

Chapter Forty-Eight

The chapter opens with Nesta waking to Cassian's command, her body aching from a restless night on the hard ground. Despite her exhaustion and emotional numbness, she forces herself to eat the food he provides, though she feels indifferent to his demands. Cassian, cold and unyielding, outlines their grueling hike ahead, emphasizing the physical toll it will take. Nesta complies mechanically, shouldering a heavy pack without protest, her detachment evident in her silence and lack of care for her own discomfort.

As they begin their trek, Nesta surrenders to the physical strain, her labored breathing and burning legs a stark contrast to the vibrant mountain scenery around her. Cassian leads without conversation, his focus solely on their progress. Nesta's internal turmoil mirrors the harshness of the journey, her thoughts as sharp as the glass-like air she breathes. The descent proves even more taxing, with the pack threatening to topple her, yet she persists, her determination fueled by a deeper, unspoken despair.

During a brief stop at the river, Nesta collapses, drinking greedily from the cold water to soothe her parched throat. Cassian allows her thirty minutes to rest, though his tone remains stern. When he warns her of the dangers of fainting, Nesta's silent response—a wish for oblivion—catches his attention. His momentary gentleness is met with resentment, highlighting the emotional chasm between them. The break is short-lived, and Cassian resumes their march, his frustration still simmering beneath the surface.

The chapter closes with Cassian's realization of the depth of Nesta's self-loathing, recognizing that her desire to cease existing cannot be alleviated by external forces. Despite his anger, he acknowledges that only Nesta can confront her inner demons. Their journey becomes a metaphor for her struggle, with Cassian's rigid expectations mirroring her own harsh self-judgment. The chapter leaves their relationship

unresolved, poised between confrontation and the possibility of healing, as they continue their arduous path forward.

