

Chapter Thirteen

Nesta Archeron struggles with physical exhaustion and self-loathing as she shelves books in the library, her body aching from recent training sessions. Despite her discomfort, she pushes through the pain, refusing to use her latent magical abilities to ease the task. Her hunger and fatigue amplify her frustration, but she finds a grim solace in the mindless labor, which temporarily distracts her from her turbulent thoughts. The chapter highlights her internal struggle with weakness and her reluctance to rely on her supernatural gifts, which she views as grotesque and alien.

The narrative shifts when Gwyn, a priestess, interrupts Nesta's work, questioning why she doesn't use magic to shelve the books. Nesta's curt dismissal of the suggestion reveals her deep-seated aversion to her powers. Gwyn, undeterred, dumps more books into Nesta's arms and confides in her about a pressing problem: she mistakenly delivered the wrong volume of a book to Merrill, a demanding and unpleasant researcher. Gwyn's anxiety over the mistake underscores her fear of failure and her gratitude toward the sanctuary that has taken her in.

Gwyn's distress over the missing book reveals her dedication to her duties and her fear of disappointing the community that has supported her. She describes Merrill as unforgiving, heightening the stakes of her error. Nesta, though initially dismissive, begins to see Gwyn's perspective, recognizing her commitment to the priestesses' shared values of healing and solidarity. The interaction hints at a potential bond forming between the two women, despite Nesta's guarded demeanor.

The chapter closes with Gwyn explaining the priestesses' way of life, emphasizing their voluntary seclusion within the mountain sanctuary. Nesta's curiosity about Gwyn's lack of exposure to daylight suggests her own restlessness and unresolved feelings about her place in the world. The exchange leaves Nesta pondering her isolation and the possibility of connection, even as she resists vulnerability. The chapter effectively

contrasts Nesta's internal turmoil with Gwyn's earnestness, setting the stage for future character development.

