

Chapter Forty-Eight

The chapter opens with Nesryn awakening abruptly, her senses heightened by a sudden, sharp biting sensation. She initially perceives the bites as coming from Falkan, a shifter, but quickly realizes she is restrained in a silk binding within a mysterious, dimly lit environment. The setting is no longer a cave but a polished, carved passage illuminated by moonlight, suggesting an ancient, sacred space. Nesryn's immediate concern is Sartaq, who remains unconscious, and her instinct to act quickly and find a way out becomes paramount as she gauges her surroundings and her captors.

As Nesryn and Falkan attempt to escape, they encounter a formidable and eerily dark spider-like creature, a kharankui, emerging from the shadows. The creature's presence is intimidating, and it immediately recognizes Nesryn and Falkan as intruders investigating forgotten places. The spider speaks in a melodious voice, questioning their purpose, revealing that they are seeking information about the traders and the legendary webs—Spiresilk—that the kharankui might possess or guard. Nesryn, under pressure, fabricates a story about a merchant seeking to trade with the kharankui, attempting to buy time while Falkan discreetly chews at the silk bindings.

The dialogue with the spider deepens, exposing the kharankui's disdain for mortals and their trade practices. The creature dismisses the idea of trading, emphasizing their predatory nature and their desire to consume dreams and years of mortals. Nesryn's questions reveal that they are in a space where the kharankui wait for someone significant—specifically, the Queen of the Valg, Maeve. Carvings on the walls depict an archway and a cloaked figure, which Nesryn deduces to be the queen, hinting at a powerful, dark figure who commands this place. The kharankui's attitude underscores their allegiance and anticipation of a dark, inevitable return.

The chapter concludes with the kharankui confirming they are waiting for Maeve, the Queen of the Valg, rather than Erawan or other dark entities. The creature's disdain for

Erawan and its focus on Maeve as their true queen reveal the political and supernatural tensions at play. The scene is charged with foreboding, as Nesryn and her companions realize they are in a nexus of dark power, waiting for a figure who embodies chaos and destruction. This revelation sets the stage for future confrontations and the unfolding of larger, sinister plans involving the Valg and their queen.

