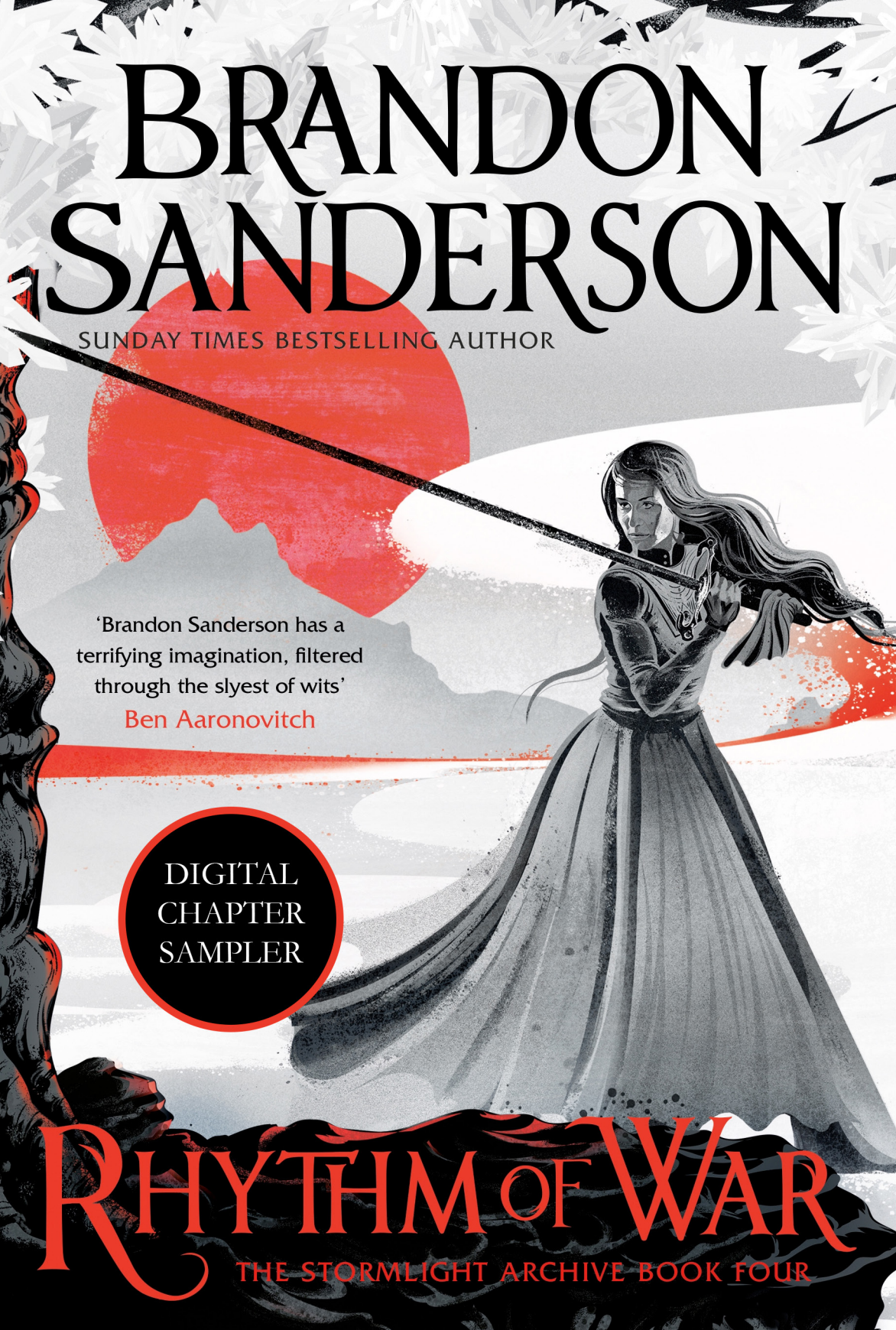
BRANDON SANDERSON

SUNDAY TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR



'Brandon Sanderson has a terrifying imagination, filtered through the slyest of wits'
Ben Aaronovitch

DIGITAL CHAPTER SAMPLER

RHYTHM OF WAR

THE STORMLIGHT ARCHIVE BOOK FOUR

First published in Great Britain in 2020 by Gollancz
an imprint of The Orion Publishing Group Ltd
Carmelite House, 50 Victoria Embankment
London EC4Y 0DZ

An Hachette UK Company

1 3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Copyright © Dragonsteel Entertainment LLC, 2020

Mistborn®, The Stormlight Archive®, Reckoners®,
Cosmere®, and Brandon Sanderson® are registered
trademarks of Dragonsteel Entertainment, LLC

All illustrations © Dragonsteel Entertainment, LLC, except
when otherwise noted
Illustrations preceding the prologue, chapters 22, 24, 29, 36, 53,
75 and 78, and interludes 5 and 7 by Ben McSweeney
Illustrations preceding chapters 3, 6, 41, 84 and 97 by Kelley Harris
Map of Roshar, sword glyphs, chapter arches and illustrations
preceding chapters 20, 46 and 73 by Isaac Stewart
Viewpoint icons by Isaac Steward, Ben McSweeney,
Howard Lyon and Miranda Minks

The moral right of Brandon Sanderson to be identified as
the author of this work has been asserted in accordance
with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act of 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be
reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted
in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical,
photocopying, recording, or otherwise, without the
prior permission of both the copyright owner and the
above publisher of this book.

All the characters in this book are fictitious, and any resemblance
to actual persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental.

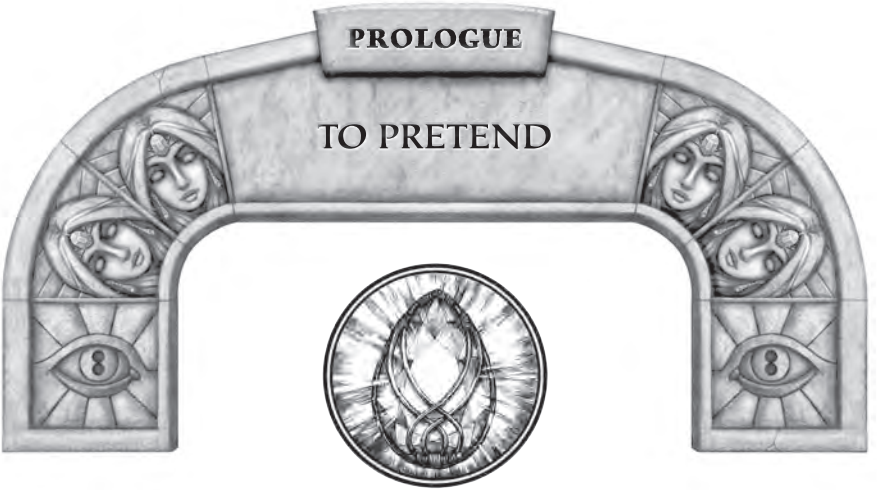
A CIP catalogue record for this book is
available from the British Library.

ISBN (Hardback) 978 0 575 09338 6
ISBN (Export Trade Paperback) 978 0 575 09339 3
ISBN (eBook) 978 0 575 09340 9

Printed in Great Britain by Clays Ltd, Elcograph S.p.A



www.gollancz.co.uk



SEVEN YEARS AGO

Of course the Parshendi wanted to play their drums.

Of course Gavilar had told them they could.

And of *course* he hadn't thought to warn Navani.

"Have you seen the size of those instruments?" Maratham said, running her hands through her black hair. "Where will we put them? And we're already at capacity after your husband invited all the foreign dignitaries. We can't—"

"We'll set up a more exclusive feast in the upper ballroom," Navani said, maintaining a calm demeanor, "and put the drums there, with the king's table."

Everyone else in the kitchens was close to panicking, assistant cooks running one direction or another, pots banging, anticipationspren shooting up from the ground like streamers. Gavilar had invited not only the highprinces, but their relatives. And every highlord in the city. *And* he wanted a double-sized Beggar's Feast. And now . . . drums?

"We've already put everyone to work in the lower feast hall!" Maratham cried. "I don't have the staff to set up—"

"There are twice as many soldiers as usual loitering around the palace tonight," Navani said. "We'll have *them* help you set up." Posting extra guards, making a show of force? Gavilar could always be counted on to do *that*.

For everything else, he had Navani.

"Could work, yes," Maratham said. "Good to put the louts to work rather than having them underfoot. We have two main feasts, then? All

right. Deep breaths." The short palace organizer scuttled away, narrowly avoiding an apprentice cook carrying a large bowl of steaming shellfish.

Navani stepped aside to let the cook pass. The man nodded in thanks; the staff had long since stopped being nervous when she entered the kitchens. She'd made it clear to them that doing their jobs efficiently was recognition enough.

Despite the underlying tension, they seemed to have things well in hand now—though there had been a scare earlier when they'd found worms in three barrels of grain. Thankfully, Brightlord Amaram had stores for his men, and Navani had been able to pry them out of his grip. For now, with the extra cooks they'd borrowed from the monastery, they might actually be able to feed all the people Gavilar had invited.

I'll have to give instructions on who is to be seated in which feast room, she thought, slipping out of the kitchens and into the palace gardens. *And leave some extra space in both. Who knows who else might show up with an invitation?*

She hiked up through the gardens toward the side doors of the palace. She'd be less in the way—and wouldn't have to dodge servants—if she took this path. As she walked, she scanned to make certain all the lanterns were in place. Though the sun hadn't yet set, she wanted the Kholinar palace to shine brightly tonight.

Wait. Was that Aesudan—her daughter-in-law, Elhokar's wife—standing near the fountains? She was supposed to be greeting guests inside. The slender woman wore her long hair in a bun lit by a gemstone of each shade. All those colors were gaudy together—Navani preferred a few simple stones themed to one color—but it did make Aesudan stand out as she chatted with two elderly ardents.

Storms bright and brash . . . that was *Rushur Kris,* the artist and master artifabrian. When had *he* arrived? Who had invited him? He was holding a small box with a flower painted on it. Could that be . . . one of his new fabrials?

Navani felt drawn toward the group, all other thoughts fleeing her mind. How had he made the heating fabrial, making the temperature vary? She'd seen drawings, but to talk to the master artist himself . . .

Aesudan saw Navani and smiled brightly. The joy seemed genuine, which was unusual—at least when directed at Navani. She tried not to take Aesudan's general sourness toward her as a personal affront; it was the prerogative of every woman to feel threatened by her mother-in-law. Particularly when the girl was so obviously lacking in talents.

Navani smiled at her in turn, trying to enter the conversation and get a better look at that box. Aesudan, however, took Navani by the arm.

"Mother! I had completely forgotten about our appointment. I'm so fickle sometimes. Terribly sorry, Ardent Kris, but I must make a hasty exit."

Aesudan tugged Navani—forcefully—back through the gardens toward the kitchens. "Thank *Kelek* you showed up, Mother. That man is the most dreadful bore."

"Bore?" Navani said, twisting to gaze over her shoulder. "He was talking about . . ."

"Gemstones. And other gemstones. And spren and boxes of spren, and *storms*! You'd think he would understand. I have *important* people to meet. The wives of highprinces, the best generals in the land, all come to gawk at the wild parshmen. Then I get stuck in the gardens talking to *ardents*? Your son abandoned me there, I'll have you know. When I find that man . . ."

Navani extricated herself from Aesudan's grip. "Someone should entertain those ardents. Why are they here?"

"Don't ask me," Aesudan said. "Gavilar wanted them for something, but he made Elhokar entertain them. Poor manners, that is. Honestly!"

Gavilar had invited one of the world's most prominent artifabrians to visit Kholinar, and he hadn't bothered to *tell* Navani? Emotion stirred deep inside her, a fury she kept carefully penned and locked away. That man. That *storming* man. How . . . how could he . . .

Angerspren, like boiling blood, began to well up in a small pool at her feet. *Calm, Navani,* the rational side of her mind said. *Maybe he intends to introduce the ardent to you as a gift.* She banished the anger with effort.

"Brightness!" a voice called from the kitchens. "Brightness Navani! Oh, please! We have a problem."

"Aesudan," Navani said, her eyes still on the ardent, who was now slowly walking toward the monastery. "Could you help the kitchens with whatever they need? I'd like to . . ."

But Aesudan was already hurrying off toward another group in the gardens, one attended by several powerful highlord generals. Navani took a deep breath and shoved down another stab of frustration. Aesudan claimed to care about propriety and manners, but she'd insert herself into a conversation between men without bringing her husband along as an excuse.

"Brightness!" the cook called again, waving to her.

Navani took one last look at the ardent, then set her jaw and hurried to the kitchens, careful not to catch her skirt on the ornamental shalebark. "What now?"

"Wine," the cook said. "We're out of both the Clavendah and the Ruby Bench."

"How?" she said. "We have reserves. . . ." She shared a glance with the

cook, and the answer was evident. Dalinar had found their wine store again. He'd grown quite ingenious at secretly draining the barrels for himself and his friends. She wished he'd dedicate half as much attention to the kingdom's needs.

"I have a private store," Navani said, pulling her notebook from her pocket. She gripped it in her safehand through her sleeve as she scribbled a note. "I keep it in the monastery with Sister Talanah. Show her this and she'll give you access."

"Thank you, Brightness," the cook said, taking the note. Before the man was out the door, Navani spotted the house steward—a white-bearded man with too many rings on his fingers—hovering in the stairwell to the palace proper. He was fidgeting with the rings on his left hand. Bother.

"What is it?" she asked, striding over.

"Highlord Rine Hatham has arrived, and is asking about his audience with the king. You remember, His Majesty promised to talk with Rine tonight about—"

"About the border dispute and the misdrawn maps, yes," Navani said, sighing. "And where is my husband?"

"Unclear, Brightness," the steward said. "He was last seen with Brightlord Amaram and some of those . . . uncommon figures."

That was the term the palace staff used for Gavilar's new friends, the ones who seemed to arrive without warning or announcement, and who rarely gave their names.

Navani ground her teeth, thinking through the places Gavilar might have gone. He would be angry if she interrupted him. Well, good. He should be seeing to his guests, rather than assuming she'd handle everything and everyone.

Unfortunately, at the moment she . . . well, she would have to handle everything and everyone.

She let the anxious steward lead her up to the grand entryway, where guests were being entertained with music, drink, and poetry while the feast was prepared. Others were escorted by master-servants to view the Parshendi, the night's true novelty. It wasn't every day the king of Alethkar signed a treaty with a group of mysterious parshmen who could talk.

She extended her apologies to Highlord Rine for Gavilar's absence, offering to review the maps herself. After that, she was stopped by a line of impatient men and women brought to the palace by the promise of an audience with the king.

Navani assured the lighteyes their concerns were being heard. She promised to look into injustices. She soothed the crumpled feelings of those who thought a personal invitation from the king meant they'd actually get to

see him—a rare privilege these days, unless you were one of the "uncommon figures."

Guests were still showing up, of course. Ones who weren't on the updated list an annoyed Gavilar had provided for her earlier that day.

Vev's golden keys! Navani forcibly painted on an amicable face for the guests. She smiled, she laughed, she waved. Using the reminders and lists she kept in her notebook, she asked after families, new births, and favorite axehounds. She inquired about trade situations, took notes on which lighteyes seemed to be avoiding others. In short, she acted like a queen.

It was emotionally taxing work, but it was her duty. Perhaps someday she'd be able to spend her days tinkering with fabrials and pretending she was a scholar. Today, she'd do her job—though a part of her felt like an impostor. However prestigious her ancient lineage might be, her anxiety whispered that she was really just a backwater country girl wearing someone else's clothing.

Those insecurities had grown stronger lately. *Calm. Calm.* There was no room for that sort of thinking. She rounded the room, pleased to note that Aesudan had found Elhokar and was chatting with him for once—rather than other men. Elhokar did look happy presiding over the pre-feast in his father's absence. Adolin and Renarin were there in stiff uniforms—the former delighting a small group of young women, the latter appearing gangly and awkward as he stood by his brother.

And . . . there was Dalinar. Standing tall. Somehow taller than any man in the room. He wasn't drunk yet, and people orbited him like they might a fire on a cold night—needing to be close, but fearing the true heat of his presence. Those haunted eyes of his, simmering with passion.

Storms alight. She excused herself and made a brief exit up the steps to where she wouldn't feel so warm. It was a bad idea to leave; they were lacking a king, and questions were bound to arise if the queen vanished too. Yet surely everyone could get on without her for a short time. Besides, up here she could check one of Gavilar's hiding places.

She wound her way through the dungeonlike hallways, passing Parshendi carrying drums nearby, speaking a language she did not understand. Why couldn't this place have a little more natural light up here, a few more windows? She'd brought the matter up with Gavilar, but he liked it this way. It gave him more places to hide.

There, she thought, stopping at an intersection. *Voices.*

". . . Being able to bring them back and forth from Braize doesn't mean anything," one said. "It's too close to be a relevant distance."

"It was impossible only a few short years ago," said a deep, powerful voice. Gavilar. "This *is* proof. The Connection is not severed, and the box

allows for travel. Not yet as far as you'd like, but we must start the journey somewhere."

Navani peered around the corner. She could see a door at the end of the short hallway ahead, cracked open, letting the voices leak out. Yes, Gavilar was having a meeting right where she'd expected: in *her* study. It was a cozy little room with a nice window, tucked away in the corner of the second floor. A place she rarely had time to visit, but where people were unlikely to search for Gavilar.

She inched up to peek in through the cracked door. Gavilar Kholin had a presence big enough to fill a room all by himself. He wore a beard, but instead of being unfashionable on him, it was . . . classic. Like a painting come to life, a representation of old Alethkar. Some had thought he might start a trend, but few were able to pull off the look.

Beyond that, there was an air of . . . distortion around Gavilar. Nothing supernatural or nonsensical. It was just that . . . well, you accepted that Gavilar could do whatever he wanted, in defiance of any tradition or logic. For him, it would work out. It always did.

The king was speaking with two men that Navani vaguely recognized. A tall Makabaki man with a birthmark on his cheek and a shorter Vorin man with a round face and a small nose. They'd been called ambassadors from the West, but no kingdom had been given for their home.

The Makabaki one leaned against the bookcase, his arms folded, his face completely expressionless. The Vorin man wrung his hands, reminding Navani of the palace steward, though this man seemed much younger. Somewhere . . . in his twenties? Maybe his thirties? No, he could be older.

On the table between Gavilar and the men lay a group of spheres and gemstones. Navani's breath caught as she saw them. They were arrayed in a variety of colors and brightness, but several seemed strangely off. They glowed with an inverse of light, as if they were little pits of violet darkness, sucking in the color around them.

She'd never seen anything like them before, but gemstones with spren trapped inside could have all kinds of odd appearances and effects. Those . . . they must be meant for fabrials. What was Gavilar doing with spheres, strange light, and distinguished artifabrians? And why wouldn't he talk to her about—

Gavilar suddenly stood up straight and glanced toward the doorway, though Navani hadn't made any sound. Their eyes met. So she pushed open the door as if she had been on her way in. She wasn't spying; she was queen of this palace. She could go where she wished, *particularly* her own study.

"Husband," she said. "There are guests missing you at the gathering. You seem to have lost track of time."

"Gentlemen," Gavilar said to the two ambassadors, "I will need to excuse myself."

The nervous Vorin man ran his hand through his wispy hair. "I want to know more of the project, Gavilar. Plus, you need to know that another of us is here tonight. I spotted her handiwork earlier."

"I have a meeting shortly with Meridas and the others," Gavilar said. "They should have more information for me. We can speak again after that."

"No," the Makabaki man said, his voice sharp. "I doubt we shall."

"There's more here, Nale!" the Vorin man said, though he followed as his friend left. "This is important! I want out. This is the only way. . . ."

"What was that about?" Navani asked as Gavilar closed the door. "Those are no ambassadors. Who are they really?"

Gavilar did not answer. With deliberate motions, he began plucking the spheres off the table and placing them into a pouch.

Navani darted forward and snatched one. "What are these? How did you get spheres that glow like this? Does this have to do with the artifabrians you've invited here?" She looked to him, waiting for some kind of answer, some explanation.

Instead, he held out his hand for her sphere. "This does not concern you, Navani. Return to the feast."

She closed her hand around the sphere. "So I can continue to cover for you? Did you promise Highlord Rine you'd mediate his dispute *tonight* of all times? Do you know how many people are expecting you? And did you say you have *another* meeting to go to now, before the feast begins? Are you simply going to ignore our guests?"

"Do you know," he said softly, "how *tired* I grow of your constant questions, woman?"

"Perhaps try answering one or two, then. It'd be a novel experience, treating your wife like a human being—rather than like a machine built to count the days of the week for you."

He wagged his hand, demanding the sphere.

Instinctively she gripped it tighter. "Why? *Why* do you continue to shut me out? Please, just tell me."

"I deal in secrets you could not handle, Navani. If you knew the scope of what I've begun . . ."

She frowned. The scope of what? He'd already conquered Alethkar. He'd united the highprinces. Was this about how he had turned his eyes toward the Unclaimed Hills? Surely settling a patch of wildlands—populated by nothing more than the odd tribe of parshmen—was nothing compared to what he'd already accomplished.

He took her hand, forced apart her fingers, and removed the sphere. She

didn't fight him; he would not react well. He had never used his strength against her, not in that way, but there had been words. Comments. Threats.

He took the strange transfixing sphere and stashed it in the pouch with the others. He pulled the pouch tight with a taut snap of finality, then tucked it into his pocket.

"You're punishing me, aren't you?" Navani demanded. "You know my love of fabrials. You taunt me *specifically* because you know it will hurt."

"Perhaps," Gavilar said, "you will learn to consider before you speak, Navani. Perhaps you will learn the dangerous price of rumors."

This again? she thought. "*Nothing* happened, Gavilar."

"Do you think I care?" Gavilar said. "Do you think the court cares? To them, lies are as good as facts."

That was true, she realized. Gavilar *didn't* care if she'd been unfaithful to him—and she hadn't. But the things she'd said had started rumors, difficult to smother.

All Gavilar cared about was his legacy. He wanted to be known as a great king, a great leader. That drive had always pushed him, but it was growing into something else lately. He kept asking: Would he be remembered as Alethkar's greatest king? Could he compete with his ancestors, men such as the Sunmaker?

If a king's court thought he couldn't control his own wife, wouldn't that stain his legacy? What good was a kingdom if Gavilar knew that his wife secretly loved his brother? In this, Navani represented a chip in the marble of his all-important legacy.

"Speak to your daughter," Gavilar said, turning toward the door. "I believe I have managed to soothe Amaram's pride. He might take her back, and her time is running out. Few other suitors will consider her; I'll likely need to pay half the kingdom to get rid of the girl if she denies Meridas again."

Navani sniffed. "*You* speak to her. If what you want is so important, maybe you could do it *yourself* for once. Besides, I don't care for Amaram. Jasnah can do better."

He froze, then looked back and spoke in a low, quiet voice. "Jasnah *will* marry Amaram, as I have instructed her. She will put aside this fancy of becoming famous by denying the church. Her arrogance stains the reputation of the entire family."

Navani stepped forward and let her voice grow as cold as his. "You realize that girl still loves you, Gavilar. They all do. Elhokar, Dalinar, the boys . . . they *worship* you. Are you sure you want to reveal to them what you truly are? *They* are your legacy. Treat them with care. They will define how you are remembered."

"Greatness will define me, Navani. No mediocre effort by someone like

Dalinar or my son could undermine that—and I personally doubt Elhokar could rise to even mediocre."

"And what about me?" she said. "I could write your history. Your life. Whatever you think you've done, whatever you think you've accomplished . . . that's ephemeral, Gavilar. *Words on the page* define men to future generations. You spurn me, but I have a grip on what you cherish most. Push me too far, and I *will* start squeezing."

He didn't respond with shouts or rage, but the cold void in his eyes could have consumed kingdoms and left only blackness. He raised his hand to her chin and gently cupped it, a mockery of a once-passionate gesture.

It was more painful than a slap.

"You know why I don't involve you, Navani?" he said softly. "Do you think you can take the truth?"

"Try for once. It would be refreshing."

"You aren't worthy, Navani. You claim to be a scholar, but where are your discoveries? You study light, but you are its opposite. A thing that destroys light. You spend your time wallowing in the muck of the kitchens and obsessing about whether or not some insignificant lighteyes recognizes the right lines on a map.

"These are not the actions of greatness. You are no scholar. You merely like being near them. You are no artifabrian. You are merely a woman who likes trinkets. You have no fame, accomplishment, or capacity of your own. Everything distinctive about you came from someone else. You have no power—you merely like to marry men who have it."

"How dare you—"

"Deny it, Navani," he snapped. "*Deny* that you loved one brother, but married the other. You pretended to adore a man you detested—all because you knew he would be king."

She recoiled from him, pulling out of his grip and turning her head to the side. She closed her eyes and felt tears on her cheeks. It was more complicated than he implied, as she had loved both of them—and Dalinar's intensity had frightened her, so Gavilar had seemed the safer choice.

But there was a truth to Gavilar's accusation. She could lie to herself and say she'd seriously considered Dalinar, but they'd all known she'd eventually choose Gavilar. And she had. He was the more influential of the two.

"You went where the money and power would be greatest," Gavilar said. "Like any common whore. Write whatever you want about me. Say it, shout it, proclaim it. I will outlive your accusations, and my legacy *will* persist. I have discovered the entrance to the realm of gods and legends, and once I join them, my kingdom will never end. *I* will never end."

He left then, closing the door behind him with a quiet click. Even in an argument he controlled the situation.

Trembling, Navani fumbled her way to a seat by the desk, which boiled over with angerspren. And shamespren, which fluttered around her like white and red petals.

Fury made her shake. Fury at him. At herself for not fighting back. At the world, because she knew what he said was at least partially true.

No. Don't let his lies become your truth. Fight it. Teeth gritted, she opened her eyes and began rummaging in her desk for some oil paint and paper.

She began painting, taking care with each calligraphic line. Pride—as if proof to him—compelled her to be meticulous and perfect. The act usually soothed her. The way that neat, orderly lines became words, the way that paint and paper transformed into meaning.

In the end, she had one of the finest glyphwards she'd ever created. It read, simply, *Death. Gift. Death.* She'd drawn each glyph in the shapes of Gavilar's tower or sword heraldry.

The prayer burned eagerly in the lamp flame, flaring bright—and as it did, her catharsis turned to shame. What was she doing? Praying for her husband's death? The shamespren returned in a burst.

How had it come to this? Their arguments grew worse and worse. She *knew* he was not this man, the one he showed her lately. He wasn't like this when he spoke to Dalinar, or to Sadeas, or even—usually—to Jasnah.

Gavilar was better than this. She suspected he knew it too. Tomorrow she would receive flowers. No apology to accompany them, but a gift, usually a bracelet.

Yes, he knew he should be something more. But . . . somehow she brought out the monster in him. And he somehow brought out the weakness in her. She slammed her safehand palm against the table, rubbing her forehead with her other hand.

Storms. It seemed not so long ago that they'd sat conspiring together about the kingdom they would forge. Now they barely spoke without reaching for their sharpest knives—stabbing them right into the most painful spots with an accuracy gained only through longtime familiarity.

She composed herself with effort, redoing her makeup, touching up her hair. She might be the things he said, but *he* was no more than a backwater thug with too much luck and a knack for fooling good men into following him.

If a man like that could pretend to be a king, she could pretend to be a queen. At any rate, they had a kingdom.

At least one of them should try to run it.

Navani didn't hear of the assassination until it had been accomplished.

At the feast, they'd been the model of perfect royalty, cordial to one

another, leading their respective meals. Then Gavilar had left, fleeing as soon as he could find an excuse. At least he'd waited until the dining was finished.

Navani had gone down to bid farewell to the guests. She had implied that Gavilar wasn't *deliberately* snubbing anyone. He was merely exhausted from his extensive touring. Yes, she was certain he'd be holding audience soon. They'd love to visit once the next storm passed. . . .

On and on she went, until each smile made her face feel as if it would crack. She was relieved when a messenger girl came running for her. She stepped away from the departing guests, expecting to hear that an expensive vase had shattered, or that Dalinar was snoring at his table.

Instead, the messenger girl brought Navani over to the palace steward, his face a mask of grief. Eyes reddened, hands shaking, the aged man reached out for her and took her arm—as if for stability. Tears ran down his face, getting caught in his wispy beard.

Seeing his emotion, she realized she rarely thought of the man by his name, rarely thought of him as a person. She'd often treated him like a fixture of the palace, much as one might the statues out front. Much as Gavilar treated her.

"Gereh," she said, taking his hand, embarrassed. "What happened? Are you well? Have we been working you too hard without—"

"The king," the elderly man choked out. "Oh, Brightness, they've taken our king! Those parshmen. Those *barbarians*. Those . . . those *monsters*."

Her immediate suspicion was that Gavilar had found some way to escape the palace, and everyone thought he'd been kidnapped. *That man* . . . she thought, imagining him out in the city with his uncommon visitors, discussing secrets in a dark room.

Gereh held to her tighter. "Brightness, they've *killed* him. King Gavilar is dead."

"Impossible," she said. "He's the most powerful man in the land, perhaps the world. Surrounded by Shardbearers. You are mistaken, Gereh. He's . . ."

He's as enduring as the storms. But of course that wasn't true—it was merely what he wished people to think. *I will never end.* . . . When he said things like that, it was hard to disbelieve him.

She had to see the body before the truth started to seep in at last, chilling her like a winter rain. Gavilar, broken and bloody, lay on a table in the larder—with guards forcibly turning aside the frightened house staff when they asked for explanations.

Navani stood over him. Even with the blood in his beard, the shattered Shardplate, his lack of breath and the gaping wounds in his flesh . . . even

then she wondered if it was a trick. What lay before her was an impossibility. Gavilar Kholin couldn't simply *die* like other men.

She had them show her the fallen balcony, where Gavilar had been found lifeless after dropping from above. Jasnah had witnessed it, they said. The normally unflappable girl sat in the corner, her fisted safehand to her mouth as she cried.

Only then did the shockspren begin to appear around Navani, like triangles of breaking light. Only then did she believe.

Gavilar Kholin was dead.

Sadeas pulled Navani aside and, with genuine sorrow, explained his role in the events. She listened in a numb sense of disconnect. She had been so busy, she hadn't realized that most of the Parshendi had left the palace in secret—fleeing into the darkness moments before their minion attacked. Their leaders had stayed behind to cover up the withdrawal.

In a trance, Navani walked back to the larder and the cold husk of Gavilar Kholin. His discarded shell. From the looks of the attending servants and surgeons, they anticipated grief from her. Wailing perhaps. Certainly there were painspren appearing in droves in the room, even a few rare anguishspren, like teeth growing from the walls.

She felt something *akin* to those emotions. Sorrow? No, not exactly. Regret. If he truly was dead, then . . . that was it. Their last real conversation had been another argument. There was no going back. Always before, she'd been able to tell herself that they'd reconcile. That they'd hunt through the thorns and find a path to return to what they'd been. If not loving, then at least aligned.

Now that would never be. It was over. He was dead, she was a widow, and . . . storms, she'd *prayed* for this. That knowledge stabbed her straight through. She had to hope the Almighty hadn't listened to her foolish pleas written in a moment of fury. Although a part of her had grown to hate Gavilar, she didn't truly want him dead. Did she?

No. No, this was not how it should have ended. And so she felt another emotion. Pity.

Lying there, blood pooling on the tabletop around him, Gavilar Kholin's corpse seemed the ultimate insult to his grand plans. He thought he was eternal, did he? He thought to reach for some grand vision, too important to share with her? Well, the Father of Storms and the Mother of the World ignored the desires of men, no matter how grand.

What she *didn't* feel was grief. His death was meaningful, but it didn't mean anything to *her*. Other than perhaps a way for her children to never have to learn what he'd become.

I will be the better person, Gavilar, she thought, closing his eyes. *For what you once were, I'll let the world pretend. I'll give you your legacy.*

Then she paused. His Shardplate—well, the Plate he was wearing—had broken near the waist. She reached her fingers into his pocket and brushed hogshide leather. She eased out the pouch of spheres he'd been showing off earlier, but found it empty.

Storms. Where had he put them?

Someone in the room coughed, and she became suddenly cognizant of how it looked for her to be rifling through his pockets. Navani took the spheres from her hair, put them into the pouch, then folded it into his hand before resting her forehead on his broken chest. That would appear as if she were returning gifts to him, symbolizing her light becoming his as he died.

Then, with his blood on her face, she stood up and made a show of composing herself. Over the next hours, organizing the chaos of a city turned upside down, she worried she'd get a reputation for callousness. Instead, people seemed to find her sturdiness comforting.

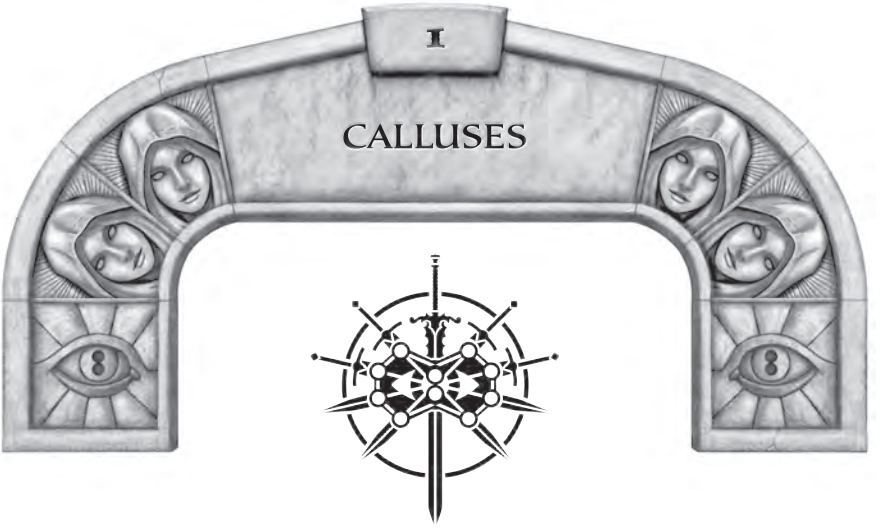
The king was gone, but the kingdom lived on. Gavilar had left this life as he'd lived it: with grand drama that afterward required Navani to pick up the pieces.

PART

ONE

Burdens

KALADIN • SHALLAN • NAVANI •
VENLI • LIRIN



1

CALLUSES

First, you must get a spren to approach.

The type of gemstone is relevant; some spren are naturally more intrigued by certain gemstones. In addition, it is essential to calm the spren with something it knows and loves. A good fire for a flamespren, for example, is a must.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

Lirin was impressed at how calm he felt as he checked the child's gums for scurvy. Years of training as a surgeon served him well today. Breathing exercises—intended to keep his hands steady—worked as well during espionage as they did during surgery.

"Here," he said to the child's mother, digging a small carved carapace chit from his pocket. "Show this to the woman at the dining pavilion. She'll get some juice for your son. Make certain he drinks it all, each morning."

"Very thank you," the woman said in a thick Herdazian accent. She gathered her son close, then looked to Lirin with haunted eyes. "If . . . if child . . . found . . ."

"I will make certain you're notified if we hear of your other children," Lirin promised. "I'm sorry for your loss."

She nodded, wiped her cheeks, and carried the child to the watchpost outside of town. Here, a group of armed parshmen lifted her hood and compared her face to drawings sent by the Fused. Hesina, Lirin's wife, stood nearby to read the descriptions as required.

Behind them, the morning fog obscured Hearthstone. It seemed to be a group of dark, shadowy lumps. Like tumors. Lirin could barely make out

tarps stretched between buildings, offering meager shelter for the many refugees pouring out of Herdaz. Entire streets were closed off, and phantom sounds—plates clinking, people talking—rose through the fog.

Those shanties would never last a storm, of course, but they could be quickly torn down and stowed. There simply wasn't enough housing otherwise. People could pack into stormshelters for a few hours, but couldn't live like that.

He turned and glanced at the line of those waiting for admittance today. It vanished into the fog, attended by swirling insectile hungerspren and exhaustionspren like jets of dust. Storms. How many more people could the town hold? The villages closer to the border must be filled to capacity, if so many were making their way this far inward.

It had been over a year since the coming of the Everstorm and the fall of Alethkar. A year during which the country of Herdaz—Alethkar's smaller neighbor to the northwest—had somehow kept fighting. Two months ago, the enemy had finally decided to crush the kingdom for good. Refugee numbers had increased soon after. As usual, the soldiers fought while the common people—their fields trampled—starved and were forced out of their homes.

Hearthstone did what it could. Aric and the other men—once guards at Roshone's manor, now forbidden weapons—organized the line and kept anyone from sneaking into town before Lirin saw them. He had persuaded Brightness Abiajan that it was essential he inspect each individual. She worried about plague; he just wanted to intercept those who might need treatment.

Her soldiers moved down the line, alert. Parshmen carrying swords. Learning to read, insisting they be called "singers." A year after their awakening, Lirin still found the notions odd. But really, what was it to him? In some ways, little had changed. The same old conflicts consumed the parshmen as easily as they had the Alethi brightlords. People who got a taste of power wanted more, then sought it with the sword. Ordinary people bled, and Lirin was left to stitch them up.

He returned to his work. Lirin had at least a hundred more refugees to see today. Hiding somewhere among them was a man who had authored much of this suffering. He was the reason Lirin was so nervous today. The next person in line was not him, however, but was instead a ragged Alethi man who had lost an arm in battle. Lirin inspected the refugee's wound, but it was a few months old at this point, and there was nothing Lirin could do about the extensive scarring.

Lirin moved his finger back and forth before the man's face, watching his eyes track it. *Shock,* Lirin thought. "Have you suffered recent wounds you're not telling me about?"

"No wounds," the man whispered. "But brigands . . . they took my wife, good surgeon. Took her . . . left me tied to a tree. Just walked off laughing . . ."

Bother. Mental shock wasn't something Lirin could cut out with a scalpel. "Once you enter the town," he said, "look for tent fourteen. Tell the women there I sent you."

The man nodded dully, his stare hollow. Had he registered the words? Memorizing the man's features—greying hair with a cowlick in the back, three large moles on the upper left cheek, and of course the missing arm—Lirin made a note to check that tent for him tonight. Assistants there watched refugees who might turn suicidal. It was, with so many to care for, the best Lirin could manage.

"On with you," Lirin said, gently pushing the man toward the town. "Tent fourteen. Don't forget. I'm sorry for your loss."

The man walked off.

"You say it so easily, surgeon," a voice said from behind.

Lirin spun, then immediately bowed in respect. Abiajan, the new citylady, was a parshwoman with stark white skin and fine red marbling on her cheeks.

"Brightness," Lirin said. "What was that?"

"You told that man you were sorry for his loss," Abiajan said. "You say it so readily to each of them—but you seem to have the compassion of a stone. Do you feel nothing for these people?"

"I feel, Brightness," Lirin said, "but I must be careful not to be overwhelmed by their pain. It's one of the first rules of becoming a surgeon."

"Curious." The parshwoman raised her safehand, which was shrouded in the sleeve of a havah. "Do you remember setting my arm when I was a child?"

"I do." Abiajan had returned—with a new name and a new commission from the Fused—after fleeing with the others following the Everstorm. She had brought many parshmen with her, all from this region, but of those from Hearthstone only Abiajan had returned. She remained closed-lipped about what she had experienced in the intervening months.

"Such a curious memory," she said. "That life feels like a dream now. I remember pain. Confusion. A stern figure bringing me more pain—though I now recognize you were seeking to heal me. So much trouble to go through for a slave child."

"I have never cared who I heal, Brightness. Slave or king."

"I'm sure the fact that Wistiow had paid good money for me had nothing to do with it." She narrowed her eyes at Lirin, and when she next spoke there was a cadence to her words, as if she were speaking the words to a song. "Did you feel for me, the poor confused slave child whose mind had been stolen from her? Did you weep for us, surgeon, and the life we led?"

"A surgeon must not weep," Lirin said softly. "A surgeon cannot *afford* to weep."

"Like a stone," she said again, then shook her head. "Have you seen any plaguespren on these refugees? If those spren get into the city, it could kill everyone."

"Disease isn't caused by spren," Lirin said. "It is spread by contaminated water, improper sanitation, or sometimes by the breath of those who bear it."

"Superstition," she said.

"The wisdom of the Heralds," Lirin replied. "We should be careful." Fragments of old manuscripts—translations of translations of translations—mentioned quick-spreading diseases that had killed tens of thousands. Such things hadn't been recorded in any modern texts he'd been read, but he *had* heard rumors of something strange to the west—a new plague, they were calling it. Details were sparse.

Abiajan moved on without further comment. Her attendants—a group of elevated parshmen and parshwomen—joined her. Though their clothing was of Alethi cut and fashion, the colors were lighter, more muted. The Fused had explained that singers in the past eschewed bright colors, preferring to highlight their skin patterns instead.

Lirin sensed a search for identity in the way Abiajan and the other parshmen acted. Their accents, their dress, their mannerisms—they were all distinctly Alethi. But they grew transfixed whenever the Fused spoke of their ancestors, and they sought ways to emulate those long-dead parshmen.

Lirin turned to the next group of refugees—a complete family for once. Though he should have been happy, he couldn't help wondering how difficult it was going to be to feed five children and parents who were all flagging from poor nutrition.

As he sent them on, a familiar figure moved along the line toward him, shooing away hungerspren. Laral wore a simple servant's dress now, with a gloved hand instead of a sleeve, and she carried a water bucket to the waiting refugees. Laral didn't walk like a servant though. There was a certain . . . determination about the young woman that no forced subservience could smother. The end of the world seemed roughly as bothersome to her as a poor harvest once had.

She paused by Lirin and offered him a drink—taken from her waterskin and poured into a fresh cup as he insisted, rather than ladled straight from the bucket.

"He's three down," Laral whispered as Lirin sipped.

Lirin grunted.

"Shorter than I expected him to be," Laral noted. "He's supposed to be a great general, leader of the Herdazian resistance. He looks more like a traveling merchant."

"Genius comes in all shapes, Laral," Lirin said, waving for her to refill his cup to give an excuse for them to keep talking.

"Still . . ." she said, then fell silent as Durnash passed by, a tall parshman with marbled black and red skin, a sword on his back. Once he was well on his way, she continued softly, "I'm honestly surprised at you, Lirin. Not once have you suggested we turn in this hidden general."

"He'd be executed," Lirin said.

"You think of him as a criminal though, don't you?"

"He bears a terrible responsibility; he perpetuated a war against an overwhelming enemy force. He threw away the lives of his men in a hopeless battle."

"Some would call that heroism."

"Heroism is a myth you tell idealistic young people—specifically when you want them to go bleed for you. It got one of my sons killed and another taken from me. You can keep your heroism and return to me the lives of those wasted on foolish conflicts."

At least it seemed to almost be over. Now that the resistance in Herdaz had finally collapsed, hopefully the refugee flood would slow.

Laral watched him with pale green eyes. She was a keen one. How he wished life had gone in another direction, that old Wistiow had held on a few more years. Lirin might call this woman daughter, and might have both Tien and Kaladin beside him now, working as surgeons.

"I won't turn in the Herdazian general," Lirin said. "Stop looking at me like that. I hate war, but I won't condemn your hero."

"And your son will come fetch him soon?"

"We've sent Kal word. That should be enough. Make sure your husband is ready with his distraction."

She nodded and moved on to offer water to the parshman guards at the town entrance. Lirin got through the next few refugees quickly, then reached a group of cloaked figures. He calmed himself with the quick breathing exercise his master had taught him in the surgery room all those years ago. Although his insides were a storm, Lirin's hands didn't shake as he waved forward the cloaked figures.

"I will need to do an examination," Lirin said softly, "so it doesn't seem unusual when I pull you out of the line."

"Begin with me," said the shortest of the men. The other four shifted their positions, placing themselves carefully around him.

"Don't look so much like you're guarding him, you sodden fools," Lirin hissed. "Here, sit down on the ground. Maybe you'll seem less like a gang of thugs that way."

They did as requested, and Lirin pulled over his stool beside the apparent leader. He bore a thin, silvered mustache on his upper lip, and was

perhaps in his fifties. His sun-leathered skin was darker than most Herdazians'; he could almost have passed for Azish. His eyes were a deep dark brown.

"You're him?" Lirin whispered as he put his ear to the man's chest to check his heartbeat.

"I am," the man said.

Dieno enne Calah. Dieno "the Mink" in Old Herdazian. Hesina had explained that *enne* was an honorific that implied greatness.

One might have expected the Mink—as Laral apparently had—to be a brutal warrior forged on the same anvil as men like Dalinar Kholin or Meridas Amaram. Lirin, however, knew that killers came in all kinds of packages. The Mink might be short and missing a tooth, but there was a power to his lean build, and Lirin spotted not a few scars in his examination. Those around the wrists, in fact . . . those were the scars manacles made on the skin of slaves.

"Thank you," Dieno whispered, "for offering us refuge."

"It wasn't my choice," Lirin said.

"Still, you ensure that the resistance will escape to live on. Heralds bless you, surgeon."

Lirin dug out a bandage, then began wrapping a wound on the man's arm that hadn't been seen to properly. "The Heralds bless us with a quick end to this conflict."

"Yes, with the invaders sent running all the way back to Damnation from which they were spawned."

Lirin continued his work.

"You . . . disagree, surgeon?"

"Your resistance has failed, General," Lirin said, pulling the bandage tight. "Your kingdom has fallen like my own. Further conflict will only leave more men dead."

"Surely you don't intend to obey these monsters."

"I obey the person who holds the sword to my neck, General," Lirin said. "Same as I always have."

He finished his work, then gave the general's four companions cursory examinations. No women. How would the general read messages sent to him?

Lirin made a show of discovering a wound on one man's leg, and—with a little coaching—the man limped on it properly, then let out a painful howl. A poke of a needle made painspren claw up from the ground, shaped like little orange hands.

"That will need surgery," Lirin said loudly. "Or you might lose the leg. No, no complaints. We're going to see to that right away."

He had Aric fetch a litter. Positioning the other four soldiers—the general included—as bearers for that litter gave Lirin an excuse to pull them all out of line.

Now they just needed the distraction. It came in the form of Toralin Roshone: Laral's husband, former citylord. He stumbled out of the fog-shrouded town, wobbling and walking unsteadily.

Lirin waved to the Mink and his soldiers, slowly leading them toward the inspection post. "You aren't armed, are you?" he hissed under his breath.

"We left obvious weapons behind," the Mink replied, "but it will be my face—and not our arms—that betrays us."

"We've prepared for that." *Pray to the Almighty it works.*

As Lirin drew near, he could better make out Roshone. The former citylord's cheeks hung in deflated jowls, still reflecting the weight he'd lost following his son's death seven years ago. Roshone had been ordered to shave his beard, perhaps because he'd been fond of it, and he no longer wore his proud warrior's takama. That had been replaced by the kneepads and short trousers of a crem scraper.

He carried a stool under one arm and muttered in a slurred voice, his wooden peg of a foot scraping stone as he walked. Lirin honestly couldn't tell if Roshone had gotten drunk for the display, or if he was faking. The man drew attention either way. The parshmen manning the inspection post nudged one another, and one hummed to an upbeat rhythm—something they often did when amused.

Roshone picked a building nearby and set down his stool, then—to the delight of the watching parshmen—tried stepping up on it, but missed and stumbled, teetering on his peg, nearly falling.

They loved watching him. Every one of these newly born singers had been owned by one wealthy lighteyes or another. Watching a former citylord reduced to a stumbling drunk who spent his days doing the most menial of jobs? To them it was more captivating than any storyteller's performance.

Lirin stepped up to the guard post. "This one needs immediate surgery," he said, gesturing to the man in the litter. "If I don't get to him now, he might lose a limb. My wife will have the rest of the refugees sit and wait for my return."

Of the three parshmen assigned as inspectors, only Dor bothered to check the "wounded" man's face against the drawings. The Mink was top of the list of dangerous refugees, but Dor didn't spare a glance for the litter bearers. Lirin had noticed the oddity a few days earlier: when he used refugees from the line as labor, the inspectors often fixated solely on the person in the litter.

He'd hoped that with Roshone to provide entertainment, the parshmen would be even more lax. Still, Lirin felt himself sweating as Dor hesitated on one of the pictures. Lirin's letter—returned with the scout who had arrived begging for asylum—had warned the Mink to bring only low-level guards who wouldn't be on the lists. Could it—

The other two parshmen laughed at Roshone, who was trying—despite his drunkenness—to reach the roof of the building and scrape away the crem buildup there. Dor turned and joined them, absently waving Lirin forward.

Lirin shared a brief glance with his wife, who waited nearby. It was a good thing none of the parshmen were facing her, because she was pale as a Shin woman. Lirin probably didn't look much better, but he held in his sigh of relief as he led the Mink and his soldiers forward. He could sequester them in the surgery room, away from the public eye until—

"Everyone stop what you're doing!" a female voice shouted from behind. "Prepare to give deference!"

Lirin felt an immediate urge to bolt. He almost did, but the soldiers simply kept walking at a regular pace. Yes. Pretend that you hadn't heard.

"You, surgeon!" the voice shouted at him. It was Abiajan. Reluctantly Lirin halted, excuses running through his mind. Would she believe he hadn't recognized the Mink? Lirin was already in rough winds with the citylady after insisting on treating Jeber's wounds after the fool had gotten himself strung up and whipped.

Lirin turned around, trying hard to calm his nerves. Abiajan hurried up, and although singers didn't blush, she was clearly flustered. When she spoke, her words had adopted a staccato cadence. "Attend me. We have a visitor."

It took Lirin a moment to process the words. She wasn't demanding an explanation. This was about . . . something else?

"What's wrong, Brightness?" he asked.

Nearby, the Mink and his soldiers stopped, but Lirin could see their arms shifting beneath their cloaks. They'd said they'd left behind "obvious" weapons. Almighty help him, if this turned bloody . . .

"Nothing's wrong," Abiajan said, speaking quickly. "We've been blessed. *Attend me.*" She looked to Dor and the inspectors. "Pass the word. Nobody is to enter or leave the town until I give word otherwise."

"Brightness," Lirin said, gesturing toward the man in the litter. "This man's wound may not appear dire, but I'm certain that if I don't tend to it immediately, he—"

"It will wait." She pointed to the Mink and his men. "You five, wait. Everyone just *wait.* All right. Wait and . . . and you, surgeon, come with me."

She strode away, expecting Lirin to follow. He met the Mink's eyes

and nodded for him to wait, then hurried after the citylady. What could have put her so out of sorts? She'd been practicing a regal air, but had now abandoned it completely.

Lirin crossed the field outside of town, walking alongside the line of refugees, and soon found his answer. A hulking figure easily seven feet tall emerged from the fog, accompanied by a small squad of parshmen with weapons. The dreadful creature had a beard and long hair the color of dried blood, and it seemed to meld with his simple wrap of clothing—as if he wore his hair itself for a covering. He had a pure black skin coloring, with lines of marbled red under his eyes.

Most importantly, he had a jagged carapace unlike any Lirin had seen, with a strange pair of carapace fins—or horns—rising above his ears.

The creature's eyes glowed a soft red. One of the Fused. Here in Hearthstone.

It had been months since Lirin had seen one—and that had been only in passing as a small group had stopped on the way to the battlefront in Herdaz. That group had soared through the air in breezy robes, bearing long spears. They had evoked an ethereal beauty, but the carapace on this creature looked far more wicked—like something one might *expect* to have come from Damnation.

The Fused spoke in a rhythmic language to a smaller figure at his side, a warform parshwoman. *Singer,* Lirin told himself. *Not parshwoman. Use the right term even in your head, so you don't slip when speaking.*

The warform stepped forward to translate for the Fused. From what Lirin had heard, even those Fused who spoke Alethi often used interpreters, as if speaking human tongues were beneath them.

"You," the interpreter said to Lirin, "are the surgeon? You've been inspecting the people today?"

"Yes," Lirin said.

The Fused replied, and again the interpreter translated. "We are searching for a spy. He might be hidden among these refugees."

Lirin felt his mouth go dry. The thing standing above him was a nightmare that should have *remained* a legend, a demon whispered of around the midnight fire. When Lirin tried to speak, the words wouldn't come out, and he had to cough to clear his throat.

At a barked order from the Fused, the soldiers with him spread out to the waiting line. The refugees backed away, and several tried to run, but the parshmen—though small beside the Fused—were warforms, with powerful strength and terrible speed. They caught runners while others began searching through the line, throwing back hoods and inspecting faces.

Don't look behind you at the Mink, Lirin. Don't seem nervous.

"We . . ." Lirin said. "We inspect each person, comparing them to the drawings given us. I promise you. We've been watchful! No need to terrorize these poor refugees."

The interpreter didn't translate Lirin's words for the Fused, but the creature spoke immediately in its own language.

"The one we seek is not on those lists," the interpreter said. "He is a young man, a spy of the most dangerous kind. He would be fit and strong compared to these refugees, though he might have feigned weakness."

"That . . . that could describe any number of people," Lirin said. Could he be in luck? Could this be a coincidence? It might not be about the Mink at all. Lirin felt a moment of hope, like sunlight peeking through stormclouds.

"You would remember this man," the interpreter continued. "Tall for a human, with wavy black hair worn to the shoulders. Clean shaven, he has a slave's brand on his forehead. Including the glyph *shash*."

Slave's brand.

Shash. Dangerous.

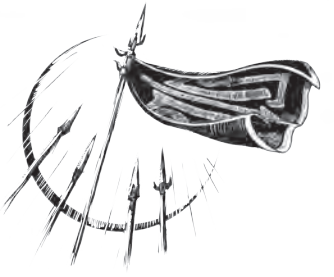
Oh no . . .

Nearby, one of the Fused's soldiers threw back the hood of another cloaked refugee—revealing a face that should have been intimately familiar to Lirin. Yet the harsh man Kaladin had become looked like a crude drawing of the sensitive youth Lirin remembered.

Kaladin immediately burst alight with power. Death had come to visit Hearthstone today, despite Lirin's every effort.

2

SEVERED CORDS



Next, let the spren inspect your trap. The gemstone must not be fully infused, but also cannot be fully dun. Experiments have concluded that seventy percent of maximum Stormlight capacity works best.

If you have done your work correctly, the spren will become fascinated by its soon-to-be prison. It will dance around the stone, peek at it, float around it.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

I told you we'd been spotted," Syl said as Kaladin flared with Stormlight.

Kaladin grunted in reply. Syl formed into a majestic silvery spear as he swept his hand outward—the weapon's appearance forcing back the singers who had been searching for him. Kaladin pointedly avoided looking at his father, to not betray their relationship. Besides, he knew what he would see. Disappointment.

So, nothing new.

Refugees scrambled away in a panic, but the Fused no longer cared about them. The hulking figure turned toward Kaladin, arms folded, and smiled.

I told you, Syl said in Kaladin's mind. *I'm going to keep reminding you until you acknowledge how intelligent I am.*

"This is a new variety," Kaladin said, keeping his spear leveled at the Fused. "You ever seen one of these before?"

No. Seems uglier than most though.

Over the last year, new varieties of Fused had been appearing on the battlefields in a trickle. Kaladin was most familiar with the ones who could fly like Windrunners. Those were called the *shanay-im,* they'd learned; it roughly meant "Those Ones of the Heavens."

Other Fused could not fly; as with the Radiants, each type had their own set of powers. Jasnah posited there would be ten varieties, though Dalinar—offering no explanation of why he knew this—said there would be only nine.

This variety marked the seventh Kaladin had fought. And, winds willing, the seventh he would kill. Kaladin raised his spear to challenge the Fused to single combat, an action that always worked with the Heavenly Ones. This Fused, however, waved for his companions to strike at Kaladin from all sides.

Kaladin responded by Lashing himself upward. As he darted into the sky, Syl automatically lengthened her shape into a long lance ideal for striking at ground objects from the air. Stormlight churned inside Kaladin, daring him to move, to act, to *fight.* But he needed to be careful. There were civilians in the area, including several very dear to him.

"Let's see if we can draw them away," Kaladin said. He Lashed himself downward at an angle so he swooped backward toward the ground. Unfortunately, the fog kept Kaladin from going too far or too high, lest he lose sight of his enemies.

Be careful, Syl said. *We don't know what kinds of powers this new Fused might—*

The fog-shrouded figure in the near distance collapsed suddenly, and something shot out of the body—a small line of red-violet light like a spren. That line of light darted to Kaladin in the blink of an eye, then it *expanded* to re-form the shape of the Fused with a sound like stretching leather mixed with grinding stone.

The Fused appeared in the air right in front of Kaladin. Before Kaladin could react, the Fused had grabbed him by the throat with one hand and by the front of the uniform with another.

Syl yelped, fuzzing to mist—her lance form was far too unwieldy for such a close-quarters fight. The weight of the enormous Fused, with his stony carapace and thick muscles, dragged Kaladin out of the air and slammed him against the ground, flat on his back.

The Fused's constricting fingers cut off Kaladin's airflow, but with Stormlight raging inside him, Kaladin didn't need to breathe. Still, he grabbed the Fused's hands to pry them free. Stormfather! The creature was *strong.* Moving his fingers was like trying to bend steel. Shrugging off the initial panic of being yanked out of the air, Kaladin gathered his wits and

summoned Syl as a dagger. He sliced the Fused's right hand, then his left, leaving the fingers dead.

Those would heal—the Fused, like Radiants, used Light to repair their wounds. But with the creature's fingers dead, Kaladin kicked free with a grunt. He Lashed himself upward again, soaring into the air. Before he could catch his breath, however, a red-violet light streaked through the fog below, looping about itself and zipping up behind Kaladin.

A viselike arm grabbed him in an arm triangle from behind. A second later, a piercing pain stabbed Kaladin between the shoulders as the Fused knifed him in the neck.

Kaladin screamed and felt his limbs go numb as his spinal cord was severed. His Stormlight rushed to heal the wound, but this Fused was plainly experienced at fighting Surgebinders, because he continued to plunge the knife into Kaladin's neck time and time again, keeping him from recovering.

"Kaladin!" Syl said, flitting around him. "Kaladin! What should I do?" She formed into a shield in his hand, but his limp fingers dropped her, and she returned to her spren form.

The Fused's moves were expert, precise as he hung on from behind—he didn't seem to be able to fly when in humanoid shape, only as a ribbon of light. Kaladin felt hot breath on his cheek as the creature stabbed again and again. The part of Kaladin trained by his father considered the wound analytically. Severing of the spine. Repeated infliction of full paralysis. A clever way of dealing with an enemy who could heal. Kaladin's Stormlight would run out quickly at this rate.

The soldier in Kaladin worked more by instinct than deliberate thought, and noticed—despite spinning in the air, grappled by a terrible enemy—that he regained a single moment of mobility before each new stab. So as the tingling feeling rushed through his body, Kaladin bent forward, then *slammed* his head back into that of the Fused.

A flash of pain and white light disrupted Kaladin's sight. He twisted as he felt the Fused's grip slacken, then drop. The creature seized Kaladin by his coat, hanging on—a mere shadow to Kaladin's swimming vision. That was enough. Kaladin swept his hand at the thing's neck, Syl forming as a side sword. Cut through the gemheart, the head, or the neck with a Blade, and—great powers notwithstanding—the Fused would die.

Kaladin's vision recovered enough to let him see a violet-red light burst from the chest of the Fused. He left a body behind each time his soul—or whatever—became a ribbon of red light. Kaladin's Blade sliced the body's head clean off, but the light had already escaped.

Stormwinds. This thing seemed more spren than singer. The discarded

body tumbled through the fog, and Kaladin followed it down, his wounds fully healing. He breathed in a second pouch of spheres as he landed beside the fallen corpse. Could he even kill this being? A Shardblade could cut spren, but that didn't kill them. They re-formed eventually.

Sweat poured down Kaladin's face, his heart thundering inside him. Though Stormlight urged him to move, he stilled himself and watched the fog, searching for signs of the Fused. They'd gotten far enough from the city that he couldn't see anyone else. Just shadowed hills. Empty.

Storms. That was close. As close to death as he'd come in a long, long while. Made all the more alarming by how quickly and unexpectedly the Fused had taken him. There was a danger to feeling like he owned the winds and the sky, to knowing he could heal quickly.

Kaladin turned around slowly, feeling the breeze on his skin. Carefully, he walked over to the lump that remained of the Fused. The corpse—or whatever it was—looked dried out and fragile, the colors faded, like the shell of a snail long dead. The flesh had turned into some kind of stone, porous and light. Kaladin picked up the decapitated head and pressed his thumb into the face, which crumbled like ash. The rest of the body followed on its own a few moments later, then even the carapace disintegrated.

A line of violet-red light came streaking in from the side. Kaladin immediately launched himself upward, narrowly avoiding the grasp of the Fused that formed from the light beneath him. The creature, however, immediately dropped the new body and shot upward after Kaladin as a light. This time Kaladin dodged a little too slowly, and the creature—forming from the light—seized him by the leg.

The Fused heaved upward, using his powerful upper-body strength to climb Kaladin's uniform. By the time the Sylblade formed in Kaladin's hands, the Fused had him in a powerful grip—legs wrapped around his torso, left hand grabbing Kaladin's sword hand and holding it out to the side while he shoved his right forearm into Kaladin's throat. That forced his head up, making it difficult to see the Fused, let alone get leverage against him.

He didn't need leverage, however. Grappling with a Windrunner was a dangerous prospect, for whatever Kaladin could touch, he could Lash. He poured Light into his enemy to Lash the creature away. The Light resisted, as it did when applied to Fused, but Kaladin had enough to push through the resistance.

Kaladin Lashed himself in the other direction, and it soon felt like enormous hands were pulling the two of them apart. The Fused grunted, then said something in his own language. Kaladin dropped the Sylblade and focused on trying to push the enemy away. The Fused was glowing with Stormlight now; it rose off him like luminescent smoke.

Finally the enemy's grip slipped, then he shot away from Kaladin like an arrow from a Shardbow. A fraction of a second later, that relentless red-violet light darted from the chest and headed straight for Kaladin yet again.

Kaladin narrowly avoided it, Lashing himself downward as the Fused formed and reached for him. After missing, the Fused fell through the mists, vanishing. Again Kaladin found himself low on Stormlight, his heart racing. He breathed in his third—of four—pouch of spheres. They'd learned to start wearing those sewn into the inside of their uniforms. Fused knew to try to cut away a Radiant's sphere reserve.

"Wow," Syl said, hovering up beside Kaladin, naturally taking a position where she could watch behind him. "He's good, isn't he?"

"It's more than that," Kaladin said, scanning the featureless fog. "He's attacking with a different strategy than most. I haven't done a lot of grappling."

Wrestling wasn't often seen on the battlefield. At least not a disciplined one. Kaladin was practiced with formations, and was growing more confident with swordplay, but it had been years since he'd trained on how to escape a headlock.

"Where is he?" Syl asked.

"I don't know," Kaladin said. "But we don't have to beat him. We only need to stay out of his grasp long enough for the others to arrive."

It took a few minutes of watching before Syl cried out. "There!" she said, forming a ribbon of light pointing the way toward what she'd seen.

Kaladin didn't wait for further explanation. He Lashed himself away through the fog. The Fused appeared, but grasped empty air as Kaladin dodged. The creature's body fell as the line of light ejected again, but Kaladin began an erratic zigzag pattern, evading the Fused twice more.

This creature used Voidlight to form new bodies somehow. Each one looked identical, with hair as a kind of clothing. He wasn't being reborn each time—he was teleporting, but using the ribbon of light to transfer between locations. They'd met Fused that could fly, and others that had powers like Lightweavers. Perhaps this was the variety whose powers mirrored, in a way, the traveling abilities of Elsecallers.

After the creature materialized the third time, he again briefly gave up the chase. *He can teleport only three times before he needs to rest,* Kaladin guessed. *He attacked in a burst of three each time. So after that, his powers need to regenerate? Or . . . no, he probably needs to go somewhere and fetch more Voidlight.*

Indeed, a few minutes later, the red-violet light returned. Kaladin Lashed himself directly away from the light, picking up speed. Air became a roar around him, and by the fifth Lashing, he was fast enough that the red light couldn't keep up, and dwindled behind.

Not quite so dangerous if you can't reach me, are you? Kaladin thought. The Fused evidently came to the same conclusion, the ribbon of light diving downward through the fog.

Unfortunately, the Fused probably knew Kaladin intended to return to Hearthstone. So, instead of continuing, Kaladin flew down as well. He came to rest on a hilltop overgrown with lumpish rockbuds, their vines spilling out liberally in the humidity.

The Fused stood at the bottom of the hill, looking up. Yes . . . that dark brown wrap he wore *was* hair, from the top of his head, wound long and tight around his body. He broke a carapace spur off his arm—a sharp and jagged weapon—and pointed it toward Kaladin. He had probably used one of those as a dagger when attacking Kaladin's back.

Both spur and hair seemed to imply he couldn't take objects with him when teleporting—so he couldn't keep Voidlight spheres on his person, but had to retreat to refill.

Syl formed as a spear. "I'm ready," Kaladin called. "Come at me."

"So you can run?" the Fused called in Alethi, his voice rough, like stones grinding together. "Watch for me from the corner of your eye, Windrunner. We'll meet again soon." He became a ribbon of red light—leaving another crumbling corpse as he disappeared into the fog.

Kaladin sat down and let out a long breath, Stormlight puffing in front of him and mingling with the fog. That fog would burn away as the sun rose higher, but for now it still blanketed the land, making it feel eerie and forlorn. Like he had accidentally stepped into a dream.

Kaladin was hit with a sudden wave of exhaustion. The dull sense of Stormlight running out, mixed with the usual deflation after a battle. And something more. Something increasingly common these days.

His spear vanished and Syl reappeared, standing in the air in front of him. She'd taken to wearing a stylish dress, ankle-length and sleek, instead of the filmy girlish one. When he'd asked, she'd explained that Adolin had been advising her. Her long, blue-white hair faded to mist, and she didn't wear a safehand sleeve. Why would she? She wasn't human, let alone Vorin.

"Well," she said, hands on hips, "we showed him."

"He almost killed me twice."

"I didn't say *what* we showed him." She turned around, keeping watch in case this was a trick. "You all right?"

"Yeah," Kaladin said.

"You look tired."

"You always say that."

"Because you always look tired, dummy."

He climbed to his feet. "I'll be fine once I get moving."

"You—"

"We are *not* going to argue about this again. I'm fine."

Indeed, he felt better when he got up and drew in a little more Stormlight. So what if the sleepless nights had returned? He'd survived on less sleep before. The slave Kaladin had been would have laughed himself silly to hear that this new Kaladin—lighteyed Shardbearer, a man who enjoyed luxurious housing and warm meals—was upset about a little lost sleep.

"Come on," he said. "If we were spotted on our way here—"

"If?"

"—*because* we were spotted, they'll send more than just one Fused. Heavenly Ones will come for me, and that means the mission is in jeopardy. Let's get back to the town."

She waited expectantly, her arms folded.

"Fine," Kaladin said. "You were right."

"And you should listen to me more."

"And I should listen to you more."

"And therefore you should get more sleep."

"Would that it were so easy," Kaladin said, rising into the air. "Come on."



Veil was growing increasingly upset that nobody had kidnapped her.

She strolled through the warcamp market, in full disguise, idling by shops. She'd spent more than a *month* wearing a fake face out here, making exactly the right comments to exactly the right people. And still no kidnapping. She hadn't even been mugged. What was the world coming to?

I could punch us in the face, Radiant noted, *if it would make you feel better.*

Levity, from Radiant? Veil smiled as she pretended to browse a fruit stand. If Radiant was cracking jokes, they really were getting desperate. Usually Radiant was as funny as . . . as . . .

Usually Radiant is as lighthearted as a chasmfiend, Shallan offered, bleeding to the front of their personality. *One with a particularly large emerald inside . . .*

Yes, that. Veil smiled at the warmth that came from Shallan, and even Radiant, who was coming to enjoy humor. This last year, the three of them had settled into a comfortable balance. They weren't as separate as they'd been, and swapped personas easily.

Things seemed to be going so well. That made Veil worry, of course. Were they going too well?

Never mind that, for now. She moved on from the fruit stand. She'd spent this month in the warcamps wearing the face of a woman named Chanasha: a lowborn lighteyed merchant who had found modest success

hiring out her chull teams to caravans crossing the Shattered Plains. They'd bribed the real woman to lend her face to Veil, and she now resided in a secure location.

Veil turned a corner and strolled down another street. The Sadeas warcamp was much as she remembered it from her days living in these camps—though it was somehow even rougher. The road needed a good scraping; rockbud polyps caused nearby wagons to rattle and bump as they passed. Most of the stalls had a guard prominently stationed near the goods. This wasn't the sort of place where you trusted the local soldiers to police for you.

She passed more than a few luckmerches, selling glyphwards or other charms against the dangerous times. Stormwardens trying to sell lists of coming storms and their dates. She ignored these and moved on to a specific shop, one that carried sturdy boots and hiking shoes. That was what sold well in the warcamps these days. Many customers were travelers passing through. A quick survey of the other merchants would tell the same story. Rations that would keep for a long trip. Repair shops for wagons or carts. And, of course, anything that wasn't reputable enough to have a place at Urithiru.

There were also numerous slave pens. Nearly as many as there were brothels. Once the bulk of the civilians moved to Urithiru, all ten warcamps quickly became a seedy stopover for caravans.

At Radiant's prompting, Veil covertly checked over her shoulder for Adolin's soldiers. They were well out of sight. Good. She did spot Pattern watching from a wall nearby, ready to report to Adolin if needed.

All was in place, and their intelligence indicated her kidnapping *should* happen today. Maybe she needed to prod a little more.

The shoe merchant finally approached her—a stout fellow who had a beard striped with white. With that contrast, Shallan had an urge to draw him, so Veil stepped back and let Shallan emerge to take a Memory of him for her collection.

"Is there anything that interests you, Brightness?" he asked.

Veil emerged again. "How quickly could you get a hundred pairs of these?" she asked, tapping one of the shoes with a reed Chanasha always carried in her pocket.

"A hundred pairs?" the man asked, perking up. "Not long, Brightness. Four days, if my next shipment arrives on time."

"Excellent," she said. "I have a special contact with old Kholin at his silly tower, and can unload a large number if you can get them to me. I'll need a bulk discount, of course."

"Bulk discount?" the man said.

She swiped her reed in the air. "Yes, naturally. If you want to use my contacts to sell to Urithiru, I'll need to have the very best deal."

He rubbed at that beard of his. "You're . . . Chanasha Hasareh, aren't you? I've heard of you."

"Good. You'll know I don't play games." She leaned in and poked him in the chest with her reed. "I've got a way past old Kholin's tariffs, if we move quickly. Four days. Any way you can make it three?"

"Perhaps," he said. "But I am a law-abiding man, Brightness. Why . . . it would be illegal to avoid tariffs."

"Illegal only if we accept that Kholin has authority to *demand* these tariffs. Last I checked, he wasn't our king. He can claim whatever he wants, but now that the storms have changed, the Heralds are going to show up and put him in his place. Mark my words."

Nice work, Radiant thought. *That was well handled.*

Veil tapped the reed on the boots. "A hundred pairs. Three days. I'll send a scribe to haggle details before the end of the day. Deal?"

"Deal."

Chanasha wasn't the smiling type, so Veil didn't favor this merchant with one. She tucked her reed into her sleeve and gave him a curt nod before continuing through the market.

You don't think it was too blatant? Veil asked. *That last part about Dalinar not being king felt over the top.*

Radiant wasn't certain—subtlety wasn't her strong suit—but Shallan approved. They needed to push harder, or she'd never get kidnapped. Even lingering near a dark alleyway—one she knew her marks frequented—drew no attention.

Stifling a sigh, Veil made her way to a winehouse near the market. She'd been coming here for weeks now, and the owners knew her well. Intelligence said they, like the shoe merchant, belonged to the Sons of Honor, the group Veil was hunting.

The serving girl brought Veil inside out of the cool weather to a small, out-of-the-way corner with its own table. Here she could drink in solitude and go over accounts.

Accounts. Blah. She dug them out of her satchel and set them out on the table. The lengths they went to in the name of staying in character. They had to perfectly maintain the illusion, as the real Chanasha never let a day go by without reconciling her accounts. She seemed to find it *relaxing.*

Fortunately, they had Shallan to handle this part; she had some practice with Sebarial's accounts. Veil relaxed, letting Shallan take over. And actually, this wasn't *so* bad. She did doodles along the sides of the margins as she worked, even if it wasn't *quite* in character. Veil acted like it was

imperative that they keep absolutely in character at all times, but Shallan knew they needed to relax a little, now and then.

We could relax by visiting the gambling dens . . . Veil thought.

Part of the reason they had to be so diligent was because these warcamps were a tempting playground for Veil. Gambling without concern for Vorin propriety? Bars that would serve whatever you wanted, no questions asked? The warcamps were a wonderful little storm away from Dalinar Kholin's perfect seat of honesty.

Urithiru was too full of Windrunners, men and women who would fall over themselves to make sure you didn't bruise your elbow on a misplaced table. This place, though. Veil could get to like this place. So, maybe it *was* better that they stayed strictly in character.

Shallan tried to focus on the accounts. She could do these numbers; she'd first trained on accounting when doing her father's ledgers. That had begun before she . . .

Before she . . .

It might be time, Veil whispered. *To remember, once and for all. Everything.*

No, it was not.

But . . .

Shallan retreated immediately. *No, we can't think of that. Take control.*

Veil sat back in the seat as her wine arrived. Fine. She took a long drink and tried to pretend to be doing ledgers. Honestly, she couldn't feel anger at Shallan. She channeled it instead toward Ialai Sadeas. That woman couldn't be content with running a little fiefdom here, making a profit off the caravans and keeping to herself. Oh no. She had to plan storming treason.

And so Veil tried to do ledgers *and* pretend she liked it. She took another long drink. A short time later her brain started to feel fuzzy, and she almost drew in Stormlight to burn off the effect—but stopped. She hadn't ordered anything particularly intoxicating. So if she was getting light-headed . . .

She looked up, her eyes growing unfocused. They'd drugged the wine! *Finally,* she thought before slumping over in her seat.



"I don't understand how hard it can be," Syl was saying as she and Kaladin drew close to Hearthstone. "You humans sleep *literally* every day. You've been practicing it all your lives."

"You'd think that, wouldn't you," Kaladin said, landing with a light step right outside town.

"Obviously I would, since I just said so," she replied, sitting on his shoulder, watching behind them. Her words were lighthearted, but he sensed

in her the same tension he felt, like the air itself was stretched and pulled tight.

Watch for me from the corner of your eye, Windrunner. He felt a phantom pain from his neck, where the Fused had plunged his dagger into Kaladin's spine over and over.

"Even babies can sleep," Syl said. "Only *you* could make something so simple into something extremely difficult."

"Yeah?" Kaladin asked. "And can you do it?"

"Lie down. Pretend to be dead for a while. Get up. Easy. Oh, and since it's you, I'll add the mandatory last step: complain."

Kaladin strode toward the town. Syl would expect a response, but he didn't feel like giving one. Not out of annoyance, but more . . . a kind of general fatigue.

"Kaladin?" she asked.

He'd felt a disconnect these last months. These last years . . . it was as if life for everyone continued, but Kaladin was separate from them, incapable of interacting. Like he was a painting hanging in a hallway, watching life stream past.

"Fine," Syl said. "I'll do your part." Her image fuzzed, and she became a perfect replica of Kaladin, sitting on his own shoulder. "Well well," she said in a growling, low-pitched voice. "Grumble grumble. Get in line, men. Storming rain, ruining otherwise terrible weather. Also, I'm banning toes."

"Toes?"

"People keep tripping!" she continued. "I can't have you all hurting yourselves. So, no toes from now on. Next week we'll try not having feet. Now, go off and get some food. Tomorrow we're going to get up before dawn to practice scowling at one another."

"I'm not *that* bad," Kaladin said, but couldn't help smiling. "Also, your Kaladin voice sounds more like Teft."

She transformed back and sat primly—clearly pleased with herself. And he had to admit he felt more upbeat. *Storms,* he thought. *Where would I be if I hadn't found her?*

The answer was obvious. He'd be dead at the bottom of a chasm, having leaped into the darkness.

As they approached Hearthstone, they found a scene of relative order. The refugees had been returned to a line, and the warform singers who had come with the Fused waited near Kaladin's father and the new citylady, their weapons sheathed. Everyone seemed to understand that their next steps would depend greatly upon the results of Kaladin's duel.

He strode up and seized the air in front of him, the Sylspear forming as a majestic silver weapon. The singers drew their weapons, mostly swords.

"You can fight a Radiant all on your own, if you'd like," Kaladin said. "Alternatively, if you don't feel like dying today, you can gather the singers in this town and retreat a half hour's walk to the east. There's a storm-shelter out that way for people from the outer farms; I'm sure Abiajan can lead you to it. Stay inside until sunset."

The six soldiers rushed him.

Kaladin sighed, drawing in a few more spheres' worth of his Stormlight. The skirmish took about thirty seconds, and left one of the singers dead with her eyes burned out while the others retreated, their weapons shorn in half.

Some would have seen bravery in this attack. For much of Alethi history, common soldiers had been encouraged to throw themselves at Shardbearers. Generals taught that the slightest chance of earning a Shard was worth the incredible risk.

That was stupid enough, but Kaladin wouldn't drop a Shard when killed. He was Radiant, and these soldiers knew it. From what he'd seen, the attitudes of the singer soldiers depended greatly upon the Fused they served. The fact that these had thrown their lives away so wantonly did not speak highly of their master.

Fortunately, the remaining five listened to Abiajan and the other Hearthstone singers who—with some effort—persuaded them that despite fighting bravely, they were now defeated. A short time later, they all went trudging out through the quickly vanishing fog.

Kaladin checked the sky again. *Should be close now,* he thought as he walked over to the checkpoint where his mother waited, a patterned kerchief over her shoulder-length unbraided hair. She gave Kaladin a side hug, holding little Oroden—who reached out his hands for Kaladin to take him.

"You're getting tall!" he said to the boy.

"Gagadin!" the child said, then waved in the air, trying to catch Syl—who always chose to appear to Kaladin's family. She did her usual trick, changing into the shapes of various animals and pouncing around in the air for the child.

"So," Kaladin's mother said, "how is Lyn?"

"Does that *always* have to be your first question?"

"Mother's prerogative," Hesina said. "So?"

"She broke up with him," Syl said, shaped as a tiny glowing axehound. The words seemed odd coming from its mouth. "Right after our last visit."

"Oh, Kaladin," his mother said, pulling him into another side hug. "How's he taking it?"

"He sulked for a good two weeks," Syl said, "but I think he's mostly over it."

"He's *right here,*" Kaladin said.

"And he doesn't ever answer questions about his personal life," Hesina said. "Forcing his poor mother to turn to other, more divine sources."

"See," Syl said, now prancing around as a cremling. "*She* knows how to treat me. With the *dignity* and *respect* I deserve."

"Has he been disrespecting you again, Syl?"

"It's been *at least* a day since he mentioned how great I am."

"It's demonstrably unfair that I have to deal with both of you at once," Kaladin said. "Did that Herdazian general make it to town?"

Hesina gestured toward a nearby building nestled between two homes, one of the wooden sheds for farming equipment. It didn't appear terribly sturdy; some of the boards had been warped and blown loose by a recent storm.

"I hid them in there once the fighting started," Hesina explained.

Kaladin handed Oroden to her, then started toward the shed. "Grab Laral and gather the townspeople. Something big is coming today, and I don't want them to panic."

"Explain what you mean by 'big,' son."

"You'll see," he said.

"Are you going to go talk to your father?"

Kaladin hesitated, then glanced across the foggy field toward the refugees. Townspeople had started to drift out of their homes to see what all the ruckus was about. He couldn't spot his father. "Where did he go?"

"To check whether that parshman you sliced is actually dead."

"Of course he did," Kaladin said with a sigh. "I'll deal with Lirin later."

Inside the shed, several very touchy Herdazians pulled daggers on him as he opened the door. In response, he sucked in a little Stormlight, causing wisps of luminescent smoke to rise from his exposed skin.

"By the Three Gods," whispered one of them, a tall fellow with a ponytail. "It's true. You've returned."

The reaction disturbed Kaladin. This man, as a freedom fighter in Herdaz, *should* have seen Radiants before now. In a perfect world, Dalinar's coalition armies would have been supporting the Herdazian freedom effort for months now.

Only, everyone had given up on Herdaz. The little country had seemed close to collapse, and Dalinar's armies had been licking their wounds from the Battle of Thaylen Field. Then reports had trickled in of a resistance in Herdaz fighting back. Each report sounded like the Herdazians were nearly finished, and so resources were allocated to more winnable fronts. But each time, Herdaz stood strong, relentlessly harrying the enemy. Odium's armies lost tens of thousands fighting in that small, strategically unimportant country.

Though Herdaz had eventually fallen, the blood toll exacted on the enemy had been remarkably high.

"Which of you is the Mink?" Kaladin asked, glowing Stormlight puffing out of his mouth as he spoke.

The tall fellow gestured to the rear of the shed, to where a shadowed figure—shrouded in his cloak—had settled against the wall. Kaladin couldn't make out his face beneath the hood.

"I'm honored to meet the legend himself," Kaladin said, stepping forward. "I've been told to extend you an official invitation to join the coalition army. We will do what we can for your country, but for now Brightlord Dalinar Kholin and Queen Jasnah Kholin are both very eager to meet the man who held against the enemy for so long."

The Mink didn't move. He remained seated, his head bowed. Finally, one of his men moved over and shook the man's shoulder.

The cloak shifted and the body fell limp, exposing rolls of tarps assembled to appear like the figure of a person wearing the cloak. A dummy? What in the Stormfather's unknown name?

The soldiers seemed equally surprised, though the tall one merely sighed and gave Kaladin a resigned look. "He does this sometimes, Brightlord."

"Does what? Turns into rags?"

"He sneaks away," the man explained. "He likes to see if he can do it without us noticing."

One of the other men cursed in Herdazian as he searched behind nearby barrels, eventually uncovering one of the loose boards. It opened into the shadowed alley between buildings.

"We'll find him in town somewhere, I'm sure," the man told Kaladin. "Give us a few minutes to hunt for him."

"One would think he'd avoid playing games," Kaladin said, "considering the dangerous situation."

"You . . . don't know our gancho, Brightlord," the man said. "This is *exactly* how he treats dangerous situations."

"He is no like being caught," another said, shaking his head. "When in danger, he is to vanish."

"And abandon his men?" Kaladin asked, aghast.

"You don't survive like the Mink has without learning to wiggle out of situations others could never escape," the tall Herdazian said. "If we were in danger, he'd try to come back for us. If he couldn't . . . well, we're his guards. Any of us would give our lives so he could escape."

"Is no like he needs us a lot," another said. "The Ganlos Riera herself couldn't catch him!"

"Well, locate him if you can, and pass along my message," Kaladin said.

"We need to be out of this town quickly. I have reason to suspect a larger force of Fused is on its way here."

The Herdazians saluted him, though that wasn't necessary for a member of another country's military. People did odd things around Radiants.

"Well done!" Syl said as he left the shed. "You barely scowled when they called you Brightlord."

"I am what I am," Kaladin said, hiking out past his mother, who was now conferring with Laral and Brightlord Roshone. Kaladin spotted his father organizing some of Roshone's former soldiers, who were trying to corral the refugees. Judging by the smaller line, a few seemed to have run off.

Lirin spotted Kaladin approaching, and his lips tightened. The surgeon was a shorter man—Kaladin got his height from his mother. Lirin stepped away from the group and wiped the sweat from his face and balding head with a handkerchief, then took off his spectacles, polishing them quietly as Kaladin stepped up.

"Father," Kaladin said.

"I had hoped," Lirin said softly, "that our message would inspire you to approach *covertly*."

"I tried," Kaladin said. "But the Fused have set up posts all through the land, watching the sky. The fog unexpectedly cleared up near one of those, and I was exposed. I'd hoped they hadn't seen me, but . . ." He shrugged.

Lirin put his spectacles back on, and both men knew what he was thinking. Lirin had warned that if Kaladin kept visiting, he would bring death to Hearthstone. Today it had come to the singer who had attacked him. Lirin had covered the corpse with a shroud.

"I'm a soldier, Father," Kaladin said. "I fight for these people."

"Any idiot with hands can hold a spear. I trained *your* hands for something better."

"I—" Kaladin stopped himself and took a long, deep breath. He heard a distinctive thumping sound in the distance. *Finally.*

"We can discuss this later," Kaladin said. "Go pack up any supplies you want to take. Quickly. We need to leave."

"Leave?" Lirin said. "I've told you already. The townspeople need me. I'm not going to abandon them."

"I know," Kaladin said, waving toward the sky.

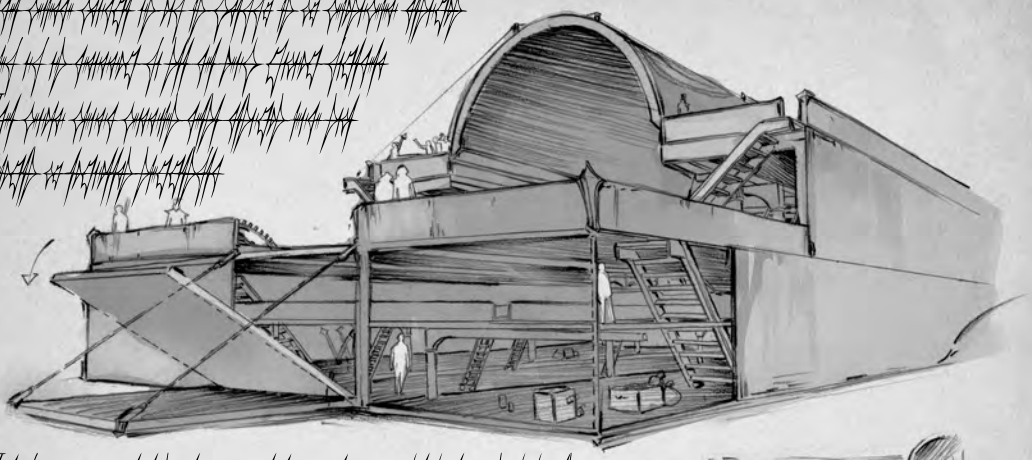
"What are you . . ." Lirin trailed off as an enormous dark shadow emerged from the fog, a vehicle of incredible size flying slowly through the air. To either side, two dozen Windrunners—glowing bright with Stormlight—soared in formation.

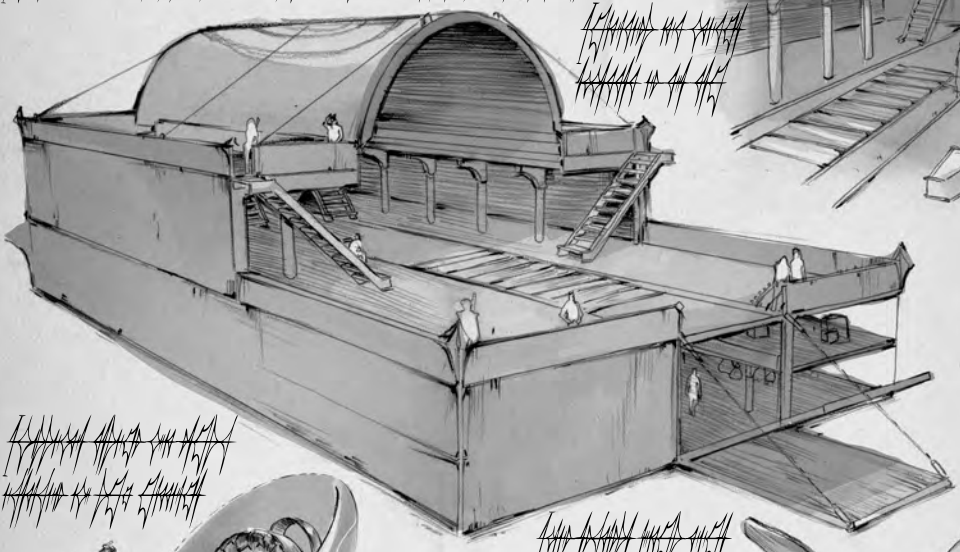
It wasn't a ship so much as a gigantic floating platform. Awespren formed

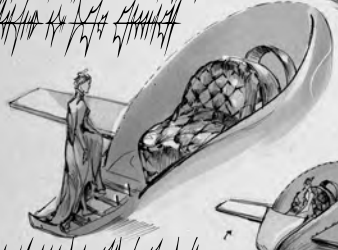
around Lirin anyway, like rings of blue smoke. Well, the first time Kaladin had seen Navani make the platform float, he'd gaped too.

It passed in front of the sun, casting Kaladin and his father into shade.

"You've made it quite clear," Kaladin said, "that you and Mother won't abandon the people of Hearthstone. So I arranged to bring them with us."















The final step in capturing spren is the most tricky, as you must remove the Stormlight from the gemstone. The specific techniques employed by each artifabrian guild are closely guarded secrets, entrusted only to their most senior members.

The easiest method would be to use a larkin—a type of cremling that feasts on Stormlight. That would be wonderful and convenient if the creatures weren't now almost entirely extinct. The wars in Aimia were in part over these seemingly innocent little creatures.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

Navani Kholin leaned out over the side of the flying platform and looked down hundreds of feet to the stones below. It said a lot about where she'd been living that she kept being surprised by how *fertile* Alethkar was. Rockbuds clustered on every surface, except where they'd been cleared for living or farming. Entire fields of wild grasses waved green in the wind, bobbing with lifespren. Trees formed bulwarks against the storms, with interlocking branches as tight as a phalanx.

Here—as opposed to the Shattered Plains or Urithiru—things *grew*. It was the home of her childhood, but now it felt almost alien.

"I *do* wish you wouldn't crane like that, Brightness," said Velat. The middle-aged scholar wore tight braids against the wind. She *did* try to mother everyone around her.

Navani, naturally, leaned out farther. One would think that during more than fifty years of life, she would have found a way to rise above her nat-

ural impetuous streak. Instead she'd rather alarmingly found her way to enough power to simply do as she chose.

Below, her flying platform made a satisfyingly geometric shadow on the stones. Townspeople clustered together, gawking upward as Kaladin and the other Windrunners backed them off to provide room for the landing.

"Brightlord Dalinar," Velat said, "can you talk sense into her, please? She's going to drop right off, I swear it."

"It's *Navani's* ship, Velat," Dalinar said from behind, his voice as steady as steel, as immutable as mathematics. She loved his voice. "I think she'd have me thrown off if I tried to prevent her from enjoying this moment."

"Can't she enjoy it from the *center* of the platform? Perhaps nicely tethered to the deck? With two ropes?"

Navani grinned as the wind tugged at her loose hair. She held the rail with her freehand. "This area is clear of people now. Send the order—a steady descent to the ground."

She'd started this design using old chasm-spanning bridges as a model. After all, this wasn't a warship, but a transport intended to move large groups of people. The end construction was little more than a large wooden rectangle: over a hundred feet long, sixty feet wide, and around forty feet thick to support three decks.

They had built high walls and a roof on the rear portion of the upper deck. The front third was exposed to the air, with a railing around the sides. For most of the trip, Navani's engineers had maintained their command post in the sheltered portion. But with the need for delicate maneuvers today, they'd moved the tables out and bolted them to the deck in the right front corner of the platform.

Right front, she thought. *Should we be using nautical terms instead? But this isn't the ocean. We're flying.*

Flying. It had *worked.* Not just in maneuvers and tests on the Shattered Plains, but on a real mission, flying hundreds of miles.

Behind her, over a dozen ardent engineers tended the open-air command station. Ka—a scribe from one of the Windrunner squads—sent the order to Urithiru via spanreed. When in motion, they couldn't write full instructions—spanreeds had trouble with that. But they could send flashes of light that could be interpreted.

In Urithiru, another group of engineers worked the complex mechanisms that kept this ship in the air. In fact, it used the very same technology that powered spanreeds. When one of them moved, the other moved in concert with it. Well, halves of a gemstone could also be paired so that when one was lowered, the other half—no matter where it was—would rise into the air.

Force was transferred: if the distant half was underneath something

heavy, you'd have trouble lowering yours. Unfortunately, there was some additional decay; the farther apart the two halves were, the more resistance you felt in moving them. But if you could move a pen, why not a guard tower? Why not a carriage? Why not an *entire ship*?

So it was that hundreds of men and chulls worked a system of pulleys connected to a wide lattice of gemstones at Urithiru. When they let their lattice down along the side of the plateau outside the tower, Navani's ship rose up into the sky.

Another lattice, secured on the Shattered Plains and connected to chulls, could then be used to make the ship move forward or backward. The real advancement had come as they'd learned to use aluminum to isolate motion along a plane, and even change the vectors of force. The end result was chulls that could pull for a while, then be turned around—the gemstones temporarily disjoined—to march back the other direction, as all the while the airship continued in a straight line.

Alternating between those two lattices—one to control altitude and a second to control horizontal movement—let Navani's ship *soar*.

Her ship. *Her* ship. She wished she could share it with Elhokar. Though most people remembered her son only as the man who had struggled to replace Gavilar as king, she'd known him as the curious, inquisitive boy who had adored her drawings. He had always enjoyed heights. How he'd have loved the view from this deck . . .

Work on this vessel had helped sustain her during the months following his death. Of course, it hadn't been her math that had finally made this ship a reality. They'd learned about the interactions between conjoined fabrials and aluminum from the Azish scientists. This wasn't the direct result of her engineering schematics either; the ship was a fair bit more mundane in appearance than her original fanciful designs.

Navani merely guided people smarter than she was. So maybe she didn't deserve to grin like a child as she watched it work. She did anyway.

Deciding upon a name had taken her months of deliberation. In the end, however, she'd taken inspiration from the bridges that had inspired her. In specific, the one that had—so many months ago—rescued Dalinar and Adolin from certain death, something she hoped this vessel would do for many others in similarly dire situations.

And so, the world's first air transport had been named the *Fourth Bridge*. With the permission of Highmarshal Kaladin's old team, she'd embedded their old bridge in the center of the deck as a symbol.

Navani stepped away from the ledge and walked to the command station. She heard Velat sigh in relief—the cartographer had tethered herself to the deck with a rope. Navani would have preferred to bring Isasik, but he was

off on one of his mapping expeditions, this time to the eastern part of the Shattered Plains.

Still, she had a full complement of scientists and engineers. White-bearded Falilar was reviewing schematics with Rushu while a host of assistants and scribes ran this way and that, checking structural integrity or measuring Stormlight levels in the gemstones. At this point, there wasn't a whole lot for Navani to do other than stand around and look important. She smiled, recalling Dalinar saying something similar about battlefield generals once the plan was in motion.

The *Fourth Bridge* set down, and the front doors of the bottom level opened to accept passengers. A dozen Edgedancers flowed out toward the town. Glowing with Stormlight, they moved with a strange gait—alternating pushing off with one foot while sliding on the other. They could glide across wood or stone as if it were ice, and gracefully leaped over stones.

The last Edgedancer in the group—a lanky girl who seemed to have grown an entire foot in the last year—missed her jump though, and tripped over a large rock the others had dodged. Navani covered a smile. Being Radiant did not, unfortunately, make one immune to the awkwardness of puberty.

The Edgedancers would usher the townspeople onto the transport and heal those who were wounded or sick. Windrunners darted through the sky to watch for potential problems.

Rather than bother the engineers or soldiers, Navani drifted over to Kmakl, the Thaylen prince consort. Fen's aging husband was a navy man, and Navani had thought he might enjoy joining them on the *Fourth Bridge*'s first mission. He gave her a respectful bow, his eyebrows and long mustaches drooping alongside his face.

"You must think us very disorganized, Admiral," Navani said to him in Thaylen. "No captain's cabin and barely a handful of bolted-down desks for a command station."

"She is an odd ship, to be sure," the elderly sailor replied. "But majestic in her own way. I was listening to your scholars talk, and they were guessing the ship made about five knots on average."

Navani nodded. This mission had begun as an extended endurance test—indeed, Navani hadn't been on the voyage when it had begun. The *Fourth Bridge* had spent weeks flying out over the Steamwater Ocean, taking refuge from storms in laits and coastal coves. During that time, the ship's only crew had been her engineers and a handful of sailors.

Then the request had come from Kaladin. Would they like to try a more rigorous stress test by stealing an entire town out of Alethkar—rescuing

an infamous Herdazian general in the process? Dalinar had made the decision, and the *Fourth Bridge* had changed course toward Alethkar.

Windrunners had delivered the command staff—Navani included—and Radiants to the vessel earlier today.

"Five knots," Navani said. "Not particularly fast, compared to your best ships."

"Pardon, Brightness," he said. "But this is essentially a giant barge—and for that five knots is impressive, even ignoring the fact that it is *flying*." He shook his head. "This ship is faster than an army marching at double time—yet it brings your troops in fresh *and* provides its own mobile high ground for archery support."

Navani couldn't refrain from beaming with pride. "There are still a lot of kinks to work out," she said. "The fans on the rear barely increased speed. We're going to need something better. The manpower involved is enormous."

"If you say so," he said. The elderly man adopted a distant expression, turning and staring out toward the horizon.

"Admiral?" Navani asked. "Are you all right?"

"I'm simply imagining the end of an era. The livelihood I've known, the way of the oceans and the navy . . ."

"We'll continue to need navies," Navani said. "This air transport is merely an additional tool."

"Perhaps, perhaps. But for a moment, imagine a fleet of ordinary ships suffering an attack from one of *these* up above. It wouldn't need trained archers. The flying sailors could drop stones and sink a fleet in minutes. . . ." He glanced to her. "My dear, if these things become ubiquitous, it won't only be navies that are rendered obsolete. I can't decide if I'm glad to be old enough to wish my world a fond farewell, or if I envy the young lads who get to explore this new world."

Navani found herself at a loss for words. She wanted to offer encouragement, but the past that Kmakl regarded with such fondness was . . . well, like waves in water. Gone now, absorbed by the ocean of time. It was the future that excited her.

Kmakl seemed to sense her hesitance, as he smiled. "Don't mind the ramblings of a grouchy old sailor. Look, the Bondsmith wishes your attention. Go and guide us toward a new horizon, Brightness. That is where we'll find success against these invaders."

She gave Kmakl a fond pat on the arm, then hastened off toward Dalinar. He stood near the front center of the deck, and Highmarshal Kaladin was striding toward him accompanied by a bespectacled man. This must be the Windrunner's father—though it took some imagination on her part to see the resemblance. Kaladin was tall, and Lirin was short. The younger

man had that unruly hair falling in a natural curl. Lirin, on the other hand, was balding, with the rest of his hair kept very short.

However, as she stepped up beside Dalinar, she caught Lirin's eyes—and the familial connection became more obvious. That same quiet intensity, that same faintly judgmental gaze that seemed to know too much about you. In that moment she saw two men with the same soul, for all their physical differences.

"Sir," Kaladin said to Dalinar. "My father, the surgeon."

Dalinar nodded his head. "Lirin Stormblessed. It is my honor."

". . . Stormblessed?" Lirin asked. He didn't bow, which Navani found undiplomatic, considering whom he was meeting.

"I assumed you would take your son's house name," Dalinar said.

Lirin glanced at his son, who evidently hadn't told him about his elevation. But he said nothing more, instead turning to give her airship a proper nod of respect.

"This is a magnificent creation," Lirin said. "Do you think it could quickly deliver a mobile hospital, staffed with surgeons, to a battlefield? The lives that could be saved that way . . ."

"An ingenious application," Dalinar said. "Though Edgedancers generally do that job now."

"Oh. Right." Lirin adjusted his spectacles, then finally seemed to find a little respect for Dalinar. "I appreciate what you're doing here, Brightlord Kholin, but can you say how long my people will be trapped on this vehicle?"

"It will be a several-week flight to reach the Shattered Plains," Dalinar said. "But we'll be delivering supplies, blankets, and other items of comfort during the trip. You'll be performing an important function, helping us learn how to better equip these transports. Plus we'll be denying the enemy an important population center and farming community."

Lirin nodded, thoughtful.

"Why don't you inspect the accommodations?" Dalinar offered. "The holds aren't luxurious, but there's space enough for hundreds."

Lirin accepted the dismissal—though he again didn't bow or offer respect as he strode away.

Kaladin hung back. "I apologize for my father, sir. He doesn't deal well with surprises."

"It's all right," Dalinar said. "I can only imagine what these people have been through lately."

"It might not be over quite yet, sir. I was spotted while scouting earlier today. One of the Fused—a variety I've never seen before—came to Hearthstone hunting me. I ran him off, but I have no doubt we'll soon encounter more resistance."

Dalinar tried to remain stoic, but Navani could see his disappointment in the downturn of his lips. "Very well," he said. "I'd hoped the fog might cover us, but that was plainly too convenient. Go alert the other Windrunners, and I'll send word for the Edgedancers to hasten the evacuation."

Kaladin nodded. "I'm running low on Light, sir."

Navani slipped her notebook from her pocket as Dalinar raised his hand and pressed it against Kaladin's chest. There was a faint . . . warping to the air around them, and for a moment she thought she could see into Shadesmar. Another realm, filled with beads of glass and candle flames floating in place of people's souls. She thought, for the briefest moment, she heard a *tone* in the distance. A pure note vibrating through her.

It was gone in a moment, but she wrote her impressions anyway. Dalinar's powers were related to the composition of Stormlight, the three realms, and—ultimately—the very nature of deity. There were secrets here to unlock.

Kaladin's Light was renewed, wisps of it steaming off his skin, visible even in daylight. The spheres he carried would be renewed as well. Somehow Dalinar reached between realms to touch the Almighty's own power, an ability once reserved solely for storms and the things that lived in them.

Appearing invigorated, the young Windrunner stepped across the deck. He knelt and rested his hand on the rectangular patch of wood that stood out from the rest—not newly cut, but dinged and marked from arrows. His old bridge had been embedded to be flush with the rest of the deck. The Bridge Four Windrunners all enacted this same wordless ritual when they left the airship. It took only a moment, then Kaladin launched into the air.

Navani finished her notes, covering a smile as she found Dalinar reading over her shoulder. That was still a decidedly odd experience, for all that she tried to encourage him.

"I've already let Jasnah make notes on what I do," Dalinar said. "Yet each time, you pull out this notebook. What are you looking for, gemheart?"

"I'm not sure yet," she said. "Something is odd about the nature of Urithiru, and I think Bondsmiths might be related to the tower, at least from what we read about the old Radiants." She flipped to another page and showed him some schematics she'd drawn. The tower city of Urithiru had an enormous gemstone construction at its heart—a crystal pillar, a fabrial unlike any she'd ever seen. She was increasingly certain the tower had once been powered by that pillar, as this flying ship was powered by the gemstones her engineers had embedded within the hull. But the tower was broken, barely functioning.

"I tried infusing that pillar," Dalinar said. "It didn't work." He could infuse Stormlight into ordinary spheres, but those tower gemstones had resisted.

"We must be approaching the problem in the wrong way. I can't help thinking if I knew more about Stormlight, the solution would be simple."

She shook her head. The *Fourth Bridge* was an extraordinary accomplishment, but she worried she was failing in a greater task. Urithiru was high in the mountains, where it was too cold to grow plants—yet the tower had numerous fields. People had not only survived up in that harsh environment, they had *thrived.*

How? She knew the tower had once been occupied by a powerful spren named the Sibling. A spren on the level of the Nightwatcher or the Stormfather—and capable of making a Bondsmith. She had to assume the spren, or perhaps something about its relationship with a human, had allowed the tower to function. Unfortunately, the Sibling had died during the Recreance. She wasn't certain what level of "dead" that meant. Was the Sibling dead like the souls of Shardblades that still walked around? Some spren she interviewed said the Sibling was "slumbering," but they treated that as final.

The answers weren't clear, and that left Navani struggling to try to understand. She studied Dalinar and his bond with the Stormfather, hoping it would offer some further clue.

"So," an accented voice said from behind them, "the Alethi really have learned to fly. I should have believed the stories. Only your kind are stubborn enough to bully nature herself."

Navani started, though she was slower to respond than Dalinar, who spun—hand on his side sword—and immediately stepped between Navani and the strange voice. She had to peek around him to see the man who had spoken.

He was a short fellow, missing a tooth, with a flat nose and a jovial expression. His worn cloak and ragged trousers marked him as a refugee. He stood next to Navani's engineer station, where he'd picked up the map that charted the *Fourth Bridge*'s course.

Velat, standing at the center of the desks, yelped when she saw him, then reached over to snatch the paper away.

"Refugees are to gather belowdecks," Navani said, pointing the way back to the steps.

"Good for them," the Herdazian man said. "Your flying boy says you've got a place for me here. Don't know what I think of serving an Alethi. I've spent most of my life trying to stay away from them." He eyed Dalinar. "You specifically, Blackthorn. No offense."

Ah, Navani thought. She'd heard that the Mink wasn't what people expected. She revised her assessment, then glanced toward the Cobalt Guardsmen who were belatedly rushing up from the sides of the ship. They appeared chagrined, but Navani waved them off. She'd ask some pointed

questions later about why they'd been so lax as to let this man sneak up the steps to the command station.

"I find wisdom in men who knew to avoid the person I once was," Dalinar said to the Mink. "But this is a new era, with new enemies. Our past squabbles are of no concern now."

"Squabbles?" the man asked. "So that's the Alethi word for them. Yes, yes. My mastery of your language, you see, is lacking. I'd been mistakenly referring to your actions as 'raping and burning my people.'"

He pulled something from his pocket. Another of Velat's maps. He glanced over his shoulder—to check that she wasn't watching—then unrolled it and cocked his head, inspecting it.

"What remains of my army is secluded in four separate hollows between here and Herdaz," he said. "I have only a few hundred left. Use your flying machine to rescue them, and we'll talk. Alethi bloodlust has cost me many loved ones over the years, but I'd be a fool not to admit the value in pointing it—like the proverbial sword's blade—at *someone else*."

"It will be done," Dalinar said.

Navani didn't miss that—despite claiming earlier that the *Fourth Bridge* was her ship—he agreed to fly it per the Mink's request without so much as consulting her. She tried not to let things like that bother her. It wasn't that her husband didn't respect her—he'd proven on numerous occasions that he did. Dalinar Kholin was simply accustomed to being the most important—and generally most capable—person around. That led a man to surge forward like an advancing stormwall, making decisions as the need arose.

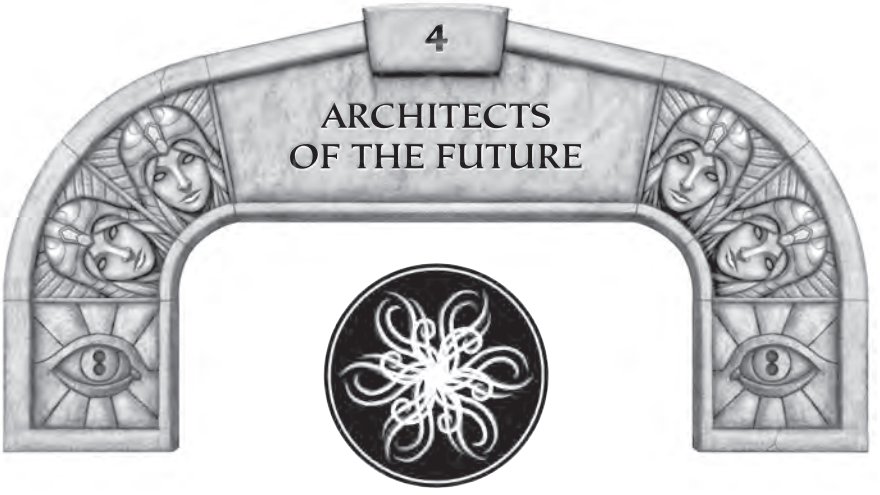
Still, it irked her more than she'd ever admit out loud.

The first of the real refugees began to arrive down below, herded gently by the Edgedancers. Navani focused on the problem at hand: making certain each person was settled and comfortable in the most economical and orderly way possible. She'd drawn up a plan. Unfortunately, the welcome was interrupted as Lyn—a Windrunner woman with long dark hair worn in a braid—slammed down onto the deck.

"Incoming Fused, sir," she reported to Dalinar. "Three full flights of them."

"Kaladin was right, then," he said. "Hopefully we can drive them away. Storms help us if they decide to harry the ship all the way to the Shattered Plains."

That was Navani's worst fear—that flying enemies would be able to strike at and even disable the transport. She had precautions in place to try to prevent that, and it looked like she'd get to witness their initial test firsthand.



4

ARCHITECTS OF THE FUTURE

To draw Stormlight out of a gemstone, I use the Arnist Method. Several large empty gemstones are brought close to the infused one while the spren is inspecting it. Stormlight is slowly absorbed from a small gemstone by a very large gemstone of the same type—and several together can draw the Light out quickly. The method's limitation is, of course, the fact that you need not merely acquire one gemstone for your fabrial, but several larger ones to withdraw the Stormlight.

Other methods must exist, as proven by the extremely large gemstone fabrials created by the Vriztl Guild out of Thaylenah. If Her Majesty would please repeat my request to the guild, this secret is of vital importance to the war effort.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

When they awoke, Radiant immediately took charge and assessed the situation. She had a sack over her head, so nobody saw her disorientation, and she was careful not to move and warn her captors. Shallan had fortunately attached her Lightweaving in such a way that it would keep up their illusory face even while they were unconscious.

Radiant didn't appear to be bound, though she was being carried over someone's shoulder. He smelled of chulls. Or maybe it was the sack.

Her body had activated her powers, healed her, and let her wake sooner than she would have otherwise. Radiant didn't like sneaking about or

pretending, but she trusted that Veil and Shallan knew what they were doing. She instead did her part: judging the danger of the current situation.

She seemed to be fine, though uncomfortable. Her head kept bouncing into the man's back, pressing the sack against her face with each step. Deep down, she felt satisfaction from Veil. They'd nearly given up on this mission. It was nice to know that all their work hadn't been in vain.

Now, where were they taking her? That had proven one of the biggest mysteries: where the Sons of Honor held their little meetings. Shallan's team had managed to get one person into the group months ago, but he hadn't been important enough to be given the information they needed. A lighteyes had been required.

They suspected Ialai had taken over the cult, now that Amaram was dead. Her faction was planning to seize the Oathgate at the center of the Shattered Plains. Unfortunately, Radiant didn't have proof of these facts, and she would *not* move against Ialai without solid proof. Dalinar agreed with her, particularly after what Adolin had done to Ialai's husband.

Too bad he didn't find a way to finish off the pair of them, Veil thought.

That would not have been right, Radiant thought back. *Ialai was no threat to him then.*

Shallan didn't agree, and naturally Veil didn't either, so Radiant let the matter drop. Hopefully Pattern was still following at a distance as instructed. Once the group stopped and began initiating Radiant, the spren would fetch Adolin and the soldiers in case she needed extraction.

Eventually her captors halted, and rough hands hauled her off the shoulder. She closed her eyes and forced herself to remain limp as they set her on the ground. Wet and slimy rock, someplace cool. The sack came off, and she smelled something pungent. When she didn't stir fast enough, someone dumped water on her head.

It was time for Veil to take over. She gasped "awake," shoving aside her first instinct, which was to grab a knife and make short work of whoever had drenched her. Veil wiped her eyes with her safehand sleeve, and found herself someplace dank and humid. Plants on the stone walls had pulled in at the ruckus, and the sky was a distant crack high in the air. Lifespren bobbed around many thick plants and vines.

She was in one of the chasms. Kelek's breath! How had they carried her down into the *chasms* without anyone seeing?

A group of people in black robes stood around her, each holding a brightly shining diamond broam in one palm. She blinked at the sharp light. Their hoods looked a fair bit more comfortable than her sack. Each robe was embroidered with the Double Eye of the Almighty, and Shallan had a fleeting thought, wondering at the seamstress they'd hired to do all this work. What had they told her? "Yes, we want twenty identi-

cal, mysterious robes, sewn with ancient arcane symbols. They're for . . . parties."

Forcing herself to stay in character, Veil gazed up with wonder and confusion, then shied back against the chasm wall, startling a cremling with dark purple colorings.

A figure at the front spoke first, his voice deep and resonant. "Chanasha Hasareh, you have a fine and reputable name. After the legacy of Chanaranach'Elin, Herald of the Common Man. Do you truly wish for their return?"

"I . . ." Veil raised her hand before the light of the spheres. "What is this? What is happening?" *And which one of you is Ialai Sadeas?*

"We are the Sons of Honor," another figure said. Female this time, but not Ialai. "It is our sworn and sacred duty to usher in the return of the Heralds, the return of storms, and the return of our god—the Almighty."

"I . . ." Veil licked her lips. "I don't understand."

"You will," the first voice said. "We've been watching you, and we find your passion to be worthy. You wish to oust the false king, the Blackthorn, and see the kingdom rightfully returned to the highprinces? You wish the justice of the Almighty to fall upon the wicked?"

"Of course," Veil said.

"Excellent," the woman said. "Our faith in you is well placed." Veil was pretty sure that was Ulina, a member of Ialai's inner circle. She'd initially been an unimportant lighteyed scribe, but was rapidly climbing the social ladder in the new power dynamic of the warcamps.

Unfortunately, if Ulina was here, Ialai probably was not. The highprincess often sent Ulina to do things she did not wish to do herself. That indicated Veil had failed in at least one of her goals: she hadn't made "Chanasha" seem important enough to deserve special attention.

"We guided the return of the Radiants," the man said. "Have you wondered why they appeared? Why all of this—the Everstorm, the awakening of the parshmen—is happening? *We* orchestrated it. *We* are the grand architects of the future of Roshar."

Pattern would have enjoyed that lie. Veil found it wanting. A good lie, the delicious kind, hinted at hidden grandeur or further secrets. This was instead the lie of a drunken has-been at the bar, trying to drum up enough pity to get a free drink. It was more pathetic than interesting.

Mraize had explained about this group and their efforts to bring back the Heralds—who had actually never been gone. Gavilar had led them along, used their resources—and their hearts—to further his own goals. During that time, they'd briefly been important movers in the world.

Much of that glory had faded when the old king had fallen, and Amaram had squandered the rest of it. These scattered remnants weren't architects

of the future. They were a loose end, and even Radiant agreed that this task—given them by both Dalinar and secretly Mraize—was worthy. It was time to end the Sons of Honor once and for all.

Veil looked up at the cultists, walking a careful line between appearing cautious and fawning. "The Radiants. You're Radiant?"

"We are something greater," the man said. "But before we say more, you must be initiated."

"I welcome any chance to serve," Veil said, "but . . . this is quite sudden. How can I be sure you're not agents of the false king seeking to trap people like me?"

"All will be made clear in time," the woman said.

"And if I insist on proof?" Veil said.

The figures glanced at one another. Veil got the feeling they hadn't encountered much resistance during their previous recruitments.

"We serve the *rightful* queen of Alethkar," the woman finally said.

"Ialai?" Veil breathed. "Is she here?"

"Initiation first," the man said, gesturing to two others. They approached Veil—including a tall one whose robes came down only to midcalf. He was notably rough as he grabbed her by the arms and hauled her upward, then repositioned her on her knees.

Remember that one, she thought as the other figure removed a glowing device from a black sack. The fabrial was set with two bright garnets, and had a series of intricate wire loops.

Shallan was particularly proud of that design. And although Veil had initially found it showy, she now recognized that was good for this group. They seemed to trust it implicitly as they held it up to her and pressed some buttons. The garnets went dark, and the figure proclaimed, "She bears no illusions."

Selling them that device had been delicious fun. Wearing the guise of a mystic, Veil had used the device to "expose" one of her Lightweavers in a carefully planned scheme. Afterward Veil had charged them double what Shallan had wanted—and the extravagant price had seemed only to make the Sons believe in its power more. Almighty bless them.

"Your initiation!" the man said. "Swear to seek to restore the Heralds, the church, and the Almighty."

"I swear it," Veil said.

"Swear to serve the Sons of Honor and uphold their sacred work."

"I swear it."

"Swear to the true queen of Alethkar, Ialai Sadeas."

"I swear it."

"Swear you do not serve the false spren who bow before Dalinar Kholin."

"I swear it."

"See," the woman said, looking to one of her companions. "If she'd been a Radiant, she couldn't have sworn a false oath."

Oh, you sweet soft breeze, Veil thought. *Bless you for being so naive. We're not all Bondsmiths or their ilk.* The Windrunners or Skybreakers might have had trouble being so glib with a broken promise, but Shallan's order was *founded* on the idea that all people lied, especially to themselves.

She couldn't break an oath to her spren without consequences. But this group of human debris? She wouldn't think twice about it—though Radiant *did* express some discontent.

"Rise, Daughter of Honor," the man said. "Now, we must replace your hood and return you. But fear not; one of us will soon contact you with further instructions and training."

"Wait," Veil said. "Queen Ialai. I need to see her to prove to myself whom I'm serving."

"Perhaps you will earn this privilege," the woman said, sounding smug. "Serve us well, and eventually you will receive greater rewards."

Great. Veil braced herself for what that meant: *more* time in these warcamps pretending to be a fussy lighteyed woman, carefully worming her way up through the ranks. It sounded dreadful.

Unfortunately, Dalinar was genuinely concerned about Ialai's growing influence. This little cult here might be gaudy and overacted, but it would be unwise to let a martial presence grow unchecked. They couldn't risk another incident like Amaram's betrayal, which had cost thousands of lives.

Besides, Mraize considered Ialai to be dangerous. That was recommendation enough for Veil to see the woman brought down. So she'd have to keep working on this—and they'd therefore also have to find more ways to sneak Adolin out to spend time with Shallan. The girl wilted if not given proper loving attention.

For her sake, Veil tried again. "I don't know if waiting is wise," she said to the others as the tall man prepared to replace her sack. "You should know, I have connections to Dalinar Kholin's inner circle. I can feed you information about his plans, if I'm properly incentivized."

"There will be time for that," the woman said. "Later."

"Don't you want to know what he's planning?"

"We already know," the man said, chuckling. "We have a source far closer to him than you."

Wait.

Wait.

Shallan came alert. They had someone near Dalinar? Perhaps they were lying, but . . . could she risk that?

We need to do something, she thought. If Ialai had an operative in Dalinar's inner circle, it could be life-threatening. They didn't have time for Veil to

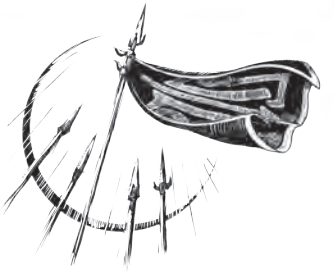
slowly infiltrate her way to the top. They needed to know who this informant was *now*.

Veil stepped back, letting Shallan take over. Radiant could fight, and Veil could lie. But when they needed a problem solved quickly, it was Shallan's turn.

"Wait," Shallan said, standing up and pushing aside the man's hands as he tried to shove the sack over her head. "I'm not who you think I am."

5

BROKEN SPEARS



If the Stormlight in a gemstone is withdrawn quickly enough, a nearby spren can be sucked into the gemstone. This is caused by a similar effect to a pressure differential, created by the sudden withdrawal of Stormlight, though the science of the two phenomena are not identical.

You will be left with a captured spren, to be manipulated as you see fit.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin
to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

The Windrunners rose around Kaladin in a defensive spread. They hung in the air like no skyeel ever could: motionless, equidistant.

Below, refugees stopped—despite the chaos of the evacuation—to stare up through the awespren at the sentinels in blue. There was something natural about the way Windrunners swooped and banked, but it was another matter altogether to be confronted by the surreal sight of a squad of soldiers hanging in the sky as if on wires.

The fog had mostly burned away, giving Kaladin a good view of the Heavenly Ones as they advanced in the distance. The enemy wore solid-colored battle garb, muted save for the occasional bright crimson. They wore robes that trailed behind them several feet, even in battle. Those would be impractical to walk in, but why walk when they could fly?

They'd learned much about the Fused from the Herald Ash. Each of those Heavenly Ones was an ancient entity; ordinary singers had been sacrificed, giving up their bodies and lives to host a Fused soul. Each approaching enemy carried a long lance, and Kaladin envied the way they moved with

the winds. They did it naturally, as if they hadn't merely claimed the sky—as he had—but had instead been *born* to it. Their grace made him feel like a stone tossed briefly into the air.

Three flights would mean fifty-four members. Would Leshwi be among them? He hoped she would, as they needed a rematch. He wasn't certain he'd be able to recognize her, as she'd died last time. He couldn't claim credit; Rock's daughter Cord had done the deed with a well-placed arrow from her Shardbow.

"Three flights is small enough we don't need everyone," Kaladin called to the others. "Squires beneath rank CP4, you drop to the ground and guard the civilians—don't pick a fight with a Fused unless they come at you first. The rest of you, primary engagement protocol."

The newer Windrunners dropped down to the ship with obvious reluctance, but they were disciplined enough not to complain. Like all squires—including the more experienced ones he'd let remain in the air—these hadn't bonded their own spren, and therefore relied on having a nearby full Windrunner knight for their powers.

Kaladin had some three hundred Windrunners at this point—though only around fifty full knights. Almost all of the surviving original members of Bridge Four had bonded a spren by now, as had many of the second wave—those who had joined him soon after he had moved to Dalinar's camp. Even some of the third wave—those who had joined the Windrunners after moving to Urithiru—had found a spren to bond.

There, unfortunately, progress stopped. Kaladin had lines of men and women ready to advance and say the oaths, but there weren't willing honorspren to be found. At this point, there was only a single one he knew of who was willing, but didn't have a bond.

But that was another problem for another time.

Lopen and Drehy moved up beside him, floating slowly, brilliant Shardspears forming in their waiting hands. Kaladin reached overhead and seized his own spear as it formed from mist, then thrust it forward. His Windrunners broke apart, flying out to meet the approaching Heavenly Ones.

Kaladin waited. If Leshwi was among this force, she'd spot him. Ahead, the first of the Heavenly Ones met Windrunners, proffering spears in challenge. Each gesture was an offer of one-on-one combat. His soldiers accepted, instead of ganging up on the enemy. The layman might have found that odd, but Kaladin had learned to use the ways of the Heavenly Ones and their ancient—some might say archaic—methods of fighting.

The paired Windrunners and Fused broke off to engage in contests of skill.

The resulting confrontation looked like two streams of water crashing into one another, then spraying to the sides. In moments, all of the Windrunners were engaged, leaving behind a handful of Fused.

In small-scale skirmishes, the Heavenly Ones preferred to wait for opportunities to fight one-on-one, instead of doubling up on enemies. It wasn't always so—Kaladin had twice been forced to fight multiples at once—but the more Kaladin fought these creatures, the more he respected their ways. He hadn't expected to find honor among the enemy.

As he scanned the unengaged Fused, his eyes focused on one in particular. A tall femalen with a stark red, black, and white skin pattern, marbled like the turbulent mixing of three shades of paint. Though her features were different, the pattern seemed much the same. Plus there was something about the way she held herself, and the way she wore her long crimson and black hair.

She saw him and smiled, then held out her spear. Yes, this was Leshwi. A leader among the Fused—high enough that the others deferred to her, but not so high that she stayed behind during fights. A status similar to Kaladin's own. He held out his spear.

She darted upward, and Kaladin swooped to follow. As he did, an explosion of light expanded below. For a brief moment Kaladin glimpsed Shadesmar, and he soared in a black sky marked by strange clouds flowing like a roadway.

A wave of power surged through the battlefield, causing Windrunners to burst alight. Dalinar had fully opened a perpendicularity, becoming a reservoir of Stormlight that would instantly renew any Radiant who drew near. It was a powerful edge, and one of the reasons they continued to risk bringing the Bondsmith on missions.

Stormlight raged inside Kaladin as he flew after Leshwi. She trailed white and red cloth behind her, slightly longer than the others' garments; it flowed in a swooping, fluid response to her actions as she turned and curved around, leveling her spear at Kaladin and diving toward him.

Fully trained Windrunners had several important advantages in these battles. They had much greater potential speed than the Heavenly Ones, and they had access to Shardweapons. One might have thought these advantages insurmountable, but the Heavenly Ones were ancient, practiced, and cunning. They had trained for *millennia* with their powers, and they could fly forever without running out of Voidlight. They only drained it to heal, and—he'd heard—to perform the occasional rare Lashing.

And, of course, the Fused had a singular terrible edge over Kaladin's people: They were immortal. Kill them, and they'd be reborn in the next Everstorm. They could afford a recklessness that Kaladin could not. As

he and Leshwi clashed—spears slamming together, each grunting as they tried to slide their weapon around and stab the other—Kaladin was forced to pull away first.

Leshwi's spear was lined with a silvery metal that resisted Shardblade cuts. More importantly, it was set with a gemstone at its base. If the weapon struck Kaladin, that gemstone would suck away Kaladin's Stormlight and render him unable to heal—a potentially deadly tool against a Radiant, even one infused by Dalinar's perpendicularity.

As soon as Kaladin broke away, Leshwi dove deeper, trailing fluttering cloth. He followed, Lashing himself downward and plummeting through the battlefield. A beautiful chaos, each pair dancing their own individual contest. Leyten zipped past directly overhead, chasing a Heavenly One dressed in grey-blue. Skar shot beneath Kaladin, nearly colliding with Kara as she scored a hit on her opponent.

Orange singer blood sprayed in the air, individual drops splashing Kaladin on the forehead, other drops chasing him as he swooped toward the ground. Kara didn't have a Blade yet; she would have said the Third Ideal by now, he was certain. If only she had a spren.

Kaladin pulled up near the ground, skimming the stone by inches, orange blood raining down around him. Ahead, Leshwi dodged through a crowd of screaming refugees.

Kaladin followed, darting between Leven the cobbler and his wife. Their horrified screams, however, made him slow. He couldn't risk colliding with bystanders. He flew up to the side, then pulled to a stop in the air, watching, anticipating.

Nearby, Lopen skimmed past. "You all right, gancho?" he called to Kaladin.

"I'm fine," Kaladin said.

"I can fight her if you want a breather!"

Leshwi emerged on the other side, and Kaladin ignored Lopen, zipping after. He and Leshwi brushed the outer buildings of the town, rattling stormshutters. He discarded his spear, and Syl appeared near his head as a ribbon of light. He controlled his general direction with Lashings, using his hands, arms, and the contours of his body to govern fine motions. This much air rushing around him gave him the ability to sculpt his trajectory, almost as if he were swimming.

He increased his speed with another Lashing, but Leshwi dodged down through the crowds again. Her recklessness almost cost her as she buzzed a group under the protection of Godeke the Edgedancer. He was a hair too slow, and his Shardblade only sliced off the end of her trailing robes.

She turned away from the people after that, though she stayed near the ground. The Heavenly One couldn't go as fast as a Windrunner, and so she

focused on sudden turns or weaving around obstacles—requiring Kaladin to moderate his speed and remain unable to press one of his strongest advantages.

He followed, the chase thrilling him in part *because* of how well Leshwi flew. She turned again, this time coursing in close to the *Fourth Bridge*. She slowed as they skimmed along the side of the enormous vehicle, and she peered at the wooden construction keenly.

She's intrigued by the airship, Kaladin thought, following. *She likely wants to gather as much information about it as she can.* In Jasnah's interviews with the two Heralds—who had lived thousands of years—it had come out that they too were amazed by this creation. As incredible as it seemed, modern artifabrians had discovered things that even the Heralds hadn't known.

Kaladin broke off the chase for a moment, instead soaring over the top of the large ship. He spotted Rock standing at the side of the vehicle with his son, delivering water to the refugees. When Rock saw Kaladin gesturing, the large Horneater snatched a spear from a pile placed there and Lashed it into the air. It shot up to Kaladin, who grabbed it, then Lashed himself after Leshwi.

He got on her tail again as she rose in a wild loop. She often tried to wear him down—leading him in intricate chases—before coming in to fight at close quarters.

Syl, flying beside Kaladin, eyed the spear Rock had thrown. Despite the wind rushing in his ears, Kaladin heard her dismissive sniff. Well, she couldn't be infused with Stormlight. Trying to push it into her was like trying to fill an already brimming cup with more water.

The next few turns strained Kaladin's abilities to their fullest as Leshwi dove and dodged through the battlefield. Most of the others were engaged directly in duels, fighting with spear or Blade. Some led one another on chases, but none were as intricate as the weaving Kaladin was required to do.

His focus narrowed. The other combatants became nothing more than obstacles in the air. His entire being, the fullness of his attention, fixated on chasing that figure ahead of him. The roaring air seemed to fade, and Syl shot ahead of him, leaving a trail of light—a beacon for Kaladin to follow.

Windspren darted from the sky and fell in beside him as he curved in a gut-wrenching turn, spinning as Leshwi arrowed between Skar and another Fused. Kaladin followed, sliding directly through the space between the two spears—narrowly avoiding being stabbed—then Lashed himself around to follow Leshwi. Sweating, he gritted his teeth against the force of the turn.

Leshwi glanced back at him, then dove. She was going to make another pass at the *Fourth Bridge*.

Now, Kaladin thought, pouring Light into his weapon as he dove after Leshwi. It tried to pull out of his hand, but he held it back even as he thrust it forward. As Leshwi neared the ground, he finally let go of the spear, launching it toward her.

She, unfortunately, glanced behind at just the right moment, allowing her to narrowly dodge the spear. It crashed to the ground, splintering, the head smashed up into the shaft. Recovering, Leshwi pulled upward in a stunning move, soaring past Kaladin, who—in the moment—lost concentration and nearly collided with the ground.

He landed roughly, catching himself on the stone—hard enough that he'd have broken bones without Stormlight—then cursed and looked upward. Leshwi disappeared into the fight, leaving him behind with an exultant swirling maneuver in the sky. She seemed to revel in losing him when she could.

Kaladin groaned, shaking his hand where he'd hit the ground. His Stormlight healed the sprain in moments, but it still hurt in a phantom way, like the echoing of a loud noise in one's mind after it left one's ears.

Syl appeared in the air before him in the shape of a young woman, hands on her hips. "And don't you dare return!" she shouted up at the departing Fused. "Or we'll . . . um . . . come up with a better insult than this one!" She glanced at Kaladin. "Right?"

"You could have caught her," Kaladin said, "if you'd been flying on your own without me."

"Without you, I'd be as dumb as a rock. And without me you'd fly like one. I think we're better off not worrying about what we could do without the other." She folded her arms. "Besides, what would I do if I caught her? *Glare* at her? I need you for the stabby-stabby part."

He grunted, climbing to his feet. A moment later, a Radiant with a white beard hovered down nearby. It was odd how much difference a small change in perspective could make. Teft had always seemed . . . rumpled. Beard a little ragged, skin a little rough, mood a lot of both.

But hovering in the sky, the glow of Stormlight making his beard shine, he seemed divine. Like a wise god from one of Rock's stories.

"Kaladin, lad?" Teft asked. "You all right?"

"Fine."

"You sure?"

"I'm *fine.* How's the battlefield?"

"Mostly quick engagements," Teft said. "No casualties so far, thank Kelek."

"They're more interested in inspecting the *Fourth Bridge* than they are in killing us," Kaladin said.

"Ah, that makes sense," Teft said. "Shall we try to stop them?"

"No. Navani's fabrials are hidden in the hold. A few flybys won't tell the enemy anything."

Kaladin surveyed the town, then studied the battlefield in the air. Rapid clashes, with the Heavenly Ones generally backing away quickly. "They aren't committed to a full assault; they're testing our defenses and surveying the flying machine. Spread the word. Have our Windrunners lead the enemy in chases; have them fight defensively. Minimize our casualties."

Teft saluted as another group of townspeople was led up into the ship. Roshone ushered them on, and the old blowhard looked *concerned* for the people under his care. Perhaps he'd been taking acting lessons with the Lightweavers.

Atop the ship, Dalinar glowed with a near impenetrable light. Though it wasn't the enormous pillar of radiance he'd created the first time he'd done this, today's beacon was still powerful enough that it was difficult to look directly at it.

In the past, the Fused had focused their attacks on Dalinar. Today they buzzed the ship—but didn't try to strike at the Bondsmith. They were afraid of him for reasons nobody yet understood, and only committed to a full assault on him if they had overwhelming numbers and ground support.

"I'll pass the word," Teft told Kaladin, but seemed hesitant about him. "You *sure* you're well, lad?"

"I'd be better if you'd stop asking."

"Right, then." Teft shot into the sky.

Kaladin dusted himself off, eyeing Syl. First Lopen, then Teft, acting like he was fragile. Had Syl told the others to keep watch over him? Just because he was feeling a tad tired lately?

Well, he didn't have time for that nonsense. A Heavenly One was approaching, red clothing fluttering, spear proffered toward him. It wasn't Leshwi, but Kaladin was happy to accept the challenge. He needed to be up and flying again.



The cultists froze, staring at Shallan through the eyeholes in their hoods. The chasm fell silent, save for the noises of scuttling cremlings. Even the tall man with the sack didn't move, though that wasn't as surprising. He'd be waiting for her to take the lead.

I'm not who you think I am, Shallan had said, implying she was going to make some startling revelation.

Now she had to think of one.

I'm really curious to see where this goes . . . Radiant thought at her.

"I am no simple tradeswoman," Shallan said. "You obviously don't trust me yet—and I'm guessing you've seen the oddities about my lifestyle. You want an explanation, don't you?"

The two lead cultists glanced at one another.

"Of course," the woman said. "Yes, you should not have tried to hide things from us."

Remember Adolin, Radiant thought. *Making a disturbance could be tactically dangerous.*

She'd told Pattern and Adolin—who might be watching by now—that if she was in distress, she'd create a distraction so they could attack. They'd try to take the cultists captive, but it could lose them the chance to capture Ialai.

Hopefully they'd see she wasn't in distress, but was instead prying information out of these people.

"Did you ever wonder why I disappear from the warcamps sometimes?" Shallan asked. "And why I have far more money than I should? I have a second business, a hidden one. With the help of agents at Urithiru, I've been copying schematics the Kholin artifabrians have been developing."

"Schematics?" the woman said. "Like what?"

"Surely you've heard news of the enormous flying platform that left Narak a few weeks ago. I have the plans. I know *exactly* how it was done. I've sold smaller fabrial schematics to Natan buyers, but nothing on this level. I've been searching for a buyer of enough means to purchase this secret."

"Selling military secrets?" the male cultist said. "To other kingdoms? That is treason!"

Says the man wearing a silly hood and trying to depose the Kholin monarchy, Veil thought. *These people . . .*

"It's only treason if you accept Dalinar's family as rightful rulers," Shallan said to him. "I do not. But if we can truly help House Sadeas assert itself . . . These secrets could be worth thousands of broams. I would share them with Queen Sadeas."

"We will take them to her," the woman said.

Radiant affixed her with a calculated stare, level and calm. A leader's stare, one Shallan had sketched a dozen times over as she watched Dalinar interact with people. The stare of one in power, who didn't need to say it.

You will not take this from me, the stare said. *If you want favor for having been involved in this revelation, you'll do it by assisting me—not by taking it for yourself.*

"I'm certain that someday this might—" the man began.

"Show me," the woman said, interrupting him.

Hooked, Veil thought. *Nice work, you two.*

"I've got some of the plans in my satchel," Shallan said.

"We searched the satchel," the woman said, waving to a nearby cultist to produce the bag. "There were no plans."

"You think I'd be foolish enough to leave them where they could be discovered?" Shallan said, taking the satchel. She dug inside and covertly took a quick breath of Light as she pulled out a small notebook. She flipped to a rear page, then took out a charcoal pencil. Before the others could crowd around, she breathed out carefully, snapping a Lightweaving in place. Fortunately, she'd been asked to help with the schematics—Shallan had real trouble creating a Lightweaving of something she hadn't previously drawn.

By the time the lead cultists had positioned themselves to peer over her shoulder, she had the Lightweaving in place. As she carefully rubbed her charcoal across the page, it seemed to reveal a hidden schematic.

Your turn, Shallan said as Veil took over.

"You trace the schematic on a piece of paper above this one," Veil explained, "and press very hard. That leaves an indentation in the page. A light brush of charcoal reveals it. This isn't the entire thing, naturally; I keep it as proof for potential buyers."

Shallan felt a little stab of pride at the complicated illusion. It appeared exactly as she wanted it to, making a complicated series of lines and notations appear magically on the page as she did the rubbing.

"I can't make any sense of that," the man complained.

The woman, however, leaned closer. "Replace her sack," the woman said. "We'll bring the matter to the queen. This might be interesting enough for her to grant an audience."

Veil steeled herself as a cultist snatched away her notebook, probably to try applying charcoal to the other pages, which would of course do nothing. The tall man pulled the sack over her head, but as he did so he leaned close.

"What now?" he whispered to Veil. "This feels like trouble."

Don't break character, Red, she thought, bowing her head. She needed to get to Ialai and discover if the woman really did have a spy in Dalinar's court. That meant taking a few risks.

Red was the first one they'd embedded into the Sons of Honor, but his persona—that of a darkeyed workman—hadn't been important enough to get any real access. Hopefully, together they could—

Shouts rose nearby in the chasm. Veil spun, blinded by the sack. Storms alight. What was that?

"We've been followed," the male leader of the conspirators said. "To arms! Those are Kholin troops!"

Damnation, Veil thought. *Radiant was right.*

Adolin, seeing her sack replaced, had decided it was time to take this group captive and cut their losses.



Kaladin traded blows with his enemy, landing one hit, then another. As he came back around, the Heavenly One thrust down with his lance. But Kaladin had drilled spearplay until he could practically fight in his sleep. Hovering in the air, surging with Stormlight, his body knew what to do and deflected the thrust.

Kaladin made his own lunge, scoring another hit. As they danced, they rotated around one another. Much of Kaladin's formal training had been with spear and shield, intended for formation tactics, but he'd always loved the longspear, wielded two-handed. There was a power to it, a control. He could move the weapon so much more deftly this way.

This Heavenly One wasn't as good as Leshwi. Kaladin scored yet another slice along the enemy's arm. The Shardspear did no physical damage other than greying the flesh around where the cut would have been. It soon healed, but each healing came more slowly. The enemy's Voidlight was running out.

The enemy started humming one of the Fused songs, gritting his teeth as he tried to spear Kaladin. They saw Kaladin as a challenge, a test. Leshwi always got to fight Kaladin first, but if he disengaged or defeated her, another was always waiting. A part of him wondered if this was why he was so tired lately. Even little skirmishes were a slog, never giving him a break.

A deeper part of him knew that wasn't the reason at all.

His enemy prepared to strike, and Kaladin reached with his off hand for one of his belt knives, then whipped it into the air. The Fused overreacted and fumbled his defense. That let Kaladin score a spear hit along the thigh. Defeating a Fused was a test in endurance. Cut them enough, and they slowed. Cut them more, and they stopped healing entirely.

His opponent's humming grew louder, and Kaladin sensed the wounds weren't healing any longer. Time to go for the kill. He dodged a strike—then changed Syl into a hammer, which he swung down on the enemy's weapon, smashing it. The powerful blow threw the Heavenly One completely off balance.

Kaladin dropped the hammer and thrust his hands forward; Syl was instantly a spear, steady in his grip. His aim was true, and he speared the enemy right through the arm. The Fused grunted as Kaladin whipped the spear out by reflex, then spun it around and leveled it at the enemy's neck.

The Fused met his eyes, then licked his lips, waiting. The creature began to slowly drop from the sky, his Light expended, his powers failing.

Killing him does no good, Kaladin thought. *He'll simply be reborn.* Still, that was one Fused out of combat for a few days at least.

He's out anyway, he thought as the creature's arm flopped down at his side, useless and dead from the Shardspear cut. *What good is another death?*

Kaladin lowered his spear, then gestured to the side. "Go," he said. Some of them understood Alethi.

The Fused hummed a different tone, then raised his broken spear to Kaladin—holding it in his off hand. The Heavenly One dropped the weapon toward the rocks below. The creature bowed his head to Kaladin, then drifted away.

Now, where had—

A ribbon of red light streaked in from the side.

Kaladin immediately Lashed himself backward and spun, weapon out. He hadn't realized he'd been dedicating a part of his energy to watching for that red light.

It darted away from him now that he'd noticed it. Kaladin tried to follow it with his eyes, but couldn't keep track of it as it maneuvered among the homes below.

Kaladin breathed out. The fog was all but gone, letting him scan the entirety of Hearthstone—a little cluster of homes bleeding people toward the *Fourth Bridge* in a steady stream. The citylord's manor stood on the hilltop at the far edge of town, overlooking them all. It had once seemed so large and imposing to Kaladin.

"Did you see that light?" he asked Syl.

Yes. That was the Fused from before. When she was a spear, her words came directly into his mind.

"My quick reaction scared it away," Kaladin said.

"Kal?" a feminine voice called. Lyn came swooping in, wearing a brilliant blue Alethi uniform, Stormlight puffing from her lips as she spoke. She wore her long dark hair in a tight braid, and carried a functional—but ordinary—lance under her arm. "You all right?"

"I'm fine," he said.

"You sure?" she said. "You seem distracted. I don't want anyone stabbing you in the back."

"Now you care?" he snapped.

"Of course I do," she said. "Not wanting us to be more doesn't mean I stopped caring."

He glanced at her, then had to turn away because he could see genuine concern in her face. Their relationship hadn't been right. He knew that as well as she did, and the pain he felt wasn't for the end of that. Not specifically.

It was simply one more thing weighing him down. One more loss.

"I'm *fine*," he said, then glanced to the side as he felt the power from Dalinar end. Was something wrong?

No, the time had merely passed. Dalinar generally didn't keep his perpendicularity open for entire battles, but instead used it periodically to recharge spheres and Radiants. Holding it open was taxing for him.

"Run a message to the other Windrunners in the air," Kaladin said to Lyn. "Tell them I spotted that new Fused, the one I told them about earlier. He moved toward me as a ribbon of red light—like a windspren, but the wrong color. He can fly incredibly quickly, and could strike at one of us up here."

"Will do . . ." she said. "If you're sure you don't need any help . . ."

Kaladin pointedly ignored that comment and dropped toward the ship. He wanted to make sure Dalinar was being watched, in case the strange new Fused came after him.

Syl landed on his shoulder and rode downward with her hands primly on her knees.

"The others keep checking on me," Kaladin said to her, "like I'm some delicate piece of glasswork ready to fall off the shelf at any moment and break. Is that your doing?"

"What? That your team is considerate enough to watch out for one another? That would be *your* fault, I'd say."

He landed on the deck of the ship, then turned his head and looked straight at her.

"I didn't say anything to them," she told him. "I know how anxious the nightmares make you. It would be worse if I told anyone about them."

Great. He hadn't liked the idea of her talking to the others, but at least it would have explained why everyone was acting so strangely. He crossed over to Dalinar, who was speaking with Roshone, who had come up from below.

"The town's new leaders keep prisoners in the manor's stormcellar, Brightlord," Roshone was saying, pointing at his former dwelling. "There are currently only two people there, but it would be a crime to abandon them."

"Agreed," Dalinar said. "I'll send one of the Edgedancers to free them."

"I will accompany them," Roshone said, "with your permission. I know the layout of the building."

Kaladin sniffed. "Look at him," he whispered to Syl, "acting like some hero now that Dalinar is around to impress."

Syl reached up and flicked Kaladin on the ear, and he felt a surprisingly sharp pain, like a jolt of power.

"Hey!" he said.

"Stop being a stumer."

"I'm not being a . . . What's a stumer?"

"I don't know," Syl admitted. "It's a word I heard Lift using. Regardless, I'm pretty sure *you're* being one right now."

Kaladin glanced at Roshone, who headed toward the manor with Godeke. "Fine," Kaladin said. "He has maybe improved. A little."

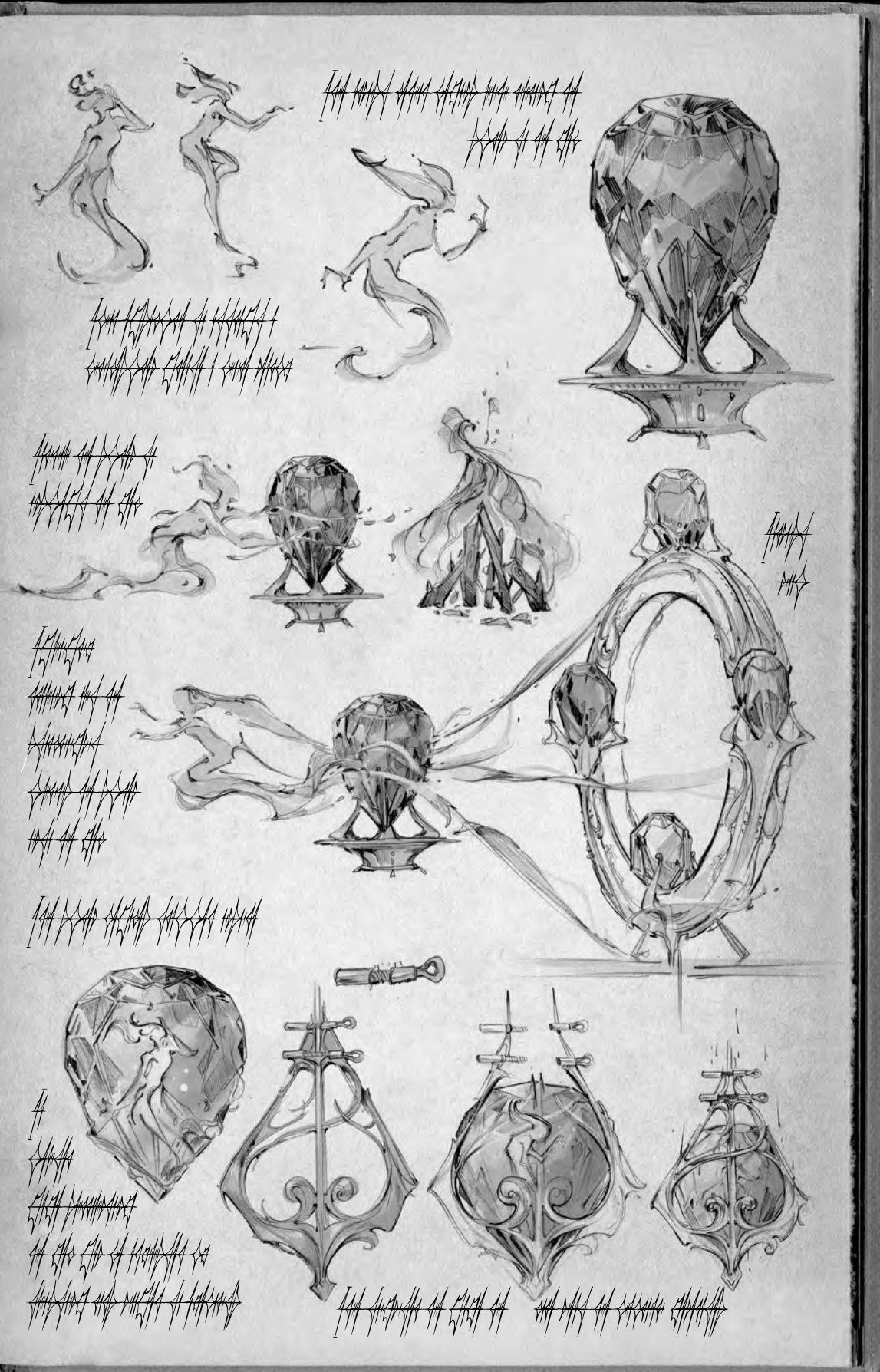
Roshone was the same petty lighteyes he'd always been. But during this last year, Kaladin had seen another side to the former citylord. He seemed to legitimately care. As if realizing, only now, his responsibility.

He'd still gotten Tien killed. For that, Kaladin didn't think he could ever forgive Roshone. At the same time, Kaladin didn't intend to forgive *himself* for that loss either. So at least Roshone was in good company.

Rock and Dabbid were helping the refugees, so Kaladin told them he'd seen the strange Fused again. Rock nodded, understanding immediately. He waved to his older children—including Cord, who carried Amaram's old Shardbow strapped to her back and wore the full set of Shardplate she'd found in Aimia.

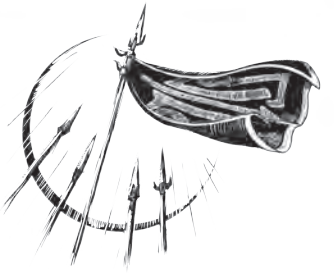
Together they moved in a not-so-subtle way over near Dalinar, keeping a watch on the sky for red lines of light. Kaladin glanced upward as one of the Heavenly Ones shot past, chased by Sigzil.

"That's Leshwi," Kaladin said, launching into the air.



6

A LOOSE THREAD



With a captured spren, you may begin designing a proper fabrial. It is a closely guarded secret of artifabrians that spren, when trapped, respond to different types of metals in different ways. A wire housing for the fabrial, called a "cage," is essential to controlling the device.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

Radiant backed up, the sack on her head. She pressed her fingers against the cool stone of the wall as the shouting continued. Yes, that was Adolin's voice. As she'd feared, he'd come to rescue her.

Radiant considered pulling off the hood, summoning her Shardblade, and demanding the conspirators surrender. However, she acknowledged what Veil and Shallan wanted. They needed to meet Ialai face-to-face.

A scraping sounded nearby. Radiant turned toward it. Rock on rock. And . . . some sort of mechanism turning?

She strode blindly toward the sound. "Bring me," she shouted. "Don't leave me to them!"

"Fine," Ulina said from somewhere nearby. "You two, grab her. You, guard the doorway from inside. Try to jam the mechanism closed. Quickly!"

Rough hands grabbed Radiant by the shoulders and pulled her along, steering her into what sounded—from the echoing footsteps—like a tunnel. Stone ground on stone behind them, cutting off the noise of the skirmish in the chasm. At least she knew how the cultists were getting in and out

of the chasms. Radiant stumbled and purposefully fell to her knees so she could put her hands on the ground. Smooth, cut rock. Done with a Shardblade, she suspected.

The others forced her to her feet and pushed her up an incline. They didn't remove the sack, even when she protested that it wasn't necessary.

Well, a tunnel made sense. This warcamp had been occupied by Sadeas and Ialai for years before everyone else moved to Urithiru. They would have wanted a secret escape route from their warcamp, particularly during the early years on the Plains when everyone—Adolin said—had been so certain the princedoms would shatter apart and start fighting one another.

The tunnel eventually reached another door, and this one opened into what sounded like a small room. A cellar perhaps? Those weren't common on the Shattered Plains—too easy to flood—but the richer lighteyes had them for chilling wine.

The conspirators muttered to themselves about what to do. Four people. Judging by the sounds of rustling cloth, they were removing their robes. Probably had ordinary clothing underneath. Red wasn't here; he'd have squeezed her arm to let her know. So she was alone.

The others eventually hauled her up some steps and then outside; she felt wind on her hands and warm sunlight on her skin. She pretended to be pliable and easy to move, though she waited—ready to attack—in case this was some kind of ruse, and she was assaulted.

They led her through the streets quickly, the hood still on. Shallan took over, as she had an incredible—likely supernatural—ability to sense and memorize direction. She mapped their path in her head. Sneaky little cremlings; they led her in a large double loop, ending at a location near where they'd emerged from the cellar.

The hike up had taken only a few minutes, so they had to be near the eastern edge of the warcamp. Perhaps the fortress there? That would put her near the old Sadeas lumberyards, where Kaladin had spent months building Bridge Four from the broken remnants of the men delivered there to die. She wondered if anyone in the area had found it odd that they were leading around a woman with a sack on her head. Judging by how upset they seemed as they finally pulled her into a building, they weren't thinking very clearly. They forced her down into a chair, then left, boots thumping on wood.

She soon heard them arguing in a nearby room. Carefully, Veil reached up and removed her hood. The cultist left guarding her—a tall man with a scar on his chin—didn't demand she replace it. She was sitting in a stiff wooden chair right inside the door of a stone room with a large circular

rug. The rug didn't do much to liven the otherwise bare chamber. These warcamp buildings were so fortresslike: few windows, little ornamentation.

Shallan had always viewed Sadeas as a blowhard. A fortress like this—and the escape tunnel she'd traveled through—made Veil revise that assessment. She sifted through Shallan's memories, and what *Veil* saw in the man was pure craftiness.

Shallan didn't have many memories of Ialai, but Veil knew enough to be careful. Highprince Thanadal had started this new "kingdom" at the warcamps. But soon after Ialai had set up here, Thanadal had been found dead, supposedly knifed by a prostitute. Vamah—the other highprince who hadn't supported Dalinar—had fled the warcamps in the night. He seemed to believe Ialai's lie that Dalinar had ordered the assassination.

That left Ialai Sadeas the one true remaining power here in the warcamps. She had an army, had co-opted the Sons of Honor, and was demanding tariffs from arriving trade caravans. This woman remained a thorn, a reminder of the old Alethkar full of squabbling lighteyes always eyeing one another's lands.

Veil listened as best she could to the arguments coming from the next room; the conspirators seemed frustrated that they'd lost so many in the strike. They seemed frantic, and worried that it was "all falling apart."

At last, the door swung open and three people stormed out. Veil recognized Ulina, the woman she'd suspected earlier from her voice. They were followed by a lighteyed soldier in Sadeas colors.

The guard gestured for Veil to enter, so she rose and carefully poked her head into the room. It was larger than the antechamber, with very narrow windows. Despite the attempt to soften it with a rug, couches, and pillows, it still felt like a fortress. A place for lighteyes to hole up in during storms or to fall back to if attacked.

Ialai Sadeas sat at a table on the far side of the room, shrouded in shadows, away from the windows and the glowing sphere lamps on the walls. Near to her sat a large hutch with a roll top covering its front.

All right, Veil thought, walking forward. *We've found her. Have we decided what we're going to do with her?*

She knew Radiant's vote: get her to say something incriminating, then bring her in. Veil, however, hadn't pushed this mission solely to gather evidence for Dalinar. She hadn't even done it because the Ghostbloods saw Ialai as a threat. Veil had done it because this woman stubbornly continued to jeopardize everything Shallan loved.

Dalinar and Jasnah needed to keep their eyes on the real prize: reclaiming Alethkar. And so, Veil had determined to snip this particular loose

thread. Adolin had killed Highprince Sadeas in a moment of honest passion. Veil had come to finish the job he'd begun.

Today Veil intended to assassinate Ialai Sadeas.



The hardest thing in the world for Kaladin to do was nothing. It was excruciating to watch one of his soldiers fight for his life against a skilled, dangerous opponent—and do nothing to help.

Leshwi was a being of incredible age, the spirit of a singer long dead turned into something more akin to a spren—a force of nature. Sigzil was a capable fighter, but far from the order's best. His true talents lay in his understanding of numbers, his knowledge of other cultures, and his ability to remain focused and practical in situations where others lost their heads.

He was quickly forced onto the defensive. Leshwi loomed over him—thrusting down with her spear—then swung around and stabbed from the side. She expertly flowed from one attack to the next, forcing Sigzil to keep spinning around, barely deflecting or dodging her strikes.

Kaladin Lashed himself forward, fingers tight on his spear. It was vital his team keep to the Heavenly Ones' sense of honor. So long as the enemy agreed to one-on-one combat, his soldiers were never in danger of being overwhelmed and wiped out.

The forces on the ground might mercilessly brutalize one another, but up here—in the skies—they'd found mutual respect. The respect of combatants who *would* kill one another, but as part of a contest, not a slaughter. Break that unspoken rule, gang up on Leshwi now, and that precarious balance would end.

Leshwi shot forward and speared Sigzil in the chest. Her weapon impaled him straight through, bursting from the back of his blue uniform, slick with blood. He struggled, gasping, Stormlight leaking from his mouth. Leshwi hummed a loud tone, and the gemstone on her spear began to glow, sucking Stormlight from her prey.

Kaladin groaned, the deaths of so many he'd failed flashing before him. Tien? Nalma? *Elhokar?*

He was again in that terrible nightmare at the Kholinar palace, where his friends killed one another. Screams and lights and pain and blood all swirled around one image: a man Kaladin was sworn to protect, lying on the floor.

Moash's spear straight through him.

"*No!*" Kaladin shouted. He couldn't simply watch. He *couldn't*. He Lashed himself forward, but Leshwi met his eyes. He paused.

She yanked her spear from Sigzil's chest right before his Stormlight

went out. Sigzil sagged in the air, and Kaladin grabbed him, holding him as he blinked in a daze, clutching his silvery Shardspear.

"Drop your weapon," Kaladin said to him, "and bow to her."

"What? Sir?" Sigzil frowned as his wound healed.

"Drop your spear," Kaladin said, "and bow to her."

Sigzil, looking confused, did as he requested. Leshwi nodded to him in turn.

"Go back to the ship," Kaladin said, "and sit out the rest of this battle. Stay with the squires."

"Um, yes, sir," Sigzil said. He floated off, poking at the bloody hole in his jacket.

Leshwi glanced to the side. A short distance away—hanging in the air with no weapon—was the Heavenly One that Kaladin had defeated earlier.

Leshwi shouldn't care that Kaladin had spared the creature. It had been a foolish gesture toward a being who could be reborn with each new storm. Then again, Leshwi probably knew that if Sigzil were killed, a new Radiant could be raised up using his spren. It wasn't exactly the same—in fact, in terms of Kaladin's relief, there was a *huge* difference.

At any rate, as Leshwi raised her spear to him, he was glad to accept the challenge.



In the middle deck of the *Fourth Bridge,* Navani counted off another family and pointed them toward a clearly marked and numbered section of the hold. The ardents there were quick to provide comfort to the worried family. Wide-eyed children clutching blankets settled in, several of them sniffling. Parents arranged sacks with the clothing and other possessions they'd hastily packed.

"Some few are refusing to leave," Ardent Falilar said quietly to Navani. He fretted at his pure white beard as he looked over the list of names. "They'd rather continue living in oppression than abandon their homeland."

"How many?" she asked.

"Not many. Fifteen people. Otherwise the evacuation is going faster than I'd estimated. The refugees, obviously, were already prepared to move—and most of the normal townspeople had already been forced into close quarters with their neighbors to give parshmen their dwellings."

"Then what are you so worried about?" Navani asked, making a notation on her list. Nearby, Renarin had stepped up to the family with the sniffling children. He summoned a small globe of light, then began bouncing it

between his hands. Such a simple thing, but the children who saw it grew wide-eyed, forgetting their fear.

The ball of light was bright blue. Part of Navani felt it should be red—to reveal the true nature of the spren that hid inside Renarin. A Voidspren. Or at least an ordinary spren corrupted to the enemy's side. None of them knew what to do about that fact, least of all Renarin. As with most Radiants, he hadn't known what he was doing when he began. Now that he'd formed the bond, it was too late to turn back.

Renarin claimed the spren was trustworthy, but something was odd about his powers. They had managed to recruit several standard Truthwatchers—and they could create illusions like Shallan. Renarin couldn't do that. He could only summon lights, and they did strange, unnatural things sometimes. . . .

"So many things could still go wrong!" Falilar said, drawing Navani's attention back to the moment. "What if we underestimated the weight this many people will add? What if the strain cracks gemstones faster than we'd planned? The fans barely worked at all. It's not a disaster, Brightness, but there's *so much to worry about*."

He tugged at his beard again. It was a wonder he had any hairs left at this point.

Navani patted his arm fondly—if Falilar didn't have something to worry about, he'd go mad. "Do a visual inspection of the gemstones. Then double-check your calculations."

"Triple-check, you mean?" he said. "Yes, I suppose. Keep myself busy. Stop worrying." He reached for his beard, then pointedly shoved his hand in the pocket of his ardent robes.

Navani passed her checklist to another ardent, then climbed the steps to the top deck. Dalinar said he'd reopen the perpendicularity soon, and she wanted to be there—her pencil poised—when he did.

Down below, the townspeople kept clustering and looking up at the strange battle overhead. All this gawking was *really* going to throw off the orderly boarding plan she'd commissioned. Next time she'd have the ardents draw up a second plan that indicated how long it might take if a battle were occurring.

Well, at least only the Heavenly Ones were here. They tended to ignore civilians, considering them little more than battlefield obstacles. Other groups of Fused were far more . . . brutal.

The command station was mostly empty now, all of her ardents having been recruited to comfort and guide the boarding townspeople. Only Rushu remained, absently watching the flying Windrunners with her notebook open.

Bother. The pretty young ardent was *supposed* to be cataloguing the

town's food supplies. Rushu was brilliant, but like a sphere, she tended to shine in all directions unless carefully focused.

"Brightness," Rushu said as Navani walked up. "Did you see that? The Fused over there—the one now fighting Highmarshal Kaladin—she let one of the Windrunners go after stabbing him."

"I'm sure she was merely distracted by Kaladin's arrival," Navani said, glancing toward Dalinar, who stood directly ahead.

The large Horneater bridgeman had taken a position near Dalinar and was looking over some sacks of supplies that Rushu had apparently forgotten about. Navani didn't miss that his daughter—the Shardbearer—was standing very close as well. Kaladin had been promoted beyond being a simple bodyguard, but he did tend to keep an eye out for Dalinar regardless. Almighty bless him for it.

"Brightness," Rushu said, "I *swear* there is something odd about this battle. Too many of the Windrunners are idling about, not fighting."

"Reserves, Rushu," Navani said. "Come, let my husband worry about tactics. We have another duty."

Rushu sighed, but did as asked, tucking her notebook under her arm and accompanying Navani. Dalinar stood with his hands clasped behind his back, watching the fighting. As Navani had hoped, he relaxed his posture, then brought his hands to the sides—as if gripping some unseen fabric.

He pulled his hands together, and the perpendicularity opened as a burst of light. Gloryspren, like golden spheres, began to spiral around him. Navani got a better glimpse of Shadesmar this time. And again she heard that *tone*. That was new, wasn't it? Though she didn't consider herself talented at drawing—at least not compared to a master like Shallan—she sketched what she saw, trying to capture an image of that place with the strange sun over a sea of beads. She could visit it in person if she wished, using the Oathgates—but something felt different about these visions.

"What did you see?" she asked Rushu.

"I didn't see anything, Brightness," Rushu said. "But . . . I felt something. Like a pulse, a powerful *thump*. For a moment I felt as if I were falling into eternity. . . ."

"Write that down," Navani said. "Capture it."

"Very well," Rushu said, opening her notebook again. She glanced up as Kaladin skimmed the deck overhead, dangerously close, following one of the Fused.

"Focus, Rushu," Navani said.

"If you wish depictions or descriptions of Shadesmar," Rushu said, "Queen Jasnah has released journals of her travels there."

"I'm well aware," Navani said, still drawing. "And I've read the journals." The ones Jasnah would give her, anyway. Storming woman.

"Then why do you need my depiction of it?" Rushu asked.

"We're looking for something else," Navani said, glancing at Dalinar—then shielding her watering eyes. She blinked, then waved for Rushu to follow her to withdraw back to the nearby command post. "There's someplace beyond Shadesmar, a place where Dalinar gets this power. Once long ago, the tower was maintained by a Bondsmith like my husband—and from what the spren have said, I conclude that the tower got *its* power from that place beyond Shadesmar as well."

"You're still worrying about that, Brightness?" Rushu pursed her lips. "It's not your fault we haven't decoded the tower's secrets. It's a puzzle one woman—or an army of women—can't be expected to unlock after only a year."

Navani winced. Was she truly that transparent? "This is about more than the tower, Rushu," Navani said. "Everyone is praising the effectiveness of this ship. Brightlord Kmakl is imagining entire fleets of airships blotting out the sun. Dalinar speaks of moving tens of thousands of troops in an assault on Kholinar. I don't think either of them realistically understands how much *work* goes into keeping this one ship in the air."

"Hundreds of laborers in Urithiru turning winches to raise and lower the ship," Rushu said, with a nod. "Dozens of chulls used to move it laterally. Thousands of fabrials to facilitate both—all needing to be perpetually reinfused. Careful synchronization via a half dozen spanreeds to coordinate maneuvers. Yes, it is highly improbable we could field more than two or three of these vessels."

"Unless," Navani said, stabbing her finger at her notes, "we discover how the ancients made the tower work. If we knew that secret, Rushu, we would not only be able to restore Urithiru—we might be able to power these airships. We might be able to create fabrials beyond what anyone has ever imagined."

Rushu cocked her head. "Neat," she said. "I'll write down my thoughts."

"That's all? Just . . . 'neat'?"

"I like big ideas, Brightness. Keeps my job from getting boring." She glanced to the side. "But I still think it's odd how many Windrunners are standing around."

"Rushu," Navani said, rubbing her forehead. "Do try to focus."

"Well, I do try. I simply fail. Like that fellow over there? What's he doing? Not guarding the ship. Not helping with the refugees. Shouldn't he be fighting?"

"He's probably a scout," Navani said. She followed Rushu's gaze past the edge of the ship, toward the fertile stone fields. "Obviously he . . ."

Navani trailed off as she picked out the man in question standing atop a hill—distinctly separated from the battle. Navani could see why Rushu

would think him a Windrunner. He wore a uniform after the exact cut of Bridge Four. In fact, Rushu—who paid attention to the oddest things, but never seemed to notice important details—might have once seen this man in their ranks. He'd often been at Kaladin's side during the early months of Bridge Four's transition into Dalinar's army.

Rushu missed the fact that this man's uniform was black, that he wore no patch on his shoulder. That his narrow face and lean figure would mark him as a man interdicted. A traitor.

Moash. The man who had killed Navani's son.

He seemed to meet her eyes, despite the distance. He then burst alight with Stormlight and dropped out of view behind the hill.

Navani stood there, frozen with shock. Then she gasped, heat washing over her as if she'd suddenly stepped into burning sunlight. He was here. That *murderer* was here!

She scrambled over to one of the Windrunner squires on the deck. "Go!" she shouted at him, pointing. "Warn the others. Moash, the traitor, is here!"



Kaladin again chased Leshwi through a chaotic battlefield. The flight gave him the chance to quickly survey how his soldiers were doing, and what he saw was encouraging.

Many of them had pushed back their opponents. The bulk of the Heavenly Ones were hovering in a wide perimeter, pulling away from fights. Kaladin suspected they'd realized there was little to discover by looking at the outside of the ship.

The Heavenly Ones, unsupported by ground troops or other Fused, didn't seem to want to fully commit. Only a few contests continued, and Kaladin's was the most furious. Indeed, he had to turn his full attention to the chase, lest he lose Leshwi.

Kaladin found himself grinning as he followed her through a wide loop, weaving and dodging around other combatants. When he'd begun training, he'd have thought maneuvers like this turn impossible. To perform the feat, he had to constantly dismiss and renew his Lashings, each at a different angle in a loop—doing so without conscious thought—all while sculpting his motion with the rushing wind to avoid obstacles.

He could now execute such a maneuver. If not easily, at least regularly. It left him wondering what else Windrunners could do with enough training.

Leshwi seemed to want to buzz past every other combatant on the battlefield, forcing Kaladin to constantly reorient. A test. She wanted to push him, see how good he truly was.

Let me get close, and I'll show *you how good I am,* he thought, cutting out of the loop and flying down to intercept her. That put him close enough to strike with his spear.

She deflected, then darted to the side. He Lashed himself after her, and the two of them shot through the air parallel to the ground, curling around one another while each tried to get in a hit. The wind was a huge factor, tugging at his spear. At these speeds, it was like dueling in a highstorm.

They quickly left the town and the main battle. Kaladin had Syl re-form as a sword—but Leshwi was prepared for his lunge. She slid her spear through her hands and gripped it near the head, then dove in and struck at his neck, throwing off his next attack.

Kaladin took a slice on the neck—but not enough for her to siphon away his Stormlight. He pulled away farther, still flying parallel to her, the wind making his hair whip and twist. He didn't want to end up isolated, so he curved back toward the main battlefield.

Leshwi followed. Apparently she'd determined he could keep up with her, and now wanted to spar. Their loop took them toward the manor, coming in from the north side.

This land was so familiar to Kaladin. He'd played on these hills with Tien. He first touched a spear—well, a length of wood he pretended was a spear—right over there. . . .

Stay focused, he thought. *This is a time for fighting, not reminiscing.*

Only . . . this wasn't some random battlefield off in the Unclaimed Hills. For the first time in his life, he *knew* the terrain. Better than anyone else in this battle.

He smiled, then came in close to Leshwi for a clash, slowing and nudging them to the east. He allowed a slice along his arm, then pulled away as if in shock. He shot toward the ground, leveling off and darting among the hills, Leshwi following.

There, he thought. *That one.*

He ducked around the side of a hill, pulling his water flask off his belt. Here, on the leeward side of the hill, the rock had been carved away into a cavern for storing equipment. And as it had always been when he was young, the door was slightly ajar and crusted over with the cocoons of lurgs: little creatures that spent days hiding inside their coverings, waiting for rain to wake them up.

Kaladin sprayed water from his canteen across the door, then dropped the canteen and ducked around the next hill over, falling still near the ground. He heard Leshwi come in behind him. She slowed—evidenced by the sound of rustling cloth. She'd have found the discarded canteen.

Kaladin peeked around and spotted her hovering between the hills,

maybe two feet off the ground, her long clothing dragging on the stone. She slowly turned in a circle, trying to locate him.

The lurgs started dropping from their cocoons, thinking rain had come. They began hopping around, causing the door to creak. Leshwi immediately spun and leveled her lance toward them.

Kaladin launched toward her. She nearly reacted in time, but this close to the ground her long lance was a hindrance. Leshwi had to twist it around and grab it closer to the head before striking, which gave Kaladin the chance to ram a newly shortened Sylspear toward her chest.

He caught her in the shoulder, making her gasp in pain. She ducked his follow-up slash, but again had trouble maneuvering her lance as he slashed her in the leg.

For a moment, the struggle was everything. Leshwi dropped her lance and pulled a short sword from her belt, then came in closer than Kaladin had expected, knocking aside his spear and trying to grab him by the arm. Her greyed flesh healed slowly enough that he was able to ram his shoulder into her wound, making her grunt. When she tried to slide the sword into his neck, he deflected it with a Sylbuckler that appeared on his arm.

Leshwi feinted toward him to make him pull back, then snatched her lance and streaked toward the sky. Kaladin followed, his spear materializing before him—and was on her before she could pick up enough speed to dodge. She was forced to defend by sweeping his attacks away, growing more and more reckless. Until Kaladin saw his moment and made the Sylspear vanish in his hands right as she blocked.

Then—while Leshwi was reacting to the failed block—he stabbed forward, the spear forming as he did so, and slammed it straight into—

Pain.

Leshwi had brought her spear around to strike precisely as he did. Her weapon hit him in the shoulder, mirroring where he'd struck her opposite shoulder. He felt his Stormlight draining away, leeched into the spear; it felt as if his very soul was being drawn out. He held on, sucking in all the remaining Light from the recharged spheres in his pouches—then forced his spear deeper into her wound until tears leaked from the corners of her eyes.

Leshwi smiled. He grinned back, a full-toothed grin, even while she was draining away his life.

He yanked away almost at the same moment she did. She immediately put her free hand to her wound, and Kaladin shivered. Frost crackled on his uniform as a great deal of Stormlight rushed to fill the wound. That had cost him. He was dangerously low, and Dalinar had taken another break from his perpendicularity.

Leshwi eyed him as they hovered. Then Kaladin heard the screaming.

He started, turning toward the sounds. People yelling for help? Yes, the citylord's manor was on fire—plumes of smoke rising through broken windows. What was going on? Kaladin had been so focused on his duel, he hadn't seen.

Keeping one eye on Leshwi, he scanned the region. Most of the people had made it to the ship, and the other Windrunners were withdrawing. The Edgedancers had already boarded, but there was a small group of people standing in front of the burning manor.

One of them stood a good foot or two taller than the others. A hulking form of red and black with dangerous carapace and long hair the color of dried blood. The Fused from earlier, the one that could become a red line of light. He had gathered the soldiers Kaladin had sent away. Several were accosting townspeople, slamming them to the ground, threatening them with weapons and causing them to scream in pain and panic.

Kaladin felt a burning anger. This Fused went after the civilians?

He heard an angry-sounding hum beside him. Leshwi had drifted near—closer than he should have let her get—but she didn't strike. She watched the Fused and his soldiers below, and the sound of her angry humming intensified.

She looked to him, then nodded toward the Fused and the unfortunate people. He understood the gesture immediately. *Go. Stop him.*

Kaladin moved forward, then paused and held up his spear before Leshwi. Then he dropped it. Though Syl vanished to mist almost immediately, he hoped Leshwi would understand.

Indeed, she smiled, then—her off hand still pressed to her wound—she held out her own spear and pointed the tip downward. *A draw,* the gesture seemed to say.

She nodded again toward the manor. Kaladin needed no further encouragement. He shot toward the terrified people.



7

THE RAREST VINTAGE

The two metals of primary significance are zinc and brass, which allow you to control expression strength. Zinc wires touching the gemstone will cause the spren inside to more strongly manifest, while brass will cause the spren to withdraw and its power to dim.

Remember that a gemstone must be properly infused following the spren's capture. Drilled holes in the gemstone are ideal for proper use of the cage wires, so long as you don't crack the structure and risk releasing the spren.

—Lecture on fabrial mechanics presented by Navani Kholin to the coalition of monarchs, Urithiru, Jesevan, 1175

Veil stepped up to Ialai Sadeas. She'd heard of this woman's craftiness, her competence. Veil was therefore surprised to find the woman looking so . . . weathered.

Ialai Sadeas was a woman of moderate height. While she'd never been renowned as a great beauty, she seemed to have withered since Shallan had last seen her. Though she wore a dress of the sharpest and most recent fashion—embroidered along the sides—it seemed to hang on her like a cloak on a tavern's wall peg. Her cheeks were sunken and hollow, and she held an empty wine cup in her hand.

"So, you've finally come for me," she said.

Veil hesitated. What did that mean?

Strike now, Veil thought. *Summon the Blade; burn those self-satisfied eyes out of her skull.*

But she wouldn't act on her will alone. They had a balance, an important

one. The Three never did what only one of them wanted, not in regard to a decision this important. And so, she held back. Radiant didn't want to kill Ialai. She was too honorable. But what of Shallan?

Not yet, Shallan thought. *Talk to her first. Find out what she knows.*

Therefore, Veil bowed—staying in character. "My queen."

Ialai snapped her fingers, and the guard retreated with the last of the cultists, closing the door behind him. She wasn't the frightened type, Ialai Sadeas—though Veil did notice a door on the far wall of the room, behind Ialai, as a potential exit.

Ialai sat back in her chair, letting Veil hold the bow. "I do not intend to be queen," she eventually said. "That is a lie that some of my more . . . overeager followers perpetuate."

"Who then do you support for the throne? Surely not the usurper Dalinar, or the niece he has appointed unlawfully."

Ialai watched Veil, who slowly stood from the bow. "In the past," Ialai said, "I have supported the heir—Elhokar's son, Gavilar's grandson, the rightful king."

"He is only a boy, not yet six."

"Then urgent action must be taken," Ialai said, "to rescue him from the clutches of his aunt and great-uncle, the rats who have deposed him. To support me is *not* to upset the lineage, but to work for a better, stable, and *correct* Alethi union."

Clever. Under such a guise, Ialai could pretend to be a humble patriot. But . . . why did she look so haunted? A wreckage of her former self? She'd been hit hard by Sadeas's death and the traitorous turn of Amaram's army. Had those events encouraged a downward spiral? Most importantly, who was the spy this woman had close to Dalinar?

Ialai stood up, letting her wine cup roll off the table and shatter on the floor. She walked past Veil to the nearby hutch and rolled up the front, revealing a dozen or more carafes of wine, each a different color.

While Ialai was surveying these, Veil held her hand to the side and began summoning her Shardblade. Not to strike, but because Pattern was with Adolin. The act of summoning should give Pattern an indication of her direction. She stopped almost immediately, preventing the sword from coalescing.

Adolin would want to come find her. Unfortunately, striking against Ialai's fortress would be more dangerous than jumping a group of conspirators in the chasm. Dalinar had no authority here, and though the Lightweaving Shallan had stuck to Adolin would keep him from being recognized, Veil wasn't certain he could risk moving in the open.

"Do you favor wines?" Ialai asked her.

"I'm not particularly thirsty, Brightness," Veil said.

"Join me anyway."

Veil stepped up beside her, looking at the array of wines. "This is quite a collection."

"Yes," Ialai said, selecting one, a clear—probably a grain alcohol. Left uninfused, the color gave no indication of flavoring or potency. "I requisition samples of the vintages that pass through the warcamps. It is one of the few luxuries these Heralds-forsaken stormlands can offer."

She poured a small cup, and Veil could immediately tell she'd been wrong. It didn't have the sharp, immediately overpowering sensation of something like a Horneater vintage. Instead there was a fruity scent mixed with the faint stench of alcohol. Curious.

Ialai offered it to Veil first, who accepted the cup and took a drink. It tasted sharply sweet, like a dessert wine. How had they made it clear? Most fruit wines had natural coloring.

"No fear of poison?" Ialai asked.

"Why should I fear poison, Brightness?"

"This was prepared for me, and there are many who would see me dead. Remaining in my proximity can be dangerous."

"Like the attack in the chasm earlier?"

"It is not the first such strike," she said, though Veil knew of no others that Dalinar had ordered. "Strange, how easily my enemies strike at me in quiet, dark chasms. Yet it has taken them so long to attack me in my chambers." She looked right at Veil.

Damnation. She knew what Veil had come here to do.

Ialai drank deeply. "What do you think of the wine?"

"It was nice."

"That's all?" Ialai held up her cup, inspecting the last few drops. "It's sweet, fermented from a fruit, not a grain. It reminds me of visits to Gavilar's wineries. I would guess it an Alethi vintage, rescued before the kingdom fell, made from simberries. The flesh of the fruit is clear, and they took great care to remove the rinds. Revealing what was truly inside."

Yes, she *did* suspect. After a moment of decision, Shallan emerged. If it was to be wordplay, then she should be the one in control.

Ialai selected another carafe, this time a pale orange. "How is it," she said, "that you have access to such important documents as Navani's schematics? She can be extremely secretive with her projects—not because she fears someone stealing them, but because she relishes a dramatic reveal."

"I cannot give away my sources," Shallan said. "Surely you understand the importance of protecting the identities of those who serve you." She pretended to think. "Though I can perhaps share a name, if I were to get one in return—someone you have close to the king. A way for both of us to have further access to the Kholin inner circle."

A little clumsy, Veil noted. *You sure you want control right now?*

Ialai smiled, then handed Shallan a small cup of the orange. She took it—and found it bland and flavorless.

"Well?" Ialai asked, sipping her own cup.

"It is weak," Shallan said. "Powerless. Yet I taste a hint of something wrong. A touch of sourness. An . . . annoyance that should be exterminated from the vintage."

"And yet," Ialai said, "it looks so good. A proper orange, to be enjoyed by children—and those who act like them. Perfect for people who want to maintain appearances before others. Then the sourness. That's what this vintage *truly* is, isn't it? Awful, no matter how it may appear."

"To what end?" Shallan asked. "What good does it do to package an inferior wine with such a fine label?"

"It might fool some, for a time," Ialai said. "Allow the winemaker to gain quick and easy ground over his competition. But he'll eventually be revealed as a fraud, and his creation will be discarded in favor of a truly *strong* or *noble* vintage."

"You make bold claims," Shallan said. "One hopes the winemaker doesn't hear. He might be irate."

"Let him be. We both know what he is."

As Ialai moved to serve a third cup, Shallan began to summon her Shardblade again—giving Pattern another hint to indicate her direction.

Bring it all the way, Veil thought. *Strike.*

Is this who we want to be with our powers? Radiant thought. *If we start down this path, where will it lead us?*

Could they really serve Dalinar Kholin by acting against his explicit orders? He didn't want this. He probably should, but he didn't.

"Ah, here," Ialai said. "Perfect." She held up a deep blue. This time she didn't offer it to Shallan first, but took a sip. "A wonderful vintage, but the last of its kind. Every other bottle destroyed in a fire. After today, even this bit will be gone."

"You seem so resigned," Shallan said. "The Ialai Sadeas I've heard about would scour entire kingdoms looking for another bottle of the vintage she so loves. Never surrendering."

"That Ialai wasn't nearly so tired," she said, her hand drooping—as if the weight of the cup of wine was somehow too great. "I've fought so long. And now I'm alone . . . sometimes it seems the very shadows work against me." Ialai selected a carafe of Horneater white—Shallan could smell it as soon as the top was off—and held it out. "I believe this is yours. Invisible. Deadly."

Shallan didn't take the drink.

"Get on with it," Ialai said. "You killed Thanadal when he tried to deal. So I can't try that. You hunted Vamah and murdered him after he fled, and

there's little chance of me surviving the same. I thought I might be safe if I hunkered down for a time. Yet here you are."

Invisible. Deadly. Sweet wisdom of Battah . . .

Shallan had been engaging in this entire conversation assuming that Ialai knew her for an operative of Dalinar. That wasn't the case at all. Ialai saw her as an operative of Mraize, of the *Ghostbloods.*

"*You* killed Thanadal," Shallan said.

Ialai laughed. "He told you that, did he? So they lie to their own?"

Mraize hadn't specifically told her Ialai had killed Thanadal. But he'd clearly implied it.

Veil gritted her teeth, frustrated. She'd come here of her own volition. Yes, Mraize was always hinting to her what he and the Ghostbloods wanted. But Veil did *not* serve him. She had undertaken this mission for . . . the good of Alethkar. And Adolin. And . . .

"Go on," Ialai said. "Do it."

Veil thrust her hand to the side, summoning her Shardblade. Ialai dropped the carafe of Horneater white, jumping despite herself. Though fearspren boiled up from the ground, Ialai merely closed her eyes.

Oh! a perky voice said in Veil's mind. *We were almost here anyway, Veil! What are we doing?*

"Did they at least tell you why they decided we need to die?" Ialai asked. "Why they hated Gavilar? Amaram? Me and Thanadal, once we knew the secrets? What it is about the Sons of Honor that frightens them?"

Veil hesitated.

You found her! Pattern said in her mind. *Do you have evidence, like Dalinar wanted?*

"They'll send you after Restares next," Ialai said. "But they'll watch you. In case you rise high enough, learn enough to threaten them. Have you asked yourself what they want? What they expect to *get* out of the end of the world?"

"Power," Veil said.

"Ah, nebulous 'power.' No, it is more specific than that. Most of the Sons of Honor simply wanted their gods back, but Gavilar saw more. He saw entire worlds. . . ."

"Tell me more," Veil said.

Shouts sounded outside the room. Veil glanced at the door in time to see a brilliant Shardblade slice through the lock. Adolin, wearing the false face she'd given him, kicked open the door a moment later.

People flooded in around him—soldiers and five of Shallan's Lightweaver agents.

"Once I'm dead," Ialai hissed, "don't let them search my rooms before you do. Look for the rarest vintage. It is . . . exotic."

"Don't give me riddles," the Three said. "Give me answers. What *are* the Ghostbloods trying to do?"

Ialai closed her eyes. "*Do it.*"

Instead, the Three dismissed her Blade. *I vote against killing her,* Veil thought. Killing her would mean she had been manipulated by Mraize. She *hated* that idea.

"You're not dying today," the Three said. "I have more questions for you."

Ialai kept her eyes closed. "I won't get to answer. They won't let me."

Shallan emerged, calming her nerves as several soldiers rushed up to surround Ialai. Veil and Radiant settled back, both pleased at this outcome. They were their *own* person. They did not belong to Mraize.

She shook her head and trotted over to Adolin, then dismissed his illusory face with a touch. She needed to see him as himself.

"Which one are you?" he asked quietly, giving her a pouch of infused spheres.

"Shallan," she said, putting the pouch into her satchel, which a soldier had fetched for her from beside the wall. She glanced over her shoulder as the soldiers bound Ialai, and again Shallan was struck by how *deflated* the woman looked.

Adolin pulled Shallan close. "Did she confess to you?"

"She danced around it," Shallan said, "but I think I can make a case to Dalinar that what she said constitutes treason. She wants to depose Jasnah and put Elhokar's son on the throne."

"Gavinor is way too young."

"And she'd be guiding him," Shallan said. "Which is why she's a traitor—she wants the power."

But . . . Ialai had spoken like that plan was in the past, as if she were now fighting only for survival. Had the Ghostbloods truly killed Highprinces Thanadal and Vamah?

"Well," Adolin said, "with her in custody, perhaps we can get her armies to stand down. We can't afford a war with our own right now."

"Ishnah," Shallan called, drawing the attention of one of her agents. The short Alethi woman hastened over. She'd been with Shallan for over a year now, and—along with Vathah, leader of the deserters that Shallan had recruited—was one of those she trusted most.

"Yeah, Brightness?" Ishnah asked.

"Take Vathah and Beryl. Go with those soldiers and make certain they don't let Ialai speak to anyone. Gag her if you have to. She has a way of getting inside people's heads."

"Consider it done," Ishnah said. "You want to put the illusion on her first?"

The contingency plan for extraction was simple: They'd use Lightweaving to make themselves into House Sadeas guards, and Ialai into

someone lowborn. They'd march her out the gates with ease, capturing the highprincess right out from underneath the watchful eyes of her guards.

"Yes," Shallan said, waving the soldiers to bring the woman over. Ialai walked with her eyes closed, still maintaining her fatalistic air. Shallan took Ialai by the arm, then breathed out and let the Lightweaving surround her, changing the woman to look like one of the sketches Shallan had done recently—a kitchen woman with rosy cheeks and a wide smile.

Ialai didn't deserve such a kindly face, nor did she deserve such a light treatment. Shallan felt an unexpected spike of disgust at touching Ialai; this creature and her husband had plotted and executed a terrible plan to betray Dalinar. Even after the move to Urithiru, Ialai had worked to undermine him at every opportunity. If this woman had gotten her way, Adolin would have died before Shallan met him. And now they were just going to take her in to play more games?

Shallan let go, hand going to her satchel. Radiant was the one who emerged, however. She grabbed Ialai by her arm and towed her over to Adolin's soldiers, handing her off.

"Take her out with the others," Adolin said.

"You got the rest of the conspirators?" Shallan asked, walking back to him.

"They tried to escape out the side door as we burst in, but I think we managed to round them all up."

Ishnah and the soldiers—Adolin's men, hand-picked from among his finest—led the disguised and bound Ialai out the door. The highprincess sagged in their grip.

Adolin watched her go, a frown on his lips.

"You're thinking," Shallan said, "that we shouldn't have ever let her leave Urithiru. That it'd be easier if we'd ended her, and the threat she represented, before it went this far."

"I'm thinking," Adolin said, "that maybe we don't want to travel that road."

"Maybe we started already. Back when you . . ."

Adolin drew his lips to a line. "I don't have any answers right now," he eventually said. "I don't know if I ever did. But we should ransack this place quickly. Father might want more proof than your word, and it would be awfully helpful if we could present him with incriminating journals or letters."

Shallan nodded, waving over Gaz and Red. She would have them search the place.

And what of what Ialai had said? *Look for the rarest vintage.* . . . Shallan eyed the wines set out on the counter of the hutch. Why speak in riddles? *Adolin and the others were coming in,* Shallan thought. *She didn't want*

them to understand. Storms, the woman had grown paranoid. But why trust Shallan?

I won't get to answer. They won't let me. . . .

"Adolin," she said. "Something is wrong with this. With Ialai, with me being here, with—"

She cut herself off as shouts sounded in the antechamber. Shallan scrambled out, feeling a sense of dread. She found Ialai Sadeas lying on the floor, foam coming from the mouth of her fake face. The soldiers watched with horror.

The highprincess stared up with lifeless eyes. Dead.



Kaladin flew through the smoke billowing up over the manor. He soared down toward where the townspeople were being threatened by the strange Fused and his soldiers. That was Waber, the manor's gardener, being held against the ground with a boot to his face.

This is obviously a trap, Syl said in Kaladin's mind. *That Fused knows exactly what to do in order to draw the attention of a Windrunner: attack innocents.*

She was right. Kaladin forced himself to drop carefully a short distance away. The Fused had torn a hole in the wall around a side entrance of the manor. Though flames licked the upper floors of the structure, the room beyond the hole was dark, not yet afire. At least not completely.

As soon as Kaladin landed, the singers released Waber and the others, then retreated through the broken hole in the stone wall. *Five soldiers,* Kaladin noted. *Three with swords, two with spears.*

The Fused carried one captive as he strode into the building; thin, with a gaunt face, the captive was bleeding from a slash along his stomach. Godeke the Edgedancer. His Stormlight had apparently run out. Storms send he was still alive. The Fused wanted to use him as bait, so the chances seemed good.

Kaladin strode toward the broken wall. "You want to fight me, Fused? Come on. Let's have at it."

The creature, shadowed inside the building, growled something in his own rhythmic language. One of the soldiers translated. "I will fight you inside where you cannot fly away, little Windrunner. Come, face me."

I don't like this, Syl said.

"Agreed," Kaladin whispered. "Be ready to go get help."

He Lashed himself upward slightly, enough to make him lighter on his feet, then inched into the burning building. This large room had once been the dining chamber, where Kaladin's father had eaten with Roshone and talked of thieves and compromises. The ceiling was burned in patches, the

fire consuming it from above. Flamespren danced along the wood with a frantic delight.

The hulking Fused stood directly ahead, two soldiers at each side. They moved forward to flank Kaladin. Where was the fifth soldier? There, near an overturned table, fiddling with something that glowed a deep violet-black. Voidlight? Wait . . . was that a *fabrial*? The light dimmed suddenly.

Kaladin's powers vanished.

He felt it as a strange *smothering* sensation, as if something heavy had been placed on top of his mind. His full weight came upon him again, his Lashing canceled.

Syl gasped and her spear puffed away as she became a spren—and when Kaladin tried to resummon his Blade, nothing happened.

Immediately, Kaladin stepped backward to try to escape the range of the strange fabrial. But the soldiers quickly rushed to surround him, cutting off his retreat. Kaladin's assumption that he could beat them easily had relied on his Shardspear and his powers.

Storms! Kaladin strained to create a Lashing. Stormlight still raged inside him, and kept him from needing to breathe the acrid smoke, but something was suppressing his other abilities.

The Fused laughed and spoke in Alethi. "Radiants! You rely too much on your powers. Without them, what are you? A peasant child with no *real* training in the art of warfare or—"

Kaladin slammed himself against the soldier to his right.

The sudden motion caused the singer to cry out and fall backward. Kaladin yanked the spear from the man's hand, then—in a fluid motion—whipped it into a two-handed lunge, impaling a second soldier.

The two soldiers on his left recovered and leaped for him. Kaladin felt the wind encircle him as he spun between the two of them, catching one sword—aimed low—with the butt of his spear as he caught the second one—aimed high—right behind the spear's head. Metal met wood with a familiar *thunk,* and Kaladin finished his spin, throwing off both weapons.

He gutted one man, then tripped him—sending him stumbling to the ground in front of his ally. These soldiers were trained well, but hadn't seen much actual combat yet—as evidenced by how the remaining singer froze when he saw his friends dying.

Kaladin kept moving, almost without thought, spearing the fourth soldier in the neck. *There,* Kaladin thought as the expected ribbon of red light came darting toward him. *He will go for my back again.*

Kaladin dropped his spear, pulled a throwing knife off his belt, and turned. He rammed the knife into the air right before the Fused appeared—slamming the small blade into the creature's neck, angled between two pieces of carapace.

The Fused let out an *urk* of shock and pain, his eyes wide.

Fire made wood snap overhead, and burning cinders dropped down as the enormous Fused toppled forward like a felled tree, the floorboards shaking with the impact. Blessedly, no red ribbon of light rose from him this time.

"That's a relief," Syl said, landing on Kaladin's shoulder. "I guess if you catch him before he teleports, you really can kill him."

"At least until the Everstorm rebirths him," Kaladin said, checking the singers he'd killed. Other than the one dying slowly from the gut wound, he'd left only two alive—the one he'd shoved, and the fifth one, across the room, who had activated the fabrial.

The former had scrambled out the gaping hole in the wall to escape. The latter had left the fabrial and was inching to the side, his sword out, eyes wide.

The man was trying to reach Godeke—perhaps to use him as a hostage. In the fray, the wounded Edgedancer had fallen to the ground beside the husk after the Fused had teleported to Kaladin. Godeke was now moving—but not under his own power. A small, gangly figure had the Edgedancer by one leg and was slowly dragging him away from the fight. Kaladin hadn't seen Lift sneak into the room—but then again, she often showed up where one did not expect her.

"Take him out the hole, Lift," Kaladin said, stepping toward the last singer. "Are your powers suppressed too?"

"Yeah," she said. "What'd they do to us?"

"I'm extremely curious about this too," Syl said, zipping over to the device on the floor, a gemstone covered in metal pieces and resting on tripod legs. "That is a *very* strange fabrial."

Kaladin pointed his spear at the last singer, who—hesitantly—dropped his sword and raised his hands. He had a jagged skin pattern of red and black.

"What is that fabrial?" Kaladin asked.

"I . . . I . . ." The soldier swallowed. "I don't know. I was told to twist the gemstone at the base to activate it."

"That's Voidlight powering it," Syl said. "I've never seen anything like it."

Kaladin glanced at the smoke pooling on the ceiling. "Lift?" he said.

"On it," she said, scrambling over to the device while Kaladin kept the soldier guarded. A moment later, Kaladin's powers returned. He sighed in relief, though that made Stormlight puff before him. Nearby, Godeke gasped, unconsciously breathing in Stormlight, and his wound started to heal.

Strengthened by the Light, Kaladin grabbed the soldier and lifted him up, infusing him enough to make him hang in the air. "I told you to leave

the city," Kaladin growled softly. "I'm memorizing your face, your pattern, your *stench.* If I see you again, ever, I will send you hurtling upward with so much Stormlight that you will have a long, *long* time to think during the fall back down. Understood?"

The singer nodded, humming a conciliatory sound. Kaladin shoved him, recovering his Stormlight and making the man fall to the ground. He scrambled away out the hole.

"There was another human in here," Lift said. "An old lighteyed man in beggar's clothing. I was watching from outside the building, and saw the man come in here with Godeke. A short time later, that Fused broke through the wall, carrying Godeke—but I didn't spot the other man."

Roshone. The former citylord had told Dalinar he was going to search the manor's stormcellar to free imprisoned townspeople. Though he wasn't proud of it, Kaladin hesitated—but when Syl looked at him, he gritted his teeth and nodded.

So long as it is right . . . he thought.

"I'll find him," Kaladin said. "Make sure Godeke recovers, then get that fabrial to Brightness Navani. She's going to find it very interesting."



Shallan removed the illusion, revealing Ialai's face, spittle dripping from her lips. One of Adolin's men checked her pulse, confirming it.

She *was* dead.

"Damnation!" Adolin said, standing helpless above the body. "What happened?"

We didn't do this, Veil thought. *We decided not to kill her, right?*

I . . . Shallan's mind began to fuzz, everything feeling blurry. Had she done this? She'd wanted to. But she hadn't, had she? She was . . . was more in control than that.

I didn't do it, Shallan thought. She was reasonably certain.

So what happened? Radiant asked.

"She must have taken poison," said Vathah, leaning down. "Blackbane."

Even after many months as Shallan's squire and then agent, the former deserter didn't look like he belonged with Adolin's soldiers. Vathah was too rough. Not sloppy, but unlike Adolin's men, he didn't care much for the spit and polish. He showed his disdain by leaving his jacket undone, his hair messy.

"I've seen someone die like that before, Brightness," he explained. "Back in Sadeas's army, an officer was smuggling and selling supplies. When he finally got found out, he poisoned himself rather than be taken."

"I didn't see her do it," Ishnah said, sheepish. "I'm sorry."

"Nale's nuts," muttered one of Adolin's soldiers. "This is going to look bad, isn't it? This is exactly what the Blackthorn *didn't* want. Another Sadeas corpse on our hands."

Adolin drew in a long deep breath. "We have enough evidence to have seen her hanged; my father will simply have to accept that. We'll bring troops to the warcamps to make certain her soldiers don't get rowdy. Storms. This mess should have been cleaned up months ago."

He pointed at several soldiers. "Check the other conspirators for poison, and gag them all. Shallan will disguise the body like a rug or something so we can get it out. Gen and Natem, search Ialai's things in the next room to see if you can find any useful evidence."

"No!" Shallan said.

Adolin froze, glancing at her.

"I'll search through Ialai's things in the next room. I know what to watch for, and your soldiers don't. You handle the captives and search the rest of the building."

"Good idea," Adolin said. He rubbed his brow, but then—perhaps seeing the little anxietyspren that appeared near her, like a twisting black cross—smiled. "Don't worry. Every mission has a few hitches."

She nodded, more to put him at ease than to indicate her real feelings. As the soldiers moved to follow his orders, she knelt by Ialai's body.

Ishnah joined her. "Brightness? Do you need something?"

"She didn't eat poison, did she?" Shallan asked softly.

"Can't be certain," Ishnah said. "I know a little about blackbane though. . . ." She blushed. "Well, I know a lot. My gang would use it on rivals. It's tough to make, because you need to dry the leaves out, then make a gum out of them to get it to full potency. Anyway, eating it isn't the best. If you can get it into the blood though, it kills quickly. . . ." She trailed off, frowning—perhaps realizing as Shallan had that Ialai had died very quickly.

Shallan knew of blackbane herself. She'd studied up on poisons recently. *Would I be able to spot a pinprick?* Shallan thought, kneeling beside the corpse.

Either way, she suspected Ialai had been right: The Ghostbloods hadn't trusted Shallan to kill her, and they'd sent a second knife to see the job done. That would mean they had an operative among Adolin's guards or Shallan's own agents. The idea made Shallan's stomach twist.

And this person was separate from the spy Ialai supposedly had among Dalinar's elite? Storms. It was tying Shallan's mind in knots. "Look the body over," Shallan whispered to Ishnah. "See if you can find evidence if this was self-inflicted, or if someone else killed her."

"Yes, Brightness."

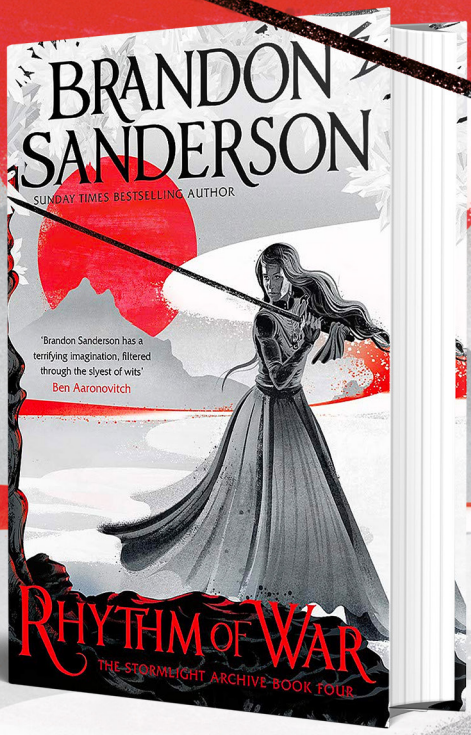
Shallan quickly walked back into the room with the wine hutch. Gaz and Red were already working to gather Ialai's things. Storms, could she trust these two?

In any case, Ialai's prediction had proven correct. And it was possible that this room held secrets Mraize didn't want Shallan to find.

Ready for more? Then pre-order

RHYTHM OF WAR

PUBLISHED WORLDWIDE
17 NOVEMBER 2020



Pre-order from your local bookshop or...

WATERSTONES
SIGNED EXCLUSIVE EDITION

AMAZON.CO.UK

HIVE.CO.UK

AUDIO

EBOOK

International pre-orders...

AUS

NZ