

Chapter 14

venture into the woods at night. Do not leave the protection of the manor's magic. The blight you speak of comes from beyond the borders of Prythian, a darkness that started seeping in years ago, slowly at first, but increasingly more aggressive. It is a darkness that feeds on magic, twisting and contaminating it. The High Lords are aware, fighting it in their own ways, but its source remains elusive. Be careful what you ask of the night, and of the stranger shadows it brings.”

As the Suriel's voice faded into the chill of the approaching evening, I cut it free from the snare.

With a nod that felt like a benediction or maybe a warning, it turned, its dark robes melding with the shadows among the birch trees, and then it was as if it had never been there at all. The woods felt denser now, heavy with secrets and the weight of my new knowledge. Tamlin, a High Lord, not just some lord of a small territory but one of the mightiest in Prythian. The threat of a blight stealing and altering magic, its origin a mystery even to such an ancient creature as the Suriel. My mind raced with the implications, and for the first time since my arrival in this enchanted land, the scale of what I faced—and what I could possibly lose—began to sink in.

I began my journey back to the manor, each step weighted with the burden of my new knowledge. I knew I could not flee, not without endangering myself and my family further. But perhaps, if I stayed, if I learned more about the magic and the secrets of this land, there might still be hope. Not just for my survival, but for whatever lay beyond this battle against the blight. As the sun dipped lower, casting long shadows through the woods, I realized that despite the dangers, despite the fear, I was not alone. I had the protection of the High Lord, and perhaps, just perhaps, that would be enough to survive whatever challenges lay ahead.