

Chapter Seventy-Three

The chapter opens with Nesta locked in a brutal fight against Bellius, her strength waning as he drives her toward a symbolic line in the earth. Despite her exhaustion, she refuses to yield, even as Bellius lands punishing blows. When he knocks her across the line, the mountain trembles, signaling a shift in the battle. Nesta crawls away, defying him until the last moment, but Bellius draws a knife, taunting her with the promise of a violent end. Just as she resigns herself to death, Cassian intervenes with lethal force, slicing Bellius's throat and saving her.

Cassian's arrival initially brings relief as he helps Nesta stand, but the moment turns sinister when he suddenly threatens her, his voice and actions no longer his own. Nesta struggles against his grip, horrified as she realizes he's being controlled. Cassian is trapped in his own body, silently screaming for her to fight or flee, but unable to break free from the force manipulating him. His internal agony contrasts sharply with the physical threat he now poses to Nesta, creating a tense and heartbreaking dynamic.

The chapter takes a darker turn as Briallyn, the true orchestrator of Cassian's actions, reveals herself. Wearing the Crown, she asserts control over Cassian, forcing him to present Nesta to her. Nesta's defiance shifts from physical combat to a mental battle as she faces Briallyn's twisted power. The scene underscores the vulnerability of both Nesta and Cassian, as well as the insidious nature of the Crown's influence, which turns allies into weapons.

The chapter ends on a cliffhanger, with Briallyn's triumph and Cassian's helplessness heightening the stakes. Nesta's resilience is tested in a new way as she confronts not just physical danger but the betrayal of her mate's autonomy. The mountain's earlier shuddering hints at deeper magical forces at play, leaving readers anticipating the next confrontation and the potential consequences of Briallyn's unchecked power.