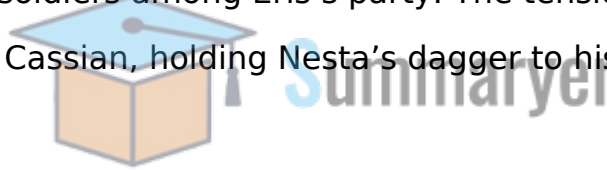


# Chapter Sixty-Nine

Eris leads a small caravan eastward, accompanied by Briallyn, with Cassian and Azriel secretly tracking them. The group enters an ancient, moss-covered forest, eventually stopping at a lakeside camp. Cassian and Azriel observe from a distance, noting the mix of nobility and soldiers among Eris's party. The tension escalates when Eris suddenly confronts Cassian, holding Nesta's dagger to his ribs, revealing a calculated trap.



Meanwhile, Nesta, Gwyn, and Emerie struggle to ascend a treacherous mountain as part of the Blood Rite. Exhausted and injured, they push forward despite their physical and mental anguish. Nesta reflects on the possibility that the mountain amplifies their fears, draining their resolve. When they spot Bellius and his group closing in, Nesta takes decisive action, carrying Gwyn on her back to ensure their survival, embodying relentless determination.

Back at the lakeside camp, Cassian and Azriel face off against Eris, who taunts them with cryptic remarks about Rhysand and the Morrigan. The confrontation takes a darker turn as Briallyn's voice interjects, revealing her involvement in the scheme. The scene underscores the political and personal vendettas at play, with Cassian and Azriel caught in a dangerous game of power and deception.

The chapter weaves together two parallel narratives of survival and confrontation. Nesta's physical endurance and leadership contrast with Cassian's precarious situation, highlighting the themes of resilience and betrayal. The mounting tension in both storylines sets the stage for pivotal developments, leaving readers eager to see how the characters will navigate their respective challenges.