

Chapter Forty-Two

The chapter opens with Nesryn and Sartaq crashing into a hidden net strung between mountain peaks, a trap designed to ensnare their ruk, Kadara. During the violent collision, Sartaq shields Nesryn, taking the brunt of the impact as they are thrown from the saddle. The scene is chaotic, with descriptions of twisting bodies, shattered shale, and Kadara's desperate attempts to protect the hatchling in her talons. The pair survive the fall but are left disoriented and injured, with Sartaq bearing the worst of the wounds.

As they regain their bearings, Nesryn frantically frees herself and Sartaq from the tangled saddle straps, relieved to find him alive despite his injuries. Meanwhile, Kadara lies trapped in the nearly invisible webbing, her wings pinned. Sartaq and Nesryn rush to cut her free, their urgency underscored by the hatchling's absence—it had been thrown during the crash. The tension mounts as they realize the hatchling is vulnerable, its distressed cries echoing through the pass.

Their efforts to rescue Kadara are interrupted when the hatchling is suddenly attacked by a monstrous creature, its spine brutally pierced. The gruesome death leaves Nesryn and Sartaq horrified, the scene emphasizing the brutality of their unseen enemies. With shadows closing in, Sartaq desperately commands Kadara to fly, but the injured ruk struggles to rise. Nesryn readies her bow, preparing for a fight as the threat draws nearer.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Nesryn and Sartaq facing imminent danger. The loss of the hatchling and Kadara's incapacitation heighten the stakes, leaving them vulnerable in the treacherous pass. The narrative builds tension through visceral action and emotional weight, setting the stage for a confrontation with the lurking enemies. The chapter underscores themes of survival, sacrifice, and the harsh realities of their journey.