The Assassin and the Desert

The Assassin and the Desert is the second novella in Sarah J. Maas's *Throne of Glass* prequel series, chronicling the early adventures of Celaena Sardothien before the events of *Throne of Glass*.

After being punished by the King of the Assassins for defiance, Celaena Sardothien is sent to the Red Desert to train with the Silent Assassins. There, she must earn their trust and learn the skills she needs to survive—not only physically, but politically.

Isolated, tested, and far from everything she knows, Celaena must navigate a new world of danger, shifting alliances, and ancient secrets. But even in the harsh desert, her resolve burns brightly.

This thrilling novella reveals a formative chapter in Celaena's past—and sets the stage for the fierce heroine she is destined to become.

Chapter One

Celaena Sardothien, Adarlan's greatest assassin, finds herself in the brutal expanse of the Red Desert, enduring scorching heat and oppressive conditions as she journeys toward the fortress of the Silent Assassins. Sent by her mentor, Arobynn Hamel, as punishment for defying his orders to trade slaves, she reflects on the consequences of her rebellion—bruises, cuts, and now this grueling exile. Guided by a wary nomad who abandons her two miles from her destination, Celaena presses forward alone, battling dehydration and the desert's relentless sun, her resolve tested by the unforgiving environment.

Upon reaching the hidden oasis fortress, Celaena is struck by its lush contrast to the surrounding desert, though her thirst remains unquenched as she is escorted through its halls. She observes the fortress's layout, noting exits, sentries, and the bustling activity of trainees and meditators. The Silent Assassins' stronghold is far from silent, filled with the sounds of training, nature, and flowing water. Celaena maintains her composed demeanor, aware of her reputation and the need to project strength despite her exhaustion.

Led to the Mute Master, the leader of the Silent Assassins, Celaena encounters a poised and observant figure surrounded by armed attendants. The Master, though unarmed, exudes authority, and the presence of hidden watchers in the shadows signals the gravity of her arrival. Despite her fatigue, Celaena remains alert, analyzing her surroundings and the potential threats. The chapter underscores her resilience and adaptability as she navigates both the physical challenges of the desert and the psychological tension of her introduction to the assassins' order.

The chapter sets the stage for Celaena's training and transformation, highlighting her defiance, physical endurance, and strategic mind. The harsh desert serves as a metaphor for her internal struggles and the discipline she must embrace. Her journey to the fortress mirrors her broader arc—a punishment that may ultimately forge her into a more formidable assassin. The Silent Assassins' enigmatic presence hints at the trials and alliances to come, leaving readers anticipating her next steps in this unfamiliar and demanding world.

Chapter Two

Celaena Sardothien faces a brutal test of skill and worthiness as she is ambushed by four attackers in a desert chamber. Despite being unarmed and clad in cumbersome clothing, she deftly disables each assailant through quick reflexes and precise strikes. The confrontation is revealed to be an initiation, overseen by a silent Master, to determine her readiness for training. Celaena's confidence in her abilities is unwavering, even as she battles exhaustion and thirst in the harsh environment.

After proving her combat prowess, Celaena is introduced to Ansel, a striking young woman adorned in ornate wolf-themed armor. Ansel's playful demeanor and unique appearance intrigue Celaena, though she remains wary of the unfamiliar surroundings. The Master signals their shared living arrangements, and Ansel reveals Celaena's training will begin at dawn. Despite initial reservations, Celaena accepts the arrangement, relieved to have passed the test and earned the Master's approval.

As they leave the chamber, Celaena reflects on her discomfort with sharing a room with a stranger, a stark contrast to her solitary life as an assassin. She observes the presence of other female assassins, a novelty compared to her guild back home. Ansel's casual friendliness and lack of personal boundaries unsettle Celaena, who remains guarded. The thought that Ansel might surpass her in skill lingers, adding to her unease.

Their conversation turns to Celaena's reputation, with Ansel teasing her for being less dramatic than expected. Despite the lighthearted exchange, Celaena remains vigilant, acutely aware of her missing weapons. The chapter ends with Celaena following Ansel through the halls, her mind racing with questions about her new environment and the challenges ahead. The dynamic between the two women hints at both camaraderie and potential rivalry.

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.

Chapter Four

Celaena continues her training with the Silent Assassins, pushing herself to improve under Ansel's guidance. Despite her progress, she grows frustrated by the Master's absence and the lack of direct instruction, receiving only basic corrections from older assassins. Ilias, the Master's son, often trains nearby, his presence hinting at a possible interest in her. Celaena observes the Silent Assassins' unique fighting style, noting their quiet movements and less brutal approach compared to the cutthroat environment of Adarlan, where Arobynn fostered competition and rewarded ruthlessness.

The chapter highlights the stark contrast between the Silent Assassins' communal learning and the adversarial training Celaena experienced under Arobynn. Here, seasoned assassins willingly share knowledge, and camaraderie binds the group, creating a sense of collective purpose. Celaena, however, struggles to adapt, resisting their corrections and clinging to her pride as Adarlan's top assassin. Despite her disdain, she recognizes the value of their methods and the fortress's mysterious allure, which seems to offer answers to its members. Her primary goal remains obtaining a letter of recommendation from the Master, even if it requires force.

The narrative shifts when Lord Berick's soldiers launch a surprise attack on the fortress. Celaena joins the assassins in defense, taking position on the battlements with Ansel. Ilias coordinates their response using silent signals, and the assassins prepare to ignite a hidden oil trench to deter the invaders. Ansel explains the plan to Celaena, who realizes the strategic brilliance behind the trap. The assassins fire flaming arrows, creating a massive wall of fire to scare off the attackers without engaging in direct combat.

As the flames erupt, Celaena ducks for cover amid enemy arrows, witnessing the efficiency and discipline of the Silent Assassins. The chapter ends with the attackers

repelled, leaving Celaena to reflect on the group's unity and skill. The encounter reinforces her determination to prove herself to the Master, even as she grapples with the differences between her past and this new, enigmatic order. The attack also raises questions about potential betrayal, hinting at deeper conflicts to come.

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.

Chapter Six

The chapter opens with a thrilling escape as Ansel and Celaena race through the palace gates on their horses, Kasida and Hisli, leaving the guards in chaos. Ansel’s bold leadership is evident as she navigates the crowded streets, her red hair a vivid marker of their flight. The girls break free into the vast Red Desert, pursued by three mounted guards, their ordinary horses no match for the Asterion steeds. The tension is palpable as Celaena struggles to keep up, the desert landscape stretching endlessly before them.

As they gallop across the dunes, Celaena’s frustration with Ansel’s reckless plan boils over. Ansel, however, remains defiant, urging Celaena to embrace the adventure. The scene shifts dramatically as the dunes part to reveal the stunning Gulf of Oro, its turquoise waters and cool breeze offering a fleeting moment of respite. Ansel whoops with joy, charging toward the beach, and despite her anger, Celaena finds herself smiling, swept up in the exhilaration of their wild ride.

The pursuit intensifies as the guards close in, forcing Ansel to reveal her audacious plan: jumping the Desert Cleaver, a massive rock wall split by a narrow fissure. Celaena is horrified by the risk, but with the guards armed and relentless, she has little choice but to follow. The narrow canyon passage heightens the danger, with arrows ricocheting off the walls as they navigate the treacherous path. Ansel’s fearless leap across the ravine leaves Celaena with no option but to trust her horse and her own courage.

In the final moments, Celaena confronts the sheer drop of the ravine, her breath caught in her throat. Ansel’s triumphant cry echoes through the canyon as she lands safely on the other side, leaving Celaena to face the leap alone. The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Celaena poised at the edge, forced to choose between certain capture and a potentially fatal jump. The blend of adrenaline, danger, and fleeting joy captures

the essence of their daring escape.

Chapter Seven

Celaena and Ansel face the consequences of their reckless decision to steal Asterion horses, realizing their actions have already reached the Master. Upon returning to the fortress, they are met by Mikhail and other assassins, forcing them to kneel before the Master in his receiving chamber. As the Master approaches, Celaena recalls a traumatic memory of Arobynn's violence and Sam's desperate threats, momentarily distracting her from the present. The tension escalates as Ansel attempts to justify their actions, while Celaena remains silent, fearing the Master's wrath and the potential loss of her training opportunity.

The Master's disapproval is palpable as he examines the two young assassins, his silence amplifying their dread. Ansel takes the lead in apologizing, suggesting stable duty as a fitting punishment, while Celaena unexpectedly claims responsibility for the theft. The Master's reaction is inscrutable, but his subtle amusement hints at leniency. To their relief, he assigns them morning stable duty, sparing them harsher consequences. However, the moment takes a surprising turn when the Master signals Celaena's long-awaited first lesson, leaving her elated and hopeful for her remaining time at the fortress.

The next day, Celaena and Ansel endure the grueling task of cleaning the livestock pens, a punishment far more unpleasant than their usual training. Despite the physical exhaustion, Celaena's anticipation for her sunset lesson with the Master grows, overshadowing her fatigue. Ansel offers encouragement as Celaena prepares for the unknown, her nerves mingling with excitement. When the time arrives, she ascends to the fortress rooftop, where the Master awaits, gazing across the desert, his intentions still a mystery.

The chapter concludes with Celaena standing on the rooftop, surrounded by torchlight and the vast desert landscape. The Master's silence and the presence of a covered

reed basket heighten the suspense, leaving Celaena—and the reader—curious about what her first lesson will entail. This moment marks a turning point for Celaena, as she finally earns the Master’s approval and steps closer to her goal, though the challenges ahead remain uncertain.

Chapter Eight

In Chapter Eight, Celaena Sardothien engages in a lighthearted moment with her friend Ansel, applying makeup for Ansel's birthday and Midsummer Eve celebration. Their banter reveals Celaena's fondness for cosmetics, which she considers both practical for her work as an assassin and enjoyable. The playful exchange underscores their growing friendship, a rarity for Celaena, who reflects on her impending departure from the desert fortress and her reluctance to leave Ansel behind. The chapter highlights Celaena's internal conflict as she grapples with her attachment to Ansel and her unresolved feelings about returning to Rifthold.

The Midsummer Eve festival unfolds in an unusual silence, with assassins dancing without music under the moonlight. Celaena observes the festivities with a mix of curiosity and detachment, noting the contrast between the Master's joyful, grandfatherly demeanor and Arobynn's calculated grace. Ansel's carefree dancing with Mikhail contrasts with Celaena's introspection, as she reflects on her strained relationship with Arobynn and her concern for Sam, whom she fears may have suffered worse punishment than she did. The festival serves as a backdrop for Celaena's simmering anger toward Arobynn and her resolve to assert independence.

Celaena's thoughts drift to her plans to move out of the Assassin's Keep, a decision fueled by her growing disillusionment with Arobynn's cruelty. She vows to protect herself and Sam from further harm, even contemplating violent retribution if necessary. Her internal monologue reveals a shift in her loyalty and a desire for autonomy, underscored by her admiration for the Master's kindness. The chapter captures Celaena's emotional turmoil as she balances her past traumas with her newfound sense of agency.

The chapter concludes with Ilias inviting Celaena to dance, breaking her reverie. Despite her initial hesitation, she accepts, allowing herself a rare moment of levity.

Their silent dance symbolizes Celaena's tentative steps toward embracing joy and connection, even as she remains aware of the challenges awaiting her return to Rifthold. The scene encapsulates the chapter's themes of friendship, resilience, and the tension between duty and personal freedom.

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.

Chapter Ten

Celaena awakens in the desert with a pounding headache, disoriented and far from the assassins' fortress. She discovers her belongings packed on her horse, Kasida, but her sword is missing. A note from Ansel explains the Master chose to send her away discreetly rather than publicly dismiss her, providing a letter of approval but no clear reason for her abrupt expulsion. Confused and hurt, Celaena questions what she might have done wrong, feeling betrayed after beginning to see the assassins as her newfound family.

As Celaena rides north toward Xandria, she reflects on her rejection, wondering if her perceived selfishness or her fight with Ansel led to her dismissal. The pain of exclusion stings more than physical wounds, leaving her emotionally raw. Her journey is interrupted when she spots Lord Berick’s army marching toward the assassins' fortress. Though she considers warning them, she decides against it, rationalizing that the Master must have anticipated the attack and deliberately sent her away to keep her safe—or because he no longer wanted her involved.

Upon reaching Xandria, Celaena finds the city quieter than during her previous visit. She books passage on a ship to Amier, planning her return to Rifthold. With hours to spare before departure, she wanders the empty streets, her thoughts lingering on the fortress and the impending battle. Despite her resentment, she struggles with guilt over abandoning the assassins, even as she reminds herself they made their choice by casting her out.

The chapter closes with Celaena’s unresolved tension between self-preservation and loyalty. Her physical journey mirrors her emotional turmoil—exiled, directionless, and grappling with feelings of inadequacy. The Master’s cryptic dismissal and the looming conflict underscore her isolation, leaving her to navigate both the desert and her fractured sense of belonging alone.

Chapter Eleven

Celaena races across the desert on her horse Kasida, driven by urgency as she approaches the besieged fortress. The scene is one of chaos: breached walls, scattered bodies, and ongoing battles between assassins and soldiers. The unlocked gates suggest betrayal from within. Armed with a scavenged sword and her daggers, Celaena enters the carnage-filled courtyard, noting the strategic precision of the attack. Her primary concern shifts to locating the Master and Ansel, suspecting the latter's involvement in the treachery that allowed the enemy forces to infiltrate so easily.

As Celaena navigates the fortress, she encounters evidence of a carefully orchestrated assault, with fires, arrow remnants, and silent upper levels heightening the tension. She fights her way past a soldier on the stairs, moving toward the Master's greeting room. There, she discovers Mikhail dead and Ilias severely wounded, confirming her worst fears. The Master lies paralyzed on the dais, helpless as Ansel stands over him, sword raised to deliver the killing blow. Celaena intervenes at the last moment, throwing a dagger to disarm Ansel.

A violent confrontation erupts between the former allies. Ansel reveals her motive: a deal with Lord Berick for a thousand soldiers to invade the Flatlands, using the fortress's downfall as her bargaining chip. The betrayal cuts deep as Celaena realizes Ansel's calculated manipulation, including sending her away to avoid interference. The emotional weight of their clash is palpable, with Celaena torn between her loyalty to the Master and her shattered trust in Ansel. The Master's pleading eyes add urgency to the fight, as Celaena struggles to reconcile the friend she knew with the ruthless traitor before her.

The chapter culminates in a tense standoff, with Ansel defiant and Celaena determined to protect the Master at all costs. Their duel is not just physical but ideological, pitting

Ansel's vengeful ambitions against Celaena's sense of justice. The unresolved conflict leaves readers questioning Ansel's ultimate fate and the broader consequences for the fortress. The chapter masterfully blends action, betrayal, and emotional stakes, setting the stage for a dramatic resolution in the ongoing narrative.

Chapter Twelve

The chapter opens with Celaena tending to Ilias's severe stomach wound while the Master, partially paralyzed from poison, struggles to reach his son. As assassins arrive to assist, Celaena identifies the poison as gloriella—a paralytic rather than a lethal dose, revealing Ansel's intent to make the Master witness her betrayal. Despite the chaos, Celaena ensures the Master receives an antidote while keeping her promise to allow Ansel a 20-minute head start before pursuit. The tension escalates as Celaena prepares to fire a single arrow at Ansel, who flees across the desert toward Briarcliff.

Celaena's arrow narrowly misses Ansel's horse, deliberately fired after the agreed-upon time, symbolizing her conflicted loyalty. The aftermath reveals Ilias recovering and the fortress mourning fallen assassins. The Master summons Celaena the next morning, expressing relief she spared Ansel. He discloses his long-standing awareness of Ansel's true identity—the surviving daughter of a murdered lord—and his hope that she would confront her pain rather than let it consume her. His wisdom highlights the destructive path of hatred Ansel chose, contrasting with Celaena's resilience.

The Master reflects on Ansel's complex relationship with the assassins, acknowledging her genuine moments of friendship despite her betrayal. He suggests Celaena's influence might someday soften Ansel's vengeance, emphasizing the significance of their bond. Celaena grapples with her grief, questioning whether anger could ease the pain, while the Master offers solace by framing her mercy as a lasting impact on Ansel's conscience.

In the closing scene, the Master presents Celaena with a letter for her master, urging her to deliver it with pride. The chapter concludes with a poignant blend of resolution and unresolved emotion, underscoring themes of betrayal, endurance, and the fragile hope for redemption. Celaena's actions—balancing justice with compassion—leave a lingering imprint on both the narrative and the characters' futures.