

Chapter 28: Nesta and Departure

Chapter 28 marks a moment of profound transition, as the protagonist prepares to leave behind a world that has become an unexpected home. Dressed in an elaborate gown with delicate frills, smooth silk, and an absurd ivory hat that feels foreign on her, she stands on the precipice of two lives. Though she never chose this path willingly, she has come to accept it, forging bonds that now make this departure feel less like an escape and more like a quiet heartbreak.

The weight of unspoken emotions lingers between her and those she leaves behind. There are no tearful goodbyes, no grand declarations—only the solemn understanding that parting ways is inevitable. Lucien’s teasing remarks barely conceal his unease, while Tamlin remains reserved, his concern visible in the stiffness of his posture. Though their words remain lighthearted, there is an underlying tension, a quiet acknowledgment that this farewell carries deeper consequences than any of them are willing to admit aloud.

As she steps away, magic intervenes, sweeping her into an enchanted slumber that bridges the gap between past and present. When she awakens, she finds herself in a lavish estate, surrounded by finery that starkly contrasts the poverty she once knew. The sheer grandeur of her family’s new home is a testament to Tamlin’s silent care, his unseen hand ensuring their well-being even in his absence.

The reunion with her sisters is filled with disbelief and hesitant joy, their reactions wavering between relief and astonishment at both her return and the sudden wealth that has transformed their lives. Gone are the days of hunger and hardship—replaced instead by shimmering chandeliers, gilded furnishings, and gardens lush with imported blooms. Yet, amidst the comfort and security, the protagonist cannot shake the hollowness creeping into her chest, an ache that no amount of luxury can erase.

She quickly realizes that while her family has found peace, she herself is haunted by the unresolved echoes of her past. The abrupt nature of her departure from Prythian weighs on her, the lingering knowledge that Tamlin had sent her away not out of rejection but out of a desperate attempt to protect her. The words they never spoke—the love she never had the chance to fully express—hang between them like an unfinished melody, their absence more painful than any physical separation.

In quiet moments, she reflects on how much she has changed, how distant she now feels from the girl who once counted coins to buy bread, who feared faeries and longed for an escape from her bleak reality. This life of wealth and security is something she once dreamed of, yet now, it feels more like a gilded cage. While her sisters marvel at their newfound prosperity, she is painfully aware that a different kind of richness—one built on magic, love, and sacrifice—has been stripped away from her.

Nesta, with her piercing gaze and sharp intuition, is the only one who senses the dissonance within her. Though she does not pry, there is an understanding in her silence, a quiet acknowledgment that whatever the protagonist has endured is far beyond what their world can comprehend. Elain, ever optimistic, speaks of future travels, of tulip fields and grand adventures, oblivious to the war raging in her sister’s heart.

As the days pass, she tries to settle into this new reality, but the threads that tether her to Prythian remain unbroken. She finds herself retracing old paths, as if searching for remnants of the past that might anchor her. But the truth is undeniable—she no longer belongs in this world of polite society and whispered courtship, no longer fits the mold of the girl who once dreamed of marrying for security rather than love.

This chapter is a meditation on love, sacrifice, and the cost of safety. It explores the difficult choices that come with protecting the ones we care for, even at the risk of severing something irreplaceable. The protagonist’s departure is not just a physical separation but an emotional and spiritual one—a leaving behind

of the self she once was, stepping toward an uncertain but inevitable future.

As she gazes at the vast estate, surrounded by comfort yet feeling profoundly displaced, she realizes that this is not the end of her journey. The love she left behind, the choices forced upon her, and the battles yet to be fought call to her, a silent reminder that her story is far from over. And though she stands within the safety of her childhood home, her heart still beats for the world she was forced to leave behind.