

Chapter Thirty-Five

The chapter opens with Falkan, injured and bleeding, collapsing in the forest. Nesryn rushes to his aid despite Sartaq's initial refusal, revealing that Falkan had followed them in the form of a falcon. Tensions rise as Sartaq accuses Falkan of being a spy or assassin due to his shape-shifting abilities, but Falkan insists he is merely a merchant who inherited the gift unwillingly. He explains that his powers emerged late and that he has no allegiance to any court. Nesryn defends him, demanding medical attention, while Sartaq remains distrustful.

As Nesryn tends to Falkan's wound, he shares his backstory, explaining how he discovered his shape-shifting abilities and his desire to reclaim the years stolen from him by a mysterious force. Despite his pain, Falkan maintains his innocence, and Nesryn believes him, revealing that she has a shifter among her friends. Sartaq reluctantly assists with bandages, though his hostility lingers. The group prepares to return to the aerie, with Falkan's condition requiring urgent care. The dynamic between the characters highlights themes of trust and prejudice.

The flight back to the aerie is tense and perilous, with Falkan's unconscious body adding to the challenge. Sartaq's anger simmers, but they arrive safely as night falls. Upon landing, they are met by Houlun, Borte, and others, who quickly take Falkan to a healer. Sartaq confronts Houlun about Falkan's presence, suggesting she knew more than she let on. Meanwhile, Borte observes the black blood on Kadara, hinting at the violent encounter with the spider creature. The scene underscores the unresolved tensions and mysteries surrounding Falkan's role.

The chapter closes with Nesryn and Borte exchanging brief remarks about the day's events. Borte notes the unusual dynamic between Sartaq and Houlun, implying guilt or secrecy. Nesryn remains focused on unpacking, her thoughts unspoken but her actions reflecting her determination. The aftermath of the confrontation leaves questions

unanswered, setting the stage for further revelations about Falkan's past and the broader conflicts at play. The chapter blends action, dialogue, and character development to advance the plot.

