

Chapter Twenty-Six

Chaol spends an evening in the Torre kitchens with Yrene, where Cook overwhelms them with an abundance of food. Despite their protests, they indulge in the meal, sharing a comfortable silence as they observe the kitchen's bustling activity. As night falls, Yrene and Cook insist Chaol stay overnight, and he agrees, sending a note to Nesryn at the palace. Yrene leads him to a small, ground-level room in the physicians' complex, which overlooks a garden courtyard and is modest but welcoming.

In the room, Yrene checks Chaol's leg mobility, removing his boots and socks to assess his progress. Their conversation shifts to the stolen scrolls and books they retrieved from the library, hinting at the potential ancient knowledge they contain. Chaol keeps his suspicions about the scrolls' age to himself, aware of their possible significance. Yrene offers to fetch him clothes and other necessities, but Chaol reassures her he can manage on his own, leading to a brief, awkward exchange.

Before leaving, Yrene lingers, and Chaol thanks her sincerely for her care and companionship. She responds with a quiet nod, her eyes reflecting unspoken emotions as she departs. Chaol remains cautious, mindful of the lingering threat of the Valg despite the recent calm. The chapter ends with a tender moment between them, underscoring their growing connection amidst the underlying tension of their mission.

The next morning, Chaol is informed by Eretia, a stern woman, that Yrene has a meeting with Hafiza and will meet him later. Eretia escorts him back to the palace, her no-nonsense demeanor contrasting with Chaol's curiosity about her role. Upon arrival, he encounters Shen, a guard whose hidden mechanical arm catches Chaol's attention. The chapter closes with Chaol's realization of Shen's prosthetic, hinting at deeper stories and connections within the palace's inhabitants.