

CHAPTER IV - Thuvia, Maid of Mars

CHAPTER IV - Thuvia, Maid of Mars begins with Thuvia awakening aboard a Martian craft, its crew now disguised in the colors of Helium rather than Dusr. Though this shift raises hope that her captor may be Carthoris, the men's silence and veiled responses offer no real reassurance. The vessel's route ends at a lifeless Martian city—one of many abandoned relics that dot Barsoom's landscape—suggesting that her arrival is part of a much darker scheme. The crumbling palace where she is confined reveals whispers of ancient greatness, but her confinement carries only unease. Eavesdropping from her chamber, Thuvia learns of the captors' plot to lure an unknown pursuer, a trap built upon her presence.

Three nights pass in tense captivity, each moment spent among dust-covered ruins and fading murals of long-dead civilizations. On the third night, she is led to the deserted plaza and left alone beneath the stars. The empty expanse, haunted by silence and the memory of lost empires, becomes a stage for her next ordeal. Just as the city seems to sleep, a massive figure emerges from the shadows—Thar Ban, a Green Martian from Torquas, seizes her, mistaking her vulnerability as opportunity. Before she can cry out, she is whisked into the night, just as a second flier descends from the sky. It is Carthoris, tracking her captors with determination and anger burning behind his steady focus.

The prince of Helium opens fire upon the fleeing party, disabling their flier and scattering the false Heliumites. Aboard his own ship, Carthoris is injured in the struggle but undeterred. His pursuit of Thuvia and Thar Ban, though slowed by mechanical damage, becomes more desperate as the terrain grows unforgiving. With his flier failing, he descends into the endless plains on foot, trailing the faint signs of his quarry through dust and forgotten Martian valleys. His only guide becomes a banth—one of Barsoom's fiercest predators—whose path suggests it, too, follows the same scent.

The chase leads him into rocky highlands, where the red dust of Mars grows thin, and the landscape becomes a maze of stone and silence. The banth suddenly vanishes before a cliffside wall, and Carthoris, sensing something concealed, begins to investigate. Behind a thicket of stone and lichen, he discovers the entrance to a darkened tunnel carved into the cliffs—a place untouched by wind or time. Though uncertain what waits within, the passage feels like the only clue left in a world of vanishing trails and shifting sand.

Inside the tunnel, he is enveloped by shadow and silence, but the air holds the scent of life—faint, distant, and mixed with the wild musk of the banth. Though his injuries slow him, Carthoris moves carefully, his blade ready and heart steady, driven by more than duty. For all Thuvia's silence and suspicion, he remains convinced of her courage and believes that saving her is worth every peril this labyrinth may hold.

The chapter captures the essence of Barsoom's allure: a combination of deadly wonder, forgotten cities, and the raw emotions of its heroes. Carthoris's resolve, even in the face of injury and uncertainty, reflects the legacy of John Carter and the enduring qualities of Helium's warriors. Thuvia, though a prisoner, remains sharp and resilient, embodying more than just the damsel trope. Her calm observation of events and her strategic mind hint that she is far from helpless, despite her situation.

As this chapter closes, the mystery deepens—the ruins hide not only physical threats but the motives of political enemies intent on igniting war through deception. The wilderness of Mars is more than backdrop; it is a living part of the conflict, amplifying tension and isolating heroes in their private battles. Carthoris and Thuvia are now closer to each other in fate, yet the distance of misunderstanding and the designs of enemies still loom. Their separate paths are destined to collide once more—through darkness, dust, and the fire of Barsoom's burning heart.