

Chapter Forty-Nine

The chapter opens with Nesryn confronting the dark and sinister figure of a spider, which reveals itself as a storyteller of ancient and powerful lore. Nesryn, despite her fear, seeks to learn a story—one that might provide insight into the dark forces at play. The spider, with a wicked chuckle, begins recounting a tale from a distant, bygone world where three kings of shadow and pain ruled a desolate land. This story serves as a mythic parallel to the current struggle, illustrating the nature of power, darkness, and betrayal that echoes through the histories and legends of their worlds.

The narrative the spider shares centers on Maeve, a powerful queen whose dark magic and ambition transcend worlds. Originally allied with Orcus, the eldest Valg king, Maeve's restless nature drives her to explore realms beyond her own, piercing the veil between worlds using her gifts. She secretly leaves her realm, seeking other lands and forbidden knowledge. Her intent is to escape her own fate and find a place where she can rule invisibly, hiding among near-immortals and manipulating their perceptions through her formidable powers. Her actions set into motion a chain of events that threaten to destabilize entire worlds.

As the story unfolds, the spider describes how Maeve's departure triggers a brutal pursuit by the Valg kings, who learn of her defection and seek to reclaim her. Orcus and his brothers acquire the keys to control the gates between worlds, enabling them to sweep across realms with their armies. Maeve, foreseeing her enemies' actions, plans her own defiance by establishing a hidden refuge among the near-immortals, the queens Mab and Mora. She cunningly implants the idea of a third queen—her—within their minds, ensuring her influence endures even if she remains concealed, demonstrating her mastery of manipulation and dark magic.

The chapter concludes with the revelation of Maeve's strategic cunning. She steals the keys from the Valg kings and manages to send two of them back to their realm, only to

be betrayed by her own ambitions when the youngest king, Brannon, recognizes her threat. Despite her brilliance and deception, her plans are thwarted, and she is left in a state of near-victory, yet vulnerable. The story underscores the themes of power, treachery, and the enduring influence of dark, ancient magic, illustrating Maeve's complex character and the perilous nature of her ambitions.

