

# Chapter 1: A Hunter's Gamble

*"Chapter 1: A Hunter's Gamble"*. The forest stretched endlessly before her, blanketed in a thick layer of snow that muted every sound except the occasional snap of frozen branches underfoot. Feyre moved carefully, her breath misting in the icy air as she scanned her surroundings for any sign of movement. Winter had tightened its grip, and food had become a rare commodity, forcing her farther from home than she would have dared venture in milder seasons. Each step she took was driven by desperation, not just for herself but for the starving family waiting back at their dilapidated cottage.

Nestled high in a tree, her sharp eyes traced the barren landscape below, searching for any hint of movement among the frost-coated brush. The woods had grown eerily quiet, the usual rustling of small creatures absent, as though even they knew of the dangers that lurked in the deeper shadows. Stories of faeries prowling beyond the invisible border separating Prythian from the mortal lands echoed in her mind, cautioning her to remain alert. Though many dismissed these tales as myths meant to frighten children, she knew better than to underestimate the unseen forces that roamed these woods.

Despite the risks, her hunger outweighed her fear. It had been days since they had eaten anything substantial, and she could not return home empty-handed. As the daylight began to wane, she adjusted her grip on her bow, preparing to leave, her muscles stiff from the cold. Just as she shifted her weight to descend, movement in the distance caught her attention—a flicker of life against the white backdrop of the forest.

A doe.

Her heart pounded as she observed the graceful creature, its ribs faintly visible beneath its tawny coat. A kill like this would feed her family for weeks, providing sustenance that had been sorely lacking. She nocked an arrow, preparing to take her shot when another figure emerged from the trees, sending a shiver down her spine.

A wolf.

It was far larger than any she had seen before, moving with unnatural silence through the snow, its coat as thick and pale as the frost-covered ground. Instinct warned her that this was no ordinary predator—it was either an unnaturally large beast or something far worse: a faerie in disguise. The villagers often spoke of creatures that walked among them, hiding in plain sight, their true nature only revealed when it was too late. If this was indeed a faerie, she was on the verge of making a fatal mistake.

Her fingers tightened around the arrow shaft, hesitation creeping in. If she let the wolf take the doe, her family would go hungry, but if she struck down a faerie, the consequences could be dire. She could feel the weight of the moment pressing down on her, the choice between caution and necessity battling in her mind.

She exhaled slowly, reaching for one of the special arrows in her quiver—iron-tipped and fletched with mountain ash, the only defense mortals had against the magic of the fae. If the stories held any truth, the materials would weaken or even kill a faerie, though she had never tested this theory herself. Her hands were steady as she took aim, focusing on the wolf's ribs just as she would with any other prey.

The arrow flew true, piercing the wolf's side with deadly precision. It let out a soundless cry, its massive frame collapsing into the snow, leaving only crimson staining the white landscape. For a breathless moment, Feyre remained still, watching, waiting for something unnatural to happen—for glowing eyes to flash open, for the body to twist and shift into something unspeakable. But nothing came.

The forest remained still.

Despite the silence, unease crept up her spine. Had she truly slain a mere beast, or had she just sealed her fate with a single arrow? Either way, the doe was hers now, and she would not waste the opportunity. She wasted no time in preparing the carcasses, cutting swiftly, her hands numbed by the cold but her mind sharp with focus.

With the weight of the deer slung over her shoulders, she cast one last glance at the fallen wolf before trudging homeward. The unease in her chest did not fade, lingering like a whisper of warning in the frigid air.