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Professor Dnaw went on, "There's a... lore of sorts surrounding this particular fungus – a superstition, some would call it. I'm telling you this so you wouldn't be in the dark of the whispers that would inevitably follow given the number of students who'd witnessed your ceremony. It uh... foretells that, should a prolégo mushroom ever end up as an ingredient in a creature's wand, a prophecy would unravel, one that the wands' owners are bound to fulfil; a prophecy that no power or foresight would enable them to escape."

"And I am to understand the prophecy is bad?" she asked, voice steady but her heart was thumping quicker than scampering rogues.

"Well, no. It's more complicated than that. You see, legend has it that if only one wand carried a prolégo mushroom, the master of the wand would be destined for greatness – a positive omen. However, where two of such wands exist, one would be known for a greatness while the other would be infamous for treachery. The order in which these beings come of age to wield a wand is irrelevant. Both have an equal chance of being either destined for greatness or infamous for treachery."

Reida gulped, making sure she had her voice before replying, "So my wand is one of the two in existence?"

"Three, actually," Theo said, his mouth curved into a frown. The approachable demeanor she was used to seeing was now hidden under that stony exterior that she'd come to learn signify his worry.

"Who holds the other two?" she questioned, though she already had a good guess of one of them by the look in his eyes.

"Me," Theo said, then added in a discontent murmur, "And the future high lord of Incanta." Theo's jaw and fists clenched, a modicum of anger marring his face.

Pivoting her attention back to the professor, she asked, "And what does legend foretell when there are three such wands in existence?"

Professor Gnaw harrumphed. "All three creatures would be remembered for centuries: one for greatness; one for treachery; and one for heartbreak."

Subtly jolting in her seat, Reida's face blanched. In her head, her lycan moaned in dread. Back in the kingdom, her mother was known for having to go through five mate bond rejections before meeting her father. Would Reida be destined to go down that same path? If the prophesized heartbreak was so notorious that she'd be "remembered for centuries" for it, did that mean her suffering would be worse than the multiple ones her mother endured?

"And what if four existed?" Reida asked, trying to momentarily distract her mind from the third curse.

"Well," Professor Gnaw reluctantly said, "it's never known to happen, but according to legend, if there are four, one would forever be commemorated for greatness; one would give name to the highest form of treachery; one would be Incanta's symbol of heartbreak; and one would be left to languish in eternal regret."

It just got worse and worse.

"And these would all be different individuals?" Reida persisted asking, trying to ignore the mild throbbing in her head and the agonizing howl of her animal in her mind. "No one creature would be destined to more than one prophecy?"

"Indeed, Your Highness."

"The last time this happened... were the prophecies fulfilled?"

"Yes, unfortunately," the professor muttered sadly, like he lost someone in it, and Reida hadn't develop a thick-enough skin to pry.

"And if there are five such wands?" She was almost too afraid to know.

"Oh, there's no such thing," Professor Dnaw said, the lilt in his tone speaking for his relief. "Legend never foretold more than four existing at any one time. And I, for one, hope it stays that way."

Something still didn't click for Reida. "How would anyone know the number of wands that would have that ingredient, though? Are all wands given through a ceremony?"

"As far as we know, yes," the professor piped. "Unless one comes from a remote village and happens to attract nature's elements while going on a random walk and a fellow villager happens to possess the necessary knowledge and craft to turn those ingredients into wands, which doesn't happen anymore at this day and age. In essence, one who needs a wand would only get one through a ceremony normally held in schools, and the

ingredients of every wand are listed, recorded, and sent to the ministry.*

"That's how you know there're only three in existence," Reida murmured, more to herself than to anyone else in the room.

"You won't necessarily get the worse of the three fates, Reida," Theo interrupted. "Given your background and ambition, there's a high chance you're destined for greatness."

"I thought the probabilities were equal," she retorted.

"Well, they are, but..." he sighed, wondering why he opened his mouth in the first place. She looked so pale, so scared. There was an urge to take her hands and hold her, and since he couldn't do that, he hoped his words would. "It's better to believe you're destined for the best out of the three rather than worrying about falling into the curse of the other two."

Reida took her time to compose herself, a skill her mother taught her – to take her time, never rush – before she spoke again, "I understand that." There was a power in her voice despite there being no change in volume – a level of control that all three men felt, especially as she continued, "But given my family's history, you can't fault me for being concerned about the two curses."

Theo's firm baritone echoed, "Treachery is not in your blood, Reida. Whatever your uncle did turned into a blessing for a segment of the kingdom that was neglected. And you are not destined for heartbreak."

"You don't know that," she refuted with a fire in her eyes and an unrelenting insistence in her voice.

Little did she know Theo's eyes was ready to burn brighter and his tone only got more assertive. "I know every heartbreak your family and allies endured brought them closer to the creature they were destined for, so if we insist on being pessimistic, perhaps we should start looking at it that way."

"Indeed!" Professor Gnaw interrupted with optimistic glee. All eyes snapped to him like he was bringing rainbows and sunshine to a dark, gloomy warzone. "Theodore is correct. There's no specific timeline for a prophecy to be fulfilled. Fickle things they are when it comes to schedule. Anyhoo, it doesn't spell out what happens after the prophecy has come to pass. Some in history have drastically changed the course of their lives despite it."

"Like who?" Reida heard herself asking.

The professor's stared into space, and his finger tapped on his desk when

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he began, "There's Patricia Backhock – infamous for betraying her husband for a female lover in a time when it was scandalous, went on to start the first formal schools for witches."

Another tap on the desk, and he continued, "Gideon Tyson – infamous for betraying his own family for Incanta's ruler, though his family was a cult of ruthless thieves, so... make of it what you will."

One more tap on his desk, and he beamed. "Sarafina Layson – heartbroken after her lover of a hundred and two years left her for a younger woman. She went on to experiment potions and spells out of pure passion and curiosity, becoming so accomplished in her discoveries that Incanta's ruler requested to meet her, and when she refused, he went to her himself, giving birth to one of the greatest love pursuits in Incanta's history."

"Did they end up together?" Liam asked, speaking for the first time.

"Why, of course!" Professor Gnaw exclaimed like it was daftly obvious, then grumbled under his breath, "This is why they shouldn't take romance out of history texts. Kids nowadays don't know anything."

Reida and Theo felt the chilling burn of fear ebbing away. Their eyes – dark and light – met in a way that spoke for their relief. Even if they were destined to be cursed, it wasn't the end of the road. There would always be hope for something better.

"But!" Professor Gnaw lifted a finger, drawing everyone's attention back to him. "It's important to remember that a mushroom shouldn't have the power to dominate our thoughts. It is but a fungus. A pretty fungus, but still, just a fungus."



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