

Chapter 21: Cassian

Cassian, frustrated by Nesta's cold demeanor and emotional distance, confronts her after a tense gathering at the house. Despite her sharp rebuffs and refusal to engage, he insists on walking her home through the snowy streets, revealing his lingering concern for her safety. Their exchange is charged with unresolved tension, as Cassian struggles to reconcile the fierce, vulnerable woman he once knew with the closed-off stranger she has become. Nesta, meanwhile, remains defiant, rejecting his attempts to bridge the gap between them.

The chapter delves into Cassian's internal conflict as he grapples with his feelings for Nesta. He recalls her bravery during the battle with Hybern, where she shielded him at great personal risk, contrasting it with her current isolation and self-destructive behavior. Though he claims indifference to her choices, his actions—like carrying a carefully chosen Solstice gift—betray his deep investment in her well-being. Nesta, however, remains unyielding, dismissing his gestures with biting remarks.

Their walk becomes a battleground of wills, with Nesta repeatedly demanding Cassian leave her alone. He provokes her with teasing grins and stubborn persistence, refusing to abandon her despite her hostility. The tension escalates when he reveals the gift, which she outright rejects. Cassian's frustration peaks as he accuses her of playing games, while Nesta defends her right to autonomy, blaming their world for her suffering.

The chapter culminates in a heated confrontation where Nesta orders Cassian to stop interfering in her life. Her venomous words underscore her resentment toward the forced camaraderie of the court, while Cassian's wounded pride and unspoken care create a poignant stalemate. The unresolved dynamic between them—marked by trauma, pride, and unacknowledged connection—leaves both characters at an impasse, setting the stage for further emotional reckoning.