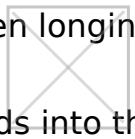
Chapter IV - Thuvia - Maid of Mars

Chapter IV thrusts Thuvia into the clutches of captors whose motives remain cloaked behind false banners and half-spoken threats. At first, she sees the markings of Dusar and braces for hostility. But the insignia of Helium offers a fleeting glimmer of hope—perhaps these men are allies. That illusion vanishes when her questions are dodged, and she is flown to a long-abandoned city hidden within Barsoom’s desolate lands. Once a thriving metropolis, now it echoes only the whispers of ancient fears and Martian superstition. Her shelter, a dusty palace carved from crumbling stone, does little to mask the chill of danger. As she overhears her captors plotting, the truth emerges—they do not serve Helium or Dusar, but a deeper scheme involving bait, betrayal, and a man who must follow. When she is discovered eavesdropping, the response is swift and cold. She is left alone, under threat of a fate unspoken yet deeply feared.

Thuvia, a princess of Ptarth, has faced peril before, but this isolation sharpens her senses. Her mind turns to escape, yet the looming silence of the city seems to press in on her, hinting at unseen dangers that walk in the ruins. Stories of white apes—ferocious, six-limbed creatures—linger in her thoughts, making each creak and shadow feel alive. Before she can act, the situation takes an unexpected turn. Thar Ban, a green Martian chieftain from Torquas, bursts onto the scene and seizes her as his own prize. He regards her as a symbol of power and prestige among his kind. Her previous captors attempt to resist but are swiftly overwhelmed by the brute strength and coordination of Thar Ban's warriors. Now in different hands, Thuvia again faces uncertainty—though in the brutal world of green Martians, survival depends on boldness more than diplomacy.

Meanwhile, Carthoris of Helium is only steps behind. His desperate chase had begun the moment her disappearance was known. At first, signs suggested she had been

taken by Dusarians, leading him to believe diplomacy or strategy might recover her. But his arrival at the ruined city brings only silence and the aftermath of conflict. The damaged flier that once served her captors lies discarded. The trail grows cold, yet Carthoris refuses to turn back. He battles remnants of her abductors in a blur of steel and fire before continuing on foot, his path now fueled not just by duty but devotion. Though Mars is vast, he believes her presence draws him closer—each step narrowing the space between longing and reunion.



Carthoris descends into the rugged foothills, guided only by instinct and scattered clues. There, in the red dust, he spots deep, clawed footprints and strange drag marks that suggest something—or someone—has been taken unwillingly. A sudden sound alerts him to a stalking banth. But instead of preparing to fight, he follows the predator’s path, hoping it has tracked the same quarry. His bet is dangerous, yet logical—banths are relentless and sensitive to scent. They seldom veer from prey unless wounded or confused. If the beast had followed Thuvia’s scent, then so too could he. His pursuit eventually leads him to the mouth of a shadowy cave etched into a rocky cliff. It seems untouched, yet something about its presence feels deliberate.

Inside, the air is cool and stale, the silence absolute. Carthoris steps cautiously, noting symbols on the walls unlike any he’s seen before. This place may be more than a hiding spot—it could be sacred ground, a forgotten passage, or something worse. He presses forward, thoughts of Thuvia anchoring his resolve. Even here, surrounded by mystery, her image gives him purpose. While her location remains unknown, he senses the city’s illusions and this cave’s presence are connected. These places, shaped by Barsoom's ancient powers and present chaos, seem designed to test the strength of one’s will. For Carthoris, it is not just a test of strength or skill, but of faith—in his mission, and in her.

In times of war and confusion, Barsoom’s hidden cities serve as mirrors to the hearts of its explorers. They amplify fear, resilience, and the need for truth. Carthoris and Thuvia, though separated by circumstance and distance, are united by their refusal to surrender to fear or fate. While each faces different threats, their choices show parallel

courage—his in the relentless pursuit, hers in the resistance against domination. The true heart of this chapter lies not in the capture or chase, but in how two individuals hold onto purpose despite everything designed to strip it away. On Barsoom, survival is often granted to the strong, but peace belongs to the steadfast.

