

Chapter Forty-Three

Chaol, now without his brace, is given a temperamental black mare named Farasha for a desert-bound journey. Despite her name meaning "butterfly," the horse is fierce and rebellious, testing Chaol's limits from the start. He suspects the royals intentionally gave him a challenging horse but refuses to request a gentler one, determined not to show weakness. Yrene, his companion, observes the horse's behavior with concern while riding her own chestnut mare, both horses beautiful but not as stunning as the Asterion stallion Chaol once received from Dorian—a bittersweet reminder of a past life.

The chapter delves into Chaol's reflections on his lost stallion, left unnamed and likely lost to the chaos of war. He wonders if Farasha senses his guilt over forgetting the noble horse and resents him for it. Princess Hasar, leading the expedition, boasts about the Muniqi breed's Fae ancestry and their adaptation to desert climates, highlighting their speed and unique features like the *jibbah*, a sinus bulge aiding their survival. Yrene remains neutral during Hasar's lecture, focusing on practical preparations while Chaol admires her appearance—elegant in white and gold desert attire.

The group sets off through Antica's bustling streets, slowed by narrow paths and the oppressive heat. Hasar, impatient to showcase her riding skills, curses the delays, while Chaol struggles to control Farasha, who snaps at bystanders. Yrene points out the city's aqueducts and gardens, remnants of a conqueror who cherished the land. As they exit the city, Hasar and others race ahead, leaving Chaol and Yrene with a slower group. The reckless riding of some nobles damages the scrubland, sparking Chaol's disapproval.

Ascending a rocky hill, the group prepares to water their horses before crossing the dunes. Chaol notices the careless damage left by previous riders, including bloodied

bushes, and disapproves of their recklessness. The chapter ends with a sense of anticipation as the remaining riders approach the cliff's edge, their companions seemingly vanishing into the horizon. The journey underscores themes of resilience, memory, and the contrast between Chaol's disciplined nature and the royals' indulgent recklessness.

