

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

SARAH J. MAAS



TOWER *of* DAWN

A THRONE OF GLASS NOVEL

BLOOMSBURY

TOWER *of* DAWN

*For my grandmother, Camilla,
who crossed mountains and seas,*

and whose own remarkable story is my favorite epic of all



BOOKS BY SARAH J. MAAS

The Throne of Glass series

Assassin's Blade

Throne of Glass

Crown of Midnight

Heir of Fire

Queen of Shadows

Empire of Storms

Tower of Dawn

•

The Throne of Glass Colouring Book

A Court of Thorns and Roses series

A Court of Thorns and Roses

A Court of Mist and Fury

A Court of Wings and Ruin

•

A Court of Thorns and Roses Colouring Book

TOWER *of* DAWN

SARAH J. MAAS



BLOOMSBURY

LONDON OXFORD NEW YORK NEW DELHI SYDNEY

CONTENTS

[Map](#)

[Part One: The God-City](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Three](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Four](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Five](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Six](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Eight](#)

[Part Two: Mountains and Seas](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Thirty](#)

[Chapter Thirty-One](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Two](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Three](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Four](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Five](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Six](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Thirty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Forty](#)

[Chapter Forty-One](#)

[Chapter Forty-Two](#)

[Chapter Forty-Three](#)

[Chapter Forty-Four](#)

[Chapter Forty-Five](#)

[Chapter Forty-Six](#)

[Chapter Forty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Forty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Forty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Fifty](#)

[Chapter Fifty-One](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Two](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Three](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Four](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Five](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Six](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Eight](#)

[Chapter Fifty-Nine](#)

[Chapter Sixty](#)

[Chapter Sixty-One](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Two](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Three](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Four](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Five](#)

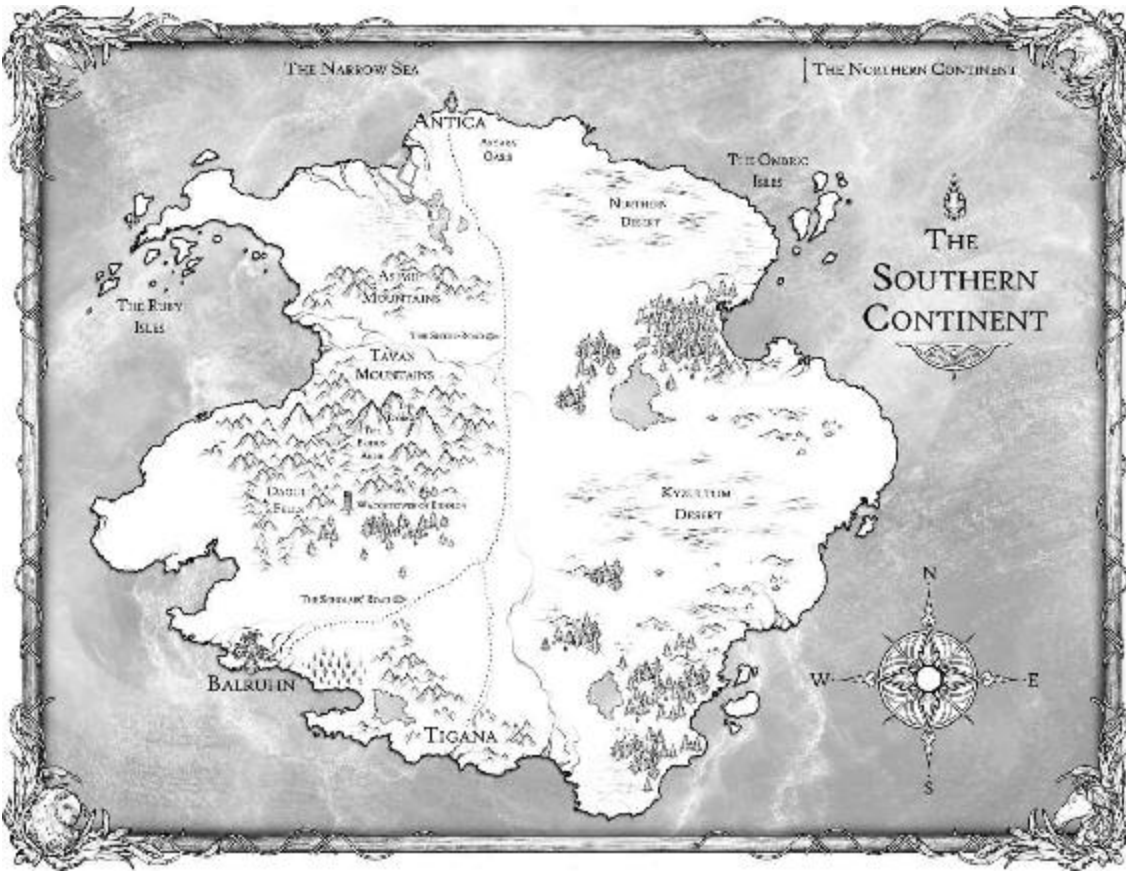
[Chapter Sixty-Six](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Seven](#)

[Chapter Sixty-Eight](#)

[Fireheart](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)



PART ONE

THE GOD-CITY

1

Chaol Westfall, former Captain of the Royal Guard and now Hand to the newly crowned King of Adarlan, had discovered that he hated one sound above all others.

Wheels.

Specifically, their clattering along the planks of the ship on which he'd spent the past three weeks sailing through storm-tossed waters. And now

their rattle and thunk over the shining green marble floors and intricate mosaics throughout the Khagan of the Southern Continent's shining palace in Antica.

With nothing to do beyond sit in the wheeled chair that he'd deemed had become both his prison and his only path to seeing the world, Chaol took in the details of the sprawling palace perched atop one of the capital city's countless hills. Every bit of material had been taken from and built in honor of some portion of the khagan's mighty empire:

Those polished green floors his chair now clattered over were hewn from quarries in the southwest of the continent. The red pillars fashioned like mighty trees, their uppermost branches stretching across the domed ceilings high above—all part of one endless receiving hall—had been hauled in from the northeastern, sand-blasted deserts.

The mosaics that interrupted the green marble had been assembled by craftsmen from Tigana, another of the khagan's prized cities at the mountainous southern end of the continent. Each portrayed a scene from the khaganate's rich, brutal, glorious past: the centuries spent as a nomadic horse-people in the grassy steppes of the continent's eastern lands; the emergence of the first khagan, a warlord who unified the scattered tribes into a conquering force that took the continent piece by piece, wielding

cunning and strategic brilliance to forge a sweeping empire; and then depictions of the three centuries since—the various khagans who had expanded the empire, distributing the wealth from a hundred territories across the lands, building countless bridges and roads to connect them all, ruling over the vast continent with precision and clarity.

Perhaps the mosaics provided a vision of what Adarlan might have been, Chaol mused as the murmurings of the gathered court flitted between the carved pillars and gilded domes ahead. That is, if Adarlan hadn't been ruled by a man controlled by a demon king hell-bent on turning this world into a feast for his hordes.

Chaol twisted his head to peer up at Nesryn, stone-faced behind him as she pushed his chair. Only her dark eyes, darting over every passing face and window and column, revealed any sort of interest in the khagan's sprawling home.

They'd saved their finest set of clothes for today, and the newly appointed Captain of the Guard was indeed resplendent in her crimson-and-gold uniform. Where Dorian had dug up one of the uniforms Chaol had once worn with such pride, he had no idea.

He'd initially wanted to wear black, simply because color ... He'd never felt comfortable with colors, save the red and gold of his kingdom. But

black had become the color of Erawan's Valg-infested guards. They had worn those black-on-black uniforms as they'd terrorized Rifthold. As they'd rounded up, tortured, and then butchered his men.

Then strung them along the palace gates to swing in the wind.

He'd barely been able to look at the Antican guards they'd passed on their way here, both in the streets and in this very palace—standing proud and alert, swords at their backs and knives at their sides. Even now, he resisted the urge to glance to where he knew they'd be stationed in the hall, exactly where he would have positioned his own men. Where he himself would undoubtedly have been standing, monitoring all, while emissaries from a foreign kingdom arrived.

Nesryn met his stare, those ebony eyes cool and unblinking, her shoulder-length black hair swaying with each step. Not a trace of nerves flickered across her lovely, solemn face. No inkling that they were about to meet one of the most powerful men in the world—a man who could alter the fate of their own continent in the war surely now breaking out across Adarlan and Terrasen.

Chaol faced forward without saying a word. The walls and pillars and arched doorways had ears and eyes and mouths, she'd warned him.

It was that thought alone that kept Chaol from fiddling with the clothes

he'd finally decided upon: light brown pants, knee-high chestnut-colored boots, a white shirt of finest silk, mostly concealed by a dark teal jacket. The jacket was simple enough, the cost of it only revealed by the fine brass buckles down the front and the glimmer of delicate golden thread skimming the high collar and edges. No sword hung from his leather belt—the absence of that comforting weight like some phantom limb.

Or legs.

Two tasks. He had two tasks while here, and he still was not certain which one would prove the more impossible:

Convincing the khagan and his six would-be heirs to lend their considerable armies to the war against Erawan ...

Or finding a healer in the Torre Cesme who could discover some way to get him walking again.

To—he thought with no small ripple of disgust—fix him.

He hated that word. Almost as much as the clattering of the wheels. *Fix*.

Even if that's what he was beseeching the legendary healers to do for him, the word still grated, made his gut churn.

He shoved the word and the thought from his mind as Nesryn followed the near-silent flock of servants who had led them from the docks, through the winding and dusty cobblestoned streets of Antica, all the way up the

sloped avenue to the domes and thirty-six minarets of the palace itself.

Strips of white cloth—from silk to felt to linen—had been hanging from countless windows and lanterns and doorways. Likely because of some official or distant royal relation dying recently, Nesryn had murmured.

Death rituals were varied and often a blend from the countless kingdoms and territories now governed by the khaganate, but the white cloth was an ancient holdover from the centuries when the khagan's people had roamed the steppes and laid their dead to rest under the watchful, open sky.

The city had been hardly gloomy, though, as they traveled through it.

People still hurried about in clothes of various makes, vendors still called out their wares, acolytes in temples of wood or stone—every god had a home in Antica, Nesryn supplied—still beckoned to those on the street. All of it, even the palace, watched over by the shining, pale-stoned tower atop one of its southern hills.

The Torre. The tower that housed the finest mortal healers in the world.

Chaol had tried not to look too long at it through the carriage windows, even if the massive tower could be seen from nearly every street and angle of Antica. None of the servants had mentioned it, or pointed out the dominant presence that seemed to rival even the khagan's palace.

No, the servants hadn't said much at all on the trek here, even regarding

the mourning-banners flapping in the dry wind. Each of them remained silent, men and women alike, their dark hair shining and straight, and each wore loose pants and flowing jackets of cobalt and bloodred edged with pale gold. Paid servants—but descendants of the slaves who had once been owned by the khagan's bloodline. Until the previous khagan, a visionary and firebrand, had outlawed slavery a generation ago as one of her countless improvements to the empire. The khagan had freed her slaves but kept them on as paid servants—along with their children. And now their children's children.

Not a single one of them appeared underfed or undercompensated, and none had shown even a flicker of fear as they'd escorted Chaol and Nesryn from the ship to the palace. The current khagan, it seemed, treated his servants well. Hopefully his yet-undecided Heir would as well.

Unlike Adarlan or Terrasen, inheritance of the empire was decided by the khagan—not by birth order or gender. Having as many children as possible to provide him or her with a wide pool to choose from made that choice only somewhat easier. And rivalry amongst the royal children ... It was practically a blood sport. All designed to prove to their parent who was the strongest, the wisest, the most suited to rule.

The khagan was required by law to have a sealed document locked away

in an unmarked, hidden trove—a document that listed his or her Heir, should death sweep upon them before it could be formally announced. It could be altered at any time, but it was designed to avoid the one thing the khaganate had lived in fear of since that first khagan had patched together the kingdoms and territories of this continent: collapse. Not from outside forces, but from war within.

That long-ago first khagan had been wise. Not once during the three hundred years of the khaganate had a civil war occurred.

And as Nesryn pushed him past the graceful bowing of the servants now paused between two enormous pillars, as the lush, ornate throne room spread before them with its dozens of people gathered around the golden dais glittering in the midday sun, Chaol wondered which of the five figures standing before the enthroned man would one day be chosen to rule this empire.

The only sounds came from the rustling clothing of the four dozen people—he counted in the span of a few casual blinks—gathered along either side of that glinting dais, forming a wall of silk and flesh and jewels, a veritable avenue through which Nesryn wheeled him.

Rustling clothing—and the clatter and squeak of the wheels. She'd oiled them this morning, but weeks at sea had worn on the metal. Every scrape

and shriek was like nails on stone.

But he kept his head high. Shoulders back.

Nesryn paused a healthy distance from the dais—from the wall of five royal children, all in their prime, male and female, standing between them and their father.

Defense of their emperor: a prince or princess's first duty. The easiest way to prove their loyalty, to angle for being tapped Heir. And the five before them ...

Chaol schooled his face into neutrality as he counted again. Only five.

Not the six Nesryn had described.

But he didn't scan the hall for the missing royal sibling as he bowed at the waist. He'd practiced the movement over and over this final week at sea, as the weather had turned hotter, the air becoming dry and sunbaked.

Doing it in the chair still felt unnatural, but Chaol bowed low—until he was staring at his unresponsive legs, at his spotless brown boots and the feet he could not feel, could not move.

From the whisper of clothing to his left, he knew Nesryn had come to his side and was bowing deeply as well.

They held it for the three breaths Nesryn claimed were required.

Chaol used those three breaths to settle himself, to shut out the weight of

what was upon them both.

He had once been skilled at maintaining an unfaltering composure. He'd served Dorian's father for years, had taken orders without so much as blinking. And before that, he'd endured his own father, whose words had been as cutting as his fists. The true and current Lord of Anielle.

The *Lord* now in front of Chaol's name was a mockery. A mockery and a lie that Dorian had refused to abandon despite Chaol's protests.

Lord Chaol Westfall, Hand of the King.

He hated it. More than the sound of wheels. More than the body he now could not feel beneath his hips, the body whose stillness still surprised him, even all these weeks later.

He was Lord of Nothing. Lord of Oath-Breakers. Lord of Liars.

And as Chaol lifted his torso and met the upswept eyes of the white-haired man on that throne, as the khagan's weathered brown skin crinkled in a small, cunning smile ... Chaol wondered if the khagan knew it as well.

2

There were two parts of her, Nesryn supposed.

The part that was now Captain of Adarlan's Royal Guard, who had made a vow to her king to see that the man in the wheeled chair beside her was healed—and to muster an army from the man enthroned before her. That

part of Nesryn kept her head high, her shoulders back, her hands within a nonthreatening distance of the ornate sword at her hip.

Then there was the other part.

The part that had glimpsed the spires and minarets and domes of the god-city breaking over the horizon as they'd sailed in, the shining pillar of the Torre standing proud over it all, and had to swallow back tears. The part that had scented the smoky paprika and crisp tang of ginger and beckoning sweetness of cumin as soon as she had cleared the docks and knew, deep in her bones, that she was *home*. That, yes, she lived and served and would die for Adarlan, for the family still there, but this place, where her father had once lived and where even her Adarlan-born mother had felt more at ease ... These were her people.

The skin in varying shades of brown and tan. The abundance of that shining black hair— *her* hair. The eyes that ranged from uptilted to wide and round to slender, in hues of ebony and chestnut and even the rare hazel and green. Her people. A blend of kingdoms and territories, yes, but ... Here there were no slurs hissed in the streets. Here there would be no rocks thrown by children. Here her sister's children would not feel different. Unwanted.

And that part of her ... Despite her thrown-back shoulders and raised

chin, her knees indeed quaked at who—at *what*—stood before her.

Nesryn had not dared tell her father where and what she was leaving to do. Only that she was off on an errand of the King of Adarlan and would not be back for some time.

Her father wouldn't have believed it. Nesryn didn't quite believe it herself.

The khagan had been a story whispered before their hearth on winter nights, his offspring legends told while kneading endless loaves of bread for their bakery. Their ancestors' bedside tales to either lull her into sweet sleep or keep her up all night in bone-deep terror.

The khagan was a living myth. As much of a deity as the thirty-six gods who ruled over this city and empire.

There were as many temples to those gods in Antica as there were tributes to the various khagans. *More.*

They called it the god-city for them—and for the living god seated on the ivory throne atop that golden dais.

It was indeed pure gold, just as her father's whispered legends claimed.

And the khagan's six children ... Nesryn could name them all without introduction.

After the meticulous research Chaol had done while on their ship, she

had no doubt he could as well.

But that was not how this meeting was to go.

For as much as *she* had taught the former captain about her homeland these weeks, he'd instructed her on court protocol. He had rarely been so directly involved, yes, but he had witnessed enough of it while serving the king.

An observer of the game who was now to be a prime player. With the stakes unbearably high.

They waited in silence for the khagan to speak.

She'd tried not to gawk while walking through the palace. She had never set foot inside it during her few visits to Antica over the years. Neither had her father, or his father, or any of her ancestors. In a city of gods, this was the holiest of temples. And deadliest of labyrinths.

The khagan did not move from his ivory throne.

A newer, wider throne, dating from a hundred years ago—when the seventh khagan had chucked out the old one because his large frame didn't fit in it. He'd eaten and drunk himself to death, history claimed, but at least had the good sense to name his Heir before he clutched his chest one day and slumped dead ... right in that throne.

Urus, the current khagan, was no more than sixty, and seemed in far

better condition. Though his dark hair had long since gone as white as his carved throne, though scars peppered his wrinkled skin as a reminder to all that *he* had fought for this throne in the final days of his mother's life ... His onyx eyes, slender and uptilted, were bright as stars. Aware and all-seeing.

Atop his snowy head sat no crown. For gods among mortals did not need markers of their divine rule.

Behind him, strips of white silk tied to the open windows fluttered in the hot breeze. Sending the thoughts of the khagan and his family to where the soul of the deceased—whoever they might be, someone important, no doubt—had now rejoined the Eternal Blue Sky and Slumbering Earth that the khagan and all his ancestors still honored in lieu of the pantheon of thirty-six gods their citizens remained free to worship.

Or any other gods outside of it, should their territories be new enough to not yet have had their gods incorporated into the fold. There had to be several of those, since during his three decades of rule, the man seated before them had added a handful of overseas kingdoms to their borders.

A kingdom for every ring adorning his scar-flecked fingers, precious stones glinting among them.

A warrior bedecked in finery. Those hands slid from the arms of his

ivory throne—assembled from the hewn tusks of the mighty beasts that roamed the central grasslands—and settled in his lap, hidden beneath swaths of gold-trimmed blue silk. Indigo dye from the steamy, lush lands in the west. From Balruhn, where Nesryn’s own people had originally hailed, before curiosity and ambition drove her great-grandfather to drag his family over mountains and grasslands and deserts to the god-city in the arid north. The Faliqs had long been tradesmen, and not of anything particularly fine. Just simple, good cloth and household spices. Her uncle still traded such things and, through various lucrative investments, had become a moderately wealthy man, his family now dwelling in a beautiful home within this very city. A definitive step up from a baker—the path her father had chosen upon leaving these shores.

“It is not every day that a new king sends someone so important to our shores,” the khagan said at last, using their own tongue and not Halha, the language of the southern continent. “I suppose we should deem it an honor.”

His accent was so like her father’s—but the tone lacked the warmth, the humor. A man who had been obeyed his entire life, and fought to earn his crown. And executed two of the siblings who proved to be sore losers. The surviving three ... one had gone into exile, and the other two had sworn

fealty to their brother. By having the healers of the Torre render them infertile.

Chaol inclined his head. “The honor is mine, Great Khagan.”

Not *Majesty*—that was for kings or queens. There was no term high or grand enough for this man before them. Only the title that the first of his ancestors had borne: Great Khagan.

“Yours,” the khagan mused, those dark eyes now sliding to Nesryn.

“And what of your companion?”

Nesryn fought the urge to bow again. Dorian Havilliard was the opposite of this man, she realized. Aelin Galathynius, however ... Nesryn wondered if the young queen might have more in common with the khagan than she did with the Havilliard king. Or would, if Aelin survived long enough. If she reached her throne.

Nesryn shoved those thoughts down as Chaol peered at her, his shoulders tightening. Not at the words, not at the company, but simply because she knew that the mere act of having to look *up*, facing this mighty warrior-king in that chair ... Today would be a hard one for him.

Nesryn inclined her head slightly. “I am Nesryn Faliq, Captain of the Royal Guard of Adarlan. As Lord Westfall once was before King Dorian appointed him as his Hand earlier this summer.” She was grateful that years

spent living in Rifthold had taught her not to smile, not to cringe or show fear—grateful that she’d learned to keep her voice cool and steady even while her knees quaked.

Nesryn continued, “My family hails from here, Great Khagan. Antica still owns a piece of my soul.” She placed a hand over her heart, the fine threads of her gold-and-crimson uniform, the colors of the empire that had made her family often feel hunted and unwanted, scraping against her calluses. “The honor of being in your palace is the greatest of my life.” It was, perhaps, true.

If she found time to visit her family in the quiet, garden-filled Runni Quarter—home mostly to merchants and tradesmen like her uncle—they would certainly consider it so.

The khagan only smiled a bit. “Then allow me to welcome you to your true home, Captain.”

Nesryn felt, more than saw, Chaol’s flicker of annoyance. She wasn’t entirely certain what had triggered it: the claim on her homeland, or the official title that had now passed to her.

But Nesryn bowed her head again in thanks.

The khagan said to Chaol, “I will assume you are here to woo me into joining this war of yours.”

Chaol countered a shade tersely, “We’re here at the behest of my king.”

A note of pride at that word. “To begin what we hope will be a new era of prosperous trade and peace.”

One of the khagan’s offspring—a young woman with hair like flowing night and eyes like dark fire—exchanged a wry look with the sibling to her left, a man perhaps three years her elder.

Hasar and Sartaq, then. Third and secondborn, respectively. Each wore similar loose pants and embroidered tunics, with fine leather boots rising to their knees. Hasar was no beauty, but those eyes ... The flame dancing in them as she glanced to her elder brother made up for it.

And Sartaq—commander of his father’s ruk riders. The rukhin.

The northern aerial cavalry of his people had long dwelled in the towering Tavan Mountains with their ruks: enormous birds, eagle-like in shape, large enough to carry off cattle and horses. Without the sheer bulk and destructive weight of the Ironteeth witches’ wyverns, but swift and nimble and clever as foxes. The perfect mounts for the legendary archers who flew them into battle.

Sartaq’s face was solemn, his broad shoulders thrown back. A man perhaps as ill at ease in his fine clothes as Chaol. She wondered if his ruk, Kadara, was perched on one of the palace’s thirty-six minarets, eyeing the

cowering servants and guards, waiting impatiently for her master's return.

That Sartaq was here ... They had to have known, then. Well in advance.

That she and Chaol were coming.

The knowing glance that passed between Sartaq and Hasar told Nesryn enough: they, at least, had discussed the possibilities of this visit.

Sartaq's gaze slid from his sister to Nesryn.

She yielded a blink. His brown skin was darker than the others'—perhaps from all that time in the skies and sunlight—his eyes a solid ebony.

Depthless and unreadable. His black hair remained unbound save for a small braid that curved over the arch of his ear. The rest of his hair fell to just past his muscled chest, and swayed slightly as he gave what Nesryn could have sworn was a mocking incline of his head.

A ragtag, humbled pair, Adarlan had sent. The injured former captain, and the common-bred current one. Perhaps the khagan's initial words about *honor* had been a veiled mention of what he perceived as an insult.

Nesryn dragged her attention away from the prince, even as she felt Sartaq's keen stare lingering like some phantom touch.

"We arrive bearing gifts from His Majesty, the King of Adarlan," Chaol was saying, and twisted in his chair to motion the servants behind them to come forward.

Queen Georgina and her court had practically raided the royal coffers before they'd fled to their mountain estates this spring. And the former king had smuggled out much of what was left during those final few months. But before they'd sailed here, Dorian had ventured into the many vaults beneath the castle. Nesryn still could hear his echoed curse, filthier than she'd ever heard him speak, as he found little more than gold marks within.

Aelin, as usual, had a plan.

Nesryn had been standing beside her new king when Aelin had flipped open two trunks in her chambers. Jewelry fit for a queen—for a Queen of Assassins—had sparkled within.

I've enough funds for now, Aelin had only said to Dorian when he began to object. *Give the khagan some of Adarlan's finest.*

In the weeks since, Nesryn had wondered if Aelin had been glad to be rid of what she'd purchased with her blood money. The jewels of Adarlan, it seemed, would not travel to Terrasen.

And now, as the servants laid out the four smaller trunks—divided from the original two to make it seem like *more*, Aelin had suggested—as they flipped open the lids, the still-silent court pressed in to see.

A murmur went through them at the glistening gems and gold and silver.

“A gift,” Chaol declared as even the khagan himself leaned forward to

examine the trove. “From King Dorian Havilliard of Adarlan, and Aelin Galathynius, Queen of Terrasen.”

Princess Hasar’s eyes snapped to Chaol at the second name.

Prince Sartaq only glanced back at his father. The eldest son, Arghun, frowned at the jewels.

Arghun—the politician amongst them, beloved by the merchants and power brokers of the continent. Slender and tall, he was a scholar who traded not in coin and finery but in knowledge.

Prince of Spies, they called Arghun. While his two brothers had become the finest of warriors, Arghun had honed his mind, and now oversaw his father’s thirty-six viziers. So that frown at the treasure ...

Necklaces of diamond and ruby. Bracelets of gold and emerald. Earrings—veritable small chandeliers—of sapphire and amethyst. Exquisitely wrought rings, some crowned with jewels as large as a swallow’s egg. Combs and pins and brooches. Blood-gained, blood-bought.

The youngest of the assembled royal children, a fine-boned, comely woman, leaned the closest. Duva. A thick silver ring with a sapphire of near-obscene size adorned her slender hand, pressed delicately against the considerable swell of her belly.

Perhaps six months along, though the flowing clothes—she favored

purple and rose—and her slight build could distort that. Certainly her first child, the result of her arranged marriage to a prince hailing from an overseas territory to the far east, a southern neighbor of Doranelle that had noted the rumblings of its Fae Queen and wanted to secure the protection of the southern empire across the ocean. Perhaps the first attempt, Nesryn and others had wondered, of the khaganate greatly expanding its own considerable continent.

Nesryn didn't let herself look too long at the life growing beneath that bejeweled hand.

For if one of Duva's siblings were crowned khagan, the first task of the new ruler—after his or her sufficient offspring were produced—would be to eliminate any other challenges to the throne. Starting with the offspring of his or her siblings, if they challenged their right to rule.

She wondered how Duva was able to endure it. If she had come to love the babe growing in her womb, or if she was wise enough to not allow such a feeling. If the father of that babe would do everything he could to get that child to safety should it come to that.

The khagan at last leaned back in his throne. His children had straightened again, Duva's hand falling back at her side.

“Jewels,” Chaol explained, “set by the finest of Adarlanian craftsmen.”

The khagan toyed with a citrine ring on his own hand. “If they came from Aelin Galathynius’s trove, I have no doubt that they are.”

A beat of silence between Nesryn and Chaol. They had known—anticipated—that the khagan had spies in every land, on every sea. That Aelin’s past might be just a tad difficult to work around.

“For you are not only Adarlan’s Hand,” the khagan went on, “but also the Ambassador of Terrasen, are you not?”

“Indeed I am,” Chaol said simply.

The khagan rose with only the slightest stiffness, his children immediately stepping aside to clear a path for him to step off the golden dais.

The tallest of them—strapping and perhaps more unchecked than Sartaq’s quiet intensity—eyed up the crowd as if assessing any threats within. Kashin. Fourthborn.

If Sartaq commanded the ruks in the northern and central skies, then Kashin controlled the armies on land. Foot soldiers and the horse-lords, mostly. Arghun held sway over the viziers, and Hasar, rumor claimed, had the armadas bowing to her. Yet there remained something less polished about Kashin, his dark hair braided back from his broad-planed face.

Handsome, yes—but it was as if life amongst his troops had rubbed off on

him, and not necessarily in a bad way.

The khagan descended the dais, his cobalt robes whispering along the floor. And with every step over the green marble, Nesryn realized that this man had indeed once commanded not just the ruks in the skies, but also the horse-lords, *and* swayed the armadas to join him. And then Urus and his elder brother had gone hand-to-hand in combat at the behest of their mother while she lay dying from a wasting sickness that even the Torre could not heal. The son who walked off the sand would be khagan.

The former khagan had a penchant for spectacle. And for this final fight between her two selected offspring, she had placed them in the great amphitheater in the heart of the city, the doors open to any who could claw inside to find a seat. People had sat upon the archways and steps, with thousands cramming the streets that flowed to the white-stoned building. Ruks and their riders had perched on the pillars crowning the uppermost level, more rukhin circling in the skies above.

The two would-be Heirs had fought for six hours.

Not just against each other, but also against the horrors their mother unleashed to test them: great cats sprang from hidden cages beneath the sandy floor; iron-spiked chariots with spear-throwers had charged from the gloom of the tunnel entrances to run them down.

Nesryn's father had been amongst the frenzied mob in the streets,
listening to the shouted reports from those dangling off the columns.

The final blow hadn't been an act of brutality or hate.

The now-khagan's elder brother, Orda, had taken a spear to the side
thanks to one of those charioteers. After six hours of bloody battle and
survival, the blow had kept him down.

And Urus had set aside his sword. Absolute silence had fallen in the
arena. Silence as Urus had extended a bloodied hand to his fallen brother—
to help him.

Orda had sent a hidden dagger shooting for Urus's heart.

It had missed by two inches.

And Urus had ripped that dagger free, screaming, and plunged it right
back into his brother.

Urus did not miss as his brother had.

Nesryn wondered if a scar still marred the khagan's chest as he now
strode toward her and Chaol and the jewels displayed. If that long-dead
khagan had wept for her fallen son in private, slain by the one who would
take her crown in a matter of days. Or if she had never allowed herself to
love her children, knowing what must befall them.

Urus, Khagan of the Southern Continent, stopped before Nesryn and

Chaol. He towered over Nesryn by a good half foot, his shoulders still broad, spine still straight.

He bent with only a touch of age-granted strain to pluck up a necklace of diamond and sapphire from the chest. It glittered like a living river in his scar-flecked, bejeweled hands.

“My eldest, Arghun,” said the khagan, jerking his chin toward the narrow-faced prince monitoring all, “recently informed me of some fascinating information regarding Queen Aelin Ashryver Galathynius.”

Nesryn waited for the blow. Chaol just held Urus’s gaze.

But the khagan’s dark eyes—Sartaq’s eyes, she realized—danced as he said to Chaol, “A queen at nineteen would make many uneasy. Dorian Havilliard, at least, has been trained since birth to take up his crown, to control a court and kingdom. But Aelin Galathynius ...”

The khagan chucked the necklace into the chest. Its thunk was as loud as steel on stone.

“I suppose some would call ten years as a trained assassin to be experience.”

Murmurs again rippled through the throne room. Hasar’s fire-bright eyes practically glowed. Sartaq’s face did not shift at all. Perhaps a skill learned from his eldest brother—whose spies had to be skilled indeed if they’d

learned of Aelin's past. Even though Arghun himself seemed to be struggling to keep a smug smile from his lips.

"We may be separated by the Narrow Sea," the khagan said to Chaol, whose features did not so much as alter, "but even we have heard of Celaena Sardothien. You bring me jewels, no doubt from her own collection. Yet they are jewels for *me*, when my daughter Duva"—a glance toward his pregnant, pretty daughter standing closely beside Hasar—"has yet to receive any sort of wedding gift from either your new king or returned queen, while every other ruler sent theirs nearly half a year ago." Nesryn hid her wince. An oversight that could be explained by so many truths—but not ones that they dared voice, not here. Chaol didn't offer any of them as he remained silent.

"But," the khagan went on, "regardless of the jewels you've now dumped at my feet like sacks of grain, I would still rather have the truth. Especially after Aelin Galathynius shattered your own glass castle, murdered your former king, and seized your capital city."

"If Prince Arghun has the information," Chaol said at last with unfaltering coolness, "perhaps you do not need it from me."

Nesryn stifled her cringe at the defiance, the tone—

"Perhaps not," the khagan said, even as Arghun's eyes narrowed slightly.

“But I think *you* should like some truth from me.”

Chaol didn't ask for it. Didn't look remotely interested beyond his,

“Oh?”

Kashin stiffened. His father's fiercest defender, then. Arghun only exchanged glances with a vizier and smiled toward Chaol like an adder ready to strike.

“Here is why I think you have come, Lord Westfall, Hand to the King.”

Only the gulls wheeling high above the dome of the throne room dared make any noise.

The khagan shut lid after lid on the trunks.

“I think you have come to convince me to join your war. Adarlan is cleaved, Terrasen is destitute, and will no doubt have some issue convincing her surviving lords to fight for an untried queen who spent ten years indulging herself in Rifthold, purchasing these jewels with blood money.

Your list of allies is short and brittle. Duke Perrington's forces are anything but. The other kingdoms on your continent are shattered and separated from your northern territories by Perrington's armies. So you have arrived here, fast as the eight winds can carry you, to beg me to send my armies to your shores. To convince me to spill our blood on a lost cause.”

“Some might consider it a noble cause,” Chaol countered.

“I am not done yet,” the khagan said, lifting a hand.

Chaol bristled but did not speak out of turn again. Nesryn’s heart thundered.

“Many would argue,” the khagan said, waving that upraised hand toward a few viziers, toward Arghun and Hasar, “that we remain out of it. Or better yet, ally with the force sure to win, whose trade has been profitable for us these ten years.”

A wave of that hand toward some other men and women in the gold robes of viziers. Toward Sartaq and Kashin and Duva. “Some would say that we risk allying with Perrington only to potentially face his armies in our harbors one day. That the shattered kingdoms of Eyllwe and Fenharrow might again become wealthy under new rule, and fill our coffers with good trade. I have no doubt you will promise me that it shall be so. You will offer me exclusive trading deals, likely to your own disadvantage. But you are desperate, and there is nothing you possess that I do not already own. That I cannot take if I wish.”

Chaol kept his mouth shut, thankfully. Even as his brown eyes simmered at the quiet threat.

The khagan peered into the fourth and final trunk. Jeweled combs and brushes, ornate perfume bottles made by Adarlan’s finest glassblowers. The

same who had built the castle Aelin had shattered. “So, you have come to convince me to join your cause. And I shall consider it while you stay here. Since you have undoubtedly come for another purpose, too.”

A flick of that scarred, jeweled hand toward the chair. Color stained Chaol’s tan cheeks, but he did not flinch, did not cower. Nesryn forced herself to do the same.

“Arghun informed me your injuries are new—that they happened when the glass castle exploded. It seems the Queen of Terrasen was not quite so careful about shielding her allies.”

A muscle feathered in Chaol’s jaw as everyone, from prince to servant, looked to his legs.

“Because your relations with Doranelle are now strained, also thanks to Aelin Galathynius, I assume the only path toward healing that remains open to you is here. At the Torre Cesme.”

The khagan shrugged, the only reveal of the irreverent warrior-youth he’d once been. “My beloved wife will be deeply upset if I were to deny an injured man a chance at healing”—the empress was nowhere to be seen in this room, Nesryn realized with a start—“so I, of course, shall grant you permission to enter the Torre. Whether its healers will agree to work upon you shall be up to them. Even I do not control the will of the Torre.”

The Torre—the Tower. It dominated the southern edge of Antica, nestled atop its highest hill to overlook the city that sloped down toward the green sea. Domain of its famed healers, and tribute to Silba, the healer-goddess who blessed them. Of the thirty-six gods this empire had welcomed into the fold over the centuries, from religions near and far, in this city of gods ... Silba reigned unchallenged.

Chaol looked like he was swallowing hot coals, but he mercifully managed to bow his head. “I thank you for your generosity, Great Khagan.” “Rest tonight—I will inform them that you shall be ready tomorrow morning. Since you cannot go to them, one will be sent to you. If they agree.”

Chaol’s fingers shifted in his lap, but he did not clench them. Nesryn still held her breath.

“I am at their disposal,” Chaol said tightly.

The khagan shut the final trunk of jewels. “You may keep your presents, Hand of the King, Ambassador to Aelin Galathynius. I have no use for them—and no interest.”

Chaol’s head snapped up, as if something in the khagan’s tone had snared him. “Why.”

Nesryn barely hid her cringe. More of a demand than anyone ever dared

make of the man, judging by the surprised anger in the khagan's eyes, in the glances exchanged between his children.

But Nesryn caught the flicker of something else within the khagan's eyes. A weariness.

Something oily slid into her gut as she noted the white banners streaming from the windows, all over the city. As she looked to the six heirs and counted again.

Not six.

Five. Only five were here.

Death-banners at the royal household. All over the city.

They were not a mourning people—not in the way they could be in Adarlan, dressing all in black and moping for months. Even amongst the khagan's royal family, life picked up and went on, their dead not stuffed in stone catacombs or coffins, but shrouded in white and laid beneath the open skies of their sealed-off, sacred reserve on the distant steppes.

Nesryn glanced down the line of five heirs, counting. The eldest five were present. And just as she realized that Tumelun, the youngest—barely seventeen—was not there, the khagan said to Chaol, “Your spies are indeed useless if you have not heard.”

With that, he strode for his throne, leaving Sartaq to step forward, the

second-eldest prince's depthless eyes veiled with sorrow. Sartaq gave Nesryn a silent nod. Yes. Yes, her suspicions were right—

Sartaq's solid, pleasant voice filled the chamber. "Our beloved sister, Tumelun, died unexpectedly three weeks ago."

Oh, gods. So many words and rituals had been passed over; merely coming here to demand their aid in war was uncouth, untoward—

Chaol said into the fraught silence, meeting the stares of each taut-faced prince and princess, then finally the weary-eyed khagan himself, "You have my deepest condolences."

Nesryn breathed, "May the northern wind carry her to fairer plains."

Only Sartaq bothered to nod his thanks, while the others now turned cold and stiff.

Nesryn shot Chaol a silent, warning look not to ask about the death. He read the expression on her face and nodded.

The khagan scratched at a fleck on his ivory throne, the silence as heavy as one of the coats the horse-lords still wore against that bitter northern wind on the steppes and their unforgiving wooden saddles.

"We've been at sea for three weeks," Chaol tried to offer, his voice softer now.

The khagan did not bother to appear understanding. "That would also

explain why you are so unaware of the other bit of news, and why these cold jewels might be of more use for *you*.” The khagan’s lips curled in a mirthless smile. “Arghun’s contacts also brought word from a ship this morning. Your royal coffers in Rifthold are no longer accessible. Duke Perrington and his host of flying terrors have sacked Rifthold.”

Silence, pulsing and hollow, swept through Nesryn. She wasn’t sure if Chaol was breathing.

“We do not have word on King Dorian’s location, but he yielded Rifthold to them. Fled into the night, if rumor is to be believed. The city has fallen. Everything to the south of Rifthold belongs to Perrington and his witches now.”

Nesryn saw the faces of her nieces and nephews first.

Then the face of her sister. Then her father. Saw their kitchen, the bakery. The pear tarts cooling on the long, wooden table.

Dorian had left them. Left them all to ... to do what? Find help?

Survive? Run to Aelin?

Had the royal guard remained to fight? Had anyone fought to save the innocents in the city?

Her hands were shaking. She didn’t care. Didn’t care if these people clad in riches sneered.

Her sister's children, the great joy in her life ...

Chaol was staring up at her. Nothing on his face. No devastation, no shock.

That crimson-and-gold uniform became stifling. Strangling.

Witches and wyverns. In her city. With those iron teeth and nails.

Shredding and bleeding and tormenting. Her family—her *family*—
“Father.”

Sartaq had stepped forward once more. Those onyx eyes slid between Nesryn and the khagan. “It has been a long journey for our guests. Politics aside,” he said, giving a disapproving glance at Arghun, who seemed amused—*amused* at this news he'd brought, that had set the green marble floors roiling beneath her boots—“we are still a nation of hospitality. Let them rest for a few hours. And then join us for dinner.”

Hasar came to Sartaq's side, frowning at Arghun while she did. Perhaps not from reprimand like her brother, but simply for Arghun not telling *her* of this news first. “Let no guest pass through our home and find its comforts lacking.” Even though the words were welcoming, Hasar's tone was anything but.

Their father gave them a bemused glance. “Indeed.” Urus waved a hand toward the servants by the far pillars. “Escort them to their rooms. And

dispatch a message to the Torre to send their finest—Hafiza, if she'll come down from that tower.”

Nesryn scarcely heard the rest. If the witches held the city, then the Valg who had infested it earlier this summer ... There would be no one to fight them. No one to shield her family.

If they had survived.

She couldn't breathe. Couldn't think.

She should not have left. Should not have taken this position.

They could be dead, or suffering. Dead. Dead.

She did not notice the female servant who came to push Chaol's chair.

Barely noticed the hand Chaol reached out to twine through her own.

Nesryn didn't so much as bow to the khagan as they left.

She could not stop seeing their faces.

The children. Her sister's smiling, round-bellied children.

She should not have come.

3

Nesryn had gone into shock.

And Chaol could not go to her, could not scoop her into his arms and hold her close.

Not when she had walked, silent and drifting like a wraith, right into a

bedroom of the lavish suite they'd been appointed on the first floor of the palace, and shut the door behind her. As if she had forgotten anyone else in the world existed.

He didn't blame her.

Chaol let the servant, a fine-boned young woman with chestnut hair that fell in heavy curls to her narrow waist, wheel him into the second bedroom. The suite overlooked a garden of fruit trees and burbling fountains, cascades of pink and purple blossoms hanging from potted plants anchored into the balcony above. They provided living curtains before his towering bedroom windows—doors, he realized.

The servant mumbled something about drawing a bath, her use of his language unwieldy compared to the skill of the khagan and his children. Not that he was in any position to judge: he was barely fluent in any of the other languages within his own continent.

She slipped behind a carved wooden screen that no doubt led into his bathing chamber, and Chaol peered through his still-open bedroom door, across the pale marble foyer, to the shut doors of Nesryn's bedroom.

They should not have left.

He couldn't have done anything, but ... He knew what the not-knowing would do to Nesryn. What it was already doing to him.

Dorian was not dead, he told himself. He had gotten out. Fled. If he were in Perrington's grip—Erawan's grip—they would have known. Prince Arghun would have known.

His city, sacked by the witches. He wondered if Manon Blackbeak had led the attack.

Chaol tried and failed to recount where the debts were stacked between them. Aelin had spared Manon's life at Temis's temple, but Manon had given them vital information about Dorian under the Valg thrall. Did it make them even? Or tentative allies?

It was a waste to hope that Manon would turn against Morath. But he sent up a silent prayer to whatever god might be listening to protect Dorian, to guide his king to friendlier harbors.

Dorian would make it. He was too clever, too gifted, not to. There was no other alternative—none—that Chaol would accept. Dorian was alive, and safe. Or on his way to safety. And when Chaol got a moment, he was going to squeeze the information out of the eldest prince. Mourning or no. Everything Arghun knew, *he* would know. And then he'd ask that servant girl to comb every merchant ship for information about the attack.

No word—there had been no word about Aelin. Where she was now, what she'd been doing. Aelin, who might very well be the thing that cost

him this alliance.

He ground his teeth, and was still grinding them as the suite doors opened and a tall, broad-shouldered man strode in as if he owned the place. Chaol supposed he did. Prince Kashin was alone and unarmed, though he moved with the ease of a person confident in his body's unfailing strength.

How, Chaol supposed, he himself had once walked about the palace in Rifthold.

Chaol lowered his head in greeting as the prince shut the hall door and surveyed him. It was a warrior's assessment, frank and thorough. When his brown eyes at last met Chaol's, the prince said in Adarlan's tongue, "Injuries like yours are not uncommon here, and I have seen many of them—especially among the horse-tribes. My family's people."

Chaol didn't particularly feel like discussing his injuries with the prince, with anyone, so he only nodded. "I'm sure you have."

Kashin cocked his head, scanning Chaol again, his dark braid slipping over his muscled shoulder. Reading, perhaps, Chaol's desire not to start down this particular road. "My father indeed wishes you both to join us at dinner. And more than that, to join us every night afterward while you are here. And sit at the high table."

It wasn't a strange request of a visiting dignitary, and it was certainly an honor to sit at the khagan's own table, but to send his son to do it ... Chaol considered his next words carefully, then simply chose the most obvious one. "Why?"

Surely the family wished to keep close to one another after losing their youngest member. Inviting strangers to join them—

The prince's jaw tightened. Not a man used to veiling his emotions, as his three elder siblings were. "Arghun reports our palace is safe of spies from Duke Perrington's forces, that his agents have not yet come. I am not of that belief. And Sartaq—" The prince caught himself, as if not wanting to bring in his brother—or potential ally. Kashin grimaced. "There was a reason I chose to live amongst soldiers. The double-talk of this court ..."

Chaol was tempted to say he understood. Had felt that way for most of his life. But he asked, "You think Perrington's forces have infiltrated this court?"

How much did Kashin, or Arghun, know of Perrington's forces—know the truth of the Valg king who wore Perrington's skin? Or the armies he commanded, worse than any their imaginations might conjure? But that information ... He'd keep that to himself. See if it could somehow be used, if Arghun and the khagan did not know of it.

Kashin rubbed at his neck. “I do not know if it is Perrington, or someone from Terrasen, or Melisande, or Wendlyn. All I know is that my sister is now dead.”

Chaol’s heart stumbled a beat. But he dared ask, “How did it come about?”

Grief flickered in Kashin’s eyes. “Tumelun was always a bit wild, reckless. Prone to moods. One day, happy and laughing; the next, withdrawn and hopeless. They ...” His throat bobbed. “They say she leaped from her balcony because of it. Duva and her husband found her later that night.”

Any death in a family was devastating, but a suicide ... “I’m sorry,” Chaol offered quietly.

Kashin shook his head, sunlight from the garden dancing on his black hair. “I do not believe it. My Tumelun would not have jumped.”

My Tumelun. The words told enough about the prince’s closeness to his younger sister.

“You suspect foul play?”

“All I know is that no matter Tumelun’s moods ... I knew her. As I know my own heart.” He put a hand over it. “She would not have jumped.”

Chaol considered his words carefully once again. “As sorry as I am for

your loss, do you have any reason to suspect why a foreign kingdom might have engineered it?”

Kashin paced a few steps. “No one within *our* lands would be stupid enough.”

“Well, no one within Terrasen or Adarlan would ever do such a thing—even to manipulate you into this war.”

Kashin studied him for a heartbeat. “Even a queen who was once an assassin herself?”

Chaol didn’t let one flicker of emotion show. “Assassin she might have been, but Aelin had hard lines that she did not cross. Killing or harming children was one of them.”

Kashin paused before the dresser against the garden wall, adjusting a gilded box on its polished dark surface. “I know. I read that in my brother’s reports, too. Details of her kills.” Chaol could have sworn the prince shuddered before he added, “I believe you.”

No doubt why the prince was even having this conversation with him.

Kashin went on, “Which leaves not many other foreign powers who might do it—and Perrington at the top of that short list.”

“But why target your sister?”

“I do not know.” Kashin paced another few steps. “She was young,