

Chapter Forty

The chapter opens with a rain-soaked Velaris, where Nesta accompanies Cassian to a centuries-old blacksmith's shop on the city's outskirts. Despite the inclement weather, Nesta remains composed, her calm demeanor contrasting with the harsh conditions. Cassian, a regular patron of the shop, brings her to learn about blade-making, as Illyrian blacksmiths would not welcome a female apprentice. The blacksmith, a skilled but gruff High Fae, initially hesitates but eventually agrees to demonstrate the process after Nesta's polite request and Cassian's flattery about the artistry of blades.

Inside the workshop, Nesta observes the blacksmith's detailed explanation of blade forging, from ore selection to design. Though she speaks little, her focus is evident. When she asks to try hammering a blade herself, the blacksmith relents, providing a half-made sword for her to practice on. Her initial attempts are clumsy, but she persists, gradually improving with each strike. The blacksmith, surprisingly patient, guides her through the process, and Cassian notes her determination and growing skill, reminiscent of her resilience during the war with Hybern.

Nesta's progress becomes more apparent as she moves on to hammering a dagger, her movements surer and her confidence increasing. Sweat beads on her brow, but she continues with focused intensity, even managing a slight smile. Cassian feels a surge of pride as he watches her, recognizing the strength and focus she has developed. The blacksmith, usually reserved, smiles at her for the first time, acknowledging her dedication and natural aptitude for the craft.

The chapter culminates with Nesta tackling a great sword, her strikes precise and powerful, as if moving to an internal rhythm. Cassian is captivated by her transformation, seeing her as a force emerging from the heat and shadows of the forge. The rain and wind outside provide a backdrop to her rhythmic hammering, leaving Cassian to wonder what new strength and purpose will arise from this

experience. The chapter closes with a reflection on the challenges of swordplay, hinting at the continued growth of Nesta and her companions in their training.

