

Chapter Sixty-Eight

The chapter opens with Nesta and her companions seeking shelter in the wilderness, ultimately finding themselves with no choice but to climb a tree for safety as night falls. Gwyn reveals how she managed to rest during their ordeal by using a long rope, which was likely left by Queen Briallyn's Illyrians and used for binding captives. The group's focus on concealment and survival highlights their vulnerability and resourcefulness in the face of danger from predatory creatures that are attracted to their scent. Sitting side by side on a sturdy branch, they discuss their strategies for avoiding detection and the importance of their shared shelter in the cold, harsh environment.

Emerie then shares insights about the history of the Rite, a brutal test of strength and resilience that many Illyrians undertake. She recounts stories from her family about their ancestors' daring exploits, emphasizing how few have reached the mountain top of Ramiel, which is guarded by jagged, deadly rocks. The Rite is a tribute to Enalius, a heroic Illyrian warrior who fought to hold a strategic pass during an ancient war, sacrificing himself to buy time for others. This history underscores the significance of the Rite as both a spiritual and cultural tradition, linking past heroism to present-day challenges faced by those attempting the climb.

As dawn breaks, Gwyn estimates that Ramiel is still days away, but they must reach a specific landmark—a wooden bridge over a ravine—that might be their only advantage against other competitors. Gwyn's reconnaissance reveals that the bridge is likely intact and unguarded, making it a critical point for their progress. The group debates whether to run or walk, knowing that speed could attract attention but also that hesitation might cost them the opportunity to secure the crossing. They resolve to run, pushing through exhaustion and hunger, aware that every second counts in their race against other competitors.

Suddenly, they encounter hostile males racing toward the ravine, aiming to destroy the bridge and prevent others from crossing. Recognizing the threat, Nesta and her companions decide to intercept them, risking confrontation to protect their chance of survival and progress. The chapter culminates in a tense chase, with Nesta leading a swift and coordinated effort to reach the ravine first. The urgency of the moment, combined with their determination to survive and succeed, underscores the chapter's themes of resilience, strategic thinking, and the relentless pursuit of a shared goal amidst perilous circumstances.



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