

Nightfall

The chapter opens with a vivid depiction of the tense atmosphere on the eve of battle, as Princess Elena Galathynius observes the enemy's army gathering on the Black Mountains. The pounding of bone drums and the flickering fires create a stark contrast between the enemy's formidable presence and Elena's own forces, which are comparatively diminished. Despite her strategic awareness and the prayers she offers, she recognizes the grim reality that her side faces imminent destruction. Her thoughts are tinged with a sense of foreboding, knowing that her fate—and that of her people—may be sealed before dawn, emphasizing the weight of leadership amid impending catastrophe.

Gavin, her war leader, approaches her with concern and a glimmer of hope that her father's forces might arrive in time. Elena, however, perceives the valley as a death trap, having led her army into a position of utter vulnerability. Their conversation reveals a deep emotional struggle: Gavin's instinct to prioritize Elena's survival, urging her to escape and live on, clashes with her unwavering resolve to remain and fight alongside her people. The chapter explores their contrasting perspectives—Gavin's pragmatic despair versus Elena's resolute bravery—highlighting the personal sacrifices made in the face of overwhelming odds.

As night falls, Elena reflects on the broader context of the war, contemplating the impending fall of her homeland, Orynth. She mourns the loss of her father's fading power and the destructive advance of Erawan, the dread-lord. Her thoughts reveal a deep understanding that the battle's outcome is inevitable and that her father's strength is waning, making victory unlikely. Her last words from her father echo in her mind, urging her to find a way to ensure her future rises despite the darkness. This internal struggle underscores her sense of duty and the tragic awareness of the impending doom for her world.

The chapter culminates with the arrival of Erawan himself, signaling that the enemy has finally entered the stage. The fires of the dread-lord's camp extinguish, and the drums grow louder, symbolizing the final confrontation. Elena and Gavin acknowledge the futility of hope for victory, recognizing that the battle—and perhaps the war—is already lost. Their shared resolve, tinged with grief and acceptance, underscores the tragic heroism of their fight and the looming dominance of Erawan, setting the stage for a confrontation that will determine the fate of their land and future generations.

