

# Chapter Sixty-One

Nesta pushes herself to complete a personal challenge by descending ten thousand stairs, a test she set for herself after passing the Valkyrie trials. As she moves downward, she reflects on her growth, newfound friendships, and the joy of training with Cassian and her fellow Valkyries. Her relationship with Cassian is explored in intimate detail, highlighting the contrast between tender lovemaking and passionate encounters, which have become a vital part of her healing and self-discovery. The physical exertion of the stairs mirrors her emotional journey toward self-mastery.

While descending, Nesta practices Mind-Stilling, a Valkyrie technique for maintaining calm amid chaos, symbolizing her transformation. She embraces the pain and exhaustion, refusing to let them control her, and emerges stronger with each step. The repetitive motion becomes meditative, reinforcing her sense of autonomy and resilience. By the time she reaches the bottom, she acknowledges the person she is becoming—someone she might even like—marking a stark contrast to her past self-destructive tendencies.

At the bottom, Nesta faces a choice: indulge in old habits or return to the House for the Starfall celebration. Despite the allure of the city, she chooses to climb back up, drawn by Cassian and the life she has built. The arduous ascent represents her commitment to growth and connection. When she arrives, Cassian greets her with warmth, and their reunion is filled with unspoken understanding and affection. He carries her to the party, where she is overwhelmed by the beauty of the starry sky.

At the Starfall celebration, Nesta is awestruck by the celestial display, moved to tears by the sheer wonder of existence. Surrounded by friends and loved ones, she experiences a profound sense of gratitude and joy, a far cry from her previous numbness. The chapter closes with her reaching out to touch a passing star, symbolizing her embrace of life's beauty and her hard-won redemption. Her journey

from self-loathing to self-acceptance culminates in this moment of pure, unguarded happiness.

