

Chapter Thirty-Four

The chapter opens with Nesta encountering a terrifying creature emerging from black water—a kelpie with bone-white skin, obsidian hair, and grotesque features including a too-wide mouth filled with jagged teeth. Overcome with terror, Nesta freezes as the creature drags itself onto land, its elongated fingers digging into the moss. The kelpie's predatory demeanor and unnatural movements heighten the tension, culminating in its sudden lunge toward Nesta. Despite an internal voice urging her to flee, she remains paralyzed until the kelpie seizes her legs and pulls her into the water.

Meanwhile, Cassian and Azriel deal with two captured soldiers bearing Eris's insignia. The soldiers exhibit vacant expressions and strange behavior, lacking fear or awareness of their predicament. Azriel binds them with his Siphons' power while Cassian notes their unwashed stench and possible connection to Eris's missing troops. The brothers speculate about the soldiers' odd state, but their focus shifts abruptly when Cassian realizes Nesta is no longer in the tree where he left her, sparking urgency to find her.

The narrative alternates between Nesta's harrowing struggle and Cassian's growing alarm. As the kelpie drags her underwater, Nesta's panic and pain break her stupor, but her attempts to resist are futile. The bog's grass offers no grip, symbolizing her helplessness. Meanwhile, Cassian and Azriel race back to Nesta's last known location, their concern mounting when she's nowhere to be found. The chapter's dual threads of horror and urgency create a gripping cliffhanger.

The chapter masterfully blends supernatural horror with action, contrasting Nesta's visceral terror with Cassian's tactical response to the mysterious soldiers. The kelpie's otherworldly menace and the soldiers' eerie blankness suggest larger, unseen forces at play. The abrupt cuts between perspectives amplify tension, leaving readers anxious for Nesta's fate and the truth behind the soldiers' behavior. The prose

maintains a dark, immersive tone, staying true to the series' signature blend of fantasy and emotional intensity.

