

ARIN'S HAND TWITCHED AGAINST THE PILLOW.

His legs twisted the sheets.

He opened his eyes. The moon was large and yellow in the window. He wondered how the moon would look from the rooftop gardens, and he suddenly was in the gardens—both of them at the same time, even though the eastern garden and the western one were separated by a locked door. The smooth stones were cold under his bare feet. He was somewhere between sleeping and waking. Then he forgot this realization and was fully inside the dream without knowing that he was.

He heard someone's footfalls on the other side of the garden wall. But *he* was on both sides, in both gardens his and Kestrel's. He was alone. He was still. He was not making that sound.

Again, he heard the gravel scatter. But no one else was there.

The night sky unfolded. Someone was snipping its threads. It came down on him in panels of silk. The blue of

it covered his eyes, filled his mouth. His ribs spread wide. He was drowning. He was trying to drink the cloth. His throat yearned for it even as his lungs collapsed.

He startled awake. The sheets were damp. His breath came short.

The dream deteriorated. He had only images of blue silk. On his eyes. In his mouth, too.

He sat up straight. His bed was washed in moonlight. His mind flickered with the memory of the last time he'd seen Kestrel. The spill of her blue dress over the piano bench.

He made himself go back to sleep.

In the morning, he vaguely knew that he'd had a nightmare. Then he frowned, uncertain that "nightmare" was the right word. He tried to remember it. He had flashes: the sensation of drowning, the sense that he had *wanted* to drown. Something blue.

Arin suddenly remembered enough to wish that he hadn't. He shoved the dream from his mind. As is the way with fragile thoughts, the cobwebby threads spun away. They became nothing . . . or almost nothing. They became a feeling he could no longer explain as he cupped water from the basin to his mouth. The feeling drifted, not a thought or a memory anymore just a flutter of unease.

He went to Sarsine's room for breakfast. The suite had been hers as a girl, decorated according to the orders of Arin's sister, whose own suite was closed off, curtains drawn.

Sarsine set her cup in its saucer. “What’s wrong?”

“Nothing.” He’d come to talk, but found that he didn’t know what to say and didn’t really want to say anything after all.

“You have shadows under your eyes. The god of sleep does not love you.”

Arin shrugged. He peeled a summer fruit, the little knife moving quickly in his hand. The fruit’s violet flesh dented and dripped. It smelled fragrant, dusky, sweet. Familiar. A perfume. On the skin, right at the base of her throat.

He dropped the fruit to his plate, no longer hungry.

Sarsine took it from him and ate, sucking her thumb to get the juice. “Aren’t you pleased that some of us are well enough to harvest fruit?”

He focused his attention. “Yes, but . . .”

“Not well enough to fight.”

“I don’t want you to fight.”

“Not *me*, perhaps.” She drank her tea.

“Could you oversee a project?”

She raised her black brows.

He pulled folded pages from the inside pocket of his light jacket. They described in detail how he’d made the miniature cannon: the process for making the molds for the barrel and ball, the dimensions, the way to fit the barrel into a leather stock.

Sarsine examined the pages. “How many do you want?”

“As many as you can have made.”

He went quiet. She let him be. He ate a bit of bread, and caught himself staring at Tensen’s ring on his smallest finger. He wondered why his spymaster had lied to him.

Tensen had promised the Moth her anonymity. That had been clear from the first. Then Tensen had seemed to backtrack on that promise—or to let it fall under the weight of his greater promise of loyalty to Arin. Tensen had named Risha as his clever spy.

Why would a Herrani woman be so insistent on her anonymity?

A servant, likely, in the imperial palace. Scared to be discovered. The emperor was a vengeful man.

Arin touched his scar. His fingers were sticky.

Could the Moth have been Deliah? But the Herrani dressmaker, who had sewn Arin's face, had given him information directly. He didn't understand why she would do that *and* go through an elaborate charade of being Tensen's secret spy.

As if guessing the course of his thoughts, Sarsine said.
“What about the messenger?”

“I spoke with him. Told him he could go home.”

“Arin. The borders are closed. He trekked through the mountains from Valoria. You can’t send him back. He has no home.”

Arin winced. “I wasn’t thinking.”

“That only happens to you when your heart gets in the way.”

He felt again that flutter of unease. He tried to remember the dream he had made himself forget. He stood, eager to get away from his cousin, who knew him too well—even though that was, he realized, why he had come. “The messenger can stay in my old rooms, then.”

Sarsine said, “I’ll let him know, if he hasn’t already left.”

Roshar was in the kitchen yard with his tiger, who'd just killed a chicken. The flagstones were strewn with bloody feathers. The tiger, though still small, had large paws. It lay in the yard, panting in the sun, paws over its prize, muzzle pink and wet.

The prince eyed Arin.

"Was that a laying hen?" Arin asked.

"I have news for you. Not about chickens."

"The Valorian prisoners?"

Roshar sat at the edge of the well. His expression was hard to read.

Arin's heart dropped. "What kind of news?"

"Would you like the bad news first, or the news I'm not sure whether you will take as good or bad?"

"Bad news."

"Your spymaster's dead."

"Tensen?" Arin had expected this, yet the stab of sorrow went as deep as if he'd been wholly unprepared.

"The dressmaker, too. The general killed Tensen—or at least, that's what they say. Unclear about the dressmaker."

Arin's stomach was hollow. He remembered looking up at Deliah through the veil of his own blood and thinking, for a moment, that she looked like his mother.

"Do you want the other news?" Roshar tentatively asked.

No. Arin was suddenly sure that he did not want to hear it, would not be able to bear it. He felt a sinking dread.

"Your . . ." Roshar stumbled.

A chicken feather lifted in a sudden breeze and eddied along the base of the well.

“Arin, Kestrel’s dead.”

His ears were ringing. He felt as if he’d fallen into the well. He heard Roshar’s voice from far away. The words tumbled down to him. “It was recent,” Roshar said. “A disease. While she was away from the capital, traveling with the prince. The whole empire is in mourning.”

“That’s not true.”

Roshar said something. Arin couldn’t hear him. He was at the bottom of the well. The water closed over his head, cold and black.

“I'M FINE.”

“Arin, I know you're not.”

Sarsine had been waiting for him by Javelin's empty stall when Arin returned with the lathered horse. Arin felt a jagged, sharp sort of feeling. Rusted in parts, menacingly shiny in others. If it had been a real thing lying in the dirt, anyone would have known better than to touch it.

He had gone for a ride. He'd left his house so there would be no question of visiting or avoiding parts of it that reminded him of her. He'd pushed Javelin hard. But when he had finally slowed the stallion and paced him under the green canopy of the city's horse paths, he'd wiped the sweat from his face and remembered whose horse was beneath him. He saw that he had no choices. He saw that even avoidance was a reminder. *A wound healed clean*, he had decided when he'd thought of Kestrel as he'd stood on the ship after the sea battle.

His hands held the reins too short. An emotion claimed

him, merciless and familiar. His heart shrank. It felt small and hard and full, like a nut he could crack in his fist.

His face was still wet. He'd ridden too far. He turned Javelin back home.

When he saw Sarsine waiting in the open, shaded stables on a three-legged stool, he had ignored her and let Javelin drink from the trough in the yard. He had stripped the horse of his saddle. Lifted off the reins. Fetched a bucket of water, which he had slowly poured over the horse, who snorted and lowered his head. Arin had scraped water from the coat, then wiped him down with a cloth. He checked the hooves, digging out mud and pebbles with a pick, using his fingers to get gently into the grooves one either side of the hoof's frog.

Finally Arin saw that his silence wouldn't be enough to make his cousin go away. He brought the horse into the stables. He said he was fine, she said he wasn't. He wiped down Javelin's tack and hung it up and tried silence again, this time because he was sure that if he spoke he'd say something he'd regret.

She said, "Why do you think it's wrong to mourn her?"

"Sarsine." His voice was tight. "If you love me, you'll leave."

"Answer me first."

The words shot out of him. "Because she wasn't who I thought she was. You can't mourn someone you didn't know."

"I saw how you two were with each other. Why would you think you didn't know her?"

“Because she’s a *liar*. She has her games, her clever tricks. Everyone falls into her trap. I did, too . . .” He trailed off, listening to his own words. He began to brush Javelin’s brown coat, leaning in hard. “She’s not dead.”

“She’s not?” Sarsine sounded worried.

He watched the horse’s muscles twitch and leap under the brush. “No.”

“Arin, I know how this feels. You know that I do. Like it’s impossible, like some mistake has been made and if you could only correct it—”

“That’s not it. I’m saying that the whole story sounds false.”

“I don’t understand.”

The brush was moving rapidly. “The secret marriage, to start with. The Firstsummer wedding was valuable to the emperor. All that goodwill. The excitement to witness the emperor’s dynasty growing. The bride. She was a prize, do you know that? That wedding wasn’t about the emperor’s son marrying Kestrel. It was about the emperor marrying the military. The emperor would never forgo that wedding. If they married in secret, then why didn’t the emperor force them to marry again for everyone to see? It doesn’t make sense.”

“You don’t want it to make sense.”

“A *disease* killed her? I never saw her sick the entire time I worked in her villa. She was only bedridden once, and that’s because—” Arin stopped, remembering how she’d limped. She’d been injured in a duel that she had fought for him.

He lowered the brush.

He'd been here before. He used to do this all the time: invent stories about Kestrel that fit with her bandaged knee, the way she'd kissed him, the night she'd unlocked the door that separated her rooftop garden from his. From a window in his suite, he'd seen the door open. He had waited, pulse rising. Moments like that, right before she had shut the door again, haunted him in the capital, made him imagine things about her. Lovely, tempting scenarios. He remembered how he'd even wondered if she could be Tensen's Moth.

"Firstsummer was about a month ago," he heard himself saying.

Javelin huffed and stamped. He curved his neck to whuffle Arin's chest.

Sarsine started to speak.

"Please leave," Arin said. "I answered your question. I want to be alone. I need to think," he added, though he wasn't even sure what he was thinking.

When she'd gone, Arin threaded fingers through the horse's mane. Kestrel loved Javelin. She'd left him behind anyway.

Arin remembered seeing her hand in Javelin's mane, curling into the coarse strands. This made him remember the almost freakish length between her littlest finger and thumb as her hand spanned piano keys. The black star of the birthmark. He saw her again in the imperial palace. Her music room. He'd seen that room only once. About a month ago, right before Firstsummer. Her blue sleeves were fastened at the wrist.

Something tugged inside him. A flutter of unease.

Do you sing?

Those had been her first words to him, the day she had bought him.

A band of nausea circled Arin's throat, just as it had when she had asked him that question, in part for the same reason.

She'd had no trace of an accent. She had spoken in perfect, natural, mother-taught Herrani.

"I told you everything I know," said the messenger. Arin had gone to his childhood suite, feeling an anxiety verging on panic at the thought of not finding the man there, of having to track him down, of time lost . . . but the man had opened the outermost door almost immediately after Arin's pounding knock.

"I didn't ask you the right questions," Arin said. "I want to start again. You said that the prisoner reached through the bars of the wagon to give you the moth."

"Yes."

"And you couldn't really see her."

"That's right."

"But you said she was Herrani. Why would you say that if you couldn't *see* her?"

"Because she spoke in Herrani."

"Perfectly."

"Yes."

"No accent."

"No."

"Describe the hand."

"I'm not sure . . ."

“Start with the skin. You said it was paler than yours, than mine.”

“Yes, like a house slave’s.”

Which wasn’t very different from a Valorian’s. “Could you see her wrist, her arm?”

“The wrist, yes, now that you mention it. She was in chains. I saw the manacle.”

“Did you see the sleeve of a dress?”

“Maybe. Blue?”

Dread churned inside Arin. “You think or you know?”

“I don’t know. Things happened too fast.”

“Please. This is important.”

“I don’t want to say something I’m not sure is true.”

“All right, all right. Was this her right hand or her left?”

“I don’t know.”

“Can you tell me *anything* about it? Did she wear a seal ring?”

“Not that I saw, but—”

“Yes?”

“She had a birthmark. On the hand, near the thumb. It looked like a little black star.”