

Chapter 5: Captive in Prythian

In Chapter 5, the journey into the unknown began with an unrelenting silence, broken only by the rhythmic clatter of hooves against the damp forest floor. The protagonist found herself astride a white mare, its steady gait offering the only semblance of stability amidst the chaos that had upended her life. Ahead of her, the beast—a towering figure of fur and raw power—moved with effortless grace, leading her deeper into the endless stretch of trees, away from the world she knew and into the heart of the faerie lands. Though she rode without physical restraints, the weight of captivity settled over her like an invisible shackle, binding her fate to the whims of a creature she neither understood nor trusted.

Dread coiled in her chest as she crossed the unseen boundary separating the mortal world from Prythian, the fabled realm of faeries that humans spoke of in whispers and cautionary tales. Here, the air itself felt different—thicker, tinged with magic, pressing against her skin as though it sought to unravel her very essence. The trees loomed taller, their ancient trunks twisted with veins of silver, their leaves whispering secrets in an unfamiliar tongue. Every shadow seemed to shift, watching, waiting. She knew she should be planning her escape, yet the enormity of her situation left her momentarily frozen, grappling with the realization that she had stepped into a world where humans were nothing more than prey.

Her thoughts swirled with uncertainty. Having killed a faerie, she was well aware that she had violated the fragile terms of the Treaty, yet the exact consequences remained unclear. Would she be imprisoned, enslaved, or worse—left to rot in some forsaken corner of the realm? The ambiguity gnawed at her, forcing her to recall the old legends, the warnings of those who had vanished without a trace, and the foolish mortals who willingly sought out faeries, only to be swallowed by their merciless world. The Children of the Blessed, with their blind reverence for faeries, would have seen this as a gift, a divine summons. But she was no fool. She had spent her life surviving, and she had no intention of changing that now.

As they pressed onward, the landscape shifted subtly, the rigid familiarity of the mortal forest giving way to something more surreal, more alive. Flowers bloomed in impossible colors, their petals opening and closing as though breathing. The air vibrated with an unseen energy, and beneath the surface of a nearby stream, golden fish flickered like flames, unaffected by the current. It was beautiful—terrifyingly so. She found herself unable to look away, caught between awe and unease. If Prythian was as cruel as the stories claimed, why did it appear so enchanting? But then again, beauty was often the most effective trap.

Despite the heavy silence, her captor showed no interest in offering explanations, nor did he seem concerned with whether she followed willingly. When she finally dared to break the quiet, demanding to know her fate, his response was as cryptic as it was infuriating. "You live because I allow it," he said simply, offering no further clarity, no glimpse into what awaited her beyond the veil of trees. His voice was deep, edged with something ancient and unreadable, making it clear that she held no power here. The realization stung, but she refused to let her fear show.

She contemplated escape, measuring her odds against the strength and speed of the beast beside her. Even if she could slip away undetected, she had no bearings in this unfamiliar land, no knowledge of the dangers lurking beyond the trees. Was it better to take her chances in the wild or remain at the mercy of a faerie whose motives remained a mystery? The question haunted her as exhaustion began to creep in, her body aching from the long ride and the tension coiled in her muscles.

As night fell, the beast made camp beneath the outstretched limbs of a massive oak, its branches woven with luminescent vines that bathed the clearing in an eerie glow. He uttered no command, yet she understood—this was where they would rest. Despite her exhaustion, sleep did not come easily. Every sound in the forest felt amplified, every rustle of leaves a potential threat. She remained tense, watching her captor

from the corner of her eye, waiting for the moment he would lower his guard.

But that moment never came. Instead, a strange lethargy settled over her, her limbs growing heavier with each passing second. The air thickened, her mind fogging, and she barely had time to register the enchantment taking hold before her vision blurred and the world faded into darkness. The last thing she saw was the beast watching her, his expression unreadable, as sleep claimed her without mercy.