

Chapter Forty-Eight

Nesryn awakens to the sensation of Falkan, a small creature, biting at the silk binding her body. Disoriented and nauseous, she finds herself in a dimly lit stone passage, its walls polished and covered in ancient carvings. Nearby lies Sartaq, unconscious and similarly wrapped in silk, his face crusted with blood. As Falkan works to free her, Nesryn scans their surroundings, noting the eerie stillness and the strange, smooth rock formations that suggest they are no longer in the familiar mountain pass.

A menacing spider, larger and darker than the others, emerges and engages Nesryn in conversation. The spider speaks in a lyrical voice, questioning their presence in the forgotten place. Nesryn improvises a story about being sent by a merchant to trade, hoping to buy time as Falkan continues chewing through the silk. The spider dismisses the idea of trade, revealing a disdain for its northern kin who interact with mortals, and instead boasts of its kind's predatory nature. Nesryn's hands tremble as she struggles to maintain the ruse, fearing for Sartaq's life.

The spider reveals that its kind waits for the return of their queen, pointing to a carving on the wall depicting a cloaked figure. As Nesryn squints to make out the details, the spider brushes away dirt to reveal the image of a woman with flowing hair and a dress. The spider declares they await the Queen of the Valg, who is known in this world as Maeve. This revelation shocks Nesryn, as it contradicts the earlier assumption that the spiders served Erawan, another dark figure.

The chapter ends with the spider's chilling proclamation about Maeve's return, leaving Nesryn to grapple with the implications. The encounter underscores the spiders' loyalty to a far more ancient and terrifying power, while Nesryn and Falkan remain trapped in a desperate race against time. The tension builds as the spider's presence looms, and the carved gate on the wall hints at a looming threat beyond their current predicament.