

Chapter Seventeen

Nesta approaches Clotho, the priestess of the library, with a proposition to train the priestesses in physical combat and mental discipline. She clarifies that Cassian, not herself, will oversee the training, emphasizing his respectful nature. Clotho hesitates, predicting few participants, but ultimately grants her blessing. Nesta posts a sign-up sheet, though initially, no names appear. Despite the lack of immediate interest, she remains committed to the idea, checking the list daily while continuing her own rigorous training regimen with Cassian.

Nesta's personal training intensifies as Cassian teaches her foundational combat skills, including proper stance and weighted exercises to build strength. She pushes her limits by attempting to climb the library's massive staircase, incrementally increasing her progress each night. Exhaustion dominates her days, but small gestures—like a mysterious bouquet of flowers—hint at unseen support. Meanwhile, her shelving duties become an extension of her training as she incorporates lunges while carrying heavy books, drawing curious glances from the priestesses.

Despite her persistent efforts, the sign-up sheet remains blank, testing Nesta's resolve. Cassian encourages her to "keep reaching out your hand," but she begins to doubt the impact of her outreach if no one responds. The chapter highlights her internal struggle between determination and discouragement, as well as her growing physical and mental resilience. The absence of participants contrasts with her own progress, underscoring the isolation she feels despite her efforts to connect.

The chapter culminates with Cassian instructing Nesta on proper punching technique, emphasizing precision and body mechanics over brute force. Their banter reveals a dynamic of mutual respect and challenge, with Cassian balancing critique with encouragement. Nesta's progress in training mirrors her broader journey of self-improvement, even as she grapples with unanswered outreach. The chapter leaves her

at a crossroads, physically stronger but emotionally uncertain about whether her efforts will ever be met with reciprocity.

