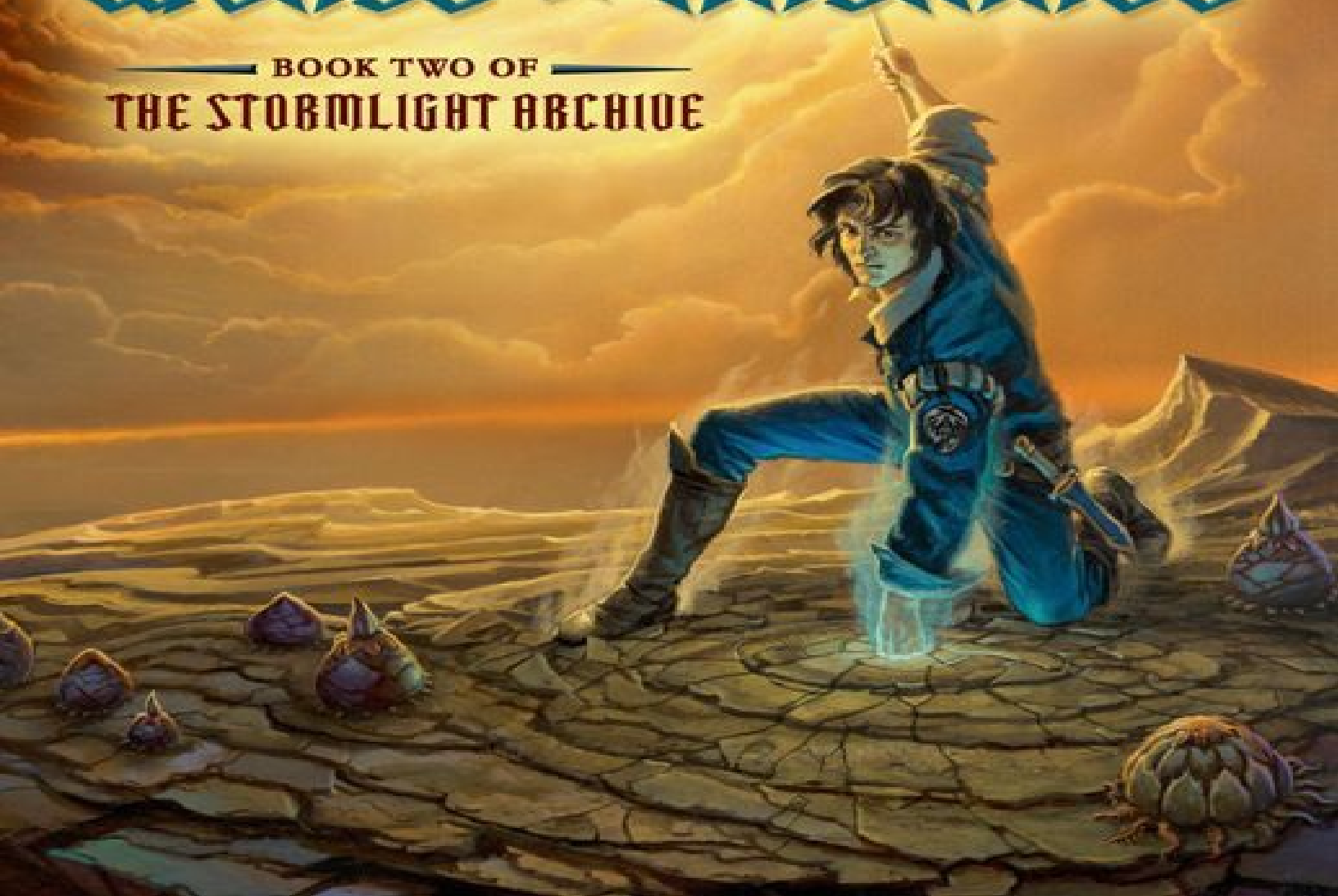


#1 *NEW YORK TIMES* BESTSELLING AUTHOR

BRANDON SANDERSON

WORDS OF RADIANCE

— BOOK TWO OF —
THE STOBMLIGHT ARCHIVE





BRANDON SANDERSON

WORDS OF
RADIANCE

Book Two of
THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE



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For Oliver Sanderson,

Who was born during the middle of the writing of this book, and was walking
by the time it was done.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

As you might imagine, producing a book in the Stormlight Archive is a major undertaking. It involved almost eighteen months of writing, from outline to final revision, and includes the artwork of four different individuals and the editorial eyes of a whole host of people, not to mention the teams at Tor who do production, publicity, marketing, and everything else a major book needs in order to be successful, Adolin,” Jakamav said. in a E4.

For some two decades now, the Stormlight Archive has been my dream—the story I always wished I could tell. The people you’ll read about below quite literally make my dreams a reality, and there aren’t words to express my gratitude for their efforts. First in line on this novel needs to be my assistant and primary continuity editor, the incumbent Peter Ahlstrom. He worked very long hours on this book, putting up with my repeated insistence that things which did not fit continuity actually did—eventually persuading me I was wrong far more often than not.

As always, Moshe Feder—the man who discovered me as a writer—did excellent editorial work on the book. Joshua Bilmes, my agent, worked hard on the book in both an agenting and editorial capacity. He’s joined by Eddie Schneider, Brady “Words of Bradiance” McReynolds, Krystyna Lopez, Sam Morgan, and Christa Atkinson at the agency. At Tor, Tom Doherty put up with me delivering a book even longer than the last one when I promised to make it shorter. Terry McGarry did the copyediting, Irene Gallo is responsible for the art direction for the cover, Greg Collins for interior design, Brian Lipofsky’s team at Westchester Publishing Services for compositing, Meryl Gross and Karl Gold for production, Patty Garcia and her team for publicity. Paul Stevens acted as superman whenever we needed him. A big thanks to all of you.

You may have noticed that this volume, like the one before it, includes amazing art. My vision for the Stormlight Archive has always been of a series that transcended common artistic expectations for a book of its nature. As such, it is an honor to once again have my favorite artist, Michael Whelan,

involved in the project. I feel that his cover has captured Kaladin perfectly, and I am extremely grateful for the extra time he spent on the cover—at his own insistence—going through three drafts before he was satisfied. To have endpapers of Shallan as well is more than I had hoped to see for the book, and I’m humbled by how well this whole package came together.

When I pitched the Stormlight Archive, I spoke of having “guest star” artists do pieces for the books here and there. We have our first of those in this novel, for which Dan dos Santos (another of my personal favorite artists, and the man who did the cover for Warbreaker) agreed to do some interior illustrations.

Ben McSweeney graciously returned to do more brilliant sketchbook pages for us, and he is a pure delight to work with. Quick to recognize what I want, sometimes even when I’m not quite sure what I want, I’ve rarely met a person who mixes talent and professionalism in the way Ben does. You can find more of his art at InkThinker.net.

A long time ago, almost ten years now, I met a man named Isaác Stewart who—in addition to being an aspiring writer—was an excellent artist, particularly when it came to things like maps and symbols. I started collaborating with him on books (starting with *Mistborn*) and he eventually set me up on a blind date with a woman named Emily Bushman—whom I subsequently married. So needless to say, I owe Isaac a few big favors. With each progressive book he works on, that debt on my part grows greater as I see the amazing work he has done. This year, we decided to make his involvement a little more official as I hired him full-time to be an in-house artist and to help me with administrative tasks. So if you see him, welcome him to the team. (And tell him to keep working on his own books, which are quite good.)

Also joining us at Dragonsteel Entertainment is Kara Stewart, Isaac’s wife, as our shipping emerald broamfly manager. (I actually tried to hire Kara first—and Isaac piped up noting that some of the things I wanted to hire her for, he could do. And it ended up that I got both of them, in a very convenient deal.) She’s the one you’ll interact with if you order T-shirts, posters, or the like through my website. And she’s awesome.

We used a few expert consultants on this book, including Matt Bushman for

his songwriting and poetry expertise. Ellen Asher gave some great direction on the scenes with horses, and Karen Ahlstrom was an additional poetry and song consultant. Mi'chelle Walker acted as Alethi handwriting consultant. Finally, Elise Warren gave us some very nice notes relating to the psychology of a key character. Thank you all for lending me your brains.

This book had an extensive beta read done under some strict time constraints, and so a hearty bridgeman salute goes to those who participated. They are: Jason Denzel, Mi'chelle Walker, Josh Walker, Eric Lake, David Behrens, Joel Phillips, Jory Phillips, Kristina Kugler, Lyndsey Luther, Kim Garrett, Layne Garrett, Brian Delambre, Brian T. Hill, Alice Arneson, Bob Kluttz, and Nathan Goodrich.

Proofreaders at Tor include Ed Chapman, Brian Connolly, and Norma Hoffman. Community proofreaders include Adam Wilson, Aubree and Bao Pham, Blue Cole, Chris King, Chris Kluwe, Emily Grange, Gary Singer, Jakob Remick, Jared Gerlach, Kelly Neumann, Kendra Wilson, Kerry Morgan, Maren Menke, Matt Hatch, Patrick Mohr, Richard Fife, Rob Harper, Steve Godecke, Steve Karam, and Will Raboin.

My writing group managed to get through about half of the book, which is a lot, considering how long the novel is. They are an invaluable resource to me. Members are: Kaylynn ZoBell, Kathleen Dorsey Sanderson, Danielle Olsen, Ben-son-son-Ron, E. J. Patten, Alan Layton, and Karen Ahlstrom.

And finally, thanks to my loving (and rambunctious) family. Joel, Dallin, and little Oliver help keep me humble each day by always making me be the “bad guy” who gets beat up. My forgiving wife, Emily, put up with a lot this past year, as tours grew long, and I'm still not sure what I did to deserve h

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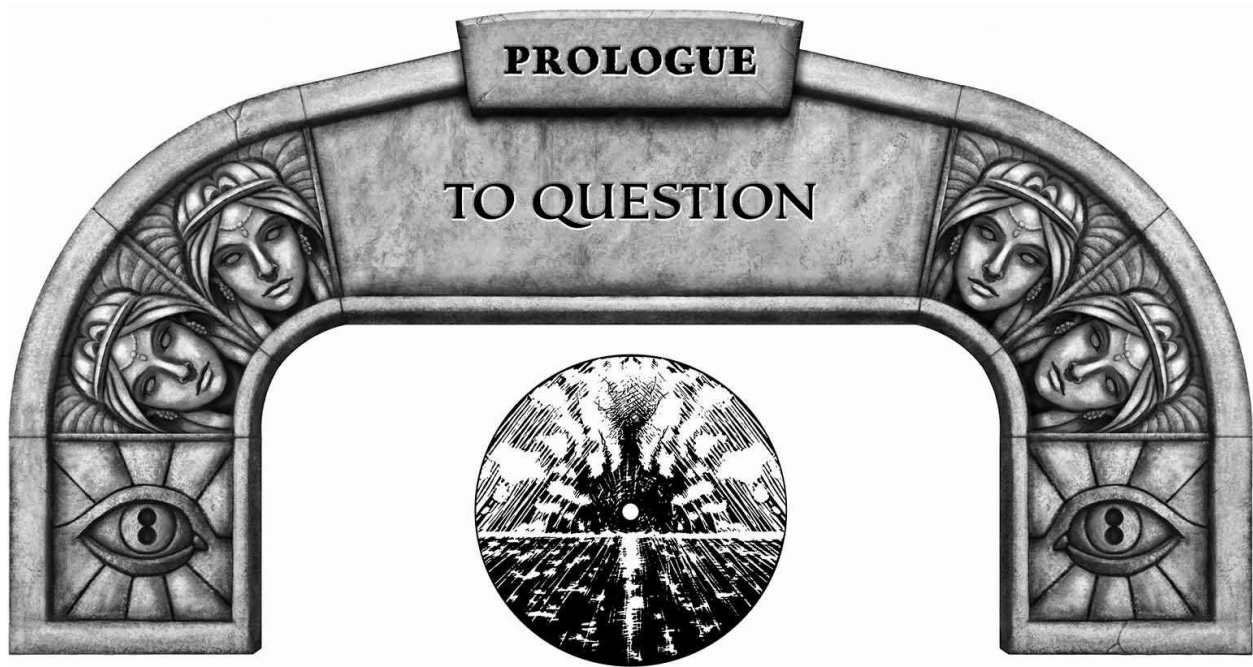
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SIX YEARS AGO

Jasnah Kholin pretended to enjoy the party, giving no indication that she intended to have one of the guests killed.

She wandered through the crowded feast hall, listening as wine greased tongues and dimmed minds. Her uncle Dalinar was in the full swing of it, rising from the high table to shout for the Parshendi to bring out their drummers. Jasnah's brother, Elhokar, hurried to shush their uncle—though the Alethi politely ignored Dalinar's outburst. All save Elhokar's wife, Aesudan, who snickered primly behind a handkerchief.

Jasnah turned away from the high table and continued through the room. She had an appointment with an assassin, and she was all too glad to be leaving the stuffy room, which stank of too many perfumes mingling. A quartet of women played flutes on a raised platform across from the lively hearth, but the music had long since grown tedious.

Unlike Dalinar, Jasnah drew stares. Like flies to rotten meat those eyes were, constantly following her. Whispers like buzzing wings. If there was one thing the Alethi court enjoyed more than wine, it was gossip. Everyone expected

Dalinar to lose himself to wine during a feast—but the king’s daughter, admitting to heresy? That was unprecedented.

Jasnah had spoken of her feelings for precisely that reason.

She passed the Parshendi delegation, which clustered near the high table, talking in their rhythmic language. Though this celebration honored them and the treaty they’d signed with Jasnah’s father, they didn’t look festive or even happy. They looked nervous. Of course, they weren’t human, and the way they reacted was sometimes odd.

Jasnah wanted to speak with them, but her appointment would not wait. She’d intentionally scheduled the meeting for the middle of the feast, as so many would be distracted and drunken. Jasnah headed toward the doors but then stopped in place.

Her shadow was pointing in the wrong direction.

The stuffy, shuffling, chattering room seemed to grow distant. Highprince Sadeas walked right through the shadow, which quite distinctly pointed toward the sphere lamp on the wall nearby. Engaged in conversation with his companion, Sadeas didn’t notice. Jasnah stared at that shadow—skin growing clammy, stomach clenched, the way she felt when she was about to vomit. Not again. She searched for another light source. A reason. Could she find a reason? No.

The shadow I said flatlyf the Kinganguidly melted back toward her, oozing to her feet and then stretching out the other way. Her tension eased. But had anyone else seen?

Blessedly, as she searched the room, she didn’t find any aghast stares. People’s attention had been drawn by the Parshendi drummers, who were clattering through the doorway to set up. Jasnah frowned as she noticed a non-Parshendi servant in loose white clothing helping them. A Shin man? That was unusual.

Jasnah composed herself. What did these episodes of hers mean? Superstitious folktales she’d read said that misbehaving shadows meant you

were cursed. She usually dismissed such things as nonsense, but some superstitions were rooted in fact. Her other experiences proved that. She would need to investigate further.

The calm, scholarly thoughts felt like a lie compared to the truth of her cold, clammy skin and the sweat trickling down the back of her neck. But it was important to be rational at all times, not just when calm. She forced herself out through the doors, leaving the muggy room for the quiet hallway. She'd chosen the back exit, commonly used by servants. It was the most direct route, after all.

Here, master-servants dressed in black and white moved on errands from their brightlords or ladies. She had expected that, but had not anticipated the sight of her father standing just ahead, in quiet conference with Brightlord Meridas Amaram. What was the king doing out here?

Gavilar Kholin was shorter than Amaram, yet the latter stooped shallowly in the king's company. That was common around Gavilar, who would speak with such quiet intensity that you wanted to lean in and listen, to catch every word and implication. He was a handsome man, unlike his brother, with a beard that outlined his strong jaw rather than covering it. He had a personal magnetism and intensity that Jasnah felt no biographer had yet managed to convey.

Tearim, captain of the King's Guard, loomed behind them. He wore Gavilar's Shardplate; the king himself had stopped wearing it of late, preferring to entrust it to Tearim, who was known as one of the world's great duelists. Instead, Gavilar wore robes of a majestic, classical style.

Jasnah glanced back at the feast hall. When had her father slipped out? Sloppy, she accused herself. You should have checked to see if he was still there before leaving.

Ahead, he rested his hand on Amaram's shoulder and raised a finger, speaking harshly but quietly, the words indistinct to Jasnah.

"Father?" she asked.

He glanced at her. “Ah, Jasnah. Retiring so early?”

“It’s hardly early,” Jasnah said, gliding forward. It seemed obvious to her that Gavilar and Amaram had ducked out to find privacy for their discussion.

“This is the tiresome part of the feast, where the conversation grows louder but no smarter, and the company drunken.”

“Many people consider that sort of thing enjoyable.”

“Many people, unfortunately, are idiots.”

Her father smiled. “Is it terribly difficult for you?” he asked softly. “Living with the rest of us, suffering our average wits and simple thoughts? Is it lonely to be so singular in your brilliance, Jasnah?”

She took it as the rebuke it was, and found herself blushing. Even her mother Navani could not do that to her.

“Perhaps if you ancient powerinffound pleasant associations,” Gavilar said, “you would enjoy the feasts.” His eyes swung toward Amaram, whom he’d long fancied as a potential match for her.

It would never happen. Amaram met her eyes, then murmured words of parting to her father and hastened away down the corridor.

“What errand did you give him?” Jasnah asked. “What are you about this night, Father?”

“The treaty, of course.”

The treaty. Why did he care so much about it? Others had counseled that he either ignore the Parshendi or conquer them. Gavilar insisted upon an accommodation.

“I should return to the celebration,” Gavilar said, motioning to Tearim. The two moved along the hallway toward the doors Jasnah had left.

“Father?” Jasnah said. “What is it you aren’t telling me?”

He glanced back at her, lingering. Pale green eyes, evidence of his good birth. When had he become so discerning? Storms . . . she felt as if she hardly knew this man any longer. Such a striking transformation in such a short time.

From the way he inspected her, it almost seemed that he didn't trust her. Did he know about her meeting with Liss?

He turned away without saying more and pushed back into the party, his guard following.

What is going on in this palace? Jasnah thought. She took a deep breath. She would have to prod further. Hopefully he hadn't discovered her meetings with assassins—but if he had, she would work with that knowledge. Surely he would see that someone needed to keep watch on the family as he grew increasingly consumed by his fascination with the Parshendi. Jasnah turned and continued on her way, passing a master-servant, who bowed.

After walking a short time in the corridors, Jasnah noticed her shadow behaving oddly again. She sighed in annoyance as it pulled toward the three Stormlight lamps on the walls. Fortunately, she'd passed from the populated area, and no servants were here to see.

“All right,” she snapped. “That's enough.”

She hadn't meant to speak aloud. However, as the words slipped out, several distant shadows—originating in an intersection up ahead—stirred to life. Her breath caught. Those shadows lengthened, deepened. Figures formed from them, growing, standing, rising.

Stormfather. I'm going insane.

One took the shape of a man of midnight blackness, though he had a certain reflective cast, as if he were made of oil. No . . . of some other liquid with a coating of oil floating on the outside, giving him a dark, prismatic quality.

He strode toward her and unsheathed a sword.

Logic, cold and resolute, guided Jasnah. Shouting would not bring help

quickly enough, and the inky litness of this creature bespoke a speed certain to exceed her own.

She stood her ground and met the thing's glare, causing it to hesitate. Behind it, a small clutch of other creatures had materialized from the darkness. She had sensed those eyes upon her during the previous months.

By now, the entire hallway had darkened, as if it had been submerged and was slowly sinking into lightless depths. Heart racing, breath quickening, Jasnah raised her hand to the granite wall beside her, seeking to touch something solid. Her fingers sank in unfortunate Wyndleto the stone a fraction, as if the wall had become mud.

Oh, storms. She had to do something. What? What could she possibly do?

The figure before her glanced at the wall. The wall lamp nearest Jasnah went dark. And then . . .

Then the palace disintegrated.

The entire building shattered into thousands upon thousands of small glass spheres, like beads. Jasnah screamed as she fell backward through a dark sky. She was no longer in the palace; she was somewhere else—another land, another time, another . . . something.

She was left with the sight of the dark, lustrous figure hovering in the air above, seeming satisfied as he resheathed his sword.

Jasnah crashed into something—an ocean of the glass beads. Countless others rained around her, clicking like hailstones into the strange sea. She had never seen this place; she could not explain what had happened or what it meant. She thrashed as she sank into what seemed an impossibility. Beads of glass on all sides. She couldn't see anything beyond them, only felt herself descending through this churning, suffocating, clattering mass.

She was going to die. Leaving work unfinished, leaving her family unprotected!

She would never know the answers.

No.

Jasnah flailed in the darkness, beads rolling across her skin, getting into her clothing, working their way into her nose as she tried to swim. It was no use. She had no buoyancy in this mess. She raised a hand before her mouth and tried to make a pocket of air to use for breathing, and managed to gasp in a small breath. But the beads rolled around her hand, forcing between her fingers. She sank, more slowly now, as through a viscous liquid.

Each bead that touched her gave a faint impression of something. A door. A table. A shoe.

The beads found their way into her mouth. They seemed to move on their own. They would choke her, destroy her. No . . . no, it was just because they seemed attracted to her. An impression came to her, not as a distinct thought but a feeling. They wanted something from her.

She snatched a bead in her hand; it gave her an impression of a cup. She gave . . . something . . . to it? The other beads near her pulled together, connecting, sticking like rocks sealed by mortar. In a moment she was falling not among individual beads, but through large masses of them stuck together into the shape of . . .

A cup.

Each bead was a pattern, a guide for the others.

She released the one she held, and the beads around her broke apart. She floundered, searching desperately as her air ran out. She needed something she could use, something that would help, some way to survive! Desperate, she swept her arms wide to touch as many beads as she could.

A silver platter.

A coat.

A statue.

A lantern.

And then, something ancient.

Something ponderous and slow of thought, yet somehow strong. The palace itself. Frantic, Jasnah seized this sphere and forced her power into it. Her mind blurring, she gave this bead everything she had, and then commanded it to rise.

Beads shifted.

A great crashing sounded as beads that she didflymet one another, clicking, cracking, rattling. It was almost like the sound of a wave breaking on rocks. Jasnah surged up from the depths, something solid moving beneath her, obeying her command. Beads battered her head, shoulders, arms, until finally she exploded from the surface of the sea of glass, hurling a spray of beads into a dark sky.

She knelt on a platform of glass made up of small beads locked together. She held her hand to the side, uplifted, clutching the sphere that was the guide. Others rolled around her, forming into the shape of a hallway with lanterns on the walls, an intersection ahead. It didn't look right, of course—the entire thing was made of beads. But it was a fair approximation.

She wasn't strong enough to form the entire palace. She created only this hallway, without even a roof—but the floor supported her, kept her from sinking. She opened her mouth with a groan, beads falling out to clack against the floor. Then she coughed, drawing in sweet breaths, sweat trickling down the sides of her face and collecting on her chin.

Ahead of her, the dark figure stepped up onto the platform. He again slid his sword from his sheath.

Jasnah held up a second bead, the statue she'd sensed earlier. She gave it power, and other beads collected before her, taking the shape of one of the statues that lined the front of the feast hall—the statue of Talenelat'Elin, Herald of War. A tall, muscular man with a large Shardblade.

It was not alive, but she made it move, lowering its sword of beads. She doubted it could fight. Round beads could not form a sharp sword. Yet the threat made the dark figure hesitate.

Gritting her teeth, Jasnah heaved herself to her feet, beads streaming from her clothing. She would not kneel before this thing, whatever it was. She stepped up beside the bead statue, noting for the first time the strange clouds overhead. They seemed to form a narrow ribbon of highway, straight and long, pointing toward the horizon.

She met the oil figure's gaze. It regarded her for a moment, then raised two fingers to its forehead and bowed, as if in respect, a cloak flourishing out behind. Others had gathered beyond it, and they turned to each other, exchanging hushed whispers.

The place of beads faded, and Jasnah found herself back in the hallway of the palace. The real one, with real stone, though it had gone dark—the Stormlight dead in the lamps on the walls. The only illumination came from far down the corridor.

She pressed back against the wall, breathing deeply. I, she thought, need to write this experience down.

She would do so, then analyze and consider. Later. Now, she wanted to be away from this place. She hurried away, with no concern for her direction, trying to escape those eyes she still felt watching.

It didn't work.

Eventually, she composed herself and wiped the sweat from her face with a kerchief. Shadesmar, she thought. That is what it is called in the nursery tales. Shadesmar, the mythological kingdom of the spren. Mythology she'd never believed. Surely she could find something if she searched the histories well enough. Nearly everything that happened had happened before. The grand lesson of history, and . . .

Storms! Her appointment.

Cursing to herself, she hurried on her way. That experience continued to distract her, but she needed to said, settling downflymake her meeting. So she continued down two floors, getting farther from the sounds of the thrumming Parshendi drums until she could hear only the sharpest cracks of their beats.

That music's complexity had always surprised her, suggesting that the Parshendi were not the uncultured savages many took them for. This far away, the music sounded disturbingly like the beads from the dark place, rattling against one another.

She'd intentionally chosen this out-of-the-way section of the palace for her meeting with Liss. Nobody ever visited this set of guest rooms. A man that Jasnah didn't know lounged here, outside the proper door. That relieved her. The man would be Liss's new servant, and his presence meant Liss hadn't left, despite Jasnah's tardiness. Composing herself, she nodded to the guard—a Veden brute with red speckling his beard—and pushed into the room.

Liss stood from the table inside the small chamber. She wore a maid's dress—low cut, of course—and could have been Alethi. Or Veden. Or Bav. Depending on which part of her accent she chose to emphasize. Long dark hair, worn loose, and a plump, attractive figure made her distinctive in all the right ways.

“You're late, Brightness,” Liss said.

Jasnah gave no reply. She was the employer here, and was not required to give excuses. Instead, she laid something on the table beside Liss. A small envelope, sealed with weevilwax.

Jasnah set two fingers on it, considering.

No. This was too brash. She didn't know if her father realized what she was doing, but even if he hadn't, too much was happening in this palace. She did not want to commit to an assassination until she was more certain.

Fortunately, she had prepared a backup plan. She slid a second envelope from the safepouch inside her sleeve and set it on the table in place of the first. She removed her fingers from it, rounding the table and sitting down.

Liss sat back down and made the letter vanish into the bust of her dress. “An odd night, Brightness,” the woman said, “to be engaging in treason.”

“I am hiring you to watch only.”

“Pardon, Brightness. But one does not commonly hire an assassin to watch. Only.”

“You have instructions in the envelope,” Jasnah said. “Along with initial payment. I chose you because you are expert at extended observations. It is what I want. For now.”

Liss smiled, but nodded. “Spying on the wife of the heir to the throne? It will be more expensive this way. You sure you don’t simply want her dead?”

Jasnah drummed her fingers on the table, then realized she was doing it to the beat of the drums above. The music was so unexpectedly complex—precisely like the Parshendi themselves.

Too much is happening, she thought. I need to be very careful. Very subtle.

“I accept the cost,” Jasnah replied. “In one week’s time, I will arrange for one of my sister-in-law’s maids to be released. You will apply for the position, using faked credentials I assume you are capable of producing. You will be hired.

“From there, you watch and report. I will tell you if your other services are needed. You move only if I say. Understood?”

“You’re the one payin’,”

L12551152512157551112341011129151210615infiss said, a faint Bav dialect showing through.

If it showed, it was only because she wished it. Liss was the most skilled assassin Jasnah knew. People called her the Weeper, as she gouged out the eyes of the targets she killed. Although she hadn’t coined the cognomen, it served her purpose well, since she had secrets to hide. For one thing, nobody knew that the Weeper was a woman.

It was said the Weeper gouged the eyes out to proclaim indifference to whether her victims were lighteyed or dark. The truth was that the action hid a second secret—Liss didn't want anyone to know that the way she killed left corpses with burned-out sockets.

“Our meeting is done, then,” Liss said, standing.

Jasnah nodded absently, mind again on her bizarre interaction with the spren earlier. That glistening skin, colors dancing across a surface the color of tar . . .

She forced her mind away from that moment. She needed to devote her attention to the task at hand. For now, that was Liss.

Liss hesitated at the door before leaving. “Do you know why I like you, Brightness?”

“I suspect that it has something to do with my pockets and their proverbial depth.”

Liss smiled. “There's that, ain't going to deny it, but you're also different from other lighteyes. When others hire me, they turn up their noses at the entire process. They're all too eager to use my services, but sneer and wring their hands, as if they hate being forced to do something utterly distasteful.”

“Assassination is distasteful, Liss. So is cleaning out chamber pots. I can respect the one employed for such jobs without admiring the job itself.”

Liss grinned, then cracked the door.

“That new servant of yours outside,” Jasnah said. “Didn't you say you wanted to show him off for me?”

“Talak?” Liss said, glancing at the Veden man. “Oh, you mean that other one. No, Brightness, I sold that one to a slaver a few weeks ago.” Liss grimaced.

“Really? I thought you said he was the best servant you'd ever had.”

“Too good a servant,” Liss said. “Let's leave it at that. Storming creepy, that

Shin fellow was.” Liss shivered visibly, then slipped out the door.

“Remember our first agreement,” Jasnah said after her.

“Always there in the back o’ my mind, Brightness.” Liss closed the door.

Jasnah settled in her seat, lacing her fingers in front of her. Their “first agreement” was that if anyone should come to Liss and offer a contract on a member of Jasnah’s family, Liss would let Jasnah match the offer in exchange for the name of the one who made it.

Liss would do it. Probably. So would the dozen other assassins Jasnah dealt with. A repeat customer was always more valuable than a one-off contract, and it was in the best interests of a woman like Liss to have a friend in the government. Jasnah’s family was safe from the likes of these. Unless she herself employed the assassins, of course.

Jasnah let out a deep sigh, then rose, trying to shrug off the weight she felt bearing her down.

Wait. Did Liss say her old servant was Shin?

It was of lightning and bursts of wind. It was probably a coincidence. Shin people weren’t plentiful in the East, but you did see them on occasion. Still, Liss mentioning a Shin man and Jasnah seeing one among the Parshendi . . . well, there was no harm in checking, even if it meant returning to the feast. Something was off about this night, and not just because of her shadow and the spren.

Jasnah left the small chamber in the bowels of the palace and strode out into the hallway. She turned her steps upward. Above, the drums cut off abruptly, like an instrument’s strings suddenly cut. Was the party ending so early? Dalinar hadn’t done something to offend the celebrants, had he? That man and his wine . . .

Well, the Parshendi had ignored his offenses in the past, so they probably would again. In truth, Jasnah was happy for her father’s sudden focus on a treaty. It meant she would have a chance to study Parshendi traditions and

histories at her leisure.

Could it be, she wondered, that scholars have been searching in the wrong ruins all these years?

Words echoed in the hallway, coming from up ahead. “I’m worried about Ash.”

“You’re worried about everything.”

Jasnah hesitated in the hallway.

“She’s getting worse,” the voice continued. “We weren’t supposed to get worse. Am I getting worse? I think I feel worse.”

“Shut up.”

“I don’t like this. What we’ve done was wrong. That creature carries my lord’s own Blade. We shouldn’t have let him keep it. He—”

The two passed through the intersection ahead of Jasnah. They were ambassadors from the West, including the Azish man with the white birthmark on his cheek. Or was it a scar? The shorter of the two men—he could have been Alethi—cut off when he noticed Jasnah. He let out a squeak, then hurried on his way.

The Azish man, the one dressed in black and silver, stopped and looked her up and down. He frowned.

“Is the feast over already?” Jasnah asked down the hallway. Her brother had invited these two to the celebration along with every other ranking foreign dignitary in Kholinar.

“Yes,” the man said.

His stare made her uncomfortable. She walked forward anyway. I should check further into these two, she thought. She’d investigated their backgrounds, of course, and found nothing of note. Had they been talking about a Shardblade?

“Come on!” the shorter man said, returning and taking the taller man by the arm.

He allowed himself to be pulled away. Jasnah walked to where the corridors crossed, then watched them go.

Where once drums had sounded, screams suddenly rose.

Oh no . . .

Jasnah turned with alarm, then grabbed her skirt and ran as hard as she could.

A dozen different potential disasters raced through her mind. What else could happen on this broken night, when shadows stood up and her father looked upon her with suspicion? Nerves stretched thin, she reached the steps and started climbing.

It took her far too long. She could hear the screams as she climbed and finally emerged into chaos. Dead bodies in one direction, a demolished wall in the other. How . . .

The destruction led toward her father’s rooms.

The entire palace shook, and a crunch echoed from that direction.

No, no, no!

She passed Shardblade cuts on the stone walls as she ran.

Please.

Corpses with burned eyes. Bodies littered the floor like discarded bones at the dinner table.

Not this.

A broken doorway. Her father’s quarters. Jasnah stopped in the hallway, gasping.

Control yourself, control . . .

She couldn't. Not now. Frantic, she ran into the quarters, though a Shardbearer would kill her with ease. She wasn't thinking straight. She should get someone who could help. Dalinar? He'd be drunk. Sadeas, then.

The room looked like it had been hit by a highstorm. Furniture in a shambles, splinters everywhere. The balcony doors were broken outward. Someone lurched toward them, a man in her father's Shardplate. Tearim, the bodyguard?

No. The helm was broken. It was not Tearim, but Gavilar. Someone on the balcony screamed.

"Father!" Jasnah shouted.

Gavilar hesitated as he stepped out onto the balcony, looking back at her.

The balcony broke beneath him.

Jasnah screamed, dashing through the room to the broken balcony, falling to her knees at the edge. Wind tugged locks of hair loose from her bun as she watched two men fall.

Her father, and the Shin man in white from the feast.

The Shin man glowed with a white light. He fell onto the wall. He hit it, rolling, then came to a stop. He stood up, somehow remaining on the outer palace wall and not falling. It defied reason.

He turned, then stalked toward her father.

Jasnah watched, growing cold, helpless as the assassin stepped down to her father and knelt over him.

Tears fell from her chin, and the wind caught them. What was he doing down there? She couldn't make it out.

When the assassin walked away, he left behind her father's corpse. Impaled

on a length of wood. He was dead—indeed, his Shardblade had appeared beside him, as they all did when their Bearers died.

“I worked so hard . . .” Jasnah whispered, numb. “Everything I did to protect this family . . .”

How? Liss. Liss had done this!

No. Jasnah wasn’t thinking straight. That Shin man . . . she wouldn’t have admitted to owning him in such a case. She’d sold him.

“We are sorry for your loss.”

Jasnah spun, blinking bleary eyes. Three Parshendi, including Klade, stood in the doorway in their distinctive clothing. Neatly stitched cloth wraps for both men and women, sashes at the waist, loose shirts with no sleeves. Hanging vests, open at the sides, woven in bright colors. They didn’t segregate clothing by gender. She thought they did by caste, however, and—

Stop thinking like a scholar for one storming day!

“We take responsibility for his death,” said the foremost Parshendi. Gangnah was female, though with the Parshendi, the gender differences seemed minimal. The clothing hid breasts and hips, neither of which were ever very pronounced. Fortunately, the lack of a beard was a clear indication. All the Parshendi men she’d ever seen had beards, which they wore tied with bits of gemstone, and—

STOP IT.

“What did you say?” Jasnah demanded, forcing herself to her feet. “Why would it be your fault, Gangnah?”

“Because we hired the assassin,” the Parshendi woman said in her heavily accented singsong voice. “We killed your father, Jasnah Kholin.”

“You . . .”

Emotion suddenly ran cold, like a river freezing in the heights. Jasnah looked from Gangnah to Klade, to Varnali. Elders, all three of them. Members of the Parshendi ruling council.

“Why?” Jasnah whispered.

“Because it had to be done,” Gangnah said.

“Why?” Jasnah demanded, stalking forward. “He fought for you! He kept the predators at bay! My father wanted peace, you monsters! Why would you betray us now, of all times?”

Gangnah drew her lips to a line. The song of her voice changed. She seemed almost like a mother, explaining something very difficult to a small child.

“Because your father was about to do something very dangerous.”

“Send for Brightlord Dalinar!” a voice outside in the hall shouted. “Storms! Did my orders get to Elhokar? The crown prince must be taken to safety!” Highprince Sadeas stumbled into the room along with a team of soldiers. His bulbous, ruddy face was wet with sweat, and he wore Gavilar’s clothing, the regal robes of office. “What are the savages doing here? Storms! Protect Princess Jasnah. The one who did this—he was in their retinue!”

The soldiers moved to surround the Parshendi. Jasnah ignored them, turning and stepping back to the broken doorway, hand on the wall, looking down at her father splayed on the rocks below, Blade beside him.

“There will be war,” she whispered. “And I will not stand in its way.”

“This is understood,” Gangnah said from behind.

“The assassin,” Jasnah said. “He walked on the wall.”

Gangnah said nothing.

In the shattering of her world, Jasnah caught hold of this fragment. She had seen something tonight. Something that should not have been possible. Did it relate to the strange spren? Her experience in that place of glass beads and a dark sky?

These questions became her lifeline for stability. Sadeas demanded answers from the Parshendi leaders. He received none. When he stepped up beside her and saw the wreckage below, he went barreling off, shouting for his guards and running down below to reach the fallen king.

Hours later, it was discovered that the assassination—and the surrender of three of the Parshendi leaders—had covered the flight of the larger portion of their number. They escaped the city quickly, and the unfortunate Wyndlehe cavalry Dalinar sent after them were destroyed. A hundred horses, each nearly priceless, lost along with their riders.

LK5H">The Parshendi leaders said nothing more and gave no clues, even when they were strung up, hanged for their crimes.

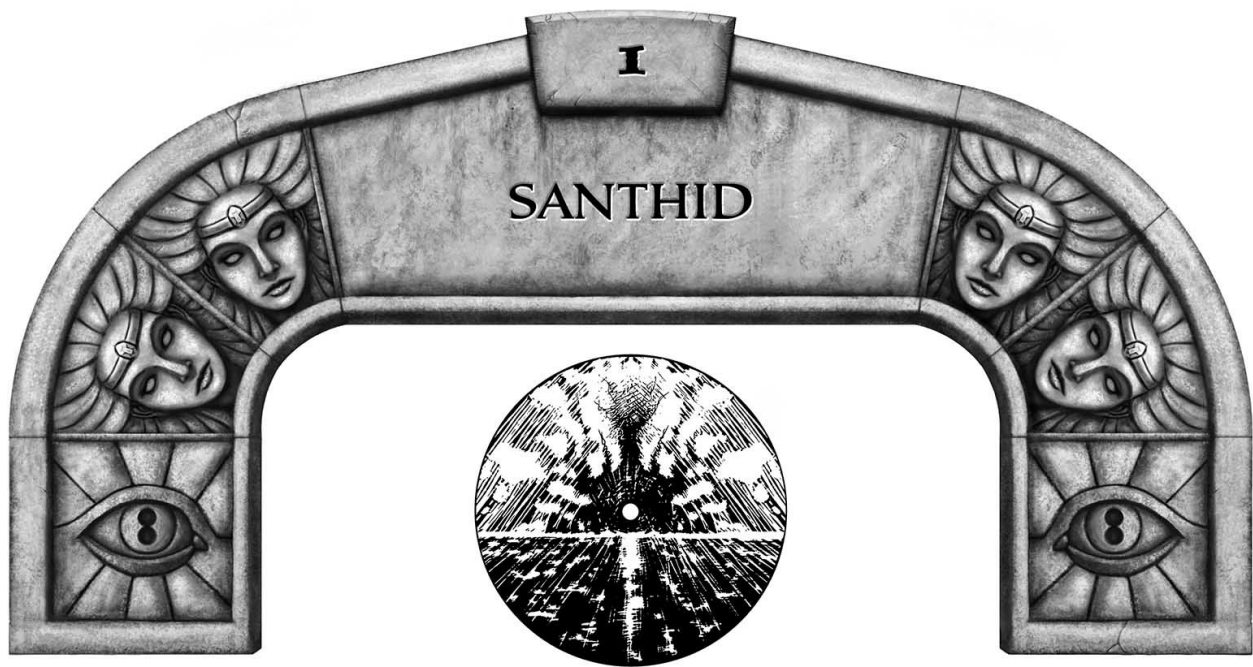
Jasnah ignored all that. Instead, she interrogated the surviving guards on what they had seen. She followed leads about the now-famous assassin's nature, prying information from Liss. She got almost nothing. Liss had owned him only a short time, and claimed she hadn't about his strange powers. Jasnah couldn't find the previous owner.



PART
ONE

Alight

SHALLAN • KALADIN • DALINAR



To be perfectly frank, what has happened these last two months is upon my head. The death, destruction, loss, and pain are my burden. I should have seen it coming. And I should have stopped it.

—From the personal journal of Navani Kholin, Jesees 1174

Shallan pinched the thin charcoal pencil and drew a series of straight lines radiating from a sphere on the horizon. That sphere wasn't quite the sun, nor was it one of the moons. Clouds outlined in charcoal seemed to stream toward it. And the sea beneath them . . . A drawing could not convey the bizarre nature of that ocean, made not of water but of small beads of translucent glass.

Shallan shivered, remembering that place. Jasnah knew much more of it than she would speak of to her ward, and Shallan wasn't certain how to ask. How did one demand answers after a betrayal such as Shallan's? Only a few days had passed since that event, and Shallan still didn't know exactly how her relationship with Jasnah would proceed.

The deck rocked as the ship tacked, enormous sails fluttering overhead. Shallan was forced to grab the railing with her clothed safehand to steady

herself. Captain Tozbek said that so far, the seas hadn't been bad for this part of Longbrow's Straits. However, she might have to go below if the waves and motion got much worse.

Shallan exhaled and tried to relax as the ship settled. A chill wind blew, and windspren zipped past on invisible air currents. Every time the sea grew rough, Shallan remembered that day, that alien ocean of glass beads . . .

She looked down again at what she'd drawn. She had only glimpsed that place, and her sketch was not perfect. It— Shardblades?" in a ool

She frowned. On her paper, a pattern had risen, like an embossing. What had she done? That pattern was almost as wide as the page, a sequence of complex lines with sharp angles and repeated arrowhead shapes. Was it an effect of drawing that weird place, the place Jasnah said was named Shadesmar? Shallan hesitantly moved her freehand to feel the unnatural ridges on the page.

The pattern moved, sliding across the page like an axehound pup under a bedsheet.

Shallan yelped and leapt from her seat, dropping her sketchpad to the deck. The loose pages slumped to the planks, fluttering and then scattering in the wind. Nearby sailors—Thaylen men with long white eyebrows they combed back over their ears—scrambled to help, snatching sheets from the air before they could blow overboard.

"You all right, young miss?" Tozbek asked, looking over from a conversation with one of his mates. The short, portly Tozbek wore a wide sash and a coat of gold and red matched by the cap on his head. He wore his eyebrows up and stiffened into a fanned shape above his eyes.

"I'm well, Captain," Shallan said. "I was merely spooked."

Yalb stepped up to her, proffering the pages. "Your accouterments, my lady."

Shallan raised an eyebrow. "Accouterments?"

“Sure,” the young sailor said with a grin. “I’m practicing my fancy words. They help a fellow obtain reasonable feminine companionship. You know—the kind of young lady who doesn’t smell too bad an’ has at least a few teeth left.”

“Lovely,” Shallaan said, taking the sheets back. “Well, depending on your definition of lovely, at least.” She suppressed further quips, suspiciously regarding the stack of pages in her hand. The picture she’d drawn of Shadesmar was on top, no longer bearing the strange embossed ridges.

“What happened?” Yalab said. “Did a cremling crawl out from under you or something?” As usual, he wore an open-fronted vest and a pair of loose trousers.

“It was nothing,” Shallaan said softly, tucking the pages away into her satchel.

Yalab gave her a little salute—she had no idea why he had taken to doing that—and went back to tying rigging with the other sailors. She soon caught bursts of laughter from the men near him, and when she glanced at him, gloryspren danced around his head—they took the shape of little spheres of light. He was apparently very proud of the jape he’d just made.

She smiled. It was indeed fortunate that Tozbek had been delayed in Kharbranth. She liked this crew, and was happy that Jasnah had selected them for their voyage. Shallaan sat back down on the box that Captain Tozbek had ordered lashed beside the railing so she could enjoy the sea as they sailed. She had to be wary of the spray, which wasn’t terribly good for her sketches, but so long as the seas weren’t rough, the opportunity to watch the waters was worth the trouble.

The scout atop the rigging let out a shout. Shallaan squinted in the direction he pointed. They were within sight of the distant mainland, sailing parallel to it. In fact, they’d docked at port last night to shelter from the highstorm that had blown past. When sailing, you always wanted to be near to port—venturing into open seas when a highstorm could surprise you was suicidal.

The smear of darkness Jasnah’s note in a times to the north was the Frostlands, a largely uninhabited area along the bottom edge of Roshar.

Occasionally, she caught a glimpse of higher cliffs to the south. Thaylenah, the great island kingdom, made another barrier there. The straits passed between the two.

The lookout had spotted something in the waves just north of the ship, a bobbing shape that at first appeared to be a large log. No, it was much larger than that, and wider. Shallan stood, squinting, as it drew closer. It turned out to be a domed brown-green shell, about the size of three rowboats lashed together. As they passed by, the shell came up alongside the ship and somehow managed to keep pace, sticking up out of the water perhaps six or eight feet.

A santhid! Shallan leaned out over the rail, looking down as the sailors jabbered excitedly, several joining her in craning out to see the creature. Santhidyn were so reclusive that some of her books claimed they were extinct and all modern reports of them untrustworthy.

“You are good luck, young miss!” Yalb said to her with a laugh as he passed by with rope. “We ain’t seen a santhid in years.”

“You still aren’t seeing one,” Shallan said. “Only the top of its shell.” To her disappointment, waters hid anything else—save shadows of something in the depths that might have been long arms extending downward. Stories claimed the beasts would sometimes follow ships for days, waiting out in the sea as the vessel went into port, then following them again once the ship left.

“The shell is all you ever see of one,” Yalb said. “Passions, this is a good sign!”

Shallan clutched her satchel. She took a Memory of the creature down there beside the ship by closing her eyes, fixing the image of it in her head so she could draw it with precision.

Draw what, though? she thought. A lump in the water?

An idea started to form in her head. She spoke it aloud before she could think better. “Bring me that rope,” she said, turning to Yalb.

“Brightness?” he asked, stopping in place.

“Tie a loop in one end,” she said, hurriedly setting her satchel on her seat. “I need to get a look at the santhid. I’ve never actually put my head underwater in the ocean. Will the salt make it difficult to see?”

“Underwater?” Yalb said, voice squeaking.

“You’re not tying the rope.”

“Because I’m not a storming fool! Captain will have my head if . . .”

“Get a friend,” Shallan said, ignoring him and taking the rope to tie one end into a small loop. “You’re going to lower me down over the side, and I’m going to get a glimpse of what’s under the shell. Do you realize that nobody has ever produced a drawing of a live santhid? All the ones that have washed up on beaches were badly decomposed. And since sailors consider hunting the things to be bad luck—”

“It is!” Yalb said, voice growing more high pitched. “Ain’t nobody going to kill one.”

Shallan finished the loop and hurried to the side of the ship, her red hair whipping around her face as she leaned out over the rail. The santhid was still there. How did it keep up? She could see no fins.

She looked back at Yalb; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m at the edgere, who held the rope, grinning. “Ah, Brightness. Is this payback for what I said about your backside to Beznk? That was just in jest, but you got me good! I . . .” He trailed off as she met his eyes. “Storms. You’re serious.”

“I’ll not have another opportunity like this. Naladan chased these things for most of her life and never got a good look at one.”

“This is insanity!”

“No, this is scholarship! I don’t know what kind of view I can get through the water, but I have to try.”

Yalb sighed. “We have masks. Made from a tortoise shell with glass in hollowed-out holes on the front and bladders along the edges to keep the water out. You can duck your head underwater with one on and see. We use them to check over the hull at dock.”

“Wonderful!”

“Of course, I’d have to go to the captain to get permission to take one. . . .”

She folded her arms. “Devious of you. Well, get to it.” It was unlikely she’d be able to go through with this without the captain finding out anyway.

Yalb grinned. “What happened to you in Kharbranth? Your first trip with us, you were so timid, you looked like you’d faint at the mere thought of sailing away from your homeland!”

Shallan hesitated, then found herself blushing. “This is somewhat foolhardy, isn’t it?”

“Hanging from a moving ship and sticking your head in the water?” Yalb said. “Yeah. Kind of a little.”

“Do you think . . . we could stop the ship?”

Yalb laughed, but went jogging off to speak with the captain, taking her query as an indication she was still determined to go through with her plan. And she was.

What did happen to me? she wondered.

The answer was simple. She’d lost everything. She’d stolen from Jasnah Kholin, one of the most powerful women in the world—and in so doing had not only lost her chance to study as she’d always dreamed, but had also doomed her brothers and her house. She had failed utterly and miserably.

And she’d pulled through it.

She wasn’t unscathed. Her credibility with Jasnah had been severely wounded, and she felt that she had all but abandoned her family. But

something about the experience of stealing Jasnah's Soulcaster—which had turned out to be a fake anyway—then nearly being killed by a man she'd thought was in love with her . . .

Well, she now had a better idea of how bad things could get. It was as if . . . once she had feared the darkness, but now she had stepped into it. She had experienced some of the horrors that awaited her there. Terrible as they were, at least she knew.

You always knew, a voice whispered deep inside of her. You grew up with horrors, Shallan. You just won't let yourself remember them.

"What is this?" Tozbek asked as he came up, his wife, Ashlv, at his side. The diminutive woman did not speak much; she dressed in a skirt and blouse of bright yellow, a headscarf covering all of her hair except the two white eyebrows, which she had curled down beside her cheeks.

"You Jasnah's note in a times ng miss," Tozbek said, "you want to go swimming? Can't you wait until we get into port? I know of some nice areas where the water is not nearly so cold."

"I won't be swimming," Shallan said, blushing further. What would she wear to go swimming with men about? Did people really do that? "I need to get a closer look at our companion." She gestured toward the sea creature.

"Young miss, you know I can't allow something so dangerous. Even if we stopped the ship, what if the beast harmed you?"

"They're said to be harmless."

"They are so rare, can we really know for certain? Besides, there are other animals in these seas that could harm you. Redwaters hunt this area for certain, and we might be in shallow enough water for khornaks to be a worry." Tozbek shook his head. "I'm sorry, I just cannot allow it."

Shallan bit her lip, and found her heart beating traitorously. She wanted to push harder, but that decisive look in his eyes made her wilt. "Very well."

Tozbek smiled broadly. “I’ll take you to see some shells in the port at Amydlatn when we stop there, young miss. They have quite a collection!”

She didn’t know where that was, but from the jumble of consonants squished together, she assumed it would be on the Thaylen side. Most cities were, this far south. Though Thaylenah was nearly as frigid as the Frostlands, people seemed to enjoy living there.

Of course, Thaylens were all a little off. How else to describe Yalb and the others wearing no shirts despite the chill in the air?

They weren’t the ones contemplating a dip in the ocean, Shallan reminded herself. She looked over the side of the ship again, watching waves break against the shell of the gentle santhid. What was it? A great-shelled beast, like the fearsome chasmfiends of the Shattered Plains? Was it more like a fish under there, or more like a tortoise? The santhidyn were so rare—and the occasions when scholars had seen them in person so infrequent—that the theories all contradicted one another.

She sighed and opened her satchel, then set to organizing her papers, most of which were practice sketches of the sailors in various poses as they worked to maneuver the massive sails overhead, tacking against the wind. Her father would never have allowed her to spend a day sitting and watching a bunch of shirtless darkeyes. How much her life had changed in such a short time.

She was working on a sketch of the santhid’s shell when Jasnah stepped up onto the deck.

Like Shallan, Jasnah wore the havah, a Vorin dress of distinctive design. The hemline was down at her feet and the neckline almost at her chin. Some of the Thaylens—when they thought she wasn’t listening—referred to the clothing as prudish. Shallan disagreed; the havah wasn’t prudish, but elegant. Indeed, the silk hugged the body, particularly through the bust—and the way the sailors gawked at Jasnah indicated they didn’t find the garment unflattering.

Jasnah was pretty. Lush of figure, tan of skin. Immaculate eyebrows, lips painted a deep red, hair up in a fine braid. Though Jasnah was twice Shallan’s

age, her mature beauty was something to be admired, even envied. Why did the woman have to be so perfect?

Jasnah ignored the eyes of the sailors. It wasn't that she didn't notice men. Jasnah noticed Jasnah's note in a times everything and everyone. She simply didn't seem to care, one way or another, how men perceived her.

No, that's not true, Shallan thought as Jasnah walked over. She wouldn't take the time to do her hair, or put on makeup, if she didn't care how she was perceived. In that, Jasnah was an enigma. On one hand, she seemed to be a scholar concerned only with her research. On the other hand, she cultivated the poise and dignity of a king's daughter—and, at times, used it like a bludgeon.

“And here you are,” Jasnah said, walking to Shallan. A spray of water from the side of the ship chose that moment to fly up and sprinkle her. She frowned at the drops of water beading on her silk clothing, then looked back to Shallan and raised her eyebrow. “The ship, you may have noticed, has two very fine cabins that I hired out for us at no small expense.”

“Yes, but they're inside.”

“As rooms usually are.”

“I've spent most of my life inside.”

“So you will spend much more of it, if you wish to be a scholar.”

Shallan bit her lip, waiting for the order to go below. Curiously, it did not come. Jasnah gestured for Captain Tozbek to approach, and he did so, groveling his way over with cap in hand.

“Yes, Brightness?” he asked.

“I should like another of these . . . seats,” Jasnah said, regarding Shallan's box.

Tozbek quickly had one of his men lash a second box in place. As she waited for the seat to be ready, Jasnah waved for Shallan to hand over her sketches.

Jasnah inspected the drawing of the santhid, then looked over the side of the ship. “No wonder the sailors were making such a fuss.”

“Luck, Brightness!” one of the sailors said. “It is a good omen for your trip, don’t you think?”

“I shall take any fortune provided me, Nanhel Eltorv,” she said. “Thank you for the seat.”

The sailor bowed awkwardly before retreating.

“You think they’re superstitious fools,” Shallan said softly, watching the sailor leave.

“From what I have observed,” Jasnah said, “these sailors are men who have found a purpose in life and now take simple pleasure in it.” Jasnah looked at the next drawing. “Many people make far less out of life. Captain Tozbek runs a good crew. You were wise in bringing him to my attention.”

Shallan smiled. “You didn’t answer my question.”

“You didn’t ask a question,” Jasnah said. “These sketches are characteristically skillful, Shallan, but weren’t you supposed to be reading?”

“I . . . had trouble concentrating.”

“So you came up on deck,” Jasnah said, “to sketch pictures of young men working without their shirts on. You expected this to help your concentration?”

Shallan blushed, as Jasnah stopped at one sheet of paper in the stack. Shallan sat patiently—she’d been well trained in that by her father—until Jasnah turned it toward her. The picture of Shadesmar, of course.

“You have respected my command not to peer into this said, folding his arms at the edgererealm again?” Jasnah asked.

“Yes, Brightness. That picture was drawn from a memory of my first . . . lapse.”

Jasnah lowered the page. Shallan thought she saw a hint of something in the woman's expression. Was Jasnah wondering if she could trust Shallan's word?

"I assume this is what is bothering you?" Jasnah asked.

"Yes, Brightness."

"I suppose I should explain it to you, then."

"Really? You would do this?"

"You needn't sound so surprised."

"It seems like powerful information," Shallan said. "The way you forbade me . . . I assumed that knowledge of this place was secret, or at least not to be trusted to one of my age."

Jasnah sniffed. "I've found that refusing to explain secrets to young people makes them more prone to get themselves into trouble, not less. Your experimentation proves that you've already stumbled face-first into all of this—as I once did myself, I'll have you know. I know through painful experience how dangerous Shadesmar can be. If I leave you in ignorance, I'll be to blame if you get yourself killed there."

"So you'd have explained about it if I'd asked earlier in our trip?"

"Probably not," Jasnah admitted. "I had to see how willing you were to obey me. This time."

Shallan wilted, and suppressed the urge to point out that back when she'd been a studious and obedient ward, Jasnah hadn't divulged nearly as many secrets as she did now. "So what is it? That . . . place."

"It's not truly a location," Jasnah said. "Not as we usually think of them. Shadesmar is here, all around us, right now. All things exist there in some form, as all things exist here."

Shallan frowned. "I don't—"

Jasnah held up a finger to quiet her. “All things have three components: the soul, the body, and the mind. That place you saw, Shadesmar, is what we call the Cognitive Realm—the place of the mind.

“All around us you see the physical world. You can touch it, see it, hear it. This is how your physical body experiences the world. Well, Shadesmar is the way that your cognitive self—your unconscious self—experiences the world. Through your hidden senses touching that realm, you make intuitive leaps in logic and you form hopes. It is likely through those extra senses that you, Shallan, create art.”

Water splashed on the bow of the ship as it crossed a swell. Shallan wiped a drop of salty water from her cheek, trying to think through what Jasnah had just said. “That made almost no sense whatsoever to me, Brightness.”

“I should hope that it didn’t,” Jasnah said. “I’ve spent six years researching Shadesmar, and I still barely know what to make of it. I shall have to accompany you there several times before you can understand, even a little, the true significance of the place.”

Jasnah grimaced at the thought. Shallan was always surprised to see visible emotion from her. Emotion was something relatable, something human—and Shallan’s mental image of Jasnah Kholin was of someone almost divine. It was, up traditional Pattern hummedlyon reflection, an odd way to regard a determined atheist.

“Listen to me,” Jasnah said. “My own words betray my ignorance. I told you that Shadesmar wasn’t a place, and yet I call it one in my next breath. I speak of visiting it, though it is all around us. We simply don’t have the proper terminology to discuss it. Let me try another tactic.”

Jasnah stood up, and Shallan hastened to follow. They walked along the ship’s rail, feeling the deck sway beneath their feet. Sailors made way for Jasnah with quick bows. They regarded her with as much reverence as they would a king. How did she do it? How could she control her surroundings without seeming to do anything at all?

“Look down into the waters,” Jasnah said as they reached the bow. “What do

you see?”

Shallan stopped beside the rail and stared down at the blue waters, foaming as they were broken by the ship’s prow. Here at the bow, she could see a deepness to the swells. An unfathomable expanse that extended not just outward, but downward.

“I see eternity,” Shallan said.

“Spoken like an artist,” Jasnah said. “This ship sails across depths we cannot know. Beneath these waves is a bustling, frantic, unseen world.”

Jasnah leaned forward, gripping the rail with one hand unclothed and the other veiled within the safehand sleeve. She looked outward. Not at the depths, and not at the land distantly peeking over both the northern and southern horizons. She looked toward the east. Toward the storms.

“There is an entire world, Shallan,” Jasnah said, “of which our minds skim but the surface. A world of deep, profound thought. A world created by deep, profound thoughts. When you see Shadesmar, you enter those depths. It is an alien place to us in some ways, but at the same time we formed it. With some help.”

“We did what?”

“What are spren?” Jasnah asked.

The question caught Shallan off guard, but by now she was accustomed to challenging questions from Jasnah. She took time to think and consider her answer.

“Nobody knows what spren are,” Shallan said, “though many philosophers have different opinions on—”

“No,” Jasnah said. “What are they?”

“I . . . shallan looked up at a pair of windspren spinning through the air above. They looked like tiny ribbons of light, glowing softly, dancing around one another. “They’re living ideas.”

Jasnah spun on her.

“What?” Shallan said, jumping. “Am I wrong?”

“No,” Jasnah said. “You’re right.” The woman narrowed her eyes. “By my best guess, spren are elements of the Cognitive Realm that have leaked into the physical world. They’re concepts that have gained a fragment of sentience, perhaps because of human intervention.

“Think of a man who gets angry often. Think of how his friends and family might start referring to that anger as a beast, as a thing that possesses him, as something external to him. Humans personify. We speak of the wind as if it has a will of its own.

“Spren are those ideas—these bothering you?” Syl asked them the songly ideas of collective human experience—somehow come alive. Shadesmar is where that first happens, and it is their place. Though we created it, they shaped it. They live there; they rule there, within their own cities.”

“Cities?”

“Yes,” Jasnah said, looking back out over the ocean. She seemed troubled. “Spren are wild in their variety. Some are as clever as humans and create cities. Others are like fish and simply swim in the currents.”

Shallan nodded. Though in truth she was having trouble grasping any of this, she didn’t want Jasnah to stop talking. This was the sort of knowledge that Shallan needed, the kind of thing she craved. “Does this have to do with what you discovered? About the parshmen, the Voidbringers?”

“I haven’t been able to determine that yet. The spren are not always forthcoming. In some cases, they do not know. In others, they do not trust me because of our ancient betrayal.”

Shallan frowned, looking to her teacher. “Betrayal?”

“They tell me of it,” Jasnah said, “but they won’t say what it was. We broke an oath, and in so doing offended them greatly. I think some of them may

have died, though how a concept can die, I do not know.” Jasnah turned to Shallan with a solemn expression. “I realize this is overwhelming. You will have to learn this, all of it, if you are to help me. Are you still willing?”

“Do I have a choice?”

A smile tugged at the edges of Jasnah’s lips. “I doubt it. You Soulcast on your own, without the aid of a fabrial. You are like me.”

Shallan stared out over the waters. Like Jasnah. What did it mean? Why—

She froze, blinking. For a moment, she thought she’d seen the same pattern as before, the one that had made ridges on her sheet of paper. This time it had been in the water, impossibly formed on the surface of a wave.

“Brightness . . .” she said, resting her fingers on Jasnah’s arm. “I thought I saw something in the water, just now. A pattern of sharp lines, like a maze.”

“Show me where.”

“It was on one of the waves, and we’ve passed it now. But I think I saw it earlier, on one of my pages. Does it mean something?”

“Most certainly. I must admit, Shallan, I find the coincidence of our meeting to be startling. Suspiciously so.”

“Brightness?”

“They were involved,” Jasnah said. “They brought you to me. And they are still watching you, it appears. So no, Shallan, you no longer have a choice. The old ways are returning, and I don’t see it as a hopeful sign. It’s an act of self-preservation. The spren sense impending danger, and so they return to us. Our attention now must turn to the Shattered Plains and the relics of Urithiru. It will be a long, long time before you return to your homeland.”

Shallan nodded mutely.

“This worries you,” Jasnah said.

“Yes, Brightness. My family . . .”

Shallan felt like a traitor in abandoning her brothers, who had been depending on her for wealth. She’d written to them and explained, said, folding his arms at the edge without many specifics, that she’d had to return the stolen Soulcaster—and was now required to help Jasnah with her work.

Balat’s reply had been positive, after a fashion. He said he was glad at least one of them had escaped the fate that was coming to the house. He thought that the rest of them—her three brothers and Balat’s betrothed—were doomed.

They might be right. Not only would Father’s debts crush them, but there was the matter of her father’s broken Soulcaster. The group that had given it to him wanted it back.

Unfortunately, Shallan was convinced that Jasnah’s quest was of the utmost importance. The Voidbringers would soon return—indeed, they were not some distant threat from stories. They lived among men, and had for centuries. The gentle, quiet parshmen who worked as perfect servants and slaves were really destroyers.

Stopping the catastrophe of the return of the Voidbringers was a greater duty than even protecting her brothers. It was still painful to admit that.

Jasnah studied her. “With regard to your family, Shallan. I have taken some action.”

“Action?” Shallan said, taking the taller woman’s arm. “You’ve helped my brothers?”

“After a fashion,” Jasnah said. “Wealth would not truly solve this problem, I suspect, though I have arranged for a small gift to be sent. From what you’ve said, your family’s problems really stem from two issues. First, the Ghostbloods desire their Soulcaster—which you have broken—to be returned. Second, your house is without allies and deeply in debt.”

Jasnah proffered a sheet of paper. “This,” she continued, “is from a

conversation I had with my mother via spanreed this morning.”

Shallan traced it with her eyes, noting Jasnah’s explanation of the broken Soulcaster and her request for help.

This happens more often than you’d think, Navani had replied. The failing likely has to do with the alignment of the gem housings. Bring me the device, and we shall see.

“My mother,” Jasnah said, “is a renowned artifabrian. I suspect she can make yours function again. We can send it to your brothers, who can return it to its owners.”

“You’d let me do that?” Shallan asked. During their days sailing, Shallan had cautiously pried for more information about the sect, hoping to understand her father and his motives. Jasnah claimed to know very little of them beyond the fact that they wanted her research, and were willing to kill for it.

“I don’t particularly want them having access to such a valuable device,” Jasnah said. “But I don’t have time to protect your family right now directly. This is a workable solution, assuming your brothers can stall a while longer. Have them tell the truth, if they must—that you, knowing I was a scholar, came to me and asked me to fix the Soulcaster. Perhaps that will sate them for now.”

“Thank you, Brightness.” Storms. If she’d just gone to Jasnah in the first place, after being accepted as her ward, how much easier would it have been? Shallan looked down at the paper, noticing that the conversation continued.

As for the other matter, Navani wrote, I’m very fond of this suggesti stanza

“What is this second part?” Shallan asked, looking up from the paper.

“Sating the Ghostbloods alone will not save your house,” Jasnah said. “Your debts are too great, particularly considering your father’s actions in alienating so many. I have therefore arranged a powerful alliance for your house.”

“Alliance? How?”

Jasnah took a deep breath. She seemed reluctant to explain. “I have taken the initial steps in arranging for you to be betrothed to one of my cousins, son of my uncle Dalinar Kholin. The boy’s name is Adolin. He is handsome and well-acquainted with amiable discourse.”

“Betrothed?” Shallan said. “You’ve promised him my hand?”

“I have started the process,” Jasnah said, speaking with uncharacteristic anxiety. “Though at times he lacks foresight, Adolin has a good heart—as good as that of his father, who may be the best man I have ever known. He is considered Alethkar’s most eligible son, and my mother has long wanted him wed.”

“Betrothed,” Shallan repeated.

“Yes. Is that distressing?”

“It’s wonderful!” Shallan exclaimed, grabbing Jasnah’s arm more tightly. “So easy. If I’m married to someone so powerful . . . Storms! Nobody would dare touch us in Jah Keved. It would solve many of our problems. Brightness Jasnah, you’re a genius!”

Jasnah relaxed visibly. “Yes, well, it did seem a workable solution. I had wondered, however, if you’d be offended.”

“Why on the winds would I be offended?”

“Because of the restriction of freedom implicit in a marriage,” Jasnah said. “And if not that, because the offer was made without consulting you. I had to see if the possibility was even open first. It has proceeded further than I’d expected, as my mother has seized on the idea. Navani has . . . a tendency toward the overwhelming.”

Shallan had trouble imagining anyone overwhelming Jasnah. “Stormfather! You’re worried I’d be offended? Brightness, I spent my entire life locked in my father’s manor—I grew up assuming he’d pick my husband.”

“But you’re free of your father now.”

“Yes, and I was so perfectly wise in my own pursuit of relationships,” Shallan said. “The first man I chose was not only an ardent, but secretly an assassin.”

“It doesn’t bother you at all?” Jasnah said. “The idea of being beholden to another, particularly a man?”

“It’s not like I’m being sold into slavery,” Shallan said with a laugh.

“No. I suppose not.” Jasnah shook herself, her poise returning. “Well, I will let Navani know you are amenable to the engagement, and we should have a causal in place within the day.”

A causal—a conditional betrothal, in Vorin terminology. She would be, for all intents and purposes, engaged, but would have no legal footing until an official betrothal was signed and verified by the ardents.

“The boy’s father has said he will not force Adolin into anything,” Jasnah explained, “though the boy is recently single, as he has managed to offend yet another young lady. Regardless, Dalinar would rather you two meet before anything more binding is agreed upon. There have been . . . shifts in the political climate of the Shattered Plains. A great loss to my uncle’s army. Another reason for us to hasten to the Plains.”

“Adolin Kholin,” Shallan said, listening with half an ear. “A duelist. A fantastic one. And even a Shardbearer.”

“Ah, so you were paying attention to your readings about my father and family.”

“I was—but I knew about your family before that. The Alethi are the center of society! Even girls from rural houses know the names of the Alethi princes.” And she’d be lying if she denied youthful daydreams of meeting one. “But Brightness, are you certain this match will be wise? I mean, I’m hardly the most important of individuals.”

“Well, yes. The daughter of another highprince might have been preferable for Adolin. However, it seems that he has managed to offend each and every

one of the eligible women of that rank. The boy is, shall we say, somewhat overeager about relationships. Nothing you can't work through, I'm sure."

"Stormfather," Shallan said, feeling her legs go weak. "He's heir to a princedom! He's in line to the throne of Alethkar itself!"

"Third in line," Jasnah said, "behind my brother's infant son and Dalinar, my uncle."

"Brightness, I have to ask. Why Adolin? Why not the younger son? I—I have nothing to offer Adolin, or the house."

"On the contrary," Jasnah said, "if you are what I think you are, then you will be able to offer him something nobody else can. Something more important than riches."

"What is it you think that I am?" Shallan whispered, meeting the older woman's eyes, finally asking the question that she hadn't dared.

"Right now, you are but a promise," Jasnah said. "A chrysalis with the potential for grandeur inside. When once humans and spren bonded, the results were women who danced in the skies and men who could destroy the stones with a touch."

"The Lost Radiants. Traitors to mankind." She couldn't absorb it all. The betrothal, Shadesmar and the spren, and this, her mysterious destiny. She'd known. But speaking it . . .

She sank down, heedless of getting her dress wet on the deck, and sat with her back against the bulwark. Jasnah allowed her to compose herself before, amazingly, sitting down herself. She did so with far more poise, tucking her dress underneath her legs as she sat sideways. They both drew looks from the sailors.

"They're going to chew me to pieces," Shallan said. "The Alethi court. It's the most ferocious in the world."

Jasnah snorted. "It's more bluster than storm, Shallan. I will train you."

“I’ll never be like you, Brightness. You have power, authority, wealth. Just look how the sailors respond to you.”

“Am I specifically using said power, authority, or wealth right now?”

“You paid for this trip.” Alight

“Did you not pay for several trips on this ship?” Jasnah asked. “They did not treat you the same as they do me?”

“No. Oh, they are fond of me. But I don’t have your weight, Jasnah.”

“I will assume that did not have implications toward my girth,” Jasnah said with a hint of a smile. “I understand your argument, Shallan. It is, however, dead wrong.”

Shallan turned to her. Jasnah sat upon the deck of the ship as if it were a throne, back straight, head up, commanding. Shallan sat with her legs against her chest, arms around them below the knees. Even the ways they sat were different. She was nothing like this woman.

“There is a secret you must learn, child,” Jasnah said. “A secret that is even more important than those relating to Shadesmar and spren. Power is an illusion of perception.”

Shallan frowned.

“Don’t mistake me,” Jasnah continued. “Some kinds of power are real—power to command armies, power to Soulcast. These come into play far less often than you would think. On an individual basis, in most interactions, this thing we call power—authority—exists only as it is perceived.

“You say I have wealth. This is true, but you have also seen that I do not often use it. You say I have authority as the sister of a king. I do. And yet, the men of this ship would treat me exactly the same way if I were a beggar who had convinced them I was the sister to a king. In that case, my authority is not a real thing. It is mere vapors—an illusion. I can create that illusion for them, as can you.”

“I’m not convinced, Brightness.”

“I know. If you were, you would be doing it already.” Jasnah stood up, brushing off her skirt. “You will tell me if you see that pattern—the one that appeared on the waves—again?”

“Yes, Brightness,” Shallan said, distracted.

“Then take the rest of the day for your art. I need to consider how to best teach you of Shadesmar.” The older woman retreated, nodding at the bows of sailors as she passed and went back down belowdecks.

Shallan rose, then turned and grabbed the railing, one hand to either side of the bowsprit. The ocean spread before her, rippling waves, a scent of cold freshness. Rhythmic crashing as the sloop pushed through the waves.

Jasnah’s words fought in her mind, like skyeels with only one rat between them. Spren with cities? Shadesmar, a realm that was here, but unseen? Shallan, suddenly betrothed to the single most important bachelor in the world?

She left the bow, walking along the side of the ship, freehand trailing on the railing. How did the sailors regard her? They smiled, they waved. They liked her. Yalb, who hung lazily from the rigging nearby, called to her, telling her that in the next port, there was a statue she had to go visit. “It’s this giant foot, young miss. Just a foot! Never finished the blustering statue . . .”

She smiled to him and continued. Did she want them to look at her as they looked at Jasnah? Always afraid, always worried that they might do something wrong? Was that power?

When I first sailed from Vedenar, she said, folding his arms at the edgere thought, reaching the place where her box had been tied, the captain kept urging me to go home. He saw my mission as a fool’s errand.

Tozbek had always acted as if he were doing her a favor in conveying her after Jasnah. Should she have had to spend that entire time feeling as if she’d imposed upon him and his crew by hiring them? Yes, he had offered a

discount to her because of her father's business with him in the past—but she'd still been employing him.

The way he'd treated her was probably a thing of Thaylen merchants. If a captain could make you feel like you were imposing on him, you'd pay better. She liked the man, but their relationship left something to be desired. Jasnah would never have stood for being treated in such a way.

That santhid still swam alongside. It was like a tiny, mobile island, its back overgrown with seaweed, small crystals jutting up from the shell.

Shallan turned and walked toward the stern, where Captain Tozbek spoke with one of his mates, pointing at a map covered with glyphs. He nodded to her as she approached. "Just a warning, young miss," he said. "The ports will soon grow less accommodating. We'll be leaving Longbrow's Straits, curving around the eastern edge of the continent, toward New Natanan. There's nothing of worth between here and the Shallow Crypts—and even that's not much of a sight. I wouldn't send my own brother ashore there without guards, and he's killed seventeen men with his bare hands, he has."

"I understand, Captain," Shallan said. "And thank you. I've revised my earlier decision. I need you to halt the ship and let me inspect the specimen swimming beside us."

He sighed, reaching up and running his fingers along one of his stiff, spiked eyebrows—much as other men might play with their mustaches. "Brightness, that's not advisable. Stormfather! If I dropped you in the ocean . . ."

"Then I would be wet," Shallan said. "It is a state I've experienced one or two times in my life."

"No, I simply cannot allow it. Like I said, we'll take you to see some shells in ___"

"Cannot allow it?" Shallan interrupted. She regarded him with what she hoped was a look of puzzlement, hoping he didn't see how tightly she squeezed her hands closed at her sides. Storms, but she hated confrontation. "I wasn't aware I had made a request you had the power to allow or disallow,

Captain. Stop the ship. Lower me down. That is your order.” She tried to say it as forcefully as Jasnah would. The woman could make it seem easier to resist a full highstorm than to disagree with her.

Tozbek worked his mouth for a moment, no sound coming out, as if his body were trying to continue his earlier objection but his mind had been delayed. “It is my ship . . .” he finally said.

“Nothing will be done to your ship,” Shallan said. “Let’s be quick about it, Captain. I do not wish to overly delay our arrival in port tonight.”

She left him, walking back to her box, heart thumping, hands trembling. She sat down, partially to calm herself.

Tozbek, sounding profoundly annoyed, began calling orders. The sails were lowered, the ship slowed. Shallan breathed out, feeling a fool.

And yet, what Jasnah said worked. The way Shallan acted frustrated and done something in the eyes of Tozbek. An illusion? Like the spren themselves, perhaps? Fragments of human expectation, given life?

The santhid slowed with them. Shallan rose, nervous, as sailors approached with rope. They reluctantly tied a loop at the bottom she could put her foot in, then explained that she should hold tightly to the rope as she was lowered. They tied a second, smaller rope securely around her waist—the means by which to haul her, wet and humiliated, back onto the deck. An inevitability, in their eyes.

She took off her shoes, then climbed up over the railing as instructed. Had it been this windy before? She had a moment of vertigo, standing there with socked toes gripping a tiny rim, dress fluttering in the coursing winds. A windspren zipped up to her, then formed into the shape of a face with clouds behind it. Storms, the thing had better not interfere. Was it human imagination that had given windspren their mischievous spark?

She stepped unsteadily into the rope loop as the sailors lowered it down beside her feet, then Yalb handed her the mask he’d told her of.

Jasnah appeared from belowdecks, looking about in confusion. She saw Shallan standing off the side of the ship, and then cocked an eyebrow.

Shallan shrugged, then gestured to the men to lower her.

She refused to let herself feel silly as she inched toward the waters and the reclusive animal bobbing in the waves. The men stopped her a foot or two above the water, and she put on the mask, held by straps, covering most of her face including the nose.

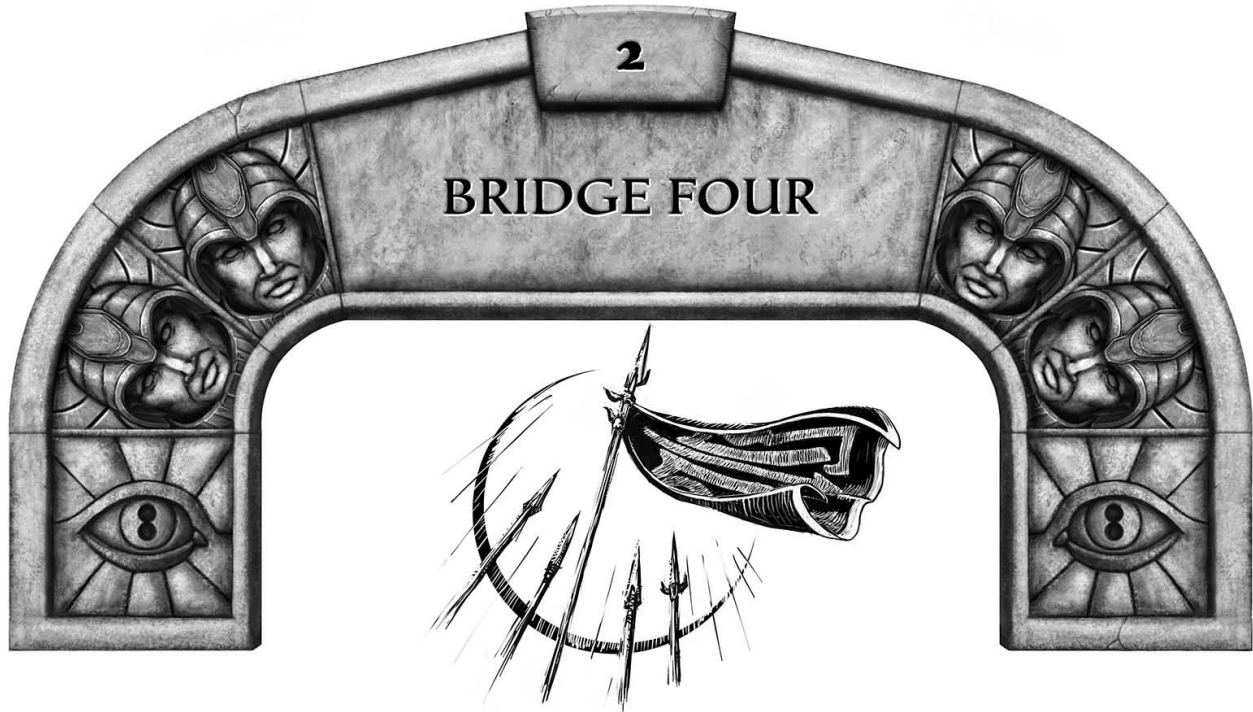
“Lower!” she shouted up at them.

She thought she could feel their reluctance in the lethargic way the rope descended. Her foot hit the water, and a biting cold shot up her leg. Stormfather! But she didn’t have them stop. She let them lower her farther until her legs were submerged in the frigid water. Her skirt ballooned out in a most annoying way, and she actually had to step on the end of it—inside the loop—to prevent it from rising up about her waist and floating on the water’s surface as she submerged.

She wrestled with the fabric for a moment, glad the men above couldn’t see her blushing. Once it got wetter, though, it was easier to manage. She finally was able to squat, still holding tightly to the rope, and go down into the water up to her waist.

Then she ducked her head under the water.

Light streamed down from the surface in shimmering, radiant columns. There was life here, furious, amazing life. Tiny fish zipped this way and that, picking at the underside of the shell that shaded a majestic creature. Gnarled like an ancient tree, with rippled and folded skin, the true form of the santhid was a beast with long, drooping blue tendrils, like those of a jellyfish, only far thip;.” Sh



Our first clue was the Parshendi. Even weeks before they abandoned their pursuit of the gemhearts, their pattern of fighting changed. They lingered on the plateaus after battles, as if waiting for something.

—From the personal journal of Navani Kholin, Jeseses 1174

Breath.

A man's breath was his life. Exhaled, bit by bit, back into the world. Kaladin breathed deeply, eyes closed, and for a time that was all he could hear. His own life. In, out, to the beating of the thunder in his chest.

Breath. His own little storm.

Outside, the rain had stopped. Kaladin remained sitting in the darkness. When kings and wealthy lighteyes died, their bodies weren't burned like those of common men. Instead, they were Soulcast into statues of stone or metal, forever frozen.

The darkeyes' bodies were burned. They became smoke, to rise toward the heavens and whatever waited there, like a burned prayer.

Breath. The breath of a lighteyes was no different from that of a darkeyes. No more sweet, no more free. The breath of kings and slaves mingled, to be breathed by men again, over and over.

Kaladin stood up and opened his eyes. He'd spent the highstorm in the darkness of this small room alongside Bridge Four's new barrack. Alone. He walked to the door, but stopped. He rested his fingers on a cloak he knew hung from a hook there. In the darkness, he could not make out its deep blue color, nor the Kholin glyph—in the shape of Dalinar's sigil—on the back.

It seemed that every change in his life had been marked by a storm. This was a big one. He shoved open the door and stepped out into the light as a free man.

He left the cloak, for now.

Bridge Four cheered him as he emerged. They had gone out to bathe and shave in the riddens of the storm, as was their custom. The line was almost done, Rock having shaved each of the men in turn. The large Horneater hummed to himself as he worked the razor over Drehy's balding head. The air smelled wet from the rain, and a washed-out firepit nearby was the only trace of the stew the group had shared the night before.

In many ways, this place wasn't so different from the lumberyards his men had recently escaped. The long, rectangular stone barracks were much the same—Soulcast rather than having been built by hand, they looked like enormous stone logs. These, however, each had a couple of smaller rooms on the sides for sergeants, with their own doors that opened to the outside. They'd been painted with the is it?"fkresting symbols of the platoons using them before; Kaladin's men would have to paint over those.

"Moash," Kaladin called. "Skar, Teft."

The three jogged toward him, splashing through puddles left by the storm. They wore the clothing of bridgemen: simple trousers cut off at the knees, and leather vests over bare chests. Skar was up and mobile despite the wound to his foot, and he tried rather obviously not to limp. For now, Kaladin didn't order him to bed rest. The wound wasn't too bad, and he needed the man.

“I want to look at what we’ve got,” Kaladin said, leading them away from the barrack. It would house fifty men along with a half-dozen sergeants. More barracks flanked it on either side. Kaladin had been given an entire block of them—twenty buildings—to house his new battalion of former bridgemen.

Twenty buildings. That Dalinar should so easily be able to find a block of twenty buildings for the bridgemen bespoke a terrible truth—the cost of Sadeas’s betrayal. Thousands of men dead. Indeed, female scribes worked near some of the barracks, supervising parshmen who carried out heaps of clothing and other personal effects. The possessions of the deceased.

Not a few of those scribes looked on with red eyes and frazzled composesures. Sadeas had just created thousands of new widows in Dalinar’s camp, and likely as many orphans. If Kaladin had needed another reason to hate that man, he found it here, manifest in the suffering of those whose husbands had trusted him on the battlefield.

In Kaladin’s eyes, there was no sin greater than the betrayal of one’s allies in battle. Except, perhaps, for the betrayal of one’s own men—of murdering them after they risked their lives to protect you. Kaladin felt an immediate flare of anger at thoughts of Amaram and what he’d done. His slave brand seemed to burn again on his forehead.

Amaram and Sadeas. Two men in Kaladin’s life who would, at some point, need to pay for the things they’d done. Preferably, that payment would come with severe interest.

Kaladin continued to walk with Teft, Moash, and Skar. These barracks, which were slowly being emptied of personal effects, were also crowded with bridgemen. They looked much like the men of Bridge Four—same vests and knee-trousers. And yet, in some other ways, they couldn’t have looked less like the men of Bridge Four. Shaggy-haired with beards that hadn’t been trimmed in months, they bore hollow eyes that didn’t seem to blink often enough. Slumped backs. Expressionless faces.

Each man among them seemed to sit alone, even when surrounded by his fellows.

“I remember that feeling,” Skar said softly. The short, wiry man had sharp features and silvering hair at the temples, despite being in his early thirties. “I don’t want to, but I do.”

“We’re supposed to turn those into an army?” Moash asked.

“Kaladin did it to Bridge Four, didn’t he?” Teft asked, wagging a finger at Moash. “He’ll do it again.”

“Transforming a few dozen men is different from doing the same for hundreds,” Moash said, kicking aside a fallen branch from the highstorm. Tall and solid, Moash had a scar on his chin but no slave brand on his forehead. He walked straight-backed with his chin up. Save for those dark brown eyes of his, he could have passed for an officer.

Kaladin led the three past Jasnah’s note in a sky barrack after barrack, doing a quick count. Nearly a thousand men, and though he’d told them yesterday that they were now free—and could return to their old lives if they wished—few seemed to want to do anything but sit. Though there had originally been forty bridge crews, many had been slaughtered during the latest assault and others had already been short-manned.

“We’ll combine them into twenty crews,” Kaladin said, “of about fifty each.” Above, Syl fluttered down as a ribbon of light and zipped around him. The men gave no sign of seeing her; she would be invisible to them. “We can’t teach each of these thousand personally, not at first. We’ll want to train the more eager ones among them, then send them back to lead and train their own teams.”

“I suppose,” Teft said, scratching his chin. The oldest of the bridgemen, he was one of the few who retained a beard. Most of the others had shaved theirs off as a mark of pride, something to separate the men of Bridge Four from common slaves. Teft kept his neat for the same reason. It was light brown where it hadn’t gone grey, and he wore it short and square, almost like an ardent’s.

Moash grimaced, looking at the bridgemen. “You assume some of them will be ‘more eager,’ Kaladin. They all look the same level of despondent to me.”

“Some will still have fight in them,” Kaladin said, continuing on back toward Bridge Four. “The ones who joined us at the fire last night, for a start. Teft, I’ll need you to choose others. Organize and combine crews, then pick forty men—two from each team—to be trained first. You’ll be in command of that training. Those forty will be the seed we use to help the rest.”

“I suppose I can do that.”

“Good. I’ll give you a few men to help.”

“A few?” Teft asked. “I could use more than a few. . . .”

“You’ll have to make do with a few,” Kaladin said, stopping on the path and turning westward, toward the king’s complex beyond the camp wall. It rose on a hillside overlooking the rest of the warcamps. “Most of us are going to be needed to keep Dalinar Kholin alive.”

Moash and the others stopped beside him. Kaladin squinted at the palace. It certainly didn’t look grand enough to house a king—out here, everything was just stone and more stone.

“You are willing to trust Dalinar?” Moash asked.

“He gave up his Shardblade for us,” Kaladin said.

“He owed it to us,” Skar said with a grunt. “We saved his storming life.”

“It could have just been posturing,” Moash said, folding his arms. “Political games, him and Sadeas trying to manipulate each other.”

Syl alighted on Kaladin’s shoulder, taking the form of a young woman with a flowing, filmy dress, all blue-white. She held her hands clasped together as she looked up at the king’s complex, where Dalinar Kholin had gone to plan.

He’d told Kaladin that he was going to do something that would anger a lot of people. I’m going to take away their games. . . .

“We need to keep that man alive,” Kaladin said, looking back to the others. “I don’t know if I trust him, but he’s the only person on these Plains who has

shown Jasnah's note in a sky even a hint of compassion for bridgemen. If he dies, do you want to guess how long it will take his successor to sell us back to Sadeas?"

Skar snorted in derision. "I'd like to see them try with a Knight Radiant at our head."

"I'm not a Radiant."

"Fine, whatever," Skar said. "Whatever you are, it will be tough for them to take us from you."

"You think I can fight them all, Skar?" Kaladin said, meeting the older man's eyes. "Dozens of Shardbearers? Tens of thousands of troops? You think one man could do that?"

"Not one man," Skar said, stubborn. "You."

"I'm not a god, Skar," Kaladin said. "I can't hold back the weight of ten armies." He turned to the other two. "We decided to stay here on the Shattered Plains. Why?"

"What good would it do to run?" Teft asked, shrugging. "Even as free men, we'd just end up conscripted into one army or another out there in the hills. Either that, or we'd end up starving."

Moash nodded. "This is as good a place as any, so long as we're free."

"Dalinar Kholin is our best hope for a real life," Kaladin said. "Bodyguards, not conscripted labor. Free men, despite the brands on our foreheads. Nobody else will give us that. If we want freedom, we need to keep Dalinar Kholin alive."

"And the Assassin in White?" Skar asked softly.

They'd heard of what the man was doing around the world, slaughtering kings and highprinces in all nations. The news was the buzz of the warcamps, ever since reports had started trickling in through spanreed. The emperor of Azir, dead. Jah Keved in turmoil. A half-dozen other nations left without a

ruler.

“He already killed our king,” Kaladin said. “Old Gavilar was the assassin’s first murder. We’ll just have to hope he’s done here. Either way, we protect Dalinar. At all costs.”

They nodded one by one, though those nods were grudging. He didn’t blame them. Trusting lighteyes hadn’t gotten them far—even Moash, who had once spoken well of Dalinar, now seemed to have lost his fondness for the man. Or any lighteyes.

In truth, Kaladin was a little surprised at himself and the trust he felt. But, storm it, Syl liked Dalinar. That carried weight.

“We’re weak right now,” Kaladin said, lowering his voice. “But if we play along with this for a time, protecting Kholin, we’ll be paid handsomely. I’ll be able to train you—really train you—as soldiers and officers. Beyond that, we’ll be able to teach these others.

“We could never make it on our own out there as two dozen former bridgemen. But what if we were instead a highly skilled mercenary force of a thousand soldiers, equipped with the finest gear in the warcamps? If worst comes to worst, and we have to abandon the camps, I’d like to do so as a cohesive unit, hardened and impossible to ignore. Give me a year with this thousand, and I can have it done.”

“Now that plan I like,” Moash said. “Do I get to learn to use a sword?” Alight

“We’re still darkeyes, Moash.”

“Not you,” Skar said from his other side. “I saw your eyes during the—”

“Stop!” Kaladin said. He took a deep breath. “Just stop. No more talk of that.”

Skar fell silent.

“I am going to name you officers,” Kaladin said to them. “You three, along with Sigzil and Rock. You’ll be lieutenants.”

“Darkeyed lieutenants?” Skar said. The rank was commonly used for the equivalent of sergeants in companies made up only of lighteyes.

“Dalinar made me a captain,” Kaladin said. “The highest rank he said he dared commission a darkeyes. Well, I need to come up with a full command structure for a thousand men, and we’re going to need something between sergeant and captain. That means appointing you five as lieutenants. I think Dalinar will let me get away with it. We’ll make master sergeants if we need another rank.

“Rock is going to be quartermaster and in charge of food for the thousand. I’ll appoint Lopen his second. Teft, you’ll be in charge of training. Sigzil will be our clerk. He’s the only one who can read glyphs. Moash and Skar . . .”

He glanced toward the two men. One short, the other tall, they walked the same way, with a smooth gait, dangerous, spears always on their shoulders. They were never without. Of all the men he’d trained in Bridge Four, only these two had instinctively understood. They were killers.

Like Kaladin himself.

“We three,” Kaladin told them, “are each going to focus on watching Dalinar Kholin. Whenever possible, I want one of us three personally guarding him. Often one of the other two will watch his sons, but make no mistake, the Blackthorn is the man we’re going to keep alive. At all costs. He is our only guarantee of freedom for Bridge Four.”

The others nodded.

“Good,” Kaladin said. “Let’s go get the rest of the men. It’s time for the world to see you as I do.”

* * *

By common agreement, Hobber sat down to get his tattoo first. The gap-toothed man was one of the very first who had believed in Kaladin. Kaladin remembered that day; exhausted after a bridge run, wanting to simply lie

down and stare. Instead, he'd chosen to save Hobber rather than letting him die. Kaladin had saved himself that day too.

The rest of Bridge Four stood around Hobber in the tent, watching in silence as the tattooist worked carefully on his forehead, covering up the scar of his slave's brand with the glyphs Kaladin had provided. Hobber winced now and then at the pain of the tattoo, but he kept a grin on his face.

Kaladin had heard that you could cover a scar with a tattoo, and it ended up working quite well. Once the tattoo ink was injected, the glyphs drew the eye, and you could barely tell that the skin beneath was scarred.

Once the process was finished, the tattooist provided a mirror for Hobber to look into. The bridgeman touched his forehead hesitantly. The skin was red from the needles, but the dark tattoo perfectly covered the slave brand.

"What does it say?" Hobber asked softly, tears in his eyes.

"Freedom," Sigzil stanza

"The smaller ones above," Kaladin said, "say the date you were freed and the one who freed you. Even if you lose your writ of freedom, anyone who tries to imprison you for being a runaway can easily find proof that you are not. They can go to Dalinar Kholin's scribes, who keep a copy of your writ."

Hobber nodded. "That's good, but it's not enough. Add 'Bridge Four' to it. Freedom, Bridge Four."

"To imply you were freed from Bridge Four?"

"No, sir. I wasn't freed from Bridge Four. I was freed by it. I wouldn't trade my time there for anything."

It was crazy talk. Bridge Four had been death—scores of men had been slaughtered running that cursed bridge. Even after Kaladin had determined to save the men, he'd lost far too many. Hobber would have been a fool not to take any opportunity to escape.

And yet, he sat stubbornly until Kaladin drew out the proper glyphs for the

tattooist—a calm, sturdy dark-eyed woman who looked like she could have lifted a bridge all on her own. She settled down on her stool and began adding the two glyphs to Hobber’s forehead, tucked right below the freedom glyph. She spent the process explaining—again—how the tattoo would be sore for days and how Hobber would need to care for it.

He accepted the new tattoos with a grin on his face. Pure foolishness, but the others nodded in agreement, claspng Hobber on the arm. Once Hobber was done, Skar sat quickly, eager, demanding the same full set of tattoos.

Kaladin stepped back, folding his arms and shaking his head. Outside the tent, a bustling marketplace sold and bought. The “warcamp” was really a city, built up inside the craterlike rim of some enormous rock formation. The prolonged war on the Shattered Plains had attracted merchants of all varieties, along with tradesmen, artists, and even families with children.

Moash stood nearby, face troubled, watching the tattooist. He wasn’t the only one in the bridge crew who didn’t have a slave brand. Teft didn’t either. They had been made bridgemen without technically being made slaves first. It happened frequently in Sadeas’s camp, where running bridges was a punishment that one could earn for all manner of infractions.

“If you don’t have a slave’s brand,” Kaladin said loudly to the men, “you don’t need to get the tattoo. You’re still one of us.”

“No,” Rock said. “I will get this thing.” He insisted on sitting down after Skar and getting the tattoo right on his forehead, though he had no slave brand. Indeed, every one of the men without a slave brand—Beld and Teft included—sat down and got the tattoo on their foreheads.

Only Moash abstained, and had the tattoo placed on his upper arm. Good. Unlike most of them, he wouldn’t have to go about with a proclamation of former slavery in plain view.

Moash stood up from the seat, and another took his place. A man with red and black skin in a marbled pattern, like stone. Bridge Four had a lot of variety, but Shen was in a class all his own. A parshman.

“I can’t tattoo him,” the artist said. “He’s property.”

Kaladin opened his mouth to object, but the other bridgemen jumped in first.

frustration done! “He’s been freed, like us,” Teft said.

“One of the team,” Hobber said. “Give him the tattoo, or you won’t see a sphere from any of us.” He blushed after he said it, glancing at Kaladin—who would be paying for all this, using spheres granted by Dalinar Kholin.

Other bridgemen spoke out, and the tattoo artist finally sighed and gave in. She pulled over her stool and began working on Shen’s forehead.

“You won’t even be able to see it,” she grumbled, though Sigzil’s skin was nearly as dark as Shen’s, and the tattoo showed up fine on him.

Eventually, Shen looked in the mirror, then stood up. He glanced at Kaladin, and nodded. Shen didn’t say much, and Kaladin didn’t know what to make of the man. It was actually easy to forget about him, usually trailing along silently at the back of the group of bridgemen. Invisible. Parshmen were often that way.

Shen finished, only Kaladin himself remained. He sat down next and closed his eyes. The pain of the needles was a lot sharper than he’d anticipated.

After a short time, the tattooist started cursing under her breath.

Kaladin opened his eyes as she wiped a rag on his forehead. “What is it?” he asked.

“The ink won’t take!” she said. “I’ve never seen anything like it. When I wipe your forehead, the ink all just comes right off! The tattoo won’t stay.”

Kaladin sighed, realizing he had a little Stormlight raging in his veins. He hadn’t even noticed drawing it in, but he seemed to be getting better and better at holding it. He frequently took in a little these days while walking about. Holding Stormlight was like filling a wineskin—if you filled it to bursting and unstopped it, it would squirt out quickly, then slow to a trickle. Same with the Light.

He banished it, hoping the tattoo artist didn't notice when he breathed out a small cloud of glowing smoke. "Try again," he said as she got out new ink.

This time, the tattoo took. Kaladin sat through the process, teeth clenched against the pain, then looked up as she held the mirror for him. The face that looked back at Kaladin seemed alien. Clean-shaven, hair pulled back from his face for the tattooing, the slave brands covered up and, for the moment, forgotten.

Can I be this man again? he thought, reaching up, touching his cheek. This man died, didn't he?

Syl landed on his shoulder, joining him in looking into the mirror. "Life before death, Kaladin," she whispered.

He unconsciously sucked in Stormlight. Just a little, a fraction of a sphere's worth. It flowed through his veins like a wave of pressure, like winds trapped in a small enclosure.

The tattoo on his forehead melted. His body shoved out the ink, which started to drip down his face. The tattooist cursed again and grabbed her rag.

Kaladin was left with the image of those glyphs melting away. Freedom dissolved, and underneath, the violent scars of his captivity. Dominated by a branded glyph.

Shash. Dangerous.

The woman wiped his face. "I don't know why this is happening! I thought it would stay that time. I—"

"It's all right," Kaladin said, taking the rag as he stood, finishing the cleanup. stanza

They nodded. He'd have to explain to them later what was happening; they knew of his abilities.

"Let's go," Kaladin said to them, tossing a small bag of spheres to the

tattooist, then taking his spear from beside the tent entrance. The others joined him, spears to shoulders. They didn't need to be armed while in camp, but he wanted them to get used to the idea that they were free to carry weapons now.

The market outside was crowded and vibrant. The tents, of course, would have been taken down and stowed during last night's highstorm, but they'd already sprung up again. Perhaps because he was thinking about Shen, he noticed the parshmen. He picked out dozens of them with a cursory glance, helping set up a few last tents, carrying purchases for lighteyes, helping shopowners stack their wares.

What do they think of this war on the Shattered Plains? Kaladin wondered. A war to defeat, and perhaps subjugate, the only free parshmen in the world?

Would that he could get an answer out of Shen regarding questions like that. It seemed all he ever got from the parshman were shrugs.

Kaladin led his men through the market, which seemed far friendlier than the one in Sadeas's camp. Though people stared at the bridgemen, nobody sneered, and the haggling at nearby stands—while energetic—didn't progress to shouting. There even seemed to be fewer urchins and beggars.

You just want to believe that, Kaladin thought. You want to believe Dalinar is the man everyone says he is. The honorable lighteyes of the stories. But everyone said the same things about Amaram.

As they walked, they did pass some soldiers. Too few. Men who had been on duty back in the camp when the others had gone on the disastrous assault where Sadeas had betrayed Dalinar. As they passed one group patrolling the market, Kaladin caught two men at their front raising their hands before themselves, crossed at the wrist.

How had they learned Bridge Four's old salute, and so quickly? These men didn't do it as a full salute, just a small gesture, but they nodded their heads to Kaladin and his men as they passed. Suddenly, the more calm nature of the market took on another cast to Kaladin. Perhaps this wasn't simply the order and organization of Dalinar's army.

There was an air of quiet dread over this warcamp. Thousands had been lost to Sadeas's betrayal. Everyone here had probably known a man who had died out on those plateaus. And everyone probably wondered if the conflict between the two highprinces would escalate.

"It's nice to be seen as a hero, isn't it?" Sigzil asked, walking beside Kaladin and watching another group of soldiers pass by.

"How long will the goodwill last, do you think?" Moash asked. "How long before they resent us?"

"Ha!" Rock, towering behind him, clapped Moash on the shoulder. "No complaining today! You do this thing too much. Do not make me kick you. I do not like kicking. It hurts my toes."

"Kick me?" Moash snorted. "You won't even carry a spear, Rock."

"Spears are not for kicking complainers. But big Unkalaki feet like mine—it is; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m something re what they were made for! Ha! This thing is obvious, yes?"

Kaladin led the men out of the market and to a large rectangular building near the barracks. This one was constructed of worked stone, rather than Soulcast rock, allowing far more finesse in design. Such buildings were becoming more common in the warcamps, as more masons arrived.

Soulcasting was quicker, but also more expensive and less flexible. He didn't know much about it, only that Soulcasters were limited in what they could do. That was why the barracks were all essentially identical.

Kaladin led his men inside the towering building to the counter, where a grizzled man with a belly that stretched to next week supervised a few parshmen stacking bolts of blue cloth. Rind, the Kholin head quartermaster, to whom Kaladin had sent instructions the night before. Rind was lighteyed, but what was known as a "tenner," a lowly rank barely above darkeyes.

"Ah!" Rind said, speaking with a high-pitched voice that did not match his girth. "You're here, finally! I've got them all out for you, Captain."

Everything I have left.”

“Left?” Moash asked.

“Uniforms of the Cobalt Guard! I’ve commissioned some new ones, but this is what stock remained.” Rind grew more subdued. “Didn’t expect to need so many so soon, you see.” He looked Moash up and down, then handed him a uniform and pointed to a stall for changing.

Moash took it. “We going to wear our leather jerkins over these?”

“Ha!” Rind said. “The ones tied with so much bone you looked like some Western skullbearer on feast day? I’ve heard of that. But no, Brightlord Dalinar says you’re each to be outfitted with breastplates, steel caps, new spears. Chain mail for the battlefield, if you need it.”

“For now,” Kaladin said, “uniforms will do.”

“I think I’ll look silly in this,” Moash grumbled, but walked over to change. Rind distributed the uniforms to the men. He gave Shen a strange look, but delivered the parshman a uniform without complaint.

The bridgemen gathered in an eager bunch, jabbering with excitement as they unfolded their uniforms. It had been a long time since any of them had worn anything other than bridgeman leathers or slave wraps. They stopped talking when Moash stepped out.

These were newer uniforms, of a more modern style than Kaladin had worn in his previous military service. Stiff blue trousers and black boots polished to a shine. A buttoned white shirt, only the edges of its collar and cuffs extending beyond the jacket, which came down to the waist and buttoned closed beneath the belt.

“Now, there’s a soldier!” the quartermaster said with a laugh. “Still think you look silly?” He gestured for Moash to inspect his reflection in the mirror on the wall.

Moash fixed his cuffs and actually blushed. Kaladin had rarely seen the man

so out of sorts. “No,” Moash said. “I don’t.”

The others moved eagerly and began changing. Some went to the stalls at the side, but most didn’t care. They were bridgemen and slaves; they’d spent most of their recent lives being paraded about in loincloths or little more.

Teft had his on before anyone else, and knew to do up the buttons in the right places. “Been a long time,” he whispered, buckling his belt. “Don’t know that I Alight

“This is what you are, Teft,” Kaladin said. “Don’t let the slave rule you.”

Teft grunted, affixing his combat knife in its place on his belt. “And you, son? When are you going to admit what you are?”

“I have.”

“To us. Not to everyone else.”

“Don’t start this again.”

“I’ll storming start whatever I want,” Teft snapped. He leaned in, speaking softly. “At least until you give me a real answer. You’re a Surgebinder. You’re not a Radiant yet, but you’re going to be one when this is all blown through. The others are right to push you. Why don’t you go have a hike up to that Dalinar fellow, suck in some Stormlight, and make him recognize you as a lighteyes?”

Kaladin glanced at the men in a muddled jumble as they tried to get the uniforms on, an exasperated Rind explaining to them how to do up the coats.

“Everything I’ve ever had, Teft,” Kaladin whispered, “the lighteyes have taken from me. My family, my brother, my friends. More. More than you can imagine. They see what I have, and they take it.” He held up his hand, and could faintly make out a few glowing wisps trailing from his skin, since he knew what to look for. “They’ll take it. If they can find out what I do, they’ll take it.”

“Now, how in Kelek’s breath would they do that?”

“I don’t know,” Kaladin said. “I don’t know, Teft, but I can’t help feeling panic when I think about it. I can’t let them have this, can’t let them take it—or you men—from me. We remain quiet about what I can do. No more talk of it.”

Teft grumbled as the other men finally got themselves sorted out, though Lopen—one armed, with his empty sleeve turned inside out and pushed in so it didn’t hang down—prodded at the patch on his shoulder. “What’s this?”

“It’s the insignia of the Cobalt Guard,” Kaladin said. “Dalinar Kholin’s personal bodyguard.”

“They’re dead, gancho,” Lopen said. “We aren’t them.”

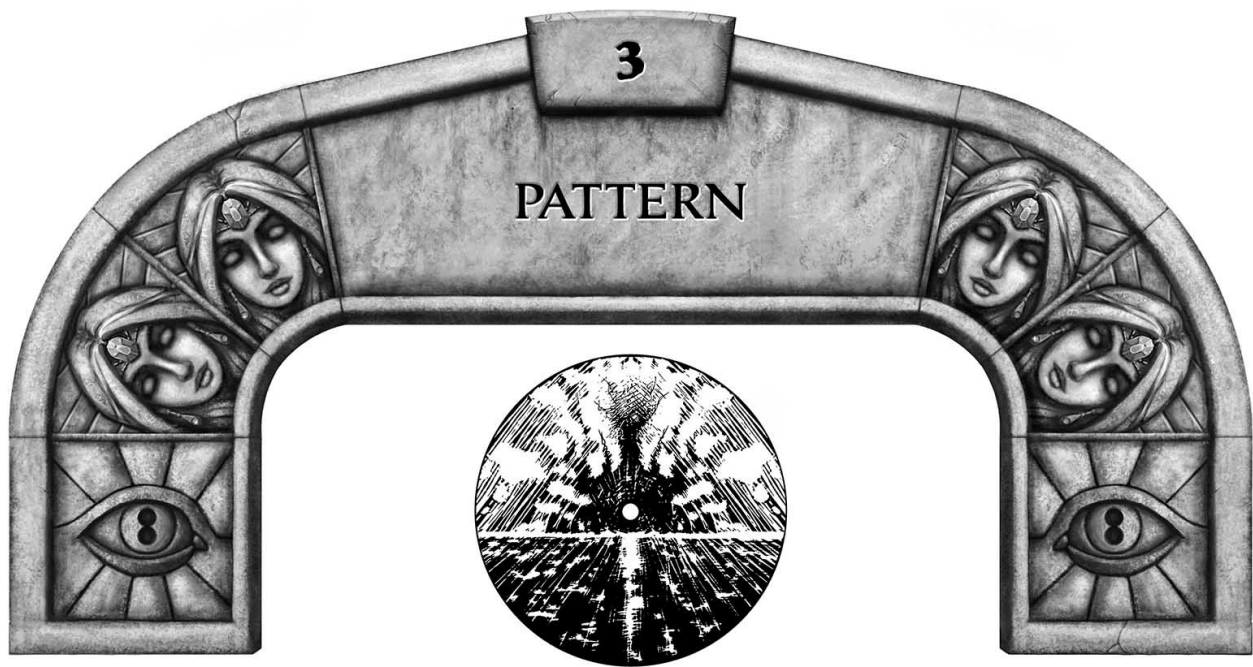
“Yeah,” Skar agreed. To Rind’s horror, he got out his knife and cut the patch free. “We’re Bridge Four.”

“Bridge Four was your prison,” Kaladin protested.

“Doesn’t matter,” Skar said. “We’re Bridge Four.” The others agreed, cutting off the patches, tossing them to the ground.

Teft nodded and did likewise. “We’ll protect the Blackthorn, but we’re not just going t





Soldiers reported being watched from afar by an unnerving number of Parshendi scouts. Then we noticed a new pattern of their penetrating close to the camps in the night and then quickly retreating. I can only surmise that our enemies were even then preparing their stratagem to end this war.

—From the personal journal of Navani Kholin, Jeseses 1174

Research into times before the Hierocracy is frustratingly difficult, the book read. During the reign of the Hierocracy, the Vorin Church had near-absolute control over eastern Roshar. The fabrications they promoted—and then perpetuated as absolute truth—became ingrained in the consciousness of society. More disturbingly, modified copies of ancient texts were made, aligning history to match Hierocratic dogma.

In her cabin, Shallan read by the glow of a goblet of spheres, wearing her nightgown. Her cramped chamber lacked a true porthole and had just a thin slit of a window running across the top of the outside wall. The only sound she could hear was the water lapping against the hull. Tonight, the ship did not have a port in which to shelter.

The church of this era was suspicious of the Knights Radiant, the book read.

Yet it relied upon the authority granted Vorinism by the Heralds. This created a dichotomy in which the Recreance, and the betrayal of the knights, was overemphasized. At the same time, the ancient knights—the ones who had lived alongside the Heralds in the shadowdays—were celebrated.

This makes it particularly difficult to study the Radiants and the place named Shadesmar. What is fact? What records did the church, in its misguided attempt to cleanse the past of perceived contradictions, rewrite to suit its preferred narrative? Few documents from the period survive that did not pass said, folding his arms in Kaladin . . ., but she could through Vorin hands to be copied from the original parchment into modern codices.

Shallan glanced up over the top of her book. The volume was one of Jasnah's earliest published works as a full scholar. Jasnah had not assigned Shallan to read it. Indeed, she'd been hesitant when Shallan had asked for a copy, and had needed to dig it out of one of the numerous trunks full of books she kept in the ship's hold.

Why had she been so reluctant, when this volume dealt with the very things that Shallan was studying? Shouldn't Jasnah have given her this right off? It —

The pattern returned.

Shallan's breath caught in her throat as she saw it on the cabin wall beside the bunk, just to her left. She carefully moved her eyes back to the page in front of her. The pattern was the same one that she'd seen before, the shape that had appeared on her sketchpad.

Ever since then, she'd been seeing it from the corner of her eye, appearing in the grain of wood, the cloth on the back of a sailor's shirt, the shimmering of the water. Each time, when she looked right at it, the pattern vanished. Jasnah would say nothing more, other than to indicate it was likely harmless.

Shallan turned the page and steadied her breathing. She had experienced something like this before with the strange symbol-headed creatures who had appeared unbidden in her drawings. She allowed her eyes to slip up off the page and look at the wall—not right at the pattern, but to the side of it, as if

she hadn't noticed it.

Yes, it was there. Raised, like an embossing, it had a complex pattern with a haunting symmetry. Its tiny lines twisted and turned through its mass, somehow lifting the surface of the wood, like iron scrollwork under a taut tablecloth.

It was one of those things. The symbolheads. This pattern was similar to their strange heads. She looked back at the page, but did not read. The ship swayed, and the glowing white spheres in her goblet clinked as they shifted. She took a deep breath.

Then looked directly at the pattern.

Immediately, it began to fade, the ridges sinking. Before it did, she got a clear look at it, and she took a Memory.

"Not this time," she muttered as it vanished. "This time I have you." She threw away her book, scrambling to get out her charcoal pencil and a sheet of sketching paper. She huddled down beside her light, red hair tumbling around her shoulders.

She worked furiously, possessed by a frantic need to have this drawing done. Her fingers moved on their own, her unclothed safehand holding the sketchpad toward the goblet, which sprinkled the paper with shards of light.

She tossed aside the pencil. She needed something crisper, capable of sharper lines. Ink. Pencil was wonderful for drawing the soft shades of life, but this thing she drew was not life. It was something else, something unreal. She dug a pen and inkwell from her supplies, then went back to her drawing, replicating the tiny, intricate lines.

She did not think as she drew. The art consumed her, and creationspren popped into existence all around. Dozens of tiny shapes soon crowded the small table beside her cot and the floor of the cabin near where she knelt. The spren shifted and spun, each no larger than the bowl of a spoon, becoming shapes they'd recently encountered. She mostly ignored them, though she'd never seen so many at once.

Faster and faster they shifted forms as she drew, intent. The pattern seemed impossibly traditional, perimeterly possible to capture. Its complex repetitions twisted down into infinity. No, a pen could never capture this thing perfectly, but she was close. She drew it spiraling out of a center point, then re-created each branch off the center, which had its own swirl of tiny lines. It was like a maze created to drive its captive insane.

When she finished the last line, she found herself breathing hard, as if she'd run a great distance. She blinked, again noticing the creations spread around her—there were hundreds. They lingered before fading away one by one. Shallan set the pen down beside her vial of ink, which she'd stuck to the tabletop with wax to keep it from sliding as the ship swayed. She picked up the page, waiting for the last lines of ink to dry, and felt as if she'd accomplished something significant—though she knew not what.

As the last line dried, the pattern rose before her. She heard a distinct sigh from the paper, as if in relief.

She jumped, dropping the paper and scrambling onto her bed. Unlike the other times, the embossing didn't vanish, though it left the paper—budding from her matching drawing—and moved onto the floor.

She could describe it in no other way. The pattern somehow moved from paper to floor. It came to the leg of her cot and wrapped around it, climbing upward and onto the blanket. It didn't look like something moving beneath the blanket; that was simply a crude approximation. The lines were too precise for that, and there was no stretching. Something beneath the blanket would have been just an indistinct lump, but this was exact.

It drew closer. It didn't look dangerous, but she still found herself trembling. This pattern was different from the symbolheads in her drawings, but it was also somehow the same. A flattened-out version, without torso or limbs. It was an abstraction of one of them, just as a circle with a few lines in it could represent a human's face on the page.

Those things had terrified her, haunted her dreams, made her worry she was going insane. So as this one approached, she scuttled from her bed and went as far from it in the small cabin as she could. Then, heart thumping in her

chest, she pulled open the door to go for Jasnah.

She found Jasnah herself just outside, reaching toward the doorknob, her left hand cupped before her. A small figure made of inky blackness—shaped like a man in a smart, fashionable suit with a long coat—stood in her palm. He melted away into shadow as he saw Shallan. Jasnah looked to Shallan, then glanced toward the floor of the cabin, where the pattern was crossing the wood.

“Put on some clothing, child,” Jasnah said. “We have matters to discuss.”

* * *

“I had originally hoped that we would have the saen,” Jasnah said, sitting on a stool in Shallan’s cabin. The pattern remained on the floor between her and Shallan, who lay prone on the cot, properly clothed with a robe over the nightgown and a thin white glove on her left hand. “But of course, that would be too easy. I have suspected since Kharbranth that we would be of different orders.”

“Orders, Brightness?” Shallan asked, timidly using a pencil to prod at the pattern on the floor. It shied away, like an animal that had been poked. Shallan was fascinated by how it raised the surface of the floor, though a part of her did not want to have anything to do with it and its unnatural, eye-; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m in front of retwisting geometries.

“Yes,” Jasnah said. The inklike spren that had accompanied her before had not reappeared. “Each order reportedly had access to two of the Surges, with overlap between them. We call the powers Surgebinding. Soulcasting was one, and is what we share, though our orders are different.”

Shallan nodded. Surgebinding. Soulcasting. These were talents of the Lost Radiants, the abilities—supposedly just legend—that had been their blessing or their curse, depending upon which reports you read. Or so she’d learned from the books Jasnah had given her to read during their trip.

“I’m not one of the Radiants,” Shallan said.

“Of course you aren’t,” Jasnah said, “and neither am I. The orders of knights were a construct, just as all society is a construct, used by men to define and explain. Not every man who wields a spear is a soldier, and not every woman who makes bread is a baker. And yet weapons, or baking, become the hallmarks of certain professions.”

“So you’re saying that what we can do . . .”

“Was once the definition of what initiated one into the Knights Radiant,” Jasnah said.

“But we’re women!”

“Yes,” Jasnah said lightly. “Spren don’t suffer from human society’s prejudices. Refreshing, wouldn’t you say?”

Shallan looked up from poking at the pattern spren. “There were women among the Knights Radiant?”

“A statistically appropriate number,” Jasnah said. “But don’t fear that you will soon find yourself swinging a sword, child. The archetype of Radiants on the battlefield is an exaggeration. From what I’ve read—though records are, unfortunately, untrustworthy—for every Radiant dedicated to battle, there were another three who spent their time on diplomacy, scholarship, or other ways to aid society.”

“Oh.” Why was Shallan disappointed by that?

Fool. A memory rose unbidden. A silvery sword. A pattern of light. Truths she could not face. She banished them, squeezing her eyes shut.

Ten heartbeats.

“I have been looking into the spren you told me about,” Jasnah said. “The creatures with the symbol heads.”

Shallan took a deep breath and opened her eyes. “This is one of them,” she said, pointing her pencil at the pattern, which had approached her trunk and was moving up onto it and off it—like a child jumping on a sofa. Instead of

threatening, it seemed innocent, even playful—and hardly intelligent at all. She had been frightened of this thing?

“Yes, I suspect that it is,” Jasnah said. “Most spren manifest differently here than they do in Shadesmar. What you drew before was their form there.”

“This one is not very impressive.”

“Yes. I will admit that I’m disappointed. I feel that we’re missing something important about this, Shallan, and I find it annoying. The Cryptics have a fearful reputation, and yet this one—the first specimen I’ve ever seen—seems . . .”

It climbed up the wall, then slipped down, then climbed back up, then slipped down again.

“Imbecilic?” Shallan asked.

“Perhaps it simply needs more time,” Jasnah said. “When I first bonded with Ivory—” She stopped abruptly.

“What?” Shallan said.

“I’m sorry. He does not like me to speak of him. It makes him anxious. The knights’ breaking of their oaths was very painful to the spren. Many spren died; I’m certain of it. Though Ivory won’t speak of it, I gather that what he’s done is regarded as a betrayal by the others of his kind.”

“But—”

“No more of that,” Jasnah said. “I’m sorry.”

“Fine. You mentioned the Cryptics?”

“Yes,” Jasnah said, reaching into the sleeve that hid her safehand and slipping out a folded piece of paper—one of Shallan’s drawings of the symbolheads. “That is their own name for themselves, though we would probably name them liespren. They don’t like the term. Regardless, the Cryptics rule one of the greater cities in Shadesmar. Think of them as the

lighteyes of the Cognitive Realm.”

“So this thing,” Shallan said, nodding to the pattern, which was spinning in circles in the center of the cabin, “is like . . . a prince, on their side?”

“Something like that. There is a complex sort of conflict between them and the honorspren. Spren politics are not something I’ve been able to devote much time to. This spren will be your companion—and will grant you the ability to Soulcast, among other things.”

“Other things?”

“We will have to see,” Jasnah said. “It comes down to the nature of spren. What has your research revealed?”

With Jasnah, everything seemed to be a test of scholarship. Shallan smothered a sigh. This was why she had come with Jasnah, rather than returning to her home. Still, she did wish that sometimes Jasnah would just tell her answers rather than making her work so hard to find them. “Alai says that the spren are fragments of the powers of creation. A lot of the scholars I read agreed with that.”

“It is one opinion. What does it mean?”

Shallan tried not to let herself be distracted by the spren on the floor. “There are ten fundamental Surges—forces—by which the world works. Gravitation, pressure, transformation. That sort of thing. You told me spren are fragments of the Cognitive Realm that have somehow gained sentience because of human attention. Well, it stands to reason that they were something before. Like . . . like a painting was a canvas before being given life.”

“Life?” Jasnah said, raising her eyebrow.

“Of course,” Shallan said. Paintings lived. Not lived like a person or a spren, but . . . well, it was obvious to her, at least. “So, before the spren were alive, they were something. Power. Energy. Zen-daughter-Vath sketched tiny spren she found sometimes around heavy objects. Gravitationspren—fragments of the power or force that causes us to fall. It stands to reason that every spren

was a power before it was a spren. Really, you can divide spren into two general groups. Those that respond to emotions and those that respond to forces like fire or wind pressure.”

“So you believe Namar’s theory on spren categorization?” she asked, looking westward.

“Yes.”

“Good,” Jasnah said. “As do I. I suspect, personally, that these groupings of spren—emotion spren versus nature spren—are where the ideas of mankind’s primeval ‘gods’ came from. Honor, who became Vorinism’s Almighty, was created by men who wanted a representation of ideal human emotions as they saw in emotion spren. Cultivation, the god worshipped in the West, is a female deity that is an embodiment of nature and nature spren. The various Voidspren, with their unseen lord—whose name changes depending on which culture we’re speaking of—evoke an enemy or antagonist. The Stormfather, of course, is a strange offshoot of this, his theoretical nature changing depending on which era of Vorinism is doing the talking. . . .”

She trailed off. Shallan blushed, realizing she’d looked away and had begun tracing a glyphward on her



The next clue came on the walls. I did not ignore this sign, but neither did I grasp its full implications.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jeseses 1174

“I’m running through water,” Dalinar said, coming to himself. He is it?”fkow muchwas moving, charging forward.

The vision coalesced around him. Warm water splashed his legs. On either side of him, a dozen men with hammers and spears ran through the shallow water. They lifted their legs high with each step, feet back, thighs lifting parallel to the water’s surface, like they were marching in a parade—only no parade had ever been such a mad scramble. Obviously, running that way helped them move through the liquid. He tried to imitate the odd gait.

“I’m in the Purelake, I think,” he said, under his breath. “Warm water that only comes up to the knees, no signs of land anywhere. It’s dusk, though, so I can’t see much.

“People run with me. I don’t know if we’re running toward something or away from it. Nothing over my shoulder that I can see. These people are

obviously soldiers, though the uniforms are antiquated. Leather skirts, bronze helms and breastplates. Bare legs and arms.” He looked down at himself. “I’m wearing the same.”

Some highlords in Alethkar and Jah Keved still used uniforms like this, so he couldn’t place the exact era. The modern uses were all calculated revivals by traditionalist commanders who hoped a classical look would inspire their men. In those cases, however, modern steel equipment would be used alongside the antique uniforms—and he didn’t see any of that here.

Dalinar didn’t ask questions. He’d found that playing along with these visions taught him more than it did to stop and demand answers.

Running through this water was tough. Though he’d started near the front of the group, he was now lagging behind. The group ran toward some kind of large rock mound ahead, shadowed in the dusk. Maybe this wasn’t the Purelake. It didn’t have rock formations like—

That wasn’t a rock mound. It was a fortress. Dalinar halted, looking up at the peaked, castle-like structure that rose straight from the still lake waters. He’d never seen its like before. Jet-black stone. Obsidian? Perhaps this place had been Soulcast.

“There’s a fortress ahead,” he said, continuing forward. “It must not still exist—if it did, it would be famous. It looks like it’s created entirely from obsidian. Finlike sides rising toward peaked tips above, towers like arrowheads . . . Stormfather. It’s majestic.

“We’re approaching another group of soldiers who stand in the water, holding spears wardingly in all directions. There are perhaps a dozen of them; I’m in the company of another dozen. And . . . yes, there’s someone in the middle of them. Shardbearer. Glowing armor.”

Not just a Shardbearer. Radiant. A knight in resplendent Shardplate that glowed with a deep red at the joints and in certain markings. Armor did that in the shadowdays. This vision was taking place before the Recreance.

Like all Shardplate, the armor was distinctive. With that skirt of chain links,

those smooth joints, the vambraces that extended back just so . . . Storms, that looked like Adolin's armor, though this armor pulled in more at the waist. Female? Dalinar couldn't tell for certain, as the faceplate was down.

"Form up!" the knight ordered as Dalinar's group arrived, and he nodded to himself. Yes, female.

Dalinar and the other soldiers formed a ring around the knight, weapons outward. Not far off, traditional for my ly another group of soldiers with a knight at their center marched through the water.

"Why did you call us back?" asked one of Dalinar's companions.

"Caeb thinks he saw something," the knight said. "Be alert. Let's move carefully."

The group started away from the fortress in another direction from the one they'd come. Dalinar held his spear outward, sweating at his temples. To his own eyes, he didn't look any different from his normal self. The others, however, would see him as one of their own.

He still didn't know terribly much about these visions. The Almighty sent them to him, somehow. But the Almighty was dead, by his own admission. So how did that work?

"We're looking for something," Dalinar said, under his breath. "Teams of knights and soldiers have been sent into the night to find something that was spotted."

"You all right, new kid?" asked one of the soldiers to his side.

"Fine," Dalinar said. "Just worried. I mean, I don't even really know what we're looking for."

"A spren that doesn't act like it should," the man said. "Keep your eyes open. Once Sja-anat touches a spren, it acts strange. Call attention to anything you see."

Dalinar nodded, then under his breath repeated the words, hoping that Navani

could hear him. He and the soldiers continued their sweep, the knight at their center speaking with . . . nobody? She sounded like she was having a conversation, but Dalinar couldn't see or hear anyone else with her.

He turned his attention to the surroundings. He'd always wanted to see the center of the Purelake, but he'd never had a chance to do much besides visit the border. He'd been unable to find time for a detour in that direction during his last visit to Azir. The Azish had always acted surprised that he would want to go to such a place, as they claimed there was "nothing there."

Dalinar wore some kind of tight shoes on his feet, perhaps to keep him from cutting them on anything hidden by the water. The footing was uneven in places, with holes and ridges he felt rather than saw. He found himself watching little fish dart this way and that, shadows in the water, and next to them a face.

A face.

Dalinar shouted, jumping back, pointing his spear downward. "That was a face! In the water!"

"Riverspren?" the knight asked, stepping up beside him.

"It looked like a shadow," Dalinar said. "Red eyes."

"It's here, then," the knight said. "Sja-anat's spy. Caeb, run to the checkpoint. The rest of you, keep watching. It won't be able to go far without a carrier." She yanked something off her belt, a small pouch.

"There!" Dalinar said, spotting a small red dot in the water. It flowed away from him, swimming like a fish. He charged after, running as he'd learned earlier. What good would it do to chase a spren, though? You couldn't catch them. Not with any method he knew.

The others charged behind. Fish scattered away, frightened by Dalinar's splashing. "I'm chasing a spren," Dalinar said under his breath. "It's what we've been hunting. It looks a little like a face—a shadowy one, with red eyes. It swims through the water like a fish. Wa Alight

“Storms!” the knight shouted suddenly. “It brought an escort!”

The larger spren twisted, then dove downward in the water, vanishing into the rocky ground. Dalinar stopped, uncertain if he should keep chasing the smaller one or remain here.

The others turned and started to run the other way.

Uh-oh . . .

Dalinar scrambled back as the rocky lake bottom began to shake. He stumbled, splashing down into the water. It was so clear he could see the floor cracking under him, as if something large were pounding against it from beneath.

“Come on!” one of the soldiers cried, grabbing him by the arm. Dalinar was pulled to his feet as the cracks below widened. The once-still surface of the lake churned and thrashed.

The ground jolted, almost tumbling Dalinar off his feet again. Ahead of him, several of the soldiers did fall.

The knight stood firm, an enormous Shardblade forming in her hands.

Dalinar glanced over his shoulder in time to see rock emerging from the water. A long arm! Slender, perhaps fifteen feet long, it burst from the water, then slammed back down as if to get a firm purchase on the lakebed. Another arm rose nearby, elbow toward the sky, then they both heaved as if attached to a body doing a push-up.

A giant body ripped itself out of the rocky floor. It was like someone had been buried in sand and was now emerging. Water streamed from the creature’s ridged and pocked back, which was overgrown with bits of shalebark and submarine fungus. The spren had somehow animated the stone itself.

As it stood and twisted about, Dalinar could make out glowing red eyes—like molten rock—set deep in an evil stone face. The body was skeletal, with thin

bony limbs and spiky fingers that ended in rocky claws. The chest was a rib cage of stone.

“Thunderclast!” soldiers yelled. “Hammers! Ready hammers!”

The knight stood before the rising creature, which stood thirty feet tall, dripping water. A calm, white light began to rise from her. It reminded Dalinar of the light of spheres. Stormlight. She raised her Shardblade and charged, stepping through the water with uncanny ease, as if it had no purchase on her. Perhaps it was the strength of Shardplate.

“They were created to watch,” a voice said from beside him.

Dalinar looked to the soldier who had helped him rise earlier, a long-faced Selay man with a balding scalp and a wide nose. Dalinar reached down to help the man to his feet.

This wasn’t how the man had spoken before, but Dalinar recognized the voice. It was the same one that came at the end of most of the visions. The Almighty.

“The Knights Radiant,” the Almighty said, standing up beside Dalinar, watching the knight attack the nightmare beast. “They were a solution, a way to offset the destruction of the Desolations. Ten orders of knights, founded with the purpose of helping men fight, then rebuild.”

Dalinar repeated it, word for word, focused on catching every one and not on thinking about what they meant.

The Almighty turned to him. “I was surprised when these orders arrived. I did not teach my frustration doneRHeralds this. It was the spren—wishing to imitate what I had given men—who made it possible. You will need to refund them. This is your task. Unite them. Create a fortress that can weather the storm. Vex Odium, convince him that he can lose, and appoint a champion. He will take that chance instead of risking defeat again, as he has suffered so often. This is the best advice I can give you.”

Dalinar finished repeating the words. Beyond him, the fight began in earnest,

water splashing, rock grinding. Soldiers approached bearing hammers, and unexpectedly, these men now also glowed with Stormlight, though far more faintly.

“You were surprised by the coming of the knights,” Dalinar said to the Almighty. “And this force, this enemy, managed to kill you. You were never God. God knows everything. God cannot be killed. So who were you?”

The Almighty did not answer. He couldn't. Dalinar had realized that these visions were some kind of predetermined experience, like a play. The people in them could react to Dalinar, like actors who could improvise to an extent. The Almighty himself never did this.

“I will do what I can,” Dalinar said. “I will refound them. I will prepare. You have told me many things, but there is one I have figured out on my own. If you could be killed, then the other like you—your enemy—probably can be as well.”

The darkness came upon Dalinar. The yelling and splashing faded. Had this vision occurred during a Desolation, or between? These visions never told him enough. As the darkness evaporated he found himself lying in a small stone chamber within his complex in the warcamps.

Navani knelt beside him, clipboard held before her, pen moving as she scribbled. Storms, she was beautiful. Mature, lips painted red, hair wound about her head in a complex braid that sparkled with rubies. Bloodred dress. She looked at him, noting that he was blinking back awake, and smiled.

“It was—” he began.

“Hush,” she said, still writing. “That last part sounded important.” She wrote for a moment, then finally removed pen from pad, the latter held through the cloth of her sleeve. “I think I got it all. It's hard when you change languages.”

“I changed languages?” he asked.

“At the end. Before, you were speaking Selay. An ancient form of it, certainly, but we have records of that. I hope my translators can make sense

of my transcription; my command of that language is rusty. You do need to speak more slowly when you do this, dearest.”

“That can be hard, in the moment,” Dalinar said, rising. Compared to what he’d felt in the vision, the air here was cold. Rain pelted the room’s closed shutters, though he knew from experience that an end to his vision meant that the storm had nearly spent itself.

Feeling drained, he walked to a seat beside the wall and settled down. Only he and Navani were in the room; he preferred it that way. Renarin and Adolin waited out the storm nearby, in another room of Dalinar’s quarters and under the watchful eyes of Captain Kaladin and his bridgeman bodyguards.

Perhaps he should invite more scholars in to observe his visions; they could all write down his words, then consult to produce the most accurate version. But storms, he had enough trouble with one person watching him in such a state, raving and thrashing on the ground. He believed in the visions, even depended upon them. “Did you bother me?” Syl asked. “No, but that didn’t mean it wasn’t embarrassing.”

Navani sat down beside him, and wrapped her arms around him. “Was it bad?”

“This one? No. Not bad. Some running, then some fighting. I didn’t participate. The vision ended before I needed to help.”

“Then why that expression?”

“I have to refound the Knights Radiant.”

“Refound the . . . But how? What does that even mean?”

“I don’t know. I don’t know anything; I only have hints and shadowy threats. Something dangerous is coming, that much is certain. I have to stop it.”

She rested her head on his shoulder. He stared at the hearth, which crackled softly, giving the small room a warm glow. This was one of the few hearths that hadn’t been converted to the new fabrial heating devices.

He preferred the real fire, though he wouldn't say it to Navani. She worked so hard to bring new fabrials to them all.

“Why you?” Navani asked. “Why do you have to do this?”

“Why is one man born a king, and another a beggar?” Dalinar asked. “It is the way of the world.”

“It is that easy for you?”

“Not easy,” Dalinar said, “but there is no point in demanding answers.”

“Particularly if the Almighty is dead. . . .”

Perhaps he should not have shared that fact with her. Speaking of just that one idea could brand him a heretic, drive his own ardents from him, give Sadeas a weapon against the Throne.

If the Almighty was dead, what did Dalinar worship? What did he believe?

“We should record your memories of the vision,” Navani said with a sigh, pulling back from him. “While they are fresh.”

He nodded. It was important to have a description to match the transcriptions. He began to recount what he'd seen, speaking slowly enough that she could write it all down. He described the lake, the clothing of the men, the strange fortress in the distance. She claimed there were stories of large structures on the Purelake told by some who lived there. Scholars had considered them mythological.

Dalinar stood up and paced as he moved on to the description of the unholy thing that had risen from the lake. “It left behind a hole in the lakebed,” Dalinar explained. “Imagine if you were to outline a body on the floor, then watch that body rip itself free from the ground.

“Imagine the tactical advantage such a thing would have. Spren move quickly and easily. One could slip in behind battle lines, then stand up and start attacking the support staff. That beast's stone body must have been difficult to break. Storms . . . Shardblades. Makes me wonder if these are the things

the weapons were truly designed to fight.”

Navani smiled as she wrote.

“What?” Dalinar asked, stopping in his pacing.

“You are such a soldier.”

“Yes. And?”

“And it’s endearing,” she said, finishing her writing. “What happened next?”

“The frustration done by the Almighty spoke to me.” He gave her the monologue as best he could remember while he paced in a slow, restful walk. I need to sleep more, he thought. He wasn’t the youth he’d been twenty years ago, capable of staying up all night with Gavilar, listening with a cup of wine as his brother made plans, then charging to battle the next day full of vigor and hungering for a contest.

Once he was done with his narrative, Navani rose, tucking her writing implements away. She’d take what he’d said and have her scholars—well, his scholars, which she’d appropriated—work at matching his Alethi words up with the transcriptions she’d recorded. Though, of course, she’d first remove the lines where he mentioned sensitive issues, such as the Almighty’s death.

She’d also search for historical references to match his descriptions. Navani liked things neat and quantified. She’d prepared a timeline of all of his visions, trying to piece them into a single narrative.

“You’re still going to publish the proclamation this week?” she asked.

Dalinar nodded. He’d released it to the highprinces a week ago, in private. He’d intended to release it the same day to the camps, but Navani had convinced him that this was the wiser course. News was seeping out, but this would let the highprinces prepare.

“The proclamation will go to the public within a few days,” he said. “Before the highprinces can put further pressure on Elhokar to retract it.”

Navani pursed her lips.

“It must be done,” Dalinar said.

“You’re supposed to unite them.”

“The highprinces are spoiled children,” Dalinar said. “Changing them will require extreme measures.”

“If you break the kingdom apart, we’ll never unify it.”

“We’ll make certain that it doesn’t break.”

Navani looked him up and down, then smiled. “I am fond of this more confident you, I must admit. Now, if I could just borrow a little of that confidence in regards to us . . .”

“I am quite confident about us,” he said, pulling her close.

“Is that so? Because this traveling between the king’s palace and your complex wastes a lot of my time each day. If I were to move my things here—say, into your quarters—think how much more convenient everything would be.”

“No.”

“You’re confident they won’t let us marry, Dalinar. So what else are we to do? Is it the morality of the thing? You yourself said that the Almighty was dead.”

“Something is either right or it’s wrong,” Dalinar said, feeling stubborn. “The Almighty doesn’t come into it.”

“God,” Navani said flatly, “doesn’t come into whether his commands are right or wrong.”

“Er. Yes.”

“Careful,” Navani said. “You’re sounding like Jasnah. Anyway, if God is

dead—”

“God isn’t dead. If the Almighty died, then he was never God, that Jasnah’s note in a to move’s all.”

She sighed, still close to him. She went up on her toes and kissed him—and not demurely, either. Navani considered demureness for the coy and frivolous. So, a passionate kiss, pressing against his mouth, pushing his head backward, hungering for more. When she pulled away, Dalinar found himself breathless.

She smiled at him, then turned and picked up her things—he hadn’t noticed her dropping them during the kiss—and then walked to the door. “I am not a patient woman, you realize. I am as spoiled as those highprinces, accustomed to getting what I want.”

He snorted. Neither was true. She could be patient. When it suited her. What she meant was that it didn’t suit her at the moment.

She opened the door, and Captain Kaladin himself peered in, inspecting the room. The bridgeman certainly was earnest. “Watch her as she travels home for the day, soldier,” Dalinar said to him.

Kaladin saluted. Navani pushed by him and left without a goodbye, closing the door and leaving Dalinar alone again.

Dalinar sighed deeply, then walked to the chair and settled down by the hearth to think.

He started awake some time later, the fire having burned out. Storms. Was he falling asleep in the middle of the day, now? If only he didn’t spend so much time at night tossing and turning, head full of worries and burdens that should never have been his. What had happened to the simple days? His hand on a sword, secure in the knowledge that Gavilar would handle the difficult parts?

Dalinar stretched, rising. He needed to go over preparations for releasing the king’s proclamation, and then see to the new guards—

He stopped. The wall of his room bore a series of stark white scratches forming glyphs. They hadn't been there before.

Sixty-two days, the glyphs read. Death follows.

* * *

A short time later, Dalinar stood, straight-backed, hands clasped behind him as he listened to Navani confer with Rushu, one of the Kholin scholars. Adolin stood nearby, inspecting a chunk of white rock that had been found on the floor. It had apparently been pried from the row of ornamental stones rimming the room's window, then used to write the glyphs.

Straight back, head up, Dalinar told himself, even though you want to just slump in that chair. A leader did not slump. A leader was in control. Even when he least felt like he controlled anything.

Especially then.

"Ah," said Rushu—a young female ardent with long eyelashes and buttonlike lips. "Look at the sloppy lines! The improper symmetry. Whoever did this is not practiced with drawing glyphs. They almost spelled death wrong—it looks more like 'broken.' And the meaning is vague. Death follows? Or is it 'follow death'? Or Sixty-Two Days of Death and Following? Glyphs are imprecise."

"Just make the copy, Rushu," Navani said. "And don't speak of this to anyone."

"Not even you?" Rushu asked, sounding distracted as she wrote.

Navani sighed, walking over to Dalinar and Adolin. "She is good at what she does," said, folding his arms on the ground Navani said softly, "but she's a little oblivious sometimes. Anyway, she knows handwriting better than anyone. It's one of her many areas of interest."

Dalinar nodded, bottling his fears.

"Why would anyone do this?" Adolin asked, dropping the rock. "Is it some

kind of obscure threat?”

“No,” Dalinar said.

Navani met Dalinar’s eyes. “Rushu,” she said. “Leave us for a moment.”

The woman didn’t respond at first, but scuttled out at further prompting. As she opened the door, she revealed members of Bridge Four outside, led by Captain Kaladin, his expression dark. He’d escorted Navani away, then come back to find this—and then had immediately sent men to check on and retrieve Navani.

He obviously considered this lapse his fault, thinking that someone had sneaked into Dalinar’s room while he was sleeping. Dalinar waved the captain in.

Kaladin hurried over, and hopefully didn’t see how Adolin’s jaw tightened as he regarded the man. Dalinar had been fighting the Parshendi Shardbearer when Kaladin and Adolin had clashed on the battlefield, but he’d heard talk of their run-in. His son certainly did not like hearing that this darkeyed bridgeman had been put in charge of the Cobalt Guard.

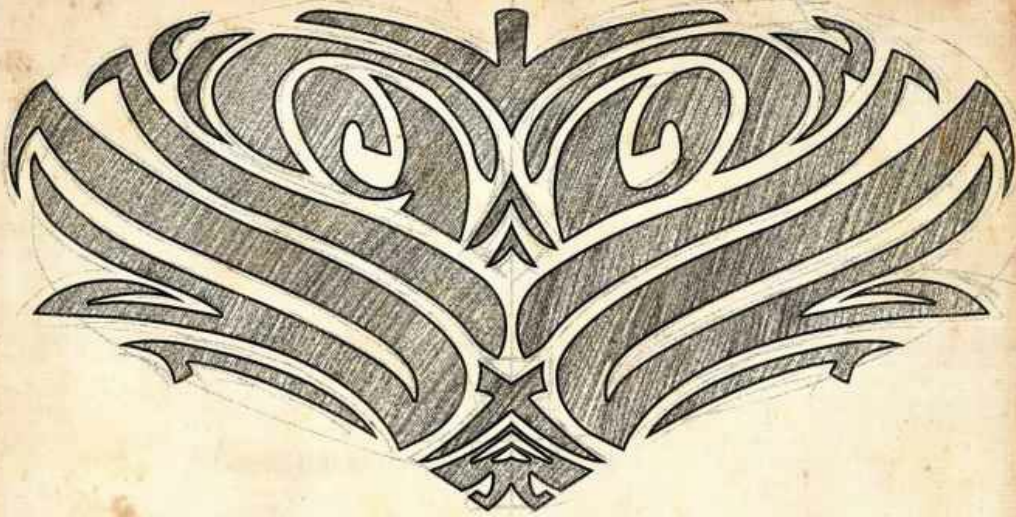
“Sir,” Captain Kaladin said, stepping up. “I’m embarrassed. One week on the job, and I’ve failed you.”

“You did as commanded, Captain,” Dalinar said.

“I was commanded to keep you safe, sir,” Kaladin said, anger bleeding into his voice. “I should have posted guards at individual doors inside your quarters, not just outside of the room complex.”

“We’ll be more observant in the future, Captain,” Dalinar said. “Your predecessor always posted the same guard as you did, and it was sufficient before.”

“Times were different before, sir,” Kaladin said, scanning the room and narrowing hiny other relig



Freedom

Bridge 4

Kholin

Tanat

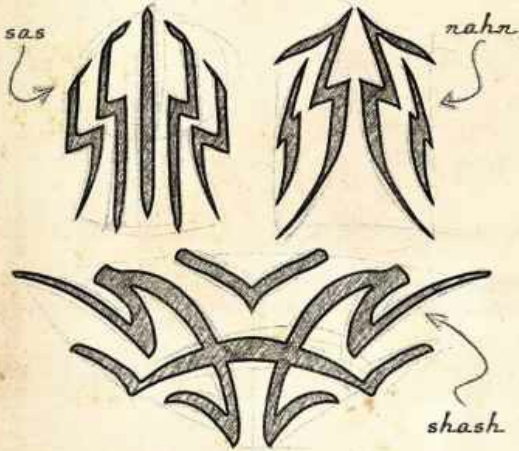


I had to spend hours watching
bridgemen to sketch their stupid
forehead glyphs so you could have
them, my friend. I'm pretty sure
this is how they were designed
—Nazh.



Traditional
Year 1173

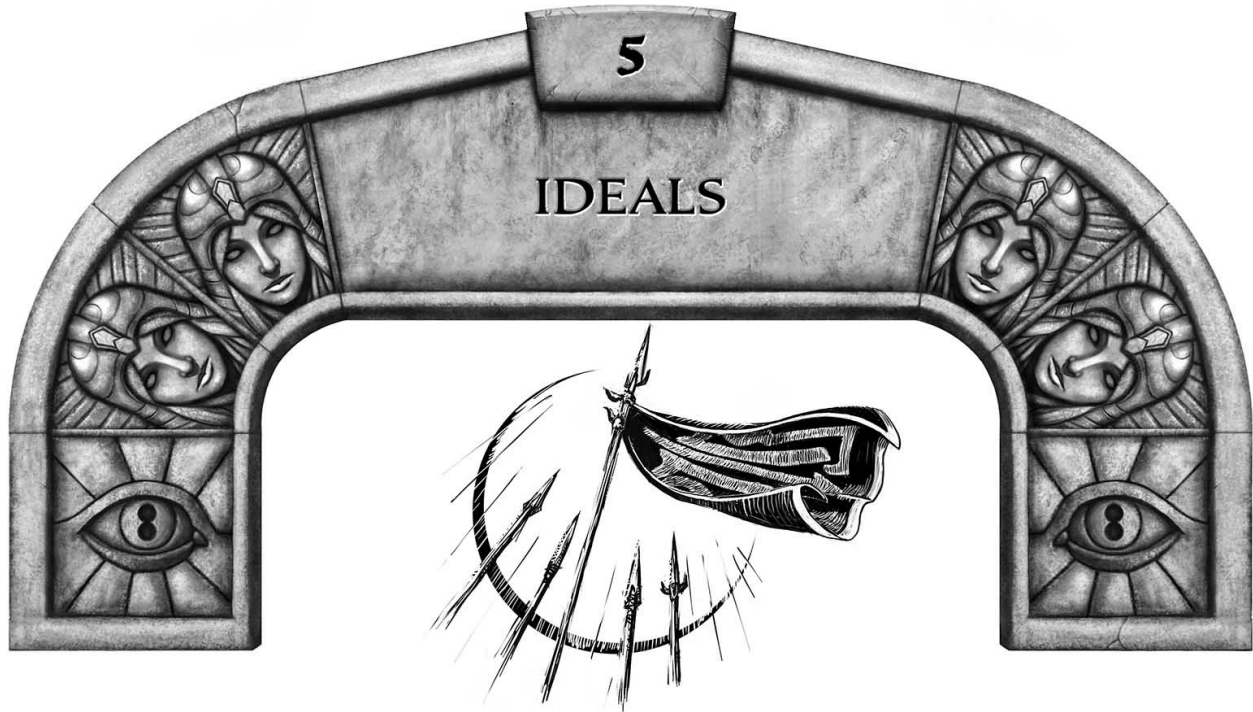
Stylized
Year 1173



Kaladin's forehead brands



Bridge 4 Uniform Insignia



The sign on the wall proposed a greater danger, even, than its deadline. To foresee the future is of the Voidbringers.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jeseses 1174

“Toward victory and, at long last, vengeance.” The crier carried a writ with the king’s words on it—bound between two cloth-covered boards—though she obviously had the words memorized. Not surprising. Kaladin alone had made her repeat the proclamation three times.

“Again,” he said, sitting on his stone beside Bridge Four’s firepit. Many members of the crew had lowered their breakfast bowls, going silent. Nearby, Sigzil repeated the words to himself, memorizing them.

The crier sighed. She was a plump, lighteyed young woman with strands of red hair mixed in her black, bespeaking Veden or Horneater heritage. There would be dozens of women like her moving through the warcamp to read, and sometimes explain, Dalinar’s words.

She opened the ledger again. In any other battalion, Kaladin thought idly, its leader would be of a high enough social class to outrank her.

“Under the authority of the king,” she said, “Dalinar Kholin, Highprince of War, hereby orders changes to the manner of collection and distribution of gemhearts on the Shattered Plains. Henceforth, each gemheart will be collected in turn by two highprinces working in tandem. The spoils become the property of the king, who will determine—based on the effectiveness of the parties involved and their alacrity to obey—their share.

“A prescribed rotation will detail which highprinces and armies are responsible for hunting gemhearts, and in what order. The pairings will not always be the same, and will be judged based on strategic compatibility. It is expected that by the Codes we all hold dear, the men and women of these armies will welcome this renewed focus on victory and, at long last, vengeance.”

The crier snapped the book closed, looking up at Kaladin and cocking a long black eyebrow he was pretty sure had been painted on with makeup.

“Thank you,” he said. She nodded to him, then moved off toward the next battalion stopped in place, annoyed.

Kaladin climbed to his feet. “Well, there’s the storm we’ve been expecting.”

The men nodded. Conversation at Bridge Four had been subdued, following the strange break-in at Dalinar’s quarters yesterday. Kaladin felt a fool. Dalinar, however, seemed to be ignoring the break-in entirely. He knew far more than he was telling Kaladin. How am I supposed to do my job if I don’t have the information I need?

Not two weeks on the job, and already the politics and machinations of the lighteyes were tripping him up.

“The highprinces are going to hate this proclamation,” Leyten said from beside the firepit, where he was working on Beld’s breastplate straps, which had come from the quartermaster with the buckles twisted about. “They base pretty much everything on getting those gemhearts. We’re going to have discontent aplenty on today’s winds.”

“Ha!” Rock said, ladling up curry for Lopen, who had come back for

seconds. “Discontent? Today, this will mean riots. Did you not hear that mention of the Codes? This thing, it is an insult against the others, whom we know do not follow their oaths.” He was smiling, and seemed to consider the anger—even rioting—of the highprinces to be amusing.

“Moash, Drehy, Mart, and Eth with me,” Kaladin said. “We’ve got to go relieve Skar and his team. Teft, how goes your assignment?”

“Slowly,” Teft said. “Those lads in the other bridge crews . . . they have a long way to go. We need something more, Kal. Some way to inspire them.”

“I’ll work on it,” Kaladin said. “For now, we should try food. Rock, we’ve only got five officers at the moment, so you can have that last room on the outside for storage. Kholin gave us requisition rights from the camp quartermaster. Pack it full.”

“Full?” Rock asked, an enormous grin splitting his face. “How full?”

“Very,” Kaladin said. “We’ve been eating broth and stew with Soulcast grain for months. For the next month, Bridge Four eats like kings.”

“No shells, now,” Mart said, pointing at Rock as he gathered his spear and did up his uniform jacket. “Just because you can fix anything you want, it doesn’t mean we’re going to eat something stupid.”

“Airsick lowlanders,” Rock said. “Don’t you want to be strong?”

“I want to keep my teeth, thank you,” Mart said. “Crazy Horneater.”

“I will fix two things,” Rock said, hand to his chest, as if making a salute. “One for the brave and one for the silly. You may choose between these things.”

“You’ll make feasts, Rock,” Kaladin said. “I need you to train cooks for the other barracks. Even if Dalinar has extra cooks to spare now with fewer regular troops to feed, I want the bridgemen to be self-sufficient. Lopen, I’m assigning Dabbid and Shen to help you assist Rock from here on out. We need to turn those thousand men into soldiers. It starts the same way it did

with all of you—by filling their stomachs.”

“It will be done,” Rock said, laughing, slapping Shen on the shoulder as the frustration donelilyparshman stepped up for seconds. He’d only just started doing things like that, and seemed to hide in the back less than he once had. “I will not even put any dung in it!”

The others chuckled. Putting dung in food was what had gotten Rock turned into a bridgeman in the first place. As Kaladin started out toward the king’s palace—Dalinar had an important meeting with the king today—Sigzil joined him.

“A moment of your time, sir,” Sigzil said quietly.

“If you wish.”

“You promised me that I could have a chance to measure your . . . particular abilities.”

“Promised?” Kaladin asked. “I don’t remember a promise.”

“You grunted.”

“I . . . grunted?”

“When I talked about taking some measurements. You seemed to think it was a good idea, and you told Skar we could help you figure out your powers.”

“I suppose I did.”

“We need to know exactly what you can do, sir—the extent of the abilities, the length of time the Stormlight remains in you. Do you agree that having a clear understanding of your limits would be valuable?”

“Yes,” Kaladin said reluctantly.

“Excellent. Then . . .”

“Give me a couple of days,” Kaladin said. “Go prepare a place where we

can't be seen. Then . . . yes, all right. I'll let you measure me."

"Excellent," Sigzil said. "I've been devising some experiments." He stopped on the path, allowing Kaladin and the others to draw away from him.

Kaladin rested his spear on his shoulder and relaxed his hand. He frequently found his grip on the weapon too strong, his knuckles white. It was like part of him still didn't believe he could carry it in public now, and feared it would be taken from him again.

Syl floated down from her daily sprint around the camp on the morning winds. She alighted on his shoulder and sat, seeming lost in thought.

Dalinar's warcamp was an organized place. Soldiers never lounged lazily here. They were always doing something. Working on their weapons, fetching food, carrying cargo, patrolling. Men patrolled a lot in this camp. Even with the reduced army numbers, Kaladin passed three patrols as his men marched toward the gates. That was three more than he'd ever seen in Sadeas's camp.

He was reminded again of the emptiness. The dead didn't need to become Voidbringers to haunt this camp; the empty barracks did that. He passed one woman, seated on the ground beside one of those hollow barracks, staring up at the sky and clutching a bundle of masculine clothing. Two small children stood on the path beside her. Too silent. Children that small shouldn't be quiet.

The barracks formed blocks in an enormous ring, and in the center of them was a more populated part of camp—the bustling section that contained Dalinar's living complex, along with the quarters of the various highlords and generals. Dalinar's complex was a moundlike stone bunker with fluttering banners and scuttling clerks carrying armfuls of ledgers. Nearby, several officers had set up recruitment tents, and a long line of would-be soldiers had formed. Some were sellswords who had made their way to the Shattered Plains seeking work. Others were bakers or frustrationd donelily the like, who had heeded the cry for more soldiers following the disaster.

"Why didn't you laugh?" Syl said, inspecting the line as Kaladin hiked

around it, on toward the gates out of the warcamp.

“I’m sorry,” he replied. “Did you do something funny that I didn’t see?”

“I mean earlier,” she said. “Rock and the others laughed. You didn’t. When you laughed during the weeks things were hard, I knew that you were forcing yourself to. I thought, maybe, once things got better . . .”

“I’ve got an entire battalion of bridgemen to keep track of now,” Kaladin said, eyes forward. “And a highprince to keep alive. I’m in the middle of a camp full of widows. I guess I don’t feel like laughing.”

“But things are better,” she said. “For you and your men. Think of what you did, what you accomplished.”

A day spent on a plateau, slaughtering. A perfect melding of himself, his weapon, and the storms themselves. And he’d killed with it. Killed to protect a lighteyes.

He’s different, Kaladin thought.

They always said that.

“I guess I’m just waiting,” Kaladin said.

“For what?”

“The thunder,” Kaladin said softly. “It always follows after the lightning. Sometimes you have to wait, but eventually it comes.”

“I . . .” Syl zipped up in front of him, standing in the air, moving backward as he walked. She didn’t fly—she didn’t have wings—and didn’t bob in the air. She just stood there, on nothing, and moved in unison with him. She seemed to take no notice of normal physical laws.

She cocked her head at him. “I don’t understand what you mean. Drat! I thought I was figuring this all out. Storms? Lightning?”

“You know how, when you encouraged me to fight to save Dalinar, it still

hurt you when I killed?”

“Yes.”

“It’s like that,” Kaladin said softly. He looked to the side. He was again gripping his spear too tightly.

Syl watched him, hands on hips, waiting for him to say more.

“Something bad is going to happen,” Kaladin said. “Things can’t just continue to be good for me. That’s not how life is. It might have to do with those glyphs on Dalinar’s wall yesterday. They seemed like a countdown.”

She nodded.

“Have you ever seen anything like that before?”

“I remember . . . something,” she whispered. “Something bad. Seeing what is to come—it isn’t of Honor, Kaladin. It’s something else. Something dangerous.”

Wonderful.

When he said nothing more, Syl sighed and zipped into the air, becoming a ribbon of light. She followed him up there, moving between gusts of wind.

She said that she’s honorspren, Kaladin thought. So why does she still keep up the act of playing with winds?

He’d have to ask her, assuming she’d answer Jasnah’s note in a and no9;d answer him. Assuming she even knew the answer.

* * *

Torol Sadeas laced his fingers before himself, elbows on the fine stonework tabletop, as he stared at the Shardblade he’d thrust down through the center of the table. It reflected his face.

Damnation. When had he gotten old? He imagined himself as a young man,

in his twenties. Now he was fifty. Storming fifty. He set his jaw, looking at that Blade.

Oathbringer. It was Dalinar's Shardblade—curved, like a back arching, with a hooklike tip on the end matched by a sequence of jutting serrations by the crossguard. Like waves in motion, peeking up from the ocean below.

How often had he lusted for this weapon? Now it was his, but he found the possession hollow. Dalinar Kholin—driven mad by grief, broken to the point that battle frightened him—still clung to life. Sadeas's old friend was like a favored axehound he'd been forced to put down, only to find it whimpering at the window, the poison having not quite done its work.

Worse, he couldn't shake the feeling that Dalinar had gotten the better of him somehow.

The door to his sitting room opened, and Ialai slipped in. With a slender neck and a large mouth, his wife had never been described as a beauty—particularly as the years stretched long. He didn't care. Ialai was the most dangerous woman he knew. That was more attractive than any simple pretty face.

“You've destroyed my table, I see,” she said, eyeing the Shardblade slammed down through the center. She flopped down onto the small couch beside him, draped one arm across his back, and put her feet up on the table.

While with others, she was the perfect Alethi woman. In private, she preferred to lounge. “Dalinar is recruiting heavily,” she said. “I've taken the opportunity to place a few more of my associates among the staff of his warcamp.”

“Soldiers?”

“What do you take me for? That would be far too obvious; he will have new soldiers under careful watch. However, much of his support staff has holes as men join the call to take up spears and reinforce his army.”

Sadeas nodded, still staring at that Blade. His wife ran the most impressive

network of spies in the warcamps. Most impressive indeed, since very, very few knew of it. She scratched at his back, sending shivers up the skin.

“He released his proclamation,” Ialai noted.

“Yes. Reactions?”

“As anticipated. The others hate it.”

Sadeas nodded. “Dalinar should be dead, but since he is not, at least we can depend upon him to hang himself in time.” Sadeas narrowed his eyes. “By destroying him, I sought to prevent the collapse of the kingdom. Now I’m wondering if that collapse wouldn’t be better for us all.”

“What?”

“I’m not meant for this, love,” Sadeas whispered. “This stupid game on the plateaus. It sated me at first, but I’m growing to loathe it. I want war, Ialai. Not hours of marching on the off chance that we’ll find some little skirmish!”

“Those little skirmishes bring us wealth.”

Which was why he’d suffered them so long. s bothering you?” Syl asked they despite thelyHe rose. “I will need to meet with some of the others. Aladar. Ruthar. We need to fan the flames among the other highprinces, raise their indignation at what Dalinar attempts.”

“And our end goal?”

“I will have it back, Ialai,” he said, resting his fingers on Oathbringer’s hilt. “The conquest.”

It was the only thing that made him feel alive any longer. That glorious, wonderful Thrill of being on the battlefield and striving, man against man. Of risking everything for the prize. Domination. Victory.

It was the only time he felt like a youth again.

It was a brutal truth. The best truths, however, were simple.

He grabbed Oathbringer by the hilt and yanked it up out of the table. “Dalinar wants to play politician now, which is unsurprising. He has always secretly wanted to be his brother. Fortunately for us, Dalinar is no good at this sort of thing. His proclamation will alienate the others. He will push the highprinces, and they’ll take up arms against him, fracturing the kingdom. And then, with blood at my feet and Dalinar’s own sword in my hand, I will forge a new Alethkar from flame and tears.”

“What if, instead, he succeeds?”

“That, my dear, is when your assassins will be of use.” He dismissed the Shardblade; it turned to mist and vanished. “I will conquer this kingdom anew, and then Jah Keved will follow. After all, the purpose of this life is to train soldiers. In a way, I’m only doing what God himself wants.”

* * *

The walk between the barracks and the king’s palace—which the king had started calling the Pinnacle—took an hour or so, which gave Kaladin plenty of time to think. Unfortunately, on his way, he passed a group of Dalinar’s surgeons in a field with servants, gathering knobweed sap for an antiseptic.

Seeing them made Kaladin think not only of his own efforts gathering the sap, but of his father. Lirin.

If he were here, Kaladin thought as he passed them, he’d ask why I wasn’t out there, with the surgeons. He’d demand to know why, if Dalinar had taken me in, I hadn’t requested to join his medical corps.

In fact, Kaladin could probably have gotten Dalinar to employ all of Bridge Four as surgeons’ assistants. Kaladin could have trained them in medicine almost as easily as he had the spear. Dalinar would have done it. An army could never have too many good surgeons.

He hadn’t even considered it. The choice for him had been simpler—either become Dalinar’s bodyguards or leave the warcamps. Kaladin had chosen to put his men in the path of the storm again. Why?

Eventually, they reached the king's palace, which was built up the side of a large stone hill, with tunnels dug down into the rock. The king's own quarters sat at the very top. That meant lots of climbing for Kaladin and his men.

They hiked up the switchbacks, Kaladin still lost in thought about his father and his duty.

"That's a tad unfair, you know," Moash said as they reached the top.

Kaladin looked to the others, realizing that they were puffing from the long climb. Kaladin, however, had drawn in Stormlight without noticing. He wasn't even winded.

He smiled pointedly for Syl's benefit stanza

"Soldier," Kaladin said with a nod to one of them, a lighteyes of low rank. Militarily, Kaladin outranked a man like this—but not socially. Again, he wasn't certain how all of this was supposed to work.

The man looked him up and down. "I heard you held a bridge, practically by yourself, against hundreds of Parshendi. How'd you do that?" He did not address Kaladin with "sir," as would have been appropriate for any other captain.

"You want to find out?" Moash snapped from behind. "We can show you. Personally."

"Hush," Kaladin said, glaring at Moash. He turned back to the soldier. "I got lucky. That's it." He stared the man in the eyes.

"I suppose that makes sense," the soldier said.

Kaladin waited.

"Sir," the soldier finally added.

Kaladin waved his men forward, and they passed the lighteyed guards. The interior of the palace was lit by spheres grouped in lamps on the walls—sapphires and diamonds blended to give a blue-white cast. The spheres were

a small but striking reminder of how things had changed. Nobody would have let bridgemen near such casual use of spheres.

The Pinnacle was still unfamiliar to Kaladin—so far, his time spent guarding Dalinar had mostly been in the warcamp. However, he'd made certain to look over maps of the place, so he knew the way to the top.

“Why did you cut me off like that?” Moash demanded, catching up to Kaladin.

“You were in the wrong,” Kaladin said. “You’re a soldier now, Moash. You’re going to have to learn to act like one. And that means not provoking fights.”

“I’m not going to scrape and bow before lighteyes, Kal. Not anymore.”

“I don’t expect you to scrape, but I do expect you to watch your tongue. Bridge Four is better than petty gibes and threats.”

Moash fell back, but Kaladin could tell he was still smoldering.

“That’s odd,” Syl said, landing on Kaladin’s shoulder again. “He looks so angry.”

“When I took over the bridgemen,” Kaladin said softly, “they were caged animals who had been beaten into submission. I brought back their fight, but they were still caged. Now the doors are off those cages. It will take time for Moash and the others to adjust.”

They would. During the final weeks as bridgemen, they’d learned to act with the precision and discipline of soldiers. They stood at attention while their abusers marched across bridges, never uttering a word of derision. Their discipline itself had become their weapon.

They’d learn to be real soldiers. No, they were real soldiers. Now they had to learn how to act without Sadeas’s oppression to push against.

Moash moved up beside him. “I’m sorry,” he said softly. “You’re right.”

Kaladin smiled, this time genuinely.

“I’m not going to pretend I don’t hate them,” Moash said. “But I frustrationd donelily’ll be civil. We have a duty. We’ll do it well. Better than anyone expects. We’re Bridge Four.”

“Good man,” Kaladin said. Moash was going to be particularly tricky to deal with, as more and more, Kaladin found himself confiding in the man. Most of the others idolized Kaladin. Not Moash, who was as close to a real friend as Kaladin had known since being branded.

The hallway grew surprisingly decorative as they approached the king’s conference chamber. There was even a series of reliefs being carved on the walls—the Heralds, embellished with gemstones on the rock to glow at appropriate locations.

More and more like a city, Kaladin thought to himself. This might actually be a true palace soon.

He met Skar and his team at the door into the king’s conference chambers. “Report?” Kaladin asked softly.

“Quiet morning,” Skar said. “And I’m fine with that.”

“You’re relieved for the day, then,” Kaladin said. “I’ll stay here for the meeting, then let Moash take the afternoon shift. I’ll come back for the evening shift. You and your squad get some sleep; you’ll be back on duty tonight, stretching to tomorrow morning.”

“Got it, sir,” Skar said, saluting. He collected his men and moved off.

The chamber beyond the doors was decorated with a thick rug and large unshuttered windows on the leeward side. Kaladin had never been in this room, and the palace maps—for the protection of the king—only included the basic hallways and routes through the servants’ quarters. This room had one other door, probably out onto the balcony, but no exits other than the one Kaladin stepped through.

Two other guards in blue and gold stood on either side of the door. The king himself paced back and forth beside the room's desk. His nose was larger than the paintings of him showed.

Dalinar spoke with Highlady Navani, an elegant woman with grey in her hair. The scandalous relationship between the king's uncle and mother would have been the talk of the warcamp, if Sadeas's betrayal hadn't overshadowed it.

"Moash," Kaladin said, pointing. "See where that door goes. Mart and Eth, stand watch just outside in the hall. Nobody other than a highprince comes in until you've checked with us in here."

Moash gave the king a salute instead of a bow, and checked on the door. It indeed led to the balcony that Kaladin had spotted from below. It ran all around this upmost room.

Dalinar studied Kaladin and Moash as they worked. Kaladin saluted, and met the man's eyes. He wasn't going to fail again, as he'd done the day before.

"I don't recognize these guards, Uncle," the king said with annoyance.

"They're new," Dalinar said. "There is no other way onto that balcony, soldier. It's a hundred feet in the air."

"Good to know," Kaladin said. "Drehy, join Moash out there on the balcony, close the door, and keep watch."

Drehy nodded, jumping into motion.

"I just said there's no way to reach that balcony from the outside," Dalinar said.

"Then that's the way I'd try to get in," Kaladin said, "if I wanted stanza

Dalinar smiled in amusement.

The king, however, was nodding. "Good . . . good."

"Are there any other ways into this room, Your Majesty?" Kaladin asked.

“Secret entrances, passages?”

“If there were,” the king said, “I wouldn’t want people knowing about them.”

“My men can’t keep this room safe if we don’t know what to guard. If there are passages nobody is supposed to know about, those are immediately suspect. If you share them with me, I’ll use only my officers in guarding them.”

The king stared at Kaladin for a moment, then turned to Dalinar. “I like this one. Why haven’t you put him in charge of your guard before?”

“I haven’t had the opportunity,” Dalinar said, studying Kaladin with eyes that had a depth behind them. A weight. He stepped over and rested a hand on Kaladin’s shoulder, pulling him aside.

“Wait,” the king said from behind, “is that a captain’s insignia? On a darkeyes? When did that start happening?”

Dalinar didn’t answer, instead walking Kaladin to the side of the room. “The king,” he said softly, “is very worried about assassins. You should know this.”

“A healthy paranoia makes the job easier for his bodyguards, sir,” Kaladin said.

“I didn’t say it was healthy,” Dalinar said. “You call me ‘sir.’ The common address is ‘Brightlord.’”

“I will use that term if you command, sir,” Kaladin said, meeting the man’s eyes. “But ‘sir’ is an appropriate address, even for a lighteyes, if he’s your direct superior.”

“I’m a highprince.”

“Speaking frankly,” Kaladin said—he wouldn’t ask for permission. This man had put him in the role, so Kaladin would assume it came with certain privileges, unless told otherwise. “Every man I’ve ever called ‘Brightlord’ has betrayed me. A few men I’ve called ‘sir’ still have my trust to this day. I

use one more reverently than the other. Sir.”

“You’re an odd one, son.”

“The normal ones are dead in the chasms, sir,” Kaladin said softly. “Sadeas saw to that.”

“Well, have your men on the balcony guard from farther to the side, where they can’t hear through the window.”

“I’ll wait with the men in the hall, then,” Kaladin said, noticing that the two men of the King’s Guard had already moved through the doors.

“I didn’t order that,” Dalinar said. “Guard the doors, but on the inside. I want you to hear what we’re planning. Just don’t repeat it outside this room.”

“Yes, sir.”

“Four more people are coming to the meeting,” Dalinar said. “My sons, General Khal, and Brightness Teshav, Khal’s wife. They may enter. Anyone else should be kept back until the meeting is over.”

Dalinar went back to a conversation with the king’s m; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m responsibilityreother. Kaladin got Moash and Drehy positioned, then explained the door protocol to Mart and Eth. He’d have to do some training later. Lighteyes never truly meant “Don’t let anyone else in” when they said “Don’t let anyone else in.” What they meant was “If you let anyone else in, I’d better agree that it was important enough, or you’re in trouble.”

Then, Kaladin took his post inside the closed door, standing against a wall with carved paneling made of a rare type of wood he didn’t recognize. It’s probably worth more than I’ve earned in my entire lifetime, he thought idly. One wooden panel.

The highprince’s sons arrived, Adolin and Renarin Kholin. Kaladin had seen the former on the battlefield, though he looked different without his Shardplate. Less imposing. More like a spoiled rich boy. Oh, he wore a

uniform like everyone else, but the buttons were engraved, and the boots . . . those were expensive hogshide ones without a scuff on them. Brand new, likely bought at ridiculous expense.

He did save that woman in the market, though, Kaladin thought, remembering the encounter from weeks ago. Don't forget about that.

Kaladin wasn't sure what to make of Renarin. The youth—he might have been older than Kaladin, but sure didn't look it—wore spectacles and walked after his brother like a shadow. Those slender limbs and delicate fingers had never known battle or real work.

Syl bobbed around the room, poking into nooks, crannies, and vases. She stopped at a paperweight on the women's writing desk beside the king's chair, poking at the block of crystal with a strange kind of crab-thing trapped inside. Were those wings?

“Shouldn't that one wait outside?” Adolin asked, nodding toward Kaladin.

“What we're doing is going to put me in direct danger,” Dalinar said, hands clasped behind his back. “I want him to know the details. That might be important to his job.” Dalinar didn't look toward Adolin or Kaladin.

Adolin walked up, taking Dalinar by the arm and speaking in a hushed tone that was not so soft that Kaladin couldn't hear. “We barely know him.”

“We have to trust some people, Adolin,” his father said in a normal voice. “If there's one person in this army I can guarantee isn't working for Sadeas, it's that soldier.” He turned and glanced at Kaladin, once again studying him with those unfathomable eyes.

He didn't see me with the Stormlight, Kaladin told himself forcefully. He was practically unconscious. He doesn't know.

Does he?

Adolin threw up his hands but walked to the other side of the room, muttering something to his brother. Kaladin remained in position, standing comfortably

at parade rest. Yes, definitely spoiled.

The general who arrived soon after was a limber, bald man with a straight back and pale yellow eyes. His wife, Teshav, had a pinched face and hair streaked blond. She took up position by the writing desk, which Navani had made no move to occupy.

“Reports,” Dalinar said from the window as the door clicked shut behind the two newcomers. stanza

“I suspect you know what you’ll hear, Brightlord,” said Teshav. “They’re irate. They sincerely hoped you would reconsider the command—and sending it out to the public has provoked them. Highprince Hatham was the only one to make a public announcement. He plans to—and I quote—‘see that the king is dissuaded from this reckless and ill-advised course.’”

The king sighed, settling into his seat. Renarin sat down immediately, as did the general. Adolin found his seat more reluctantly.

Dalinar remained standing, looking out the window.

“Uncle?” the king asked. “Did you hear that reaction? It’s a good thing you didn’t go so far as you had considered: to proclaim that they must follow the Codes or face seizure of assets. We’d be in the middle of a rebellion.”

“That will come,” Dalinar said. “I still wonder if I should have announced it all at once. When you’ve got an arrow stuck in you, it’s sometimes best to just yank it out in one pull.”

Actually, when you had an arrow in you, the best thing to do was leave it there until you could find a surgeon. Often it would plug the blood flow and keep you alive. It was probably best not to speak up and undermine the highprince’s metaphor, however.

“Storms, what a ghastly image,” the king said, wiping his face with a handkerchief. “Do you have to say such things, Uncle? I already fear we’ll be dead before the week is out.”

“Your father and I survived worse than this,” Dalinar said.

“You had allies, then! Three highprinces for you, only six against, and you never fought them all at the same time.”

“If the highprinces unite against us,” General Khal said, “we will not be able to stand firm. We’ll have no choice but to rescind this proclamation, which will weaken the Throne considerably.”

The king leaned back, hand to his forehead. “Jezerezeh, this is going to be a disaster. . . .”

Kaladin raised an eyebrow.

“You disagree?” Syl asked, moving over toward him as a cluster of fluttering leaves. It was disconcerting to hear her voice coming from such shapes. The others in the room, of course, couldn’t see or hear her.

“No,” Kaladin whispered. “This proclamation sounds like a real tempest. I just expected the king to be less . . . well, whiny.”

“We need to secure allies,” Adolin said. “Form a coalition. Sadeas will gather one, and so we counter him with our own.”

“Dividing the kingdom into two?” Teshav said, shaking her head. “I don’t see how a civil war would serve the Throne. Particularly one we’re unlikely to win.”

“This could be the end of Alethkar as a kingdom,” the general agreed.

“Alethkar ended as a kingdom centuries ago,” Dalinar said softly, staring out that window. “This thing we have created is not Alethkar. Alethkar was justice. We are children wearing our father’s cloak.”

“But Uncle,” the king said, “at least the kingdom is something. More than it has been in centuries! If we fail here, and ; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m responsibilityrefracture to ten warring princedom, it will negate everything my father worked for!”

“This isn’t what your father worked for, son,” Dalinar said. “This game on the Shattered Plains, this nauseating political farce. This isn’t what Gavilar envisioned. The Everstorm comes. . . .”

“What?” the king asked.

Dalinar turned from the window finally, walking to the others, and rested his hand on Navani’s shoulder. “We’re going to find a way to do this, or we’re going to destroy the kingdom in the process. I won’t suffer this charade any longer.”

Kaladin, arms folded, tapped one finger against his elbow. “Dalinar acts like he’s the king,” he mouthed, whispering so softly only Syl could hear. “And everyone else does as well.” Troubling. It was like what Amaram had done. Seizing the power he saw before him, even if it wasn’t his.

Navani looked up at Dalinar, raising her hand to rest on his. She was in on whatever he was planning, judging by that expression.

The king wasn’t. He sighed lightly. “You’ve obviously got a plan, Uncle. Well? Out with it. This drama is tiring.”

“What I really want to do,” Dalinar said frankly, “is beat the lot of them senseless. That’s what I’d do to new recruits who weren’t willing to obey orders.”

“I think you’ll have a hard time spanking obedience into the highprinces, Uncle,” the king said dryly. For some reason, he absently rubbed at his chest.

“You need to disarm them,” Kaladin found himself saying.

All eyes in the room turned toward him. Brightness Teshav gave him a frown, as if speaking were not Kaladin’s right. It probably wasn’t.

Dalinar, however, nodded toward him. “Soldier? You have a suggestion?”

“Your pardon, sir,” Kaladin said. “And your pardon, Your Majesty. But if a squad is giving you trouble, the first thing you do is separate its members. Split them up, stick them in better squads. I don’t think you can do that here.”

“I don’t know how we’d break apart the highprinces,” Dalinar said. “I doubt I could stop them from associating with one another. Perhaps if this war were won, I could assign different highprinces different duties, send them off, then work on them individually. But for the time being, we are trapped here.”

“Well, the second thing you do to troublemakers,” Kaladin said, “is you disarm them. They’re easier to control if you make them turn in their spears. It’s embarrassing, makes them feel like recruits again. So . . . can you take their troops away from them, maybe?”

“We can’t, I’m afraid,” Dalinar said. “The soldiers swore allegiance to their lighteyes, not to the Crown specifically—it’s only the highprinces who have sworn to the Crown. However, you are thinking along the right lines.”

He squeezed Navani’s shoulder. “For the last two weeks,” he said, “I’ve been trying to decide how to approach this problem. My gut tells me that I need to treat the highprinces—the entire lighteyed population of Alethkar—like new recruits, in need of discipline.”

“He came to me, and we talked,” Navani said. “We can’t actually bust the highprinces down to a manageable rank, as much as Dalinar would like to do just that. Instead, we need to lead them to believe that we’re going to take it all from them, if they don’t shape up.”

“This proclamation will make them mad,” Dalinar said. “I want them mad. I want them to think about the war, their place here, and I want to remind them of Gavilar’s assassination. If I can push them to act more like soldiers, even if it starts with them taking up arms against me, then I might be able to persuade them. I can reason with soldiers. Regardless, a big part of this will involve the threat that I’m going to take away their authority and power if they don’t use it correctly. And that begins, as Captain Kaladin suggested, with disarming them.”

“Disarm the highprinces?” the king asked. “What foolishness is this?”

“It’s not foolishness,” Dalinar said, smiling. “We can’t take their armies from them, but we can do something else. Adolin, I intend to take the lock off your

scabbard.”

Adolin frowned, considering that for a moment. Then a wide grin split his face. “You mean, letting me duel again? For real?”

“Yes,” Dalinar said. He turned to the king. “For the longest time, I’ve forbidden him from important bouts, as the Codes prohibit duels of honor between officers at war. More and more, however, I’ve come to realize that the others don’t see themselves as being at war. They’re playing a game. It’s time to allow Adolin to duel the camp’s other Shardbearers in official bouts.”

“So he can humiliate them?” the king asked.

“It wouldn’t be about humiliation; it would be about depriving them of their Shards.” Dalinar stepped into the middle of the group of chairs. “The highprinces would have a hard time fighting against us if we controlled all of the Shardblades and Shardplate in the army. Adolin, I want you to challenge the Shardbearers of other highprinces in duels of honor, the prizes being the Shards themselves.”

“They won’t agree to it,” General Khal said. “They’ll refuse the bouts.”

“We’ll have to make sure they agree,” Dalinar said. “Find a way to force them, or shame them, into the fights. I’ve considered that this would probably be easier if we could ever track down where Wit ran off to.”

“What happens if the lad loses?” General Khal asked. “ms too unpredictable.”

“We’ll see,” Dalinar said. “This is only one part of what we will do, the smaller part—but also the most visible part. Adolin, everyone tells me how good you are at dueling, and you have pestered me incessantly to relax my prohibition. There are thirty Shardbearers in the army, not counting our own. Can you defeat that many men?”

“Can I?” Adolin said, grinning. “I’ll do it without breaking a sweat, so long as I can start with Sadeas himself.”

So he's spoiled and cocky, Kaladin thought.

said, folding his arms. "No," Dalinar said. "Sadeas won't accept a personal challenge, though eventually bringing him down is our goal. We start with some of the lesser Shardbearers and work up."

The others in the room seemed troubled. That included Brightness Navani, who drew her lips to a line and glanced at Adolin. She might be in on Dalinar's plan, but she didn't love the idea of her nephew dueling.

She didn't say so. "As Dalinar indicated," Navani said, "this won't be our entire plan. Hopefully, Adolin's duels won't need to go far. They are meant mostly to inspire worry and fear, to apply pressure to some factions who are working against us. The greater part of what we must do will entail a complex and determined political effort to connect with those who can be swayed to our side."

"Navani and I will work to persuade the highprinces of the advantages of a truly unified Alethkar," Dalinar said, nodding. "Though the Storm-father knows, I'm less certain of my political acumen than Adolin is of his dueling. It is what must be. If Adolin is to be the stick, I must be the feather."

"There will be assassins, Uncle," Elhokar said, sounding tired. "I don't think Khal is right; I don't think Alethkar will shatter immediately. The highprinces have come to like the idea of being one kingdom. But they also like their sport, their fun, their gemhearts. So they will send assassins. Quietly, at first, and probably not directly at you or me. Our families. Sadeas and the others will try to hurt us, make us back down. Are you willing to risk your sons on this? How about my mother?"

"Yes, you are right," Dalinar said. "I hadn't . . . but yes. That is how they think." He sounded regretful to Kaladin.

"And you're still willing to go through with this plan?" the king asked.

"I have no choice," Dalinar said, turning away, walking back toward the window. Looking out westward, in toward the continent.

“Then at least tell me this,” Elhokar said. “What is your endgame, Uncle? What is it you want out of all of this? In a year, if we survive this fiasco, what do you want us to be?”

Dalinar put his hands on the thick stone windowsill. He stared out, as if at something he could see and the rest of them could not. “I’ll have us be what we were before, son. A kingdom that can stand through storms, a kingdom that is a light and not a darkness. I will have a truly unified Alethkar, with highprinces who are loyal and just. I’ll have more than that.” He tapped the windowsill. “I’m going to refound the Knights Radiant.”

Kaladin nearly dropped his spear in shock. Fortunately, nobody was watching him—they were leaping to their feet, staring at Dalinar.

“The Radiants?” Brightness Teshav demanded. “Are you mad? You’re going to try to rebuild a sect of traitors who gave us over to the Voidbringers?”

“The rest of this sounds good, Father,” Adolin said, stepping forward. “I know you think about the Radiants a lot, but you see them . . . differently than everyone else. It won’t go well if you announce that you want to emulate them.”

The king just groaned, burying his face in his hands.

“People are wrong about them,” Dalinar said. “And even if they are not, the original Radiants—the ones instituted frustrationd donelily by the Heralds—are something even the Vorin church admits were once moral and just. We’ll need to remind people that the Knights Radiant, as an order, stood for something grand. If they hadn’t, then they wouldn’t have been able to ‘fall’ as the stories claim they did.”

“But why?” Elhokar asked. “What is the point?”

“It is what I must do.” Dalinar hesitated. “I’m not completely certain why, yet. Only that I’ve been instructed to do it. As a protection, and a preparation, for what is coming. A storm of some sort. Perhaps it is as simple as the other highprinces turning against us. I doubt that, but perhaps.”

“Father,” Adolin said, hand on Dalinar’s arm. “This is all well and good, and maybe you can change people’s perception of the Radiants, but . . . Ishar’s soul, Father! They could do things we cannot. Simply naming someone a Radiant won’t give them fanciful powers, like in the stories.”

“The Radiants were about more than what they could do,” Dalinar said. “They were about an ideal. The kind of ideal we’re lacking, these days. We may not be able to reach for the ancient Surgebindings—the powers they had—but we can seek to emulate the Radiants in other ways. I am set on this. Do not try to dissuade me.”

The others did not seem convinced.

Kaladin narrowed his eyes. So did Dalinar know about Kaladin’s powers, or didn’t he? The meeting moved on to more mundane topics, such as how to maneuver Shardbearers into facing Adolin and how to step up patrols of the surrounding area. Dalinar considered making the warcamps safe to be a prerequisite for what he was attempting.

When the meeting finally ended, most people inside departing to carry out orders, Kaladin was still considering what Dalinar had said about the Radiants. The man hadn’t realized it, but he’d been very accurate. The Knights Radiant did have ideals—and they’d called them that very thing. The Five Ideals, the Immortal Words.

Life before death, Kaladin thought, playing with a sphere he’d pulled from his pocket, strength before weakness, journey before destination. Those Words made up the First Ideal in its entirety. He had only an inkling of what it meant, but his ignorance hadn’t stopped him from figuring out the Second Ideal of the Windrunners, the oath to protect those who could not protect themselves.

Syl wouldn’t tell him the other three. She said he would know them when he needed to. Or he wouldn’t, and would not progress.

Did he want to progress? To become what? A member of the Knights Radiant? Kaladin hadn’t asked for someone else’s ideals to rule his life. He’d just wanted to survive. Now, somehow, he was headed straight down a path

that no man had trod in centuries. Potentially becoming something that people across Roshar would hate or revere. So much attention . . .

“Soldier?” Dalinar asked, stopping by the door.

“Sir.” Kaladin stood up straight again and saluted. It felt good to do that, to stand at attention, to find a place. He wasn’t certain if it was the good feeling of remembering a life he’d once loved, or if it was the pathetic feeling of an axehound finding its leash again.

“My nephew was right,” Alight

“I’ve got about two dozen of those, sir,” Kaladin said. “That’s not enough for full guard details running all day protecting all four of you. I should have more men trained before too long, but putting a spear in the hands of a bridgeman does not make him a soldier, let alone a good bodyguard.”

Dalinar nodded, looking troubled. He rubbed his chin.

“Sir?”

“Your force isn’t the only one stretched thin in this warcamp, soldier,” Dalinar said. “I lost a lot of men to Sadeas’s betrayal. Very good men. Now I have a deadline. Just over sixty days . . .”

Kaladin felt a chill. The highprince was taking the number found scrawled on his wall very seriously.

“Captain,” Dalinar said softly, “I need every able-bodied man I can get. I need to be training them, rebuilding my army, preparing for the storm. I need them assaulting plateaus, clashing with the Parshendi, to get battle experience.”

What did this have to do with him? “You promised that my men wouldn’t be required to fight on plateau runs.”

“I’ll keep that promise,” Dalinar said. “But there are two hundred and fifty soldiers in the King’s Guard. They include some of my last remaining battle-ready officers, and I will need to put them in charge of new recruits.”

“I’m not just going to have to watch over your family, am I?” Kaladin asked, feeling a new weight settling in his shoulders. “You’re implying you want to turn over guarding the king to me as well.”

“Yes,” Dalinar said. “Slowly, but yes. I need those soldiers. Beyond that, maintaining two separate guard forces seems like a mistake to me. I feel that your men, considering your background, are the least likely to include spies for my enemies. You should know that a while back, there may have been an attempt on the king’s life. I still haven’t figured out who was behind it, but I worry that some of his guards may have been involved.”

Kaladin took a deep breath. “What happened?”

“Elhokar and I hunted a chasmfiend,” Dalinar said. “During that hunt, at a time of stress, the king’s Plate came close to failing. We found that many of the gemstones powering it had likely been replaced with ones that were flawed, making them crack under stress.”

“I don’t know much of Plate, sir,” Kaladin said. “Could they have just broken on their own, without sabotage?”

“Possible, but unlikely. I want your men to take shifts guarding the palace and the king, alternating with some of the King’s Guard, to get you familiar with him and the palace. It might also help your men learn from the more experienced guards. At the same time, I’m going to start siphoning off the officers from his guard to train soldiers in my army.

“Over the next few weeks, we’ll merge your group and the King’s Guard into one. You’ll be in charge. Once you’ve trained bridgemen from those other crews well enough, we’ll replace soldiers; This plan see



We had never considered that there might be Parshendi spies hiding among our slaves. This is something else I should have seen.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesan 1174

Shallan sat again on her box on the ship's deck, though she now wore a hat on her head, a coat over her dress, and a glove on her freehand—her safehand was, of course, pinned inside its sleeve.

The chill out here on the open ocean was something unreal. The captain said that far said, folding his armsinf said under his breath approximationto the south, the ocean itself actually froze. That sounded incredible; she'd like to see it. She'd occasionally seen snow and ice in Jah Keved, during the odd winter. But an entire ocean of it? Amazing.

She wrote with gloved fingers as she observed the spren she'd named Pattern. At the moment, he had lifted himself up off the surface of the deck, forming a ball of swirling blackness—infinite lines that twisted in ways she could never have captured on the flat page. Instead, she wrote descriptions supplemented with sketches.

“Food . . .” Pattern said. The sound had a buzzing quality and he vibrated

when he spoke.

“Yes,” Shallan said. “We eat it.” She selected a small limafruit from the bowl beside her and placed it in her mouth, then chewed and swallowed.

“Eat,” Pattern said. “You . . . make it . . . into you.”

“Yes! Exactly.”

He dropped down, the darkness vanishing as he entered the wooden deck of the ship. Once again, he became part of the material—making the wood ripple as if it were water. He slid across the floor, then moved up the box beside her to the bowl of small green fruits. Here, he moved across them, each fruit’s rind puckering and rising with the shape of his pattern.

“Terrible!” he said, the sound vibrating up from the bowl.

“Terrible?”

“Destruction!”

“What? No, it’s how we survive. Everything needs to eat.”

“Terrible destruction to eat!” He sounded aghast. He retreated from the bowl to the deck.

Pattern connects increasingly complex thoughts, Shallan wrote. Abstractions come easily to him. Early, he asked me the questions “Why? Why you? Why be?” I interpreted this as asking me my purpose. When I replied, “To find truth,” he easily seemed to grasp my meaning. And yet, some simple realities—such as why people would need to eat—completely escape him. It—

She stopped writing as the paper puckered and rose, Pattern appearing on the sheet itself, his tiny ridges lifting the letters she had just penned.

“Why this?” he asked.

“To remember.”

“Remember,” he said, trying the word.

“It means . . .” Stormfather. How did she explain memory? “It means to be able to know what you did in the past. In other moments, ones that happened days ago.”

“Remember,” he said. “I . . . cannot . . . remember . . .”

“What is the first thing you do remember?” Shallan asked. “Where were you first?”

“First,” Pattern said. “With you.”

“On the ship?” Shallan said, writing.

“No. Green. Food. Food not eaten.”

“Plants?” Shallan asked.

“Yes. Many plants.” He vibrated, and she thought she could hear in that vibration the blowing of wind through branches. Shallan breathed in. She could almost see it said, folding his arms mechanical bridge. The deck in front of her changing to a dirt path, her box becoming a stone bench. Faintly. Not really there, but almost. Her father’s gardens. Pattern on the ground, drawn in the dust . . .

“Remember,” Pattern said, voice like a whisper.

No, Shallan thought, horrified. NO!

The image vanished. It hadn’t really been there in the first place, had it? She raised her safehand to her breast, breathing in and out in sharp gasps. No.

“Hey, young miss!” Yalb said from behind. “Tell the new kid here what happened in Kharbranth!”

Shallan turned, heart still racing, to see Yalb walking over with the “new kid,” a six-foot-tall hulk of a man who was at least five years Yalb’s senior. They’d picked him up at Amydlatn, the last port. Tozbek wanted to be sure

they wouldn't be undermanned during the last leg to New Natanan.

Yalb squatted down beside her stool. In the face of the chill, he'd acquiesced to wearing a shirt with ragged sleeves and a kind of headband that wrapped over his ears.

"Brightness?" Yalb asked. "You all right? You look like you swallowed a turtle. And not just the head, neither."

"I'm well," Shalan said. "What . . . what was it you wanted of me, again?"

"In Kharbranth," Yalb said, thumbing over his shoulder. "Did we or did we not meet the king?"

"We?" Shalan asked. "I met him."

"And I was your retinue."

"You were waiting outside."

"Doesn't matter none," Yalb said. "I was your footman for that meeting, eh?"

Footman? He'd led her up to the palace as a favor. "I . . . guess," she said. "You did have a nice bow, as I recall."

"See," Yalb said, standing and confronting the much larger man. "I mentioned the bow, didn't I?"

The "new kid" rumbled his agreement.

"So get to washing those dishes," Yalb said. He got a scowl in response. "Now, don't give me that," Yalb said. "I told you, galley duty is something the captain watches closely. If you want to fit in around here, you do it well, and do some extra. It will put you ahead with the captain and the rest of the men. I'm giving you quite the opportunity here, and I'll have you appreciate it."

That seemed to placate the larger man, who turned around and went tromping toward the lower decks.

“Passions!” Yalb said. “That fellow is as dun as two spheres made of mud. I worry about him. Somebody’s going to take advantage of him, Brightness.”

“Yalb, have you been boasting again?” Shallan said.

“Tain’t boasting if some of it’s true.”

“Actually, that’s exactly what boasting entails.”

“Hey,” Yalb said, turning toward her. “What were you doing before? You know, Jasnah’s note in a s were with the colors?”

“Colors?” Shallan said, suddenly cold.

“Yeah, the deck turned green, eh?” Yalb said. “I swear I saw it. Has to do with that strange spren, does it?”

“I . . . I’m trying to determine exactly what kind of spren it is,” Shallan said, keeping her voice even. “It’s a scholarly matter.”

“I thought so,” Yalb said, though she’d given him nothing in the way of an answer. He raised an affable hand to her, then jogged off.

She worried about letting them see Pattern. She’d tried staying in her cabin to keep him a secret from the men, but being cooped up had been too difficult for her, and he didn’t respond to her suggestions that he stay out of their sight. So, during the last four days, she’d been forced to let them see what she was doing as she studied him.

They were understandably discomfited by him, but didn’t say much. Today, they were getting the ship ready to sail all night. Thoughts of the open sea at night unsettled her, but that was the cost of sailing this far from civilization. Two days back, they’d even been forced to weather a storm in a cove along the coast. Jasnah and Shallan had gone ashore to stay in a fortress maintained for the purpose—paying a steep cost to get in—while the sailors had stayed on board.

That cove, though not a true port, had at least had a stormwall to help shelter the ship. Next highstorm, they wouldn’t even have that. They’d find a cove

and try to ride out the winds, though Tozbek said he'd send Shallan and Jasnah ashore to seek shelter in a cavern.

She turned back to Pattern, who had shifted into his hovering form. He looked something like the pattern of splintered light thrown on the wall by a crystal chandelier—except he was made of something black instead of light, and he was three-dimensional. So . . . Maybe not much like that at all.

“Lies,” Pattern said. “Lies from the Yalb.”

D; Shallan said with a sigh. “Yalb is far too skilled at persuasion for his own good, sometimes.”

Pattern hummed softly. He seemed pleased.

“You like lies?” Shallan asked.

“Good lies,” Pattern said. “That lie. Good lie.”

“What makes a lie good?” Shallan asked, taking careful notes, recording Pattern's exact words.

“True lies.”

“Pattern, those two are opposites.”

“Hmmm . . . Light makes shadow. Truth makes lies. Hmmm.”

Liespren, Jasnah called them, Shallan wrote. A moniker they don't like, apparently. When I Soulcast for the first time, a voice demanded a truth from me. I still don't know what that means, and Jasnah has not been forthcoming. She doesn't seem to know what to make of my experience either. I do not think that voice belonged to Pattern, but I cannot say, as he seems to have forgotten much about himself.

She returned to making a few sketches of Pattern both in his floating and flattened forms. Drawing let her mind relax. By the time she was done, there were several half-remembered passages from her research that she wanted to quote in her notes.

She made her way down the steps below the traditional lycks, Pattern following. He drew looks from the sailors. Sailors were a superstitious lot, and some took him as a bad sign.

In her quarters, Pattern moved up the wall beside her, watching without eyes as she searched for a passage she remembered, which mentioned spren that spoke. Not just windspren and riverspren, which would mimic people and make playful comments. Those were a step up from ordinary spren, but there was yet another level of spren, one rarely seen. Spren like Pattern, who had real conversations with people.

The Nightwatcher is obviously one of these, Alai wrote, Shallan copying the passage. The records of conversations with her—and she is definitely female, despite what rural Alethi folktales would have one believe—are numerous and credible. Shubalai herself, intent on providing a firsthand scholarly report, visited the Nightwatcher and recorded her story word for word. . . .

Shallan went to another reference, and before long got completely lost in her studies. A few hours later, she closed a book and set it on the table beside her bed. Her spheres were getting dim; they'd go out soon, and would need to be reinfused with Stormlight. Shallan released a contented sigh and leaned back against her bed, her notes from a dozen different sources laid out on the floor of her small chamber.

She felt . . . satisfied. Her brothers loved the plan of fixing the Soulcaster and returning it, and seemed energized by her suggestion that all was not lost. They thought they could last longer, now that a plan was in place.

Shallan's life was coming together. How long had it been since she'd just been able to sit and read? Without worried concern for her house, without dreading the need to find a way to steal from Jasnah? Even before the terrible sequence of events that had led to her father's death, she had always been anxious. That had been her life. She'd seen becoming a true scholar as something unreachable. Stormfather! She'd seen the next town over as being unreachable.

She stood up, gathering her sketchbook and flipping through her pictures of the santhid, including several drawn from the memory of her dip in the ocean.

She smiled at that, recalling how she'd climbed back up on deck, dripping wet and grinning. The sailors had all obviously thought her mad.

Now she was sailing toward a city on the edge of the world, betrothed to a powerful Alethi prince, and was free to just learn. She was seeing incredible new sights, sketching them during the days, then reading through piles of books in the nights.

She had stumbled into the perfect life, and it was everything she'd wished for.

Shallan fished in the pocket inside her safehand sleeve, digging out some more spheres to replace those dimming in the goblet. The ones her hand emerged with, however, were completely dun. Not a glimmer of Light in them.

She frowned. These had been restored during the previous highstorm, held in a basket tied to the ship's mast. The ones in her goblet were two storms old now, which was why they were running out. How had the ones in her pocket gone dun faster? It defied reason.

"Mmmmm . . ." Pattern said from the wall near her head. "Lies."

Shallan replaced the spheres in her pocket, then opened the door into the ship's narrow companionway and moved to Jasnah's cabin. It was the cabin that Tozbek and his wife usually shared, but they had vacated it for the third—and smallest—of the cabin Jasnah's note in a s weres to give Jasnah the better quarters. People did things like that for her, even when she didn't ask.

Jasnah would have some spheres for Shallan to use. Indeed, Jasnah's door was cracked open, swaying slightly as the ship creaked and rocked along its evening path. Jasnah sat at the desk inside, and Shallan peeked in, suddenly uncertain if she wanted to bother the woman.

She could see Jasnah's face, hand against her temple, staring at the pages spread before her. Jasnah's eyes were haunted, her expression haggard.

This was not the Jasnah that Shallan was accustomed to seeing. The

confidence had been overwhelmed by exhaustion, the poise replaced by worry. Jasnah started to write something, but stopped after just a few words. She set down the pen, closing her eyes and massaging her temples. A few dizzy-looking spren, like jets of dust rising into the air, appeared around Jasnah's head. Exhaustionspren.

Shallan pulled back, suddenly feeling as if she'd intruded upon an intimate moment. Jasnah with her defenses down. Shallan began to creep away, but a voice from the floor suddenly said, "Truth!"

Startled, Jasnah looked up, eyes finding Shallan—who, of course, blushed furiously.

Jasnah turned her eyes down toward Pattern on the floor, then reset her mask, sitting up with proper posture. "Yes, child?"

"I . . . I needed spheres . . ." Shallan said. "Those in my pouch went dun."

"Have you been Soulcasting?" Jasnah asked sharply.

"What? No, Brightness. I promised I would not."

"Then it is the second ability," Jasnah said. "Come in and close that door. I should speak to Captain Tozbek; it won't latch properly."

Shallan stepped in, pushing the door closed, though the latch didn't catch. She stepped forward, hands clasped, feeling embarrassed.

"What did you do?" Jasnah asked. "It involved light, I assume?"

"I seemed to make plants appear," Shallan said. "Well, really just the color. One of the sailors saw the deck turn green, but it vanished when I stopped thinking about the plants."

"Yes . . ." Jasnah said. She flipped through one of her books, stopping at an illustration. Shallan had seen it before; it was as ancient as Vorinism. Ten spheres connected by lines forming a shape like an hourglass on its side. Two of the spheres at the center looked almost like pupils. The Double Eye of the Almighty.

“Ten Essences,” Jasnah said softly. She ran her fingers along the page. “Ten Surges. Ten orders. But what does it mean that the spren have finally decided to return the oaths to us? And how much time remains to me? Not long. Not long . . .”

“Brightness?” Shallan asked.

“Before your arrival, I could assume I was an anomaly,” Jasnah said. “I could hope that Surgebindings were not returning in large numbers. I no longer have that hope. The Cryptics sent you to me, of that I have no doubt, because they knew you would need training. That gives me hope that I was at least one of the first.”

“I don’t understand.”

Jasnah looked up toward Shallan, meeting her eyes with an intense gaze. The woman’s eyes were reddened with fatigue. How late Alight

“To be honest,” Jasnah said, “I don’t understand either.”

“Are you all right?” Shallan asked. “Before I entered, you seemed . . . distressed.”

Jasnah hesitated just briefly. “I have merely been spending too long at my studies.” She turned to one of her trunks, digging out a dark cloth pouch filled with spheres. “Take these. I would suggest that you keep spheres with you at all times, so that your Surgebinding has the opportunity to manifest.”

“Can you teach me?” Shallan asked, taking the pouch.

“I don’t know,” Jasnah said. “I will try. On this diagram, one of the Surges is known as Illumination, the mastery of light. For now, I would prefer you expend your efforts on learning this Surge, as opposed to Soulcasting. That is a dangerous art, more so now than it once was.”

Shallan nodded, rising. She hesitated before leaving, however. “Are you sure you are well?”

“Of course.” She said it too quickly. The woman was poised, in control, but also obviously exhausted. The mask was cracked, and Shallan could see the truth.

She’s trying to placate me, Shallan realized. Pat me on the head and send me back to bed, like a child awakened by a nightmare.

“You’re worried,” Shallan said, meeting Jasnah’s eyes.

The woman turned away. She pushed a book over something wiggling on her table—a small purple spren. Fearspren. Only one, true, but still.

“No . . .” Shallan whispered. “You’re not worried. You’re terrified.” Stormfather!

“It is all right, Shallan,” Jasnah said. “I just need some sleep. Go back to your studies.”

Shallan sat down on the stool beside Jasnah’s desk. The older woman looked back at her, and Shallan could see the mask cracking further. Annoyance as Jasnah drew her lips to a line. Tension in the way she held her pen, in a fist.

“You told me I could be part of this,” Shallan said. “Jasnah, if you’re worried about something . . .”

“My worry is what it has always been,” Jasnah said, leaning back in her chair. “That I will be too late. That I’m incapable of doing anything meaningful to stop what is coming—that I’m trying to stop a highstorm by blowing against it really hard.”

“The Voidbringers,” Shallan said. “The parshmen.”

“In the past,” Jasnah said, “the Desolation—the coming of the Voidbringers—was supposedly always marked by a return of the Heralds to prepare mankind. They would train the Knights Radiant, who would experience a rush of new members.”

“But we captured the Voidbringers,” Shallan said. “And enslaved them.” That was what Jasnah postulated, and Shallan agreed, having seen the

research. “So you think a kind of revolution is coming. That the parshmen will turn against us as they did in the past.”

“Yes,” Jasnah said, rifling through stanza

“The Voidbringers are captive,” Shallan said, glancing toward Pattern. He rested on the floor, almost invisible, saying nothing. “The parshmen can barely communicate. How could they possibly stage a revolution?”

Jasnah found the sheet of paper she’d been seeking and handed it to Shallan. Written in Jasnah’s own hand, it was an account by a captain’s wife of a plateau assault on the Shattered Plains.

“Parshendi,” Jasnah said, “can sing in time with one another no matter how far they are separated. They have some ability to communicate that we do not understand. I can only assume that their cousins the parshmen have the same. They may not need to hear a call to action in order to revolt.”

Shallan read the report, nodding slowly. “We need to warn others, Jasnah.”

“You don’t think I’ve tried?” Jasnah asked. “I’ve written to scholars and kings all around the world. Most dismiss me as paranoid. The evidence you readily accept, others call flimsy.

“The ardents were my best hope, but their eyes are clouded by the interference of the Hierocracy. Besides, my personal beliefs make ardents skeptical of anything I say. My mother wants to see my research, which is something. My brother and uncle might believe, and that is why we are going to them.” She hesitated. “There is another reason we seek the Shattered Plains. A way to find evidence that might convince everyone.”

“Urithiru,” Shallan said. “The city you seek?”

Jasnah gave her another curt glance. The ancient city was something Shallan had first learned about by secretly reading Jasnah’s notes.

“You still blush too easily when confronted,” Jasnah noted.

“I’m sorry.”

“And apologize too easily as well.”

“I’m . . . uh, indignant?”

Jasnah smiled, picking up the representation of the Double Eye. She stared at it. “There is a secret hidden somewhere on the Shattered Plains. A secret about Urithiru.”

“You told me the city wasn’t there!”

“It isn’t. But the path to it may be.” Her lips tightened. “According to legend, only a Knight Radiant could open the way.”

“Fortunately, we know two of those.”

“Again, you are not a Radiant, and neither am I. Being able to replicate some of the things they could do may not matter. We don’t have their traditions or knowledge.”

“We’re talking about the potential end of civilization itself, aren’t we?” Shallan asked softly.

Jasnah hesitated.

“The Desolations,” Shallan said. “I know very little, but the legends . . .”

“In the aftermath of each one, mankind was broken. Great cities in ashes, industry smashed. Each time, knowledge and growth were reduced to an almost prehistoric state—it took centuries of rebuilding to restore civilization to what traditional ly it had been before.” She hesitated. “I keep hoping that I’m wrong.”

“Urithiru,” Shallan said. She tried to refrain from just asking questions, trying instead to reason her way to the answer. “You said the city was a kind of base or home to the Knights Radiant. I hadn’t heard of it before speaking with you, and so can guess that it’s not commonly referred to in the literature. Perhaps, then, it is one of the things that the Hierocracy suppressed knowledge of?”

“Very good,” Jasnah said. “Although I think that it had begun to fade into legend even before then, the Hierocracy did not help.”

“So if it existed before the Hierocracy, and if the pathway to it was locked at the fall of the Radiants . . . then it might contain records that have not been touched by modern scholars. Unaltered, unchanged lore about the Voidbringers and Surgebinding.” Shallan shivered. “That’s why we’re really going to the Shattered Plains.”

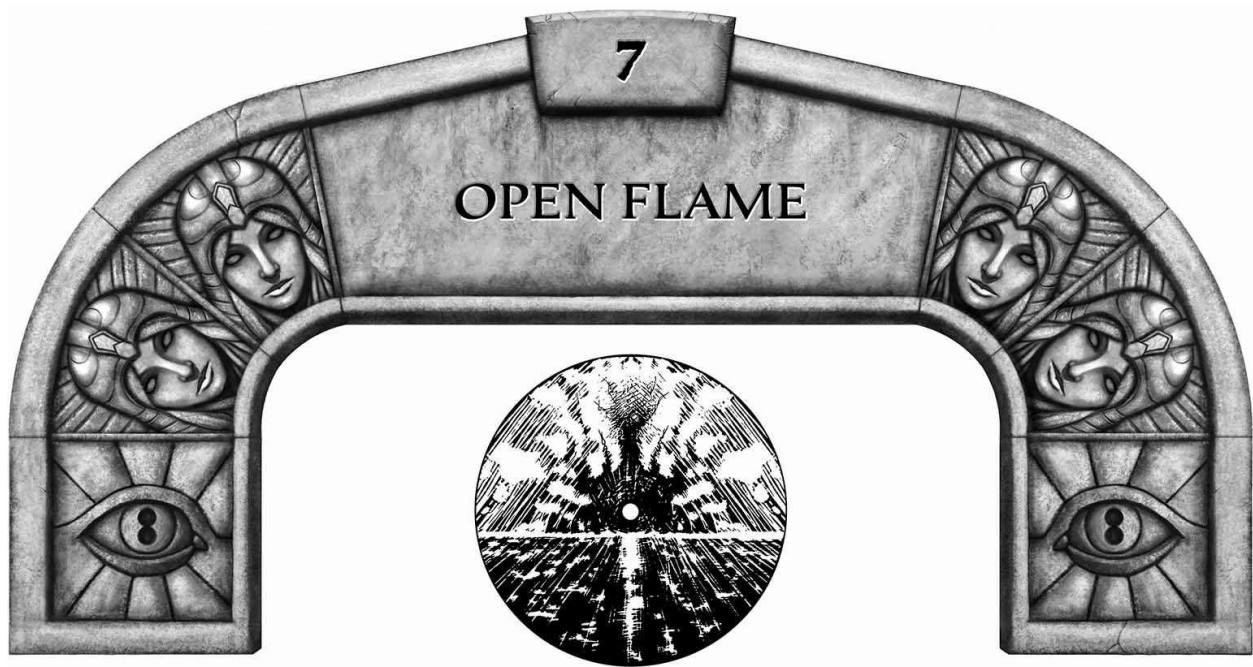
Jasnah smiled through her fatigue. “Very good indeed. My time in the Palanaeum was very useful, but also in some ways disappointing. While I confirmed my suspicions about the parshmen, I also found that many of the great library’s records bore the same signs of tampering as others I’d read. This ‘cleansing’ of history, removing direct references to Urithiru or the Radiants because they were embarrassments to Vorinism—it’s infuriating. And people ask me why I am hostile to the church! I need primary sources. And then, there are stories—ones I dare to believe—claiming that Urithiru was holy and protected from the Voidbringers. Maybe that was wishful fancy, but I am not too much a scholar to hope that something like that might be true.”

“And the parshmen?”

“We will try to persuade the Alethi to rid themselves of those.”

“Not an easy task.”

“A nearly impossible one,” Jasnah said, standing. She began to pack her books away for the night, putting them in her waterproofed trunk. “Parshmen are such perfect slaves. Docile, obedient. Our society has become far too reliant upon them. The parshmen wouldn’t need to turn violent to throw us into chaos—though I’m certain that is what’s coming—they could simply walk away.”



I was unprepared for the grief my loss brought—like an unexpected rain—breaking from a clear sky and crashing down upon me. Gavilar’s death years ago was overwhelming, but this . . . this nearly crushed me.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesach 1174

Still half asleep, Shallan panicked. She scrambled off her cot, accidentally slapping the goblet of mostly drained spheres. Though she used wax to keep it in place, the swat knocked it free and sent spheres tumbling across her cabin.

The scent of smoke was powerful. She ran to her door, disheveled, heart thumping. At least she’d fallen asleep in her clothing. She threw open the door.

Three men crowded in the passageway outside, holding aloft torches, their backs to her.

Torches, sparking with flamespren dancing about the fires. Who brought open flame onto a ship? Shallan stopped in numb confusion.

The shouts came from the deck above, and it seemed that the ship wasn’t on

fire. But who were these men? They carried axes, and were focused on Jasnah's cabin, which was open.

Figures moved inside. In a frozen moment of horror, one threw something ; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.inf said, stepping approximationto the floor before the others, who stepped aside to make way.

A body in a thin nightgown, eyes staring sightlessly, blood blossoming from the breast. Jasnah.

“Be sure,” one of the men said.

The other one knelt and rammed a long, thin knife right into Jasnah's chest. Shallan heard it hit the wood of the floor beneath the body.

Shallan screamed.

One of the men spun toward her. “Hey!” It was the blunt-faced, tall fellow that Yalb had called the “new kid.” She didn't recognize the other men.

Somehow fighting through the terror and disbelief, Shallan slammed her door and threw the bolt with trembling fingers.

Stormfather! Stormfather! She backed away from the door as something heavy hit the other side. They wouldn't need the axes. A few determined smashes of shoulder to door would bring it down.

Shallan stumbled back against her cot, nearly slipping on the spheres rolling to and fro with the ship's motion. The narrow window near the ceiling—far too small to fit through—revealed only the dark of night outside. Shouts continued above, feet thumping on wood.

Shallan trembled, still numb. Jasnah. . . .

“Sword,” a voice said. Pattern, hanging on the wall beside her. “Mmmm . . . The sword . . .”

“No!” Shallan screamed, hands to the sides of her head, fingers in her hair. Stormfather! She was trembling.

Nightmare. It was a nightmare! It couldn't be—

“Mmmm . . . Fight . . .”

“No!” Shallan found herself hyperventilating as the men outside continued to ram their shoulders against her door. She was not ready for this. She was not prepared.

“Mmmm . . .” Pattern said, sounding dissatisfied. “Lies.”

“I don't know how to use the lies!” Shallan said. “I haven't practiced.”

“Yes. Yes . . . remember . . . the time before . . .”

The door crunched. Dared she remember? Could she remember? A child, playing with a shimmering pattern of light . . .

“What do I do?” she asked.

“You need the Light,” Pattern said.

It sparked something deep within her memory, something prickled with barbs she dared not touch. She needed Stormlight to fuel the Surgebinding.

Shallan fell to her knees beside her cot and, without knowing exactly what she was doing, breathed in sharply. Stormlight left the spheres around her, pouring into her body, becoming a storm that raged in her veins. The cabin went dark, black as a cavern deep beneath the earth.

Then Light began to rise from her skin like vapors off boiling water. It lit the cabin with swimming shadows.

“Now what?” she demanded.

“Shape the lie.”

What did that mean? The door crunched again, cracking, a large split opening down the center.

Panicked, Shallan let out a breath. Stormlight streamed from her in a cloud; she almost felt as if she could touch it. She could frustration and doner. 4feel its potential.

“How!” she demanded.

“Make the truth.”

“That makes no sense!”

Shallan screamed as the door broke open. New light entered the cabin, torchlight—red and yellow, hostile.

The cloud of Light leaped from Shallan, more Stormlight streaming from her body to join it. It formed a vague upright shape. An illuminated blur. It washed past the men through the doorway, waving appendages that could have been arms. Shallan herself, kneeling by the bed, fell into shadow.

The men’s eyes were drawn to the glowing shape. Then, blessedly, they turned and gave chase.

Shallan huddled against the wall, shaking. The cabin was utterly dark. Above, men screamed.

“Shallan . . .” Pattern buzzed somewhere in the darkness.

“Go and look,” she said. “Tell me what is happening up on deck.”

She didn’t know if he obeyed, as he made no sound when he moved. After a few deep breaths, Shallan stood up. Her legs shook, but she stood.

She collected herself somewhat. This was terrible, this was awful, but nothing, nothing, could compare to what she’d had to do the night her father died. She had survived that. She could survive this.

These men, they would be of the same group Kabsal had been from—the assassins Jasnah feared. They had finally gotten her.

Oh, Jasnah . . .

Jasnah was dead.

Grieve later. What was Shallan going to do about armed men taking over the ship? How would she find a way out?

She felt her way out into the passageway. There was a little light here, from torches above on the deck. The yells she heard there grew more panicked.

“Killing,” a voice suddenly said.

She jumped, though of course it was only Pattern.

“What?” Shallan hissed.

“Dark men killing,” Pattern said. “Sailors tied in ropes. One dead, bleeding red. I . . . I do not understand. . . .”

Oh, Stormfather . . . Above, the shouting heightened, but there was no scramble of boots on the deck, no clanging of weapons. The sailors had been captured. At least one had been killed.

In the darkness, Shallan saw shaking, wiggling forms creep up from the wood around her. Fearspren.

“What of the men who chased after my image?” she asked.

“Looking in water,” Pattern said.

So they thought she’d jumped overboard. Heart thumping, Shallan felt her way to Jasnah’s cabin, expecting at any moment to trip over the woman’s corpse on the floor. She didn’t. Had the men dragged it above?

Shallan entered Jasnah’s cabin and closed the door. It wouldn’t latch shut, so she pulled a box over to block it.

She had to do something. She felt her way to one of Jasnah’s trunks, which had been thrown open by the men, its contents—clothing—scattered about. In the bottom, Shallan found the hidden drawer and pulled it open. Light suddenly bathed the cabin. The spheres were so bright they blinded s

bothering you?” Syl asked they sufficiently Shallan for a moment, and she had to look away.

Pattern vibrated on the floor beside her, form shaking in worry. Shallan looked about. The small cabin was a shambles, clothing on the floor, papers strewn everywhere. The trunk with Jasnah’s books was gone. Too fresh to have soaked in, blood was pooled on the bed. Shallan quickly looked away.

A shout suddenly sounded above, followed by a thump. The screaming grew louder. She heard Tozbek bellow for the men to spare his wife.

Almighty above . . . the assassins were executing the sailors one at a time. Shallan had to do something. Anything.

Shallan looked back at the spheres in their false bottom, lined with black cloth. “Pattern,” she said, “we’re going to Soulcast the bottom of the ship and sink it.”

“What!” His vibrating increased, a buzz of sound. “Humans . . . Humans . . . Eat water?”

“We drink it,” Shallan said, “but we cannot breathe it.”

“Mmmm . . . Confused . . .” Pattern said.

“The captain and the others are captured and being executed. The best chance I can give them is chaos.” Shallan placed her hands on the spheres and drew in the Light with a sharp breath. She felt a fire with it inside of her, as if she were going to burst. The Light was a living thing, trying to press out through the pores of her skin.

“Show me!” she shouted, far more loudly than she’d intended. That Stormlight urged her to action. “I’ve Soulcast before. I must do it again!” Stormlight puffed from her mouth as she spoke, like breath on a cold day.

“Mmmmm . . .” Pattern said anxiously. “I will intercede. See.”

“See what?”

“See!”

Shadesmar. The last time she’d gone to that place, she’d nearly gotten herself killed. Only, it wasn’t a place. Or was it? Did it matter?

She reached back through recent memory to the time when she’d last Soulcast and accidentally turned a goblet into blood. “I need a truth.”

“You have given enough,” Pattern said. “Now. See.”

The ship vanished.

Everything . . . popped. The walls, the furniture, it all shattered into little globes of black glass. Shallan prepared herself to fall into the ocean of those glass beads, but instead she dropped onto solid ground.

She stood in a place with a black sky and a tiny, distant sun. The ground beneath her reflected light. Obsidian? Each way she turned, the ground was made of that same blackness. Nearby, the spheres—like those that would hold Stormlight, but dark and small—bounced to a rest on the ground.

Trees, like growing crystal, clustered here and there. The limbs were spiky and glassy, without leaves. Nearby, little lights hung in the air, flames without their candles. People, she realized. Those are each a person’s mind, reflected here in the Cognitive Realm. Smaller ones were scattered about her feet, dozens upon dozens, but so small she almost couldn’t make them out. The minds of fish?

She turned around said, folding his arms, hopefully and came face-to-face with a creature that had a symbol for a head. Startled, she screamed and jumped back. These things . . . they had haunted her . . . they . . .

It was Pattern. He stood tall and willowy, but slightly indistinct, translucent. The complex pattern of his head, with its sharp lines and impossible geometries, seemed to have no eyes. He stood with hands behind his back, wearing a robe that seemed too stiff to be cloth.

“Go,” he said. “Choose.”

“Choose what?” she said, Stormlight escaping her lips.

“Your ship.”

He did not have eyes, but she thought she could follow his gaze toward one of the little spheres on the glassy ground. She snatched it, and suddenly was given the impression of a ship.

The Wind’s Pleasure. A ship that had been cared for, loved. It had carried its passengers well for years and years, owned by Tozbek and his father before him. An old ship, but not ancient, still reliable



I seek not to use my grief as an excuse, but it is an explanation. People act strangely soon after encountering an unexpected loss. Though Jasnah had been away for some time, her loss was unexpected. I, like many, assumed her to be immortal.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesach 1174

The familiar scraping of wood as a bridge slid into place. The stomping of feet in unison, first a flat sound on stone, then the ringing thump of boots on wood. The distant calls of scouts, shouting back the all-clear.

The sounds of a plateau run were familiar to Dalinar. Once, he had craved these sounds. He'd been impatient between runs, longing for the chance to strike down Parshendi with his Blade, to win wealth and recognition.

That Dalinar had been seeking to cover up his shame—the shame of lying slumped in a drunken stupor while his brother fought an assassin.

The setting of a plateau run was uniform: bare, jagged rocks, mostly the same dull color as the stone surface they sat on, broken only by the occasional

cluster of closed rockbuds. Even those, as their name implied, could be mistaken for more rocks. There was nothing but more of the same from here where you stood, all the way out to the far horizon; and everything you'd brought with you, everything human, was dwarfed by the vastness of these endless, fractured plains and deadly chasms.

Over the years, this activity had become rote. Marching beneath that white sun like molten steel. Crossing gap after gap. Eventually, plateau runs had become less something to anticipate and more a dogged obligation. For Gavilar and glory, yes, but mainly because they—and the enemy—were here. This was what you did.

The scents of a plateau run were the scents of a great stillness: baked stone, dried crem, long-traveled winds.

Most recently, Dalinar was coming to detest plateau runs. They were a frivolity, a waste of life. They weren't about fulfilling the Vengeance Pact, but about greed. Many gemhearts appeared on the near plateaus, convenient to reach. Those didn't sate the Alethi. They had to reach farther, toward assaults that cost dearly.

Ahead, Highprince Aladar's men fought on a plateau. They had arrived before Dalinar's said, folding his arms in during highstorms approximations army, and the conflict told a familiar story. Men against Parshendi, fighting in a sinuous line, each army trying to shove the other back. The humans could field far more men than the Parshendi, but the Parshendi could reach plateaus faster and secure them quickly.

The scattered bodies of bridgemen on the staging plateau, leading up to the chasm, attested to the danger of charging an entrenched foe. Dalinar did not miss the dark expressions on his bodyguards' faces as they surveyed the dead. Aladar, like most of the other highprinces, used Sadeas's philosophy on bridge runs. Quick, brutal assaults that treated manpower as an expendable resource. It hadn't always been this way. In the past, bridges had been carried by armored troops, but success bred imitation.

The warcamps needed a constant influx of cheap slaves to feed the monster. That meant a growing plague of slavers and bandits roaming the Unclaimed

Hills, trading in flesh. Another thing I'll have to change, Dalinar thought.

Aladar himself didn't fight, but had instead set up a command center on an adjacent plateau. Dalinar pointed toward the flapping banner, and one of his large mechanical bridges rolled into place. Pulled by chulls and full of gears, levers, and cams, the bridges protected the men who worked them. They were also very slow. Dalinar waited with self-disciplined patience as the workers ratcheted the bridge down, spanning the chasm between this plateau and the one where Aladar's banner flew.

Once the bridge was in position and locked, his bodyguard—led by one of Captain Kaladin's darkeyed officers—trotted onto it, spears to shoulders. Dalinar had promised Kaladin his men would not have to fight except to defend him. Once they were across, Dalinar kicked Gallant into motion to cross to Aladar's command plateau. Dalinar felt too light on the stallion's back—the lack of Shardplate. In the many years since he'd obtained his suit, he'd never gone out onto a battlefield without it.

Today, however, he didn't ride to battle—not truly. Behind him, Adolin's own personal banner flew, and he led the bulk of Dalinar's armies to assault the plateau where Aladar's men already fought. Dalinar didn't send any orders regarding how the assault should go. His son had been trained well, and he was ready to take battlefield command—with General Khal at his side, of course, for advice.

Yes, from now on, Adolin would lead the battles.

Dalinar would change the world.

He rode toward Aladar's command tent. This was the first plateau run following his proclamation requiring the armies to work together. The fact that Aladar had come as commanded, and Roion had not—even though the target plateau was closest to Roion's warcamp—was a victory unto itself. A small encouragement, but Dalinar would take what he could get.

He found Highprince Aladar watching from a small pavilion set up on a secure, raised part of this plateau overlooking the battlefield. A perfect location for a command post. Aladar was a Shardbearer, though he

commonly lent his Plate and Blade to one of his officers during battles, preferring to lead tactically from behind the battle lines. A practiced Shardbearer could mentally command a Blade to not dissolve when he let go of it, though—in an emergency—Aladar could summon it to himself, making it vanish from the hands of his officer in an eyeblink, then appear in his own hands ten heartbeats later. Lending a Blade required a great deal of trust on both sides.

Dalinar dismounted. His horse, Gallant, glared at the groom who tried to take bothering you?" Syl asked they " aid="28FAly him, and Dalinar patted the horse on the neck. "He'll be fine on his own, son," he said to the groom. Most common grooms didn't know what to do with one of the Ryshadium anyway.

Trailed by his bridgeman guards, Dalinar joined Aladar, who stood at the edge of the plateau, overseeing the battlefield ahead and just below. Slender and completely bald, the man had skin a darker tan than most Alethi. He stood with hands behind his back, and wore a sharp traditional uniform with a skirtlike takama, though he wore a modern jacket above it, cut to match the takama.

It was a style Dalinar had never seen before. Aladar also wore a thin mustache and a tuft of hair beneath his lip, again an unconventional choice. Aladar was powerful enough, and renowned enough, to make his own fashion—and he did so, often setting trends.

"Dalinar," Aladar said, nodding to him. "I thought you weren't going to fight on plateau runs any longer."

"I'm not," Dalinar said, nodding toward Adolin's banner. There, soldiers streamed across Dalinar's bridges to join the battle. The plateau was small enough that many of Aladar's men had to withdraw to make way, something they were obviously all too eager to do.

"You almost lost this day," Dalinar noted. "It is well that you had support." Below, Dalinar's troops restored order to the battlefield and pushed against the Parshendi.

“Perhaps,” Aladar said. “Yet in the past, I was victorious in one out of three assaults. Having support will mean I win a few more, certainly, but will also cost half my earnings. Assuming the king even assigns me any. I’m not convinced that I’ll be better off in the long run.”

“But this way, you lose fewer men,” Dalinar said. “And the total winnings for the entire army will rise. The honor of the—”

“Don’t talk to me about honor, Dalinar. I can’t pay my soldiers with honor, and I can’t use it to keep the other highprinces from snapping at my neck. Your plan favors the weakest among us and undercuts the successful.”

“Fine,” Dalinar snapped, “honor has no value to you. You will still obey, Aladar, because your king demands it. That is the only reason you need. You will do as told.”

“Or?” Aladar said.

“Ask Yenev.”

Aladar started as if slapped. Ten years back, Highprince Yenev had refused to accept the unification of Alethkar. At Gavilar’s order, Sadeas had dueled the man. And killed him.

“Threats?” Aladar asked.

“Yes.” Dalinar turned to look the shorter man in the eyes. “I’m done cajoling, Aladar. I’m done asking. When you disobey Elhokar, you mock my brother and what he stood for. I will have a unified kingdom.”

“Amusing,” Aladar said. “Good of you to mention Gavilar, as he didn’t bring the kingdom together with honor. He did it with knives in the back and soldiers on the field, cutting the heads off any who resisted. Are we back to that again, then? Such things don’t sound much like the fine words of your precious book.”

Dalinar ground his teeth, turning away to watch the battlefield. His first instinct was to tell Aladar he was an officer under Dalinar’s command, and

take the man to task for his tone. The traditional hummingly treat him like a recruit in need of correction.

But what if Aladar just ignored him? Would he force the man to obey? Dalinar didn't have the troops for it.

He found himself annoyed—more at himself than at Aladar. He'd come on this plateau run not to fight, but to talk. To persuade. Navani was right. Dalinar needed more than brusque words and military commands to save this kingdom. He needed loyalty, not fear.

But storms take him, how? What persuading he'd done in life, he'd accomplished with a sword in hand and a fist to the face. Gavilar had always been the one with the right words, the one who could make people listen.

Dalinar had no business trying to be a politician.

Half the lads on that battlefield probably didn't think they had any business being soldiers, at first, a part of him whispered. You don't have the luxury of being bad at this. Don't complain. Change.

"The Parshendi are pushing too hard," Aladar said to his generals. "They want to shove us off the plateau. Tell the men to give a little and let the Parshendi lose their advantage of footing; that will let us surround them."

The generals nodded, one calling out orders.

Dalinar narrowed his eyes at the battlefield, reading it. "No," he said softly.

The general stopped giving orders. Aladar glanced at Dalinar.

"The Parshendi are preparing to pull back," Dalinar said.

"They certainly don't act like it."

"They want some room to breathe," Dalinar said, reading the swirl of combat below. "They nearly have the gemheart harvested. They will continue to push hard, but will break into a quick retreat around the chrysalis to buy time for the final harvesting. That's what you'll need to stop."

The Parshendi surged forward.

“I took point on this run,” Aladar said. “By your own rules, I get final say over our tactics.”

“I observe only,” Dalinar said. “I’m not even commanding my own army today. You may choose your tactics, and I will not interfere.”

Aladar considered, then cursed softly. “Assume Dalinar is correct. Prepare the men for a withdrawal by the Parshendi. Send a strike team forward to secure the chrysalis, which should be almost opened up.”

The generals set up the new details, and messengers raced off with the tactical orders. Aladar and Dalinar watched, side by side, as the Parshendi shoved forward. That singing of theirs hovered over the battlefield.

Then they pulled back, careful as always to respectfully step over the bodies of the dead. Ready for this, the human troops rushed after. Led by Adolin in gleaming Plate, a strike force of fresh troops broke through the Parshendi line and reached the chrysalis. Other human troops poured through the gap they opened, shoving the Parshendi to the flanks, turning the Parshendi withdrawal into a tactical disaster.

In minutes, the Parshendi had abandoned the plateau, jumping away and fleeing.

“Damnation,” Aladar said softly. “I hate that you’re so good at this.”

Dalinar narrowed his eyes, noticing that so traditional humminglyme of the fleeing Parshendi stopped on a plateau a short distance from the battlefield. They lingered there, though much of their force continued on away.

Dalinar waved for one of Aladar’s servants to hand him a spyglass, then he raised it, focusing on that group. A figure stood at the edge of the plateau out there, a figure in glistening armor.

The Parshendi Shardbearer, he thought. The one from the battle at the Tower. He almost killed me.

Dalinar didn't remember much from that encounter. He'd been beaten near senseless toward the end of it. This Shardbearer hadn't participated in today's battle. Why? Surely with a Shardbearer, they could have opened the chrysalis sooner.

Dale ship had bee



I wish to think that had I not been under sorrow's thumb, I would have seen earlier the approaching dangers. Yet in all honesty, I'm not certain anything could have been done.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesach 1174

Kaladin led the way down into the chasms, as was his right.

They used a rope ladder, as they had in Sadeas's army. Those ladders had been unsavory things, the ropes frayed and stained with moss, the planks battered by far too many highstorms. Kaladin had never lost a man because of those storming ladders, but he'd always worried.

This one was brand new. He knew that for a fact, as Rind the quartermaster had scratched his head at the request, and then had one built to Kaladin's specifications. It was sturdy and well made, like Dalinar's army itself.

Kaladin reached the bottom with a final hop. Syl floated down and landed on his shoulder as he held up a sphere to survey the chasm bottom. The single sapphire broam was worth more by itself than the entirety of his wages as a bridgeman.

In Sadeas's army, the chasms had been a frequent destination for bridgemen. Kaladin still didn't know if the purpose had been to scavenge every possible resource from the Shattered Plains, or if it had really been about finding something menial—and will-breaking—for bridgemen to do between runs.

The chasm bottom here, however, was untouched. There were no paths cut through the snarl of stormleavings on the ground, and there were no scratched messages or instructions in the lichen on the walls. Like the other chasms, this one opened up like a vase, wider at the bottom than at the cracked top—a result of waters rushing through during highstorms. The floor was relatively flat, smoothed by the hardened sediment of settling crem.

As he moved forward, Kaladin had to pick his way over all kinds of debris. Broken sticks and logs from trees blown in from across the Plains. Cracked rockbud shells. Countless tangles of dried vines, twisted through one another like discarded yarn.

And bodies, of course.

A lot of corpses ended up in the chasms. Whenever men lost their battle to seize a plateau, they had to retreat and leave their dead behind. Storms! Sadeas often left the corpses behind even if he won—and bridgemen he'd leave wounded, abandoned, even if they could have been saved.

After a highstorm, the dead ended up here, in the chasms. And since storms ble said, folding his armsinf remember.” approximationw westward, toward the warcamps, the bodies washed in this direction. Kaladin found it hard to move without stepping on bones entwined in the accumulated foliage on the chasm floor.

He picked his way through as respectfully as he could as Rock reached the bottom behind him, uttering a quiet phrase in his native tongue. Kaladin couldn't tell if it was a curse or a prayer. Syl moved from Kaladin's shoulder, zipping into the air, then streaking in an arc to the ground. There, she formed into what he thought of as her true shape, that of a young woman with a simple dress that frayed to mist just below the knees. She perched on a branch and stared at a femur poking up through the moss.

She didn't like violence. He wasn't certain if, even now, she understood death. She spoke of it like a child trying to grasp something beyond her.

"What a mess," Teft said as he reached the bottom. "Bah! This place hasn't seen any kind of care at all."

"It is a grave," Rock said. "We walk in a grave."

"All of the chasms are graves," Teft said, his voice echoing in the dank confines. "This one's just a messy grave."

"Hard to find death that isn't messy, Teft," Kaladin said.

Teft grunted, then started to greet the new recruits as they reached the bottom. Moash and Skar were watching over Dalinar and his sons as they attended some lighteyed feast—something that Kaladin was glad to be able to avoid. Instead, he'd come with Teft down here.

They were joined by the forty bridgemen—two from each reorganized crew—that Teft was training with the hope that they'd make good sergeants for their own crews.

"Take a good look, lads," Teft said to them. "This is where we come from. This is why some call us the order of bone. We're not going to make you go through everything we did, and be glad! We could have been swept away by a highstorm at any moment. Now, with Dalinar Kholin's stormwardens to guide us, we won't have nearly as much risk—and we'll be staying close to the exit just in case . . ."

Kaladin folded his arms, watching Teft instruct as Rock handed practice spears to the men. Teft himself carried no spear, and though he was shorter than the bridgemen who gathered around him—wearing simple soldiers' uniforms—they seemed thoroughly intimidated.

What else did you expect? Kaladin thought. They're bridgemen. A stiff breeze could quell them.

Still, Teft looked completely in control. Comfortably so. This was right.

Something about it was just . . . right.

A swarm of small glowing orbs materialized around Kaladin's head, spren the shape of golden spheres that darted this way and that. He started, looking at them. Gloryspren. Storms. He felt as if he hadn't seen the like in years.

Syl zipped up into the air and joined them, giggling and spinning around Kaladin's head. "Feeling proud of yourself?"

"Teft," Kaladin said. "He's a leader."

"Of course he is. You gave him a rank, didn't you?"

"No," Kaladin said. "I didn't give it to him. He claimed it. Come on. Let's walk."

She nodded, alighting in the air and settling herself down, her legs crossed at the knees as if she were primly seating herself in an invisible chair. She continued to hover there, moving exactly in step with him.

"Giving up all pretense of obeying natural laws again, I see," he said.

"Natural laws?" Syl said, finding the concept amusing. "Laws are of men, Kaladin. Nature doesn't have them!"

"If I toss something upward, it comes back down."

"Except when it doesn't."

"It's a law."

"No," Syl said, looking upward. "It's more like . . . more like an agreement among friends."

He looked at her, raising an eyebrow.

"We have to be consistent," she said, leaning in conspiratorially. "Or we'll break your brains."

He snorted, walking around a clump of bones and sticks pierced by a spear. Cankered with rust, it looked like a monument.

“Oh, come on,” Syl said, tossing her hair. “That was worth at least a chuckle.”

Kaladin kept walking.

“A snort is not a chuckle,” Syl said. “I know this because I am intelligent and articulate. You should compliment me now.”

“Dalinar Kholin wants to refound the Knights Radiant.”

“Yes,” Syl said loftily, hanging in the corner of his vision. “A brilliant idea. I wish I’d thought of it.” She grinned triumphantly, then scowled.

“What?” he said, turning back to her.

“Has it ever struck you as unfair,” she said, “that spren cannot attract spren? I should really have had some gloryspren of my own there.”

“I have to protect Dalinar,” Kaladin said, ignoring her complaint. “Not just him, but his family, maybe the king himself. Even though I failed to keep someone from sneaking into Dalinar’s rooms.” He still couldn’t figure out how someone had managed to get in. Unless it hadn’t been a person. “Could a spren have made those glyphs on the wall?” Syl had carried a leaf once. She had some physical form, just not much.

“I don’t know,” she said, glancing to the side. “I’ve seen . . .”

“What?”

“Spren like red lightning,” Syl said softly. “Dangerous spren. Spren I haven’t seen before. I catch them in the distance, on occasion. Stormspren? Something dangerous is coming. About that, the glyphs are right.”

He chewed on that for a while, then finally stopped and looked at her. “Syl, are there others like me?”

Her face grew solemn. “Oh.”

“Oh?”

“Oh, that question.”

“You’ve been expecting it, then?”

“Yeah. Sort of.”

“So you’ve had plenty of time to think about a good answer, frustration done made ” Kaladin said, folding his arms and leaning back against a somewhat dry portion of the wall. “That makes me wonder if you’ve come up with a solid explanation or a solid lie.”

“Lie?” Syl said, aghast. “Kaladin! What do you think I am? A Cryptic?”

“And what is a Cryptic?”

Syl, still perched as if on a seat, sat up straight and cocked her head. “I actually . . . I actually have no idea. Huh.”

“Syl . . .”

“I’m serious, Kaladin! I don’t know. I don’t remember.” She grabbed her hair, one clump of white translucence in each hand, and pulled sideways.

He frowned, then pointed. “That . . .”

“I saw a woman do it in the market,” Syl said, yanking her hair to the sides again. “It means I’m frustrated. I think it’s supposed to hurt. So . . . ow? Anyway, it’s not that I don’t want to tell you what I know. I do! I just . . . I don’t know what I know.”

“That doesn’t make sense.”

“Well, imagine how frustrating it feels!”

Kaladin sighed, then continued along the chasm, passing pools of stagnant

water clotted with debris. A scattering of enterprising rockbuds grew stunted along one chasm wall. They must not get much light down here.

He breathed in deeply the scents of overloaded life. Moss and mold. Most of the bodies here were mere bone, though he did steer clear of one patch of ground crawling with the red dots of rotspren. Just beside it, a group of frillblooms wafted their delicate fanlike fronds in the air, and those danced with green specks of lifespren. Life and death shook hands here in the chasms.

He explored several of the chasm's branching paths. It felt odd to not know this area; he'd learned the chasms closest to Sadeas's camp better than the camp itself. As he walked, the chasm grew deeper and the area opened up. He made a few marks on the wall.

Along one fork he found a round open area with little debris. He noted it, then walked back, marking the wall again before taking another branch. Eventually, they entered another place where the chasm opened up, widening into a roomy space.

"Coming here was dangerous," Syl said.

"Into the chasms?" Kaladin asked. "There aren't going to be any chasmfiends this close to the warcamps."

"No. I meant for me, coming into this realm before I found you. It was dangerous."

"Where were you before?"

"Another place. With lots of spren. I can't remember well . . . it had lights in the air. Living lights."

"Like lifespren."

"Yes. And no. Coming here risked death. Without you, without a mind born of this realm, I couldn't think. Alone, I was just another windspren."

"But you're not windspren," Kaladin said, kneeling beside a large pool of

water. “You’re honorspren.”

“Yes,” Syl said.

Kaladin closed his hand around his sphere, bringing near-darkness s bothering you?” Syl asked they fashionablyto the cavernous space. It was day above, but that crack of sky was distant, unreachable.

Mounds of flood-borne refuse fell into shadows that seemed almost to give them flesh again. Heaps of bones took on the semblance of limp arms, of corpses piled high. In a moment, Kaladin remembered it. Charging with a yell toward lines of Parshendi archers. His friends dying on barren plateaus, thrashing in their own blood.

The thunder of hooves on stone. The incongruous chanting of alien tongues. The cries of men both lighteyed and dark. A world that cared nothing for bridgemen. They were refuse. Sacrifices to be cast into the chasms and carried away by the cleansing floods.

This was their true home, these rents in the earth, these places lower than any other. As his eyes adjusted to the dimness, the memories of death receded, though he would never be free of them. He would forever bear those scars upon his memory like the many upon his flesh. Like the ones on his forehead.

The pool in front of him glowed a deep violet. He’d noticed it earlier, but in the light of his sphere it had been harder to see. Now, in the dimness, the pool could reveal its eerie radiance.

Syl landed on the side of the pool, looking like a woman standing on an ocean’s shore. Kaladin frowned, leaning down to inspect her more closely. She seemed . . . different. Had her face changed shape?

“There are others like you,” Syl whispered. “I do not know them, but I know that other spren are trying, in their own way, to reclaim what was lost.”

She looked to him, and her face now had its familiar form. The fleeting change had been so subtle, Kaladin wasn’t sure if he’d imagined it.

“I am the only honorspren who has come,” Syl said. “I . . .” She seemed to be stretching to remember. “I was forbidden. I came anyway. To find you.”

“You knew me?”

“No. But I knew I’d find you.” She smiled. “I spent the time with my cousins, searching.”

“The windspren.”

“Without the bond, I am basically one of them,” she said. “Though they don’t have the capacity to do what we do. And what we do is important. So important that I left everything, defying the Stormfather, to come. You saw him. In the storm.”

The hair stood up on Kaladin’s arms. He had indeed seen a being in the storm. A face as vast as the sky itself. Whatever the thing was—spre, Herald, or god—it had not tempered its storms for Kaladin during that day he’d spent strung up.

“We are needed, Kaladin,” Syl said softly. She waved for him, and he lowered his hand to the shore of the tiny violet ocean glowing softly in the chasm. She stepped onto his hand, and he stood up, lifting her.

She walked up his fingers and he could actually feel a little weight, which was unusual. He turned his hand as she stepped up until she was perched on one finger, her hands clasped behind her back, meeting his eyes as he held that finger up before his face.

“You,” Syl said. “You’re going to need to become what Dalinar Kholin is looking for. Don’t let him search in vain.”

“They’ll take it from me, Syl,” Kaladin whispered. “They’ll find a way to take you from me.”

“That said, folding his armsmKaladin realizedre’s foolishness. You know that it is.”

“I know it is, but I feel it isn’t. They broke me, Syl. I’m not what you think I

am. I'm no Radiant."

"That's not what I saw," Syl said. "On the battlefield after Sadeas's betrayal, when men were trapped, abandoned. That day I saw a hero."

He looked into her eyes. She had pupils, though they were created only from the differing shades of white and blue, like the rest of her. She glowed more softly than the weakest of spheres, but it was enough to light his finger. She smiled, seeming utterly confident in him.

At least one of them was.

"I'll try," Kaladin whispered. A promise.

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“Kaladin?” The voice was Rock’s, with his distinctive Horneater accent. He pronounced the name “kal-ah-deen,” instead of the normal “kal-adin.”

Syl zipped off Kaladin’s finger, becoming a ribbon of light and flitting over to Rock. He showed respect to her in hiy, touching his shoulders in turn with one hand, and then raising the hand to his forehead. She giggled; her profound solemnity had become girlish joy in moments. Syl might only be a cousin to windspren, but she obviously shared their impish nature.

“Hey,” Kaladin said, nodding to Rock, and fishing in the pool. He came out with an amethyst broam and held it up. Somewhere up there on the Plains, a lighteyes had died with this in his pocket. “Riches, if we still were bridgemen.”

“We are still bridgemen,” Rock said, coming over. He plucked the sphere from Kaladin’s fingers. “And this is still riches. Ha! Spices they have for us to requisition are tuma’alki! I have promised I will not fix dung for the men, but it is hard, with soldiers being accustomed to food that is not much better.” He held up the sphere. “I will use him to buy better, eh?”

“Sure,” Kaladin said. Syl landed on Rock’s shoulder and became a young woman, then sat down.

Rock eyed her and tried to bow to his own shoulder.

“Stop tormenting him, Syl,” Kaladin said.

“It’s so fun!”

“You are to be praised for your aid of us, mafah’liki,” Rock said to her. “I will endure whatever you wish of me. And now that I am free, I can create a shrine fitting to you.”

“A shrine?” Syl said, eyes widening. “Ooooh.”

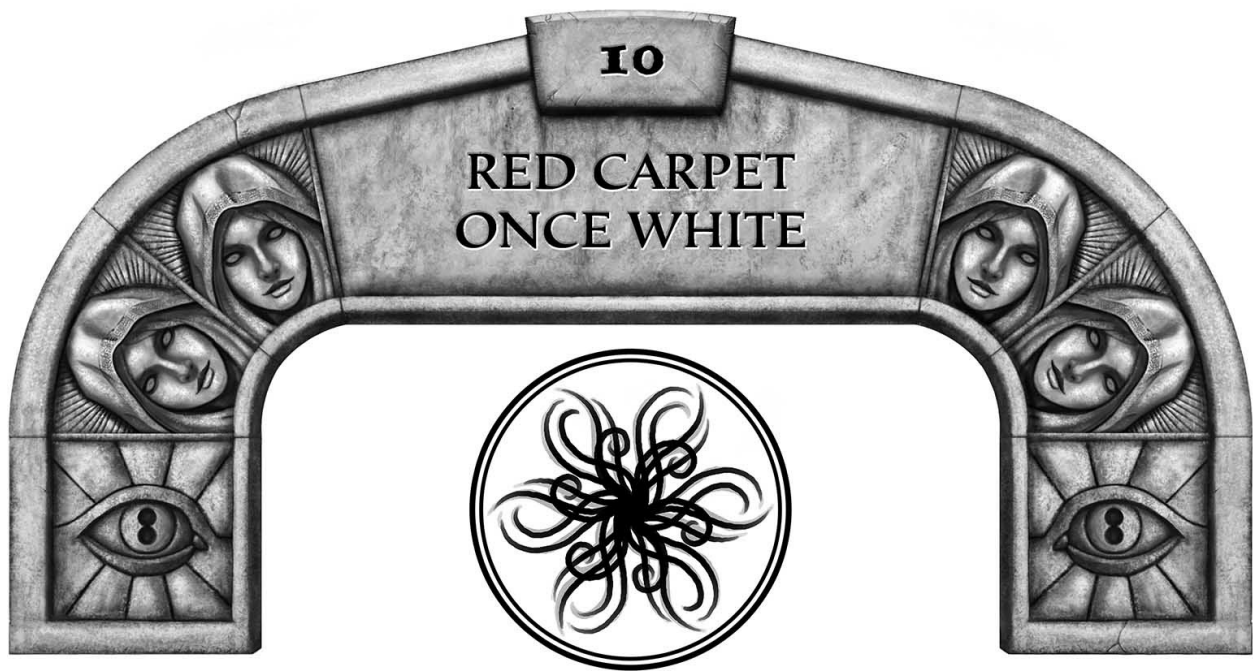
“Syl!” Kaladin said. “Stop it. Rock, I saw a good place for the men to practice. It’s back a couple of branches. I marked it on the walls.”

“Yes, we saw this thing,” Rock said. “Teft has led the men there. It is strange. This place is frightening; it is a place that nobody comes, and yet the new recruits . . .”

“They’re opening up,” Kaladin guessed.

“Yes. How did you know this thing would happen?”

“They were there,” Kaladin said, “in Sadeas’s warcamp, when we were assigned to Horneater wa



SIX YEARS AGO

The world ended, and Shallan was to blame.

“Pretend it never happened,” her father whispered. He wiped something wet from her cheek. His thumb came back red. “I’ll protect you.”

Was the room shaking? No, that was Shallan. Trembling. She felt so small. Eleven had seemed old to her, once. But she was a child, still a child. So small.

She looked up at her father with a shudder. She couldn’t blink; her eyes were frozen open.

Father started to whisper, blinking tears. “Now go to sleep in chasms deep, with darkness all around you . . .”

A familiar lullaby, one he always used to sing to her. In the room behind him, dark corpses stretched out on the floor. A red carpet once white.

“Though rock and dread may be your bed, so sleep my baby dear.”

Father gathered her into his arms, and she felt her skin squirming. No. No, this affection wasn't right. A monster should not be held in love. A monster who killed, who murdered. No.

She could not move.

“Now comes the storm, but you'll be warm, the wind will rock your basket . . .”

Father carried Shallan over the body of a woman in white. Little blood there. It was the man who bled. Mother lay facedown, so Shallan couldn't see the eyes. The horrible eyes.

Almost, Shallan could imagine that the lullaby was the end to a nightmare. That it was night, that she had awakened screaming, and her father was singing her to sleep . . .

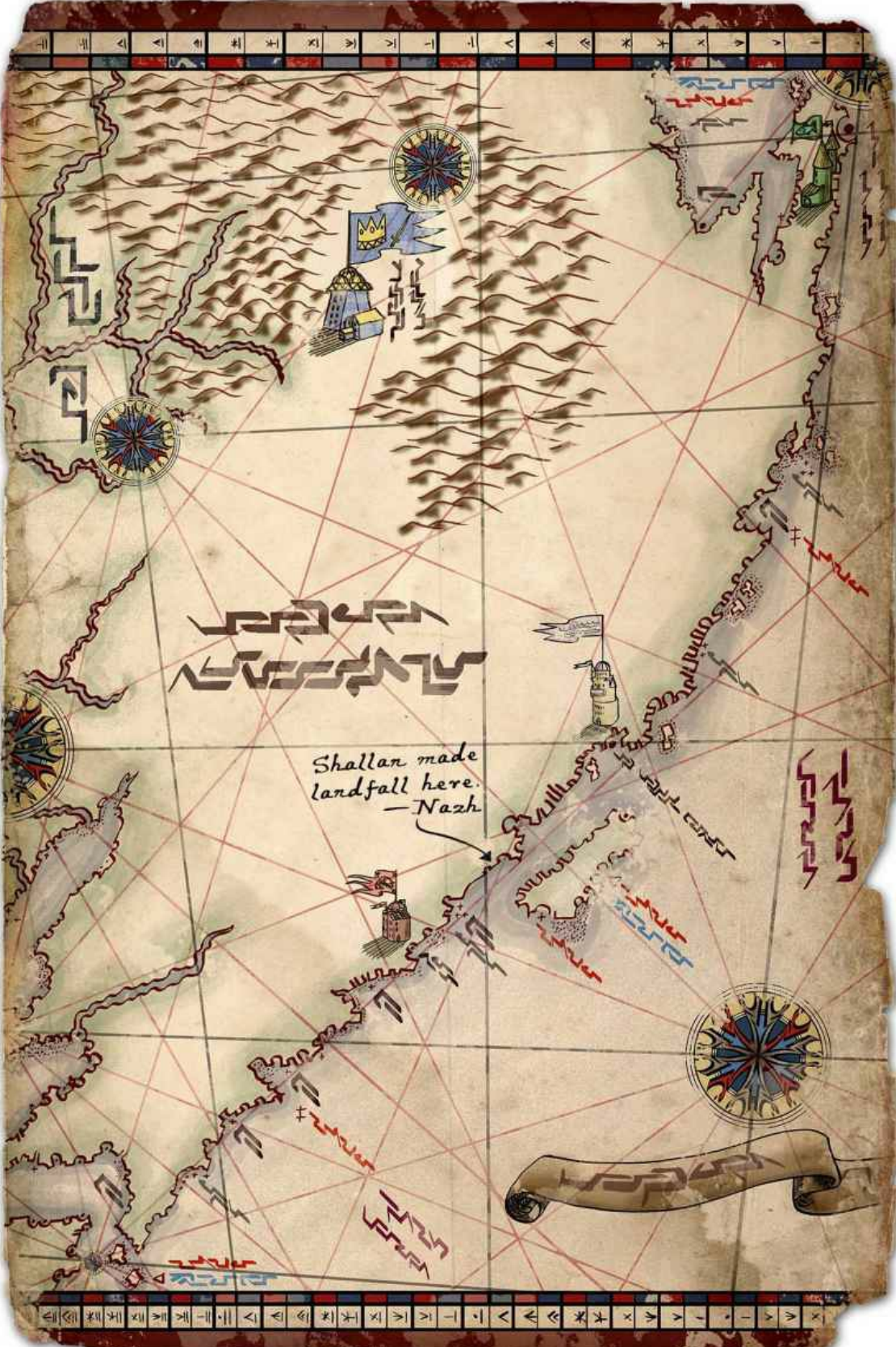
“The crystals fine will glow sublime, so sleep my baby dear.”

They passed Father's strongbox set into the wall. It glowed brightly, light streaming from the cracks around the closed door. A monster was inside.

“And with a song, it won't be long, you'll sleep my baby dear.”

With Shallan in his arms, Father left the room and closed the door on the corpses.

breath caught in her throat Wyndle, sir,” Kaladin What are you doing

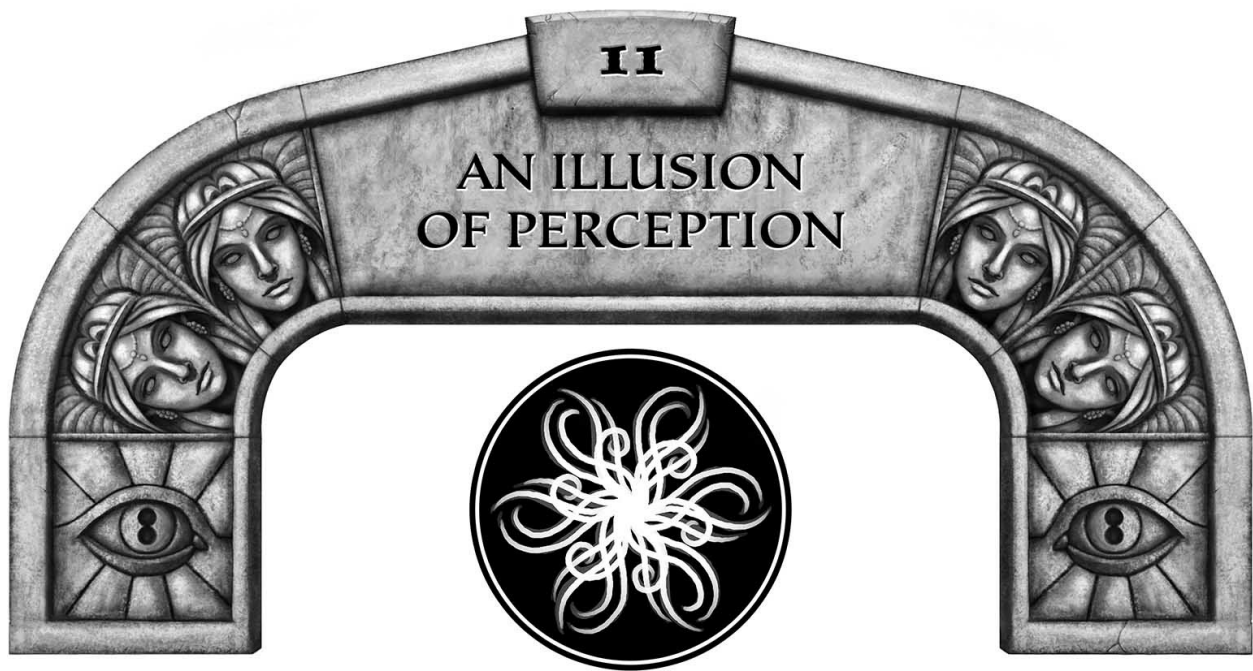


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Shallan made
landfall here.
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מלכות ישראל
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מלכות ישראל
מלכות יהודה



But, understandably, we were focused on Sadeas. His betrayal was still fresh, and I saw its signs each day as I passed empty barracks and grieving widows. We knew that Sadeas would not simply rest upon his slaughters in pride. More was coming.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesach 1174

Shallan awoke mostly dry, lying on an uneven rock that rose from the ocean. Waves lapped at her toes, though she could barely feel them through the numbness. She groaned, lifting her cheek from the wet granite. There was land nearby, and the surf sounded against it with a low roar. In the other direction stretched only the endless blue sea.

She was cold and her head throbbed as if she'd banged it repeatedly against a wall, but she was alive. Somehow. She raised her hand—rubbing at the itchy dried salt on her forehead—and hacked out a ragged cough. Her hair stuck to the sides of her face, and her dress was stained from the water and the seaweed on the rock.

How . . . ?

Then she saw it, a large brown shell in the water, almost invisible as it moved toward the horizon. The santhid.

She stumbled to her feet, clinging to the pointy tip of her rock perch. Woozy, she watched the creature until it was gone.

Something hummed beside her. Pattern formed his usual shape on the surface of the churning sea, translucent as if he were a small wave himself.

“Did . . .” She coughed, clearing her voice, then groaned and sat down on the rock. “Did anyone else make it?”

“Make?” Pattern asked.

“Other people. The sailors. Did they escape?”

“Uncertain,” Pattern said, in his humming voice. “Ship . . . Gone. Splashing. Nothing seen.”

“The santhid. It rescued me.” How had it known what to do? Were they intelligent? Could she have somehow communicated with it? Had she missed an opportunity to—

She almost started laughing as she realized the direction her thoughts were going. She’d nearly drowned, Jasnah was dead, the crew of the Wind’s Pleasure likely murdered or swallowed by the sea! Instead of mourning them or marveling at her survival, Shallan was engaging in scholarly speculation?

That’s what you do, a deeply buried part of herself accused her. You distract yourself. You refuse to think about things that bother you.

But that was how she survived.

Shallan wrapped her arms around herself for warmth on her stone perch and stared out over the ocean. She had to face the truth. Jasnah was dead. breath caught in her throat Wyndle extendeddefe

Jasnah was dead.

Shallan felt like weeping. A woman so brilliant, so amazing, was just . . . gone. Jasnah had been trying to save everyone, protect the world itself. And they'd killed her for it. The suddenness of what had happened left Shallan stunned, and so she sat there, shivering and cold and just staring out at the ocean. Her mind felt as numb as her feet.

Shelter. She'd need shelter . . . something. Thoughts of the sailors, of Jasnah's research, those were of less immediate concern. Shallan was stranded on a stretch of coast that was almost completely uninhabited, in lands that froze at night. As she'd been sitting, the tide had slowly withdrawn, and the gap between herself and the shore was not nearly as wide as it had been. That was fortunate, as she couldn't really swim.

She forced herself to move, though lifting her limbs was like trying to budge fallen tree trunks. She gritted her teeth and slipped into the water. She could still feel its biting cold. Not completely numb, then.

"Shallan?" Pattern asked.

"We can't sit out here forever," Shallan said, clinging to the rock and getting all the way down into the water. Her feet brushed rock beneath, and so she dared let go, half swimming in a splashing mess as she made her way toward the land.

She probably swallowed half the water in the bay as she fought through the frigid waves until she finally was able to walk. Dress and hair streaming, she coughed and stumbled up onto the sandy shore, then fell to her knees. The ground here was strewn with seaweed of a dozen different varieties that writhed beneath her feet, pulling away, slimy and slippery. Cremlings and larger crabs scuttled in every direction, some nearby making clicking sounds at her, as if to ward her off.

She dully thought it a testament to her exhaustion that she hadn't even considered—before leaving the rock—the sea predators she'd read about: a dozen different kinds of large crustaceans that were happy to have a leg to snip free and chew on. Fearspren suddenly began to wiggle out of the sand, purple and sluglike.

That was silly. Now she was frightened? After her swim? The spren soon vanished.

Shallan glanced back at her rock perch. The santhid probably hadn't been able to deposit her any closer, as the water grew too shallow. Stormfather. She was lucky to be alive.

Despite her mounting anxiety, Shallan knelt down and traced a glyphward into the sand in prayer. She didn't have a means of burning it. For now, she had to assume the Almighty would accept this. She bowed her head and sat reverently for ten heartbeats.

Then she stood and, hope against hope, began to search for other survivors. This stretch of coast was pocketed with numerous beaches and inlets. She put off seeking shelter, instead walking for a long time down the shoreline. The beach was composed of sand that was coarser than she'd expected. It certainly didn't match the idyllic stories she'd read, and it ground unpleasantly against her toes as she walked. Alongside her, it rose in a moving shape as Pattern kept pace with her, humming anxiously.

Shallan passed branches, even bits of wood that might have belonged to ships. She saw no people and found no footprints. As the day grew long, she gave up, sitting down on a weathered stone. She hadn't noticed that her feet were sliced and reddened from walking on the rocks. Her hair was a complete mess. Her safepouch had a few spheres in it, but none were stanza

Firewood, she thought. She'd gather that and build a fire. In the night, that might signal other survivors.

Or it might signal pirates, bandits, or the shipboard assassins, if they had survived.

Shallan grimaced. What was she going to do?

Build a small fire to keep warm, she decided. Shield it, then watch the night for other fires. If you see one, try to inspect it without getting too close.

A fine plan, except for the fact that she'd lived her entire life in a stately

manor, with servants to light fires for her. She'd never started one in a hearth, let alone in the wilderness.

Storms . . . she'd be lucky not to die of exposure out here. Or starvation. What would she do when a highstorm came? When was the next one? Tomorrow night? Or was it the night after.

"Come!" Pattern said.

He vibrated in the sand. Grains jumped and shook as he spoke, rising and falling around him. I recognize that . . . Shallan thought, frowning at him. Sand on a plate. Kabsal . . .

"Come!" Pattern repeated, more urgent.

"What?" Shallan said, standing up. Storms, but she was tired. She could barely move. "Did you find someone?"

"Yes!"

That got her attention immediately. She didn't ask further questions, but instead followed Pattern, who moved excitedly down the coast. Would he know the difference between someone dangerous and someone friendly? For the moment, cold and exhausted, she almost didn't care.

He stopped beside something halfway submerged in the water and seaweed at the edge of the ocean. Shallan frowned.

A trunk. Not a person, but a large wooden trunk. Shallan's breath caught in her throat, and she dropped to her knees, working the clasps and pulling open the lid.

Inside, like a glowing treasure, were Jasnah's books and notes, carefully packed away, protected in their waterproof enclosure.

Jasnah might not have survived, but her life's work had.

* * *

Shallan knelt down by her improvised firepit. A grouping of rocks, filled with sticks she'd gathered from this little stand of trees. Night was almost upon her.

With it came the shocking cold, as bad as the worst winter back home. Here in the Frostlands, this would be common. Her clothing, which in this humidity hadn't completely dried despite the hours walking, felt like ice.

She did not know how to build a fire, but perhaps she could make one in another way. She fought through her weariness—storms, but she was exhausted—and took out a glowing sphere, one of many she'd found in Jasnah's trunk.

"All right," she whispered. "Let's do this." Shadesmar.

"Mmm . . ." Pattern said. She was learning to interpret his humming. This seemed anxious. "Dangerous."

"Why?"

"What is land here is sea there."

Shallan frustration done. made nodded dully. Wait. Think.

That was growing hard, but she forced herself to go over Pattern's words again. When they'd sailed the ocean, and she'd visited Shadesmar, she'd found obsidian ground beneath her. But in Kharbranth, she'd dropped into that ocean of spheres.

"So what do we do?" Shallan asked.

"Go slowly."

Shallan took a deep, cold breath, then nodded. She tried as she had before. Slowly, carefully. It was like . . . like opening her eyes in the morning.

Awareness of another place consumed her. The nearby trees popped like bubbles, beads forming in their place and dropping toward a shifting sea of them below. Shallan felt herself falling.

She gasped, then blinked back that awareness, closing her metaphoric eyes. That place vanished, and in a moment, she was back in the stand of trees.

Pattern hummed nervously.

Shallan set her jaw and tried again. More slowly this time, slipping into that place with its strange sky and not-sun. For a moment, she hovered between the worlds, Shadesmar overlaying the world around her like a shadowy afterimage. Holding between the two was difficult.

Use the Light, Pattern said. Bring them.

Shallan hesitantly drew the Light into herself. The spheres in the ocean below moved like a school of fish, surging toward her, clinking together. In her exhaustion, Shallan could barely maintain her double state, and she grew woozy, looking down.

She held on, somehow.

Pattern stood beside her, in his form with the stiff clothing and a head made of impossible lines, arms clasped behind his back, and hovering as if in the air. He was tall and imposing on this side, and she absently noticed that he cast a shadow the wrong way, toward the distant, cold-seeming sun instead of away from it.

“Good,” he said, his voice a deeper hum here. “Good.” He cocked his head, and though he had no eyes, turned around as if regarding the place. “I am from here, yet I remember so little . . .”

Shallan had a sense that her time was limited. Kneeling, she reached down and felt at the sticks she’d piled to form the place for her fire. She could feel the sticks—but as she looked into this strange realm, her fingers also found one of the glass beads that had surged up beneath her.

As she touched it, she noticed something sweeping through the air above her. She cringed, looking up to find large, birdlike creatures circling around her in Shadesmar. They were a dark grey and seemed to have no specific shape, their forms blurry.

“What . . .”

“Spren,” Pattern said. “Drawn by you. Your . . . tiredness?”

“Exhaustionspren?” she asked, shocked by their size here.

“Yes.”

She shivered, then looked down at the sphere beneath her hand. She was dangerously close to falling into Shadesmar completely, and could barely see the impressions of the physical realm around her. Only those beads. She felt as if she would tumble into their sea at any moment.

“Please,” Shallan said to the sphere. “I need you to become fire.” frustration done. made

Pattern buzzed, speaking with a new voice, interpreting the sphere’s words. “I am a stick,” he said. He sounded satisfied.

“You could be fire,” Shallan class="TX" aid="I3QP4">“I am a stick.”

The stick was not particularly eloquent. She supposed that she shouldn’t be surprised.

“Why don’t you become fire instead?”

“I am a stick.”

“How do I make it change?” Shallan asked of Pattern.

“Mm . . . I do not know. You must persuade it. Offer it truths, I think?” He sounded agitated. “This place is dangerous for you. For us. Please. Speed.”

She looked back at the stick.

“You want to burn.”

“I am a stick.”

“Think how much fun it would be?”

“I am a stick.”

“Stormlight,” Shallan said. “You could have it! All that I’m holding.”

A pause. Finally, “I am a stick.”

“Sticks need Stormlight. For . . . things . . .” Shallan blinked away tears of fatigue.

“I am—”

“—a stick,” Shallan said. She gripped the sphere, feeling both it and the stick in the physical realm, trying to think through another argument. For a moment, she hadn’t felt quite so tired, but it was returning—crashing back upon her. Why . . .

Her Stormlight was running out.

It was gone in a moment, drained from her, and she exhaled, slipping into Shadesmar with a sigh, feeling overwhelmed and exhausted.

She fell into the sea of spheres. That awful blackness, millions of moving bits, consuming her.

She threw herself from Shadesmar.

The spheres expanded outward, growing into sticks and rocks and trees, restoring the world as she knew it. She collapsed into her small stand of trees, heart pounding.

All grew normal around her. No more distant sun, no more sea of spheres. Just frigid cold, a night sky, and biting wind that blew between the trees. The single sphere she’d drained slipped from her fingers, clicking against the stone ground. She leaned back against Jasnah’s trunk. Her arms still ached from dragging that up the beach to the trees.

She huddled there, frightened. “Do you know how to make fire?” she asked

Pattern. Her teeth chattered. Stormfather. She didn't feel cold anymore, but her teeth were chattering, and her breath was visible as vapor in the starlight.

She found herself growing drowsy. Maybe she should just sleep, then try to deal with it all in the morning.

“Change?” Pattern asked. “Offer the change.”

“I tried.”

“I know.” His vibrations sounded depressed.

Shallan stared at that pile of sticks, feeling utterly useless. What was it Jasnah had said? Control is the basis of all true power? Authority and strength are matters of perception? Well, this was a direct refutation of that. Shallan could imagine herself as grand, could act like a queen, but that didn't change a thing said, folding his arms tired of re out here in the wilderness.

Well, Shallan thought, I'm not going to sit here and freeze to death. I'll at least freeze to death trying to find help.

She didn't move, though. Moving was hard. At least here, huddled by the trunk, she didn't have to feel the wind so much. Just lying here until morning . . .

She curled into a ball.

No. This didn't seem right. She coughed, then somehow got to her feet. She stumbled away from her not-fire, dug a sphere from her safepouch, then started walking.

Pattern moved at her feet. Those were bloodier now. She left a red trail on the rock. She couldn't feel the cuts.

She walked and walked.

And walked.

And . . .

Light.

She didn't move any more quickly. She couldn't. But she did keep going, shambling directly toward that pinprick in the darkness. A numb part of her worried that the light was really Nomon, the second moon. That she'd march toward it and fall off the edge of Roshar itself.

So she surprised herself by stumbling right into the middle of a small group of people sitting around a campfire. She blinked, looking from one face to another; then—ignoring the sounds they made, for words were meaningless to her in this state—she walked to the campfire and lay down, curled up, and fell asleep.

* * *

“Brightness?”

Shallan grumbled, rolling over. Her face hurt. No, her feet hurt. Her face was nothing compared to that pain.

If she slept a little longer, maybe it would fade. At least for that time. . . .

“B-Brightness?” the voice asked again. “Are you feeling well, yes?”

That was a Thaylen accent. Dredged from deep within her, a light surfaced, bringing memories. The ship. Thaylens. The sailors?

Shallan forced her eyes open. The air smelled faintly of smoke from the still-smoldering fire. The sky was a deep violet, brightening as the sun broke the horizon. She'd slept on hard rock, and her body ached.

She didn't recognize the speaker, a portly Thaylen man with a white beard wearing a knit cap and an old suit and vest, patched in a few inconspicuous places. He wore his white Thaylen eyebrows tucked up over his ears. Not a sailor. A merchant.

Shallan stifled a groan, sitting up. Then, in a moment of panic, she checked her safehand. One of her fingers had slipped out of the sleeve, and she pulled it back in. The Thaylen's eyes flicked toward it, but he said nothing.

“You are well, then?” the man asked. He spoke in Alethi. “We were going to pack to go, you see. Your arrival last night was . . . unexpected. We did not wish to disturb you, but thought perhaps you would want to wake before we depart.”

Shallan ran her freehand through her hair, a mess of red locks stuck with twigs. Two other men—tall, hulking, and of Vorin descent—packed up blankets and bedrolls. She’d have killed for one of those during the night. She remembered tossing uncomfortably.

Stilling the needs of nature, she turned and was surprised to see three large chull wagons with cages on the back. Inside were a handful s bothering you?” Syl asked they see howreof dirty, shirtless men. It took just a moment for it all to click.

Slavers.

She shoved down an initial burst of panic. Slaving was a perfectly legal profession. Most of the time. Only this was the Frostlands, far from the rule of any group or nation. Who was to say what was legal here and what was not?

Be calm, she told herself forcefully. They wouldn’t have awakened you politely if they were planning something like that.

Selling a Vorin woman of high dahn—which the dress marked her as being—would be a risky gambit for a slaver. Most owners in civilized lands would require documentation of the slave’s past, and it was rare indeed that a lighteyes was made a slave, aside from ardents. Usually someone of higher breeding would simply be executed instead. Slavery was a mercy for the lower classes.

“Brightness?” the slaver asked nervously.

She was thinking like a scholar again, to distract herself. She’d need to get past that.

“What is your name?” Shallan asked. She hadn’t intended to make her voice quite so emotionless, but the shock of what she’d seen left her in turmoil.

The man stepped back at her tone. “I am Tvlakv, humble merchant.”

“Slaver,” Shallan said, standing up and pushing her hair back from her face.

“As I said. A merchant.”

His two guards watched her as they loaded equipment onto the lead wagon. She did not miss the cudgels they carried prominently at their waists. She’d had a sphere in her hand as she walked last night, hadn’t she?

Memories of that made her feet flare up again. She had to grit her teeth against the agony as painspren, like orange hands made of sinew, clawed out of the ground nearby. She’d need to clean her wounds, but bloodied and bruised as they were, she wasn’t going to be walking anywhere anytime soon. Those wagons had seats. . . .

They likely stole the sphere from me, she thought. She felt around in her safepouch. The other spheres were still there, but the the sleeve was unbuttoned. Had she done that? Had they peeked? She couldn’t suppress a blush at the thought.

The two guards regarded her hungrily. Tvlakv acted humble, but his leering eyes were also very eager. These men were one step from robbing her.

But if she left them, she’d probably die out here, alone. Stormfather! What could she do? She felt like sitting down and sobbing. After everything that had happened, now this?

Control is the basis of all power.

How would Jasnah respond to this situation?

The answer was simple. She would be Jasnah.

“I will allow you to assist me,” Shallan said. She somehow kept her voice even, despite the anxious terror she felt inside.

“ . . . Brightne said.



Unfortunately, we fixated upon Sadeas’s plotting so much that we did not take note of the changed pattern of our enemies, the murderers of my husband, the true danger. I would like to know what wind brought about their sudden, inexplicable transformation.

—From the journal of Navani Kholin, Jesesach 1174

Kaladin pressed the stone against the wall of the chasm, and it stuck there. “All right,” he said, stepping back.

Rock jumped up and grabbed it, then dangled from the wall, bending legs below. His deep, bellowing laugh echoed in the chasm. “This time, he holds me!”

Sigzil made a notation on his ledger. “Good. Keep hanging on, Rock.”

“For how long?” Rock asked.

“Until you fall.”

“Until I . . .” The large Horneater frowned, hanging from the stone with both

hands. “I do not like this experiment any longer.”

“Oh, don’t whine,” Kaladin said, folding his arms and leaning on the wall beside Rock. Spheres lit the chasm floor around them, with its vines, debris, and blooming plants. “You’re not dropping far.”

“It is not the drop,” Rock complained. “It is my arms. I am big man, you see.”

“So it’s a good thing you have big arms to hold you.”

“It does not work that way, I think,” Rock said, grunting. “And the handhold is not good. And I—”

The stone popped free and Rock fell downward. Kaladin grabbed his arm, steadying him as he caught himself.

“Twenty seconds,” Sigzil said. “Not very long.”

“I warned you,” Kaladin said, picking up the fallen stone. “It lasts longer if I use more Stormlight.”

“I think we need a baseline,” Sigzil said. He fished in his pocket and pulled out a glowing diamond chip, the smallest denomination of sphere. “Take all of the Stormlight from this, put it into the stone, then we’ll hang Rock from that and see how long he takes to fall.”

Rock groaned. “My poor arms . . .”

“Hey, mancha,” Lopen called from farther down the chasm, “at least you’ve got two of them, eh?” The Herdazian was watching to make sure none of the new recruits somehow wandered over and saw what Kaladin was doing. It shouldn’t happen—they were practicing several chasms over—but Kaladin wanted someone on guard.

Eventually they’ll all know anyway, Kaladin thought, taking the chip from Sigzil. Isn’t that what you just promised Syl? That you’d let yourself become a Radiant?

Kaladin drew in the chip's Stormlight with a sharp intake of breath said, folding his arms into Stormblessed." approximation, then infused the Light into the stone. He was getting better at that, drawing the Stormlight into his hand, then using it like luminescent paint to coat the bottom of the rock. The Stormlight soaked into the stone, and when he pressed it against the wall, it stayed there.

Smoky tendrils of luminescence rose from the stone. "We probably don't need to make Rock hang from it," Kaladin said. "If you need a baseline, why not just use how long the stone remains there on its own?"

"Well, that's less fun," Sigzil said. "But very well." He continued to write numbers on his ledger. That would have made most of the other bridgemen uncomfortable. A man writing was seen as unmasculine, even blasphemous—though Sigzil was only writing glyphs.

Today, fortunately, Kaladin had with him Sigzil, Rock, and Lopen—all foreigners from places with different rules. Herdaz was Vorin, technically, but they had their own brand of it and Lopen didn't seem to mind a man writing.

"So," Rock said as they waited, "Stormblessed leader, you said there was something else you could do, did you not?"

"Fly!" Lopen said from down the passage.

"I can't fly," Kaladin said dryly.

"Walk on walls!"

"I tried that," Kaladin said. "I nearly broke my head from the fall."

"Ah, gancho," Lopen said. "No flying or walking on walls? I need to impress the women. I do not think sticking rocks to walls will be enough."

"I think anyone would find that impressive," Sigzil said. "It defies the laws of nature."

"You do not know many Herdazian women, do you?" Lopen asked, sighing.

“Really, I think we should try again on the flying. It would be the best.”

“There is something more,” Kaladin said. “Not flying, but still useful. I’m not certain I can replicate it. I’ve never done it consciously.”

“The shield,” Rock said, standing by the wall, staring up at the rock. “On the battlefield, when the Parshendi shot at us. The arrows hit your shield. All the arrows.”

“Yes,” Kaladin said.

“We should test that,” Sigzil said. “We’ll need a bow.”

“Spren,” Rock said, pointing. “They pull the stone against the wall.”

“What?” Sigzil said, scrambling over, squinting at the rock Kaladin had pressed against the wall. “I don’t see them.”

“Ah,” Rock said. “Then they do not wish to be seen.” He bowed his head toward them. “Apologies, mafah’liki.”

Sigzil frowned, looking closer, holding up a sphere to light the area. Kaladin walked over and joined them. He could make out the tiny purple spren if he looked closely. “They’re there, Sig,” Kaladin said.

“Then why can’t I see them?”

“It has to do with my abilities,” Kaladin said, glancing at Syl, who sat on a cleft in the rock nearby, one leg draping over and swinging.

“ stanza

“I am alaii’iku,” Rock said, raising a hand to his breast.

“Which means?” Sigzil asked impatiently.

“That I can see these spren, and you cannot.” Rock rested a hand on the smaller man’s shoulder. “It is all right, friend. I do not blame you for being blind. Most lowlanders are. It is the air, you see. Makes your brains stop

working right.”

Sigzil frowned, but wrote down some notes while absently doing something with his fingers. Keeping track of the seconds? The rock finally popped off the wall, trailing a few final wisps of Stormlight as it hit the ground. “Well over a minute,” Sigzil said. “I counted eighty-seven seconds.” He looked to the rest of them.

“We were supposed to be counting?” Kaladin asked, glancing at Rock, who shrugged.

Sigzil sighed.

“Ninety-one seconds,” Lopen called. “You’re welcome.”

Sigzil sat down on a rock, ignoring a few finger bones peeking out of the moss beside him, and made some notations on his ledger. He scowled.

“Ha!” Rock said, squatting down beside him. “You look like you have eaten bad eggs. What is problem?”

“I don’t know what I’m doing, Rock,” Sigzil said. “My master taught me to ask questions and find precise answers. But how can I be precise? I would need a clock for the timing, but they are too expensive. Even if we had one, I don’t know how to measure Stormlight!”

“With chips,” Kaladin said. “The gemstones are precisely weighed before being encased in glass.”

“And can they all hold the same amount?” Sigzil asked. “We know that uncut gems hold less than cut ones. So is one that was cut better going to hold more? Plus, Stormlight fades from a sphere over time. How many days has it been since that chip was infused, and how much Light has it lost since then? Do they all lose the same amount at the same rate? We know too little. I think perhaps I am wasting your time, sir.”

“It’s not a waste,” Lopen said, joining them. The one-armed Herdazian yawned, sitting down on the rock by Sigzil, forcing the other man over a

little. “We just need to be testing other things, eh?”

“Like what?” Kaladin said.

“Well, gancho,” Lopen said. “Can you stick me to the wall?”

“I . . . I don’t know,” Kaladin said.

“Seems like it would be good to know, eh?” Lopen stood up. “Shall we try?”

Kaladin glanced at Sigzil, who shrugged.

Kaladin drew in more Stormlight. The raging tempest filled him, as if it were battering against his skin, a captive trying to find a way out. He drew the Stormlight into his hand and pressed it against the wall, painting the stones with luminescence.

Taking a deep breath, he picked up Lopen—the slender man was startlingly easy to lift, particularly with a measure of Stormlight still inside Kaladin’s veins. He pressed Lopen against the wall.

When Kaladin dubiously stepped back, the Herdazian remained there, stuck to the stone by his uniform, which bunched up under his armpits.

Lopen grinned. “It worked!” traditionalfAbrobadarly

“This thing could be useful,” Rock said, rubbing at his strangely cut Horneater beard. “Yes, this is what we need to test. You are a soldier, Kaladin. Can you use this in combat?”

Kaladin nodded slowly, a dozen possibilities popping into his head. What if his enemies ran across a pool of Light he had put on the floor? Could he stop a wagon from rolling? Stick his spear to an enemy shield, then yank it from their hands?

“How does it feel, Lopen?” Rock asked. “Does this thing hurt?”

“Nah,” Lopen said, wiggling. “I’m worried my coat will rip, or the buttons will snap. Oh. Oh. Question for you! What did the one-armed Herdazian do

to the man who stuck him to the wall?”

Kaladin frowned. “I . . . I don’t know.”

“Nothing,” Lopen said. “The Herdazian was ’armless.” The slender man burst into laughter.

Sigzil groaned, though Rock laughed. Syl had cocked her head, zipping over to Kaladin. “Was that a joke?” she asked softly.

“Yes,” Kaladin said. “A distinctly bad one.”

“Ah, don’t say that!” Lopen said, still chuckling. “It’s the best one I know—and trust me, I’m an expert on one-armed Herdazian jokes. ‘Lopen,’ my mother always says, ‘you must learn these to laugh before others do. Then you steal the laughter from them, and have it all for yourself.’ She is a very wise woman. I once brought her the head of a chull.”

Kaladin blinked. “You . . . What?”

“Chull head,” Lopen said. “Very good to eat.”

“You are a strange man, Lopen,” Kaladin said.

“No,” Rock said. “They really are good. The head, he is best part of chull.”

“I will trust you two on that,” Kaladin said. “Marginally.” He reached up, taking Lopen by the arm as the Stormlight holding him in place began to fade. Rock grabbed the man’s waist, and they helped him down.

“All right,” Kaladin said, instinctively checking the sky for the time, though he couldn’t see the sun through the narrow chasm opening above. “Let’s experiment.”

* * *

Tempest stoked within him, Kaladin dashed across the chasm floor. His movement startled a group of frillblooms, which pulled in frantically, like hands closing. Vines trembled on the walls and began to curl upward.

Kaladin's feet splashed in stagnant water. He leaped over a mound of debris, trailing Stormlight. He was filled with it, pounding with it. That made it easier to use; it wanted to flow. He pushed it into his spear.

Ahead, Lopen, Rock, and Sigzil waited with practice spears. Though Lopen wasn't very good—the missing arm was a huge disadvantage—Rock made up for it. The large Horneater would not fight Parshendi and would not kill, but had agreed to spar today, in the name of “experimentation.”

He fought very well, and Sigzil was acceptable with the spear. Together on the battlefield, the three bridgemen might once have given ; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em; } p.m the minionreKaladin trouble.

Times changed.

Kaladin tossed his spear sideways at Rock, surprising the Horneater, who had raised his weapon to block. The Stormlight made Kaladin's spear stick to Rock's, forming a cross. Rock cursed, trying to turn his spear around to strike, but in doing so smacked himself on the side with Kaladin's spear.

As Lopen's spear struck, Kaladin pushed it down easily with one hand, filling the tip with Stormlight. The weapon hit the pile of refuse and stuck to the wood and bones.

Sigzil's weapon came in, missing Kaladin's chest by a wide margin as he stepped aside. Kaladin nudged and infused the weapon with the flat of his hand, shoving it into Lopen's, which he'd just pulled out of the refuse, plastered with moss and bone. The two spears stuck together.

Kaladin slipped between Rock and Sigzil, leaving the three of them in a jumbled mess, off balance and trying to disentangle their weapons. Kaladin smiled grimly, jogging down to the other end of the chasm. He picked up a spear, then turned, dancing from one foot to the other. The Stormlight encouraged him to move. Standing still was practically impossible while holding so much.

Come on, come on, he thought. The three others finally got their weapons tormlight ran out. They formed up to face him again.

Kaladin dashed forward. In the dim light of the chasm, the glow of the smoke rising from him was strong enough to cast shadows that leaped and spun. He crashed through pools, the water cold on his unshod feet. He'd removed his boots; he wanted to feel the stone underneath him.

This time, the three bridgemen set the butts of their spears on the ground as if against a charge. Kaladin smiled, then grabbed the top of his spear—like theirs, it was a practice one, without a real spearhead—and infused it with Stormlight.

He slapped it against Rock's, intending to yank it out of the Horneater's hands. Rock had other plans, and hauled his spear back with a strength that took Kaladin by surprise. He nearly lost his grip.

Lopen and Sigzil quickly moved to come at him from either side. Nice, Kaladin thought, proud. He'd taught them formations like that, showing them how to work together on the battlefield.

As they drew close, Kaladin let go of his spear and stuck out his leg. The Stormlight flowed out of his bare foot as easily as it did his hands, and he was able to swipe a large glowing arc on the ground. Sigzil stepped in it and tripped, his foot sticking to the Light. He tried to stab as he fell, but there was no force behind the blow.

Kaladin slammed his weight against Lopen, whose strike was off-center. He shoved Lopen against the wall, then pulled back, leaving the Herdazian stuck to the stone, which Kaladin had infused in the heartbeat they'd been pressed together.

"Ah, not again," Lopen said with a groan.

Sigzil had fallen face-first in the water. Kaladin barely had time to smile before he noticed Rock swinging a log at his head.

An entire log. How had Rock lifted that thing? Kaladin threw himself out of the way, rolling on the ground and scraping his hand as the log crashed against the floor of the chasm.

Kaladin growled, Stormlight passing between his teeth and rising into the air in front of him. He jumped onto Rock's log as the Horneater tried to lift it again. frustrationd done

Kaladin's landing slammed the wood back against the ground. He leaped toward Rock, and part of him wondered just what he was thinking, getting into a hand-to-hand fight with someone twice his weight. He slammed into the Horneater, hurling them both to the ground. They rolled in the moss, Rock twisting to pin Kaladin's arms. The Horneater obviously had training as a wrestler.

Kaladin poured Stormlight into the ground. It wouldn't affect or hamper him, he'd found. So, as they rolled, first Rock's arm stuck to the ground, then his side.

The Horneater kept fighting to get Kaladin into a hold. He almost had it, till Kaladin pushed with his legs, rolling both of them so Rock's other elbow touched the ground, where it stuck.

Kaladin tore away, gasping and puffing, losing most of his remaining Stormlight as he coughed. He leaned up against the wall, mopping sweat from his face.

"Ha!" Rock said, stuck to the ground, splayed with arms to the sides. "I almost had you. Slippery as a fifth son, you are!"

"Storms, Rock," Kaladin said. "What I wouldn't do to get you on the battlefield. You are wasted as a cook."

"You don't like the food?" Rock asked, laughing. "I will have to try something with more grease. This thing will fit you! Grabbing you was like trying to keep my hands on a live lakefish! One that has been covered in butter! Ha!"

Kaladin stepped up to him, squatting down. "You're a warrior, Rock. I saw it in Teft, and you can say whatever you want, but I see it in you."

"I am wrong son to be soldier," Rock said stubbornly. "It is a thing of the

tuanalikina, the fourth son or below. Third son cannot be wasted in battle.”

“Didn’t stop you from throwing a tree at my head.”

“Was small tree,” Rock said. “And very hard head.”

Kaladin smiled, then reached down, touching the Stormlight infused into the stone beneath Rock. He hadn’t ever tried to take it back after using it in this way. Could he? He closed his eyes and breathed in, trying . . . yes.

Some of the tempest within him stoked again. When he opened his eyes, Rock was free. Kaladin hadn’t been able to take it all back, but some. The rest was evaporating into the air.

He took Rock by the hand, helping the larger man to his feet. Rock dusted himself off.

“That was embarrassing,” Sigzil said as Kaladin walked over to free him too. “It’s like we’re children. The Prime’s own eyes have not seen such a shameful show.”

“I have a very unfair advantage,” Kaladin said, helping Sigzil to his feet. “Years of training as a soldier, a larger build than you. Oh, and the ability to emit Stormlight from my fingers.” He patted Sigzil on the shoulder. “You did well. This is just a test, like you wanted.”

A more useful type of test, Kaladin thought.

“Sure,” Lopen said from behind them. “Just go ahead and leave the Herdazian stuck to the wall. The view here is wonderful. Oh, and is that slime running down my cheek? A fresh new look for the Lopen, who cannot brush it away, because—have I mentioned?—his hand is stuck to the wall.”

Kaladin smiled, walking over. “You were the one who asked me to stick you to a wall in the first place, Lopen.”

“My other hand?” Lopen said. “The one that was cut off long ago, eaten by a fearsome beast? It is making a rude gesture toward you right now. I thought you would wish to know, so that you can prepare to be insulted.” He said it

with the same lightheartedness with which he seemed to approach everything. He had even joined the bridge crew with a certain crazy eagerness.

Kaladin let him down.

“This thing,” Rock said, “it worked well.”

“Yes,” Kaladin said. Though honestly, he probably could have dispatched the three men more easily just by using a spear and the extra speed and strength the Stormlight lent. He didn’t know yet whether that was because he was unfamiliar with these new powers, but he did think that forcing himself to use them had put him in some awkward positions.

Familiarity, he thought. I need to know these abilities as well as I know my spear.

That meant practice. Lots of practice. Unfortunately, the best way to practice was to find someone who matched or bested you in skill, strength, and capacity. Considering what he could now do, that was going to be a tall order.

The three others walked over to dig waterskins from their packs, and Kaladin noticed a figure standing in the shadows a little ways down the chasm. Kaladin stood up, alarmed until Teft emerged into the light of their spheres.

“I thought you were going to be on watch,” Teft growled at Lopen.

“Too busy being stuck to walls,” Lopen said, raising his waterskin. “I thought you had a bunch of greenvines to train?”

“Drehy has them in hand,” Teft said, picking his way around some debris, joining Kaladin beside the chasm wall. “I don’t know if the lads told you, Kaladin, but bringing that lot down here broke them out of their shells somehow.”

Kaladin nodded.

“How did you get to know people so well?” Teft asked.

“It involves a lot of cutting them apart,” Kaladin said, looking down at his

hand, which he'd scraped while fighting Rock. The scrape was gone, Stormlight having healed the tears in his skin.

Teft grunted, glancing back at Rock and the other two, who had broken out rations. "You ought to put Rock in charge of the new recruits."

"He won't fight."

"He just sparred with you," Teft said. "So maybe he will with them. People like him more than me. I'm just going to screw this up."

"You'll do a fine job, Teft, I won't have you saying otherwise. We have resources now. No more scrimping for every last sphere. You'll train those lads, and you'll do it right."

Teft sighed, but said no more.

"You saw what I did."

"Aye," Teft said. "We'll need to bring down the entire group of twenty if we want to give you a proper challenge."

"That or find another person like myself," Kaladin said. "Someone to spar with."

"Aye, frustration done"

"There were ten orders of knights, right?" Kaladin asked. "Do you know much of the others?" Teft had been the first one to figure out what Kaladin could do. He'd known before Kaladin himself had.

"Not much," Teft said with a grimace. "I know the orders didn't always get along, despite what the official stories say. We'll need to see if we can find someone who knows more than I do. I . . . I kept away. And the people I knew who could tell us, they aren't around any longer."

If Teft had been in a dour mood before, this drove him down even further. He looked at the ground. He spoke of his past infrequently, but Kaladin was more and more certain that whoever these people had been, they were dead

because of something Teft himself had done.

“What would you think if you heard that somebody wanted to refound the Knights Radiant?” Kaladin said softly to Teft.

Teft looked up sharply. “You—”

“Not me,” Kaladin said, speaking carefully. Dalinar Kholin had let him listen in on the conference, and while Kaladin trusted Teft, there were certain expectations of silence that an officer was required to uphold.

Dalinar is a lighteyes, part of him whispered. He wouldn’t think twice if he were revealing a secret you’d shared with him.

“Not me,” Kaladin repeated. “What if a king somewhere decided he wanted to gather a group of people and name them Knights Radiant?”

“I’d call him an idiot,” Teft said. “Now, the Radiants weren’t what people say. They weren’t traitors. They just weren’t. But everyone is sure they betrayed us, and you’re not going to change minds quickly. Not unless you can Surgebind to quiet them.” Teft looked Kaladin up and down. “Are you going to do it, lad?”

“They’d hate me, wouldn’t they?” Kaladin said. He couldn’t help noticing Syl, who walked through the air until she was close, studying him. “For what the old Radiants did.” He held up a hand to stop Teft’s objection. “What people think they did.”

“Aye,” Teft said.

Syl folded her arms, giving Kaladin a look. You promised, that look said.

“We’ll have to be careful about how we do it, then,” Kaladin said. “Go gather the new recruits. They’ve had enough practice down here for one day.”

Teft nodded, then jogged off to do as ordered. Kaladin gathered his spear and the spheres he’d set out to light the sparring, then waved to the other three. They packed up their things and began the hike back out.

“So you’re going to do it,” Syl said, landing on his shoulder.

“I want to practice apart as the S

more first,” Kaladin said. And get used to the idea.

“It will be fine, Kaladin.”

“No. It will be hard. People will hate me, and even if they don’t, I’ll be set apart from them. Separated. I’ve accepted that as my lot, though. I’ll deal with it.” Even in Bridge Fond done

INTERLUDES



ESHONAI • YM • RYSN



The Rhythm of Resolve thrummed softly in the back of Eshonai's mind as she reached the plateau at the center of the Shattered Plains.

The central plateau. Narak. Exile.

Home.

She ripped the helm of the Shardplate from her head, taking a deep breath of cool air. Plate ventilated wonderfully, but even it grew stuffy after extended exertions. Other soldiers landed behind her—she had taken some fifteen hundred this run. Fortunately, this time they'd arrived well before the humans, and had harvested the gemheart with minimal fighting. Devi carried it; he had earned the privilege by being the one to spot the chrysalis from afar.

Almost she wished it had not been so easy a run. Almost.

Where are you, Blackthorn? she thought, looking westward. Why have you not come to face me again?

She thought she'd seen him on that run a week or so back, when they'd been forced off the plateau by his son. Eshonai had not participated in that fight;

her wounded leg ached, and the jumping from plateau to plateau had stressed it, even in Shardplate. Perhaps she should not be going on these runs in the first place.

She'd wanted to be there in case her strike force grew surrounded, and needed a Shardbearer—even a wounded one—to break them free. Her leg still hurt, but Plate cushioned it enough. Soon she would have to return to the fighting. Perhaps if she participated directly, the Blackthorn would appear again.

She needed to speak with him. She felt an urgency to do so blowing upon the winds themselves.

Her soldiers raised hands in farewell as they went their separate ways. Many softly sang or hummed a song to the Rhythm of Mourning. These days, few sang to Excitement, or even to Resolve. Step by step, storm by storm, depression claimed her people—the listeners, as they called their race. “Parshendi” was a human term.

Eshonai strode toward the ruins that dominated Narak. After so many years, there wasn't much left. Ruins of ruins, one might call them. The works of men and listeners alike did not last long before the might of the highstorms.

That stone spire ahead, that had probably once been a tower. O frustration done

The spire must have had a strong core to survive the winds so long. Other examples of ancient engineering had not fared so well. Eshonai passed lumps and mounds, remnants of fallen buildings that had slowly been consumed by the Shattered Plains. The storms were unpredictable. Sometimes huge sections of rock would break free from formations, leaving gouges and jagged edges. Other times, spires would stand for centuries, growing—not shrinking—as the winds both weathered and augmented them.

Eshonai had discovered similar ruins in her explorations, such as the one she'd been on when her people had first encountered humans. Only seven years ago, but also an eternity. She had loved those days, exploring a wide world that felt infinite. And now . . .

Now she spent her life trapped on this one plateau. The wilderness called to her, sang that she should gather up what things she could carry and strike out. Unfortunately, that was no longer her destiny.

She passed into the shadow of a big lump of rock that she always imagined might have been a city gate. From what little they'd learned from their spies over the years, she knew that the Alethi did not understand. They marched over the uneven surface of the plateaus and saw only natural rock, never knowing that they traversed the bones of a city long dead.

Eshonai shivered, and attuned the Rhythm of the Lost. It was a soft beat, yet still violent, with sharp, separated notes. She did not attune it for long. Remembering the fallen was important, but working to protect the living was more so.

She attuned Resolve again and entered Narak. Here, the listeners had built the best home they could during the years of war. Rocky shelves had become barracks, carapace from greatshells forming the walls and roofs. Mounds that had once been buildings now grew rockbuds for food on their leeward sides. Much of the Shattered Plains had once been populated, but the largest city had been here at the center. So now the ruins of her people made their home in the ruins of a dead city.

They had named it Narak—exile—for it was where they had come to be separated from their gods.

Listeners, both malen and femalen, raised hands to her as she passed. So few remained. The humans were relentless in their pursuit of vengeance.

She didn't blame them.

She turned toward the Hall of Art. It was nearby, and she hadn't put in an appearance there for days. Inside, soldiers did a laughable job of painting.

Eshonai strode among them, still wearing her Shardplate, helm under her arm. The long building had no roof—allowing in plenty of light to paint by—and the walls were thick with long-hardened crem. Holding thick-bristled brushes, the soldiers tried their best to depict the arrangement of rockbud

flowers on a pedestal at the center. Eshonai did a round of the artists, looking at their work. Paper was precious and canvas nonexistent, so they painted on shell.

The paintings were awful. Splotches of garish color, off-center petals . . . Eshonai paused beside Varanis, one of her lieutenants. He held the brush delicately between armored fingers, a hulking form before an easel. Plates of chitin armor grew from his arms, shoulders, chest, even head. They were matched by her own, under her Plate.

“You are getting better,” { font-weight : normal; font-style : italic; font-size : 0.d done

He looked to her, and hummed softly to Skepticism.

Eshonai chuckled, resting a hand on his shoulder. “It actually looks like flowers, Varanis. I mean it.”

“It looks like muddy water on a brown plateau,” he said. “Maybe with some brown leaves floating in it. Why do colors turn brown when they mix? Three beautiful colors put together, and they become the least beautiful color. It makes no sense, General.”

General. At times, she felt as awkward in the position as these men did trying to paint pictures. She wore warform, as she needed the armor for battle, but she preferred workform. More limber, more rugged. It wasn’t that she disliked leading these men, but doing the same thing every day—drills, plateau runs—numbed her mind. She wanted to be seeing new things, going new places. Instead, she joined her people in a long funeral vigil as, one by one, they died.

No. We will find a way out of it.

The art was part of that, she hoped. By her order, each man or woman took a turn in the Hall of Art at their appointed time. And they tried; they tried hard. So far, it had been about as successful as trying to leap a chasm with the other side out of sight. “No spren?” she asked.

“Not a one.” He said it to the Rhythm of Mourning. She heard that rhythm far too often these days.

“Keep trying,” she said. “We will not lose this battle for lack of effort.”

“But General,” Varanis said, “what is the point? Having artists won’t save us from the swords of humans.”

Nearby, other soldiers turned to hear her answer.

“Artists won’t help,” she said to the Rhythm of Peace. “But my sister is confident that she is close to discovering new forms. If we can discover how sts, then it might teach her more about the process of change—and that might help her with her research. Help her discover forms stronger, even, than warform. Artists won’t get us out of this, but some other form might.”

Varanis nodded. He was a good soldier. Not all of them were—warform did not intrinsically make one more disciplined. Unfortunately, it did hamper one’s artistic skill.

Eshonai had tried painting. She couldn’t think the right way, couldn’t grasp the abstraction needed to create art. Warform was a good form, versatile. It didn’t impede thought, like mateform did. As with workform, you were yourself when you were warform. But each had its quirks. A worker had difficulty committing violence—there was a block in the mind somewhere. That was one of the reasons she liked the form. It forced her to think differently to get around problems.

Neither form could create art. Not well, at least. Mateform was better, but came with a whole host of other problems. Keeping those types focused on anything productive was almost impossible. There were two other forms, though the first—dullform—was one they rarely used. It was a relic of the past, before they’d rediscovered something better.

That left only nimbleform, a general form that was lithe and careful. They used it for nurturing young and doing the kind of work that required more dexterity than brawn. Few could be spared for that form, though it was more skilled at art.se Investiture to—”

The old songs spoke of hundreds of forms. Now they knew of only five. Well, six if one counted slaveform, the form with no spren, no soul, and no song. The form the humans were accustomed to, the ones they called parshmen. It wasn't really a form at all, however, but a lack of any form.

Eshonai left the Hall of Art, helm under her arm, leg aching. She passed through the watering square, where nimbles had crafted a large pool from sculpted crem. It caught rain during the riddens of a storm, thick with nourishment. Here, workers carried buckets to fetch water. Their forms were strong, almost like that of warform, though with thinner fingers and no armor. Many nodded to her, though as a general she had no authority over them. She was their last Shardbearer.

A group of three mateforms—two female, one male—played in the water, splashing at one another. Barely clothed, they dripped with what others would be drinking.

“You three,” Eshonai snapped at them. “Shouldn't you be doing something?”

Plump and vapid, they grinned at Eshonai. “Come in!” one called. “It's fun!”

“Out,” Eshonai said, pointing.

The three muttered to the Rhythm of Irritation as they climbed from the water. Nearby, several workers shook their heads as they passed, one singing to Praise in appreciation of Eshonai. Workers did not like confrontation.

It was an excuse. Just as those who took on mateform used their form as an excuse for their inane activities. When a worker, Eshonai had trained herself to confront when necessary. She'd even been a mate once, and had proven to herself firsthand that one could indeed be productive as a mate, despite . . . distractions.

Of course, the rest of her experiences as a mate had been an utter disaster.

She spoke to Reprimand to the mateforms, her words so passionate that she actually attracted angerspren. She saw them coming from a ways off, drawn by her emotion, moving with an incredible speed—like lightning dancing

toward her across the distant stone. The lightning pooled at her feet, turning the stones red.

That put the fear of the gods into the mateforms, and they ran off to report to the Hall of Art. Hopefully, they wouldn't end up in an alcove along the way, mating. Her stomach churned at the thought. She had never been able to fathom people who wanted to remain in mateform. Most couples, in order to have a child, would enter the form and sequester themselves away for a year—then would be out of the form as soon after the child's birth as possible. After all, who would want to go out in public like that?

The humans did it. That had baffled her during those early days, when she'd spent time learning their language, trading with them. Not only did humans not change forms, they were always ready to mate, always distracted by sexual urges.

What she wouldn't have given to be able to go among them unnoticed, to adopt their monochrome skin for a year and walk their highways, see their grand cities. Instead, she and the others had ordered the murder of the Alethi king in a desperate gambit to stop the listener gods from returning.

Well, that had worked—the Alethi king hadn't been able to put his plan into action. But now, her people were slowly being destroyed as a result.

She finally reached the rock formation she called home: a small, collapsed dome. It reminded her . . . Almighty above the minionre of the ones on the edge of the Shattered Plains, actually—the enormous ones that the humans called warcamps. Her people had lived in those, before abandoning them for the security of the Shattered Plains, with its chasms the humans couldn't jump.

Her home was much, much smaller, of course. During the early days of living here, Venli had crafted a roof of greatshell carapace and built walls to divide the space into chambers. She'd covered it all over with crem, which had hardened with time, creating something that actually felt like a home instead of a shanty.

Eshonai set her helm on a table just inside, but left the rest of her armor on.

Shardplate just felt right to her. She liked the sensation of strength. It let her know that something was still reliable in the world. And with the power of Shardplate, she could mostly ignore the wound to her leg.

She ducked through a few rooms, nodding to the people she passed. Venli's associates were scholars, though no one knew the proper form for true scholarship. Nimbleform was their makeshift substitute for now. Eshonai found her sister beside the window of the farthest chamber. Demid, Venli's once-mate, sat next to her. Venli had held nimbleform for three years, as long as they'd known of the form, though in Eshonai's mind's eye she still saw her sister as a worker, with thicker arms and a stouter torso.

That was the past. Now, Venli was a slender woman with a thin face, her marblings delicate swirling patterns of red and white. Nimbleform grew long hairstrands, with no carapace helm to block them. Venli's, a deep red, flowed down to her waist, where they were tied in three places. She wore a robe, drawn tight at the waist and showing a hint of breasts at the chest. This was not mateform, so they were small.

Venli and her once-mate were close, though their time as mates had produced no children. If they'd gone to the battlefield, they'd have been a warpair. Instead, they were a researchpair, or something. The things they spent their days doing were very un-listener. That was the point. Eshonai's people could not afford to be what they had been in the past. The days of lounging isolated on these plateaus—singing songs to one another, only occasionally fighting—were over.

“So?” Venli asked to Curiosity.

“We won,” Eshonai said, leaning back against the wall and folding her arms with a clink of Shardplate. “The gemheart is ours. We will continue to eat.”

“That is well,” Venli said. “And your human?”

“Dalinar Kholin. He did not come to this battle.”

“He will not face you again,” Venli said. “You nearly killed him last time.” She said it to the Rhythm of Amusement as she rose, picking up a piece of

paper—they made it from dried rockbud pulp following a harvest—which she handed to her once-mate. Looking it over, he nodded and began making notes on his own sheet.

That paper required precious time and resources to make, but Venli insisted the reward would be worth the effort. She'd better be right.

Venli regarded Eshonai. She had keen eyes—glassy and dark, like those of all listeners. Venli's always seemed to have an extra depth of secret knowledge to them. In the right light, they had a violet cast.

“What would you do, Sister?” Venli asked. “If you and this Kholin were actually able to stop trying to kill each other long enough to have a conversation?”

“I'd sue for peace. . . . Almighty abovem the minionre”

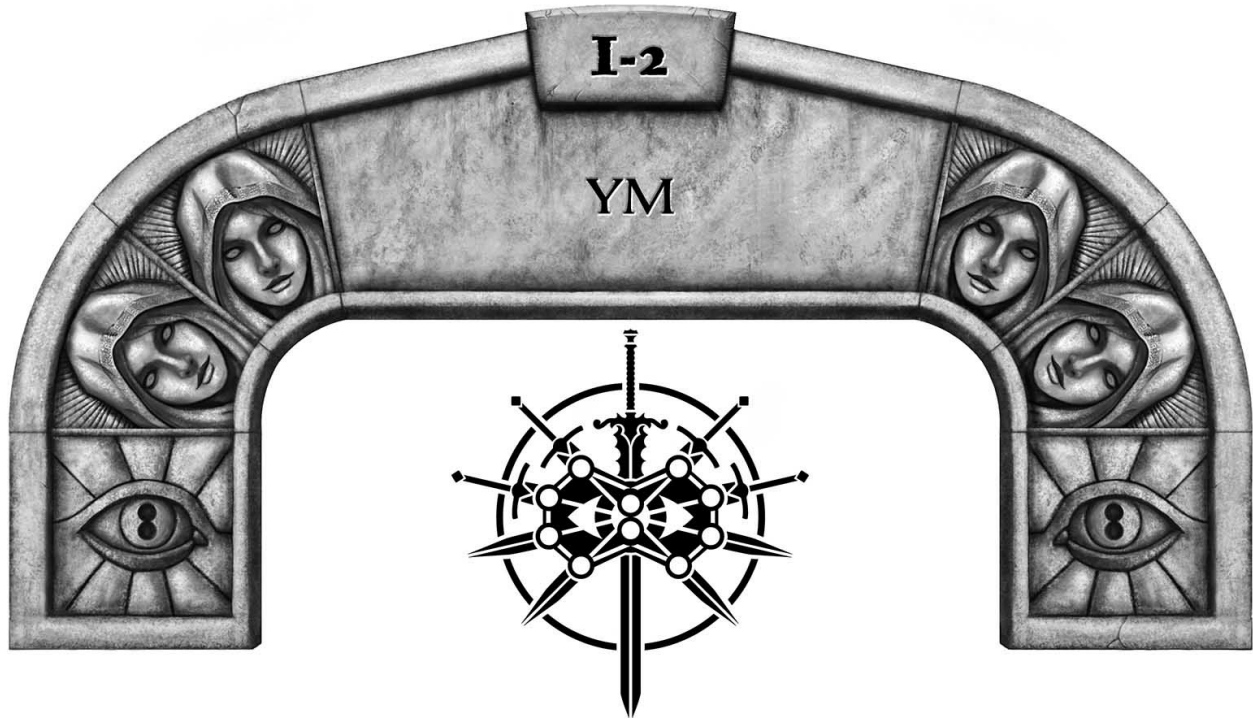
“We murdered his brother,” Venli said. “We slaughtered King Gavilar on a night when he'd invited us into his home. That is not something the Alethi will forget, or forgive.”

Eshonai unfolded her arms and flexed a gauntleted hand. That night. A desperate plan, made between herself and five others. She had been part of it despite her youth, because of her knowledge of the humans. All had voted the same.

Kill the man. Kill him, and risk destruction. For if he had lived to do what he told them that night, all would have been lost. The others who had made that decision with her were dead now.

“I have discovered the secret of stormform,” Venli said.

“What?” Eshonai stood up straight. “You were to be working on a form to help! A form for diplomats, or for scholars.”



Ym carefully trimmed the wood from the side of the small block. He held it up to the spherelight beside his bench, pinching his spectacles by the rim and holding them closer to his eyes.

Such delightful inventions, spectacles. To live was to be a fragment of the cosmere that was experiencing itself. How could he properly experience if he couldn't see? The Azish man who had first created these devices was long deceased, and Ym had submitted a proposal that he be considered one of the Honored Dead.

Ym lowered the piece of wood and continued to carve it, carefully whittling off the front to form a curve. Some of his colleagues bought their lasts—the wooden forms around which a cobbler built his shoes—from carpenters, but Ym had been taught to make his own. That was the old way, the way it had been done for centuries. If something had been done one way for such a long time, he figured there was probably a good reason.

Behind him stood the shadowed cubbies of a cobbler's shop, the toes of dozens of shoes peeking out like the noses of eels in their holes. These were test shoes, used to judge size, choose materials, and decide styles so he could construct { font-weight : normal; font-style : normal; font-size : 1.42em; text-

decoration : none; line-height : 1.2em; text-align : center; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em 0em 1.50em 0em; } p., speak finally
What are you doing the perfect shoe to fit the foot and character of the individual. A fitting could take quite a while, assuming you did it properly.

Something moved in the dimness to his right. Ym glanced in that direction, but didn't change his posture. The spren had been coming more often lately—specks of light, like those from a piece of crystal suspended in a sunbeam. He did not know its type, as he had never seen one like it before.

It moved across the surface of the workbench, slinking closer. When it stopped, light crept upward from it, like small plants growing or climbing from their burrows. When it moved again, those withdrew.

Ym returned to his sculpting. "It will be for making a shoe."

The evening shop was quiet save for the scraping of his knife on wood.

"Sh-shoe . . . ?" a voice asked. Like that of a young woman, soft, with a kind of chiming musicality to it.

"Yes, my friend," he said. "A shoe for young children. I find myself in need of those more and more these days."

"Shoe," the spren said. "For ch-children. Little people."

Ym brushed wooden scraps off the bench for later sweeping, then set the last on the bench near the spren. It shied away, like a reflection off a mirror—translucent, really just a shimmer of light.

He withdrew his hand and waited. The spren inched forward—tentative, like a cremling creeping out of its crack after a storm. It stopped, and light grew upward from it in the shape of tiny sprouts. Such an odd sight.

"You are an interesting experience, my friend," Ym said as the shimmer of light moved onto the last itself. "One in which I am honored to participate."

"I . . ." the spren said. "I . . ." The spren's form shook suddenly, then grew more intense, like light being focused. "He comes."

Ym stood up, suddenly anxious. Something moved on the street outside. Was it that one? That watcher, in the military coat?

But no, it was just a child, peering in through the open door. Ym smiled, opening his drawer of spheres and letting more light into the room. The child shied back, just as the spren had.

The spren had vanished somewhere. It did that when others drew near.

“No need to fear,” Ym said, settling back down on his stool. “Come in. Let me get a look at you.”

The dirty young urchin peered back in. He wore only a ragged pair of trousers, no shirt, though that was common here in Iri, where both days and nights were usually warm.

The poor child’s feet were dirty and scraped.

“Now,” Ym said, “that won’t do. Come, young one, settle down. Let’s get something on those feet.” He moved out one of his smaller stools.

“They say you don’t charge nothin’,” the boy said, not moving.

“They are quite wrong,” Ym said. “But I think you will find my cost bearable.”

“Don’t have no spheres.”

“No spheres are needed. Your payment will be your story. Your experiences. I would hear them.”

“They said you was strange,” the boy said, finally walking into the shop. se Investiture to—”

“They were right,” Ym said, patting the stool.

The urchin stepped timidly up to the stool, walking with a limp he tried to hide. He was Iriali, though the grime darkened his skin and hair, both of

which were golden. The skin less so—you needed the light to see it right—but the hair certainly. It was the mark of their people.

Ym motioned for the child to raise his good foot, then got out a washcloth, wetted it, and cleaned away the grime. He wasn't about to do a fitting on feet so dirty. Noticeably, the boy tucked back the foot he'd limped on, as if trying to hide that it had a rag wrapped around it.

“So,” Ym said, “your story?”

“You're old,” the boy said. “Older than anyone I know. Grandpa old. You must know everythin' already. Why do you want to hear from me?”

“It is one of my quirks,” Ym said. “Come now. Let's hear it.”

The boy huffed, but talked. Briefly. That wasn't uncommon. He wanted to hold his story to himself. Slowly, with careful questions, Ym pried the story free. The boy was the son of a whore, and had been kicked out as soon as he could fend for himself. That had been three years ago, the boy thought. He was probably eight now.

As he listened, Ym cleaned the first foot, then clipped and filed the nails. Once done, he motioned for the other foot.

The boy reluctantly lifted it up. Ym undid the rag, and found a nasty cut on the bottom of that foot. It was already infected, crawling with rotspren, tiny motes of red.

Ym hesitated.

“Needed to get some shoes,” the urchin said, looking the other way. “Can't keep on without 'em.”

The rip in the skin was jagged. Done climbing over a fence, perhaps? Ym thought.

The boy looked at him, feigning nonchalance. A wound like this would slow an urchin down terribly, which on the streets could easily mean death. Ym knew that all too well.

He looked up at the boy, noting the shadow of worry in those little eyes. The infection had spread up the leg.

“My friend,” Ym whispered, “I believe I am going to need your help.”

“What?” the urchin said.

“Nothing,” Ym replied, reaching into the drawer of his table. The light spilling out was just from five diamond chips. Every urchin who had come to him had seen those. So far, Ym had been robbed of them only twice.

He dug more deeply, unfolding a hidden compartment in the drawer and taking a more powerful sphere—a broam—from there, covering its light quickly in his hand while reaching for some antiseptic with the other hand.

The medicine wasn’t going to be enough, not with the boy unable to stay off his feet. Lying in bed for weeks to heal, constantly applying expensive medication? Impossible for an urchin fighting for food each day.

Ym brought his hands back, sphere tucked inside of one. Poor child. It must hurt something fierce. The boy probably ought to have been laid out in bed, feverish, but every urchin knew to chew ridgebark to stay alert and awake longer than they should.

Nearby, the sparkling light spren peeked out from underneath a stack of leather squares. Ym applied the medication, then set it aside and lifted the boy’s foot, humming softly.

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The rotspren fled from the wound.

When Ym removed his hand, the cut had scabbed over, the color returning to normal, the signs of infection gone. So far, Ym had used this ability only a handful of times, and had always disguised it as medicine. It was unlike

anything he had ever heard of. Perhaps that was why he had been given it—so the cosmere could experience it.

“Hey,” the boy said, “that feels a lot better.”

“I’m glad,” Ym said, returning the sphere and the medicine to his drawer. The spren had retreated. “Let us see if I have something that fits you.”

He began fitting shoes. Normally, after fitting, he’d send the patron away and craft a perfect set of shoes just for them. For this child, unfortunately, he’d have to use shoes he’d already made. He’d had too many urchins never return for their pair of shoes, leaving him to fret and wonder. Had something happened to them? Had they simply forgotten? Or had their natural suspicion gotten the better of them?

Fortunately, he had several good, sturdy pairs that might fit this boy. I need more treated hogshide, he thought, making a note. Children would not properly care for shoes. He needed leather that would age well even if unattended.

“You’re really gonna give me a pair of shoes,” the urchin said. “For nothin’?”

“Nothing but your story,” Ym said, slipping another testing shoe onto the boy’s foot. He’d given up on trying to train urchins to wear socks.

“Why?”

“Because,” Ym said, “you and I are One.”

“One what?”

“One being,” Ym said. He set aside that shoe and got out another. “Long ago, there was only One. One knew everything, but had experienced nothing. And so, One became many—us, people. The One, who is both male and female, did so to experience all things.”

“One. You mean God?”

“If you wish to say it that way,” Ym said. “But it is not completely true. I

accept no god. You should accept no god. We are Iriali, and part of the Long Trail, of which this is the Fourth Land.”

“You sound like a priest.”

“Accept no priests either,” Ym said. “Those are from other lands, come to preach to us. Iriali need no preaching, only experience. As each experience is different, it brings completeness. Eventually, all will be gathered back in—when the Seventh Land is attained—and we will once again become One.”

“So you an’ me . . .” the urchin said. “Are the same?”

“Yes. Two minds of a single being experiencing different lives.”

“That’s stupid.”

“It is simply a matter of perspective,” Ym said, dusting the boy’s feet with powder and slipping back on a pair of the test shoes. “Please walk on those for a moment.”

The boy gave him a strange look, but obeyed, trying a few steps. He didn’t limp any longer.

“Perspective,” Ym said, holding up his hand and wiggling his fingers. . . . Almighty abovem insisted onre“From very close up, the fingers on a hand might seem individual and alone. Indeed, the thumb might think it has very little in common with the pinky. But with proper perspective, it is realized that the fingers are part of something much larger. That, indeed, they are One.”

The urchin frowned. Some of that had probably been beyond him. I need to speak more simply, and—

“Why do you get to be the finger with the expensive ring,” the boy said, pacing back the other direction, “while I gotta be the pinky with the broken fingernail?”

Ym smiled. “I know it sounds unfair, but there can be no unfairness, as we are all the same in the end. Besides, I didn’t always have this shop.”

“You didn’t?”

“No. I think you’d be surprised at where I came from. Please sit back down.”

The boy settled down. “That medicine works real well. Real, real well.”

Ym slipped off the shoes, using the powder—which had rubbed off in places—to judge how the shoe fit. He fished out a pair of premade shoes, then worked at them for a moment, flexing them in his hands. He’d want a cushion on the bottom for the wounded foot, but something that would tear off after a few weeks, once the wound was healed. . . .

“The things you’re talking about,” the boy said. “They sound dumb to me. I mean, if we’re all the same person, shouldn’t everyone know this already?”

“As One, we knew truth,” Ym said, “but as many, we need ignorance. We exist in variety to experience all kinds of thought. That means some of us must know and others must not—just like some must be rich, and others must be poor.” He worked the shoe a moment longer. “More people did know this, once. It’s not talked about as much as it should be. Here, let’s see if these fit right.”

He handed the boy the shoes, who put them on and tied the laces.

“Your life might be unpleasant—” Ym began.

“Unpleasant?”

“All right. Downright awful. But it will get better, young one. I promise it.”

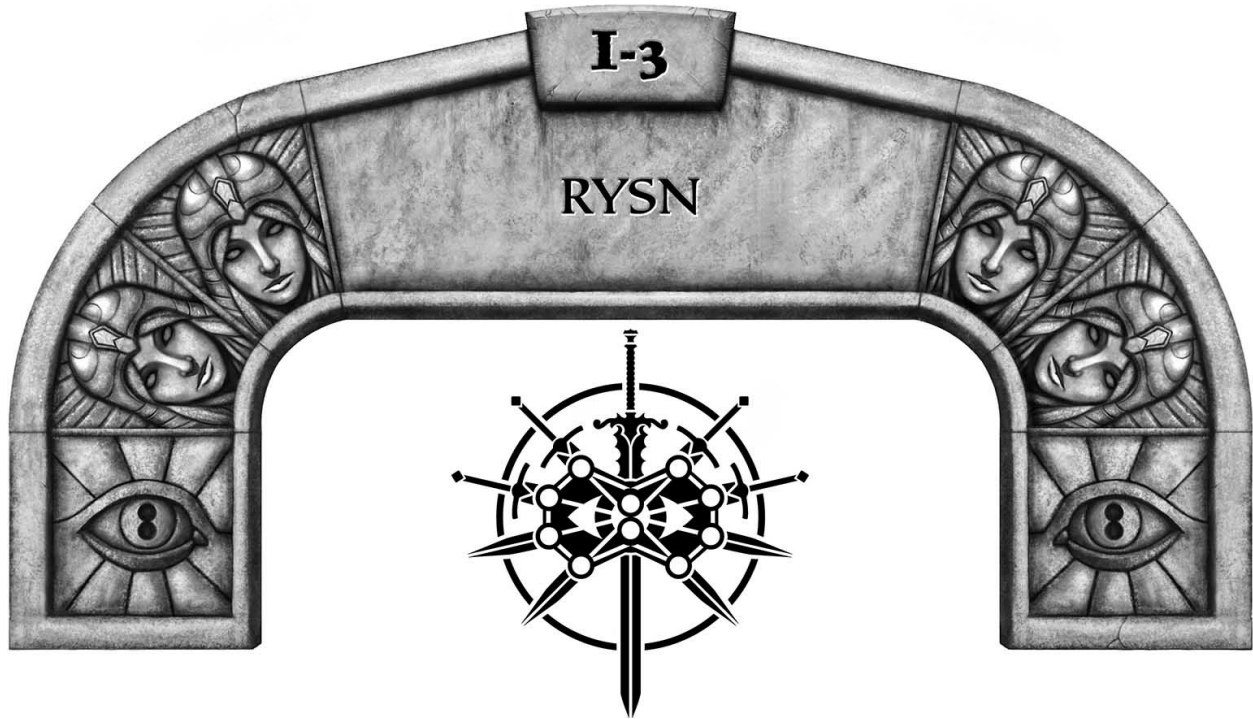
“I thought,” the boy said, stamping his good foot to test the shoes, “that you were gonna tell me that life is awful, but it all don’t matter in the end, ’cuz we’re going the same place.”

“That’s true,” Ym said, “but isn’t very comforting right now, is it?”

“Nope.”

Ym turned back to his worktable. “Try not to walk on that wounded foot too much, if you can help it.”

The urchin strode to the door with a sudden



Rysn liked to pretend that her pot of Shin grass was not stupid, but merely contemplative. She sat near the prow of her catamaran, holding the pot in her lap. The otherwise still surface of the Reshi Sea rippled from the paddling of the guide behind her. The warm, damp air made beads of sweat form on Rysn's brow and neck.

It was probably going to rain again. Precipitation here on the sea was the worst kind—not mighty or impressive like a highstorm, not even insistent like an ordinary shower. Here, it was just a misting haze, more than a fog but less than a drizzle. Enough to ruin hair, makeup, clothing—indeed, every element of a careful young woman's efforts to present a suitable face for trading.

Rysn shifted the pot in her lap. She'd named the grass Tyvnk. Sullen. Her babsk had laughed at the name. He understood. In naming the grass, she acknowledged that he was right and she had been wrong; his trade with the Shin people last year had been exceptionally profitable.

Rysn chose not to be sullen at being proven so clearly wrong. She'd let her plant be sullen instead.

They'd traversed these waters for two days now, and then only after waiting at port for weeks until the right time between highstorms for a trip onto the nearly enclosed sea. Today, the waters were shockingly still. Almost as serene as those of the Purelake.

Vstim himself rode two boats over in their irregular flotilla. Paddled by new parshmen, the sixteen sleek catamarans were laden with goods that had been purchased with the profits of their last expedition. Vstim was still resting in the back of his boat. He looked like little more than another bundle of cloth, almost indistinguishable from the sacks of goods.

He would be fine. People got sick. It happened, but he would become well again.

And the blood you saw on his handkerchief?

She suppressed the thought and pointedly turned around in her seat, shifting Tyvnk to the crook of her left arm. She kept the pot sleep my baby dear."fk includeWhat are you doingvery clean. That soil stuff the grass needed in order to live was even worse than crem, and it had a proclivity for ruining clothing.

Gu, the flotilla's guide, rode in her own boat, just behind her. He looked a lot like a Purelaker with those long limbs, the leathery skin, and dark hair. Every Purelaker she'd met, however, had cared deeply about those gods of theirs. She doubted Gu had ever cared about anything.

That included getting them to their destination in a timely manner.

"You said we were near," she said to him.

"Oh, we are," he said, lifting his oar and then slipping it back down into the water. "Soon, now." He spoke Thaylen rather well, which was why he'd been hired. It certainly wasn't for his punctuality.

"Define 'soon,'" Rysn said.

"Define . . ."

“What do you mean by ‘soon’?”

“Soon. Today, maybe.”

Maybe. Delightful.

Gu continued to paddle, only doing so on one side of the boat, yet somehow keeping them from going in circles. At the rear of Rysn’s boat, Kylrm—head of their guards—played with her parasol, opening it and closing it again. He seemed to consider it a wondrous invention, though they’d been popular in Thaylenah for ages now.

Shows how rarely Vstim’s workers get back to civilization. Another cheerful thought. Well, she’d apprenticed under Vstim wanting to travel to exotic places, and exotic this was. True, she’d expected cosmopolitan and exotic to go hand in hand. If she’d had half a wit—which she wasn’t sure she did, these days—she’d have realized that the really successful traders weren’t the ones who went where everyone else wanted to go.

“Hard,” Gu said, still paddling with his lethargic pace. “Patterns are off, these days. The gods do not walk where they always should. We shall find her. Yes, we shall.”

Rysn stifled a sigh and turned forward. With Vstim incapacitated again, she was in charge of leading the flotilla. She wished she knew where she was leading it—or even knew how to find their destination.

That was the trouble with islands that moved.

The boats glided past a shoal of branches breaking the sea’s surface. Encouraged by the wind, gentle waves lapped against the stiff branches, which reached out of the waters like the fingers of drowning men. The sea was deeper than the Purelake, with its bafflingly shallow waters. Those trees would be dozens of feet tall at the very least, with bark of stone. Gu called them i-nah, which apparently meant bad. They could slice up a boat’s hull.

Sometimes they’d pass branches hiding just beneath the glassy surface, almost invisible. She didn’t know how Gu knew to steer clear of them. In

this, as in so much else, they just had to trust him. What would they do if he led them into an ambush out here on these silent waters? Suddenly, she felt very glad that Vstim had ordered their guards to monitor his fabrial that showed if people were drawing near. It—

Land.

Rysn stood up in the catamaran, making it rock precariously. She was in a motionlyriously. There was something ahead, a distant dark line.

“Ah,” Gu said. “See? Soon.”

Rysn remained standing, waving for her parasol when a sprinkle of rain started to fall. The parasol barely helped, though it was waxed to double as an umbrella. In her excitement, she hardly gave it—or her increasingly frizzy hair—a thought. Finally.

The island was much bigger than she’d expected. She’d imagined it to be like a very large boat, not this towering rock formation jutting from the waters like a boulder in a field. It was different from other islands she’d seen; there didn’t seem to be any beach, and it wasn’t flat and low, but mountainous. Shouldn’t the sides and top have eroded over time?

“It’s so green,” Rysn said as they drew closer.

“The Tai-na is a good place to grow,” Gu said. “Good place to live. Except when it’s at war.”

“When two islands get too close,” Rysn said. She’d read of this in preparation, though there were not many scholars who cared enough about the Reshi to write of them. Dozens, perhaps hundreds, of these moving islands floated in the sea. The people on them lived simple lives, interpreting the movements of the islands as divine will.

“Not always,” Gu said, chuckling. “Sometimes close Tai-na is good. Sometimes bad.”

“What determines?” Rysn asked.

“Why, the Tai-na itself.”

“The island decides,” Rysn said flatly, humoring him. Primitives. What was her babsk expecting to gain by trading here? “How can an island—”

Then the island ahead of them moved.

Not in the drifting way she’d imagined. The island’s very shape changed, stones twisting and undulating, a huge section of rock rising in a motion that seemed lethargic until one appreciated the grand scale.

Rysn sat down with a plop, her eyes wide. The rock—the leg—lifted, streaming water like rainfall. It lurched forward, then crashed back down into the sea with incredible force.

The Tai-na, the gods of the Reshi Isles, were greatshells.

This was the largest beast she’d ever seen, or ever heard of. Big enough to make mythological monsters like the chasmfiends of distant Natanatan seem like pebbles in comparison!

“Why didn’t anyone tell me?” she demanded, looking back at the boat’s other two occupants. Surely Kylrm at least should have said something.

“Is better to see,” Gu said, paddling with his usual relaxed posture. She did not much care for his smirk.

“And take away that moment of discovery?” Kylrm said. “I remember when I first saw one move. It’s worth not spoiling. We never tell the new guards when they first come.”

Rysn contained her annoyance and looked back at the “island.” Curse those inaccurate accounts from her readings. Too much hearsay, not enough experience. She found it hard to believe that no one had ever recorded the truth. Likely, she simply had the wrong sources.

A falling haze of rain shrouded the enormous beast in mist and enigma. What

did a thing so big eat? Did it notice the people living upon its base Investiture to—”

mating like for these monsters?

It had to be ancient. The boat drew into its shadow, and she could see the greenery growing across its stony skin. Shalebark mounds made vast fields of vibrant colors. Moss coated nearly everything. Vines and rockbuds wound around trunks of small trees that had gained a foothold in cracks between plates of the animal’s shell.

Gu led the convoy around the hind leg—giving it a very wide berth, to her relief—and came up along the creature’s flank. Here, the shell dipped down into the water, forming a platform. She heard the people before she saw them, their laughter rising amid splashes. The rain stopped, so Rysn lowered her parasol and shook it over the water. She finally spotted the people, a group of youths both male and female climbing up onto a ridge of shell and leaping from it into the sea.

That was not so surprising. The water of the Reshi Sea, like that of the Purelake, was remarkably warm. She had once ventured into the water near her homeland. It was a frigid experience, and not one to be engaged in while of sound mind. Frequently, alcohol and bravado were involved in any ocean dip.

Out here, though, she expected that swimmers were commonplace. She had not expected them to be unclothed.

Rysn blushed furiously as a group of people ran past on the docklike shell outcropping, as bare as the day they were born. Young men and women alike, uncaring of who saw. She was no Alethi prude, but . . . Kelek! Shouldn’t they wear something?

Shamespren fell around her, shaped like white and red flower petals that drifted on a wind. Behind her, Gu chuckled.

Kylrm joined him. “That’s another thing we don’t warn the newcomers about.”

Primitives, Rysn thought. She shouldn't blush so. She was an adult. Well, almost.

The flotilla continued toward a section of shell that formed a kind of dock—a low plate that hung mostly above water. They settled in to wait, though for what, she didn't know.

After a few moments, the plate lurched—water streaming off it—as the beast took another lethargic step. Waves lapped against the boats from the splashdown ahead. Once things were settled, Gu guided the boat to the dock. “Up you go,” he said.

“Shall we tie the boats to anything?” Rysn said.

“No. Not safe, with movement. We will pull back.”

“And at night? How do you dock the boats?”

“When we sleep, we move boats away, tie together. Sleep out there. Find island again in the morning.”

“Oh,” Rysn said, taking a calming breath and checking to make sure her pot of grass was carefully stored in the bottom of the catamaran.

She stood up. This was not going to be kind to her shoes, which had been quite expensive. She had a feeling the Reshi wouldn't care. She could probably meet their king barefooted. Passions! From what she'd seen, she could probably meet him bare-chested.

She climbed up carefully, and was pleased to find that despite being an inch or so underwater, the shell was not slippery. Kylrm climbed up with her and she handed him the folded-up parasol, stepping back and waiting as Gu maneuvered his boat away. Another oarsman brought up his boat . . . Almighty abovem">“Yes?”re instead, a longer catamaran with parshmen to help row.

Her babsk huddled inside, wrapped in his blanket despite the heat, head propped up against the back of the boat. His pale skin had a waxy cast.

“Babsk . . .” Rysn said, heart wrenching. “We should have turned around.”

“Nonsense,” he said, his voice frail. He smiled anyway. “I’ve suffered worse. The trade must happen. We’ve leveraged too much.”

“I will go to the island’s king and traders,” Rysn said. “And ask for them to come here to negotiate with you on the docks.”

Vstim coughed into his hand. “No. These people aren’t like the Shin. My weakness will ruin the deal. Boldness. You must be bold with the Reshi.”

“Bold?” Rysn said, glancing at the boat guide, who lounged with fingers in the water. “Babsk . . . the Reshi are a relaxed people. I do not think much matters to them.”

“You will be surprised, then,” Vstim said. He followed her gaze toward the nearby swimmers, who giggled and laughed as they leaped into the waters. “Life can be simple here, yes. It attracts such people like war attracts painspren.”

Attracts . . . One of the women scampered past, and Rysn noticed with shock that she had Thaylen eyebrows. Her skin had been tanned in the sun, so the difference in tones hadn’t been immediately obvious. Picking through those swimming, Rysn saw others. Two that were probably Herdazians, even . . . an Alethi? Impossible.

“People seek out this place,” Vstim said. “They like the life of the Reshi. Here, they can simply go with the island. Fight when it fights another island. Relax otherwise. There will be people like this in any culture, for every society is made of individuals. You must learn this. Do not let your assumptions about a culture block your ability to perceive the individual, or you will fail.”

She nodded. He seemed so frail, but his words were firm. She tried not to think about the swimming people. The fact that at least one of them was of her own kind made her even more embarrassed.

“If you cannot trade with them . . .” Rysn said.

“You must do it.”

Rysn felt cold, despite the heat. This was what she’d joined with Vstim to do, wasn’t it? How many times had she wished he would let her lead? Why feel so timid now?

She glanced toward her own boat, moving off, carrying her pot of grass. She looked back at her babsk. “Tell me what to do.”

“They know much of foreigners,” Vstim said. “More than we know of them. This is because so many of us come to live among them. Many of the Reshi are as carefree as you say, but there are also many who are not. Those prefer to fight. And a trade . . . it is like a fight to them.”

“To me too,” Rysn said.

“I know these people,” Vstim said. “We must have Passion that Talik is not here. He is their best, and often goes to trade with other islands. Whichever you do meet for trade, he or she will judge you as they would judge a rival in battle. And to them, battle is about posturing.

“I once had the misfortune to be on an isle during war.se Investiture to—”

Rysn swallowed, nodding.

“You are not ready for this, child,” Vstim said.

“I know.”

“Good. Finally you realize it. Go now. They will not suffer us long on their island unless we agree to join them permanently.”

“Which would require . . . ?” Rysn said.

“Well, for one, it requires giving all you own to their king.”

“Lovely,” Rysn said, rising. “I wonder how he’d look wearing my shoes.” She took a deep breath. “You still haven’t told me what we’re trading for.”

“They know,” her babsk said, then coughed. “Your conversation will not be a negotiation. The terms were set years ago.”

She turned to him, frowning. “What?”

“This is not about what you can get,” Vstim said, “but about whether or not they think you are worthy of it. Convince them.” He hesitated. “Passions guide you, child. Do well.”

It seemed a plea. If their flotilla was turned away . . . The cost of this trade was not in the goods—woods, cloth, simple supplies purchased cheaply—but in the outfitting of a convoy. It was in traveling so far, paying guides, wasting time waiting for a break between storms, then more time searching for the right island. If she was turned away, they could still sell what they had—but at a stiff devastating loss, considering the high overhead of the trip.

Two of the guards, Kylrm and Nlent, joined her as she left Vstim and walked along the docklike protrusion of shell. Now that they were so close, it was difficult to see a creature and not an island. Just ahead of her, the patina of lichen made the shell nearly indistinguishable from rock. Trees clustered here, their roots draping into the water, their branches reaching high and creating a forest.

She hesitantly stepped onto the only path leading up from the waters. Here, the “ground” formed steps that seemed far too square and regular to be natural.

“They cut into its shell?” Rysn said, climbing.

Kylrm grunted. “Chulls can’t feel their shells. This monster probably can’t either.”

As they walked, he kept his hand on his gtet, a type of traditional Thaylen sword. The thing had a large triangular wedge of a blade with a grip directly at the base; you’d hold the grip like a fist, and the long blade would extend out down past the knuckles, with parts of the hilt resting around the wrist for support. Right now, he wore it in a sheath at his side, along with a bow on his back.

Why was he was so anxious? The Reshi were not supposed to be dangerous. Perhaps when you were a paid guard, it was better to assume everyone was dangerous.

The pathway wound upward through thick jungle. The trees here were limber and hale, their branches almost constantly moving. And when the beast stepped, everything shook.

Vines trembl { font-weight : normal; font-style : normal; font-size : 1.42em; text-decoration : none; line-height : 1.2em; text-align : center; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em 0em 1.50em 0em; } p. in a emotionlyed and twisted on the pathway or drooped from branches, and these pulled out of the way at her approach, but crept back quickly after her passing. Soon, she couldn't see the sea, or even smell its brine. The jungle enveloped everything. Its thick green and brown were broken occasionally by pink and yellow mounds of shalebark that seemed to have been growing for generations.

She'd found the humidity oppressive before, but here it was overwhelming. She felt as if she were swimming, and even her thin linen skirt, blouse, and vest seemed as thick as old Thaylen highland winter gear.

After an interminable climb, she heard voices. To her right, the forest opened up to a view of the ocean beyond. Rysn caught her breath. Endless blue waters, clouds dropping a haze of rain in patches that seemed so distinct. And in the distance . . .

“Another one?” she asked, pointing toward a shadow on the horizon.

“Yeah,” Kylrm said. “Hopefully going the other way. I'd rather not be here when they decide to war.” His grip tightened on the handle of his sword.

The voices came from farther up the way, so Rysn resigned herself to more climbing. Her legs ached from the effort.

Though the jungle remained impenetrable to her left, it remained open to her right, where the massive flank of the greatshell formed ridges and shelves. She caught sight of some people sitting around tents, leaning back and staring out over the sea. They hardly gave her and the two guards more than a

glance. Up farther, she found more Reshi.

These were jumping.

Men and women alike—and in various states of undress—were taking turns leaping off the shell’s outcroppings with whoops and shouts, plummeting toward the waters far below. Rysn grew nauseated just watching them. How high up were they?

“They do it to shock you. They always jump from greater heights when a foreigner is here.”

Rysn nodded, then—with a sudden start—realized that the comment hadn’t come from one of her guards. She turned and discovered that to her left, the forest had moved back around a large outcrop of shell like a rock mound.

There, hanging upside down and tied by his feet to a point at the top of the shell, was a lanky man with pale white skin verging on blue. He wore only a loincloth, and his skin was covered with hundreds upon hundreds of small, intricate tattoos.

Rysn took a step toward him, but Kylrm grabbed her shoulder and pulled her back. “Aimian,” he hissed. “Keep your distance.”

The blue fingernails and deep blue eyes should have been a clue. Rysn stepped back, though she couldn’t see his Voidbringer shadow.

“Keep your distance indeed,” the man said. “Always a wise idea.” His accent was unlike any she’d heard, though he spoke Thaylen well. He hung there with a pleasant smile on his face, as if completely indifferent to the fact that he was upside down.

“Are you . . . well?” Rysn asked the man.

“Hmmm?” he said. “Oh, between blackouts, yes. Quite well. I think I’m growing numb to the pain of my ankles, which is just delightful.”

Rysn brought her hands up to her chest, not daring to get any closer. Aimian. Very bad luck. She wasn’t particularly superstitious—she was even skeptical

of the Passions sometimes—but . . . well, this was an shut the doorfeverythinglyAimian.

“What fell curses did you bring on this people, beast?” Kylrm demanded.

“Improper puns,” the man said lazily. “And a stench from something I ate that did not sit well with me. Are you off to speak with the king, then?”

“I . . .” Rysn said. Behind her, another Reshi whooped and leaped from the shelf. “Yes.”

“Well,” the creature said, “don’t ask about the soul of their god. They don’t like to speak of that, it turns out. Must be spectacular, to let the beasts grow this large. Beyond even the spren who inhabit the bodies of ordinary greatshells. Hmmm . . .” He seemed very pleased by something.

“Do not feel for him, trademaster,” Kylrm said softly to her, steering her away from the dangling prisoner. “He could escape if he wished.”

Nlent, the other guard, nodded. “They can take off their limbs. Take off their skin too. No real body to them. Just something evil, taking human form.” The squat guard wore a charm on his wrist, a charm of courage, which he took off and held tightly in one hand. The charm hadn’t any properties itself, of course. It was a reminder. Courage. Passion. Want what you need, embrace it, desire it and bring it to you.

Well, what she needed was her babsk to be here with her. She turned her steps upward again, the confrontation with the Aimian leaving her unnerved. More people ran and leaped from the shelves to her right. Crazy.

Trademaster, she thought. Kylrm called me “trademaster.” She wasn’t, not yet. She was property owned by Vstim; for now just an apprentice who provided occasional slave labor.

She didn’t deserve the title, but hearing it strengthened her. She led the way up the steps, which twisted farther around the beast’s shell. They passed a place where the ground split, the shell showing skin far beneath. The rift was like a chasm; she couldn’t have leaped from one side to the other without

falling in.

Reshi she passed on the path refused to respond to her questions. Fortunately, Kylrm knew the way, and when the path split, he pointed to the right fork. At times, the path leveled out for significant distances, but then there were always more steps.

Her legs burning, her clothing damp with sweat, they reached the top of this flight and—at long last—found no more steps. Here, the jungle fell away completely, though rockbuds clutched the shell in the open field—beyond which was only the empty sky.

The head, Rysn thought. We've climbed all the way to the beast's head.

Soldiers lined the path, armed with spears bearing colorful tassels. Their breastplates and armguards were of carapace carved wickedly with points, and though they wore only wraps for clothing, they stood as stiff-backed as any Alethi soldier, with stern expressions to match. So her babsk was right. Not every Reshi was the “lounge and swim” type.

Boldness, she thought to herself, remembering Vstim's words. She could not show these people a timid face. The king stood at the end of the pathway of guards and rockbuds, a diminutive figure on the edge of a carapace shelf { font-weight : normal; font-style : italic; font-size : 0.8em } So, looking toward the sun.

Rysn strode forward, passing through a double row of spears. She would have expected the same kind of clothing on the king, but instead the man wore full, voluminous robes of vibrant green and yellow. They looked terribly hot.

As she drew nearer, Rysn got a sense for just how high she had climbed. The waters below shimmered in the sunlight, so far down that Rysn wouldn't have heard a rock hit if she'd dropped one. Far enough that looking over the side made her stomach twist upon itself and her legs tremble.

Getting close to the king would require stepping out onto that shelf where he stood. It would place her within a breath of plummeting down hundreds and

hundreds of feet.

Steady, Rysn told herself. She would show her babsk that she was capable. She was not the ignorant girl who had misjudged the Shin or who had offended the Iriali. She had learned.

Still, perhaps she should have asked Nlent to lend her his charm of courage.

She stepped out onto the shelf. The king seemed young, at least from behind. Built like a youth, or . . .

No, Rysn thought with a start as the king turned. It was a woman, old enough that her hair was greying, but not so old that she was bent with age.

Someone stepped out onto the shelf behind Rysn. Younger, he wore the standard wrap and tassels. His hair was in two braids that fell over tan, bare shoulders. When he spoke, there wasn't even a hint of an accent to his voice. "The king wishes to know why his old trading partner, Vstim, has not come in person, and has instead sent a child in his place."

"And are you the king?" Rysn asked the newcomer.

The man laughed. "You stand beside him, yet ask that of me?"

Rysn looked toward the robed figure. The robes were tied with the front open enough to show that the "king" definitely had breasts.

"We are led by a king," the newcomer said. "Gender is irrelevant."

It seemed to Rysn that gender was part of the definition, but it wasn't worth arguing over. "My master is indisposed," she said, addressing the newcomer—he'd be the island's trademaster. "I am authorized to speak for him, and to accomplish the trade."

The newcomer snorted, sitting down on the edge of the shelf, legs hanging out over the edge. Rysn's stomach did a somersault. "He should have known better. The trade is off, then."

"You are Talik, I assume?" Rysn said, folding her arms. The man was no

longer facing her. It seemed an intentional slight.

“Yes.”

“My master warned me about you.”

“Then he isn’t a complete fool,” Talik said. “Just mostly.”

His pronunciation was astonishing. She found herself checking him for Thaylen eyebrows, but he was obviously Reshi.

Rysn clenched her teeth, then forced herself to sit down beside him on the edge. She tried to do it as nonchalantly as he had, but she just couldn’t. Instead, she settled down—not easy in a fashionable skirt—and scooted out beside him.

Oh, Passions! I’m going to fall off of this and die. Don shut the doorfeverythingly’t look down! Do not look down!

She couldn’t help it. She glanced downward, and felt immediately woozy. She could see the side of the head down there, the massive line of a jaw. Nearby, standing on a ridge above the eye to Rysn’s right, people pushed large bundles of fruit off the side. Tied with vine rope, the bundles swung down beside the maw below.

Mandibles moved slowly, pulling the fruit in, jerking the ropes. The Reshi pulled those back up to affix more fruit, all under the eyes of the king, who was supervising the feeding from the very tip of the nose to Rysn’s left.

“A treat,” Talik said, noticing where she watched. “An offering. These small bundles of fruit, of course, do not sustain our god.”

“What does?”

He smiled. “Why are you still here, young one? Did I not dismiss you?”

“The trade does not have to be off,” Rysn said. “My master told me the terms were already set. We have brought everything you require in payment.” Though for what, I don’t know. “Turning me aside would be pointless.”

The king, she noticed, had stepped closer to listen.

“It would serve the same purpose as everything in life,” Talik said. “To please Relu-na.”

That would be the name of their god, the greatshell. “And your island would approve of such waste? Inviting traders all this way, only to send them off empty-handed?”

“Relu-na approves of boldness,” Talik said. “And, more importantly, respect. If we do not respect the one with whom we trade, then we should not do it.”

What ridiculous logic. If a merchant followed that line of reasoning, he’d never be able to trade. Except . . . in her months with Vstim, it seemed that he’d often sought out people who liked trading with him. People he respected. Those kinds of people certainly would be less likely to cheat you.

Perhaps it wasn’t bad logic . . . simply incomplete.

Think like the other trader, she recalled. One of Vstim’s lessons—which were so different from the ones she’d learned at home. What do they want? Why do they want it? Why are you the best one to provide it?

“It must be hard to live out here, in the waters,” Rysn said. “Your god is impressive, but you cannot make everything you need for yourselves.”

“Our ancestors did it just fine.”

“Without medicines,” Rysn said, “that could have saved lives. Without cloth from fibers that grow only on the mainland. Your ancestors survived without these things because they had to. You do not.”

The trademaster hunched forward.

Don’t do that! You’ll fall!

“We are not idiots,” Talik said.

Rysn frowned. Why—

“I’m so tired of explaining this,” the man continued. “We live simply. That does not make us stupid. For years the outsiders came, trying to exploit us because of our ignorance. We are tired of it, woman. Everything you say is true. Not true— . . . Almighty above”>“Yes?”reobvious. Yet you say it as if we’d never stopped to consider. ‘Oh! Medicine! Of course we need medicine! Thank you for pointing that out. I was just going to sit here and die.’”

Rysn blushed. “I didn’t—”

“Yes, you did mean that,” Talik said. “The condescension dripped from your lips, young lady. We’re tired of being taken advantage of. We’re tired of foreigners who try to trade us trash for riches. We don’t have knowledge of the current economic situation on the mainland, so we can’t know for certain if we are being cheated or not. Therefore, we trade only with people we know and trust. That is that.”

Current economic situation on the mainland . . . ? Rysn thought. “You’ve trained in Thaylenah,” she guessed.

“Of course I have,” Talik said. “You have to know a predator’s tricks before you can catch him.” He settled back, which let her relax a little. “My parents sent me to train as a child. I had one of your babsks. I made trademaster on my own before returning here.”

“Your parents being the king and queen?” Rysn guessed again.

He eyed her. “The king and king’s consort.”

“You could just call her a queen.”

“This trade is not happening,” Talik said, standing. “Go and tell your master we are sorry for his illness and hope that he recovers. If he does, he may return next year during the trading season and we will meet with him.”

“You imply you respect him,” Rysn said, scrambling to her feet—and away from that drop. “So just trade with him!”

“He is sickly,” Talik said, not looking at her. “It would not do him justice. We’d be taking advantage of him.”

Taking advantage of . . . Passions, these people were strange. It seemed even odder to hear such things coming from the mouth of a man who spoke such perfect Thaylen.

“You’d trade with me if you respected me,” Rysn said. “If you thought I was worthy of it.”

“That will take years,” Talik said, joining his mother at the front of the shelf. “Go away, and—”

He cut off as the king spoke to him softly in Reshi.

Talik drew his lips into a line.

“What?” Rysn asked, stepping forward.

Talik turned toward her. “You have apparently impressed the king. You argue fiercely. Though you dismiss us as primitives, you’re not as bad as some.” He ground his teeth for a moment. “The king will hear your argument for a trade.”

Rysn blinked, looked from one to the other. Hadn’t she just made her argument for a trade, with the king listening?

The woman regarded Rysn with dark eyes and a calm expression. I’ve won the first fight, Rysn realized, like the warriors on the battlefield. I’ve dueled and been judged worthy to spar with the one of greater authority.

The king spoke, and Talik { font-weight : normal; font-style : normal; font-size : 1.42em; text-decoration : none; line-height : 1.2em; text-align : center; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em 0em 1.50em 0em; } p. in a emotiononlyinterpreted. “The king says that you are talented, but that the trade cannot—of course—continue. You should return with your babsk when he comes again. In a decade or so, perhaps we will trade with you.”

Rysn searched for an argument. “And is that how Vstim gained respect, Your

Majesty?” She would not fail in this. She couldn’t! “Over years, with his own babsk?”

“Yes,” Talik said.

“You didn’t interpret that,” Rysn said.

“I . . .” Talik sighed, then interpreted her question.

The king smiled with apparent fondness. She spoke a few words in their language, and Talik turned to his mother, looking shocked. “I . . . Wow.”

“What?” Rysn demanded.

“Your babsk slew a coracot with some of our hunters,” Talik said. “On his own? A foreigner? I had not heard of such a thing.”

Vstim. Slaying something? With hunters? Impossible.

Though he obviously hadn’t always been the wizened old ledgerworm that he was now, she’d imagined he’d been a wizened young ledgerworm in the past.

The king spoke again.

“I doubt you’ll be slaying any beasts, child,” Talik interpreted. “Go. Your babsk will recover from this. He is wise.”

No. He is dying, Rysn thought. It came to her mind unbidden, but the truth of it terrified her. More than the height, more than anything else she’d known. Vstim was dying. This might be his final trade.

And she was ruining it.

“My babsk trusts me,” Rysn said, stepping closer to the king, moving along the greatshell’s nose. “And you said you trust him. Can you not trust his judgment that I am worthy?”

“One cannot substitute for personal experience,” Talik translated.

The beast stepped, ground trembling, and Rysn clenched her teeth, imagining them all toppling off. Fortunately, up this high, the motion was more like a gentle sway. Trees rustled, and her stomach lurched, but it wasn't any more dangerous than a ship surging on a wave.

Rysn stepped closer to where the king stood beside the beast's nose. "You are king—you know the importance of trusting those beneath you. You cannot be everywhere, know everything. At times, you must accept the judgment of those you know. My babsk is such a man."

"You make a valid point," Talik translated, sounding surprised. "But what you do not realize is that I have already paid your babsk this respect. That is why I agreed to speak with you myself. I would not have done this for another."

"But—"

"Return below," the king said through Talik, her voice growing harder. She seemed to think this was the end. "Tell your babsk that you proceeded far enough to speak with me personally. Doubtless, this is more than he expected. You may leave the island, and return when he is well."

"I . . ." Rysn felt as if a fist were crushing her throat, making it hard for her to speak. She couldn't fail him, not now.

"Give him my best wishes Investiture to—"

Talik smiled in what seemed to be satisfaction. Rysn glanced at her two guards, who bore grim expressions.

Rysn stepped away. She felt numb. Turned away, like a child demanding sweets. She felt a furious blush consume her as she walked past the men and women preparing more bundles of fruit.

Rysn stopped. She looked to her left, out at the endless expanse of blue. She turned back toward the king. "I believe," Rysn said loudly, "that I need to speak with someone with more authority."

Talik turned toward her. “You have spoken to the king. There is nobody with more authority.”

“I beg your pardon,” Rysn said. “But I do think there is.”

One of the ropes shook from having its fruit gift consumed. This is stupid, this is stupid, this is—

Don’t think.

Rysn scrambled to the rope, causing her guards to cry out. She grabbed the length of rope and let herself over the side, climbing down beside the greatshell’s head. The god’s head.

Passions! This was hard in a skirt. The rope bit into the skin of her arms, and it vibrated as the creature below crunched on the fruit upon its end.

Talik’s head appeared above. “What in Kelek’s name are you doing, idiot woman?” he screamed. She found it amusing that he’d learned their curses while studying with them.

Rysn clung to the rope, heart rushing in a mad panic. What was she doing? “Relu-na,” she yelled back at Talik, “approves of boldness!”

“There is a difference between boldness and stupidity!”

Rysn continued to climb down. It was more of a slide. Oh, Craving, Passion of need . . .

“Pull her back up!” Talik ordered. “You soldiers, help.” He gave further orders in Reshi.

Rysn looked up as workers grabbed the rope to haul her back upward. A new face appeared above, however, looking down. The king. She raised a hand, halting them as she studied Rysn.

Rysn continued on down. She didn’t go terribly far, maybe fifty feet or so. Not even down to the creature’s eye. She stopped herself, with effort, her fingers burning. “O great Relu-na,” Rysn said loudly, “your people refuse to

trade with me, and so I come to you to beg. Your people need what I have brought, but I need a trade even more. I cannot afford to return.”

The creature, of course, did not reply. Rysn hung in place beside its shell, which was crusted with lichen and small rockbuds.

“Please,” Rysn said. “Please.”

What am I expecting to happen? Rysn wondered. She didn’t expect the thing to make any sort of reply. But maybe she could persuade those above that she was bold enough to be worthy. It couldn’t hurt, at least.

The rope quivered in her hands, and she made the mistake of glancing down.

Actually, what she was doing could hurt. Very much.

“The king,” Talik said above, “has commanded that you return.” { font-weight : normal; font-style : italic; font-size : 0.listenSo

“Will our negotiation continue?” Rysn asked, glancing up. The king actually looked



“So what kind of spren is it?” Thude asked to the slow Rhythm of Curiosity. He held up the gemstone, peering in sleep my baby dear.”fk almostWhat are you doing at the smoky creature moving about inside.

“Stormspren, my sister says,” Eshonai replied as she leaned against the wall, arms folded.

The strands of Thude’s beard were tied with bits of raw gemstone that shook and twinkled as he rubbed his chin. He held the large cut gemstone up to Bila, who took it and tapped it with her finger.

They were a warpair of Eshonai’s own personal division. They dressed in simple garments that were tailored around the chitinous armor plates on their arms, legs, and chests. Thude also wore a long coat, but he wouldn’t take that to battle.

Eshonai, by contrast, wore her uniform—tight red cloth that stretched over her natural armor—and a cap on her skullplate. She never spoke of how that uniform imprisoned her, felt like manacles that tied her in place.

“A stormspren,” Bila said to the Rhythm of Skepticism as she turned the stone over in her fingers. “Will it help me kill humans? Otherwise, I don’t see

why I should care.”

“This could change the world, Bila,” Eshonai said. “If Venli is right, and she can bond with this spren and come out with anything other than dullform . . . well, at the very least we will have an entirely new form to choose. At the greatest we will have power to control the storms and tap their energy.”

“So she will try this personally?” Thude asked to the Rhythm of Winds, the rhythm that they used to judge when a highstorm was near.

“If the Five give her permission.” They were to discuss it, and make their decision, today.

“That’s great,” Bila said, “but will it help me kill humans?”

Eshonai attuned Mourning. “If stormform is truly one of the ancient powers, Bila, then yes. It will help you kill humans. Many of them.”

“Good enough for me, then,” Bila said. “Why are you so worried?”

“The ancient powers are said to have come from our gods.”

“Who cares? If the gods would help us kill those armies out there, then I’d swear to them right now.”

“Don’t say that, Bila,” Eshonai said to Reprimand. “Never say anything like that.”

The woman quieted, tossing the stone onto the table. She hummed softly to Skepticism. That walked the line of insubordination. Eshonai met Bila’s eyes and found herself softly humming to Resolve.

Thude glanced from Bila to Eshonai. “Food?” he asked.

“Is that your answer to every disagreement?” Eshonai asked, breaking her song.

“It’s hard to argue with your mouth full,” Thude said.

“I’m sure I’ve seen you do just that,” Bila said. “Many times.”

“The arguments end happy, though,” Thude said. “Because everyone is full. So . . . food?”

“Fine,” Bila said, glancing at Eshonai.

The two withdrew. Eshonai sat down at the table, feeling drained. When had she started worrying if her friends were insubordinate? It was this horrid uniform.

She picked up the gemstone, staring into its depths. It was a large one, about a third the size of her fist, se Investiture to—”

She hated trapping them. The right way was to go into the highstorm with the proper attitude, singing the proper song to attract the proper spren. You bonded it in the fury of the raging storm and were reborn with a new body. People had been doing this from the arrival of the first winds.

The listeners had learned that capturing spren was possible from the humans, then had figured out the process on their own. A captive spren made the transformation much more reliable. Before, there had always been an element of chance. You could go into the storm wanting to become a soldier, and come out a mate instead.

This is progress, Eshonai thought, staring at the little smoky spren inside the stone. Progress is learning to control your world. Put up walls to stop the storms, choose when to become a mate. Progress was taking nature and putting a box around it.

Eshonai pocketed the gemstone, and checked the time. Her meeting with the rest of the Five wasn’t scheduled until the third movement of the Rhythm of Peace, and she had a good half a movement until then.

It was time to speak with her mother.

Eshonai stepped out into Narak and walked along the path, nodding to those who saluted. She passed mostly soldiers. So much of their population wore

warform these days. Their small population. Once, there had been hundreds of thousands of listeners scattered across these plains. Now a fraction remained.

Even then, the listeners had been a united people. Oh, there had been divisions, conflicts, even wars among their factions. But they had been a single people—those who had rejected their gods and sought freedom in obscurity.

Bila no longer cared about their origins. There would be others like her, people who ignored the danger of the gods and focused only on the fight with the humans.

Eshonai passed dwellings—ramshackle things constructed of hardened crem over frames of shell, huddled in the leeward shadow of lumps of stone. Most of those were empty now. They'd lost thousands to war over the years.

We do have to do something, she thought, attuning the Rhythm of Peace in the back of her mind. She sought comfort in its calm, soothing beats, soft and blended. Like a caress.

Then she saw the dullforms.

They looked much like what the humans called “parshmen,” though they were a little taller and not nearly as stupid. Still, dullform was a limiting form, without the capacities and advantages of newer forms. There shouldn't have been any here. Had these people bonded the wrong spren by mistake? It happened sometimes.

Eshonai strode up to the group of three, two femalen and one malen. They were hauling rockbuds harvested on one of the nearby plateaus, plants which had been encouraged to grow quickly by use of Stormlight-infused gems.

“What is this?” Eshonai asked. “Did you choose this form in error? Or are you new spies?”

They looked at her with insipid eyes. Eshonai attuned Anxiety. She had once tried dullform—she had wanted to know what their spies would suffer.

Trying to force concepts through her brain had been like trying to think rationally while in a dream.

“Did someone ask you to adopt this form?” Eshonai said, speaking slowly and clearly.

“Nobody asked it,” the malen said to no the Voidbringers?”m“I—”re rhythm at all. His voice sounded dead. “We did it.”

“Why?” Eshonai said. “Why would you do this?”

“Humans won’t kill us when they come,” the malen said, hefting his rockbud and continuing on his way. The others joined him without a word.

Eshonai gaped, the Rhythm of Anxiety strong in her mind. A few fearspren, like long purple worms, dove in and out of the rock nearby, collecting toward her until they crawled up out of the ground around her.

Forms could not be commanded; every person was free to choose for themselves. Transformations could be cajoled and requested, but they could not be forced. Their gods had not allowed this freedom, so the listeners would have it, no matter what. These people could choose dullform if they wished. Eshonai could do nothing about it. Not directly.

She hastened her pace. Her leg still ached from her wound, but was healing quickly. One of the benefits of warform. She could almost ignore the damage at this point.

A city full of empty buildings, and Eshonai’s mother chose a shack on the very edge of the city, almost fully exposed to the storms. Mother worked her shalebark rows outside, humming softly to herself to the Rhythm of Peace. She wore workform; she’d always preferred it. Even after nimbleform had been discovered, Mother had not changed. She had said she didn’t want to encourage people to see one form as more valuable than another, that such stratification could destroy them.

Wise words. The type Eshonai hadn’t heard out of her mother in years.

“Child!” Mother said as Eshonai approached. Solid despite her years, Mother had a neat round face and wore her hairstrands in a braid, tied with a ribbon. Eshonai had brought her that ribbon from a meeting with the Alethi years ago. “Child, have you seen your sister? It is her day of first transformation! We need to prepare her.”

“It is attended to, Mother,” Eshonai said to the Rhythm of Peace, kneeling down beside the woman. “How goes the pruning?”

“I should be finishing soon,” Mother said. “I need to leave before the people who own this house return.”

“You own it, Mother.”

“No, no. It belongs to two others. They were in the house last night, and told me I needed to leave. I’ll just finish with this shalebark before I go.” She got out her file, smoothing one side of a ridge, then painting it with sap to encourage growth in that direction.

Eshonai sat back, attuning Mourning, and Peace left her. Perhaps she should have chosen the Rhythm of the Lost instead. It changed in her head.

She forced it back. No. No, her mother was not dead.

She wasn’t fully alive, either.

“Here, take this,” Mother said to Peace, handing Eshonai a file. At least Mother recognized her today. “Work on that outcropping there. I don’t want it to keep growing downward. We need to send it up, up toward the light.”

“The storms are too strong on this side of the city.”

“Storms? Nonsense. No storms here.” Mother paused. “I wonder where we’ll be taking your sister. She’ll need a storm for her transformation.”

“Don’t worry about { font-weight : normal; font-style : normal; font-size : 1.42em; text-decoration : none; line-height : 1.2em; text-align : center; text-indent : 0em; margin : 0em 0em 1.50em 0em; } p. in a small lythat, Mother,” Eshonai said, forcing herself to speak to Peace. “I will care for it.”

“You are so good, Venli,” Mother said. “So helpful. Staying home, not running off, like your sister. That girl . . . She’s never where she should be.”

“She is now,” Eshonai whispered. “She’s trying to be.”

Mother hummed to herself, continuing working. Once, this woman had one of the best memories in the city. She still did, in a way.

“Mother,” Eshonai said, “I need help. I think something terrible is going to happen. I can’t decide if it is less terrible than what is already happening.”

Mother filed at a section of shalebark, then blew off the dust.

“Our people are crumbling,” Eshonai said. “We’re being weathered away. We moved to Narak and chose a war of attrition. That has meant six years with steady losses. People are giving up.”

“That’s not good,” Mother said.

“But the alternative? Dabbling in things we shouldn’t, things that might bring the eyes of the Unmade upon us.”

“You’re not working,” Mother said, pointing. “Don’t be like your sister.”

Eshonai placed her hands in her lap. This wasn’t helping. Seeing Mother like this . . .

“Mother,” Eshonai said to Supplication, “why did we leave the dark home?”

“Ah, now that’s an old song, Eshonai,” Mother said. “A dark song, not for a child like you. Why, it’s not even your day of first transformation.”

“I’m old enough, Mother. Please?”

Mother blew on her shalebark. Had she forgotten, finally, this last part of what she had been? Eshonai’s heart sank.

“Long are the days since we knew the dark home,” Mother sang softly to one

of the Rhythms of Remembrance. “The Last Legion, that was our name then. Warriors who had been set to fight in the farthest plains, this place that had once been a nation and was now rubble. Dead was the freedom of most people. The forms, unknown, were forced upon us. Forms of power, yes, but also forms of obedience. The gods commanded, and we did obey, always. Always.”

“Except for that day,” Eshonai said along with her mother, in rhythm.

“The day of the storm when the Last Legion fled,” Mother continued in song. “Difficult was the path chosen. Warriors, touched by the gods, our only choice to seek dullness of mind. A crippling that brought freedom.”

Mother’s calm, sonorous song danced with the wind. As frail as she seemed other times, when she sang the old songs, she seemed herself again. A parent who had at times conflicted with Eshonai, but a parent whom Eshonai had always respected.

“Daring was the challenge made,” Mother sang, “when the Last Legion abandoned thought and power in exchange for freedom. They risked forgetting all. And so songs they composed, a hundred stories to tell, to remember. I tell them to you, and you will tell them to your children, until the forms are again discovered.”

From there, Mother launched into one of the early songs, about how the people would make their home in the ruins of an abandoned kingdom. How they would shut the doorhavlspread out, act as simple tribes and refugees. It was their plan to remain hidden, or at least ignored.

The songs left out so much. The Last Legion hadn’t known how to transform into anything other than dullform and mateform, at least not without the help of the gods. How had they known the other forms were possible? Had these facts originally been recorded in the songs, and then lost over the years as words changed here and there?

Eshonai listened, and though her mother’s voice did help her attune Peace again, she found herself deeply troubled anyway. She had come here for answers. Once, that would have worked.

No longer.

Eshonai stood to leave her mother singing.

“I found some of your things,” Mother said, breaking the song, “when cleaning today. You should take them. They clutter the home, and I will be moving out soon.”

Eshonai hummed Mourning to herself, but went to see just what her mother had “discovered.” Another pile of rocks, in which she saw child’s playthings? Strips of cloth she imagined were clothing?

Eshonai found a small sack in front of the building. She opened it to find paper.

Paper made from local plants, not human paper. Rough paper, with varied color, made after the old listener way. Textured and full, not neat and sterile. The ink on it was beginning to fade, but Eshonai recognized the drawings.

My maps, she thought. From those early days.

Without meaning to, she attuned Remembrance. Days spent hiking across the wilderness of what the humans called Natanatan, passing through forests and jungles, drawing her own maps and expanding the world. She’d started alone, but her discoveries had excited an entire people. Soon, though still in her teenage years, she’d been leading entire expeditions to find new rivers, new ruins, new spren, new plants.

And humans. In a way, this was all her fault.

Her mother started singing again.

Looking through her old maps, Eshonai found a powerful longing within her. Once, she’d seen the world as something fresh and exciting. New, like a blossoming forest after a storm. She was dying slowly, as surely as her people were.

She packed up the maps and left her mother’s house, walking toward the center of town. Her mother’s song, still beautiful, echoed behind her. Eshonai

attuned Peace. That let her know that she was nearly late for the meeting with the rest of the Five.

She did not hasten her pace. She let the steady, sweeping beats of the Rhythm of Peace carry her forward. Unless you concentrated on attuning a certain rhythm, your body would naturally choose the one that fit your mood. Therefore, it was always a conscious decision to listen to a rhythm that did not match how you felt. She did this now with Peace.

The listeners had made a decision centuries ago, a decision that set them back to primitive levels. Choosing to murder Gavilar Kholin had been an act to affirm that decision of their ancestors. Eshonai had not then been one of their leaders, but they had listened to her counsel and given her the right to vote among them.

The choice, horrible though it seemed, had been one of courage. They'd hoped that a long war would bore the Alethi.

Eshonai and the others had underestimated Alethi greed. The gemhearts had changed everything.

In the center of town, near the pool, was a tall tower that remained proudly erect . . . Almighty above—"I—"ret in defiance of centuries' worth of storms. Once, there had been steps within, but cream leaking in windows had filled the building up with rock. So workers had carved steps running around its outside.

Eshonai started up the steps, holding to the chain for safety. It was a long but familiar climb. Though her leg ached, warform had great endurance—though it required more food than any other form to keep it strong. She made it to the top with ease.

She found the other members of the Five waiting for her, one member wearing each known form. Eshonai for warform, Davim for workform, Abronai for mateform, Chivi for nimbleform, and the quiet Zuln for dullform. Venli waited as well, with her once-mate, though he was flushed from the difficult climb. Nimbleform, though good for many delicate activities, did not have great endurance.

Eshonai stepped up onto the flat top of the once-tower, wind blowing against her from the east. There were no chairs up here, and the Five sat on the bare rock itself.

Davim hummed to Annoyance. With the rhythms in one's head, it was difficult to be late by accident. They rightly suspected that Eshonai had dallied.

She sat on the rock and took the spren-filled gemstone from her pocket, setting it on the ground in front of her. The violet stone glowed with Stormlight.

"I am worried about this test," Eshonai said. "I do not think we should allow it to proceed."

"What?" Venli said to Anxiety. "Sister, don't be ridiculous. Our people need this."

Davim leaned forward, arms on his knees. He was broad faced, his workform skin marbled mostly of black with tiny swirls of red here and there. "If this works, it will be an amazing advance. The first of the forms of ancient power, rediscovered."

"Those forms are tied to the gods," Eshonai said. "What if, in choosing this form, we invite them to return?"

Venli hummed Irritation. "In the old day, all forms came from the gods. We have found that nimbleform does not harm us. Why would stormform?"

"It is different," Eshonai said. "Sing the song; hum it to yourself. 'Its coming brings the gods their night.' The ancient powers are dangerous."

"Men have them," Abronai said. He wore mateform, lush and plump, though he controlled its passions. Eshonai had never envied him the position; she knew, from private conversations, that he would have preferred to have another form. Unfortunately, others who held mateform either did so transiently—or did not possess the proper solemnity to join the Five.

“You yourself brought us the report, Eshonai,” Abronai continued. “You saw a warrior among the Alethi using ancient powers, and many others confirmed it to us. Surgebinding and the rope

s have returned to men. The spren again betray us.”

“If Surgebindings are back,” Davim said to Consideration, “then it might indicate that the gods are returning anyway. If so, we’d best be prepared to deal with them. Forms of power will help with that.”

“We don’t know they will come,” Eshonai said to01C;We don’t know any of this. Who knows if men even h Resolve.



PART

TWO

Winds' Approach

SHALLAN • KALADIN • ADOLIN • SADEAS

the Voidbringers?”m“I—” He could



Warform is worn for battle and reign,

Claimed by the gods, given to kill.

Unknown, unseen, but vital to gain.

It comes to those with the will.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 15th stanza

The wagon rattled and shook its way across the stone ground, Shallan perched on the hard seat next to Bluth, one of the slab-faced mercenaries Tvlakv employed. He guided the chull pulling the wagon, and didn't speak much, though when he thought she wasn't looking, he would inspect her with eyes like beads of dark glass.

It was chilly. She wished the weather would turn, and spring—or even summer—would come for a time. That wasn't likely in a place notorious for its permanent chill. Having improvised a blanket from the lining of Jasnah's trunk, Shallan draped it over her knees and down to her feet, as much to

obscure how tattered her skirt had become as against the cold.

She tried to distract herself by studying the surroundings; the flora out here in the southern Frostlands was completely unfamiliar to her. If there was grass, it grew in patches along the leeward sides of rocks, with short spiky blades rather than long, waving ones. The rockbuds never grew larger than a fist, and they didn't open all the way, even when she'd tried pouring water on one. Their vines were lazy and slow, as if numbed by the cold. There were also spindly little shrubs that grew in cracks and along hillsides. Their brittle branches scraped the sides of the wagon, their tiny green leaves the size of raindrops folding and pulling into the stalks.

The shrubs grew prolifically, spreading wherever they could find purchase. As the wagon rolled past a particularly tall clump, Shallan reached out and snapped off a branch. It was tubular, with an open center, and felt rough like sand.

"These are too fragile for highstorms," Shallan said, holding it up. "How does this plant survive?"

Bluth grunted.

"It is common, Bluth," Shallan said, "to engage one's traveling companion in mutually diverting dialogue."

"I'd do that," he said darkly, "if I knew what in Damnation half those words meant."

Shallan started. She honestly hadn't expected a response. "Then we are even," she said, "as you use plenty of words I don't know. Admittedly, I think most of them are curses. . . ."

She'd meant it lightheartedly, but his expression only darkened further. "You think I'm as dumb as that stick."

Stop insulting my stick. The words came to her mind, and almost to her lips, unbidden. She should have been better at holding her tongue, considering her upbringing. But freedom had arrived for his men⁴—without the fear that her

father was looming behind every closed door—had severely diminished her self-control.

She suppressed the taunt this time. “Stupidity is a function of one’s surroundings,” she said instead.

“You’re saying I’m dumb because I was raised that way?”

“No. I’m saying that everyone is stupid in some situations. After my ship was lost, I found myself ashore but unable to make a fire to warm myself. Would you say that I’m stupid?”

He shot her a glance, but did not speak. Perhaps to a darkeyes, that question sounded like a trap.

“Well I am,” Shallan said. “In many areas, I’m stupid. Perhaps when it comes to large words, you’re stupid. That’s why we need both scholars and caravan workers, guardsman Bluth. Our stupidities complement one another.”

“I can see why we need fellows who know how to light fires,” Bluth said. “But I don’t see why we need people to use fancy words.”

“Shhhh,” Shallan said. “Don’t say that so loudly. If the lighteyes hear, they might stop wasting their time making up new words, and instead start interfering with the business of honest men.”

He glanced at her again. Not even a glimmer of humor in the eyes beneath that thick brow. Shallan sighed, but turned her attention back to the plants. How did they survive highstorms? She should get out her sketchpad and—

No.

She blanked her mind and let it go. A short time later, Tvlakv called the midday halt. Shallan’s wagon slowed, and one of the others pulled up beside it.

Tag drove this one, with the two parshmen sitting in the cage behind, working quietly at weaving hats from reeds they’d gathered in the morning. People often ordered parshmen to do such menial work—something to make

sure all of their time was spent earning money for those who owned them. Tvlakv would sell the hats for a few chips at his destination.

They kept working as the wagon stopped. They would have to be told to do something else, and had to be trained specifically for each job they did. But once they were trained, they would work without complaint.

Shallan had difficulty not seeing their quiet obedience as something pernicious. She shook her head, then held out her hand to Bluth, who helped her from the wagon without further prodding. On the ground, she rested her hand on the side of the vehicle and breathed in sharply through her teeth. Stormfather, what had she done to her feet? Painspren wiggled out of the wall beside her, little orange bits of sinew—like hands with the flesh removed.

“Brightness?” Tvlakv said, waddling her direction. “I’m afraid we haven’t much to offer you in the way of meals. We are poor for merchants, you see, and cannot afford delicacies.”

“Whatever you have will suffice,” Shallan said, trying to keep the pain from showing in her face, though the spren had already given her away. “Please have one of your men get down my trunk.”

Tvlakv did so without complaint, though he watched hungrily as Bluth lowered it to the ground. It seemed a particularly bad idea to let him see what was inside; the less information he had, the better off she would be.

“These cages,” Shallan said, looking over the back of her wagon, “from those thank you very much.” m “I—” reclasps at top, it looks like the wooden sides can be affixed over the bars.”

“Yes, Brightness,” Tvlakv said. “For highstorms, you see.”

“You only have enough slaves to fill one of the three wagons,” Shallan said. “And the parshmen ride in another. This one is empty, and will make an excellent traveling wagon for me. Put the sides on.”

“Brightness?” he said with surprise. “You want to be put into the cage?”

“Why not?” Shallan asked, meeting his eyes. “Certainly I’m safe in your custody, tradesman Tvlakv.”

“Er . . . yes . . .”

“You and your men must be well acquainted with rough travel,” Shallan said calmly, “but I am not. Sitting day in and out in the sun on a hard bench will not suit me. A proper carriage, however, would be a welcome amelioration of this wilderness journey.”

“Carriage?” Tvlakv said. “It’s a slave wagon!”

“Mere words, tradesman Tvlakv,” Shallan said. “If you please?”

He sighed, but gave the order, and the men pulled the sides out from beneath the wagon and hooked them up on the outside. They left off the back one, where the cage door was. The result did not look especially comfortable, but it would offer some privacy. Shallan had Bluth haul her chest up and inside, to Tvlakv’s dismay. Then, she climbed in and pulled the cage door shut. She held her hand out through the bars toward Tvlakv.

“Brightness?”

“The key,” she said.

“Oh.” He pulled it out of a pocket, regarding it for a moment—too long a moment—before handing it to her.

“Thank you,” she replied. “You may send Bluth with my meal when it is ready, but I shall require a bucket of clean water immediately. You have been most accommodating. I will not forget your service.”

“Er . . . Thank you.” It almost sounded like a question, and as he walked away, he seemed confused. Good.

She waited for Bluth to bring the water, then crawled—to stay off her feet—through the enclosed wagon. It stank of dirt and sweat, and she grew nauseated thinking of the slaves who had been held here. She would ask Bluth to have the parshmen scrub it later.

She stopped before Jasnah's trunk, then knelt and gingerly raised the lid. Light spilled out from the infused spheres inside. Pattern waited there as well—she had instructed him not to be seen—his shape raising the cover of a book.

Shallan had survived, so far. She certainly wasn't safe, but at least she wasn't going to freeze or starve immediately. That meant she finally had to face greater questions and problems. She rested her hand on the books, ignoring her throbbing feet for the moment. "These have to reach the Shattered Plains."

Pattern vibrated with a confused sound—a questioning pitch that implied curiosity.

"Someone needs to continue Jasnah's work," Shallan said. "Urithiru must be found, and the Alethi must be convinced that the return of the Voidbringers is imminent." She shivered, thinking of the marbled parshmen working just one wagon over.

"You thank you very much." "I—" "re . . . mmm . . . continue?" Pattern asked.

"Yes." She'd made that decision the moment she'd insisted that Tvlakv head for the Shattered Plains. "That night before the sinking, when I saw Jasnah with her guard down . . . I know what I must do."

Pattern hummed, again sounding confused.

"It's hard to explain," Shallan said. "It's a human thing."

"Excellent," Pattern said, eager.

She raised an eyebrow toward him. He'd quickly come a long way from spending hours spinning in the center of a room or climbing up and down walls.

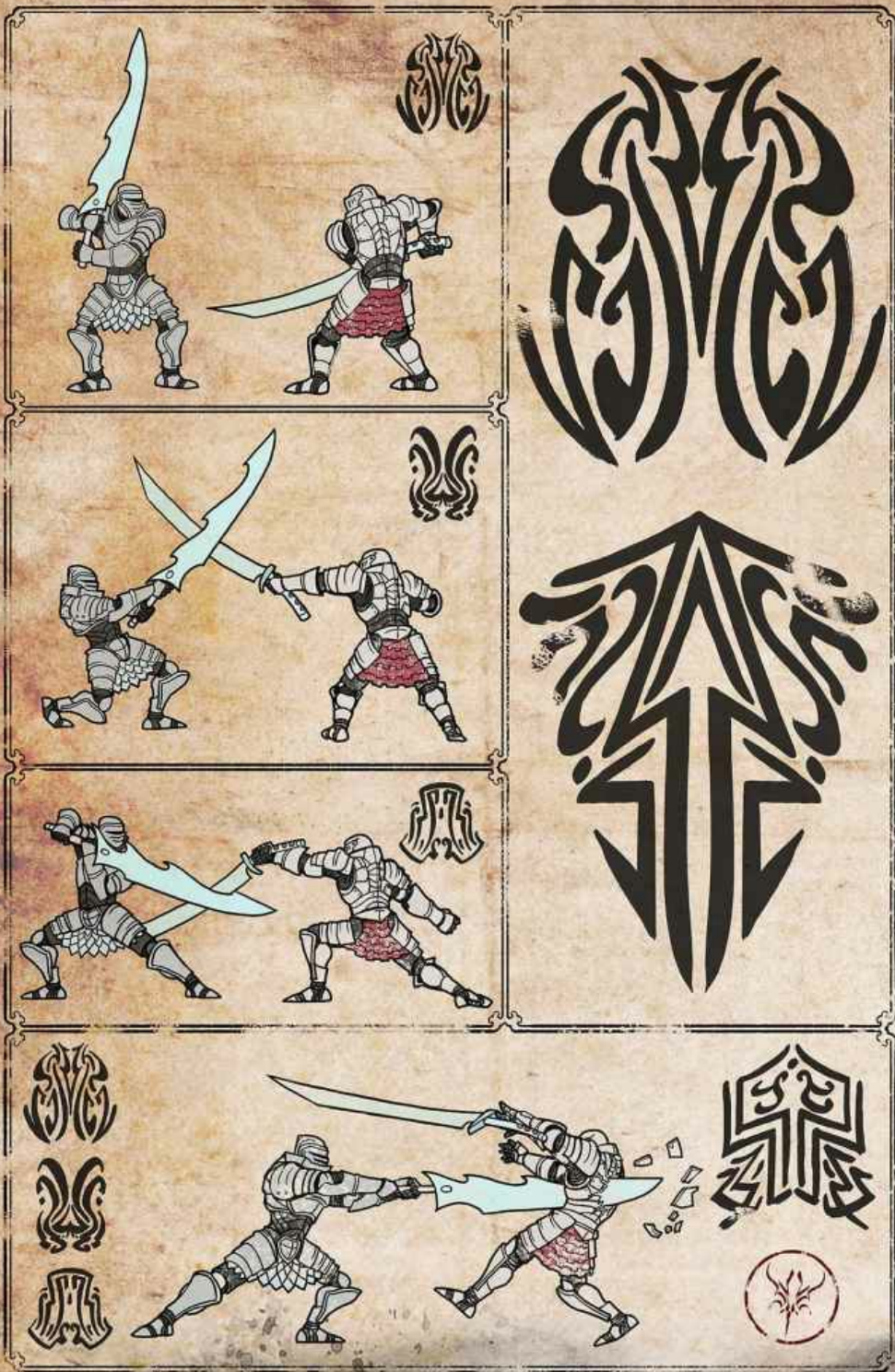
Shallan took out some spheres for better light, then removed one of the cloths Jasnah had wrapped around her books. It was immaculately clean. Shallan

dipped the cloth into the bucket of water and began to wash her feet.

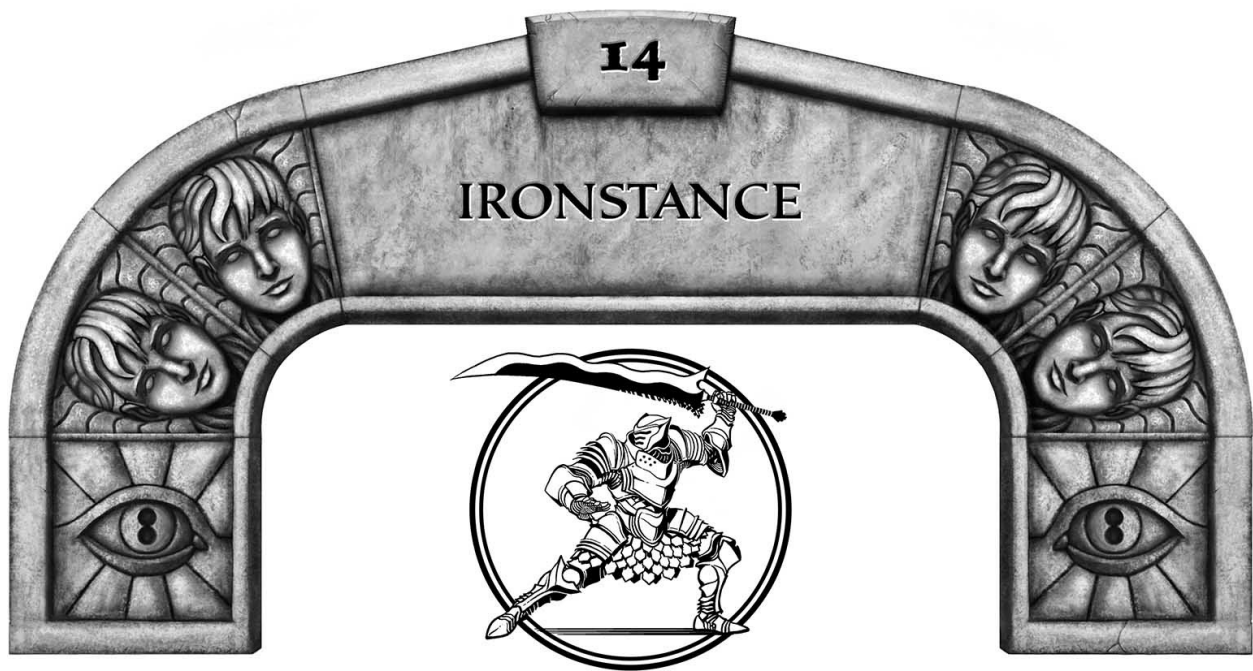
“Before I saw Jasnah’s expression that night,” she explained, “before I talked to her through her fatigue and got a sense of just how worried she was, I had fallen into a trap. The trap of a scholar. Despite my initial horror at what Jasnah had described about the parshmen, I had come to see it all as an intellectual puzzle. Jasnah was so outwardly dispassionate that I assumed she did the same.”

Shallan winced as she dug a bit of rock from a crack in her foot. More painspren wiggled out of the floor of the wagon. She wouldn’t be walking great distances anytime soon, but at least she didn’t see any rotspren yet. She had better find some antiseptic.

“Our danger isn’t just theoretical, Pattern. It is real and it is terrible.”. in a small l



Excerpt from a longer scroll. The bottom half was eaten by an axehound as I fled the place where I'd stolen this.



Mateform meek, for love to share,

Given to life, it brings us joy.

To find this form, one must care.

True empathy one must employ.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 5th stanza

“It’s been a while,” Adolin said, kneeling and holding his Shardblade before him, point sunken a few inches into the stone ground. He was alone. Just him and the sword in one of the new preparation rooms, built alongside the dueling arena.

“I remember when I won you,” Adolin whispered, looking at his reflection in the blade. “Nobody took me seriously then, either. The fop with the nice clothing. Tinalar thought to duel me just to embarrass me; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1., speak stood them?” my father. Instead I got his Blade.” If he’d lost, he would have had to give Tinalar his Plate, which he’d inherited from his mother’s side of the family.

Adolin had never named his Shardblade. Some did, some didn't. He'd never thought it appropriate—not because he didn't think the Blade deserved a name, but because he figured he didn't know the right one. This weapon had belonged to one of the Knights Radiant, long ago. That man had named the weapon, undoubtedly. To call it something else seemed presumptuous. Adolin had felt that way even before he'd started thinking of the Radiants in a good light, as his father did.

This Blade would continue after Adolin died. He didn't own it. He was borrowing it for a time.

Its surface was austere smooth, long, sinuous like an eel, with ridges at the back like growing crystals. Shaped like a larger version of a standard longsword, it bore some resemblance to the enormous, two-handed broadswords he'd seen Horneaters wield.

“A real duel,” Adolin whispered to the Blade. “For real stakes. Finally. No more tiptoeing around it, no more limiting myself.”

The Shardblade didn't respond, but Adolin imagined that it listened to him. You couldn't use a weapon like this, a weapon that seemed like an extension of the soul itself, and not feel at times that it was alive.

“I speak so confidently to everyone else,” Adolin said, “since I know they rely on me. But if I lose today, that's it. No more duels, and a severe knot in Father's grand plan.”

He could hear people outside. Stomping feet, a buzz of chatter. Scraping on the stone. They'd come. Come to see Adolin win or be humiliated.

“This might be our last fight together,” Adolin said softly. “I appreciate what you've done for me. I know you'd do it for anyone who held you, but I still appreciate it. I . . . I want you to know: I believe in Father. I believe he's right, that the things he sees are real. That the world needs a united Alethkar. Fights like this one are my way to make it happen.”

Adolin and his father weren't politicians. They were soldiers—Dalinar by choice, Adolin more by circumstance. They wouldn't be able to just talk their

way into a unified kingdom. They'd have to fight their way into one.

Adolin stood up, patting his pocket, then dismissing his Blade to mist and crossing the small chamber. The stone walls of the narrow hallway he entered were etched with reliefs depicting the ten basic stances of swordsmanship. Those had been carved elsewhere, then placed here when this room was built—a recent addition, to replace the tents that dueling preparation had once happened in.

Windstance, Stonestance, Flamestance . . . There was a relief, with depicted stance, for each of the Ten Essences. Adolin counted them off to himself as he passed. This small tunnel had been cut into the stone of the arena itself, and ended in a small room cut into the rock. The bright sunlight of the dueling grounds glared around the edges of the final pair of doors between him and his opponent.

With a proper preparation room for meditation, then this staging room to put on armor or retreat between bouts, the dueling arena at the warcamps was transforming into one as proper as those back in Alethkar. A welcome addition.

Adolin stepped into the staging room, where his brother and aunt were waiting. Stormfather, his hands were sweating. He hadn't felt this nervous when rid { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } Jasnahmadly into battle, when his life was actually in danger.

Aunt Navani had just finished a glyphward. She stepped away from the pedestal, setting aside her brushpen, and held up the ward for him to see. It was painted in bright red on a white cloth.

“Victory?” Adolin guessed.

Navani lowered it, raising an eyebrow at him.

“What?” Adolin said as his armorers entered, carrying the pieces of his Shardplate.

“It says ‘safety and glory,’” Navani said. “It wouldn’t kill you to learn some glyphs, Adolin.”

He shrugged. “Never seemed that important.”

“Yes, well,” Navani said, reverently folding the prayer and setting it in the brazier to burn. “Hopefully, you will eventually have a wife to do this for you. Both the reading of glyphs and the making of them.”

Adolin bowed his head, as was proper while the prayer burned. Pailiah knew, this wasn’t the time to offend the Almighty. Once it was done, however, he glanced at Navani. “And what of the news of the ship?”

They had expected word from Jasnah when she reached the Shallow Crypts, but none had been forthcoming. Navani had checked in with the harbormaster’s office in that distant city. They said the Wind’s Pleasure had not yet arrived. That put it a week overdue.

Navani waved a dismissive hand. “Jasnah was on that ship.”

“I know, Aunt,” Adolin said, shuffling uncomfortably. What had happened? Had the ship been caught in a highstorm? What of this woman Adolin might be marrying, if Jasnah had her way?

“If the ship is delayed, it’s because Jasnah is up to something,” Navani said. “Watch. We’ll get a communication from her in a few weeks, demanding some task or piece of information. I’ll have to pry from her why she vanished. Battah send that girl some sense to go with her intelligence.”

Adolin didn’t press the issue. Navani knew Jasnah better than anyone else. But . . . he was certainly concerned for Jasnah, and felt a sudden worry that he might not get to meet the girl, Shallan, when expected. Of course, the causal betrothal wasn’t likely to work out—but a piece of him wished that it would. Letting someone else choose for him had a strange appeal, considering how loudly Danlan had cursed at him when he’d broken off that particular relationship.

Danlan was still one of his father’s scribes, so he saw her on occasion. More

glares. But storm it, that one was not his fault. The things she'd said to her friends . . .

An armorer set out his boots, and Adolin stepped into them, feeling them click into place. The armorers quickly affixed the greaves, then moved upward, covering him in too-light metal. Soon, all that remained were the gauntlets and the helm. He knelt down, placing his hands into the gauntlets at his side, fingers in their positions. In the strange manner of Shardplate, the armor constricted on its own, like a skyeel curling around its rat, pulling to comfortable tightness around his wrists.

He turned and reached for his helm from the last armorer. It was Renarin.

“You ate chicken?” Renarin asked as Adolin took the helm.

“For breakfast.”

“And you talked to the sword?” aid="11C3listenso

“Had an entire conversation.”

“Mother's chain in your pocket?”

“Checked three times.”

Navani folded her arms. “You still hold to those foolish superstitions?”

Both brothers looked at her sharply.

“They're not superstitions,” Adolin said at the same time Renarin said, “It's just good luck, Aunt.”

She rolled her eyes.

“I haven't done a formal duel in a long time,” Adolin said, pulling on the helm, faceplate open. “I don't want anything to go wrong.”

“Foolishness,” Navani repeated. “Trust in the Almighty and the Heralds, not whether or not you had the right meal before you duel. Storms. Next thing I

know, you'll be believing in the Passions."

Adolin shared a look with Renarin. His little traditions probably didn't help him win, but, well, why risk it? Every duelist had his own quirks. His hadn't let him down yet.

"Our guards aren't happy about this," Renarin said softly. "They keep talking about how hard it's going to be to protect you when someone else is swinging a Shardblade at you."

Adolin slammed down his faceplate. It misted at the sides, locking into place, becoming translucent and giving him a full view of the room. Adolin grinned, knowing full well Renarin couldn't see the expression. "I'm so sad to be denying them the chance to babysit me."

"Why do you enjoy tormenting them?"

"I don't like minders."

"You've had guards before."

"On the battlefield," Adolin said. It felt different to be followed about everywhere he went.

"There's more. Don't lie to me, Brother. I know you too well."

Adolin inspected his brother, whose eyes were so earnest behind his spectacles. The boy was too solemn all the time.

"I don't like their captain," Adolin admitted.

"Why? He saved Father's life."

"He just bothers me." Adolin shrugged. "There's something about him that is off, Renarin. That makes me suspicious."

"I think you don't like that he ordered you around, on the battlefield."

"I barely even remember that," Adolin said lightly, stepping toward the door

out.

“Well, all right then. Off with you. And Brother?”

“Yes?”

“Try not to lose.”

Adolin pushed open the doors and stepped out onto the sand. He’d been in this arena before, using the argument that though the Alethi Codes of War proscribed duels between officers, he still needed to maintain his skills.

To placate his father, Adolin had stayed away from important bouts—bouts for championships or for Shards. He hadn’t dared risk his Blade and Plate. Now everything was different.

The air was still chill with winter, but the sun was bright overhead. His breath sounded against the plate of his helm, and his feet crunched in sand. He checked to see that his father was watching. He was. As was the king.

Sadeas hadn’t come. Just as well. That might have distracted Adolin with memories of one of the last times that Sadeas and Dalinar had been amiable, sitting together up on those stone steps, watching Adolin duel. Had Sadeas been planning a betrayal even then, while laughing with his father and chatting like an old friend?

Focus. His foe today wasn’t Sadeas, though someday . . . Someday soon he’d get that man in the arena. It was the goal of everything he was doing here.

For now, he’d have to settle for Salinor, one of Thanadal’s Shardbearers. The man had only the Blade, though he’d been able to borrow a set of the King’s Plate for a bout with a full Shardbearer.

Salinor stood on the other side of the arena, wearing the unornamented slate-grey Plate and waiting for the highjudge—Brightlady Istow—to signal the start of the bout. This fight was, in a way, an insult to Adolin. In order to get Salinor to agree to the duel, Adolin had been forced to bet both his Plate and

his Blade against just Salinor's Blade. As if Adolin weren't worthy, and had to offer more potential spoils to justify bothering Salinor.

Aand often spok



Workform worn for strength and care.

Whispering spren breathe at your ear.

Seek first this form, its mysteries to bear.

Found here is freedom from fear.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 19th stanza

“Tradesman Tvlakv,” Shallan said, “I believe that you are wearing a different pair of shoes today than you were on the first day of our trip.”

Tvlakv stopped on his way to the evening fire, but adapted smoothly to her challenge. He turned toward her with a smile, shaking his head. “I fear you must be mistaken, Brightness! Just after leaving on this trip, I lost one of my clothing trunks to a storm. I have but this one pair of shoes to my name.”

It was a flat-out lie. However, after six days of traveling together, she had discovered that Tvlakv didn’t much mind being caught in a lie.

Shallan perched on her wagon’s front seat that expressionfk, as if What are

you doing in the dim light, feet bandaged, staring Tvlakv down. She'd spent most of the day milking knobweed stems for their sap, then rubbing it on her feet to keep away the rotspren. She felt extremely satisfied to have noticed the plants—it showed that though she lacked much practical knowledge, some of her studies could be useful in the wild.

Did she confront him about his lie? What would it accomplish? He didn't seem to get embarrassed by such things. He watched her in the darkness, eyes beady, shadowed.

“Well,” Shallan said to him, “that is unfortunate. Perhaps in our travels we will meet another merchant group with whom I can trade for proper footwear.”

“I will be certain to look for such an opportunity, Brightness.” Tvlakv gave her a bow and a fake smile, then continued toward the evening cook fire, which was burning fitfully—they were out of wood, and the parshmen had gone out into the evening to search for more.

“Lies,” Pattern said softly, his shape nearly invisible on the seat beside her.

“He knows if I can't walk, I'm more dependent upon him.”

Tvlakv settled down beside the struggling fire. Nearby, the chulls—unhooked from their wagons—lumbered around, crunching tiny rockbuds beneath their gargantuan feet. They never strayed far.

Tvlakv started whispering quietly with Tag, the mercenary. He kept a smile on his face, but she didn't trust those dark eyes of his, glittering in the firelight.

“Go see what he's saying,” Shallan told Pattern.

“See . . . ?”

“Listen to his words, then come back and repeat them to me. Don't get too close to the light.”

Pattern moved down the side of the wagon. Shallan leaned back against the

hard seat, then took a small mirror she'd found in Jasnah's trunk out of her safe pouch along with a single sapphire sphere for light. Just a mark, nothing too bright, and it was failing at that. When is that next highstorm due? Tomorrow?

It was nearing the start of a new year—and that meant the Weeping was coming, though not for a number of weeks. It was a Light Year, wasn't it? Well, she could endure highstorms out here. She'd already been forced to suffer that indignity once, locked within her wagon.

In the mirror, she could see that she looked awful. Red eyes with bags under them, her hair a frazzled mess, her dress frayed and soiled. She looked like a beggar who had found a once-nice dress in a trash heap.

It didn't bother her overly much. Was she worried about looking pretty for slavers? Hardly. However, Jasnah hadn't cared what people thought of her, yet had always kept her appearance immaculate. Not that Jasnah had acted alluringly—never for a moment. In fact, she'd disparaged such behavior in no uncertain terms. Using a fetching face to make men do as you wish is no different from a man using muscle to force a woman to his will, she'd said. Both are base, and both will fail a person as they age.

No, Jasnah had not approved of seduction as a tool. However, people responded differently to those who looked in control of themselves.

But what can I do? Shallan thought. I have no makeup; I don't even have shoes to wear. the Hierocracyf abilitiesly

“... she could be someone important,” Tvlakv's voice said abruptly nearby. Shallan jumped, then looked to the side, where Pattern now rested on the seat beside her. The voice came from there.

“She is trouble,” Tag's voice said. Pattern's vibrations produced a perfect imitation. “I still think we should just leave her and go.”

“It is fortunate for us,” Tvlakv's voice said, “that the decision is not yours. You worry about making dinner. I shall worry about our little lighthearted companion. Someone is missing her, someone rich. If we can sell her back to

them, Tag, it could be what finally digs us out.”

Pattern imitated the sounds of a crackling fire for a short time, then fell silent.

The precise reproduction of the conversation was marvelous. This, Shallan thought, could be very useful.

Unfortunately, something needed to be done about Tvlakv. She couldn't have him regarding her as something to be sold back to those missing her—that was uncomfortably close to viewing her as a slave. If she let him continue in such a mindset, she'd spend the entire trip worrying about him and his thugs.

So what would Jasnah do, in this situation?

Gritting her teeth, Shallan slipped down off the wagon, stepping gingerly on her wounded feet. She could walk, barely. She waited for the painspren to retreat, then—covering up her agony—she approached the meager fire and sat down. “Tag, you are excused.”

He looked to Tvlakv, who nodded. Tag retreated to check on the parshmen. Bluth had gone to scout the area, as he often did at night, checking for signs of others passing this way.

“It is time to discuss your payment,” Shallan said.

“Service to one so illustrious is payment in itself, of course.”

“Of course,” she said, meeting his eyes. Don't back down. You can do this. “But a merchant must make a living. I am not blind, Tvlakv. Your men do not agree with your decision to help me. They think it a waste.”

Tvlakv glanced at Tag, looking unsettled. Hopefully, he wondered what else she had guessed.

“Upon arriving at the Shattered Plains,” Shallan said, “I will acquire a grand fortune. I do not have it yet.”

“That is . . . unfortunate.”

“Not in the slightest,” Shallan said. “It is an opportunity, tradesman Tvlakv. The fortune I will acquire is the result of a betrothal. If I arrive safely, those who rescued me—saved me from before his o



Nimbleform has a delicate touch.

Gave the gods this form to many,

Tho' once defied, by the gods they were crushed.

This form craves precision and plenty.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 27th stanza

“You know,” Moash said from Kaladin’s side, “I always thought this place would be . . .”

“Bigger?” Drehy offered in his lightly accented voice.

“Better,” Moash said, looking around the practice grounds. “It looks just like where darkeyed soldiers practice.”

These sparring grounds were reserved for Dalinar’s lighteyes. In the center, the large open courtyard was filled with a thick layer of sand. A raised wooden walkway ran around the perimeter, stretching between the sand and the narrow surrounding building, which was just one room deep. That narrow

building wrapped around the courtyard except at the front, which had a wall with an archway for the entrance, and had a wide roof that extended, giving shade to the wooden walkway. Lighteyed officers stood chatting in the shade or watching men sparring in the sunlight of the yard, and ardents moved this way and that, delivering weapons or drinks.

It was a common layout for training grounds. Kaladin had been in several buildings like this. Mostly back when he'd first been training in Amaram's army.

Kaladin set his jaw, resting his fingers on the archway leading into the training grounds. It had been seven days since Amaram's arrival in the warcamps. Seven days of dealing with the fact that Amaram and Dalinar were friends.

He'd decided to be storming happy about Amaram's arrival. After all, it meant that Kaladin would be able to find a chance to finally stick a spear in that man.

No, he thought, entering the training grounds, not a spear. A knife. I want to be up close to him, face-to-face, so I can watch him panic as he dies. I want to feel that knife going in.

Kaladin waved to his men and entered through the archway, forcing himself to focus on his surroundings instead of Amaram. That archway was good stone, quarried nearby, built into a structure with the traditional eastward reinforcement. Judging by the modest crem deposits, these walls hadn't been here long. It was another sign that Dalinar was starting to think of the warcamps as permanent—he was taking down simple, temporary buildings and replacing them with sturdy structures.

"I don't know what you expected," Drehy said to Moash as he inspected the grounds. "How would you make sparring grounds different for the lighteyes? Use diamond dust instead of sand?"em; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1., speak across the What are you doing

"Ouch," Kaladin said.

“I don’t know how,” Moash said. “It’s just that they make such a big deal of it. No darkeyes on the ‘special’ sparring grounds. I don’t see what makes them special.”

“That’s because you don’t think like lighteyes,” Kaladin said. “This place is special for one simple reason.”

“Why’s that?” Moash asked.

“Because we’re not here,” Kaladin said, leading the way in. “Not normally, at least.”

He had with him Drehy and Moash, along with five other men, a mix of Bridge Four members and a few survivors of the old Cobalt Guard. Dalinar had assigned those to Kaladin, and to Kaladin’s surprise and pleasure, they had accepted him as their leader without a word of complaint. To a man, he’d been impressed with them. The old Guard had deserved its reputation.

A few, all darkeyed, had started eating with Bridge Four. They’d asked for Bridge Four patches, and Kaladin had gotten them some—but ordered them to put their Cobalt Guard patches on the other shoulder, and continue to wear them as a mark of pride.

Spear in hand, Kaladin led his team toward a group of ardents who bustled in their direction. The ardents wore Vorin religious garb—loose trousers and tunics, tied at the waist with simple ropes. Pauper’s clothing. They were slaves, and then they also weren’t. Kaladin had never given much thought to them. His mother would probably lament how little Kaladin cared for religious observance. The way Kaladin figured it, the Almighty didn’t show much concern for him, so why care back?

“This is the lighteyes’ training ground,” said the lead ardent sternly. She was a willowy woman, though you weren’t supposed to think of ardents as male or female. She had her head shaven, like all ardents. Her male companions wore square beards with clean upper lips.

“Captain Kaladin, Bridge Four,” Kaladin said, scanning the practice grounds and shouldering his spear. It would be very easy for an accident to happen

here, during sparring. He'd have to watch for that. "Here to guard the Kholin boys while they practice today."

"Captain?" one of the ardents scoffed. "You—"

Another ardent silenced him by whispering something. News about Kaladin had traveled quickly through camp, but ardents could be an isolated lot, sometimes.

"Drehy," Kaladin said, pointing. "See those rockbuds growing up on the top of the wall there?"

"Yup."

"They're cultivated. That means there's a way up."

"Of course there is," the lead ardent said. "The stairwell is at the northwestern corner. I have the key."

"Good, you can let him in," Kaladin said. "Drehy, keep an eye on things from up there."

"On it," Drehy said, trotting in the direction of the stairwell.

"And what kinds of danger do you expect them to be in here?" the ardent said, folding her arms.

"I see lots of weapons," Kaladin said, "lots of people moving in and out, and . . . are those Shardblades I see? I wonder help." If we ly what could possibly go wrong." He gave her a pointed look. The woman sighed, then handed her key to an assistant, who jogged off after Drehy.

Kaladin pointed to positions for his other men to watch from. They moved off, leaving only him and Moash. The lean man had turned immediately at the mention of Shardblades, and now watched them hungrily. A pair of lighteyed men bearing them had moved out into the center of the sands. One Blade was long and thin, with a large crossguard, while the other was wide and enormous, with wicked spikes—slightly flamelike—jutting out of both sides along the lower third. Both weapons had protective strips on the edges,

like a partial sheath.

“Huh,” Moash said, “I don’t recognize either of those men. I thought I knew all the Shardbearers in camp.”

“They aren’t Shardbearers,” the ardent said. “They’re using the King’s Blades.”

“Elhokar lets people use his Shardblade?” Kaladin asked.

“It is a grand tradition,” the ardent said, seeming annoyed that she had to explain. “The highprinces used to do it in their own pryncedoms, before the reunification, and now it is the king’s obligation and honor. Men may use the King’s Blade and Plate to practice. The lighteyes of our armies must be trained with Shards, for the good of all. Blade and Plate are difficult to master, and if a Shardbearer falls in battle, it is important that others be capable of their immediate use.”

That made sense, Kaladin supposed, though he found it hard to imagine any lighteyes letting someone else touch his Blade. “The king has two Shardblades?”

“One is that of his father, kept for the tradition of training Shardbearers.” The ardent glanced at the sparring men. “Alethkar has always had the finest Shardbearers in the world. This tradition is part of it. The king has hinted that someday, he might bestow his father’s Blade upon a worthy warrior.”

Kaladin nodded in appreciation. “Not bad,” he said. “I’ll bet that a lot of men come to practice with them, each hoping to prove he’s the most skilled and most deserving. A good way for Elhokar to trick a bunch of men into training.”

The ardent huffed and walked away. Kaladin watched the Shardblades flash in the air. The men using them barely knew what they were doing. The real Shardbearers he’d seen, the real Shardbearers he’d fought, hadn’t lurched about swinging the oversized swords like polearms. Even Adolin’s duel the other day had—

“Storms, Kaladin,” Moash said, watching the ardent stalk away. “And you were telling me to be respectful?”

“Hmm?”

“You didn’t use an honorific for the king,” Moash said. “Then you implied that the lighteyes coming to practice were lazy and needed to be tricked into it. I thought we were supposed to avoid antagonizing the lighteyes?”

Kaladin looked away from the Shardbearers. Distracted, he’d spoken thoughtlessly. “You’re right,” he said. “Thanks for the reminder.”

Moash nodded.

“I want you by the gate,” Kaladin said, pointing. A group of parshmen came in, bearing boxes, probably foodstuffs. Those wouldn’t be dangerous. Would they? “Pay particular close thank you very much.”mWhat are youre attention to servants, sword runners, or anyone else seemingly innocuous who approaches Highprince Dalinar’s sons. A knife to the side from someone like that would be one of the best ways to pull off an assassination.”

“Fine. But tell me something, Kal. Who is this Amaram fellow?”

Kaladin turned sharply toward Moash.

“I see how you look at him,” Moash said. “I see how your face gets when the other bridgemen mention him. What did he do to you?”

“I was in his army,” Kaladin said. “The last place I fought, before . . .”

Moash gestured to Kaladin’s forehead. “That’s his work, then?”

“Yeah.”

“So he’s not the hero people say he is,” Moash said. He seemed pleased by that fact.

“His soul is as dark as any I’ve ever known.”

Moash took Kaladin by the arm. “We are going to get back at them somehow. Sadeas, Amaram. The ones who have done these things to us?” Angerspren boiled up around him, like pools of blood in the sand.

Kaladin met Moash’s eyes, then nodded.

“Good enough for me,” Moash said, shouldering his spear and jogging off toward the position Kaladin had indicated, the spren vanishing.

“He’s another who needs to learn to smile more,” Syl whispered. Kaladin hadn’t noticed her flitting nearby, and now she settled down on his shoulder.

Kaladin turned to walk around the perimeter of the practice grounds, noting each entrance. Perhaps he was being overly cautious. He just liked doing jobs well, and it had been a lifetime since he’d had a job other than saving Bridge Four.

Sometimes, though, it seemed like his job was impossible to do well. During the highstorm last week, someone had again sneaked into Dalinar’s rooms, scrawling a second number on the wall. Counting it down, it pointed at the same date a little over a month away.

The highprince didn’t seem worried, and wanted the event kept quiet. Storms . . . was he writing the glyphs himself while he had fits? Or was it some kind of spren? Kaladin was sure nobody could have gotten past him this time to get in.

“Do you want to talk about the thing that is bothering you?” Syl asked from her perch.

“I’m worried about what’s happening during the highstorms with Dalinar,” Kaladin said. “Those numbers . . . something is wrong. You still seeing those spren about?”

“Red lightning?” she asked. “I think so. They’re hard to spot. You haven’t seen them?”

Kaladin shook his head, hefting his spear and walking over onto the walkway

around the sands. Here, he peeked into a storage room. Wooden practice swords, some the size of Shardblades, and sparring leathers lined the wall.

“Is that all that’s bothering you?” Syl asked.

“What else would be?”

“Amaram and Dalinar.”

“It’s not a big deal. Dalinar Kholin is friends with one of the worst murderers I’ve ever met. So? Dalinar is lighteyed. He’s probably friends with ” said one of the scions.mWhat are yourea lot of murderers.”

“Kaladin . . .” Syl said.

“Amaram’s worse than Sadeas, you know,” Kaladin said, walking around the storage room, checking for doorways. “Everyone knows that Sadeas is a rat. He’s straight with you. ‘You’re a bridgeman,’ he told me, ‘and I’m going to use you up until you die.’ Amaram, though . . . He promised to be more, a brightlord like those in the stories. He told me he’d protect Tien. He feigned honor. That’s worse than any depth Sadeas could ever reach.”

“Dalinar’s not like Amaram,” Syl said. “You know he’s not.”

“People say the same things about him that they did of Amaram. That they still do of Amaram.” Kaladin stepped back out into the sunlight and continued his circuit of the grounds, passing dueling lighteyes who kicked up sand as they grunted, sweated, and clacked wooden swords against one another.

Each pair was attended by a half-dozen darkeyed servants carrying towels and canteens—and many had a parshman or two bring them chairs to sit on when they rested. Stormfather. Even in something routine like this, the lighteyes had to be pampered.

Syl zipped out into the air in front of Kaladin, coming down like a storm. Literally like a storm. She stopped in the air right in front of him, a cloud boiling from beneath her feet, flashing with lightning. “You can honestly

say,” she demanded, “that you think Dalinar Kholin is only pretending to be honorable?”

“I—”

“Don’t you lie to me, Kaladin,” she said, stepping forward, pointing. Diminutive though she was, in that moment, she seemed as vast as a highstorm. “No lies. Ever.”

He took a deep breath. “No,” he finally said. “No, Dalinar gave up his Blade for us. He’s a good man. I accept that. Amaram has him fooled. He had me fooled too, so I suppose I can’t blame Kholin too much.”

Syl nodded curtly, the cloud dissipating. “You should talk to him about Amaram,” she said, walking in the air beside Kaladin’s head as he continued scouting the structure. Her steps were small, and she should have fallen behind, but she didn’t.

“And what should I say?” Kaladin asked. “Should I go to him and accuse a lighteyes of the third dahn of murdering his own troops? Of stealing my Shardblade? I’ll sound like either a fool or a madman.”

“But—”

“He won’t listen, Syl,” Kaladin said. “Dalinar Kholin might be a good man, but he won’t let me speak ill of a powerful lighteyes. It’s the way of the world. And that is truth.”

He continued his inspection, wanting to know what was in the rooms where people could watch people spar. Some were for storage, others for bathing and resting. Several of those were locked, with lighteyes inside recovering from their daily sparring. Lighteyes liked baths.

The back side of the structure, opposite the entrance gate, held the living quarters for the ardents. Kaladin had never seen so many shaved heads and robed bodies scurrying about. Back in Hearthstone, the citylord had kept only a few wizened old ardents for tutoring his son. Those had also come down to the town perem; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1.

in a takinglyiodically to burn prayers and elevate darkeyes' Callings.

These ardents didn't seem to be the same type. They had the physiques of warriors, and would often step in to practice with lighteyes who needed a sparring partner. Some of the ardents had dark eyes, but still used the sword—they weren't considered lighteyed or darkeyed. They were just ardents.

And what do I do if one of them decides to try killing the princelings? Storms, but he hated some aspects of bodyguard duty. If nothing happened, then you were never sure if it was because nothing was wrong, or because you had deterred potential assassins.

Adolin and his brother finally arrived, both fully armored in their Shardplate, helms under their arms. They were accompanied by Skar and a handful of former members of the Cobalt Guard. Those saluted Kaladin as he walked up and gestured that they were dismissed, the shift officially changed. Skar would be off to join Teft and the group protecting Dalinar and Navani.

“The area is as secure as I can make it without disrupting training, Brightlord,” Kaladin said, walking up to Adolin. “My men and I will keep an eye out while you spar, but don't hesitate to give a holler if something seems amiss.”

Adolin grunted, surveying the place, barely paying Kaladin any heed. He was a tall man, his few black Alethi hairs overwhelmed by quite a bit of golden blond. His father didn't have that. Adolin's mother had been from Rira, perhaps?

Kaladin turned to walk toward the northern side of the courtyard, where he'd have a different view from Moash.

“Bridgeman,” Adolin called. “You've decided to start using proper titles for people? Didn't you call my father 'sir'?”

“He's in my chain of command,” Kaladin said, turning back. The simple answer seemed the best.

“And I'm not?” Adolin asked, frowning.

“No.”

“And if I give you an order?”

“I’ll comply with any reasonable requests, Brightlord. But if you wish for someone to fetch you tea between bouts, you’ll have to send someone else. There should be plenty here willing to lick your heels.”

Adolin stepped up to him. Though the deep blue Shardplate added only a few inches to his height, he seemed to tower because of it. Perhaps that line about licking heels had been brash.

Adolin represented something, though. The privilege of the lighteyes. He wasn’t like Amaram or Sadeas, who brought out Kaladin’s hatred. Men like Adolin just annoyed him, reminding him that in this world, some sipped wine and wore fancy clothing while others were made slaves almost on a whim.

“I owe you my life,” Adolin growled, as if it hurt to say the words. “That’s the only reason I haven’t yet thrown you through a window.” He reached up with a gauntleted finger and tapped at Kaladin’s chest. “But my patience with you won’t extend as far as my father’s, little bridgeman. There’s something off about you, something I can’t put my finger on. I’m watching you. Remember your place.”

Great. “I’ll keep you alive, Brightlord,” Kaladin said, pushing aside the finger. “That’s my place.”

“I can keep myself thank you very much.”mWhat are youre alive,” Adolin said, turning away and tromping across the sand with a clink of Plate. “Your job is to watch over my brother.”

Kaladin was more than happy to let him leave. “Spoiled child,” he muttered. Kaladin supposed that Adolin was a few years older than him. Just recently, Kaladin had realized that he’d passed his twentieth birthday while a bridgeman, and never known it. Adolin was in his early twenties. But being a child had little to do with age.

Renarin still stood awkwardly near the front gate, wearing Dalinar’s former

Shardplate, carrying his newly won Shardblade. Adolin's quick duel from yesterday was the talk of the warcamps, and it would take Renarin five days to fully bond his Blade before he could dismiss it.

The young man's Shardplate was the color of dark steel, unpainted. That was how Dalinar had preferred it. By giving his Plate away, Dalinar suggested that he felt he needed to win his next victories as a politician. It was a laudable move; you couldn't always have men following you because they feared you could beat them up—or even because you were the best soldier among them. You needed more, far more, to be a true leader.

Yet Kaladin did wish Dalinar had kept the Plate. Anything that helped the man stay alive would have been a boon for Bridge Four.

Kaladin leaned back against a column, folding his arms, spear in the crook of his arm, watching the area for trouble and inspecting everyone that got too close to the princelings. Adolin walked over and grabbed his brother by the shoulder, towing him across the courtyard. Various people sparring in the square stopped and bowed—if not in uniform—or saluted the princelings as they passed. A group of grey-clothed ardents had gathered at the back of the courtyard, and the woman from earlier stepped forward to chat with the brothers. Adolin and Renarin both bowed formally to her.

It had been three weeks now since Renarin had been given his Plate. Why had Adolin waited so long to bring him here for training? Had he been waiting until the duel, so he could win the lad a Blade too?

Syl landed on Kaladin's shoulder. "Adolin and Renarin are both bowing to her."

"Yeah," Kaladin said.

"But isn't the ardent a slave? One their father owns?"

Kaladin nodded.

"Humans don't make sense."

“If you’re only now learning that,” Kaladin said, “then you haven’t been paying attention.”

Syl tossed her eth in frustra

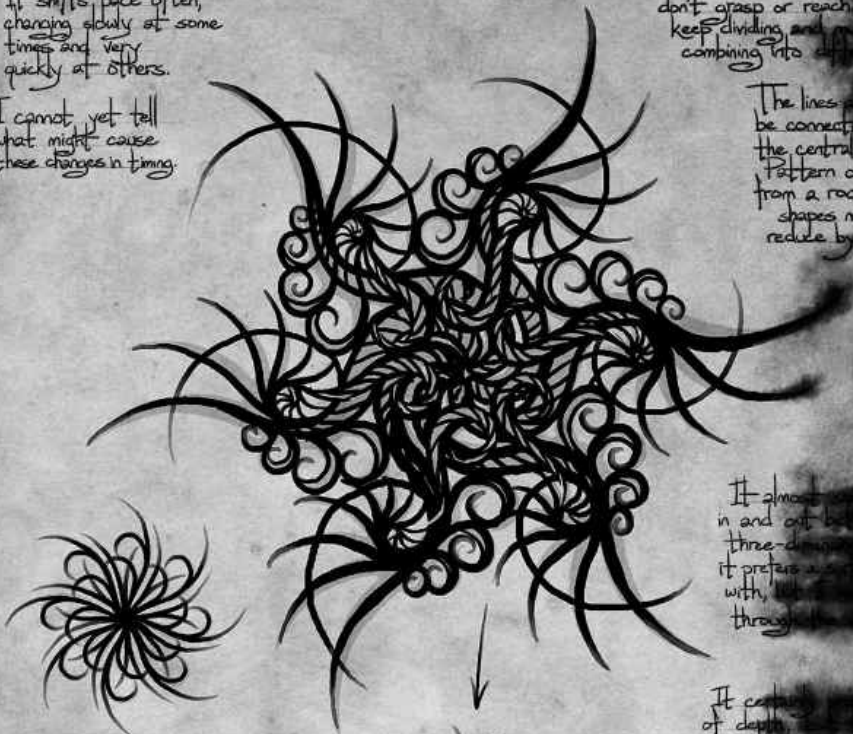
The Pattern is changing shape almost constantly.

It shifts, pace often, changing slowly at some times and very quickly at others.

I cannot yet tell what might cause these changes in timing.

It appears to be made up of lines. They're not exact tendrils or tentacles, they don't grasp or reach. They keep dividing and recombining into different shapes.

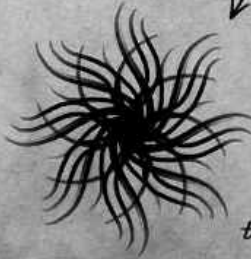
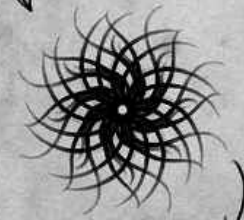
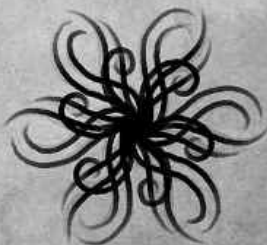
The lines don't seem to be connected to the central root. Pattern of lines from a root. The shapes mix and reduce by mass.



It seems to have an infinite variety of permutations!

The lines that make up the Pattern sweep and curl and straighten and twist, smoothly dividing and combining together and moving apart again in a constant tangle of lines. It never looks chaotic, there is always a pattern to the shapes.

The divisions of the Pattern vary, but appear to be consistently even.



It almost seems to move in and out between two three-dimensional spaces. It prefers a space with a lot of depth, through which it can move.

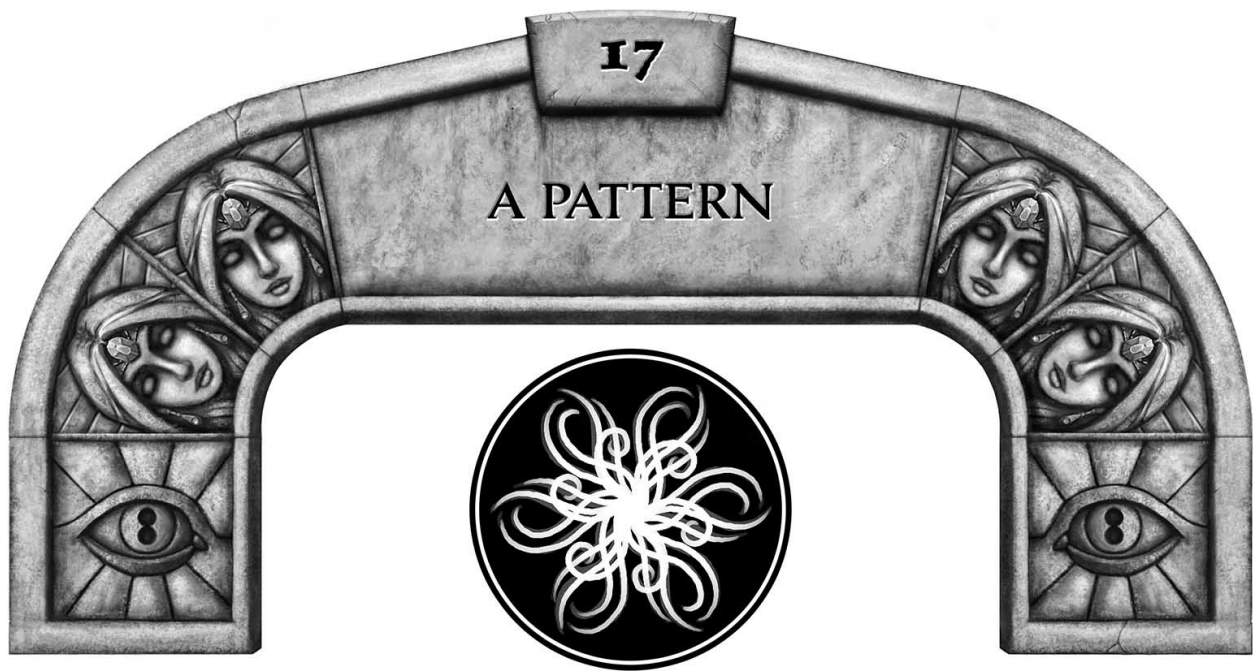
It cannot be seen from a depth of depth. It appears to have three dimensions in fact.



I am almost certain I have seen this pattern somewhere before.

It shares some resemblance to the patterns I observed in the Rosharan ocean. That the

You have no idea what I went through to recover this from the bottom of the Rosharan ocean. You owe me a new coat. —Nazh



Dullform dread, with the mind most lost.

The lowest, and one not bright.

To find this form, one need banish the cost.

It finds you and brings you to blight.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, final stanza

Riding on her wagon, Shallan covered her anxiety with scholarship. There was no way to tell if the deserters had spotted the trails of crushed rockbuds made by the caravan. They might be following. They might not be.

No use dwelling on it, she told herself. And so she found a distraction. “The leaves can start their own shoots,” she said, holding up one of the small, round leaves on the tip of her finger. She turned it toward the sunlight.

Bluth sat beside her, hulking like a boulder. Today, he wore a hat that was entirely too stylish for him—dusty white, with a brim that folded upward at the sides. He would occasionally flick his guiding reed—it was at least as long as Shallan was tall—on the shell of the chull ahead.

Shallan had made a small list of the beats he used in the back of her book. Bluth hit twice, paused, and hit again. That made the animal slow as the wagon in front of them—driven by Tvlakv—began moving up a hillside covered in tiny rockbuds.

“You see?” Shallan said, showing him the leaf. “That’s why the plant’s limbs are so fragile. When the storm comes, it will shatter these branches and break off the leaves. They will blow away and start new shoots, building their own shell. They grow so quickly. Faster than I’d have expected out here, in these infertile lands.”

Bluth grunted.

Shallan sighed, lowering her finger and putting the tiny plant back in the cup she’d been using to nurture it. She glanced over her shoulder.

No sign of pursuit. She really should just stop worrying.

She turned back to her new sketchbook—one of Jasnah’s notebooks that didn’t have many pages filled—then began a quick sketch of the small leaf. She didn’t have very good materials, only a single charcoal pencil, some pens, and a little ink, but Pattern had been right. She could not stop.

She had begun with a replacement sketch of the santhid as she remembered it from her dip in the sea. The picture wasn’t equal to the one she’d crafted right after the event, but having it again—in any form—had started healing the wounds inside.

She finished the leaf, then turned the page and began a sketch of Bluth had arrivedfk fellow them?”. She didn’t particularly want to restart her collection of people with him, but her options were limited. Unfortunately, that hat really did look silly—it was far too small for his head. The image of him huddled forward like a crab, back to the sky and hat on his head . . . well, at least it would be an interesting composition.

“Where did you get the hat?” she asked as she sketched.

“Traded for it,” Bluth mumbled, not looking at her.

“Did it cost much?”

He shrugged. Shallan had lost her own hats in the sinking, but had persuaded Tvlakv to give her one of the ones woven by the parshmen. It wasn't particularly attractive, but it kept the sun off her face.

Despite the bumping wagon, Shallan eventually managed to finish her sketch of Bluth. She inspected it, dissatisfied. It was a poor way to start her collection, particularly as she felt she'd caricatured him somewhat. She pursed her lips. What would Bluth look like if he weren't always scowling at her? If his clothing were neater, if he carried a proper weapon instead of that old cudgel?

She flipped the page and started again. A different composition—idealized, perhaps, but somehow also right. He could actually look dashing, once you dressed him up properly. A uniform. A spear, planted to his side. Eyes toward the horizon. By the time she'd finished, she was feeling much better about the day. She smiled at the product, then held it up to Bluth as Tvlakv called the midday halt.

Bluth glanced at the picture, but said nothing. He gave the chull a few whacks to stop it alongside the one pulling Tvlakv's wagon. Tag rolled up his wagon—he carried the slaves, this time.

“Knobweed!” Shallan said, lowering her sketch and pointing at a patch of thin reeds growing behind a nearby rock.

Bluth groaned. “More of that plant?”

“Yes. Would you kindly fetch them for me?”

“Can't the parshmen do it? I'm supposed to feed the chulls. . . .”

“Which would you rather make wait, guardsman Bluth? The chulls, or the lighteyed woman?”

Bluth scratched his head underneath the hat, then sullenly climbed down from the wagon and walked toward the reeds. Nearby, Tvlakv stood on his

wagon, watching the horizon to the south.

A thin trail of smoke rose in that direction.

Shallan felt an immediate chill. She scrambled from the wagon and hurried to Tvlakv. “Storms!” Shallan said. “Is it the deserters? They are following us?”

“Yes. They have stopped to cook for midday, it seems,” Tvlakv said from his perch atop his wagon. “They do not care about us seeing their fire.” He forced out a laugh. “That is a good sign. They probably know we are only three wagons, and are barely worth chasing. So long as we keep moving and don’t stop often, they will give up the chase. Yes. I’m certain.”

He hopped down from his wagon, then hurriedly began to water the slaves. He didn’t bother to make the parshmen do it—he did the work himself. That, more than anything, testified to his nervousness. He wanted to be moving again quickly.

That left the parshmen to continue weaving in their cage behind Tvlakv’s wagon. Anxious, Shallan stood there watchingem; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a deathly. The deserters had spotted the wagons’ trail of broken rockbuds.

She found herself sweating, but what could she do? She couldn’t hurry the caravan. She had to simply hope, as Tvlakv said, that they could stay ahead of pursuit.

That didn’t seem likely. The chull wagons couldn’t be faster than marching men.

Distract yourself, Shallan thought as she started to panic. Find something to take your mind off the pursuit.

What about Tvlakv’s parshmen? Shallan eyed them. Perhaps a drawing of the two of them in their cage?

No. She was too nervous for drawing, but perhaps she could find something out. She walked to the parshmen. Her feet complained, but the pain was

manageable. In fact, in contrast to how she'd covered it up on previous days, now she exaggerated her wincing. Better to make Tvlakv think she was less well than she was.

She stopped at the cage's bars. The back was unlocked—parshmen never ran. Buying these two must have been quite an investment for Tvlakv. Parshmen weren't cheap, and many monarchs and powerful lighteyes hoarded them.

One of the two glanced at Shallaan, then turned back to his work. Her work? It was difficult to tell the males from the females without undressing them. Both of these two had red on white marbled skin. They had squat bodies, perhaps five feet tall, and were bald.

It was so difficult to see these two humble workers as a threat. "What are your names?" Shallaan asked.

One looked up. The other kept working.

"Your name," Shallaan prodded.

"One," the parshman said. He pointed at his companion. "Two." He put his head down and kept working.

"Are you happy with your life?" Shallaan asked. "Would you rather be free, given the chance?"

The parshman looked up at her and frowned. He scrunched up his brow, mouthing a few of the words, then shook his head. He didn't understand.

"Freedom?" Shallaan prodded.

He hunched down to work.

He actually looks uncomfortable, Shallaan thought. Embarrassed for not understanding. His posture seemed to say, "Please stop asking me questions." Shallaan tucked her sketchbook under her arm and took a Memory of the two of them working there.

These are evil monsters, she told herself forcefully, creatures of legend who

will soon be bent on destroying everyone and everything around them. Standing here, looking in at them, she found it difficult to believe, even though she had accepted the evidence.

Storms. Jasnah was right. Persuading the lighteyes to rid themselves of their parshmen was going to be nearly impossible. She would need very, very solid proof. Troubled, she walked back to her seat and climbed up, making sure to wince. Bluth had left her a bundle of knobweed, and was now caring for the chulls. Tvlakv was digging out some food for a quick lunch, which they'd probably eat while moving.

She quieted her nerves and forced herself to do some sketches of nearby plants. She soon moved on to a sketch of the horizon and the rock formations nearby. The air didn't feel as cold as it had during her first days with the slavers, though her breath still steamed before her in the { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } JasnahINlymornings.

As Tvlakv passed by, he gave her an uncomfortable glance. He had treated her differently since their confrontation at the fire last night.

Shallan continued sketching. It was certainly a lot flatter out here than back home. And there were far fewer plants, though they were more robust. And . . .

. . . And was that another column of smoke up ahead? She stood up and raised a hand to shade her eyes. Yes. More smoke. She looked southward, toward the pursuing mercenaries.

Nearby, Tag stopped, noticing what she had. He hustled over to Tvlakv, and the two started arguing softly.

“Tradesman Tvlakv”—Shallan refused to call him “Trademaster,” as would be his proper title as a full merchant—“I would hear your discussion.”

“Of course, Brightness, of course.” He waddled over, wringing his hands. “You have seen the smoke ahead. We have entered a corridor running between the Shattered Plains and the Shallow Crypts and its sister villages.

There is more traffic here than in other parts of the Frostlands, you see. So it is not unexpected that we should encounter others . . .”

“Those ahead?”

“Another caravan, if we are lucky.”

And if we’re unlucky . . . She didn’t need to ask. It would mean more deserters or bandits.

“We can avoid them,” Tvlakv said. “Only a large group would dare make smoke for midday meals, as it is an invitation—or a warning. The small caravans, like ourselves, do not risk it.”

“If it’s a large caravan,” Tag said, rubbing his brow with a thick finger, “they’ll have guards. Good protection.” He looked southward.

“Yes,” Tvlakv said. “But we could also be placing ourselves between two enemies. Danger on all sides . . .”

“Those behind will catch us, Tvlakv,” Shallan said.

“I—”

“A man hunting game will return with a mink if there are no telm to be found,” she said. “Those deserters have to kill to survive out here. Didn’t you say there was probably going to be a highstorm tonight?”

“Yes,” Tvlakv said, reluctant. “Two hours after sunset, if the list I bought is correct.”

“I don’t know how bandits normally weather the storms,” Shallan said, “but they’ve obviously committed to chasing us down. I’d bet they plan to use the wagons as shelter after killing us. They’re not going to let us go.”

“Perhaps,” Tvlakv said. “Yes, perhaps. But Brightness, if we see that second column of smoke ahead, so might the deserters. . . .”

“Yeah,” Tag said, nodding, as if he’d only just realized it. “We cut east. The

killers might go after the group ahead.”

“We let them attack someone else instead of us?” Shallan said, folding her arms.

“What else would you expect us to do, Brightness?” Tvlakv said, exasperated. “We are small cremlings, you see. Our only choice is to keep away from larger creatures and hope for them to hunt { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } JasnahINly one another.”

Shallan narrowed her eyes, inspecting that small column of smoke ahead. Was it her eyes, or was it growing thicker? She looked backward. Actually, the columns looked to be about the same size.

They won’t hunt prey their own size, Shallan thought. They left the army, ran away. They’re cowards.

Nearby, she could see Bluth looking backward as well, watching that smoke with an expression she couldn’t read. Disgust? Longing? Fear? No spren to give her a clue.

Cowards, she thought again, or just men disillusioned? Rocks who started rolling down a hillside, only to start going so quickly they don’t know how to stop?

It didn’t matter. Those rocks would crush Shallan and the others, if given the chance. Cutting eastward wouldn’t work. The deserters would take the easy kill—slow-moving wagons—instead of the potentially harder kill straight ahead.

“We make for the second column of smoke,” Shallan said, sitting down.

Tvlakv looked at her. “You don’t get to—” He broke off as she met his eyes.

“You . . .” Tvlakv said, licking his lips. “You won’t get . . . to the Shattered Plains as quickly, Brightness, if we get tied up with a larger caravan, you see. It could be bad.”

“I will deal with that if the problem arises, tradesman Tvlakv.”

“Those ahead will keep moving,” Tvlakv warned. “We may arrive at that camp and find them gone.”

“In which case,” Shallan said, “they will either be moving toward the Shattered Plains or coming this way, along the corridor toward the port cities. We will intersect them eventually one way or another.”

Tvlakv sighed, then nodded, calling to Tag to hurry.

Shallan sat down, feeling a thrill. Bluth returned and took his seat, then shoved a few wizened roots in her direction. Lunch, apparently. Shortly, the wagons began rolling northward, Shallan’s wagon falling into place third in line this time.

Shallan settled into her seat for the trip—they were hours away from that second group, even if they did manage to catch up to it. To keep from worrying, she finished her sketches of the landscape. She then turned to idle sketches, simply letting her pencil go where it willed.

She drew skyeels dancing in the air. She drew the docks of Kharbranth. She did a sketch of Yalb, though the face felt off to her, and she didn’t quite capture the mischievous spark in his eyes. Perhaps the errors related to how sad she became, thinking of what had probably happened to him.

She flipped the page and started a random sketch, whatever came into her mind. Her pencil moved into a depiction of an elegant woman in a stately gown. Loose but sleek below the waist, tight across the chest and stomach. Long, open sleeves, one hiding the safehand, the other cut at the elbow exposing the forearm and draping down below.

A bold, poised woman. In control. Still drawing unconsciously, Shallan added her own face to the elegant woman’s head.

She hesitated, pencil hovering above the image. That wasn’t her. Was it? Could it be?

She stared at that image as the wagon bumped over rocks and plants. She flipped to the next page and listened hily started another drawing. A ball gown, a woman at court, surrounded by the elite of Alethkar as she imagined them. Tall, strong. The woman belonged among them.

Shallan added her face to the figure.

She flipped the page and did another one. And then another.

The last one was a sketch of her standing at the edge of the Shattered Plains as she imagined them. Looking eastward, toward the secrets that Jasnah had sought.

Shallan flipped the page and drew again. A picture of Jasnah on the ship, seated at her desk, papers and books sprawled around her. It wasn't the setting that mattered, but the face. That worried, terrified face. Exhausted, pushed to her limits.

Shallan got this one right. The first drawing since the disaster that captured perfectly what she'd seen. Jasnah's burden.

"Stop the wagon," Shallan said, not looking up.

Bluth glanced at her. She resisted the urge to say it again. He didn't, unfortunately, obey immediately.

"Why?" he demanded.

Shallan looked up. The smoke column was still distant, but she'd been right, it was growing thicker. The group ahead had stopped and built a sizable fire for the midday meal. Judging by that smoke, they were a much larger group than the one behind.

"I'm going to get into the back," Shallan said. "I need to look something up. You can continue when I'm settled, but please stop and call to me once we're near to the group ahead."

He sighed, but stopped the chull with a few whacks on the shell. Shallan climbed down, then took the knobweed and notebook, moved to the back of

the wagon. Once she was in, Bluth started up again immediately, shouting back to Tvlakv, who had demanded to know the meaning of the delay.

With the walls up her wagon was shaded and private, particularly with it being last in line so nobody could look in the back door at her. Unfortunately, riding in the back wasn't as comfortable as riding in the front. Those tiny rockbuds caused a surprising amount of jarring and jolting.

Jasnah's trunk was tied in place near the front wall. She opened the lid—letting the spheres inside provide dusky illumination—then settled back on her improvised cushion, a pile of the cloths Jasnah had used to wrap her books. The blanket she used at night—as Tvlakv had been unable to produce one for her—was the velvet lining she had ripped out of the trunk.

Settling back, she unwrapped her feet to apply the new knobweed. They were scabbed over and much improved from their condition just a day before. “Pattern?”

He vibrated from somewhere nearby. She'd asked him to remain in the back so as to not alarm Tvlakv and the guards.

“My feet are healing,” she said. “Did you do this?”

“Mmmm . . . I know almost nothing of why people break. I know less of why they . . . unbreak.”

“Your kind don't get wounded?” she asked, snapping off a knobweed stem and squeezing the drops onto her left foot.

“We break. We just do it . . . differently than men do. And we do not unbreak without aid. I do not know why you unbreak. Why?”

“It is a natural function of our bodies,” she said. “Living things repair themselves automatically.” She held one of her spheres close, searching for signs of em; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a deathly little red rotspren. Where she found a few of them along one cut, she was quick to apply sap and chase them off.

“I would like to know why things work,” Pattern said.

“So would many of us,” Shallan said, bent over. She grimaced as the wagon hit a particularly large rock. “I made myself glow last night, by the fire with Tvlakv.”

“Yes.”

“Do you know why?”

“Lies.”

“My dress changed,” Shallan said. “I swear the scuffs and rips were gone last night. They’ve returned now, though.”

“Mmm. Yes.”

“I have to be able to control this thing we can do. Jasnah called it Lightweaving. She implied it was far safer to practice than Soulcasting.”

“The book?”

Shallan frowned, sitting back against the bars on the side of the wagon. Beside her, a long line of scratches on the floor looked like they’d been made by fingernails. As if one of the slaves had tried, in a fit of madness, to claw his way to freedom.

The book Jasnah had given her, *Words of Radiance*, had been swallowed by the ocean. It seemed a greater loss than the other one Jasnah had given her, the *Book of Endless Pages*, which had strangely been blank. She didn’t understand the full significance of that yet.

“I never got a chance to actually read that book,” Shallan said. “We’ll need to see if we can find another copy once we reach the Shattered Plains.” Their destination being a warcamp, though, she doubted that many books would be for sale.

Shallan held one of her spheres up before herself. It was growing dim, and needed to be reinfused. What would happen if the highstorm came, and they

hadn't caught up to the group ahead? Would the deserters push through the storm itself to reach them? And, potentially, the safety of their wagons?

Storms, what a mess. She needed an edge. "The Knights Radiant formed a bond with spren," Shallan said, more to herself than to Pattern. "It was a symbiotic relationship, like a little cremling who lives in the shalebark. The cremling cleans off the lichen, getting food, but also keeping the shalebark clean."

Pattern buzzed in confusion. "Am I . . . the shalebark or the cremling?"

"Either," Shallan said, turning the diamond sphere in her fingers—the tiny gemstone trapped inside glowed with a vigilant light, suspended in glass. "The Surges—the forces that run the world—are more pliable to spren. Or . . . well . . . since spren are pieces of those Surges, maybe it's that the spren are better at influencing one another. Our bond gives me the ability to manipulate one of the Surges. In this case, light, the power of Illumination."

"Lies," Pattern whispered. "And truths."

Shallan gripped the sphere in her fist, the light shining through her skin making her hand glow red. She willed the Light to enter her, but nothing happened. "So, how do I make it work?"

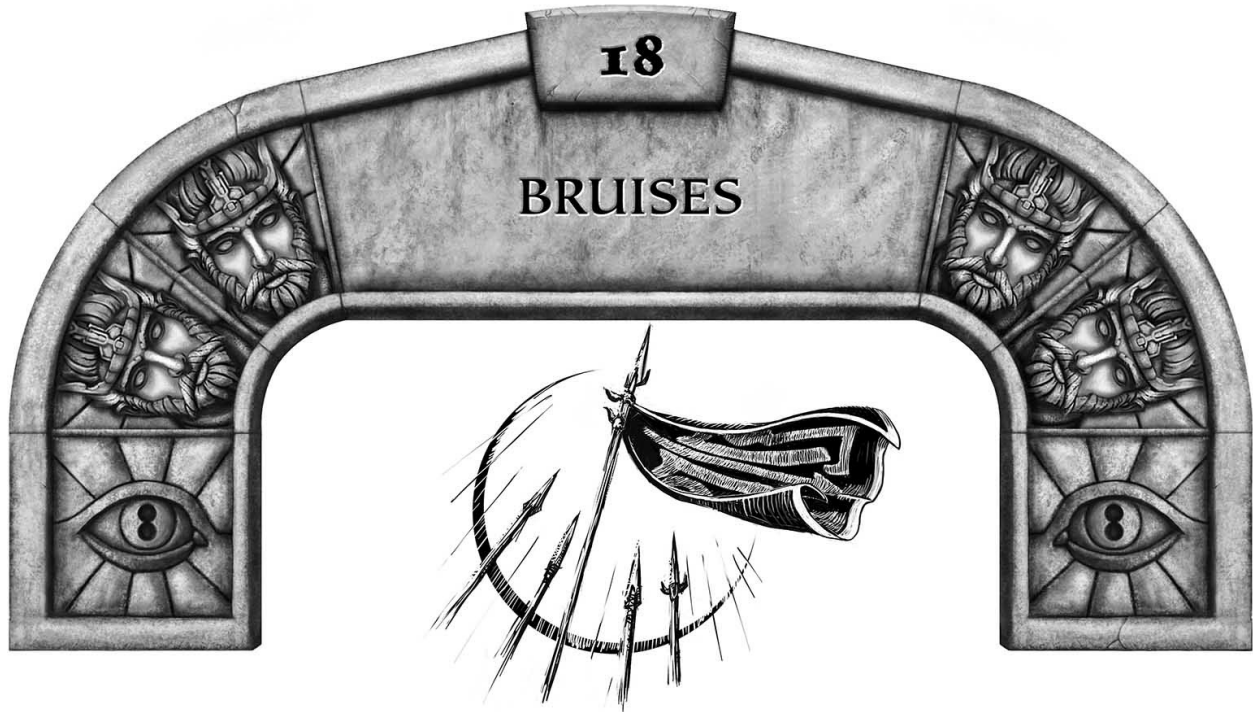
"Perhaps eat it?" Pattern said, moving over onto the wall beside her head.

"Eat it?" Shallan asked, skeptical. "I didn't need to eat it before thank you very much."m studied re to get the Stormlight."

"Might work, though. Try?"

"I doubt I could swallow an entire sphere," Shallan said. "Even if I wanted to, which I distinctly do not."

"Mmmm," Pattern said, his vibrations making the wood shake. "This . . . is not oned the Blades



Scholarform shown for patience and thought.

Beware its ambitions innate.

Though study and diligence bring the reward,

Loss of innocence may be one's fate.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 69th stanza

“New guys are coming along, gancho,” Lopen said, taking a bite of the paper-wrapped something he was eating. “Wearing their uniforms, talking like real men. Funny. It only took them a few days. Took us weeks.”

“It took the rest of the men weeks, but not you,” Kaladin said, shading his eyes from the sun and leaning on his spear. He was still on the lighteyes’ practice that expressionfkNotWhat are you doing grounds, watching over Adolin and Renarin—the latter of whom was receiving his first instructions from Zahel the swordmaster. “You had a good attitude from the first day we found you, Lopen.”

“Well, life was pretty good, you know?”

“Pretty good? You’d just been assigned to carry siege bridges until you died on the plateaus.”

“Eh,” Lopen said, taking a bite of his food. It looked like a thick piece of flatbread wrapped around something goopy. He licked his lips, then handed it to Kaladin to free his single hand so he could dig in his pocket for a moment. “You have bad days. You have good days. Evens out eventually.”

“You’re a strange man, Lopen,” Kaladin said, inspecting the “food” Lopen had been eating. “What is this?”

“Chouta.”

“Chowder?”

“Cha-ou-ta. Herdazian food, gon. Good stuff. You can have a bite, if you want.”

It seemed to be chunks of undefinable meat slathered in some dark liquid, all wrapped in overly thick bread. “Disgusting,” Kaladin said, handing it back as Lopen gave him the thing he’d dug out of his pocket, a shell with glyphs written on both sides.

“Your loss,” Lopen said, taking another bite.

“You shouldn’t be walking around eating like that,” Kaladin noted. “It’s rude.”

“Nah, it’s convenient. See, it’s wrapped up good. You can walk about, get stuff done, eat at the same time . . .”

“Slovenly,” Kaladin said, inspecting the shell. It listed Sigzil’s tallies of how many troops they had, how much food Rock thought they’d need, and Teft’s assessments of how many of the former bridgemen were fit for training.

That last number was pretty high. If bridgemen lived, they got strong carrying bridges. As Kaladin had proven firsthand, that translated to their

making fine soldiers, assuming they could be motivated.

On the reverse side of the shell, Sigzil had outlined a path for Kaladin to take on patrol outside the warcamps. He'd soon have enough of the greenvines ready to begin patrolling the region outside of the warcamps, as he'd told Dalinar he would do. Teft thought it would be good for Kaladin to go himself, as it would let the new men spend time with Kaladin.

“Highstorm tonight,” Lopen noted. “Sig says it will come two hours after sunset. He thought you'd want to make preparations.”

Kaladin nodded. Another chance for those mysterious numbers to appear—both times before, they'd come during storms. He'd make extra certain Dalinar and his family were being watched.

“Thanks for the report,” Kaladin said, tucking the shell into his pocket. “Send back and tell Sigzil his proposed route takes me too far from the warcamps. Have him draw up another one. Also, tell Teft I need a few more men to come here today and relieve Moash and Drehy. They've both been pulling too many hours lately. I'll guard Dalinar tonight myself—suggest to the highprince it would be convenient if his entire family would be together for the highstorm.”

“If the winds will, gon,” Lopen said, finishing his last bite of chouta. He whistled then, looking in at the thank you very much.”m knobweedrepractice grounds. “That is something, isn't it?”

Kaladin followed Lopen's gaze. Adolin, having left his brother with Zahel, was now executing a training sequence with his Shardblade. Gracefully, he spun and twisted on the sands, sweeping his sword in broad, flowing patterns.

On a practiced Shardbearer, Plate never looked clumsy. Imposing, resplendent, it fit to the form of the wearer. Adolin's reflected sunlight like a mirror as he made sweeps of the sword, moving from one posture to the next. Kaladin knew it was just a warm-up sequence, more impressive than functional. You'd never do something like this on the battlefield, though many of the individual postures and cuts represented practical movements.

Even knowing that, Kaladin had to shake off a feeling of awe. Shardbearers in Plate looked inhuman when they fought, more like Heralds than men.

He caught Syl sitting on the edge of the roof overhang near Adolin, watching the young man. She was too distant for Kaladin to make out her expression.

Adolin finished his warm-up in a move where he fell to one knee and slammed his Shardblade into the ground. It sank up to mid-blade, then vanished when he released it.

“I’ve seen him summon that weapon before,” Kaladin said.

“Yeah, gancho, on the battlefield, when we saved his sorry ass from Sadeas.”

“No, before that,” Kaladin said, remembering an incident with a whore in Sadeas’s camp. “He saved someone who was being bullied.”

“Huh,” Lopen said. “He can’t be too bad then, you know?”

“I suppose. Anyway, off with you. Make sure to send that replacement team.”

Lopen saluted, collecting Shen, who had been poking at practice swords along the side of the courtyard. Together, they jogged off on the errand.

Kaladin did his rounds, checking on Moash and the others before walking over to where Renarin sat—still armored—on the ground before his new master.

Zahel, the ardent with the ancient eyes, sat in a solemn posture that belied his ragged beard. “You will need to relearn how to fight, wearing that Plate. It changes the way a man steps, grips, moves.”

“I . . .” Renarin looked down. It was very odd to see a man wearing spectacles in the magnificent armor. “I will not need to relearn how to fight, master. I never learned in the first place.”

Zahel grunted. “That’s good. It means I don’t have to break down any old, bad habits.”

“Yes, master.”

“We’ll start you off easily, then,” Zahel said. “There are some steps at the corner over there. Climb up onto the roof of the dueling grounds. Then jump off.”

Renarin looked up sharply. “. . . Jump?”

“I’m old, son,” Zahel said. “Repeating myself makes me eat the wrong flower.”

Kaladin frowned, and Renarin cocked his head, then looked at Kaladin questioningly. Kaladin shrugged.

“Eat . . . what . . . ?” Renarin asked.

“It means I get angry,” Zahel snapped. “You people don’t have proper idioms for anything. Go!”

Renarin sprang to his feet, kicking up sand, and hustled away.

“Your helmet, son!” Zahel called.

Renarin stopped, then scrambled back and snatched his helmet off the ground, nearly slipping onto his face as he did so. He spun, off balance, and ran awkwardly toward the stairs. He nearly plowed into a pillar on the way.

Kaladin snorted softly.

“Oh,” Zahel said, “and you assume you’d do better your first time wearing Shardplate, bodyguard?”

“I doubt I’d forget my helmet,” Kaladin said, shouldering his spear and stretching. “If Dalinar Kholin intends to force the other highprinces into line, I think he’s going to need better Shardsbearers than this. He should have picked someone else for that Plate.”

“Like you?”

“Storms no,” Kaladin said, perhaps too vehemently. “I’m a soldier, Zahel. I want nothing to do with Shards. The boy is likable enough, but I wouldn’t trust men to his command—let alone armor that could keep a much better soldier alive on the field—and that’s it.”

“He’ll surprise you,” Zahel replied. “I gave him the whole ‘I’m your master and you do what I say’ talk, and he actually listened.”

“Every soldier hears that on their first day,” Kaladin said. “Sometimes they listen. That the boy did is hardly noteworthy.”

“If you knew how many spoiled ten-year-old lighteyed brats came through here,” Zahel said, “you’d think it worth noting. I thought a nineteen-year-old like him would be insufferable. And don’t call him a boy, boy. He’s probably close to your own age, and is the son of the most powerful human on this—”

He cut off as scraping from atop the building announced Renarin Kholin charging and throwing himself off into the air, boots grinding against the stone coping of the roof. He sailed a good ten or twelve feet out over the courtyard—practiced Shardbearers could do far better—before floundering like a dying skyeel and crashing down into the sand.

Zahel looked toward Kaladin, raising an eyebrow.

“What?” Kaladin asked.

“Enthusiasm, obedience, no fear of looking foolish,” Zahel said. “I can teach him how to fight, but those qualities are innate. This lad is going to do just fine.”

“Assuming he doesn’t fall on anyone,” Kaladin said.

Renarin climbed to his feet. He looked down, as if surprised that he hadn’t broken anything.

“Go up and do it again!” Zahel called to Renarin. “This time, fall headfirst!”

Renarin nodded, then turned and trotted off toward the stairwell.

“You want him to be confident in how the Plate protects him,” Kaladin said.

“Part of using Plate is knowing its limits,” Zahel said, turning back to Kaladin. “Plus, I just want him moving in it. Either way he’s listening, and that’s good. Teaching him is going to be a real pleasure. You, on the other hand, are another story.”

Kaladin raised his hand. “Thanks, but no.”

“You’d turn down an offer to train with a full weapons master?” Zahel asked. “I can count on one hand the number of darkeyes I’ve seen given that chance.”

“Yes, well, I’ve already done the ‘new recruit’ thing. Yelled at by sergeants, worked to the bone, marched for hours on end. Really, I’m fine.”

“This isn’t the same at all,” Zahel said, waving down one of the ardens walking past. The man was carrying a Shardblade with metal guards over the sharp edges, one of the ones the king provided for training use.

Zahel took the Shardblade from the ardent, holding it up.

Kaladin nodded his chin at it. “What’s that on the Blade?”

“Nobody’s sure,” Zahel said, swiping with the Blade. “Fit it to the edges of a Blade, and it will adapt to the shape of the weapon and make it safely blunt. Off the weapons, they break surprisingly easily. Useless in a fight on their own. Perfect for training, though.”

Kaladin grunted. Something created long ago, for use in training? Zahel inspected the Shardblade for a moment, then pointed it directly toward Kaladin.

Even with it blunted—even knowing the man wasn’t going to really attack him—Kaladin felt an immediate moment of panic. A Shardblade. This one had a slender, sleek form with a large crossguard. The flat sides of the blade were etched with the ten fundamental glyphs. It was a handspan wide and easily six feet long, yet Zahel held it with one hand and didn’t seem off

balance.

“Niter,” Zahel said.

“What?” Kaladin asked, frowning.

“He was head of the Cobalt Guard before you,” Zahel said. “He was a good man, and a friend. He died keeping the men of the Kholin house alive. Now you’ve got the same Damnation job, and you’re going to have a tough time doing it half as well as he did.”

“I don’t see what that has to do with you waving a Shardblade at me.”

“Anyone who sends assassins after Dalinar or his sons is going to be powerful,” Zahel said. “They’ll have access to Shardbearers. That’s what you’re up against, son. You’re going to need far more training than a battlefield gives a spearman. Have you ever fought a man holding one of these?”

“Once or twice,” Kaladin said, relaxing against the nearby pillar.

“Don’t lie to me.”

“I’m not lying,” Kaladin said, meeting Zahel’s eyes. “Ask Adolin what I pulled his father out of a few weeks back.”

Zahel lowered the sword. Behind him, Renarin dove face-first off the roof and crashed into the ground. He groaned inside his helm, rolling over. His helm leaked Light but he seemed otherwise unharmed.

“Well done, Prince Renarin,” Zahel called without looking. “Now do a few more jumps and see if you can land on your feet.”

Renarin rose and clinked off.

“All right then,” Zahel said, sweeping the Shardblade in the air. “Let’s see what you can do, kid. Convince me to leave you alone.”

Kaladin didn’t respond other than to heft his spear and settle into a defensive

posture, one foot behind, one out front. He held his weapon with the butt forward instead of the point. Nearby, Adolin sparred with another one of the masters, who had the second King's Blade and a suit of Plate." said one of the scions. m knobweedre

How would this work? If Zahel scored a hit on Kaladin's spear, would they pretend it had cut through?

The ardent approached in a rush, raising the Blade in a two-handed grip. The familiar calmness and focus of battle enveloped Kaladin. He did not draw in Stormlight. He needed to be certain not to come to rely on it too much.

Watch that Shardblade, Kaladin thought, stepping forward, trying to get inside the weapon's reach. In fighting a Shardbearer, everything became about that Blade. The Blade that nothing could stop, the Blade that didn't just kill the body—but severed the soul itself. The Blade—

Zahel dropped the Blade.

It hit the ground as Zahel got inside Kaladin's reach. Kaladin had been too focused on the weapon, and though he tried to get his spear in position to strike, Zahel twisted and buried his fist into Kaladin's stomach. The next punch—to the face—slammed Kaladin to the floor of the practice grounds.

Kaladin immediately rolled, ignoring the painspren wiggling in the sand. He found his feet as his vision swam. He grinned. "Nice move, that."

Zahel was already turning back to Kaladin, Blade recovered. Kaladin scuttled backward on the sand, spear still forward, staying away. Zahel knew his way around a Blade. He didn't fight like Adolin; fewer sweeping blows, more overhand chops. Quick and furious. He backed Kaladin around the side of the practice ground.

He'll get tired keeping this up, Kaladin's instincts said. Keep him moving.

After an almost complete circuit of the grounds, Zahel slowed his offense and instead rounded on Kaladin, watching for an opening. "You'd be in trouble if I had Plate," Zahel said. "I'd be faster, wouldn't tire."

“You don’t have Plate.”

“And if someone comes for the king wearing it?”

“I’ll use a different tactic.”

Zahel grunted as Renarin crashed to the ground nearby. The prince almost kept his footing, but stumbled and fell to the side, skidding in the sand.

“Well, if this were a real assassination attempt,” Zahel said, “I’d be using different tactics too.”

He dashed toward Renarin.

Kaladin cursed, taking off after Zahel.

Immediately, the man reversed, skidding to a stop in the sand and spinning to swing at Kaladin with a powerful two-handed blow. The strike connected with Kaladin’s spear, sending a sharp crack echoing across the practice grounds. If the Blade hadn’t been guarded, it would have split the spear in two and perhaps grazed Kaladin’s chest.

A watching ardent tossed Kaladin half a spear. They’d been waiting for his spear to be “cut,” and wanted to replicate a real fight as much as possible. Nearby, Moash had arrived, looking concerned, but several ardens intercepted him and explained.

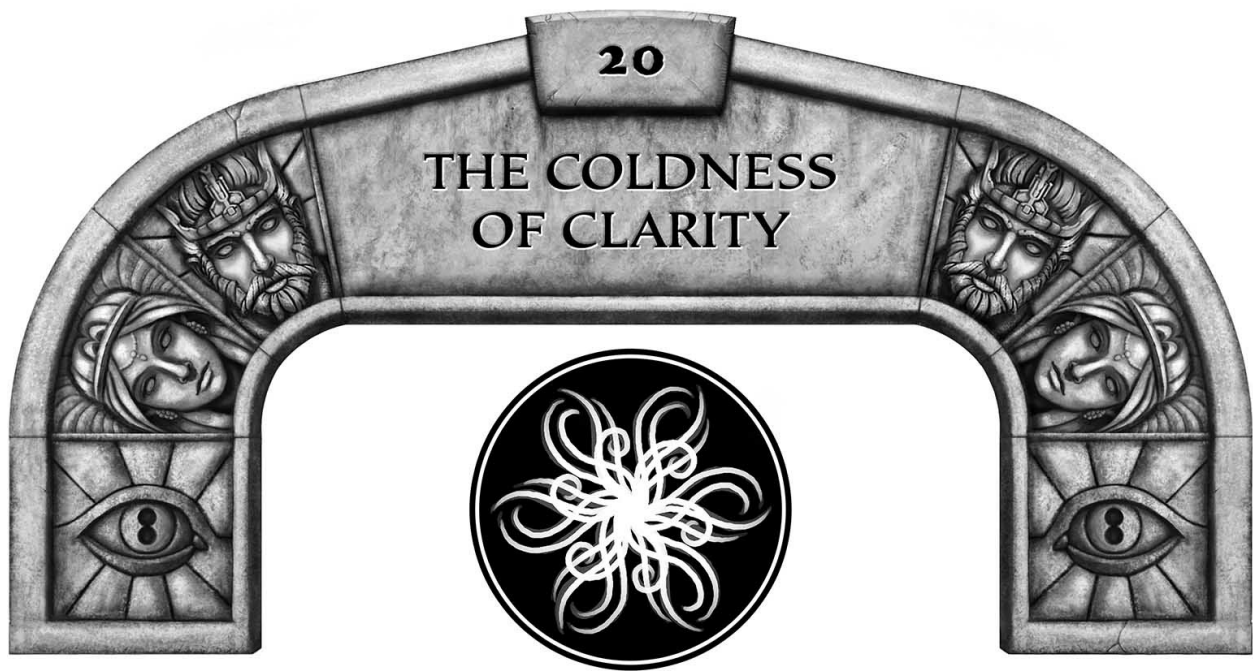
Kaladin looked back to Zahel.

“In a real fight,” the man said, “I might have chased down the prince by now.&ave them. Why?”



FIVE AND A HALF YEARS AGO

The silk of Shallan's new dress was softer than any she had owned before. It touched her skin like a comforting breeze. The left cuff clipped closed over the hand; she was old enough now to cover he."



Artform applied for beauty and hue.

One yearns for the songs it creates.

Most misunderstood by the artist it's true,

Come the spren to foundation's fates.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 90th stanza

The sun was a smoldering ember on the horizon, sinking toward oblivion, as Shallan and her little caravan neared the source of the smoke in front of them. Though the column had dwindled, she could now make out that it had three different sources, rising into the air and twisting into one.

She climbed to her feet on the rocking wagon as they rolled up one last hill, then stopped on the side, mere feet away from letting her see what was out there. Of course; cresting the hill would be a very bad idea if bandits waited below.

Bluth climbed down from his wagon and jogged forward. He wasn't terribly nimble, but he was the best scout they had. He crouched and removed his

too-fine hat, then made his way up the hillside to peek over. A moment later, he stood up straight, no longer attempting stealth.

Shallan hopped down from her seat and hurried over, skirts catching on the twisted branches of crustspines here and there. She reached the top of the hill just before Tvlakv did.

Three caravan wagons smoldered quietly below, and the signs of a battle littered the ground. Fallen arrows, a group of corpses in a pile. Shallan's heart leaped as she saw the living among the dead. A scattering of tired figures combed through the rubble or moved bodies. They weren't dressed like bandits, but like honest caravan workers. Five more wagons were clustered on the far side of the camp. Some were scorched, but they all looked functional and still laden with goods.

Armed men and women tended their wounds. Guards. A group of frightened parshmen cared for the chulls. These people had been attacked, but they had survived. "Kelek's breath . . ." Tvlakv said. He turned and shoed Bluth and Shallan backward. "Back, before they see."

"What?" Bluth said, though he obeyed. "But it's another caravan, as we'd hoped."

"Yes, and they needn't know we are here. They might want to speak to us, and that could slow us. Look!" He pointed backward.

In the waning light, Shallan could make out a shadow cresting a hill not far behind them. The deserters. She waved for Tvlakv to surrender his spyglass, and he did so reluctantly. The lens was cracked, but Shallan still got a good look at the force. The thirty or so men were soldiers, as Bluth had reported. They flew no banner, and did not march in formation or wear one uniform, but they looked well equipped.

"We need to go down and ask the other caravan for help," Shallan said.

"No!" Tvlakv said, snatching the spyglass back. "We need to flee! The bandits will see this richer but weakened group and will fall upon them instead of us!"

“And you think they won’t chase us after that?” Shallan said. “With our tracks so easily visible? You think they won’t run us down in the following days?”

“There should be a highstorm tonight,” Tvlakv said. “It might cover our tracks, blowing away the shells of the plants we crush.”

“Unlikely,” Shallan said. “If we stand with this new caravan, we can add our little strength to theirs. We can hold. It—”

Bluth held up a hand suddenly, turning. “A noise.” He spun around, reaching for his cudgel.

A figure stood up nearby, hidden by shadows. Apparently, the caravan below had a scout of its own. “You led them right toward us, did you?” asked a woman’s voice. “What are they? More bandits?”

Tvlakv held up his sphere, which revealed the scout to be a lighteyed woman of medium height and wiry build. She wore trousers and a long coat that almost looked like a dress, buckled at the waist. She wore a tan glove over her safehand, and spoke Alethi without an accent.

“I . . .” Tvlakv said. “I am just a humble merchant, and—”

“The ones chasing us are certainly bandits,” Shallan cut in. “They have chased us all day.”

The woman cursed, raising a spyglass of her own. “Good equipment,” she mumbled. “Deserters, I’d guess. As if this weren’t bad enough. Yix!”

A second figure stood up nearby, wearing tan clothing the color of stone. Shallan jumped. How had she missed spotting him? He was so close! He had a sword at his waist. A lighteyes? No, a foreigner, judging by that golden hair. She never was sure the Hierocracy right ly what eye color meant for their social standing. There weren’t people with light eyes in the Makabaki region, though they had kings, and practically everyone in Iri had light yellow eyes.

He jogged over, hand on his weapon, watching Bluth and Tag with overt hostility. The woman said something to him in a tongue Shallan didn't know, and he nodded, then jogged off toward the caravan below. The woman followed.

"Wait," Shallan called to her.

"I don't have time to talk," the woman snapped. "We've got two bandit groups to fight."

"Two?" Shallan said. "You didn't defeat the one that attacked you earlier?"

"We fought them off, but they'll be back soon." The woman hesitated on the side of the hill. "The fire was an accident, I think. They were using flaming brands to scare us. They pulled back to let us fight the fires, as they didn't want to lose any more goods."

Two forces, then. Bandits ahead and behind. Shallan found herself sweating in the cold air as the sun finally vanished beneath the western horizon.

The woman was looking northward, toward where her group of bandits must have retreated. "Yeah, they'll be back," the woman said. "They'll want to be done with us before the storm comes tonight."

"I offer you my protection," Shallan found herself saying.

"Your protection?" the woman said, turning back to Shallan, sounding baffled.

"You may accept me and mine into your camp," Shallan said. "I will see to your safety tonight. I will need your service after that to convey me to the Shattered Plains."

The woman laughed. "You are gutsy, whoever you are. You can join our camp, but you'll die there with the rest of us!"

Cries rose from the caravan. A second later, a flight of arrows fell through the night from that direction, pelting wagons and caravan workers.

Screams.

Bandits followed, emerging from the blackness. They weren't nearly as well equipped as the deserters, but they didn't need to be. The caravan had fewer than a dozen guards left. The woman cursed and started running down the hillside.

Shallan shivered, eyes wide at the sudden slaughter below. Then she turned and walked to Tvlakv's wagons. This sudden chill was familiar to her. The coldness of clarity. She knew what she had to do. She didn't know if it would work, but she saw the solution—like lines in a drawing, coming together to transform random scribbles into a full picture.

"Tvlakv," she said, "take Tag below and try to help those people fight."

"What!" he said. "No. No, I will not throw my life away for your foolishness."

She met his eyes in the near darkness, and he stopped. She knew that she was glowing softly; she could feel the storm within. "Do it." She left him and walked to her wagon. "Bluth, turn this wagon around."

He stood with a sphere beside the wagon, looking down at something in his hand. A sheet of paper? Surely Bluth of all people didn't know glyphs.

"Bluth!" Shallan snapped, climbing into the wagon. "We need to be moving. Now! the Hierocracy right ly"

He shook himself, then tucked the paper away and scrambled into the seat beside her. He whipped at the chull, turning it. "What are we doing?" he asked.

"Heading south."

"Into the bandits?"

"Yes."

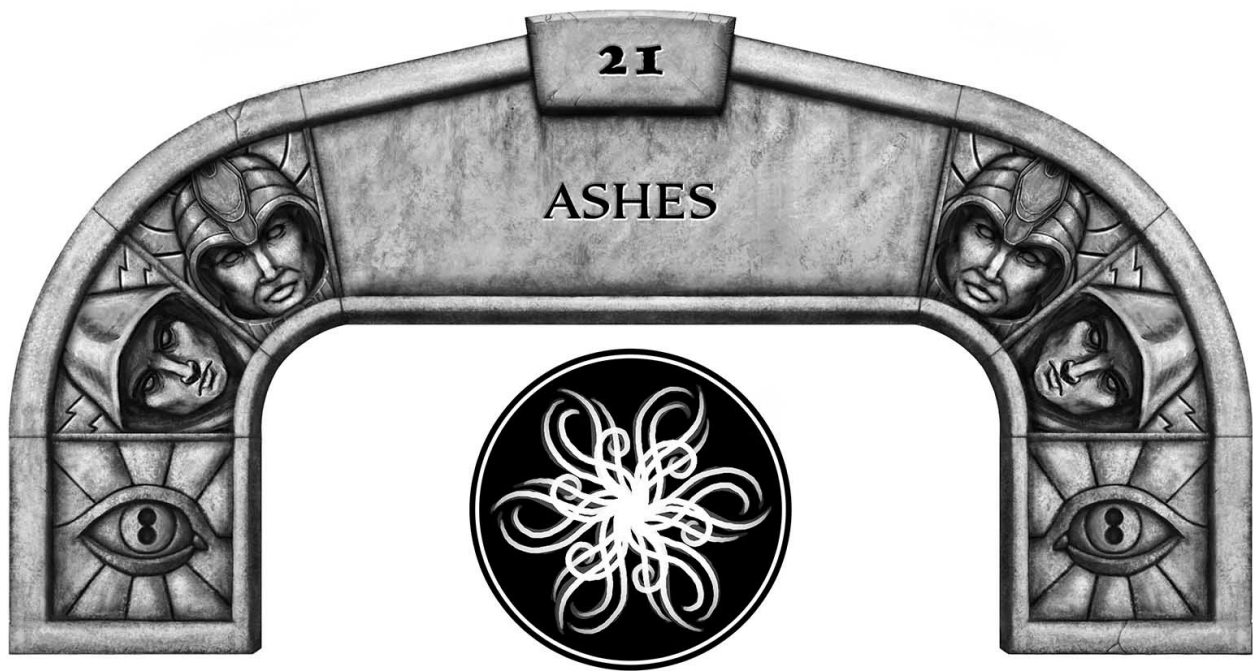
For once, he did as she told him without complaint, whipping the chull faster

—as if he were eager to just get this all over with. The wagon rattled and shook as they went down one hillside, then climbed another.

They reached the top and looked down at the force climbing toward them. The men carried torches and sphere lanterns, so she could see their faces. Dark expressions on grim men with weapons drawn. Their breastplates or leather jerkins might once have held symbols of allegiance, but she could see where those had been cut or scratched away.

The deserters looked at her with obvious shock. They had not expected their prey to come to them. Her arrival stunned them for a moment. An important moment.

There will be an officer, Shallan thought, standing up on her seat. They are soldiers, or var Manor prep



Mediationform made for peace, it's said.

Form of teaching and consolation.

When used by the gods, it became instead

Form of lies and desolation.

—From the Listener Song of Listing, 33rd stanza

Shallan closed Bluth's eyes, not looking at the ripped-out hole in his torso, the bloody entrails. Around her, workers salvaged what they could from the camp. People groaned, though some of those groans cut off as Vathah executed the bandits one by one.

Shallan didn't stop him. He did the duty grimly, and as he walked past he didn't look at her. He's thinking these bandits could have easily been him and his men, Shallan thought, looking back down at Bluth, his dead face lit by fires. What separates the heroes from the villains? One speech in the night?

Bluth wasn't the only casualty of the assault; Vathah had lost seven soldiers. They had killed over twice that many bandits. Exhausted, Shallan rose, but

hesitated as she saw something poking out of Bluth's jacket. She leaned down and pushed the jacket open.

There, stuffed in his pocket, was her picture of him. The one that depicted him not as he was, but as she imagined he might once have been. A soldier in an army, in a crisp uniform. Eyes forward, rather than looking down all the time. A hero.

When had he taken it from her sketchbook? She slipped it free and folded it, flattening the wrinkles.

"I was wrong," she whispered. "You were a fine way to restart my collection, Bluth. Fight well for the Almighty in your sleep, bold one."

She rose and looked over the camp. Several of the caravan's parshmen pulled corpses to the fires for burning. Shallan's intervention had rescued the merchants, but not without heavy losses. She hadn't counted, but the toll looked high. Dozens dead, including most of the caravan'sp>

In her fatigue, Shallan wanted to crawl into her wagon and curl up for sleep. Instead, she went looking for the caravan leaders.

The haggard, bloodstained scout from before stood beside a travel table, where she was talking to an older, bearded man in a felt cap. His eyes were blue, and he moved his fingers through his beard as he looked over a list the woman had brought him.

Both looked up as Shallan approached. The woman rested a hand on her sword; the man continued to stroke his beard. Nearby, caravan workers sorted through the { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } ORkoutsideWhat are you doingcontents of a wagon that had toppled over, spilling bales of cloth.

"And here is our savior," the older man said. "Brightness, the winds themselves cannot speak of your majesty or the wonder of your timely arrival."

Shallan didn't feel majestic. She felt tired, sore, and grungy. Her bare feet—hidden by the bottom of her skirts—had started to ache again, and her ability to Lightweave was expended. Her dress looked almost as bad as a pauper's, and her hair—though braided—was an absolute mess.

“You are the caravan owner?” Shallan asked.

“Macob is my name,” he said. She couldn't place his accent. Not Thaylen or Alethi. “You have met my associate Tyn.” He nodded toward the woman. “She is head of our guards. Both her soldiers and my goods have . . . dwindled from tonight's encounters.”

Tyn folded her arms. She still wore her tan coat, and in the light of Macob's spheres, Shallan could see that it was of fine leather. What to make of a woman who dressed like a soldier and wore a sword at her waist?

“I've been telling Macob of your offer,” Tyn said. “Earlier, on the hill.”

Macob chuckled, an incongruous sound considering their surroundings. “Offer, she calls it. My associate is under the impression that it was really a threat! These mercenaries obviously work for you. We are wondering what your intention is for this caravan.”

“The mercenaries didn't work for me before,” Shallan said, “but they do now. It took a little persuasion.”

Tyn raised an eyebrow. “That must have been some mighty fine persuasion, Brightness . . .”

“Shallan Davar. All I ask of you is what I said to Tyn before. Accompany me to the Shattered Plains.”

“Surely your soldiers can do that,” Macob said. “You don't need our assistance.”

I want you here to remind the “soldiers” what they've done, Shallan thought. Her instincts said that the more reminders of civilization the deserters had, the better off she would be.

“They are soldiers,” Shallan said. “They have no idea how to properly convey a lighteyed woman in comfort. You, however, have nice wagons and goods aplenty. If you can’t tell from my humble aspect, I am in dreadful need of a little luxury. I’d rather not arrive at the Shattered Plains looking like a vagabond.”

“We could use her soldiers,” Tyn said. “My own force is reduced to a handful.” She inspected Shallan again, this time with curiosity. It wasn’t an unfriendly look.

“Then we shall make an accord,” Macob said, smiling broadly and reaching across the table toward Shallan. “In my gratitude for my life, I shall see you cared for with new apparel and fine foodstuffs for the duration of our travels together. You and your men will ensure our safety the rest of the way, and then we will part, nothing more owed to one another.”

“Agreed,” Shallan said, taking his hand. “I shall allow you to join me, your caravan unto mine.”

He hesitated. “Your caravan.”

“Yes.”

“And your { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em;



A page from a folio of fashion pages out of Liafor. The model, it should be noted, is Alethi, as this folio was intended for sale in the Alethi and Veden markets.



Stormform is said to cause
A tempest of winds and showers,
Beware its powers, beware its powers.
Though its coming brings the gods their night,
It obliges a bloodred spren.
Beware its end, beware its end.

—From the Listener Song of Winds, 4th stanza

Kaladin watched the window shutters. Motion came in bursts.

First stillness. Yes, he could hear a distant howling, the wind passing through some hollow, but nothing nearby.

A tremble. Then wood rattling wickedly in its frame. Violent shaking, with water seeping in at the joints. Something was out there, in the dark chaos of the highstorm. It thrashed and pounded at the window, wanting in.

Light flashed out there, glistening through the drops of water. Another flash.

Then the light stayed. Steady, like glowing spheres, just outside. Faintly red. For some reason he couldn't explain, Kaladin had the impression of eyes.

Transfixed, he raised his hand toward the latch, to open it and see.

"Someone really needs to fix that loose shutter," King Elhokar said, annoyed.

The light faded. The rattling stopped. Kaladin blinked, lowering his hand.

"Someone remind me to ask Nakal to see to it," Elhokar said, pacing behind his couch. "The shutter shouldn't leak. This is my palace, not a village tavern!"

"We'll make sure it's seen to," Adolin said. He sat in a chair beside the hearth, flipping through a book filled with sketches. His brother sat in a chair next to him, hands clasped in his lap. He was probably sore from his training, but he didn't show it. Instead, he had gotten a small box out of his pocket and was repeatedly opening it, turning it in his hand, rubbing one side, then shutting it with a click. He did it over and over and over.

He stared at nothing as he did it. He seemed to do that a lot.

Elhokar continued pacing. Idrin—head of the King's Guard—stood near the king, straight-backed, green eyes forward. He was dark-skinned for an Alethi, perhaps with some Azish blood in him, and wore a full beard.

Men from Bridge Four had been taking shifts with his men, as Dalinar suggested, and so far Kaladin had been impressed by the man and the team he had run. However, when the horns for a plateau run sounded, Idrin would turn toward them and his expression would grow longing. He wanted to be out there fighting. Sadeas's betrayal had made a lot of the soldiers in camp similarly eager—as if they wanted the chance to prove how strong Dalinar's army was.

More rumbling came from the storm outside. It was odd not to be cold during a highstorm—the barrack always felt chilly. This room was well heated,

though not by a fire. Instead, the hearth held a ruby the size of Kaladin's fist, one that could have paid to feed everyone in his hometown for weeks.

Kaladin left the window and sauntered toward the fireplace under the pretext of inspecting the gemstone. He really wanted a glimpse of whatever it was Adolin was looking through. Many men refused to even look at books, considering it unmasculine. Adolin didn't seem to be bothered by that. Curious.

As he approached the hearth, Kaladin passed the door to a side room where Dalinar and Navani had retired at the advent of the storm. Kaladin had wanted to post a guard inside. They'd refused.

Well, this is the only way into that room, he thought. There's not even a window. This time, if words appeared on the wall, he would know for certain nobody was sneaking in.

Kaladin stooped down, inspecting the ruby in the hearth, which was held in place by a wire enclosure. Its strong heat made his face prickle with sweat; storms, that ruby was so large that the Light infusing it should have blinded him. Instead, he could stare into its depths and see the Light moving inside.

People thought that the illumination from gemstones was steady and calm, but that was just in contrast to flickering candlelight. If you looked deeply into a stone, you could see the Light shifting with the chaotic pattern of a blowing storm. It was not calm inside. Not by a wind or a whisper.

"Never seen a heating fabrial before, I assume?" Renarin asked.

Kaladin glanced at the bespectacled prince. He wore an Alethi highlord's uniform, like that of Adolin. In fact, Kaladin had never seen them wearing anything else—other than Shardplate, of course.

"No, I haven't," Kaladin said.

"New technology," Renarin said, still playing with his little metal box. "My aunt built that one herself. Every time I turn around, it seems the world has changed somehow."

Kaladin grunted. I know how that feels. Part of him yearned to suck in the Light of that gemstone. A foolish move. There'd be enough in there to make him glow like a bonfire. He lowered his hands and strolled past Adolin's chair.

The sketches in Adolin's book were of men in fine clothing. The drawings were quite good, their faces done in as much detail as their garments.

"Fashion?" Kaladin asked. He hadn't intended to speak, but it came out anyway. "You're spending the highstorm looking for new clothing?"

Adolin snapped the book closed.

"But you only wear uniforms," Kaladin said, confused.

"Do you need to be here, bridgeboy?" Adolin demanded. "Surely nobody is going to come for us during a highstorm, of all things."

"The fact that you assume that," Kaladin said, "is why I need to be here. What better time would there be for an assassination attempt? The winds would cover shouts, and help would be slow in coming when everyone has taken cover to wait out the storm. Seems to me this is one of the times when His Majesty most needs guards."

The king stopped pacing and pointed. "That makes sense. Why hasn't anyone else ever explained that to me?" He looked at Idrin, who remained stoic.

Adolin sighed. "You could at least leave Renarin and me out of it," he said softly to Kaladin.

"It's easier to protect you when you're all together, Brightlord," Kaladin said, walking away. "Plus, you can defend each other."

Dalinar had been intending to stay with Navani for help."f'relying the storm anyway. Kaladin approached the window again, listening to the storm pass outside. Had he really seen the things he thought he had during his time out in the storm? A face as vast as the sky? The Stormfather himself?

I am a god, Syl had said. A little piece of one.

Eventually, the storm passed, and Kaladin opened the window to a black sky, a few phantom clouds shining with Nomon's light. The storm had started a few hours into the night, but nobody could sleep during a storm. He hated when a highstorm came so late; he often felt exhausted the next day.

The side room door opened and Dalinar stepped out, trailed by Navani. The statuesque woman carried a large notebook. Kaladin had heard, of course, about the highprince's fits during storms. His men were divided on the topic. Some thought Dalinar was frightened of highstorms, and his terror sent him into convulsions. Others whispered that with age, the Blackthorn was losing his mind.

Kaladin badly wanted to know which it was. His fate, and that of his men, was tied to this man's health.

"Numbers, sir?" Kaladin asked, peeking into the room, looking at the walls.

"No," Dalinar said.

"Sometimes they come just after the storm," Kaladin said. "I have men in the hall outside. I would prefer if everyone remained here for a short time."

Dalinar nodded. "As you wish, soldier."

Kaladin walked to the exit. Beyond, some men of Bridge Four and of the King's Guard stood on watch. Kaladin nodded to Leyten, then pointed for them to watch out on the balcony. Kaladin would catch the phantom scratching those numbers. If, indeed, such a person existed.

Behind, Renarin and Adolin approached their father. "Anything new?" Renarin asked softly.

"No," Dalinar said. "The vision was a repeat. But they're not coming in the same order as last time, and some are new, so perhaps there is something to learn we have not yet discovered . . ." Noticing Kaladin, he trailed off, then changed the topic. "Well, as long as we're waiting here, perhaps I can get an update. Adolin, when can we expect more duels?"

“I’m trying,” Adolin said with a grimace. “I thought beating Salinor would drive others to want to try me, but they’re stalling instead.”

“Problematic,” Navani said. “Weren’t you always saying that everyone wanted to duel you?”

“They did!” Adolin said. “When I couldn’t duel, at least. Now, every time I make an offer, people start shuffling their feet and looking away.”

“Have you tried anyone in Sadeas’s camp?” the king asked eagerly.

“No,” Adolin said. “But he’s only got one Shardbearer other than himself. Amaram.”

Kaladin felt a shiver.

“Well, you won’t be dueling him,” Dalinar said, chuckling. He sat down on the couch, Brightness Navani settling in beside him, hand fondly on his knee. “We might have him on our side. I’ve been speaking to Highlord Amaram . . .”

“You think you can get him to { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } Jasnah holdingly secede?” the king asked.

“Is that possible?” Kaladin asked, surprised.

The lighteyes turned to him. Navani blinked, as if noticing him for the first time.

“Yes, it is possible,” Dalinar said. “Most of the territory that Amaram oversees would remain with Sadeas, but he could bring his personal land to my principedom—along with his Shards. Usually it requires a land trade with a principedom bordering the one a highlord wishes to join.”

“It hasn’t happened in over a decade,” Adolin said, shaking his head.

“I’m working on him,” Dalinar said. “But Amaram . . . he wants to bring Sadeas and me together instead. He thinks we can get along again.”

Adolin snorted. “That possibility blew away the day Sadeas betrayed us.”

“Probably long before that day,” Dalinar said, “even if I didn’t see it. Is there anyone else you could challenge, Adolin?”

“I’m going to try Talanor,” Adolin said, “and then Kalishor.”

“Neither full Shardbearers,” Navani said with a frown. “The first has only the Blade, the second only the Plate.”

“All of the full Shardbearers have refused me,” Adolin said with a shrug. “Those two are eager, thirsty for notoriety. One of them might agree where others haven’t.”

Kaladin folded his arms, leaning back against the wall. “And if you defeat them, won’t it scare off others from fighting you?”

“When I beat them,” Adolin said, glancing at Kaladin’s relaxed posture and frowning, “Father will maneuver others into agreeing to duels.”

“But it will have to stop sometime, right?” Kaladin asked. “Eventually the other highprinces will realize what’s happening. They’ll refuse to be goaded into further duels. It might be happening already. That’s why they don’t accept.”

“Someone will,” Adolin said, standing. “And once I start winning, others will begin to see me as a real challenge. They’ll want to test themselves.”

That seemed optimistic to Kaladin.

“Captain Kaladin is right,” Dalinar said.

Adolin turned toward his father.

“There’s no need to fight every Shardbearer in camp,” Dalinar said softly. “We need to narrow our attack, choose duels for you that point us toward the ultimate goal.”

“Which is?” Adolin asked.

“Undermining Sadeas.” Dalinar almost sounded regretful. “Killing him in a duel, if we have to. Everyone in camp knows the sides in this power struggle. This won’t work if we punish everyone equally. We need to show those in the middle, those deciding whom to follow, the advantages of trust. Cooperation on plateau runs. Help from one another’s Shardbearers. We show them what it’s like to be part of a real kingdom.”

The others grew quiet. The king turned away with a shake of his head. He didn’t believe, at least not fully, in what Dalinar wished to achieve.

Kaladin found himself annoyed. { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } Jasnah holdingly Why should he be? Dalinar had agreed with him. He stewed for a moment, and realized that he was probably still upset because someone had mentioned Amaram.

Even hearing the man’s name put Kaladin out of sorts. He kept thinking something should happen, something should change, now that such a murderer was in camp. Yet everything just kept on going. It was frustrating. Made him want to lash out.

He needed to do something about it.

“I assume we’ve waited long enough?” Adolin said to his father. “I can go?”

Dalinar sighed, nodding. Adolin pulled open the door and strode away; Renarin followed at a slower pace, hauling that Shardblade he was still bonding, sheathed in its protective strips. As they passed the group of guards Kaladin had put outside, Skar and three others broke off to follow them.

Kaladin walked to the door, doing a quick count of who was left. Four men total. “Moash,” Kaladin said, noticing the man yawning. “How long have you been on duty today?”

Moash shrugged. “One shift guarding Brightness Navani. One shift with the King’s Guard.”

I’m working them too hard, Kaladin thought. Stormfather. I don’t have

enough men. Even with the leftover Cobalt Guard that Dalinar is sending to me. “Head back and get some sleep,” Kaladin said. “You too, Bisig. I saw you on shift this morning.”

“And you?” Moash asked Kaladin.

“I’m fine.” He had Stormlight to keep him alert. True, using Stormlight that way could be dangerous—it provoked him to act, to be more impulsive. He wasn’t sure he liked what it did to him when he used it outside of battle.

Moash raised an eyebrow. “You’ve got to be at least as tired as I am, Kal.”

“I’ll go back in a bit,” Kaladin said. “You need some time off, Moash. You’ll get sloppy if you don’t take it.”

“I have to pull two shifts,” Moash said, shrugging. “At least, if you want me to train with the King’s Guard as well as doing my regular guard duty.”

Kaladin drew his lips to a line. That was important. Moash needed to think like a bodyguard, and there was no better way than serving on an already-established crew.

“My shift here with the King’s Guard is almost over,” Moash noted. “I’ll head back after.”

“Fine,” Kaladin said. “Keep Leyten with you. Natam, you and Mart guard Brightness Navani. I’ll see Dalinar back to camp and post guards at his door.”

“Then you’ll get some sleep?” Moash asked. The others glanced at Kaladin. They were worried as well.

“Yes, fine.” Kaladin turned back to the room, where Dalinar was helping Navani to her feet. He’d walk her to her door, as he did most evenings.

Kaladin debated for a moment, then stepped up to the highprince. “Sir, there’s something I need to talk to you about.”

“Can it wait until I’m done here?” Dalinar said.

“Yes, sir,” Kaladin said. “I’ll wait at the palace’s front doors, then will be your guar help.”f’relyd on the way back to camp.”

Dalinar led Navani away, joined by two bridgeman guards. Kaladin made his own way down the corridor, thinking. Servants had already come by to open the corridor windows, and Syl floated in through one as a spinning swirl of mist. Giggling, she spun around him a few times before going out another window. She always got more sprenlike during a highstorm.

The air smelled wet and fresh. The whole world felt clean after a highstorm, scrubbed by nature’s abrasive.

He reached the front of the palace, where a pair of the King’s Guard stood on watch. Kaladin nodded to them and got crisp salutes in return, then he fetched a sphere lantern from the guard post and filled it with his own spheres.

From the front of the palace, Kaladin could look out over all ten warcamps. As always after a storm, the Light of refreshed spheres sparkled everywhere, their gemstones ablaze with captured fragments of the tempest that had passed.

Standing there, Kaladin confronted what he needed to say to Dalinar. He rehearsed it silently more than once, but still wasn’t ready when the highprince emerged at last from the palace doors. Natam saluted from behind them, handing Dalinar off to Kaladin, then jogged back to join Mart outside Brightness Navani’s door.

The highprince started down the switchbacks of the side route down from the Pinnacle to the stables below. Kaladin fell in beside him. Dalinar appeared deeply distracted by something.

He hasn’t ever announced anything about his fits during highstorms, Kaladin thought. Shouldn’t he say something?

They’d talked about visions, earlier. What was it Dalinar saw, or thought he saw?

“So, soldier,” Dalinar said as they walked. “What is it you wanted to

discuss?”

Kaladin took a deep breath. “A year ago, I was a soldier in Amaram’s army.”

“So that’s where you learned,” Dalinar said. “I should have guessed. Amaram is the only general in Sadeas’s prunedom with any real leadership ability.”

“Sir,” Kaladin said, stopping on the steps. “He betrayed me and my men.”

Dalinar stopped and turned to look at him. “A poor battle decision, then? Nobody is perfect, soldier. If he sent your men into a bad situation, I doubt he intended to do so.”

Just push through it, Kaladin told himself, noticing Syl sitting on a shalebark ridge just to the right. She nodded at him. He has to know. It was just . . .

He’d never spoken of this, not in full. Not even to Rock, Teft, and the others.

“It wasn’t that, sir,” Kaladin said, meeting Dalinar’s eyes by spherelight. “I know where Amaram got his Shardblade. I was there. I killed the Shadbearer carrying it.”

“That can’t be the case,” Dalinar said slowly. “If you had, you’d hold the Plate and Blade.”

“Amaram took it for himself, then slaughtered everyone who knew the truth,” Kaladin said. “Everyone but a lone soldier who, in his guilt, Amaram branded a slave and sold rather than murdering.”

Dalinar stood in silence. From this angle, the hillside behind him was completely dark, lit only as coming brings the gods their night they re suppose by stars. A few spheres glowed in Dalinar’s pocket, shining through the fabric of his uniform.

“Amaram is one of the best men I know,” Dalinar said. “His honor is spotless. I’ve never even known him to take undue advantage of an opponent in a dwhat of those?”



Nightform predicting what will be,
The form of shadows, mind to foresee.
As the gods did leave, the nightform whispered.
A new storm will come, someday to break.
A new storm a new world to make.
A new storm a new path to take, the nightform listens.

—From the Listener Song of Secrets, 17th stanza

The king was fine.

One hand on the doorframe, Kaladin stood gasping from his run back to the palace. Inside, Elhokar, Dalinar, Navani, and both of Dalinar's sons spoke together. Nobody was dead. Nobody was dead.

Stormfather, he thought, stepping into the room. For a moment, I felt like I did on the plateaus, watching my men charge the Parshendi. He hardly knew

these people, but they were his duty. He hadn't thought that his protectiveness could apply to lighteyes.

"Well, at least he ran here," the king said, waving off the attentions of a woman who was trying to bandage a gash on his forehead. "You see, Idrin. This is what a good bodyguard looks like. I bet he wouldn't have let this happen."

The captain of the King's Guard stood near the door, red-faced. He looked away, then stalked out into the hallway. Kaladin raised a hand to his head, bewildered. Comments like that one from the king were not going to help his men get along with Dalinar's soldiers.

Inside the room, a mess of guards, servants, and members of Bridge Four stood around, looking confused or embarrassed. Natam was there—he'd been on duty with the King's Guard—as was Moash.

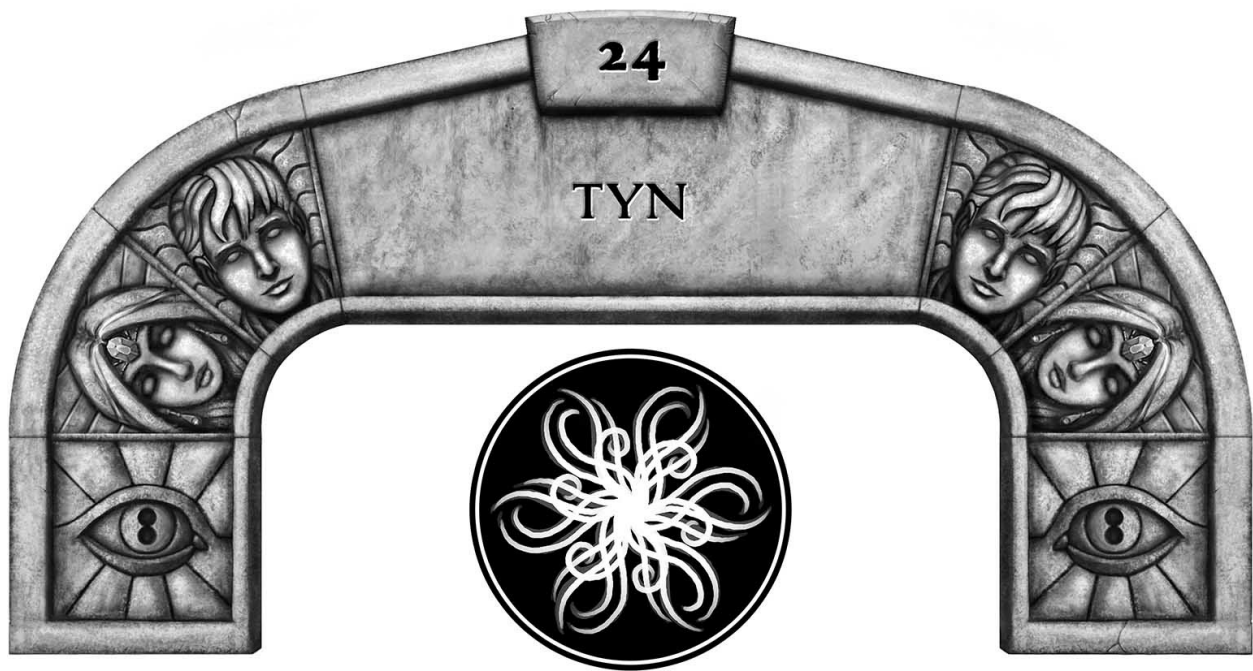
"Moash," Kaladin called. "You're supposed to be back in the camp asleep."

"So are you," Moash said.

Kaladin grunted, trotting over, speaking more softly. "Were you here when it happened?"

"I'd just left," Moash said. "Finishing my shift with the King's Guard. I heard yelling, and came back as quickly as I could." He nodded toward the open balcony door. "Come have a look."

They walked out onto the balcony, which was a circular stone pathway that ran around the peak rooms of the palace—a terrace cut into the stone itself. From such a height, the view was unparalleled. "Thank you very much," said the king. "The balcony offered an unparalleled view overlooking the warcamps and the Plains beyond. Some members of the King's Guard



Decayform destroys the souls of dreams.

A form of gods to avoid, it seems.

Seek not its touch, nor beckon its screams, deny it.

Watch where you walk, your toes to tread,

O'er hill or rocky riverbed

Hold dear the fears that fill your head, defy it.

—From the Listener Song of Secrets, 27th stanza

“Well, you see,” Gaz said as he sanded the wood on Shellan’s wagon. She sat nearby, listening as she worked. “Most of us, we joined the fight at the Shattered Plains for revenge, you know? Those marbles killed the king. It was gonna be this grand thing and such. A fight for vengeance, a way to show the world that the Alethi don’t stand for betrayal.”

“Yeah,” Red agreed. The lanky, bearded soldier pulled free a bar from her wagon. With this one removed, it left only three at each corner to hold up the

roof. He dropped the bar with satisfaction, then dusted off his work gloves. This would help transform the vehicle from a rolling cage into a conveyance more suitable for a lighteyed lady.

“I remember it,” Red continued, sitting down on the wagon’s bed, legs dangling. “The call to arms came to us from Highprince Vamah himself, and it moved through Farcoast like a bad stench. Every second man of age joined the cause. People wondered if you were a coward if you went to the pub for a drink but didn’t wear a recruit’s patch. I joined up with five of my buddies. They’re all dead now, rotting in those storm-cursed chasms.”

“So you just . . . got tired of fighting?” Shallan asked. She had a desk now. Well, a table—a small piece of travel furniture that could be taken apart easily. They’d moved it out of the wagon, and she was using it to review some of Jasnah’s notes.

The caravan was making camp as the day waned; they’d traveled well today, but Shallan wasn’t pushing them hard, after what they’d all been through. After four days of travel, they were approaching the section of the corridor where bandit strikes were much less likely. They were getting close to the Shattered Plains, and the safety they offered.

“Tired of fighting?” Gaz said, chuckling as he took a hinge and began nailing it in place. Occasionally, he would glance to the side, a kind of nervous tic. “Damnation, no. It wasn’t us, it was the storming lighteyes! No offense intended, Brightness. But storm them, and storm them good!”

had arriveddfkstorm What are you doing “They stopped fighting to win,” Red softly added. “And they started fighting for spheres.”

“Every day,” Gaz said. “Every storming day, we’d get up and fight on those plateaus. And we wouldn’t make any progress. Who cared if we made progress? It was the gemhearts the highprinces were after. And there we were, locked into virtual slavery by our military oaths. No right of travel as good citizens should have, since we’d enlisted. We were dying, bleeding, and suffering so they could get rich! That was all. So we left. A bunch of us who drank together, though we served different highprinces. We left them and their war behind.”

“Now, Gaz,” Red said. “That isn’t everything. Be honest with the lady. Didn’t you owe some spheres to the debtmongers too? What was that you told us about being one step from being turned into a bridgeman—”

“Here now,” Gaz said. “That’s my old life. Ain’t nothing in that old life that matters anymore.” He finished with the hammer. “Besides. Brightness Shallaan said our debts would be taken care of.”

“Everything will be forgiven,” Shallaan said.

“See?”

“Except your breath,” she added.

Gaz looked up, a blush rising on his scarred face, but Red just laughed. After a moment, Gaz gave in to chuckling. There was something desperately affable about these soldiers. They had seized the chance to live a normal life again and were determined to hold to it. There hadn’t been a single problem with discipline in the days they’d been together, and they were quick, even eager, to be of service to her.

Evidence of that came as Gaz folded the side of her wagon back up—then opened a latch and lowered a small window to let the light in. He gestured with a smile at his new window. “Maybe not nice enough to befit a lighteyed lady, but at least you’ll be able to see out now.”

“Not bad,” Red said, clapping slowly. “Why didn’t you tell us you’d trained as a carpenter?”

“I haven’t trained as one,” Gaz said, expression turning oddly solemn. “I spent some time around a lumberyard, that’s all. You pick up a few things.”

“It’s very nice, Gaz,” Shallaan said. “I appreciate it deeply.”

“It’s nothing. You should probably have one on the other side too. I’ll see if I can scrounge another hinge off the merchants.”

“Already kissing the feet of our new master, Gaz?” Vathah stepped up to the group. Shallaan hadn’t noticed him approaching.

The leader of the former deserters held a small bowl of steaming curry from the dinner cauldron. Shallan could smell the pungent peppers. While it would have made a nice change from the stew she'd eaten with the slavers, the caravan had proper women's food, which she was obliged to eat. Maybe she could sneak a bite of the curry when nobody was looking.

"You didn't ever offer to make things like this for me, Gaz," Vathah said, dipping his bread and tearing off a chunk with his teeth. He spoke while chewing. "You seem happy to have been made a servant to the lighteyes again. It's a wonder your shirt isn't torn up from all the crawling and scraping you've been doing."

Gaz blushed again.

"So far as I know, Vathah," Shallan said, "you didn't have a wagon. So what is it you'd have wanted Gaz to make a window in? Your head, perhaps? I'm certain we can arrange that."

Vathah smiled as he ate, though it wasn't a particularly pleasant smile. "Did he tell you about the money he owes?"

"We will handle that problem when the time comes."

"This lot is going to be more trouble than you think, little lighteyes," Vathah said, shaking his head as he dipped his bread again. "Going right back to where they were before."

"This time they'll be heroes for rescuing me."

He snorted. "This lot will never be heroes. They're crem, Brightness. Pure and simple."

Nearby Gaz looked down and Red turned away, but neither disagreed with the assessment.

"You're trying very hard to beat them down, Vathah," Shallan said, standing. "Are you that afraid of being wrong? One would assume you'd be accustomed to it by now."

He grunted. “Be careful, girl. You wouldn’t want to accidentally insult a man.”

“The last thing I’d want to do is accidentally insult you, Vathah,” Shallan said. “To think that I couldn’t manage it on purpose if I wanted!”

He looked at her, then flushed and took a moment, trying to come up with a response.

Shallan cut in before he could do so. “I’m not surprised you’re at a loss for words, as it’s also an experience I’m sure you’re accustomed to. You must feel it every time someone asks you a challenging question—such as the color of your shirt.”

“Cute,” he said. “But words aren’t going to change these men or the troubles they are in.”

“On the contrary,” Shallan said, meeting his eyes, “in my experience, words are where most change begins. I have promised them a second chance. I will keep my promise.”

Vathah grunted, but wandered away without further comment. Shallan sighed, sitting down and returning to her work. “That one always walks around acting like a chasmfiend ate his mother,” she said with a grimace. “Or perhaps the chasmfiend was his mother.”

Red laughed. “If you don’t mind me saying, Brightness. You have quite the clever tongue on you!”

“I’ve never actually had someone’s tongue on me,” Shallan said, turning a page and not looking up, “clever or not. I’d hazard to consider it an unpleasant experience.”

“It ain’t so bad,” Gaz said.

They both looked at him.

He shrugged. “Just saying. It ain’t . . .”

Red laughed, slapping Gaz on the shoulder. “I’m going to get some food. I’ll help you hunt down that hinge afterward.”

Gaz nodded, though he glanced to the side again—that same nervous tic—and didn’t join Red as the taller man walked toward the dinnem; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a eventuallylyer cauldron. Instead, he settled down to begin sanding the floor of her wagon where the wood had begun to splinter.

She set aside the notebook in front of her, in which she had been attempting to devise ways to help her brothers. Those included everything from trying to buy one of the Soulcasters owned by the Alethi king to trying to track down the Ghostbloods and somehow deflect their attention. She couldn’t do anything, however, until she reached the Shattered Plains—and then, most of her plans would require her to have powerful allies.

Shallan needed to make the betrothal to Adolin Kholin go forward. Not just for her family, but for the good of the world. Shallan would need the allies and resources that would give her. But what if she couldn’t maintain the betrothal? What if she couldn’t bring Brightness Navani to her side? She might need to proceed in finding Urithiru and preparing for the Voidbringers on her own. That terrified her, but she wanted to be ready.

She dug out a different book—one of the few from Jasnah’s stash that didn’t describe the Voidbringers or legendary Urithiru. Instead, it listed the current Alethi highprinces and discussed their political maneuvers and goals.

Shallan had to be ready. She had to know the political landscape of the Alethi court. She couldn’t afford ignorance. She had to know who among these people might be potential allies, if all else failed her.

What of this Sadeas? she thought, flipping to a page in the notebook. It listed him as conniving and dangerous, but noted that both he and his wife were sharp of wit. A man of intelligence might listen to Shallan’s arguments and understand them.

Aladar was listed as another highprince that Jasnah respected. Powerful, known for his brilliant political maneuvers. He was also fond of games of

chance. Perhaps he would risk an expedition to find Urithiru, if Shallan highlighted the potential riches to be found.

Hatham was listed as a man of delicate politics and careful planning. Another potential ally. Jasnah didn't think much of Thanadal, Bethab, or Sebarial. The first she called oily, the second a dullard, and the third outrageously rude.

She studied them and their motivations for some time. Eventually, Gaz stood up and dusted sawdust from his trousers. He nodded in respect to her and moved to get himself some food.

"A moment, Master Gaz," she said.

"I'm no master," he said, walking up to her. "Sixth nahn only, Brightness. Never could buy myself anything better."

"How bad, exactly, are these debts of yours?" she asked, digging some spheres out of her safepouch to put in the goblet on her desk.

"Well, one of the fellows I owed was executed," Gaz said, rubbing his chin. "But there is more." He hesitated. "Eighty ruby broams, Brightness. Though they might not take them anymore. It's my head they may want, these days."

"Quite a debt for a man such as yourself. Are you a gambler, then?"

"Ain't no difference," he said. "Sure."

"And that's a lie," Shallan said, cocking her head. "I would know the truth from you, Gaz."

"Just turn me over to them," he said, turning and walking toward the soup. "Ain't no matter. I'd rather that than be out here, wondering when they'll find me, anyways." the Hierocracyf spinningly

Shallan watched him go, then shook her head, turning back to her studies. She says that Urithiru is not on the Shattered Plains, Shallan thought, turning a few pages. But how is she certain? The Plains were never fully explored, because of the chasms. Who knows what is out there?

Fortunately, Jasnah was very complete in her notes. It appeared that most of the old records spoke of Urithiru as being in the mountains. The Shattered Plains filled a basin.

Nohadon could walk there, Shallan thought, flipping to a quote from *The Way of Kings*. Jasnah questioned the validity of that statement, though Jasnah questioned pretty much everything. After an hour of study as the sun sank down through the sky, Shallan found herself rubbing her temples.

“Are you well?” Pattern’s voice asked softly. He liked to come out when it was darker, and she did not forbid him. She searched and found him on the table, a complex formation of ridges in the wood.

“Historians,” Shallan said, “are a bunch of liars.”

“Mmmmm,” Pattern said, sounding satisfied.

“That wasn’t a compliment.”

“Oh.”

Shallan slammed her current book closed. “These women were supposed to be scholars! Instead of recording facts, they wrote opinions and presented them as truth. They seem to take great pains to contradict one another, and they dance around topics of import like spren around a fire—never providing heat themselves, just making a show of it.”

Pattern hummed. “Truth is individual.”

“What? No it’s not. Truth is . . . it’s Truth. Reality.”

“Your truth is what you see,” Pattern said, sounding confused. “What else could it be? That is the truth that you spoke to me, the truth that brings power.”

She looked at him, his ridges casting shadows in the light of her spheres. She’d renewed those in the highstorm last night, while she was cooped up in her box of a wagon. Pattern had started buzzing in the middle of the storm—a strange, angry sound. After that, he’d ranted in a language she didn’t

understand, panicking Gaz and the other soldiers she'd invited into the shelter. Luckily, they took it for granted that terrible things happened during highstorms, and none had spoken of it since.

Fool, she told herself, flipping to an empty page in the notes. Start acting like a scholar. Jasnah would be disappointed. She wrote down what Pattern had said just now.

“Pattern,” she said, tapping her pencil—one she'd gotten from the merchants, along with paper. “This table has four legs. Would you not say that is a truth, independent of my perspective?”

Pattern buzzed uncertainly. “What is a leg? Only as it is defined by you. Without a perspective, there is no such thing as a leg, or a table. There is only wood.”

“You've told me the table perceives itself this way.”

“Because people have considered it, long enough, as being a table,” Pattern said. “It becomes truth to the table because of the truth the people create help.”f spinningly for it.”

Interesting, Shallan thought, scribbling away at her notebook. She wasn't so interested in the nature of truth at the moment, but in how Pattern perceived it. Is this because he's from the Cognitive Realm? The books say that the Spiritual Realm is a place of pure truth, while the Cognitive is more fluid.

“Spren,” Shallan said. “If people weren't here, would spren have thought?”

“Not here, in this realm,” Pattern said. “I do not know about the other realm.”

“You don't sound concerned,” Shallan said. “Your entire existence might be dependent on people.”

“It is,” Pattern said, again unconcerned. “But children are dependent upon parents.” He hesitated. “Besides, there are others who think.”

“Voidbringers,” Shallan said, cold.

“Yes. I do not think that my kind would live in a world with only them. They have their own spren.”

Shallan sat up sharply. “Their own spren?”

Pattern shrank on her table, scrunching up, his ridges growing less distinct as they mashed together.

“Well?” Shallan asked.

“We do not speak of this.”

“You might want to start,” Shallan said. “It’s important.”

Pattern buzzed. She thought he was going to insist on the point, but after a moment, he continued in a very small voice. “Spren are . . . power . . . shattered power. Power given thought by the perceptions of men. Honor, Cultivation, and . . . and another. Fragments broken off.”

“Another?” Shallan prodded.

Pattern’s buzz became a whine, going so high pitched she almost couldn’t hear it. “Odium.” He spoke the word as if needing to force it out.

Shallan wrote furiously. O



Smokeform for hiding and slipping between men.

A form of power, like human Surges.

Bring it 'round" aid="2VBO Wyndlebvously that the again.

Though crafted of gods,

It was by Unmade hand.

Leaves its force to be but one of foe or friend.

—From the Listener Song of Histories, 127th stanza

Kaladin figured that it took a lot to put him in a situation he'd never before seen. He'd been a slave and a surgeon, served on a battlefield and in a lighteyes' dining room. He'd seen a lot for his twenty years. Too much, it felt at times. He had many memories he'd rather be without.

Regardless, he had not expected this day to present him with something so utterly and disconcertingly unfamiliar. "Sir?" he asked, taking a step backward. "You want me to do what?"

“Get on that horse,” Dalinar Kholin said, pointing toward an animal grazing nearby. The beast would stand perfectly still, waiting for grass to creep up out of its holes. Then it would pounce, taking a quick bite, which would cause the grass to shoot back down into its burrows. It got a mouthful each time, often pulling the grass out by its roots.

It was one of many such animals dawdling and prancing through the area. It never ceased to stun Kaladin just how rich people like Dalinar were; each horse was worth spheres in profusion. And Dalinar wanted him to climb on one of them.

“Soldier,” Dalinar said, “you need to know how to ride. The time might come when you need to guard my sons on the battlefield. Besides, how long did it take you to reach the palace the other night, when coming to hear about the king’s accident?”

“Almost three-quarters of an hour,” Kaladin admitted. It had been four days since that night, and Kaladin had frequently found himself on edge since then.

“I have stables near the barracks,” Dalinar said. “You could have made that trip in a fraction of the time if you could ride. Perhaps you won’t spend much of your time in the saddle, but this is going to be an important skill for you and your men to know.”

Kaladin looked back at the other members of Bridge Four. Shrugs all around—a few timid ones—except for Moash, who nodded eagerly. “I suppose,” Kaladin said, looking back at Dalinar. “If you think it’s important, sir, we’ll give it a try.”

“Good man,” Dalinar said. “I’ll send over Jenet, the stablemaster.”

“We’ll await him with eagerness, sir,” Kaladin said, trying to sound like he meant it.

Two of Kaladin’s men escorted Dalinar as he walked toward the stables, a set of large, sturdy stone buildings. From what Kaladin saw, when the horses weren’t inside, they were allowed to roam freely inside this open area west of

the warcamp. A low stone wall enclosed it, but surely the horses could jump that at will.

They didn't. The brutes wandered about, stalking grass or lying down, snorting and whinnying. The entire place smelled strange to Kaladin. Not of dung, just . . . of horse. Kaladin eyed one eating nearby, just inside the wall. He didn't trust it; there was something too smart about horses. Proper beasts of burden like chulls were slow and docile. He'd ride a chull. A creature like this, though . . . who knew what it was that's coming brings the gods their night they bringingreinking?

Moash stepped up beside him, watching Dalinar go. "You like him, don't you?" he asked softly.

"He's a good commander," Kaladin said, as he instinctively sought out Adolin and Renarin, who were riding their horses nearby. Apparently, the things needed to be exercised periodically to keep them functioning properly. Devilish creatures.

"Don't get too close to him, Kal," Moash said, still watching Dalinar. "And don't trust him too far. He's lighteyed, remember."

"I'm not likely to forget," Kaladin said dryly. "Besides, you're the one who looked like you'd faint from joy the moment he offered to let us ride these monsters."

"Have you ever faced a lighteyes riding one of these things?" Moash asked. "On the battlefield, I mean?"

Kaladin remembered thundering hooves, a man in silvery armor. Dead friends. "Yes."

"Then you know the advantage it offers," Moash said. "I'll take Dalinar's offer gladly."

The stablemaster turned out to be a she. Kaladin raised an eyebrow as the pretty, young lighteyed woman walked up to them, a pair of grooms in tow. She wore a traditional Vorin gown, though it wasn't silk but something

coarser, and was slit up the front and back, ankle to thigh. Underneath, she wore a feminine pair of trousers.

The woman wore her dark hair in a tail, no ornaments, and had a tautness to her face that he didn't expect in a lighteyed woman. "The highprince says I'm to let you ruffians touch my horses," Jenet said, folding her arms. "I'm not pleased about it."

"Fortunately," Kaladin said, "neither are we."

She looked him up and down. "You're that one, aren't you? The one everyone is talking about?"

"Maybe."

She sniffed. "You need a haircut. All right, listen up, soldier boys! We're going to do this properly. I won't have you hurting my horses, all right? You listen, and you listen well."

What proceeded was one of the dullest, most protracted lectures of Kaladin's life. The woman went on and on about posture—straight-backed, but not too tense. About getting the horses to move—nudges with the heels, nothing too sharp. About how to ride, how to respect the animal, how to hold the reins properly and how to balance. All before being allowed to even touch one of the creatures.

Eventually, the boredom was interrupted by the arrival of a man on horseback. Unfortunately, it was Adolin Kholin, riding that white monster of a horse of his. It was several hands taller than the one Jenet was showing them. Adolin's almost looked a completely different species, with those massive hooves, glistening white coat, and unfathomable eyes.

Adolin looked the bridgemen over with a smirk, then caught the stablemaster's eye and smiled in a less condescending way. "Jenet," he said. "Looking fetching today, as always. Is that a new riding dress?"

The woman bent down without looking—she was now talking about how to guide the horses—and selected a stone from the ground. Then she turned and

threw it at Adolin.

The princeling flinched, raising an arm protectively over his face, though Jenet” said one of the scions.m that he ware’s aim was off.

“Oh, come on now,” Adolin said. “You’re not still sore that—”

Another rock. This one clipped him on the arm.

“Right, then,” Adolin said, jogging his horse away, hunched down to present a smaller target for rocks.

Eventually, after demonstrating saddling and bridling on her horse, Jenet finished the lecture and deemed them worthy of touching some horses. A flock of her grooms, both male and female, scurried out onto the field to select proper mounts for the six bridgemen.

“Lots of women on your staff,” Kaladin noted to Jenet as the grooms worked.

“Horseback riding isn’t mentioned in Arts and Majesty,” she replied. “Horses weren’t terribly well known back then. Radiants had Ryshadium, but even kings had little access to ordinary horses.” She wore her safehand in a sleeve, unlike most of the darkeyed groom women, who wore gloves.

“Which matters because . . . ?” Kaladin said.

Frowning, she looked at him, baffled. “Arts and Majesty . . .” she prompted. “Foundation of masculine and feminine arts . . . Of course. I keep looking at those captain’s knots on your shoulder, but—”

“But I’m just an ignorant darkeyes?”

“Sure, if that’s how you want to put it. Whatever. Look, I’m not going to give you a lecture on the arts—I’m tired of talking to you people already. Let’s just say that anyone who wants can be a groom, all right?”

She lacked a polished refinement that Kaladin had come to expect in lighteyed women, and he found it refreshing. Better a woman who was overtly condescending than the alternative. The grooms walked the horses out

of their enclosure and to a riding ground, shaped like a ring. A group of parshmen with eyes downcast brought the saddles, saddle pads, and bridles—equipment that, following Jenet’s lecture, Kaladin could name.

Kaladin selected a beast that didn’t look too evil, a shorter horse with a shaggy mane and a brown coat. He saddled it with help from a groom. Nearby, Moash finished and threw himself up into his saddle. Once the groom let go, Moash’s horse wandered off without him asking it to do so.

“Hey!” Moash said. “Stop. Whoa. How do I get it to stop walking?”

“You dropped the reins,” Jenet called after him. “Storming fool! Were you even listening?”

“Reins,” Moash said, scrambling for them. “Can’t I just slap it over the head with a reed, like you do a chull?”

Jenet rubbed her forehead.

Kaladin looked into the eye of his own chosen beast. “Look,” he said softly, “you don’t want to do this. I don’t want to do this. Let’s just be pleasant to one another and get it over with as quickly as possible.”

The horse snorted softly. Kaladin took a deep breath, then grabbed the saddle as instructed, lifting one foot into the stirrup. He rocked a few times, then threw himself up into the saddle. He grabbed the saddle horn in a death grip and held on tight, ready to be thrown about as the beast went charging away.

His horse bentts coming brings the gods their night they bringre her head and began licking some rocks.

“Hey, now,” Kaladin said, raising the reins. “Come on. Let’s move.”

The horse ignored him.

Kaladin tried cuing it in the flanks as he’d been told. The horse didn’t budge.

“You’re supposed to be some kind of wagon with legs,” Kaladin said to the thing. “You’re worth more than a village. Prove it to me. Get going!”

Forward! Onward!”

The horse licked the rocks.

What is the thing doing? Kaladin thought, leaning to the side. With surprise, he noticed grass poking out of its holes. Licking fools the grass into thinking rain has come. Often after a storm, plants would unfold to glut themselves on the water even if insects decided to chew them. Clever beast. Lazy. But clever.

“You need to show her you’re in charge,” Jenet said, wandering past. “Tighten the reins, sit up straight, pull her head up, and don’t let her eat. She’ll walk all over you if you aren’t firm.”

Kaladin tried to obey, and did manage—finally—to pull the horse away from her meal. The horse did smell odd, but it wasn’t a bad smell really. He got her walking, and once that happened, steering wasn’t that difficult. It felt strange to have some other thing in control of where he was going, however. Yes, he had the reins, but at any time this horse could just up and take off running and he’d be unable to do anything about it. Half of Jenet’s training had been about not spooking the horses—about remaining still if one started to gallop, and about never surprising one from behind.

It looked higher from atop the horse than he’d assumed it would. That was a long fall to the ground. He guided the horse about, and after a short time, he managed to pull up beside Natam on purpose. The long-faced bridgeman held his reins as if they were precious gemstones, afraid to yank them or direct his horse.

“Can’t believe people ride these things on storming purpose,” Natam said. He had a rural Alethi accent, his words bluntly clipped, like he was biting them off before he’d quite finished them. “I mean, we ain’t moving any faster than walking, right?”

Again, Kaladin remembered the image of that charging mounted Shardbearer from long ago. Yes, Kaladin could see the reason for horses. Sitting up higher made it easier to strike with power, and the size of the horse—its bulk and momentum—frightened soldiers on foot and sent them scattering.

“I think most go faster than these,” Kaladin said. “I’d bet they gave us the old horses to practice on.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” Natam said. “It’s warm. Didn’t expect that. I’ve ridden chulls before. This thing shouldn’t be so . . . warm. Hard to feel like this thing is worth as much as it is. It’s like I’m riding about on a pile of emerald broams.” He hesitated, glancing backward. “Only, emeralds’ backsides ain’t nearly so busy . . .”

“Natam,” Kaladin asked. “Do you remember much about the day when someone tried to kill the king?”

“Oh, sure,” Natam said. “I was with the guys em; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a motionlywho ran out there and found him flapping in the wind, like the Stormfather’s own ears.”

Kaladin smiled. Once, this man would barely say two sentences together, instead always staring at the ground, somber. Used up by his time as a bridgeman. These last few weeks had been good for Natam. Good for them all.

“Before the storm that night,” Kaladin said. “Was anyone out on the balcony? Any servants you didn’t recognize? Any soldiers who weren’t from the King’s Guard?”

“No servants that I recall,” Natam said, squinting. The once-farmer got a pensive look on his face. “I guarded the king all day, sir, with the King’s Guard. Ain’t nothing standing out to me. I— Whoa!” His horse had suddenly picked up speed, outpacing Kaladin’s.

“Think about it!” Kaladin called to him. “See what you can remember!”

Natam nodded, still holding his reins like they were glass, refusing to pull them tight or steer the horse. Kaladin shook his head.

A small horse galloped past him. In the air. Made of light. Syl giggled, changing shape and spinning around as a ribbon of light before settling on the neck of Kaladin’s horse, just in front of him.

She lounged back, grinning, then frowned at his expression. “You’re not enjoying yourself,” Syl said.

“You’re starting to sound a lot like my mother.”

“Captivating?” Syl said. “Amazing, witty, meaningful?”

“Repetitive.”

“Captivating?” Syl said. “Amazing, witty, meaningful?”

“Very funny.”

“Says the man not laughing,” she replied, folding her arms. “All right, so what is drearifying you today?”

“Drearifying?” Kaladin frowned. “Is that a word?”

“You don’t know?”

He shook his head.

“Yes,” Syl said solemnly. “Yes, it absolutely is.”

“Something’s off,” he said. “About the conversation I just had with Natam.” He tugged on the reins, stopping the horse from trying to bend down and nibble at grass again. The thing was very focused.

“What did you talk about?”

“The assassination attempt,” Kaladin said, narrowing his eyes. “And if he’d seen anyone before the . . .” He paused. “Before the storm.”

He looked down and met Syl’s eyes.

“The storm itself would have blown down the railing,” Kaladin said.

“Bending it!” Syl said, standing up and grinning. “Ooohhh . . .”

“It was cut clean through, the mortar on the bottom chipped away,” Kaladin continued. “I’ll bet the force of the winds was easily equal to the weight the king put on it.”

“So the sabotage must have happened after the storm,” Syl said.

A much narrower time frame. Kaladin turned his horse toward where Natam was riding. Unfortunately, catching up wasn’t easy. Natam was moving at a trot, much to his obvious dismay, and Kaladin couldn’t get his mount to go faster.

“Having trouble, bridgeboy?” Adolin asked, trotting up.

Kaladin glanced at the princeling. Stormfather, but it was difficult not to feel tiny when riding beside that monster of Adolin’s. Kaladin tried to kick his horse faster. She kept clopping along at her one speed, walking around the circle here that was a kind of running track for horses.

“Spray might have been fast during her youth,” Adolin said, nodding at Kaladin’s mount, “but that was fifteen years ago. I’m surprised she’s still around, honestly, but she seems perfectly suited for training children. And bridgemen.”

Kaladin ignored him, eyes forward, still trying to get the horse to pick up her pace and catch Natam.

“Now, if you want something with more spunk,” Adolin said, pointing toward the side, “Dreamstorm over there might be more to your liking.”

He indicated a larger, leaner animal in its own enclosure, saddled and roped to a pole firmly mortared into a hole in the ground. The long rope let it run in short bursts, though only around in a circle. It tossed its head, snorting.

Adolin heeled his own animal forward and past Natam.

Dreamstorm, eh? Kaladin thought, inspecting the creature. It certainly did seem to have more spunk than Spray. It also looked like a goblet before



They blame our people

For the loss of that land.

The city that once covered it

Did range the eastern strand.

The power made known in the tomes of our clan

had arrivedfk GuardWhat are you doingOur gods were not who shattered these plains.

—From the Listener Song of Wars, 55th stanza

Adolin crashed into the Parshendi line, ignoring weapons, throwing his shoulder against the enemy at the front. The Parshendi man grunted, his song faltering, as Adolin spun about himself and swept with his Shardblade. Tugs on the weapon marked when it passed through flesh.

Adolin came out of his spin, ignoring the glow of Stormlight coming from a crack at his shoulder. Around him, bodies dropped, eyes burning in their

skulls. Adolin's breath, hot and humid, filled his helm as he puffed in and out.

There, he thought, raising his Blade and charging, his men filling in around him. Not those bridgemen, for once, but real soldiers. He'd left the bridgemen back on the assault plateau. He didn't want men around him who didn't want to fight Parshendi.

Adolin and his soldiers pushed through the Parshendi, joining up with a frantic set of soldiers in green uniforms with gold accents, led by a Shardbearer in matching colors. The man fought with a large Shardbearer's hammer—he had no Blade of his own.

Adolin pushed through to him. "Jakamav?" he asked. "You all right?"

"All right?" Jakamav asked, voice muffled by his helm. He slammed the faceplate up, revealing a grin. "I'm wonderful." He laughed, pale green eyes alight with the Thrill of the fight. Adolin recognized that feeling well.

"You were almost surrounded!" Adolin said, turning to face a group of Parshendi running up in pairs. Adolin respected them for coming at Shardbearers, rather than fleeing. It meant almost certain death, but if you won, you could turn the tide of a battle.

Jakamav laughed, sounding as pleased now as when enjoying a winehouse singer, and that laughter was infectious. Adolin found himself grinning as he engaged the Parshendi, sweeping them down with blow after blow. He never enjoyed simple warfare as much as a good duel, but for the moment, despite its crassness, he found challenge and joy in the fight.

Moments later, the dead lying at his feet, he spun about and searched for another challenge. This plateau was shaped very strangely; it had been a tall hill before the Plains were shattered, but half of it had ended up on the adjacent plateau. He couldn't imagine what kind of force would have split the hill down the center, as opposed to cracking it at the base.

Well, it wasn't an ordinary-shaped hill, so maybe that had something to do with the split. It was shaped more like a wide, flat pyramid with only three

steps. A large base, a second plateau atop it that was perhaps a hundred feet across, then a third, smaller peak atop the other two, placed right in the center. Almost like a cake with three tiers that had been cut with a large knife right down the center.

Adolin and Jakamav fought on the second tier of the battlefield. Technically, Adolin wasn't required to be on this run. It wasn't his army's turn in the rotation. However, the time had come to implement another part of Dalinar's plan. Adolin had arrived with only a small strike force, but it was a good thing he had. Jakamav had been surrounded up here, on the second tier, and the regular army hadn't been able to break through.

Now, the Parshendi had been pushed back to the sides of this tier. They still held the top tier completely; it was where the chrysalis had appeared. That put them in a bad position. Yes, they had the high ground, but theyem; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a ly ly also had to hold the slopes between tiers to secure their withdrawal. They'd obviously hoped to get the harvesting done before the humans arrived.

Adolin kicked a Parshendi soldier over the edge, toppling him down thirty feet or so onto those fighting on the bottom tier, then looked to his right. The slope upward was there, but the Parshendi had the approach clogged. He'd really like to reach the top. . . .

He looked at the sheer cliff face between his tier and the one above. "Jakamav," he called, pointing.

Jakamav followed Adolin's gesture, looking upward. Then stepped back from the fighting.

"That's crazy!" Jakamav said as Adolin jogged up.

"Sure is."

"Let's be at it, then!" He handed his hammer to Adolin, who slipped it into the sheath on his friend's back. Then the two of them ran to the rock wall and started to climb.

Adolin's Plated fingers ground against rock as he pulled himself straight up. Soldiers below cheered them on. There were handholds aplenty, though he would never have wanted to do this without Plate to propel his climb and protect him if he fell.

It was still crazy; they'd end up surrounded. However, two Shardbearers could do amazing things when supporting one another. Besides, if they got overwhelmed, they could always jump off the cliff, assuming their Plate was healthy enough to survive the fall.

It was the sort of risky move that Adolin would never dare when his father was on the battlefield.

He paused halfway up the cliff. Parshendi gathered on the edge of the tier above, preparing for them.

"You have a plan for getting a foothold up there?" Jakamav asked, clinging to the rocks beside Adolin.

Adolin nodded. "Just be ready to support me."

"Sure." Jakamav scanned the heights, face hidden behind his helm. "What are you doing here, by the way?"

"I figured no army would turn away some Shardbearers who wanted to help."

"Shardbearers? Plural?"

"Renarin is down below."

"Hopefully not fighting."

"He's surrounded by a large squad of soldiers with careful instructions not to let him get into the fighting. Father wanted him to see a few of these, though."

"I know what Dalinar is doing," Jakamav said. "He's trying to show a spirit of cooperation, trying to get the highprinces to stop being rivals. So he sends his Shardbearers to help, even when the run isn't his."

“Are you complaining?”

“Nope. Let’s see you make an opening up there. I’ll need a moment to get the hammer out.”

Adolin grinned inside his helmet, then continued climbing. Jakamav was a landlord and Shardbearer under Highprince Roion, and a fairly good friend. It was important that lighteyes like Jakamav saw Dalinar and Adolin actively working toward a better Alethkar. Perhaps a few episodes like this would show the value of a trustworthy alliance, instead of the backstabbing, temporary coalition Sadeas represented.

Adolin climbed farther, Jakamav close behind, until he was a dozen feet from the top. The Parshendi clustered there, hammers and macests coming brings the gods their night they authorityre at the ready—weapons for fighting a man in Shardplate. A few farther down launched arrows, which bounced ineffectively off the Plate.

All right, Adolin thought, holding his hand to the side—clinging to the rocks with the other—and summoned his Blade. He slammed it directly into the rock wall with the flat of the blade facing upward. He climbed up beside the sword.

Then he stepped onto the flat of the blade.

Shardblades couldn’t break—they could barely bend—so it held him. He suddenly had leverage and good footing, and so when he crouched down and leaped, the Plate hurled him upward. As he passed the edge of the top tier, he grabbed the rock there—just beneath the feet of the Parshendi—and pulled on it to throw himself into the waiting foe.

They broke off their singing as he smashed into them with the force of a boulder. He got his feet underneath him, mentally sending a summons to his Blade, then slammed his shoulder into one group. He began to lay about himself with punches, smashing the chest of one Parshendi, then the head of another. The soldiers’ carapace armor cracked with sickening sounds, and the punches flung them backward, knocking some off the cliff.

Adolin took a few hits on his forearms before his Blade finally re-formed in his hands. He swung about, so focused on holding his ground that he didn't notice Jakamav until the Shardbearer in green fell in beside him, crushing Parshendi with his hammer.

“Thanks for tossing a platoon's worth of Parshendi down on my head,” Jakamav called as he swung. “That was a wonderful surprise.”

Adolin grinned, pointing. “Chrysalis.”

The top tier wasn't well populated—though more Parshendi were flooding up the incline. He and Jakamav had a direct path to the chrysalis, a hulking, oblong boulder of brown and faint green. It was matted to the rocks with the same stuff that made up its shell.

Adolin leaped over the twitching form of a Parshendi with dead legs and charged the chrysalis, Jakamav following at a clanking jog. Getting to a gemheart was tough—the chrysalises had skin like rock—but with a Shardblade, it could be easy. They just had to kill the thing, then cut a hole so they could rip out the heart and—

The chrysalis was already open.

“No!” Adolin said, scrambling up to it, grabbing the sides of the hole and peering into the slushy violet interior. Chunks of carapace floated within the goop, and a conspicuous gap lay where the gemheart normally connected to veins and sinew.

Adolin spun, searching across the top of the plateau. Jakamav clanked up and cursed. “How did they get it out so quickly?”

There. Nearby, Parshendi soldiers scattered, yelling in their impenetrable, rhythmic language. Standing behind them was a tall figure in silvery Shardplate, a red cloak billowing out behind. The armor had peaked joints, ridges rising like the points on a crab's shell. The figure was easily seven feet tall, the armor making him look massive, perhaps because it covered a Parshendi who had that carapace armor growing from his skin.

“It’s him!” Adolin said, running forward. This was the one his father had fought on the Tower, the only Shardbearer they’d seen among the Parshendi for weeks, maybe months.

Perhaps the last one they had.

The Shardbearer turned toward Adolin, gripping a large uncut gemstone in his hand. It dripped ichor help.”f cloudsre and plasma.

“Fight me!” Adolin said.

A group of Parshendi soldiers charged past the Shardbearer, running toward the long drop-off at the back of the formation, where the hill had been split down the center. The Shardbearer handed his gemheart to one of these charging men, then turned and watched them jump.

They soared across the gap to land on the top of the other half of the hill, the one on the adjacent plateau. It still amazed Adolin that these Parshendi soldiers could leap chasms. He felt a fool as he realized that these heights were not a trap for them as they would be for humans. To them, a mountain split in half was just another chasm to leap.

More and more of the Parshendi made the leap, flowing away from the humans below and jumping to safety. Adolin did spot one who stumbled as he leapt. The poor fellow screamed as he plummeted into the chasm. This was dangerous for them, but it was obviously less so than trying to fight off the humans.

The Shardbearer remained. Adolin ignored the fleeing Parshendi—ignored Jakamav, who called for him to fall back—and ran up to that Shardbearer, swinging his Blade full force. The Parshendi raised his own Blade, slapping aside Adolin’s blow.

“You are the son, Adolin Kholin,” the Parshendi said. “Your father? Where is?”

Adolin froze in place. The words were in Alethi—heavily accented, yes, but understandable.

The Shardbearer slammed up his faceplate. And, to Adolin's shock, there was no beard on that face. Didn't that make this a woman? Telling the difference with Parshendi was difficult for him. The vocal timbre was rough and low-pitched, though he supposed it could be feminine.

"I must need speak to Dalinar," the woman said, stepping forward. "I met him one time, much long ago."

"You refused our every messenger," Adolin said, backing away, sword out. "Now you wish to speak with us?"

"That was long ago. Time does change."

Stormfather. Something inside of Adolin urged him to go in swinging, to batter this Shardbearer down and get some answers, win some Shards. Fight! He was here to fight!

His father's voice, in the back of his mind, held him at bay. Dalinar would want this chance. It could change the course of the entire war.

"He will want to contact you," Adolin said, taking a deep breath, shoving down the Thrill of battle. "How?"

"Will send messenger," ds on his hips

the Shardbearer said. “Do not kill one who comes.” She raised her Shardblade toward him in salute, then let it drop and dematerialize. She turned to charge toward the chasm and hurled herself across in a prodigious leap.

* * *

Adolin pulled off his helm as he strode across the plateau. Surgeons saed while the hale sat around in groups, drinking water and grouching about their failure.

A rare mood hovered over the armies of Roion and Ruthar this day. Usually when the Alethi lost a plateau run it was because the Parshendi pushed them back in a wild scrambling retreat across bridges. It wasn’t often that a run ended with the Alethi controlling the plateau, but with no gemheart to show for it.

He released one gauntlet, the straps undoing themselves automatically at his will, then hooked it at his waist. He used a s the Hierocracyf cloudsreweaty hand to push back sweatier hair. Now where had Renarin gotten to?

There, on the staging plateau, sitting on a rock surrounded by guards. Adolin tromped across one of the bridges, raising a hand to Jakamav, who was removing his Plate nearby. He’d want to ride back in comfort.

Adolin jogged up to his brother, who sat on a boulder with his helm off, staring at the ground in front of him.

“Hey,” Adolin said. “Ready to head back?”

Renarin nodded.

“What happened?” Adolin asked.

Renarin continued staring at the ground. Finally, one of the bridgeman guards—a compact man with silvering hair—nodded his head to the side. Adolin walked with him a short distance away.

“A group of shellheads tried to seize one of the bridges, Brightlord,” the

bridgeman said softly. “Brightlord Renarin insisted on going to help. Sir, we tried hard to dissuade him. Then, when he got near and summoned his Blade, he just kind of . . . stood there. We got him away, sir, but he’s been sitting on that rock ever since.”

One of Renarin’s fits. “Thank you, soldier,” Adolin said. He walked back over and laid his ungauntleted hand on Renarin’s shoulder. “It’s all right, Renarin. It happens.”

Renarin shrugged again. Well, if he was in one of his moods, there was nothing to do but let him stew. The younger man would talk about it when he was ready.

Adolin organized his two hundred troops, then paid his respects to the highprinces. Neither seemed very grateful. In fact, Ruthar seemed convinced that Adolin and Jakamav’s stunt had driven the Parshendi off with the gemheart. As if they wouldn’t have withdrawn the moment they had it anyway. Idiot.

Adolin smiled affably, regardless. Hopefully Father was right, and the extended hand of fellowship would help. Personally, Adolin just wanted a chance at each of them in the dueling ring, where he could teach them a little respect.

On his way back to his army, he searched out Jakamav, who sat under a small pavilion, having a cup of wine as he watched the rest of his army trudge back across the bridges. There were a lot of slumped shoulders and long faces.

Jakamav gestured for his steward to get Adolin a cup of sparkling yellow wine. Adolin took it in his unarmored hand, though he didn’t drink.

“That was quite nearly awesome,” Jakamav said, staring out at the battle plateau. From this lower vantage, it looked truly imposing, with those three tiers.

Almost looks man-made, Adolin thought idly, considering the shape. “Nearly,” Adolin agreed. “Can you imagine what an assault would look like if we had twenty or thirty Shardbearers on the battlefield at once? What

chance would the Parshendi have?”

Jakamav grunted. “Your father and the king are seriously committed to this course, aren’t they?”

“As am I.”

“I can see what you and your father are doing here, Adolin. But if you keep dueling, you’re going to lose your Shards. Even you can’t always win. Eventually you’ll hit an off day. Then it will all be gone.”

“I might lose at some point,” Adolin agreed. “Of course by then I’ll have won half the Shards in the kingdom, so I should be ” said one of the scions.m on the floorreable to arrange a replacement.”

Jakamav sipped his wine, smiling. “You are a cocky bastard, I’ll give you that.”

Adolin smiled, then settled down in a squat beside Jakamav’s chair—he couldn’t sit in one himself, not in Shardplate—so he could meet his friend’s eyes. “The truth is, Jakamav, I’m not really worried about losing my Shards—I’m more worried about finding duels in the first place. I can’t seem to get any Shardbearers to agree to a bout, at least not for Shards.”

“There have been certain . . . inducements going around,” Jakamav admitted. “Promises made to Shardbearers if they refused you.”

“Sadeas.”

Jakamav inspected his wine. “Try Eranniv. He’s been boasting that he’s better than the standings give him credit for. Knowing him, he’ll see everyone else refusing, and see it as an opportunity for him to do something spectacular. He’s pretty good, though.”

“So am I,” Adolin said. “Thanks, Jak. I owe you.”

“What’s this I hear about you being betrothed?”

Storms. How had that gotten out? “It’s just a causal,” Adolin said. “And it

might not even get that far. The woman's ship seems to have been severely delayed."

Two weeks now, with no word. Even Aunt Navanw to the wound



FIVE YEARS AGO

Shallan longed to stay outside. Here in the gardens, people didn't scream at each other. Here there was peace.

Unfortunately, it was a fake peace—a peace of carefully planted shalebark and cultivated vines. A fabrication, designed to amuse and distract. More and more she longed to escape and visit places where the plants weren't carefully trimmed into shapes, where people didn't step lightly, as if afraid of causing a rockslide. A place away from the shouting.

A cool mountain breeze came down from the heights and swept through the gardens, making vines shy backward. She sat away from the flowerbeds, and the sneezing they would bring her, instead studying a section of sturdy shalebark. The cremling she sketched turned at the wind, its enormous feelers twitching, before leaning back down to chew on the shalebark. There were so many kinds of cremlings. Had anyone tried to count them all?

By luck, her father had owned a drawing book—one of the works of Dandos the Oilsworn—and she used that for instruction, letting it rest open beside her.

A yell sounded from inside the nearby manor house. Shallan's hand stiffened, making an errant streak across her sketch. She took a deep breath and tried to return to her drawing, but another series of shouts put her on edge. She set her pencil down.

She was nearly out of sheets from the latest stack her brother had brought her. He returned unpredictably but never for long, and when he came, he and Father avoided one another.

Nobody in the manor knew where Helaran went when he left.

She lost track of time, staring at a blank sheet of paper. That happened to her sometimes. When she raised her eyes, the sky was darkening. Almost time for Father's feast. He had those regularly now.

Shallan packed up her things in the satchel, then took off her sun hat and walked toward the manor house. Tall and imposing, the building was an exemplar of the Veden ideal. Solitary, strong, towering. A work of square blocks and small windows, dappled by dark lichen. Some books called manors like this the soul of Jah Keved—isolated estates, each brightlord ruling independently. It seemed to her that those writers romanticized rural life. Had they ever actually visited one of the manors, experienced the true dullness of country life in person, or did they merely fantasize about it from the comfort of their cosmopolitan cities?

Inside the house, Shallan turned up the stairs toward her quarters. Father would want her looking nice for the feast. There would be a new dress for her to wear as she sat quietly, not coming brings the gods their night p speak over that that interrupting the discussion. Father had never said so, but she suspected he thought it a pity she had begun speaking again.

Perhaps he did not wish her to be able to speak of things she'd seen. She stopped in the hallway, her mind going blank.

“Shallan?”

She shook herself to find Van Jushu, her fourth brother, on the steps behind her. How long had she been standing and staring at the wall? The feast would

start soon!

Jushu's jacket was undone and hung askew, his hair mussed, his cheeks flushed with wine. No cufflinks or belt; they had been fine pieces, each with a glowing gemstone. He'd have gambled those away.

"What was Father yelling about earlier?" she asked. "Were you here?"

"No," Jushu said, running his hand through his hair. "But I heard. Balat has been starting fires again. Nearly burned down the storming servants' building." Jushu pushed past her, then stumbled, grabbing the bannister to keep from falling.

Father was not going to like Jushu coming to the feast like this. More yelling.

"Storms-cursed idiot," Jushu said as Shellan helped him right himself. "Balat is going straight crazy. I'm the only one left in this family with any sense. You were staring at the wall again, weren't you?"

She didn't reply.

"He'll have a new dress for you," Jushu said as she helped him toward his room. "And nothing for me but curses. Bastard. He loved Helaran, and none of us are him, so we don't matter. Helaran is never here! He betrayed Father, almost killed him. And still, he's the only one who matters. . . ."

They passed Father's chambers. The heavy stumpweight door was open a crack as a maid tidied the room, allowing Shellan to see the far wall.

And the glowing strongbox.

It was hidden behind a painting of a storm at sea that did nothing to dim the powerful white glow. Right through the canvas, she saw the outline of the strongbox blazing like a fire. She stumbled, pulling to a stop.

"What are you staring at?" Jushu demanded, holding to the bannister.

"The light."

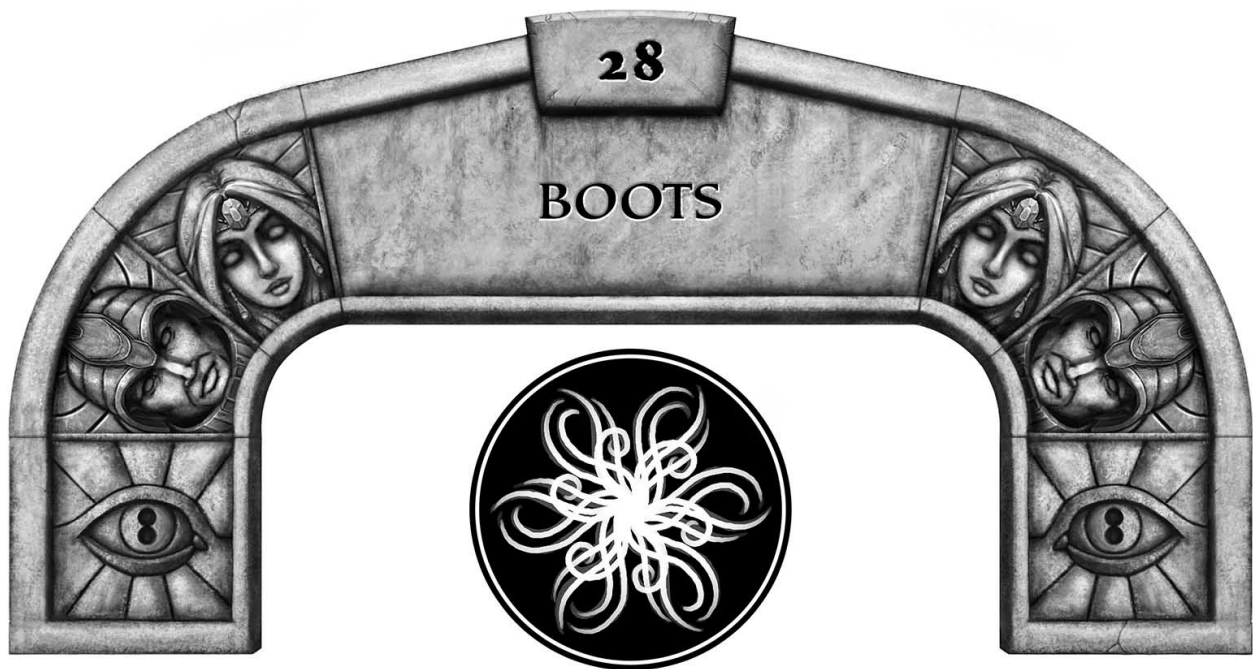
“What light?”

“Behind the painting.”

He squinted, lurching forward. “What in the Halls are you talking about, girl? It really did ruin your mind, didn’t it? Watching him kill Mother?” Jushu pulled away from her, cursing softly to himself. “I’m the only one in this family who hasn’t gone crazy. The only storming one . . .”

Shallan stared into that light. There hid a monster.

There hid Mother’s soul.



The betrayal of spren has brought us here.

thank you very much.”inf had changedkatThey gave their Surges to human heirs,

He stilid="181NK6">But not to those who know them most dear, before us.

’Tis no surprise we turned away

Unto the gods we spent our days

And to become their molding clay, they changed us.

—From the Listener Song of Secrets, 40th stanza

“Th’information’ll cost ya twelve broams,” Shallan said. “Ruby, you see. I’ll check each one.”

Tyn laughed, tossing her head back, jet-black hair falling free around her shoulders. She sat in the driver’s seat of the wagon. Where Bluth used to sit.

“You call that a Bav accent?” Tyn demanded.

“I’ve only heard them three or four times.”

“You sounded like you have rocks in your mouth!”

“That’s how they sound!”

“Nah, it’s more like they have pebbles in their mouths. But they talk really slow, with overemphasized sounds. Like this. ‘Oi looked over the paintings that ya gave me, and they’re roit nice. Roit nice indeed. Ain’t never had a cloth for my backside that was so pleasant.’”

“You’re exaggerating that!” Shallan said, though she couldn’t help laughing.

“A tad,” Tyn said, leaning back and sweeping her long, chull-guiding reed in front of her like a Shardblade.

“I don’t see why knowing a Bav accent would be useful,” Shallan said.

“They’re not a very important people.”

“Kid, that’s why they’re important.”

“They’re important because they’re unimportant,” Shallan said. “All right, I know I’m bad at logic sometimes, but something about that statement seems off.”

Tyn smiled. She was so relaxed, so . . . free. Not at all what Shallan had expected after their first encounter.

But then the woman had been playing a part. Leader of the guard. This woman Shallan was talking to now, this seemed real.

“Look,” Tyn said, “if you’re going to fool people, you’ll need to learn how to act beneath them as well as above them. You’re getting the whole ‘important lighteyes’ thing down. I assume you’ve had good examples.”

“You could say that,” Shallan replied, thinking of Jasnah.

“Thing is, in a lot of situations, being an important lighteyes is useless.”

“Being unimportant is important. Being important is useless. Got it.”

Tyn eyed her, chewing on some jerky. Her sword belt hung from a peg on the side of the seat, swaying to the rhythm of the chull’s gait. “You know, kid, you get kind of mouthy when you let your mask down.”

Shallan blushed.

“I like it. I prefer people who can laugh at life.”

“I can guess what you’re try help.” fartreing to teach me,” Shallan said. “You’re saying that a person with a Bav accent, someone who looks lowly and simple, can go places a lighteyes never could.”

“And can hear or do things a lighteyes never could. Accent is important. Elocute with distinction, and it often won’t matter how little money you have. Wipe your nose on your arm and speak like a Bav, and sometimes people won’t even glance to see if you’re wearing a sword.”

“But my eyes are light blue,” Shallan said. “I’ll never pass for lowly, no matter what my voice sounds like!”

Tyn fished in her trouser pocket. She had slung her coat over another peg, and so wore only the pale tan trousers—tight, with high boots—and a buttoned shirt. Almost a worker’s shirt, though of nicer material.

“Here,” Tyn said, tossing something to her.

Shallan barely caught it. She blushed at her clumsiness, then held it up toward the sun: a small vial with some dark liquid inside.

“Eyedrops,” Tyn said. “They’ll darken your eyes for a few hours.”

“Really?”

“Not hard to find, if you have the right connections. Useful stuff.”

Shallan lowered the vial, suddenly feeling a chill. “Is there—”

“The reverse?” Tyn cut in. “Something to turn a darkeyes into a lighteyes? Not that I know of. Unless you believe the stories about Shardblades.”

“Makes sense,” Shallan said, relaxing. “You can darken glass by painting it, but I don’t think you can lighten it without melting down the whole thing.”

“Anyway,” Tyn said, “you’ll need a good backwater accent or two. Herdazian, Bavlander, something like that.”

“I probably have a rural Veden accent,” Shallan admitted.

“That won’t work out here. Jah Keved is a cultured country, and your internal accents are too similar to one another for outsiders to recognize. Alethi won’t hear rural from you, like a fellow Veden would. They’ll just hear exotic.”

“You’ve been to a lot of places, haven’t you?” Shallan asked.

“I go wherever the winds take me. It’s a good life, so long as you’re not attached to stuff.”

“Stuff?” Shallan asked. “But you’re—pardon—you’re a thief. That’s all about getting more stuff!”

“I take what I can get, but that just proves how transient stuff is. You’ll take some things, but then you’ll lose them. Just like the job I pulled down south. My team never returned from their mission; I’m half convinced they ran off without seeing me paid.” She shrugged. “It happens. No need to get worked up.”

“What kind of job was it?” Shallan asked, blinking pointedly to take a Memory of Tyn lounging there, sweeping her reed as if conducting musicians, not a care in the world. They’d nearly died a couple of weeks back, but Tyn took it in stride.

“It was a big job,” Tyn said. “Important, for the kinds of people who make thank you very much.” Her dark eyes were things change in the world. I still haven’t heard back who hired us. Maybe my men didn’t run off; maybe they just failed. I don’t know for certain.” Here, Shallan caught tension in Tyn’s face. A tightening of the skin around the eyes, a distance to her gaze. She was worried about what her employers might do to her. Then it was gone, smoothed away. “Have a look,” Tyn said, nodding up ahead.

Shallan followed the gesture and noticed moving figures a few hills over. The landscape had slowly changed as they approached the Plains. The hills grew steeper, but the air a little warmer, and plant life was more prevalent. Stands of trees clustered in some of the valleys, where waters would flow after highstorms. The trees were squat, different from the flowing majesty of the ones she’d known in Jah Keved, but it was still nice to see something other than scrub.

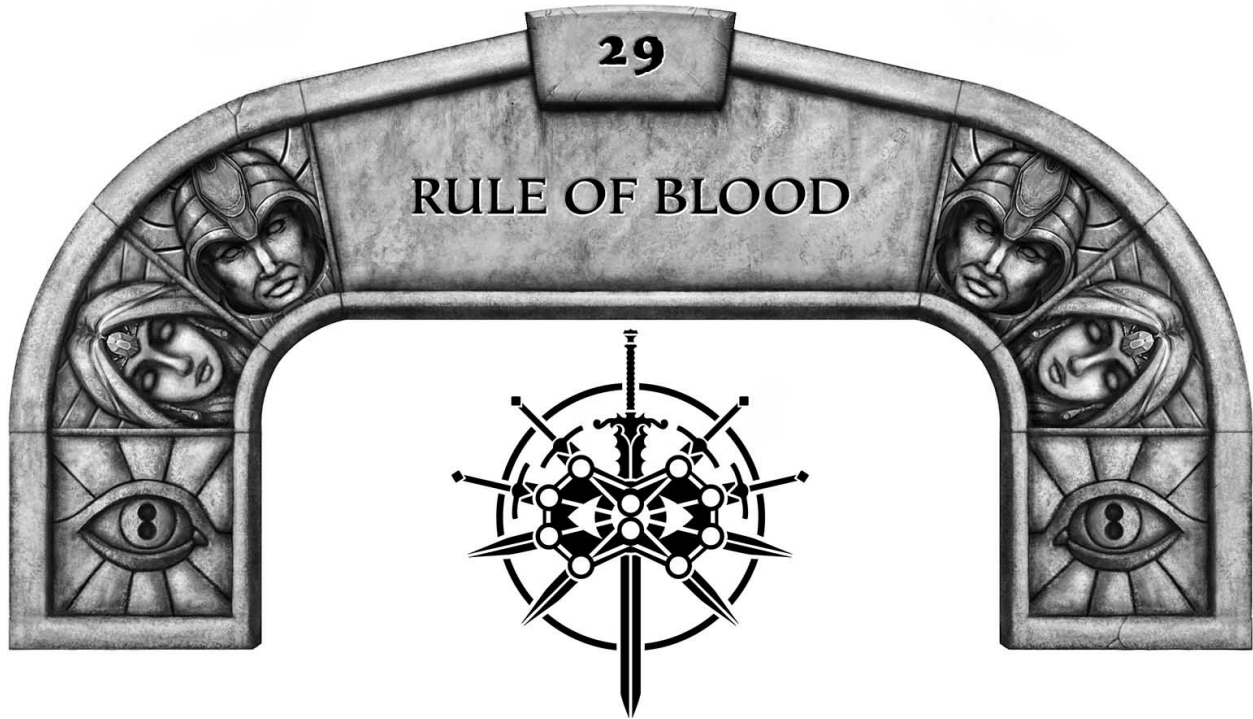
The grass here was fuller. It pulled smartly away from the wagons, sinking into its burrows. The rockbuds here grew large, and shalebark cropped up in patches, often with lifespren bouncing about like tiny green motes. During their days traveling they’d passed other caravans, more plentiful now that they were closer to the Shattered Plains. So Shallan wasn’t surprised to see someone up ahead. The figures, however, rode horses. Who could afford animals like that? And why didn’t they have an escort? There seemed to be only four of them.

The caravan rolled to a stop as Macob yelled an order from the first wagon. Shallan had learned, through awful experience, just how dangerous any encounter out here could be. None were taken lightly by caravan masters. She was the authority here, but she allowed those with more experience to call stops and choose their path.

“Come on,” Tyn said, stopping the chull with a whack of the stick, then hopping down from the wagon and grabbing her coat and sword off their

pegs.

Shallan scrambled down, putting on her Jasnah face. She let herself be herself with Tyn. With the others, she needed to be a leader. Stiff, stern, but hopefully inspiring. To that end, she was pleased with the bk from the one



Artform for colors beyond our ken;

For its grand songs we yearn.

We must attract creationspren;

These songs suffice 'til we learn.

—From the Listener Song of Revision, 279th stanza

Torol Sadeas closed his eyes and rested Oathbringer on his shoulder, breathing in the sweet, moldy scent of Parshendi blood. The Thrill of battle surged within him, a blessed and beautiful strength.

His own blood pumped so loudly in his ears he almost couldn't hear the battlefield shouts and groans of pain. For a moment, he reveled only in the delicious glow of the Thrill, the heady euphoria at having spent an hour engaged in the only thing that brought true joy anymore: contending for his life, and taking those of enemies lesser than himself.

It faded. As always, the Thrill was fleeting once battle itself ended. It had

grown less and less sweet during these raids on the Parshendi, likely because he knew deep inside that this contest was pointless. It did not stretch him, did not carry him further toward his ultimate goals of conquest. Slaughtering crem-covered savages in a Heralds-forsaken land had truly lost its savor.

He sighed, lowering his Blade, opening his eyes. Amaram approached across the battlefield, stepping over corpses of men and Parshendi. His Shardplate was bloodied purple up to the elbows, and he carried a glimmering gemheart in one gauntleted hand. He kicked aside a Parshendi corpse and joined Sadeas, his own honor guard fanning out to join those of his highprince. Sadeas spared a moment of annoyance for how efficiently they moved, particularly when compared to his own men.

Amaram pulled off his helm and hefted the gemheart, tossing it up and catching it. “Your maneuver here today failed, you realize?”

“Failed?” Sadeas said, lifting his faceplate. Nearby, his soldiers slaughtered a pocket of fifty Parshendi who hadn’t managed to get off the plateau when the rest retreated. “I think this went quite nicely.”

Amaram pointed. A stain had appeared on the plateaus to the west, toward the warcamps. The banners indicated that Hatham and Roion, the two highprinces who were supposed to have gone on this plateau run, had arrived together—they used bridges like Dalinar’s, slow plodding things it had been easy to outrun. One of the advantages of the bridge crews Sadeas preferred was that they needed very little training to function. If Dalinar had thought to slow him down with his stunt of trading Oathbringer for Sadeas’s bridgemen, he had been proven a fool.

“We needed to get out here,” Amaram said, “seize the gemheart, and return before the others arrived. Then you could have claimed that you didn’t gather. What are you doing? You weren’t in the rotation today. The arrival of both other armies removes that shred of deniability.”

“You mistake me,” Sadeas said. “You assume I still care about deniability.” The last Parshendi died with enraged screams; Sadeas felt proud of that.

Others said Parshendi warriors on the field never surrendered, but he'd seen them try it once, long ago, in the first year of the war. They'd laid down their weapons. He'd slaughtered them all personally, with Shardhammer and Plate, beneath the eyes of their retreating companions watching from a nearby plateau.

Never again had any Parshendi denied him or his men their right to finish a battle the proper way. Sadeas waved for the vanguard to gather and escort him back to the warcamps while the rest of the army licked its wounds. Amaram joined him, crossing a bridge and passing idling bridgemen who lay on the ground and slept while better men died.

"I am duty-bound to join you on the battlefield, Your Highness," Amaram said as they walked, "but I want you to know that I do not approve of our actions here. We should be seeking to bridge our differences with the king and Dalinar, not trying to agitate them further."

Sadeas snorted. "Don't give me that noble talk. It works fine for others, but I know you for the ruthless bastard you really are."

Amaram set his jaw, eyes forward. When they reached their horses, he reached out, hand on Sadeas's arm. "Torol," he said softly, "there is so much more to the world than your squabbles. You're right about me, of course. Take that admission with the understanding that to you, above all others, I can speak the truth. Alethkar needs to be strong for what is coming."

Sadeas climbed the mounting block the groom had set out. Getting onto a horse in Shardplate could be dangerous to the animal if not done correctly. Besides, he'd once had a stirrup snap on him when he stepped into it to haul himself into the saddle. He'd ended up on his backside.

"Alethkar does need to be strong," Sadeas said, holding out a gauntleted hand. "So I'll make it so by force of fist and the rule of blood."

Amaram reluctantly placed the gemheart there, and Sadeas gripped it, holding his reins in the other hand.

"Do you ever worry?" Amaram asked. "About what you do? About what we

must do?" He nodded toward a group of surgeons, carrying wounded men across the bridges.

"Worry?" Sadeas said. "Why should I? It gives the wretches a chance to die in battle for something worthwhile."

"You say things like that a lot these days, I've noticed," Amaram said. "You weren't like that before."

"I've learned to accept the world as it is, Amaram," Sadeas said, turning his horse. "That's something very few people are willing to do. They stumble along, hoping, dreaming, pretending. That doesn't change a single storming thing in life. You have to stare the world in the eyes, in all its grimy brutality. You have to acknowledge its depravities. Live with them. It's the only way to accomplish anything meaningful."

With a squeeze of the knees, Sadeas started his horse forward, leaving Amaram behind for the moment.

The man would remain loyal. Sadeas and Amaram had an understanding. Even Amaram now being a Shardbearer would not change that. ts coming brings the gods their night they " Eshonai saidre

As Sadeas and his vanguard approached Hatham's army, he noticed a group of Parshendi on a nearby plateau, watching. Those scouts of theirs were getting bold. He sent a team of archers to go chase them off, then rode toward a figure in resplendent Shardplate at the front of Hatham's army: the highprince himself, seated upon a Ryshadium. Damnation. Those animals were far superior to any other horseflesh. How to get one?

"Sadeas?" Hatham called out to him. "What have you done here?"

After a quick moment of decision, Sadeas lifted his arm back and hurled the gemheart across the plateau separating them. It hit the rock near Hatham and bounced along in a roll, glowing faintly.

"I was bored," Sadeas shouted back. "I thought I'd save you some trouble."

Then, ignoring further questions, Sadeas continued on his way. Adolin Kholin had a duel today, and he'd decided not to miss it, just in case the youth embarrassed himself again.

* * *

A few hours later, Sadeas settled down into his place in the dueling arena, tugging at the stock on his neck. Insufferable things—fashionable, but insufferable. He would never tell a soul, not even Ialai, that he secretly wished he could just go about in a simple uniform like Dalinar.

He couldn't ever do that, of course. Not just because he wouldn't be seen bowing to the Codes and the king's authority, but because a military uniform was actually the wrong uniform for these days. The battles they fought for Alethkar at the moment weren't battles with sword and shield.

It was important to dress the part when you had a role to play. Dalinar's military outfits proved he was lost, that he didn't understand the game he was playing.

Sadeas leaned back to wait as whispers filled the arena like water in a bowl. A large attendance today. Adolin's stunt in his previous duel had drawn attention, and anything novel was of interest to the court. Sadeas's seat had a space cleared around it to give him extra room and privacy, though it was really just a simple chair built onto the stone bleachers of this pit of an arena.

He hated how his body felt outside of Shardplate, and he hated more how he looked. Once, he'd turned heads as he walked. His power had filled a room; everyone had looked to him, and many had lusted when seeing him. Lusted for his power, for who he was. < ;Brightness Da

The upper lip of the formation which shapes the fat shows distinct signs of open build-up, resulting in large spikes that rim the edge in the predominant direction of the winds.



Many of these species are new to me. The plant life here isn't nearly so lush as it was on father's estates, or even Kharbrah, but there is a frantic determination to the way it grows.





'Tis said it was warm in the land far away
When Voidbringers entered our songs.
We brought them home to stay
And then those homes became their own,
It happened gradually.
And years ahead 'twil still be said 'tis how it has to be.

—From the Listener Song of Histories, 12th stanza

Shallan gasped at the sudden flare of color.

It disrupted the landscape like breaking lightning in an otherwise clear sky. Shallan set down her spheres—Tyn was having her practice palming them—and stood up in the wagon, steadying herself with her freehand on the back of her seat. Yes, it was unmistakable. Brilliant red and yellow on an otherwise dull canvas of brown and green.

“Tyn,” Shallan said. “What’s that?”

The other woman lounged with feet out, a wide-brimmed white hat tipped over her eyes despite the fact that she was supposed to be driving. Shallan wore Bluth’s hat, which she’d recovered from his things, to keep the sun off.

Tyn turned to the side, lifting her hat. “Huh?”

“Right there!” Shallan said. “The color.”

Tyn squinted. “I don’t see anything.”

How could she miss that color, so vibrant when compared to the rolling hills full of rockbuds, reeds, and patches of grass? Shallan took the woman’s spyglass and raised it to look more closely. “em; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1., speakmsdefePlants,” Shallan said. “There’s a rock overhang there, sheltering them from the east.”

“Oh, is that all?” Tyn settled back, closing her eyes. “Thought it might be a caravan tent or something.”

“Tyn, it’s plants.”

“So?”

“Divergent flora in an otherwise uniform ecosystem!” Shallan exclaimed. “We’re going! I’ll go tell Macob to steer the caravan that way.”

“Kid, you’re kind of strange,” Tyn said as Shallan yelled at the other wagons to stop.

Macob was reluctant to agree to the detour, but fortunately he accepted her authority. The caravan was about a day out from the Shattered Plains. They’d been taking it easy. Shallan struggled to contain her excitement. So much out here in the Frostlands was uniformly dull; something new to draw was exciting beyond normal reason.

They approached the ridge, which had caused a high shelf of rock at exactly the right angle to form a windbreak. Larger versions of these formations were

called laits. Sheltered valleys where a town could flourish. Well, this wasn't nearly so large, but life had still found it. A grove of short, bone-white trees grew here. They had vivid red leaves. Vines of numerous varieties draped the rock wall itself, and the ground teemed with rockbuds, a variety that remained open even when there wasn't rain, blossoms drooping with heavy petals from the inside, along with tonguelike tendrils that moved like worms, seeking water.

A small pond reflected the blue sky, feeding the rockbuds and trees. The leafy shade in turn gave shelter to a bright green moss. The beauty was like veins of ruby and emerald in a drab stone.

Shallan hopped down the moment the wagons pulled up. She frightened something in the underbrush, and a few very small, feral axehounds burst away. She wasn't sure of the breed—she honestly wasn't even sure they were axehounds, they moved so quickly.

Well, she thought, walking into the tiny lait, that probably means I don't have to worry about anything larger. A predator like a whitespine would have frightened away smaller life.

Shallan walked forward with a smile. It was almost like a garden, though the plants were obviously wild rather than cultivated. They moved quickly to retract blooms, feelers, and leaves, opening a patch around her. She stifled a sneeze and pushed through to find a dark green pond.

Here, she set down a blanket on a boulder, then settled herself to sketch. Others from the caravan went scouting through the lait or around the top of the rock wall.

Shallan breathed in the wonderful humidity as the plants relaxed. Rockbud petals stretching out, timid leaves unfolding. Color swelled around her like nature blushing. Stormfather! She hadn't realized how much she'd missed the variety of beautiful plants. She opened her sketchbook and drew out a quick prayer in the name of Shalash, Herald of Beauty, Shallan's namesake.

The plants retracted again as someone moved through them. Gaz stumbled past a group of rockbuds, cursing as he tried not to step on their vines. He

came up to her, then hesitated, looking down at the pool. “Storms!” he said. “Are those fish?”

“Eels,” Shallan guessed as something rippled the green surface of the pool. “Bright orange ones, it appears. We had some like them” aid="11C3rdentslily back in my father’s ornamental garden.”

Gaz leaned down, trying to get a good look, until one of the eels broke the surface with a flipping tail, spraying him with water. Shallan laughed, taking a Memory of the one-eyed man peering into thos shadow. The o



Smokeform for hiding and slipping 'tween men.

A form of power—like Surges of spren.

Do we dare to wear this form again? It spies.

Crafted of gods, this form we fear.

By Unmade touch its curse to bear,

Formed from shadow—and death is near. It lies.

—From the Listener Song of Secrets, 51st stanza

Kaladin led his troop of sore, tired men up to Bridge Four's barrack, and—as he'd secretly requested—the men got a round of cheers and welcoming calls. It was early evening, and the familiar scent of stew was one of the most inviting things Kaladin could imagine.

He stepped aside and let the forty men tromp past him. They weren't members of Bridge Four, but for tonight, they'd be considered such. They held their heads higher, smiles breaking out as men passed them bowls of

stew. Rock asked one how the patrolling had gone, and though Kaladin couldn't hear the soldier's reply, he could definitely hear the bellowing laughter it prompted from Rock.

Kaladin smiled, leaning back against the barrack wall, folding his arms. Then he found himself checking the sky. The sun hadn't quite set, but in the darkening sky, stars had begun to appear around Taln's Scar. The Tear hung just above the horizon, a star much brighter than the others, named for the single tear that Reya was said to have shed. Some of the stars moved—starspren, nothing to be surprised by—but something felt odd about the evening. He breathed in deeply. Was the air stale?

“Sir?”

Kaladin turned. One of the bridgemen, an earnest man with short dark hair and strong features, had not joined the others at the stew cauldron. Kaladin searched for his name . . .

“Pitt, isn't it?” Kaladin said.

“Yes, sir,” the man replied. “Bridge Seventeen.”

“What did you need?”

“I just . . .” The man glanced at the inviting fire, with members of Bridge Four laughing and chatting with the patrol group. Nearby, someone had hung a few distinctive suits of armor on the barrack walls. They were carapace helmets and breastplates, attached to the leathers of common bridgemen. Those had now been replaced with fine steel caps and breastplates. Kaladin wondered who had hung the old suits up. He hadn't even known that some of the men had fetched them; they were the extra suits that Leyten had crafted for the men and stashed down in the chasms before being freed.

“Sir,” Pitt said, “I just want to say that I'm sorry.”

“For?”

“Back when we were bridgemen.” Pitt raised a hand to his head. “Storms,

that seems like a different life. I couldn't think rightly during those times. It's all hazy. But I remember being glad when your crew was sent out instead of mine. I remember hoping you'd fail, since you dared to walk with your chin up . . . I—”

“It's all right, Pitt,” Kaladin said. “It wasn't your fault. You can blame Sadeas.”

“I suppose.” Pitt got a distant look on his face. “He broke us right good, didn't he, sir?”

“Yes.”

“Turns out, though, men can be reforged. I wouldn't have thought that.” Pitt looked over his shoulder. “I'm going to have to go do this for the other lads of Bridge Seventeen, aren't I?”

“Withclass="TX" aid



The spren betrayed us, it's often felt.
Our minds are too close to their realm
That gives us our forms, but more is then
Demanded by the smartest spren,
We can't provide what the humans lend,
Though broth are we, their meat is men.

—From the Listener Song of Spren, 9th stanza

In his dream, Kaladin was the storm.

He claimed the land, surging” said one of the scions.inf cocked an
eyebrowkat across it, a cleansing fury. All washed before him, broke before
him. In his darkness, the land was reborn.

He soared, alive with lightning, his flashes of inspiration. The wind's
howling was his voice, the thunder his heartbeat. He overwhelmed,

overcame, overshadowed, and—

And he had done this before.

An awareness came to Kaladin, like water seeping under a door. Yes. He'd dreamed this dream before.

With effort, he turned around. A face as large as eternity stretched behind him, the force behind the tempest, the Stormfather himself.

SON OF HONOR, said a voice like roaring wind.

“This is real!” Kaladin yelled into the storm. He was wind itself. Spren. He found voice somehow. “You are real!”

SHE TRUSTS YOU.

“Syl?” Kaladin called. “Yes, she does.”

SHE SHOULD NOT.

“Are you the one who forbade her to come to me? Are you the one who keeps the spren back?”

YOU WILL KILL HER. The voice, so deep, so powerful, sounded regretful. Mournful. YOU WILL MURDER MY CHILD AND LEAVE HER CORPSE TO WICKED MEN.

“I will not!” Kaladin shouted.

YOU BEGIN IT ALREADY.

The storm continued. Kaladin saw the world from above. Ships in sheltered harbors rocking on violent swells. Armies huddled in valleys, preparing for war in a place of many hills and mountains. A vast lake going dry ahead of his arrival, the water retreating into holes in the rock beneath.

“How can I prevent it?” Kaladin demanded. “How can I protect her?”

YOU ARE HUMAN. YOU WILL BE A TRAITOR.

“No I won’t!”

YOU WILL CHANGE. MEN CHANGE. ALL MEN.

The continent was so vast. So many people speaking languages he could not comprehend, everyone hiding in their rooms, their caverns, their valleys.

AH, the Stormfather said. SO IT WILL END.

“What?” Kaladin shouted into the winds. “What changed? I feel—”

HE COMES FOR YOU, LITTLE TRAITOR. I AM SORRY.

Something rose before Kaladin. A second storm, one of red lightning, so enormous as to make the continent—the world itself—into nothing by comparison. Everything fell into its shadow.

I AM SORRY, the Stormfather said. HE COMES.

Kaladin awoke, heart thundering in his chest.

He almost fell from his chair. Where was he? The Pinnacle, the king’s conference chamber. Its coming brings the gods their night they immediatelyreKaladin had sat down for a moment and . . .

He blushed. He’d dozed off.

Adolin stood nearby, talking to Renarin. “I’m not sure if anything will come from the meeting, but I’m glad Father agreed to it. I’d almost given up hope of it happening, with how long the Parshendi messenger took to arrive.”

“You’re sure the one you met out there was a woman?” Renarin asked. He seemed more at ease since he had finished bonding his Blade a couple weeks back, and no longer needed to carry it around. “A woman Shardbearer?”

“The Parshendi are pretty odd,” Adolin said with a shrug. He glanced toward Kaladin, and his lips rose in a smirk. “Sleeping on the job, bridgeboy?”

The leaking shutter shook nearby, water dribbling in under the wood. Navani and Dalinar would be in the room next door.

The king wasn't there.

“His Majesty!” Kaladin cried, scrambling to his feet.

“In the privy, bridgeboy,” Adolin said, nodding to another door. “You can sleep during a highstorm. That’s impressive. Almost as impressive as how much you drool when you’re dozing.”

No time for gibes. That dream . . . Kaladin turned toward the balcony door, breathing quickly.

He comes. . . .

Kaladin pulled open the balcony door. Adolin shouted and Renarin called out, but Kaladin ignored them, facing the tempest.

The wind still howled and rain pelted the stone balcony with a sound like sticks breaking. There was no lightning, however, and the wind—while violent—was not nearly strong enough to fling boulders or topple walls. The bulk of the highstorm had passed.

Darkness. Wind from the depths of nothingness, battering him. He felt as if he were standing above the void itself, Damnation, known as Braize in the old songs. Home to demons and monsters. He stepped out hesitantly, light from the still-open door spilling onto the wet balcony. He found the railing—a part that was still secure—and clenched it in cold fingers. Rain bit him on the cheek, seeping through his uniform, burrowing through the cloth and seeking warm skin.

“Are you mad?” Adolin demanded from the doorway. Kaladin could barely hear his voice over the wind and distant rumbles of thunder.

* * *

Pattern hummed softly as rain fell on the wagon.

Shallan's slaves huddled together and whimpered. She wished she could quiet the blasted spren, but Pattern wasn't responding to her promptings. At least the highstorm was nearly over. She wanted to get away and read what Tyn's correspondents had to say about Shallan's homeland.

Pattern's hums sounded almost like a whimper. Shallan frowned and leaned down close to him. Were those words?

"Bad . . . bad . . . so bad . . ."

* * *

Syl shot out of the highstorm's dense darkness, a sudden flash of light in the black. She spun about Kaladin before coming to rest on the iron railing before him. Her dress seemed longer and more flowing than usual. The rain passed through her without disturbing her. "Thank you very much." m attitudes.4shape.

Syl looked into the sky, then turned her head sharply over her shoulder. "Kaladin. Something is wrong."

"I know."

Syl spun about, twisting this way, then that. Her small eyes opened wide. "He's coming."

"Who? The storm?"

"The one who hates," she whispered. "The darkness inside. Kaladin, he's watching. Something's going to happen. Something bad."

Kaladin hesitated only a moment, then scrambled back into the room, pushing past Adolin and entering the light. "Get the king. We're leaving. Now."

"What?" Adolin demanded.

Kaladin threw open the door into the small room where Dalinar and Navani waited. The highprince sat on a sofa, expression distant, Navani holding his

hand. That wasn't what Kaladin had expected. The highprince didn't seem frightened or mad, just thoughtful. He was speaking softly.

Kaladin froze. He sees things during the storms.

"What are you doing?" Navani demanded. "How dare you?"

"Can you wake him?" Kaladin asked, stepping into the room. "We need to leave this room, leave this palace."

"Nonsense." It was the king's voice. Elhokar stepped into the room behind him. "What are you babbling about?"

"You're not safe here, Your Majesty," Kaladin said. "We need to get you out of the palace and take you to the warcamp." Storms. Would that be safe? Should he go somewhere nobody would expect?

Thunder rumbled outside, but the sound of rainfall slackened. The storm was dying.

"This is ridiculous," Adolin said from behind the king, throwing his hands into the air. "This is the safest place in the warcamps. You want us to leave? Drag the king out into the storm?"

"We need to wake the highprince," Kaladin said, reaching for Dalinar.

Dalinar caught his arm as he did so. "The highprince is awake," Dalinar said, his gaze clearing, returning from the distant place where it had been. "What is going on here?"

"The bridgeboy wants us to evacuate the palace," Adolin said.

"Soldier?" Dalinar asked.

"It's not safe here, sir."

"What makes you say that?"

"Instinct, sir."

The room grew still. Outside, the rainfall slackened to a gentle patter. The riddens had arrived.

“We go, then,” Dalinar said, rising.

“What?” the king demanded.

“You put this man in charge of your guard, Elhokar,” Dalinar said. “If he thinks our position is not safe, we should do as he says.”

There was an implied for now after that sentence, but Kaladin didn't care. He shoved past the king and Adolin, rushing back through the main chamber to the doorway out. His heart hammered inside of him, his muscles tense. Syl, visible only to his eyes, flitted through the room,ts coming brings the gods their night they immediatelyre frantic.

Kaladin threw open the doors. Six men stood on watch in the hallway beyond, mostly bridgemen with one member of the King's Guard, a man named Ralinar. “We're leaving,” Kaladin said, pointing. “Beld and Hobber, you're a



had arrivedfkd What are you doingBut it is not impossible to blend

Their Surges to ours in the end.

It has been promised and it can come.

Or do we understand the sum?

We question not if they can have us then,

But if we dare to have them again.

—From the Listener Song of Spren, 10th stanza

Kaladin fell with the rain.

He clung to the assassin's bone-white clothing with his one working hand.
The assassin's dropped Shardblade exploded into mist beside them, and
together they plummeted toward the ground a hundred feet below.

The tempest within Kaladin was almost still. Too little Stormlight!

The assassin suddenly started glowing more powerfully.

He has spheres.

Kaladin breathed in sharply, and Light streamed from spheres in pouches at the assassin's waist. As the Light streamed into Kaladin, the assassin kicked at him. One handhold was not enough, and Kaladin was thrown free.

Then he hit.

He hit hard. No preparation, no getting his feet beneath him. He smacked against cold, wet stone, and his vision flashed like lightning.

It cleared a moment later, and he found himself lying on the rocks at the base of the rise that led to the king's palace, a gentle rain sprinkling him. He looked up at the distant light of the hole in the wall above. He'd survived.

One question answered, he thought, struggling to his knees on the wet rock. The Stormlight was already working on his skin, which was shredded along his right side. He'd broken something in his shoulder; he could feel its healing as a burning pain that slowly retreated.

But his right forearm and hand, faintly lit by the Stormlight rising from the rest of him, were still a dull grey. Like a dead candle in a row, this part of him did not glow. He couldn't feel it; he couldn't even move the fingers. They drooped, limp, as he cradled the hand.

Nearby, the Assassin in White stood up straight in the rain. He'd somehow gotten his feet beneath him and landed, in control, with poise. This man had a level of experience with his powers that made Kaladin look like a new recruit.

The assassin turned on Kaladin, then stopped short. He spoke softly in a language Kaladin didn't understand, the words breathy and sibilant, bearing lots of "sh" sounds.

Got to move, Kaladin thought. Before he summons that Blade again. Unfortunately, he failed to shove down the horror at having lost the hand. No

more spear fighting. No more surgery. Both men he had learned to be were now lost to him.

Except . . . he could almost feel . . .

“Did I Lash you?” the assassin asked in accented Alethi. His eyes had darkened, losing their sapphire blue quality. “To the ground? But why did you not die falling? No. I must have Lashed you upward. Impossible.” He stepped back.

A moment of surprise. A moment to live help.” fustre. Perhaps . . . Kaladin felt the Light working, the tempest within straining and pushing. He gritted his teeth and heaved somehow.

The color returned to his hand, and feeling—cold pain—suddenly flooded his arm, hand, fingers. Light began to stream from his hand.

“No . . .” the assassin said. “No!”

Whatever Kaladin had done to his hand had consumed much of his Light and his overall glow faded, leaving him barely alight. Still on his knees, gritting his teeth, Kaladin grabbed the knife from his belt, but found his grip weak. He almost fumbled the weapon as he got it free.

He swapped the knife to his off hand. It would have to do.

He threw himself to his feet and charged the assassin. Have to hit him quickly to have a chance.

The assassin jumped backward, soaring a good ten feet, his white clothing rippling in the night air. He landed with a lithe grace, Shardblade appearing in his hand. “What are you?” he demanded.

“Same thing you are,” Kaladin said. He felt a wave of nausea, but forced himself to appear firm. “Windrunner.”

“You can’t be.”

Kaladin held up the knife, the few wisps of remaining Light steaming from

his skin. Rain sprinkled him.

The assassin scrambled backward, eyes as wide as if Kaladin had turned into a chasmfiend. “They told me I was a liar!” the assassin screamed. “They told me I was wrong! Szeth-son-son-Vallano . . . Truthless. They named me Truthless!”

Kaladin stepped forward as threateningly as he could manage, hoping his Stormlight would last long enough to be imposing. He breathed out, letting it puff before him, faintly luminescent in the darkness.

The assassin scrambled back through a puddle. “Are they back?” he demanded. “Are they all back?”

“Yes,” Kaladin said. It seemed like the right answer. The answer that would keep him alive, at least.

The assassin stared at him a moment longer, then turned and fled. Kaladin watched the glowing form run, then lurch into the sky. He zipped eastward as a streak of light.

“Storms,” Kaladin said, then breathed out the last of his Light and collapsed in a heap.

* * *

When he regained consciousness, Syl stood beside him on the rocky ground, hands on her hips. “Sleeping when you’re supposed to be on guard duty?”

Kaladin groaned and sat up. He felt horribly weak, but he was alive. Good enough. He held up his hand, but couldn’t see much in the darkness now that his Stormlight had faded.

He could move his fingers. His entire hand and forearm ached, but it was the most wonderful ache he’d ever felt.

“I healed,” he whispered, then coughed. “I healed from a Shardblade wound. Why didn’t you tell me I could do that?”

“Because I didn’t know you could do it until you did it, silly.” She said it as if it were the most obvious fact in the world. Her voice grew softer. “There are dead. Up above.”

Kaladin the Hierocracyfustrenodded. Could he walk? He managed to get to his feet, and slowly made his way around the base of the Pinnacle, toward the steps on the other side. Syl flitted around him anxiously. His strength began to return a little as he found the steps and began to climb. He had to stop several times to catch his breath, and at one point he ripped off the sleeve of his coat to hide that it had been cut through with a Shardblade.

He reached the top. Part of him feared that he’d find everyone dead. The hallways were silent. No shouts, no guards. Nothing. He continued on, feeling alone, until he saw light ahead.

“Stop!” called a trembling voice. Mart, of Bridge Four. “You in the dark! Identify yourself!”

Kaladin continued forward into the light, too exhausted to reply. Mart and Moash stood guard at the door to the king’s chambers, along with some of the men from the King’s Guard. They let out whoopsion without qu



Our gods were born splinters of a soul,
Of one who seeks to take control,
Destroys all lands that he beholds, with spite.
They are his spren, his gift, his price.
But the nightforms speak of future life,
A challenged champion. A strife even he must requite.

—From the Listener Song of Secrets, final stanza

Highprince Valam might be dead, Brightness Tyn, the spanreed wrote. Our informants are uncertain. He was never in the best of health, and now there are rumors that his illness finally overcame him. His forces are gearing up to seize Vedenar, however, so if he's dead, his bastard son is likely pretending he is not.

Shallan sat back, though the reed continued writing. It moved seemingly of its own volition, paired to an identical reed used by Tyn's associate

somewhere in Tashikk. They'd set up regular camp following the highstorm, Shallan joining Tyn in her magnificent tent. The air still smelled of rain, and the floor of the tent let some water leak through, wetting Tyn's rug. Shallan wished she'd worn her oversized boots instead of slippers.

What would it mean for her family if the highprince was dead? He had been one of her father's main problems in the latter days of his life, and her house had gone into debt securing allies to win the highprince's ear or perhaps—instead—to try to unseat him. A succession war could pressure the people who held her family's debts, and that might make them come to her brothers demanding payments. Or, instead, the chaos could cause the creditors to forget about Shallan's brothers and their insignificant house. And what of the Ghostbloods? Would the succession war make them more or less likely to come, demanding their Soulcaster?

Stormfather! She needed more information.

The reed continued to move, listing the names of those who were making a play for the throne of Jah Keved. "Do you know any of these people personally?" Tyn asked, arms crossed contemplatively as she stood beside the writing table. "What's happening might offer us some opportunities."

"I" said one of the scions. inf vanished to mist. kat wasn't important enough for those types," Shallan said with a grimace. It was true.

"We might want to make our way to Jah Keved, regardless," Tyn said. "You know the culture, the people. That'll be useful."

"It's a war zone!"

"War means desperation, and desperation is our mother's milk, kid. Once we follow your lead at the Shattered Plains—maybe pick up another member or two for our team—we probably will want to go visit your homeland."

Shallan felt an immediate stab of guilt. From what Tyn said, the stories she told, it had become clear that she often chose to have someone like Shallan under her wing. An acolyte, someone to nurture. Shallan suspected that was at least partly because Tyn liked having someone around to impress.

Her life must be so lonely, Shallan thought. Always moving, always taking whatever she can get, but never giving. Except once in a while, to a young thief she can foster . . .

A strange shadow moved across the wall of the tent. Pattern, though Shallan only noticed him because she knew what to look for. He could be practically invisible when he wanted to be, though unlike some spren he could not vanish completely.

The spanreed continued to write, giving Tyn a longer rundown of conditions in various countries. After that, it produced a curious statement.

I have checked with informants at the Shattered Plains, the pen wrote. The ones you asked after are, indeed, wanted men. Most are former members of the army of Highprince Sadeas. He is not forgiving of deserters.

“What’s this?” Shallan asked, rising from her stool and going to look more closely at what the pen wrote.

“I implied earlier we’d have to discuss this,” Tyn said, changing the paper for the spanreed. “As I keep explaining, the life we lead requires doing some harsh things.”

The leader, whom you call Vathah, is worth a bounty of four emerald broams, the pen wrote. The rest, two broams each.

“Bounty?” Shallan demanded. “I gave promises to these men!”

“Hush!” Tyn said. “We’re not alone in this camp, fool child. If you want us dead, all you need to do is let them overhear this conversation.”

“We’re not turning them in for money,” Shallan said more softly. “Tyn, I gave my word.”

“Your word?” Tyn said, laughing. “Kid, what do you think we are? Your word?”

Shallan blushed. On the table, the spanreed continued to write, oblivious to the fact they weren’t paying attention. It was saying something about a job

Tyn had done before.

“Tyn,” Shallan said, “Vathah and his men can be useful.”

Tyn shook her head, walking over to the side of the tent, pouring herself a cup of wine. “You should be proud of what you did here. You have barely any experience, yet you took over three separate groups, convincing them to put you—practically sphereless and completely without authority—”
aid="11C3rdentss made in charge. Brilliant!

“But here’s the thing. The lies we tell, the dreams we create, they’re not real. We can’t let them be real. This might be the hardest lesson you have to learn.” She turned to Shallan, her expression having gone hard, all sense of relaxed playfulness gone. “When a good con woman dies, it’s usually because she starts believing her own lies. She finds something good and wants it to continue. She keeps it going, thinking she can juggle it. One day more, she tells herself. One day more, and then . . .”

Tyn dropped the cup. It fuse. The king

hit the ground, the wine splashing bloodred across the tent floor and Tyn's rug.

Red carpet . . . once it was white . . .

“Your rug,” Shallan said, feeling numb.

“You think I can afford to haul a rume when I leave the Shattered Plains?”
Tyn asked softly, stepping across the spilled wine, taking g with

Shallan by the arm. “You think we can take any of this? It’s meaningless. You’ve lied to these men. You’ve built yourself up, and tomorrow—when we enter that warcamp—the truth will hit you like a slap in the face.

“You think you can actually get clemency for these n like Highprince Sadeas? Don’t be an idiot. Even if you get the con going with Dalinar, you want to spend what little credibility we can fake in order to free murderers from Dalinar’s political enemy? How long did you think you could keep this lie going?”

Shallan sat back down on the stool, agitated—both at Tyn and at herself. She shouldn’t be surprised that Tyn wanted to betray Vathah and his men—she knew what Tyn was, and had eagerly let the woman teach her. In truth, Vathah and his men probably did deserve their punishments.

That didn’t mean Shallan was going to betray them. She had told them they could change. She had given her word.

Lies . . .

Just because you learned how to lie didn’t mean you had to let the lie rule you. But how could she protect Vathah without alienating Tyn? Did she even have that option?

What would Tyn do when Shallan proved to actually be the woman betrothed to Dalinar Kholin’s son?

How long did you think you could keep this lie going . . .

“Here now,” Tyn said, smiling broadly. “That’s some good news.”

Shallan shook herself from her ruminations, glancing at what the spanreed had been writing.

In regards to your mission in Amydlatn, it read, our benefactors have written to say that they are pleased. They do want to know if you recovered the information, but I think this is secondary to them. They let slip that they’ve found the information they need elsewhere, something about a city they’ve

been researching.

For your part, there is no news of the target surviving. It seems that your worry about the mission's failure is unfounded. What the Hierocracyff,reever happened aboard the ship, it worked to our favor. The Wind's Pleasure is reported lost with all hands. Jasnah Kholin is dead.

Jasnah Kholin is dead.

Shallan gaped, jaw dropping. That . . . it isn't . . .

"Maybe those idiots did manage to complete the job," Tyn said, satisfied. "It looks like I'll be paid after all."

"Your mission in Amydlatn," Shallan whispered. "It was to assassinate Jasnah Kholin."

"Run the operation, at least," Tyn said, distracted. "Would have gone myself, but can't stand ships. Those churning seas turn my stomach inside out. . . ."

Shallan couldn't speak. Tyn was an assassin. Tyn had been behind the hit on Jasnah Kholin.

The spanreed was still writing.

. . . some interesting news. You asked after House Davar in Jah Keved. It looks like Jasnah, before leaving Kharbranth, took a new ward . . .

Shallan reached for the spanreed.

Tyn caught her hand, the woman's eyes widening as the reed wrote a few last sentences.

. . . a girl named Shallan. Red hair. Pale skin. Nobody knows much about her. Didn't seem important news to our informants until I pried.

Shallan looked up just as Tyn did, meeting the woman's eyes.

"Ah, Damnation," Tyn said.

Shallan tried to pull free. Instead, she found herself being hauled off the chair.

She couldn't follow Tyn's quick motions as the woman slammed her to the ground, face-first. The woman's boot followed to Shallan's back, knocking the air from her and throwing a shock through her body. Shallan's vision fuzzed as she gasped for air.

"Damnation, Damnation!" Tyn said. "You're Kholin's ward? Where's Jasnah? Did she live?"

"Help!" Shallan croaked, barely able to speak as she tried to crawl toward the tent wall.

Tyn knelt on Shallan's back, pressing the air from her lungs again. "I had my men clear the area around this tent. I was worried about you alerting the deserters that we would turn them in. Stormfather!" She knelt down, head closer to Shallan's ear. As Shallan struggled, Tyn grabbed her on the shoulder and squeezed hard. "Did. Jasnah. Live?"

"No," Shallan whispered, tears of pain coming to her eyes.

"The ship, you may have noticed," Jasnah's voice said from behind them, "has two very fine cabins which I hired out for us at no small expense."

Tyn cursed, leaping up and spinning to see who had spoken. It was, of course, Pattern. Shallan didn't give him a glance, but scrambled toward the tent wall. Vathah and the others were out there, somewhere. If she could just —

Tyn caught her leg, yanking her backward.

I can't escape, a primal part of her the Hierocracyff, re thought. Panic surged within Shallan, bringing with it memories of days spent completely impotent. Her father's increasingly destructive violence. A family falling apart.

Powerless.

Can't run, can't run, can't run . . .

Fight.

Shallan pulled her leg free of Tyn and spun, launching herself at the woman. She would not be powerless again. She would not!

Tyn gasped as Shallan attacked with everything she had. A clawing, angry, frantic mess. It wasn't effective. Shallan knew next to nothing about how to fight, and in moments she found herself croaking in pain a second time, Tyn's fist buried in her stomach.

Shallan sank to her knees, tears on her cheeks. She tried, ineffectively, to inhale. Tyn cracked her on the side of the head, making her vision go all white.

"Where did that come from?" Tyn said.

Shallan blinked, looking up, vision swimming. She was on the ground again. Her fingernails had left a set of bloody rips across Tyn's cheek. Tyn reached up, hand coming away red. Her expression darkened, and she reached to the table, where her sword rested in its sheath.

"What a mess," Tyn growled. "Storm it! I'm going to have to invite that Vathah here, then find a way to blame this on him." Tyn pulled the sword from its sheath.

Shallan struggled to her knees, then tried to climb to her feet, but her legs were unsteady and the room lurched around her, as if she were still on the ship.

"Pattern?" she croaked. "Pattern?"

She heard something outside. Shouts?

"I'm sorry," Tyn said, voice cold. "I'm going to have to tie this up tight. In a way, I'm proud of you. You fooled me. You'd have been good at this."

Calm, Shallan told herself. Be calm!

Ten heartbeats.

But for her, it didn't have to be ten, did it?

No. It must be. Time, I need time!

She had spheres in her sleeve. As Tyn approached, Shallan breathed in sharply. Stormlight became a raging tempest inside of her and she raised her hand, thrusting out a pulse of Light. She couldn't form it into anything—she still didn't know how—but it seemed for a moment to show a rippling image of Shallan, standing proudly like a woman of the court.

Tyn stopped short at the sight of the projection of light and color, then waved her sword out in front of her. The Light rippled, dissipating into smoky trails.

“So I'm going mad,” Tyn said. “Hearing voices. Seeing things. I guess part of me doesn't want to do this.” She advanced, raising her blade. “I'm sorry that you have to learn the lesson this way. Sometimes, we must do things we don't like, kid. Difficmen? From a ma

ult things.”

Shallan growled, thrusting her hands forward. Mist twisted and writhed in her hands as a brilliantly silver Blade formed there, spearing Tyn through the chest. The woman barely had time to gasp in surprise as her eyes burned in her skull.

Tyn’s corpse slid back off the weapon, collapsing in a heap. { margin-top: 1.50em; margin-right: 1.50em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } Jasnah at a ly

“Difficult things,” Shallan growled. “Yes. I believe I told you. I’ve learned that lesson already. Thank you.” She crawled to her feet, wobbling.

The tent flap ripped open and Shallan turned, holding up the Shardblade point-first toward the opening. Vathah, Gaz, and a few other soldiers stopped there in a jumble, weapons bloodied. They looked from Shallan to the corpse on the floor with its burned-out eyes, then back to Shallan.

She felt numb. She wanted to dismiss the Blade, hide it. It was terrible.

She did not. She crushed those emotions and hid them deep within. At the moment, she needed something strong to hold to, and the weapon served that purpose. Even if she hated it.

“Tyn’s soldiers?” Was that her voice, completely cold, purged of emotion?

“Stormfather!” Vathah said, stepping into the tent, hand to his chest as he stared at the Shardblade. “That night, when you pled with us, you could have killed us every one, and the bandits too. You could have done it on your own —”

“Tyn’s men!” Shallan shouted.

“Dead, Brightness,” Red said. “We heard . . . heard a voice. Telling us to come get you, and they wouldn’t let us pass. Then we heard you screaming, and—”

“Was it the voice of the Almighty?” Vathah asked in a whisper.

“It was my spren,” Shallan said. “That is all you need know. Search this tent. This woman was hired to assassinate me.” It was true, after a fashion. “There might be records of who hired her. Bring me anything you find with writing on it.”

As they swarmed in and set to work, Shallan sat down on the stool beside the table. The spanreed still waited there, hovering, paused at the bottom of the page. It needed a new sheet.

Shallan dismissed the Shardblade. “Do not speak of what you saw here to the others,” she told Vathah and his men. Though they promised quickly, she doubted that would hold for long. Shardblades were near-mythical objects, and a woman holding one? Rumors would spread. Just what she needed.

You’re alive because of that cursed thing, she thought to herself. Again. Stop complaining.

She took the spanreed up and changed the paper, then set it with its point at the corner. After a moment, Tyn’s distant accomplice started writing again.

Your benefactors on the Amydlatn job wish to meet with you, the pen wrote. It seems that the Ghostbloods have something else for you to do. Would you like me to arrange a meeting with them in the warcamps?

The pen stopped in place, waiting for a response. What had the spanreed said above? That these people—Tyn’s benefactors, tt: 0.00em; m

INTERLUDES



ESHONAI • ZAHEL • TALN



In the city of Narak, people closed up windows tightly as night approached and the storm loomed. They stuffed rags under doors, shoved bracing boards into position, pounded large, square blocks of wood into windows.

Eshonai did not join in the preparations, but stood outside Thude's dwelling, listening to his report—he'd just returned from meeting with the Alethi, arranging a parley to discuss peace. She had wanted to send someone earlier, but the Five had deliberated and complained until Eshonai wanted to throttle the lot of them. At least they'd finally agreed to let her send a messenger.

"Seven days," Thude said. "The meeting will happen on a neutral plateau."

"Did you see him?" Eshonai asked, eager. "The Blackthorn?"

Thude shook his head.

"What of the other one?" Eshonai asked. "The Surgebinder?"

"No sign of him either." Thude looked troubled. He looked eastward. "You'd better go. I can give you more details after the storm is done."

Eshonai nodded, resting her hand on her friend's shoulder. "Thank you."

“Good luck,” Thude said to Resolve.

“To all of us,” she replied as he shut the door, leaving her alone in a dark, seemingly empty city. Eshonai checked the stormshield on her back, then took the sphere with Venli’s captive spren from her pocket and attuned the Rhythm of Resolve.

The time had come. She ran toward the storm.

Resolve was a stately beat with a steady, rising sense of import and power. She left Narak, and reaching the first chasm, she jumped. Only warform had the strength for such leaps; for the workers to reach outer plateaus and grow food, they used rope bridges that were pulled back and stowed before each storm.

She landed in full stride, her footsteps falling to the beat of Resolve. The stormwall appeared in the distance, barely visible in the darkness. Winds rose, pushing against her, as if to hold her back. Aboem; text-decoration : none; font-variant : normal; line-height : 1. in a started ">She nodded. They didve, windspren zipped and danced in the air. They were heralds of what was to come.

Eshonai jumped two more chasms, then slowed, striding up to the top of a low hill. The stormwall now dominated the night sky, advancing at a terrible pace. The enormous sheet of darkness mingled debris with rain, a banner of water, rock, dust, and fallen plants. Eshonai unhooked the large shield on her back.

For the listeners, there was a certain romanticism to going out in the storm. Yes, the storms were terrible—but every listener would have to spend a number of nights out in them, alone. The songs said that someone seeking a new form would be protected. She wasn’t certain if this was fancy or fact, but the songs didn’t prevent most listeners from hiding in a cleft of rock to avoid the stormwall, then coming out once it had passed.

Eshonai preferred a shield. It felt more like facing the Rider straight on. This one, the soul of the storm, was the one the humans called Stormfather—and he was not one of her people’s gods. In fact, the songs named him a traitor—

a spren who had chosen to protect humans instead of the listeners.

Still, her people respected him. He would kill any who did not respect him.

She placed the base of the shield against a ridge of rock on the ground, then turned her shoulder against it, lowered her head, and braced herself with one foot back. Her other hand held the stone with the spren in it. She'd have preferred to wear her Plate, but for some reason having it on interfered with the transformation process.

She felt and heard the storm approach. The ground shook, the air roared. Bits of leaves swept across her in a chill gust, like scouts before an oncoming army that charged behind, the howling wind its battle cry.

She squeezed her eyes shut.

It slammed against her.

Despite her posture and her braced muscles, something cracked against the shield and flipped it away. The wind caught it and ripped it from her fingers. She stumbled backward, then threw herself to the ground, shoulder to the wind, head ducked.

Thunder beat against her as the raging wind tried to pull her off the plateau and toss her into the air. She kept her eyes closed, as all was black within the storm save for the flashes of lightning. It did not seem to her she was being protected. Her shoulder against the wind, huddling down behind a hillock, it seemed that the wind was doing its best to destroy her. Rocks crunched against the dark plateau nearby, shaking the ground. All she could hear was the roar of wind in her ears, punctuated occasionally by thunder. A terrible song without rhythm.

She kept Resolve attuned inside of her. She could feel that, at least, even if she couldn't hear.

Rain that fell like arrowheads beat into her body, bouncing off her skullplate and her armor. She set her jaw against the deep, bone-chilling cold and stayed in place. She had done this many times before, either when transforming or

when on the occasional surprise raid against the Alethi. She could survive. She would survive.

She focused on the rhythm in her head, clinging to some rocks as the wind tried to push her back off the plateau. Demid, Venli's once-mate, had started a movement where people who wanted to transform waited inside buildings until the storm had been going for a while. They only stepped out once the initial burst of fury g hidden.



Someone was near.

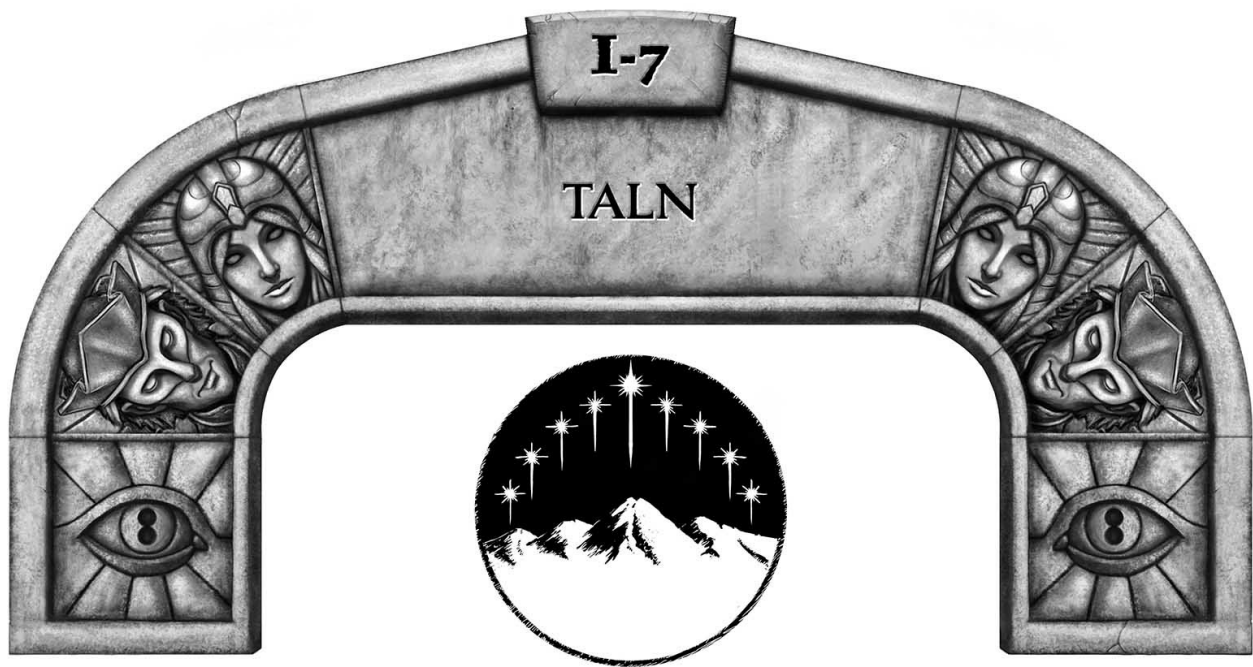
Zahel awoke, snapping his eyes open, knowing instantly that someone was approaching his room.

Blast! It was the middle of the night. If this was another lighteyed brat he'd turned away, come to beg . . . He grumbled to himself, climbing off his cot. I am far, far too old for this.

He pulled open his door, revealing the courtyard of the practice grounds at night. The air was wet. Oh, right. One of those storms had come, Invested to the hilt and looking for a place to stick it all. Cursed things.

>A young man, hand poised to knock, jumped back in surprise from the opening door. Kaladin. The bridgeman-turned-bodyguard. The one with that spren Zahel could sense always spinning about.

“You look like death itself,” Zahel snapped at the boy. Kaladin’s clothing was bloodied, his uniform ripped up on one side. The right sleeve was missing. “What happened?” “Attempt on the king’s life,” the boy said softly. “Not tp>



Of fires that burned and yet they were gone. Of heat he could feel when others felt not. Of screams his own that nobody heard. Of torture sublime, for life it meant.

“He just stares like that, Your Majesty.”

Words.

“He doesn’t seem to see anything. Sometimes he mumbles. Sometimes he shouts. But always, he just stares.”

The Gift and words. Not his. Never his. Now his.

“Storms, it’s haunting, isn’t it? I had to ride all this way with that, Your Majesty. Listening to him ranting in the back of the wagon half the time. Then feeling him stare at the back of my head the rest.”

“And Wit? You mentioned him.”

“Started on the trip with me, Your Majesty. But on the second day, he declared that he needed a rock.”

“A . . . rock.”

“Yes, Your Majesty. He hopped out of the wagon and found one, then, er, he hit himself on the head with it, Your Majesty. Did it three or four times. Came right back to the wagon with an odd grin, and said . . . um . . .”

“Yes?”

“Well, he said that he’d needed, uh, I had this remembered for you. He said, ‘I needed an objective frame of reference by which to judge the experience of your company. Somewhere between four and five blows, I place it.’ I don’t rightly understand what he meant, sir. I think he was mocking me.”

“Safe bet.”

Why didn’t they scream? That heat! Of death. Of death and the dead and the dead and their talking and not screaming of death except of the death that did not come.

“After that, Your Majesty, Wit just kind of, well, ran off. Into the hills. Like some storming Horneater.”

“Don’t try to understand Wit, Bordin. You’ll only cause yourself pain.”

“Yes, Brightlord.”

“I like this Wit.”

“We’re quite aware, Elhokar.”

“Honestly, Your Majesty, I preferred the madman for company.”

“Well of course you did. If people liked to be around Wit, he wouldn’t be much of a Wit, would he?”

They were on fire. The walls were on fire. The floor was on fire. Burning and the inside of a cannot where to be and then at all. Where?

A trip. Water? Wheels?

Fire. Yes, fire.

“Can you hear me, madman?”

“Elhokar, look at him. I doubt he understands.”

“I am Talenel’Elin, Herald this test,” Eshonai said. “I am the Blade of War.” Voice. He spoke it. He didn’t think it. The words came, like they always came.

“What was that? Speak louder, man.”

“The time of the Return, the Desolation, is near at hand. We must prepare. You will have forgotten much, following the destruction of the times past.”

“I can make out some of it, Elhokar. It’s Alethi. Northern accent. Not what I’d have expected from one with such dark skin.”

“Where did you get the Shardblade, madman? Tell me. Most Blades are accounted for through the generations, their lineage and history recorded. This one is completely unknown. From whom did you take it?”

“Kalak will teach you to cast bronze, if you have forgotten this. We will Soulcast blocks of metal directly for you. I wish we could teach you steel, but casting is so much easier than forging, and you must have something we can produce quickly. Your stone tools will not serve against what is to come.”

“He said something about bronze. And stone?”

“Vedel can train your surgeons, and Jezrien . . . he will teach you leadership. So much is lost between Returns . . .”

“The Shardblade! Where did you get it?”

“How did you separate it from him, Bordin?”

“We didn’t, Brightlord. He just dropped it.”

“And it didn’t vanish away? Not bonded, then. He couldn’t have had it for

long. Were his eyes this color when you found him?”

“Yes, sir. A darkeyed man with a Shardblade. Odd sight, that.”

“I will train your soldiers. We should have time. Ishar keeps talking about a way to keep information from being lost following Desolations. And you have discovered something unexpected. We will use that. Surgebinders to act as guardians . . . Knights . . .”

“He’s said this all before, Your Majesty. When he mumbles, uh, he just keeps at it. Over and over. I don’t think he even knows what he’s saying. Eerie, how his expression doesn’t change as he talks.”

“That is an Alethi accent.”

“He looks like he’s been living in the wild for some time, with that long hair and those broken nails. Perhaps a villager lost their mad father.”

“And the Blade, Elhokar?”

“Surely you don’t think it’s his, Uncle.”

“The coming days will be difficult, but with training, humanity will survive. You must bring me to your leaders. The other Heralds should join us soon.”

“I am willing to consider anything, these days. Your Majesty, I suggest you send him to the ardents. Perhaps they can help his mind to recover.”

“What will you do with the Shardblade?”

“I’m certain we can find a good use for it. In fact, something occurs to me right now. I might have need of you, Bordin.”

“Whatever you need, Brightlord.”

“I think . . . I think I am late . . . this time . . .”ing to change that. in a thosere

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

How long had it been?

Too long.



They were waiting for Eshonai when she returned.

A gathering of thousands crowded the edge of the plateau just outside of Narak. Workers, nimble, soldiers, and even some mates who had been drawn away from their hedonism by the prospect of something novel. A new form, a form of power?

Eshonai strode toward them, marveling at the energy. Tiny, almost invisible lines of red lightning flared from her hand if she made a fist quickly. Her

marbled skin tone—mostly black, with a slight grain of red streaks—had not changed, but she'd lost the bulky armor of warform. Instead, small ridges peeked out through the skin of her arms, which was stretched tightly in places. She'd tested the new armor against stones and found it very durable.

She had hairstrands again. How long had it been since she'd felt those? More wondrous, she felt focused. No more worries about the fate of her people. She knew what to do.

Venli pushed to the front of the crowd as Eshonai reached the edge of the chasm. They looked across the void at one another, and Eshonai could see the question on her sister's lips. It worked?

Eshonai leapt the chasm. She didn't require the running start that warform used; she crouched down, then threw herself up and into the air. The wind seemed to writhe around her. She shot over the chasm and landed among her people, red lines of power running up her legs as she crouched, absorbing the impact of the landing.

People backed away. So clear. Everything was so clear.

"I have returned from the storms," she said to Praise, which could also be used for true satisfaction. "I bring with me the future of two peoples. Our time of loss is at an end."

"Eshonai?" It was Thude, wearing his long coat. "Eshonai, your eyes."

"Yes?"

"They're red."

"They are a representation of what I've become."

"But, in the songs—"

"Sister!" Eshonai called to Resolve. "Come look upon what you have wrought!"

Venli approached, timid at first. "Stormform," she whispered to Awe. "It

works, then? You can move in the storms without danger?”

“More than that,” Eshonai said. “The winds obey me. And Venli, I can feel something . . . something the nature of the bond. But where, where, where p speakmm approximation building. A storm.”

“You feel a storm right now? In the rhythms?”

“Beyond the rhythms,” Eshonai said. How could she explain it? How could she describe taste to one with no mouth, sight to one who had never seen? “I feel a tempest brewing just beyond our experience. A powerful, angry tempest. A high storm. With enough of us bearing this form together, we could bring it. We could bend the storms to our will, and could bring them down upon our enemies.”

Humming to the Rhythm of Awe spread through those who watched. As they were listeners, they could feel the rhythm, hear it. All were in tune, all were in rhythm with one another. Perfection.

Eshonai held out her arms to the sides and spoke in a loud voice. “Cast aside despair and sing to the Rhythm of Joy! I have looked into the depths of the Storm Rider’s eyes, and I have seen his betrayal. I know his mind, and have seen his intent to help the humans against us. But my sister has discovered salvation! With this form we can stand on our own, independent, and we can sweep our enemies from this land like leaves before the tempest!”

The humming to Awe grew louder, and some began to sing. Eshonai gloried in it.

She pointedly ignored the voice deep within her that was screaming in horror.

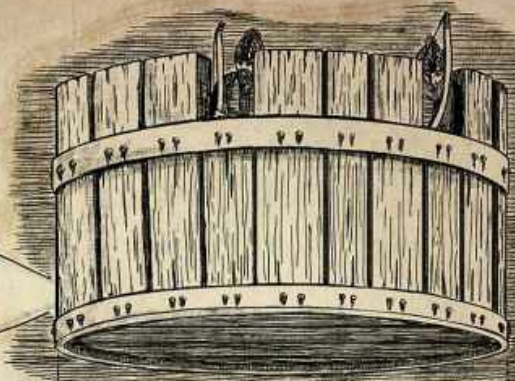


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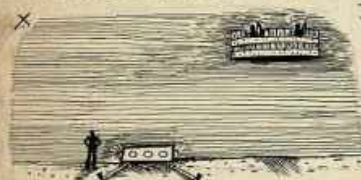
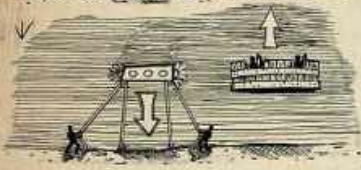
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SHALLAN • KALADIN • ADOLIN • NAVANI

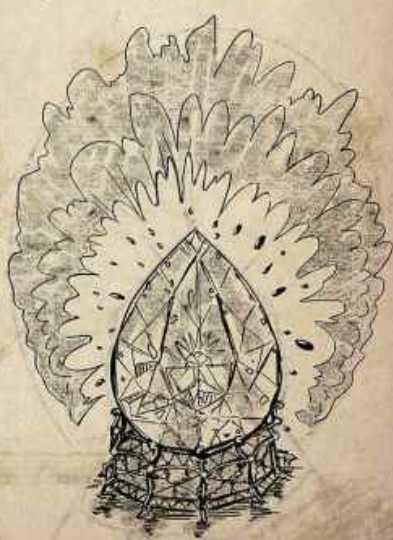
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They also, when they had settled their rulings in the nature of each bond's placement, called the name of it the Nahel bond, with regard to its effect upon the souls of those caught in its grip; in this description, each was related to the bonds that drive Roshar itself, ten Surges, named in turn and two for each order; in this light, it can be seen that each order would by necessity share one Surge with each of its neighbors.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 8, page 6

Adolin threw his Shardblade.

Wielding the weapons was about more than just practicing stances and growing accustomed to the too-light swordplay. A master of the Blade learned to do more with the bond. He learned to command it to remain in place after being dropped, and learned to summon it back from the hands of those who might have picked it up. He learned that man and sword were, in some ways, one. The weapon became a piece of your soul.

Adolin had learned to control his Blade in this way. Usually diamond chipf snortedKeep archers in silence. Today, the weapon disintegrated almost immediately after leaving his fingers.

The long, silvery Blade transmuted to white vapor—holding its shape for just a brief moment, like a smoke ring—before exploding in a puff of writhing white streams. Adolin growled in frustration, pacing back and forth on the plateau, hand held out to the side as he resummoned the weapon. Ten heartbeats. At times, it felt like an eternity.

He wore his Plate without the helm, which sat atop a nearby rock, and so his hair blew free in the early morning breeze. He needed the Plate; his left shoulder and side were a mass of purple bruises. His head still ached from slamming into the ground during the assassin's attack last night. Without the Plate, he wouldn't be nearly so nimble today.

Besides, he needed its strength. He kept looking over his shoulder, expecting the assassin to be there. He'd stayed up all night last night, sitting on the floor outside his father's room, wearing Plate, arms crossed on his knees, chewing ridgebark to stay awake.

He'd been caught without his Plate once. Not again.

And what will you do? he thought to himself as his Blade reappeared. Wear it all the time?

The part of him that asked such questions was rational. He didn't want to be rational right now.

He shook the condensation from his Blade, then twisted and hurled it, transmitting the mental commands that would tell it to hold together. Once again, the weapon shattered to mist moments after it left his fingers. It didn't even cross half the distance to the rock formation he was aiming for.

What was wrong with him? He'd mastered Blade commands years ago. True, he hadn't often practiced throwing his sword—such things were forbidden in duels, and he hadn't ever thought he'd need to use the maneuver. That was before he'd been trapped on the ceiling of a hallway, unable to properly engage an assassin.

Adolin walked to the edge of the plateau, staring out over the uneven expanse of the Shattered Plains. A huddle of three guards watched him nearby.

Laughable. What would three bridgemen do if the Assassin in White returned?

Kaladin was worth something in the attack, Adolin thought. More than you were. That man had been suspiciously effective.

Renarin said that Adolin was unfair toward the bridgeman captain, but there was something strange about that man. More than his attitude—the way he always acted like by talking to you, he was doing you a favor. The way he seemed so decidedly gloomy at everything, angry at the world itself. He was unlikable, plain and simple, but Adolin had known plenty of unlikable people.

Kaladin was also strange. In ways Adolin couldn't explain.

Well, for all that, Kaladin's men were just doing their duty. No use in snapping at them, so he gave them a smile.

Adolin's Shardblade dropped into his fingers again, too light for its size. He had always felt a certain strength when holding it. Never before had Adolin felt powerless when bearing his Shards. Even surrounded by the Parshendi, even certain he was going to die, he'd still felt power.

W up sharply. f to find rehere was that feeling now?

He spun and threw the weapon, focusing as Zahel had taught him years before, sending a direct instruction to the Blade—picturing what he needed it to do. It held together, spinning end over end, flashing in the air. It sank up to its hilt into the stone of the rock formation. Adolin let out the breath he had been holding. Finally. He released the Blade, and it burst into mist, which streamed like a tiny river from the hole left behind.

“Come,” he said to his bodyguards, snatching his helm from the rock and walking toward the nearby warcamp. As one might expect, the crater edge that formed the warcamp wall was most weathered here, in the east. The camp had spilled out like the contents of a broken turtle egg, and—over the years—had even started to creep down onto the near plateaus.

Emerging from that creep of civilization was a distinctly odd procession. The congregation of robed ardens chanted in unison, surrounding parshmen who carried large poles upright like lances. Silk cloth shimmered between these poles, a good forty feet wide, rippling in the breeze and cutting off the view of something in the center.

Soulcasters? They didn't normally come out during the day. "Wait here," he told his bodyguards, then jogged over toward the ardens.

The three bridgemen obeyed. If Kaladin had been with them, he would have insisted on following. Maybe the way the fellow acted was a result of his strange position. Why had father put a darkeyed soldier outside the command structure? Adolin was all for treating men with respect and honor regardless of eye shade, but the Almighty had put some men in command and others beneath them. It was simply the natural order of things.

The parshmen carrying the poles watched him come, then looked down at the ground. Nearby ardens let Adolin pass, though they looked uncomfortable. Adolin was allowed to see Soulcasters, but having him visit them was irregular.

Inside the temporary silk room, Adolin found Kadash—one of the foremost of Dalinar's ardens. The tall man had once been a soldier, as the scars on his head testified. He spoke with ardens in bloodred robes.

Soulcasters. It was the word for both the people who performed the art and the fabrials they used. Kadash was not one himself; he wore the standard grey robes instead of red, his head shaven, face accented by a square beard. He noticed Adolin, hesitated briefly, then bowed his head in respect. Like all of the ardens, Kadash was technically a slave.

That included the five Soulcasters. Each stood with right hand to breast, displaying a sparkling fabrial across the back of the palm. One of the ardens glanced at Adolin. Stormfather—that gaze wasn't completely human, not any longer. Prolonged use of the Soulcaster had transformed the eyes so that they sparkled like gemstones themselves. The woman's skin had hardened to something like stone, smooth, with fine cracks. It was as if the person were a living statue.

Kadash hustled over toward Adolin. “Brightlord,” he said. “I had not realized you were coming to supervise.”

“I’m not here to supervise,” Adolin said, glancing with discomfort at the Soulcasters. “I’m just surprised. Don’t you usually do this at night?”

“We can’t afford to any longer, bright one,” Kadash said. “There are too many demands upon the Soulcasters. Buildings, food, removal of waste . . . To f { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah if shereit it all in, we are going to need to start training multiple ardents on each fabrial, then working them in shifts. Your father approved this earlier in the week.”

This drew glances from several of the red-robed ardents. What did they think about others training on their fabrials? Their almost-alien expressions were unreadable.

“I see,” Adolin said. Storms, we rely on these things a lot. Everyone talked about Shardblades and Shardplate, and their advantages in war. But in truth, it was these strange fabrials—and the grain they created—that had allowed this war to proceed as it had.

“May we proceed, bright one?” Kadash asked.

Adolin nodded, and Kadash walked back to the five and gave a few brief commands. He spoke quickly, nervous. It was odd to see that in Kadash, who was normally so placid and unflappable. Soulcasters had that effect on everyone.

The five started softly chanting, a harmony to the singing of the ardents outside. The five stepped forward and raised their hands in a line, and Adolin found his face breaking out in a sweat, blown cold by the wind that managed to sneak past the silken walls.

At first there was nothing. And then stone.

Adolin thought he caught a brief glimpse of mist coalescing—like the moment a Shardblade appeared—as a massive wall sprang into existence.

Wind blew inward, as if sucked by that materializing rock, making the cloth flap violently, snapping and writhing in the air. Why should the wind pull inward? Shouldn't it have been blown outward by rock displacing it?

The large barrier abutted the cloth on either side, causing the silk screens to bulge outward, and rose high into the air.

"We'll need taller poles," Kadash muttered to himself.

The stone wall had the same utilitarian look as the barracks, but this was a new shape. Flat on the side facing the warcamps, it was sloped on the other side, like a wedge. Adolin recognized it as something his father had been deliberating building for months now.

"A windbreak!" Adolin said. "That's wonderful, Kadash."

"Yes, well, your father seemed to like the proposal. A few dozen of these out here, and the construction yards will be able to expand onto the entire plateau without fear of highstorms."

That wasn't completely true. You always had to worry about highstorms, since they could hurl boulders and blow hard enough to rip buildings from their foundations. But a good solid windbreak would be a blessing of the Almighty out here in the stormlands.

The Soulcasters retreated, not speaking with the other ardens. The parshmen scrambled to keep up, those on one side of the barrier running along behind it with their silk and opening the back of the room to let the new windbreak slip out of the enclosure. They passed by Adolin and Kadash, leaving them exposed on the plateau and standing in the shade of the large new stone structure.

The silk wall went back up, blocking sight of the Soulcasters. Just before it did, Adolin noticed one of the Soulcasters' hands. The fabrial's glow was gone. Likely one or more of the gemstones in it had shattered.

"I still find it incredible," Kadash said, looking up at the stone barrier. "Even after all these years. If we needed proof of the Almighty's hand in our lives,

this is certainly it.” A few glory { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah if sherespren appeared around him, spinning and golden.

“The Radiants could Soulcast,” Adolin said, “couldn’t they?”

“It is written that they could,” Kadash said carefully. The Recreance—the term for the Radiants’ betrayal of mankind—was often seen as a failure of Vorinism as a religion. The way the Church sought to seize power in the centuries that followed was even more embarrassing.

“What else could the Radiants do?” Adolin asked. “They had strange powers, right?”

“I have not read on it extensively, bright one,” Kadash said. “Perhaps I should have spent more time learning about them, if only to remember the evils of pride. I will be certain to do this, bright one, in order to remain faithful and remember the proper place of all ardents.”

“Kadash,” Adolin said, watching the shimmering silken procession retreat, “I need information right now, not humility. The Assassin in White has returned.”

Kadash gasped. “The disturbance at the palace last night? The rumors are true?”

“Yes.”

There was no use hiding it. His father and the king had told the highprinces, and were planning on how to release the information to everyone else.

Adolin met the ardent’s eyes. “That assassin walked on the walls, as if the pull of the earth were nothing to him. He fell a hundred feet without injury. He was like a Voidbringer, death given form. So I ask you again. What could the Radiants do? Were abilities like these ascribed to them?”

“Those and more, bright one,” Kadash whispered, face drained of color. “I spoke with some of the soldiers who survived that first terrible night when

the old king was killed. I thought the things they claimed to have seen the result of trauma—”

“I need to know,” Adolin said. “Look into it. Read. Tell me what this creature might be capable of doing. We have to know how to fight him. He will return.”

“Yes,” Kadash said, visibly shaken. “But . . . Adolin? If what you say is true . . . Storms! It could mean the Radiants are not dead.”

“I know.”

“Almighty preserve us,” Kadash whispered.

* * *

Navani Kholin loved warcamps. In ordinary cities, everything was so messy. Shops where they hardly belonged, streets that refused to run in straight lines.

Military men and women, however, valued order and rationality—at least, the better ones did. Their camps reflected that. Barracks in neat rows, shops confined to marketplaces, as opposed to popping up on every corner. From her vantage atop her observation tower, she could see much of Dalinar’s camp. So neat, so intentional.

This was the mark of humankind: to take the wild, unorganized world and make something logical of it. You could get so much more done when everything was in its place, when you could easily find what or whom you needed. Creativity required such things.

Careful planning was, indeed, the water that nourished innovation.

She took { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah if she in a deep breath and turned back toward the engineering grounds, which dominated the eastern section of Dalinar’s warcamp. “All right, everyone!” she called. “Let’s give it a try!” This test had been planned long before the assassin’s attack, and she’d decided to proceed. What else was she

going to do? Sit around and worry?

The grounds below became a buzz of activity. Her elevated observation platform was perhaps twenty-five feet high, and gave her a good view of the engineering grounds. She was flanked by a dozen different ardens and scholars—and even Matain and a few other stormwardens. She still wasn't sure what she thought of those fellows—they spent too much time talking about numerology and reading the winds. They called it a science in an attempt to dodge Vorin prohibitions of predic019;t own anyt



And when they were spoken of by the common folk, the Releasers claimed to be misjudged because of the dreadful nature of their power; and when they dealt with others, always were they firm in their claim that other epithets, notably “Dustbringers,” often heard in the common speech, were unacceptable substitutions, in particular for their similarity to the word “Voidbringers.” They did also exercise anger in great prejudice regarding it, though to many who speak, there was little difference between these two assemblies.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 17, page 11

Shallan awoke as a new woman.

She wasn’t yet completely certain who that woman was, but she knew who that woman was not. She was not the same frightened girl who had suffered the storms of a broken home. She was not the same naive woman who had tried to steal from Jasnah Kholin. She was not the same woman who had been deceived by Kabsal and then Tyn.

That did not mean she was not still frightened or naive. She was both. But she was also tired. Tired of being shoved around, tired of being misled, tired of

being dismissed. During the trip with Tvlakv, she'd pretended she could lead and take charge. She no longer felt the need to pretend.

She knelt beside one of Tyn's trunks. She'd resisted letting the men break it open—she wanted a few trunks for keeping clothing—but her search of the tent hadn't found the proper key.

"Pattern," she said. "Can you look inside of this? Squeeze in through the keyhole?"

"Mmm . . ." Pattern moved onto the side of the trunk, then shrank down to be the size of her thumbnail. He moved in easily. She heard his voice from inside. "Dark."

"Drat," she said, fishing out a sphere and holding it up to the keyhole. "Does that help?"

"I see a pattern," he said.

"A pattern? What kind of—"

Click.

Shallan started, then reached to lift the lid of the trunk. Pattern buzzed happily inside.

"You unlocked it."

"A pattern," he said happily.

"You can move things?"

"Push a little here and there," he said. "Very little strength on this side. Mmm . . ."

The trunk was filled with clothing and had a pouch of spheres in a black cloth bag. Both would be very useful. Shallan searched through and found a dress with fine embroidery and a modern cut. Tyn needed it, of course, for times

when she pretended to be of a higher status. Shallan put it on, found it loose through the bust but otherwise acceptable, then did her face and hair at the mirror using the dead woman's makeup and brushes.

When she left the tent that morning, she felt—for the first time in what seemed ages—like a true lighteyed woman. That was well, for today she would finally reach the Shattered Plains. And, hopefully, destiny.

She strode out into the morning light. Her men worked alongside the caravan's parshmen to break down camp. With Tyn's guards dead, the only armed force in the camp belonged to Shallan.

Vathah fell into step beside her. "We burned the bodies last night as you instructed, Brightness. And another guard patrol stopped by this morning while you were getting ready. They obviously wanted us to know that they intend to keep the peace. If someone camps in this spot and finds the bones of Tyn and her soldiers in the ashes, it could lead to questions. I don't know that the caravan workers will keep your secret if asked."

"Thank you," Shallan said. "Have one of the men gather the bones into a sack. I'll deal with them."

Had she really just said that?

Vathah nodded curtly, as if this were the expected answer. "Some of the men are uncomfortable, now that we're so close to the warcamps."

"Do you still think I'm incapable of keeping my promises to them?"

He actually smiled. "No. I think I've been right convinced, Brightness."

"Well then?"

"I'll reassure them," he said.

"Excellent." They parted ways as Shallan sought out Macob. When she found him, the bearded, aging caravan trademaster bowed to her with far more respect than he'd ever shown her before. He'd already heard about the Shardblade. up sharply. f leatherre

“I will need one of your men to run down to the warcamps and find me a palanquin,” Shallan said. “Sending one of my soldiers is currently impossible.” She wouldn’t risk them being recognized and imprisoned.

“Certainly,” Macob said, voice stiff. “The price will be . . .”

She gave him a pointed stare.

“. . . paid out of my own purse, as thanks to you for a safe arrival.” He put an odd emphasis on the word safe, as if it were of questionable merit in the sentence.

“And the price for your discretion?” Shallan asked.

“My discretion can always be assured, Brightness,” the man said. “And my lips are not the ones that should trouble you.”

True enough.

He climbed up into his wagon. “One of my men will run on ahead, and we will send a palanquin back for you. With that, I bid you farewell. I hope it is not insulting for me to say, Brightness, that I hope we never meet again.”

“Then our views in that regard are in agreement.”

He nodded to her and tapped his chull. The wagon rolled away.

“I listened to them last night,” Pattern said with a buzzing, excited voice from the back of her dress. “Is nonexistence really such a fascinating concept to humans?”

“They spoke of death, did they?” Shallan asked.

“They kept wondering if you would ‘come for them.’ I realize that nonexistence is not something to look forward to, but they talked on, and on, and on about it. Fascinating indeed.”

“Well, keep your ears open, Pattern. I suspect this day is going to only get

more interesting.” She walked back toward the tent.

“But, I don’t have ears,” he said. “Ah yes. A metaphor? Such delicious lies. I will remember that idiom.”

* * *

The Alethi warcamps were so much more than Shallan had expected them to be. Ten compact cities in a row, each casting up smoke from thousands of fires. Lines of caravans streamed in and out, passing the crater rims that made up their walls. Each camp flew hundreds of banners proclaiming the presence of high-ranked lighteyes.

As the palanquin carried her down a slope, she was truly stunned at the magnitude of the population. Stormfather! She’d once considered the regional fair on her father’s lands to be a huge gathering. How many mouths were there to feed down below? How much water did they require from each highstorm?

Her palanquin lurched. She’d left the wagon behind; the chulls belonged to Macob. She’d try to sell the wagon, if it remained when she sent her men for it later. For now, she rode the palanquin, which was carried by parshmen under the watchful eyes of a lighteyed man who owned them and rented out the vehicle. He strolled along ahead. The irony of being carried on the backs of Voidbringers as she entered the warcamps was not lost on her.

Behind the vehicle marched Vathah and her eighteen guards, then her five slaves, who carried her trunks. She’d dressed them in shoes and clothing from the merchants, but y up sharply. f leatherreou couldn’t cover up months of slavery with a new outfit—and the soldiers weren’t much better. Their uniforms had only been washed when a highstorm hit, and that was more of a douse than a wash. The occasional whiff she got of them was why she had them marching behind her palanquin.

She hoped she wasn’t as bad. She had Tyn’s perfume, but the Alethi elite preferred frequent bathing and a clean scent—part of the wisdom of the Heralds. Wash with the coming highstorm, both servant and brightlord, to ward away rotspren and purify the body.

She'd done what she could with some pails of water, but did not have the luxury of stopping to prepare more properly. She needed the protection of a highprince, and quickly. Now that she had arrived, the immensity of her tasks struck her afresh: Discover what Jasnah had been looking for on the Shattered Plains. Use the information there to persuade the Alethi leadership to take measures against the parshmen. Investigate the people Tyn had been meeting with and . . . do what? Scam them somehow? Find out what they knew about Urithiru, deflect their attention away from her brothers, and perhaps find a way to repay them for what they'd done to Jasnah?

So much to do. She would need resources. Dalinar Kholin was her best hope for that.

"But will he take me in?" she whispered.

"Mmmm?" Pattern said from the seat nearby.

"I will need him as a patron. If Tyn's sources know that Jasnah is dead, then Dalinar probably knows as well. How will he react to my unexpected arrival? Will he take her books, pat me on the head, and send me back to Jah Keved? The Kholin house has no need of a bond to a minor Veden like me. And I . . . I'm just rambling out loud, aren't I?"

"Mmmm," Pattern said. He sounded drowsy, though she didn't know if spren could get tired.

Her anxiety grew as her procession approached the warcamps. Tyn had been adamant that Shallan not ask for Dalinar's protection, as that would make her beholden to him. Shallan had killed the woman, but she still respected Tyn's opinion. Was there merit to what she'd said about Dalinar?

A knock came at her palanquin window. "We're going to have the parshmen put you down for a bit," Vathah said. "Need to ask around and see where the highprince is."

"Fine."

She waited impatiently. They must have sent the palanquin owner on the

errand—Vathah was as nervous as she was at the idea of sending one of his men into the warcamps alone. She eventually heard a muffled conversation outside, and Vathah returned, his boots scraping rock. She drew back the curtain, looking up at him.

“Dalinar Kholin is with the king,” Vathah said. “The whole lot of the highprinces are there.” He looked disturbed as he turned warcamps. “Something’s on the winds, Brightness.” He squinted. “Too many patrols. Lots of soldiers out. The palanquin owner won’t say, but from the sound of it, something happened recently. Something deadly.”

“Take me to the king, then,” Shallan said.

Vathah raised an eyebrow at her. The king of Alethkar was arguably the most powerful man in the world. lighteyed woman leather “You aren’t going to kill him, are you?” Vathah asked softly, leaning down.

“What?”

“I figure it’s one reason a woman would have . . . you know.” He didn’t meet her eyes. “Get close, summon the thing, have it through a man’s chest before anyone knows what happened.”

“I’m not going to kill your king,” she said, amused.

“Wouldn’t care if you did,” Vathah said softly. “Almost hope you would. He’s a child wearing his father’s clothes, that one is. Everything’s gotten worse for Alethkar since he took the throne. But my men, we’d have a hard time getting away if you did something like that. Hard time indeed.”

“I will keep my promise.”

He nodded, and she let the drapes fall back down over the palanquin window. Stormfather. Give a woman a Shardblade, get her close . . . Had anyone ever tried that? They must have, though thinking about it made her sick.

The palanquin turned northward. Passing the warcamps took a long time; they were enormous. Eventually, she peeked out and saw a tall hill to the left

with a building sculpted from—and onto—the stone of the top. A palace?

What if she did convince Brightlord Dalinar to take her in and trust her with Jasnah's research? What would she be in Dalinar's household? A lesser scribe, to be tucked aside and ignored? That was how she'd spent most of her life. She found herself suddenly, passionately determined not to let it happen again. She needed the freedom and the funding to investigate Urithiru and Jasnah's murder. Shallan would accept nothing else. She could accept nothing else.

So make it happen, she thought.

Would that it were so easy as wishing. As the palanquin turned up the switchbacks leading to the palace, her new satchel—from Tyn's things—shook and hit her foot. She picked it up and flipped through the pages inside, finding the crinkled sketch of Bluth as she'd imagined him. A hero instead of a slaver.

"Mmmmm . . ." Pattern said from the seat beside her.

"This picture is a lie," Shallan said.

"Yes."

"And yet it isn't. This is what he became, at the end. To a small degree."

"Yes."

"So what is the lie, and what is the truth?"

Pattern hummed softly to himself, like a contented axehound before the hearth. Shallan fingered the picture, smoothing it. Then she pulled out a sketchpad and a pencil, and started drawing. It was a difficult task in the lurching palanquin; this would not be her finest drawing. Still, her fingers moved across the sketch with an intensity she hadn't felt in weeks.

Broad lines at first, to fix the image in her head. She wasn't copying a Memory this time. She was searching for something nebulous: a lie that could be real if she could just imagine it correctly.

She scratched frantically at the paper, hunkering down, and soon stopped feeling the rhythm of the porters' steps. She saw only the drawing, knew only the emotions she bled onto that page. Jasnah's determination. Tyn's confidence. A," Shallan said softlyrdents made sense of rightness that she could not describe, but which she drew from her brother Helaran, the best person she'd ever known.

It all poured from her into the pencil and onto the page. Streaks and lines that became shadows and patterns that became figures and faces. A quick sketch, hurried, yet one alive. It depicted Shallan as a confident young woman standing before Dalinar Kholin, as she imagined him. She'd put him in Shardplate as he, and those around him, studied Shallan with penetrating consternation. She stood strong, hand raised toward them as she spoke with confidence and power. No trembling here. No fear of confrontation.

This is what I would have been, Shallan thought, if I had not been raised in a household of fear. So this is what I will be today.

It wasn't a lie. It was a different truth.

A knock came at the palanquin's door. It had stopped moving; she'd barely noticed. With a nod to herself, she folded the sketch and slipped it into the pocket of her safehand sleeve. Then she stepped out of the vehicle and onto cold rock. She felt invigorated, and realized she had sucked in a tiny amount of Stormlight without meaning to.

The palace was both finer and more mundane than she might have expected. Certainly, this was a warcamp, and so the king's seat wouldn't match the majesty of the royal dwellings of Kharbranth. At the same time, it was amazing that such a structure could have been crafted here, away from the culture and resources of Alethkar proper. The towering stone fortress of sculpted rock, several stories high, perched toward the



in a highstorm.” infing his speakatNow, as each order was thus matched to the nature and temperament of the Herald it named patron, there was none more archetypal of this than the Stonewards, who followed after Talenelat’Elin, Stonesinew, Herald of War: they thought it a point of virtue to exemplify resolve, strength, and dependability. Alas, they took less care for imprudent practice of their stubbornness, even in the face of proven error.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 13, page 1

The meeting finally reached a break. They weren’t done—Stormfather, it didn’t seem like they’d ever be done—but the arguing was over for the moment. Adolin stood, wounds along his leg and side protesting, and left his father and aunt to speak in hushed tones as the large chamber filled with a buzz of conversation.

How did Father stand it? A full two hours had passed, according to Navani’s fabrial clock on the wall. Two hours of highprinces and their wives complaining about the Assassin in White. Nobody could agree on what should be done.

They all ignored the truth stabbing them in the face. Nothing could be done.

Nothing other than Adolin staying alert and practicing, training to face the monster when he returned.

And you think you can beat him? When he can walk on walls and make the very spren of nature obey him?

It was a discomfoting question. At his father's suggestion, Adolin had reluctantly changed out of his Plate and into something more appropriate. We need to project confidence at this meeting, Dalinar had said, not fear.

General Khal wore the armor instead, hiding in a room to the side with a strike force. Father seemed to think it unlikely the assassin would strike during the meeting. If the assassin wanted to kill the highprinces, he could take them much more easily alone, in the night. Attacking them all together, in the company of their guards and dozens of Shardbearers, seemed like it would be an imprudent decision. Indeed, there were Shards aplenty at this meeting. Three of the highprinces wore their Plate, and the others had Shardbearers in attendance. Abrobadar, Jakamav, Resi, Relis . . . Adolin had rarely seen so many collected together at once.

Would any of it matter? Accounts had been flooding in from around the world for weeks. Kings slaughtered. Ruling bodies decapitated all across Roshar. In Jah Keved, the assassin had reportedly killed dozens of soldiers bearing half-shard shields that could block his Blade, as well as three Shardbearers, including the king. It was a crisis that spanned the entire world, and one man was behind it. Assuming he was even a man.

Adolin found himself a cup of sweet wine at the edge of the room, poured by an eager servant in blue and gold. Orange wine, basicallo accompany he



Now, as the Windrunners were thus engaged, arose the event which has hitherto been referenced: namely, that discovery of some wicked thing of eminence, though whether it be some rogueries among the Radiants' adherents or of some external origin, Avena would not suggest.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 38, page 6

“... sorry for your loss,” Shallan said. “I have brought with me what things of Jasnah’s I was able to recover. My men have them outside.”

She found it surprisingly difficult to say the words with an even tone. She’d grieved for Jasnah during her weeks traveling, yet speaking of the death—remembering that terrible night—returned the emotions like surging waves, threatening to overwhelm again.

The image she’d drawn of herself came to her rescue. She could be that woman today—and that woman, while not emotionless, could push through the loss. She focused her attention on the moment, and the task at hand—specifically the two people in front of her. Dalinar and Navani Kholin.

The highprince was exactly what she’d expected him to be: a man with

blunted features, short black hair silvering at the sides. His stiff uniform made him seem the only one in the room who knew anything about combat. She wondered if those bruises on his face were the result of the campaign against the Parshendi. Navani looked like a version of Jasnah twenty years older, still pretty, though with a motherly air. Shallan could never imagine Jasnah being motherly.

Navani had been smiling as Shallan approached, but now that levity was gone. She still had hope for her daughter, Shallan thought as the woman sat down in a nearby seat. I just crushed it.

“I thank you for bringing us this news,” Brightlord Dalinar said. “It is . . . good to have confirmation.”

It felt terrible. Not just to be reminded of the death, but to weigh others down with it looked him up and downfkshadow that the as well. “I have information for you,” Shallan said, trying to be delicate. “About the things Jasnah was working on.”

“More about those parshmen?” Navani snapped. “Storms, that woman was too fascinated by them. Ever since she got it into her head that she was to blame for Gavilar’s death.”

What was this? That wasn’t a side of all this that Shallan had ever heard.

“Her research can wait,” Navani said, eyes fierce. “I want to know exactly what happened when you think you saw her die. Precisely as you remember it, girl. No details passed over.”

“Perhaps after the meeting . . .” Dalinar said, resting a hand on Navani’s shoulder. The touch was surprisingly tender. Was this not his brother’s wife? That look in his eyes; was that familial affection for his sister, or was it something more?

“No, Dalinar,” Navani said. “Now. I would hear it now.”

Shallan took a deep breath, preparing to begin, steeling herself against the emotions—and finding herself surprisingly in control. As she gathered her

thoughts, she noticed a blond-haired young man watching her. That would likely be Adolin. He was handsome, as rumors indicated, and wore a blue uniform like his father. And yet Adolin's was somehow more . . . stylish? Was that the right word? She liked how his somewhat unruly hair contrasted with the crisp uniform. It made him seem more real, less picturesque.

She turned back to Navani. "I woke in the middle of the night to shouting and the smell of smoke. I opened my door to unfamiliar men crowded around the doorway to Jasnah's cabin, across the companionway from my own. They had her body on the floor, and . . . Brightness, I watched them stab her through the heart. I'm sorry."

Navani tensed, head flinching, as if she'd been slapped.

Shallan continued. She tried to give Navani as much truth as she could, but obviously the things Shallan had done—weaving light, Soulcasting the ship—weren't wise to share, at least for now. Instead, she indicated that she'd barricaded herself in her cabin, a lie she'd already prepared.

"I heard the men yelling up above as they were being executed, one by one," Shallan said. "I realized that the only hope I could give them was a crisis for the brigands, so I used the torch I'd taken and set the ship on fire."

"On fire?" Navani asked, horrified. "With my daughter unconscious?"

"Navani—" Dalinar said, squeezing her shoulder.

"You doomed her," Navani said, locking eyes with Shallan. "Jasnah wouldn't have been able to swim, like the others. She—"

"Navani," Dalinar repeated, more firmly. "This child's choice was a good one. You can hardly expect her to have taken on a band of men single-handed. And what she saw . . . Jasnah was not unconscious, Navani. It was too late to do anything for her at that point."

The woman took a deep breath, obviously struggling to keep her emotions in check. "I . . . apologize," she said to Shallan. "I am not myself at the moment, and I stray toward the irrational. Thank . . . thank you for bringing word to

us.” She stood. “Excuse me.” lighteyed womanf deeplyre

Dalinar nodded, letting her make a reasonably graceful exit. Shallaan stepped back, hands clasped before herself, feeling impotent and strangely ashamed as she watched Navani leave. She hadn’t expected that to go particularly well. And it hadn’t.

She took the moment to check on Pattern, who was on her skirt, practically invisible. Even if he was noticed, he’d be thought an odd part of the fabric design—assuming, that was, he did as she’d ordered and didn’t move or speak.

“I assume your trip here was an ordeal,” Dalinar said, turning to Shallaan. “Shipwrecked in the Frostlands?”

“Yes. Fortunately, I met with a caravan and traveled with them this way. We did encounter bandits, I regret to say, but were rescued by the timely arrival of some soldiers.”

“Soldiers?” Dalinar said, surprised. “From what banner?”

“They did not say,” Shallaan replied. “I take it they were formerly of the Shattered Plains.”

“Deserters?”

“I have not asked for specifics, Brightlord,” Shallaan said. “But I did promise them clemency for previous crimes, in recognition of their act of nobility. They saved dozens of lives. Everyone in the caravan I joined can vouch for the bravery of these men. I suspect they sought atonement and a chance to start over.”

“I will see that the king seals pardons for them,” Dalinar said. “Prepare a list for me. Hanging soldiers always feels like a waste.”

Shallaan relaxed. One item dealt with.

“There is another matter of some delicacy we must discuss, Brightlord,” Shallaan said. They both turned toward Adolin, loitering nearby. He smiled.

And he did have a very nice smile.

When Jasnah had first explained the causal to her, Shallan's interest had been completely abstract. Marriage into a powerful Alethi house? Allies for her brothers? Legitimacy, and a way to continue working with Jasnah for the salvation of the world? These had seemed like wonderful things.

Looking at Adolin's grin, however, she didn't consider any of those advantages. Her pains of speaking of Jasnah didn't fade completely, but she found it much easier to ignore them when looking at him. She found herself blushing.

This, she thought, could be dangerous.

Adolin stepped up to join them, the hum of conversation all around giving them some privacy within the crowd. He had found a cup of orange wine for her somewhere, which he held out. "Shallan Davar?" he asked.

"Um . . ." Was she? Oh, right. She took the wine. "Yes?"

"Adolin Kholin," he said. "I am sorry to hear of your hardships. We will need to speak to the king of his sister. I can spare you that task, if I might go in your place."

"Thank you," Shallan said. "But I would prefer to see him myself."

"Of course," Adolin said. "As for our . . . involvement. It did make a lot more sense when you were Jasnah's ward, didn't it?" in a highstorm."m contrasts.4

"Probably."

"Though, now that you're here, perhaps we should go for a walk and just see how things feel."

"I like to walk," Shallan said. Stupid! Quick, say something witty. "Um. Your hair is nice."

A part of her—the part trained by Tyn—groaned.

“My hair?” Adolin said, touching it.

“Yes,” Shallan said, trying to get her sluggish brain working again. “Blond hair isn’t often seen in Jah Keved.”

“Some people see it as a mark of my bloodline being impure.”

“Funny. They say the same about me because of my hair.” She smiled at him. That seemed the right move, since he smiled back. Her verbal recovery hadn’t been the deftest of her career, but she couldn’t be doing too poorly, so long as he was smiling.

Dalinar cleared his throat. Shallan blinked. She’d completely forgotten that the highprince was there.

“Adolin,” he said, “fetch me some wine.”

“Father?” Adolin turned to him. “Oh. All right, then.” He walked off. Ash’s eyes, that man was handsome. She turned to Dalinar who, well, wasn’t. Oh, he was distinguished, but his nose had been broken at some point, and his face was a tad unfortunate. The bruises didn’t help either.

In fact, he was downright intimidating.

“I would know more of you,” he said softly, “the precise status of your family, and why you are so eager to be involved with my son.”

“My family is destitute,” Shallan said. Frankness seemed the right approach with this man. “My father is dead, though the people to whom we owe money do not yet know it. I had not considered a union with Adolin until Jasnah suggested it, but I would seize it eagerly, if allowed. Marriage into your house would provide my family with a great deal of protection.”

She still didn’t know what to do about the Soulcaster her brothers owed. One step at a time.

Dalinar grunted. He wouldn’t have expected her to be so direct. “So you have nothing to offer,” he said.

“From what Jasnah said to me of your opinions,” Shallan said, “I did not assume that my monetary or political offerings would be your first consideration. If such a union was your goal, you’d have had Prince Adolin married off years ago.” She winced at her forwardness. “With all due respect, Brightlord.”

“No offense taken,” Dalinar said. “I like it when people are direct. Just because I want to let my son have a say in the matter doesn’t mean I don’t want him to marry well. A woman from a minor foreign house who professes her family is destitute and who brings nothing to the union?”

“I did not say I could offer nothing,” Shallan replied. “Brightlord, how many wards has Jasnah Kholin taken in the last ten years?”

“None that I know of,” he admitted.

“Do you know how many she has turned away?”

“I’ve an inkling.”

“Yet she took me. Might that not constitute an endorsement of what I canllustrations preceding chapters in a ">* * *

Dalinar nodded slowly. “We will maintain the causal for now,” he said. “The reason I agreed to it in the first place still stands—I want Adolin to be seen as unavailable to those who would manipulate him for political gain. If you can somehow persuade me, Brightness Navani, and of course the lad himself, we can progress the causal to a full betrothal. In the meantime, I’ll give you a position among my lesser clerks. You can prove yourself there.”

The offer, though generous, felt like ropes tightening about her. The stipend of a lesser clerk would be enough to live on, but nothing to brag about. And she had no doubt that Dalinar would be watching her. Those eyes of his were scarily discerning. She wouldn’t be able to move without her actions being reported to him.

His charity would be her prison.

“That is generous of you, Brightlord,” she found herself saying, “but I actually have—”

“Dalinar!” one of the others in the room called. “Are we going to start this meeting again sometime today, or am I going to have to order in a proper dinner!”

Dalinar turned toward a plump, bearded man in traditional clothing—an open-fronted robe over a loose shirt and warrior’s skirt, called a takama. Highprince Sebarial, Shallan thought. Jasnah’s notes dismissed him as obnoxious and useless. She’d had kinder words even for Highprince Sadeas, whom she had noted was not to be trusted.

“Fine, fine, Sebarial,” Dalinar said, breaking away from Shallan and walking to a group of seats in the center of the room. He settled down in one beside the desk there. A proud man with a prominent nose settled down next to him. That would be the king, Elhokar. He was younger than Shallan had pictured. Why had Sebarial called on Dalinar to reconvene the meeting, and not the king?

The next few moments were a test of Shallan’s preparation as highborn men and women settled themselves in the lavish chairs. Beside each one was a small table and behind that, a master-servant for important needs. A number of parshmen kept the tables filled with wine, nuts, and fresh and dried fruit. Shallan shivered each time one of those passed her.

She counted the highprinces off in her head. Sadeas was easy to pick out, red-faced from visible veins under the skin, like her father had displayed after drinking. Others nodded to him and let him seat himself first. He seemed to command as much respect as Dalinar. His wife, Ialai, was a slender-necked woman with thick lips, large bust, and a wide mouth. Jasnah had noted that she was as shrewd as her husband.

Two highprinces sat to either side of the couple. One was Aladar, a renowned duelist. The short man was listed in Jasnah’s notes as a powerful highprince, fond of taking risks, known to gamble in the type of games of random chance that the devotaries forbade. He and Sadeas seemed to be on very friendly terms. Weren’t they enemies? She’d read that they often squabbled over

lands. Well, that was obviously a broken stone, for they seemed united as they regarded Dalinar.

Joining them were Highprince Ruthar and his wife. Jasnah considered them to be little more than thieves, but warned that the pair were dangerous and opportunistic.

The room seemed oriented so that all eyes were on those two factions. The king and Dalinar against Sadeas, Ruthar, and Aladar. Obviously, the political alignments had changed since Jasnah made her notes.

The room hushed, and nobody seemed to care that Shallan was up sharply. f deeplyre watching. Adolin took a seat behind his father, next to a younger man in spectacles and an empty seat probably vacated by Navani. Shallan carefully rounded the room—the peripheries were clogged with guards, attendants, and even some men in Shardplate—getting out of Dalinar’s direct line of sight, just in case he noticed her and decided to eject her.

Brightlady Jayla Ruthar spoke first, leaning forward over clasped hands. “Your Majesty,” she said, “I fear that our conversation this day has run in circles, and that nothing is being accomplished. Your safety is, of course, our greatest concern.”

Across the circle of highprinces, Sebarial snorted loudly as he chewed on slices of melon. Everyone else seemed to pointedly ignore the obnoxious, bearded man.

“Yes,” Aladar said. “The Assassin in White. We must do something. I will not wait in my palace to be assassinated.”

“He is murdering princes and kings all across the world!” Roion added. The man looked like a turtle to Shallan, with those hunched shoulders and that balding head. What had Jasnah said about him . . . ?

That he’s a coward, Shallan thought. He always chooses the safe option.

“We must present a unified Alethkar,” Hatham said—she recognized him immediately, with that long neck and refined way of speaking. “We must not

allow ourselves to be attacked one at a time, and we must not squabble.”

“That’s precisely why you should follow my commands,” the king said, frowning at the highprinces.

“No,” Ruthar said, “it is why we must abandon these ludicrous restrictions you have placed upon us, Your Majesty! This is not a time to look foolish before the world.”

“Listen to Ruthar,” Sebarial said dryly, leaning back in his chair. “He’s an expert at looking like a fool.”

The arguing continued, and Shallan got a better feel for the room. There were actually three factions. Dalinar and the king, the team with Sadeas, and what she dubbed the peacemakers. Led by Hatham—who seemed, when he spoke, the most natural politician in the room—this third group sought to mediate.

So that’s what it’s really about, she thought, listening as Ruthar argued with the king and Adolin Kholin. They’re each trying to persuade these neutral highprinces to join their faction.

Dalinar said little. The same for Sadeas, who seemed content to let Highprince Ruthar and his wife speak for him. The two watched each other, Dalinar with a neutral expression, Sadeas with a faint smile. It seemed innocent enough until you saw their eyes. Locked on to one another, rarely blinking.

There was a storm in this room. A silent one.

Everyone seemed to fall into one of the three factions except for Sebarial, who kept rolling his eyes, occasionally throwing out commentary that bordered on the obscene. He obviously made the other Alethi, with their haughty airs, uncomfortable.

Shallan slowly picked apart the conversation’s subtext. This talk of prohibitions and rules placed by the king . . . it wasn’t the rules themselves that seemed to matter, but the authority behind them. How much would the highprinces submit illustrations preceding chapters in a ">* * *

Right up to the moment when one of them mentioned her.

“Wait,” said Vamah—one of the neutral highprinces. “Who is that girl over there? Does someone have a Veden in their retinue?”

“She was speaking with Dalinar,” Roion said. “Is there news of Jah Keved that you’re keeping from us, Dalinar?”

“You, girl,” said Ialai Sadeas. “What can you tell us of your homeland’s succession war? Do you have information on this assassin? Why would someone in the employ of the Parshendi seek to undermine your throne?”

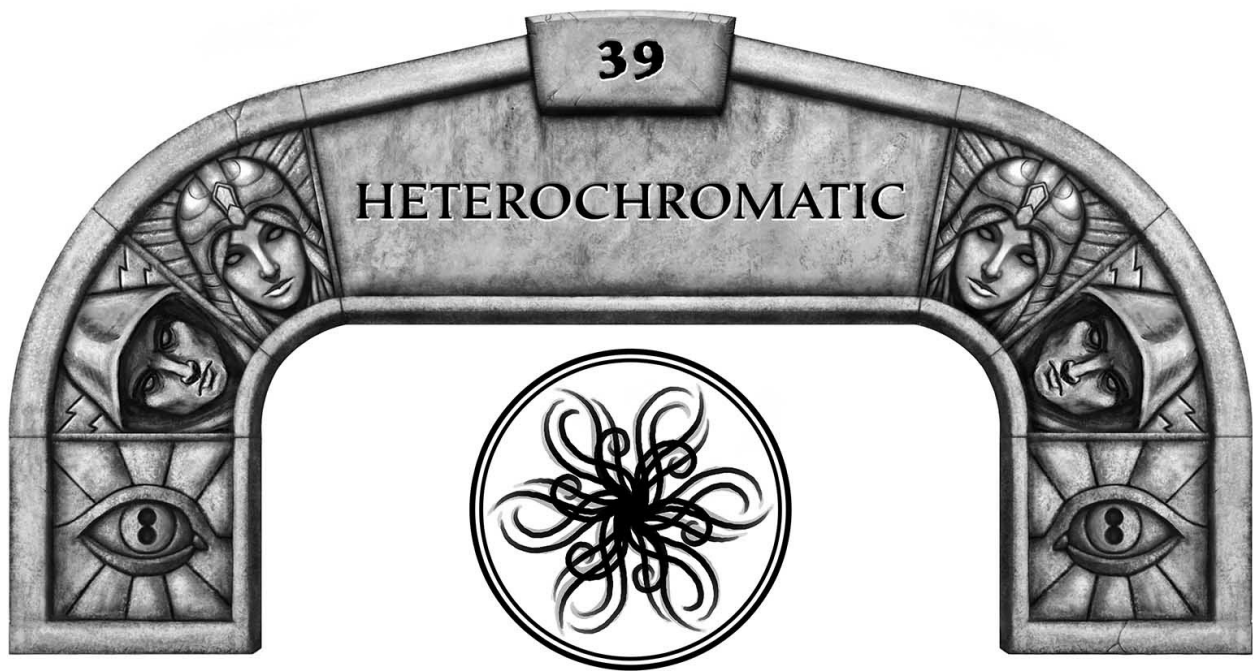
All eyes in the room turned toward Shallan. She felt a moment of sheer panic. The most important people in the world, interrogating her, their eyes drilling into her—

And then she remembered the drawing. That was who she was.

“Alas,” Shallan said, “I will be of little use to you, Brightlords and Brightladies. I was away from my homeland when that tragic assassination occurred, and I have no insight into its cause.”

“Then what are you doing here?” Hatham asked, polite, but insistent.

“She’s watching the zoo, obvioulat and wide,



FOUR YEARS AGO

Father held feasts because he wanted to pretend that everything was all right. He invited local brightlords from nearby hamlets, he fed them and gave them wine, he displayed his daughter.

Then, the next day after everyone was gone, he sat at his table and listened to his scribes tell him how impoverished he had grown. Shallan saw him afterward sometimes, holding his forehead, staring straight ahead at nothing.

For tonight, however, they feasted and pretended.

“You’ve met my daughter, of course,” Father said, gesturing to Shallan as his guests were seated. “The jewel of House Davar, our pride above all others.”

The visitors—lighteyes from two valleys over—nodded politely as Father’s parshmen brought wine. Both the drink and the slaves were a way to display riches Father didn’t actually possess. Shallan had begun helping with the accounts, her duty as daughter. She knew the truth of their finances.

The evening’s chill was offset by the crackling hearth; this room might have felt homey somewhere else. Not here.

The servants poured her wine. Yellow, mildly intoxicating. Father drank violet, prepared in its strength. He settled himself down at the high table, which ran the width of the room—the same room where Helaran had threatened to kill him a year and a half ago. They'd received a brief letter from Helaran six months back, along with a book by the famous Jasnah Kholin for Shallan to read.

Shallan had read his note to her father in a trembling whisper. It hadn't said much. Mostly veiled threats. That night, Father had beaten one of the maids near to death. Isan still walked with a limp. The servants no longer gossiped about Father having killed his wife.

Nobody does anything at all to resist him, Shallan thought, glancing toward her father. We're all too scared.

Shallan's three other brothers sat in a huddled knot at their own table. They avoided looking at their father or interacting with the guests. Several small sphere goblets glowed on the tables, but the room as a whole could have used more light. Neither spheres nor hearthlight were enough to drive out the gloom. She thought that her father liked it that way.

The visiting lighteyes—Brightlord Tavinar—was a slender, well-dressed man with a deep red silk coat. He and his wife sat close together at the high table, their teenaged daughter between them. Shallan had not caught her name.

As the evening progressed, Father tried to speak to them a few times, but they gave only terse responses. For all that it was supposed to be a feast, nobody seemed to be enjoying themselves. The visitors looked as if they wished they'd never accepted the invitation, but Father was more politically important than they, and good relations with him would be valuable.

Shallan picked at her own food, listening to her father boast about his new axehound breeding the missing piece. Push for the Alethi to speak an approximation stud. He spoke of their prosperity. Lies.

She did not want to contradict him. He had been good to her. He was always good to her. Yet, shouldn't someone do something?

Helaran might have. He'd left them.

It's growing worse and worse. Someone needs to do something, say something, to change Father. He shouldn't be doing the things that he did, growing drunk, beating the darkeyes . . .

The first course passed. Then Shallan noticed something. Balat—whom Father had started calling Nan Balat, as if he were the oldest—kept glancing at the guests. That was surprising. He usually ignored them.

Tavinar's daughter caught his eye, smiled, then looked back at

er food. Shallan blinked. Balat . . . and a girl? How odd to consider.

Father didn't seem to notice. He eventually stood and raised his cup to the room. "Tonight, we celebrate. Good neighbors, strong wine."

Tavinar and his wife hesitantly raised their cups. Shallan had only just begun to study propriety—it was hard to drs kept leaving—but she knew that a good Vorin brightlord was not supposed to celebrate drunkenness. Not that they wouldn't get drunk, but it was the Vorin way not to talk about it. Such niceties were not her father's strong point.

"It is an important night," Father said after taking a sip of his wine. "I have just received word from Brightlord Gevelmar, whom I believe you know, Tavinar. I have been without a wife for too long. Brightlord Gevelmar is sending his youngest daughter along with writs of marriage. My ardens will perform the service at the end of the month, and I will have a wife."

Shallan felt cold. She pulled her shawl closer. The aforementioned ardens sat at their own table, dining silently. The three men were greying in equal measure, and had served long enough to know Shallan's grandfather as a youth. They treated her with kindness, however, and studying with them brought her pleasure when all other things seemed to be collapsing.

"Why does nobody speak?" Father demanded, turning around the room. "I have just become betrothed! You look like a bunch of storming Alethi. We're Veden! Make some noise, you idiots."

The visitors clapped politely, though they looked even more uncomfortable than they had before. Balat and the twins shared looks, and then lightly thumped the table.

"To the void with all of you." Father slumped back into his chair as his parshmen approached the low table, each bearing a box. "Gifts for my children to mark the occasion," Father said with a wave of the hand. "Don't know why I bother. Bah!" He drank the rest of his wine.

The boys got daggers, very fine pieces engraved like Shardblades. Shallan's gift was a necklace of fat silvery links. She held it silently. Father didn't like

her speaking much at feasts, though he always placed her table close to the high table.

He never shouted at her. Not directly. Sometimes, she wished he would. Maybe then Jushu wouldn't resent her so. It—

The door to the feast hall slammed open. The poor light revealed a tall man in dark clothing standing at the threshold.

“What is this!” Father demanded, rising, slamming his hands on the table. “Who interrupts my feast?”

The mthemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito they explanationrean strode in. His face was so long and slender, it looked as if it had been pinched. He wore ruffles at the cuffs of his soft maroon coat, and the way he pursed his lips made him look as if he'd just found a latrine that had overflowed in the rain.

One of his eyes was intense blue. The other dark brown. Both lighteyed and dark. Shallan felt a chill.

A Davar house servant dashed up to the high table, then whispered to Father. Shallan did not catch what was said, but whatever it was, it drained the thunder right out of Father's expression. He remained standing, but his jaw dropped.

A handful of servants in maroon livery filed in around the newcomer. He stepped forward with a precise air, as if choosing his steps with some care to avoid stepping in anything. “I have been sent by His Highness, Highprince Valam, ruler of these lands. It has come to his attention that dark rumors persist in these lands. Rumors regarding the death of a lighteyed woman.” He met Father's eyes.

“My wife was killed by her lover,” Father said. “Who then killed himself.”

“Others tell a different story, Brightlord Lin Davar,” the newcomer said. “Such rumors are . . . troublesome. They provoke dissatisfaction with His Highness. If a brightlord under his rule were to have murdered a lighteyed woman of rank, it is not something he can ignore.”

Father did not respond with the outrage Shallan would have predicted. Instead he waved his hands toward Shallan and the visitors. "Away," he said. "Give me space. You there, messenger, let us speak alone. No need to drag mud into the hallway."

The Tavinars rose, looking all too eager to be going. The girl did glance back at Balat as they left, whispering softly.

Father looked toward Shallan, and she realized she'd frozen in place again at the mention of her mother, sitting at her table just before the high table.

"Child," Father said softly, "go sit with your brothers."

She withdrew, passing the messenger as he stepped up to the high table. Those eyes . . . It was Redin, the highprince's bastard son. His father used him as an executioner and assassin, it was said.

Since her brothers hadn't been explicitly banished from the room, they took chairs around the hearth, far enough away to give father privacy. They left a spot for Shallan, and she settled down, the fine silk of her dress rumpling. The voluminous way it enveloped her made her feel as if she weren't really there and only the dress mattered.

The highprince's bastard settled down at the table with Father. At least someone was confronting him. But what if the highprince's bastard decided Father was guilty? What then? Inquest? She didn't want Father to fall; she wanted to stop the darkness that was slowly strangling them all. It seemed like their light had gone out when Mother died.

When Mother . . .

"Shallan?" Balat asked. "Are you well?"

She shook herself. "Can I see the daggers? They looked quite fine from my table."

Wikim just stared at the fire, but Balat tossed his to her. She caught it clumsily, then pulled it from its sheath, admiring the way the metal folds

reflected the hearthlight.

The boys watched the flamespren dance on the fire. The three brothers never talked anymore.

Balat glanced over his shoulder, toward the high table. “I wish I could hear what was being said,” he whispered. “Maybe they’ll drag him away. That would be fitting, for what he’s done.”

“He didn’t kill Mother,” Shallan said softly.

“Oh?” Balat snorted. “Then what did happen?”

“I . . .”

She didn’t know. She couldn’t think. Not of that time, that day. Had Father actually done it? She felt cold again, despite the fire’s warmth.

The silence returned.

Someone . . . someone needed to do something.

“They’re talking about plants,” Shallan said.

Balat and Jushu looked at her. Wikim continued staring at the fire.

“Plants,” Balat said flatly.

“Yes. I can hear them faintly.”

“I can’t hear a thing.”

Shallan shrugged from within her too-enveloping dress. “My ears are better than yours. Yes, plants. Father is complaining that the trees in his gardens never listen when he tells them to obey. ‘They have been dropping their leaves because of a sickness,’ he says, ‘and they refuse to grow new ones.’

“‘Have you tried beating them for their disobedience?’ the messenger asks.

“‘All the time,’ Father replies. ‘I even break off their limbs, yet they still do not obey! It is untidy. At the very least, they should clean up after themselves.’

“‘A problem,’ the messenger says, ‘as trees without foliage are hardly worth keeping. Fortunately, I have the solution. My cousin once had trees that acted this way, and he found that all he needed to do was sing to them and their leaves popped right back out.’

“‘Ah, of course,’ Father says. ‘I will try that immediately.’

“‘I hope that it works for you.’

“‘Well, if it does, I will certainly be relieved.’”

Her brothers stared at her, baffled.

Finally, Jushu cocked his head. He was the youngest of the brothers, just above Shallan herself. “Re . . . leaf . . . ed . . .”

Balat burst into laughter—loud enough that their father glared at them. “Oh, that is awful,” Balat said. “That is purely awful, Shallan. You should be ashamed.”

She huddled down in her dress, grinning. Even Wikim, the older twin, cracked a smile. She hadn’t seen him smile in . . . how long?

Balat wiped his eyes. “I actually thought, for a moment, you could really hear them. You little Voidbringer.” He let out a deep breath. “Storms, but that felt good.”

“We should laugh more,” Shallan said.

“This hasn’t been a place for laughter,” Jushu said, sipping his wine.

“Because of Father?” Shallan asked. “There’s one of him and four of us. We just need to be more optimistic.”

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margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; JasnahBlade re“Being optimistic does not change facts,” Balat said. “I wish Helaran hadn’t left.” He thumped his fist down on the side of his chair.

“Do not begrudge him his travels, Tet Balat,” Shallaan said softly. “There are so many places to see, places we will probably never visit. Let one of us go to them. Think of the stories he will bring back to us. The colors.”

Balat looked across the drab blackrock room, with its muted hearths glowing red-orange. “Colors. I wouldn’t mind a little more color around here.”

Jushu smiled. “Anything would be a nice change from Father’s face.”

“Now, don’t be down on Father’s face,” Shallaan said. “It’s quite adept at doing its duty.”

“Which is?”

“Reminding us all that there are worse things than his odor. It’s really quite a noble Calling.”

“Shallaan!” Wikim said. He looked dramatically unlike Jushu. Spindly and sunken-eyed, Wikim had hair cut so short he almost looked like an ardent. “Don’t say such things where Father could hear.”

“He’s engrossed in conversation,” Shallaan said. “But you are right. I probably shouldn’t mock our family. House Davar is distinctive and enduring.”

Jushu raised his cup. Wikim nodded sharply.

“Of course,” she added, “the same could be said for a wart.”

Jushu just about spat out his wine. Balat let out another roaring laugh.

“Stop that racket!” Father shouted at them.

“It’s a feast!” Balat called back. “Did you not ask us to be more Veden!”

Father glared at him, then returned to his conversation with the messenger.

The two huddled together at the high table, Father's posture supplicating, the highprince's bastard sitting back with an arched eyebrow and a still face.

"Storms, Shallan," Balat said. "When did you become so clever?"

Clever? She didn't feel clever. Suddenly, the forwardness of what she'd said caused her to shrink back into her chair. These things, they'd simply slid out of her mouth. "Those are just things . . . just things I read in a book."

"Well, you should read more of those books, small one," Balat said. "It seems brighter in here for it."

Father slammed his hand down on the table, shaking cups, rattling plates. Shallan glanced at him, worried as he pointed his finger at the messenger and said something. It was too soft and far away for Shallan to make it out, but she knew that look in her father's eyes. She had seen it many times before he took his cane—or even once the fireplace poker—to one of the servants.

The messenger stood up in a smooth motion. His refinement seemed a shield that rebuffed Father's temper.

Shallan envied him.

"It appears I will get nowhere with this conversation," the messenger said loudly. He looked at Father, but his tone seemed to imply that his words were for them all. "I came prepared for that inevitability. The highprince has given me authority, and I would very much like to know the truth of what happened in this household lighteyed womanf beautyre. Any lighteyes of birth who can provide witness will be welcomed."

"They need the testimony of a lighteyes," Jushu said softly to his siblings. "Father is important enough that they can't just remove him."

"There was one," the messenger said loudly, "who was willing to speak to us of the truth. He has since made himself unavailable. Do any of you have his courage? Will you come with me and testify to the highprince of the crimes committed on these lands?"

He looked toward the four of them. Shallan huddled in her chair, trying to look small. Wikim didn't look away from the flames. Jushu looked like he might stand, but then turned to his wine, cursing, his face growing red.

Balat. Balat grabbed the sides of his chair as if to stand, but then glanced at Father. That intensity in Father's eyes remained. When his rage was red-hot, he yelled, he threw things at the servants.

It was now, when his rage became cold, that he grew truly dangerous. This was when Father got quiet. This was when the yelling stopped.

Father's yelling, at least.

"He'll kill me," Balat whispered. "If I say a word, he'll kill me." His earlier bravado melted away. He seemed not a man any longer, but a youth—a terrified teenager.

"You could do it, Shallan," Wikim hissed at her. "Father won't dare hurt you. Besides, you actually saw what happened."

"I didn't," she whispered.

"You were there!"

"I don't know what happened. I don't remember it."

It didn't happen. It didn't.

A log shifted in the hearth. Balat stared at the floor, and did not stand. None of them would. A whirling group of translucent flower petals stirred among them, fading into view. Shamespren.

"I see," the messenger said. "If any of you . . . remember the truth at some point in the future, you will find willing ears in Vedenar."

"You will not tear this house apart, bastard," Father said, standing. "We stand by one another."

"Saveo, as her tuto



That they responded immediately and with great consternation is undeniable, as these were primary among those who would forswear and abandon their oaths. The term Recreance was not then applied, but has since become a popular title by which this event is named.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 38, page 6

Sebarial shared his carriage with Shallan as they left the king's palace and rode toward his warcamp. Pattern kept vibrating softly on the folds of her skirt, and she had to shush him.

The highprince sat across from her, head tilted back against the cushioned wall, snoring softly as the carriage rattled. The ground here had been scraped clean of rockbuds and set with a line of flagstones down the center, to divide left from right.

Her soldiers were safe, and would catch up later. She had a base of operations and an income. In the tension of the meeting, and then Navani's withdrawal, the Kholin house hadn't yet demanded that Shallan turn over Jasnah's things. She still needed to approach Navani about helping with the research, but so far, the day had actually worked out quite well.

Now Shallan just needed to save the world.

Sebarial snorted and shook awake from his short nap. He settled into his seat, wiping his cheek. “You’ve changed.”

“Excuse me?”

“You look younger. In there, I would have guessed you were twenty, maybe twenty-five. But now I see that you can’t be older than fourteen.”

“I am seventeen,” Shallan said dryly.

“Same difference.” Sebarial grunted. “I could have sworn your dress was more vibrant before, your features sharper, prettier . . . Must have been the light.”

“Do you always make a habit of insulting the looks of young ladies?” Shallan asked. “Or is it only after you drool in front of them?”

He grinned. “You weren’t trained in the court, obviously. I like that. But be careful—insult the wrong people in this place, and retribution can be swift.”

Through the carriage window Shallan saw that they were finally approaching a warcamp flying Sebarial’s banner. It bore the glyphs sebes and laial stylized into a skyeel, deep gold on a black field.

The soldiers at the gates saluted, and Sebarial gave orders for one to conduct Shallan’s men to his manor when they arrived. The carriage continued, and Sebarial settled back to watch her, as if anticipating something.

She couldn’t fathom what. Perhaps she was reading him wrong. She turned her attention out the window, and soon decided that this place was a warcamp in name only. The streets were straighter than you might have in a city that had grown naturally, but Shallan saw far more civilians than she did mercenariesfkER that the soldiers.

They passed taverns, open markets, shops, and tall buildings that surely could hold a dozen different families. People crowded many of the streets. The place wasn’t as varied and vibrant as Kharbranth had been, but the buildings

were of solid wood and stone, constructed up against one another to share support.

“Rounded roofs,” Shallan said.

“My engineers say they repel the winds better,” Sebarial said proudly. “Also, buildings with rounded corners and sides.”

“So many people!”

“Almost all permanent residents. I have the most complete force of tailors, artisans, and cooks in the camps. Already, I’ve set up twelve manufactories—textiles, shoes, ceramics, several mills. I control the glassblowers as well.”

Shallan turned back toward him. That pride in his voice didn’t at all match what Jasnah had written of the man. Of course, most of her notes and knowledge of the highprinces came from infrequent visits to the Shattered Plains, and none had been recent.

“From what I’ve heard,” Shallan said, “your forces are among the least successful in the war against the Parshendi.”

Sebarial got a twinkle in his eyes. “The others hunt quick income from gemhearts, but what will they spend their money on? My textile mills will soon produce uniforms at a much cheaper price than they can be shipped in for, and my farmers will provide food far more varied than what is supplied through Soulcasting. I’m growing both lavis and tallew, not to mention my hog farms.”

“You sly eel,” Shallan said. “While the others fight a war, you’ve been building an economy.”

“I’ve had to be careful,” he confided, leaning in. “I didn’t want them to notice what I was doing at first.”

“Clever,” Shallan said. “But why are you telling me?”

“You’ll see it anyway, if you’re to act as one of my clerks. Besides, the secrecy doesn’t matter anymore. The manufactories are now producing, and

my armies barely go on a single plateau run a month. I have to pay Dalinar's fines for avoiding them and forcing him to send someone else, but it's worth the cost. Anyway, the smarter highprinces have figured out what I'm up to. The others just think I'm a lazy fool."

"And so you're not a lazy fool?"

"Of course I am!" he exclaimed. "Fighting is too much work. Besides, soldiers die, and that makes me pay out to their families. It's just useless all around." He looked out the window. "I saw the secret three years back. Everyone was moving here, but nobody thought of the place as permanent—despite the value of those gemhearts, which ensured that Alethkar would always have a presence here. . . ." He smiled.

The carriage eventually pulled up to a modest manor-style home amid the taller tenement buildings. The manor had grounds filled with ornamental shalebark, a flagstone drive, and even some trees. The stately home, while not enormous, had a refined classical design, with pillars along the front. It used the row of taller stone buildings behind it as a perfect windbreak.

"We probably have a room for you," Sebarial said. "Maybe in the cellars. Never do seem to have enough space for all of the stuff I'm illustrations preceding chapters in a Elhokarre expected to have. Three full sets of dining furniture. Bah! As if I'm ever going to have anyone over."

"You really don't think highly of the others, do you?" Shallan asked.

"I hate them," Sebarial said. "But I try to hate everyone. That way, I don't risk leaving out anyone who is particularly deserving. Anyway, here we are. Don't expect me to help you out of the carriage."

She didn't need his help, as a footman quickly arrived and assisted her as she stepped out onto the stone steps built in beside the driveway. Another footman went to Sebarial, who cursed at him, but accepted the aid.

A short woman in a fine dress stood on the manor's steps, hands on her hips. She had curly dark hair. From northern Alethkar, then?

“Ah,” Sebarial said as he and Shallan walked up toward the woman. “The bane of my existence. Please try to hold your laughter until we separate. My frail, aging ego can no longer handle the mockery.”

Shallan gave him a confused look.

Then the woman spoke. “Please tell me you didn’t kidnap her, Turi.”

No, not Alethi at all, Shallan thought, trying to judge the woman’s accent. Herdazian. The fingernails, with a rocklike cast to them, proved that. She was darkeyed, but her fine dress indicated she was not a servant.

Of course. The mistress.

“She insisted on coming with me, Palona,” Sebarial said, climbing the steps. “I couldn’t dissuade her. We’ll have to give her a room or something.”

“And who is she?”

“Some foreigner,” Sebarial said. “When she said she wanted to come with me, it seemed to annoy old Dalinar, so I allowed it.” He hesitated. “What was your name?” he asked, turning to Shallan.

“Shallan Davar,” Shallan said, bowing to Palona. She might be darkeyed, but she was apparently head of this household.

The Herdazian woman cocked an eyebrow. “Well, she is polite, which means she probably won’t fit in here. I honestly can’t believe you brought home a random girl because you thought it would annoy one of the other highprinces.”

“Bah!” Sebarial said. “Woman, you make me the most henpecked man in all of Alethkar—”

“We aren’t in Alethkar.”

“—and I’m not even storming married!”

“I’m not marrying you, so stop asking,” Palona said, folding her arms,

looking Shallan up and down speculatively. “She’s far too young for you.”

Sebarial grinned. “I used that line already. On Ruthar. It was delightful—he sputtered so much, you could have mistaken him for a storm.”

Palona smiled, then waved him inside. “There’s mulled wine in your study.”

He sauntered toward the door. “Food?”

“You ran the cook off. Remember?”

“Oh, right. Well, you could have made the food.”

“As could up sharply. f somehowre you.”

“Bah. You’re useless, woman! All you do is spend my money. Why do I put up with you, again?”

“Because you love me.”

“Can’t be that,” Sebarial said, pausing beside the front doors. “I’m not capable of love. Too much a curmudgeon. Well, do something with the girl.” He walked inside.

Palona beckoned Shallan up to join her. “What really happened, child?”

“He didn’t say anything untrue,” Shallan said, realizing that she was blushing. “But he did leave out a few facts. I have come for the purpose of an arranged marriage to Adolin Kholin. I thought staying in the Kholin household might leave me too restricted, so I sought other options.”

“Huh. That actually makes it sound like Turi—”

“Don’t call me that!” a voice called from inside.

“—that the idiot did something politically savvy.”

“Well,” Shallan said, “I did kind of bully him into taking me in. And I implied publicly that he was going to give me a very generous stipend.”

“Too large a one!” the voice said from inside.

“Is he . . . standing in there listening?” Shallan asked.

“He’s good at skulking,” Palona said. “Well, come along. Let’s get you settled. Make sure you tell me how much he’s promised—even by implication—for your stipend. I’ll make sure it happens.”

Several footmen unloaded Shallan’s trunks from the coach. Her soldiers hadn’t arrived yet. Hopefully, they hadn’t run into trouble. She followed Palona into the building, which proved to have as classic a decor as the exterior implied. Lots of marble and crystal. Statues trimmed in gold. A sweeping, broad staircase leading to a second-floor balcony overlooking the entrance hall. Shallan didn’t notice the highprince around, skulking or otherwise.

Palona led Shallan to a very nice set of rooms in the eastern wing. They were all white, and richly furnished, the hard stone walls and floors softened with silk hangings and thick rugs. She hardly deserved such rich decor.

I suppose I shouldn’t feel that way, Shallan thought as Palona checked the closet for towels and linen. I’m betrothed to a prince.

Still, so much finery reminded her of her father. The lace, jewelry, and silk he’d given her in attempts to make her forget about . . . other times . . .

Shallan blinked, turning to Palona, who was speaking about something.

“Excuse me?” Shallan asked.

“Servants,” Palona said. “You have your own lady’s maid?”

“I don’t,” Shallan said. “I’ve got eighteen soldiers, though, and five slaves.”

“And they’ll be helping you change clothes?”

Shallan blushed. “I mean that I’d like them to be housed, if you can manage it.”

“I can,” Palona said lightly. up sharply. somehow “I can probably even find something productive for them to do. You’ll want them paid out of your stipend, I assume—your maid as well, which I’ll get for you. Food is served at second bell, noon, and tenth bell. If you want something at other times, ask at the kitchens. Cook might swear at you, assuming I can get him to come back this time. We’ve a storm cistern, so there’s usually running water. If you want it warm for a bath, the boys will need an hour or so to heat it.”

“Running water?” Shallan said, eager. She’d seen this for the first time in Kharbranth.

“As I said, storm cistern.” Palona pointed upward. “Each highstorm fills it, and the shape of the cistern sifts out the crem. Don’t use the system until midday after a highstorm, or the water will be brown. And you look entirely too eager about this.”

“Sorry,” Shallan said. “We didn’t have this sort of thing in Jah Keved.”

“Welcome to civilization. I trust you left your club and loincloth at the door. Let me set to finding you a maid.” The short woman started to leave.

“Palona?” Shallan asked.

“Yes, child?”

“Thank you.”

Palona smiled. “Winds know, you’re not the first stray he’s brought home. Some of us even end up staying.” She left.

Shallan sat down on the plush, white bed, and sank almost down to her neck. What had they made the thing out of? Air and wishes? It felt luxurious.

In her sitting room—her sitting room—thumps announced the footmen arriving with her trunks. They left a moment later, closing the door. For the first time in quite a long while, Shallan found herself not fighting for her survival or worrying about being murdered by one of her traveling companions.

So she fell asleep.



This act of great villainy went beyond the impudence which had hitherto been ascribed to the orders; as the fighting was particularly intense at this time, many attributed this act to a sense of inherent betrayal; and after they withdrew, about two thousand made assault upon them, destroying much of the membership; but this was only nine of the ten, as one said they would not abandon their arms and flee, but instead entertained great subterfuge at the expense of the other nine.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 38, page 20

Kaladin rested his fingers on the chasm wall as Bridge Seventeen formed up behind him.

He remembered being frightened of these chasms when he first descended into them. He had feared that heavy rains would cause a flash flood while his men were scavenging. He was a little surprised Gaz hadn't found a way to "accidentally" get Bridge Four assigned to chasm duty on the day of a highstorm.

Bridge Four had embraced its punishment, claiming "I suppose." Wyndle special that the these pits. Kaladin was startled to realize that coming down

here felt more like coming home than returning to Hearthstone and his parents would have. The chasms were his.

“The lads are ready, sir,” Teft said, stepping up beside him.

“Where were you the other night?” Kaladin asked, looking up toward the crack of open sky above.

“I was off duty, sir,” Teft said. “Went to see what I could find in the market. Do I need to report every little thing I do?”

“You went to the market,” Kaladin said, “in a highstorm?”

“Time may have gotten away from me for a breath or two . . .” Teft said, looking away.

Kaladin wanted to press further, but Teft was entitled to his privacy. They’re not bridgemen anymore. They don’t have to spend all of their time together. They’ll start having lives again.

He wanted to encourage that. Still, it was disturbing. If he didn’t know where they all were, how could he make sure they were all safe?

He turned around to regard Bridge Seventeen—a motley crew. Some had been slaves, purchased for the bridges. Others had been criminals, though the crimes punishable by bridge duty in Sadeas’s army could be practically anything. Falling into debt, insulting an officer, fighting.

“You,” Kaladin said to the men, “are Bridge Seventeen, under the command of Sergeant Pitt. You are not soldiers. You may wear the uniforms, but they don’t fit you yet. You’re playing dress-up. We’re going to change that.”

The men shuffled and looked about. Though Teft had been working with them and the other crews for weeks now, these didn’t yet see themselves as soldiers. As long as that was true, they’d hold those spears at awkward angles, look around lazily when being addressed, and shuffle in line.

“The chasms are mine,” Kaladin said. “I give you leave to practice here. Sergeant Pitt!”

“Yes, sir!” Pitt said, standing at attention.

“This is a sloppy mess of stormleavings you’ve got to work with, but I’ve seen worse.”

“I find that hard to believe, sir!”

“Believe it,” Kaladin said, looking over the men. “I was in Bridge Four. Lieutenant Teft, they’re yours. Make them sweat.”

“Aye, sir,” Teft said. He began to call out orders as Kaladin picked up his spear and made his way farther down the chasms. It would be slow going, getting all twenty crews into shape, but at least Teft had successfully trained the sergeants. Heralds send that the same training worked on the common men.

Kaladin wished he could explain, even to himself, why he felt so anxious about getting these men ready. He felt he was racing toward something. Though what, he didn’t know. That writing on the wall . . . Storms, it had him on edge. Thirty-seven days.

He passed Syl sitting on the frond of a frillbloom growing from the wall. It pulled closed at Kaladin’s approach. She didn’t notice, but remained sitting in the air.

“What is it that you want, Kaladin?” she asked.

“To keep my men alive,” he said immediately. Illustrations preceding chapters in a 1”>□ “No,” Syl said, “that was what you wanted.”

“You’re saying I don’t want them to be safe?”

She slid down onto his shoulder, moving like a stiff breeze had blown her. She crossed her legs, sitting ladylike, skirt rippling as he walked.

“In Bridge Four, you dedicated everything you had to saving them,” Syl said. “Well, they’re saved. You can’t go about protecting every one like a . . . um . . . Like a . . .”

“Father kurl watches over his eggs?”

“Exactly!” She paused. “What’s a kurl?”

“A crustacean,” Kaladin said, “about the size of a small axehound. Looks kind of like a cross between a crab and a tortoise.”

“Ooooo . . .” Syl said. “I wanna see one!”

“They don’t live out here.”

Kaladin walked with his eyes forward, so she poked him in the neck until he looked at her. Then she rolled her eyes exaggeratedly. “So you admit that your men are relatively safe,” she said. “That means you haven’t really answered my question. What do you want?”

He passed piles of bones and wood, overgrown with moss. On one pile, rotspren and lifespren spun about one another, little motes of red and green glowing around the vines that sprouted incongruously from the mass of death.

“I want to beat that assassin,” Kaladin said, surprised by how vehemently he felt it.

“Why?”

“Because it’s my job to protect Dalinar.”

Syl shook her head. “That’s not it.”

“What? You think you’ve gotten that good at reading human intentions?”

“Not all humans. Just you.”

Kaladin grunted, stepping carefully around the edge of a dark pool. He’d rather not spend the rest of the day with soaked boots. These new ones didn’t hold out the water as well as they should.

“Maybe,” he said, “I want to beat that assassin because this is all his fault. If

he hadn't killed Gavilar, Tien wouldn't have been drafted, and I wouldn't have followed him. Tien wouldn't have died."

"And you don't think Roshone would have found another way of getting back at your father?"

Roshone was the citylord of Kaladin's hometown back in Alethkar. Sending Tien into the army had been an act of petty vengeance on his part, a way to get back at Kaladin's father for not being a good enough surgeon to save Roshone's son.

"He probably would have done something else," Kaladin admitted. "Still, that assassin deserves to die."

He heard the others before he reached them, their voices echoing down the cavernous chasm bottom.

"What I'm trying to explain," one said, "is that nobody seems to be asking the right questions." Sigzil's voice, with his elevated Azish accent. "We call the Parshendi savages, and everyone says they hadn't ever met people until that day they encountered the Alethi expedition. If those things are illustrations preceding chapters in a 1">□ Shin assassin? A Shin assassin who can Surgebind, no less."

Kaladin stepped into the light of their spheres sprinkled about on the floor of the chasm, which had been cleared of debris since the last time Kaladin had been here. Sigzil, Rock, and Lopen sat on boulders, waiting for him.

"Are you implying that the Assassin in White never really worked for the Parshendi?" Kaladin asked. "Or are you implying that the Parshendi lied about being as isolated as they claimed?"

"I'm not implying anything," Sigzil said, turning toward Kaladin. "My master trained me to ask questions, so I'm asking them. Something doesn't make sense about this whole matter. The Shin are extremely xenophobic. They rarely leave their lands, and you never find them working as mercenaries. Now this one goes about assassinating kings? With a Shardblade? Is he still working for the Parshendi? If so, why did they wait so

long to unleash him against us again?”

“Does it matter who he’s working for?” Kaladin asked, sucking in Stormlight.

“Of course it does,” Sigzil said.

“Why?”

“Because it’s a question,” he said, as if offended. “Besides, discovering his true employer might give us a clue to their goal, and knowing that might help us defeat him.”

Kaladin smiled, then tried to run up the wall.

After falling to the ground, ending up flat on his back, he sighed.

Rock’s head leaned in over him. “Is fun to watch,” he said. “But this thing, you are certain she can work?”

“The assassin walked on the ceiling,” Kaladin said.

“Are you sure he wasn’t just doing what we did?” Sigzil asked skeptically. “Using the Stormlight to stick one object to another? He could have sprayed the ceiling with Stormlight, then jumped up into it to stick there.”

“No,” Kaladin said, Stormlight escaping his lips. “He jumped up and landed on the ceiling. Then he ran down the wall and sent Adolin to the ceiling somehow. The prince didn’t stick there, he fell that way.” Kaladin watched his Stormlight rise and evaporate. “At the end of it all, the assassin . . . he flew away.”

“Ha!” Lopen said from his rock perch. “I knew it. When we have this figured out, the king of all Herdaz, he will say to me, ‘Lopen, you are glowing, and this is impressive. But you can also fly. For this, you may marry my daughter.’”

“The king of Herdaz doesn’t have a daughter,” Sigzil said.

“He doesn’t? I have been lied to all this time!”

“You don’t know your royal family?” Kaladin asked, sitting up.

“Gon, I haven’t been to Herdaz since I was a baby. There are as many Herdazians in Alethkar and Jah Keved these days as there are in our homeland. Flick my sparks, I’m practically an Alethi! Only not so tall and not so grouchy.”

Rock gave Kaladin a hand and pulled him to his feet. Syl had taken a perch on the wall.

“Do you know how this works?” { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah in thereKaladin asked her.

She shook her head.

“But the assassin is a Windrunner,” Kaladin said.

“I think?” Syl said. “Something like you? Maybe?” She shrugged.

Sigzil followed the direction that Kaladin was looking. “I wish I could see it,” he mumbled. “It would be a— Gah!” He jumped backward, pointing. “It looks like a little person!”

Kaladin raised an eyebrow toward Syl.

“I like him,” she said. “Also, Sigzil, I’m a ‘she’ and not an ‘it,’ thank you very much.”

“Spren have genders?” Sigzil asked, amazed.

“Of course,” she said. “Though, technically, it probably has something to do with the way people view us. Personification of the forces of nature or some similar gobbledyblarthy.”

“Doesn’t that bother you?” Kaladin asked. “That you might be a creation of human perception?”

“You’re a creation of your parents. Who cares how we were born? I can think. That’s good enough.” She grinned in a mischievous way, then zipped down as a ribbon of light toward Sigzil, who had settled down on a rock with a stunned expression. She stopped right in front of him, returned to the form of a young woman, then leaned in and made her face look exactly like his.

“Gah!” Sigzil cried again, scrambling away, making her giggle and change her face back.

Sigzil looked toward Kaladin. “She talks . . . She talks like a real person.” He raised a hand to his head. “The stories say the Nightwatcher might be capable of that. . . . Powerful spren. Vast spren.”

“Is he calling me vast?” Syl said, cocking her head to the side. “Not sure what I think of that.”

“Sigzil,” Kaladin said, “could the Windrunners fly?”

The man gingerly sat back down, still staring at Syl. “Stories and lore aren’t my specialty,” he said. “I tell of different places, to make the world smaller and to help men understand each other. I’ve heard legends speak of people dancing on the clouds, but who is to say what is fancy and what is truth, from stories so old?”

“We’ve got to figure this out,” Kaladin said. “The assassin will return.”

“So,” Rock said, “jump at wall some more. I will not laugh much.” He settled down on a boulder and plucked a small crab off the ground beside him. He inspected it, then popped it into his mouth and began chewing.

“Ew,” Sigzil said.

“Tastes good,” Rock said, speaking with his mouth full. “But better with salt and oil.”

Kaladin regarded the wall, then closed his eyes and drew in more Stormlight. He felt it inside of him, beating against the walls of his veins and arteries, trying to escape. Daring him forward. To jump, to move, to do.

“So,” Sigzil said to the others, “are we assuming that the Assassin in White was the one who sabotaged the king’s railing?”

“Bah,” Rock said. “Why would he do this thing? He could kill in a highstorm.”m with a sighs.4 more easily.”

“Yeah,” Lopen agreed. “Maybe the railing was done by one of the other highprinces.”

Kaladin opened his eyes and looked at his arm, palm against the slick wall of the chasm, elbow straight. Stormlight rose from his skin. Curling wisps of Light that vaporized in the air.

Rock nodded. “All highprinces want the king dead, though they will not speak of this. One of them sent saboteur.”

“So how did this saboteur get to the balcony?” Sigzil asked. “It must have taken some time to cut through the railing. It was metal. Unless . . . How smooth was that cut, Kaladin?”

Kaladin narrowed his eyes, watching that Stormlight rise. It was raw power. No. “Power” was the wrong term. It was a force, like the Surges that ruled the universe. They made fire burn, made rocks fall, made light glow. These wisps, they were the Surges reduced to some primal form.

He could use it. Use it to . . .

“Kal?” Sigzil’s voice asked, though it seemed distant. Like an unimportant buzzing. “How smooth was the cut to the railing? Could it have been a Shardblade?”

The voice faded. For a moment, Kaladin thought he saw shadows of a world that was not, shadows of another place. And in that place, a distant sky with a sun enclosed, almost as if by a corridor of clouds.

There.

He made the direction of the wall become down.

Suddenly, his arm was all that was supporting him. He fell forward into the wall, grunting. His awareness of his surroundings returned in a crash—only, his perspective was bizarre. He scrambled to his feet, and found himself standing on the wall.

He backed up a few paces—walking up the side of the chasm. To him, that wall was the floor, and the other three bridgemen stood on the actual floor, which looked like the wall. . . .

This, Kaladin thought, is going to get confusing.

“Wow,” Lopen said, standing up excitedly. “Yeah, this is really going to be fun. Run up the wall, gancho!”

Kaladin hesitated, then turned and started running. It was like he was in a cave, the two walls of the chasm the top and bottom. Those slowly squeezed together as he moved toward the sky.

Feeling the rush of the Stormlight within him, Kaladin grinned. Syl streaked along beside him, laughing. The closer they got to the top, the narrower the chasm became. Kaladin slowed, then stopped.

Syl streaked out in front of him, zipping out of the chasm as if leaping from the mouth of the cave. She turned about, a ribbon of light.

“Come on!” she called to him. “Out onto the plateau! Into the sunlight!”

“There are scouts out there,” he said, “watching for gemhearts.”

“Come out anyway. Stop hiding, Kaladin. Be.”

Lopen and Rock whooped below in excitement. Kaladin stared outward at the blue sky. “I have to know,” he whispered.

“Know?”

“You ask me why I protect Dalinar. I have to know if he really is the missing piece. Push for the Alethi to they one handre what he seems, Syl. I have to know if one of them lives up to his reputation. That will tell me—”

“Tell you?” she asked, becoming the image of a full-size young woman standing on the wall before him. She was nearly as tall as he was, her dress fading to mist. “Tell you what?”

“If honor is dead,” Kaladin whispered.

“He is,” Syl said. “But he lives on in men. And in me.”

Kaladin frowned.

“Dalinar Kholin is a good man,” Syl said.

“He is friends with Amaram. He could be the same, inside.”

“You don’t believe that.”

“I have to know, Syl,” he said, stepping forward. He tried to take her arm as he would a human’s, but she was too insubstantial. His hand passed through. “I can’t just believe it. I need to know it. You asked what I want. Well, that’s it. I want to know if I can trust Dalinar. And if I can . . .”

He nodded toward the light of the day outside the chasm.

“If I can, I’ll tell him what I can do. I will believe that at least one lighteyes won’t try to take everything from me. Like Roshone did. Like Amaram did. Like Sadeas did.”

“And that is what it will take?” she asked.

“I warned you that I was broken, Syl.”

“No. You’ve been reforged. It can happen to men.”

“To other men, yes,” Kaladin said, raising his hand, feeling the scars on his forehead. Why had the Stormlight never healed those? “I’m not certain about myself yet. But I will protect Dalinar Kholin with everything I have. I will learn who he is, who he really is. Then, maybe . . . we’ll give him his Knights Radiant.”

“And Amaram? What of him?”

Pain. Tien. “Him I’m going to kill.”

“Kaladin,” she said, hands clasped before her, “don’t let this destroy you.”

“It can’t,” he said, Stormlight running out. His uniform coat began to fall backward, toward the ground, as did his hair. “Amaram already took care of that.”

The ground below fully reasserted itself, and Kaladin fell backward away from her. He sucked in Stormlight, twisting in the air as his veins flared back to life. He landed feet-first in a rush of power and Light.

The other three remained silent for a few moments as he stood up straight.

“That,” Rock said, “was very fast way to get down. Ha! But it did not include falling on face, which would be fun. So you get only soft clap.” He proceeded to clap. It was indeed soft. Lopen, however, cheered and Sigzil nodded with a wide grin.

Kaladin snorted, grabbing a waterskin. “The king’s railing was cut with a Shardblade, Sigzil.” He took a drink. “And no, it wasn’t the Assassin in White. That attempt on Elhokar’s life was too crude.”

Sigzil nodded.

“What’s more,” Kaladin said, “the railing must have been cut illustrations preceding chapters in a 1">□after the highstorm that night. Otherwise, the wind would have blown the railing out of shape. So our saboteur, a Shardbearer, somehow got out onto the balcony after the storm.”

Lopen shook his head, catching the waterskin as Kaladin threw it back. “We’re supposed to believe that one of the camp’s Shardbearers snuck through the palace and got onto that balcony, gon? And nobody noticed him?”

“Could someone else do this thing?” Rock said, gesturing to the wall. “Walk

up it?”

“I doubt it,” Kaladin said.

“A rope,” Sigzil said.

They looked to him.

“If I wanted to sneak a Shardbearer in, I’d bribe some servant to let down a rope.” Sigzil shrugged. “One could be smuggled out onto the railing easily, perhaps wrapped around the servant’s body under their clothin be back on th

g. The saboteur and maybe some friends could climb up the rope, cut the railing and dig at the mortar, then climb back down. The accomplice then cuts the rope and goes back inside.”

Kaladin nodded slowly.

“So,” Rock said, “we find out who went on balcony after storm, and we find accomplice. Easy! Ha. Maybe you are not airsick, Sigzil. just a little.”

Kaladin felt unsettled. Moash had been out on that balcony between the storm and the king’s near fall.

“I’ll ask around,” Sigzil said, rising.

“No,” Kaladin said quickly. “I’ll do it. Don’t speak a word of this to anyone else. I want to see what I can find.”

“All right,” Sigzil said. He nodded toward the wall. “Can you do that again?”

“More tests?” Kaladin asked with a sigh.

“We have time,” Sigzil said. “Besides, I believe Rock wants to see if you fall on your face.”

“Ha!”

“All right,” Kaladin said. “But I’m going to have to drain some of those spheres we’re using for light.” He glanced toward them sitting in little piles on the too-clean ground. “By the way, why did you clear away the rubble in this area?”

“Clear it away?” Sigzil asked.

“Yeah,” Kaladin said. “There was no need to go moving remains around, even if they are just skeletons. It . . .”

He trailed off as Sigzil picked up a sphere and held it up toward the wall, exposing something Kaladin had missed before. Deep gouges where the moss had been scraped off, the rock scored.

Chasmfiend. One of the massive greatshells had passed through the area, and its bulk had scraped everything away.

“I didn’t think they came this close to the warcamps,” Kaladin said. “Maybe we shouldn’t train the lads down here for a while, just in case.”

The others nodded.

“Is gone now,” Rock said. “Otherwise, we’d have been eaten. Is obvious. So, back to training.”

Kaladin nodded, though those gouges haunted him as he practiced.

* * *

A few hours later, they led a tired group of up sharply. Instead former bridgemen back into their barrack block. Exhausted as they looked, the men of Bridge Seventeen seemed more lively than they’d been before going down into the chasm. They perked up even more when they reached their barrack and found one of Rock’s apprentice chefs fixing them a big pot of stew.

It was dark by the time Kaladin and Teft got back to Bridge Four’s own barrack. Another of Rock’s apprentices was fixing the stew here, Rock himself—having gotten back a little earlier than Kaladin—tasting and giving criticism. Shen moved behind Rock, stacking bowls.

Something was wrong.

Kaladin stopped just outside the light of the firepit, and Teft froze beside him. “Something is off,” Teft said.

“Yeah,” Kaladin agreed, scanning the men. They were clumped together on one side of the fire, some seated, others standing in a group. Their laughter forced, their postures nervous. When you trained men for war, they started to use combat stances whenever they were uncomfortable. Something on the other side of that fire was a threat.

Kaladin stepped into the light and found a man sitting there in a nice uniform, hands down at his side, head bowed. Renarin Kholin. Oddly, he was rocking

back and forth with a small motion, staring at the ground.

Kaladin relaxed. “Brightlord,” Kaladin said, stepping over to him. “Is there something you need?”

Renarin scrambled to his feet and saluted. “I would like to serve under your command, sir.”

Inside, Kaladin groaned. “Let’s talk away from the fire, Brightlord.” He took the spindly prince by the arm, leading him away from the ears of the others.

“Sir,” Renarin said, speaking softly, “I want—”

“You shouldn’t call me sir,” Kaladin whispered. “You’re lighteyed. Storms, you’re the son of the most powerful man in eastern Roshar.”

“I want to be in Bridge Four,” Renarin said.

Kaladin rubbed his forehead. During his time as a slave, dealing with much larger problems, he had forgotten about the headaches of dealing with highborn lighteyes. Once, he might have assumed he’d heard the most outlandish of their ridiculous demands. Not so, it seemed.

“You can’t be in Bridge Four. We’re bodyguards for your own family. What are you going to do? Guard yourself?”

“I won’t be a liability, sir. I’ll work hard.”

“I don’t doubt you would, Renarin. Look, why do you want to be in Bridge Four?”

“My father and my brother,” Renarin said softly, face shadowed, “they’re warriors. Soldiers. I’m not, if you haven’t noticed.”

“Yes. Something about . . .”

“Physical ailments,” Renarin said. “I’ve a blood weakness.”

“That’s a folk description of many different conditions,” Kaladin said. “What

do you really have?”

“I’m epileptic,” Renarin said. “It means—”

“Yes, yes. Is it idiopathic or symptomatic?”

Renarin stood absolutely still in the darkness, the missing piece pushing for the alethite to the one hand. “Uh . . .”

“Was it caused by a specific brain injury,” Kaladin asked, “or is it something that just started happening for no reason?”

“I’ve had it since I was a kid.”

“How bad are the seizures?”

“They’re fine,” Renarin said quickly. “It’s not as bad as everyone says. It’s not like I fall to the ground or froth like everyone thinks. My arm will jerk a few times, or I’ll twitch uncontrollably for a few moments.”

“You retain consciousness?”

“Yeah.”

“Myoclonic, probably,” Kaladin said. “You’ve been given bitterleaf to chew?”

“I . . . Yes. I don’t know if it helps. The jerking isn’t the whole problem. A lot of times, when it’s happening, I get really weak. Particularly along one side of my body.”

“Huh,” Kaladin said. “I suppose that could fit with the seizures. Have you ever had any persistent relaxation of the muscles, an inability to smile on one side of your face, for example?”

“No. How do you know these things? Aren’t you a soldier?”

“I know some field medicine.”

“Field medicine . . . for epilepsy?”

Kaladin coughed into his hand. “Well, I can see why they didn’t want you going into battle. I’ve seen men with wounds that caused similar symptoms, and the surgeons always dismissed those men from duty. It’s no shame to not be fit enough for battle, Brightlord. Not every man is needed for fighting.”

“Sure,” Renarin said bitterly. “Everyone tells me that. Then they all go back to fighting. The ardents, they claim every Calling is important, but then what do they teach about the afterlife? That it’s a big war to reclaim the Tranquiline Halls. That the best soldiers in this life are glorified in the next.”

“If the afterlife really is a big war,” Kaladin said, “then I hope I end up in Damnation. At least there I might be able to get a wink or two of sleep. Regardless, you’re no soldier.”

“I want to be.”

“Brightlord—”

“You don’t have to set me to doing anything important,” Renarin said. “I came to you, instead of one of the other battalions, because most of your men spend their time patrolling. If I’m patrolling, I won’t be in much danger, and my fits won’t hurt anyone. But at least I can see, I can feel what it’s like.”

“I—”

He rushed on. Kaladin had never heard so many words from the normally quiet young man.

“I will obey your commands,” Renarin said. “Treat me like a new recruit. When I’m here, I’m not a prince’s son, I’m not a lighteyes. I’m just another soldier. Please. I want to be part of it. When Adolin was young, my father made him serve in a spearman squad for two months.”

“He did?” Kaladin asked, genuinely surprised.

“Father said every officer should serve in the shoes of his men,” Renarin said. “in a highstorm.”m with a sighs.4“I have Shards now. I’m going to be in war,

but I've never felt what it's like to really be a soldier. I think this is the closest I'll be able to get. Please."

Kaladin folded his arms, looking the youth over. Renarin looked anxious. Very anxious. He'd formed his hands to fists, though Kaladin could see no sign of the box Renarin often fiddled with when nervous. He'd begun breathing deeply, but had set his jaw, and kept his eyes forward.

Coming to see Kaladin, to ask this of him, terrified the young man for some reason. He'd done it anyway. Could one ask anything more of a recruit?

Am I really considering this? It seemed ludicrous. And yet, one of Kaladin's jobs was to protect Renarin. If he could pound some solid self-defense skills into him, that would go a long way toward helping him survive assassination attempts.

"I should probably point out," Renarin said, "how much easier it will be to guard me if I'm spending time training with your men. Your resources are thin, sir. Having one fewer person to protect must be appealing. The only times I'll leave are the days when I practice with my Shards under Swordmaster Zahel."

Kaladin sighed. "You really want to be a soldier?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Go take those dirty stew bowls and wash them," Kaladin said, pointing. "Then help Rock clean his cauldron and put away the cooking implements."

"Yes, sir!" Renarin said with an enthusiasm Kaladin had never heard from anyone assigned washing duty. Renarin jogged over and began happily snatching up bowls.

Kaladin folded his arms and leaned against the barrack. The men didn't know how to react to Renarin. They'd hand over bowls of half-finished stew to please him, and conversation hushed when he was too near. But they'd been nervous around Shen too, before eventually coming to accept him. Could they ever do the same for a lighteyes?

Moash had refused to hand his bowl to Renarin, washing it himself, as was their common practice. Once done, he strolled over to Kaladin. “You’re really going to let him join?”

“I’ll speak to his father tomorrow,” Kaladin said. “Get the highprince’s read on it.”

“I don’t like it. Bridge Four, our nightly conversations . . . these things are supposed to be safe from them, you know?”

“Yeah,” Kaladin said. “But he’s a good kid. I think if any lighteyes could fit in here, he could.”

Moash turned, raising an eyebrow toward him.

“You disagree, I presume?” Kaladin asked.

“He doesn’t act right, Kal. The way he talks, the way he looks at people. He’s strange. That’s not important, though—he’s lighteyed, and that should be enough. It means we can’t trust him.”

“We don’t need to,” Kaladin said. “We’re just going to keep an eye on him, maybe try to train him to defend himself.”

Moash grunted, nodding. He seemed to accept those as good reasons for letting Renarin stay.

lighteyed womaninsteadreI’ve got Moash here, Kaladin thought. Nobody else is close enough to hear. I should ask . . .

But how did he form the words? Moash, were you involved in a plot to kill the king?

“Have you thought about what we’re going to do?” Moash asked. “Regarding Amaram, I mean.”

“Amaram is my problem.”

“You’re Bridge Four,” Moash said, taking Kaladin by the arm. “Your

problem is our problem. He's the one who made you a slave."

"He did more than that," Kaladin growled softly, ignoring Syl's gesturing that he should remain quiet. "He killed my friends, Moash. Right before my eyes. He's a murderer."

"Then something has to be done."

"It does," Kaladin asked. "But what? You think I should go to the authorities?"

Moash laughed. "What are they going to do? You have to get the man into a duel, Kaladin. Bring him down, man against man. Until you do it, something's going to feel wrong to you, deep down in your gut."

"You sound like you know what this feels like."

"Yeah." Moash gave a little half smile. "I have some Voidbringers in my past too. Maybe that's why I understand you. Maybe that's why you understand me."

"Then what—"

"I don't really want to talk about it," Moash said.

"We're Bridge Four," Kaladin said, "like you said. Your problems are mine." What did the king do to your family, Moash?

"Suppose that's true," Moash said, turning away. "I just . . . Not tonight. Tonight, I just want to relax."

"Moash!" Teft called from nearer the fire. "You coming?"

"I am," Moash called back. "What about you, Lopen? You ready?"

Lopen grinned, standing up and stretching beside the fire. "I am the Lopen, which means I am ready for anything at any time. You should know this by now."

Nearby, Drehy snorted and flipped a chunk of stewed longroot at Lopen. It splatted against the Herdazian's face.

Lopen kept right on talking. "As you can see, I was perfectly ready for that, as shown by the poise I display as I make this decidedly rude gesture."

Teft chuckled as he, Peet, and Sigzil walked over to join Lopen. Moash moved to go with them, then hesitated. "You coming, Kal?"

"Where?" Kaladin asked.

"Out," Moash said, shrugging. "Visit a few taverns, play some rings, get something to drink."

Out. The bridgemen had rarely done such things in Sadeas's army, at least not as a group, with friends. At first, they had been too beaten down to care for anything other than sticking their noses in drink. Later, lack of funds and the general prejudice against them among the troops had worked to keep the bridgemen to themselves.

It up sharply. Instead, it wasn't the case any longer. Kaladin found himself stammering. "I . . . probably ought to stay . . . uh, to go look in at the fires of the other crews . . ."

"Come on, Kal," Moash said. "You can't always work."

"I'll go with you another time."

"Fine." Moash jogged over to join the others.

Syl left the fire, where she'd been dancing with a flamespren, and zipped over to Kaladin. She hung in the air, watching the group walk off into the evening.

"Why didn't you go?" she asked him.

"I can't live that life anymore, Syl," No. Probably



And thus were the disturbances in the Revv toparchy quieted, when, upon their ceasing to prosecute their civil dissensions, Nalan'Elin betook himself to finally accept the Skybreakers who had named him their master, when initially he had spurned their advances and, in his own interests, refused to countenance that which he deemed a pursuit of vanity and annoyance; this was the last of the Heralds to admit to such patronage.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 5, page 17

The warcamp was still busy, despite the hour. She wasn't surprised; her time in Kharbranth had taught her that not everyone treated the arrival of night as a reason to stop working. Here, there were nearly as many people about in the streets as when she'd first ridden through.

And almost nobody paid attention to her.

For once, she didn't feel conspicuous. Even in Kharbranth, people had glanced at her—noticed her, considered her. Some had thought of robbing her, others of how to use her. A young lighteyes without proper escort was distinctive, and possibly an opportunity. However, while wearing straight dark hair and dark brown eyes, she might as well have been invisible. It was

wonderful.

Shallan smiled, stuffing her hands in the pockets of her coat—she still felt embarrassed by thof Radiancelooked at it.

She reached an intersection. In one direction, the warcamp glittered with torches and oil lanterns. A market, busy enough that nobody trusted spheres in their lamps. Shallan walked toward it; she'd be safer on the more traveled streets. Her fingers crinkled on the paper in her pocket, and she drew it out as she stopped to wait for a group of chattering people to move from in front of her.

The map looked easy enough to parse. She just needed to get her bearings. She waited, then finally realized that the group in front of her wasn't going to move. She was expecting them to defer to her as they would a lighteyes. Shaking her head at her foolishness, she went around them.

It continued like that; she was forced to squeeze through tight places between bodies, and was jostled as she walked. This market flowed like two rivers passing one another, with shops on either side and vendors peddling food in the center. It was even covered in some places by awnings that stretched across to the buildings on the other side.

Perhaps only ten paces across, it was a claustrophobic, bustling, jabbering mess. And Shallan loved it. She found herself wanting to stop and sketch half the people she passed. They all seemed so full of life, whether haggling or simply walking with a friend and chewing on a snack. Why hadn't she gone out more in Kharbranth?

She stopped, grinning at a man performing a show with puppets and a box. Farther down the way, a Herdazian used a sparkflicker and some kind of oil to make bursts of flame in the air. If she could just stop off a little time and do a sketch of him . . .

No. She had business to be about. Part of her didn't want to go forward with it, obviously, and her mind was trying to distract her. She was becoming increasingly aware of this defense of hers. She used it, she needed it, but she couldn't let it control her life.

She did stop at the cart of a woman selling glazed fruit, however. They looked juicy and red, and had been stabbed through with a little stick before being dipped in a glassy melted sugar. Shallan pulled a sphere from her pocket and held it out.

The woman froze, staring at the sphere. Others stopped nearby. What was the problem? It was just an emerald mark. It wasn't like she'd gotten out the broam.

She looked at the glyphs listing prices. A stick of candied fruit was a single clearchip. Denominations of spheres wasn't something she'd often had to think about, but if she remembered . . .

Her mark was worth two hundred and fifty times the cost of the treat. Even in her family's strained state, this wouldn't have been considered much money to them. But that was on the level of houses and estates, not the level of street vendors and working darkeyes.

"Uh, I don't think I can change that," the woman said. "Er . . . citizen." A title given to a wealthy darkeyes of the first or second nahn.

Shallan blushed. How many times was she going to prove just how naive she was? "It's for one of the treats, and for some help. I'm new to the area. I could use some directions."

"Expensive way to get directions, miss," the woman said, but pocketed the sphere with deft fingers nonetheless.

"I need to find Nar Street."

"Ah. You're going the wrong storming way, miss. Back up the market flow, turn right. You'll need to go, uh, six blocks, I think? It's easy to find; the highprince made everyone lay out their buildings in squares, like in a proper city. Look for the taverns, and you'll be there. But miss, I don't think that's the sort of place one like you should be visiting, if you don't mind me saying."

Even as a darkeyes, people thought her incapable of taking care of herself.

“Thank you,” Shallan said, plucking out one of the sticks of candied fruit. She hastened away, crossing the flow to join those walking in the opposite direction through the market. up sharply. fbtre

“Pattern?” she whispered.

“Mmm.” He was clinging to the outside of her coat, near the knees.

“Trail behind and watch to see if anyone follows me,” Shallan said. “Do you think you can do that?”

“They will make a pattern if they come,” he said, dropping to the ground. For a brief moment in the air, between coat and stone, he was a dark mass of twisting lines. Then he vanished like a drop of water hitting a lake.

Shallan hurried along with the flow, safehand securely gripping the sphere pouch in her coat pocket, freehand carrying the stick of fruit. She remembered all too well how Jasnah’s deliberate flashing of too much money in Kharbranth had lured thieves like vines to stormwater.

Shallan followed the directions, her sense of liberation replaced by anxiety. The corner she took out of the market led her to a roadway that was much less crowded. Was the fruit vendor trying to direct Shallan into a trap where she could be robbed easily? Head down, she hurried along the road. She couldn’t Soulcast to protect herself, not as Jasnah had. Storms! Shallan hadn’t even been able to make sticks catch fire. She doubted she’d be able to transform living bodies.

She had Lightweaving, but she was already using that. Could she Lightweave a second image at the same time? How was her disguise doing, anyway? It would be draining the Light from her spheres. She almost pulled them out to see how much was gone, then stopped herself. Fool. She was worried about being robbed, and so she considered revealing a handful of money?

She stopped after two blocks. Some people did walk this street, a handful of men in workers’ clothing heading home for the night. The buildings here certainly weren’t as nice as the ones she’d left behind.

“Nobody follows,” Pattern said from her feet.

Shallan jumped nearly to the rooftops. She raised her freehand to her breast, breathing in and out deeply. She really thought she could infiltrate a group of assassins? Her own spren often made her jump.

Tyn said that nothing would teach me, Shallan thought, but personal experience. I’m just going to have to muddle through these first few times and hope I get used to this before I get myself killed.

“Let’s keep moving,” Shallan said. “We’re running out of time.” She started forward, digging into the fruit. It really was good, though her nerves prevented her from fully enjoying it.

The street with the taverns was actually five blocks away, not six. Shallan’s increasingly wrinkled paper showed the meeting place as a tenement building across from a tavern with blue light shining through the windows.

Shallan tossed aside her fruit stick as she stepped up to the tenement building. It couldn’t be old—nothing in these warcamps could be more than five or six years old—but it looked ancient. The stones weathered, the window shutters hanging askew in places. She was surprised a highstorm hadn’t blown the thing over.

Fully aware that she could be striding into the whitespine’s den for dinner, she walked up and knocked. The door was opened by a darkeyed man the size of a boulder who had a beard trimmed like a Horneater’s. His hair did seem to have ,” Shallan said softly, raislilysome red in it.

She resisted the urge to shuffle from one foot to the next as he looked her up and down. Finally, he opened the door all the way, motioning her in with thick fingers. She didn’t miss the large axe that leaned against the wall just next to him, illuminated by the single feeble Stormlight lamp—it looked like it only had a chip in it—on the wall.

Taking a deep breath, Shallan entered.

The place smelled moldy. She heard water dripping from somewhere farther

inside, stormwater infallibly making its way from a leaking roof down, down, down to the ground floor. The guard did not speak as he led her along the hall. The floor was wood. There was something about walking on wood that made her feel as if she were going to fall through. It seemed to groan with every step. Good stone never did anything like that.

The guard nodded toward an opening in the wall, and Shallan stared into the blackness there. Steps. Down.

Storms, what am I doing?

Not being timid. That was what she was doing. Shallan glanced at the brutish guard and raised an eyebrow, forcing her voice to sound calm. “You really went all-out on the decor. How long did you have to look to find a den in the Shattered Plains that had a creepy staircase in it?”

The guard actually smiled. It didn’t make him look any less intimidating.

“The stairs aren’t going to collapse under me, are they?” Shallan asked.

“Is fine,” the guard said. His voice was surprisingly high pitched. “He did not collapse for me, and I had two breakfasts today.” He patted his stomach. “Go. They wait for you.”

She got out a sphere for light and started down the stairwell. The stone walls here had been cut. Who would go to the trouble to burrow out a basement for a rotting tenement building? The answer came as she noticed several extended crem dribbles on the wall. A little like wax melting down the side of a candle, these had hardened to stone long ago.

This hole was here before the Alethi came, she thought. When settling this warcamp, Sebarial had built this building above an already-existent basement. The warcamp craters must have once held people. There was no other explanation. Who had they been? The Natan people of long ago?

The steps led down into a small, empty room. How odd to find a basement in such a ramshackle building; normally, you found them only in wealthy homes, as the precautions one needed to take to prevent flooding were

extensive. Shallan folded her arms, confused, until one corner of the floor opened, bathing the room in light. Shallan stepped back, breath catching. A part of the rock floor was false, hiding a trapdoor.

The basement had a basement. She stepped up to the edge of the hole and saw a ladder heading down toward red carpet and light that seemed almost blinding following the dimness she'd been in. This place must flood something fierce after a storm.

She swung onto the ladder and made her way down, glad for the trousers. The trapdoor closed above—it appeared to have some sort of pulley mechanism.

She hopped off onto the carpet and turned, finding a room that was incongruously palatial. A long dining table ran down the center, and it sparkled with glass goblets that had gemstones set in their sides; their glow sprayed the room with light. Cozy shelves lined the walls, each laden with books and ornaments. Many were in small glass cases. Trophies of some s lighteyed womanfbtreort?

Of the half-dozen or so people in the room, one drew her attention most. Straight-backed, with jet-black hair, he wore white clothing and stood in front of the room's crackling hearth. He reminded her of someone, a man from her childhood. The messenger with the smiling eyes, the enigma who knew so much. Two blind men waited at the end of an era, contemplating beauty. . . .

The man turned around, revealing light violet eyes and a face scarred by old wounds, including a cut that ran down his cheek and deformed his upper lip. Though he looked refined—holding a goblet of wine in his left hand and dressed in the finest of suits—his face and hands told another story. Of battles, of killing, and of strife.

This was not the messenger from Shallan's past. The man raised his right hand, in which he held some kind of long reed. He placed this to his lips. He held it like a weapon, pointed right at Shallan.

She froze in place, unable to move, staring down that weapon across the room. Finally, she glanced over her shoulder. A target hung on the wall in the

form of a tapestry with various creatures on it. Shallan yelped and jumped to the side just before the man blew on his weapon, shooting a small dart through the air. It passed within inches of her before embedding itself in one of the figures on the wall hanging.

Shallan raised her safehand to her breast and took a deep breath. Steady, she thought at herself. Steady.

“Tyn,” the man said, lowering the blowgun, “is unwell?” The quiet way he spoke made Shallan shiver. She could not place his accent.

“Yes,” Shallan said, finding her voice.

The man set his goblet on the mantel beside him, then slipped another dart from his shirt pocket. He tucked this carefully into the end of the blowgun. “She does not seem the type to let something so trivial keep her from an important meeting.”

He looked up at Shallan, blowgun loaded. Those violet eyes seemed like glass, his scarred face expressionless. The room seemed to hold its breath.

He’d seen through her lie. Shallan felt a cold sweat.

“You are right,” Shallan said. “Tyn is well. However, the plan did not go as she promised. Jasnah Kholin is dead, but the implementation of the assassination was sloppy. Tyn felt it prudent to work through an intermediary for now.”

The man narrowed his eyes, then finally raised his reed and blew sharply. Shallan jumped, but the dart did not strike her, instead flying to hit the wall hanging.

“She reveals herself as a coward,” he said. “You came here willingly, knowing that I might just kill you for her mistakes?”

“Every woman starts somewhere, Brightlord,” Shallan said, voice trembling rebelliously. “I can’t claw my way upward without taking a few chances. If you don’t mind, then I have had a chance to meet people that Tyn probably

would never have introduced me to.”

“Bold,” the man said. He gestured with two fingers, and one of the people ’t
kill



But as for the Bondsmiths, they had members only three, which number was not uncommon for them; nor did they seek to increase this by great bounds, for during the times of Madasa, only one of their order was in continual accompaniment of Urithiru and its thrones. Their spren was understood to be specific, and to persuade them to grow to the magnitude of the other orders was seen as seditious.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 16, page 14

Kaladin never felt more uncomfortably conspicuous than when visiting Dalinar's lighteyed training grounds, where all of the other soldiers were highborn.

Dalinar mandated that his soldiers wear uniforms during duty hours, and these men obeyed. In his own blue uniform, Kaladin shouldn't have felt set off from them, but he did. Theirs were more lavish, with bright buttons up the sides of the fine coats and gemstones set into the buttons. Others ornamented their uniforms with embroidery. Colorful scarves were growing popular.

The lighteyed looked over Kaladin and his men as they entered. As much as the regular soldiers treated his men like heroes—as much as even these

officers respected Dalinar and his decisions—their postures were hostile toward him and his.

You are not wanted here, those stares said. Everyone has a place. You're out of yours. Like a chull in a dining hall.

“May I be relieved from duty for today's training, sir?” Renarin asked Kaladin. The youth wore a Bridge Four uniform.

Kaladin nodded. His departure made the other bridgemen relax. Kaladin pointed toward three watch positions, and three of his men ran off to stand guard. Moash, Teft, and Yake stayed with him.

Kaladin marched them up to Zahel, who stood at the back of the sand-covered courtyard. Though the other ardents all busied themselves carrying water, towels, or sparring weapons to dueling lighteyes, Zahel had drawn a circle in the sand and was throwing little colored rocks into it.

“I'm taking you up on your offer,” Kaladin said, stepping up to him. “I brought three of my men to learn with me.”

“Didn't offer to train four of you,” Zahel said.

“I know.”

Zahel grunted. “Do forty laps around the outside of this building at a jog, then report back. You have until I get tired of my game to return.”

Kaladin gestured sharply, and all four of them took off at a run.

“Wait,” Zahel called.

Kaladin stopped, boots crunching sand.

“I was just testing “How do you know?” information.” kat how willing you were to obey me,” Zahel said, throwing a rock into his circle. He grunted, as if pleased with himself. Finally, he turned to look at them. “I suppose I don't need to toughen you up. But boy, you've got red on your ears like I've never seen.”

“I— Red on my ears?” Kaladin asked.

“Damnation language. I mean that you feel you’ve got something to prove, that you are spoiling for a fight. It means you’re angry at everything and everyone.”

“Can you blame us?” Moash asked.

“I suppose I can’t. But if I’m going to train you lads, I can’t have your red ears getting in the way. You’re going to listen, and you’re going to do what I say.”

“Yes, Master Zahel,” Kaladin said.

“Don’t call me master,” Zahel said. He thumbed over his shoulder toward Renarin, who was putting on his Shardplate with the assistance of some ardens. “I’m his master. For you lads, I’m just an interested party who wants to help you keep my friends alive. Wait here until I get back.”

He turned to walk toward Renarin. As Yake picked up one of the colored stones Zahel had been throwing, the man said, without looking, “And don’t touch my rocks!”

Yake jumped and dropped the stone.

Kaladin settled back, leaning against one of the pillars that held up the roof overhang, watching Zahel give instruction to Renarin. Syl zipped down and began inspecting the little rocks with a curious expression, trying to figure out what was special about them.

A short time later, Zahel walked past with Renarin, explaining the lad’s training for today. Apparently, he wanted Renarin to eat lunch. Kaladin smiled as some ardens hurriedly carried out a table, dining ware, and a heavy stool that could support a Shardbearer. They even had a tablecloth. Zahel left the bemused Renarin, who sat in his hulking Shardplate with his faceplate up, regarding a full lunch. He awkwardly picked up a fork.

“You’re teaching him to be delicate with his newfound strength,” Kaladin

said to Zahel as the man passed back the other way.

“Shardplate is powerful stuff,” Zahel said, not looking at Kaladin.
“Controlling it is about more than punching through walls and jumping off buildings.”

“So when do we—”

“Keep waiting.” Zahel wandered off.

Kaladin glanced at Teft, who shrugged. “I like him.”

Yake chuckled. “That’s because he’s almost as grouchy as you are, Teft.”

“I ain’t grouchy,” Teft snapped. “I just have a low threshold for stupidity.”

They waited until Zahel jogged back toward them. The men grew immediately alert, eyes widening. Zahel carried a Shardblade.

They’d been hoping for it. Kaladin had told them they might be able to hold one as part of this training. Their eyes followed that Blade as they’d follow a gorgeous woman taking off her glove.

Zahel stepped up, then slammed the Blade into the sandy ground in front of them. He took his hand off the hilt and waved. “All right. Try it out.”

They stared at it. “Kelek’s breath,” Teft finally said. “You are serious, aren’t you? in a highstorm.”m blacknesss.4”

Nearby, Syl had turned from the rocks and stared at the Blade.

“The morning after talking to your captain in the middle of the Damnation night,” Zahel said, “I went to Brightlord Dalinar and the king and asked permission to train you in sword stances. You don’t have to carry swords around or anything, but if you’re going to fight an assassin with a Shardblade, you need to know the stances and how to respond to them.”

He looked down, resting his hand on the Shardblade. “Brightlord Dalinar suggested letting you handle one of the king’s Shardblades. Smart man.”

Zahel removed his hand and gestured. Teft reached out to touch the Shardblade, but Moash seized the thing first, taking it by the hilt and yanking it—too hard—out of the ground. He stumbled backward, and Teft backed away.

“Be careful, now!” Teft barked. “You’ll cut off your own storming arm if you act like a fool.”

“I’m no fool,” Moash said, holding the sword up, pointing it outward. A single gloryspren faded into existence near his head. “It’s heavier than I expected.”

“Really?” Yake said. “Everyone says they’re light!”

“Those are people used to a regular sword,” Zahel said. “If you’ve trained all of your life with a longsword, then pick up something that looks like it has two or three times as much steel to it, you expect it to weigh more. Not less.”

Moash grunted, delicately swiping with the weapon. “From the way the stories are told, I thought it wouldn’t have any weight at all. Like it would be as light as a breeze.” He hesitantly stuck it into the ground. “It has more resistance when it cuts than I thought too.”

“Guess it’s about expectations again,” Teft said, scratching at his beard and waving Yake to have the weapon next. The stout man pulled it free more carefully than Moash had.

“Stormfather, but it feels strange to hold this,” Yake said.

“It’s just a tool,” Zahel said. “A valuable one, but still just a tool. Remember that.”

“It’s more than a tool,” Yake said, swiping it. “I’m sorry, but it just is. I might believe that about a regular sword, but this . . . this is art.”

Zahel shook his head in annoyance.

“What?” Kaladin asked as Yake reluctantly handed the Shardblade over to Teft.

“Men prohibited from using the sword because they’re too lowborn,” Zahel said. “Even after all these years, it strikes me as silly. There’s nothing holy about swords. They’re better in some situations, worse in others.”

“You’re an ardent,” Kaladin said. “Aren’t you supposed to uphold Vorin arts and traditions?”

“Well,” Zahel said, “if you haven’t noticed, I’m not a very good ardent. I just happen to be an excellent swordsman.” He nodded toward the sword. “You going to take a turn?”

Syl looked at Kaladin sharply.

“I’ll pass unless you demand it,” Kaladin said to Zahel.

“Not curious at all how it feels? in a highstorm.”m blacknesss.4”

“Those things have killed too many of my friends. I’d rather not have to touch it, if it’s all the same to you.”

“Suit yourself,” Zahel said. “Brightlord Dalinar’s suggestion was to get you used to these weapons. To take away some of the awe. Half the time a man dies by one of those, it’s because he’s too busy staring to dodge.”

“Yeah,” Kaladin said softly. “I’ve seen that. Swing it at me. I need practice facing one down.”

“Sure. Let me get the sword’s guard.”

“No,” Kaladin said. “No guard, Zahel. I need to be afraid.”

Zahel studied Kaladin for a moment, then nodded, walking over to take the sword from Moash—who had begun a second turn swinging it.

Syl zipped past, twisting around the heads of the men, who couldn’t see her. “Thank you,” she said, settling onto Kaladin’s shoulder.

Zahel walked back and fell into a stance. Kaladin recognized it as one of the

lighteyed dueling stances, but he didn't know which one. Zahel stepped forward and swung.

Panic.

Kaladin couldn't keep it from rising. In an instant, he saw Dallet die—the Shardblade shearing through his head. He saw faces with burned-out eyes reflecting on the Blade's too-silvery surface.

The Blade passed a few inches in front of him. Zahel stepped into the swing and brought the Blade around again in a flowing maneuver. This time it would hit, so Kaladin had to step back.

Storms, those monsters were beautiful.

Zahel swung again, and Kaladin had to jump to the side to dodge. A bit overzealous there, Zahel, he thought. He dodged again, then reacted to a shadow he'd seen from the corner of his eye. He spun, and came face-to-face with Adolin Kholin.

They stared one another in the eyes. Kaladin waited for a wisecrack. Adolin's eyes flicked toward Zahel and the Shardblade, then turned back to Kaladin. Finally, the prince gave a shallow nod. He turned about and walked toward Renarin.

The implication was simple. The Assassin in White had bested both of them. There was nothing to mock in preparing to fight him again.

Doesn't mean he's not a spoiled blusterer, Kaladin thought, turning back to Zahel. The man had waved over a fellow ardent, and was delivering the Shardblade to him.

“I have to go train Prince Renarin,” Zahel said. “Can't leave him alone all day for you fools. Ivis here will go through some sparring moves with you and let you each face down a Shardblade, as Kaladin has done. Get comfortable with the sight, so you don't freeze when one comes for you.”

Kaladin and the others nodded. Only after Zahel had trotted away did Kaladin

notice that the new ardent, Ivis, was a woman. Though she was an ardent, she kept her hand gloved, so there was some acknowledgment of her gender, even if the flowing ardent clothing and shaved head masked some of the other obvious signs.

A woman with a sword. An odd sight. Of course, was it any odder than darkeyed men holding a Shardblade?

Ivis gave them lengths of wood that, weight and balance wise, were decent approximations of a Shardblade. Like a child's scribble with chalk could be a decent approximation of a person. Then she "How do you know?" m blackness.⁴ put them through several routines, demonstrating the ten Shardblade sword stances.

Kaladin had been looking to kill lighteyes from the moment he'd first touched a spear, and during the later years—before being enslaved—he'd gotten pretty good at it. But those lighteyes he'd hunted on the battlefield hadn't been terribly skilled. The majority of men who were truly good with a sword had made their way to the Shattered Plains. So the stances were new to him.

He started to see and understand. Knowing the stances would let him anticipate a swordsman's next move. He didn't have to be wielding a sword himself—he still thought it an inflexible weapon—to make use of that.

An hour or so later, Kaladin set down his practice sword and stepped over to the water barrel. No ardents or parshmen ran drinks to him or his men. He was just fine with that; he wasn't some pampered rich boy. He leaned against the barrel, taking a ladle of water, feeling the good exhaustion deep in his muscles that told him he'd been doing something worthwhile.

He scanned the grounds for Adolin and Renarin. He wasn't on duty watching either of them—Adolin would have come with Mart and Eth, and Renarin was under the watch of the three that Kaladin had assigned earlier. Still, he couldn't help looking to see how they were. An accident here could be—

A woman was on the practice grounds. Not an ardent, but a true lighteyed woman, the one with the vibrant red hair. She had just wandered in, and was

scanning the grounds.

He didn't bear a grudge about the incident with his boots. It simply typified how, to a lighteyes, men like Kaladin were playthings. You toyed with darkeyes, took what you needed from them, and gave no thought to having left them far worse for the interaction.

It was how Roshone had been. It was how Sadeas was. It was how this woman was. She wasn't evil, really. She just didn't care.

She's probably a good match for the princeling, he thought as Yake and Teft jogged over for some water. Moash stayed with his practice, intent on his sword forms.

"Not bad," Yake said, following Kaladin's gaze.

"Not bad at what?" Kaladin asked, trying to figure out what the woman was doing.

"Not bad looking, Captain," Yake said with a laugh. "Storms! Sometimes, it seems the only thing you think about is who has to be on duty next."

Nearby, Syl nodded emphatically.

"She's lighteyed," Kaladin said.

"So?" Yake said, slapping him on the shoulder. "A lighteyed lady can't be attractive?"

"No." It was as simple as that.

"You are a strange one, sir," Yake said.

Eventually, Ivis called for Yake and Teft to stop idling and return to practice. She didn't call for Kaladin. He seemed to intimidate many of the ardents.

Yake jogged back, but Teft lingered for a moment, then nodded toward the girl, Shallan. "You think we have to worry about her? Foreign woman about whom we know very little, sent in to suddenly be Adolin's betrothed. Sure

would make a good assassin.”

“Damnation,” Kaladin said. “I should have seen that. Good eye, Teft.”

Teftllustrations preceding chapters in a to re shrugged modestly, then jogged back to his training.

He’d assumed the woman was an opportunist, but could she actually be an assassin? Kaladin picked up his practice sword and wandered toward her, passing Renarin, who was training in some of the same stances that Kaladin’s men were practicing.

As Kaladin walked toward Shallan, Adolin clanked up beside him in Shardplate.

“What is she doing here?” Kaladin asked.

“Come to watch me while I spar, presumably,” Adolin said. “I usually have to kick them out.”

“Them?”

“You know. Girls who want to gawk at me while I fight. I wouldn’t mind, but if we allowed it, they’d clog the entire grounds every time I came. Nobody would be able to get any sparring done.”

Kaladin raised an eyebrow at him.

“What?” Adolin asked. “You don’t get women coming to watch while you spar, bridgeboy? Little darkeyed ladies, missing seven teeth and afraid of bathing . . .”

Kaladin looked away from Adolin, drawing his lips to a line. Next time, he thought, I let the assassin have this one.

Adolin chuckled for a moment, though his laughter trailed off awkwardly. “Anyway,” he continued, “she probably has a better reason to be here than others, considering our relationship. We’ll still have to kick her out. Can’t set a bad precedent.”

“You really let this happen?” Kaladin asked. “A betrothal to a woman you’d never met?”

Adolin shrugged armored shoulders. “Things always go so well at first, and then . . . they fall apart on me. I can never figure out where I go wrong. I thought, maybe if there were something more formal in place . . .”

He scowled, as if remembering who he was talking to, and tromped forward at a faster pace to get away from Kaladin. Adolin reached Shallan, who—humming to herself—passed him right by without looking. Adolin raised a hand, mouth opened to speak, as he turned and watched her walk farther across the courtyard. Her eyes were on Nall, head ardent of the practice grounds. Shallan bowed to her in reverence.

Adolin scowled, turning to jog after Shallan, passing Kaladin, who smirked at him.

“Come to watch you, I see,” Kaladin said. “Completely fascinated by you, obviously.”

“Shut up,” Adolin growled.

Kaladin strolled after Adolin, reaching Shallan and Nall in the middle of a conversation.

“. . . visual records of these suits are pathetic, Sister Nall,” Shallan was saying, handing Nall a bound leather portfolio. “We need new sketches. Though much of my time will be spent clerking for Brightlord Sebarial, I would like a few projects of my own during my time at the Shattered Plains. With your blessing, I wish to proceed.”

“Your talent is admirable,” Nall said, flipping through pages. “Art is your Calling?”

“Natural History, Sister Nall, though sketching is a priority for me in that line of study as well.”

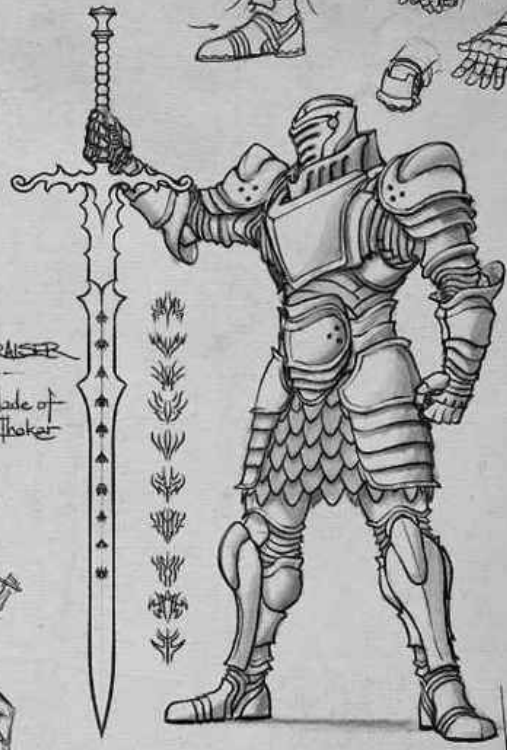
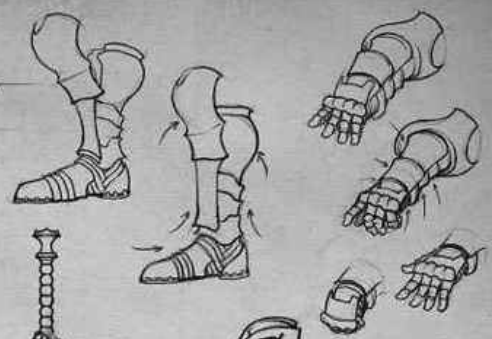
“As well it should be.” The ardent turned another page lighteyed

womanfSTreage. “You have my blessing, dear child. Tell me, which devotary do you call your own?”

“That is . . . a subject of some consternation on my part,” Shallan said, taking the portfolio back. “Oh! Adolin. I didn’t notice you there. My, but you



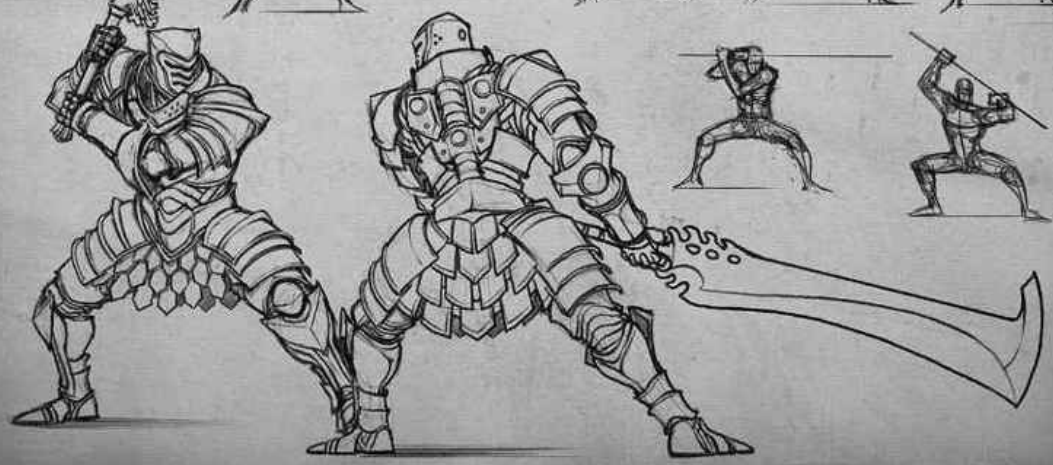
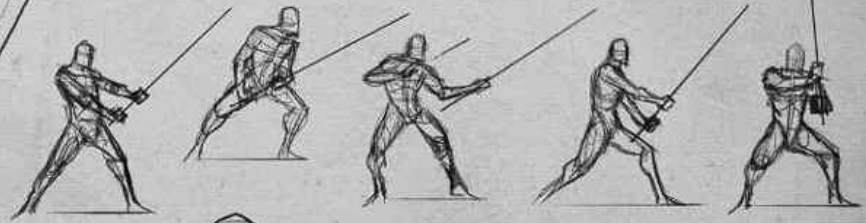
FIRESTORM
The Blade of King Gaspar



SUNRAISER
The Blade of King Elhoker



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THREE AND A HALF YEARS AGO

Shallan poked at the cage, and the colorful creature inside shifted on its perch, cocking its head at her.

It was the most bizarre thing she'd ever seen. It stood on two feet like a person, though its feet were clawed. It was only about as tall as two fists atop one another, but the way it turned its head as it looked at her showed unmistakable personality.

The thing only had a little bit of shell—on the nose and mouth—but the strangest part was its hair. It had bright green hair that covered its entire body. The hair lay flat, as if manicured. As she watched, the creature turned and began to pick at the hair—a large flap of it lifted up, and she could see it grew out of a central spine.

“What does the young lady think of my chicken?” the merchant said proudly, standing with hands clasped behind his back, ample stomach thrust forward like the prow of a ship. Behind, people moved through the fair in a throng. There were so many. Five hundred, perhaps even more, people in the same place.

“Chicken,” Shallan said, poking at the cage with a timid finger. “I’ve eaten chicken before.”

“Not this breed!” the Thaylen man said with a laugh. “Chickens for eating are stupid—this one is smart, almost as smart as a man! It can speak. Listen. Jeksonofnone! Say your name!”

“Jeksonofnone,” the creature said.

Shallan jumped back. The word was mangled in a high storm. “Inf, tradesman Tvlakvkin by the creature’s inhuman voice, but it was recognizable. “A Voidbringer!” she hissed, safehand to her chest. “An animal that speaks! You’ll bring the eyes of the Unmade upon us.”

The merchant laughed. “These things live all over Shinovar, young lady. If their speech drew the Unmade, the entire country would be cursed!”

“Shallan!” Father stood with his bodyguards where he had been speaking to another merchant across the way. She hurried toward him, looking over her shoulder at the strange animal. Deviant though the thing was, if it could talk, she felt sorry for its being trapped in that cage.

The Middlefest Fair was a highlight of the year. Set during the midpeace—a period opposite the Weeping when there were no storms—it drew people from hamlets and villages all around. Many of the people here were from lands her father oversaw, including lesser lighteyes from families who had ruled the same villages for centuries.

The darkeyes came too, of course, including merchants—citizens of the first and second nahns. Her father didn’t speak of it often, but she knew he found their wealth and station inappropriate. The Almighty had chosen the lighteyes to rule, not these merchants.

“Come along,” Father said to her.

Shallan followed him and his bodyguards through the busy fair, which was laid out on her father’s estates about a half day’s travel from the mansion. The basin was fairly well sheltered, the slopes nearby covered in jella trees.

Their strong branches grew spindly leaves—long spikes of pink, yellow, and orange, and so the trees looked like explosions of color. Shallan had read in one of her father’s books that the trees drew in crem, then used it to make their wood hard, like rock.

In the basin itself, most of the trees had been broken down, though some were instead used to hold up canopies dozens of yards wide, tied in place high above. They passed a merchant cursing as a windspren darted through his enclosure, making objects stick together. Shallan smiled, pulling her satchel out from under her arm. There wasn’t time to sketch, however, as her father barreled on toward the dueling grounds where—if this was like previous years—she would spend most of the fair.

“Shallan,” he said, causing her to scurry to catch up. At fourteen, she felt horribly gangly and far too boyish in figure. As womanhood had begun to come upon her, she had learned that she should be embarrassed by her red hair and freckled skin, as they were a mark of an impure heritage. They were traditional Veden colorings, but that was because—in their past—their lines had mixed with the Horneaters up in the peaks.

Some people were proud of the coloring. Not her father, so neither was Shallan.

“You are coming to an age where you must act more like a lady,” Father said. The darkeyes gave them plenty of room, bowing as her father passed. Two of Father’s ardents trailed after them, hands behind their backs, contemplative. “You will need to stop gawking so often. It will not be long before we will want to find a husband for you.”

“Yes, Father,” she said.

“I may need to stop bringing you to events like these,” he said. “All you do is run around and act like a child. You need a new tutor, at the very least.”

He’d scared off the last tutor. The woman had been an expert in languages, and Shallan had been picking up Azish quite well—but she’d left soon after one of Father up sharply. f scholarre’s . . . episodes. Shallan’s stepmother had appeared the next day with bruises on her face. Brightness Hasheh, the tutor,

had packed her things and fled without giving notice.

Shallan nodded to her father's words, but secretly hoped that she'd be able to sneak away and find her brothers. Today she had work to do. She and her father approached the "dueling arena," which was a grandiose term for a section of roped-off ground where parshmen had dumped half a beach's worth of sand. Canopied tables had been erected for the lighteyes to sit at, dine, and converse.

Shallan's stepmother, Malise, was a young woman less than ten years older than Shallan herself. Short of stature with buttonlike features, she sat straight-backed, her black hair brightened by a few streaks of blond. Father settled in beside her in their box; he was one of four men of his rank, fourth dahn, who would be attending the fair. The duelists would be the lesser lighteyes from the surrounding region. Many of them would be landless, and duels would be one of their only ways to gain notoriety.

Shallan sat in the seat reserved for her, and a servant handed her chilled water in a glass. She had barely taken a single sip before someone approached the box.

Brightlord Revilar might have been handsome, if his nose hadn't been removed in a youthful duel. He wore a wooden replacement, painted black—a strange mixture of covering up the blemish and drawing attention to it at the same time. Silver-haired, well-dressed in a suit of a modern design, he had the distracted look of someone who had left his hearth burning untended back at home. His lands bordered Father's; they were two of the ten men of similar rank who served under the highprince.

Revilar approached with not one, but two master-servants at his side. Their black-and-white uniforms were a distinction that ordinary servants were denied, and Father eyed them hungrily. He'd tried to hire master-servants. Each had cited his "reputation" and had refused.

"Brightlord Davar," Revilar said. He did not wait for permission before climbing up the steps into the box. Father and he were the same rank, but everyone knew the allegations against Father—and that the highprince saw them as credible.

“Revilar,” Father said, eyes forward.

“May I sit?” He took a seat beside Father—the one that Helaran, as heir, would have used if he’d been there. Revilar’s two servants took up places behind him. They somehow managed to convey a sense of disapproval of Father without saying anything.

“Is your son going to duel today?” Father asked.

“Actually, yes.”

“Hopefully he can keep all of his parts. We wouldn’t want your experience to become a tradition.”

“Now, now, Lin,” Revilar said. “That is no way to speak to a business associate.”

“Business associate? We have dealings of which I am not aware?”

One of Revilar’s servants, the woman, set a small sheaf of pages on the table before Father. Shallan’s stepmother took them hesitantly, then began to read them out loud. The terms were for an exchange of goods, Father trading some of his breechtree cotton and raw shum to Revilar in exchange for a small payment. Revilar would then take the goods to market for sale.

Father stopped the reading three-quarters of the way through. “Are you delusional? One clearmark a bag? A tenth of what that in a highstorm.”mpressions.4shum is worth! Considering patrols of roadways and maintenance fees paid back to the villages where the materials are harvested, I would lose spheres on this deal.”

“Oh, it is not so bad,” Revilar said. “I think you will find the arrangement quite agreeable.”

“You’re insane.”

“I’m popular.”

Father frowned, growing red-faced. Shallan could remember a time when

she'd rarely, if ever, seen him angry. Those days were long, long dead. "Popular?" Father demanded. "What does—"

"You may or may not know," Revilar said, "that the highprince himself recently visited my estates. It seems he likes what I have been doing for this principedom's textiles. That, added to my son's dueling prowess, has drawn attention to my house. I have been invited to visit the highprince in Vedenar one week out of ten, starting next month."

At times, Father was not the cleverest of men, but he did have a mind for politics. So Shallan thought, at least, though she did so want to believe the best about him. Either way, he saw this implication immediately.

"You rat," Father whispered.

"You have very few options open to you, Lin," Revilar said, leaning toward him. "Your house is on the decline, your reputation in shambles. You need allies. I need to look the part of a financial genius to the highprince. We can assist one another."

Father bowed his head. Outside the box, the first duelists were announced, an inconsequential bout.

"Everywhere I step, I find only corners," Father whispered. "Slowly, they trap me."

Revilar pushed the papers toward Shallan's stepmother once more. "Would you start again? I suspect your husband was not listening carefully the last time." He glanced at Shallan. "And does the child need to be here?"

Shallan left without a word. It was what she'd wanted anyway, though she did feel bad leaving Father. He didn't often speak with her, let alone ask for her opinion, but he did seem to be stronger when she was near.

He was so disconcerted that he didn't even send one of the guards with her. She slipped out of the box, satchel under her arm, and passed through the Davar servants who were preparing her father's meal.

Freedom.

Freedom was as valuable as an emerald broom to Shallan, and as rare as a larkin. She hurried away, lest her father realize he had given no orders for her to be accompanied. One of the guards at the perimeter—Jix—stepped toward her anyway, but then looked back at the box. He went that way instead, perhaps intending to ask if he should follow.

Best to not be easily found when he returned. Shallan took a step toward the fair, with its exotic merchants and wonderful sights. There would be guessing games and perhaps a Worldsinger telling tales of distant kingdoms. Over the polite clapping of the lighteyes watching the duel behind her, she could hear drums from the common darkeyes along with singing and merriment.

Work first. Darkness lay over her house like a storm's shadow. She would find the sun. She would.

That meant turning back to the dueling grounds, for now. She rounded the back," Shallan said softly, raised the boxes, weaving between parshmen who bowed and darkeyes who gave her nods or bows, depending on their rank. She eventually found a box where several lesser lighteyed families shared space in the shade.

Eylita, daughter of Brightlord Tavinar, sat on the end, just within the sunlight shining through the side of the box. She stared at the duelists with a vapid expression, head slightly cocked, a whimsical smile on her face. Her long hair was a pure black.

Shallan stepped up beside the box and hissed at her. The older girl turned, frowning, then raised hands to her lips. She glanced at her parents, then leaned down. "Shallan!"

"I told you to expect me," Shallan whispered back. "Did you think about what I wrote you?"

Eylita reached into the pocket of her dress, then slipped out a small note. She grinned mischievously and nodded.

Shallan took the note. “You’ll be able to get away?”

“I’ll need to take my handmaid, but otherwise I can go where I want.”

What would that be like?

Shallan ducked away quickly. Technically, she outranked Eylita’s parents, but age was a funny thing among the lighteyes. Sometimes, the higher-ranked child didn’t seem nearly as important when speaking to adults of a lower dahn. Besides, Brightlord and Brightness Tavinar had been there on that day, when the bastard had come. They were not fond of Father, or his children.

Shallan backed away from the boxes, then turned toward the fair itself. Here, she paused nervously. The Middlefest Fair was an intimidating collage of people and places. Nearby, a group of tenners drank at long tables and placed bets on the matches. The lowest rank of lighteyes, they were barely above darkeyes. They not only had to work for their living, they weren’t even merchants or master craftsmen. They were just . . . people. Helaran had said there were many of them in the cities. As many as there were darkeyes. That seemed very odd to her.

Odd and fascinating at the same time. She itched to find a corner to watch where she would not be noticed, her sketchpad out and her imagination boiling. Instead, she forced herself to move around the edge of the fair. The tent that her brothers had spoken of would be on the outer perimeter, wouldn’t it?

Darkeyed fairgoers gave her a wide berth, and she found herself afraid. Her father spoke of how a young lighteyed girl could be a target for the brutish people of the lower classes. Surely nobody would harm her here in the open, with so many people about. Still, she clutched her satchel to her chest and found herself trembling as she walked.

What would it be like, to be brave like Helaran? As her mother had been.

Her mother . . .

“Brightness?”

Shallan shook herself. How long had she been standing there, on the path? The sun had moved. She turned sheepishly to find Jix the guard standing behind her. Though he had a gut and rarely kept his hair combed, Jix was strong—she had once seen him pull a cart out of the way when the chull’s hitch broke. He’d been one of her father’s guards for as long as she could remember.

“Ah,” she said, trying to cover her nervousness, “you’re here to accompany me?”

“Well, I was gonna bring you back. . . .”

“Did my,” Shallan said softly, raising her father’s order to you?”

Jix chewed on the yamma root, called cussweed by some, in his cheek. “He was busy.”

“Then you will accompany me?” She shook from the nervousness of saying it.

“I suppose.”

She breathed out a sigh of relief and turned around on the pathway, stone where rockbuds and shalebark had been scraped away. She turned one way, then the other. “Um . . . We need to find the gambling pavilion.”

“That’s not a place for a lady.” Jix eyed her. “Particularly not one of your age, Brightness.”

“Well, I suppose you can go tell my father what I’m doing.” She shuffled from one foot to the other.

“And in the meantime,” Jix said, “you’ll try to find it on your own, won’t you? Go in by yourself if you find it?”

She shrugged, blushing. That was exactly what she’d do.

“Which means I’d have left you wandering around in a place like that without protection.” He groaned softly. “Why do you defy him like this, Brightness?”

You're just going to make him angry."

"I think . . . I think he will anger no matter what I or anyone does," she said. "The sun will shine. The highstorms will blow. And Father will yell. That's just how life is." She bit her lip. "The gambling pavilion? I promise that I will be brief."

"This way," Jix said. He didn't walk particularly quickly as he led her, and he frequently glared at darkeyed fairgoers who passed. Jix was lighteyed, but only of the eighth dahn.

"Pavilion" turned out to be too grand a term for the patched and ripped tarp strung up at the edge of the fairgrounds. She'd have found it on her own soon enough. The thick canvas, with sides that hung down a few feet, made it surprisingly dark inside.

Men crowded together in there. The few women that Shallan saw had the fingers cut out of the gloves on their safehands. Scandalous. She found herself blushing as she stopped at the perimeter, looking in at the dark, shifting forms. Men shouted inside with raw voices, any sense of Vorin decorum left out in the sunlight. This was, indeed, not a place for someone like her. She had trouble believing it was a place for anyone.

"How about I go in for you," Jix said. "Is it a bet you're wanting to—"

Shallan pushed forward. Ignoring her own panic, her discomfort, she moved into the darkness. Because if she did not, then it meant that none of them were resisting, that nothing would change.

Jix stayed at her side, shoving her some space. She had trouble breathing inside; the air was dank with sweat and curses. Men turned and glanced at her. Bows—even nods—were slow in coming, if they were offered at all. The implication was clear. If she wouldn't obey social conventions by staying out, they didn't have to obey them by showing her deference.

"Is there something specific you're searching for?" Jix asked. "Cards? Guessing games?"

“Axehound fights.”

Jix groaned. “You’re gonna end up stabbed, and I’m gonna end up on a roasting spit. This is crazy. . . .”

She turned, not knowing how to react. Hearing a group of men cheering. That sounded promising. She ignored the increasing trembling in her hands, and also tried to ignore a group of drunk men sitting in a ring on the ground, staring at what appeared to be vomit.

The cheering men sat on crude benches with others crowded around. A glimpse between bodies showed two small axehounds. There were no spectators. When people crowded about like this, spectators were rare, even though the emotions seemed to be very high.

One set of benches was not crowded. Balat sat here, coat unbuttoned, leaning on a post in front of him with arms crossed. His disheveled hair and stooped posture gave him an uncaring look, but his eyes . . . his eyes lusted. He watched the poor animals killing one another, fixated on them with the intensity of a woman reading a powerful novel.

Shallan stepped up to him, Jix remaining a little ways behind. Now that he’d seen Balat, the guard relaxed.

“Balat?” Shallan asked timidly. “Balat!”

He glanced at her, then nearly toppled off his bench. He scrambled up to his feet. “What in the . . . Shallan! Get out of here. What are you doing?” He reached for her.

She cringed down despite herself. He sounded like Father. As he took her by the shoulder, she held up the note from Eylita. The lavender paper, dusted with perfume, seemed to glow.

Balat hesitated. To the side, one axehound bit deeply into the leg of the other. Blood sprayed the ground, deep violet.

“What is it?” Balat asked. “That is the glyphpair of House Tavinar.”

“It’s from Eylita.”

“Eylita? The daughter? Why . . . what . . .”

Shallan broke the seal, opening the letter to read for him. “She wishes to walk with you along the fairgrounds stream. She says she’ll be waiting there, with her handmaid, if you want to come.”

Balat ran a hand through his curling hair. “Eylita? She’s here. Of course she’s here. Everyone is here. You talked to her? Why— But—”

“I know how you’ve looked at her,” Shallan said. “The few times you’ve been near.”

“So you talked to her?” Balat demanded. “Without my permission? You said I’d be interested in something like”—he took the letter—“like this?”

Shallan nodded, wrapping her arms around herself.

Balat looked back toward the fighting axehounds. He bet because it was expected of him, but he didn’t come here for the money—unlike Jushu would.

Balat ran his hand through his hair again, then looked back at the letter. He wasn’t a cruel man. She knew it was a strange thing to think, considering what he sometimes did. Shallan knew the kindness he showed, the strength that hid within him. He hadn’t acquired this fascination with death until Mother had left them. He could come back, stop being like that. He could.

“I need . . .” Balat looked out of the tent. “I need to go! She’ll be waiting for me. I shouldn’t make her wait.” He buttoned up his coat.

Shallan nodded eagerly, following him from the pavilion. Jix trailed along behind, though a couple of men called out to him. He must be known in the pavilion.

Balat up sharply. f scholarre stepped out into the sunlight. He seemed a changed man, just like that.

“Balat?” Shallan asked. “I didn’t see Jushu in there with you.”

“He didn’t come to the pavilion.”

“What? I thought—”

“I don’t know where he went,” Balat said. “He met some people right after we arrived.” He looked toward the distant stream that ran down from the heights and through a channel around the fairgrounds. “What do I say to her?”

“How should I know?”

“You’re a woman too.”

“I’m fourteen!” She wouldn’t spend time courting, anyway. Father would choose her a husband. His only daughter was too precious to be wasted on something fickle, like her own powers of decision.

“I guess . . . I guess I’ll just talk to her,” Balat said. He jogged off without another word.

Shallan watched him go, then sat down on a rock and trembled, arms around herself. That place . . . the tent . . . it had been horrible.

She sat there for an extended time, feeling ashamed of her weakness, but also proud. She’d done it. It was small, but she’d done something.

Eventually, she rose and nodded to Jix, letting him lead the way back toward their box. Father should be finished with his meeting by now.

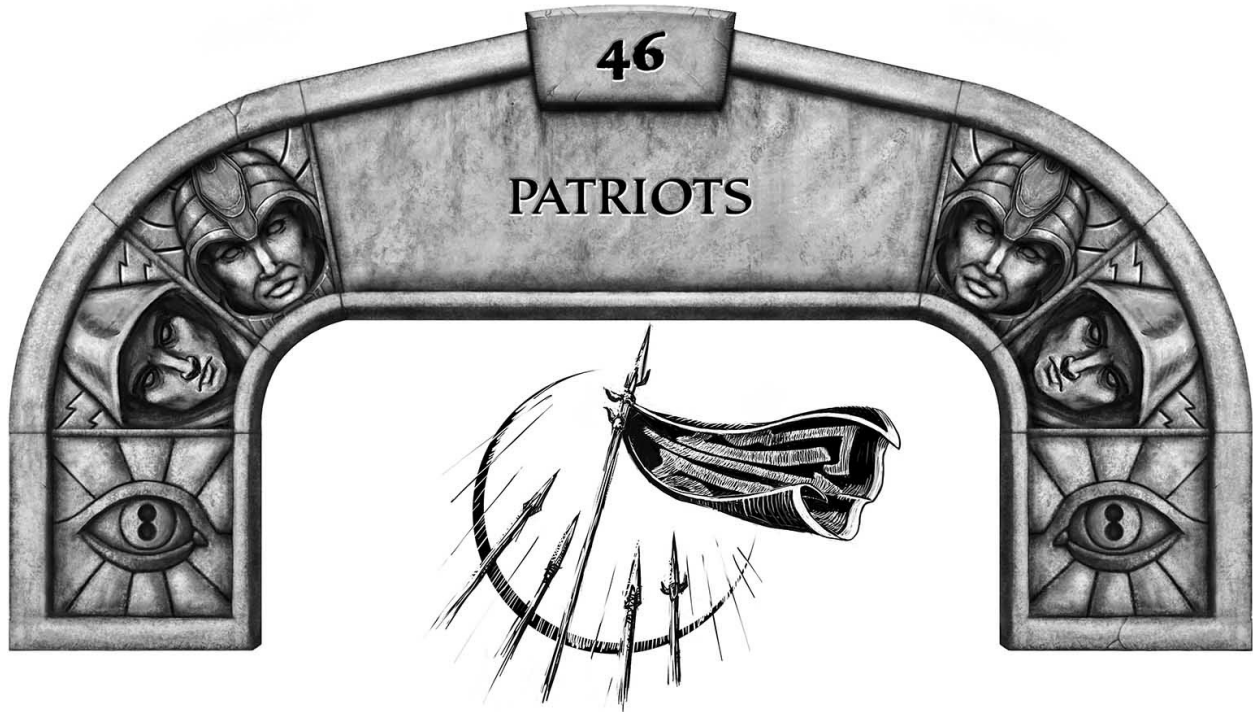
It turned out that he had finished that meeting only to start another. A man she did not know sat next to Father with a cup of chilled water in one hand. Tall, slender, and blue-eyed, he had deep black hair without a hint of impurity and wore clothing the same shade. He glanced at Shallan as she stepped up into the box.

The man started, dropping his cup to the table. He caught it with a swift lunge, keeping it from tipping over, then turned to stare at her with a slack

jaw.

It was gone in a second, replaced with an expression of practiced indifference.

“C



When Simol was informed of the arrival of the Edgedancers, a concealed consternation and terror, as is common in such cases, fell upon him; although they were not the most demanding of orders, their graceful, limber movements hid a deadliness that was, by this time, quite renowned; also, they were the most articulate and refined of the Radiants.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 20, page 12

Kaladin reached the end of the line of bridgemen. They stood at attention, spears to shoulders, eyes forward. The transformation was marvelous. He nodded under the darkening sky.

“Impressive,” he said to Pitt, the sergeant of Bridge Seventeen. “I’ve rarely seen such a fine platoon of spearmen.”

It was the kind of lie that commanders learned to give. Kaladin didn’t mention how some of the bridgemen shuffled while they stood, or how their maneuvers in formation were sloppy. They were trying. He could sense it in their earnest expressions, and in the way they had begun taking pride in their uniforms, their identity. They were ready to patrol, at least close to the warcamps. He made a mental note to have Teft start taking them out in a

rotation with the other two crews that were ready.

Kaladin was proud of them, and he let them know it as the hour stretched long and night arrived. He then dismissed them to their evening meal, which smelled quite different from Rock's Horneater stew. Bridge Seventeen considered their nightly bean curry to be part of their identity. Individuality through meal choice; Kaladin found that amusing as he moved off into the night, shouldering his spear. He had three more crews to look in on.

The next, Bridge Eighteen, was one of those having problems. Their sergeant, though earnest, didn't have the presence necessary for a good officer. Or, well, none of the bridgemen had that. He was just particularly weak. Prone to begging instead of ordering, awkward in social situations.

It couldn't all be blamed on Vet, however. He'd also been given a particularly discordant group of men. Kaladin found the soldiers of Eighteen sitting in isolated bunches, eating their evening meal. No laughter, no camaraderie. They weren't as solitary as they'd been as bridgemen. Instead, they'd splintered into little cliques who didn't mingle.

Sergeant Vet called them to order and they rose sluggishly, not bothering to stand in a straight line or salute. Kaladin saw the truth in their eyes. What could he do to them? Surely nothing as bad as their lives had been as bridgemen. So why make an effort?

Kaladin spoke to them of motivation and unity for a time. I'll need to do another training session in the chasms with this lot, he thought. And if that didn't work either . . . well, he'd probably have to break them up, stick them in other platoons that were working.

He eventually left EthemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito p speakppkatighteen, shaking his head. They didn't seem to want to be soldiers. Why had they taken Dalinar's offer then, instead of leaving?

Because they don't want to make choices anymore, he thought. Choices can be hard.

He knew how that felt. Storms, but he did. He remembered sitting and staring

at a blank wall, too morose to even get up and go kill himself.

He shivered. Those were not days he wanted to remember.

As he made his way toward Bridge Nineteen, Syl floated past on a current of wind in the form of a small patch of mist. She melded into a ribbon of light and zipped around him in circles before coming to rest on his shoulder.

“Everyone else is eating their dinners,” Syl said.

“Good,” Kaladin said.

“That wasn’t a status report, Kaladin,” she said. “It was a point of contention.”

“Contention?” He stopped in the darkness near the barrack of Bridge Nineteen, whose men were doing well, eating around their fire as a group.

“You’re working,” Syl said. “Still.”

“I need to get these men ready.” He turned his head to look at her. “You know something is coming. Those countdowns on the walls . . . Have you seen more of those red spren?”

“Yes,” she admitted. “I think so, at least. In the corners of my eyes, watching me. Very infrequently, but there.”

“Something is coming,” Kaladin said. “That countdown points right toward the Weeping. Whatever happens then, I’ll have the bridgemen ready to weather it.”

“Well, you won’t if you drop dead from exhaustion first!” Syl hesitated. “People really can do that, right? I heard Teft saying he felt like he was going to do so.”

“Teft likes to exaggerate,” Kaladin said. “It’s one mark of a good sergeant.”

Syl frowned. “And that last part . . . was a joke?”

“Yes.”

“Ah.” She looked into his eyes. “Rest anyway, Kaladin. Please.”

Kaladin looked toward Bridge Four’s barrack. It was a distance away, down the rows, but he thought he could hear Rock’s laughter echoing through the night.

Finally, he sighed, acknowledging his exhaustion. He could check on the last two platoons tomorrow. Spear in hand, he turned and hiked back. The advent of darkness meant it would be about two hours before men started turning in for the night. Kaladin arrived to the familiar scent of Rock’s stew, though Hobber—sitting on a tall stump the men had fashioned for him, a blanket across his grey, useless legs—was doing the serving. Rock stood nearby, arms folded, looking proud.

Renarin was there, taking and washing the dishes of those who’d finished. He did that every night, kneeling quietly beside the washbasin in his bridgeman uniform. The lad certainly was earnest. He didn’t display any of the spoiled temperament of his brother. Though he had insisted on joining them, he often sat at the edges of the group, near the back of the bridgemen at night. Such an odd young man.

Kaladin passed Hobber and gripped the man’s shoulder. He nodded, meeting Hobber’s eyes up sharply. f concernre, raising a fist. Fight on. Kaladin reached for some stew, then froze.

Sitting nearby on a log were not one, but three beefy, thick-armed Herdazians. All wore Bridge Four uniforms, and Kaladin only recognized Punio out of the three.

Kaladin found Lopen nearby, staring at his hand—which he held before himself in a fist for some reason. Kaladin had long since given up on understanding Lopen.

“Three?” Kaladin demanded.

“Cousins!” Lopen replied, looking up.

“You have too many of those,” Kaladin said.

“That’s impossible! Rod, Huio, say hello!”

“Bridge Four,” the two men said, raising their bowls.

Kaladin shook his head, accepting his own stew and then walking past the cauldron into the darker area beside the barrack. He peeked into the storage room, and found Shen stacking sacks of tallew grain there, lit only by a single diamond chip.

“Shen?” Kaladin said.

The parshman continued stacking bags.

“Fall in and attention!” Kaladin barked.

Shen froze, then stood up, back straight, at attention.

“At ease, soldier,” Kaladin said softly, stepping up to him. “I spoke to Dalinar Kholin earlier today and asked if I could arm you. He asked if I trusted you. I told him the truth.” Kaladin held out his spear to the parshman. “I do.”

Shen looked from the spear to Kaladin, dark eyes hesitant.

“Bridge Four doesn’t have slaves,” Kaladin said. “I’m sorry for being frightened before.” He urged the man to take the spear, and Shen finally did so. “Leyten and Natam practice in the mornings with a few men. They’re willing to help you learn so that you don’t have to train with the greenvines.”

Shen held the spear with what seemed to be reverence. Kaladin turned to leave the storage room.

“Sir,” Shen said.

Kaladin paused.

“You are,” Shen said, speaking in his slow way, “a good man.”

“I’ve spent my life being judged for my eyes, Shen. I won’t do something similar to you because of your skin.”

“Sir, I—” The parshman seemed troubled by something.

“Kaladin!” Moash’s voice came from outside.

“Was there something you wanted to say?” Kaladin asked Shen.

“Later,” the parshman said. “Later.”

Kaladin nodded, then stepped out to see what the disturbance was. He found Moash looking for him near the cauldron.

“Kaladin!” Moash said, spotting him. “Come on. We’re going out, and you’re coming with us. Even Rock is coming tonight.”

“Ha! Stew is in good hands,” Rock said. “I will go do this thing. Will be good to get away from stink of little bridgemen.”

“Hey!” Drehy said.

“Ah. And stink of big bridgemen too.”

“Come on,” Moash said, waving to Kaladin. “lighteyed womanf concernre You promised.”

He’d done no such thing. He just wanted to settle down by the fire, eat his stew, and watch the flamespren. Everyone was looking at him, though. Even the ones who weren’t going with Moash tonight.

“I . . .” Kaladin said. “Fine. Let’s go.”

They cheered and clapped. Storming fools. They cheered to see their commander go out drinking? Kaladin slurped down a few bites of stew, then handed the rest to Hobber. With reluctance, he then walked over to join Moash, as did Lopen, Peet, and Sigzil.

“You know,” Kaladin growled under his breath to Syl, “if this had been one

of my old spearman crews, I'd assume they wanted me out of the camp so they could get away with something while I'm gone."

"I doubt it's that," Syl said, frowning.

"No," Kaladin said. "These men just want to see me as human." He did need to go, for that reason. He was already too separate from the men. He didn't want them thinking of him as they would a lighteyes.

"Ha!" Rock said, jogging up to join them. "These men, they claim they can drink more than Horneater. Airsick lowlanders. Is not possible."

"A drinking contest?" Kaladin said, groaning inwardly. What was he getting into?

"None of us are on duty until the late morning," Sigzil said with a shrug. Teft was watching the Kholins overnight, along with Leyten's team.

"Tonight," Lopen said, finger to the air, "I will be victorious. It is said you should never bet against the one-armed Herdazian in a drinking contest!"

"It is?" Moash asked.

"It will be said," Lopen continued, "you should never bet against the one-armed Herdazian in a drinking contest!"

"You weigh about as much as a starved axehound, Lopen," Moash said skeptically.

"Ah, but I have focus."

They continued, turning down a pathway that led toward the market. The warcamp was laid out with blocks of barracks forming a large circle around the lighteyed buildings closer to the center. On the way out toward the market, which was in the outer ring of camp followers beyond the soldiers, they passed plenty of other barracks manned by ordinary soldiers—and the men there were busy in tasks that Kaladin had rarely seen in Sadeas's army. Sharpening spears, oiling breastplates, before their dinner call came.

Kaladin's men weren't the only ones going out for the night, though. Other groups of soldiers had already eaten, and these strolled toward the market, laughing. They were recovering, slowly, from the slaughter that had left Dalinar's army crippled.

The market was aglow with life, torches and oil lanterns shining from most buildings. Kaladin wasn't surprised. An ordinary army would have had camp followers aplenty, and that was for a moving army. Here, merchants showed off wares. Criers sold news they claimed had come via spanreed, reporting events in the world. What was that about a war in Jah Keved? And a new emperor in Azir? Kaladin had only a vague idea of where that was.

Sigzil jogged over to get an earful of news, paying the crier a sphere while Lopen and Rock argued which tavern was the best up sharply. f concernre to visit for the night. Kaladin watched the flow of life. Soldiers passing on the night watch. A group of chatting darkeyed women moving from spice merchant to spice merchant. A lighteyed courier posting projected highstorm dates and times on a board, her husband yawning nearby and looking bored—as if he'd been forced to come along to keep her company. The Weeping was coming up soon, the time of constant rain with no highstorms—the only break was Lightday, right in the middle. It was an off year in the thousand-day cycle of two years, which meant the Weeping would be a calm one this time.

“Enough arguing,” Moash said to Rock, Lopen, and Peet. “We're going to the Ornery Chull.”

“Aw!” Rock said. “But they do not have Horneater lagers!”

“That's because Horneater lagers melt your teeth,” Moash said. “Anyway, it's my pick tonight.” Peet nodded eagerly. That tavern had been his choice as well.

Sigzil got back from hearing the news, and he'd apparently stopped somewhere else as well, as he carried something steaming and wrapped in paper.

“Not you too,” Kaladin said, groaning.

“It’s good,” Sigzil said defensively, then took a bite of the chouta.

“You don’t even know what it is.”

“Of course I do.” Sigzil hesitated. “Hey, Lopen. What’s in this stuff?”

“Flangria,” Lopen said happily as Rock ran off to the street vendor to get himself some chouta too.

“Which is?” Kaladin asked.

“Meat.”

“What kind of meat?”

“The meaty kind.”

“Soulcast,” Kaladin said, looking at Sigzil.

“You ate Soulcast food every night as a bridgeman,” Sigzil said, shrugging and taking a bite.

“Because I had no choice. Look. He’s frying that bread.”

“You fry the flangria too,” Lopen said. “Make little balls of it, mixed with ground lavis. Batter it up and fry it, then stuff it in fried bread and pour on gravy.” He made a satisfied sound, licking his lips.

“It’s cheaper than water,” Peet noted as Rock jogged back.

“That’s probably because even the grain is Soulcast,” Kaladin said. “It will all taste like mold. Rock, I’m disappointed in you.”

The Horneater looked sheepish, but took a bite. His chouta crunched.

“Shells?” Kaladin asked.

“Cremling claws.” Rock grinned. “Deep-fried.”

Kaladin sighed, but they finally struck out again through the crowd, eventually reaching a wooden building built on the leeward side of a larger stone structure. Everything here was, of course, arranged so that as many doorways as possible could point away from the Origin, streets designed so that they could run east to west and provide a way for winds to blow.

Warm, orange light spilled from the tavern. Firelight. No tavern would use spheres for light. Even with locks on the lanterns, the rich glow of spheres might be just a little too tempting,” Shallan said softly, raiss made for the intoxicated patrons. Shouldering their way inside, the bridgemen were confronted by a low roar of chatter, yelling, and singing.

“We’ll never find seats,” Kaladin said over the din. Even with the reduced population of Dalinar’s warcamp, this place was packed.

“Of course we will find seat,” Rock said, grinning. “We have secret weapon.” He pointed to where Peet, oval-faced and quiet, was working his way through the room toward the front bar. A pretty darkeyed woman stood polishing a glass there, and she smiled brightly when she saw Peet.

“So,” Sigzil said to Kaladin, “have you given thought to where you’re going to house the married men of Bridge Four?”

Married men? Looking at Peet’s expression as he leaned across the bar, chatting with the woman, it seemed that might not be far off. Kaladin hadn’t given any thought to it. He should have. He knew that Rock was married—the Horneater had already sent letters to his family, though the Peaks were so far away, news had not yet returned. Teft had been married, but his wife was dead, as was much of his family.

Some of the others might have families. When they’d been bridgemen, they hadn’t spoken much of their pasts, but Kaladin had teased out hints here and there. They would slowly reclaim normal lives, and families would be part of that, particularly here with the stable warcamp.

“Storms!” Kaladin said, raising a hand to his head. “I’ll have to ask for more space.”

“There are many barracks partitioned to allow families,” Sigzil noted. “And some of the married soldiers rent places in the market. Men could move to one of those choices.”

“This thing would break up Bridge Four!” Rock said. “It cannot be allowed.”

Well, married men tended to make better soldiers. He’d have to find a way to make it work. There were a lot of empty barracks around in Dalinar’s camp now. Maybe he should ask for a few more.

Kaladin nodded toward the woman at the bar. “She doesn’t own the place, I assume.”

“No, Ka is just barmaid,” Rock said. “Peet is quite taken with her.”

“We’ll need to see if she can read,” Kaladin said, stepping aside as a semi-drunk patron pushed out into the night. “Storms, but it would be good to have someone around to do that.” In a normal army, Kaladin would be lighteyed, and his wife or sister would act as the battalion’s scribe and clerk.

Peet waved them over, and Ka led them through to a table set off to the side. Kaladin settled himself with his back to the wall, near enough to a window that he could look out if he wanted, but where he wouldn’t be silhouetted. He spared some pity for Rock’s chair as the Horneater settled down. Rock was the only one in the crew who had a few inches’ height on Kaladin, and he was practically twice as broad.

“Horneater lager?” Rock asked hopefully, looking at Ka.

“It melts our cups,” she said. “Ale?”

“Ale,” Rock said with a sigh. “This thing should be a drink for women, not for large Horneater men. At least he is not wine.”

Kaladin told her to bring whatever, barely paying attention. This place was not lighteyed womanf concernreinviting, really. It was loud, obnoxious, smoky, and smelly. It was also alive. Laughing. Boasts and calls, mugs clanking. This . . . this was what some people lived for. A day of honest

labor, followed by an evening at the tavern with friends.

That was not so bad a life.

“It’s loud tonight,” Sigzil noticed.

“Is always loud,” Rock replied. “But tonight, maybe more.”

“The army won a plateau run along with Bethab’s army,” Peet said.

Good for them. Dalinar hadn’t gone, but Adolin had, along with three men from Bridge Four. They hadn’t been required to go into battle, though—and any plateau run that didn’t endanger Kaladin’s men was a good one.

“So many people is nice,” Rock said. “Makes tavern warmer. Is too cold outside.”

“Too cold?” Moash said. “You’re from the storming Horneater Peaks!”

“And?” Rock asked, frowning.

“And those are mountains. It’s got to be colder up there than anything down here.”

Rock actually sputtered, an amusing mixture of indignation and incredulity, bringing a red cast to his light Horneater skin. “Too much air! Hard for you to think. Cold? Horneater Peaks is warm! Wonderfully warm.”

“Really?” Kaladin asked, skeptical. This could be one of Rock’s jokes. Sometimes, those didn’t make much sense to anyone but Rock himself.

“It’s true,” Sigzil said. “The peaks have hot springs to warm them.”

“Ah, but these are not springs,” Rock said, wagging a finger at Sigzil. “This is lowlander word. The Horneater oceans are waters of life.”

“Oceans?” Peet asked, frowning.

“Very small oceans,” Rock said. “One for every peak.”

“The top of each mountain forms a kind of crater,” Sigzil explained, “which is filled with a large lake of warm water. The heat is enough to create a pocket of livable land, despite the altitude. Walk too far from one of the Horneater towns, though, and you’ll end up in freezing temperatures and ice fields left by the highstorms.”

“You are telling story wrong,” Rock said.

“These are facts, not a story.”

“Everything is story,” Rock said. “Listen. Long ago, the Unkalaki—my people, ones you call Horneaters—did not live in peaks. They lived down where air was thick and thinking was difficult. But we were hated.”

“Who would hate Horneaters?” Peet said.

“Everyone,” Rock replied as Ka brought the drinks. More special attention. Most everyone else was having to go to the bar to pick up drinks. Rock smiled at her and grabbed his large mug. “Is first drink. Lopen, you are trying to beat me?”

“I’m at it, mancha,” Lopen said, raising his own mug, which was not quite so large.

The large Horneater took a pull on his drink, which left froth on his lip.

“Everyone wanted to kill Horneaters,” he said, thumping his fist on the table. “They were frightened of us. Storie in a highstorm.” curiosity.4s say we were too good at fighting. So we were hunted and nearly destroyed.”

“If you were so good at fighting,” Moash said, pointing, “then how come you were nearly destroyed?”

“There are few of us,” Rock said, hand proudly to his chest. “And very many of you. You are all over down here in lowlands. Man cannot step without finding toes of Alethi beneath his boot. So the Unkalaki, we were nearly destroyed. But our tana’kai—is like a king, but more—went to the gods to plead for help.”

“Gods,” Kaladin said. “You mean spren.” He sought out Syl, who had chosen a perch on a rafter up above, watching a couple of little insects climb on a post.

“These are gods,” Rock said, following Kaladin’s gaze. “Yes. Some gods, though, they are more powerful than others. The tana’kai, he sought the strongest among them. He went first to gods of the trees. ‘Can you hide us?’ he asked. But gods of the trees could not. ‘Men hunt us too,’ they said. ‘If you hide here, they will find you, and will use you for wood just like they use us.’”

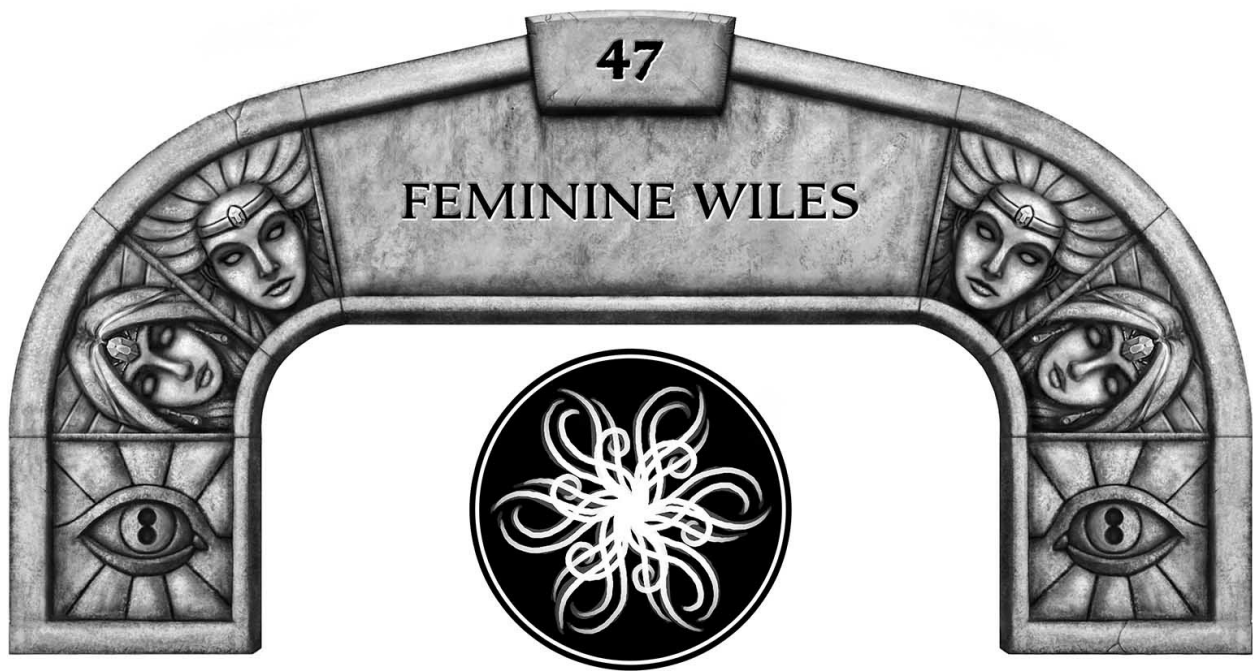
“Use Horneaters,” Sigzil said blandly, “as wood.”

“Hush,” Rock replied. “Next, tana’kai, he visited gods of the waters. ‘Can we live in your depths?’ he pled. ‘Give to us power to breathe as fish, and we will serve you beneath oceans.’ Alas, waters could not help. ‘Men dig into our hearts with hooks, and bring forth those we protect. If you were to live here, you would become their meals.’ So we could not live there.

“Last, tana’kai—desperate—visited most powerful of gods, gods of the mountains. ‘My people are dying,’ he pled. ‘Please. Let us live on your slopes and worship you, and let your snows and ice provide our protection.’

“Gods of the mountains thought long. ‘You cannot live upon our slopes,’ they said, ‘for is no life here. This is place of spirits, not of men. But if you can find way to make him a place of men and of spirits, we will protect you.’ And so, tana’kai returned to gods of the waters and said, ‘Give to us your water, that we may drink and live upon mountains.’ And he was promised. Tana’kai went to gods of the trees and said, ‘Give to us your fruit in bounty, that we may eat and live upon the mountains.’ And he was promised. Then, tana’kai returned to mountains, and said, ‘Give to us your heat, this thing that is in your heart, that we may live upon your peaks.’

“And this thing, he pleased gods of mountains, who saw that Unkalaki would work hard. They would not be burden upon the gods, but would solve problems on their own. And so, gods of mountains withdrew their peaks into themselves, and made open place for waters of life. The oceans were created of gods of the waters. Gracan’t e



Yet, were the orders not disheartened by so great a defeat, for the Lightweavers provided spiritual sustenance; they were enticed by those glorious creations to venture on a second assault.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 21, page 10

“It doesn’t make sense,” Shallan said. “Pattern, these maps are baffling.”

The spren hovered nearby in his three-dimensional form full of twisting lines and angles. Sketching him had proven difficult, as whenever she looked closely at a section of his form, she found that it had so much detail as to defy proper depiction.

“Mmm?” Pattern asked in his humming voice.

Shallan climbed off her bed and tossed the book onto her white-painted writing desk. She knelt beside Jasnah’s trunk, digging through it before coming out with a map of Roshar. It was ancient, and not terribly accurate; Alethkar was depicted as far too large and the world as a whole was misshapen, with trade routes emphasized. It clearly predated modern methods of survey and cartography. Still, it was important, for it showed the Silver

Kingdoms as they had supposedly existed during the time of the Knights Radiant.

“Urithiru,” Shallan said, pointing toward a shining city depicted on the map as the center of everything. It wasn’t in Alethkar mercenariesfko, that the, or Alethela as it had been known at the time. The map put it in the middle of the mountains near what might have been modern Jah Keved. However, Jasnah’s annotations said other maps from the time placed it elsewhere. “How could they not know where their capital was, the center of the orders of knights? Why does every map argue with its fellows?”

“Mmmmmm . . .” Pattern said, thoughtful. “Perhaps many had heard of it, but never visited.”

“Cartographers as well?” Shallan asked. “And the kings who commissioned these maps? Surely some of them had been to the place. Why on Roshar would it be so difficult to pinpoint?”

“They wished to keep its location secret, perhaps?”

Shallan stuck the map to the wall using some weevilwax from Jasnah’s supplies. She backed away, folding her arms. She hadn’t dressed for the day yet, and wore her dressing gown, hands uncovered.

“If that’s the case,” Shallan said, “they did too good a job of it.” She dug out a few other maps from the time, created by other kingdoms. In each, Shallan noted, the country of origin was presented far larger than it should have been. She stuck these to the wall too.

“Each shows Urithiru in a different location,” Shallan said. “Notably close to their own lands, yet not in their lands.”

“Different languages on each,” Pattern said. “Mmm . . . There are patterns here.” He started to try sounding them out.

Shallan smiled. Jasnah had told her that several of them were thought to have been written in the Dawnchant, a dead language. Scholars had been trying for years to—

“Behardan King . . . something I do not understand . . . order, perhaps . . .” Pattern said. “Map? Yes, that would likely be map. So the next is perhaps to draw . . . draw . . . something I do not understand . . .”

“You’re reading it?”

“It is a pattern.”

“You’re reading the Dawnchant.”

“Not well.”

“You’re reading the Dawnchant!” Shallan exclaimed. She scrambled up to the map beside which Pattern hovered, then rested her fingers on the script at the bottom. “Behardan, you said? Maybe Bajerden . . . Nohadon himself.”

“Bajerden? Nohadon? Must people have so many names?”

“One is honorific,” Shallan said. “His original name wasn’t considered symmetrical enough. Well, I guess it wasn’t really symmetrical at all, so the ardens gave him a new one centuries ago.”



THREE YEARS AGO

“These are really good, Shallan,” Balat said, leafing through pages of her sketches. The two of them sat in the gardens, accompanied by Wikim, who sat on the ground tossing a cloth-wrapped ball for his axehound Sakisa to catch.

“My anatomy is off,” Shallan said with a blush. “I can’t get the proportions right.” She needed models to pose for her so she could work on that.

“You’re better than Mother ever was,” Balat said, flipping to another page, where she had sketched Balat on the sparring grounds with his swordsmanship tutor. He tipped it toward Wikim, who raised an eyebrow.

Her middle brother was looking better and better these last four months. Less scrawny, more solid. He almost constantly had mathematical problems with him. Father had once railed at him for that, claiming it was feminine and unseemly—but, in a rare show of dissension, Father’s ardents had approached him and told him to calm himself, and that the Almighty approved of Wikim’s interest. They hoped Wikim might find his way into their ranks.

“I heard that you got another letter from Eylita,” Shallan said, trying to distract Balat from the sketchbook. She couldn’t keep herself from blushing as he turned page after page. Those weren’t meant for others to look at. They weren’t any good.

“Yeah,” he said, grinning.

“You going to have Shallan read it to you?” Wikim asked, throwing the ball.

Balat coughed. “I had Malise do it. Shallan was busy.”

“You’re embarrassed!” Wikim said, pointing. “What is in those letters?”

“Things my fourteen-year-old sister doesn’t need to know about!” Balat said.

“That racy, eh?” Wikim asked. “I wouldn’t have figured that for the Tavinar girl. She seems too proper.”

“No!” Balat blushed further. “They aren’t racy; they are merely private.”

“Private like your—”

“Wikim,” Shallan cut in.

He looked up, and then noticed that angerspren were pooling underneath Balat’s feet. “Storms, Balat. You are getting so touchy about that girl.”

“Love makes us all fools,” Shallan said, distracting the two.

“Love?” Balat asked, glancing at her. “Shallan, you’re barely old enough to pin up your safehand. What do you know about love?”

She blushed. “I . . . never mind.”

“Oh, look at that,” Wikim said. “She’s thought up something clever. You’re going to have to say it now, Shallan.”

“No use keeping something like that inside,” Balat agreed.

“Ministara says I speak my mind too much. That it’s not a feminine attribute.”

Wikim laughed. “That hasn’t seemed to stop any women I’ve known.”

“Yeah, Shallan,” Balat said. “If you can’t say the things you think of to us, then who can you say them to?”

“Trees,” she said, “rocks, shrubs. Basically anything that can’t get me in trouble with my tutors.”

“You don’t have to worry about Balat, then,” Wikim said. “He couldn’t manage something clever even in repetition.”

“Hey!” Balat said. Though, unfortunately, it wasn’t far from the truth.

h



This folio page shows contemporary designs out of Azir, using local models. Though these are specifically male civil servant outfits, the styles have deeply influenced all Azish fashion





These Lightweavers, by no coincidence, included many who pursued the arts; namely: writers, artists, musicians, painters, sculptors. Considering the order's general temperament, the tales of their strange and varied mnemonic abilities may have been embellished.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 21, page 10

After leaving her carriage at a stable in the Outer Market, Shallan was led to a stairwell carved into the stone of a hillside. She climbed this, then stepped hesitantly out onto a terrace that had been cut from the side of the hill here. Lighteyes wearing stylish clothing chatted over cups of wine at the patio's numerous ironwork tables.

They were high enough here to look out over the warcamps. The perspective was eastward, toward the Origin. What an unnatural arrangement; it made her feel exposed. Shallan was accustomed to balconies, gardens, and patios all facing away from the storms. True, nobody was likely to be out here when a highstorm was expected, but it just felt off to her.

A master-servant in looked him up and downfkEVdefe black and white arrived and bowed, calling her Brightness Davar without need of an

introduction. She'd have to get used to that; in Alethkar she was a novelty, and an easily recognizable one. She let the servant lead her among the tables, sending her guards for the day off toward a larger room cut farther into the stone to the right. This one had a proper roof and walls, so it could be completely closed off, and a group of other guards waited here upon the whims of their masters.

Shallan drew the eyes of the other patrons. Well, good. She had come here to upset their world. The more people spoke of her, the better her chances of persuading them, when the time came, to listen to her regarding the parshmen. Those were everywhere in camp, even here in this luxurious winehouse. She spotted three in the corner, moving wine bottles from wall-mounted racks to crates. They moved at a plodding yet implacable pace.

A few more steps brought her to the marble balustrade right at the edge of the terrace. Here Adolin had a table set off by itself with an unobstructed view directly east. Two members of Dalinar's house guard stood by the wall a short distance away; Adolin was important enough, apparently, that his guards didn't need to wait with the others.

Adolin browsed a folio, oversized by design so it wouldn't be mistaken for a woman's book. Shallan had seen some folios containing battle maps, others with designs for armor or pictures of architecture. She was amused as she caught sight of the glyphs for this one, with women's script underneath for further clarification. Fashions out of Liafor and Azir.

Adolin looked as handsome as he had before. Maybe more so, now that he was obviously more relaxed. She would not let him muddle her mind. She had a purpose to this meeting: an alliance with House Kholin to help her brothers and give her resources for exposing the Voidbringers and discovering Urithiru.

She couldn't afford to come off as weak. She had to control the situation, could not act like a sycophant, and she couldn't—

Adolin saw her and closed the portfolio. He stood up, grinning.

—oh, storms. That smile.

“Brightness Shallan,” he said, holding out a hand toward her. “You are settling well in Sebarial’s camp?”

“Yeah,” she said, grinning at him. That mop of unruly hair just made her want to reach out and run her fingers through it. Our children would have the strangest hair ever, she thought. His gold and black Alethi locks, my red ones, and . . .

And was she really thinking about their children? Already? Foolish girl.

“Yes,” she continued, trying to de-melt a little. “He has been quite kind to me.”

“It’s probably because you’re family,” Adolin said, letting her sit, then pushing in her chair. He did it himself, rather than allowing the master-servant to do so. She would not have expected that of someone so highborn. “Sebarial only does what he feels he’s forced to.”

“I think he may surprise you,” Shallan said.

“Oh, he’s already done that on several occasions.”

“Really? When?”

“Well { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah how to re,” Adolin said, sitting, “he once produced a very, um, loud and inappropriate noise at a meeting with the king. . . .” Adolin smiled, shrugging as if embarrassed, but he didn’t blush as Shallan might have in a similar situation. “Does that count?”

“I’m not sure. Knowing what I do of Uncle Sebarial, I doubt that such a thing is particularly surprising from him. Expected is more like it.”

Adolin laughed, tossing his head back. “Yes, I suppose you’re right. That you are.”

He seemed so confident. Not in a particularly conceited way, not like her father had been. In fact, it occurred to her that her father’s attitude had been

caused not by confidence, but the opposite.

Adolin seemed perfectly at ease both with his station and those around him. When he waved for the master-servant to bring him a list of wines, he smiled at the woman, though she was darkeyed. That smile was enough to produce a blush even in a master-servant.

Shallan was supposed to get this man to court her? Storms! She'd felt far more capable when trying to scam the leader of the Ghostbloods. Act refined, Shallan told herself. Adolin has moved with the elite, and has been in relationships with the most sophisticated ladies of the world. He will expect that from you.

"So," he said, flipping through the list of wines, described by glyphs, "we are supposed to get married."

"I would lighten that phrasing, Brightlord," Shallan said, choosing her words carefully. "We aren't supposed to get married. Your cousin Jasnah merely wanted us to consider a union, and your aunt seemed to agree."

"The Almighty save a man when his female relatives collude about his future," Adolin said with a sigh. "Sure, it's all right for Jasnah to run about into her middle years without a spouse, but if I reach my twenty-third birthday without a bride, it's like I'm some kind of menace. Sexist of her, don't you think?"

"Well, she wanted me to get married too," Shallan said. "So I wouldn't call her sexist. Merely . . . Jasnah-ist?" She paused. "Jasnagynistic? No, drat. It would have to be Misjasnahistic, and that doesn't work nearly as well, does it?"

"You're asking me?" Adolin asked, turning around the menu so she could see it. "What do you think we should order?"

"Storms," she breathed. "Those are all different kinds of wine?"

"Yeah," Adolin said. He leaned toward her, as if conspiratorial. "Honestly, I don't pay a lot of attention. Renarin knows the difference between them—

he'll drone on if you let him. Me, I order something that sounds important, but I'm really just choosing based on color." He grimaced. "We're technically at war. I won't be able to take anything too intoxicating, just in case. Kind of silly, as there won't be any plateau runs today."

"You're sure? I thought they were random."

"Yeah, but my warcamp isn't up. They almost never lighteyed womanf, lettrecome too close before a highstorm, anyway." He leaned back, scanning the menu, before pointing at one of the wines and winking at the serving woman.

Shallan felt cold. "Wait. Highstorm?"

"Yeah," Adolin said, checking the clock in the corner. Sebarial had mentioned that those were growing more and more common around here. "Should come any time now. You didn't know?"

She sputtered, looking eastward, across the cracked landscape. Act poised! she thought. Elegant! Instead, a primal part of her wanted to scramble for a hole and hide. Suddenly she imagined she could sense the pressure dropping, as if the air itself were trying to escape. Could she see it out there, starting? No, that was nothing. She squinted anyway.

"I didn't look at the list of storms Sebarial keeps," Shallan forced herself to say. In all honesty, it was probably outdated, knowing him. "I've been busy."

"Huh," Adolin said. "I wondered why you didn't ask about this place. I just assumed you'd heard of it already."

This place. The open balcony, facing east. The lighteyes drinking wine now seemed anticipatory to her, with an air of nervousness. The second room—the large one for bodyguards she'd seen with the substantial doors—made far more sense now.

"We're here to watch?" Shallan whispered.

"It's the new fad," Adolin said. "Apparently we're supposed to sit here until

the storm is almost upon us, then run into that other room and take shelter. I've wanted to come for weeks now, and only just managed to convince my minders that I'd be safe here." He said that last part somewhat bitterly. "We can go move into the safe room now, if you want."

"No," Shallan said, forcing herself to pry her fingers from the table edge. "I'm fine."

"You look pale."

"It's natural."

"Because you're Veden?"

"Because I'm always at the edge of panic these days. Oh, is that our wine?"

Poised, she reminded herself yet again. She pointedly did not look eastward.

The servant had brought them two cups of brilliant blue wine. Adolin picked his up and studied it. He smelled it, sipped it, then nodded in satisfaction and dismissed the servant with a parting smile. He watched the woman's backside as she retreated.

Shallan raised an eyebrow at him, but he didn't seem to notice that he'd done anything wrong. He looked back at Shallan and leaned in again. "I know you're supposed to swish the wine about and taste it and things," he whispered, "but nobody has ever explained to me what I'm looking for."

"Bugs floating in the liquid, perhaps?"

"Nah, my new food taster would have spotted one of those." He smiled, but Shallan realized he probably wasn't joking. A thin man who didn't wear a uniform had walked over to chat with the bodyguards. Probably the food taster.

Shallan sipped her wine. It was good—slightly sweet, a tad spicy. Not that she could spare much thought for its tastellustrations preceding chapters in a rsre, with that storm—

Stop it, she told herself, smiling at Adolin. She needed to make sure this meeting went well for him. Get him to talk about himself. That was one piece of advice she remembered from books.

“Plateau runs,” Shallan said. “How do you know when to begin one, anyway?”

“Hmm? Oh, we have spotters,” Adolin said, lounging back in his chair. “Men who stand atop towers with these enormous spyglasses. They inspect every plateau we can reach in a reasonable time, watching for a chrysalis.”

“I hear you’ve captured your share of those.”

“Well, I probably shouldn’t talk about it. Father doesn’t want it to be a competition anymore.” He looked at her, expectant.

“But surely you can talk about what happened before,” Shallan said, feeling as if she were filling an expected role.

“I suppose,” Adolin said. “There was one run a few months back where I seized the chrysalis basically by myself. You see, Father and I, we would usually jump the chasm first and clear the way for the bridges.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?” Shallan asked, dutifully looking at him with widened eyes.

“Yes, but we’re Shardbearers. We have strength and power granted by the Almighty. It’s a great responsibility, and it’s our duty to use it for the protection of our men. We save hundreds of lives by going across first. Lets us lead the army, firsthand.”

He paused.

“So brave,” Shallan said, in what she hoped was a breathy, adoring voice.

“Well, it’s the right thing to do. But it is dangerous. That day, I leaped across, but my father and I got pushed too far apart by the Parshendi. He was forced to jump back across, and a blow to his leg meant that when he landed, his greave—that’s a piece of armor on the leg—cracked. That made it dangerous

for him to jump back again. I was left alone while he waited for the bridge to lock down.”

He paused again. She was probably supposed to ask what happened next.

“What if you need to poop?” she asked instead.

“Well, I put my back to the chasm and laid about me with my sword, intending to . . . Wait. What did you say?”

“Poop,” Shallan said. “You’re out there on the battlefield, encased in metal like a crab in its shell. What do you do if nature calls?”

“I . . . er . . .” Adolin frowned at her. “That is not something any woman has ever asked me before.”

“Yay for originality!” Shallan said, though she blushed as she said it. Jasnah would have been displeased. Couldn’t Shallan mind her tongue for a single conversation? She’d gotten him talking about something he liked; everything had been going well. Now this.

“Well,” Adolin said slowly, “every battle has breaks in the flow, and men rotate in and out of the front lines. For every five minutes you’re fighting, you often have almost as many resting. When a Shardbearer pulls back, men inspect his armor for cracks, give him something to drink or eat, and help him with lighteyed womanf, lettre . . . what you just mentioned. It’s not something that makes a good topic of conversation, Brightness. We don’t really talk about it.”

“That’s precisely what makes it a good topic of conversation,” she said. “I can find out about wars and Shardbearers and glorious killing in the official accounts. The grimy details, though—nobody writes those down.”

“Well, it does get grimy,” Adolin said with a grimace, taking a drink. “You can’t really . . . I can’t believe I’m saying this . . . you can’t really wipe yourself in Shardplate, so someone has to do it for you. Makes me feel like an infant. Then, sometimes, you just don’t have time . . .”

“And?”

He inspected her, narrowing his eyes.

“What?” she asked.

“Just trying to determine if you’re secretly Wit wearing a wig. This is something he would do to me.”

“I’m not doing anything to you,” she said. “I’m just curious.” And honestly, she was. She’d thought about this. Perhaps more than it deserved consideration.

“Well,” Adolin said, “if you must know, an old adage on the battlefield teaches that it’s better to be embarrassed than dead. You can’t let anything draw your attention from fighting.”

“So . . .”

“So yes, I, Adolin Kholin—cousin to the king, heir to the Kholin principedom—have shat myself in my Shardplate. Three times, all on purpose.” He downed the rest of his wine. “You are a very strange woman.”

“If I must remind you,” Shallan said, “you are the one who opened our conversation today with a joke about Sebarial’s flatulence.”

“I guess I did at that.” He grinned. “This is not exactly going the way it’s supposed to, is it?”

“Is that a bad thing?”

“No,” Adolin said, then his grin widened. “Actually, it’s kind of refreshing. Do you know how many times I’ve told that story about saving the plateau run?”

“I’m sure you were quite brave.”

“Quite.”

“Though probably not as brave as the poor men who have to clean your armor.”

Adolin bellowed out a laugh. For the first time it seemed like something genuine—an emotion from him that wasn’t scripted or expected. He pounded his fist on the table, then waved for more wine, wiping a tear from his eye. The grin he gave her threatened to bring out another blush.

Wait, Shallan thought, did that just . . . work? She was supposed to be acting feminine and delicate, not asking men what it’s like to have to defecate in battle.

“All right,” Adolin said, taking the cup of wine. He didn’t even glance at the serving woman this time. “What other dirty secrets do you want to know? You’ve got me laid bare. There are tons of things the stories and official histories don’t mention.”

“T,” Shallan said softly, rais

“That’s what you want to know?” Adolin said, scratching his head. “I thought for sure you’d want to know about the chafing. . . .”

Shallan got out her satchel, setting a piece of paper on the table and starting a sketch. “From what I’ve been able to determine, nobody has done a solid study on the Chasmfiends. There are some sketches of dead ones, but that’s it, and the anatomy on those is dreadful.

“They must have an interesting life cycle. They haunt these chasms, but I doubt they actually live here. There’s not enough food to support creatures of their size. That means they come here as part of some migratory pattern. They come here to pupate. Have you ever seen a juvenile? Before they form the chrysalis?”

“No,” Adolin said, scooting his chair around the table. “It often happens at night, and we don’t spot them until morning. They’re hard to see out there, colored like rock. Makes me think that the Parshendi must be watching us. We end up fighting over plateaus so often. It might mean they spot us mobilizing, then use the direction we’re going to judge where to find the

chrysalis. We get a head start, but they move faster over the Plains, so we arrive near the same time. . . .”

He trailed off, cocking his head to get a better look at her sketch. “Storms! That’s really good, Shallan.”

“Thanks.”

“No, I mean really good.”

She’d done a quick sketch of several types of chrysalises she had read about in her books, along with quick depictions of a man beside them for size reference. It wasn’t very good—she’d done it for speed. Yet Adolin seemed genuinely impressed.

“The shape and texture of the chrysalis,” Shallan said, “could help place the chasmfiends in a family of similar animals.”

“It looks most like this one,” Adolin said, scooting closer and pointing at one of the sketches. “When I’ve touched one, they’ve been hard as rock. It’s hard to dig into one without a Shardblade. It can take men with hammers forever to break into one.”

“Hmmm,” Shallan said, making a note. “You’re sure?”

“Yeah. That’s how they look. Why?”

“That’s the chrysalis of a yu-nerig,” Shallan said. “A greatshell from the seas around Marabethia. The people there feed criminals to them, I’m told.”

“Ouch.”

“This might be a false positive, a coincidence. The yu-nerig are an aquatic species. The only time they come onto land is to pupate. Seems tenuous to assume a relationship to the chasmfiends . . .”

“Sure,” Adolin said, taking a drink of wine. “If you say so.”

“This is probably important,” Shallan said.

“For research. Yeah, I know. Aunt Navani is always talking about things like that.”

“This could be of more practical import than that,” Shallan said. “About how many of these things total are killed by your armies and the Parshendi each month?” “How do you know?” m, stoppings.⁴

Adolin shrugged. “One every three days or so, I’d guess. Sometimes more, sometimes less. So . . . fifteen or so a month?”

“You see the problem?”

“I . . .” Adolin shook his head. “No. Sorry. I’m kind of useless at anything that doesn’t involve someone getting stabbed.”

She smiled at him. “Nonsense. You proved skilled at choosing wine.”

“I did that basically at random.”

“And it tastes delicious,” Shallan said. “Empirical proof of your methodology. Now, you probably don’t see the problem because you don’t have the proper facts. Greatshells, generally, are slow to breed and slow to grow. This is because most ecosystems can only support a small population of apex predators of this size.”

“I’ve heard some of those words before.”

She looked to him, raising an eyebrow. He’d gotten a lot closer to her, in order to look at her drawing. He wore a faint cologne, a brisk woody scent. Oh my . . .

“All right, all right,” he said, chuckling as he inspected her drawings. “I’m not as dense as I feign. I see what you’re saying. You really think we could kill enough of them that it could be a problem? I mean, people have been doing teens precisel

greatshell hunts for generations, and the beasts are still around.”

“You’re not hunting them here, Adolin. You’re harvesting them. You’re systematically destroying their juvenile population. Have fewer of them been pupating lately?”

“Yeah,” he said, though he sounded unsure. “We think it might be the season.”

“It might be. Or, it might be that, after over five years of harvesting, the population is starting to dwindle. Animals like the chasmfiends don’t normally have predators. Suddenly losing a hundred and fifty or more of their numbers a year could be catastrophic to their population.”

Adolin frowned. “The gemhearts we get feed the people of the warcamps. Without a constant flow of new stones of reasonable size, the Soulcasters will eventually crack the ones we have, and we won’t be able to support the armies here.”

“I’m not telling you to stop your hunts,” Shallan said, blushing. This probably wasn’t the point she should be making. Urithiru and the parshmen, that was the immediate problem. Still, she needed to gain Adolin’s trust. If she could provide useful help regarding the chasmfiends, perhaps he’d listen when she approached him with something even more revolutionary.

“All I’m saying,” Shallan continued, “is that it’s worth thinking about and studying. What would it be like if you could start raising chasmfiends, growing them to juveniles in batches like men raise chulls? Instead of hunting three a week, what if you could breed and harvest hundreds?”

“That would be useful,” Adolin said thoughtfully. “What would you need in order to make it happen?”

“Well, I wasn’t saying . . . I mean . . .” She stopped herself. “I need to get out onto the Shattered Plains,” she said more firmly. “If I’m going to try { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah how to re to figure out how to breed them, I’d need to see one of these chrysalises before it’s been cut into. Preferably, I get to see an adult chasmfiend, and—ideally—

I'd like a captured juvenile to study."

"Just a small list of impossibilities."

"Well, you did ask."

"I might be able to get you onto the Plains," Adolin said. "Father promised that he'd show Jasnah a dead chasmfiend, so I think he was planning to take her out after a hunt. Seeing a chrysalis, though . . . those rarely appear close to camp. I'd have to take you dangerously close to Parshendi territory."

"I'm sure you can protect me."

He looked at her, expectant.

"What?" Shallan asked.

"I'm waiting for a wisecrack."

"I was serious," Shallan said. "With you there, I'm certain the Parshendi wouldn't dare get close."

Adolin smiled.

"I mean," she said, "the stench alone—"

"I suspect I'm never going to live down telling you about that."

"Never," Shallan agreed. "You were honest, detailed, and engaging. Those aren't the sorts of things I let myself forget about a man."

His smile broadened. Storms, those eyes . . .

Careful, Shallan told herself. Careful! Kabsal took you in easily. Don't repeat that.

"I'll see what I can do," Adolin said. "The Parshendi might not be an issue in the near future."

“Really?”

He nodded. “It’s not widely known, though we’ve told the highprinces. Father is going to be meeting with some of the Parshendi leaders tomorrow. It could end up starting a peace negotiation.”

“That’s fantastic!”

“Yeah,” Adolin said. “I’m not hopeful. The assassin . . . anyway, we’ll see what happens tomorrow, though I’ll have to do this between the other work Father has for me.”

“The duels,” Shallan said, leaning in. “What is going on there, Adolin?”

He seemed hesitant.

“Whatever is going on in the camps now,” she said, speaking more softly, “Jasnah didn’t know about it. I feel woefully ignorant about politics here, Adolin. Your father and Highprince Sadeas had a falling-out, I’ve gathered. The king has changed the nature of these plateau runs, and everyone is talking about how you’re dueling now. But from what I’ve been able to gather, you never stopped dueling.”

“It’s different,” he said. “Now I’m dueling to win.”

“And you didn’t before?”

“No, then I dueled to punish.” He glanced about, then met her eyes. “It began when my father started seeing visions . . .”

He continued. He { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah how to re poured out a surprising story, one with far greater detail than she’d anticipated. A story of betrayal, and of hope. Visions of the past. A unified Alethkar, prepared to weather a coming storm.

She didn’t know what to make of it all, though she gathered that Adolin was telling her of it because he knew the rumors in camp. She’d heard of Dalinar’s fits, of course, and had an inkling of what Sadeas had done. When

Adolin mentioned that his father wanted the Knights Radiant to return, Shallan felt a chill. She glanced about for Pattern—he'd be close—but couldn't find him.

The meat of the story, at least in Adolin's estimation, was the betrayal by Sadeas. The young prince's eyes grew dark, face flushed, as he talked of being abandoned on the Plains, surrounded by enemies. He seemed embarrassed when he spoke of salvation by a lowly bridge crew.

He's actually confiding in me, Shallan thought, feeling a thrill. She rested her freehand on his arm as he spoke, an innocent gesture, but it seemed to spur him forward as he quietly explained Dalinar's plan. She wasn't certain he should be sharing all of this with her. They barely knew one another. But speaking of it seemed to lift a weight from Adolin's back, and he grew more relaxed.

"I guess," Adolin said, "that's the end of it. I'm supposed to win Shardblades off the others, taking away their bite, embarrassing them. But I don't know if it will work."

"Why not?" Shallan asked.

"The ones who agree to duel me aren't important enough," he said, forming a fist. "If I win too much from them, the real targets—the highprinces—will get scared of me and refuse duels. I need matches that are more high profile. No, what I need is to duel Sadeas. Pound that grinning face of his into the stones and take back my father's Blade. He's too oily, though. We'll never get him to agree."

She found herself wishing desperately to do something, anything, to help. She felt herself melting at the intense concern in those eyes, the passion.

Remember Kabsal . . . she reminded herself again.

Well, Adolin wasn't likely to try to assassinate her—but then, that didn't mean she should let her brain turn to curry paste around him. She cleared her throat, tearing her eyes away from his and looking down at her sketch.

“Bother,” she said. “I’ve left you upset. I’m not very good at this wooing thing.”

“Could have fooled me . . .” Adolin said, resting his hand on her arm.

Shallan covered another blush by ducking her head and digging into her satchel. “You,” she said, “need to know what your cousin was working on before she died.”

“Another volume in her father’s biography?”

“No,” Shallan said, getting out a sheet of paper. “Adolin, Jasnah thought that the Voidbringers were going to return.”

“What?” he said, frowning. “She didn’t even believe in the Almighty. Why would she believe in the Voidbringers?”

“She had evidence,” Shallan said, tapping the paper with one finger. “A lot of that sank in the ocean, I’m afraid, but I do have in a highstorm.”m, stoppings.4some of her notes, and . . . Adolin, how hard do you think it would be to convince the highprinces to get rid of their parshmen?”

“Get rid of what?”

“How hard would it to be to make everyone stop using parshmen as slaves? Give them away, or . . .” Storms. She didn’t want to start a genocide here, did she? But these were the Voidbringers. “. . . or set them free or something. Get them out of the warcamps.”

“How difficult would it be?” Adolin said. “Off the cuff, I’d say impossible. That, or really impossible. Why would we even want to do something like that?”

“Jasnah thought they might be related to the Voidbringers and their return.”

Adolin shook his head, looking bemused. “Shallan, we can barely get the highprinces to fight this war properly. If my father or the king were to require everyone to get rid of their parshmen . . . Storms! It would break the kingdom in a heartbeat.”

So Jasnah was right on that count as well. Unsurprising. Shallan was interested to see how violently Adolin himself opposed the idea. He took a big gulp of wine, seeming utterly floored.

Time to pull back, then. This meeting had gone very well; she wouldn't want to end it on a sour note. "It was something Jasnah said," Shallan said, "but really, I'd rather that Brightlady Navani judge how important a suggestion it was. She would know her daughter, her notes, better than anyone."

Adolin nodded. "So go to her."

Shallan tapped the paper in her fingers. "I've tried. She's not been very accommodating."

"Aunt Navani can be overbearing sometimes."

"It's not that," Shallan said, scanning the words on the letter. It was a reply she'd gotten after requesting to meet the woman and discuss her daughter's work. "She doesn't want to meet with me. She barely seems to want to acknowledge I exist."

Adolin sighed. "She doesn't want to believe. About Jasnah, I mean. You represent something to her—the truth, in a way. Give her time. She just needs to grieve."

"I'm not certain if this is something that should wait, Adolin."

"I'll talk to her," he said. "How about that?"

"Wonderful," she said. "Much like you yourself."

He grinned. "It's nothing. I mean, if we're going to halfway-almost-kind-of-maybe-get-married, we should probably look out for one another's interests." He paused. "Don't mention that parshman thing to anyone else, though. That's not something that will go over well."

She nodded absently, then realized she'd been staring at him. She was going to kiss those lips of his someday. She let herself imagine it.

And, Ash's eyes . . . he had a very friendly way about him. She hadn't expected that in someone so highborn. She'd never actually met anyone of his rank before coming to the Shattered Plains, but all the men she knew near his level had been stiff and even angry.

Not Adolin. Storms, but being with him was something else she could get very, very used to.

People began to stir on the patio. She ignored them for a moment, but then many began to stand up from their seats, looking eastward.

Highstorm. Right.

Shallan felt a spike of alarm as she looked toward the Origin of Storms. The wind picked up, leaves and bits of refuse fluttering across the patio. Down below, the Outer Market had been packed up, tents folded away, awnings withdrawn, windows closed. The entirety of the warcamps braced itself.

Shallan stuffed her things into her satchel, then rose to her feet, stepping to the edge of the terrace, freehand fingers on the stone railing there. Adolin joined her. Behind them, people whispered and gathered. She heard iron grinding across stone; the parshmen had begun pulling away the tables and chairs, stowing them to both protect them and make a path for the lighteyes to retreat to safety.

The horizon had bled from light to dark, like a man flushing with anger. Shallan gripped the railing, watching the entire world transform. Vines withdrew, rockbuds closed. Grass hid in its holes. They knew, somehow. They all knew.

The air grew chill and wet, and prestorm winds gusted against her, blowing her hair back. Below and just to the north, the warcamps had piled refuse and waste to be blown away with the storm. It was a forbidden practice in most civilized areas, where that waste could blow into the next town. Out here, there was no next town.

The horizon grew even darker. A few people on the balcony fled to the back room's safety, their nerves getting the better of them. Most stayed, silent.

Windspren zipped in tiny rivers of light overhead. Shallan took Adolin by the arm, staring eastward. Minutes passed until finally, she saw it.

The stormwall.

A huge sheet of water and debris blown before the storm. In places, it flashed with light from behind, revealing movement and shadows within. Like the skeleton of a hand when light illuminated the flesh, there was something inside this wall of destruction.

Most of the people fled the balcony, though the stormwall was still distant. In moments, only a handful remained, Shallan and Adolin among them. She watched, transfixed, as the storm approached. It took longer than she'd expected. It was moving at a terrible speed, but it was so large, they'd been able to spot it from quite a distance.

It consumed the Shattered Plains, one plateau at a time. Soon, it loomed over the warcamps, coming on with a roar.

"We should go," Adolin eventually said. She barely heard him.

Life. Something lived inside that storm, something that no artist had ever drawn, no scholar had ever described.

"Shallan!" Adolin began to tow her toward the protected room. She grabbed the railing with her freehand, remaining in place, clutching her satchel to her chest with her safehand. That humming, that was Pattern.

She'd never been so close to a highstorm. Even when she'd been only inches away from one, separated by a window shutter, she had not been as close as she was now. Watching that darkness descend upon the warcamps . . .

I need to draw.

"Shallan!" Adolin said, pulling her away from the railing. "They'll close the doors if we don't go now!"

With a start, she realized lighteyed womanf, lettre that everyone else had left the balcony. She allowed Adolin to get her moving, and she joined him in a

dash across the empty patio. They reached the room at the side, packed with huddled lighteyes who watched in terror. Adolin's guards entered right after her, and several parshmen slammed the thick doors. The bar thumped in place, locking out the sky, leaving them to the light of spheres on the walls.

Shallan counted. The highstorm hit—she could feel it. Something beyond the thumping of the door and the distant sound of thunder.

“Six seconds,” she said.

“What?” Adolin asked. His voice was hushed, and others in the room spoke in whispers.

“It took six seconds after the servants closed the doors until the storm hit. We could have spent that much longer out there.”

Adolin regarded her with an incredulous expression. “When you first realized what we were doing on that balcony, you seemed terrified.”

“I was.”

“Now you wish you'd stayed out until the last moment before the storm hit?”

“I . . . yeah,” she said, blushing.

“I have no idea what to make of you.” Adolin regarded her. “You're not like anyone I've met.”

“It's my air of feminine mystique.”

He raised an eyebrow.

“It's a term we use,” she said, “when we're feeling particularly erratic. It's considered polite not to point out that you know this. Now, do we just . . . wait in here?”

“In this box of a room?” Adolin asked, sounding amused. “We're lighteyes, not livestock.” He gestured to the side, where several servants had opened doors leading to places burrowed deeper into the mountain. “Two sitting

rooms. One for men, the other for women.”

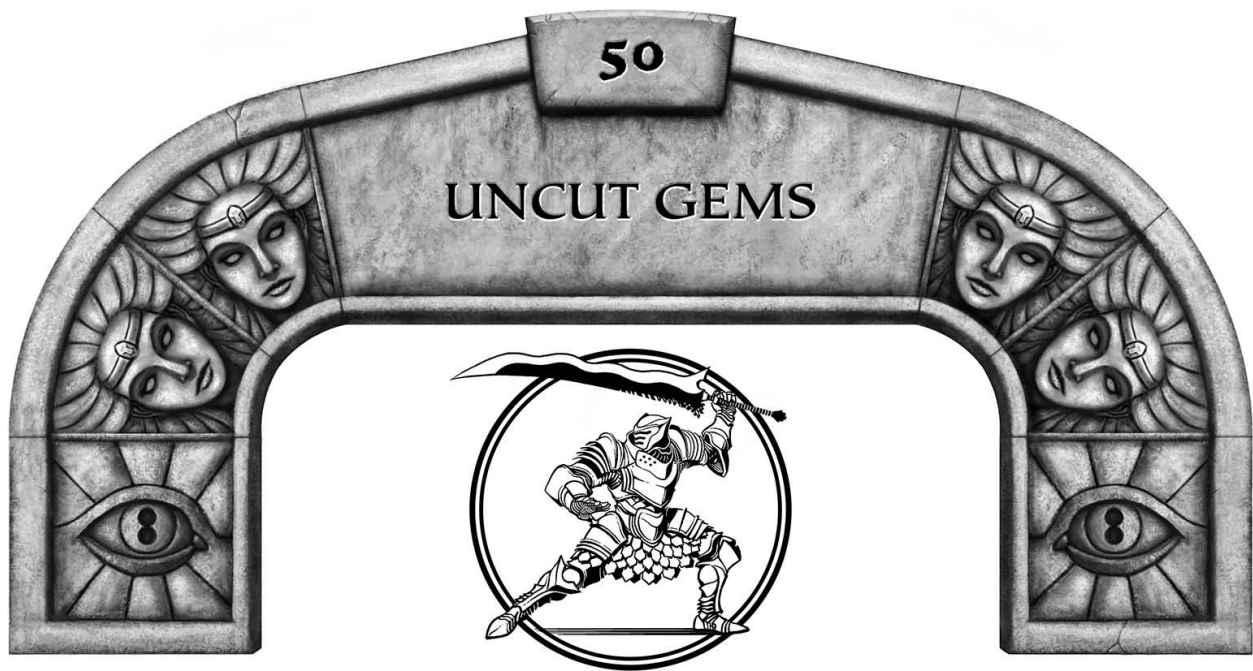
Shallan nodded. Sometimes during a highstorm, the genders would retire to separate rooms to chat. It looked like the winehouse followed this tradition. They’d probably have finger food. Shallan walked toward the indicated room, but Adolin rested a hand on her arm, making her pause.

“I’ll see about getting you out onto the Shattered Plains,” he said. “Amaram wants to go explore more, he’s said, than he gets to during a plateau run. I think he and Father are having dinner to talk about it tomorrow night, and I can ask then if I can bring you. I’ll also talk to Aunt Navani. Maybe we can discuss what I’ve come up with at the feast next week?”

“There’s a feast next week?”

“There’s always a feast next week,” Adolin said. “We just have to figure out who’s throwing it. I’ll send to you.”

She smiled, and then they separated. Next week is not soon enough, she thought. I’ll have to find a way to drop in on him whd reluctant. &



And now, if there was an uncut gem among the Radiants, it was the Willshapers; for though enterprising, they were erratic, and Invia wrote of them, “capricious, frustrating, unreliable,” as taking it for granted that others would agree; this may have been an intolerant view, as often Invia expressed, for this order was said to be most varied, inconsistent in temperament save for a general love of adventure, novelty, or oddity.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 7, page 1

Adolin sat in a high-backed chair, cup of wine in his hand, listening to the highstorm rumble outside. He should have felt safe in this bunker of rock, but there was something about storms that undercut any sense of security, no matter how rational. He’d be glad for the Weeping, and the end of the highstorms for a few weeks.

Adolin raised his cup toward Elit, who stomped past. He hadn’t seen the man above, on the winehouse terrace, but this chamber also served as a highstorm bunker for several shops in the Outer Market.

“Are you ready for our duel?” Adolin asked. “You’ve made me wait an entire week so far, Elit.”

The short, balding man took a drink of wine, then lowered his cup, not looking at Adolin. “My cousin is planning to kill you for challenging me,” he said. “Right after he kills me for agreeing to the challenge.” He finally turned toward Adolin. “But when I stomp you into the sands and claim all of your family’s Shards, I’ll be the rich one and he’ll be forgotten. Am I ready for our duel? I long for it, Adolin Kholin.”

“You’re the one who wanted to wait,” Adolin noted.

“The more time to savor what I’m going to do to you.” Elit smiled illustrations preceding chapters , speak ikat with white lips, then moved on.

Creepy fellow. Well, Adolin would deal with him in two days, the date of their duel. Before that, though, was tomorrow’s meeting with the Parshendi Shardbearer. It loomed over him like a thunderhead. What would it mean, if they finally found peace?

He mulled over that thought, regarding his wine and listening with half an ear to Elit chatting behind him with someone. Adolin recognized that voice, didn’t he?

Adolin sat upright, then looked over his shoulder. How long had Sadeas been back there, and why hadn’t Adolin spotted him when first entering?

Sadeas turned to him, a calm smile on his face.

Maybe he’ll just . . .

Sadeas strolled up to Adolin, hands clasped behind his back, wearing a fashionable open-fronted short brown coat and an embroidered green stock. The buttons along the front of the coat were gemstones. Emeralds to match the stock.

Storms. He did not want to deal with Sadeas today.

The highprince took the seat beside Adolin, their backs to a hearth that a parshman had begun stoking. The room contained a low hum of nervous conversation. You could never quite be comfortable, no matter how pretty the

decor, when a highstorm raged outside.

“Young Adolin,” Sadeas said. “What do you think of my coat?”

Adolin took a gulp of wine, not trusting himself to reply. I should just get up and walk away. But he didn't. A small part of him wished for Sadeas to provoke him, push away his inhibitions, drive him to do something stupid. Killing the man right here, right now, would likely earn Adolin an execution—or at least an exile. It might be worth either punishment.

“You've always been so keen-eyed when it comes to style,” Sadeas continued. “I'd know your opinion. I do think the coat is splendid, but I worry that the short cut might be trending out of fashion. What is the latest from Liafor?”

Sadeas pulled out the front of his jacket, moving his hand to display a ring that matched the buttons. The ring's emerald, like those on the jacket, was uncut. They glowed softly with Stormlight.

Uncut emeralds, Adolin thought, then looked up to meet Sadeas's eyes. The man smiled.

“The gemstones are recent acquisitions,” Sadeas noted. “I am fond of them.”

Gained from doing a plateau run with Ruthar that he wasn't supposed to have been on. Racing ahead of the other highprinces, like this was the old days, where each prince tried to be first and claim their winnings.

“I hate you,” Adolin whispered.

“As well you should,” Sadeas said, letting go of his coat. He nodded toward Adolin's bridgeman guards, watching with overt hostility nearby. “My former property is treating you well? I've seen their like patrolling the market here. I find that amusing for reasons I doubt I could ever properly express.”

“They patrol,” Adolin said, “to create a better Alethkar.”

“Is that what Dalinar wants? I am surprised to hear it. He talks of justice, of course, but he doesn't allow justice to take its course. Not properly.”

“And I know where you’re going, Sadeas,” Adolin snapped. “You’re annoyed that we haven’t been letting you put judges into our warcamp as Highprince of Information. Well, I’ll have you know that Father has decided to let—”

“Highprince of . . . Information? You didn’t hear? I recently renounced the title.”

“What?”

“Yes,” Sadeas said. “I fear I was never a good match for the position. My Shalashian temperament, perhaps. I wish Dalinar good fortune in finding a replacement—though from what I’ve heard, the other highprinces have come to an agreement that none of us are . . . suited to these kinds of appointments.”

He renounces the king’s authority, Adolin thought. Storms, this was bad. He gritted his teeth, and found himself reaching his hand to the side to summon his Blade. No. He pulled the hand back. He’d find a way to force this man into the dueling ring. Killing Sadeas now—no matter how much he deserved it—would undermine the very laws and codes Adolin’s father was working so hard to uphold.

But storms . . . Adolin was tempted.

Sadeas smiled again. “Do you think me an evil man, Adolin?”

“That’s too simple a term,” Adolin snapped. “You’re not just evil, you’re a selfish, crem-cruste eel who is trying to strangle this kingdom with his bulbous, bastard hand.”

“Eloquent,” Sadeas said. “You realize I created this kingdom.”

“You only helped my father and uncle.”

“Men who are both gone,” Sadeas said. “The Blackthorn is as dead as old Gavilar. Instead, two idiots rule this kingdom, and each one is—in a way—a shadow of a man I loved.” He leaned forward, looking Adolin straight in the

eyes. “I’m not strangling Alethkar, son. I’m trying with everything I have to keep a few chunks of it strong enough to weather the collapse your father is bringing.”

“Don’t call me son,” Adolin hissed.

“Fine,” Sadeas said, standing. “But I’ll tell you one thing. I’m glad you survived the events on the Tower that day. You’ll make a fine highprince in the coming months. I have a feeling that in ten years or so—following an extended civil war between the two of us—our alliance will be a strong one. By then, you’ll understand why I did what I did.”

“I doubt it. I’ll have rammed my sword through your gut long before that, Sadeas.”

Sadeas raised his cup of wine, then walked off, joining a different group of lighteyes. Adolin let out a long sigh of exhaustion, then leaned back against the chair. Nearby, his short bridgeman guard—the one with the silver at his temples—gave Adolin a nod of respect.

Adolin slumped there, feeling drained, until long after the highstorm ended and people started to depart. Adolin preferred to wait until the rain stopped completely before leaving, anyway. He never had liked how his uniform looked when it got wet.

Eventually, he rose, collected his two guards, and stepped out of the winehouse to a grey sky and a deserted Outer Market. He was mostly illustrations preceding chapters in a 1Vre over the conversation with Sadeas, and kept reminding himself that up to that point the day had been going very well.

Shallan and her carriage had already gone, of course. He could have ordered a ride for himself, but after being locked away for so long, it felt good to be walking in the open air; chill, wet, and fresh from the storm.

Hands in the pockets of his uniform, he started along a pathway through the Outer Market, strolling around puddles. Gardeners had begun growing ornamental shalebark along the sides of the path, though it wasn’t very high

yet, just a few inches. A good shalebark ridge could take years to grow properly.

Those two insufferable bridgemen followed along behind him. Not that Adolin minded the men personally—they seemed like amiable enough fellows, particularly when away from their commander. Adolin just didn't like needing minders. Though the storm had passed into the west, the afternoon felt gloomy. Clouds obscured the sun, which had moved from its zenith and was drooping slowly toward the distant horizon. He didn't pass many people, so his only companions were the bridgemen—well, those and a legion of cremlings that had emerged to feast upon plants that lapped at water in pools.

Why did plants spend so much more time in their shells out here than they did back home? Shallan probably knew. He smiled, forcing thoughts of Sadeas into the back of his mind. This thing with Shallan, it was working. It always worked at first though, so he contained his enthusiasm.

She was marvelous. Exotic, witty, and not smothered in Alethi propriety. She was smarter than he was, but she didn't make him feel stupid. That was a large point in her favor.

He passed out of the market, then crossed the open ground beyond it, eventually reaching Dalinar's warcamp. The guards let him through with crisp salutes. He idled in the warcamp market, comparing the wares he saw here with those in the market near the Pinnacle.

What will happen to this place, Adolin thought, when the war stops? It would end someday. Perhaps tomorrow, with the negotiations with the Parshendi Shardbearer.

The Alethi presence wouldn't end here, not with the chasmfiends to hunt, but surely this large a population couldn't continue, could it? Could he really be witnessing a permanent shift of the king's seat?

Hours later—after spending some time at jewelry shops looking for something for Shallan—Adolin and his guards reached his father's complex. By then, Adolin's feet were starting to ache and the camp had grown dark.

He yawned, making his way through the cavernous guts of his father's bunkerish dwelling. Wasn't it about time they built a proper mansion? Being an example for the men was all well and good, but there were certain standards a family like theirs should uphold. Particularly if the Shattered Plains were going to remain as important as they had been. It was . . .

He hesitated, stopping at an intersection and looking right. He'd been intending to visit the kitchens for a snack, but a group of men moved and threw shadows in the other direction. Hushed whispers.

"What is this?" Adolin demanded, marching toward the gathering, his two guards following. "Soldiers? What have you found?"

The men scrambled to turn and salute, spears to shoulders. They were more bridgemen from Kaladin's unit. Just beyond them were the doors to the wing where Dalinar, Adolin, and Renarin all made their quarters. Those doors lay open, and the men had set spheres on the ground.

What was going on? Normally, two or maybe four men would be on guard here. Not eight. And . . . why was there a parshman wearing a guardsman uniform, holding a spear with the others?

"Sir!" said a lanky, long-armed man at the front of the bridgemen. "We were just heading in to check on the highprince, when . . ."

Adolin didn't hear the rest. He pushed through the bridgemen, finally seeing what the spheres illuminated on the floor of the sitting room.

More scratched glyphs. Adolin knelt down, trying to read them. Unfortunately, they hadn't been drawn in any kind of picture to help. He thought they were numbers . . .

"Thirty-two days," said one of the bridgemen, a short Azish man. "Seek the center."

Damnation. "Have you told anyone of this?" Adolin asked.

"We just found it," the Azish man said.

“Post guards at either end of the hallway,” Adolin said. “And send for my aunt.”

* * *

Adolin summoned his Blade, then dismissed it, then summoned it again. A nervous habit. The white fog appeared—manifesting as little vines sprouting in the air—before snapping into the form of a Shardblade, which suddenly weighed down his hand.

He stood in the sitting room, those foreboding markings staring up at him, as if in silent challenge. The closed door kept the bridgemen out so only he, Dalinar, and Navani would be privy to the discussion. Adolin wanted to use the Blade to cut those cursed glyphs away. Dalinar had proven that he was sane. Aunt Navani almost had an entire document of the Dawnchant translated, using the words of Father’s visions as a guide!

The visions were from the Almighty. It all made sense.

Now this.

“They were made with a knife,” Navani said, kneeling beside the glyphs. The sitting room was a large open area, used for receiving callers or holding meetings. Doors beyond led to the study and the bedrooms.

“This knife,” Dalinar replied, holding up a side knife of the style most lighteyes wore. “My knife.”

The edge was blunted and still bore flecks of stone from the gouges. The scratches matched the size of the blade. They’d found it just in front of the door to Dalinar’s study, where he’d spent the highstorm. Alone. Navani’s carriage had been delayed, and she’d been forced to return to the palace or risk being caught in the storm.

“Someone else could have taken it and done this,” Adolin snapped. “They could have sneaked into your study, grabbed it while you were consumed by the visions, and come out here . . .”

The other two looked at him.

“Often,” Navani said, “the simplest answer is the right one.”

Adolin sighed, dismissing his Blade and slumping down in a chair beside the offending glyphs. His father stood tall. In fact, Dalinar Kholin never seemed to have stood as tall as he did now, hands clasped behind his back, eyes away from the glyphs, toward the wall—eastward.

Dalinar illustrations preceding chapters in a 1Vrewas a rock, a boulder too big for even storms to move. He seemed so sure. It was something to cling to.

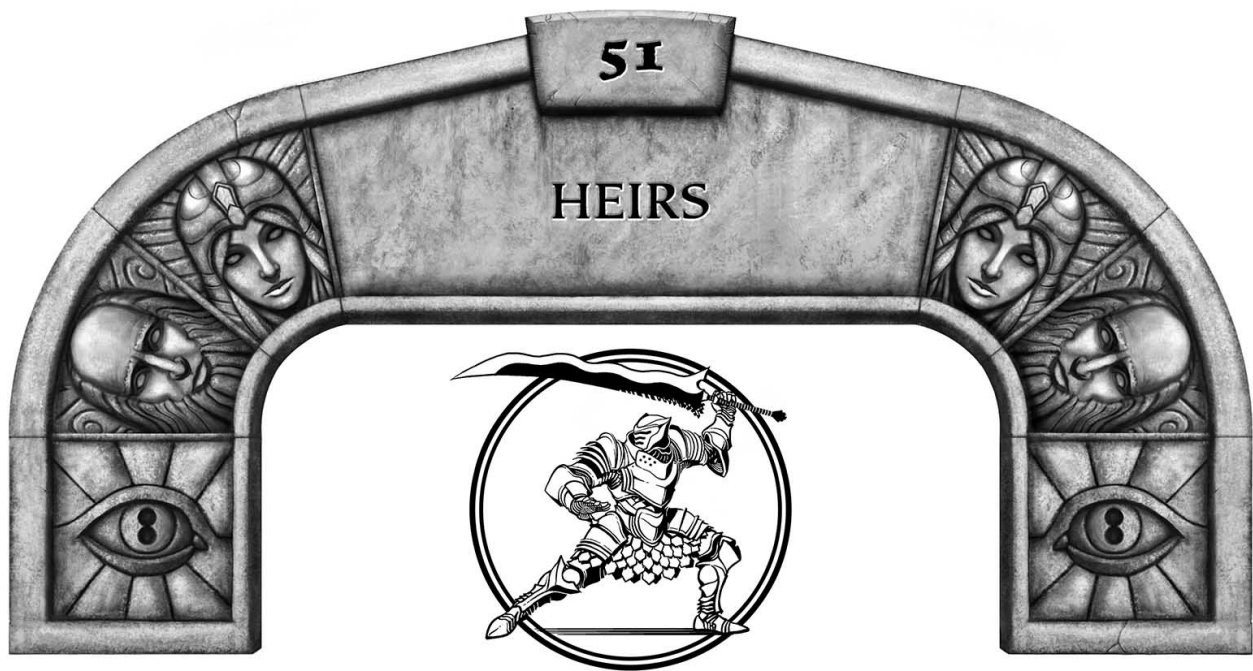
“You don’t remember anything?” Navani asked Dalinar, rising.

“No.” He turned to Adolin. “I think it’s obvious now that I was behind each of these. Why does that bother you so, son?”

“It’s the idea of you scribbling on the ground,” Adolin said, shivering. “Lost in one of those visions, not in control of yourself.”

“The Almighty’s path for me is a strange one,” Dalinar said. “Why do I need to get the information this way? Scratches on the ground or the wall? Why not say it to me plainly in the visions?”

“It’s foretelling, you realize,” Adolin said softly. “Seeing the future. A thing of the Voidbringers..00em; text-



In short, if any presume Kazilah to be innocent, you must look at the facts and deny them in their entirety; to say that the Radiants were destitute of integrity for this execution of one their own, one who had obviously fraternized with the unwholesome elements, indicates the most slothful of reasoning; for the enemy's baleful influence demanded vigilance on all occasions, of war and of peace.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 32, page 17

The next day, Adolin stomped his feet into his boots, hair still damp from a morning bath. It was amazing the difference a little hot water and some time to reflect could make. He'd come to two decisions.

He wasn't going to worry about his father's disconcerting behavior during the visions. The whole of it—the visions, the command to refound the Knights Radiant, the preparation for a disaster that might or might not come—was a package. Adolin had already decided to believe that his father wasn't mad. Further worry was pointless.

The other decision might get him into trouble. He left his quarters, entering the sitting room, where Dalinar was already planning with Navani, General

Khal, Teshav, and Captain Kaladin. Renarin, frustratingly, guarded the door wearing a Bridge Four uniform. He'd refused to give up on that decision of his, despite Adolin's insistence.

"We'll need the bridgemen again," Dalinar said. "If something goes wrong, we may need a quick retreat."

"I'll prepare Bridges Five and Twelve for the day, sir," Kaladin said. "Those two seem nostalgic for their bridges, and talk about the bridge runs with fondness."

"Weren't those bloodbaths?" Navani asked.

"They were," Kaladin said, "but soldiers are a strange lot, Brightness. A disaster unifies them. These men would never want to go back, but they still identify as bridgemen."

Nearby, General Khal nodded in understanding, though Navani still seemed baffled.

"I'll take my position here," Dalinar said, holding up a map of the Shattered Plains. "We can scout the meeting plateau first, while I wait. It apparently has some odd rock formations."

"That sounds good," Brightness Teshav said.

"It does," Adolin said, joining the group, "except for one thing. You won't be there, Father."

"Adolin," Dalinar said with a suffering tone. "I know you think this is too dangerous, but—"

"It is too dangerous," Adolin said. "The assassin is still out there—and he attacked us last on the very day the Parshendi messenger came to camp. Now, we have a meeting with the enemy out on the Shattered Plains? Father, you can in a highstorm." inf assassinationkat't go."

"I have to," Dalinar said. "Adolin, this could mean an end to the war. It could mean answers—why they attacked in the first place. I will not give up this

opportunity.”

“We’re not going to give it up,” Adolin said. “We’re just going to do things a little differently.”

“How?” Dalinar asked, narrowing his eyes.

“Well for one thing,” Adolin said, “I’m going to go in your place.”

“Impossible,” Dalinar said, “I won’t risk my son on—”

“Father!” Adolin snapped. “This is not subject to discussion!”

The room fell silent. Dalinar lowered his hand from the map. Adolin stuck out his jaw, meeting his father’s eyes. Storms, it was difficult to deny Dalinar Kholin. Did his father realize the presence he had, the way he moved people about by sheer force of expectation?

Nobody contradicted him. Dalinar did what he wanted. Fortunately, these days those motives had a noble purpose. But in many ways he was the same man he had been twenty years ago, when he’d conquered a kingdom. He was the Blackthorn, and he got what he wanted.

Except today.

“You are too important,” Adolin said, pointing. “Deny that. Deny that your visions are vital. Deny that if you die, Alethkar would fall apart. Deny that every single person in this room is less important than you are.”

Dalinar drew in a deep breath, then exhaled slowly. “It shouldn’t be so. The kingdom needs to be strong enough to survive the loss of one man, no matter who.”

“Well, it’s not there yet,” Adolin said. “To get it there, we’re going to need you. And that means you need to let us watch out for you. I’m sorry, Father, but once in a while you just have to let someone else do their job. You can’t fix every problem with your own hands.”

“He’s right, sir,” Kaladin said. “You really shouldn’t be risking yourself out

on those Plains. Not if there's another option."

"I fail to see that there is one," Dalinar said, his tone cool.

"Oh, there is," Adolin said. "But I'm going to need to borrow Renarin's Shardplate."

* * *

The strangest thing about this experience, in Adolin's estimation, wasn't wearing his father's old armor. Despite the outward stylistic differences, suits of Shardplate all tended to fit similarly. The armor adapted, and within a short time after donning it, the Plate felt exactly like Adolin's own.

It also wasn't strange to ride at the front of the force, Dalinar's banner flapping over his head. Adolin had been leading them to battle on his own for six weeks now.

No, the strangest part was riding his father's horse.

Gallant was a large black animal, bulkier and squatter than Sureblood, Adolin's horse. Gallant looked like a warhorse even when compared to other Ryshadium. So far as Adolin knew, no man had ever ridden him but Dalinar. Ryshadium were finicky that way. It had taken a lengthy explanation from Dalinar to even get the horse to allow Adolin to hold the reins, let alone { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah murderre climb into the saddle.

It had eventually worked, but Adolin wouldn't dare ride Gallant into battle; he was pretty sure the beast would throw him off and run away, looking to protect Dalinar. It did feel odd climbing on a horse that wasn't Sureblood. He kept expecting Gallant to move differently than he did, turn his head at the wrong times. When Adolin patted his neck, the horse's mane felt off to him in ways he couldn't explain. He and his Ryshadium were more than simply rider and horse, and he found himself oddly melancholy to be out on a ride without Sureblood.

Foolishness. He had to stay focused. The procession approached the meeting plateau, which had a large, oddly shaped mound of rock near the center. This plateau was close to the Alethi side of the Plains, but much farther south than Adolin had ever gone. Early patrols had said chasmfiends were more common out in this region, but they never spotted a chrysalis here. Some kind of hunting ground, but not a place for pupating?

The Parshendi weren't there yet. When the scouts reported that the plateau was secure, Adolin urged Gallant across the mobile bridge. He felt warm in his Plate; the seasons, it seemed, had finally decided to inch through spring and maybe even toward summer.

He approached the rock mound at the center. It really was odd. Adolin circled it, noticing its shape, ridged in places, almost like . . .

"It's a chasmfiend," Adolin realized. He passed the face, a hollowed-out piece of stone that evoked the exact feeling of a chasmfiend's head. A statue? No, it was too natural. A chasmfiend had died here centuries ago, and instead of being blown away, had slowly crusted over with crem.

The result was eerie. The crem had duplicated the creature's form, clinging to the carapace, entombing it. The hulking rock seemed like a creature born of stone, like the ancient stories of Voidbringers.

Adolin shivered, nudging the horse away from the stone corpse and toward the other side of the plateau. Shortly, he heard alarms from the outrunners. Parshendi coming. He steeled himself, ready to summon his Shardblade. Behind him arrayed a group of bridgemen, ten in number, including that parshman. Captain Kaladin had remained with Dalinar back in the warcamp, just in case.

Adolin was the one more exposed. Part of him wished for the assassin to come today. So Adolin could try himself again. Of all the duels he hoped to fight in the future, this one—against the man who had killed his uncle—would be the most important, even more than taking down Sadeas.

The assassin did not make an appearance as a group of two hundred Parshendi crossed from the next plateau, jumping gracefully and landing on

the meeting plateau. Adolin's soldiers stirred, armor clanking, spears lowering. It had been years since men and Parshendi had met without blood being spilled.

"All right," Adolin said in his helm. "Fetch my scribe."

Brightness Inadara was carried up through the ranks in a palanquin. Dalinar wanted Navani with him—ostensibly because he wanted her advice, but probably also to protect her.

"Let's go," Adolin said, nudging Gallant forward. They crossed the plateau, just him and Brightness Inadara, who rose from her palanquin to walk. She was a wizened matron, with grey hair she cut short for simplicity. He'd seen sticks with more flesh on them than she had, but she was keen-minded and as trustworthy a scribe as they had.

The Parshendi in a high storm."m impressions.4 Shardbearer emerged from the ranks and strode forward on the rocks alone. Uncaring, unworried. This was a confident one.

Adolin dismounted and went the rest of the way on foot, Inadara at his side. They stopped a few feet from the Parshendi, the three of them alone on an expanse of rock, the fossilized chasmfiend staring at them from the left.

"I am Eshonai," the Parshendi said. "Do you remember me?"

"No," Adolin said. He pitched his voice down to try and match the voice of his father, and hoped that—with the helm in place—it would be enough to fool this woman, who couldn't know well what Dalinar sounded like.

"Not surprising," Eshonai said. "I was young and unimportant when we first met. Barely worth remembering."

Adolin had originally expected Parshendi conversation to be singsongish, from what he'd heard said of them. That wasn't the case at all. Eshonai had a rhythm to her words, the way she emphasized them and where she paused. She changed tones, but the result was more of a chant than a song.

Inadara took out a writing board and spanreed, then started writing down what Eshonai said.

“What is this?” Eshonai demanded.

“I came alone, as you asked,” Adolin said, trying to project his father’s air of command. “But I will record what is said and send it back to my generals.”

Eshonai did not raise her faceplate, so Adolin had a good excuse not to raise his. They stared at each other through eye slits. This was not going as well as his father had hoped, but it was about what Adolin had expected.

“We are here,” Adolin said, using the words his father had suggested he begin with, “to discuss the terms of a Parshendi surrender.”

Eshonai laughed. “That is not the point at all.”

“Then what?” Adolin demanded. “You seemed eager to meet with me. Why?”

“Things have changed since I spoke with your son, Blackthorn. Important things.”

“What things?”

“Things you cannot imagine,” Eshonai said.

Adolin waited, as if pondering, but actually giving Inadara time to correspond with the warcamps. Inadara leaned up to him, whispering what Navani and Dalinar had written for him to say.

“We tire of this war, Parshendi,” Adolin said. “Your numbers dwindle. We know this. Let us make a truce, one that would benefit us both.”

“We are not as weak as you believe,” Eshonai said.

Adolin found himself frowning. When she’d spoken to him before, she’d seemed passionate, inviting. Now she was cold and dismissive. Was that right? She was Parshendi. Perhaps human emotions didn’t apply to her.

Inadara whispered more to him.

“What do you want?” Adolin asked, speaking the words his father sent.
“How can there be peace?”

“There will be peace, Blackthorn, when one of us is dead. I came here because I wanted to see you with my own eyes, and I wanted to warn you. We have just changed the rules of this conflict. Squabbling over gemstones no longer matters.”

No longer matters? Adolin started to sweat. She ma
impressions.4kes it sound like they were playing their own game all this time. Not desperate at all. Could the Alethi have misjudged everything so profoundly?

She turned to go.

No. All of this, just to have the meeting puff into smoke? Storm it!

“Wait!” Adolin cried, stepping forward. “Why? Why are you acting like this? What is wrong?”

She looked back at him. “You really want to end this?”

“Yes. Please. I want peace. Regardless of the cost.”

“Then you will have to destroy us.”

“Why?” Adolin repeated. “Why did you kill Gavilar, all those years ago? Why betray our treaty?”

“King Gavilar,” Eshonai said, as if mulling over the name. “He should not have revealed his plans to us that night. Poor fool. He did not know. He bragged, thinking we would welcome the return of our gods.” She shook her head, then turned again and jogged off, armor clinking.

Adolin stepped back, feeling useless. If his father had been there, would he have been able to do more? Inadara still wrote, sending the words to Dalinar.

A reply from him finally came. “Return to the warcamps. There is nothing you, or I myself, could have done. Clearly, her mind is already made up.”

Adolin spent the return ride brooding. When he finally reached the warcamps a few hours later, he found his father in conference with Navani, Khal, Teshav, and the army’s four battalionlords.

Together, they pored over the words that Inadara had sent. A group of parshman servants quietly brought wine and fruit. Teleb—wearing the Plate that Adolin had won from his duel with Eranniv—watched from the side of the room, Shardhammer on his back, faceplate up. His people had once ruled Alethkar. What did he think of all this? The man usually kept his opinions to himself.

Adolin stomped into the room, pulling off his father’s—well, Renarin’s—helm. “I should have let you go,” Adolin said. “It wasn’t a trap. Perhaps you could have talked sense to her.”

“These are the people who murdered my brother on the very night they signed a treaty with him,” Dalinar said, inspecting maps on the table. “It seems they have not changed at all from that day. You did perfectly, son; we know everything we need to.”

“We do?” Adolin said, walking up to the table, helm under arm.

“Yes,” Dalinar said, looking up. “We know that they will not agree to peace, no matter what. My conscience is clear.”

Adolin looked over the outspread maps. “What is this?” he asked, noting troop movement symbols. They were all pointed across the Shattered Plains.

“A plan of assault,” Dalinar said quietly. “The Parshendi will not deal with us, and they are planning something big. Something to change the war. The time has come to bring the fight directly to them and end this war, one way or another.”

“Stormfather,” Adolin said. “And if we’re surrounded while we’re out there?”

“We will take everyone,” Dalinar said, “our whole army, and as many of the highprinces as will join me. Soulcasters for food. The Parshendi won’t be able to surround that large a force, and even if they did, it wouldn’t matter. We’d be lighteyed womanfyore able to stand against them.”

“We can leave right after the final highstorm before the Weeping,” Navani said, writing some numbers on the side of the map. “It is the Light Year, and so we’ll have steady rains, but no highstorms for weeks. We won’t be exposed to one while out on the Plains.”

It would also put them out on the Shattered Plains, alone, within days of the date that had been scratched on the walls and floor. . . . Adolin’s spine crawled.

“We have to beat them to it,” Dalinar said softly, scanning the maps. “Interrupt whatever it is they are planning. Before the countdown ends.” He looked up at Adolin. “I need you to duel more. High-profile matches, as high profile as you can manage. Win Shards for me, son.”

“I’m dueling Elit tomorrow,” Adolin said. “From there, I have a plan for my next target.”

“Good. To succeed out on the Plains, we will need Shardbearers—and we will need the loyalty of as many highprinces as will follow me. Focus your dueling on the Shardbearers of the faction loyal to Sadeas, and beat them with as much fanfare as you can manage. I will go to the neutral highprinces, and will remind them of their oaths to fulfill the Vengeance Pact. If we can take Shards from those who follow Sadeas and use them to end the war, it will go a long way toward proving what I’ve been saying all along. That unity is the path to Alethi greatness.”

Adolin nodded. “I’ll see it done.”



Now, as the Truthwatchers were esoteric in nature, their order being formed entirely of those who never spoke or wrote of what they did, in this lies frustration for those who would see their exceeding secrecy from the outside; they were not naturally inclined to explanation; and in the case of Corberon's disagreements, their silence was not a sign of an exceeding abundance of disdain, but rather an exceeding abundance of tact.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 11, page 6

Kaladin strolled along the Shattered Plains at night, passing tufts of shalebark and vines, lifespren spinning about them as motes. Puddles still lingered in low spots from the previous day's highstorm, fat with crem for the plants to feast upon. To his left, Kaladin heard the sounds of the warcamps, busy with activity. To the right . . . silence. Just those endless plateaus.

When he'd been a bridgeman, Sadeas's troops hadn't stopped him from walking this path. What was there for men out here, on the Plains? Instead, Sadeas had posted guards at the edges of the camps and at bridges, so the slaves couldn't escape.

What was there for men out here? Nothing but salvation itself, discovered in

the depths of those chasms.

Kaladin turned and strolled out along one of the chasms, passing soldiers on guard duty at bridges, torches shivering in the wind. They saluted him.

There, he thought, picking his way along a particular plateau. The warcamps to his left stained the air with light, enough to see where he was. At the plateau's edge he came to the place where he had met with the King's Wit on that night weeks ago. A night of decision, a night of change.

Kaladin stepped up to the edge of the chasm, looking eastward.

Change and decision. He checked over his shoulder. He'd passed the guard post, and now nobody was close enough to see him. So, belt laden with bags of spheres, Kaladin stepped off into the chasm.

* * *

Shallan did not care for Sadeas's warcamp.

The air was different here than it was in Sebarial's camp. It stank, and it smelled of desperation.

Was desperation even a smell? She thought she could describe it. The scent of sweat, of cheap drink, and of crem that had not been cleaned off the streets. That all churned above roads that were poorly lit. In Sebarial's camp, people walked in groups. Here, they loped along in packs.

Sebarial's camp smelled of spice and industry—of new leather and, sometimes, livestock. Dalinar's camp smelled of polish and oil. Around every second corner in Dalinar's camp, someone was doing something practical. There were too few soldiers in Dalinar's camp these days, but each wore his uniform, as if it were a shield against the chaos of the times.

In Sadeas's camp, the men who wore their uniforms wore them with unbuttoned jackets and wrinkled trousers. She passed tavern after tavern, each spitting forth a racket. The women who idled in front of some indicated that not all were simply taverns. Whorehouses were common in every camp,

of course, but they seemed more blatant here.

She passed fewer parshmen than she commonly saw in Sebarial's camp. Sadeas preferred traditional slaves: men and women with branded foreheads, scurrying about with backs bowed and shoulders slumped.

This was, honestly, what she'd expected from all of the warcamps. She'd read accounts of men at war—of camp followers and discipline problems. Of tempers flaring, of the attitudes of men who were trained to kill. Perhaps, instead of wondering at the awfulness of Sadeas's camp, she should be marveling that the others weren't the same.

Shallan hurried on her way. She wore the face of a young darkeyed man, her hair pushed up into her cap. She wore a pair of sturdy gloves. Even disguised as a boy, she wasn't about to go around with her safehand exposed.

Before leaving tonight, she had done a series of sketches to use as new faces, if need be. Testing had proven she could draw a sketch in the morning, then use it for an image in the afternoon. If she waited longer than about a day, though, the image she created was blurred and sometimes looked melted. That made perfect sense to Shallan. The process of creation left a picture in her mind that eventually wore thin.

Her current face had been based on the messenger youths who moved in Sadeas's camp. Though her heart thumped every time she passed a pack of soldiers, nobody gave her a second glance.

Amaram was a highlord—a man of third dahn, which made him a full rank higher than Shallan's father had been, two ranks higher than Shallan herself. That entitled him to his own little domain within his liege's warcamp. His manor flew his own banner, and he had his own personal military force occupying nearby buildings. Posts set into the stone and striped with his colors—burgundy and forest green—delineated his sphere of influence. She passed them without pausing.

“Hey, you!”

Shallan froze in place, feeling very small in the darkness. Not small enough. She turned slowly as a pair of patrolling guards walked up. Their uniforms were sharper than any she'd seen in this camp. Even the buttons were polished, though at the waists they wore skirtlike takama instead of trousers. Amaram was a traditionalist, and his uniforms reflected that.

The guards loomed over her, as most Alethi did. "Messenger?" one asked. "This time of night?" He was a solid fellow with a greying beard and a thick, wide nose.

"It's not even second moon yet, sir," Shallan said in what she hoped was a boyish voice.

He frowned at her. What had she said? Sir, she realized. He's not an officer.

"Report at the guard posts from now on when you visit," the man said, pointing toward a small, lit area in the distance behind them. "We're going to start keeping a secure perimeter."

"Yes, Sergeant."

"Oh, stop harassing the lad, Hav," the other soldier said. "You can't expect him to know rules that half the soldiers don't even know yet."

"On with you," Hav said, waving Shallan through. She hastened to obey. A secure perimeter? She didn't envy these men that task. Amaram didn't have a wall to keep people out, just some striped posts.

Amaram's manor was relatively small—two stories, with a handful of rooms on each floor. It might once have been a tavern, and was temporary, as he'd only just arrived at the warcamps. Stacked piles of crembrick and stone nearby indicated some far grander building was being planned. Near the piles stood other buildings that had been appropriated as barracks for Amaram's personal guard, which included only about fifty men. Most of the soldiers he'd brought, recruited from Sadeas's lands and sworn to him, would billet elsewhere.

Once she got close to Amaram's home, she ducked beside an outbuilding and

squatted down. She'd spent three evenings scouting this area, wearing a different face each time. Perhaps that had been overly cautious. She wasn't certain. She'd never done anything like this before. Fingers trembling, she took off her cap—that part of the costume was real—and let her hair spill around her shoulders. Then she dug a folded picture out of her pocket and waited.

Minutes passed as she stared at the manor. Come on . . . she thought. Come on . . .

Finally, a young darkeyed woman stepped out of the manor, arm-in-arm with a tall man in trousers and a loose buttoned shirt. The woman tittered as her friend said something, then she scampered off into the night, the man calling after her and following. The maid—Shallan still hadn't been able to learn her name—left every night at this time. Twice with this man. Once with another.

Shallan took a deep breath, drawing in Stormlight, then held up the picture she'd drawn of the girl earlier. About Shallan's height, hair about the same length, similar enough build . . . It would have to do. She breathed out, and became someone else.

“How do you know?” m her hairs.⁴She giggles and laughs, Shallan thought, plucking off her masculine gloves and replacing the one on the safehand with a tan feminine one, and often prances about, walking on her toes. Her voice is higher than mine, and she doesn't have an accent.

Shallan had practiced sounding right, but hopefully she wouldn't need to find out how believable her voice was. All she had to do was go in the door, up the stairs, and slip into the appropriate room. Easy.

She stood up, holding her breath and living off the Stormlight, and strode toward the building.

* * *

Kaladin hit the bottom of the chasm in a glowing storm of Light. He took off at a jog, spear over his shoulder. It was difficult to stand still with Stormlight in his veins.

He dropped a few of the pouches of spheres to use later. The Stormlight rising from his exposed skin was enough to illuminate the chasm, and it cast shadows on the walls as he ran. Those seemed to become figures, crafted by the bones and branches stretching from the heaps on the ground. Bodies and souls. His movement made the shadows twist, as if turning to regard him.

He ran with a silent audience, then. Syl flew down as a ribbon of light and took up position beside his head, matching his speed. He leaped over obstacles and splashed through puddles, letting his muscles warm to the exercise.

Then he jumped up onto the wall.

He hit awkwardly, tripping and rolling through some frillblooms. He came to rest facedown, lying on the wall. He growled and pushed himself to his feet as Stormlight sealed a small cut on his arm.

Jumping onto the wall felt too unnatural; when he hit, it took time to orient himself.

He started running again, sucking in more Stormlight, accustoming himself to the change of perspective. When he reached the next gap between plateaus, to his eyes it looked as if he'd reached a deep pit. The walls of the chasm were his floor and ceiling.

He hopped off the wall, focused on the floor of the chasm, and blinked—willing that direction to become down to him again. He landed in another stumble, and this time tripped into a puddle.

He rolled over onto his back, sighing, lying in the cold water. Crem that had settled to the bottom squished between his fingers as he clenched fists.

Syl landed on his chest, taking the form of a young woman. She put hands on her hips.

“What?” he asked.

“That was pathetic.”

“Agreed.”

“Maybe you’re taking it a little too quickly,” she said. “Why not try to jump onto the wall without a running start?”

“The assassin could do it this way,” Kaladin said. “I need to be able to fight like he does.”

“I see. And I suppose he started doing all of this the moment he was born, without any practice at all.”

Kaladin exhaled softly. “You sound like Tukks used to.”

“Oh? Was he brilliant, beautiful, and always right?”

“He was loud, intolerant, and profoundly acerbic,” Kaladin said, standing up. “But yes, he was basically always right.” He faced the wall and leaned his spear against it. “Szeth called this ‘LashingthemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito they companionre.’”

“A good term,” Syl said, nodding.

“Well, to get this down, I’m going to have to practice some fundamentals.” Just like learning a spear.

That probably meant hopping onto and off the wall a couple hundred times.

Better than dying on that assassin’s Shardblade, he thought, and got to it.

* * *

Shallan stepped into Amaram’s kitchens, trying to move with the energetic grace of the girl whose face she wore. The large room smelled strongly of the curry simmering over the hearth—the remnants of the night’s meal, waiting in case any lighteyes got peckish. The cook browsed a novel in the corner while her girls scrubbed pots. The room was well lit with spheres. Amaram apparently trusted his servants.

A long flight of steps led up to the second floor, providing quick access for

servants to bring meals to Amaram. Shallan had drawn a layout of the building from guesses based on window locations. The room with the secrets had been easy to locate—Amaram had the windows shuttered, and never opened them. She'd guessed right about the stairwell in the kitchens, it seemed. She strode toward those steps, humming to herself, as the woman she imitated often did.

“Back already?” the cook said, not looking up from her novel. She was Herdazian, from the accent. “His gift tonight wasn't nice enough? Or did the other one spot you two together?”

Shallan said nothing, trying to cover her anxiety with the humming.

“Might as well put you to use,” the cook said. “Stine wanted someone to polish mirrors for him. He's in the study, cleaning the master's flutes.”

Flutes? A soldier like Amaram had flutes?

What would the cook do if Shallan bolted up the stairs and ignored the order? The woman was probably high ranked for a darkeyes. An important member of the household staff.

The cook didn't look up from her novel, but continued softly. “Don't think we haven't noticed you sneaking off during midday, child. Just because the master is fond of you doesn't mean you can take advantage. Go to work. Spending your free evening cleaning instead of playing might remind you that you have duties.”

Gritting her teeth, Shallan looked up those steps toward her goal. The cook slowly lowered her novel. Her frown seemed the type that one didn't disobey.

Shallan nodded, moving away from the steps and into the corridor beyond. There would be another set of steps upward in the front hall. She'd just have to make her way in that direction and—

Shallan froze in place as a figure stepped into the hallway from a side room. Tall with a square face and angular nose, the man wore a lighteyed outfit of modern design: an open jacket over a buttoned shirt, stiff trousers, a stock

tied in place at his neck.

Storms! Highlord Amaram—fashionable or otherwise—was not supposed to be in the building today. Adolin had said that Amaram was dining with Dalinar and the king tonight. Why was he here?

Amaram stood looking over a ledger in his hand, and didn't seem to have noticed her. He turned away from her and strolled down the corridor.

Run. It was her immediate reaction. Escape
othemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito they companionreut the front doors, vanish into the night. The problem was, she'd spoken to the cook. When the woman Shallan was imitating came back later, she'd be in a storm of trouble—and she'd be able to prove, with witnesses, that she hadn't come back into the house earlier. Whatever Shallan did, there was a good chance that once she was gone, Amaram would find out that someone had been sneaking about, imitating one of his maids.

Stormfather! She'd only just stepped into the building, and already she'd messed everything up.

Stairs creaked up ahead. Amaram was going up to his room, the one Shallan was supposed to inspect.

The Ghostbloods will be mad at me for alerting Amaram, Shallan thought, but they'll be even angrier if I do that and then return with no information.

She had to get into that room, alone. That meant she couldn't let Amaram enter it.

Shallan scrambled after him, rushing into the entry hall and twisting around the newel post to propel herself up the stairs. Amaram reached the top landing and turned toward the hallway. Maybe he wouldn't go in that room.

She wasn't so lucky. As Shallan scurried up the steps, Amaram turned toward just that door and raised a key, slipping it into the lock and turning it.

“Brightlord Amaram,” Shallan said, out of breath as she reached the top

landing.

He turned toward her, frowning. “Telesh? Weren’t you going out tonight?”

Well, at least she knew her name now. Did Amaram really take such an interest in his servants as to be aware of a lowly maid’s evening plans?

“I did, Brightlord,” Shallan said, “but I came back.”

Need a distraction. But not something too suspicious. Think! Was he going to notice that the voice was different?

“Telesh,” Amaram said, shaking his head. “You still can’t choose between them? I promised your good father I’d see you cared for. How can I do that if you won’t settle down?”

“It’s not that, Brightlord,” Shallan said quickly. “Hav stopped a messenger on the perimeter coming for you. He sent me back to tell you.”

“Messenger?” Amaram said, slipping the key back out of the lock. “From whom?”

“Hav didn’t say, Brightlord. He seemed to think it was important, though.”

“That man . . .” Amaram said with a sigh. “He’s too protective. He thinks he can keep a tight perimeter in this mess of a camp?” The highlord considered, then stuffed the key back in his pocket. “Better see what it’s about.”

Shallan gave him a bow as he passed her by and trotted down the stairs. She counted to ten once he was out of sight, then scrambled to the door. It was still locked.

“Pattern!” Shallan whispered. “Where are you?”

He came out from the folds of her skirts, moving across the floor and then up the door until he was just before her, like a raised carving on the wood.

“The lock?” Shallan asked.

“It is a pattern,” he said, then grew very small and moved into the keyhole. She’d had him try a few more times on lighteyed woman’s relocks back in her rooms, and he’d been able to unlock those as he had Tyn’s trunk.

The lock clicked, and she opened the door and slipped into the dark room. A sphere plucked from her dress pocket lit it for her.

The secret room. The room with shutters always closed, kept locked at all times. A room that the Ghostbloods wanted so desperately to see.

It was filled with maps.

* * *

The trick to jumping between surfaces wasn’t the landing, Kaladin discovered. It wasn’t about reflexes or timing. It wasn’t even about changing perspective.

It was about fear.

It was about that moment when, hanging in the air, his body lurched from being pulled down to being pulled sideways. His instincts weren’t equipped to deal with this shift. A primal part of him panicked every time down stopped being down.

He ran at the wall and jumped, throwing his feet to the side. He couldn’t hesitate, couldn’t be afraid, couldn’t flinch. It was like teaching himself to dive face-first onto a stone surface without raising his hands for protection.

He shifted his perspective and used Stormlight to make the wall become downward. He positioned his feet. Even still, in that brief moment, his instincts rebelled. The body knew, it knew, that he was going to fall back to the chasm floor. He would break bones, hit his head.

He landed on the wall without stumbling.

Kaladin stood up straight, surprised, and exhaled a deep breath, puffing with Stormlight.

“Nice!” Syl said, zipping around him.

“It’s unnatural,” Kaladin said.

“No. I could never be involved in anything unnatural. It’s just . . . extranatural.”

“You mean supernatural.”

“No I don’t.” She laughed and zipped on ahead of him.

It was unnatural—as walking wasn’t natural for a child who was just learning. It became natural over time. Kaladin was learning to crawl—and unfortunately, he’d soon be required to run. Like a child dropped in a whitespine’s lair. Learn quickly or be lunch.

He ran along the wall, hopping over a shalebark outcropping, then jumped to the side and shifted to the floor of the chasm. He landed with only a slight stumble.

Better. He ran after Syl and kept at it.

* * *

Maps.

Shallan crept forward, her solitary sphere revealing a room draped with maps and strewn with papers. They were covered in glyphs that had been scribbled quickly, not made to be beautiful. She could barely read most of them.

I’ve heard of this, she thought. The stormwarden script. The way they get around the restrictions on writing.

Amaram was a stormwarden? A chart of times on one wall, listing highstorms and calculations of their next arrival—written in the same hand as the notes on the maps—seemed proof of that. Perhaps this was what the Ghostbloods were seeking: the missing piece. Push for the Alethi to their companion, re blackmail material. Stormwardens, as male scholars, made most people uncomfortable. Their use of glyphs in a way that was basically the

same as writing, their secretive nature . . . Amaram was one of the most accomplished generals in all of Alethkar. He was respected even by those he fought. Exposing him as a stormwarden could seriously damage his reputation.

Why would he bother with such strange hobbies? All of these maps faintly reminded her of the ones she'd discovered in her father's study, after his death—though those had been of Jah Keved. “Watch outside, Pattern,” she said. “Bring me word quickly when Amaram returns to the building.”

“Mmmm,” he buzzed, withdrawing.

Aware that her time was short, Shallan hurried to the wall, holding up her sphere and taking Memories of the maps. The Shattered Plains? This map was far more extensive than any she'd seen before—and that included the Prime Map that she'd studied in the king's Gallery of Maps.

How had Amaram obtained something so extensive? She tried to work out the use of glyphs—there was no grammar to them that she could see. Glyphs weren't meant to be used that way. They conveyed a single idea, not a string of thoughts. She read a few in a row.

Origin . . . direction . . . uncertainty. . . . The place of the center is uncertain? That was probably what it meant.

Other notes were similar, and she translated in her head. Perhaps pushing this direction will yield results. Warriors spotted watching from here. Other groupings of glyphs made no sense to her. This script was bizarre. Perhaps Pattern could translate it, but she certainly couldn't.

Aside from the maps, the walls were covered in long sheets of paper filled with writing, figures, and diagrams. Amaram was working on something, something big—

Parshendi! she realized. That's what those glyphs mean. Parap-shenesh-idi. The three glyphs individually meant three separate things—but together, their sounds made the word “Parshendi.” That was why some of the writings seemed like gibberish. Amaram was using some glyphs phonetically. He

underlined them when he did this, and that allowed him to write in glyphs things that never should have worked. The stormwardens really were turning glyphs into a full script.

Parshendi, she translated, still distracted by the nature of the characters, must know how to return the Voidbringers.

What?

Remove secret from them.

Reach center before Alethi armies.

Some of the writings were lists of references. Though they'd been translated to glyphs, she recognized some of the quotes from Jasnah's work. They referred to the Voidbringers. Others were purported sketches of Voidbringers and other creatures of mythology.

This was it, full proof that the Ghostbloods were interested in the same things Jasnah was. As was Amaram, apparently. Heart beating with excitement, Shallan turned around, looking over the room. Was the secret to Urithiru here? Had he found it?

There was too much for Shallan to translate fully at the moment. The script was too in a highstorm."m her hairs.4 difficult, and her thumping heart made her too nervous. Besides, Amaram would likely return very soon. She took Memories so she could sketch this all out later.

As she did, the writings she translated in passing caused a new species of dread to rise within her. It seemed . . . it seemed that Highlord Amaram—paragon of Alethi honor—was actively trying to bring about the return of the Voidbringers.

I have to stay a part of this, Shallan thought. I can't afford to have the Ghostbloods cast me out for making a mess of this incursion. I need to discover what else they know. And I have to know why Amaram is doing what he does.

She couldn't just run tonight. She couldn't risk leaving Amaram alerted that someone had infiltrated his secret room. She couldn't botch this assignment.

Shallan had to craft better lies.

She pulled a sheet of paper from her pocket and slapped it onto the desk, then began to frantically draw.

* * *

Kaladin jumped off the wall at a careful speed, twisting to the side and landing back on the ground without breaking step. He wasn't going very quickly, but at least he didn't stumble anymore.

With each jump, he shoved the visceral panic farther down. Up, back onto the wall. Down again. Again and again, sucking in Stormlight.

Yes, this was natural. Yes, this was him.

He continued running along the chasm bottom, feeling a surge of excitement. Shadows waved him on as he dodged between piles of bone and moss. He leaped over a large pool of water, but misjudged its size. He came down—about to splash into the shallow water.

But by reflex, he looked upward and Lashed himself toward the sky.

For a brief moment, Kaladin stopped falling down and fell up instead. His momentum continued forward, and he cleared the pool, then Lashed himself downward again. He landed in a trot, sweating.

I could Lash myself upward, he thought, and fall into the sky forever.

But no, that was how an ordinary person thought. A skyeel didn't fear falling, did it? A fish didn't fear drowning.

Until he began thinking in a new way, he wouldn't control this gift he had been given. And it was a gift. He would embrace this.

The sky was now his.

Kaladin shouted, dashing forward. He leaped and Lashed himself to the wall. No pausing, no hesitance, no fear. He hit at a dead run, and nearby, Syl laughed for joy.

But that, that was simple. Kaladin jumped off the wall and looked directly above him at the opposite wall. He Lashed himself in that direction, and flung his body into a flip. He landed, going down on one knee upon what had been the ceiling to him a moment before.

“You did it!” Syl said, flitting around him. “What changed?”

“I did.”

“Well, yeah, but what about you?” Syl asked.

“Everything.”

She frowned at him. He grinned back, then took off at a run along the side of the chasm. ~~themissingpiece~~PushfortheAlethito they companionre

* * *

Shallan strode down the mansion’s back steps to the kitchen, thumping each foot down harder than it would normally fall, trying to imitate being heavier than she was. The cook looked up from her novel and dropped it in a wide-eyed panic, moving to stand. “Brightlord!”

“Remain seated,” Shallan mouthed, scratching at her face to mask her lips. Pattern spoke the words she’d told him to say in a perfect imitation of Amaram’s voice.

The cook remained seated, as ordered. Hopefully, from that position, she wouldn’t notice that Amaram was shorter than he should be. Even walking on her tiptoes—which was masked by the illusion—she was much shorter than the highprince.

“You spoke to the maid Telesh earlier,” Pattern said as Shallan mouthed the words.

“Yes, Brightlord,” the cook said, speaking softly to match Pattern’s tone of voice. “I sent her off to work with Stine for the evening. I thought the girl needed a little direction.”

“No,” Pattern said. “Her return was at my command. I have sent her out again, and told her not to speak of what happened tonight.”

The cook frowned. “What . . . happened tonight?”

“You are not to speak of this event. You interfered with something that is not of your concern. Pretend you did not see Telesh. Never speak of this event to me. If you do, I will pretend none of this happened. Do you understand?”

The cook grew pale, and nodded her head, sinking down in her chair.

Shallan nodded to her

curtly, then walked from the kitchens out into the night. There, she ducked to the side of the building, heart pounding. A grin formed on her face anyway.

Out of sight, she exhaled Stormlight in a cloud, then stepped forward. As she passed through it, the image of Amaram vanished, replaced by that of the messenger boy she'd been imitating before. She scrambled back to the front of the bt down on the steps, slumping and leaning with her head on her hand.

Amaram and Hav walked up through the night, speaking softly. “. . . I didn't notice that the girl had seen me talking to the messenger, Highlord,” Hav was saying. “She must have realized . . .” He trailed off as they saw Shallan.

She hopped to her feet and bowed to Amaram.

“It's no matter now, Hav,” Amaram said, waving the soldier back to his rounds.

“Highlord,” Shallan said. “I bring you a message.”

“Obviously, darkborn,” the man said, stepping up to her. “What does he want?”

“He?” Shallan asked. “This is from Shallan Davar.”

Amaram cocked his head. “Who?”

“Betrothed of Adolin Kholin,” she said. “She is trying to update the accounting of all of the Shardblades in Alethkar with pictures. She would like to schedule a time to come and do a sketch of yours, if you are willing.”

“Oh,” Amaram said. He seemed to relax. “Yes, well, that would be fine. I am free most afternoons. Have her send someone to speak with my steward to arrange a meeting.”

“Yes, Highlord. I'll see { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; JasnahAQre that it is done.” Shallan moved to leave.

“You came this late?” Amaram asked. “To ask such a simple question.”

Shallan shrugged. “I don’t question the commands of lighteyes, Highlord. But my mistress, well, she can be distracted at times. I suppose she wanted me on her task while it was fresh in her mind. And she’s really interested in Shardblades.”

“Who isn’t?” Amaram mused, turning away, speaking softly. “They’re wondrous things, aren’t they?”

Was he talking to her, or to himself? Shallan hesitated. A sword formed in his hand, mist coalescing, water beading on its surface. Amaram held it up, looking at himself in the reflection.

“Such beauty,” he said. “Such art. Why must we kill with our grandest creations? Ah, but I’m babbling, delaying you. I apologize. The Blade is still new to me. I find excuses to summon it.”

Shallan was barely listening. A Blade with the back edge ridged like flowing waves. Or perhaps tongues of fire. Etchings all along its surface. Curved, sinuous.

She knew this Blade.

It belonged to her brother Helaran.

* * *

Kaladin charged through the chasm, and the wind joined him, blowing at his back. Syl soared before him as a ribbon of light.

He reached a boulder in his way and jumped into the air, Lashing himself upward. He soared a good thirty feet upward before Lashing himself to the side and downward at the same time. The downward Lashing slowed his momentum upward; the sideways Lashing brought him to the wall.

He dismissed the downward Lashing and hit the wall with one hand, twisting and throwing himself to his feet. He kept running along the chasm wall. When he reached the end of the plateau, he leaped toward the next one and Lashed himself at its wall instead.

Faster! He held nearly all of the Stormlight he had left, fetched from the pouches he'd dropped earlier. He held so much that he glowed like a bonfire. It encouraged him as he jumped and Lashed himself forward, eastward. This made him fall through the chasm. The floor of the chasm whipped along beneath him, plants a blur to his sides.

He had to remember that he was falling. This was not flight, and every second he moved, his speed increased. That didn't stop the feeling of liberty, of ultimate freedom. It just meant this could be dangerous.

The winds picked up and he Lashed himself backward at the last moment, slowing his descent as he crashed against a chasm wall before him.

That direction was down to him now, so he stood and ran along it. He was using the Stormlight at a furious rate, but he didn't need to scrimp. He was paid like a lighteyed officer of the sixth dahn, and his spheres held not tiny chips of gemstone, but broams. A month's pay for him now was more than he had ever seen at a time, and the Stormlight it held was a vast fortune compared to what he'd once known.

He shouted as he jumped a group of frillblooms, their fronds pulling in beneath him. He Lashed himself to the other chasm wall and crossed the chasm, landing on his hands. He threw himself back upward, and somehow Lashed himself only slightly in that direction.

Now much lighter, he was able to twist in the air and come down on his feet. He stood on the wa," Shallan said softly TOI ll, facing down the chasm, hands in fists and Light pouring off him.

Syl hesitated, flitting around him back and forth. "What?" she asked.

"More," he said, then Lashed himself forward again, down the corridor.

Fearless, he fell. This was his ocean to swim, his winds upon which to soar. He fell face-first toward the next plateau. Just before he arrived, he Lashed himself sideways and backward.

His stomach lurched. He felt like someone had tied a rope around him and

pushed him off a cliff, then yanked on the rope right as he reached the end of it. The Stormlight inside, however, made the discomfort negligible. He pulled sideways, into another chasm.

Lashings sent him eastward again down another corridor, and he wove around plateaus, keeping to the chasms—like an eel swimming through the waves, swerving around boulders. Onward, faster, still falling . . .

Teeth clenched at both the wonder and the forces twisting him, he tossed caution aside and Lashed himself upward. Once, twice, three times. He let go of all else, and amid the streaming Light, he shot from the chasms out into the open air above.

He Lashed himself back to the east so that he could fall in that direction again, but now no plateau walls got in his way. He soared toward the horizon, distant, lost in the darkness. He gained speed, coat flapping, hair whipping behind him. Air buffeted his face, and he narrowed his eyes, but did not close them.

Beneath, dark chasms passed one after another. Plateau. Pit. Plateau. Pit. This sensation . . . flying over the land . . . he had felt this before, in dreams. What took bridgemen hours to cross, he passed in minutes. He felt as if something were boosting him from behind, the wind itself carrying him. Syl zipped along to his right.

And to his left? No, those were other windspren. He'd accumulated dozens of them, flying around him as ribbons of light. He could pick out Syl. He didn't know how; she didn't look different, but he could tell. Like you could pick a family member out of a crowd just by their walk.

Syl and her cousins twisted around him in a spiral of light, free and loose, but with a hint of coordination.

How long had it been since he felt this good, this triumphant, this alive? Not since before Tien's death. Even after saving Bridge Four, darkness had shadowed him.

That evaporated. He saw a spire of rock ahead on the plateaus, and nudged

himself toward it with a careful Lashing to the right. Other Lashings to his rear slowed his fall enough that when he hit the tip of the spire of rock, he could clutch to it and spin around it, fingers on the smooth cremstone.

A hundred windspren broke around him, like the crash of a wave, spraying outward from Kaladin in a fan of light.

He grinned. Then he looked upward, toward the sky.

* * *

Highlord Amaram continued to stare at the Shardblade in the night. He held it up before him in the light spilling from the front of the manor house.

Shallan remembered her father's quiet terror as he looked upon that weapon, leveled toward him. Could it be a coincidence? Two weapons that looked the same? Perhaps her memory was flawed.

No. No, she would never forget the look of that Blade. It was the one Helaran had held. And no two Blades lighteyed womanfH2re were the same.

"Brightlord," Shallan said, drawing Amaram's attention. He seemed startled, as if he'd forgotten she was there.

"Yes?"

"Brightness Shallan," she said, "wants to make certain the records are all correct and that the histories of the Blades and Plate in the Alethi army have been properly traced. Your Blade is not in them. She asked if you would mind sharing the origin of your Blade, in the name of scholarship."

"I've explained this to Dalinar already," Amaram said. "I don't know the history of my Shards. Both were in the possession of an assassin who tried to kill me. A younger man. Veden, with red hair. We don't know his name, and his face was ruined in my counterattack. I had to stab him through his faceplate, you see."

Young man. Red hair.

She stood before her brother's killer.

"I . . ." Shallan stammered, feeling sick. "Thank you. I will pass the information along."

She turned, trying not to stumble as she walked away. She finally knew what had happened to Helaran.

You were involved in all of this, weren't you, Helaran? she thought. Just like Father was. But how, why?

It seemed that Amaram was trying to bring back the Voidbringers. Helaran had tried to kill him.

But would anyone really want to bring back the Voidbringers? Perhaps she was mistaken. She needed to get to her rooms, draw those maps from the Memories she'd taken, and try to figure this all out.

The guards, blessedly, did not give her any further troubles as she slipped away from Amaram's camp and into the anonymity of the darkness. That was well, for if they'd looked closely, they'd have seen the messenger boy with tears in his eyes. Crying for a brother that now, once and for all, Shallan knew was dead.

* * *

Upward.

One Lashing, then another, then a third. Kaladin shot up into the sky. Nothing but open expanse, an infinite sea for his delight.

The air grew cold. Still upward he went, reaching for the clouds. Finally, worried about running out of Stormlight before returning to the ground—he had only one infused sphere left, carried in his pocket for an emergency—Kaladin reluctantly Lashed himself downward.

He didn't fall downward immediately; his momentum upward merely slowed. He was still Lashed to the sky; he hadn't dismissed the upward Lashings.

Curious, he Lashed himself downward to slow further, then dismissed all of his Lashings except one up and one down. He eventually came to a stop hanging in midair. The second moon had risen, bathing the Plains in light far below. From here, they looked like a broken plate. No . . . he thought, squinting. It's a pattern. He'd seen this before. In a dream.

Wind blew against him, causing him to drift like a kite. The windspren he'd attracted scampered away now that he wasn't riding upon the winds. Funny. He'd never realized one could attract windspren as one attracted the spren of emotions.

All you had illustrations preceding chapters in a , lookings.4 to do was fall into the sky.

Syl remained, spinning around him in a swirl until finally coming to rest on his shoulder. She sat, then looked down.

“Not many men ever see this view,” she noted. From up here, the warcamps—circles of fire to his right—seemed insignificant. It was cold enough to be uncomfortable. Rock claimed the air was thinner up high, though Kaladin couldn't tell any difference.

“I've been trying to get you to do this for a while now,” Syl said.

“It's like when I first picked up a spear,” Kaladin whispered. “I was just a child. Were you with me back then? All that time ago?”

“No,” Syl said, “and yes.”

“It can't be both.”

“It can. I knew I needed to find you. And the winds knew you. They led me to you.”

“So everything I've done,” Kaladin said. “My skill with the spear, the way I fight. That's not me. It's you.”

“It's us.”

“It’s cheating. Unearned.”

“Nonsense,” Syl said. “You practice every day.”

“I have an advantage.”

“The advantage of talent,” Syl said. “When the master musician first picks up an instrument and finds music in it that nobody else can, is that cheating? Is that art unearned, just because she is naturally more skilled? Or is it genius?”

Kaladin Lashed himself westward, back toward the warcamps. He didn’t want to leave himself stranded in the middle of the Shattered Plains without Stormlight. The tempest within had calmed greatly since he started. He fell in that direction for a time—getting as close as he dared before slowing himself—then removed part of the upward Lashing and began to drift downward.

“I’ll take it,” Kaladin said. “Whatever it is that gives me that edge. I’ll use it. I’ll need it to beat him.”

Syl nodded, still sitting on his shoulder.

“You don’t think he has a spren,” Kaladin said. “But how does he do what he does?”

“The weapon,” Syl said, more confidently than she had before. “It’s something special. It was created to give abilities to men, much as our bond does.”

Kaladin nodded, light wind ruffling his jacket as he fell through the night. “Syl . . .” How to broach this? “I can’t fight him without a Shardblade.”

She looked the other way, squeezing her arms together, hugging herself. Such human gestures.

“I’ve avoided the training with the Blades that Zahel offers,” Kaladin continued. “It’s hard to justify. I need to learn how to use one of those weapons.”

“They’re evil,” she said in a small voice.

“Because they’re symbols of the knights’ broken oaths,” Kaladin said. “But where did they come from in the first place? How were they forged?”

Syl didn’t answer.

{ margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; }
“Can a new one be forged? One that doesn’t bear the stain of broken promises?”

“Yes.”

“How?”

She didn’t reply. They floated downward for a time in silence until gently coming to rest on a dark plateau. Kaladin got his bearings, then walked over and drifted off the edge, going down into the chasms. He wouldn’t want to walk back using the bridges. The scouts would find it odd that he was coming back without having gone out.

Storms. They’d have seen him flying out here, wouldn’t they? What would they think? Were any close enough to have seen him land?

Well, he couldn’t do anything about that now. He reached the bottom of the chasm and started walking back toward the warcamps, his Stormlight slowly dying out, leaving him in darkness. He felt deflated without it, sluggish, tired.

He fished the last infused sphere from his pocket and used it to light his path.

“There’s a question you’re avoiding,” Syl said, landing on his shoulder. “It’s been two days. When are you going to tell Dalinar about those men that Moash took you to meet?”

“He didn’t listen when I told him about Amaram.”

“This is obviously different,” Syl said.

It was, and she was right. Building and sa



As to the other orders that were inferior in this visiting of the far realm of spren, the Elsecallers were prodigiously benevolent, allowing others as auxiliary to their visits and interactions; though they did never relinquish their place as prime liaisons with the great ones of the spren; and the Lightweavers and Willshapers both also had an affinity to the same, though neither were the true masters of that realm.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 6, page 2

Adolin slapped away Elit's Shardblade with his forearm. Shardbearers didn't use shields—each section of Plate was stronger than stone.

He swept in, using Windstance as he moved across the sand of the arena.

Win Shards for me, son.

Adolin flowed through the stance's strikes, one direction then the other, forcing Elit away. The man scrambled, Plate leaking from a dozen places where Adolin had struck him.

Any hope for a peaceful end to the war on the Shattered Plains was gone. Done for. He knew how much his father had wanted that end, and the

Parshendi arrogance made him angry. Frustrated.

He kept that down. He could not be consumed by it. He moved smoothly through the stance, careful, maintaining a calm serenity.

Elit had apparently expected Adolin to be reckless, as in his first duel for Shards. Elit kept backing up, waiting for that moment of recklessness. Adolin didn't give it to him.

Today, he fought with precision—exacting form and stance, nothing out of place. Downplaying his ability in his previous duel had not coaxed anyone powerful into agreeing to a bout. Adolin had barely persuaded Elit.

Time for a different tactic.

Adolin passed where Sadeas, Aladar, and Ruthar watched. The core of the coalition against Father. By now, each of them had gone on plateau runs illicitly, getting to the plateau and stealing the gemheart before those assigned could arrive. Each time, they paid the fines Dalinar levied for their disobedience. Dalinar couldn't do anything more to them without risking open war.

But Adolin could punish them in other ways.

Elit stumbled back, wary, as Adolin swept in. The man tested forward, and Adolin slapped the Blade away, then brought in a backhand and clipped Elit's forearm. It, too, started to leak Stormlight.

The crowd murmured, conversations rising over the arena. Elit came in again, and Adolin slapped away his strikes, but did not counterattack.

Ideal form. Each step in place. The Thrill rose within him, but he shoved it down. He was disgusted by the highprinces and their squabbling, but today he would not show them that fury. Instead, he'd show them perfection.

"He's trying to wear you down, Elit!" Ruthar's voice from the stands nearby. In his younger years, he'd been something of a duelist himself, though nowhere near as good as Dalinar or Aladar. "Don't let him!"

Adolin smiled inside his helm as Elit nodded and dashed forward in Smokestance, thrusting with his Blade. A gamble. Most contests against Plate were won by breaking sections, but at times you could drive the point of your Blade through a joint between plates, cracking them and scoring a hit.

It was also a way to try to wound your opponent, more than just defeat him. { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah waitedre

Adolin calmly stepped back and used the proper Windstance sweeps for parrying a thrust. Elit's weapon clanged away, and the crowd grumbled further. First, Adolin had given them a brutal show, which had annoyed them. Then, he'd given them a close fight, with plenty of excitement.

This time, he did something opposite of both, refusing the exciting clashes that were often so much a part of a duel.

He stepped to the side and swung to score a slight hit on Elit's helm. It leaked from a small crack. Not as much as it should, however.

Excellent.

Elit growled audibly from within his helm, then came in with another thrust. Right at Adolin's faceplate.

Trying to kill me, are you? Adolin thought, taking one hand from his Blade and raising it just under Elit's oncoming Blade, letting it slide between his thumb and forefinger.

Elit's Blade ground along Adolin's hand as he lifted upward and to the right. It was a move that you could never perform without Plate—you'd end with your hand sliced in half if you tried that on a regular sword, worse if you tried it on a Shardblade.

With Plate, he easily guided the thrust up past his head, then swept in with his other hand, slamming his Blade against Elit's side.

Some in the crowd cheered at the straight-on blow. Others booed, however.

The classical strike there would have been to hit Elit's head, trying to shatter the helm.

Elit stumbled forward, knocked off balance by the missed thrust and subsequent blow. Adolin heaved against him with a shoulder, throwing him to the ground. Then, instead of pouncing, he stepped backward.

More booing.

Elit stood up, then took a step. He lurched slightly, then took another step. Adolin backed up and set his Blade with the point toward the ground, waiting. Overhead, the sky rumbled. It would probably rain later today—not a highstorm, thankfully. Just a mundane rainshower.

“Fight me!” Elit shouted from within his helm.

“I have.” Adolin replied quietly. “And I’ve won.”

Elit lurched forward. Adolin backed up. To the boos of the crowd, he waited until Elit locked up completely—his Plate out of Stormlight. The dozens of small cracks Adolin had put in the man's armor had finally added up.

Then, Adolin strolled forward, placed a hand against Elit's chest, and shoved him over. He crashed to the ground.

Adolin looked up at Brightlady Istow, highjudge.

“Judgment,” the highjudge said with a sigh, “again goes to Adolin Kholin. The victor. Elit Ruthar forfeits his Plate.”

The crowd didn't much like it. Adolin turned to face them, sweeping his Blade a few times before dismissing it to mist. He removed his helm and bowed to their boos. Behind, his armorers—whom he'd prepared for this—rushed out and pushed away those of Elit. They pulled off the Plate, which now belonged to Adolin.

He smiled, and when they were done, followed them into the staging room beneath the seats. Renarin waited by the door, wearing his own Plate, and Aunt Navani sat by the room's brazier.

Renarin peeked out at the dissatisfied crowds. “Stormfather. The first duel like this you did, you were done in under a minute, and they hated you. Today,” Shallan said softly “You were at it for the better part of an hour, and they seem to hate you more.”

Adolin sat down with a sigh on one of the benches. “I won.”

“You did,” Navani said, stepping up, inspecting him as if for wounds. She was always worried when he dueled. “But weren’t you supposed to do it with great fanfare?”

Renarin nodded. “That’s what Father asked for.”

“This will be remembered,” Adolin said, accepting a cup of water from Peet, one of the bridgeman guards for the day. He nodded thankfully. “Fanfare is about making everyone pay attention. This will work.”

He hoped. The next part was as important.

“Aunt,” Adolin said as she started writing a prayer of thanks. “Have you given any thought to what I asked?”

Navani kept drawing.

“Shallan’s work really does sound important,” Adolin said. “I mean—”

A knock came at the door to the chamber.

So quickly? Adolin thought, rising. One of the bridgemen opened the door.

Shallan Davar burst in, wearing a violet dress, red hair flaring as she crossed the room. “That was incredible!”

“Shallan!” She wasn’t the person he’d been expecting—but he wasn’t unhappy to see her. “I checked your seat before the fight and you weren’t there.”

“I forgot to burn a prayer,” she said, “so I stopped to do so. I caught most of

the fight, though.” She hesitated right before him, seeming awkward for a moment. Adolin shared that awkwardness. They had only been officially courting for little more than a week, but with the causal in place . . . what was their relationship?

Navani cleared her throat. Shallan spun and raised her freehand to her lips, as if having only just noticed the former queen. “Brightness,” she said, and bowed.

“Shallan,” Navani said. “I hear only good things from my nephew regarding you.”

“Thank you.”

“I will leave you two, then,” Navani said, walking toward the door, her glyphward unfinished.

“Brightness . . .” Shallan said, raising a hand toward her.

Navani left and pulled the door closed.

Shallan lowered her hand, and Adolin winced. “Sorry,” Adolin said. “I’ve been trying to talk to her about it. I think she needs a few more days, Shallan. She’ll come around—she knows that she shouldn’t be ignoring you, I can sense it. You just remind her of what happened.”

Shallan nodded, looking disappointed. Adolin’s armorers came over to help him remove his Plate, but he waved them away. It was bad enough to show her his sloppy hair, plastered to his head from being in the helm. His clothing underneath—a padded uniform—would look awful.

“So, uh, you liked the duel?” he asked.

“You were wonderful,” Shallan said, turning back to him. “Elit kept jumping at you, and you just brushed him off like an annoying cremling trying to crawl up your leg.” lighteyed womanf trainedre

Adolin grinned. “The rest of the crowd didn’t think it was wonderful.”

“They came to see you get stomped,” she said. “You were so inconsiderate for not giving that to them.”

“I’m quite stingy in that regard,” Adolin said.

“You almost never lose, from what I’ve discovered. Awfully boring of you. Maybe you should try for a tie now and then. For variety.”

“I’ll consider it,” he said. “We can discuss it, perhaps over dinner this evening? At my father’s warcamp?”

Shallan grimaced. “I’m busy this evening. Sorry.”

“Oh.”

“But,” she said, stepping closer. “I might have a gift for you soon. I haven’t had much time to study—I’ve been working hard to reconstruct Sebarial’s house ledgers—but I might have stumbled upon something that can help you. With your duels.”

“What?” he asked, frowning.

“I remembered something from King Gavilar’s biography. It would require you to win a duel in a spectacular way, though. Something amazing, something that would awe the crowd.”

“Fewer boos, then,” Adolin said, scratching at his head.

“I think everyone would appreciate that,” Renarin noted from beside the door.

“Spectacular . . .” Adolin said.

“I’ll explain more tomorrow,” Shallan said.

“What happens tomorrow?”

“You’re feeding me dinner.”

“I am?”

“And taking me on a walk,” she said.

“I am?”

“Yes.”

“I’m a lucky man.” He smiled at her. “All right, then, we can—”

The door slammed open.

Adolin’s bridgeman guards jumped, and Renarin cursed, standing up. Adolin just turned, gently moving Shallan to the side so he could see who was standing beyond. Relis, current dueling champion and Highprince Ruthar’s eldest son.

As expected.

“What,” Relis demanded, stalking into the room, “was that?” He was followed by a small gaggle of other lighteyes, including Brightlady Istow, the highjudge. “You insult me and my house, Kholin.”

Adolin clasped his gauntleted hands behind his back as Relis stalked right up to him, shoving his face into Adolin’s.

“You didn’t like the duel?” Adolin asked casually.

“That was not a duel,” Relis snapped. “You embarrassed my cousin by refusing to fight properly. I demand that this farce be invalidated.”

“I’ve told you, Prince Relis,” Istow said from behind. “Prince Adolin didn’t break any—”

“You want your cousin’s Plate back?” Adolin asked quietly, meeting Relis’s eyes. “Fight me for it.” { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah waitedre

“I won’t be goaded by you,” Relis said, tapping the center of Adolin’s breastplate. “I won’t let you pull me into another of your dueling farces.”

“Six Shards, Relis,” Adolin said. “Mine, those of my brother, Eranniv’s Plate, and your cousin’s Plate. I wager them all on a single bout. You and me.”

“You are a dunnard if you think I’ll agree to that,” Relis snapped.

“Too afraid?” Adolin asked.

“You’re beneath me, Kholin. These last two fights prove it. You don’t even know how to duel anymore—all you know are tricks.”

“Then you should be able to beat me easily.”

Relis wavered, shifting from one foot to the other. Finally, he pointed at Adolin again. “You’re a bastard, Kholin. I know you fought my cousin to embarrass my father and myself. I refuse to be goaded.” He turned to leave.

Something spectacular, Adolin thought, glancing at Shallan. Father asked for fanfare. . . .

“If you’re afraid,” Adolin said, looking back to Relis, “you don’t have to duel me alone.”

Relis stopped in place. He looked back. “Are you saying you’ll take me on with anyone else at the same time?”

“I am,” Adolin said. “I’ll fight you and whomever you bring, together.”

“You are a fool,” Relis breathed.

“Yes or no?”

“Two days,” Relis snapped. “Here in the arena.” He looked to the highjudge. “You witness this?”

“I do,” she said.

Relis stormed out. The others trailed after. The highjudge lingered, regarding Adolin. “You realize what you have done.”

“I know the dueling conventions quite well. Yes. I’m aware.”

She sighed, but nodded, walking out.

Peet closed the door, then looked at Adolin, raising an eyebrow. Great. Now he was getting attitude from the bridgemen. Adolin sank back down on the bench. “Will that do for spectacular?” he asked Shallan.

“You really think you can beat two at once?” she asked.

Adolin didn’t reply. Fighting two men at once was hard, particularly if they were both Shardbearers. They could gang up on you, flank you, blindside you. It was far harder than fighting two in a row.

“I don’t know,” he said. “But you wanted spectacular. So I’ll try for spectacular. Now, I hope you actually have a plan.”

Shallan sat down next to him. “What do you know of Highprince Yenev . . . ?”

lighteyed womanf trainedre

"A LADY'S FACE"

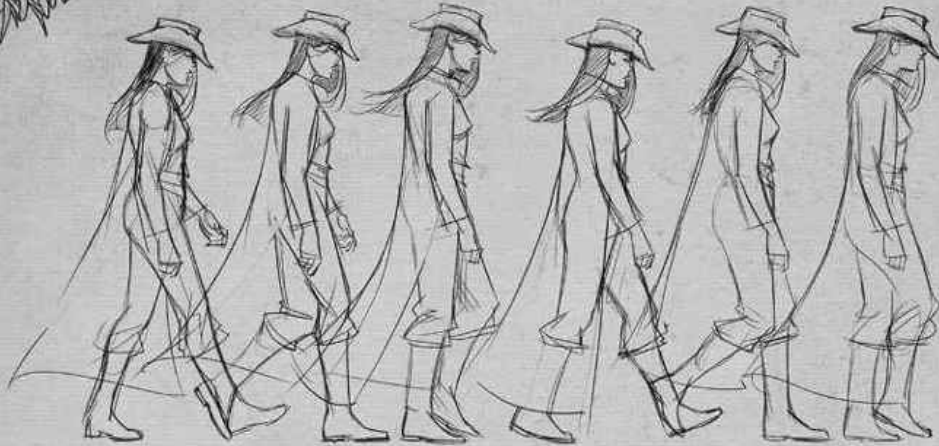
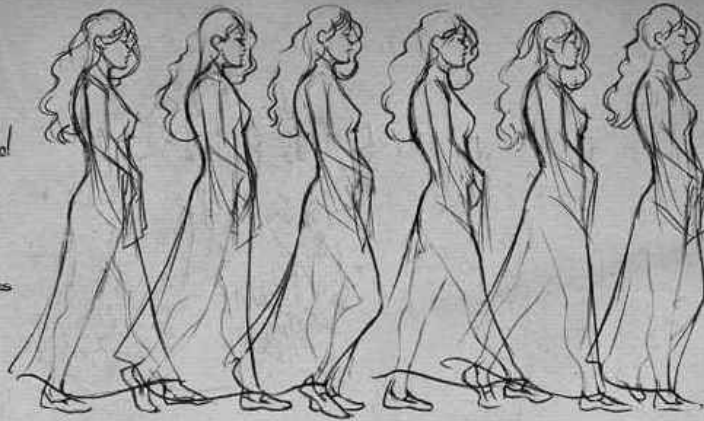
by BRIGHTNESS AXEERIE

A proper Vorin lady walks with her swordhand covered by her freshhand, both held before her. She steps with poise and deliberation!

- Head up!
- Back straight!
- Feet level with the floor!

She does NOT swing her arms or raise her toes like a common darkie at a farm dance!

She does not slouch!





There came also sixteen of the order of Windrunners, and with them a considerable number of squires, and finding in that place the Skybreakers dividing the innocent from the guilty, there ensued a great debate.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 28, page 3

Shallan stepped from the carriage into a light rainfall. She wore the white coat and trousers of the dark-eyed version of herself that she'd named Veil. Rain sprinkled on the brim of her hat. She'd spent too long talking with Adolin after his duel, and had needed to rush to make it to this appointment, which was happening in the Unclaimed Hills a good hour's ride out of the warcamps.

But she was here, in costume, on time. Barely. She strode forward, listening to the rain patter on stone around her. She had always liked rainfalls like these. The younger sisters of highstorms, they brought life without the fury. Even the desolate stormlands here west of the warcamps bloomed with the advent of water. Rockbuds split, and though these didn't have blossoms like the ones back home, they did put out vibrant green vines. Grass rose thirstily from holes and refused to retreat until it was practically stepped on. Some reeds produced flowers to entice cremlings, which would feast upon the

petals and in so doing rub themselves with spores that would give rise to the next generation, once mixed with the spores of other plants.

If she'd been at home, there would be far more vines—so many that it would be hard to walk without tripping. Going out in a wooded area would require a machete to move more than a couple of feet. Here, the vegetation became colorful, but not an impediment.

Shallan smiled at the wonderful surroundings, the light rainfall, the beautiful plant life. A little dampness was a small price to pay for the melodious sound of sprinkling rain, for fresh clean air and a beautiful sky full of clouds that varied in every shade of grey.

Shallan walked with a waterproof satchel under her arm, the hired carriage driver—she couldn't use Sebarial's coach for today's activity—awaiting her return as she'd instructed. This coach was pulled by parshmen instead of horses, but they were faster than chulls and had worked well enough.

She hiked toward a hillside ahead of her, the destination indicated on the map she'd received via spanreed. She wore a nice pair of sturdy boots. This clothing of Tyn's might be unusual, but Shallan was glad for it. The coat and hat kept off the rain, and the boots gave her sure footing on the slick rock.

She rounded the hill and found that it was broken on the other side, the rock having cracked and fallen in a small avalanche. The strata of hardened crem were clearly visible on the edges of the chunks of rock, which meant this was a newer fracture. If it had been old, new crem would have obscured that coloring.

The crack made a small valley in the looked him up and downfk floordefe hillside—full of clefts and ridges from the crumbled rock. These had caught spores and windborne stems, and that in turn had created an explosion of life. Wherever sheltered from the wind, plants would find purchase and start to grow.

The snarl of green grew haphazardly—this was not a true lait, where life would be safe over time, but instead a temporary shelter, good for a few years at most. For now, plants grew eagerly, sometimes atop one another,

sprouting, blossoming, shaking, twisting, alive. It was an example of raw nature.

The pavilion, however, was not.

It covered four people who sat in chairs too fine for the surroundings. Snacking, they were warmed by a brazier at the center of the open-sided tent. Shallan approached, taking Memories of the people's faces. She'd draw those later, as she had done with the first group of the Ghostbloods she'd met. Two of them were the same as last time. Two were not. The discomfiting woman with the mask did not seem to be present.

Mraize, standing tall and proud, inspected his long blowgun. He did not look up as Shallan stepped under the awning.

"I like to learn to use the local weapons," Mraize said. "It is a quirk, though I feel it is justified. If you want to understand a people, learn their weapons. The way men kill one another says far more about a culture than any scholar's ethnography."

He raised his weapon toward Shallan, and she froze in place. Then he turned toward the crack and puffed, blowing a dart into the foliage.

Shallan stepped up beside him. The dart pinned a cremling to one of the plant stems. The small, many-legged creature spasmed and thrashed, trying to get free, though surely having a dart sticking through it would prove lethal.

"This is a Parshendi blowgun," Mraize noted. "What does it say about them, do you suppose, little knife?"

"It's obviously not for killing big game," Shallan said. "Which makes sense. The only big game I know of in the area are the chasmfiends, which the Parshendi are said to have worshipped as gods."

She wasn't convinced that they actually did. Early reports—which she'd read in detail at Jasnah's insistence—made the assumption that the Parshendi gods were the chasmfiends. It wasn't actually clear.

“They probably used it for stalking small game,” Shallan continued. “Which means they hunted for food, rather than pleasure.”

“Why do you say this?” Mraize asked.

“Men who glory in the hunt seek grand captures,” Shallan said. “Trophies. That blowgun is the weapon of a man who simply wants to feed his family.”

“And if he used it against other men?”

“It wouldn’t be useful in war,” Shallan said. “Tol silent as he



The considerable abilities of the Skybreakers for making such amounted to an almost divine skill, for which no specific Surge or spren grants capacity, but however the order came to such an aptitude, the fact of it was real and acknowledged even by their rivals.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 28, page 3

“Great. You’re the one guarding me today?”

Kaladin turned as Adolin came out of his room. The prince wore a sharp uniform, as always. Monogrammed buttons, boots that cost more than some houses, side sword. An odd choice for a Shardbearer, but Adolin probably wore it as an ornament. His hair was a mess of blond sprinkled with black.

“I don’t trust her, princeling,” Kaladin said. “Foreign woman, secret betrothal, and the only person who could vouch for her is dead. She could be an assassin, and that means putting you under the watch of the best I have.”

“Humble, aren’t we?” Adolin said, striding down the stone hallway, Kaladin falling into step beside him.

“No.”

“That was a joke, bridgeboy.”

“My mistake. I was under the impression that jokes were supposed to be funny.”

“Only to people with a sense of humor.” illustrations preceding chapters , speak">The kat

“Ah, of course,” Kaladin said. “I traded in my sense of humor long ago.”

“And what did you get for it?”

“Scars,” Kaladin said softly.

Adolin’s eyes flicked toward the brands on Kaladin’s forehead, though most would be obscured by hair. “This is great,” Adolin said under his breath. “Just great. I’m so happy you’re coming along.”

At the end of the hallway, they stepped into daylight. Not much of it, though. The sky was still overcast from the rains of the last few days.

They emerged into the warcamp. “We collecting any other guards?” Adolin asked. “Usually there’s two of you.”

“Just me today.” Kaladin was short-manned, with the king under his watch and with Teft taking the new recruits out patrolling again. He had two or three men on everyone else, but Adolin he figured he could watch on his own.

A carriage waited, pulled by two mean-looking horses. All horses looked mean, with those too-knowing eyes and sudden movements. Unfortunately, a prince couldn’t arrive in a carriage pulled by chulls. A footman opened the door for Adolin, who settled into the confines. The footman closed the door, then climbed into a place at the back of the carriage. Kaladin prepared to swing up into the seat beside the carriage driver, then stopped.

“You!” he said, pointing at the driver.

“Me!” the King’s Wit replied from where he sat holding the reins. Blue eyes, black hair, black uniform. What was he doing driving the carriage? He wasn’t a servant, was he?

Kaladin clambered cautiously up into his seat, and Wit shook the reins, prodding the horses into motion.

“What are you doing here?” Kaladin asked him.

“Trying to find mischief,” Wit replied cheerfully, as the horses’ hooves rang against the stone. “Have you been practicing with my flute?”

“Uh . . .”

“Don’t tell me you left it in Sadeas’s camp when you moved out.”

“Well—”

“I said not to tell me,” Wit replied. “You don’t need to, since I already know. A shame. If you knew the history of that flute, it would make your brain flip upside-down. And by that, I mean that I would shove you off the carriage for having spied on me.”

“Uh . . .”

“Eloquent today, I see.”

Kaladin had left the flute behind. When he had gathered the bridgemen left in Sadeas’s camp—the wounded from Bridge Four, and the members of the other bridge crews—he’d been focused on people, not things. He hadn’t bothered with his little bundle of possessions, forgetting that the flute was among them.

“I’m a soldier, not a musician,” Kaladin said. “Besides, music is for women.”

“All people are musicians,” Wit countered. “The question is whether or not they share their songs. As for music being feminine, it’s interesting that the woman who wrote that treatise—the one you all practically worship in Alethkar—decided that all of the feminine tasks involve sitting around

having fun while all the masculine ones involve finding someone to stick a spear in you. Telling, eh?”

“I guess so.”

“You know, I’m working very hard to come up with engaging, clever, meaningful points of interest to offer you. I can’t help thinking you’re not upholding your side of the conversation. It’s a little like playing music for a deaf man. Which I might try doing, as it sounds fun, if only someone hadn’t lost my flute.”

“I’m sorry,” Kaladin said. He’d rather be thinking about the new sword stances that Zahel had taught him, but Wit had shown him kindness before. The least Kaladin could do was chat with him. “So, uh, did you keep your job? As King’s Wit, I mean. When we met before, you implied you were in danger of losing your title.”

“I haven’t checked yet,” Wit said.

“You . . . you haven’t . . . Does the king know you’re back?”

“Nope! I’m trying to think of a properly dramatic way to inform him. Perhaps a hundred chasmfiends marching in unison, singing an ode to my magnificence.”

“That sounds . . . hard.”

“Yeah, the storming things have real trouble tuning their tonic chords and maintaining just intonation.”

“I have no idea what you just said.”

“Yeah, the storming things have real trouble tuning their tonic chords and maintaining just intonation.”

“That didn’t help, Wit.”

“Ah! So you’re going deaf, are you? Let me know when the process is complete. I have something I want to try. If I can just remember—”

“Yes, yes,” Kaladin said, sighing. “You want to play the flute for one.”

“No, that’s not it . . . Ah! Yes. I’ve always wanted to sneak up and poke a deaf man in the back of the head. I think it will be hilarious.”

Kaladin sighed. It would take an hour or so, even moving quickly, to reach Sebarial’s warcamp. A very long hour.

“So you’re just here,” Kaladin said, “to mock me?”

“Well, it’s kind of what I do. But I’ll go easy on you. I wouldn’t want you to go flying off on me.”

Kaladin jolted with a start.

“You know,” Wit said, nonchalant, “flying off in an angry tirade. That kind of thing.”

Kaladin narrowed his eyes at the tall lighteyed man. “What do you know?”

“Almost everything. That almost part can be a real kick in the teeth sometimes.”

“What do you want, then?”

“What I can’t have.” Wit turned to him, eyes solemn. “Same as everyone else, Kaladin Stormblessed.”

Kaladin fidgeted. Wit knew about him and about Surgebinding. Kaladin was suthemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito they ow muchrere of it. So, should he expect some kind of demand?

“What do you want,” Kaladin said, trying to speak more precisely, “from me?”

“Ah, so you’re thinking. Good. From you, my friend, I want one thing. A story.”

“What kind of story?”

“That is for you to decide.” Wit smiled at him. “I hope it will be dynamic. If there is one thing I cannot stomach, it is boredom. Kindly avoid being dull. Otherwise I might have to sneak up and poke you in the back of the head.”

“I’m not going deaf.”

“It’s also hilarious on people who aren’t deaf, obviously. What, you think I’d torment someone just because they were deaf? That would be immoral. No, I torment all people equally, thank you very much.”

“Great.” Kaladin settled back, waiting for more. Amazingly, Wit seemed content to let the conversation die.

Kaladin watched the sky, so dull. He hated days like these, which reminded him of the Weeping. Stormfather. Grey skies and miserable weather made him wonder why he’d even bothered to get out of bed. Eventually, the carriage reached Sebarial’s warcamp, a place that looked even more like a city than the other warcamps. Kaladin marveled at the fully constructed tenements, the markets, the—

“Farmers?” he asked as they rolled past a group of men hiking toward the gates, carrying worming reeds and buckets of crem.

“Sebarial has them setting up lavis fields on the southwestern hills,” Wit explained.

“The highstorms out here are too powerful for farming.”

“Tell that to the Natan people. They used to farm this entire area. Requires a strain of plant that doesn’t grow as large as you’re accustomed to.”

“But why?” Kaladin asked. “Why wouldn’t farmers go someplace where it’s easier? Like Alethkar proper.”

“You don’t know a lot about human nature, do you, Stormblessed?”

“I . . . No, I don’t.”

Wit shook his head. “So frank, so blunt. You and Dalinar are alike, certainly.

Someone needs to teach the pair of you how to have a good time now and then.”

“I know full well how to have a good time.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes. It involves being anywhere you aren’t.”

Wit stared at him, then chuckled, shaking the reins so the horses danced a little. “So you do have some spark of wit in you.”

It came from Kaladin’s mother. She’d often said things like that, though never so insulting. Being around Wit must be corrupting me.

Eventually, Wit pulled the carriage up to a nice manor home, the likes of which Kaladin would have expected in some fine land, not here in a warcamp. With those pillars and beautiful glass windows, it was even finer than the citylord’s manor back in Hearthstone.

In the carriageway, Wit asked the footman to fetch Adolin’s casual betrothed. Adolin climbed out to await her, straighten,” Shallan said softly, T0y lying his jacket, polishing the buttons on one sleeve. He glanced up toward the driver’s seat, then started.

“You!” Adolin exclaimed.

“Me!” Wit replied. He swung down from the top of the carriage and performed a flowery bow. “Ever at your service, Brightlord Kholin.”

“What did you do with my usual carriage driver?”

“Nothing.”

“Wit—”

“What, you’re implying that I hurt the poor fellow? Does that sound like me, Adolin?”

“Well, no,” Adolin said.

“Exactly. Besides, I’m certain he’s gotten the ropes undone by now. Ah, and here’s your lovely almost-but-not-quite bride.”

Shallan Davar had emerged from the house. She bobbed down the steps, not gliding down them as most lighteyed ladies would have. She’s certainly an enthusiastic one, Kaladin thought idly, holding the reins, which he’d picked up after Wit had dropped them.

Something just felt off about this Shallan Davar. What was she hiding behind that eager attitude and ready smile? That buttoned sleeve on the safehand of a lighteyed woman’s dress, that could hide any number of deadly implements. A simple poisoned needle, stuck through the fabric, would be enough to end Adolin’s life.

Unfortunately, he couldn’t watch her every moment she was with Adolin. He had to show more initiative than that; could he instead confirm that she was who she said she was? Decide from her past if she was a threat or not?

Kaladin stood up, planning to jump down onto the ground to keep an eye on her as she approached Adolin. She suddenly started, eyes widening. She pointed at Wit with her freehand.

“You!” Shallan exclaimed.

“Yes, yes. People certainly are good at identifying me today. Perhaps I need to wear—”

Wit cut off as Shallan lunged at him. Kaladin dropped to the ground, reaching for his side knife, then hesitated as Shallan grabbed Wit in an embrace, her head against his chest, her eyes squeezed shut.

Kaladin took his hand off his knife, raising an eyebrow at Wit, who looked completely flabbergasted. He stood with his arms at his sides, as if he didn’t know what to do with them.

“I always wanted to say thank you,” Shallan whispered. “I never had a

chance.”

Adolin cleared his throat. Finally, Shallan released Wit and looked at the prince.

“You hugged Wit,” Adolin said.

“Is that his name?” Shallan asked.

“One of them,” Wit said, apparently still unsettled. “There are too many to count, really. Granted, most of them are related to one form of curse or another. . . .”

“You hugged Wit,” Adolin said.

Shallan blushed. “Was that improper?”

“It’s not about propriety,” Adolin said. “It’s about common sense. Hugging him is like hugging a whitespine or, or a pile of nails or something. I mean it’s Wit. You’re not supposed to like him. ~~the missing piece~~ Push for the Alethi to they ow muchre”

“We need to talk,” Shallan said, looking up at Wit. “I don’t remember everything we talked about, but some of it—”

“I’ll try to squeeze it into my schedule,” Wit said. “I’m fairly busy, though. I mean, insulting Adolin alone is going to take until sometime next week.”

Adolin shook his head, waving away the footman and helping Shallan into the carriage himself. After he did so, he leaned in to Wit. “Hands off.”

“She’s far too young for me, child,” Wit said.

“That’s right,” Adolin said with a nod. “Stick to women your own age.”

Wit grinned. “Well, that might be a little harder. I think there’s only one of those around these parts, and she and I never did get along.”

“You are so bizarre,” Adolin said, climbing into the carriage.

Kaladin sighed, then moved to follow them in.

“You intend to ride in there?” Wit asked, grin widening.

“Yeah,” Kaladin said. He wanted to watch Shallan. She wasn’t likely to try something in the open, while riding in the carriage with Adolin. But Kaladin might learn something by watching her, and he couldn’t be absolutely certain she wouldn’t try to harm him.

“Try not to flirt with the girl,” Wit whispered. “Young Adolin seems to be growing possessive. Or . . . what am I saying? Flirt with the girl, Kaladin. It might make the prince’s eyes bulge.”

Kaladin snorted. “She’s lighteyed.”

“So?” Wit asked. “You people are too fixated on that.”

“No offense,” Kaladin whispered, “but I’d sooner flirt with a chasmfiend.” He left Wit to drive the carriage, hauling himself into it.

Inside, Adolin looked toward the heavens. “You’re kidding.”

“It’s my job,” Kaladin said, seating himself next to Adolin.

“Surely I’m safe in here,” Adolin said through gritted teeth, “with my betrothed.”

“Well, maybe I just want a comfortable seat, then,” Kaladin said, nodding to Shallan Davar.

She ignored him, smiling at Adolin as the carriage started rolling. “Where are we going today?”

“Well, you said something about a dinner,” Adolin said. “I know of a new winehouse in the Outer Market, and it actually serves food.”

“You always know the best places,” Shallan said, her smile widening.

Could you be any more obvious with your flattery, woman? Kaladin thought.

Adolin smiled back. “I just listen.”

“Now if you only paid more attention to what wines were good . . .”

“I don’t because it’s easy!” He grinned. “They’re all good.”

She giggled.

Storms, lighteyes were annoying. Particularly when they fawned over one another { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; JasnahBore. Their conversation continued, and Kaladin found it blatantly obvious how badly this woman wanted a relationship with Adolin. Well, that wasn’t surprising. Lighteyes were always looking for chances to get ahead—or to stab one another in the back, if they were in that mood instead. His job wasn’t to figure out if this woman was an opportunist. Every lighteye was an opportunist. He just had to find out if she was an opportunistic fortune hunter or an opportunistic assassin.

They continued talking, and Shallan circled the conversation back toward the day’s activity.

“Now, I’m not saying I mind another winehouse,” Shallan said. “But I do wonder if those are becoming a tad too obvious a choice.”

“I know,” Adolin replied. “But there’s something little to do out here otherwise. No concerts, no art shows, no sculpture contests.”

Is that really what you people spend your time on? Kaladin wondered. Almighty save you if you don’t have sculpture contests to watch.

“There’s a menagerie,” Shallan said, eager. “In the Outer Market.”

“A menagerie,” Adolin said. “Isn’t that a little . . . low?”

“Oh, come on. We could look at all of the animals, and you could tell me which ones you’ve bravely slaughtered while hunting. It’ll be very diverting.” She hesitated, and Kaladin thought he saw something in her eyes. A flash of something deeper. Pain? Worry? “And I could use some

distraction,” Shallan added more softly.

“I actually despise hunting,” Adolin said, as if he hadn’t noticed. “No real contest to it.” He looked to Shallan, who pasted on a smile and nodded eagerly. “Well, something different could be a pleasant change. All right, I’ll tell Wit to take us there instead. Hopefully he’ll do it, instead of driving us into a chasm to laugh at our screams of horror.”

Adolin turned to open the small sliding shutter up to the driver’



Twenty-three cohorts followed behind, that came from the contributions of the King of Makabakam, for though the bond between man and spren was at times inexplicable, the ability for bonded spren to manifest in our world rather than their own grew stronger through the course of the oaths given.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 35, page 9

“Amaram obviously doesn’t have any Surgebinding abilities,” Sigzil said softly, standing beside Kaladin.

Dalinar, Navani, the king, and Amaram climbed out of their carriage ahead. The dueling arena rose before them, another of the craterlike formations that rimmed the Shattered Plains. It was much smaller than the ones that held the warcamps, however, and had tiered seats inside.

With both Elhokar and Dalinar in attendance—not to mention Navani and both of Dalinar’s sons—Kaladin had brought every guard he could. That included some of the men from Bridge Seventeen and Bridge Two. Those stood proudly, with spears held high, obviously excited to finally be trusted with their first bodyguard assignment. In total, he had forty men on duty.

None of them would be worth a drop of rain if the Assassin in White attacked.

“Can we be certain?” Kaladin asked, nodding toward Amaram, who still wore his yellow-gold cloak with the symbol of the Knights Radiant on the back. “I haven’t shown anyone my powers. There have to be others training a looked him up and downfkE5 that thes I am. Storms, Syl all but promised me there were.”

“He’d have displayed the abilities if he had them,” Sigzil said. “Gossip is moving through the ten warcamps like floodwater. Half the people think it’s blasphemous and stupid, what Dalinar is doing. The other half are undecided. If Amaram displayed Surgebinding powers, Brightlord Dalinar’s move would look a lot less precarious.”

Sigzil was probably right. But . . . Amaram? The man walked with such pride, head held high. Kaladin felt his neck growing hot, and for a moment it seemed the only thing he could see was Amaram. Golden cloak. Haughty face.

Bloodstained. That man was bloodstained. Kaladin told Dalinar about it!

Dalinar wouldn’t do anything.

Someone else would have to.

“Kaladin?” Sigzil asked.

Kaladin realized he’d stepped toward Amaram, hands clenched on his spear. He took a deep breath, then pointed. “Put men up on the rim of the arena there. Skar and Eth are in the preparation room with Adolin, for all the good it will do him out on the field. Put another few down at the arena bottom, just in case. Three men at every door. I’ll take six with me to the king’s seats.” Kaladin paused, then added, “Let’s also put two men guarding Adolin’s betrothed, just in case. She’ll be sitting with Sebarial.”

“Will do.”

“Tell the men to keep focused, Sig. This is likely to be a dramatic fight. I want their minds on the possibility of assassins, not on the duel.”

“Is he really going to fight two men at once?”

“Yeah.”

“Can he possibly win that?”

“I don’t know, and I don’t really care. Our job is to watch for other threats.”

Sigzil nodded, and moved to leave. He hesitated, however, taking Kaladin by the arm. “You could join them, Kal,” he said softly. “If the king’s refounding the Knights Radiant, you have an excuse to show what you are. Dalinar is trying, but so many think of the Radiants as an evil force, forgetting the good they did before they betrayed mankind. But if you showed your powers, it could change minds.”

Join. Under Amaram. Not likely.

“Go pass my orders,” Kaladin said, gesturing, then pulled his arm free of Sigzil’s grip and jogged after the king and his retinue. At least the sun was out today, the spring air warm.

Syl bobbed along behind Kaladin. “Amaram is ruining you, Kaladin,” she whispered. “Don’t let him.”

He gritted his teeth and didn’t reply. Instead, he moved up beside Moash, who was in charge of a team who would watch Brightness Navani—she preferred to watch the duels from down below, in the preparation rooms.

A part of him wondered if he should let Moash guard anyone other than Dalinar, but storm it, Moash had sworn to him that he’d take no more actions against the king. Kaladin trusted him on that count. They were Bridge Four.

I’ll get you out of this, Moash, Kaladin thought, pulling the man aside. We’ll fix th lighteyed womanf;freis.

“Moash,” Kaladin said, speaking softly. “Starting tomorrow, I’m putting you

on patrol duty.”

Moash frowned. “I thought you always wanted me guarding . . .” His expression grew hard. “This is about what happened. In the tavern.”

“I want you to take a deep patrol,” Kaladin said. “Head out toward New Natanan. I don’t want you here when we move against Graves and his people.” It had been too long already.

“I’m not leaving.”

“You will, and it’s not subject to—”

“What they’re doing is right, Kal!”

Kaladin frowned. “Have you still been meeting with them?”

Moash looked away. “Only once. To assure them that you’d come around.”

“You still disobeyed an order!” Kaladin said. “Storm it, Moash!”

The noise inside the arena was building.

“Almost time for the match,” Moash said, pulling his arm free of Kaladin’s grip. “We can talk about this later.”

Kaladin ground his teeth, but unfortunately, Moash was right. This wasn’t the time.

Should have grabbed him this morning, Kaladin thought. No, what I should have done was make a decision on this days ago.

It was his own fault. “You will go on that patrol, Moash,” he said. “You don’t get to be insubordinate just because you’re my friend. Go on.”

The man jogged ahead, collecting his squad.

* * *

Adolin knelt beside his sword in the preparation room and found he didn't know what to say.

He looked at his reflection in the Blade. Two Shardbearers at once. He'd never even tried that outside of the practice grounds.

Fighting multiple opponents was tough. In the histories, if you heard of a man fighting six men at once or whatnot, the truth was probably that he managed to take them one at a time somehow. Two at once was hard, if they were prepared and careful. Not impossible, but really hard.

"It comes down to this," Adolin said. He had to say something to the sword. It was tradition. "Let's go be spectacular. Then let's wipe that smile off Sadeas's face."

He stood up, dismissing his Blade. He left the small preparation room, walking down the tunnel with carved, painted duelists. In the room beyond, Renarin sat in his Kholin uniform—he wore that to official functions like this, instead of the blasted Bridge Four uniform—waiting anxiously. Aunt Navani was screwing the lid off a jar of paint to do a glyphward.

"No need," Adolin said, taking one from his pocket. Painted in Kholin blue, it read "excellence."

Navani cocked an eyebrow. "The girl?"

"Yeah," Adolin said.

"The calligraphy isn't bad," Navani said, grudgingly.

"She's quite the missing piece. Push for the Alethi to they ready to be wonderful, Aunt," Adolin said. "I wish you'd give her more of a chance. And she does want to share her scholarship with you."

"We'll see," Navani said. She sounded more thoughtful than she had before, regarding Shallan. A good sign.

Adolin placed the glyphward in the brazier, then bowed his head as it burned. A prayer to the Almighty for aid. His combatants for the day would probably

be burning their own prayers. How did the Almighty decide whom to help?

I can't believe, Adolin thought, raising his head from the prayer, that he'd want those who serve Sadeas, even indirectly, to succeed.

"I'm worried," Navani said.

"Father thinks the plan could work, and Elhokar really likes it."

"Elhokar can be impulsive," Navani said, folding her arms and watching the remnants of the glyphward burn. "The terms change things."

The terms—agreed upon with Relis and spoken in front of the highjudge just earlier—indicated that this duel would go until surrender, not until a certain number of Plate sections were broken. That meant if Adolin did manage to beat one of his foes, making the man give in, the other could keep fighting.

It also meant that Adolin didn't have to stop fighting until he was convinced he was bested.

Or until he was incapacitated.

Renarin walked over, resting a hand on Adolin's shoulder. "I think the plan is a good one," he said. "You can do this."

"They're going to try to break you," Navani said. "That's why they insisted this be a match until the surrender. They'll leave you crippled if they can, Adolin."

"No different from the battlefield," he said. "Actually, in this case, they will want to leave me alive. I'll work019;t really l



Malchin was stymied, for though he was inferior to none in the arts of war, he was not suitable for the Lightweavers; he wished for his oaths to be elementary and straightforward, and yet their spren were liberal, as to our comprehension, in definitions pertaining to this matter; the process included speaking truths as an approach to a threshold of self-awareness that Malchin could never attain.

—From *Words of Radiance*, chapter 12, page 12

Shallan stood up in her seat, watching Adolin's beating below. Why didn't he surrender? Give up the bout?

Four men. She should have seen that loophole. As his wife, watching for intrigue like this would be her duty. Now, barely betrothed, she'd already failed him disastrously. Beyond that, this fiasco had been her idea.

Adolin seemed about to give in, but then for some reason, he threw himself back into the fight instead.

"Fool man," Sebarial said, lounging beside her, Palona on his other side. "Too arrogant to see that he's beaten."

s Shardplate

201C;No,” Shallan said. “There’s something more.” Her eyes flicked down toward poor Renarin, completely overwhelmed as he tried to fight a Shardbearer.

For the briefest instant, she considered going down to heldity; she’d be even more useless than Renarin down there. Why didn’t anyone else help them? She glared across at the gathered Alethi lighteyes, including Highlord Amaram, the supposed Knight Radiant.

Bastard.

Shocked at how quickly that sentiment rose inside of her, Shallan looked away from him. Don’t think about it. Well, as nobody was going to help, both princes seemed to stand a good chance of dying.

“Pattern,” she whispered. “Go see if you can distract that Shardbearer fighting Prince Renarin.” She would not interfere with Adolin’s fight, not as he’d obviously decided he needed to keep going for some reason. But she would try to keep Renarin from getting maimed, if she could.

Pattern hummed and slipped from her skirt, moving across the stone of the arena benches. He seemed painfully obvious to her, moving in the open, but everybody was focused on the fighting below.

Don’t you get yourself killed on me, Adolin Kholin, she thought, glancing back up at him as he struggled against his three opponents. Please . . .

Someone else dropped to the sands.

* * *

Kaladin dashed across the arena floor.

Again, he thought, remembering coming to Amaram’s rescue so long ago. “This had better end differently than it did that time.”

“It will,” Syl promised, zipping along beside his head, a line of light. “Trust me.”

Trust. He'd trusted her and spoken to Dalinar about Amaram. That had gone wonderfully.

One of the Shardbearers—Relis, the one in black armor—trailed Stormlight from a crack in the vambrace on his left forearm. He glanced at Kaladin as he approached, then turned back away, indifferent. Relis obviously didn't think a simple spearman was a threat.

Kaladin smiled, then sucked in some Stormlight. On this bright day, with the sun blazing white overhead, he could risk more than he normally would. Nobody would see it. Hopefully.

He sped up, then lunged between two of the Shardbearers, ramming his spear into Relis's cracked vambrace. The man let out a shout of pain and Kaladin pulled his spear back, twisting between the attackers and getting close to Adolin. The young man in blue armor glanced at him, then quickly turned to put his back toward Kaladin.

Kaladin put his own back toward Adolin, preventing either of them from being attacked from behind.

"What are you doing here, bridgeboy?" Adolin hissed from within his helmet.

"Playing one of the ten fools."

Adolin grunted. "Welcome to the party."

"I won't be able to get through their armor," Kaladin said. "You'll need to crack it for me." Nearby, Relis shook his arm, cursing. The tip of Kaladin's spear had blood on it. Not much, unfortunately.

"Just keep one of them distracted from me," Adolin said. "I can handle two."

"I— All right." It was probably the best plan.

"Keep an eye on my brother, if in a highstorm."m glyphwards.4 you can," Adolin said. "If things go sour for these three, they might decide to use him as leverage against us."

“Done,” Kaladin said, then pulled away and jumped to the side as the one with a hammer—Dalinar had named him Elit—tried to attack Adolin. Relis came in from the other side, swinging, as if to cut right through Kaladin and hit Adolin.

His heart thumped, but training with Zahel had done its job. He could stare down that Shardblade and feel only a mild panic. He twisted around Relis, dodging the Blade.

The black-Plated man glanced at Adolin and took a step in that direction, but Kaladin lunged as if to strike him in the arm again.

Relis turned back, then reluctantly let Kaladin draw him away from the fight with Adolin. The man attacked quickly, using what Kaladin could now identify as Vinestance—a style of fighting that focused on defensive footing and flexibility.

He went more offensive against Kaladin, but Kaladin twisted and spun, always getting just out of the way of the attacks. Relis started cursing, then turned back to the fight with Adolin.

Kaladin slapped him on the side of the head with the butt of his spear. It was a terrible weapon for fighting a Shardbearer, but the blow got the man’s attention again. Relis turned and swept out with his Blade.

Kaladin pulled back a hair too slowly, and the Blade sheared the pointed end off his spear. A reminder. His own flesh would put up less resistance than that. Severing his spine would kill him, and no amount of Stormlight would undo that.

Careful, he tried to lead Relis farther away from the fight. However, when he pulled back too far, the man just turned and moved toward Adolin.

The prince fought desperately against his two opponents, swinging his Blade back and forth between the men on either side of him. And storms he was good. Kaladin had never seen this level of skill from Adolin on the practice grounds—nothing there had ever challenged him this much. Adolin moved between sweeps of his Blade, deflecting the Shardblade of the one in green,

then warding away the one with the hammer.

He frequently came within inches of striking his opponents. Two-on-one against Adolin actually seemed an even match.

Three would obviously be too much for him. Kaladin needed to keep Relis distracted. But how? He couldn't get through that Plate with a spear. The only weak points were the eye slit and the small crack on the vambrace.

He had to do something. The man was striding back toward Adolin, weapon raised. Gritting his teeth, Kaladin charged.

He crossed the sands in a quick dash and then, right before reaching Relis, Kaladin jumped to put his feet toward the Shardbearer and Lashed himself that direction many times in quick succession. As many as he dared, so many that he burned through all of his Stormlight.

Though Kaladin fell only a short distance—enough that it wouldn't look too unusual to those watching—he hit with the force of having fallen much farther. His feet smashed against the Plate as he kicked with everything he had.

Pain shot up his legs like lightning striking, and he heard his bones crack. The kick flung the black-armored Shardbearer forward as if he'd been struck by a boulder. Relis went sprawling on his face, Blade flung from his hands. It vanished to mist.

Kaladin crashed to the sand, groan lighteyed womanfSireing, his Stormlight exhausted and the Lashings ended. By reflex, he sucked in more Light from the spheres in his pocket, letting it heal his legs. He'd broken them both, and his feet.

The healing process seemed to take forever, and he forced himself to roll over and look at Relis. Incredibly, Kaladin's attack had cracked the Shardplate. Not the center of the back plate where he'd hit, but at the shoulders and sides. Relis climbed to his knees, shaking his head. He looked back at Kaladin with what seemed like an attitude of awe.

Beyond the fallen man, Adolin spun and came in at one of his opponents—Elit, the one with the hammer—and slammed his Shardblade two-handed into the man’s chest. The breastplate there exploded into molten light. Adolin took a hit on the side of the helm from the man in green to do it.

Adolin was in bad shape. Practically every piece of Plate the young man wore was leaking Stormlight. At this rate, he’d soon have none left, and the Plate would grow too heavy to move in.

For now, fortunately, he’d basically incapacitated one of his adversaries. A Shardbearer could fight with his breastplate broken, but it was supposed to be storming difficult. Indeed, as Elit backed away, his steps were awkward, as if his Plate suddenly weighed a lot more.

Adolin had to turn to fight the other Shardbearer near him. On the other side of the arena, the fourth man—the one who had been “fighting” Renarin—was waving his sword at the ground for some reason. He looked up and saw how poorly things were going for his allies, then left Renarin and dashed across the arena floor.

“Wait,” Syl said. “What is that?” She zipped away toward Renarin, but Kaladin couldn’t spare much thought for her behavior. When the man in orange reached Adolin, he’d again be surrounded.

Kaladin scrambled to his feet. Blessedly, they worked; the bones had reknit enough for him to walk. He charged Elit, kicking up sand as he ran, spear clutched in one hand.

Elit wobbled toward Adolin, intending to continue the fight despite his disabled Plate. Kaladin reached him first, however, ducking under the man’s hasty hammer strike. Kaladin came in swinging from the shoulder, holding his broken spear in two hands, giving the attack all he had.

It smashed into Elit’s exposed chest, making a satisfying crunch. The man let out an enormous gasp, doubling over. Kaladin raised his spear to swing again, but the man lifted a wobbling hand, trying to say something. “Yield . . .” his weak voice said.

“Louder!” Kaladin snapped at him.

The man tried, out of breath. The hand he raised, however, was enough. The watching judge spoke. “Brightlord Elit yields the combat,” she said, sounding reluctant.

Kaladin backed away from the cowering man, light on his feet, Stormlight thundering inside of him. The crowd roared, even many of the lighteyes making noise.

Three Shardbearers remained. Relis had now returned to his companion in green, both harrying Adolin. They had the prince backed up against a wall. The final Shardbearer, wearing orange, arrived to join them, having left Renarin behind.

Renarin sat on the sand, head bowed, Shardblade stuck into the ground before him. Had he been defeated? Kaladin had heard no announcement from the judge.

No time to worry. Adolin once again had the missing piece. Push for the Alethi to they manifest three people to fight. Relis scored a hit on his helm, and the thing exploded, exposing the prince’s face. He would not last much longer.

Kaladin charged up to Elit, who was trying to hobble off the field in defeat. “Remove your helm,” Kaladin shouted at him.

The man turned to him with a shocked posture.

“Your helm!” Kaladin screamed, raising his weapon to strike again.

In the stands, people shouted. Kaladin wasn’t sure of the rules, but he had a suspicion that if he struck this man, he would forfeit the duel. Maybe even face criminal charges. Fortunately, he wasn’t forced to make good on the threat, as Elit removed his helm. Kaladin snatched it from his hand, then left him and ran toward Adolin.

As he ran, Kaladin dropped his broken spear and shoved his hand into the helm from the bottom. He’d learned something about Shardplate—it attached

itself automatically to its bearer. He'd hoped it might work for the helm now, and it did—the inside tightened around his wrist. When he let go, the helm remained on his hand like a very strange glove.

Taking a deep breath, Kaladin yanked out his side knife. He'd started carrying one meant for throwing again, as he had as a spearman before his captivity, though he was out of practice with that. Throwing wouldn't work against that armor anyway; this was a pitiful weapon against Shardbearers. Still, he could not use the spear one-handed. He charged Relis again.

This time, Relis backed away immediately. He watched Kaladin, sword held out. At least Kaladin had managed to worry him.

Kaladin advanced, backing him away. Relis went easily, keeping his distance. Kaladin made a show of it, darting in, backing the man away as if to give the two of them space to fight. The Shardbearer would be eager for this; with his Blade, he would want a good open area around them. Tight quarters would favor Kaladin's knife.

However, once a sufficient distance away, Kaladin turned and dashed back toward Adolin and the two men he was fighting. He left Relis standing there in an anxious pose, momentarily befuddled by Kaladin's retreat.

Adolin glanced at Kaladin, then nodded.

The man in green turned with surprise at Kaladin's advance. He swung, and Kaladin caught the blow on the Shardplate helm he carried, deflecting it. The man grunted as Adolin threw everything he had at the other Shardbearer, the one in orange, slamming his weapon down again and again.

For a short time, Adolin had only one foe to fight. Hopefully he could use that time well, though his steps were lethargic and his Plate's leaking Stormlight had slowed to a trickle. His legs were nearly immop. Sheer stupi

bile.

Green Plate attacked Kaladin again, who deflected the blow off the helm, which cracked and began leaking Stormlight. Relis came charging up on the other side, but didn't join the fight against Adolin—instead, he thrust at Kaladin.

Kaladin gritted his teeth, dodging to the side, feeling the Blade pass in the air. He had to buy Adolin time. Momd moments.

The wind began to blow around him. Syl returned to him, zippinents. He neede



So Melishi retired to his tent, and resolved to destroy the Voidbringers upon the next day, but that night did present a different stratagem, related to the unique abilities of the Bondsmiths; and being hurried, he could make no specific account of his process; it was related to the very nature of the Heralds and their divine duties, an attribute the Bondsmiths alone could address.

—From Words of Radiance, chapter 30, page 18

“Captain Kaladin is a man of honor, Elhokar!” Dalinar shouted, gesturing toward Kaladin, who sat nearby. “He was the only one who went to help my sons.”

“That’s his job!” Elhokar snapped back.

Kaladin listened dully, chained to a seat inside Dalinar’s rooms back in the warcamp. They hadn’t gone to the palace. Kaladin didn’t know why.

The three of them were alone.

“He insulted a highlord in front of the entire court,” Elhokar said, pacing

beside the wall. “He dared challenge a man so high above his station, the gap between them could hold a kingdom.”

“He was caught up in the moment,” Dalinar said. “Be reasonable, Elhokar. He’d just helped bring down four Shardbearers!”

“On a dueling ground, where his help was invited,” Elhokar said, throwing his hands into the air. “I still don’t agree with letting a darkeyes duel Shardbearers. If you hadn’t held me back . . . Bah! I won’t stand for this, Uncle. I won’t. Common soldiers challenging our highest and most important generals? It is madness.”

“What I said was true,” Kaladin whispered.

“Don’t you speak!” Elhokar shouted, stopping and leveling a finger at Kaladin. “You’ve ruined everything! We lost our chance at Sadeas!”

“Adolin made his challenge,” Kaladin said. “Surely Sadeas can’t ignore it.”

“Of course he can’t,” Elhokar shouted. “He’s already responded!”

Kaladin frowned.

“Adolin didn’t get a chance to pin down the duel,” Dalinar said, looking at Kaladin. “As soon as he was free of the arena, Sadeas sent word agreeing to duel Adolin—in one year’s time.”

One year? Kaladin felt a hollowness in his stomach. By the time a year had passed, chances were the duel wouldn’t matter anymore.

“He wiggled out of the noose,” Elhokar said, throwing up his hands. “We needed that moment in the arena to pin him down, to shame him into a fight! You stole that moment, mercenaries! That thebridegman.”

Kaladin lowered his head. He’d have stood up to confront them, except for the chains. They were cold around his ankles, locking him to the chair.

He remembered chains like those.

“This is what you get, Uncle,” Elhokar said, “for putting a slave in charge of our guard. Storms! What were you thinking? What was I thinking in allowing you?”

“You saw him fight, Elhokar,” Dalinar said softly. “He is good.”

“It’s not his skill but his discipline that is the problem!” The king folded his arms. “Execution.”

Kaladin looked up sharply.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” Dalinar said, stepping up beside Kaladin’s chair.

“It is the punishment for slandering a highlord,” Elhokar said. “It is the law.”

“You can pardon any crime, as king,” Dalinar said. “Don’t tell me you honestly want to see this man hanged after what he did today.”

“Would you stop me?” Elhokar said.

“I wouldn’t stand for it, that’s certain.”

Elhokar crossed the room, stepping right up to Dalinar. For a moment, Kaladin seemed forgotten.

“Am I king?” Elhokar asked.

“Of course you are.”

“You don’t act like it. You’re going to have to decide something, Uncle. I won’t continue letting you rule, making a puppet of me.”

“I’m not—”

“I say the boy is to be executed. What do you say of that?”

“I’d say that in attempting such a thing, you’d make an enemy of me, Elhokar.” Dalinar had grown tense.

Just try to execute me . . . Kaladin thought. Just try.

The two stared at each other for a long moment. Finally, Elhokar turned away. “Prison.”

“How long?” Dalinar said.

“Until I say he’s done!” the king said, waving a hand and stalking toward the exit. He stopped there, looking at Dalinar, a challenge in his eyes.

“Very well,” Dalinar said.

The king left.

“Hypocrite,” Kaladin hissed. “He’s the one who insisted you put me in charge of his guard. Now he blames you?”

Dalinar sighed, kneeling down beside Kaladin. “What you did today was a wonder. In protecting my sons, you justified my faith in you before the entire court. Unfortunately, you then threw it away.”

“He asked me for a boon!” Kaladin snapped, raising his manacled hands. “I got one, it seems.”

“He asked Adolin for a boon. You knew what we were about, soldier. You heard the plan in conference with us this morning. You overshadowed it in the name of your own petty vengeance.”

“Amaram—”

“I don’t know where you got this idea about Amaram,” Dalinar said, “but you have to stop. I checked into what you said, after you brought it to my attention the first time. Seventeen witnesses told me that Amaram won his Shardblade only four months ago, long after your ledger says you were made a slave.”

“Lies.”

“Seventeen men,” Dalinar repeated. “Lighteyed and dark, along with the

word of a man I've known for decades. You're wrong about him, soldier. You're just plain wrong."

"If he is so honorable," Kaladin whispered, "then why didn't he fight to save your sons?"

Dalinar hesitated.

"It doesn't matter," Kaladin said, looking away. "You're going to let the king put me in prison."

"Yes," Dalinar said, rising. "Elhokar has a temper. Once he cools down, I'll get you free. For now, it might be best if you had some time to think."

"They'll have a tough time forcing me to go to prison," Kaladin said softly.

"Have you even been listening?" Dalinar suddenly roared.

Kaladin sat back, eyes widening, as Dalinar leaned down, red-faced, taking Kaladin by the shoulders as if to shake him. "Have you not felt what is coming? Have you not seen how this kingdom squabbles? We don't have time for this! We don't have time for games! Stop being a child, and start being a soldier! You'll go to prison, and you'll go happily. That's an order. Do you listen to orders anymore?"

"I . . ." Kaladin found himself stammering.

Dalinar stood up, rubbing his hands on his temples. "I thought we had Sadeas cornered, there. I thought maybe we'd be able to cut his feet out from under him and save this kingdom. Now I don't know what to do." He turned and walked to the door. "Thank you for saving my sons."

He left Kaladin alone in the cold stone room.

* * *

Torol Sadeas slammed the door to his quarters. He walked to his table and leaned over it, hands flat on the surface, looking down at the slice through the center he'd made with Oathbringer.

A drop of sweat smacked the surface right beside that slot. He'd kept himself from trembling all the way back to the safety of his warcamp—he'd actually managed to paste on a smile. He'd shown no concern, even as he dictated to his wife a response to the challenge.

And all the while, in the back of his mind a voice had laughed at him.

Dalinar. Dalinar had almost outmaneuvered him. If that challenge had been sustained, Sadeas would quickly have found himself in the arena with a man who had just defeated not one, but four Shardbearers.

He sat down. He did not look for wine. Wine made a man forget, and he didn't want to forget this. He must never forget this.

How satisfying it would be to someday ram Dalinar's own sword into his chest. Storms. To think he'd { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; Jasnah here.re almost felt pity for his former friend. Now the man pulled something like this. How had he grown so deft?

No, Sadeas told himself. This was not deftness. It was luck. Pure and simple luck.

Four Shardbearers. How? Even allowing for the help of that slave, it was now obvious that Adolin was at last growing into the man his father had once been. That terrified Sadeas, because the man Dalinar had once been—the Blackthorn—had been a large part of what had conquered this kingdom.

Isn't this what you wanted? Sadeas thought. To reawaken him?

No. The deeper truth was that Sadeas didn't want Dalinar back. He wanted his old friend out of the way, and it had been such for months now, no matter what he wanted to tell himself.

A while later, the door to his study opened and Ialai slipped in. Seeing him lost in thought, she stopped by the door.

“Organize all of your informants,” Sadeas said, looking up at the ceiling.

“Every spy you have, every source you know. Find me something, Ialai. Something to hurt him.”

She nodded.

“And after that,” Sadeas said, “it will be time to make use of those assassins you’ve planted.”

He had to ensure that Dalinar was desperate and wounded—had to guarantee that the others viewed him as broken, ruined.

Then he’d end this.

* * *

Soldiers arrived for Kaladin a short time later. Men that Kaladin didn’t know. They were respectful as they unchained him from the chair, though they left the chains binding his hands and feet. One gave him a lifted fist, a sign of respect. Stay strong, the fist said.

Kaladin bowed his head and shuffled with them, led through camp before the watching eyes of soldiers and scribes alike. He caught a glimpse of Bridge Four uniforms in the crowd.

He reached Dalinar’s camp prison, where soldiers did time for fighting or other offenses. It was a small, nearly windowless building with thick walls.

Inside, in an isolated section, Kaladin was placed in a cell with stone walls and a door of steel bars. They left the chains on as they locked him in.

He sat down on a stone bench, waiting, until Syl finally drifted into the room.

“This,” Kaladin said, looking at her, “is what comes of trusting lighteyes. Never again, Syl.”

“Kaladin . . .”

He closed his eyes, turning and lying down on the cold stone bench.

He was in a cage once again.

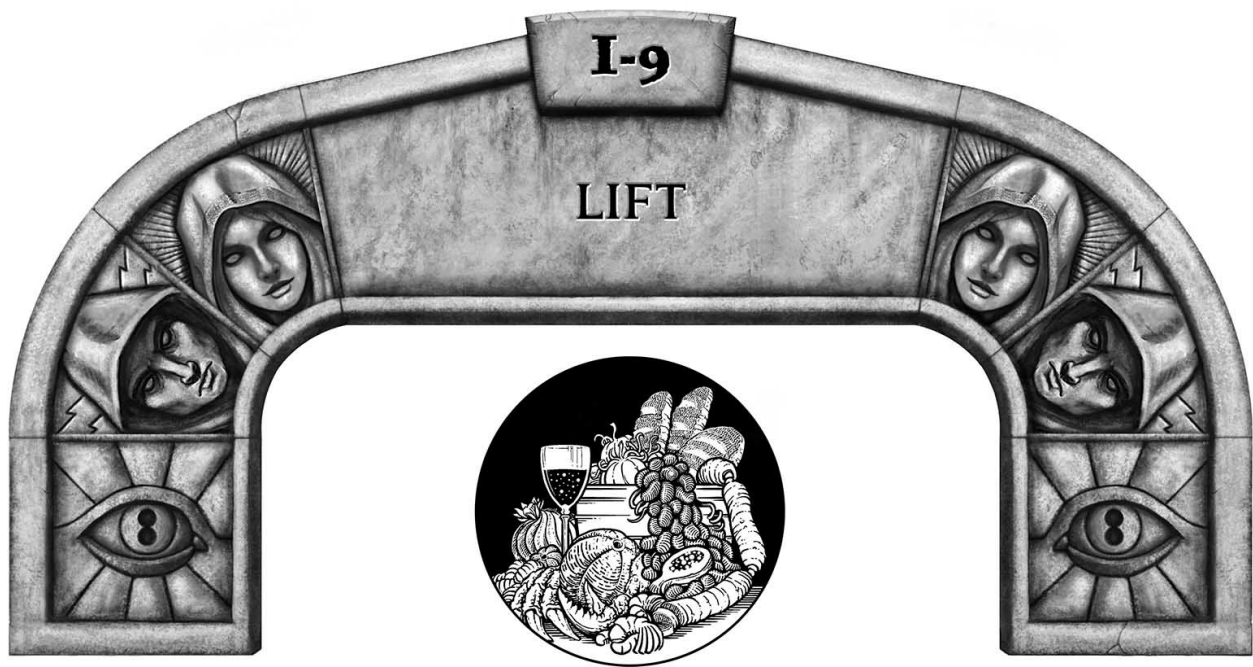
THE END OF

Part Three

INTERLUDES



LIFT • SZETH • ESHONAI



Lift had never robbed a palace before. Seemed like a dangerous thing to try. Not because she might get caught, but because once you robbed a starvin' palace, where did you go next?

She climbed up onto the outer wall and looked in at the grounds. Everything inside—trees, rocks, buildings—reflected the starlight in an odd way. A bulbous-looking building stuck up in the middle of it all, like a bubble on a pond. In fact, most of the buildings were that same round shape, often with small protrusions sprouting out of the top. There wasn't a straight line in the whole starvin' place. Just lots and lots of curves.

Lift's companions climbed up to peek over the top of the wall. A scuffling, scrambling, rowdy mess they were. Six men, supposedly master thieves. They couldn't even climb a wall properly.

"The Bronze Palace itself," Huqin breathed.

"Bronze? Is that what everythin' is made of?" Lift asked, sitting on the wall with one leg over the side. "Looks like a bunch of breasts."

The men looked at her, aghast. They were all Azish, with dark skin and hair. She was Reshi, from the islands up north. Her mother had told her that,

though Lift had never seen the place.

“What?” Huqin demanded.

“Breasts,” Lift said, pointing. “See, like a lady layin’ on her back. Those points on the tops are nipples. Bloke who built this place musta been single for a looong time.”

Huqin turned to one of his companions. Using their ropes, they scuttled back down the outside of the wall to hold a whispered conference.

“Grounds at this end look empty, as my informant indicated would be the case,” Huqin said. He was in charge of the lot of them. Had a nose like someone had taken hold of it when he was a kid and pulled real, real hard. Lift was surprised he didn’t smack people in the face with it when he turned.

“Everyone’s focused on choosing the new Prime Aqasix,” said Maxin. “We could really do this. Rob the Bronze Palace itself, and right under the nose of the vizierate.”

“Is it . . . um . . . safe?” asked Huqin’s nephew. He was in his teens, and puberty hadn’t been kind to him. Not with that face, that voice, and those spindly legs.

“Hush,” Huqin snapped.

“No,” Tigzikk said, “the boy is right to express caution. This will be very dangerous.”

Tigzikk was considered the learned one in the group on account of his being able to cuss in three languages. Downright scholarly, that was. He wore fancy clothing, while most of the others wore black. “There will be chaos,” Tigzikk continued, “because so many people move through the palacethemissingpiecePushfortheAlethito they hands claspedworkinghands clasped tonight, but there will also be danger. Many, many bodyguards and a likelihood of suspicion on all sides.”

Tigzikk was an aging fellow, and was the only one of the group Lift knew

well. She couldn't say his name. That "quq" sound on the end of his name sounded like choking when someone pronounced it correctly. She just called him Tig instead.

"Tigzikk," Huqin said. Yup. Choking. "You were the one who suggested this. Don't tell me you're getting cold now."

"I'm not backing down. I'm pleading caution."

Lift leaned down over the wall toward them. "Less arguing," she said. "Let's move. I'm hungry."

Huqin looked up. "Why did we bring her along?"

"She'll be useful," Tigzikk said. "You'll see."

"She's just a child!"

"She's a youth. She's at least twelve."

"I ain't twelve," Lift snapped, looming over them.

They turned up toward her.

"I ain't," she said. "Twelve's an unlucky number." She held up her hands. "I'm only this many."

". . . Ten?" Tigzikk asked.

"Is that how many that is? Sure, then. Ten." She lowered her hands. "If I can't count it on my fingers, it's unlucky." And she'd been that many for three years now. So there.

"Seems like there are a lot of unlucky ages," Huqin said, sounding amused.

"Sure are," she agreed. She scanned the grounds again, then glanced back the way they had come, into the city.

A man walked down one of the streets leading to the palace. His dark

clothing blended into the gloom, but his silver buttons glinted each time he passed a streetlight.

Storms, she thought, a chill running up her spine. I didn't lose him after all.

She looked down at the men. "Are you coming with me or not? 'Cuz I'm leaving." She slipped over the top and dropped into the palace yards. Lift squatted there, feeling the cold ground. Yup, it was metal. Everything was bronze. Rich people, she decided, loved to stick with a theme.

As the boys finally stopped arguing and started climbing, a thin, twisting trail of vines grew out of the darkness and approached Lift. It looked like a little stream of spilled water picking its way across the floor. Here and there, bits of clear crystal peeked out of the vines, like sections of quartz in otherwise dark stone. Those weren't sharp, but smooth like polished glass, and didn't glow with Stormlight.

The vines grew super-fast, curling about one another in a tangle that formed a face.

"Mistress," the face said. "Is this wise?"

"'Ello, Voidbringer," Lift said, scanning the grounds.

"I am not a Voidbringer!" he said. "And you know it. Just { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; it1Qin gemstone . . . just stop saying that!"

Lift grinned. "You're my pet Voidbringer, and no lies are going to change that. I got you captured. No stealing souls, now. We ain't here for souls. Just a little thievery, the type what never hurt nobody."

The vine face—he called himself Wyndle—sighed. Lift scuttled across the bronze ground over to a tree that was, of course, also made of bronze. Huqin had chosen the darkest part of night, between moons, for them to slip in—but the starlight was enough to see by on a cloudless night like this.

Wyndle grew up to her, leaving a small trail of vines that people didn't seem to be able to see. The vines hardened after a few moments of sitting, as if briefly becoming solid crystal, then they crumbled to dust. People spotted that on occasion, though they certainly couldn't see Wyndle himself.

"I'm a spren," Wyndle said to her. "Part of a proud and noble—"

"Hush," Lift said, peeking out from behind the bronze tree. An open-topped carriage passed on the drive beyond, carrying some important Azish folk. You could tell by the coats. Big, drooping coats with really wide sleeves and patterns that argued with each other. They all looked like kids who had snuck into their parents' wardrobe. The hats were nifty, though.

The thieves followed behind her, moving with reasonable stealth. They really weren't that bad. Even if they didn't know how to climb a wall properly.

They gathered around her, and Tigzikk stood up, straightening his coat—which was an imitation of one of those worn by the rich scribe types who worked in the government. Here in Azir, working for the government was real important. Everyone else was said to be "discrete," whatever that meant.

"Ready?" Tigzikk said to Maxin, who was the other one of the thieves dressed in fine clothing.

Maxin nodded, and the two of them moved off to the right, heading toward the palace's sculpture garden. The important people would supposedly be shuffling around in there, speculating about who should be the next Prime.

Dangerous job, that. The last two had gotten their heads chopped off by some bloke in white with a Shardblade. The most recent Prime hadn't lasted two starvin' days!

With Tigzikk and Maxin gone, Lift only had four others to worry about. Huqin, his nephew, and two slender brothers who didn't talk much and kept reaching under their coats for knives. Lift didn't like their type. Thieving shouldn't leave bodies. Leaving bodies was easy. There was no challenge to it if you could just kill anyone who spotted you.

“You can get us in,” Huqin said to Lift. “Right?”

Lift pointedly rolled her eyes. Then she scuttled across the bronze grounds toward the main palace structure.

Really does look like a breast . . .

Wyndle curled along the ground beside her, his vine trail sprouting tiny bits of clear crystal here and there. He was as sinuous and speedy as a moving eel, only he grew rather than actually moving. Voidbringers were a strange lot.

“You realize that I didn’t choose you,” he said, a face appearing in the vines. “Uh . . . mought outs.”⁴ as they moved. His speaking left a strange effect, the trail behind him clotted with a sequence of frozen faces. The mouth seemed to move because it was growing so quickly beside her. “I wanted to pick a distinguished Iriali matron. A grandmother, an accomplished gardener. But no, the Ring said we should choose you. ‘She has visited the Old Magic,’ they said. ‘Our mother has blessed her,’ they said. ‘She will be young, and we can mold her,’ they said. Well, they don’t have to put up with—”

“Shut it, Voidbringer,” Lift hissed, drawing up beside the wall of the palace. “Or I’ll bathe in blessed water and go listen to the priests. Maybe get an exorcism.”

Lift edged sideways until she could look around the curve of the wall to spot the guard patrol: men in patterned vests and caps, with long halberds. She looked up the side of the wall. It bulged out just above her, like a rockbud, before tapering up further. It was of smooth bronze, with no handholds.

She waited until the guards had walked farther away. “All right,” she whispered to Wyndle. “You gotta do what I say.”

“I do not.”

“Sure you do. I captured you, just like in the stories.”

“I came to you,” Wyndle said. “Your powers come from me! Do you even listen to—”

“Up the wall,” Lift said, pointing.

Wyndle sighed, but obeyed, creeping up the wall in a wide, looping pattern. Lift hopped up, grabbing the small handholds made by the vine, which stuck to the surface by virtue of thousands of branching stems with sticky discs on them. Wyndle wove ahead of her, making a ladder of sorts.

It wasn't easy. It was starvin' difficult, with that bulge, and Wyndle's handholds weren't very big. But she did it, climbing all the way to the near-top of the building's dome, where windows peeked out at the grounds.

She glanced toward the city. No sign of the man in the black uniform. Maybe she'd lost him.

She turned back to examine the window. Its nice wooden frame held very thick glass, even though it pointed east. It was unfair how well Azimir was protected from highstorms. They should have to live with the wind, like normal folk.

“We need to Voidbring that,” she said, pointing at the window.

“Have you realized,” Wyndle said, “that while you claim to be a master thief, I do all of the work in this relationship?”

“You do all the complainin' too,” she said. “How do we get through this?”

“You have the seeds?”

She nodded, fishing in her pocket. Then in the other one. Then in her back pocket. Ah, there they were. She pulled out a handful of seeds.

“I can't affect the Physical Realm except in minor ways,” Wyndle said. “This means that you will need to use Investiture to—”

Lift yawned.

“Use Investiture to—”

She yawned wider. Starvin' in chasms deep, with darkness all around

you . . .” they hands claspedreVoidbringers never could catch a hint.

Wyndle sighed. “Spread the seeds on the frame.”

She did so, throwing the handful of seeds at the window.

“Your bond to me grants two primary classes of ability,” Wyndle said. “The first, manipulation of friction, you’ve already—don’t yawn at me!—discovered. We have been using that well for many weeks now, and it is time for you to learn the second, the power of Growth. You aren’t ready for what was once known as Regrowth, the healing of—”

Lift pressed her hand against the seeds, then summoned her awesomeness.

She wasn’t sure how she did it. She just did. It had started right around when Wyndle had first appeared.

He hadn’t talked then. She kind of missed those days.

Her hand glowed faintly with white light, like vapor coming off the skin. The seeds that saw the light started to grow. Fast. Vines burst from the seeds and wormed into the cracks between the window and its frame.

The vines grew at her will, making constricted, straining sounds. The glass cracked, then the window frame popped open.

Lift grinned.

“Well done,” Wyndle said. “We’ll make an Edgedancer out of you yet.”

Her stomach grumbled. When had she last eaten? She’d used a lot of her awesomeness practicing earlier. She probably should have stolen something to eat. She wasn’t quite so awesome when she was hungry.

She slipped inside the window. Having a Voidbringer was useful, though she wasn’t completely sure her powers came from him. That seemed the sorta thing a Voidbringer would lie about. She had captured him, fair and square. She’d used words. A Voidbringer had no body, not really. To catch something like that, you had to use words. Everybody knew it. Just like

curses made evil things come find you.

She had to get out a sphere—a diamond mark, her lucky one—to see properly in here. The small bedroom was decorated after the Azish way with lots of intricate patterns on the rugs and the fabric on the walls, mostly gold and red here. Those patterns were everything to the Azish. They were like words.

She looked out the window. Surely she'd escaped Darkness, the man in the black and silver with the pale crescent birthmark on his cheek. The man with the dead, lifeless stare. Surely he hadn't followed her all the way from Marabethia. That was half a continent away! Well, a quarter one, at the least.

Convinced, she uncoiled the rope that she wore wrapped around her waist and over her shoulders. She tied it to the door of a built-in closet, then fed it out the window. It tightened as the men started climbing. Nearby, Wyndle grew up around one of the bedposts, coiled like a skyeel.

She heard whispered voices below. "Did you see that? She climbed right up it. Not a handhold in sight. How . . . ?"

"Hush." That was Huqin.

Lift began poking through cabinets and drawers as the boys clambered in the window one at a time. Once inside, the thieves pulled up the rope and shut the window as best they could. Huqin studied the vines she'd grown from seeds on the frame.

Lift stuck her head in the bottom in such a short time. mought outs.4 of a wardrobe, groping around. "Ain't nothing in this room but moldy shoes."

"You," Huqin said to her, "and my nephew will hold this room. The three of us will search the bedrooms nearby. We will be back shortly."

"You'll probably have a whole sack of moldy shoes . . ." Lift said, pulling out of the wardrobe.

"Ignorant child," Huqin said, pointing at the wardrobe. One of his men grabbed the shoes and outfits inside, stuffing them in a sack. "This clothing

will sell for bundles. It's exactly what we're looking for."

"What about real riches?" Lift said. "Spheres, jewelry, art . . ." She had little interest in those things herself, but she'd figured it was what Huqin was after.

"That will all be far too well guarded," Huqin said as his two associates made quick work of the room's clothing. "The difference between a successful thief and a dead thief is knowing when to escape with your takings. This haul will let us live in luxury for a year or two. That is enough."

One of the brothers peeked out the door into the hallway. He nodded, and the three of them slipped out. "Listen for the warning," Huqin said to his nephew, then eased the door almost closed behind him.

Tigzikk and his accomplice below would listen for any kind of alarm. If anything seemed to be amiss, they'd slip off and blow their whistles. Huqin's nephew crouched by the window to listen, obviously taking his duty very seriously. He looked to be about sixteen. Unlucky age, that.

"How did you climb the wall like that?" the youth asked.

"Gumption," Lift said. "And spit."

He frowned at her.

"I gots magic spit."

He seemed to believe her. Idiot.

"Is it strange for you here?" he asked. "Away from your people?"

She stood out. Straight black hair—she wore it down to her waist—tan skin, rounded features. Everyone would immediately mark her as Reshi.

"Don't know," Lift said, strolling to the door. "Ain't never been around my people."

"You're not from the islands?"

“Nope. Grew up in Rall Elorim.”

“The . . . City of Shadows?”

“Yup.”

“Is it—”

“Yup. Just like they say.”

She peeked through the door. Huqin and the others were well out of the way. The hallway was bronze—walls and everything—but a red and blue rug, with lots of little vine patterns, ran down the center. Paintings hung on the walls.

She pulled the door all the way open and stepped out.

“Lift!” The nephew scrambled to the door. “They told us to wait here!”

“And?”

“And we should wait here! We don’t want to get Uncle Huqin in trouble!”

“What’s the point of sneaking into a in chasms deep, with darkness all around you . . .” they hands claspedrepalace if not to get into trouble?” She shook her head. Odd men, these. “This should be an interesting place, what with all of the rich folk hanging around.” There ought to be some really good food in here.

She padded out into the hallway, and Wyndle grew along the floor beside her. Interestingly, the nephew followed. She’d expected him to stay in the room.

“We shouldn’t be doing this,” he said as they passed a door that was open a crack, shuffles sounding from inside. Huqin and his men, robbing the place silly.

“Then stay,” Lift whispered, reaching a large stairwell. Servants whisked back and forth below, even a few parshmen, but she didn’t catch sight of anyone in one of those coats. “Where are the important folk?”

“Reading forms,” the nephew said from beside her.

“Forms?”

“Sure,” he said. “With the Prime dead, the viziers, scribes, and arbiters were all given a chance to fill out the proper paperwork to apply to take his place.”

“You apply to be emperor?” Lift said.

“Sure,” he said. “Lots of paperwork involved in that. And an essay. Your essay has to be really good to get this job.”

“Storms. You people are crazy.”

“Other nations do it better? With bloody succession wars? This way, everyone has a chance. Even the lowest of clerks can submit the paperwork. You can even be discrete and end up on the throne, if you are convincing enough. It happened once.”

“Crazy.”

“Says the girl who talks to herself.”

Lift looked at him sharply.

“Don’t pretend you don’t,” he said. “I’ve seen you doing it. Talking to the air, as if somebody were there.”

“What’s your name?” she asked.

“Gawx.”

“Wow. Well then, Gaw. I don’t talk to myself because I’m crazy.”

“No?”

“I do it because I’m awesome.” She started down the steps, waited for a gap between passing servants, then made for a closet across the way. Gawx cursed, then followed.

Lift was tempted to use her awesomeness to slide across the floor quickly, but she didn't need that yet. Besides, Wyndle kept complaining that she used the awesomeness too often. That she was at risk of malnutrition, whatever that meant.

She slipped up to the closet, using just her normal everyday sneakin' skills, and moved inside. Gawx scrambled into the closet with her just before she pulled it shut. Dinnerware on a serving cart clinked behind them, and they could barely crowd into the space. Gawx moved, causing more clinks, and she elbowed him. He stilled as two parshmen passed, bearing large wine barrels.

"You should go back upstairs," Lift whispered to him. "This could be dangerous."

"Oh, sneaking into the storming royal palace is dangerous? Thanks. I hadn't realized."

">Unite them. in a vs.4I mean it," Lift said, peeking out of the closet. "Go back up, leave when Huqin returns. He'll abandon me in a heartbeat. Probably will you, too."

Besides, she didn't want to be awesome with Gawx around. That started questions. And rumors. She hated both. For once, she'd like to be able to stay someplace for a while without being forced to run off.

"No," Gawx said softly. "If you're going to steal something good, I want a piece of it. Then maybe Huqin will stop making me stay behind, giving me the easy jobs."

Huh. So he had some spunk to him.

A servant passed carrying a large, plate-filled tray. The food smells wafting from it made Lift's stomach growl. Rich-person food. So delicious.

Lift watched the woman go, then broke out of the closet, following after. This was going to get difficult with Gawx in tow. He'd been trained well enough by his uncle, but moving unseen through a populated building wasn't easy.

The serving woman pulled open a door that was hidden in the wall. Servants' hallways. Lift caught it as it closed, waited a few heartbeats, then eased it open and slipped through. The narrow hallway was poorly lit and smelled of the food that had just passed.

Gawx entered behind Lift, then silently pulled the door closed. The serving woman disappeared around a corner ahead—there were probably lots of hallways like this in the palace. Behind Lift, Wyndle grew around the doorframe, a dark green, funguslike creep of vines that covered the door, then the wall beside her.

He formed a face in the vines and spots of crystal, then shook his head.

“Too narrow?” Lift asked.

He nodded.

“It's dark in here. Hard to see us.”

“Vibrations on the floor, mistress. Someone coming this direction.”

She looked longingly after the servant with the food, then shoved past Gawx and pushed open the door, entering the main hallways again.

Gawx cursed. “Do you even know what you're doing?”

“No,” she said, then scuttled around a corner into a large hallway lined with alternating green and yellow gemstone lamps. Unfortunately, a servant in a stiff, black and white uniform was coming right at her.

Gawx let out a “meep” of worry, ducking back around the corner. Lift stood up straight, clasped her hands behind her back, and strolled forward.

She passed the man. His uniform marked him as someone important, for a servant.

“You, there!” the man snapped. “What is this?”

“Mistress wants some cake,” Lift said, jutting out her chin.

“Oh, for Yaezir’s sake. Food is served in the gardens! There is cake there!”

“Wrong type,” Lift said. “Mistress wants berry cake.”

The man threw his hands into the air. “Kitchens are back the other way,” he said. “Try and persuade the cook, though she’ll probably chop your hands off before she takes another special request. Storming country scribes! Special dietary needs are supposed to be sent ahead of time, with the proper forms!” He stalked off, leaving Lift with hands behind her back, watching him.

Gawx slunk around the corner. “I thought we were dead for sure.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Lift said, hurrying down the hallway. “This ain’t the dangerous part yet.”

At the other end, this hallway intersected another one—with the same wide rug down the center, bronze walls, and glowing metal lamps. Across the way was a door with no light shining under it. Lift checked in both directions, then dashed to the door, cracked it, peeked in, then waved for Gawx to join her inside.

“We should go right down that hallway outside,” Gawx whispered as she shut the door all but a crack. “Down that way, we’ll find the vizier quarters. They’re probably empty, because everyone will be in the Prime’s wing deliberating.”

“You know the palace layout?” she asked, crouching in near darkness beside the door. They were in a small sitting room of some sort, with a couple of shadowed chairs and a small table.

“Yeah,” Gawx said. “I memorized the palace maps before we came. You didn’t?”

She shrugged.

“I’ve been in here once before,” Gawx said. “I watched the Prime sleeping.”

“You what?”

“He’s public,” Gawx said, “belongs to everyone. You can enter a lottery to come look at him sleeping. They rotate people through every hour.”

“What? On a special day or something?”

“No, every day. You can watch him eat too, or watch him perform his daily rituals. If he loses a hair or cuts off a nail, you might be able to keep it as a relic.”

“Sounds creepy.”

“A little.”

“Which way to his rooms?” Lift asked.

“That way,” Gawx said, pointing left down the hallway outside—the opposite direction from the vizier chambers. “You don’t want to go there, Lift. That’s where the viziers and everyone important will be reviewing applications. In the Prime’s presence.”

“But he’s dead.”

“The new Prime.”

“He ain’t been chosen yet!”

“Well, it’s kind of strange,” Gawx said. By the dim light of the cracked door, she could see him blushing, as if he knew how starvin’ odd this all was.

“There’s never not a Prime. We just don’t know who he is yet. I mean, he’s alive, and he’s already Prime—right now. We’re just catching up. So, those are his quarters, and the scions and viziers want to be in his presence while they decide who he is. Even if the person they decide upon isn’t in the room.”

“That makes no sense.”

“Of course it makes sense,” Gawx said. “It’s government. This is all very well detailed in the codes and . . .” He trailed off as Lift yawned. Azish could be real boring. At least he could take a hint, though.

“Anyway,” Gawx continued, “everyone outside in the gardens is hoping to be called in for a personal interview. It might not come to where they fElhokarre that, though. The scions can’t be Prime, as they’re too busy visiting and blessing villages around the kingdom—but a vizier can, and they tend to have the best applications. Usually, one of their number is chosen.”

“The Prime’s quarters,” Lift said. “That’s the direction the food went.”

“What is it with you and food?”

“I’m going to eat their dinner,” she said, soft but intense.

Gawx blinked, startled. “You’re . . . what?”

“I’m gonna eat their food,” she said. “Rich folk have the best food.”

“But . . . there might be spheres in the vizier quarters. . . .”

“Eh,” she said. “I’d just spend ’em on food.”

Stealing regular stuff was no fun. She wanted a real challenge. Over the last two years, she’d picked the most difficult places to enter. Then she’d snuck in.

And eaten their dinners.

“Come on,” she said, moving out of the doorway, then turned left toward the Prime’s chambers.

“You really are crazy,” Gawx whispered.

“Nah. Just bored.”

He looked the other way. “I’m going for the vizier quarters.”

“Suit yourself,” she said. “I’d go back upstairs instead, if I were you. You aren’t practiced enough for this kind of thing. You leave me, you’re probably going to get into trouble.”

He fidgeted, then slipped off in the direction of the vizier quarters. Lift rolled her eyes.

“Why did you even come with them?” Wyndle asked, creeping out of the room. “Why not just sneak in on your own?”

“Tigzikk found out about this whole election thing,” she said. “He told me tonight was a good night for sneaking. I owed it to him. Besides, I wanted to be here in case he got into trouble. I might need to help.”

“Why bother?”

Why indeed? “Someone has to care,” she said, starting down the hallway. “Too few people care, these days.”

“You say this while coming in to rob people.”

“Sure. Ain’t gonna hurt them.”

“You have an odd sense of morality, mistress.”

“Don’t be stupid,” she said. “Every sense of morality is odd.”

“I suppose.”

“Particularly to a Voidbringer.”

“I’m not—”

She grinned and hurried her pace toward the Prime’s quarters. She knew she’d found those when she glanced down a side hallway and spotted guards at the end. Yup. That door was so nice, it had to belong to an emperor. Only super-rich folk built fancy doors. You needed money coming out your ears before you spent it on a door.

Guards" > Unite them. in a vs.4 were a problem. Lift knelt down, peeking around the corner. The hallway leading to the emperor’s rooms was narrow, like an alleyway. Smart. Hard to sneak down something like that. And those two guards, they weren’t the bored type. They were the “we gotta stand here

and look real angry” type. They stood so straight, you’d have thought someone had shoved brooms up their backsides.

She glanced upward. The hallway was tall; rich folk liked tall stuff. If they’d been poor, they’d have built another floor up there for their aunts and cousins to live in. Rich people wasted space instead. Proved they had so much money, they could waste it.

Seemed perfectly rational to steal from them.

“There,” Lift whispered, pointing to a small ornamented ledge that ran along the wall up above. It wouldn’t be wide enough to walk on, unless you were Lift. Which, fortunately, she was. It was dim up there too. The chandeliers were the dangly kind, and they hung low, with mirrors reflecting their spherelight downward.

“Up we go,” she said.

Wyndle sighed.

“You gotta do what I say or I’ll prune you.”

“You’ll . . . prune me.”

“Sure.” That sounded threatening, right?

Wyndle grew up the wall, giving her handholds. Already, the vines he’d trailed through the hallway behind them were vanishing, becoming crystal and disintegrating into dust.

“Why don’t they notice you?” Lift whispered. She’d never asked him, despite their months together. “Is it ’cuz only the pure in heart can see you?”

“You’re not serious.”

“Sure. That’d fit into legends and stories and stuff.”

“Oh, the theory itself isn’t ridiculous,” Wyndle said, speaking out of a bit of vine near her, the various cords of green moving like lips. “Merely the idea

that you consider yourself to be pure in heart.”

“I’m pure,” Lift whispered, grunting as she climbed. “I’m a child and stuff. I’m so storming pure I practically belch rainbows.”

Wyndle sighed again—he liked to do that—as they reached the ledge. Wyndle grew along the side of it, making it slightly wider, and Lift stepped onto it. She balanced carefully, then nodded to Wyndle. He grew further along the ledge, then doubled back and grew up the wall to a point above her head. From there, he grew horizontally to give her a handhold. With the extra inch of vine on the ledge and the handhold above, she managed to sidle along, stomach to the wall. She took a deep breath, then turned the corner into the hallway with the guards.

She moved along it slowly, Wyndle wrapping back and forth, enhancing both footing and handholds for her. The guards didn’t cry out. She was doing it.

“They can’t see me,” Wyndle said, growing up beside her to create another line of handholds, “because I exist mostly in the Cognitive Realm, even though I’ve moved my consciousness to this Realm. I can make myself visible to anyone, should I desire, though it’s not easy for me. Other spren are more skilled at it, while some have the opposite trouble. Of course, no matter how I manifest, nobody can touch me, as I barely have any sub”>Unite them. in a vs.4stance in this Realm.”

“Nobody but me,” Lift whispered, inching down the hallway.

“You shouldn’t be able to either,” he said, sounding troubled. “What did you ask for, when you visited my mother?”

Lift didn’t have to answer that, not to a storming Voidbringer. She eventually reached the end of the hallway. Beneath her was the door. Unfortunately, that was exactly where the guards stood.

“This does not seem very well thought out, mistress,” Wyndle noted. “Had you considered what you were going to do once you got here?”

She nodded.

“Well?”

“Wait,” she whispered.

They did, Lift with her front pressed to the wall, her heels hanging out above a fifteen-foot drop onto the guards. She didn’t want to fall. She was pretty sure she was awesome enough to survive it, but if they saw her, that would end the game. She’d have to run, and she’d never get any dinner.

Fortunately, she’d guessed right, unfortunately. A guard appeared at the other end of the hallway, looking out of breath and not a little annoyed. The other two guards jogged over to him. He turned, pointing the other way.

That was her chance. Wyndle grew a vine downward, and Lift grabbed it. She could feel the crystals jutting out between the tendrils, but they were smooth and faceted—not angular and sharp. She dropped, vine smooth between her fingers, pulling herself to a stop just before the floor.

She only had a few seconds.

“. . . caught a thief trying to ransack the vizier quarters,” said the newer guard. “Might be more. Keep watch. By Yaezir himself! I can’t believe they’d dare. Tonight of all nights!”

Lift cracked open the door to the emperor’s rooms and peeked in. Big room. Men and women at a table. Nobody looking her direction. She slipped through the door.

Then became awesome.

She ducked down, kicked herself forward, and for a moment, the floor—the carpet, the wood beneath—had no purchase on her. She glided as if on ice, making no noise as she slid across the ten-foot gap. Nothing could hold her when she got Slick like this. Fingers would slip off her, and she could glide forever. She didn’t think she’d ever stop unless she turned off the awesomeness. She’d slide all the way to the storming ocean itself.

Tonight, she stopped herself under the table, using her fingers—which

weren't Slick—then removed the Slickness from her legs. Her stomach growled in complaint. She needed food. Real fast, or no more awesomeness for her.

“Somehow, you are partly in the Cognitive Realm,” Wyndle said, coiling beside her and raising a twisting mesh of vines that could make a face. “It is the only answer I can find to why you can touch spren. And you can metabolize food directly into Stormlight.”

She shrugged. He was always saying words like those. Trying to confuse her, starvin' Voidbringer. Well, she wouldn't talk back to him, not now. The men and women standing around the table might hear her, even if they couldn't hear Wyndle.

That food was in here somewhere. She could smell it.

“But why?” Wyndle said. “Why did She give you this incredible talent? Why a child? There are soldiers, grand kings, incredible scholars among humankind. Instead she chose you.”

Food, food, food. Smelled great. Lift crawled along under the long table. The men and women up above were talking in very concerned voices.

“Your application was clearly the best, Dalksi.”

“What! I misspelled three words in the first paragraph alone!”

“I didn't notice.”

“You didn't . . . Of course you noticed! But this is pointless, because Axikk's essay was obviously superior to mine.”

“Don't bring me into this again. We disqualified me. I'm not fit to be Prime. I have a bad back.”

“Ashno of Sages had a bad back. He was one of the greatest Emuli Primes.”

“Bah! My essay was utter rubbish, and you know it.”

Wyndle moved along beside Lift. “Mother has given up on your kind. I can feel it. She doesn’t care any longer. Now that He’s gone . . .”

“This arguing does not befit us,” said a commanding female voice. “We should take our vote. People are waiting.”

“Let it go to one of those fools in the gardens.”

“Their essays were dreadful. Just look at what Pandri wrote across the top of hers.”

“My . . . I . . . I don’t know what half of that even means, but it does seem insulting.”

This finally caught Lift’s attention. She looked up toward the table above. Good cusses? Come on, she thought. Read a few of those.

“We’ll have to pick one of them,” the other voice—she sounded very in charge—said. “Kadasixes and Stars, this is a puzzle. What do we do when nobody wants to be Prime?”

Nobody wanted to be Prime? Had the entire country suddenly grown some sense? Lift continued on. Being rich seemed fun and all, but being in charge of that many people? Pure misery, that would be.

“Perhaps we should pick the worst application,” one of the voices said. “In this situation, that would indicate the cleverest applicant.”

“Six different monarchs killed . . .” one of the voices said, a new one. “In a mere two months. Highprinces slaughtered throughout the East. Religious leaders. And then, two Primes murdered in a matter of a single week. Storms . . . I almost think it’s another Desolation come upon us.”

“A Desolation in the form of a single man. Yaezir help the one we choose. It is a death sentence.”

“We have stalled too long as it is. These weeks of waiting with no Prime have been harmful to Azir. Let’s just pick the worst application. From this stack.”

“What if we pick someone who is legitimately terrible? Is it not our cleared his throatfElhokarreduty to care for the kingdom, regardless of the risk to the one we choose?”

“But in picking the best from among us, we doom our brightest, our best, to die by the sword . . . Yaezir help us. Scion Ethid, a prayer for guidance would be appreciated. We need Yaezir himself to show us his will. Perhaps if we choose the right person, he or she will be protected by his hand.”

Lift reached the end of the table and looked out at a banquet that had been set onto a smaller table at the other side of the room. This place was very Azish. Curls of embroidery everywhere. Carpets so fine, they probably drove some poor woman blind weaving them. Dark colors and dim lights. Paintings on the walls.

Huh, Lift thought, someone scratched a face off of that one. Who’d ruin a painting like that, and such a fine one, the Heralds all in a row?

Well, nobody seemed to be touching that feast. Her stomach growled, but she waited for a distraction.

It came soon after. The door opened. Likely the guards coming to report about the thief they’d found. Poor Gawx. She’d have to go break him out later.

Right now, it was time for food. Lift shoved herself forward on her knees and used her awesomeness to Slick her legs. She slid across the floor and grabbed the corner leg of the food table. Her momentum smoothly pivoted her around and behind it. She crouched down, the tablecloth neatly hiding her from the people at the room’s center, and unSlicked her legs.

Perfect. She reached up a hand and plucked a dinner roll off the table. She took a bite, then hesitated.

Why had everyone grown quiet? She risked a glance over the tabletop.

He had arrived.

The tall Azish man with the white mark on his cheek, like a crescent. Black uniform with a double row of silver buttons down the coat's front, a stiff silver collar poking up from a shirt underneath. His thick gloves had collars of their own that extended halfway back around his forearms.

Dead eyes. This was Darkness himself.

Oh no.

“What is the meaning of this!” demanded one of the viziers, a woman in one of their large coats with the too-big sleeves. Her cap was of a different pattern, and it clashed quite spectacularly with the coat.

“I am here,” Darkness said, “for a thief.”

“Do you realize where you are? How dare you interrupt—”

“I have,” Darkness said, “the proper forms.” He spoke completely without emotion. No annoyance at being challenged, no arrogance or pomposity. Nothing at all. One of his minions entered behind him, a man in a black and silver uniform, less ornamented. He proffered a neat stack of papers to his master.

“Forms are all well and good,” the vizier said. “But this is not the time, constable, for—”

Lift bolted.

Her instincts finally battered down her surprise and she ran, leaping over a couch on her way to the room's back door. Wyndle moved beside her in a streak.

She tore a hunk off the roll with her teeth; she was going to need the food. Beyond where they fElhokarre that door would be a bedroom, and a bedroom would have a window. She slammed open the door, dashing through.

Something swung from the shadows on the other side.

A cudgel took her in the chest. Ribs cracked. Lift gasped, dropping face-first

to the floor.

Another of Darkness's minions stepped from the shadows inside the bedroom.

"Even the chaotic," Darkness said, "can be predictable with proper study." His feet thumped across the floor behind her.

Lift gritted her teeth, curled up on the floor. Didn't get enough to eat . . . So hungry.

The few bites she'd taken earlier worked within her. She felt the familiar feeling, like a storm in her veins. Liquid awesomeness. The pain faded from her chest as she healed.

Wyndle ran around her in a circle, a little lasso of vines sprouting leaves on the floor, looping her again and again. Darkness stepped up close.

Go! She leaped to her hands and knees. He seized her by the shoulder, but she could escape that. She summoned her awesomeness.

Darkness thrust something toward her.

The little animal was like a cremling, but with wings. Bound wings, tied-up legs. It had a strange little face, not crabbish like a cremling. More like a tiny axehound, with a snout, mouth, and eyes.

It seemed sickly, and its shimmering eyes were pained. How could she tell that?

The creature sucked the awesomeness from Lift. She actually saw it go, a glistening whiteness that streamed from her to the little animal. It opened its mouth, drinking it in.

Suddenly, Lift felt very tired and very, very hungry.

Darkness handed the animal to one of his minions, who made it vanish into a black sack he then tucked in his pocket. Lift was certain that the viziers—standing in an outraged cluster at the table—ushfor&

hadn't seen any of this, not with Darkness's back to them and the two minions crowding around.

"Keep all spheres from her," Darkness said. "She must not be allowed to Invest."

Lift felt terror, panicked in a way she hadn't known for years, ever since her days in Rall Elorim. She struggled, thrashing, biting at the hand held against her. Darkness didn't even grunt. He hauled her to her feet, and another minion took her by the arms, wrenching them backward until she gasped at the pain.

No. She'd freed herself! She couldn't be taken like this. Wyndle continued to spin around her on the ground, distressed. He was a good type, for a Voidbringer.

Darkness turned to the viziers. "I will trouble you no further."

"Mistress!" Wyndle said. "Here!"

The half-eaten roll lay on the floor. She'd dropped it when the cudgel hit. Wyndle ran into it, but he couldn't do anything more than make it wobble. Lift thrashed, trying to pull free, but without that storm inside of her, she was just a child in the grip of a trained soldier.

"I am highly disturbed by the nature of this incursion, constable," the lead vizier said, shuffling through the stack of papers that Darkness had dropped. "Your paperwork is in order, and I see { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; } you even included a plea—granted by the arbiters—to search the palace itself for this urchin. Surely you did not need to disturb a holy conclave. For a common thief, no less."

"Justice waits upon no man or woman," Darkness said, completely calm. "And this thief is anything but common. With your leave, we will cease disturbing you."

He didn't seem to care if they gave him leave or not. He strode toward the door, and his minion pulled Lift along after. She got her foot out to the roll,

but only managed to kick it forward, under the long table by the viziers.

“This is a leave of execution,” the vizier said with surprise, holding up the last sheet in the stack. “You will kill the child? For mere thievery?”

Kill? No. No!

“That, in addition to trespassing in the Prime’s palace,” Darkness said, reaching the door. “And for interrupting a holy conclave in session.”

The vizier met his gaze. She held it, then wilted. “I . . .” she said. “Ah, of course . . . er . . . constable.”

Darkness turned from her and pulled open the door. The vizier set one hand on the table and raised her other hand to her head.

The minion dragged Lift up to the door.

“Mistress!” Wyndle said, twisting up nearby. “Oh . . . oh dear. There is something very wrong with that man! He is not right, not right at all. You must use your powers.”

“Trying,” Lift said, grunting.

“You’ve let yourself grow too thin,” Wyndle said. “Not good. You always use up the excess. . . . Low body fat . . . That might be the problem. I don’t know how this works!”

Darkness hesitated beside the door and looked at the low-hanging chandeliers in the hallway beyond, with their mirrors and sparkling gemstones. He raised his hand and gestured. The minion not holding Lift moved out into the hallway and found the chandelier ropes. He unwound those and pulled, raising the chandeliers.

Lift tried to summon her awesomeness. Just a little more. She just needed a little.

Her body felt exhausted. Drained. She really had been overdoing it. She struggled, increasingly panicked. Increasingly desperate.

In the hallway, the minion tied off the chandeliers high in the air. Nearby, the vizier leader glanced from Darkness to Lift.

“Please,” Lift mouthed.

The vizier pointedly shoved the table. It clipped the elbow of the minion holding Lift. He cursed, letting go with that hand.

Lift dove for the floor, ripping out of his grip. She squirmed forward, getting underneath the table.

The minion seized her by the ankles.

“What was that?” Darkness asked, his voice cold, emotionless.

“I slipped,” the vizier said.

“Watch yourself.”

“Is that a threat, constable? I am beyond your reach.”

“ where they fElhokarreNobody is beyond my reach.” Still no emotion.

Lift thrashed underneath the table, kicking at the minion. He cursed softly and hauled Lift out by her legs, then pulled her to her feet. Darkness watched, face emo hand that hel



Szeth-son-son-Vallano, Truthless of Shinovar, sat atop the highest tower in the world and contemplated the End of All Things.

The souls of the people he had murdered lurked in the shadows. They whispered to him. If he drew close, they screamed.

They also screamed when he shut his eyes. He had taken to blinking as little as possible. His eyes felt dry in his skull. It was what any . . . sane man would do.

The highest tower in the world, hidden in the tops of the mountains, was perfect for his contemplation. If he had not been bound to an Oathstone, if he had been another man entirely, he would have stayed here. The only place in the East where the stones were not cursed, where walking on them was allowed. This place was holy.

Bright sunlight shone down to banish the shadows, which kept those screams to a minimum. The screamers deserved their deaths, of course. They should have killed Szeth. I hate you. I hate . . . everyone. Glories within, what a strange emotion.

He did not look up. He would not meet the gaze of the God of Gods. But it

was good to be in the sunlight. There were no clouds here to bring the darkness. This place was above them all. Urithiru ruled even the clouds.

The massive tower was also empty; that was another reason he liked it. A hundred levels, built in ring shapes, each one beneath larger than the one above it to provide a sunlit balcony. The eastern side, however, was a sheer, flat edge that made the tower look from a distance as if that side had been sliced off by an enormous Shardblade. What a strange shape.

He sat on that edge, right at the top, feet swinging over a drop of a hundred massive stories and a plummet down the mountainside below. Glass sparkled on the smooth surface of the flat side there.

Glass windows. Facing east, toward the Origin. The first time he had visited this place—just after being exiled from his homeland—he hadn't understood just how odd those windows were. Back then, he'd still been accustomed to gentle highstorms. Rain, wind, and meditation.

Things were different in these cursed lands of the stonewalkers. These hateful lands. These lands flowing with blood, death, and screams. And . . . And . . .

Breathe. He forced the air in and out and stood up on the rim of the parapet atop the tower.

He had fought an impossibility. A man with Stormlight, a man who knew the storm within. That meant . . . problems. Years ago, Szeth had been banished for raising the alarm. The false alarm, it had been said.

The Voidbringers are no more, they had told him.

The spirits of the stones themselves promised it.

The powers of old are no more.

The Knights Radiant are fallen.

We are all that remains.

All that remains.">Unite them., speak6kat . . . Truthless.

“Have I not been faithful?” Szeth shouted, finally looking up to face the sun. His voice echoed against the mountains and their spirit-souls. “Have I not obeyed, kept my oath? Have I not done as you demanded of me?”

The killing, the murder. He blinked tired eyes.

SCREAMS.

“What does it mean if the Shamanate are wrong? What does it mean if they banished me in error?”

It meant the End of All Things. The end of truth. It would mean that nothing made sense, and that his oath was meaningless.

It would mean he had killed for no reason.

He dropped off the side of the tower, white clothing—now a symbol to him of many things—flapping in the wind. He filled himself with Stormlight and Lashed himself southward. His body lurched in that direction, falling across the sky. He could only travel this way for a short time; his Stormlight did not last long.

Too imperfect a body. The Knights Radiant . . . they’d been said . . . they’d been said to be better at this . . . like the Voidbringers.

He had just enough Light to free himself from the mountains and land in a village in the foothills. They often set out spheres for him there as an offering, considering him some kind of god. He would feed upon that Light, and it would let him go a farther distance until he found another city and more Stormlight.

It would take days to get where he was going, but he would find answers. Or, barring that, someone to kill.

Of his own choice, this time.



Eshonai waved her hand as she climbed the central spire of Narak, trying to shoo away the tiny spren. It danced around her head, shedding rings of light from its cometlike form. Horrid thing. Why would it not leave her alone?

Perhaps it could not stay away. She was experiencing something wonderfully new, after all. Something that had not been seen in centuries. Stormform. A form of true power.

A form given of the gods.

She continued up the steps, feet clinking in her Shardplate. It felt good on her.

She had held this form for fifteen days now, fifteen days of hearing new rhythms. At first, she had attuned those often, but this had made some people very nervous. She had backed off, and forced herself to attune the old, familiar ones when speaking.

It was difficult, for those old rhythms were so dull. Buried within those new rhythms, the names of which she intuited somehow, she could almost hear voices speaking to her. Advising her. If her people had received such guidance over the centuries, they surely would not have fallen so far.

Eshonai reached the top of the spire, where the other four awaited her. Again, her sister Venli was also there, and she wore the new form as well—with its spikin“Uh . . .inf coincidencekatg armor plates, its red eyes, its lithe danger. This meeting would proceed very differently from the previous one. Eshonai cycled through the new rhythms, careful not to hum them. The others weren’t ready yet.

She sat down, then gasped.

That rhythm! It sounded like . . . like her own voice yelling at her. Screaming in pain. What was that? She shook her head, and found that she had reflexively pulled her hand to her chest in anxiety. When she opened it, the cometlike spren shot out.

She attuned Irritation. The others of the Five regarded her with heads cocked, a couple humming to Curiosity. Why did she act as she did?

Eshonai settled herself, Shardplate grinding against stone. This close to the lull—the time called the Weeping by the humans—highstorms were growing more rare. That had created a small impediment in her march to see every listener given stormform. There had only been one storm since Eshonai’s own transformation, and during it, Venli and her scholars had taken stormform along with two hundred soldiers chosen by Eshonai. Not officers. Common soldiers. The type she was sure would obey.

The next highstorm was mere days away, and Venli had been gathering her spren. They had thousands ready. It was time.

Eshonai regarded the others of the Five. Today’s clear sky rained down white sunlight, and a few windspren approached on a breeze. They stopped when they grew near, then zipped away in the opposite direction.

“Why have you called this meeting?” Eshonai asked the others.

“You’ve been speaking of a plan,” Davim said, broad worker’s hands clasped before him. “You’ve been telling everyone of it. Shouldn’t you have brought it to the Five first?”

“I’m sorry,” Eshonai said. “I am merely excited. I believe, however, we should now be the Six.”

“That has not been decided,” Abronai said, weak and plump. Mateform was disgusting. “This moves too quickly.”

“We must move quickly,” Eshonai replied to Resolve. “We have only two highstorms before the lull. You know what the spies report. The humans are planning a final push toward us, toward Narak.”

“It is a pity,” Abronai said to Consideration, “that your meeting with them went so poorly.”

“They wanted to tell me of the destruction they planned to bring,” Eshonai lied. “They wanted to gloat. That was the only reason they met with me.”

“We need to be ready to fight them,” Davim said to Anxiety.

Eshonai laughed. A blatant use of emotion, but she truly felt it. “Fight them? Haven’t you been listening? I can summon a highstorm.”

“With help,” Chivi said to Curiosity. Nimbleform. Another weak form. They should expunge that one from their ranks. “You have said you cannot do it alone. How many others would you need? Certainly the two hundred you have now are enough.”

“No, that is not nearly enough,” Eshonai replied. “I feel that the more people we have in this form, the more likely we are to succeed. I would like, therefore, to move that we transform.”

“Yes, in chasms deep, with darkness all around you . . .” they ” Sadeasre” Chivi said. “But how many of us?”

“All of us.”

Davim hummed to Amusement, thinking it must be a joke. He trailed off as the rest sat in silence.

“We will have just one chance,” Eshonai said to Resolve. “The humans will

leave their warcamps together, in one large army that intends to reach Narak during the lull. They will be completely exposed on the plateaus, with no shelter. A highstorm at that

time would destroy them.”

“We don’t even truly know if you can summon one,” Abronai said to Skepticism.

“That is why we need as many of us in stormform as possible,” Eshonai said. “If we miss this opportunity, our children will sing us the songs of Cursing, assuming they are enough to do so. This is our chance, our one chance. Imagine the ten armies of men, isolated on the plain live long

ateaus, buffeted and overwhelmed by a tempest they could never have expected! With stormform, we would be immune to its effects. If any survive, we could destroy them easily.”

“It is tempting,” Davim said.

“I do not like the look of those who have taken this form,” Chivi said. “I w people clamor to be given it. Perhaps two hundred are enough.”

“Eshonai,” Davim said, “how does this form feel?”

He was asking more than he actually said. Each form changed a person in some ways. Warform made you more aggressive, mateform made you easy to distract, nimbleform encouraged focus, and workform made you obedient.

Eshonai attuned Peace.

No. That was the screaming voice. How had she spent weeks in this form and not noticed?

“I feel alive,” Eshonai said to Joy. “I feel strong, and I feel powerful. I feel a connection to the world that I should have always known. Davim, this is like the change from dullform to one of the other forms—it is that much of an upgrade. Now that I hold this strength, I realize I wasn’t fully alive before.”

She lifted her hand and made a fist. She could feel the energy coursing down her arm as the muscles flexed, though it was hidden beneath the Shardplate.

“Red eyes,” Abronai whispered. “Have we come to this?”

“If we decide to do this,” Chivi said. “Perhaps we four should assess it first, then say if the others should join us.” Venli opened her mouth to speak, but Chivi waved her hand, interrupting her. “You have had your say, Venli. We know what you wish.”

“We cannot wait, unfortunately,” Eshonai said. “If we want to trap the Alethi armies, we will need time to transform everyone before the Alethi leave to search for Narak.”

“I’m willing to try it,” Abronai said. “Perhaps we should propose a mass transformation to our people.”

“No.” Zulu spoke to Peace.

The dullform member of the Five sat slouched, looking at the ground before her. She almost never said anything.

Eshonai attuned Annoyance. “What was that?”

“No,” Zulu repeated. “It is not right.”

“I would have us all be in agreement,” Davim said. “Zulu, can you not listen to reason?”

“It is not right,” the dullform said again.

“She is dull,” Eshonai said. “We should ignore her.”

Davim hummed to Anxiety. “Zulu represents the past, Eshonai. You shouldn’t say such things of her.”

“The past is dead.”

Abronai joined Davim in humming to Anxiety. “Perhaps this is worth more thought. Eshonai, you . . . do not speak as you used to. I hadn’t realized the changes were so stark.”

Eshonai attuned one of the new rhythms, the Rhythm of Fury. She held the song inside, and found herself humming. These were so cautious, so weak! They would see her people destroyed.

“We will meet again later today,” Davim said. “Let us spend time considering. Eshonai, I would speak with you alone during that period, if you are willing.”

“Of course.”

They rose from their places atop the pillar. Eshonai stepped to the edge and looked down as the others filed down. The spire was too high to jump from, even in Shardplate. She so wanted to try.

It seemed that every person in the city had gathered around the base to await the decision. In the weeks since Eshonai's transformation, talk of what had happened to her—then the others—had infused the city with a certain mixture of anxiety and hope. Many had come to her, begging to be given the form. They saw the chance it offered.

“They're not going to agree to it,” Venli said from behind once the others were down. She spoke to Spite, one of the new rhythms. “You spoke too aggressively, Eshonai.”

“Davim is with us,” Eshonai said to Confidence. “Chivi will come too, with persuasion.”

“That isn't enough. If the Five do not come to a consensus—”

“Don't worry.”

“Our people must take that form, Eshonai,” Venli said. “It is inevitable.”

Eshonai found herself attuning the new version of Amusement . . . Ridicule, it was. She turned to her sister. “You knew, didn't you? You knew exactly what this form would do to me. You knew this before you took the form yourself.”

“I . . . Yes.”

Eshonai grabbed her sister by the front of her robe, then yanked her forward, holding her tightly. With Shardplate it was easy, though Venli resisted more than she should have been able to, and a small spark of red lightning ran across the woman's arms and face. Eshonai was not accustomed to such strength from her scholar of a sister.

“You could have destroyed us,” Eshonai said. “What if this form had done something terrible?”

Screaming. In her head. Venli smiled.

“How did you discover this?” Eshonai asked. “It didn’t come from the songs. There is more.”

Venli did not speak. She met Eshonai’s eyes and hummed to Confidence. “We must make certain the Five agree to this plan,” she said. “If we are to survive, and if we are to defeat the humans, we must be in this form—all of us. We in chasms deep, with darkness all around you . . .” they ” Sadeasremust summon that storm. It has been . . . waiting, Eshonai. Waiting and building.”

“I will see to it,” Eshonai said, dropping Venli. “You can gather enough spren for us to transform all of our people?”

“My staff have been working on it these three weeks. We will be ready to transform thousands upon thousands over the course of the final two highstorms before the lull.”

“Good.” Eshonai started down the steps.

“Sister?” Venli asked. “You are planning something. What is it? How will you persuade the Five?”

Eshonai continued down the steps. With the added balance and strength of Shardplate, she didn’t need to bother with the chains to steady herself. As she neared the bottom, where the others of the Five were speaking to the people, she stopped a short distance above the crowd and drew in a deep breath.

Then, as loudly as she could, Eshonai shouted, “In two days, I will take any who wish to go into the storm and give them this new form.”

The crowd stilled, their humming dropping off.

“The Five seek to deny you this right,” Eshonai bellowed. “They don’t want you to have this form of power. They are frightened, like cremlings hiding in cracks. They cannot deny you! It is the right of every person to choose their own form.”

She raised her hands above her head, humming to Resolve, and summoned a storm.

A tiny one, a mere trickle compared to what waited. It grew between her hands, a wind coursing with lightning. A miniature tempest in her palms, light and power, wind spinning in a vortex. It had been centuries since this power had been used, and so—like a river that had been dammed—the energy waited impatiently to be freed.

The tempest grew so that it whipped at her clothing, spinning around her in a swirl of wind, crackling red lightning, and dark mist. Finally, it dissipated. She heard Awe being sung throughout the crowd—full songs, not humming. Their emotions were strong.

“With this power,” Eshonai declared, “we can destroy the Alethi and protect our people. I have seen your despair. I have heard you sing to Mourning. It need not be so! Come with me into the storms. It is your right, your duty, to join with me.”

Behind her on the steps, Venli hummed to Tension. “This will divide us, Eshonai. Too aggressive, too abrupt!”

“It will work,” Eshonai said to Confidence. “You do not know them as I do.”

Below, the other members of the Five were glaring up at her, looking betrayed, though she could not hear their songs.

Eshonai marched to the bottom of the spire, then pushed her way through the crowd, being joined by her soldiers in stormform. The people made way for her, many humming to Anxiety. Most who had come were workers or nimbleforms. That made sense. The warforms were too pragmatic for gawking.

Eshonai and her stormform warriors left the town’s center ring. She allowed Venli to tag along behind, but paid the woman no heed. Eshonai eventually approached the barracks on the leeward side of the city, a large group of buildings built together to form a community for the soldiers. Though her troops were not required to sleep here, many did so.

The practice grounds one plateau over were busy with the sounds of warriors honing their skills, or—more likely—newly transformed soldiers being trained. The second division, a hundred and twenty-eight in number, were away watching for humans entering the middle plateaus. Scouts in warpairs roamed the Plains. She'd set them on this task soon after obtaining her form, as she had known even then that she would need to change the way this battle worked. She wanted every bit of information about the Alethi and their current tactics that she could get.

Her soldiers would ignore chrysalises for the time being. She would not lose soldiers to that petty game any longer, not when each man and woman under her command represented the potential of stormform.

The other divisions were all here, however. Seventeen thousand soldiers total. A mighty force in some ways, but also so few, compared to what they had once been. She raised her hand in a fist, and her stormform division raised the call for all soldiers in the listener army to gather. Those practicing set down their weapons and jogged over. Others left the barracks. In a short time, all had joined her.

“It is time to end the fight against the Alethi,” Eshonai announced in a loud voice. “Which of you are willing to follow me in doing so?”

Humming to Resolve moved through the crowd. So far as she could hear, not a one hummed to Skepticism. Excellent.

“This will require each soldier to join me in this form,” Eshonai shouted, her words being relayed through the ranks.

More humming to Resolve.

“I am proud of you,” Eshonai said. “I am going to have the Storm Division go among you and take your word, each of you, on this transformation. If there are any here who do not wish to change, I would know of it personally. It is your decision, by right, and I will not force you—but I must know.”

She looked to her stormforms, who saluted and broke apart, moving in warpairs. Eshonai stepped back, folding her arms, watching as these visited

each other division in turn. The new rhythms thrummed in her skull, though she stayed away from the Rhythm of Peace, with its strange screams. There was no fighting against what she had become. The eyes of the gods were too strongly upon her.

Nearby, some soldiers gathered, familiar faces beneath hardened skullplates, the men bearing bits of gemstone tied to their beards. Her own division, once her friends.

She could not quite explain why she had not chosen them at first for the transformation, instead picking two hundred soldiers from across many divisions. She'd needed soldiers who were obedient, but not known for their brightness.

Thude and the soldiers of Eshonai's former division . . . they knew her too well. They would have questioned.

Soon, she had gotten word. Of her seventeen thousand troops, only a handful refused the required transformation. Those who had declined were gathered on the practice grounds.

As she contemplated her next move, Thude approached. Tall and thick-limbed, he had always worn warform save for two weeks as a mate to Bila. He hummed to Resolve—the way for a soldier to indicate a willingness to obey orders.

“I am worried about this, Eshonai,” he said. “Do so many need to change?”

“If we do not transform,” Eshonai said, “we are dead. The humans will ruin us.”

He continued to hum to Resolve, to indicate he trusted her. His eyes seemed to tell another story.

Melu in such a short time. mre suppos.4, of her stormforms, returned and saluted. “The counting is finished, sir.”

“Excellent,” Eshonai said. “Pass word to the troops. We're going to do the

same thing for everyone in the city.”

“Everyone?” Thude said to Anxiety.

“Our time is short,” Eshonai said. “If we do not act, we will miss our opportunity to move against the humans. We have two storms left; I want every willing person in this city ready to take up stormform before those have passed us. Those who will not are given that right, but I want them gathered so we may know where we stand.”

“Yes, General,” Melu said.

“Use a tight scouting formation,” Eshonai said, pointing toward parts of the city. “Move through the streets, counting every person. Use the non-stormform divisions too, for speed. Tell the common people that we’re trying to determine how many soldiers we will have for the coming battle, and have our soldiers be calm and sing to Peace. Put those people who are willing to transform into the central ring. Send those who are unwilling out here. Give them an escort so that they do not get lost.”

Venli stepped up to her as Melu passed the word, sending ranks out to obey. Thude rejoined his division.

Every half year, they did an accounting to determine their numbers and see if the forms were properly balanced. Once in a while, they would need more volunteers to become mates or workers. Most often, they needed more warforms.

That meant this exercise was familiar to the soldiers, and they took easily to the orders. After years of war, they were accustomed to doing as she said. Many had the same depression that the regular people expressed—only for the troops, it manifested as bloodlust. They just wanted to fight. They would probably have charged head-on against the human encampments, and ten times their own numbers, if Eshonai ordered.

The Five all but handed this to me, she thought as the first of the unwilling began to trickle out of the city, guarded by her soldiers. For years I’ve been absolute leader of our armies, and every person among us with a hint of

aggression has been given to me as a soldier.

Workers would obey; it was their nature. Many of the nimbles who hadn't transformed yet were loyal to Venli, as the majority of them aspired to be scholars. The mates wouldn't care, and the few dulls would be too numb of brain to object.

The city was hers.

"We'll have to kill them, unfortunately," Venli said, watching the unwilling be gathered. They huddled together, afraid, despite the soft songs of the soldiers. "Will your troops be able to do it?"

"No," Eshonai said, shaking her head. "Many would resist us if we did this now. We will have to wait for all of my soldiers to be transformed. They will not object then."

"That's sloppy," Venli said to Spite. "I thought you commanded their loyalty."

"Do not question me," Eshonai said. "I control this city, not you."

Venli quieted, though her humming to Spite continued. She would attempt to seize control from Eshonai. It was an uncomfortable realization, as was the realization of how deeply Eshonai herself wanted to be in control. That didn't feel like her. Not at all.

None of this feels like me. I . . .

The new rhythms' beats surged in her mind. She turned from such thoughts as a group of soldiers approached, towing a shouting figure. Abronai, of the Five. She should have realized that he'd be trouble; he maintained mateform too easily, avoiding its distractions.

Transforming him would have been dangerous, she thought. He has too much control over himself.

As the stormform soldiers pulled him to Eshonai, his shouts beat against her. "This is outrageous! The dictates of the Five rule us, not the will of a single

person! Can't you see that the form, the new form is overriding her! You've all lost your minds! Or . . . or worse."

It was uncomfortably close to the truth.

"Put him with the others," Eshonai said, gesturing toward the group of dissidents. "What of the rest of the Five?"

"They agreed," Melu said. "Some were reluctant, but they agreed."

"Go and fetch Zuln. Put her with the dissenters. I don't trust her to do what is needed."

The soldier didn't question as she towed Abronai away. There were perhaps a thousand dissenters there on the large plateau that made up the practice grounds. An acceptably small number.

"Eshonai . . ." The song was sung to Anxiety. She turned as Thude approached. "I don't like this, what we're doing here."

Bother. She had worried that he would be difficult. She took him by the arm, leading him a ways off. The new rhythms cycled through her mind as her armored feet crunched on the stones. Once they were far enough away from Venli and the others for some privacy, she turned Thude to look him in the eyes.

"Out with it," she said to Irritation, picking one of the old, familiar rhythms for him.

"Eshonai," he said quietly. "This isn't right. You know it's not right. I agreed to change—every soldier did—but it's not right."

"Do you disagree that we needed new tactics in this war?" Eshonai said to Resolve. "We were dying slowly, Thude."

"We did need new tactics," Thude said. "But this . . . Something's wrong with you, Eshonai."

"No, I just needed an excuse for such extreme action. Thude, I've been

considering something like this for months.”

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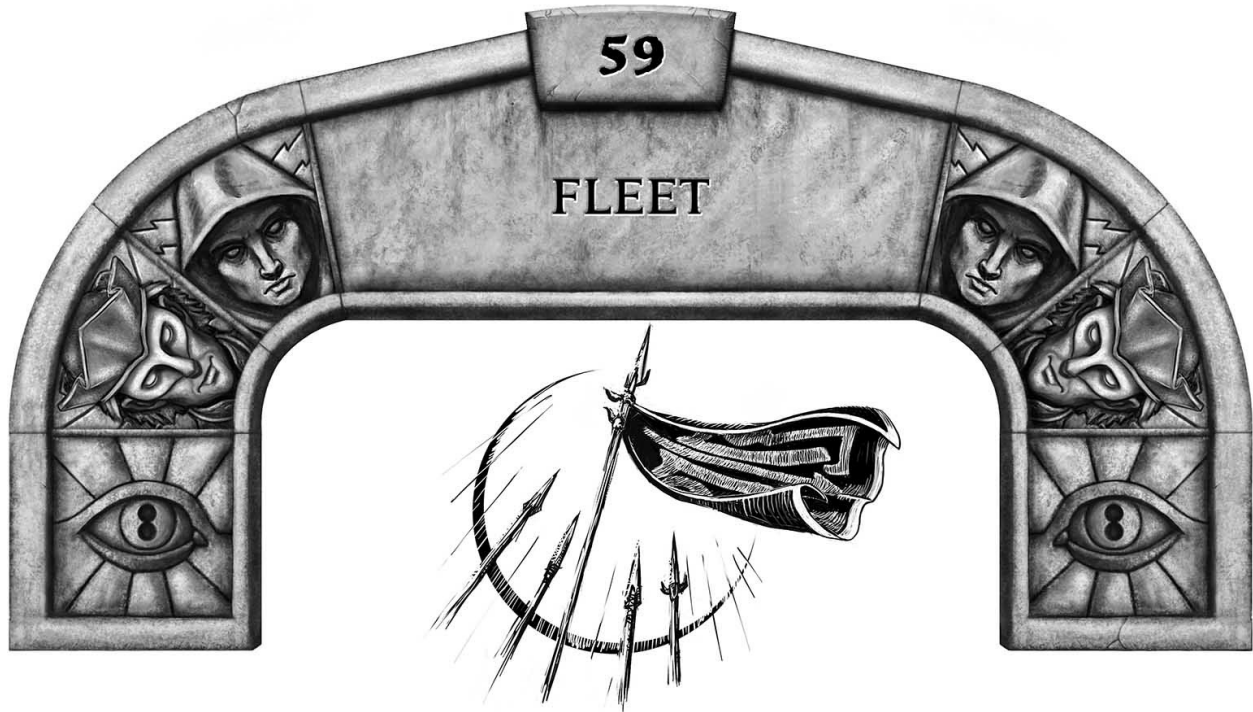


PART

FOUR

The Approach

KALADIN • SHALLAN • DALINAR



{ margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; text-indent: 0.00em; text-align: center; it1Q. consideredpredictablI'll address this letter to my "old friend," as I have no idea what name you're using currently.

Kaladin had never been in prison before.

Cages, yes. Pits. Pens. Under guard in a room. Never a proper prison.

Perhaps that was because prisons were too nice. He had two blankets, a pillow, and a chamber pot that was changed regularly. They fed him far better than he'd ever been fed as a slave. The stone shelf wasn't the most comfortable bed, but with the blankets, it wasn't too bad. He didn't have any windows, but at least he wasn't out in the storms.

All in all, the room was very nice. And he hated it.

In the past, the only times he'd been stuck in a small space had been to weather a highstorm. Now, being enclosed here for hours on end, with nothing to do but lie on his back and think . . . Now he found himself restless, sweating, missing the open spaces. Missing the wind. The solitude didn't

bother him. Those walls, though. They felt like they were crushing him.

On the third day of his imprisonment, he heard a disturbance from farther inside the prison, beyond his chamber. He stood up, ignoring Syl, who sat on an invisible bench on his wall. What was that shouting? It echoed in from the hallway.

His little cell was in its own room. The only people he'd seen since being locked up were the guards and the servants. Spheres glowed on the walls, keeping the place well lit. Spheres in a room meant for criminals. Were they there to taunt the men locked away? Riches just beyond reach.

He pressed against the cold bars, listening to the indistinct shouts. He imagined Bridge Four having come to break him out. Stormfather send they didn't try something so foolish.

He eyed one of the spheres in its setting on the wall.

"What?" Syl asked him.

"I might be able to get close enough to suck that Light out. It's only a little farther than the Parshendi were when I drew the Light from their gemstones."

"Then what?" Syl asked, voice small.

Good question. "Would you help me break out, if I wanted to?"

"Do you want to?"

"I'm not sure." He turned around, still standing, and rested his back against the bars. "I might need to. Breaking out would be against the law, though."

She lifted her chin. "I'm no highspren. Laws don't matter; what's right matters."

"On that point, we agree."

"But you came willingly," Syl said. "Why would you leave now?"

“I won’t let them execute me.”

“They’re not going to,” Syl said. “You heard Dalinar.”

“Dalinar can go rot. He let this happen.”

“He tried to—”

“He let it happen!” Kaladin snapped, turning and slamming his hands against the bars. Another storming cage. He was right back where he’d begun! “He’s the same as the others,” Kaladin growled.

Syl zipped over to him, coming to restou ate chicken?” Renarin asked they ” Sadeasre between the bars, hands on hips. “Say that again.”

“He . . .” Kaladin turned away. Lying to her was hard. “All right, fine. He’s not. But the king is. Admit it, Syl. Elhokar is a terrible king. At first he lauded me for trying to protect him. Now, at the snap of his fingers, he’s willing to execute me. He’s a child.”

“Kaladin, you’re scaring me.”

“Am I? You told me to trust you, Syl. When I jumped down into the arena, you said this time things would be different. How is this different?”

She looked away, seeming suddenly very small.

“Even Dalinar admitted that the king had made a big mistake in letting Sadeas wiggle out of the challenge,” Kaladin said. “Moash and his friends are right. This kingdom would be better off without Elhokar.”

Syl dropped to the floor, head bowed.

Kaladin walked back to his bench, but was too stirred up to sit. He found himself pacing. How could a man be expected to live trapped in a little room, without fresh air to breathe? He wouldn’t let them leave him here.

You’d better keep your word, Dalinar. Get me out. Soon.

The disturbance, whatever it had been, quieted. Kaladin asked the servant about it when she came with his food, pushing it through the small opening at the bottom of the bars. She wouldn't speak to him, and scurried off like a cremling before a storm.

Kaladin sighed, retrieving the food—steamed vegetables, dribbled with a salty black sauce—and flopping back on his bench. They gave him food he could eat with his fingers. No forks or knives for him, just in case.

“Nice place you have here, bridgeboy,” Wit said. “I considered moving in here myself on several occasions. The rent might be cheap, but the price of admission is quite steep.”

Kaladin scrambled up to his feet. Wit sat on a bench by the far wall, outside the cell and under the spheres, tuning some kind of strange instrument on his lap made of taut strings and polished wood. He hadn't been there a moment ago. Storms . . . had the bench even been there before?

“How did you get in?” Kaladin asked.

“Well, there are these things called doors . . .”

“The guards let you?”

“Technically?” Wit asked, plucking at a string, then leaning down to listen as he plucked another. “Yes.”

Kaladin sat back down on the bench in his cell. Wit wore his black-on-black, his thin silver sword undone from his waist and sitting on the bench beside him. A brown sack slumped there as well. Wit leaned down to tune his instrument, one leg crossed over the other. He hummed softly to himself and nodded. “Perfect pitch,” Wit said, “makes this all so much easier than it once was. . . .”

Kaladin sat, waiting, as Wit settled back against the wall. Then did nothing.

“Well?” Kaladin asked.

“Yes. Thank you.”

“Are you going to play music for me?”

“No. You wouldn’t appreciate into step beside hmre suppos.4it.”

“Then why are you here?”

“I like visiting people in prison. I can say whatever I want to them, and they can’t do anything about it.” He looked up at Kaladin, then rested his hands on his instrument, smiling. “I’ve come for a story.”

“What story?”

“The one you’re going to tell me.”

“Bah,” Kaladin said, lying back down on his bench. “I’m in no mood for your games today, Wit.”

Wit plucked a note on his instrument. “Everyone always says that—which, first off, makes it a cliché. I am led to wonder. Is anyone ever in the mood for my games? And if they are, would that not defeat the point of my type of game in the first place?”

Kaladin sighed as Wit continued to pluck out notes. “If I play along today,” Kaladin asked, “will that get rid of you?”

“I will leave as soon as the story is done.”

“Fine. A man went to jail. He hated it there. The end.”

“Ah . . .” Wit said. “So it’s a story about a child, then.”

“No, it’s about—” Kaladin cut off.

Me.

“Perhaps a story for a child,” Wit said. “I will tell you one, to get you in the mood. A bunny rabbit and a chick went frolicking in the grass together on a sunny day.”

“A chick . . . baby chicken?” Kaladin said. “And a what?”

“Ah, forgot myself for a moment,” Wit said. “Sorry. Let me make it more appropriate for you. A piece of wet slime and a disgusting crab thing with seventeen legs slunk across the rocks together on an insufferably rainy day. Is that better?”

“I suppose. Is the story over?”

“It hasn’t started yet.”

Wit abruptly slapped the strings, then began to play them with ferocious intent. A vibrant, energetic repetition. One punctuated note, then seven in a row, frenzied.

The rhythm got inside of Kaladin. It seemed to shake the entire room.

“What do you see?” Wit demanded.

“I . . .”

“Close your eyes, idiot!”

Kaladin closed his eyes. This is stupid.

“What do you see?” Wit repeated.

Wit was playing with him. The man was said to do that. He was supposedly Sigzil’s old mentor. Shouldn’t Kaladin have earned a reprieve by helping out his apprentice?

There was nothing of humor to those notes. Those powerful notes. Wit added a second melody, complementing the first. Was he playing that with his other hand? Both at the same time? How could one man, one instrument, produce so much music?

Kaladin saw . . . in his mind . . .

A race.

“That’s the song of a man who is running,” Kaladin said.

“In the driest part of the brightest day, blue and gold honestre the man set off from the eastern sea.” Wit said it perfectly to the beat of his music, a chant that was almost a song. “And where he went or why he ran, the answer comes from you to me.”

“He ran from the storm,” Kaladin said softly.

“The man was Fleet, whose name you know; he’s spoken of in song and lore. The fastest man e’er known to live. The surest feet e’er known to roam. In time long past, in times I’ve known, he raced the Herald Chan-a-rach. He won that race, as he did each one, but now the time for defeat had come.

“For Fleet so sure, and Fleet the quick, to all that heard he yelled his goal: to beat the wind, and race a storm. A claim so brash, a claim too bold. To race the wind? It can’t be done. Undaunted, Fleet was set to run. So to the east, there went our Fleet. Upon the shore his mark was set.

“The storm grew strong, the storm grew wild. Who was this man all set to dash? No man should tempt the God of Storms. No fool had ever been so rash.”

How did Wit play this music with only two hands? Surely another hand had joined him. Should Kaladin look?

In his mind’s eye, he saw the race. Fleet, a barefooted man. Wit claimed all knew of him, but Kaladin had never heard of such a story. Lanky, tall, with tied-back long hair that went to his waist. Fleet took his mark on the shore, leaning forward in a running posture, waiting as the stormwall thundered and crashed across the sea toward him. Kaladin jumped as Wit hit a burst of notes, signaling the race’s start.

Fleet tore off just in front of an angry, violent wall of water, lightning, and wind-blown rocks.

Wit did not speak again until Kaladin prompted him. “At first,” Kaladin said, “Fleet did well.”

“O’er rock and grass, our Fleet did run! He leaped the stones and dodged the trees, his feet a blur, his soul a sun! The storm so grand, it raged and spun, but away from it our Fleet did run! The lead was his, the wind behind, did man now prove that storms could lose?”

“Through land he ran so quick and sure, and Alethkar he left behind. But now the test he saw ahead, for mountains he would have to climb. The storm surged on, released a howl; it saw its chance might now approach.

“To the highest mounts and the coldest peaks, our hero Fleet did make his way. The slopes were steep and paths unsure. Would he maintain his mighty lead?”

“Obviously not,” Kaladin said. “You can never stay ahead. Not for long.”

“No! The storm grew close, ’til it chewed his heels. Upon his neck, Fleet felt its chill. Its breath of ice was all around, a mouth of night and wings of frost. Its voice was of the breaking rocks; its song was of the crashing rain.”

Kaladin could feel it. Icy water seeping through his clothing. Wind buffeting his skin. A roar so loud that soon, he could hear nothing at all.

He’d been there. He’d felt it.

“Then the tip he reached! The point he found! Fleet climbed no more; he crossed the peak. And down the side, his speed returned! Outside the storm, Fleet found the sun. Azir’s plains were now his path. He sprinted west, more broad his stride.”

“But he was growing weak,” Kaladin said. “No man can run that far without u yourself com

Reproduction of a mosaic purportedly illustrating the city of Stormseat.





Have you given up on the gemstone, now that it is dead? And do you no longer hide behind the name of your old master? I am told that in your current incarnation you've taken a name that references what you presume to be one of your virtues.

“Aha!” Shallan said. She scrambled across her fluffy bed—sinking down practically to her neck with each motion—and leaned precariously over the side. She scabbled among the stacks of papers on the floor, tossing aside irrelevant sheets.

Finally, she retrieved the one she wanted, holding it up while pushing hair out of her eyes and tucking it behind her ears. The page was a map, one of those ancient ones that Jasnah had talked about. It had taken forever to find a merchant at the Shattered Plains who had a copy.

“Look,” Shallan said, holding the map beside a modern one of the same area, copied by her own hand from Amaram's wall.

Bastard, she noted to herself.

She turned the maps around so that Pattern—who decorated the wall above

her headboard—could see them.

“Maps,” he said.

“Aou ate chicken?” Renarin asked p speak. She kin pattern!” Shallan exclaimed.

“I see no pattern.”

“Look right here,” she said, edging over beside the wall. “On this old map, the area is . . .”

“Natanatan,” Pattern read, then hummed softly.

“One of the Epoch Kingdoms,” Shallan said. “Organized by the Heralds themselves for divine purposes and blah blah. But look.” She stabbed the page with her finger. “The capital of Natanatan, Stormseat. If you were to judge where we’d find the ruins of it, comparing this old map to the one Amaram had . . .”

“It would be in those mountains somewhere,” Pattern said, “between the words ‘Dawn’s Shadow’ and the U in ‘Unclaimed Hills.’”

“No, no,” Shallan said. “Use a little imagination! The old map is wildly inaccurate. Stormseat was right here. On the Shattered Plains.”

“That is not what the map says,” Pattern said, humming.

“Close enough.”

“That is not a pattern,” he said, sounding offended. “Humans; you do not understand patterns. Like right now. It is second moon. Each night, you sleep during this time. But not tonight.”

“I can’t sleep tonight.”

“More information, please,” Pattern said. “Why not tonight? Is it the day of the week? Do you always not sleep on Jesel? Or is it the weather? Has it grown too warm? The position of the moons relative to—”

“It’s none of that,” Shallan said, shrugging. “I just can’t sleep.”

“Your body is capable of it, surely.”

“Probably,” Shallan said. “But not my head. It surges with too many ideas, like waves against the rocks. Rocks that . . . I guess . . . are also in my head.” She cocked her head. “I don’t think that metaphor makes me sound particularly bright.”

“But—”

“No more complaints,” Shallan said, raising a finger. “Tonight, I am doing scholarship.”

She put the page down on her bed, then leaned over the side, fishing out several others.

“I wasn’t complaining,” Pattern complained. He moved down onto the bed beside her. “I do not remember well, but did Jasnah not use a desk when . . . ‘doing scholarship’?”

“Desks are for boring people,” Shallan said. “And for people who don’t have a squishy bed.” Would Dalinar’s camp have had such a plush bed for her? Likely, the workload would have been smaller. Though, finally, she’d managed to finish sorting through Sebarial’s personal finances and was almost ready to present him with a set of relatively neat books.

In a stroke of insight, she’d slipped a copy of one of her pages of quotes about Urithiru—its potential riches, and its connection to . . .” Pattern said in a ing outs.⁴ the Shattered Plains—in among the other reports she’d sent Palona. At the bottom, she wrote, “Among Jasnah Kholin’s notes are these indications of something valuable hidden out on the Shattered Plains. Will keep you informed of my discoveries.” If Sebarial thought there was opportunity beyond gemhearts out on the Plains, she might be able to get him to take her out there with his armies, in case Adolin’s promises didn’t come through.

Getting all of that ready had left her with little time for studying,

unfortunately. Perhaps that was why she couldn't sleep. This would be easier, Shallan thought, if Navani would agree to meet with me. She'd written again, and gotten the reply that Navani was busy caring for Dalinar, who had come down with a sickness. Nothing life-threatening, apparently, but he had withdrawn for a few days to recuperate.

Did Adolin's aunt blame her for botching the dueling agreement? After what Adolin had decided to do last week . . . Well, at least his preoccupation left Shallan with some time to read and think about Urithiru. Anything other than worrying about her brothers, who still hadn't responded to her letters pleading for them to leave Jah Keved and come to her.

"I find sleeping very odd," Pattern said. "I know that all beings in the Physical Realm engage in it. Do you find it pleasant? You fear nonexistence, but is not unconsciousness the same thing?"

"With sleep, it's only temporary."

"Ah. It is all right, because in the morning, you each return to sentience."

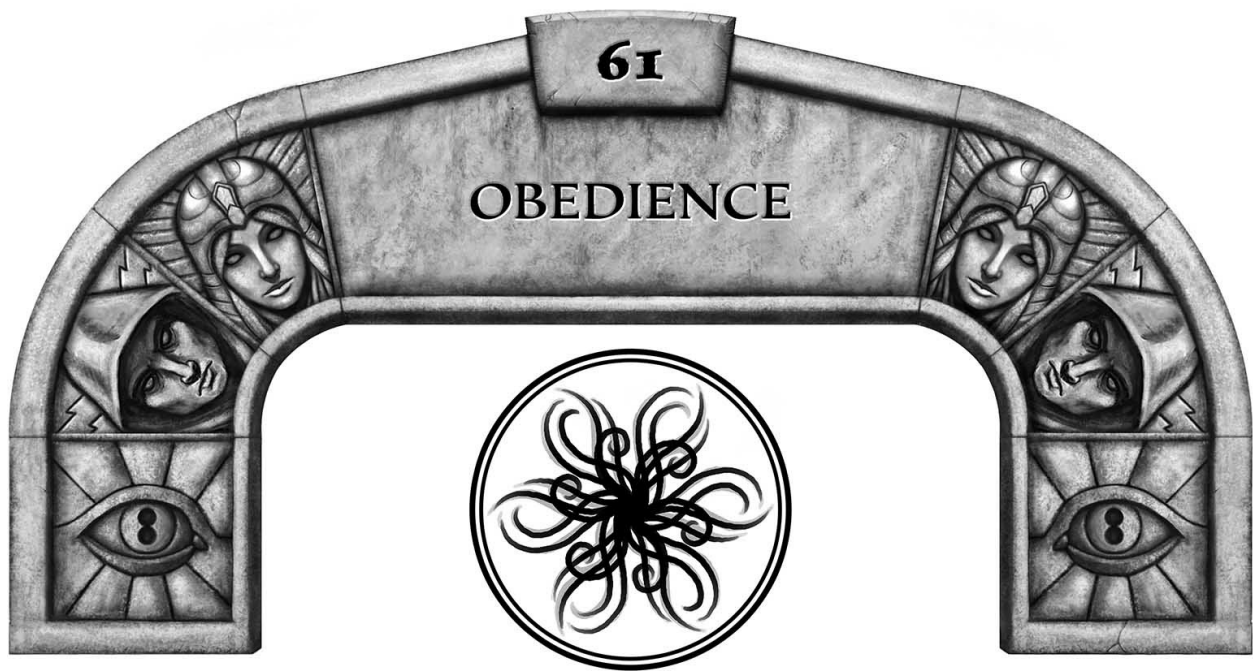
"Well, that depends on the person," Shallan said absently. "For many of them, 'sentience' might be too generous a term. . . ."

Pattern hummed, trying to sort through to the meaning of what she said. Finally, he buzzed an approximation of a laugh.

Shallan cocked an eyebrow at him.

"I have guessed that what you said is humorous," Pattern said. "Though I do not know why. It was not a joke. I know of jokes. A soldier came running into camp after going to see the prostitutes. He was white in the face. His friends asked if he had found a good time. He said that he had not. They asked why. He said that when he'd asked how much the woman charged, she'd said one mark plus the tip. He told his friends that he hadn't realized they were charging body parts now."

"



ONE AND A HALF YEARS AGO

Shallan became the perfect daughter.

She kept quiet, particularly in Father's presence. She spent most days in her room, sitting by the window, reading the same books over and over or sketching the same objects again and again. He had proven several times by this point that he would not touch her if she angered him. technically WyndleOathgate that the

Instead, he would beat others in her name.

The only times she allowed herself to drop the mask was when she was with her brothers, times when her father couldn't hear. Her three brothers often cajoled her—with an edge of desperation—to tell them stories from her books. For their hearing only, she made jokes, poked fun at Father's visitors, and invented extravagant tales by the hearth.

Such an insignificant way to fight back. She felt a coward for not doing more. But surely . . . surely things would get better now. Indeed, as Shallan was ioldiers, and s



This is, I suspect, a little like a skunk naming itself for its stench.

Life continued in Kaladin's cell. Though the accommodations were nice for a dungeon, he found himself wishing he were back in the slave wagon. At least then he'd been able to watch the scenery. Fresh air, wind, an occasional rinse in the highstorm's last rains. Life certainly hadn't been good, but it had been better than being locked away and forgotten.

They took the spheres away at night, abandoning him to blackness. In the dark, he found himself imagining that he was someplace deep, with miles of stone above him and no pathway out, no hope of rescue. He could not conceive a worse death. Better to be gutted on the battlefield, looking up at the open sky as your life leaked away.

* * *

Light awoke him. He sighed, watching the ceiling as the guards—lighteyed soldiers he didn't know—replaced the lamp spheres. Day after day, everything was the storming same in here. Waking to the frail light of spheres, which only made him wish for the sun. The servant arriv's expression grew grim.inf muttered. kated to give him his breakfast. He'd

placed his chamber pot in reach of the opening at the bottom of the bars, and it scraped stone as she pulled it out and replaced it with a fresh one.

She scurried away. He frightened her. With a groan at stiff muscles, Kaladin sat up and regarded his meal. Flatbread stuffed with bean paste. He stood, waving away some strange spren like taut wires crossing before him, then forced himself to do a set of push-ups. Keeping his strength up would be difficult if the imprisonment continued too long. Perhaps he could ask for some stones to use for training.

Was this what happened to Moash's grandparents? Kaladin wondered, taking the food. Waiting for a trial until they died in prison?

Kaladin sat back on his bench, nibbling on the flatbread. There'd been a highstorm yesterday, but he'd barely been able to hear it, locked away in this room.

He heard Syl humming nearby, but couldn't find where she'd gone. "Syl?" he asked. She kept hiding from him.

"There was a Cryptic at the fight," her voice said softly.

"You mentioned those before, didn't you? A type of spren?"

"A revolting type." She paused. "But not evil, I don't think." She sounded begrudging. "I was going to follow it, as it fled, but you needed me. When I went back to look, it had hidden from me."

"What does it mean?" Kaladin asked, frowning.

"Cryptics like to plan," Syl said slowly, as if recalling something long lost. "Yes . . . I remember. They debate and watch and never do anything. But . . ."

"What?" Kaladin asked, rising.

"They're looking for someone," Syl said. "I've seen the signs. Soon, you might not be alone, Kaladin."

Looking for someone. To choose, like him, as a Surgebinder. What kind of

Knight Radiant had been made by a group of spren Syl so obviously detested? It didn't seem like someone he'd want to get to know.

Oh, storms, Kaladin thought, sitting back down. If they choose Adolin . . .

The thought should have made him sick. Instead, he found Syl's revelation oddly comforting. Not being alone, even if it did turn out to be Adolin, made him feel better and drove away some small measure of his gloom.

As he was finishing his meal, a thump came from the hallway. The door opening? Only lighteyes could visit him, though so far none had. Unless you counted Wit.

The storm catches everyone, eventually. . . .

Dalinar Kholin stepped into the room.

Despite his sour thoughts, Kaladin's immediate reaction—drilled into him over the years—was to stand and salute, hand to breast. This was his commanding officer. He felt an idiot as soon as he did it. He stood behind bars and saluted the man who'd put him here?

“At ease,” Dalinar said with a nod. The wide-shouldered man stood with hands clasped behind his back. Something about Dalinar was imposing, even when he was relaxed.

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He looks like the generals from the stories, Kaladin thought. Thick of face and greying of hair, solid in the same way that a brick was. He didn't wear a uniform, the uniform wore him. Dalinar Kholin represented an ideal that Kaladin had long since decided was a mere fancy.

“How are your accommodations?” Dalinar asked.

“Sir? I'm in storming prison.”

A smile cracked Dalinar's face. “So I see. Calm yourself, soldier. If I'd ordered you to guard a room for a week, would you have done it?”

“Yes.”

“Then consider this your duty. Guard this room.”

“I’ll make sure nobody unauthorized runs off with the chamber pot, sir.”

“Elhokar is coming around. He’s finished cooling off, and now only worries that releasing you too quickly will make him look weak. I’ll need you to stay here a few more days, then we’ll draft a formal pardon for your crime and have you reinstated to your position.”

“I don’t see that I have any choice, sir.”

Dalinar stepped closer to the bars. “This is hard for you.”

Kaladin nodded.

“You are well cared for, as are your men. Two of your bridgemen guard the way into the building at all times. There is nothing to worry you, soldier. If it’s your reputation with me—”

“Sir,” Kaladin said. “I guess I’m just not convinced that the king will ever let me go. He has a history of letting inconvenient people rot in dungeons until they die.”

As soon as he said the words, Kaladin couldn’t believe they’d come from his lips. They sounded insubordinate, even treasonous. But they’d been sitting there, in his mouth, demanding to be spoken.

Dalinar remained in his posture with hands clasped behind his back. “You speak of the silversmiths back in Kholinar?”

So he did know. Stormfather . . . had Dalinar been involved? Kaladin nodded.

“How did you hear of that incident?”

“From one of my men,” Kaladin said. “He knew the imprisoned people.”

“I had hoped we could escape those rumors,” Dalinar said. “But of course,

rumor grows like lichen, crusted on and impossible to completely scrub free. What happened with those people was a mistake, soldier. I'll admit that freely. The same won't happen to you."

"Are the rumors about them true, then?"

"I would really rather not speak of the Roshone affair."

Roshone.

Kaladin remembered screams. Blood on the floor of his father's surgery room. A dying boy.

A day in the rain. A day when one man tried to steal away Kaladin's light. He eventually succeeded.

"Roshone?" Kaladin whispered.

"Yes, a minor lighteyes," Dalinar said, sighing.

"Sir, it's important that I know of this. For my own peace of mind."

Dalinar looked him up and down { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnahed offre. Kaladin just stared straight ahead, mind . . . numb. Roshone. Everything had started to go wrong when Roshone had arrived in Hearthstone to be the new citylord. Before then, Kaladin's father had been respected.

When that horrid man had arrived, dragging petty jealousy behind him like a cloak, the world had twisted upon itself. Roshone had infected Hearthstone like rotspren on an unclean wound. He was the reason Tien had gone to war. He was the reason Kaladin had followed.

"I suppose I owe you this," Dalinar said. "But it is not to be spread around. Roshone was a petty man who gained Elhokar's ear. Elhokar was crown prince then, commanded to rule over Kholinar and watch the kingdom while his father organized our first camps here in the Shattered Plains. I was . . . away at the time.

“Anyway, do not blame Elhokar. He was taking the advice of someone he trusted. Roshone, however, sought his own interests instead of those of the Throne. He owned several silversmith shops . . . well, the details are not important. Suffice it to say that Roshone led the prince to make some errors. I cleared it up when I returned.”

“You saw this Roshone punished?” Kaladin asked, voice soft, feeling numb.

“Exiled,” Dalinar said, nodding. “Elhokar moved the man to a place where he couldn’t do any more harm.”

A place he couldn’t do any more harm. Kaladin almost laughed.

“You have something to say?”

“You don’t want to know what I think, sir.”

“Perhaps I don’t. I probably need to hear it anyway.”

Dalinar was a good man. Blinded in some ways, but a good man. “Well, sir,” Kaladin said, controlling his emotions with difficulty, “I find it . . . troubling that a man like this Roshone could be responsible for the deaths of innocent people, yet escape prison.”

“It was complicated, soldier. Roshone was one of Highprince Sadeas’s sworn liegemen, cousin to important men whose support we needed. I originally argued that Roshone should be stripped of station and made a tenner, forced to live his life in squalor. But this would have alienated allies, and could have undermined the kingdom. Elhokar argued for leniency toward Roshone, and his father agreed via spanreed. I relented, figuring that mercy was not an attribute I should discourage in Elhokar.”

“Of course not,” Kaladin said, clenching his teeth. “Though it seems that such mercy often ends up serving the cousins of powerful lighteyes, and rarely someone lowly.” He stared through the bars between himself and Dalinar.

“Soldier,” Dalinar asked, voice cool. “Do you think I’ve been unfair toward

you or your men?”

“You. No, sir. But this isn’t about you.”

Dalinar exhaled softly, as if in frustration. “Captain, you and your men are in a unique position. You spend your daily lives around the king. You don’t see the face that is presented to the world, you see the man. It has ever been so for close bodyguards.

“So your loyalty needs to be extra firm and generous. Yes, the man you guard has flaws. Every man does. He is still your king, and I will have your respect.”

“I can and vanished to mist.fcursedre do respect the Throne, sir,” Kaladin said. Not the man sitting in it, perhaps. But he did respect the office. Somebody needed to rule.

“Son,” Dalinar said after a moment’s thought, “do you know why I put you into the position that I did?”

“You said it was because you needed someone you could trust not to be a spy for Sadeas.”

“That’s the rationale,” Dalinar said, stepping up closer to the bars, only inches from Kaladin. “But it’s not the reason. I did it because it felt right.”

Kaladin frowned.

“I trust my hunches,” Dalinar said. “My gut said you were a man who could help change this kingdom. A man who could live through Damnation itself in Sadeas’s camp and still somehow inspire others was a man I wanted under my command.” His expression grew harder. “I gave you a position no darkeyes has ever held in this army. I let you into conferences with the king, and I listened when you spoke. Do not make me regret those decisions, soldier.”

“You don’t already?” Kaladin asked.

“I’ve come close,” Dalinar said. “I understand, though. If you truly believe

what you told me about Amaram . . . well, if I'd been in your place, I'd have been hard pressed not to do the same thing you did. But storm it, man, you're still a darkeyes."

"It shouldn't matter."

"Maybe it shouldn't, but it does. You want to change that? Well, you're not going to do it by screaming like a lunatic and challenging men like Amaram to duels. You'll do it by distinguishing yourself in the position I gave you. Be the kind of man that others admire, whether they be lighteyed or dark. Convince Elhokar that a darkeyes can lead. That will change the world."

Dalinar turned and walked away. Kaladin couldn't help thinking that the man's shoulders seemed more bowed than when he'd entered.

After Dalinar left, Kaladin sat back on his bench, letting out a long, annoyed breath. "Stay calm," he whispered. "Do as you're told, Kaladin. Stay in your cage."

"He's trying to help," Syl said.

Kaladin glanced to the side. Where was she hiding? "You heard about Roshone."

Silence.

"Yes," Syl finally said, voice sounding small.

"My family's poverty," Kaladin said, "the way the town ostracized us, Tien being forced into the army, these things were all Roshone's fault. Elhokar sent him to us."

Syl didn't respond. Kaladin fished a bit of flatbread from his bowl, chewing on it. Stormfather—Moash really was right. This kingdom would be better off without Elhokar. Dalinar tried his best, but he had an enormous blind spot regarding his nephew.

It was time someone stepped in and cut the ties binding Dalinar's hands. For the good of the kingdom, for the good of Dalinar Kholin himself, the king

had to die.

Some people—like a festering finger or a leg shattered . . .” Pattern said in a As.4 beyond repair—just needed to be removed.



Now, look what you’ve made me say. You’ve always been able to bring out the most extreme in me, old friend. And I do still name you a friend, for all that you weary me.

What are you doing? the spanreed wrote to Shallan.

Nothing much, she wrote back by spherelight, just working on Sebarial’s income ledgers. She peeked out through the hole in her illusion, regarding the street far below. People flowed through the city as if marching to some strange rhythm. A dribble, then a burst, then back to a dribble. Rarely a constant flow. What caused that?

You want to come visit? the pen wrote. This is getting really boring.

Sorry, she wrote back to Adolin, I really need to get this work done. It might be nice to have a spanreed conversation to keep me company, though.

Pattern hummed softly beside her at the lie. Shallan had used an illusion to

expand the size of the shed atop this tenement in Sebarial's warcamp, providing a hidden place to sit and watch the street below. Five hours of waiting—comfortable enough, with the stool and spheres for light—had revealed nothing. Nobody had approached the lone stone-barked tree growing beside the pathway.

She didn't know the species. It was too old to have been planted there recently; it must predate Sebarial's arrival. The gnarled, sturdy bark made her think it was some variety of dendrolith, but the tree also had long fronds that rose into the air like streamers, twisting and fluttering in the wind. Those were reminiscent of a dalewillow. She'd already done a sketch; she would look it up in her books later.

The tree was used to people, and didn't pull in its fronds as they passed it. If someone had approached carefully enough to avoid brushing the fronds, Shallan would have spotted them. If, instead, they'd moved quickly, the fronds would have felt the vibrations and withdrawn—which she also would have spotted. She was reasonably certain that if anyone had tried to fetch the item in the tree, she'd have known it, even if she'd been looking away for a moment.

I suppose, the pen wrote, I can continue to keep you company. Shoren isn't doing anything else.

Shoren was the ardent who wrote for Adolin today, come to visit by Adolin's order. The prince had pointedly noted that he was using an ardent, rather than one of his father's scribes. Did he think she'd grow jealous if he used another woman for scribing duties?

He did seem surprised that she didn't get jealous. Were the women of the court so petty? Or was Shallan the odd one, too relaxed? His eyes did wander, and she had to admit she ate chicken?" Renarin asked p speakEkat that wasn't something that pleased her. And there was his reputation to consider. Adolin was said to have, in the past, changed relationships as frequently as other men changed coats.

Perhaps she should cling more firmly, but the thought of it nauseated her. Such behavior reminded her of Father, holding so tightly to everything that

he eventually broke it all.

Yes, she wrote back to Adolin, using the board set on a box beside her, I'm certain the good ardent has nothing at all better to do than transcribe notes between two courting lighteyes.

He's an ardent, Adolin sent. He likes to serve. It's what they do.

I thought, she wrote, that saving souls was what they did.

He's tired of that, Adolin sent. He told me that he already saved three this morning.

She smiled, checking on the tree—still no change. He did, did he? she wrote. Has them tucked away in his back pocket for safekeeping, I assume?

No, Father's way was not right. If she wanted to keep Adolin, she had to try something far more difficult than just clinging to him. She'd have to be so irresistible that he didn't want to let go. Unfortunately, this was one area where neither Jasnah's training nor Tyn's would help. Jasnah had been indifferent toward men, while Tyn had not talked about keeping men, only distracting them for a quick con.

Is your father feeling better? she wrote.

Yes, actually. He's been up and about since yesterday, looking as strong as ever.

Good to hear, she wrote. The two continued exchanging idle comments, Shallan watching the tree. Mraize's note had instructed her to come at sunrise and search the hole in the tree trunk for her instructions. So she'd come four hours early, while the sky was still dark, and sneaked up to the top of this building to watch.

Apparently, she hadn't come early enough. She'd really wanted to get a view of them placing the instructions. "I don't like this," Shallan said, whispering to Pattern and ignoring the pen, which scribed Adolin's next line to her. "Why didn't Mraize just give me the instructions via spanreed? Why make

me come here?”

“Mmm . . .” Pattern said from the floor beneath her.

The sun had long since risen. She needed to go get the instructions, but still she hesitated, tapping her finger against the paper-covered board beside her.

“They’re watching,” she realized.

“What?” Pattern said.

“They are doing exactly what I did. They are hiding somewhere, and want to watch me pick up the instructions.”

“Why? What does it accomplish?”

“It gives them information,” Shallan said. “And that is the sort of thing these people thrive upon.” She leaned to the side, peering out of her hole, which would appear from the outside as a gap between two of the brick succession warT0 made s.

She didn’t think Mraize wanted her dead, despite the sickening incident with the poor carriage driver. He’d given leave for the others around him to kill her, if they feared her, but that—like so much about Mraize—had been a test. If you really are strong and clever enough to join us, that incident implied, then you’ll avoid being assassinated by these people.

This was another test. How did she pass it in a way that didn’t leave anyone dead this time?

They’d be watching for her to come get her instructions, but there weren’t many good places to keep an eye on the tree. If she were Mraize and his people, where would she go to observe?

She felt silly thinking it. “Pattern,” she whispered, “go look in the windows of this building that face the street. See if anyone is sitting in one of them, watching as we are.”

“Very well,” he said, sliding out of her illusion.

She was suddenly conscious of the fact that Mraize's people might be hiding somewhere very close, but shoved aside her nervousness, reading Adolin's reply.

Good news, by the way, the pen wrote. Father visited last night, and we talked at length. He's preparing his expedition out onto the Plains to fight the Parshendi, once and for all. Part of getting ready involves some scouting missions in the coming days. I got him to agree to bring you out onto the plateaus during one of them.

And we can find a chrysalis? Shallan asked.

Well, the pen wrote, even if the Parshendi aren't fighting over those anymore, Father doesn't take risks. I can't bring you on a run when there is a chance they might come and contest us. But, I've been thinking we can probably arrange the scouting mission so it passes by a plateau with a chrysalis a day or so after it was harvested.

Shallan frowned. A dead, harvested chrysalis? she wrote. I don't know how much that will tell me.

Well, Adolin replied, it's better than not seeing one at all, right? And you did say you wanted the chance to cut one up. This is almost the same thing.

He was right. Besides, getting out onto the Plains was the real goal. Let's do it. When?

In a few days.

"Shallan!"

She jumped, but it was only Pattern, buzzing with excitement. "You were right," he said. "Mmmm. She watches below. Only one level down, second room."

"She?"

"Mmm. The one with the mask."

Shallan shivered. Now what? Go back to her rooms, then write to Mraize and say that she didaid="2I0GC9">S

n't appreciate being spied upon?

It wouldn't accomplish anything useful. Looking down at her pad of paper, she realized that her relationship with Mraize was similar to her relationship with Adolin. In both cases, she couldn't just do as expected. She needed to excite, exceed.

ou ate chicken?" Renarin asked they had thereI'll need to go, she wrote to Adolin. Sebarial is asking for me. It might take me a while.

She clicked off the spanreed and tucked it and the board away in her satchel. Not her usual one, but a rugged bag with a leather strap that went over her shoulder, like Veil would carry. Then, before she could lose her nerve, she ducked out of her illusory hiding place. She put her back to the wall of the shed, facing away from the street, then touched the side of the illusion and withdrew the Stormlight.

That made the illusory section of wall vanish, quickly breaking down and streaming into her hand. Hopefully, nobody had been looking at the shed at that moment. If they had been, though, they would probably just think the change a trick of the eyes.

Next, she knelt and used Stormlight to infuse Pattern and bind to him an image of Veil from a drawing she'd done earlier. Shallan nodded for him to move, and as he did, the image of Veil walked.

She looked good. A confident stride, a swishing coat, peaked hat shading her face against the sun. The illusion even blinked and turned her head on occasion, as prescribed by the drawing sequence Shallan had done earlier.

She watched, hesitating. Was that actually how she looked while wearing Veil's face and clothing? She didn't feel nearly that poised, and the clothing always seemed exaggerated, even silly, to her. On this image, it looked appropriate.

"Go down," Shallan whispered to Pattern, "and walk to the tree. Try to approach carefully, slowly, and buzz loudly to get the tree's leaves to pull back. Stand at the trunk for a moment, as if retrieving the thing inside, then

walk to the alleyway between this building and the next.”

“Yes!” Pattern said. He zipped off toward the stairs, excited to be part of the lie.

“Slower!” Shallan said, wincing to see Veil’s pace not matching her speed. “As we practiced!”

Pattern slowed and reached the steps. Veil’s image moved down them. Awkwardly. The illusion could walk and stand still on flat ground, but other terrain—such as steps—wasn’t accommodated. To anyone watching, it would seem like Veil was stepping on nothing and gliding down the stairs.

Well, it was the best they could do for the moment. Shallan took a deep breath and pulled on her hat, breathing out a second image, one that covered her over and transformed her into Veil. The one on Pattern would remain so long as he had Stormlight. That Stormlight drained from him a lot faster than it did from Shallan, though. She didn’t know why.

She went down the steps, but only one level, walking as quietly as she could. She counted over two doors in the dim hallway. The masked woman was inside that one. Shallan left it alone, instead ducking into an alcove by the stairwell, where she would be hidden from anyone in the hallway.

She waited.

A door eventually clicked open, and clothing rustled in the hallway. The masked woman passed Shallan’s hiding place, amazingly quiet as she moved down the steps.

“What is your name?” Shallan asked.

The woman froze on the steps. She spun—gloved safehand on the knife at her side—and saw Shallan standing in the alcove. The woman’s masked eyes flicked back toward the room she’d left.

“I sent a double,” Shallan said, “wearing my clothing. That’s what you saw.”
vanished to mist.f

The woman did not move, still crouched on the steps.

“Why did he want you to follow me?” Shallan asked. “He’s that interested in finding out where I’m staying?”

“No,” the woman finally said. “The instructions in the tree call for you to set about a task immediately, with no time to waste.”

Shallan frowned, considering. “So your job wasn’t to follow me home, but to follow me on the mission. To watch how I accomplished it?”

The woman said nothing.

Shallan strolled forward and seated herself on the top step, crossing her arms on her legs. “So what is the job?”

“The instructions are in—”

“I’d rather hear it from you,” Shallan said. “Call me lazy.”

“How did you find me?” the woman asked.

“A sharp-eyed ally,” Shallan said. “I told him to watch the windows, then send me word of where you were. I was waiting up above.” She grimaced. “I was hoping to catch one of you placing the instructions.”

“We placed them before even contacting you,” the woman said. She hesitated, then took a few steps upward. “Iyatil.”

Shallan cocked her head.

“My name,” the woman said. “Iyatil.”

“I’ve never heard one like it.”

“Unsurprising. Your task today was to investigate a certain new arrival into Dalinar’s camp. We wish to know about this person, and Dalinar’s allegiances are uncertain.”

“He’s loyal to the king and the Throne.”

“Outwardly,” the woman said. “His brother knew things of an extraordinary nature. We are uncertain if Dalinar was told of these things or not, and his interactions with Amaram worry us. This newcomer is linked.”

“Amaram is making maps of the Shattered Plains,” Shallan said. “Why? What is out there that he wants?” And why would he want to return the Voidbringers?

Iyatil didn’t answer.

“Well,” Shallan said, rising, “let’s get to it, then. Shall we?”

“Together?” Iyatil said.

Shallan shrugged. “You can sneak along behind, or you can just go with me.” She extended her hand.

Iyatil inspected the hand, then clasped it with her own gloved freehand in acceptance. She kept her other hand on the dagger at her side the entire time, though.

* * *

Shallan flipped through the instructions Mraize had left, as the oversized palanquin lurched along toward Dalinar’s warcamp. Iyatil sat across from Shallan, legs tucked beneath her, watching with beady, masked eyes. The woman wore simple trousers and a shirt, such that Shallan had originally mistaken her for a boy that first time.

Her presence was thoroughly unsettling.

“A madman,” Shallan said, flipping to the next page of instructions. “Mraize is this interested in a simple madman?”

“ . . .” Pattern said in a woulds.⁴ “Dalinar and the king are interested,” Iyatil said. “So, then, are we.”

There did seem to be some sort of cover-up involved. The madman had arrived in the custody of a man named Bordin, a servant whom Dalinar had stationed in Kholinar years ago. Mraize's information indicated that this Bordin was no simple messenger, but instead one of Dalinar's most trusted footmen. He had been left behind in Alethkar to spy on the queen, or so the Ghostbloods inferred. But why would someone need to keep an eye on the queen? The briefing didn't say.

This Bordin had come to the Shattered Plains in haste a few weeks ago, bearing the madman and other mysterious cargo. Shallan's charge was to find out who this madman was and why Dalinar had hidden him away in a monastery with strict instructions that nobody was to be allowed access save specific ardents.

"Your master knows more about this," Shallan said, "than he is telling me."

"My master?" Iyatil asked.

"Mraize."

The woman laughed. "You mistake. He is not my master. He is my student."

"In what?" Shallan asked.

Iyatil stared at her with a level gaze and gave no reply.

"Why the mask?" Shallan asked, leaning forward. "What does it mean? Why do you hide?"

"I have many times asked myself," Iyatil said, "why those of you here go about so brazenly with features exposed to all who would see them. My mask reserves my self. Besides, it gives me the ability to adapt."

Shallan sat back, thoughtful.

"You are willing to ponder," Iyatil said. "Rather than asking question after question. This is good. Your instincts, however, must be judged. Are you the hunter, or are you the quarry?"

“Neither,” Shallan said immediately.

“All are one or the other.”

The palanquin’s porters slowed. Shallan peeked out the curtains and found that they had finally reached the edge of Dalinar’s warcamp. Here, soldiers at the gates stopped each person in line waiting to enter.

“How will you get us in?” Iyatil asked as Shallan closed the curtains. “Highprince Kholin has grown cautious of late, with assassins appearing in the night. What lie will gain us access to his realm?”

Delightful, she thought, revising her list of tasks. Shallan not only had to infiltrate the monastery and discover information about this madman, she had to do it without revealing too much about herself—or what she could do—to Iyatil.

She had to think quickly. The soldiers at the front called for the palanquin to approach—lighteyes wouldn’t be required to wait in the ordinary line, and the soldiers would assume this nice a vehicle had someone rich inside. Taking a deep breath, Shallan removed her hat, pulled her hair forward over her shoulder, then pushed her face out of the curtains so that her hair hung down before her outside the palanquin. At the same moment, she withdrew her illusion and pulled the curtains closed behind her head, tight against her neck, to prevent Iyatil from seeing the transformation.

The porters were parshmen, and she doubted the parshmen would say anything about what they saw her do. Their lighteyed master was turned away, fortunately. Her vanished to mist.f

Now, how to get Veil’s appearance back on? There were people on the street here; she wasn’t about to breathe Stormlight while hanging out the window.

“Pattern,” she whispered. “Go make a noise at the window on the other side of the palanquin.”

Tyn had drilled into her the need to make a distracting motion with one hand while palming an object with the other. The same principle might work here.

A sharp yelp sounded from the other window. Shallan moved her head back into the palanquin with a quick motion, breathing out Stormlight. She flipped the curtains in a diverting way and obscured her face with the hat as she put it on.

Iyatil looked back toward her from the window where the yelp had sounded, but Shallan was Veil again. She settled back, meeting Iyatil's gaze. Had the smaller woman seen?

They rode in silence for a moment.

"You bribed the guards ahead of time," Iyatil finally guessed. "I would know how you did this. Kholin's men ar bribe. You got to one of the supervisors, perhaps?"

Shallan smiled in what she hoped was a frustrating way.

The palanquin continued on toward the warcamp's temple, a part of Dalinar's camp that she'd never visited. Actually, she hadn't been to visit Sebarial's ardents very often either—though when she had gone, she'd found them surprisingly devout, considering who owned them.

She peeked out the window as they approached. Dalinar's temple grounds were as plain as she would have expected. Grey-robed ardents passed the palanquin in pairs or small groups, mixing among people of all stations. Those had come for prayers, instruction, or advice—a good temple, properly equipped, could provide each of these things and more. Darkeyes from almost any nahn could come to be taught a trade, exercising their divine Right to Learn, as mandated by the Heralds. Lesser lighteyes came to learn trades as well, and the higher dahns came to learn the arts or progress in their Callings to please the Almighty.

A large population of ardents like this one would have true masters in every art and trade. Perhaps she should come and seek Dalinar's artists for training.

She winced, wondering where she would find time for such a thing. What with courting Adolin, infiltrating the Ghostbloods, researching the Shattered Plains, and doing Sebarial's ledgers, it was a wonder she had time to sleep. Still, it felt impious of her to expect success in her duties while ignoring the Almighty. She did need to have more concern for such things.

And what is the Almighty to think of you? she wondered. And the lies you're growing so proficient at producing. Honesty was among the divine attributes

of the Almighty, after all, which everyone was supposed to seek.

The temple complex here included more than one building, though most people would only visit the main structure. Mraize's instructions had included a map, so she knew the specific building she needed—one near the back, where the ardent healers saw to the sick and cared for people with long-term illnesses.

“It will not be easy to enter,” Iyatil said. “The ardents are protective of their charges, and have them locked away in the { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: JasnahHEreback, kept from the eyes of other men. They will not welcome an attempt at intrusion.”

“The instructions indicated that today was the perfect time to sneak in,” Shallan said. “I was to make haste to not miss the opportunity.”

“Once a month,” Iyatil said, “all may come to the temple to ask questions or see a physician with no offering requested. Today will be a busy day, a day of confusion. That will make for an easier time infiltrating, but it does not mean they will simply let you saunter in.”

Shallan nodded.

“If you would rather do this at night,” Iyatil said, “perhaps I can persuade Mraize that the matter can wait until then.”

Shallan shook her head. She had no experience sneaking about in the darkness. She'd just make a fool of herself.

But how to get in . . .

“Porter,” she commanded, sticking her head out the window and pointing, “take us to that building there, then set us down. Send one of your number to seek the master healers. Tell them I need their aid.”

The tenner who led the parshmen—hired with Shallan's spheres—nodded brusquely. Tenners were a strange lot. This one didn't own the parshmen; he just worked for the woman who rented them out. Veil, with dark eyes, would

be beneath him socially, but was also the one paying his wage, and so he just treated her as he would any other master.

The palanquin settled down and one of the parshmen walked off to deliver her request.

“Going to feign sickness?” Iyatil asked.

“Something like that,” Shallan said as footsteps arrived outside. She climbed out to meet a pair of square-bearded ardens, conferring as the parshmen led them in her direction. They looked her over, noting her dark eyes and her clothing—which was well-made but obviously intended for rugged use. Likely, they placed her in one of the upper-middle nahns, a citizen, but not a particularly important one.

“What is the problem, young woman?” asked the older of the two ardens.

“It is my sister,” Shallan said. “She has put on this strange mask and refuses to remove it.”

A soft groan rose from inside the palanquin.

“Child,” said the lead ardent, his tone suffering, “a stubborn sister is not a matter for the ardens.”

“I understand, good brother,” Shallan said, raising her hands before her. “But this is no simple stubbornness. I think . . . I think one of the Voidbringers has inhabited her!”

She pushed aside the curtains of the palanquin, revealing Iyatil inside. Her strange mask made the ardens pull back and break off their objections. The younger of the two men peered in at Iyatil with wide eyes.

Iyatil turned to Shallan, and with an almost inaudible sigh, started rocking back and forth in place. “Should we kill them?” she muttered. “No. No, we shouldn’t. But someone will see! No, do not say these things. No. I will not listen to you.” She started humming.

The younger ardent turned to look back at the senior.

“This is dire,” the ardent said, nodding. “Porter, come. Have your parshmen bring the palanquin.”

* * *

A short time later, Shallan waited in the corner of a small monastery room, watching Iyatil sit and resist the ministrations of several ardents. She kept warning them that if they removed her mask, she would have to kill them.

That did not seem to be part of the act.

Fortunately, she otherwise played her part well. Her ravings, mixed with her hidden face, gave even Shallan shivers. The ardents seemed alternately fascinated and horrified.

Concentrate on the drawing, Shallan thought to herself. It was a sketch of one of the ardents, a portly man about her own height. The drawing was rushed but capable. She idly found herself wondering what a beard would feel like. Would it itch? But no, hair on your head didn't itch, so why should hair on your face? How did they keep food out of the things?

She finished with a few quick marks, then rose quietly. Iyatil kept the ardents' attention with a new bout of raving. Shallan nodded to her in thanks, then slipped out of the door, entering the hallway. After glancing to the sides to see that she was alone, she used a cloud of Stormlight to transform into the ardent. That done, she reached up and tucked her straight red hair—the only part of her that threatened to pop out of the illusion—inside the back of her coat.

“Pattern,” she whispered, turning and walking down the hallway with a relaxed demeanor.

“Mmm?”

“Find him,” she said, removing from her satchel a sketch of the madman that Mraize had left in the tree. The sketch had been done at a distance, and wasn't terribly good. Hopefully . . .

“Second hallway on the left,” Pattern said.

Shallan looked down at him, though her new costume—an ardent’s robe—obscured him where he sat on her coat. “How do you know?”

“You were distracted by your drawing,” he said. “I peeked about. There is a very interesting woman four doors down. She appears to be rubbing excrement on the wall.”

“Ew.” Shallan thought she could smell it.

“Patterns . . .” he said as they walked. “I did not get a good look at what she was writing, but it seemed very interesting. I think I shall go and—”

“No,” Shallan whispered, “stay with me.” She smiled, nodding to several ardenters who strolled past. They didn’t speak to her, fortunately, merely nodding back.

The monastery building, like most everything in Dalinar’s warcamp, was sliced through with dull, unornamented hallways. Shallan followed Pattern’s instructions to a thick door set into the stone. The lock clicked open with Pattern’s help, and Shallan quietly slipped inside.

A single small window—more of a slit—proved insufficient to fully illuminate the large figure sitting on the bed. Dark-skinned, like a man from the Makabaki kingdoms, he had dark, ragged hair and hulking arms. Those were the arms of either a laborer or a soldier. The man sat slumped, back bowed, head down, frail light from the window cutting a slice across his back in white. It made for a grim, powerful silhouette.

The man was whispering. Shallan couldn’t make out the words. She shivered, her back to the door, and held up the sketch Mraize had given her. This seemed to be the same person—at least, the skin color into step beside hm, right?s.4and stout build were the same, though this man was far more muscled than the picture indicated. Storms . . . those hands of his looked as if they could crush her like a cremling.

The man did not move. He did not look up, did not shift. He was like a

boulder that had rolled to a stop here.

“Why is it kept so dark in this room?” Pattern asked, perfectly cheerful.

The madman didn’t react to the comment, or even Shallan, as she stepped forward.

“Modern theory for helping the mad suggests dim confines,” Shallan whispered. “Too much light stimulates them, and can reduce the effectiveness of treatment.” That was what she remembered, at least. She hadn’t read much on this subject. The room was dark. That window couldn’t be more than a few fingers wide.

What was he whispering? Shallan cautiously continued forward. “Sir?” she asked. Then she hesitated, realizing that she was projecting a young woman’s voice from an old, fat ardent’s body. Would that startle the man? He wasn’t looking, so she withdrew the illusion.

“He doesn’t seem angry,” Pattern said. “But you call him mad.”

“‘Mad’ has two definitions,” Shallan said. “One means to be angry. The other means broken in the head.”

“Ah,” Pattern said, “like a spren who has lost his bond.”

“Not exactly, I’d guess,” Shallan said, stepping up to the madman. “But similar.” She knelt down by the man, trying to figure out what he was saying.

“The time of the Return, the Desolation, is at hand,” he whispered. She would have expected an Azish accent from him, considering the skin color, but he spoke perfect Alethi. “We must prepare. You will have forgotten much, following the destruction of times past.”

She looked over at Pattern, lost in the shadows at the side of the room, then back at the man. Light glinted off his dark brown eyes, two bright pinpricks on an otherwise shadowed visage. That slumped posture seemed so morose. He whispered on, about bronze and steel, about preparations and training.

“Who are you?” Shallan whispered.

“Talenel’Elin. The one you call Stonesinew.”

She felt a chill. Then the madman continued, whispering the same things he had before, repeated exactly. She couldn’t even be certain if his comment had been a reply to her question, or just a part of his recitation. He did not answer further questions.

Shallan stepped back, folding her arms, satchel over her shoulder.

e difficult to



Yes, I'm disappointed. Perpetually, as you put it.

Kaladin lay on his bench, ignoring the afternoon bowl of steamed, spiced tallew on the floor.

He had begun to imagine himself as that whitespine in the menagerie. A predator in a cage. Storms send that he didn't end up like that poor beast. Wilted, hungry, confused. They don't do well in captivity, Shallan had said.

How many days had it been? Kaladin found himself not caring. That worried him. During his time as a slave, he'd also stopped caring about the date.

He wasn't so far removed from that wretch he'd once been. He felt himself slipping back toward that same mindset, like a man climbing a cliff covered in crem and slime. Each time he tried to pull himself higher, he slid back. Eventually he'd fall.

Old ways of thinking . . . a slave's ways of thinking . . . churned within him. Stop caring. Worry only about the next meal, and keeping it away from the others. Don't think too much. Thinking is dangerous. Thinking makes you hope, makes you want.

Kaladin shouted, throwing himself off his bench and pacing in the small room, hands to his head. He'd thought himself so strong. A fighter. But all they had to do to take that away was stuff him in a box for a few weeks, and the truth returned! He slammed himself against the bars and stretched a hand between them, toward one of the lamps on the wall. He sucked in a breath.

Nothing happened. No Stormlight. The sphere continued to glow, even and steady.

Kaladin cried out, reaching farther, pushing his fingertips toward that distant light. Don't let the darkness take me, he thought. He . . . prayed. How long had it been since he'd done that? He didn't have someone to properly write and burn the words, but the Almighty listened to hearts, didn't he? Please. Not again. I can't go back to that.

Please.

He strained for that sphere, breathing in. The Light seemed to resist, then gloriously streamed out into his fingertips. The storm pulsed in his veins.

Kaladin held his breath, eyes shut, savoring it. The power strained against him, trying to escape. He pushed off the bars and started pacing again, eyes closed, not so frantic as before.

"I'm worried about you." Syl's voice. "You're growing dark."

Kaladin opened his eyes and finally found her, sitting between two of the bars as if on a swing.

"I'll be all right," Kaladin said, letting Stormlight rise from his lips like smoke. "I just need to get out of this cage."

"It's worse than that. It's the darkness . . . the darkness . . ." She looked to the side, then giggled suddenly, streaking off to inspect something on the floor. A little cremling that was creeping along the edge of the room. She stood over it, eyes widening at the stark red and violet color of its shell.

Kaladin smiled. She was still a spren. Childlike. The world was a place of

wonder to Syl. What would that be like?

He sat down and ate his meal, feeling as if he { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah dore'd pushed aside the gloom for a time. Eventually, one of the guards checked on him and found the dun sphere. He pulled it out, frowning, shaking his head before replacing it and moving on.

* * *

Amaram was coming into this room.

Hide!

Shallan was proud of how quickly she spat out the rest of her Stormlight, wreathing herself in it. She didn't even give thought to how the madman had reacted to her Lightweaving before, though perhaps she should have. Regardless, this time he didn't seem to notice.

Should she become an ardent? No. Something much simpler, something faster.

Darkness.

Her clothing turned black. Her skin, her hat, her hair—everything pure black. She scrambled back away from the door into the corner of the room, farthest from the slot of a window, stilling herself. With her illusion in place, the Lightweaving consumed the trails of Stormlight that would normally rise from her skin, further masking her presence.

The door opened. Her heart thundered within her. She wished she'd had time to create a false wall. Amaram entered the room with a young darkeyed man, obviously Alethi, with short dark hair and prominent eyebrows. He wore Kholin livery. They shut the door quietly behind themselves, Amaram pocketing a key.

Shallan felt an immediate anger at seeing her brother's murderer here, but found that it had quieted somewhat. A smoldering loathing instead of an

intense hatred. It had been a long time since she'd seen Helaran, now. And Balat had a point in that her older brother had abandoned them.

To try to kill this man, apparently—or so she'd been able to put together from what she'd read of Amaram and his Shardblade. Why had Helaran gone to kill this man? And could she really blame Amaram when, in truth, he'd probably just been defending himself?

She felt like she knew so little. Though Amaram was still a bastard, of course.

Together, Amaram and the Alethi darkeyes turned to the madman. Shallan couldn't make out much of their features in the mostly dark room. "I don't know why you need to hear it for yourself, Brightlord," the servant said. "I told you what he said."

"Hush, Bordin," Amaram said, crossing the room. "Listen at the door."

Shallan stood stiff, pressed back in the corner. They'd see her, wouldn't they?

Amaram knelt beside the bed. "Great Prince," he whispered, hand to the madman's shoulder. "Turn. Let me see you."

The madman looked up, still muttering.

"Ah . . ." Amaram said, breathing out. "Almighty above, ten names, all true. You are beautiful. Gavilar, we have done it. We have finally done it."

"Brightlord?" Bordin said from the door. "I don't like being here. If we're discovered, people might ask questions. The treasure . . ."

"He truly spoke of Shardblades?"

"Yes," Bordin said. "A whole cache of them."

"The Honorblades," Amaram whispered. "Great Prince, please, give me the same words you spoke to this one."

The madman . . ." Pattern said in a 10s.4 muttered on, the same as Shallan

had heard. Amaram continued kneeling, but eventually he turned toward the nervous Bordin. “Well?”

“He repeated those words every day,” Bordin said, “but he only spoke of the Blades once.”

“I would hear of them for myself.”

“Brightlord . . . We could wait here days and not hear those words. Please. We must go. The ardens will eventually come by on their rounds.”

Amaram stood up with obvious reluctance. “Great Prince,” he said to the huddled figure of the madman, “I go to recover your treasures. Speak not of them to the others. I will put the Blades to good use.” He turned to Bordin. “Come. Let us search out this place.”

“Today?”

“You said it was close.”

“Yes, well, that was why I brought him all the way out here. But—”

“If he accidentally speaks of this to others, I would have them go to the place and find it empty of treasures. Come, quickly. You will be rewarded.”

Amaram strode out. Bordin lingered at the door, looking at the madman, then trailed out and shut the door with a click.

Shallan breathed out a long, deep breath, slumping down to the floor. “It’s like that sea of spheres.”

“Shallan?” Pattern asked.

“I’ve fallen in,” she said, “and it isn’t that the water is over my head—it’s that the stuff isn’t even water, and I have no idea how to swim in it.”

“I do not understand this lie,” Pattern said.

She shook her head, the color bleeding back into her skin and clothing. She

made herself look like Veil again, then walked to the door, accompanied by the sound of the madman's rambling. Herald of War. The time of the Return is near at hand. . . .

Outside, she found her way back to the room with Iyatil, then apologized profusely to the ardens there who were looking for her. She pled that she had gotten lost, but said she'd accept an escort to take her back to her palanquin.

Before going, however, she leaned down to hug Iyatil, as if to wish her sister farewell.

"You can escape?" Shallan whispered.

"Don't be stupid. Of course I can."

"Take this," Shallan said, pressing a sheet of paper into Iyatil's gloved freehand. "I wrote upon it the ramblings of the madman. They repeat without change. I saw Amaram sneak into the room; he seems to think these words are authentic, and he seeks a treasure the madman spoke of earlier. I will write a thorough report via spanreed to you and the others tonight."

Shallan moved to pull back, but Iyatil held on. "Who are you really, Veil?" the woman asked. "You caught me in stealth spying upon you, and you can lose me in the streets. This is not easily accomplished. Your clever drawings fascinate Mraize, another near-impossible task, considering all that he has seen. Now what you have done today."

Shallan felt a thrill. Why should she feel so excited to have the respect of these people? They were murderers.

But storms take her, she had earned that respect.

"I seek the truth," Shallan said. "Wherever it may be, whoever may hold it. That's who I am." She nodded to Iyatil, then pulled away and escaped the monastery.

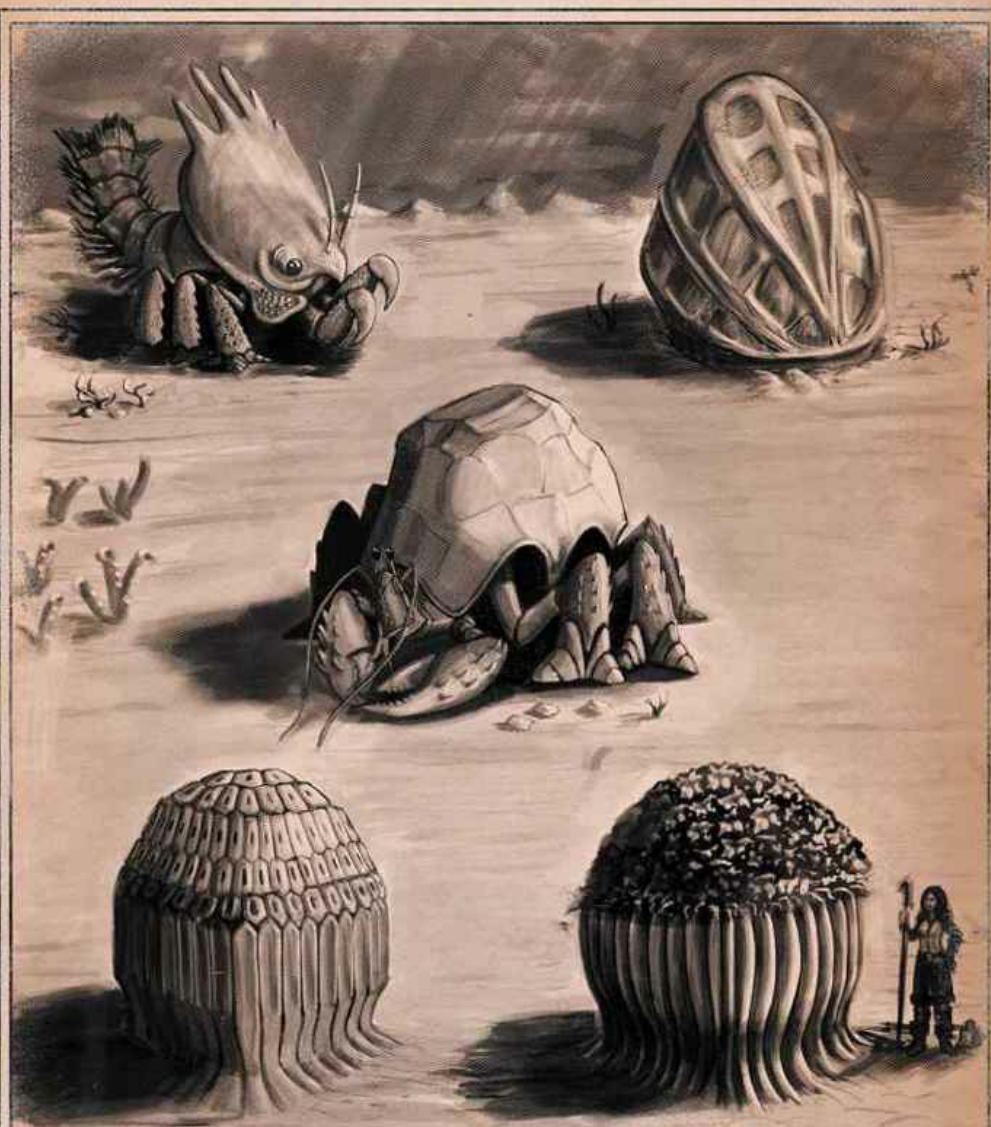
Later on that night, after sending in a full report of the day's events—as well as promising drawings of the madman, Amaram, and Bordin for good

measure—she received back a simple message from Mraize.

The truth destroys more people than it saves, Veil. But you have proven yourself. You no longer need fear our other members; they have been instructed not to touch you. You are required to get a specific tattoo, a symbol of your loyalty. I will send a drawing. You may add it to your person wherever you wish, but must prove it to me when we next meet.

Welcome to the Ghostbloods.

recollection of the metamorphosis, and training will have to resume as if with a new beast. There's no guarantee that a docile grub will pupate into



To encourage pupation of the mature larvae, feed them a consistent diet of rocklily leaves. To discourage pupation of your adult chulls, add drops of shalebark oil to the drinking water and feed chulls crushed shelltick before a storm. Sheltering your livestock during a highstorm remains the most-proven method to keep your chulls from pupating.

FIG. 38 -- METAMORPHOSIS OF THE CHULL: LARVA (THE CHULL CREMLING), FIRST PUPATION, ADULT CHULL, SECOND PUPATION, SENESCENCE.



ONE AND A HALF YEARS AGO

What is a woman's place in this modern world? Jasnah Kholin's words read. I rebel against this question, though so many of my peers ask it. The inherent bias in the inquiry seems invisible to so many of them. They consider themselves progressive because they are willing to challenge many of the assumptions of the past.

They ignore the greater assumption—that a “place” for women must be defined and set forth to begin with. Half of the population must somehow be reduced to the role arrived at by a single conversation. No matter how broad that role is, it will be—by nature—a reduction from the infinite variety that is womanhood.

I say that there is no role for women—there is, instead, a role for each woman, and she must make it for herself. For some, it will be the role of scholar; for others, it will be the role of wife. For others, it will be both. For yet others, it will be neither.

Do not mistake me in assuming I value one woman's role above another. My point is not to stratify our society—we have done that far too well already—

my point is to diversify our discourse.

A woman's strength should not be in her role, whatever she chooses it to be, but in the power to choose that role. It is amazing to me that I even have to make this point, as I see it as the very foundation of our conversation.

Shallan closed the book. Not two hours had passed since Father had ordered Helaran's assassination. After Shallan had retreated to her room, a pair of Father's guards had appeared in the hallway outside. Probably not to watch her—she doubted that Father knew that she'd overheard his order for Helaran to be killed. The guards were to see that Malise, Shallan's stepmother, did not try to flee.

That could be a mistaken assumption. Shallan didn't even know if Malise was still alive, following her screaming and Father's cold, angry ranting.

Shallan wanted to hide, to hunker down in her closet with blankets wrapped around her, eyes squeezed shut. The words in Jasnah Kholin's book strengthened her, though in some ways it seemed laughable for Shallan to even be reading it. Highlady Kholin talked about the nobility of choice, as if every woman had such opportunity. The decision between being a mother or a scholar seemed a difficult decision in Jasnah's estimation. That wasn't a difficult choice at all! That seemed like a grand place to be! Either would be delightful when compared to a life of fear in a house seething with anger, depression, and hopelessness.

She imagined what Highlady Kholin must be, a capable woman who did not do as others insisted she must. A woman with power, authority. A woman who had the luxury of seeking her dreams.

What would that be like?

Shallan stood up. She walked to the door, then cracked it open. Though the evening had grown late, the two guards still stood at the other end of the hallway. Shallan's heart thumped, and she cursed her timidity. Why couldn't she be like women who acted, instead of being someone who hid in her room with a pillow around her head?

Shaking, she slipped from the room. She padded toward the soldiers, feeling their eyes on her. One raised his hand. She didn't know the man's name. Once, she'd known all of the guards' names. Those men, whom she'd grown up with, had been replaced now.

"My father will need me," she said, not stopping at the guard's gesture. Though he was lighteyed, she did not need to obey him. She might spend most of every day in her rooms, but she was still of a much higher rank than he.

She walked by the men, trembling hands clenched tight. They let her go. When she passed her father's door, she heard soft weeping inside. Malise still lived, thankfully.

She found Father in the feast hall, sitting alone with both firepits roaring, full of flames. He slumped at the high table, lit by harsh light, staring at the tabletop.

Shallan slipped into the kitchen before he noticed her, and mixed his favorite. Deep violet wine, spiced with cinnamon and warmed against the chill day. He looked up as she walked back into the feast hall. She set the cup before him, looking into his eyes. No darkness there today. Just him. That was very rare, these days.

"They won't listen, Shallan," he whispered. "Nobody will listen. I hate that I have to fight my own house. They should support me." He took the drink. "Wikim just stares at the wall half the time. Jushu is worthless, and Balat fights me every step. Now Malise too."

"I will speak to them," Shallan said.

He drank the wine, then nodded. "Yes. Yes, that would be good. Balat is still out with those cursed axehound corpses. I'm glad they're dead. That litter was full of runts. He didn't need them anyway. . . ."

Shallan stepped into the chill air. The sun had set, bux201C;It defie



Is not the destruction we have wrought enough? The worlds you now tread bear the touch and design of Adonalsium. Our interference so far has brought nothing but pain. technically Wyndle afraid approximation

Feet scraped on the stone outside of Kaladin's cage. One of the jailers checking on him again. Kaladin continued to lie motionless with closed eyes, and did not look.

In order to keep the darkness at bay, he had begun planning. What would he do when he got out? When he got out. He had to tell himself that forcibly. It wasn't that he didn't trust Dalinar. His mind, though . . . his mind betrayed him, and whispered things that were not true.

Distortions. In his state, he could believe that Dalinar lied. He could believe that the highprince secretly wanted Kaladin in prison. Kaladin was a terrible guard, after all. He'd failed to do anything about the mysterious countdowns scrawled on walls, and he'd failed to stop the Assassin in White.

With his mind whispering lies, Kaladin could believe that Bridge Four was happy to be rid of him—that they pretended they wanted to be guards, just to make him happy. They secretly wanted to go on with their lives, lives they'd

enjoy, without Kaladin spoiling them.

These untruths should have seemed ridiculous to him. They didn't.

Clink.

Kaladin snapped his eyes open, growing tense. Had they come to take him, to execute him, as the king wished? He leaped to his feet, coming down in a battle stance, the empty bowl from his meal held to throw.

The jailer at the cell door stepped back, eyes widening. "Storms, man," he said. "I thought you were asleep. Well, your time is served. King signed a pardon today. They didn't even strip your rank or position." The man rubbed his chin, then pulled the cell door open. "Guess you're lucky."

Lucky. People always said that about Kaladin. Still, the prospect of freedom forced away the darkness inside of him, and Kaladin approached the door. Wary. He stepped out, the guard backing away.

"You are a distrustful one, aren't you?" the jailer said. A lighteyes of low rank. "Guess that makes you a good bodyguard." The man gestured for Kaladin to leave the room first.

Kaladin waited.

Finally, the guard sighed. "Right, then." He walked out the doorway into the hall beyond.

Kaladin followed, and with each step felt himself traveling back a few days in time. Shut the darkness away. He wasn't a slave. He was a soldier. Captain Kaladin. He'd survived this . . . what had it been? Two, three weeks? This short time back in a cage.

He was free now. He could return to his life as a bodyguard. But one thing . . . one thing had changed.

Nobody will ever, ever, do this to me again. Not king or general, not brightlord or brightlady.

He would die first.

They passed a leeward window, and Kaladin stopped to breathe in the cool, fresh scent of open air. The window gave an ordinary, mundane view of the camp outside, but it seemed glorious. A small breeze stirred his hair, and he let himself smile, reaching a hand to his chin. Several weeks' growth. He'd have to let Rock shave that.

"Here," the jailer said. "He's free. Can we finally be done with this farce, Your Highness?"

"Your High blue and goldfhe Knights Radiantness"? Kaladin turned down the hallway to where the guard had stopped at another cell—one of the larger ones set into the hallway itself. Kaladin had been put in the deepest cell, away from the windows.

The jailer twisted a key in the lock of the wooden door, then pulled it open. Adolin Kholin—wearing a simple tight uniform—stepped out. He also had several weeks of growth on his face, though the beard was blond, speckled black. The princeling took a deep breath, then turned toward Kaladin and nodded.

"He locked you away?" Kaladin said, baffled. "How . . . ? What . . . ?"

Adolin turned to the jailer. "Were my orders followed?"

"They wait in the room just beyond, Brightlord," the jailer said, sounding nervous.

Adolin nodded, moving in that direction.

Kaladin reached the jailer, taking him by the arm. "What is happening? The king put Dalinar's heir in here?"

"The king didn't have anything to do with it," the jailer said. "Brightlord Adolin insisted. So long as you were in here, he wouldn't leave. We tried to stop him, but the man's a prince. We can't storming make him do anything, not even leave. He locked himself away in the cell and we just had to live

with it.”

Impossible. Kaladin glanced at Adolin, who walked slowly down the hallway. The prince looked a lot better than Kaladin felt—Adolin had obviously seen a few baths, and his prison cell had been much larger, with more privacy.

It had still been a cell.

That was the disturbance I heard, Kaladin thought, on that day, early after I was imprisoned. Adolin came and shut himself in.

Kaladin jogged up to the man. “Why?”

“Didn’t seem right, you in here,” Adolin said, eyes forward.

“I ruined your chance to duel Sadeas.”

“I’d be crippled or dead without you,” Adolin said. “So I wouldn’t have had the chance to fight Sadeas anyway.” The prince stopped in the hallway, and looked at Kaladin. “Besides. You saved Renarin.”

“It’s my job,” Kaladin said.

“Then we need to pay you more, bridgeboy,” Adolin said. “Because I don’t know if I’ve ever met another man who would jump, unarmored, into a fight among six Shardbearers.”

Kaladin frowned. “Wait. Are you wearing cologne? In prison?”

“Well, there was no need to be barbaric, just because I was incarcerated.”

“Storms, you’re spoiled,” Kaladin said, smiling.

“I’m refined, you insolent farmer,” Adolin said. Then he grinned. “Besides, I’ll have you know that I had to use cold water for my baths while here.”

“Poor boy.”

“I know.” Adolin hesitated, then held out a hand.

Kaladin clasped it. “I’m sorry,” he said. “For ruining the plan.” succession warH5so

“Bah, you didn’t ruin it,” Adolin said. “Elhokar did that. You think he couldn’t have simply ignored your request and proceeded, letting me expand on my challenge to Sadeas? He threw a tantrum instead of taking control of the crowd and pushing forward. Storming man.”

Kaladin blinked at the audacious tone, then glanced toward the jailer, who stood a distance behind, obviously trying to look inconspicuous.

“The things you said about Amaram,” Adolin said. “Were they true?”

“Every one.”

Adolin nodded. “I’ve always wondered what that man was hiding.” He continued walking.

“Wait,” Kaladin said, jogging to catch up, “you believe me?”

“My father,” Adolin said, “is the best man I know, perhaps the best man alive. Even he loses his temper, makes bad judgment calls, and has a troubled past. Amaram never seems to do anything wrong. If you listen to the stories about him, it’s like everyone expects him to glow in the dark and piss nectar. That stinks, to me, of someone who works too hard to maintain his reputation.”

“Your father says I shouldn’t have tried to duel him.”

“Yeah,” Adolin said, reaching the door at the end of the hallway. “Dueling is formalized in a way I suspect you just don’t get. A darkeyes can’t challenge a man like Amaram, and you certainly shouldn’t have done it like you did. It embarrassed the king, like spitting on a gift he’d given you.” Adolin hesitated. “Of course, that shouldn’t matter to you anymore. Not after today.”

Adolin pushed open the door. Beyond, most of the men of Bridge Four crowded into a small room where the jailers obviously spent their days. A

table and chairs had been shoved to the corner to make room for the twenty-something men who saluted Kaladin as the door opened. Their salutes dissolved immediately as they started to cheer.

That sound . . . that sound quashed the darkness until it vanished completely. Kaladin found himself smiling as he stepped out to meet them, taking hands, listening to Rock make a wisecrack about his beard. Renarin was there in his Bridge Four uniform, and he immediately joined his brother, speaking to him quietly in a jovial way, though he had out his little box that he liked to fidget with.

Kaladin glanced to the side. Who were those men beside the wall? Members of Adolin's retinue. Was that one of Adolin's armorers? They carried some items draped with sheets. Adolin stepped into the room and loudly clapped his hands, quieting Bridge Four.

"It turns out," Adolin said, "that I'm in possession of not one, but two new Shardblades and three sets of Plate. The Kholin principedom now owns a quarter of the Shards in all of Alethkar, and I've been named dueling champion. Not surprising, considering Relis was on a caravan back to Alethkar the night after our duel, sent by his father in an attempt to hide the shame of being beaten so soundly.

"One complete set of those Shards is going to General Khal, and I've ordered two of the sets of Plate given to appropriate lighteyes of rank in my father's army." Adolin nodded toward the sheets. "That leaves one full set. Personally, I'm curious to know if the stories are 's expression grew grim.m outwards.4true. If a darkeyes bonds a Shardblade, will his eyes change color?"

Kaladin felt a moment of sheer panic. Again. It was happening again.

The armorers removed the sheets, revealing a shimmering silvery Blade. Edged on both sides, a pattern of twisting vines ran up its center. At their feet, the armorers uncovered a set of Plate, painted orange, taken from one of the men Kaladin had helped defeat.

Take these Shards, and everything changed. Kaladin immediately felt sick,

almost cripplingly so. He turned back to Adolin. “I can do with these as I wish?”

“Take them,” Adolin said, nodding. “They are yours.”

“Not anymore,” Kaladin said, pointing toward one of the members of Bridge Four. “Moash. Take these. You’re now a Shardbearer.”

All of the color drained from Moash’s face. Kaladin prepared himself. Last time . . . He flinched as Adolin grabbed him by the shoulder, but the tragedy of Amaram’s army did not repeat. Instead, Adolin yanked Kaladin back into the hallway, holding up a hand to stop the bridgemen from talking.

“Just a second,” Adolin said. “Nobody move.” Then, in a quieter voice, he hissed to Kaladin. “I’m giving you a Shardblade and Shardplate.”

“Thank you,” Kaladin said. “Moash will use them well. He’s been training with Zahel.”

“I didn’t give them to him. I gave them to you.”

“If they’re really mine, then I can do with them as I wish. Or are they not really mine?”

“What’s wrong with you?” Adolin said. “This is the dream of every soldier, darkeyed or light. Is this out of spite? Or . . . is it . . .” Adolin seemed completely baffled.

“It’s not out of spite,” Kaladin said, speaking softly. “Adolin, those Blades have killed too many people I love. I can’t look at them, can’t touch them, without seeing blood.”

“You’d be lighteyed,” Adolin whispered. “Even if it didn’t change your eye color, you’d count as one. Shardbearers are immediately of the fourth dahn. You could challenge Amaram. Your whole life would change.”

“I don’t want my life to change because I’ve become a lighteyes,” Kaladin said. “I want the lives of people like me . . . like I am now . . . to change. This gift is not for me, Adolin. I’m not trying to spite you or anyone else. I just

don't want a Shardblade."

"That assassin is going to come back," Adolin said. "We both know it. I'd rather have you there with Shards to back me up."

"I'll be more useful without them."

Adolin frowned.

"Let me give the Shards to Moash," Kaladin said. "You saw, on that field, that I can handle myself fine without a Blade and Plate. If we Shard-up one of my best men, there will be three of us to fight him, not just two."

Adolin looked into the room, then skeptically back at Kaladin. "You succession warH5soare crazy, you realize."

"I'll accept that."

"Fine," Adolin said, striding back into the room. "You. Moash, was it? I guess those Shards are yours, now. Congratulations. You now outrank ninety percent of Alethkar. Pick yourself a family name and ask to join one of the houses under Dalinar's banner, or start your own if you are inclined."

Moash glanced at Kaladin for confirmation. Kaladin nodded.

The tall bridgeman walked to the side of the room, reaching out a hand to rest his fingers on the Shardblade. He ran those fingers all the way down to the hilt, then seized it, lifting the Blade in awe. Like most, it was enormous, but Moash held it easily in one hand. The heliodor set into the pommel flashed with a burst of light.

Moash looked to the others of Bridge Four, a sea of wide eyes and speechless mouths. Gloryspren rose around him, a spinning mass of at least two dozen spheres of light.

"His eyes," Lopen said. "Shouldn't they be changing?"

"If it happens," Adolin said, "it might not be until he's bonded the thing. That takes a week."

“Put the Plate on me,” Moash said to the armorers. Urgent, as if he feared it would be taken from him.

“Enough of this!” Rock said as the armorers began to work, his voice filling the room like captive thunder. “We have party to give! Great Captain Kaladin, Stormblessed and dweller in prisons, you will come eat my stew now. Ha! I have been cooking it as long as you were locked away.”

Kaladin let the bridgemen usher him out into the sunlight, where a crowd of soldiers waited—including many of the bridgemen from other crews. These cheered, and Kaladin caught sight of Dalinar waiting off to the side. Adolin moved to join his father, but Dalinar watched Kaladin. What did that look mean? So pensive. Kaladin looked away, accepting the greetings of bridgemen as they clasped his hand and clapped him on the back.

“What did you say, Rock?” Kaladin said. “You cooked a stew for each day I was locked in prison?”

“No,” Teft said, scratching his beard. “The storming Horneater has been cooking a single pot, letting it simmer for weeks now. He won’t let us try it, and insists on getting up at night and tending it.”

“Is celebratory stew,” Rock said, folding his arms. “Must simmer long time.”

“Well, let’s get to it, then,” Kaladin said. “I could certainly use something better than prison food.”

The men cheered, piling off toward their barrack. As they moved, Kaladin grabbed Teft by the arm. “How did the men take it?” he asked. “My imprisonment?”

“There was talk of breaking you out,” Teft admitted softly. “I beat some sense into them. Ain’t no good soldier who hasn’t spent a day or two locked up. It’s part of the job. They didn’t demote you, so they just wanted to slap your wrist a little. The men saw the truth of it.”

Kaladin nodded.

Teft glanced at the others. “There’s quite a lot of anger among them about this Amaram fellow. And a lot of interest. Anything about your past gets them talking, you know.”

“Lead them back to the barrack,” Kaladin said. His expression grew grim. “I’ll join you in a moment.”

“Don’t take too long,” Teft said. “The lads have been guarding this doorway for three weeks now. You owe them their celebration.”

“I’ll be along,” Kaladin said. “I just want to say a few things to Moash.”

Teft nodded and jogged off to wrangle the others. The prison’s front room felt empty when Kaladin walked back in. Only Moash and the armorers remained. Kaladin walked up to them, watching Moash make a fist with his gauntlet.

“I’m still having trouble believing this, Kal,” Moash said as the armorers fit on his breastplate. “Storms . . . I’m now worth more than some kingdoms.”

“I wouldn’t suggest selling the Shards, at least not to a foreigner,” Kaladin said. “That sort of thing can be considered treason.”

“Sell?” Moash said, looking up sharply. He made another fist. “Never.” He smiled, a grin of pure joy as the breastplate locked into place.

“I’ll help him with the rest,” Kaladin said to the armorers. They withdrew reluctantly, leaving Kaladin and Moash alone.

He helped Moash fit one of the pauldrons to his shoulder. “I had a lot of time to think, in there,” Kaladin said.

“I can imagine.”

“The time led me to a few decisions,” Kaladin said as the section of Plate locked into place. “One is that your friends are right.”

Moash turned to him sharply. “So . . .”

“So tell them I agree with their plan,” Kaladin said. “I’ll do what they want me to in order to help them . . . accomplish their task.”

The room grew strangely still.

Moash took him by the arm. “I told them you’d see.” He gestured to the Plate he wore. “This will help too, with what we must do. And once we’ve finished, I think a certain man you challenged might need the same treatment.”

“I only agree,” Kaladin said, “because it’s for the best. For you, Moash, this is about revenge—and don’t try to deny it. I really think it is what Alethkar needs. Maybe what the world needs.”

“Oh, I know,” Moash said, putting on the helmet, visor up. He took a deep breath, then took a step and stumbled, nearly crashing to the ground. He steadied himself by grabbing a table, which he crunched beneath his fingers, the wood splitting.

He stared at what he’d done, then laughed. “This . . . this is going to change everything. Thank you, Kaladin. Thank you.”

“Let’s get those armorers and help you take it off,” Kaladin said.

“No. You go to Rock’s storming feast. I’m going to the sparring grounds to practice! I won’t take this off until I can move in it naturally.”

Having seen how much work Renarin was putting into learning his Plate, Kaladin suspected that might take longer than Moash wanted. He didn’t say anything, instead stepping back out into the sunlight. He enjoyed that for a moment, eyes closed, head vanished to mist. The Knights Radiant toward the sky.

Then, he jogged off to rejoin Bridge Four.



My path has been chosen very deliberately. Yes, I agree with everything you have said about Rayse, including the severe danger he presents.

Dalinar stopped on the switchbacks down from the Pinnacle, Navani at his side. In the waning light, they watched a river of men flowing back into the warcamps from the Shattered Plains. The armies of Bethab and Thanadal were returning from their plateau run, following their highprinces, who had probably gotten back somewhat earlier.

Down below, a rider approached the Pinnacle, likely with news for the king on the runs. Dalinar looked to one of his guards—he had four tonight, two for him, two for Navani—and gestured.

“You want the details, Brightlord?” asked the bridgeman.

“Please.”

The man jogged off down the switchbacks. Dalinar watched him go, thoughtful. These men were remarkably disciplined, considering their origin—but they were not career soldiers. They did not like what he had done in throwing their captain into prison.

He suspected they wouldn't let it become a problem. Captain Kaladin led them well—he was the exact type of officer Dalinar looked for. The kind that showed initiative not because of a desire for advancement, but because of the satisfaction of a job well done. Those kinds of soldiers often had rocky starts until they learned to keep their heads. Storms. Dalinar himself had needed similar lessons pounded into him at various points in his life.

He continued with Navani down the switchbacks, walking slowly. She looked radiant tonight, hair done with sapphires that glowed softly in the light. Navani liked these strolls together, and they were in no hurry to arrive at the feast.

“I keep thinking,” Navani said, continuing their previous conversation, “that there should be a way to use fabrials as pumps. You have seen the gemstones built to attract certain substances, but not others—it is most useful with something like smoke above a fire. Could we make this work with water?”

Dalinar grunted, nodding.

“More and more buildings in the warcamps are plumbed,” she continued, “after the Kharbranthian manner—but those use gravity itself as a way to conduct the liquid through their piping. I imagine true motion, with gemstones at the ends of piping segments to pull water through at a flow, against the pull of the earth. . . .”

He grunted again.

“We made a breakthrough in the design of new Shardblades the other day.”

“What, really?” he asked. “What happened? How soon will you have one ready?”

She smiled, arm around his.

“What?”

“Just seeing if you are still you,” she said. “Our breakthrough was realizing that the technically Wyndle spotted approximation gemstones in the Blades—

used to bond them—might not have originally been part of the weapons.”

He frowned. “That’s important?”

“Yes. If this is true, it means the Blades aren’t powered by the stones. Credit goes to Rushu, who asked why a Shardblade can be summoned and dismissed even if its gemstone has gone dun. We had no answers, and she spent the last few weeks in contact with Kharbranth, using one of those new information stations. She came up with a scrap from several decades after the Recreance which talks about men learning to summon and dismiss Blades by adding gemstones to them, an accident of ornamentation it seems.”

He frowned as they passed a shalebark outcropping where a gardener was working late, carefully filing away and humming to himself. The sun had set; Salas had just risen in the east.

“If this is true,” Navani said, sounding happy, “we’re back to knowing absolutely nothing about how Shardblades were crafted.”

“I don’t see why that’s a breakthrough at all.”

She smiled, patting him on the arm. “Imagine you had spent the last five years believing an enemy had been following Dialectur’s War as a model for tactics, but then heard it reported they instead had never heard of the treatise.”

“Ah . . .”

“We had been assuming that somehow, the strength and lightness of the Blades was a fabrial construct powered by the gemstone,” Navani said. “This might not be the case. It seems the gemstone’s purpose is only used in initially bonding the Blade—something that the Radiants didn’t need to do.”

“Wait. They didn’t?”

“Not if this fragment is correct. The implication is that the Radiants could always dismiss and summon Blades—but for a time the ability was lost. It was only recovered when someone added a gemstone to his Blade. The

fragment says the weapons actually shifted shape to adopt the stones, but I'm not certain if I trust that.

“Either way, after the Radiants fell but before men learned to put gemstones into their Blades and bond them, the weapons were apparently still supernaturally sharp and light, though bonding was impossible. This would explain several other fragments of records I've read and found confusing. . . .”

She continued, and he found her voice pleasant. The details of fabrial construction, however, were not pressing to him at the moment. He did care. He had to care. Both for her, and for the needs of the kingdom.

He just couldn't care right now. In his head, he went over preparations for the expedition out onto the Shattered Plains. How to protect the Soulcasters from sight, as they preferred. Sanitation shouldn't be an issue, and water would be plentiful. How many scribes would he need to bring? Horses? Only one week remained, and he had the majority of the preparations in place, such as mobile bridge construction and supply estimations. There was always more to plan, however.

Unfortunately, the biggest variable was one he couldn't plan for, not specifically. He didn't know how many troops he'd have. It depended on which of the highprinces, if any, agreed to go with him. Less than a week out, and he still wasn't certain if any of them would.

I could use Hatham most, Dalinar thought. He runs a tight army. If only Aladar hadn't sided with Sadeas so vigorously; I can't figure that man out. Thanadal and Bethab . . . storms, will I bring their mercenaries if either of those two agree to come? Is that the kind of force I want? Dare I refuse any spear that comes to me?

“I'm not going to get a good conversation out of you tonight, am I?” Navani asked.

“No,” he admitted as they reached the base of the Pinnacle and turned south. “I'm sorry.”

She nodded, and he could see the mask cracking. She talked about her work because it was something to talk about. He stopped beside her. “I know it hurts,” he said softly. “But it will get better.”

“She wouldn’t let me be a mother to her, Dalinar,” Navani said, staring into the distance. “Do you know that? It was almost like . . . like once Jasnah climbed into adolescence, she no longer needed a mother. I would try to get close to her, and there was this coldness, like even being near me reminded her that she had once been a child. What happened to my little girl, so full of questions?”

Dalinar pulled her close; propriety could seek Damnation. Nearby, the three guards shuffled, looking the other way.

“They’ll take my son too,” Navani whispered. “They’re trying.”

“I will protect him,” Dalinar promised.

“And who will protect you?”

He had no answer to that. Answering that his guards would do it sounded trite. That wasn’t the question she’d asked. Who will protect you when that assassin returns?

“I almost wish that you would fail,” she said. “In holding this kingdom together, you make a target of yourself. If everything just collapsed, and we fractured back to princedoms, perhaps he’d leave us alone.”

“And then the storm would come,” Dalinar replied softly. Twelve days.

Navani eventually pulled back, nodding, composing herself. “You’re right, of course. I just . . . this is the first time, for me. Dealing with this. How did you manage it, when Shshshsh died? I know you loved her, Dalinar. You don’t have to deny it for my ego.”

He hesitated. The first time; an implication that when Gavilar had died, she had not been broken up about it. She had never stated so outright an implication of the . . . difficulties the two had been having.

“I’m sorry,” she said. “Was that too difficult a question, considering its source?” She tucked away her kerchief, which she’d used to dab her eyes dry. “I apologize; I know that you don’t like to talk about her.”

It wasn’t that it was a difficult question. It was that Dalinar didn’t remember his wife. How odd, that he could go weeks without even noticing this hole in his memories, this change that had ripped out a piece of him and left him patched over. Without even a prick of emotion when her name, which he could not hear, was’s expression grew grim.m husbands.4 mentioned.

Best to move to some other topic. “I cannot help but assume that the assassin is involved in all of this, Navani. The storm that comes, the secrets of the Shattered Plains, even Gavilar. My brother knew something, something he never shared with any of us.” You must find the most important words a man can say. “I would give almost anything to know what it was.”

“I suppose,” Navani said. “I will go back to my journals of the time. Perhaps he said something that would give us clues—though I warn you, I’ve pored over those accounts dozens of times.”

Dalinar nodded. “Regardless, that isn’t a worry for today. Today, they are our goal.”

They turned, looking as coaches clattered past, making their way to the nearby feasting basin, where lights glowed a soft violet in the night. He narrowed his eyes and found Ruthar’s coach approaching. The highprince had been stripped of Shards, all but his own Blade. They had cut off Sadeas’s right hand in this mess, but the head remained. And it was venomous.

The other highprinces were almost as big a problem as Sadeas. They resisted him because they wanted things to be easy, as they had been. They gluttoned themselves on their riches and their games. Feasts manifested that all too much, with their exotic food, their rich costumes.

The world itself seemed close to ending, and the Alethi threw a party.

“You must not despise them,” Navani said.

Dalinar's frown deepened. She could read him too well.

"Listen to me, Dalinar," she said, turning him to meet her eyes. "Has any good ever com up to him. Cl



However, it seems to me that all things have been set up for a purpose, and if we—as infants—stumble through the workshop, we risk exacerbating, not preventing, a problem.

The Shattered Plains.

Kaladin did not claim these lands as he did the chasms, where his men had found safety. Kaladin remembered all too well the pain of bloodied feet on his first run, battered by this broken stone wasteland. Barely anything grew out here, only the occasional patch of rockbuds or set of enterprising vines draping down into a chasm. Blade and PlatefksN that the on the leeward side of a plateau. The bottoms of the cracks were clogged with life, but up here it was barren.

The aching feet and burning shoulders from running a bridge had been nothing compared to the slaughter that had awaited his men at the end of a bridge run. Storms . . . even looking across the Plains made Kaladin flinch. He could hear the hiss of arrows in the air, the screams of terrified bridgemen, the song of the Parshendi.

I should have been able to save more of Bridge Four, Kaladin thought. If I'd

been faster to accept my powers, could I have done so?

He breathed in Stormlight to reassure himself. Only it didn't come. He stood, dumbfounded, while soldiers marched across one of Dalinar's enormous mechanical bridges. He tried again. Nothing.

He fished a sphere from his pouch. The firemark glowed with its customary light, tinting his fingers red. Something was wrong. Kaladin couldn't feel the Stormlight inside as he once had.

Syl flitted across the chasm high in the air with a group of windspren. Her giggling laughter rained down upon him, and he looked up. "Syl?" he asked quietly. Storms. He didn't want to look like an idiot, but something deep within him was panicking like a rat caught by its tail. "Syl!"

Several marching soldiers glanced at Kaladin, then up toward the air. Kaladin ignored them as Syl zipped down in the form of a ribbon of light. She swirled around him, still giggling.

The Stormlight returned to him. He could feel it again, and he greedily sucked it from the sphere—though he did have the presence of mind to clutch the sphere in a fist and hold it to his chest to make the process less obvious. The Light of one mark wasn't enough to expose him, but he felt far, far better with that Stormlight raging inside of him.

"What happened?" Kaladin whispered to Syl. "Is something wrong with our bond? Is it because I haven't found the Words soon enough?"

She landed on his wrist and took the form of a young woman. She peered at his hand, cocking her head. "What's inside?" she asked with a conspiratorial whisper.

"You know what this is, Syl," Kaladin said, feeling chilled, as if he'd been hit by a wave of stormwater. "A sphere. Didn't you see it just now?"

She looked at him, face innocent. "You are making bad choices. Naughty." Her features mimicked his for a moment and she jumped forward, as if to startle him. She laughed and zipped away.

Bad choices. Naughty. So, this was because of his promise to Moash that he'd help assassinate the king. Kaladin sighed, continuing forward.

Syl couldn't see why his decision was the right one. She was a spren, and had a stupid, simplistic morality. To be human was often to be forced to choose between distasteful options. Life wasn't clean and neat like she wanted it to be. It was messy, coated with crem. No man walked through life without getting covered in it, not even Dalinar.

"You want too much of me," he snapped at her as he reached the other side of the chasm. "I'm not some glorious knight of ancient days. I'm a broken man. Do you hear me, Syl? I'm broken."

She zipped up to him and whispered, "That's what they blue and goldf, pullreall were, silly." She streaked away.

Kaladin watched as the soldiers filed across the bridge. They weren't doing a plateau run, but Dalinar had brought plenty of soldiers anyway. Going out onto the Shattered Plains was entering a war zone, and the Parshendi were ever a threat.

Bridge Four tromped across the mechanical bridge, carrying their smaller one. Kaladin wasn't about to leave the camps without that. These mechanisms Dalinar employed—the massive, chull-pulled bridges that could be ratcheted down into place—were amazing, but Kaladin didn't trust them. Not nearly as much as he did a good bridge on his shoulders.

Syl flitted by again. Did she really expect him to live according to her perception of what was right and wrong? Was she going to yank his powers away every time he did something that risked offending her?

That would be like living with a noose around his neck.

Determined to not let his worries ruin the day, he went to check on Bridge Four. Look at the open sky, he told himself. Breathe the wind. Enjoy the freedom. After so much time in captivity, these things were wonders.

He found Bridge Four beside their bridge at parade rest. It was odd to see

them with their old padded-shoulder leather vests on over their new uniforms. It transformed them into a weird mix of what they had been and what they were now. They saluted him together, and he saluted back.

“At ease,” he told them, and they broke formation, laughing and joking with one another as Lopen and his assistants distributed waterskins.

“Ha!” Rock said, settling down on the side of the bridge to drink. “This thing, it is not so hard as I remember it being.”

“It’s because we’re going slower,” Kaladin said, pointing at Dalinar’s mechanical bridge. “And because you’re remembering the early days of bridge carries, not the later ones when we were well-fed and well-trained. It got easier then.”

“No,” Rock said. “The bridge is light because we have defeated Sadeas. Is the proper way of things.”

“That makes no sense.”

“Ha! Perfect sense.” He took a drink. “Airsick lowlander.”

Kaladin shook his head, but let himself find a smile at Rock’s familiar voice. After slaking his own thirst, he jogged across the plateau toward where Dalinar had just finished crossing. Nearby, a tall rock formation surmounted the plateau, and atop it was a wooden structure like a small fort. Sunlight glinted off one of the spyglasses fitted there.

No permanent bridge led to this plateau, which was just outside the secure area closest to the warcamp. These scouts positioned here were vaulters, who leaped chasms at narrow points with the use of long poles. It seemed like a job that would require a special brand of craziness—and because of that, Kaladin had always felt respect for these men.

One of the vaulters was speaking with Dalinar. Kaladin would have expected the man to be tall and limber, but he was short and compact, with thick forearms. He wore a Kholin uniform with white stripes edging the coat.

“We did see something out here, Brightlord,” the vaulter said to Dalinar. “I saw it with my own two eyes { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah heardre, and recorded the date and time in glyphs on my ledger. It was a man, a glowing one, who flew around in the sky back and forth over the Plains.”

Dalinar grunted.

“I’m not crazy, sir,” the vaulter said, shuffling from one foot to the other. “The other lads saw it too, once I—”

“I believe you, soldier,” Dalinar said. “It was the Assassin in White. He looked like that when he came for the king.”

The man relaxed. “Brightlord, sir, that’s what I thought. Some of the men back at camp told me I was just seeing what I wanted.”

“Nobody wants to see that one,” Dalinar said. “But why would he spend his time out here? Why hasn’t he come back to attack, if he’s this close?”

Kaladin cleared his throat, uncomfortable, and pointed at the watchman’s post. “That fort up there, is it wood?”

“Yes,” the vaulter said, then noticed the knots on Kaladin’s shoulders. “Uh, sir.”

“That can’t possibly withstand a highstorm,” Kaladin said.

“We break it down, sir.”

“And carry it back to camp?” Kaladin asked, frowning. “Or do you leave it out here for the storm?”

“Leave it, sir?” the short man said. “We stay here with it.” He pointed toward a burrowed-out section of rock, cut with hammers or a Shardblade, at the base of the stone formation. It didn’t look very large—just a cubby, really. It looked like they took the wooden floor of the platform up above, then locked it into place with clasps at the side of the cubby to form a kind of door.

A special kind of crazy indeed.

“Brightlord, sir,” the vaulter said to Dalinar, “the one in white might be out here somewhere. Waiting.”

“Thank you, soldier,” Dalinar said, nodding his dismissal. “Keep an eye out for us while we travel. We’ve had reports of a chasmfiend moving in close to the camps.”

“Yes, sir,” the man said, saluting and then jogging back toward the rope ladder leading up to his post.

“What if the assassin does come for you?” Kaladin asked softly.

“I don’t see how it would be any different out here,” Dalinar said. “He’ll be back eventually. On the Plains or in the palace, we’ll have to fight him.”

Kaladin grunted. “I wish you’d accept one of those Shardblades that Adolin has been winning, sir. I’d feel more comfortable if you could defend yourself.”

“I think you’d be surprised,” Dalinar said, shading his eyes, turning toward the warcamp. “I do feel wrong leaving Elhokar alone back there, though.”

“The assassin said he wanted you, sir,” Kaladin said. “If you’re apart from the king, that will only serve to protect him.”

“I suppose,” Dalinar said. “Unless the assassin’s comments were misdirection.” He shook his head. “I might order you to stay with him next time. I can’t help but feel I’m missing something important, something right in front of me.”

Kaladin set his jaw, trying to ignore the chill he felt. His expression grew grim. “Order you to stay with him next time. . . . It was almost like fate itself was pushing Kaladin to be in a position to betray the king.”

“About your imprisonment,” the highprince said.

“Already forgotten, sir,” Kaladin said. Dalinar’s part in it, at least. “I

appreciate not being demoted.”

“You’re a good soldier,” Dalinar said. “Most of the time.” His eyes flicked toward Bridge Four, picking up their bridge. One of the men at the side drew his attention in particular: Renarin, wearing his Bridge Four uniform, hefting the bridge into place. Nearby, Leyten laughed and gave him pointers on how to hold the thing.

“He’s actually starting to fit in, sir,” Kaladin said. “The men like him. I never thought I’d see the day.”

Dalinar nodded.

“How was he?” Kaladin asked softly. “After what happened in the arena?”

“He refused to go practice with Zahel,” Dalinar said. “So far as I know, he hasn’t summoned his Shardblade in weeks.” He watched for a moment longer. “I can’t decide if his time with your men is good for him—helping him think like a soldier—or if it’s just encouraging him to avoid his greater responsibilities.”

“Sir,” Kaladin said. “If I may say so, your son seems like kind of a misfit. Out of place. Awkward, alone.”

Dalinar nodded.

“Then, I can say with confidence that Bridge Four is probably the best place he could find himself.” It felt odd to be saying it of a lighteyes, but it was true.

Dalinar grunted. “I’ll trust your judgment. Go. Make sure those men of yours are on the watch for the assassin, in case he does come today.”

Kaladin nodded, leaving the highprince behind. He’d heard about Dalinar’s visions before—and had had an inkling of their contents. He didn’t know what he thought, but he intended to get a copy of the vision records in their entirety so he could have Ka read it to him.

Perhaps these visions were why Syl was always so determined to trust

Dalinar.

As the day passed, the army moved across the Plains like the flow of some viscous liquid—mud dribbling down a shallow incline. All of this so Shallan could see a chasmfiend chrysalis. Kaladin shook his head, crossing a plateau. Adolin was certainly smitten; he'd managed to roll out an entire strike force, his father included, just to sate the girl's whims.

“Walking, Kaladin?” Adolin said, trotting up. The prince rode that white beast of a horse, the thing with the hooves like hammers. Adolin wore his full suit of blue Shardplate, helm tied to a knob on the back of the saddle. “I thought you had full requisition right from my father's stables.”

“I have full requisition right from the quartermasters too,” Kaladin said, “but you don't see me hiking out here with a cauldron on my back just because I can.”

Adolin chuckled. “You should try riding more. You have to admit that there are advantages. The speed of the gallop, the height of attack.” He patted his horse on the neck.

“I guess I just trust my own feet too much.” blue and goldf, pullre

Adolin nodded, as if that had been the wisest thing a man had ever said, before riding back to check on Shallan in her palanquin. Feeling a little fatigued, Kaladin fished in his pocket for another sphere, just a diamond chip this time, and held it to his chest. He breathed in.

Again, nothing happened. Storm it! He looked about for Syl, but couldn't find her. She'd been so playful lately, he was starting to wonder if this was all some kind of trick. He actually hoped it was that, and not something more. Despite his inward grouching and complaints, he desperately wanted this power. He had claimed the sky, the winds themselves. Giving them up would be like giving up his own hands.

He eventually reached the edge of their current plateau, where Dalinar's mechanical bridge was setting up. Here, blessedly, he found Syl inspecting a cremling crawling across the rocks toward the safety of a nearby crack.

Kaladin sat down on a rock beside her. “So you’re punishing me,” he said. “For agreeing to help Moash. That’s why I’m having trouble with the Stormlight.”

Syl followed along behind the cremling, which was a kind of beetle with a round, iridescent shell.

“Syl?” Kaladin asked. “Are you all right? You seem . . .”

Like you were before. When we first met. It made a feeling of dread rise within him to acknowledge it. If his powers were withdrawing, was it because the bond itself was weakening?

She looked up at him, and her eyes became more focused, her expression like that of her normal self. “You have to decide what you want, Kaladin,” she said.

“You don’t like Moash’s plan,” Kaladin said. “Are you trying to force me to change my mind regarding him?”

She scrunched up her face. “I don’t want to force you to do anything. You have to do what you think is right.”

“That’s what I’m trying to do!”

“No. I don’t think you are.”

“Fine. I’ll tell Moash and his friends that I’m out, that I’m not going to help them.”

“But you gave Moash your word!”

“I gave my word to Dalinar too. . . .”

She drew her lips to a line, meeting his eyes.

“That’s the problem, isn’t it,” Kaladin whispered. “I’ve made two promises, and I can’t keep my word to both.” Oh, storms. Was this the sort of thing that had destroyed the Knights Radiant?

What happened to your honorspren when you confronted them with a choice like this? A broken vow either way.

Idiot, Kaladin thought at himself. It seemed he couldn't make any right choices these days.

"What do I do, Syl?" he whispered.

She flitted up until she was standing in the air just before him, eyes meeting his. "You must speak the Words."

"I don't know them."

"Find them." She looked toward the sky. "Find them soon, Kaladin. And no, simply telling Moash you won't help isn't going to work. vanished to mist.f, pullreWe've gone too far for that. You need to do what your heart needs to do." She rose upward toward the sky.

"Stay with me, Syl," he whispered after her, standing. "I'll figure this out. Just . . . don't lose yourself. Please. I need you."

Nearby, gears on Dalinar's bridge mechanism turned as soldiers twisted levers, and the entire thing started to unfold.

"Stop, stop, stop!" Shallan Davar jogged up, a flurry of red hair and blue silk, a large floppy hat on her head to keep off the sun. Two of her guards jogged after her, but neither was Gaz.

Kaladin spun about, alarmed at her tone, searching for signs of the Assassin in White.

Shallan, puffing, raised her safehand to her chest. "Storms, what is wrong with palanquin porters? They absolutely refuse to move quickly. 'It's not stately,' they say. Well, I don't really do stately. All right, give me a minute, then you can continue."

She settled down on a rock near the bridge. The baffled soldiers regarded her as she dug out her drawing pad, then started sketching. "All right," she said. "Continue. I've been trying all day to get a progressive sketch of that bridge

as it unfolds. Storming porters.”

What a bizarre woman.

The soldiers hesitantly continued positioning the bridge, unfolding it beneath the watchful eyes of three of Dalinar’s engineers—widowed wives of his fallen officers. Several carpenters were also on hand to work at their orders if the bridge got stuck or a piece snapped.

Kaladin gripped his spear, trying to sort through his emotions regarding Syl, and the promises he’d made. Surely he could work this out somehow. Couldn’t he?

Seeing this bridge intruded on his mind with thoughts of bridge runs, and he found that a welcome distraction. He could see why Sadeas had preferred the simple, if brutal, method of the bridge crews. Those bridges were faster, cheaper, and less prone to problems. These massive things were ponderousn’t y

s, like big ships trying to maneuver in a bay.

Armored bridge runners is the natural solution, Kaladin thought. Men with shields, with full support from the army to get them into position. You could have fast, mobile bridges, but also not leave men to be slaughtered.

Of course, Sad the bridgemen killed, as bait to keep arrows away from his soldiers.

One of the carpenters helping with the bridge—examining one of the wooden steadying pins and talking about carving a new one—was familiar to Kaladin. The stout man had a birthmark across his forehead, shaded by the carpenter's cap he wore.

Kaladin knew that face. Had the man been one of Dalinar's soldiers, one of those who had lost the will to fight following the slaughter on the Tower? Some of those had switched to other duties in camp.

He was distracted as Moash walked over, raising a hand toward Bridge Four, who cheered him. Moash's brilliant Shardplate—which he'd had repainted blue with red accents at the points—looked surprisingly natural on him. It hadn't even been a week yet, but Moash walked in the armor easily.

He stepped up to Kaladin, then knelt down on one knee, Plate clinking. He saluted, arm across chest. 's expression grew grim.m people."s.4

His eyes . . . they were lighter in color; tan instead of deep brown as they'd once been. He wore his Shardblade strapped across his back in a guarded sheath. Only one more day until he had it bonded.

"You don't need to salute me, Moash," Kaladin said. "You're lighteyed now. You outrank me by a mile or two."

"I'll never outrank you, Kal," Moash said, faceplate of his helm up. "You're my captain. Forever." He grinned. "But I can't tell you how much storming fun it is to watch the lighteyes try to figure out how to deal with me."

"Your eyes are really changing."

“Yeah,” Moash said. “But I’m not one of them, you hear me? I’m one of us. Bridge Four. I’m our . . . secret weapon.”

“Secret?” Kaladin asked, raising an eyebrow. “They’ve probably heard about you all the way in Iri by now, Moash. You’re the first darkeyed man to be given a Blade and Plate in over a lifetime.”

Dalinar had even granted Moash lands and a stipend from them, a lavish sum, and not just by bridgeman standards. Moash still stopped by for stew some nights, but not all. He was too busy arranging his new quarters.

There was nothing wrong with that. It was natural. It was also part of why Kaladin had turned down the Blade himself—and perhaps why he’d always been worried about showing his powers to the lighteyes. Even if they didn’t find a way to take the abilities from him—he knew that fear was irrational, though he felt it all the same—they might find a way to take Bridge Four from him. His men . . . his very self.

They might not be the ones who take it from you, Kaladin thought. You might be doing it to yourself, better than any lighteyes could.

The thought nauseated him.

“We’re getting close,” Moash said softly as Kaladin took out his waterskin.

“Close?” Kaladin asked. He lowered the waterskin and looked over his shoulder across the plateaus. “I thought we still had a few hours to go before we reached the dead chrysalis.”

It was far out, almost as far out as the armies went on bridge runs. Bethab and Thanadal had claimed it yesterday.

“Not that,” Moash said, looking to the side. “Other things.”

“Oh. Moash, are you . . . I mean . . .”

“Kal,” Moash said. “You’re with us, right? You said it.”

Two promises. Syl told him to follow his heart.

“Kaladin,” Moash said, more solemnly. “You gave me these Shards, even after you were angry with me for disobeying you. There’s a reason. You know, deep down, that what I’m doing is right. It’s the only solution.”

Kaladin nodded.

Moash glanced around, then stood up, Plate clinking. He leaned in to whisper. “Don’t worry. Graves says you aren’t going to have to do much. We just need an opening.” blue and goldf, pullre

Kaladin felt sick. “We can’t do it when Dalinar is in the warcamp,” he whispered. “I won’t risk him being hurt.”

“No problem,” Moash said. “We feel the same way. We’ll wait for the right moment. The newest plan is to hit the king with an arrow, so there’s no risk of implicating you or anyone else. You lead him to the right spot, and Graves will fell the king with his own bow. He’s an excellent shot.”

An arrow. It felt so cowardly.

It needed to be done. It needed to be.

Moash patted him on the shoulder, stepping off in his clinking Shardplate. Storms. All Kaladin had to do was lead the king into a specific spot . . . that, and betray Dalinar’s trust in him.

And if I don’t help kill the king, won’t I be betraying justice and honor? The king had murdered—or as good as murdered—many people, some through indifference, others through incompetence. And storms, Dalinar wasn’t innocent either. If he’d been as noble as he pretended, wouldn’t he have seen Roshone imprisoned, rather than shipped off somewhere where he “couldn’t do any more harm”?

Kaladin walked over to the bridge, watching the men march across. Shallan Davar sat primly on a rock, continuing her sketches of the bridge mechanism. Adolin had climbed off his horse and handed it to some grooms for watering. He waved Kaladin over.

“Princeling?” Kaladin asked, stepping up.

“The assassin has been seen out here,” Adolin said. “On the Plains at night.”

“Yes. I heard the scout telling your father about it.”

“We need a plan. What if he attacks out here?”

“I hope he does.”

Adolin looked to him, frowning.

“From what I saw,” Kaladin said, “and from what I’ve learned about the assassin’s initial attack on the old king, he depends on confusion in his victims. He jumps off walls and onto ceilings; he sends men falling the wrong direction. Well, there aren’t any walls or ceilings out here.”

“So he can just full-on fly,” Adolin said with a grimace.

“Yes,” Kaladin said, pointing with a smile, “since we have, what is it, three hundred archers with us?”

Kaladin had used his abilities effectively against Parshendi arrows, and so perhaps archers wouldn’t be able to kill the assassin. But he imagined it would be hard for the man to fight with wave after wave of arrows flying at him.

Adolin nodded slowly. “I’ll talk to them, get them ready for the possibility.” He started walking toward the bridge, so Kaladin joined him. They passed Shallan, who was still absorbed in her sketching. She didn’t even notice Adolin waving at her. Lighteyed women and their diversions. Kaladin shook his head.

“Do you know anything about women, bridgeboy?” Adolin asked, looking over his shoulder and watching Shallan as the two of them crossed the bridge.

“Lighteyed women?” Kaladin asked. “Nothing. Thankfully.”

“People think I know a lot about women,” Adolin said. “The truth is, I know

how succession warH5y ly to get them—how to make them laugh, how to make them interested. I don't know how to keep them." He hesitated. "I really want to keep this one."

"So . . . tell her that, maybe?" Kaladin said, thinking back to Tarah, and the mistakes he'd made.

"Do such things work on darkeyed women?"

"You're asking the wrong man," Kaladin said. "I haven't had much time for women lately. I was too busy trying to avoid being killed."

Adolin seemed to be barely listening. "Perhaps I could say something like that to her. . . . Seems too simple, and she's anything but simple. . . ." He turned back to Kaladin. "Anyway. Assassin in White. We need more of a plan than just telling the archers to be ready."

"Do you have any ideas?" Kaladin said.

"You won't have a Shardblade, but won't need one, because of . . . you know."

"I know?" Kaladin felt a spike of alarm.

"Yeah . . . you know." Adolin glanced away and shrugged, as if trying to act nonchalant. "That thing."

"What thing?"

"The thing . . . with the . . . um, stuff?"

He doesn't know, Kaladin realized. He's just fishing, trying to figure out why I can fight so well.

And he's doing a really, really bad job of it.

Kaladin relaxed, and even found himself smiling at Adolin's awkward attempt. It was nice to feel an emotion other than panic or worry. "I don't think you have any idea what you're talking about."

Adolin scowled. “There’s something odd about you, bridgeboy,” he said. “Admit it.”

“I admit nothing.”

“You survived that fall with the assassin,” Adolin said. “And at first, I worried you were working with him. Now . . .”

“Now what?”

“Well, I’ve decided that whatever you are, you’re on my side.” Adolin sighed. “Anyway, the assassin. My instincts say the best plan is the one we used when fighting together in the arena. You distract him while I kill him.”

“That could work, though I worry that he’s not the type to let himself get distracted.”

“Neither was Relis,” Adolin said. “We’ll do it, bridgeboy. You and I. We’re going to bring that monster down.”

“We’ll need to be fast,” Kaladin said. “He’ll win a drawn-out fight. And Adolin, strike for the spine or the head. Don’t try a weakening blow first. Go right for the kill.”

Adolin frowned at him. “Why?”

“I saw something when the two of us fell together,” Kaladin said. “I cut him, but he healed the wound somehow.”

“I have a Blade. He won’t be able to heal from that . . . right?”’s expression grew grim.m people.”s.4

“Best to not find out. Strike to kill. Trust me.”

Adolin met his eyes. “Oddly, I do. Trust you, I mean. It’s a very strange sensation.”

“Yeah, well, I’ll try to hold myself back from going skipping across the plateau in joy.”

Adolin grinned. “I’d pay to see that.”

“Me skipping?”

“You happy,” Adolin said, laughing. “You’ve got a face like a storm! I half think you could frighten off a storm.”

Kaladin grunted.

Adolin laughed again, slapping him on the shoulder, then turned as Shallan finally crossed the bridge, her sketching apparently done. She looked to Adolin fondly, and as he reached out to take her hand, she rose up on her toes and gave him a kiss on the cheek. Adolin drew back, startled. Alethi were more reserved than that in public.

Shallan grinned at him. Then she turned and gasped, raising a hand to her mouth. Kaladin jumped, again, looking for danger—but Shallan just went dashing off to a nearby clump of rocks.

Adolin raised his hand to his cheek, then looked to Kaladin with a grin. “She probably saw an interesting bug.”

“No, it’s moss!” Shallan called back.

“Ah, of course,” Adolin said, strolling over, Kaladin following. “Moss. So exciting.”

“Hush, you,” Shallan said, wagging her pencil at him as she bent down, inspecting the rocks. “The moss grows in a strange pattern here. What could cause that?”

“Alcohol,” Adolin said.

She glanced at him.

He shrugged. “Makes me do crazy things.” He looked at Kaladin, who shook his head. “That was funny,” Adolin said. “It was a joke! Well, kind of.”

“Oh hush,” Shallan said. “This looks almost like the same pattern as a

flowering rockbud, the kind common here on the Plains. . . .” She started sketching.

Kaladin folded his arms. Then he sighed.

“What does that sigh mean?” Adolin asked him.

“Boredom,” Kaladin said, glancing back at the army, still crossing the bridge. With a force of three thousand—that was about half of Dalinar’s current army, following heavy recruitment—moving out here took time. On bridge runs, these crossings had felt so quick. Kaladin had always been exhausted, savoring the chance to rest. “I guess out here, it’s so barren that there’s not much to get excited about other than moss.”

“You hush too,” Shallan told him. “Go polish your bridge or something.” She leaned in, then poked her pencil at a bug that was crawling across the moss. “Ah . . .” she said, then hurriedly scribbled some notes. “Anyway, you’re wrong. There’s a lot out here to get excited about, if you look in the right places. Some of the soldiers said a chasmfiend has been spotted. Do you think it might attack us?”

“You sound entirely too hopeful saying that, Shallan { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah heardre,” Adolin said.

“Well, I do still need a good sketch of one.”

“We’ll get you to the chrysalis. That will have to be enough.”

Shallan’s scholarship was an excuse; the truth was obvious to Kaladin. Dalinar had brought an unusual number of scouts with him today, and Kaladin suspected once they reached the chrysalis—which was on the border of unexplored lands—they’d range ahead and gather information. This was all preparation for Dalinar’s expedition.

“I don’t understand why we need so many soldiers,” Shallan said, noticing Kaladin’s gaze as he studied the army. “Didn’t you say the Parshendi haven’t been showing up to fight over chrysalises lately?”

“No, they haven’t,” Adolin said. “That’s precisely what makes us worried.”

Kaladin nodded. “Whenever your enemy changes established tactics, you need to worry. It could mean they’re getting desperate. Desperation is very, very dangerous.”

“You’re good at military thinking, for a bridgeboy,” Adolin said.

“Coincidentally,” Kaladin said, “you’re good at not being unobnoxious, for a prince.”

“Thanks,” Adolin said.

“That was an insult, dear,” Shallan said.

“What?” Adolin said. “It was?”

She nodded, still sketching, though she glanced up to eye Kaladin. He met the expression calmly.

“Adolin,” Shallan said, turning back to the small rock formation in front of her, “would you slay this moss for me, please?”

“Slay . . . the moss.” He looked at Kaladin, who just shrugged. How was he to know what a lighteyed woman meant? They were a strange breed.

“Yes,” Shallan said, standing up. “Give that moss, and the rock behind it, a good chop. As a favor for your betrothed.”

Adolin looked baffled, but he did as she asked, summoning his Shardblade and hacking at the moss and rock. The top of the small pile of stones slipped free, cut with ease, and clattered to the floor of the plateau.

Shallan stepped up eagerly, crouching down beside the perfectly flat top of the sliced stone. “Mmm,” she said, nodding to herself. She started sketching.

Adolin dismissed his Blade. “Women!” he said, shrugging at Kaladin. Then he went jogging off to get a drink without asking her for an explanation.

Kaladin took a step after him, but then hesitated. What did Shalla find so interesting here? This woman was a puzzle, and he knew he wouldn't be completely comfortable until he understood her. She had too much access to Adolin, and therefore Dalinar, to leave uninvestigated.

He stepped closer, looking over her shoulder as she drew. "Strata," he said. "You're counting the strata of crem to guess how old the rock is."

"Good guess," she said, "but this is a bad location for strata dating. The wind blows across the plateaus too strongly, and the crem doesn't collect in pools evenly. So the strata here are erratic and inaccurate."

Kaladin frowned, narrowing his eyes. The cross section of rock was normal cremstone on the outside, some strata visible as different shades of brown. The center of the stone, though, was white. You didn't see white rock like that often; it had to be quarried. Which meant this was either a very strange occurrence, or . . .

"There was a structure here once," Kaladin said. "A long time ago. It must have taken centuries for the crem to get that thick on something sticking out of the ground."

She glanced at him. "You're smarter than you look." Then, turning back to her drawing, she added, "Good thing . . ."

He grunted. "Why does everything you say have to include some quip? Are you that desperate to prove how clever you are?"

"Perhaps I'm merely annoyed at you for taking advantage of Adolin."

"Advantage?" Kaladin asked. "Because I called him obnoxious?"

"You deliberately said it in a way you expected he wouldn't understand. To make him look like a fool. He's trying very hard to be nice to you."

"Yes," Kaladin said. "He's always so munificent to all of the little darkeyes who flock around to worship him."

Shalla snapped her pencil against the page. "You really are a hateful man,

aren't you? Underneath the mock boredom, the dangerous glares, the growls—you just hate people, is that it?"

"What? No, I—"

"Adolin is trying. He feels bad for what happened to you, and he's doing what he can to make up for it. He is a good man. Is it too much for you to stop provoking him?"

"He calls me bridgeboy," Kaladin said, feeling stubborn. "He's been provoking me."

"Yes, because he is the one storming around with alternating scowls and insults," Shallan said. "Adolin Kholin, the most difficult man to get along with on the Shattered Plains. I mean look at him! He's so unlikable!"

She gestured with the pencil toward where Adolin was laughing with the darkeyed water boys. The groom walked up with Adolin's horse, and Adolin took his Shardplate helm off the carrying post, handing it over, letting one of the water boys try it on. It was ridiculously large on the lad.

Kaladin flushed as the boy took a Shardbearer's pose, and they all laughed again. Kaladin looked back to Shallan, who folded her arms, drawing pad resting on the flat-topped cut rock before her. She smirked at him.

Insufferable woman. Bah!

Kaladin left her and hiked across the rough ground to join Bridge Four, where he insisted on taking a turn hauling the bridge, despite Teft's protests that he was "above that sort of thing" now. He was no storming lighteyes. He'd never be above doing an honest day's work.

The familiar weight of the bridge settled onto his shoulders. Rock was right. It did feel lighter than it once had. He smiled as he heard cursing from Lopen's cousins, who—like Renarin—were being initiated on this run into their first { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah heardre bridge carry.

They hiked the bridge over a chasm—crossing on one of Dalinar’s larger, less mobile ones—and started across the plateau. For a time, marching at the front of Bridge Four, Kaladin could imagine that his life was simple. No plateau assaults, no arrows, no assassins or bodyguarding. Just him, his team, and a bridge.

Unfortunately, as they neared the other side of the large plateau, he started to feel weary and—by reflex—tried to suck in some Stormlight to bolster him. It wouldn’t come.

Life was not simple. It never had been, certainly not while running bridges. To pretend otherwise was to paint over the past.

He helped set the bridge down, then—noticing the vanguard moving out in front of the army—he and the bridgemen shoved their bridge into place across the chasm. The vanguard cheerfully welcomed the chance to get ahead, marching over the bridge and securing the next plateau.

Kaladin and the others followed, then—a half hour later—they let the vanguard onto the next plateau. They continued like that for a time, waiting for Dalinar’s bridge to arrive before crossing, then leading the vanguard onto the next plateau. Hours passed—sweaty, muscle-straining hours. Good hours. Kaladin didn’t come to any realizations about the king, or his place in the man’s potential assassination. But for the moment, he carried his bridge and enjoyed the progress of an army moving toward their goal beneath an open sky.

As the day grew long, they approached the target plateau, where the hollowed-out chrysalis awaited Shallan’s study. Kaladin and Bridge Four let the vanguard across as they’d been doing, then settled in to wait. Eventually, the bulk of the army approached, and Dalinar’s lumbering bridges moved into position, ratcheting down to span the chasm.

Kaladin gulped deeply of warm water as he watched. He washed his face with the water, then wiped his brow. They were getting close. This plateau was far out onto the Plains, almost to the Tower itself. Getting back would take hours, assuming they moved at the same relaxed speed they had taken getting out here. It would be well after dark when they returned to the

warcamps.

If Dalinar does want to assault the center of the Shattered Plains, Kaladin thought, it will take days of marching, all the while exposed on the plateaus, with the potential of being surrounded and cut off from the warcamps.

The Weeping would make a great chance for that. Four straight weeks of rain, but no highstorms. This was the off year, when there wouldn't even be a highstorm on Lightday in the middle—part of the thousand-day cycle of two years that made up a full storm rotation. Still, he knew that many Alethi patrols had tried exploring eastward before. They'd all been destroyed by highstorms, chasmfiends, or Parshendi assault teams.

Nothing short of an all-out, full-on movement of resources toward the center would work. An assault that would leave Dalinar, and whoever came with him, isolated.

Dalinar's bridge thumped down into place. Kaladin's men traversed their own bridge and prepared to pull it across to go move the vanguard. Kaladin crossed, then waved them on ahead of him. He walked over to where the larger bridge had settled down.

Dalinar was crossing it while walking with some of his scouts, all vaulters, with servants behind carrying long poles. "I want you to spread out," the highprince succession warH5y ly said to them. "We won't have much time before we need to head back. I want a survey of as many plateaus as you can see from here. The more of our route we can plan now, the less time we'll have to waste during the actual assault."

The scouts nodded, saluting as he dismissed them. He stepped off the bridge and nodded to Kaladin. Behind them, Dalinar's generals, scribes, and engineers crossed the bridge. They'd be followed by the bulk of the army, and finally the rearguard.

"I hear you've been building mobile bridges, sir," Kaladin said. "You realize those mechanical ones are too slow for your assault, I assume."

Dalinar nodded. "But I will have soldiers carry them. No need for your men

to do so.”

“Sir, that is thoughtful of you, but I don’t think you have to worry. The bridge crews will carry for you, if ordered. Many of them will probably welcome the familiarity.”

“I thought you and your men considered assignment to those bridge crews a death sentence, soldier,” Dalinar said.

“The way Sadeas ran them, it was. You could do a better job. Armored men, trained in formations, running the bridges. Soldiers marching in front with shields. Archers with instructions to defend the bridge crews. Besides, the danger is only for an assault.”

Dalinar nodded. “Prepare the crews, then. Having your men on the bridges will free the soldiers in case we get attacked.” He started to walk across the plateau, but one of the carpenters on the other side of the chasm called to him. Dalinar turned and started to cross the bridge again.

He passed officers and scribes crossing the bridge, including Adolin and Shallan, who walked side by side. She’d given up on the palanquin and he had given up on his horse, and she seemed to be explaining to him about the hidden remnants of a structure she’d found inside that rock earlier.

Behind them, on the other side, he had wanted



Rayse is captive. He cannot leave the system he now inhabits. His destructive potential is, therefore, inhibited.

As the bridge fell out from beneath him, Kaladin reached for Stormlight.

Nothing.

Panic surged through him. His stomach dropped and he tumbled into the air.

The fall into the darkness of the chasm was a brief moment, but also an eternity. He caught a glimpse of Shallan and several men in blue uniforms falling and flailing in terror.

Like a drowning man struggling toward the surface, Kaladin thrashed for the Stormlight. He would not die this way! The sky was his! The winds were his. The chasms were his.

He would not!

Syl screamed, a terrified, painful sound that vibrated Kaladin's very bones. In that moment, he got a breath of Stormlight, life itself.

He crashed into the ground at the bottom of the chasm and all went black.

* * *

Swimming through pain.

The pain washed over him, a liquid, but did not get inside. His skin kept it out.

WHAT HAVE YOU DONE? The distant voice sounded like rumbling thunder.

Kaladin gasped and opened his eyes, and the pain crawled inside. Suddenly, his entire body hurt.

He lay on his back, staring upward at a streak of light in the air. Syl? No . . . no, that was sunlight. The opening at the top of the chasm, high above him. This far out onto the Shattered Plains, the chasms here were hundreds of feet deep.

Kaladin groaned and sat up. That strip of light seemed impossibly distant. He'd been swallowed by the darkness, and the chasm nearby was shadowed, obscure. He put a hand to his head.

I got some Stormlight right at the end, he thought. I survived. But that scream! It haunted him, echoing in his mind. It had sounded too much like the scream he'd heard when touching the duelist's Shardblade in the arena.

Check for wounds, his father's teachings whispered from the back of his mind. The body could go into shock with a bad break or wound, and not notice the damage that had been done. He went through the motions of checking his limbs for breaks, and did not reach for any of the spheres in his pouch. He didn't want to light the gloom, and potentially face the dead around him.

Was Dalinar among them? Adolin had been running toward his father. Had the prince managed to get to Dalinar before the bridge collapsed? He'd been wearing Plate, and had jumped at the end.

Kaladin felt at his legs, then his ribs. He found aches and scrapes, but nothing broken or ripped. That Stormlight he'd held within that theld at the end . . . it had protected him, perhaps even healed him, before running out. He finally reached into his pouch and fished out spheres, but found those all drained. He tried his pocket, then froze as he heard something scraping nearby.

He leaped to his feet and spun, wishing he had a weapon. The chasm bottom grew brighter. A steady glow revealed fanlike frillblooms and draping vines on the walls, gathered twigs and moss on the floor in patches. Was that a voice? He felt a surreal moment of confusion as shadows moved on the wall ahead of him.

Then someone wandered around the corner, wearing a silk dress and carrying a pack over her shoulder. Shallan Davar.

She screamed when she saw him, throwing the pack to the ground and stumbling backward, hands to her sides. She even dropped her sphere.

Rolling his arm in its socket, Kaladin stepped closer into the light. "Calm down," he said. "It's me."

"Stormfather!" Shallan said, scrambling to grab the sphere off the ground again. She stepped forward, thrusting the light toward him. "It is you . . . the bridgeman. How . . . ?"

"I don't know," he lied, looking upward. "I've got a wicked crick in my neck and my elbow hurts like thunder. What happened?"

"Someone threw the emergency latch on the bridge."

"What emergency latch?"

"It topples the bridge into the chasm."

"Sounds like a storming stupid thing to have," Kaladin said, fishing in his pocket for his other spheres. He glanced at them covertly. Also drained. Storms. He'd used them all?

“Depends,” Shallan said. “What if your men have retreated over the bridge and enemies are pouring across it after you? The emergency latch is supposed to have some kind of safety lock so it can’t be thrown by accident, but you can release it in a hurry if you need to.”

He grunted as Shallan shone her sphere past him toward where the two halves of the bridge had smashed into the ground of the chasm. There were the bodies he’d expected.

He looked. He had to. No sign of Dalinar, though several of the officers and lighteyed ladies who had been crossing the bridge lay in twisted, broken heaps on the ground. A drop of two hundred feet or more did not leave survivors.

Except Shallan. Kaladin didn’t remember grabbing her as he fell, but he didn’t remember much of that fall beyond Syl’s scream. That scream . . .

Well, he must have managed to grab Shallan by reflex, infusing her with Stormlight to slow her fall. She looked disheveled, her blue dress scuffed and her hair a mess, but she was apparently otherwise unharmed.

“I woke up down here in the darkness,” Shallan said. “It’s been a while since we fell.”

“How can you tell?”

“It’s almost dark up there,” Shallan said. “It will be night soon. When I woke I heard echoes of yelling. Fighting. I saw something glowing from around that corner. Turned out to be a soldier who had fallen, his sphere pouch ripped.” She shivered visibly. “He’d been killed by . . .” Pattern said in a thinks.⁴ something before the fall.”

“Parshendi,” Kaladin said. “Just before the bridge collapsed, I heard horns from the vanguard. We got attacked.” Damnation. That probably meant that Dalinar had retreated, assuming he’d actually survived. There was nothing worth fighting for out here.

“Give me one of those spheres,” Kaladin said.

She handed one over, and Kaladin went searching among the fallen. For pulses, ostensibly, but really for any equipment or spheres.

“You think any of these might be alive?” Shallan asked, voice sounding small in the otherwise silent chasm.

“Well, we survived somehow.”

“How do you think that happened?” Shallan said, looking upward toward the gap far, far above.

“I saw some windspren just before we fell,” Kaladin said. “I’ve heard folktales of them protecting a person as he falls. Perhaps that’s what happened.”

Shallan went silent as he searched the bodies. “Yes,” she finally said. “That sounds logical.”

She seemed convinced. Good. So long as she didn’t start wondering about the stories told of “Kaladin Stormblessed.”

Nobody else was alive, but he verified for certain that neither Dalinar nor Adolin were among the corpses.

I was a fool not to spot that an assassination attempt was coming, Kaladin thought. Sadeas had tried hard to undermine Dalinar at the feast a few days back, with the revelation of the visions. It was a classic ploy. Discredit your enemy, then kill him, to make certain he didn’t become a martyr.

The corpses had little of value. A handful of spheres, some writing implements that Shallan greedily snatched up and stuffed into her satchel. No maps. Kaladin had no specific idea where they were. And with night imminent . . .

“What do we do?” Shallan asked softly, staring at the darkened realm, with its unexpected shadows, its gently moving frills, vines, polyplike staccatos, their tendrils out and wafting in the air.

Kaladin remembered his first times down in this place, which always felt too

green, too muggy, too alien. Nearby, two skulls peeked out from beneath the moss, watching. Splashing sounded from a distant pool, which made Shallan spin wildly. Though the chasms were a home to Kaladin now, he did not deny that at times they were distinctly unnerving.

“It’s safer down here than it seems,” Kaladin said. “During my time in Sadeas’s army, I spent days upon days in the chasms, gathering salvage from the fallen. Just watch for rotspren.”

“And the chasmfiends?” Shallan asked, spinning to look in another direction as a cremling scuttled along the wall.

“I never saw one.” Which was true, though he had seen a shadow of one once, scraping its way down a distant chasm. Even thinking of that day gave him chills. “They aren’t as common as people claim. The real danger is highstorms. You see, if it rains, even far away from here—”

“Yes, flash flooding,” Shallan said. “Very dangerous in a slot canyon. I’ve read about them.”

“I’m sure that will be very helpful,” his expression grew grim. “You mentioned some dead soldiers nearby?” Kaladin said.

She pointed, and he strode in that direction. She followed, sticking close to his light. He found a few dead spearmen who had been shoved off the plateau above. The wounds were fresh. Just beyond them was a dead Parshendi, also fresh.

The Parshendi man had uncut gems in his beard. Kaladin touched one, hesitated, then tried to draw the Stormlight out. Nothing happened. He sighed, then bowed his head for the fallen, before finally pulling a spear from underneath one of the bodies and standing up. The light above had faded to a deep blue. Night.

“So, we wait?” Shallan asked.

“For what?” Kaladin asked, raising the spear to his shoulder.

“For them to come back . . .” She trailed off. “They’re not coming back for us, are they?”

“They’ll assume we’re dead. Storms, we should be dead. We’re too far out for a corpse-recovery operation, I’d guess. That’s doubly true since the Parshendi attacked.” He rubbed his chin. “I suppose we could wait for Dalinar’s major expedition. He was indicating he’d come this way, searching for the center. It’s only a few days away, right?”

Shallan paled. Well, she paled further. That light skin of hers was so strange. It and the red hair made her look like a very small Horneater. “Dalinar is planning to march just after the final highstorm before the Weeping. That storm is close. And it will involve lots, and lots, and lots of rain.”

“Bad idea, then.”

“You could say so.”

He’d tried to imagine what a highstorm would be like down here. He had seen the aftereffects when salvaging with Bridge Four. The twisted, broken corpses. The piles of refuse crushed against walls and into cracks. Boulders as tall as a man casually washed through chasms until they got wedged between two walls, sometimes fifty feet up in the air.

“When?” he asked. “When is that highstorm?”

She stared at him, then dug into her satchel, flipping through sheets of paper with her freehand while holding the satchel through the fabric of her safehand. She waved him over with his sphere, as she had to tuck hers away.

He held it up for her as she looked over a page with lines of script.

“Tomorrow night,” she said softly. “Just after first moonset.”

Kaladin grunted, holding up his sphere and inspecting the chasm. We’re just to the north of the chasm we fell from, he thought. So the way back should be . . . that way?

“All right then,” Shallan said. She took a deep breath, then snapped her

satchel closed. “We walk back, and we start immediately.”

“You don’t want to sit for a moment and catch your breath?”

“My breath is quite well caught,” Shallan said. “If it’s all the same to you, I’d rather be moving. Once back, we can sit sipping mulled wine and laugh about how silly it was of us to hurry all that way, since we had so much time to spare. I’d like very much to feel that foolish. You?”

“Yeah.” He liked the chasms. It didn’t mean he wanted to risk a highstorm in one of them. “You don’t have a map in that satchel, do you?”

“No,” Shallan said with a grimace. “I didn’t bring my own. Brightness Velat has the maps. I was using hers. But I might be able to remember some of what I’ve seen.”

“Then I think we should go this way,” Kaladin said, pointing. He started walking.

* * *

The bridgeman started walking off in the direction he’d pointed, not even giving her a chance to state her opinion on the matter. Shallan kept a huff to herself, snatching up her pack—she’d found some waterskins on the soldiers—and satchel. She hurried after him, her dress catching on something she hoped was a very white stick.

The tall bridgeman deftly stepped over and around debris, eyes forward. Why did he have to be the one who survived? Though to be honest, she was pleased to find anyone. Walking down here alone would not have been pleasant. At least he was superstitious enough to believe that he’d been saved by some twist of fate and spren. She had no idea how she’d saved herself, let alone him. Pattern rode on her skirts, and before she’d found the bridgeman, he’d been speculating that the Stormlight had kept her alive.

Alive after a fall of at least two hundred feet? It only proved how little she knew about her abilities. Stormfather! She’d saved this man too. She was sure of it; he’d been falling right beside her as they plummeted.

But how? And could she figure out how to do it again?

She hurried to keep up with him. Blasted Alethi and their freakishly long legs. He marched like a soldier, giving no thought to how she had to pick her way more carefully than he did. She didn't want to get her skirt caught on every branch they passed.

They reached a pool of water on the chasm floor, and he hopped up onto a log that bridged the water, barely breaking stride as he crossed. She stopped at the edge.

He looked back at her, holding up a sphere. "You aren't going to demand I give you my boots again, are you?"

She raised a foot, revealing the military-style boots she wore underneath her dress. That got him to cock an eyebrow.

"I wasn't about to come out onto the Shattered Plains in slippers," she said, blushing. "Besides, nobody can see your shoes under a dress this long." She regarded the log.

"You want me to help you across?" he asked.

"Actually, I'm wondering how the trunk of a stumpweight tree got here," she confessed. "They can't possibly be native to this area of the Shattered Plains. Too cold out here. It might have grown along the coast, but a highstorm really carried it that far? Four hundred miles?"

"You're not going to demand we stop for you to sketch a picture, are you?"

"Oh please," Shallan said, stepping up onto the log and picking her way across. "Do you know how many sketches I have of stumpweights?"

The other things down here were a different matter entirely. As they continued on their way, Shallan us { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnahysreed her sphere—which she had to juggle in her freehand, trying to manage it along with the satchel in her safehand and the pack over her shoulder—to illuminate her surroundings. They were

stunning. Dozens of different varieties of vines, frillblooms of red, orange, and violet. Tiny rockbuds on the walls, and haspers in little clusters, opening and closing their shells as if breathing.

Motes of lifspren drifted around a patch of shalebark that grew in knobby patterns like fingers. You almost never saw that formation above. The tiny glowing specks of green light drifted through the chasm toward an entire wall of fist-size tube plants with little feelers wiggling out the top. As Shallan passed, the feelers retracted in a wave running up the wall. She gasped softly and took a Memory.

The bridgeman stopped ahead of her, turning. “Well?”

“Don’t you even notice how beautiful it is?”

He looked up at the wall of tube plants. She was certain she’d read about those somewhere, but the name escaped her.

The bridgeman continued on his way.

Shallan jogged after him, pack thumping against her back. She almost tripped over a snarled pile of dead vines and sticks as she reached him. She cursed, hopping on one foot to stay upright before steadying herself.

He reached out and took the pack from her.

Finally, she thought. “Thank you.”

He grunted, slipping it over his shoulder before continuing on without another word. They reached a crossroads in the chasms, a path going right and another going left. They’d have to weave around the next plateau before them to continue westward. Shallan looked up at the rift—getting a good picture in her mind of how this side of the plateau looked—as Kaladin chose one of the paths.

“This is going to take a while,” he said. “Even longer than it took to get out here. We had to wait upon the whole army then, but we could also cut through the centers of the plateaus. Having to go around every one of them

will add a lot to the trip.”

“Well, at least the companionship is pleasant.”

He eyed her.

“For you, I mean,” she added.

“Am I going to have to listen to you prattle all the way back?”

“Of course not,” she said. “I also intend to do some blathering, a little nattering, and the occasional gibber. But not too much, lest I overdo a good thing.”

“Great.”

“I’ve been practicing my burble,” she added.

“I just can’t wait to hear.”

“Oh, well, that was it, actually.”

He studied her, those severe eyes of his boring into her own. She turned away from him. He didn’t trust her, obviously. He was a bodyguard; she doubted that he trusted many people.

They reached another intersection, and Kaladin took longer to make this decision. She could see why—down here, it was difficult to determine which way was which. The plateau formations were varied and erratic. Some were long and thin, others almost perfectly round. They had knobs and peninsulas off to their sides, and that made a maze of the twisted paths between them. It should have been easy—there were few dead ends, after all, and so they really just had to keep moving westward.

But which direction was westward? It would be very, very easy to get lost down here.

“You’re not picking our course at random, are you?” she asked.

“No.”

“You seem to know a lot about these chasms.”

“I do.”

“Because the gloomy atmosphere matches your disposition, I assume.”

He kept his eyes forward, walking without comment.

“Storms,” she said, hurrying to catch up. “That was supposed to be lighthearted. What would it take to make you relax, bridgeboy?”

“I guess I’m just a . . . what was it again? A ‘hateful man’?”

“I haven’t seen any proof to the contrary.”

“That’s because you don’t care to look, lighteyes. Everyone beneath you is just a plaything.”

“What?” she said, taking it like a slap to the face. “Where would you get that idea?”

“It’s obvious.”

“To whom? To you only? When have you seen me treat someone of a lesser station like a plaything? Give me one example.”

“When I was imprisoned,” he said immediately, “for doing what any lighteyes would have been applauded for doing.”

“And that was my fault?” she demanded.

“It’s the fault of your entire class. Each time one of us is defrauded, enslaved, beaten, or broken, the blame rests upon all of you who support it. Even indirectly.”

“Oh please,” she said. “The world isn’t fair? What a huge revelation! Some people in power abuse those they have power over? Amazing! When did this

start happening?”

He gave no reply. He'd tied his spheres to the top of his spear with a pouch formed from the white handkerchief he'd found on one of the scribes. Held high, it lit the chasm nicely for them.

“I think,” she said, tucking away her own sphere for convenience, “that you're just looking for excuses. Yes, you've been mistreated. I admit it. But I think you're the one who cares about eye color, that it's just easier for you to pretend that every lighteyes is abusing you because of your status. Have you ever asked yourself if there's a simpler explanation? Could it be that people don't like you, not because you're darkeyed, but because you're just a huge pain in the neck?”

He snorted, then moved on more quickly.

“No,” Shallan said, practically running to keep even with him and his long stride. “You're not wiggling out of this. You don't get to imply that I'm abusing my station, then walk off without a response. You did this earlier, with Adolin. Now with me. What is your problem?”

“You want a better example of you playing with people beneath you?” Kaladin asked, dodging her question. “Fine. You stole my boots. You pretended to be someone you weren't and bullied a darkeyed guard you'd barely met. Is that a good enough eou ate chicken?” Renarin asked they hand. s.4xample of you playing with someone you saw as beneath you?”

She stopped in her tracks. He was right, there. She wanted to blame Tyn's influence, but his comment cut the bite out of her argument.

He stopped ahead of her, looking back. Finally, he sighed. “Look,” he said. “I'm not holding a grudge about the boots. From what I've seen lately, you're not as bad as the others. So let's just leave it at that.”

“Not as bad as the others?” Shallan said, walking forward. “What a delightful compliment. Well, let's say you're right. Perhaps I am an insensitive rich woman. That doesn't change the fact that you can be downright mean and offensive, Kaladin Stormblessed.”

He shrugged.

“That’s it?” she asked. “I apologize, and all I get in return is a shrug?”

“I am what the lighteyes have made me to be.”

“So you’re not culpable at all,” she said flatly. “For the way you act.”

“I’d say not.”

“Stormfather. I can’t say anything to change the way you treat me, can I? You’re just going to continue to be an intolerant, odious man, full of spite. Incapable of being pleasant around others. Your life must be very lonely.”

That seemed to get under his skin, as his face turned red in the spherelight. “I’m starting to revise my opinion,” he said, “of you not being as bad as the others.”

“Don’t lie,” she said. “You’ve never liked me. Right from the start. And not just because of the boots. I see how you watch me.”

“That’s because,” he said, “I know you’re lying through your smile at everyone you meet. The only time you seem honest is when you’re insulting someone!”

“The only honest things I can say to you are insults.”

“Bah!” he said. “I just . . . Bah! Why is it that being around you makes me want to claw my face off, woman?”

“I have special training,” she said, glancing to the side. “And I collect faces.”
What was that?

“You can’t just—”

He cut off as the scraping noise, echoing from one of the chasms, grew louder.

Kaladin immediately put his hand over his improvised sphere lantern,

plunging them into darkness. In Shallan's estimation, that did not help. She stumbled toward him in the darkness, grabbing his arm with her freehand. He was annoying, but he was also there.

The scraping continued. A sound like rock on rock. Or . . . carapace on rock.

"I guess," she whispered nervously, "having a shouting match in an echoing network of chasms was not terribly wise."

"Yeah."

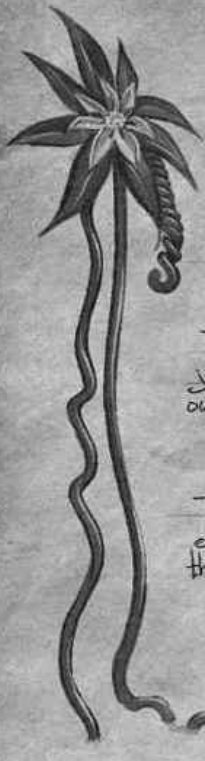
"It's getting closer, isn't it?" she whispered.

"Yeah."

"So . . . run?"

The scraping seemed just beyond the next turn. { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnahysre

"Yeah," Kaladin said, pulling his hand off his spheres and charging away from the noise.



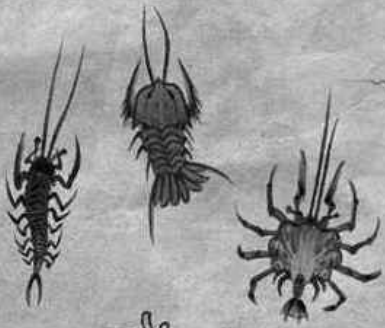
A variety of vinebud that
is unknown to men.

It is difficult to study,
as it mostly clings to the stone
above the waterline.

It blooms a tremendous flower
of bright leaves, and the vines
grow to be dozens of feet long!

The vines appear to seek, not
just water, but others of their
own kind, creating the occasional
tangle in the chasms above.

The volume seems incredibly
elastic! When withdrawn, both
the length and diameter visibly
compress more than any
variety I've ever seen.



A standard, though
very large variety of
frillbloom grows here.





Whether this was Tanavast's design or not, millennia have passed without Rayse taking the life of another of the sixteen. While I mourn for the great suffering Rayse has caused, I do not believe we could hope for a better outcome than this.

Kaladin scrambled down the chasm, leaping branches and refuse, splashing through puddles. The girl kept up better than he'd expected, but—hampered by her dress—she was nowhere near as swift as he was.

He held himself back, matching her pace. Exasperating though she might be, he wasn't going to abandon Adolin's betrothed to be eaten by a chasmfiend.

They reached an intersection and chose a path at random. At the next intersection, he only paused long enough to check to see if they were being followed.

They were. Thumping from behind them, claws on stone. Scraping. He grabbed the girl's satchel—he was already carrying her pack—as they ran down another corridor. Either Shallan was in excellent shape, or the panic got to her, because she didn't even seem winded when they reached the next intersection.

No time for hesitation. He barreled down a pathway, ears full of the sound of grinding carapace. A sudden four-voiced trump echoed through the chasm, as loud as a thousand horns being blown. Shallan screamed, though Kaladin barely heard her over the horrible sound.

The chasm plants withdrew in large waves. In moments, the entire place went from fecund to barren, like the world preparing for a highstorm. They hit another intersection, and Shallan hesitated, looking back toward the sounds. She held her hands out, as if preparing to embrace the thing. Storming woman! He grabbed her and pulled her after him. They ran down two chasms without stopping.

It was still chasing, though he could only hear it. He had no idea how close it was, but it had their scent. Or their sound? He had no idea how they hunted.

Need a plan! Can't just—

At the next intersection, Shallan turned the opposite way from the one he had picked. Kaladin cursed, pounding to a stop and running after her.

“This is no time,” he said, puffing, “to argue about—”

“Shut it,” she said. “Follow.”

She led them to an intersection, then another. Kaladin was feeling winded, his lungs protesting. Shallan stopped, then pointed and ran down a chasm. He followed, looking over his shoulder.

He could see only blackness. Moonlight was too distant, too choked, to illuminate these depths. They wouldn't know if the beast was upon them until it entered the light of his spheres. But Stormfather, . . .” Pattern said, speaking his t it sounded close.

Kaladin turned his attention back to his running. He nearly tripped over something on the ground. A corpse? He leaped it, catching up to Shallan. The hem o019;s lumberya



He bears the weight of God's own divine hatred, separated from the virtues that gave it context. He is what we made him to be, old friend. And that is what he, unfortunately, wished to become.

"I was young," Teft said, "so I didn't hear much. Kelek, I didn't want to hear much. The things my family did, they weren't the sort of things you want your parents doing, all right? I didn't want to know. So it's not surprising I can't remember."

Sigzil nodded in that mild, yet infuriating way of his. The Azish man just knew things. And he made you tell him things too. Unfair, that was. Terribly. Why did Teft have to end up with him on watch duty?

The two sat on rocks { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: 0.00em; margin-left: 0.00em; } that checks near the chasms just east of Dalinar's warcamp. A cold wind blew in. Highstorm tonight.

He'll be back before then. Surely by then.

A cremling scuttled past. Teft threw a rock at it, driving it toward a nearby crack. "I don't know why you want to hear all of these things anyway. They

aren't any use."

Sigzil nodded. Storming foreigner.

"All right, fine," Teft said. "It was some kind of cult, you see, called the Envisagers. They . . . well, they thought if they could find a way to return the Voidbringers, then the Knights Radiant would return as well. Stupid, right? Only, they knew things. Things they shouldn't, things like what Kaladin can do."

"I see this is hard for you," Sigzil said. "Want to play another hand of michim to pass the time instead?"

"You just want my storming spheres," Teft snapped, wagging his finger at the Azish man. "And don't call it by that name."

"Michim is the game's actual name."

"That's a holy word, and ain't no game named a holy word."

"The word isn't holy where it came from," Sigzil said, obviously annoyed.

"We ain't there now, are we? Call it something else."

"I thought you'd like it," Sigzil said, picking up the colored rocks that were used in the game. You bet them, in a pile, while trying to guess the ones your opponent had hidden. "It's a game of skill, not chance, so it doesn't offend Vorin sensibilities."

Teft watched him pick up the rocks. Maybe it would be better if he just lost all of his spheres in that storming game. It wasn't good for him to have money again. He couldn't be trusted with money.

"They thought," Teft said, "that people were more likely to manifest powers if their lives were in danger. So . . . they'd put lives in danger. Members of their own group—never an innocent outsider, bless the winds. But that was bad enough. I watched people let themselves be pushed off cliffs, watched them tied in place with a candle slowly burning a rope until it snapped and dropped a rock to crush them. It was bad, Sigzil. Awful. The sort of thing

nobody should have to watch, especially a boy of six.”

“So what did you do?” Sigzil asked softly, pulling tight the string on his little bag of rocks.

“Ain’t none of your business,” Teft said. “Don’t know why I’m even talking to you.”

“It’s all right,” Sigzil said. “I can see—”

“I turned them in,” Teft blurted out. “To the citylord. He held a trial for them, a big one. Had them all executed in the end. Never did understand that. They were only a danger to themselves. Their punishment for threatening suicide was to be killed. Nonsense, that is. Should have found a way to help them . . .”

“Your parents?”

“Mother died in that rock–string contraption,” Teft said. “She really believed, Sig. That she had it in her, you know? The powers? That if she were about to die, they’d come out in her, and she’d save herself { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah killedre . . .”

“And you watched?”

“Storms, no! You think they’d let her son watch that? Are you mad?”

“But—”

“Did watch my father die, though,” Teft said, looking out over the Plains. “Hanged.” He shook his head, digging in his pocket. Where had he put that flask? As he turned, however, he caught sight of that other lad sitting back there, fiddling with his little box as he often did. Renarin.

Teft wasn’t one for all that nonsense like Moash had talked about, wanting to overturn lighteyes. The Almighty had put them in their place, and who had business questioning him? Not spearmen, that’s for certain. But in a way, Prince Renarin was as bad as Moash. Neither one knew their place. A lighteyes wanting to join Bridge Four was as bad as a darkeyes talking stupid

and lofty to the king. It didn't fit, even if the other bridgemen seemed to like the lad.

And, of course, Moash was one of them now. Storms. Had he left his flask back at the barrack?

"Heads up, Teft," Sigzil said, rising.

Teft turned around and saw men in uniform approaching. He scrambled to his feet, grabbing his spear. It was Dalinar Kholin, accompanied by several of his lighteyed advisors, along with Drehy and Skar from Bridge Four, the day's guards. With Moash promoted away and Kaladin . . . well, not there . . . Teft had taken over daily assignments. Nobody else would storming do it. They said he was in command now. Idiots.

"Brightlord," Teft said, slapping his chest in salute.

"Adolin told me you men were coming here," the highprince said. He spared a glance for Prince Renarin, who had also stood and saluted, as if this weren't his own father. "A rotation, I understand?"

"Yes, sir," Teft said, looking toward Sigzil. It was a rotation.

Teft was just on nearly every shift.

"You really think he's alive out there, soldier?" Dalinar asked.

"He is, sir," Teft said. "It's not about what I or anyone thinks."

"He fell hundreds of feet," Dalinar said.

Teft continued to stand at attention. The highprince hadn't asked a question, so Teft didn't give a reply.

He did have to banish a few terrible images in his head. Kaladin having knocked his head while falling. Kaladin having been crushed by the falling bridge. Kaladin lying with a broken leg, unable to find spheres to heal himself. The fool boy thought he was immortal, sometimes.

Kelek. They all thought he was.

“He is going to come back, sir,” Sigzil said to Dalinar. “He’s going to come climbing right up out of that chasm right there. It will be well if we’re here to meet him. Uniforms on, spears polished.”

“We wait on our own time, sir,” Teft said. “Neither of us three are supposed to be anywhere else.” He blushed as soon as he said it. And here he’d been thinking about how Moash talked back to his betters.

“I didn’t come to order you away from your chosen task, soldier,” Dalinar said. “I came to make certain you were carou ate chicken?” Renarin asked they le and s.4ing for yourselves. No men are to skip meals to wait here, and I don’t want you getting any ideas about waiting during a highstorm.”

“Er, yes, sir,” Teft said. He had used his morning meal break to put in duty here. How had Dalinar known?

“Good luck, soldier,” Dalinar said, then continued on his way, flanked by attendants, apparently off to inspect the battalion that was nearest to the eastern edge of camp. Soldiers there scurried like cremlings after a storm, carrying supply bags and piling them inside their barracks. The time for Dalinar’s full expedition onto the Plains was quickly approaching.

“Sir,” Teft called after the highprince.

Dalinar turned back toward him, his attendants pausing mid-sentence.

“You don’t believe us,” Teft said. “That he’ll come back, I mean.”

“He’s dead, soldier. But I understand that you need to be here anyway.” The highprince touched his hand to his shoulder, a salute to the dead, then continued on his way.

Well, Teft supposed that was all right, Dalinar not believing. He’d just be that much more surprised when Kaladin did return.

Highstorm tonight, Teft thought, settling back down on his rock. Come on, lad. What are you doing out there?

* * *

Kaladin felt like one of the ten fools.

Actually, he felt like all of them. Ten times an idiot. But most specifically Eshu, who spoke of things he did not understand in front of those who did.

Navigation this deep in the chasms was hard, but he could usually read directions by the way that the debris was deposited. Water blew in from the east to the west, but then it drained out the other way—so cracks on walls where debris was smashed in tight usually marked a western direction, but places where debris had been deposited more naturally—as water drained—marked where water had flowed east.

His instincts told him which way to go. They'd been wrong. He shouldn't have been so confident. This far from the warcamps, the waterflows must be different.

Annoyed at himself, he left Shallan drawing and walked out a ways. "Syl?" he asked.

No response.

"Sylphrena!" he said, louder.

He sighed and walked back to Shallan, who knelt on the mossy ground—she'd obviously given up on protecting the once-fine dress from stains and rips—drawing on her sketchpad. She was another reason he felt like a fool. He shouldn't let her provoke him so. He could hold in the retorts against other, far more annoying lighteyes. Why did he lose control when talking with her?

Should have learned my lesson, he thought as she sketched, her expression growing intense. She's won every argument so far, hands down.

He leaned against a section of the chasm wall, spear in the crook of his arm, light shining from the spheres tied tightly at its head. He had made invalid assumptions about her, as she had so poignantly noted. Again and again. It

was like a part of him frantically wanted to dislike her.

If only he into step beside hm. This wass.4 could find Syl. Everything would be better if he could see her again, if he could know that she was all right. That scream . . .

To distract himself, he moved over to Shallan, then leaned down to see her sketch. Her map was more of a picture, one that looked eerily like the view Kaladin had had, nights ago, when flying above the Shattered Plains.

“Is all that necessary?” he asked as she shaded in the sides of a plateau.

“Yes.”

“But—”

“Yes.”

It took longer than he’d have preferred. The sun passed through the crack overhead, vanishing from sight. A1C;Cover that

ready past noon. They had seven hours until the highstorm, assuming the timing prediction was right—even the best stormwardens got the calculations wrong sometimes.

Seven hours. The hike out here, he thought, took about that long. But surely they'd made some progress toward the warcamps. They'd hiked all morning.

Well, no use rushing Shallan. He left her to it, walking back along the chasm, looking up at the shape of the rift up above and comparing it to her drawing. From what he could see, her map was dead on. She was drawing, from memory, their entire path as if seen from above—and she did it perfectly, every little knob and ledge accounted for.

“Stormfather,” he whispered, jogging back. He'd known she had skill in drawing, but this was something entirely different.

Who was this woman?

She was still drawing when he arrived. “Your picture is amazingly accurate,” he said.

“I may have . . . underplayed my skill a little last night,” Shallan said. “I can remember things pretty well, though to be honest, I didn't realize how far off our path was until I drew it. A lot of these plateau shapes are unfamiliar to me; we might be into the areas that haven't been mapped yet.”

He looked to her. “You remember the shapes of all of the plateaus on the maps?”

“Uh . . . yes?”

“That's incredible.”

She sat back on her knees, holding up her sketch. She brushed aside an unruly lock of red hair. “Maybe not. Something's very odd here.”

“What?”

“I think my sketch must be off.” She stood up, looking troubled. “I need more

information. I'm going to walk around one of the plateaus here."

"All right . . ."

She started walking, still focused on her sketch, barely paying attention to where she was going as she stumbled over rocks and sticks. He kept up with ease, but didn't bother her as she turned her eyes toward the rift ahead. She walked them all the way around the base of the plateau to their right.

It took a painfully long time, even walking quickly. They were losing minutes. Did she know where they were or not?

"Now that plateau," she said, pointing to the next wall. She began walking around the base of that plateau.

"Shallan," Kaladin said. "We don't have—"

"This is important."

"So is not getting crushed in a highstorm."

"If we don't find out where we are, we won't ever escape," she said, handing him the sheet of paper. "Wait here. I'll be right back." She jogged off, skirt swishing.

Kaladin stared at the paper, inspecting the path she'd drawn. Though they'd started the morning going the right way, it was as he'd feared—Kaladin had eventually wound them around until they were going directly south again. He'd even somehow turned them back going east for a while!

That put them even farther from Dalinar's camp than when they'd begun the night before.

Please let her be wrong, he thought, going around the plateau the other direction to meet her halfway.

But if she was wrong, they wouldn't know where they were at all. Which option was worse?

He got a short distance down the chasm before freezing. The walls here were scraped free of moss, the debris on the floor pushed around and scratched. Storms, this was fresh. Since the last highstorm at least. The chasmfiend had come this way.

Maybe . . . maybe it had gone past on its way farther out into the chasms.

Shallan, distracted and muttering to herself, appeared around the other side of the plateau. She walked, still staring at the sky, muttering to herself. “. . . I know I said that I saw these patterns, but this is too grand a scale for me to know instinctively. You should have said something. I—”

She cut off abruptly, jumping as she saw Kaladin. He found himself narrowing his eyes. That had sounded like . . .

Don't be silly. She's no warrior. The Knights Radiant had been soldiers, hadn't they? He didn't really know much about them.

Still, Syl had seen several strange spren about.

Shallan gave a glance to the wall of the chasm and the scrapes. “Is that what I think it is?”

“Yeah,” he said.

“Delightful. Here, give me that paper.”

He handed it back and she slipped a pencil out of her sleeve. He gave her the satchel, which she set on the floor, using the stiff side as a place to sketch. She filled in the two plateaus closest to them, the ones she'd walked around to get a full view.

“So is your drawing off or not?” Kaladin asked.

“It's accurate,” Shallan said as she drew, “it's just strange. From my memory of the maps, this set of plateaus nearest to us should be farther to the north. There is another group of them up there that are exactly the same shape, only mirrored.”

“You can remember the maps that well?”

“Yes.”

He didn't press further. From what he'd seen, maybe she could do just that.

She shook her head. “What are the chances that a series of plateaus would take the exact same shape as those on another part of the Plains? Not just one, but an entire sequence . . .”

blue and gold. After re““The Plains are symmetrical,” Kaladin said.

She froze. “How do you know that?”

“I . . . it was a dream. I saw the plateaus arrayed in a wide symmetrical formation.”

She looked back at her map, then gasped. She began scribbling notes on the side. “Cymatics.”

“What?”

“I know where the Parshendi are.” Her eyes widened. “And the Oathgate. The center of the Shattered Plains. I can see it all—I can map almost the entire thing.”

He shivered. “You . . . what?”

She looked up sharply, meeting his eyes. “We have to get back.”

“Yes, I know. The highstorm.”

“More than that,” she said, standing. “I know too much now to die out here. The Shattered Plains are a pattern. This isn't a natural rock formation.” Her eyes widened further. “At the center of these Plains was a city. Something broke it apart. A weapon . . . Vibrations? Like sand on a plate? An earthquake that could break rock . . . Stone became sand, and at the blowing of the highstorms, the cracks full of sand were hollowed out.”

Her eyes seemed eerily distant, and Kaladin didn't understand half of what she'd said.

"We need to reach the center," Shallan said. "I can find it, the heart of these Plains, by following the pattern. And there will be . . . things there . . ."

"The secret you're searching for," Kaladin said. What had she said just earlier? "Oathgate?"

She blushed deeply. "Let's keep moving. Didn't you mention how little time we had? Honestly, if one of us weren't chatting away all the time and distracting everyone, I'm half certain we'd be back already."

He cocked an eyebrow at her, and she grinned, then pointed the direction for them to go. "I'm leading now, by the way."

"Probably for the best."

"Though," she said, "as I consider, it might be better to let you lead. That way, we might find our way to the center by accident. Assuming we don't end up in Azir."

He gave her a chuckle at that because it seemed the right thing to do. Inside, however, it ripped him apart. He'd failed.

The next few hours were excruciating. After walking the length of two plateaus, Shallan had to stop and update her map. It was correct to do so—they couldn't risk getting off track again.

It just took so much time. Even moving as quickly as they could between drawing sessions, practically running the entire way, their progress was too slow.

Kaladin shuffled from foot to foot, watching the sky as Shallan filled in her map again. She cursed and grumbled, and he noticed her brushing away a drop of sweat that had fallen from her brow onto the increasingly crumpled paper.

Maybe four hours left until the storm, Kaladin thought. We aren't going to

make it.

“I’ll try for scouts again,”ou ate chicken?” Renarin asked they le and s.4 he said.

Shallan nodded. They had entered the territory where Dalinar’s pole-wielding scouts watched for new chrysalises. Shouting to them was a slim hope—even if they were lucky enough to find one of those groups, he doubted they had enough rope handy to reach to the bottom of the chasm.

But it was a chance. So he moved away—so as to not disturb her drawing—cupped his mouth, and began shouting. “Hello! Please reply! We’re trapped in the chasms! Please reply!”

He walked for a time, shouting, then stopped to listen. Nothing came back. No questioning shouts echoing down from above, no signs of life.

They’ve probably all withdrawn into their cubbies by now, Kaladin thought. They’ve broken down their watchposts and are waiting for the highstorm.

He stared up with frustration at that slot of attenuated sky. So distant. He remembered this feeling, being down here with Teft and the others, longing to climb out and escape the horrible life of a bridgeman.

For the hundredth time, he tried drawing in the Stormlight of those spheres. He clutched the sphere until his hand and the glass were sweaty, but the Stormlight—the power within—did not flow to him. He couldn’t feel the Light anymore.

“Syl!” he yelled, tucking away the sphere, cupping his hands around his mouth. “Syl! Please! Are you there, anywhere . . . ?” He trailed off. “I still don’t know,” he said more softly. “Is this a punishment? Or is it something more? What is wrong?”

No reply. Surely if she were watching him, she wouldn’t let him die down here. Assuming she could think to notice. He had a horrible image of her riding the winds, mingling with the windspren, having forgotten herself and him—becoming terribly, blissfully ignorant of what she truly was.

She'd feared that. She'd been terrified of it.

Shallan's boots scratched the ground as she walked up. "No luck?"

He shook his head.

"Well, onward, then." She took a deep breath. "Through soreness and exhaustion we go. You wouldn't be willing to carry me a little ways . . ."

He glared at her.

She shrugged with a smile. "Think how grand it would be! I could even get a reed to whip you with. You'd be able to go back and tell all the other guards what an awful person I am. It'll be a wonderful opportunity for griping. No? Well, all right then. Off we go."

"You're a strange woman."

"Thank you."

He fell into step beside her.

"My," she noted, "you've brewed another storm over your head, I see."

"I've killed us," he whispered. "I took the lead, and I got us lost."

"Well, I didn't notice we were going the wrong way either. I wouldn't have done any better."

"I should have thought to have you map our progress from the start today. I was too confident."

"It's done," she said. "If I'd been more clear with you about how well I could draw these plateaus, then you'd probably have made better { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah killedre use of my maps. I didn't, and you didn't know, so here we are. You can't blame yourself for everything, right?"

He walked in silence.

“Uh, right?”

“It’s my fault.”

She rolled her eyes exaggeratedly. “You are really intent on beating yourself up, aren’t you?”

His father had said the same thing time and time again. It was who Kaladin was. Did they expect him to change?

“We’ll be fine,” Shallan said. “You’ll see.”

That darkened his mood further.

“You still think I’m too optimistic, don’t you?” Shallan said.

“It’s not your fault,” Kaladin said. “I’d rather be like you. I’d rather not have lived the life I have. I would that the world was only full of people like you, Shallan Davar.”

“People who don’t understand pain.”

“Oh, all people understand pain,” Kaladin said. “That’s not what I’m talking about. It’s . . .”

“The sorrow,” Shallan said softly, “of watching a life crumble? Of struggling to grab it and hold on, but feeling hope become stringy sinew and blood beneath your fingers as everything collapses?”

“Yes.”

“The sensation—it’s not sorrow, but something deeper—of being broken. Of being crushed so often, and so hatefully, that emotion becomes something you can only wish for. If only you could cry, because then you’d feel something. Instead, you feel nothing. Just . . . haze and smoke inside. Like you’re already dead.”

He stopped in the chasm.

She turned and looked to him. “The crushing guilt,” she said, “of being powerless. Of wishing they’d hurt you instead of those around you. Of screaming and scrambling and hating as those you love are ruined, popped like a boil. And you have to watch their joy seeping away while you can’t do anything. They break the ones you love, and not you. And you plead. Can’t you just beat me instead?”

“Yes,” he whispered.

Shallan nodded, holding his eyes. “Yes. It would be nice if nobody in the world knew of those things, Kaladin Stormblessed. I agree. With everything I have.”

He saw it in her eyes. The anguish, the frustration. The terrible nothing that clawed inside and sought to smother her. She knew. It was there, inside. She had been broken.

Then she smiled. Oh, storms. She smiled anyway.

It was the single most beautiful thing he’d seen in his entire life.

“How?” he asked.

She shrugged lightly. “Helps if you’re crazy. Come on. I do believe we’re under a slight time constraint . . .”

She started down the chasm. He stood behind, feeling drained. And oddly brightened.

He should feel like a fool. He’d done it again—he’d been telling her how easy her life was, vanished to mist. After a while she’d had that hiding inside of her all along. This time, though, he didn’t feel like an idiot. He felt like he understood. Something. He didn’t know what. The chasm just seemed a little brighter.

Tien always did that to me . . . he thought. Even on the darkest day.

He stood still long enough that frillblooms opened around him, their wide, fanlike fronds displaying veined patterns of orange, red, and violet. He

eventually jogged after Shallan, shocking the plants closed.

“I think,” she said, “we need to focus on the positive side of being down here in this terrible chasm.”

She eyed him. He didn’t say anything.

“Come on,” she said.

“I . . . have the sense that it would be better not to encourage you.”

“What’s the fun in that?”

“Well, we are about to get hit by a highstorm’s flood.”

“So our clothing will get washed,” she said with a grin. “See! Positive.”

He snorted.

“Ah, that bridgeman grunt dialect again,” she noted.

“That grunt meant,” he said, “that at least if the waters come, it will wash away some of your stench.”

“Ha! Mildly amusing, but no points to you. I already established that you’re the malodorous one. Reuse of jokes is strictly forbidden on pain of getting dunked in a highstorm.”

“All right then,” he said. “It’s a good thing we’re down here because I had guard duty tonight. Now I’m going to miss it. That is practically like getting the day off.”

“To go swimming, no less!”

He smiled.

“I,” she proclaimed, “am glad we are down here because the sun is far too bright up above, and it tends to give me a sunburn unless I wear a hat. It is much better to be down in the dank, dark, smelly, moldy, potentially life-

threatening depths. No sunburns. Just monsters.”

“I’m glad to be down here,” he said, “because at least it was me, and not one of my men, who fell.”

She hopped over a puddle, then eyed him. “You’re not very good at this.”

“Sorry. I meant that I’m glad to be down here because when we get out, everyone will cheer me for being a hero for rescuing you.”

“Better,” Shallan said. “Except for the fact that I do believe that I am the one rescuing you.”

He glanced at her map. “Point.”

“I,” she said, “am glad to be down here because I’ve always wondered what it’s like to be a chunk of meat traveling through a digestive system, and these chasms remind me of the intestines.”

“I hope you’re not serious.”

“What?” She looked shocked. “Of course I’m not. Ew.”ou ate chicken?”
Renarin asked they le and s.4

“You really do try too hard.”

“It’s what keeps me insane.”

He scrambled up a large pile of debris, then offered a hand to help her. “I,” he said, “am happy to be here because it reminds me of how lucky I am to be free of Sadeas’s army.”

“Ah,” she said, stepping up to the top with him.

“His lighteyes sent us down here to gather,” Kaladin said, sliding down the other side. “And didn’t pay us much at all for the effort.”

“Tragic.”

“You could say,” he told her as she stepped down off the pile, “that we were given only a pittance.”

He grinned at her.

She cocked her head.

“Pit-tance,” he said, gesturing toward the depth of the hole they were in. “You know. We’re in a pit . . .”

“Oh, storms,” she said. “You don’t actually expect that to count. That was terrible!”

“I know. I’m sorry. My mother would be disappointed.”

“She didn’t like wordplay?”

“No, she loved it. She’d just be mad I tried to do it when she wasn’t around to laugh at me.”

Shallan smiled, and they continued on, keeping a brisk pace. “I am glad we’re down here,” she said, “because by now, Adolin will be worried sick about me—so when we get back, he’ll be ecstatic. He might even let me kiss him in public.”

Adolin. Right. That dampened his mood.

“We probably need to stop so I can draw out our map,” Shallan said, frowning at the sky. “And so that you can yell some more for our potential salvation.”

“I suppose,” he said as she settled down to get out her map. He cupped his hands. “Hey, up there? Anyone? We’re down here, and we’re making bad puns. Please save us from ourselves!”

Shallan chuckled.

Kaladin smiled, then started as he actually heard something echoing back. Was that a voice? Or . . . Wait . . .

A trumping sound—like a horn’s call, but overlapping itself. It grew louder, washing over them.

Then an enormous, skittering mass of carapace and claws crashed around the corner.

Chasmfiend.

Kaladin’s mind panicked, but his body simply moved. He snatched Shallan by the arm, hauling her to her feet and pulling her into a run. She shouted, dropping her satchel.

Kaladin pulled her after him and did not look back. He could feel the thing, too close, the walls of the chasm shaking from its pursuit. Bones, twigs, shell, and plants cracked and snapped.

The monster trumped again, a deafening sound.

It was almost upon them. Storms, but it could move. He’d never have imagined something so large being so quick. There was no distracting it this time. It was almost upon them; he could feel it right behind into step beside hm. This wass.4 . . .

There.

He whipped Shallan in front of him and thrust her into a fissure in the wall. As a shadow loomed over him, he threw himself into the fissure, shoving Shallan backward. She grunted as he pressed her against some of the refuse of twigs and leaves that had been packed into this crack by floodwaters.

The chasm fell silent. Kaladin could hear only Shallan’s panting and his own heartbeat. They’d left most of their spheres on the ground, where Shallan had been preparing to draw. He still had his spear, his improvised lantern.

Slowly, Kaladin twisted about, putting his back to Shallan. She held him from behind, and he could feel her tremble. Stormfather. He trembled himself. He twisted his spear to give light, peering out at the chasm. This fissure was shallow, and only a few feet stood between him and the opening.

The frail, washed-out light of his diamond spheres twinkled off the wet floor. It illuminated broken frillblooms on the walls and several writhing vines on the ground, severed from their plants. They twisted and flopped, like men arching their backs. The chasmfiend . . . Where was it?

Shallan gasped, arms tightening around his waist. He looked up. There, higher up the crack, a large, inhuman eye watched them. He couldn't see the bulk of the chasmfiend's head; just part of the face and jaw, with that terrible glassy green eye. A large claw slammed against the side of the hole, trying to force its way in, but the crack was too small.

The claw dug at the hole, and then the head withdrew. Scraping rock and chitin sounded in the chasm, but the thing didn't go far before stopping.

Silence. A steady drip somewhere fell into a pool. But otherwise, silence.

"It's waiting," Shallan whispered, head near his shoulder.

"You sound proud of it!" Kaladin snapped.

"A little." She paused. "How long, do you suppose, until . . ."

He looked upward, but couldn't see the sky. The crack didn't run all the way up the side of the chasm, and was barely ten or fifteen feet tall. He leaned forward to look at the slot high above, not extending all the way out of the crack, just getting a little closer to the lip so he could see the sky. It was getting dark. Not sunset yet, but getting close.

"Two hours, maybe," he said. "I—"

A crashing tempest of carapace charged down the chasm. Kaladin jumped back, pressing Shallan against the refuse again as the chasmfiend tried—without success—to get one of its legs into the fissure. The leg was still too large, and though the chasmfiend could shove the tip in toward them—getting close enough to brush Kaladin—it wasn't enough to hurt them.

That eye returned, reflecting the image of Kaladin and Shallan—tattered and dirtied from their time in the chasm. Kaladin looked less frightened than he

felt, staring that thing in the eye, spear held up wardingly. Shallan, rather than looking terrified, seemed fascinated.

Crazy woman.

The chasmfiend withdrew again. It stopped just down the chasm. He could hear it settling down to watch.

“So . . .” Shallan said, “we wait?”

Sweat trickled down the sides of Kaladin’s face. Wait. How long? He could imagine staying in here, like a frightened rockbud t { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah killedrerapped in its shell, until the waters came crashing through the chasms.

He’d survived a storm once. Barely, and only then with the aid of Stormlight. In here, it would be far different. The waters would whip them in a surge through the chasms, smashing them into walls, boulders, churning them with the dead until they drowned or were ripped limb from limb . . .

It would be a very, very bad way to die.

His grip tightened on his spear. He waited, sweating, worrying. The chasmfiend didn’t leave. Minutes passed.

Finally, Kaladin mad9;d been walki



I suspect that he is more a force than an individual now, despite your insistence to the contrary. That force is contained, and an equilibrium reached.

Kaladin stared at the glistening length of metal, which dripped with condensation from its summoning. It glowed softly the color of garnet along several faint lines down its length.

Shallan had a Shardblade.

He twisted his head toward her, and in so doing, his cheek brushed the flat of the blade. No screams. He froze, then cautiously raised a finger and touched the cold metal.

Nothing happened. The screech he had heard in his mind when fighting alongside Adolin did not recur. It seemed a very bad sign to him. Though he did not know the meaning of that terrible sound, it was related to his bond with Syl.

“How?” he asked.

“It’s not important.”

“I rather think it is.”

“Not at the moment! Look, are you going to take this thing? Holding it this way is awkward. If I drop it by accident and cut off your foot, it’s going to be your fault.”

He hesitated, regarding his face reflected in its metal. He saw corpses, friends with burning eyes. He’d refused these weapons each time one was offered to him.

But always before, it had been after the fight, or at least on the practice grounds. This was different. Besides, he wasn’t choosing to become a Shardbearer; he would only use this weapon to protect someone’s life.

Making a decision, he reached up and seized the Shardblade by the hilt. At least this told him one thing—Shallan wasn’t likely to be a Surgebinder. Otherwise, he suspected she’d hate this Blade as much as he did.

“You’re not supposed to let people use your Blade,” Kaladin said. “By tradition, only the king and the highprinces do that.”

“Great,” she said. “You can report me to Brightness Navani for being wildly indecent and ignorant of protocol. For now, can we just survive, please?”

“Yeah,” he said, hefting the Blade. “That sounds wonderful.” He barely knew how to use one of these. Training with a practice sword did not make you an expert with the real thing. Unfortunately, a spear was going to be of little use against a creature so large and so well armored.

“Also . . .” Shallan said. “Could you not do that ‘reporting me’ thing I mentioned? That was a joke. I don’t think I’m supposed to have that Blade.”

“Nobody would believe me anyway,” Kaladin said. “You are going to run, right? As I instructed?”

“Yes. But if you could, please lead the monster to the left.”

“That yourself?” “fkub that the’s toward the warcamps,” Kaladin said, frowning. “I was planning to lead it deeper into the chasms, so that you—”

“I need to get back to my satchel,” Shallan said.

Crazy woman. “We’re fighting for our lives, Shallan. The satchel is unimportant.”

“No, it’s very important,” she said. “I need it to . . . Well, the sketches in there show the pattern of the Shattered Plains. I’ll need that to help Dalinar. Please, just do it.”

“Fine. If I can.”

“Good. And, um, please don’t die, all right?”

He was suddenly aware of her pressed against his back. Holding him, breath warm on his neck. She trembled, and he thought he could hear in her voice both terror and fascination at their situation.

“I’ll do my best,” he said. “Get ready.”

She nodded, letting go of him.

One.

Two.

Three.

He leaped out into the chasm, then turned and dashed left, toward the chasmfiend. Storming woman. The beast lurked in the shadows in that direction. No, it was a shadow. An enormous, looming shadow, long and eel-like, lifted above the floor of the chasm and gripping the walls with its legs.

It trumped and surged forward, carapace scraping on rock. Holding tightly to the Shardblade, Kaladin threw himself to the ground and ducked underneath the monster. The ground heaved as the beast smashed claws toward him, but Kaladin came up unscathed. He swung wildly with the Shardblade, carving a line in the rock wall beside him but missing the chasmfiend.

It curled in the chasm, twisting underneath itself, then turning about. The maneuver went far more smoothly for the monster than Kaladin would have hoped.

How do I even kill something like this? Kaladin wondered, backing up as the chasmfiend settled on the floor of the chasm to inspect him. Hacking at that enormous body was unlikely to kill it quickly enough. Did it have a heart? Not the stone gemheart, but a real one? He'd have to try to get underneath it again.

Kaladin continued to back down the chasm, trying to lead the creature away from Shallan. It moved more carefully than Kaladin would have expected. He was relieved to catch sight of Shallan escaping the crack and scrambling away down the passage.

“Come on, you,” Kaladin said, waving the Shardblade at the chasmfiend. It reared up in the chasm, but did not strike at him. It watched, eyes hidden in its darkened face. The only light came from the distant slit high above and the spheres he'd tossed out into the chasm, which now were behind the monster.

Shallan's Blade glowed softly too, from a strange pattern along its length. Kaladin had never seen one do that before, but then, he'd never seen a Shardblade in the dark before.

Looking up at the rearing, alien silhouette before him—with its too many legs, its twisted head, its segmented armor—Kaladin thought he must know what a Voidbringer looked like. Surely nothing more terrible than this could exist.'s expression grew grim.mmls.4

Stepping backward, Kaladin stumbled on an outcropping of shalebark sprouting from the floor.

The chasmfiend struck.

Kaladin regained his balance easily, but had to throw himself into a roll—which required dropping the Shardblade, lest he slice himself. Shadowy claws smashed around him as he came out of his roll and sprang one way, then the other. He ended up pressed against the slimy side of the chasm just

in front of the monster, puffing. He was too close for the claws to get him, perhaps, and—

The head snapped down, mandibles gaping. Kaladin cursed, hurling himself to the side again. He grunted, rolling to his feet and scooping up the discarded Shardblade. It hadn't vanished—he knew enough about them to understand that once Shallan instructed it to remain, it would stay until she summoned it back.

Kaladin turned around as a claw came down where he had just been. He got a swipe at it, cutting through the claw's tip as it crashed into rock.

His cut didn't seem to do much. The Blade scored the carapace and killed the flesh inside—prompting a trump of anger—but the claw was enormous. He'd done the equivalent of cutting off the tip of an enemy soldier's big toe. Storms. He wasn't fighting the beast; he was just annoying it.

It came more aggressively, sweeping at him with a claw. Fortunately, the confines of the chasm made it difficult for the creature to swing; its arms brushed the walls, and it couldn't pull back for full leverage. That was probably why Kaladin was still alive. He got out of the way of the sweep, barely, but tripped in the darkness again. He could hardly see.

As another claw crashed toward him, Kaladin got to his feet and dashed away—running farther down the corridor, farther from the light, passing plants and flotsam. The chasmfiend trumped and charged after him, clacking and scraping.

Kaladin felt so slow without Stormlight. So clumsy and awkward.

The chasmfiend was close. He judged his next move by instinct. Now! He stopped with a lurch, then sprinted back toward the creature. It slowed with great difficulty, carapace grinding on the walls, and Kaladin ducked and ran beneath it. He slammed the Shardblade upward, sinking it deep into the creature's underside.

The beast trumped more frantically. He seemed to have actually hurt it, for it immediately lifted upward to pull itself off the sword. Then it twisted down

upon itself in an eyeblink, and Kaladin found those frightful jaws coming at him. He threw himself forward, but the snapping jaws caught his leg.

Blinding pain ran up the limb, and he struck out with the Blade even as the beast flung him about. He thought he hit its face, though he couldn't be certain.

The world spun.

He hit the ground and rolled.

No time to be dizzy. With everything still spinning, he groaned and turned over. He'd lost the Shardblade—he didn't know where it was. His leg. He couldn't feel it.

He looked down, expecting to see nothing but a ragged stump. It wasn't quite so bad. Bloodied, the trousers ripped, but he couldn't see bone. The numbness was from shock.

His mind had gone analytical and focused on the wounds. That wasn't good. He needed the soldier at the moment, not the surgeon. The chasmfiend was righting itself in the chasm, and a chunk of its facial carapace was missing.

Gou ate chicken?" Renarin asked they playings.4et. Away.

Kaladin turned over and climbed to hands and knees, then lurched to his feet. The leg worked, kind of. His boot squished as he stepped.

Where was the Shardblade? There, ahead. It had flown far, embedding itself in the ground near the spheres he'd tossed from the rift. Kaladin hobbled toward it, but had trouble walking, let alone running. He was halfway there when his leg gave out. He hit hard, scraping his arm on shalebark.

The chasmfiend trumped and—

"Hey! Hey!"

Kaladin twisted about. Shallan? What was that fool woman doing, standing in the chasm, waving her hands like a maniac? How had she even gotten past

him?

She yelled again, getting the chasmfiend's attention. Her voice echoed oddly.

The chasmfiend turned from Kaladin to Shallan, then began to smash at her.

"No!" Kaladin yelled. But what was the use in shouting? He needed his weapon. Gritting his teeth, he twisted about and scrambled—as best he could—to the Shardblade. Storms. Shallan . . .

He ripped the sword from the rock, but then he collapsed again. The leg just wouldn't hold him. He twisted back, holding out the Blade, searching the chasm. The monster continued to swipe about, trumping, the terrible sound echoing and reverberating in the narrow confines. Kaladin couldn't see a corpse. Had Shallan escaped?

Stabbing the blasted thing through the chest only seemed to have made it angrier. The head. His only chance was the head.

Kaladin struggled to his feet. The monster stopped smashing against the ground and with a trump surged toward him. Kaladin gripped the sword in two hands, then wavered. His leg buckled beneath him. He tried to go down on one knee, but the leg gave out completely, and he slumped to the side and narrowly avoided slicing himself with the Shardblade.

He splashed into a pool of water. In front of him, one of the spheres he'd tossed shone with a bright white light.

He reached into the water, snatching it, clutching the chilled glass. He needed that Light. Storms, his life depended on it.

Please.

The chasmfiend loomed above.

Kaladin sucked in a breath, straining, like a man gasping for air. He heard . . . as if distantly . . .

Weeping.

No power entered him.

The chasmfiend swung and Kaladin twisted, and strangely found himself. The other version of him stood above him, sword raised, larger than life. It was bigger than him by half.

What in the Almighty's own eyes . . . ? Kaladin thought, dumbfounded, as the chasmfiend smashed an arm down onto the figure beside Kaladin. That not-him shattered into a puff of Stormlight.

What had he done? How had he done it?

No matter. He lived. With a cry of desperation, he threw himself back to his feet and lurched toward the chasmfiend. He needed to get close, as he had before, too close for the claws to swing in these confines.

So close that . . .

The chasmfiend reared, then snapped down for a bite, mandibles extending, terrible eyes bearing down.

Kaladin thrust upward.

* * *

The chasmfiend crashed down, chitin snapping, legs spasming. Shallan cried out, freehand to mouth, from where she hid behind a boulder, her skin and clothing turned deep black.

The chasmfiend had fallen on Kaladin.

Shallan dropped her paper—it bore a drawing of her and another of Kaladin—and scrambled across the rocks, dismissing the blackness around her. She'd needed to be close to the fighting for the illusions to work. Better if she'd been able to send them on Pattern, but that was problematic because—

She stopped in front of the still-twitching beast, a heap of flesh and carapace like a fallen avalanche of stone. She shifted from one foot to another, uncertain what to do. "Kaladin?" she called out. Her voice was frail in the

darkness.

Stop it, she told herself. No timidity. You're past that. Taking a deep breath, she moved forward, picking her way over the huge armored legs. She tried to shove aside a claw, but it was far too heavy for her, so she climbed over it and skidded down the other side.

She froze as she heard something. The chasmfiend's head lay nearby, massive eyes cloudy. Spren started to rise from it, like trails of smoke. The same ones as before, only . . . leaving? She held her light closer.

The bottom half of Kaladin's body protruded from the chasmfiend's mouth. Almighty above! Shallan gasped, then scrambled forward. She tried, with difficulty, to pull Kaladin from the closed maw before summoning her Shardblade and cutting away at several mandibles.

"Kaladin?" she asked, nervously peering into the thing's mouth from the side, where she'd removed a mandible.

"Ow," a weak voice trailed back to her.

Alive! "Hang on!" she said, hacking at the thing's head, careful not to cut too close to Kaladin. Violet ichor spurted out, coating her arms, smelling like wet mold.

"This is kind of uncomfortable . . ." Kaladin said.

"You're alive," Shallan said. "Stop complaining."

He was alive. Oh, Stormfather. Alive. She would have a whole heap of prayers to burn when they got back.

"Smells awful in here," Kaladin said weakly. "Almost as bad as you do."

"Be glad," Shallan said as she worked. "Here, I have a reasonably perfect specimen of a chasmfiend—with only a minor case of being dead—and I'm chopping it apart for you instead of studying it."

"I'm eternally grateful."

“How did you get in its mouth, anyway?” Shallan asked, prying off a piece of carapace with a sickening sound. She tossed it aside.

“Stabbed it through the roof of its mouth,” Kaladin said, “into the brain. Only way I could figure to kill the blasted thing.”

She leaned down, reaching her hand through the large hole she’d opened. With some work—and with a little cutting at the front mandibles—she managed to help Kaladin wiggle out the side of the mouth. Covered in ichor and blood, face pale from apparent blood loss, he looked like death itself.

“Storms,” she whispered, vanished to mist. Sere as he lay back on the rocks.

“Bind my leg,” Kaladin said weakly. “The rest of me should be fine. Heal right up . . .”

She looked at the mess of his leg, and shivered. It looked like . . . Like . . . Balat . . .

Kaladin wouldn’t be walking on that leg anytime soon. Oh, Stormfather, she thought, cutting off the skirt of her dress at the knees. She wrapped his leg tightly, as he instructed. He seemed to think he didn’t need a tourniquet. She listened to him; he’d probably bound far more wounds than she had.

She cut the sleeve off her right arm and used that to bind a second wound on his side, where the chasmfiend had started to rip him in half as it bit. Then she settled down next to him, feeling drained and cold, legs and arm now exposed to the chill air of the chasm bottom.

Kaladin took a deep breath, resting on the rock ground, eyes closed. “Two hours until the highstorm,” he whispered.

Shallan checked the sky. It was almost dark. “If that long,” she whispered. “We beat it, but we’re dead anyway, aren’t we?”

“Seems unfair,” he said. Then he groaned, sitting up.

“Shouldn’t you—”

“Bah. I’ve had far worse wounds than 1D; he said. &



ONE YEAR AGO

Shallan slipped into Balat's room, holding a short note between her fingers.

Balat spun, standing. He relaxed. "Shallan! You nearly killed me with fright."

The small room, like many in the manor house, had open windows with simple reed shutters—those were closed and latched today, as a highstorm was approaching. The last one before the Weeping. Servants outside pounded on the walls as they affixed sturdy stormshutters over the reed ones.

Shallan wore one of her new dresses, the expensive kind that Father bought for her, after the Vorin style, straight and slim-waisted with a pocket on the sleeve. A woman's dress. She also wore the necklace he had given her. He liked it when she did that.

Jushu lounged on a chair nearby, rubbing some kind of plant between his fingers, his face distant. He had lost weight during the two years since his creditors had dragged him from the house, though with those sunken eyes and the scars on his wrists, he still didn't look much like his twin.

Shallan eyed the bundles Balat had been preparing. "Good thing Father never

checks in on you, Balat. Those bundles look so fishy, we could make a stew out of them.”

Jushu chuckled, rubbing the scar on one wrist with the other hand. “Doesn’t help that he jumps every time a servant so much as sneezes out in the hallway.”

“Quiet, both of you,” Balat said, eyeing the window where workers locked a stormshutter in place. “This is not a time for levity. Damnation. If he discovers that I’m planning to leave . . .”

“He won’t,” Shallan said, unfolding the letter. “He’s too busy getting ready to parade himself in front of the highprince.”

“Does it feel odd to anyone else,” Jushu said, “to be this rich? How many deposits of valuable stone are there on our lands?”

Balat turned back to packing his bundles. “So long as it keeps Father happy, I don’t care.”

The problem was, it hadn’t made Father happy. Yes, House Davar was now wealthy—the new quarries provided a fantastic income. Yet, the better off they were, the darker Father grew. Walking the hallways grumbling. Lashing out at servants.

Shallan scanned the letter’s contents.

“That’s not a pleased face,” Balat said. “They still haven’t been able to find him?”

Shallan shook her head. Helaran had vanished. Really vanished. No more contact, no more letters; even the people he’d been in touch with earlier had no idea where he’d gone.

Balat sat into step beside him” Szethkat down on one of his bundles. “So what do we do?”

“You will need to decide,” Shallan said.

“I have to get out. I have to.” He ran his hand through his hair. “Eylita is ready to go with me. Her parents are away for the month, visiting Alethkar. It’s the perfect time.”

“If you can’t find Helaran, then what?”

“I’ll go to the highprince. His bastard said that he’d listen to anyone willing to speak against Father.”

“That was years ago,” Jushu said, leaning back. “Father’s in favor now. Besides, the highprince is nearly dead; everyone knows it.”

“It’s our only chance,” Balat said. He stood up. “I’m going to leave. Tonight, after the storm.”

“But Father—” Shallan began.

“Father wants me to ride out and check on some of the villages along the eastern valley. I’ll tell him I’m doing that, but instead I’ll pick up Eylita and we’ll ride for Vedenar and go straight to the highprince. By the time Father arrives a week later, I’ll have had my say. It might be enough.”

“And Malise?” Shallan asked. The plan was still for him to take their stepmother to safety.

“I don’t know,” Balat said. “He’s not going to let her go. Maybe once he leaves to visit the highprince, you can send her away someplace safe? I don’t know. Either way, I have to go. Tonight.”

Shallan stepped forward, laying a hand on his arm.

“I’m tired of the fear,” Balat said to her. “I’m tired of being a coward. If Helaran has vanished, then I really am eldest. Time to show it. I won’t just run, spending my life wondering if Father’s minions are hunting us. This way . . . this way it will be over. Decided.”

The door slammed open.

For all her complaints that Balat was acting suspicious, Shallan jumped just

as high as he did, letting out a squeak of surprise. It was only Wikim.

“Storms, Wikim!” Balat said. “You could at least knock or—”

“Eylita is here,” Wikim said.

“What?” Balat leaped forward, grabbing his brother. “She wasn’t to come! I was going to pick her up.”

“Father summoned her,” Wikim said. “She arrived with her handmaid just now. He’s speaking with her in the feast hall.”

“Oh no,” Balat said, shoving Wikim aside, barreling through the door.

Shallan followed, but stopped in the doorway. “Don’t do anything foolish!” she called after him. “Balat, the plan!”

He didn’t appear to have heard her.

“This could be bad,” Wikim said.

“Or it could be wonderful,” Jushu said from behind them, still lounging. “If Father pushes Balat too far, maybe he’ll stop whining and do something.”

Shallan felt cold as she stepped into the hallway. That coldness vanished to mist. *f animalre . . .* was that panic? Overwhelming panic, so sharp and strong it washed away everything else.

This had been coming. She’d known this had been coming. They tried to hide, they tried to flee. Of course that wouldn’t work.

It hadn’t worked with Mother either.

Wikim passed her, running. She stepped slowly. Not because she was calm, but because she felt pulled forward. A slow pace resisted the inevitability.

She turned up the steps instead of going down to the feast hall. She needed to fetch something.

It took only a minute. She soon returned, the pouch given to her long ago tucked into the safe pouch in her sleeve. She walked down the steps and to the doorway of the feast hall. Jushu and Wikim waited just outside of it, watching tensely.

They made way for her.

Inside the feast hall, there was shouting, of course.

“You shouldn’t have done this without talking to me!” Balat said. He stood before the high table, Eylita at his side, holding to his arm.

Father stood on the other side of the table, half-eaten meal before him. “Talking to you is useless, Balat. You don’t hear.”

“I love her!”

“You’re a child,” Father said. “A foolish child without regard for your house.”

Bad, bad, bad, Shallan thought. Father’s voice was soft. He was most dangerous when his voice was soft.

“You think,” Father continued, leaning forward, palms on the tabletop, “I don’t know about your plan to leave?”

Balat stumbled back. “How?”

Shallan stepped into the room. What is that on the floor? she thought, walking along the wall toward the door into the kitchens. Something blocked the door from closing.

Rain began to pelt the rooftop outside. The storm had come. The guards were in their guardhouse, the servants in their quarters to wait the storm’s passing. The family was alone.

With the windows closed, the only light in the room was the cool illumination of spheres. Father did not have a fire burning in the hearth.

“Helaran is dead,” Fng form of the



You, however, have never been a force for equilibrium. You tow chaos behind you like a corpse dragged by one leg through the snow. Please, hearken to my plea. Leave that place and join me in my oath of nonintervention.

Kaladin caught Shallan's hand.

Boulders crashed above, smashing against the plateaus, breaking off chunks and tossing them down around him. Wind raged. Water swelled below, rising toward him. He clung to Shallan, but their wet hands started to slip.

And then, in a sudden surge, her grip tightened. With a strength that seemed to belie her smaller form, she heaved. Kaladin shoved with his good leg as water washed over it, and forced himself up the remaining distance to join her in the rocky alcove.

The hollow was barely three or four feet deep, shallower than the crack they'd hid in. Fortunately, it faced westward. Though icy wind twisted about and sprayed water on them, the brunt of the storm was broken by the plateau.

Puffing, Kaladin pulled against the wall of the alcove, his injured leg

smarting like nothing else, Shallan clinging to him. She was a warmth in his arms, and he held to her as much as she did him, both of them sitting hunched against the rock, his head brushing the top of the hollowed hole.

The plateau shuddered, quivering like a frightened man. He couldn't see much; the blackness was absolute except when lightning came. And the sound. Thunder crashing, seemingly disconnected from the sprays of lightning. Water roared like an angry beast, and the flashes illuminated a frothing, churning, raging river in the chasm.

Damnation . . . it was almost up to their alcove. It had risen fifty or more feet in moments. The dirty water was filled with branches, broken plants, vines ripped from their mountings.

“The sphere?” Kaladin asked in the blackness. “You had a sphere with you for light.”

“Gone,” she shouted over the roar. “I must have dropped ’s expression grew grim. inf’s wrongkatit when I grabbed you!”

“I didn’t—”

A crash of thunder, accompanied by a blinding flash of light, sent him stuttering. Shallan pulled more tightly against him, fingers digging into his arm. The light left an afterimage in his eyes.

Storms. He could swear that afterimage was a face, horribly twisted, the mouth pulled open. The next lightning bolt lit the flood just outside with a sequence of crackling light, and it showed water bobbing with corpses. Dozens of them pulled past in the current, dead eyes toward the sky, many just empty sockets. Men and Parshendi.

The water surged upward, and a few inches of it flooded the chamber. The water of dead men. The storm went dark again, as black as a cavern beneath the ground. Just Kaladin, Shallan, and the bodies.

“That was,” Shallan said, her head near his, “the most surreal thing I’ve ever seen.”

“Storms are strange.”

“You speak from experience?”

“Sadeas hung me out in one,” he said. “I was supposed to die.”

That tempest had tried to rip the skin, then muscles, from his skeleton. Rain like knives. Lightning like a cauterizing iron.

And a small figure, all white, standing before him with hands forward, as if to part the tempest for him. Tiny and frail, yet as strong as the winds themselves.

Syl . . . what have I done to you?

“I need to hear the story,” Shallan said.

“I’ll tell it to you sometime.”

Water washed up over them again. For a moment, they became lighter, floating in the sudden burst of water. The current pulled with unexpected strength, as if eager to tow them out into the river. Shallan screamed and Kaladin gripped the rock on either side, holding on in a panic. The river retreated, though he could still hear it rushing. They settled back into the alcove.

Light came from above, too steady to be lightning. Something was glowing on the plateau. Something that moved. It was hard to see, since water streamed off the side of the plateau above, falling in a sheet before their refuge. He swore he saw an enormous figure walking up there, a glowing inhuman form, followed by another, alien and sleek. Striding the storm. Leg after leg, until the glow passed.

“Please,” Shallan said. “I need to hear something other than that. Tell me.”

He shivered, but nodded. Voices. Voices would help. “It started when Amaram betrayed me,” he said, tone hushed, just loud enough for her—pressed close—to hear. “He made me a slave for knowing the truth, that he’d killed my men in his lust to get a Shardblade. That it mattered more to him

than his own soldiers, more to him than honor . . .”

He continued on, talking of his days as a slave, of his attempts to escape. Of the men he'd gotten killed for trusting him. It gushed from him, a story he'd never told. Who would he have told it to? Bridge Four had lived most of it with him.

He told her of the wagon and of Tvlakv—that name earned a gasp. She apparently knew him. He spoke of the numbness, the . . . nothing. The th succession warH5in made inking he should kill himself, but the trouble believing that it was worth the effort.

And then, Bridge Four. He didn't talk about Syl. Too much pain there right now. Instead, he talked of bridge runs, of terror, of death, and of decision.

Rain washed over them, blown in swirls, and he swore he could hear chanting out there somewhere. Some kind of strange spren zipped past their enclosure, red and violet and reminiscent of lightning. Was that what Syl had seen?

Shallan listened. He would have expected questions from her, but she didn't ask a single one. No pestering for details, no chattering. She apparently did know how to be quiet.

He got through it all, amazingly. The last bridge run. Rescuing Dalinar. He wanted to spill it all out. He talked about facing the Parshendi Shardbearer, about how he'd offended Adolin, about holding the bridgehead on his own . . .

When he finished, they both let the silence settle on them, and shared warmth. Together, they stared out at the rushing water just out of reach and lit by flashing.

“I killed my father,” Shallan whispered.

Kaladin looked toward her. In a flash of light, he saw her eyes as she looked up from where her head had been resting against his chest, beads of water on her eyelashes. With his hands around her waist, hers around him, it was as close as he'd held a woman since Tarah.

“My father was a violent, angry man,” Shallan said. “A murderer. I loved him. And I strangled him as he lay on the floor, watching me, unable to move. I killed my own father . . .”

He didn’t prod her, though he wanted to know. Needed to know.

She went on, fortunately, speaking of her youth and the terrors she had known. Kaladin had thought his life terrible, but there was one thing he’d had, and perhaps not cherished enough: parents who loved him. Roshone had brought Damnation itself to Hearthstone, but at least Kaladin’s mother and father had always been there to rely upon.

What would he have done, if his father had been like the abusive, hateful man Shallan described? If his mother had died before his own eyes? What would he have done if, instead of living off Tien’s light, he had been required to bring light to the family?

He listened with wonder. Storms. Why wasn’t this woman broken, truly broken? She described herself that way, but she was no more broken than a spear with a chipped blade—and a spear like that could still be as sharp a weapon as any. He preferred one with a score or two on the blade, a worn handle. A spearhead that had known fighting was just . . . better than a new one. You could know it had been used by a man fighting for his life, and that it had remained sure and not broken. Marks like those were signs of strength.

He did feel a chill as she mentioned her brother Helaran’s death, anger in her voice.

Helaran had been killed in Alethkar. At Amaram’s hands.

Storms . . . I killed him, didn’t I? Kaladin thought. The brother she loved. Had he told her about that?

No. No, he hadn’t mentioned that he’d killed the Shardbearer, only that Amaram had killed Kaladin’s men to cover up his lust for the weapon. He’d gotten used’s expression grew grim, realizing,4 to, over the years, referencing the event without mentioning that he’d killed a Shardbearer. His first few months as a slave had beaten into him the dangers of talking about

an event like that. He hadn't even realized he'd fallen into that habit of speaking here.

Did she realize? Had she inferred that Kaladin, not Amaram, had been the one to actually kill the Shardbearer? She didn't seem to have made that connection. She continued talking, speaking of the night—also during a storm—when she'd poisoned, then murdered her father.

Almighty above. This woman was stronger than he'd ever been.

“And so,” she continued, pressing her head back against his chest, “we decided that I would find Jasnah. She . . . had a Soulcaster, you see.”

“You wanted to see if she could fix yours?”

“That would have been too rational.” He couldn't see her scowl at herself, but he heard it, somehow. “My plan—being stupid and naive—was to swap mine for hers and bring back a working one to make money for the family.”

“You had never left your family's lands before.”

“Yes.”

“And you went to rob one of the smartest women in the world?”

“Er . . . yes. Remember that bit about ‘stupid and naive’? Anyway, Jasnah found out. Fortunately, I intrigued her and she agreed to take me on as a ward. The marriage to Adolin was her idea, a way to protect my family while I trained.”

“Huh,” he said. Lightning flashed outside. The winds seemed to be building even further, if that was possible, and he had to raise his voice even though Shallan was right there. “Generous, for a woman you intended to rob.”

“I think she saw something in me that—”

Silence.

Kaladin blinked. Shallan was gone. He panicked for a moment, searching

about himself, until he realized that his leg no longer hurt and the fuzziness in his head—from blood loss, shock, and possible hypothermia—was gone too.

Ah, he thought. This again.

He took a deep breath and stood up, stepping out of the blackness to the lip of the opening. The stream below had stopped, as if frozen solid, and the opening of the alcove—which Shallan had made far too low to stand up in—could now hold him standing at full height.

He looked out and met the gaze of a face as wide as eternity itself.

“Stormfather,” Kaladin said. Some named him Jezerezeh, Herald. This didn’t fit what Kaladin had heard of any Herald, however. Was the Stormfather a spren, perhaps? A god? It seemed to stretch forever, yet he could see it, make out the face in its infinite expanse.

The winds had stopped. Kaladin could hear his own heartbeat.

CHILD OF HONOR. It spoke to him this time. Last time, in the middle of the storm, it had not—though it had done so in dreams.

Kaladin looked to the side, again checking to see if Shallan was there, but he couldn’t see her any longer. She wasn’t part of this vision, whatever it was. { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: Jasnah attackre

“She’s one of them, isn’t she?” he asked. “Of the Knights Radiant, or at least a Surgebinder. That’s what happened when fighting the chasmfiend, that’s how she survived the fall. It wasn’t me either time. It was her.”

The Stormfather rumbled.

“Syl,” Kaladin said, looking back to the face. The plateaus in front of him had vanished. It was just him and the face. He had to ask. It hurt him, but he had to. “What have I done to her?”

YOU HAVE KILLED HER. The voice shook everything. It was as if . . . as if the shaking of the plateau and his own body made the sounds for the voice.

“No,” Kaladin whispered. “No!”

IT HAPPENED AS IT ONCE DID, the Stormfather said, angry. A human emotion. Kaladin recognized it. MEN CANNOT BE TRUSTED, CHILD OF TANAVAST. YOU HAVE TAKEN HER FROM ME. MY BELOVED ONE.

The face seemed to withdraw, fading.

“Please!” Kaladin screamed. “How can I fix it? What can I do?”

IT CANNOT BE FIXED. SHE IS BROKEN. YOU ARE LIKE THE ONES WHO CAME BEFORE, THE ONES WHO KILLED SO MANY OF THOSE I LOVE. FAREWELL, SON OF HONOR. YOU WILL NOT RIDE MY WINDS AGAIN.

“No, I—”

The storm returned. Kaladin collapsed back into the alcove, gasping at the sudden restoration of pain and cold.

“Kelek’s breath!” Shallan said. “What was that?”

“You saw the face?” Kaladin asked.

“Yes. So vast . . . I could see stars in it, stars upon stars, infinity . . .”

“The Stormfather,” Kaladin said, tired. He reached around beneath him for something that was suddenly glowing. A sphere, the one Shallan had dropped earlier. It had gone dun, but was now renewed. “Who t

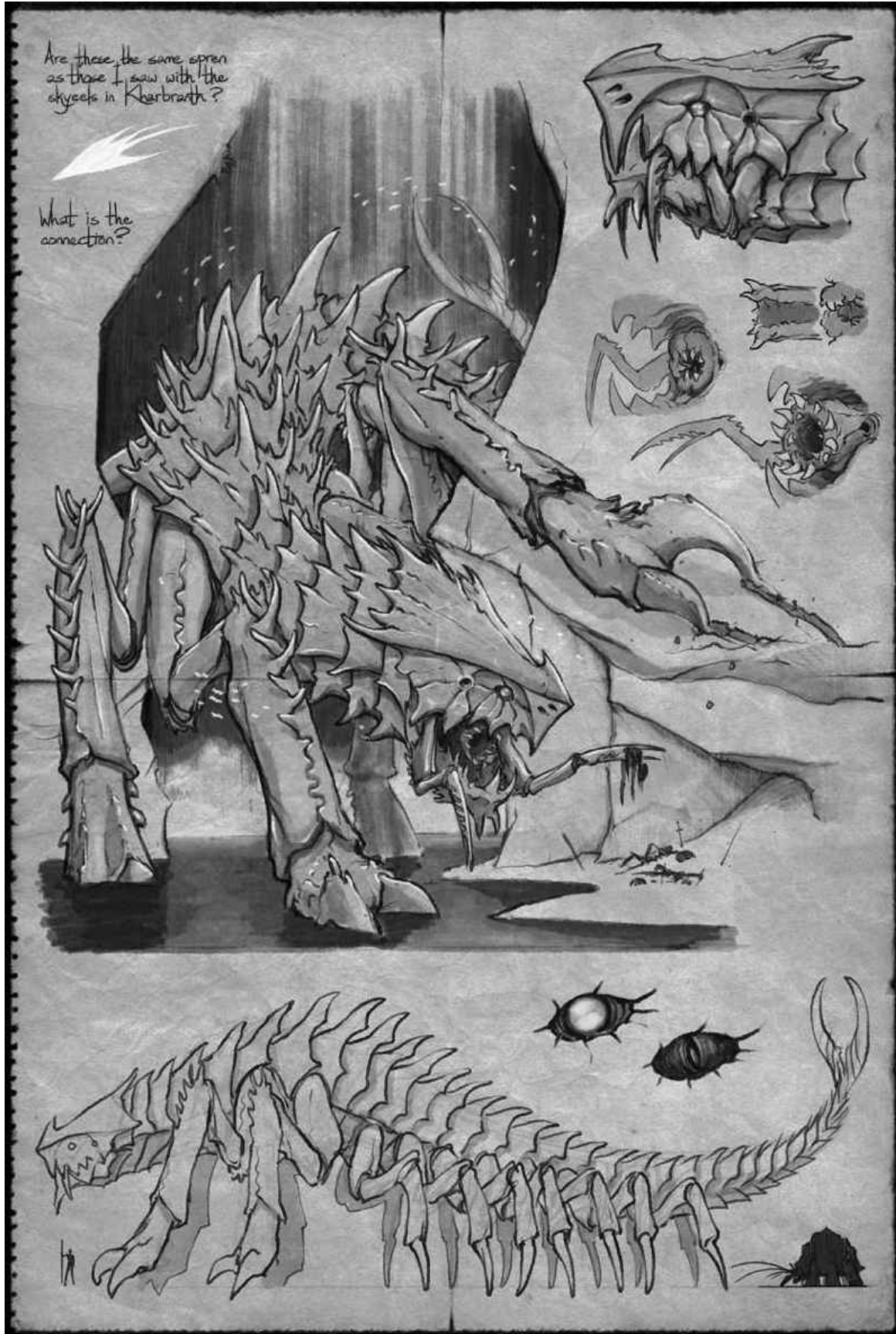
“That was amazing,” she whispered. “I need to draw it.”

“Good luck,” Kaladin said, “in this rain.” As if to punctuate his point, another wave of it washed over them. It would swirl in between the chasms, twisting about and sometimes blowing back at them. They sat in water a few inches deep, but it didn't pull them away again.

“My poor drawings,” Shallan said, “it's not a threat.”

Are these the same spren as those I saw with the skyseers in Kharbrath?

What is the connection?





The cosmere itself may depend upon our restraint.

“At least speak with him, Dalinar,” Amaram said. The man walked quickly to match Dalinar’s pace, his cloak of the Knights Radiant billowing behind him, as they inspected the lines of troops loading up wagons with supplies for the trip out onto the Shattered Plains. “Come to an accommodation with Sadeas before you leave. Please.”

Dalinar, Navani, and Amaram passed a group of spearmen running to get into place with their battalion, which was counting ranks. Just beyond them, the men and women of the camp acted similarly . . .” Pattern said, speakceing his texcited. Cremlings scuttled this way and that, moving through pools of water left by the storm.

Last night’s highstorm was the final one of the season. Sometime tomorrow, the Weeping would begin. Wet though it would be, it provided a window. Safety from storms, time to strike out. He planned to leave by midday.

“Dalinar?” Amaram asked. “Will you talk to him?”

Careful, Dalinar thought. Don’t make any judgments just yet. This had to be

done with precision. At his side, Navani eyed him. He'd shared his plans regarding Amaram with her.

"I—" Dalinar began.

A series of horns interrupted him, blaring above through the camp. They seemed more urgent than usual. A chrysalis had been spotted. Dalinar counted the rhythms, placing the plateau location.

"Too far," he said, pointing to one of his scribes, a tall, lanky woman that often helped Navani with her experiments. "Who is on the schedule for today's runs?"

"Highprinces Sebarial and Roion, sir," the scribe said, consulting her ledger.

Dalinar grimaced. Sebarial never sent troops, even when commanded. Roion was slow. "Send the signal flags to tell those two the gemheart is too far out to try for. We'll be marching for the Parshendi camp later today, and I can't have some of our troops splitting off and running for a gemheart."

He made the order as if either man would commit any troops to his march. He had hopes for Roion. Almighty send that the man didn't get frightened at the last minute and refuse to go on the expedition.

The attendant rushed away to call off the plateau run. Navani pointed to a group of scribes who were tabulating supply lists, and he nodded, stopping while she walked over to talk to the women and get an estimate on readiness.

"Sadeas won't like a gemheart being left unharvested," Amaram said as the two of them waited. "When he hears you called off the run, he'll send his own troops for it."

"Sadeas will do as he wishes, regardless of my intervention."

"Each time you allow him to disobey openly," Amaram said, "it drives a wedge between him and the Throne." Amaram took Dalinar by the arm. "We have bigger problems than you and Sadeas, my friend. Yes, he betrayed you. Yes, he likely will again. But we can't afford to let the two of you go to war."

The Voidbringers are coming.”

“How can you be certain of that, Amaram?” Dalinar asked.

“Instinct. You gave me this title, this position, Dalinar. I can feel something from the Stormfather himself. I know that a disaster is coming. Alethkar needs to be strong. That means you and Sadeas working together.”

Dalinar shook his head slowly. “No. The opportunity for Sadeas to work with me has long since passed. The road to unity in Alethkar is not at the table of negotiation, it’s out there.”

Across the plateaus, to the Parshendi camp, wherever it was. An end to this war. Closure for both him and his brother.

Unite them.

“Sadeas wants you to try this expedition,” Amaram said. “He’s certain you will fail blue and goldfthe raire.”

“And when I do not,” Dalinar said, “he will lose all credibility.”

“You don’t even know where you’ll find the Parshendi!” Amaram said, throwing his hands into the air. “What are you going to do, just wander out there until you run across them?”

“Yes.”

“Madness. Dalinar, you appointed me to this position—an impossible position, mind you—with the charge to be a light to all nations. I’m finding it hard to even get you to listen to me. Why should anyone else?”

Dalinar shook his head, looking eastward, over those broken plains. “I have to go, Amaram. The answers are out there, not here. It’s like we walked all the way to the shore, then huddled there for years, peering out at the waters but afraid to get wet.”

“But—”

“Enough.”

“Eventually, you’re going to have to give away authority and let it stay given, Dalinar,” Amaram said softly. “You can’t hold it all, pretending you aren’t in charge, but then ignore orders and advice as if you were.”

The words, problematically truthful, slapped him hard. He did not react, not outwardly.

“What of the matter I assigned you?” Dalinar asked him.

“Bordin?” Amaram said. “So far as I can tell, his story checks out. I really think that the madman is only raving about having had a Shardblade. It’s patently ridiculous that he might have actually had one. I—”

“Brightlord!” A breathless young woman in a messenger uniform—narrow skirt slit up the sides, with silk leggings beneath—scrambled up to him. “The plateau!”

“Yes,” Dalinar said, sighing. “Sadeas is sending out troops?”

“No, sir,” the woman said, flush in the cheeks from her run. “Not . . . I mean . . . He came out of the chasms.”

Dalinar frowned, looking sharply toward her. “Who?”

“Stormblessed.”

* * *

Dalinar ran the entire way.

When he drew close to the triage pavilion at the edge of camp—normally reserved for tending to the wounded who came back from plateau runs—he had trouble seeing because of the crowd of men in cobalt blue uniforms blocking the path. A surgeon was yelling for them to back up and give him room.

Some of the men saw Dalinar and saluted, hastily pulling out of the way. The

blue parted like waters blown in a storm.

And there he was. Ragged, hair matted in snarls, face scratched and leg wrapped in an improvised bandage. He sat on a triage table and had removed his uniform coat, which sat on the table beside him, tied into a round bundle with what looked like a vine wrapping it.

Kaladin looked up as Dalinar approached, and then moved to pull himself to his feet.

“Soldier, don’t—” Dalinar began, but Kaladin didn’t listen. He hauled himself up tall, using a spear to support his bad leg. Then he raised hand to breast, a slow motion, as if the arm blue and gold the raire were tied with weights. It was, Dalinar figured, the most tired salute he’d ever seen.

“Sir,” Kaladin said. Exhaustionspren puffed around Kaladin like little jets of dust.

“How . . .” Dalinar said. “You fell into a chasm!”

“I fell face-first, sir,” Kaladin said, “and fortunately, I’m particularly hard-headed.”

“But . . .”

Kaladin sighed, leaning on his spear. “I’m sorry, sir. I don’t really know how I survived. Some spren were involved, we think. Anyway, I hiked back through the chasms. I had a duty to see to.” He nodded to the side.

Farther into the triage tent, Dalinar saw something he hadn’t originally noticed. Shallan Davar—a tangle of red hair and ripped clothing—sat amid a pack of surgeons.

“One future daughter-in-law,” Kaladin said, “delivered safe and sound. Sorry about the damage done to the packaging.”

“But there was a highstorm!” Dalinar said.

“We really wanted to get back before that,” Kaladin said. “Ran into some

troubles along the way, I'm afraid." With lethargic movements, he took out his side knife and cut the vines off the package beside him. "You know how everyone kept saying there was a chasmfiend prowling about in the nearby chasms?"

"Yes . . ."

Kaladin lifted the remnants of his coat away from the table, revealing a massive green gemstone. Though bulbous and uncut, the gemheart shone with a powerful inner light.

"Yeah," Kaladin said, taking the gemheart in one hand and tossing it to the ground before Dalinar. "We took care of that for you, sir." In the blink of an eye, gloriespren replaced his exhaustionspren.

Dalinar stared mutely at the gemheart as it rolled and tapped against the front of his boot, its light almost blinding.

"Oh, don't be so melodramatic, bridgeman," Shallan called. "Brightlord Dalinar, we found the beast already dead and rotting in the chasm. We survived the highstorm by climbing up its back to a crack in the side of the plateau, where we waited out the rains. We could only get the gemheart out because the thing was half-rotted already."

Kaladin looked to her, frowning. He turned back to Dalinar almost immediately. "Yes," Kaladin said. "That's what happened."

He was a far worse liar than Shallan was.

Amaram and Navani finally arrived, the former having remained behind to escort the latter. Navani gasped when she saw Shallan, then ran to her, snapping angrily at the surgeons. She fussed and bustled around Shallan, who seemed far less the worse for wear than Kaladin, despite the terrible state of her dress and hair. In moments, Navani had Shallan wrapped in a blanket to cover her exposed skin, then she sent a runner back to prepare a warm bath and meal at Dalinar's complex, to be had in whichever order Shallan wished.

Dalinar found himself smiling. Navani pointedly ignored Shallan's protests

that none of this was necessary. The mother axehound had finally emerged. Shallan was apparently no longer an outsider, but one of Navani's clutch—and Chana help the man or woman who stood between Navani and one of her own.

"Sir, 's expression grew grim.m?" Adolin asked.4" Kaladin said, finally letting the surgeons settle him back on the table. "The soldiers are gathering supplies. The battalions forming up. Your expedition?"

"You needn't worry, soldier," Dalinar said. "I could hardly expect you to guard me in your state."

"Sir," Kaladin said, more softly, "Brightness Shallan found something out there. Something you need to know. Talk to her before you set out."

"I'll do so," Dalinar said. He waited for a moment, then waved the surgeons aside. Kaladin seemed to be in no immediate danger. Dalinar stepped closer, leaning in. "Your men waited for you, Stormblessed. They skipped meals, pulled triple shifts. I half think they'd have sat out here, at the head of the chasms, through the highstorm itself if I hadn't intervened."

"They are good men," Kaladin said.

"It's more than that. They knew you would return. What is it they understand about you that I don't?"

Kaladin met his eyes.

"I've been searching for you, haven't I?" Dalinar said. "All this time, without seeing it."

Kaladin looked away. "No, sir. Maybe once, but . . . I'm just what you see, and not what you think. I'm sorry."

Dalinar grunted, inspecting Kaladin's face. He had almost thought . . . But perhaps not.

"Give him anything he wants or needs," Dalinar said to the surgeons, letting them approach. "This man is a hero. Again."

He withdrew, letting the bridgemen crowd around—which, of course, started the surgeons cursing at them again. Where had Amaram gone? The man had been here just a few minutes ago. As the palanquin arrived for Shallan, Dalinar decided to follow and find out just what it was that Kaladin said the girl knew.

* * *

One hour later, Shallan snuggled into a nest of warm blankets, wet hair on her neck, smelling of flowered perfume. She wore one of Navani's dresses—which was too big for her. She felt like a child in her mother's clothing. That was, perhaps, exactly what she was. Navani's sudden affection was unexpected, but Shallan would certainly accept it.

The bath had been glorious. Shallan wanted to curl up on this couch and sleep for ten days. For the moment, however, she let herself revel in the distinctive feeling of being clean, warm, and safe for the first time in what seemed like an eternity.

“You can’t take her, Dalinar.” Navani’s voice came from Pattern on the table beside Shallan’s couch; it felt a moment’s guilt for sending him to spy on the two of them while she bathed. After all, they had been talking about her.

“This map . . .” Dalinar’s voice said.

“She can draw you a better map and you can take it.”

“She can’t draw what she hasn’t seen, Navani. She’ll need to be there, with us, to draw out the center of the pattern on the Plains once we penetrate in that direction.”

“Someone else—”

“Nobody else has been able to do this,” Dalinar’s voice said.

Shallan winced. She was not doing a very good job of keeping her drawing ability hidden.

“She just got back from that terrible place,” Navani’s voice said.

“I won’t let a similar accident occur. She will be safe.”

“Unless you all die,” Navani snapped. “Unless this entire expedition is a disaster. Then everything will be taken from me. Again.” Pattern stopped, then spoke further in his own voice. “He held her at this point, and whispered some things I did not hear. From there, they got very close and made some interesting noises. I can reproduce—”

“No,” Shallan said, blushing. “Too private.”

“Very well.”

“I need to go with them,” Shallan said. “I need to complete that map of the

Shattered Plains and find some way to correlate it with the ancient ones of Stormseat.”

It was the only way to find the Oathgate. Assuming it wasn't destroyed in whatever shattered the Plains, Shallan thought. And, if I do find it, will I even be able to open it? Only one of the Knights Radiant was said to be able to open the pathway.

“Pattern,” she said softly, clutching a mug of warmed wine, “I'm not a Radiant, right?”

“I do not think so,” he said. “Not yet. There is more to do, I believe, though I cannot be certain.”

“How can you not know?”

“I was not me when the Knights Radiant existed. It is complex to explain. I have always existed. We are not ‘born’ as men are, and we cannot truly die as men do. Patterns are eternal, as is fire, as is the wind. As are all spren. Yet, I was not in this state. I was not . . . aware.”

“You were a mindless spren?” Shallan said. “Like the ones that gather around me when I draw?”

“Less than that,” Pattern said. “I was . . . everything. In everything. I cannot explain it. Language is insufficient. I would need numbers.”

“Surely there are others among you, though,” Shallan said. “Older Cryptics? Who were alive back then?”

“No,” Pattern said softly. “None who experienced the bond.”

“Not a single oh. She didn't

INTERLUDES



LHAN • ESHONAI • TARAVANGIAN

ou ate chicken?” Renarin asked they , page Syl zipp



“Congratulations,” Brother Lhan said. “You have found your way to the easiest job in the world.”

The young ardent pursed her lips, looking him up and down. She had obviously not expected her new mentor to be rotund, slightly drunk, and yawning.

“You are the . . . senior ardent I’ve been assigned to?”

“To whom I’ve been assigned,” Brother Lhan corrected, putting an arm around the young woman’s shoulders. “You’re going to have to learn how to speak punctiliously. Queen Aesudan likes to feel that those around her are refined. It makes her feel refined by association. My job is to mentor you on these items.”

“I have been an ardent here in Kholinar for over a year,” the woman said. “I hardly think that I need mentoring at all—”

“Yes, yes,” Brother Lhan said, guiding her out of the monastery’s entryway. “It’s just that, you see, your superiors say you might need a little extra direction. Being assigned to the queen’s own retinue is a marvelous privilege!

One, I understand, you have requested with some measure of . . . ah . . . persistence.”

She walked with him, and each step revealed her reluctance. Or perhaps confusion. They passed into the Circle of Memories, a round room with ten lamps on the walls, one for each of the ancient Epoch Kingdoms. An eleventh lamp represented the Tranquiline Halls, and a large ceremonial keyhole set into the wall represented the need for ardents to ignore borders, and look only at the hearts of men . . . or something like that. He wasn't sure, honestly.

Outside the Circle of Memories, they entered one of the covered walkways between monastery buildings, a light rain sprinkling the rooftops. The last leg of the walkways, the sunwalk, gave a wonderful view of Kholinar—at least on a clear day. Even today, Lhan could see much of the city, as both the temple and the high palace occupied a flat-topped hill.

Some said that the Almighty himself had drawn Kholinar in rock, scooping out sections of ground with a fluent finger. Lhan wondered how drunk he'd been at the time. Oh, the city was beautiful, but it was the beauty of an artist who wasn't quite right in the mind. The rock took the shape of rolling hills and steeply sloping valleys, and when the stone was cut into, it exposed thousands of brilliant strata of red, white, yellow, and orange.

The most majestic formations were the windblades—enormous, curving spines of rock that cut through the city. Beautifully lined with colorful strata on the sides, they curved, curled, rose, and fell unpredictably, like fish leaping from the ocean. Supposedly, this all had to do with how the winds blew through the area. He did mean to get around to studying why that was. One of these days.

Slipped feet fell softly on glossy marble, accompanying the sound of the rains, as Lhan escorted the girl—what was her name? She had a name. It would form a bridge to speak. The again? “Look at that city,” he said. “Everyone out there has to work, even the lighteyes. Bread to bake, lands to oversee, cobblestones to . . . ah . . . cobble? No, that's shoes. Damnation. What do you call people who cobble, but don't actually cobble?”

“I don't know,” the young woman said softly.

“Well, it’s no matter to us. You see, we have only one job, and it’s an easy one. To serve the queen.”

“That is not easy work.”

“But it is!” Lhan said. “So long as we’re all serving the same way. In a very . . . ah . . . careful way.”

“We are sycophants,” the young woman said, staring out over the city. “The queen’s ardens tell her only what she wants to hear.”

“Ah, and here we are, at the point of the matter.” Lhan patted her on the arm. What was her name again? They’d told it to him. . . .

Pai. Not a very Alethi name; she’d probably chosen it upon being made an ardent. It happened. A new life, a new name, often a simple one.

“You see, Pai,” he said, watching to notice if she reacted. Yes, it did seem he’d gotten the name right. His memory must be improving. “This is what your superiors wanted me to talk to you about. They fear that if you’re not properly instructed, you might cause a bit of a storm here in Kholinar. Nobody wants that.”

He and Pai passed other ardens along the sunwalk, and Lhan nodded to them. The queen had a lot of ardens. A lot of ardens.

“Here’s the thing,” Lhan said. “The queen . . . she sometimes worries that maybe the Almighty isn’t pleased with her.”

“Rightly so,” Pai said. “She—”

“Hush, now,” Lhan said, wincing. “Just . . . hush. Listen. The queen figures that if she treats her ardens well, it will buy her favor with the One who makes the storms, so to speak. Nice food. Nice robes. Fantastic quarters. Lots of free time to do whatever we want. We get these things as long as she thinks she’s on the right path.”

“Our duty is to give her the truth.”

“We do!” Lhan said. “She’s the Almighty’s chosen, isn’t she? Wife of King Elhokar, ruler while he’s off fighting a holy war of retribution against the regicides on the Shattered Plains. Her life is very hard.”

“She throws feasts every night,” Pai whispered. “She engages in debauchery and excess. She wastes money while Alethkar languishes. People in outer towns starve as they send food here, with the understanding that it will be passed on to soldiers who need it. It rots because the queen can’t be bothered.”

“They have plenty of food on the Shattered Plains,” Lhan said. “They’ve got gemstones coming out of their ears there. And nobody is starving here either. You’re exaggerating. Life is good.”

“It is if you’re the queen or one of her lackeys. She even canceled the Beggars’ Feasts. It is reprehensible.”

Lhan groaned inside. This one thing is like H5

They entered the palace’s grand eastern hall. The carved pillars here were considered one of the greatest artworks of all time, and one could trace their history back to before the shadowdays. The gilding on the floor was ingenious—a lustrous gold that had been placed beneath Soulcast ribbons of crystal. It ran like rivulets between floor mosaics. The ceiling had been decorated by Oolelen himself, the great ardent painter, and depicted a storm blowing in from the east.

All of this could have been crem in the gutter for the reverence Pai gave it. She seemed to see only the ardents strolling about, contemplating the beauty. And eating. And composing new poems for Her Majesty—though honestly, Lhan avoided that sort of thing. It seemed like work.

Perhaps Pai’s attitude came from a residual jealousy. Some ardents were envious of the queen’s personal chosen. He tried to explain some of the luxuries that were now hers: warm baths, horseback riding using the queen’s personal stables, music and art . . .

Pai’s expression grew darker with each item. Bother. This wasn’t working.

New plan.

“Here,” Lhan said, steering her toward the steps. “There’s something I want to show you.”

The steps twisted down through the palace complex. He loved this place, every bit of it. White stone walls, golden sphere lamps, and an age. Kholinar had never been sacked. It was one of the few eastern cities that hadn’t suffered that fate in the chaos after the Hierocracy’s fall. The palace had burned once, but that fire had died out after consuming the eastern wing. Renner’s miracle, it was called. The arrival of a highstorm to put out the fire. Lhan swore the place still smelled of smoke, three hundred years later. And . . .

Oh, right. The girl. They continued down the steps and eventually entered the palace kitchens. Lunch had ended, though that didn’t stop Lhan from snatching a plate of fried bread, Herdazian style, from the counter as they passed. Plenty was laid out for the queen’s favorites, who might find themselves peckish at any time. Being a proper sycophant could work up an appetite.

“Trying to lure me with exotic foods?” Pai asked. “For the past five years, I have eaten only a bowl of boiled tallow for each meal, with a piece of fruit on special occasions. This will not tempt me.”

Lhan stopped in place. “You’re not serious, are you?”

She nodded.

“What is wrong with you?”

She blushed. “I am of the Devotary of Denial. I wished to experience separation from the physical needs of my—”

“This is worse than I thought,” Lhan said, taking her by the hand and pulling her through the kitchens. Near the back, they found the door leading out to the service yard, where supplies were delivered and refuse taken away. There, shaded from the rain by an awning, they found piles of uneaten food.

Pai gasped. “Such waste! You bring me here to convince me not to make a storm? You are doing quite the opposite!”

“There used to be an ardent who took all of this and distributed it to the poor,” Lhan said. “She died a few years { margin-top: 0.00em; margin-right: 0.00em; margin-bottom: itske re back. Since then, the others have made some effort to take care of it. Not much, but some. The food does get taken away eventually, usually dumped into the square to be picked through by beggars. It’s mostly rotten by then.”

Storms. He could almost feel the heat of her anger.

“Now,” Lhan said, “if there were an ardent among us whose only hunger was to do good, think how much she could accomplish. Why, she could feed hundreds just from what is wasted.”

Pai eyed the piles of rotting fruit, the sacks of open grain, now ruined in the rain.

“Now,” Lhan said, “let us contemplate the opposite. If some ardent tried to take away that which we have . . . well, what might happen to her?”

“Is that a threat?” she asked softly. “I do not fear physical harm.”

“Storms,” Lhan said. “You think we’d— Girl, I have someone else put my slippers on for me in the morning. Don’t be dense. We’re not going to hurt you. Too much work.” He shivered. “You’d get sent away, quickly and quietly.”

“I do not fear that either.”

“I doubt you fear anything,” Lhan said, “except maybe having a little fun. But what good would it do anyone if you were sent away? Our lives wouldn’t change, the queen would remain the same, and that food out there would still spoil. But if you stay, you can do good. Who knows, maybe your example will help all of us reform, eh?”

He patted her on the shoulder. “Think about it for a few minutes. I want to go

finish my bread.” He wandered off, checking over his shoulder a few times. Pai settled down beside the heaps of rotting food and stared at them. She didn’t seem bothered by the ripe odor.

Lhan watched her from inside until he got bored. When he got back from his afternoon massage, she was still there. He ate dinner in the kitchen, which wasn’t terribly luxurious. The girl was entirely too interested in those heaps of garbage.

Finally, as evening fell, he ambled back to her.

“Don’t you even wonder?” she asked, staring at those piles of refuse, rain pattering just beyond. “Don’t you stop to think about the cost of your gluttony?”

“Cost?” he asked. “I told you nobody starves because we—”

“I don’t mean the monetary cost,” she whispered. “I mean the spiritual cost. To you, to those around you. Everything’s wrong.”

“Oh, it’s not that bad,” he said, settling down.

“It is. Lhan, it’s bigger than the queen, and her wasteful feasts. It wasn’t much better before that, with King Gavilar’s hunts and the wars, pryncedom against pryncedom. The people hear of the glory of the battle on the Shattered Plains, of the riches there, but none of it ever materializes here.

“Does anyone among the Alethi elite care about the Almighty anymore? Sure, they curse by his name. Sure, they talk about the Heralds, burn glyphwards. But what do they do? Do they change their lives? Do they listen to the Arguments? Do they transform, recasting their souls into certain if the raireto something greater, something better?”

“They have Callings,” Lhan said, fidgeting with his fingers. “Digiting, then?”
“The devotaries help.”

She shook her head. “Why don’t we hear from Him, Lhan? The Heralds said we defeated the Voidbringers, that Aharietiam was the great victory for

mankind. But shouldn't He have sent them to speak with us, to counsel us? Why didn't they come during the Hierocracy and denounce us? If what the Church had been doing was so evil, where was the word of the Almighty against it?"

"I . . . Surely you're not suggesting we return to that?" He pulled out his handkerchief and dabbed at his neck and head. This conversation was getting worse and worse.

"I don't know what I'm suggesting," she whispered. "Only that something is wrong. All of this is just so very wrong." She looked to him, then climbed to her feet. "I have accepted your proposal."

"You have?"

"I will not leave Kholinar," she said. "I will stay here and do what good I can."

"You won't get the other ardents into trouble?"

"My problem is not with the ardents," she said, offering a hand to help him to his feet. "I will simply try to be a good example for all to follow."

"Well, then. That seems like a fine choice."

She walked off, and he dabbed his head. She hadn't promised, not exactly. He wasn't certain how worried he should be about that.

Turned out, he should have been very worried.

The next morning, he stumbled into the People's Hall—a large, open building in the shadow of the palace where the king or queen addressed the concerns of the masses. A murmuring crowd of horrified ardents stood just inside the perimeter.

Lhan had already heard, but he had to see for himself. He forced his way to the front. Pai knelt on the floor here, head bowed. She'd painted all night, apparently, writing glyphs on the floor by spherelight. Nobody had noticed. The place was usually locked up tight when not in use, and she'd started

working well after everyone was either asleep or drunk.

Ten large glyphs, written directly on the stone of the floor running up to the dais with the king's Common Throne. The glyphs listed the ten foolish attributes, as represented by the ten fools. Beside each glyph was a written paragraph in women's script explaining how the queen exemplified each of the fools.

Lhan read with horror. This . . . this didn't just chastise. It was a condemnation of the entire government, of the lighteyes, and of the Throne itself!

Pai was executed the very next morning.

The riots started that evening.



That voice deep within that women that the Eshonai still screamed. Even when she didn't attune the old Rhythm of Peace. She kept herself busy to quiet it, walking the perfectly circular plateau just outside of Narak, the one where her soldiers often practiced.

Her people had become something old, yet something new. Something powerful. They stood in lines on this plateau, humming to Fury. She divided

them by combat experience. A new form would not a soldier make; many of these had been workers all their lives.

They would have a part to play. They would bring about something grand.

“The Alethi will come,” Venli said, strolling at Eshonai’s side and absently bringing energy to her fingers and letting it play between two of them. Venli smiled often while wearing this new form. Otherwise, it didn’t seem to have changed her at all.

Eshonai knew that she herself had changed. But Venli . . . Venli acted the same.

Something felt wrong about that.

“The agent who sent this report is certain of it,” Venli continued. “Your visit to the Blackthorn seems to have encouraged them to action, and the humans intend to strike toward Narak in force. Of course, this could still turn into a disaster.”

“No,” Eshonai said. “No. It is perfect.”

Venli looked to her, stopping on the rock field. “We need no more training. We should act, right now, to bring a highstorm.”

“We will do it when the humans near,” Eshonai said.

“Why? Let us do it tonight.”

“Foolishness,” Eshonai said. “This is a tool to use in battle. If we produce an unexpected storm now, the Alethi won’t come, and we won’t win this war. We must wait.”

Venli seemed thoughtful. Finally, she smiled, then nodded.

“What do you know that you aren’t telling me?” Eshonai demanded, taking her sister by the shoulder.

Venli smiled more broadly. “I’m simply persuaded. We must wait. The storm

will blow the wrong way, after all. Or is it all other storms that have blown the wrong way, and this one will be the first to blow the right way?”

The wrong way? “How do you know? About the direction?”

“The songs.”

The songs. But . . . they said nothing about . . .

Something deep within Eshonai nudged her to move on. “If that is true,” she said, “we’ll have to wait until the humans are practically on top of us to catch them in it.”

“Then that is what we do,” Venli said. “I will set to the teaching. Our weapon will be ready.”

She spoke to the Rhythm of Craving, a rhythm like the old Rhythm of Anticipation, but more violent.

Venli walked away, joined by her once-mate and many of her scholars. They seemed comfortable in these forms. Too comfortable. They couldn’t have held these forms before . . . could they?

Eshonai shoved down the screams and went to prepare another battalion of new soldiers. She had always hated being a general. How ironic, then, that she would be recorded in their songs as the warleader who had finally crushed the Alethi.

one way or another.m and pulls.4



Taravangian, king of Kharbranth, awoke to stiff muscles and an ache in his back. He didn't feel stupid. That was a good sign.

He sat up with a groan. Those aches were perpetual now, and his best healers could only shake their heads and promise him that he was fit for his age. Fit. His joints cracked like logs on the fire and he couldn't stand quickly, lest he lose his balance and topple to the floor. To age truly was to suffer the ultimate treason, that of one's body against oneself.

He sat up in his cot. Water lapped quietly against the hull of his cabin, and the air smelled of salt. He heard shouts in the near distance, however. The ship had arrived on schedule. Excellent.

As he settled himself, one servant approached with a table and another with a warm, wet cloth for wiping his eyes and hands. Behind them waited the King's Testers. How long had it been since Taravangian had been alone, truly alone? Not since before the aches had come upon him.

Maben knocked on the open door, bearing his morning meal on a tray, stewed and spiced grain mush. It was supposed to be good for his constitution. Tasted like dishwater. Bland dishwater. Maben stepped forward to set out the

meal, but Mrall—a Thaylen man in a black leather cuirass who wore both his head and eyebrows shaved—stopped her with a hand to the arm.

“Tests first,” Mrall said.

Taravangian looked up, meeting the large man’s gaze. Mrall could loom over a mountain and intimidate the wind itself. Everyone assumed he was Taravangian’s head bodyguard. The truth was more disturbing.

Mrall was the one who got to decide whether Taravangian would spend the day as king or as a prisoner.

“Surely you can let him eat first!” Maben said.

“This is an important day,” Mrall said, voice low. “I would know the result of the testing.”

“But—”

“It is his right to demand this, Maben,” Taravangian said. “Let us be on with it.”

Mrall stepped back, and the testers approached, a group of three stormwardens in deliberately esoteric robes and caps. They presented a series of pages covered in figures and glyphs. They were today’s variation on a sequence of increasingly challenging mathematical problems devised by Taravangian himself on one of his better days.

He picked up his pen with hesitant fingers. He did not feel stupid, but he rarely did. Only on the worst of days did he immediately recognize the difference. On those days, his mind was thick as tar, and he felt like a prisoner in his own mind, aware that something was profoundly wrong.

Today wasn’t one of those, fortunately. He wasn’t a complete idiot. At worst, he’d just be very stupid.

He set to his task, solving what mathematical problems he could. It took the better part of an hour, but during the process, he was able to gauge his capacity. As he had suspected, he was not obtain their power. It will form a bridge

He was speaking his terribly smart—but he was not stupid, either. Today . . . he was average.

That would do.

He turned over the problems to the stormwardens, who consulted in low voices. They turned to Mrall. “He is fit to serve,” one proclaimed. “He may not offer binding commentary on the Diagram, but he may interact outside of supervision. He may change government policy so long as there is a three-day delay before the changes take effect, and he may also freely pass judgment in trials.”

Mrall nodded, looking to Taravangian. “Do you accept this assessment and these restrictions, Your Majesty?”

“I do.”

Mrall nodded, then stepped back, allowing Maben to set out Taravangian’s morning meal.

The trio of stormwardens tucked away the papers he’d filled out, then they retreated to their own cabins. The testing was an extravagant procedure, and consumed valuable time each morning. Still, it was the best way he had found to deal with his condition.

Life could be tricky for a man who awoke each morning with a different level of intelligence. Particularly when the entire world might depend upon his genius, or might come crashing down upon his idiocy.

“How is it out there?” Taravangian asked softly, picking at his meal, which had gone cold during the testing.

“Horrible,” Mrall said with a grin. “Just as we wanted it.”

“Do not take pleasure in suffering,” Taravangian replied. “Even when it is a work of our hands.” He took a bite of the mush. “Particularly when it is a work of our hands.”

“As you wish. I will do so no more.”

“Can you really change that easily?” Taravangian asked. “Turn off your emotions on a whim?”

“Of course,” Mrall said.

Something about that tickled at Taravangian, some thread of interest. If he had been in one of his more brilliant states, he might have seized upon it—but today, he sensed thought seeping away like water between fingers. Once, he had fretted about these missed opportunities, but he had eventually made his peace. Days of brilliance—he had come to learn—brought their own problems.

“Let me see the Diagram,” he said. Anything to distract from this slop they insisted on feeding him.

Mrall stepped aside, allowing Adrotagia—head of Taravangian’s scholars—to approach, bearing a thick, leatherbound volume. She set it onto the table before Taravangian, then bowed.

Taravangian rested his fingers upon the leatherbound cover, feeling a moment of . . . reverence? Was that right? Did he revere anything anymore? God was dead, after all, and Vorinism therefore a sham.

This book, though, was holy. He opened it to one of the pages marked with a reed. Inside were scribbles.

Frenetic, bombastic, majestic scribbles that had been painstakingly copied from the walls of his former bedroom. Sketches laid atop one another, lists of numbers that seemed to make no sense, lines upon lines upon lines of script written in a cramped hand.

Madness. And genius.

Here and there, Taravangian could find hints that this writing was his own. The way he wiggled a line, the way he wrote along the edge of a wall, much like ” Peet said. in a y,s.4how he would write along the side of a page when he was running out of room. He didn’t remember any of this. It was the

product of twenty hours of lucid insanity, the most brilliant he had ever been.

“Does it strike you as odd, Adro,” Taravangian asked the scholar, “that genius and idiocy are so similar?”

“Similar?” Adrotagia asked. “Vargo, I do not see them as similar at all.” He and Adrotagia had grown up together, and she still used Taravangian’s boyhood nickname. He liked that. It reminded him of days before all of this.

“On both my most stupid days and my most incredible,” Taravangian said, “I am unable to interact with those around me in a meaningful way. It is like . . . like I become a gear that cannot fit those turning beside it. Too small or too large, it does not matter. The clock will not work.”

“I had not considered that,” Adrotagia said.

When Taravangian was at his stupidest, he was not allowed from his room. Those were the days he spent drooling in a corner. When he was merely dull-minded, he was allowed out under supervision. He spent those nights crying for what he had done, knowing that the atrocities he committed were important, but not understanding why.

When he was dull, he could not change policy. Interestingly, he had decided that when he was too brilliant, he was also not allowed to change policy. He’d made this decision after a day of genius where he’d thought to fix all of Kharbranth’s problems with a series of very rational edicts—such as requiring people to take an intelligence test of his own devising before being allowed to breed.

So brilliant on one hand. So stupid on another. Is that your joke here, Nightwatcher? he wondered. Is that the lesson I’m to learn? Do you even care about lessons, or is what you do to us merely for your own amusement?

He turned his attention back to the book, the Diagram. That grand plan he had devised on his singular day of unparalleled brilliance. Then, too, he’d spent the day staring at a wall. He’d written on it. Babbling the whole time, making connections no man had ever before made, he had scribbled all over his walls, floor, even parts of the ceiling he could reach. Most of it had been

written in an alien script—a language he himself had devised, for the scripts he had known had been unable to convey ideas precisely enough.

Fortunately, he'd thought to carve a key on the top of his bedside table, otherwise they wouldn't have been able to make sense of his masterpiece.

They could barely make sense of it anyway. He flipped through several pages, copied exactly from his room. Adrotagia and her scholars had made notations here and there, offering theories on what various drawings and lists might mean. They wrote those in the women's script, which Taravangian had learned years ago.

Adrotagia's notes on one page indicated that a picture there appeared to be a sketch of the mosaic on the floor of the Veden palace. He paused on that page. It might have relevance to this day's activities. Unfortunately, he wasn't smart enough today to make much sense of the book or its secrets. He had to trust that his smarter self was correct in his interpretations of his even smarter self's genius.

He shut the book and put down his spoon. "Let us be on with it." He stood up and left the cabin. Demid, Venli's once-mate, m what to dos.⁴, Mrall on one side of him and Adrotagia on the other. He emerged into sunlight and to the sight of a smoldering coastal city, complete with enormous terraced formations—like plates, or sections of shalebark, the remnants of city covering them and practically spilling over the sides. Once, this sight had been wondrous. Now, it was black, the buildings—even the palace—destroyed.

Vedenar, one of the great cities of the world, was now little more than a heap of rubble and ash.

Taravangian idled by the rail. When his ship had sailed into the harbor the night before, the city had been dotted with the red glow of burning buildings. Those had seemed alive. More alive than this. The wind was blowing in off the ocean, pushing at him from behind. It swept the smoke inland, away from the ship, so that Taravangian could barely smell it. An entire city burned just beyond his fingertips, and yet the stench vanished into the wind.

The Weeping would come soon. Perhaps it would wash away some of this

destruction.

“Come, Vargo,” Adrotagia said. “They are waiting.”

He nodded, joining her in climbing into the rowboat for tendering to shore. There had once been grand docks for this city. No more. One faction had destroyed them in an attempt to keep out the others.

“It’s amazing,” Mrall said, settling down into the tender beside him.

“I thought you said you weren’t going to be pleased any longer,” Taravangian said, stomach turning as he saw one of the heaps at the edge of the city. Bodies.

“I am not pleased,” Mrall said, “but in awe. Do you realize that the Eighty’s War between Emul and Tukar has lasted six years, and hasn’t produced nearly this level of desolation? Jah Keved ate itself in a matter of months!”

“Soulcasters,” Adrotagia whispered.

It was more than that. Even in his painfully normal state, Taravangian could see it was so. Yes, with Soulcasters to provide food and water, armies could march at speed—no carts or supply lines to slow them—and commence a slaughter in almost no time at all. But Emul and Tukar had their share of Soulcasters as well.

Sailors started rowing them toward shore.

“There was more,” Mrall said. “Each highprince sought to seize the capital. That made them converge. It was almost like the wars of some Northern savages, with a time and place appointed for the shaking of spears and chanting of threats. Only here, it depopulated a kingdom.”

“Let us hope, Mrall, that you make an overstatement,” Taravangian said. “We will need this kingdom’s people.” He turned away, stifling a moment of emotion as he saw bodies upon the rocks of the shore, men who had died by being shoved over the side of a nearby cliff into the ocean. That ridge normally sheltered the dock from highstorms. In war, it had been used to kill,

one army pressing the other back off the drop.

Adrotagia saw his tears, and though she said nothing, she pursed her lips in disapproval. She did not like how emotional he became when he was low of intellect. And yet, he knew for a fact that the old woman still burned a glyphward each morning as a prayer for her deceased husband. A strangely devout action for blasphemers such as they.

“What is the day’s news from home?” Taravangian asked to draw attention from the tears he wiped away.

“Dova reports that the number of Death R things like4SSoattles we’re finding has dropped even further. She didn’t find a single one yesterday, and only two the day before.”

“Moelach moves, then,” Taravangian said. “It is certain now. The creature must have been drawn by something westward.” What now? Did Taravangian suspend the murders? His heart yearned to—but if they could discover even one more glimmer about the future, one fact that could save hundreds of thousands, would it not be worth the lives of the few now?

5QIC">“Tell Dova to continue the work,” he said. He had not anticipated that their covenant would attract the loyalty of an ardent, of all things. The Diagram, and its members, knew no boundaries. Dova had discovered their work on her own, and they’d needed to either induct her or assassinate her.

“It will be done,” Adrotagia said.

The boatm



PART
FIVE

Winds Alight

KALADIN • SHALLAN • DALINAR •
ADOLIN • WIT



They will come you cannot stop their oaths look for those who survive when they should not that pattern will be your clue.

—From the Diagram, Coda of the Northwest Bottom Corner: paragraph 3

You have killed her. . . .

Kaladin couldn't sleep.

He knew he should sleep. He lay in his dark barrack room, surrounded by familiar stone, comfortable for the first time in days. A soft pillow, a mattress as good as the one he'd had back home in Hearthstone.

His body felt wrung out, like a rag after the washing was done. He'd survived the chasms and brought Shallan home safely. Now he needed to sleep and heal.

You have killed her. . . .

He sat up in his bed, and felt a wave of dizziness. He gritted his teeth and let it pass. His leg wound throbbed inside his bandage. The camp surgeons had

done a good job with that; his father would have been pleased.

The camp FABRIALS

Kaladin reached out in the darkness, feeling beside the wall until he found his spear. He took hold, then propped himself up and stood. The leg flared with immediate pain, and he gritted his teeth, but it wasn't so bad. He'd taken fathom bark for the pain, and it was working. He'd refused the firemoss the surgeons had tried to give him. His father had hated using the addictive stuff.

Kaladin forced his way to the door of his small room, then shoved it open and stepped into the sunlight. He shaded his eyes and scanned the sky. No clouds yet. The Weeping, the worst part of the year, would roll in sometime tomorrow. Four weeks of ceaseless rain and gloom. It was a Light Year, so not even a highstorm in the middle. Misery.

Kaladin longed for the storm within. That would have awakened his mind, made him feel like moving.

"Hey, gancho?" Lopen said, popping up from where he sat beside the firepit. "You need something?"

"Let's go watch the army leave."

"You're not supposed to be walking, I think. . . ."

"I'll be fine," Kaladin said, hobbling with difficulty.

Lopen rushed over to help him, getting up under Kaladin's arm, lifting weight off the bad leg. "Why don't you glow a bit, gon?" us an approxi

; Lopen asked softly. “Heal that problem?”

He’d prepared a lie: something about not wanting to alert the surgeons by healing too quickly. He couldn’t force it out. Not to a member of Bridge Four.

“I’ve lost the ability, Lopen,” he said softly. “Syl has left me.”

The leell unusually silent. “Well,” he finally said, “maybe you should buy her something nice.”

“Buy something nice? For a spren?”

“Yeah. Like . . . I don’t know. A nice plant, maybe, or a new hat. Yes, a hat. Might be cheap. She’s small. If a tailor tries to charge you full price for a hat that small, you thump him real good.”

“That’s the most ridiculous piece of advice I’ve ever been given.”

“You should rub yourself with curry and go prancing through the camp singing Horneater lullabies.”

Kaladin looked at Lopen, incredulous. “What?”

“See? Now the bit about the hat is only the second most ridiculous piece of advice you’ve ever been given, so you should try it. Women like hats. I have this cousin who makes them. I can ask her. You might not even need the actual hat. Just the spren of the hat. That’ll make it even cheaper.”

“You’re a very special kind of weird, Lopen.”

“Of course I am, gon. There’s only one of me.”

They continued through the empty camp. Storms, the place seemed hollow. They passed empty barrack after empty barrack. a member of Bridge Four?”al4SSoKaladin walked with care, glad for Lopen’s help, but even this was draining. He shouldn’t be moving on the leg. Father’s words, the words of a surgeon, floated up from the depths of his mind.

Torn muscles. Bind the leg, ward against infection, and keep the subject from putting weight on it. Further tearing could lead to a permanent limp, or worse.

“You want to get a palanquin?” Lopen asked.

“Those are for women.”

“Ain’t nothing wrong with being a woman, gancho,” Lopen said. “Some of my relatives are women.”

“Of course they . . .” He trailed off at Lopen’s grin. Storming Herdazian. How much of what he said was to deliberately sound obtuse? Well, Kaladin had heard men telling jokes about how stupid Herdazians were, but Lopen could talk rings around those men. Of course, half of Lopen’s own jokes were about Herdazians. He seemed to find those extra funny.

As they approached the plateaus, the dead silence gave way to the low roar of thousands of people assembled in a limited area. Kaladin and Lopen finally broke free of the barrack rows, emerging onto the natural terrace just above the parade grounds that debouched onto the Shattered Plains. Thousands of soldiers were gathered there. Spearmen in huge blocks, lighteyed archers in thinner ranks, officers prancing on horseback in gleaming armor.

Kaladin gasped softly.

“What?” Lopen asked.

“It’s what I always thought I’d find.”

“What? Today?”

“As a young man in Alethkar,” Kaladin said, unexpectedly emotional. “When I dreamed of the glory of war, this is what I imagined.” He hadn’t pictured the greenvines and barely capable soldiers that Amaram had trained in Alethkar. Neither had he pictured the crude, if effective, brutes of Sadeas’s army—or even the quick strike teams of Dalinar’s plateau runs.

He’d imagined this. A full army, arrayed for a grand march. Spears held high,

banners fluttering, drummers and trumpeters, messengers in livery, scribes on horses, even the king's Soulcasters in their own sectioned-off square, hidden from sight by walls of cloth carried on poles.

Kaladin knew the truth of battle now. Fighting was not about glory, but about men lying on the ground screaming and thrashing, tangled in their own viscera. It was about bridgemen thrown against a wall of arrows, or of Parshendi cut down while they sang.

Yet in this moment, Kaladin let himself dream again. He gave his youthful self—still there deep inside him—the spectacle he'd always imagined. He pretended that these soldiers were about something wonderful, instead of just another pointless slaughter.

"Hey, someone else is actually coming," Lopen said, pointing. "Look at that."

By the banners, Dalinar had been joined by only a single highprince: Roion. However, as Lopen pointed out, another force—not quite as large or as well organized—was flowing northward up the wide, open pathway along the eastern rim of the warcamps. At least one other highprince had responded to Dalinar's call.

"Let's find Bridge Four," Kaladin said. "I want to see the men off."

* * *

"Sebarial?" Dalinar asked. "Sebarial's troops are joining us?"

Roion grunted, wringing his hands—as if wishing to wash them—as he sat in the saddle. "I guess we should be glad for any support at all."

"Sebarial," Dalinar said, dumbfounded. "He wouldn't even send troops on close plateau runs, where there was no risk of Parshendi. Why would he send men now?"

Roion shook his head and shrugged.

Dalinar turned Gallant and trotted the horse toward the oncoming group, as

did Roion. They passed Adolin, who rode just behind with Shallan, side by side, her guards and his following. Renarin was over with the bridgemen, of course.

Shallan was riding one of Adolin's own horses, a petite gelding over which Sureblood towered. Shallan wore a traveling dress of the kind messenger women preferred, with the front and back slit all the way to the waist. She wore leggings—basically silk trousers, but women preferred other names—underneath.

Behind them rode a large group of Navani's scholars and cartographers, including Isasik, the ardent who was the royal cartographer. These passed around the map Shallan had drawn, Isasik riding to the side, chin raised, as if pointedly ignoring the praise the women were giving Shallan's map. Dalinar needed all these scholars, though he wished he didn't. Each scribe he brought was another life he risked. That was made worse by Navani herself coming. He couldn't dismiss her argument. If you think it's safe enough for you to bring the girl, then it's safe enough for me.

As Dalinar made his way toward Sebarial's oncoming procession, Amaram rode up, wearing his Shardplate, his golden cloak trailing behind. He had a fine warhorse, the hulking breed used in Shinovar to pull heavy carts. It still looked like a pony beside Gallant.

"Is that Sebarial?" Amaram asked, pointing at the oncoming force.

"Apparently."

"Should we send him away?"

"Why would we do that?"

"He's untrustworthy," Amaram said.

"He keeps his word, so far as I know," Dalinar said. "That is more than I can say for most."

"He keeps his word because he never promises anything."

Dalinar, Roion, and Amaram trotted up to Sebarial, who stepped out of a carriage at the front of the army. A carriage. For a war procession. Well, it wouldn't slow Dalinar any more than all of these scribes. In fact, he should probably have a few more carriages made ready. It would be nice for Navani to have a way to ride in comfort once the days wore long.

"Sebarial?" Dalinar asked.

"Dalinar!" the plump man said, shading his eyes. "You look surprised."

"I am."

"Ha! That's reason enough to have come. Wouldn't you say, Palona?"

Dalinar could barely make out the woman sitting in the carriage, wearing an enormous fashionable hat and a sleek gown.

"You brought your mistress?" Dalinar asked.

"Sure how willing you were to obey me officerLSs. f. Why not? If we fail out there, I'll be dead and she'll be out on her ear. She insisted, anyway. Storming woman." Sebarial walked up right beside Gallant. "I've got a feeling about you, Dalinar old man. I think it's wise to stay close to you. Something's going to happen out there on the Plains, and opportunity rises like the dawn."

Roion sniffed.

"Roion," Sebarial said, "shouldn't you be hiding under a table somewhere?"

"Perhaps I should, if only to get away from you."

Sebarial laughed. "Well said, you old turtle! Maybe this trip won't be a complete bore. Onward, then! To glory and some such nonsense. If we find riches, remember that I get my part! I got here before Aladar. That has to count for something."

"Before . . ." Dalinar said with a start. He twisted around, looking back toward the warcamp bordering his own to the north.

There, an army wearing Aladar's colors of white and dark green spilled out onto the Shattered Plains.

"Now that," Amaram said, "I really didn't expect."

* * *

"We could try a coup," Ialai said.

Sadeas turned in his saddle toward his wife. Their guards scattered the hills around them, distant enough to be out of earshot as the highprince and his wife enjoyed a gentle "ride through the hills." In reality, the two of them had wanted a closer look at Sebarial's expansions out here west of the warcamps, where he was setting up full-scale farming operations.

Ialai rode with eyes forward. "Dalinar will be gone from the camp, and with him Roion, his only supporter. We could seize the Pinnacle, execute the king, and take the throne."

Sadeas turned his horse, looking eastward over the warcamps. He could just barely make out Dalinar's army gathering distantly on the Shattered Plains.

A coup. One last step, a slap in the face of old Gavilar. He'd do it. Storm it, he would.

Except for the fact that he didn't need to.

"Dalinar has committed to this foolish expedition," Sadeas said. "He'll be dead soon, surrounded and destroyed on those Plains. We don't need a coup; if I'd known that he would actually do this, we wouldn't have even needed your assassin."

Ialai looked away. Her assassin had failed. She considered it a strong fault on her part, though the plan had been executed with exactness. These things were never certain. Unfortunately, now that they'd tried and failed, they'd need to be careful about . . .

Sadeas turned his horse, frowning as a messenger approached on horseback. The youth was allowed to pass the guards and proffered a letter to Ialai.

She read it, and her disposition darkened.

“You aren’t going to like this,” she said, looking up.

* * *

Dalinar kicked Gallant into motion, tearing across the landscape, startling plants into their dens. He passed his army in a few minutes of hard riding and approached the new force.

Aladar sat on horseback here, surveying his army. He wore a fashionable uniform, black with maroon stripes on the sleeves and a matching stock at the neck. Soldiers swarmed around him. He had one of the largest forces on the Plains—storms, with Dalinar’s numbers reduced, Aladar’s army might be the largest.

He was also one of Sadeas’s greatest supporters.

“How are we going to do this, Dalinar?” Aladar asked as Dalinar trotted up. “Do we all go out on our own, crossing different plateaus but meeting back up, or do we march in an enormous column?”

“Why?” Dalinar asked. “Why have you come?”

“You made such passionate arguments all along, and now you act surprised that someone listened?”

“Not someone. You.”

Aladar pressed his lips to a line, finally turning to meet Dalinar’s eyes.

“Roion and Sebarial, the two biggest cowards in our midst, are marching to war. Am I to stay behind and let them seek the fulfillment of the Vengeance Pact without me?”

“The other highprinces seem content to do so.”

“I suspect they are better at lying to themselves than I am.”

Suddenly, all of Aladar's vehement arguments—at the forefront of the faction against Dalinar—took on a different cast. He was arguing to convince himself, Dalinar thought. He was worried all along that I was right.

“Sadeas will not be pleased,” Dalinar said.

“Sadeas can storm off. He doesn't own me.” Aladar fiddled with his reins for a moment. “He wants to, though. I can feel it in the deals he forces me to make, the knives he slowly places at everyone's throats. He'd have us all as his slaves by the end of this.”

“Aladar,” Dalinar said, moving his horse right up alongside the other man's so the two of them faced each other directly. He held Aladar's eyes. “Tell me Sadeas didn't put you up to this. Tell me this isn't part of another plot to abandon or betray me.”

Aladar smiled. “You think I'd just tell you if it were?”

“I would hear a promise from your own lips.”

“And you'll trust that promise? How well did that serve you, Dalinar, when Sadeas professed his friendship?”

“A promise, Aladar.”

Aladar met his eyes. “I think the things you say about Alethkar are naive at best, and undoubtedly impossible. Those delusions of yours aren't a sign of madness, as Sadeas wants us to think—they're just the dreams of a man who wants desperately to believe in something, something foolish. ‘Honor’ is a word applied to the actions of men from the past who have had their lives scrubbed clean by historians.” He hesitated. “But . . . storm me for a fool, Dalinar, I wish they could be true. I came for myself, not Sadeas. I won't betray you. Even if Alethkar can't ever be what you want, we can at least crush the Parshendi and avenge old Gavilar. It's just the right thing to do.”

Dalinar nodded.

“I could be lying,” Aladar how willing you were to obey me officerLSs. f

said.

“But you aren’t.”

“How do you know?”

“Honestly? I don’t. But if this is all going to work, I am going to have to trust some of you.” To an extent. He would never put himself in another position like the Tower.

Either way, Aladar’s presence meant this incursion was actually possible. Together, the four of them would likely outnumber the Parshendi—though he wasn’t certain how trustworthy the scribes’ counts of their numbers were.

It was not the grand coalition of all highprinces that Dalinar had wanted, but even with the chasms favoring the Parshendi, this could be enough.

“We march together,” Dalinar said, pointing. “I don’t want us spread out. We keep to plateaus next to one another, or the same plateau when possible. And you’ll need to leave your parshmen behind.”

“That’s an unusual requirement,” Aladar said with a frown.

“We’re marching against their cousins,” Dalinar said. “Best to not risk the possibility of them turning against us.”

“But they’d never . . . Bah, whatever. It can be done.”

Dalinar nodded, extending a hand to Aladar as, behind, Roion and Amaram finally trotted up; Dalinar had outstripped them on Gallant.

“Thank you,” Dalinar said to Aladar.

“You really do believe in all of this, don’t you?”

“Yes.”

Aladar extended his hand, but hesitated. “You realize that I’m stained through and through. I’ve got blood on these hands, Dalinar. I’m not some

perfect, honorable knight as you seem to want to pretend.”

“I know you’re not,” Dalinar said, taking the hand. “I’m not either. We will have to do.”

They shared a nod, then Dalinar turned Gallant and began to trot back toward his own army. Roion groaned, complaining about his thighs after having galloped all the way over. The ride today was not going to be pleasant for him.

Amaram fell in beside Dalinar. “First Sebarial, then Aladar? Your trust seems to come cheaply today, Dalinar.”

“Would you have me turn them away?”

“Think how spectacular this victory would be if we did it on our own.”

“I hope we’re above such vainglory, old friend,” Dalinar said. They rode for a time, passing Adolin and Shallan again. Dalinar scanned his force and noticed something. A tall man in blue sat on a stone in the midst of Bridge Four’s bodyguards.

Speaking of fools . . .

“Come with me,” Dalinar said to Amaram.

Amaram let his horse lag behind. “I think I should go see to—”

“Come,” Dalinar said sharply. “I want you to speak to that young man so we can put a stop to the rumors and the things he’s been saying about you. Those don’t do anyone any good.”

“Very well,” Amaram said, catching up.

* * *

Kaladin found himself standing up amid t Alight

She looked gorgeous. Kaladin was willing to admit it, if only to himself.

Brilliant red hair, ready smile. She said something clever; Kaladin could almost hear the words. He waited, hoping that she'd look toward him, meet his eyes across the short distance.

She didn't. She rode on, and Kaladin felt like an utter fool. A part of him wanted to hate Adolin for holding her attention, but he found that he couldn't. The truth was, he liked Adolin. And those two were good for one another. They fit.

Perhaps Kaladin could hate that.

He settled back down on a rock, bowing his head. The bridgemen crowded in around him. Hopefully they hadn't seen Kaladin following Shallan with his eyes, straining to hear her voice. Renarin stood, like a shade, at the back of the group. The bridgemen were coming to accept him, but he still seemed very awkward around them. Of course, he seemed awkward around most people.

I need to talk to him more about his condition, Kaladin thought. Something seemed off to him about that man and his explanation of the epilepsy.

"Why are you here, sir?" Bisig asked, drawing Kaladin's attention back to the other bridgemen.

"I wanted to see you off," Kaladin said, sighing. "I assumed you'd be happy to see me."

"You are like child," Rock said, wagging a thick finger at Kaladin. "What would you do, great Captain Stormblessed, if you caught one of these men walking about with hurt leg? You would have that man beaten! Once he healed, of course."

"I thought," Kaladin noted, "that I was your commander."

"Nah, can't be," Teft said, "because our commander would be smart enough to stay in bed."

"And eat much stew," Rock said. "I left you stew to eat while I am gone."

“You’re going on the expedition?” Kaladin asked, looking up at the large Horneater. “I thought you were just seeing the men off. You aren’t willing to fight. What will you do out there?”

“Someone must fix food for them,” Rock said. “This expedition, it will take days. I will not leave my friends to the mercy of camp chefs. Ha! The food they cook will all be from Soulcast grain and meat. Tastes like crem! Someone must come with proper spices.”

Kaladin looked up at the group of frowning men. “Fine,” he said. “I’ll go back. Storms, I . . .”

Why were the bridgemen parting? Rock looked over his shoulder, then laughed, backing away. “Now we shall see real trouble.”

Behind them, Dalinar Kholin was climbing from his saddle. Kaladin sighed, then waved for Lopen to help him to his feet so he could salute properly. He got upright—earning a glare from Teft—before noticing that Dalinar was not alone.

Amaram. Kaladin stiffened, straining to keep his face expressionless.

Dalinar and Amaram approached. The pain in Kaladin’s leg seemed to fade, and the boy. What Sofor the moment he could only see that man. That monster of a man. Wearing Plate Kaladin had earned, a golden cloak billowing out behind, bearing the symbol of the Knights Radiant.

Control yourself, Kaladin thought. He managed to swallow his rage. Last time it had gotten the better of him, he’d earned himself weeks in prison.

“You should be resting, soldier,” Dalinar said.

“Yes, sir,” Kaladin replied. “My men have already made that abundantly clear.”

“Then you trained them well. I’m proud to have them along with me on this expedition.”

Teft saluted. “If there is danger to you, Brightlord, it will be out there on the

Plains. We can't protect you if we wait back here."

Kaladin frowned, realizing something. "Skar is here . . . Teft . . . so who is watching the king?"

"We've seen to it, sir," Teft said. "Brightlord Dalinar asked me leave our best man behind with a team of his own selection. They'll watch the king."

Their best man . . .

Coldness. Moash. Moash had been left in charge of the king's safety, and had a team of his own choosing.

Storms.

"Amaram," Dalinar said, waving for the highlord to step up. "You told me that you'd never seen this man before arriving here on the Shattered Plains. Is that true?"

Kaladin met the eyes of a murderer.

"Yes," Amaram said.

"What of his claim that you took your Blade and Plate from him?" Dalinar asked.

"Brightlord," Amaram said, taking Dalinar by the arm, "I don't know if the lad is touched in the head or merely starved for attention. Perhaps he served in my army, as he claims—he certainly bears the correct slave brand. But his allegations regarding me are obviously preposterous."

Dalinar nodded to himself, as if this were all expected. "I believe an apology is due."

Kaladin struggled to remain upright, his leg feeling weak. So this would be his final punishment. Apologizing to Amaram in public. A humiliation above all others.

"I—" Kaladin began.

“Not you, son,” Dalinar said softly.

Amaram turned, posture suddenly more alert—like that of a man preparing for a fight. “Surely you don’t believe these allegations, Dalinar!”

“A few weeks ago,” Dalinar said, “I received two special visitors in camp. One was a trusted servant who had come from Kholinar in secret, bringing a precious cargo. The other was that cargo: a madman who had arrived at the gates of Kholinar carrying a Shardblade.”

Amaram paled and stepped back, hand going to his side.

“I told my servant,” Dalinar said calmly, “to go drinking with your personal guard—he knew many of them—and talk of a treasure that the madman said had been hidden for years outside the warcamp. By my order, he then placed the madman’s Shardblade in a nearby cavern. After that, we waited.”

a member of Bridge Four?” al4SSoHe’s summoning his Blade, Kaladin thought, looking at Amaram’s hand. Kaladin reached for his side knife, but Dalinar was already raising his own hand.

White mist coalesced in Dalinar’s fingers, and a Shardblade appeared, tip to Amaram’s throat. Wider than most, it was almost cleaverlike in appearance.

A Blade formed in Amaram’s hand a second later—a second too late. His eyes went wide as he stared at the silvery Blade held to his throat.

Dalinar had a Shardblade.

“I thought,” Dalinar said, “that if you had been willing to murder for one Blade, you would certainly be willing to lie for a second. And so, after I knew you’d sneaked in to see the madman on your own, I asked you to investigate his claims for me. I gave your conscience plenty of time to come clean, out of respect for our friendship. When you told me you’d found nothing—but in fact you had actually recovered the Shardblade—I knew the truth.”

“How?” Amaram hissed, looking at the Blade Dalinar held. “How did you

get it back? I removed it from the cave. My men had it safe!”

“I wasn’t about to risk it just to prove a point,” Dalinar said, cold. “I bonded this Blade before we hid it away.”

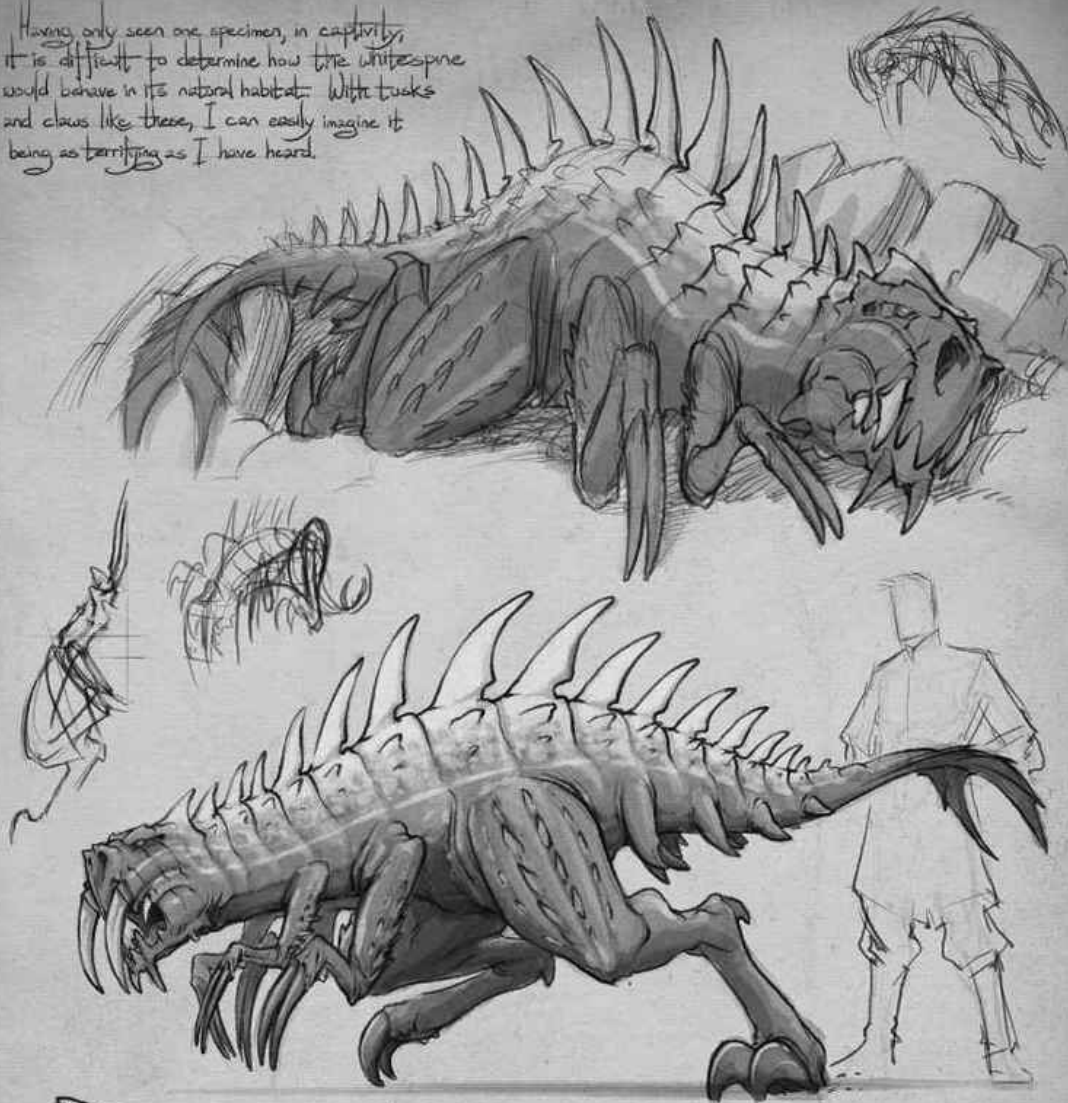
“That week you spent ill,” Amaram said.

“Yes.”

“Damnation.”

Dalinaran Herdazian f

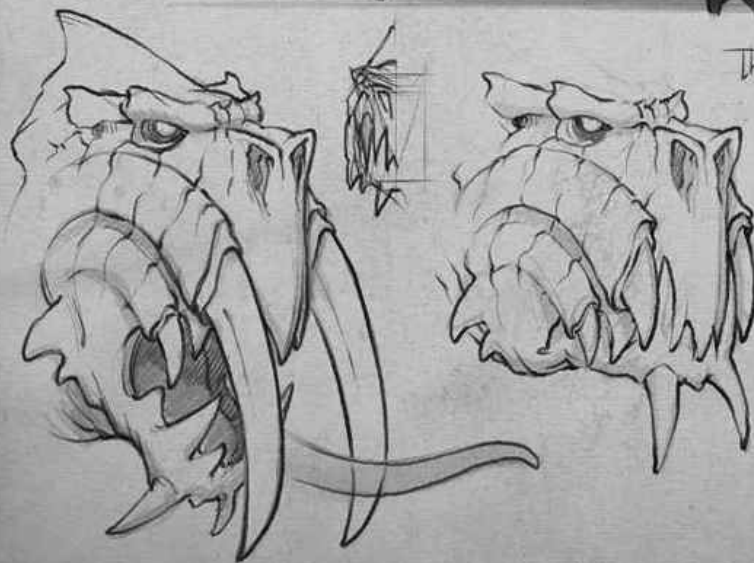
Having only seen one specimen, in captivity, it is difficult to determine how the Whitespine would behave in its natural habitat. With tusks and claws like these, I can easily imagine it being as terrifying as I have heard.

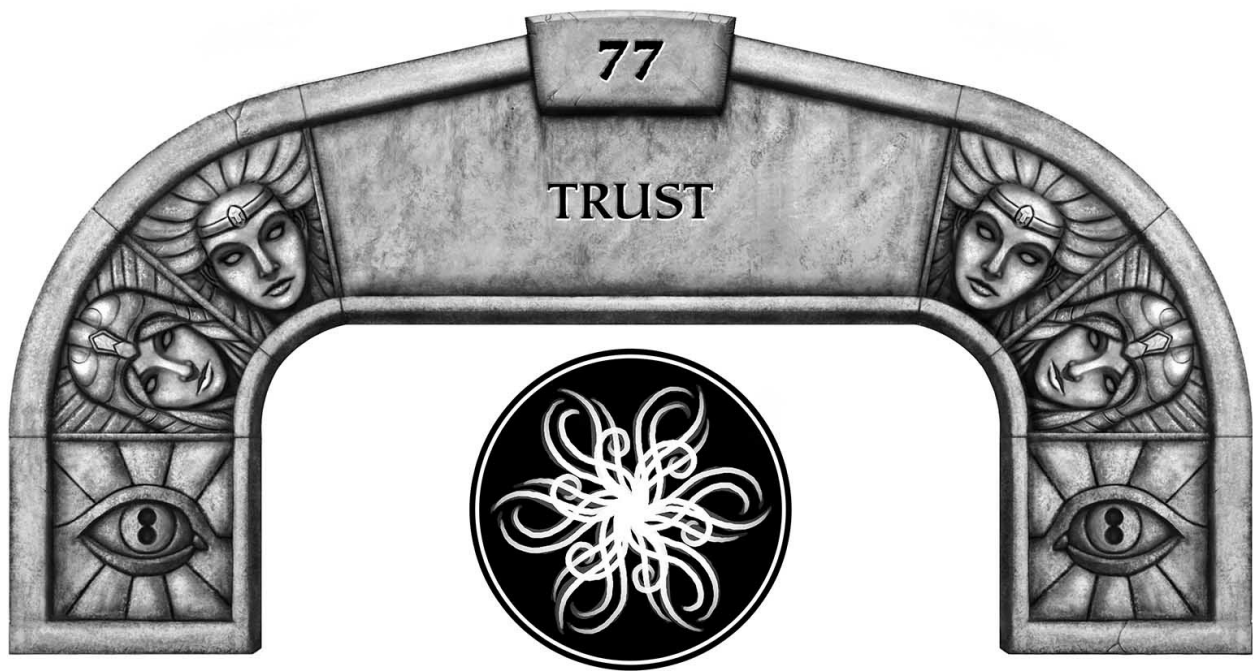


The Whitespine possesses tiny eyes in recessed cavities. It may have good peripheral vision, but poor focus at long distances.

The large nasal cavities suggest that it depends greatly on its sense of smell.

The tusks are highly prized as trophies. Artisans engrave the surfaces, or carve them into various shapes. The tusks will change in color, over time, from the natural hue into a smooth, polished white.





One danger in deploying such a potent weapon will be the potential encouragement of those exploring the Nahel bond. Care must be taken to avoid placing these subjects in situations of powerful stress unless you accept the consequences of their potential Investiture.

—From the Diagram, Floorboard 27: paragraph 6

Like a river suddenly undammed, the four armies flooded out onto the plateaus. Shallan watched from horseback, excited, anxious. Her little part of the convoy included Vathah and her soldiers, along with Marri, her lady's maid. Gaz, notably, hadn't arrived yet, and Vathah claimed to not know where he was. Perhaps she should have looked more into the nature of his debts. She'd been so busy with other things . . . storms, if the man vanished, how would she feel about that?

She would have to deal with that later. Today, she was part of something extremely important—a story that had begun with Gavilar and Dalinar's first hunting expedition into the Unclaimed Hills years ago. Now came the final chapter, the mission that would unearth the truth and determine the future of the Shattered Plains, the Parshendi, and perhaps Alethkar itself.

Shallan kicked her horse forward, eager. The gelding started to walk, placid despite Shallan's prodding.

Storming animal.

Adolin trotted up beside her on Sureblood. The beautiful animal was pure white—not dusty grey, like some horses she'd seen, but actually white. That Adolin should have the larger horse was patently unfair. She was shorter than he was, so she should be on the taller horse.

“You purposely gave me a slow one,” Shallan complained, “didn't you?”

“Sure did.”

“I'd smack you. If I could reach you up there.”

He chuckled. “You said you don't have a lot of experience riding, so I picked a horse that had a lot of experience being ridden. Trust me, you'll be thankful.”

“I want to ride in a majestic charge as we begin our expedition!”

“And you can do so.”

“Slowly.”

“Technically, slow speeds can be very majestic.”

“Technically,” she said, “a man doesn't need all of his toes. Shall we remove a few of yours and prove it?”

He laughed. “As long as you don't hurt my face, I suppose.”

“Don't be ridiculous. I like your face.”

He grinned, Shardplate helm hanging from his saddle so as to not mess up his hair. She waited for him to add a quip to hers, but he didn't.

That was all right. She liked Adolin as he was. He was kind, noble, and

genuine. It didn't matter that he wasn't brilliant or . . . or whatever else Kaladin was. She couldn't even define it. So there.

Passionate, with an intense, smoldering resolve. A leashed anger that he used, because he had dominated it. And a certain tempting arrogance. Not the haughty pride of a highlord. Instead, the secure, stab Alight

Davim hummed to Alle sense of determination that whispered that no matter who you were—or what you did—you could not hurt him. Could not change him.

He was. Like the wind and rocks were.

Shallan completely missed what Adolin said next. She blushed. “What was that?”

“I said that Sebarial has a carriage. You might want to travel with him.”

“Because I'm too delicate for riding?” Shallan said. “Did you miss that I walked back through the chasms in the middle of a highstorm?”

“Um, no. But walking and riding are different. I mean, the soreness . . .”

“Soreness?” Shallan asked. “Why would I be sore? Doesn't the horse do all of the work?”

Adolin looked at her, eyes widening.

“Um,” she said. “Dumb question?”

“You said you'd ridden before.”

“Ponies,” she said, “on my father's estates. Around in circles . . . All right, from that expression, I'm led to believe I'm being an idiot. When I get sore, I'll go ride with Sebarial.”

“Before you get sore,” Adolin said. “We'll give it an hour.”

As annoyed as she was at this turn, she couldn't deny his expertise. Jasnah

had once defined a fool as a person who ignored information because it disagreed with desired results.

She determined to not be bothered, and instead enjoy the ride. The army as a whole moved slowly, considering that each piece seemed to be so efficient. Spearmen in blocks, scribes on horseback, scouts roving outward. Dalinar had six of the massive mechanical bridges, but he had also brought all of the former bridgemen and their simpler, man-carried bridges, designed as copies of the ones they'd left in Sadeas's camp. That was good, since Sebarial only had a couple of bridge crews.

She allowed herself a moment of personal satisfaction at the fact that he'd come on the expedition. As she was thinking on that, she noticed someone running up the line of troops behind her. A short man, with an eye patch, who drew glares from Adolin's bridgeman guards for the day.

"Gaz?" Shallan said with relief as he hustled up, carrying a package under his arm. Her fears that he'd been knifed in an alley somewhere were unfounded.

"Sorry, sorry," he said. "It came. You owe the merchant two sapphire brooms, Brightness."

"It?" Shallan asked, accepting the package.

"Yeah. You asked me to find one for you. I storming did." He seemed proud of himself.

She unwrapped the cloth around the rectangular object, and found inside a book. Words of Radiance, the cover said. The sides were worn, and the pages faded—one patch across the top was even stained from spilled ink sometime in the past.

Rarely had she been as pleased to receive something so damaged. "Gaz!" she said. "You're wonderful!"

He grinned, shooting Vathah a triumphant smile. The taller man rolled his eyes, muttering something Shallan didn't hear. said, following Kaladin's gaze.ment of patterns. f

“Thank you,” Shallan said. “Thank you truly, Gaz.”

* * *

As the time passed and one day led into another, Shallan found the distraction of the book extremely welcome. The armies moved about as fast as a herd of sleepy chulls, and the scenery was actually quite boring, though she’d never admit that to Kaladin or Adolin, considering what she’d told them last time she was out here.

The book, though. The book was wonderful. And frustrating.

But what was the “wicked thing of eminence” that led to the Recreance? she thought, writing the quote in her notebook. It was the second day of their travels on the Plains, and she had agreed to ride in the coach Adolin had provided—alone, though it baffled Adolin why she wouldn’t want her lady’s maid with her. Shallan did not want to explain Pattern to the girl.

The book had a chapter for each order of Knights Radiant, with talk of their traditions, their abilities, and their attitudes. The author admitted that a lot of it was hearsay—the book had been written two hundred years after the Recreance, and by then facts, lore, and superstition had mixed freely. Beyond that, it was in an old dialect of Alethi, using the protoscript, a precursor to the true women’s script of modern day. She spent a lot of her time sorting out meanings, occasionally calling over some of Navani’s scholars to provide definitions or interpretation.

Still, she had learned a great deal. For example, each order had different Ideals, or standards, to determine advancement. Some were specific, others left to the interpretation of the spren. Also, some orders were individualistic, while others—like the Windrunners—functioned in teams, with a specific hierarchy.

She settled back, thinking about the powers described. Would the others be appearing, then? As she and Jasnah had? Men who could glide elegantly across the ground as if they weighed nothing, women who could melt stone with a touch. Pattern had offered some few insights, but mostly he had been of use telling her what sounded likely to have been real, and what from the

book was a mistake based on hearsay. His memory was spotty, but growing much better, and hearing what the book said often made him remember more.

Right now, he buzzed on the seat beside her in a contented way. The carriage hit a bump—it was rough out here—but at least in the coach, she could read and reference other books at the same time. That would have been practically impossible while riding.

The coach did make her feel shut away, though. Not everyone who tries to take care of you is trying to do what your father did, she told herself firmly.

Adolin's warned-of soreness had never manifested, of course. Originally, she'd felt a small amount of pain in her thighs from holding herself in place in the saddle, but Stormlight had made it vanish.

"Mmm," Pattern said, climbing onto the door of the carriage. "It comes."

Shallan looked out the window and felt a drop of water sprinkle against her face. Rock darkened as rain coated it. Soon, the air filled with a steady drizzle, light and pleasant. Though colder, it reminded her of some of the rainfalls back in Jah Keved. Here in the stormlands, it seemed that rain was rarely this soft.

She pulled down the shades and scooted to the center of the seat so she wouldn't get rained on. She soon found that the pleasing+rem blankets. f sound of water muffled the soldiers' voices and the monotonous sound of marching feet, making it a nice accompaniment to reading. A quote sparked her interest, and so she dug out her sketch of the Shattered Plains and her old maps of Stormseat.

I need to find out how these maps relate, she thought. Multiple points of reference, preferably. If she could identify two places on the Shattered Plains that matched points on her map of Stormseat, she could judge how large Stormseat had been—the old map had no scale—and then overlay it on the map of the Shattered Plains. That would give them some context.

What really drew her attention was the Oathgate. On the map of Stormseat, Jasnah thought it was represented by a round disc, like a dais, on the

southwestern side of the city. Was there a doorway there on that dais somewhere? A magical portal to Urithiru? How did one of the knights operate it?

“Mmm,” Pattern said.

Shallan’s carriage started to slow. She frowned, scooting to the door, meaning to peek out the window. The door opened, however, to reveal Highlady Navani standing outside, Dalinar himself holding up an umbrella for her.

“Would you mind company?” Navani asked.

“Not at all, Brightness,” Shallan said, scrambling to pick up her papers and books, which she’d spread about on all of the seats. Navani patted Dalinar fondly on the arm, then climbed into the coach, using a towel to dry her feet and legs. She sat once Dalinar shut the door.

They started rolling again, and Shallan fidgeted with her papers. What was her relationship with Navani? She was Adolin’s aunt, but she was romantically involved with his father. So she was kind of Shallan’s future mother-in-law, though by Vorin tradition Dalinar would never be allowed to marry her.

Shallan had tried for weeks to get this woman to listen to her, and had failed. Now, she seemed to have been forgiven for bearing the news of Jasnah’s death. Did that mean Navani . . . liked her?

“So,” Shallan said, feeling awkward, “did Dalinar exile you to the coach to protect you from getting sore, as Adolin did to me?”

“Sore? Heavens no. If anyone should be riding in the coach, it’s Dalinar. When there is fighting to be done, we’ll need him rested and ready. I came because it’s rather difficult to read while riding in the rain.”

“Oh.” Shallan shifted in her seat.

Navani studied her, then finally sighed. “I have been ignoring things,” the

older woman said, “that I should not. Because they bring me pain.”

“I am sorry.”

“You have nothing to apologize for.” Navani held out her hand toward Shallan. “May I?”

Shallan looked at her handful of notes, diagrams, and maps. She hesitated.

“You are engaged in work you obviously think very important,” Navani said softly. “This city Jasnah was searching for, according to the notes you sent me? Perhaps I can help you interpret my daughter’s intentions.”

Was there anything in these pages that would incriminate Shallan and reveal her powers? Her activities as Veil?

She didn’t think so. She’d been studying the Knights Radiant as part of it, but she was searching for their center of power, so that made sense. Her father, Darknessresistant, she handed over the papers.

Navani leafed through them, reading by spherelight. “The organization of these notes is . . . interesting.”

Shallan blushed. The organization made sense to her. As Navani continued to look through the notes, Shallan found herself growing oddly anxious. She’d wanted Navani’s help—she’d all but begged for it. Now, however, she found herself feeling like this woman was intruding. This had become Shallan’s project, her duty and her quest. Now that Navani had apparently overcome her grief, would she insist on taking over completely?

“You think like an artist,” Navani said. “I can see it in the way you put the notes together. Well, I suppose I can’t expect everything you do to be annotated precisely as I’d wish. A magical portal to another city? Jasnah actually believed in this?”

“Yes.”

“Hmm,” Navani said. “Then it’s probably true. That girl never did have the decency to be wrong an appropriate amount of the time.”

Shallan nodded, glancing at the notes, feeling anxious.

“Oh, don’t get so touchy,” Navani said. “I’m not going to steal the project from you.”

“I’m that transparent?” Shallan said.

“This research is obviously very important to you. I assume Jasnah persuaded you that the fate of the world itself rested upon the answers you find?”

“She did.”

“Damnation,” Navani said, flipping to the next page. “I shouldn’t have ignored you. It was petty.”

“It was the act of a grieving mother.”

“Scholars don’t have time for such nonsense.” Navani blinked, and Shallan caught a tear in the woman’s eye.

“You’re still human,” Shallan said, reaching across, putting her hand on Navani’s knee. “We can’t all be emotionless chunks of rock like Jasnah.”

Navani smiled. “She sometimes had the empathy of a corpse, didn’t she?”

“Comes from being too brilliant,” Shallan said. “You grow accustomed to everyone else being something of an idiot, trying to keep up with you.”

“Chana knows, I wondered sometimes how I raised that child without strangling her. By age six, she was pointing out my logical fallacies as I tried to get her to go to bed on time.”

Shallan grinned. “I always just assumed she was born in her thirties.”

“Oh, she was. It just took thirty-some years for her body to catch up.” Navani smiled. “I won’t take this from you, but neither should I allow you to attempt a project so important on your own. I would be part. Figuring out the puzzles that captivated her . . . it will be like having her again. My little Jasnah,

insufferable and wonderful.”

How surreal it was to imagine Jasnah as a child being held by a mother. “It would be an honor to have your aid, Brightness Navani.”

Navani held up the page. “You’re trying to overlay Stormseat with the Shattered Plains. It’s not going to work unless you have a point of reference.”

“Preferably two+? f Darknessre,” Shallan said.

“It’s been centuries since that city fell. It was destroyed during Aharietiam itself, I believe. We’re going to have trouble finding clues out here, though your list of descriptions will help.” She tapped her finger against the papers. “This isn’t my area of expertise, but I have several archaeologists among Dalinar’s scribes. I should show them these pages.”

Shallan nodded.

“We’ll want copies of everything here,” Navani said. “I don’t want to lose originals to all of this rain. I could have the scribes work on it tonight, after we camp.”

“If you wish.”

Navani looked up at her, then frowned. “It is your decision.”

“You’re serious?” Shallan asked.

“Absolutely. Think of me as an additional resource.”

All right then. “Yes, have them make copies,” Shallan said, digging in her satchel. “And copies of this too—it’s my attempt at re-creating one of the murals described as being on the outer wall of the temple to Chanaranach in Stormseat. It faced leeward, and was supposedly shaded, so we might be able to find hints of it.

“Also, I need a surveyor to measure each new plateau we cross, once we get farther in. I can draw them out, but my spatial reasoning can be off. I want exact sizes to make the map more accurate. I’ll need guards and sc In

sacrificin



AhbuttheywereleftbehindItisobviousfromthenatureofthebondButwherewherew
AhbuttheywereleftbehindItisobviousfrom
thenatureofthebondButwherewherewherewhereSetoffObviousRealizationlike
apricityTheyarewiththeShinWemustfindone
CanwemaketouseaTruthlessCanwecrafta weapon

—From the Diagram, Floorboard 17: paragraph 2, every second letter starting with the first

In the darkness, Shalla's violet spheres gave life to the rain. Without the spheres, she couldn't see the drops, only hear their deaths upon the stones and the cloth of her pavilion. With the light, each falling speck of water flashed briefly, like starspren.

She sat at the edge of the pavilion, as she liked to watch the rainfall between bouts of sketching, while the other scholars sat closer to the center. So did Vathah and a couple of his soldiers, watching over her like nesting skyeyes with a single pup. It amused her that they'd grown so protective; they seemed actively proud to be her soldiers. She'd honestly expected them to run off after gaining their clemency.

Four days into the Weepit Dalinar that



Q: For what essential must we strive? A: The essential of preservation, to shelter a seed of humanity through the coming storm. Q: What cost must we bear? A: The cost is irrelevant. Mankind must survive. Our burden is that of the species, and all other considerations are but dust by comparison.

—From the Diagram, Catechism of the Back of the Flowered Painting:
paragraph 1

Dalinar stood with hands behind his back, waiting in his command tent and listening to the patter of rain on the cloth. The floor of the tent was wet. You couldn't avoid that, in the Weeping. He knew that from miserable experience—he'd been out on more than one military excursion during this time of year.

It was the day after they'd discovered the Parshendi on the Plains—both the dead one and the one the bridgemen called Shen, or Rlain, as he had said his name was. Dalinar himself had allowed the man to be armed.

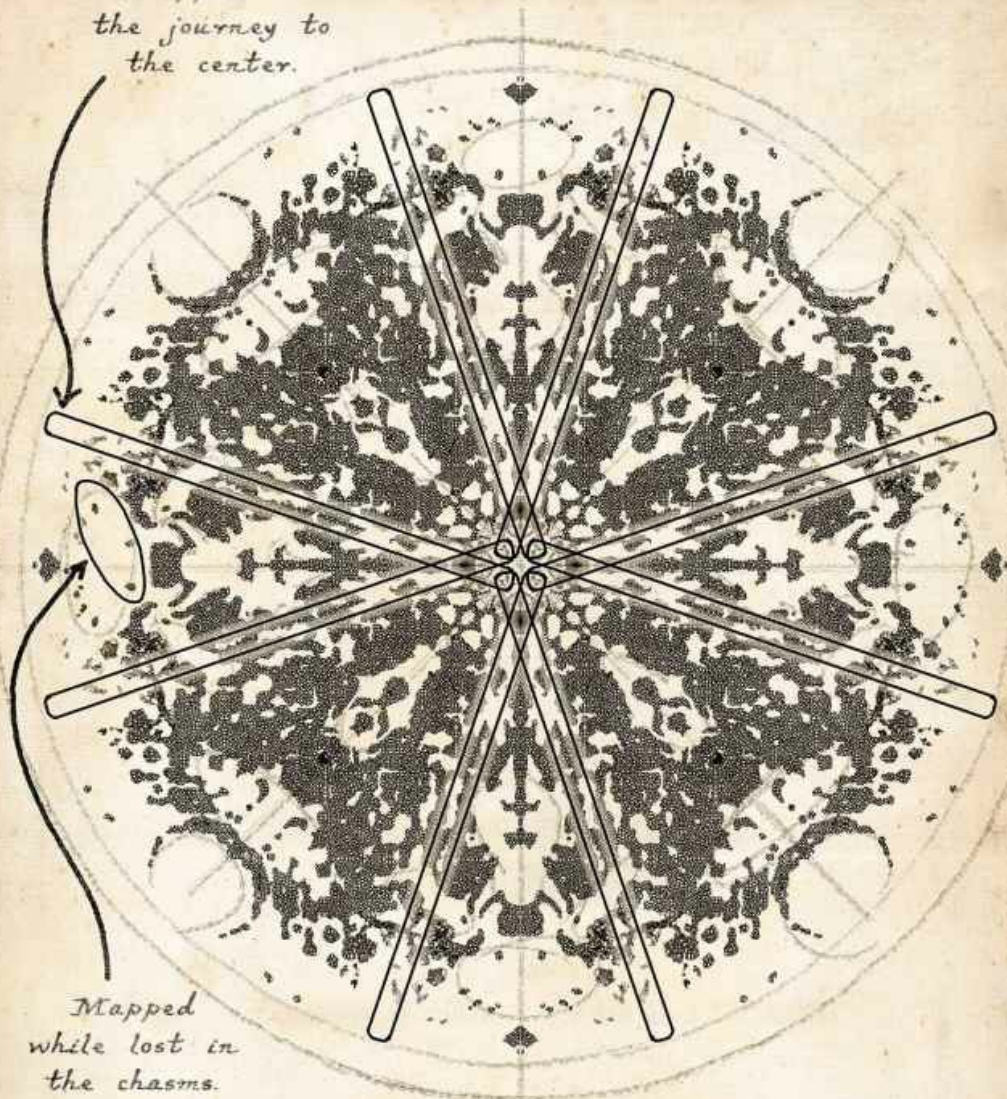
Shallan claimed that all parshmen were Voidbringers in embryo. He had ample reason to believe her word, considering what she'd shown him. But what was he to do? The Radiants had returned, the Parshendi had manifested red eyes. Dalinar felt as if he were trying to stop a dam from breaking, all the

while not knowing where the leaks were actually coming from.

The tent flaps parted and Adolin ducked in, escorting Navani. She hung her stormcoat on the rack beside the flap, and Adolin grabbed a towel and began drying his hair and face.

Adolin was betrothed upon the desk o

Mapped on
the journey to
the center.



Mapped
while lost in
the chasms.

Note: Eastern side of the Plains is much more eroded
than this. Light areas are plateaus packed closely together.
Dark areas represent plateaus less densely packed.

I know you wanted me to draw every plateau, but shadows,
woman! Even I'm not THAT crazy.



You must become king. Of Everything.

—From the Diagram, Tenets of Instruction, Back of the Footboard:
paragraph 1

Shallan fought against the wind, pulling her stormcoat—stolen from a soldier—close around her as she struggled up the slick incline.

“Brightness?” Gaz asked. He grabbed his cap to keep it from blowing free. “Are you certain you want to do this?”

“Of course I am,” Shallan said. “Whether or not what I’m doing is wise . . . well, that’s another story.”

These winds were unusual for the Weeping, which was supposed to be a period of placid rainfall, a time for contemplating the Almighty, a respite from highstorms.

Maybe things were different out here in the stormlands. She pulled herself up the rocks. The Shattered Plains had grown increasingly rough as the armies traveled inward—now on their eighth day of the expedition—following

Shallan's map, created with the help of Rlain, the former bridgeman.

Shallan crested the rock formation and found the view that the scouts had described. Vathah and Gaz stomped up behind her, muttering about the cold. The heart of the Shattered Plains extended before Shallan. The inner plateaus, never explored by men.

"It's here," she said.

Gaz scratched at the socket beneath his eye patch. "Rocks?"

"Yes, guardsman Gaz," Shallan said. "Rocks. Beautiful, wonderful rocks."

In the distance, she saw shadows draped in a veil of misty rain. Seen together in a group like this, it was unmistakable. This was a city. A city covered over with centuries' worth of crem, like children's blocks dribbled with many coats of melted wax. To the innocent eye, it undoubtedly looked much like the rest of the Shattered Plains. But it was oh so much more.

It was proof. Even this formation Shallan stood upon had probably once been a building. Weathered on the stormward side, dribbled with crem down the leeward side to create the bulbous, uneven slope they had climbed.

"Brightness!" +reinfYour Majestykin

She ignored the voices from down below, instead waving impatiently for the spyglass. Gaz handed it to her, and she raised it to inspect the plateaus ahead. Unfortunately, the thing had fogged up on one end. She tried to rub it clean, rain washing over her, but the fog was on the inside. Blasted device.

"Brightness?" Gaz asked. "Shouldn't we, uh, listen to what they're saying down below?"

"More twisted Parshendi spotted," Shallan said, raising the spyglass again. "Wouldn't the designer of the thing have built it to be sealed on the inside, to prevent moisture from getting in?"

Gaz and Vathah stepped back as several members of Bridge Four reached the top of the incline.

“Brightness,” one of the bridgemen said, “Highprince Dalinar has withdrawn the vanguard and ordered a secure perimeter on the plateau behind us.” He was a tall, handsome man whose arms seemed entirely too long for his body. Shallan looked with dissatisfaction at the inner plateaus.

“Brightness,” the bridgeman continued reluctantly, “he did say that if you wouldn’t come, he would send Adolin to . . . um . . . cart you back over his shoulder.”

“I would like to see him do that,” Shallan said. It did sound kind of romantic, the sort of thing you’d read of in a novel. “He’s that worried about the Parshendi?”

“Shen . . . er, Rlain . . . says we’re practically to their home plateau, Brightness. Too many of their patrols have been spotted. Please.”

“We need to get in there,” Shallan said, pointing. “That’s where the secrets are.”

“Brightness . . .”

“Very well,” she said, turning and hiking down the incline. She slipped, which did not help her dignity, but Vathah caught her arm before she tumbled onto her face.

Once down, they quickly crossed this smaller plateau, joining scouts who were jogging back toward the bulk of the army. Rlain claimed to know nothing himself of the Oathgate—or even really much about the city, which he called “Narak” instead of Stormseat. He said his people had only taken up permanent residence here following the Alethi invasion.

During the push inward, Dalinar’s soldiers had spotted an increasing number of Parshendi and had clashed with them in brief skirmishes. General Khal thought that the forays had been intended to draw the army off course, though how they would figure that, Shallan didn’t know—but she did know she was growing tired of feeling damp all the time. They had been out here nearly two weeks now, and some of the soldiers had begun to mutter that the army

would need to return to the warcamps soon, or risk not getting back before the highstorms resumed.

Shallan stalked across the bridge and passed several lines of spearmen setting up behind short, wavelike ridges in the stone—likely the footings of old walls. She found Dalinar and the other highprinces in a tent set up at the center of camp. It was one of six identical tents, and it wasn't immediately obvious which one held the four highprinces. A safety precaution of some sort, she assumed. As Shallan stepped in out of the rain, she intruded upon their conversation.

“The current plateau does have very favorable defensible positions,”+the bo. What lily Aladar said, gesturing toward a map set out on the travel table before them. “I prefer our chances against an assault here to moving deeper.”

“And if we move deeper,” Dalinar said with a grunt, “we’ll be in danger of getting split during an attack, half on one plateau, half on the other.”

“But do they even need to attack?” Roion said. “If I were them, I’d just form up out there as if to prepare for an attack—but then I wouldn’t. I’d stall, forcing my enemy to get stuck out here waiting for an attack until the highstorms returned!”

“He makes a valid point,” Aladar admitted.

“Trust a coward,” Sebarial said, “to know the smartest way to stay out of fighting.” He sat with Palona beside the table, eating fruit and smiling pleasantly.

“I am not a coward,” Roion said, forming fists at his sides.

“I didn’t mean it as an insult,” Sebarial said. “My insults are far more pithy. That was a compliment. If I had my way, I’d hire you to run all wars, Roion. I suspect there would be far fewer casualties, and the price of undergarments would double once soldiers were told that you were in charge. I’d make a fortune.”

Shallan handed her dripping coat to a servant, then took off her cap and

began drying her hair with a towel. “We need to press closer to the center of the Plains,” she said. “Roion is right. I refuse to let us bivouac. The Parshendi will just wait us out.”

The others looked to her.

“I wasn’t aware,” Dalinar said, “that you decided our tactics, Brightness Shallan.”

“It’s our own fault, Dalinar,” Sebarial said, “for giving her so much leeway. We probably should have tossed her off the Pinnacle weeks ago, the moment she arrived at that meeting.”

Shallan was stirring up a retort as the tent flaps parted and Adolin trudged in, Shardplate streaming. He pushed up his faceplate. Storms . . . he looked so good, even when you could see only half his face. She smiled.

“They are definitely agitated,” Adolin said. He saw her, and gave her a quick smile before clinking up to the table. “There are at least ten thousand of those twisted Parshendi out there, moving in groups around the plateaus.”

“Ten thousand,” Aladar said with a grunt. “We can take ten thousand. Even with them having the terrain advantage, even if we have to assault rather than defend, we should handle that many with ease. We have over thirty thousand.”

“This is what we came to do,” Dalinar said. He looked at Shallan, who blushed at her forwardness earlier. “Your portal, the one you think is out here. Where would it be?”

“Closer to the city,” Shallan said.

“What of those red eyes?” Roion asked. He looked very uncomfortable. “And the flashes of light they cause when they fight? Storms, when I spoke earlier, I didn’t mean that I wanted us to go farther. I was just worried at what the Parshendi would do. I . . . there’s no easy way to do this, is there?”

“So far as+? fNOre Rlain has said,” Navani said from her seated position at

the side of the room, “only their soldiers can jump between plateaus, but we can assume the new form capable of it as well. They can flee us if we push forward.”

Dalinar shook his head. “They set up on the Plains, rather than fleeing all those years ago, because they knew it was their best chance for survival. On the open, unbroken rock of the stormlands, they could be hunted and destroyed. Out here they have the advantage. They won’t abandon it now. Not if they think they can fight us.”

“If we want to make them fight, then,” Aladar said, “we need to threaten their homes. I guess we really should press toward the city.”

Shallan relaxed. Each step closer to the center—by Rlain’s explanations, they were but half a day away—got her closer to the Oathgate.

Dalinar leaned forward, spreading his hands to the sides, his shadow falling on the battle maps. “Very well. I did not come all this way to timidly wait upon Parshendi whims. We’ll march inward tomorrow, threaten their city, and force them to engage.”

“The closer we get,” Sebarial noted, “the more likely we are to become cut off without hope of retreat.”

Dalinar didn’t respond, but Shallan knew what he was thinking. We gave up hope of retreat days ago. A flight across days and days of plateaus would be a disaster if the Parshendi decided to harry. The Alethi fought here, and they won, seizing the shelter of Narak.

That was their only option.

Dalinar adjourned the meeting, and the highprinces left, surrounded by groups of aides holding umbrellas. Shallan waited as Dalinar caught her eyes. In moments only she, Dalinar, Adolin, and Navani remained.

Navani walked up to Dalinar, taking his arm with both of hers. An intimate posture.

“This portal of yours,” Dalinar said.

“Yes?” Shallan asked.

Dalinar looked up and met her eyes. “How real is it?”

“Jasnah was convinced it was completely real. She was never wrong.”

“This would be a storming bad time for her to break her record,” he said softly. “I agreed to press forward, in part, because of your exploration.”

“Thank you.”

“I did not do it for scholarship,” Dalinar said. “From what Navani tells me, this portal offers a unique opportunity for retreat. I had hoped to defeat the Parshendi before danger overtook us, whatever it was. Judging by what we’ve seen, danger has arrived early.”

Shallan nodded.

“Tomorrow is the last day of the countdown,” Dalinar said. “Scribbled on the walls during highstorms. Whatever it is, whatever it was, we meet it tomorrow—and you are my backup plan, Shallan Davar. You will find this portal, and you will make it work. If the evil overwhelms us, your pathway will be our escape. You may be the only chance that our armies—and indeed, Alethkar itself—have for survival.”

* * *

Days passed, and Kaladin refused to let the rain overcome him.

He limped through the camp, using a crutch that Lopen had fetched for him despite objecting that it was a member of Bridge Four’s. It was too soon for Kaladin to be up and about.

The place was still empty, save for the occasional parshmen lugging wood from the forests outside or carrying sacks of grain. The camp didn’t get any news about the expedition. The king was probably being sent word via spanreed, but he didn’t share it with everyone else.

Storms, this place feels eerie, Kaladin thought, limping past deserted barracks, rain pattering against the umbrella that Lopen had tied to Kaladin's crutch. It worked. Kind of. He passed rainspren, like blue candles sprouting from the ground, each with a single eye in the center of its top. Creepy things. Kaladin had always disliked them.

He fought the rain. Did that make any sense? It seemed that the rain wanted him to stay inside, so he went out. The rain wanted him to give in to the despair, so he forced himself to think. Growing up, he'd had Tien to help lighten the gloom. Now, even thinking of Tien increased that gloom instead—though he couldn't avoid it. The Weeping reminded him of his brother. Of laughter when the darkness threatened, of cheerful joy and carefree optimism.

Those images warred with ones of Tien's death. Kaladin squeezed his eyes shut, trying to banish that memory. Of the frail young man, barely trained, being cut down. Tien's own company of soldiers had put him at the front as a distraction, a sacrifice to slow the enemy.

Kaladin set his jaw, opening his eyes. No more moping. He would not whine or wallow. Yes, he'd lost Syl. He'd lost many loved ones during his life. He would survive this agony as he had survived the others.

He continued his limping circuit of the barracks. He did this four times a day. Sometimes Lopen came with him, but today Kaladin was alone. He splashed through puddles of water, and found himself smiling because he wore the boots Shallan had stolen from him.

I never did believe she was a Horneater, he thought. I need to make sure she knows that.

He stopped, leaning on the crutch and looking out through the rain toward the Shattered Plains. He couldn't see far. The haze of rainfall prevented that.

You come back safely, he thought to those out there. All of you. This time, I can't help you if something goes wrong.

Rock, Teft, Dalinar, Adolin, Shallan, everyone in Bridge Four—all out on their own. How different a place would the world be if Kaladin had been a

better man? If he'd used his powers and had returned to the warcamp with Shallan full of Stormlight? He had been so close to revealing what he could do . . .

You'd been thinking that for weeks, he thought to himself. You'd never have done it. You were too scared.

He hated admitting it, but it was true.

Well, if his suspicions about Shallan were true, perhaps Dalinar would have his Radiant anyway. May she make a better run of it than Kaladin had.

He continued on his limping way, rounding back to Bridge Four's barrack. He stopped when he saw a fine carriage, pulled by horses bearing the king's livery, waiting in front of it.

Kaladin cursed, hobbling forward. Lopen ran out to meet him, not carrying an umbrella. A lot of people gave up on trying to stay dry during the Weeping.

"Lopen!+ along4Slily" Kaladin said. "What?"

"He's waiting for you, gancho," Lopen said, gesturing urgently. "The king himself."

Kaladin limped more quickly toward his room. The door was open, and Kaladin peeked in to find King Elhokar standing inside, looking about the small chamber. Moash guarded the door, and Taka—a former member of the King's Guard—stood nearer to the king.

"Your Majesty?" Kaladin asked.

"Ah," the king said, "bridgeman." Elhokar's cheeks were flushed. He'd been drinking, though he didn't appear drunk. Kaladin understood. With Dalinar and that disapproving glare of his gone for a time, it was probably nice to relax with a bottle.

When Kaladin had first met the king, he'd thought Elhokar lacked regality. Now, oddly, he thought Elhokar did look like a king. It wasn't that the king had changed—the man still had his imperious features, with that overly large

nose and condescending manner. The change was in Kaladin. The things he'd once associated with kingship—honor, strength of arms, nobility—had been replaced with Elhokar's less inspiring attributes.

“This is really all that Dalinar assigns one of his officers?” Elhokar asked, gesturing around the room. “That man. He expects everyone to live with his own austerity. It is as if he's completely forgotten how to enjoy himself.”

Kaladin looked to Moash, who shrugged, Shardplate clinking.

The king cleared his throat. “I was told you were too weak to make the trip to see me. I see that might not be the case.”

“I'm sorry, Your Majesty,” Kaladin said. “I'm not well, but I walk the camp each day to rebuild my strength. I feared that my weakness and appearance might be offensive to the Throne.”

“You've learned to speak politically, I see,” the king said, folding his arms. “The truth is that my command is meaningless, even to a darkeyes. I no longer have authority in the eyes of men.”

Great. Here we go again.

The king waved curtly. “Out, you other two. I'd speak to this man alone.”

Moash glanced at Kaladin, looking concerned, but Kaladin nodded. With reluctance, Moash and Taka walked out, shutting the door, leaving them to the light of a few dwindling spheres that the king set out. Soon, those wouldn't have any Stormlight to them at all—it had been too long without a highstorm. They'd need to break out candles and oil lamps.

“How did you know,” the king asked him, “how to be a hero?”

“Your Majesty?” Kaladin asked, sagging against his crutch.

“A hero,” the king said, waving flippantly. “Everyone loves you, bridgeman. You saved Dalinar, you fought Shardbearers, you came back after falling into the storming chasms! How do you do it? How do you know?”

“It’s really just luck, Your Majesty.”

“No, no,” the king said. He began pacing. “It’s a pattern, though I can’t figure it out. When I try to be strong, I make a fool of myself. When I try to be merciful, people walk all over me. When I try to listen to counsel, it turns out I’ve picked the wrong men! When I try to do everything on my own, Dalinar has Alight

“How do people know what to do? Why don’t I know what to do? I was born to this office, given the throne by the Almighty himself! Why would he give me the title, but not the capacity? It defies reason. And yet, everyone seems to know things that I do not. My father could rule even the likes of Sadeas—men loved Gavilar, feared him, and served him all at once. I can’t even get a darkeyes to obey a command to come visit the palace! Why doesn’t this work? What do I have to do?”

Kaladin stepped back, shocked at the frankness. “Why are you asking me this, Your Majesty?”

“Because you know the secret,” the king said, still pacing. “I’ve seen how your men regard you; I’ve heard how people speak of you. You’re a hero, bridgeman.” He stopped, then walked up to Kaladin, taking him by the arms. “Can you teach me?”

Kaladin regarded him, baffled.

“I want to be a king like my father was,” Elhokar said. “I want to lead men, and I want them to respect me.”

“I don’t . . .” Kaladin swallowed. “I don’t know if that’s possible, Your Majesty.”

Elhokar narrowed his eyes at Kaladin. “So you do still speak your mind. Even after the trouble it brought you. Tell me. Do you think me a bad king, bridgeman?”

“Yes.”

The king drew in a sharp breath, still holding Kaladin by the arms.

I could do it right here, Kaladin realized. Strike the king down. Put Dalinar on the throne. No hiding, no secrets, no cowardly assassination. A fight, him and me.

That seemed a more honest way to be about it. Sure, Kaladin would probably be executed, but he found that didn't bother him. Should he do it, for the good of the kingdom?

He could imagine Dalinar's anger. Dalinar's disappointment. Death didn't bother Kaladin, but failing Dalinar . . . Storms.

The king let go and stalked away. "Well, I did ask," he muttered to himself. "I merely have to win you over as well. I will figure this out. I will be a king to be remembered."

"Or you could do what is best for Alethkar," Kaladin said, "and step down."

The king stopped in place. He turned on Kaladin, expression darkening. "Do not overstep yourself, bridgeman. Bah. I should never have come here."

"I agree," Kaladin said. He found this entire experience surreal.

Elhokar made to leave. He stopped at the door, not looking at Kaladin. "When you came, the shadows went away."

"The . . . shadows?"

"I saw them in mirrors, in the corners of my eyes. I could swear I even heard them whispering, but you frightened them. I haven't seen them since. There's something about you. Don't try to deny it." The king looked to him. "I am sorry for what I did to you. I watched you fight to help Adolin, and then I saw you defend Renarin+remsupposed. f . . . and I grew jealous. There you were, such a champion, so loved. And everyone hates me. I should have gone to fight myself.

"Instead, I overreacted to your challenge of Amaram. You weren't the one who ruined our chance against Sadeas. It was me. Dalinar was right. Again.

I'm so tired of him being right, and me being wrong. In light of that, I am not at all surprised that you find me a bad king.”

Elhokar pushed open the door and left.



The Unmade are a deviation, a flair, a conundrum that may not be worth your time. You cannot help but think of them. They are fascinating. Many are mindless. Like the spren of human emotions, only much more nasty. I do believe a few can think, however.

—From the Diagram, Book of the 2nd Desk Drawer: paragraph 14

Dalinar strode from the tent into a subtle rain, joined by Navani and Shallan. The rain sounded softer out here than it had inside the tent, where the drops had drummed upon the fabric.

They had marched farther inward all that morning, bringing them to the very heart of the ruined plateaus. They were close now. So close, they had the Parshendi's full attention.

It was happening.

An attendant offered an umbrella to each person leaving the tent, but Dalinar waved his away. If his men had to stand in this, he'd join them. He'd be soaked by the end of this day anyway.

He strode through the ranks, following bridgemen in stormcoats who led the way with sapphire lanterns. It was still day, but the thick cloud cover rendered everything dim. He used blue light to identify himself. Roion and Aladar, seeing that Dalinar had eschewed an umbrella, stepped out into the rain with him. Sebarial, of course, stayed underneath his.

They reached the edge of the mass of troops who had formed up in a large oval, facing outward. He knew his soldiers well enough to sense their anxiety. They stood too stiffly, with no shuffling or stretching. They were also silent, not chattering to distract themselves—not even griping. The only voices he heard were occasional barked orders as officers trimmed the lines. Dalinar soon saw what was causing the uneasiness.

Glowing red eyes amassed on the next plateau.

They hadn't glowed before. Red eyes yes, but not with those uncanny glows. In the dim light, the Parshendi bodies were indistinct, no more than shadows. The crimson eyes hovered like Taln's Scar—like spheres in the darkness, deeper in color than any ruby. Parshendi beards often bore bits of gemstone woven into them in patterns, but today those didn't glow.

Too long without a highstorm, Dalinar thought. Even the gems in Alethi spheres—cut with facets and so able to hold light longer—had almost all failed by this point of the Weeping, though larger gemstones might last another week or so.

They had entered the darkest part of the year. The time when Stormlight did not shine.

“Oh, Almighty!”+ H Wyndlenobody automatically Roion whispered, looking at those red eyes. “Oh, by the names of God himself. What have you brought us to, Dalinar?”

“Can you do anything to help?” Dalinar asked softly, looking to Shallan, who stood beneath her umbrella at his side, her guards just behind.

Face pale, she shook her head. “I'm sorry.”

“The Knights Radiant were warriors,” Dalinar said, very softly.

“If they were, then I’ve got a long way to go. . . .”

“Go, then,” Dalinar told the girl. “When there is an opening in the fighting, find that pathway to Urithiru, if it exists. You’re my only contingency plan, Brightness.”

She nodded.

“Dalinar,” Aladar said, sounding horrified as he watched the red eyes, which were forming into ordered ranks on the other side of the chasm, “tell me straight. When you brought us on this march, did you expect to find these horrors?”

“Yes.” It was true enough. He didn’t know what horrors he’d find, but he had known that something was coming.

“You came anyway?” Aladar demanded. “You hauled us all the way out onto these cursed plains, you let us be surrounded by monsters, to be slaughtered and—”

Dalinar grabbed Aladar by the front of the jacket and hauled him forward. The move caught the other man completely off guard, and he quieted, eyes widening.

“Those are Voidbringers out there,” Dalinar hissed, rain dribbling down his face. “They’ve returned. Yes, it is true. And we, Aladar, we have a chance to stop them. I don’t know if we can prevent another Desolation, but I’d do anything—including sacrificing myself and this entire army—to protect Alethkar from those things. Do you understand?”

Aladar nodded, wide-eyed.

“I hoped to get here before this happened,” Dalinar said, “but I didn’t. So now we’re going to fight. And storm it, we’re going to destroy those things. We’re going to stop them, and we’re going to hope that will stop this evil from spreading to the world’s parshmen, as my niece feared. If you survive

this day, you'll be known as one of the greatest men of our generation."

He released Aladar, letting the highprince stumble back. "Go to your men, Aladar. Go lead them. Be a champion."

Aladar stared at Dalinar, mouth gaping. Then, he straightened. He slapped his arm to his chest, giving a salute as crisp as any Dalinar had seen. "It will be done, Brightlord," Aladar said. "Highprince of War." Aladar barked to his attendants—including Mintez, the highlord that Aladar usually had use his Shardplate in battle—then put his hand to his side-sword and dashed away in the rain.

"Huh," Sebarial said from beneath his umbrella. "He's actually buying into it. He thinks he's going to be a storming hero."

"He now knows I was right about the need to unify Alethkar. He's a good soldier. Most of the highprinces are . . . or were, at some point."

"Pity you ended up with us two instead of them," Sebarial said, noddin+the bo. What hilyg toward Roion, who still stared out at the shifting red eyes. There were thousands now, still increasing as more Parshendi arrived. Scouts reported that they were gathering on all three plateaus bordering the large one that the Alethi occupied.

"I'm useless in a battle," Sebarial continued, "and Roion's archers will be wasted in this rain. Besides, he's a coward."

"Roion is not a coward," Dalinar said, laying a hand on the shorter highprince's arm. "He's careful. That did not serve him well in the squabbling over gemhearts, where men like Sadeas threw away lives in exchange for prestige. But out here, care is an attribute I'd choose over recklessness."

Roion turned to Dalinar, blinking away water. "Is this really happening?"

"Yes," Dalinar said. "I want you with your men, Roion. They need to see you. This is going to terrify them, but not you. You're careful, in control."

“Yeah,” Roion said. “Yes. You . . . you’re going to get us out of this, right?”

“No, I’m not,” Dalinar said.

Roion frowned.

“We’re all going to get ourselves out of it together.”

Roion nodded, and didn’t object. He saluted as Aladar had, if less crisply, then headed toward his army on the northern flank, calling for his aides to give him the numbers of his reserves.

“Damnation,” Sebarial said, watching Roion go. “Damnation. What about me? Where’s my impassioned speech?”

“You,” Dalinar said, “are to go back to the command tent and not get in the way.”

Sebarial laughed. “All right. That I can do.”

“I want Teleb in command of your army,” Dalinar said. “And I’m sending both Serugiadis and Rust to join him. Your men will fight better against these things with a few Shardbearers at their head.” All three were men who had been given Shards following Adolin’s dueling spree.

“I’ll give the order that Teleb is to be obeyed.”

“And Sebarial?” Dalinar asked.

“Yes?”

“If you have a mind for it, burn some prayers. I don’t know if anyone up there is listening anymore, but it can’t hurt.” Dalinar turned toward the sea of red eyes. Why were they just standing there watching?

Sebarial hesitated. “Not as confident as you acted to the other two, eh?” He smiled, as if that comforted him, then sauntered off. What a strange man. Dalinar nodded to one of his aides, who went to give the orders to the three Kholin Shardbearers, first picking Serugiadis—a lanky young man whose

sister Adolin had once courted—out of his command post along the ranks, then running off to fetch Teleb and explain Dalinar’s orders.

That seen to, Dalinar stepped up to Navani. “I need to know you’re safe in the command tent. As safe as anyone can be.”

“Then pretend I’m there,” she said.

“But—”

“You want my help with fabrials?” Navani said. “I can’t set up that sort of thing remo said, following Kaladin’s gaze.ment of group ofs. ftely, Dalinar.”

He ground his teeth, but what could he say? He was going to need every edge he could get. He looked out at the red eyes again.

“Campfire tales come alive,” said Rock, the massive Horneater bridgeman. Dalinar had never seen that one guarding him or his sons; he was a quartermaster, Dalinar believed. “These things should not be. Why do they not move?”

“I don’t know,” Dalinar said. “Send a few of your men to fetch Rlain. I want to see if he can provide any explanations.” As two bridgemen ran off, Dalinar turned to Navani. “Gather your scribes to write my words. I will speak to the soldiers.”

Within moments, she had a pair of scribes—shivering as they stood under umbrellas with pencils out to write—ready to record his words. They’d send women down the lines and read his message to all the men.

Dalinar climbed into Gallant’s saddle to get a little height. He turned toward the ranks of men nearby. “Yes,” he shouted over the sound of the rain, “these are Voidbringers. Yes, we’re going to fight them. I don’t know what they can do. I don’t know why they’ve returned. But we came here to stop them.

“I know you’re scared, but you have heard of my visions in the highstorms. In the warcamps, the lighteyes mocked me and dismissed what I’d seen as delusions.” He thrust his arm to the side, pointing at the sea of red eyes.

“Well out there, you see proof that my visions were true! Out there, you see what I have been told would come!”

Dalinar licked wet lips. He had given many battlefield speeches in his life, but never had he said anything like what came to him now. “I,” he shouted, “have been sent by the Almighty himself to save this land from another Desolation. I have seen what those things can do; I have lived lives broken by the Voidbringers. I’ve seen kingdoms shattered, peoples ruined, technology forgotten. I’ve seen civilization itself brought to the trembling edge of collapse.

“We will prevent this! Today you fight not for the wealth of a lighteyes, or even for the honor of your king. Today, you fight for the good of all men. You will not fight alone! Trust in what I have seen, trust in my words. If those things have returned, then so must the forces that once defeated them. We will see miracles before this day is out, men! We merely have to be strong enough to deserve them.”

He looked across a sea of hopeful eyes. Storms. Were those gloriespren about his head, spinning like golden spheres in the rain? His scribes finished writing down the short speech, then hurriedly started making copies to send with runners. Dalinar watched them go, hoping to the Tranquiline Halls that he hadn’t just lied to everyone.

His force seemed small in this darkness, surrounded by enemies. Soon, he heard his own words being spoken in the distance, read out to the troops. Dalinar remained seated, Shallan beside his horse, though Navani moved off to see to several of her contraptions.

The battle plan called for them to wait a little longer, and Dalinar was content to do so. With these chasms to cross, it was far better to be assaulted than to assault. Perhaps the separate armies forming up would encourage the Parshendi to start the battle by coming to him. Fortunately, the rain meant no arrows. The bowstrings wouldn’t stand the dampness, nor would the animal glue in the a member of Bridge Four?”al4ShilyParshendi recurve bows.

The Parshendi started singing.

It came in a sudden roar over the rains, startling his men, making them shy backward in a wave. The song wasn't one Dalinar had ever heard during plateau runs. This was more staccato, more frenetic. It rose all around, coming from the three surrounding plateaus, shouted like thrown axes at the Alethi in the center.

Dalinar shivered. Wind blew against him, stronger than was normal during the Weeping. The gust drove raindrops against the side of his face. Cold bit his skin.

“Brightlord!”

Dalinar turned in his saddle, noting four bridgemen approaching along with Rlain—he still had the man under guard at all times. He waved for his guards to part, allowing the Parshendi bridgeman to scramble up to his horse.

“That song!” Rlain said. “That song.”

“What is it, man?”

“It is death,” Rlain whispered. “Brightlord, I have never heard it before, but the rhythm is one of destruction. Of power.”

Across the chasm, the Parshendi started to glow. Tiny lines of red sparked around their arms, blinking and shaking, like lightning.

“What is that?” Shallan asked.

Dalinar narrowed his eyes, and another burst of wind washed over him.

“You have to stop it,” Rlain said. “Please. Even if you have to kill them. Do not let them finish that song.”

It was the day of the countdown he had scribbled on the walls without knowing. The last day.

Dalinar made his decision based on instinct. He called for a messenger, and one jogged up—Teshav's ward, a girl in her fifteenth year. “Pass the word,” he commanded her. “Send to General Khal at the command tent, the

battalionlords, my son, Teleb, and the other highprinces. We're changing strategies."

"Brightlord?" the messenger asked. "What change?"

"We attack. Now!"

* * *

Kaladin stopped at the entrance to the lighteyed training grounds, rainwater streaming off his umbrella's waxed cloth, surprised at what he saw. In preparation for a storm, the ardents normally swept and shoveled the sand into covered trenches at the edges of the ground to keep it from being blown away.

He had expected to see something similar during the Weeping. Instead, they had left the sand out, but had then placed a short wooden barrier across the gateway in. It plugged the front of the sparring grounds, allowing them to fill up with water. A small cascade of rainwater poured over the lip of the barrier and into the roadway.

Kaladin regarded the small lake th down in one o

at now filled the courtyard, then sighed and reached down, undoing his laces, then pulling off both boots and socks. When he stepped in, the cold water came up to his calves.

Soft sand squished between his toes. What was the purpose of this? He crossed the courtyard, crutch under his arm, boots joined by the laces and slung over his shoulder. The chill water numbed his wounded foot, which actu, though his leg still hurt with each step. It seemed that the two weeks of healing hadn't done much for his wounds. H a member of Bridge Four?"al4Shilyis continued insistence that he walk so much probably wasn't helping.

He'd been spoiled by his abilities; a soldier with such a wound normally would take months to recover. Without Stormlight, he'd just have to be patient and heal like everyone else.

He had expected to find the training grounds as abandoned as most of the camp. Even the markets were relatively empty, people preferring to remain indoors during the Weeping. Here, however, he found the ardents laughing and chatting as they sat in chairs in the raised arcades framing the sparring grounds. They sewed leather practice jerkins, cups of auburn wine on tables at their sides. That area rose enough above the yard floor to stay dry.

Kaladin walked along, searching among them, but didn't find Zahel. He even peeked in the man's room, but it was empty.

"Up above, bridgeman!" one of the ardents called. The bald woman pointed toward the stairwell at the corner, where Kaladin had often sent guards to secure the roof when Adolin and Renarin practiced.

Kaladin waved in thanks, then hobbled over and awkwardly made his way up the steps. He had to close his umbrella to fit. Rain fell on his head as he poked it out of the opening in the roof, where the stairwell ended. The roof was made of tile set into hardened crem, and Zahel lay there in a hammock he'd strung between two poles. Kaladin thought they might be lightning rods, which didn't strike him as safe. A tarp hung above the hammock and kept Zahel almost dry.

The ardent swung gently, eyes closed, holding a square bottle of hard honu, a type of lavis grain liquor. Kaladin inspected the rooftop, judging his ability to cross those sloped tiles without toppling off and breaking his neck.

“Ever been to the Purelake, bridgeman?” Zahel asked.

“No,” Kaladin said. “One of my men talks about it, though.”

“What have you heard?”

“It’s an ocean that’s so shallow, you can wade across it.”

“It’s ridiculously shallow,” Zahel said. “Like an endless bay, mere feet deep. Warm water. Calm breezes. Reminds me of home. Not like this cold, damp, godsforsaken place.”

“So why aren’t you there instead of here?”

“Because I can’t stand being reminded of home, idiot.”

Oh. “Why are we talking about it, then?”

“Because you were wondering why we made our own little Purelake down below.”

“I was?”

“Of course you were. Damnation boy. I know you well enough by now to know that questions bother you. You don’t think like a spearman.”

“Spearmen can’t be curious?”

“No. Because if they are, they either get killed or they end up showing someone in charge how smart they are. Then they get put somewhere more useful.”

Kaladin raised an eyebrow, waiting for more explanation. Finally, he sighed, and asked, “Why have you blocked off the courtyard below?”

“Why do you think?”

“You are a really annoying person, Zahel. Do you realize that?”

“Sure do.” He took a drink of his honu.

“I assume,” Kaladin said, “that you blocked Alight

“Excellent deduction,” Zahel said. “Like fresh blue paint on a wall.”

“Whatever that means. The problem is, why is it necessary to keep the sand in the courtyard? Why not just put it away, like you do before highstorms?”

“Did you know,” Zahel said, “that rains during the Weeping don’t drop crem?”

“I . . .” Did he know that? Did it matter?

“Good thing too,” Zahel said, “or our entire camp here would end up clogged with the stuff. Anyway, rain like this, it’s great for washing.”

“You’re telling me that you’ve turned the floor of the dueling grounds into a bath?”

“Sure did.”

“You wash in that?”

“Sure do. Not ourselves, of course.”

“Then what?”

“Sand.”

Kaladin frowned, then peered over the side, looking at the pool below.

“Every day,” Zahel said, “we go in there and stir it up. The sand settles back down to the bottom, and all the yuck floats away, carried by the rain in little streams out of the camp. Did you ever consider that sand might need

washing?”

“No, actually.”

“Well it does. After a year’s worth of being kicked by stinky bridgeman feet and equally stinky—but far more refined—lighteyes feet, after a year of having people like me spill food on it, or having animals find their way in here to do business, the sand needs cleaning.”

“Why are we talking about this?”

“Because it’s important,” Zahel said, taking a drink. “Or something. I don’t know. You came to me, kid, interrupting my vacation. That means you have to listen to me blab.”

“You’re supposed to say something profound.”

“Did you miss the part about me being on vacation?”

Kaladin stood in the rain. “Do you know where the King’s Wit is?”

“That fool, Dust? Not here, blessedly. Why?”

Kaladin needed someone to talk to, and had spent the better part of the day searching for Wit. He hadn’t found the man, though he had broken down and bought some chouta from a lonely street vendor.

It had tasted good. That hadn’t helped his mood.

So, he’d given up on finding Wit and had come to Zahel instead. That appeared to have been a mistake. Kaladin sighed, turning back down the stairs.

“What was it you wanted?” Zahel called to him. The man had cracked an eye, looking toward Kaladin.

“Have you ever had to choose between two equally distasteful choices?”

“Every day I choose to keep breathing.”

“I worry something awful is going to happen,” Kaladin said. “I can prevent it, but the awful thing . . . it might be best for everyone if it does happen.”

“Hu how willing you were to obey me officer group ofs. fh,” Zahel said.

“No advice?” Kaladin asked.

“Choose the option,” Zahel said, rearranging his pillow, “that makes it easiest for you to sleep at night.” The old ardent closed his eyes and settled back.

“That’s what I wish I’d done.”

Kaladin continued down the steps. Below, he didn’t get out his umbrella. He was already soaked anyway. Instead, he poked through the racks at the side of the practice grounds until he found a spear—real, not practice. Then he set down his crutch and hobbled out into the water.

There, he fell into a spearman’s stance and closed his eyes. Rain fell around him. It splattered in the water of the pool, sprinkled the rooftop, pattered the streets outside. Kaladin felt drained, like his blood had been sucked from him. The gloom made him want to sit still.

Instead, he started dancing with the rain. He went through spear forms, doing his best to avoid putting weight on his wounded leg. He splashed in the waters. He sought peace and purpose in the comfortable forms.

He didn’t find either.

His balance was off, and his leg screamed. The rain didn’t accompany him; it just annoyed him. Worse, the wind didn’t blow. The air felt stale.

Kaladin stumbled over his own feet. He twisted the spear about him, then dropped it clumsily. It spun away to splash into the pool. As he fetched it, he noticed the ardents watching him with looks ranging from befuddled to amused.

He tried again. Simple spear forms. No spinning the weapon, no showing off. Step step thrust.

The spear’s shaft felt wrong in his fingers. Off balance. Storms. He’d come

here seeking solace, but he only grew more and more frustrated as he tried to practice.

How much of his ability with the spear had come from his powers? Was he nothing without them?

He dropped the spear again after trying a simple twist and thrust. He reached for it, and found a rainspren sitting next to it in the water, looking upward, unblinking.

He snatched the spear with a growl, then looked up toward the sky. “He deserves it!” he bellowed at those clouds.

Rain pelted him.

“Give me a reason why he doesn’t!” Kaladin yelled, uncaring if the ardents heard. “It might not be his fault, and he might be trying, but he’s still failing.”

Silence.

“It’s right to remove the wounded limb,” Kaladin whispered. “This is what we have to do. To . . . To . . .”

To stay alive.

Where had those words come from?

Gotta do what you can to stay alive, son. Turn a liability into an advantage whenever you can.

Tien’s death.

That moment, that horrible moment, when he watched unable to do anything as his brother died. Tien’s own squadleader had sacrificed the untrained to gain a moment’s advantage.

That squadleader had spoken to Kaladin after it was all over. Gotta do what you can to stay alive. . . .

It made a twisted, horrible kind of sense.

It hadn't been Tien's fault. Tien had tried. He'd still failed. So they'd killed him.

Kaladin fell to his knees in the water. "Almighty, oh Almighty."

The king . . .

The king was Dalinar's Tien.

* * *

"Attack?" Adolin asked. "Are you certain that is what my father said?"

The young woman who had run the message nodded a rain-slicked head, looking miserable in her slitted dress and runner's sash. "You're to stop that singing, if you can, Brightlord. Your father indicated it was important."

Adolin looked over his battalions, which held the southern flank. Just beyond them, on one of the three plateaus that surrounded their army, the Parshendi sang a horrible song. Sureblood danced, snorting.

"I don't like it either," Adolin said softly, patting the horse on the neck. That song put him on edge. And those threads of red light on their arms, in their hands. What were those?

"Perel," he said to one of his field commanders, "tell the men to get ready for the mark. We're going to charge across those bridges onto the southern plateau. Heavy infantry first, shortspears behind, longspears at the ready in case we're overrun. I want the men ready to form blocks on the other side until we're sure where the Parshendi lines will fall. Storms, I wish we had archers. Go!"

The word spread, and Adolin nudged Sureblood up beside one of the bridges, which had already been set. His bridgeman guards for the day followed, a pair named Skar and Drehy.

"You two going to sit out?" Adolin asked the bridgemen, his eyes forward.

“Your captain doesn’t like you going into battle against Parshendi.”

“To Damnation with that!” Drehy said. “We’ll fight, sir. Those aren’t Parshendi anyway. Not anymore.”

“Good answer. They’ll advance once we start our assault. We need to hold the bridgehead for the rest of our army. Try to keep up with me, if you can.” He glanced over his shoulder, waiting. Watching until . . .

A large blue gemstone rose into the air, hoisted high on a distant pole near the command tent.

“Go!” Adolin kicked Sureblood into motion, thundering across the bridge and splashing through a pool on the other side. Rainspren wavered. His two bridgemen followed at a run. Behind them, the heavy infantry in thick armor with hammers and axes—perfect for splitting Parshendi carapace—surged into motion.

The bulk of the Parshendi continued their chanting. A smaller group broke off, perhaps two thousand in number, and moved to intercept Adolin. He growled, leaning low, Shardblade appearing in his hand. If they—

A flash of light.

The world lurched, and Adolin found himself skidding on the ground, his Shardplate grinding against stones. The armor absorbed the blow of the fall, but could do nothing for Adolin’s own shock. The world spun, and a spray of water spurted in through the slits in his helm, washing over his face.

As he came to rest, he heaved himself backward, up to his feet. He stumbled, clanking, thrashing about in case any Parshendi had gotten close. He blinked away water inside his helm, then oriented himself on a change in the landscape in front of him. Whit+ along4Shilye amid the brown and grey. What was that . . .

He finally blinked his eyes clear enough to get a good look. The whiteness was a horse, fallen to the ground.

Adolin screamed something raw, a sound that echoed in his helm. He ignored the shouts of soldiers, the sound of rain, the sudden and unnatural crack behind him. He ran to the body on the ground. Sureblood.

“No, no, no,” Adolin said, skidding to his knees beside the horse. The animal bore a strange, branching burn all down the side of his white coat. Wide, jagged. Sureblood’s dark eyes, open to the rain, did not blink.

Adolin raised his hands, suddenly hesitant to touch the animal.

A youth on an unfamiliar field.

Sureblood wasn’t moving.

More nervous that day than during the duel that won his Blade.

Shouts. Another crack in the air, sharp, immediate.

They pick their rider, son. We fixate on Shards, but any man—courageous or coward—can bond a Blade. Not so here, on this ground. Only the worthy win here . . .

Move.

Grieve later.

Move!

Adolin roared, leaping to his feet and charging past the two bridgemen who nervously stood guard over him with spears. He started the process of summoning his Blade and ran toward the fighting up ahead. Only moments had passed, but already the Alethi lines were collapsing. Some infantry advanced in clusters while others had hunkered down, stunned and confused.

Another flash, accompanied by a cracking of the air. Lightning. Red lightning. It appeared in flashes from groups of Parshendi, then was gone in the blink of an eye. It left a bright afterimage—glowing, forked—that briefly obscured Adolin’s sight.

Ahead of him, men dropped, fried in their armor. Adolin shouted as he charged, bellowing for the men to hold their lines.

More cracks sounded, but the strikes didn't seem well aimed. They'd sometimes flash backward or would follow strange paths, rarely going straight toward the Alethi. As he ran, he saw a blast come from a pair of Parshendi, but it arced immediately down into the ground.

The Parshendi stared downward, befuddled. It was as if the lightning worked . . . well, like lightning from the sky, not following any sort of predictable path.

“Charge them, you cremlings!” Adolin shouted, running through the middle of the soldiers. “Back into your lines! It's just like advancing on archers! Keep your heads. Tighten up. If we break, we're dead!”

He wasn't certain how much of that they heard, but the image of him yelling, crashing into the line of Parshendi, did something. Shouts rose from officers, lines re-formed.

Lightning flashed right at Adolin.

The sound was incredible, and the light. He stood in place, blinded. When it faded, he found himself completely unharmed. He looked down at the armor, which was vibrating softly—a hum that rattled his skin in a strangely comforting way. Nearby, another crack of lightning left a small group of Parshendi, but it didn't blind him. His helm—which as always was partially translucent from the inside—darkened in a jagged streak, perfectly overlaying the lightning.

Adolin grinned with clenched teeth, feeling a savage satisfaction as he pushed into the Parshendi and swung his Shardblade through their necks. By the old stories, the suit he wore had been created to fight these very monsters.

Though these Parshendi soldiers were sleeker and more ferocious-looking than the ones he'd previously fought, their eyes burned just as easily. Then they dropped dead and something wiggled out of their chests—small red spren, like tiny lightning, that zipped into the air and vanished.

“They can be killed!” one of the soldiers yelled nearby. “They can die!”

Others raised the call, passing it down the lines. Obvious though the revelation seemed, it bolstered his troops, and they surged forward.

They can die.

* * *

Shallan drew. Frantic.

A map in ink. Each line precise. The large sheet, crafted at her order, covered a wide board on the floor. It was the largest drawing she’d ever done; she’d filled it in, section by section, as they traveled.

She listened with half an ear to the other scholars in the tent. They were a distraction, but an important one.

Another line, rippled on the sides, forming a thin plateau. It was a copy of the one she’d drawn in seven other places on the map. The Plains were a fourfold radial pattern mirrored down the center of each quadrant, and so anything she drew in one quadrant she could repeat in the others, mirrored as appropriate. The eastern side was worn down, yes, so her map wouldn’t be accurate in that area—but for cohesion, she needed to finish those parts. So she could see the whole pattern.

“Scout reporting in,” a messenger woman said, bursting into the tent, letting in a gust of the wet wind. This unexpected wind . . . it almost felt like the wind before a highstorm.

“What is the report?” Inadara asked. The severe woman was supposed to be a great scholar. She reminded Shallan of her father’s ardents. In the corner of the room, Prince Renarin stood in his Shardplate, arms folded. He had orders to protect them all, should the Parshendi try to break onto the command plateau.

“The large center plateau is just as the parshman told us,” the scout said, breathless. “It’s only one plateau over, to the east.” Lyn was a solid-looking

woman with long black hair and keen eyes. “It’s obviously inhabited, though there doesn’t seem to be anyone there right now.”

“And the plateaus surrounding it?” Inadara asked.

“Shim and Felt are scouting those,” Lyn said. “Felt should be back soon. I can do a rough drawing of what I saw of the center plateau for you.”

“Do it,” Inadara said. “We need to find that Oathgate.”

Shallan wiped a stray drop of water—fallen from Lyn’s coat—off her map, then continued drawing. The army’s path from the warcamps inward had allowed her to extrapolate and draw eight chains of plateaus, two each—mirrored—starting from the four “sides” of the Plains and working inward.

She had almost completed the last of the eight arms reaching toward the center. This c+remtwistings. flose, earlier scout reports—and what Shallan had seen herself—allowed her to fill in everything around the center. Rlain’s explanations had helped, but he hadn’t been able to draw out the center plateaus for her. He’d never paid attention to their shapes, and Shallan needed precision.

Fortunately, earlier reports had almost been enough. She didn’t need much more. She was almost done.

“What do you think?” Lyn asked.

“Show it to Brightness Shallan.” Inadara sounded displeased, which seemed her normal state.

Shallan glanced over Lyn’s hastily sketched map, then nodded, turning back to her drawing. It would be better if she could see the center plateau herself, but the corner this woman had drawn gave Shallan an idea.

“Not going to say anything?” Inadara asked.

“Not done yet,” Shallan said, dipping her pen in the ink.

“We have been given an order by the highprince himself to find the

Oathgate.”

“I will.”

Something crashed outside, like distant lightning.

“Mmm . . .” Pattern said. “Bad. Very bad.”

Inadara looked at Pattern, who dimpled the floor near Shallan. “I do not like this thing. Spren should not speak. It may be of them, a Voidbringer.”

“I am not a Voidspren,” Pattern said.

“Brightness Shallan—”

“He’s not a Voidspren,” Shallan said absently.

“We should study it,” Inadara said. “How long did you say it has been following you?”

A heavy footstep sounded on the floor, Renarin stepping forward. Shallan would have preferred to keep Pattern secret, but when the winds had started picking up, he’d started buzzing loudly. There was no avoiding it now that he’d drawn the scholars’ attention. Renarin leaned down. He seemed fascinated by Pattern.

He wasn’t the only one. “It is likely involved,” Inadara said. “You should not dismiss one of my theories so quickly. I still think it might be related to the Voidbringers.”

“Know you nothing of Patterns, old human?” Pattern said, huffing. When had he picked up how to huff? “Voidbringers have no pattern. Besides, I have read of them in your lore. They speak of spindly arms like bone, and horrific faces. I should think, if you wish to find one, the mirror might be a location where you can begin your search.”

Inadara recoiled. Then she stomped away, moving to chat with Brightness Velat and the ardent Isasik about their interpretation of Shallan’s map.

Shallan smiled as she drew. “That was clever.”

“I am trying to learn,” Pattern replied. “Insults in particular will be of great use to my people, as they are truths and lies combined in a quite interesting manner.”

The pops continued outside. “What is that?” she asked softly, finishing another plateau.

“Stormspren,” Pattern said. “They are a variety of Voidspren. It is not good. I feel something very dangerous brewing. Draw more quickly.”

“The Oathgate must be in that center plateau somewhere,” Inadara said to her group of scholars.

“We will never search the entire thing in time,” said one of the ardents, a man who seemed to be constantly removing his spectacles and wiping them down. He put them back on. “That plateau is by far the largest we’ve found on the Plains.”

It was a problem. How to find the Oathgate? It could be anywhere. No, Shallan thought, drawing with precise motions, the old maps placed what Jasnah thought was the Oathgate southwest of the city center. Unfortunately, she still didn’t have a scale for reference. The city was too ancient, and all the maps were copies of copies of copies or re-creations from descriptions. She was certain by now that Stormseat hadn’t made up the entire Shattered Plains—the city hadn’t been nearly so huge. Structures like the warcamps had been outbuildings, or satellite cities.

But that was just a guess. She needed something concrete. Some sign.

The tent flaps opened again. It had grown cold outside. Was the rain harder than it had been?

“Damnation!” the newcomer swore, a thin man in a scout’s uniform. “Have you seen what is happening out there? Why are we split across the plateaus? Wasn’t the plan to fight a defensive battle?”

“Your report?” Inadara asked.

“Get me a towel and some paper,” the scout said. “I rounded the southern side of the central plateau. I’ll draw what I saw . . . but Damnation! They’re throwing lightning, Brightness. Throwing it! It’s insane. How do we fight such things?”

Shallan finished the last plateau on her drawing. She settled back on her heels, lowering her pen. The Shattered Plains, drawn almost in their entirety. But what was she doing? What was the point?

“We will make an expedition into the central plateau,” Inadara said. “Brightlord Renarin, we will need your protection. Perhaps in the Parshendi city we will find the elderly or the workers, and we can protect them, as Brightlord Dalinar has instructed. They might know about the Oathgate. If not, we can begin breaking into buildings and searching for clues.”

Too slow, Shallan thought.

The newly arrived scout stepped up to Shallan’s large map. He leaned over, inspecting it as he dried himself off with a towel. Shallan gave him a glare. If he dripped water on this after all she’d done . . .

“That’s wrong,” he said.

Wrong? Her art? Of course it wasn’t wrong. “Where?” she asked, exhausted.

“That plateau there,” the man said, pointing. “It’s not long and thin, as you drew it. It’s a perfect circle, with big gaps between it and the plateaus on its east and west.”

&ally felt nice



There is one you will watch. Though all of them have some relevance to precognition, Moelach is one of the most powerful in this regard. His touch seeps into a soul as it breaks apart from the body, creating manifestations powered by the spark of death itself. But no, this is a distraction. Deviation. Kingship. We must discuss the nature of kingship.

—From the Diagram, Book of the 2nd Desk Drawer: paragraph 15

Kaladin limped up the switchbacks to the palace, his leg a knotted mass of pain. Almost falling as he reached the doors, he slumped against them, gasping, his crutch under one arm, spear in the other hand. As if he could do anything with that.

Have . . . to get . . . to the king. . . .

How would he get Elhokar away? Moash would be watching. Storms. The assassination could happen any day . . . any hour now. Surely Dalinar was already far enough from the warcamps.

Keep. Moving.

Kaladin stumbled into the entryway. No guards at the doors. Bad sign. Should he have raised the alarm? Alight

Fool, Kaladin thought to himself. You change your mind now? After all of this? What are you doing?

But storm it . . . the king tried. He actually tried. The man was arrogant, perhaps incapable, but he tried. He was sincere.

Kaladin stopped, exhausted, leg screaming, and leaned against the wall. Shouldn't this be easier? Now that he'd made the decision, shouldn't he be focused, confident, energized? He felt none of that. He felt wrung out, confused, and uncertain.

He pushed himself forward. Keep going. Almighty send that he wasn't too late.

Was he back to praying now?

He picked through darkened corridors. Shouldn't there be more light? With some difficulty, he reached the king's upper rooms, with the conference chamber and its balcony to the side. Two men in Bridge Four uniforms guarded the door, but Kaladin didn't recognize either of them. They weren't Bridge Four—they weren't even members of the old King's Guard. Storms.

Kaladin hobbled up to them, knowing he must look a sight, soaked through and through, limping on a leg that—he noticed—was trailing blood. He'd split the sutures on his wounds.

“Stop,” said one of the men. The fellow had a chin so cleft, it looked like he'd taken an axe to the face as a baby. He looked Kaladin up and down. “You're the one they call Stormblessed.”

“You're Graves's men.”

The two looked at each other.

“It's all right,” Kaladin said. “I'm with you. Is Moash here?”

“He’s off for the moment,” the soldier said. “Getting some sleep. It’s an important day.”

I’m not too late, Kaladin thought. Luck was with him. “I want to be part of what you’re doing.”

“It’s taken care of, bridgeman,” the guard said. “Go back to your barrack and pretend nothing is happening.”

Kaladin leaned in close, as if to whisper something. The guard leaned forward.

So Kaladin dropped his crutch and slammed his spear up between the man’s legs. Kaladin immediately turned, spinning on his good leg and dragging the other one, whipping his spear toward the other man.

The man got his spear up to block, and tried to shout. “To arms! To—”

Kaladin slammed against him, knocking aside his spear. Kaladin dropped his own spear and grabbed the man by the neck with numb, wet fingers and cracked his head against the wall. Then he twisted and dropped, bringing his elbow down onto Cleft-chin’s head, driving it down into the floor.

Both men fell still. Light-headed from the sudden exertion, Kaladin slammed himself back against the door. The world spun. At least he knew he could still fight without Stormlight.

He found himself laughing, though it turned into a cough. Had he really just attacked those men? He was committed now. Any. f. Storms, he didn’t even really know why he was doing this. The king’s sincerity was part of it, but that wasn’t the true reason, not deep down. He knew this was what he should do, but why? The thought of the king dying for no good reason made him sick. It reminded him of what had been done to Tien.

But that wasn’t the full reason either. Storms, he wasn’t making any sense, not even to himself.

Neither guard moved save for a few twitches. Kaladin coughed and coughed,

gasping for breath. No time for weakness. He reached up a clawlike hand and twisted the door handle, forcing it open. He half fell into the room, then stumbled to his feet.

“Your Majesty?” he called, propping himself up on his spear and dragging his bad leg. He reached the back of a couch and used it to pull himself fully upright. Where was the—

The king lay on the couch, unmoving.

* * *

Adolin swept broadly with his Blade, maintaining perfect Windstance, the sword’s point spraying water as he sheared through the neck of a Parshendi soldier. Red lightning crackled from the corpse in a bright flare, connecting the soldier to the ground as he died. Nearby Alethi were careful not to step in puddles beside the corpse. They had learned the hard way that this strange lightning could kill quickly via water.

Raising his sword and charging, Adolin led a rush against the nearest Parshendi group. Curse this storm and the winds that had brought it! Fortunately, the darkness had been pushed back somewhat, as Navani had sent fabrials to bathe the battlefield in an extraordinarily even white light.

Adolin and his team clashed again with the Parshendi. However, as soon as he got among the enemy, he felt something tug on his left arm. A loop of rope? He jerked back. No rope could hold Shardplate. He growled and yanked the rope free of the hands holding it. Then he jerked as another rope looped his neck and pulled him backward.

He shouted, spinning and sweeping his Blade through the rope, severing it. Three more loops leaped from the darkness for him; the Parshendi had sent an entire team. Adolin turned to defensive sweeps, as he’d been trained by Zahel to resist a dedicated rope strike. They’d have strung other ropes across the ground in front of him, expecting that he’d charge them . . . Yes, there they were.

Adolin backed away, slicing free the ropes that reached him. Unfortunately,

his men had been depending on him to break the Parshendi line. As he backed away instead, the enemy pressed against the Alethi line in force. As always, they didn't use traditional battle formations, instead attacking in squads and pairs. That was frightfully effective on this chaotic, rain-soaked battlefield, with cracks of lightning and bursts of wind.

Perel, the field commander that he'd put in charge near the lights, called the retreat for Adolin's flank. Adolin let out a series of curses, cutting loose one final rope and stepping backward, sword out in case the Parshendi pursued.

They didn't. Two figures, however, shadowed him as he joined the retreat.

"Still alive, bridgemen?" Adolin asked.

"Still alive," Skar said.

"You've got some loops of rope stuck to you still, sir," Drehy said.

Adolin held out his arm and let Drehy cut them free with his side knife. Over his shoulder, Adolin watched the Parshendi re-form their lines. + along4Sres. fFrom farther back, the sound of that harsh chanting reached him between crashes of lightning and bursts of wind.

"They keep sending teams to engage and distract me," Adolin said. "They don't intend to defeat me; they just want to keep me out of the battle."

"They'll have to really fight you sooner or later," Drehy said, cutting off another of the ropes. Drehy reached up and ran his hand over his bald head, wiping the rain off. "They can't just leave a Shardbearer alone."

"Actually," Adolin said, narrowing his eyes, listening to that chanting. "That's exactly what they're doing."

Through sheets of windborne rain, Adolin jogged in a clanking run up to the command position, near the lights. Perel—wrapped in a large stormcoat—stood there bellowing orders. He gave Adolin a quick salute.

"Status?" Adolin asked.

“Treading water, Brightlord.”

“I have no idea what that means,” Adolin said.

“Swimming term, sir,” Perel said. “We’re fighting back and forth, but we’re not making any headway. We’re fairly evenly matched; each side is looking for an edge. I’m most worried about those Parshendi reserves. They should have committed those by now.”

“The reserves?” Adolin asked, peering across the dim plateau. “You mean the singers.” To both right and left, Alethi troops engaged other Parshendi units. Men shouted and screamed, weapons clashed, the familiar deadly sounds of a battlefield.

“Yes, sir,” Perel said. “They’re up against that rock formation at the middle of the plateau, singing their storming hearts out.”

Adolin remembered that rock outcropping, looming in the dim light. It was easily large enough for a battalion on top. “Could we climb it from behind?”

“In this rain, Brightlord?” Perel asked. “Not likely. Maybe you could, but would you really want to go alone?”

Adolin waited for the familiar eagerness to urge him forward, the desire to rush into the fight without concern for the consequences. He’d trained himself to resist that urge, and was surprised to find it . . . gone. Nothing.

He frowned. He was tired. Was that the reason? He considered the situation, thinking to the sound of rain on his helmet.

We need to get to those Parshendi at the back, he thought. Father wants the reserves engaged, the song broken off . . .

What had Shallan said about these inner plateaus? And the rock formations on them?

“Gather me a battalion,” Adolin said. “A thousand men, heavy infantry. Once I’ve been gone with them for a half hour, send the rest of the men in a full assault against the Parshendi. I’m going to try something, and I want you to

provide a distraction.”

* * *

“You’re dead,” Dalinar shouted toward the sky. He spun about, still on the central plateau between the three battlefields, startling the aides and attendants near him. “You told me you had been killed!”

Rain pelted his face. Were his ears said, following Kaladin’s gaze. ment of thoses. fs playing tricks on him in this havoc of rain and shouting?

“I am not the Almighty,” the voice said. Dalinar turned, searching among his startled companions. Four bridgemen in stormcoats stepped back, as if frightened. His captains watched the clouds unsteadily, holding hands on swords.

“Did any of you hear that voice?” Dalinar asked.

Women and men alike shook heads.

“Are you . . . hearing the Almighty?” asked one of the messenger women.

“Yes.” It was the simplest answer, though he wasn’t sure what was happening. He continued to cross the central plateau, intending to check on Adolin’s battlefront.

“I am sorry,” the voice repeated. Unlike in the visions, Dalinar could find no avatar speaking the words. They came out of nowhere. “You have striven hard. But I can do nothing for you.”

“Who are you?” Dalinar hissed.

“I am the one left behind,” the voice said. It wasn’t exactly as he’d heard it in the visions; this voice had a depth to it. A density. “I am the sliver of Him that remains. I saw His corpse, saw Him die when Odium murdered Him. And I . . . I fled. To continue as I always have. The piece of God left in this world, the winds that men must feel.”

Was he responding to Dalinar’s question, or speaking a mere monologue? In

the visions, Dalinar had originally assumed he was having conversations with this voice, only to find that its half of the seeming dialogue had been preset. He could not tell if this was the same or not.

Storms . . . was he in the middle of a vision now? He froze in place, suddenly imagining a horrible picture of himself, sprawled on the floor of the palace, having imagined everything leading up to this battle in the rain.

No, he thought forcefully. I will not travel down that path. He had always recognized when he was in a vision before; he had no reason to believe that had changed.

The reserves he'd ordered for Aladar trotted past, spearmen with points toward the sky. That would be storming dangerous if real lightning came, but they didn't have much choice.

Dalinar waited for the voice to say more, but nothing happened. He proceeded, and soon approached Adolin's plateau.

Was that thunder?

No. Dalinar turned and picked out a horse galloping across the plateau toward him, a messenger on its back. He held up a hand, interrupting a tactical report by Captain Javiah.

"Brightlord!" the messenger shouted. She reared the horse. "Brightlord Teleb has fallen! Highprince Roion has been routed. His lines are broken, his remaining men surrounded by Parshendi! He's trapped on the northern plateau!"

"Damnation! Captain Khal?"

"Still up, fighting toward where Roion was last seen. He's nearly overwhelmed."

Dalinar spun to Javiah. "Reserves?"

"I don't know what we have left," the man said, face pale in the dim light. "Depends on if any have rotated out."

“Find out and bring them here!” Dalinar said, running to the messenger.
“Off,” he told her.

“Sir?”+the bo. What res. f

“Off!”

The woman scrambled from the saddle as Dalinar placed foot into stirrup and swung into position. He turned the horse—thankful, for once, he didn’t have on any Shardplate. This light horse wouldn’t have been able to carry him.

“Gather whatever you can and follow!” he shouted. “I need men, even if you have to pull that battalion of spearmen back from Aladar.”

Captain Javiah’s reply was lost in the rain as Dalinar leaned low and cued the horse with his heels. The animal snorted, and Dalinar had to fight it before getting it to move. The pops of lightning in the distance had the creature skittish.

Once pointed the right direction, he gave the horse its head, and it galloped eagerly. Dalinar crossed the plateau in a rush, triage tents, command posts, and food stations passing in a blur. As he neared the northern plateau, he reined in the horse and scanned the area for Navani.

No sign of her, though he did see several large tarps laid on the ground here—expansive squares of black cloth. She’d been at work. He called a question to an engineer, and she pointed, so Dalinar rode along the chasm in that direction. He passed a succession of other tarps that had been arranged on the stone.

Across the chasm to his left, men died with shouts and screams. He saw firsthand how terribly Roion’s battle was progressing. The danger was manifest in broken groups of men flying beleaguered banners, split into vulnerable small bunches by red-eyed enemies. The Alethi would fight on, but with their line fragmenting, their prospects were grim.

Dalinar remembered fighting like that himself two months ago, surrounded

by a sea of enemies, without hope for salvation. Dalinar pushed his horse faster, and soon spotted Navani. She stood beneath an umbrella directing a group of workers with another large tarp.

“Navani!” Dalinar shouted, pulling his horse to a slippery stop across the tarp from her. “I need a miracle!”

“Working on it,” she shouted back.

“No time for working. Execute your plan. Now.”

He was too distant to see her glare, but he felt it. Fortunately, she waved workers away from her current tarp and began shouting orders to her engineers. The women ran up to the chasm, where a line of rocks was arrayed. They were attached to ropes, Dalinar thought, though he wasn't sure how this process worked. Navani shouted instructions.

Too much time, Dalinar thought, anxious, watching across the chasm. Had they recovered Teleb's Shards? He couldn't spare grief for the man, not now. They needed those Shards.

Behind Dalinar, soldiers gathered. Roion's archers, finest in the warcamps, had been useless in this rain. The engineers backed up at a barked order from Navani, and the workers shoved the line of some forty rocks into the chasm.

As the rocks fell, tarps jumped fifty feet into the air, pulled at the front corners and centers. In an instant, a long line of improvised pavilions flanked the chasm.

“Move!” Dalinar said, urging his horse between two of the pavilions.

“Archers forward!”

Men dashed into the protected areas under the tarps, some muttering at the lack of any visible poles holding them in the air. Navani had pulled up only the fronts, so the tarps slanted backward, away from the chasm+remAnys. f. The rain streamed down in that direction. They also had sides, like tents, so only the open faces were toward Roion's battlefront.

Dalinar swung from the horse and handed the reins to a worker. He jogged under one of the pavilions to where archers were forming ranks. Navani entered, carrying a large sack over her shoulder. She opened it to reveal a large glowing garnet suspended within a delicate wire lacework fabrial.

She fiddled with it for a moment, then stepped back.

“We really should have had more time to test this,” she warned to Dalinar, folding her arms. “Attractors are new inventions. I’m still half afraid this thing will suck the blood out of anyone who touches it.”

It didn’t. Instead, water quickly started to pool around the thing. Storms, it worked! The fabrial was pulling moisture from the air. Roion’s archers removed bowstrings from protected pockets, bending bows and stringing them at the orders of their lieutenants. Many of the men here were lighteyes—archery was seen as an acceptable Calling for a lighteyed man of modest means. Not everyone could be an officer.

The archers began loosing waves of arrows across the chasm into the Parshendi who had surrounded Roion’s forces. “Good,” Dalinar said, watching the arrows fly. “Very good.”

“The rain and wind are still going to make aiming the arrows difficult,” Navani said. “And I don’t know how well the fabrials will work; with the front of the pavilions open, humidity is going to flood in constantly. We might run out of Stormlight after just a short time.”

“It’s enough,” Dalinar said. The arrows made an almost immediate difference, drawing Parshendi attention away from the beleaguered men. It wasn’t a maneuver to try unless you were desperate—the risk of hitting allies was great—but Roion’s archers proved deserving of their reputation.

He pulled Navani close with one arm. “You did well.” Then he called for his horse—his horse, not that wild messenger beast—as he charged out of the pavilion. Those archers would give him an opening. Hopefully it wasn’t too late for Roion.

* * *

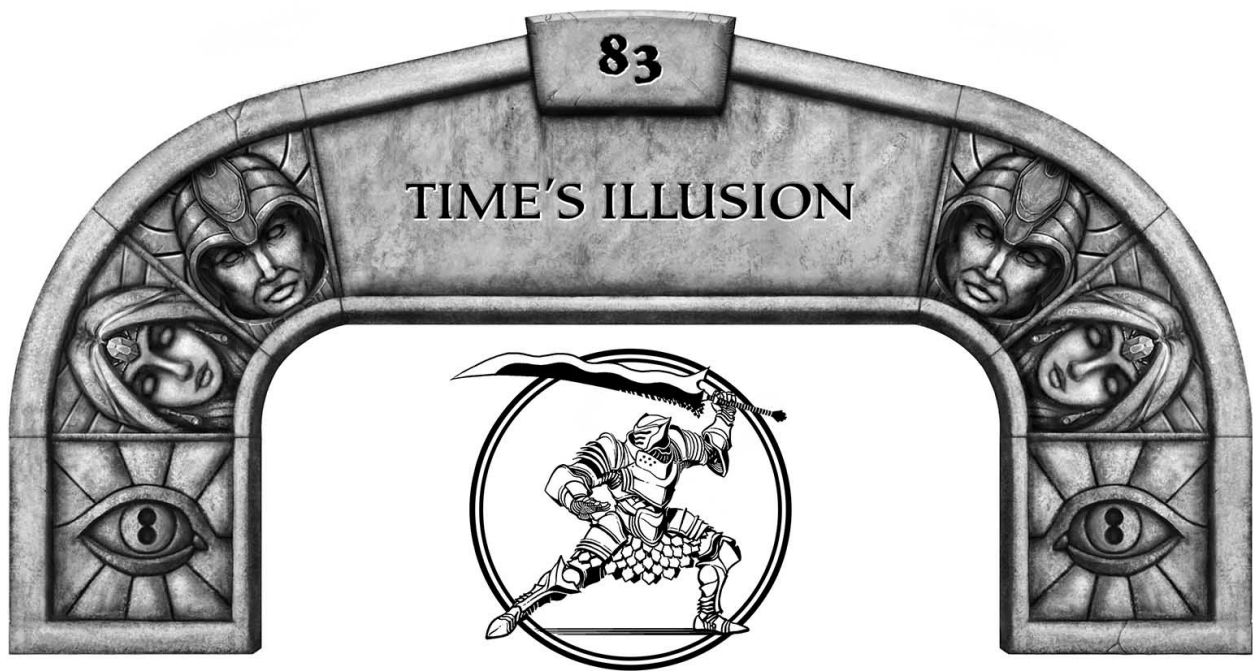
No! Kaladin thought, rounding the couch to the king's side. Was he dead? There was no obvious wound.

The king shifted, then groaned in a lazy way and sat upright. Kaladin let out a deep breath. An empty wine bottle rested on the end table, and Kaladin could smell the spilled wine now that he was closer.

“Bridgeman?” Elhokar's speech was slurred. “Have you come to gloat over me?”

“Storms, Elhokar,” Kaladin said. “How much have you had?”

“They all . . . they all talk about me,” Elhokar said, D; Dalinar sai



Obviously they are fools The Desolation needs no usher It can and will sit where it wishes and the signs are obvious that the spren anticipate it doing so soon The Ancient of Stones must finally begin to crack It is a wonder that upon his will rested the prosperity and peace of a world for over four millennia

—From the Diagram, Book of the 2nd Ceiling Rotation: pattern 1

Shallan stepped off the bridge onto a deserted plateau.

The rain muffled the sounds of warfare, making the area feel even more isolated. Darkness like dusk. Rainfall like hushed whispers.

This plateau was high+ H WyndleWe , Brightlord.”er than most, so she could see Stormseat’s center arrayed around her. Pillars with crem accreting at their bases, transforming them to stalagmites. Buildings that had become mounds, overgrown with stone like snow covering a fallen log. In the darkness and rain, the ancient city presented a sketch of skyline for the imagination to fill in.

This city hid beneath time’s own illusion.

The others followed her across the bridge. They'd skirted the fighting on Aladar's battlefront, slipping along the Alethi lines to attain this farther plateau. Getting up here had taken time, as the bridgemen had needed to locate a usable landing. They'd had to climb a slope on the adjoining plateau and place their bridge there to get across the chasm.

"How can you be sure this is the right place?" Renarin asked, clinking down onto the plateau beside her. Shallan had opted for an umbrella, but Renarin stood in the rain, helm under his arm, letting the water stream down his face. Didn't he wear spectacles? She hadn't seen them on him much lately.

"It is the right place," Shallan said, "because it's deviant."

"That's hardly a logical conclusion," Inadara said, joining the two of them as soldiers and bridgemen crossed to the empty plateau. "A portal of this nature would be kept hidden; it would not be deviant."

"The Oathgates were not hidden," Shallan said. "That is beside the point, however. This plateau is a circle."

"Many are circular."

"Not this circular," Shallan said, striding forward. Now that she was here, she could see just how irregularly . . . well, regular the plateau was. "I was looking for a dais on a plateau, but didn't realize the scale of what I was searching for. This entire plateau is the dais upon which the Oathgate sat.

"Don't you see? The other plateaus were created by some kind of disaster—they are jagged, broken. This place is not. That's because it was already here when the shattering happened. On the old maps it was a raised section, like a giant pedestal. When the Plains were broken, it remained this way."

"Yes . . ." Renarin said, nodding. "Imagine a plate with a circle etched into the center . . . if a force shattered the plate, it might break along the already weakened lines."

"Leaving you with a bunch of irregular pieces," Shallan agreed, "and one shaped like a circle."

“Perhaps,” Inadara said. “But I find it odd that something so tactically important would be exposed.”

“The Oathgates were a symbol,” Shallan said, continuing to walk. “The Vorin Right of Travel, given to all citizens of sufficient rank, is based on the Heralds’ declaration that all borders should be open. If you were going to create a symbol of that unity—a portal that connected all of the Silver Kingdoms together—where would you put it? Hidden in a locked room? Or on a stage that rose above the city? It was out here because they were proud of it.”

They continued through the blowing rain. There was a hallowed quality to this place, and honestly, that was part of how she knew she was right.

“Mmmm,” Alight

“The Voidspren?” Shallan whispered.

“The bonded ones. They craft a storm.”

Right. Her task was urgent; she didn’t have time to stand around thinking. She was about to order the search begun, but paused as she noticed Renarin staring westward, his eyes distant.

“Prince Renarin?” she asked.

“The wrong way,” he whispered. “The wind is blowing from the wrong direction. West to east . . . Oh, Almighty above. It’s terrible.”

She followed his gaze, but could see nothing.

“It’s actually real,” Renarin said. “The Everstorm.”

“What are you talking about?” Shallan asked, feeling a chill at the tone of his voice.

“I . . .” He looked to her and wiped the water from his eyes, gauntlet hanging from his waist. “I should be with my father. I should be able to fight. Only I’m useless.”

Great. He was creepy and whiny. “Well, your father ordered you to help me, so deal with your issues. Everyone, let’s search this place.”

“What are we looking for, cousin?” asked Rock, one of the bridgemen.

Cousin, she thought. Cute. Because of the red hair. “I don’t know,” she said. “Anything strange, out of the ordinary.”

They split up and spread out across the plateau. Along with Inadara, Shallan had a small group of ardents and scholars to help her, including one of Dalinar’s stormwardens. She sent teams of several scholars, one bridgeman, and one soldier each in different directions.

Renarin and the majority of the bridgemen insisted on going with her. She couldn’t complain about that—this was a war zone. Shallan passed a lump on the ground, part of a large ring. Perhaps once a low ornamental wall. How would this place have looked? She pictured it in her mind, and wished she could have drawn it. That would certainly have helped her visualize.

Where would the portal be? Most likely at the center, so that was the direction she went. There she found a large stone mound.

“This is all?” Rock asked. “He is just more rock.”

“That is exactly what I was hoping to find,” Shallan said. “Anything exposed to the air would have weathered away or become immured with crem. If we’re to discover anything useful, it will have to be inside.”

“Inside?” asked one of the bridgemen. “Inside what?”

“The buildings,” Shallan said, feeling at the wall until she found a ripple in the back of the rock. She turned to Renarin. “Prince Renarin, would you kindly slay this rock for me?”

* * *

Adolin raised his sphere in the dark chamber, shining light on the wall. After so long outdoors in the Weeping, it felt strange not to have rain tapping against his helm. The musty air in this place was already growing humid, and

even with the shuffling of soldiers and men coughing, the boy. What's made Adolin felt like it was too silent. Within this rocky tomb, they may as well have been miles away from the battlefield just outside.

“How did you know, sir?” asked Skar, the bridgeman. “How'd you guess that this rock mound would be hollow?”

“Because a clever woman,” Adolin said, “once asked me to attack a boulder for her.”

Together, he and these men had circled to the other side of the large rock formation that the chanting Parshendi were using to guard their backs. With a few twists of the Shardblade, Adolin had cut an entrance into the mound, which had proven to be hollow as he'd hoped.

He picked his way through the dusty chambers, passing bones and dried debris that might once have been furniture. Presumably it had rotted away before the crem had finished sealing the building. Had it been a kind of communal dwelling, long ago? Or perhaps a market? It did have a lot of rooms; many doorways still bore rusted hinges that had once held doors.

A thousand men moved through the building with him, holding lanterns that carried large cut gems—five times bigger than brooms, though even some of those were starting to fail, as it had been so long since a highstorm.

A thousand men was a large number to navigate through these eerie confines. But, unless he was completely off, they should now be approaching the opposite wall—the one just behind the Parshendi. Some of his men scouted nearby rooms, and came back with the confirmation. The building ended here. Adolin now saw the outlines of windows, sealed up with crem that had spilled in through gaps over the years, dribbling down the wall and piling on the floor.

“All right,” he called out to the company commanders and their captains. “Let's gather everyone we can in this room here and the hall right outside. I'll cut an exit hole. As soon as it's open, we need to spill out and attack those singing Parshendi.

“First Company, you split to either side and secure this exit. Don’t get pushed back! I’ll charge and try to draw attention. Everyone else move through and join the assault as quickly as you can manage.”

The men nodded. Adolin took a deep breath, then closed his faceplate and stepped up to the wall. They were on the second floor of the building, but he estimated the buildup of crem outside would place that at about ground level. Indeed, from outside he heard a faint sound. Humming, resonating through the wall.

Storms, the Parshendi were right there. He summoned his Blade, waited until the company commanders passed the word back that their men were ready, then hacked at the wall in several long ribbons. He sliced it the other way with sweeping blows, then slammed his Plate shoulder into it.

The wall broke down and fell out, stone blocks cascading away from him. The rain returned in force. He was only a few feet off the ground, and he eagerly pushed his way out onto the slick wet rocks. Just to his left, Parshendi reserves stood in rows facing away from him, absorbed in their chanting. The clamor of battle was nearly inaudible here, all but drowned out by the spine-tingling sound of that inhuman singing.

Perfect. The rain and chanting had covered the noise of the hole opening. He hacked open another hole as men spilled out from the first one, bearing lights. He began to open a third exit, but heard a shout. One of the Parshendi had finally noticed him. She was female—with this new form of theirs, that was more obvious than it had been before.

He charged the short distance Alight

It was shockingly easy. These Parshendi abandoned their song reluctantly, coming out of their trance disoriented and confused. Those who fought did so without coordination, and Adolin’s swift attack didn’t allow time for them to summon their strange sparking energy.

It was like killing sleeping men. Adolin had done dirty work with his Shards before. Damnation, any time you took the field with Plate and Blade against ordinary men, you did dirty work—slaughtering those who might as well

have been children with sticks. This was worse though. Often they'd come to just before he killed them—blinking to consciousness, shaking themselves awake, only to find themselves face-to-face with a full Shardbearer in the rain, murdering their friends. Those looks of horror haunted Adolin as he sent corpse after corpse to the ground.

Where was the Thrill that usually propelled him through this kind of butchery? He needed it. Instead, he felt only nausea. Standing amid a field of the newly dead—the acrid smoke of burned-out eyes curling up through the rain—he trembled and dropped his Blade in disgust. It vanished to mist.

Something crashed into him from behind.

He lurched over a corpse—stumbling but keeping his feet—and spun about. A Shardblade smashed against his chest, spreading a glowing web of cracks across his breastplate. He deflected the next blow with his forearm and stepped back, taking a battle stance.

She stood before him, rain streaming from her armor. What had she named herself? Eshonai.

Inside his helm, Adolin grinned at the Shardbearer. This he could do. An honest fight. He raised his hands, the Shardblade forming from mist as he swung upward and deflected her attack in a sweeping parry.

Thank you, he thought.

* * *

Dalinar rode Gallant back across the bridge from Roion's plateau, nursing a bloody wound at his side. Stupid. He should have seen that spear. He'd been too focused on that red lightning and the quickly shifting Parshendi fighting pairs.

The truth, Dalinar thought, sliding from his horse so a surgeon could inspect the wound, is that you're an old man now. Perhaps not by the measuring of lifespans, as he was only in his fifties, but by the yardstick of soldiers he was certainly old. Without Shardplate to assist, he was getting slow, getting weak.

Killing was a young man's game, if only because the old men fell first.

That cursed rain kept coming, so he escaped it under one of Navani's pavilions. The archers kept the Parshendi from following across the chasm to harry Roion's beleaguered retreat. With the help of the bowmen, Dalinar had successfully saved the highprince's army, half of it at least—but they'd lost the entire northern plateau. Roion rode across to safety, followed by an exhausted Captain Khal on foot—General Khal's son wore his own Plate and bore Teleb's Blade, which he'd blessedly recovered from the corpse after the other man had fallen.

They'd been forced to leave the body, and the Plate. Just as bad, the Parshendi how willing you were to obey me officergettings. f singing continued unabated. Despite the soldiers saved, this was a terrible defeat.

Dalinar undid his breastplate and sat down with a grunt as the surgeon ordered him a stool. He suffered the woman's ministrations, though he knew the wound was not terrible. It was bad—any wound was bad on the battlefield, particularly if it impaired the sword arm—but it wouldn't kill him.

"Storms," the surgeon said. "Highprince, you're all scars under here. How many times have you been wounded in the shoulder?"

"Can't remember."

"How can you still use your arm?"

"Training and practice."

"That's not how it works . . ." she whispered, eyes wide. "I mean . . . storms . . ."

"Just sew the thing up," he said. "Yes, I'll stay off the battlefield today. No, I won't stress it. Yes, I've heard all the lectures before."

He shouldn't have been out there in the first place. He'd told himself he wouldn't ride into battle anymore. He was supposed to be a politician now, not a warlord.

But once in a while, the Blackthorn needed to come out. The men needed it. Storms, he needed it. The—

Navani thundered into the tent.

Too late. He sighed as she stalked up to him, passing this tent's fabrial—which glowed on a little pedestal, collecting water around it in a shimmering globe. That water streamed off along two metal rods at the sides of the fabrial, spilling onto the ground, then running out of the tent and over the plateau's edge.

He looked up at Navani grre getting out



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—From the Diagram, Book of the 2nd Ceiling Rotation: pattern 15

The stone block slid inward, confirming Shallaan's deduction. They had opened a building that hadn't been entered, or even seen, for centuries. Renarin stepped back from the hole he'd made, giving Shallaan a chance to step forward. The air from inside smelled stale, musty.

Renarin dismissed his Blade, and oddly, as he did so, he let out a relieved sigh and relaxed against the outer wall of the building. Shallaan moved to enter, but the bridgemen slipped in front of her to check the building's safety first, raising sapphire lanterns.

The light revealed majesty.

Shallaan's breath caught in her throat. The large, circular room was a space

worthy of a palace or temple. A mosaic mural covered the wall and floor with majestic images and dazzling color. Knights in armor stood before swirling skies of red and blue. People from all walks of life were depicted in all manner of settings, each crafted from vivid colors of every kind of stone—a masterwork that brought the whole world into one room.

Worried she'd damage the portal somehow, she'd placed Renarin's cuts near a ripple that she had hoped indicated a doorway, and it seemed that she'd been correct. She entered through the hole and walked a curving path through the circular chamber, silently counting the divisions in the floor mural. There were ten main ones, just as there had been ten orders of knights, ten kingdoms, ten peoples. And then—between the segments representing the first and tenth kingdoms—was a narrower eleventh section. It depicted a tall tower. Urithiru.

She'd found it, the portal. And this artwork! Such beauty. It was breathtaking.

No, there wasn't time to admire art right now. The large floor mosaic swirled around the center, but the swords of each knight pointed toward the same area of the wall, so Shallan walked in that direction. Everything in here seemed perfectly preserved, even the lamps on the walls, which appeared to still hold dun gemstones.

On the wall, she found a metal disc set into the stone. Was this steel? It hadn't rusted or even tarnished despite its long abandonment.

"It's coming," Renarin announced from the other side of the room, his quiet voice echoing across the domed chamber. Storms, that boy was disturbing, particularly when accompanied by a howling storm and the sound of rain pelting the plateau outside.

Brightness Inadara and several scholars arrived. Stepping into the chamber, they gasped and then began talking over one another as they rushed to examine the mural.

Shallan studied the strange disc set into the wall. It was shaped like a ten-pointed star and had a thin slot directly in the center. The Radiants could

operate this place, she thought. And what did the Radiants have that nobody else did? Many things, but the shape of that slot in the metal gave her a pretty good guess why only they could make the Oathgate work.

“Renarin, get over here,” Shallan said.

The boy clomped in her direction.

“Shallan,” Pattern said warningly. “Time is very short. They have summoned the Everstorm. And said, following Kaladin’s gaze. ment of came s. f . . . and there’s something else, coming from the other direction. A highstorm?”

“It’s the Weeping,” Shallan said, looking to Pattern, who dimpled the wall just beside the steel disc. “No highstorms.”

“One is coming anyway. Shallan, they’re going to hit together. Two storms coming, one from each direction. They will crash into each other right here.”

“I don’t suppose they’ll just, you know, cancel each other out?”

“They will feed each other,” Pattern said. “It will be like two waves hitting with their peaks coinciding . . . it will create a storm like none the world has ever seen. Stone will shatter, plateaus themselves might collapse. It’s going to be bad. Very, very bad.”

Shallan looked to Inadara, who had walked up beside her. “Thoughts?”

“I don’t know what to think, Brightness,” Inadara said. “You were right about this place. I . . . I no longer trust myself to judge what is correct and what is false.”

“We need to move the armies to this plateau,” Shallan said. “Even if they defeat the Parshendi, they’re doomed unless we can make this portal work.”

“It doesn’t look like a portal at all,” Inadara said. “What will it do? Open a doorway in the wall?”

“I don’t know,” Shallan said, looking to Renarin. “Summon your Shardblade.”

He did so, wincing as it appeared. Shallan pointed at the slot like a keyhole in the wall—acting on a hunch. “See if you can scratch that metal with your Blade. Be very careful. We don’t want to ruin the Oathgate, in case I’m wrong.”

Renarin stepped up and carefully—using his hand to pinch the weapon from above—placed the tip of the blade on the metal around the keyhole. He grunted as the Blade wouldn’t cut. He tried a little harder, and the metal resisted the Blade.

“Made of the same stuff!” Shallan said, growing excited. “And that slot is shaped like it might fit a Blade. Try sliding the weapon in, very slowly.”

He did so, and as the point moved into the hole, the entire shape of the keyhole shifted, the metal flowing to match the shape of Renarin’s Shardblade. It was working! He got the weapon placed, and they turned around, looking over the chamber. Nothing appeared to have changed.

“Did that do anything?” Renarin asked.

“It has to have,” Shallan said. They’d unlocked a door, perhaps. But how to turn the equivalent of the doorknob?

“We need Highlady Navani to help,” Shallan said. “More importantly, we need to bring everyone here. Go, soldiers, bridgemen! Run and tell Dalinar to gather his armies on this plateau. Tell him that if he doesn’t, they are doomed. The rest of you scholars, we’re going to put our heads together and figure out how this storming thing works.”

* * *

Adolin danced through the storm, trading blows with Eshonai. She was good, though she didn’t use stances he how willing you were to obey me officer came s. f recognized. She dodged back and forth, feeling him out with her Blade, bursting through the storm like a crackling thunderbolt.

Adolin kept after her, sweeping with his Shardblade, forcing her away. A duel. He could win a duel. Even in the middle of a storm, even against a

monster, this was something he could do. He backed her away across the battlefield, closer to where his armies had crossed the chasm to join this battle.

She was difficult to maneuver. He had only met this Eshonai twice, but he felt he knew her through the way she fought. He sensed her eagerness for blood. Her eagerness to kill. The Thrill. He did not feel it himself. He sensed it in her.

Around him, Parshendi fled or fought in pockets as his men harried them. He passed a Parshendi, forced to the ground by soldiers, being gutted in the rain as he tried to crawl away. Water and blood splashed on the plateau, frantic yells sounding amid the thunder.

Thunder. Distant thunder from the west. Adolin glanced in that direction, and nearly lost his concentration. He could see it building, wind and rain spinning in a gigantic pillar, flashing red.

Eshonai swung for him, and Adolin turned back, blocking the blow with his forearm. That section of his Plate was getting weak, the cracks leaking Stormlight. He stepped into the blow and swung his own Blade, one-handed, into Eshonai's side. He was rewarded by a grunt. She didn't fold, though. She didn't even step back. She raised her Blade and smashed it down against his forearm yet again.

The Plate there exploded in a flash of light and molten metal. Storms. Adolin was forced to pull the arm back and release the gauntlet—now too heavy, without the connecting Plate to help it—letting it drop off his hand. The wind that blew against his exposed skin was startlingly powerful.

A little more, Adolin thought, not backing away despite the lost section of Plate. He grabbed his Shardblade in two hands—one metal, the other flesh—and battered forward with a series of strikes. He transitioned out of Windstance. No sweeping majesty for him. He needed the frantic fury of Flamestance. Not just for the power, but because of what he needed to convey to Eshonai.

Eshonai growled, forced backward. “Your day has ended, destroyer,” she

said inside her helm. “Today, your brutality turns against you. Today, extinction turns from us to you.”

A little more.

Adolin pressed her with a burst of swordplay, then he flagged, presenting her with an opening. She took it immediately, swinging for his helm, which leaked from an earlier blow. Yes, she was fully caught up in the Thrill. That lent her energy and strength, but it drove her to recklessness. To ignore her surroundings.

Adolin took the hit to the head and stumbled. Eshonai laughed with glee and moved to swing again.

Adolin lunged forward and slammed his shoulder and head into her chest. His helm exploded from the force of it, but his gambit succeeded.

Eshonai had not noticed how close they were to the chasm.

His shove threw her over the plateau’s edge. He felt Eshonai’s panic, heard her shout, as she was dropped into the open blackness.

Unfortunately, the exploding helm left Adolin momentarily blinded. He stumbled, and when he put a foot down, it landed only on empty air. He lurched, then fell toward the void of the chasm.

For a timeless said, following Kaladin’s gaze.ment of came s. f moment, all he felt was panic and fright, a frozen eternity before he realized he wasn’t falling. His vision cleared, and he looked down into the maw before him, rain falling in curtains all around. Then he looked back over his shoulder.

To where two bridgemen had grabbed hold of the steel link skirt of his Plate and were struggling to hold him back from the brink. Grunting, they clung to the slick metal, holding tight with feet thrust against stones to keep from being pulled off with him.

Other soldiers materialized, rushing to help. Hands grabbed Adolin around the waist and shoulders, and together they hauled him back from the brink of

the void—to the point that he was able to get his balance again and stumble away from the chasm.

Soldiers cheered, and Adolin let out an exhausted laugh. He turned to the bridgemen, Skar and Drehy. “I guess,” Adolin said, “I don’t need to wonder if you two can keep up with me or not.”

“This was nothing,” Skar said.

“Yeah,” Drehy added. “Lifting fat lighteyes is easy. You should try a bridge sometime.”

Adolin grinned, then wiped water from his face with his exposed hand. “See if you can find a chunk of my helm or forearm piece. Regrowing the armor will go faster if we’ve got a seed. Collect my gauntlet too, if you would.”

The two nodded. That red lightning in the sky was building, and that spinning column of dark rain was expanding, growing outward. That . . . that did not seem like a good sign.

He needed a better grasp on what was happening in the rest of the army. He jogged across , who were run



But who is the wanderer, the wild piece, the one who makes no sense? I glimpse at his implications, and the world opens to me. I shy back. Impossible. Is it?

—From the Diagram, West Wall Psalm of Wonders: paragraph 8 (Note by Adrotagia: Could this refer to Mraize?)

“She didn’t say if she could even open the pathway?” Dalinar asked as he stalked toward the command tent. Rain pummeled the ground around him, so dense that it was no longer possible to distinguish separate windblown sheets in the glare of Navani’s fabrial floodlights. It was long past when he should have found cover.

“No, Brightlord,” said Peet, the bridgeman. “But she was insistent that we couldn’t face what was coming at us. Two highstorms.”

“How could there be two?” Navani asked. She wore a stout cloak but was soaked clear through anyway, her umbrella having blown away long ago. Roion walked on Dalinar’s other side, his beard and mustache limp with water.

“I don’t know, Brightness,” Peet said. “But that’s what she said. A highstorm and something else. She called it an Everstorm. She expects they’re going to collide right here.”

Dalinar considered, frowning. The command tent was just ahead. Inside, he’d talk to his field commanders, and—

The command tent shuddered, then ripped free in a burst of wind. Trailing ropes and spikes, it blew right past Dalinar, almost close enough to touch. Dalinar cursed as the light of a dozen lanterns—once contained in the tent—spilled onto the plateau. Scribes and soldiers scrambled, trying to grab maps and sheet how willing you were to obey me her head” Peet said. lls of paper as rain and wind claimed them.

“Storm it!” Dalinar said, turning his back to the powerful wind. “I need an update!”

“Sir!” Commander Cael, head of the field command, jogged over, his wife—Apara—following. Cael’s clothing was mostly dry, though that was quickly changing. “Aladar has won his plateau! Apara was just composing you a message.”

“Really?” Almighty bless that man. He’d done it.

“Yes, sir,” Cael said. He had to shout against the wind and rain. “Highprince Aladar said the singing Parshendi went right down, letting him slaughter them. The rest broke and fled. Even with Roion’s plateau fallen, we’ve won the day!”

“Doesn’t feel like it,” Dalinar shouted back. Just minutes ago, the rainfall had been light. The situation was degrading quickly. “Send orders immediately to Aladar, my son, and General Khal. There’s a plateau just to the southeast, perfectly round. I want all of our forces to move there to brace for an oncoming storm.”

“Yes, sir!” Cael said with a salute, fist to coat. With the other hand, however, he pointed over Dalinar’s shoulder. “Sir, have you seen that?”

He turned, looking back toward the west. Red light flashed, lightning coursing down in repeated blasts. The sky itself seemed to spasm as something built there, swirling in an enormous storm cell that was rapidly expanding outward.

“Almighty above . . .” Navani whispered.

Nearby another tent shook, its stakes coming undone. “Leave the tents, Cael,” Dalinar said. “Get everyone moving. Now. Navani, go to Brightness Shallan. Help her if you can.”

The officer leaped away and began shouting orders. Navani went with him, vanishing into the night, and a squad of soldiers chased after her to provide protection.

“And me, Dalinar?” Roion asked.

“We’ll need you to take command of your men and lead them to safety,” Dalinar said. “If such a thing can be found.”

That tent nearby shook again. Dalinar frowned. It didn’t seem to be moving along with the wind. And was that . . . shouting?

Adolin crashed through the tent’s fabric and skidded along the stones on his back, his armor leaking Light.

“Adolin!” Dalinar shouted, dashing to his son.

The young man was missing several segments of his armor. He looked up with gritted teeth, blood streaming from his nose. He said something, but it was lost to the wind. No helm, no left vambrace, the breastplate cracked just short of shattering, his right leg exposed. Who could have done such a thing to a Shardbearer?

Dalinar knew the answer immediately. He cradled Adolin, but looked up past the collapsed tent. It whipped in the storm and tore away as a man strode past it, glowing with spinning trails of Stormlight. Those foreign features, clothing all of white plastered to his body by the rain, a bowed, hairless head, shadows

hiding eyes that glowed with Stormlight.

Gavilar's murderer. Szeth, the Assassin in White.

* * *

Shallan worked through the inscriptions along the wall of the round chamber, frantically searching for some way to make the Oathgate function.

This had to work. It had to.

"This is all in the Dawnchant," Inadara said. "I can't make sense of any of it."

The Knights Radiant are the key.

Shouldn't Renarin's sword have been enough? "What's the pattern?" she whispered.

"Mmm . . ." Pattern said. "Perhaps you cannot see it because you are too close? Like the Shattered Plains?"

Shallan hesitated, then stood and walked to the center of the room, where the depictions of the Knights Radiant and their kingdoms met at a central point.

"Brightlord Renarin?" Inadara asked. "Is something wrong?" The young prince had fallen to his knees and was huddled next to the wall.

"I can see it," Renarin answered feverishly, his voice echoing in the chamber. Ardents who had been studying part of the murals looked up at him. "I can see the future itself. Why? Why, Almighty? Why have you cursed me so?" He screamed a pleading cry, then stood and cracked something against the wall. A rock? Where had he gotten it? He gripped the thing in a gauntleted hand and began to write.

Shocked, Shallan took a step toward him. A sequence of numbers?

All zeros.

“It’s come,” Renarin whispered. “It’s come, it’s come, it’s come. We’re dead. We’re dead. We’re dead. . . .”

* * *

Dalinar knelt beneath a fracturing sky, holding his son. Rainwater washed the blood from Adolin’s face, and the boy blinked, dazed from his thrashing.

“Father . . .” Adolin said.

The assassin stepped forward quietly, with no apparent urgency. The man seemed to glide through the rain.

“When you take the pryncedom, son,” Dalinar said, “don’t let them corrupt you. Don’t play their games. Lead. Don’t follow.”

“Father!” Adolin said, his eyes focusing.

Dalinar stood up. Adolin lurched over onto all fours and tried to get to his feet, but the assassin had broken one of Adolin’s greaves, which made it almost impossible to rise. The boy slipped back into the pooling water.

“You’ve been taught well, Adolin,” Dalinar said, eyes on that assassin. “You’re a better man than I am. I was always a tyrant who had to learn to be something else. But you, you’ve been a good man from the start. Lead them, Adolin. Unite them.”

“Father!”

Dalinar walked away from Adolin. Nearby, scribes and attendants, captains and enlisted men all shouted and scrambled, trying to find order in the chaos of the storm. They followed Dalinar’s order to evacuate, and most had yet to notice the figure in white.

The assassin stopped ten paces from Dalinar. Roion, pale-faced and stammering, backed away from the two of them and began shouting. “Assassin! Assassin!”

The rainfall was actually letting up a little. That didn’t bring Dalinar much

hope; not with that red lightning+? f if shes. f on the horizon. Was that . . . a stormwall building at the front of the new storm? His efforts to disrupt the Parshendi had fallen short.

The Shin man didn't strike. He stood opposite Dalinar, motionless, expressionless, water dripping down his face. Unnaturally calm.

Dalinar was far taller and broader. This small man in white, with his pale skin, seemed almost a youth, a stripling by comparison.

Behind him, Roion's cries were lost in the confusion. However, Bridge Four did run up to surround Dalinar, spears in hand. Dalinar waved them back. "There's nothing you can do here, lads," Dalinar said. "Let me face him."

Ten heartbeats.

"Why?" Dalinar asked the assassin, who still stood there in the rain. "Why kill my brother? Did they explain the reasoning behind your orders?"

"I am Szeth-son-son-Vallano," the man said. Harshly. "Truthless of Shinovar. I do as my masters demand, and I do not ask for explanations."

Dalinar revised his assessment. This man was not calm. He seemed that way, but when he spoke, he did it through clenched teeth, his eyes open too wide.

He's mad, Dalinar thought. Storms.

"You don't have to do this," Dalinar said. "If it's about pay . . ."

"What I am owed," the assassin shouted, rainwater spraying from his face and Stormlight rising from his lips, "will come to me eventually! Every bit of it. I will drown in it, stonewalker!"

Szeth put his hand to the side, Shardblade appearing. Then, with a curt, deprecatory motion—like he was merely trimming a bit of gristle from his meat—he strode forward and swung at Dalinar.

Dalinar caught the Blade with his own, which appeared in his hand as he raised it.

The assassin spared a glance for Dalinar's weapon, then smiled, lips drawn thin, showing only a hint of teeth. That eager smile matched with haunted eyes was one of the most evil things Dalinar had ever seen.

"Thank you," the assassin said, "for extending my agony by not dying easily." He stepped back and burst afire with white light.

He came at Dalinar again, inhumanly quick.

* * *

Adolin cursed, shaking out of his daze. Storms, his head hurt. He'd smacked it something good when the assassin tossed him to the ground.

Father was fighting Szeth. Bless the man for listening to reason and bonding that madman's Blade. Adolin gritted his teeth and struggled to get to his feet, something that was difficult with a broken greave. Though the rain was letting up, the sky remained dark. To the west, lightning plunged downward like red waterfalls, almost constant.

At the same time, wind gusted from the east. Something was building out there too, from the Origin. This was very bad.

Those things Father said to me . . .

Adolin stumbled, almost falling to the ground, but hands appeared to assist him. He glanced to the side to find those two bridgemen from before, Skar and Drehy, helping him to his feet.

"You two," Adolin said, "are getting a storming raise. Help me get this armor off." He frantically began removing sections of armor. The entire suit was so battered it was nearly useless.

Metal clanged nearby as Dalinar fought. If he could hold a little longer, Adolin would be able to help. He would not let that creature get the better of him again. Not again!

He spared a glance for what Dalinar was doing, and froze, hands on the straps for his breastplate.

His father . . . his father moved beautifully.

* * *

Dalinar did not fight for his life. His life hadn't been his own for years.

He fought for Gavilar. He fought as he wished he had all those years ago, for the chance he had missed. In that moment between storms—when the rain stilled and the winds drew in their breaths to blow—he danced with the slayer of kings, and somehow held his own.

The assassin moved like a shadow. His step seemed too quick to be human. When he jumped, he soared into the air. He swung his Shardblade like flashes of lightning, and would occasionally stretch forward with his other hand, as if to grab Dalinar.

Recalling their previous encounter, Dalinar recognized that as the more dangerous of Szeth's weapons. Each time, Dalinar managed to bring his Blade around and force the assassin away. The man attacked from different directions, but Dalinar didn't think. Thoughts could get jumbled, the mind disoriented.

His instincts knew what to do.

Duck when Szeth leaped over Dalinar's head. Step backward, avoiding a strike that should have severed his spine. Lash out, forcing the assassin away. Three quick steps backward, sword up wardingly, strike for the assassin's palm as it tried to touch him.

It worked. For this brief time, he fought this creature. Bridge Four remained back, as he'd commanded. They'd only have interfered.

He survived.

But he did not win.

Finally, Dalinar twisted away from a strike but was unable to move quickly enough. The assassin rounded on him and thrust a fist into his side.

Dalinar's ribs cracked. He grunted, stumbling, almost falling. He swung his Blade toward Szeth, warding the man back, but it didn't matter. The damage was done. He sank to his knees, barely able to remain upright for the pain.

In that instant he knew a truth he should always have known.

If I'd been there, on that night, awake instead of drunk and asleep . . . Gavilar would still have died.

I couldn't have beaten this creature. I can't do it now, and I couldn't have done it then.

I couldn't have saved him.

It brought peace, and Dalinar finally set down that boulder, the one he'd been carrying for over six years.

The assassin stalked toward him, glowing with terrible Stormlight, but a figure lunged for him from behind.

Dalinar expected it to be Adolin, perhaps one of the bridgemen.

Instead, it was Roion.

* * *

Adolin tossed aside the last remnant of armor and went running for his father. He wasn't too late. Dalinar knelt before the assassin, defeated, but not dead.

Adolin shouted, drawing close, and an unexpected figure leapt out of the wreckage of a tent. Highprince Roion—incongruously holding a side sword and leading a small force of soldiers—rushed the assassin.

Rats had a better chance fighting a chasmfiend.

Adolin barely had time to shout as the assassin—moving at blinding speed—spun and cut the blade from the hilt of Roion's sword. Szeth's hand shot out and slammed against Roion's chest.

Roion shot into the air, trailing a wisp of Stormlight. He screamed as the sky swallowed him.

He lasted longer than his men. The assassin swept between them, deftly avoiding spears, moving with uncanny grace. A dozen soldiers fell in an instant, eyes burning.

Adolin jumped over one of the bodies as it collapsed. Storms. He could still hear Roion screaming up above somewhere.

Adolin thrust at the assassin, but the creature twisted and slapped the Shardblade away. The assassin was grinning. He didn't speak, though Stormlight leaked between his teeth.

Adolin tried Smokestance, attacking with a quick sequence of jabs. The assassin silently battered them away, unfazed. Adolin focused, dueling the best he could, but he was a child before this thing.

Roion, still screaming, plummeted from the sky and hit nearby with a sickening wet crunch. A quick glance at his corpse told Adolin that the highprince would never rise again.

Adolin cursed and lunged for the assassin, but a fluttering tarp—brushed by the assassin in passing—leaped toward Adolin. The monster could command inanimate objects! Adolin sliced through the tarp and then jumped forward to swing for the assassin.

He found nothing to fight.

Duck.

He threw himself to the ground as something passed over his head, the assassin flying through the air. Szeth's hissing Shardblade missed Adolin's head by inches.

Adolin rolled and came to his knees, puffing.

How . . . What could he do . . . ?

You can't beat it, Adolin thought. Nothing can beat it.

The assassin landed lightly. Adolin climbed back to his feet, and found himself in company. A dozen of the bridgemen formed up around him. Skar, at their head, looked to Adolin and nodded. Good men. They'd seen Roion's fall, and still they joined him. Adolin hefted his Shardblade and noticed that a short distance away, his father had managed to regain his feet. Another small group of bridgemen moved in around him, and he allowed it. He and Adolin had dueled and lost. Their only chance now was a mad rush.

Nearby, shouts arose. General Khal and a large strike force of soldiers, judging by the banner approaching. There wasn't time. The assassin stood on the wet plateau between Dalinar's small troop and Adolin's, head bowed. Fallen blue lanterns gave light. The sky had gone as black as night, except when broken by that red lightning.

Charge and mob a Shardbearer. Hope for a lucky blow. It was the only way. Adolin nodded to Dalinar. His father nodded back, grim. He knew. He knew there was no beating this thing. +rem terribly s. f

Lead them, Adolin.

Unite them.

Adolin screamed, charging forward, sword out, men running with him. Dalinar advanced too, more slowly, one arm across his chest. Storms, the man could barely walk.

Szeth snapped his head up, face devoid of all emotion. As they arrived, he leaped, shooting into the air.

Adolin's eyes followed him up. Surely they hadn't chased him off . . .

The assassin twisted in the air, then crashed back down to the ground, glowing like a comet. Adolin barely parried a blow from the Blade; the force of it was incredible. It tossed him backward. The assassin spun, and a pair of bridgemen fell with burning eyes. Others lost spearheads as they tried to stab at him.

The assassin ripped free from the press of bodies, trailing blood from a couple of wounds. Those wounds closed as Adolin watched, the blood stopping. It was as Kaladin had said. With a horrible sinking feeling, Adolin realized just how little a chance they'd ever had.

The assassin dashed for Dalinar, who brought up the rear of the attack. The aging soldier raised his Blade, as if in respect, then thrust once.

An attack. That was the way to go.

“Father . . .” Adolin whispered.

The assassin parried the thrust, then placed his hand against Dalinar's chest.

The highprince, suddenly glowing, lurched up into the dark sky. He didn't scream.

The plateau fell silent. Some bridgemen propped up wounded fellows. Others turned toward the assassin, pulling into a spear formation, looking frantic.

The assassin lowered his Blade, then started to walk away.

“Bastard!” Adolin spat, dashing after him. “Bastard!” He could barely see for the tears.

The assassin stopped, then leveled his weapon toward Adolin.

Adolin stumbled to a halt. Storms, his head hurt.

“It is finished,” the assassin whispered. “I am done.” He turned from Adolin and continued to walk away.

Like Damnation itself, you are! Adolin raised his Shardblade overhead.

The assassin spun and slapped the weapon so hard with his own Blade that Adolin distinctly heard something snap in his wrist. His Blade tumbled from his fingers, vanishing. The assassin's hand slapped out, knuckles striking Adolin in the chest, and he gasped, his breath suddenly gone from his throat.

Stunned, he sank to his knees.

“I suppose,” the assassin snarled, “I can kill one more, on my own time.” Then he grinned, a terrible smile with teeth clenched, eyes wide. As if he were in enormous pain.

Gasping, Adolin awaited the blow. He looked toward the sky. Father, I’m sorry. I . . .

I . . .

What was that?

He blinked as he made out something glowing in the air, drifting down, like a leaf. A figure. A man.

Dalinar.+ along4Sin made

The highprince fell slowly, as if he were no more weighty than a cloud. White Light streamed from his body in glowing wisps. Nearby bridgemen murmured, soldiers shouted, pointing.

Adolin blinked, certain he was delusional. But no, that was Dalinar. Like . . . one of the Heralds themselves, coming down from the Tranquiline Halls.

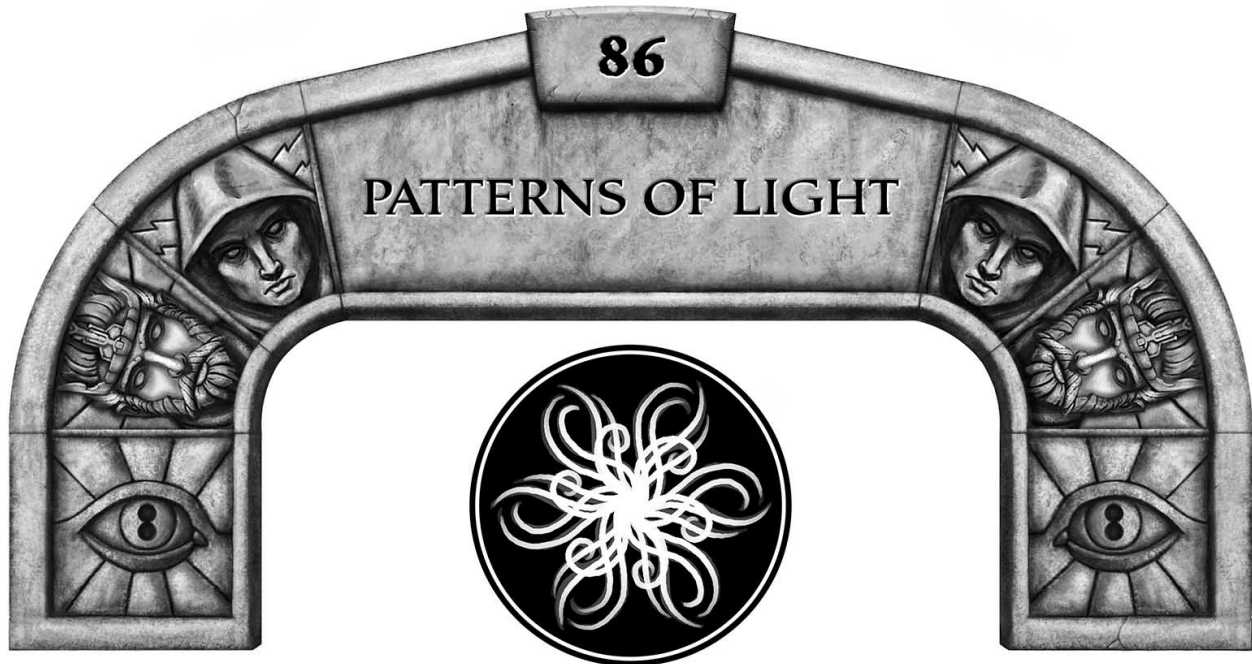
The assassin looked, then stumbled back, mouth open in horror. “No . . . No!”

And then, like a falling star, a blazing fireball of light and motion shot down in front of Dalinar. It crashed into the ground, sending out a ring of Stormlight like white smoke. At the center, a figure in blue crouched with one hand on the stones, the other clutching a glowing Shardblade.

His eyes afire with a light that somehow made the assassin’s seem dull by comparison, he wore the uniform of a bridgetman, and bore the glyphs of slavery on his forehead.

The expanding ring of smoky light faded, save for a large glyph—a swordlike shape—which remained for a brief moment before puffing away.

“You sent him to the sky to die, assassin,” Kaladin said, Stormlight puffing from his lips, “but the sky and the winds are mine. I claim them, as I now claim your life.”



One is almost certainly a traitor to the others.

—From the Diagram, Book of the 2nd Desk Drawer: paragraph 27

Kaladin let the Stormlight evaporate before him. He was running low—his frantic flight across the Plains had drained him. How shocked he had been when the flare of light rising into the darkening sky above a lit plateau had turned out to be Dalinar himself. Lashed to the sky by Szeth.

Kaladin had caught him quickly and sent him back to the ground with a careful Lashing of his own. Ahead, Szeth stumbled away from the princeling, holding out his sword wardingly toward Kaladin, eyes wide and lips trembling. Szeth looked horrified.

Good.

Dalinar finally landed on the plateau with a soft step, and Kaladin’s Lashing ran out.

“Seek shelter,” Kaladin said, the tempest in his veins dampening further. “I flew over a storm on my way here . . . a big one. Coming from the west.”

“We’re in the process of withdrawing.”

“Hurry,” Kaladin said. “I will deal with our friend.”

“Kaladin?”

Kaladin turned, glancing at the highprince, who stood tall, despite cradling one arm against his chest. Dalinar met his eyes. “You are what I’ve been looking for.”

“Yes. Finally.”

Kaladin turned and strode toward the assassin. He passed Bridge Four in a tight formation, and the H Wyndle the best automatically men—at a barked command from Teft—threw something down before Kaladin. Blue lanterns, lit by oversized gems that had lasted the Weeping.

Bless them. Stormlight streamed up as he passed, filling him. With a sinking feeling, however, he noticed two corpses with burned-out eyes at their feet. Pedin and Mart. Eth clutched his brother’s body, weeping. Other bridgemen had lost limbs.

Kaladin snarled. No more. He would lose no further men to this monster.

“You ready?” he whispered.

Of course, Syl said in his head. I’m not the one we’ve been waiting on.

Burning with Stormlight, enraged and alight, Kaladin launched himself at the assassin and met him Blade against Blade.

* * *

“We’re dead . . .” Renarin muttered.

“Someone shut him up,” Shallan snapped. “Gag him if you have to.” She

pointedly turned around, ignoring the raving prince. She still stood in the center of the muraled chamber. The pattern. What was the pattern?

A circular room. A thing on one side that adapted to fit different Shardblades. Depictions of Knights on the floor, glowing with Stormlight, pointing at a tower city, just as the myths described. Ten lamps on the walls. The lock hung over what she thought was a depiction of Natanatan, the kingdom of the Shattered Plains. It—

Ten lamps. With gems in them. Latticework of metal enclosing each one.

Shallan blinked, a shock running through her.

“It’s a fabrial.”

* * *

The assassin hurtled into the air. Captain Kaladin flew upward, chasing him, trailing Light.

“Status of the retreat!” Dalinar bellowed, crossing the plateau, his ribs smarting like nothing else, his wound from before little better. Storms. That one had faded as he fought, but now it ached something fierce. “Someone get me information!”

Scribes and ardents appeared from the nearby wreckage of tents. Shouts rose from around the plateau. The wind started to pick up—their period of reprieve, the short calm, was over. They needed to escape these plateaus. Now.

Dalinar reached Adolin and helped the young man to his feet. He looked quite a bit worse for wear, bruised, battered, dizzy. He flexed his right hand and winced in pain, then gingerly let it relax.

“Damnation,” Adolin said. “That bridgeboy is really one of them? The Knights Radiant?”

“Yes.”

Oddly, Adolin smiled, seeming satisfied. “Ha! I knew there was something wrong with that man.”

“Go,” Dalinar said, pushing Adolin along. “We need to get the army to move two plateaus over, that direction, where Shallan waits. Get over there and organize what you can.” He looked westward as the wind whipped up further, with bursts of rain. “Time is short.”

Adolin shouted for the bridgemen to join him, which they did, helping their wounded—though they were unfortunately forced to leave their dead. Several of them carried Adolin’s Shardplate as well, which was apparently spent. He followed Kaladin’s gaze, following the line of approaches.

Dalinar limped eastward across the plateau as fast as he could manage in his condition, searching for . . .

Yes. The place where he’d left Gallant. The horse snorted, shaking a wet mane. “Bless you, old friend,” Dalinar said, reaching the Ryshadium. Through the thunder and the chaos, the horse had not fled.

Dalinar moved much more easily once in the saddle, and eventually found Roion’s army pouring southward toward Shallan’s plateau, in organized ranks. He allowed himself a sigh of relief at their orderly march; the majority of the army had already crossed to the southern plateau, only one away from Shallan’s round one. That was wonderful. He couldn’t remember where Captain Khal had been sent, but with Roion himself fallen, Dalinar had assumed he’d left this army in chaos.

“Dalinar!” a voice called.

He turned to find the utterly incongruous sight of Sebarial and his mistress sitting beneath a canopy, eating dried sellafruit off a plate held by an awkward-looking soldier.

Sebarial raised a cup of wine toward Dalinar. “Hope you don’t mind,” Sebarial said. “We liberated your stores. They were blowing past at the time, headed for certain doom.”

Dalinar stared at them. Palona even had a novel out and was reading.

“You did this?” Dalinar asked, nodding toward Roion’s army.

“They were making a racket,” Sebarial said. “Wandering around, shouting at one another, weeping and wailing. Very poetic. Figured someone should get them moving. My army is already off on that other plateau. It’s getting rather cramped there, you realize.”hat person loo

Palona flipped the page in her novel, barely paying attention.

“Have you seen Aladar?” Dalinar asked.

Sebarial gestured with his wine. “He should be about finished crossing as well. You’ll find him that direction. Downwind, happily.”

“Don’t dally,” he said. “You remain here, and you’re a dead man.”

“Like Roion?” Sebarial asked.

“Unfortunately.”

“So it is true,” Sebarial said, standing up, brushing off his trousers—which were somehow still dry. “Who am I going to make fun of now?” He shook his head sadly.

Dalinar rode off in the direction indicated. He noticed that, incredibly, a pair of bridgemen were still tailing him, only now catching up to where he’d found Sebarial. They saluted as Dalinar noticed them.

He told them where he was going, then sped up. Storms. In terms of pain, riding with broken ribs wasn’t much better than walking with them. Worse, actually.

He did find Aladar on the next plateau over, supervising his army as it seeped onto the perfectly round plateau that Shallan had indicated. Rust Elthal was there as well, wearing his Plate—one of the suits Adolin had won—and guiding one of Dalinar’s large, mechanical bridges. It settled down next to two others that spanned the chasm here, crossing in places the smaller bridges wouldn’t have been able to.

The plateau everyone was crowding onto was relatively small, by the scale of the Shattered Plains said, following Kaladin’s gaze. It was a good size for a landing of approach. It—but it was still several hundred yards across. It would fit the armies, hopefully.

“Dalinar?” Aladar asked, trotting his horse over. Lit by a large diamond—stolen from one of Navani’s fabrial lights, it seemed—hanging from his

saddle, Aladar sported a soaked uniform and a bandage on his forehead, but appeared otherwise unharmed. “What in Kelek’s tongue is going on out here? I can’t get a straight answer from anyone.”

“Roion is dead,” Dalinar said wearily, reining in Gallant. “He fell with honor, attacking the assassin. The assassin, hopefully, has been distracted for a time.”

“We won the day,” Aladar said. “I scattered those Parshendi. We left well over half of them dead on that plateau, perhaps even three quarters. Adolin did even better on his plateau, and from reports, the ones on Roion’s plateau have fled. The Vengeance Pact is fulfilled! Gavilar is avenged, and the war is over!”

So proud. Dalinar had difficulty finding the words to deflate him, so he just stared at the other man. Feeling numb.

Can’t afford that, Dalinar thought, sagging in his saddle. Have to lead.

“It doesn’t matter, does it?” Aladar asked more softly. “That we won?”

“Of course it matters.”

“But . . . shouldn’t it feel different?”

“Exhaustion,” Dalinar said, “pain, suffering. This is what victory usually feels like, Aladar. We’ve won, yes, but now we have to survive with our victory. Your men are almost across?”

He nodded.

“Get everyone onto that plateau,” Dalinar said. “Force them up against one another if you have to. We need to be ready to move through the portal as quickly as possible, once it is opened.”

If it opened.

Dalinar urged Gallant forward, crossing one of the bridges to the packed ranks on the other side. From there, he forced his way—with difficulty—

toward the center, where he hoped to find salvation.

* * *

Kaladin shot into the air after the assassin.

The Shattered Plains fell away beneath him. Fallen gemstones twinkled across the plateau, abandoned where tents had blown down or soldiers had fallen. They illuminated not only the central plateau, but three others around it and one more beyond, one that looked oddly circular from above.

The armies gathered on that one. Small lumps dotted the others like freckles. Corpses. So many.

Kaladin looked toward the sky. He was free once again. Winds surged beneath him, seeming to lift him, propel him. Carry him. His Shardblade shattered into mist and Syl zipped out, becoming a ribbon of light that spun around him as he flew.

Syl lived. Syl lived. He still felt euphoric about that. Shouldn't she be dead? When he'd asked on their flight out, her response had been simple.

I was only as dead as your oaths, Kaladin.

Kaladin continued upward, out of the path of the oncoming storms. He could see those distinctly from this vantage. Two+the bo. What . made of them, one rolling from the west and bursting with red lightning, the other approaching more quickly from the east with a dark grey stormwall. They were going to collide.

“A highstorm,” Kaladin said, shooting up through the sky after Szeth. “The red storm is from the Parshendi, but why is there a highstorm coming? This isn't the time for one.”

“My father,” Syl said, voice growing solemn. “He brought the storm, rushing its pace. He's . . . broken, Kaladin. He doesn't think any of this should be happening. He wants to end it all, wash everyone away, and try to hide from the future.”

Her father . . . did that mean the Stormfather wanted them dead?

Great.

The assassin disappeared above, vanishing into the dark clouds. Kaladin gritted his teeth, Lashing himself upward again for more acceleration. He shot into the clouds, and all around him became featureless grey.

He kept watch for glimmers of light to announce the assassin coming for him. He might not have much warning.

The area around him lightened. Was that the assassin? Kaladin extended his hand to the side, and Syl formed into the Blade immediately.

“Not ten heartbeats?” he asked.

Not when I’m here with you, ready. The delay is primarily something of the dead. They need to be revived each time.

Kaladin burst out of the clouds and into sunlight.

He gasped. He’d forgotten that it was still daytime. Here, far above the earthy darkness of war, the sunlight beat upon the cover of clouds, making them glow with pale beauty. The thin air was frigid, but raging Stormlight inside him made that easy to ignore.

The assassin hovered nearby, toes pointed downward, head bowed, silvery Shardblade held to the side. Kaladin Lashed himself so that he stopped, then sank level with the assassin.

“I am Szeth-son-son-Vallano,” the man said. “Truthless . . . Truthless.” He looked up, eyes wide, teeth clenched. “You have stolen Honorblades. It is the only explanation.”

Storms. Kaladin had always imagined the Assassin in White as a calm, cold killer. This was something different.

“I possess no such weapon,” Kaladin said. “And I don’t know why it would matter if I did.”

“I hear your lies. I know them.” Szeth shot forward, sword out.

Kaladin Lashed himself to the side, jerking out of the way. He swiped with his Blade, but didn’t come close to connecting. “I should have practiced more with the sword,” he muttered.

Oh. That’s right. You probably want me to be a spear, don’t you?

The weapon fuzzed to mist, then elongated and grew into the shape of a silvery spear, with glowing, swirling glyphs along the sharpened sides of the spearhead.

Szeth twisted in the air, Lashing himself back into a hovering position. He looked at the spear, then seemed to tremble. “No. Truthless. I am Truthless. No questions.”

Stormlight streaming from his mouth, Szeth threw his head back and screamed; a futile, human sound that dissipated a member of Bridge Four?”al4S. made in the infinite expanse of sky.

Beneath them, thunder rumbled and the clouds shivered with color.

* * *

Shallan dashed from lamp to lamp in the circular chamber, infusing each one with Stormlight. She glowed brightly, having drawn the Light from the ardens’ lanterns. There wasn’t time for explanation.

So much for keeping her nature as a Surgebinder hidden.

This room was a giant fabrial, powered by the Stormlight of those lamps. She should have seen it. She passed Inadara, who stared at her. “How . . . how are you doing this, Brightness?”

Several of the scholars had settled onto the ground where they hurriedly sketched glyphward prayers onto cloths, using chalk because of the moisture. Shallan didn’t know if those prayers were a request for safety from the storms or from Shallan herself. She did hear the words “Lost Radiant” murmured by one.

Two more lanterns. She infused a ruby with Stormlight, bringing it to life, but then ran out of Light.

“Gemstones!” she said, spinning on the room. “I need more Stormlight.”

The people inside looked to one another, all but Renarin, who continued to scratch identical glyphs on the rocks as he wept. Stormfather. She’d bled them all dry. One of the scholars had dug an oil lantern from her pack, and it paled beside the lamps on the walls.

Shallan ducked out of the opening in the door, looking at the mass of soldiers who gathered there. Thousands upon thousands shuffled in the darkness. Fortunately, some of them carried lanterns.

“I need your Stormlight!” she said. “It—”

Was that Adolin? Shallan gasped, other thoughts fleeing for the moment as she spotted him in the front of the crowd, leaning on a bridgeman for support. Adolin was a mess, the left side of his face a patchwork of blood and bruises, his uniform ripped and bloodied. Shallan ran to him, pulling him close.

“Good to see you too,” he said, burying his face in her hair. “I hear you’re going to get us out of this mess.”

“Mess?” she asked.

Thunder rumbled and cracked without pause as red lightning blasted down not in streaks but in sheets. Storms! She hadn’t realized it was so close!

“Mmm . . .” Pattern said. She looked left. A stormwall was approaching. The storms were like two hands, closing in to crush the armies between them.

Shallan breathed in sharply, and Stormlight entered her, bringing her to life. Adolin had a gemstone or two on him, apparently. He pulled back, looking her over.

“You too?” he said.

“Um . . .” She bit her lip. “Yeah. Sorry.”

“Sorry? Storms, woman! Can you fly like he does?”

“Fly?”

Thunder cracked. Impending doom. Right.

“Make sure everyone is ready to move!” she said, dashing back into the chamber.

* * *

Storms crashed together beneath Kaladin. The clouds broke apart, black, red, and grey mingling in enormous swirls, lightning how willing you were to obey me officer approaches. f arcing among them. It seemed to be Aharietiam again, the ending of all things.

Above all this, atop the world, Kaladin fought for his life.

Szeth flew by in a sweeping flash of silvery metal. Kaladin deflected the blow, the spear in his hand vibrating with a plangent ding. Szeth continued on, passing him, and Kaladin Lashed himself in that direction.

They fell westward, skimming the tops of the clouds—though to Kaladin’s eyes, that direction was down. He fell with his spear aimed, point straight toward the murderous Shin.

Szeth jerked left, and Kaladin followed, quickly Lashing himself that way. Violent, churning, angry clouds mixed beneath him. The two storms seemed to be fighting; the lightning that lit them was like thrown punches. Crashes sounded, and not all of them thunder. Near Kaladin a large stone churned up through the clouds, spinning vapors across its length. It breached in the light like a leviathan, then sank back into the clouds.

Stormfather . . . He was hundreds, perhaps thousands of feet in the air. What kind of violence was happening below if boulders were thrown this high?

Kaladin Lashed himself toward Szeth, picking up speed, moving along the

top surface of the storms. He drew close, then eased back, letting his acceleration match that of Szeth so they flew side by side.

Kaladin drove his spear toward the assassin. Szeth parried deftly, Shardblade held in one hand while supporting the Blade from behind with the other, diverting Kaladin's thrust to the side.

"The Knights Radiant," Szeth screamed, "cannot have returned."

"They have," Kaladin said, yanking his spear back. "And they're going to kill you." He Lashed himself slightly to the side as he swung, twisting in the air and sweeping toward Szeth.

Szeth jerked upward, however, passing over Kaladin's spear. As they continued to fall through the air, clouds just beside them, Szeth dove inward and struck. Kaladin cursed, barely Lashing himself away in time.

Szeth dove past him, disappearing into the clouds below, becoming just a shadow. Kaladin tried to trace that shadow, but failed.

Szeth burst up beside Kaladin a second later, striking with three quick blows. One took Kaladin in the arm, and he dropped Syl.

Damnation. He Lashed himself back away from Szeth, then forced Stormlight into his greying, lifeless hand. With an effort, he made the color return, but Szeth was already upon him with an airborne lunge.

Mist formed in Kaladin's left hand as he raised it to ward, and a silvery shield appeared, glowing with a soft light. Szeth's Blade deflected away, causing the man to grunt in surprise.

Strength returned to Kaladin's right hand, the severing healed, but forcing that much Stormlight through it left him feeling drained. He fell away from Szeth, trying to keep his distance, but the assassin kept on him, jerking each direction that Kaladin did as he tried to escape.

"You are new at this," Szeth called. "You cannot fight me. I will win."

Szeth zipped forward, and Syl formed into a spear in Kaladin's hands again.

She seemed to be able to anticipate the weapon he wanted. Szeth slammed his weapon against Syl. It brought them face-to-face and they tumbled, eye to eye, their Lashings pulling them along the clouds.

“I always win,” Szeth said. He said it in a strange way, as if angry.

“You’re wrong,” Kaladin said. “About me. I’m not new to this.”

“You only just acquired your abilities.”

“No. The wind is mine. The sky is mine. They have been mine since childhood. You are the trespasser here. Not me.”

They broke apart, Kaladin throwing the assassin backward. He stopped thinking so much about his Lashings, about what he should be doing.

Instead, he let himself be.

He dove for Szeth, coat flapping, spear pointed for the man’s heart. Szeth got out of the way, but Kaladin dropped the spear and swung his hand in a great arc. Syl formed an axehead halberd. It came within inches of Szeth’s face.

The assassin cursed, but responded with his Blade. A shield was in Kaladin’s hand a split second later, and he slammed away the attack. Syl shattered even as he did so, forming back into a sword as Kaladin thrust forward with empty hands. The sword appeared, and the weapon bit deeply into Szeth’s shoulder.

The assassin’s eyes widened. Kaladin twisted his Blade, pulling it out of the assassin’s flesh, then tried a backhand to end the man permanently. Szeth was too fast. He Lashed himself backward, forcing Kaladin to follow, piling on Lashing after Lashing.

Szeth’s hand still worked. Damnation. The strike to the shoulder hadn’t fully severed the soul leading to the arm. And Kaladin’s Stormlight was running out.

Szeth’s looked even lower, fortunately. The assassin seemed to be using it up at a much faster rate than Kaladin, judging by the decreased glow around him. Indeed, he didn’t try to heal his shoulder—which would have required a

lot of Light—but continued to flee, jerking back and forth, trying to outrun Kaladin.

The shadowy battle continued below, a tangle of lightning, winds, and spinning clouds. As Kaladin chased Szeth, something gargantuan moved beneath the clouds, a shadow the size of a city. A second later, the top of an entire plateau broke through the dark clouds, twisting slowly, as if it had been thrown upward from below.

Szeth almost ran into it. Instead, he Lashed upward enough to crest it, then landed on the surface. He ran along it as it turned lethargically in the air, its momentum running out.

Kaladin landed behind him, though he retained most of a Lashing upward, keeping himself light. He ran up the side of the plateau, heading almost directly upward toward the sky, dodging to the side as Szeth suddenly twisted and cut through a rock formation, sending boulders tumbling downward.

Rocks clattered along the surface of the plateau, which itself began to tumble back down toward the ground. Szeth reached the peak and threw himself off, and Kaladin followed shortly thereafter, launching from the stone surface, which sank like a dying ship into the roiling clouds.

They continued their chase, but Szeth did it falling backward along the stormtop, his eyes on Kaladin. Wild eyes. “You’re trying to convince me!” he shouted. “You can’t be one of them!”

“You’ve seen that I am,” Kaladin shouted back.

“The Voidbringers!”

“Are back,” Kaladin shouted. Alight

“THEY CAN’T BE. I AM TRUTHLESS!” The assassin panted. “I need not fight you. You are not my target. I have . . . I have work to do. I obey!”

He turned and Lashed himself downward.

Into the clouds, down toward the plateau where Dalinar had gone.

* * *

Shallan rushed into the room as the storms crashed together outside.

What was she doing? There wasn't time. Even if she could open a portal, those storms were here. She wouldn't have time to get people through.

They were dead. All of them. Thousands had probably already been swept to their deaths by the stormwall.

She ran to the last lamp anyway, infusing its spheres.

The floor started to glow.

Ardents jumped to their feet in surprise and Inadara yelped. Adolin stumbled in through the doorway, a crashing wind and a spray of angry rain trailing him.

Beneath them, the intricate design shone from within. It looked almost like stained glass. Gesturing frantically for Adolin to join her, Shallan ran across to the lock on the wall.

"Sword," she shouted at Adolin over the sounds of storms outside. "In there!" Renarin had long since dismissed his.

Adolin obeyed, scrambling forward, summoning his Shardblade. He rammed it into the slot, which again flowed to fit the weapon.

Nothing happened.

"It's not working," Adolin shouted.

Only one answer.

Shallan grabbed the hilt of his sword and whipped it out—ignoring the scream in her mind that came from touching it—then tossed it aside. Adolin's sword vanished to mist.

A deep truth.

“There is something wrong with your Blade, and with all Blades.” She hesitated for just a second. “All but mine. Pattern!”

He formed in her hands, the Blade she’d used to kill. The hidden soul. Shallan rammed it into the slot, and the weapon vibrated in her hands and glowed. Something deep within the plateau unlocked.

Outside, lightning fell and men screamed.

Now the mechanism’s operation became clear to her. Shallan threw her weight against the sword, pushing it before her like the spoke on a mill. The inner wall of the building was like a ring inside a tube—it could rotate, while the outer wall remained in place. The sword moved the inner wall as she pushed on it, though it stuck at first, the fallen blocks of the cut doorway getting in the way. Adolin threw his weight against the sword with her, and together they pushed it around the circle until they were above the picture of Urithiru, half the circumference from Natanatan where she’d begun. She pulled her Blade free.

The ten lamps faded like closing eyes.

* * *

Kaladin followed Szeth into the storm, diving into the blackness, falling amid the churning winds and the blasting lightning. Wind attacked him, tossing him about, and no Lashings could prevent this. He might be master of the winds, but storms were another thing. f liness. f

Take care, Syl sent. My father hates you. This is his domain. And it is mixed with something even more terrible, another storm. Their storm.

Nevertheless, the highstorms were the source of Stormlight—and being in here energized Kaladin. His reserves of Stormlight burst alight, as they obviously did for Szeth. The assassin suddenly reappeared as a stark white explosion that zoomed through the maelstrom toward the plateaus.

Kaladin growled, Lashing himself after Szeth. Lightning of a dozen colors flashed around him, red, violet, white, yellow. Rain soaked him. Rocks spun past him, some colliding, but the Stormlight healed him as quickly as the debris did damage.

Szeth moved along the plateaus, coursing just above them, and Kaladin followed with difficulty. This churning wind was tough to navigate, and the darkness was near absolute. Flashes lit the Plains in fitful bursts. Fortunately, Szeth's glow could not be hidden, and Kaladin kept his attention on that blazing beacon.

Faster.

Just as Zahel had taught weeks ago, Szeth didn't need to defeat Kaladin to win. He just had to get to those Kaladin protected.

Faster.

A burst of lightning illuminated the battle plateaus. And beyond them, Kaladin caught a glimpse of the army. Thousands of men huddled on the large circular plateau. Many hunkered down. Others panicked.

The lightning was gone in a moment, and the land became dark again, though Kaladin had seen enough to know this was a disaster. A cataclysm. Men being blown off the edge, others crushed by falling rocks. In minutes, the army would be gone. Storms, Kaladin wasn't even certain if he could survive this nexus of destruction.

Szeth crashed down among them, a glowing light amid the blackness. As Kaladin Lashed himself down in that direction, lightning struck again.

Its light revealed Szeth standing on an empty plateau, baffled. The army was gone.

* * *

The sounds of the raging storm outside vanished. Shallan shivered, wet and cold.

“Almighty above . . .” Adolin breathed. “I’m almost scared of what we’ll find.”

Rotating the inside wall of the building had moved their doorway opposite hardened crem. Perhaps there had been a natural doorway here before; Adolin summoned his Blade to cut a hole.

Pattern . . . her Shardblade . . . vanished back to mist, and the room’s mechanisms settled down. She didn’t hear anything outside, no crashing of winds, no thunder.

Emotions fought inside of her. She’d saved herself and Adolin, it appeared. But the rest of the army . . . Adolin cut a doorway; sunlight spilled through it. Shallan walked to the opening, nervous, passing Inadara, who sat in the corner, looking overwhelmed.

At the doorway, Shallan looked out at the same plateau as before, only now it was sunlit and calm. Four armies’ worth of men and women crouched, soggy and wet, many holding their heads and hunkering down against wind that no longer blew. Nearby, two figures stood beside a massive Ryshadium stallion. Dalinar and Navani, who had apparently been on their way to the central building.

Beyond them spread the peaks of an unfamiliar mountain range. It was the same plateau, and here was in a ring with nine others. To Shallan’s left, an enormous ribbed tower—shaped like cups of increasingly smaller sizes stacked atop one another—broke the peaks. Urithiru.

The plateau hadn’t contained the portal.

The plateau was the portal.

* * *

Szeth screamed words at Kaladin, but those were lost in the tempest. Rocks crashed down around them, ripped from somewhere distant. Kaladin was sure he heard terrible screams over the winds, as red spren he’d never seen before—like small meteors, trailing light behind them—zipped around him.

Szeth screamed again. Kaladin caught the word this time. “How!”

Kaladin’s answer was to strike with his Blade. Szeth parried violently, and they clashed, two glowing figures in the blackness.

“I know this column!” Szeth screamed. “I have seen its like before! They went to the city, didn’t they!”

The assassin launched himself into the air. Kaladin was all too eager to follow. He wanted out of this tempest.

Szeth screamed away, heading westward, away from the storm with the red lightning—following the path of the common highstorm. That alone was dangerous enough.

Kaladin gave chase, but that proved difficult in the buffeting winds. It wasn’t that they served Szeth more than Kaladin; the tempest was simply unpredictable. They’d shove him one way and Szeth another.

What happened if Szeth lost him?

He knows where Dalinar went, Kaladin thought, gritting his teeth as a flash of sudden whiteness blinded him from one side. I don’t.

He couldn’t protect Dalinar if he couldn’t find the man. Unfortunately, a chase through this darkness favored the person who was trying to escape. Slowly, Szeth pulled ahead.

Kaladin tried to follow, but a surge of wind drove him in the wrong direction. Lashings didn’t really let him fly. He couldn’t resist such unpredictable winds; they controlled him.

No! Szeth’s glowing form dwindled. Kaladin shouted into the darkness, blinking eyes against the rain. He’d almost lost sight . . .

Syl spun into the air in front of him. But he was still carrying the spear. What?

Another one, then another. Ribbons of light, occasionally taking the shapes of

young women or men, laughing. Windspren. A dozen or more spun around him, leaving trails of light, their laughter somehow strong over the sounds of the storm.

There! Kaladin thought.

Szeth was ahead. Kaladin Lashed himself through the tempest toward him, jerking one way, then the other. Dodging blitzes of lightning, ducking under hurled boulders, blinking away the sheets of driven rain.

A whirlwind of chaos. And ahead . . . light?

The stormwall.

Szeth burst free of the storm's very front. Through the mess of water and debris, Kaladin could just barely make out the assassin turning around to look backward, his posture confident.

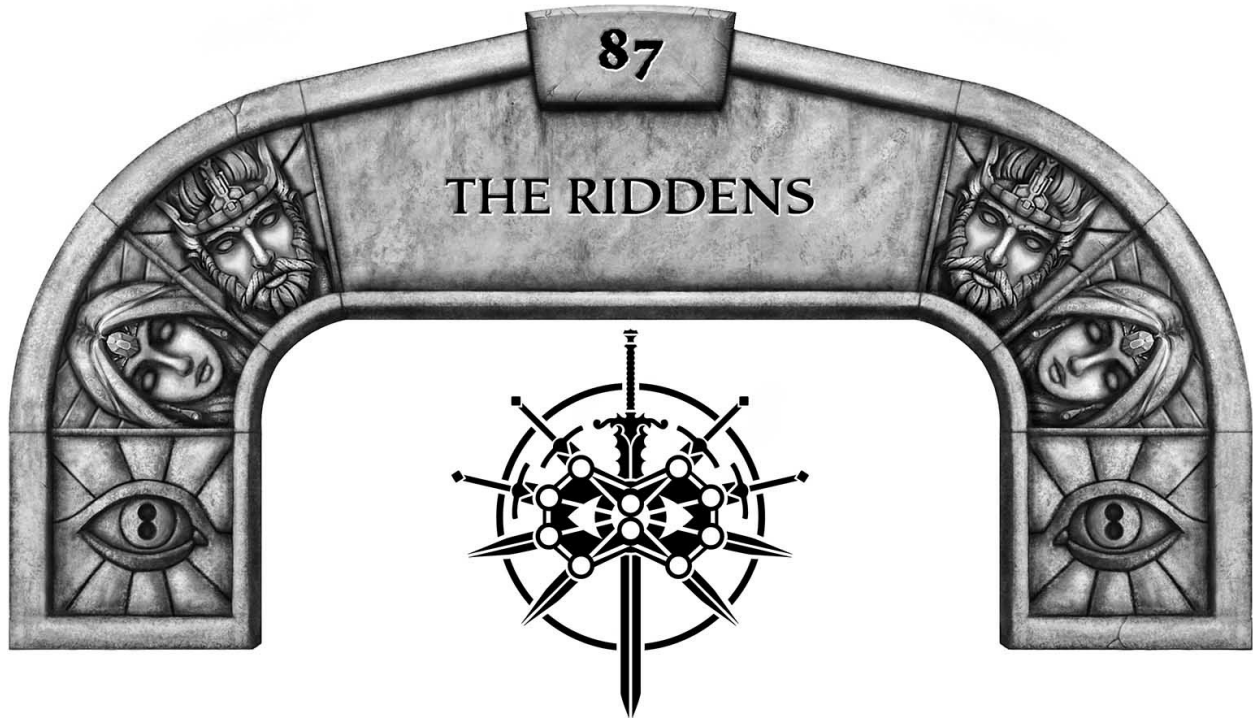
He thinks he's lost me.

+the bo. What . made Kaladin exploded out of the stormwall, surrounded by windspren that spiraled away in a pattern of light. He shouted, driving his spear toward Szeth, who parried hastily, his eyes wide. "Impossible!"

Kaladin spun around and slashed his spear—which became a sword—through Szeth's foot.

The assassin lurched away along the length of the stormwall. Both Szeth and Kaladin continued to fall westward, just in front of the wall of water and debris.

Beneath them, the land passed in a blur. The two storms had finally separated, and the highstorm was moving along its normal pat201D; Dalinar



Chaos in Alethkar is, of course, inevitable. Watch carefully, and do not let power in the kingdom solidify. The Blackthorn could become an ally or our greatest foe, depending on whether he takes the path of the warlord or not. If he seems likely to sue for peace, assassinate him expeditiously. The risk of competition is too great.

—From the Diagram, Writings upon the Bedstand Lamp: paragraph 4
(Adrotagia's 3rd translation from the original hieroglyphics)

The Shattered Plains had been shattered again.

Kaladin strolled across them with Szeth's Shardblade on his shoulder. He passed heaps of rock and fresh cracks in the ground. Enormous puddles like small lakes shimmered amid huge chunks of broken stone. Just to his left, an entire plateau had crumbled into the chasms around it. The jagged, ripped-up base of the plateau had a black, charred cast to it.

"This is going to happen again?" Kaladin said. "That other storm is still out there?"

"Yes," Syl said, sitting on his shoulder. "A new storm. It's not of us, but of

him.”

+reinf nimbleformkm “Will it be this bad every time it passes?” Kaladin asked, surveying the wreckage. Of the plateaus he could see, only the one had been destroyed completely. But if the storm could do that to pure rock, what would it do to a city? Particularly since it blew the wrong way.

Stormfather . . . Laits would no longer be laits. Buildings that had been constructed to face away from the storms would suddenly be exposed.

“I don’t know,” Syl said softly. “This is a new thing, Kaladin. Not from before. I don’t know how it happened or what it means. Hopefully, it won’t be this bad except when a highstorm and an everstorm crash into each other.”

Kaladin grunted, picking his way over to the edge of his current plateau. He breathed in a little Stormlight, then Lashed himself upward to offset the natural pull of the ground. He became weightless. He pushed off lightly with his foot and drifted across the chasm to the next plateau.

“So how did the army vanish like that?” he asked, removing his Lashing and settling down on the rock.

“Uh . . . how should I know?” Syl said. “I was kind of distracted.”

He grunted. Well, this was the plateau where everyone had been. Perfectly round. Odd, that. On a nearby plateau, what had once been a large hill had been cracked wide open, exposing the remnants of a building inside. This perfectly circular one was far more flat, though it looked like there was a hill or something at the center. He strode in that direction.

“So they’re all spren,” he said. “Shardblades.”

Syl grew solemn.

“Dead spren,” Kaladin added.

“Dead,” Syl agreed. “Then they live again a little when someone summons them, syncing a heartbeat to their essence.”

“How can something be ‘a little’ alive?”

“We’re spren,” Syl said. “We’re forces. You can’t kill us completely. Just . . . sort of.”

“That’s perfectly clear.”

“It’s perfectly clear to us,” Syl said. “You’re the strange ones. Break a rock, and it’s still there. Break a spren, and she’s still there. Sort of. Break a person, and something leaves. Something changes. What’s left is just meat. You’re weird.”

“I’m glad we established that,” he said, stopping. He couldn’t see any evidence of the Alethi. Had they really escaped? Or had a sudden surge of the storm swept them all into the chasms? It seemed unlikely such a disaster would have left nothing behind.

Please let it not be so. He lifted Szeth’s sword off his shoulder and set it down, point first, in front of him. It sank a few inches into the rock.

“What about this?” he asked, looking over the thin, silvery weapon. An unornamented Blade. That was supposed to be odd. “It doesn’t scream when I hold it.”

“That’s because it’s not a spren,” Syl said softly.

“What is it, then?”

“Dangerous.”+rem in its s. f

She stood up from his shoulder, then walked as if down a flight of steps toward the sword. She rarely flew when she had a human form. She flew as a ribbon of light, or as a group of leaves, or as a small cloud. He’d never noticed before how odd, yet normal, it was that she stuck to the nature of the form she used.

She stopped just before the sword. “I think this is one of the Honorblades, the swords of the Heralds.”

Kaladin grunted. He'd heard of those.

"Any man who holds this weapon will become a Windrunner," Syl explained, looking back at Kaladin. "The Honorblades are what we are based on, Kaladin. Honor gave these to men, and those men gained powers from them. Spren figured out what He'd done, and we imitated it. We're bits of His power, after all, like this sword. Be careful with it. It is a treasure."

"So the assassin wasn't a Radiant."

"No. But Kaladin, you have to understand. With this sword, someone can do what you can, but without the . . . checks a spren requires." She touched it, then shivered visibly, her form blurring for a second. "This sword gave the assassin power to use Lashings, but it also fed upon his Stormlight. A person who uses this will need far, far more Light than you will. Dangerous levels of it."

Kaladin reached out and took the sword by the hilt, and Syl flitted away, becoming a ribbon of light. He hefted the weapon and set it back on his shoulder before continuing on his way. Yes, there was a hill up ahead, probably a crem-covered building. As he drew closer, blessedly, he saw motion around it.

"Hello?" he called.

The figures near it stopped and turned. "Kaladin?" a familiar voice called. "Storms, is that you?"

He grinned, the figures resolving into men in blue uniforms. Teft scrambled across the rock like a madman to meet him. Others came after, shouting and laughing. Drehy, Peet, Bisig, and Sigzil, Rock towering over them all.

"Another one?" Rock asked, eyeing Kaladin's Shardblade. "Or is he yours?"

"No," Kaladin said. "I took this from the assassin."

"He is dead, then?" Teft asked.

"Yes."

“You slew the Assassin in White,” Bisig breathed. “It’s truly over then.”

“I suspect that it is just beginning,” Kaladin said, nodding toward the building. “What is this place?”

“Oh!” Bisig said. “Come on! We need to show you the tower—that Radiant girl taught us how to summon the plateau back, so long as we have you.”

“Radiant girl?” Kaladin asked. “Shallan?”

“You don’t sound surprised,” Teft said with a grunt.

“She has a Shardblade,” Kaladin said. One that didn’t scream in his mind. Either she was a Radiant or she had another of these Honorblades. As he stepped up to the building, he noticed a bridge in the shadows nearby.

“It’s not ours,” Kaladin said.

“No,” Leyten said. “That belongs to Bridge Seventeen. We had to leave ours behind in the storm.”

Rock nodded. how willing you were to obey me officer Gs. f““We were too busy stopping lighteyed heads from becoming too friendly with swords of enemies. Ha! But we needed bridge here. Way platform works, we had to get off him for Shallan Davar to transport herself back.”

Kaladin poked his head into the chamber inside the hill, then paused at the beauty he found inside. Other members of Bridge Four waited here, including a tall man Kaladin didn’t immediately recognize. Was that one of Lopen’s cousins? The man turned around, and Kaladin realized what he’d mistaken for a cap was a reddish skullplate.

Parshendi. Kaladin tensed as the Parshendi man saluted. He was wearing a Bridge Four uniform.

And he had the tattoo.

“Rlain?” Kaladin said.

“Sir,” Rlain said. His features were no longer rounded and plump, but instead sharp, muscular, with a thick neck and a stronger jaw, now lined by a red and black beard.

“It appears you are more than you seemed,” Kaladin said.

“Pardon, sir,” he said. “But I would suggest that applies to both of us.” When he spoke now, his voice had a certain musicality to it—an odd rhythm to his words.

“Brightlord Dalinar has pardoned Rlain,” Sigzil explained, walking around Kaladin and entering the chamber.

“For being Parshendi?” Kaladin asked.

“For being a spy,” Rlain said. “A spy for a people who, it appears, no longer exist.” He said this to a different beat, and Kaladin thought he could sense pain in that voice. Rock walked over and put a hand on Rlain’s shoulder.

“We can give you the story once we get back to the city,” Teft said.

“We figured you’d come back here,” Sigzil added. “To this plateau, and so we needed to be here to greet you, for all Brightness Davar grumbled. Anyway, there’s a lot to tell—a lot is happening. I think that you’re kind of going to be at the center of it.”

Kaladin took a deep breath, but nodded. What else did he expect? No more hiding. He had made his decision.

What do I tell them about Moash? he wondered as the members of Bridge Four piled into the room around him, chattering about how he needed to infuse the spheres in the lanterns. A couple of the men bore wounds from the fighting, including Bisig, who kept his right hand in his coat pocket. Grey skin peeked out from the cuff. He’d lost the hand to the Assassin in White.

Kaladin pulled Teft aside. “Did we lose anyone else?” Kaladin asked. “I saw Mart and Pedin.”

“Rod,” Teft said with a grunt. “Dead to the Parshendi.”

Kaladin closed his eyes, breathing out in a hiss. Rod had been one of Lopen's cousins, a jovial Herdazian who hardly spoke Alethi. Kaladin had barely known him, but the man had still been Bridge Four. Kaladin's responsibility.

"You can't protect us all, son," Teft said. "You can't stop people from feeling pain, can't stop men from dying."

Kaladin opened his eyes, but did not challenge those statements. Not vocally, at least.

"Kal," Teft said, voice getting even softer. "At the end there, right before you arrived . . . Storms, son, I swear I saw a couple of the l+rem in its s. fads glowing. Faintly, with Stormlight."

"What?"

"I've been listening to readings of those visions Brightlord Dalinar sees," Teft continued. "I think you should do the same. From what I can guess, it seems that the orders of the Knights Radiant were made up of more than just the knights themselves."

Kaladin looked over the men of Bridge Four, and found himself smiling. He shoved down the pain at his losses, at least for the time being. "I wonder," he said softly, "what it will do to Alethi social structure when an entire group of former slaves starts going about with glowing skin."

"Not to mention those eyes of yours," Teft said with a grunt.

"Eyes?" Kaladin said.

"Haven't you seen?" Teft said. "What am I saying? Ain't no mirrors out on the Plains. Your eyes, son. Pale blue, like glassy water. Lighter than that of any king."

Kaladin turned away. He'd hoped his eyes wouldn't change. The truth, that they had, made him uncomfortable. It said worrisome things. He didn't want to believe that lighteyes had any grounds upon which to build the oppression.

They still don't, he thought, infusing the gemstones in the lanterns as Sigzil instructed him. Perhaps the lighteyes rule because of the memory, buried deeply, of the Radiants. But just because they look a little like Radiants doesn't mean they should have been able to oppress everyone.

Storming lighteyes. He . . .

He was one of them now.

Storm it!

He summoned Syl as a Blade, following Sigzil's instructions, and used her as a key to work the fabrial.

* * *

Shallan stood at the front gates of Urithiru, looking up, trying to comprehend.

Inside, voices echoed in the grand hall and lights bobbed as people explored. Adolin had taken command of that endeavor, while Navani set up a camp to see to the wounded and to measure supplies. Unfortunately, they'd left most of their food and gear behind on the Shattered Plains. In addition, the travel through the Oathgate had not been as cheap as Shallan had first assumed. Somehow, the trip had drained the majority of the gemstones held by the men and women on the plateau—including Navani's fabrials, clutched in the hands of engineers and scholars.

They had run a few tests. The more people you moved, the more Light was required. It seemed that Stormlight, and not just the gemstones that contained it, would become a valuable resource. Already, they had to ration their gemstones and lanterns to explore the building.

Several scribes passed by, bringing paper to draw out maps of Adolin's exploration. They bobbed quick, uncomfortable bows to Shallan and called her "Brightness Radiant." She still hadn't talked at length with Adolin about what had happened to her.

"Is it true?" Shallan asked, tilting her head all the way back, looking up the

side of the enormous tower toward the blue sky high above. “Am I one of them?”

“Mmm . . .” Pattern said from her skirt. “Almost you are. Still+the bo. What

“What kind of words? An oath?”

“Lightweavers make no oaths beyond the first,” Pattern said. “You must speak truths.”

Shallan stared up at the heights for a time longer, then turned and walked back down toward their improvised camp. It was not the Weeping here. She wasn’t certain if that was because they were actually above the rainclouds, or if the weather patterns had simply been thrown off by the arrival of the strange highstorms.

In camp, men sat on the stone, divided by ranks, shivering in their wet coats. Shallan’s breath puffed before her, though she had taken in Stormlight—just a dash—to keep herself from noticing the cold. Unfortunately, there wasn’t much to use for fires. The large stone field in front of the tower city bore very few rockbuds, and the ones that did grow were tiny, smaller than a fist. They would provide little wood for fires.

The field was ringed by ten columnar plateaus, with steps winding around their bases. The Oathgates. Beyond that extended the mountain range.

Crem did cover some of the steps here, and dripped over the sides of the open field. There wasn’t nearly as much as there had been on the Shattered Plains. Less rain must fall up here.

Shallan stepped up to one edge of the stone field. A sheer drop. If Nohadon really had walked to this city, as The Way of Kings claimed, then his path would have included scaling cliff faces. So far, they had found no way down other than through the Oathgates—and even if there were such a way, one would still be stranded in the middle of the mountains, weeks from civilization. Judging from the sun height, the scholars placed them near the center of Roshar, somewhere in the mountains near Tu Bayla or maybe Emul.

The remote location made the city incredibly defensible, or so Dalinar said. It also left them isolated, potentially cut off. And that, in turn, explained why everyone looked at Shallan as they did. They'd tried other Shardblades; none were effective at making the ancient fabriall work. Shallan was literally their only way out of these mountains.

One of the soldiers nearby cleared his throat. "You certain you should be that close to the edge, Brightness Radiant?"

She gave the man a droll look. "I could survive that drop and stroll away, soldier."

"Um, yes, Brightness," he said, blushing.

She left the edge and continued on to find Dalinar. Eyes followed her as she walked: soldiers, scribes, lighteyes, and highlords alike. Well, let them see Shallan the Radiant. She could always find freedom later, wearing another face.

Dalinar and Navani supervised a group of women near the center of the army. "Any luck?" Shallan asked, approaching.

Dalinar glanced at her. The scribes wrote letters using every spanreed they had, delivering messages of warning to the warcamps and to the relay room in Tashikk. A new storm might come, blowing in from the west, not the east. Prepare.

New Natanan, on the very eastern coast of Roshar, would be struck today after the everstorm left the Shattered Plains. Then it would enter the eastern ocean and move toward the Origin.

None of them knew what would happen next. Would it round the world and come crashing into the western coast? Were the highstorms all one storm that rounded the planet along with the others?

Scholars and stormwardens thought the former, these days. Their calculations said that, assuming the everstorm moved at the same speed as a highstorm this time of year, they'd have a few days before it returned and hit Shinovar

and Iri, then blew across the continent, laying waste to cities thought protected.

“No news,” Dalinar said, voice tense. “The king seems to have vanished. What’s more, Kholinar appears to be in a state of riot. I haven’t been able to get straight answers on either question.”

“I’m sure the king is somewhere safe,” Shallan said, glancing at Navani. The woman maintained a composed face, but as she gave instructions to a scribe, her voice was terse and clipped.

One of the pillarlike plateaus nearby flashed. It happened with a wall of light revolving around its perimeter, leaving streaks of blurred afterimage to fade. Someone had activated the Oathgate.

Dalinar stepped up beside her and they waited tensely, until a group of figures in blue appeared at the plateau edge and started down the steps. Bridge Four.

“Oh, thank the Almighty,” Shallan whispered. It was him, not the assassin.

One of the figures pointed down toward where Dalinar and the rest of them stood. Kaladin separated from his men, dropping off the steps and floating over the army. He landed on the stones in stride, carrying a Shardblade on his shoulder, his long officer’s coat unbuttoned and coming down to his knees.

He still has the slave brands, she thought, though his long hair obscured them. His eyes had become a pale blue. They glowed softly.

“Stormblessed,” Dalinar called.

“Highprince,” Kaladin said.

“The assassin?”

“Dead,” Kaladin said, hefting the Blade and sticking it down into the rock before Dalinar. “We need to talk. This—”

“My son, bridgeman,” Navani asked from behind. She stepped up and took

Kaladin by the arm, as if completely unconcerned by the Stormlight that drifted from his skin like smoke. “What happened to my son?”

“There was an assassination attempt,” Kaladin said. “I stopped it, but the king was wounded. I put him someplace safe before coming to help Dalinar.”

“Where?” Navani demanded. “We’ve had our people in the warcamps search monasteries, mansions, the barracks . . .”

“Those places were too obvious,” Kaladin said. “If you could think to look there, so might the assassins. I needed someplace nobody would think of.”

“Where, then?” Dalinar asked.

Kaladin smiled.

* * *

The Lopen made a fist with his hand, clutching the sphere inside. In the next room over, his mother scolded a king.

“No, no, Your Majesty,” she said, words thickly accented, using the same stern tone she used with the axehounds. “You roll the whole thing up and eat it. You can’t pick it apart like that.”

“I don’t feel so hungry, nanha,” Elhokar said. His voice was weak, but he’d awoken from his drunken stupor, which was a good sign.

“You’ll eat anyway!” Mother said. “I know what to do when I see a man that pale in the face, and pardon, Your Majesty, but you are pale as a sheet hung out for the sun to bleach! And that’s the truth of it. You’re going to eat. No complaints.”

“I’m the king. I don’t take orders from—”

“You’re in my home now!” she said, and Lopen mouthed along with the words. “In a Herdazian woman’s home, nobody’s station means nothing beside her own. I’m not going to have them come and get you and find you not properly fed! I’ll not have people saying that, Your Brightship, no I

won't! Eat up. I've got soup cooking."

The Lopen smiled, and though he heard the king grumble, he also heard the sound of spoon against plate. Two of Lopen's strongest cousins sat out front of the hovel in Little Herdaz—which was technically in Highprince Sebarial's warcamp, though the Herdazians didn't pay much attention to that. Four more cousins sat at the end of the street, idly sewing some boots, watching for anything suspicious.

"All right," Lopen whispered, "you really need to work this time." He focused on that sphere in his hand. Just like he did every day, and had done every day since Captain Kaladin had started glowing. He'd feth's s



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—From the Diagram, North Wall Coda, Windowsill region: paragraph 2
(This appears to be a sequence of dates, but their relevance is as yet
unknown.)

They soon began to move into the tower.

There was nothing else they could do, though Adolin's explorations were far from finished. Night was approaching, and the temperature was dropping outside. Beyond that, the highstorm that had hit the Shattered Plains would be raging across the land currently, and would eventually hit these mountains. It took over a day for one to cross the entire continent, and they were probably somewhere near the center, so it would be growing close.

An unscheduled highstorm, Shallan thought, walking through the dark hallways with her guards. And something else coming from the other direction.

She could tell that this tower—its contents, every hallway—was a majestic wonder. It spoke worlds about how tired she was that she didn't want to draw any of it. She just wanted to sleep.

Their spherelight revealed something odd on the wall ahead. Shallan frowned, shaking off her fatigue and stepping up to it. A small folded piece of paper, like a card. She glanced back at her guards, who looked equally confused.

She pulled the card off the wall; it had been stuck in place with some weevilwax on the back. Inside was the triangle symbol of the Ghostbloods. Beneath it, Shallan's name. Not Veil's name.

Shallan's.

Panic. Alertness. In a moment, she had sucked in the Light of their lantern, plunging the corridor into darkness. Light shone from a doorway nearby, however.

She stared at it. Gaz moved to investigate, but Shallan stopped him with a gesture.

Run or fight?

Run where? she thought. Hesitant, she stepped up to the doorway, again motioning her guards back. said, following Kaladin's gaze. jobk V automatically

Mraize stood inside, gazing out a large, glassless window that overlooked another section of the innards of this tower. He turned toward her, twisted and scarred, yet somehow refined in his gentleman's clothing.

So. She had been found out.

I am no longer a child who hides in her room when the shouting comes, she thought firmly to herself, walking into the room. If I run from this man, he will see me as something to be hunted.

She stepped right up to him, ready to summon Pattern. He wasn't like other

Shardblades; she acknowledged that now. He could come more quickly than the ten requisite heartbeats.

He'd done that before. She hadn't been willing to admit that he was capable of it. Admitting that would have meant too much.

How many more of my lies, she thought, hold me back from things I could accomplish?

But she needed those lies. Needed them.

"You led me on a grand hunt, Veil," Mraize said. "If your abilities had not been manifest during the course of saving the army, I perhaps never would have located your false identity."

"Veil is the false identity, Mraize," Shallan said. "I am me."

He inspected her. "I think not."

She met that gaze, but shivered inside.

"A curious position you are in," Mraize said. "Will you hide the true nature of your powers? I was able to guess what they are, but others will not be so knowledgeable. They might see only the Blade, and not ask what else you can do."

"I don't see how it's a concern of yours."

"You are one of us," Mraize said. "We look after our own."

Shallan frowned. "But you've seen through the lie."

"Are you saying you don't want to be one of the Ghostbloods?" His tone was not threatening, but those eyes . . . storms, those eyes could have drilled through stone. "We do not offer the invitation to just anyone."

"You killed Jasnah," Shallan hissed.

"Yes. After she, in turn, had assassinated a number of our members. You

didn't think her hands were clean of blood, did you, Veil?"

She looked away, breaking his gaze.

"I should have guessed that you would turn out to be Shallan Davar," Mraize continued. "I feel a fool for not seeing it earlier. Your family has a long history of involvement in these events."

"I will not help you," Shallan said.

"Curious. You should know that I have your brothers."

She looked to him sharply.

"Your house is no more," Mraize said. "Your family's grounds seized by a passing army. I rescued your brothers from the chaos of the succession war, and am bringing them here. Your family, however, does owe me a debt. One Soulcaster. Broken."

He met her eyes. "How convenient that you, by my estimations, are one, little knife."

She summoned Pattern. "I will kill you before I let you use them as blackmail —"

"No blackmail," Mraize said. "They will arrive safe. A gift to you. You may wait upon my words and see. I mention your debt only so that it has a chance to find . . . purchase in your mind."

She frowned, holding her Shardblade, wavering. "Why?" she finally asked.

"Because, you are ignorant." Mraize stepped closer to her, towering over her. "You don't know who we are. You don't know what we're trying to accomplish. You don't know much of anything at all, Veil. Why did your father join us? Why did your brother seek out the Skybreakers? I have done some research, you see. I have answers for you." Surprisingly, he turned from her and walked toward the doorway. "I will give you time to consider. You seem to think that your newfound place among the Radiants makes you unfit for our numbers, but I see it differently, as does my babsk. Let Shallan Davar

be a Radiant, conformist and noble. Let Veil come to us.” He stopped by the doorway. “And let her find truth.”

He disappeared into the hallway. Shallan found herself feeling even more drained than before. She dismissed Pattern and leaned back against the wall. Of course Mraize would have found his way here—he’d likely been among the armies, somewhere. Getting to Urithiru had been one of the Ghostbloods’ primary goals. Despite her determination not to help them, she’d transported them—along with the army—right where they wanted to go.

Her brothers? Would they actually be safe? What of her family servants, her brother’s betrothed?

She sighed, walking to the doorway and collecting her guards. Let her find truth. What if she didn’t want to find the truth? Pattern hummed softly.

After walking through the tower’s ground floor—using her own glow for light—she found Adolin in the hallway beside a room, where he’d said he’d be. He had his wrist wrapped, and the bruises on his face were starting to purple. They made him look slightly less intoxicatingly handsome, though there was a rugged “I punched a lot of people today” quality to that, which was fetching in its own right.

“You look exhausted,” he said, giving her a peck of a kiss.

“And you look like you let someone play sticks with your face,” she said, but smiled at him. “You should get some sleep too.”

“I will,” he said. “Soon.” He touched her face. “You’re amazing, you realize. You saved everything. Everyone.”

“No need to treat me like I’m glass, Adolin.”

“You’re a Radiant,” he said. “I mean . . .” He ran his hand through his persistently messy hair. “Shallan. You’re something greater than even a lighteyes.”

“Was that a wisecrack about my girth?”

“What? No. I mean . . .” He blushed.

“I will not let this be awkward, Adolin.”

“But—”

She grabbed him in an embrace and forced him into a kiss, a deep and how willing you were to obey me officerpalaces. fpassionate one. He tried to mumble something, but she kept on kissing, pressing her lips against his, letting him feel her desire. He melted into the kiss, then grabbed her by the torso and pulled her close.

After a moment, he pulled back. “Storms, that smarts!”

“Oh!” Shallan raised a hand to her mouth, remembering the bruises on his face. “Sorry.”

He grinned, then winced again, as apparently that hurt too. “Worth it. Anyway, I’ll promise to avoid being awkward if you avoid being too irresistible. At least until I’m healed up. Deal?”

“Deal.”

He looked to her guards. “Nobody disturbs the Lady Radiant, understand?”

They nodded.

“Sleep well,” he said, pushing open a door into the room. Many of the rooms still had wooden doors, despite their long abandonment. “Hopefully, the room is suitable. Your spren chose it.”

Her spren? Shallan frowned, then stepped into the room. Adolin closed the door.

Shallan studied the windowless stone chamber. Why had Pattern chosen this particular place for her? The room didn’t seem distinctive. Adolin had left a Stormlight lantern for her that was extravagant, considering how few lit gemstones they had—and it showed a small square chamber with a stone bench in the corner. There were a few blankets on it. Where had Adolin

found blankets?

She frowned at the wall. The rock here was faded in a square, as if someone had once hung a picture there. Actually, that looked oddly familiar. Not that she'd been here before, but the place that square hung on the wall . . .

It was exactly in the same place where the picture had hung on her father's wall back in Jah Keved.

Her mind started to fuzz.

"Mmm . . ." Pattern said from the floor beside her. "It is time."

"No."

"It is time," he repeated. "The Ghostbloods circle you. The people need a Radiant."

"They have one. The bridgeboy."

"Not enough. They need you."

Shallan blinked out tears. Against her will, the room started to change. White carpet appeared. A picture on the wall. Furniture. Walls painted light blue.

Two corpses.

Shallan stepped over one, though it was just an illusion, and walked to the wall. A painting had appeared, part of the illusion, and it was outlined with a white glow. Something was hidden behind it. She pulled aside the picture, or tried to. Her fingers only made the illusion blur.

This was nothing. Just a re-creation of a memory she wished she didn't have.

"Mmm . . . A better lie, Shallan."

She blinked away tears. Her fingers lifted, and she pressed them against the wall again. This time, she could feel the painting's frame. It wasn't real. For the moment, she pretended that it was, and let the image capture her.

“Can’t I just keep pretending?”

“No.”

She was there, in her father’s room. Trembling, she pulled aside the picture, revealing the strongbox in the wall beyond. She raised the key, and hesitated. “M a member of Bridge Four?” al4S made other’s soul is inside.”

“Mmm . . . No. Not her soul. That which took her soul.”

Shallan unlocked the safe, then tugged it open, revealing the contents. A small Shardblade. Thrust into the strongbox hastily, tip piercing through the back, hilt toward her.

“This was you,” she whispered.

“Mmm . . . Yes.”

“Father took you from me,” Shallan said, “and tried to hide you in here. Of course, that was useless. You vanished as soon as he closed the strongbox. Faded to mist. He wasn’t thinking clearly. Neither of us were.”

She turned.

Red carpet. Once white. Her mother’s friend lay on the floor, bleeding from the arm, though that wound hadn’t killed him. Shallan walked to the other corpse, the one facedown in the beautiful dress of blue and gold. Red hair spilled out in a pattern around the head.

Shallan knelt and rolled over her mother’s corpse, confronting a skull with burned-out eyes.

“Why did she try to kill me, Pattern?” Shallan whispered.

“Mmm . . .”

“It started when she found out what I could do.”

She remembered it now. Her mother’s arrival, with a friend Shallan didn’t

recognize, to confront her father. Her mother's shouts, arguing with her father.

Mother calling Shallan one of them.

Her father barging in. Mother's friend with a knife, the two struggling, the friend getting cut in the arm. Blood spilled on the carpet. The friend had won that fight, eventually holding Father down, pinned on the ground. Mother took the knife and came for Shallan.

And then . . .

And then a sword in Shallan's hands.

"He let everyone believe that he'd killed her," Shallan whispered. "That he'd murdered his wife and her lover in a rage, when I was the one who had actually killed them. He lied to protect me."

"I know."

"That secret destroyed him. It destroyed our entire family."

"I know."

"I hate you," she whispered, staring into her mother's dead eyes.

"I know." Pattern buzzed softly. "Eventually, you will kill me, and you will have your revenge."

"I don't want revenge. I want my family."

Shallan wrapped her arms around herself and buried her head in them, weeping as the illusion bled white smoke, then vanished, leaving her in an empty room.

* * *

I can only conclude, Amaram wrote hurriedly, the glyphs a mess of sloppy ink, that we have been successful, Restares. The reports from Dalinar's army

indicate that Voidbringers were not only spotted, but fought. Red eyes, ancient powers. They have apparently unleashed a new storm upon this world.

He looked up from his pad and peeked out the window. His carriage rattled down the roadway in Dalinar's warcamp. All of his soldiers were away a member of Bridge Four?" al4S made y, and his remaining guards had gone to oversee the exodus. Even with Amaram's reputation, he'd been able to pass into the camp with ease.

He turned back to his paper. I do not exult in this success, he wrote. Lives will be lost. It has ever been our burden as the Sons of Honor. To return the Heralds, to return the dominance of the Church, we had to put the world into a crisis.

That crisis we now have, a terrible one. The Heralds will return. How can they not, with the problems we now face? But many will die. So very many. Nalan send that it is worth the loss. Regardless, I will have more information soon. When I next write you, I hope to do so from Urithiru.

The coach pulled to a stop and Amaram pushed open the door. He handed the letter to the carriage driver, Pama. She took it and began digging in her satchel for the spanreed to send the communication to Restares. He would have done it himself, but you could not use a spanreed while moving.

She would destroy the papers when done. Amaram spared a glance for the trunks on the back of the coach; they contained a precious cargo, including all of his maps, notes, and theories. Should he have left those with his soldiers? Bringing the force of fifty into Dalinar's warcamp would have drawn attention for certain, even with the chaos here, so he'd ordered them to meet him on the Plains.

He needed to keep moving. He strode away from the coach, pulling up the hood on his cloak. The grounds of Dalinar's temple complex were even more frenzied than most of the warcamps, as many people had come to the ardents in this time of stress. He passed a mother begging for one of them to burn a prayer for her husband, who fought with Dalinar's army. The ardent kept repeating that she should gather her things and join the caravans heading out

across the Plains.

It was happening. It was really happening. The Sons of Honor had, at long last, achieved their goal. Gavilar would be proud. Amaram hastened his pace, turning as another ardent bustled up to him, to ask if he needed anything. Before she could look in his hood and recognize him, however, her attention was drawn by a pair of frightened youths who complained that their father was too old to make the trip, and begged for the ardents to help them carry him somehow.

He made it to the corner of the monastery building where they kept the insane and rounded to the back wall, out of sight, near the rim of the warcamp itself. He looked about, then summoned his Blade. A few swift slices would—

What was that?

He spun, certain he'd seen someone approach. But it was nothing. Shadows playing tricks on him. He made his slices in the wall and then carefully pushed open the hole he'd made. The Great One—Talenelat'Elin, Herald of War himself—sat in the dark room, in much the same posture he'd borne before. Perched on the end of his bed, slumped forward, head bowed.

“Why must they keep you in such darkness?” Amaram said, dismissing his Blade. “This is not fit for the lowliest of men, let alone one such as yourself. I will have words with Dalinar about the way the insane are—”

No, he would not. Dalinar thought him a murderer. Amaram drew in a long, deep breath. Prices would need to be paid to see the Heralds return, but by Jezerezeh himself, the loss of Dalinar's friendship would be a stiff one indeed. Would that mercy had not stayed his hand, all those months ago, when he could have executed that spearman.+ along4S made

He hastened to the Herald's side. “Great Prince,” Amaram whispered. “We must go.”

Talenelat did not move. He was whispering again, though. The same things as before. Amaram could not help being reminded of the last time he had visited this place, in the company of someone who had been playing him for

one of the ten fools all along. Who knew that Dalinar had grown so crafty in his old age? Time had changed both of them.

“Please, Great Prince,” Amaram said, getting the Herald to his feet with some difficulty. The man was enormous, as tall as Amaram but built like a wall. The dark brown skin had surprised him the first time he’d seen the man—Amaram had, somewhat foolishly, expected that all of the Heralds would look Alethi.

The Herald’s dark eyes were, of course, some kind of disguise.

“The Desolation . . .” Talenelat whispered.

“Yes. It comes. And with it, your return to glory.” Amaram began to walk the Herald toward his opening. “We must get you to—”

The Herald’s hand snapped up in front of him.

Amaram started, freezing in place, as he saw something in the Herald’s fingers. A small dart, the tip dripping with some clear liquid.

Amaram glanced at the opening, which spilled sunlight into the room. A small figure there made a puffing sound, a blowgun held to lips beneath a half mask that covered the upper face.

The Herald’s other hand shot out, quick as an eyeblink, and snatched the dart from the air mere inches from Amaram’s face. The Ghostbloods. They weren’t trying to kill the Herald.

They were trying to kill Amaram.

He cried out, reaching his hand to the side, summoning his Blade. Too slow. The figure looked from him to the Herald, then scuttled away with a soft curse. Amaram chased after, leaping the rubble of the wall and breaking out into light, but the figure was moving too quickly.

Heart thumping in his chest, he looked back toward Talenelat, worried for the Herald’s safety. Amaram started as he found the Herald standing tall, straight-backed, head up. Dark brown eyes, startlingly lucid, reflected the

light of the opening. Talenelat raised one dart before himself and inspected it.

Then he dropped both darts and sat back down on his bed. His strange, unchanging mantra started over again, muttered. Amaram felt a chill run down his spine, but when he returned to the Herald, he could not get the man to respond.

With effort, he made the Herald rise again and ushered him to the coach.

* * *

Szeth opened his eyes.

He immediately squeezed them closed again. “No. I died. I died!”

He felt rock beneath him. Blasphemy. He heard water dripping and felt the sun on his face. “Why am I not dead?” he whispered. “The Shardblade pierced me. I fell. Why didn’t I die?#dazian. à



There hasto bean answer What is the answer Stop The Parshendi One of them Yes they
There hasto bean answer What is the answer
Stop The Parshendi One of them Yes they are the missing piece Push for the Alethi to
destroy them outright before this one obtain their power It will form a bridge

—From the Diagram, Floorboard 17: paragraph 2, every second letter starting
with the second

Dalinar stood in darkness.+ H Wyndle captain automatically

He turned about, trying to remember how he'd come to this place. In the shadows, he saw furniture. Tables, a rug, drapes from Azir with wild colors. His mother had always been proud of those drapes.

My home, he thought. As it was when I was a child. Back before conquest, back before Gavilar . . .

Gavilar . . . hadn't Gavilar died? No, Dalinar could hear his brother laughing in the next room. He was a child. They both were.

Dalinar crossed the shadowed room, feeling the fuzzy joy of familiarity. Of things being as they should be. He'd left his wooden swords out. He had a

collection, each carved like a Shardblade. He was too old for those now, of course, but he still liked having them. As a collection.

He stepped to the balcony doors and pushed them open.

Warm light bathed him. A deep, enveloping, piercing warmth. A warmth that soaked down deep through his skin, into his very self. He stared at that light, and was not blinded. The source was distant, but he knew it. Knew it well.

He smiled.

Then he awoke. Alone in his new rooms in Urithiru, a temporary location for him to stay while they scouted the entire tower. A week had passed since they had arrived at this place, and the people of the warcamps had finally started to arrive, bearing spheres recharged during the unexpected highstorm. They needed those badly to make the Oathgate function.

Those from the warcamps arrived none too soon. The Everstorm had not yet returned, but if it moved like a regular highstorm, it should be striking any day now.

Dalinar sat in the darkness for a short time, contemplating that warmth he had felt. What had that been? It had been an odd time to get one of the visions. They always came during highstorms. Before, when he'd felt one coming on while sleeping, it had awakened him.

He checked with his guards. No highstorm was blowing. Contemplative, he started to dress. He wanted to see if he could get out onto the roof of the tower today.

* * *

As Adolin walked the dark halls of Urithiru, he tried not to show how overwhelmed he felt. The world had just shifted, like a door on its hinges. A few days ago, his causal betrothal had been that of a powerful man to a relatively minor scion of a distant house. Now, Shallan might be the most important person in the world, and he was . . .

What was he?

He raised his lantern, then made a few marks in chalk on the wall to indicate he'd been here. This tower was huge. How did the entire thing stay up? They could probably explore in here for months without opening every door. He had thrown himself into the duty of exploration because it seemed like something he could do. It also, unfortunately, gave him time to think. He didn't like how few answers he came up with.

He turned around, realizing he'd gotten far from the rest of his scouting party. He was doing that more and more often. The first groups from the Shattered Plains had started arriving, and they needed to decide where to house everyone.

Were those voices ahead? Adolin frowned, then continued down the corridor, leaving his lantern behind so it wouldn't give him away. He was surprised+? f. For s. f when he recognized one of the speakers down the hallway. Was that Sadeas?

It was. The highprince stood with a scouting party of his own. Silently, Adolin cursed the wind that had persuaded Sadeas—of all people—to heed the call to come to Urithiru. Everything would have been so much easier if he'd just stayed behind.

Sadeas gestured for a few of his soldiers to go down one branch of the tunnel-like corridor. His wife and a few of her scribes went the other way, two soldiers trailing. Adolin watched for a moment as the highprince himself raised a lantern, inspecting a faded painting on the wall. A fanciful picture, with animals from mythology. He recognized a few from children's stories, like the enormous, minklike creature with the mane of hair that burst out around and behind its head. What was it called again?

Adolin turned to go, but his boot scraped stone.

Sadeas spun, raising his lantern. "Ah, Prince Adolin." He wore white, which really didn't help his complexion—the pale color made his ruddy features seem downright bloody by comparison.

“Sadeas,” Adolin said, turning back. “I wasn’t aware that you had arrived.” Storming man. He’d ignored Father all those months, and now he decided to obey?

The highprince strolled up the hallway, passing Adolin. “This place is remarkable. Remarkable indeed.”

“So you acknowledge that my father was right,” Adolin said. “That his visions are true. The Voidbringers have returned, and you are made a fool.”

“I will admit,” Sadeas said, “there is more fight left to your father than I’d once feared. A remarkable plan. Contacting the Parshendi, working out this deal with them. They put on quite a show, I hear. It certainly convinced Aladar.”

“You can’t possibly believe it was all a show.”

“Oh please. You deny that he had a Parshendi among his own guard? Isn’t it convenient that these new ‘Radiants’ include the head of Dalinar’s guard and your own betrothed?”

Sadeas smiled, and Adolin saw the truth. No, he didn’t believe this, but it was the lie he would tell. HMakabaki regio

e would start the whisperings again, trying to undermine Dalinar.

“Why?” Adolin asked, stepping up to him. “

Why are you like this, Sadeas?”

“Because,” Sadeas said with a sigh, “it has to happen. You can’t have an army with two generals, son. Your father and I, we whitespines who both want a kingdom. It’s him or me. We’ve been pointed that way since Gavilar died.”

lass="TX" aid="3HFIVG">“It doesn’t have to be that way.”

“It does. Your father will never trust me again, Adolin, and you know it.” Sadeas’s face darkened. “I will take this from him. This city, these discoveries. It’s just a setback.”

Adolin stood for a moment, staring Sadeas in the eyes, and then slyly snapped.

That’s it.

Adolin grabbed Sadeas by the throat with his unwounded hand, slamming the highprince back against the wall. The look of utter shock on Sadeas’s face amused a part of Adolin, the very small part said, following Kaladin’s gaze. ment of you cans. ft that wasn’t completely, totally, and irrevocably enraged.

He squeezed, choking off a cry for help as he moved to pin Sadeas back against the wall, grabbing the man’s arm with his own. But Sadeas was a trained soldier. He tried to break the hold, taking Adolin by the arm and twisting.

Adolin kept hold, but lost his balance. The two of them fell in a jumble, twisting, rolling. This wasn’t the calculated intensity of the dueling grounds, or even the methodical butchery of the battlefield.

This was two sweating, straining men, both on the edge of panic. Adolin was younger, but he was still bruised from the fight with the Assassin in White.

He managed to come up on top, and as Sadeas struggled to yell, Adolin slammed the man’s head down against the stone floor to daze him. Breathing in gasps, Adolin grabbed his side knife. He plunged the knife toward Sadeas’s face, though the man managed to get his hands up to grab Adolin by the wrist.

Adolin grunted, forcing the knife closer, clutched in his off hand. He brought the right in anyway, the wrist flaring with pain, as he leaned it against the crossguard. Sweat prickled on Sadeas’s brow, the knife’s tip touching the end of his left nostril.

“My father,” Adolin said with a grunt, sweat from his nose dripping down onto the blade of the knife, “thinks I’m a better man than he is.” He strained, and felt Sadeas’s grip weaken. “Unfortunately for you, he’s wrong.”

Sadeas whimpered.

With a surge, Adolin forced the blade up past Sadeas’s nose and into the eye socket—piercing the eye like a ripe berry—then rammed it home into the brain.

Sadeas shook for a moment, blood pooling around the blade as Adolin worked it to be certain.

A second later, a Shardblade appeared beside Sadeas—his father’s Shardblade. Sadeas was dead.

Adolin stumbled back to not get blood on his clothing, though his cuffs were already stained. Storms. Had he just done that? Had he just murdered a highprince?

Dazed, he stared at that weapon. Neither man had summoned his Blade for the fight. The weapons might be worth a fortune, but they’d do less good than a rock in such a close-quarters fight.

Thoughts coming more clearly, Adolin picked up the weapon and stumbled away. He ditched the Blade out a window, dropping it down into one of the planterlike outcroppings of the terrace below. It might be safe there.

After that, he had the presence of mind to cut off his cuffs, remove his chalk mark on the wall by scraping it free with his own Blade, and walk as far away as he could before finding one of his scouting parties and pretending he’d been in that area all along.

* * *

Dalinar finally figured out the locking mechanism, then pushed on the metal door at the end of the stairwell. The door was set into the ceiling here, the steps running straight up to it.

The trapdoor refused to open, despite being unlocked. He'd oiled the parts. Why wasn't it moving?

Crem, of course, he thought. He summoned his Shardblade and made a series of quick cuts around the trapdoor. Then, with an effort, he was able to force it to open. The ancient trapdoor swung upward and let him out onto the very top. How willing you were to obey me officer you cans. fop of the tower city.

He smiled, stepping onto the roof. Five days of exploration had sent Adolin and Navani into the depths of the city-tower. Dalinar, however, had been driven to seek the top.

For such an enormous tower, the roof was actually relatively small, and not that encrusted with crem. This high, less rain likely dropped during highstorms—and everyone knew crem was thicker in the east than it was in the west.

Storms, this place was high. His ears had popped several times while riding to the top, using the fabrial lift that Navani had discovered. She spoke of counterweights and conjoined gemstones, sounding awed by the technology of the ancients. All he knew was that her discovery had let him avoid climbing up some hundred flights of steps.

He stepped up to the edge and looked down. Below, each ring of the tower expanded out a little farther than the one above it. Shallan is right, he thought. They're gardens. Each outer ring is dedicated to planting food. He did not know why the eastern face of the tower was straight and sheer, facing the Origin. No balconies along that side.

He leaned out. Distant, so far down it made him queasy, he picked out the ten pillars that held the Oathgates. The one to the Shattered Plains flashed, and a large group of people appeared on it. They flew Hatham's flag. With the maps Dalinar's scholars had sent, it had only taken Hatham and the others about a week of quick marching to reach the Oathgate. When Dalinar's army had crossed that same distance, they'd done so very cautiously, wary of Parshendi attacks.

Now that he saw those pillars from this perspective, he recognized that there

was one of them in Kholinar. It made up the dais upon which the palace and royal temple had been built. Shallan suspected that Jasnah had tried to open the Oathgate there; the woman's notes said that Oathgates to each of the cities were locked tight. Only the one in the Shattered Plains had been left open.

Shallan hoped to figure out how to use the others, though their tests right now showed them to be locked somehow. If she managed to make them work, the world would become a much, much smaller place. Assuming there was anything left of it.

Dalinar turned and looked upward, regarding the sky. He took a deep breath. This was why he had come to the top.

"You sent that storm to destroy us!" he shouted toward the clouds. "You sent it to cover up what Shallan, and then Kaladin, were becoming! You tried to end this before it could begin!"

Silence.

"Why send me visions and tell me to prepare!" Dalinar shouted. "Then try to destroy us when we listen to them?"

I WAS REQUIRED TO SEND THOSE VISIONS ONCE THE TIME ARRIVED. THE ALMIGHTY DEMANDED IT OF ME. I COULD NO MORE DISOBEY THAN I COULD REFUSE TO BLOW THE WINDS.

Dalinar breathed in deeply. The Stormfather had replied. Blessedly, he had replied.

"The visions were his, then," Dalinar said, "and you the vehicle for choosing who received them?"

YES.

"Why did you pick me?" Dalinar demanded.

IT DOES NOT MATTER. Alight

YOU WERE TOO SLOW. YOU FAILED. THE EVERSTORM IS HERE,
AND THE SPREN OF THE ENEMY COME TO INHABIT THE ANCIENT
ONES. IT IS OVER. YOU HAVE LOST.

“You said that you were a fragment of the Almighty.”

I AM HIS . . . SPREN, YOU MIGHT SAY. NOT HIS SOUL. I AM THE
MEMORY MEN CREATE FOR HIM, NOW THAT HE IS GONE. THE
PERSONIFICATION OF STORMS AND OF THE DIVINE. I AM NO
GOD. I AM BUT A SHADOW OF ONE.

“I’ll take what I can get.”

HE WISHED FOR ME TO FIND YOU, BUT YOUR KIND HAVE
BROUGHT ONLY DEATH TO MINE.

“What do you know of this storm that the Parshendi unleashed?”

THE EVERSTORM. IT IS A NEW THING, BUT OLD OF DESIGN. IT
ROUNDS THE WORLD NOW, AND CARRIES WITH IT HIS SPREN.
ANY OF THE OLD PEOPLE IT TOUCHES WILL TAKE ON THEIR
NEW FORMS.

“Voidbringers.”

THAT IS ONE TERM FOR THEM.

“This Everstorm will come again, for certain?”

REGULARLY, LIKE HIGHSTORMS, THOUGH LESS FREQUENT. YOU
ARE DOOMED.

“And it will transform the parshmen. Is there no way to stop it?”

NO.

Dalinar closed his eyes. It was as he had feared. His army had defeated the
Parshendi, yes, but they were only a fraction of what was coming. Soon he
would face hundreds of thousands of them.

The other lands weren't listening. He'd managed to speak, via spanreed, with the emperor of Azir himself—a new emperor, as Szeth had visited the last one. There had been no succession war in Azir, of course. Those required too much paperwork.

The new emperor had invited Dalinar to visit, but obviously considered his words to be ravings. Dalinar hadn't realized that rumors of his madness had traveled so far. Even without that, however, he suspected his warnings would be ignored, as the things he spoke of were insane. A storm that blew the wrong way? Parshmen turning into Voidbringers?

Only Taravangiaomething final

n of Kharbranth—and now, apparently, Jah Keved—had seemed willing to listen. Heralds bless that man; hopefully he could bring some peace to that tortured land. Dalinar had asked for more information about how he'd obtained that throne; initial reports indicated he'd stumbled into the position unexpectedly. But he was too new, and Jah Keved too broken, for him to be able to do much.

Beyond that, there were sudden and unexpected reports, coming via spanreed, of Kholinar rioting. No straight answers there yet, either. And what was this he heard of a plague in the Purelake? Storms, what a mess this all had become.+ alongFNSo

He would need to do something about it. All of it.

Dalinar looked to the sky again. “I have been commanded to refound the Knights Radiant. I will need to join their number if I am to lead them.”

Distant thunder rumbled in the sky, though there were no clouds.

“Life before death!” Dalinar shouted. “Strength before weakness! Journey before destination!”

I AM THE SLIVER OF THE ALMIGHTY HIMSELF! the voice said, sounding angry. I AM THE STORMFATHER. I WILL NOT LET MYSELF BE BOUND IN SUCH A WAY AS TO KILL ME!

“I need you,” Dalinar said. “Despite what you TX" aid="3HFJ2

did. The bridgeman spoke of oaths given, and of each order of knights being different. The First Ideal is the same. After that, each order is unique, requiring different Words.”

The thunder rumbled. It sounded . . . like a challenge. Could Dalinar interpret thunder now?

This was a dangerous gambit. He confronted something primal, something something that had actively tried to murder him and his entire army.

“Fortunately,” Dalinar said, “I know the second oath I am to make. I don’t need to be told it. I will unite instead of divide, Stormfather. I will bring men together.”

The thunder silenced. Dalinar stood alone, staring at the sky, waiting.

VERY WELL, the Stormfather finally said. THESE WORDS ARE ACCEPTED.

Dalinar smiled.

I WILL NOT BE A SIMPLE SWORD TO YOU, the Stormfather warned. I WILL NOT COME AS YOU CALL, AND YOU WILL HAVE TO DIVEST YOURSELF OF THAT . . . MONSTROSITY THAT YOU CARRY. Y

">OU WILL BE A RADIANT WITH NO SHARDS.

“It will be what it must,” Dalinar said, summoning his Shardblade. As soon as it appeared, screams sounded in his head. He dropped the weapon as if it were an eel that had snapped at him. The screams vanished immediately.

“What was the meaning of the last vision I received?” Dalinar said. “The one this morning, that came with no highstorm.”

NO VISION WAS SENT THIS MORNING.

“Yes it was. I saw light and warmth.”

A SIMPLE DREAM. NOT OF ME, NOR OF GODS.

Curious. Dalinar could have sworn it felt the same way as the visions, if not stronger.

GO, BONDSMITH, the Stormfather said. LEAD YOUR DYING PEOPLE TO FAILURE. ODIUM DESTROYED THE ALMIGHTY HIMSELF. YOU ARE NOTHING TO HIM.

“The Almighty could die,” Dalinar said. “If that is true, then this Odium can be killed. I will find a way to do it. The visions mentioned a challenge, a champion. Do you know anything of this?”

The sky gave no reply beyond a simple rumble. Well, there would be time for more questions later.

Dalinar walked down off the top of Urithiru and entered the stairwell again. The flight of steps opened into a room that encompassed nearly the entire top floor of the tower ciFJ3A">The Blad

ty, and it shone with light through glass windows. Glass with no shutters or support, some of it facing east. How it survived highstorms Dalinar did not know, though lines of cream did streak it in places.

Ten short pillars ringed this room, with another at the center. “Well?” Kaladin asked, turning away from an inspection of one of them. Shallan rounded another; she looked far less she had when they’d first come to the city. Though their days here in Urithiru had been frantic and ragged than