

We turned north, racing the winter skies. Snow was already beginning to fall in soft, feather-like tufts by the time we passed through the Vale of York and into the Cumbrian Mountains. But when we reached the old Roman road that led to Carlisle, we passed it by, heading further west toward the sea.

“Where are we going? Why are we not returning to Carlisle?” I asked Arthur, reigning in my horse in next to his.

“Carlisle was only a temporary home. I am taking you home to our true capital.” His eyes glimmered, but he said not another word on the subject.

Days, weeks, hours passed. Time was as meaningless here as in the veil of mists surrounding Avalon. Each mile looked the same as the last as the world melted into a landscape of heavy gray clouds, swirling snow and icy wind that bit into my cheeks with the teeth of a starving wolf.

The sky darkened and the meager glow behind the clouds faded. I remember fighting the weight of my leaden eyelids, willing myself to stay awake. Then it seemed to me the whole landscape came alive. Dryads emerged from their trees as we passed, tall, thin and straight-backed as the naked bark that usually camouflaged them from human eyes. In between snowflakes, pale lights glimmered, whirling and diving with temperament of the wind. One brushed my cheek in a gentle kiss and I thought I heard a childish giggle. As we skirted a sluggish stream, the white-haired, pale-eyed fey appeared. To my great astonishment, they bowed, forming an honor guard on all sides.

I jerked awake to find myself in Arthur’s arms. He must have lifted me like a child from my horse and lay me in front of him in his saddle. How he or the horse could manage my weight, I didn’t know, but I was grateful.

I snuggled closer to Arthur's chest and listened to his heart beat as tiny droplets of snow piled up on the hood of my cloak. I knew then I had been dreaming, but somehow I knew it to be more than that. The land was welcoming me home.

I dozed again and when I awoke, the eastern clouds were slowly breaking, the first light of dawn glowing rose and gold in their underbelly. We had ridden all night.

Realizing I was awake, Arthur lowered down my hood and kissed the top of my head. He slowed his horse and helped me sit aright in front of him, whispering into my hair, "Behold your kingdom, my Queen."