

## Chapter 1

~~There was a~~One man ~~snored~~snoring, passed out on the ground less than a foot away from the edge of a mountain. At least twenty people were crowded with him on a small platform, but none dared to venture so near the edge, even if it meant being situated uncomfortably close to a perfect stranger. Cusi Huarcaay watched the sleeping man with a mixture of envy and disgust—  
envy because he could find such comfort in the midst of their circumstances, and disgust for the very same reason. She could not remember ever being so miserable; her toes had no feeling, her fingers would hardly move, and her insides ached from the cold. Someone had been kind enough to prepare the group a fire, but it was a pathetic creature, producing far more smoke than warmth, crackling and emitting a haze that ascended in the convulsive ripples of a serpent. A man with a stick prodded it, attempting to spread the flames, but he managed only to agitate it so that it hissed and ~~spat~~spit at him with venom.

With her arm, Cusi shielded her face from the sparks. Her cousin, a girl about Cusi's age, fifteen, did the same. In the eerie orange glow of the firelight, they were nearly identical: dark eyes and skin with black hair cascading over their shoulders and past their waists. The snoring man was also a cousin; in fact, all of them were cousins or aunts or uncles, relatives Cusi barely knew or didn't trust.

In the nearby stone watchtower, laughter accompanied the glow of a more potent fire. Two silhouettes emerged—the night watchmen—and their feet tread upon the rocky earth as they navigated their way between the scattered bodies of those trying to sleep. The first watchman to reach the fire poured on a flask of water, then kicked in loose dirt. He grabbed the cloak of the man closest to him.

“Look at this—vicuña wool.”

The other watchman wrapped around his shoulders the nearest cloak he could find. “I killed a lord at Vilcas. He was dressed like this and covered in gold.”

The first watchman spat into the fire. “Cuzco takes everything. My daughter. My only child. I'm glad to see it burn.”

**Commented [BP1]:** I've changed the en dashes and hyphens in the document to be em dashes, which is the proper format. I didn't mark them in track changes because they don't really show up well that way, but I just wanted to let you know about it.

**Commented [BP2]:** Later on you mention Cusi throwing up, which I know is from the kick to her head, but it made me think that she's probably been through more than just the cold at this point. Is there an easy way to include some of the other pains she might be dealing with, like aches from the journey or hunger from not being fed properly?

**Commented [BP3]:** Beautiful imagery here.(:

**Commented [BP4]:** I don't mind that you don't mention Cura's name right away, but when it came up later I wondered if some readers might be confused for a moment about who Cura was. Is there a good place to drop that name in this paragraph? Perhaps in the following line: “In the eerie orange flow of the firelight, she and Cura were nearly identical...”

**Commented [BP5]:** I thought at first that the watchman actually put the fire out, so I was a little confused when Cusi was burned by it. Consider making clear here that the fire didn't go out (although that does leave me wondering why the watchman bothered to try) or that some embers remain.

**Commented [BP6]:** I love the little hints of world building with these occasional Spanish words.

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The watchmen circled the group, and Cusi stared at her feet. One of them stopped behind her; she clenched her hands and prayed he would not take her cloak too.

“Think if I kicked him, he’d wake up?”

“He’s so drunk he’d hit the ground and not know it.”

The watchman started in the opposite direction, toward the snoring man, and Cusi unclenched her fists.

“I like this one. Give him *chicha*, and he prophesies about gods and giant llamas.”

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The men laughed, and Cusi turned away. Cura stared into the fire. “I wish I was like him,” she whispered. “Not afraid.”

Cusi glanced at the guards, who stood over the snoring man, prodding him with their feet, inching his body precariously close to the edge. “I wish I wasn’t here.”

Cura cracked an empty smile. “My father sent me here because he thought it was safe.”

“Mine too,” Cusi said, even though it was a lie.

**Commented [BP7]:** This was more of a rhetorical addition than a technical change, so feel free to ignore this edit if you prefer no comma here.

A man emerged from behind the watchtower, and Cusi recognized the commander who had ordered her arrest. Cusi heard a conversation between him and one of the guards but did not understand it; all she could make out was the word “Cuzco.” The commander disappeared into the watchtower. The guard approached.

“We leave for Cuzco at first light,” he said. “The general meets us there.”

“The general?” ~~asked~~~~said~~ the other guard.

“He wants her.”

Cusi did not have to look up to know who they meant. At the sound of footsteps, she began to tremble.

“Cusi Huarcay.” A foot ~~impacted~~ heavily with her back, pushing her face-first into the dirt, mere inches from the fire. She closed her eyes and tried to ignore the burn of cold flesh in

**Commented [BP8]:** Strict, traditionalist grammarians think “impact” should never be a used as a verb. Personally, I don’t think it’s a big deal since using “impact” as a verb is starting to become pretty common, but I just thought I should bring it up in case you decided to reword this bit. It all depends on your audience.

sudden proximity to warmth. “Daughter of Huascar.” The foot dug deeper into her spine. “Mine would’ve ~~have~~ been her age.” The foot moved to her neck. “We could kill her.”

“They want Huascar to watch.”

The foot lingered on her neck and released its hold. Cusi exhaled, ~~but~~ a swift kick to the head propelled her body sideways, throwing her arm into the fire. She screamed. A sizzle and a sudden putrid odor, the smell of singed hair. She jerked backwards and collapsed on her side. She heard angry voices, clouded out by the ringing in her ears. She closed her eyes. A cold hand touched Cusi’s.

“They’re gone,” Cura whispered.

Cusi blinked and rolled to her back. Her arm stung. She lifted it closer and choked on the smell.

“Are you okay?”

Cusi looked for the guards. “Where are they?”

“The commander made them stop. He was angry.”

Cusi tried to look but couldn’t lift her head without feeling ~~nauseated~~. Fear vanished with coherent thought, and she could no longer feel the cold. She watched the stars and the new sentry as they circled. Cura lay beside Cusi and grasped her hand when footsteps approached. Neither let go until morning when Inti appeared suddenly above the mountains—no ~~colours~~, no spectacle; a practical ascendance.

The prisoners were forced to march on a trail of steep switchbacks, one among a network of ~~roads~~ descending ~~roads~~. Somewhere below, the townspeople of Pisac were awakening from a peaceful night of slumber; they would soon venture outdoors to spend the day among their crops, grown on terraces, giant stone steps that crawled from the banks of the river Chango into bare surrounding mountain. In the opposite direction, where the snoring man had passed the night defiantly oblivious, were cliffs carved and filled with the dead and their belongings, essentials of the afterlife.

**Commented [BP9]:** I really like this detail here—you give a little glimpse into the enemy’s side and hint at how complicated these political and social upheavals really are. Just like Cusi would do what she can to protect her family, we understand that this guard wants the same thing for his.

**Commented [BP10]:** Again, this is a minor usage issue, but traditional grammarians argue that “nauseated” is more appropriate than “nauseous” in this case. If you think it sounds too awkward, I wouldn’t worry about it since it’s something few people would criticize.

**Commented [BP11]:** Do you prefer British spellings over American? I’m not an expert in this area, but I’ll do my best to make sure that we keep things consistently British in spelling if you prefer.

**Commented [BP12]:** Again, this is more of a rhetorical suggestion because I feel the colon gives a more appropriate beat here than the comma. A period would work the same, though, or another dash.

Guards prodded the prisoners forward with their weapons, and Cusi collapsed. A guard reached out to strike her, and the commander spat, “You touch her, you carry her.” When Cusi could not stand, the guard who had kicked her was forced to carry her to Cuzco. She vomited on his shoulder.

They descended upon the city near sunset. A sea of thatch roofs, homes of adobe and stone, overflowed beyond the city center and lapped at Cuzco’s edge into the mountains. Thousands lived in the Incan capital. Knowledge, politics, religion, art—all attributes of civilization had culminated to produce the greatest city in the world—or what had once been. Cuzco’s center, adorned with gold-coated palaces and temples, lay in disarray. Palaces were vandalized, their massive walls torn apart, stone by stone.

The prisoners descended to Inti’s temple, the Coricancha, a dazzling structure coated in gold. A crowd had assembled to witness the captives’ march of defeat. The commander halted the procession in the temple courtyard and placed Cusi at the very front so all could see. Onlookers were silent, except for the wailing of a child. Young men elbowed their way through the crowd to catch a glimpse of the prisoners; mothers partook in quiet conversation; small children slept soundly; older ones felt it coming, with no knowledge of what it was. Cusi looked into the audience. An ancient man, his face etched with wrinkles like tidal marks in the sand, stood at the front. He stared at her with the blind blue eyes of cataracts—an ill omen.

Drums sounded, and trumpets blared, to victory. The crowd awoke with a start.

“Long live Atahualpa!”

The cheer carried swiftly through the crowd in a relay of thunder, a magnificent rumbling, slowly amalgamating until the very city spoke. The music grew louder, challenging the people to overpower it, to demonstrate their allegiance to Atahualpa. Cusi fell to her knees and clutched her ears, trying to block out the pounding. She felt the drums as they neared. Her heart jumped with every beat. She did not look until it stopped.

He was there, the general, with his spear and brightly-colored headdress, seated upon a golden litter with ~~forty~~<sup>40</sup> men to lift him. Soldiers and musicians surrounded him, staring down

**Commented [BP13]:** I love the consistency of Cusi’s reactions to her head injury. Great details and very realistic.

**Commented [BP14]:** This spelling of color is different than before. Do you have a preference?

at Cusi stoically. The general stood and lifted his spear to hush the crowd. He prolonged the silence.

“Brothers and sisters.” His voice carried to everyone present. “You are witnesses of the wrath of your lord, Atahualpa, who is benevolent to his people and brings vengeance upon his enemies. Behold.” He raised his left hand, and the soldiers pushed forward a prisoner, chained, dressed in rags, covered in blood and filth. Cusi’s father.

“Behold, his adversary, the bastard Huascar. He was born in disgrace and has brought shame upon this great city, deceiving the subjects of his father, convincing them with flattery that our Lord Inti had appointed him as the Lord Huayna Capac’s heir.” The guards struck Huascar, forcing him to his knees. “Our Lord Inti has been just in this matter, exposing the imposter and restoring his rightful son to the throne.” The guards began to punch him, kick him, piss on him. “Those in league with this devil have been punished according to their crime. These men and women before you, found guilty of treason, sought to escape the wrath of our Lord Atahualpa but could not escape the watchful eye of our Lord Inti, who has determined to avenge his beloved son. And so it will be with all who defy the laws of our Lord. Not one can escape his vengeance.”

**Commented [BP15]:** Just wanted to double-check that you meant “Not one” and not “No one.”

As his final words faded, the soldiers fell back, leaving Huascar on his hands and knees, bloody and dripping of urine.

“Look at your daughter.”

Cusi wanted to die right there. She wanted the general to pierce her heart with his spear so it would be over and she would not remember this. Huascar raised his head, but his eyes were lowered.

“Tayta,” Cusi whispered. He did not look.

“Take them away.”

Cusi was pulled upright by her hair. Her head exploded with pain, and she stumbled. The guard continued to yank her hair, dragging her knees against the cobblestone. Desperately she lunged forward, barely touching her father’s arm before being ripped away.

“Tayta!” she cried.

In that moment, Huascar looked. Tears streaked his face, leaving trails where they washed away the dirt. ~~And~~ his eyes. Cusi could not have received a greater blow. His eyes were glassy and bloodshot and dead. ~~Her father was already dead.~~

She was dragged to a prison and abandoned there with the other prisoners. Cura snuck beside her.

“You’re bleeding,” she said and touched Cusi’s knees, where her robe had been soaked with blood.

“It doesn’t hurt,” Cusi ~~said.~~

**Commented [BP16]:** I love this moment. It’s so engaging, and we get a real sense of how serious this whole situation is. We can tell that there’s great conflict and have already grown to care about Cusi and her family. Yet at the same time, you bring a great balance to these characters with the depth you add so subtly.

**Commented [BP17]:** I wonder if we should have some sort of action here—but I don’t want it to take away from the impact of the line she says. Maybe something simple like her wiping at her nose or leaning her head back against the wall? Still, overall I love the basis we already have of Cusi’s character from this short chapter.