

Chapter Thirty-Nine

Nesta is consumed by an unrelenting inner fire, driving her to descend an endless stairwell as a form of physical and emotional release. The repetitive motion mirrors her determination to break free from past fears, particularly her recent encounter with a kelpie and the trauma of the Cauldron. She vows never to be paralyzed by fear again, channeling her energy into relentless movement. This descent symbolizes her rejection of meekness and her resolve to reclaim her strength.

The next day, despite the harsh autumn rain, Nesta and the priestesses gather for training, undeterred by the weather. Cassian, their tutor, is struck by Nesta's fierce focus and eagerness to push herself, though he struggles to contain his desire for her. The group has grown, with new priestesses joining, including Gwyn, who wears Illyrian leathers. Cassian recognizes their collective determination and suggests bringing in another tutor, Azriel, to accommodate the expanding group.

Azriel joins the training, and while the priestesses are initially hesitant, they quickly adapt to his presence. Cassian focuses on teaching Nesta, Emerie, and Gwyn combat techniques, including a pressure point strike that can incapacitate an opponent. The rain soaks them, but their exertion keeps them warm. Gwyn seems distracted, occasionally glancing at Azriel, but Cassian remains focused on the lesson. Nesta's playful interaction with Cassian reveals their growing chemistry, even as they maintain their training discipline.

After training, Nesta and Gwyn retreat to a cozy corner of the library to study a chapter on meditation techniques. Despite the simplicity of the instructions, they acknowledge the challenge of mastering the practice. Gwyn emphasizes the discipline required, while Nesta jokes about the potential for a nap. Their camaraderie and shared commitment to growth highlight their bond as they prepare to apply their newfound knowledge in their next training session.