Loth will reunite with Kit and whether they can escape the treacherous mountains alive.



Twenty-Two

The chapter depicts the somber yet opulent marriage ceremony of Queen Sabran the Ninth of Inys and Aubrecht Lievelyn, High Prince of Mentendon, held at midnight in the Great Sanctuary of Briar House. The setting is rich with symbolism: red stained-glass windows memorialize past bloodshed, and scoundrel trees with golden leaves frame the space. Sabran, adorned in a crimson gown and gold crown, hesitates momentarily at the entrance, observed by her confidante Ead and the calculating Seyton Combe. The ceremony unfolds under a gilded baldachin, with 600 witnesses, including the Sanctarian Order, in attendance.

Sabran's emotional turmoil is palpable as she proceeds without her close friend Loth, who was sent away by Combe. The political undertones are evident—Igrain Crest, a key advisor, views the union as both a necessity and a compromise. Lievelyn enters in regal attire, his crimson cloak mirroring Sabran's gown, and the two meet at the center. The Arch Sanctarian officiates, invoking the union's sacred purpose to uphold Virtudom, though his reference to Cleolind as a "heretic" draws subtle disapproval from Ead and Chassar.

The ritual proceeds with the exchange of vows and rings, a moment charged with tension as Sabran's hand trembles. Lievelyn offers a tentative smile, while Roslain, Sabran's giver, watches anxiously. Sabran's vow—to love, defend, and remain faithful—is delivered with measured resolve, though her pause hints at inner conflict. The ceremony's gravity is underscored by its historical context: a marriage following closely after a burial, a first in Berethnet history.

As the chapter concludes, the focus shifts to the unspoken dynamics between the characters. Ead's vigilant gaze captures Sabran's vulnerability and the political machinations surrounding the union. The marriage, while a strategic alliance, is fraught with personal and political stakes, leaving Sabran at a crossroads between

duty and desire. The scene closes with the couple's hands joined, their futures irrevocably intertwined beneath the candlelit baldachin.



Twenty-Three

Lord Arteloth Beck endures a grueling journey through the icy Spindles, battling extreme cold and physical exhaustion. Haunted by grief for his lost companion Kit, he focuses on survival, skinning a mountain ewe and building a fire in a cave. Despite his fear of attracting wyrms, he finds solace in the routine of sustenance and shelter. His hands, raw and red, serve as a grim reminder of his deteriorating condition, while an unexplained rash fuels his anxiety about an uncertain fate.

Loth follows the Donmata Marosa’s instructions to travel southeast toward the desert, aiming to reach Rauca and eventually find Ead’s guardian, Chassar uq-Ispad. His pack contains no map but holds coins bearing the image of King Jantar, offering a glimmer of hope. Feverish and plagued by nightmares of Kit, Sabran, and the Donmata, Loth struggles to maintain his resolve. The chapter underscores his isolation and the psychological toll of his journey, as he grapples with both physical pain and haunting visions.

His precarious respite is shattered when a grotesque cockatrice invades the cave. The creature’s mangled appearance and predatory instincts send Loth into a panic. After a frantic escape attempt, the cockatrice captures him, carrying him to a mountain summit. In a desperate struggle, Loth loses his weapon and nearly his life, but a sudden interruption spares him from certain death. The encounter highlights his vulnerability and the ever-present danger of the wilderness.

As the cockatrice attacks, Loth clings to fleeting memories of joy—his sister Margret, dances with Ead, and hunts with Sabran—to steel himself against impending doom. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with the beast momentarily distracted, leaving Loth’s fate uncertain. This moment encapsulates the themes of resilience and mortality, as Loth confronts the possibility of death while drawing strength from cherished moments of his past.

Twenty-Four

The chapter opens with Ead awaiting word from Chassar about her extended stay in Inys, while the court grows fond of Prince Aubrecht Lievelyn. Sabran, the queen, begins attending masques and plays with her consort, displaying rare moments of joy and affection. However, her frustration mounts when she fails to conceive an heir, leading to volatile outbursts. Ead remains a constant presence, observing Sabran's struggles with both the pressures of motherhood and the financial burdens of defending Mentendon from wyrms, which strain the royal coffers.

Sabran's impatience and despair become more pronounced as she distances herself from Lievelyn, staying up late with her ladies instead. Ead, privy to the queen's intimate fears and secrets, notes her conflicting desires for pregnancy and dread of its consequences. The atmosphere in Briar House grows tense with rumors, including speculation about Ead's sudden rise to favor as a Lady of the Bedchamber. Despite the court's gossip, Ead remains focused on her duties, though she cherishes her rare moments of solitude.

During one such morning walk, Ead reflects on the legacy of past queens like Glorian Shieldheart, who defied adversity to protect Inys. Her thoughts are interrupted by an encounter with Lievelyn in the hothouse, where she discreetly gathers saffron for Sabran. The prince, curious and kind, joins her in searching for lavender to aid the queen's sleep. Their conversation hints at the shared burden of court life, though Ead remains guarded despite Lievelyn's apparent sincerity.

The chapter closes with Ead and Lievelyn walking together at dawn, their interaction underscoring the quiet tensions and unspoken alliances within the court. Ead's loyalty to Sabran is evident, but her actions—such as collecting medicinal herbs—reveal a deeper, more personal commitment to the queen's well-being. The juxtaposition of Sabran's public struggles and Ead's private resolve highlights the complex dynamics of

power, duty, and personal connection in the royal household.



Twenty-Five

Niclays Roos, an exiled scholar, finds temporary solace in Ginura as a guest of the Moyaka household. During the vibrant Summerfall festival, he immerses himself in Seiikinese culture, savoring local delicacies and marveling at the golden leaves transforming into red buds. Accompanied by his chaperons, Eizaru and Purumé, he explores the coastal landscape, including the striking Grieving Orphan volcanic stack. Despite his exile, Niclays begins to envision a future in Ginura, clinging to the fragile hope that he might escape the confines of Orisima permanently.

The arrival of letters from Mentendon disrupts Niclays' fragile peace. The first, from High Prince Aubrecht II, denies his petition for clemency, citing political tensions with Queen Sabran of Inys. Though disheartened, Niclays notes the prince’s willingness to reconsider if he can appease the queen. The second letter, from his niece Truyde, arrives over a year late, revealing her continued fascination with the Tablet of Rumelabar’s riddle. Niclays is moved by her words but frustrated by the delayed communication, which could have warned him of Sulyard’s arrival.

Truyde’s letter reignites Niclays’ curiosity about the ancient riddle, which speaks of cosmic balance and the peril of imbalance. He transcribes the riddle, pondering its meaning and the implications of the Tablet of Rumelabar. Memories of his academic studies resurface, particularly the discovery of a subterranean temple in the Sarras Mountains. The riddle’s enigmatic nature haunts him, intertwining with his guilt over Sulyard’s imprisonment and his own unfulfilled quest for knowledge.

As Niclays grapples with these thoughts, his companions take him to observe night-flying herons, offering a brief respite. Yet, his mind remains preoccupied with the riddle and his unresolved past. The chapter closes with Niclays caught between the allure of newfound freedom in Ginura and the weight of his exile, his intellectual passions, and the consequences of his actions. The tension between hope and despair

underscores his precarious existence in the East.



Twenty-Six

The chapter opens with Queen Sabran preparing for her first public appearance in fourteen years, a royal progress to Ascalon that has stirred excitement across Inys. Ead Duryan, one of her ladies-in-waiting, discreetly arms herself with hidden blades, hinting at underlying tensions. The queen's attire—midnight velvet and a sword-shaped brooch—is carefully chosen to evoke her late mother, Queen Rosarian, and to project regal divinity. Sabran's sleeplessness and quiet demeanor reveal her anxiety about facing the public after years of seclusion, while Ead's gentle combing of her hair offers a rare moment of solace.

As Sabran's ladies-in-waiting adorn her with jewels and a silver crown, the queen's emotional vulnerability surfaces. She confides in Ead about her wish to announce her pregnancy but hesitates due to medical advice. Their intimate exchange, culminating in Sabran grasping Ead's hand, underscores their deepening bond. The queen's nostalgia is further evoked when Roslain gifts her a sapphire-and-pearl necklace from her mother, symbolizing the weight of legacy. Sabran's final question—"How do I look?"—reflects her need for reassurance before stepping into the public eye.

The procession departs under a clear blue sky, with Sabran escorted by her husband, Aubrecht Lievelyn, and the Dukes Spiritual. Ead remains vigilant, suspecting that the unresolved threat of assassins could strike during the event. Lord Eller's unease contrasts with Seyton Combe's confidence, highlighting political tensions within the court. Ead's frustration over her inability to investigate the cutthroats adds urgency to the scene, as the royal party ventures into Ascalon's bustling streets.

The chapter concludes with a glimpse of Ascalon's history, once a paradise founded by Galian the Saint but now marred by crime and decay. The city's stone architecture, a legacy of fire-prevention laws, stands as a metaphor for Inys's resilience and decline. Ead's observations as she rides through the capital underscore the contrast between

its idealized past and gritty reality, setting the stage for the queen’s encounter with her people—a moment fraught with both hope and danger.



Twenty-Seven

In this chapter of *The Priory of the Orange Tree*, Niclays Roos devises a perilous plan to secure his return to the West by creating an elixir from dragon blood, a substance forbidden by Eastern law. Despite his usual cowardice, Niclays resolves to take the risk, driven by desperation and ambition. He sends a secret letter to Lady Tané Miduchi, a dragonrider, requesting a meeting, ensuring the message is delivered discreetly. As he waits for her response, Niclays reflects on his past and the mysterious silk fragment left to him by his deceased mentor, Jannart, which holds an undeciphered secret tied to Jannart's death.

Niclays's encounter with Tané on a secluded beach is tense and fraught with danger. He blackmails her by threatening to expose her role in the arrest of two individuals, including her friend, unless she provides him with dragon blood and scales. Tané, initially hostile and threatening, is visibly shaken by Niclays's revelation about her friend's fate. The confrontation escalates as she presses a blade to his throat, outraged by his demand to defile a dragon, which she reveres as a god. Niclays remains steadfast, leveraging her fear of exposure to secure his demands.

The chapter delves into Niclays's complex motivations, revealing his obsession with the silk fragment and his unresolved grief over Jannart's death. The fragment, a legacy from Jannart's widow and granddaughter, symbolizes both a personal mystery and a professional challenge. Niclays's determination to unlock its secrets mirrors his broader quest for redemption and scientific discovery. His actions underscore his moral ambiguity, as he manipulates Tané while grappling with his own guilt and ambition.

The confrontation between Niclays and Tané highlights the clash between Western alchemical pursuits and Eastern spiritual reverence for dragons. Tané's internal conflict—between her duty as a dragonrider and her fear of exposure—adds depth to

her character. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Tané’s blade at Niclays’s throat, leaving their negotiation unresolved. This moment encapsulates the high stakes of Niclays’s plan and the precarious balance of power between the two characters, setting the stage for further conflict.



Twenty-Eight

Loth arrives in Rauca, the vibrant capital of the Ersyr, overwhelmed by its sensory richness—colorful spices, fragrant gardens, and towering windcatchers adorned with blueglass. Accompanied by a silent ichneumon, he navigates the bustling streets, feeling out of place yet intrigued by the unfamiliar culture. The grandeur of the Ivory Palace, home to the House of Taumargam, dominates the cityscape, its gleaming domes and pristine walls a stark contrast to the chaotic markets below. Loth seeks Chassar uq-Ispad, an ambassador, but the ichneumon diverts him into a covered market, delaying his mission.

Exhausted and parched, Loth attempts to bargain for water but struggles with the language and local customs. A kind merchant gifts him a *pargh*, a face cloth, and directs him to Chassar’s estate in Rumelabar. Loth’s discomfort with haggling and his fear of the plague highlight his vulnerability in this foreign land. The merchant’s generosity and the ichneumon’s stubbornness underscore the chapter’s themes of cultural dissonance and unexpected kindness. Loth’s determination to send a letter to Margret reveals his lingering ties to home and his resourcefulness in adversity.

The Place of Doves, a striking square adorned with pink tiles and towering dovecotes, becomes Loth’s next destination. He entrusts a letter to a bird-keeper, hoping to bypass Combe’s scrutiny. The ichneumon leads him to an inn, where a masked woman’s unsettling presence adds an air of mystery. Loth’s physical and emotional exhaustion culminates in a private moment of grief for Kitston Glade, revealing the depth of his sorrow and the weight of his journey.

As night falls, Loth’s grief overwhelms him, and he weeps uncontrollably before collapsing into a fitful sleep. The chapter closes with his fragmented thoughts, emphasizing his isolation and the emotional toll of his quest. The juxtaposition of Rauca’s beauty and Loth’s inner turmoil creates a poignant contrast, underscoring the

challenges of navigating both an unfamiliar world and personal loss. The masked woman’s reappearance hints at impending intrigue, leaving the reader eager for the next chapter’s developments.



Twenty-Nine

The chapter opens with Tané, a dragonrider, confined to her luxurious quarters at Salt Flower Castle after confessing to her dragon, Nayimathun. Despite the opulence of her surroundings, she is consumed by anxiety, unable to eat or sleep. Nayimathun has left to retrieve Sulyard, a foreigner under divine protection, and secure the release of Susa from jail. Meanwhile, the coastal settlement of Sidupi is under attack by pirates, diverting most dragonriders to assist the High Sea Guard. Tané's isolation and dread are palpable as she awaits Nayimathun's return, her physical discomfort mirroring her emotional turmoil.

A sudden earthquake disrupts the night, injuring Tané's ankle and aggravating old wounds. Her attendants rush to aid her, but the disturbance heightens her unease. The quake, a rare occurrence in Seiiki, adds to the sense of impending chaos. As Tané attempts to rest, she is abruptly awakened by six masked soldiers from the land army, who demand she accompany them to meet the Governor of Ginura. The governor's unexpected summons, typically reserved for high-ranking individuals, fills Tané with suspicion and fear, though she resolves to cooperate, trusting Nayimathun will intervene if necessary.

Tané's apprehension grows as she prepares to leave, secretly arming herself with a hidden blade. The soldiers' insistence and the late-hour summons suggest grave consequences, possibly linked to her earlier actions or the foreigner Roos. As she is escorted through the castle, fellow dragonriders Onren and Kanperu intervene, questioning the soldiers' authority. Their presence briefly bolsters Tané's confidence, but the soldiers claim the Sea General has been informed, a statement met with skepticism. The tension underscores the power dynamics between the dragonriders and the land army.

The chapter closes with Tané’s quiet plea to Onren to alert Nayimathun if she does not return promptly. Despite Onren’s reassurances that the summons is likely trivial, Tané’s physical pain and mental distress hint at deeper trouble. The unresolved confrontation leaves the reader anticipating the governor’s motives and Tané’s fate, while the underlying themes of loyalty, authority, and impending conflict loom large. The chapter masterfully blends personal struggle with broader political intrigue, setting the stage for further upheaval.



Thirty

The chapter opens with Truyde utt Zeedeur imprisoned in the Dearn Tower, having confessed to orchestrating a staged attack during the royal visit. Her plan was to convince Queen Sabran of imminent danger from Yscalin and the Nameless One, hoping to push her toward negotiations with the East. However, the scheme backfired when genuine enemies of the House of Berethnet infiltrated the performance, resulting in the murder of Lievelyn and several others. Truyde’s intentions, though well-meaning, led to unintended bloodshed and chaos.

Meanwhile, Ead reflects on the aftermath of the ambush, particularly her own involvement in the violence. Tharian Lintley, who witnessed her combat skills, has kept silent, but Ead remains wary. The court is in mourning, with Lievelyn lying in state and Sabran secluded in grief. The tension escalates when Margret delivers a cryptic letter from Loth, revealing Kit’s death and warning of danger to Sabran from an unknown "Cupbearer." The message hints at a deeper conspiracy linked to Queen Rosarian’s death.

Ead and Margret grapple with whether to inform Sabran about Loth’s survival, fearing Combe’s interference. Margret also shares concerns about her father’s deteriorating mental state, adding another layer of personal turmoil. Ead resolves to investigate the Cupbearer threat herself, determined to protect Sabran from further harm. The chapter underscores the pervasive atmosphere of distrust and the weight of hidden agendas within the court.

The final section shifts to Sabran’s fragile condition, suffering from pregnancy-related illness and profound grief. Her emotional state is fragile, and her interactions are strained. When she unexpectedly requests Ead as her bedfellow, it signals a rare moment of vulnerability. Roslain advises Ead on how to care for Sabran during the night, emphasizing the need for constant light. The chapter closes with Ead joining

Sabran in the Royal Bedchamber, hinting at the deepening bond between them amid the surrounding dangers.



Thirty-One

The chapter opens with Tané reflecting on her past triumph—scaling Mount Tego, a grueling trial that proved her worthiness to the spirit Kwiriki. Now, however, she feels broken and hollow, imprisoned for an undisclosed crime. Dragged before the Governor of Ginura, she is confronted with her betrayal: aiding a foreigner in violation of Seiiki's strict laws. The Governor reveals that Tané's actions were exposed by the executed prisoner, who described her scar. Tané's once-promising future as a dragon rider lies in ruins, and her shame is palpable as she admits her selfish motives—fear of losing her chance to ride a dragon.

Tané's confession exposes her desperation and flawed judgment. She believed the outsider was a divine test, yet her decision to hide him was driven by cowardice and ambition. The Governor condemns her for endangering Seiiki, emphasizing how Kwiriki's favor has now vanished. Tané's friend Susa, implicated in the crime, was executed despite Nayimathun's plea for clemency. The revelation of Susa's loyalty to Tané over the state deepens her guilt, leaving her emotionally shattered. The sorrower bird's cries outside mirror her unraveling psyche.

The chapter takes a darker turn as the Governor discloses Nayimathun's capture by the Fleet of the Tiger Eye, a group of dragon hunters. Tané is devastated, imagining the torture her dragon endures. With nothing left to lose, she accuses Roos, a corrupt surgeon, of aiding the hunters. However, the Governor reveals Roos has fled, likely joining the hunters—a small, bitter consolation. Tané's despair peaks as she realizes her mistakes have cost her everything: her dragon, her friend, and her destiny.

In the final confrontation, the Governor coldly informs Tané that execution is justified, given the gravity of her crimes. Tané accepts her fate, acknowledging her catastrophic errors. The chapter ends with a heavy silence, underscoring the irreversible consequences of her actions. Tané's journey from revered apprentice to disgraced

prisoner is complete, leaving her utterly alone and consumed by regret.



Thirty-Two

The chapter opens with Lord Arteloth Beck, known as Loth, awakening in an unfamiliar underground chamber, naked and disoriented. He soon experiences the terrifying onset of the bloodblaze, a plague that feels like his blood is boiling, causing unbearable pain. In his agony, he recalls stories of the Grief of Ages, understanding why the East sealed its borders. As he struggles toward a pool for relief, a mysterious figure with a calming voice intervenes, questioning his identity and the origin of an iron box he carried. Loth, fearing he will infect others, warns them away before losing consciousness again.

When Loth next wakes, he finds himself healed and in a bed within the same chamber. Weak but free of pain, he reflects on his survival as a merciful act of the Saint. After cleansing himself in a pool, he notices a woman in a green cloak, who leads him through stone passages adorned with bronze statuettes. The woman, speaking with a Lasian accent, directs him to a curtained archway, where he is to meet Chassar uq-Ispad, the Ersyri ambassador. The setting is starkly different from the open-air estates Loth expected, adding to his growing confusion.

Loth is greeted by Chassar, who reveals they are in the Priory of the Orange Tree in Lasia—a shocking revelation, as Loth last remembers being in Rauca. Chassar explains that an ichneumon named Aralaq rescued him and brought him to the Priory, a place few outsiders survive to see. Loth struggles to comprehend the situation, especially when Chassar dismisses the foundational myth of the Damsel and the Saint as false. The ambassador’s calm demeanor and cryptic remarks unsettle Loth, who remains devoutly loyal to his faith and troubled by the blasphemy.

The chapter ends with Chassar preparing to unravel a tale that contradicts everything Loth believes, setting the stage for a confrontation between faith and hidden truths. The sand eagle’s presence and Chassar’s enigmatic smile underscore the tension,

leaving Loth—and the reader—eager yet apprehensive about the revelations to come. The Priory’s secrecy, the ichneumon’s role, and the challenge to Inysh orthodoxy hint at a larger conflict brewing beneath the surface.



Thirty-Three

The chapter opens with Niclays and Jannart in Brygstad Palace, stealing moments of intimacy in a room reserved for royal births. Their relationship is clandestine, as Jannart is bound by an arranged marriage, and their love violates the laws of Virtudom. The narrative hints at the tension between their private lives and public duties, especially as Jannart is a close friend of High Prince Edvart, who may turn a blind eye to their affair. The setting is rich with symbolism, from the star-painted ceiling to the tapestries, reflecting the duality of their existence—both opulent and constrained.

Jannart is depicted as a man of intellectual passion, having shifted from art to historical research to fill gaps left by the Grief of Ages, a cataclysmic event that destroyed much of the world's knowledge. Niclays, meanwhile, lounges in bed, his thoughts drifting to recent events—a wyvern's awakening near the capital due to reckless hunters. This incident underscores the theme of human arrogance disrupting natural order, a recurring concern in their world. Their conversation reveals Niclays' cynicism and Jannart's optimism, as well as their deep emotional connection despite their differences.

The dialogue between the two lovers reveals layers of their relationship. Niclays' dependence on wine to numb his pain—both from societal rejection and personal guilt—is a point of contention, though Jannart avoids confrontation. Their banter about the mythical Milk Lagoon, a haven for lovers, reflects their shared longing for escape and a life free from constraints. Jannart's belief in the Lagoon's existence contrasts with Niclays' self-deprecating doubt, yet their affection remains palpable, even as they grapple with the realities of aging and mortality.

The chapter closes with a tender moment between the two, as Jannart reassures Niclays of their future together, whether or not they find the Milk Lagoon. Their physical and emotional intimacy is juxtaposed with the broader societal pressures they

face, highlighting the fragility of their happiness. The narrative leaves readers with a sense of bittersweet hope, as the couple clings to their love in a world that threatens to tear them apart.



Thirty-Four

The chapter opens with Queen Sabran’s pregnancy bringing joy to Inys, as the people celebrate the promise of a new heir despite the recent death of Prince Aubrecht. Sabran decides to return to Ascalon Palace to avoid the painful memories of Briar House, and the court prepares for the arrival of the child with new gowns and a refurbished lying-in chamber. However, beneath the surface of celebration, Sabran struggles with physical sickness and emotional turmoil, her condition carefully monitored by her Ladies of the Bedchamber, who prioritize the unborn child’s safety above all else.

Amidst the personal challenges, political tensions loom large. The Dukes Spiritual, particularly Igrain Crest, pressure Sabran to address the threat of an invasion from Yscalin, which is reportedly building a fleet. Crest also urges Sabran to remarry, suggesting an alliance with King Raunus of Hróth to secure military support. Sabran, however, resists these demands, asserting that her focus must remain on her pregnancy and the well-being of her child. Her refusal to entertain the idea of remarriage while pregnant reveals her growing assertiveness and strategic thinking.

The confrontation between Sabran and Crest highlights the queen’s evolving leadership style. Crest, accustomed to wielding influence, is taken aback by Sabran’s firmness, especially when the queen insists on having her trusted ladies, Ead and Katryen, remain during the discussion. Sabran’s refusal to yield to Crest’s demands underscores her determination to protect her autonomy and the sanctity of her pregnancy, even as she acknowledges the political stakes. The tension between the two women reflects broader themes of power and control within the court.

The chapter closes with Sabran reflecting on her relationship with Crest, recognizing the duchess’s frustration at being denied. Katryen attempts to soothe Sabran, reminding her of Crest’s eventual acceptance of past decisions. However, the arrival of

a signal beacon warning of coastal danger foreshadows impending conflict, leaving the reader with a sense of unease. Sabran’s resilience and strategic evasion of Crest’s pressures suggest a queen who is increasingly aware of the delicate balance between personal and political survival.



Thirty-Five

Niclays Roos, a former alchemist turned reluctant surgeon aboard the pirate ship *Pursuit*, successfully treats a crew member stung by a rare quarl, earning the favor of the Golden Empress. Despite his medical triumph, he endures harsh conditions, sleeping on the deck and facing abuse from pirates. His despair deepens as he reflects on his lost comforts in Orisima, contrasting sharply with his current plight. The chapter highlights his vulnerability and the precariousness of his new role under the empress’s ruthless command.

Laya Yidagé, the ship’s interpreter, emerges as a sympathetic figure, offering Niclays food and warmth while revealing her own tragic past. Born in Kumenga, she joined the pirates after a failed quest to find her missing father, surviving by leveraging her linguistic skills. Her camaraderie with Niclays provides a rare moment of connection amidst the brutality of their surroundings. Their conversation underscores the themes of survival and the fleeting nature of kindness in a merciless world.

Niclays confides in Laya about his alchemical pursuit of immortality, hoping to study the captured Eastern dragon aboard the ship. Laya, intrigued, suggests his knowledge might intrigue the Golden Empress, who seeks eternal life herself. She shares the legend of Komoridu’s sorceress and her mythical mulberry tree, hinting at the empress’s obsession with longevity. This exchange foreshadows potential alliances or conflicts, as Niclays’s ambitions intersect with the empress’s desires.

The chapter closes with Niclays’s growing curiosity about the dragon and the mulberry tree legend, his heartbeat quickening at the possibilities. Laya’s tale weaves myth into the narrative, suggesting deeper mysteries ahead. Their bond, forged in shared isolation, offers a glimmer of hope amid the grim reality of piracy, setting the stage for Niclays’s precarious journey toward redemption—or ruin.

Thirty-Six

The chapter opens with Ead keeping vigil over Queen Sabran, who remains gravely ill after being wounded by the White Wyrm. The aftermath of the attack haunts Ead, particularly the memory of Sabran's near-death experience and the loss of her unborn child. Despite rigorous precautions, Sabran developed a severe infection that left her infertile—a devastating revelation that threatens the continuity of the Berethnet bloodline. This secret is known only to a select few, including the Royal Physician and the court's inner circle, who now grapple with the implications of a queen who cannot produce an heir.

Sabran's physical and emotional turmoil is palpable as she oscillates between despair and rage. She lashes out at Ead, demanding the window be opened despite the cold, and bitterly curses her fate. Her anguish stems not only from her inability to bear children but also from the guilt of having once sought an elixir to avoid pregnancy, leading to her banishment of Niclays Roos. Ead, though sympathetic, refuses to indulge Sabran's self-destructive tendencies, challenging her to rise above her grief. Their tense exchange underscores Sabran's isolation and the weight of her crown.

The political ramifications of Sabran's infertility loom large. The Dukes Spiritual debate whether to conceal the truth or consider drastic measures, such as adopting an heir. Sabran, meanwhile, spirals into self-recrimination, believing her attempts to delay motherhood have doomed her lineage. She questions why the Saint, who seemingly favored her by repelling Fýredel, has now abandoned her. Ead, though burdened by her own role in perpetuating court illusions, urges Sabran to hold onto faith, but the queen's despair remains unshaken.

In the chapter's closing moments, Sabran's vulnerability surfaces as she confesses her regrets to Ead. The once-proud queen is reduced to a broken figure, grappling with the collapse of her dynasty and the impending threat of the Nameless One. Ead's quiet

presence offers a fragile solace, but the chapter leaves no doubt that Sabran's personal tragedy is intertwined with the kingdom's uncertain future. The weight of legacy, loss, and looming catastrophe hangs heavy in the air, setting the stage for the challenges to come.



Thirty-Seven

The chapter opens in the study of Principal Secretary Combe, a powerful and calculating figure whose unassuming workspace belies his influence. Ead Duryan, a Lady of the Bedchamber, is summoned and informed that Queen Sabran has discharged her from court due to their intimate relationship. Combe reveals his network of spies reported their affair, emphasizing the political instability it could cause. Ead maintains her composure but internally strategizes her next move, aware of the precariousness of her position.

Combe justifies his actions by stressing the need for Sabran to remarry and produce an heir to secure Inys's future. He compares Ead’s dismissal to his earlier exile of Lord Arteloth, though he admits Loth’s case pained him. Ead challenges Combe’s motives, accusing him of hypocrisy given his lineage as a descendant of the Knight of Courtesy. Combe defends his ruthless methods as necessary to uphold the crown’s stability, revealing his role as a shadowy enforcer who eliminates threats to the realm.

The tension escalates as Combe hints at growing dissent among the Dukes Spiritual, who may challenge Sabran’s rule now that she lacks an heir. Ead warns that Sabran will retaliate if she discovers Combe’s interference, but he dismisses her concerns, asserting his indispensability. Their exchange underscores the power struggle at court, with Combe positioning himself as Sabran’s protector while manipulating events behind the scenes. Ead’s defiance and Combe’s cold pragmatism highlight their conflicting loyalties.

The chapter climaxes when Combe orders his retainer to kill Ead, testing her rumored magical abilities. In a burst of self-defense, Ead disarms the attacker, revealing her latent powers. Combe, now confirmed in his suspicions, observes her with calculated interest. The confrontation leaves Ead exposed but resolute, setting the stage for her next confrontation with the forces arrayed against her and Sabran. The chapter ends

with Ead’s hidden strengths unveiled, complicating the political intrigue further.



Thirty-Eight

The chapter opens with Tané, a scholar on Feather Island, engaging in her morning ritual of prayer and reflection in an underground cavern. She kneels before a unique statue of the Great Elder Kwiriki, depicted with hybrid animal features, finding solace in the quiet darkness. Her routine is interrupted by Elder Vara, an eccentric but kind figure who invites her to the restricted repository, a rare privilege. Tané hesitates, aware of the rules, but Elder Vara insists, leaving her to finish her prayers before she reluctantly prepares to follow him.

Feather Island is described as a remote and mystical place, shrouded in fog and steeped in legend. The island is divided by a ravine said to contain the bones of Kwiriki, whose presence keeps the land perpetually misty. Tané resides in Vane Hall, a hermitage on a dormant volcano, where scholars live in isolation, dedicating themselves to learning and menial tasks. The island’s harsh beauty and solitude mirror Tané’s inner turmoil, as she grapples with her past and the loss of her dreams.

Tané reflects on the teachings of the hermitage, particularly the contrast between fire and water. Fire symbolizes destruction and insatiable desire, while water represents adaptability and resilience—qualities embodied by the Eastern dragons. These lessons underscore the island’s spiritual ethos and Tané’s own struggle to reconcile her identity. Her short hair and the nickname "Ghost of Vane Hall" signify her fractured sense of self, as she mourns her former life and the death of her friend Susa, clinging to Elder Vara’s kindness as a lifeline.

The chapter culminates in a sudden earthquake that triggers intense pain in Tané’s side, causing her to collapse. Elder Vara rushes to her aid, carrying her to a courtyard where he had planned to take her for a walk. The incident hints at a deeper mystery surrounding Tané’s condition and foreshadows further revelations. The chapter closes with Tané’s physical and emotional vulnerability, poised on the brink of a potential

turning point in her journey.



Thirty-Nine

The chapter follows Eadaz uq-Nāra as she journeys through the Burlah desert with a caravan of forty travelers. Clad in a white pargh and riding a camel, Ead reflects on her return to the South, which initially felt like a rebirth but soon became a harsh reminder of the desert's unforgiving nature. The caravan encounters Nuram tribesmen, who warn of wyrms venturing beyond the mountains, possibly emboldened by rumors of a High Western's sighting. Ead's thoughts drift to her visit to the Buried City near the Dreadmount, where she searched for clues about the Long-Haired Star but found only a collapsed tunnel.

Ead's journey is marked by a sense of displacement, as she struggles to reconcile her past life in the Western court with her current identity as a dusty traveler. The desert's relentless winds and scorching sun strip away her illusions, leaving her feeling like a wandering spirit. A scorpion scurries past her camel as the travelers sing in Ersyri, a language that evokes distant memories. The caravan-master announces an impending sandstorm, forcing the group to seek shelter at a Nuram camp, much to Ead's frustration, as she feels time slipping away.

Ead's solitude is briefly interrupted by Ragab, a grizzled postrider with a tragic past, who becomes her companion. The other travelers view both Ead and Ragab with pity, but Ragab's stories and resilience offer a rare connection. He shares his love for the Desert of the Unquiet Dream, prompting Ead to ask him to recount its origin tale. Ragab begins the story of the Melancholy King, a ruler who, grieving his lost queen, follows her apparition into the desert, believing it to be a dream.

The tale of the Melancholy King serves as a poignant metaphor for Ead's own journey—a blend of longing, loss, and the relentless pursuit of something just out of reach. As Ragab narrates, Ead shivers, recalling the story's tragic end. The chapter closes with the caravan bracing for the storm, leaving Ead suspended between her

past and present, much like the king in the tale, caught between reality and the mirage of what once was.



Forty

The chapter opens with Niclays aboard the pirate ship *Pursuit*, enduring relentless rain and the ever-present threat of the dragon Valeysa the Harrower, whose fiery presence looms ominously over the fleet. Niclays, a captive alchemist, fears both the dragon’s wrath and the pirates’ brutality as the ship sails east toward Kawontay. His anxiety is compounded by the pursuit of Seiikinese iron ships, though the pirates remain confident in their evasion. The tension is palpable as Niclays navigates his precarious existence, clinging to survival while pondering his uncertain fate.

Summoned to the Golden Empress’s cabin, Niclays encounters the cunning pirate leader, who reveals her fluency in Seiikinese and her shrewd ability to manipulate others. The Empress, adorned in otter fur and wielding a knife, asserts her dominance through psychological intimidation, probing Niclays for his motives. Their exchange is laced with tension as she challenges his claims of being both an anatomist and an alchemist, exposing his desperation to study the captured Lacustrine dragon for his quest to unlock eternal life. Niclays’s fear and vulnerability are laid bare under her piercing scrutiny.

The Golden Empress shifts the conversation to a fragment of writing Niclays cherishes, a keepsake from his late lover, Jannart. She reveals the text’s significance as part of an ancient Eastern legend about a mulberry tree that grants eternal life. Niclays, stunned, realizes she has been searching for this very fragment. The Empress’s gentle handling of the paper contrasts with her earlier menace, revealing her own obsession with the legend. Niclays, however, remains skeptical, questioning whether the tree is merely a myth, yet he is drawn deeper into her web as she hints at a potential bargain between them.

The chapter culminates in a tense standoff, with the Golden Empress leveraging Niclays’s emotional attachment to the fragment and his scientific ambitions. Her

manipulation is evident as she alternates between threats and offers of collaboration, leaving Niclays torn between fear and curiosity. The encounter underscores the power dynamics at play, with Niclays’s survival hinging on his ability to navigate the Empress’s unpredictable whims. The chapter closes with an unresolved tension, setting the stage for further intrigue and conflict as Niclays’s fate remains intertwined with the pirates’ schemes and the elusive legend of eternal life.



Forty-One

Ead, the protagonist, experiences an intense fever that heightens her senses, making her acutely aware of her surroundings in the Priory. The chapter opens with her lying in her eyrie, overwhelmed by physical sensations and vivid memories of Sabran, the woman she loves and worries about. Her heightened state leads to a moment of intimate longing, followed by a resolve to protect Sabran from political threats in Inys. As she cuts herself accidentally while handling a pomegranate, an idea begins to form in her mind, hinting at a plan to sway the Prioress into aiding Sabran's cause.

The narrative shifts to Ead's reflections on her birthmother, Zāla du Agriya uq-Nāra, a legendary figure in the Priory who died when Ead was six. Zāla's heroic deeds and tender moments with Ead are recounted, revealing a deep emotional bond that contrasts with the Priory's emphasis on detachment. Ead's grief and longing for maternal comfort are palpable as she touches the door to the room where Zāla died, whispering a prayer for her mother's spirit. This moment underscores Ead's isolation and her yearning for connection amidst her duties.

Ead's focus returns to her plan as she enters the dining chamber and interacts with Sarsun, a bird companion. Using her blood and a riddlebox, she unlocks a key shaped like an orange blossom, the symbol of the Priory. The scene is charged with tension and mystery, as Ead follows Sarsun to a hidden, lightless room where she encounters an effigy of Cleolind, the Mother of the Priory. The statue's warrior-like depiction challenges the Damsel archetype, emphasizing Cleolind's true strength and leadership.

The chapter concludes with Ead standing before Cleolind's effigy, holding the key and searching for guidance. The atmosphere is reverent and suspenseful, as Ead's actions suggest a pivotal moment in her quest to protect Sabran and fulfill her role in the Priory. The juxtaposition of personal longing, historical legacy, and impending action

creates a rich tapestry of emotion and intrigue, setting the stage for the next developments in the story.



Forty-Two

In this chapter, Niclays Roos is deeply engrossed in deciphering an ancient text, *The Tale of Komoridu*, which he believes holds the key to immortality. Working tirelessly on a silk scroll, he meticulously copies characters of varying sizes, convinced they form a celestial map. His companion, Laya, interrupts his work with broth, teasing him about his obsession. Niclays defends his alchemical pursuits, claiming madness is a necessary trait for progress. The tension is palpable as he races against time, aware that failure could cost him his life.

Niclays recalls his earlier attempts to decode the text, experimenting with circular and rectangular star charts. He theorizes that the characters represent stars, with their sizes indicating brightness. His work is interrupted by the thrashing of a captive dragon below deck, adding to the ship’s unease. Laya, sensing his emotional turmoil, gently probes about his past, specifically the death of his close friend Jannart. Niclays, usually guarded, opens up about his grief, revealing their shared love for ancient languages and knowledge.

The scene shifts abruptly as the Golden Empress, accompanied by her bloodied navigator Padar and the fierce Captain Ghonra, enters the room. She demands updates on Niclays’ progress, and he nervously presents his findings, suggesting the characters form a navigational guide to the mythical mulberry tree. The Golden Empress, skeptical yet intrigued, orders Laya to translate the characters. To everyone’s surprise, the text reveals a cryptic message about the "Way of the Outcasts" and the location of the tree, hidden beneath celestial clues.

The chapter culminates in a breakthrough as Padar matches the characters to constellations, confirming Niclays’ theory. The final pane points to the "Magpie," a constellation known to the Seiikinese, hinting at the tree’s location. Niclays’ excitement is tempered by the Golden Empress’s calculating gaze, leaving the reader

with a sense of impending danger and the stakes of their quest. The chapter masterfully blends intellectual pursuit with emotional depth, setting the stage for the next phase of their journey.



Forty-Three

Ead prepares for a perilous journey to confront Kalyba, the banished and feared Lady of the Woods. Armed with weapons and clad in the white cloak of a postulant, she is seen off by Chassar and the ichneumon Aralaq. Chassar expresses confidence in Ead's abilities but warns her to retreat if the danger becomes too great. Aralaq, though gruff, pledges to protect her, highlighting the bond between them. The chapter sets the stage for Ead's quest, emphasizing the risks posed by Kalyba's dark magic and the unresolved tension surrounding her past at the Priory.

As Ead and Aralaq traverse the forest, the narrative delves into Kalyba's enigmatic history. Once a mysterious figure at the Priory, Kalyba claimed immortality and possessed unsettling powers not derived from the sacred orange tree. Ead recalls Kalyba's ability to enchant and manipulate, such as transforming her fingers into feathers, which captivated Ead and her friend Jondu. The reasons for Kalyba's banishment remain shrouded in rumor, including suspicions that she poisoned the former Prioress. These memories underscore Kalyba's duality—both alluring and dangerous—and foreshadow the challenges Ead will face.

During their journey, Ead reflects on her past and her unresolved feelings for Sabran, the Queen of Inys. She grapples with guilt over her deception and wonders if Sabran still trusts her despite the lies. These introspective moments reveal Ead's vulnerability and her longing for redemption. Meanwhile, Aralaq's gruff yet loyal nature provides a counterbalance, as he ensures her safety and sustenance. The interplay between Ead's inner turmoil and the external dangers of the forest deepens the chapter's emotional stakes.

The chapter culminates with Ead and Aralaq nearing Kalyba's domain, the Bower of Eternity. As they cross the treacherous Minara River and endure the elements, Ead steels herself for the confrontation ahead. Her determination to uncover the truth

about Kalyba—and perhaps herself—drives her forward. The chapter masterfully blends action, memory, and introspection, painting a vivid picture of Ead’s resolve amidst uncertainty and danger. The stage is set for a climactic encounter that will test her courage and loyalty.



Forty-Four

The chapter opens with Ead's shock at encountering Lord Arteloth (Loth) in the Priory, a place where outsiders are forbidden. Both are stunned by the unexpected reunion, as Loth had been drugged and held captive for months. Despite his confusion, he recognizes Ead as his old friend and resolves to reconnect with her before his memories fade entirely. Ead, however, reacts with betrayal and anger, especially when she learns that Chassar, her mentor, deliberately kept Loth's presence from her.

Ead confronts Chassar, demanding answers about Loth's arrival. Chassar reveals that Loth brought a crucial riddlebox from the Donmata Marosa, an unexpected ally. He explains that Loth cannot leave the Priory, as their secrets must remain protected. Ead argues for his release, citing his family and loyalty, but Chassar dismisses her concerns, emphasizing the Priory's greater mission. Their argument escalates as Ead admits her emotional ties to Sabran and the Inysh court, which Chassar views as blasphemous.

The tension shifts when Chassar discloses the Prioress's new task for Ead: a dangerous mission beyond the Gate of Ungulus to destroy a rumored dragon egg in the uncharted Eria. Ead is horrified at the prospect of years in exile, interpreting the assignment as punishment for her divided loyalties. Chassar suggests an alternative—bearing a child for the Priory—but Ead rejects this outright, seeing it as no choice at all.

The chapter ends with Ead storming out, determined to confront the Prioress directly. Chassar tries to stop her, but she refuses to listen, highlighting her growing defiance and internal conflict between duty and personal connections. The unresolved tension sets the stage for further confrontation and underscores Ead's struggle to reconcile her past allegiances with the Priory's demands.

Forty-Five

The chapter opens on Feather Island, where Tané and Elder Vara witness the aftermath of a devastating earthquake. The beaches are flooded, and an eerie silence hangs over the land. The scholars discover the body of a young Seiikinese dragon washed ashore, its scales dulled by mist and birds. The elders conclude the dragon was boiled alive by the sea—an unnatural and ominous event that leaves the community in shock. Tané, deeply disturbed by the sight, struggles to comprehend the implications of such a horrific omen.

As the scholars mourn the dragon's death, Elder Vara summons a surgeon, Doctor Moyaka, to examine Tané's old injury. Tané is initially reluctant, recognizing the name Moyaka as connected to a painful past involving threats to her dragon. Elder Vara reassures her, revealing he and the High Elder know about her exile from Seiiki. Despite her discomfort, Tané agrees to the examination, determined not to appear childish. The encounter with Moyaka stirs memories of her traumatic experiences in Ginura, adding to her emotional turmoil.

Doctor Moyaka, a practitioner of Seiikinese and Mentish medicine, examines the lump on Tané's side, diagnosing it as a bone spur. She proposes a minor procedure to confirm her assessment. Tané, who has longed for numbness since arriving on the island, accepts a pain-relieving drug. The smoke induces a dreamlike state, temporarily easing her shame and grief. As Moyaka begins the procedure, Tané's physical discomfort is dulled, but the emotional weight of her past lingers.

The chapter highlights Tané's internal struggle as she grapples with her exile, the trauma of her past, and the unsettling discovery of the dead dragon. The unnatural death of the dragon serves as a harbinger of darker forces at work, while Tané's interaction with Moyaka underscores her unresolved pain. The island's scholars, meanwhile, remain in a state of collective mourning, their world shaken by both

natural disaster and supernatural omens. The chapter ends with Tané caught between physical relief and emotional vulnerability, hinting at deeper conflicts to come.



Forty-Six

In this chapter, Ead returns to the kitchens of the Priory, reminiscing about her childhood and reconnecting with Tulgus, the head cook. She subtly inquires about the Prioress’s sun wine, masking her true intentions while observing Loth, who appears drugged with dreamroot. Ead seizes an opportunity to steal a pinch of powder from the spice jars, hinting at her clandestine plans. The scene establishes her calculated demeanor and the tension of her impending actions, as she balances nostalgia with the urgency of her mission.

Ead continues her day by maintaining a facade of normalcy, practicing archery under the watchful eyes of the Silver Damsels. Her precision and composure conceal her inner turmoil. Returning to her sunroom, she discovers her belongings missing, signaling that her escape is imminent. The chapter builds suspense as Ead prepares for her departure, steeling herself for the point of no return. Her resolve hardens, reflecting her determination to defy the Prioress and protect those beyond the Priory’s narrow focus.

As night falls, Ead orchestrates her plan, drugging the wine meant for the Prioress and using her hidden knife and travel clothes to escape. She employs an ancient technique called "candling" to incapacitate the guards, showcasing her rare skills. The tension peaks as she enters the Prioress’s chamber, only to find her awake and aware of the betrayal. The Prioress’s disdain for Ead’s broader worldview—rooted in her mother’s influence—reveals the ideological rift between them.

The confrontation between Ead and the Prioress underscores the chapter’s central conflict: the Priory’s isolationism versus Ead’s belief in protecting all humanity. The Prioress condemns Ead’s allegiance to Inys and the East, framing it as a betrayal of the Mother’s teachings. Ead’s silent defiance and the Prioress’s venomous rhetoric highlight the deeper stakes of their clash, setting the stage for Ead’s rebellion and the

broader struggle against the Priory’s rigid dogma.



Forty-Seven

The chapter follows Loth and Ead as they flee through the forest on the ichneumon Aralaq, heading toward the Lasian capital of Nzene. Loth reflects on his past, recalling memories of his sister Margret and their shared studies about Lasia, while grappling with the hope of reuniting with her. The journey is arduous, with Aralaq navigating treacherous terrain until they reach the foothills of the Godsblades, where they pause to take in the breathtaking view of Nzene—a city of golden sandstone, towering temples, and the grand Palace of the High Ruler.

Aralaq reveals that Ead’s wound is poisoned by an ice leech secretion, necessitating a stop for a cure in Nzene despite Ead’s urgency to reach Córvugar. Ead, weak and disoriented, awakens in a cave and learns of the delay. She realizes the Prioress intended for her to bleed out, framing her as a traitor for the Red Damsels to execute. Aralaq defends his decision, emphasizing that ichneumons protect their own, and assures her the poultice has neutralized the poison. Tension lingers as Ead worries about the relentless pursuit of the Red Damsels.

A strained conversation unfolds between Ead and Loth, who confronts her about her deceptions—her false identity, her feigned conversion to the Saint’s religion, and her hidden magical abilities. Ead admits to lying for survival but defends her beliefs, asserting that the Saint was a flawed figure who forced his religion upon others. She reveals her powers, including immunity to Draconic plague and the ability to manipulate shadows and fire. Loth, though resentful, listens as she explains the moral neutrality of magic, dependent on its wielder.

The chapter closes with an uneasy silence between them, underscored by the glittering torchlight of Nzene below. Loth’s anger is tempered by curiosity, while Ead remains vigilant, aware that their respite is temporary. The looming threat of the Red Damsels and the unresolved tension between the two characters set the stage for the

challenges ahead, blending personal conflict with the urgency of their mission.



Forty-Eight

The chapter opens on Feather Island, where the aftermath of a fire is being quenched by heavy rain. The Little Shadow-girl emerges from exile and connects with the earth, reflecting on the celestial origins of a powerful jewel she carries. This jewel, a remnant of a comet that ended the Great Sorrow, is revealed to be one of two ancient artifacts imbued with cosmic power. The narrative hints at their historical significance, suggesting they once granted control over natural forces to their bearers.

The jewel, now cleansed by the rain, symbolizes both a deep connection to the past and a burden of responsibility. The girl contemplates its history, noting how these celestial fragments were lost for nearly a millennium but never truly forgotten. Her internal monologue reveals the jewel's importance to her people's strength and survival, framing it as a key to reclaiming lost power. The dark blue hue of the jewel mirrors the depths of the Abyss and her own heart, emphasizing its profound emotional and mystical weight.

In a moment of resolve, the girl—revealed to be Tané—makes a solemn vow amidst the storm. She pledges to reunite the jewel with Nayimathun, a dragon currently held in captivity. This promise is portrayed as a sacred commitment, echoing ancient covenants made before the gods. Tané's determination is unwavering, even if the quest spans her entire lifetime, underscoring the depth of her loyalty and the gravity of her mission.

The chapter concludes with Tané's unwavering dedication to her vow, highlighting themes of redemption, sacrifice, and the enduring bond between beings and their heritage. The storm's eye serves as a metaphorical and literal crossroads, where past and future converge. Tané's journey is set in motion, promising a pursuit that will test her resolve and redefine her destiny. The jewel, now a beacon of hope, becomes the focal point of her quest to restore what was stolen and mend the fractures of history.

Forty-Nine

Loth and Ead arrive in Inys aboard the *Bird of Truth*, greeted by a melancholic and sunless coastline. Their destination is Albatross Roost, the westernmost settlement, from where they plan to ride hard to Ascalon within a week. Ead, visibly weakened since leaving Lasia, remains vigilant as they observe the growing Draconic Army fleet near Quarl Bay. In a display of her formidable power, Ead silently incinerates five enemy ships with fire, a stark reminder of the looming threat posed by King Sigoso’s impending invasion. The weight of their mission hangs heavy as they prepare for the challenges ahead.

As the ship docks, Loth reflects on his complicated feelings about returning to Inys, a place he never expected to see again. Despite initial tension between him and Ead, their shared experiences during the journey have rekindled their former camaraderie. They avoid contentious topics like religion, focusing instead on their mutual goal of protecting Virtudom. Ead, wary of expending her magical resources, acknowledges the need for caution, while Loth grapples with his fear of her abilities. Their bond deepens as they openly accept each other’s flaws, symbolized by Loth’s gesture of covering Ead’s Priory ring—a sign of trust and solidarity.

Disembarking in a harbor reeking of fish and seaweed, Loth and Ead note the unusual presence of sweet-bags—hawthorn charms—hanging from doorways, a long-forgotten tradition to ward off evil. This sparks a conversation about Inys’s pre-Six Virtues religion, hinting at deeper cultural and historical layers beneath the surface. Traveling onward, they encounter a war-torn landscape: burned villages and smoldering sanctuaries, evidence of wyrm attacks orchestrated by the Draconic Army. Ead speculates that these acts of intimidation are precursors to a full-scale assault led by the Nameless One, heightening the urgency of their mission.

Exhausted and drenched, the pair take refuge in a rundown inn by the River Catkin. Ead, keeping a low profile, overhears troubling rumors about Queen Sabran’s unexplained absence and the growing unease among her subjects. The lack of news about her pregnancy and the escalating Draconic threats have sown fear and uncertainty. Loth, weary but determined, steels himself for the trials to come as they prepare to infiltrate Ascalon. The chapter closes with a sense of impending doom, underscoring the high stakes of their quest to save Virtudom from annihilation.



Fifty

The chapter opens with Ead, a skilled and stealthy operative, navigating the palace after killing a guard. She instructs Loth to hide with Margret while she scouts the area, noting his shock at her lethal actions. Ead moves through the palace undetected, neutralizing two knights-errant outside the Sanctuary Royal. Inside, she observes the courtiers' divided loyalties, symbolized by their livery, and hears a prayer for Queen Sabran, who is supposedly in seclusion. Ead deduces that the Duchess of Justice is consolidating power, leaving the sanctuary with a grim understanding of the political turmoil.

Meanwhile, Loth reunites with his sister Margret after months of absence. Their emotional reunion is tinged with urgency as Loth reveals Ead's presence and the dire situation surrounding Queen Sabran. Margret shares that Sabran is confined in the royal apartments, guarded by Crest retainers, with only Roslain permitted to attend her. The absence of light in Sabran's quarters—a stark deviation from her usual habits—hints at her distress. Loth discloses the devastating truth that Sabran is not pregnant, her womb having been injured by the White Wyrm, which explains Crest's power grab.

Margret processes the revelation, realizing Crest aims to seize the throne before Sabran's natural death. The trio recognizes the impending threat of the Nameless One's return and the need for unity in Inys. Ead arrives, reuniting with Margret, and they quickly shift focus to rescuing Sabran. Margret reiterates the queen's isolation and the suspicious absence of key figures like Combe and the Knights of the Body. Ead, determined to reach Sabran, acknowledges the challenge of bypassing Crest's forces with only three of them.

The chapter underscores the tension between loyalty and survival as Ead, Loth, and Margret strategize to free Sabran from Crest's control. The political machinations,

emotional reunions, and looming supernatural threat converge, setting the stage for a high-stakes rescue mission. The absence of trusted allies and the manipulation of Sabran's supposed pregnancy highlight the fragility of power in Inys. The chapter ends with a sense of urgency as the trio prepares to confront the forces arrayed against them, united by their devotion to Sabran and their homeland.



Fifty-One

The chapter opens with Tané approaching Elder Vara at dawn in the courtyard of Vane Hall, where he is oiling his iron leg. She brings him food and engages in a conversation about his prosthetic, revealing his dependence on it since its creator is deceased. Their exchange shifts to more pressing matters when Elder Vara shares troubling news: the Fleet of the Tiger Eye is rumored to be holding the dragon Nayimathun hostage, using her as leverage for safe passage. Tané is visibly shaken by this revelation, as Nayimathun is a revered figure in her culture, and the possibility of her survival reignites Tané's determination to act.

Elder Vara further reveals that the Golden Empress seeks the fabled mulberry tree on the lost isle of Komoridu, adding another layer of intrigue to the unfolding events. Tané, struggling to contain her emotions, asks for permission to access the repository to research celestial jewels, also known as tide or wishing jewels. Elder Vara, though surprised by her knowledge of these secret artifacts, agrees and provides her with a letter to gain entry to Windward Hall's archives. This sets Tané on a new path, as she believes the celestial jewels might hold the key to freeing Nayimathun.

Prepared for a arduous journey, Tané dresses warmly and sets off across the island, braving the cold and treacherous terrain. Her thoughts remain fixated on Nayimathun's plight, fueling her resolve to find a solution. As she traverses the sacred Path of the Elder, surrounded by fog and ancient graves, she reflects on the past, including the fate of her friend Susa, whose execution haunts her. The solemn atmosphere of the burial ground underscores the weight of her mission and the sacrifices made by those who came before her.

Upon reaching Windward Hall, Tané is greeted by a bonesinger, who welcomes her into the hermitage. She presents Elder Vara's letter, requesting access to the repository to study documents from Empress Mokwo's reign. The bonesinger, respectful of Elder

Vara’s authority, offers her the choice to rest or begin her research immediately. Tané’s journey highlights her resilience and dedication, as she seeks to uncover the secrets of the celestial jewels and potentially save Nayimathun, setting the stage for further discoveries and challenges.



Fifty-Two

The chapter opens with Queen Sabran of Inys confronting Ead and Loth in the Council Chamber after a night of upheaval. Sabran, having narrowly escaped a treasonous plot by the Duchess of Justice, demands answers from her companions. Ead, dressed in warrior-like attire, and Loth exchange uneasy glances as Sabran, weakened but resolute, presses them to explain their recent actions. The queen’s return to power follows the arrest of traitors and the arrival of dubious allies claiming to support her, all of whom she imprisons pending further investigation.

Ead reveals her true identity as Eadaz du Zāla uq-Nāra, a mage sent to protect Sabran by Chassar uq-Ispad. She explains her connection to the Priory of the Orange Tree and the magic of siden, derived from the same tree that once shielded Cleolind Onjenyu. Sabran reacts with skepticism, mocking the idea of enchanted trees, but Ead challenges her dismissiveness. Meanwhile, Loth recounts his own journey, including his exile to Cárscaro, the death of his companion Kit, and his encounters with the Flesh King and the Donmata Marosa, all of which deepen the mystery surrounding Sabran’s lineage.

The conversation takes a darker turn as Ead and Loth unravel the hidden truths of Inys’s history. They disclose that Sabran’s ancestor, Galian Berethnet, may not have been the hero the kingdom believes him to be. Instead, he allegedly stole credit for defeating the Nameless One from Cleolind and wielded a sword forged by the Witch of Inysca, Kalyba. Ead further explains the dual nature of magic—siden and sterren—and their connection to the Long-Haired Star. Sabran listens in silence, her expression unreadable, as her faith in her family’s legacy is shaken.

The chapter concludes with Sabran grappling with the revelations about her ancestry and the foundations of her reign. Ead’s defiance and Loth’s corroboration force the queen to confront the possibility that her bloodline is built on lies. Despite her initial

resistance, Sabran’s curiosity and inner conflict suggest a willingness to reconsider long-held beliefs. The tension between tradition and truth sets the stage for deeper exploration of Inys’s past and its implications for the future.



Fifty-Three

The chapter opens with Ead preparing for the Feast of High Winter at Ascalon Palace, dressed in an elegant gown as she contemplates her precarious position at court. Having accepted a title from Queen Sabran, she fears being perceived as a traitor by her sisters, yet sees no alternative for survival. Margret Beck arrives, revealing her new role as Lady of the Bedchamber and offering companionship. Their conversation highlights Margret's acceptance of Ead's true identity as a witch, showcasing her open-mindedness and loyalty despite societal prejudices.

As Ead and Margret enter the Banqueting House, the court's reaction to Ead's presence is palpable, with silence and stares marking her as an outsider. Seated at the high table—a first for Ead—she joins Loth and Margret in hushed discussion. Loth shares his disturbing findings about Lady Crest, who conspired against Queen Rosarian and later Sabran, driven by twisted piety and a desire for control. Crest's actions, including arranging assassinations and manipulating Sabran's reign, reveal her as a power-hungry fanatic willing to betray the monarchy.

The group grapples with Crest's motivations, including her alliance with King Sigoso and her role in Lievelyn's murder. Loth explains how Crest viewed Lievelyn as a corrupting influence on Sabran, leading her to eliminate him once he served his purpose. The revelation that Sabran might not be of Berethnet lineage adds another layer of tension, threatening the throne's legitimacy. Ead reflects on how religious fervor can justify atrocities, drawing parallels to her past experiences with fanaticism.

The chapter culminates with Queen Sabran's dramatic entrance, radiating solitary grandeur as the court rises in reverence. Her unadorned appearance contrasts with the opulence around her, symbolizing her isolation and resilience. The scene underscores the weight of the secrets uncovered and the impending confrontation with Crest, setting the stage for a pivotal moment in Sabran's reign. The chapter

masterfully blends political intrigue, personal loyalty, and the consequences of unchecked ambition.



Fifty-Four

The chapter opens with Niclays Roos aboard the *Pursuit*, sailing through the Sundance Sea after weeks docked in the ruined city of Kawontay. The ship is heavily armed, and the crew has stocked provisions for their journey. Despite initial plans to sell the dragon Nayimathun, the Golden Empress retains it as leverage against the High Sea Guard. Niclays carries a vial of the dragon's blood and a scale, haunted by the memory of carving it from the creature. The ship, flying plague sails to avoid detection, is pursued by Seiiki's forces, but the Empress threatens Nayimathun's life if they interfere.

Niclays reflects on his role as Master of Recipes, a title granted by the Golden Empress, while Laya Yidagé joins him on deck. She reveals her concerns about Nayimathun's deteriorating health, as the dragon's scales dry out without proper immersion. Their conversation shifts to the precariousness of their mission: if the mythical mulberry tree they seek doesn't yield the elixir of life, the Empress will likely execute Niclays. Laya proposes an escape plan, suggesting they flee to the City of the Thousand Flowers and then to Kawontay, where Ersyri smugglers could help them cross the Abyss.

Niclays grapples with the concept of "home," realizing he has no true place to return to. His thoughts drift to his deceased lover, Jannart, whose belief in the mulberry tree's legend drives Niclays forward. Laya reassures him that Jannart's memory will guide him, but Niclays remains skeptical about their survival. The chapter highlights his internal conflict between his desire for redemption and his fear of failure, as well as his lingering guilt over his past actions.

As the *Pursuit* sails deeper into the sea, Niclays and Laya watch the stars, contemplating their uncertain future. Niclays resolves to see the mission through, hoping to honor Jannart's legacy and perhaps find a new home in Brygstad or Hróth.

The chapter ends on a somber note, with Niclays acknowledging that this journey will determine whether he finds peace or meets his end. The themes of sacrifice, loyalty, and the search for belonging underscore the narrative.



Fifty-Five

Ead and Margret arrive in Caliburn-on-Sea aboard the *Flower of Ascalon* and journey across the snow-covered Leas toward Serinhall, the ancestral home of the Beck family. The landscape is blanketed in winter stillness, with frozen fields and no laborers in sight. Margret, warmly greeted by the locals, reflects on her potential as Countess of Goldenbirch, a title she might have held had she been the elder child. The duo passes the ruins of Goldenbirch, a pilgrimage site tied to Galian Berethnet, before reaching the imposing Serinhall, a grand prodigy house with domed rooftops and bay windows.

Upon arrival, Ead reveals her belief that Galian may have hidden Ascalon, the sacred sword of the House of Berethnet, in the province, and that the Beck family could be its keepers. Margret is skeptical but acknowledges her father, Lord Clarent Beck, would know if such a secret existed. The conversation hints at the family's historical ties to the Saint, including a visit during Princess Sabran's birth. The urgency of their mission is underscored by Lord Clarent's declining health, suffering from *mind fog* after a riding accident.

The pair engage in a spirited race to Serinhall's gatehouse, where they are greeted by servants. Margret introduces Ead as Viscountess Nurtha, a title Ead reluctantly accepts. Inside, they admire portraits of notable Beck ancestors, including Lord Rothurt Beck and Margret Ironside, highlighting the family's noble lineage. Margret jokes about her impending marriage to Lord Morwe, noting her mother's pride in their heritage. The opulence of Serinhall's corridors contrasts with the simplicity of their quest.

Lady Annes Beck, the Countess of Goldenbirch, warmly welcomes Margret but regards Ead with suspicion, referencing her recent heresy accusations. Ead defends herself, asserting Queen Sabran's support. Lady Annes, preoccupied with wedding preparations for Margret, dismisses their urgency to discuss Ascalon. The chapter ends with Margret attempting to steer the conversation back to their mission, while Lady

Annes insists on hosting them for supper, delaying their search for the sword and underscoring the tension between familial obligations and their quest.



Fifty-Six

In this chapter, Loth is occupied with drafting urgent missives to the Virtues Council about an impending threat, a task made slightly easier by Seyton Combe’s return to power. Sabran joins him, bearing a letter from High Princess Ermuna of Mentendon, who demands justice for Lady Truyde’s execution and blames Sabran for the abduction of Doctor Niclays Roos by pirates. Sabran reflects on her delayed pardon for Roos, acknowledging her mistake, while Loth remains skeptical of the alchemist’s character. The tension between duty and remorse is palpable as they discuss the political ramifications of Ermuna’s demands.

Sabran reveals that Ermuna has agreed to search the Library of Ostendeur for records on Empress Mokwo, a crucial step in addressing the looming threat. Their conversation takes a personal turn when Loth shares Igrain Crest’s shocking revelation: Sabran’s mother may have had an affair with Captain Gian Harlowe, casting doubt on Sabran’s legitimacy as queen. Sabran reacts with a mix of resignation and defiance, recognizing Crest’s manipulation but also acknowledging the possible truth. Loth attempts to comfort her, emphasizing that Prince Wilstan could still be her father, but Sabran’s introspection hints at deeper emotional turmoil.

The chapter delves into Sabran’s internal conflict as she contemplates appointing Roslain as the new Duchess of Justice, despite Loth’s reservations about Roslain’s innocence in recent events. Sabran’s resolve to punish Crest contrasts with her tempered mercy toward Roslain, reflecting her struggle to balance justice and compassion. Their discussion is interrupted by Lady Nelda Stillwater, who reaffirms her loyalty and pleads for Roslain’s mercy. Sabran’s measured response underscores her growing political acumen, even as she grapples with personal betrayals.

The chapter closes with the arrival of Margret and Eadaz in Summerport, signaling new developments. Loth and Sabran’s dynamic is highlighted as they navigate trust and

forgiveness, particularly in their dealings with Seyton Combe. Sabran offers Loth the chance to retaliate against Combe for past wrongs, but Loth chooses mercy, embodying the virtues he holds dear. The chapter masterfully intertwines political intrigue with personal revelations, setting the stage for further conflict and resolution in the narrative.



Fifty-Seven

The chapter opens with the execution of Igrain Crest, a noblewoman convicted of murder, in the undercroft of Ascalon Palace. Despite Queen Sabran's initial desire for a brutal public execution, she relents to a quieter beheading. Crest remains defiant to the end, hurling insults at Sabran and claiming her actions were justified. The scene is tense and ceremonial, with Crest's family members, including Roslain, present to witness her death. The execution is carried out swiftly, and Roslain assumes the Crest family title, marking the end of Igrain's influence.

Following the execution, Sabran retreats into introspection, grappling with revelations about her lineage. Ead, her companion, tries to comfort her as Sabran wrestles with the knowledge that she may be descended from Kalyba, the Lady of the Woods, and Gian Harlowe, making her a bastard. Sabran feels her identity and legacy are built on lies, compounded by the loss of her loved ones. Ead reassures her that her bloodline does not diminish her accomplishments, but Sabran remains troubled by the implications of her ancestry and Kalyba's betrayal.

The chapter delves deeper into Sabran's emotional turmoil as she reflects on Kalyba's actions, including the mysterious barb placed inside her. Ead attempts to rationalize Kalyba's motives, emphasizing that her alliance with the Nameless One makes her an enemy regardless of their shared blood. Sabran's grief and uncertainty are palpable, and the chapter highlights her struggle to reconcile her past with her present role as queen. The intimate conversation between Sabran and Ead underscores the weight of leadership and personal identity.

The chapter concludes with an urgent message from High Princess Ermuna, hinting at an impending crisis. The letter's date suggests that the thousand-year binding of the Nameless One is nearing its end, foreshadowing a looming threat. Ead senses the inevitability of this revelation, and the chapter ends on a foreboding note, setting the

stage for the next phase of the story. The sandglass metaphor reinforces the urgency and inevitability of the coming conflict, leaving the reader anticipating the consequences of this turning point.



Fifty-Eight

The chapter follows Lord Arteloth (Loth) aboard the *Elegant* as he journeys across the treacherous Abyss, weary of the sea and longing for land. The narrative reveals that Queen Sabran of Inys has successfully rallied support for an unprecedented alliance with Eastern heretics and wyrms, despite religious and political opposition. The desperate plan involves dividing the Draconic Army by besieging Cárscaro, forcing Fýredel to defend it, thereby weakening their forces for the impending battle against the Nameless One. Loth reflects on the high stakes, acknowledging the likelihood of death but resolving to fight rather than face annihilation.

Loth’s departure is marked by emotional farewells, including his mother and Queen Sabran, who gifts him her coronation ring as a token for the Unceasing Emperor. Sabran’s determination to protect her people and honor Ead, a fallen companion, underscores her leadership. Loth, haunted by memories of Ead, is interrupted by the cabin girl announcing their arrival at the Bonehouse Trench, where he must transfer to another ship bound for the Empire of the Twelve Lakes. The scene shifts to the deck, where the eerie Abyss, teeming with mythical dangers, sets a foreboding tone.

Upon spotting the *Rose Eternal*, Loth is greeted by Estina Melaugo, a privateer who expresses surprise at his survival. The crew assists Loth and his Inysh entourage onto the new ship, where he reunites with Captain Gian Harlowe. Harlowe introduces his new cartographer, Hafrid of Elding, and engages Loth in brief conversation about the perils of the Abyss. The exchange hints at Harlowe’s respect for Loth, despite their past tensions, and establishes the crew’s camaraderie and efficiency.

The chapter culminates with Loth’s transition to the *Rose Eternal*, symbolizing the next phase of his diplomatic mission. The interactions with Melaugo and Harlowe highlight the blend of danger and adventure inherent in their quest. Loth’s internal reflections on sacrifice, leadership, and loss intertwine with the external challenges of

the journey, setting the stage for the high-stakes negotiations and battles to come. The Abyss serves as both a physical and metaphorical threshold, emphasizing the uncertainty and courage required to confront the looming threat of the Nameless One.



Fifty-Nine

The chapter opens with the *Rose Eternal* caught in a violent storm in the Sundance Sea. Loth, a nobleman aboard the ship, battles seasickness in his cabin before deciding to face the tempest head-on, invoking the Knight of Courage’s teachings. On deck, he is met with chaos: crew members struggle against the wind and waves, one sailor is swept overboard, and the ship’s mast begins to splinter. Despite the danger, Loth seeks solace near Captain Harlowe, a seasoned seafarer, as the storm threatens to destroy the vessel.

As the storm intensifies, the *Rose Eternal* is nearly capsized by a rogue wave, sending Loth sliding across the deck. He is saved by a carpenter clinging to the ratlines, highlighting the crew’s desperation. Amid the turmoil, a cry of “Land ahoy!” sparks hope, but the island’s sudden appearance is met with suspicion. Harlowe orders the ship toward the unknown land, despite Quartermaster Plume’s warning that its inhabitants may kill them. The crew scrambles to adjust sails and ropes, their efforts a chaotic yet coordinated dance of survival.

The island’s approach reveals an unnatural pull, as if the ship is being drawn toward it against the storm’s will. A mysterious flash of light from the island’s shore raises questions—is it a signal or a trap? Harlowe, recognizing the danger of running aground, orders the crew to drop anchors and stow sails, prioritizing the ship’s survival over the storm’s immediate threat. Plume and Melaugo protest, but Harlowe remains resolute, his authority unwavering even as the crew faces exhaustion and injury.

The chapter culminates in a tense standoff between the crew’s fear of the unknown island and the inevitability of their approach. Harlowe’s decision to halt the ship reflects his pragmatism and loyalty to the *Rose Eternal*, even as the storm rages on. Loth, caught between admiration for the captain’s leadership and his own terror, watches as the crew braces for whatever awaits them on the mysterious shore. The

chapter leaves readers with a cliffhanger, questioning whether the island offers salvation or further peril.



Sixty

The chapter "East" from *The Priory of the Orange Tree* opens with the ship *Pursuit* navigating the treacherous Unending Sea under the guidance of Padar, a skilled navigator who interprets the stars like pieces on a celestial gameboard. Despite the challenges posed by the gyre, Padar's expertise ensures the ship stays on course. Niclays Roos, a key character, stands on deck, filled with anticipation as he nears his destination, silently addressing someone named Jan. The scene is set with a sense of purpose and determination as the crew relies on the stars for direction.

Laya Yidagé, another prominent figure, observes the journey with a grim expression, hinting at underlying tensions or unresolved conflicts. The Golden Empress, a commanding presence, takes the wheel as the ship adjusts its course, harnessing the wind to propel forward. The crew's collective enthusiasm is palpable, with their cries of "Onward" echoing Niclays' own burgeoning hope. The narrative captures a moment of unity and shared purpose among the diverse group of travelers.

The chapter emphasizes the theme of adventure and discovery as the *Pursuit* ventures into uncharted territory, symbolized by the phrase "where the maps end." The mulberry tree and "wonders untold" serve as metaphors for the unknown, reflecting the crew's willingness to embrace the unpredictable. The Southern Star's twinkling presence adds a mystical quality, underscoring the blend of human skill and celestial guidance that defines their journey.

Overall, the chapter blends action, emotion, and symbolism to depict a pivotal moment in the characters' quest. Niclays' internal monologue and the crew's outward exuberance create a dynamic contrast, while the Golden Empress' leadership anchors the group's resolve. The prose evokes a sense of wonder and anticipation, leaving readers eager to learn what lies beyond the horizon.

Sixty-One

The chapter opens with Lord Arteloth (Loth) awakening bound and disoriented aboard the *Rose Eternal*, captained by a mysterious young woman from Feather Island. The cold and eerie dusk set a tense atmosphere as Loth realizes he and the gunner Thim are prisoners. Their captor, a silent Seiikinese woman with a scarred cheek, ignores Loth’s demands and threats of piracy. Loth notices a flower-painted case at her hip, suspecting it holds a jewel crucial to defeating the Nameless One—a threat he urgently explains to her through Thim’s translation.

The woman, revealed to be Tané, remains aloof but engages when Loth correctly identifies the twin jewel’s color as white. Her grip on his throat and cold interrogation hint at her desperation. Loth pleads for the jewel’s return to Queen Sabran, warning of the Nameless One’s imminent rise. Tané’s refusal and abrupt departure leave Loth and Thim stranded, their mission in jeopardy. Thim, reading the stars, realizes they are far east of their intended course, suggesting Tané is using the jewel’s power to propel the ship unnaturally fast.

Thim speculates Tané is pursuing the Golden Empress, leader of the ruthless Fleet of the Tiger Eye, whose butcher-ship *Pursuit* dwarfs the *Rose Eternal*. The gunner warns of their grim odds against the pirate fleet, but Loth remains cautiously optimistic about Tané’s combat skills. Their bleak situation forces them to consider retaking the ship if Tané abandons it, though Thim doubts their chances. To pass time, Loth engages Thim in riddles, briefly lightening the mood despite Tané’s irritation at their chatter.

The chapter closes with Tané steering the ship under the stars, her focus unwavering as she plans her next move. Loth’s riddle—about a flower that opens at night—goes unanswered, symbolizing the unresolved tension between captor and captives. The narrative underscores Tané’s determination and Loth’s desperation, setting the stage

for a high-stakes confrontation with the Golden Empress. The jewel’s power and the looming threat of the Nameless One heighten the urgency, leaving the characters—and readers—anticipating the next clash.



Sixty-Two

The chapter opens with Niclays and a group of pirates gathered around a scholar who has been deciphering an ancient script on Komoridu Island. The scholar reveals the story of Neporo, a pearl-diver who gained immortality after eating fruit from a magical mulberry tree. Despite her eternal youth, Neporo faced isolation and despair, eventually returning to the island to live among outcasts. The Golden Empress listens intently, her focus on the scholar’s words as she sharpens her sword, creating an atmosphere of tension and anticipation.

The scholar continues, explaining how Neporo’s immortality was limited—she could still be killed, though not by age or illness. Centuries later, during the eruption of the Dreadmount, Neporo received two celestial jewels from a dragon, which she used to seal the Nameless One, a powerful beast, for a thousand years. She was aided by Cleolind, a princess from the South who also possessed eternal life. Together, they wielded the jewels, but Cleolind perished in the process, leaving Neporo to return her body and one jewel to the South.

Niclays and his companion Laya react with shock, realizing the implications of the story: the founding legend of the House of Berethnet, which claims a lineage of queens keeps the Nameless One imprisoned, is false. Instead, the jewels are the true source of the beast’s confinement. The scholar then reveals that the second jewel, the rising jewel, was hidden within a descendant of Neporo, passed down through generations. The tree’s death raises questions about the jewel’s current whereabouts and its significance.

The chapter concludes with the Golden Empress questioning the scholar about the tree’s death and the missing jewel. Niclays, torn between fear and fascination, hesitates to flee, captivated by the revelations. The scholar’s tale upends long-held beliefs, setting the stage for further conflict and discovery. The chapter leaves readers

with a sense of impending upheaval as the characters grapple with the truth and its consequences.



Sixty-Three

Tané awakens in an opulent canopy bed within the palace of the Unceasing Emperor in the City of the Thousand Flowers. Disoriented, she discovers her belongings—including a precious jewel case—nearby, though her sash is missing. A servant in layered blue and white informs her she is a guest of the emperor and assures her of her companions' safety, including Nayimathun, her dragon. Despite the luxurious surroundings, Tané feels uneasy, haunted by her past actions and uncertain of her true status in this grand setting.

The servant brings Tané a meal and offers to prepare a bath, treating her with deference as a "noble rider." Tané reflects on her humble origins, doubting claims of her lineage to the legendary Queen Neporo. Her physical wounds, including a bandaged thigh, remind her of recent violence. When Thim, a Seiikinese man she once sailed with, visits, their conversation is tense but reveals a grudging mutual respect. Thim thanks her for saving his life, though their alliance remains fragile due to past betrayals.

Tané questions Thim about his decision to sail with Westerners, who are known to despise dragons. His cryptic response—"Would the world be any better if we were all the same?"—leaves her unsettled. After he departs, Tané bathes, washing away the salt and grime of her journey, yet unable to cleanse her guilt. She dresses in fine Lacustrine clothing, but the luxury feels undeserved, amplifying her fear of impending confrontation with the emperor and Nayimathun.

Venturing into the palace grounds with a crutch, Tané is awed by the grandeur of the courtyard and the Hall of the Fallen Star. She asks a guard for directions to the Twilight Gardens, where Lord Arteloth awaits. As she limps across the vast space, the weight of her secrets and the emperor's looming summons press upon her. The chapter closes with Tané poised between fleeting refuge and the inevitability of reckoning.

Sixty-Four

Tané prepares for a covert mission to Inys, entrusted with delivering a crucial letter on behalf of her homeland. Equipped with weapons, supplies, and a finely crafted saddle for her dragon Nayimathun, she departs under the cover of darkness from the City of the Thousand Flowers. Only a few companions, including Loth, bid her farewell, emphasizing the secrecy of her task. Loth requests Tané to convey messages to Queen Sabran and Ead, revealing his concern and hope for their reunion. As Tané and Nayimathun take flight, the chapter highlights the weight of their mission and the emotional stakes for those left behind.

The journey westward is fraught with challenges as Tané and Nayimathun navigate harsh weather and avoid areas ravaged by fire-breathers. They rest briefly on an island in the Sleepless Sea, where Nayimathun regains strength after her captivity. A rare moment of levity occurs as the dragon playfully splashes Tané, eliciting genuine laughter—a respite from her recent hardships. Despite the looming dangers, Tané finds unexpected peace in the freedom of flight, her bond with Nayimathun deepening as they press on toward the ominous Abyss.

Crossing the Abyss proves physically and emotionally taxing, with freezing nights and eerie darkness reminding Tané of the Nameless One’s imprisonment. Nayimathun’s resilience is tested, but she periodically descends to swim, offering brief reprieves. Tané’s unease in these waters contrasts with her earlier tranquility, underscoring the Abyss’s malevolent history. Their conversations about Inys reveal cultural tensions, as Tané recounts the kingdom’s disdain for Eastern traditions. Nayimathun urges compassion, reminding Tané that Queen Sabran’s request for aid signals a potential shift in perspective.

As they approach the Ersyr, the Golden Land, the harsh journey gives way to warmer seas and clearer skies. Tané glimpses remnants of civilization beneath the waves,

hinting at forgotten stories. The chapter closes with Nayimathun’s need to rest before venturing into the desert, leaving Tané to reflect on the duality of their mission—bridging divides while confronting ancient enmities. The narrative balances the urgency of their task with moments of human (and draconic) vulnerability, setting the stage for the challenges ahead in Inys.



Sixty-Five

The chapter opens with Tané awakening in a salmon-colored stone room, her hands bound and the rising jewel taken from her. A shaved-head woman interrogates her about Queen Sabran's ring and the blue jewel, accusing Tané of killing a sister and consorting with a wyrm—a crime punishable by death. Tané, trained to withstand torture, remains silent but demands to speak only with Chassar uq-Ispad. The woman leaves, and Tané reflects on her dragon Nayimathun's escape, clinging to hope despite her dire situation.

Chassar uq-Ispad arrives, a towering figure in purple brocade, and Tané reveals her mission: to retrieve a fruit from the orange tree to save Eadaz uq-Nāra from poisoning. Chassar is stunned, believing Eadaz dead, and grows wary when Tané mentions Lord Arteloth Beck. He explains the Prioress's intent to execute Tané for her crimes and to control the rising jewel. Tané pleads for his help, warning that Eadaz will die without the fruit, but Chassar hesitates, torn between loyalty to the Prioress and saving Eadaz.

Later, Tané is led to a rocky ledge near a thunderous waterfall, believing all is lost. Chassar intervenes, claiming the Prioress ordered further interrogation, and secretly helps Tané escape. He guides her to a hidden stair, returning her lacquer case and providing silk to carry the fruit. Tané worries about reaching Inys without her dragon, but Chassar instructs her to follow the River Minara and promises aid. He refuses to let her stay for the rising jewel, vowing to send it later if possible, then disappears.

Tané descends the treacherous stair, clinging to the cliffside, and finally glimpses the orange tree Loth had described. The chapter ends on a note of precarious hope as Tané prepares to face the tree's judgment, her survival and Eadaz's fate hanging in the balance. Chassar's defiance of the Prioress and Tané's resilience underscore the tension between duty and sacrifice, setting the stage for the next phase of her perilous journey.

Sixty-Six

The chapter opens with Ead emerging from a prolonged, deathlike slumber, her senses slowly returning as she struggles to break free from her immobile state. A golden sun ignites within her, symbolizing her revival, while fragmented memories and voices—particularly Margret's—guide her back to consciousness. The "wretched fruit," an orange with mystical properties, plays a crucial role in her recovery, hinting at deeper lore and sacrifices made on her behalf. Ead's dry humor and Margret's steadfast care underscore their bond, even as Ead grapples with the implications of her resurrection.

Margret reveals the extraordinary events that transpired during Ead's unconsciousness, including Loth's diplomatic mission to the East and the arrival of a Seiikinese girl bearing a golden fruit and a legendary jewel. This "rising jewel," thought to be lost in the East, now surfaces in the West, raising urgent questions about its origins and significance. Margret's protective demeanor clashes with Ead's desperation to uncover the truth, highlighting the tension between Ead's warrior instincts and her fragile physical state. The chapter subtly weaves political intrigue with personal stakes, as Ead's recovery intersects with broader geopolitical shifts.

The reunion between Ead and Sabran is charged with emotion, their brief exchange blending affection and exasperation. Sabran's hurried arrival and fierce embrace convey her relief and fear, while Ead's wry remark about their mutual "damning" lightens the moment. Their dynamic, layered with unspoken history, adds depth to the narrative. Meanwhile, Margret's delayed wedding and her mother's insistence on a white dress provide a fleeting glimpse of normalcy amidst the chaos, grounding the story in human details.

As Ead regains strength, her interactions with Aralaq and Doctor Bourn underscore her resilience and the support of her allies. The chapter closes with Ead poised to re-enter

the world, her physical recovery mirroring the unfolding mysteries around the jewel and Loth's mission. The blend of personal and political threads sets the stage for future confrontations, leaving readers eager to see how Ead will navigate the challenges ahead.



Sixty-Seven

The chapter opens with Niclays awakening in excruciating pain, disoriented and weak, as Laya tends to his wounds. He realizes with horror that his arm has been amputated and his throat bears the scars of cautery, injuries he knows are likely fatal. The two are trapped in an iron cage, suspended in a cavern near Dreadmount, the birthplace of the Nameless One. Niclays notices a mural depicting Cleolind Onjenyu piercing the Nameless One with Ascalon, a revelation that contradicts historical lies he once believed.

As Niclays struggles with pain and delirium, a mysterious woman named Kalyba appears, claiming to be of the Firstblood and offering immortality. She reveals her ability to restore the dead to life, hinting at Niclays' deceased lover, Jannart. Kalyba's appearance shifts to resemble Jannart, further unsettling Niclays as she proposes a cryptic favor in exchange for her gifts. The scene blurs the line between reality and hallucination, leaving Niclays and Laya in a state of terror and confusion.

The narrative then shifts to a political gathering in the House of Berethnet, where Sabran hosts the rulers of the South. Jantar Taumargam, the Splendid, and Kagudo Onjenyu, the young High Ruler of Lasia, stand out as formidable leaders. Sabran discusses the need for military support against an impending threat, emphasizing the importance of unity. Kagudo's presence, guarded by the Priory, underscores her significance as a warrior and descendant of Cleolind.

The chapter juxtaposes Niclays' harrowing ordeal with the high-stakes diplomacy of Sabran's court, linking personal suffering to broader geopolitical tensions. Themes of deception, power, and mortality intertwine as Niclays confronts his mortality and Sabran navigates alliances. The vivid imagery of the cavern and the tension in the court create a sense of impending conflict, setting the stage for the unfolding narrative.

Sixty-Eight

The chapter opens with a formidable Eastern fleet crossing the Abyss, armored with advanced weaponry and protective materials derived from Seiikinese wyrms. The flagship *Dancing Pearl* leads the armada, accompanied by the *Defiance*, carrying the Warlord of Seiiki. Dragons swim alongside the ships, their riders braving the harsh conditions. Loth observes one such rider, noting the potential for unity between the divided worlds if reconciliation is achieved. The scene sets a tone of impending conflict and the possibility of alliance, underscored by the awe-inspiring presence of the dragons.

Loth engages in a game of Knaves and Damsels with the Unceasing Emperor, who inquires about Queen Sabran. The emperor expresses curiosity about his potential ally, prompting Loth to reflect on Sabran’s character. He describes her as loyal yet guarded, shaped by the trauma of her mother’s murder and the burdens of rulership. The emperor relates to her orphanhood and the challenges of ascending to power young, revealing his own loss of parents to smallpox. Their conversation highlights the shared struggles of rulers, bridging cultural divides through personal stories.

The dialogue delves deeper into Sabran’s past, including her coronation at fourteen and the betrayal of her regent, Lady Igrain Crest. The emperor draws parallels to his own regency and the political machinations he faced. Loth shares Sabran’s love for hunting, music, and dancing, which she abandoned after her mother’s death. The emperor’s probing questions reveal his interest in Sabran’s personal life, particularly her lack of a lover, hinting at his own unfulfilled love story. The exchange underscores the sacrifices demanded by leadership and the loneliness it often entails.

The emperor recounts his forbidden love for a woman of low rank, referred to as the Sea Maiden, and the political pressures that forced their separation. His story mirrors Sabran’s struggles with tradition and personal desire, emphasizing the constraints of

power. Loth reflects on the parallels to Ead’s exile, drawing connections between their worlds. The chapter closes with a sense of unresolved tension, as the emperor’s tale of love and loss foreshadows the challenges ahead for both rulers. The narrative weaves together themes of duty, sacrifice, and the fragile hope for unity across divided realms.



Sixty-Nine

The chapter opens with Tané deeply missing her homeland of Seiiki, yearning for its natural beauty and spiritual connection to her gods. Her guilt over Nayimathun's absence weighs heavily on her, as she fears the dragon may have been hunted down. Ead arrives, offering comfort and checking on Tané's recovery. Their conversation shifts to the impending battle, with Ead expressing cautious optimism about using the jewels to defeat the Nameless One. Tané remains skeptical, but Ead shares her theory on weakening Kalyba by forcing her to change shapes, though she admits it’s untested.

Ead proposes that Tané should wield Ascalon, the legendary sword, due to her prolonged exposure to the sterren in the rising jewel. Tané, burdened by guilt and feelings of unworthiness, hesitates but ultimately agrees to take the opportunity if it arises. The exchange highlights the growing trust between them, despite their historical enmity. As Ead leaves, Tané prays to the stars for strength to fulfill her duty, reflecting her internal struggle and determination. The scene underscores the high stakes of their mission and the personal sacrifices involved.

The narrative shifts to Ead and Sabran aboard the *Reconciliation*, where Sabran expresses a desire to escape their responsibilities someday. Ead acknowledges the impracticality of this dream, as both are bound to their duties—Sabran as a queen and Ead as a member of the Priory. Their tender moment is tinged with melancholy, as they recognize the constraints of their roles. Sabran, however, chooses to focus on the present, cherishing their fleeting time together before the looming battle. Their dialogue reveals the tension between personal desires and overarching responsibilities.

The chapter concludes with a sense of impending confrontation, as the characters prepare for the final battle against the Nameless One. Tané’s resolve and Ead’s

strategic planning highlight their readiness, while Sabran’s vulnerability adds emotional depth. The interplay of hope, duty, and fear weaves through the chapter, setting the stage for the climactic conflict. The characters’ interactions underscore themes of sacrifice, trust, and the weight of legacy, leaving the reader anticipating the next chapter’s resolution.



Seventy

The chapter "Abyss" opens with Loth observing the ghostly appearance of the *Reconciliation* and other ships emerging from the fog above the Bonehouse Trench. The scene is set for a pivotal moment as mercenaries in Cárscaro attempt to assassinate King Sigoso and secure Donmata Marosa, whose fate remains uncertain. The Unceasing Emperor, adorned in ornate armor, acknowledges Loth's presence, signaling the beginning of a significant alliance. The tension is palpable as the ships are tethered together, and Sabran arrives with her retinue, dressed in a blend of regal and practical attire, symbolizing her readiness for the challenges ahead.

Sabran's arrival is marked by a delicate interplay of diplomacy and underlying tension as she meets the Unceasing Emperor. Their exchange, though courteous, underscores the historical and cultural divides between their realms. Sabran's crown, adorned with dancing pearls, becomes a subtle point of connection, while the Emperor's fluency in Inysh language hints at a deeper, albeit limited, understanding between them. The conversation shifts to the impending battle, with the Emperor revealing that the Eastern dragons are submerged, gathering strength beneath the waves, a revelation that adds to the chapter's mounting suspense.

The arrival of the Warlord of Seiiki and his dragonriders further complicates the dynamics, as centuries of estrangement and mutual suspicion linger among the gathered leaders. The Warlord's clipped military tone and Sabran's measured response highlight the fragile nature of their alliance. King Raunus's entrance introduces another layer of tension, his physical presence and brusque demeanor contrasting sharply with the more diplomatic exchanges. The chapter captures the precarious balance of power and the unspoken wariness that defines these interactions.

The chapter concludes with the rulers retreating to their respective ships, their brief unity giving way to individual preparations for the coming conflict. Tané's abrupt

departure and Ead's subtle gesture to Loth hint at unresolved personal stakes amidst the larger political and military maneuvers. The scene leaves readers with a sense of impending confrontation, as the characters brace for a battle that will test their alliances and reshape their world.



Seventy-One

The chapter "Abyss" depicts a chaotic naval battle aboard the *Reconciliation*, where Loth and Queen Sabran face the onslaught of the Draconic Navy. Eastern dragons wreak havoc, breaching the waves to drag victims underwater, while fires rage and grappling hooks entangle combatants. Sabran, guarded by the Knights of the Body, watches as the witch Kalyba transforms from a wyrm into a woman on the *Defiance*. Recognizing the threat, Sabran declares that Ead must confront Kalyba, and Loth prepares to distract the witch to aid Ead’s strike. Amid the carnage, the crew scrambles to defend the ship as enemy vessels close in.

Meanwhile, Tané engages Kalyba in a fierce duel on the *Defiance*, wielding the rising jewel to counter the witch’s fiery attacks. Kalyba shifts between human and animal forms, wielding the sword Ascalon with deadly precision. Tané fights desperately, using the jewel’s power to enhance her reflexes, but Kalyba’s mastery of fire and transformation keeps her on the defensive. The battle reaches a climax as Tané severs one of Kalyba’s antlers, forcing her back into human form, wounded but still dangerous. The witch’s obsession with Ascalon and her hatred for Sabran’s lineage become evident as she taunts Tané.

Sabran and Loth arrive on the *Defiance*, drenched from their escape through the waves. The queen confronts Kalyba, her ancestor, revealing their eerie resemblance. Kalyba mocks Sabran, calling her an imitation and belittling her sword as a lesser copy of Ascalon. Sabran accuses Kalyba of destroying the House of Berethnet, to which the witch responds with a chilling monologue about her immortal grievances. She reveals her jealousy and heartbreak over Galian’s love for Cleolind, framing her actions as a twisted legacy. The tension escalates as Sabran maneuvers to position Kalyba for Ead’s unseen approach.

The chapter culminates in a standoff between Sabran and Kalyba, with Tané and Loth poised for action. Kalyba’s bitterness and immortality-driven nihilism contrast with Sabran’s resolve to protect her legacy. The scene is set for Ead’s decisive intervention, as the witch’s arrogance blinds her to the impending threat. The battle’s outcome hangs in the balance, with the fate of the *Defiance* and its combatants uncertain amidst the storm of fire and steel.



Seventy-Two

The chapter opens in the aftermath of a brutal battle in the foothills of the Spindles, where the wyrm Valeysa lies dead, surrounded by the carnage of human and draconic remains. Fýredel, a key draconic figure, abandoned his territory, summoning his siblings to attack the united armies of North, South, and West, but they were ultimately defeated. With the Nameless One's disappearance, Fýredel fled, leaving his followers scattered. The rising sun illuminates the devastation, revealing a landscape marred by blood, fire, and bones, while Loth searches for Margret amidst the chaos.

Loth arrives at the battlefield, brought by Onren, a Seiikinese woman, on dragonback. His focus is on Cárscaro, where smoke rises from the ruined city. King Sigoso, the murderer of queens, is dead, his corpse hanging from the Gate of Niunda, causing his soldiers to desert. Loth desperately hopes that Princess Marosa has survived and is ready to assume power. The scene underscores the political upheaval and the fragile hope for a new beginning in the wake of the tyrant's demise.

The narrative shifts to a field hospital, a league from the battlefield, where the wounded suffer in agony. King Jantar of the Ersyr is among the severely injured, and the medical staff struggles to treat burns, amputations, and other grievous wounds. Loth finds Margret in a tent for Inysh casualties, tending to Sir Tharian Lintley, who bears a deep, stitched wound. Margret, exhausted and covered in ash, clings to Loth, seeking solace in his embrace as she processes the trauma of the battle.

The chapter closes with a poignant moment between Loth and Margret, who find comfort in each other as dawn breaks over the Spindles. The pink light of the rising sun symbolizes hope and renewal after the night of destruction. Their embrace reflects the resilience of the human spirit amidst loss and devastation, marking the end of the conflict and the beginning of a new era. The imagery of the gilded sky underscores the theme of rebirth and the possibility of healing.

Seventy-Three

Niclays Roos returns to Brygstad, the capital of Mentendon, after years of exile, summoned by High Princess Ermuna to aid in diplomatic relations with Seiiki. Despite the city's familiar beauty—its sugared roofs, bell-gabled houses, and the towering Sanctuary of the Saint—Niclays feels no joy. Haunted by memories of his past, he reluctantly obeys the royal invitation, knowing refusal would risk another banishment. As his coach crosses the Sun Bridge, he reflects on his impoverished arrival decades earlier, contrasting it with his current fractured state, both physically and emotionally.

The chapter delves into Niclays' physical and emotional scars. Having lost part of his arm and narrowly escaped death aboard the *Dancing Pearl*, he dismisses the assurances of Inysh physicians with characteristic cynicism. He muses on the heroic deeds of Eadaz and Tané, who defeated the Nameless One—a feat he slept through, much to his wry amusement. The city's bells and the sight of the Free State Theatre stir memories of happier times with his late friends, Jannart and Edvart, though he takes solace in knowing his friend Laya survived and returned home.

Before facing the court, Niclays detours to the Old Quarter, immersing himself in the sensory delights of Brygstad—gingerbread, sugared quinces, and apple tarts—reminiscent of his youth. The bustling markets and bookshops evoke thoughts of his friends in Seiiki, Purumé and Eizaru, whom he hopes might one day join him. His journey culminates at the Sun in Splendor, a shabby inn unchanged by time, where he gathers the courage to confront the ghosts of his past, symbolized by his impending visit to Jannart's tomb.

The chapter closes with Niclays visiting the Silver Cemetery, where Jannart and Edvart lie entombed. The alabaster effigy of Jannart, crafted in his likeness, forces Niclays to confront his grief and denial. The inscription on the statue's shield serves as a poignant reminder of the love and loss that define his return. This moment of quiet

reflection underscores the chapter's themes of memory, survival, and the enduring weight of the past as Niclays prepares to re-enter the world he once fled.



Seventy-Four

Lord Arteloth Beck, heir to the Earldom of Goldenbirch, grapples with his impending responsibilities while longing for the vibrant life at court. Despite his affection for his family estate, Serinhall, Loth feels unprepared for the weight of governance and mourns the absence of his dear friends—Ead, who seeks to escape her newfound fame, and another who has passed away. His sister Margret offers comfort and insight, acknowledging their shared displacement: Loth yearns for court, while she, as the second-born, is freer to choose her path. Their conversation highlights the irony of their upbringing, which fostered love for places they cannot fully inhabit.

A letter from the House of Vetalda interrupts Loth’s introspection, stirring memories of distant lands and adventures. As he reads, sensory recollections of sea winds and spiced wine mingle with the familiar scents of Goldenbirch, hinting at a latent desire for change. Margret’s optimism about Inys’s evolving future contrasts with Loth’s resignation, yet her words plant a seed of possibility. The chapter subtly foreshadows a pivotal decision as Loth picks up his quill, poised between duty and aspiration.

Meanwhile, in Briar House, Ead and Queen Sabran share an intimate moment fraught with unspoken tension. Ead reveals a letter from Chassar, offering her the role of Prioress of the Orange Tree—a chance to lead the Red Damsels and hunt the remaining threats, including the formidable Fýredel. Sabran’s guarded reaction betrays her fear of separation, though she outwardly supports Ead’s ambition. Their emotional exchange underscores the impossibility of a shared future, as Ead’s destiny lies in Lasia, far from Inys’s court.

The chapter weaves together themes of duty, longing, and transformation. Loth and Ead stand at crossroads, torn between personal desires and larger callings. While Loth wrestles with inherited responsibility, Ead confronts the cost of her newfound power and the sacrifices it demands. Both narratives reflect a world in flux, where characters

must navigate the tension between tradition and change, love and duty, as they shape the future of their realms.



Seventy-Five

The chapter follows Lady Tané of Clan Miduchi as she navigates her role as an unofficial ambassador between Seiiki and the Empire of the Twelve Lakes. Despite the apparent calm in the world, Tané feels an underlying restlessness, haunted by a sense of calling from her past. She reunites with her dragon, Nayimathun, and prepares for a journey, carrying a letter from the Unceasing Emperor. The narrative hints at unresolved tensions, such as the lingering threat of the Golden Empress and the illegal trade in dragonflesh, which Tané is determined to confront.

Tané reflects on her recent rewards, including a mansion in Nanta, but remains burdened by the loss of her friend Susa. Her emotional scars run as deep as the physical one on her cheekbone, a constant reminder of her path to the Abyss. After delivering the letter in Ginura, she joins Nayimathun on the beach, where she expresses her desire to travel to Komoridu. The dragon agrees, and they set off, symbolizing Tané’s quest for closure and understanding of her heritage.

Upon arriving at Komoridu, Tané explores the island, uncovering remnants of its ancient past. She discovers a cave with a weathered statue of Neporo of Komoridu, whose face eerily resembles her own. Overwhelmed by the connection, Tané kneels before the statue and simply says, “Thank you.” The encounter feels dreamlike, and she stays until her lantern burns out, eventually falling asleep beside a dead mulberry tree under the stars.

The chapter concludes with Tané waking to find a white butterfly cupped in her hand and her side bleeding, a mysterious and symbolic moment. The butterfly, often seen as a messenger from the celestial plane, hints at Tané’s deeper connection to the spiritual world and her ancestors. This poignant ending underscores her journey of self-discovery and the unresolved mysteries that continue to shape her destiny.

Seventy-Six

The chapter opens with the ship *Rose Eternal* sailing along the western coast of Yscalin, a land recovering from the devastation of the Draconic Years. Fields are being replanted with lavender, and prayer houses are being rebuilt, signaling hope and renewal. Ead, now the Prioress of the Orange Tree, reflects on her new role as a leader rather than a handmaiden. She embraces her duty to protect the balance of the world, vowing to hunt down the dragon Fýredel and restore harmony when the Long-Haired Star returns. The setting is serene, with mereswine leaping in the waves and the salt wind invigorating Ead.

Ead contemplates the weight of leadership, contrasting her position with that of queens and empresses. Unlike Sabran, she does not bear a crown but serves as one among many guardians of the Priory. Her resolve is unwavering: she will ensure the orange tree’s fire is the only one that ascends, symbolizing her commitment to her sacred duty. The peaceful scene on the ship is interrupted by Gian Harlowe, who joins her at the stern. Their conversation shifts to Queen Marosa’s plans to reopen Yscalin to foreign sovereigns, hinting at diplomatic efforts to maintain peace in the region.

The tone becomes more introspective as Ead broaches a sensitive topic with Harlowe: rumors of his past relationship with Queen Rosarian and the mythical Milk Lagoon. Harlowe dismisses the lagoon as a fable, but Ead challenges him, suggesting legends often hold truths. Their exchange reveals Harlowe’s guarded emotions and his reluctance to revisit the past. He speaks cryptically of secrets and shadows, implying that some truths are better left unspoken. His words resonate with Ead, who understands the weight of hidden histories and unshared stories.

The chapter closes with a moment of quiet reflection between Ead and Harlowe under the stars. Harlowe’s cryptic remark about Ead’s future as a song hints at her destined legacy, while her faint smile suggests acceptance of her path. The scene underscores

the themes of secrecy, legacy, and the interplay between myth and reality. Ead’s final words, “But not today,” leave the reader with a sense of anticipation, as her journey and the untold stories of the world remain unfolding.

