

Chapter 17

The chapter opens with Manon Blackbeak confronting the grim reality of her sister Asterin's impending execution. As the sky over Morath darkens, Manon remains restless, her focus solely on her blade, Wind-Cleaver, and the weight of her decisions. Her thoughts are haunted by the consequences of her choices, including Asterin's imprisonment in the deepest dungeon, guarded to prevent rescue or escape. Manon's internal struggle reflects her sense of guilt and her understanding that her actions have led to this tragic outcome. Her loyalty to her Clan and her responsibilities as Wing Leader weigh heavily on her mind, shaping her resolve.

Manon's interactions reveal her internal conflict and the harsh realities of her leadership. She recognizes that rescuing Asterin would betray her Matron and undermine her authority, especially after the failed Ferian Gap assault under Iskra's command. Despite her desire to save her sister, Manon accepts her duty to uphold the rules and her sense of honor, knowing that her decision to let Asterin face execution is a form of mercy. Her focus shifts toward the moment when she must utter the Words of Request, a final act of compassion that will end her sister's suffering swiftly, rather than through prolonged torture or slow death.

The chapter vividly depicts the somber execution scene on a broad Morath veranda, with the crowd eager for blood and the Matrons overseeing the proceedings. Asterin, in her riding leathers, is presented before her family and the gathered witches, battered but defiant. The ritual includes a brutal punishment—twelve blows for her supposed crimes—though her injuries suggest a more violent reality. Manon's anger simmers beneath her composed exterior, but Asterin's bold words and defiant attitude hint at her resilience. The scene underscores the brutal and ritualistic nature of their society's justice, emphasizing themes of loyalty, sacrifice, and the cost of leadership.

As the chapter concludes, tensions reach a breaking point. Manon's grandmother and the Yellowlegs Matron prepare to recite the ancient ritual, signaling the final act of blood sacrifice. The atmosphere is tense, with Manon's internal conflict mounting as she prepares to carry out her duty. Sorrel's silent defiance and Asterin's unwavering spirit underscore the tragic costs of their brutal world. Manon's resolve is tested as she braces herself for the moment of mercy or finality, knowing that her actions will define her leadership and her legacy. The chapter ends with the looming threat of violence, emphasizing the relentless cycle of loyalty, revenge, and sacrifice that pervades their society.



Summaryer