

Chapter Sixty-Four

Chaol awakens to a body that aches but is whole, breathing without pain as Yrene helps him sit up. Nesryn and Sartaq arrive, bearing signs of recent struggle, with the prince's braid cut short and Nesryn clad in ruk leathers. They explain how they followed Chaol's note and were guided by mysterious cats through the tunnels. The healers, who accompanied them in large numbers, begin to disperse, their expressions grave, while Eretia tends to Hafiza, who is frail but alive. The group's reunion is marked by relief and unspoken tension.

The focus shifts to Duva, unconscious on the floor, with Hafiza assuring Sartaq that his sister will remain asleep despite her Valg ring. Yrene's decision to spare Duva earns quiet gratitude from Sartaq, but Chaol soon notices Yrene's injury and demands she be treated. Eretia's sharp retorts and Hafiza's wry humor lighten the mood momentarily, but the conversation takes a serious turn as Hafiza reveals the cost of saving Chaol's life: a life-bond between him and Yrene, tethering their fates together.

Hafiza explains that while the bond stabilizes Chaol's spine, allowing him to walk when Yrene's magic is strong, his mobility will fluctuate with her energy levels. On difficult days, he may need a cane or wheelchair, as the spinal damage remains irreversible. Chaol reassures Yrene, emphasizing that his worth is not diminished by these limitations. Yrene, however, is devastated, having hoped to fully heal him, but Chaol comforts her, insisting she has already healed him in the ways that truly matter.

The chapter concludes with Hafiza revealing the final condition of the life-bond: when death comes, it will claim both Chaol and Yrene together. Despite this somber revelation, Yrene shows no fear, her golden eyes reflecting resolve rather than sorrow. The bond, while carrying a heavy price, also symbolizes their unbreakable connection, leaving them to face the future as one. The scene closes with a sense of acceptance and unity, underscoring the depth of their sacrifice and devotion.