

Chapter Three

Celaena prepares for dinner in the desert fortress, choosing attire that complements her appearance despite the lingering heat. Accompanied by Ansel, she navigates the complex with varying rules of silence, exhausted yet observant. Upon entering the bustling dining hall, she notes its exits and diverse occupants—assassins of all ages and nationalities who show little interest in her presence. Ansel introduces her casually to the group, highlighting the subdued yet attentive atmosphere as Celaena remains wary of her unfamiliar surroundings.

The chapter reveals the dynamics of the assassin community through dinner interactions. Ansel serves Celaena food, assuring her it's safe despite ongoing tensions with Lord Berick, a local adversary. Through banter with Mikhail, Ansel explains Berick's relentless attempts to eliminate the assassins, from poisoned gifts to failed military tactics. The conversation underscores the fortress's resilience and the assassins' camaraderie, even as they maintain a cautious awareness of external threats.

Ansel's role as a negotiator with Berick adds depth to her character, revealing her bravery and occasional dramatics. Mikhail's teasing contrasts with the gravity of their situation, as Berick's brutality is hinted at through past encounters. Celaena, though initially hesitant, begins to eat and observes the diverse, surprisingly joyful atmosphere—a stark contrast to the deadly profession of those around her.

The chapter closes with Celaena's quiet reflection on the unique blend of cultures and the unexpected sense of community among the assassins. Her curiosity about the foreign dignitaries and the fortress's operations lingers, setting the stage for further exploration of this enigmatic world. The juxtaposition of danger and normalcy in the dining hall encapsulates the duality of her new environment.