

Chapter Nine

Celaena struggles to concentrate during her training with the Master, haunted by Ansel's accusation that she is spoiled and selfish. Distracted, she nearly misses an asp creeping toward her during their rooftop session. The Master senses her turmoil and encourages her to speak, but Celaena hesitates, feeling her conflict with Ansel is too trivial for his attention. As they sit in silence, the weight of her unspoken fears grows, culminating in her admission that she is terrified to return home because everything has changed—and she isn't sure she wants things to return to how they were before.

The Master responds with silent empathy, then shifts the lesson by demonstrating a series of fluid, asp-like movements. Celaena joins him, mimicking his motions until she achieves a breakthrough, feeling the "rightness" of the forms as dawn breaks. This moment of clarity and connection with the Master contrasts sharply with her earlier turmoil, offering her a temporary reprieve from her anxieties. The physical discipline becomes a metaphor for her emotional journey—learning to adapt and embrace change rather than resist it.

Returning to her room, Celaena braces for another confrontation with Ansel but finds her absent. When Ansel later wakes her, their reconciliation begins awkwardly, with both apologizing for their harsh words. Ansel reveals Celaena is her first true friend, hinting at her own loneliness beneath her outward confidence. Their toast to friendship takes a dark turn, however, as Celaena notices Ansel's sorrowful expression and the strange taste of the wine—realizing too late that she has been poisoned.

The chapter ends with Celaena collapsing into unconsciousness, the betrayal casting a shadow over their earlier reconciliation. This abrupt conclusion leaves unanswered questions about Ansel's motives and the consequences of her actions, setting the stage for future conflict. The juxtaposition of Celaena's emotional vulnerability and physical mastery underscores the complexity of her character, while the poisoning

introduces a dramatic twist that disrupts the tentative peace between the two friends.

