

Chapter One

Chaol Westfall, the former Captain of the Royal Guard and now Hand to the King of Adarlan, arrives at the Khagan's palace in Antica, resentful of the sound of his wheelchair's wheels. The palace's grandeur, built from materials across the Southern Continent, reflects the khaganate's power and history. Chaol observes the intricate mosaics depicting the empire's rise, drawing parallels to what Adarlan could have been without its corrupt ruler. Accompanied by Nesryn, his companion and Captain of the Guard, he prepares to meet the khagan, aware of the high stakes of their mission.

Chaol's internal struggle is evident as he grapples with his physical limitations and the trauma of his past. The absence of his sword and the discomfort in his formal attire underscore his vulnerability. His hatred for the word "fix" reveals his deep-seated resentment toward his condition. Despite his pride, he acknowledges the necessity of seeking healing from the Torre Cesme, the renowned tower of healers, though the prospect fills him with disgust and uncertainty.

The chapter highlights the cultural richness of Antica, from its diverse death rituals to the bustling city life. Nesryn's knowledge of local customs provides context for their surroundings, including the significance of the white cloths hanging throughout the city. The Torre Cesme looms in the distance, a symbol of hope and dread for Chaol. His focus remains divided between his two goals: securing the khagan's support for the war and finding a healer who can restore his mobility.

As they approach the khagan's court, Chaol and Nesryn maintain a composed demeanor, aware of the palace's watchful eyes. The chapter sets the stage for their diplomatic challenge, emphasizing the political and personal stakes. Chaol's determination to fulfill his duties clashes with his internal turmoil, creating a tense atmosphere. The narrative foreshadows the difficult negotiations ahead, blending themes of power, resilience, and the quest for redemption.