

Chapter Five

Chaol, exhausted and uneasy, struggles with sleep in the opulent yet tense household of a tentative ally. The heat, the lurking dangers of spies, and the haunting memories of Rifthold's fall weigh heavily on him. As he prepares for a crucial meeting, he observes the lavish surroundings—filled with fine crafts and treasures from across the khagan's empire—while grappling with the stark contrast between this peaceful, multicultural city and the fractured, fearful world he left behind.

Princess Hasar's cryptic announcement about the healer's arrival leaves Chaol wary, adding to his distrust of his hosts. During a tense dinner, Prince Arghun's probing questions about Adarlan's brutal enslavement practices push Chaol to the edge, forcing him to offer curt replies. Only Sartaq's intervention shifts the conversation, but Chaol remains vigilant, scanning the room for signs of Morath's influence. The heirs' lively chatter in unfamiliar languages highlights the cultural richness of the khagan's court, yet Chaol feels isolated and on guard.

Nesryn, visibly distressed, remains withdrawn throughout the evening, refusing Chaol's attempts to connect. Her silence and haunted demeanor contrast sharply with the vibrant feast, where Chaol indulges in the khagan's exquisite cuisine but abstains from alcohol. The emotional distance between Chaol and Nesryn grows, underscored by her rejection of his offer to share a room. Their strained relationship, marked by past failures to communicate, leaves Chaol frustrated and self-critical as he tosses and turns through the night.

As they await the late healer the next morning, Nesryn's disheveled appearance and refusal to wear Adarlan's colors reflect her inner turmoil. Chaol, dressed meticulously by his servant Kadja, observes Nesryn's detachment with concern. The chapter closes with their uneasy silence, highlighting the unresolved tensions between them and the uncertainty of their situation in the khagan's court.