

# Episode 4: Ruby and the Frozen Heart

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From set *Wilds of Eldrain*

11. 08. 2023

The day is brisk and bright when Kellan and Ruby return to Edgewall. After the rough living of Dunbarrow and the wonder of the giants' home, this place seems both a paradise and a hovel. That is what Kellan likes most about it. If he were to return home to Orrinshire, he knows precisely what he would see: his mother at the loom, his stepfather tending sheep, the villagers going about their day in perfect harmony. There are no traces of the Wicked Slumber in Orrinshire, nor any surprises.

Here in Edgewall there are plenty.

First is the spread of violet across the town. Where once the cursed threads accented the streets and alleys, they now form rivers and brooks. When they left, there were dozens of sleepers. Now, with a sinking heart, Kellan realizes that the victims are beyond counting. Leaning against balconies, hidden beneath parchment and blankets, standing at open windows ...

Even Ruby is thrown off by the sight. She doesn't say so—she's too brave—but he hears it in the sharp draw of her breath as they walk the streets. He sees it in the careful hops she makes to avoid any strands of violet, in the stiffness of her posture. "Watch your step," she tells him with a smile more for his sake than any joy of her own. "Can't have our hero falling asleep on us."

"Don't call me that," Kellan replies. "My mother always tells me that if I act like something I've done is no big deal, everyone else will, too. You're just as heroic as I am."

Ruby laughs. "Your mom does sound like a nice lady, but you're mistaken. Peter's the hero in our family. Raising your little sister all on your own *and* being the best hunter in town ..." She hops a cursed thread. "That's a real hero."

"I think there are plenty of ways to be a hero," Kellan says. "Peter's one, but so are you. And I'd like to be one someday, too."

"Well, you're already on a quest," says Ruby. She leads them through the streets to a small cabin on the very edge of town. An uncharitable soul might say it isn't part of Edgewall at all, but the city colors draped in the window proudly proclaim otherwise. A plume of applewood smoke rises from the chimney. Kellan's stomach rumbles.

"What do you think makes a hero, anyway?" she asks him.

"A hero is someone who always does the right thing," he says. "Someone who makes other people's lives better."

Ruby stops with her hand on the door. She narrows her eyes. Kellan waits to see if she'll answer, but there's no chance to talk it over. Peter spots them from the window and invites them inside. With

fresh venison steaks sizzling in his cast iron pans, the subject of heroism gallantly gives way to that of dinner. And plans.

They tell him they are going to Loch Larent, and he agrees to take them—on one condition.

“You must wear my thickest cloak, and when you can no longer feel your nose, you must turn back. No matter the circumstances.”

“But what if we’re not done by then?” Kellan says.

“Then once the two of you have returned, I will go myself,” says Peter. “I’ve heard about that castle. No one’s managed to get to the center. Not the other hunters, not the bandits. Syr Imodane tried it before she came here. In her opinion it was an easier thing to brave the wilds than it was to walk more than forty paces across the drawbridge—and she with that firey magic to warm her.”

Quiet falls over the room. Kellan glances to Ruby, and Ruby to Kellan.

“I’m not going to turn back,” he says. “I can’t. Not when so many people are sick. My lord said that whoever defeats the witches will end the curse—”

“Your lord did not say it had to be you, lad,” says Peter. “There’s no shame in needing help. You’re only a boy, and Ruby still young herself. You must know when a beast can be felled, and when it is best to leave it be.”

When Kellan catches Ruby’s eye again, he knows she’s thinking the same thing.

What if Peter’s right?

In the end, Ruby makes the promise. Her brother drapes a bearskin around her shoulders, though she insists on keeping the hood. To Kellan he grants a fine coat of wool, the sight of which makes the boy break out in a groan. The wool is from Orrinshire.

Yet he wears it proudly at night, when Peter tells them he has a surprise for them, and he buries his face in its raised collar once the embarrassment overcomes him. For there, in the town square, there are children gathered in red hoods and woolen cloaks. Dozens of them, he thinks—and there are girls in wool as much as there are boys in red. All watch in perfect stillness as two puppets triumph over all manner of trouble to defeat an evil, man-eating witch.

In the flickering candlelight, Kellan thinks he sees Ruby tear up. But she wipes them away the second he spots her, and the two of them say no more of this sacred moment.



Art by: Julie Dillon

Loch Larent lies a long week's journey from Edgewall. Peter takes them much of the way, but as they approach the loch itself, he announces that he will stop to make camp. And who could blame him? Even a full day's travel away, it is so cold that Kellan must hop from foot to foot to keep warm. In all his winters, he's weathered only two days colder than this—both in the bitterest months. He and his family huddled up with the sheep so that no one would freeze. Deep down, he wondered whether it was possible for someone to freeze at all. It seemed a thing that water did, or perhaps beer, but never people.

He wonders less about that now. But he doesn't bring that up. Neither does Ruby.

Peter is more vigilant. "Are you certain you don't want me to come with you?" he asks.

"You're still recovering," Ruby answers, though Kellan hears a pang of regret in her voice. "And besides ... I think I want to try this one. To see how far I can go."

They bid farewell to Peter. He holds them close, wishes them well, and lingers by the fire as they go. For a long while afterward, Ruby looks over her shoulder, perhaps searching for his silhouette against the orange light. Everything else in this place is blue, green, or violet. The sky above is marbled with all three colors swirling over each other like the layers of a noblewoman's cloak. Beneath the frozen surface of the loch, eerie blue lights bob and weave, vying for their attention. Kellan thinks he sees a pair of yellow eyes under the ice—but a moment later they disappear.

Most striking of all is the castle. Seeing it through the mirror is one thing; to lay eyes on it in person is quite another. Kellan had no idea how large it was until now. The main tower stands on a cliff overlooking the loch, but whoever designed it could not bear to stop there. Madness struck the unseen architect: gates leading to new fortresses, drawbridges to nowhere, a never-ending series of baileys, each giving way to a new gate. Kellan counts five portcullises alone.

They'd snuck into a cabin, climbed a beanstalk, and walked beneath the door to enter a giant's stronghold.

They had not yet stormed a castle.

The road before them, paved with glittering crystal gravel, seems more threat than invitation. Yet Kellan does not hesitate to step upon it. Fear is nothing in the face of the greater good, he tells himself.

But Ruby stops, her foot at the very edge of the crunchy gravel. “This ... feels different, doesn’t it?”

“Only if you let it,” Kellan says. He holds out his hand. “At least we don’t have to do any climbing this time.”

Ruby laughs up a cloud of vapor. She takes his hand and starts on the path. “Don’t say that too loudly, or Trojan might burst out of a snow drift.”

“I don’t think that would be so bad,” Kellan says. “The places he used to talk about sounded great, didn’t they?”

Ruby blows a raspberry. “The places he was talking about were made up, Kellan! All my life in Edgewall and I’ve never heard anyone talk about a *pain circus* before. What does that even mean?”

“I don’t know. I thought maybe it was something the fae did,” Kellan says. He tries not to let the disappointment reach his tone, but as always, Ruby’s too clever for that to work.

“You really want to see more of the fae lands, don’t you?” says Ruby. She squeezes his hand. “I’m sure once this is done, you’ll be the toast of the town.”

He isn’t so sure about that. Part of him wonders—he was always too fae for the humans, so what if he’s too human for the fae? Talion already pointed out how little he knew of fae customs every time they spoke. He still hasn’t gotten the basket hilts to work for him. What if it’s the same there, but different?

He tries to think of something to say.

But someone else soon speaks for him: a woman’s voice carried on gelid wind.

*“Knights, bandits, and would-be kings have failed to walk this path. Two children have little hope of success. Turn back.”*

The sky overhead darkens, the wind strengthens; were it not for the steel pin holding Kellan’s cloak in place, it would have been torn right from his small body.

Ruby pulls down the bear’s head over her own to keep from freezing. Kellan does the same, though with his plain hood of wool.

“We’re not going to give up that easily,” he shouts into the air. But here the air is so cold that it cuts him to speak, and when only silence responds, he regrets making such an effort.

*“The brave live short lives. Do not think your age will earn you any mercy from me. My realm will be safe from threats, regardless of who those threats might be. Turn back.”*

With every word Hylda speaks the air around them grows colder. So powerful is the wind that they must strain against it with every step, but they do not stop walking.

Kellan keeps glancing over to Ruby as they go. He can’t see much of the rest of her face, but what he can see is red as her hood. Surely she can no longer feel her nose. “You don’t have to keep going.”

But Ruby only shoots him a sidelong glance. “And let the witch win?”

“She won’t win if I get there,” Kellan says. He speaks into his scarf to try and keep warm. “If we keep going ...”

*“You will die,”* comes Hylda’s voice. *“This is your final warning. Heed your own words, and turn away.”*

The veil of snow has gotten so thick that all he can see is gray and white. Still, he turns in place, looking to find the castle. In the distance he spots the faintest smudge of blue. A mile away, if not more.

Kellan blinks cold eyes. He could turn away—but if he does, no one will ever wake up, and he will never know who his father was.

“You ... don’t know ... a questing hero when you see one,” he rasps. Next to him, Ruby laughs, and it makes him feel a little braver.

*“I do. They die as easily as anyone else. You will not be the last,”* Hylda answers. Her voice fades into the howling of the wind—and the creatures within it.

The first moves too quickly for the two youths to see: a streak of cerulean across their vision, a sound like breaking glass. Only when the icy spear lands at their feet do they realize what they’re seeing. The swirling snow ahead of them has solidified into mail and plate: a warrior of frost, at least twice Kellan’s size, bears down upon them. A new spear forms in his open palm.

A wicked thrust aims straight for Kellan’s heart. Ruby pulls him out of the way. Still, the point pierces Kellan’s fine cloak to the snowy ground beneath them. Wind howls in his ears and snow stings his eyes as he tries to scamper away.

But Orrinshire wool is renowned for its strength. The very fiber of his home—perhaps sheared from his own sheep—keeps him in place. Try as he might, he cannot tear the pinned corner away.

“He can’t hurt you if his spear’s stuck!” Ruby shouts. “Just drop the cloak and go!”

But he can’t. His fingers are too stiff to work the clasp keeping his cloak in place, and even if he did, where would that leave them? In cold like this he’d surely freeze.

Kellan locks eyes with the warrior through the murk. There’s a new shape forming in its free hand: an axe.

“Ruby, go on ahead!” he says.

“Don’t be s—aah!”

Her protest is cut short when she’s yanked high into the air. Another warrior’s formed, and this one’s got her in its clutches. A rime-streaked sword is pressed right up against her throat.

No, no, this isn’t how this is supposed to go. It’s one thing for him to be in trouble, but there has to be some way out of this. In stories, there’s always something the hero figures out. But he doesn’t have any weapons and he doesn’t know any magic because his mother never taught him any, and his father never ...

The warrior readies a blow.

“Dad, *please*,” Kellan whimpers. He reaches one last time for the basket hilts ... and gold light cuts through the gray. Something in Kellan feels bright as spring no matter the surroundings, something that pours into the hilts and changes them. Acting on instinct he lashes out—



Art by: Fajareka Setiwan

—and his newfound sword cuts straight through the frost warrior’s arm.

Kellan gawps at the delicate blade of light in his hands, the thing he’s conjured from his own desperation. Around the hilt the light seems to sharpen like thorns. He admires it for a second, but now he has to get them out of this mess.

Kellan ducks beneath the warrior’s legs, running straight for Ruby. Before he can think to hesitate, he lops this warrior’s arm off, too. Catching Ruby on the way down is an easy thing in comparison.

“Kellan, you’re doing it!” she says, eyes wide. “Fae powers, you’re really doing it!”

“I am!” If he says anything else, he’s worried he’ll ruin it, as if naming it aloud will dispel the effect.

He sets her back down on the path. The warriors, howling with pain, have wandered away, leaving their weapons lodged in the snow. Ruby picks up the sword and stands back-to-back with Kellan on the path. But the longer they wait, the harder it is to stay upright. His initial giddiness begins to give way. The magical sword in his hands is heavy as iron. Has it gotten colder already? A strange sleepiness creeps in and he worries that it must be the curse—but there are no plumes of violet here, no magic save his and Hylda’s. So why is he so ...?

Kellan’s eyelids begin to droop. “Ruby ... I think I might be ...”

“Kellan?” Ruby says. She turns. “Kellan!”

Maybe they should rest before then, though. He’s so cold, and so tired, and ...

He’s already done so well, he’s earned a little nap.

Kellan falls.

This time, Ruby is the one to catch him.





Art by: Leanna Crossan

Among the swirls of blue, white, and green, there is a girl in red—and a boy she carries through the snow.

Cradled in her arms, curling up instinctively into the warmth of her cloak, Kellan is so fragile that she worries the falling snowflakes will break him. So shallow is his breathing that, could she not feel his heartbeat, she'd think him dead.

*"Take him and go home."*

Looking down on him she knows it's good advice. Her brother would tell her the same: they've failed. She can take him back, and then the two of them can figure out something else to do. Or maybe some other hero will come by, someone with a heart like a furnace and blood like molten ore, who will not be slowed by the cold.

A month ago she wouldn't have hesitated. Life was about looking out for you and yours; it was about staying alive.

But it's not just that anymore. This is bigger than the two of them; the puppet show showed her that. All those children in their red hoods—what would they think if she left him here? What would Kellan say when he awoke, knowing he might never learn the truth about his father? How could she live with herself if the Wicked Slumber never faded away?

Ruby begins to walk.

Snow crunches underfoot, wind whistles in her ear. Her footsteps have never felt so heavy as this; each one is a battle.

*"You owe him nothing."*

"People don't need to owe each other to help each other," Ruby answers, speaking into the razor wind.

There is no response. For a long span there are no words at all—no sounds save the gusts, the snow, her breathing. She can't even hear Kellan's. Frost has formed on her eyelashes. Though it is yet far, the castle comes closer with every step taken—every battle won.

One step, another. Her legs hurt.

*"He is small and weak. You are hardy and strong. You have hunter's blood. Abandon him and you may yet reach me."*

Ruby feels like she's breathing in glass, but she keeps breathing. "Keep ... talking ... I was getting lonely, anyway."

A strong gust, likely the witch's displeasure, knocks her off her feet. She and Kellan tumble into the snow. Cold saps the strength she's fought so hard to keep. Each of her limbs seems to weigh as much as a harvest pig.

Yet she raises them. Yet she stands. Yet she lifts the boy from the snow and carries him, once more. And not once throughout does the thought occur to her to leave him behind.

One foot in front of the other.

"You know what I think?" Ruby shouts into the wind. "I think you're lonely too. That's why you keep taunting me. You don't get to talk to people otherwise, do you?"

Another powerful gust. Hail batters her. She hunkers down, the cloak taking the worst of the impact.

*"Leave."*

Ruby holds Kellan tighter and keeps going.

The skeletal gates rise up before her. How long has she been walking? It feels an eternity. She turns and surveys her tracks over the frozen wastes. Peter said that was the easiest part, getting to the outermost drawbridge. It was crossing it that killed.

When she turns back to the drawbridge she can see them: lumps beneath the blanket of pure white snow. Bodies kept hidden from sight. She and Kellan will be so small as to escape notice if they end up like that. Even Peter wouldn't be able to find her.

Turn back when you cannot feel your nose, he said to her. He made her promise.

In truth, she hasn't been able to feel it for some time.

Ruby steps onto the bridge.

There are no mountains to moderate the wind here, no structures to shield from hail or sleet. The moment she's out in the open the weather comes at her from all sides. Her fingers tremble. She could not move them if she tried. But she does not need to move them to keep hold, to keep walking.

One step, another.

*"You are a fool to continue."*

"Maybe," Ruby says. She can't argue the point. Though she's only a quarter of the way along the bridge, it's already getting hard to keep lifting her feet.

*"You are going to die here."*

"I won't know that until I do," Ruby says. She's not lifting her feet anymore; she can't. She trudges through the snow like a drunkard walking home from the pub. "I have to try."



*"But why? Why?"* the witch asks. For the first time there is urgency in her voice; for the first time, she actually sounds upset. *"You have no reason to—"*

"Because my friend wants to defeat you, so he can meet his father and save the Realm, and I'm not going to let him down," Ruby says.

One third of the way there. She's walked by five bodies already.

*"You would abandon your life because ...?"*

"Because it's the right thing to do," Ruby says.

Another step. One more. Her knees give.

So she can't walk anymore. Big deal. She can still crawl.

Ruby forces herself to roll over. She shifts Kellan onto her back, throws her hands out ahead. They plunge through the snow. So cold, so tired, so clumsy, but she has to try.

*"This is pointless. You know that."*

"He would do the same for me, and he wouldn't think it was pointless," Ruby says.

It isn't going to work. She knows that, deep down, but she's going to keep trying anyway. Even if she passes out, even if the snow takes her, Kellan will wake up at some point. Maybe his fae blood will help. And then when he gets to the castle, he can figure it out. She reaches for the next handhold.

But instead, she finds an outstretched palm, its fingers pure white, the nails upon it delicately pointed. A crystal bracelet glimmers on the wrist. "Take my hand."

That voice. It's the witch. But what is she doing out here?

Ruby takes a shaky breath. Her brother met a witch once—look where it got him. She shakes her head. "No. I'm not—"

"I mean you no harm," says the witch. "But if you will not believe me, I shall prove it to you."

The witch kneels next to her. She seems sadder than Ruby expected. No amount of white finery, no heavy winter crown, no magic can conceal the loneliness in her pale eyes.

Slowly, the weather around them clears until only the gentle snowfall remains.

It is in this perfect silence that that witch leans over Kellan. "Sweet children, who have borne so much trouble ..." She presses a kiss to each of their foreheads. "Be welcome in Winter's Home."



Art by: Miranda Meeks

Magic tingles along Ruby's skin as she starts to lose focus. "What are you doing?" she mumbles.

"Keeping you safe," the witch says. Ruby feels cool fingers running through her hair. "You were right about me, I'm afraid. I'm lonely. I'd forgotten that, but the two of you have shown me what I've forsaken by staying here in this castle."

Ruby's vision starts to fade.

"Sleep, child. When the two of you wake, you shall have the truth."

The youths awake hours later in a room of glistening ice. Two golems, crafted from the same material as the walls, guard their slumber. Blankets, thick and plush, surround them, and before them is a morning banquet presented on a crystal tray. Spiced cider, pie, hearty soup—anything someone could want to warm their bones—lies beneath a sparkling cloche. All that remains is to reach for it.

Kellan does without thinking. His stomach rumbling, his head hammering. What else is a young man to do? But Ruby stays his hand.

"It's the witch's doing," she says.

"The witch who means you no harm," comes the answer from across the room. She's standing from a chair, setting down a book. She picks up her own mug and saucer before coming to sit across from the two of them. "I'm glad to see that you're well."

"How do we know this isn't a trick?" asks Ruby. "You saved us out there, but maybe you only wanted to put us at ease for a while. Maybe you're going to eat us—"

"Eat you? I suppose you've met Agatha," she says.

"We threw her into a cauldron," says Kellan. He's not sure how right Ruby is about this, or even how he ended up here, but he thought it bore saying.

If it bothers Hylda, she gives no sign of it. “She deserved no less,” she says. “I used to believe I was different from them. The other two, I mean. They always sought power. All I ever wanted was to be alone.”

Kellan glances at Ruby. He has a faint memory of Hylda’s voice, but it’s one that puts him at ease. He squeezes Ruby’s hand. “Even if you like being alone more than being with people, it’s always good to have friends.”

The witch smiles. Her face is not suited for such things. “So it is,” she says. “Even when they are very skeptical friends.”

Ruby pouts. “I’m just looking out for him!”

A laugh as unsuited to the witch as her smile. “I bear you no ill will—but you are difficult to impress. Will two more gifts prove my intentions to you?”

Ruby crosses her arms, as if waiting to see what they might be. In the meantime, Kellan avails himself of cider and pie. Hylda doesn’t mean them any harm; if she did, she would have left them out there. Besides, his mother always taught him it was rude to turn down hospitality like this.

But he soon stops when he sees what Hylda’s done. With a careful, light touch, she’s lifted the frozen crown from her head and set it on the table before them.

“There. I feel lighter already. Take that to the Kindly Lord, as proof of my defeat.”

“You’re sure?” Kellan asks.

“You aren’t defeated if you’re still around, though,” Ruby says. “Who’s to say you won’t keep growing the castle and freezing people to death?”

“I do,” she says. She gestures to the windows. “Take a look outside, if you’d like. Without the crown I can maintain only a small home for me and mine.”

Ruby narrows her eyes and goes to the window, Kellan following. The morning sun plays upon the castle’s walls, illuminating the water already running in rivulets down the stone, streams already cascading down the cliffside. The castle has begun to melt.

“I think she’s serious,” Kellan says to Ruby. Then, to their host: “That was a brave thing to do, to give up power like that. My mother always said witches aren’t all to be feared.”

“Your mother did not speak falsely,” says Hylda. “Besides, I had plenty of inspiration.”

Ruby sits. At last, she lets herself enjoy some of the cider.

Kellan takes the crown and sets it on his lap. “You said you had something else for us?”

“A gift of information,” says Hylda. “I heard the two of you speaking on the way here. You serve the Kindly Lord. When you leave this castle, you will surely find one of their gateways awaiting you. But this time, you will not cross the threshold unaware.”

“What do you mean?” Ruby asks.

Hylda looks toward the window before continuing. “We witches did not create the Wicked Slumber alone. To do so would have been beyond our power.”

“What?” says Kellan.

“When the invaders arrived, we each had different ideas of how to handle matters. Talion was the one who broke the stalemate. Eriette’s sleeping curse, they argued, would be the surest way to counteract the invaders. Since the three of us could never have cast a spell that powerful on our own, we never

would have considered it otherwise. There were four of us once, and we might have had some hope then, but she died twenty years ago. We needed four. Talion, strong as they may be, needed us for it to work as much as we needed them. Thus, they offered us the chance to save the Realm—and boons for our help. Always boons, with fae.”

Kellan swallows. “But Talion said that you put the whole world to sleep.”

Hylda smooths Kellan’s hair. “It was only meant to stop the invaders,” she says. “That it continued spiraling out of control afterward is Eriette’s doing. Of that, I’m certain. She leapt at the chance to enact a curse of that size—to have all those people at her beck and call. I think she might have even done it without a boon, had the Kindly Lord not offered one.”

“But ... this is supposed to be a heroic quest,” Kellan says. His lips start to tremble, his voice wavering. “I thought we were doing the right thing. Talion’s the one who did this?”

“You are doing the right thing,” Hylda says. “Talion has sent you to clean up the mess that all four of us created. That is a good and noble thing to do—to fix things. But it is done best when it is done knowingly.”

Ruby squeezes his shoulders, but Kellan still can’t stop shaking. Talion created this. Fae aren’t supposed to lie, are they? *Witches three have this land with slumber plagued ...*

Kellan picks up the crown in his lap and storms out of the room.

Down the winding halls and spiral stairs he goes, despite not knowing the way. Behind him Hylda calls, but he cannot make out what she’s saying with his blood rushing through his ears. When at last he arrives outside, he sees that Hylda is right: there is already a portal.

When Kellan reaches for the door, Ruby’s hand finds his wrist again. She is sweaty and out of breath, having run after him all this way, but she is there—with him.

“Together, remember?” she says.

Kellan can’t summon any words; the lump in his throat is too great. He nods and walks through the gateway.

Together into the land of fae the two heroes stride, the land of false castles and false hopes. Talion awaits, draped as always, on their throne. *“Gallant adventurers, glory great you have earned—”*

Kellan throws the crown at Talion’s feet.

The Kindly Lord studies the priceless boon. They crook a brow at the boy. *“Your father’s spirit is at last showing itself, lad. What troubles you?”*

“You lied,” Kellan says.

Talion waves a wand of hawthorn. A fae handmaiden picks up the crown and carries it away. Talion, for once, sits properly on the throne.

*“Fae do not lie,”* they say. *“It is anathema to us. If I were to lie to you, my blood would clot like spoiled milk.”*

“We know about the curse,” Ruby says. “We know you were the one who had the idea. You’re using us, aren’t you?”

Talion leans back. Is that a smirk on their face? Kellan thinks it might be, and he hates it. *“Ah. That matter. Is it such a bad thing to be used for such noble ends? A knight’s sword does not complain of drinking blood.”*

“This isn’t the same!” Kellan protests. “You asked if we were pure of heart. You said you’d help me find my—”

How shameful to break down like this, to cry in front of the Fae King, yet Kellan cannot stop his voice from cracking, nor the tears from flowing. He wipes at his eyes in frustration. "I believed you. I really believed you knew him."

"I do," says Talion. Kellan's tears have no effect on them whatsoever. *"And I will tell you what I know of him if you complete this quest. Or will you refuse to save the Realm because you do not like the reason it is being saved?"*

Kellan clenches a fist. "I ... I didn't say ... It isn't that simple!"

*"Nothing in our lands is simple,"* says Talion. *"You shall find Eriette at Castle Ardenvale. Defeat her, and you will end the curse; end the curse, and I will tell you of your father. Or do not defeat her. Return to your pastoral home, and never again come as near to belonging as you did when you embraced your heritage. The choice is yours."*

A wave of the wand. The Fae World flickers and fades around them.

Once more, they stand on the cliffs outside Hylda's castle.

And Kellan? Kellan begins to weep.