

Chapter Twenty-Six

Nesta returns from Windhaven less exhausted than usual, noting Cassian's unusually cold and distant demeanor when he retrieves her. Rhys also remains silent, reinforcing the tension between them. Back at the House of Wind, Cassian's anger lingers, leaving Nesta unsettled and curious about its cause. Her restlessness leads her to the dining room, where she finds Cassian brooding over a vanished wineglass—a result of the House's restrictions on alcohol around her. The strained atmosphere hints at deeper unresolved conflicts between them.

Cassian's preoccupation becomes evident as he barely engages in conversation, his thoughts clearly consumed by something grave. Nesta attempts to lighten the mood by mentioning Emerie's potential involvement in training, but Cassian responds tersely. His distant behavior prompts Nesta to probe further, asking about his meeting with Eris. Cassian reveals his frustration with Eris's manipulative nature and the psychological toll of their interactions, admitting feelings of inadequacy in the face of Eris's cunning. His self-doubt and anger underscore his internal struggle with his identity as a warrior.

Nesta recognizes the depth of Cassian's pain, realizing how Eris's words have wounded him—mirroring insults she herself once used. Shame and empathy overwhelm her as she witnesses his vulnerability. Determined to alleviate his suffering, she takes an unexpected initiative, kissing his neck and kneeling before him. Cassian, initially hesitant, relents as Nesta's actions shift the dynamic between them. Her boldness contrasts with their usual tension, revealing a softer, more intimate side to their relationship.

The chapter culminates in a moment of raw connection as Nesta's actions momentarily distract Cassian from his anguish. Her willingness to comfort him physically underscores her growing emotional investment in their bond. Meanwhile, Cassian's

vulnerability highlights his complexity beyond the warrior facade. The scene sets the stage for deeper emotional exploration, blending tension, tenderness, and unresolved conflicts that define their evolving relationship.

