

Chapter 1

Voice Jin approached the ~~s~~Serpent-~~p~~Path, and her words cut through the whistle of the wind.

"Asagi is dead," ~~she said.~~

~~A tall woman~~Tall, proud, she ~~sat high~~towered ~~above~~over commoner and warrior alike on ~~her~~a powerful black horse. She did not dismount. Her attention was on Taskmaster Isaan only. The workers, knee deep in drifts and bent against the wind along the ~~s~~Serpent-~~p~~Path, were inconsequential ~~to her~~. Taskmaster Isaan's warriors, huddled in their furs around the meagre warmth of a song-light, touched their fists to their foreheads: ~~unseen gestures of submission.~~ ~~# gestures that went unseen.~~Voice Jin noted me without looking. Took in the bow. Took in the swords thrust through my belt, one long, one short. But she gave me no acknowledgement at all. I was beneath her notice.

Unseen.

Taskmaster Isaan looked up from his book of philosophy. His eyes ~~narrowed~~. He grunted once, adjusted his thick, lynx-fur scarf against the bitter air. Flakes of snow drifted between him and the ~~lord's Voice~~Voice Jin. He noted the two armoured warriors flanking ~~the lord's Voice~~her. Pointedly ignored the third man.

"How ~~did he die~~?" Isaan asked. His eyes turned back to the book, seeking truth in the rows of script.

"You'll see for yourself," the Voice said. Flecks of fallen snow speckled the black lacquer of her armour. She was a striking woman, but her eyes were dark as her iron, colder than ~~the winter~~.

"Now? No?" ~~Isaan said.~~ ~~He~~Isaan gestured towards the diggers. "Work's not done yet. One hour until sundown. The quota is still behind."

The Voice looked over towards the struggling labourers. The workers knew that sundown drew near. Their digging had slowed. Their sieving had slowed. Their chatter had slowed and then died away. *Get to the end*, they thought. ~~Maybe it was just that the cold had slowed them. The temperature had dropped again last night.~~

Their fingers ~~would be feeling the effect~~. Some would be burning. ~~The sand beneath the snow carried the essence of a god's passing.~~ It was not for mortal men. The diggers cast glances at

Commented [Ed1]: Move to new line for emphasis

Commented [Ed2]: This is an odd clash of "she doesn't see them" and "she sees me but doesn't" – see all or none?

Commented [Ed3]: Add some extra eye description

Commented [Ed4]: Confusing, I'm not sure what this is referring to. There are too many people ignoring everyone.

Commented [Ed5]: Since we're hearing all about the snow now, can you link this specifically to the scene around them rather than generically winter? It's a great sentiment but I think you can take it further.

Commented [Ed6]: This scene is quite beautiful in terms of falling snow, can this be a little more poetic? Go for a metaphor or simile to bring the scene to life

Commented [Ed7]: Instead of suggesting what 'would' be happening, reduce passivity by telling us outright: their fingers have gone blue etc.

Commented [Ed8]: Too early for world detail, keep to the action