

# Chapter Five

Celaena and Ansel endure a grueling journey through the desert, struggling with discomfort and exhaustion as they travel toward Xandria. Celaena complains about the sand infiltrating her clothes and the meager meals of dates and bread, while Ansel remains more resilient, teasing Celaena for her fussiness. Their banter reveals their contrasting backgrounds, with Ansel hailing from the harsh Western Wastes. Despite their fatigue, the two share a moment of camaraderie under the vast desert sky, though Celaena remains unsettled by their exposed surroundings and the potential dangers lurking in the night.

As they rest, their conversation shifts to Ansel's homeland and its dark history involving the Ironteeth witches. Ansel recounts how the Crochan Queens' once-beautiful kingdom was destroyed by the Ironteeth Clans, who were cursed by the last Crochan Queen's spell. The land eventually recovered, but the witches' legacy lingers. Ansel's tone grows somber as she describes the witches' terrifying traits—iron teeth and nails capable of gutting a person—hinting at the brutality of their reign. Celaena, intrigued and unnerved, presses for more details, sensing there's more to Ansel's knowledge than she's letting on.

Ansel shares a chilling childhood memory of encountering an Ironteeth witch, revealing how her sister and a friend ventured into a cursed watchtower on the summer solstice. The friend was dragged away by an old woman with iron teeth, and only her bones were later found. The story leaves Celaena horrified, and Ansel's casual demeanor afterward contrasts sharply with the tale's grim outcome. Despite the trauma, Ansel dismisses the witches as beatable, boasting that with an army of assassins, she could eradicate them and protect the defenseless—a hint at her ambitious, almost rebellious mindset.

The chapter closes with Celaena unable to sleep, haunted by the image of the witch and her victim. Ansel's laughter and quick descent into slumber highlight her hardened nature, while Celaena's lingering fear underscores her vulnerability in the face of the unknown. Their dynamic—Ansel's boldness versus Celaena's wariness—sets the stage for deeper conflicts and revelations. The chapter masterfully blends world-building, character development, and tension, leaving readers eager to see how their journey and the witches' legacy will unfold.

