

*Here is an excerpt from the early chapters of a fantasy/sci-fi novel. The author wanted a slower pace, more descriptions, and compound sentences. There is virtually no dialogue in this excerpt, allowing for more visuals to create a longer set-up.*

For some reason, Joanne felt like dancing that morning. Not the kind of dance you would do at a festival or a wedding where happy groups of people sway to the upbeat music of cheerful minstrels and bards. Nor was it a dance for a solemn ceremony for druids that pay homage to their groves and shrines. Her dance was unique; her own. The earth below her feet gave her stride and spring. It was an ancient dance; as ancient as herself.

Joanne had left her father's house in Eagle Rock Falls earlier that morning. Her bow and quiver still lay beside her bed. She had no intention of practicing today, nor had she expected trouble. There hadn't been trouble in New Havenport for a hundred years. Still, she was the cautious type.

Joanne quietly walked past the Cloaked Vixen Tavern, where she had often stopped in for a meal or a drink. She mounted her mare and made her way to the Clementine River. Joanne crossed the South Bridge, leaving the village behind. She gave her horse a gentle kick and broke into a sprint, racing towards the familiar glades.

Joanne made her way into the woods. She quickly sensed she was not alone. A unicorn had been watching her from behind a cluster of trees as she crossed the bridge. The unicorn began running toward her. Joanne darted through the trees, going deeper into the woods. The unicorn followed. The creature's white graceful form was a stark contrast to the dark colors of the forest.

*Hurry, Ferra!* Joanne playfully called out telepathically to her unicorn friend.  
*Catch me!*

Ferra heard her as she picked up speed to keep pace with the swift maiden. Joanne's steed was quick and agile, but unicorns are faster. Ferra approached Joanne from behind in a dexterous stride. She gently nipped at the end of Joanne's long platinum blond hair. Joanne smiled and laughed as she felt Ferra behind her.

Without missing a stride, Joanne leaped off her horse and onto Ferra's back. Joanne quickly wrapped her arms around the unicorn's neck, embracing her friend as they raced along. Ferra's speed increased. Soon, the two had broken free of the woods

and approached an open green meadow. They traversed the meadow and began to move into the hills on the horizon. They made their way to the top of one a low-rounded hill. Ferra slowed to a canter. She and Joanne looked down the other side into a shallow valley surrounded by forest. In the distance, Azure Lake lay in a thin perimeter of meadow and a shady grove of trees.

*Our favorite place*, Joanne said to Ferra.

The two casually descended toward the calm body of water and reached the grassy meadow strip along the southwest bank. Joanne dismounted. Ferra moved over to a nearby tree to rest.

Joanne began to undress. She placed her tunic, doublet, and boots on the grassy bank. She was tall by the standards of her people, no doubt due in large part to her mother's faerie heritage. Although she did not have wings, she did possess the slender, elegant, figure typical of her kin. She had the muscle tone of a seasoned warrior, but the smoothness and contour of a well-kept courtesan. She had lived over a millennium, but she was human and one would have guessed her age to be no more than thirty. Her complexion was light, more creamy than pale, and remarkable as her torso was constantly exposed to sunlight. Her eyes were hazel-green, a rarity among her people.

Joanne slid gracefully into the cool water, fully submerging for a moment, then came up again. She began moving slowly and steadily toward the middle of the lake. The sun was high, its rays reflecting off the smooth surface of the water.

"I hope you have some other exercise plan today, because that's the saddest excuse for a Militia Captain's daily regimen I've ever seen!" said a woman's voice.

The voice had come from the other side of the lake. Normally, Joanne would have reacted swiftly and defensively to the sound of someone encroaching on her time of solitude and sanctuary, but she recognized this voice instantly.

"Care to join me?" Joanne asked as she swam toward the woman.