

Chapter Sixty-Five

Nesta awakens alone in the western dumping ground of the Blood Rite, separated from her friends Emerie and Gwyn. Realizing they must be in the northern or southern territories, she climbs a tree to orient herself toward Ramiel, the ritual's endpoint. The distance seems insurmountable, and with her healing abilities suppressed by the Rite's magic, even minor injuries could prove fatal. Determined to survive and rescue her friends, Nesta pushes forward, aware that no outside help will come due to the Rite's strict laws.

As warriors begin waking behind her, Nesta notices her silver charm bracelet glowing—a beacon she unknowingly created to guide her back to her friends. The charm pulses strongest when pointed north, signaling urgent danger in that direction. This revelation sparks hope: the Rite's anti-magic rules don't suppress her "Made" objects, a loophole the Illyrians hadn't anticipated. The charm's magic affirms Nesta's personhood, a subtle but profound comfort amid the brutality of the trial.

Choosing to trust the charm, Nesta races northward, battling impractical boots and rough terrain. She strategizes survival needs—water, shelter, fire—while staying alert for pursuing warriors. The charm's persistent glow confirms her path, though she hides its light to avoid detection. Her progress is abruptly interrupted when an arrow narrowly misses her, revealing that some participants have weapons—a dangerous violation of the Rite's typical rules.

Dodging the arrow, Nesta scans for the attacker, realizing the stakes have escalated. The weapon confirms the Rite's lethality, but she refuses to yield. Drawing her knife, she prepares to fight or flee, her resolve hardening. The chapter ends with Nesta poised between survival and sacrifice, her journey northward now a race against both the elements and armed adversaries. Her determination to reunite with her friends fuels her forward, even as the risks mount.