

Chapter 26: Rhysand

The chapter opens with Rhysand observing a group of young Illyrian girls reluctantly participating in combat training under Devlon's supervision. Though their numbers are small and their enthusiasm lacking, their presence marks a significant step toward challenging traditional Illyrian gender norms. Rhysand notes the symbolic taunt of Illyrian bows placed nearby—a weapon many males struggle to wield—and privately vows to personally train any girl who dares to attempt mastering them. The scene is set against the stark backdrop of Windhaven camp, freshly covered in snow, emphasizing the harshness of both the environment and the societal barriers the girls face.

Rhysand, Cassian, and Azriel discuss the sparse attendance of female trainees, attributing it to families being away for Solstice. The conversation shifts to the growing dissent within Illyrian camps, particularly from the rival Ironcrest clan led by the troublesome Kallon. Cassian's restrained reaction to Kallon's provocations reveals his respect for Illyrian traditions like the Rite, despite Azriel's darker suggestions for dealing with the agitator. The tension underscores the broader struggle to reform Illyrian culture while navigating its deeply ingrained hierarchies and rivalries.

The dynamics between the three leaders take center stage as Rhysand attempts to reassure Cassian about the progress represented by the girls' training. Azriel's presence, met with fear by the camp's women, highlights his complex relationship with his Illyrian heritage. Cassian's stoic demeanor hints at unresolved personal wounds tied to their mission of fostering change. Rhysand's internal reflections reveal his understanding of Cassian's emotional stakes, emphasizing the slow, arduous nature of their efforts to transform Illyrian society.

The chapter closes with a moment of solidarity as Rhysand offers Cassian encouragement, acknowledging the incremental nature of their progress. Cassian's

insistence on long-term commitment over quick wins reflects the depth of his investment in empowering Illyrian females. The final lines—"Our world might very well depend on it"—elevate their personal mission to a cosmic scale, suggesting that societal reform is intertwined with the survival of their world. The chapter masterfully balances intimate character moments with broader themes of resistance and cultural evolution.

