

# Chapter 8

The chapter begins with the protagonist experiencing a brief moment of intimacy and normalcy with Tamlin before he is called away to the border, leaving her isolated for the week. During this time, she grapples with physical and emotional distress, including nightmares and nausea, while avoiding discussions about the traumatic events involving her sisters. Lanthe, present during her visits, offers little reassurance beyond instructing her to observe Tamlin's actions and trust him to handle the situation. This period emphasizes her sense of helplessness and the weight of unspoken fears, as she remains confined on the estate, awaiting further developments.

The narrative then shifts to the grand Tithe ceremony held in the manor's hall, where various town and court representatives present their offerings—ranging from gold to livestock—to the High Lord, Tamlin. The scene depicts a formal, almost regal atmosphere, with Lucien overseeing the tallying of contributions and Lanthe offering blessings and comforting words to the departing guests. The protagonist observes the event with a mixture of detachment and curiosity, recognizing the underlying power dynamics and the importance of these displays of allegiance and obligation within the court's social structure.

A significant focus is placed on the interaction with the water-wraith emissary, a creature from the lake who pleads for mercy, claiming there are no fish left to pay the tithe. Tamlin's response is cold and unwavering, insisting that the water-wraith must meet her obligations within three days or face penalties, despite her pleas and the clear suffering of her kind. This exchange highlights Tamlin's strict adherence to rules and his inability to make exceptions, even when the circumstances seem dire. The scene underscores the harsh realities of court diplomacy and the often merciless nature of the court's demands.

The chapter concludes with the protagonist questioning Tamlin's merciless stance, particularly his refusal to show mercy to the water-wraith. Tamlin's rationale—that making exceptions would lead to chaos and demands from others—reflects his rigid sense of order and authority. The protagonist's internal conflict grows as she observes the suffering inflicted by the court's strict policies, contrasting her own feelings of helplessness with Tamlin's unwavering enforcement. This ending emphasizes the tension between compassion and duty within the court's hierarchical and often brutal society.

