

# Chapter Thirty-Five

The chapter plunges Nesta into a harrowing underwater struggle against a kelpie, evoking traumatic memories of her past encounter with the Cauldron. Disoriented in the frigid darkness, she initially panics but quickly recalls her weapons and magic. Despite the kelpie's relentless grip, Nesta fights back with her dagger, severing its hold on her leg. The creature retaliates, pinning her to the silty bottom and assaulting her with a grotesque kiss that forces air into her lungs—a cruel act meant to prolong her suffering. The violation triggers flashbacks to her abuse by Tomas, heightening her terror and rage.

As the kelpie disarms her, Nesta's desperation grows. The creature's predatory touches and taunting laughter mirror the entitlement of her past tormentors, reinforcing her sense of helplessness. Yet, she refuses to succumb, internally reaching for her dormant power. Amid the swirling darkness, she glimpses a golden disk—an object of power—floating toward her. The kelpie remains oblivious as Nesta grasps it, recognizing its significance. Her body aches from cuts and bruises, but the disk offers a fleeting hope, a tool to turn the tide against her captor.

With clarity born of sheer desperation, Nesta realizes the golden disk is the Mask, a powerful artifact. As the kelpie drags her deeper, she steels herself for a final gamble. The creature senses her resolve too late—Nesta swiftly slams the Mask onto her face, seizing control of the situation. The act symbolizes her defiance, a rejection of the victimhood that has haunted her. The chapter climaxes with this pivotal moment, leaving her fate uncertain but her agency undeniable.

The chapter masterfully intertwines physical struggle with psychological trauma, highlighting Nesta's resilience. Her journey from panic to empowerment mirrors her broader arc of reclaiming autonomy. The kelpie's brutality and the Mask's emergence serve as metaphors for her internal battles, culminating in a decisive act of self-

preservation. The vivid, visceral prose immerses readers in Nesta's ordeal, underscoring the themes of survival and transformation that define her character.

