Chapter Two

Nesryn, Captain of Adarlan's Royal Guard, is a woman divided between duty and heritage. As she stands before the khagan in the god-city of Antica, her professional role demands poise and loyalty to her king, yet her personal connection to the city—where her father once lived—stirs deep emotions. The sights, smells, and people of Antica feel like home, a stark contrast to the discrimination she faced elsewhere. This duality leaves her knees trembling as she faces the khagan, a living myth whose presence overwhelms her.

The khagan, seated on an ivory throne, embodies both divine authority and mortal power. His scarred hands and piercing eyes reflect a lifetime of battle and rule, while the absence of a crown underscores his godlike status. Nesryn, raised on stories of his lineage, is acutely aware of the stakes of this meeting. Alongside her companion Chaol, she has prepared meticulously, balancing her cultural knowledge with courtly protocols. The palace itself feels like a sacred labyrinth, heightening the tension of their silent wait for the khagan to speak.

When the khagan finally addresses them, his tone is measured, devoid of the warmth Nesryn associates with her father's voice. His words acknowledge the significance of their mission but carry an undercurrent of scrutiny. The scene underscores the khagan's absolute power and the precariousness of Nesryn's position as both a representative of Adarlan and a daughter of Antica. Her internal conflict—between duty and identity—mirrors the broader political tensions at play.

The chapter masterfully blends personal and political stakes, painting Nesryn as a complex protagonist torn between worlds. The khagan's imposing presence and the weight of history loom large, setting the stage for a high-stakes negotiation. Nesryn's journey is not just about fulfilling her king's orders but also reconciling her past with her present. The vivid descriptions of Antica's culture and the khagan's court immerse

the reader in a world where myth and reality collide.