

Chapter Sixty-Eight

The chapter follows Nesta, Emerie, and Gwyn as they navigate the treacherous Illyrian Rite, seeking shelter in a tree for the night. With no caves available, they use a rope left by Queen Briallyn's forces to secure themselves to a branch, hoping their scents will mask Emerie's Illyrian identity from predatory creatures. The group discusses the Rite's history, including the legendary warrior Enalius, who defended a strategic pass during an ancient war. The conversation highlights the Rite's brutality and the significance of Ramiel, the mountain they must climb, while foreshadowing the challenges ahead.

As night deepens, the trio takes turns keeping watch, their hunger and exhaustion palpable. Emerie shares her knowledge of the Rite, explaining the Pass of Enalius—a perilous route Cassian and his brothers once conquered—and its symbolic importance. Nesta reflects on the legacy of bravery and wonders if her own name will endure. The group's camaraderie and determination shine through their shared struggle, even as distant roars remind them of the dangers lurking in the darkness.

The next morning, Gwyn scouts the terrain and discovers a critical bridge over a ravine, which could give them an advantage if they reach it first. Realizing other competitors are also heading toward the bridge, the trio debates whether to run or proceed cautiously. They ultimately choose to sprint, despite their exhaustion, to intercept the rival group before they can destroy the bridge. The tension escalates as both parties race toward the same objective, setting the stage for a confrontation.

The chapter culminates in a high-stakes chase, with Nesta, Emerie, and Gwyn altering their course to confront the males before they reach the bridge. Armed with makeshift weapons and fueled by desperation, the trio prepares for a potential battle. The narrative underscores their resilience and strategic thinking, as well as the physical and emotional toll of the Rite. The cliffhanger ending leaves readers anticipating the

outcome of their daring maneuver and the next phase of their journey toward Ramiel.

