

## Chapter 26: you're all you need

The chapter opens with Essun entering a glittering mica structure in Castrima, the comm's infirmary, where she encounters Antimony, a stone eater who warns Hoa, another stone eater, to keep his distance. The tension between the two stone eaters is palpable, but Essun ignores their standoff and focuses on Alabaster, her former mentor and lover, who lies severely injured on a bed of cushions. His body is partially petrified, with stone replacing flesh, and Essun notices tooth marks on his arm, hinting at Antimony's role in his condition. Their reunion is fraught with unspoken grief and unresolved history.

Alabaster and Essun exchange strained pleasantries, revealing the depth of their shared trauma. Essun confesses to marrying and having children, though her husband killed one of their orogene children, a loss that haunts her. Alabaster, in turn, admits he understands her murder of Corundum but cannot forgive it. Their conversation is layered with pain and resignation, underscoring the emotional toll of their past actions. Essun declares her intent to kill her husband, prioritizing vengeance over reconciliation, while Alabaster, despite his wounds, refuses to seek retribution against her.

The dialogue shifts to Alabaster probing Essun's abilities, asking if she can now wield obelisks at will. He directs her attention to a pink spinel blade, which momentarily mesmerizes her, confirming her connection to the obelisks. Alabaster reveals he used the obelisks to tear a rift in the continent, triggering the catastrophic Fifth Season, and admits this was deliberate retaliation against Yumenes. His revelation shocks Essun, who realizes the full extent of his power and the scale of his actions.

Alabaster's final request is even more startling: he urges Essun not to fix the rift but to worsen it. His demand underscores his nihilistic worldview and his belief in the necessity of destruction. Essun is left speechless, grappling with the moral weight of

his proposition and her own role in the unfolding catastrophe. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, leaving her—and the reader—to ponder the implications of Alabaster's devastating plan.

