

Vermilion dodges flame, ice, lightning and poison strikes from the dragons. He hovers on the spot as more from the opposite direction towards us.

'Vermillion, fly!' I shout as they get closer. But he doesn't move and continues to wait. 'Vermillion, please!' I cry out then as they release elements toward us. He flies upward, causing the strikes from each group to hit each other. I laugh at the realisation Vermillion had planned that move. No wonder he wasn't listening to me.

The dragons form a group together and fly behind us, 'Vermillion, they're going to catch up to us,' I say to him.

He flaps his wings quicker and zooms through the sky. Some of the smaller dragons cannot keep up. The larger ones, however, are close behind us. We lean forward as shards of ice shoot past us. There is a mountain split in two in the distance. Vermillion turns sideways. I scream and hug myself against him for dear life. 'Gods, is this necessary, Vermillion?' Alec shouts, clinging even tighter to the dragon and me.

'Wands! He is going to fly through the gap! I'm not sure we will make it!' I shout before I squeal as he glides between the mountain halves. Half the dragons following us are too big and retreat. We soar out the other end. Alec and I let out a heavy breath of relief. We are at the shoreline. Vermillion flies into the closest cove. We watch the dragons fly around searching for us, but after a while, they leave.

'It's probably not safe to go back and retrieve the sceptre just yet. Emerald Island is just across the water. We can fly over there, and I can get my spell book,' I say to Alec and Reaper.

'All right, let's go,' Alec says, lifting me back onto Vermillion.

Reaper perches on my shoulder, and Alec climbs up behind me. Vermillion trots out of the cove, flaps his wings and descends into the sky across the ocean.

As we arrive, we find some of our people who stayed behind and celebrated the solstice here on Emerald Island.

Vampires and Werewolves approach and bow but stare up at Vermillion with caution. Alec helps me down, and Reaper immediately flies onto a nearby tree branch.

A vampire who looks to be around fifty, even those he's probably well over one hundred years old, approaches us, 'King Alec, Queen Nina, we have all been so worried. It's been days since you left, and we've had no contact from the mainland,' he says.

'Harold, it's good to see you,' Alec says. 'We haven't been able to return home here until now. Unfortunately, things have taken a turn for the worst. Thypon, the god of monsters, entered through the veil. We are at war. We will probably stay the night but will have to continue on our way to complete our quest tomorrow to help win this war,' Alec explains.

The crowd gasps, and Harold pails, 'The god of monsters, you say?' he asks for confirmation.

'Yes, he has brought many monsters that raid the land, water and skies, so you all need to be wary and on watch. If they reach Emerald Island and you cannot defeat them all, then you must leave the island and find safety and shelter elsewhere until the war is over,' Alec says.

'But what if we don't win this war?' he asks.

Alec glances at me and then back at Harold, 'You better pray to gods we don't lose,' he replies, takes my hand and walks toward the castle.

As we walk past servants up the stairs, they stop and bow.

'Please organise a meal for your queen and deliver it up to our chamber,' Alec says to them.

'Yes, your grace,' they curtsy and continue past us.

We arrive in our chambers. Reaper is perched in the window. I close my eyes and breathe in the smell of mint, lavender and rose.

'I've missed this place,' I smile and throw myself on our bed, landing on my back.

Alec walks over to the bed and leans against the post. He crosses his arms and looks at me with a smirk.

'I miss seeing you in bed, waiting for me,' he laughs.

I grab a silk pillow from behind me and throw it at him. He catches it and continues to laugh, but then he stops and sighs heavily. 'I wish there was no war. I want nothing more than to see you happy. But right now, we don't have time for playfulness. You must study the spell book and replenish yourself with food and rest before we leave tomorrow,' he says.

I reach for the other pillow and hug it tightly in a foetal position. It smells like Magnus. A tear forms and drips onto the pillow. I feel Alec as he lays on the bed beside me and wraps his arm around me.

'I know you miss him, Nina. We will free him, and you will be back in his arms in no time,' he says, hugging me tighter.

I nod and pray to the gods Alec is right.

After a few moments, enjoying Alec's touch. I sit up, swing my legs over the bed, walk over to a dark thick wooden desk, and sit in the regal chair. I almost knock a bottle of ink with the quill over as I reach for my spell book. I place my book in front of me and stare at my shaking hands. I'm tired, exhausted, and hungry. I miss Magnus terribly and worry about the fate of Mysteria.

Alec places his hand on my shoulder, 'If anyone can save Mysteria. I know it would be you. You can do this, Nina,' he assures me.

I place my hand over his on my shoulder. Before I can reply, there's a knock at the door. Alec's fingers slip from my shoulder. He opens the door to see a maid holding a tray of food. He thanks her, takes it from her, and places it on the desk beside my spellbook.

'Make sure you eat all this up. I'll check on Vermillion and have him fed, too,' he says.

'Okay, don't be too long,' I reply.

'I haven't even reached the door, and you miss me already,' he smiles.

'Maybe just a little,' I say, returning the smile.

He nods and leaves the room, closing the door behind him.

Reaper flies from the window ledge onto my desk and flips the front cover of the spell book open with his beak.

'Thanks, Reaper,' I say and scratch his head.

'You better get reading. The world isn't going to save itself,' Reaper mind-links.

'If only it were that easy,' I reply and flip through the pages of the spell book until I find the sealing spell.

I read the information at the top of the page.

'The sealing spell is not always successful and requires much power and may require a coven of witches or others to cast together. One must have a vessel to seal thee in: a location or an item. If the spell is successful, it will remain in place forever until the spell castor or castors remove the seal.'

I stare at a small blue vase and peek inside it, 'So we need an item or location to seal Thypon in. I can see why a volcano was perfect, but there are none here in Mysteria,' I say to Reaper.

'Well, I don't think that vase will help. Maybe something that closes with a lid,' Reaper suggests.

'Ooh, what about a lamp? We could trap him like a genie?' I smile.

'Maybe worry about where or what we will seal him in later and focus on mesmerising the chant,' he says.

'Fine,' I reply and continue to read the page.

'The one to be sealed must be on the location required or the item within a close radius. Restraints or distractions may be required to keep one trapped in place. Once ready, you may begin the chant:

Within this vessel shall hold thee

Forever sealed for eternity

No more harm will be done

Seal the darkness to protect everyone

No more dangers, no more harm.

Seal this creature, and let this be done.

Repeat until they have been absorbed into the location or item.'

I bite my lip and stare at Reaper, preening the quill of all things...

'It doesn't sound too hard, I guess,' I say to Reaper.

He tilts his head, jumps onto the page, and looks up at me, 'It may sound easy reading it, Nina, but doing it may be a whole kettle of fish,' he says and jumps off the book.

'You're probably right. It could be more difficult than it seems,' I sigh and push the book to the back of the desk and drag the food tray in front of me.

Reaper's talons patter across the desk toward my plate of food. Holding a piece of sliced meat in one claw, he tears off shreds and gobbles it down. I take a chunk of bread and dip it in the bowl of soup. It has a nice creamy taste to it. Once we finish the food, I take the spell book and hold it up as I pace the floor repeating the chant over in hopes of remembering it by heart.

'Within this vessel shall hold thee

Forever sealed for eternity

No more harm will be done

Seal the darkness to protect everyone

No more dangers, no more harm.

Seal this creature and let this be done,' I say for the tenth time until Alec enters.

He looks over at the desk and then at me, 'I'm glad you've eaten. How are you going with the spell?' he asks.

'Other than finding a location or item to seal him in. We're going well. I think I've memorised the spell, but I'll practice it in the morning before we leave to be sure,' I smile.