

Chapter Five

The chapter opens with Celaena lying on her cloak in the desert, attempting to find comfort despite the harsh environment. She reflects on her discomfort, feeling sand everywhere and wishing for the luxury of her previous life in Rifthold. Her conversation with Ansel reveals their differing attitudes toward hardship; while Celaena is accustomed to rough conditions, she clearly finds this journey challenging. The harshness of the desert setting underscores her vulnerability and the physical toll of their travel, emphasizing the contrast between her past life and her current circumstances.

Ansel shares her background, delving into the history of the Flatlands and the cursed land once ruled by the Crochan witches. She describes the destruction wrought by the Ironteeth Clans five centuries earlier, highlighting their brutal nature with iron teeth and fingernails capable of killing in a single swipe. The history reveals a land scarred by violence, yet also hints at lingering magic and curses, such as the land's resistance to the Ironteeth and the spells cast by the Crochan Queen to protect the land from the invaders.

The narrative shifts to Ansel recounting her personal experience with witches, particularly a haunting childhood memory of her sister and a mysterious tower. Her story involves a forbidden exploration, a terrifying encounter with an old woman with metal teeth, and the subsequent disappearance of her friend Maddy. The chilling tale of the child's bones and the old witch leaves a lasting impression on Celaena, illustrating the dangerous and supernatural elements woven into their world's history. Ansel's account emphasizes the peril and mystique surrounding witches, especially the Ironteeth, and the fear they evoke.

The chapter concludes with Ansel expressing her desire for a powerful army of assassins to combat witches and defend their realm, contrasting her ambitions with

the current complacency of her people. Celaena's sarcastic remark about her being the "Defender of the Realm" underscores the disparity between Ansel's noble aspirations and her pragmatic reality. As Ansel falls asleep, Celaena remains awake, haunted by the images of the witch's dark deeds. The scene transitions to a bustling market in Xandria, illustrating the vibrant, diverse world they inhabit, despite lingering tensions and the scars of past conflicts.

