

Chapter Sixty-Four

Nesta awakens disoriented and in pain, her mouth dry and head throbbing, to find herself in a harsh, cold environment surrounded by unconscious Illyrian warriors. She quickly realizes she has been forcibly taken to participate in the Blood Rite, a brutal trial where magic is bound, leaving her powerless. Panic sets in as she recalls her friends, Gwyn and Emerie, screaming before she blacked out. With no weapons or warm clothing, Nesta understands she must act quickly before the others awaken and discover her vulnerable state.

Determined to survive, Nesta assesses her surroundings, noting the sheer number of warriors and the absence of her friends. She remembers stories of Cassian, Rhysand, and Azriel surviving the Rite by fighting their way to each other, but doubts her own chances. The cold is unbearable, and she knows she needs warmth, shoes, and a weapon. Spotting a distant tree, she considers using moss to determine direction but finds none. Her priority becomes finding higher ground to locate Ramiel, the sacred mountain, and hopefully her friends.

As Nesta prepares to move, she notices a predatory male staring at her with cruel intent. Fear courses through her when she sees a knife embedded in a tree—a rare weapon in the Rite. She faces a choice: flee or fight for the blade. Knowing the danger of being unarmed among awakened warriors, she decides to run for the knife, her survival instincts overriding her fear. The chapter ends with her sprinting toward the weapon, the stakes of her predicament painfully clear.

Meanwhile, Cassian is in turmoil after discovering Nesta, Emerie, and Gwyn have been taken. His family gathers, but Rhysand reminds him of the Rite's unbreakable laws: interfering means death for both rescuer and rescued. Cassian's desperation grows as he realizes he can do nothing but wait, a prospect he finds unbearable. The chapter highlights the emotional tension between Cassian's protective instincts and the harsh

realities of Illyrian tradition, setting the stage for the challenges both he and Nesta must face.

